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EXCAVATIONS IN THE MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.

[WITH PLATES XXVI-XXVIII.]

By F. TURVILLE-PETRE.

THE cave known as the Mugharet el-Kebarah lies some 15 kilometres south of the Mugharet el-Wad, near the southern end of the Carmel range, in the vicinity of the Jewish colony of Zikhron Yakob. It is situated in a limestone cliff, approached by a short steep slope and looks north-west towards the Mediterranean from which it is separated by the flat and rather marshy coastal plain, here some 3 kilometres broad. The modern floor lay some 15 metres above the level of the plain.

The cave is of irregular shape and measures internally 17 m. in length by 13 m. in breadth. The height of the cave roof is very various; at the entrance it is not more than 3·6 m. above the original floor, but inside the cave the roof forms two domes which reach a height of 5 m. and 5·6 m. respectively, while at the innermost eastern corner it rises in a chimney some 20 m. high to the summit of the cliff; this chimney is the original water-hole through which the cave was formed.

The cave had a well-filled appearance, the modern floor level sloping considerably downwards from the entrance towards the back.

Excavations undertaken in the spring of 1931 were confined to the interior of the cave, the terrace being left intact.

Level A, which contained potsherds and other objects of most periods from the First Bronze Age to recent Arab, varied in thickness from 10 cm. at the centre of the cave to 50 cm. at the front and 75 cm. at the back; immediately below this, flint implements and worked bone characteristic of the Natufian culture began to appear. In the course of excavation, this Natufian occupation level (marked B on the section), was found to extend all over the cave except in the area immediately beneath the chimney where it was practically absent. The level varied in thickness from 2 m. at the back of the cave, which formed the principal occupation area, to 1 m. at the centre, and 50 cm. at the entrance. Below this was a second Mesolithic occupation level, C, with a fairly uniform thickness of 25 cm. all over the cave. Below level C were a series of three Middle Aurignacian layers, and below these again a Mousterian level, but with these we are not now concerned.

To return to level B. Towards the front part of the cave at a depth of from 60 cm. to 1 m. below the original surface was a collective burial pit closely resembling the burial pits at the Mugharet el-Wad. Here, as there, the bodies seem to have been thrown in without any attempt at orientation, and packed in with stones. Together with adult skeletons were those of several infants; there were no ornaments associated with the burials and all were in a very damaged condition. Of the flint implements, made principally of black, grey or brown nodular flint, associated with this level, the most numerous were sickle blades (Fig. F, Nos. 6-11),

showing a more or less high degree of polish along the working edge. Of these, over a thousand specimens were found. The backs of the blades are usually trimmed by means either of the ordinary flat back retouch, or by the oblique, sharpening technique described by Miss Garrod on flints from the Mugharet el-Wad, the latter method greatly predominating. The ends of the blade are either squared off or slightly curved. Sometimes one end is squared and the other pointed, the pointed specimens forming the tips of a sickle.

Second in numerical importance to the sickle blades are a series of small crescents (Fig. F, Nos. 12-18) varying in length from 15 m. to 35 m. Here again, as in most of the other types of flint implement from this level, the two alternative methods of retouch are found, the oblique technique predominating. In all, there were some 500 crescents. In addition to the crescents, a number of other microlithic forms occur, triangular (Fig. F, No. 19), roughly trapezoidal, oval, and straight.

Another characteristic type is the parallel sided blade with flattened and nearly always concave back (Fig. F, Nos. 24-27).

Gravers were not very numerous (36 in all), and include *bec-de-flûte*, angle and prismatic forms. (Fig. F, Nos. 22, 23.) Not infrequently, they are made on sickle blades. (Fig. F, No. 4.)

Borers are numerous and well made (Fig. F, Nos. 20, 21); there were also a few small picks. (Fig. F, No. 3.)

In addition, there is the usual series of end and round scrapers (Fig. G, Nos. 1-5), and steep cores generally utilized as scrapers (Fig. G, Nos. 11-14), but these are of no special significance.

Finally, there is a small group of large coarsely-trimmed choppers, picks, and scrapers, made in a light-coloured chert. (Fig. G, Nos. 7-10, 15.)

