A Little Handbook of Stratigraphic Exercises:
Mastering the Harris Matrix

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Mastering the Harris Matrix

Adonice-Ackad Baaklini

Archaeopress Archaeology

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I dedicate this book to my family.

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FOREWORD

This is an excellent book for the field archaeologist on the most important parts of the archaeological process which is of excavation and recording.

Stratigraphy and excavation by layers of datable deposits is the key to the door of understanding a site and the recording of artefacts and deposits with unique codes, drawings and photography is essential to the post-excavation work of recording and dating a site.

A site can be a simple deposition or can be more complex with later intrusive features as postholes or pits and in some cases burials cut into earlier deposits.

The understanding and dating of a site can only be achieved by due process and this book is essential to explain that process and is to be recommended to all archaeologists.

Dr Paul Wilkinson MCIfA., FRSA

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book falls conveniently into three chapters: Introduction, Exercises, and Explanations.

Chapter 1 focuses on the presentation of the Harris matrix and the concepts and tools needed to understand it, while Chapter 2 offers 25 stratigraphy exercises. The latter are organised by degree of difficulty, from easiest to hardest, and centre on the creation of Harris matrices based on a drawing of a section from an imaginary site with the stratigraphic units highlighted. The exercises are resolved in Chapter 3 (Explanations) with comments on the salient points.

Chapter 1 is by no means exhaustive but is rather intended to give the reader the basic understanding necessary to start creating matrices. The concept of Chapter 1 will be explained within the context of each example as we go along – there is no need to memorise or fully understand the basics from the first read.

The exercises that make up Chapters 2 and 3 need really to be taken in isolation: it is highly recommended you check the explanations after each exercise, and not wait until you have finished a group of them. The comments in Chapter 3 will often refer to the theories in Chapter 1, so hopping from Chapters 3 to 1 will become a natural thing to do.

Paper and a pen are all you need to tackle the exercises, but the geeks among you could, of course, use any design software.