University of Sistan and Baluchestan

Iranian Journal of Archaeological Studies

Print ISSN: 2251-743X Online ISSN: 2676-2919

Archaeological Sciences Research Centre

Charles Cournault's Call for a 'Persian Museum' at the Louvre

Daniel Thomas Potts

Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University,USA.
E- mail:daniel.potts@nyu.edu

Received: 19/ 08/ 2024; Received in Revised form: 20/ 10/ 2024; Accepted: 28/ 11/ 2024; Published: 20/ 12/ 2024

Abstract

In 1857, the French artist Charles Cournault published a plea for a French mission to Persepolis. The aim of the mission was to obtain examples of relief sculpture, like those he had seen in the British Museum, for the Louvre Museum. Believing that Achaemenid art deserved as much attention as Assyrian, Greek and Roman art, Cournault urged the government to undertake the mission and felt certain that it would be aided by the efforts of the Iranian diplomat Farrokh Khan who was, at the time, in France. Franco-Iranian relations having never been better, Cournault believed the time was right for a concerted effort to obtain diagnostic Persepolitan sculptures for the purpose of educating the public. If France did not pursue this goal, he felt certain that other powers would do so. Cournault displayed a reverence for ancient Achaemenid art and sought to promote its qualities to an audience accustomed to viewing Greek, Roman and, more recently, Assyrian art as the greatest of all early human artistic traditions.

Keywords: Charles Cournault, Persepolis, Louvre, Achaemenids.

Article Type: Research Article

Introduction

Although much attention has been paid to the early French expeditions to Susa and the work of the Dieulafoys and Jacques de Morgan (Chevalier 1997: 66-161; Chevalier 2002; Nasiri-Moghaddam 2004: 99-122) a proposal published in 1857 by the French artist, illustrator, archaeologist and museum director, Charles Cournault (1815-1904), calling for the acquisition of sculptures from Persepolis for the Louvre, appears to have gone unnoticed. As Cournault (Figure. 1). is generally unfamiliar to scholars of ancient Iran, his early life will be briefly sketched in order to highlight some of the formative influences that affected his professional and artistic trajectory.



Figure.1: *Charles Cournault. Public domain. (After: Anonymous n.d.).*

Cournault's Roots

Born at Langres on November 9th, 1815, Charles Cournault was the son of Henri Cournault (1783-1856), an artillery colonel, amateur scientist and

© The Author(s):

DOI: 10.22111/IJAS.2024.50523.1327

Publisher: University of Sistan and Baluchestan

lover of history (biographical details are drawn from Quintard 1904; Meixmoron de Dombasle 1905; Barrucand 1982; Demarolle 1993; Dagorne 2016; and Morinière 2019). As a child Cournault was tutored at home and at an early age demonstrated a keen interest in drawing. Continuing his education in Paris at the Collège Louis-le-Grand, Cournault graduated in 1833 and began studying law, a subject in which he had little interest. Harboring a passion for history and painting, Cournault abandoned his study of the law in 1836.

From 1833 to 1838 Cournault was a pupil of the painter Nicolas-Toussaint Charlet (1792-1845). In 1839, while working in Charlet's studio, he met Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) who, seven years earlier, had visited Morocco and Algeria as a member of comte Charles de Mornay's (1803-1878) diplomatic mission to Soltan Moulay 'Abd ur-Rahman of Morocco (Allard and Fabre 2018: 77; Hannoosh 2019). Cournault's friendship with Delacroix prompted him to follow in the great artist's footsteps and in 1840 he set out for Algiers together with the painter Louis-Eugène Ginain (1818-1886). During this trip, and on a second visit in 1843, Cournault produced a large number of drawings and watercolour. Algeria left a lasting impression on Cournault's artistic sensibilities and he developed a life-long interest in Islamic art, design and architecture, as well as a love of Arabic calligraphy and Hispano-Muslim arts of all kinds. These influences eventually led Cournault to the built an Orientalist house at Malzéville in which many of the objects he brought home from North Africa were installed.

