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Palaeolithic sites from Southern Dongola Reach Survey. Preliminary report

Preface

In 2000 the Polish Archaeological Mission to the Middle Nile Valley, directed by B. Żurawski, finished its research in the northern Sudan, along the northern bank of the Nile, from Ez Zuma to Old Dongola (Southern Dongola Reach Survey – SDRS). Among many recorded archaeological sites there occurred also some Palaeolithic sites. They were preserved in various conditions and seem to represent different chronological and functional units.

The area under prospection of less than 150 km in length (Fig. 1) has never been systematically examined. The only exception was the area of the southern bank of the Nile, from Ed Debba to Korti, studied by the Combined Prehistoric Expedition in 1967-1968 (de Heinzelin, 1967-1968; Marks et al. 1967-1968). In the north, the concession of the SDRS adjoins the regions investigated by the Polish Expedition to Old Dongola (Jakobielski and Krzyżaniak 1967-1968) and by the Royal Ontario Museum Expedition in Toronto (Grzymski 1987). In the east, the SDRS area adjoins the regions examined by the Italian Expedition, and even further to the east - by Gdańsk Archaeological Museum Expedition. A full interpretation of the prehistoric occurrences in the SDRS area is still difficult as the survey examination yields the information of limited character. The artefacts have been found and recorded, often completely eroded, and their assortment may be accidental.

Geomorphological background

The absence of the geomorphologist in our field work did not permit to distinguish the geomorphological units in the area, and to compare their situation to those recorded by the Combined Prehistoric Expedition. Therefore we were

limited to registration of sites in their landscape. The area of the prospection of the SDRS is of some 150 km in length on the right bank of the Nile and stretches into the range of the local Jebels. Contrary to the situation on the left bank of the river our area borders rocky massifs of which the tops keep the names rooted in a local tradition; isolated inselbergs of the Nubian Sandstone also occur here (e.g., five Jebels at Abkor). The region of Hammur (from Old Dongola to Jebel El Alim) consists of rather a flat plate of sandstone almost touching the river. On its surface occur knolls formed as a consequence of water erosion, inselbergs of ferruginous sandstone and the youngest forms – migrating sandy dunes. Probably part of this plate contains also silts and other deposits resulting from river aggradations.

Natural border of this plain constitute chains of the Jebels: J. Kulluaru, Ez Zuruq and J. Nuseif Tamr, Ed Diqun, J. El Missad and J. Umm Nuqdara. Behind these Jebels the plain retires into the desert and then again turns to the river by J. Kulmakol and J. Ibn Auf. These latest Jebels form a specific unit visible from afar as black mountains, being covered by a sheath of ferruginous sandstone. Local wadis form seasonal humidity reservoirs and are covered with plants. Several kilometres before Khor Mahafour in the landscape again begin to dominate the sandstone, heavily eroded, with sheaths of quartzite gravels and deep, periodically active wadis. The town of Karima and nearby villages lie already at the edge of the sandstone plate and narrow river valley.

The Stone Age sites

Our map (Fig. 2a-c) illustrates the distribution of the Stone Age sites in the concession area of SDRS. In order to establish their chronology and function we will compare their inventories to the material originating from systematically excavated sites.

Lower Palaeolithic

These assemblages, containing handaxes (Fig. 3-5) are situated on the slopes of Jebels exposed to the river (J. Ez Zuruq, J. El Missad) or simply are at a close distance from it (e.g., rocky hills near Bukibul and Karendiwai). An isolated find at Argi is a single handaxe mixed with later lithic material. Remaining assemblages do not contain many specimens; they usually consist of a single handaxe and few flakes. These sites are often not far from the Middle Palaeolithic sites. They are clearly assemblages connected with outcrops of ferruginous sandstone and all of the artefacts from the examined assemblages are made of this raw material. It seems that in this part of Nubia the Lower Palaeolithic is not very abundant and artefacts of this chronology occur in the context of later inventories (Marks et. al. 1967-1968).

Middle Palaeolithic

The occurrence of the Levallois technique in assemblages was the main determinant of their Middle Palaeolithic chronology. Sites of this date are the most numerous among the Stone Age assemblages. They contain numerous Levallois cores, Levallois flakes, blades and points with or without denticulate retouch (Fig. 6-7); a few small handaxes were also noted. Sites of this chronology were investigated near Ed Debba (Marks et al. 1967-1968) and at Jebel Kobkabba (Kobusiewicz and Kabaciński 1996).

Assemblages containing the Middle Palaeolithic artefacts found by SDRS could be divided into two kinds. They are the workshops of ferruginous sandstone (analogous to Jebel Kobkabba) situated at its outcrops, and sites situated along the river or sometimes at certain distance from it (showing the ancient course of the Nile?).

Strikine is also a difference between the locations containing artefacts made of ferruginous sandstone and these containing tools and debitage made of chert and flint. Technologically and morphologically, all these assemblages do not differ: the Levallois technology dominates in them. The only difference among them is the kind of the raw material and the size of the specimen.

Late Palaeolithic

It is difficult to classify the SDRS sites to this time period. Having only the lithic material collected from the surface and no absolute dating, it was decided to classify to this period all sites without the Levallois technique and without pottery. It was also noted that the lithic industries of the Late Palaeolithic and Neolithic assemblages are technologically and morphologically similar in this area. They are dominated by the bladelet debitage, cores have mostly one striking platform, and among tools dominate segments (lunates), perforators and blades with retouched edges (probably insertions) as well as scrapers made usually from cortical flakes (Fig. 8-12). Among the exploited raw materials appear now quartz, agate, fossil wood, and rhyolit. The Late Palaeolithic assemblages (Argi, Bir esh Shuweiki and rocky massif from Barsa to el Arak) occur in the zones occupied also by the Neolithic sites.

