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The Flint Assemblage from the Middle Bronze Age IIB Village at el-Munṭar el-Abyad

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Introduction

The flint assemblage described below was retrieved from the 2003 salvage excavations carried out at the site of el-Munṭar el-Abyad, in the central part of the Bet She'an Valley (see Atrash and Golani, this volume). The small assemblage yielded 300 items (Table 1), its bulk dating from Middle Bronze Age II, with few items dating from earlier phases, which are otherwise not represented at the site (see below). The flint assemblage originated mainly in MB II contexts (n = 220; Stratum III), while the remainder (n = 80) was found within later Persian (Stratum II) and Roman (Stratum I), as well as unstratified, contexts. Within Stratum III, most of the items (n = 184) were associated with Stratum IIIA, and only 14, with the earlier Stratum IIIB. However, this ratio (about 13:1) reflects the much more extensive exposure of the Stratum IIIA remains compared to those of Stratum IIIB. Due to the small sample size, all the lithics are treated here as a single assemblage, and their provenance is described in Tables 1 and 2. In the field, only limited and unsystematic sieving was applied, which undoubtedly resulted in the loss of small components and a probable bias toward complete tools and cores.

The Pre-Middle Bronze Age Assemblage

The assemblage includes a significant number of implements from periods earlier than the Middle Bronze Age, which were found in all the excavated strata: one characteristic of the Middle Palaeolithic, at least one dated to the Neolithic, six to the Chalcolithic, and eight to the Early and Intermediate Bronze Ages (Table 2). Thus, in terms of diagnostic items, there are apparently more intrusive earlier items than typical Middle Bronze Age objects. The high ratio of intrusive tools calls into question the overall integrity of the assemblage and the actual dating of other, chronologically non-diagnostic items (debitage and ad hoc tools).

Table 1. General Composition of the Assemblage

Stratum / Category	IIIA		IIIB		IIIA–B		Total Stratum III		I, II, and Unstratified		Grand Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary flakes	9	5			3	14	12	6	4	5	16	6
Primary blades	6	3	1	8			7	3	2	3	9	3
Flakes	47	27	6	46	10	45	63	30	20	26	83	29
Blades	11	6					11	5	5	7	16	6
Bladelets	2	1					2	1			2	1
CTE: core tablets	1	1	1	8			2	1			2	1
CTE: ridge blades	1	1	1	8			2	1	1	1	3	1
CTE: others	11	6					11	5	6	8	17	6
Total Debitage	*88*	*51*	*9*	*69*	*13*	*59*	*110*	*53*	*38*	*50*	*148*	*52*
Tools	41	24	1	8	5	23	47	23	25	33	72	25
Cores	3	2					3	1	7	9	10	4
Chips	17	10	1	8	2	9	20	10			20	7
Chunks	24	14	2	15	2	9	28	13	6	8	34	12
Total debris	*41*	*24*	*3*	*23*	*4*	*18*	*48*	*23*	*6*	*8*	*54*	*19*
Total	*173*	*100*	*13*	*100*	*22*	*100*	*208*	*100*	*76*	*100*	*284*	*100*
Intrusive tools and cores	13		1		0		14		4		18	

The Middle Paleolithic Period

The assemblage includes a single typical centripetal Levallois core from Stratum IIIA, patinated, and heavily abraded.

The Neolithic Period

A distal fragment of a Pottery Neolithic (Yarmukian) sickle blade was found in an MB II context (Stratum IIIB, L1246), truncated and bearing typical deep denticulation on its cutting edge. Two other items might point to a Pre-Pottery Neolithic occupation at the site: a fragment of a truncated blade (49 mm long) exhibiting a convex-concave profile and a bidirectional scar pattern, and a truncated unipolar blade (Fig. 1:1) with a pair of opposing notches, which resembles the Naḥal Ḥemar knife type (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988:13–43).

The Chalcolithic Period

The assemblage includes several typical Chalcolithic tools, most of them found in MB IIB contexts of Stratum IIIA.

