**Gaston Camille Charles Maspero 1846-1916**

**http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaston\_Maspero**



**Gaston Camille Charles Maspero** (June 23, 1846 – June 30, 1916) was a [French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France) [Egyptologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptologist).

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## Life

Gaston Maspero was born in [Paris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris) to parents of [Lombard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lombardy) origin. While at school he showed a special taste for history, and by the age of fourteen he was already interested in [hieroglyphic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_hieroglyphs) writing. It was not until his second year at the [École Normale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecole_Normale_Sup%C3%A9rieure) in 1867 that Maspero met fellow [Egyptologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptologist) [Auguste Mariette](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auguste_Mariette), who was in Paris as commissioner for the [Egyptian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt) section of the [Exposition Universelle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exposition_Universelle_%281867%29). [Auguste Mariette](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auguste_Mariette) gave him two newly discovered hieroglyphic texts of considerable difficulty to study, and the young self-taught scholar produced translations of them in less than a [fortnight](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortnight), a great feat in those days when Egyptology was still almost in its infancy. The publication of these texts in the same year established his academic reputation.

A short time was spent in assisting a gentleman in [Peru](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peru) who was seeking to prove an [Aryan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aryan) affinity for the dialects spoken by the Indians of that country to publish his research, but in 1868 Maspero was back in France at more profitable work. In 1869 he became a teacher (*répétiteur*) of [Egyptian language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_language) and archeology at the [École Pratique des Hautes Études](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89cole_Pratique_des_Hautes_%C3%89tudes), and in 1874 he was appointed to the chair of [Champollion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Champollion) at the [Collège de France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coll%C3%A8ge_de_France).

He originally wanted to attend Hermans Van Lisk School for dance and [homography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heterography_and_homography) but his father wouldn't support his chosen path. So in November 1880 Professor Maspero went to Egypt as head of an archeological mission sent there by the French government, which ultimately developed into the well-equipped [Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institut_Fran%C3%A7ais_d%E2%80%99Arch%C3%A9ologie_Orientale). This occurred a few months before the death of Mariette, whom Maspero then succeeded as director-general of excavations and of the antiquities of Egypt.

Aware that his reputation was then more as a linguist than an archaeologist, Maspero's first work in the post was to build on Mariette's achievements at [Saqqara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saqqara). He expanded their scope from the early [Old Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Kingdom) to the later, with particular interest in tombs with long and complete hieroglyphic inscriptions that could help illustrate the development of the Egyptian language. Selecting five later Old Kingdom tombs, he was successful in that aim, finding over 4000 lines of hieroglyphics which were then sketched and photographed.

As an aspect of his attempt to curtail the rampant illegal export of Egyptian antiquities by tourists, collectors and agents for the major European and American museums, Maspero arrested the Abd al-Russul brothers from the notorious treasure-hunting village of Gorna, who confessed under torture to having found the great cache of royal [mummies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mummies) at [Deir el-Bahri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deir_el-Bahri) in July 1881. The cache was moved to Cairo as soon as possible to keep it safe from robbers.

In 1886 he resumed work begun by Mariette to uncover the [Sphinx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sphinx), removing more than 65 feet (20 m) of sand and seeking tombs below it (which he did not find, but have later been found and left unopened). He also introduced admission charges for Egyptian sites to the increasing number of tourists to pay for their upkeep and maintenance.

In spite of the brutality towards the Abd al-Russul brothers, Maspero was popular with museum keepers and collectors because he was known to be a "pragmatic" director of the Service of Antiquities, one who would allow them to remove from the country what he did not want for the Bulaq Museum. Maspero did not attempt to halt all collecting, but rather sought to control what went out of the country and to gain the confidence of those who were regular collectors. When Maspero left his position in 1886 and was replaced by a series of other directors who attempted to halt the trade in antiquities, his absence was much lamented.

Maspero resumed his professorial duties in Paris from June 1886 until 1899, when, at 53, he returned to Egypt in his old capacity as director-general of the department of antiquities. On October 3rd that year an earthquake at Karnak collapsed 11 columns and left the main hall in ruins. Maspero had already made some repairs and clearances there (continued in his absence by unofficial but authorized explorers of many nationalities) in his previous tenure of office, and now he set up a team of workmen under French Egyptologists and regularly visited to oversee its reconstruction work, opposing some [Romantics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanticism) who wished the ruins left as they were. In 1903 an alabaster pavement was found in the court of the 7th Pylon, and beneath it a shaft leading to a large hoard of almost 17,000 statues, with every part of the dig drawn, recorded and photographed.

On his arrival in 1899 he found the collections in the [Bulak Museum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulak_Museum) enormously increased, and while working to expand them further he superintended their removal from [Gizeh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gizeh) to the new quarters at [Kasr en-Nil](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Kasr_en-Nil&action=edit&redlink=1) in 1902. The vast catalogue of the collections made rapid progress under Maspero's direction. Twenty-four volumes or sections were already published in 1909. This work and the increasing workload of the Antiquities Service led to an expansion of staff at the museum, including the 17 year old [Howard Carter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howard_Carter). It was Maspero who recommended Carter to [Lord Carnarvon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Carnarvon) in 1907, when the Earl approached him to seek advice for the use of an expert to head his planned archaeological expedition to the [Valley of the Kings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valley_of_the_Kings).

He also set including a network of local museums throughout Egypt, including a new larger Cairo facility, to encourage the Egyptians to take greater responsibility for the maintenance of their own heritage by increasing public awareness of it. In 1912 he also succeeded where his predecessors had failed in the introduction of a series of anti-looting laws, before retiring in 1914.

Maspero died in June 1916 and was interred in the [Cimetière du Montparnasse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cimeti%C3%A8re_du_Montparnasse) in Paris.

## Works

Among his best-known publications are the large *Histoire ancienne des peuples de l'Orient classique* (3 vols., Paris, 1895-1897, translated into English by Mrs McClure for the S.P.C.K.), displaying the history of the whole of the nearer East from the beginnings to the conquest by [Alexander](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_the_Great); a smaller *Histoire des peuples de l'Orient*, 1 vol., of the same scope, which passed through six editions from 1875 to 1904; *Etudes de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes* (Paris, 1893, etc.), a collection of reviews and essays originally published in various journals, and especially important as contributions to the study of [Egyptian religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_religion); *L'Archéologie égyptienne* (1907), of which several editions have been published in English. He also established the journal *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes*; the *Bibliothèque égyptologique*, in which the scattered essays of the French Egyptologists are collected, with biographies, etc.; and the *Annales du service des antiquités de l'Egypte*, a repository for reports on official excavations, etc.

Maspero also wrote: *Les inscriptions des pyramides de* [*Saqqarah*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saqqarah) (Paris, 1894); *Les momies royales de Deir el-Bahari* (Paris, 1889); *Les contes populaires de l'Egypte ancienne* (3rd ed., Paris, 1906); and *Causeries d'Egypte* (1907), translated by Elizabeth Lee as *New Light on Ancient Egypt* (1908).

## See also

* [List of Egyptologists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Egyptologists)

## External links

* [Works by Gaston Maspero](http://www.gutenberg.org/author/Gaston_Maspero) at [Project Gutenberg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Gutenberg)

## References

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