This site was particularly rich in objects of worked bone. Simple points, intended as borers or daggers, and made usually on the metacarpal, metatarsal or tibial bones of goat or gazelle (Pl. XXVI), were particularly numerous, more than 100 complete specimens being found; the articulation of the joint usually remained as a handle, but sometimes the articulation was cut down and polished and occasionally the handle was pierced. A few specimens of polished bone were pointed at both ends, and one or two are rather spatulæ than points.

Probably the most important object found was a grooved bone sickle-blade haft 38 cm. in length, decorated at the handle by a carving representing a goat's head (Pl. XXVII, Fig. 1). Towards the tip, on the side opposed to the groove is a semicircular knob, which is repeated in a small nearly complete sickle-blade haft, 23 cm. in length (Pl. XXVII, Fig. 2), and in a number of fragments, and seems to have been a standard feature of these possibly ritual objects. There are two more carved animal heads (Pl. XXVII, Fig. 3), representing respectively a bovine animal and a deer, which presumably formed the handles of further hafts, as did also a decorated fragment, and a fragment pierced near the centre.

Harpoons were rather numerous (Pl. XXVIII), and varied in size from one 16 cm. long, with 5 barbs, to single barbed specimens 4.5 cm. long. Four bone fish hooks were found, and a few small bone implements polished all over and pointed at both ends, identical with those