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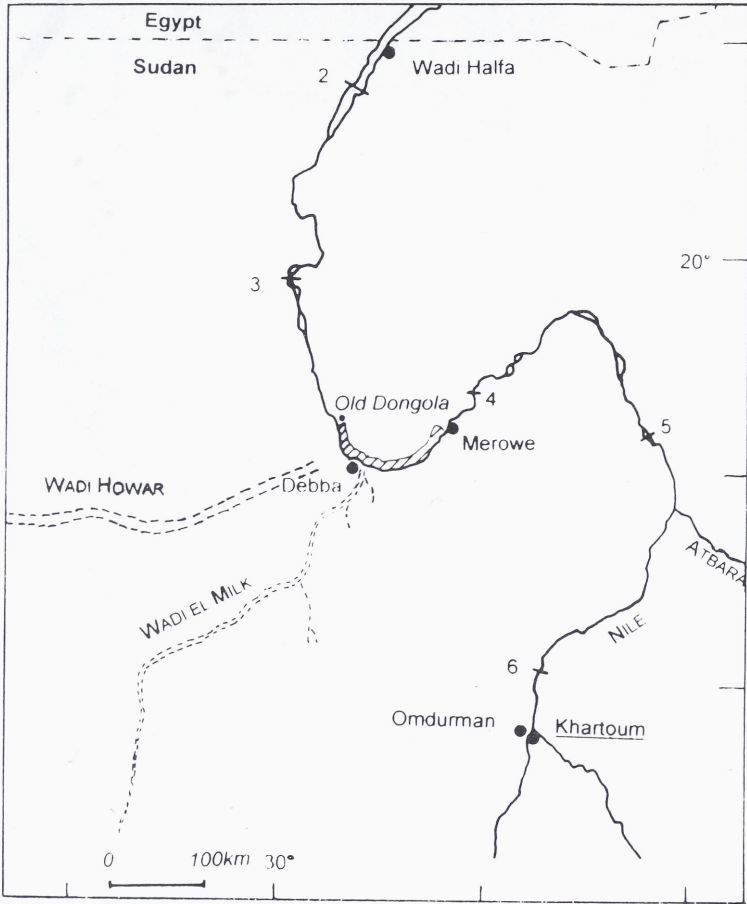


Fig. 1. The concession of the Southern Dongola Reach Survey (slashed).



Fig. 2a- 2c. Based on 1:250 000 scale map of Sudan, sheet 45E-F.

2a. Distribution of Stone Age Sites: Lower Paleolithic (triangles); Middle Paleolithic (circle); Later Paleolithic and Neolithic (squares).



Fig. 2a- 2c. Based on 1:250 000 scale map of Sudan, sheet 45E-F.

2b. Distribution of Stone Age Sites: Lower Palaeolithic (triangles); Middle Paleolithic (circle); Later Palaeolithic and Neolithic (squares).

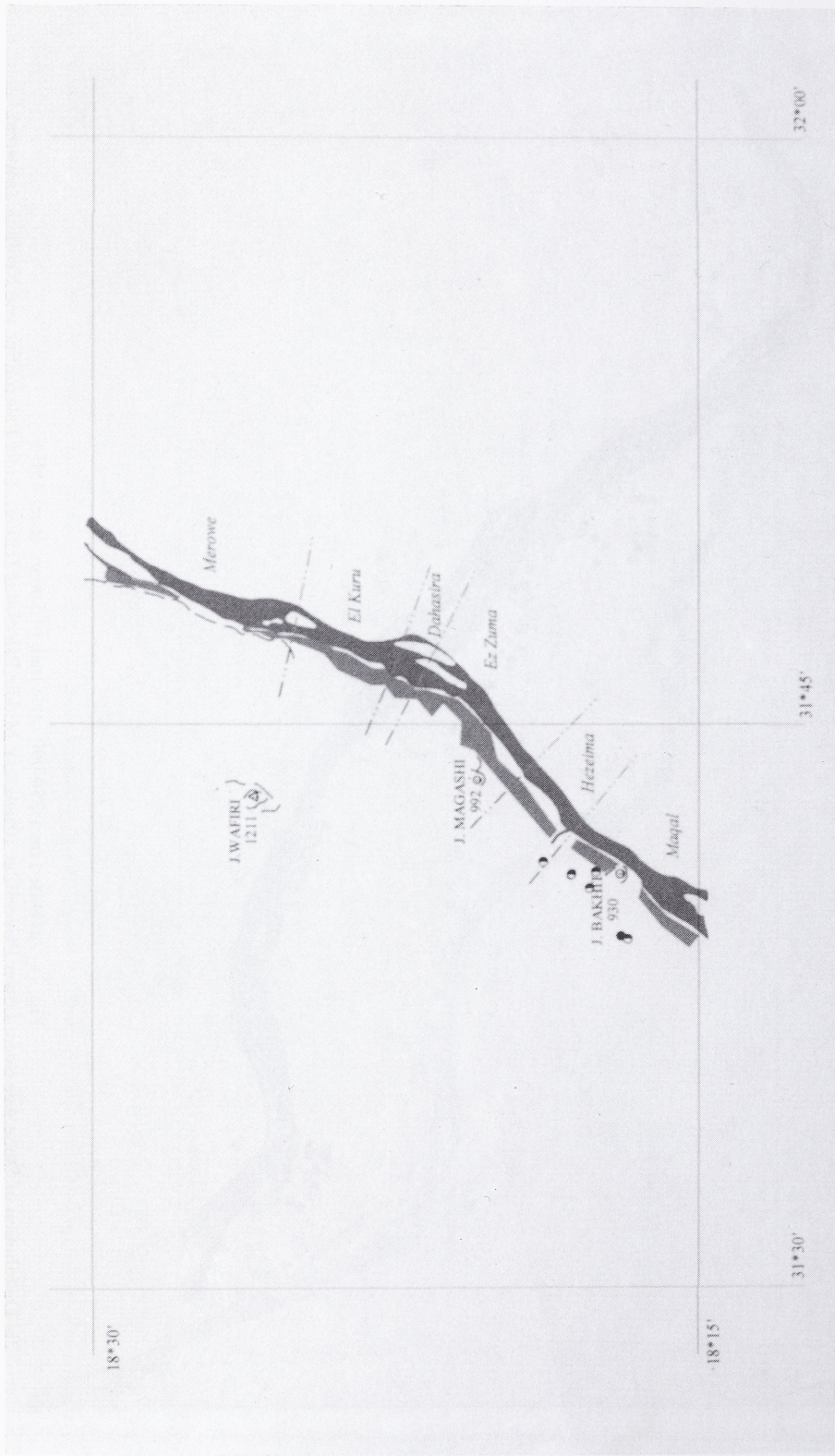


Fig. 2a- 2c. Based on 1:250 000 scale map of Sudan, sheet 45E-F.

