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John Evans
Excerpt
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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

IN the following pages I purpose to give an account of the various forms of stone implements, weapons, and ornaments of remote antiquity discovered in Great Britain, their probable uses and method of manufacture, and also, in some instances, the circumstances of their discovery. While reducing the whole series into some sort of classification, as has been done for the stone antiquities of Denmark by Professor Worsaae, and for those of Ireland by Sir William Wilde, I hope to add something to our knowledge of this branch of Archæology by instituting comparisons, where possible, between the antiquities of England and Scotland and those of the other countries of Western Europe. Nor, in considering the uses of the various forms and their method of manufacture, must I neglect to avail myself of the illustrations afforded by the practice of modern savages, of which Sir John Lubbock and others have already made such profitable use.

But before commencing any examination of special forms, there are some few general considerations on which it seems advisable to enter, if only in a cursory manner; and this is the more necessary, since notwithstanding the attention which has of late years been devoted to Prehistoric Antiquities, and the numerous treatises which have appeared upon the subject, there is seemingly still much misapprehension abroad as to the nature and value of the conclusions based upon recent archæological and geological investigations.

At the risk therefore of being tedious, I shall have to notice once more many things already well known to archæologists, but which, it would appear from the misconceptions so often evinced, even by those who speak and write on such matters, can hardly be too often repeated.

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Not the least misunderstood of these subjects is the classification of the antiquities of Western Europe, first practically adopted by the Danish antiquaries, under periods known as the Iron, Bronze, and Stone Ages; the Iron Age, so far as Denmark is concerned, being supposed to go back to about the Christian era, the Bronze Age to embrace a period of one or two thousand years previous to that date, and the Stone Age all previous time of man's occupation of that part of the world. These different periods have been, and in some cases may be, safely subdivided; but into this question I need not now enter, as it does not affect the general sequence. The idea of the succession is this:—

1. That there was a period in each given part of Western Europe, say, for example, Denmark, when the use of metals for cutting instruments of any kind was unknown, and man had to depend on stone, bone, wood, and other readily accessible natural products, for his implements and weapons of the chase or war.

2. That this period was succeeded by one in which the use of copper, or of copper alloyed with tin—bronze—became known, and gradually superseded the use of stone for certain purposes, though it remained in use for others; and

3. That a time arrived when bronze, in its turn, gave way to iron or steel, as being a superior metal for all cutting purposes; and which, as such, has remained in use up to the present day.

Such a classification into different ages in no way implies any exact chronology, far less one that would be applicable to all the countries of Western Europe alike, but is rather to be regarded as significant only of a succession of different stages of civilization; for it is evident that at the time when, for instance, in a country such as Italy, the Iron Age may have commenced, some of the more northern countries of Europe may possibly have been in their Bronze Age, and others again still in their Stone Age.

Neither does this classification imply that in the Bronze Age of any country stone implements had entirely ceased to be in use, nor even that in the Iron Age both bronze and stone had been completely superseded for all cutting purposes. Like the three principal colours of the rainbow, these three stages of civilization overlap, intermingle, and shade off the one into the other; and yet their succession, so far as Western Europe is concerned, appears to be equally well defined with that of the prismatic colours, though the proportions of the spectrum may vary in different countries.

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I have spoken of this division into Periods as having been first practically adopted by the Danish school of antiquaries, but in fact this classification is by no means so recent as has been commonly supposed. Take, for instance, the following passage from Bishop Lyttelton's "Observations on Stone Hatchets,"* written in 1766:—"There is not the least doubt of these stone instruments having been fabricated in the earliest times, and by barbarous people, before the use of iron or other metals was known, and from the same cause spears and arrows were headed with flint and other hard stones." A century earlier, Sir William Dugdale, in his "History of Warwickshire," † also speaks of stone celts as weapons used by the Britons before the art of making arms of brass or iron was known. We find, in fact, that the same views were entertained not only by various writers ‡ within the last two centuries, but also by many of the early poets and historians. There are even biblical grounds for argument in favour of such a view of a gradual development of material civilization. For all, including those who invest Adam with high moral attributes, must confess that whatever may have been his mental condition, his personal equipment in the way of tools or weapons could have been but inefficient if no artificer was instructed in brass and iron until the days of Tubal Cain, the sixth in descent from Adam's outcast son, and that too at a time when a generation was reckoned at a hundred years, instead of at thirty, as now.

