



The Late Paleolithic Art of the steppes in the Northern Black Seaside and the Sea of Azov Side

by Victor S. Vetrov*

ABSTRACT

The Late Paleolithic Age in the steppe zone of the Northern Black Seaside and the Sea of Azov Side is a very interesting phenomenon. The hunt after the herd hoofed animals became the reason of the occurrence of the nomad hunters' economy with its specificity. It has found the reflection in the features of the sites' device, specificity of the economic objects' designs and other features of the Paleolithic hunters life. Has it found the reflection in the art these society? when the general analysis of the mobile art's goods of this region has been done we consider that it is possible to put the question about the allocation of the Northern Black Seaside and the Sea of Azov Side in a separate area of the late Paleolithic art's development. This region has the characteristic features and contrastly allocated on a background of the late Paleolithic art of the neighbor areas. On the base of the analysis of the mobile art's goods it is also possible to consider the information contacts peripheral societies of the steppe zone.

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Geographical Location.

The region studied in our work, is situated in southern Ukraine, between 45° and 48° latitude north and 28° and 40° longitude east (fig. 1). This territory includes the Black Sea lowland, southern part of Dnieper plateau, southern part of Dnieper lowland, the Azov plateau, the part of Donetsk Ridge and Kuban lowland. The relief of these plateaus is generally characterized by the alternation of the plain by water that in the past caused deep valleys (till 60-80 metre), whose rivers often have a meandering course. Average heights are about 200 metre above the sea level. The landscape of all regions is mainly steppe.

Natural Environment. The reconstruction of the natural environment of this region in the Late Palaeolithic period remains a very debatable problem at the present moment. In spite of large number of the investigated Late Palaeolithic monuments, many of them have different stratifications which sometimes cannot be easily correlated with each other. Therefore we can speak only about the common conditions of the natural environment of steppes in the Northern Black Seaside and the Seaside of Azov in the Late Palaeolithic Age. With regard to this question we base ourselves on the publications by I.V. Sapozhnikov, A.A. Krotova, N.B. Leonova, O. Sopher, L.L. Zaliznyak. [1-5] In the Late Palaeolithic Age the steppe regions of

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the Northern Black Seaside and the Seaside of Azov was characterized by glacial steppe vegetation, with a small amount of woods, which were growing in the valleys of the rivers and streams, and the basic artistic representations at that time were herd hoofed animals such as the bison, the horse, and the northern deer.

Economic Strategy of the Paleolithic Hunters. The common ecological characteristics of all Black Sea and the Azov Sea steppes led to the economical and cultural typology of hunters of herd hoofed animals. Such hunt was conducted following seasonal migrations and the specific behavior of these animals. The features of such economical and cultural model of steppe hunters of the Late Palaeolithic Age was studied by M.I. Gladlii, V.N. Stanko, L.L. Zaliznyak, I.V. Sapozhnikov, A.A. Krotova [6-10] The specificity of these hunted animals has determined the economic structure and features of material culture in the Pleistocene. However the importance of such specialized hunting is appreciated ambiguously by different scientists. In different parts of the steppe region we have very different monuments. They differ according to size, structure and certainly the objects of the hunt. Such diversity is caused, first of all, by the fact that not all sites of the Late Paleolithic Age were in an extremely steppe landscape. In the deltas and middle course of many rivers there were woods, a situation that considerably influenced the type of hunted prays and, consequently, the economic and living structures of the sites.

The group of twenty sites that is located not far from Rogalik can be served as an illustration of the specialized hunt after herd hoofed animals. From 70 to 100% of hunted animals on these sites were horses. At some sites bones of the bison and northern deer were found in only small quantities. Only in some cases there is evidence of the presence of fireplaces and probably comfortable dwelling constructions. The characteristics of the sites sometime suggest a short-term occupation. In these cases we are probably dealing with systems of small hunting camps located along the seasonal migration of the horses. [11]

The next group is represented by the sites at Amvrosievka and Anetovka-2. There are many bones of hundreds of bison, which were probably killed during a mass hunt. On the same sites one can recognise the places used to recycle carcasses and those to manufacture flint-stone instruments. [12] They are interesting and original monuments with a complex lay-out and a most powerful layer of a settled culture.

