

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

'These palaces accommodated his household and those of a number of officials who came to reside with him.'

Caliph Harun al-Rashid, grandson of al-Mansur, moved his court to al-Raqqa between 180 and 192 / 796 and 809, during a period of political unrest in Baghdad and southern Iraq. Al-Rashid extended the fortifications and created a whole new suburb of palaces to the north of al-Raqqa. These palaces accommodated his household and those of a number of officials who came to reside with him. The link with Baghdad and the eastern lands was maintained using a sophisticated mail system. Al-Rashid's sons and future caliphs all spent much of their youth at al-Raqqa.



Name:
Palace B

Dynasty:
Hegira 180–92 / AD 796–808 Abbasid

Details:
Raqqqa, Syria

Justification:
Clay, both compact masses and sun-dried bricks, was the main material for the construction of all the palaces at al-Raqqa. The interior and exterior walls that were in public view were coated with white plaster.



Name:
Palace B

Dynasty:
Hegira 180–92 / AD 796–808 Abbasid

Details:
Raqqqa, Syria

Justification:
This is part of the palace complex of Harun al-Rashid, and it is known as Palace B. The plan consists of a main entrance that leads into a large garden surrounded by several quarters with inner courtyards and colonnades. The administrative quarters are on the northern side.



Name:
Fragment of a glass floor tile with a plaster base

Dynasty:
Hegira 218–27 / AD 833–42 Abbasid

Details:
National Museum of Damascus
Damascus, Syria

Justification:
A fragment of a glass floor-tile still backed by the underlay (a layer of gypsum) from the reception hall in the administrative quarter at Palace B. The glass tiles were pressed into the gypsum in a manner similar to mosaic.



Name:
Fragment of a painted wooden panel

Dynasty:
Hegira 218–27 / AD 833–42 Abbasid

Details:
National Museum of Damascus
Damascus, Syria

Justification:
A wooden panel similar to those that furnished the reception halls in the palaces of al-Raqqa. Similar panels are seen in Umayyad palaces (i.e. Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi), and show, therefore, a continuity of style between the Umayyad and Abbasid periods.



Name:
Ceramic jar

Dynasty:
Hegira 2nd century / AD 8th century Abbasid

Details:
National Museum of Damascus
Damascus, Syria

Justification:
Made in Basra and excavated in al-Raqqa, this early Abbasid jar is evidence of trade between the two Abbasid provinces. The inscription reads: 'Drink with enjoyment and good health ... made in Basra by Yahya bin Umayya for the ruler of al-Hira...'.
