

THE CAUCASUS - LEVANT - ZAGROS: POSSIBLE RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE PALAEOLITHIC

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The Caucasus, Levant and Zagros are distinguished from other regions of Western Asia by the abundance of stratified cave sites and rich stone tool industries attributed to the Middle Palaeolithic. In general, the natural environments of these regions are sufficiently different; nevertheless the south-eastern part of the Caucasian isthmus (Transcaucasian upland) and the adjacent areas of the Zagros are so similar that they may be regarded as a single ecosystem. This fact has been noted, for example, by Ph. Smith who also pointed to probable relations of the Middle Palaeolithic of Iran with that of the Caucasus (Smith 1986).

Compared with the Mousterian stone industries of the Levant and Zagros, those of the Caucasus appear to differ in a high degree of variability. A distribution of different groups of the Caucasian industries (Fig. 1) seems to correlate with the latitudinal extension of three principal orographical provinces of the Caucasian isthmus: 1) the North-Caucasian plains connected with the southern Russian steppe; 2) the mountain system of the Great Caucasus in the middle part of the isthmus; 3) the volcanic Transcaucasian upland in the South. The glacial-mountain barrier of the Great Caucasus is not only the main watershed line but also the principal "cultural divide."

Within the North-Caucasian plains, Mousterian sites have not yet been found. The Mousterian industries of the northern slope of the Great Caucasus, located primarily within the Kuban river basin (Ilkskaia, Matuzka, Mezmay, Monasheskaia, Barakaevskaia caves, the Gubskij rockshelter N 1), resemble generally those of the Russian Plain and the Crimea. In spite of many local peculiarities of the assemblages, the North-Caucasian industries, characterized as a whole by non-Levallois technique and by a considerable proportion of bifacial tools, seem to belong to the outskirts of so-called East European Micoquian province (Zamiatnin 1934; Golovanova 1991; Lioubine 1994). A single exception is the industry of the lower layers at the Myshtulagty Lagat cave (the Northern Ossety) containing numerous Levalloisian blades and points (Gidjrati 1986), which are very similar to those from the Tskhinvalian occurrences located in Transcaucasia (see below).

The stone industries of the southern slope of the Great Caucasus and those of the Transcaucasian upland show both certain common "Caucasian" and local peculiarities; however, in some of them dim reflections of possible relations with the Levantine and Zagros Mousterian should be noted as well. Most of the Mousterian industries of the southern slope vary widely within the limits of the Typical Mousterian, or in some cases rather the Denticulate Mousterian, and show a low or moderate Levallois index (Lioubine 1984, 1989). Such industries were found in the group of sites located in the Sochian sea-side district (e.g., the caves Akhstyr, Vorontsovskaja) and in the East-Colchisian district of Georgia (the caves

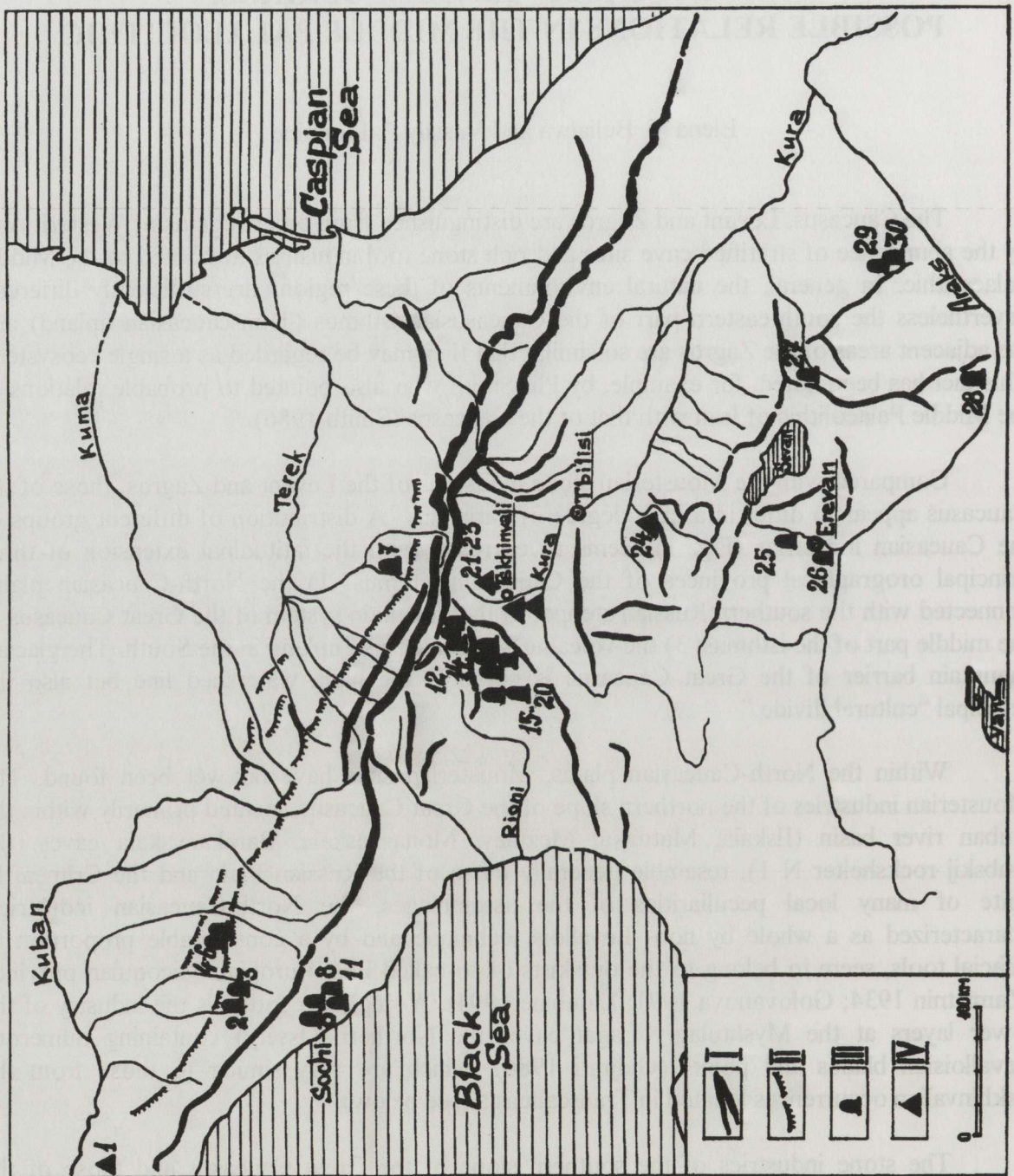


Fig. 1. Distribution of the Middle Palaeolithic sites in the Caucasus region. I - ridges; II - escarpments; III - the main cave sites (2: Matuzka, 3: Mezmay, 4-6: Barakaevskaia, Monasheskaia, Gubskij rockshelter N 1, 7: Myshtulagty-Lagat, 8-11: Akhstyr, Vorontsovskaja, Navalishenskaia, Kepshinskaia ets, 12-14: Kudaro I, Kudaro III and Tsona, 15-20: Sakajia, Ortvala, Samertskhle-klde, Ortvala-klde, Djrchula, Bronzovaia ets, 25: Lusakert I, 26: Erevan, 27: Zar, 28: Gazma, 29: Azykh, 35: Taglar); IV - the main open-air sites and occurrences (1: Ilaskaia, 21-23: Tamarasheni, Kusreti, Karkustakau, 24: Tsopi).

