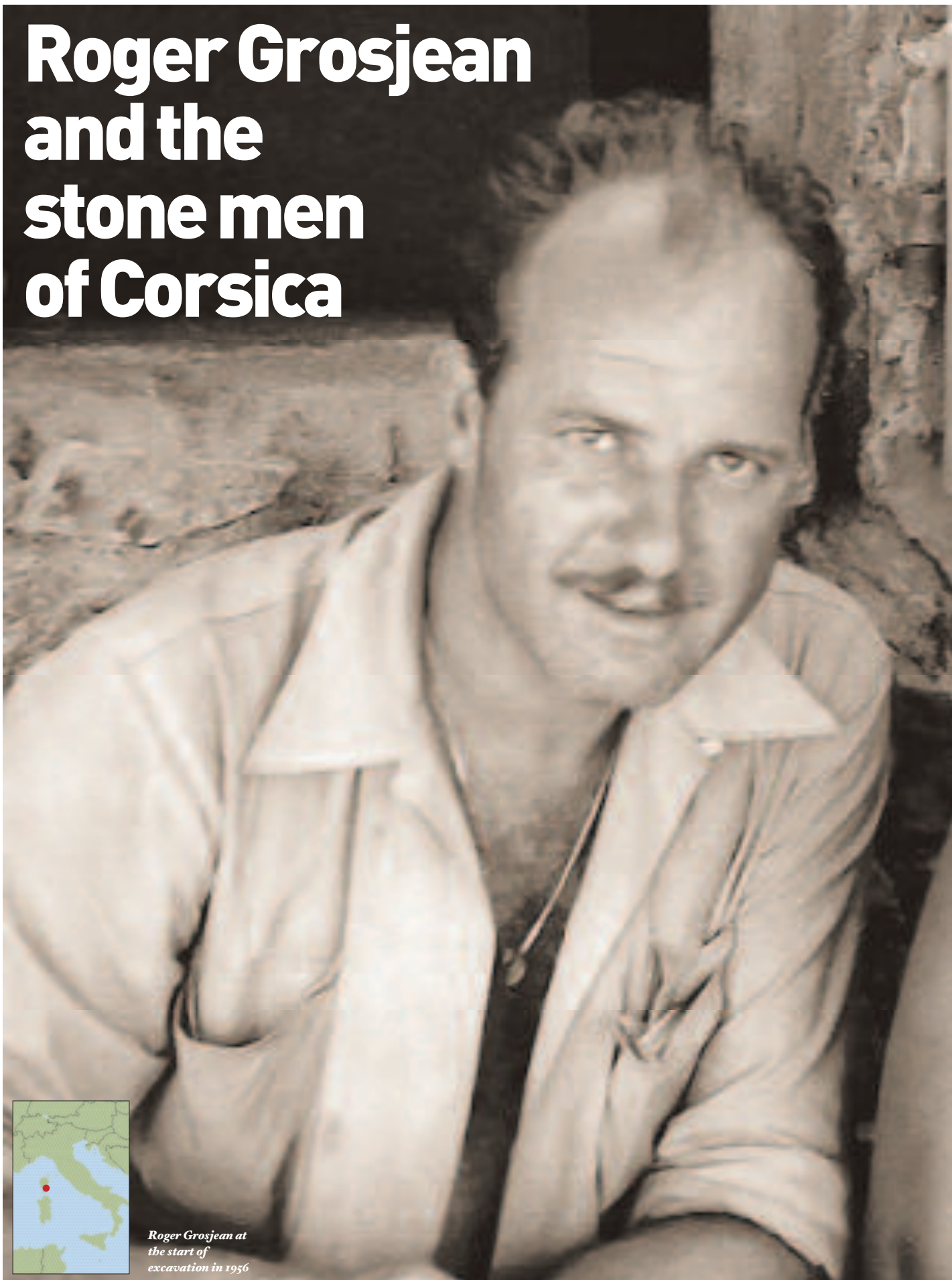


Roger Grosjean and the stone men of Corsica



*Roger Grosjean at
the start of
excavation in 1956*

“There they stand in the landscape, great, granite figures – some 13 feet tall and weighing up to 2 1/2 tons. Their hollow gaze seems to follow the visitor; their enigmatic expressions change from minute to minute in the shifting sunlight.”

Thus starts an article in *Time Magazine*, July 1968, about the “stone men” – the sculpted prehistoric menhirs – of Corsica. The man who excavated them in the middle of the last century, Roger Grosjean, had a rather short but remarkable life that is now slowly being revealed. It is a life in which Great Britain and British people played a role, in different ways and at different times.