Three sickle blades (Fig. 1:2–4), made on relatively short and narrow blades, are backed and bitruncated. In some cases, the truncation was made by bipolar retouch (Fig. 1:2) or on the ventral side of the blades (Fig. 1:4). One fragment of a perforated flint disc (Fig.

Table 2. Tool Typology

Stratum / Category	IIIA	IIIB	IIIA– B	Total Stratum III	I, II, and Unstratified	Grand Total	
	N	N	N	N	N	N	%
Middle Bronze Age							
Sickle blades – Large Geometric	7		1	8	4	12	17
Scrapers	3		1	4	3	7	10
Truncations	1			1	2	3	4
Perforators	4		1	5	4	9	13
Notches and denticulates	9			9	3	12	17
Backed items	2			2	2	4	6
Retouched items	11	1		12	4	16	23
Double tools					1	1	1
Varia	2		2	4	2	6	9
Total	*39*	*1*	*5*	*47*	*26*	*71*	*100*
Intrusive Tools							
Neolithic Period							
Sickle blades		1		1		1	
Varia	2			2		2	
Chalcolithic Period							
Perforated disc	1			1		1	
Sickle blade	3			3		3	
Retouched bifacial waste	1			1		1	
Tabular scraper					1	1	
Early–Intermediate Bronze Ages							
Sickle blades (Canaanean)	4			4	3	7	
Retouched Canaanean blades	1			1		1	
Total	*12*	*1*		*13*	*4*	*17*	

2:1) was made on a large flake retouched in a partly bifacial manner, especially on its straight base. The hole was bifacially prepared. The tool was broken in the past, and the later retouch applied to the breakage surfaces implies reuse of the tool after breakage. Perforated flint discs are characteristic finds in the Golan during this period (Noy 1998:277–283), and examples of this type are also known from various Chalcolithic sites in the Middle Jordan Valley, such as Neve Ur and Abu Ḥamid (Noy 1998).

One fragment of a tabular scraper might be dated either to the Chalcolithic or the Early Bronze Age. However, the fact that the tool is devoid of cortex, similar to many tabular scrapers of the Golan Chalcolithic (Noy 1998), points to a probable Chalcolithic date for this object.

