



GROUSSET, RENÉ

GROUSSET, RENÉ (b. Aubais, Gard, France, 5 September 1885; d. Paris, 12 September 1952; [Figure 1](#)), French historian who based his wide-ranging research on the studies of the leading French orientalist of his time, and wrote works of synthesis on various aspects of Oriental history and culture. He was forced by ill health to abandon his formal university education after graduating from the University of Montpellier in history and geography (1903), but continued studying oriental art and history on his own. In 1912 he joined the administrative staff of the Beaux-Arts in Paris and embarked on the research for his first major publication, *Histoire de l'Asie*. During the First World War he was severely wounded and received the Croix de Guerre and the Légion d'Honneur. After the war he resumed his research and the *Histoire de l'Asie* was published in three volumes in 1922. It proved a great success with the educated public. He was appointed assistant curator at the Musée Guimet, Paris, from 1925, and professor of Indian art and culture (*indianisme*) at the École du Louvre, in 1928. After some years as curator at the Musée Cernuschi, Paris (1933-44), he returned to the Musée Guimet as curator. His teaching career in Paris continued with his appointment in 1941 as professor of the history and geography of the countries of the Far East at the École des Langues Orientales and later, in 1945, as professor at the École de la France d'outre-mer, and at the École des Sciences politiques. He traveled in Persia and Syria (1929-30) and visited Japan in 1949. He was affiliated to a number of academic societies in Paris, Tehran, and Tokyo, and was a member of the Société asiatique from 1924, and the managing editor of the *Journal asiatique* for a decade (1936-46). He was among the founders of the Franco-Persian



Société des Études iraniennes et de l'Art persan (1930) which organized lectures at the Musée Guimet, printed in its *Publications*. He was elected to the Académie Française in 1946.

Although Grousset never acquired proficiency in any of the oriental languages, he used his formidable flair for reading and collating a vast range of material culled from different sources to write many works of synthesis on the history and culture of the main eastern countries (China, Japan, Central Asia, Persia, Armenia, the Middle East in general, etc.). He focused mainly on artistic and philosophical aspects rather than economic and material issues, and concentrated upon the affinities between civilizations and the historical role of prominent men of action (Attila, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, etc.). Many eminent French scholars including Sylvain Lévi, Louis Massignon, Paul Pelliot, Gaston Maspero, Henri Massé, and Louis Renou were impressed by the elegance of his style and the wealth of the documentation mustered by him and gave him much advice and encouragement. They regarded him and his prolific output as a reliable and necessary link between their own specialized works and a cultured public curious about other cultures and new perspectives.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Grousset's major works include: *Les civilisations de l'Orient*, 4 vols., Paris, 1929-30; tr. C. A. Phillips as *The civilisations of the East*, New York-London, 1931-34.

L'épopée des Croisades, Paris, 1926, 2nd ed. 1939; tr. N. Lindsay as *The Epic of the Crusades*, New York, 1970.

Histoire des croisades et du royaume franc de Jérusalem, 3 vols., Paris, 1934-36.

L'Empire des Steppes: Attila, Gengis-Khan, Tamerlan, 1st ed, Paris, 1939; tr. N. Walford as *The Empire of the Steppes, A History of Central Asia*, New Brunswick, 1970.



Le Conquérant du monde: vie de Gengis-khan, Paris, 1944; tr. M. McKellar and D. Sinor as *Conqueror of the World*, New York, 1966.

Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à 1071, Paris, 1947. *La Chine et son art*, Paris, 1950; tr. H. Chevalier, as *Chinese Art and Culture*, New York, 1959.

Works on Persia: "La fresque de Cehel Sutun à Ispahan," *Artistica* 5, 1929, pp. 196-8.

"L'Iran extérieur: son art," *Bulletin de la Société des Études iraniennes et de l'Art persan*, 2, 1932.

"Travaux français en Iran," *La Revue de Paris* 15, June 1932, pp. 885-99.

L'exposition iranienne au Musée Cernuschi, Paris, 1948, vol. 1, pp. 105-11.

"L'Âme de l'Iran et l'humanisme," in *L'Âme de l'Iran*, ed. P. Grousset, L. Massignon, and H. Massé, Paris, 1951, pp. 7-11.

Biographies and bibliographical works on Grousset: Special issue of *France-Asie* devoted to Grousset, "La vie et l'œuvre de René Grousset," IX/88-89, Sept.-Oct. 1953, pp. 731-938; includes a bibliography of his works, pp. 935-38.

P. Gaxotte, *Discours de réception à l'Académie française, élu en remplacement de M. René Grousset, le 29 octobre 1953*, *Publications de l'Institut de France* 20, Paris, 1953.

D. F. Lach, "René Grousset, 1885-1952," in S. W. Halperin ed., *Some 20th Century Historians: Essays on Eminent Europeans*, Chicago, 1961, pp. 201-25.

M. Lalou, "René Grousset (1885-1952)," *JA* 240, 1952, pp. 387-88.