Singing the quatrains
Omar Khayyām and Umm Kulthūm

by Jan Just Wüskam
(Leiden University)

In the 1950s and 1960s Omar Khayyām enjoyed an enormous popularity in Egypt. This had, of course, to do with the intrinsic and perennial qualities of the quatrains but even more so with the fact that they were performed by the woman who till today is considered Kaswâb al-Shârâ, the ‘Star of the Orient’, that greatest of Arab singers, Umm Kulthūm (1898-1975). She did not sing the quatrains in Persian, but in the Arabic translation of her long-time admirer, friend and songwriter, Ahmad Râmi (1882-1981), the Shârâ al-Shâbâb, ‘the poet of the Youth’ as he was called, after the name of the journal in which he first published.

As a part of the large repertoire that Ahmad Râmi especially wrote for Umm Kulthūm, she also sung selections of Ahmad Râmi’s translation of Omar Khayyām’s quatrains. Umm Kulthūm’s performance has brought the quatrains to the attention of an audience of many millions in Egypt and, propelled by the singer’s fame, also in the rest of the Arab world. Omar Khayyām’s popularity had in fact not only spread to the Western World after he had been discovered by Edward FitzGerald in 1859 – or rather after FitzGerald’s translation had in itself become a discovery. In Iran Khayyām the poet became as popular as ūfīz (d. 1320) and Sa’dî (d. 1292) had there all the time, but only after he had become famous in England and the US. Before his Western discovery Khayyām was just one of many interesting Persian poets, as is evident from his relatively modest entry in the Astakhâda, the poetical anthology by Lutf ‘Ali Beg Añ̄âr Begdîl (d. 1780) which precedes the Omar hynie by about a century. Modern works by Khayyām-enthousiasts (such as Mehdi Amirmazavi’s recent book) have a tendency to project Khayyām’s present popularity back into history, but this is entirely anachronistic. The Arab Middle East saw the publication of a considerable number of different translations of the quatrains of Khayyām once he had been recognized in the West as a great poet.

One of these Arabic translations was made in the late 1920’s by the Egyptian poet Ahmad Muhammad Râmi. Ahmad Râmi’s translation seems first to have become public in 1924, but in its final shape it was published in 1931. This translation became popular and has remained in
print ever since. Ahmad Rāmū came from a literary and musical family. His brother Mâhmûd was a composer, but he died in 1923, too early to make a lasting name in Arab music for himself. Ahmad Rāmū was active in many fields of literature and the performing arts. In his younger years he had travelled in Europe, among other things in search of manuscripts of Khayyām’s quatrains in Europe’s oriental collections, as he tells his reader in the preface to his translation. His translation is said to be based on his research on the most important Persian manuscripts of the quatrains, kept in Oxford, Paris, Berlin, London, Cambridge and also in Patna in India, and on a number of translations into European languages. From Ahmad Rāmū’s translation itself it is not clear what exactly has been the consequence of all this research, but the introduction to the translation gives the book a nice cosmopolitan flair, behind which its textual sources remain hidden.

Apart from his work on Khayyām’s quatrains Ahmad Rāmū has also translated plays by Shakespeare into Arabic, yet his lasting fame rests on the numerous lyrics he wrote for both Umm Kulthūm and Muhammad ‘Abd al-Walâhî (1899 or 1907-1991), two great names in Egypt’s musical history. The relationship between Ahmad Rāmū and Umm Kulthūm was one of long standing. From 1924 onwards Rāmū started visiting Umm Kulthūm and read poetry with her. Ahmad’s brother Mâhmûd was hired to teach her the lute. Soon after, in 1926, Ahmad Rāmū started writing lyrics for Umm Kulthūm’s repertoire. In the late 1920’s and the 1930’s the composer Muhammad al-Qasabî and Ahmad Rāmū completely dominated Umm Kulthūm’s repertoire. Ahmad Rāmū provided the romantic texts. When in 1935 Umm Kulthūm’s first film Wākîd (‘Love’) came out, the script and song texts were by Ahmad Rāmū.

