FLINT IMPLEMENTS OF THE FAYUM, EGYPT.

BY

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The province of the Fayum, in which the implements described below were found, consists of a natural leaf-shape depression, surrounded by the Libyan Hills, on the west of the Nile, and about fifty miles southwest of Cairo. The Bah Yusuf (Joseph's canal) connects the Fayum with the valley of the Nile, and in the northwest end of it is the Lake Birket-el-Kurun ("Lake of Horns"). In ancient times Lake Moeris filled nearly the whole depression of the province, and the present Birket-el-Kurun is considered by some authorities to be its shrunken representative. Here also was the celebrated "Labyrinth."

The district of the Fayum has yielded a great deal of material for archeological and for historical research in the stricter sense in the form of papyri and the celebrated Hellenistic encaustic portraits.

Lake Birket-el-Kurun is salt, and drinking water has to be carried to the neighborhood on camels. In ancient times the lake water was potable, having been of considerable volume.

The Arabs near Cairo have for some time been selling flint implements of new types from the Fayum; indeed, information came some years ago from Schweinfurth, Sayce, Sturge, and Evans that they had been found there in small numbers. Latterly H. J. Beadnell published a short paper[a] with map and plates. The map was important as showing roughly the supposed limits of the water. An outline is annexed, based on Beadnell's map, with slight additions regarding implementiferous localities and the ancient border. The implements occur over most parts of the surface above the ancient water level and where the prevailing north wind removes the sand—such as the crests of undulations. For, in some parts the hardened clay of the lake bottom is barred with lines of small sand waves having clear spaces between; stones and implements are on the bare parts, and few, if any, under the sand. They appear to prevent the sand from settling. There is practically nothing on the old lake floor, even where the deposit has been weathered away to the bed-rock, excepting around the border.

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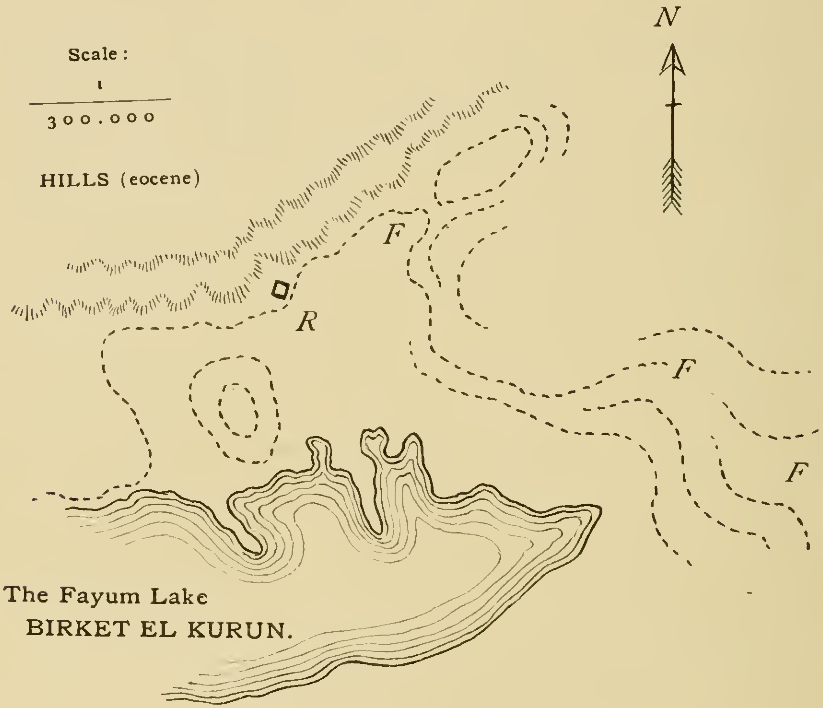
[a] Geological Magazine, February, 1903.

About the year 2200 B. C. Amenemhat I began to bring the periodical inflow from high Nile under control. If a natural lake existed long before, having broken in through the gap during some great flood, its level also must have varied, not only by evaporation but during cycles of low Nile, and also no water might have entered the oasis for years in succession.

The nodules of flint that occur all over this desert are of a tough consistency, small, and very suitable for making arrow points and the distinctive and peculiar Fayum implements. This may be the reason why only two "coups-de-poing," or "drift" implements of Chelléen or Acheuléen type were found.



Map of Fayum Desert.

The dotted line shows approximately the shore of the ancient lake; F F, implementiferous spots; R, ruins of Qasr el Sagha.

The implements from the flint mines in the Eastern Desert are of a cherty material, which occurs in masses and nodules of such shape and consistency as to be suitable for making them, and they are found only in that vicinity. Examples may now be seen in most of the museums on the four continents from both these localities, as also of those discovered by the writer in Somaliland. It is indeed probable that peculiar types discovered in different parts of the world have been evolved through the local material. For example, in the paleolithic workshops in the Madras Province of India, which I discovered with the help of Mr. Bruce Foote and Mr. Macleod, the material in the shape of quartzite nodules is suitable for that type of implement. Specimens of these also are now to be seen in nearly all museums. At Banda (United Provinces of India) were procured numbers of polished axes set up in shrines, etc.

Besides the implements shown in the accompanying plates, there were found in the Fayum disks about 10 centimeters in diameter, and scrapers, the paleolithic "racloir" of de Mortillet's Le Préhistorique.[a]

The implements here figured are soon likely to become dispersed by presentation among different museums. The number discovered was very large, as areas of surface were laid off systematically and many Arabs were employed. They are remarkably quick at finding small objects in the sand. The selection is therefore more or less representative.

