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NOTE ON A PALAEOLITHIC INDUSTRY FROM WADI BUZNA, FEZZAN

ABSTRACT: *In 1979, a Middle Palaeolithic industry was analysed on the surface of a flat-top mountain at Wadi Buzna, affluent to Wadi Ajjal, Fezzan, Libya. In frame of the ongoing project of interregional comparisons with Moravian Bohunician sites, the lithic industry from Wadi Buzna becomes important for its Levallois technological background, and tendencies towards blade production.*

KEY WORDS: *Wadi Buzna – Middle Palaeolithic – Libya*

Territories of North Africa and the Near East traditionally evoked the interest of Czech Palaeolithic archaeologists. In the sense of earlier views of K. Absolon (1929), Palaeolithic populations spreading from Central Asia into Europe separated in two parallel streams – the first one directed towards Europe, and the second one towards North Africa. Therefore, Absolon proposed to compare systematically the Palaeolithic development in both regions. Since the time of his trip to Maghreb in 1927 he had prepared further similar projects, which, however, were never realised.

The situation changed during the late 70s and 80s, as systematic surface research of Palaeolithic industries in North Africa was subsequently encouraged in the context of two larger projects: first (1979–1981), the prospection for the National Museum of Libya, organized by J. Jelínek for ICOM, UNESCO, especially in the territory of Fezzan, and, second (1987), in context of the systematic excavations of the 5th dynasty necropolis, organized by M. Verner, Institute of Egyptology, Charles University, in Abusir near Cairo (Svoboda 1980, 1993). Simultaneously, archaeological excavations in the Brno region of Moravia (Bohunice and Stránská skála) revealed specific industries labelled the Bohunician, suggesting certain technological parallels to the Near East and North Africa (Valoch 1976).

In frame of the Libyan project, Palaeolithic prospection concentrated in the region of Wadi Ajjal, an east-to-west oriented depression separating the Hamada Murzuq from the Ubari Erg. Various Middle Palaeolithic industries were found at the southern edge of the Wadi, on the top of a steep cliff of the Messak Beds, predominantly of sandstones of Jurassic and Lower Cretaceous age. Another typical location was the surface of several deltoid formations, cut by erosion in the cliff. Two sites were studied in detail: the Acheulian site of Germa, located in one of the deltoid formations, and a later Middle Palaeolithic site above Wadi Buzna, located on the top of an isolated flat-top mountain. Therefore, the geographical location of these two sites is radically different: basal plain close to the past water streams in the former case, and a strategic location on the mountain top-plain in the latter case. Broader surveys over the Wadi Ajjal, however, have not proven that preference for any of these locations would be of any cultural significance, since the Acheulian sites are documented on both the plain and the cliffs.

The cliff surrounding the site of Wadi Buzna is decorated by rock engravings (Pesce 1968, Jelínek 1994), while Neolithic surface sites are located on the plain forming the valley floor deep below.

