

Sheikhs and Samurai: Léon Roches and the French Imperial Project

DANA IRWIN
Emory University

Although largely unknown today, French diplomat Léon Roches (1809–1901) had a lengthy career in service that delineated the shape of French imperial interests during the nineteenth century. He served during the formation of French control over North Africa and during the dissolution of Japan's Tokugawa (1603–1868) shogunate. His life illustrates the major French discourses surrounding colonial areas; and his cultural assumptions informed the decisions of his *politique personnele*. By restoring a place to Roches in the history of the French Empire, we can better understand the influence of cultural discourses on international policy.

Roches & His Historians

The cherry blossoms were in bloom and the sun shone majestically on the Japanese coast as a ship carrying the new diplomatic envoy from France neared the harbor. The approaching Europeans were left breathless at the landscape of what was often referred to in France as “the mysterious archipelago.” After disembarking, they encountered “Orientals,” who wore elaborate hairstyles and clothes of fine silk, seemingly confirming the mystical images of the Far East they had read of in France. Léon Roches (1809–1901), the French representative to the Japanese government, reached Yokohama in April 1864. His recent appointment to Japan withdrew him from his previous post as Consul-General to Tunis. Roches welcomed this assignment, in part hoping to use it as a means to gain a position in the Foreign Ministry on the Quai d’Orsay of Paris (Ericson 1978, 12). Roches spoke no Japanese and was unaware of the political turmoil facing the current government. The only knowledge of Japan he possessed had been gleaned from the few books he managed to peruse before voyaging to Asia. Roches ultimately served as the French delegate during four of the most eventful years of Japanese history. Though he failed to achieve the goals set forth by the Foreign Ministry, his legacy has remained important and merits consideration in regard to the French imperial project of the nineteenth century.

Although Roche's time in the diplomatic corps coincided with important events in the history of French foreign policy, no full-length biography of Roches exists in any language. One reason may be because his career spanned three continents and thirty-five years. His papers are scattered in a variety of archives, and each segment of his career poses different questions to the historian. Scholars have begun to investigate his career in Algeria, especially because of his relationship with the famous resistance fighter Abd al-Qadir (1808–83). Several works have approached Roches' time in Japan: the works of historians Marc David Ericson (1978), Jean-Pierre Lehmann (1980), Meron Medzini (1971), and Richard Sims (1998) hoped to answer the question as to why Roches aligned himself with the Tokugawa shogunate during the 1868 Meiji Restoration. These authors have tied Roches' decision to French trading policy, to his own *politique personelle*, and to shifts within the colonial claims of European powers in Asia. No scholar, as of yet, has investigated what Roches' career meant for the development of the French Empire of the nineteenth century.

What would befit a serious study of the diplomatic career of Roches would be a discursive analysis of the type that Michel Foucault (1926–84) endorsed in his body of work. The reigning assumptions about the East, masculinity, and France's place in global society helped define how diplomats created policy in imperial situations. Roches was placed in contexts of which he knew little; and his beliefs about race, nation, and citizenship were maintained throughout his life. These discourses helped shape Roches' understanding of Japan and the actions he took in order to affect what he believed should be the policy of France toward Japan. The inevitability of the Meiji Restoration was not apparent in 1867, and Roches found the reigning shogun to be sympathetic. Roches had a penchant for the adventurous and endorsed a vision of manhood that privileged a warrior ethos. Roches' entire life was a pursuit of the glories of the spiritual soldier.

Roches before Japan: "A Handsome Swashbuckler"

Léon Roches was a flamboyant character, known as both "a handsome swashbuckler" and "an excellent Frenchman" (Lehmann 1980, 275). He was attracted to adventure and to others who could satiate his desire for the exotic. He was an imperial *colon* for most of his life, spending only his childhood and final years in France. The majority of his adult life was spent in North Africa, and his final four years in diplomatic service were spent in Japan. His life sheds light on the French imperial project and its many veiled and secretive attempts to attain hegemony.

Roches traveled unique networks of diplomacy. He was one of the first French diplomats to spend time in both the Middle East and the Far East. His experience serving the Bey (Chieftain) of Tunis for three years in the

1830s, before he received a governmental post, colored all his later actions. Roches represented an extreme version of French foreign policy; his personal views and experience trumped the actual policy set by his superiors. He often met the consternation of his superiors, who complained that he never followed orders. In Japan, he would brag to his diplomatic colleagues that he followed his own *politique personnelle*, regardless of what the ministers in Paris had to say. Roches, however, was careful not to put such boasts in writing (Lehmann 1980, 266).