Turning, however, to Greek and Roman authors, we find Hesiod, § about B.C. 850, mentioning a time when bronze had not been superseded by iron:—

Τῷς δ' ἦν χάλκεα μὲν τεύχεα, χάλκκει δὲ τε οἴκοι
Χαλκῶ δ' εἰργάζοντο, μέλας δ' οὐκ ἔσχε σίδηρος.

Lucretius || is even more distinct in his views as to the successive Periods:—

"Arma antiqua manus, ungues, dentesque fuerunt
Et lapides, et item sylvarum fragmina rami,—
Posterior ferri vis est ærisque reperta;
Sed prior æris erat quam ferri cognitum usus.—
Ære solum terræ tractabant, æreque belli
Miscabant fluctus et vulnera vasta ferebant."

So early as the days of Augustus it would appear that bronze arms were regarded as antiquities, and that emperor seems to have

* *Archæologia*, ii. 118.

† p. 778.

‡ I would especially refer to an excellent article by the Rev. John Hodgson in vol. i. of the *Archæologia Æliana* (A.D. 1816), entitled "An Inquiry into the Æra when Brass was used in purposes to which Iron is now applied."

§ *Op. et Di.*, i. 150.

|| *De Rerum Nat.*, v. 1232.

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commenced the first archæological and geological collection on record, having adorned one of his country residences “*rebus vetustate ac raritate notabilibus, qualia sunt Capreis immanium belluarum ferarumque membra prægrandia, quæ dicuntur gigantum ossa et arma heroum.*”*

We learn from Pausanias† what these arms of the heroes were, for he explains how in the heroic times all weapons were of bronze, and quotes Homer’s description of the axe of Pisander and the arrow of Meriones. He also cites the spear of Achilles in the Temple of Minerva, at Phaselis, the point and ferrule of which only were of bronze; and the sword of Memnon in the Temple of Æsculapius, at Nicomedia, which was wholly of bronze. In the same manner Plutarch‡ relates that when Cimon disinterred the remains of Theseus in Scyros he found with them a bronze spear-head and sword.

There is, indeed, in Homer constant mention of arms, axes, and adzes of bronze, and though iron is also named, it is of far less frequent occurrence. According to the Arundelian marbles,§ it was discovered only 188 years before the Trojan war, though of course such a date must be purely conjectural. Even Virgil preserves the unities, and often gives to the heroes of the Æneid bronze arms, as well as to some of the people of Italy—

“*Æratæque micant peltæ, micat æreus ensis.*” ||

The fact that in the Greek¶ language the words χαλκίος and χαλκίειν remained in use as significant of working in iron affords a very strong, if not an irrefragable argument as to bronze having been the earlier metal known to that people. In the same way the continuance in use of bronze cutting implements in certain religious rites—as was also the case with some stone implements which I shall subsequently mention—affords evidence of their comparative antiquity. The Tuscans** at the foundation of a city ploughed the pomœrium with a bronze ploughshare, the priests of the Sabines cut their hair with bronze knives, and the Chief Priest of Jupiter at Rome used shears of the same metal for that purpose. In the same manner Medea has attributed to her, both by Sophocles and Ovid, †† a bronze sickle when gathering her magic

* Suetonius, Vit. Aug., cap. lxxii.

† Laconica, cap. 3.

‡ Op., ed. 1624, vol. i. p. 17.

§ Wilkinson, Anc. Egypt., iii. 241.

|| Æn., l. vii. 743.

¶ Χαλκίειν δὲ καὶ τὸ σιδηρέειν ἔλεγον, καὶ χαλκίος τοὺς τὸν σίδηρον ἔργαζομένους.—Jul. Pollux, Onomasticon, lib. vii. cap. 24.

** Macrobius, Saturnal., v. 19. Rhodiginus, Antiq., Lect. xix. c. 10.

†† Met., lib. vii. 228.

herbs, and Elissa is represented by Virgil as using a similar instrument for the same purpose. Altogether, if history is to count for anything, there can be no doubt that in Greece and Italy, the earliest civilized countries of Europe, the use of bronze preceded that of iron, and therefore that there was in each case a Bronze Age of greater or less duration preceding the Iron Age.