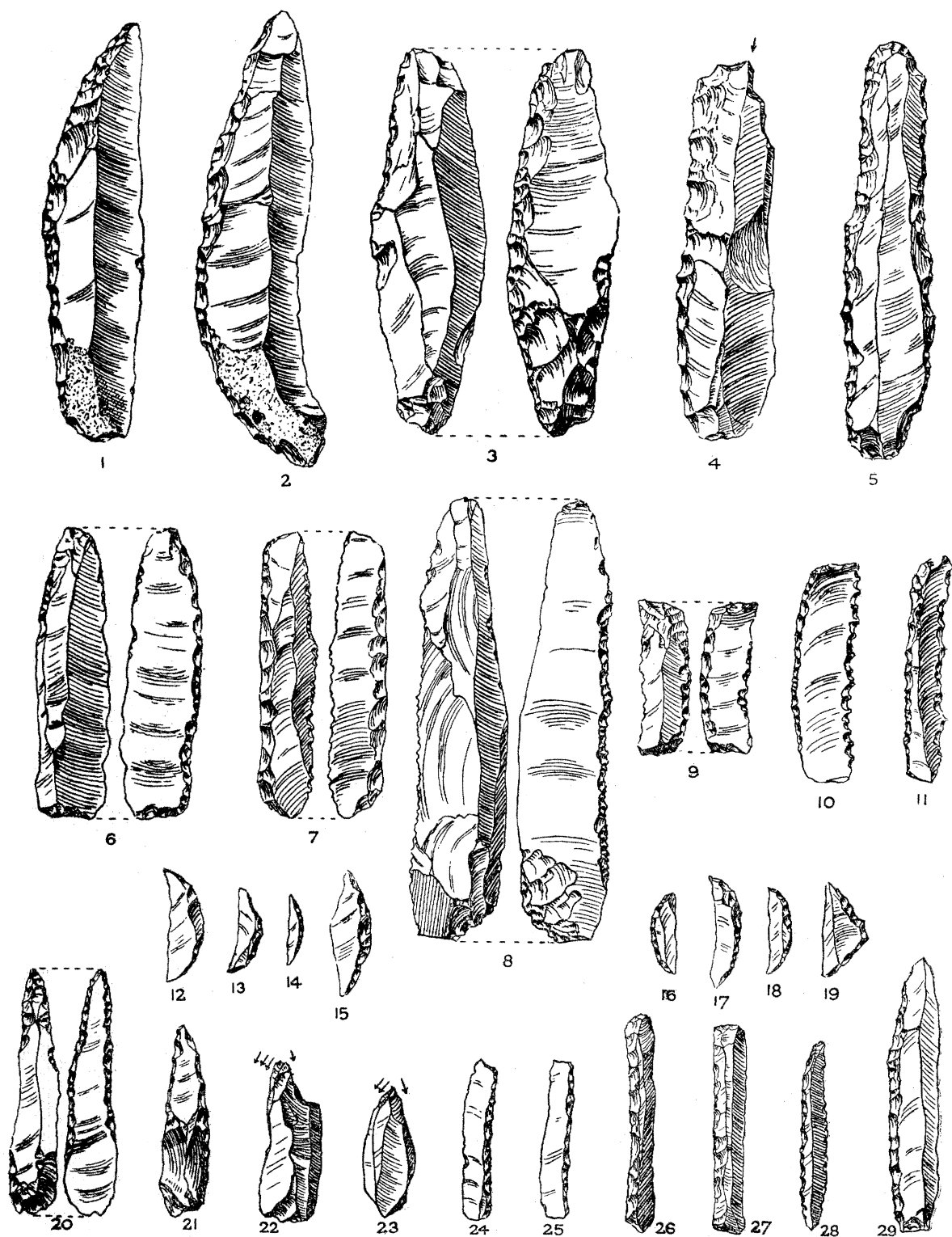


FIG. F.—FLINT IMPLEMENTS FROM LEVEL B, MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.

