

Women | Muslim Women as Professionals, Artisans and Performing Artists

'Many Muslim women have made history as accomplished musicians and dancers at the highest level.'

Many Muslim women have made history as accomplished musicians and dancers at the highest level; several were engaged as court performers and were generously rewarded. Thus we know of Nasab, whose skill in drumming was such that the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir bi Allah gave her a plot of land in Cairo, which subsequently grew into a neighbourhood known after her as al-Tabalah – The Drummer. One female musician, the lute player, Itifaq, even succeeded in marrying the Mamluk ruler al-Malik al-Muzaffar Haji bin Qalawun. When she came to perform, he spread silk fabrics on the floor for her to tread on, and after she had finished, he gave her four jewels and six pearls, worth 4,000 dinars.



Name:
Large dish

Dynasty:
Hegira 5th century / AD 11th century Fatimid

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
An example of a female musician performing in the presence of her patron, a frequently depicted subject in the Fatimid period.



Name:
The 'Lady of Sabra' plate

Dynasty:
Hegira, second half of the 4th century / AD 10th century Fatimid

Details:
Museum of Islamic Art
Raqqada, Kairouan, Tunisia

Justification:
It is thought that the woman depicted on this plate may be a dancer.



Name:
Four ivory panels

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

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

Justification:
The scenes from court life seen on these panels include female musicians and dancers, hunters, birds and animals.

**Name:**

Fresco panel: 'Dancers'

Dynasty:

Hegira first third of the 2nd century / AD first half of the 8th century Umayyad

Details:

In situ at Qusayr 'Amra

Amman, Jordan

Justification:

A rare depiction of a female dancer found within the privacy of the royal bath complex. The whirling folds at the bottom of her skirt suggest motion, accentuated by her raised left arm and the tilt of her head.