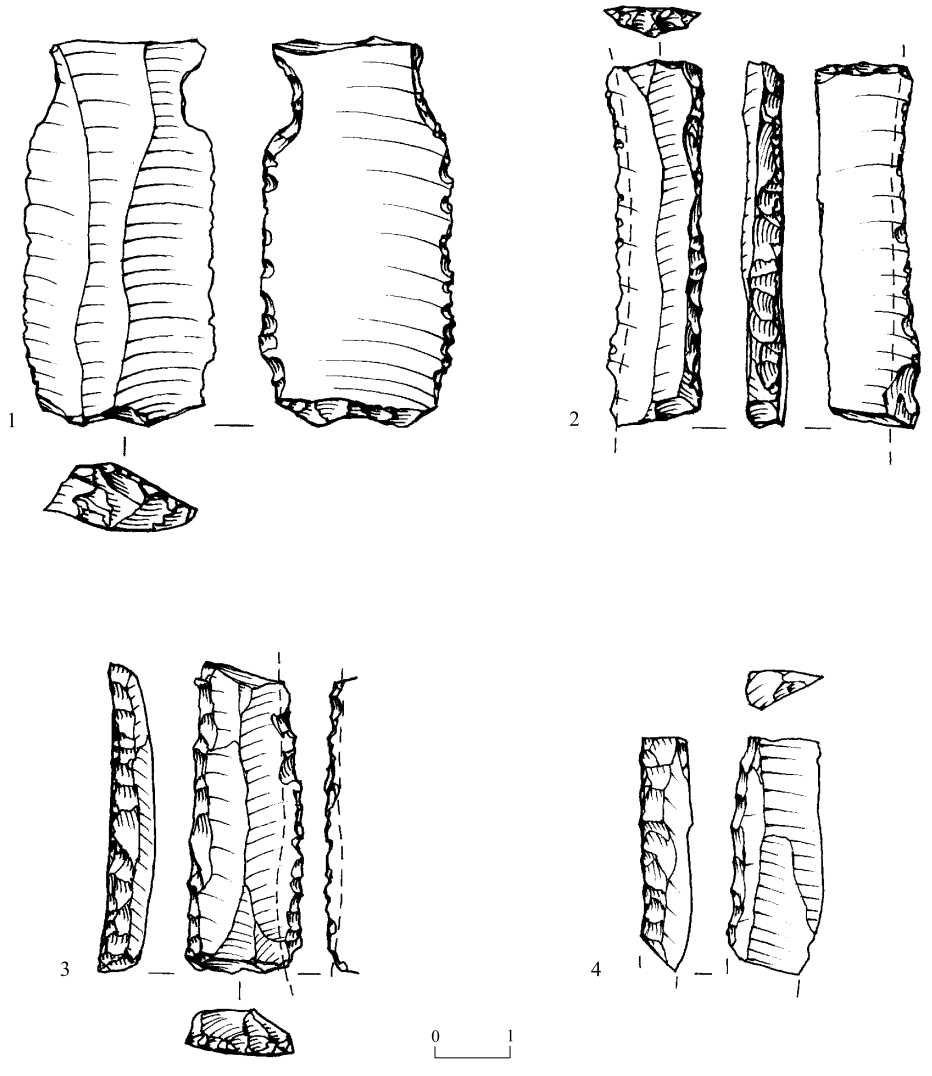

Fig. 1. Flint tools: truncated blade with opposing notches (1) from the Neolithic period, and sickle blades (2–4) from the Chalcolithic period.

One retouched item made on a flake resulted from the resharpening of a bifacial tool, with a visible polish on its distal part. The item might be broadly dated to the Neolithic–Chalcolithic periods (Fig. 2:2).

The Early and Intermediate Bronze Ages

The assemblage comprises eight tools made on Canaanean blades, found both in MB II Stratum III and in unstratified contexts. Seven of these are sickle blades (Figs. 2:3, 4), and one is a retouched Canaanean blade. The tools are broken, and except for the two illustrated items, all are represented by small fragments. All the blades exhibit a typical trapezoidal profile; in one case (Fig. 2:4), cortex remains were preserved on the blade's lateral side.

