

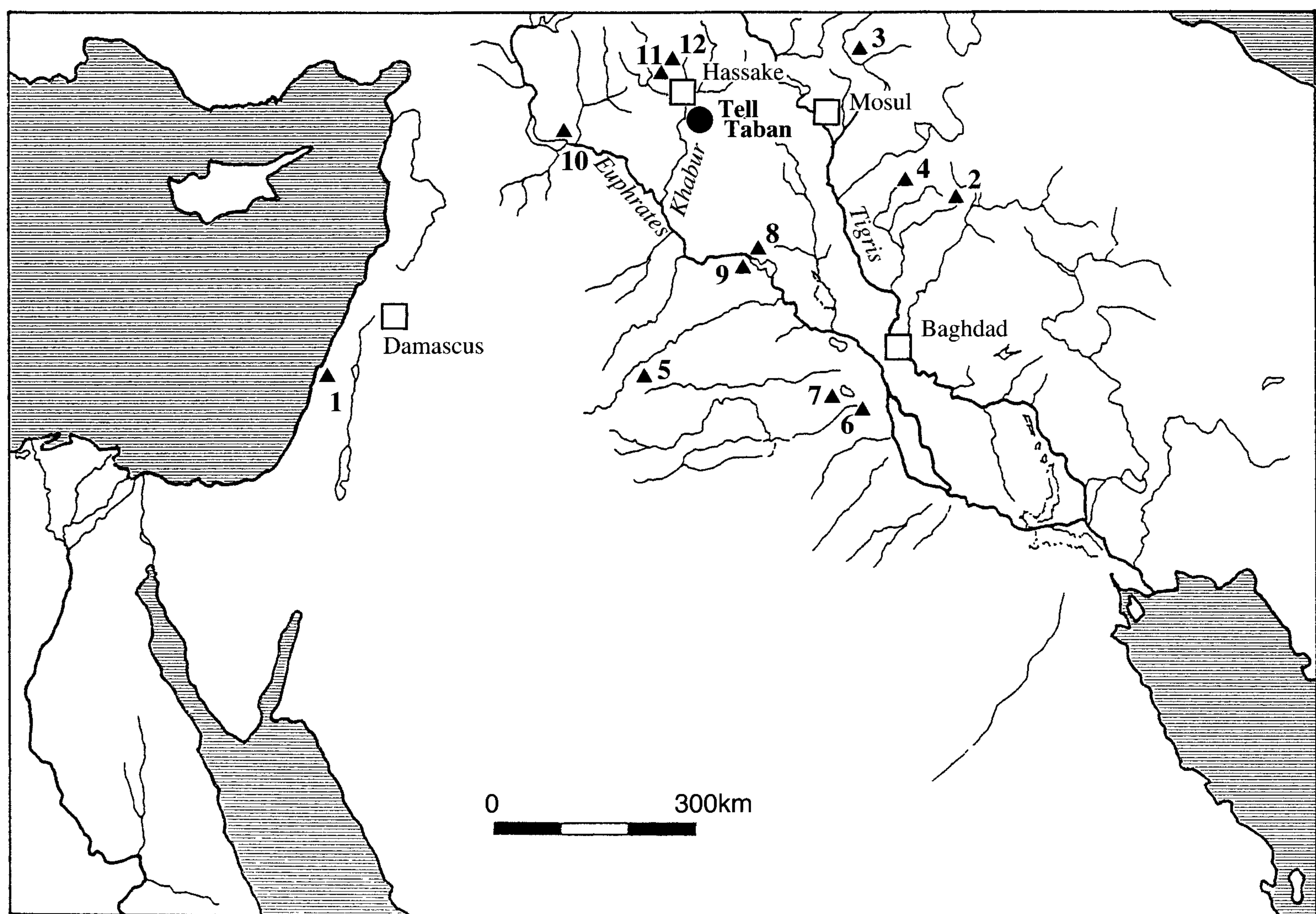
## LITHIC ARTIFACTS FROM TELL TABAN, HASSAKE, NORTH-EAST SYRIA

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### Introduction

In September to November of 1997, 1998 and 1999, the archaeological mission from the Institute for Cultural Studies of Ancient Iraq, Kokushikan University, Tokyo headed by this author excavated the Mittanian/Assyrian site of Tell Taban, located on the east bank of the Middle Khabur in the suburbs of the city of Hassake, 500 km north-east of Damascus, the capital city of the Syrian Arab Republic (Fig. 1).

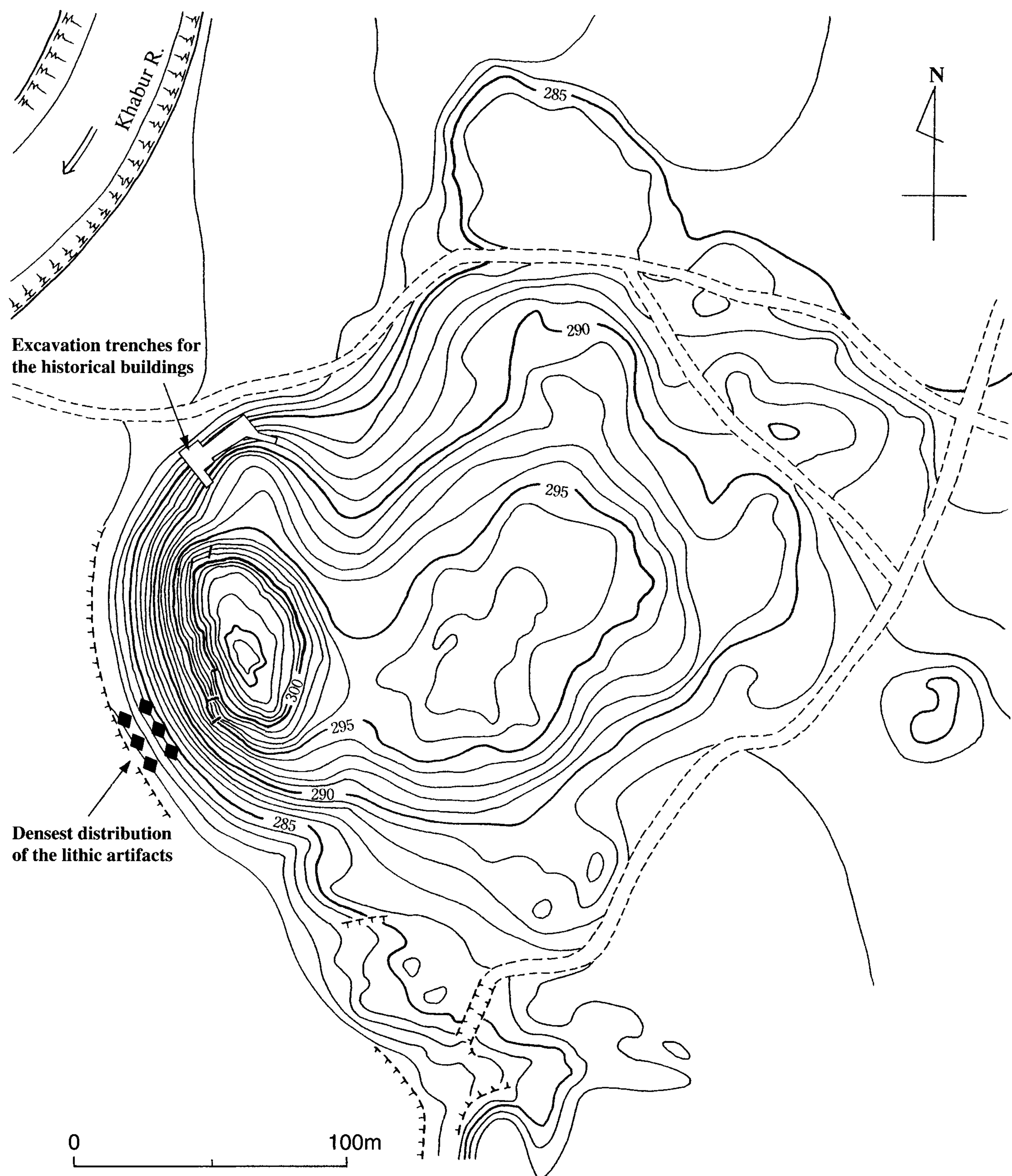
Tell Taban was artificially founded in the Mittanian period at the edge of a fluvial terrace of the River Khabur or a terrace associated with lake<sup>1)</sup>, most probably having been formed in the Pleistocene. Later in the Middle Assyrian period, this site was enlarged with bigger buildings such as palaces and temples, constructed upon the Mittanian structures (see Ohnuma et al. [1999; 2000; 2001]