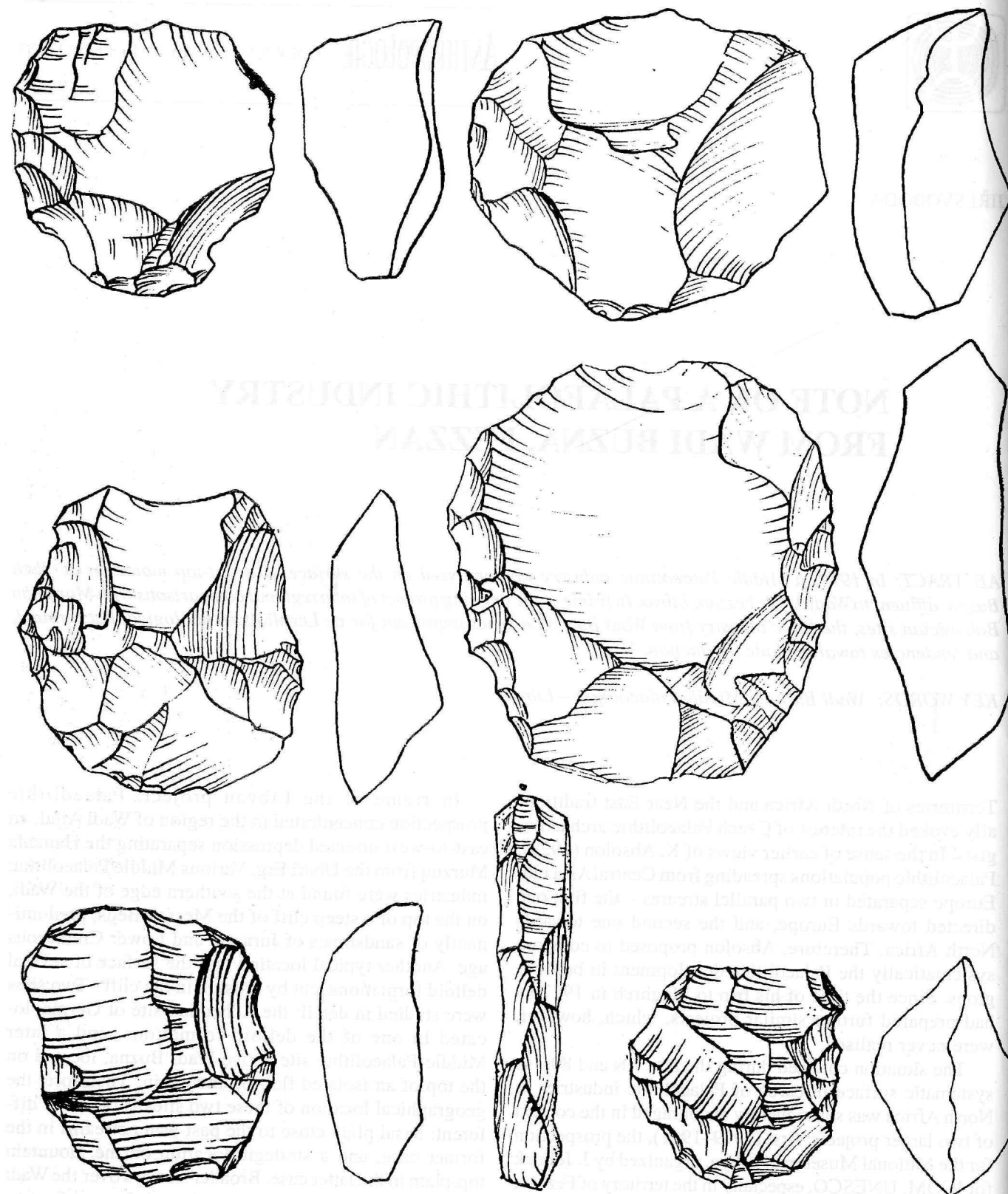


FIGURE 1. Wadi Buzna, Fezzan. The types of cores, and a crested blade.

