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A BRITISH MILITARY MISSION TO THE NEAR EAST, RUSSIA AND THE DANUBIAN PRINCIPALITIES (1835-1836)
(Summary)

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In 1835, during a strained phase of Russian-British relations, when the western public was flooded with rumours of Russia’s bellicose preparations, the Foreign Office was extremely eager to have reliable information on the military situation of the Black Sea area. Thus, when the Earl of Durham was appointed British ambassador to St. Petersburg, it was also decided to send to Southern Russia two British officers to personally ascertain “whether unusual preparations were perceivable in fortresses, military stations, ports, and arsenals”. The mission was official and overt, and the consent of Tsar Nicholas was obtained on a basis of reciprocity. Thus, Lieutenant-Colonel William Lennox Lascelles Fitzgerald de Ros and Captain Charles Ramsay Drinkwater Bethune started, in July 1835, for the Crimea, via Constantinople, a mission which was to last for more than half a year, period during which they travelled 4,000 miles by land and as much by sea. Starting from de Ros’ journal, published in 1855, and their unpublished correspondence with the Foreign Office, this paper offers a detailed précis of their itinerary and mission, with details on military aspects (the status of Greek, Turkish, Moldavian and Austrian armies), but also with minute references to the political, economic or social realities from the districts visited.

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