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An Integrated phytolith and geochemical approach to understanding activity areas and the choice of building materials in Neolithic sites using ethnographic analysis.

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The Neolithic in southwest Asia is an important period in human history which saw the advent of sedentism, agriculture, and ultimately the rise of complex societies. It is also, however, one of the most poorly understood. This is partly due to problems associated with site recognition and partly because of the lack of preservation of many forms of evidence, particularly biological. As a result, many Neolithic sites are comprised of a series of structures, the construction and function of which is difficult, if not impossible, to unravel. With this in mind we have been developing an integrated method to increase our understanding of such sites based on more durable forms of evidence, i.e. phytoliths and geochemical elements. Using an ethnographic approach we sampled a number of buildings from a recently abandoned mud and stone constructed village in Jordan, to help us understand building construction and to establish if different activity areas have specific phytolith and geochemical signals. We then used the results of this analysis to help us interpret the Neolithic sites of WF16, Beidha and Ain Ghazal.