In addition, a visit to Italy in 1845 brought Cournault into contact with the French Orientalist Adalbert de Beaumont (1809-1869) who, together with Eugène V. Collinot (1824-1889), had established a factory for the production of 'Persian' ceramics and tiles at Venice (Arnoux 1868: 399; Collinot and Beaumont 1883). A lengthy stay in England, particularly in London, followed in 1851. Between these study tours, Cournault applied himself to the study of numismatics, ancient bronzes and Oriental manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Royale, and spent long hours in the Louvre. He also met Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey (1804-1892) and Émile Prisse d'Avennes (1807-1879), both of whom stimulated his love of Chinese, Arab and Persian decorative arts. From 1858 Cournault began to be involved in archaeology and the Museum of Nancy, where he made fundamental contributions to prehistory and Gallo-Roman studies and earned himself renown as the founder of Merovingian archaeology and one of the first scientific archaeological illustrators (Demarolle 1993; Anonymous n.d). It is for this phase of Cournault's busy life that he is best known.

Cournault's biographers have stressed that, 'As a painter, collector and master of his work, it was always the Orient that stimulated Charles Cournault. But what is this Orient? In his pictorial works the desire for accuracy takes second place to the picturesque effect; an unsystematic, eclectic taste manifests itself in his collection; and his house mixes heterogeneous elements. There is no doubt: this is an Orient that resists the analytical gaze of critical reasoning. It is an entity built of nostalgia, the ideal, of simplicity, it is the Orient of the Romantics in all its beauty' (Barrucand 1982: 36; see also Hecre 2004). The sources of Cournault's Orient, it has been assumed, were largely North African. Yet, as noted above, Cournault was also in conversation with colleagues who were deeply interested in Persian ornament and, at the British Museum, he was exposed to the aesthetics of ancient Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome when he was in London.

Farrokh Khan

Overlooked by all of Cournault's biographers, however, is an interest in Persepolis which seems to have found written expression when one of Iran's premier diplomats of the 19th century, Farrokh Khan Gaffārī Amīn al-Molk (1812-1871), was in France in 1857 (Gaffary 2012). Farrokh Khan's presence appears to have been the catalyst for the development of Cournault's thoughts, and his importance should not be underestimated.

The career of Farrokh Khan (Figure. 2) began when he was a boy. After serving Fath 'Ali Shah as a page he pursued a military career, taking part in the sieges of Herat (1833, 1838) and in suppressing uprisings in Mazandaran (1836), Isfahan (1837) and Gilan (1839). Mirza Taqi Khan placed him in charge of tax collection throughout the Qajar realm in 1850 and in 1854 he became private treasurer to Naser al-Din Shah (Gaffary 2012). In the summer of 1856, at the height of the crisis that resulted in the Anglo-Persian War, the Persian chargé d'affaires in Constantinople, Ahmad Effendi, held talks with the British Minister, Stratford Canning. When it became clear that no rapprochement could be achieved, Naser al-Din Shah sent Farrokh Khan to the Ottoman capital to take charge of negotiations. By late August he had left Tehran. On November 22nd Canning handed Farrokh Khan an ultimatum with

a list of demands. First and foremost amongst these was the lifting of the siege of Herat. Unsurprisingly, Naser al-Din Shah rejected the ultimatum, Herat fell, and war was declared by Britain against Iran. In company with the French Minister in Tehran, Nicolas Prosper Bourrée (1811-1886), Farrokh Khan sailed for Marseille aboard the French imperial yacht Roland, which had previously been Napoleon III's and had seen action in the Crimean War. The vessel landed on January 13th, 1857, and four days later, Farrokh Khan, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, and his suite arrived in Paris.



