

The Fatimids | Pleasures and Celebrations at Court

‘The court was exceptionally extravagant when celebrating religious and civic festivals.’

Chess was played widely at court, although al-Hakim bi Amrillah (r. 386–411 / 996–1021) banned the game in 403 / 1012. Astronomy and astrology were popular pastimes. Astrological charts were drawn up and caliphs like, for instance, al-Mu‘izz and al-Hakim engaged in astrology. Beyond the various private pastimes, the court was exceptionally extravagant when celebrating religious and civic festivals. Processions were elaborate affairs used to display Fatimid might and propagate Isma‘ili theology. Keenly anticipated annual banquets and gift-presentation ceremonies were held for civil servants, army generals, the judiciary and the religious establishment.



Name:
Gold coin (dinar)

Dynasty:
Hegira 380 / AD 990 Fatimid

Details:
Aqaba Archaeological Museum
Aqaba, Jordan

Justification:
The Fatimids knew that money could buy influence and loyalty and they distributed it thriftily to their loyal servants and followers.



Name:
Chess piece

Dynasty:
Hegira 4th–5th centuries / 10th–11th centuries Fatimid or Norman

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum
Berlin, Germany

Justification:
The royal game of chess had reached the Arabs from the East and they in turn introduced it to Europe.



Name:
Chess piece

Dynasty:
Hegira 4th or 5th century / AD 10th or 11th century Fatimid

Details:
The British Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:
Chess was enjoyed at court in the evenings, alongside wine drinking and music.



Name:
Rectangular piece of wood

Dynasty:

Hegira 5th century / AD 11th century Fatimid

Details:

Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:

Banqueting and scenes of revelry are common in Fatimid art and illustrate the centrality of fine living both at court and among the upper class.



Name:

Ewer

Dynasty:

About hegira 391–452 / AD 1000–1060 Fatimid

Details:

Victoria and Albert Museum
London, England, United Kingdom

Justification:

The Fatimids exploited excellence in craftsmanship and surrounded themselves with lavish ornaments that underlined their power.