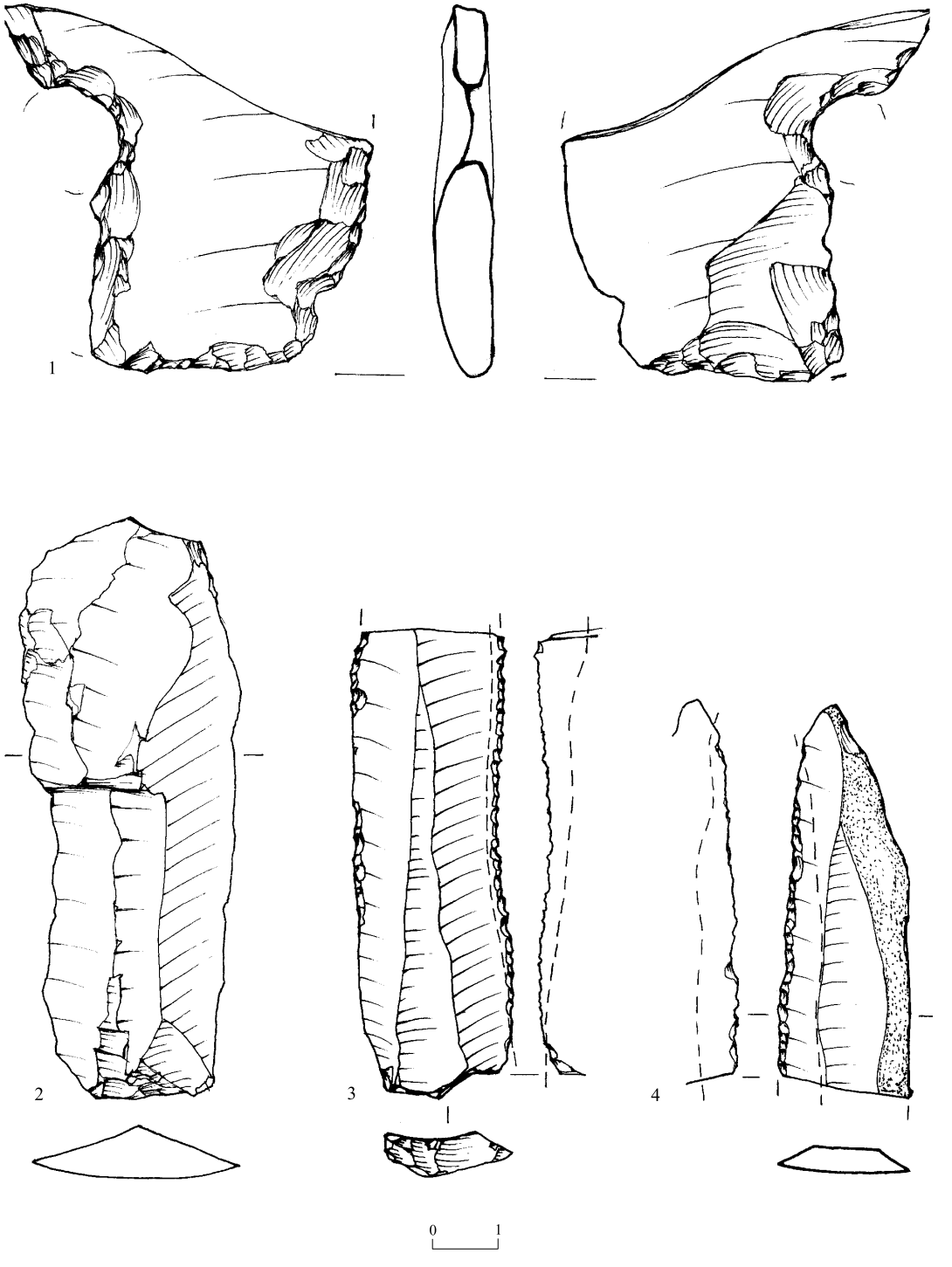

Fig. 2. Flint tools: disc (1) and bifacial tool spall (2) from the Chalcolithic period; sickle blades (3, 4) from the Early–Intermediate Bronze Ages.

THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE II ASSEMBLAGE

Compared to the flint assemblages from the earlier periods (see above), which have many diagnostic forms, the Middle Bronze Age diagnostics are limited to a single tool type, namely the large geometric sickle blades. This fact impedes proportional estimation, as it is hard to define the number of intrusive items within the "non-diagnostic" categories. Therefore, the conclusions based on the analysis of the non-diagnostic parts of the assemblage, and its overall integrity as representing a Middle Bronze Age occupation, must be treated with caution.

Raw Materials and Technology

The major part of the assemblage assigned to MB II is made on high-quality Eocene flint exhibiting shades of gray, beige and brown, while only a few isolated specimens are of other raw materials such as banded flint with battered cortex and siliceous limestone.

The number of cores in the assemblage is relatively low (n = 10, 4% of the assemblage). The cores are small, and most of them served for the production of simple flakes. Two core fragments exhibit a scar pattern suggesting some form of blade/bladelet production. It should be noted that although the prevailing view (Rosen 1997:50) asserts that blade/bladelet production is absent from the Middle Bronze Age cultural repertoire, some large geometric sickles in the present assemblage (e.g., Figs. 3:1; 4:1) were made on standardized blades. This pattern is also evident in some other assemblages containing large geometric items (Matskevich 2005:267–268). More than half of the cores (n = 6) might be characterized as amorphous, exhibiting multiple unprepared striking platforms. The rest bear a single striking platform.

The prevalence of simple flake production for ad hoc tools is evident from the analysis of the core trimming elements. Core tablets and ridge blades are very rare; the majority of the CTEs is composed of flakes, resulting from a change in the direction of the flaking during core reduction. The ratio of blades to flakes (1:4) also attests to a rare and irregular production of blades at the site.