The exact nature of the relationship between Umm Kulthūm and Ahmad Rāmū has been the object of speculation. In his biographical compilation on Umm Kulthūm, the Egyptian radio and TV journalist Sa’d Sânnî Ramûdî tells how Ahmad Râmû, in 1954 during a conference in Beirut, was completely surprised by the news that Umm Kulthûm had just married (in fact her family doctor, Hasan al-Hifnûwî). Ahmad Râmû immediately left the conference, withdrew to his hotel room and wrote the ode Dāhkayt, ‘Memories’, also titled Qoṣat Dubûr, ‘My love story’. Later on, the ode was, of course, incorporated in Umm Kulthûm’s repertoire (songbook, p. 199 = Diwâ’n Râmû, pp. 197-198). That caused an interesting lover’s paradox. That Ahmad Râmû was infatuated with love of the ‘Star of the Orient’ is evident. His ode Dâhkayt, and some others as well, such as Hayyârî Qulî mu’âk, ‘You have brought my heart in utter confusion’ (songbook, p. 194, in which Umm Kulthûm probably sang Hayyârî = Dâhkayt, Râmû, pp. 281-282), would, because of Ahmad Râmû’s popularity as a poet, have been read and heard by a hundred thousand of people anyway, but only when Umm Kulthûm would sing this ode it would be heard by at least a hundred million in the entire Arab father-land. The rejected lover could only let his complaint be widely heard if Umm Kulthûm, the object of his unrequited love, would make it popular. For whatever it is true, the anecdote, which is said to have been recorded from the mouth of Ahmad Râmû himself, nicely shows the intimate symbiosis between the singer and her poet.

When one reads Ahmad Râmû’s poetry from this angle one gets the impression that many poems in the Diwân could actually have been written for Umm Kulthûm or were at least inspired by her. Would she have been the one he waited for at night, while listening at the radio? (Diwân Râmû, p. 81):

‘How many nights I have spent awake
All alone, while people around me were sleeping?
I ask the wind about a companion that whispers
To me, and sleep flies away from my eyelids.’

‘My love story’, written when he heard that Umm Kulthûm had married, begins (Diwân Râmû, p. 197):

‘Memories that transgress the horizon of my imagination
A lightning that shines in the dark of the night.
She woke up my heart from its slumber,
And illuminated me behind the curtain of the empty days.
How can I forget her, as long as my heart beats in my breast?
She is the story of my love.’

On July 7, 1975, a few months after the singer’s demise, Ahmad Râmû wrote an elegy for her, which begins as follows (Diwân Râmû, p. 191):

‘I would never have thought that I would write an elegy for her,
After all those emotional songs that I have created for her.
I have heard her singing and she enchanted me.
Today I hear myself: I cry, and I mourn for her.
I loved her from the morning of my life and I lived for her.’

But Ahmad Râmû was more than just a sentimentalist. Directly after Egypt’s revolution of 1952 a new national anthem was written by Ahmad Râmû with music by Riyyûd al-Sûnbi (1906-1981). It shows that this duo was at the height of their popularity. But Egypt has had quite a number of national anthems in a relatively short period. In 1970 the poem Nashîd al-Sûlûb, the ‘Song of Arms’, by Salâh Gâlin (1930-1986) became Egypt’s national anthem, after it had first been made popular and famous in 1956 during the Suez crisis by a rendering by Umm Kulthûm.
(songbook, p. 312) on a musical score by Kamāl al-Tawfīq (1922-2003), the same composer who also wrote the scores for the national anthems of several other Arab countries. In 1979 the text of Egypt’s national anthem was changed into the well-known *Bilādī, bilādī, bilādī* song by Muhammad Yūnus al-Qādi, who wrote the text as early as 1878, and for the melody of which use was made of the musical score originally composed by Sayyid Darāwsh (1892-1923), another great name.

This short digression on modern Egypt’s musical and literary history may serve to show that Khayyām’s quatrains were brought to an immense public by the country’s artistic elite and top-performers of the period. In 1949 Ahmad Rāmī’s translation of the quatrains had come on Umm Kulthūm’s repertoire and Riyyād al-Sunbūṭī (d. 1961), who was the singer’s principal lute-player and composer at the time, had made the musical score. He has been Umm Kulthūm’s preferred composer for many years, and he was the necessary third person in the relationship. The trio, Ahmad Rāmī, Riyyād al-Sunbūṭī and Umm Kulthūm contributed each according to their talents and capacities: words, melody, performance. The fourth factor was, of course, Umm Kulthūm’s music ensemble, and Queen Umm Kulthūm lead them all. Ahmad Rāmī kept writing lyrics for Umm Kulthūm till well in the 1970’s and the relationship between him and the singer remained one of loyalty and trust, though not one of exclusivity, as Umm Kulthūm was constantly diversifying her dependence on songwriters and composers. Her songbook mentions thirteen different composers (including herself), and more than fifty poets whose works she sang. Of the latter group Ahmad Rāmī has contributed by far the most to her repertoire.

