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## Glass Tokens from Palace B in Al-Raqqa

By Stefan Heidemann

In 1952 ten glasstokens were discovered in Palace B within the palace area located north of the twin cities al-Raqqa and al-Rafīqa at the middle Euphrates. Palace B was a richly decorated compound close to the main palace of Harun al-Rashid (reigned 170-193/786-809) at its south-western corner (fig. 1, 2, 3). Al-Raqqa/al-Rafīqa served Harun al-Rashid as his imperial residence from 180/796 to 192/808. Abbasid glass tokens produced in Syria or northern Mesopotamia were previously unknown. A production of these in al-Raqqa's industrial district located between the two cities during the period of Harun al-Rashid can be assumed on the basis of numerous contemporary glass workshops there.<sup>1</sup> One token, which is now in the exhibition of the Museum in al-Raqqa, with a different design, was found in this area (ill. 4).<sup>2</sup>

All tokens from Palace B were made of a pale green glass. They had a diameter of about 25 mm and were stamped with the same die. The reverse is blank. They had, on the rim, traces of a break, which occurred when the glass was in a cold state. These traces are in a random position to the inscription. This, therefore, seems to exclude the possibility that these tokens were intended as cheap jewellery where someone had merely broken away the glass mount or loop. The weights vary between 3.30 g and 4.35 g without a significant peak. This does not suggest the use of these tokens as weights either. A supposed use as currency tokens would also not explain the break at the rim. A glass-workshop within a splendid, richly decorated palace neighbouring the main palace of Harun al-Rashid seems unlikely too. The Syrian archaeologist, Nasib Saliby, the excavator of Palace B, read the inscription as<sup>3</sup>

*mubārak wa- / kayl rashīd*

blessing and / a right kayl-weight

This reading would point to a *dirham kayl*-weight of 3.13 g<sup>4</sup>, which, however, can be excluded for several reasons mentioned above. Furthermore the reading *kayl rashīd* creates philological problems. Usually the word *rashīd* did not specify an object like a weight. One would expect attributes like *wāfin*, *jayyid* or *jā'iz*, "full", "good" or "perfect". *Rashīd* implies "rightly guided" or "orthodox in his belief". An interpretation as "kayl-weight of [Harun] al-Rashid" is not possible. This would be a *kayl rashīdī*. Another reading may be proposed:

*mubārak wa- / kīl rashīd*

Mubārak rightly guided agent

Both readings obviously involve a word-play on the name of the caliph. The attribute *rashīd*, however, fits much better with an agent than with an object. However one would expect the office to be qualified with a definite article, i.e. *al-wakīl al-rashīd*.

The traces of the break at the rim may suggest that these tokens sealed or closed something, probably something precious. The token had to be broken away in order to unseal or open it. A certain Mubārak might be in charge of the correct handling of these objects. Remains of the consumption of precious objects (or liquids) are likely to be found in a palace compound. Until now further parallels are missing. Perhaps other specimens of similar glass tokens might have survived in various collections. The author would be grateful to know about them.

About these tokens and the excavations in al-Raqqa see: Stefan Heidemann - Andrea Becker (eds.): *Raqqa II - Die islamische Stadt*, Mainz 2003, 195-196.



fig. 1



fig. 2

Heidemann, no. 610, 3.75 g Heidemann, no. 614, 3.30 g



fig. 3



fig. 4

Heidemann, no 614 (drawing) Glasstoken from industrial district (drawing: Henderson, 1998)

<sup>1</sup> Julian Henderson, "Archaeological Investigation of an Islamic Industrial Complex at Raqqa, Syria", in: *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 11 (*Gedenkschrift für Michael Meinecke*) 1999, 243-265. On the urban development of the industrial district see the forthcoming article by Stefan Heidemann, "The History of the Industrial and Commercial Area of 'Abbasid al-Raqqa, called al-Raqqa al-Muhtariqa", in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*.

<sup>2</sup> Julian Henderson, "Recent Investigations of Islamic Industry at Raqqa: Harun al-Rashid's Glass Workshop", in: *Syrian/British Archaeological Cooperation. A Symposium Held 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> May, 1998 at al-Assad Library, Damascus*. Organised by the Directorate General of Antiquities & Museums, the Council for British Research in the Levant and the British Council, Damascus 1998, 25-27, pl. 14-15. The illustration is taken from this publication.

<sup>3</sup> Šalībī, N. (1954-5): "Rapport préliminaire sur la deuxième campagne de fouilles a Raqqa (Automne 1952). Hufrīyāt al-Raqqa. Taqrīr awwalī 'an al-mauṣim al-thānī khārīf 1952." In: *Annales Archéologiques Syriennes* 4-5 [1954-5] *AAS* 4-5, 205-212 (Europ. part), 69-76 (Arabic part), here p. 209 [Fr.], 75 [Arab.].

<sup>4</sup> Hinz, Walther: *Islamische Maße und Gewichte, umgerechnet ins metrische System* (Handbuch der Orientalistik, 1. Abteilung, Ergänzungsband I, Heft 1), Leiden 1955, 2-3.