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ON THE USE OF BRONZE AND IRON IN ANCIENT EGYPT, WITH REFERENCE TO GENERAL ARCHÆOLOGY. By A. H. RHIND, Esq., Hon. Mem. S.A. Scot.

In this valuable communication Mr Rhind referred to the common opinion, that the absence of iron relics among the innumerable spoils from the older tombs of Egypt has to be accounted for by the natural tendency of that metal to rapid decomposition, likely also to be hastened by the nitrous soil of the country. That this opinion was unfounded, Mr Rhind showed, by referring to the various articles of iron found by himself in an unrifled tomb at Thebes, and which, after a period of two thousand years, were as lustrous and pliant as on the day they left the forge. The fact of the rarity of iron remains in Egyptian tombs was then considered in reference to the inquiry as to the position which the ancient Egyptians occupied in relation to working in iron. The frescoes with the colours supposed to indicate metals were referred to, as well as the mineral resources of the country, and the result arrived at was, that up to, and even beyond, the period when Thebes was in its zenith, iron could only have been used in very small proportion, the staple material being bronze. Of this last metal all sorts of armour were made, as well as articles for the ordinary purposes of life; but as in other countries, to which Mr Rhind referred, so he conceived that in Egypt also, iron in later times came more or less to displace bronze, and it was not unlikely that Phœnicia was the diffusive centre from which its use was carried to Egypt. At all events it was shown, from various passages in Holy Scripture, that the inhabitants of that country were familiar with the use of iron. But Mr Rhind was careful to guard against thereby presupposing the localisation of the discovery of the use of iron, or of fixing on any chronological

determination, either relative or absolute, as an epochal starting-point. We do indeed find lying back into the past, and over a large tract of the earth, a broad basis of bronze-culture, on which an iron culture has been, as it were, superimposed; but we look in vain among actual vestiges for proofs of such hypothetical schemes as Voltaire or Goguet would promulgate, whereby men, led on, step by step, according to supposed regular gradations of awakening ingenuity, are made to arrive at a knowledge of iron only after a previous probation with more simply fabricated metallic substances. In fact, there was nothing known which would *fix* a relative chronology in the matter of the discovery of bronze and iron, which may have depended on the mineralogical or other physical conditions of the countries of the pioneers of civilisation, or even upon circumstances in this respect accidental. But it was stated, in conclusion, that while we may cease to inquire for definite data to decide which of these two metals were first wrung from nature, and may even conclude that from a most remote antiquity both were in his hands, we do know that in regions where iron was subsequently employed for the great purposes of practical life, bronze had previously occupied the prominent position, and even continued to do so after we have distinct evidence of the co-existence of iron-working.