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FINDS FROM THE NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENT APRILTSI, PAZARDZIK DISTRICT, BULGARIA

Abstract: The paper focuses on the importance of the raw material factor in the interpretation of flint assemblages. The general perspective and consideration of every prehistoric chipped stone industry should include an assessment of the raw materials used, their availability, variability and the supplying potential of the palaoenvironment. Bulgarian prehistory is characterized by a remarkable abundance and diversity of flint raw materials. The main sources are located in the Moesian platform in northern Bulgaria, hosted by the Lower and Upper Cretaceous limestones and chalks. Some of them gain a noticeable importance as an immanent feature among the diagnostic flint assemblages' characteristics. Typical is the case of 'Balkan Flint' which attains a noticeable significance in the Neolithisation of the Balkans and subsequently – in the context of the supra-regional Karanovo I–Starčevo–Criş-Körös cultural complex. Another well known example of wide spatial distribution and use of the flint raw material referred to the so-called 'Dobrudzhanski', or Ludogorie flint, served for the production of the remarkable and incomparable super blades from the Varna and Durankulak cemeteries, as well as from sites like Sava, Smiadovo, etc. The paper aims to improve present day knowledge on the topic and to prevent confusion, consequent upon the irrelevant use of, and speculation about some of the terms and statements related to this problem.
Keywords: raw material, Moesian platform, Ludogorie flint, Balkan Flint, flint assemblages, super blades.

The Neolithic settlement near the village of Apriltsi has been investigated by Yavor Boyadziev[1] and Stoilka Terziiska-Ignatova in 2001 in a rescue excavation (Бояджиев, Терзийска-Игнатова 2002).

The finds from the site (95 in total) include clay, stone, flint and bone tools, anthropomorphic figurines and altars. The small number of bone and flint artefacts is noteworthy – only two of the former and seven of the latter. There are no zoomorphic figurines. Most numerous are the clay objects – 53, 35 of which are weights.

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[1] See the article Boyadzhiev, Slavchev "Late Neolithic settlement near the village of Apriltsi, Pazardzik district" in this volume.

Clay finds

Weights

The weights are made of clay with different amount of non-organic temper, the organic temper is less common. Most of them are well smoothed and their colour varies from dark-grey to grey-brown. There are some red-brick coloured weights that were probably burnt secondarily.

The weights can be divided into four types two of which have several sub-types according to their longitudinal and transverse cross-section.

I. Weights with parallelogram shape, whose upper part is formed as an arch (fig. 1, 1-3). All of them have a hole in the upper part. Their transverse cross-section is: rectangular, rectangular with rounded corners, rectangular with slightly bulging sides in the middle. The height is 6.5-7 cm, the width in the base is 3-3.5 cm, and the length is 6-7.2 cm.

II. Weights with round shape and a hole in the middle or a hole that is slightly away from the geometric centre (fig.1, 6,8,9,11). The cross-section at the hole is oval, flat from below and convex on the top, rectangular. Their diameter varies between 5.3 cm to 9 cm. Most of them have well-treated surface and grey, grey-black to brick-brown colour.

III. Weight with a quadrangular shape, rounded corners and a hole in the upper part (fig.1, 7). Quadrangular cross-section with rounded corners. Well smoothed, brick-brown colour, 7 cm high.

IV. Weight with an ovoid shape and a hole in the upper part (fig.1, 4). Made of clay mixed with sand and small pebbles. It has worn surface and brick-brown colour. Round cross-section, diam. - 4.5 cm, height - 5 cm.

Discs

They are made of reused walls of vessels, roughly shaped with no particular form. Irregular round shape, diam. 5.6-6 cm. One example has a hole (fig.1, 12).

A spindle whorl

It is made of fine clay, slightly biconical shape, grey colour, well treated surface, diam. 3.8 cm (fig.1, 5).