There are also two types not figured and peculiar to the Fayum, all the specimens of both series having been presented to the Cairo Museum.

The first is an unsightly, irregularly shaped, flat knife, pointed at both ends, rather rough, and with concave angles for fish-scaling. Not uncommon.

The second is a flat knife of a round and sometimes of an oval shape, but having somewhere in its circumference a well-marked, carefully worked, re-entrant angle or concave edge. The shape varies so much that a complete representative series would be out of the question. Figs. 124, 125, 127, 128, 129, partly resemble them.

Many of the implements figured resemble some of de Mortillet's and are classified as later paleoliths of the Solutréen epoch, corresponding to the Laugerie-Haute epoch of Evans—the apogee in the making of stone implements, as de Mortillet remarks. The color of the material varies greatly.

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In addition to the publications mentioned, consult:

J. DE MORGAN, Recherches sur les origines de l'Egypte: L'age de la pierre et les metaux, Paris 1896, pages 72–76.

GRENFELL, HUNT, and HOGARTH, Fayum towns and their papyri, London, 1900. Publication of the Egypt Exploration Fund. The introduction discusses the ancient geography of the Fayum in the relation of Lake Moeris to Bahr Yusuf in particular.

LINANT BEY, Memoire sur le lac Moeris, 1843.

R. H. BROWN, The Fayum and Lake Moeris, 1892.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES.

PLATE 1.

Thin knives, some of unusual narrowness, finely worked by compression on both sides. Nos. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9 have for their bases the natural outside of the stone; No. 10 is beautifully flaked by compression.

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[a] Edition of 1900, p. 170.

PLATE 2.

Arrowheads, many of new and hitherto unknown types. Nearly all are exquisitely worked along the edges. No. 27 was found with 19 similar ones in a heap, partly covered by blown sand and may be the contents of the same quiver. Nos. 27, 28, 29 are about one-fourth inch in thickness, and are of a light pink color.

PLATE 3.

Further types of arrows of unusually large size and varied shapes. Some resemble examples from Ireland.

PLATE 4.

Nos. 97 to 107 are additional types of arrows. No. 107 must be compared with the Solutréen javelin heads or "Pointes à cran" figured in Le Préhistorique (p. 181) and with those in Plates 7 and 8. Nos. 108 and 109 are of crystal, the only examples not included in my discovery. They are in the Cairo Museum.

PLATE 5.

Nos. 112, 114, 116, 117, 120 are flat on the underside and show the conchoidal fracture or bulb of percussion. The rest are worked on both sides; having a natural butt end, however, they might resemble de Mortillet's Mousterian or middle-paleolithic pointes à main (p. 163).

PLATE 6.

No. 122 is one of a large number of bent flakes, polished and worked to a scraping edge on one side and peculiar to the Fayum. Nos. 123, 125, 126 another Fayum type. They resemble adze blades for working wood and hollowing out trees for canoes. Nos. 124, 125, 127, 128, 129 are knives with a cutting edge all round and an angle for scraping "grattoirs concaves." No. 130 exactly resembles de Mortillet's "double grattoir Solutréen" in the Musée de Saint Germain. These are not exclusively paleolithic. Evans figures one from Bridlington. No. 131 is one of two implements found which resemble a gravel-drift paleolith.

PLATE 7.

These implements resemble the "pointes en feuille de laurier" figured in Le Préhistorique on pages 181, 627, and 629. They belong to the later paleoliths or Solutréen epoch. These forms drift insensibly into the "Pointes en feuille de saule" and "pointes à cran" of the same epoch. Nos. 159 and 160 resemble the remarkable crescent-shaped implements on Plate 8, but are straight.

PLATE 8.

Nos. 172, 173, large crescent-shaped "pointes à cran," use unknown. No. 178 is a "lame pointue." Nos. 174 to 183 are peculiar Fayum arrowheads or javelin heads called "pointes à cran" and are somewhat waterworn and polished by friction and use. No. 184 in Plate 8 to 198 on Plate 9 are saws, now thought by M. Maspero and others to have been fixed in wooden handles like a sickle. Some are not toothed, and No. 191 is a rare form. No. 182 is a saw, not toothed, but probably equally effective.

PLATE 9.

Figures 194 to 198 are the continuation of the series of saws shown on Plate 8. No. 198 strongly resembles the implement on Plate 11 (No. 246), but the latter is very carefully worked and not toothed. Nos. 199 and 200 are implements purchased from Arabs and were apparently reworked by them to present a more salable appearance. The patination, which is sometimes extraordinary, proves their antiquity. Nos. 201 to 213, whether arrow or javelin heads, are of rare, varied, and practically unfamiliar types. No. 214 is unique.

Plate 10.