2c. Distribution of Stone Age Sites: Lower Palaeolithic (triangles); Middle Palaeolithic (circle); Later Palaeolithic and Neolithic (squares).

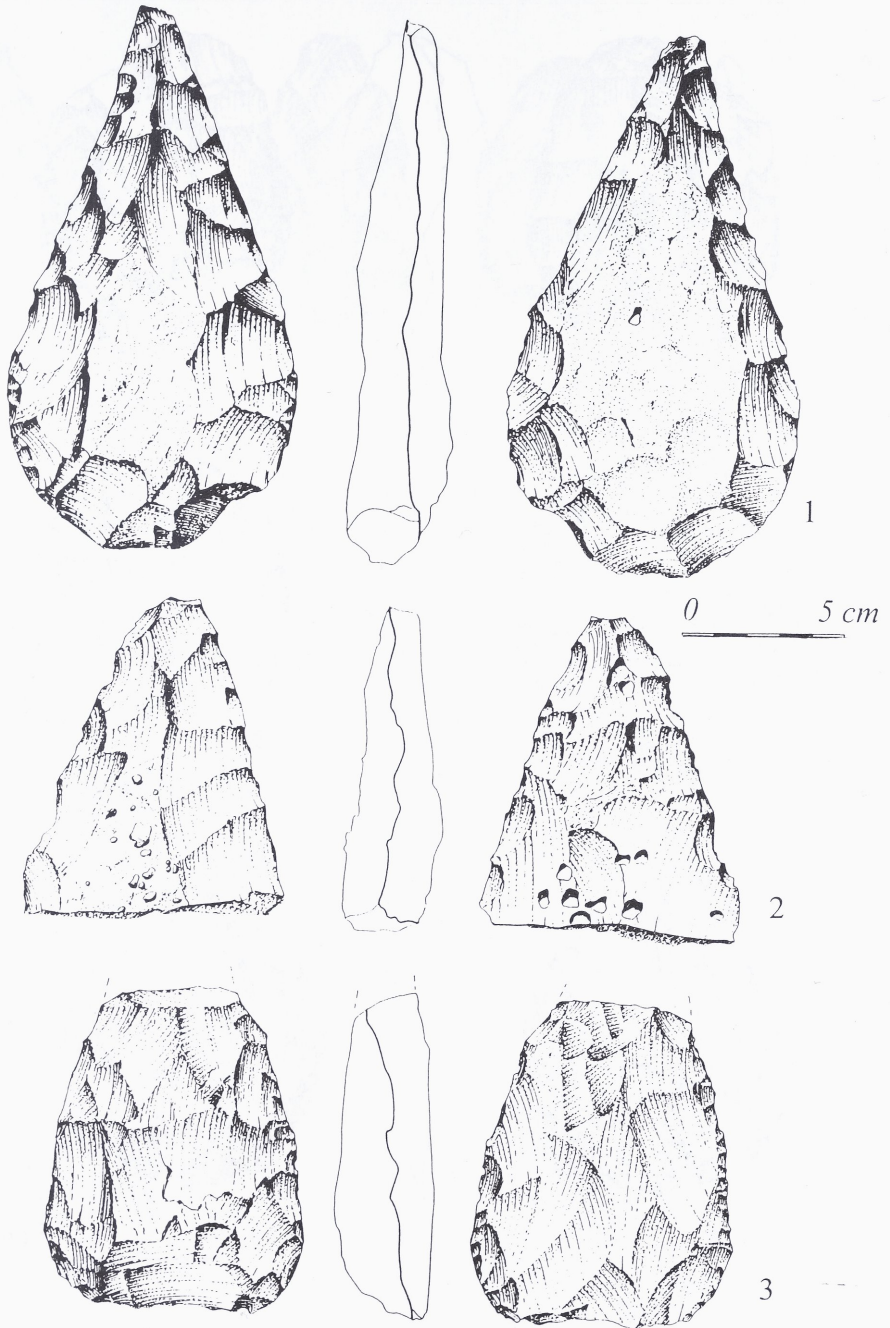


Fig. 3. Handaxes (inv. no. 1 - 246; 2 - 185; 3 - 616).

