

Neolithic Heritage, Jericho and the West Bank

Bill Finlayson and Paul Burtenshaw

Department of Archaeology, University of Reading

Sustainable Preservation Initiative

Abstract

The Neolithic represents a key period in human history, understood as the period when people first domesticated plants and animals, developed the social means to live together in large sedentary communities, and perhaps even laid the foundations of formal religion. The southern Levant is one of the best-known areas where this transition took place, and Jericho undoubtedly the most spectacular site of the period. It should be possible to capture the importance of this heritage in a way that appeals to the general public, and while this has been achieved elsewhere around the world, the presentation of the Neolithic has always seemed to struggle in the region that should lie at its heart. We are currently experimenting with a Neolithic Heritage Trail in southern Jordan, working on presentation, local engagement, and preservation of the sites. Ultimately, any Neolithic trail should lead to Jericho.

Keywords

Basta, Beidha, Jericho, Wadi Faynan, West Bank, Kathleen Kenyon, Neolithic, conservation, cultural heritage management, heritage trails, public archaeology, site interpretation, tourism.

Introduction

In a national and regional context where cultural heritage is both economically important for the tourism revenues it brings in and for the complex roles it plays in identity politics, it is remarkable that the Neolithic remains of the Levant and of the Jordan valley have received limited public attention. Given the monumental tower of Neolithic Jericho, and the high public profile of excavations conducted at Jericho in the 1950s (BBC 1956; Kenyon 1957), this low profile appears particularly surprising. In terms of human history, the history of archaeology, and academic knowledge, Jericho and the Neolithic have enormous significance. The low profile of Neolithic cultural heritage is made even harder to understand in the context of countries around the Levant, such as Turkey and Cyprus, both of which more actively promote the Neolithic to tourists, and have a longer track record of recognising the significance of Neolithic sites through inscription on the World Heritage list.

In this paper we describe Neolithic heritage and efforts to develop interest in this heritage in Jordan, before focussing on the site of Jericho itself and its West Bank context. After discussing how the Neolithic remains may be conserved and presented, we go beyond the site to consider the role Neolithic heritage may have in community development. Here we stress that there is more to cultural heritage than the economic opportunities that may arise with tourism, but advocate fostering local community initiatives to maximise the value of a heritage asset, culturally as well as economically.

The Neolithic and heritage tourism

Cultural heritage management and tourism have a long history in the Levant, with Thomas Cook offering the first organized tour in 1869, and with tours developed around such themes as biblical archaeology, or visits to the many spectacular and

monumental sites such as classical cities or crusader castles (Jacobs 2010). This model of mass heritage tourism has largely omitted earlier prehistoric archaeology, which generally lacks the immediacy of monumental sites and the widespread popular historical knowledge of the more recent past. The nature and practical implementation of this mass tourism, which generally focuses on an elite and foreign tourist, means that local populations often lack the economic or educational capital to take advantage of anything but marginal economic opportunities from the industry (Adams 2010; Comer 2012). Further, the focus on such an audience, and the interpretation of archaeological sites as part of European heritage, often creates a local alienation from heritage, with cultural heritage associated with wealth and outsiders (Abu Khafajah 2010).

The Neolithic of the Jordan Valley and Wadi Araba (c. 12,000 – 6000 years ago) represents one of the key episodes in a global human history, when communities first settled down and developed both the social and religious means of living together, and the new farming economies based on domesticated plants and animals that enabled such settled lifestyles. The domestication of goats, sheep, and plants such as lentils, barley and wheat that occurs in the Neolithic is also very visibly part of the present heritage, and even the process of settling down in villages resonates with many local communities. However, although the Jordan Valley sites represent some of the earliest moments in this history, the many significant sites in this area are hardly recognized outside of academia, and their potential for enriching economic, social and cultural lives has barely been tapped.

For some years now there has been an effort to create a Neolithic Heritage Trail in southern Jordan. Growing out of a number of projects, including excavations at WF16 (Finlayson and Mithen 2007), Shkarat Msaied (Kinzel *et al.* 2011), Ghuwyr 1