Sakajia, Ortvala, Bronzovaia, Samertskhleklde and some others (Tushabramishvili 1963; Nioradze 1992).

At the same time, in the Eastern Colchis and in the neighbouring region of the South Ossety, there is a group of Mousterian industries (the cave site Djrchula, the Mousterian levels of the caves Kudaro 1, 3 and Tsona, the open-air occurrences (Karkustakau, Tamarasheni, Kusreti) near the town of Tskhinvali (Lioubine 1977)) with as high values of IL, Ilam and IF as those of the "classic" Levalloisian industries of the Levant. A remote reminiscence of the blade-rich Levantine Mousterian industries may be seen in the assemblages of the sites Kudaro 1, 3, Tsona and Djrchula (Ilam=25-36,6; IL=48,6-73,9) where there is a large number of pointed blades (lames appointées) and elongated Mousterian points (Fig. 2-4). In spite of some local peculiarities of the retouching technique, these pointed forms particularly resemble those of the Hummalian industries. Regarding the Tskhinvalian group of industries (Fig.5-6), they clearly differ from the neighbouring cave assemblages in a relatively small percentage of the retouched tools, lesser values of IL (37,7-41,6) and Ilam (17,3-20,6), the shorter Levalloisian points and some other features.

The Mousterian industries of the Transcaucasian upland, bordering on Iran and Turkey, also suggest probable relations with the South. In the karstic caves of the eastern part of the Little Caucasus, there is a group of the industries made of flint and schist (Taglar, Gazma) which seem to be sufficiently close to those of the Zagros (Djafarov 1983; Lioubine 1984). This group of the Mousterian Transcaucasian industries differs from the Zagrosian ones in the higher Levallois and Blade indices (IL=38-53; Ilam=25-43) and in a considerable number of Levalloisian points (Fig.7). Nevertheless, these assemblages are similar to the Mousterian of the Zagros in such a complex of features as follows: 1) predominance of uni- and bi-directional primary flaking; 2) a large percentage of retouched tools, including different types of side-scrapers (e.g., double, convergent, déjeté ones) and variable points (Figs.8-10); 3) developed, often invasive and even stepped retouch, indicating a considerable degree of tool reduction; 4) use of the truncating-facetting techniques for tool fashioning (Fig.10); 5) a very small percentage of the Upper Palaeolithic forms and so on.

The characteristics of another Transcaucasian group of the industries made of obsidian and located in the lava grottos of the Ararat and Kelbadjar depressions (Lusakert, Erevanskaia, Zar) are not yet published in detail. According to the author of excavation (Eritsian 1975), the site of Lusakert contains four cultural horizons with different Mousterian industries: B - the Denticulate-Levalloisian variant rich in blades; C1 - the Levallois-Mousterian with a large number of the Levalloisian points(45%); C2 - the Tayac-Denticulate variant; D - the local variant of MTA (the Arzni-type industry). The industry of the site of Erevanskaia attributed generally to the Typical Mousterian is characterized by low values of IL and Ilam, a large number of various sidescrapers (52%), use of the truncating-facetting method and intentional breaking (Eritsian and Semenov 1971). The third industry (Zar), judging by brief preliminary reports, is similar to that of the Taglar.

Finally, the most outwardly archaic and exotic Mousterian (?) industry, contrasting absolutely with all of the aforementioned Caucasian Mousterian industries, was found in the open-air site of Tsopi located in southern Georgia. This andesite-porphyrific industry seems to

remind one of the Quina Mousterian because of a predominance of large, thick sidescrapers (73.5%), including mainly single lateral and transverse convex specimens accompanied with convergent and déjeté types. These sidescrapers are fashioned with scalar, often heavy, invasive and stepped retouch which in some cases is bifacial and plano-convex (Fig.11-13). Truncating-facetting technique was also used. Tools of the Upper Palaeolithic group are very rare. Provided the published tool description is sufficiently correct (Grigolia 1963; Lioubine 1977), the assemblage appears to contain as well several small hand-axes.

Certain features mentioned above make it possible to associate in some measure the Tsopi industry with the Jabrudian. In any case, until present, another parallel to Tsopi within Western Asia seems to be unknown. At the same time, the Tsopi industry differs from the Jabrudian in shorter proportions of tools, abundance of transverse sidescrapers including many specimens fashioned with interior thinning of the basal part, a smaller number of convergent sidescrapers and déjeté ones.

To summarize, certain Mousterian industries located to the south of the Great Caucasus manifest evident resemblance with both the Levantine Mousterian and that of the Zagros. However, some direct contacts may be postulated only with the latter. As to the Levant, it seems to be permissible to suppose rather remote genetic relations (dissemination of Levallois technique in a number of the mentioned Caucasian industries, "Jabrudian" aspect of the Tsopi industry). Finally, a lack or scarcity of bifaces in the Middle Palaeolithic industries of these three regions (except the northern part of the Caucasus) make it possible to assume a faraway common origin of their Mousterian traditions.

