



Bernard P. Groslier at Angkor with the Elephant Terrace of Jaiivarman VII to the left in the background, c. 1960. (Photo by Wilhelm Solheim II.)

# Bernard Philippe Groslier

## 1926–1986

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BERNARD PHILIPPE GROSlier, French scholar and former conservator of the temples of Angkor, died in Paris on 29 May 1986. Groslier devoted himself to the study of Cambodia's past but also had great affection for the country's present people. His greatest concern during the deteriorating political situation in Cambodia in the early 1970s was for his field workers at the Angkor complex: how they and their dependents, a total of some 6000 people, could be protected. He echoed this sentiment to a friend, saying, "The stones will survive. I worry about the people." Many years before, in a prescient description, Groslier had assessed the Cambodian psychology:

His fertile imagination revels in the marvellous and the fantastic. . . . It would, however, be a mistake to be misled by his outwardly easy-going way of life. . . . Beneath a care-free surface there slumber savage forces and disconcerting cruelties which may blaze up in outbreaks of passionate brutality. (*Angkor, Art and Civilization*. 1966:12)

Bernard Groslier's father, George, helped to pioneer the French research at Angkor and was Conservator of the first National Museum in Phnom Penh (1916). Bernard was born in Phnom Penh on 10 May 1926. As a young man he went to France for study (Clermont-Ferrand, 1943–1944). He was a member of the French Resistance from 1942 to 1944, then enlisted in the military until 1948, serving in France, Germany, the Far East, and French Indochina (where he was wounded in 1946). Among his many wartime decorations was a medal of the Resistance and a *croix de guerre* 39–45 with a bronze star.

After the war, he enrolled at the Sorbonne in Paris, and, in 1950, received his *license* in history, as well as a diploma in Cambodian from the Ecole des Langues Orientales (Paris). He also studied at the Ecole de Louvre, the Ecole des Hautes-Etudes, and the Institut of Ethnology. In the summers of 1942 and 1943, he participated in excavations at the Gallo-Roman site of Gergovie being conducted by the University of Strasbourg. Other summers were spent at the University of Cambridge's Star Carr excavations (1948) and in Italy, at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Paestum (1949).

In 1950, he returned to Southeast Asia, to Saigon, under the auspices of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), and the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient (EFEO). While in Saigon, he was a temporary member of the EFEO (1950–1952) and later served as its Secretary General (1952–1954). He also carried out conservation work at the Musée Blanchard de la Brosse and edited the *Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Indochinoises* (BSEI). In 1952–1953, he undertook his first excavations at Angkor, at the Palais Royal of Angkor Thom. This was followed by a second season under the EFEO at the Palais Royal and Rolous (Hariharalaya) in 1958. Detection of an irrigation system at Roluos followed earlier hydraulic studies using aerial photography.

During the rest of the 1950s, Groslier travelled extensively for assignments under the direction of CNRS and EFEO, studying archaeological sites, art history, and ceramics.

His research took him to Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Bali, Viet Nam, India, and Istanbul. He participated in excavations at Apollonia of Cyrene and at Argos on the Peloponese. He was also active in the Pacific Science Council and the Far-Eastern Prehistory Association. In 1959, he reconstructed Chandi Sungei Batu Pahat in Northern Perak for the Malayan government; it was the first use of anastylosis in that country.

At the end of 1959, he was named Director of Archaeological Research for the EFEO and Conservator of Angkor. This marked the beginning of a fifteen-year period of great productivity. In the course of careful restoration of monuments at Angkor and elsewhere in Cambodia, he developed variations of anastylosis to deal with both stone and brick structures. At Angkor, anastylosis was used to reconstruct the Baphuon, parts of Angkor Wat, Thommanom, Vat Athvear, Prasat Kravan, Prasat Bei, Prasat Sok Kraop, Prasat Einkosei, Spean Praptos de Kompong Kdei, and the western steps of Sras Srang. His work of particular note outside of Angkor was at Sambor Prei Kuk (with the construction of a conservation annex), Beng Mealea, Preah Khan de Kompong Svay, Koh Ker, Banteay Chmar, Vat Ek, Vat Baset, Bat Banon, Ta Prohm de Bati, and Vat Nokor. From 1963 to 1966, he advised the government of Thailand on the reconstruction of the Khmer sanctuary at Prasat Hin Phimai.

Immense energy was channeled into the Angkor reconstruction program, the scale of which was awesome: each monument was disassembled stone by stone, reinforced concrete foundations and drainage channels were laid, and then the temples were painstakingly pieced back together. Groslier never became jaded by the beauty of the temples.

The regal majesty and calm repose of Angkor Wat; the troubled message of the Bayon with its hundred faces. . . . Fully to express them we need something more than words, something better than pictures: we need to add the dawn breaking over the forest, the sun's ray suddenly piercing the clouds—and the silence. . . . Rare breezes and shifting lights; a heavy coolness; indefinable scents; immobility rather than death, and repose rather than sadness. All these make up the beauty of the stone of Angkor and the memory of the men who wrought them. (*Angkor, Art and Civilization*. 1966:198)

Work was not limited to above-ground restoration. Groslier reorganized the conservancy at Angkor and created laboratories for analysis of material at Angkor and in France. He continued to use aerial photography in his work to inventory temples, evaluate hydraulic structures, and to corroborate the layout of Angkor for fabrication of large scale maps.

Stratigraphic excavations were conducted almost every year, as the following summary of Groslier's work shows.

