



DROUVILLE, GASPARD

DROUVILLE, GASPARD (1783-1856), French military officer, soldier-of-fortune, and travel writer.

Known mainly for his account of Iran, *Voyage en Perse, pendant les années 1812 et 1813* (1819), which was based on experiences and observations during a period of service with 'Abbās Mirzā Qajar (q.v.), Gaspard Drouville is an obscure figure whose life both before and after his Persian sojourn has been shrouded in mystery and plagued by incorrect assumptions for over two centuries. The years of his birth and death remain unconfirmed. His Russian patronymic, Ivanovich (Frey, p. 508), suggests that his father was named Jean, while his surname, taken from that of a hamlet in Lorraine (book review in *Bulletin des Sciences Géographiques, Économie Publique*, p. 250), points to a possible origin in northeastern France and certainly not in Iran, as suggested by Ker Porter (II, p. 587). Drouville's father may have been one Jean Baptiste Drouville attested at Ourches and Pulnoy, near the hamlet of Drouville, in 1784 (Duvernoy, p. 576) and 1789 (Godfrin, pp. 251, 253).

The earliest records of Drouville document his participation in the ill-fated Saint-Domingue expedition of 1801-3, when Napoleon dispatched forces to put down the slave rebellion on Hispaniola island in the Antilles. A sub-lieutenant grenadier in the 86th Infantry Regiment of the Line, Drouville was one of circa 900 soldiers who, on 27 March 1803, recaptured the French Fort Ça-Ira, in Haiti. For this, he earned particular commendation from General Pierre François Xavier Boyer (1772-1851), his commanding officer (Boyer, p. 126). After the remnants of his regiment returned to France they were merged with



other battalions and in October 1805, proceeded to Poitiers and Paris before joining the Third Army of Portugal, under General Jean-Andoche Junot (1771-1813), in August 1807. In his memoirs, Junot's chief of staff, General Baron Pierre Thiébault (1769-1846), described Drouville's involvement in a series of events that ultimately led to his desertion from the French army. When an insurrection broke out in Lisbon, Drouville launched himself into the fray, wreaking havoc upon both insurgents and innocent bystanders alike with his sabre. He appalled his commanding officer by then entering the home of Thiébault's host, Jácome Ratton (1736-1820), a Franco-Portuguese businessman, with blood dripping from his weapon.

No sooner had the Third Army of Portugal moved on to Salamanca and Madrid than Drouville became involved in a dispute that resulted in a challenge to a duel. According to Thiébault, Drouville and his opponent were walking to the spot appointed for the duel when Drouville allowed himself to be overtaken and ran his enemy through from behind with his sabre. This explains William Price's account of his meeting with Drouville in 1813 at Tabriz, of which Price wrote: "He pretended he had fought a duel in Spain with another officer, whom he had killed, and had fled to this place for refuge" (Price, p. 63). After the murder was discovered, an order was issued for Drouville's arrest, but he succeeded in escaping, shooting a sentry in the process and deserting to the anti-French, Spanish guerilla force commanded by Don Julián Sánchez García (Calmettes, pp. 502-3).

Drouville next appears as the author of a pamphlet (Drouville, 1811, 1813) presented to Prince Frederick Augustus (1763-1827), Duke of York and Albany, who exercised overall command of the British forces in the Peninsula War. In it, the merits of the creation of one or more British lancer regiments were argued. Dated 5 November 1811, the pamphlet was authored by one "J.B. Drouville, Captain of Cavalry, lately in the French Army, now in the Peninsula" (Drouville, 1811). The identity of Gaspard and J.B. Drouville is proven by a handwritten manuscript of Drouville's most famous work, *Voyage en Perse*, dated to 1815, in the Bavarian State Library (Munich). The title page identifies its author not as Gaspard Drouville, as in the later printed editions of 1819 and 1825a-b, but as J.B. Drouville.

