



KHAYYAM, OMAR VII. GERMAN TRANSLATIONS OF THE

Omar Khayyam is generally known in the West as a mathematician, astronomer, astrologer, and poet. His literary fame in Europe, going back to the early 18th century, as attested in the work of Thomas Hyde (q.v.; 1636-1703), is due to his collection of poetry, the *Rubaiyat* (Pers. *Robā'iyāt*, 'quatrains'). The German discourse on Persian literature can be described as part of the *zeitgeist* of the 17th century, in that the interest of German poets in Persian culture and literature increased continuously. The 18th and 19th centuries crowned the reception of Persian literature in the German language (Maillard and Tafazoli, pp. 5-22). In the 19th century, one can begin to speak of a German reception and translation of Khayyam.

In the classification of Khayyam translations into German, a categorical distinction is helpful: One category consists of direct translations from the Persian original texts; the other of translations into German from mainly English, but also French, translations. The translations from English into German are based primarily on the work of Edward FitzGerald (q.v.; 1809-83). Within these categories, the German translations of the *Rubaiyat* in the 19th and 20th centuries are listed here. Given the variety of the interpretations of the poems, as well as debates over the origin and authenticity of the different editions on which the translations were based (Arberry, 1952, pp. 151-159;



Rypka, 1959, pp. 224; Rempis, 1933, pp. 15-20), the history of the reception of the *Rubaiyat* is a very complex matter. This problem is compounded by the dearth of biographical information for some relatively obscure translators.

The reception of the *Rubaiyat* in Germany began in the 19th century with the rise of scholarly interest in Persian literature (Tafazoli, pp. 322-539). The first translation, by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (q. v.; 1774-1856), included twenty-five quatrains (Hammer-Purgstall, pp. 80-82). The “Voltaire of Persian poetry,” as he calls Khayyam, seems strange and unique, above all because of the “irreligious content of his poems” (Hammer-Purgstall, p. 80).

The question of the religious aspect of Khayyam’s poems became a common feature in the historical reception of Khayyam’s work. Thus, the writer and critic Julius Hart (1859-1930), in his Khayyam translation, refers to Hammer-Purgstall’s comparison with Voltaire, but without naming the Orientalist (Hart, p. 41). Hart translated a selection of sixty quatrains in his *Divan der persischen Poesie* (1887). The writer and publicist Anton E. Wollheim (1810-84) published some of Khayyam’s poems in the second volume of his *National-Literatur sämtlicher Völker des Orients*, which is devoted exclusively to the literature of Persia. In the section on mysticism (Wollheim, pp. 204-52), after commenting briefly on Khayyam’s life and the translations known to him, Wollheim presented some quatrains in his own translation and that of Hammer-Purgstall (Wollheim, pp. 206-9). Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866), in his book *Grammatik, Poetik und Rhetorik der Perser* (1874), dealing with questions of language and poetics, and in the fortieth volume of his journal *Jahrbüchern der Literatur* (1827), published a few of Khayyam’s poems: two quatrains in the yearbooks (Rückert, 1827, pp. 208 f.) and two in his book on poetics in connection with the explanations of the *robā’iyāt* as a genre with “freedom of diversity” (Rückert, 1874, pp. 65-67). These interpretative selections gradually made Khayyam a familiar name.

The art collector, translator, Hispanist, Orientalist, and poet Adolf Friedrich von Schack (1815-94) published an extensive and free translation of a random selection of 336 quatrains (1878). Schack complained in his epilogue that Khayyam’s reputation had so far reached only the Orientalists, although the Persian poet deserved to be represented as a universal figure. In order to acquaint German readers with Khayyam’s importance, he provided an account of the life and career of the poet (Schack, 1878, pp. 113-15), adorned with legends and anecdotes according to the state of knowledge of the time, and he pointed to what he regarded as a one-sided interpretation of



Khayyam's poems found among Sufi circles. He criticized the Sufi way of explicating Khayyam's poems through a rigidly mystical interpretation of references to wine and the enjoyment of life. Schack pointed out that by no means all of Khayyam's poems were mystical, theological, or derisory in tone; rather, they contained a deep and serious content (pp. 115-17). He promised a faithful reproduction of Khayyam's poetic sense and spirit. His translation was based on a Calcutta edition from 1836, without offering any explicit information about it, as well as on Jean-Baptiste Nicolas' 1867 French edition and translation (which had become an important source-text for the German reception of Khayyam). Among the 336 quatrains were 110 taken from FitzGerald's English translation published in London in 1868, which Schack identified with an asterisk (pp. 12 f.). It is clear from this that the translator must have been unaware of a number of stanzas in the original Persian form.