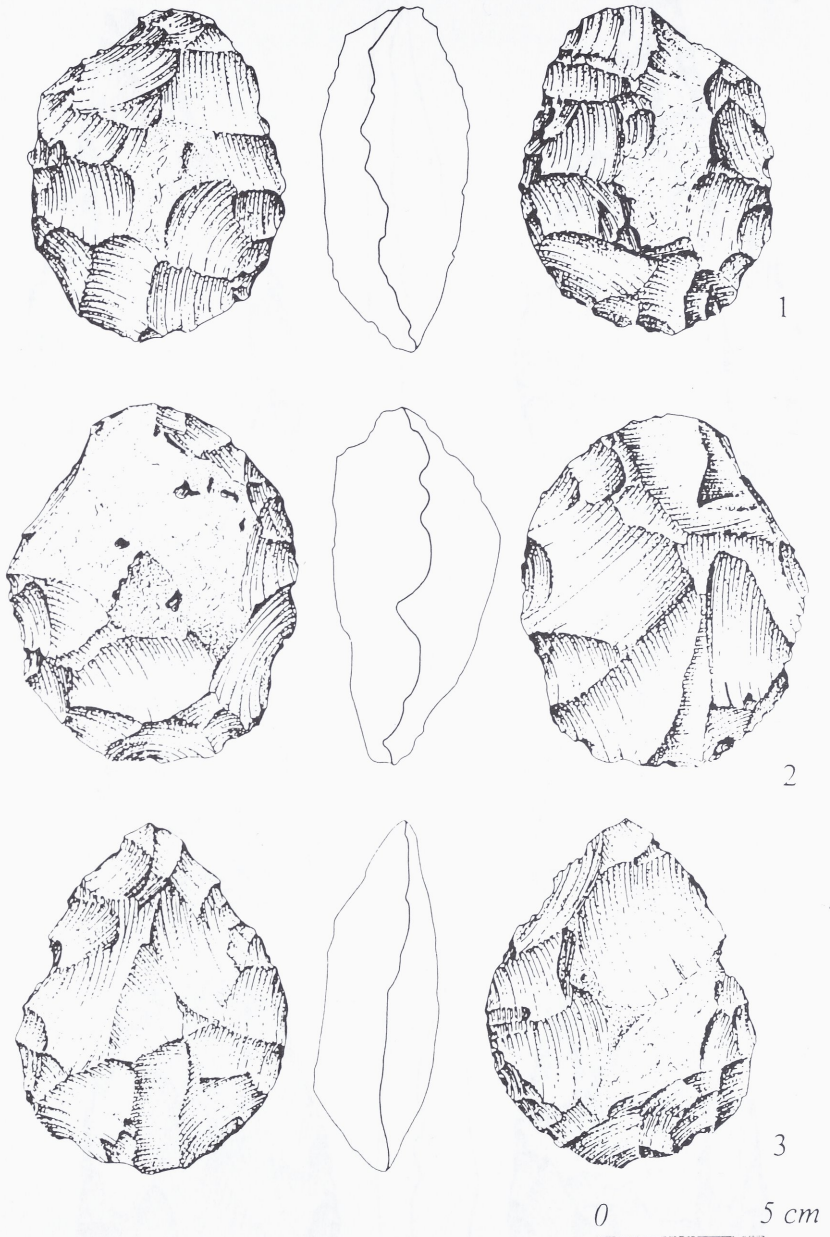


Fig. 4. Handaxes (inv. no. 1 - 5; 2 - 240; 3 - 1374).

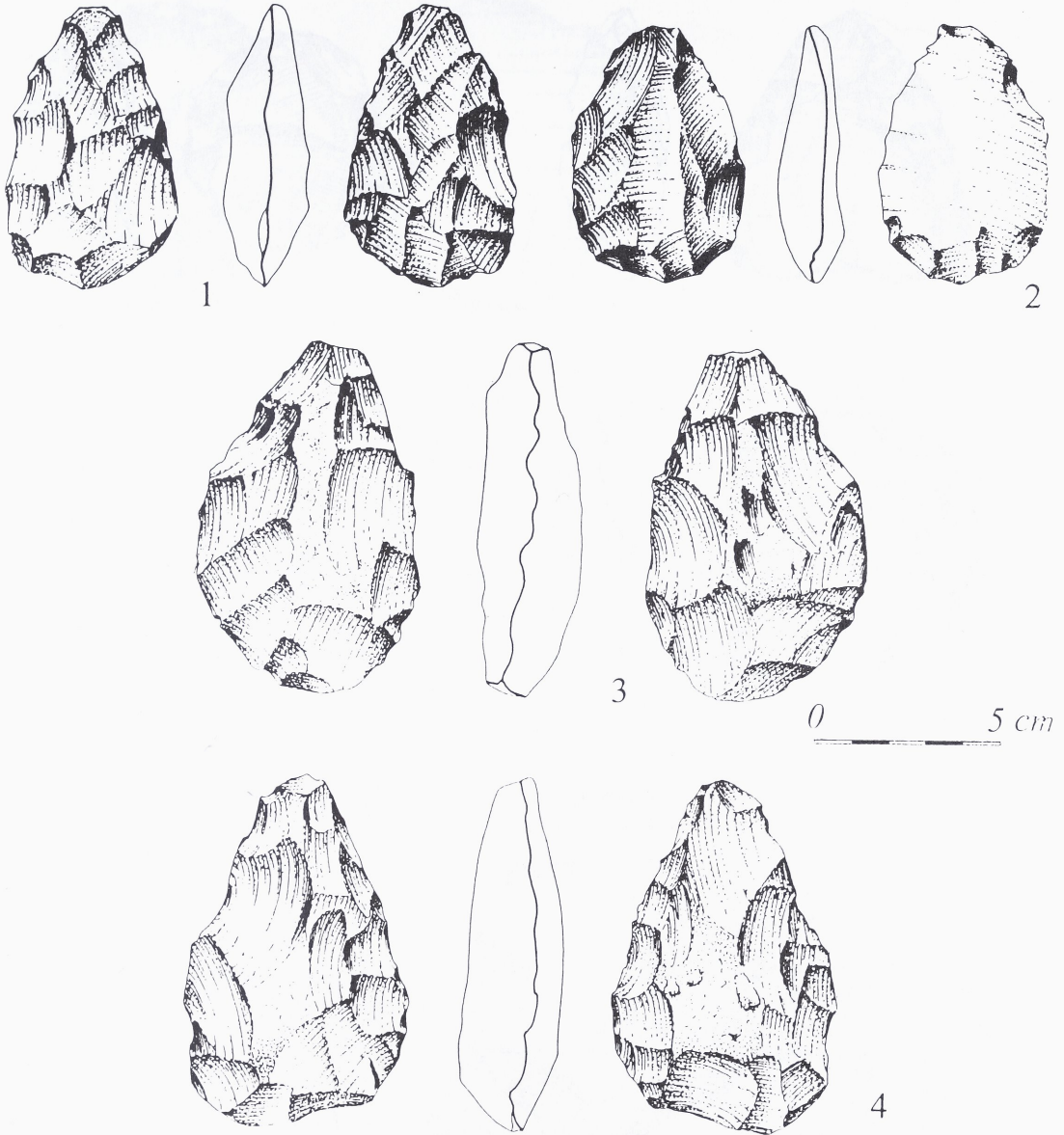


Fig. 5. Small handaxes (inv. no. 1 - 257; 2 - 135; 3 - 113; 4 - 760).

