The Fatimids | Royal Women: Granddaughters of Fatima al-Zahra

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In North Africa the sophisticated and highly educated women of the Zirid (Sanhaja Berber) dynasty emulated their royal counterparts in Egypt. During the 5th / 11th century a Zirid princess added a mosque to the ribat (fortified enclosure) in Monastir; it became known as the Mosque of al-Sayyida in recognition of her work. In the library at Kairouan, there are a number of Qur’an manuscripts commissioned by Zirid princesses intended for use at the Great Mosque, among them Umm Milal’s Qur’an and that of Umm al-‘Ilū, the sister of the Zirid prince al-Mu‘izz. A third manuscript was presented by Fatima, governess to the prince Badis Bin al-Mansur.

Name:
Pendant earring

Dynasty:
Hegira 5th–6th centuries / AD 11th–12th centuries Fatimid

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Raqqada, Kairouan, Tunisia

Justification:
An earring that was found in Tunisia which recalls Fatimid ornamentation.

Name:
Page from a Qur’an

Dynasty:
Hegira 410 / AD 1020 Fatimid-Zirid

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Raqqada, Kairouan, Tunisia

Justification:
Fatima, governess to the Zirid prince Badis, endowed this Qur’an to the Great Mosque of Kairouan. Interestingly it was compiled under the supervision of another woman, Dura al-Katiba – Dura the lady-scribe.

Name:
Ribat and Mosque of the Sayyida

Dynasty:
Hegira mid-3rd century / AD 9th century Aghlabid and Zirid

Details:
Monastir, Tunisia

Justification:
The Mosque of al-Sayyida within the ribat at Monastir was endowed by a Zirid princess.