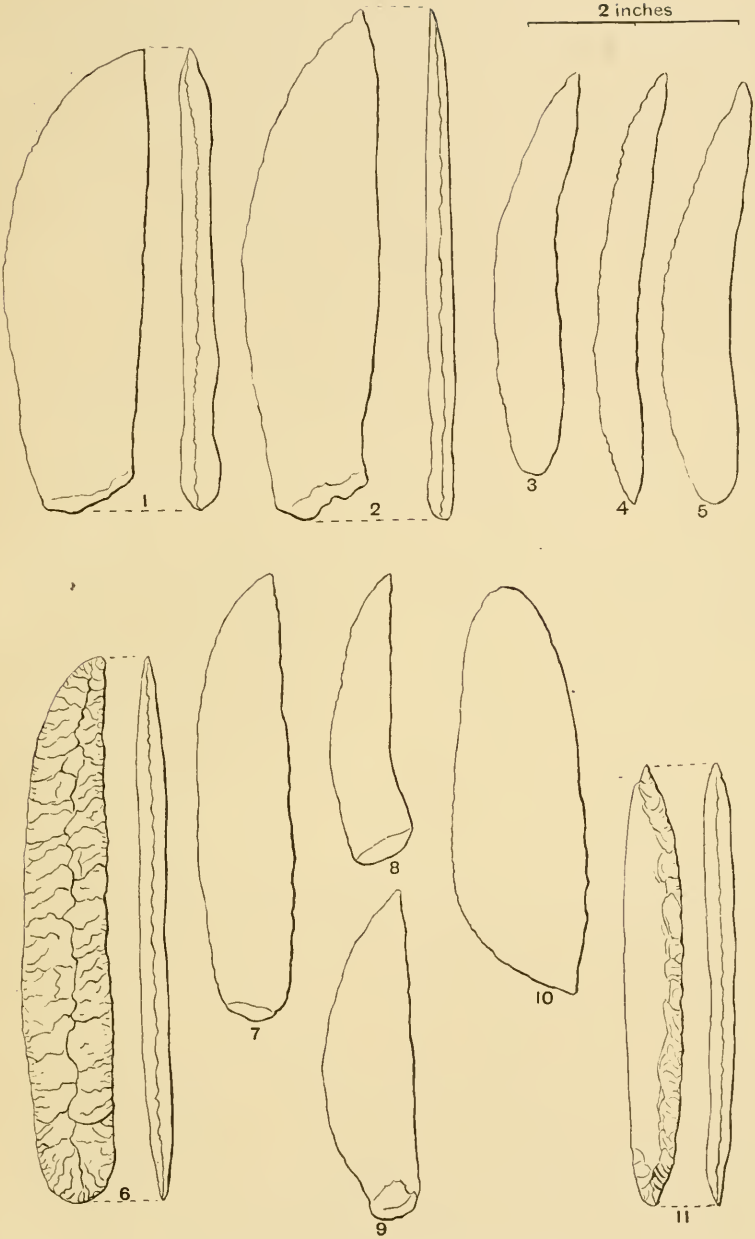
These are large and remarkable forms of arrows.

Plate 11.

Nos. 237 and 238 are rare forms, of which one example was found and figured by Beadnell. No. 239 is unique and is perhaps a "grattoir," combined with a borer, like the "poinçon Solutréen," Nos. 243, 244, 245 are butt ends of similar ones. Nos. 241 and 242 are somewhat similar to each other, and have therefore been placed together. They were probably used for boring wood, as the cutting edge is worked only on one side. No. 240 has the concave part at the end very carefully worked. Nos. 246 and 249 are flakes beautifully worked into knives. Larger examples of these, struck off as a single flake from the block and delicately serrated, are shown in the Cairo Museum. No. 250 is a knife with rounded ends.

Plate 12.

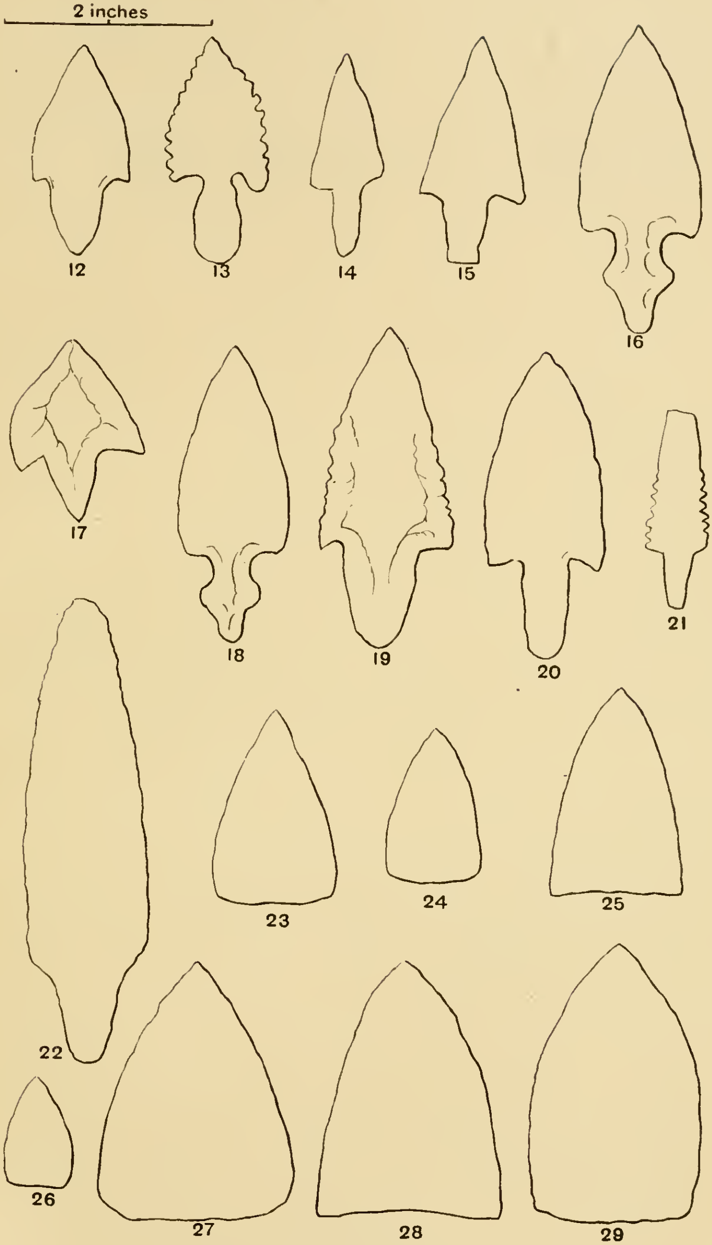
An example of No. 251 was found and figured by Beadnell in the publication previously referred to. No. 252 is a portion of a long serrated spearhead. No. 253 consists of parts of an armlet, similar to those discovered in Wadi esh-Sheikh, and figured in the Liverpool Museum Bulletin, as well as in Read's Guide to the Stone Age, published by the British Museum. Another example may be found in the Cairo Museum. No. 256 is a spearhead, finely worked in purple flint with white patinations. No. 257 is the same. No. 258 resembles the implements on Plate 11, but is flat on the underside, as also is No. 254. No. 259 was picked up under a large rock by a Berber boy. M. Maspero says that these are now regarded as sacrificial knives, and they are so labeled in the Cairo Museum. The serrations pointing forward to keep the handle in place, are especially to be noted.



