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

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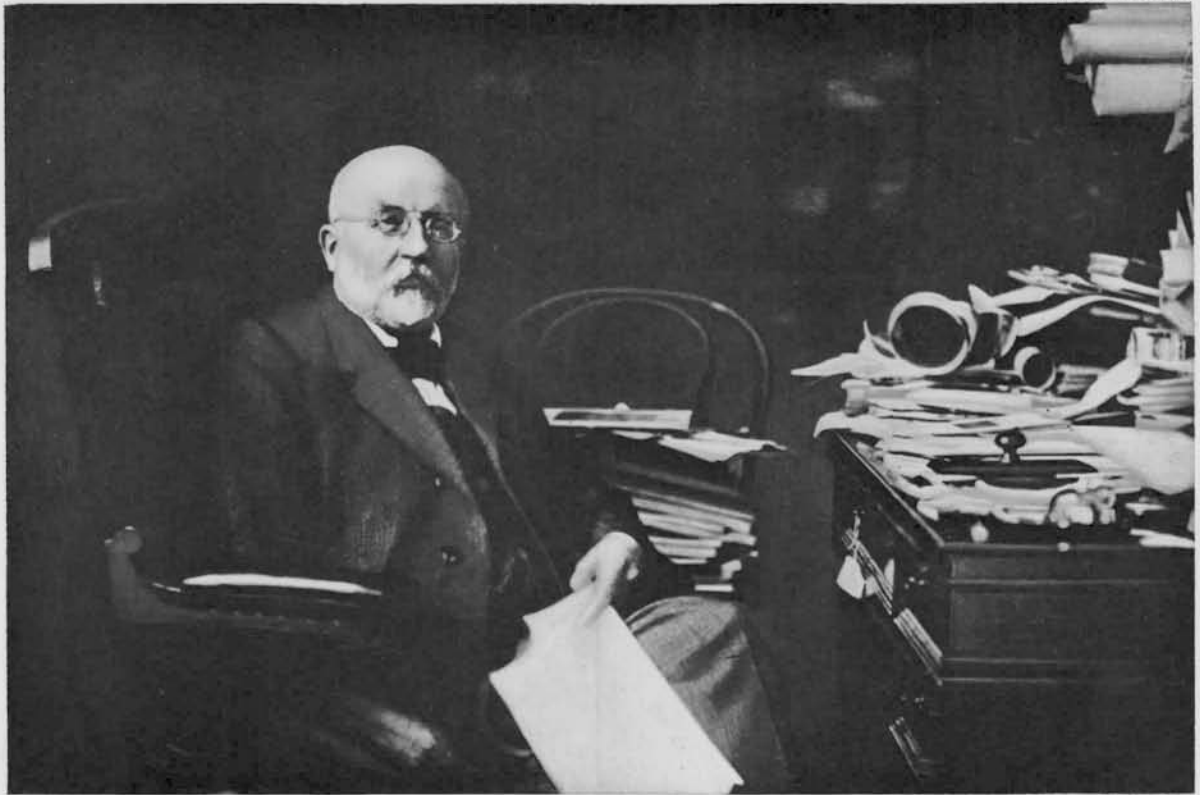
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Emory Walker, Photo

Sir Gaston Maspero. K.C.M.G.

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BY PROFESSOR EDOUARD NAVILLE, D.C.L., LL.D., F.S.A.

GASTON MASPERO, born on the 23rd of June 1846, had just passed his seventieth birthday when he died suddenly on the 30th of June, 1916, while addressing the "Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres."

He was not a Frenchman by birth. His father was a political refugee from Milan; but the son Gaston was naturalized when very young, and thus enabled to enter the *École Normale*, the famous college which has been the nursery of so many eminent scholars and scientists, and to which Frenchmen only have access.

Even as a youth at the *Lycée Louis le Grand* he already felt the spell of Egypt, and later, at the *École Normale*, he carried on his Egyptian studies privately. At that time, he was introduced to E. DE ROUGÉ, the great French Egyptologist, who encouraged him and gave him some of his books. He did not stay long at the *École Normale*, which he had entered in 1865. In 1867, owing to some troubles in the school, he was obliged to leave, and went with a French family to Montevideo. The head of this family was occupied with studies on the language of the Incas called Quichua; and MASPERO, without assuming any responsibility for the conclusions drawn from these researches, had to bring them out.

