



McDONALD INSTITUTE MONOGRAPHS

Temple places

Excavating cultural sustainability in prehistoric Malta

By Caroline Malone, Reuben Grima, Rowan McLaughlin,
Éóin W. Parkinson, Simon Stoddart & Nicholas Vella



Volume 2 of Fragility and Sustainability – Studies on Early Malta,
the ERC-funded *FRAGSUS Project*

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With contributions by

Stephen Armstrong, Jennifer Bates, Jeremy Bennett, Anthony Bonanno,
Sara Boyle, Catriona Brogan, Josef Caruana, Letizia Ceccerelli, Petros Chatzimpaloglou,
Nathaniel Cutajar, Michelle Farrell, Katrin Fenech, Charles French, Christopher O. Hunt,
Conor McAdams, Finbar McCormick, John Meneely, Jacob Morales Mateos,
Paula Reimer, Alastair Ruffell, Ella Samut-Tagliaferro, Katya Stroud & Sean Taylor

Illustrations by

Steven Ashley, Caroline Malone, Rowan McLaughlin, Stephen Armstrong,
Jeremy Bennett, Catriona Brogan, Petros Chatzimpaloglou, Michelle Farrell,
Katrin Fenech, Charles French, Conor McAdams, Finbar McCormick, John Meneely,
Alastair Ruffell, Georgia Vince & Nathan Wright



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(0)(1223) 339327
eaj31@cam.ac.uk
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CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHEN ARMSTRONG

Archaeology, College of Humanities, University of Exeter, UK

Email: sa622@exeter.ac.uk

STEPHEN ASHLEY

Norfolk Museums Service, Shirehall, Market Avenue, Norwich, UK

Email: steven.ashley@norfolk.gov.uk

DR JENNIFER BATES

Dept. of Anthropology, Penn Museum, University of Pennsylvania

Email: jenbates@sas.upenn.edu

JEREMY BENNETT

Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Email: jmb241@cam.ac.uk

PROF. ANTHONY BONANNO

Department of Classics & Archaeology, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

Email: anthony.bonanno@um.edu.mt

DR SARA BOYLE (NOW STEWART)

Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, Land & Property Services, Lanyon Plaza, 7 Lanyon Place, Town Parks, Belfast, Northern Ireland

DR CATRIONA BROGAN

14 Glenmanus Village, Portrush, Antrim, Northern Ireland

Email: cbrogan03@qub.ac.uk

DR JOSEF CARUANA

Head Office Heritage Malta, Ex Royal Naval Hospital, Kalkara, Malta

Email: josef.caruana@gov.mt

LETIZIA CECCARELLI

Department of Chemistry, Materials and Chemical Engineering 'G. Natta', Politecnico di Milano, P.zza Leonardo da Vinci, 32, 20133 Milano, Italy

Email: letizia.ceccarelli@polimi.it

DR PETROS CHATZIMPALOGLOU

Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Email: pc529@cam.ac.uk

NATHANIEL CUTAJAR

Head Office Heritage Malta, Ex Royal Naval Hospital, Kalkara, Malta

Email: nathaniel.cutajar@gov.mt

DR MICHELLE FARRELL

Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, School of Energy, Construction and Environment, Coventry University, Coventry, UK

Email: ac5086@coventry.ac.uk

DR KATRIN FENECH

Department of Classics & Archaeology, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

Email: katrin.fenech@um.edu.mt

PROF. CHARLES FRENCH

Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Email: caif2@cam.ac.uk

DR REUBEN GRIMA

Department of Conservation and Built Heritage, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

Email: reuben.grima@um.edu.mt

SHEILA HAMILTON DYER

Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, Bournemouth University, Bournemouth, UK

Email: shamiltondyer@bournemouth.ac.uk

PROF. CHRISTOPHER O. HUNT

Faculty of Science, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK

Email: c.o.hunt@ljmu.ac.uk

PROF. CAROLINE MALONE

School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland

Email: c.malone@qub.ac.uk

CONOR McADAMS

Centre for Archaeological Science School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia

Email: cm065@uowmail.edu.au

DR FINBAR McCORMICK

Emeritus, School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland

Email: f.mccormick@qub.ac.uk

DR ROWAN McLAUGHLIN
School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's
University, Belfast, Northern Ireland
Email: r.mclaughlin@qub.ac.uk

JOHN MENEELY
School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's
University, Belfast, Northern Ireland
Email: j.meneely@qub.ac.uk