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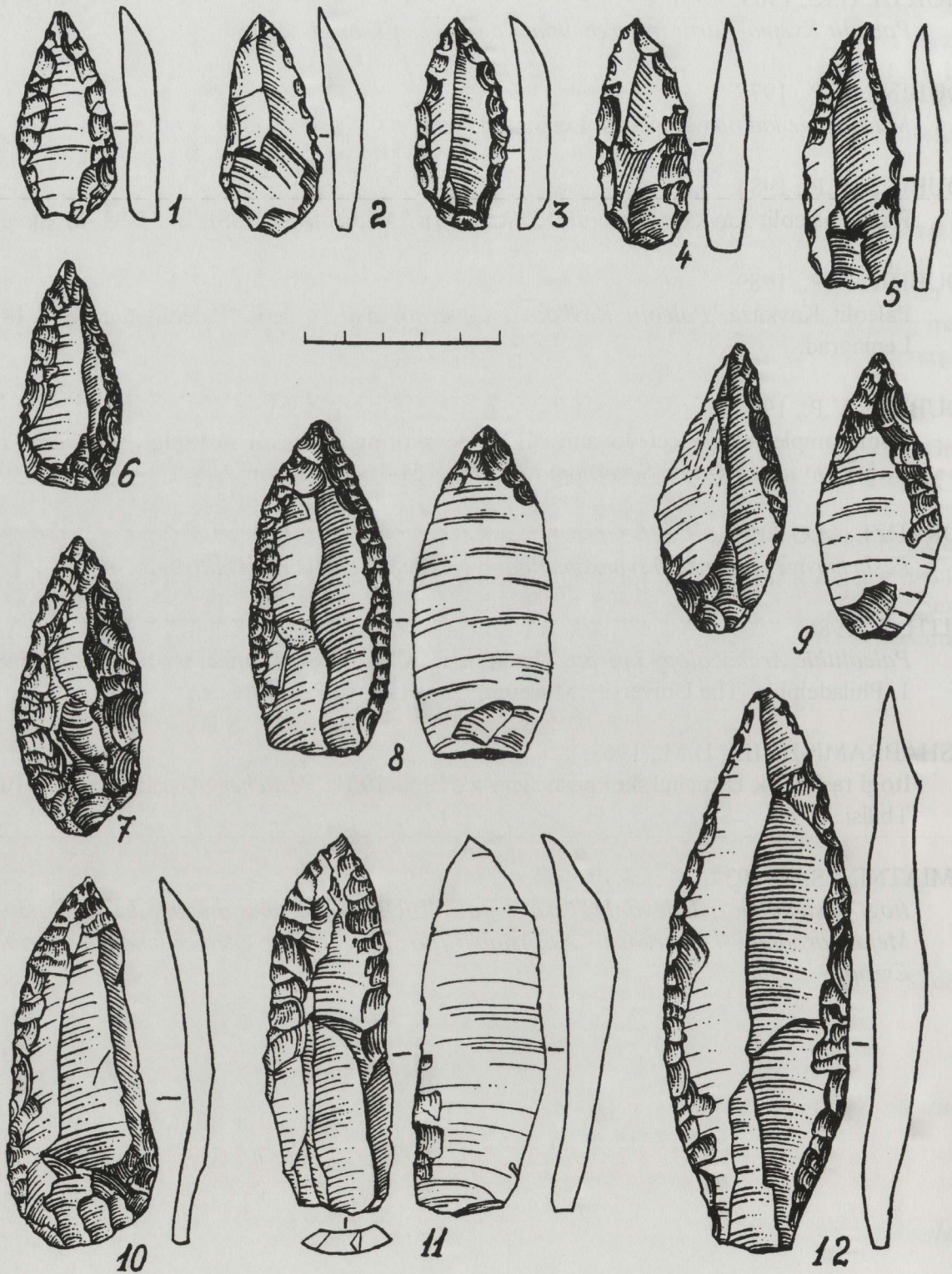


Fig. 2. Djruchula Cave (layer 1). Points (after D.M. Tushabramishvili).

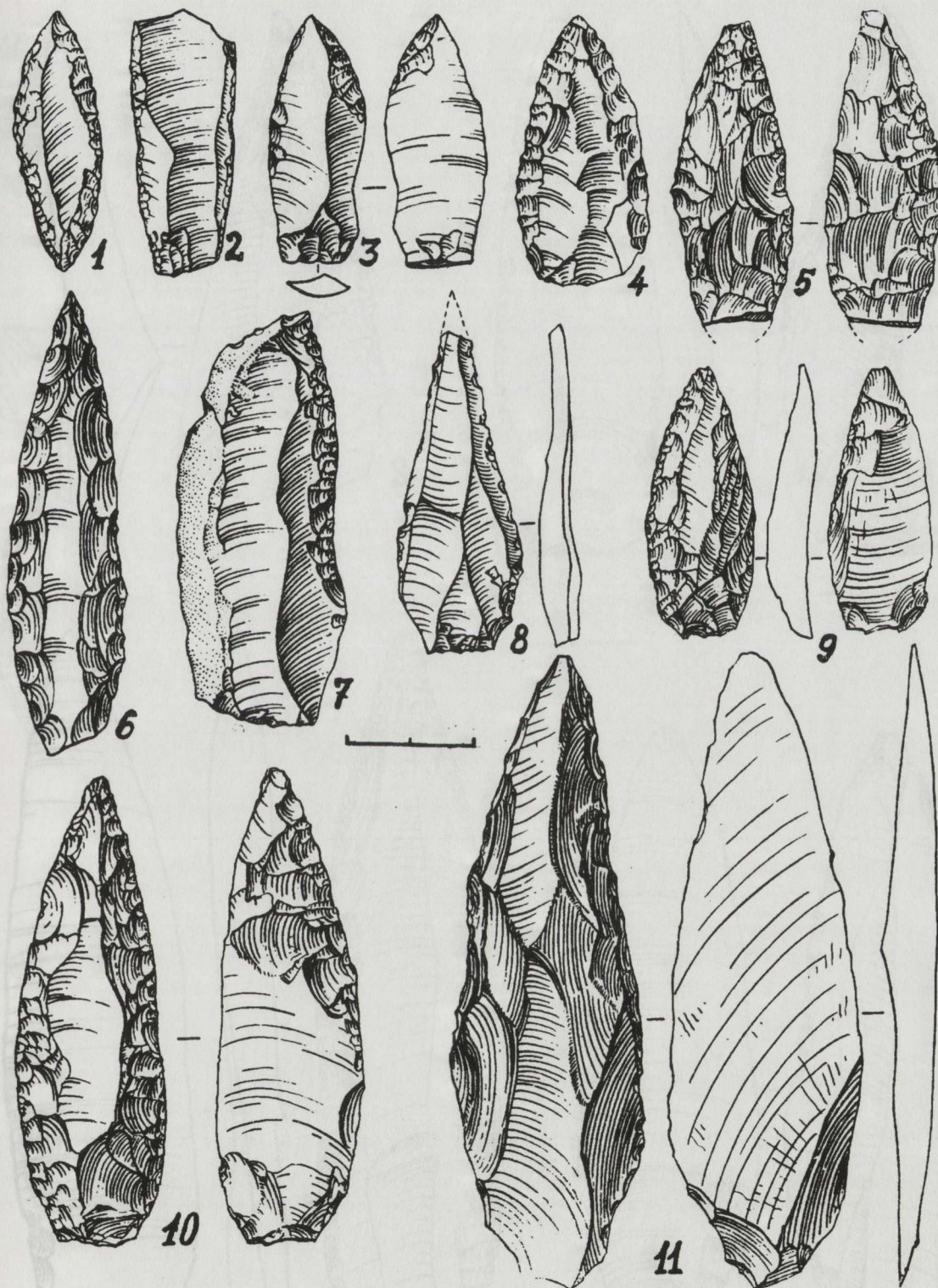


Fig. 3. Examples of tools: 1: atypical limace; 2, 7: sidescrapers; 8-11: points (1-4, 7-Djruchula (after D.M. Tushabramishvili); 5, 6: Tsona (after A.N. Kalandadze); 8-11: Kudaro I and Kudaro III (after V.P. Lioubine).