A year later he was again in France and very soon published the result of his own Egyptian studies, which he had continued in South America: the translation of the long inscription of Rameses II at the entrance to the great temple of Abydos¹. The copy made by DEVÉRIA had been handed to him by MARIETTE, to whom the essay is dedicated. In 1869 he published the "Hymn to the Nile"² from two papyri in the British Museum, *Sallier II* and *Anastasi VII*. In both these works he appears as the follower of E. DE ROUGÉ, who may be said to have been the founder of Egyptian philology. Indeed, nobody before DE ROUGÉ had translated a running text. Having set the example and shown the method by translating the first seven lines of the inscription of "Ahmes the Sailor," in 1852 he revealed to the Academy the "Tale of the Two Brothers," and in 1856 the poem of Pentaur. In turning into French these two hieratic books, DE ROUGÉ opened the wide field of Egyptian literature. He had encouraged MASPERO, who, studying his books, was so imbued with his principles

¹ *L'inscription dédicatoire du temple d'Abydos, texte traduction et notes, suivi d'un essai sur la jeunesse de Sésostris* par G. MASPERO. Paris, Franck, 1862.

² *Hymne au Nil, publié et traduit d'après les deux textes du Musée Britannique* par G. MASPERO, Paris, Franck, 1869.

that the young Egyptologist could write in DE ROUGÉ's biography that it was to him that he was indebted for his career¹.

In the same year (1869) in which he published the "Hymn to the Nile" MASPERO was appointed DE ROUGÉ's assistant at the *École des Hautes Études*. He did not work long, however, with his master, who died at the end of 1872. In 1874, being only 28 years old, he was appointed DE ROUGÉ's successor as professor at the *Collège de France*, the school of learning founded in the sixteenth century by the illustrious Hellenist, Guillaume BUDÉ. A chair in this famous school has always been considered by scholars, alike in France and abroad, as the highest position a teacher can attain in any of the various branches of learning.

Shortly before this MASPERO had taken his doctor's degree, by presenting, according to French academic custom, two compositions: one an essay in Latin "de Carchemis oppidi situ," and the other a book entitled *Du genre épistolaire chez les Égyptiens de l'époque pharaonique*. It was the first time that Egyptology had been submitted to the judgment of the Paris University. This book contains a great number of translations, most of them from papyri in the British Museum, and some of them quite new.

From that time MASPERO's energies were turned into two different channels of activity, one in Paris and the other at Cairo. He lectured in Paris until January 1881, when he first visited Egypt. MARIETTE was then dying. The founder of Egyptian archaeology, the first scientific explorer, who had succeeded in spite of the greatest difficulties in creating the Boolaq Museum, was a Frenchman. France was very desirous that the scientific work in Egypt should remain under the influence of the nation which had produced CHAMPOLLION. Therefore at the end of 1880 it was decided to found the "Institut français d'archéologie orientale," the French Parliament having voted a sum of money for its creation; and at the beginning of 1881 MASPERO, who was to be the director, arrived at Cairo with two young Egyptologists and two Arabic scholars. He had only been there a few weeks when MARIETTE died, and MASPERO was at once appointed director of the excavations and of the Boolaq Museum. This marks the beginning of his first period in this capacity, which ended in 1888 when he returned to Paris to take up again his professorial duties at the *Collège de France*.

His first directorship was very different from the second. Circumstances then were not what they are to-day; there was only the Boolaq Museum, much too small for the constant increase of antiquities, which had to be put away in store-rooms, the *shouneh* of the Arabs. The European assistants as well as the native officials were few in number, and MASPERO had great difficulties in obtaining money from an embarrassed treasury. It was the time of great financial and political troubles; these culminated in 1882 in Arabi's revolt, which obliged all the Europeans to leave the country. MASPERO had to go with the rest; he left his museum, not knowing whether he would ever return in the same capacity, or in what state he would find the precious collections which had been consigned to the care of one or two native officials. The late Sir Charles WILSON told the present writer that, having entered Cairo in the morning with the English troops, he went in the evening of the same day to Boolaq to see what had become of the museum, and was happy to find it untouched.

¹ "C'est donc à Monsieur DE ROUGÉ que je dois ma carrière."

MASPERO returned as soon as possible, in the autumn, and resumed his position and the work which had been interrupted. MARIETTE, even on his death-bed, had not ceased to think of his excavations, specially of his last undertaking, the opening of the smaller Pyramids. He was only half conscious when his friend BRUGSCH came in from Sakkarah and brought texts which he had copied in two of the Pyramids just entered, those of Pepi I and Merenra. MASPERO, immediately after his appointment, continued the work of his predecessor and opened three more. The copying and translating of about 4000 lines of inscriptions took several years. He began the publication of text and translation in 1882, and ended the work in 1894.

