



## FLANDIN AND COSTE

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**FLANDIN AND COSTE**, a French painter and an architect renowned for their outstanding illustrated account of their travels in Persia during 1839-41.

**Flandin**, Eugène Napoléon Jean-Baptiste (b. Naples, 15 August 1809; d. Tours, 29 September 1889), French orientalist, painter, archeologist, and politician ([Plate I](#)). Flandin's archeological drawings and some of his military paintings are valued more highly by museum authorities than his purely artistic paintings. He is most renowned for his famous drawings and paintings of Persian monuments, landscapes, and social life made during his travels with the architect Pascal Coste during the years 1839-41. Flandin's observations on the state of Persia and international politics in the mid-19th century also continue to provide important documentary information.

Eugène Flandin was the son of Jean-Baptiste Flandin (1777-1853), an *intendant* in Napoléon's armies. Little is known about his mother Marie-Agnès Durand (b. 1792). Eugène's early years were linked with his father's tumultuous career. He was only two years old when his family returned from Naples (1811), where his father had been assigned since 1807, serving with Joachim Napoléon Murat. Eugene's father was then attached to the staff of Comte Pierre Bruno Daru during Napoléon's Russian campaign. After 1815, he remained an officer at half-pay and occupied various military administrative positions, notably in Algeria. He was prematurely retired for "irregularities" in 1835, while still responsible for the care of his four children. Besides various studies on military affairs, he produced voluminous correspondence and pamphlets which suggest a certain mania of persecution (he had been



condemned for his slanderous denunciations of those involved in the capture and spoilation of Algiers' treasures; see Duchêne-Marullaz).

These troubled years were most unfavorable for Eugène's education. We lack information on his school years and whatever artistic training he may have received. A military career, imposed on him by his father, was soon abandoned for his real vocation. He is said to have studied art in France or in Italy, but according to most biographers, he was self-taught (Carrillon, 1996, p. 12). Contrary to some baseless assertions, he was never a disciple of Horace Vernet (1789-1863; *ibid.*, pp. 10 ff.). He undertook his first trip to Italy in 1834 "to study the masters" (Flandin's letter of March 1836, in *ibid.*, p. 12). During the years 1835-36, he again visited Venice and probably pursued his training in Belgium. His first exposition of his work at the Paris Salon in 1836 was a success, notably his landscapes of Venice and Naples. In 1837, he was attached to the French army in Algeria as a military painter. That same year, he exhibited *La prise de Constantine* and other various Algerian and Belgian subjects at the Paris Salon. Being overcome with financial difficulties, he barely covered his debts by selling some of his paintings. In 1838 and 1839, he again exhibited his work at the Paris and provincial salons. His subsequent participation in the Paris Salon is not clearly attested (apart from mentions in 1853 and 1861; *ibid.*, pp. 16-22, with references to Flandin's letters).

In 1839, Flandin was, along with Coste, made a laureate of the Institut de France, and they both joined the embassy of the Comte de Sercey to Persia (1839-41). After parting from de Sercey's mission, they left Isfahan (31 May 1841) with very limited financial means and retinue. They pursued their periplus towards Hamadān, Kangāvar, Bīsotūn, Ḥolwān, etc. They went back to Isfahan and then on to Shiraz and the Persian Gulf (Būšehr), returning to Tehran via Shiraz, Isfahan, and Kāšān. They then traveled to Tabrīz, where disastrous sanitary conditions hampered their return through Trabzon or Tiflis so that they had to take the Tabrīz-Baghdad route through Kurdistan instead. Flandin's courage during this journey was praised by Coste, who also noted his intrepidity and his violent temper (*Notes I*, pp. 162 f., 367 f.). Their timetable and work were strictly organized. After Flandin's return to France, he was awarded the *Légion d'honneur*.

In March 1843, after fruitless searching for the site of Nineveh, Paul Emile Botta (1802-70) discovered the Assyrian capital of Dur Sharrukin on the site of modern Khorsabad. Botta mistook the place for the actual site of Nineveh (Assyro-Babylonian cuneiform had not yet been deciphered). In October,



Flandin was appointed to Botta's mission by the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres to draw the excavated remains and inscriptions. He also participated in the excavations which ended in October 1844.

After his return to France, Flandin married Elisabeth Leblanc in 1846, who gave birth to his only son (1847). His paintings had not brought him the success he expected, at least not enough to get him out of financial troubles, and his career shifted to archaeology and administrative work. In 1849, he was elected mayor of Cérelles, in Touraine, where he had his secondary residence. While devoting himself to improving and embellishing his little commune, he divided his time between Paris, Normandy, and Touraine. He also prepared the reports of his missions. Having resigned from his post as a mayor in 1865, he was promoted to prefectural and other administrative functions, mainly in the Indre-et-Loire department (from 1868 till at least 1877; see Carrillon, 1996, p. 28). Along with his multiple artistic and administrative activities, Flandin remained interested in the ancient and contemporary history of the Orient and worked on preparing the text and illustrations of the reports of his missions for publication.

