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**Middle and Late Bronze Age rock-cut *tholos*-type chamber tombs in south-eastern Sicily
in a landscape perspective**

Doctoral dissertation prepared under the supervision of:

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Abstract

The so-called “Sicilian *tholoi*”, i.e. rock-cut tombs with chambers shaped like Helladic *tholoi*, first appeared in south-eastern Sicily around mid-15th century BC and spread throughout the entire southern part of the island, where they continued to be used until the end of the Bronze Age. They are the evidence of prehistoric Sicilian populations’ interactions with representatives of Aegean cultures who visited the island and represent a tangible expression of socio-political changes that occurred within local communities during later prehistory. Previous research has primarily focused on the architectural and construction aspects of these tombs, on determining their origin and chronological framework. However, the impact of introducing this burial form on various types of local landscapes (natural, funerary, socio-political) and spatial relationships between Sicilian *tholoi* and, e.g., elements of landform or other tombs in the necropoleis have not been extensively studied and have remained outside the main focus of contemporary research on the Sicilian Bronze Age.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the distribution of *tholos*-type chamber tombs from the region of south-eastern Sicily during the Middle and Late Bronze Age (c. 1440/1420-1050 BC). This analysis aims to examine their relationship with the topographical features of the landscape and other funerary structures, while also addressing several research questions concerning the impact of the new chamber model on local natural and cultural landscape. To achieve these goals, the study employs a methodology that combines (1) traditional processual approaches focused on investigating topography, tomb architecture, and burial practices with (2) a post-processual perspective based on a phenomenological approach to landscape.

The dissertation is divided into eight chapters. The first one serves as an introduction, providing framework chronology of Aegean and Sicilian Bronze Age, a glossary of architectural terms, a summary of research, fundamental information about the study region. Subsequent chapter focuses on research methodology, both its theoretical foundations and

practical aspects of archival and field research. The significance of the pivotal concept of landscape and its interpretations are discussed, along with the place of landscape in archaeology and experiential landscape archaeology, with a particular emphasis on the phenomenological approach and the utilization of the sense of sight and spatial mobility. Furthermore, the chapter distinguishes between the concept of funerary landscape and the key terms for this study, namely burial landscape, burial-, death-, and tombscape.

The material culture of south-eastern Sicily, with a particular focus on evolving burial practices and funerary architecture, is described in chapter three, which also presents the cultural and socio-economic context of successive periods within the Bronze Age. Chapter four is dedicated to intercultural contacts between Aegean populations and inhabitants of the island, providing an overview of the extent of Aegean influences. Chapter five briefly discusses the types of *tholos* structures found in Sicily, while chapter six presents Helladic *tholos*-type chamber tombs from the Aegean region, which served as a source of inspiration for their Sicilian counterparts.

Chapter seven, which includes a corpus of all *tholos*-type chamber tombs known from the Middle and Late Bronze Age period from south-eastern Sicily, presents the results of archival and field research. Various aspects related to *tholoi* and entire necropoleis are analyzed and discussed, such as their broader placement within the landscape, visibility, accessibility, and the layout of the cemeteries. It also examines the positioning of *tholoi* within and outside the necropoleis, particularly in relation to specific topographical features. The findings and conclusions drawn from the research are summarized in chapter eight.