



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Exploring Inequality in Abbasid Samarra: Snapshot of a Caliphal Capital

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Abstract

This paper examines the socio-spatial organization and inequality within the urban plan of the Abbasid city of Samarra through a detailed quantitative analysis of its areas and neighbourhoods. This analysis uses house size as a proxy for material wealth, and differences in house size as a measure of inequality, and combines this with a formalist, comparative study of the Abbasid residence.

These sources of evidence are combined with a detailed spatial analysis which examines the connections between various residential building types and service infrastructure (mosques, markets, water systems.). The results reveal a heterogeneous urban plan, with fluctuant sizes and resource accessibility depending on the period. There is a positive correlation between service infrastructure and higher-status housing, while areas with smaller blocks had fewer public goods. The architectural analysis of the Abbasid house in Samarra illustrates an evolving model: although houses decreased in size over time, the number of spaces (rooms and courtyards) increased, showing varied orientations and a preference for rectangular shapes.

We argue that Samarra's urban and architectural landscape reflects a stratified society with shifting social classes across different periods, and more broadly that architectural analyses of the kind presented can shed light on past urban and social processes.

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Early Islamic Archaeology, Samarra, Urbanism, Abbasid Architecture, Landscape Archaeology

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