Figure.2: *Farrokh Khan. An album of 195 albumen print positive photographs, business card format; 31cm Public domain Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, 4-NE-112 (1). (After: http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb403559372)*

Described in the press as 'the lion of the day,' Farrokh Khan was fêted with a magnificent ball at the Tuileries. By mid-February, he was deep in negotiations with the British Minister in Paris, Lord Cowley (1804-1884), with instructions from Naser al-Din Shah to finalize a peace treaty. When negotiations appeared to stall in late February, Napoleon III intervened personally and the final treaty was signed on March 4th. A dispatch announcing peace reached General Sir James Outram just as he was planning the next steps in his campaign. According to one account, 'When the news spread, a general feeling of disappointment prevailed throughout the little camp. In a few hours the piles of commissariat stores, the mountain-train, the light field-guns, the animals of the land-transport, were being hurried down for re-embarkation to the river — the frigates and transports lying off, ready to receive them, a few yards from the banks' (Clerk 1862: 286-287).

Farrokh Khan was a hugely popular figure in Paris, mingling in the highest society and dazzling one and all with the quantity of diamonds in which he habitually appeared. His further activities, both in Britain and on the Continent, need not concern us here. Rather, it is his appearance in Cournault's Persepolis proposal that occasions his inclusion in this study.

The Persepolis Project

In 1857, while Farrokh Khan was still in France, Cournault published a proposal (Cournault 1857) concerning Persepolis that seems to have escaped the attention of most scholars. It is given here in my own translation:

A Persian Museum at the Louvre

The history of the different vicissitudes that have tested the arts of civilized peoples presents a vast subject of study. In recent times, the spirit of historical investigation has spread and found a rich source of new information.

As early as the sixteenth century, attention was already beginning to be paid to Greek and Roman epigraphic monuments. Coins were examined. They came to throw light on history, and were a great help to artists of the Renaissance. More recently, it has been the Orient's turn. Travellers and artists have journeyed throughout Egypt and have reported from this interesting country, not only extended descriptions and exact drawings, but the existence of monuments which have made us appreciate the art of the ancients in its most solemn expression.

For the English India has been a rich vein that has not been sufficiently exploited. Judea and Mesopotamia have very recently been the destination of many visitors. Our museums have been enriched with the bas-reliefs of Nineveh, a tomb of Judea (Saulcy 1852) and a tomb of a king[1] of Sidon. (Luynes 1856).

[1]Ešmunazar II (r. 465-451 BCE). His sarcophagus was 'discovered in February, 1855, near Sayda, the old Sidon. The French Consul, M. Peretié, acquired it, and sent it to France, where it has been deposited in the Louvre, as a worthy companion to the kingly monuments of Egyptian Pharaohs and Assyrian monarchs.' See Nott *etal*.1857: 131

It is not just the semi-savage peoples of South America who have not got a place in this palace of the arts.

A single people appears forgotten, and yet it ranks amongst the most illustrious. It is the Persian people. The travels of Chardin (Chardin 1711).and Ker Porter (Ker Porter 1821).have taught us that there were, not far from Shiraz, the most imposing ruins in the world after those of Thebes. Recently a commission composed of M. Coste, architect, and M. Flandin, draftsman, explored these ruins(Flandin 1851-1852).

The palace of Darius and Xerxes was measured and drawn. A magnificent work has put the public in a position to judge the beauty of Persian art. We know of nothing better made nor more complete in this regard. Nevertheless, one wish remains. That is to see a collection of Persian antiquities arrive to complete the history of art at the Louvre. The sculpture of the ancient Persians is in no way inferior to the production of early Greece, when the hieratic forms had not yet been altered.

The British Museum offers us four bas-reliefs taken from the palace of Persepolis[1] which recall the sculptures of Aegina[2]. Same simplicity of line, same calm expression. These bas-reliefs, made to decorate monuments, contributed to the overall effect through the skillful arrangement of vertical lines. It is great art, too quickly forgotten, too late.

