Lithics left behind – household lithic inventory from the Eneolithic strata of Hârșova *tell* (Constanța County, south-eastern Romania)[1]

Loredana NIȚĂ*

Abstract: *The archaeological inventory found in either naturally collapsed or set aflame residential structures is often as rich and diverse as to provide additional information on past behavioral aspects concerning abandoned spaces. In Eneolithic contexts, lithic implements are a substantial component of such an inventory, as they represent numerous, available, multipurpose tools of every-day life. While benefiting from a generous use-span of economic to symbolic circumstances, their abandonment among the debris of a former house might mirror either their loss/lack of significance, or the acquiring of a non-utilitarian, symbolic value.*

Our contribution will focus on examples of lithic items belonging to two burnt and two collapsed residential structures uncovered in the Eneolithic site of Hârșova, with an emphasis on the techno-typological attributes and various degrees of exhaustion of the abandoned lithic implements.

Rezumat: *Inventarul arheologic recuperat din structuri de locuire abandonate sau incendiate poate fi suficient de bogat și divers, astfel încât să ofere informații asupra comportamentelor privind spațiul abandonat. În contexte eneolitice, artefactele litice reprezintă o componentă importantă a unui astfel de inventar, în calitate de unelte folosite în activitățile zilnice. Dacă spectrul utilitar variază de la domeniul economic la cel simbolic, abandonul lor printre resturile unei foste locuințe poate ilustra fie lipsa de importanță, fie căpătarea unei valori non-utilitare, simbolice.*

Articolul prezintă exemple de artefacte litice descoperite în contextele a patru structuri de locuire, două incendiate și două neincendiate, din situl eneolitic de la Hârșova, atributele lor tehno-tipologice și diversele stadii de epuizare la momentul abandonului.

Keywords: *Eneolithic, Gumelnița, household, lithic material, technology*

Cuvinte-cheie: *eneolitic, Gumelnița, locuință, material litic, tehnologie*

◈ Introduction

By means of a quite general definition, the household can be viewed as a 'task-oriented residence that combines aspects of economic production and consumption, is co-residential at some level, and is socially constructed around symbolically meaningful groups' (Kuijit *et alii* 2011, p. 503), with additional aspects related to production, storage, distribution, and maintenance activities, transmission of knowledge and material goods, social and biological reproduction, and membership.

Ever since it was coined, more than 40 years ago (Wilk, Rathje 1982), the concept of household archaeology fuelled numerous archaeological debates, strengthening the focus on the behavioural and material aspects of a condensed social unit, based on kinship (Müller 2015;

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* 'Valahia' University of Târgoviște, Târgoviște, Romania; loredana_nita2003@yahoo.com.

Tringham 2015). As it became an increasingly complex field of study, household archaeology created awareness for topics rarely explored before, using an array of techniques, *i.e.* ethnographic observations, architectural analysis, soil micromorphology, and household artifacts analysis (Rainville 2015; Chapdelaine *et alii* 2016).

As a focus of our paper, we chose the latter, namely lithic artifact analysis from four residential structures excavated in the Hârșova Eneolithic site.

The Hârșova *tell*-type site (fig. 1) is located on the Danube shore, within the present-day territory of the eponym city. Ongoing archaeological researches revealed a complex stratigraphical sequence of nearly 12 m, ranging from the Eneolithic to the Middle Ages. The Eneolithic sequence includes a series of Boian, Gumelnița, and Cernavodă I occupational layers. Out of the two main phases (each including two stages) identified in the evolution of the Gumelnița culture, the archaeologically researched area at Hârșova testifies to occupations belonging to the A2 stage, chronologically encompassed between 4350 and 4000 cal BC (Bréhard, Bălășescu 2012), pertaining to the last phases of the larger Kodjadermen-Gumelnița-Karanovo VI complex (Popescu *et alii* 2023). Studies of the Gumelnița sequence (fig. 2) defined anthropic landscape features, such as household areas, circulation spaces, and domestic refuse extents (Popovici 2010).