Another great archaeological event which marked that period was, on the denunciation of MOHAMMED ABD ER-BASSOUL, the discovery of the famous hiding-place at Deir el-Bahari where the mummies of the great kings of Egypt had been stored at the time of the XXIst Dynasty. This discovery was made in July 1881 when MASPERO was in Paris; BRUGSCH Bey and ACHMED Effendi KEMAL went by the steamer of the museum and gathered this marvellous collection, which is unique amongst the archaeological remains of any country. Where do we find, except in Egypt, not only the history or the monuments, but the bodies themselves of the great kings whose high deeds are related on the walls of the temples which they erected and which were adorned with their statues?

In this *Journal* I must not omit to say that to the time of MASPERO's first directorship, to the year 1883, belongs the beginning of the excavations of the Egypt Exploration Fund, which had been founded the year before by a committee with Sir Erasmus WILSON as chairman, and having among its members Sir Charles NEWTON, Reginald Stuart POOLE, and Miss Amelia B. EDWARDS. In the winter of 1883-4 the present writer started the excavations of the Fund by his identification of Pithom at the place called Tell el-Maskhuta.

MASPERO from the beginning was most friendly and benevolent to the Fund, the work of which he always encouraged. But political circumstances did not leave him so free as in later years; and in the first contract made with him about excavations at Pithom it was stipulated that every monument discovered should go to the museum at Boolaq, and that the excavator should not take away anything. At the end of the work I brought to the museum on my dahabeeyah everything I had found; but as the excavations had been satisfactory, and in order to encourage the Fund to further effort, MASPERO agreed that two of the monuments, *viz.* a crouching scribe, the recorder of Pithom, and a granite hawk, should be given as "don gracieux" by the Khedive to the British Museum, where they are now exhibited in the Great Gallery.

In 1886, owing to various circumstances, one of which was Madame MASPERO's health, MASPERO was obliged to return to Paris, where he remained thirteen years. He resumed his lectures at the Collège de France, in which he generally prepared books or articles which he published afterwards. These years were marked by his two greatest works, *viz.* the publication and complete translation of the texts of the Pyramids and his *Ancient History of the East*, in three quarto volumes, to which we shall revert. In 1883 he became a member of the "Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres," and in 1887 was made Honorary D.C.L. at Oxford¹. This was the only occasion on which he visited England, and he stayed only a few days.

¹ MASPERO was also an Honorary Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford. ED.

In 1899 he was asked to return to Egypt; Lord CROMER particularly insisted on his going to assume the directorship of the Museum in Cairo, which had just been built, and to organize the "Service des Antiquités," which is now one of the important administrative departments of the country. During that time he tried to keep up his literary activity as well as he could, but he had to reduce it in a great measure.

His second directorship of the "Service des Antiquités" was marked by the complete organization of that Service, which hardly existed before. This he could not have accomplished without the strong support of the Egyptian Government, and of Lord Cromer and his successors. Money was granted in sufficient quantity, and a whole staff of officials was appointed, not only for the Museum but for keeping an eye on everything connected with antiquities. The country was divided into five inspectorates. At the head of each of these is an European inspector, with native assistants. These inspectors may have to conduct excavations themselves, but their chief duty is to report on anything which turns up either fortuitously or in the work of the fellaheen.

The great difficulty at present is that the natives know what antiquities are, and the high prices they fetch in the market. Many of them have worked for European or American excavators. They find out the places where antiquities are likely to be discovered, especially cemeteries, but they do not reveal them; and during the summer, when there are but few Europeans in the country, they carry on their own excavations for the benefit of the dealers. This illicit trade the inspectors are trying to prevent, but it is only with great difficulty that they can have any influence in this respect.

MASPERO had also to regulate excavations in general. The Egypt Exploration Fund was not the sole foreign society working in Egypt, as in 1883. Not only learned bodies but also representatives of museums asked to be allowed to dig, and sometimes groups of people interested in the antiquities of Egypt applied for permission to do so, with the condition that they should have a certain share of what might be unearthed. These excavations, generally made by competent men, have often led to important results. Besides Prof. PETRIE, one of the veterans in Egyptian archaeology, and his assistants, Prof. GARSTANG representing England, Prof. REISNER America, Prof. SCHIAPARELLI the Turin Museum, Prof. STEINDORFF and the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft, under Dr BORCHARDT's direction, Germany, have all brought to light a considerable number of monuments of all kinds which have greatly furthered our knowledge of the life and customs of the Old Egyptians. They have also contributed to solve some historical problems.

