ROCKY LANDSCAPE IN CENTRAL SICILY (ITALY) KNOWLEDGE, CONSERVATION, AND ENHANCEMENT

Assoc. Prof. Daniela Patti

Università Kore di Enna, I**taly**

ABSTRACT

The rocky landscapes of central Sicily show a long-standing tradition of using carved spaces for funerary, residential, productive and religious purposes. This study presents the initial results of a multidisciplinary study of a key area in north-eastern central Sicily, where rock-cut habitats meet major historical routes. The research explores settlement dynamics, Byzantine and Greek influences, Italo-Greek monasticism, and Norman reorganization. It examines rock-cut churches and frontier landscapes, as well as the methodological challenges of studying negative architecture and the use of ICT tools. Recreating the history of these places is significant for more than just archaeology. Safeguarding rock-cut heritage requires an understanding of its formation and urges us to reactivate traces and memories to rethink rupestrian landscapes today. This approach is inclusive and comprehensive, moving beyond traditional interdisciplinarity.

This open and dynamic understanding of cultural heritage, aligned with the Faro Convention principles, promotes shared values and broad public engagement. It recognises cultural and natural heritage as equally important parts of the landscape, making public archaeology a resource for community development and bottom-up participation.

Keywords: Landscape archaeology, public archaeology, rock settlements, Faro Convention, central Sicily.

INTRODUCTION

Rock settlements are characterised by the continuous reuse of carved spaces for religious, residential, productive and funerary functions. As cultural constructions, they represent key landmarks in the organisation of space in Mediterranean area [1]. Their study provides insights into settlement dynamics and historical mobility. The rock landscape of central Sicily offers evidence for understanding routes linking the inland plains to the Nebrodi Mountains, Calabria and the Iblei Mountains and Byzantine Syracuse. Recent research on rock-cut sites in southern Italy highlights their importance [2]. Central Sicily is characterised by long and intricate occupation and environmental transformations. Positioned at the island's geographical centre, it was significant from antiquity to the Middle Ages, as a crossroads between eastern and western Sicily. Its communication routes, including the Roman *Via Valeria* [3], facilitated circulation of people, goods and cultural practices, contributing to the area's economic vitality. The investigation of these contexts remains challenging.

The "negative" nature of carved architecture complicates typological and chronological classification [4], while the irregular geometry of spaces requires accurate methods of

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