However, if we try to describe specific aspects of the steppe hunters' economy as a whole, we must realise that even large sites as Kamennaiy Balka, Anetovka-2 or Amvrosiivka are not enough. The specialized groups of the hunting camps such as Rogalik are indeed unique, but most sites of the steppe do not have a narrow specialization. Therefore, we can not speak of a common hunting strategy, or even a limited quantity of variants of such strategy, for all hunters of the steppes at the Northern Black Seaside. We can however speak about some common features of the hunters of this steppe zone. The first of all it is orientation of the hunt to follow the herds of hoofed steppe animals (the bison, the horse, the northern deer).

The constant movement to follow the herds of hoofed animals was shown in the structure of the sites. There are no complex long-term dwelling constructions here, like the sites of mammoth hunters located more north. At the sites of the steppe hunters dug-in structures (dug-in dwellings and garbage pits) are generally rare. By comparison at the sites of the mammoth hunters (Eliseevitchy, Mezin, Avdeevo, and Kostenkovskiy sites for example) one can find tens of such structures. All this suggests a very mobile life style of steppe hunters, who have a constant nomadic life to follow the migrating herds of animals. All these factors influence not only their hunting specificity and lay-out of the sites, but also their artistic production, which we are now describing.

Works of Art. Paleolithic cultures at the shores of the Northern Black Sea were such that, in spite of the presence of the Crimean mountains in this region that are rich in caves, monumental cave art is not present here. Without doubt this is the fundamental difference of the art in this region from that in Spain and France, where cave art flourished, and from the more eastern Caucasian and Ural mountains, where cave art is also present.

However in the steppe zone of the Northern Black Sea coast there are signs of practicing cults, in the opinion of the authors of the excavations. These are currently associated with monuments at Anetovka-2 and Kamennaiy Balka. It is significant to observe, for example, sizable concentrations of bones from different parts of the animals' skeletons or the bone of a single group of animals that were covered with ochre. Sometimes human bones are also found in such concentrations. If the hypothesis of a ritualistic meaning of bone coloring is correct, we can consider them monumental art. It is also possible to attribute to them the function of sanctuaries or altars dedicated to a cult of the hunt, or something similar. However from the formal-topological points of view the Paleolithic art of the steppes at the Northern Black Sea and the Sea of Azov lowland is strongly characterised by the mobile art. This artistic production consists of statuettes and engraved objects, various decorated objects and tools (bone's tips and other), body decorations (pendants from drilled animal teeth and shells), or goods without obvious use (bones with indentations).

Unfortunately, in the last hundred years not enough attention was given to the questions of publishing about Paleolithic art of the steppes in the Northern Black Sea coasts and Azov Sea lowland. Basically we have a rather scrappy information about related findings. Most publications have no detailed descriptions

of artifacts. This problem is also complicated by the fact that a significant part of materials were found before the second world war and results were not published. Moreover, many items found at that time and their related documentation were lost during the war. That is why the informational about mobiliary art of those regions is in a very sad state. Nevertheless, in this publication we shall try to take into account all material that is available to us.

In the analysis of the art of the steppe monuments of the Northern Black Sea shores, items from the sites of the mountains of Crimea were grouped separately, because in the Pleistocene the coast-line of the Black Sea was located about 100 kilometers to the south of the current one, in such a way that the Crimean mountains were practically in the middle of the steppe region. Because of this, we think that the culture of steppe hunters probably extended to the mountain sides. However the art of the mountains of Crimea is considered as a separate group, because the economic and cultural traditions of this region have neverless significant differences from that of the steppe zone.

Ornaments. This category of the artistic items is the most widespread in the steppe region of the Northern Black Sea shores and the Azov Sea lowland. With exception of those shown in fig. 2, similar ornaments were found out in the sites at Romankovo and Shevchenko. In the sites of Crimea mountains such ornaments are not a rarity either (fig. 4-2; 4-4). The ornaments at the sites of the Northern Black Sea can be found everywhere. As to more northern sites of mammoth hunters similar ornaments are present in hundreds (for example, in the site at Mezin).

