

1st Petra International Conference on Cultural Tourism (PCCT) 17th --19th May 2015 @ Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Petra College for Tourism and Archaeology, Jordan

New Research on the Old Village of Al-Ma'tan: Futures for the recent past

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Abstract:

This paper reports on an ethnoarchaeological research project examining old village structures in southern Jordan focusing on the village of Al-Ma'tan, near to 'Ain Al Baidha, in the Tafileh governorate. The project combines archaeological and ethnographic approaches, and includes film-making to promote Jordan and local tourism, as well as considering ways to enhance touristic and leisure activities engaging with the recent past.

Our fieldwork in Al-Ma'tan documents recent rural history encapsulated in the details of the construction of the houses and the everyday activities of the villagers and their engagement with the land, their animals, crops, and spring-fed orchards. A suite of new scientific microscopic techniques are being used to identify building materials and activities to complement interviews with local villagers and mapping the structures. The project also strongly links to Neolithic heritage, for which southern Jordan is also well known, with sites such as Beidha, Basta and Wadi Faynan. Recent village activities provide potential analogues for understanding Neolithic settlements from the much deeper past—how they were also constructed and used. This project, therefore, can be considered reflective of initiatives seeking to broaden engagement and appreciation for the rich diversity of attractions to be found in southern Jordan. We are very grateful to Mr Hussein Shabatat and all the members of the Baqee'a Tourism Cooperative Society, who are very active in promoting their village as an eco-tourism destination, for all their support and insights.