



The Spanish Gypsy: The History of a European Obsession

Lou Charnon-Deutsch

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Spanish Gypsy—the words themselves conjure up the sound of castanets, heels tapping the floor, plaintive yet passionate singing, and the unforgettable sight of a seductive figure, back arched, skirts swirling, dancing with fierce grace. This stereotype has been all but synonymous with Spain since the nineteenth century, and there are no signs that her power as a national icon is on the wane. Surprising as it may seem, *The Spanish Gypsy* by Lou Charnon-Deutsch, the well-known Hispanist, is the first comprehensive history of this icon, associated in the European imagination with freedom, passion, and unconventionality.

Charnon-Deutsch starts her story in the Middle Ages and proceeds to show how Europeans came to revere but also fear Gypsies because of their nomadic way of life and the freedoms it seemed to allow. Much of Charnon-Deutsch's information is drawn from historical and sociological studies, but she also proposes new readings of literature, starting with Cervantes's "Precious Jewel of Love" and moving on to the vogue for Gypsy subjects that arose in the Romantic era.

This fascinating book reaches its culmination in the chapters devoted to Spain's embrace of Gypsy myth and lore. Here the range of materials broadens to include music, dance, and the visual arts. Although the primary audience for Charnon-Deutsch's study will be students of Spanish social and cultural history, it will also be essential reading for all those interested in a group of people who remain the least understood ethnic minority in Europe.

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