



Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiī. "Your friend contests whomever you contest" | "صَدِيقُكَ مِنْ يَعَادِي مِنْ تَعَادِي". Trans. Sherif Abdelkarim. *Global Medieval Sourcebook*. 2021. https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/al_shafii_your_friend_contests/.

"Your friend contests whomever you contest" | "صَدِيقُكَ مِنْ يَعَادِي مِنْ تَعَادِي"

Text Information

Author | Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiī

Language | Arabic

Period | 8th Century, 9th Century

Genre | Poetry

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

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

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-Shāfiī, better known as al-Imām al-Shāfiī (767-820). The great belletrist ‘Abd al-Mālik al-Thālibī (d.1038) marshals these verses in blame of friendship in his famous anthology, *Yāwāqīt al-Mawāqīt fī Madh Kull Shay’ wa-Dhammihi wa-Tazīnihi wa-Tahjīnihi* [Rubies of the Ages in Praise, Blame, Adornment, and Debasement of Everything], alternatively titled *al-Laṭā’if wa-al-Żarā’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-Shāfiī’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-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 Hudhayl 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 Ḥanbal (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 *tibāq* (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

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"Your friend contests whomever you contest" | صديقك من يعادى من تعادى"

Your friend contests whomever you contest
So long as pigeons coo;

Pays without delay your debt,
Never guilting you.

Should your friend your foe underwrite,
Enjoying arrows' flight,

Then surely *he's* the foe, no doubt.
Quit him. His friendship's out.

We heard a verse,
Pearly in its framework:

"Once your friend upholds your foe, he
Crosses, end of story."

صديقك من يعادى من تعادى بطول الدّهر ما سجع الحمام

وَيُؤْفِي الدَّيْنَ عَنْكَ بِغَيْرِ مَطْلِبٍ

فَإِنْ صَافَ صَدِيقُكَ مَنْ تعادى

فَذَاكَ هُوَ الْعَدُوُّ بِغَيْرِ شُكٍ

فَإِنَّا قَدْ سَمِعْنَا بِيَتْ شِعْرٍ

إِذَا وَافَ صَدِيقُكَ مَنْ تُعَادِيْ

شَبِيهُ الدُّرِّ زَيْنُهُ النَّظَامُ:

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وَيَفْرَحُ حِينَ تَرْشُقُكَ السَّهَامُ

تَجَنَّبُهُ فَصُحبَتِهِ حَرَامٌ

فَقَدْ عَادَكَ، وَانْفَضَلَ الْكَلَامُ

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