DR JACOB MORALES MATEOS
Departamento de ciencias historicas, Universidad de
Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain
Email: jacobmoralesmateos@gmail.com

DR ANTHONY PACE
UNESCO Cultural Heritage, Valletta, Malta
Email: anthonypace@cantab.net

DR EÓIN PARKINSON
Department of Classics & Archaeology, University
of Malta, Msida, Malta
Email: ewparkinson24@gmail.com

PROF. PAULA REIMER
School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's
University, University Road, Belfast, Northern
Ireland
Email: p.j.reimer@qub.ac.uk

DR ALISTAIR RUFFELL
School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's
University, University Road, Belfast, Northern
Ireland
Email: a.ruffell@qub.ac.uk

ELLA SAMUT-TAGLIAFERRO
Formerly of the Superintendence of Cultural
Heritage, Malta

PROF. PATRICK J. SCHEMBRI
Department of Biology, University of Malta, Msida,
Malta
Email: patrick.j.schembri@um.edu.mt

DR SIMON STODDART
Department of Archaeology, University of
Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
Email: ss16@cam.ac.uk

KATYA STROUD
Head Office Heritage Malta, Ex Royal Naval
Hospital, Kalkara, Malta
Email: katya.stroud@gov.mt

DR SEAN TAYLOR
Department of Archaeology, University of
Cambridge, Cambridge, UK
Email: st435@cam.ac.uk

PROF. NICHOLAS C. VELLA
Faculty of Arts, University of Malta, Msida, Malta
Email: nicholas.vella@um.edu.mt

DR NATHAN WRIGHT
School of Social Science, The University of
Queensland, Brisbane, Australia
Email: n.wright@uq.edu.au

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Dedication – in memoriam

John Davies Evans David Hilary Trump

Malta may be small in scale but it has had a rich and important archaeological past which has been explored and enjoyed by many past scholars. A visit to the Archaeology Museums of Malta and Gozo testifies to a long history of collecting, scholarship and passion dating back to the early to mid-nineteenth century. It is a heritage that is beloved by Malta and its visitors alike.

The editors of this volume wish to pay tribute to two remarkable ‘visitors’ to Malta, each of whom, in their own way, made great contributions to our present appreciation of the islands’ ancient past and supported our early researches, teams and ideas. Now we want to record our debt as some of the continuing scholars of Maltese prehistory, since we cannot imagine where we could have begun our current quest to take the story onwards and deeper without their prior work.

On behalf of the whole *FRAGSUS* team, we wish to dedicate this volume to their enduring memory.

Professor John Davies Evans (OBE) (1925–2011) arrived in Malta in 1952 from Cambridge to commence the task of organizing the war-damaged museum collections in preparation for a synthesis of Maltese prehistory. His task was enormous, and involved a new assessment of the pottery and material culture sequence of Maltese prehistory. He prepared his now classic study *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands*, published in 1971, which has remained the primary compendium of reference to this day. Together with carefully targeted excavations, John Evans set in train the many questions that inspired not only David Trump, his successor, to explore and challenge the com-

plex story of Malta’s prehistoric past, but also ourselves over the last 35 years. John noted important aspects of sequence, material connectivity and, of course, the temples. These he recorded and described in such detail that his work remains vitally important today.

David Hilary Trump (OM) (1931–2016) succeeded John Evans, having already experienced Maltese prehistory in the field with him, and became the Curator of the Museum of Archaeology for five years until 1963. In that short time, he too made an enormous impression on the understanding of prehistoric Malta. His work at Skorba (as we discuss in Chapter 7) was inspired and informed, and it too set the direction for the future explorations of prehistory in the islands. David Trump maintained his interest in Malta throughout his career, leading regular study tours to the island and latterly, with ourselves, undertaking the sustained programme of fieldwork at the Xagħra Brochtorff Circle (1987–9). He wrote numerous books and papers on Malta’s prehistory, popular and academic; and his contribution has been widely acknowledged through museum displays, the award of the Order of Merit of Malta and an Honorary Degree from the University of Malta for which he felt hugely honoured. But back in the United Kingdom, from whence both these scholars came, there has been less mention of their work on Malta. Evans moved eastwards to Crete in his research interests, and has been identified mainly with that work; whilst Trump, a retiring and extremely modest individual, did not promote his achievements on Malta during his teaching years at Cambridge, which was arguably too theoretical to fully appreciate his remarkable contribution.



