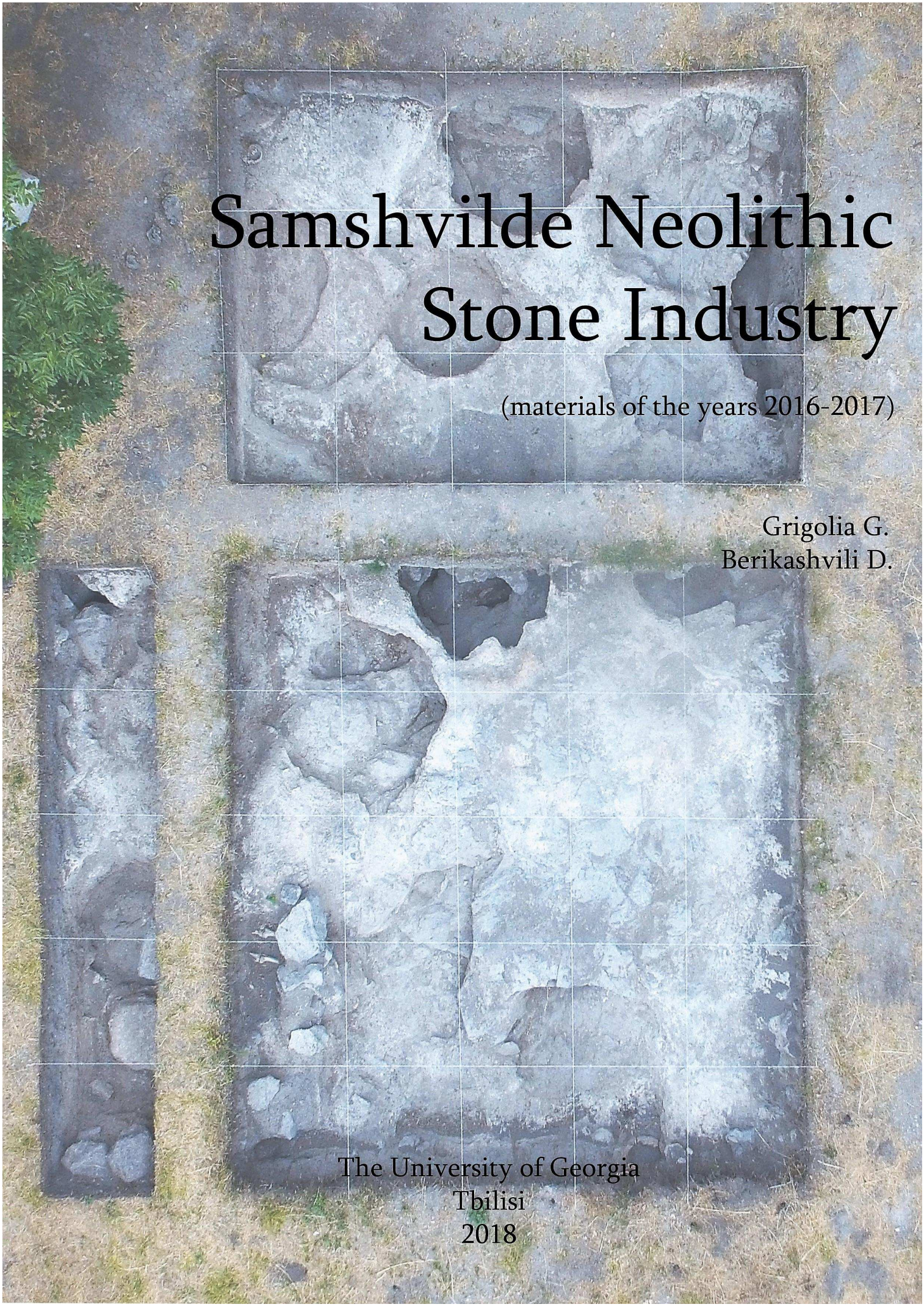

Samshvilde Neolithic Stone Industry

(materials of the years 2016-2017)

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Key Words

Samshvilde, Samshvilde Archaeology, Samshvilde Archaeological Excavations, Samshvilde Neolithic, Neolithic Scrapers, Neolithic Burials, Neolithic Arrowheads, Neolithic Blades.

