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From reality to symbol: agricultural system and dynastic order in the Guanzhong Basin during the Han Dynasty

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Propositions

From Reality to Symbol: Agricultural System and Dynastic Order in the Guanzhong Basin during the Han Dynasty

1. Agriculture was the material foundation of governance in ancient Chinese dynasties and also a visible medium through which political legitimacy and ideal governance were expressed.
2. Agricultural concepts go beyond food production; they reflect how people understand crop value, abundance, and social relationships.
3. Agricultural elements in tombs can reveal agricultural concepts that everyday remains often cannot capture, because they present a selected, idealized agricultural world.
4. Whether a crop becomes a staple depends not only on its ecological adaptability, but also on its integration into institutions, dietary habits, and social values.
5. Archaeobotany should extend beyond what people ate and how they ate it to investigate how plants were given value, meaning, and order.
6. For historical periods, archaeobotanical evidence does more than supplement ancient texts; it can test, revise, and even challenge written classifications and narratives.
7. Stable isotope analysis of crops should move beyond merely labelling ancient agriculture as “intensive” or “extensive”; its broader value lies in revealing how resource management shaped social organization and order.
8. Studies of ancient agriculture should not treat technological progress as a linear process, because ecological constraints, social acceptance, and institutional arrangements also shape the actual effects of technology.
9. Interdisciplinary research is not just the application of scientific methods to archaeology, but the integration of scientific data into historical interpretation; this requires understanding both historical context and the principles and limits of scientific methods.
10. The decision to pursue a PhD should stem from curiosity or a conscious academic choice, not from the inertia of evading life planning; a doctoral degree is not a fashionable accessory for displaying respectability or excellence.
11. Scientific achievements are never determined by hard work and ability alone; resources, opportunities, timing and chance also matter.
12. Logic is essential to scientific research, factual clarity, argument evaluation, and public life. It should be compulsory training for all high school and university students, not a foundational course for a select few.