MOVING BONEY'S PARTS (May 2013)

(Or, Moving Bonapartes)

(1: TITLE) (2: BUCKEYE)

(3: maps) (4: Jamestown) **The island of St. Helena is in the middle of nowhere**.

And that's just what the Allies wanted in 1815 when Napoleon, who had escaped from Elba, his first exile a few miles from the Italian and French coasts, finally surrendered to the British after the Battle of Waterloo. He had expected that his arch-enemies would exile him on **their** island. He learned the truth only when he was not allowed to disembark at Plymouth, and the British ship carrying him headed into the South Atlantic.

This time there would be no more Elba-type escapes. {RETURN TO #3} And certainly no attempts at rescuing him, for the British fleet would patrol the waters surrounding St. Helena for six years. Legend has it that Wellington himself, who knew the island as a way station on the British route to India where he had served, had recommended the god-forsaken site as a retreat for his nemesis.

(5: Charlet/boy) **On the left**, *we see one of the most compelling images of the 19th-*century, Napoleon alone on St. Helena. This lithograph appeared in the Memorial of St. Helena, one of the most popular books published in 19th-century Europe, a transcription of his thoughts dictated to a secretary while he was in exile, and was massively reproduced. Cheap copies could be found hanging in the meanest cottages across Europe. Its legacy can be seen **on the right**, a studio pose produced six decades later. Every Frenchman would have recognized the allusion.

(6: fat Nap) Tourists to St. Helena--especially British-- show another version of his isolation; they had been producing sketches of the exiled emperor for years. The French tended to see him as a caged lion, held in place by a martinet named Hudson Lowe, the governor of the island; the English saw him as a caricature of his former self, slowly aging, and amusing himself with a small court that continued to treat him as Emperor, a title the English never used.

(7: deathbed) In 1821, after six years of what must have been a stupendously boring existence, Napoleon died on St. Helena, probably from a combination of a bleeding ulcer and some sort of abdominal cancer.

Now, listen carefully, for I have an almost incredible story to tell.

In 1840, nineteen years after the Emperor's death, after continuous negotiating with his own French political supporters and antagonists, and then repetitious dickering with the British, King Louis Philippe finally agreed to formally ask Queen Victoria to allow Napoleon I's remains to be moved back to Paris from their resting place on St. Helena. In his will, which had been widely published in France, Napoleon had requested that his ashes rest on the banks of the Seine. Despite efforts made by Bonapartists for decades, no government—neither the British nor the French—rushed to bring the Emperor back to the nation he had ruled for sixteen years. But the young Victoria, only three years on the throne, had agreed.

Louis-Philippe, a cousin of the Bourbons who despised Bonaparte, made a bold political gamble, on the recommendation of an ambitious Prime Minister: he would send his youngest son, the Duc de Joinville, with a group of former marshals and servants of Napoleon, to the island, deep in the Atlantic, to collect Napoleon's ashes. (The French use

the term ***cendres*** (ashes) to refer to the cremated or non-cremated remains of any notable personage).

After a leisurely three-month voyage (they had stopped in Portugal, the Canary Islands, and even spent time in Brazil), the French delegation sent to collect the Emperor's mortal remains arrived on St Helena. With advance notice by the British, the islanders met them respectfully and with great curiosity. The party was on the island about five days before the exhumation; formal dinners and a hundred toasts to Anglo-French cooperation were held in Jamestown.

(8: grave in 1833/now) Napoleon himself had purposefully selected this spot for his burial on the island. He had visited it often, and loved the sound of the natural stream that flowed through it. Did he suspect that he might be brought back to France one day? Perhaps, but we have no record of such a plan, only the wish he expressed in his last testament. The grave is in a secluded valley; after his death, images of the site were widespread, and were described by poets of all nations. The weeping willows became a symbol of the sorrow of a nation for its lost hero. The site's very isolation, in the center of an isolated island, had helped to create the image of a man unfairly treated and unfeelingly buried, a martyr to his own glory.

Then, on a very rainy night, the French group, accompanied by a British honor guard, left Jamestown for the burial ground, reaching it about midnight (the time set on the strange order of the island's governor). Under sweeping winds, a freezing rain, and the sputtering light of torches, work began to uncover the grave. It was a mammoth task, not finished until 8 the following morning. The French only watched; the understanding was

that the British would open the grave, and accompany the remains to the port where they would be officially transferred to the Duc de Joinville.

