



History 101

Omar Khayyam

Omar Khayyam is notable because...his is the only name I can think of with a double 'y'! Aside from that, however, he *does* deserve some note since he was a man ahead of his times. He was a Persian astronomer, mathematician, and poet (1048-c.1132) who made important contributions to mathematics, but his chief claim to fame is his work the "*Rubaiyat*." Historically speaking, Omar Khayyam has led a double life. In his own time, he was a respected mathematician and astronomer who helped reform the ancient Muslim calendar. In the modern era, he is more fondly remembered as the author of the brief, lyrical poems known collectively as *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

Omar obtained a thorough education in philosophy and mathematics, and at an early age he attained great fame in the latter field. For example, the Sassanian and Julian calendars are based on a year of 365.15 days, which is not accurate; Omar and his collaborators devised a modification of the intercalation scheme to overcome this inaccuracy. His work on mathematics is known principally through his commentary on Euclid's *Elements* and through his treatise *On Algebra*, the most original part of which is his classification of cubic equations, which, following Archimedes, he solved by means of intersecting conic sections.

Omar's *Rubaiyat* is known in the West largely through the rather inaccurate paraphrase translation of Edward FitzGerald (1859), which seems to contain a number of non-Khayyamian verses. He considerably distorted the original to make it conform to Victorian romanticism. Recent discoveries of early-13th-century manuscripts, however, have shown that Omar's poetry follows the other tradition of this form of poetry and celebrates, with humorous skepticism, wit, and poetic skill, the joys of wine and homosexual love...rather unusual for a Moslem!

[<http://www.answers.com/topic/omar-khayyam?cat=technology>]

The covers shown here are part of my Historical Figures collection. So far, these are the only three I have for ol' Omar.