The permissions to dig were granted by a committee on MASPERO's recommendation. Of the many persons who have excavated in Egypt, all owe a debt of gratitude to MASPERO, not only for the great courtesy with which he received their requests, but also for the facilities he gave them for carrying on their work, and for his generosity in the division of the results of the excavations. The present writer has especially to express his thanks for the valuable support MASPERO gave him during several years when he was working for the Egypt Exploration Fund. MASPERO's kindness sometimes brought him into difficulties, as when he granted concessions to natives, an action severely criticised.

During his second directorship he did not himself excavate, this work being assigned to inspectors. His efforts were devoted in the first place to the arrangement

of the Cairo Museum, the immense building in which are gathered all the antiquities discovered since MARIETTE first started the small museum at Boolaq. Thence it had first been removed to the Palace of Ghizeh, one of the last constructions of the time of the Khedive ISMAEL PACHA, a showy and lightly built mansion, especially suitable for a large harem, and the solidity of which was doubtful. The new building had been finished and the contents of Ghizeh transported thither shortly before MASPERO arrived. He had to classify this collection, the riches of which one cannot conceive before having gone through these lofty galleries. The Catalogue had already been begun; MASPERO enlisted various scholars for its pursuance, and it consists now of more than 50 volumes in quarto size with numerous plates, and is not yet finished.

MASPERO wrote the Guide-book to the Museum, of which there were several editions, in both French and English. This Guide-book is most interesting and instructive; it contains many expositions of the writer's point of view on archaeology, art, history, and religion. The fault of the book is perhaps that it is too scientific for ordinary travellers and not sufficiently practical for reference. Its value can hardly be appreciated by the ordinary visitor to the Museum.

One of the principal objects of MASPERO's attention and care was the strengthening of the monuments which were going to ruin. For instance, owing to a large sum of money which had been granted by the Government, M. LEGRAIN set to work to raise the fallen columns of the great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak. This long and difficult task, which lasted several years, is now finished, and visitors are able to walk, as did the present writer in the spring of 1914, through this forest of huge columns, which was in antiquity considered one of the seven wonders of the world.

At the same time, the temple of Luxor was entirely excavated, except the mosque of the patron saint of the village. The wall of the passage which runs round the back part of the temple at Edfu was also strengthened and partially rebuilt. But MASPERO's attention was chiefly attracted to the temples in Nubia, the existence of which was threatened by the barrage of Assuan, which turns the lower part of Nubia into a lake. The first thing to be done was a complete exploration of the country and of all the cemeteries it contains. This was accomplished by Prof. REISNER or under his direction. At the same time a description of the temples was compiled and copies of all the inscriptions were made by various scholars, a work which has already run into a dozen fine volumes. All this MASPERO superintended during his annual journeys in Upper Egypt. He generally started in December in the dahabeeyah of the Museum, went straight to Nubia, stopping at various places on the way down. During his last journey in the winter of 1914-5 he visited the excavations of the Fund at Abydos. We had just got into what I regard as the tomb of Osiris, and had cleared the end of the northern nave of the great pool where the ceiling of huge monoliths is still preserved, as well as the granite pillars, giving an impression of great power and architectural skill.

In 1909 the Congress of Orientalists met at Cairo, and during that time a telegram informed MASPERO that the King of England had raised him to the dignity of K.C.M.G.

The difficulties of the administrative work, which did not always go on very smoothly, and the climate of Egypt in the summer months acted on his health, so that in the spring of 1914 he was obliged to resign. He returned to Paris a few

days before the war broke out, and was immediately elected by the "Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres" as its "Secrétaire Perpétuel." He had hardly assumed his new position when he was attacked by a severe illness, brought on partly by the departure of his youngest son for the front. He recovered sufficiently to resume his duties at the Collège de France and at the Académie; but the death of his son in February 1915 was a terrible blow to him. Nevertheless he did not relax his activities, which were, however, too much for a weakened constitution, and on June 30th, 1916, he died suddenly in his chair while in the act of rising to address the Académie.