Preamble

Samshvilde is one of the most distinguished cities among the ancient Caucasian cities and has a very convenient location. In particular, it is located on the cape which represents 150-200 m high basalt massive created at the confluence of Khrami and Chivchava rivers (pic.1). Trace of human activity in Samshvilde is observed from the ancient times which was actually confirmed by Samshvilde archaeological expedition of the University of Georgia (Berikashvili D., Grigolia G., Bukhsianidze M., Gabunia T., Odilavadze D., Kebuladze N. 2015-2016).

The 2016-2017 field season appeared to be particularly important when obsidian, flint and argillite tools were discovered in "middens" (pic.2) under medieval archaeological layers. It became clear from the beginning that this material did not belong to the medieval period and belonged to the culturally and chronologically different context, particularly, the final stage of the Stone Age – Neolith.

The purpose of this article is to publicize the tools of the above stone age obtained by Samshvilde archaeological expedition and enter it in scientific circulation. Despite the fact that the material is scarce yet, it is still rather significant and largely changes the idea about the history of Samshvilde.

Stone industry

Archaeological excavations conducted on “Sioni section" in Samshvilde in 2016 revealed absolutely new material under the medieval period layers which confirms the existence of the trace of prehistoric era human on Samshvilde territory.

The statistics of the discovered material showed that obsidian items represented by opaque and semi-transparent black rocks dominate in the collection of the newly discovered stone tools.

Obsidian flakes. The major part of the material is represented by short, wide fragments and flakes of random form. One of the massive sides of most of them is processed by steep retouch on a certain section as is common for scraping tools. The thin, sharp-edged side opposite these samples must have been used as a cutting-coulter knife which is confirmed by small size broken off pieces created on this section (tab. I. 5, 6). Part of such flakes resemble so-called "knives with a back". The longitudinal side of one of their part is broken and blunt side of the knife, i.e. space for supporting a finger convenient for use is created (tab I. 2, 3, 4, 7).

Lamellas. Three lamellas are included in Samshvilde collection, two of which are whole samples (tab II. 6, 7) (pic 3,4) and one has no head (tab II. 1) (pic. 5). There are also rectangular examples of four lamellas with broken head and end (tab II. 2, 3, 4, 5). All of them bear a trace of usage. Particularly intensely is processed one three-side lamella of rectangular form whose both longitudinal sides are cogged and grooved from the upper and lower plane (tab. II. 7). In our opinion, the latter is an independent tool and might have been used as a knife-scraper.

Scrapers. The end-retouched scraper is represented by eight pieces in Samshvilde stone items complex. It should be mentioned that all of them are formed on rough fragments and flakes and the retouched work section of each of them is arranged at the end of the tool.

Only two tools have the typical form common for the end-retouched scraper. One of them is processed on a lamella-like flake whose end part is processed by coarse retouch and belong to the category of tools with grooved blade (tab. III. 3) (pic. 6). One more tool processed on an average-size flake (tab. III. 4) whose one side is grooved by a steep retouch may be attributed to the same category. Among scraper tools included in the collection, depending on the processing of the blade, one is straight-bladed (tab. III. 7) (pic. 7), three have curved blades (tab. III. 2, 5, 6) and two may be considered as tools with indirectly retouched blades (tab. III. 1, 8). The two latter tools are processed on a depleted nucleus and a nucleus-like flake whose massive blow plane is additionally flaked.

This or that type of nuclei of finished form is not found in Samshvilde collection which may be attributed to the contingency caused by scarcity of material. It should not be excluded that the primary processing of the tool raw materials was carried out on the place of rock production. However, the possibility of such assumption is ruled out by existence of items of boulder with natural crust preserved on the surface of significant part of items included in the collection. The peculiar nature of the boulder crust preserved on the surface of the obtained materials suggests that the materials required for Samshvilde stone industry were found in Khrami and Chivchava valleys where stone pieces in the form of rolled stones, brought by the river from Tsalka-Trialeti obsidian deposits are gathered. One small obsidian sample is preserved in Samshvilde collection as well, with porous natural crust (tab. IV. 8).

Micro nucleus. In such circumstances, the fact of discovery of a sample resembling a pencil-form nucleus included in the complex is particularly noteworthy. Its head and end are sharpened and probably it was used for perforating similar to a drill-like tool (tab. IV. 7) (pic. 8).

