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Giorgos Papadavid**

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Feature enhancement from electrical resistivity data in an archaeological survey: the Sapelos hillfort experiment (Boticas, Portugal).

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ABSTRACT

The PoPaTERVA project is developing applied research regarding the comprehension of the multi-layered cultural background of the Terva Valley Archaeological Park, in Boticas, Portugal. One of the main aspects focused on the project is the appliance of remote sensing techniques to enhance non visible archaeological features. An earth resistance tomography (ERT) survey was carried out at the Sapelos hillfort, by the specialized SINERGEO geophysicist's team, using a Wenner-Schlumberger array. The resulting data was analyzed by the authors in order to extract and verify valid archaeological features regarding the settlement's structures. There are several adequate systems that can be used to visualize the surveyed data (x, y, z, Ω). However, the authors preferred the open source Visualization Toolkit (VTK) from Kitware Inc., since it supports several visualization and modelling techniques that are useful for interpretation purposes in archaeological contexts: for instance, it is possible to represent the archaeological site as a virtual scale model, which can be freely manipulated. For the Sapelos hillfort, two distinct visualizations were developed to represent the acquired electrical resistivity data. The first one is used to create a comprehensive volume from the surveyed data, which is imported as structured 3D points and mapped into a 3D volume. However, this representation does not provide the necessary insight for analysis purposes, so a second visualization is needed to cluster the relevant data for archaeological research. This visualization is based on contouring algorithms that generate isosurfaces from scalar resistivity values (Ω), therefore enhancing the features with potential archaeological interest.

Keywords: Archaeological Geophysics, Electrical Resistivity, Resistivity Imaging, VTK.

1. INTRODUCTION

Geophysical methods are widely used in Archaeology since the second half of the twentieth century^{1,2}. The most common are ground penetrating radar (GPR), magnetic and electromagnetic surveys and earth resistance tomography (ERT)^{3,4}. Having in mind the particular geological background of the Sapelos hillfort, the first geophysical approach prepared was an ERT survey.

The primary goal of this case study was to evaluate the results of an ERT survey regarding the detection of non-visible archaeological features. The survey was conducted at the site as part of a much broader investigation regarding the historical landscape patterns in the Terva Valley Archaeological Park – PAVT – area. This research is being conducted under an umbrella project, referred to as the PoPaTERVA 2013-2016. The research program, led by the Unit of Archaeology of the University of Minho, focuses on distinct layers of the landscape structure and the investigation is taking place in cross-platform projects, concerning Archaeology, Paleoenvironments, Geophysics, Geo-Thermal Hydrology, Biology and Tourism⁵.

The next section will shortly describe the well-known geological and historical background that support this project and which contextualize the surveyed area. The third section explains the geological survey methodology that was used in this area for archaeological research purposes. The survey was contracted to an external Geology company (SINERGEO), led by Bruno Pereira⁶. The raw data obtained was practically indecipherable for non-experts, therefore there was the need for a visual enhancement and clustering of the data, so that the anomalies which might relate to archaeological features could be analysed in a more efficient way.

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For that purpose, the Visualization Toolkit (VTK) from Kitware Inc. was used since, on one hand, it is an open-source package and freely available as a C++ class library for 3D computer graphics, image processing and visualization; on the other hand, VTK supports a great variety of visualization algorithms and advanced modelling techniques that can be used to increase the understanding of the surveyed data⁷. The complete visualization procedure of the surveyed data is explained in the fourth section.

In the last sections the authors present the results from this case study as well as some conclusions and directives for future work.

2. SITE CONTEXT

2.1 Geological background

The Terva valley is located in the European Variscan Belt, more specifically in the paleogeographical area of the Iberian Peninsula referred to as the Galicia-Trás-os-Montes Zone⁸ (Figure 1A, 1B). The valley holds a lithological formation that outcomes from the late Hercinic orogenic movements, resulting, in this particular area, into the metasedimentary units of the Para-autochthonon, dating back to the Silurian⁹. Due to a lesser thickening of the crustal nappe¹⁰, there exists particularly in the Terva Valley, a type of two-mica alkaline granite, locally known as *Granito de Chaves*¹¹ (Figure 1C). Resulting from Variscan collisional magmatism, this granite's metallogenetic composition often bears important mineralizations, such as W, Sn, Au or Li⁸.

