Abu al-Ala al-Maʿarri, born in December 973 CE in Maʿarrat al-Nuʿman, Syria, was a blind Arab philosopher, poet, and writer. He lost his eyesight at the age of four due to smallpox, but that did not deter him from pursuing knowledge. Al-Maʿarri was known for his ascetic lifestyle and his skepticism towards religious dogmas, which was unusual for his time. Despite his blindness, he became a prolific writer, and his works reflect a deep concern for morality and the human condition, often criticizing the religious and political establishments of his time. One of the most influential works of Al-Maʿarri is a collection of poems titled 'Luzumiyat', which translates to 'The Necessities'. This work is characterized by its promotion of rationality and ethics over religious orthodoxy. Al-Maʿarri’s Luzumiyat challenged the status quo, advocating for a life guided by reason and morality rather than religious superstition, which was a bold stance that earned him both admiration and criticism. Al-Maʿarri's magnum opus, 'Risalat al-Ghufran' or 'The Epistle of Forgiveness', is a narrative poem that is considered a precursor to Dante's 'Divine Comedy'. In this work, he describes a journey through the afterlife, where he meets Arabic poets of the past. The text is a complex blend of satire and philosophical musings on the nature of sin and redemption, showcasing Al-Maʿarri's wit and intellectual depth. Al-Maʿarri was a vegetarian and an advocate for animal rights, which was quite exceptional for his time. He expressed his views on the subject in his poetry, condemning the act of killing animals for food. His stance on non-violence extended to his disapproval of warfare and the taking of any life, which he considered an act of injustice and a source of human suffering. Despite his critical view of religion, Al-Maʿarri was well-versed in religious texts and Islamic scholarship. He was known for his ability to recite the Qur'an by heart and had an extensive knowledge of Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). His critiques were not born out of ignorance but rather from a deep engagement with religious thought, which he believed should be subjected to reason and moral scrutiny. Al-Maʿarri led a reclusive life, rarely leaving his home town after his return from a trip to Baghdad, where he had been part of the vibrant intellectual scene. His decision to lead a solitary life was influenced by his disillusionment with the society of his time, which he found corrupt and misguided. He chose to live modestly, dedicating his life to writing and reflection. Al-Maʿarri’s poetry is renowned for its linguistic mastery and use of complex and innovative metaphors. His command of the Arabic language was such that he could compose entire poems where the letters of each word did not include any of the dots that are usually part of Arabic script, a testament to his ingenuity and love for linguistic challenges. In his lifetime, Al-Maʿarri was both celebrated and vilified for his unorthodox views. While some considered him a freethinker and a humanist ahead of his time, others viewed his skepticism as heresy. His works were often the subject of controversy, and after his death, some religious authorities called for his books to be burned. Despite this, his writings have survived and continue to be studied for their literary merit and bold ideas. Al-Maʿarri’s influence extended beyond the Arab world. His works were translated into various languages, and his ideas about rationalism and skepticism found resonance with European Enlightenment thinkers. His questioning of religious and societal norms can be seen as an early form of what would later become known as humanism, emphasizing individual thought and the welfare of humanity. Al-Maʿarri passed away in 1057 CE, leaving behind a legacy that has endured for centuries. His tomb in Maʿarrat al-Nuʿman became a site of literary pilgrimage, drawing admirers of his work from across the world. The complex legacy of Al-Maʿarri is a testament to the enduring power of his words and the provocative nature of his thought, which continues to inspire debate and reflection to this day.