

## LEON DE ROSNY' BOOKS COLLECTION

### A priceless treasure in Lille Public Library

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Forgotten treasures in libraries stacks have captured the imagination and creativity of many readers. Public libraries's duty is to catalog and emphasize those treasures. Too difficult languages, too confidential catalogs, too strange subjects represented in this collection... one can assume that there are many reasons why the orientalist collection of Lille Public Library is fairly unknown among specialists, unrecognized by a greater audience and insufficiently explored by researchers.

The collection is divided into three sets: books in Western languages, Chinese and Japanese. The first consists of approximately 210 titles, and gathers for instance works of Philipp Franz von Siebold, Joseph Hoffmann, August Pfizmaier, fascicles of scholarly societies, and many of Leon de Rosny's publications about the Orient.

#### Chinese collection

The Chinese collection is the most numerous, consisting of 512 titles coming largely from Stanislas Julien and Abel Rémusat 'libraries.

It is also the least studied part of the collection ; a bilingual (french-chinese) catalog, was summarily established in the 2000s by a student (Lili Sun), and remains unpublished.

Classics, milestones of Chinese culture have been gathered by de Rosny, including the *Book of Changes* or *I Ching*, by Zhu Xi (CHI 224 and 225) in an edition of 1796, the *Book of Odes*, or *Shi Jing* (CHI 14), the *Journey to the West* or *The Monkey king* (CHI 421 ) in an edition of 1662. Let's cite among the older editions, a collection of operas of the Yuan period, in 4 volumes published in 1573 (CHI 295).

In addition to these literary texts, in verse or prose, the collection includes commentaries and interpretations of the classics, Confucian texts and glosses, some Taoist texts as the canonical book of virtues, *Dao De Jing* (CHI 83), published in 1810, and more Buddhist texts such as the *Lotus Sutra*, in an edition from 1496 (CHI 65).

The collection also includes numerous documentary books, starting with some historical writings, such as the *Chronicles* or *Shi Ji* by Si-Ma Qian, illustrated with maps and published in 1628 (CHI 195) or a collection of documents about the Opium war, about 1847 (CHI 511). Atlases, collections of maps and plans are particularly noteworthy.

The autograph manuscript copies of letters sent to China by Stanislas Julien between 1835 and 1837 are also preserved in this set, (CHI 320).

## Japanese library

The Japanese library, much better known thanks to the research of Suzanne Esmein and thanks to the catalog established in 1994 by Peter Kornicki<sup>1</sup>, brings together 395 titles: old poetry, history, epics are represented, as well as many scientific papers and especially botanical, linguistic, illustrated guides of Japan. A rare first edition of the *Kojiki*, or *Record of Ancient Matters*, published in 1644 in Kyoto (JAP 228) is placed near a reissue of the *Nihon Shoki*, or *Chronicles of Japan*, 1820, illustrated by plates dating back 1669 (JAP 10). The interest of Léon de Rosny for history and the epic occurs with an incomplete copy of the history of Hideyoshi, unifying Japan in the late sixteenth century, written by Takeuchi Kakusai, with the *Ehon Taiko Ki*, in a edition of 1861 (JAP 164), but also with the epic hero Yoshitsune by Yamada No Kakashi 1825 (JAP 162), or with the *Heike Monogatari*, published between 1710 and 1750 (JAP14), probably the first Japanese book that belonged to Leon de Rosny (exlibris 1854). The collection includes some Japanese translations of classical texts of Chinese literature, as *Shinpen Suiko gaden*, translation of the novel *Water Margin* (JAP 29). Several books, often coming from reading rooms illustrate the popular literature (Meitsuchi Kokon banashi, JAP 91), two collections of popular songs illustrated (JAP 293) or Kabuki theater (JAP 238).

The documentary books included an album of maps of Japan engraved in copper plates 1865 (*Dai Nihon koku saizu*, JAP 97), and a botanical treatise (*Somokusadote Gusa*, JAP 90).

## Language learning and civilization

The real interest of Leon de Rosny for the language, and assimilation of the Chinese and Japanese cultures, is striking. In a letter from 1868 to the director of the School of Oriental Languages, quoted by Luc Chailieu<sup>2</sup>, Leon de Rosny lists the Japanese books he considered necessary for the course, divided into four series: dictionaries and literary texts, encyclopedias and history books, Japanese editions of Buddhist books and books of general scientific interest.