The Sapelos settlement stands over a levelled hill top, crossed by quartz veins, which ridge trough the surface, following the general orientation of NNE-SSW, trending with the Régua-Verin tectonic fault¹¹. The soils are composed by granitic based deposits, slightly thick, containing altered granitic sands, mixed with quartz stones and boulders that fractured from the existing veins⁶. The quartz veins have formed in layered *Pinch and Swell* structures, varying in thickness from meters to centimetres⁶.

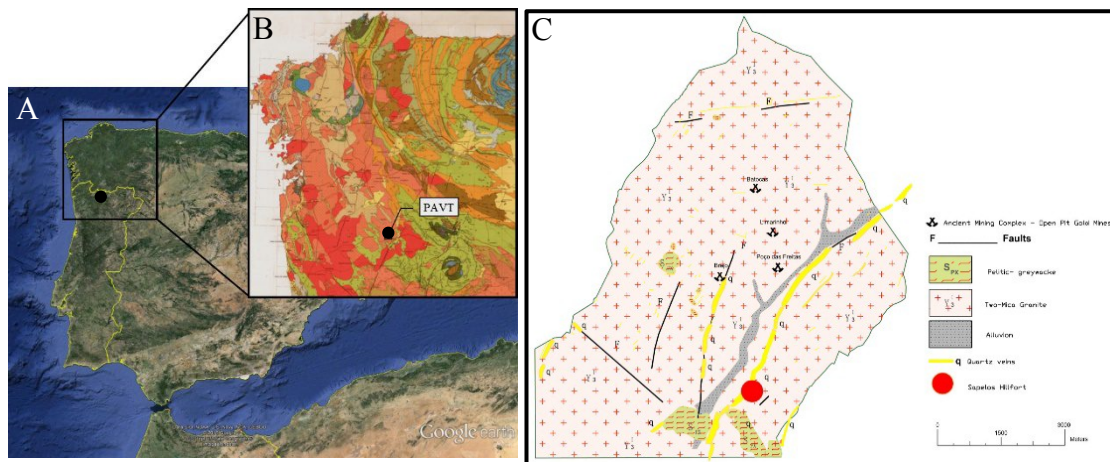


Figure 1. (A) General localization of the Terva Valley Archaeological Park – PAVT. (B) The PAVT area in the NW Iberia Geological Map 1:500 000¹². (C) PAVT simplified geological map, based on the Geological Map of Portugal, 1: 200 000¹³.

2.2 Historical background

The Sapelos hillfort is one of the nine fortified settlements occupied during Iron Age in the upper Terva River valley (Figure 2A). The number of known sites, rather high if we attend to the regional context for the same period, is, in our opinion, directly related with exploitation of the metallic mineral resources available, namely gold and tin, which later on attracted the Romans into developing large and extensive open pit mines along the valley's mineral cores.

Understanding the Sapelos hillfort's chronological path is a fundamental aspect for the comprehension of the valley's historical construction process, as this is one of its most preeminent landscape bastions. This hillfort strategically controls the entire valley from its southern limit, standing in a privileged position towards the natural crossing routes and the mineral cores. The hillforts's surface has micro-topographical aspects that induce the localization of buried structures

and some remaining walls are partially visible amongst the vegetation cover (Figure 2B). The settlement is heavily fortified by three meters wide defensive walls, displayed over two distinct lines around the hill top and slopes (Figure 2D). The Sapelos hillfort also bears a singular landscape architectural module, unique to its surroundings: it has a complex system of deep trenches, one of which surrounding the entire hill and seven other arranged in a deltoid figure towards the valley. Sometimes referred to as mining trenches, the fact that the Sapelos quartz veins have no occurrence of metallic minerals is more coherent with the hypothesis that these are, in fact, negative structures for defensive purposes.

Standing before a heavily fortified settlement, so far with no material evidences of occupation beyond the general timescale for the NW Iberia's Iron Age, raised the need for understanding the time and the reasons behind those complex fortification structures.

At present, a team of archaeologists is conducting trial archaeological trenches at Sapelos hillfort, assessed by the ERT results (Figure 2B, 2C, 2D). This research, related to the PoPaTERVA 2013-2016 project, integrates a broader investigation program over the Iron Age landscape in the PAVT area.