A scraper

It is made of wall of a vessel. It has a quadrangular shape, its preserved working surface is in a form of an arch and is tapering. The preserved length is 5.3 cm, its width is 3.4 cm, which at the edge is 2.2 cm (fig.4, 5).

A small vessel

It is made of clay mixed with sand and has a cylindrical shape. Its neck is moved away from the centre, it is strongly deformed in the upper part and perhaps presents secondarily burnt production waste. Its height is 4.8 cm (fig.1, 13).

Stone tools

The stone tools are the second most numerous found on the site – 30 in total.

Adzes

There are several fragments and one complete example that is fairly battered at the dorsal side. It has a trapezoidal shape, slightly rounded butt and rectangular cross-section. The longitudinal cross-section is asymmetrical, the blade is arch-

shaped and also asymmetrical (fig.2, 3). The surface is very well smoothed, grey-green colour. The height is 5.6 cm, the width at the blade is 4.2 cm.

An axe

It has a trapezoidal shape, symmetrical wedge-like longitudinal cross-section and an arch-like blade. The surface is very well smoothed, grey colour. The height is 7.6 cm, the width at the blade is 5.1 cm (fig. 2, 1).

Chisel

It has elongated approximately quadrangular shape that widens in the middle, non-symmetrically tapering and narrowing working edge, and rectangular cross-section (fig.2, 4). Smoothed surface and grey colour.

Pestles

They are very diverse in terms of shape and size. Naturally shaped large river pebbles (9 to 13 cm in length) are used alongside well made tools that can be divided into several types according to their longitudinal cross-section. The transverse cross-section is usually oval or round:

I. Pestles with trapezoidal longitudinal cross-section, convex on the top, with a flat base (fig.2, 2). The surface is smoothed.

II. Pestles with almost rectangular longitudinal cross-section and flat or slightly convex base (fig.2, 6). The surface is smoothed.

III. Pestles with conical shape and flat or slightly convex base (fig. 2, 7). The surface is smoothed.

The size varies between 7-8 cm and 11-12 cm.

IV. Pestles with globular or oval shape. Some of them are with very worn surface, probably as a result of long use (fig.2, 5). The diameters vary between 5-6 cm and 8-9 cm.

Grinding stones

The fragments of grinding stones are too small and cannot be reconstructed.

Burnishers

They are with oval shape, some have traces of use on both sides. The size varies between 4 cm and 7-8 cm (fig.4, 3,4).

Bone tools

As mentioned above, the bone tools are only two. One is probably a part of pin/needle, the other is a large awl or a chisel, but since the working edge is missing, its identification is difficult (fig.2, 8).

Anthropomorphic figurines

There are two standing figurines – male and female, and a male head.

Standing figurines

The male figure is preserved from the waist down and it is ithyphallic. It is made of one piece of clay, the legs are attached to each other, separated only by an incised line (fig.3, 6).

The torso and a small part of the hips are preserved from the female figurine (fig.3, 7). The realistic rendering and proportionality of the female body is noteworthy. The surface is smoothed, red-brick colour as a result of secondary burning. There is no decoration and the pubic triangle is modelled, not incised.

A head

A head of a large clay figurine was found, both sides of the neck have traces of attachment to the body. The rendering of the head astounds with its individualized features and right proportions. This is one of the rare for this period cases of realistic depictions. The surface is very well smoothed, the colour is grey. The eyes and the mouth are incised, the cheek-bones and the eye-brows are modelled, the ears are attached and have the shape of small spirals (fig.3, 5).

Altars

These numerous finds from Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements have been studied by many scholars who consider them as objects used in different cults (Николов 2007 and the references quoted there).

There are five fragments of altars from Apriltsi and most probably three of them belong to one artefact with triangular shape and Г-like legs (fig.3, 3). The decoration is mixed, chequerboard incrusted fields and two plastic knobs. Triangular foot and part of a deepened recipient are preserved from another altar. It is not decorated and has a very worn surface (fig.3,2).