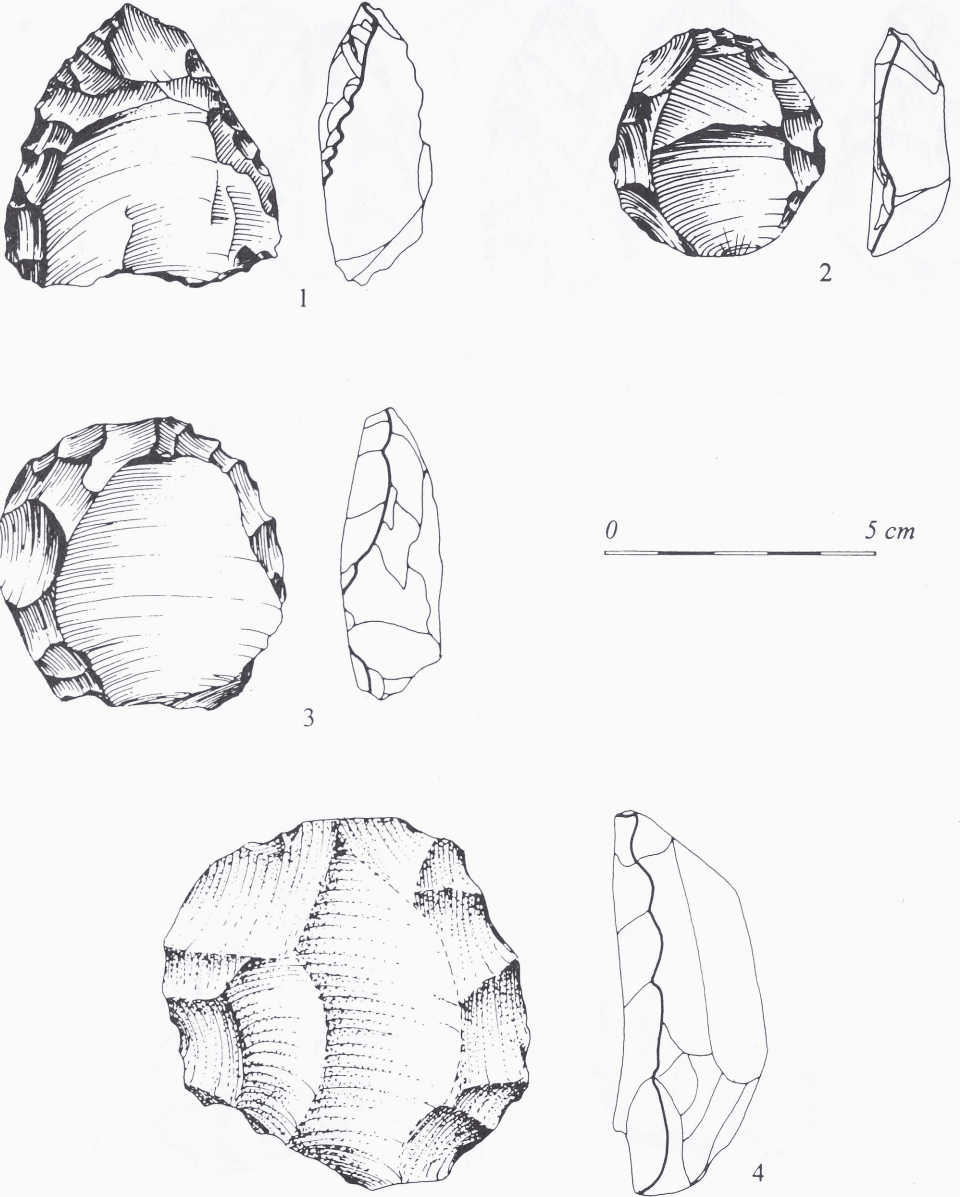


Fig. 6. Levallois cores.