Figure 0.1. *David Trump and John Evans together at the Deya Conference, Mallorca (c. 1983) (reproduced with permission of Judith Conway, niece of John Evans).*

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All archaeological excavations described in this volume were carried out using standard methods, in accordance with the policies of the SCH, in particular the guidance given in the document *Operating Procedures and Standards for Archaeology Services – February 2013*. Permits to enable excavation, survey, sampling and study were granted through the SCH and we are especially grateful to Anthony Pace and Nathaniel Cutajar for their unstinting efforts to ensure fieldwork was enabled.

Tač-Ċawla

The Tač-Ċawla excavations were directed by Prof. Caroline Malone, and the crew consisted primarily of students and staff from UoC, UM and QUB, supervised by Stephen Armstrong, Jeremy Bennett and Conor McAdams, with additional supervision from Dr Simon Stoddart, Dr Sara Boyle and Dr Emily Murray. We are also very grateful for Dr George Azzopardi who sought out accommodation for the project, assisted on

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Santa Verna

The Santa Verna excavations were directed by Prof. Caroline Malone, assisted by Dr Simon Stoddart and Dr Rowan McLaughlin. The crew consisted primarily of a number of students and staff from UoC, QUB and UM, supervised by Stephen Armstrong, Jeremy Bennett, Dr Catriona Brogan and Eóin Parkinson. Dr Evan Hill wet-sieved the soil samples using flotation and the site was sampled for soil micromorphology and geochemistry by Prof. Charles French, Dr Sean Taylor and Conor McAdams. During the excavation, our understanding of the extant megalithic structure was improved by the superb plan produced by Stephen Ashley. Tiomoid Foley conducted a condition survey of the megalithic remains, the results of which were incorporated into an MSc project. Rupert Barker made a short film of the excavations – *A Day on a Dig* (<https://youtu.be/cGNOGpq746I>). Digital laser scanning was undertaken by John Meneely. Individuals whose efforts are warmly acknowledged include Stephen Armstrong, Dr Catriona Brogan, Dr Bela Dimova, Dr Paola Filippucci, Dr Reuben Grima, Laura James, Lottie Stoddart and Dr Sean Taylor, who supervised trenches, organized field assistants and gave logistical support to the running of the project. At Santa Verna, we particularly thank Dr George Azzopardi (HM) for his invaluable logistical

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The Ġgantija excavations in 2015 were directed by Prof. Charles French, Dr Simon Stoddart, Dr Sean Taylor and David Redhouse, assisted by Stephen Armstrong, Jeremy Bennett, Dr Catriona Brogan, Conor McAdams, Aran McMahon, Eóin Parkinson, Jacob Pockney and Mariele Valci. Flotation of soil samples was undertaken by Dr Evan Hill. Digital laser scanning was undertaken by John Meneely. The field researchers comprised the geophysical survey team in 2014 under the supervision of David Redhouse and Dr Alistair Ruffell with assistance from Jeremy Bennett. Dr Sara Boyle and Jeremy Bennett undertook initial survey of the WC section area in 2014.

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Kordin III

The excavations were directed jointly by Prof. Caroline Malone and Prof. Nicholas Vella, assisted by Dr Reuben Grima, Dr Rowan McLaughlin, Ella Samut-Tagliaferro and Dr Simon Stoddart. The crew consisted mainly of students from UM, who participated as part of their annual training excavation. They were supervised by Jeremy Bennett, Dr Catriona Brogan, Rebecca Farrugia, Dr Reuben Grima, Tore Lumsdalen and Eóin Parkinson. Flotation of soil samples was undertaken by Dr

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Skorba

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Permits and access

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permissions and opportunities to study the buried archaeology. It cannot be over-emphasized just how privileged the *Project* has been in having access to excavate and examine the exceptional sites of prehistoric Malta. Not only is the entire category ‘Maltese Temple’ protected, but most sites are also inscribed within the UNESCO World Heritage Site listing for Malta. Some readers may wonder why very small trenches and sondages were permitted at all, whilst others may query the value of small investigations. This volume presents a range of scales of study from the small to the large across prehistoric sites and assesses the value of particular data sets that have been collected. Together with Volume 1, which examines the wider landscapes and environments of early Malta, and Volume 3, which examines the bones and lives of the ancient individuals, this volume fills the middle ground – the sites themselves, and we thank all our collaborators and volunteers in this venture. In particular, we thank the willing site assistants, volunteers, surveyors, cooks and illustrators who gave their time and energy to the archaeological work, and we list them below:

