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For the Session: Combining Ethnoarchaeology with Scientific Approaches

Rural Settlement, House Forms and Oral Histories in Southern Jordan

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This paper provides an overview of rural settlement in upland southern Jordan focusing on abandoned stone and mud villages in the scenic Tafileh governorate, and the village of al Ma'tan in particular. It describes the typical arched house form and how it was constructed and lived in prior to the 1960s/70s, before nearly all the inhabitants moved to their new concrete villages along the main road. At that time, the people were agro-pastoralists, grazing sheep and goats widely throughout the steeply rocky landscape, cultivating cereal and legume crops on the upland plateau, nurturing trees in spring-fed irrigated orchards, and hunting wild animals and gathering wild plants. Although villages may appear 'timeless', most are comparatively recent, with their origins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during a period of marked population expansion and settlement.

Large arches (*qaṅṅara*, pl. *qaṅṅaṭer*), were essential to the structure of a rural house, supporting the roof and giving the interior space its length and breadth; the more arches, the bigger the house and the more important the inhabitants in the social hierarchy of the village. Extended families could live in one house with platforms in the side spaces between the arches acting as 'rooms' for each smaller family unit, with sleeping areas on top and storage areas underneath. Further walled interior divisions and side rooms were used for grain and fodder storage, tools, sheltering animals and, latterly, as kitchen pantries. Other features include hearths, free-standing mud storage bins, *ṭabūn* ovens, niches and 'cubby-holes', with the roofs of houses serving as activity areas.

The paper provides the ethnographic village context to the geochemical and phytolith research being conducted by the INEA project (Identifying activity areas in Neolithic sites through ethnographic analysis of phytoliths and geochemical residues) through a collaborative partnership involving Bournemouth University, where the Project is based, the Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL), and Aberystwyth University. The presentation concludes by introducing the initiatives of the local community in al-Ma'tan to preserve their heritage and capitalize upon it through tourism initiatives, and to provide a space for the elders of the community to tell stories of their former village life and to pass it on to younger generations.