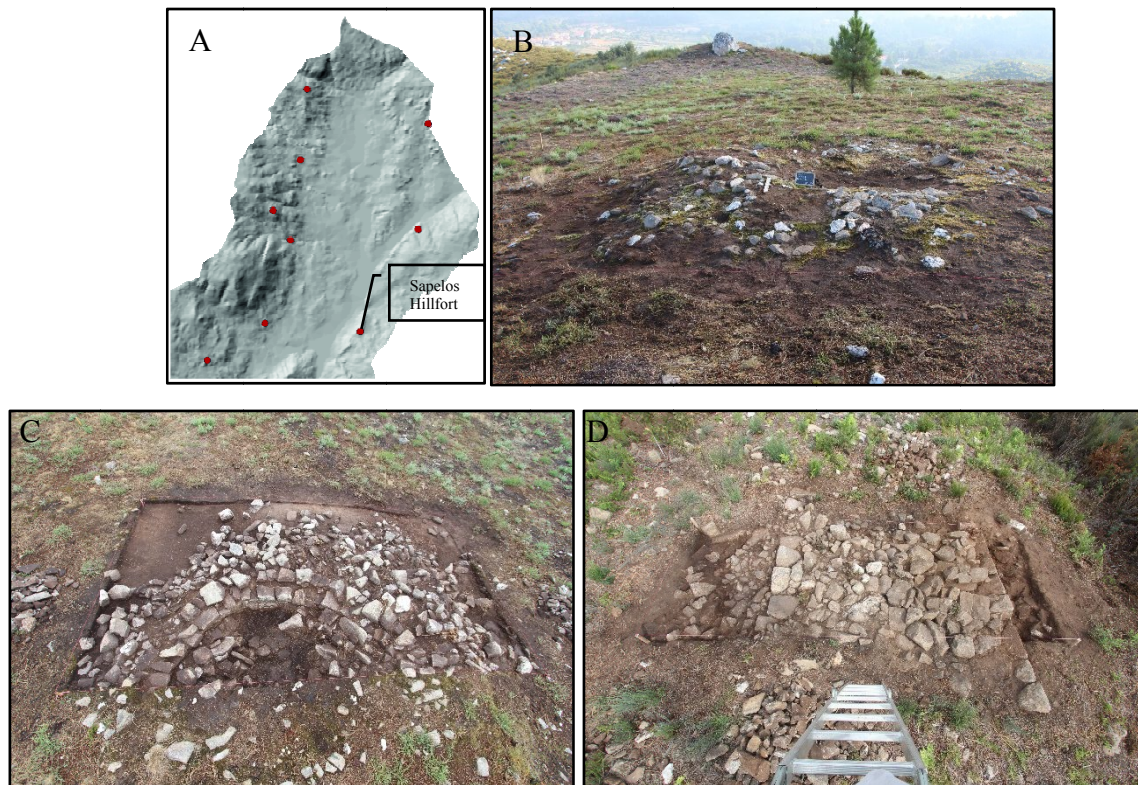


Figure 2. (A) Iron Age fortified settlements in the PAVT area. (B) The hillfort's top platform: aspect of a micro-topographical anomaly after vegetation clearing. (C) Archaeological trench over the same anomaly revealed the existence of a circular building. (D) Archaeological trench over a part of the defensive wall.

3. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

3.1 ERT Specifications

The ERT was done over a linear grid with an X parallel offset distance of 4 m, crossed by Y distal lines with 10 m spacing (Figure 3). For this survey, the team used a SYSCAL R1 Plus from IRIS Instruments and a total of 72 electrodes for an inter-electrode linear spacing of 1m⁶.



Figure 3. ERT survey grid established for the Sapelos hillfort.

For this survey the method used was the Wenner-Schlumberger array. The data was processed with *RES2INV*[®], using the software's smoothness-constrained least-squares method¹⁴, based on the following equation^{15,6,14}:

$$(J^T J + 1F)\Delta q_k = J^T g - 1Fq_k \quad (1)$$

where

$$F = \alpha_x C_x^T C_x + \alpha_z C_z^T C_z \quad (2)$$

$$C_x = \text{horizontal roughness filters} \quad (3)$$

$$C_z = \text{vertical roughness filters} \quad (4)$$

$$J = \text{Jacobian matrix of partial derivatives} \quad (5)$$

$$1 = \text{damping factor} \quad (6)$$

$$q = \text{model change vector} \quad (7)$$

$$g = \text{data misfit vector} \quad (8)$$

The inter-electrode arrange started to return data at ~0.50 m depth below current surface. The resulting data had an Ohm (Ω) class range between 1.586.377,75 Ω and 146,03 Ω .

