

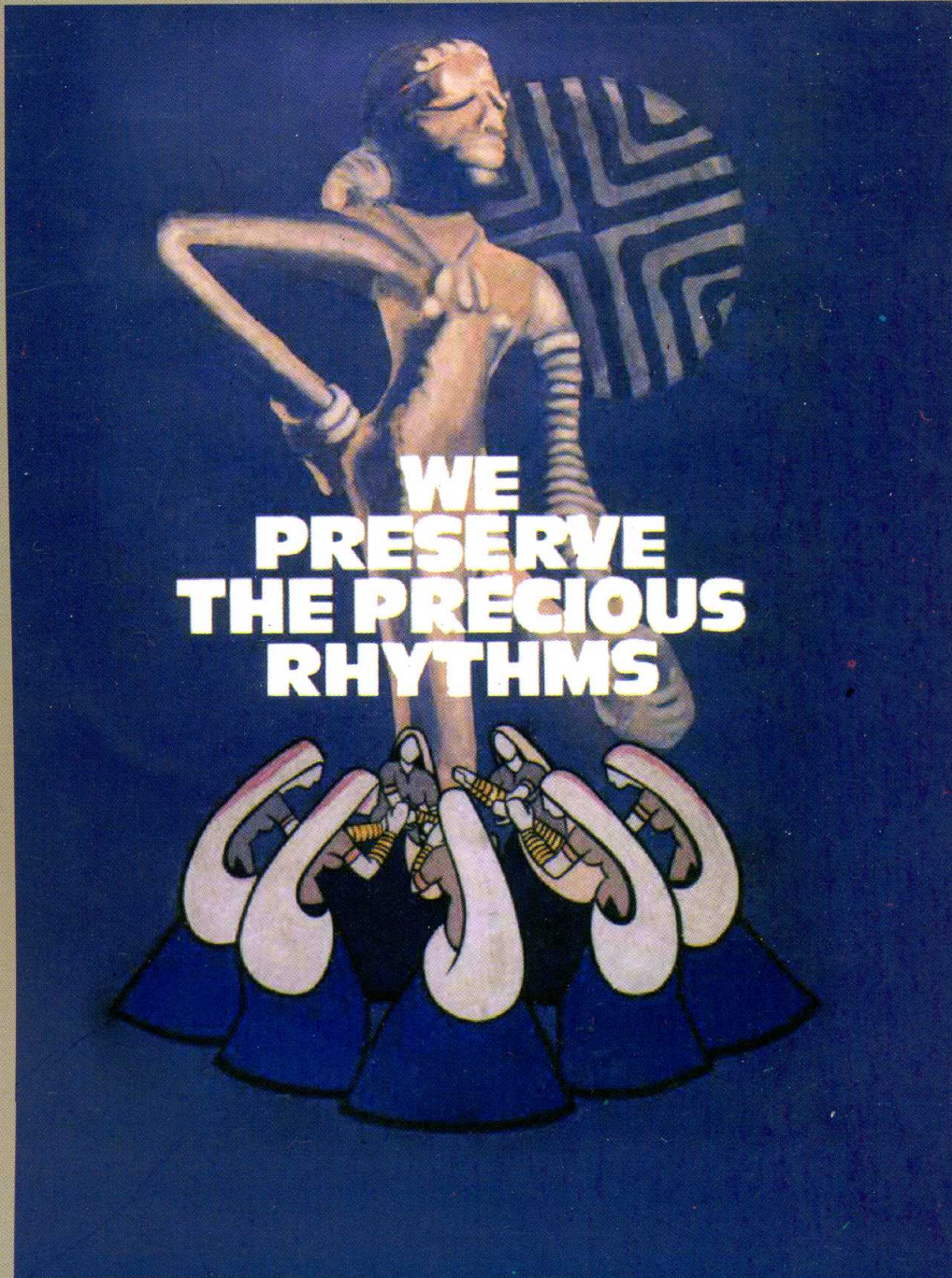
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ONGAR REVISITED

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1. Geographical Setting

The best geological description of the Ongar Hills, which is currently available, is that of W.T. Blandford (1880: 148-149). In his "*Geology of Western Sind*", this author reports that "*under Aongar Hill...about 8 miles north of Jhirak, and a mile or 2 south-west of Jhuga Pir, the Ranikot beds, near the road from Kotri to Jhirak, consist of flaggy brown limestones, resting on variously coloured soft silty shales, red, yellow, brown &c, and capped by buff marl...The Khirtar limestone, along the scarp of Aongar Hill, above the rocks just described, appears to be thinly bedded and weathers into flags. Much flint derived from the limestone is scattered about*".

Although Blandford did not recognise any prehistoric site on the top, and along the slopes of the hill, he pointed out the presence of flint nodules, which are embedded in the Eocene limestone terraces of the hill, in seams of large nodules (fig. 1, bottom) of a light brownish grey colour (10YR6/2).¹

A further schematic description of this region was given by Allchin (1976) and Allchin et al. (1978), during the 1975-1976 fieldwork carried out by the Cambridge Archaeological Expedition in Sindh, Nevertheless some of the data furnished in this paper are rather imprecise. In effect B. Allchin (1976: 486) wrote: "*in lower Sind a hill on the western bank of the present course of the Indus, a few miles south of Hyderabad, provides another extensive source of chert. In the absence of a name on the ordnance survey map this site which was*

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¹ Colours of the Munsell Soil Color Charts 2000.