In order to get a better idea of how Ahmad Rāmī worked let us have a look at the famous opening quatrain by Khayyām and how this fared in Rāmī’s hands (Persian text taken from Nicolas, No. 1):

کی زدن خرابی چانه‌الا، ما یاد میردی چوندا زمین‌الا، ما

ران و فن چوندا چوندا، زمین‌الا

And in my literal translation of Ahmad Rāmī’s Arabic translation:

‘I heard a voice calling, in the early morning,
That called from the wine house: you slumbering people,
Come on, fill the brilliant cup, before
The hand of destiny makes the cup of life overflow.’

Edward Fitzgerald, in his first version (of 1859) of the quatrains, makes two quatrains out of this one opening quatrain (his Nos. 1-2), but the idea of life’s transience is less evident in his second, reworked version (of 1866) of this quatrain. From Ahmad Rāmī’s translation of the opening quatrain it is evident that he has not let himself be influenced by Fitzgerald, but that he has faithfully followed the Persian text, although we do not know exactly which edition or version of the quatrains he used.

Let us now see how Umm Kulthūm sung this quatrain, and two others. For that purpose, I analyse some 625 minutes of Umm Kulthūm’s rendering of three of Khayyām’s quatrains. I took these from: ‘Umm Koulthoum, Roba’yet El Khayam. Music by M. Riad El Solhawy’, which is a CD (EAN 5425012900016), in a licensed edition by Platinum Records and Movies, AMD Classics, Brussels 2006 (later dates are sometimes given and the CD is available in internet shops) containing 3658 minutes of sound in all. The date of the original recording is not indicated. The songbook (pp. 217-218) gives the text of the quatrains as sung and puts them together as one collection. I purchased the CD in Paris in October 2008 during the the Umm Kulthum exhibition ‘Oum Kalsoum, la quadrifième pyramide’ in the Institut du Monde Arabe.

The 625 minutes which I have selected I have divided into six parts:

1. 000-217 Musical prelude
2. 217-324 Quatrain 1
3. 324-352 Musical interlude
4. 352-454 Quatrain 2
5. 454-512 Musical interlude
6. 512-625 Quatrain 3

In her performance Umm Kulthūm does not exactly follow the printed version of the Arabic translation by Ahmad Rāmī. The small differences which can be observed between the published translation and the performance may be based on personal preferences of Umm Kulthūm or reworkings by Ahmad Rāmī, but we do not know. These differences occur in the printed songbooks of Umm Kulthūm as well. The text of the
opening quatrain in Umm Kulthum's performance runs as follows (songbook, p. 217):

Sami'tu sawatan hatif'an fi s-saḥar
Nadā min al-ghayb wa-faqa l-bashar.
Hubbū ma'a kās al-munā qabla an
Tamla'a kās al-unrī kaff al-qadar.

Ahmad Rāmi's printed text

My translation of the quatrain as given in the Umm Kulthum songbook:

'I heard a voice calling in the early morning
it called from the unseen and people arose.
Come on, fill the cup of wishes, before
The hand of destiny fills the cup of life.'

But Umm Kulthum does more than just singing the four lines of the quatrain in a slightly different wording. Here is the exact and not-normalized rendering of her performance of the opening quatrain:

Sama'tu sawatan hatif'an ... fi s-saḥar
Sama'tu sawatan hatif'an ... fi s-saḥar
Nadā min al-ghayb wa-faqa l-bashar.
Sama'tu sawatan hatif'an ... fi s-saḥar
Sama'tu sawatan hatif'an ... fi s-saḥar
Nadā min al-ghayb wa-faqa l-bashar.
Hubbā 'ma'ā kās al-munā
Hubbā 'ma'ā kās al-munā ... qabla an
Tamla'a kū sā l-unrī kaff al-qadar.

In Umm Kulthum's rendition, the four lines of the original of Ahmad Rāmi's translation are produced in the sequence: 1-1-2-1-2-3-4.

