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LUCIEN RUDAUX, SCIENCE POPULARIZER AND THE FIRST SPACE PAINTER (1874-1947)

Abstract

Great historian Fred Ordway once mentioned astronomy painter Lucien Rudaux, who does not appear to be known in the French space circles. Until a recent issue of the french gliding magazine Vol à Voile published an article on early flying machines, with several rare pictures credited to Rudaux. It then was found the latter had been a member of Aéronautique Club de France, history's first aero club, since June 1905. A talk with its president quickly led to the launch of a research on this pioneer. The son of painter Edmond Rudaux, he thus could enter in the footsteps of his father. Also interesting, he became by alliance the grandfather of famous physicist Francis Rocard, one of the early space pioneers in France. Aged only eighteen, he became a member of prestigious Société Astronomique de France. He created in 1894 an amateur observatory in Donville-les-Bains in Normandy. After his military service in 1895-1896, he progressively became known. Also a keen photographer, he began popularizing astronomy, being both a scientific writer and artist for the journal La Nature from 1902. Three years later he even published similarly in the main national journal in France, L'Illustration. While being enrolled during the Great War, he managed to publish a first book, giving practical notions on astronomy. Six others followed until 1946, not only about astronomy, but also the Earth and meteorology. One of them, the seminal "Sur les autres mondes" (On the other worlds) in 1937 made him the first "space painter", when he showed how it would look for space probes on the surface of the solar system planets. He also contributed to the creation of the astronomical section in Palais de la Découverte in Paris. Awarded among others the highest medal in France, Légion d'Honneur, in 1936, his name lives on today with the Lucien Rudaux Memorial Award, created in 2000. A Mars crater and asteroid 3574 as well bear his name. This paper will summarize the results of the research in progress with the help of ACDF, Archives de la Manche, and his rare original space paintings in our hands.