Drouville's proposal was not acted upon by the Duke of York, but his text contains the remark "having been an eye-witness of those transactions during a four years' successive campaign" in Spain (and probably Portugal as well; book review in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, p. 373), which corresponds to the



period between his arrival there with the Third Army of Portugal in 1807 and the date of the first printed edition of his pamphlet, 1811. According to James Justinian Morier (1782-1849), British diplomat and author of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (q.v.), who met Drouville at Tabriz in early July 1813, Drouville, while still serving in a British cavalry regiment, was sent to Constantinople. From there, he was sent on to Iran by Sir Stratford Canning (1786-1880), the British ambassador to the Porte and, upon his arrival, assigned by Sir Gore Ouseley (q.v.) to the cadre of British military instructors working in Tabriz (Johnston, p. 183). Drouville allegedly arrived with a letter of recommendation from Lord Liverpool (1812-27), the then British Prime Minister (Barrett, p. 253). Just why a seemingly unimportant deserter from a French regiment was given such treatment is unclear but, in any case, by the summer of 1812 Drouville was employed alongside Lt. William Monteith, Capt. Charles Christie (q.v.) and Maj. Henry Lindsay, under the command of Col. Joseph D'Arcy (q.v.), to train 'Abbās Mirzā's troops. By Drouville's own account he spent three years in Iran, six months of which were as a guest of 'Asgar Khan Afšār Orumi, one of Abbās Mirzā's commanding officers. Among other things, he recruited and trained the cavalry and lancers; served as inspector-general of 'Abbās Mirzā's cavalry and military commander of Urmia province; and commanded the Persian forces during the capture of Lankarān in August 1812. How widely he travelled in Iran is unclear, but incidental references to Fath-'Ali Shah Qājār's (q.v., r. 1797-1834) palaces at Şoltāniya and Solaymāniya (I, p. 204; II, p. 235); Moḥammad-Taqi-Mirzā's palace at Qazvin (II, p. 223); and the city wall of Qom (II, p. 238), suggest that he saw these places, as well as Urmia, Ujān, Salmās, the Moḡān steppe, Tehran, and Ray. Writing to his mother, Morier described Drouville as follows: "Picture a man six and a half feet in height, with a great aquiline nose, moustaches up to his eyes, a wild look in his eyes, great pointed hat, huge sabre, & boots that could be heard half a league off, and you have an idea of this captain Drouville" (Johnston, p. 183).

Shortly after the Russian diplomat, Wilhelm von Freygang (1783-1849), had an audience with Ouseley at Tabriz on June 6th 1812, Drouville attended a dinner given in Freygang's honor by the British envoy. Four years later, Lord Charles Cathcart (1721-1776), the British ambassador to Russia, suggested to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh (1769-1822), that the Russians had recruited Drouville (Yapp, p. 97 and n. 7). Whether the meeting with Freygang and members of his suite led to this development is uncertain, for although the title page of *Voyage en Perse* identifies Drouville as "Cavalry Colonel in the service of H.M. the Emperor of All the Russias," this was only published in



1819 and, from other evidence, it is clear that Drouville did not enter the Russian service immediately upon leaving Tabriz. Rather, in 1814 he met István Széchenyi (1791-1860) at Terracina while serving as *aide de camp* to General Pierre Gaston Henri de Livron (1770-1831), commander of the cavalry of the Royal Guard under King Joachim Murat of Naples (Murat, p. 334; Zichy, p. 23) and in early May 1815, saw action in the Battle of Tolentino, where he prevented a potential slaughter by informing Livron that a column of advancing troops were not those of General Francesco Pignatelli, an ally, as suspected by Livron, but rather enemy Austrian troops (Guillemard, II, p. 340). The handwritten colophon of the manuscript copy of *Voyage en Perse*, reads “Munich, December 1815.” Whether or not Drouville himself went to Munich after his service in Italy is impossible to say. The fact that he is identified in the Erik Amburger Database of Foreigners in Pre-Revolutionary Russia as German prior to joining the Russian ranks might suggest that he indeed served one or another of the German princes before he is attested in 1817 as a member of the Kamenogorsk Regiment at Chernihiv, northern Ukraine. From there he moved to the Ingermanland (Ingria) Dragoons, in 1819; an Uhlan Regiment at Yamburg (Kingisepp), to the southwest of St. Petersburg in 1821; and an unidentified cavalry regiment in 1825.