Knives of Flint from the Fayum, Egypt.

For explanation of plate see page 749.

PLATE 2.

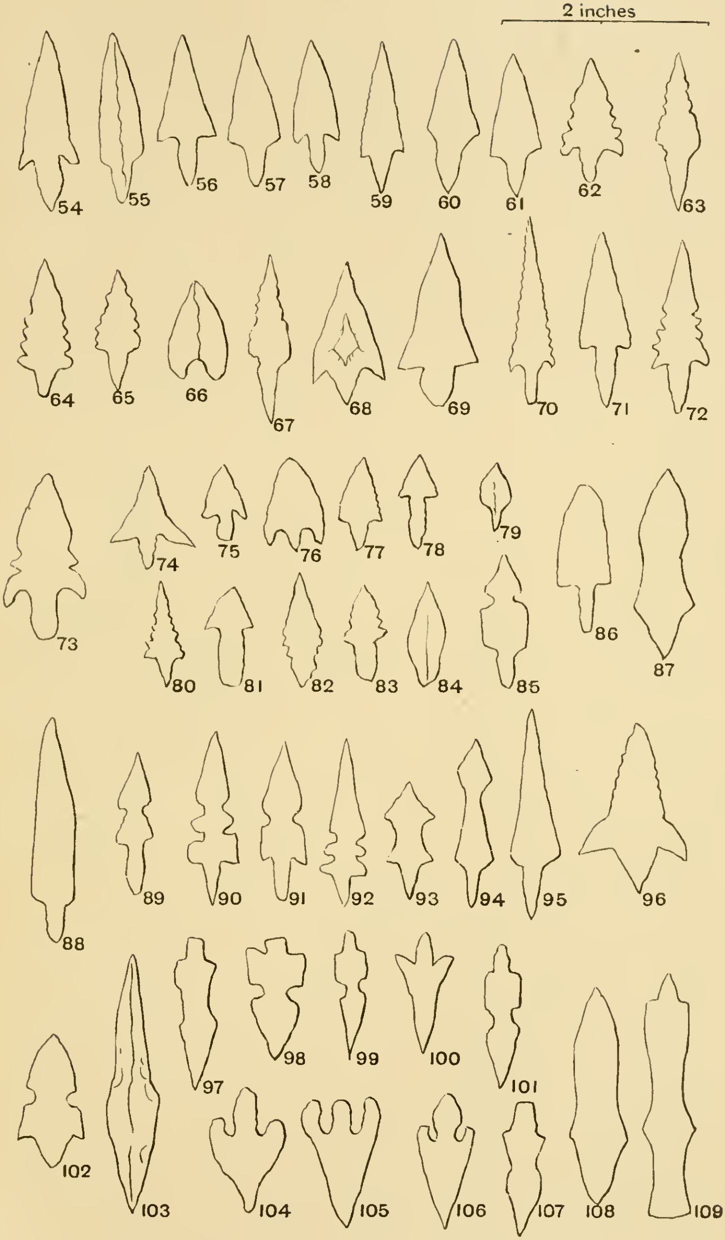


ARROWHEADS OF NEW TYPE. FAYUM, EGYPT.

FOR EXPLANATION OF PLATE SEE PAGE 750.