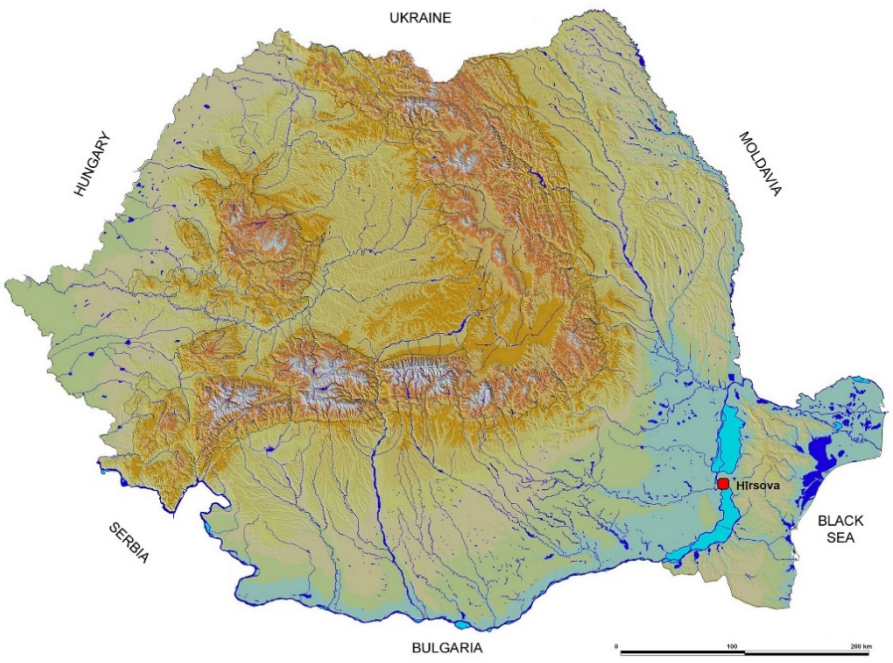

Fig. 1. Romania: Hârșova *tell* site location (modified, after Mărgărit *et alii* 2016, p. 352).
România: Localizarea sitului Hârșova *tell* (modificat, după Mărgărit *et alii* 2016, p. 352).

The applied excavation strategy focused on revealing and evaluating the informational content of each type of stratigraphical unit (hereafter, S.U.) and the extensive recovery of all archaeological material, through sediment screening (Popovici *et alii* 2000, Randoin *et alii* 2000). Due to the methodical uncovering of each occupational S.U. and wet sieving, the lithic assemblage shows an overwhelming number of splinters, spalls and small flakes resulting from intense, locally deployed retouching and rejuvenation of lithic implements, as well as several, less frequent cases of core shaping.