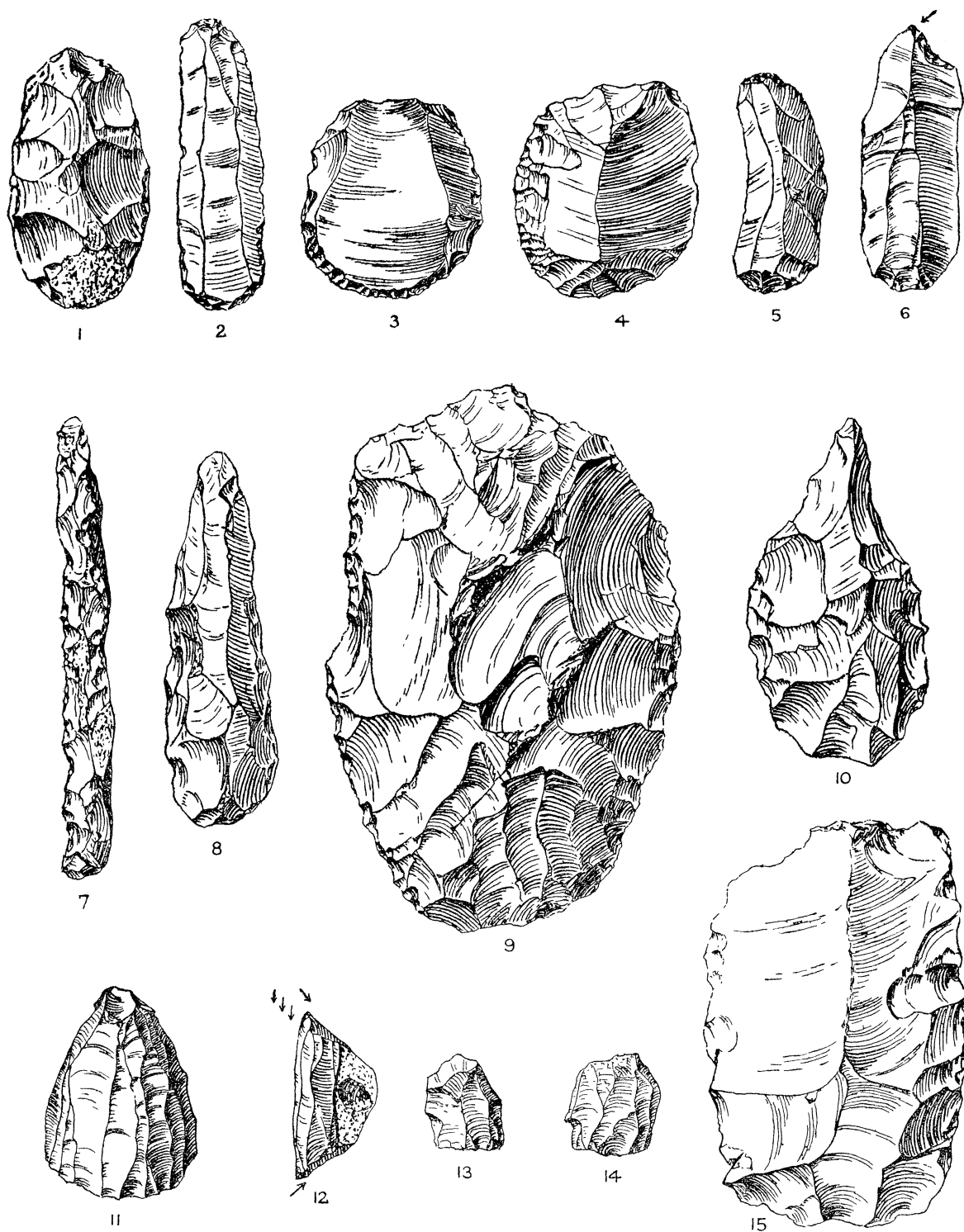


FIG. G.—FLINT AND CHERT IMPLEMENTS FROM LEVEL B, MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH. ($\times \frac{1}{3}$.)