Though less famous, Roches is striking as a French counterpart to British explorer Richard Francis Burton (1821–90). Burton, known for his translation of *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights* (1885–88), traveled across most of Africa and Asia during the second half of the nineteenth century. Both Burton and Roches would make pilgrimages to Mecca disguised as Arabs—Roches in 1841 and Burton in 1853. Burton did not take a governmental post until he was forty years old, but Roches took his first diplomatic position when he was twenty-one. Burton's fame rests largely on the impressive amount of publications he made during his life. His fast-paced accounts of travels into Central Africa and Mecca—and his translation of Arabic literary texts that emphasized their sexuality—have remained widely read to this day. Roches, on the other hand, published only one account of his journeys, *Trente-deux ans à travers l'Islam* (Thirty-two years through Islam [1884]). Roches' turgid prose could not compare with Burton's accounts, imbued as they were with the excitement of his journeys. Burton fashioned himself as the consummate Romantic adventurer, while Roches never attracted a comparable amount of attention to himself.

Burton and Roches differed in another important aspect: their relation to Arabic culture. Both men had “gone native” for periods of their life, donning traditional Arab garb and becoming fluent in Arabic. Many European travelers wholeheartedly threw themselves into their adopted culture. Famous exemplars of this tradition, along with Roches and Burton, include T. E. Lawrence (1888–1935) and Gertrude Bell (1868–1926), who are credited with creating the modern state of Iraq. For some who gave up their European past, they were making a political statement by renouncing the West; others maintained a tense relationship between the cultures they discovered and their cultures of origin. Burton maintained his practice of Arabic customs throughout much of his life, but Roches treated his transformation into an Arab as a mere youthful phase (Roches 1999, 45). Roches treasured much of what he saw in the North African culture in which he lived, but he also believed that North Africa would benefit from modernization. As for many Europeans in Africa and Asia, Roches attempted to find a way to maintain the traditions of a society while also bringing it into the modern world. In later life, Roches found that modernization and tradition were sometimes mutually exclusive.

Roches was born in Grenoble in 1809 to parents who had participated in the French Revolution: His great aunt was Madame Roland (1754–93), who presided over the salon of the Girondins. After finishing his baccalauréat and excusing himself from law school, Roches joined his father in Algeria in 1832. The following decade, spent in North Africa, became a formative time for Roches, and the relationships he formed with the Muslim elite provided him with a template on which to base his future diplomatic relationships. His father had been an original member of the expedition sent to tame the Algerian wilderness and determine the viability of agriculture in the arid environment. Roches was entranced by the contrast between the lush seaside towns and the sand dunes of the inland areas. He enjoyed awaking early to ride his stallion across the desert as the sun rose (Lehmann 1980, 277). Beyond the landscape, which he found intoxicating, the local customs of the people formed a large part of the thirty-year odyssey in these lands that he considered his home.

Insights into Roches' character are provided by his two-volume memoir, *Trente-deux ans à travers l'Islam*, first published in 1884. His story is structured as a melodrama, replete with a tale of forbidden love with a Muslim girl named Khadidja, the daughter of a local Muslim official. Roches fell in love with the daughter of the sheikh when he met her at the house of a widow he occasionally visited. "When she dared raise her eyes to me," Roches wrote of his first encounter, "I could ascertain that they were of the deepest azure blue, surmounted by perfectly arched eyebrows and curved eyelashes. . . . I was under her charm from that moment" (Roches 1999, 12). Roches' desire to speak to the girl forced him to learn Arabic and North African customs. Both were afraid of the repercussions they would face if they were caught. Their clandestine affair went on for years, even after Khadidja was married—against her will—to a local Muslim notable. Roches himself married a woman presented to him by the Bey of Tunis, Al Hussayn II (r. 1824–35). When Khadidja's husband discovered the lovers in a secret rendezvous, he flew into a rage, forbidding his wife to see Roches again. Khadidja replied, "I cannot make such a promise when he is the man I love" (Roches 1999, 73). Khadidja was whisked away by her husband to the oasis town of Ain Mahdi. Unbeknownst to Roches, al-Qadir had ordered him to lay siege to the city. Afterward, Roches learned that Khadidja had died during the blockade. Even after her death, Roches set out "to acquire new favors in the love of Khadidja, who, like all lettered Muslim women profess the greatest admiration for courageous men" (Roches 1999, 23). The echoes of Romeo and Juliet are heard amid the exotic world of North Africa; and, within the narrative, Roches embellished the facts to create an image of himself as a great masculine lover and adventurer.

The most important relationship Roches forged during this time was with Abd al-Qadir, who remains an important symbol of nascent Algerian

nationalism. He was, in Roches' words (1999, 32), "a man of genius and heart." Roches saw the emir, a functionary of the Tunisian state, as an individual who desired to "regenerate his nation, civilize it and enter upon the same glorious path as that which Muhammad Ali [1769–1849] had resolutely marched in Egypt with the aid of France" (1999, 36). At this time, Roches began to navigate the difficult terrain of his identities with Oriental customs and his French background. He was drawn to the romantic aura of the landscape and people, but he fervently believed that the French ideal of civilization should be respected. The conflict between his attraction to the exotic and his faith in civilization manifested itself in his personal journey with Islam. Al-Qadir could not allow any infidels into his intimate circle of advisers, and he presented Roches with an ultimatum: either convert to Islam or leave al-Qadir's side. Roches convinced the emir that he had converted; yet Roches wrote in his memoir that no such thing occurred (1999, 55–67). Roches played a double game of convincing the Muslim elite around him of their common faith while secretly maintaining his Catholic faith. Newspaper accounts, after Roches had achieved the position of Consul-General in Tunis, accused Roches of being Muslim. Roches' experience of "indigenization" became more complex as he took a Muslim wife—whom he would later abandon—and an Arabic name, Omar oul'd Roches (Omar son of Roches).