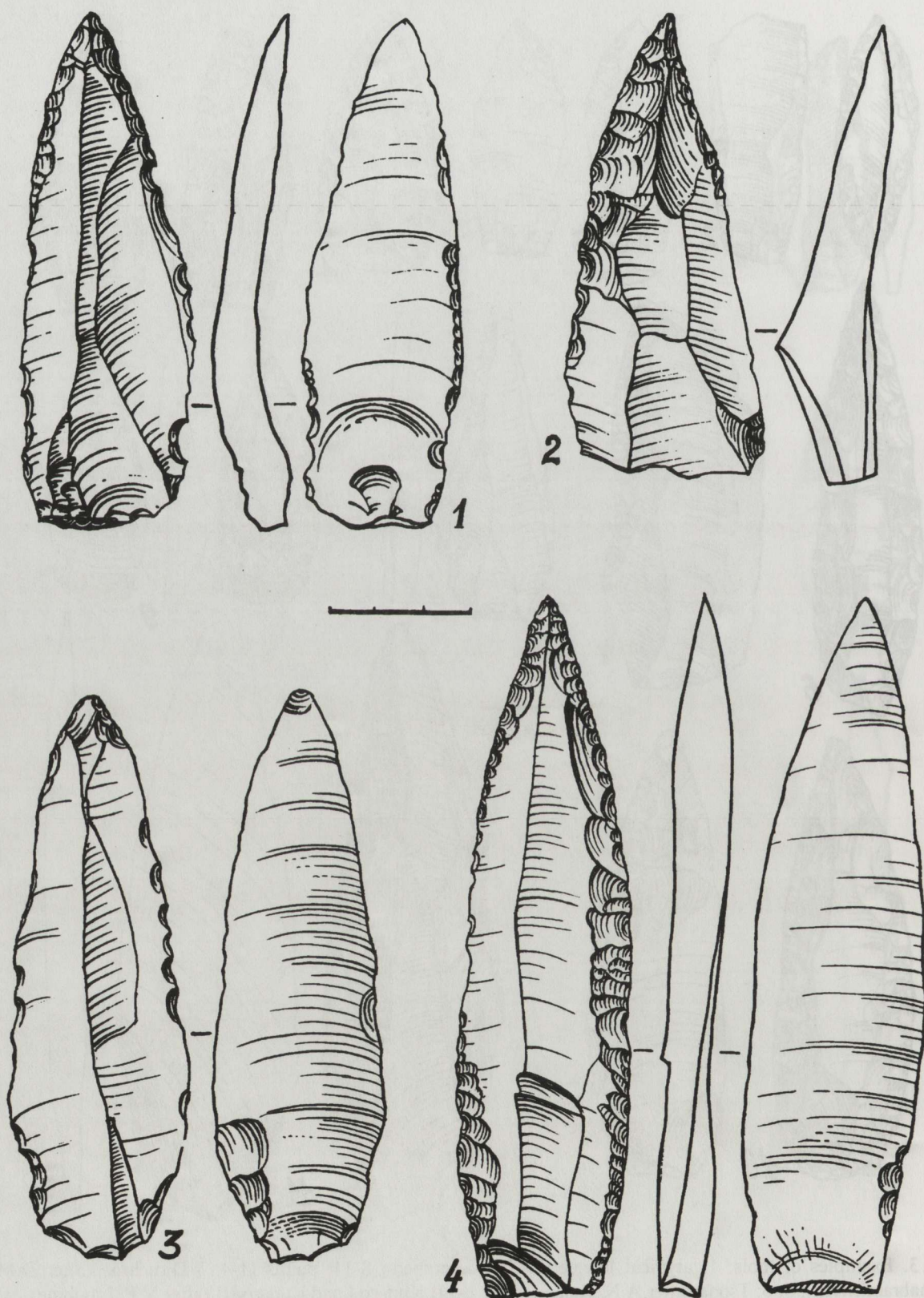


Fig. 4. Tsona Cave. Elongated points (after A.N. Kalandadze).