**Fig. 1** Map showing the location of Tell Taban and the sites mentioned in the text

1: Tabun Cave, 2: Hazar Merd Cave, 3: Shanidar Cave, 4: Tarjil, 5: Wadi Hauran near Rutba, 6: Tar Jamal, 7: Abje, 8: Masnaa, 9: 'Usiyeh, 10: Rhaiyat, 11: Menaake, 12: *west of Tell Baqar*

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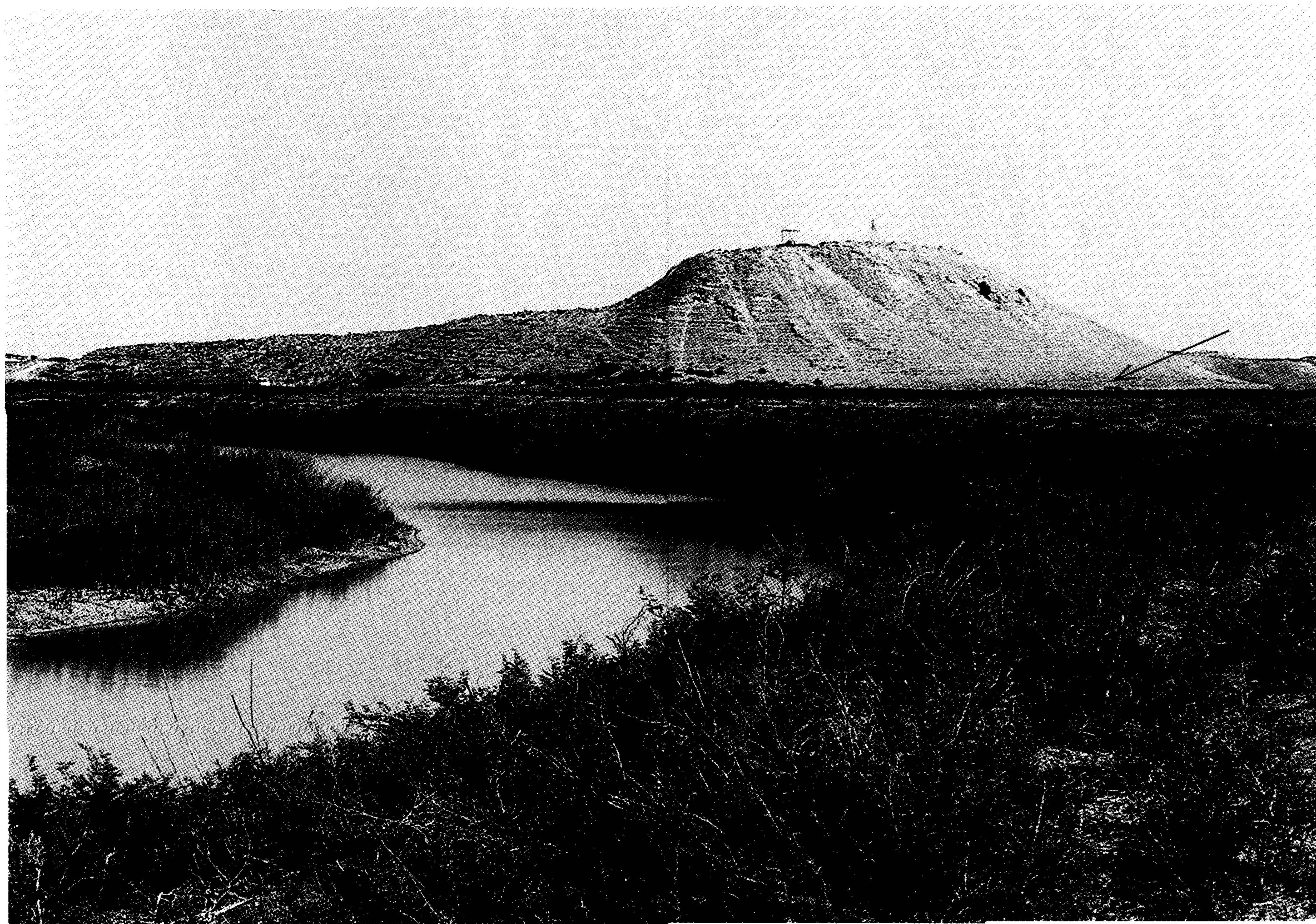
**Fig. 2** Contour map of Tell Taban

for preliminary reports of the excavational results).

During the first excavation season in 1997, maps of Tell Taban and of its close neighbourhood were completed by Yasuyoshi Okada, who joined the mission to survey the topography of the site and its surroundings (Fig. 2). This topographical survey clarified that Tell Taban covered the area of 350 m in the north-south direction and 330 m in the east-west. The foot of the tell was calculated to 280 m a.s.l. (above sea level) using the bench-mark (306 m a.s.l.) fixed on the top of the tell, and the then river-bed was calculated to 275 m a.s.l. [Ohnuma et al. 1999: pp. 3–5].