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discovered by an officer of the Pakistan Archaeological Department some ten years ago, is known as Milestone 101. A horseshoe-shaped limestone hill with a flat top between one and two square kilometers in extent is capped by a layer of chert nodules. In this respect it appears to be unique among the surrounding hills."

Unfortunately, no geological description of this area was provided by Professor A.R. Khan (1979: 80). In 1972, and mainly in the summer of 1973, he conducted an extensive survey of the hill, during which he collected an impressive quantity of flint tools, which are now in the stores of the Museum of Prehistory and Palaeogeography of the Department of Geography, Karachi University. Unfortunately most of these finds are still waiting for a detailed publication (Biagi, 2006).

2. History of the Research

The archaeological history of the research in the Ongar Hill (otherwise called Milestone 101 by Allchin²) is restricted to the surveys and surface collections made by the two above-mentioned authors in the 1970s. Nevertheless it is important to report what they discovered, because the descriptions given by the two authors are rather contradictory.

In her first paper, B. Allchin (1976: 486-487) reports that the flint assemblages were present only on the top of the horseshoe-shaped hill and that this site *"appears to have been used as a factory at many periods of the Stone Age. Artefacts and factory debris of Lower, Middle and Upper Paleolithic and perhaps also Mesolithic and pre-Harappan periods lie in great profusion"*. Two years later (Allchin et al., 1978: 296) she also wrote, *"the hill top is interesting, as it shows the wide range of artefact types found there; almost all the Middle and Upper Paleolithic types recorded in the Rohri Hills also occur*

² The location given by B. Allchin incorrect. In effect the southernmost slope of the Ongar Hill touch the Milestone 100 and not 101.
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here, and further they correspond fairly closely in average and size...In addition there is a fairly high proportion of Lower-Paleolithic types, including hand axes, with ovate and carinated variant forms, chopping tools and cleavers of rather different forms to those associated with Middle Paleolithic industries in the Thar Region...Milestone 101 is thus quite the largest Lower-Paleolithic site in the entire Thar Region...".

In contrast, A.R. Khan (1979: 80) gives the description of five distinct assemblages, which he collected mainly during the summer 1973 fieldwork season. What is interesting to notice is that he collected the three oldest of these assemblages "associated with three gravel terraces of remnants of old piedmont slopes of varying elevations. The two latter industries, particularly the fourth one, are found as surface material scattered all over the area". The five assemblages, from the oldest to the most recent, have been described as 1) Khaskheli Industry, rich in choppers and chopping tools, 2) Ongar Industry, "with typical Mid-Acheulian hand-axes, cleavers and a host of other tools" (Khan, 1979: 81), 3) Miharo Industry "associated with the lowest gravel terrace and covering much larger area is Levalloisian industry, with typical prepared cores and Levallois flakes and points", 4) "the fourth industry is a crude industry spread all over the area – over the hill-tops, all terraces and valleys. It includes discoidal cores, crude cortical flakes, denticulated tools, scrapers; borers and beaked tools, resembling to, what is now termed, Middle Stone Age of India", 5) "the youngest industry of the area is a blade-burin and steep scraper industry resembling the earliest Upper Paleolithic industry of the Levant coast...".

3. The 2005 Surveys:

Between January 26th and 29th, and on April 4th, 2005, two surveys were carried out in the study region.³ They were planned after a very

³ The surveys were carried out as a joint venture between the Institute of Sindhology Jamshoro University (Pakistan) and the Department of Science of Antiquity and the Near East, Ca' Foscari University, Venice (Italy). They were possible thanks to the kind
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brief visit paid by the author in April 2004, which revealed the existence of flint artefacts still in site on the top of the Ongar Hill (fig. 1, top).

The first day, the survey (January 26th) began from the village of Miharo (otherwise called Ongar). It is along the lowermost terrace, west of this village, that A.R. KHAN (1979) reported the recovery of a Levallois industry. Nevertheless nothing was found along the alluvial, gravelly terrace, except for abundant pieces of natural flint. 6 specific points (1-6) have yielded isolated finds (fig. 2).

During the second day, the survey (January 27th) was conducted along the lower terraces that lie between the two western points of the horseshoe-shaped (Ongar) hill, and along the southern slope of the above-mentioned terrace. Most of the finds collected from this area are attributable to the Late (Upper) Palaeolithic (points 7 and 8). The survey was continued also along the eastern terrace of the Khaskheli N (points 9 and 10).

