

Abstract lecture *Soft-core mysteries*

Environmental analyses are a vital part of the international FRAGSUS Project - Fragility and Sustainability in restricted island environments: Adaptation, Culture Change and Collapse in prehistory. The project is led by Queen's University Belfast (Professor Caroline Malone principal investigator), together with the University of Cambridge, the University of Malta, the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (Malta) and Heritage Malta.

The University of Malta team led by Prof. Nicholas Vella and Prof. Patrick J. Schembri investigated several sediment cores that had been taken around the Maltese Islands. The sediments in core sections were analysed and molluscan remains were extracted, identified and counted. This research, which is a 'work in progress', aims to answer questions about human impact on the environment and landscape of the Maltese Islands, focusing on the presumed land degradation and deforestation by the first settlers and on environmental changes associated with the decline of the Temple culture. These new data have highlighted the vulnerability of the natural environment, though not quite in the way we previously thought.