The remaining fragments cannot be reconstructed (fig.3, 1,4). They are decorated by alternating metopes of white incrusted geometrical concavities and incised lines or empty fields.

The finds from the Neolithic settlement Apriltsi have many parallels from sites in Thrace, North and West Bulgaria – along the Struma valley (Гиздова, Кънчев 2000, 23-36; Станев 2002; Чохаджиев 2001, 30,46; Чохаджиев 2007, 83-84; Georgiev, Nikolov, Nikolova, Cohadziev 1986, 148, fig.2; Höglinger 1997, Taf. 68).

What is intriguing among the artefacts from Apriltsi are the weight of type I. There are similar weights at other Late Neolithic sites but they are significantly larger, much rougher and with larger holes. Generally, all weight types from Apriltsi are very well formed with smoothed surface and rather small in size. Most probably this is related to their function.

Flint artefacts

The flint collection of the site of Apriltsi is relatively poor, consisting of only 7 artefacts. Fortunately, some of them are diagnostic tools. The artefacts were submitted to typological and functional (use-wear) analyses[2]. There are five typological tools, one blade and one undetermined fragment.

The tools belong to the following typological groups:

- Borer on blade with semi abrupt bilateral retouch (fig. 5- 2). Pointed distal part possesses fine ventral scares, most likely due to the utilisation. At the proximal part – there is a breakage on the shoulder like shaping with sporadic smoothed polish, remaining hafting traces of accommodation /hafting. The tool was used for drilling into hard material (pottery, soft stone);

[2] The use –wear analysis was made using microscopes MBS 10 (x100) and Metam P1 (x200).

- Blade with a high step bilateral retouch and distal endscraper –like rounding (fig. 5 - 3). The edges of the tool have post-depositional alterations which hamper any functional determination;
- Blade with a bilateral discontinuous retouch and angular cereal polish on the left distal part of the left edge (fig. 5 - 1). This tool was used as a sickle insert of the 'Karanovo type'. The working edge shows re-sharpening during the utilisation;
- Flake with a partial cortex and abrupt lamellar retouch on the right side (fig. 5 - 4). The tool was used for cutting plants with the left virgin edge;
- Fragment of a tool (most probably truncated blade) (fig. 5 - 5). Distal part of the right edge has Si polish which texture indicates clay processing.
- A single blade is attested among the artefacts: mesial fragment with trapezoidal section (fig. 5- 6). The blade has parallel polish on the right edge, indicating plant cutting.
- There is also one undetermined fragment without any traces of use.

The analysis of the artefacts allows the following observations:

- As for the raw material attested - there are 4 pieces made of the common 'Balkan flint' yellow-honey white spotted high quality flint (pieces of fig. 5 - 1, 2, 4, 6). One of the most diagnostic tools (fig. 5 - 3) is made by the greyish variant of this type of flint. It is worth reminding that both yellow and greyish white spotted flints are the most numerous among the abundant flint assemblages of the tell Karanovo and tell Azmak and as such their deposits were localised to be near St. Iliya hills in Thrace (Gatsov, Kurčatov 1997). In the light of recent research, this repeatedly quoted assumption could be considered as disproved. At present, it has been argued that Balkan flint deposits are situated in the Moesian platform in northern Bulgaria (Начев 2009; Gurova 2008, Gurova, Nachev 2008).
- Two of the tools are very characteristic cultural markers – they are part of the diagnostic tools that appear in the full Neolithic package within the Early Neolithic Karanovo I and II cultures in Bulgaria. They are made of Balkan flint and are recently defined as Early Neolithic 'formal toolkits' (fig. 1 – 2, 3) (Gurova 2008). The tool categories of the toolkit are known as reminiscent forms till Karanovo III and III-IV period in the Karanovo Tell sequence, i.e. till the Late Neolithic in the conventional prehistoric chronology (Гюрова 2005; Gurova 2004).