Drill tools. Four drill-like perforating tools are discovered in Samshvilde. Among them two drilling crests from the lower plane of the flake are processed by coarse retouch (tab. V. 4, 6). The remaining two tools represent a smaller flake which have a perforating crest processed by a fine retouch (tab.V. 5, 7) (pic. 9,10).

Catting tools. Labor tools in the form of cutters are represented by three pieces in the complex. Two of them are simple cutters (tab. V. 1,3). One of them, in addition to the cutting flakes has one longitudinal side and the end opposite the cutting facet blunted by a steep retouch. All the above confirm that in this case we have a doubled tool – cutter-scraper (tab. V. 1). We may also consider as a doubled tool a third tool included in this group which is primarily

a typical middle cutter. It is made on an average-size flake at the end of which a cutting facet is created at the point of meetings of sides as a result of removal of each flake by transverse blows (tab.V. 2) (pic.11).

Sickle blades. Another noteworthy item among Samshvilde materials is a two-side flint lamella with four cogs executed by a steep retouch on one of its longitudinal sides. This tool is basically processed from the back and on the lower plane the retouch is used only for the purpose of designing of sickle cogs. In addition, one of the lateral sides of lamella is designed by a fine retouch from the lower plane suggesting that the tools must have been used placed in a wooden or bone casing, when retouching of the lateral side should serve a better use of the second similar tools placed in the handle (tab. IV. 4) (pic.12 1,2).

Cogged sickle blades appear since the inception of manufacturing industry [Nebieridze L. 2010. 85] and represent a typical tool for all monuments of the Neolithic period. It is assumed that such tools must have been used in agricultural activities as a sickle (the ancient tangible culture of Abkhazia, 2013. Tab. XXXVII 5-21).

One more original item found in Samshvilde complex is a two-side, knife-like obsidian lamella of rectangular form whose one side is entirely and the other side is partially processed by a creeping retouch (tab. IV. 3) (pic. 13). It is known that such tools are considered as sickle insertions for monuments of the so-called Shulaveri-Shomutepe culture.

One more interesting argillite tool is included in Samshvilde complex. It is based on a two-side rectangular lamella with a broken head and a crest resembling a bird's beak is created in the end, in the angle of a specially thinned side. The retouched side of the tool with a crest has an illuminating reflection created as a result of use suggesting that this tool must also represent an insertion of the blade of the tool to be used for reaping as a sickle (tab. IV. 6) (pic. 14 1,2). Such tools with a crest which were called "hook-shaped" due to the well-developed beaklike crest are wide spread in the Neolithic era and we consider them to be types of tools common for the so-called "Mountain Neolithic" culture (Grigolia G. 1977).

Spear blade tools and arrowheads. Among the separate artifacts of Samshvilde, obsidian spear blade or spear blade-like tools are particularly noteworthy (pic. 15). It is formed on a wide lamella-like flake of an equilateral triangular form. The wide end of the spear blade, where there is a plane of blow and a flake relief, is specially thinned, with lateral flakes removed by the blow on the edges which must be predetermined for holding the tool conveniently or attaching it to the handle (tab. IV. 2).

Tools similar to Samshvilde spear blade are presented in large amount in Tsopa former settlement complex (Nebieridze L. 2010. 53. tab. VI 1-4) and the chronological and cultural proximity of these monuments is noteworthy.

The arrowhead designed on a thin, transparent obsidian flake discovered in Samshvilde whose lower angles are rounded and the tool has acquired a heart shape seems to point to the stage and cultural proximity to Tsopa former settlement (tab. IV.1) (pic. 16). Both sides of the arrowhead are processed by thin flakes directed to the center by blows from the edges. Unfortunately, the point part of its top is broken, but anyway it resembles the straight stem arrowheads discovered on Beiuk Kerik former settlement of Eneolithic period in Azerbaijan.

Micro retoucher. Finally, we would like to note that Samshvilde stone material includes one quadrangular longitudinal section, small-size cobble stone item similar to a matchstick, which is surrounded by a groove in one end (tab.IV. 5) (pic. 17 1,2). The item resembles a miniature retoucher and might have been used as a hanger.

