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Jews, Real and Imagined, at San Isidoro de León and Beyond

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Abstract

From the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, medieval León possessed a thriving Jewish community whose presence can be traced via archaeological and documentary remains. As regards the treasury of San Isidoro de León, however, there is no evidence for the involvement of living Jews with its luxury objects—an involvement that has been documented in comparable centers elsewhere in Iberia and Europe. Apart from a possible but unproven relationship to its textiles, a Jewish connection to the Treasury of San Isidoro remains ideological and limited to the presence of Abraham's relics in a single treasury object. However, both living and ideological Jews can be associated with León's cathedral, where a portion of the Jewish community's annual taxes was earmarked to light its altars and where the sculptural program featured the blind synagogue.

Keywords

San Isidoro (León) – Jews – León – synagogue of León – Urraca – Toledo – textiles – relics

Supplementary Material



Figure 1 The Vidal Mayor, J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig XIV
6, 83.MQ.165., folio 175v
Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program



Figure 2 The Golden Haggadah, folio 13r. Bottom left: “The Spoliation of the Egyptians and the Plague of Darkness”
c British Library Board, MS Add. 27210



Figure 3 Blind Synagogue, West Facade, Portal of St. John the Baptist,
Cathedral of Santa Maria de la Regla, Leon

Photo: Pamela A. Patton