Voyage en Perse was published by subscription in a limited edition of only 150 copies at St. Petersburg in 1819 by Alexandre Pluchart (1777-1827), a French publisher who had emigrated to Braunschweig in 1805 and from there, on the suggestion of Louis Dubois-Descours (1763-1827), Russian ambassador to the Court of Braunschweig, to St. Petersburg. Originally in charge of the Russian Senate’s in-house printing operations, Pluchart soon founded his own publishing concern (Somov, pp. 285-96). The first edition of *Voyage en Perse* included no fewer than sixty-two lithographs and etchings by prominent artists, including Karl Johann Beggrow (1799-1875), Denis Dighton (1792-1827), Stepan Fedorovich Galaktionov (1779-1854), Massimo (Maxim) Gauci (1774-1854), Charles Theodosius Heath (1785-1848), Charles Joseph Hullmandel (1789-1850), Alekander Orłowski (1777-1832), Andrei Shelnikov (b. 1788) and Bernard Édouard Swobach (1800-1870). Of these, Orłowski is today considered the most important lithographer in early 19th century Russia (Szrajber, pp. 371-79).

Of Drouville’s subsequent career little is known. Two further editions of *Voyage en Perse* appeared in Paris in 1825 (Drouville, 1825a-b), but even contemporary reviewers were uncertain whether these were authorized or



pirated. An eight-page, handwritten manuscript in French, entitled “Notes by Colonel Drouville on the campaign in Persia of 1826 during the Russian-Persian war in 1826-1828” (*Russian Military...*, unpaginated) suggests his involvement in the Second Russo-Persian War. In 1827, Pluchart brought out Drouville’s French translation of J. M. Kinneir’s (q.v.) *Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire* (Kinneir, 1827). The extensive notes accompanying Kinneir’s text contain data clearly gleaned by Drouville during and after his Persian sojourn. On 13 July 1827, the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), who knew Drouville, wrote that he was an officer of merit, but an insupportable braggart (Modzalevskii, p. 106). A Swedish official register for 1831 listing Drouville as a colonel in the Imperial Russian service (*Sveriges och Norges*, p. 541) appears to be the last mention of him.

In *Voyage en Perse*, Drouville was highly critical of the Gardane Mission (q.v.) that had preceded him by five years, and this certainly accounts for the critical reception his book received in French quarters, particularly from Auguste Andrea de Nerciat, attached as an interpreter to Gardane’s embassy, and Antoine-Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), the eminent French Orientalist. As a deserter from the French army, Drouville would have been summarily shot if he had been caught or returned voluntarily to France, and this circumstance makes it virtually impossible to believe that William Price was correct when he wrote, after hearing the story of Drouville’s alleged duel, “I no sooner heard this tale than I said he was a spy; but his story had some weight with the rest of the English because he had contributed to obtain letters of recommendation from high authority; it fell out in the sequel that he *was* a French spy” (Price, p. 63). Drouville was, however, equally critical of Russian and British involvement in Iran’s diplomatic and military affairs. Despite some harsh reviews, *Voyage en Perse* has proven to be a mine of information for modern scholars on a wide range of topics ranging across Iranian society, religion, music, medicine, material culture, geology and much more.

Drouville was a soldier, not a scholar, and when he went to Iran he had with him only three works: E. S. Waring’s account of his journey to Shiraz in 1802 (1807); the official record of General Gardane’s Mission (1809); and J. J. Morier’s account of his second visit to Iran (1818). Later, presumably in Munich (?) or St. Petersburg, Drouville was able to consult more literature (e.g., Picault, 1810) and, for the critical apparatus accompanying his translation of Kinneir’s *Geographical Memoir*, many more sources were used (Kinneir, 1827). Drouville’s stated aim in *Voyage en Perse* was to move beyond conventional



travel writing, particularly geographical description, and focus on people and their customs, presenting “down to the smallest details, the differences that exist between the private lives of the inhabitants of this vast empire, and our own” (Drouville, 1815, p. 1). Rather than being “wedded to localities,” Drouville wished to focus “on the mores and customs of the inhabitants of this interesting part of Asia” (Drouville, 1819, I, pp. i-ii). This undoubtedly accounts for the enduring utility of Drouville’s work which continues to be used by historians of the early Qajar period to this day.

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