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

Lyons 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), 20.IV.1755, the day after his birth; he was admitted in junior at a military college in 1761; he joined the régiment de Dauphin-drangons 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” if one looks in English sources (he received one of 500 livres from 1779 “pour appointemens en London). The slave-owners in Martinique apparently depended, complaining about the need for keyed stretchers for the last of their (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 clue must deserve John Russell (q.e.), whose second posthumous sale (25.III.1807, Lot 126) included “nine bottles of Massoul’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. Lambert, said to have been established in 1788 at 5 rue d’Orléans-au-Maraîs (rue Charlot today (although the earliest references date from after his return to Paris); the firm was later taken over by Lambert’s pupil Joseph Panier in 1822, and, in 1850, by Jacques-Pailland. It offered “couleurs en tablettes et en poudre, très-bien préparées; coffrets en carton, décors d’une manière agréable; papiers vélins d’une grande beauté…”. The initials P.C. do not correspond to any recorded member of the Lambert 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-Maraîs (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/25, 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 (Guillerm 1886, pp. 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 XCVIII/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; Chats d’Est-Ange; baron de Guillerm, Papiers d’un ingénieur, 1719–1829, Paris, 1886; Henri de Jouvencel, L’Assemblée de la noblesse de la vicinie de Lyon en 1789, Lyon, 1907; Koscek 1998; Georges de Lhomel, Jean-Pierre-Antoine, comte de Béhague, lieutenant général des armées du roi, 1727–1813, Paris, 1907; Lowengard 2008; Wielmont II, t.e. Lambert; État nominatif des pensions du Trésor royal, 1791, III, p. 197; 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.e.).