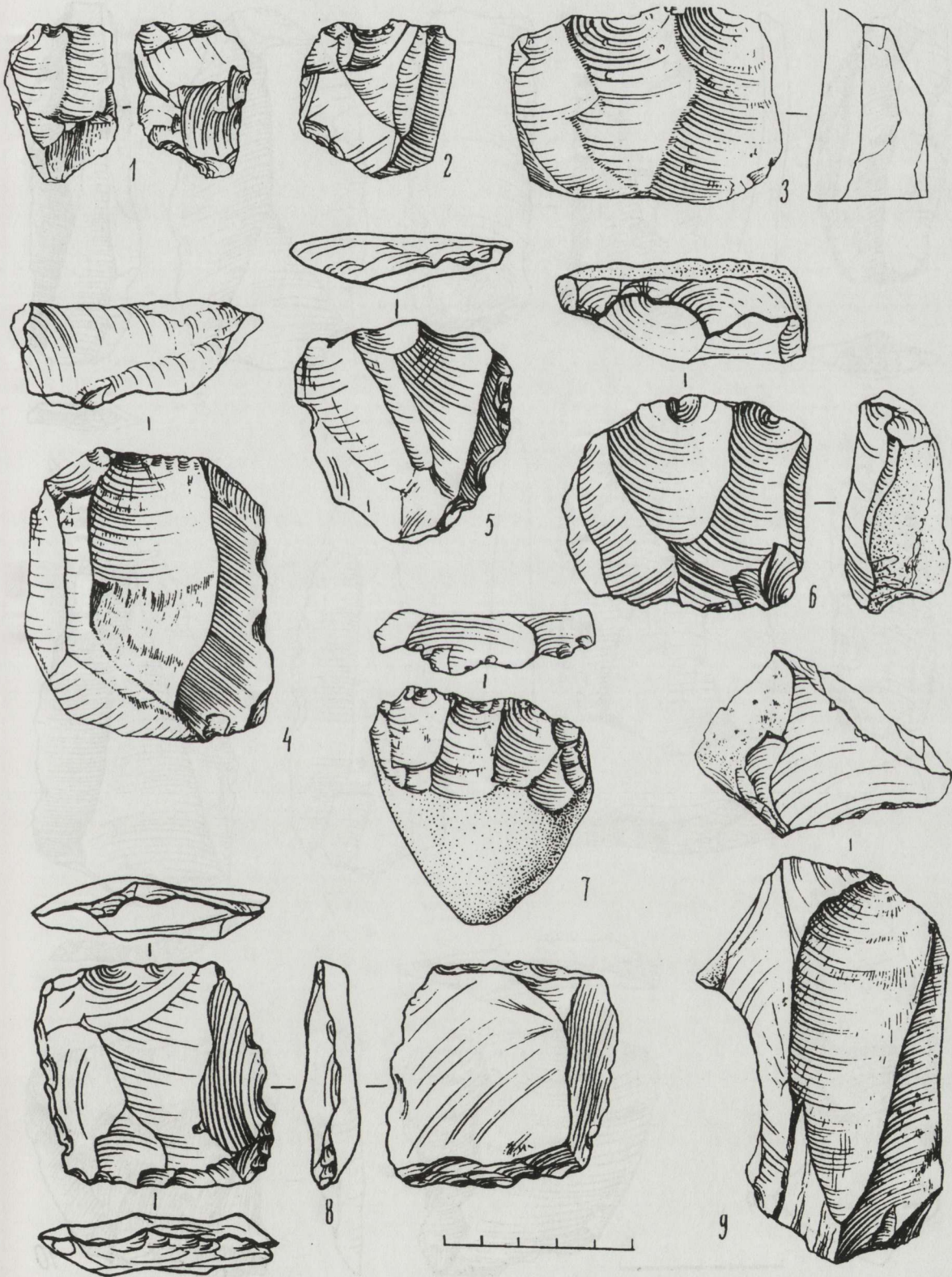


Fig. 5. Karkustakau (the Tskhinvalian group). Cores (after V.P. Lioubine).

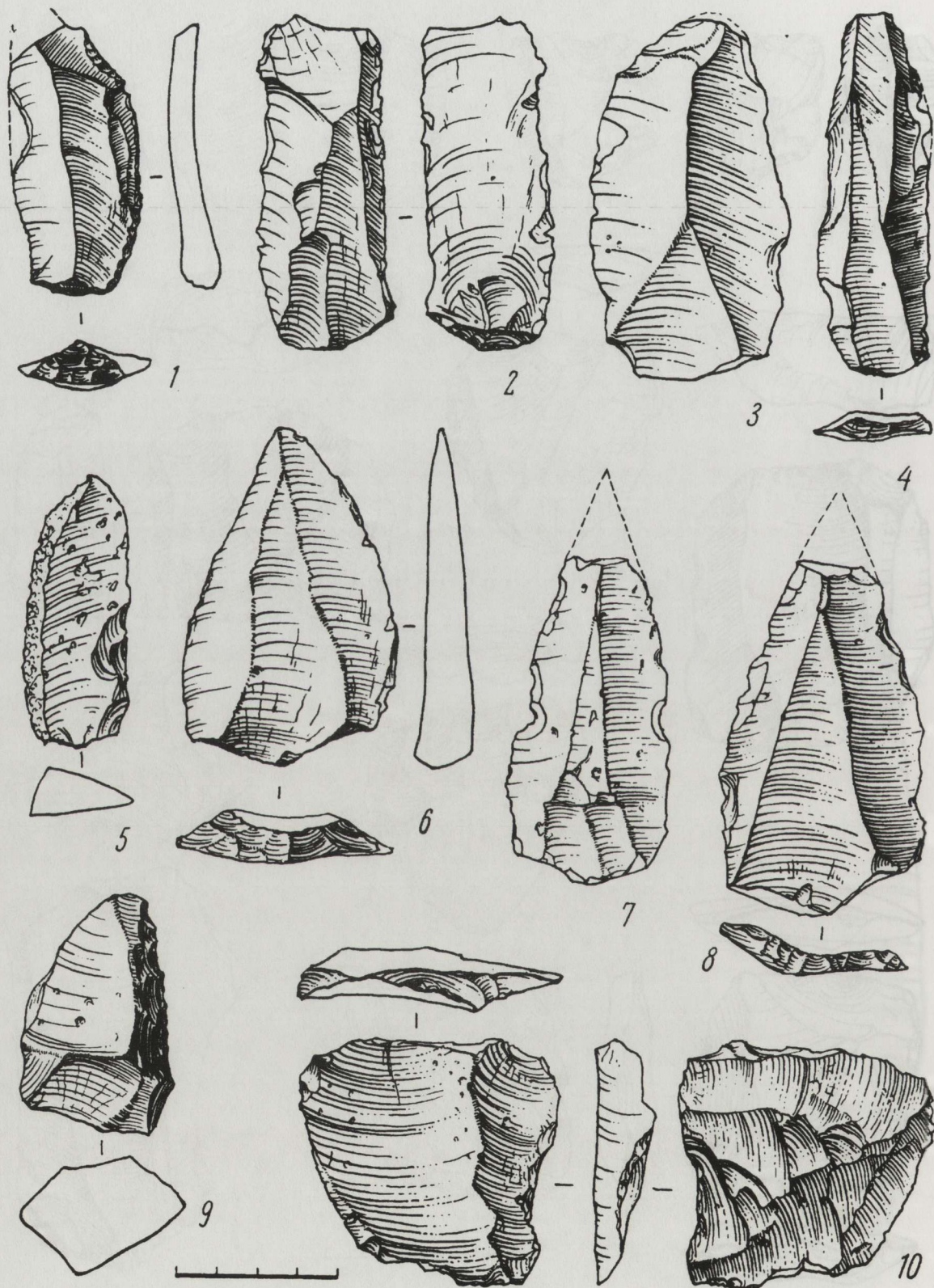


Fig. 6. Tamarasheni (the Tskhinvalian group). 1, 9: sidescrapers; 2-4: blades; 5: naturally backed knife; 6-8: Levallois points; 10: core (after V.P.Lioubine).