At the same time, we collected lithic artifacts from the foot of the tell, some 5 m higher than the river-bed, as well as from the surface of the terrace. They were sparsely scattered all around the tell at almost the same height, and the area densest in their distribution was in the western part of the tell, along the cotton field cultivated by modern villagers (Figs. 2 and 3).

Though small in number, the collection on the whole was determined, in terms of its overall techno-typological features, as a Middle Palaeolithic material. After we had finished the first season,



**Fig. 3** Tell Taban seen from the west  
(the arrow indicating the area where the lithic artifacts were densely distributed)

therefore, this author presented a brief report on the collection in Volume XX of this journal *Al-Rāfidān* [Ohnuma et al. 1999: pp. 5–7].

In the second and third seasons again, we collected similar artifacts from the same area, thereby adding several specimens to those collected in the first season.

In the present paper, this author describes the specimens collected in all the working seasons, to present unnegligible information to Palaeolithic research in the Khabur region.

### **Description of the lithic artifacts**

No outcrops of raw material flint rocks are seen in the surroundings of Tell Taban, and the flint pebbles distributed at the foot of the tell are small, the biggest being roughly of the size of adult's fist. The collected artifacts, made from these chert- or agate-like flint pebbles and grey and light- to dark-brown in colour, exhibit scarce trace of abrasion caused by rolling action. It is not very likely, therefore, that they were carried to this place by natural action from very far away. It is rather likely that they were manufactured at this place using these flint pebbles, which had been distributed in this area ever since the Pleistocene period. Some specimens are heavily edge-damaged, and patinated white to a considerable degree.

The collection composed of 42 specimens comprises cores, débitage pieces, and unretouched tool-flakes such as Levallois and pseudo-Levallois points (Table 1) (Figs. 4 to 6). In a good accordance with the size of the raw material flint pebbles, the artifacts are small, within the dimensional range of the raw material. As seen in Table 2 showing the sizes of the artifacts by categories, the biggest artifact in the whole collection is one of the prismatic cores with uni-directional flake scars, measuring 91 mm long, 76 mm wide and 48 mm thick, and the smallest is one of the cortical débitage pieces, measuring 24 mm long, 22 mm wide and 11 mm thick.

**Table 1** Inventory of the lithic artifacts from Tell Taban

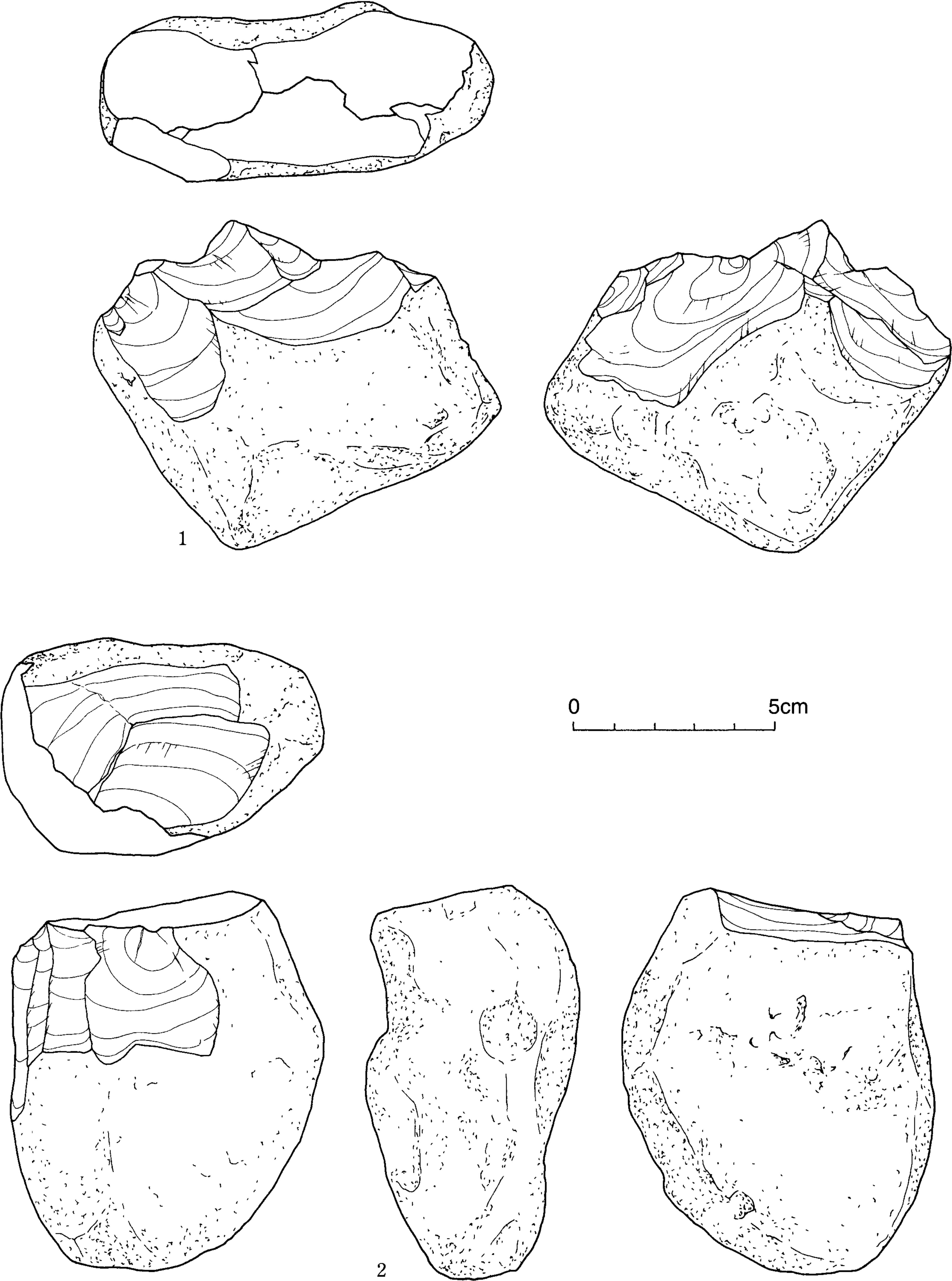
<b>Cores</b>	
Levallois flake cores	6
Levallois point cores	3
Discoidal cores	2
Prismatic cores	
with uni-directional flake scars	3
with bi-directional opposed flake scars	1
Pyramidal cores	1
Globular cores	1
Cores with few flake scars	1
<b>Débitage pieces</b>	
Cortical débitage pieces	9
Non-cortical débitage pieces	13
<b>Unretouched tool-flakes</b>	
Levallois points	1
Pseudo-Levallois points	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>