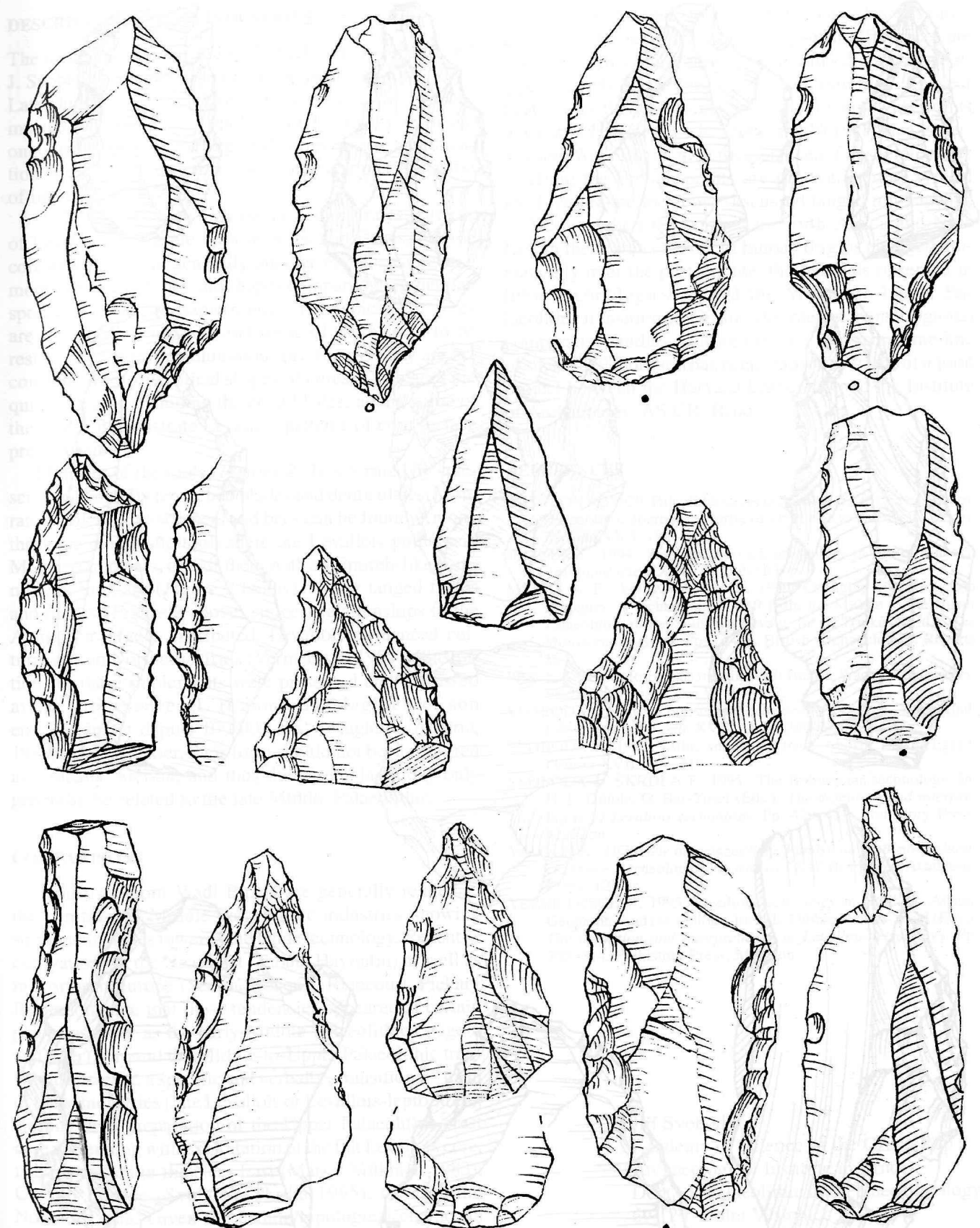


FIGURE 2. Wadi Buzna, Fezzan. The retouched tools.

