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DE LESCLUZE (Jean Baptiste)

De Lescluze, Jean-Baptiste (Bruges 13 May 1780 – Bruges 10 March 1858), trader, ship owner and city councillor.

Jean-Baptiste De Lescluze, son of Pierre-Jean, a trader and municipalcouncillor of Bruges, and Marie-François Mallet, marries Thérèse Serweytens,the daughter of a prominent member of the local council, the ship owner François Jacques Serweytens,on 6 February 1802.

From the start, De Lescluzeisininvolved in his father’s trading business: he is the first representative of P. De Lescluze&Fils of Bruges. His relationship with the Serweytens family also influences his activities. His father-in-law and two brothers-in-law are ship owners; one of the latter, Charles-Auguste Serweytens, is often associated with De Lescluze's affairs. Although De Lescluze is already active in brokering and chartering ships, his activities expand dramatically with the end of the French regime, and the implementation of the Dutch regime, by which the limitations on maritime expansion are removed.

From 1815 onwards De Lescluze founds a fleet of brigs: the 117-ton *Thérèse*, the 175-ton *Triton*, the 70-ton *Petit Auguste*; and a three-master, the 385-ton *Jeune Annette*. Apart from these he also charters ships of different origins. At first, his ships have a limited range, covering only the North Sea and the Baltic; gradually, they establish routes to Havana (1816-1817) and Batavia (1817-1818) although without much success. On 8 July 1818, King William I of the Netherlands establishes the Company for Trade and Navigation in the Levant and the Mediterranean (*Kamer voor den Levantschen Handel en de Navigatie in de Middellandse Zee*).The Ostend branch is placed under the authority of a board of directors delegated by the principal commercial centers in Flanders, with De Lescluze chosen as the delegate for Bruges. This royal initiative, occurring simultaneously with the much talked-about return of Colonel Rottiers from the shores of the Black Sea in 1820, stimulates Flemish trading interests in the Mediterranean. Though failing to convince the Antwerp merchants of his plans to mount a commercial expedition to the Black Sea, Rottiers found, in De Lescluze, an interested ear. Above all Rottiers introduces De Lescluzeto the Frenchman Edouard Taitbout de Marigny, who speaks Circassian and has contacts in the region. In the meantime, the Dutch chargé d'affaires in Constantinople (Istanbul), Gaspard Testa, obtains free passage to the Black Sea for ships sailing under Dutch flag. On 9 January 1821, De Lescluze is granted a subsidy of 7.000 fl. from William I for a commercial expedition to the Black Sea, while Taitbout de Marigny is designated as Dutch vice-consul for the southern Black Sea. Among the other participants are De Lescluze's eldest son, Jean, and one of Rottiers’ sons, who speaks Arabic and Turkish. Two De Lescluze ships, the *Triton* and the *Thérèse*, set sail for the Mediterranean and the Black Sea on 10 April 1821, but the outbreak of hostilities between Greek rebels and Ottoman military after the proclamation of Greek independence makes any commercial success impossible. De Lescluze does, however, use his ships to take part in the evacuation of Greeks from Athens, which leads Foreign Affairs Minister Rogierto obtainfor De Lescluze, in 1852, the Order of the Saviour of Greecefrom the Greek government. Leaving Taitbout and De Lescluze's son behind in the Greek Isles with part of the goods, the ships arrive at Ostend harbor on 18 December 1821 and 22 March 1822. Although this first expedition is not a commercial success, never actually having reachedthe Black Sea, it illustrates the potential for trading expeditions to the area.

By May 1822 De Lescluze launches a second expedition and, after doing business in the Greek islands, finally enters the Dardanelles and arrives in Constantinople. Despite some trials and tribulations, the De Lescluze ships reach the great Crimean port of Caffa on 30 March 1823 and Taganrog sometime in May. De Lescluze explores the Don region and, in Kertch, the rival port of Taganrog, he procures land on which to construct a trading house and warehouses while his son and Taitbout successfully explore and trade in the northeastern area of the Black Sea (Circassia). Afterwards,Taitboutis confirmed in his position as vice-consul in Caffa. On 4 November 1823 the *Triton* returns to Ostend harbor. On board are a number of exotic animals, such as a Circassian ram; gifts for William I. De Lescluze himself stays behind to charter the *Thérèse*, in the meantime visiting Constantinople and Smyrna (İzmir). On 29 January 1824, the *Thérèse* leaves Smyrna, setting sail for Ostend and leaving De Lescluze effectively ship-less. He travels to Alexandria where he meets Boghos Bey, Mohammed Ali’s confident, and begins to negotiate and organize additional business. With Victor Besson, a French naval officer formerly in the service of Napoleon, De Lescluze establishes J. De Lescluze&Besson. Also, while in Alexandria, De Lescluze meets a compatriot, the adventurer Gérard