Meanwhile, Louis-Philippe (r. 1830–48) continued to pursue a vigorous foreign policy and began to violate the terms he had signed into law with the 1837 Treaty of Tafna. When French troops began to encroach on the Bey's territory, war erupted between Tunis and the French in 1839 and would continue until 1847. When fighting began, Roches could no longer continue his close relationship with al-Qadir. This moment represented the end of the Frenchman's infatuation with the emir. Roches realized that al-Qadir was not interested in the advice he provided to the Bey about political consolidation and modernization. At age thirty, Roches found himself with neither a career nor a home. A stint as an interpreter for the army parlayed itself into Roches' upward trajectory in diplomatic service.

After a dangerous journey to Mecca, Roches journeyed to Rome in 1842. In the Eternal City, Roches had a profound spiritual experience near the tomb of St. Peter. He was convinced suddenly through "tearful sobs" to become a Jesuit missionary (Roches 1999, 395). Jesuit priests greeted the news of Roches' conversion with delight. One father even exclaimed: "We can send M. Roches to convert the Muslims" (Roches 1999, 397). Roches met with Pope Gregory XVI (1765–1846), who questioned him about the ongoing war against al-Qadir, ending the papal audience with praise of the current general of French forces, Thomas Bugeaud (1784–1849). When Bugeaud heard of Roches' plans to become a missionary, he became furious. He immediately sent letters to Roches stating in no uncertain terms that if

Roches continued to entertain these notions of becoming a priest, the general would be forced to declare him a deserter (Roches 1999, 498). With his dreams of becoming an evangelical crushed, Roches returned to Algeria to finish his service to the army. His newfound faith, however, would not desert him, leading to the problem of how to deal with issues of religion as a representative of the French government.

Until he finally achieved a coveted position as Consul-General to Tunis in 1855, Roches dallied in the army and lowly posts in the diplomatic corps. He resented the fact that his superiors forbade his entry into religious service, but he found the rewards of diplomatic employment far better, both in terms of fame and finances. In 1857, Roches prepared the *Ahd al-Aman* (Pact of security), which forced groups of nomadic Berbers to become sedentary. For the French, a turn to agriculture would mean these Berbers would become civilized (Lorcin 1995, 15). The agreement provided the French with control over these territories and gave Tunisians, both Muslim and Christian, equal status before the law. Notions of liberty, equality, and fraternity were articulated in this document, but the limits of universalism met its bounds in “the rule of colonial difference.” Because of the treaty’s stipulation that all Tunisians were equal in the eyes of the law, the Bey of Tunis believed that Europeans could be prosecuted as well. Roches and the French delegation reacted virulently to this judgment, demanding that all cases involving Europeans (as either defendants or plaintiffs) would be heard by European judges (Abi al-Diyaf 2005, 5–14). In 1860, the Tunisian state passed a constitutional charter, but the financial crisis of Algeria proved that French-style rule was unacceptable in North Africa. By the end of Roches’ tenure in North Africa, the area was facing severe crises, and Roches, most likely, was searching for a way out of the quagmire. The opportunity to go to Japan presented itself, and Roches accepted the position of Consul-General gladly.

French Discourses about Japan: Linguistic, Artistic, Exotic

After Roches was appointed Consul-General to Japan in 1864, he tried frantically to learn everything he could about the country (Roches 1999, 410). A French–Japanese dictionary did not even exist until 1866. Fortunately, Roches’ interpreter when he reached Japan was Mermet de Cachon (1828–89), the very man who would compile this first French grammar of Japanese (Beasley 1995, 98). Few books existed in French regarding the Japanese language, but numerous works were dedicated to Japanese culture. During the 1850s and 1860s, a burgeoning discourse began to grow around Japan. The isolation of the island nation provided the European imagination with the image of the Japanese as a vestibule of pure “Asianness.” For some, it held a spiritual purity in contrast to the ongoing degradation of the

West. For others, it was a land of savage barbarians. After Commodore Matthew Perry's (1794–1858) symbolic entry into Edo in 1854, the isolationist policy of the Tokugawa shogunate was effectively ended.