Roger Grosjean was born in 1920 in Chalon-sur-Saône, east central France, and spent his early years in the north, changing cities as his father, a judge, changed postings. He quickly showed interest in sport and excelled in rugby and athletics (he was the French discus record-holder in his age category). But his real passion was flying and in 1939 he joined the French Air Force and trained as a fighter pilot.

In the spring of 1943, in order to join the exiled Free French leader Charles de Gaulle, he put together a risky strategy: he told the Germans that he would send them information if they helped him reach England. When he duly arrived, having gone through Spain and Portugal, he reported his cover story and was asked to act as a double agent for the Security Service (MI5). Recruited by the Double Cross System, he took part in a deception operation aimed at the Germans concerning the landing sites in France.

Grosjean was an agent for about a year, codenamed Fido, and was condemned to death by the Germans when they realised that he was working for the allies. It is only recently that this part of his life has been uncovered, although MI5 has not yet released his file. Along with this activity, Grosjean was a member of the Free French Air Force and he did part of his advanced training at Caistor in Lincolnshire. While there, he discovered aerial archaeology, which proved useful to him later in life.

Grosjean had a difficult time after the war. He tried his hand at various jobs including publishing and business, but never got very far. He broke up from his British wife, Sallie, whom he had met in England (she became a top model in

Fighter pilot, MI5 agent and discus-throwing record holder: Roger Grosjean was no ordinary archaeologist. As François Grosjean explains, his discoveries were equally distinctive



Statue-menhir Filitosa V

“Then began a time of almost daily discoveries – of dolmens, menhirs and statue-menhirs”

Paris, and then the first woman racehorse trainer and breeder in Italy). He spent all of his free time on his new interest, archaeology, and he dug with the French archaeologist l'Abbé Breuil, famed for his work on cave and rock art. He followed courses in Paris at the Sorbonne and the Musée de l'Homme, and in 1954 he obtained a position at the CNRS (the French National Research Centre) and asked to be posted to Corsica. Nobody believed for a second that he would find anything of interest.

His first project was to survey the rather sparse archaeological monuments and menhirs that had been found over the years. This is where another British person entered his life. Dorothy Carrington, a writer who was to become an authority on Corsican culture and history, had visited the island in 1948 with her husband, the painter Sir Francis Rose. They were shown four sculpted monoliths, two of them half buried, in Filitosa, a small hamlet in south-west Corsica. She later wrote in her book *Granite Island* (Penguin 2008, originally published 1971), that she had a premonition that this was of great significance, but she did not follow it up until Grosjean arrived. The two of them went to Filitosa and examined the statues carefully. They rolled one over and saw a sculpted face with deep-socketed eyes, and a dagger carved on the upper part of the body. As she wrote about Grosjean's work, “Then began a time of almost daily discoveries – of dolmens, menhirs and statue-menhirs”.

As a trained archaeologist, Roger Grosjean knew what to look for and where to excavate. For instance, one evening he was sitting on a rather large stone with the owner of the land, Charles-Antoine Cesari. Cesari belittled Grosjean's interest, saying he had used the stone as a bench for some 20 years. Nonetheless Grosjean had it turned over, and there lay what is now one of the best known statue-menhirs in Filitosa, known as Filitosa V. The face is outlined by a V, the nose and eyes are clearly marked, and on the body there is a dagger in its sheath and a long, vertical sword. This statue now welcomes visitors at the entrance to the site.

On another occasion, just before going back to Paris, Grosjean was intrigued by a spur covered in maquis, the distinctively Corsican dense,

scrubby vegetation. The owner said that there had been an old convent there but when Grosjean finally worked his way through the trees, he found cyclopean rocks clearly signalling an important prehistoric fortified site. It contained a tumulus and a partly demolished tower.

When Grosjean returned in 1956, he had the maquis cleared away and he started excavating the spur. Over the next few weeks, numerous statue-menhirs were uncovered, many of them broken into two or three pieces. Two stood out for their remarkable beauty, Filitosa VI and Filitosa IX. The former came in three pieces. The head was complete and, according to Grosjean in an Illustrated London News article published the following year, it represented a higher



I Stantari alignments

Statue-menhir Filitosa VI



The central monument at Filitosa



Statue-menhir Filitosa IX



Statue-menhirs Cauria IV (left) and II (right)



state of evolution than any of the menhirs and statue-menhirs previously found. It had eyebrow arches, almond-shaped eyes, and a projecting nose and chin. Dorothy Carrington, who saw it a few weeks later, characterised it as “astonishingly, disturbingly realistic”, with a likeness “of some formidable warrior, some prehistoric Tamberlane”.