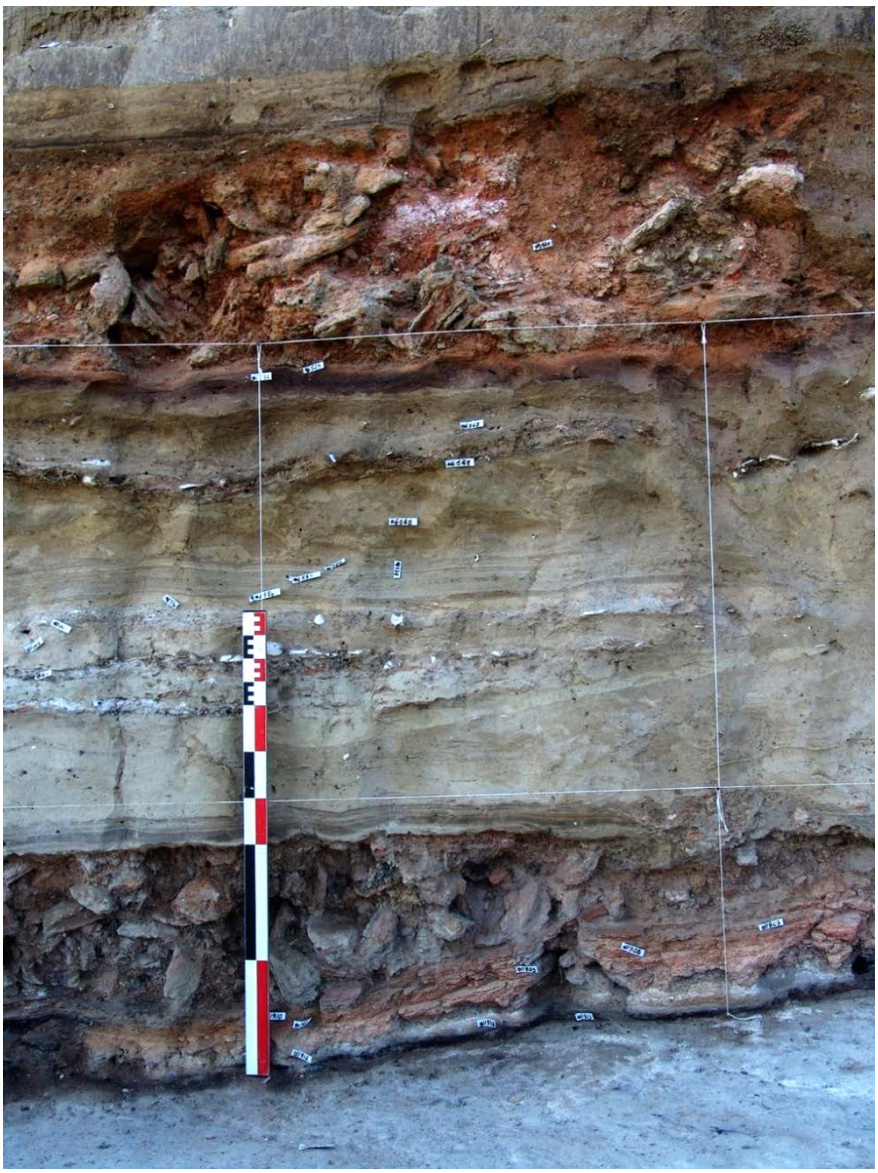

Fig. 2. Western profile sequence at Hârșova *tell* site (photo by D.-N. Popovici).
Secvența profilului vestic din situl Hârșova *tell* (foto D.-N. Popovici).

As a rule, raw-material selection favours good-quality, homogenous flint, of various colours, going from dark yellow and ochre to light or dark grey, and even black, which can be encountered in the site area (Haită 2011). Few fine-grained, dark yellow, white spotted flint varieties resemble the so-called Balkan flint types (Gurova 2012); yet, no petrographic thin section studies have been made, in order to confirm that the raw-material supply area of the Gumelnița communities from Hârșova actually extended south of the Danube. Other types of raw materials, also of local origin, such as sandstone, greenschist, quartzite or limestone are minimally represented (less than 5% of the studied lithic material).

Most of the laminar blanks show hard-hammer percussion marks; they originate from the main debitage stage of the operational sequence, most likely from a unidirectional stage of

core exploitation, as shown by previous detachment negatives visible on their dorsal side. The technological and typological spectrum includes retouched blades and bladelets, endscrapers, distal truncations on blades, and triangular points. The tool kit is based on laminar blanks, mostly fragmented. Their employment as tools is obvious either through their formal appearance as endscrapers, truncations, and pointed blades, or through the macroscopic use-wear on the long edges of unretouched blades. Another smaller tool category includes large flakes or blades, bifacially shaped into triangular points. Burins are absent from dwelling related contexts, as well as cores, crested pieces, or fully cortical items.

The lithic material discussed hereafter (fig. 3) was recovered from two burnt dwellings – no. 19 and 50 (145 items), and two abandoned/naturally collapsed dwellings – no. 48 and 54 (118 items).