3.2 First Data Analysis

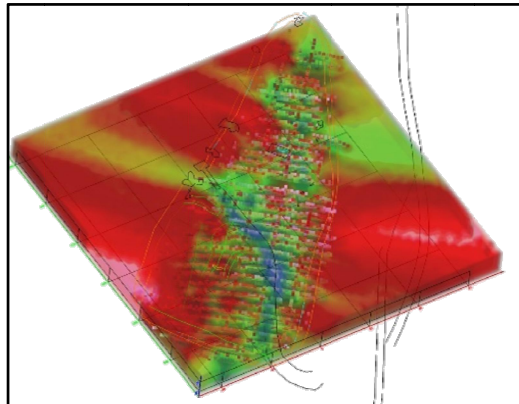


Figure 4. Isovolum interpolation, rendered with the individual sections. The model is overlapped by the main features from the site's topographical survey⁶. (Courtesy of SINERGEO)

The first visualization (Figure 4) of the data revealed very high resistivity values, directly related to the quartz veins existing at the site. This generated visual noise that masked the detection of close ranged anomalies most generally related to archaeological features. Pursuing the objective of minimizing noise, the data was sorted by relating the resistivity points with the physical evidences, triggering the detection of cluster patterns. In that way, it was possible to reduce the quartz interference, by intersecting the Ω values obtained in points where parts of remaining building walls were visible and with some vertical presence expected. Resulting from this cross-checking, the class range was focused between 24.000 Ω and 45000 Ω . This decision implies losing information as it significantly reduces the data scope. Assuming this, the results gathered were frankly positive, regarding the detection of anomalies, and they will be discussed in detail in the fifth section.

4. DATA VISUALIZATION

For the Sapelos' data, the authors used two different, but complementary, visualization procedures to represent the acquired electrical resistivity data. The first approach is a more general, volumetric based representation of the surveyed data, while the second clusters the significant data for archaeological research.

4.1 Volume-based data visualization

The surveyed data is integrated into a topological and geometrical regular array of 3D points. This geometric structure is imported into the renderer (*vtkRenderer*) using a *vtkStructuredPointsReader* (a VTK source object). The reader output is a single *vtkStructuredPoints* data object that is mapped into a *vtkVolume* using the *vtkVolumeTextureMapper3D*. To enhance the volume representation it is indispensable to classify the relevant objects of interest within a specific dataset. In the current example the objects of interest are the settlement's structures. Consequently, to distinguish potential structures within the volume representation the transfer function in *vtkVolumeProperty* was defined taking into account the resistivity values set between 24.000 Ω and 45.000 Ω . The *vtkVolumeProperty* is an object where the properties, such as color and opacity associated to the volume rendering, are defined.

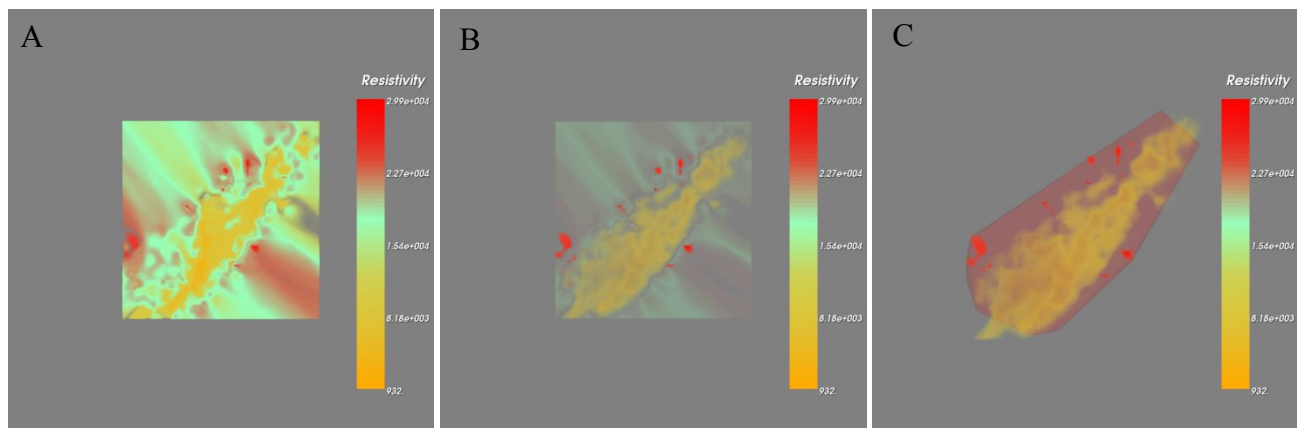


Figure 5. (A) Volumetric representation of the surveyed data. (B) Visual enhancement of the same representation. (C) Well-defined volume of interest.

