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The demythologization of landscape: landscape research in the context of prehistoric societies – the example of the Neolithic site of Göbekli Tepe. 2021. PhD Thesis, Free University Berlin.
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Summary

The Neolithic site of Göbekli Tepe in southeastern Turkey is described in the literature as unique (e.g., Schmidt 2011, 2013; Notroff *et al.* 2016; for the reception of Göbekli Tepe see Martin 2015; but *cf.* Banning 2011; Clare and Kinzel 2020; Kinzel and Clare 2020). Common assumptions about the site are, for example, that it was located on the highest point of the Germuş Mountains, it was widely visible, and it afforded the opportunity for efficiency, prominence or control (e.g., Beile-Bohn *et al.* 1998; Neef 2003; Schmidt 2011; Notroff *et al.* 2014, 2015; Gheorghiu 2015; Dietrich *et al.* 2016; Caletti 2020). These, among other assumptions, are used as reasons for the hypothesis that Göbekli Tepe served as a central ritual site and meeting place, which acted as a driving force for the spread of

Neolithization. However, this doctoral thesis proposes an alternative interpretation or narrative, starting from the premise that the previous narrative is built on a conception of the landscape, which is not, in fact, based on any investigation. In my opinion, this conception was formed rather by projecting the singularity ascribed to the archaeological site onto the landscape by way of semantic transfer. I assume that this conception of the landscape primarily reflects ideas that have been developing since the early modern period, and thus the self-conception and ontology of recent researchers.

The objective of this thesis, therefore, is to provide verifiable landscape analyses while critically reflecting on one’s own positionality and perception (Fig. 1). The landscape analyses are therefore preceded by a cultural-historical examination of various patterns of thought and perception in relation to space, landscape, history, and archaeology which have developed since the early modern period. Following a hermeneutic approach, the landscape of Göbekli Tepe is then examined from related, progressive perspectives that correspond to different concepts of landscape or space.

The analyses show that ideas such as efficiency, prominence or control cannot be applied to Göbekli Tepe in their contemporary sense. Rather, the results

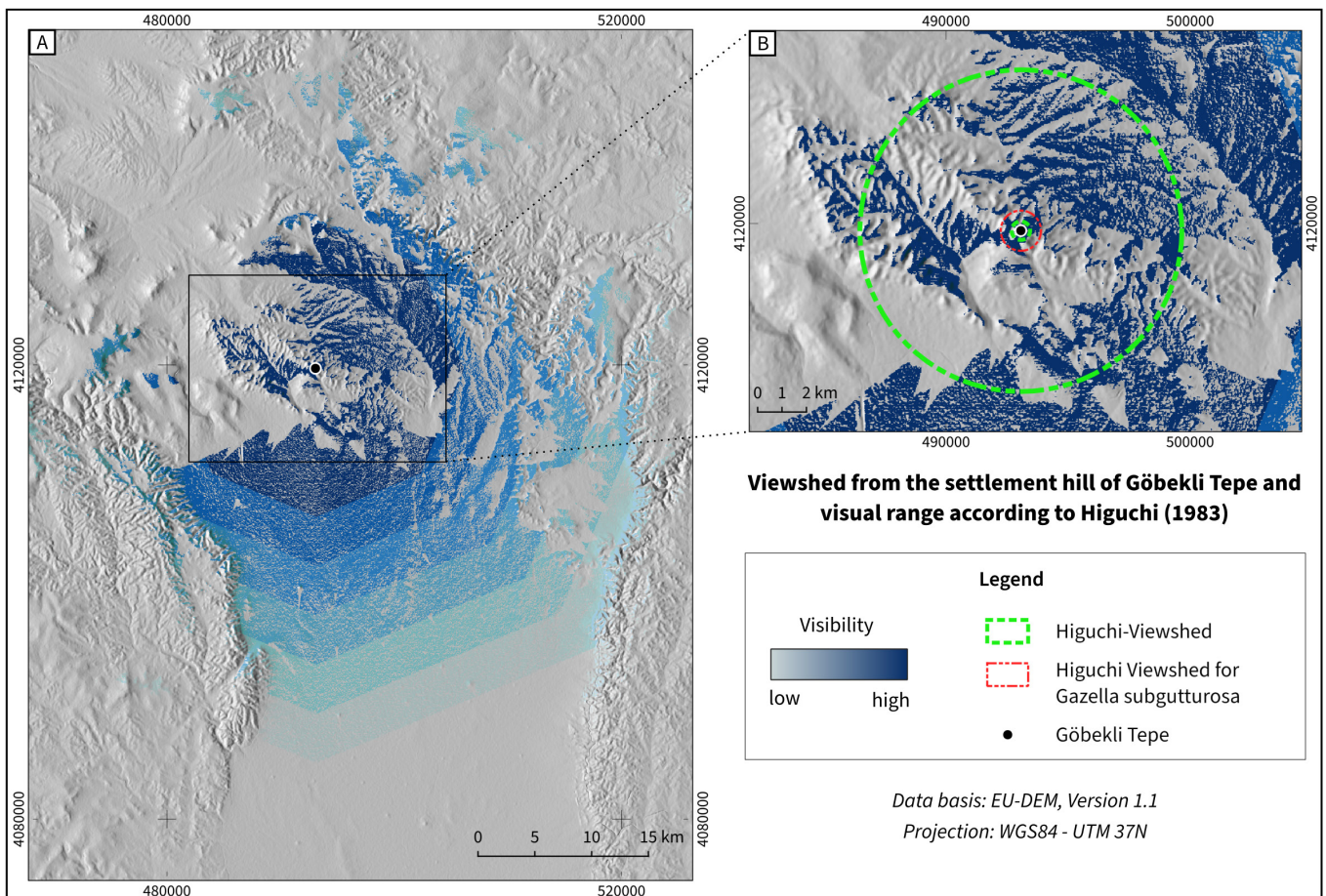


Fig. 1 A Viewshed from the plateau of Göbekli Tepe. B Detailed view with visual range after Higuchi (1983). Inner green circle: transition from short to middle distance view. Outer green circle: transition from middle to far distance view. Red circle: transition from middle to far distance view related to goitered gazelle. The transition from the near to the middle distance view related to gazelles cannot be shown due to its limited extent. (Maps: R. Braun)