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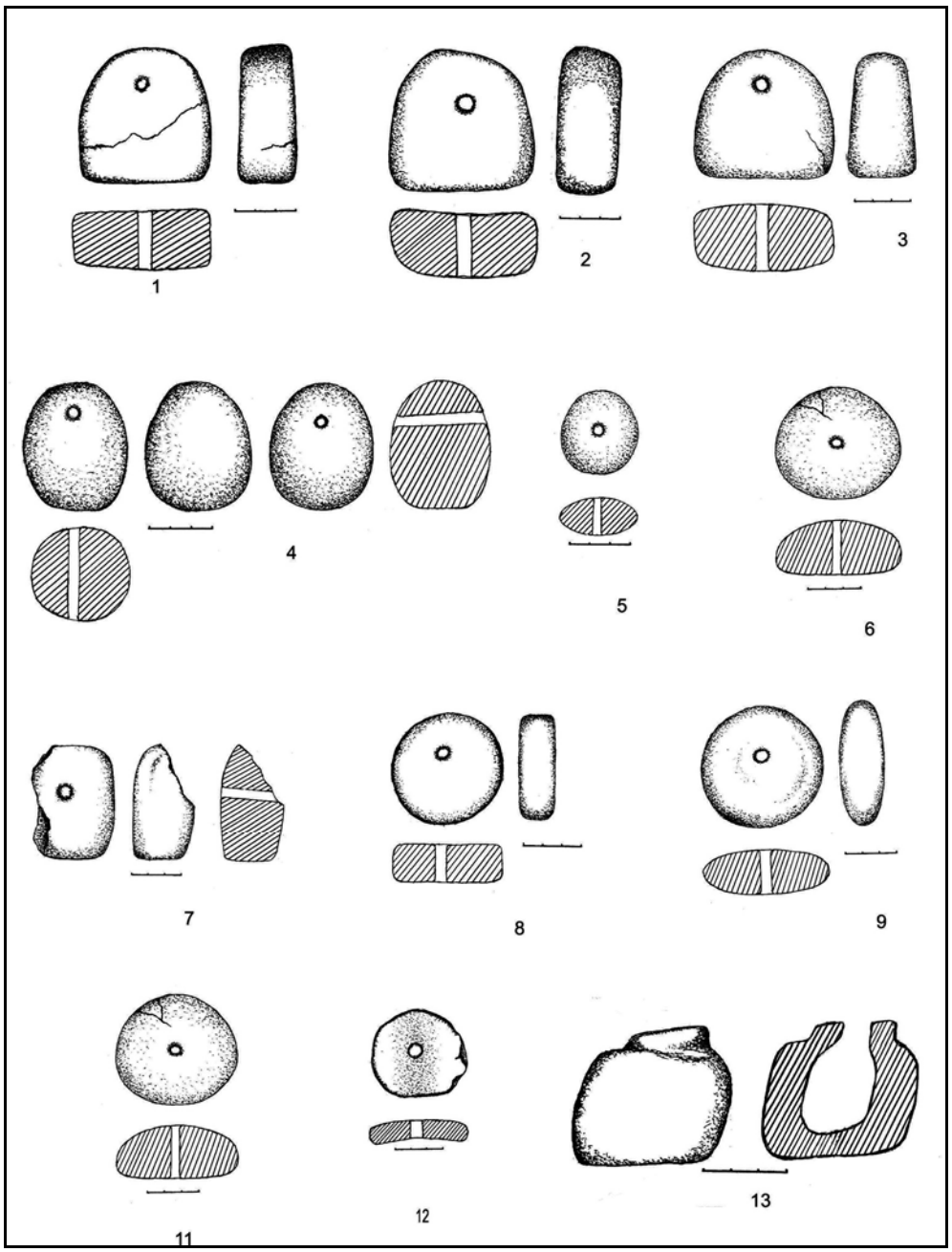

Fig. 1. Clay finds - Sondage 1: 1-3, 5-8; Sondage 2: 4; from the surface: 9,11.