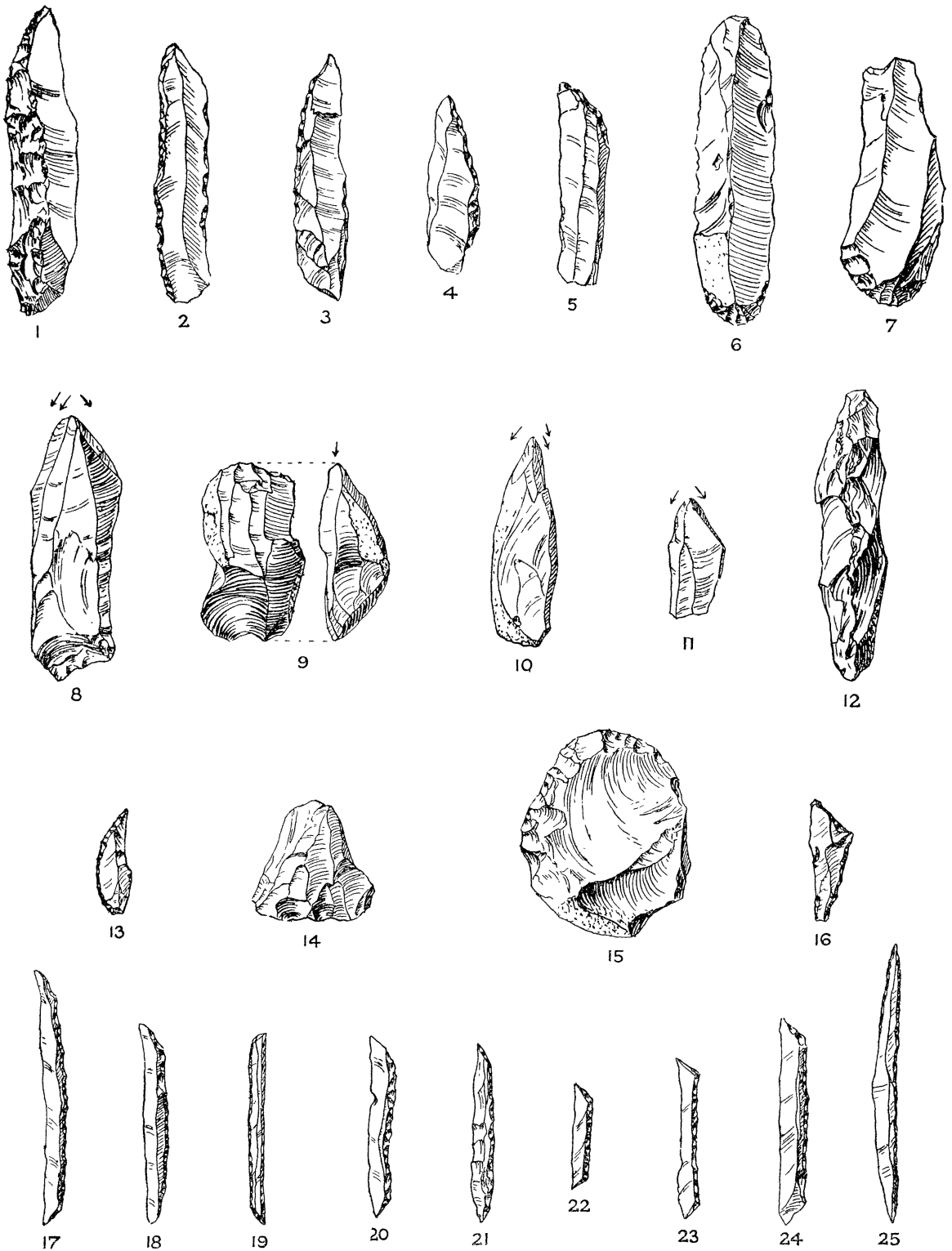


FIG. H.—FLINT IMPLEMENTS FROM LEVEL C, MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.

described by Miss Garrod as gorgets for fishing ; see Pl. XXVIII. on which are also shown two fragments of short-toothed combs, the one decorated with tectiform scratchings, the other with pitting ; a pierced pendant, decorated with raised linear bands and incisions, and a piece of polished bone rounded and pierced at both ends, perhaps a buckle.

Pear-shaped bone pendants similar to those from the Mugharet el-Wad were very numerous, more than 400 of this type having been found. In addition, the following were pierced and intended as pendants : 1 canine tooth of a large carnivore, 1 ox tooth, 1 toe bone of a goat or gazelle, 1 elongated piece of polished bone decorated with incisions along the edge, an incomplete bone plaque with pitted decoration ; a simple bone bead. Three pieces of polished bird bone were probably also used as beads, as were a number of pierced shells. Finally, there is a long rib bone pointed at one end, pierced at the other, and a piece of gazelle horn polished and pierced at the base.

Among stone objects were five basalt mortars and a number of basalt pestles ; a number of grooved polishers of basalt, sandstone, limestone, and pumice stone, and one of black steatite decorated with incised lines. There were a few flint nodules incised to represent phalli, three decorated limestone objects, perhaps stylized phalli, and a small slab of limestone incised on both faces, presumably a cult object.

If we try to correlate the Mugharet el-Kebarah culture with that of the two other known Natufian sites, namely, Shukba and the Mugharet el-Wad, it will be found that it most closely resembles that of the Lower Natufian or B2 level at the Mugharet el-Wad and therefore represents the earliest Natufian phase at present known. This phase seems to be characterized principally by the absence of microgravers so abundant in the Upper Natufian layer at the Mugharet el-Wad, by the preponderance of sickle blades over crescents and the finished workmanship of the former implement, by the predominance of the oblique sharpening retouch over the ordinary flat back technique, and finally, by the amount and variety of the worked bone.

Level C, which came immediately below the Natufian level, and between it and the uppermost Middle Aurignacian layer, had also a Mesolithic appearance. Microliths greatly predominated over normal sized implements, and the characteristic microlithic form was a much elongated triangle retouched along the back and at the tip. (Fig. H, Nos. 17-24.) Other forms were straight points (Fig. H, No. 25), and small curved points. (Fig. H, No. 13.) This microlithic series does not seem to resemble very closely that from any hitherto known site. The normal sized implements were not characteristic and included end scrapers (Fig. H, Nos. 6-7), a few steep and semi-steep scrapers (Fig. H, Nos. 14, 15), and a few graters of prismatic, angle and *bec-de-flûte* types. (Fig. H, Nos. 8-11.) There were also a number of parallel-sided blades with curved backs, but these are possibly intrusive from level B.

Strewn about the back of the cave at this level were numerous very fragmentary remains of charred human bones, obviously the result of cremation. Stratigraphically, in view of the thinness of this layer (only 25 cm.), it is not possible to say with certainty that these cremated remains should be attributed to the level C occupation rather than to the early Natufians, but in view of the complete absence of anything suggesting the practice of cremation among the rather numerous examples of Natufian burials now known, it would seem reasonable to associate them with the level C culture.



BONE POINTS FROM LAYER B, MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.

EXCAVATIONS IN THE MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.