We wish therefore that the Imperial government which is in the process of gloriously finalizing the gigantic achievement of the Louvre, considers enriching one of the rooms of the palace with diverse specimens of the art of the ancient Persians.

The moment seems all the more opportune, as we still have at Paris His Excellency Feroukh-Khan, a Persian prince remarkable both for his eminent knowledge as for his favorable disposition towards European ideas. He has visited our museums and understands the degree of interest that we can have to possess some fragments from the ruins of Persepolis. There is no doubt that upon his return to his country, he will assist with all his power the young scholars that the French government might designate to go and choose some bas-reliefs in the Mardacht[3] plain.

And let nobody talk of vandalism and profanation! From this perspective no museum would be possible. These ruins are abandoned in the midst of a desert, and nobody bothers themselves nowadays about these relics of the past.

Without causing any noticeable harm to these immense monuments, one could detach some bas-reliefs, [and] remove some fallen [column] capitals. A skilfully made choice would give us a variety of specimens illustrating an art that we know in France only from hearsay. What we undertake there, we are doing in Egypt, [and] at Nineveh. Let us take action at Persepolis, lest others[4] choose to do so before us.

Discussion and Conclusion

Cournault's vision of a Persepolitan 'museum' was inspired primarily by an interest in design, ornament and the ancient representation of the human form. It was actuated by a desire to provide visitors to the Louvre with a more comprehensive set of sources for the history of art than was then available. His exposure to the Assyrian monuments and to a small selection of Persepolitan relief fragments in the British Museum, coupled with his appreciation of Greek art, and the obvious importance of Persepolis for a complete and balanced understanding of the art of the pre-modern empires, is apparent. Equally apparent is his grasp of the advantages that might be derived from Farrokh Khan's Francophile inclinations. The Qajar envoy had been celebrated continuously during his stay in France. He had mixed with the highest eschelons of society, both royal and non-royal. All of these circumstances seemed to combine to make the moment — 1857 — ripe for a French initiative at Persepolis. At his audience of leave with Napoleon III on April 12th, 1858,

The Persian envoy Ferukh Khan, whose departure for Marseilles we have reported, will embark there for Constantinople on board the steam frigate 'Christopher Columbus', which the government has placed at his disposal. He is taking

[1] In 1851 one could see seven relief fragments from Persepolis in the Grand Central Saloon of the British Museum. These included, 'Two bas-reliefs from Persepolis, one representing a Persian wearing the cidaris, and bearing offerings, the other four doryphore, or bodyguard of the king. *Presented by the Right Hon. Sir Gore Ouseley*…. Fragments of two-bas reliefs from the palace of Persepolis, representing two soldiers wearing long dresses and tiaras. *Presented by the Earl of Aberdeen*. And a similar slab complete. *Presented by the Right Hon. Mountstuart Elphinstone.* Part of a bas-relief, a man bringing a horse or chariot from the same place. Presented by the Earl of Aberdeen…. Bas-relief, representing a man conducting a horse, from the palace of Persepolis. *Presented by the Earl of Aberdeen*.' See Anonymous 1851: 112.

[2] A reference to the sculptures from Aegina acquired by the Bavarian king Ludwig I and displayed in Munich. See Klenze and Schorn 1851: 55-75.

[3] Marv Dasht

[4] It is virtually certain that Cournault had the British in mind here.

with him magnificent gifts from the Emperor for the Shah of Persia, a complete collection of samples of all the products of Parisian industry, as well as a selection of elementary textbooks, which are to be translated and introduced into the schools of Persia(Anonymous 1858).