The French translation by Nicolas, which included the Persian text, was also the basis for a translation by Maximilian Rudolph Schenck that appeared around 1897. Schenck's intention was to provide a German translation that was as fluid in verse and measure as the original (Schenck, [1897], p. 6). After an introduction, which also contains biographical data on the poet (pp. 3-6), Schenck translated 468 quatrains and intended to bring the poet closer to the reader with notes and explanations in a footnote form. Which of these stanzas actually came from Khayyam remains unclear. Friedrich Rosen, himself a Khayyam translator, later judged Schenck's translation to be "as close as possible to the French rendition ... but with the loss of much of its peculiarity and poetic drive" (Rosen, 1909, p. 13; *"möglichst an der französischen Wiedergabe...aber eben hierdurch ist viel von der Eigenart und dem dichterischen Schwung verloren gegangen"*). In 1911, Schenck published a German text and score, based on FitzGerald and the choral work by Granville Bantock (1868-1946; see KHAYYAM xiii. MUSICAL WORKS BASED ON THE RUBAIYAT), intended to acquaint the public with the musical aspects of the *Rubaiyat*.

The last translation from the 19th century was that of the cultural historian, writer, and translator Friedrich von Bodenstedt (1819-92). Bodenstedt undertook for the first time a thematic categorization of the quatrains. He divided them into ten books with arbitrary designations: "Die Gottheit des Dichters" (Khayyam, 1881, pp. 1-20), "Der Gott des Qur'ān und sein Prophet" (pp. 21-32), "Schein und Wesen" (pp. 33-42), "Die Grenzen der Erkenntnis" (pp. 43-56), "Schicksal und Freiheit" (pp. 57-76), "Lenz und Liebe" (pp. 77-88), "Der



Dichter und seine Gegner” (pp. 89-112), “Welt und Leben” (pp. 113-54), “Der Dichter beim Pokale” (pp. 155-200), and “Verschiedene” (pp. 201-17). In the introduction (pp. ix-xxii), Bodenstedt mentions some collected historical notes about Khayyam’s life and fame. For the translation, he set himself the goal of receiving from the original texts accessible to him everything that, according to connoisseurs, is considered to be true to the poetic content (p. xxii). There is no clarification of how this is achieved. Although Bodenstedt mentions the translations by Hammer-Purgstall, Wollheim, and Schack, he is not precise about the underlying issues. Bodenstedt’s translation does not have a separate section of notes; these are presented as footnotes.

In the mid-19th century, a kind of Khayyam cult appeared in Europe, owing its genesis and development to the writer and translator Edward FitzGerald (q.v.), who came from a well-to-do Anglo-Irish family and achieved fame through his translation or adaptation of Khayyam’s quatrains (Arberry, 1959; Weber, 1959, pp. 35-111; Gray, pp. 1-14). At first, the reception of his translation was confined to the English reading public (Nordmeyer, 1969, pp. 13 ff.), but his work soon started to affect German translations, a trend that has continued (Nordmeyer, 1969, pp. 102-4), serving as the source text for many German translations of the *Rubaiyat* done in the 19th and 20th centuries, including the English-German edition in 1969 by Henry Waldemar Nordmeyer (1891-1981), an American scholar of German and professor at the University of Michigan from 1935 to 1960, and the translation by Martin Rometsch (1999).

George Dunning Gribble (1882-1956), a British playwright and author of *The Master Works of Richard Wagner*, made a German translation in 1907 from FitzGerald’s 1859 edition (PLATE I). Gribble’s partly rhymed translation included 101 quatrains (Gribble, 1907, pp. 9-109). Each page presented a quatrain with an attractive initial cap. The book contained an epilogue (Gribble, 1907, pp. 113-16) and annotations whose order followed the numbering of the quatrains (pp. 119-22). Another FitzGerald enthusiast was Arthur Altschul (1910, p. 50). Altschul, using FitzGerald’s fourth edition of 1897 and following the Persian rhyming order, compiled a hundred quatrains in a primer annotated with an afterword and endnotes (pp. 47-55). Another translation based on FitzGerald was by Walther Weibel (b. 1882) in 1911 under the pseudonym Hector G. Preconi. Preconi’s translation of 153 quatrains was based in part on FitzGerald’s second edition (1868) and partly on the work of other translators such as Nicolas and Arthur Christensen (q.v.; 1875-1945). His translation also contained brief information about Khayyam’s life and the Sufi