With Umm Kulthum's performance of the second quatrain is somewhat similar, but this second quatrain in the songbook and on the CD cannot be found in the editions of Ahmad Rāmi's translation of Khayyām's quatrains, and in a moment I will try to say why this is. The Arabic text comes from the songbook (p. 217):

Ghadan bi-jaahr il-ghayb wal-yaman li
Wa-kam yubhīma z-sarara bil-maqqābil
Wa-la bi-j afar hattā arā
Ganūla daniyāa wāli ajarī

And in my translation:

"Tomorrow lies in hiding but today is mine
How much deceiving is thinking about the future.
And I am not negligent until I see
The beauty of my world, without looking at it."
Umm Kulthüm’s actual performance of the third quatrain goes as follows:

Ghadam bi-zahr il ghayb ... wad-yawnu li
Ghadam bi-zahr il ghayb ... wad-yawnu li
Ghadam bi-zahr il ghayb ... wad-yawnu li
Wa-kam yakhbûr û ûzamnû ... bil-muqâbîlî
Ghadam bi-zahr il ghayb ... wad-yawnu li
Ghadam bi-zahr il ghayb ... wad-yawnu li
Wa-kam yakhbûr û ûzamnû ... bil-muqâbîlî
Wa-lasî bi-ghafîlî hattû arî
Ganîli dana-yûya wa bî ajîlî

Umm Kulthüm’s rendering of Ahmad Râmi’s translation is in the sequence: 1-1-1-1-2-1-2-3-4.

The performance by Umm Kulthüm of the quatrains is characterized by a repetition of the beginning line(s), which she also does in her performance of Qaîdas, odes, for that matter. With this technique she creates more substance of text, as a quatrain is actually a very short entity. It is precisely its shortness which makes the quatrain an excellent vehicle for epigrammatic literature, and that is an important reason of the genre’s popularity. Umm Kulthüm, however, does not exploit that particular feature but she prefers to use the quatrain text for a longer-drawn songline. She substitutes succinctness by repetition. While doing so she creates tense moments in the first half of the song – as if she is struggling uphill – whereas in the second half she can release this tension, going downhill, coming home, and it works. That release is always followed by an enormous applause of the audience, who rejoice in the singer’s achievement.

As we have seen, Omar Khayyâm has, from 1949 onwards, been immensely popular in Egypt but only through the performances by Umm Kulthüm of Ahmad Râmi’s translations, set on music by Riyaîd as-Sunbîî. In this, Ahmad Râmi’s translation of the quatrains has enjoyed a fate which was different from that of any other of the Arabic translations. However, Ahmad Râmi’s Arabic translation of the quatrains was used by Umm Kulthüm in a way of her own. She may have omitted the references to wine drinking from the first quatrain out of decency or prudishness. In the Persian mystical context wine is well-known as a metaphor and being drunk is understood as the state of self-abandonment of the mystic to the divine being. This is still very much the case in Iran where everybody knows that the wine poetry of the Imam Khomeini (to name but one recent example) does not celebrate real wine, the drinking of which is explicitly forbidden in the Qur’ân (5:90-91), but that it refers to the intoxication of the mystic by his divine beloved, and in classical Arabic mystical poetry this is also the case. Whether the more mundane or popular audiences of Umm Kulthüm would also understand intoxication as a mystical state is not so evident. However, as an explanation for the differences between Ahmad Râmi’s printed translation and his version in the Umm Kulthüm songbook this is not entirely satisfactory. The songbook does mention the ka’s al-tâlu’ ‘the brilliant cup’, which was left out of Ahmad Râmi’s third line of the first quatrain, in other contexts, e.g. in the song Sulûw Ka’ûb al-Jâlî ‘the solace of the brilliant cup’, in a poem (not a wine poem, though) by one of Egypt’s greatest poets of the early twentieth century, Ahmad Shawqi (d. 1932), several of whose poems were sung by Umm Kulthüm as well (songbook, pp. 216-217).

Umm Kulthüm sang quatrains which were said to be by Khayyâm but which cannot be found in Ahmad Râmi’s translation (Nos. 2 and 3 of the above sample). Either Ahmad Râmi translated more quatrains than were eventually published, or he provided Khayyâm-style quatrains of his own making. About this we have no further information, but we can speculate. The constitution of the corpus of Persian quatrains of Khayyâm is a difficult enough matter, and it is not very useful to search for Persian quatrains of a content similar to these mystery quatrains sung by Umm Kulthüm. Anyway, a search through Nicolas’ edition did not yield result. For an accomplished poet such as Ahmad Râmi it cannot have been very difficult to catch the atmosphere of Khayyâm’s poetry and write quatrains of his own manufacture in the spirit of Khayyâm, and no doubt at the request of his leading lady whom he revered.

The fact that Umm Kulthüm sang some of the quatrains differently from the wording in the published texts may have wider implications. It would be interesting to compare more of her song texts, also texts by other poets, and to see in which form they have actually been performed, and thereby have become famous, as they were written by their poets or as they were sung by Umm Kulthüm. The ambition to create both simplification and beautification may have played a role, and it would be interesting to find out whether this reworking of the text was done by Umm Kulthüm herself, who, if that is indeed the case, may have thought that she, being the diva who she was, had the fullest right to do.