It is worth noting that the assemblage included no cores or debitage items related to the production of massive blades suitable for the manufacture of the large geometric sickle blades. It is thus plausible that these tools were not produced locally but brought to the site either as blanks or finished tools. This pattern is typical of most Middle Bronze Age–Iron Age assemblages containing large geometric sickle blades, such as in Tel Bet She'an (Bankirer and Marder 2007) and Tel Reḥov (Dag, in press); however, this is not apparent at sites such as Tel Gezer (Rosen 1986) and Tel Dan (Rosen 1997:143 and personal observation), where sickle-blade workshops containing many unretouched sickle blanks were discovered.

Tools

Sickle Blades. The assemblage yielded twelve large geometric (*sensu* Rosen 1997:55) sickle blades. The typological variability within the group is low, and only two shapes were documented: eight rectangles (Fig. 3) and four triangles (Fig. 4:1–4). Most of these (n = 8) were made on massive blades and the rest, on flakes.

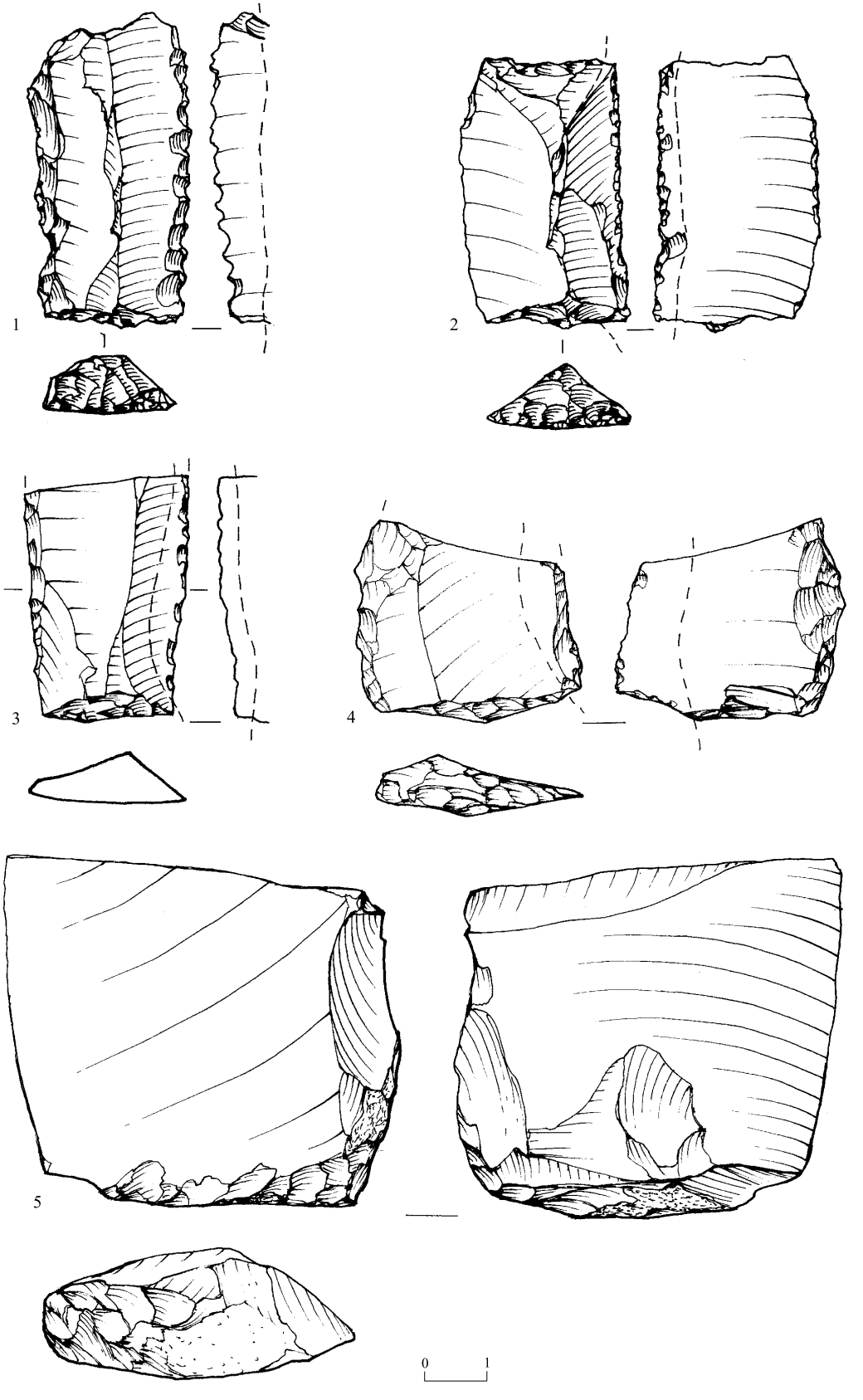

Fig. 3. Large Geometric sickle blades from Middle Bronze Age II.