interpretation, as well as some legends and anecdotes (Preconi, 1946, 5-16). FitzGerald's second edition (1868) was also the source for a translation by the Austrian writer, journalist, and historian Paul Tausig (1881-1923) of 110 quatrains, published in 1917. Tausig added a bibliography on Khayyam and FitzGerald to his translation (Tausig, 1917, pp. 129-32). Also based on FitzGerald, Fritz Segers produced a German translation of 300 quatrains, with some additional remarks (Segers, 1923, pp. 5-8). In his comments and remarks, Seger drew on numerous verses from Persian to introduce readers to the spirit of Persian poetry as comprehensibly as possible. Around 1926, there was a translation of FitzGerald's first edition by W. D. Kulenkampff. Paul Kinsky's 1927 translation of 75 quatrains was based on various sources, mainly Persian, with no introduction and no afterword. One can only learn from the comments which quatrains came from FitzGerald's translation. Philologically, this translation is of no great scholarly importance. In 1930, another German translation of FitzGerald by Richard S. Bak was published.

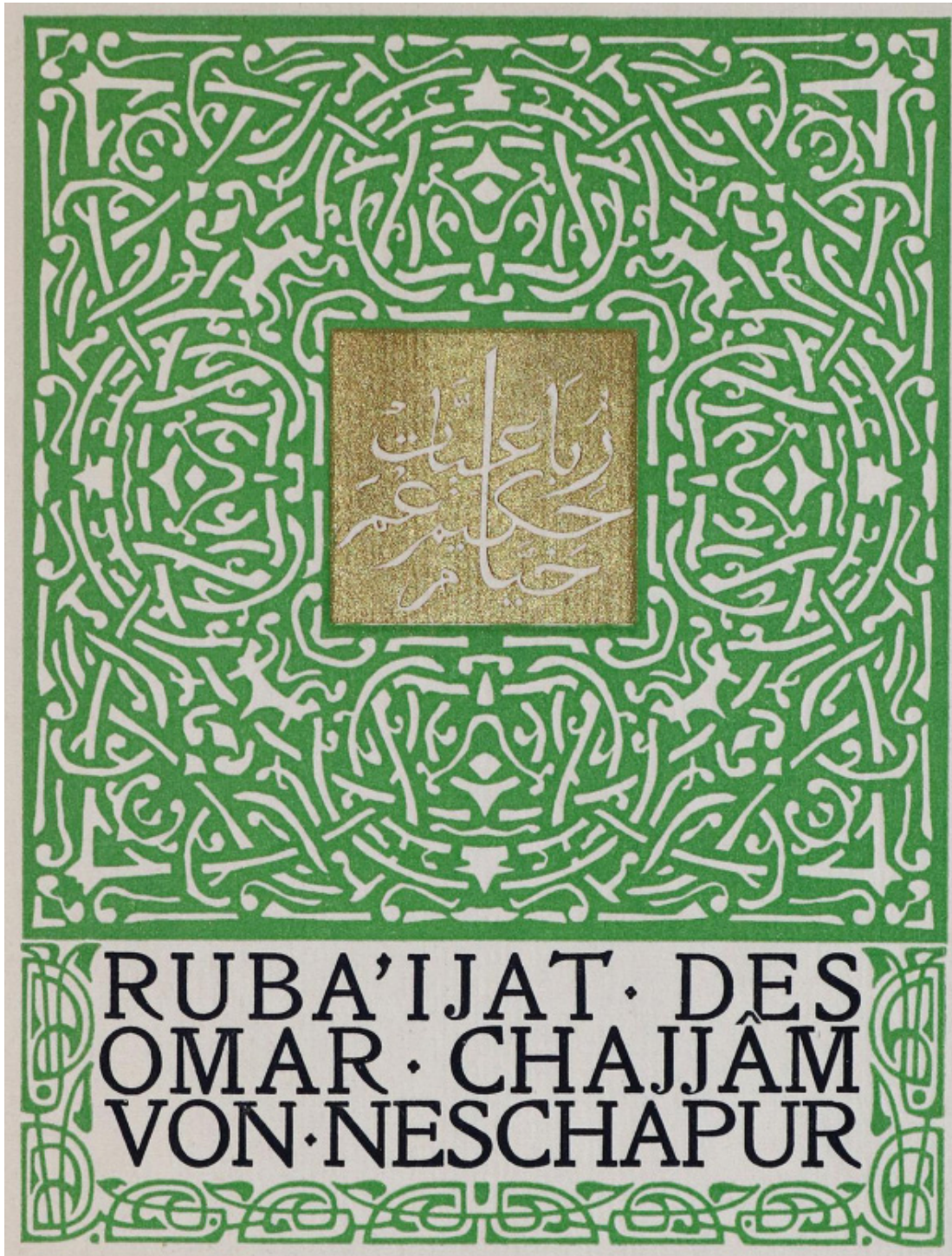


PLATE I Title page of George Dunning Gribble's German translation of Edward FitzGerald's Rubáiyát.

