

Chang'an in the Western Han and Tang Dynasties: Spatial Analysis of a Multi-layered Urban Site

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Abstract

Chang'an was China's imperial capital during the Western Han and Xin dynasties (206 BCE – 23 CE). Although the city was greatly reduced in importance at this point, the imperial capital returned to this location during the Tang (618 – 907 CE), several kilometers to the southeast from the remains of the earlier walled city. To analyze the urban fabric, I use a schematic reconstruction of the road network outside the city walls to supplement the area within the walls, which is already archaeologically well-documented. This investigation is based on a series of large-scale topographic maps prepared in the 1930's because the land surrounding the Han and Tang cities, has been leveled and almost entirely urbanized within the past three decades. Indications of the earlier roadway system are confirmed by the positions of Western Han city gates, other archaeological sites and landforms. A historical GIS is being prepared to include the area around the Tang city to help distinguish the chronological sequence of the overlaying road systems.

Keywords: Chang'an, landscape, grid, Han dynasty, historical GIS