The third day (January 28th) was devoted to a prospection along the limestone terrace of the horseshoe-shaped hill. Unfortunately the limestone quarrying, which is still very active, has destroyed almost the entire mesa. Nevertheless a small, intact area, of a few square meters, was discovered: it yielded handaxe rough-outs and Levallois-like flakes at point 11). The same day the survey was continued along the lowermost terraces of the Khaskheli N. that are extremely poor of lithic finds (point 12)

The fourth day (January 29th) was almost entirely dedicated to the survey of the long, narrow hill between Ongar, in the east, and Daphro, in the west. The hilltop was found perfectly intact, most probably because it is very difficult to reach due to the steepness of its sides. The exploration began from the eastern side of the hill, which is separated by the western one by a very narrow

collaboration and participation of Mir Atta Mohammad Talpur, Mir Ghulam Rasool Talpur, Akhtar Talpur, Farooq Talpur and two Sindh Police officers.

crest. The eastern part is very rich in (Early) Palaeolithic sites, both workshops and isolated finds (points 13-16). The largest workshop is that found at point 15) which is some 20 m in diameter. No flint tool has been removed from this hilltop, given the importance of leaving all the material in situ for further research. Moving towards the western side of the hill, other *in situ* workshops were discovered, mainly towards the northern edge of the hill (points 17 and 18).

The same day, a preliminary survey was conducted along the eastern fringes of the Daphro Hill, which extends west of the course of the Mamman N., and elongates for some 1.5 km, in an E-W direction. Although the brief visit was made in the late afternoon, it was easy to recognise that also this hill, at present largely devastated by the limestone quarries, was originally rich in Palaeolithic workshops. Many flint flakes, and a few subconical cores with blade-like flake detachment, were recognised in a small zone of the easternmost terrace. All the Daphro Hill deposit yield flint nodules of a quality and colour identical to those of Ongar.

On April 4th, the survey was resumed along the south-eastern fringes of Daphro, where the workshop, already discovered in January, was mapped (point 19). Here the original surface of weathered flint artefacts is still preserved *in situ* in a few, small cluster. The survey was continued along the southern edge of the same terrace, where an important Early Palaeolithic assemblage was found (point 20). The same day, a brief visit was paid also to Ngohi. Also this area has been almost totally destroyed by the limestone quarries.⁴

3.1. The Discoveries

The following sites, and isolated tools, were discovered during the 2005 surveys.

⁴ All the flint artifacts collected during the survey are now in the stores of the Museum of the Institute of Sindhology, Jamshoro University.
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- 1) Ongar (January 26th, 2005): 25°10'37" N, 68°13'15" E (fig. 2, n.1). A few corticated flakes and a probable Levallois core.
- 2) Ongar (January 26th, 2005): 25°10'20" N, 68°13'47" E (fig. 2, n.2). A few flakes and two scrapers, one of which is transversal on a flake with a faceted platform, found isolated on the surface (fig. 3, n. 1).
- 3) Ongar (January 26th, 2005): 25°10'20" N, 68°13'24" E (fig. 2, n.3). A few flakes.
- 4) Ongar (January 26th, 2005): 25°10'18" N, 68°13'37" E (fig. 2, n. 4). A few Levallois flakelets with faceted platform (fig. 3, n. 2).
- 5) Ongar (January 26th, 2005): 25°10'18" N, 68°13'25" E (fig. 2, n.5). One subconical blade-like-flake, corticated core (fig. 4, n. 5), one probable side Burin on retouch, on a thick blade (fig. 4, n. 7) and several flakes.
- 6) Ongar (January 26th, 2005): 25°10'13" N, 68°13'46" E (fig. 2, n.6). One subconical bladelet core (fig. 4, n. 4) and one crested blade.
- 7) Ongar (January 27th, 2005): 25°09'52" N, 68°13'53" E (fig. 2, n.7). Remains of a flakelet workshop.
- 8) Ongar (January 27th, 2005): 25°09'51" N, 68°13'44" E (fig. 2, n.8). Subconical blade-like-flakes cores (fig. 4, n. 2 and fig. 5, top) on the surface of a destroyed Late (Upper) Palaeolithic workshop.
- 9) Ongar (January 27th, 2005): 25°09'51" N, 68°13'21" E (fig. 2, n). A few retouched specimens among which is a precore (?) and one scraper, at the bottom of the left terrace of the Khaskheli N.
- 10) Ongar (January 27th, 2005): 25°09'36" N, 68°13'12" E (fig. 2, n). A few subconical bladelet cores (fig. 4, mi. 1, 3 and 6) and flakelets from the base of the left terrace of the Khaskheli N.