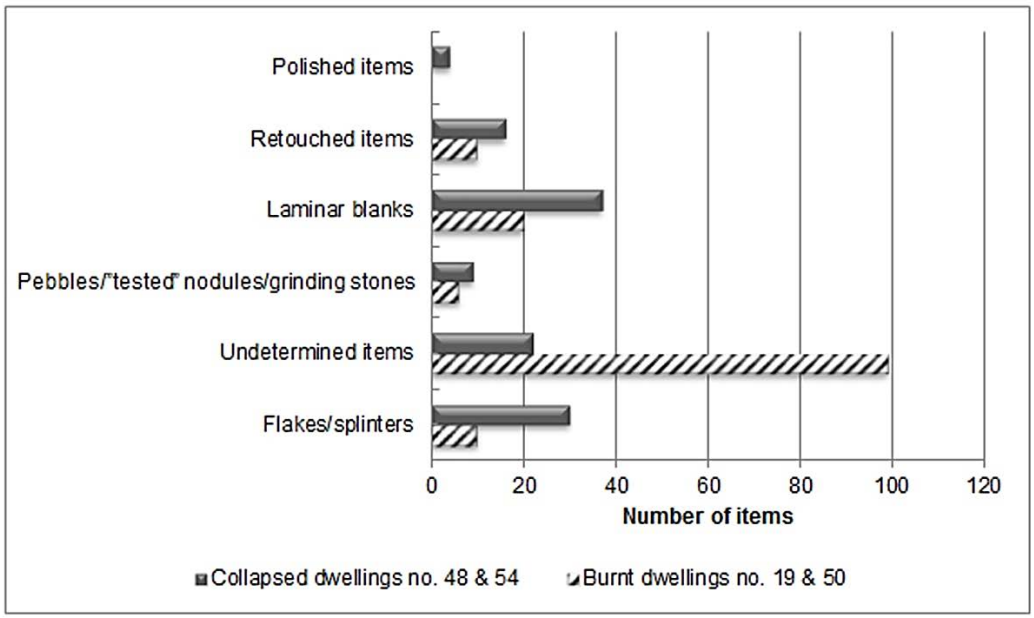

Fig. 3. Lithic inventory representation from two collapsed and two burnt dwellings in Hârșova *tell* site.
Reprezentarea inventarului litic din două locuințe prăbușite și două locuințe incendiate, din situl Hârșova *tell*.

◈ Lithics left to burn

The incineration of a building, either deliberate or accidental, does not always put an end to its existence as an archaeological complex (Twiss *et alii* 2008). While it no longer functions as a place of residence, an incinerated dwelling might continue to accumulate artifacts, as is the case of one of the two examples selected here, the rectangular incinerated dwellings no. 19 and 50 from Hârșova *tell* (fig. 4).

All the flint, sandstone and limestone lithic items in dwelling no. 50 (n = 17) originate from a unique destruction S.U. and show traces of exposure to high temperatures, i.e. fractures, cracking, and exfoliated surfaces/thermal bubbles (Bustos-Perez, Baena Preysler 2016). The inventory consists largely of flint and limestone pebbles and undetermined fragments (n = 10), the latter originating either from some low-intensity debitage activities, or from thermal breakage

during the incineration of the building. There are also several (n = 4) unretouched blanks – flake, fragmented blades, bladelet; retouched implements (n = 3) include a marginally retouched, proximal, straight-profile bladelet, with flat butt, a median blade with bilateral partial retouch, and a 64 mm long, 21 mm wide, 4 mm thick straight-base, bifacial triangular point (fig. 4/5). It might be plausible to assume that the uncovered artifacts were part of the lithic kit of the dwelling's last occupation phase and they were left inside when the fire, accidentally or intentionally, started; also, given the absence of unburnt lithic implements, the resulting debris area subsequently eluded all lithic tossing activities.

Dwelling no. 19 includes various and consistently more numerous burnt and unburnt lithic items (n = 128), originating from various depositional contexts, such as destruction, residential, and floor setting S.U.s. The flint, limestone, and greenschist nodule, undetermined fragments, splinters, and pebbles, with or without thermally induced alterations, make up 80% of the lithic inventory (n = 103).