The Goncourt Brothers (Edmond [1822–70] and Jules [1830–96]), famous French literary critics, claimed to have “discovered” Japanese art in 1861 (Lambourne 2005, 65). Regardless of the hyperbole of the Goncourts, the first recorded experience of French knowledge of Japanese art forms occurred in 1850, when Felix Braquemond (1833–1914), a Parisian art dealer who specialized in rare imports from the East and avant-garde French art, opened a crate of ceramics. The packing materials used to protect the porcelain were copies of woodblock prints by Hokusai 北斎 (1760–1849) and Hiroshige 広重 (1797–1858). Braquemond believed he had stumbled upon examples of ancient Japanese art and became entranced with the *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 genre. Braquemond's circle of friends, who included Claude Monet (1840–1926), Édouard Manet (1832–83), and Edgar Degas (1834–1917), were equally enthralled with these images of the “floating world.” The fascinating flatness of Japanese perspective found a welcome audience with this group of artists who were attempting to codify their own philosophy of art.

Looted goods, placed on European auction blocks in the spring of 1861, were brought to Paris after the raiding of the Old Summer Palace of Peking during the Second Opium War (1856–60); they further piqued the yen for Asian art (Hevia 2003, 161). Elisa Everett (1982, 12) has argued that only this small cadre of controversial artists found the woodblock prints to be the bearers of new innovations in aesthetics, since the majority of the bourgeoisie dismissed Japanese art as “primitive.” The 1870s movement known as *japonisme*, however, inspired interior design and art across middle-class Parisian homes (Silverman 1989, 20). The Impressionists, in fact, wanted to save Japanese art from becoming a bourgeois fad, commercialized and emptied of its value. In the eyes of these artists, *chinoiserie*, the eighteenth-century fascination with the porcelains and silks of China, had met this very fate. The techniques of Japanese prints infused French art with new vitality, and these artists believed it was their duty to protect it from becoming “*japonaiserie*” (Berger 1992, 43).

The artists were, of course, wrong as to the meaning of this Japanese art. They believed they had found “traditional” Japanese paintings, images unsullied by any Western influence. *Manga* 漫画 (whimsical pictures) and *ukiyo-e*, however, were innovations of the eighteenth century, not a style present from time immemorial. They were the product of a new courtier culture, a group that had been denied a role in the political sphere and relegated to artistic production. Hokusai and Hiroshige did not achieve their work simply through a study of traditional Japanese techniques, but were, in fact, deeply influenced by Dutch landscapes (Sullivan 1973, 41). For

Europeans, however, these works were windows into a foreign culture that offered new insights into art.

Ukiyo-e provided European artists with “a new way of seeing” (Berger 1992, 20). Vincent van Gogh (1853–90) felt his eye had been transformed by Japanese art. “The more you see things with a Japanese eye,” he wrote to his brother Theo, “the more subtly you perceive color. Do you see what these simple Japanese teach us almost amounts to a religion?” (Berger 1992, 125). By the time Roches was posted to Japan in 1864, many artists had begun to incorporate this Japanese style into their own work. James McNeill Whistler’s (1834–1903) *Symphony in White* and *Caprice in Purple and Gold* (both 1864) portray French women surrounded by “Asian” artifacts, such as woodblock prints, kimonos, lacquered tables, and painted screens (Lambourne 2005, 34–35). Imagery of kimonos and samurai became pervasive during the 1860s. The different cultural traditions of China and Japan were often conflated, resulting in bizarre images that contained both geisha and Chinese coolies. The European understanding of Japanese aesthetics—neither scholarly nor well informed—would help define policy in Japan.

The cultural discourses about the exoticism of the Far East had lasting consequences, because the ministers sent to Asia often brought the sense of mysticism and fear of barbarity with them on their official travels. Jean-Baptiste Gros (1793–1870) helped construct a treaty between the French and Japanese in 1859; but the confusion that Europeans had toward the East was made apparent when he referred to the shogun as “Emperor” and the Japanese officials as “Mandarins” (Sims 1998, 24). Roches was a product of these discourses. Having no knowledge of the Far East, he turned to the self-dubbed experts of Japanese culture in France to learn of the land to which he was headed. Before his arrival, he decided that certain viable traditions would be maintained, but modernization would only improve the Japanese people. His condescension and paternalism to the Japanese is evident in a letter he wrote to his Parisian superiors shortly after his arrival: “The character of the Japanese essentially distinguishes them from other Oriental people. . . . We must act towards them with goodwill and dignity, critically but with justice; we can often appeal to their sentiments of honor and to the pride found among all of them, even among the lowest classes. . . . They are gay, lively and communicative; they are disposed towards us as well as to other foreigners: whatever will be the material development of English power in this country, they run to us alone for reforms” (Medzini 1971, 88).

