
Rethinking the "Hypogeic Paradox" in the Aegean area during the 4th and early 3rd Millennia BC

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Résumé

Despite the wider evidence of rock-cut tombs in the central-western Mediterranean, the Aegean area, including insular region and Mainland Greece, continues to be perceived as a border region and marginally involved by the vast funerary hypogeism phenomenon. Since the first researches of the Greek Prehistory, the scarce evidence, mostly limited to Attica and the Cyclades, has focused on the origin of this funerary model which has been traced unilaterally to external contributions from the eastern Mediterranean. In the last two decades new evidence has radically modified the previous framework in terms of spatial distribution and especially in the perspective of the chronological sequence, thanks to the convergence between radiometric dates and the explorations of new large funerary sites throughout most advanced methodologies.

The present work seeks to review and to update the validity of models that have proposed in a primary multidisciplinary research (Cultraro 2000), mostly addressed to define the distribution map and the chronological differences of the funerary hypogeic phenomenon in the circum-Aegean area since the Late Neolithic Period. Recent and partially published data coming from the northern coastline of Peloponnese, mostly from Elis and Achaia, invite to reassess the main questions related to the introduction, diffusion and decline of the rock-cut tomb model in the Aegean during the 4th millennium BC .

The paper focuses on the relationships between the emergence of this funerary typology and the possible external stimuli coming from the South-western Balkans and Mainland Italy. Moreover, the analysis involves the architectural features (small chamber and vertical entrance), as well as the main burial aspects (secondary inhumation, bones manipulation and selective burial assemblages). Finally, a further investigation is addressed to examine the emergence of a different hypogeic building model, mostly in Attica district, which has been used for multiple purposes. The close relations with the metallurgical activity confirms the adaptation of the hypogeic architecture in a field which is alternative to the funerary context.

Mots-Clés: Aegean, Hypogeism phenomenon, rock, cut tombs, Late Neolithic, Early Helladic, Diffusionism models

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