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a Record of Excavations in the Necropolis

Alexander Henry Rhind

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Thebes – Its Tombs and Their Tenants Ancient and Present

His independent means as the son of a wealthy banker enabled Alexander Henry Rhind (1833–63) to devote his short life to antiquarianism. While reading for the Scottish bar, he studied and investigated Pictish remains, and pressed for the inclusion of archaeological sites in Ordnance Survey maps. On developing tubercular symptoms, he gave up his legal studies and passed the winters from 1855 to 1857 in Egypt, where he made the important studies and excavations recorded in this 1862 book. He focuses on the necropolis of Thebes, and in particular on the unlooted tomb of an eighteenth-dynasty official. Putting his work into the wider context of the history of ancient Egypt and the importance of the city of Thebes, he also describes the reuse of the necropolis ruins as homes for modern Egyptian peasants and as the centre of a thriving trade in antiquities, both genuine and forged.

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ALEXANDER HENRY RHIND



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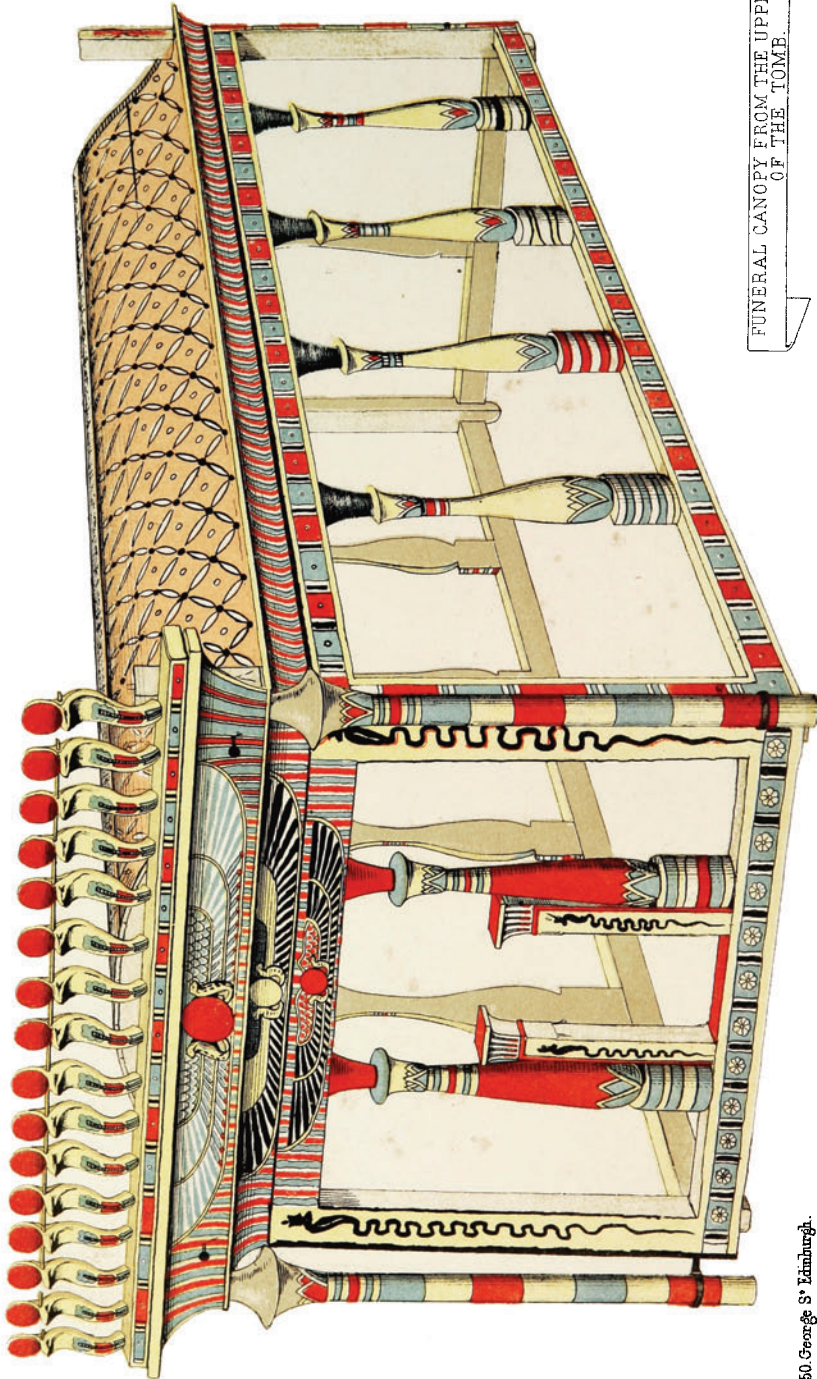
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THEBES

ITS TOMBS AND THEIR TENANTS

ANCIENT AND PRESENT

INCLUDING

A RECORD OF EXCAVATIONS IN THE NECROPOLIS

BY

A. HENRY RHIND

F.S.A. &c.