French Diplomacy in Japan before Roches: Religion, Civilization, Silk

The French never ranked as a prime player in the affairs of East Asia. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, and even Americans played far greater

roles in the opening of China and Japan than had the French before 1840. After the French defeat in the Seven Years' War (1756–63), they abandoned their positions in India. The role of the French was hindered, in part, by the consuming domestic events of the French Revolution (1789–99), Napoleonic Wars (1801–15), and succeeding Restoration of the Bourbon Monarchy (1815). After a decade in power, the Restoration faced a severe “crisis of legitimacy” in the mid-1820s (Kroen 2000, 5). After a lavish and extravagant coronation in 1825, Charles X (1757–1836, r. 1824–30) sought to restore the Church to what he believed was its exalted position during the Ancien Régime (fourteenth to eighteenth centuries). An economic crisis, spurred by bad harvests, placed artisans and farmers in a dire financial situation, while growing student movements debated the merits of a constitutional monarchy that would limit the powers of the king (Spitzer 1987, 221). Charles tried to muster popular support for his regime through the spectacular military conquest of Algeria in the spring of 1830, but the acquisition of North African lands could not mask the growing dissent of his subjects.

Much of the resistance to Charles X stemmed from his support of the Jesuits, whom the Pope had reestablished in 1814 but whom the French parliament refused to recognize. Numerous pamphlets were circulated over the course of the decade that accused the Jesuits of masterminding dastardly plots to gain control over French education and even of overthrowing the government. Liberal detractors of Charles accused him of being a “crypto-Jesuit” (Buckley 1999, 12). Although Charles signed ordinances into law in 1828 that forbade the Jesuits from teaching, the allegations of his collusion with the priests did not end. The king's final defeat occurred two years later when he was exiled after the July Revolution. Charles' successor, Louis-Philippe, the so-called “Bourgeois King” (1773–1850, r. 1830–48), spent his reign attempting to avoid the pitfalls into which Charles had fallen.

After the 1830 Revolution, a concerted effort was made to separate the activities of the state from the aims of the missionaries, both domestic and foreign. The French state feared that religious organizations would require domestic concessions if inroads were made in foreign territories by the missionaries. During the Chinese Opium War of 1840–42, French priests were refused the direct assistance of French arms (Fay 1997, 336). The Société des Missions-Etrangères, which the Pope in 1831 gave the sole right to proselytize Japan and Korea, carried out their endeavors through their own limited resources. The missionaries found their greatest support in France when their members were martyred at the hands of Asian “barbarians” (Buckley 1999, 23). If Asian nationals attacked French citizens, the state, by the end of the nineteenth century, found it imperative to impose sanctions on governments that allowed such acts to take place. Even with the formal

separation of church and state within France in 1906, the state was still confronted with the dilemma of how much support should be given to missionaries.

The *mission civilatrice* (civilizing mission) of the French was the cornerstone of their foreign policy, and it still maintains a central part of French rhetoric (Conklin 1997, 12). Those deemed “uncivilized” by the French would rectify their ways by learning the language and culture of France. As one British colonialist wrote about the efforts of the French government to civilize Africans: “The French are trying to turn Africans into good Frenchmen; we British are trying to turn them into good Africans” (Cooper 1996, 116). A severe contradiction met the universal dictums of French political thought: If all people were created equal, why were the Africans, Muslims, and Asians so vastly different? Even if they learned to speak French and discarded their “traditional” garb, they still somehow failed to be entirely French. The French government’s official position was to work with the elites and governments of other countries in order to bring them the fruits of modernity. The civilizing discourse that defined French policy overseas was at the heart of the mission in the Far East, as a memorandum circulated around the Quai d’Orsay in 1866 clearly stated: “We can count on the shogun’s interested cooperation, and by this cooperation hope to civilize Japan” (Sims 1998, 67).

The initial opening of Japan in 1854 created a scramble for power, as many European nations hoped to create a beneficial trade policy with the shogunate (Totman 1980, 34). The French, interested in exporting their goods to Japan without the threat of protective Japanese tariffs, simultaneously hoped for Japanese luxury items at reduced costs. The British were the most invested in establishing an advantageous arrangement with the Japanese, mainly due to their imperial position in Asia through their possessions of India and Hong Kong. The French, however, maintained a key position in the diplomatic negotiations that occurred in the aftermath of Japan’s open-door policy.

French interest in Japan centered on two economic aspects. First, the French did not want to be excluded from a possibly lucrative deal on imports and exports with the Japanese nation. Second, the French were in desperate need to find means to breathe life into their flagging silk industry, and the import of Japanese silkworms was seen as a possible amelioration of the troubles in that sector. Much of the French economy, which even in the 1860s lacked diversification in comparison to England and Germany, was reliant upon the silk markets of Lyon and the Drôme (Medzini 1971, 76). A pestilence had eradicated much of the French silkworm population in 1863, and new species imported from the Middle East could not adapt to the foreign climate. Japanese silkworms, first brought to France illegally in 1861, were conducive to the atmosphere of the central regions of the country, and

they even produced more silk than the original French species. The Japanese guarded the export of the insects carefully, and part of Roches' mission was to devise a plan wherein the French would receive the most worms for the cheapest price.