Thus, as we have seen, small but noteworthy material in the form of obsidian flakes and their production remains is obtained as a result of exploration works conducted during 2 field seasons (2016-17) on the territory of Samshvilde city-site. Such materials had not been discovered here before and this increases the significance of this artifact.

By peculiarities of the primary and secondary processing, Samshvilde material closely resembles Eastern Transcaucasia monuments dated by Neolithic period, such as Jermukhi, Selo, Nagutni I and II (Kalandadze. 1953. 8-10; Kalandadze, Tsereteli 1971. 62-78; Archaeology of Georgia. 1991. 216-217; 222. Liubin V. The first data about Mesolith of the Mountainous Caucasus (Ossetia), MIA, №26. 1966. Page 155-163) and Delisi former settlement (Abramishvili R. 1992. 63).

At the same time, in terms of chronology too, this material resembles the material of Sioni former settlement discovered in Kvemo Kartli (East Georgia) which dates back to the Late Neolithic period.

When discussing the above material of Samshvilde and chronological issues, particularly interesting is Tsopa former settlement located in East Georgia which also dates back to the late Neolith (Nebieridze, 2010. 7). Undoubtedly, Samshvilde is a monument belonging to Tsopa-Sioni culture which points to existence of a former settlement of the Late Neolith and Eneolith period (7^{th}-6^{th} millenniums B.C.) on the territory of the medieval city-site Samshvilde at the confluence of Khrami and Chivchava.

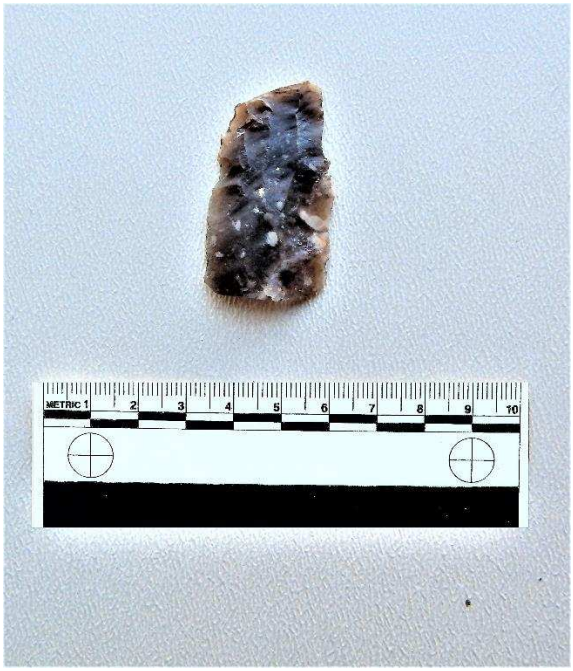
It has already been mentioned that Samshvilde stone material derives from the disturbed cultural layer whose tools bear no trace of rolling and displacement. This makes us think that the main stratum of origin of this material, i.e. central sections of Neolithic former settlement must be located somewhere near.

Pic. 1

Pic.2

Pic.3

Pic.4



Pic.5

Pic.6

Pic.7

pic.8

Pic. 9

Pic.10

Pic.11

Pic.12.1.

