

# Léon de Rosny

## De l'Orient à l'Amérique

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The first holder, in 1868, of a chair in Japanese, specially created for him at the Ecole impériale des langues orientales, Paris (France), Léon de Rosny (1837-1914) is the author of a good many Japanese-language handbooks and textbooks, the first translator of Japanese poetry into French, let alone his translations of Chinese poetry. When he was only 17 (1854), young Rosny managed to convince the chairman of the Imprimerie Impériale de France to hire him as a special advisor for engraving Japanese kata kana type faces and fonts. In 1862, he was appointed as official interpreter for the first Japanese mission in France, and he stayed with the Japanese officials all over Europe as far as St Petersburg !

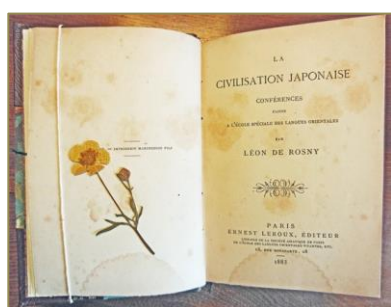
He played an important part in the philological study of ancient American civilizations and deciphered several unexplained parts of the Paris Maya codex. The co-founder, with Claude Bernard, of the Société d'ethnographie, (1860) and founder of the Société orientale et américaine (1858), Léon de Rosny is a many-sided character, who took up manifold scientific challenges as from 1860 till the end of the century. This scholar definitely was one of a kind.

His name and work are remembered by scholars and academics. Such science or patrimonial institutions as the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Collège de France, the Musée Guimet, the Institut de France and the Lille City Library (France) [who received (1909) a donation of 1000 books (Japanese and Chinese) from Rosny's own library], open their stacks to the many facets of his work.



The Rosny library collection at the Lille City Library (France)

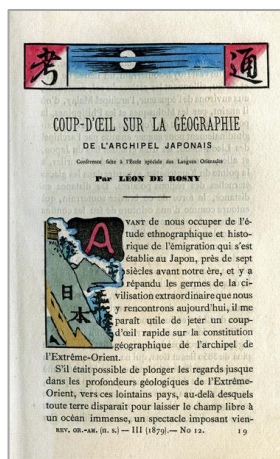
Nevertheless, such varied work, as well as the interest and controversies it very often aroused, deserves being specifically introduced to a wider audience, as long as the latter finds an interest in the evolution of ideas and social sciences, from ethnology to linguistics.



La Civilisation japonaise, 1883

Though Rosny's will ensured that all his papers should be burnt – and so did his wife-, his memory is still alive among the fourth generation of his direct descendants, who still own many documents related to the scholar's life and work, such as paintings, photos, rare books, albums, memoires and letters.

On the eve of the centenary of his death, aware as they are of the scope and, on many topics, of the innovative value of his work, some of his direct relatives decided to bring about the revival of a trend of relevance for both his work and the learned man that their scholar of a great-grand-father had been during the second half of the XIXth century.



Revue américaine et orientale, 1879

So they decided to edit and publish a book which would appeal to both scholars or keen amateurs and arouse them to delve into Rosny's research world, but would also involve institutions in order to highlight their patrimony. Many illustrations, some of them never disclosed before, result into a very lively book, sometimes a little eccentric indeed, as was its father figure, an authentic and rigorous work, with limited scientific bearing though, assuredly quite rich but not exhaustive. Its ambition is to show the diversity of Rosny's character, without any hagiographic drift.

The wide spectrum Rosny's scientific endeavour covered – ethnography, japonology, philology, orientalism, americanism, epistemology, botany, oriental religions–, as well as the many personalities he was in contact with (in particular Fukuzawa Yukichi when he was only 25, Philip von Siebold, Johan Hoffmann, Stanislas Julien, Auguste Lesouëf, Claude Bernard, Paul Broca, Brasseur de Bourbourg ...) made it necessary to devise such editorial work and make a book out of it.

The Association Léon de Rosny aims at fostering and promoting all actions likely to develop and spread the knowledge of Rosny's work among scientists as well as in the public. It expects this book not to remain simply a token of family memory, which would no doubt be too narrow a grave for this amazing character and scientific personality.

The authors are Bénédicte Fabre-Muller, Pierre Leboulleux and Philippe Rothstein, great-grand-children of Léon de Rosny.

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Le Cours de japonais, 1863

**If you want to order - free of charge - and receive by mail ...**

- The complete bibliography (50 pages),
- A digest (12 pages) of the 500 page book.

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