

---

H-France Review Vol. 10 (November 2010), No. 180

Sudipta Das, *De Broglie's Armada: A Plan for the Invasion of England, 1765-1777*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2009. xiii + 116 pp. Map, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$20.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-7618-4395-5.

Review by Linda Frey, University of Montana, and Marsha Frey, Kansas State University.

Sudipta Das, who received a B.A. from Calcutta University and a M. A. and Ph.D. from Tulane University, has previously published *Myths and Realities of French Imperialism in India, 1763-1783* in 1992 (American University Press). This book, however, focuses on the plans for an invasion of England drafted by Charles François, comte de Broglie, the younger brother of the famous general Victor François. Broglie drafted the document in 1765, two years after the disastrous peace of Paris and revised it in 1777 as the French moved towards an alliance with the United States. The plan relied on diversionary attacks and on a joint Franco-Spanish fleet that could overwhelm the British in the Channel. That victory would serve as a prelude to an invasion of 60,000 men. Publishing Broglie's plan is an interesting idea, but it is not well executed. argues that "it is historically significant that the French Directory from 1795-1799 and Napoleon's schemes during 1803-1805, were . . . essentially drawn from Broglie's original plan of invasion" (p. xi), but she does not develop this claim. These subsequent plans and their purportedly derivative nature are never analyzed. She does discuss very briefly three *mémoires* dating from 1763 to 1770, but the author of the first was not, as she asserts, the French minister to London and the citation reference to all three, A. G. is never identified (p. 20 fn. 1). Das does not compare Broglie's plans to some of the others, which were drafted virtually at this same time, such as those of the duc de Crillon, a French officer (1781), of Faure, a shipowner from Havre (1780), of the marquis de Jaucourt (1779-1782), or of an English deserter and naval officer Hamilton from (1778 to 1780). Nor does she note an interesting aftermath, the invasion plans in 1781 and 1782 developed respectively by two individuals employed by Boglie, Ricard (whom she never mentions) or Rozière in 1782.

There is some introductory material. Das includes a three page chapter on Broglie and his family, although the elder brother's role is not noted nor the fact that he was appointed at one time to head the invasion forces. There is a nine-page chapter on French foreign policy, a seven- page overview, and a four-page conclusion. These chapters form too small a part of the book and do not set the invasion plans adequately within the larger framework of the all too perceptible failures of French foreign policy. The costly war of the Austrian Succession ended in 1748 without advantage to France. And then? France "changed partners but remained the dupe" in the Seven Years' War.[1] France was defeated at land, on sea and on land, in the colonies and worst of all on the continent. The Abbé de Bernis argued that "Our policy has been absurd and shameful." [2] Other diplomatic crises in Europe marked the further retreat of French power and highlighted France's betrayal of her allies: the Poles and the Turks and within the Empire, Bavaria and Cologne. As France's geopolitical ambitions exceeded its grasp, France lost international credibility.

Das does mention the strategy of Étienne-François, duc de Choiseul, minister of foreign affairs (1758-1761 and 1766-1770), after the defeat of the Seven Years' War and his attempts to rebuild the French military, but these ideas are not analyzed in any depth. His dismissal in 1770 not coincidentally coincided with Broglie's second exile. She never discusses the rebuilding of the French navy after 1763 and only briefly the strategy of Vergennes, who was appointed foreign minister in 1774. A few years earlier in 1771, Vergennes had noted that the king had "not a ship in readiness, not a magazine supplied." [3] He could not but realize that an invasion posed certain logistical problems, a shortage of men, material, and ships, and would have to counter British naval superiority. Was the invasion for Vergennes only a feint? Nor does she discuss the enormous cost at a time when the monarchy was facing financial collapse. Vergennes was fully aware of the catastrophic bankruptcy France faced and maintained: "Even if I could annihilate England, I would refrain from such a great extravagance." [4] From what she has provided it is impossible to judge the feasibility of Broglie's plans. Das also missed the opportunity to set the issues within a larger context, such as the importance of the French navy in the American war for independence and the relationship between Broglie and Lafayette. The debate within the French council of state about the diplomatic repercussions of an invasion of England and an expansion of war aims is not mentioned, nor is the role of Antoine Raymond Jean Gualbert Gabriel de Sartine, comte d'Alby (July 12, 1729-- September 7, 1801), Secretary of State for the Navy (1774-1780). The narrow focus of this work will frustrate both the specialist and the non-specialist as will the failure to consult some of the pivotal works by John Hardman, T. C. W. Blanning, Jeremy Black, and Bailey Stone. She cites two of Jonathan Dull's works, but not his *Age of the Ship of the line: The British and French Navies, 1650-1815* nor his *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War*.

Broglie's letters and *mémoires* are not reproduced in the original French. Unfortunately, the translation is in many parts unintelligible (e.g., p. 45). As she admits, "The translation in English follows the original French document in syntax and punctuation. As a result, translated sentences in some parts of the text may appear convoluted and awkward in construction" (p. xiii). That admission is only too true and the result is predictable. The perplexed reader will struggle with too many of the sentences. To give but a few examples: "this what one is going to examine by discussing. . . ." (p. 36) or "then from the profound secret to which it was subjected." (p. 23). Those same problems bedevil the introductory material. Some sentences demanded editorial oversight: "To accomplish the readiness for war" (p. 8); "in order to enable a naval victory as a prelude to invasion" (p.6); "by this time the French naval and armed forces had been sufficiently retrieved" (p. 9); "At the heart of the project was the necessity of a victory in a major sea battle that would give the Bourbon powers an advantage to accomplish the land invasion. (p. 14);" "A large map... drew an itinerary on London" (p. 16). She often uses words that are anachronistic or just wrong. For example, in referring to the ministers, she speaks of "others of the avant-garde" ( p. 6). As Mark Twain once observed, "one should always use the correct word and not its second cousin" or more famously, "the difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug." In addition, any analysis of military plans requires a map but the one included is of poor quality and virtually useless (p. xiv). The text is further marred by erratic capitalization, incorrect accents, and numerous spelling errors in French, as well as quixotic footnoting. The mistakes are so numerous that they swamp the text and make much of the introduction and the translation unreadable.

Moreover, many of her assessments are questionable. It is odd to read that "the succession of invasion plans. . . had all been of a defensive nature" (p. 14). Given the fiscal collapse it is doubtful that "If Choiseul and Broglie had not left the diplomatic scene in 1771, their plans and impending strategy may have created a milestone in the annals of French history at that very juncture" (p. 9). One can perhaps judge that statement in the light of the failure of the 1779 invasion that involved "the clearing of the English Channel by a Franco-Spanish fleet of at least fifty ship of the line." [5 ] Broglie's writings

illustrates the rancorous Anglophobia and the revanchist sentiment only too typical in the wake of the peace of 1763. The modern Carthage was both more resilient and stronger than either Broglie or Professor Das acknowledged.

## NOTES

[1] T. C. W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London, Longman, 1986), p. 41.

[2] Quoted in Bailey Stone, *The Genesis of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), p.62.

[3] Quoted in Orville T. Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 219.

[4] Quoted in Jacques de Trentinian "The Broglie 'French Connection' and the Planned Invasion of England," Trentinian, <http://xenophongroup.com/mcjoynt.invasion.htm>.

[5] Jonathan R. Dull, "Lafayette, Franklin, and the Coming of Rochambeau's Army," <http://xenophongroup.com/mcjoynt.dulltlk.htm>, p. 4.

Linda Frey  
University of Montana  
linda.frey@umontana.edu

Marsha Frey  
Kansas State University  
mfrey@ksu.edu

Copyright © 2010 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172