Pic. 12.2

Pic.13

Pic.14.1

Pic.14.2

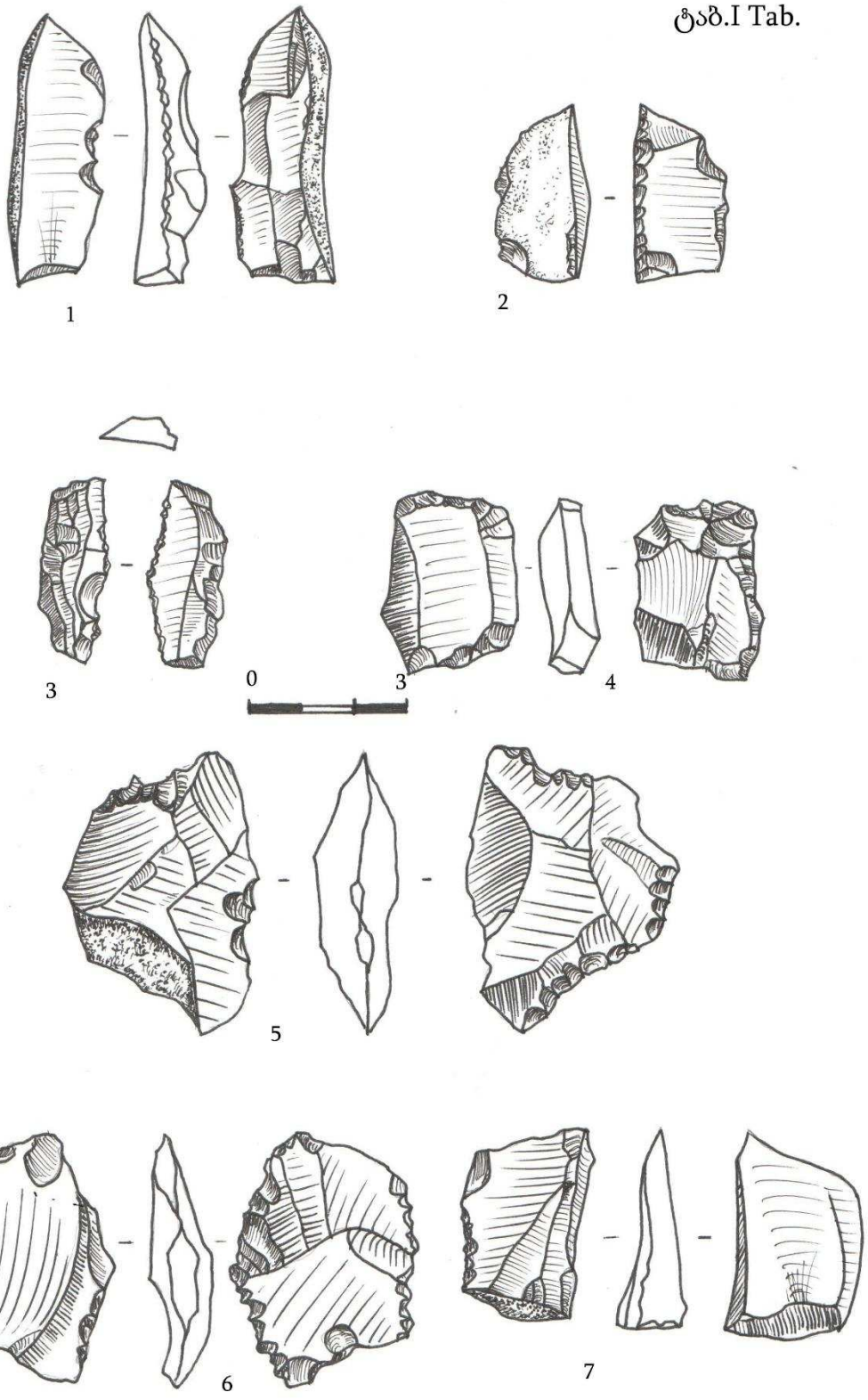
Pic.15

Pic.16

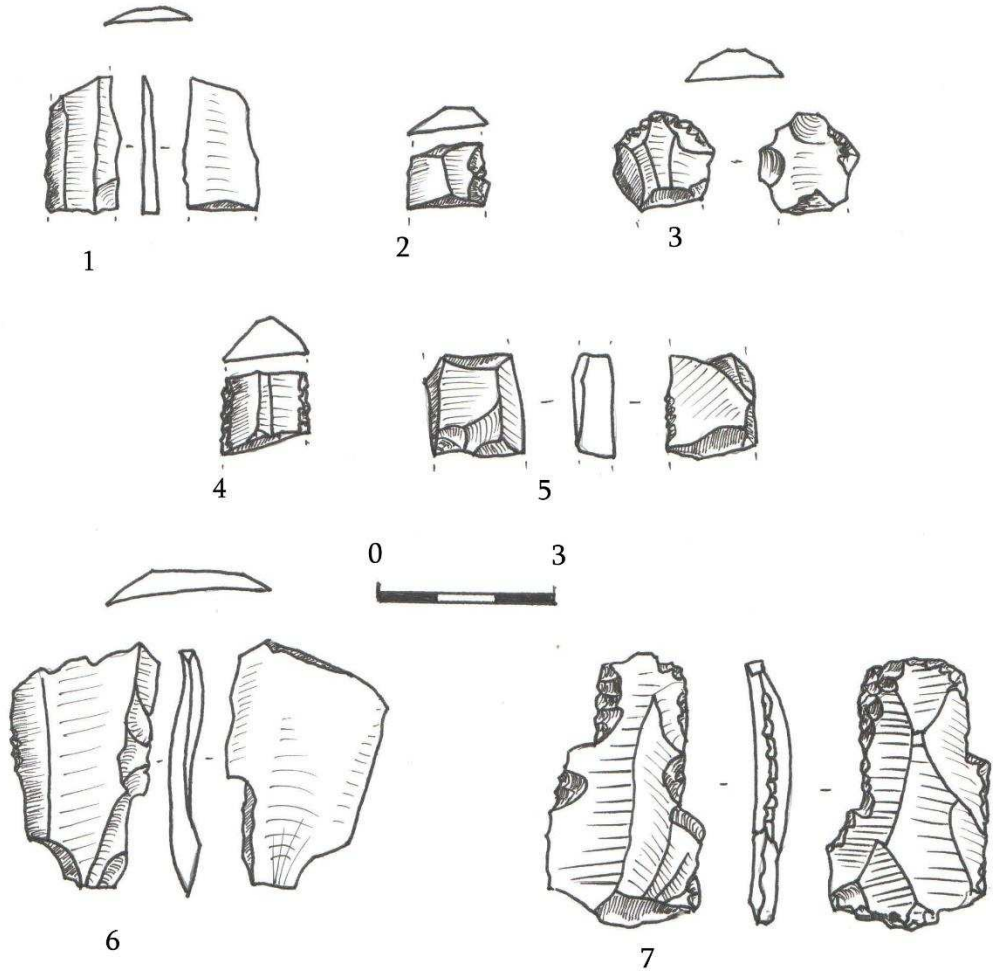