**Table 2** Mean sizes (mm) of artifacts by categories, and main types of striking platforms of cores and of butts of débitage pieces

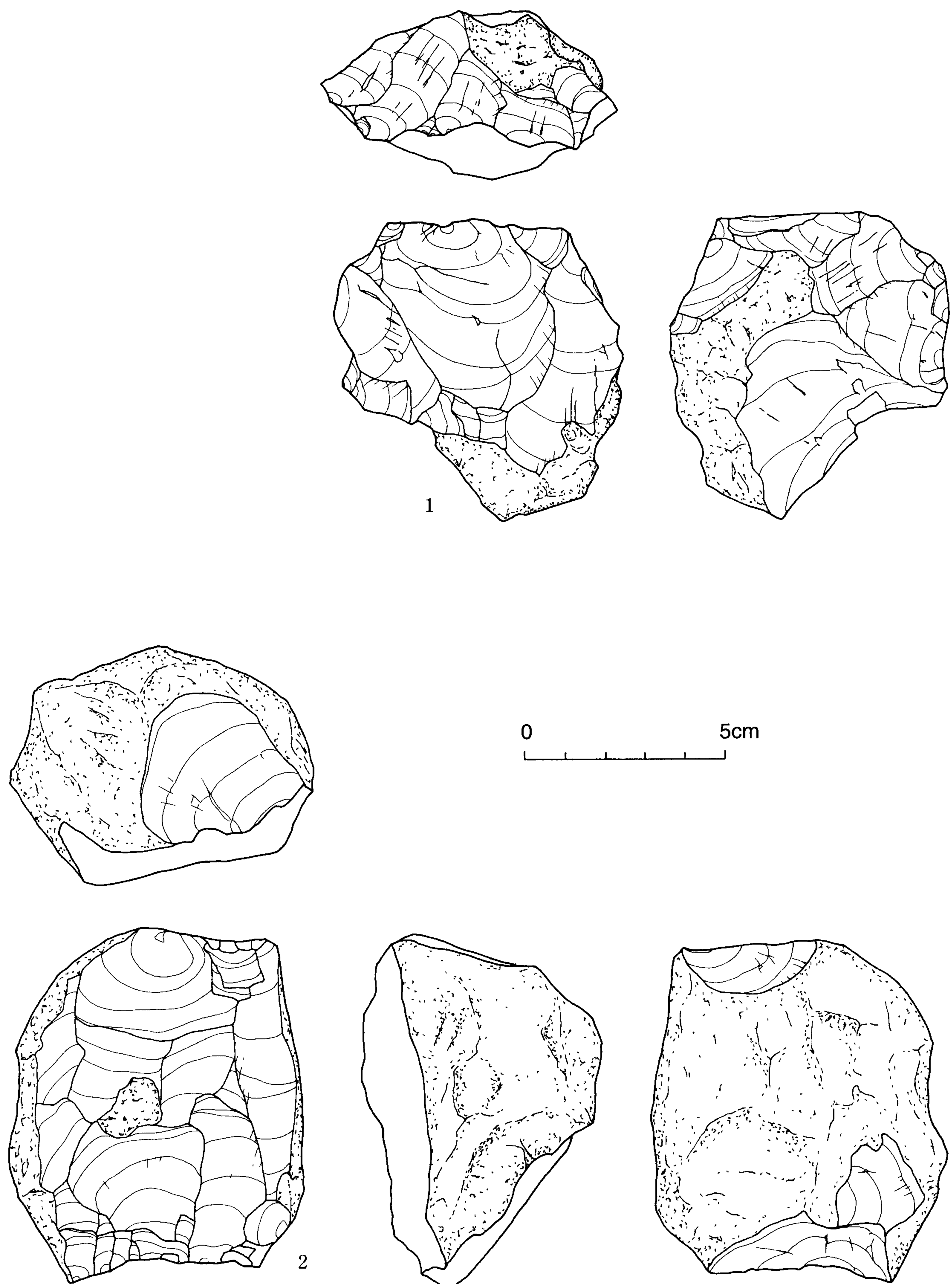
	Length	Width	Thickness	Striking platforms/butts
<b>Cores</b>				
Levallois flake cores	40.5	35.5	13.7	CMF/CDF
Levallois point cores	59.0	59.3	27.7	CMF/PL
Discoidal cores	52.5	50.5	19.0	CDF
Prismatic cores with uni-directional flake scars	61.7	55.3	39.0	PL
Prismatic core with bi-directional opposed flake scars	81.0	74.0	56.0	PL
Pyramidal core	47.0	55.0	30.0	PL
Globular core	93.0	71.0	70.0	PL
Core with few flake scars	84.0	101.1	44.0	PL
<b>Débitage pieces</b>				
Cortical débitage pieces	46.9	31.1	13.2	PL/CORT
Non-cortical débitage pieces	46.0	34.0	11.5	PL/CDF
(Mean width of the butts of the Cortical and Non-cortical débitage pieces is 16.6 mm, and the mean butt thickness is 8.1 mm)				
<b>Unretouched tool-flakes</b>				
Levallois point	44.0	28.0	6.0	CMF
(The butt width is 27.0 mm, and the butt thickness is 6.0 mm)				

CORT: Cortical; PL: Plain; CDF: Convex dihedral faceted; CMF: Convex multiple faceted

