

The Fatimids | Pleasures and Celebrations at Court

‘Despite their piety, life at the Fatimid court was not short of entertainment.’

Despite their piety, life at the Fatimid court and that of their vassals – the Zirids in North Africa and the Kalbids in Sicily – was not short of entertainment, provided by poets, singers, and dancers. In North Africa, the Fatimids welcomed local poets such as the Ifriqiyans (Tunisians) Ibn Hani and al-Ladi. Later, in Cairo, the court hosted poets from all over the Islamic world. A number of caliphs also composed poetry which was sometimes performed publicly. Musical entertainment drew on the Eastern tradition and borrowed elements from the Andalusian repertoire; it was performed by male and female musicians on instruments such as reed flutes, lutes and dulcimers. Singers, many of whom had mastered both an instrument and verse, sang poetry exploring love and chivalry. Male and female dancers performed eloquently; the popular ‘handkerchief’ dance appears on many relief carvings.

**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:

Ivory panels, depicting seated revellers who are being entertained by male and female performers.

**Name:**

Bas-relief in carved marble

Dynasty:

Hegira 4th–5th centuries / AD 10th–11th centuries Fatimid–Zirid

Details:

Bardo Museum
Tunis, Tunisia

Justification:

A panel depicting a seated royal reveller who is entertained by a musician playing a wind instrument.

**Name:**

Large dish

Dynasty:

Hegira 5th century / AD 11th century Fatimid

Details:

Museum of Islamic Art
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:

Lutenists like this elegant figure would have been a familiar sight at the Fatimid court and would have been richly rewarded.

**Name:**

Frescoed architectural fragment from a bathhouse

Dynasty:

Hegira 5th century / AD 11th century Fatimid

Details:

Museum of Islamic Art

Cairo, Egypt

Justification:

Seated princely figures holding drinking cups appear frequently on valuable objects and lavish interior decorations.
