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# A Mesolithic Site near Thari in the Thar Desert (Sindh)

Paolo Biagi and Mukhtiar Kazi

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PAOLO BIAGI* and M. MUKHTIAR KAZI**

# A MESOLITHIC SITE NEAR THARI IN THE THAR DESERT (SINDH-PAKISTAN)

**SUMMARY** - *A Mesolithic site near Thari in the Thar Desert (Sindh-Pakistan).* The Authors describe the flint assemblage from a Late Mesolithic site recently discovered in the sand dunes which extend east of the town of Thari. The flint industry is characterized by small bladelet cores and microlithic instruments mainly obtained from bladelets, among which are five isosceles trapezes. Some comparisons with the industries so far recovered from the Mesolithic sites of the Indian Subcontinent conclude the article.

## PREFACE

The site of LS1 was discovered during a preliminary survey carried out in March 1995 east of the town of Thari, in the Thar Desert; the site itself was later revisited in March 1996. It is located close to the top of a sand ridge which is part of the westernmost sand dune system of the Thar Desert; an area characterized by the presence of a large number of lake basins and old river-courses depressions which separate the sand dune formations. The exact location of the site is 27°04'50" Lat. N and 68°40'08" Long. E (fig. 1).

The flint assemblage was recovered from the surface of an oval-shaped spot, some 50 metres long (N-S) and 40 metres wide (E-W) (fig. 2). Apart from the Mesolithic artefacts the area also yielded very few, typical, heavily weathered Harappan potsherds which were collected, sparsely distributed, from the surface of the sand dune.

## THE FLINT ASSEMBLAGE

It consists of 462 artefacts, including 199 complete, unretouched pieces which were measured to develop the diagrams of fig. 3, 1 core and 22 instruments. The flint employed can be distinguished in five varieties, the outcrops of which are to be found in the Rohri Hills region, namely: 1) dark greyish brown-dark brown (10YR 4/2-4/3) to light yellowish brown (10YR 6/4) with visible nummulites, 2) variegated light brown-light yellowish brown (10YR 6/3-10YR 6/4), 3) uniform brown (10YR 5/3) to light yellowish brown (10YR 6/4), 4) rough-surfaced yellowish brown (10YR 5/4), 5) very dark yellowish brown (10YR 3/2) to dark brown (10YR 4/3).

* Department of Historical-Archaeological and Oriental Sciences. University of Venice (I)
** Department of Archaeology. Shah Abdul Latif University. Khairpur (PK)

