

8. UPPER PALAEOOLITHIC IN ALBANIA (1991-1996)

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The Paleolithic studies in Albania are still restricted. We know it from Xara, Shen Marina, Dajti mountain Gajtan, Baran, and Konispol. Geographically, the Paleolithic sites are distributed all over Albania. There are no full publications on these sites; only some preliminary data and reports are available, which are insufficient for an exact idea of Paleolithic occupation in this area. Only the Paleolithic occupation of Konispol cave has a stratigraphic position; the other sites' are without stratigraphic integrity due to the lack of systematic excavation. Of special importance amongst them is the rich collection of stone tools from Xarë, which represents a long Middle and Upper Palaeolithic sequence.

The Upper Paleolithic culture is represented by Xarë II (1), Konispol I (2) and the Cave of Shën Marinë (3) (Southern Albania), Rrezë e Dajtit (4) (Middle Albania) and Gajtan III and Bleran (5) (North Albania). Although the number of Upper Paleolithic stations is great if compared to those Middle and Lower Paleolithic, the information on the latter period is only from chance discoveries and limited in scope, with no published data.

Xarë II. The series of flint tools which come from Xarë II is limited in number and type and there is therefore not enough information to attribute it to a particular Upper Palaeolithic culture. The tools are non-typical. They are made of good quality gray flint prepared with short, shallow scalar retouch. Among them are knives on blade blanks, points, and a burin on endscraper. Also noteworthy is a tool with scalar bifacial retouch. (Fig. 1).

In conclusion, the collection of Upper Paleolithic of Xarë is characterised by knives with fine retouch and points, which, according to the retouch technique, are similar to those of Asprochaliko of Upper Paleolithic in South Epirus.

Shën Marina. The Cave of Shën Marina (approximately 6 m deep by 4 m wide by 7 m high) is situated in the valley of River Pavel at a of height 500 m above sea level and 4 km from Zara. Briefly excavated during Italian investigations in the late 1930-s, it yielded two archaeological horizons : an upper one with ceramics and domesticated fauna, and a brecciated lower horizon with only two flint artefacts but rich fauna. The artefacts were a scraper on a flake and utilised blade; the fauna included ibex (*Copra ibex*) and lacked any domesticated forms.

Rrezë Dajtit. Near the city of Tirana, by Rrezë Dajtit, some flint chips have been discovered. They were found in a moraine layer created during the Late

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Pleistocene and have therefore been defined as belonging to the time of the Orinjak culture.

Gajtan III. The only other information on the Orinjak culture comes from the Cave of Gajtan, where some flint tools with fine retouch and a very rich series of bone tools, distinguished by their variety and the high quality workmanship, have been discovered. All of this material should belong to Upper Paleolithic.

Blerani is an open air site in the valley of the small Kirg river, almost 1250 m west of the Gave of Gajtan. The collection coming from a large area by the river and from the slope of the hill is represented by blade tools made of high quality flint. The blades have fine retouch along their lateral edges. The other category of tools is represented by typical endscrapers. From a general typological point of view, Blerani represents a culture of Aurignacian type.

Konispol I. Is the first habitation horizon in Konispol Cave, which is situated in the Southern extreme of Albania, very close to the Albanian-Greek border (North of Korfu). The excavations in the cave have been carried out by an Albanian-American team. The cultural horizon, which is 4 m thick, is well preserved and represents different periods: beginning with the earliest, belonging to the Upper Palaeolithic, followed by a thin stratum representing the Mesolithic, then another thick one of Neolithic, and followed by strata of Bronze and Iron Age.

Excavation units below the Mesolithic, from depths of roughly 2,5 to 4 m, have a completely different character from human use of the cave and slower sedimentation. Faunal remains are poorly preserved and progressively rarer, as are hearths and identifiable products of lithic debitage.

The earliest cultural layer is dominated by white flint tools which tend to be badly weathered and desilicified, with poor flaking characteristics. While the sheer number of fragments of white flint is impressive, recognisable tools are few, and of little analytical value. Only few retouched tools were recorded from this entire assemblage, but a number of unretouched blades and bladelets, were recovered. No specific cultural attribution is yet possible for this ensemble; assuming the accuracy of the radiocarbon date, these levels fall to the later Upper Paleolithic (LUP) era, 26.700 ± 180 BP, thus a comparison with Asprochaliko and Kastrica Paleolithic of Greek Epirus is possible.