LONDON

LONGMAN, GREEN, LONGMAN, AND ROBERTS

1862

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PREFACE.



WHILE describing the results of certain excavations which I made at Thebes, I have endeavoured in this volume to offer, at the same time, a general view of Egyptian sepulchral facts, as represented in the Necropolis of that city. Some of those disclosed under my own eye I have thought it right to set down minutely, and in doing so, to note others, even although, individually, they may be of no great importance. For, in any field, and especially where the fruits of few explorations have been circumstantially recorded, such personally observed details are useful, by helping to furnish practical conceptions as to the sources of evidence in the given branch of investigation. In particular, I have desired to offer a precise account of the large family-tomb of an official personage which a long search brought to light in undisturbed condition, not only because its contents are of interest, but because it is in certain respects the only known instance of such a discovery. With regard to the other products of my excavations,

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the more definite have been selected and grouped so as to illustrate the different kinds of tombs, and the state in which they are now usually found.

Indeed it has been part of the plan throughout, that the various details should exhibit some realisation at once of the conditions under which, and those by means of which, Egyptian relics have been procured. Thebes has therefore been treated of introductorily as the ancient Capital, but chiefly as the central source which has been archæologically so productive. The first six chapters and the ninth have directly this scope. The seventh (on the Theories explanatory of Egyptian Sepulture), is, as it were, complementary to the preceding five, by reviewing the psychological and religious questions connected with the origin of the customs of which these five chapters contain exemplifications. In dealing with this difficult subject I have had occasionally to dissent from the opinions of writers of distinguished merit in various walks; but I have done so always with a sense of the consideration due to deductions that may appear to be the product of thought or learning, and sometimes with diffidence as to the views which I may present. For, on such special points at least as relate to Egyptian metaphysical conceptions, I have a strong conviction that whatever can now be said is almost certain to be only provisional. And so far as I can judge (although I feel my imperfect warrant to do so), the materials as yet known are not likely to permit distinct definitions to be laid down with certainty, even

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when these materials have been rendered more fully available by inquirers who have made the ancient native literature a subject of technical study. But it is impossible to cease hoping that means may be found to obtain a clearer insight as to the exact nature of those religious and ontological speculations that, dimly descried through a haze of mystical allusion, still indicate the existence of ideas to which many of the sympathies of succeeding ages respond—ideas of whose history we should not willingly lose a trace.

The eighth chapter is devoted to one of those special ethnographical topics which vestiges from the tombs illustrate—the place occupied respectively by bronze and iron in the metallurgic economy of the ancient Egyptians. Certain remarkable relics discovered in the course of my excavations, required, and throw light on, the discussion of this subject, which has so many important points of contact with the early history of civilization.

I have not considered it out of place to exhibit in the two last chapters the more salient features in the life of the present native villagers—their social position, their habits, occupations, and relation to their rulers. As the reversionary tenants of the tombs which they have converted into dwellings, as active purveyors of antiquities, and as constituting in their capacity of workmen the machinery of excavation, they and their proceedings form a kind of province on the outskirts of Egyptian archæology. But whatever may be thought of this doubtful claim, it must be a very determined antiquarianism that, even on such a site as that of Thebes, can, under the cir-

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cumstances, look so exclusively to the past as to close its eyes to the living interests of the present or the prospects of the future.

As the materials for that portion of the contents of this book derived from personal research among the tombs, were procured nearly five years ago, it may be necessary to explain why so long an interval has elapsed until the present publication. An early reason for postponement was that I contemplated being able to collect a farther series of sepulchral details in other parts of the country.* Subsequently, some retardation arose from its not having been desirable to remove the relics which I brought from Egypt, out of their packing-cases until the galleries for the Museum, in which they have now their place, were fitted up, and which were then about being prepared for the transference of that National Collection.† But the chief cause of the delay has been, that believing any work intended for publication to be entitled to at least such advantages as time and care may give, the demand for both in this case has been increased by the breaches in continuous progress involved in the circumstances of a lengthened annual absence abroad. Even now I have had to correct the proofs of two thirds of these sheets, about fifteen hundred miles from England.

In the following pages I have frequently had the pleasure, as occasion arose, to acknowledge obligations of various kinds interwoven with the preparation of this volume.

* See p. 75.

† See foot-note, p. 90.

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Although there has not been a similar opportunity to specify them, I am not the less mindful of, and would here convey cordial thanks for, other good offices, such as critical suggestions or additional information received from some friends, and assistance connected with certain of the illustrations obtained from others. The especial benefit which I have derived from Mr. Birch's philological aid various passages will show. But I must here again express my warm sense of having always personally experienced, what so many testimonies in works on Egyptian and other antiquities prove, that his learning is equalled by the liberality with which he diffuses its fruits.

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