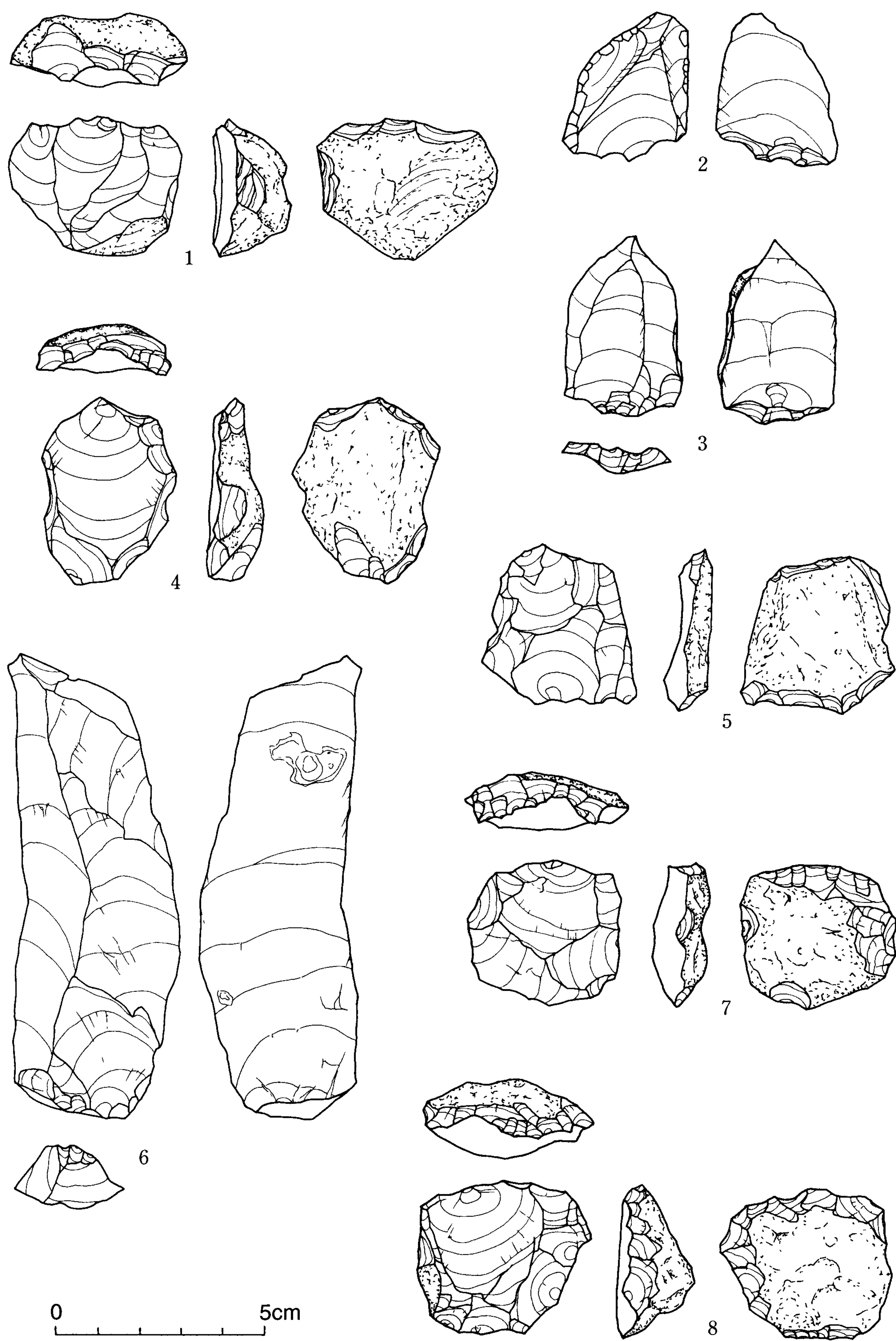




**Fig. 4** Lithic artifacts from Tell Taban (1)



**Fig. 5** Lithic artifacts from Tell Taban (2)



**Fig. 6** Lithic artifacts from Tell Taban (3)

### Middle Palaeolithic of West Asia

Regular research of the Middle Palaeolithic of West Asia was initiated with the excavations at the site of the Tabun Cave (No. 1 in Fig. 1) at Mount Carmel, Israel. Between 1929 and 1934, Garrod excavated the site five times, later describing three Middle Palaeolithic layers unearthed through the excavations, Layers D, C and B. Garrod nominated these three layers Lower Levalloiso-Mousterian, Lower Levalloiso-Mousterian and Upper Levalloiso-Mousterian, respectively [Garrod and Bate 1937].

In her 1937 report published jointly with Bate, Garrod described the Lower Levalloiso-Mousterian of Layer D as having triangular Levallois flakes, finely-made Mousterian points, side scrapers, burins, and notched pieces. She also characterized this layer with Levallois cores for triangular flakes and blade cores, both with faceted striking platforms. The Lower Levalloiso-Mousterian of Layer C was described as having broad Levallois flakes, side scrapers, burins and notched pieces. She stated that this layer was less numerous in Mousterian points than Layer D. And, the Upper Levalloiso-Mousterian of Layer B was described as having Levallois flakes of triangular or broad shapes, Mousterian points made on triangular Levallois flakes, and Levallois cores for broad flakes. She also stated that the retouched pieces such as side scrapers were far more numerous than in Layer C [*ibid*].

In 1975, three phases of the Levalloiso-Mousterian of the Levant (Lebanon, Syria and Palestine) were proposed by Copeland, on the basis of the Tabun sequence. Copeland's first phase was modelled by Tabun D, which she characterized with one-axis methods of preparation of Levallois cores and laminar, triangular parallel-sided blanks struck off along the same axis as the core preparation. The second phase modelled by Tabun C was characterized with the virtual absence of Levallois points, and with the dominant presence of broad Levallois flakes and pseudo-Levallois points. The third phase, modelled by Tabun B, was characterized with the standard production of Levallois points from either one axis or radially prepared cores, and flakes that were light and thin and mostly laminar [Copeland 1975].

The Middle Palaeolithic of the Zagros Mountains in Iraq and Iran is different from that of the Levant. The cave site of Hazar Merd (No. 2 in Fig. 1) in North Iraq was excavated by Garrod in 1928. She described the material from Layer C of this site as the Mousterian with side scrapers and elaborately-made Mousterian points, elongated in often cases. It was also described that the flakes were elongated and approached blades in many cases. Levallois methods of flaking were not reported [Garrod 1930].

The cave site of Shanidar (No. 3 in Fig. 1), also in North Iraq, was excavated by Solecki in 1951. From Layer D of this site, a Middle Palaeolithic material was unearthed. The material included Mousterian points resembling the Hazar Merd specimens, side scrapers on elongated flakes, retouched flakes, and medium- to small-sized non-Levallois cores. Solecki described this material to resemble the material from Hazar Merd Layer C [Solecki 1952; 1953; 1955].

As early as the year of 1928, Garrod reported a Middle Palaeolithic surface collection from Tarjil (No. 4 in Fig. 1) near Kirkuk, Iraq. The collection comprised Levallois cores and Levallois flakes and points [Garrod 1928].

In 1960, the Field Museum North Arabian Desert Expeditions of 1927–1950 reported materials which they had collected from the surface in the border areas of Syria, Jordan and Iraq [Field (ed.) 1960]. Included in these collections, in addition to Lower and Upper Palaeolithic materials, was a Middle Palaeolithic material. This Middle Palaeolithic material was described by Garrod as the Levalloiso-Mousterian comprising Levallois cores, Levallois flakes and points, Mousterian points, and side scrapers [Garrod 1960: 111–124].

In the western part of Iraq near the Jordanian border, the Tokyo University Iraq-Iran Archaeological Expedition of 1956–1957 collected lithic artifacts within the area along the Wadi



Hauran running near Rutba (No. 5 in Fig. 1), amounting to some 140 specimens. This collection was later analyzed by Nishiaki and Fujii. After analyzing some 50 specimens chosen as Middle Palaeolithic artifacts from the collection, these authors correlated them to a late variant of the Levantine Mousterian modelled by Tabun B, on the basis of the presence of Levallois flake cores and, in particular, a Jerf Ajla type core [Nishiaki and Fujii 1986].