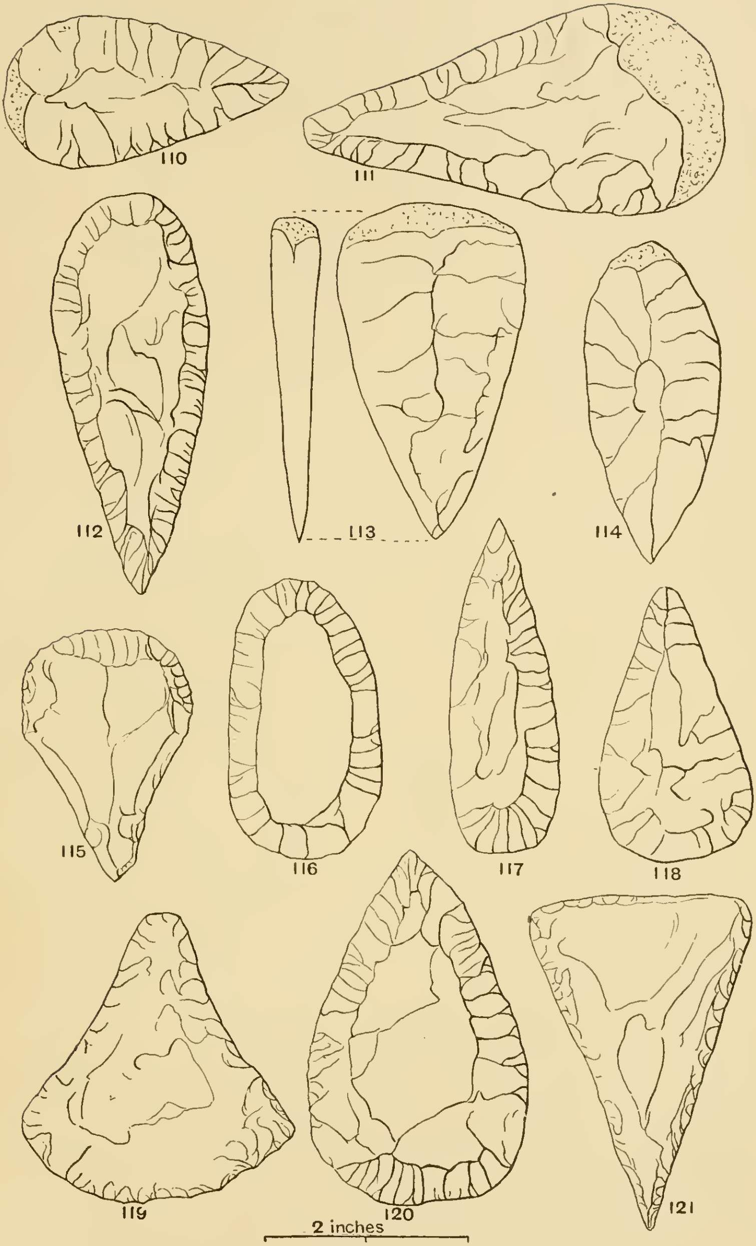
ARROWHEADS OF VARIED SHAPE. FAYUM, EGYPT.

FOR EXPLANATION OF PLATE SEE PAGE 750.



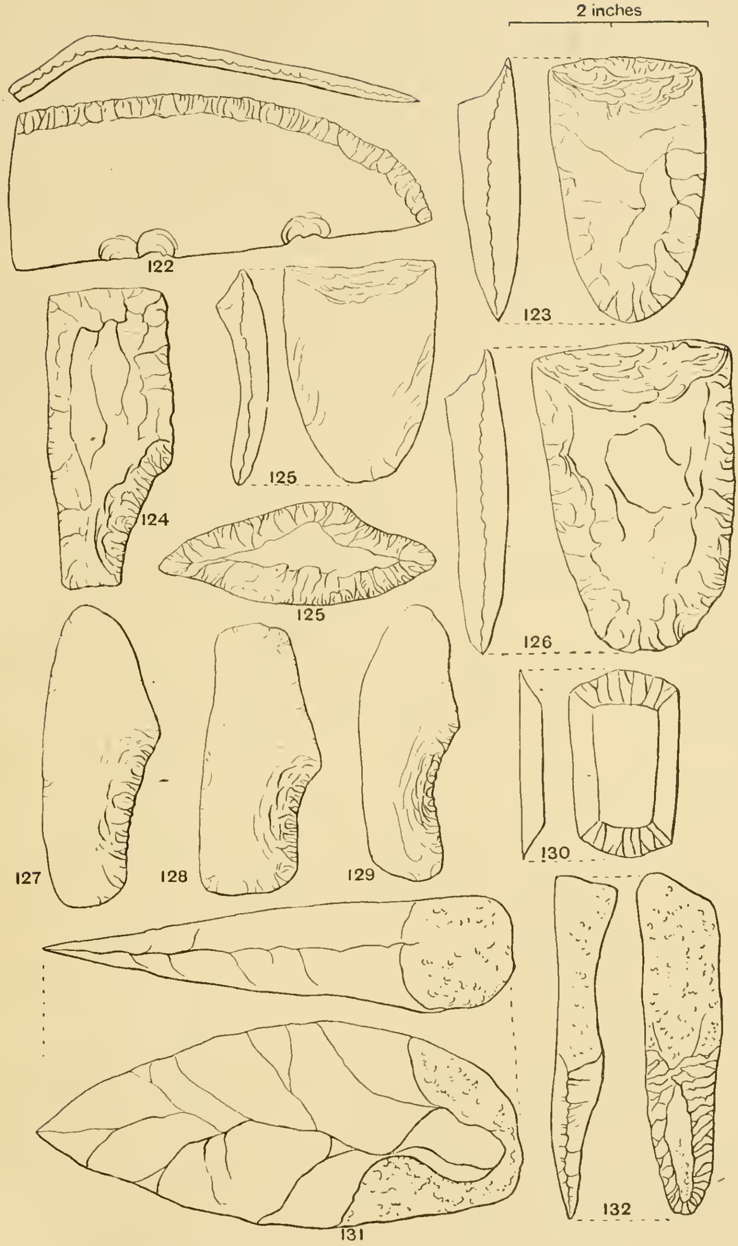
ARROWHEADS OF DIFFERENT FORMS. FAYUM, EGYPT.

FOR EXPLANATION OF PLATE SEE PAGE 750.



