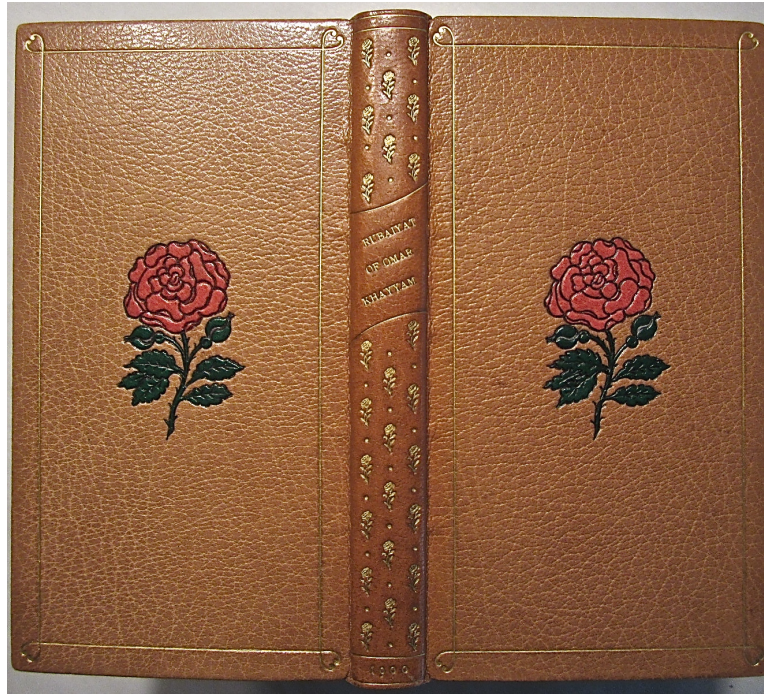


The Rubáiyát in a Hans Asper Binding



Here's something which was offered to me the other night and which I simply emailed the dealer to send with invoice. It involves a Mosher *Rubaiyat*. The dealer from the West Coast indicated that it's the 'Old World Series' edition of 1900 and "admittedly, the binding greatly exceeds the Mosher interest in this case, but I thought what the heck, it might intrigue you." Although I have numerous copies of the 1900 Mosher *Rubaiyat*, he perhaps undersells the imprint's importance. In consulting the bio-bibliography of the Mosher Press one would have seen that this edition holds a prominent place in the Mosher canon: first to carry the W. Irving Way's 'Biographical Sketch', newly collated against the original editions of 1859 & 1879 giving "an absolutely correct text", included a Pronouncing Vocabulary for the first time, the bibliography accompanying the book had been noticeably expanded, and there was an added appendix giving all the changes in the so-called fifth Fitzgerald edition. So this was quite an expanded edition going from 26 to 33 preliminary pages and text expanding from 108 to 148 pages. Anyway, the dealer sent me the following write-up in his email:

Fitzgerald, Edward, translator. *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. Portland, Maine: Thomas B. Mosher, 1900. 7" x 3.75". 147pp. Bound in full beige morocco with gilt border rules on both boards that curl into a heart shape, gilt spine lettering and flower decorations, decorative turn ins, and a green and red leather inlaid flower decoration at the center of both boards. Top edge gilt. With the mountaineering-themed bookplate of Henry F. Montagnier, designed by Georges Hantz. One of 925 copies printed on Van Gelder paper. The binding is signed on the front turn-in: Hans Asper. A superb binding, in near fine condition.

With regard to the bookbinder, Hans Asper was a well known Swiss binder in Geneva whose work spanned the late 19th and early 20th centuries (1880-1941?). Examples of his esteemed work are recorded at the Folger Shakespeare Library, the University of Pennsylvania, Brigham Young University, and at the University of Delaware. Asper was widely known for his bindings on early printed or manuscript works, but that didn't prevent him from binding contemporary works of literature or fine press books. In



this instance he employed the symbol of a rose which an Omarian would have known reflects not only its persistent mention in lines within the *Rubaiyat* itself,

“Look to the blowing Rose about us...”
“Iram indeed is gone with all its Rose...”
“And this first Summer Month that brings the Rose...”
“The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled...”
“While the Rose blows along the River Brink...”
“And then and then came Spring, and Rose-in-hand...”
“Red Wine!---the Nightingale cries to the Rose...”

and thrice in this quatrain,

Each Morn a thousand Roses brings, you say;
Yes, but where leaves the Rose of Yesterday?
And this first Summer month that brings the Rose
Shall take Jamshyd and Kaikobad away.

but it also evokes its historic use as the choice of flower planted by early admirers to important burial sites, first of Omar Khayyam at Nishapur in Iran (Persia), and then a transplanted sprig from that very rose to the churchyard grave of Omar’s prominent English translator, Edward FitzGerald buried at Boulge, Suffolk, England in 1893. The remainder of the tooling is simple yet elegant framing except for the unusual title on the rounded spine which appears on a slant (a nod to more modern design?) with gilt rose-tooled impressions both above and below loosely creating three vertical rows.



The person who most certainly commissioned the binding was the American, Henry F. Montagnier (1877-1933), a serious mountain climber and collector of works on mountaineering and Switzerland who collaborated with Douglas Freshfield on the Alpine exploration and political work in *The Life of Horace Benedict de Saussure* (London, Edward Arnold, 1920). Montagnier lived in Switzerland during WWI and conducted the basic research for the *Life of Horace*.... Many of Montagnier’s books from his library were donated to Princeton or to the American Alpine Club according to Princeton’s *BIBLIA* newsletter. Most pertinent, however, is the fact that the Emiline Fairbanks Memorial Library (Terre Haute, Indiana) received a gift which included

“a collection of Omar Khayyam... by Mr. Henry F. Montagnier.” (*Wabash Valley Review*, January 1921, and Logan Esarey’s *History of Indiana*, III, p. 90). So it was Montagnier, the Omarian, who likely commissioned the simple binding knowing exactly what he was doing when he requested a prominent rose at the center of each of the covers.

So there it is. Not a spectacular binding by any means, but high-grade professionally and with an interesting story of how it was that Hans Asper would have gotten a copy of Mosher’s *Rubaiyat* to be placed in a fine binding with its most outstanding feature being the meaningful “rose” on each cover.

Philip R. Bishop
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