Under the circumstances, it is perfectly understandable that Cournault would have felt that France's influence in Iran had never been greater and their bilateral relationship never better. What finer evidence of Persian high culture could be displayed for the edification of the French public than examples of sculptural reliefs from Persepolis? Importantly, this suggestion was not the product of a proto-colonialist desire to possess and dominate Persia's heritage. Rather, it seems to have been the expression of a universalist relativization of different traditions in art history to which he sincerely wished to expose the French public. Visitors to the Louvre would be afforded an unparalleled opportunity to see and interact with the striking monuments of Persepolis, in rooms not far from those in which examples of Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Assyrian art could be seen, thus affording a context in which mental comparisons between these great artistic traditions could be made. Cournault's motives appear to have been genuinely sincere. At the same time, it is clear that, in addition to downplaying "any noticeable harm to these immense monuments" caused by the proposed removal of relief fragments from Persepolis, Cournault paid absolutely no attention to the notion that what he was proposing — the partial dismemberment of an historic monument on the territory of another sovereign state — had profound ethical implications. Intimately aware of France's own archaeology and its growth as a scientific discipline, he would probably have been aghast if it had been suggested that another foreign power might desire to enter France and remove a portion of Chartres or Notre Dame so that it could be displayed in a museum for the edification of its citizens. Yet the idea that Persepolis belonged to humanity at large, and deserved to be known and understood by the broadest public possible, eclipsed any concept of the rights of a people to the inheritance and retention of their own cultural patrimony. Cournault was certainly not alone in being subject to such an ethical blind spot, but it is important to recognize that in his desire to showcase Persepolitan sculpture in a European venue, he was perfectly oblivious to the deeply flawed ethical position he was advocating.

How the course of the subsequent study and eventual excavation of Persepolis might have been changed, had Cournault's proposal been acted upon, we shall, of course, never know. It was another twenty years before Farhad Mirza Mo'tamed al-Dowleh (1817-1877) commissioned excavations at the site (Mousavi 2012: 140-144) and only in 1891 that the destruction, masking as excavation, by Herbert Joseph Weld-Blundell (1852-1935) was carried out (Mousavi 2012: 149-154). It is an understatement to say that France missed a huge opportunity when Cournault's proposal was ignored, even if it is unclear whether or not this would have led to a program of sustained investigations at Persepolis.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of the paper.

References

Anonymous. 1851. *Synopsis of the Contents of the British Museum*, 57th ed. London: G. Woodfall and Son.

Anonymous. 1858. Frankreich. Paris, 14. April. *Frankfurter Journal (Erste Beilage zu No. 94)*. 16 April.

Anonymous. n.d . Charles Cournault (1815-1904), Premier Conservateur du Musée Lorrain: un Artiste au Service de L'histoire et de L'archéologie,[Charles Cournault (1815-1904), First Curator of the Musée Lorrain: an Artist in the Service of History and Archaeology], Musée Lorrain. https://musee-lorrain.nancy.fr/fileadmin/ML/PDF/fichier.

Allard, S & C. Fabre. 2018. *Delacroix*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Arnoux, L. 1868. Pottery. In *Reports on the Paris Universal Exhibition*, *1867,* volume. 2. London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 391-414.

Barrucand, M. 1982. Charles Cournault, Orientaliste Lorrain du XIXe siècle,[Charles Cournault, a Lorraine "Orientalist" of the 19th Century], *Le Pays Lorrain* 63: 25-38

Chardin, J.1711. *Voyages de Mr. le Chevalier Chardin, en Perse, et Autres Lieux de L'Orient,* [Travels of Mr. Chevalier Chardin, in Persia, and other Places in the Orient], Volume 10. Amsterdam: Chez Jean Louis de Lorme.

Chevalier, N. 1997. *Une Mission en Perse: 1897-1912*,[A Mission to Persia: 1897-1912]. Paris : Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

Chevalier, N. 2002. *La Recherche Archéologique Française au Moyen-Orient,1842-1947,*[French Archaeological Research in the Middle East, 1842-1947]. Paris: Éditions Recherche Sur Les Civilisations.

Clerk, C. 1862. Shiraz to Bushire. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 92(1): 286-314.