There were three huge stones lying over the cement box into which the coffins had been put. (You can see one of them today at the Invalides in Paris.) Napoleon's corpse was surrounded by four coffins: two metal, and two mahogany, within the burial vault. But before they could be removed, the heavy stones covering the concrete vault had to be lifted, then the vault itself disassembled.

What was written on the tombstone at the St. Helena site?

Not a word.

The English had not wanted the words "Emperor" engraved on a monument that would sit on English soil. Nor did the French agree to inscribe "Napoleon Bonaparte," the name of a commoner. So there was no sign, other than common memory, that told the ignorant passer-by that Napoleon I, Emperor of the French, was buried there. Yet many had traveled--from France, from England, from all over--to visit this tomb, marked eloquently by the absence of a name. As a measure of consideration, the evening before the exhumation, the current British governor of the island had told the French contingent: "I now return to you the body of the Emperor of France." Buried as General Bonaparte, he would be exhumed as Emperor Napoleon.

In a solemn ceremony, the grave was finally uncovered, and the coffins brought out of the ground. A priest blessed them with holy water from the nearby stream before they were opened under a tent provided by the British. Three coffins were removed from the original mahogany one, and placed in the sarcophagus brought from France, which lay on a

trestle. The lead envelope was cut open, then the top of a second mahogany box had to be unscrewed, and finally the witnesses were before a modest tin container, soldered shut. ***"Only a thin piece of metal separates us from our Emperor,"*** intoned one of the Frenchmen. The tension was palpable, the silence punctuated only by the downpour's sounds on the canvas tent.

Let me pause to ask a question that might be in back of your minds: **why did the last coffin, the one containing Napoleon's body, have to be opened?** Though the tombstone itself was silent, everyone present knew that this was the burial place of Napoleon. The British had been meticulous in their record-keeping, and several of the witnesses who had accompanied the Duc de Joinville had been present at the original interment. Why risk desecrating the great man's body by exposing it to the elements? What if the body had decomposed horribly, and the last image of the great leader passed on to the world be that of a disintegrating corpse? (In fact, a daguerreotype camera had accompanied the group, but history was cruel to us: it malfunctioned because of damage while on the way, so we have no photograph of this event.)

The byword, of both British and French authorities, was "trust, but verify." Not only did the French consider the British untrustworthy—after all they had cruelly imprisoned the Emperor, but the political investment of those Frenchmen who had gambled to bring back the body had to be justified. Two decades of rumor had become so embedded in Europe's collective consciousness that some questions had to be answered definitively. Was Napoleon <u>really</u> dead? <u>how</u> had he died? had his body been stolen, or tampered with? would the corpse show signs of his imprisonment?

Much had been written since about the rigidity and pettiness of the British surveillance of Napoleon during his six years on St. Helena. The French felt justified in their suspicions, despite the generous offer of Victoria to allow them to bring the Emperor home. Then, as now, some have confidently charged that Napoleon's body was not in his grave; rather it was that of his Italian butler, Cipriani, who had died on the island during the exile. Cipriani's grave has never been found, further proof that the Emperor was not where he was supposed to be.

The devious governor of St. Helena, the infamous Hudson Lowe, had, according to this theory, exchanged Cipriani's body for that of the French emperor. George IV, as the story goes, a great student of Napoleon, wanted to do an autopsy himself. And now many believed that Napoleon's remains rested in London's Westminster Abbey, a final insult to French integrity. Even today, there are persistent charges that Napoleon is not in Napoleon's Tomb in Paris. Regular demands ask that the President of France open the tomb and the coffins in the Invalides, effect a DNA analysis (we have samples of Napoleon's DNA, and his descendants are known), and prove, once and for all, that the English are perfidious. This game is almost two centuries old.

But, back to the story of the exhumation on St. Helena.

(9: 1st bas-relief) **A bas-relief in the Invalides tomb**, commissioned by Louis-Phillipe, depicts the emotion at the gravesite. When Napoleon was finally exiled to St. Helena, there had been not that many tears in his former Empire. But by 1840, all the frustration and hatred that the French had had toward the man who had devastated their nation, while devastating others, had dissipated. Since his exile, followed by his death, Napoleon's history had been turned into legend.

As the coffins were delicately opened, can you imagine what went on in the minds of the witnesses--several of whom who had been present at the original burial 19 years before?