Spring and Summer 2014, Gozo – Tač-Ċawla, In-Nuffara, Ta’ Marziena, Ġgantija, Gozo landscapes

UoC	Dr Simon Stoddart	CI/Direction
UoC	Prof. Charles French	Geoarchaeology
UoC	Dr Sean Taylor	Geoarchaeology
UoC	Jennifer Bates (MRes)	Soil sieving
UoC	David Redhouse	Technical staff
UoC	Hettie Hill	Field assistant
UoC	Angus Knight	Field assistant
UoC	Theo Arnold Foster	Field assistant
UoC	Rosanna O’Keefe	Field assistant
UoC	Kate Wilson	Field assistant
UoC	Louise Green	Field assistant
UoC	Emma Brownlee	Field assistant
UoC	Dr Letizia Ceccarelli	Pottery study
HM	Dr George Azzopardi	Landscape archaeology
HM	Katya Stroud (MA)	Field/survey assistant
HM	Joanne Mallia (MA)	Archaeology/archives
HM	Iona Muscat (MA)	Archaeology/archives
HM	Marie Elena Zammit (MA)	Archaeology/archives
Norfolk CC	Steven Ashley	Illustration
Indep	Phil Wright	Field assistant
Indep	Dr Rebecca Enlander	Field assistant
Indep	Lottie Stoddart	Catering/illustration
QUB	Prof. Caroline Malone	PI/Direction

QUB	Conor McAdams	Field assistant
QUB	Stephen Armstrong	Field assistant
QUB	Lorraine Barry (MSc.)	Survey/technical
QUB	Dr Sara Boyle	Research coordination
QUB	Jeremy Bennett	Field/survey assistant
QUB	Dr Alastair Ruffell	GPR survey
QUB	Alix Baxter	Field assistant
QUB	Eóin Parkinson	Field assistant
QUB	Dr Emily Murray	Staff supervisor
QUB	Anastasia Boomsma	MSc. training
QUB	Deborah Schroeter	MSc. training
QUB	Claire Privilege	MSc. training
QUB	Laura Patrick	MSc. training
QUB	Joel Goodchild	MSc. training
QUB	Michael Lavery	MSc. training
QUB	Naomi Finn	Catering
QUB	Tiomoid Foley	Field assistant
QUB	Jake Morris	Field assistant
QUB	Jonny Small	Field assistant
QUB	Dr Michelle Farrell	Environmental PDRA
QUB	John Meneely	Digital scanning
QUB	Conor Graham	Survey/technical
QUB	Michael Armstrong	Field assistant
Rome	Mariele Valci	Field assistant

Acknowledgements

Swansea	Lucy Stoddart	Ecology assistant
UM	Dr Reuben Grima	Fieldwork direction
UM	Dr Nick Vella	CI/Direction
UM	Dr Katrin Fenech	Environmental analysis
UM	Prof. Patrick Schembri	Environmental direction
UM	Nicole Micaleff	Field assistant
UM	Jessica Scicluna	Field assistant
UM	Luke Brightwell	Field assistant

UM	Tamsin Kingman	Field assistant
UM	Kay Mallia	Field assistant
UM	Karl Cachia	Field assistant
UM	Cecilia Zammit Endrich	Field assistant
UM	Annalise Agius	Field assistant
UM	Joseph Grima	Field assistant
UM	Dean Galea	Field assistant

April 2015, Gozo – Santa Verna, Ġgantija, In-Nuffara

UoC	Dr Simon Stoddart	CI/Direction
UoC	Jeremy Bennett (MSc.)	Survey supervisor
UoC	Dr Letizia Ceccarelli	Ceramics and finds
UoC	Prof. Charles French	Geoarchaeology
UoC	Dr Sean Taylor	Geoarchaeology
UoC	David Redhouse	Survey supervisor
UoC	Robert Barratt	Digital recording
UoC (CAU)	Donald Horne	Site supervisor
UoC (CAU)	Katie Hutton	Site supervisor
UoC	Laura James	Site supervisor
UoC	Dr Paola Filippucci	Student training
UoC	Dr Bela Dimova	Student training
UoC	Charles Barker	Student training
UoC	Tansy Branscombe	Student training
UoC	Imogen Coulson	Student training
UoC	Olivia Crawford	Student training
UoC	Louise Green	Student training
UoC	Josie Howl	Student training
UoC	Isaac Lawton	Student training
UoC	Jodie Manners	Student training
UoC	Aran McMahon	Student training
UoC	Susanne Navara	Student training
UoC	Jacob Pockney	Student training
UoC	Lily Rice	Student training
UoC	Alisa Santikam	Student training
UoC	Rebecca Seakins	Student training
UoC	Finnoula Taylor	Student training
UoC	Katherine Wilson	Student training
UoC	Conor McAdams (M.Phil)	Geoarchaeology
UoC	Dr Ronika Power	Human osteology
UoC	Dr Letizia Ceccarelli	Pottery study
INDEP	Rupert Barker	Filmmaker