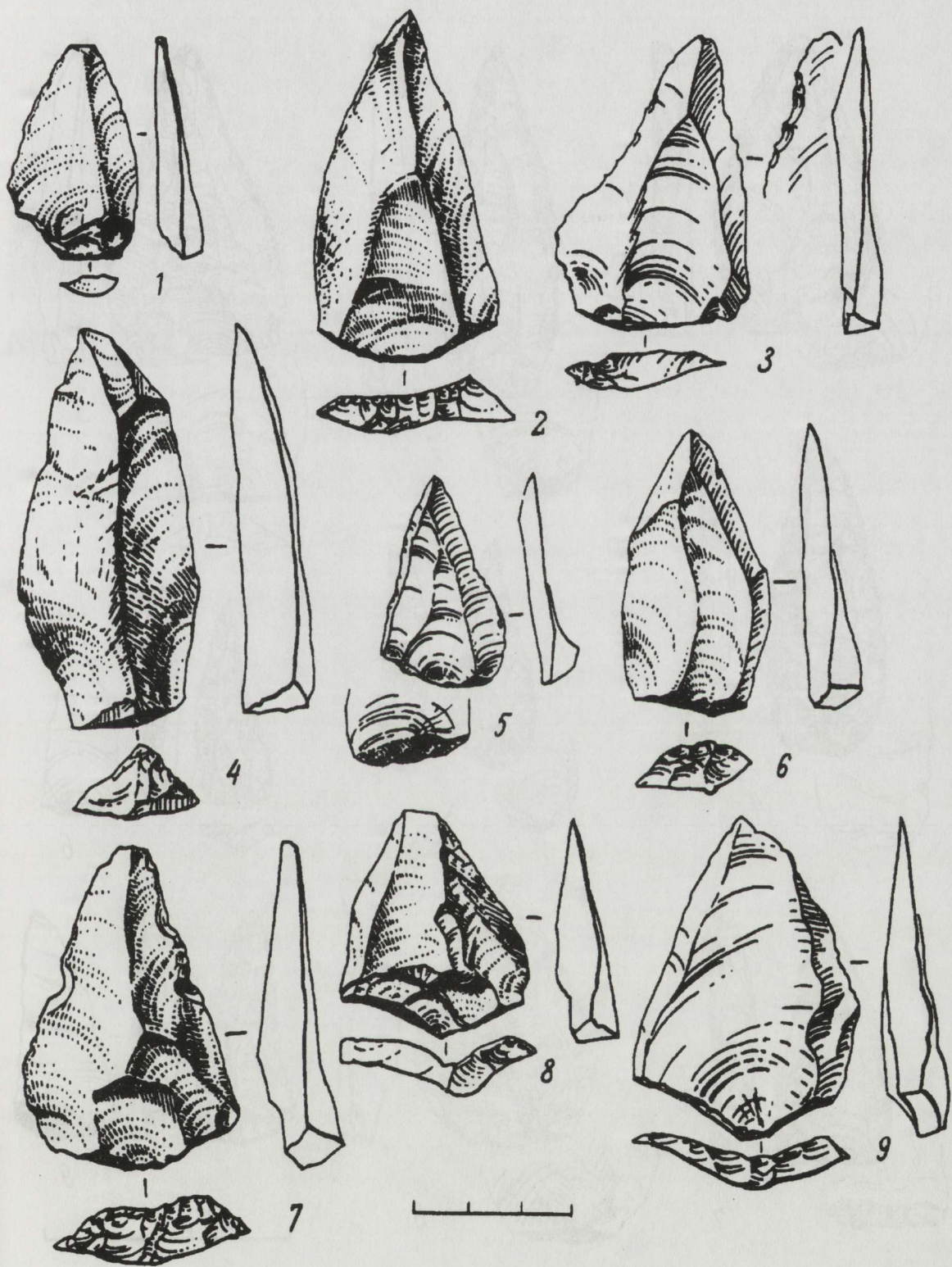


Fig. 7. Taglar Cave. Levallois points (after A.K. Djafarov).

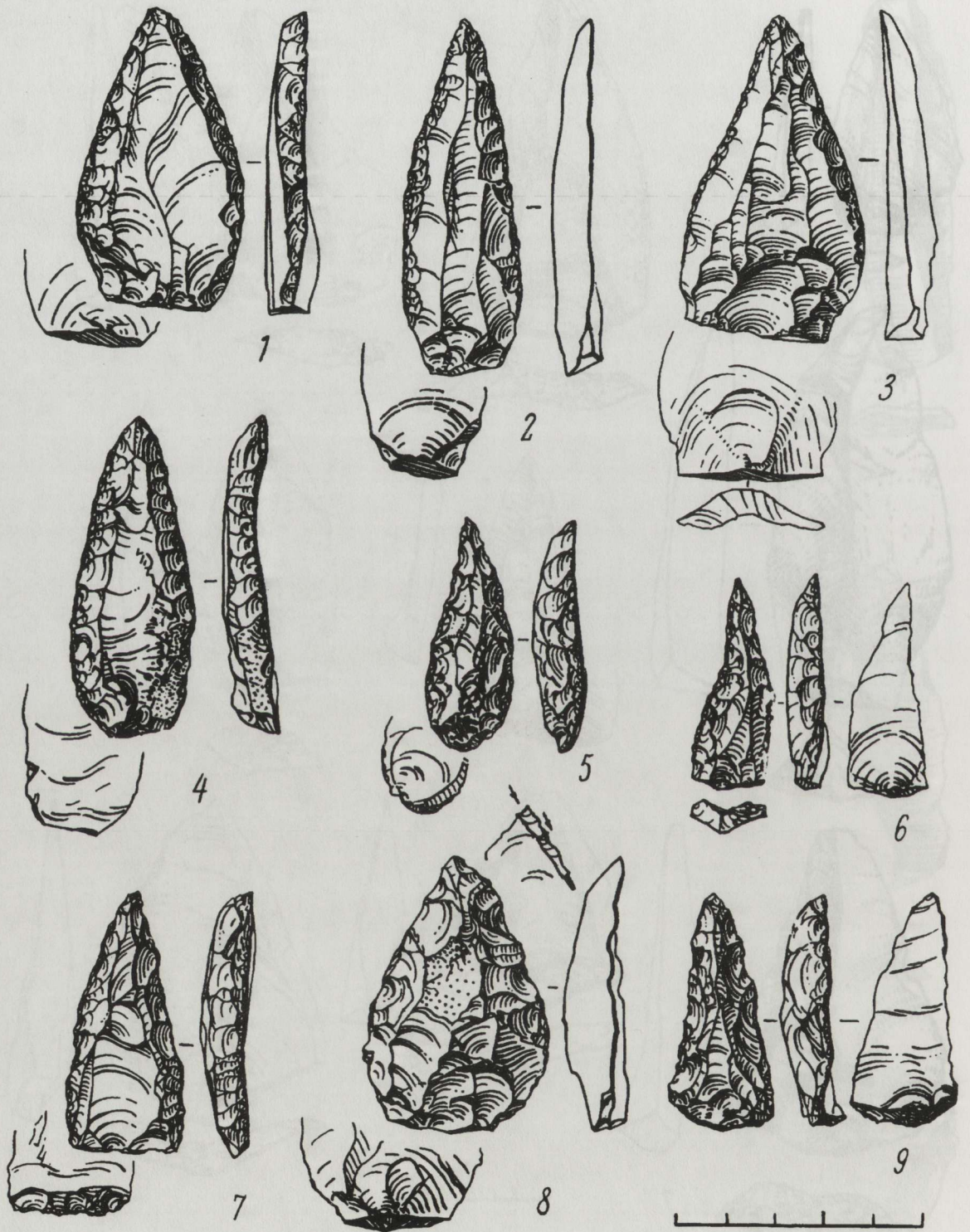


Fig. 8. Taglar Cave. Points (after A.K. Djafarov).



