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Other possibilities for maintaining the profile and growing the network include website content, conference sessions, workshops/training/exchanges, cross-cutting working groups (e.g. on prospecting in woodlands or community involvement), maintaining publication output and perhaps a newsletter.

Working together

The discussions between ArchaeoLandscapes Europe, AARG and ISAP have made it clear that there are strong motivations to create an institutional umbrella organisation for all those working in archaeological prospecting. This organisation should provide a forum to identify challenges that are best addressed at an international community level, add weight and capacity to funding applications, and facilitate and enhance projects carried out by network members. We anticipate that bringing together our two membership-based groups, reflecting different specialist areas of practice, and an integrative shared organisation that looks to the general overarching issues across the whole of archaeological prospecting and remote sensing will benefit the entire community as individual and shared projects are pursued.

The European Route of Megalithic Culture

by Daniela Stefanie Hauf MA (Hauf@osnabrueck.de)

The European Route of Megalithic Culture serves as a platform for museums, Geoparks, scientists, and experts in tourism from Denmark, England, Germany, The Netherlands, and Sweden to underline the outstanding importance of the megalithic culture for European history, to rediscover and promote the tourism value of its monuments and, in this way, improve their protection as part of the common cultural heritage.

Incorporated into the programme “The Council of Europe Cultural Routes”: 2013

Countries: Denmark, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden

The goal of the Association Megalithic Routes is to link together a selection of the oldest monuments of Europe by cultural routes which not only lead to the megalithic monuments but also highlight the manifold features of the surrounding landscape. Throughout Europe there is a close link between the origin of megalithic monuments and the early history of the cultural landscape: both begin at the same time and symbolise the first efforts of human communities to tame nature and shape the natural environment.

The “Megalithic Routes” project is committed to the principles of “low-impact tourism” and refrains from any irreversible measures affecting the natural environment when developing opportunities for tourism. Priority is given to the use of existing roads and nature routeways as well as promoting mobility in harmony with nature and current social and recreational trends such as hiking and cycling.

Moreover, museums and educational institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, charities, and public bodies are being encouraged to develop new cross-border collaborations in the field of youth education and European exchange programmes for children and young people on the subject of “Megalithic Roots”.

For more information:
www.megalithicroutes.eu

Studying sustainability and fragility in prehistoric Malta

by Rowan McLoughlin, Simon Stoddart and Caroline Malone

The five year FRAGSUS project (1 May 2013 – 30 April 2018) (PI Caroline Malone) - formed to study the sustainability and subsequently radical change amongst the Maltese Temple Building populations of prehistoric Malta in the fourth and third millennia BC. - has just entered its third year, and the following presents a brief outline of activities prior to full publication (Stoddart 2014). The
current work has focused on the island of Gozo, most particularly the re-analysis of the human 
remains of the Brochtorff Xaghra Circle, and fieldwork at four settlements: Tac Cawla, Santa Verna, 
Ggantija and In Nuffara. The “settlements” of Santa Verna and Ggantija are better known for their 
monumental (“temple”) phases, but recent fieldwork at Santa Verna has confirmed that the 
monumental phase developed out of a village from the earliest occupation of the Maltese islands. An 
environmental core has been successfully extracted from the Mgarr ix Xini valley in Gozo, but the 
main thrust of work has been on Malta where the June-July field season will now be centred.

A first key question of the project has addressed the impact of human settlement. The main field 
season of April to July 2014 principally investigated the settlement site of Tac Cawla, showing the 
development of settlement activity from the earliest occupation of the island until the Bronze Age, 
centred on a water source. Early analysis suggests a diverse plant diet, where animal rearing was 
anchored on sheep and goats. Material culture was very impoverished, compared with the temple 
offerings, although the human populations may have retained what counted for their survival from the 
food remains. A later intensive activity on the site was recorded from the late Punic early Roman 
period, when vine trenches were cut into to the pre-existing deposits. The second field season 
systematically tackled the pre-temple phases, the temple phases and the post temple phases. At Santa 
Verna, excavations followed in the footsteps of Thomas Ashby and R.N. Bradley in 1911 and David 
Trump in 1961, establishing the location of their activity where their trial trenches permitted 
reinvestigation of the salient features of the site. The model of ritual monumentalisation from village 
origins, first shown convincingly at Skorba by David Trump, was confirmed at Santa Verna during 
the season. The later monument protected deposits that dated to the Ghar Dalam and Skorba periods, 
from the late sixth and fifth millennia BC, indicating the elaboration of successful settlements into a 
sequence of monumental constructions. It can be tentatively shown that a temple was successively 
embellished and dismantled, leaving only floors and the multiphase deposits of the earlier monument 
in place. Many of the larger stones and facilities of the monument were robbed from the monument, at 
stages that varied from prehistory to quite recent times. The study of the forecourt of the Ggantija 
temple, in two locations, illustrated once again how there remain windows of opportunity to study 
preserved original landscapes. In these locations, relatively well preserved palaeosols have been 
preserved that are contemporary with the Neolithic farming communities, and which do not survive in 
the open, heavily worked agricultural landscapes of modern Malta. The aftermath of the temple 
period was studied in further protected location: the Bronze Age plateau of In Nuffara. The work 
required the investigation of deeply cut grain (?) silos to locate intact deposits from the succeeding 
Bronze Age. The original landsurface in the location had been almost entirely eroded to bedrock, and 
indeed the whole mesa top is suffering from a long term process of fissuring, as the mesa collapses 
towards the east. Two time capsules were investigated. Ironically the most promising silo, that was 
found with its capstone in place, appeared to have been abandoned empty but for a clay lining, and 
then refilled in a much later period. However, a second neighbouring silo of larger size (some 2.6 
metres in depth), had substantial intact Bronze Age deposits, sheltered by successive Punic, Roman 
and Medieval layers, which should provide precisely the environmental sequence of the post Temple 
landscape. The systematic gathering of bulk sediment and micromorphological samples, as well as 
extensive sieving programmes from all significant layers should have provided the opportunity for the 
project to study the impact of human activity on the landscape from within a tightly defined 
subsample of the island of Gozo focused on the Ramla valley between Xaghra (Ggantija/Santa Verna) 
and In Nuffara, and another just to the south of Victoria/Rabat (centred on Tac Cawla).