Henri Kersselaers, who has arrived in the city in October 1819. Having established his company, De Lescluze decided to prospect in Syria and Cyprus, making contact with the Dutch consuls there.

The summer of 1824 is the culmination point for De Lescluze's activities in the Levant. For two years he explores the Greek archipelago, the Black Sea, Egypt, Syria and the most important harbours in the region. During this time De Lescluze, in his semi-official role as co-director of the Ostend Chamber of Commerce in the Levant and as commercial envoy of the king, treats with the Dutch chargé d'affaires in Constantinople and with Foreign Affairs minister Falk. He gets to know the Dutch consuls and local traders in the area. Above all, he establishes agents in Sira, Smyrna and Constantinople in line with his plans to make Alexandria the centre of his commercial empire. In the meantime, his ships continue to navigate incessantly between Ostend and the Levant until disaster strikes in 1825 when Kersselaers, significantly in debt to De Lescluze, absconds. This upset is followed by a dispute between De Lescluze and his partner Besson, which leads to the liquidation of De Lescluze & Besson on 1 March 1825. De Lescluze also falls out with the Dutch vice-consul in Alexandria, where he would have liked to see his son Jean installed. These setbacks curtail his business projects in Alexandria and lead to his return to Ostend, and then to Bruges, where he arrives on 14 February 1826. He had been gone for nearly four years. Although De Lescluze continues to send ships to Alexandria, he redirects the main part of his activities to the more stable salt trade on the French Atlantic Coast (Marennes).

In the meantime De Lescluze becomes an important middleman in acquiring antiquities for the newly-founded Rijksmuseum van Oudheden. From the outset, he has always had an interest in archeological objects. Early in 1824 he actually exhibits a mummy in several Flemish cities. This mummy is, afterwards, acquired by C.J. Reuvers, the young conservator of the museum. Two years later, De Lescluze's substantial collection of Egyptian antiquities is auctioned in Antwerp. Reuvers is the only bidder and manages to acquire the unsold remainder in two lots in 1827-1828.

Under the Dutch regime, De Lescluze seems to have largely abstained from local politics. He does support Abbot de Foere, who defends the freedom of press, but it is clear that De Lescluze is staunchly attached to the King and his royal economic policy. There's no indication whatsoever as to De Lescluze's attitude to the Belgian Revolution of 1830, but he seems to have adjusted quite easily to the new order. From 1834 onwards, De Lescluze enters into discussions with Prime Minister Charles Rogier on the possibilities for overseas expansion. He drafts a study to illustrate that it would be in Belgium's interest to open up its frontiers. In his role as a shipping magnate, he presses for maritime and colonial expansion and is amongst the specialists consulted by King Leopold about the colonial possibilities in (French) Algeria. In any case, De Lescluze delivers a report in which he proposes the establishment of a Belgian presence in North Africa. Inspired by the example of the Antwerp ship owner, Catteaux-Wattel, who organized the first commercial expedition to Algiers between July and September 1834, De Lescluze charts a ship, the *Robuste*. She, unfortunately, goes down in a storm in Algiers harbor on 11 February 1835. A second ship, the *Météore*, arrives in Algiers (8 September 1836) with a government representative on board whose orders are to examine the possibilities for a Belgian colonial project. However Marshall Clauzel, the governor general of French Algeria, refuses to cede any coastal property or decent ports because this would compromise French conquests and sovereignty. De Lescluze returns to Ostend empty-handed, arriving on 3 March 1836. He subsequently retires from shipping; certainly, the failed bid in Algiers was his last recorded undertaking. He dies twenty-two years later at his home in Bruges, at Minderbroedersstraat 6.

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Langue
Undefined

Tomaison:
Biographical Dictionary of Overseas Belgians

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