

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

CONSTANT DE MASSOUL, baron de Constant, Pierre- Barthélemy-Marie-Reine-Joseph- Alexandre, dit

Lyon 1755 – Paris 1813

The son of Pierre Constant de Massoul (1721–1796), chevalier de Saint-Louis, capitaine au régiment d'infanterie de Provence, lieutenant du roi de Neuville, from a family long established in Lyon (an échevin in 1697), and his wife, Marie-Louise-Éléonore de Béhague, Pierre-Barthélemy de Constant was baptised at Lyon, paroisse Saint-Paul (contrary to some sources), 2.VII.1755, the day after his birth; he was admitted to the École militaire in 1766. He joined the régiment de Dauphin-dragons in 1772, becoming capitaine 1779. Between 1781 and 1786 he served in Martinique as concierge des prisons du Fort-Royal (a file in the AN d'outre-mer relates to his attempt to recover expenditure of some 15,000 livres on improvements to the military hospital). He became chevalier of both the orders of Saint-Louis and of Saint-Lazare. Father and son were living at place Saint-Michel, Lyon, when they took part in the assembly of the nobility at Lyon in 1789. Although the son (unlike his father) rarely used the Massoul surname in French sources, he does appear as “Constant, sieur de Massoul” in a list of pensions (he received one of 500 livres from 1779 “pour appointemens en qualité de Capitaine attaché au corps des dragons”).

Constant was appointed aide de camp to his uncle, général de Béhague, in 1791; they were sent to Martinique to deal with the growing tensions, with an army of 5000 men. Constant was acting maréchal des logis du corps de troupe de la Martinique. However Béhague's mission was countermanded by Rochambeau, who sought to apply the 1792 revolutionary order extending citizenship to all: Béhague was dismissed (and joined the armée des émigrés in London). The slave-owners in Martinique however opposed the revolutionary measures, and would not let Rochambeau take charge. Constant made a detailed memorandum of the complicated events (AN d'outre-mer, 2.IV.1793; Constant's correspondence with Dundas and Hawkesbury is also attached): on 19.XI.1792 he arrived in Dover to secure British support for the pro-slavery royalists, leading to the accord signed by Dubuc in London, 4.II.1793, putting Martinique under temporary British jurisdiction.

Further correspondence with the British government can be found in the Liverpool papers in the British Library. It shows that baron de Constant, as he was styled, remained in London, initially residing at 15 Wells Street, off Oxford Street (letter of 15.X.1793 to Lord Hawkesbury, soon to be Earl of Liverpool, chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and President of the Board of Trade). An undated memorial (c.1796) sent to Lord Liverpool contained an appeal from a group of émigrés concerning the “établissement du B^{ron} de Constant dans New Bond Street” on which they apparently depended, complaining about the (unexplained) “absence forcée du B^{ron} de

Constant”. (Two of the 14 signatories were the comte de Montamy and the chevalier d'Arclais de Montamy, nephews of the learned Didier d'Arclais de Montamy whose *Traité des couleurs pour la peinture en émail* was published in 1765.) In a letter of 23.V.1798 to Liverpool, Constant (back at 136 New Bond Street) invited the minister to his impending wedding to the daughter of the last marquis de Lambertye (1748–1819), who, he reminded his correspondent, was a relation of George III. At St Marylebone, 8.VI.1798, Peter, baron de Constant married Suzanne-Célinie-Zoé de Lambertye (1779–1843). The marriage contract, signed in London the previous day, was witnessed by among others the ducs de Bourbon and Harcourt, the marquis de Castellane and the bishop of Nantes.