One of the most important in the series of translations based on FitzGerald was that by Christian Hernhold Rempis (1901-72), *Die Vierzeiler 'Omar*



Chajjāms (1933). This translation of 101 quatrains followed the first edition of FitzGerald (1859) and included some treatment of philological questions (Rempis, 1933, pp. 20-28) along with a brief evaluation of the German translations published until 1933 in a comparison with English translations (pp. 10 f.). In 1935, Rempis published a translation, which was to supercede the 1933 edition in both literary and philological terms. The selection of quatrains was made from the fifty oldest and best-preserved manuscripts, dating from the 13th to the 16th century (pp. 48 f.). From these sources, Rempis carefully compiled a Persian text that formed the basis for his translation. There was a selection of 255 quatrains, which, as in Bodenstedt, were assigned to different subject areas (Rempis, 1935, p. vi). Rempis intended to bring the reader “as close as possible to the original views of the poet” (p. vi). He divided his translation into four books: “Leben und Gedankenwelt” (pp. 1-54), a lyrical translation (pp. 55-104), a literal prose translation of quatrains (pp. 105-54), and explanatory notes and source references (pp. 155-200).

A more basic selection, without introduction and epilogue, was presented by the poet and Germanic scholar Ernst Bertram (1884-1957). His manuscript, badly damaged by the destruction of the Second World War, appeared in 1944 as the 87th volume of the Insel-Bücherei. Bertram’s translation, which was published three times, contains poems by other poets as well as a selection of twenty-three quatrains (Bertram, 1951, pp. 16-22).

In 1963, the freelance writer and political journalist Max Barth (1896-1970) published a translation of 207 quatrains based on all five editions of FitzGerald (Barth, 1963, pp. 23-76). Barth’s translation was a literal one that retained the English rhyme order (p. 9). His work included an overview of Khayyam’s life and influence (pp. 9-17), his European reception (pp. 18 f.), and an interpretation of Khayyam’s freethinking (pp. 20-22), as well as a numbered and an alphabetical list of quatrains (pp. 96-107).

In addition to the FitzGerald impulse for the reception of Khayyam, there had been a strong interest in Khayyam’s original Persian poems in Germany since 1900. By the mid-20th century, there was the gradual emergence of a German school of Khayyam research that sought not to see Khayyam’s life, spirit, and poetry through “FitzGerald’s glasses” (Rempis, 1935, p. v), but rather to view them from a philological and aesthetic perspective (Rempis, 1937). In the first volume of his *Geschichte der Weltliteratur*, the literary historian Alexander Baumgartner (1841-1910) dealt with the “Literatur der Perser.” In the section on Sufism (Baumgartner, 1901, pp. 561-81), he gave a brief insight into



Khayyam's world view and quoted three quatrains (pp. 569 f.) from Wollheim's translation (Wollheim, 1873, p. 209).

One of the most famous German Khayyam translations was that of the traveler to Persia and Orientalist Friedrich Rosen (1856-1935) in 1909. According to its preface (Rosen, 1909, pp. 9-18), the quatrains were translated in a thematically ordered sequence. Unlike Bodenstedt, Rosen distinguished only four themes: "Vergänglichkeit" (pp. 21-36), "Welträtsel" (pp. 37-47), "Lehre" (pp. 49-64), and "Wein und Liebe" (pp. 65-75). It concluded with two quatrains in the epilogue "Schlussworte" (pp. 77-79). Explanations of the quatrains were inserted between the preface and the translation (p. 19). The book ended with a lengthy section on Khayyam's life and influence (pp. 81-147), notes (pp. 149-52), and some remarks on recent writings concerning Khayyam from 1897 to the end of 1906 (pp. 153f.). In keeping with the character of the translation, which is noteworthy for its elegance and readability, these were not directed at specialists but at educated readers (p. 18), and Rosen refrained from calling his work a philological or critical edition.