Pic. 17.1

Pic. 17.2

ტაბ.I Tab.



ტაბ. II Tab.



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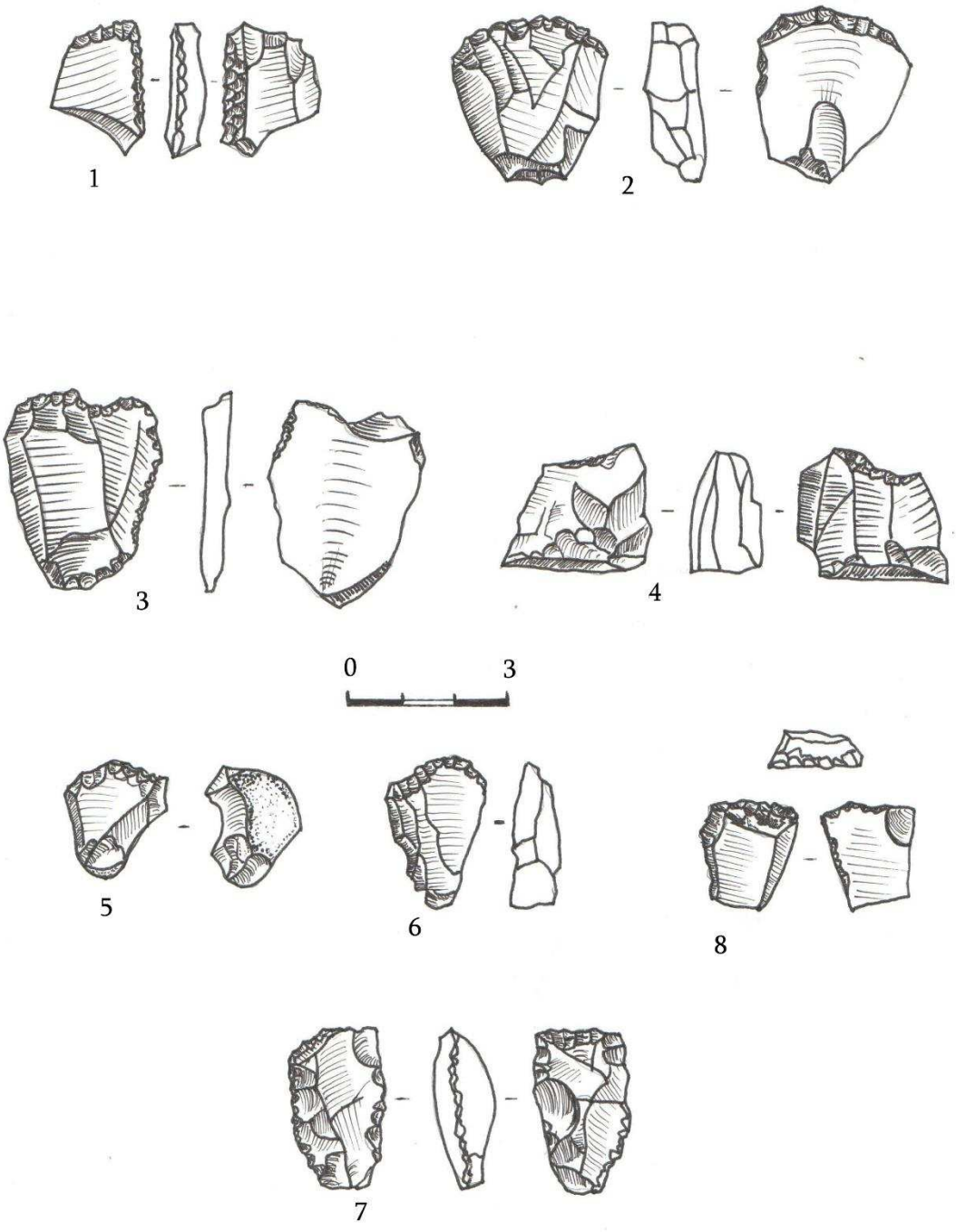