When the last tin container was cut open, all present crowded around. At first, they saw an eerily white outline of a covered human form. The satin lining from the lid of the tin coffin had detached itself, and a thin film had fallen onto the corpse. To some, it must have appeared like a spirit or ghost. A breeze moved the film, and for an instant, many thought they saw the body move. The French physician slowly rolled back the satin residue, from the feet to the head, and the body of Napoleon was finally exposed, nineteen years after his death.

What they saw shocked the witnesses. **(10: Opening casket)**

The cadaver was in amazingly good shape.

His face, looking younger than his 52 years, had a slight rictus, with three white teeth barely showing; the beard had grown a bit on the lower part of the face, as had the fingernails. And the boots had dried and split, allowing Napoleon's toes to show through.

But, according to the witnesses who had been at his original burial, the body looked exactly as it had when they had placed it there almost two decades previously.

The objects they had placed in the coffin—gold coins, other memorabilia and especially the vases containing his entrails and his heart were still resting against his legs. (It was common to separate these from the corpse of a king or emperor, and either bury them with the corpse, or elsewhere). And his famous bicorn hat was still on his thighs, though it had slipped down a bit in the original move to the site. The doctor reached out, and gently touched the closed eyelids, then felt the arms and legs. And, after only two minutes, fearing

atmospheric damage, they agreed to close the coffins again, and put them into an ebony one brought from France. Napoleon I then disappeared for eternity from the eyes of humanity.

But the truth had been verified: the Emperor, definitely recognizable, was indeed dead and in his coffin. He would now return to his home on the Seine, as he had wished.

Once there, a whole new legend would emerge, one of the sleeping patriot, always ready to rise to save France in its troubles. **(11: Nap resurgent)**

(12: ship/map) The coffins were placed on the French frigate, *La Belle Poule,* and brought quickly to France.

At Le Havre where the huge sarcophogaus was transferred once again to a riverboat that proceeded up the Seine toward Paris, 120 miles away. The banks along the way were lined with a curious, respectful public. Arriving in Courbevoie, near Neuilly, on the western edge of Paris, **(13: caisson)** the remains were put onto a caisson topped by a 10-meter high *papier-maché* monument. Crossing the Seine, the massive hearse was pulled by 18 black horses down the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, and to the Invalides. The authorities had feared spontaneous revolts, and the route was heavily guarded by French troops. Crowds were out, and respectful; perhaps the below-freezing temperatures kept passions abated.

Careful attention had been paid by a nervous government to iconography: statuary along the Champs-Elysées represented Napoleon's military victories; **(14: cortège @ Invalides)** on the bridge leading to the Invalides complex, his virtues and civic leadership were depicted; finally, on the esplanade of the Hôtel des Invalides, French history was evoked. The effigies included pre-Revolutionary kings, military leaders, Napoleon's marshals; he was thus shown as part of a serial French history, not above it. The cortège

was followed by surviving marshals and by hundreds of veterans of the Emperor's Grande Armée, now middle-aged and older.

(15: 2nd bas-relief) Another commissioned bas-relief that appears at the entrance of the Invalides tomb shows the young Duc de Joinville officially remanding the ashes to his father. This nervous king wanted very much that the public understand that it was he who had brought back Napoleon's body: Louis-Phillipe, France's first constitutional monarch. But poor Louis-Philippe would be thrown off the throne only eight years later in the great Revolution of 1848.

Let me now pass to the political issues that surrounded Napoleon's final resting place in Paris.

In one of his most remembered rhetorical utterances, Napoleon had created the basis for the impassioned debate that would roil the French parliament from 1821 (when he dies) until 1840 (when his wish was granted):

> **Je désire que mes cendres reposent sur les bords de la Seine au milieu de ce peuple que j'ai tant aimé.** [I desire that my ashes rest on the banks of the Seine among the French people whom I loved so much.]

Louis-Philippe wanted to convince that his government was practical and centrist, sensitive to all political opinion, that it was strong enough to pull all the factions together, especially in order to strengthen its hand in foreign affairs. The government also hoped to bolster its support with a nostalgic, but restless populace. Louis-Philippe, it was offered, was confident enough to remember the past, but to "forgive" Napoleon, and to bring him back home.

