



# Margaret de Flahaut (1788-1867)

## A Scotswoman at the French Court Diana Scarisbrick

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- Features eight miniatures painted by Margaret de Flahaut
- Draws on unpublished and intimate correspondence from the Archives Nationales, Paris, and elsewhere

Margaret Mercer Elphinstone (1788-1867), with her powerful mind and independent spirit, was never daunted by adversity as she sought to realize her ambitions for her family against the background of intellectual upheaval and social and political change which followed the French Revolution and the end of the ancien régime. The turning-point in her life was her controversial marriage in 1817 with the general Charles de Flahaut (1785-1870), which, contrary to all expectations, resulted in one of the most successful partnerships in the 'auld alliance' between France and Scotland.

Whereas the life of her husband, the dashing Napoleonic general and diplomat Charles de Flahaut, is well known, Margaret has remained in the shadows. Yet this biographical study, based on unpublished correspondence in the Archives Nationales, Paris, reveals her to have been the more interesting of the two. It shows how much he depended on her brains, political judgment and artistic taste as well as her fortune to guide him in his career. Her lively, observant but wicked pen takes us with her on visits to Talleyrand, to the marquis de Lafayette, to the duchesse de Praslin, to house parties in stately homes of England and Scotland. Acknowledged a superb hostess, her descriptions of the menus, and entertainments organized in her homes in Scotland, London and Paris, and at the Flahaut embassies in Vienna and in London capture the flavor of those cosmopolitan gatherings. A lifelong liberal in politics and an upholder of Whig principles, her politicomanie inspires sharp comments on the opponents of Reform in England and on the self-seeking ministers of Louis-Philippe in France.

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Diana Scarisbrick, FSA, is a historian specializing in jewelry and engraved gems. She has curated exhibitions in the United Kingdom and abroad and has written many books, including, more recently, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty* (2007) and *Portrait Jewels: Opulence and Intimacy from the Medici to the Romanovs* (2011). For many years she was the historian of Chaumet, the great Parisian jeweler. As research associate at the Beazley Archive, Oxford, she collaborated with Professor Sir John Boardman and Claudia Wagner on *The Beverley Collection of Gems at Alnwick Castle* (Philip Wilson Publishers, 2016). In 2014 she published with Benjamin Zucker the biography of Elihu Yale (Thames & Hudson). She is now working on her forthcoming history of diamond jewelry (1360-2018) for Thames & Hudson.