Books selected by Leon de Rosny himself in his personal library reflect his conception that language learning can't be dissociated from civilization: (I quote Chailieu) "For Rosny, as for members of the

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Kornicki, *La Bibliothèque japonaise de Léon de Rosny*, Bibliothèque municipale de Lille, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Luc Chailieu, « Léon de Rosny et la connaissance du Japon en France. (Eléments d'une archéologie du « savoir japonologique » français.), in *Revue l'Ethnographie*, publiée par la Société d'Ethnographie de Paris, tome LXXXVI, 2, 1990, n°108, pp. 85-107. Translated by Laure Delrue.

Society of Ethnography, when you want to understand more fully a civilization, you must not focus or study exclusively a few areas, such as physical or linguistic characters or certain forms of art, but connect to a broader knowledge including the history, geography, religion, law, medicine, industry, etc. This explains Rosny's specific interest for Japanese encyclopedias. "

## The donation to Lille public library

Several reasons have probably led Leon de Rosny to donate his Chinese and Japanese books to the city of Lille, but his so-called attachment to the "beloved hometown" where he did not come at all after the age of 18 months is certainly to thrust aside.

Angry with the Parisian academics and convinced that the taste of ethnography had to be decentralized, he proposed in 1906 Charles Delesalle, by the time mayor of Lille, the gift of "a very large collection of Chinese books and manuscripts, which contains documents of the highest importance and exceptionally rare "only on condition that" the City is committed to never alienate books donated by him and not lend outside, even at a public institution."<sup>3</sup>

In March 1911, comes a further donation consisting in "all his personal works, all of the publications of scholarly societies created or led by him." In his report, the Mayor emphasized that "the archivist of the city, Mr. Desplanque consulted on the value of the donation, [...] stated that the library of M. de Rosny included rare books, difficult to find in China."<sup>4</sup>

The last shipment was made in 1913, without giving rise to a new municipal vote. In 1903, Leon de Rosny had donated to the Sorbonne his collection of Tartar and Manchu books, and part of his library, acquired before 1901 by the Duke of Crawford, is now kept at the John Rylands Library in Manchester.

In 1929, Emile Theodore, curator, director of Lille fine arts Museum writes a note to the administrator of the city, and explains that this collection is unused. Before 1914, "Eugene Mongy, engineer and librarian of the North Industrial Institute [...], who studied Chinese, greatly praised the preciousness, the rarities of Mr. Léon de Rosny library" and since "there has been one missionary knowing the Chinese language. "<sup>5</sup>

In the early twentieth century, the library collections were kept in the city hall in the old Palais Rihour. A room was dedicated to the Rosny collection and was decorated with the bust of the donor. On April 23rd, 1916, the town hall caught fire. Fortunately, the most precious books did not suffer any loss. Paul Vanrycke, City Librarian, had the remaining collections transported in the university library, where they remained until the construction of the current library Jean Levy in 1965.

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<sup>3</sup> Ville de Lille, Conseil municipal : Procès-verbaux des séances, tome XXXVI, année 1906, p. 477 (séance du 14 septembre 1906, délibération 818)

<sup>4</sup> Ville de Lille, Conseil municipal : Procès-verbaux des séances, tome XXXXI, année 1911, p.200 (séance du 17 mars 1911, délibération 1534)

<sup>5</sup> Archives municipales de Lille, cote 2R11/4, courrier D'Emile Théodore en date du 29 juillet 1929 adressé à M. Martin, secrétaire général adjoint de la mairie de Lille, pour réponse à un courrier de la veuve de Léon de Rosny qui souhaite que le nom de l'orientaliste soit donné à une rue de Lille.

In November 1984, Suzanne Esmein Japanese specialist and librarian, went to Lille, initiating a slow rediscovery of this collection, forgotten for decades<sup>6</sup>. In 1986 and 1987, two exhibitions about Leon de Rosny and Japan were organized, and in 1994 Peter Kornicki published the Japanese books catalog.

## A true book lover

Every collection, collection of books, or collection of objects, is likely to reveal the personality and way of thinking of its owner. In the case of a book collection, we can get information about the methodology followed by the scientist who created it and, very naturally, about his relationship to the books. Leon de Rosny was undoubtedly a very touching and a true book lover. In 1850-1851, he used to be a bookbinder and typographer' apprentice. He readily realized bindings for books from his own collection (he used small gold tool figuring an owl), or for presents to his friends (ibis for Auguste Lesouëf).