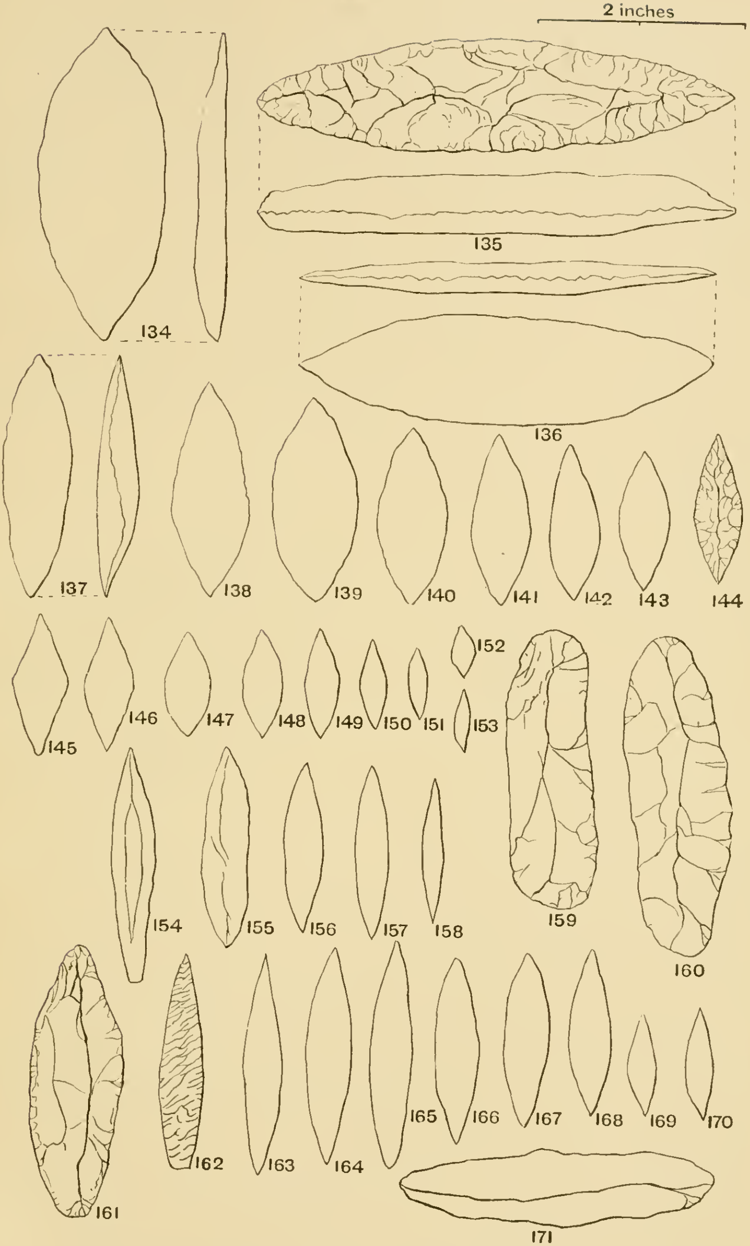
OBJECTS OF WORKED FLINT. FAYUM, EGYPT.

FOR EXPLANATION OF PLATE SEE PAGE 750.



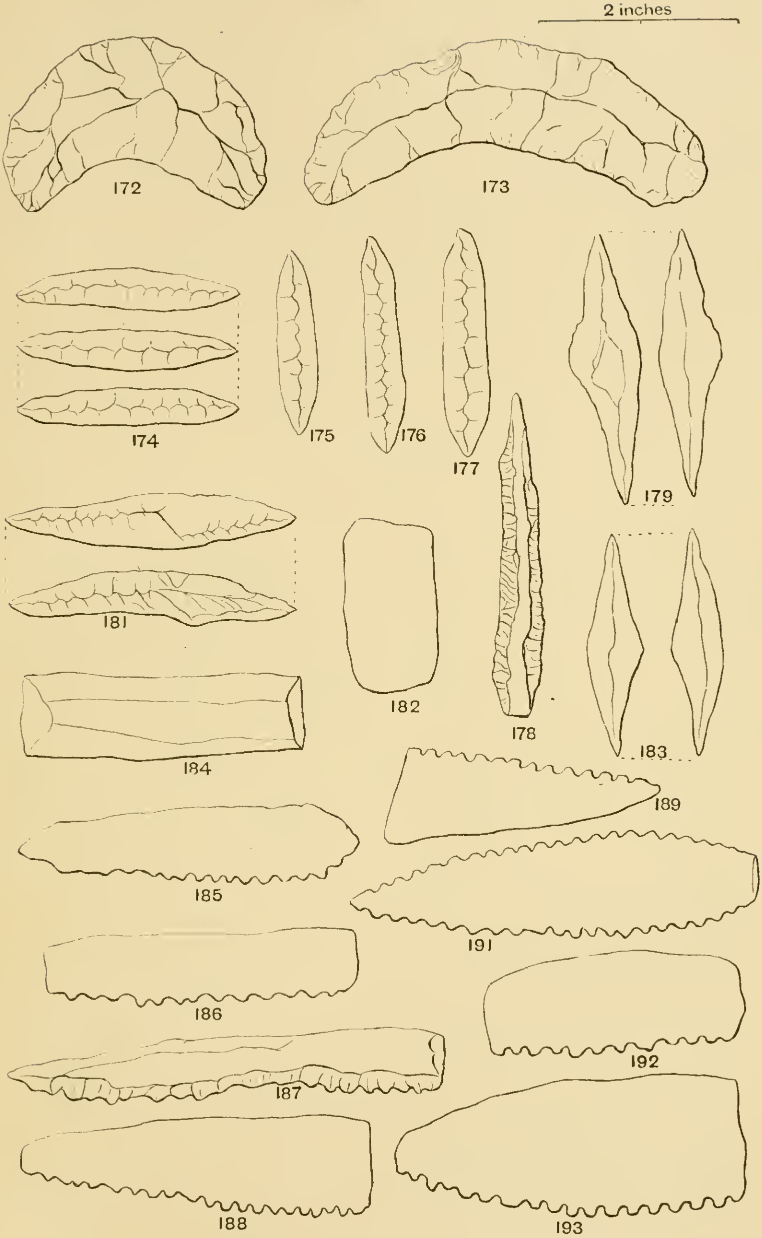
VARIOUS TYPES OF FLINT IMPLEMENTS. FAYUM, EGYPT.