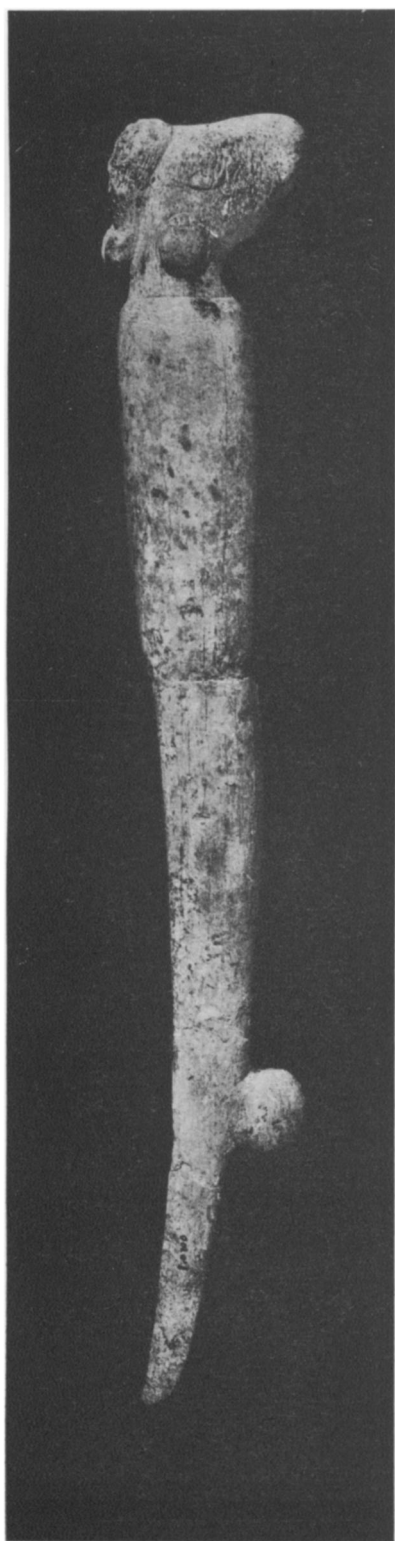


FIG. 1.—CARVED OBJECT FROM LAYER B,
MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.

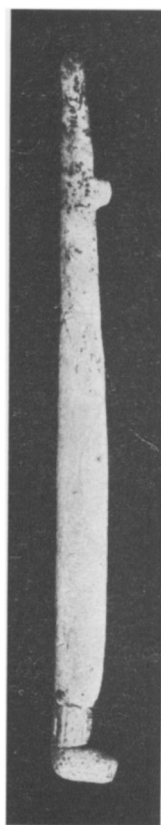


FIG. 2.—CARVED OBJECT FROM LAYER B, MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.