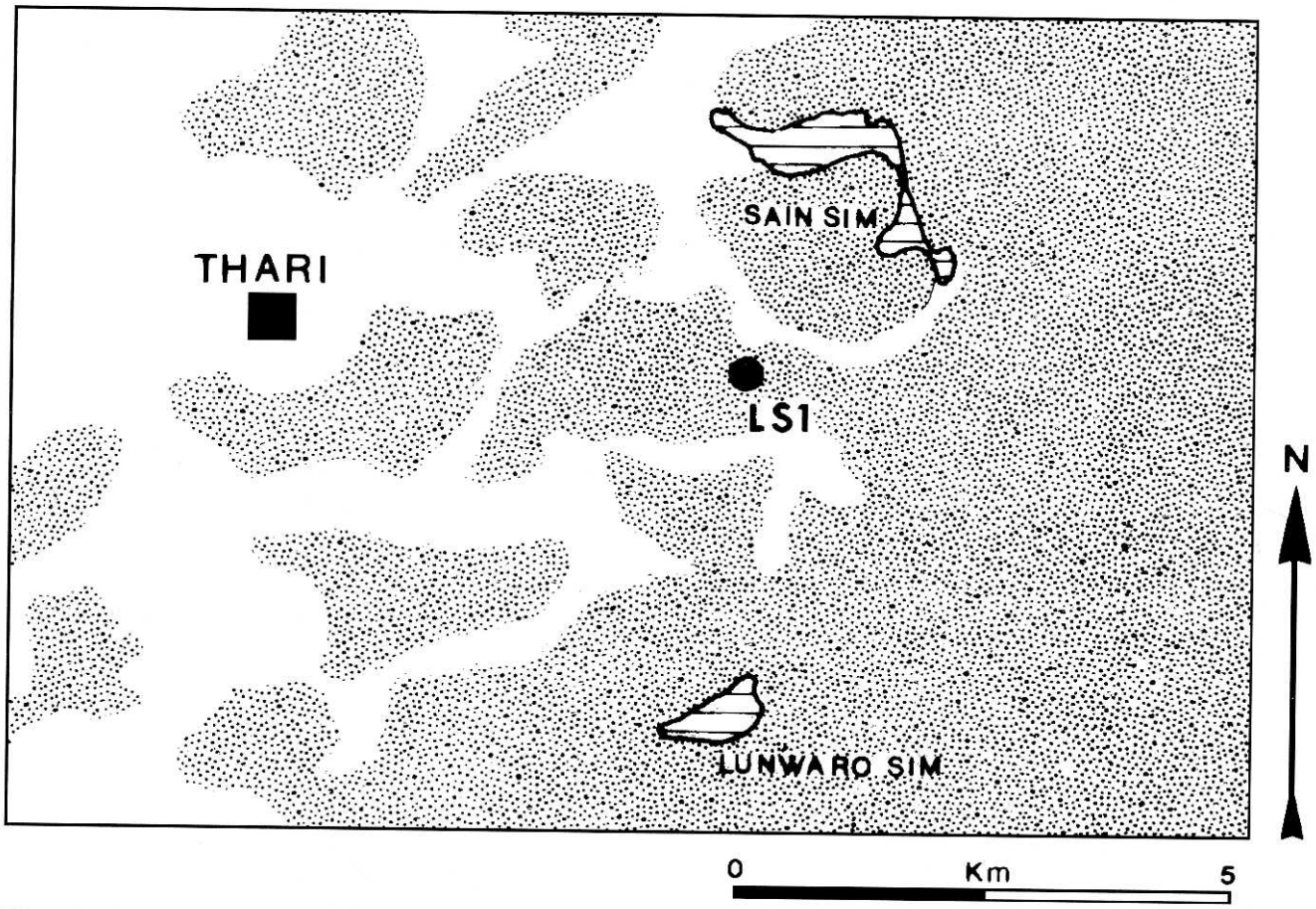


Fig. 1 - Location of site LS1 (dot). Shaded areas indicate sand dunes *(drawn by E. Starnini).*