FOR EXPLANATION OF PLATE SEE PAGE 750.



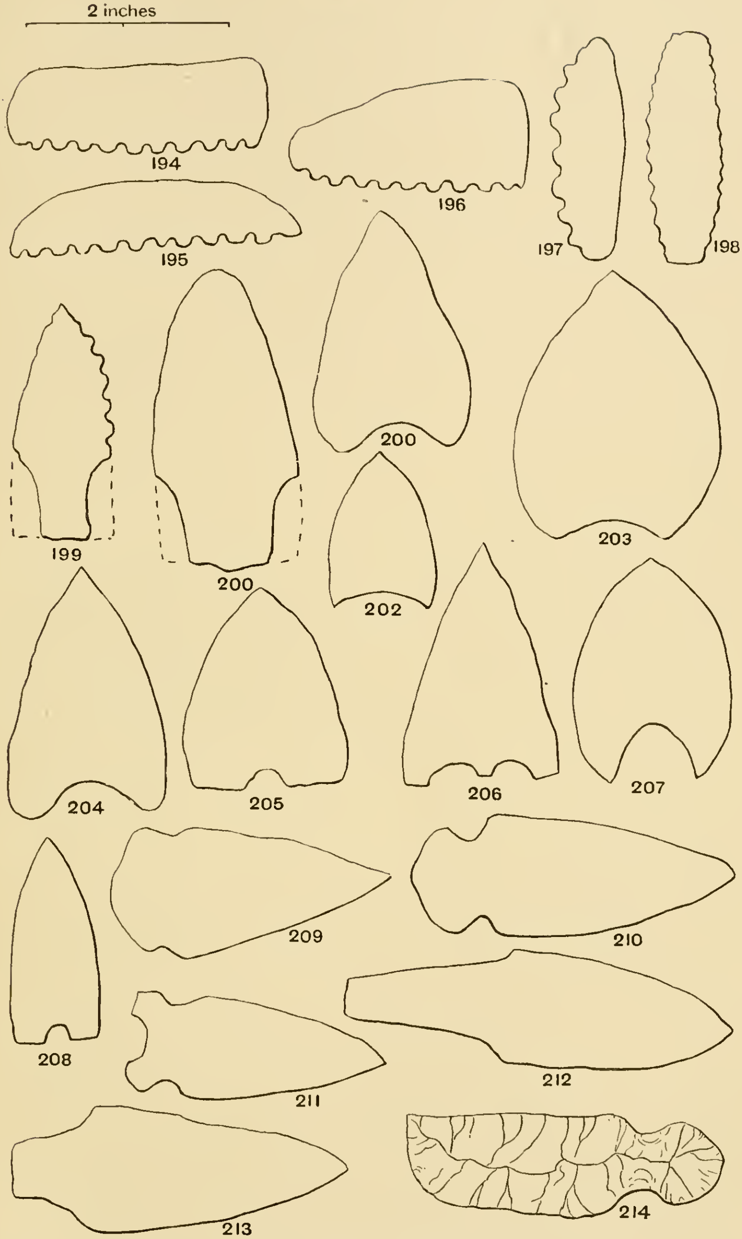
Flint Implements. Fayum, Egypt.

For explanation of plate see page 750.



ARROW AND JAVELIN HEADS, SAWS, ETC. FAYUM, EGYPT.

FOR EXPLANATION OF PLATE SEE PAGE 750.



