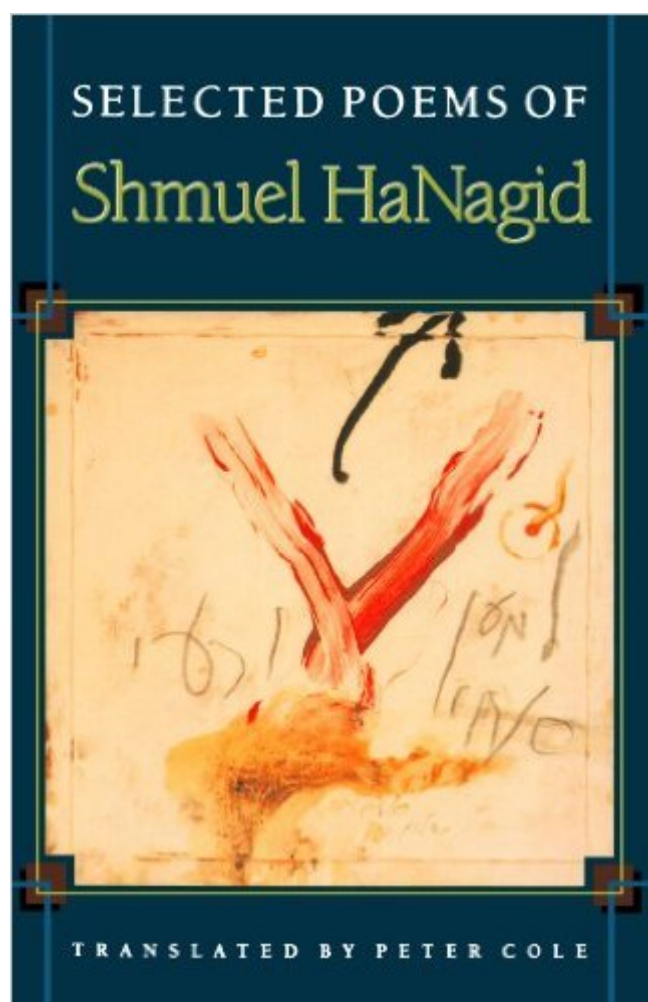


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Selected Poems Of Shmuel HaNagid



Synopsis

The first major poet of the Hebrew literary renaissance of Moslem Spain, Shmuel Ben Yosef Ha-Levi HaNagid (993-1056 c.e.) was also the Prime Minister of the Muslim state of Granada, battlefield commander of the non-Jewish Granadan army, and one of the leading religious figures in a medieval Jewish world that stretched from Andalusia to Baghdad. Peter Cole's groundbreaking versions of HaNagid's poems capture the poet's combination of secular and religious passion, as well as his inspired linking of Hebrew and Arabic poetic practice. This annotated Selected Poems is the most comprehensive collection of HaNagid's work published to date in English.

"The Multiple Troubles of Man"

The multiple troubles of man, my brother, like slander and pain, amaze you?
Consider the heart which holds them all in strangeness, and doesn't break.

"I'd Suck Bitter Poison from the Viper's Mouth"

I'd suck bitter poison from the viper's mouth and live by the basilisk's hole forever, rather than suffer through evenings with boors, fighting for crumbs from their table.

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Customer Reviews

This book sat on my shelf for years until I turned to it in a search of a specific poem concerning the 1013 sack of Cordoba. Unfortunately, that particular work is not included. Nevertheless, this is an extraordinary collection of magnificent translations. The poems are as bright and fresh as far more famous classics, and the best contemporary works. The first piece, "On Fleeing his City," is particularly heartrending. HaNagid opens, "Spirit splits in its asking, / and soul wanting is balked;"

and continues to deride those who mistake his "pitching from place to place,/ my hair wild, my eyes/ charcoaled with night--" as the results of "ease or gain."He then pinions them as men whom "not a one speaks wisely,/ their souls blunted, or blurred,/ goat-footed thinkers."But he rises above his tormentors, vowing to "sew the edge of desert to desert,/ and split the sea/ and every gorge,/ and sail in mountainous ascent,/ until the word 'forever' makes sense..." and "your soul which He loves be delivered,/ and the God of sentence/ send aegis,/ both beyond the sun and the moon."Many short poems glint with wisdom of the ages. For example:In business, don't get involved with a man who tells all he knows;if he can't keep track of a word,how could you trust him with gold?And the collection also offers many longer poems, including the second of HaNagid's 41 battle works, "The Victory over Seville," a "psalm of praise" to God, composed on Erev Sukkot, 1039, upon the miraculous defeat of Ben Abbad, the son of Seville's qadi (Islamic judge), whose followers had "slandered my people," "weakened and crushed them" and "divided their plunder,/ casting lots for their lands...

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