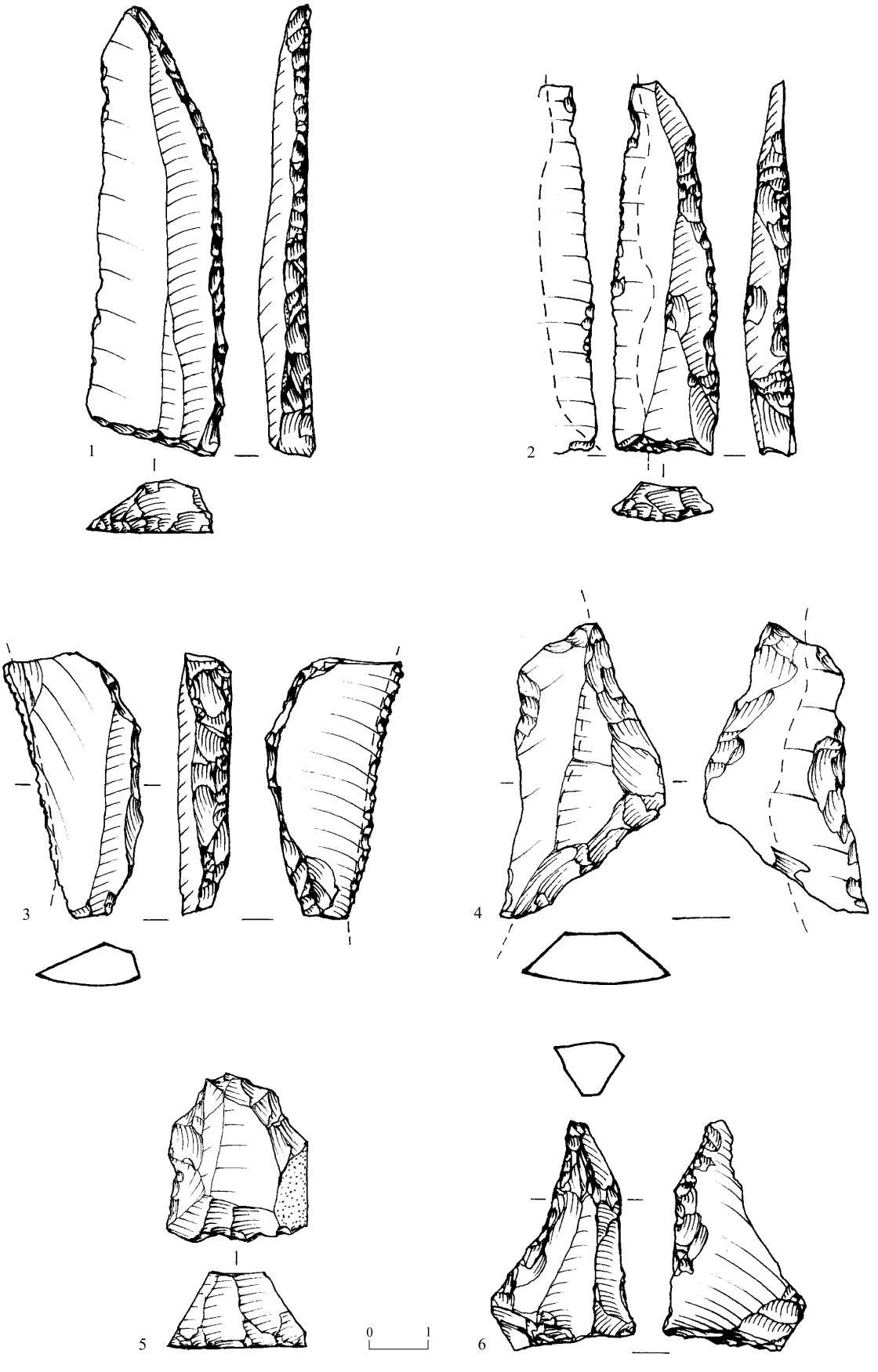

Fig. 4. Large geometric sickle blades (1–4), scraper (5) and a borer (6) from Middle Bronze Age II.

The tools are backed, either abruptly or semi-abruptly retouched on the side opposite the working edge, and the extremities of the blades are truncated. In several cases, the retouch is partially bifacial. Generally, massive blades and flakes were chosen for producing these thick (7–10 mm) sickle blades. One item (Fig. 3:5) is a massive flake exhibiting two ventral faces ("Kombewa" flake), bifacially thinned at its base. A transversal burin scar is visible on the distal end of the tool. Sickle gloss covers both sides of this tool.

Scrapers. Seven scrapers were found in the assemblage: one made on a flake, two on blades, three on primary flakes, and one on a core tablet. One of the scrapers is circular (Fig. 4:5), two are sidescrapers, and the rest are simple endscrapers.

Truncated Tools. Three tools of this type were found in the assemblage: two simple blades and one flake with a concave truncation on the distal end.

Perforators. The assemblage comprised nine perforators: three awls made on flakes and six borers (two made on blades and four on flakes). One borer (Fig. 4:6) exhibits partial bifacial shaping.

Notches and Denticulates. Six notches and six denticulates were found in the assemblage. Two items (a notch and a denticulate) were made on short blades, while the rest were made on flakes.

Backed Items. The assemblage yielded four backed blades, one exhibiting bipolar backing.

Retouched Items. This category includes 16 items: 4 flakes, 10 blades, and 2 chunks/unidentifiable blanks, all with a partially retouched edge. Fine, regular, and massive steep retouch was observed.

Double Tools. One scraper/awl, made on a core tablet, was found in the assemblage.

