

ABSTRACT

The Architecture at the Petras Cemetery

Philip P. Betancourt

The cemetery at Petras has two types of tombs, rock shelters and house tombs. The one excavated rock shelter is typical of this class of burial place in eastern Crete, with an overhanging ledge that protected the human bones and associated artifacts. The house tombs are more unusual for this part of the island because of their large size, many rooms, and careful construction. The best parallels come from the palatial site of Malia where the *Maison des Morts* and *Chrysolakkos I* and *II* were large rectangular burial buildings with many rooms and fixed benches for offerings.

The house tombs are preserved only in their lower parts. They stood above ground, forming a complex and monumental “city of the dead.” Although every house tomb at Petras has a different plan, House Tomb 2, which has been completely excavated, provides a good example of the class (Fig. 1). It was last used in MM IIA. The tomb, which consists of eight rectangular rooms, was built of uncoursed stone masonry with a flat clay roof. Room 9 has an open north side that provides access to the tomb from an unroofed courtyard. Most of the interior spaces contained secondary deposits of disarticulated human bones along with pottery and other artifacts moved here from an earlier location. Rooms 7 and 8 did not contain any bones, as they were used for the storage of pottery for use in ceremonies. A series of low stone benches along the exterior of the walls suggests repeated visits to the tomb for the placing of offerings.

A comparison between House Tomb 2 and the much smaller Mochlos Tomb IV-V-VI reveals how the Petras funerary architecture fits within the tradition of Minoan house tombs (Fig. 2). In both cases, the human bones were placed in these ossuaries after the flesh had decomposed. Both buildings stood above ground, and both had one room with an open side that faced toward an open court as well as closed spaces. In both cases, some of the rooms had



Figure 1. Aerial photograph of House Tomb 2 at Petras. Photograph by Chronis Papanikolopoulos, INSTAP Study Center for East Crete.

entrances at ground level, while others were only entered through the ceiling. The Petras tomb is larger and more monumental, but it is within the existing tradition of Minoan house tombs in eastern Crete.

Among other things, House Tomb 2 provides important information on the wooden carpentry that was used along with the stone masonry for the walls of the building. Wooden doorframes were seated on flat stone bases that were hammer-dressed to size. Figure 3 shows the green chlorite schist slab used for the doorframe at the entrance to Room 8, a space with its own outside entrance located at the southeast corner of House Tomb 2. Its restoration in Figure 4 illustrates how this end of the house tomb would have looked when it was complete.

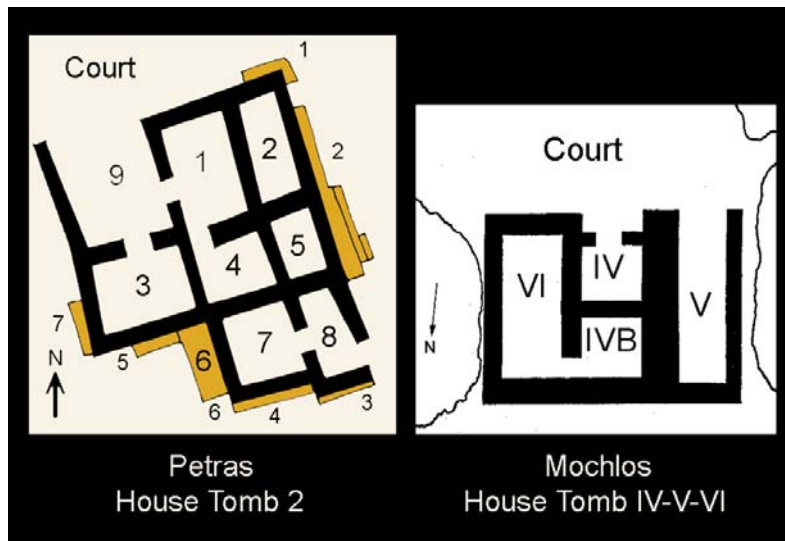


Figure 2. Comparison between Petras House Tomb 2 and Mochlos House Tomb IV-V-VI. Drawings by P. Betancourt.



Figure 3. The southeast corner of House Tomb 2 at Petras showing the bench at the eastern end of the south side and the green chlorite schist slab used as a sill for the doorframe at the entrance to Room 8. The scale on the door sill is 20 cm long. Photograph by P. Betancourt.



Figure 4. Computer restoration of the southeast corner of House Tomb 2 at Petras and the entrance into Room 8 by Judith Papit, Jeannine Beckman, Marie Nicole Pareja, Florence Hsu, and Konstantinos Chalikias, Archaeology Digital Laboratory, Tyler School of Art of Temple University.