In addition to translations of the poems, some paraphrases and interpretative translations distinguished themselves in the German reception of Khayyam's poetry. This category includes the free adaptation of 184 quatrains by Richard Hamel (1853-1924) under the pseudonym Omar Khayyam in 1912. This small collection concentrated on the Persian rhymes and its aim was "not in the most enjoyable enjoyment of the moment, but in the nascent, the well-meaning, world-consciousness of the 20th century that is heroic in the sense indicated" (Hamel, 1912, pp. xlvi). The publisher of this collection, F. Braun, often referred to the Khayyam translators Schack, Bodenstedt, FitzGerald, Rosen, and Gribble in the introduction and cited those in connection with his own explanations of Khayyam. Braun distinguished between an "old" Omar, meaning the Persian, standing under the sign of pessimism, and a "new" Omar (Hamel), whose joy in life he valued (Hamel, 1912, pp. xxxii-xxxiii, p. xlv).

Another free adaptation, without consideration of the rhyme order, was by Hans Bethge (1876-1946). Bethge was a German poet who made a name for himself through imitations of Oriental poets, including Sa'di and Hafez (q.v.). His versions of Khayyam's quatrains, first published in 1921, were based mainly on the translation by Nicolas but also referred to FitzGerald, Bodenstedt, and Schack (Bethge, 2003, 135 f.). Six years later, Walter von der Porten introduced German readers to his Khayyam translation based on the famous Bodleian manuscript (Ouseley 140; see KHAYYAM ii). Porten attempted



an “almost literal translation” (Porten, 1927, p. 7) of this manuscript, which had been copied in Şafar 865/December 1460 (pp. 8-10). Porten translated 158 quatrains and another 23 in an appendix (pp. 69-78), the authenticity of which had been repeatedly affirmed (pp. 8f.). The book concluded with a short list of annotations (pp. 79-84). Porten’s translation was published by Khosro Naghed in 1992 in a Persian-German version entitled *Wie Wasser im Strom, wie Wüstenwind*. In 1930, there was a German translation of an anthology of Persian poems by the writer and poet Alfred Henschke (1890-1928) under the alias Klabund. In the section “Persische Lyrik” (Klabund, 1930, pp. 283-320), he included a selection entitled “Das Sinngedicht des persischen Zeltmachers 96 *Robā’yāt*” (pp. 302-19). There was an illustrated Khayyam translation by Oscar Klausner in 1933, which is extant today in only fifty copies.

Dieter J. Bellmann (1934-97) summarizes Khayyam’s philosophy of life in two categories: “materialism” and “anti-religiosity” (Bellmann, [1958], p. 12). Poems are cited in accordance with these two categories. Bellmann based his translation on three texts: the Bodleian Ouseley 140 manuscript of the *Rubaiyat* mentioned above, edited by Edward Heron-Allen (q.v.) in 1898; the 1927 edition by Arthur Christensen; and the Persian text edited in 1941 by Moḥammad-‘Ali Foruḡi (q.v.). In 1965, Bozorg Alavi (1904-97) edited a partial translation of the *Rubaiyat* by Martin Remané (1962) with comments on the poems and an epilogue by Jan Rypka (1886-1968) summarizing the problem of understanding Khayyam (Remané, 1962, pp. 87-113). One does not know, according to Rypka, whether one should interpret Khayyam’s poems as an “expression of a realism, a pessimism, an agnosticism or even atheism” (p. 89). The translator Remané provided no information about the sources for his translation. Manuel Sommer used the translations by Christensen, Rempis, and Rosen for a German edition (1974) of 234 of the quatrains. Sommer’s translation includes an overview of contemporary and cultural currents in Iran of the 11th century and Khayyam’s influence (Sommer, 1974, pp. 13-37), and it concludes with a short bibliography and a word and subject index (pp. 128-48).

Cyrus Atabay (1929-96) translated 121 of the quatrains without taking into account the Persian rhyme scheme and without any additional commentary (1984). Atabay’s sonorous translation was accompanied by Josua Reichert’s Persian calligraphy. This translation was reprinted in another edition in 1998. It contains in the epilogue by the publisher brief interpretations of Khayyam (Atabay, 1998, pp. 185-92). With a renunciation of the final rhymes, the



rhythm, and the meters of the Persian, Franz Gschwandtner translated 151 quatrains in an illustrated edition in 1986. Very different from previous translations of Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* is the one composed in English and German by Ulrich Helmke. Although Helmke's translation is in the spirit of FitzGerald (Helmke, 1987, p. 9), it gathers selected verses from other translators such as Bodenstedt, Rosen, Rempis, and Preconi. Helmke's approach is unusual and interesting at the same time: He tries to contextualize the poems of Khayyam. This is done on two levels, namely through Khayyam's biography and by his poetic motifs (wine, tavern, tulip, cheeky maiden, potter, pitcher, dust, and love).

