

by Wace in 1950, when he fully uncovered Shrine Gamma, first excavated in part by Tsountas in 1886 and associated with the Tsountas House on the terrace just below it. At its fullest extent it consisted of five complex structures with exterior courts and access facilitated by plastered ramps and stairways while at the same time restricted by being enclosed in the citadel and shut-off by a gated entrance. Although the Cult Centre is a foundation for our understanding of Mycenaean religious architecture and ritual, especially within a 'palatial' context, the bulk of the material is only now being published and not yet fully understood.

Based on research for the final publication of the British excavation, I presented a history and analysis of the Tsountas House, and on the terrace above it, the Shrine, the earliest known structure of its kind at Mycenae, and its unique features. The study of the chronological evidence, as well as the evidence of religious ritual, enables me to examine the possible origin of the Cult Centre and the course of its evolution through multiple phases of construction, use, and destruction. Of particular interest is the recognition that several religious structures existed for a significant period of time prior to the inclusion of the area within the citadel wall, which indicates a more generally accessible 'popular' cult. Later, a shift in its use can be observed through changes in architectural design, approach, and access, and with the incorporation of the Centre into the physical sphere of palatial control. I presented the chronological development of the stairs and ramps used to enter and exit the various buildings, courts, and the Centre itself that exhibits a late emphasis on controlled access, ritual and festival in the open, and spectacle.

The early and complicated history of Shrine Gamma must lead us to a new assessment of the Cult Centre, its origin and development, and the implications for the nature and character of the cult practiced there. We can no longer speak of an exclusive religious precinct designed and built for the use of the privileged few, but rather see the development of an accessible ritual complex that culminates in the 'palatial' Cult Centre, not long before its destruction at the end of the LH IIIB period.

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*MICHAEL VENTRIS MEMORIAL LECTURE*  
**BECOMING PALATIAL IN EASTERN CRETE:  
THE CASE OF PETRAS  
(FINAL NEOLITHIC-MIDDLE MINOAN IIB)**

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Petras has been investigated since 1985. The coastal area comprises two hills, promontories in antiquity. On Hill I parts of an extensive urban Minoan settlement have been excavated, (EM II-LM IIIB), as well as the only Protopalatial palace in eastern Crete (MM IIA-LMIB). On Hill II (Kephala) to the east, a small FN-EMI settlement with a stratified sequence unique for Crete, a cemetery of house tombs (EMI-MM IB-IIA), and a LM III settlement were discovered.

The Prepalatial occupation testifies to the socio-economic changes that led to the palatial economy and administration. In eastern Crete several EM important settlements had

external relations but only Petras developed a palatial system. The EM I remains belong to a domestic complex, ca 300 m<sup>2</sup>. Significant is the proximity of the Aghia Photia cemetery. The FN phase includes walls founded on the bedrock. The pottery shows close relations with the eastern Aegean (cheese-pots). Particularly important was the evidence for metallurgy, possibly the earliest in Crete. Already in the FN and in EM I Petras participated in the network of exchange of goods, especially pottery and raw materials, and was probably also involved in population movements. Similar openness to the rest of Crete and the rest of the Aegean continued throughout the Prepalatial period.

In EM II the long-lived settlement on Hill I was established, ultimately becoming palatial. Most evidence came from 23 stratigraphical trenches within the palace. The settlement occupied 3000-4000 m<sup>2</sup>. The walls, built of small stones, were decorated with red plaster. A three-room building, almost completely preserved; included a rock-cut hearth, 50 cm in diameter, unusual on Crete. To the same period is dated an industrial area, possibly of communal scale, with rock-cut cavities and shallow channels. This settlement was abandoned in EM IIB. A few EM III/MM IA floors were preserved under the palace, possibly suggesting that the plateau was not densely occupied, although the cemetery demonstrated that EM III/MM IA was a period of growth and development.

On the N-NE slope of the hill, and in trial trenches dug underneath the paths for visitors, important late Prepalatial remains came to light. Despite the lack of preserved architecture, the movable finds suggest the presence of elites at Petras, also witnessed in the contemporary cemetery. A partially-excavated building was equipped with red plaster and a plastered staircase. It constitutes a *terminus post quem* for dating the most important Late Prepalatial deposit at the Petras settlement. To the SE of this building was an extensive depression, at least 10 × 5 × 2 m, filled with much good quality MM IB pottery. This secondary deposit (*Lakkos*) was preserved intact and is very important for the ceramic sequence of eastern Crete. The pottery (over 2000 kgs) was fragmentary, and mostly included vases used in feasting (cups, bowls, fruitstands) and vessels connected with cult. The *Lakkos* also contained fragments of stone vases and triton shells, and a seal with one of the earliest images of a male authority figure. The picture offered for the social organization of late Prepalatial Petras is one of various elite groups, each probably identified within the community by particular symbols, reflected in the decorative motifs of pottery and seals. This picture is strongly supported by the finds in the cemetery.