Norfolk CC	Steven Ashley	Illustration/planning
QUB	Prof. Caroline Malone	PI/Direction
QUB	Dr Rowan McLaughlin	Senior site supervisor
QUB	Eóin Parkinson (MSc.)	Site supervisor
QUB	Dr Catriona Brogan	Site supervisor
QUB	Stephen Armstrong (M.Arch.Sci.)	Site supervisor
QUB	John Meneely (MSc.)	Digital survey/technical
QUB	Dr Sean Pyne O'Donnell	Coring
LJMU	Dr Chris Hunt	Coring
QUB	Dr Rory Flood	Coring
QUB	Dr Michelle Farrell	Coring
QUB	Dr Finbar McCormick	Zooarchaeology
QUB	Tiomoid Foley (M.Arch.Sci.)	Survey assistant
QUB	Rory Sutton (M.Arch.Sci.)	Field assistant
QUB	Claire Holmes (M.Arch.Sci.)	Field assistant
QUB	Dr Evan Hill	Environmental
IAC Ltd.	Christina O'Regan (MSc.)	Field assistant
RDS	Charlotte Stoddart (MA)	Field assistant
Indep.	Rupert Barker	Film maker
ROME	Mariele Valci	Field assistant
SCH	Ella Samut-Tagliaferro (MA)	Site supervisor
SCH	Bernardette Mercieca (MSc.)	Human osteology
UM	Gillian Asciak	Student training
UM	Stephanie Parisi	Student training
UM	Maja Sausmekat	Student training
UM	Leslie Torwie	Student training
UM	Dr Reuben Grima	Landscape

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June–July 2015 – Kordin Temple

UoC	Dr Simon Stoddart	CI/Direction
UoC	Jeremy Bennett (MSc.)	Survey
UoC	Dr Letizia Ceccarelli	Ceramics
UoC	Matthew Greenhill	Field assistant
UoC	Beth Whitlock (MPhil)	Field assistant
MEPA	Tony Zammit (MSc.)	MEPA
MEPA	Joseph Magro Conti (MSc.)	MEPA
QUB	Prof. Caroline Malone	PI/Direction
QUB	John Meneely (MSc.)	Survey
QUB	Dr Rowan McLaughlin	Principal supervisor
QUB	Eóin Parkinson (MSc.)	Site supervisor
QUB	Dr Catriona Brogan	Site supervisor
QUB	Dr Finbar McCormick	Zooarchaeology
QUB	Dr Evan Hill	Molluscs/sieving
SCH	Ella Samut-Tagliaferro	SCH
Swansea	Lucy Stoddart	Field assistant
UM	Chris Gemmell	Logistics
UM	Rebecca Farrugia	Site supervisor
UM	Dr Sean Taylor	Geoarchaeology
UM	Prof. Anthony Bonanno	Ceramics
UM	Dr Nicholas Vella	CI/Direction
UM	Dr Reuben Grima	CI/Direction
UM	Adrian Camilleri	Field assistant
UM	Aidan Lehane	Field assistant

UM	Anne Marie Schembri	Field assistant
UM	Gavin Borg	Field assistant
UM	Gillian Asciak	Field assistant
UM	Prof. John Betts	Survey
UM	Leanne Azzopardi	Field assistant
UM	Luke Briitghtwell	Field assistant
UM	Maja Sausmekat	Field assistant
UM	Daniela Formosa	Field assistant
UM	Mara de Richter	Field assistant
UM	Maria Serpina	Field assistant
UM	Melanie Debono	Field assistant
UM	Nico Muscat	Field assistant
UM	Nicole Micalfeff	Field assistant
UM	Nidia Lisic	Field assistant
UM	Rachel Grillo	Field assistant
UM	Sefora Borg	Field assistant
UM	Tamsin Kingwell	Field assistant
UM	Tore Lomsdalen	Field/survey assistant
UM	Sandy Pirani	Field assistant
UM	Tamsin Cauchi	Field assistant
UM	Ryan Grech	Field assistant
UM	Gabriel Farrugia	Field assistant
UM	Dwayne Haber	Field assistant
UM	Dean Galea	Field assistant