- 11) Ongar (January 28th, 2005): 25°09'40" N, 68°13'43" E (fig. 2, ii). From a small area still intact, at the top, of the terrace, come a few artefacts that are to be referred to the Acheulian Culture, and others obtained with the Levallois technique. Among these are three unfinished handaxes, two of which are fragmented (fig. 6, nn. 1 and 2) and one, smaller, complete (fig. 7, n. 1) and two Levallois flakes (fig. 3, nn. 3 and 4).
- 12) Lower Khaskheli Terrace (January 28th, 2005): 25°09'22" N, 68°12'59" E (fig. 2, n. 12). Along the lower terrace of this stream, not far from the farmhouse, a few flakes and one small subconical core were observed on the surface.
- 13) E-W (unnamed) Long Hill (fig. 4, bottom) (January 29th, 2005) (fig. 2, n. 13). The surface of this hill is still intact, without any trace of limestone quarrying activity, most probably because the slopes are very steep and the top rather difficult to reach (fig. 5, bottom). On the hilltop numerous Acheulian workshops were observed. They are characterised by the presence of precores, cores and (very) wide flakes. One of these has been recorded at 25°09'34" N, 68°12'51" E.
- 14) E-W (unnamed) Long Hill (January 29th, 2005): 25°09'37" N, 68°12'48" E (fig. 2, n. 14). One isolated, unfinished, Acheulian, bifacial handaxe (fig. 8, bottom).
- 15) E-W (unnamed) Long Hill (January 29th, 2005): 25°09'38" N 68°12'46" E (fig. 2, n. 15). Large workshop, some 20 m in diameter, with many tested nodules, precores, (very) wide flakes and side scrapers scattered around (fig. 9, bottom).
- 16) E-W (unnamed) Long Hill (January 29th, 2005): 25°09'40" N, 68°12'45" E (fig. 2, n. 16). A few meters to the west of the previously described one, another C-shaped workshop was discovered, with tested nodules and (very) wide flakes.

- 17) E-W (unnamed) Long Hill (January 29th, 2005): 25°09'38" N, 68°12'27" E (fig. 2, n. 17). Along the northern edge of the hill, which is covered with flakes, a cluster of wide flakes was noticed at the above coordinates.
- 18) E-W (unnamed) Long Hill (January 29th, 2005): 25°09'41" N, 68°12'20" E (fig. 2, n. 18). A cluster of (very) wide flakes and a core in their centre, along the northern margin of the hill (fig. 9, top).
- 19) Daphro (April 4th, 2005): 25°09'34" N, 68°11'29" E (fig. 2, n. 19). A few clusters of Middle (?) Palaeolithic flakes and flakelets along the southern edge of the terrace.
- 20) Daphro (April 4th, 2005): 25°09'47" N, 68°10'56" E (fig. 2, n. 20). Along the edge of the left terrace that faces the wadi, an Acheulian complex, characterised by the presence of one cleaver (fig. 3, n. 5), bifacial tools (fig. 7, n. 2), cores and flakes, was recovered partly still in situ.



Fig. 1 Surface of a Palaeolithic workshop discovered along the western edge of the horse-shaped Ongar Hill in April 2005 (top); flint nodules exposed by the limestone quarries at Ongar (bottom) (*photographs by P. Biagi*).

