



Jewish Symbols and Secrets: A Fifteenth-Century Spanish Carpet

Anton Felton

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In the hundred years that led up to expulsion in 1492, hundreds of thousands of Spanish Jews converted publically - but not privately - to Christianity. They left some clues to their compelling and dangerous secret lives, revealed through personal artifacts. This book examines one such artifact - the brilliant 15th-century Vizcaya carpet that has bedazzled experts and visitors alike. It becomes clear through this original study of the private lives of the noble family who commissioned the carpet, as well as the weavers who wove it, that neither group were Christians. They were secret Jews, also known as conversos. The symbols in the carpet - with their hidden messages of Judaism and Kabbalah - are analyzed in the book, along with their alternative meanings in medieval Christian and Islamic culture. Jewish Symbols and Secrets also traces the history of the Star of David in Judaism, from Biblical times to 1600 C.E. The hitherto neglected role of textiles in Jewish culture is uncovered, as is the ancient history of the Sephardi weavers of Spain and the Mediterranean, from Biblical to Islamic times. Further insights are gained in the oft-debated question as to the total number of Jews who converted to Christianity. In understanding the worlds and the guarded secret lives of the people who came together to create this carpet, we now see it as an extraordinary and beautifully encoded statement of Jewish faith and survival. *** "...Felton's book presents a fascinating portrayal of the mysterious world of the conversos. He provides the historical background for the Jewish situation in 15th century Spain and also discusses the centrality of weaving in Murcia, Spain...He considers the role played by carpets in Jewish life and chronicles the work of Jewish weavers in Spain and North Africa.....This is a carefully researched work which examines intriguing questions in an accessible and thought-provoking manner." AJL Reviews, November/December 2012

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