Within the unretouched blanks category (n = 18), there are several flakes, alongside mostly median and proximal blades. While most of the fragmented blades uncovered do not exceed 80 mm in length, one complete blade, one proximal blade, and one median blade have unusual length values of 138 mm, 127 mm, and 133 mm, with width values ranging between 27 mm and 39 mm; apart from their size, they are also individualized through a particular choice of raw material – black, homogenous, opaque flint, which was also used for several other smaller blade fragments. Although there are no clear hints for an actual production of black flint extra-long blades or super blades (*sensu* Gurova *et alii* 2016) at the Hârșova *tell* site (debitage by-products, cores, etc.), the blades might have initially been part of similar big blades-oriented reduction sequence which took place elsewhere; they probably reached the site either being transported from an unknown production site, or through some form of exchange.

The formal tools (n = 7) include proximal, median, and distal straight profile marginally retouched blades, alongside complete and distal endscrapers, with trapezoidal cross-section, and various length values – one complete and one distal 71/74 mm specimen, and one complete and one distal 23/45 mm specimen.

While lithic artifacts in dwelling no. 50 belong to a single destruction-type S.U., items from dwelling no.19 belong to at least three different contexts: destruction, residential, and construction (i.e. floor setting and ditch filling) S.U.s. Lithic items from residential S.U.s, namely artifacts abandoned inside the living space, form a particular toolkit, including unretouched blades, few splinters, most likely originating from thermal breakage, and only two endscrapers; there are no pebbles, undetermined fragments, flakes, or retouched blades. On the other hand, lithic items from destruction S.U.s are the most numerous, with the widest representation of item types. Most of them show thermally induced alterations, except for several blades and one endscraper, which might represent an addition, through subsequent, post-arson discard, to the dwelling's inventory.

In both dwellings, irrespectively of the S.U. type, lithic items seem to be heavily worn; perpendicular/oblique fractures and irregular flaking of the long edges appear regularly, alongside thermal breakage and cracks. Particular features of the dwellings' lithic assemblages reside in the presence of a single bifacial point in dwelling no. 50 and of what could be interpreted as a small hoard of black flint long blades and blade fragments in dwelling no. 19.

Fig. 4. Lithic items recovered from burnt dwellings no. 19 and 50: 1, 2, 3 – partially retouched blades; 4 – cortical blade; 5 – bifacial point; 6 – chips/splinters.
Piese litice recuperate din locuințele incendiate nr. 19 și 50: 1, 2, 3 – lame parțial retușate; 4 – lame corticale; 5 – vârf bifacial; 6 – așchii/spărturi.

◈ Lithics left to bury

The lithic inventories (fig. 5-7) of the abandoned/naturally collapsed dwellings no. 54 and 48 appear differently structured than the ones described above, exhibiting a dominant laminar component, with both retouched and unretouched flint items.

Lithic items in dwelling no. 54 (n = 27) are almost equally divided between splinters/undetermined fragments, and unretouched blanks (flakes or blades), with only several retouched/polished items adding to the assemblage. Unretouched blanks include few complete, medium sized, 13/14 mm long flakes and median blades of various lengths. The latter are rectilinear, occasionally concave or twisted blanks, with mostly trapezoidal cross-sections, and perpendicular fractures; irregular flaking of the long edges is common, and in the case of one of the longest median blades (57 mm), its negatives are dorsally covered in macroscopic gloss. Retouched and polished items comprise only a partially retouched, 19 mm long complete flake, a bilaterally retouched median blade, with dorsal and ventral macroscopic gloss covering the retouched left edge, one complete (51 mm long) and one distal (44 mm long) endscraper, both having one of the long edges covered in irregular flaking, while the other, opposite one is partially or continuously retouched. The last item in this category is a 51 mm long, 40 mm wide, and 9 mm thick trapezoidal fragmented limestone chisel, with irregular flaking on the distal active part.

Most of the artefacts are from flint and were uncovered in destruction and construction S.U.s. Strangely, the residential S.U.s offered only a retouched flake and one endscraper; since the toolkit of an enclosed living space can hardly be reduced to just two lithic items, it is most likely that before the abandonment of the dwelling, some of the lithic material was carried away.