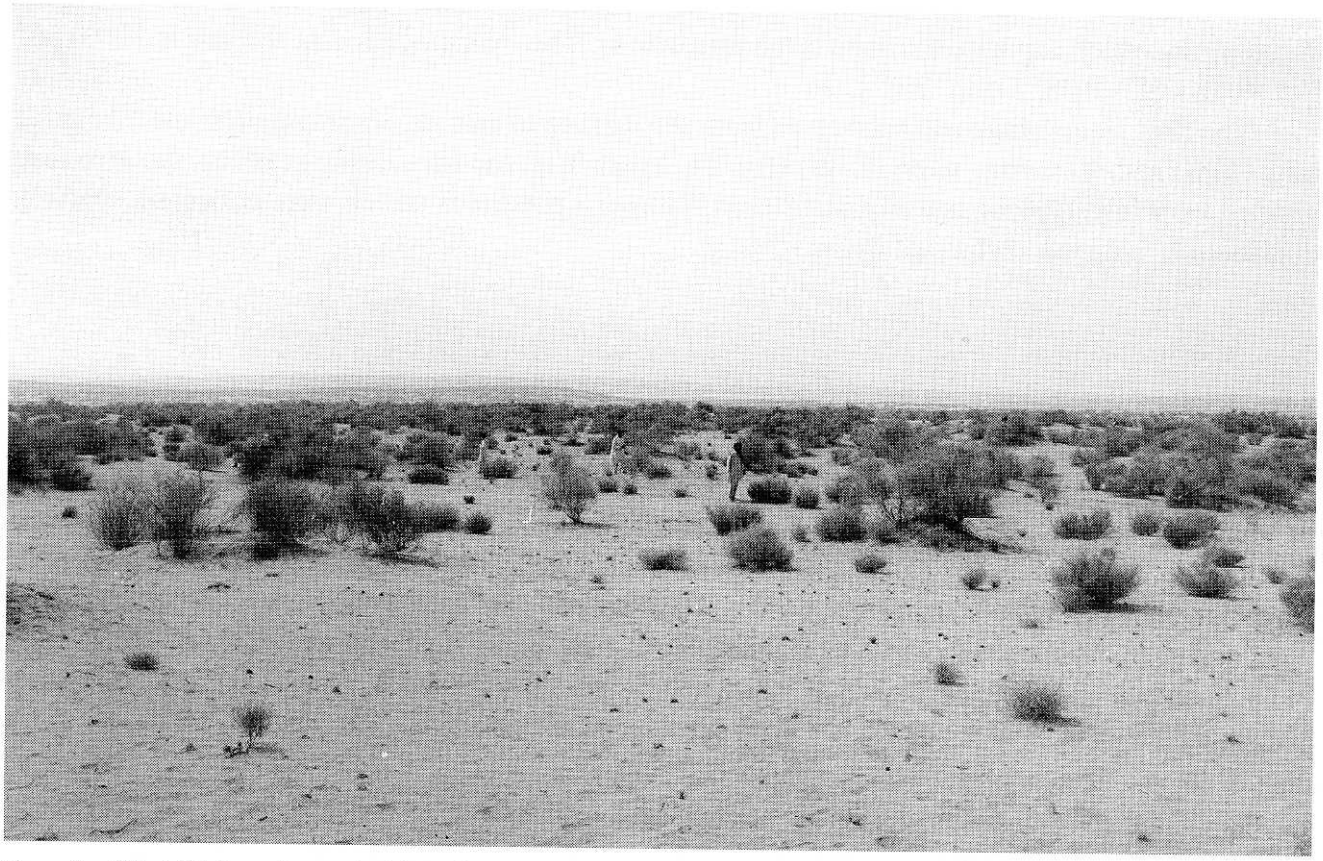

Fig. 2 - Site LS1 from the north *(photo by P. Biagi).*

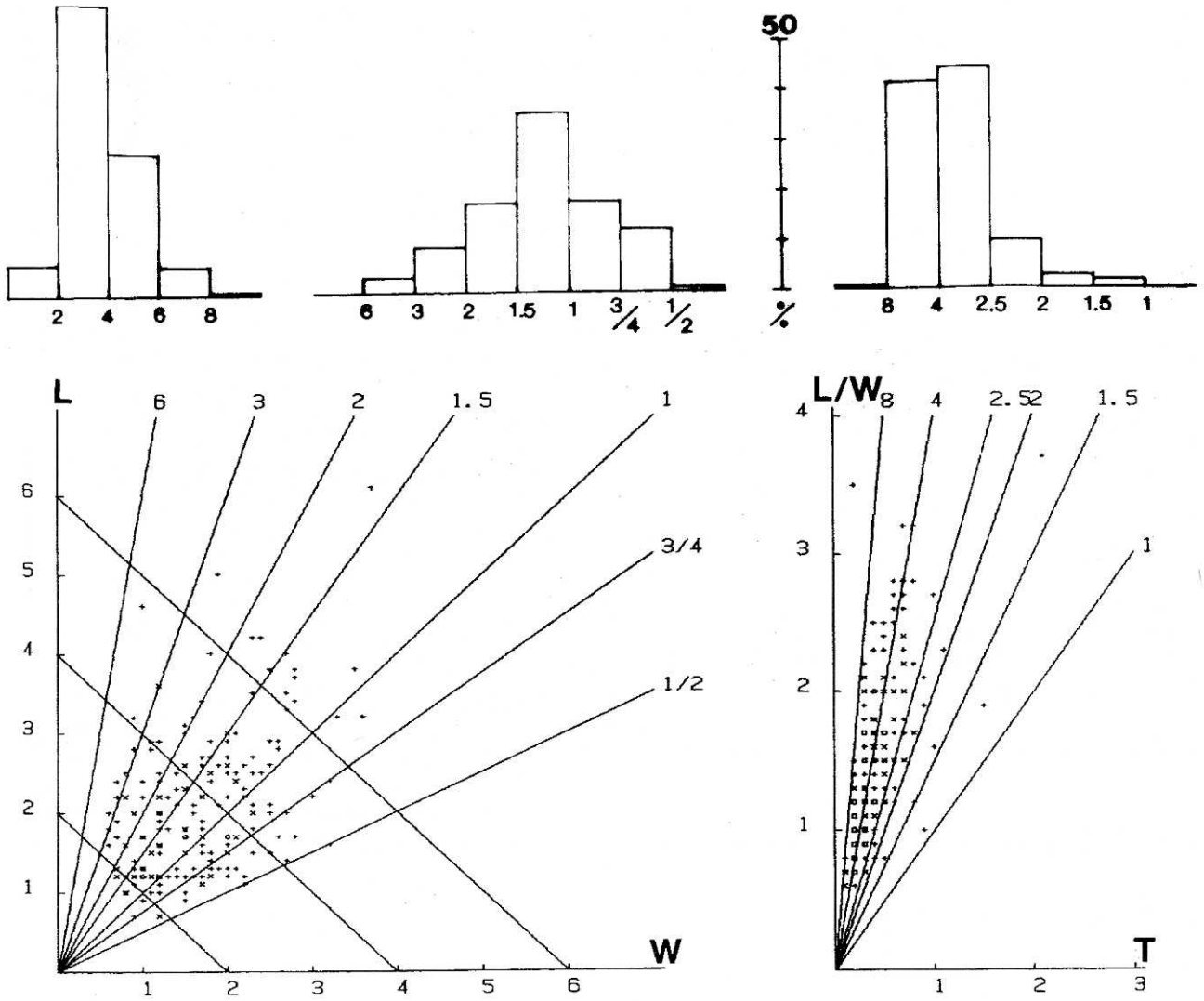


Fig. 3 - LS1: length-width and dimensional and length/width-thickness diagram of the unretouched, complete artefacts *(drawn by P. Biagi).*

The length-width and dimensional diagram developed according to Bagolini's method (Bagolini, 1968) indicates a predominance of flakes (72=36,2%) followed by wide flakes (37=18.6%), blade-like flakes (36=18.1%) and very wide flakes (26=13.1). The blades are 19 (9.5%) and the narrow blades 7 (3.6%). The microliths are 116 (58.3%), followed by the normoliths (57=28.7%), the hypermicroliths (13=6.5%), the macroliths (12=6.0%) and the hypermacroliths (1=0.5%) (fig. 3).

The assemblage includes 1 bladelet core of prismatic type with opposed detachments, recomposed from two conjoining pieces (fig. 4/1). The instruments are represented by 1 short end scraper on microflake (fig. 4/2); 1 marginal, oblique truncation on bladelet fragment (fig. 4/6) and 1 double, marginal truncation on hypermicrobladelet (fig. 4/3); 5 isosceles trapezes on bladelets (fig. 4/4, 5, 7, 8 and 9) obtained with two oblique, straight truncations; 2 have an abrupt, marginal retouch along the short side (fig. 4/8 and 9): one of these (fig. 4/8) also shows a simple, marginal retouch on the long side; 1 probable backed bladelet with abrupt, bipolar retouch along the right side (fig. 4/13); 7 retouched blades and bladelets with marginal, unilateral (fig. 4/10 and 15) or bilateral (fig. 4/11, 12 and 14), simple retouch; 2 side scrapers on flakelet (fig. 4/16 and 17); 1