These site specific studies will be able to be set within more regional studies of the landscape 
provided by the sinking of apparently successful pollen cores and the study of early and later modern 
land use studies. Successful cores have been implemented not only at Mgarr ix Xini on Gozo, but 
also at Salina on Malta, and this evidence can be added to the pre-existing successful core from Marsa 
and the more partial evidence from Xemxija, Wied Zembaq and Marsaxlokk, set within studies of 
modern pollen from Malta and Sicily. A modern time frame has also been established by looking at 
the cabreo maps from the 1860s which discuss the soil suitability of a sample of the landscapes of the 
Maltese islands. The location of the preserved Neolithic palaeosols (such as from Ggantija) appear to 
provide an interesting contrast with the studies of the best modern soils. The 1860 pattern, and most 
probably the pattern from the 1500s, appears to be much closer to that recorded by Lang (1960) than
the patterns which existed in the Neolithic period. Neolithic monuments, for which read the most successful settlements, were probably located close to key agricultural requirements such as water, prime soils and a favourable aspect. Further analysis will assess these conclusions.

The project has also made good strides towards answering a second question of how the Neolithic societies managed to sustain a complex ritualised life style. It is clear that many symbolic valuables were differentially deposited in the temples, be they exotic refashioned valuables, such as greenstone, elaborated local materials, such as figurines, or special animal parts such as horns. Settlement sites appear to be relatively impoverished, as suggested by the relative paucity of temple material culture, and the highly fragmentary evidence of lithics. Similar strides are being made towards answering a related third question of what foodstuffs were consumed to maintain the Neolithic life style. Sample sizes remain small, but have been enhanced by systematic sieving and floatation. Initial results suggest a focus on sheep and goat and broad spectrum plant remains. A fourth questions addresses the nature of the Maltese population through the re-study of human remains, drawing on the expertise of a team that includes Jay Stock, Tamsin O’Connell, Ronika Power and Bernadette Mercieca. This study indidicates an intriguing combination of indigenous and exotic traits, as well as a considerable resilience of the population, that could lead to a long life once adolescence was passed. Oral hygiene was not good, but teeth may have been protected by the presence of fluoride in the water, as suggested also by modern studies of the Gozo water supply. Particular craft strategies were developed that appear to show the use of a third hand in the mouth, and high stress on the fingers and the lower back. There is great hope that answers to the fifth question of the project will also emerge: why did the temples cease to be used in their original way? The human bones from the temple period show a surprisingly low level of stress, but further answers may emerge from the soils and food remains, and perhaps the legacy of this change will be visible in the silos of the Bronze Age.

The record of the structural remains uncovered by the projects has been greatly enhanced by the deployment of laser scanning, the work of John Meneely, supplemented by the output of photomontage (Barratt et al 2014), the work of Rob Barratt and Donald Horne. These data will provide an invaluable framework for the more traditional archaeological record, ranging from photography, to EDM recording to interpretative drawing on plastic film. Many of the sites (Taċ-Ċawla, In Nuffara, Ggantija and Santa Verna) had already been investigated by different styles of excavation, or recorded in different eras of artistic or photographic record. The digital framework will provide a key resource onto which these different eras of investigation can be draped to produce an intriguing biography of the sites under investigation.

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Figure 1. 3D Laser scan of the Bronze Age silos from In Nuffara (John Meneely).

Further details of the project can be found in the following internet locations:
https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/FRAGSUS/
https://www.facebook.com/FRAGSUS
https://www.facebook.com/1manscan
http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/gozo-project
https://fragsusuom.weebly.com/