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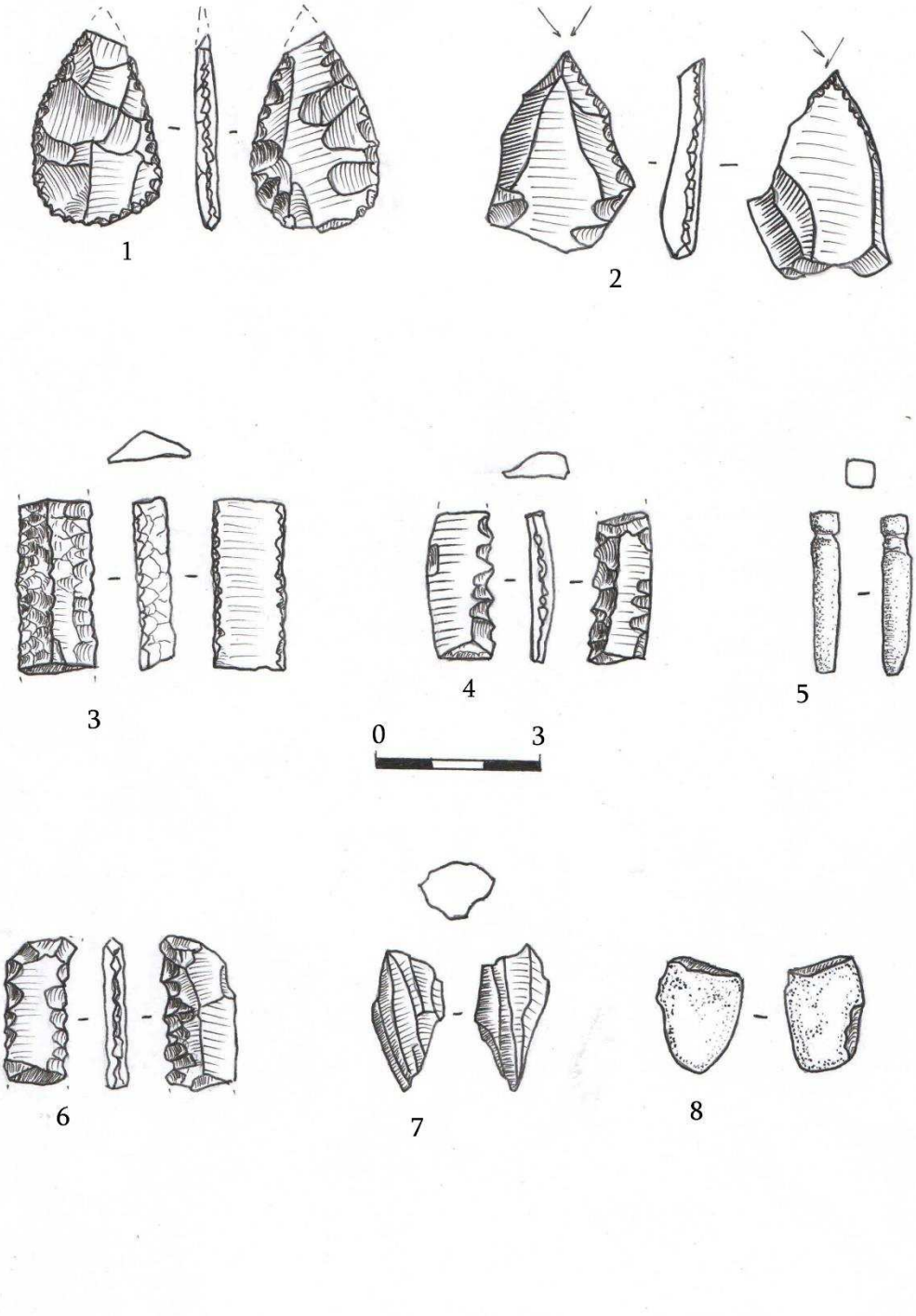