Items with symbols and ornaments. An the sites of the steppe regions ornaments are not brightly expressed. Their decorations basically consist of parallel lines cut on fragments of bones and tools (fig. 3-1; 3-2; 3-4; 3-5). Probably the most representative ornaments with crosses and lines are bone plates found at Ilskaya (fig. 3-2). However, the very small size of the fragments of this finding available to us does not allow us to substantiate this suggestion. In the sites of Crimea mountains the situation is different. On these items there are also linear dents on the bones (fig. 5-2; 5-3; 5-4). However, besides those found at Balin-Kosh there are representative cases with expressive geometrical and plant-like ornaments (fig. 5-1).

Sites at Rogalik clearly stand out in this typology of art. An interesting finding from the site at Rogalik-12 is the sandstone disk with pits on one side. The author of this excavation, A.F. Gorelik, thinks that from the centre to the edges there are series of pits in the the form of a cross with several more pits in its sectors. [13] However can not confirm this hypothesis. Nevertheless, this item is interesting and has no obvious similarity with the Paleolithic art of neighbouring regions. Another interesting finding at Rogalik-2A is the red swamp ore plate that is covered with complex geometrical ornaments on both sides. In his monograph, A.F. Gorelik defines the figure on this plate a female figurine. [14] A proper criticism of this interpretation has already been done by G.P. Grigorev. [15] In search of analogies A.F. Gorelik refers to the art of mammoth hunters located to the north and north-eastern of the region in question. But A.F. Gorelik could not find any analogy, but he noted common elements with ornaments such as zigzags, stripes and firs, which are widely distributed in the sites at Eliseevichy, Suponevo and Gontsy. But we have already pointed and confirm the opinion that the decoration on the plate at Rogalik-2A are analogous with those of the statuette from the site at Mezin (fig. 6), as basic elements coincide. First of all, its outline coincides with a triangle there that has a rounded up top side. Besides this, there is a coincidence in the orientation of basic elements of the internal shading. In both cases from the left top corner of a triangle the lines have been drawn from left to right and from the top-down, and under the top party of a triangle the lines are horizontal; from the right top corner of a triangle the lines have been drawn from right to left and from the top-down. As to discrepancies of individual details, it is necessary to take into account a technological difference between cutting lines on the firm surface of the statuette made of mammoth's tusk of the site at Mezin and cutting lines on the rather soft plate of the site at Rogalik-2A.

We suggest that the triangular symbol analyzed by us is a female symbolic. Therefore this symbol found at Rogalik-2A probably is evidence of the buffer role played by these settlements in the contacts between the nomadic cultures hunting herd hoofed animals and the more settled mammoth hunters. Moreover, this hypothesis would confirm the idea of the existence of information systems between regions of Eastern Europe, where high priority was given to mobile ar. [16] It also correlates with our detailed description of the distribution of female symbols among cultures of the Late Paleolithic Age. [17]

Plot goods of art. So far this typology of art of the Northern Black Sea was found out only in the sites at Rogalik. The fragment of the statuette of a female torso (fig. 4-2) has broad analogies with item found at the sites of the mammoth hunters, for example at Kostionkov and in East Europe. As for the engraving on the retouch of the female statuette, it is considerably more complex and ambiguous. At first sight this is a very interesting figure; however, this work will not be analyzed in more details at the moment, because it was found at the surface of the completely destroyed cultural layer of the site at Rogalik-11 (8À). This item was dated back to the Paleolithic Age by A. K. Filippov only on the basis of the Paleolithic age of the retouch traces on the engraving. This opinion is expressed in the monograph of the author of excavation, A.



F. Gorelik. [18] However the conclusion of A. K. Filippov is not on that publication. Unfortunately there are no detailed photos of the surface of the retouch that could confirm this idea. Therefore we shall offer any analysis of this object beyond show its image as it appears in the monograph in question. which is devoted to the Paleolithic art monuments of the Northern Black Sea.

Conclusion. After our study of the art of the steppes located on the north shores of the Black Sea and of the Azov Sea and its relationship with economic activity of societies of the Late Paleolithic Age, we come to the following conclusions.