(Simmons and Najjar 2006), Basta (Gebel *et al.* 2006) and Ba'ja (Gebel and Bienert 1997), the conservation and presentation of the site of Beidha within the Petra World Heritage Park (Dennis *et al.* 2002; see **Figure 1**), and socio-economic studies of both the Wadi Faynan (Burtenshaw 2013) and the Beidha and Basta area (Finlayson *et al.* 2015), the Neolithic Heritage Trail has been focused around two key objectives. The first of these objectives has arisen from the importance of Neolithic archaeology to the human story. The Levant is one of the earliest places in the world where people began to live together in long-term settled communities, making major developments in social and ideological behaviour, at the same time creating the economic structures that permitted these developments by innovating in plant and animal management and domestication, ultimately producing the pastoral and agricultural systems that continue in use today. The second objective is the understanding that the local populations, who act both as the immediate cultural owners of these sites, and their long-term stewards — in rural areas where the protection of the state is inevitably going to be weak — neither know enough about this heritage, nor gain enough social, cultural or economic benefit from it, yet at the same time their engagement is critical to sustain cultural heritage tourism and management of the sites.

The archaeological remains at these Neolithic sites are generally well-preserved, especially the stone and plaster buildings that develop over time into two storey structures, densely packed together in large settlements. The earlier buildings, often made mostly of mud, are not so well-preserved, but still contain a wealth of archaeological information. However, regardless of preservation, that information and the significance of the sites is hard to see when simply looking at a long-since abandoned settlement. Much of the information that truly reveals the significance of the Neolithic comes from very detailed archaeological work, often gained through

laborious laboratory analysis of chipped stone production, study of animal bones and plant remains, soil thin sections, isotope studies, and a host of other analytical, forensic techniques (e.g. Colledge *et al.* 2004; Finlayson and Mithen 2007; Makarewicz 2013). The detective work required to understand the Neolithic becomes part of the story of the Neolithic, a huge puzzle to be worked out. The Neolithic is very much about process, the long unfurling of the results of human ingenuity and invention, and that requires more explanation than simple display.

Presentation of these Neolithic sites also raises significant conservation issues. Early excavation projects did not normally backfill trenches on completion, which, while it has left the remains visible and open to visitors, has equally left them exposed to the elements, goats, and tourists. Although the standard has improved, tour guides have often been amongst the worst culprits, leading parties across fragile remains, rather than around them, often as the result of ignorance of their presence and what constitutes the remains of the site. Neolithic construction methods, without the protection afforded by roofs or regular maintenance, are not robust in the face of long-term exposure. At both Beidha and Basta the once very well-preserved remains became increasingly dilapidated over time. At Beidha a significant part of work in recent years has been concerned with backfilling or stabilising substantial areas. At Basta, one of the concerns of the local community regarding heritage has not been its potential for tourism, but rather the hazards that deep and eroding trenches present to children. Having learnt from this experience, more recent excavations have typically included total or partial backfilling of their archaeological trenches. Unfortunately, while this undoubtedly preserves the remains, and is essential in the absence of proactive conservation measures, it does hide them from potential visitors. However, this

is undoubtedly a better solution, until active management and maintenance plans are in place and effective.

Presenting the Neolithic narrative is only half the challenge. The other part is to engage local populations with both this story and the sites themselves. The long-term protection of heritage and cultural property relies on local communities gaining value from 'their' site and ensuring that it operates as a contemporary resource, contributing to social wellbeing and enriching daily economic, social and cultural lives.

There is currently typically little local knowledge of Neolithic archaeology in communities where research has been conducted in recent years (e.g. in Faynan, Basta, and Beidha between 2011 and 2016; see Burtenshaw 2013 and the recent British Academy research conducted by Oroub el-Abed; see Finlayson et al 2015), beyond those who have been directly employed on archaeological fieldwork, and this period does not figure in their education at all. Neolithic archaeology is often seen as a peculiar foreign hobby. The potential for economic returns through tourism and excavations attracts interest, but it is not a simple relationship. A recent study examining how some Neolithic sites could be integrated into the tourism offering of Petra highlighted the challenges that tour operators face in considering such sites including lack of knowledge, marketing and infrastructure to support trips, in addition to the context of limited institutional capacity and strategic planning in managing the Petra Archaeological Park (Tarawneh and Wray 2017).

