

Sa'di, Master of Poetry Describing the Human Conditions

Compiled by: Pooneh Rahmati

Mushrif al-Din ibn Muslih al-Din, popularly known as Sa'di, also spelled Saadi, (1213 – 1291 CE, Shiraz, Iran), was one of the greatest figures in classical Persian literature. He lost his father, Muslih al-Din, in early childhood; later he was sent to study in Baghdad at the renowned Nezamiyeh College, where he received the traditional Islamic teachings. The unsettled conditions following the Mongol invasion of Persia led him to wander abroad through Anatolia, Syria, Egypt, and

Iraq. In his works, he has also mentioned having traveled to India and Central Asia. He claimed that he was held captive by the Franks and put to work in the trenches of the fortress of Tripoli (now in Lebanon). When he returned to his native Shiraz, he was middle-aged; he seems to have spent the rest of his life in Shiraz. Sa'di took his nom de plume from the name of a local Atabeg (prince), Sa'd ibn Zangi. Sa'di's best-known works are the *Boustan* (1257; *The Orchard*) and the *Golestan* (1258;

The Rose Garden). The *Boustan* is entirely a book of poems and consists of stories aptly illustrating the standard virtues recommended to Muslims (justice, liberality, modesty, contentment) as well as reflections on the behavior of dervishes and their ecstatic practices.

The *Golestan* is mainly in prose and contains stories and personal anecdotes. The text is interspersed with a variety of short poems, containing aphorisms, advice, and humorous reflections. The morals preached in the *Golestan* demonstrate a profound awareness of Sa'di about the importance of human existence. The fate of those who depend on the changeable moods of kings is contrasted with the freedom of the dervishes.

For Western students *Boustan* and *Golestan* are of special attraction; but Sa'di is also remembered as a great lyricist, the author of a number of masterly general odes portraying human experience and also of particular odes such as the lament on the fall of Baghdad after the Mongol invasion in 1258 CE.

He is also known for a number of works in Arabic. The peculiar blend of human kindness and cynicism, humor, and resignation displayed in Sa'di's works, together with a tendency to avoid the hard dilemma, make him, to many, the most typical and lovable writer in the world of Iranian culture.

