

Songs from Samuel Hanagid

Samuel Hanagid lived from 993-1056. He was born in Cordoba and was among those who fled the capital when the Berber hordes destroyed the city in 1013. A renowned Talmudist and statesman, he was the first Spanish Jew to be granted the title Nagid ('Prince'). He was appointed vizier shortly after the accession to the throne (1038) of Badis, the Berber ruler of Granada. In this capacity he commanded the armies of Granada in a series of victorious campaigns against Seville and her allies, which lasted from 1038 to 1056. The many poems he sent his son from the battlefield constitute a unique poetic diary of his tempestuous life. He died after a strenuous campaign and was succeeded as vizier and commander by his son, Yehosef. Ten years later Yehosef was assassinated and the Jewish community of Granada was massacred by the Muslims. Hanagid's vast knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic culture is apparent in his technical mastery and in his rich repertoire of themes and motifs. He excels in the fusion of epic and lyrical elements.

The Prison

Eretz l'adam be-it k'lu kol yamav, Lachein ani omeir emet lasachal: Tarutz v'shamayim s'vivotecha mi kol avarim; Kum v'tzei im tuchal.	The earth is a prison to man all his life. Therefore I say this truth to the fool: Though you rush about, the sky surrounds you on all sides. Try to get out, if you can.
--	---

The Master

Lo ya-avidach mosh'lach ad y'kave ki yishkot veat tige vetiaf bemabadav.	No master will hire you, unless he can expect to be idle while you tire and become weary in his service.
Ata k'melkachav: b'yado y'viach toch ha-ur - v'yishmur misreifa b'cha yadav!	You are for him like tongs: with his hands he pushes you into the fire, but he takes great care not to burn himself on you.

War

K'rav dome v'rosho el y'feifa
Asher kol ish l'sachek ba y'ave,
V'sofu kaz'keina ham'usa
Asher kol shochra yivke v'yid've

War is at first like a beautiful girl
with whom all men long to play, but
in the end like a repulsive hag
whose suitors all weep and ache

The Root

Oh'vei y'mim al gav aretz,
Hay'datem ki chayeichem shav?

Oh, you merry-makers on earth's
back, do you know that your life is
nothing?

Atem misoresh mavet:
Kol anaf yashuv el sharashav!

You grew from the root of death -
and every branch to its own root
returns

Take Heart

B'itot atzb'cha chazeik l'va- vach.
V'im tamod alei sha-ar hareiga:
L'neir ma-or b'terem hadicha,
V'lichfirim m'dukarim sh'aga.

In times of sorrow, take heart,
even though you stand at death's
door: the candle flares up before it
dies, and wounded lions roar.

The Two Cries

Shit lib'cha, tavin k'lon simchat
leiv bein sh'tei vich'yot l'cha
nimtzeit:
Tivke b'eit bo-ach elei olam
Ata v'acheir yivk'cha eit tzeit.

Reflect, and you will realize how
shameful is your heart's delight,
which comes between two cries: you
cry when you come into the world,
and others cry for you when you
leave it.

Complaint

Hala-ad ani shochein b'ohel, k'mo
arav,
V'tachat y'riya kol y'motai m'dori?
Kevar shik'huni ha-arava v'hazman
Chatzeiri b'iri az y'didei chatzeiri?

Shall I forever live in a tent, like a
Bedouin? Must all my days be
passed beneath tent-curtains?
Time and the desert have already
made me forget my court back I
town. Oh, where are my courtier
friends.

Winter Wine Song

Meit av umeit eilul umeit chumam,
Gam ne-esaf tishri umeit imam.
Ba-u y'mei hakur, v'hatirosh adam,
v'kolo vakli damam.

Lachein, y'didi sov elei rei-im,
Kol ish v'ish ya-as asher zamam.

Amru: chazei avim b'hagshimam
Ushma sh'mei marom b'har'imam
Urei ch'for ulshon m'dura ze
Yeireid v'ze ya-al v'ytromam.
Kuma sh'tei vakos, v'shuv ush'tei
Bakad, uvalayil v'gam yomam.

Av has died and Elul has died, and
so has their warmth. Tishri, too,
has died and been gathered to
them. The cold days have come,
the must has grown red and is now
silent in its barrel. Therefore, my
friend, go find companions - and let
each man fulfil his own desire!
They said: 'Behold the clouds
pouring down, listen to the heavens
thundering. See the frost and the
tongues of fire: one falls mown as
the others rise and swirl. Arise,
drink from the cup, and then again
out of the jug; drink night and day!'