We presume that the economic strategies followed the need of hunting various kinds of animals and consequently hunters lived at various types of different sites, studied by us, there are common features among these sites. In this context we share the opinion of P. I. Boriskovskiy and N. D. Praslov about the special economy of the steppe regions at the Paleolithic Age [19]. In this case art is a mirror of the economic model of founding cultures. Therefore we see a uniformity of art in the steppe regions which first of all demonstrate their extreme poverty. Ornaments are the most primitive and the most representative typology of art. Nomadic life probably interfered with the maintenance of regular contacts and a wide circulation of various symbols and decorations throughout the steppe region. Actually we see only two, more or less, representative sets of symbols and decorations in the sites at Balin-Kosh in Crimea and Rogalik, which is located more to the north-east from the centre of the steppe region. In our view, the extreme northeast location of Rogalik's sites and its territorial affinity with the region of the mammoth hunters, with their various and numerous mobile art, explains the presence of female symbols in these sites. As an indirect confirmation of this hypothesis, we mentioned the finding of the female statuette in the site at Minevskiy Yar that is located to the north of Rogalik. Unfortunately this statuette was lost during the second world war. Moreover, the Paleolithic art of a steppe region greatly differs from the neighboring regions. In particular we see significant differences from the southwest region of the Dnister River and the Carpathians that is characterised by the advanced art of sites near the Moldova. This region is associated with the Middle Paleolithic period. The difference from the northern and northeast regions is also significant, as they are characterised by the highly developed art of bone's carving, the broad range of beads, the decorations on mammoth tusk plates, and statuettes of women and animals.

Therefore we identified a region of the Northern Black Sea shores and the Azov Sea steppes as separate specific cultural regions of the Paleolithic art with their typical features, which we partially presented with this contribution.

Fig. 1. A map of the location of sites on the northern shores of the Black Seas with art of the Late Paleolithic Age.

Fig. 2. Pendants: A. Drilled shells (1. Dubova Balka; 2. Rogalik's sites; 3. Solenoe Ozero-9). B. Drilled teeth of animals (1. Anetovka-2; 2. Vladimirovka-1; 3. Dubova Balka; 4. Mira; 5. Muralovka). C. Others (1. Amvrosiivka (stone); 2 Mira (bone); 3. Rogalik's sites (the fish's vertebra); 4. Dubova Balka (bone); 5. Govoruha (nacre); 6. Solenoe Ozero-9 (bone)).

Fig. 3. Symbols and decorations in the compositions. 1. Anetovka-2. 2. Ilskaya. 3. Muralovka. 4. Mira. 5. Rogalik's sites. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5-a - bone; 5 - b, c, d - stone).

Fig. 4. Plot items of art. 1. Engraving on the retouch, dolomite (Rogalik-11); 2. A Fragment of statuette, sandstone (Rogalik-12).