Although his pictures often received awards in academic circles, Flandin remained less famous than most of his contemporary Orientalist painters. Without a master or disciple he did not attract the attention of critics. Sometimes considered as a disciple of Vernet and even Ingres, he was also confused with Hippolyte Flandrin (1809-64) or his brother Paul (1811-1902; see Carrillon, 1996, p. 7). His *Assaut de Constantine* (1838), purchased by Louis-Philippe for his Neuilly palace, was lacerated with bayonets during the 1848 revolution (Guyot de Fère). Flandin, however, continued to frequent the Orientalist salons. In the atelier of Jules Laurens, he met Colombari (who was in Persia between 1833-48), Prince Soltykoff, the widow of Hommaire de Hell, and other painters (ibid., p. 87). With its precision and minuteness, Flandin's painting was no longer appreciated when he retired from artistic life in the early 1870s, at the dawn of Impressionism (ibid., p. 91). His works are mainly kept in provincial museums and private collections. They still regularly appear in auction sales (*Catalogue*, in Carrillon, 1996, pp. 155-65, 180 titles).

Despite its many predecessors, Flandin's *Voyage en Perse* remains a model of its kind and an important source, particularly on early Qajar Persia, due to both its text and its illustrations. It provides many precious observations on history, archaeology, arts, architecture, geography, social and court life, royal and provincial administration, military organization, etc. Itineraries are



carefully noted. A table of distances between clearly identified stages is given in “time necessary at the ordinary pace of a horse” (*Voyage en Perse*, Itinéraire, I, pp. 505-8). Endowed with many gifts and professional skills (classical, military, and Orientalist painting; archeological drawing; writing and reporting; military and civil administration), Flandin provides us with very precious observations, accounts, and pictures. There is hardly any illustrated book on Persia, particularly one dealing with the Qajar period, without reproductions of his celebrated paintings of monuments, bazaars, personages and costumes, street scenes, landscapes, etc. All this work, supplemented with precise written observations, was accomplished despite the many hardships endured by Coste and Flandin during their travels. However, Flandin’s pioneering work in archeological drawing was, soon after his Oriental expeditions, superseded by the new art of photography. Daguerreotype and calotype made it possible to prepare pictures, notably of archeological remains, quickly and precisely, although archeological drawing still remains an indispensable complement to research and publication ([Plate II](#)).

**Coste**, Pascal-Xavier (b. Marseilles, 29 November 1787; d. Marseilles, 7 February 1879), French architect, famous for his extensive travels and surveys (Egypt, North Africa, Persia, Europe, Russia); his architectural achievements, notably in and around Marseilles; and for his drawings, writings, and archeological explorations.

Son of a joiner, Coste studied at Marseilles under Michel-enchaud (École des Beaux-Arts). During two Egyptian missions (1817-22; 1823-27), in the service of Moḥammad-‘Alī Pasha, he completed various industrial projects. He was appointed professor at the École d’architecture de Marseille in 1829 (Jacobi). His keen interest in Arabic language and antique architecture drew the attention of the Institut de France (Académie des beaux-arts, Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres). In accordance with the Ministère des Affaires étrangères, he was sent with Flandin to accompany de Sercey’s embassy to the court of Moḥammad Shah in Persia, with precise instructions drawn up by Raoul Rochette. Although the account of their Persian travel was written by Flandin, Coste provides very precise observations in his *Notes*, notably about their hardships, their shortage of money, the persons they met en route, etc. Soon after their return (February 1842), they divided their respective tasks to publish their drawings. Coste took responsibility for the architectural renderings and monumental plans; Flandin the representation of architectural



details, large tomb reliefs, picturesque views, etc. Flandin opted for lithography, while Coste preferred engraved illustrations. Both worked in close collaboration with the engravers (Maupois).

For years after their return, Coste remained in contact with Flandin, visiting him near Tours (Coste, 1867, II, pp. 208, 272.) He also kept in touch with de Sercey and members of his Persian embassy. In addition to the Order of the Lion and Sun (awarded to all members of de Sercey's mission), he was honored as a corresponding member of many institutions: Commission des arts et monuments de France (1844); Royal Institute of British Architects (1848); Académie des beaux-arts (1854), etc. He was awarded the *Légion d'honneur* (*chevalier*, by Louis-Philippe; *officier*, by Napoléon III). Although his architectural projects were sometimes found too expensive, he was praised by prominent contemporaries such as Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (Chevalier, pp. 2-3; see also Coste, 1867, II, pp. 285, 524-25).

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