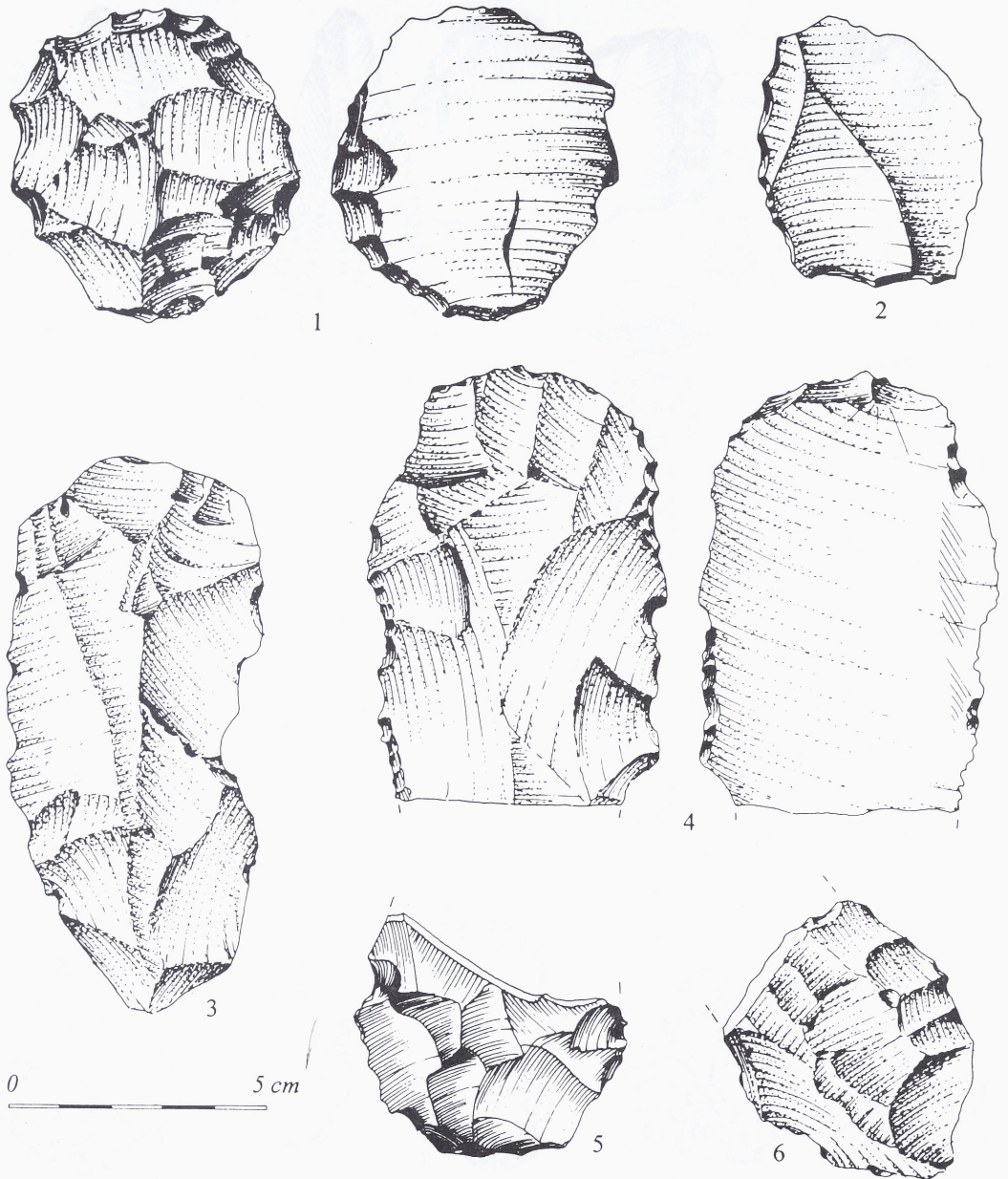


Fig. 7. Levallois debitage (inv. no. 1-18; 2-94; 3-186; 4 - 279; 5 - 136; 6-254).

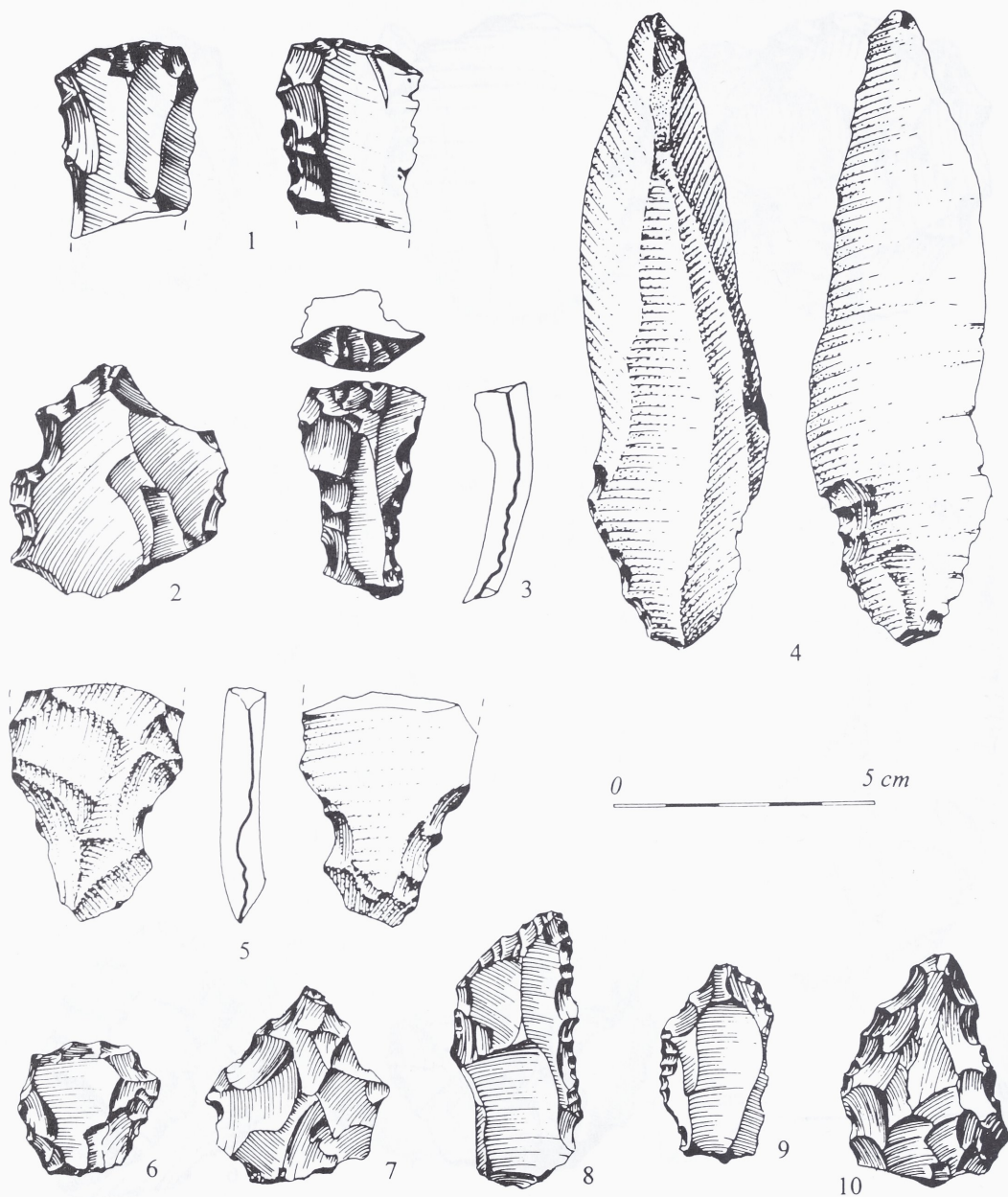


Fig. 8. Tools of Upper Paleolithic type (inv. no. 1-1300; 2-158; 3-1268; 4-311; 5-993; 6-51; 7 - 52; 8 - 53; 9 - 77; 10 - 1220).