It seems probable that the first iron used was meteoric, and such may have been that "self-fused" mass which formed one of the prizes at the funeral games of Patroclus,* and was so large that it would suffice its possessor for all purposes during five years. Even the Greek word for iron (*σίδηρος*) may not improbably be connected with the meteoric origin of the first known form of the metal. Its affinity with *ἀστὴρ*, often used for a shooting star or meteor, with the Latin *sidera* and our own "star," is evident.

Professor Lauth,† moreover, interprets the Coptic word for iron, **BEMNE**, as "the stone of heaven" (*Stein des Himmels*), which implies that in Egypt also its meteoric origin was acknowledged.

Some, however, are of opinion that during the time that bronze was employed for cutting instruments iron was also in use for other purposes.‡ At the first introduction of iron this was, no doubt, the case, but we can hardly suppose the two metals to have been introduced simultaneously; and if they had been, the questions arise, from whence did they come? and how are we to account for the one not having sooner superseded the other for cutting purposes?

Another argument that has been employed in favour of iron having been the first metal used is that bronze is a mixed metal requiring a knowledge of the art of smelting both copper and tin, the latter being only produced in few districts, and generally having to be brought from far, while certain of the ores of iron are of easy access and readily reducible,§ and meteoric iron is also found in the metallic state and adapted for immediate use. The answer to this is, first, that all historical evidence is against the use of iron previous to that of bronze; and, secondly, that even in Eastern Africa, where, above all other places, the conditions for the development of the manufacture of iron seem most favourable, we have no evidence of the knowledge of that metal having pre-

* Homer, *Il.*, xxiii. 826.

† *Zeitsch. f. Ägypt. Sprache, &c.*, 1870, p. 114.

‡ See De Rougemont, "L'Age du Bronze," p. 159.

§ See Percy's "Metallurgy," vol. i. p. 873.

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ceded that of bronze; but, on the contrary, we find in Egypt, a country often brought in contact with these iron-producing districts, no trace of iron before the twelfth dynasty,* and of its use even then the evidence is only pictorial, whereas the copper mines at Maghara are said to date back to the second dynasty, some eight hundred years earlier. Agatharchides,† more over, relates that in his time, *circa* B.C. 100, there were found buried in the ancient gold mines of Egypt the bronze chisels (*λατομίδες χαλκᾶι*) of the old miners, and he accounts for their being of that metal by the fact that at the period when the mines were originally worked the use of iron was entirely unknown. To use the words of my lamented friend, the late Mr. Crawford,‡ who by no means agreed that such a sequence was almost universal, “Ancient Egypt seems to offer a case in which a Bronze Age clearly preceded an Iron one; or, at least, in which cutting instruments of bronze preceded those of iron.”

To return, however, to Greece and Italy, there can, as I have already said, be little question but that even on historical grounds we must accept the fact that in those countries, at all events, the use of bronze preceded that of iron. We may therefore infer theoretically that the same sequence held good with the neighbouring and more barbarous nations of Western Europe. Even in the time of Pausanias§ (after A.D. 174) the Sarmatians are mentioned as being unacquainted with the use of iron; and practically we have good corroborative archæological evidence of such a sequence in other countries, for in more than one instance extensive discoveries have been made of antiquities belonging to the transitional period, when the use of iron or steel was gradually superseding that of bronze for tools or weapons, and when the forms given to the new metal were copied from those of the old. The most notable relics of this transitional period are those of the ancient cemetery at Hallstatt, in the Salzkammergut, Austria, where upwards of a thousand graves have been opened by Herr Ramsauer, of the contents of which a detailed account has been given by the Baron von Sacken.|| The evidence afforded by the discoveries in the Swiss lakes is almost equally satisfactory; but I need not now enter further into the question of the existence and succession of the Bronze and Iron Ages, which has already been so fully discussed by Sir John

* De Rougemont, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

† Photii Bibliotheca, ed. 1653, col. 1343.

‡ *Trans. Ethnol. Soc.*, vol. iv. p. 5.

§ Lib. i. c. 21.

|| “Das Grabfeld von Hallstatt und dessen Alterthümer.” Vienna, 1868.

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Lubbock and others. I am at present concerned with the Stone Age, and if, as all agree, there was a time when the use of iron or of bronze, or of both together, first became known to the barbarous nations of the West of Europe, then it is evident that before that time they were unacquainted with the use of those metals, and were therefore in that stage of civilization which has been characterized as the Stone Age.