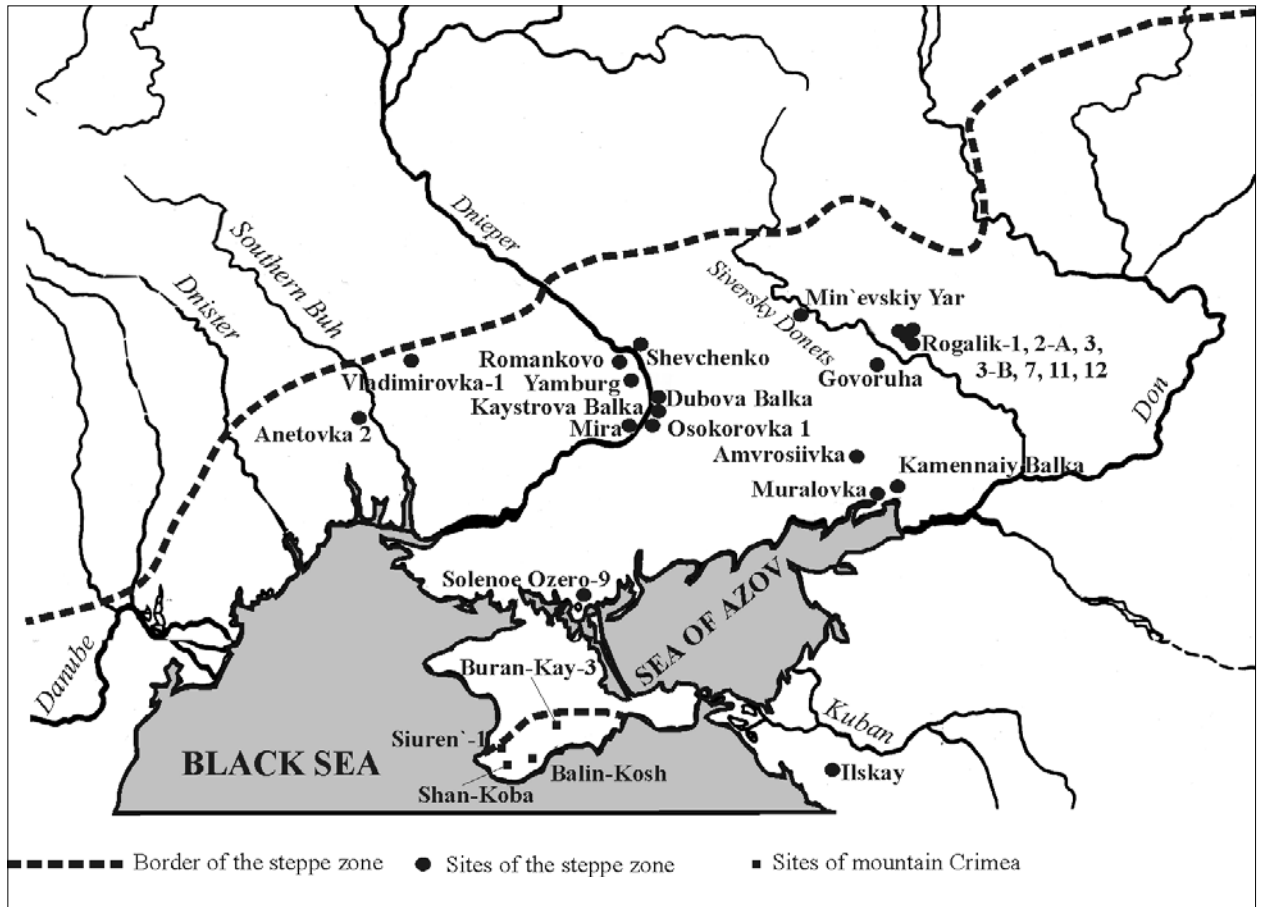


fig. 1

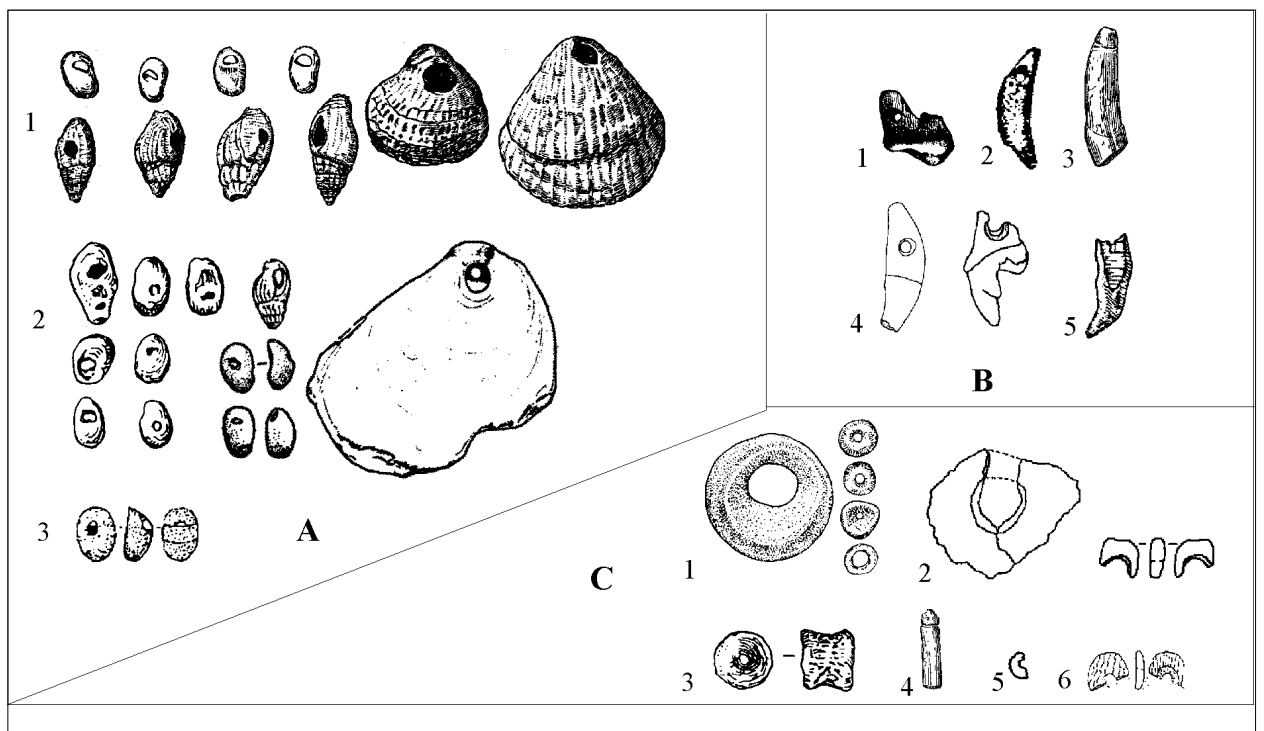