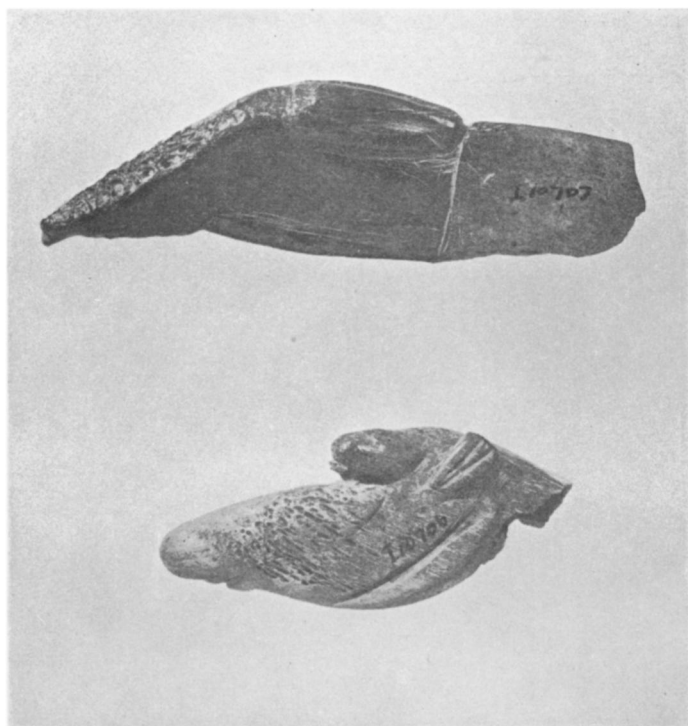
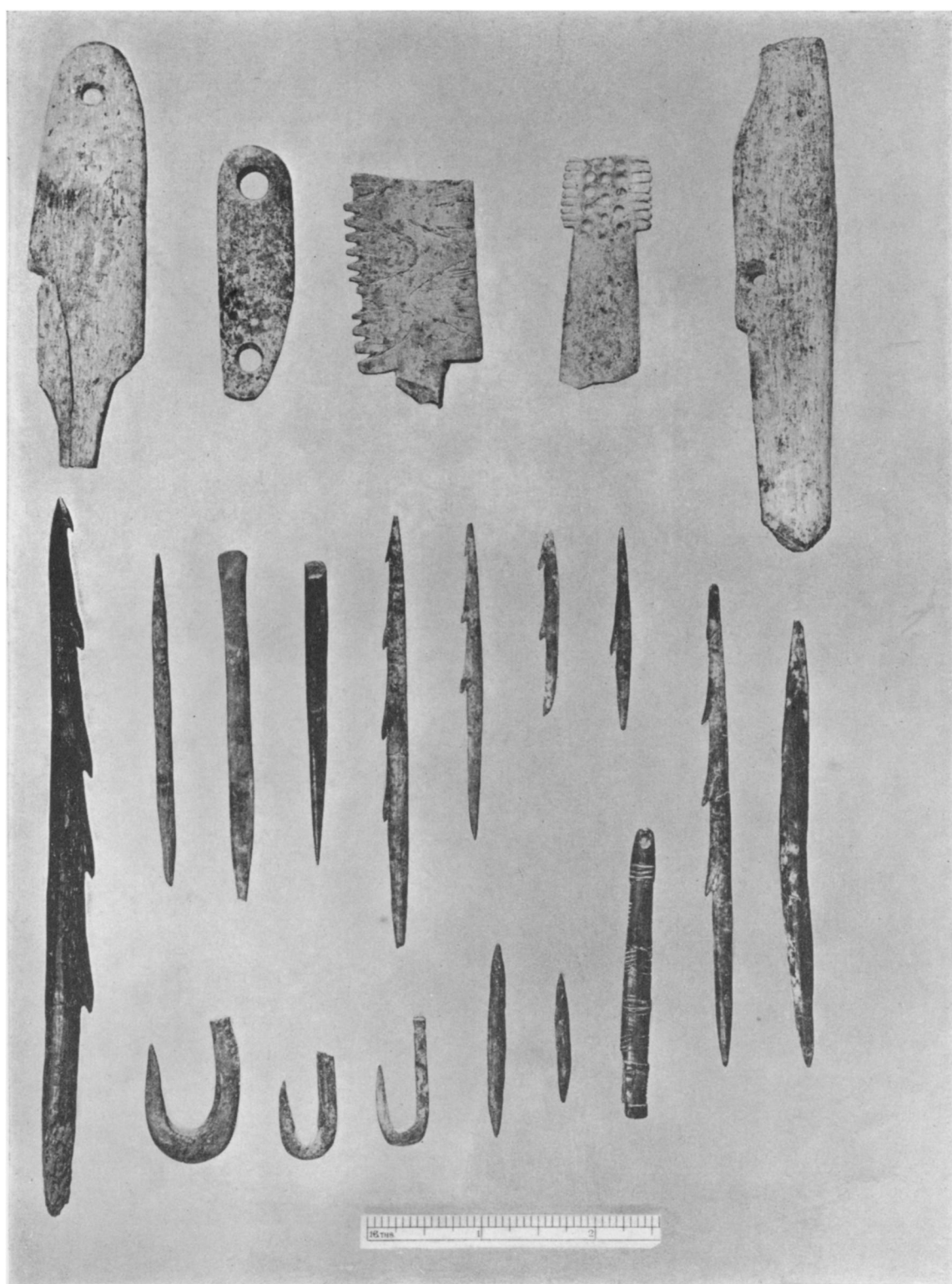


FIG. 3.—TWO CARVINGS OF ANIMAL HEADS FROM LEVEL B.

EXCAVATIONS IN THE MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.



BONE OBJECTS FROM LAYER B, MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.

EXCAVATIONS IN THE MUGHARET EL-KEBARAH.