



"Your friend contests whomever you contest" | "صديقك من يعادي من تعادي"

Text Information

Author | Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī

Language | Arabic

Period | 8th Century, 9th Century

Genre | Poetry

Source | Dīwān al-Shāfiʿī: al-Imām al-Faqīh Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, ed. Mujāhid Muṣṭafā Bahjat. Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam, page 97.

Collection | Prayer, Spirituality, and Life after Death: Global Medieval Perspectives

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

Translation and introduction by Sherif Abdelkarim.

Introduction to the Text

"Your friend contests whomever you contest" comes from the collected works ascribed to Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, better known as al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī (d.820). The great belletrist 'Abd al-Mālik al-Tha'libī (d.1038) marshals these verses in blame of friendship in his famous anthology, *Yāwāqūt al-Mawāqūt fī Madḥ Kull Shay' wa-Dhammihī wa-Tazyīnihi wa-Tahjīnihi* [Rubies of the Ages in Praise, Blame, Adornment, and Debasement of Everything], alternatively titled *al-Laṭā'if wa-al-Zarā'if* [The Subtle and Eloquent [Expressions]]. The anthology bespeaks an age's incessant knack for wit. With the right evidence, eloquence, and sense of humor, authors absurdly uglified the beautiful and beautified the ugly.

We have no extant manuscripts from his period that include al-Shāfiʿī's 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. *madh'hab*) 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 knowledge (or *ṭalab al-ilm*) 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 *badī* (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.



Further Reading

Bahjat, M., Editor. 1999. "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*. Mujaḥid Muṣṭafā Bahjat. Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam.

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van Gelder, G. 2012. *Classical Arabic Literature: A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology*. New York: New York University Press.

van Gelder, G. 2003. "Beautifying the Ugly and Uglifying the Beautiful: The Paradox in Classical Arabic Literature," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Volume 48, Issue 2, Autumn: 321–351.



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Your friend contests whomever you contest So long as pigeons coo;		صديقك من يعادي من تعادي بطول الدَّهر ما سجع الحمامُ
Pays without delay your debt, Never guiltling you.		وَيُوفِي الدَّيْنَ عَنْكَ بغير مَطْلٍ ولا يَمُنُّ به أَبداً دَوامُ
Should your friend your foe underwrite, Enjoying arrows' flight,	5	فإن صافي صديقك من تعادي ويفرح حين ترشُّقك السَّهَامُ
Then surely <i>he's</i> the foe, no doubt. Quit him. His friendship's out.		فذاك هو العدوُّ بغير شكٍّ تجنَّبَه فُصْحْبَتَه حرام
We heard a verse, Pearly in its framework:	10	فإنَّا قد سمعنا بيت شعرٍ شبيه الدُّر زينه النِّظامُ:
"Once your friend upholds your foe, he Crosses, end of story."		إذا وافى صديقك من تعادي "فقد عاداك، وانفصل الكلامُ"