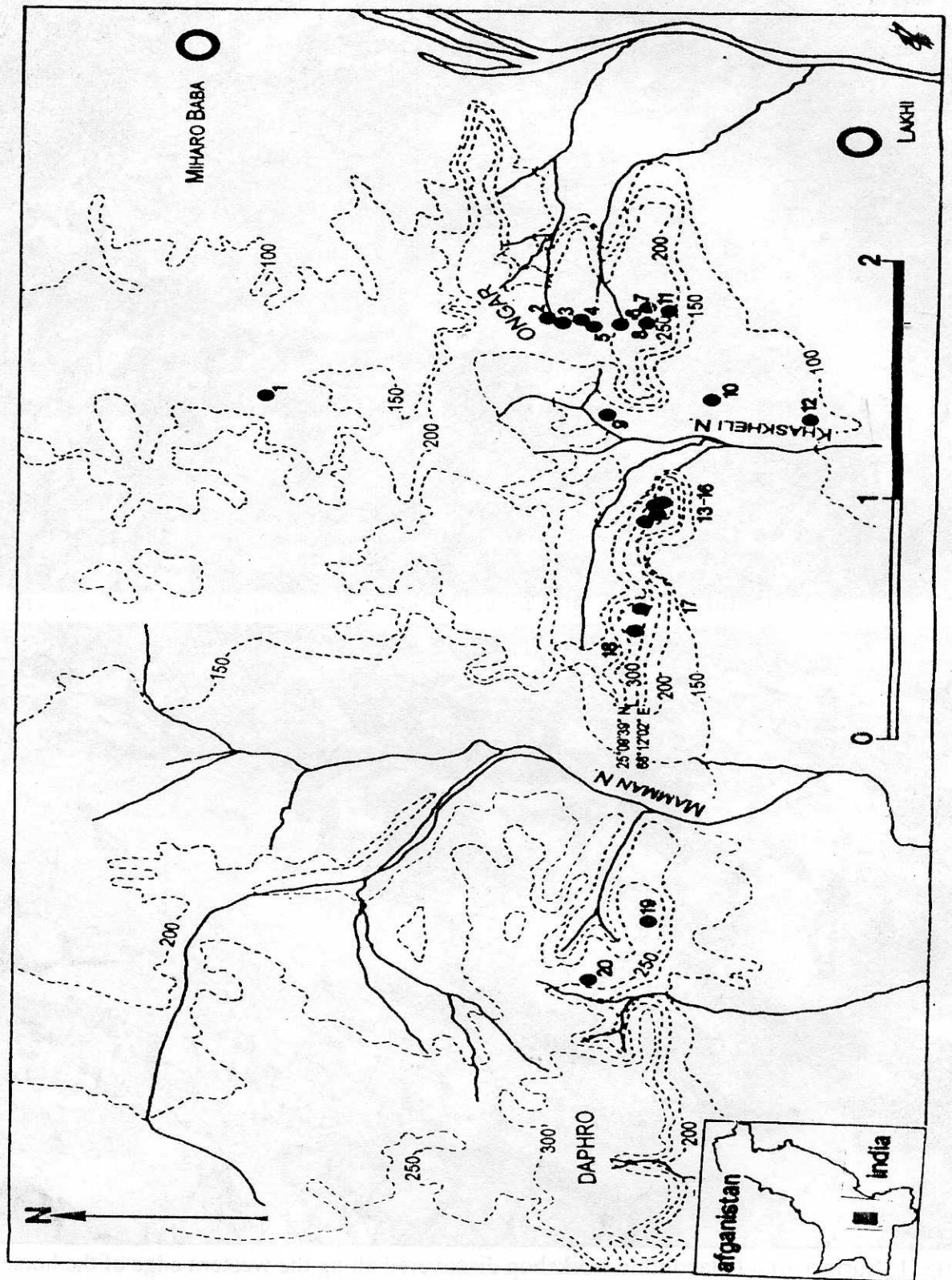


Fig. 2- Distribution map of the archaeological finds discovered in the 2005 surveys at Ongar and Daphro (1-20). The positions are approximate (drawing by P. Biagi).

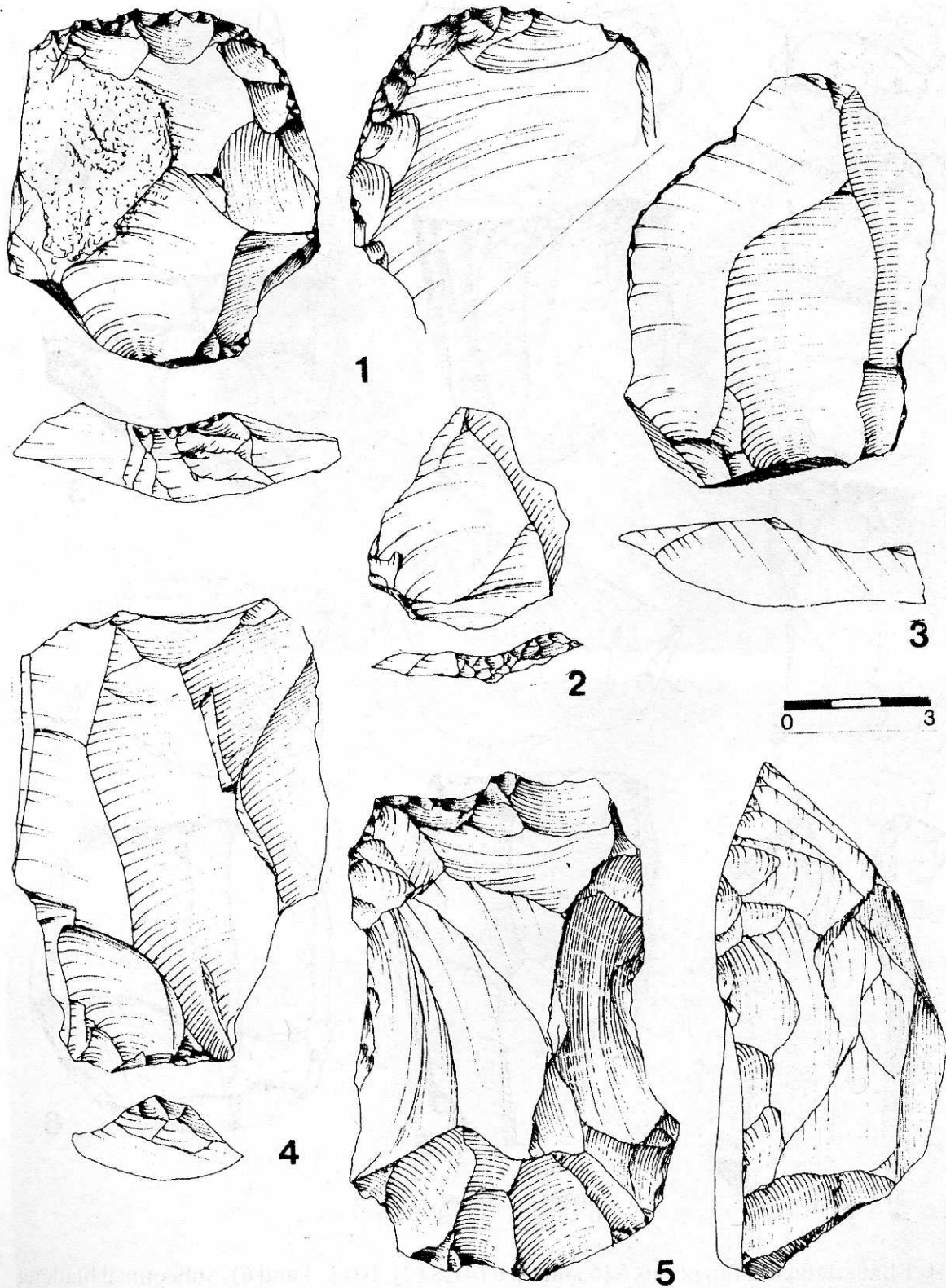


Fig. 3- Flint artefacts from points 2 (1), 4 (2), 11 (3 and 4) and 20 (5). Transversal scraper (1). Leaver (5) (drawings by P. Biagi and G. Almerigogna).