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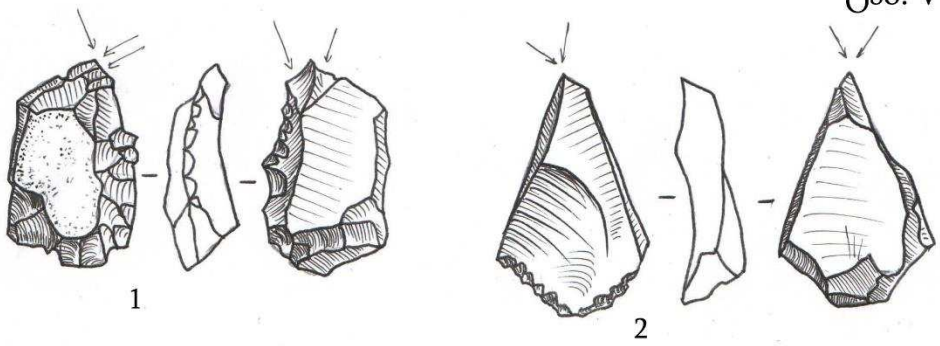

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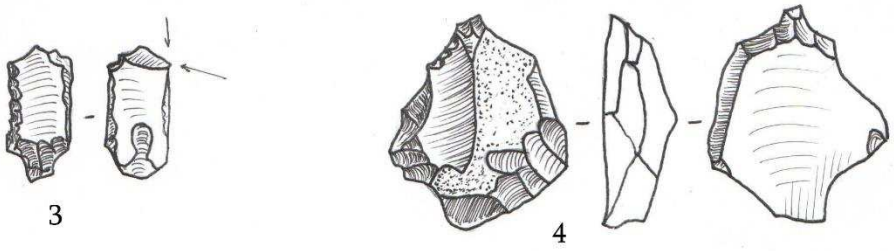

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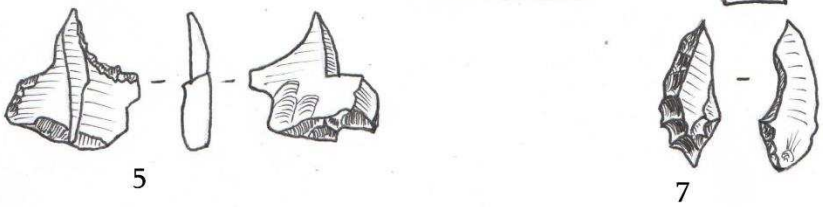

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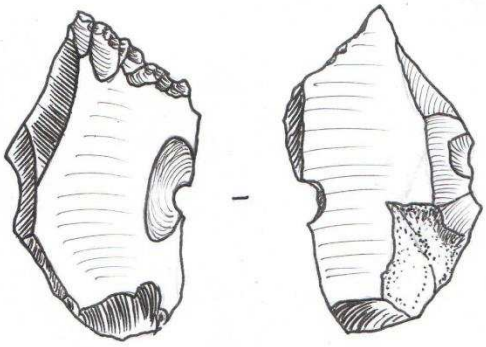

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