

Muḥyi'l-dīn ibn al-`Arabī, 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-`Arabī 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-`Arabī began the poems of the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* during the two years he spent in Mecca, from 1202-1204. The collection is addressed to `Ayn al-Shams Nizām, the daughter of a scholar of Isfahan, whom ibn al-`Arabī met in Mecca. The 61 poems in the collection are self-standing *nasībs*, or short love poems are steeped in the existing Arabic poetic tradition, drawing heavily on Sufi poetic vocabulary shared with other poets, such as `Umar 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-`Arabī later added a commentary to the work, arguing that the poems were to be read as allegory for divine love and spiritual truths.

References:

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