The first volume rendering (Figure 5A) might be considered confusing for non-experts, since it is difficult to capture the exact volume of interest (VOI). But, by observing the scale bar in the figure it is easy to recognize that the VOI has resistivity values lower than 8.180 Ω and greater than 22.700 Ω . Therefore, to minimize the visual representation outside the VOI, the opacity values of the transfer function for the resistivity values between 8.180 Ω and 22.700 Ω have to be redefined. Figure 5B illustrates high opacity values (set to 100%) for resistivity higher than 22.700 Ω (potential structures), low values (set to 20%) for resistivity lower than 8.180 Ω (material inside the VOI), and extremely low values (set to 1%) for resistivity that ranges between 8.180 Ω and 22.700 Ω (outside the VOI). This visual representation is more defined than the first one; however it is still possible to enhance the delimitation of the VOI.

To create a better-defined VOI it is necessary to generate a bounding volume, using a 3D Delaunay filter. The structured 3D points are filtered by *vtkThresholdPoints* to extract the 3D points and store them as polygonal data. The threshold

criterion of *vtkThresholdPoints* is set coherently with the relevant objects of interest and the 3D Delaunay filter (*vtkDelaunay3D*) is applied to the resulting polygonal data to generate a surrounding 3D mesh (*vtkUnstructuredGrid*) that improves the perception of the data. The created mesh is mapped into a geometric entity (*vtkActor*) and added to the renderer. However, this mesh needs to have some degree of transparency to not obstruct the analysis of the data. Since *vtkActor* is a geometric object, the primary properties are set with *vtkProperty* that handles the color, the opacity and the representation of the object (surface, wireframe or points). In this specific case the opacity is set to 10% (Figure 5C).

4.2 Geometry extraction

Although the volumetric representation of the data already enabled a satisfactory understanding of the surveyed data, it does not provide the necessary insight for analysis purposes. Therefore, the visual accuracy has to be improved by clustering the surveyed data according to the resistivity values of interest. A contouring methodology was used to create the isosurfaces that represent probable objects of interest with resistivity values that range between 24.000 Ω and 45.000 Ω . Since the data are imported as structured 3D points, the *vtkMarchingContourFilter* object was used to generate the isosurfaces from the resistivity values (scalars). The surface normals of the resulting mesh are recomputed with the *vkPolyDataNormals* filter to improve mesh rendering. The output of this filter is mapped into a geometry object (*vtkActor*) and added to the renderer (Figure 6).