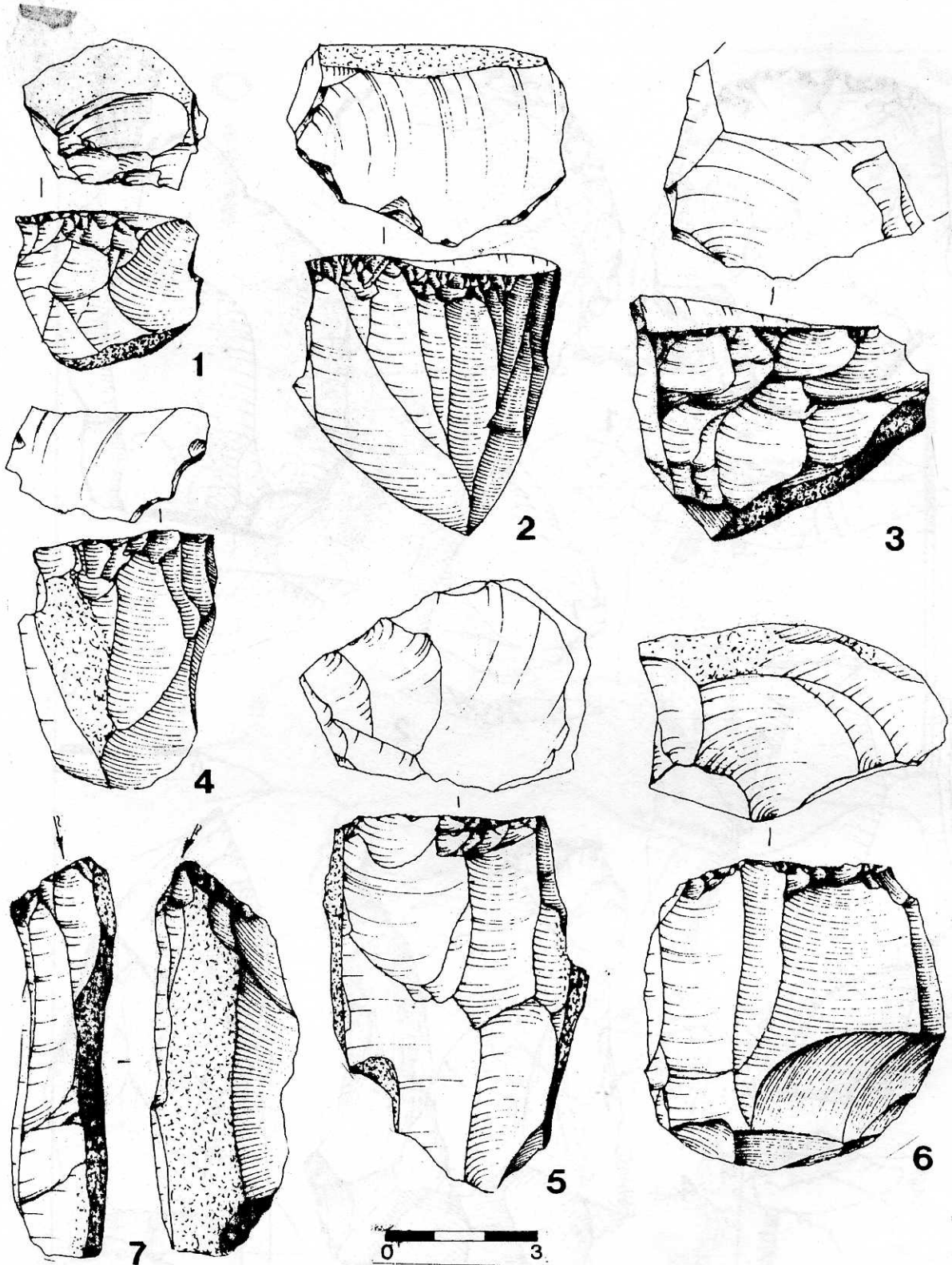


Fig. 4- Flint artefacts from points 5 (5 and 7), 6 (4), 8 (2), 10 (1, 3 and 6). Subconical bladelet and blade-like-flake cores (1-6) and probable side Burin (7) drawings by P. Biagi and G. Almerigogna).