As for Filitosa IX, Grosjean thought it the megalithic masterpiece of Corsica. It has a remarkable face in low relief, the skull is fully three dimensional, and the features are regular and symmetrical. Carrington talks of a stately, aristocratic face, a face of intimidating authority. As these statues were being aligned at the base of

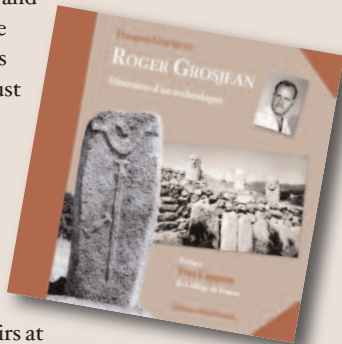


the central monument, Grosjean writes, the Corsican sun alternately accented or diminished the shadows, giving them different, almost human, expressions.

The reaction in the media, French and international, was outstanding. Headlines proclaimed “An unknown civilisation has been discovered in Corsica”, “The mystery of the stone-men”, “Enigmatic masterworks of 4000 years ago” and “The brooding masters of Filitosa”. In the years that followed, television crews arrived from France, Germany and England, and the BBC spent an entire week filming Grosjean's excavations. All this must have been rather humbling for someone who, only a few years earlier, was undecided as to where his career was going.

He pursued his search for statue-menhirs at Apazzu, Palaghju, Taravo and elsewhere, and excavated large stone monuments similar to the megalithic tower he had found at Filitosa. He called these sites Torreon – based on Torre or tower – several of which he

The Torreon monument at Alo-Bisucce



Filitosa V today



excavated: Alo-Bisucce, Cucuruzzu, Torre, Tappa, Araghju and others, not to mention Filitosa's.

Grosjean developed a theory which is worth expounding even though it has been much debated (and some say proved wrong). According to him, there had been two distinct cultures present at the same time in that part of Corsica, between 1500 and 1000BC, or thereabouts (archaeologists would now say nearer 2500–1500BC): the Megalithic culture and the Torreon culture. Members of the former, who built the dolmens and menhirs, were shepherds and goatherds who had a religion which included the representation of human beings, either themselves or their enemies. The finely sculpted statue-menhirs portrayed the Torreans with their weapons and equipment, maybe in the hope of capturing their strength and magic.

The Torreans, on the other hand, were skilled in war and navigation (they had arrived on the island more recently), and it is they who built the cyclopean fortified monuments as well as cone-shaped cult and living sites. Contrary to the Megalithic builders, they never represented the human figure in their art.

The two cultures clashed repeatedly and when the Torreans won, which they often did as they had bronze weapons, they took over the Megalithic sites, broke the statue-menhirs and reused the fragments in their new fortifications and cult monuments. Filitosa was one of the sites which had been taken over by the Torreans, hence the broken statue-menhirs in the central tower.

There remained the question of where these Torreans had come from. Grosjean found his answer when he started working on the Cauria plateau in 1964. It is as rich as the Filitosa site although more spread out. There are two alignments of menhirs as well as dolmens. The I Stantari alignment site was cleared of maquis and the wall in which menhirs were incorporated was displaced. The excavation revealed two impressive statue-menhirs: Cauria II and Cauria IV.

In an article written for *Antiquity* in 1966, Grosjean noted the strong similarity between the features on these statues and the relief at Medinet-Habu in Egypt depicting one of the Sea Peoples, the Sherden or Shardana. The statue-menhirs had lateral holes on the



Roger Grosjean as a young French Air Force pilot

tops of their heads that had probably held horns, short swords in a scabbard slung from the shoulder, a loin cloth or girdle carved around the statue and other details. Grosjean concluded that the Torreans were in fact the Sherden. He pursued his work for several more years on some 30 sites in all.

In the summer of 1975, at the height of his career and while working on his new museum in Sartène, Roger Grosjean died of a heart attack; he was only 55 years of age. In a bit more than 20 years of research, he had contributed to making Corsica one of the most exciting archaeological areas in the Mediterranean. And yet, as he said in the interview he gave to *Time Magazine*, “I have only scratched the surface. There is enough digging here to keep ten full-time archaeologists busy for the next 200 years.” Renown came to him after death. He is now recognised as one of the founders of modern Corsican archaeology.

See Roger Grosjean's “Recent work in Corsica”, *Antiquity* 40 (1966), 190–98 and *La Corse avant l'Histoire* (Klincksieck 1966); and “FIDO: French pilot and Security Service double agent malgré lui”, by François Grosjean, *International Journal of Intelligence & Counter Intelligence* 23.2 (2010), 337–52. The author is professor emeritus at the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. His book on his father, Roger Grosjean: *Itinéraires d'un Archéologue*, was published by Alain Piazzola in 2011 ■