Muhyi’l-dīn ibn al-ʿArabī, known as al-Shaykh al-Akbar, was born in 1165 (560 H) in Murcia, al-Andalus. During his lifetime he traveled throughout the Islamic world, and his life ended in Damascus in 1240 (638 H). Ibn al-ʿArabī is the author of over 350 works, including The Ringstones of Wisdom (Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam), a series of teachings of Sufi wisdom relating to 28 prophets as they were dictated to the author by the Prophet Muhammad in a dream, The Meccan Openings (al-Futuḥāt al-makkiyya), a massive work in 37 volumes comprising the author's complete Sufi doctrine that has not been fully translated, and The Interpreter of Desires (Tarjumān al-ashwāq), a collection of poetry that is presented on this site.

Ibn al-ʿArabī began the poems of the Tarjumān al-ashwāq during the two years he spent in Mecca, from 1202-1204. The collection is addressed to ʿAyn al-Shams Niẓām, the daughter of a scholar of Isfahan, whom ibn al-ʿArabī met in Mecca. The 61 poems in the collection are self-standing nasīb, or short love poems are steeped in the existing Arabic poetic tradition, drawing heavily on Sufi poetic vocabulary shared with other poets, such as ʿUmar ibn al-Fāriḍ and Abu al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī. In response to criticism of the poems' apparent focus on earthly love and eroticism, ibn al-ʿArabī later added a commentary to the work, arguing that the poems were to be read as allegory for divine love and spiritual truths.

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