Although there is no previous record of his artistic interests, in London 1795–98 Constant worked as a colourman with a shop and factory at 136 New Bond Street, London, premises he shared with the apothecary Thomas Paytherus (Constant's name does not appear in the Westminster rate books, but the address is that used in his correspondence with Lord Liverpool). Initially he advertised (*Morning chronicle*, 16.V.1795 and later dates), using the name Massoul alone rather than baron de Constant (presumably with the motive of concealing his involvement in trade), in partnership with a miniaturist called La Tour (possibly Louis Brion de La Tour, *q.v.*; the advertisements offer the “Physigraph” for drawing landscapes, etc.; “Mr Latour, Miniature Painter” had previously announced the “Physigraph” invention in the *Times*, 3.IV.1794, from his house at 72 New Bond Street; the royal patronage (of Princess Sophia of Gloucester) and address suggest a connection with Francis Tatton Latour of Bond Street, pianist to the Prince of Wales). A further notice in the *Times*, 19.XI.1795 refers to the “Manufactory of Superfine Colours, established last year by Messrs MASSOUL and Co. at 136 New Bond Street.” By 1796 the firm of “Massoul & Co.” was offering Belanger's views of Jamaica by subscription, from the same premises. By 1797 it was advertising perfectly prepared oil colours. The death of Constant's father in Lyon in 1796 (état civil) removed any ambiguity about Constant de Massoul's identity.

In 1797 *A treatise on the art of painting, and the composition of colours* was published in London (from 136 New Bond Street), “translated from the French of M. Constant de Massoul” (no French edition seems to have been printed). Although it draws on numerous sources, it integrates them and is more than a mere compilation. It described a wide range of techniques in painting and drawing, including a section on pastel. Constant reviewed pastels available commercially, in Lausanne, Vevay, Nürnberg and Paris, and described supports of paper, vellum and prepared cloth, mentioning the need for keyed stretchers for the last of these (a very recent introduction). A fixing method is presented based on information supplied by the pastellist Longastre (*q.v.*).

Constant also acknowledges observations from Danloux, Arlaud and Belanger.

The author stated that he had had “little practice [himself] in Crayon Painting”: but it seems likely that he had at least an amateur competence in a number of the fields he describes. One client must have been John Russell (*q.v.*), whose second posthumous sale (25.III.1807, Lot 126) included “nine bottles of Messoul's colours”.

Constant remained in exile in London until at least 1799 (when a passport was issued allowing him to travel to Hamburg, although it is unclear whether he went). It has not hitherto been noticed that Constant was associated with the firm of P. C. Lambertye, said to have been established in 1788 at 5 rue d'Orléans-au-Marais (rue Charlot today (although the earliest references date from after his return to Paris); the firm was later taken over by Lambertye's pupil Joseph Panier in 1822, and, in 1850, by Jacques-Michel Paillard. It offered “couleurs en tablettes et en poudre, très-bien préparées; coffrets en carton, décorés d'une manière agréable; papiers vélins d'une grande beauté...”. The initials P.-C. do not correspond to any recorded member of the Lambertye family, and may be a reference to Constant himself (to avoid open derogation).

He died in Paris, at this same address, 5 rue d'Orléans-au-Marais (he is described in his estate inventory as a négociant). The house was the subject of a sale by Constant and his wife (AN MC/RE/VI/23, 22.XI.1811–11.I.1812), evidently not completed by the time of his death. His widow moved to Poitiers with other members of her family in 1814 (Guilhermy 1886, p. 351: her son Barthélemy, baron de Constant died in Poitiers in 1867); she was given a pension of 1200 livres (*Liste générale des pensionnaires...*, 1833).

Bibliography

AN MC XCIX/8, 20.VIII.18013; AN d'outre-mer, various files; British Artists' Suppliers at npg.org.uk; British Library, correspondence of Lord Liverpool, Add. MS 38229–38232, 38254; Chaix d'Est-Ange; baron de Guilhermy, *Papiers d'un émigré, 1789–1829*, Paris, 1886; Henri de Jouvenel, *L'Assemblée de la noblesse de la sénéchaussée de Lyon en 1789*, Lyon, 1907; Kosek 1998; Georges de Lhomel, *Jean-Pierre-Antoine, comte de Béhague, lieutenant général des armées du roi, 1727–1813*, Paris, 1907; Lowengard 2008; Wœlmont III, *s.v.* Lambertye; *État nominatif des pensions sur le Trésor royal*, 1791, III, p. 197; [TREATISES](#)

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