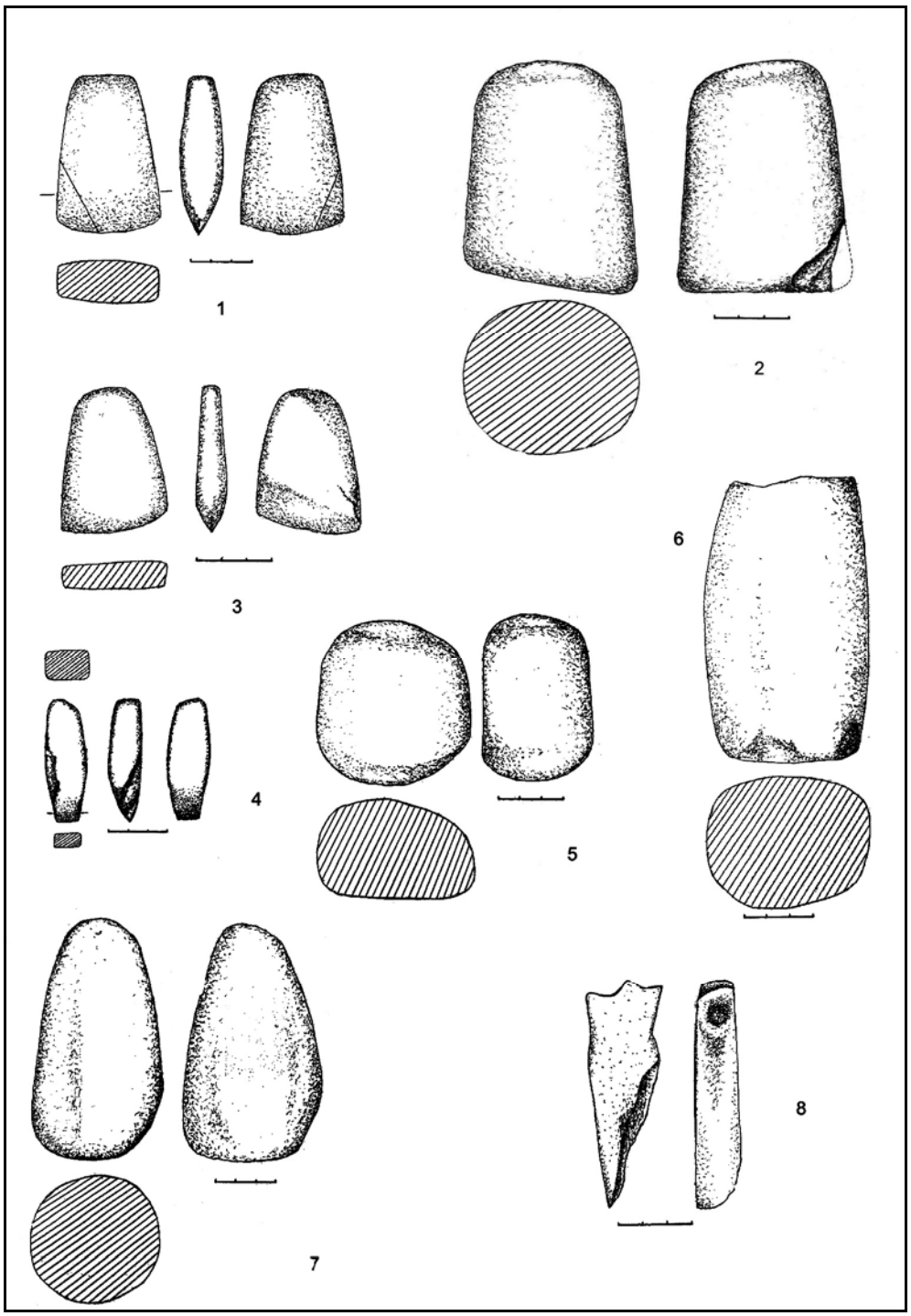

Fig. 2. Stone finds – Sondage 1: 1,3-5; from the surface: 2,7. Bone tool – from the surface: 8.