A Persian-German edition of Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, with miniatures, was published in 1997 by Purandocht Pirayech. Pirayech's translation is one of the more modern translations of Khayyam's poetry into German. It contains 168 quatrains. Pirayech seeks not a literal, but a spiritual transmission of Khayyam's world of ideas with numerous explanations in the afterword (Pirayech, 1997, pp. 7-26). She distinguishes verses attributed to Khayyam, marking them with an asterisk, from verses that are documented. Another bilingual translation is by Jalal Rostami Gooran and Ludwig Verbeek (2006). The translators strive to remain faithful to the rhythm of the poems, but they do not attempt to rhyme in every verse (Gooran and Verbeek, 2006, p. xii). The translation of 153 quatrains, accompanied by Masoud Sadedin's drawings, was done on the basis of Persian models (p. xiii), with some German translations being used comparatively (pp. 172 f.). A readable edition of the *Rubaiyat* in German translation was published by Hort Rinner (2007). The translator, who does not necessarily approach Khayyam through questions of poetics, strangely sees in his poetry no literary and philosophically planned work, but a work that the poet has made "whimsically" (Rinner, 2007, p. 6).

Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* offers a translator the possibility to interpret and to characterize Khayyam's life, intellectual world, and poetry by exploiting poetic words for the justification of his/her own views. Otto Rauth used the English translation by the founder of the Mazdaznan movement, Otoman Zar-Adusht Ha'nish (1844-1936), for his German translation (1934). Another such German translation is that of 171 quatrains (1950) by Jehuda Louis Weinberg (ca. 1876-1960). In these translations, for instance, translators go beyond the frame and the context of the original text. It seems as if they try to turn the translation into a kind of transcendental world-view that deploys the words of the poems as instruments for their ideological purposes. In the early 1980s, an



Arabic poet named Mohamed Abou-Zaid published a German translation of the *Rubaiyat*. In the preface to his translation, he referred to Khayyam as a poet from Arab culture, whose poetry includes mystical traits and religious doctrine (Khayyam, [1980], p.3). At least with regard to Khayyam's cultural affiliation, he contradicts himself in naming Nishapur as Khayyam's birthplace (p. 5). In a lengthy introduction (pp. 5-19), the translator speaks without any evidence of Khayyam's life and work as a poet and interprets some of his poetry in a free contextual reference. In total, Abou-Zaid translated 109 quatrains, without mentioning his sources or the editions used. In addition to this deficiency, a series of erroneous comments and interpretations make this translation useless for scholarly purposes.

Khayyam—a mystic? The international reception of Khayyam is often characterized by a purely mystical interpretation of the poet. This interpretation is in some cases emphasized by editors of the older editions of Khayyam translations, such as Khosro Naghed, who uses the term mystic in the title of the 1927 Walter von der Porten edition he published (1992). The characteristic of the poetic word is its ambiguity. But it is true that Khayyam, like Hafez, is often portrayed in rigidly Islamic and Sufi interpretations as a pure mystic. Such narrow interpretations are found less frequently in scholarly than in popular and ideological circles. In the prefaces and introductions of the latter, readers tend to be patronized and offered oversimplified notions so as to bend them to a particular understanding of the poet and his work. In addition, there is usually a kind of confrontation with FitzGerald's understanding of Khayyam. One of these translations is that by the Indian yogi, philosopher, and writer Paramahansa Yogananda, whose real name is Mukunda Lal Ghosh (1893-1952). He translated Khayyam into American English (1994), which was then translated into German in 1995. Yogananda's translation is based on the first edition of FitzGerald (1859). In the introduction to his translation, Yogananda attaches spiritual power to the poetry of a poet whose philosophy was not fully understood in Persia. Explanations that apparently stem from such forces form the basis for paraphrases, interpretations, and explanations of words in the translated quatrains. Khayyam's poems in the translation of Sayed Omar Ali-Shah (1922-2005; see KHAYYAM iv) are also treated as if they were Sufi documents. Ali-Shah's English translation of Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* in 1993 was translated into German in 1995. Omar Ali-Shah's translation is a purely Sufi interpretation of Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, as well as a reckoning with FitzGerald's free translation, which in the eyes of Omar Ali-Shah was a mistranslation. This



German translation of 111 quatrains is still popular in Sufi circles.

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