It is not, of course, to be expected that we should discover direct contemporary historical testimony amongst any people of their being in this condition, for in no case do we find a knowledge of writing developed in this stage of culture; and yet, apart from the material relics of this phase of progress which are found from time to time in the soil, there is to be obtained in most civilized countries indirect circumstantial evidence of the former use of stone implements, even where those of metal had been employed for centuries before authentic history commences. It is in religious customs and ceremonies—in rites which have been handed down from generation to generation, and in which the minute and careful repetition of ancient observances is indeed often the essential religious element—that such evidence is to be sought. As has already been observed by others, the transition from ancient to venerable, from venerable to holy, is as natural as it is universal; and in the same manner as some of the festivals and customs of Christian countries are directly traceable to heathen times, so no doubt many of the religious observances of ancient times were relics of what was even then a dim past.

Whatever we may think of the etymology of the word as given by Cicero,* Lactantius,† or Lucretius,‡ there is much to be said in favour of Mr. E. B. Tylor's § view of superstition being “the standing over of old habits into the midst of a new and changed state of things—of the retention of ancient practices for ceremonial purposes long after they had been superseded for the commonplace uses of ordinary life.”

Such a standing over of old customs we seem to discover among most of the civilized peoples of antiquity. Turning to Egypt and Western Asia, the early home of European civilization, we find from Herodotus || and from Diodorus Siculus ¶ that in the rite of

* De Nat. Deor., l. ii. c. 28.

† Lib. iv. c. 28.

‡ Lib. i. v. 66.

§ “Early History of Mankind,” p. 218, *q.v.*; 2nd edit. p. 221.

|| Lib. ii. 86.

¶ Lib. i. 91.

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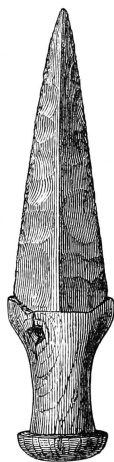
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embalming, though the brain was removed by a crooked iron, yet the body was cut open with a sharp Ethiopian stone.

In several European museums are preserved thin, flat, leaf-shaped knives of dark cherty flint found in Egypt. In character of workmanship their correspondence to the flint knives or daggers of Scandinavia is most striking. They are, however, usually provided with a tang at one end at the back of the blade, and in this respect resemble metallic blades intended to be mounted by means of a tang driven into the haft.

In the British Museum is an Egyptian dagger-like instrument of flint, from the Hay collection, still mounted in its original wooden handle, apparently by a central tang, and with remains of its skin sheath. It is shown on the scale of one-fourth in Fig. 1. There is also a polished stone knife broken at the handle, which bears upon it, in hieroglyphical characters, the name of ΠΤΑΗΜΕΣ, an officer.



EGYPT.—Fig. 1.

Curiously enough, the bodies of the chiefs or Menceys of the Guanches in Teneriffe* were also cut open with knives made of sharp pieces of obsidian, by particular persons set apart for the office.

The rite of circumcision was among those practised by the Egyptians, but whether it was performed with a stone knife, as was the case with the Jews when they came out of Egypt, is not certain. Among the latter people, not to lay stress on the case of Zipporah,† it is recorded of Joshua‡ that in circumcising the children of Israel he made use of knives of stone. It is true that in our version the words חַרְבוֹת צִיִּרִים are translated sharp knives, which by analogy with a passage in Psalm lxxxix. 44 (43 E. V.) is not otherwise than correct; but the Syriac, Arabic, Vulgate, and Septuagint translations all give knives of stone;§ and the latter version, in the account of the burial of Joshua, adds that they laid with him the stone knives (τὰς μαχαίρας τὰς πετρίνας) with which he circumcised the children of Israel—“and there they are unto this day.” Gesenius (*s. v.* צִיִּר) observes upon the passage, “This is a circumstance worthy of remark; and goes to show at least, that knives of stone were found in the sepulchres of Palestine, as well as in

* *Trans. Ethn. Soc.*, N. S., vii. 112.

† *Josh.* v. 2.

‡ *Exod.* iv. 25.

§ *Ib.*, xxiv. 30.