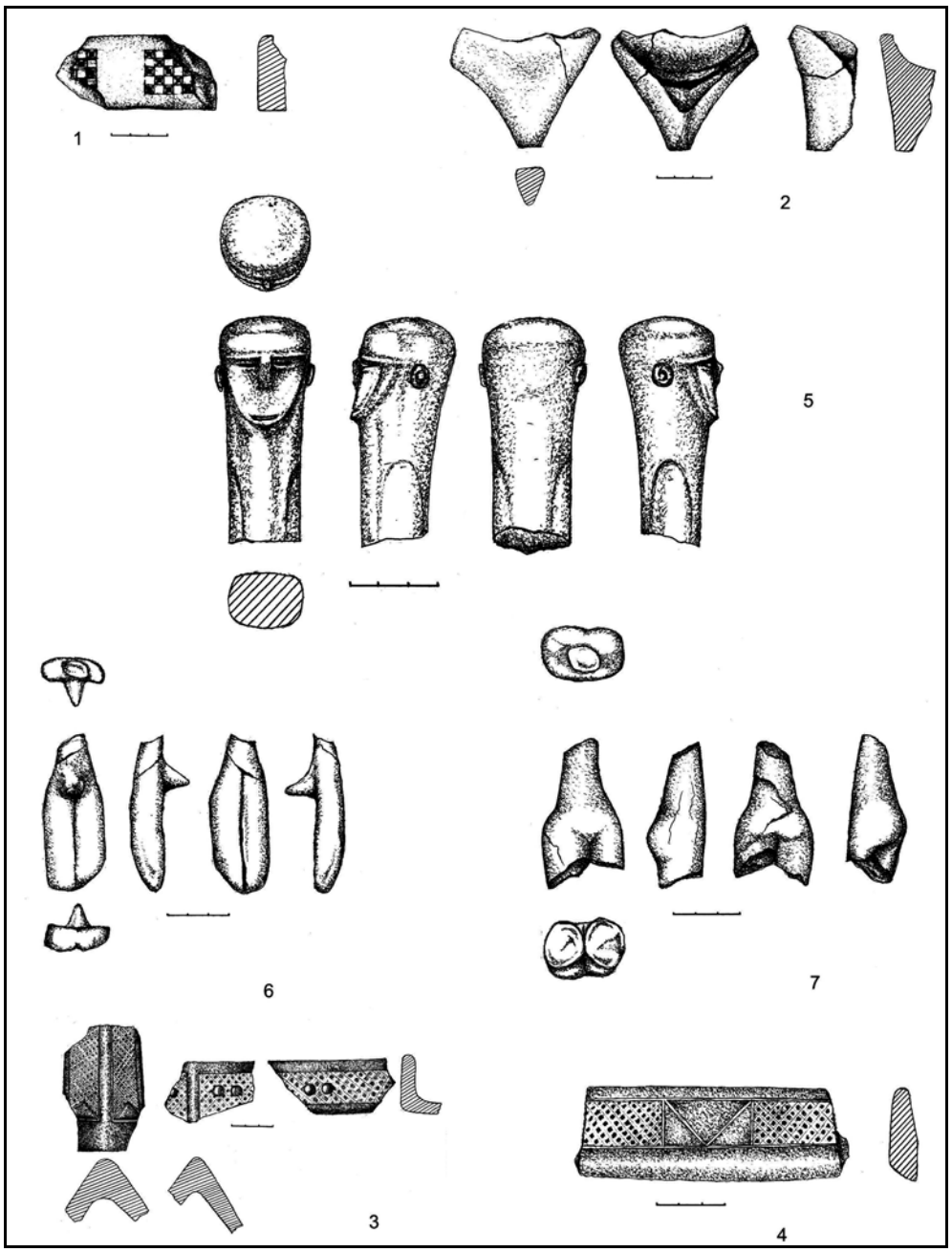

Fig. 3. Anthropomorphic figurines – Sondage 1: 5,6; Sondage 2: 7. Култови масички – Sondage 1: 2,4; Sondage 4: 1; from the surface: 3.

