



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Value through scarcity and depreciation by alteration: Adaptive building materials management in Sasanian-Islamic transitional times in Mesopotamia

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Abstract

This study examines exemplary construction methods and material management within the late-Sasanian – early-Islamic transitional phase of the 6th–9th centuries, with a focus on the site of al-ʿHira in Iraq. The archaeological and laboratory findings are supported by historical sources reaching the further region of northern Mesopotamia.

Excavations led by the author in 2022/23 at al-ʿHira (sites TK3 and TK9) reveal insights into building materials, particularly mud and fired brick. These are examined within the contexts of construction economics and resource safeguarding, – issues that are highly relevant once again today.

From the decline of the Sassanid Empire to the early Islamic 'Golden Age,' certain social groups managed construction under heightened material constraints, influencing their choices of construction methods. While the recycling of clay is recognized as a longstanding practice in the ancient river cultures of Mesopotamia, variations in strategic approaches to this practice remain largely unexamined. This article addresses the transformation of construction waste and rubble into valuable building material (recycling and even upcycling through enhancement of the ideal value) and the diminishing of material utility equaling downcycling and possibly a form of built-in obsolescence. The historical background provides context for the motivations behind these material management strategies.

Keywords

al-Hira, Late-Sasanian to Early-Islamic Transition, Building Materials, Historic recycling

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