



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

"Let the days do as they please" | ادعوا أيام تفعل ما تشاء

Text Information

Author | Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiī

Language | Arabic

Period | 8th Century, 9th Century

Genre | Poetry

Source | "Muqaddimat al-Tab'ah al-Thāniyah" ["Preface to the Second Edition"] in *Dīwān al-Shāfiī: al-Imām al-Faqīh Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiī*, edited by Mujāhid Muṣṭafā Bahjat. Dimashq: Dār al-Qalam.

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

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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-Shāfiī, better known as al-Imām al-Shāfiī (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-Shāfiī 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-Shāfiī 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-Asmaī (d.828) would visit al-Shāfiī to take Hudhaylī 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-Shāfiī 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-'ilm* (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-Shāfiī relocated to Baghdad. Among al-Shāfiī's most important students there was al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Hanbal (d.855). al-Shāfiī 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-Shāfiī 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.



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Further Reading

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

Don't sweat the nights' emergencies;
The world's afflictions lack perpetuity.

Be a man indifferent to fear,
Of noble, loyal nature.

Should your faults accrue among creation,
And you'd like to drape them,

Drape them with generosity, for every fault
Generosity enshrouds, as the saying goes.

Never show foes a fault;
Their schadenfreude's a sure misfortune.

Expect no bounty from the miser;
Jehennem waters not the parched.

Unhurriedness will not diminish your provisions,
Nor will overexertion increase them.

Despondency passes, as does joy;
Neither poverty nor affluence are on you.

If you possess a satisfied heart,
You own the world.

On whomever Death descends with its appointment,
No earth can shelter, no sky.

Allāh's earth is wide. However,
When fate strikes the space contracts.

Let the days betray every age,
For death knows no antidote.

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وطب نفساً بما حكم القضاء

فما لحوادث الدنيا بقا

وشيملك المروءة والوفاء

وسرك أن يكون لها غطاء

يغطيه كما قيل السخا

فإن شماتة الأعداء بلاء

فما في النار للظمان ما

وليس يزيد في الرزق العناء

ولا بؤس عليك ولا رخاء

فأنت ومالك الدنيا سوا

فلا أرض تقيه ولا سما

إذا نزل القضا ضاق الفضا

فما يغنى عن الموت الدوا

دع الأيام تفعل ما تشا

ولا تجزع لحادثة الليالي

وكن رجلا على الأهوال جلداً

وإن كثرت عيوبك في البرايا

تستر بالسخاء فكل عيب

ولا تر للأعادي قط ذلاً

ولا ترج السماحة من بخيل

ورزقك ليس ينقصه التأني

ولا حزن يدوم ولا سرور

إذا ما كنت ذا قلب قنوع

ومن نزلت بساحته المنايا

وأرض الله واسعة ولكن

دع الأيام تغدر كل حين