Many communities envisage the only available model of tourism as the mass tourism on show at Petra. Some more conservative communities in southern Jordan, for example at Basta, are reluctant to open their villages to such practical and cultural disruption. Other communities envisage that the infrastructure of a 'visitor centre' is all that is required to attract such tourism and become sadly disillusioned when the

Neolithic does not attract such large numbers. Such a ‘build it and they will come’ philosophy has dominated many attempts to develop archaeological tourism, but large-scale expenditure is no guarantee of tourists visiting, nor that they will spend their money locally, nor, as noted above, that local communities will be able to take advantage of any opportunities that do arise. Additionally, the mass tourism market can be fragile, vulnerable to regional crises which can hugely impact visitor numbers, as the recent political and security situation has shown at Petra. Local communities are often the least equipped to cope with such fluctuations. Excavations at sites can be an effective way to bring economic benefit to local communities and enhance social relationships based on the site, but the jobs generated are mostly temporary and do not lead to sustainable income. Equally excavations can be important vehicles for passing knowledge and awareness to local communities, however this has to be actively programmed, otherwise workers only gain a very narrow (although often deep) understand of the context they are working with (Burtenshaw 2013).

Our work in southern Jordan was inspired by this double challenge — trying to find ways to portray and interpret the Neolithic and its world changing significance in an accessible manner, while at the same time ensuring not only that there was an audience, but that both social and material benefits would flow back to the local community, helping to develop a more sustainable form of benefit.

Neolithic Jericho

Jericho has been subject to several excavations. The Neolithic remains were discovered by Kathleen Kenyon of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem in the 1950s, and included substantial walls, a massive tower, and the remains of a surprisingly sophisticated culture before farming (Kenyon 1981). The tower remains

unique, but some of the novel finds, such as plastered skulls have since been found at other sites in the southern Levant (see Fletcher in this volume). Jericho remains an outstanding example of the early Neolithic and was probably at the apex of a regional culture, a centre for innovation. The discoveries at Jericho were widely publicized in the UK, for example through the BBC *Buried Treasure* documentary on the walls of Jericho (1956; see Sparks in this volume), or the popular book *Digging Up Jericho* (Kenyon 1957), with even an exhibition as part of the Festival of Britain. Typically for the period, excavation did not include long-term planning for the conservation and display of the site. The remains have been subject to continued academic discussion (e.g. Bar-Yosef 1986; Ronen and Adler 2006; Barkai and Liran 2008) but have largely fallen out of public view.

Unlike the sites in the south of Jordan, with the exception of Jericho, all other West Bank sites are only known from fragile buried remains. The majority of excavation has been undertaken by Israeli archaeologists, for example at Netiv Hagdud (Bar-Yosef and Gopher 1997) or Gilgal (Bar-Yosef *et al.* 2005), in an echo of the dominance of international archaeologists working in the Jordanian Neolithic, which does nothing to encourage an interest in the Neolithic amongst the local population. Cultural heritage in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is under constant threat resulting from endemic long-term conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, and the scale of cultural heritage destruction in Palestine has been most recently recognized at the World Archaeological Congress, which has passed resolutions to counter the ‘daily’ destruction of sites (Resolution 9, World Archaeology Congress 7 in Jordan, 2013 and Resolution 13, World Archaeology Congress 8 in Kyoto 2016; see World Archaeology Congress 2017, 379–382). The fragmentation of the Jordan valley landscape caused by current zones of control makes heritage management extremely

difficult for the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in Palestine. This management problem is exacerbated for most Neolithic sites, surviving solely as fragile subsurface remains, easily damaged by uncontrolled development, agriculture, and looting. Excavations at the best known of these sites, Netiv Hagdud, generally only reached between 10 and 80 cm below the surface, illustrating just how easily damaged these sites can be to any form of disturbance (Bar-Yosef and Gopher 1997). A 2014 exhibition at the Israel Museum on Neolithic stone masks illustrated the problem, where most masks probably came from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but lacked archaeological contexts, and are held in private collections (Williams 2014). Without more awareness of the importance of the Neolithic to local and world heritage, these low visibility sites will be lost.

As the Neolithic remains undervalued in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, despite its critical importance to human history, it is even more vulnerable than most other cultural heritage remains. Whilst the cluster of sites around Jericho from the Bronze Age onwards have been subject to conservation and preservation plans in recent years, with significant international support (see papers by Green, Taha, and Whitcomb in this volume), this only makes it all the more remarkable that the Neolithic tower and walls of Jericho, made famous in the 1950s in the UK through Dame Kathleen Kenyon's well-publicized excavations, are now neglected and under threat of imminent collapse — especially the faces of the deep excavation trenches that had been dug to reach the Neolithic deposits at the base of the tell (Figure 2). As a result, the Neolithic part of Jericho is at risk of serious damage, without any physical solution to its conservation and stabilisation being developed. Meanwhile, the buried Neolithic sites of the wider Jordan Valley region are suffering constant

attrition and destruction, and without changing the effectiveness of their protection, what remains of this heritage is at risk of being entirely lost.