The great Romantic poet and legislator Lamartine had eloquently challenged this decision, arguing that if, in then end, Bonaparte's remains were returned to French soil—an action he was against--then the Emperor should be celebrated as a civic leader, the originator of the Civil Code, for instance; his militarism must be downplayed. Others argued that his military glory was the only reason to bring him home. A third strain of arguments was against the removal of the ashes at all; why honor a dictator who had betrayed the Revolution?

But, once it had been decided to bring his remains back to the scene of his greatest victories and defeats, where do we put them?

Now, the French were not arguing about ideas, but about an object: Napoleon's remains.

There was little doubt that the Hôtel des Invalides would be his temporary resting place, but where would he finally rest? This occasioned even more impassioned debate. Over the years, several places had been discussed.

The options were:

A SPECIALLY BUILT SITE:

- Showing that he had been an exceptional figure
- Placing his ashes somewhere that would be safer—for his admirers and from his detractors.
- BUT an idea soon abandoned because it would place him above other leaders.

(16) LES INVALIDES (where he temporarily lay):

- safely away from center of the city,

- easier crowd control
- under prominent dome, in a mausoleum with other military leaders, invalid soldiers;
- BUT too much attention to his legend.

(17.1) EGLISE DE LA MADELEINE:

- still secular site though originally constructed as a church;
- with connections to Napoleon, who had wanted to make it into a monument for his *soldiers*;
- facing the Place de la Concorde;
- BUT too central to Paris; "not great enough remove from contemporary life of capital."

(17.2) PANTHÉON:

- another secular, "former church";
- BUT for non-military heroes; too close to central Paris, and to the hot-headed youth of the Latin Quarter.

(18.1) BASILICA AT ST. DENIS:

- favored by most die-hard Imperialists;
- BUT too closely connected to "legitimate" royalty;

(18.2) CHAILLOT HILL (TROCADÉRO):

- to build a special monument on the place Napoleon had chosen for his son's palace;
- BUT too prominent, and too expensive;

(19.1) PLACE DE LA VENDÔME:

- under the Column he had commissioned in honor of his victory at Austerlitz; composed of cannons taken from Austrians and Russians;

- BUT in very center of Paris, difficult crowd control

(19.2) CHAMP DE MARS:

- build a particular monument to Napoleon where armies paraded;
- BUT rejected because dedicated to only one soldier/general
- very prominent

(20) PLACE DE LA BASTILLE (COLONNE DE JUILLET):

- NO! the Column had just been finished to honor those who had died overthrowing the Bourbons, thus a dishonor to them;
- and, too close to popular area, the dangerous eastern quarters of Paris

(21) ARC DE TRIOMPHE:

- perfect! begun by Napoleon and just completed in 1836;
- BUT Arc had been redesigned in honor of all French victories, not just Napoleon's;
- too central a recognition; all armies would have to march over his crypt.

Meanwhile, while sites still being debated, a competition produced 81 submissions for the tomb, the crypt, and/or monuments. **(22: tacky)** **(23: kitsch)**

In the end, Les Invalides was selected as the final resting place. **But another debate opened up: what sort of tomb should be built for the remains?**

One scholar has tried to schematize the complexity of that debate, held among monarchists, liberals, and Bonapartists. **(24: terms)**

Should the sepulcher be above or below ground; visible or invisible; spectacular or mysterious?

Eventually, the decision was made that the tomb would be **in the Invalides's great Eglise du Dome, but ..... below ground**. (25: "hole" cartoons)

It would not be immediately visible, but it would rest directly under at the center of the vast chapel's Greek cross plan. (26: cross-section) (27: cross-sections [2]). The French architect Louis Visconti was the designer of the crypt, which was finally finished in 1853, but not before a visit from Napoleon's spirit. (28: Hurry up!). (29: finally done [2]). Still, it would take another eight years to finish the sarcophagus; and in 1861 Boney's parts were moved to their final resting place, when Napoleon III, Napoleon I's nephew, consecrated it. (30: family reunion). This is what you see today when you visit the impressive site. (31: sunny view) (32: sarcophagus [2]).

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Now that we finally have Napoleon I tucked away, let's fast-forward exactly 100 years from the date he left St. Helena, to 1940. On the morning of June 28, 1940, Adolf Hitler made his first and only visit to Paris as his bureaucracies were occupying it. Like any tourist, he toured several of its best-known sites. He stayed in Paris for just a bit more than two hours, and one of his stops was at Napoleon's tomb–just as Napoleon had stopped to pay his respects at Frederick the Great's tomb in Potsdam in 1806. (33: Potsdam and Paris). The photograph of the Chancellor of Germany looking down on the tomb remains one of the most reproduced of that period.