fig. 2

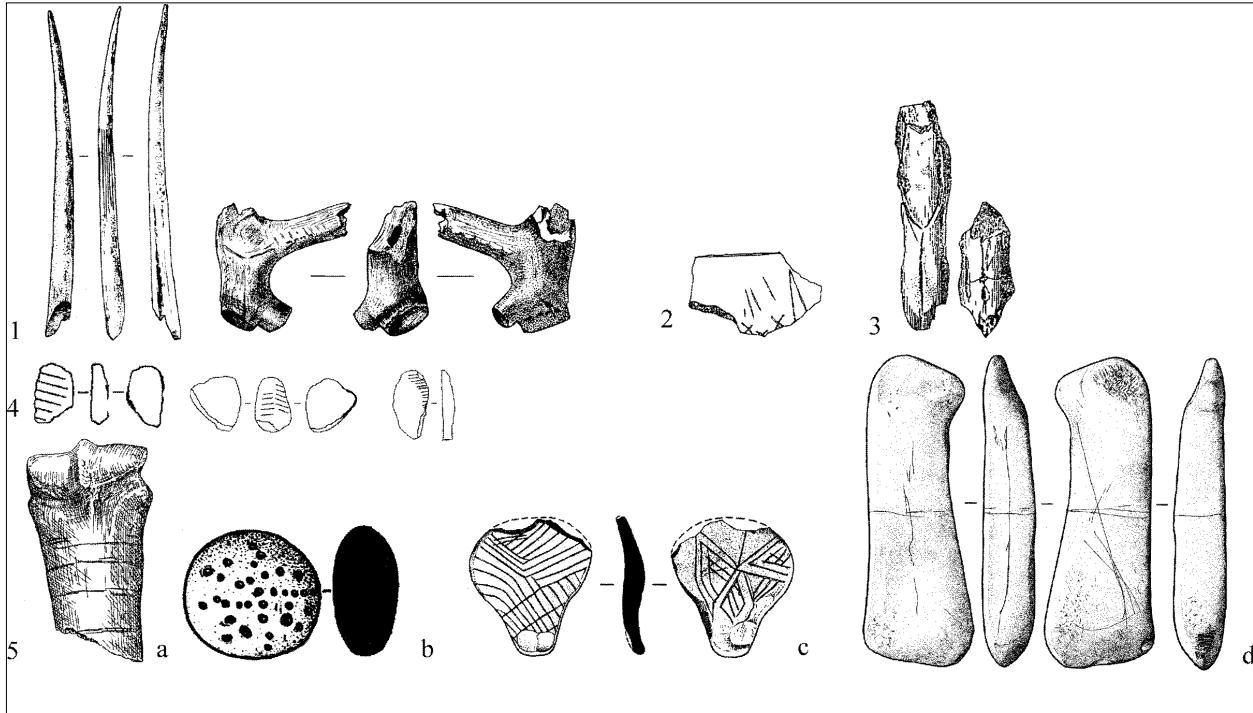


fig. 3

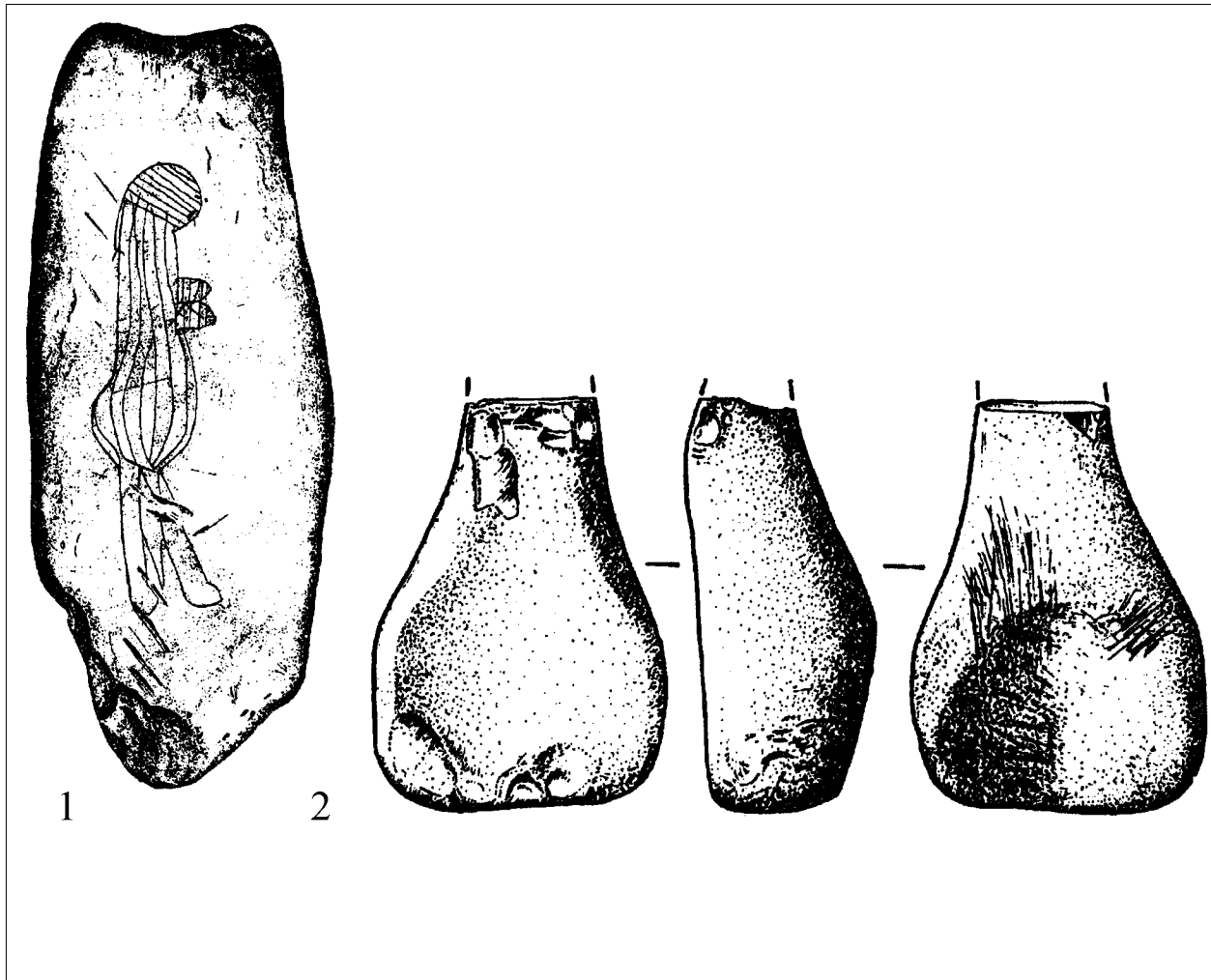


