

OBITUARY NOTICES

SIR GASTON MASPERO, K.C.M.G.

WE regret to record the death, on June 30 last year, of our distinguished Honorary Member, Sir Gaston Maspero, who had long been regarded as the foremost Egyptologist of his generation. Among students of Egyptian antiquity he was the last of the great scholars who were able to include within the range of their activity the various branches of inquiry which tend more and more to become subjects of specialized study. In any survey of his career one is most struck by this extraordinary versatility. To most people his name will be familiar as that of one of the few great historians of the ancient world, his *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l'Orient classique* (which also appeared in an English form) surveying the ancient history of Egypt and Western Asia in the light of modern excavation and research. By Egyptian philologists he will always be remembered as the first editor and translator of the "Pyramid Texts", the earlier form assumed by those magical compositions for the benefit of the dead which were known by the Egyptians themselves as the "Chapters of Coming Forth by Day" and are conveniently referred to by modern writers as the "Book of the Dead". He wrote much on art, mythology, and religion, and everything he published bore the impress of his keen insight and attractive style. As editor of the *Recueil de travaux* and as Director of the Egyptian Service des Antiquités he exerted a wide influence on others' work. In the latter capacity he came into close relations with British official life in Egypt, and his success in this difficult administrative post won him the English title he was proud to bear. It is strange that, in spite of his large circle of English

friends, he should only once have visited this country, when in 1887 he was given by Oxford the honorary degree of D.C.L. It may be added that at Oxford he was also elected to an honorary fellowship at Queen's College.

The main facts of his career may be briefly recorded. Maspero was born at Milan on June 23, 1846, and, though of Italian parentage, he was a Frenchman by both training and sympathies, having been naturalized at an early age. Already as a boy he was keenly interested in Egyptology, and it was in consequence of these extraneous studies that he fell under the influence of the French Egyptologist E. de Rougé, whose assistant he became, in 1869, at the *École des Hautes Études*; on the latter's death five years later he succeeded him as Professor at the *Collège de France*. The foundation in Cairo of the *Institut français d'archéologie orientale* was the occasion of Maspero's first connexion with Egypt. At the beginning of 1881 he went out as its first director and, on Mariette's death a few weeks later, he became head of the Bulaq Museum and director of excavations. In the following year his work was interrupted for a time, when with the other European residents he had to leave the country in consequence of Arabi's revolt. It was during Maspero's first directorship that the discovery was made of the famous hiding-place at Deir el-Bahari, where the mummies of Egyptian kings had been stored away at the time of the Twenty-first Dynasty. Maspero himself was mainly occupied at this period in continuing Mariette's work of excavating the smaller pyramids at Saqqarah and in collecting and editing the mural texts from the tomb-chambers. These were published after his return to Paris in 1886, his other principal work during the next thirteen years being his great history of antiquity to which also reference has already been made.

In 1899 he was invited by Lord Cromer to return to

Egypt as first director of the new Cairo Museum. In addition to reorganizing the Service des Antiquités, the departmental importance of which had considerably increased in the interval, he devoted himself to the arrangement and classification of the collections in the new Museum, and he inaugurated the great Catalogue on international lines. Although Maspero did not conduct excavations himself during his second directorship, he superintended the work of his assistants and gave considerable time to the preservation and strengthening of existing temples. It also fell to him to arrange the archæological survey of Nubia, the monuments of which were threatened through the rise of water on the construction of the Aswan Dam. He resigned the directorship in 1914, owing to questions of health, and, on his return to Paris a few days before the War, was elected Secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. But his health did not improve, and the loss of his son at the Front early in 1915 was a severe blow to him. Though he had passed his seventieth year, the news of his sudden death, while in the act of addressing the Academy, came as a great shock to his many friends.

It has only been possible here to touch lightly on the principal achievements of an extraordinarily active and distinguished career. Any reader desiring a more detailed estimate of Maspero's great influence on Egyptological studies and a statement of his attitude towards the vexed problems of Egyptian philology, may be referred to the intimate account of his life by Monsieur Edouard Naville in the third volume of the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, published by the Egypt Exploration Fund.

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