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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Iruña-Veleia Archaeological Assessment

Introduction: In April 2009, I was asked to assess the stratigraphic work carried out at the archaeological excavations of Iruña-Veleia by the Directors of the site, Idoia Filloy Nieva and Eliseo Gil Zubillaga. Without any financial compensation, I was pleased to carry out this assessment, as the Directors used the new methods of the analysis of archaeological stratification, as outlined in my book, *Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy*. These methods have been known to European archaeologists for several decades, although some older excavators have been slow to adapt to the new system of stratigraphic analysis. However, it is fair to say that the principles of archaeological stratigraphy as outlined in my book and the use of my invention, the "Harris Matrix", are now accepted by many archaeologists worldwide as the "industry standard" for the interpretation of stratification and the compilation of stratigraphic sequences during the course of excavation.

These methods are the archaeological equivalent of the international standard of "double-entry bookkeeping" in financial accounting. As such, it is now possible to AUDIT archaeological work on excavations and also to so examine the records compiled during excavation, by comparison of those records with the stratigraphic sequences constructed by the archaeologists. Before the invention of the Harris Matrix in 1973, such an audit process was not possible, as each archaeologist had an individualized system of recording, and none constructed stratigraphic sequences, as we now understand that term. For many pre-Matrix sites, it is probably impossible to construct stratigraphic sequences, as the principles of *archaeological stratigraphy* had not been elucidated and there was therefore no international standard for such work. That is to say, the evidence of many sites excavated before *Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy* would not stand up in Court, should the archaeologist be required to present data for judgment under the Law, as such data was not based upon records that conform to international scientific standards for recording the stratification of archaeological sites (which are largely destroyed in the process of recovering stratigraphic data) and compiling the stratigraphic sequences for sites. The compilation of the stratigraphic sequence is now seen as *the primary goal* of the excavating archaeologist, during, not after, the excavation process.

As with financial auditing, the audit of archaeological records and stratigraphic sequences is a visual exercise of examining the "books" of the excavation. Therefore, to a degree it is not entirely necessary for the auditing archaeologists to know the language of the place or the cultural period of the site, for stratification in its principles is everywhere the same, as are the units of geological analysis, even though in both instances, the deposits and surfaces are themselves different and specific to particular area or region. Since the publication of *Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy* and the invention of the Harris Matrix, which made it possible for the first time to construct true stratigraphic sequences, any archaeologist trained in those methods could audit any archaeological excavation anywhere in the world and within a few hours would be able to confirm that the work was being carried out according to such principles, or whether in fact the excavators were destroying the site, *and its transformation into a stratigraphic archive*, by incompetent stratigraphic work.

It is in those contexts that I am competent and have examined material from Iruña-Veleia, as commented up in the following remarks.

Reservations: It is understood that I did not see the actual excavations in progress, nor have I examined the original stratigraphic records. However the Reports forwarded to me by Internet, **Conjunto Archeológico de Iruña-Veleia** and **Iruña/Veleia III^{er} Milenio** appear to contain copies of primary excavation and stratigraphic data, which must be in part wholly reflective of the originals. Given that, it is my opinion, that were I afforded the opportunity of examining the original records that my conclusions, as stated below, would be affirmed positively by such an audit of the source materials. Should a Court require that, I would be pleased to visit the repository of the records of Iruña-Veleia to examine the original sections, plans and other records, to audit the same in relation to the stratigraphic sequences.

Finally (and this is not a reservation) the value of the stratigraphic record for archaeology is that every site has a unique stratigraphic sequence (that can now be presented in an international standardized format), which is based upon the truth that stratification is “undesignedly commemorative” of the Past. That is to say that no one set out to make stratification on what are now archaeological sites, but that stratification was composed as an incidental and unconscious offshoot of people building their lives and physical accoutrements over the millennia. To my knowledge, many archaeologists have destroyed such stratigraphic data without proper record, but I know of no instance where stratification has been deliberately made to present a false picture of the history of a site, for whatever motives that would have been done. Conversely, stratigraphic relationships may be incorrectly interpreted in a stratigraphic sequence, but it would be extremely difficult to falsify stratigraphic sequences that would not be exposed by the audit of all the stratigraphic data.

Examination of Iruña-Veleia stratigraphic data, as expressed in the Reports

Excavation Method: From the photographs of the excavations, it seems clear that the archaeological excavation was carried out to the highest standards. This finds expression in the quality of the photographs and the considerable cleanliness of the site, as recorded in the photographs. It may be presumed that the site was excavated by the stratigraphic method, rather than the older arbitrary system, for the surfaces shown in the photographs would not be obtained by that latter method. It is almost axiomatic that a cleanly conducted excavation is a good one.

Recording of Plan and Section Data: The recording of individual surfaces is axiomatic with modern stratigraphic work and it appears that that method was carried out at Iruña-Veleia and is demonstrated in computerized surfaces plans in the reports. The reconstruction of archaeological sites, in theory a requisite of excavation work, is the reconstruction of surfaces, not deposits, and therefore it would seem that Iruña-Veleia can be reconstructed, after artifact analyses are considered for their chronological import on the surfaces of the stratigraphic sequence. Many pre-1973 archaeological sites cannot be reconstructed, and therefore also audited for plan (surface) content and integrity, for most stratigraphic surfaces were not recorded.

Section drawings are also well recorded by stratigraphic principles, as they record the lines between deposits that represent surfaces, the record of the last being a most necessary element in obtaining the true stratigraphic sequence of any site.

Compilation and Illustration of Stratigraphic Sequences (Harris Matrix diagrams): The Directors have compiled a number of stratigraphic sequences for individual areas of the site and no doubt have a master sequence in their records, not published in the Reports. While there is some redundancy in the display of relational lines between the stratigraphic units, the removal of such lines does not alter the stratigraphic sequence diagram, nor would that adversely affect its audit, but simply makes the diagram easier to read. It is clear from such diagrams that the Directors understood and applied the modern principles of archaeological stratigraphy and therefore, it is most likely that the sequences they have compiled are the stratigraphic truth of the archaeological remains they found, excavated and recorded during the course of their excavations at Iruña-Veleia.

Edward Harris

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