The Upper Paleolithic, though it is represented by stations spread throughout the territory of Albania, is not represented by a developed and typical industry, which makes difficult to define its features.

The relative chronology Upper Paleolithic would be :

Konispol I
Gajtan III
Xarë II

Most importantly, we hope to carry out systematic surveys for intact Paleolithic sites for interdisciplinary research, to better define the Upper Paleolithic in Albania, and to compare it with that of neighboring regions.

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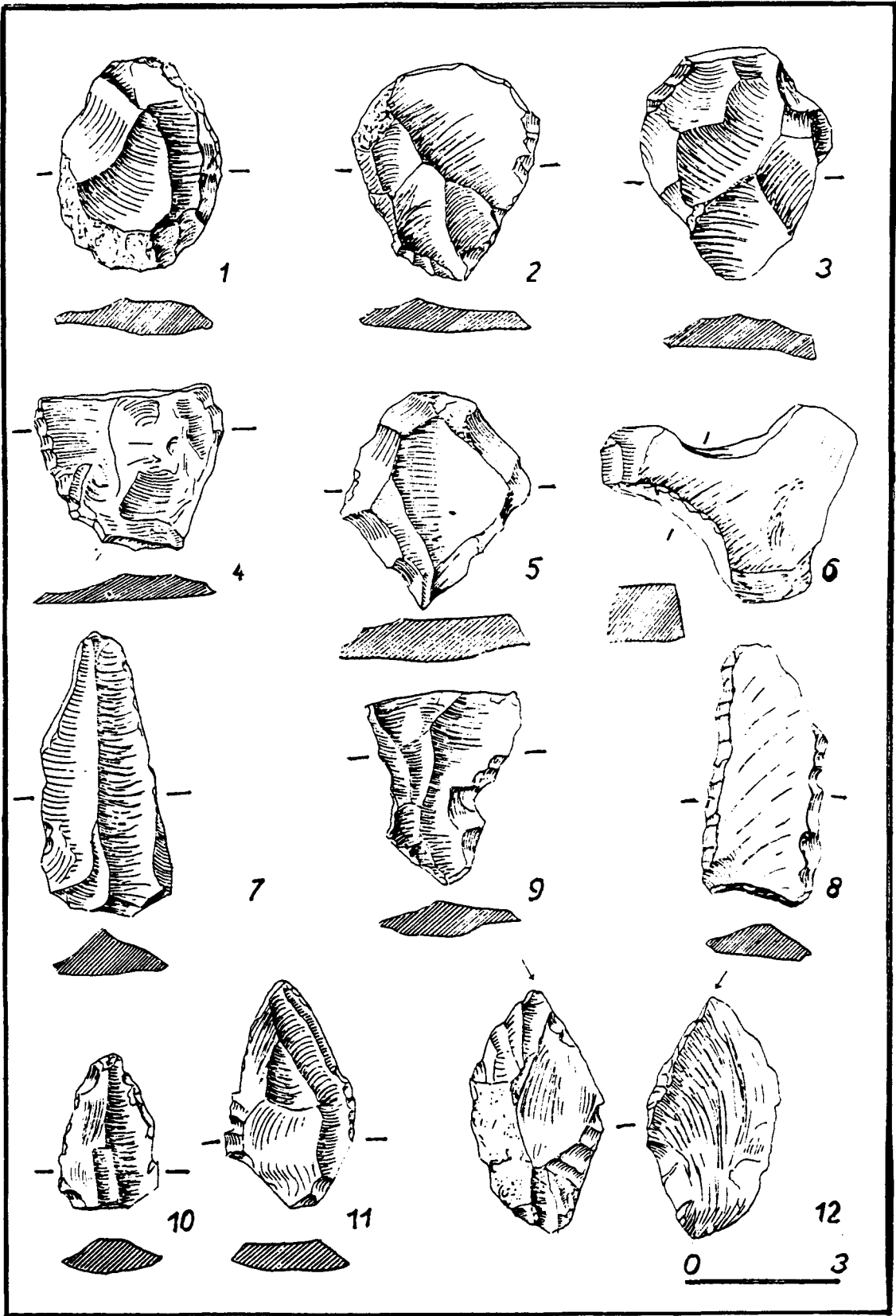


Fig. 1 : Xäre II.