fig. 4

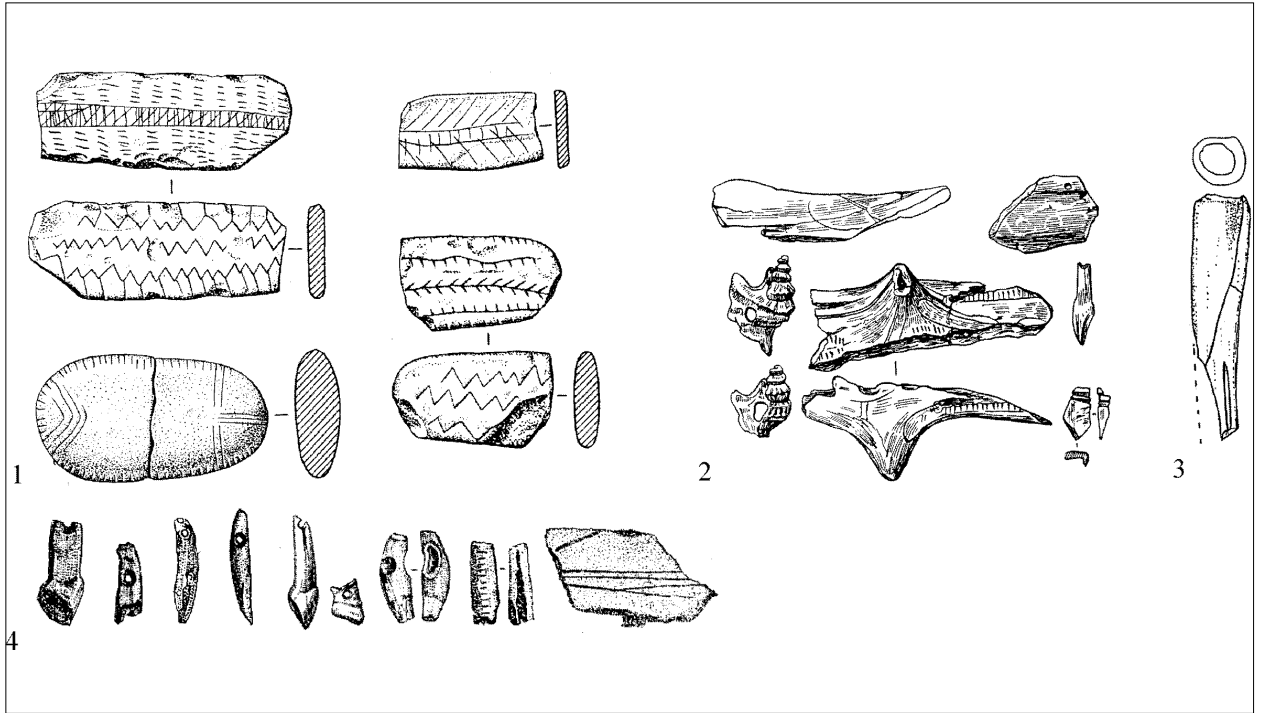


fig. 5



fig. 6 a

