



WESTERN RESEARCH ON OMAR KHAYYAM'S RUBAIYAT

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Annotation. *This article provides a comprehensive overview of Western and Russian research on the authenticity and interpretation of Omar Khayyam's rubaiyat. The study emphasizes the ongoing scholarly debate over which rubaiyat can be reliably attributed to Khayyam, highlighting the importance of original manuscripts as primary evidence. Special attention is given to the work of Russian orientalist V. A. Zhukovsky, who pioneered systematic methodologies for verifying authorship, including textual criticism, comparative analysis, and the study of stylistic, thematic, and linguistic features.*

Keywords: *Omar Khayyam, rubaiyat, V. A. Zhukovsky, authenticity, textual criticism, Sufism, translation studies, Persian literature, Eastern literary traditions.*

The authenticity of rubaiyat attributed to Omar Khayyam remains a debated issue. Determining which poems are genuine relies primarily on surviving original manuscripts. This study aims to identify Khayyam's authentic rubaiyat and examine their translations.

Western scholars studying Khayyam extensively drew on Russian research sources. Among the first to address this issue systematically was Russian orientalist V. A. Zhukovsky, who focused on verifying authorship and analyzing the rubaiyat's content. This question remains central to Khayyam studies and has yet to be fully resolved, as numerous factors affect the identification of authentic rubaiyat. To date, no scholar has definitively established the full corpus of Khayyam's original rubaiyat.

In his article "*Ways to Determine the Authentic Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*", Zhukovsky proposed a comprehensive methodology, including:

- Textual criticism;
- Analysis of historical, literary, and geographical sources;
- Examination of different manuscript versions;
- Comparative textual analysis;
- Identification of Khayyam's stylistic method (sabk);
- Study of the rubaiyat's unique content and meaning;
- Consideration of the poet's imagery and artistic skill;
- Structural analysis of rubaiyat;
- Use of lexicons and commentaries;
- Comparative study with other poets;
- Application of statistical methods.



Most scholars view Khayyam's rubaiyat as exemplifying Sufi philosophical thought. Zhukovsky was among the first to emphasize their mystical dimensions. English scholars, including F. Nicolay, A. Kristensen, Robert Graves, Henry Massey, Y. Bergs, and A. Arbery, have largely confirmed the connection between some rubaiyat and Sufi philosophy, supporting Zhukovsky's findings. Iranian scholars, such as Sayyid Hosseini Nasr and Mahmoud E'timad, also highlighted the Sufi elements in Khayyam's poetry.

Zhukovsky systematically analyzed sources and literature to distinguish authentic rubaiyat from those erroneously attributed to Khayyam. He noted the diversity of rubaiyat associated with the poet and the gradual increase in their number over time. During his 1884 trip to Iran, he first encountered a rubaiyat attributed to Khayyam in Abdulla Ansari's *Munajat*, inspiring him to separate the poet's authentic rubaiyat from miscellaneous ones. By comparing rubaiyat attributed to Khayyam with collections by Attar, Jalaluddin Rumi, Kamal Isfahani, Hafiz Shirazi, and others, Zhukovsky identified 82 rubaiyat as genuine and analyzed them according to rigorous scholarly criteria.

Themes of sorrow and despair in Khayyam's work reflect his deep philosophical and emotional insights. His rubaiyat express human helplessness in the face of life's injustices, as well as longing, suffering, and existential contemplation. Zhukovsky noted that some rubaiyat, though attributed to Khayyam in later manuscripts, were likely written by other poets or included through scribal errors.

For example, a rubaiyat previously attributed to Khayyam is now considered by Zhukovsky to belong to Najmiddin Razi:

Original Persian:

Ҳар сабза, ки дар канори чӯйе рустаст,
Гӯйи зи лаби фариштаҳӯе рустаст,
Ҳон бар сари сабза по ба хорӣ наниҳӣ,
К-он сабза ба хуни лоларӯйе рустаст

Literal English:

Every herb that grows by the side of a stream,
As if it were sprouted from the lips of an angel,
Do not tread on the herb in disgrace,
For it grows on the blood of a lily.

Not all rubaiyat reflect Khayyam's style; therefore, establishing authorship in the Eastern context is essential before Western analysis, as subtle cultural, historical, and linguistic factors influence interpretation.

Zhukovsky categorized Khayyam's rubaiyat into four thematic groups. Based on the fourth group, he described the poet as:

"A sage focused on questions of existence and life, unable to resolve life's problems through philosophy, yet developing a unique worldview based on Sufi thought. He never expressed ideas that undermine faith. Khayyam embodies pure ethics, genuine life, and

passionate devotion to the Creator, aspiring toward an eternal, bright, and beautiful existence."

Khayyam consistently relied on evidence from historical sources, which has earned him enduring respect among scholars and translators. In his rubaiyat, he often reflects on the mystery of death and the limitations of human understanding:

Original Persian:

Кас мушкили асрори ачалро накушод,
Кас аз қадам аз ниҳод берун наниҳод,
Ман менигарам зи мубтадӣ то устод,
Аҳз аст, ба дасти ҳар кӣ аз модар зод.

Corrected English translation:

No one has solved the mystery of death,
No one has escaped destiny.
I observe from beginner to master,
All are helpless, born of the mother.

The rubaiyat conveys existential and rationalist themes: human helplessness before fate, the insolubility of death, and universal limitations across social and knowledge strata. The metaphor “born of the mother” signifies human limitations under natural and social conditions.

Zhukovsky’s work firmly positioned Omar Khayyam as a highly esteemed Sufi sage, guiding the selection of rubaiyat for scholarly study. His research significantly advanced Khayyam studies, marking a new era in the scientific and literary analysis of the poet’s works.

Alongside translations, scientific editions of Khayyam’s rubaiyat began to appear. Notably, F. Nicolay published one of the best editions in Paris in 1867. Later, English and Danish scholars, including Denison Ross and Arthur Christensen, documented 108 “wandering” rubaiyat. Zhukovsky advocated that only rubaiyat documented in the oldest historical sources should be considered authentic.

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