Bibliography

1. Editions and translations of Khayyâm’s quatrains:

* Contains the translations of and introductions to the quatrains by Edward Fitzgerald of both 1859 and 1868, and the volume also contains Fitzgerald’s translation of Jami’s Sahîmîn and Abdî.


2. Other sources:

* Facsimile edition of a manuscript dated 1247/1831, with introduction, index and notes. When space in an anthology is an indicator of popularity Sâdî is by far the most important poet (afigh al-mustakallîm, he is called, ‘the most eloquent of orators’, pp. 275-293). Hájjî lagh far behind with only four pages (pp. 271-275) and Omar Khayyâm has a mere two pages (pp. 138-140) in the Aâshâhidsa.

* The wine that so pervades the quatrains has here been promoted to the title of the book. The author projects Khayyâm’s greatness back into history. In addition he treats Khayyâm the poet and Khayyâm the philosopher and mathematician as one person, which is far from historical. All this shows how great a person Khayyâm has become in the past century and a half.

* Contains the Arabic translations of the quatrains by Ahmad al-Shurûq and Ahmad Râmi. Also contains Fitzgerald’s translation of 1868. In Egypt Ahmad Râmi’s translation has remained in print in editions of Dâr al-Shurûq, one of Cairo’s more prominent publishing houses. Leiden University library possesses a copy of the 1931 edition of Ahmad Râmi’s translation (class-mark 850 F 30).


* A study on Umm Kultûm’s political activism and the development of the Egyptian and Arab myth that she became.

Rajji al-Naqqash, Luqah Umm Kultûm. Cairo (Atlas) 2004  
* The enigma of Umm Kultûm. The Memoirs of a young companion of Umm Kultûm on the singer’s life and times, and the men that lived around her.

Ahmad Rami, Diwan Rami. Cairo (Dar al-Shurûq) 2006.  
* A selection of the best known pieces of Râmi’s poetry, with a preface by Tawhid Râmi, dated April 2000, and a short biographical notice about Rami’s early life by Sâlih Gawdat, dated 1973. Several songs of Umm Kultûm’s repertoire can be found in this collection.

* An encyclopaedic work on Umm Kultûm (with a CD containing historical recordings), which also contains a comprehensive songbook of the singer. Therefore I refer to this work as ‘songbook’. The fifteen quatrains of Khayyâm as sung by Umm Kultûm are found on pp. 217-218. Ahmad Râmi is mentioned there as the song writer.

* A compilatory work containing a large number of memories of Umm Kultûm mostly written by her contemporaries and the generation after. The ‘love story’ between Ahmad Râmi and Umm Kultûm is told by Râmâyân himself (pp. 43-47).
The Rubáiyát by the Persian poet ‘Umar Khayyám (1048-1131) have been used in contemporary Iran as resistance literature, symbolizing the secularist voice in cultural debates. While Islamic fundamentalists criticize Khayyám as an atheist and materialist philosopher who questions God’s creation and the promise of reward or punishment in the hereafter, some secularist intellectuals regard him as an example of a scientist who scrutinizes the mysteries of the universe. Others see him as a spiritual master, a Sufi, who guides people to the truth. This remarkable volume collects eighteen essays on the history of the reception of ‘Umar Khayyám in various literary traditions, exploring how his philosophy of doubt, carpe diem, hedonism, and in vino veritas has inspired generations of poets, novelists, painters, musicians, calligraphers and filmmakers.

‘This is a volume which anybody interested in the field of Persian Studies, or in a study of ‘Umar Khayyám and also Edward Fitzgerald, will welcome with much satisfaction’

Christine Van Ruymbeke, University of Cambridge

Ali-Asghar Seyed-Gohrab is Associate Professor of Persian Literature and Culture at Leiden University.
The Great ʿUmar Khayyām
Iranian Studies Series

The Iranian Studies Series publishes high-quality scholarship on various aspects of Iranian civilization, covering both contemporary and classical cultures of the Persian cultural area. The contemporary Persian-speaking area includes Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Central Asia, while classical societies using Persian as a literary and cultural language were located in Anatolia, Caucasus, Central Asia and the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent. The objective of the series is to foster studies of the literary, historical, religious and linguistic products in Iranian languages. In addition to research monographs and reference works, the series publishes English-Persian critical text-editions of important texts. The series intends to publish resources and original research and make them accessible to a wide audience.