April 2016 – Skorba excavation

UoC	Dr Simon Stoddart	CI/Co-Direction
UoC	Jeremy Bennett (MSc.)	Field assistant
UoC	Eóin Parkinson (MSc.)	Field assistant
HM	Dr Josef Caruana	Heritage assistant
QUB	Prof. Caroline Malone	PI/Direction
QUB	Dr Rowan McLaughlin	Assistant direction

QUB	Dr Catriona Brogan	Field assistant
QUB	Stephen Armstrong (M.Arch.Sci.)	Field assistant
QUB	Emma Hannah (MPhil)	Field assistant
SCH	Ella Samut-Tagliaferro	Field manager
Univ. St Andrews	Dr Timothy Kinniard	OSL/geomorphology

Summer 2016 – Pottery and finds analysis (University of Malta)

UoC	Dr Simon Stoddart
Norfolk CC	Steven Ashley
QUB	Prof. Caroline Malone

QUB	Dr Rowan McLaughlin
QUB	Stephen Armstrong
QUB	Dr Catriona Brogan

June 2017 – Pottery analysis (University of Malta and National Museum of Archaeology)

UoC	Eóin Parkinson (MSc.)
QUB	Dr Rowan McLaughlin
QUB	Prof. Caroline Malone

QUB	Dr Catriona Brogan
QUB	Dr Lisa Coyle McClung

Foreword

Joseph Magro Conti

Consider, 5000 years ago you are on one of the smallest islands in the Mediterranean, which has no water sources, dependent on brief winter rain showers, shallow soil patches, with only stone, clay and salt as natural resources, perhaps a few trees and shrubs. How would you live in such environment? This second volume of the *FRAGSUS Project* (2013–18) provides readers with fresh information achieved through high quality scientific research on palaeoenvironmental analysis, radiocarbon dating, human and faunal bone studies as well as on ceramics, lithics, domestic contexts and monuments, fully addressing five main questions targeted by the project. The support of the European Research Council has been transformative in making this new knowledge about Maltese prehistory more understandable and accessible, as a reader will discover throughout this and the other two volumes.

The coming of *FRAGSUS* was a long journey. Twenty-seven years passed since I first met the main protagonists of this project, Prof. Caroline Malone and Dr Simon Stoddart. They left a long-lasting positive impression on me. I was an archaeology undergraduate at the University of Malta in 1993, under the academic guidance of Prof. Anthony Bonanno, with colleagues Nicholas Vella (now Professor, and former Head of the Archaeology Department at the University of Malta) and Dr Anthony Pace (my predecessor as Superintendent of Cultural Heritage). I was on my first archaeological research excavation by an Anglo-Maltese mission at the unique Neolithic mass burial site of the Xaghra Brochtorff Circle in Malta's sister island of Gozo. A couple of decades later I had the opportunity to participate on other research digs in Malta with Malone-Stoddart, this time as part of *FRAGSUS* at Kordin III Neolithic temples in Malta, a site about which I had long endeavoured to raise awareness for its better understanding and management.

The Temple Period is renowned for the monumental megalithic structures (presumed temples) and the associated underground mass burial places, which offer an aura about the Neolithic mindset, belief system, organisation, ritual and physical capabilities in engineering and art. But what should be further intriguing to the reader is another aspect of human life – how the early people lived? What evidence is there for this aspect from the Temple Period? Previously, such questions were largely without much evidence except sporadic discoveries of typical deposits and material culture, but which were very lacking in data to advance site prediction and environmental data collection. The very few huts so far discovered and interpreted as domestic were ephemeral and thus prone to unrecorded destruction during building construction. I was pleased to contribute my knowledge of domestic sites to the publication of the Gozo study in 2009, and delighted to write this Foreword. This work records the next stages of discovery of the inhabitation record of the Maltese islands, most notably at Taċ-Ċawla, a site preserved from development by the action of the Superintendence.

