

---

---

# Foreword

Anthony Pace

Sustainability, as applied in archaeological research and heritage management, provides a useful perspective for understanding the past as well as the modern conditions of archaeological sites themselves. As often happens in archaeological thought, the idea of sustainability was borrowed from other areas of concern, particularly from the modern construct of development and its bearing on the environment and resource exploitation. The term sustainability entered common usage as a result of the unstoppable surge in resource exploitation, economic development, demographic growth and the human impacts on the environment that has gripped the World since 1500. Irrespective of scale and technology, most human activity of an economic nature has not spared resources from impacts, transformations or loss irrespective of historical and geographic contexts. Theories of sustainability may provide new narratives on the archaeology of Malta and Gozo, but they are equally important and of central relevance to contemporary issues of cultural heritage conservation and care. Though the archaeological resources of the Maltese islands can throw light on the past, one has to recognize that such resources are limited, finite and non-renewable. The sense of urgency with which these resources have to be identified, listed, studied, archived and valued is akin to that same urgency with which objects of value and all fragile forms of natural and cultural resources require constant stewardship and protection. The idea of sustainability therefore, follows a common thread across millennia.

It is all the more reason why cultural resource management requires particular attention through research, valorization and protection. The *FRAGSUS Project* (Fragility and sustainability in small island environments: adaptation, cultural change and collapse in prehistory) was intended to further explore and enhance existing knowledge on the prehistory of Malta and Gozo. The objective of the project as

designed by the participating institutional partners and scholars, was to explore untapped field resources and archived archaeological material from a number of sites and their landscape to answer questions that could be approached with new techniques and methods. The results of the *FRAGSUS Project* will serve to advance our knowledge of certain areas of Maltese prehistory and to better contextualize the archipelago's importance as a model for understanding island archaeology in the central Mediterranean. The work that has been invested in *FRAGSUS* lays the foundation for future research.

Malta and Gozo are among the Mediterranean islands whose prehistoric archaeology has been intensely studied over a number of decades. This factor is important, yet more needs to be done in the field of Maltese archaeology and its valorization. Research is not the preserve of academic specialists. It serves to enhance not only what we know about the Maltese islands, but more importantly, why the archipelago's cultural landscape and its contents deserve care and protection especially at a time of extensive construction development. Strict rules and guidelines established by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage have meant that during the last two decades more archaeological sites and deposits have been protected in situ or rescue-excavated through a statutory watching regime. This supervision has been applied successfully in a wide range of sites located in urban areas, rural locations and the landscape, as well as at the World Heritage Sites of Valletta, Ġgantija, Ғaġar Qim and Mnajdra and Tarxien. This activity has been instrumental in understanding ancient and historical land use, and the making of the Maltese historic centres and landscape.

Though the cumulative effect of archaeological research is being felt more strongly, new areas of interest still need to be addressed. Most pressing are those areas of landscape studies which often become

peripheral to the attention that is garnered by prominent megalithic monuments. *FRAGSUS* has once again confirmed that there is a great deal of value in studying field systems, terraces and geological settings which, after all, were the material media in which modern Malta and Gozo ultimately developed. There is, therefore, an interplay in the use of the term sustainability, an interplay between what we can learn from the way ancient communities tested and used the very same island landscape which we occupy today, and the manner in which this landscape is treated in contested economic realities. If we are to seek factors of sustainability in the past, we must first protect its relics and study them using the best available methods in our times. On the other hand, the study of the past using the materiality of ancient peoples requires strong research agendas and thoughtful stewardship. The *FRAGSUS Project* has shown us how even small fragile deposits, nursed through protective legislation and guardianship, can yield significant information which the methods of pioneering scholars of Maltese archaeology would not have enabled access to. As already outlined by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, a national research agenda for cultural heritage and the humanities is a desideratum. Such a framework, reflected in the institutional partnership of the

*FRAGSUS Project*, will bear valuable results that will only advance Malta's interests especially in today's world of instant e-knowledge that was not available on such a global scale a mere two decades ago.

*FRAGSUS* also underlines the relevance of studying the achievements and predicaments of past societies to understand certain, though not all, aspects of present environmental challenges. The twentieth century saw unprecedented environmental changes as a result of modern political-economic constructs. Admittedly, twentieth century developments cannot be equated with those of antiquity in terms of demography, technology, food production and consumption or the use of natural resources including the uptake of land. However, there are certain aspects, such as climate change, changing sea levels, significant environmental degradation, soil erosion, the exploitation and abandonment of land resources, the building and maintenance of field terraces, the rate and scale of human demographic growth, movement of peoples, access to scarce resources, which to a certain extent reflect impacts that seem to recur in time, irrespectively of scale and historic context.

Anthony Pace  
Superintendent of Cultural Heritage (2003–18).