

## **Emma Jenkins**

### **Abstract**

The Neolithic in southwest Asia (c 11,700-7800 cal BP) is a critical period in human history; it was during this time, that people made the transition from living in small hunter-gatherer groups, occupying temporary camps, to fully fledged agriculturalists living in large sedentary communities.

Despite the importance of the Neolithic in southwest Asia, archaeological sites, particularly those from the earlier Pre-Pottery Periods (c 11,700-8250 cal BP), often prove difficult to interpret due to their ephemeral nature and the scarcity of biological remains.

In order to gain a greater understanding of such sites, the INEA Project (Identifying activity areas in Neolithic sites through ethnographic analysis of phytoliths and geochemical residues) are developing a method based on more durable forms of evidence that are often the result of human activities, i.e. phytoliths (bodies of silica that form in and around plant cells) and geochemical elements (traces of chemicals in soils, e.g. phosphorous, calcium and manganese). The aim is to determine if different areas have specific phytolith and geochemical signatures which can be used as indicators of archaeological settlement usage through time.

This is being achieved through ethnographic research using two settlement types: Bedouin camp sites and abandoned mud and stone constructed villages. These have been chosen because they provide the best available analogies for the Neolithic sites which will be analysed as part of this project.

This talk will focus on providing an introduction to the project and presenting preliminary results from our research to date.