His scientific work is enormous and cannot be described in a few pages. What enabled him to accomplish so much was a combination of intellectual gifts rarely met with, which were an object of envy to his colleagues. To an unfailing memory he joined a remarkable quickness in grasping any subject, and, for instance in translations, of hitting at once on the true sense. He certainly was the last "complete Egyptologist" able to embrace all the various branches of Egyptology, which have grown considerably of late and have necessarily diverged. There is hardly one branch of Egyptology, except perhaps the Calendar, on which he has not left his mark.

He began as DE ROUGÉ's pupil, with DE ROUGÉ's principles, and like his master at first attempted translations. This may be considered as his favourite work. He never published an inscription without translating it. He was very keen on being the first to put an Egyptian text into French or English, and he hardly ever quoted a translation made by another without introducing changes of some kind. In this respect, his most marvellous achievement is his translation of the text of the Pyramids. Before publishing it, he interpreted these texts in his lectures at the Collège de France, and he has himself said what an enormous amount of work they cost him, and the difficulties he had to overcome—difficulties which would have discouraged any other scholar. These religious texts were something quite new. Some of the signs were met with for the first time, the grammatical forms are not those of later times; and besides, all the allusions to ritual, magic, myths, and cosmogony make of these texts a labyrinth through which it seems impossible to find one's way. Add to this the difficulty one finds in all religious texts, *viz.* ignorance of the manner in which the ancient Egyptians expressed abstract ideas, which must be rendered by something falling under the senses, by some metaphor of which it is necessary to find the key, and one cannot but admire the extraordinary ability revealed in such an achievement as that of MASPERO. It was certainly a venture of which no other Egyptologist, except perhaps BRUGSCH, was capable. Here MASPERO has shown what was the leading feature of his mind: not so much method as intuition, the quick discovery of the truth.

MASPERO himself felt that with the progress of knowledge much would have to be revised in this translation, but he was the first to attempt it; all new translations will have to be more or less based on his, of which a great deal will survive. A new one is announced by the Berlin school; a comparison of the two will be most interesting and instructive.

As to the grammar, he published at the beginning of his career a few studies on grammatical subjects in 1871, namely, *Les pronoms personnels en égyptien* and *Des formes de la conjugaison*, and later on in 1880 *Sur la formation des thèmes trilitères*. But what occupied him chiefly was Egyptian phonetics, the sound of Egyptian words. He had collected a considerable number of notes on grammar, and he intended to publish them

and to show what the grammatical system of the Egyptian language was. This he considered as the crowning work of his long researches. In it he intended to sum up all that he had gathered in his numerous translations, and the results of the insight which he had acquired into the language. He began this work in the last number of the *Recueil*, which appeared in January 1916. He entitled his article *Introduction à l'étude de la phonétique égyptienne*. I must quote here his own words, which are in a sense his farewell to Egyptological science:—

J'ai commencé, dès mes débuts en 1867, à entasser les notes sur des points de grammaire, et, depuis lors, je n'ai cessé d'en publier quelques-unes sans essayer d'en composer une théorie d'ensemble, estimant que, dans ce genre d'étude plus que dans les autres, il ne pouvait y avoir qu'avantage à laisser le temps accroître la masse des matériaux et mûrir les idées. Si j'étais certain de pouvoir vivre une dizaine d'années de plus, je suivrais encore le même système, et je continuerais à donner seulement des fragments sans lien apparent, dont la génération nouvelle ne saisirait pas la portée, tant mes recherches m'ont mené loin du cercle de doctrines où elle se meut. Malheureusement l'âge est venu, et j'en suis arrivé à ce moment de l'existence où l'on ne doit plus compter sur l'avenir, mais où l'on accepte avec reconnaissance chaque jour qui vient: si je ne veux pas risquer d'emporter avec moi toute l'expérience que j'ai pu acquérir pendant un demi-siècle de labeur assidu, il convient de mettre à la main l'œuvre et de me hâter. Je n'ai pas l'ambition de composer ici une véritable Grammaire Égyptienne, car j'estime que nous n'en savons pas encore assez pour y réussir: le livre que je commence à rédiger aujourd'hui et que je désirerais, sans trop y compter, pouvoir mener jusqu'au bout, ne sera tout au plus qu'une introduction à l'étude de la grammaire égyptienne. Comme je l'ai dit un nombre infini de fois et imprimé à plusieurs reprises, nous avons eu la chance de trouver table rase en matière de langue au commencement de notre science, et nous avons abordé le déchiffrement sans encombrement de théories préconçues ou de paradigmes préétablis; ne vaut-il pas mieux profiter de la liberté absolue, dont la fortune nous a gratifiés de la sorte, pour créer à l'égyptien une grammaire qui ne soit inspirée exclusivement ni des modèles purement classiques, ni des modèles indo-européens, ni des modèles sémitiques, mais qui ressorte entièrement d'une analyse des textes entreprise avec l'aide de tous les moyens que la philologie peut nous prêter à quelque ordre de langue qu'elle s'applique? C'est une partie d'un chapitre préliminaire que je publie ci-joint.