Lithic inventory in dwelling no. 48 is more numerous (n = 91), it illustrates several raw material choices (flint, sandstone, limestone, quartzite, greenschist), and, when divided into technological and typological categories, it shows a dominant component of unretouched blanks (flakes/blades), retouched and polished items (61%). Other types of lithic items are pebbles, fragmented grinding stones (fig. 5/7, 10), fragmented/`tested` flint nodules (fig. 5/1, 6, 6/6), splinters and undetermined fragments.

Unretouched flint flakes and blades (n = 41) originate mostly from destruction and construction S.U.s. Flakes are small to medium size items, without regular dorsal surfaces, probably originating more from debitage mishaps than from a specific production sequence. All unretouched blades are fragmented, showing various length values, but a considerably narrow range for most width (17-23 mm) and thickness (4-9 mm) values. Apart from perpendicular and, sometimes, longitudinal fractures, they also exhibit irregular flaking of the long edges, which can be occasionally covered with extended dorsal and ventral surfaces of macroscopic gloss. The few proximal blade fragments have flat or, in one case, cortical butts, with visible flaking or crushing bulbar scars.

Several fragmented items from destruction S.U.s in dwelling no. 48 enabled partial refits – a broken rolled pebble (fig. 6/12), a thermally broken blade (fig. 6/4), and an undetermined blank, possibly a large flake (fig. 6/9); also, a refit was made between two fragments of a distal, 99 mm long unretouched blade (fig. 7/17), showing oblique and straight fractures, straight profile, and trapezoidal cross-section. One of its fragments was recovered from a pole hole filling S.U., while the other was found in a partial destruction S.U. Also, destruction and construction S.U.s occasionally include lithic items (few undetermined fragments – fig. 5/13, one blade) showing thermal breakage; their inclusion in destruction S.U.s might suggest they were discarded in a debris-filled area, while their presence in construction S.U.s, namely ditch filling and floor settings, might be unintentional.

Fig. 5. Lithic items recovered from collapsed dwellings no. 48 and 54: 1 –'tested' flint nodule; 2, 13 – burnt fragments; 3, 5 – retouched blades; 4, 8, 9 – median blades; 6 – fragmented flint nodule; 7, 10 – fragmented grinders; 11 – endscraper; 12 – distal blade.
Piese litice recuperate din locuințele prăbușite nr. 48 și 54: 1 – nodul de silex „testat"; 2, 13 – fragmente arse; 3, 5 – lame retușate; 4, 8, 9 – lame meziale; 6 – nodul de silex fragmentat; 7, 10 – râșnițe fragmentate; 11 – gratoar; 12 – lamă distală.

Fig. 6. Lithic items recovered from collapsed dwelling no. 48: 1 – retouched blade; 2, 8 – median blades; 3 – proximal blade; 4 – partially refitted median blade; 6 – fragmented flint nodule; 5, 7 – endscrapers; 9 – partially refitted laminar (?) fragment; 10 – chisel; 11, 12 – rounded pebbles; 13 – flake.
Piese litice recuperate din locuința prăbușită nr. 48: 1 – lamă retușată; 2, 8 – lame meziale; 3 – lamă proximală; 4 – remontaj parțial al unei lame meziale; 6 – fragment de nodul de silex; 5, 7 – gratoare; 9 – remontaj parțial al unui fragment laminar (?); 10 – daltă; 11, 12 – galeți rotunjiți; 13 – așchie.

Flint and limestone retouched and polished items (n = 15) were uncovered in destruction, residential, and construction S.U.s; they were defined as partially or continuously retouched blades, truncation (fig. 5/3), endscrapers (fig. 5/11, 6/7), borers (?) (fig. 7/7, 9), and chisels (fig. 6/10, 7/16). Retouched blades are mostly median fragments, with rectilinear profiles and trapezoidal cross-sections, and various length and width values. The modified surfaces are always directly retouched, as is also the case of the truncated blade, with the exception of one of the presumptive borers, which is bilaterally, both directly and inversely retouched. Endscrapers are complete and distal specimens of various sizes, with retouched or heavily worn long edges; apart from perpendicular, oblique and longitudinal fractures, one particular type of fragmentation consists in the removal of a large flake, initiated from the ventral side of the tool's active part (fig. 6/5), as if its edge took a powerful blow. Polished items include trapezoidal limestone and green schist, 54/64 mm long, 28-38 mm wide, and 10-19 mm thick chisels, with asymmetrical extremities, due to incomplete rejuvenation of the base and the active part.