Collinot, R. & A. de. Beaumont. 1883. *Ornaments de la Perse. Recueil de Dessins Pour L'art et L'industrie,* [Ornaments of Persia, Collection of Drawings for art and Industry].Paris: Canson.

Cournault, C.1857. Un Musée Perse au Louvre, [A Persian Museum at the Louvre], *Revue de L'Orient, de L'Algérie et des Colonies* 6(1): 62-64 .

Dagorne, R. 2016. Monsieur Le Conservateur Cournault, [Mr. the Curator Cournault], *Le Pays Lorrain* 97(1): 7-12.

Demarolle, J.M. 1993. L'Aquarelle au Service des "Antiquités": L'Album Archéologique de Charles Cournault, [The Watercolour in the Service of "Antiquities": The Archaeological Album of Charles Cournault] , *Mémoires de L'Académie Nationale de Metz 7th ser.* 5: 83-98.

Flandin, E.N. 1851. *Voyage en Perse de MM. Eugène Flandin, Peintre, et Pascal Coste, Architecte, Attachés à L'Ambassade de France en Perse Pendant les Années 1840 et 1841* ,[Journey to Persia by Messrs. Eugène Flandin, painter, and Pascal Coste, Architect, Attached to the French Embassy in Persia During the Years 1840 and 1841], 2 volumes. Paris: G.J. Baudry.

Gaffary, F. 2012. Amīn-al-Dawla, Farrok Khan Ḡaffārī. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/amin-al-dawla-farrok-khan-gaffari.

Hecre, E. 2004. *Les Orients de Charles Cournault,* [The Orients of Charles Cournault]. Metz: S. Domini.

Hannoosh, M. 2019. *Journey to the Maghreb and Andalusia, 1832: The Travel Notebooks and other Writings, Eugène Delacroix.* University Park PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Ker Porter, R. 1821. *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia, &c. &c. During the Years 1817, 1818, 1819, and 1820*, 2 volumes. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown.

Klenze, L. von & L. Schorn.1851. *Beschreibung der Glyptothek Seiner Majestät des Königs Ludwig I. von Bayern,*[Description of the Glyptothek of His Majesty King Ludwig I of Bavaria]. Munich: Comission Cotta.

Luynes, H. d'A. de. 1856. *Mémoire sur le Sarcophage et Inscription funéraire d'Esmunazar, roi de Sidon,*[Memoir on the sarcophagus and the funerary inscription of Esmunazar, king of Sidon] . Paris: H. Plon.

Meixmoron de Dombasle, C. de. 1905. Charles Cournault. *Mémoires de L'Académie de Stanislas 6th ser*. 2: 219-240.

Morinière, S. 2019. *Charles Cournault Foundation 2019001.* Saint-Germain-en-Laye: Musée d'Archéologie Nationale.

Mousavi, A. 2012. *Persepolis. Discovery and Afterlife of a World Wonder*. Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614510338

Nasiri-Moghaddam, N. 2004. *L'archéologie Française en Perse et les Antiquités Nationales (1884-1914)*,[French Archaeology in Persia and National Antiquities (1884-1914)]. Paris: Connaissances et Savoirs.

Nott, J. C; G. R. Gliddon; A. Maury; F. Pulszky & J. A. Meigs. 1857. *Indigenous Races of the Earth; or, New Chapters of Ethnological Inquiry...* Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co- London: Trübner and Co.

Quintard, L. 1904. Charles Cournault (1815-1904). *Bulletin des Sociétés Artistiques de L'est* (March supplement): 60-61.

Saulcy, F. de. 1852. Recherches Sur Les Tombeaux des Rois de Juda et Preuves Que le Couvercle Que a été Trouvé Dans un de ces Tombeaux, et qui est Depose au Louvre, est celui de la Tombe de David , [Research on the Tombs of the Kings of Judah and Proofs that the Cover which was found in one of These Tombs, and which is Deposited in the Louvre, is That of the Tomb of David], *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne* 28(1): 245-266