

ROMAN STRATIGRAPHY

A drawing of site stratigraphy (Fig. 9.23) shows a sequence of deposits in the ground, involving several different episodes of human activity. This could be a Roman building along the Adriatic Coast of eastern Italy. Careful study and analysis of the layers make it possible to determine the sequence of events that took place there. The basal layer of sterile earth was first covered by a layer of shells and charcoal that accumulated as a pile or midden of garbage from eating food like clams or mussels. Note that a Greek coin dating to ca. 600 BC was found in this layer. This shell layer was then covered naturally by sandy clay, deposited by a river flood.

Later, a house was built on top of the sandy clay layer. The foundation trenches for the stone house walls were cut through the sandy clay and into the older midden beneath. The house was destroyed by fire; a dark layer of ash and burned rubble covered the area in and around the house. Subsequently, a sand storm buried the area completely in a thick layer. Next, the growth of vegetation created a layer of topsoil in the upper part of the sand layer. Most recently, a pit was dug into the topsoil, through the sand, the house remains, the sandy clay, and into the midden deposit. The pit was then filled with trash, including some beer cans, and topsoil.

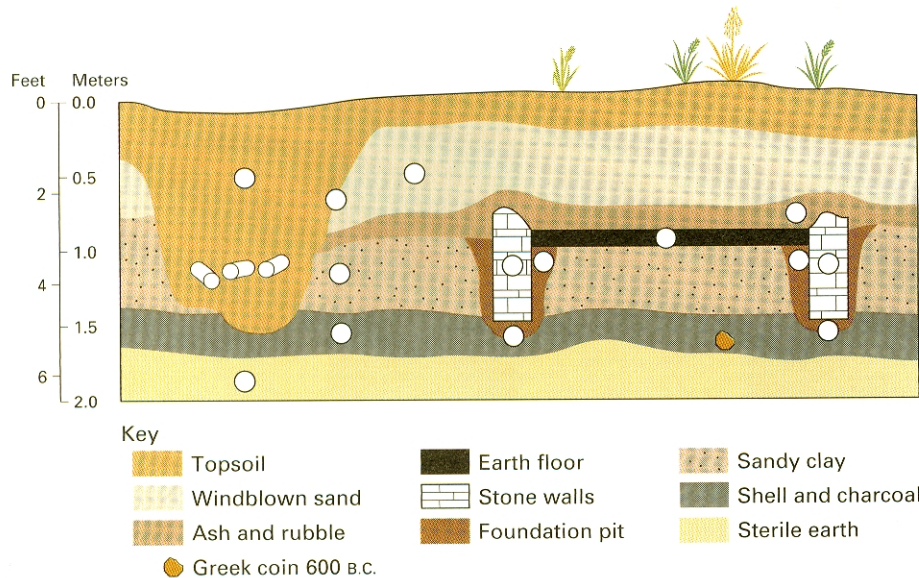


Fig. 9.23 Drawing of a hypothetical section or profile from an archaeological site.

Harris Matrix

Number the layers and interfaces on the drawing. You might start with 1 for the top layer. Use your numbers to fill in the blank Harris Matrix (Fig. 9.24). Then answer the questions about this stratigraphic example. There are both multiple choice questions and short essay questions.

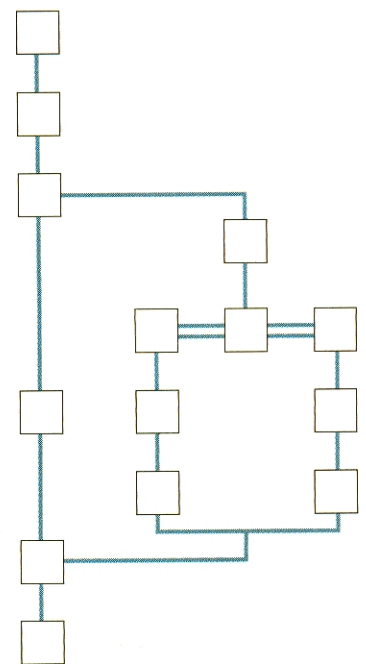


Fig. 9.24 Harris Matrix to be filled in.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. How big was the building shown in the section?
 - a. 4 m wide
 - b. 2 m wide by 4 m long
 - c. 2 m wide or long
 - d. 4 m wide or long
2. From what period does the Greek coin date?
 - a. 4000 BC
 - b. 600 BC
 - c. AD 600
 - d. Roman period
3. Where did the sediments in the sandy layer come from?
 - a. windblown sand from the coast
 - b. river clays that flooded the site
 - c. natural soil formation
 - d. all of the above
4. How many different episodes of human activity are recorded in this stratigraphy?
 - a. one
 - b. two
 - c. three
 - d. four
5. What is the best estimate for the age of the sandy clay layer above the sterile earth layer?
 - a. younger than the Roman building
 - b. older than the Roman building
 - c. from 600 BC or older
 - d. from 600 BC or younger
 - e. from between 600 BC and the Roman period

Essay Questions

Prepare a one-paragraph answer to the following questions.

1. What is the reason for using the Harris Matrix?
2. How did the Greek coin get in this Roman site?
3. What are the major differences between the Harris Matrix and a traditional section drawing?