indicate that the buildings of the site are neither a deliberate construction of a symbolic landscape nor are they structures planned with the aim of having an external impact. Instead, their construction process is seen as the result of an organic interaction between the availability of materials and the nature of the environment, as well as internalized building forms. The T-pillar buildings probably reflect the transition from non-permanent, mobile tents to permanent constructions (Fig. 2). Their “monumentality” is more likely to have emerged from an autotelic motivation. Both, the immaterial (e.g., “symbolic”) and material nature of the T-pillar buildings, are to be regarded as an expression of the struggle to deal with a changing lifestyle in the early Neolithic. My assumption is that the Neolithic transition not only brought with it economic, social and psychological consequences (e.g., Benz and Bauer 2013), but that it also led to a questioning or endangering of world views and belief systems. Instead of being interpreted as a place where Neolithization was driven forward, as has been mostly assumed so far (e.g., Schmidt 1998, 2005; Notroff *et al.* 2016; *cf.* Morenz and Schmidt 2009), Göbekli Tepe is interpreted as a place where the Palaeolithic way of life and associated belief systems were consciously adhered to (*cf.* Benz and Bauer 2013; Clare and Kinzel 2020; Watkins 2019).

In terms of distance to resources, it is found that Göbekli Tepe was favourably located in many respects; a modeling of potential migration corridors of the goitered gazelle indicates that it was centrally located between summer and fall grazing grounds. Yet, resource availability was nearly uniform across the greater region. Therefore, the choice of location should not be understood as strategic and efficiency-oriented (as we understand it today), but rather as an attraction to places with known structures and conditions. That is, the choice was not an exclusively rational one but rather was rooted in a complex process that served the various requirements of a hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

Indeed, Göbekli Tepe is by no means located on the highest point of the Germuş Mountains, but on one of its lowest plateaus. The wide view of its surroundings which it is usually credited with is, in fact, limited to distant areas, while its immediate surroundings are visible in a restricted way (Fig. 1). Thus, the possibility of gaining a direct view of the settlement was also limited. The location of Göbekli Tepe did not, therefore, offer prominence and control. Rather, it offered protection on the one hand, and, due to its good view of its distant surroundings, an openness of space on the other, which also facilitated swift information gathering (regarding the landscape).

Based on their site characteristics (such as mountainousness, water supply, proximity to resources, *etc.*), the known sites with T-shaped pillars can be divided into three groups that presumably represent a chronological sequence. Göbekli Tepe can be assigned to the first group. The second group of sites follows the location patterns of Göbekli Tepe in many respects, but the openness of the space decreases sharply. In line with

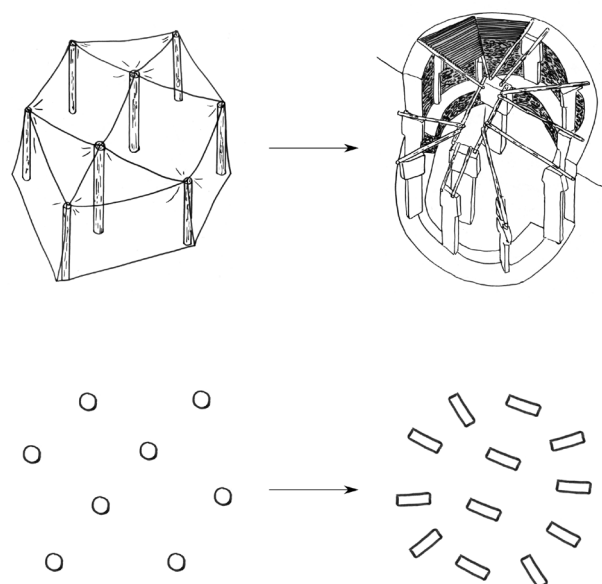


Fig. 2 Schematic drawing: perspective view (top) and plan (bottom) of the transformation process of non-permanent mobile tents (left) into permanent buildings with T-pillars (right). (Reconstruction of T-pillar building [top right] adapted from Kurapkat 2015: fig. 234; drawings: R. Braun).

the argument that the T-pillar phenomenon represents a society that held to Palaeolithic values and saw itself as endangered, we may conjecture that these sites indicate a strengthening desire to occupy hidden, safe settlements. The third group shows a settlement pattern that is now more strongly oriented toward plains. The concern for security is still found to a reduced extent, but the sites' location at the edge of plains now offers a considerable opening of space and proximity to potential agricultural land. The T-pillar sites of this third group are interpreted as locations of shared memory, where the former, Palaeolithic values are only reflected in a traditional, transformed form. They already point to the subsequent loss of significance in the late PPNB, which led to the abandonment of the T-pillar architecture and a further transformation of the underlying belief systems.

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