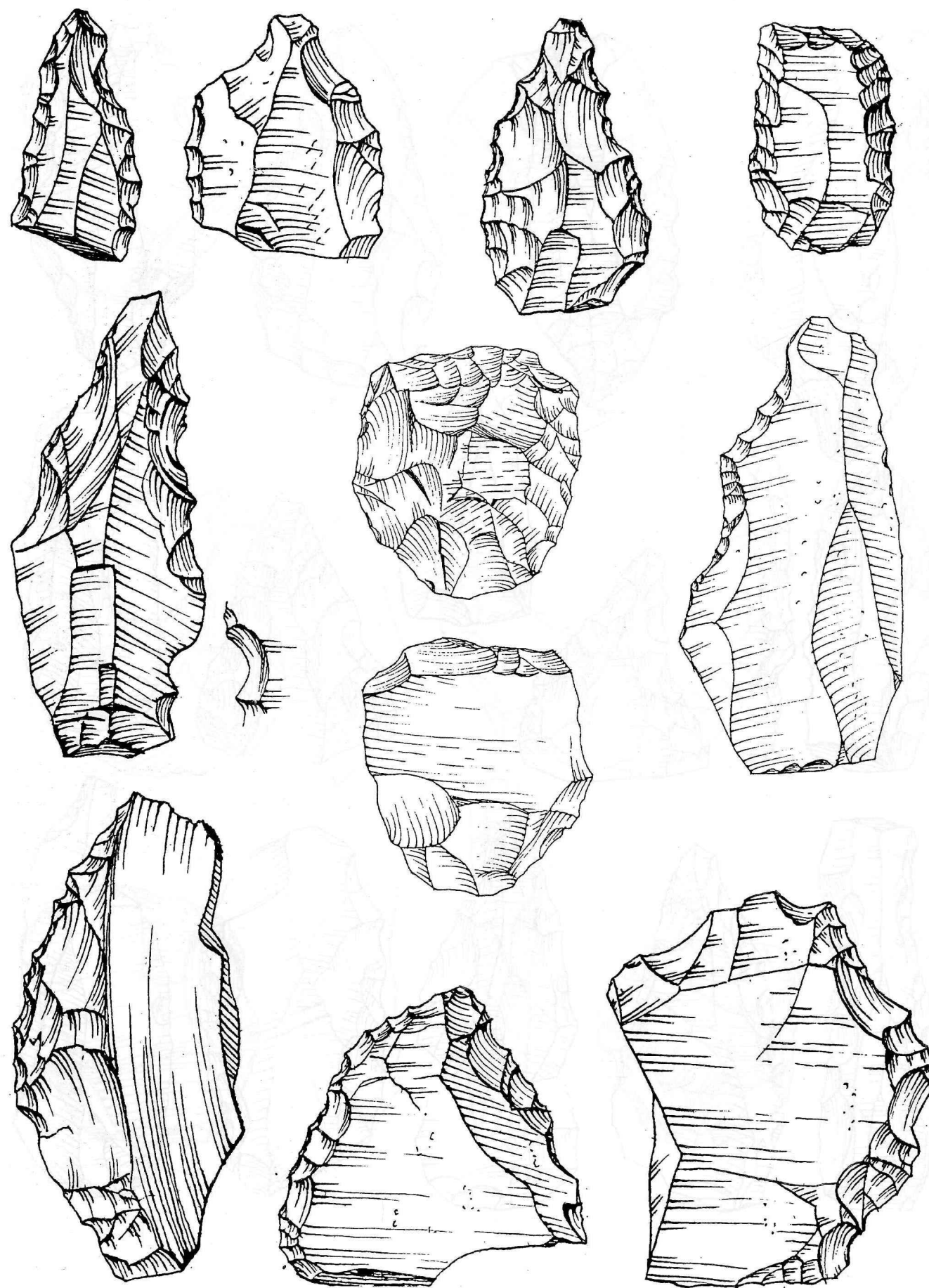


FIGURE 3. Wadi Buzna, Fezzan. The retouched tools and a prepared core.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INDUSTRIES

The sample was collected by V. Gebauer, J. Jelínek and J. Svoboda on the surface of the top plain in spring 1979. Later during the same season, selected artifacts were documented and drawn in Tripoli. Actually, in frame of the ongoing projects in interregional comparisons, a publication of the drawings and a few related comments may be of interest.

The technology (Figure 1) demonstrates patterns of Levallois technique both in cores and flakes, but the core assemblage is generally smaller in dimensions and more variable in types and shapes compared to Acheulian specimens from the same region. The typical flat cores are less regular in shape and some of them seem to be residuals from more voluminous pre-forms. They are accompanied by prismatic shapes of cores. The blades are quite frequent, including the crest blades; again, some of the blades demonstrate Levallois patterns of core surface preparation.

Majority of the tools (Figures 2–3) is formed by side-scrapers, laterally retouched blades and denticulates. More rarely, micro-end-scrapers and becs can be found. Among the more diagnostic tools there are Levallois points and Mousterian points, one of them with an Emireh-like trimming at the base (Figure 2 below). A few tanged flakes and blades (Figure 2 above) suggest relationships to the Aterian, a largely distributed, Levallois-influenced cultural unit in Northern Africa (Vermeersch 1995). Illustrations of these implements were presented and discussed at the conference „L'Homme du Maghreb et son environnement depuis 100 000 ans“ (Maghnia, Algeria, 1989); after J. Tixier, their form should not be considered as typically Aterian, and thus the assemblage may only generally be related to the late Middle Palaeolithic.

COMPARISONS

Industries from Wadi Buzna are generally related to the complex of Middle Palaeolithic industries showing strong tendencies towards the blade technology. Recently, excavations in the Near East (Tabun, Hayonim) as well as in Northern Europe (Seclin, Rocourt, Rencourt, Piekary II) demonstrate that these tendencies appeared at certain places as early as the early Middle Palaeolithic (stage 6 and later). Around the Middle-to-Upper Palaeolithic transition, however, a specific and verbally „transitional“ form of these industries (late Levallois or Levallois-leptolithic), starting with preparation of the Upper Palaeolithic crest core and ending with exploitation of the flat Levallois core, is documented in the Near East (Marks, Volkman 1983), Central Europe (Svoboda, Škrdlá 1995), Central and Northern Asia. Given the techno/typological characters manifested in the Wadi Buzna industries, they seem to be generally comparable rather with the latter complex.

Whereas the Levallois-leptolithic complex is homogeneous in terms of technology, regional differences are manifested by certain rare but culturally diagnostic tool-types, namely the points: the Emireh points in the Near East versus the leaf-points and the Jerzmanowice points in Central Europe. In what concerns North Africa generally and Wadi Buzna in particular, even if basal retouches recalling the Emireh points are present, a more typical local feature are the above discussed tanged implements.

Because the role ascribed to North Africa and Near East in the search of modern human origins changed dramatically over the past decade, the parallels observed in lithic technologies around the Middle-to-Upper Palaeolithic transition emphasize the interest in interregional comparative studies. During the past few years, one line of such a collaboration has been realised in frame of a joint project between the Harvard University and the Institute of Archaeology, AS CR, Brno.

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