The Neolithic is largely undervalued amongst both the local population and the tourism industry. Occupation has created significant poverty and a lack of development in Jericho, and the archaeological site can be used to address wider development agendas, turning it into a positive asset. Jericho is now on the UNESCO Tentative List, having been nominated by the Palestinian Authority, and within this context it appears that it is now time to attempt to remedy the situation regarding the Neolithic heritage. The Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage are working with an Italian project to train Department staff and develop the wider Jericho archaeological context, but, despite recent cultural heritage initiatives around Jericho (see Green, and Taha in this volume), this ongoing work has not considered the Neolithic at Jericho in its wider setting. The Tell es-Sultan Management Plan prepared by the Ministry of Tourism and Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage provides an analysis of what is required at Jericho/Tell es-Sultan, yet despite a conference held in 2005 (Nigro and Taha 2006), and various projects working on the later aspects of the tell and in the surrounding countryside, the central objective of conserving and presenting the Neolithic remains has not been achieved. Similarly, although there is tourism to Jericho — unfortunately a significant component of this is through organised coach tours that bring little economic benefit to the local community — it generally omits the Neolithic components of the site.

Conservation and Site Interpretation

Neolithic Jericho shares many of the same conservation issues as Beidha in Jordan, but on a larger scale. The very deep archaeological trench that exposed the Neolithic

remains was left open. An important part of the conservation problem in such cases is not the direct deterioration of the archaeological remains in the period since they were excavated, but the collapse of the faces of the trench, causing damage to unexcavated deposits behind the sections, as well as to any exposed archaeological remains below. The problem is significantly greater at Jericho than at Beidha or Basta, as the deep sections at Jericho cannot be substantially reduced in height, short of a major archaeological excavation, nor can the relatively small exposure of Neolithic archaeology at the site be backfilled to protect the remains without losing its visual impact. Given the tentative world heritage status of these remains, any conservation work should be minimal, designed principally to reduce erosion and prevent the faces of Kenyon's Trench I, with its Neolithic remains, collapsing.

The tower at Jericho is a rare example of a monumental structure from the Neolithic, certainly within the southern Levant. However, even with this monumental component, the significance of the early Neolithic at Jericho is not immediately evident just from the physical remains visible on the ground. These Neolithic remains require interpretation and presentation. This has been conventionally achieved by signage, but there are very few examples where on-site presentation of Neolithic sites has been attempted in the Levant. Poor sign design, and the use of materials susceptible to vandalism or the effects of strong sunlight (Figures 3–4), has meant that in most cases signs have added little to the visitor experience, or have even, once the signs become damaged, had a generally negative effect on the visual experience of a site visit. Even at the world heritage site of Khirokitia in Cyprus, the combination of small print and lengthy, overly technical information on signs, makes it hard for visitors to really appreciate the significance of the site (Figure 5). As a general rule of

thumb, it appears unwise to allow the archaeologists who have excavated a site to have free reign over the content of information provided to visitors.

Signs are not the only way to provide information. Where sites are staffed there are many more options to provide information and guidance. There are also now many media options available to provide user-friendly information, including downloadable apps to use on mobile phones that are not dependent on internet access. However, as an economic, simple, and potentially durable mechanism to provide information, site signage remains important. It does, however, require proper design with useful information, and the material used has to be appropriate. The most durable on-site signs presently used appear to be those made of ceramic, which experience at Hisham's Palace and Petra has shown to be colour-fast and resistant to vandalism. In the south Jordan Neolithic Heritage Trail such signs have been used both to provide outline information regarding a site, as at Shkarat Msaied, and to provide significantly greater information on the path that guides visitors around the site, as at Beidha (Figure 6).

Community Development

While there are relatively well-established procedures for conservation and site presentation, there are fewer precedents in the Middle East for engaging with local communities and mobilising archaeological remains for local community development. In Jordan, development of archaeological sites, particularly for tourism has tended to happen in a top-down manner, often preventing local communities from feeling connected to, and developing a value for, local heritage, or gaining economically from it (Abu Al Haija 2011; Comer 2012; Abu Kahfajah 2010; Shunnaq et al. 2008). To avoid such a scenario and to ensure the Neolithic at Jericho can be

used to create a positive relationship with the local community, two broad strategies can be taken. The first focuses on how the particular Neolithic story can contribute to socio-cultural values, while the second focuses on how such a story and heritage asset can generate sustainable economic opportunities. Such community strategies can only work if they are tailored to the specifics of the community and cultural heritage involved. Any project hoping for results must understand the perspectives, capacities, power relations and practical context of their location. The diversity of responses to Neolithic heritage in our previous cases in Jordan demonstrates the needs for an initial period of this sort of background research at any location. Methodologies for such research have been strengthened through the work of the DEEPSAL project in Jordan (Finlayson et al 2015).

