



Palestinian Dry Stone Structures- an Endogenous Expression of Cultural Landscape

Shadi Ghadban, Prof. Arch.
Department of Architectural Engineering
Birzeit University- Palestine

September, 2015
Syros- Greece

Dry- Stone Structures in Palestine

1. The dry-stone structures in Palestine were connected with the origins of agriculture itself: the cultivation of grain crops and somewhat later the domestication of fruit trees, mainly fig and olive trees, grapevines and pastureland.
2. They were generated as a result of clearing the Land from abundant stones before cultivation can take place and/ or adapting existing stone formations for daily use.
3. They were broadly distributed throughout the Palestinian mountainous areas, from Ramallah district in the north through Hebron district in the south, as very few of them have been documented in the northernmost parts of the West Bank, however, or along the western side of the Jordan Valley.

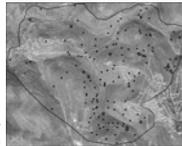
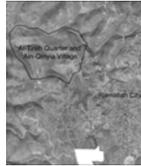
Prelude & History

1. Dry-stone structures evolved over time to reflect the environmental, cultural and historical context in which they exist, to meet certain needs of the population in ways that reflect their values and accommodate their ways of living (Holm, 2006).
2. Generally, they are built from shepherds, hunters and peasants using rough unworked fieldstones, with irregular and polygonal forms, without employing any bonding material.
3. These structures originated mainly in the both sides of the Mediterranean Basin probably at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (2300- 1600 BCE).
4. They have proven to be a key landscape and architectural element, one that reflects the earliest modes of living and ways of thinking about and utilizing the landscape.

A'In Qlnia, an outstanding Site

A fieldwork was conducted in this area between 2012-2013, and the results can be summarized as follows:

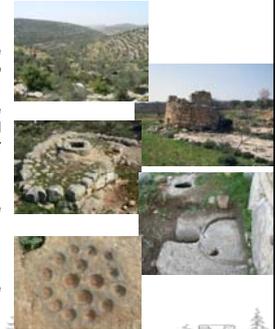
1. The richness and remarkable variety of the agricultural dry-stone structures in this area, which reflects various socio-economical conditions during the late Ottoman period,
2. The available structures are unique and diverse regarding the used building techniques used in the construction process,
3. The existence of a reasonable number of still standing intact structures, but with alarming physical conditions of the majority of them,
4. Some statistics from the area:
 - Total area: 3000m2 that contains:
 - 167 watchtowers, 2 archaeological sites, 40 water cisterns, hundreds of rock-hewn marks and plenty of terrace walls.



Dry- Stone Structures In Palestine

Dry-stone structures were used for:

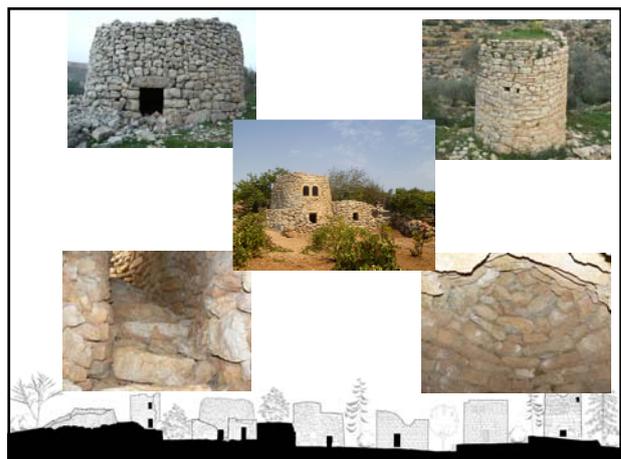
1. To generate terrace walls following the contours of the hills and mountains to provide suitable level areas for planting,
2. To allow maximum rainwater to penetrate the soil, thus preventing soil erosion and making more moisture available to their crops,
3. To mark borders of land property,
4. To provide shelters (watchtowers) for people working in the fields,
5. To layout open barns for the livestock,
6. To shape the water springs and cisterns, rock-hewn marks, grape and olive presses...etc.



Current Situation

As the importance of agricultural practice is vanishing from the daily life of modern Palestinian villagers, the importance of these structures is declining, because of:

1. The importance attached to such traditional constructions –and the attention people pay to them– are likewise vanishing,
2. In the present day most of them is abandoned, either partially or totally destroyed.
3. Any appreciation of their previous important role in traditional Palestinian life has more or less vanished,
4. With public and private transportation becoming faster and easier, farmers typically travel to their lands in the morning and return back to their homes in the evening.
5. Also, transporting and processing the crops are also getting easier and more efficient through the use of modern techniques.



Final Notes

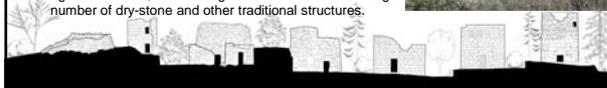
1. The dry-stone structures constitute excellent examples of the traditional local architecture, reflecting a now largely lost way of life and conveying a sense of the day-to-day activities associated with those places where they exist,
2. They were – and still are – a unique representation of a particular cultural heritage,
3. Possessing a genuinely iconic quality within the Palestinian landscape, these structures effectively symbolize the distinctive flavour of that once-vibrant rural society and, indeed, embody a whole host of social, economic, architectural, aesthetic, symbolic meanings and values.

Therefore,



Factors contributing to this situation

1. The impact of the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967 on the area,
2. the ongoing Israeli practice of confiscating large amounts of Palestinian agricultural land for constructing settlements,
3. the many obstacles Israeli authorities place in the way of any large-scale Palestinian mass agricultural projects, so as to maintain Palestine's dependency on the Israeli economy and,
4. Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (1994) the development of other employment sectors within the Palestinian economy has added to the declining importance of agricultural activity, by attracting more farmers to work in administrative and governmental employment.
5. Besides, the rapid and largely unorganized urban expansion seen since 1994 has consumed much agricultural land, contributing to the destruction of a large number of dry-stone and other traditional structures.



THANK YOU



1. It is essential in the present day not only to study and document these structures throughout the entire country, but also to raise public awareness of their existence and their cultural importance,
2. Specifically, these structures should be listed among the important heritage features, which are designated and mandated to be protected, maintained and regenerated,
3. Moreover complete restoration is needed for exemplary types, in order to integrate them once again into the Palestinian landscape and encourage their re-use for various modern functions: such as tourism, education, and agricultural festivals.