Adjacent to the FM-EM I settlement is the cemetery on the Kephala hill; this place of the ancestors apparently played an major role in the remarkable continuity of Petras, as witnessed again in the LM IIIC period when a settlement was established here. The cemetery comprises an as yet unknown number of house tombs (11 partially excavated) and also at least one rock shelter with secondary burials, containing EM I-MM I pottery. Of special interest are vases of Cycladic origin, fragments of marble figurines and silver jewellery, suggesting that contacts between Petras and the islands continued after the occupation at Aghia Photia ceased. In EM IB-IIA Petras continued to be part of the Aegean *koine*. The rock shelter produced also an exceptional gold tree-of-life pendant and bone seals. The human remains (20,987 fragments, including 82 skulls) belonged to 165 individuals. The inverted stratigraphy indicates that the secondary burials occurred on a single occasion.

The house tombs (HT), larger than 60 m<sup>2</sup> and comprising up to nine rooms, are dated mainly in the Prepalatial period, although there were also some Protopalatial burials. HT 2 has been completely investigated. The pottery belongs to the latest Prepalatial period. Important for its architecture and grave goods, HT 2 also illustrates the transition from collective to individual burials, in two larnakes and a pithos, unfortunately not accompanied by pottery. The exact chronological range of HT 2 is further complicated by the presence of hard stone seals, some with hieroglyphic inscriptions, all found in the same room. HT 4 produced two more MM II seals, one with a hieroglyphic inscription; seals from HT 3 are earlier. Also found in the tombs were interesting vases, and bronze tools and gold jewellery. The organization of space around and within the tombs indicates that the cemetery served as a focal point for rituals related to the social coherence of the community. HT 2 is surrounded by seven benches and a stepped platform, while other tombs lack such features. Two rooms of HT 2 were used for the storage of vessels.

At the beginning of MM II, when the palace was constructed, Petras saw major spatial re-organization. The plateau on Hill I was artificially levelled and a massive cyclopean-like retaining wall, equipped with a strong tower, was constructed. At the foot of the hill, close to the shoreline, another massive wall was built, with large rectangular towers. Both are preserved to the height of more than 3 m., and probably indicate real or potential threats, internal or external. Alternatively they could represent the neutralization of a pre-existing danger and the supremacy of a certain social group within the settlement, prior to the construction of the palace; social conflict in this period is also suggested by contemporary fortification walls in eastern Crete.

No MM IIA levels were excavated in the palace, but in one trial trench dug beneath the visitor paths, badly preserved MM IIA architectural remains were discovered, belonging to an important building with three large column bases. No such features are preserved from the Protopalatial palace. A fragmentary faïence nautilus rhyton, a stalactite fragment, and a sea pebble with 16 incised bucrania, found in the same context, suggest a ritual character. In the Protopalatial period the palace was not the only important building; a heterarchical organization analogous to that of Mallia is possible.

The stratigraphical trenches in the palace offer a *terminus post quem* (MM IB) for the latest Prepalatial floors, and a *terminus ante quem* (MM IIB) for the destruction of the hieroglyphic archive. The palace, a Protopalatial structure, in use with modifications and reconstructions until LM IB, had at least two storeys. The Protopalatial central court was used until the LM IA destruction. In LM IB a stoa was constructed on the east side of the court, and the circulation patterns changed. The first central court was connected at its northern side to a monumental plastered staircase and had a system of drains. An important part of the Protopalatial palace, backfilled in Neopalatial times, is a space with a plaster bench 5 m long, a flagstone floor, and plastered orthostats, found empty and probably a cult place. The adjacent (LM IB) room contained a plaster libation table.

The MM IIB hieroglyphic archive deposit was the only preserved destruction deposit of the first palace. The archive room was on the upper floor, over a gate, at the west end of the north façade of the palace. The room collapsed due to a violent fire, and the deposit was sealed. The excavation of the archive enabled us, for the first time in Minoan archaeology, to reconstruct both the space and operations of an archive. We know that there were two scribes and that the catastrophe took place in the day time, while people were working in the

archive room. The sealings were impressed by over 40 different seals, many depicting animals. The study of the pottery showed that there were two sets of decorated vases (footed cup, one handled cup and bowl), presumably for the two scribes, while unpainted cups and bowls might have been used by visitors or assistants.