For the first strategy, initial research focuses on how this heritage might connect with contemporary values and identities, how it may be a source of inspiration and the practical considerations of educational channels and approaches. This can then inform a series of artist and cultural events, as well as specific educational activities. For the second strategy, key information includes understanding the market opportunities for any community enterprises, the local community's capacities and motivations for being part of a community business, and attitudes and relationships towards any existing economic connections to cultural heritage, which may include tourism. Based on this, we can develop appropriate community enterprises which offer long-term, community-led and sustainable business opportunities. While business may include a tourism element, it is likely that it will not rely, or solely rely, on this activity. This is due to the limited capacity of such projects to greatly influence the existing tourism market and further to the volatile nature of such a market. The aim is to provide the community with both the business skills (including organization, accounting,

production and marketing) and wider understanding of developing certain businesses (e.g. commodification of culture or sustainable use of sites) so that community members are not just participants but have the knowledge to make their own decisions about how to utilize cultural heritage sustainably and responsibly. Such a business training program is intertwined with the educational and cultural activities as such activities provide the inspiration for marketable products and bind the business and participants to the site.

Jericho has the potential to act as a hub for the Neolithic in the West Bank, providing the opportunity to target not only one site, but to develop a more wide-ranging interest and concern for the less spectacular remains. However, for this to be a sustainable project, it is important to connect Jericho and the Neolithic to the local community, both culturally and economically, and to then ensure that the community can feel invested in this heritage.

Conclusion

While there are excellent reasons to locate the Neolithic Heritage Trail in the southern Jordan, including archaeological, social and economic grounds, it would appear almost perverse not to include Jericho within the wider framework of promoting south-west Asian Neolithic cultural heritage. The absence of attention to the Neolithic within one of the key regions for early Neolithic developments, and at the site where the south-west Asian Neolithic first came into focus, is in stark contrast to late Neolithic examples in Turkey (e.g. Çatalhöyük) or Cyprus (Khirokitia) which have been inscribed as World Heritage sites and are popular with both academic experts and tourist visitors, while at the same time creating local economic opportunities. The monumental remains of Jericho provide a very visible example of

the wealth of Neolithic heritage and provide an opportunity to develop local knowledge and understanding of the Neolithic, its importance to world history, and its relevance as a part of local heritage.

Preservation of this buried resource depends to a great extent on the sympathy of local people, farmers and developers — in reporting finds, and being sympathetic to the requirements of cultural managers. A wider educational and promotional campaign will lead to better management of the buried Neolithic heritage resource, reducing its attrition and destruction through development, agriculture and looting. Information should be provided not only on the nature and significance of the remains, but also within a campaign to encourage people to see the Neolithic as part of their own heritage, a significant and unique link through the origins of farming and community to the modern population.

By adding to the range of visitor attractions at Jericho, developing Neolithic tourism will help extend the length of visits, thereby adding to the amount of tourism spend in the location. Restrictions on trade in the Occupied Palestinian Territories make it hard to build businesses and the cultural heritage is an accessible resource that local communities can use in a sustainable manner. The project will give communities the knowledge and skills not only to access and protect this Neolithic past, but also utilize it to provide social and economic benefits in the present.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Reconstructions at Neolithic Beidha, now used to support the site display and interpretation.

Figure 2. Dr Hamdan Taha and colleagues in front of the Neolithic tower at Jericho, standing on material collapsed from the deep trench section face.

Figure 3. The original signage at Ghuwayr 1, before becoming damaged.

Figure 4. Signage at Ghuwayr 1, after vandalism and becoming bleached by the sun.

Figure 5. Signage at Khirokitia world heritage Neolithic site on Cyprus.

Figure 6. Introductory ceramic tile sign at Beidha.



Finlayson-Fig-01 .jpg



Finlayson-fig-02.jpg



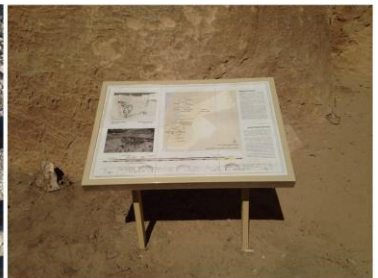
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