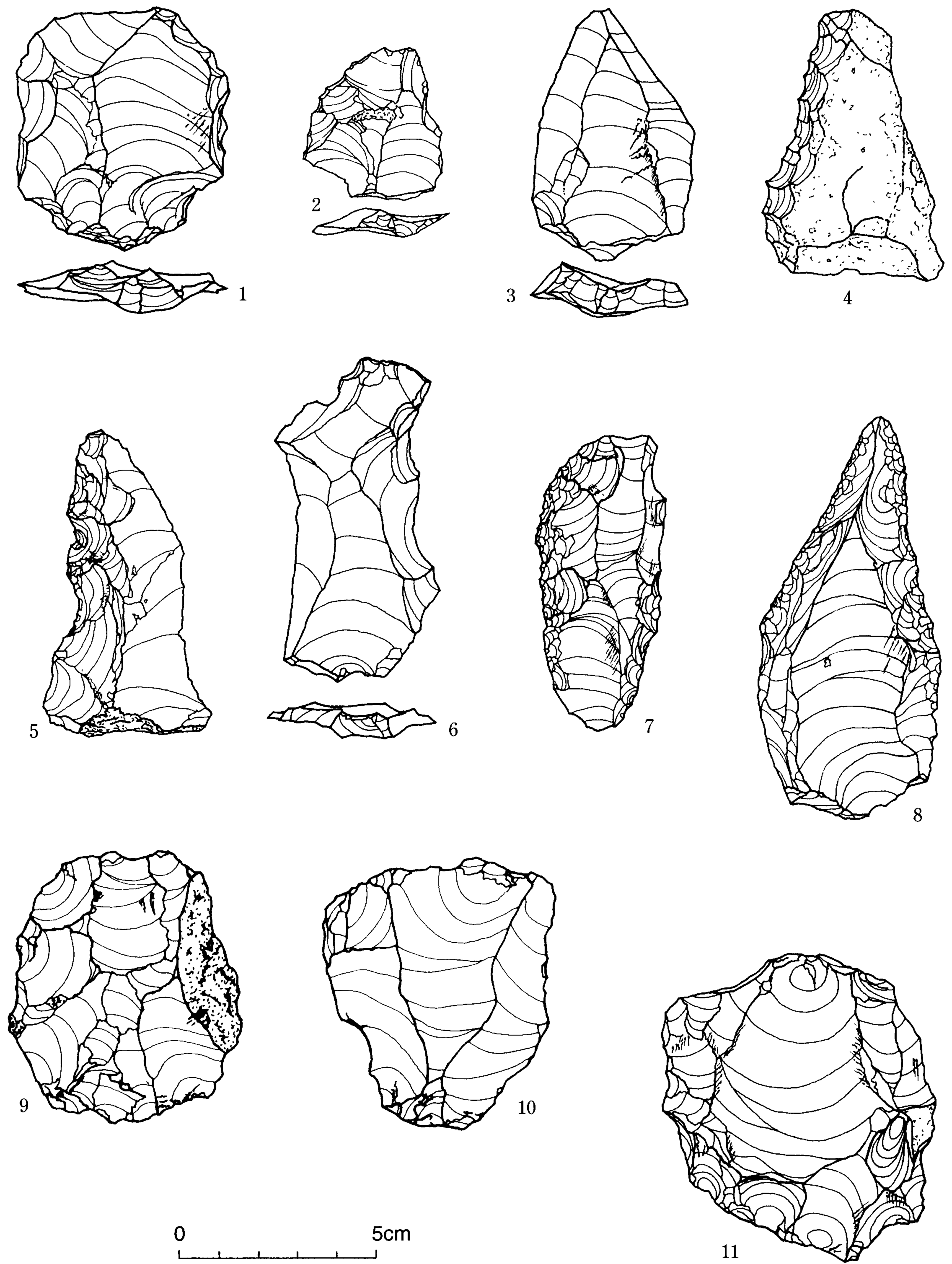
In 1973 and 1975, the Archaeological Expedition to Iraq from Kokushikan University collected lithic artifacts on a rocky fan in the South-western Desert near Kerbala, Iraq. From this open-air site which they named Tar Jamal (No. 6 in Fig. 1), Middle Palaeolithic artifacts composed of some 1,200 specimens were collected. The collection, made from agate-like flint in most cases, comprised discoidal cores, prismatic cores, and Levallois cores of the flake and point types. Levallois flakes/blades/points and retouched pieces such as Mousterian points, burins, denticulated pieces, perforators, and side scrapers were also included [Ohnuma 1976; 1984/85] (Fig. 7). In terms of techno-typological features, this material is a Middle Palaeolithic product, most probably having been related to the Levantine Mousterian modelled by Tabun B, characterized by Levallois flakes and points.

In the 1975 working season, the Archaeological Expedition to Iraq from Kokushikan University also collected Middle Palaeolithic artifacts in the desert area near Tar Jamal, on the top surface of a small, natural hill called Abje (No. 7 in Fig. 1), 10 m high from its surroundings. Excluding later specimens from the collection composed of 210 pieces, Middle Palaeolithic artifacts amounted to some 120. These were made from agate-like flint and heavily abraded. Levallois and discoidal cores with faceted striking platforms, and flakes detached from these types of cores were included. In shape, the cores from Abje are similar to the Tar Jamal specimens, but are much smaller [Wada 1984/85] (Fig. 8).

In the Haditha region in the north-western part of Iraq, the mission from the Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University directed by Chmielewski and Kozłowski conducted, in 1981 to 1983, systematic geological/geomorphological and archaeological research in the Masnaa area (No. 8 in Fig. 1). During this research, they outlined the sequence of six terraces of the River Euphrates of the area, dating them on the bases of techno-typology and states of preservation of the collected lithic assemblages [Chmielewski and Kozłowski 1985]. In addition to the Lower Palaeolithic material from Terrace 4 with heavily rounded chopper/chopping-tools and Abbevillian-type hand-axes, they collected Middle Palaeolithic materials from Terraces 4 to 6. Included in the Middle Palaeolithic materials were Levallois cores of flake, blade, and point types, retouched pieces such as side scrapers and denticulated pieces, and Levallois flakes and points. Kozłowski who was in charge of the surveys of lithic materials stated that the Middle Palaeolithic sites on Terraces 4 to 6 had been workshops to exploit flint raw material from nearby outcrops. He also stated that the Middle Palaeolithic materials from Terraces 4 to 6 could be correlated to the Middle-Eastern Mousterio-Levalloisian, dated to the Eemian Interglacial through the Early Würm [*ibid*].