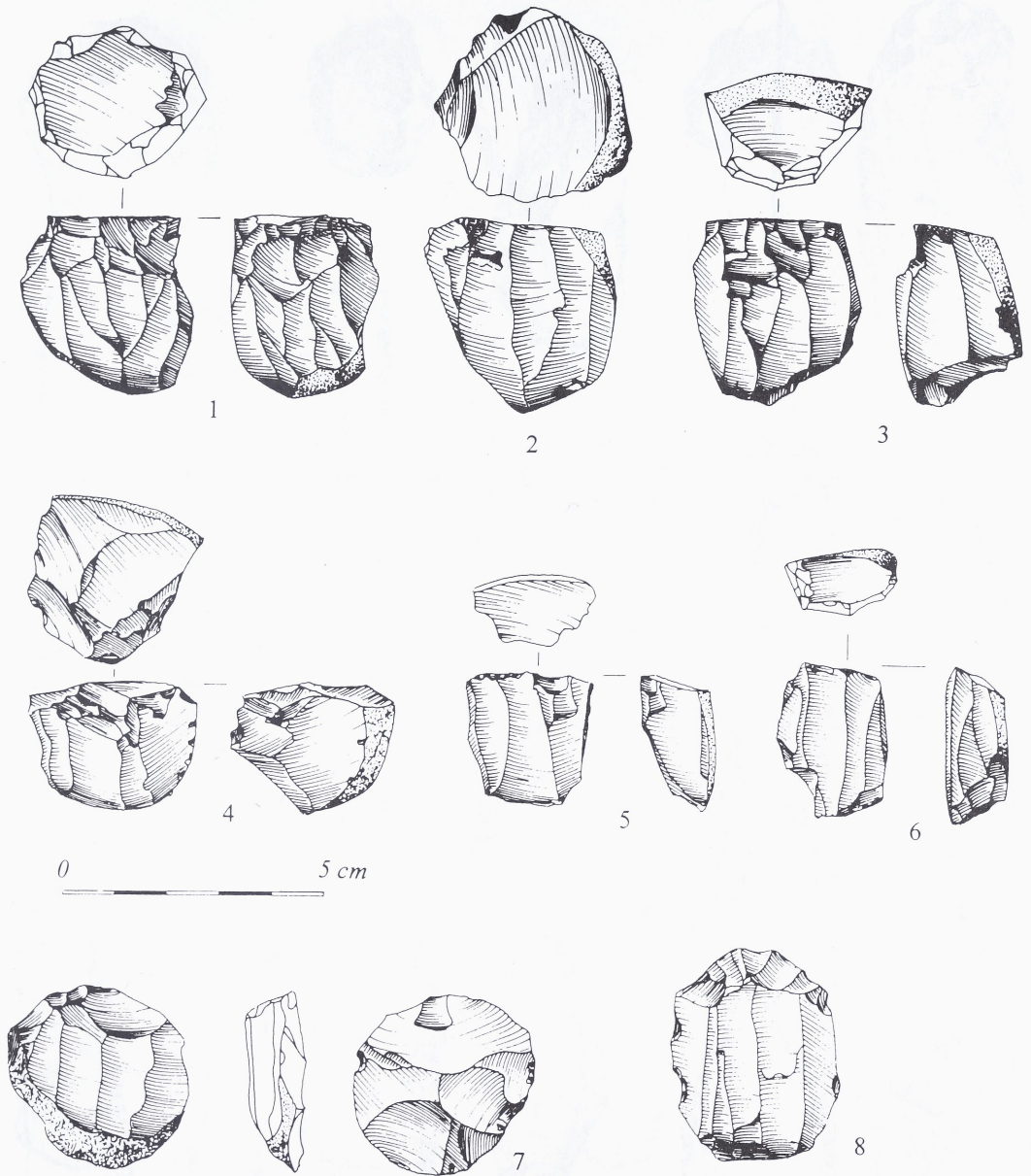


Fig. 9. Single platform cores and examples of reutilisation. (inv. no. 1 - 537; 2 - 330; 3 - 538; 4 - 540; 5 - 345; 6 - 535; 7 - 539; 8 - 1342).



Fig. 10. Retouched flakes and blades (inv. no. 1 - 929; 2 - 483; 3 - 441; 4 - 496; 5 - 1095; 6 - 516; 7 - 511; 8 - 403; 9 - 491; 10 - 332; 11 - 1450; 12 - 696; 13 - 562; 14 - 561; 15 - 560; 16 - 1046; 17 - 1094; 18 - 704; 19 - 588; 20 - 515).