Fig. 5 - Subconical blade-like-flake core from point 8 (top) and the hill that elongates between Ongar and Daphro, from the north-west (bottom) (photographs by P. Biagi)

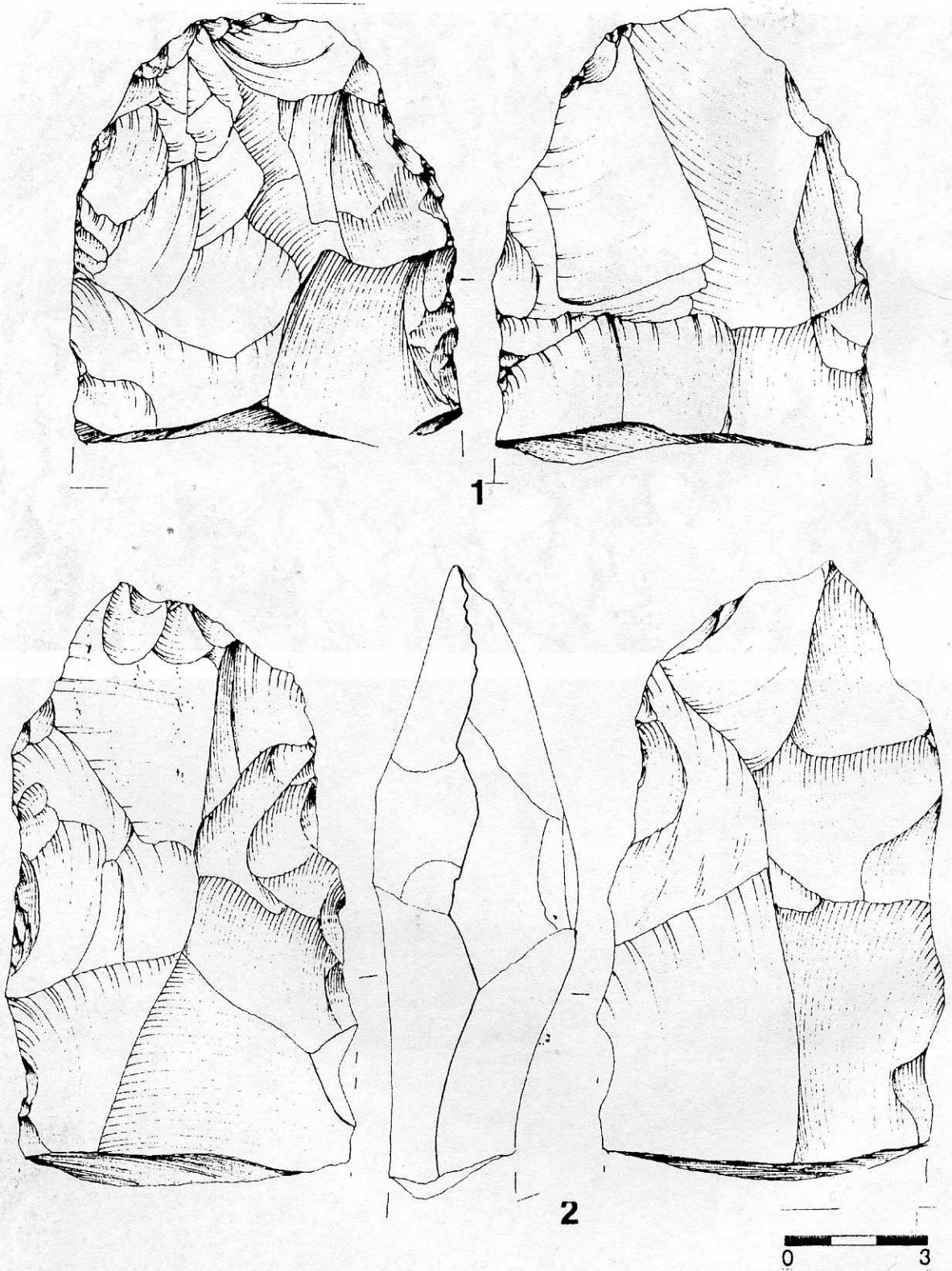


Fig. 6 - Unfinished, bifacial handaxe from point 11 (1 and 2) (drawings by P. Biagi and G. Almerigogna).