The French were willing to contribute intellectual and diplomatic fervor to this endeavor; however, they could not supply the same amount of military reinforcements as the British. Napoléon III (1808–73, r. 1852–72) was in a delicate position: his involvement in the Chinese Opium War, Mexico, and territorial skirmishes in Africa resulted in the weakening of morale and the loss of resources, as the army was stretched beyond its means. The French hoped Japan was politically stable and troops would not be necessary. As the Civil War (1861–65) preoccupied the Americans, the French posted its first representative to Japan in 1859, Duchesne de Bellecourt (1817–81). The Foreign Ministry hoped to protect its national interests, but Bellecourt proved disastrous in his position (Sims 1998, 61). For most of his term, he was unaware of the impending political entropy—partly because the officials of the shogunate hid their troubles. Not until the very end of his assignment did he begin to suspect that the shogunate was facing a political crisis. It became the duty of Roches, the second French Consul-General in Japan, to navigate the modernization of the Japanese.

The Arrival of Roches in Japan: Political Alignment, Political Struggles

When Roches arrived in Japan in 1864, he was at a serious disadvantage, not knowing the language or culture of Japan. The Consul-General of Japan was a prestigious position, and he would be only the second person to hold the position since Japan had reopened its ports to foreigners. No records in the archives detail how the Foreign Ministry came to the belief that Roches was the right man for the job. Roche's expertise in Algeria came from his knowledge of Arabic and involvement with local elites, but he had no such proficiency in the Japanese context. The foreign minister, Drouyn de Lhouys (1805–81), in his letter to Roches asking him to take the appointment, requested that Roches continue "to display his combination of prudence and firmness" (Lehmann 1980, 284). The letter contained no other information as to what was occurring in Japan either politically or economically. Although Roches' predecessor, Bellecourt, had begun to believe that the Tokugawa shogunate's control was unraveling, Roches was never informed of these suspicions. During the first year of his sojourn in Japan, Roches fumbled around aimlessly, unsure of French aims in the region and the political culture of the regime, with which he sought a direct working relationship.

Roches faced a series of troubles when he realized that French policy in Asia was so ambiguous. Lhouys informed Roches that France could not and would not provide military support to the Japanese. Roches was not to become involved in Japanese domestic issues, but he was ordered to maintain the economic interests of his homeland “at all costs” (Lehmann 1980, 291). French contradictions in policy manifested themselves in issues of religion. Japanese treaties did not allow missionaries to access the interior of the country, but the government was compelled to support any of its citizens in the area. As Bellecourt wrote: “Above all [the government] could not countenance abandoning the right of protecting the missionaries under any circumstances” (Lehmann 1979, 381). Roches maintained a moderate approach to the problem of the Christian religion in Japan. He continually told Father Bernard Petitjean (1829–84), who had been appointed a Vicar Apostolic to Japan in 1866, not to proselytize too fervently or he could be the one to blame for any subsequent violence. Petitjean took umbrage to Roches’ warnings and responded with a terse note stating that the missionaries were “the glory of God.” If the Japanese hurt these men of God, they would pay for their sins in the next world (Lehmann 1979, 355). Roches came under attack from members of the religious community and the press, who claimed he had converted to Islam while in Algeria (Lehmann 1980, 289). This attack may have compelled Roches to include in his memoirs the tale of his Christian rebirth in Rome.

As his first task as Consul-General, Roches had to contend with the insurrectionary forces across Japan, which were attacking foreigners. Radicals had been agitating for the expulsion of aliens for several months, reaching a crescendo in the spring of 1864. They carried out violence under a slogan of *sonnō jōi* 尊王攘夷, a statement of supreme imperial loyalty: “Revere the Emperor, expel the barbarians.” In both the Satsuma and Chōshū regions, rebels were leading battles against the shogunate, whose armies were unequipped and poorly trained. Centralized control over the army or the state was non-existent, and the shogunate looked to the foreign powers for aid. Upon Roches’ arrival, the European ministers were mounting an attack against insurgents at the port of Shimonoseki (Jansen 2000, 252). Roches—contradicting his official orders—provided French troops to the European coalition to defeat the Chōshū rebels.

The Shimonoseki Indemnities sought payment for the costs of those killed in the first attacks of 1863 and the cost of the resulting military expedition. The British believed the sanctions were so harsh that the shogunate would rather open the ports at Shimonoseki and Hyōgo than pay the fines. The government, however, preferred to pay the penalties. These crises forced Roches to devise a strategy to protect French interests, so he drew on his vast experience with North African elites to form his policy. Roches aligned himself with the shogunate because it was the recognized govern-

ment of Japan. The oppositional forces, especially to Westerners, seemed like bands of marauders capitalizing on a complicated situation (Lehmann 1980, 286). Roches committed a mistake while investing so personally in his relationship with the shogun. When he realized that Tokugawa Yoshinobu 徳川慶喜 (1837–1913), the fifteenth and final Tokugawa shogun, could no longer claim power, it was too late to turn back.