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those of north-western Europe.”* Under certain circumstances modern Jews make use of a fragment of flint or glass for this rite. The occurrence of flint knives in ancient Jewish sepulchres may, however, be connected with a far earlier occupation of Palestine than that of the Jews. It was a constant custom with them to bury in caves, and recent discoveries have shown that, like the caves of Western Europe, many of these were at a remote period occupied by those unacquainted with the use of metals, and whose stone implements are found mixed up with the bones of the animals which had served them for food.†

Of analogous uses of stone we find some few traces among classical writers. Ovid, speaking of Atys, makes the instrument with which he maimed himself to be a sharp stone.

“Ille etiam saxo corpus laniavit acuto.”

The solemn treaties among the Romans were ratified by the Fetialis‡ sacrificing a pig with a flint stone, which, however, does not appear to have been sharpened. “Ubi dixit, porcum saxo silice percussit.” The “religiosa silix”§ of Claudian seems rather to have been a block of stone like that under the form of which Jupiter, Cybele, Diana, and even Venus were worshipped. Pausanias informs us that it was the custom among the Greeks to bestow divine honours on certain unshaped stones, and ΖΕΥΣ ΚΑΣΙΟΣ is thus represented on coins of Seleucia in Syria, while the Paphian Venus appears in the form of a conical stone on coins struck in Cyprus.

The traces, however, of the Stone Age in the religious rites of Greece and Rome are extremely slight, and this is by no means remarkable when we consider how long the use of bronze, and even of iron, had been known in those parts of Europe at the time when authentic history commences. We shall subsequently see at how early a period different implements of stone had a mysterious if not a superstitious virtue assigned to them. I need only mention as an instance that in a beautiful gold necklace|| of Greek or Etruscan workmanship, and now in the British Museum, the central pendant consists of a delicate flint arrow-head, elegantly set in gold, and probably worn as a charm.

* See also Tylor's “Early History of Mankind,” 2nd edit., p. 217. The entire chapter on the Stone Age, Past and Present, is well worthy of careful perusal, and enters more fully into the whole question of the Stone Age throughout the world than comes within my province.

† *Comptes Rendus*, 1871, lxxiii. 540. ‡ Livy, lib. i. c. 24. § Rapt. Proserp., i. 201.

|| “Horæ Ferales,” p. 136. *Arch. Journ.*, vol. xi. p. 169.

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Nor is the religious use of stone confined to Europe.* In Western Africa, when the god Gimawong makes his annual visit to his temple at Labode, his worshippers kill the ox which they offer with a stone.

To come nearer home, it is not to be expected that in this country, the earliest written history of which (if we except the slight account derived from merchants trading hither) comes from the pen of foreign conquerors, we should have any records of the Stone Age. In Cæsar's time the tribes with which he came in contact were already acquainted with the use of iron, and were, indeed, for the most part immigrants from Gaul, a country whose inhabitants had, by war and commerce, been long brought in contact with the more civilized inhabitants of Italy and Greece. I have elsewhere shown † that the degree of civilization which must be conceded to those maritime tribes far exceeds what is accorded by popular belief. The older occupants of Britain, who had retreated before the Belgic invaders, and occupied the western and northern parts of the island, were no doubt in a far more barbarous condition; but in no case in which they came in contact with their Roman invaders do they seem to have been unacquainted with the use of iron. Even the Caledonians,‡ in the time of Severus, who tattooed themselves with the figures of animals, and went nearly naked, carried a shield, a spear, and a sword, and wore iron collars and girdles, though they deemed these latter ornamental and an evidence of wealth, in the same way as other barbarians esteemed gold.

But though at the commencement of the Christian era the knowledge of the use of iron may have been general throughout Britain, and though probably an acquaintance with bronze, at all events in the southern part of the island, may probably date many centuries further back, it by no means follows, as I cannot too often repeat, that the use of stone for various purposes to which it had previously been applied should suddenly have ceased on a superior material, in the shape of metal, becoming known. On the contrary, we know that the use of certain stone weapons was contemporary with the use of bronze daggers, and the probability is that in the poorer and more inaccessible parts of the country stone continued in use for many ordinary purposes long after bronze,

* *Arch. für Anthropol.*, iii. 16.

† "Coins of the Ancient Britons," pp. 42, 263, *et alii*.

‡ Herodian, lib. iii. c. 14.