◈ Discussion – a typology for abandonment

When considering S.U. types, there is no obvious segregation between lithic typological categories or blank morphology. For the most part, the laminar blanks recovered from the dwellings presented here can be labeled as tools, being either retouched or showing extensive macroscopic use-wear. Also, the presence of splinters and small flakes points to a certain intensity of lithic equipment rejuvenation, which might have taken place inside the occupied space. Nevertheless, this type of debitage/rejuvenation refuse might have been disposed of in an area of debris coming from the previous dismantling of the dwellings.

The destruction S.U.s hold most of the lithic material in both burnt and collapsed structures. Apparently, the lithic material disposal took place both during the household functioning time, and after its demise. Lithics found in destruction S.U.s might define two types of situations: firstly, lithic items may belong to the formerly inhabited space, i.e. having been used during the dwelling's life-span and abandoned there (such is the case of the incinerated dwelling no. 50, in which all flint items found in destruction S.U.s exhibit traces of exposure to high temperatures); secondly, lithics from the actual destroyed dwelling might be joined by lithics from different contexts, abandoned in an area already filled with debris and, probably, perceived as a "garbage" disposal place – for example, in the incinerated dwelling no. 19, the destruction S.U.s held both burnt and unburnt flint items – most likely, the unburnt ones did not belong to the same space, having been discarded after the blaze destroyed the dwelling.

Within various construction types S.U.s, such as floors and benches setting, walls/hearths structure, and ditches filling, only a small part of the lithic material does exhibit burn marks, in both incinerated and collapsed dwellings. Lithic items found in stratigraphical units such as wall structures or floor settings are quite frequent. Their presence not ***inside***, but ***within*** the dwelling, might have symbolic meaning (*sensu* Rosenberg 2013), although their small (splinters, bladelets, flakes, undetermined fragments) to medium size (retouched and unretouched fragmented blanks) could also point to an unintended inclusion in the construction material (clay), during extraction/processing. However, the structure of an inside wall in dwelling no. 48 included one large, 115 mm long, 58 mm wide, and 44 mm thick fragment of a grinding stone (fig. 5/10), not likely to have been accidentally/unknowingly placed there. Also, the inclusion of a complete endscraper, a chisel, a flat pebble, or a 100 mm long blade fragment inside floor settings in dwellings no. 48 and 19 could represent more than fortuitous occurrences.

Fig. 7. Lithic items recovered from collapsed dwelling no. 48: 1, 3, 10 – proximal blades; 2, 4, 5, 8, 11, 13-15 – median blades; 6 – cortical flake; 7, 9 – borers (?); 12 – distal blade; 16 – chisel; 17 – two refitted fragments of a distal blade.
Piese litice recuperate din locuința prăbușită nr. 48: 1, 3, 10 – lame proximale; 2, 4, 5, 8, 11, 13-15 – lame meziale; 6 – așchie corticală; 7, 9 – perforatoare (?); 12 – lamă distală; 16 – daltă; 17 – racord între două fragmente ale unei lame distale.

To sum up, the lithic inventory uncovered in the four dwellings presented here could be differentiated into two large categories. First, there are `tangible` lithic items that were used and abandoned within residential and destruction S.U.s, their life-span ending with the demise of the dwelling itself, through fire or underneath crumbled walls; some of them, particularly those without burn marks, but nevertheless found in incinerated structures, might have even belonged to totally different contexts during usage. Secondly, there are 'intangible' lithic items, those previously discarded in contexts others than the dwelling itself, but subsequently mixed with constructing materials and integrated within its structures – walls, floors, hearths, foundations, pole holes. They might be broken or whole, undamaged or burnt, small or big, retouched/modified or not; they all exhibit some form of use-wear and/or damage and few of them might even illustrate an intentional act, probably invested with symbolic meaning.

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