Chief Editor:
A.A. Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden University)

Advisory Board of ISS:
F. Abdullaeva (University of Cambridge)
G.R. van den Berg (Leiden University)
D.P. Brookshaw (Stanford University)
J.T.P. de Bruijn (Leiden University)
N. Chalisoja (Russian State University of Moscow)
D. Davis (Ohio State University)
F.D. Lewis (University of Chicago)
L. Lewisohn (University of Exeter)
S. McGlinn (Unaffiliated)
Ch. Melville (University of Cambridge)
D. Meneghini (University of Venice)
N. Pourjavady (University of Tehran)
Ch. van Ruymbeke (University of Cambridge)
S. Sharma (Boston University)
K. Talatot (University of Arizona)
Z. Vesel (CNRS, Paris)
R. Zipoli (University of Venice)

The Great 'Umar Khayyām

A Global Reception of the Rubāiyāt

A.A. Seyed-Gohrab (ed.)

Leiden University Press
In fond memory of Alexander H. Morton

Cover design: Tarek Atrissi Design

ISBN 978 90 8728 157 1
e-ISBN 978 94 0660 079 9
NUR 630 / 321

© A.A. Seyed-Gohrab / Leiden University Press, 2012

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.
# Contents

Acknowledgements 9

## Introduction

A.A. Seyyed-Gohrab (Leiden University)

*Khayyām's Universal Appeal: Man, Wine, and the Hereafter in the Quatrains* 11

## Khayyām in Persia

M. Amirrezvai (University of Mary Washington)

*Reading the Rubā‘īyāt as “Resistance Literature”* 39

A.H. Morton (SOAS, University of London)

Some ’Umarian Quatrains from the Lifetime of ’Umar Khayyām* 55

M. Bagheri (University of Tehran)

*Between Tavern and Madrasa: ’Umar Khayyām the Scientist* 67

## Khayyām in the Arab World and Turkey

M. Alsulami (Leiden University, Imam al-Qara University)

*The Arab ’Umar Khayyām* 73

Jan Just Witkam (Leiden University)

*Ahmad Râ‘î’s Arabic translation of the Quatrains of ’Umar Khayyām* 85

S. Sötemann (Independent scholar)

*Quatrains of ’Umar Khayyām in Turkish and Turkish Quatrains* 97

## Khayyām in the Netherlands

J.T.P. de Bruin (Leiden University)

*Other Persian Quatrains in Holland: the Roseraie du Savoir of Huseyn-i Āzhd* 105

M. Goud (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam)

*Khayyām’s Impact on Modern Dutch Literature* 115

J.D.F. van Habema (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam)

*Bitter Certainty: J.H. Leopold on ’Umar Khayyām* 129

J. Biegstraaten (Independent Scholar, Chairman of the Dutch Omar Khayyām Society)

*How ’Umar Khayyām Inspired Dutch Visual Artists* 135

R. de Groot (University of Amsterdam)

*The Legacy of ’Umar Khayyām in Music of the Netherlands* 143
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank several organisations, colleagues and friends. First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), and Leiden University Fund (LUF) van Walsum, and Leiden Institute for Arca Studies (LIAS) who offered me financial aid to organize an academic conference to highlight not only 'Umar Khayyam as a mathematician, philosopher and astronomer, but also the reception of Khayyam in various literary traditions. The results of this fruitful meeting are presented in this book. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), who presented me with a VIDI award supporting research in the framework of my project ‘Of Poetry and Politics: Classical Poetic Concepts in New Politics of Twentieth Century Iran.” This book on Khayyam shows very well how classical poetic themes and topics are used in a modern context, not only in the Iranian world but also in other cultures around the globe.

The Khayyam conference opened with an extraordinary performance from Het Nederlands Kammerkoor (Dutch chamber orchestra), singing a wide range of classical Western and Persian compositions based on the quatrains of Khayyam. This impressive opening had an effect that continued in the following days, especially because of the fruitful cooperation with the musicologist Professor Rokus de Groot (University of Amsterdam).

The term Rubā‘iyāt is used in the title of this book as a homage to Edward FitzGerald, although properly speaking it refers to all the Persian quatrains attributed to Khayyam. While Khayyam’s quatrains were introduced to a number of literary traditions through FitzGerald’s adaptation, his work was not the only channel of transmission.

Thanks are also due to my colleagues who have always been supporting in many ways. I would particularly like to thank my student assistant Amin Ghodratzedeh who meticulously read the entire manuscript and generated an index.