Varia. This category comprises six items. Two flakes with ventral removal scars on both extremities could be defined as *pièces esquillées*. The rest are items that fit none of the existing categories: a convergent sidescraper with massive ventral thinning; a flake retouched on the ventral side along its whole circumference; a flake retouched by unifacial invasive retouch; and a massive item with a triangular section, shaped by retouch in various parts and edges into a pick/massive scraper.

Discussion and Conclusions

One of the most interesting results of the analysis of the lithic assemblage from the present excavation at el-Munṭar el-Abyad is the documentation of items from periods unattested in

the excavation, namely the Neolithic (the Yarmukian culture, with a possible presence of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic), the Chalcolithic (with striking similarities to the Chalcolithic culture of the Golan Heights), and the Early–Intermediate Bronze Ages. The presence of diagnostic items from these periods in the assemblage probably points to a nearby occupation. It is worth noting that several Pre-Pottery and Pottery Neolithic sites are known in the region, e.g., Munḥata (Gopher 1989) and Ḥamadiya (Kaplan 1965), and a Chalcolithic occupation was documented in the immediate vicinity in a survey (Zori 1962:187).

The MB II lithic assemblage is characterized by large geometric sickle blades, probably brought to the site as finished implements or blanks. Concerning the rest of the assemblage, its integrity as specifically representing a Middle Bronze Age occupation is difficult to estimate. The assemblage from the Middle Bronze Age strata and unstratified contexts is characterized by a simple production of flakes intended for manufacturing a broad range of ad hoc tools.

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