Also in the Haditha region, the Archaeological Expedition to Iraq from Kokushikan University of 1982 collected Middle Palaeolithic artifacts on a rocky fan at the site 'Usiyeh (No. 9 in Fig. 1), 15 m higher than the surface of the River Euphrates. The collection was composed of some 400 artifacts, including 172 cores and 190 débitage pieces. All of the artifacts were made from agate-like flint. The cores comprised prismatic cores, with a single or opposed two striking platforms, discoidal cores, and Levallois cores of the flake, blade and point types. The débitage pieces comprised cortical, partially-cortical, and non-cortical flakes such as Levallois flakes, blades and points, and pseudo-Levallois points (Fig. 9). In all probability, the 'Usiyeh material was related to the Levantine Tabun B type Mousterian with Levallois flakes and points [Ohnuma 1998].

In the Lower Balikh near the Middle Euphrates, Syria, Copeland collected Middle Palaeolithic artifacts at the site Rhaiyat (No. 10 in Fig. 1), which she described as having Levallois cores with centripetal or parallel preparation. Because nothing was found but cores and cortical flakes, she



**Fig. 7** Lithic artifacts from Tar Jamal

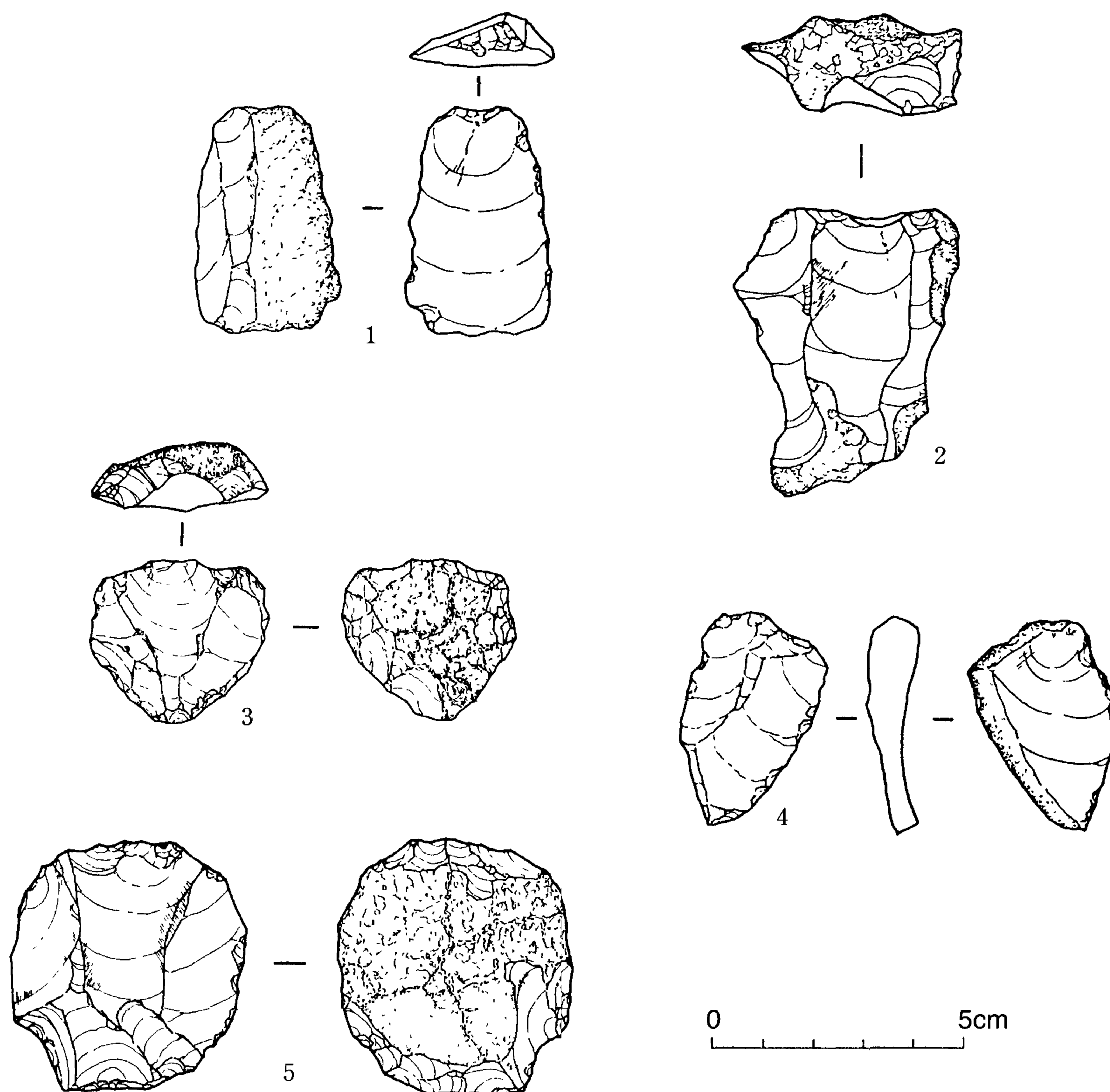


Fig. 8 Lithic artifacts from Abje

defined the site as a factory site [1981: 255].

At many places in the Khabur Basin near Hassake, more than ten Middle Palaeolithic open-air sites were mapped by the 1989–1992 Khabur Prospection Project directed by Lyonnet [Nishiaki 1992]. All of the sites were located on higher wadi/river terraces or hill slopes, among which the sites of Menaake (No. 11 in Fig. 1) and a wadi terrace *west of Tell Baqar* (No. 12 in Fig. 1) were representative. Cores and cortical flakes were large in quantity, but very few tools were collected, which led Nishiaki, who joined the 1990–91 projects and directed the 1991 prehistoric survey, to suggest that the two sites had been factory sites. Nishiaki also suggested a similarity of these materials to the Levantine Tabun Type C or B Mousterian, on the basis of the presence of Levallois flake cores and Levallois flakes [*ibid*].

### Concluding remarks

The lithic artifacts collected from the foot of Tell Taban is characterized by Levallois and discoidal cores, both with convex multiple faceted or convex dihedral faceted striking platforms.

In the Levant to the west-west-south from Hassake, Middle Palaeolithic materials similar to the Taban collection have been reported at many sites. In the Zagros regions in the east of the Tigris and Euphrates, however, no such materials have been so far reported, except a single collection from Tarjil, Iraq.