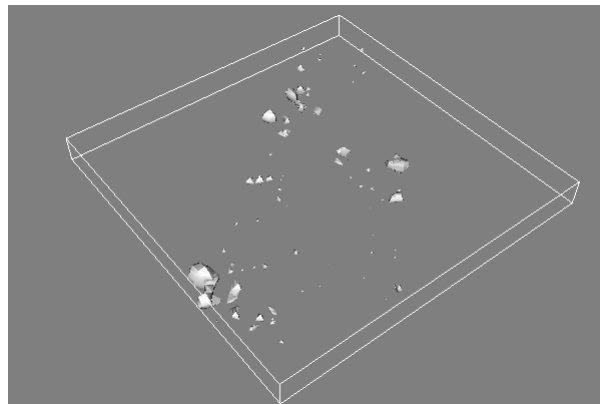


Figure 6. Isosurfaces of the clustered anomalies

4.3 Integration of the two visualizations

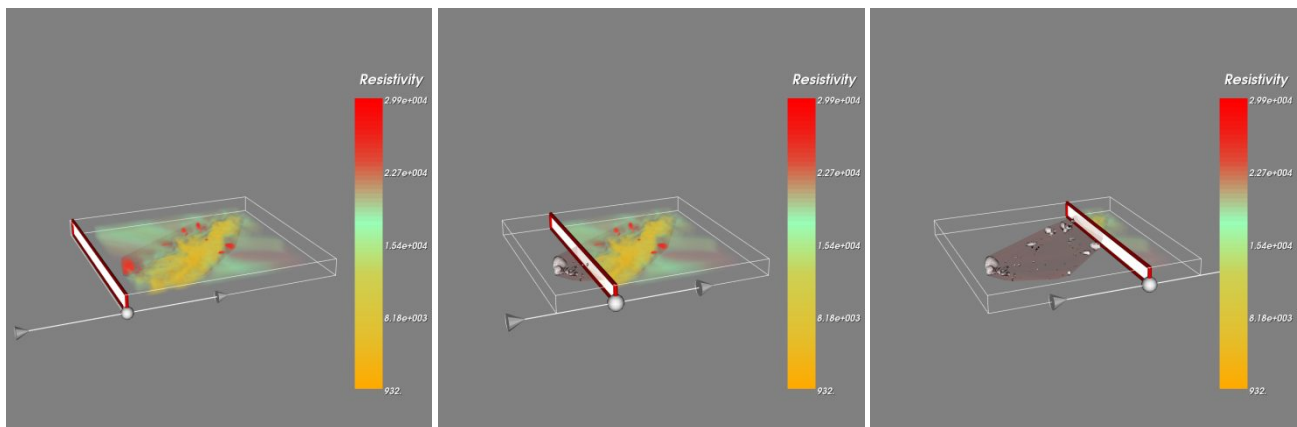


Figure 7. Interactive sweeping plane

These two visualizations can be combined and used to filter noise of the overall representation of the surveyed data, allowing a cleaner visualization of the objects of interest. But it is not enough to combine the two visualizations: it is necessary to create an interactive sweeping plane for dragging along an axis to separate the potential structures.

The implementation of interactive objects using VTK is usually performed with widgets that provide an interface to a complex operation. To implement the interactive sweeping plane a *vtkImplicitPlaneWidget* object is used. This 3D widget defines an infinite plane that is placed in the scene and is represented by a plane with a normal vector. This normal vector can be selected and moved to freely rotate the plane, while the plane itself can be translated in any direction. Figure 7 shows the implemented interactive sweeping plane that is immediately updated as the planes moves along the sweeping axis. To achieve the desired “cleaning” effect, it is also necessary to define a plane (*vtkPlane*) that is used as clipping plane: on one side of the plane the user observes the volume rendering on the other side the mesh from the contouring procedure. This plane is shared with the interaction handler (*vtkInteractionHandler*) and when the implicit plane widget is moved the user notices the “cleaning” of the noise preventing a clearer representation of the potential structures of interest.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

First, the raw results from the survey were represented as an extremely compact data volume. To gain insight through the entire data came to be impossible, as the structures of interest were veiled by the quartz constraints.

Cross-checking the data by intersecting both resistivity and archaeological dimensions resulted in the successful mapping of several volumes of interest that are, in the authors’ opinion, related to the archaeological subset of the hillfort. However, this relation is not always strictly obvious, as it also depends on the spacing between the electrical probes.

In Figure 8, one can observe a planar representation where the VOI are overlapped by the topographical points regarding the archaeological features visible on the ground. The signalled case (1) regards the building shown in Figure 2B and 2C. In this case, there is no VOI matching this particular building. From the archaeological excavation it is now known that this particular structure has no vertical expression at the depth of the first electrical signal (ca. 0,50 m). Thus, for future ERT surveys, reducing the inter-electrode spacing will be most certainly required.

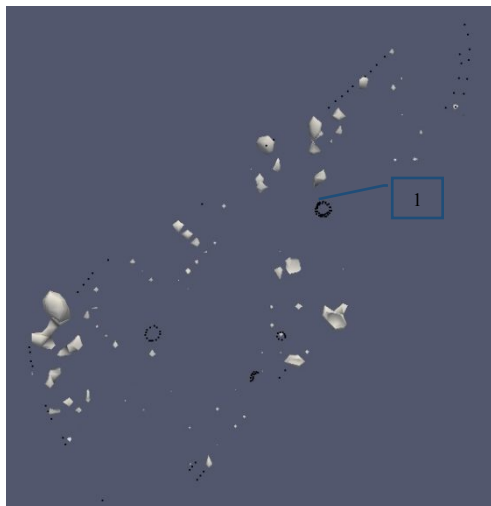


Figure 8. Superposition of the recognized archaeological features (represented with the black points) with the volumes of interest (represented as a grey mesh models).

Nevertheless, the visual results seem to make sense from an archaeological point of view, as the volumes of interest shown seem to indicate what appears to be the top defensive wall of the hillfort. In the same way, most of the smaller volumes of the inner area seem to indicate the presence of buried buildings associated with the settlement’s occupation.

Working data from ERT surveys in order to evaluate non visible archaeological features is not, in any way, linear nor simple, mostly since there are a number of variables particular to each site that can substantially alter the electrical response to the features.

The Sapelos’ experiment revealed that the usage of geophysical data processed with 3D visualization methods can be a powerful tool to enhance the analysis of the volumetric data and help an archaeological analysis for a given site.

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