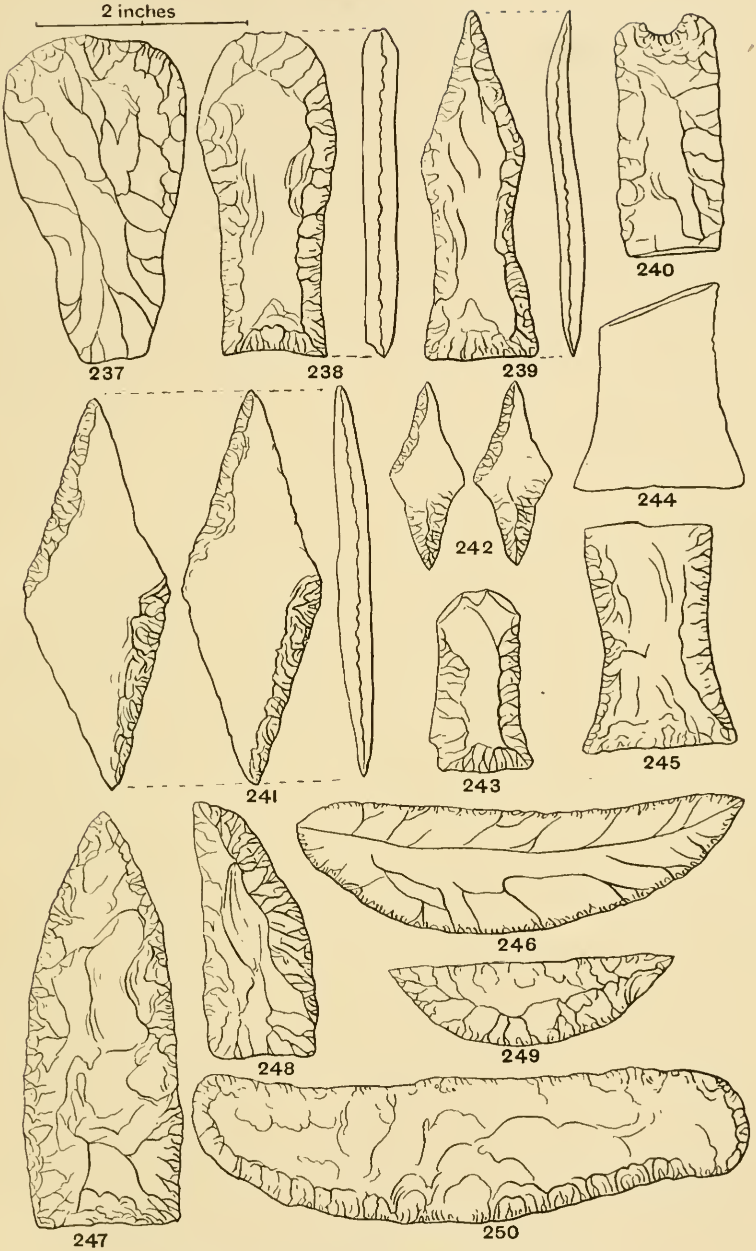
Saws and Other Implements of Flint. Fayum, Egypt.

For explanation of plate see pages 750, 751.

PLATE 10.

ARROWHEADS OF REMARKABLE FORM. FAYUM, EGYPT.

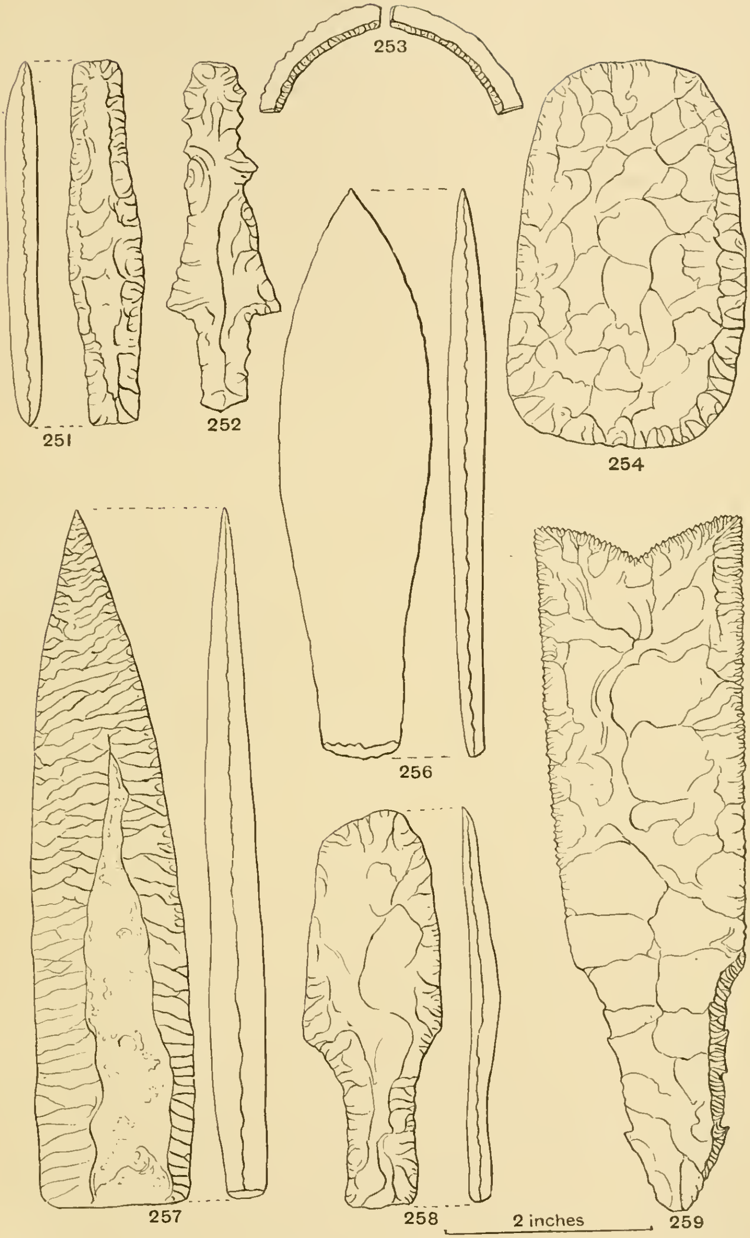
FOR EXPLANATION OF PLATE SEE PAGE 751.



Scrapers, Knives, Drills, etc. Fayum, Egypt.

For explanation of plate see page 751.

PLATE 12.



SPEARHEADS, SACRIFICIAL KNIVES, ETC. FAYUM, EGYPT.

FOR EXPLANATION OF PLATE SEE PAGE 751.