I hesitate to translate this paragraph, which sets forth MASPERO's point of view so clearly that it could only be obscured or weakened by being turned into another language. His principle is very simple. Let us study Egyptian for itself, without attempting to cast it into a Semitic or Indo-Germanic or any other mould. Egyptian may present features which belong to different classes of languages, without itself belonging to any of them. This book begins with the graphic system which expresses three sorts of articulations: "1° des consonnes proprement dites supposant l'existence de phonèmes occlusifs et sifflants.—2° des voyelles.—3° des sonnantes." The chapter published refers only to consonants. This classification of the Egyptian letters shows that he was by no means in agreement with the German school. His opposition will have come out strongly in the chapter on vowels, which I believe is finished. In the last letter which he wrote to me, speaking of those articles, he said: "I shall not enter into polemics with the Berlin school, but my doctrine is so much opposed to theirs that it will come to the same thing."

How far he carried his work we do not know. It is probably not finished, and it may be feared that we have lost one of those masterpieces which effect a complete change in many points of view and which introduce research into new fields.

MASPERO's view on mythology and religion are to be found chiefly in numerous articles in the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*. Most of them have been republished in

the collection of his works which is part of the *Bibliothèque égyptologique*. They are for the most part reviews of books bearing on Egyptian religion. Here also MASPERO had ideas which are the result of a thorough knowledge of religious texts, and which the study of such writings as the Book of the Dead forces upon one's mind. There was not one Egyptian faith; especially there was no fixed religious system. It varied according to localities and to time. The faith of Heliopolis is not that of Abydos, and the origins of the gods are not the same. Besides, one can trace in those books remains of obsolete ceremonies or customs, old fetichism, and much magic. Here also the names under which religions are classified cannot be applied, and we have to study the faith of the Egyptians as a thing apart.

In art, MASPERO distinguished various schools, especially the curious productions of the time of Amenophis IV, which he attributed to Heracleopolis; he also broke with the idea, which is still too prevalent, that art runs parallel to the time and is intimately connected with a definite date.

His greatest work is his *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l'Orient classique* (in three volumes 1895-1899). He had first published a handbook covering the same field. But here we have a complete picture of what the life of these nations was from their origin to the conquest of Persia by Alexander. It shows the result of the great change which has taken place in our views as to antiquity. Fifty years ago the nations were divided into Greeks, Barbarians, and Hebrews. Besides this, these nations were considered as absolutely separated from each other. Each one had its own political limits and its own customs, and had hardly anything in common with the rest. The discovery of prehistoric antiquity and of primitive civilisation considerably contributed to shatter this idea, proving that these primitive people already possessed extensive trade relations even with distant countries. Afterwards the great archaeological discoveries, chiefly in Mesopotamia, revealed how nations have been influenced by others, and not necessarily through war or invasion. Egypt, owing to its special nature and the few points from which it is accessible, was more isolated than the nations of Western Asia; besides, it is probably in Egypt that we find the oldest monuments. MASPERO therefore began with Egypt, and the origin of the Egyptian empire. He intended to rewrite the Egyptian part of the first volume, which has been much altered owing to the discovery, made chiefly at Abydos, of the Kings of the first three Dynasties. Already in the first volume he passes to Chaldaea and to the earliest Sumerian civilisation, and afterwards, parallel with the history of Egypt, he describes the empires of Assyria and of Persia and the events which took place in Palestine. Having in his youth studied cuneiform, he could speak of those empires of Western Asia not exactly as an expert, but with a certain knowledge of the texts which were not to him, as to many historians, a sealed book. Evidently with the progress of science many of his statements will be contested; but it will be long before another scholar attempts so vast a work, which would have filled another man's life, and could be accomplished in five or six years only owing to the extraordinary capacity for labour given to its author.

Egyptology will long mourn the death of MASPERO, the chief of the French school, the worthy successor of CHAMPOLLION and DE ROUGÉ, whose authority was recognized far beyond the frontiers of France, and who was the last representative of the heroic age of Egyptology, the age of the great conquests in Egyptian science.