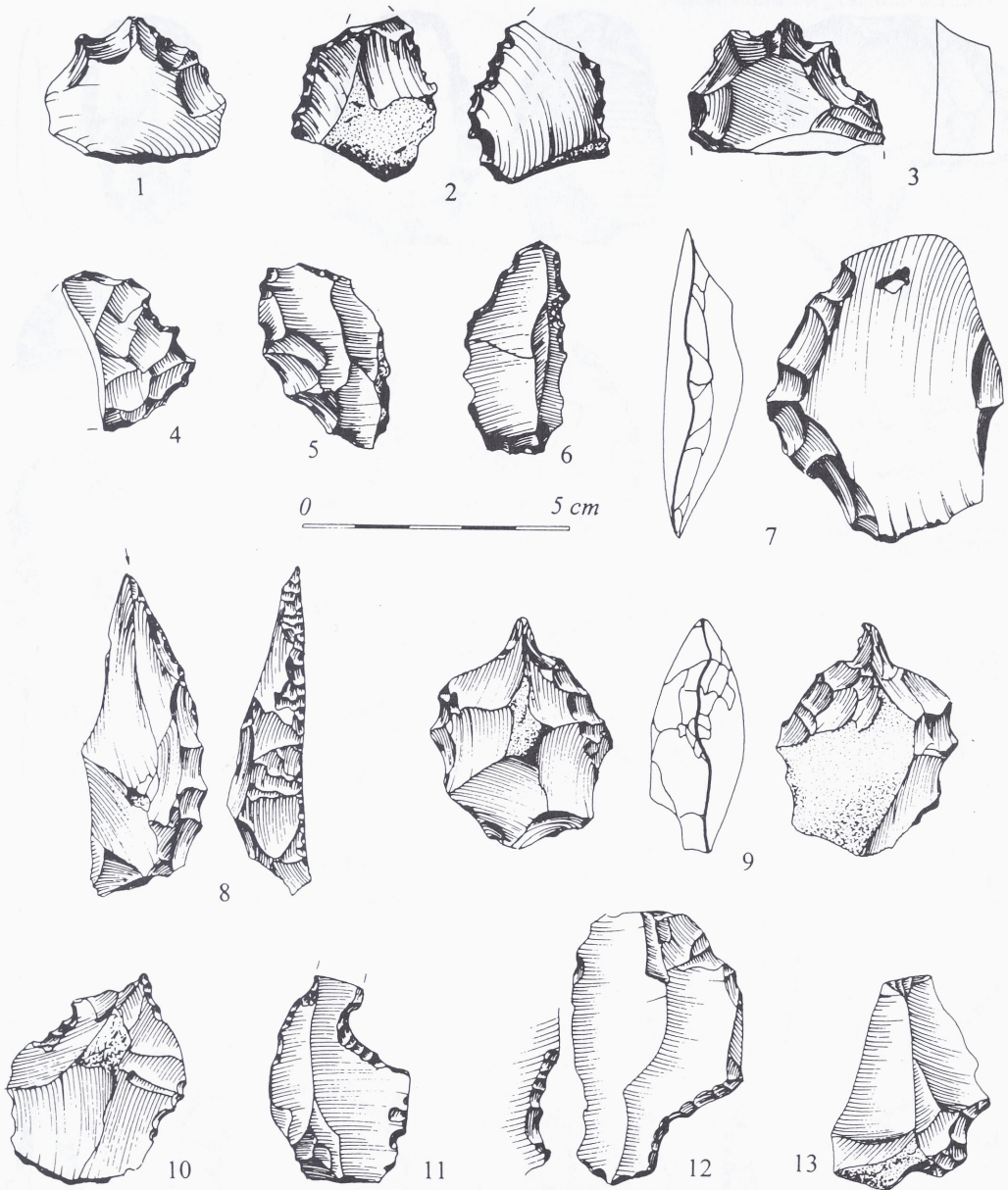


Fig. 11. Denticulated and notched tools (inv. no. 1 - 440; 2 - 137; 3 - 1143; 4 - 1328; 5 - 586; 6 - 546; 7 - 759; 8 - 1476; 9 - 581; 10 - 1036; 11 - 1043; 12 - 1380; 13 - 1477).

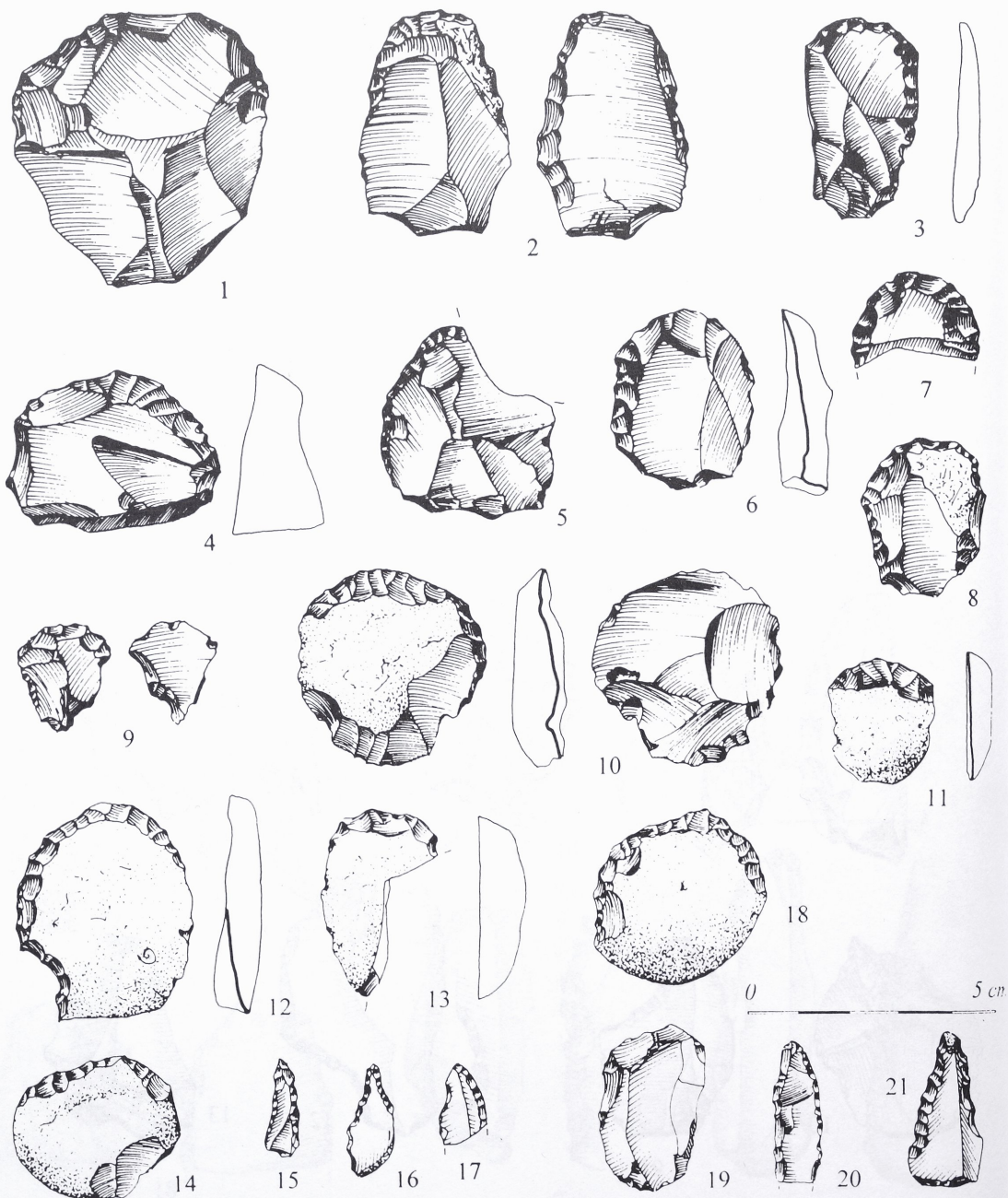


Fig.12. Endscrapers and perforators (inv. no. 1 - 1091; 2 - 1163; 3 - 1216; 4 - 1083; 5 - 1056; 6 - 930; 7 - 174; 8 - 154; 9 - 626; 10 - 1275; 11 - 1322; 12 - 1292; 13 - 810; 14 - 1503; 15 - 1502; 16 - 1545; 17 - 1303; 18 - 417; 19 - 341; 20 - 509; 21 - 697).