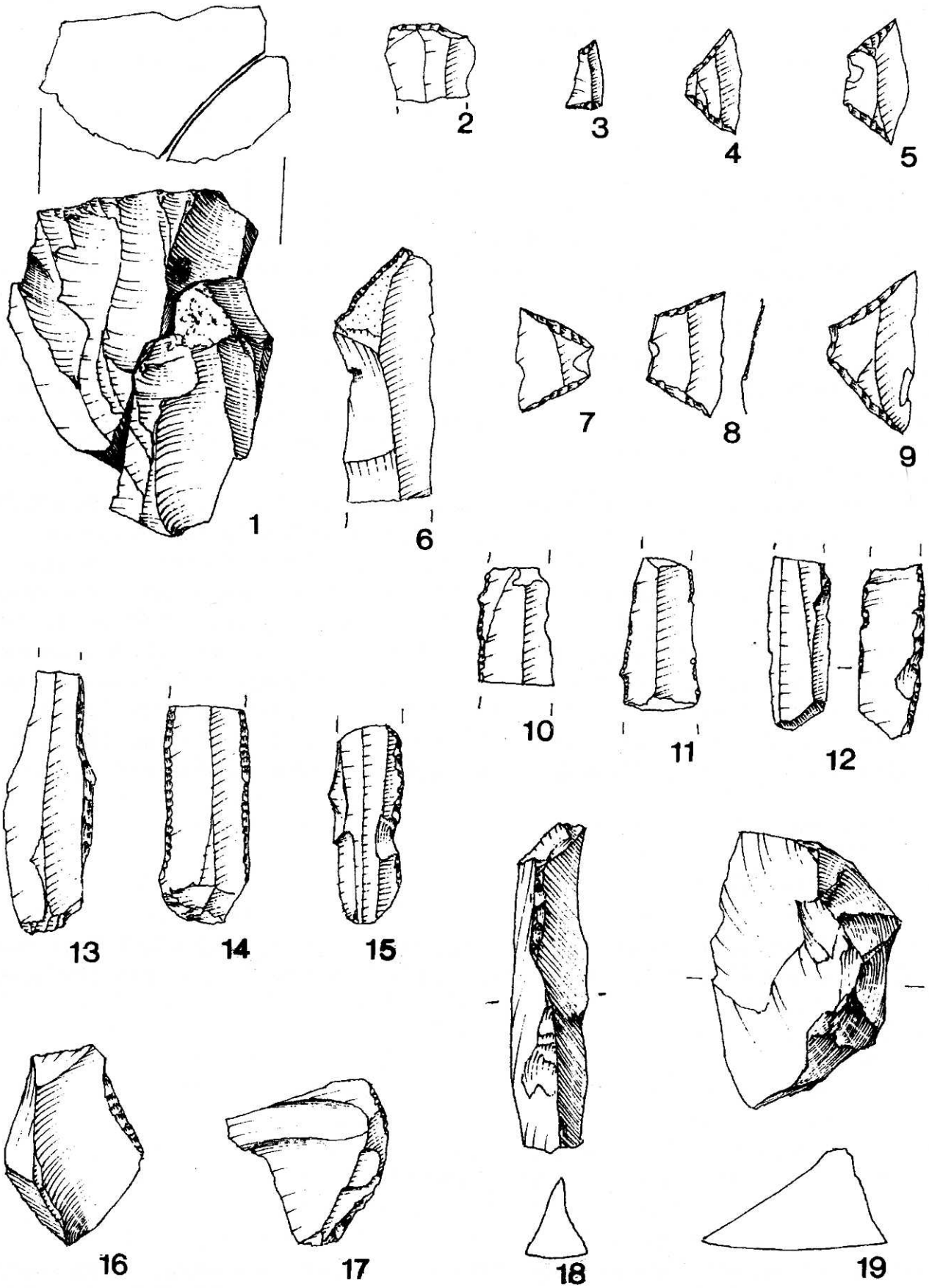


Fig. 4 - LS1 flint assemblage: core (1), end scraper (2), truncations (3 and 6), isosceles trapezes (4, 5, 7, 8 and 9), retouched blades (10-15), side scrapers (16 and 17), crested blade (18), crested flake (19) (1:1) *(drawn by E. Starnini).*

denticulated side scraper; and 1 flakelet with marginal, abrupt retouch. Apart from the retouched instruments are to be mentioned 11 bladelets, 4 of which complete, 1 crested blade (fig. 4/18), 1 crested flake (fig. 4/19) and 4 tablettes.

## CONSIDERATIONS

The Mesolithic of the Indian Subcontinent is rather well documented at least if compared with what is known for the preceding Late Palaeolihic period (MISRA, 1985). Noticeable concentrations of sites are attested in north-western India, while their presence is still uncertain, or badly documented, in the southern part of the Indus Valley (ALLCHIN, 1985). Even though little is still known about the detailed chronology of the Mesolithic in the country, a few observations made by SHARMA (1973: 133) on his finds from the Ganga Valley of northern India, should indicate that, at least in that region, the microlithic industries with triangles precede those characterized by the presence of trapezes.

Two of the best known sites which lie rather close to that of LS1 near Thari, are those of Budha Pushkar (ALLCHIN and GOUDIE, 1973), along the southern shore of the same lake, and of Bagor, on the top of a sand dune facing the old-river bed (MISRA, 1974). From this latter also come a few trapezes which closely resemble those of LS1, both for their size and shape. Similar assemblages are also known from Langhnaj (SANKALIA, 1965), from which ALLCHIN *et al.* (1978: 251) report the presence of microlithic geometrics, and other sites of Gujarat. According to these observations the assemblage recovered from the dune of LS1 seems to be attributable to the Mesolithic, most probably to a late moment in the development of this period, given the presence of geometrical trapezes obtained from bladelets. Apart from the few finds mentioned by ALLCHIN (1985: 132) in Lower Sindh, this is the only site so far discovered in the northern territories of the region.

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AUTHORS' ADDRESS:

PAOLO BIAGI, Department of Historical-Archaeological and Oriental Sciences, University of Venice, Palazzo Bernardo, S. Polo 1977, I-30125 VENICE (ITALY)

MUHAMMAD MUKHTIAR KAZI, Department of Archaeology, Shah Abdul Latif University, KHAIRPUR (SINDH, PAKISTAN)