In the memoirs of the Sino-Japanese committee, he made particularly original layouts, for instance by creating rebus from names of Stanislas Julien or August Pfizmaier.

For Leon de Rosny, the creation of a study library was fundamental, the statutes of the Society of Japanese Studies at its founding in 1873, mentioned this concern as soon as Article 2: "The Company ... shall set up a special library according to its studies."

Child, he had access to the rich library of his father, Lucien de Rosny, which already included a major orientalist collection and then he attended the Imperial Library, and the library of Stanislas Julien. He wrote numerous reviews to the Asian Journal.

## Provenances

If the majority of his Chinese library comes from the legacy of that of Stanislas Julien, who died in 1873, Leon de Rosny constituted his collection of Japanese books mostly alone, at a time when relations between Japan and the West are far from common: he used to place advertisements in scholarly journals, he had intensive epistolary communications with other orientalists, and organized, after the Shogun mission in 1862, a network of Japanese friends and books providers.

Several Japanese books in the collection have Russian ex libris, or show Japanese words phonetically transcribed in Cyrillic characters. One can draw several assumptions about it. First, Leon de Rosny made a visit to Russia to escort the Japanese embassy in 1862; we also know that Rosny had bought books from the collection of an Orthodox priest attached to the Russian legation in Hakodate, Ivan Makhov. Finally, Leon de Rosny was a scientific advisor for the ethnography at the 1867 Universal Exhibition, and one of the events of that Exhibition was the visit of the Tsar and his Court: it is likely

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<sup>6</sup> *Les Nouvelles de l'estampe*, n° 86 (may 1986) : « Une bibliothèque japonaise en France au milieu du XIXe siècle : celle de Léon de Rosny ».

that Rosny found there the opportunity to make contact with new suppliers of books. Several Japanese volumes in the series bear the Universal Exhibition label.

Lille's public library keeps in the Rosny collection (JAP 294) a letter from Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935), Japanese specialist, who made several trips to Japan in Yokohama in 1873, and in Tokyo, where he learned the language and Japanese literature. In Yokohama, he published several studies about Japanese language and literature, and in 1883 he translated the *Kojiki* into English. In a letter dated from November 11, 1886, Tokyo, Chamberlain proudly announces that he has acquired an issue of the first edition of the *Kojiki*, which he sends to Rosny. He had asked two years ago to Chamberlain to find a first edition of the *Nihon-Gi* unsuccessfully.

Leon de Rosny has enriched his collection of Japanese books when the Doctor Mouriers' library was sold in auction, by the Maisonneuve brothers. Dr. Mourier, who was a student of Rosny, went to Japan and died in 1884.

## Relations with the Japanese delegation in 1862

Rosny has established friendly relations with the interpreters of the Japanese embassy in 1862, especially with Matsuki Koan (1833-1893), Mitsukiri Shuhei (1825-1886) and Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901).

Suzanne Esmein<sup>7</sup> underlines the high interest for books shown by the members of the delegation in Paris : their first official visit after meeting with the Emperor, is to a bookstore. They visit the Government Printing Office, where Rosny presents the printing stamps, and when they move to Paris again before leaving Europe, Rosny gives them a tour of the imperial library, so that when they left Europe they are accompanied by "a considerable number of packages containing mostly European books ..." <sup>8</sup>

Of course, such friends could be sensitive to Rosny's requests to sending books. In a letter dated from November 17, 1862, in Alexandria, Fukuzawa Yukichi, on the way back to Japan, announced to Rosny "« I will write necessarily to you some officer in this ship when she shall leave of Japan and also send some Japanese book if I shall have a good opportunity.. "

Arrived in Japan, Matsuki Koan, wrote Rosny from Kanagawa, on January 28, 1863, "Would I send some book by this ship it is told this ship shall not go than till to Saigon I have been see now not yet the Japanese, and thus heard no news according to Japan I wish your miscarry not always and to remain "

Finally, a few Japanese books bear the stamp of the libraries of scholarly societies Rosny belonged to.

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<sup>7</sup> Suzanne Esmein, « L'ambassade japonaise de 1862, le journal *Le Temps* et Léon de Rosny », in *Un érudit loossois et le Japon*, Association Nord-Japon, Université populaire loossoise, 1987

<sup>8</sup> *Le Temps*, 8 octobre 1862, n°551.

Gifts, purchases, loans, exchanges are pieces of the collector patient puzzle, making this collection something coherent, whole and alive, modeled in the image of its collector and reflecting his perception of science and his key to the world.