1952–1953 and 1958	Palais Royal of Angkor: four levels dated from the tenth to fourteenth century A.D. with remains of foundations, wooden constructions, water systems; Rolous dated to the second half of the ninth century A.D.
Winter 1961–1962	Sambor Prei Kuk: dated sixth to seventh century A.D.; discovery of Khmer ceramics from this period
Spring 1962	Mimot: a neolithic site discovered through aerial survey, with a stratigraphy dated from c. 5000–2000 B.C.
Winter 1962–1963	Prasat Kravan d'Angkor: discovery of temple annexes and stratigraphy of the tenth century A.D.
Winter 1963–1964	Sras Srang: excavation of first known Khmer cemetery, with more than 200 burials, along with bronze (300 pieces reported) and ceramics (1000 pieces reported). The ceramic finds in particular were useful in documenting the chronology of Khmer ceramics

- Winter 1964–1965 Thommanom: evidence for wooden annexes for the twelfth century A.D. temple; also occupational evidence dating the site to the seventh to eighth century, providing documentation for the transition from the ceramics found at Sambor Prei Kuk
- Winter 1965–1966 Baksei Chamkrong; under the tenth century A.D. temple were found Iron Age (c. 800 B.C.–A.D. 200) burials
- Winter 1968–1969 Terrace of the Leper King, along with three new parts of the terrace and additional terraces to the north: discovery of wood pilings from the edifice that covered the “terrace”; also Buddhist remains of the thirteenth to fourteenth century A.D.
- Winter 1969–1970 Excavations in front of the Baphuon: with discovery of an extension towards the Bayon of the Elephant Terrace, and of tenth to twelfth century A.D. habitation sites rich in imported Chinese ceramic finds

It was exploration and discovery that excited Groslier most. I encouraged him in the 1980s to publish the results of his many excavations, but he contended that he hadn't the time—he had too much to discover. Once he had found the answers he sought, he was satisfied. Thus for instance, although he had two seasons of work at the Palais Royal (1952–1953 and 1958), he never chose to publish a complete report. He referred to his excavations over the years, including mention in 1960 (*JSS*) of pollen analysis that supported stratigraphic finds by showing fluctuations in wild species (forest trees, ferns, Graminaceae) and cultivated species (rice, palm trees, coconuts). However, the summary was preliminary and contained no information on exact levels, quantity, or scientific identification of the pollen remains.

Groslier's work at Angkor was forced to a close in the mid-1970s by the worsening political situation. In addition, he received an injury in 1973 when he tried one evening to catch a thief who had broken into the house. His driver was killed, and Groslier was stabbed three times, one wound damaging his liver. After his recovery, he returned to Paris. As at Angkor, he followed his own program of research, although he consulted with colleagues all over the world. The driving force of his life continued to be his work, for which he had endless energy, curiosity, and love.

He carried out survey programs for both the Malay and Burmese governments: for the Department of Museums of the Federation of Malaya he surveyed the Tembeling area in the central part of the Malay Peninsula, as well as designing a plan for the preservation of Malacca (1974). In 1975–1976, after the earthquake that ravaged Pagan, Groslier participated in a study mission to make an aerial photographic inventory of the monuments and to develop the rescue program still in progress under the direction of P. Pichard. Groslier became increasingly involved with the work of CNRS, acting as Director of the Center for Archaeological Research from 1976 to 1978. It was at this time that the CNRS installed its new research center at Valbonne (Sophia-Antipolis). Groslier was instrumental in the move and in the organization of the new laboratory.

Groslier's written work from 1949 to 1984 covers a wide range of topics. In the 1950s and 1960s there were several short ethnographic pieces. During his editorship of *BSEI*, he began contributing not only obituaries and book reviews but also articles. “Mileau et Evolution en Asie” (*BSEI* 27(3):295–332) was the first of many syntheses blending the diverse elements of Southeast Asian history into a coherent sequence. Elucidation of overall trends and relationships characterizes three of his major publications: *Angkor, Homme et Pierres* (1956), *Indochine, Carrefour des Arts* (1961), and *Indochine, Archaeologia Mundi* (1966).

Two exceptions were collaborative works, the first of which was his book with C. R. Boxer (1958) on sixteenth century Portuguese descriptions of Angkor. This effort, well received, also contained the first of several discourses on the hydraulics of Angkor. Another joint publication was with architect Jacques Dumarçay, *Les Inscriptions du Bayon* (1973), an epigraphic analysis somewhat outside of Groslier's usual fields of publication.

During the 1970s, Groslier produced three detailed studies on the relationship of Khmer settlement to its environment, particularly the influence of geography, religion, and agriculture on the organization of urban and rural space: "Pour une Géographie historique du Cambodge" (1973), "Agriculture et Religion dans l'Empire angkorien" (1974), and "La Cité Hydraulique angkoriennne" (1979). His interest in the exploitation of space, particularly Khmer water management, dates back to the early 1950s when he began his aerial inventory of Cambodia. In these articles Groslier expanded his concept of how hydraulic developments humanized the Khmer landscape and fostered an agricultural revolution upon which rested the power of the Angkorean empire.

The writings of Bernard Philippe Groslier testify to his passion for knowledge, and the temples at Angkor to his perseverance and appreciation of beauty. Those who knew him, even slightly, will miss him greatly.

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**FORTHCOMING**

L'image d'Angkor dans la conscience khmère, in *Seska Khmer*, conference held at the Sorbonne 26 May 1984. (Transcribed by Ying Phong Tan and Ang Choulean.)

Jardin de pierre, jardin des Dieux, in *Paradis, étude des jardins*, conference held at Palerme for le Centro Studii di storia et arte dei giardini, November, 1985.