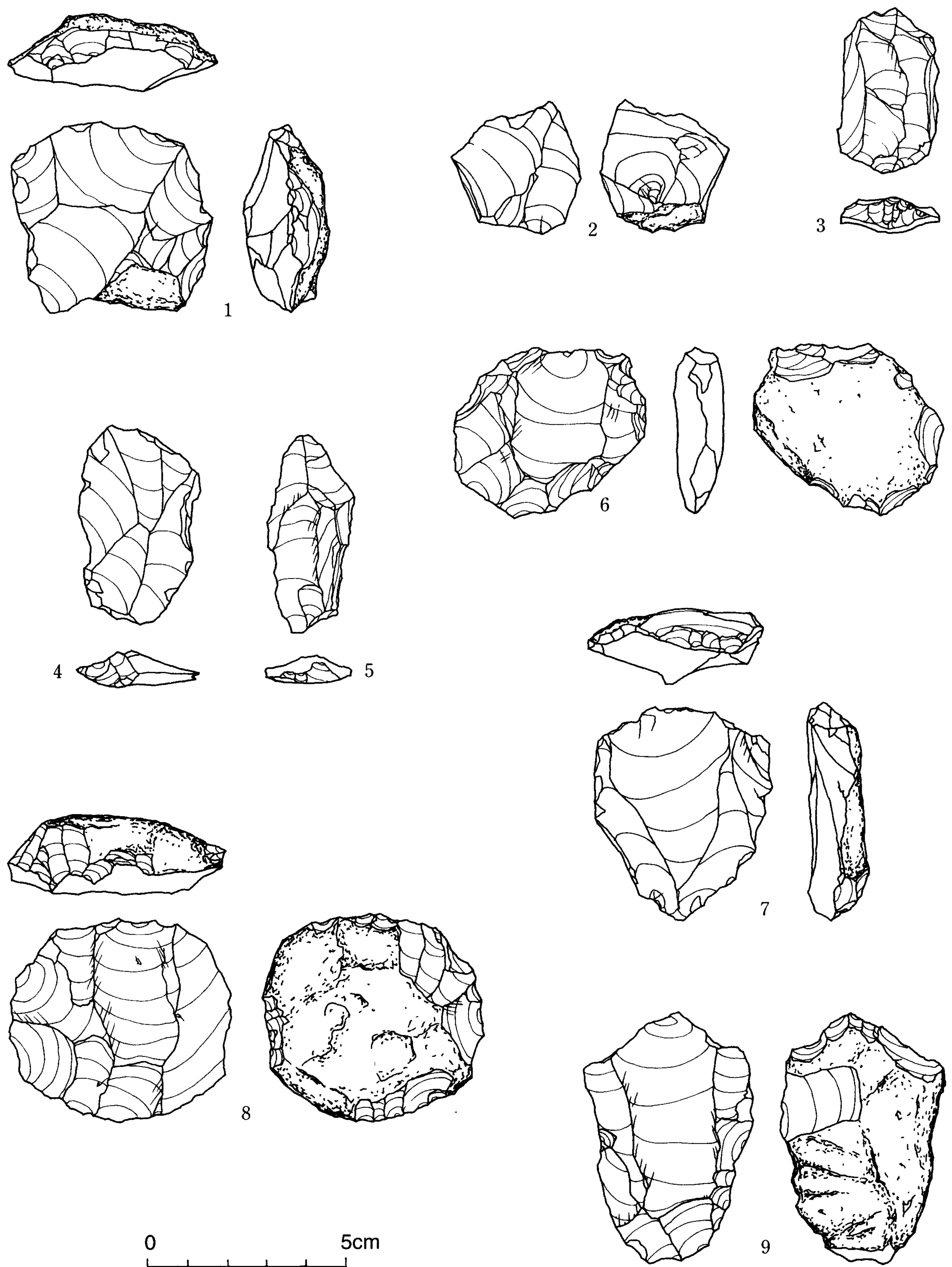


Fig. 9 Lithic artifacts from 'Usiyeh



It may be true that the Taban collection is too small in quantity to finally conclude concerning its cultural lineage. However, if we judge from the dominance of Levallois methods of flaking in the collection, we may safely say that this material had more or less relation to the Levantine Tabun Type B Mousterian, characterized by Levallois flakes and points.

It regrettably seems that not much attention was paid to Palaeolithic artifacts during excavations in the Hassake Salvage area, probably because such artifacts might have been considered as floats from some other places.

It is hoped that this short report could have suggested a possibility that the archaeological mounds in the Hassake Salvage area, if initially founded on Pleistocene terraces, involved Palaeolithic artifacts.

### Acknowledgement

The author thanks Mr. Seiji Kadowaki, who completed the illustrations of the lithic artifacts from Tell Taban and 'Usiyeh, which are printed in the present paper.

### Note

- 1) Details of the natural ground, on which Tell Taban was initially founded and from which the lithic artifacts were collected, are being clarified now by Professor Mitsuo Hoshino of the University of Nagoya through mineralogical analysis.

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## Explanation of lithic artifacts in Figs. 4 to 9

Fig. 4 Lithic artifacts from Tell Taban (1)

1. Core with few flake scars (Levallois or blade core representing the initial stage of reduction; seemingly not a used chopping-tool because the edge is not damaged)
2. Prismatic core with uni-directional flake scars (blade core representing the initial stage of reduction; probably a product of the Upper Palaeolithic or later period; the biggest artifact in the whole collection)

Fig. 5 Lithic artifacts from Tell Taban (2)

1. Levallois point core
2. Prismatic core with bi-directional opposed flake scars (many hinges existing due to hardness of the raw material)

Fig. 6 Lithic artifacts from Tell Taban (3)

1. Levallois point core (the striking platform resembling the “chapeau de gendarme” type)
2. Pseudo-Levallois point (the edge and butt heavily damaged)
3. Levallois point (atypical specimen with core side; the butt resembling the “chapeau de gendarme” type)
4. Levallois flake core
5. Discoidal core approaching Levallois flake core
6. Blade (either of the Middle Palaeolithic period or of the Upper Palaeolithic or later period)
7. Levallois flake core
8. Levallois flake core

Fig. 7 Lithic artifacts from Tar Jamal

1. Levallois flake
2. Levallois flake
3. Levallois point
4. Denticulated flake
5. Denticulated flake
6. Levallois blade
7. Side scraper on Levallois flake
8. Mousterian point on Levallois flake
9. Discoidal core
10. Levallois point core
11. Levallois flake core

Fig. 8 Lithic artifacts from Abje

1. Partially-cortical flake [Wada 1984/85: Fig.VI-1-4]
2. Levallois blade core (atypical specimen with cortex remaining) [Wada 1984/85: Fig.VI-1-3]
3. Levallois point core [Wada 1984/85: Fig.VI-1-2]
4. Naturally-backed pseudo-Levallois point [Wada 1984/85: Fig.VI-1-7]
5. Levallois flake core [Wada 1984/85: Fig.VI-1-1]

Fig. 9 Lithic artifacts from 'Usiyeh

1. Discoidal core
2. Pseudo-Levallois point
3. Levallois flake
4. Levallois flake
5. Levallois blade
6. Levallois flake core
7. Levallois point core
8. Levallois blade core
9. Levallois flake core