

UNDERSTANDING CROP PROCESSING MODELS AND THEIR SOCIAL MEANINGS DURING THE XINZHAI PERIOD (1850-1750 CAL BC)

Jingping An¹, Wiebke Kirleis¹, Guiyun Jin², Chunqing Zhao³

¹ *Pre-and Protohistorical Archaeology, Kiel University*

² *Institute of Cultural Heritage, Shandong University*

³ *Institute of Archaeology Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*

In China, the Xinzhai period (1850-1750 cal BC), which is exclusively recorded in the Central Plain, has widely been regarded as a critical period for the formation of Chinese urbanization. However, little is known about the labor and social organization in this period. In this research, archaeobotanical assemblages were used to explore the crop-processing model and further provide insights into the mobilization of labor and the organization of society at the archaeological site of Xinzhai on the Central Plain. It offers the first case study linking agricultural activities and social organization about the Xinzhai period. By integratedly discussing macro-botanical remains and phytolith remains, it concludes that hulled cereals foxtail millet, common millet, and rice and also the free-threshing pulse species soybean were all semi-processed before storage with minor labor involved in the initial harvest period. Since they are all summer crops and harvested during the later summer and autumn, the practice of semi-processing might imply less labor was deployed before storage. Thus, the labor in crop processing appeared to be organized on a small scale in more focused units of production such as household basis. This pattern is different from the bulk processing of crops before storage by the communal community in the contemporaneous Dongzhao site. Differentiation of social organization among settlements in the Xinzhai period thus can be suggested. This conclusion contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the social development in the Central Plain by indicating it highly possibly witnessed a constant increase in social complexity before urbanization.

Keywords

Xinzhai period, Macro-botanical remains, Phytolith, Crop processing, Labor mobilization, Social organization

Note/comment