Fig. 9. Taglar Cave. 1-3, 5-9: sidescrapers (2, 3, 6: "rods"), 4: blade (after A.K. Djafarov).



Fig. 10. Taglar Cave. Sidescrapers (1-5, 8: truncated-faceted pieces; 6: *dèjeté* scraper; 7: "rod") (after A.K. Djafarov).

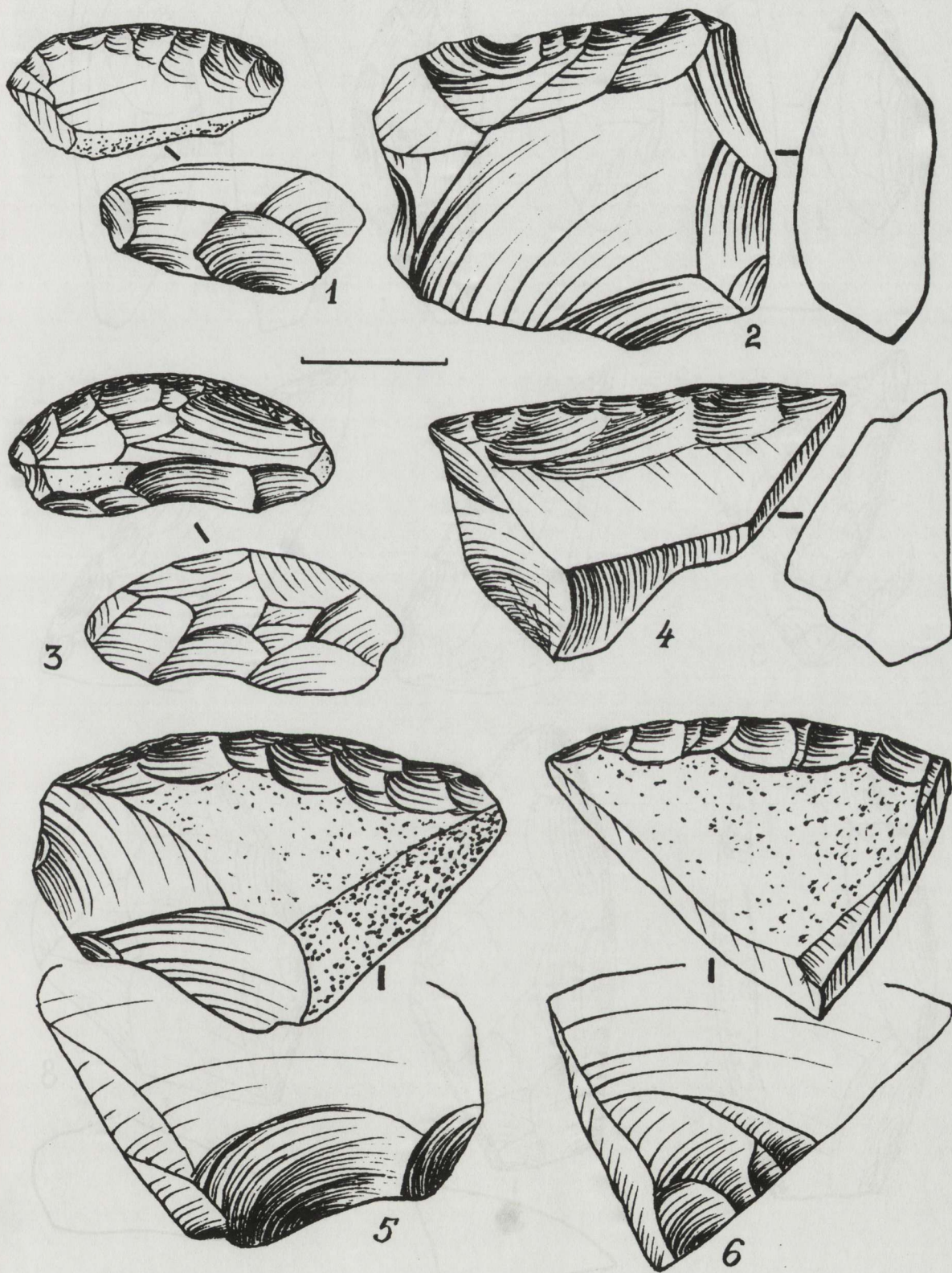


Fig. 11. Tsopi. Examples of transverse scrapers (after G.K. Grigolia).