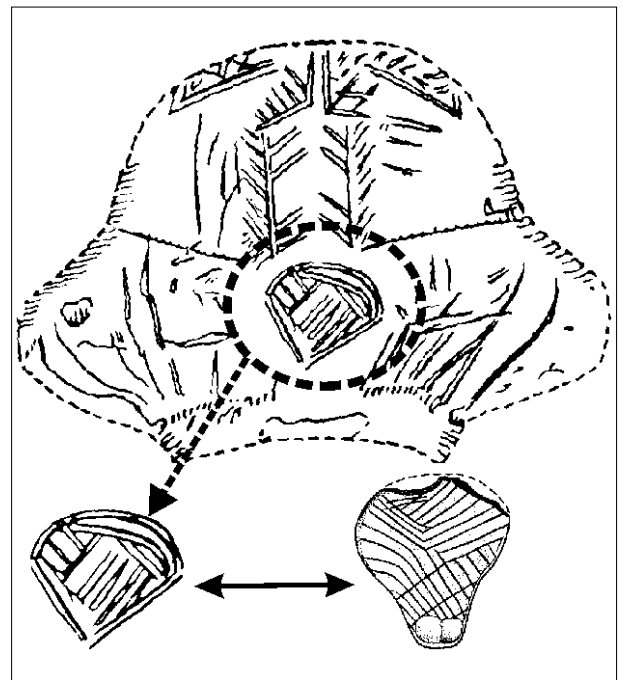


fig. 6 b



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