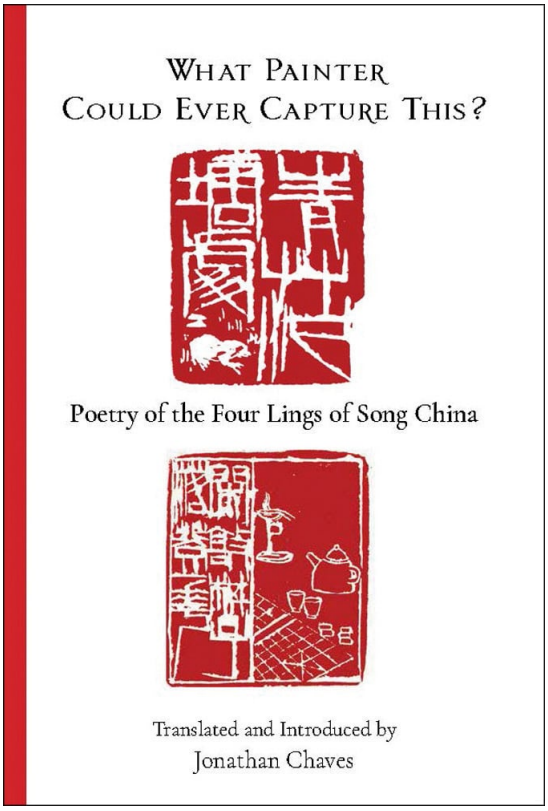
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What Painter Could Ever Capture This?

Poetry of the Four Lings of Song China

Jonathan Chaves

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- Classical Chinese poetry immediately accessible to Western readers
- The first joint presentation of four brilliant but neglected 12th-century poets
- Two hundred and six translated poems with Chinese text included
- By an award-winning scholar and translator

Often overlooked in Chinese poetic history are a number of accomplished late-Song poets, among the most important of whom were four men from Wenzhou known as the "Four Lings" because, apparently by common consent, they all had noms-de-plume containing the character ling, meaning "numinous" or "magical." The four were: Weng Juan (d. after 1214), Xu Zhao (d. 1211), Xu Ji (1162–1214), and Zhao Shixiu (1170–1219). As other late-Song poets, they leaned toward understated, straightforward diction that incurred the enmity of those who preferred the more flowery, allusive style of the high Tang.

As they navigated the uncertain career paths of would-be minor officials, the Four Lings wrote movingly about their joys and disappointments, the hardships of poverty and old age, and the solace to be found in nature and friendship. Seeming to share a single poetic sensibility, they wrote in a naturalistic and accessible style that won widespread admiration; it is fitting that they now be presented together, as friends and fellow poets of consequence.

Jonathan Chaves is a professor of Chinese language and literature at The George Washington University. He has been awarded the Lucien Stryk Prize for best translation from an Asian work of literature, the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize for best translation, and nomination for the National Book Award in Translation.

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