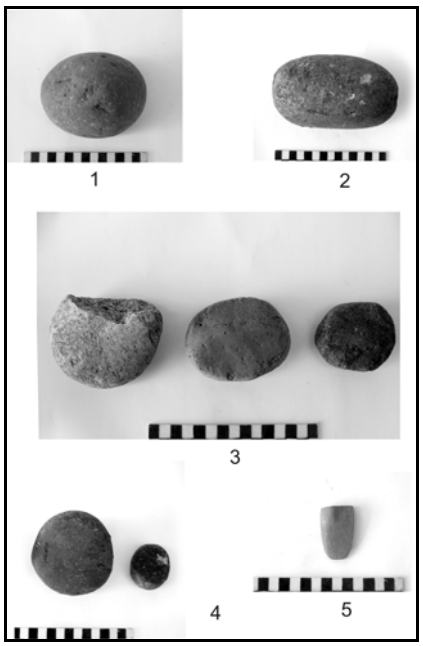

Fig.4. Stone burnishers: 3, 4; Stone pestles: 1,2; Clay burnisher:5.

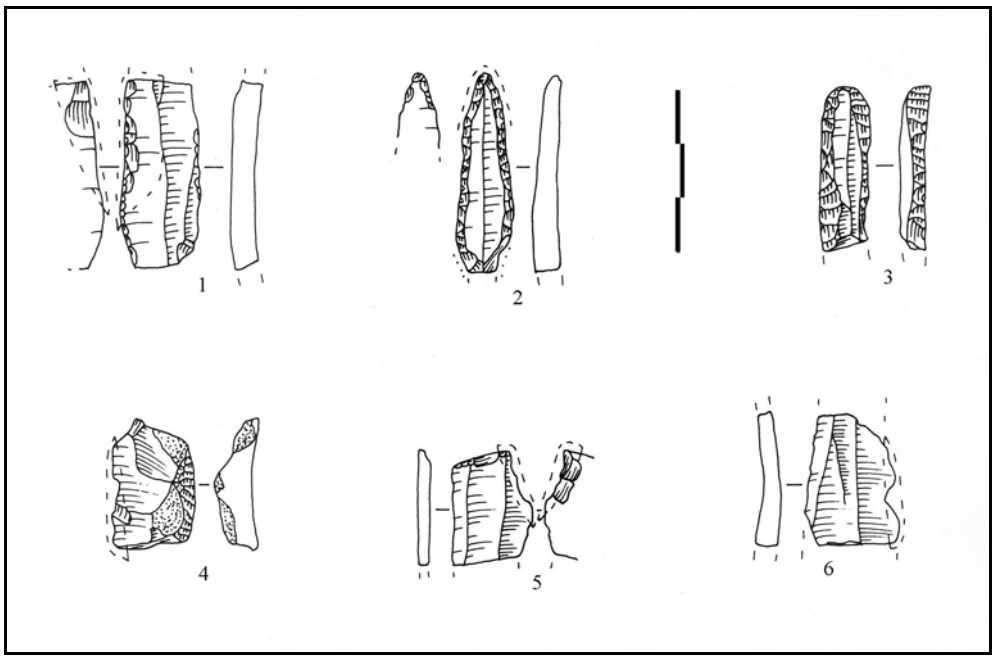

Fig.5. Flint artefacts: 1 – retouched blade; 2 – borer on blade; 3 – blade with high bilateral step retouch; 4 – retouched flake; 5 – fragmented tool; 6 – mesial blade fragment. Drawings – M. Gurova.