

Stones and Fire: Landscape Archaeology and the Management of Wildfire in Antiquity

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How did people in antiquity prevent local fire incidents from developing into wildfire? Considering the lack of modern technologies, what tools were in reach of the common man allowing him to control and manage fire? The answer to those questions may be found in *Landscape Archaeology*.

Landscape Archaeology is both an archaeological technique and a theoretical construction: it provides a way for archaeologists to look at the past as the integration of people and their surroundings. In this discipline the focus shifts from a specific site or period to the landscape with all its components and periods. The Landscape archaeologist observes the overall landscape surveys documents it and analyses the different archaeological features within the research area. The changes that were made by human beings in a landscape are the subject under investigation. Since the agricultural revolution (taking place approximately 10,000 years ago), men have been changing their surroundings. In the southern Levant and specifically in Israel, where there is a long continuance of human habitation, there are hardly any landscapes which can be titled as: "natural". Our present landscapes are the result of thousands of years of human involvement and development. *Landscape Archaeology* studies can point to the way the cultural landscape on its various manmade features and their layout allowed people in antiquity to prevent wildfire. The roles of deforesting and grazing in preventing wildfires are well known, but there is another factor which is at least as important: stone walls have been used as field boundaries and terraces are still a common phenomenon in our highland regions. Those were mainly built to enable agriculture on mountain slopes, but it is apparent that the way the terraces have been spread across vast areas, is important in avoiding wildfires. This study though focused on antiquity, points to the fact that thoughtful landscape development and the preservation of cultural landscapes can assist with preventing wildfires and their catastrophic results.