Roches' relationship with Japanese leaders was established quickly. On October 15, 1864, Roches reported to his superiors back in Paris: "I can even add that the *roju* [*rōjū* 老中, shogunal elder council] have given me proofs of consideration and trust of which I believe it unnecessary to render account to the department but which give me hope of fruitfully fulfilling the mission which the government of the Emperor [Napoléon III] has entrusted to me" (Sims 1998, 48). After Tokugawa Iemochi 徳川家茂 (1846–66, r. 1858–66) died, Tokugawa Yoshinobu succeeded to power. With his prized position as an advisor to the shogunate assured by the *rōjū*, Roches provided the new shogun with copious amounts of advice. Yoshinobu appreciated Roches' help, thanking the minister "for the excellent counsel which you have not ceased to give to the Japanese government since your happy arrival in this country" (Sims 1998, 54); but Yoshinobu found himself awkwardly situated. Yoshinobu did not want to give into foreign demands, but his support among his own people was slipping away. Moreover, Roches' promises of success seemed so tantalizing. If the shogun only modeled his army on that of France, recommended Roches, then Yoshinobu would become a leader akin to Napoleon. By 1867, the shogun took to wearing a French uniform. At this moment, although he prized Japanese traditions, modernization compelled a swift rejection of the samurai way.

Roches did not seek to maintain the structure of the shogunate as he found it; rather, he advised that the shogun should centralize his own power and wrest any power from the regional *daimyō* 大名 (feudal lords). Before Yoshinobu had come to power, Roches had set about conducting a series of administrative reforms (Honjo 1935, 23). In March 1865, upon the request of the minister, Léonce Verny (1837–1908) arrived in Japan to develop a modern shipyard and naval base at Yokosuka, at the mouth of Tokyo Bay. Furthermore, Roches established a modern mint and French schools for regime officials and their sons (Sims 1998, 82). The government requested arms and Roches gladly provided them, along with a cadre of trained French military officers. Most of these actions were taken without the knowledge of either Roches' colleagues in Japan or his superiors in France.

Roches hoped Yoshinobu would effect further change in the organization of Japanese government by instituting a council of which the shogun would hold a firm majority and thus quell any dissenting opinion. Roches' own experience with Abd al-Qadir in Algeria influenced this position.

Roches was attracted throughout his life to men who embodied a form of masculinity that was based on a warrior ethos. Men of the sword represented for Roches the ideal form of manhood. The young Meiji Emperor (1852–1912, r. 1867–1912) had been sheltered from the world and was unable to rule properly in an environment so tense. The success of the supporters of the Emperor was in no way inevitable at this period, as American diplomats worried that the Meiji Emperor was “ignorant of the true state of things” (Diplomatic Correspondence 1869, 648).

The Quai d’Orsay originally supported Roches in his endeavors in Japan. Even as late as February 1867, the ministry assessed Roches’ place as such: “M. Roches has been able to obtain so legitimate an influence in this country, which owes to him its transformation since 1864, that he corresponds and on several occasions when the Japanese ministers have wished to have a plan adopted by their sovereign they have asked him to support it” (Sims 1998, 56). These days of Roches’ crowning glory would come to a crashing end when a variety of circumstances conspired to place Roches’ policies and plans of action in serious doubt over the course of the following year. By the following February, Roches would leave Japan, disgusted and dispirited.

The Downfall of Roches: End of the Shogunate, End of Roches’ Career

When the Marquis de Moustier was appointed foreign minister in October 1866, Roches’ fortunes began to change. In a missive from the minister to Roches in May 1867, Moustier told him not to become involved in Japanese politics, only to maintain French interests. Moustier viewed Roches with a suspicious and indignant eye. He found Roches impertinent and unwilling to communicate news to Paris. Part of the withdrawal of French support for Roches came from the unease they felt at what would happen to Anglo–French relations (Sims 1998, 61). The French and British maintained support for shogunal power before 1864 because they believed the regional *daimyō* and those siding with the Emperor were anti-foreign. Harry Parkes (1828–85) and his predecessor, Rutherford Alcock (1809–72), questioned this assumption and were the first to seek a redress in British policy. Now that the British were beginning to believe that supporting the Tokugawa regime would no longer be viable, the French diplomats in Paris began to agree; but Roches continued to advise and support the shogun. The French did not want to risk angering the British Foreign Office. Moustier, by the time he had reprimanded Roches, had already begun to distance the Foreign Ministry from the shogunate by declining to declare its support for the shogun’s claim to sovereignty across Japan.

With the alliance of Chōshū and Satsuma, bitter rivals before 1866, the reign of the Tokugawa shogunate was nearing its end. The forces of the

shogunate could not match the combined strength of these revolutionary troops, armed as they were by European powers (Totman 1980, 5). In January 1868, the Meiji Emperor dissolved the shogunate. Yoshinobu's resignation came after a decisive defeat on the battlefield. By this point, the course of history seemed inevitable to many members of the diplomatic corps. "We could hardly expect," wrote American Secretary of State William Henry Seward (1801–72) to his deputy, "anything less than serious political changes as a consequence of the sudden entrance of Japan into relations with the other nations" (Diplomatic Correspondence 1869, 634). Roches watched the events transpire with consternation and guilt. He had become a deleterious asset of the government. The French state would now have to negotiate with a Japanese government against which the French delegate had fought and conspired. Roches began to draw up his own resignation.