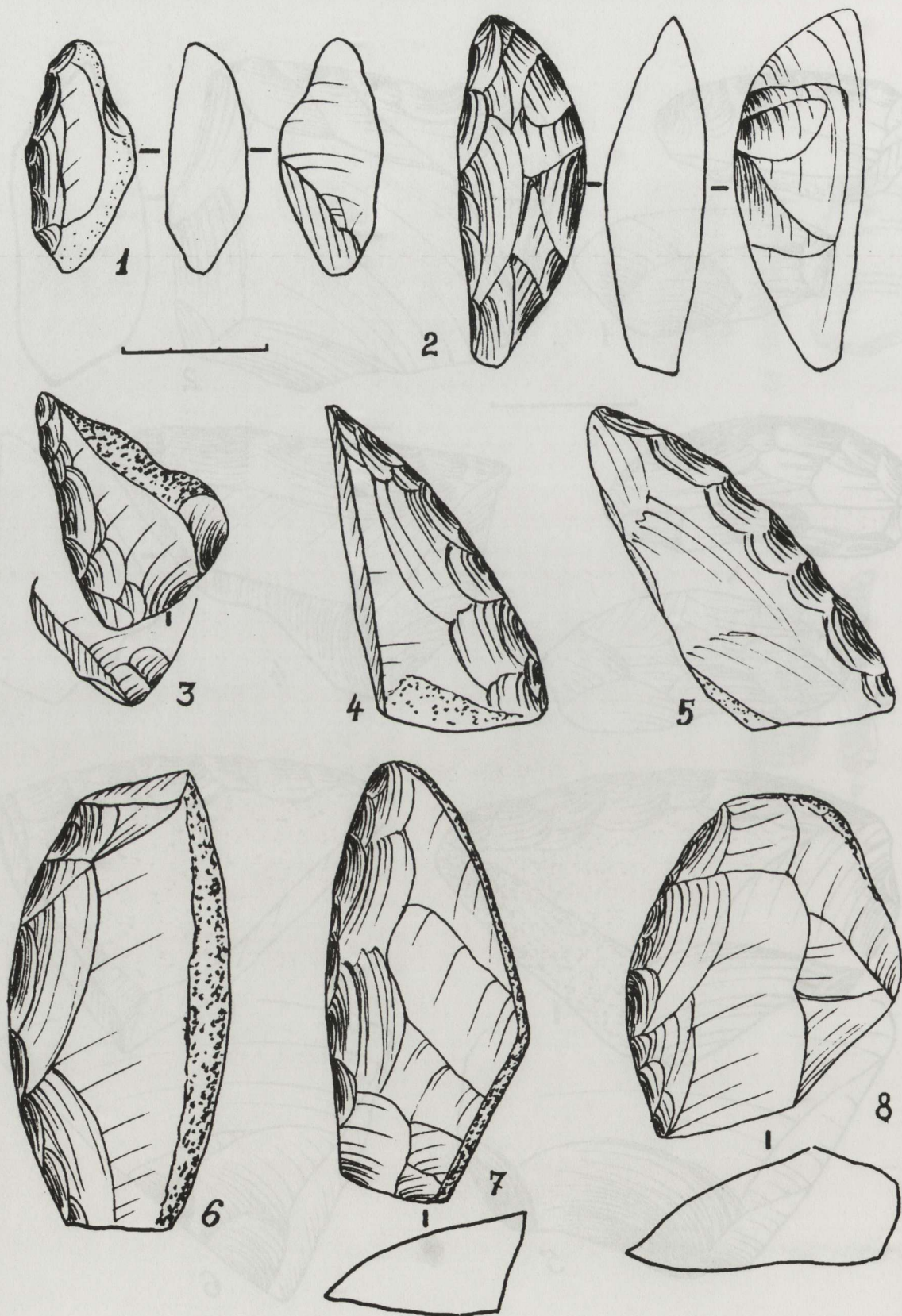


Fig. 12. Tsopi. 1, 3-8: lateral and diagonal sidescrapers, 2: limace (after G.K. Grigolia).

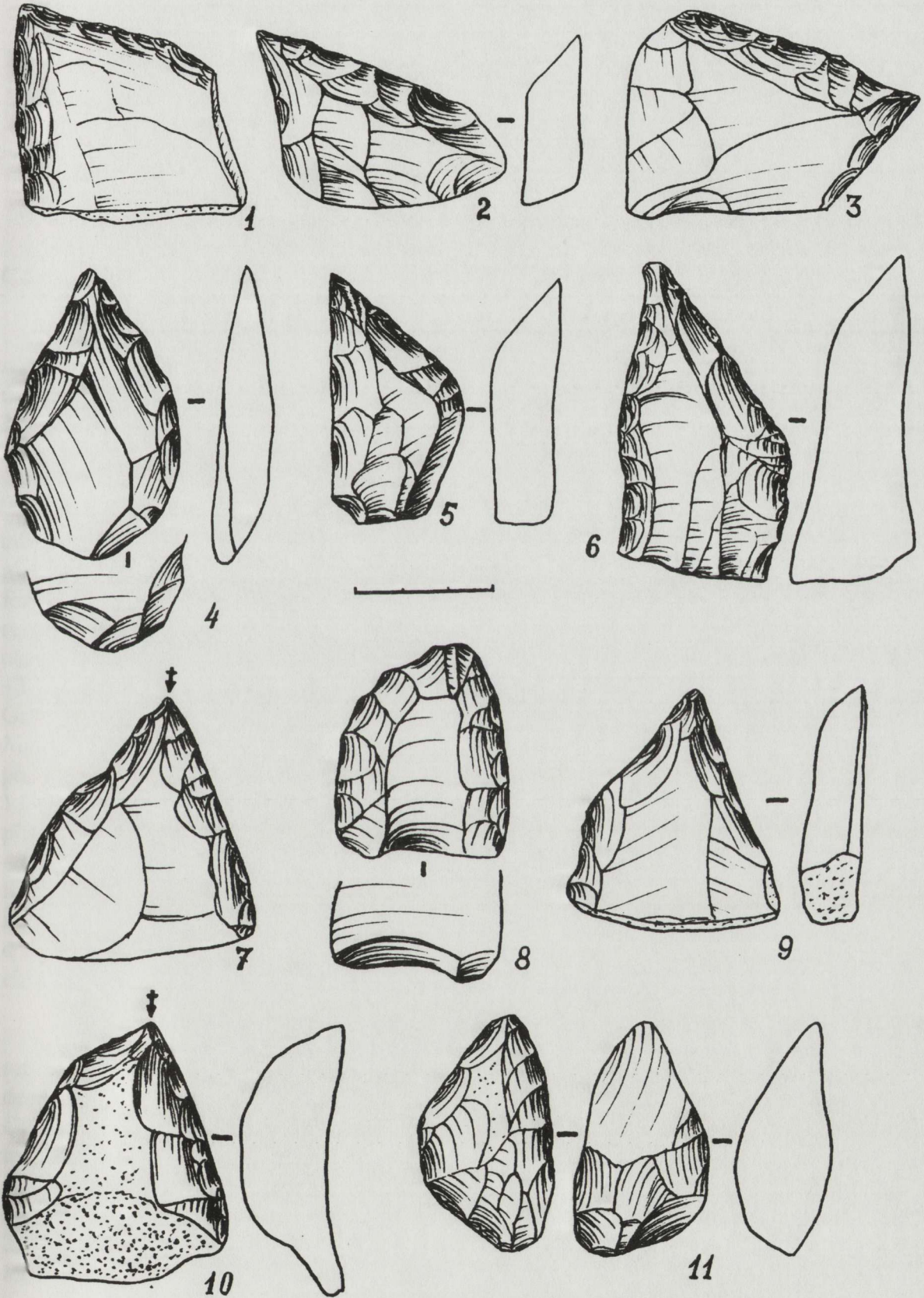


Fig. 13. Tsopi. 1-3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11: sidescrapers; 4, 7, 9: points (after G.K. Grigolia).