

The Abbasids | Al-Raqqa: Caliph Harun al-Rashid's Capital in Syria

'Al-Rafiqa (al-Raqqa) became the summer resort of the Abbasid court of Baghdad.'

The twin Syrian cities of al-Raqqa and al-Rafiqa lie on the banks of the Euphrates on a strategic trade, postal and pilgrimage route that links the eastern and western parts of the Abbasid Empire. Although Raqqa's history goes back to prehistoric times, it acquired importance in the early Abbasid period when in 154 / 770–1 the caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur (r. 136–58 / 754–75) passed through it and fell in love with its location and pleasant air. He decided to build adjacent to it a fortified palace-city which he named al-Rafiqa. From then on al-Rafiqa (al-Raqqa) became the summer resort of the Abbasid court of Baghdad, as well as a refuge during periods of political unrest.



Name:

City walls of Rafiqa (Raqqa) and the Baghdad Gate

Dynasty:

Hegira 155–158 / AD 771–5; additions AH 180–92 / 796–809 and renovation some time during the 5th/11th century Abbasid

Details:

Raqqa, Syria

Justification:

Al-Raqqa was not only the formal residence of the caliph Mu'tasim it was also the garden city of the other Abbasid caliphs with several orchards and parks, a horseracing arena and hunting grounds.



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Details:

Raqqa, Syria

Justification:

View of the exterior façade of al-Rafiqa (al-Raqqa) with its rounded towers.



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Hegira 155–158 / AD 771–5; additions AH 180–92 / 796–809 and renovation some time during the 5th/11th century Abbasid

Details:

Raqqa, Syria

Justification:

View of al-Rafiqa (al-Raqqa).



Name:

Capital

Dynasty:

Hegira 3rd century / AD 9th century Abbasid

Details:

Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum
Berlin, Germany

Justification:

The architecture of Al-Raqqa, like that in other Arab cities of the Abbasid period, was influenced by the local and regional styles of previous dynasties, especially those belonging to the Byzantines and Sassanids.

**Name:**

Fragment from a carved wooden piece

Dynasty:

Around hegira 4th–5th century / AD 10th–11th century Abbasid

Details:

National Museum of Damascus
Damascus, Syria

Justification:

An 11th-century fragment of carved wood that was discovered during excavations in the Abbasid palace complex at al-Raqqa. The partial inscription is 'commander of the faithful', written in foliated kufic script.

**Name:**

Fragment of a pottery bowl

Dynasty:

Hegira 136–58 / AD 754–75 Abbasid

Details:

National Museum of Damascus
Damascus, Syria

Justification:

Made in southern Iraq and excavated at al-Raqqa, the inscription on this bowl reveals both the name of the maker and his patron: 'Made by Ibrahim the Christian, made at al-Hira for the prince Sulayman, son of the Prince of the Believers [the Caliph]'. Sulayman was one of the sons of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur, who ruled between 136–58 / 754–75.
