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# INTRODUCTION


## WHY FRAGMENTS?

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How can we be sure that the current interpretation is the correct one? Is there only one possible explanation? Is it possible that we are being misled and misleading others in our journey through these fragments?



Our lives are filled with fragments. Fragments of memories of the past. Fragments of dreams. Fragments of ideas that then come together to make a whole. Fragments of thoughts, of hopes and of expectations. We are often happily able to piece together these fragments to understand where we are coming from, where and what we are, and (hopefully) decide where we are going.

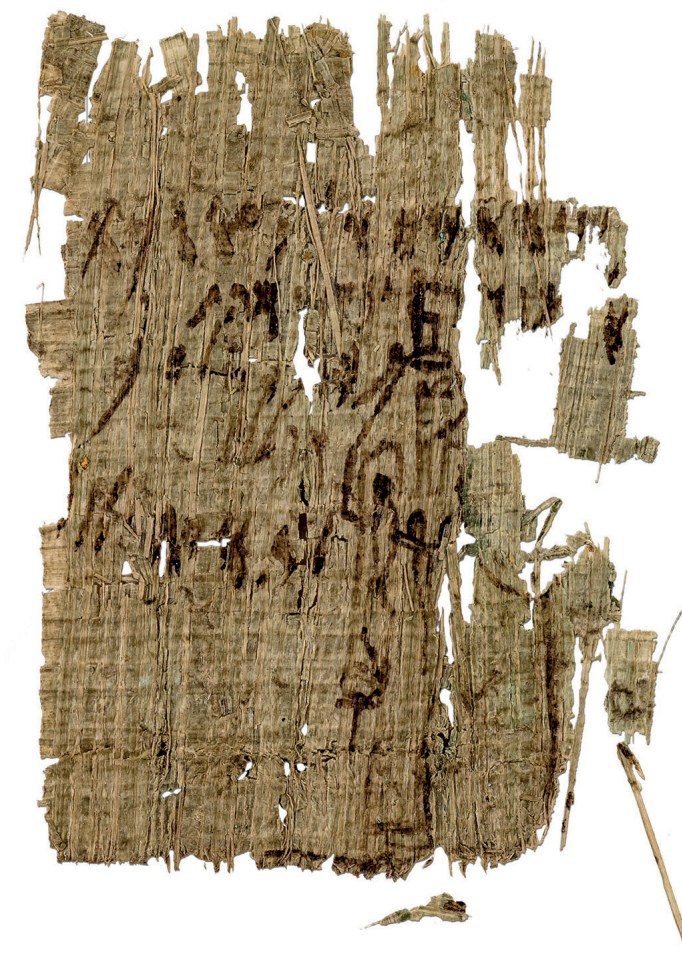
In Cultural Heritage – in Art, Archaeology and Architecture – professionals, and also the general public, often meet fragments of the past that were once a whole: a painting, a ceramic vase, a textile, a ruin of a building, one part of a once sprawling archaeological site. Professionals in the field then have the role of explaining, interpreting, representing, or creating in some real or virtual way, once again the whole, to help communicate with their audiences the meaning of the fragment, what it represents, what it once was. And in this way ‘reinstat[e]’ the object as well as the context it once belonged to, and possibly also inform on the society that conceived and produced it and why.

This seminar takes us on a journey through the complexity of fragments that make up our past, our Cultural Heritage, and hence our lives, and with the help of experts – conservators, archaeologists, historians and art historians, architects, and philosophers – understand what these fragments are, their importance, how to read and interpret them, and the messages they are conveying to us, which may be the same message the complete object once transmitted, or indeed a completely different one. How can we be sure that our current interpretation is a correct one? Is there only one possible explanation? Is it possible that we are being misled – and misleading others – in our journey through these fragments? Indeed, are fragments important at all? In a disposable world, where new is better and old is passé, can and do fragments still hold a meaning for us and our society?

The journey starts with Session 1, where we are presented with three joint papers, by six Heritage Malta professionals, who guide us in a journey through incompleteness in Art, Archaeology and Architecture, and how we interpret and understand it. Paintings Conservators David Frank Bugeja and Anthony Spagnol present a paper on ‘Unravelling Art Fragments’ where the conservator’s approach to the restoration, interpretation and display of fragmentary art is addressed through case studies. A second paper by Archaeologists David Cardona and Sharon Sultana on ‘Fragments in Archaeology – the artefact, the context, the site’ addresses the shard as a fragment of an object, and a site as a fragment of a landscape –

how does the study of fragments of objects, sites and multifaceted data aid in the understanding of materials long gone, and hence a better understanding of the whole? A third paper by Art Historian Sandro Debono and Architect Veronica Bonello on 'The Auberge d'Italie – a site of layered historic fragments' takes us through the exciting journey of the current works on the historic setting of the MUŻA project, which is unfolding numerous exciting and as yet untold stories.

Session 2 features four short presentations by esteemed professionals who address the theme of 'fragments' from their experience and their point of view: these are Philosopher Professor Joe Friggieri, Conservation Architects Perit Konrad Buhagiar and Dr Shirley Cefai, and Historian Dr Joan Abela. The themes addressed include a discussion on philosophical fragments; fragments and ruins; Maltese identity, the Enlightenment and the role of fragments; and archival fragments and their importance, then followed by a lively debate with the audience on the various points raised, and other related ones. The abstracts of these presentations, as well as those by the speakers during Session 1, are included in this publication.



A 6th century BC fragmented papyrus inscribed with an incantation in Phoenician script.  
**Heritage Malta Collection** – Inv No. NMA 938  
(Photo: Steven Psaila – Editing: Josian Bonello)

This spectacular relic was found inside a bronze holder recovered from a rock cut tomb at Tal-Virtu', Rabat-Malta, in 1969. It was eventually donated to the National Museum of Archaeology by Dr Daniel Micallef.

The inscription is a prayer from a dead person invoking divine help to defeat the enemy blocking the sea journey to the underworld. It reads:

*'Laugh, oh strong of heart, at your enemy,  
make fun of, weaken and attack the adversary.  
... despise him, crush him over the waters;  
... bring him down  
... over the sea, tie him, hang him.'*