In the past fifty years, the Maltese Islands have undergone successive building booms, each significantly endangering Malta's historic environment. In my quest as an applied archaeologist/heritage manager for over two decades at the Planning Authority and for the past two years as Superintendent of Cultural Heritage, I have endeavoured to collaborate with disparate stakeholders to save or mitigate impacts on the fragile remains of the past, and to raise awareness. The findings from *FRAGSUS* will be an especially useful source of information for policy makers, heritage managers, regulatory agencies and conservation scientists in their quest to preserve and understand Malta's past. The study enables them to make informed decisions about future human impacts on the archaeological heritage, mainly caused by



Figure 0.2. *Joseph Magro Conti at Kordin.*

building development on the small island environment and its island society and economy.

This volume is a seminal interdisciplinary study, not only for Maltese prehistory but also a milestone

in world prehistory more generally. As prehistory pre-dates the invention of writing, the approach of *FRAGSUS*'s research agenda turns archaeo-environmental data into 'words' by digging deep into the embryonic matrix of garden soils on which the temples builders sustained themselves. The project can now explain queries about this sustainability, a theme that is still relevant to modern generations. With the use of multidisciplinary and multinational teams of specialists, the study placed innovative scientific approaches at the fore, and addressed silent aspects that go beyond the traditional art-historical basics of Grand Traditions. The investigations into the core essence of life five millennia ago belong to new scientific approaches.

The *FRAGSUS Project* has addressed lacunae and used unconventional approaches in theory and method to obtain robust scientifically-backed results that have filled in significant gaps in the research agenda of Maltese prehistory and beyond. Equally, the results have surely raised many questions for future research agendas. I look forward to further collaboration, and I am eager to see more collaborative projects between Maltese veterans and upcoming academics and our overseas colleagues.

Joseph Magro Conti
Superintendent of Cultural Heritage, Malta
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Temple places

The ERC-funded *FRAGSUS Project* (*Fragility and sustainability in small island environments: adaptation, culture change and collapse in prehistory, 2013–18*) led by Caroline Malone (Queen's University Belfast) has focused on the unique Temple Culture of Neolithic Malta, and its antecedents and successors through investigation of archaeological sites and monuments. This, the second volume of three, presents the results of excavations at four temple sites and two settlements, together with analysis of chronology, economy and material culture.

The project focused on the integration of three key strands of Malta's early human history (environmental change, human settlement and population) set against a series of questions that interrogated how human activity impacted on the changing natural environment and resources, which in turn impacted on the Neolithic populations. The evidence from early sites together with the human story preserved in burial remains reveals a dynamic and creative response over millennia. The scenario that emerges implies settlement from at least the mid-sixth millennium BC, with extended breaks in occupation, depopulation and environmental stress coupled with episodes of recolonization in response to changing economic, social and environmental opportunities.

Excavation at the temple site of Santa Verna (Gozo) revealed an occupation earlier than any previously dated site on the islands, whilst geophysical and geoarchaeological study at the nearby temple of Ġgantija revealed a close relationship with a spring, Neolithic soil management, and evidence for domestic and economic activities within the temple area. A targeted excavation at the temple of Skorba (Malta) revisited the chronological questions that were first revealed at the site over 50 years ago, with additional OSL and AMS sampling. The temple site of Kordin III (Malta) was explored to identify the major phases of occupation and to establish the chronology, a century after excavations first revealed the site. Settlement archaeology has long been problematic in Malta, overshadowed by the megalithic temples, but new work at the site of Taċ-Ċawla (Gozo) has gathered significant economic and structural evidence revealing how subsistence strategies supported agricultural communities in early Malta. A study of the second millennium BC Bronze Age site of In-Nuffara (Gozo) likewise has yielded significant economic and chronological information that charts the declining and changing environment of Malta in late prehistory.

Editors:

Caroline Malone is a Professor in the School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University Belfast.

Reuben Grima is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Conservation and Built Heritage, University of Malta.

Rowan McLaughlin is Senior Researcher in the Department of Scientific Research at the British Museum, and previously Research Fellow for the *FRAGSUS Project*; he is honorary research scholar at Queen's University Belfast.

Eóin W. Parkinson completed his PhD at Cambridge University and is currently Leverhulme Research Fellow at the University of Malta.

Simon Stoddart is Reader in Prehistory in the Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge.

Nicholas C. Vella is Associate Professor of Mediterranean Archaeology in the Department of Classics and Archaeology, University of Malta.

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