



"Let the days do as they please" | "ءاشت ام لعفت ماي ألأعد"

Text Information

Author | Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī

Language | Arabic

Period | 8th Century, 9th Century

Genre | Poetry

Source | "Muqaddimat al-Ṭabʿah al-Thānīyah" ["Preface to the Second Edition"] in *Dīwān al-Shāfiʿī: al-Imām al-Faqīh Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī*, edited by Mujāhid Muṣṭafā Bahjat. Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam.

Collection | What Makes A Good Life? Poetic Reflections from the Premodern World

URL | https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al_shafii_let_days_do_they_please/

Translation and introduction by Sherif Abdelkarim.

Introduction to the Text

"Let the days do as they please" comes from the collected poems ascribed to Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, better known as al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī (767-820). We have no extant manuscripts from his period that include his poetic works, which appeared in various anthologies since the Middle Ages. Only relatively recently, at the turn of the twentieth century, was the poetry ascribed to him published in a single *dīwān*, or poetry collection. These poems were penned by different hands at different points in history. In the preface to his second edition of the *Dīwān*, Dr. Mujāhid Bahjat notes that the majority of poems ascribed to al-Shāfiʿī may be ascribed to other poets or are otherwise unconfirmed as his own; he traces only twelve directly to him, whereas a given edition may include over 160 poems and poetic fragments [Bahjat, 3-4, 19-20].

Although primarily recognized as the namesake to one of the four main jurisprudential schools (or *madhāhib*, sg. *madhʿhab*) in Sunni Islam, al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī equally distinguished himself as a master of language and *adab* (*belles-lettres*). Growing up, this descendant of the prophetic line of the Banū Hāshim tribe lived among the Hudhayl—a clan known for the purity of their Arabic—in order to immerse himself in the study of the language. This training made his reputation as a poet and poetic critic. Years later, in Baghdad, the famed philologist and grammarian al-Aṣmaʿī (d.828) would visit al-Shāfiʿī to take Hudhalī poetry from him. As did all eminent scholars who sought him out (there were many), he marveled at his double command of language and poetry.

al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī was born in Gaza in 767. With the death of his father, he and his mother moved to Mecca two years later. His pursuit of *ṭalab al-ʿilm* (knowledge) brought him at a young age to Medina, where he studied *ḥadīth* (prophetic narrations) and *fiqh* (Islamic law) under al-Imām Mālik ibn Anas until the latter's death in 795. He then accepted a post in Yemen as governor of Najran, although a revolt in 803 prematurely ended his political career when it led to his arrest and summoning to the court of the Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d.809) in al-Raqqah, a city in Syria. There, he would meet the jurist Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d.805), who helped secure his acquittal. Under al-Imām al-Shaybānī's tutelage, al-Shāfiʿī relocated to Baghdad. Among al-Shāfiʿī's most important students there was al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d.855). al-Shāfiʿī would make one more major move in 814 for Egypt, where he continued to study and teach a variety of subjects, primarily jurisprudence, until his death in 820 at the age of 54.

The verses ascribed to al-Shāfiʿī probably reflect a lifetime's worth of occasional compositions and pronouncements, and certainly reflect their author's erudition, fine manners, and familiarity with classical meters. Precise and brief, the poetry employs a range of sophisticated rhetorical strategies nevertheless, from *ṭibāq* (contrariety) to *bayān* (eloquence), to *jinās* (paronomasia), to additional instances of *badʿ* (ingenuity)—stylistically unique tropes and schemes [Bahjat, pp. 29-37, 42-43]. Thematically, the poems touch on the matters of wisdom literature, including personal comportment, friendship, the pursuit of knowledge, and the cultivation of virtues.



Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī. "Let the days do as they please | دع الأيام تفعل ما تشاء". Trans. Sherif Abdelkarim. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al_shafii_let_days_do_they_please/.

Further Reading

Bahjat, Mujāhid Muṣṭafā, editor. "Muqaddimat al-Ṭab'ah al-Thānīyah" ["Preface to the Second Edition"]. In *Dīwān al-Shāfiʿī: al-Imām al-Faqīh Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī*, Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, 1999.

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“Let the days do as they please” | “دع الأيام تفعل ما تشاء”

Let the days do as they please, And take heart with what destiny decreed.		وطب نفساً بما حكم القضاء	دع الأيام تفعل ما تشاء
Don't sweat the nights' emergencies; The world's afflictions lack perpetuity.		فما لحوادث الدنيا بقاء	ولا تجزع لحادثة الليالي
Be a man indifferent to fear, Of noble, loyal nature.	5	وشيمتك المروءة والوفاء	وكن رجلاً على الأهوال جلدأ
Should your faults accrue among creation, And you'd like to drape them,		وسرّك أن يكون لها غطاء	وإن كثرت عيوبك في البرايا
Drape them with generosity, for every fault Generosity enshrouds, as the saying goes.	10	يغطيه كما قيل السخا	تستر بالسخاء فكل عيب
Never show foes a fault; Their schadenfreude's a sure misfortune.		فإن شماتة الأعداء بلاء	ولا تر للأعداء قط ذلاً
Expect no bounty from the miser; Jehennem waters not the parched.		فما في النار للظمان ما	ولا ترج السماح من بخل
Unhurriedness will not diminish your provisions, Nor will overexertion increase them.	15	وليس يزيد في الرزق العناء	ورزقك ليس ينقصه التأنى
Despondency passes, as does joy; Neither poverty nor affluence are on you.		ولا بؤس عليك ولا رخاء	ولا حزن يدوم ولا سرور
If you possess a satisfied heart, You own the world.		فأنت ومالك الدنيا سوا	إذا ما كنت ذا قلب قنوع
On whomever Death descends with its appointment, No earth can shelter, no sky.	20	فلا أرض تقيه ولا سما	ومن نزلت بساحته المنايا
Allāh's earth is wide. However, When fate strikes the space contracts.		إذا نزل القضا ضاق الفضاء	وأرض الله واسعة ولكن
Let the days betray every age, For death knows no antidote.	25	فما يغني عن الموت الدوا	دع الأيام تغدر كل حين