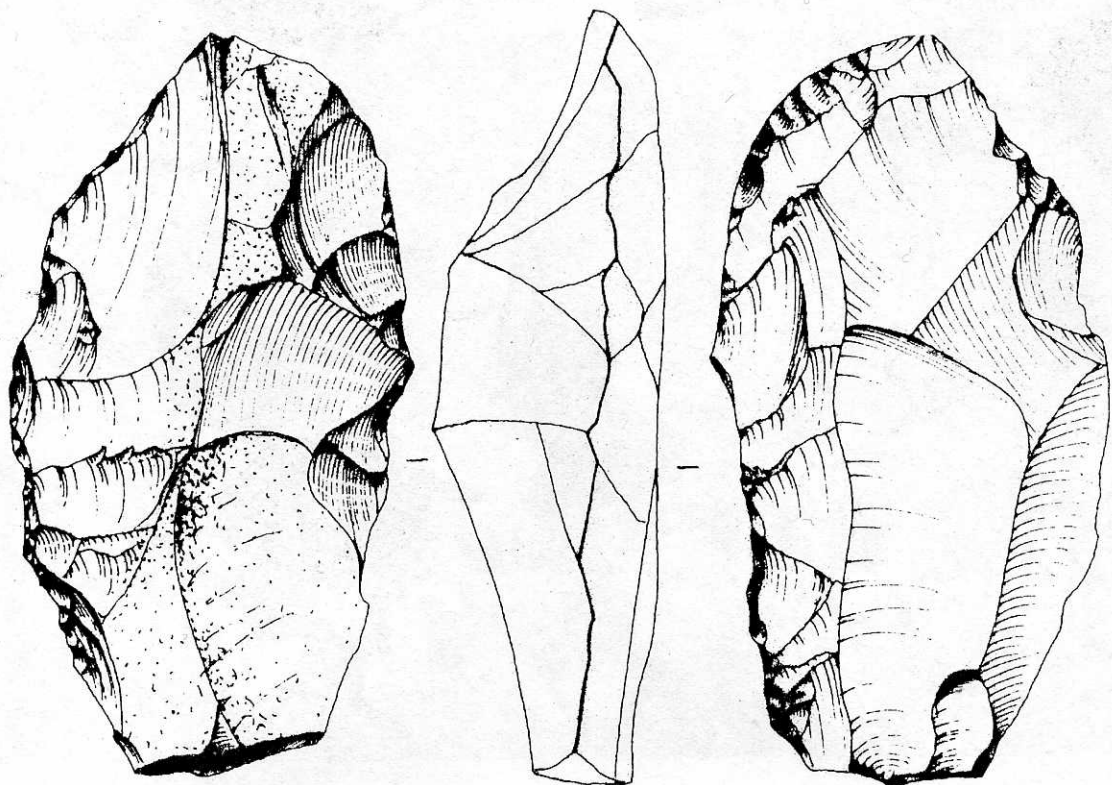


Fig. 7 - Unfinished bifacial handaxe from point 11 (1) and bifacial tool (core?) From point 20 (2) (drawings by P. Biagi and G. Almerigogna).



Fig. 8 - Bifacial tool from the top of the elongated hill (top) and unfinished, bifacial handaxe from point 14 (bottom) (photographs by P. Biagi).



Fig. 9 - C-shaped workshop at point 16 (top) and large Acheulian workshop at point 15 (bottom) (photographs by P. Biagi).

3.2. The Flint Assemblages

During the 2005 survey, 20 archaeological sites, or isolated finds of major importance, have been discovered on the Hills of Ongar and Daphro, as well as on the hill between these two. It is important to point out that most of these hills are still subject to an uninterrupted quarrying activity that started more than fifty years ago. Thus, the discovery of a Palaeolithic surface, still intact, on the elongated hill between Ongar and Daphro, is of unique archaeological importance.

All the assemblages recovered in this area in 2005, show a strong brown patina (7.5YR4/6) due to exposure and weathering. They all can be referred to workshop activities, which, broadly speaking, took place in three main Palaeolithic periods. This indicates that the hills were major raw material sources throughout a long time-span, most probably between the Middle/Late (?) Pleistocene and the beginning of the Late (Upper) Palaeolithic. The 2005 discoveries would suggest a Palaeolithic sequence similar to that described by B. Allchin (1976), although no tool referable to any Holocene period has ever been recorded in the surveyed area.

Nevertheless, the flint industries seem attributable to three distinct complexes, the first of which is to be ascribed to a period in the development of the Acheulian, with the presence of (unfinished) bifacial handaxes, cleavers and (very) wide flakes, the second, most probably to the Middle Palaeolithic, with a flake industry sometimes detached with the Levallois technique, and the third to the Late (Upper) Palaeolithic, characterised by subconical cores with bladelet or blade-like-flake detachments. The very simplistic sequence just outlined is similar, but not identical, to that described by Negrino and Kazi (1966) for the Rohri Hills. Although parallels can be extended to both the geological and sedimentary condition of the two limestone hilly regions (Raza and Bender, 1995), among which is the occurrence of pocket of

"red soil" on the top of the mesas (see Biagi and Cremaschi, 1988 for the Rohri Hills), and the presence of artefacts with different weathering traces, some differences can be noticed, although our knowledge of the Ongar and Daphro Hills is undoubtedly much more limited than that of the Rohri Hills, where the research has been conducted systematically for many years.

4. Conclusion

According to the observations made during the 2005 surveys, the Palaeolithic workshops of the study area are not limited to the Ongar. Contrary to what supposed by the previous authors, all the other hills, belonging to the same Eocene, limestone formation, visited during the brief surveys, are very rich in seams of good quality flint nodules. Furthermore, they all revealed the occurrence of prehistoric activity at their top. Since the hilly region is very large and totally uninvestigated from an archaeological point of view, further surveys are highly needed in order to define the extent of the prehistoric exploitation of the flint raw material sources in the region.

Another point of great importance is that the limestone quarrying activity, which has already devastated an incredible number of archaeological sites, at present is even more active in the region than in the recent past. Claims (Allchin, 1976: 488) asking for "effective steps...to be...taken immediately to preserve sufficient representative areas of the Rohri Hills and the single hill at Milestone 101 from destruction by quarrymen and constructors in search for road metal" have remained unheard. Nevertheless we cannot but continue to "stress too strongly the need for prompt action on the part of the Government of Pakistan where this is concerned", although nothing has happened during the last thirty years.

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