On February 18, 1868, the American minister to Japan, Robert Van Valkenburgh (1821–88), wrote to Secretary of State Seward of Roches' "sudden" announcement of leaving his post in Japan and returning to France (Diplomatic Correspondence 1869, 648). Roches cited personal reasons for his swift decision. He also informed his colleagues that having been "a warm supporter of the Tycoon, and that having been driven from this part of this country, and pronounced in rebellion by the Mikado, he felt he had to return to France and make his explanations to his government in person" (Diplomatic Correspondence 1869, 665). On February 20, Roches met with Yoshinobu. The bitterness of the former shogun was apparent as he told the French minister: "my mind and my heart are unchanged. I shall remain faithful to my duties" (Diplomatic Correspondence 1869, 716). Moustier, however, could not allow Roches to leave without a successor in place, especially during a time of crisis, so Roches would remain in Japan until June.

Violence continued throughout the spring of 1868. In March, anti-foreign Japanese soldiers attacked Parkes on his way to an audience with the Emperor in Kyoto (Diplomatic Correspondence 1869, 709). That same month, retainers of the Daimyō of Tosa attacked a French steamer, the *Dupleix* (involved in the original bombardments of Shimonoseki), killing eleven French sailors. The negotiations around this assault would be Roches' final official duty. In his final letters to Moustier, Roches displayed his bitter disappointment: "I undertook a work of civilization which now appears to have been beyond my strength, and yet I still hope to carry it to its final conclusion" (Lehmann 1980, 301). Roches returned to France and wrote his memoirs of his time in North Africa. He never wrote about his service in Japan. He died at the age of 91 in 1901. What Roches had hoped would be the final crowning achievement of his long career became his greatest disgrace.

The (Double) Legacy of Roches

Roches' involvement left a double legacy: one to the Japanese and one to the French. Although Roches' political alignment proved fateful in Japan, he succeeded in certain reforms—such as those of the navy and military—that continued after the Meiji Restoration and his departure (Medzini 1971, 180). Roches had regaled Japanese officials with tales of Napoleon's successes across the battlefields of Europe. The diminutive emperor became a symbol of military might for the Japanese to emulate. This model was replaced with that of Bismarck (1815–98) after the French defeat at the hands of the Prussian Army in 1870; but the administrative reforms Roches created remained in place.

For the French, Roches reinforced the cultural fascination with Japan. Roches' created the Japanese Pavilion at the Parisian World Exposition of 1867, which was an unmitigated success. The Parisian press deemed the Japanese representatives at the fair "the Frenchmen of the West" (Hokenson 2004, 102). The art, including *manga*, *ukiyo-e*, and *netsuke* 根付 (ornamental sash fasteners), inflamed the growing craze of *japonisme*, which reached new heights in the 1870s. In Paris, shogunal representatives found individuals from their bitter rivals from Satsuma in possession of their own booth at the Expo: Roches had placed the civil wars of Japan on literal display. Most spectators, however, unaware of this political altercation, were instead seduced by the spectacle of Oriental arts and performances. The French constructed the Japanese world as filled solely with samurai and geisha but felt they understood this culture because of their own relationship to the notions of *gloire* and *grandeur*. The fears aroused by the foreignness of these Asian bodies were assuaged by the supposed Japanese commitment to nobility. The French began to believe they had a complete understanding of the island nation. "by the time I arrived in Japan," Pierre Loti (1850–1923) wrote in his enormously successful novel, *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), "I already knew what to expect; I had seen the landscape of Japan on every woman's fan" (Loti 1965, 13). *Madame Chrysanthemum* became Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*—who, in turn, became *Miss Saigon* (1989) and David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* (1988)—and gave to succeeding generations a sense of "Japanese" behavior. The lure of the Orient was, and remains, strong. The French recognized an affinity between the two cultures because the two nations held seemingly common bonds in the pursuit of civility and honor, even if the Japanese maintained certain "barbaric" practices. Japan continued to hold the French entranced throughout the twentieth century, as evidenced by Roland Barthes' (1915–80) *Empire of Signs* (*L'Empire des signes*, 1970).

The career of Léon Roches represented many of the most important contours of the French imperial project of the nineteenth century. He spent

time in East Asia and North Africa, areas of the nation's most important colonial claims. Diplomats like Roches traveled the globe to impart a certain style of civilization to the territories they believed lacked fundamental aspects of civility. The civilizing discourse that Roches promoted still holds an exalted place in French politics as current president Nicolas Sarkozy (b. 1955) attempts to deal with Muslim immigrants, whom many French believe have not yet become sufficiently attuned to the ways of the country. Roches never questioned his notions of civilization and believed that France, however flawed, held a model for all nations to follow. But, in the end, Roches learned the most from those whom he believed he was teaching.

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