One witness recounts that it was standing here when Hitler first had an idea that would lead to a farcical international incident:

> **We were secretly hoping ... for Hitler to find words appropriate for the occasion and the site. [Then] something absolutely unexpected happened. He**

> **mentioned the Duke of Reichstadt, Napoleon's son, whose remains were in Vienna. ... He gave the order to have the Duke of Reichstadt's ashes transferred to Paris so that they would lie at the side of his father. ... [This] was a gesture of reconciliation, but events did not allow it to find a positive echo from the French.**

This last sentence is an understatement, for the event caused the first serious breach between the victorious Nazis and the quasi-fascist Vichy regime that would be Germany's allies throughout the war.

Hitler sent the following letter to Marshal Philippe Pétain, the World War I hero and chief executive of Vichy France:

> **Monsieur le Maréchal, the 15th of December [1940] will bring the centenary of the arrival of Napoleon's body at the Invalides. I would like to honor that occasion by letting you know ... that I have decided to offer the mortal remains of the Duke of Reichstadt to the French people. Thus, the son of Napoleon, leaving surroundings that during his tragic life were foreign to him, will return to his native country to rest next to his august father. Please accept, Monsieur le Maréchal, my personal esteem.**
>
> **Signed: Adolf Hitler**

The young son of Napoleon **(34: boy/Capuchin crypt)**, only four years old when his father was exiled to St. Helena, and but 21 when he died of tuberculosis in Vienna, had been essentially kidnapped by his grandfather, the Austrian Emperor Franz II, with the connivance of Metternich, the Austrian Foreign Minister, and kept in a velvet prison in Vienna. His early death must have relieved Prince Metternich, who always feared a

resurgence of Bonapartism in Europe. Napoleon II, as the French referred to him, though he had never actually reigned, had been know in in the Austrian court as the Duke of Reichstadt, and had been buried with appropriate honors in the Capuchin Chapel where generations of Hapsburgs had lain for centuries.

Now back to 1940. Pétain, for once, was incensed at the arrogance of the German leader. Informed that he was expected to be at the Invalides to receive the coffin on behalf of a grateful France, he haughtily refused: to appear under the Nazi flag, surrounded by German military, would have offended even the most neutral Frenchman. And, to put it bluntly, Pétain could care less about Napoleon II's remains. His refusal to attend was an embarrassment to his pro-German government and to the German diplomats in Paris who had arranged the transfer.

What followed was nearly comic, a combination of the ghoulish, the pompous, the hypocritical, and the amusing--one of the few instances of the Occupation that can still bring smiles. In fact, there were wags in Paris who asked after the move had been announced: "Why move him away from his mother? Why not move them both? Or move Napoleon to Vienna. Keep the family together."

Placed on a special armored train (35: Duke on train/transfer), the enormous coffin made the slow trip from Vienna to Paris through a freezing European winter. One Frenchman remembers that his father, a railroad worker, took him to the Gare de l'Est that cold morning to watch the train come in. His father asked his comrades when the Napoleon II's body was arriving. "What Napoleon? We're expecting a special train with the body of a German big shot, the Duke of Reichstadt." As one historian has pointed out, the French knew more about the Duke of Windsor than they did Napoleon's son.

The train arrived in the middle of the night, a century to the day of the first Napoleon's arrival in Paris. The coffin, which had been surrounded inside the car by a small forest of Austrian pines, was placed on a special caisson that was then pulled solemnly through Paris, in the light of torches, accompanied by a somber drumming, down major boulevards, along the Seine, past the Louvre, to the Invalides. The scene was right out of Leni Riefenstahl's and Goebbels's lugubrious performance manual: darkness, torches, slow pacing, hints of ancient Teutonic tradition.

Very few people were in the streets, for it was well after the curfew hour. It was wicked cold, with a persistent sleet falling on the catafalque. When the parade reached the Invalides, the coffin was carried in by German soldiers, and formally delivered to the elaborately uniformed Garde Républicaine, who laid it at the chapel's altar, where finally a tri-color flag was draped over the casket. (36: Garde/viewing)

Somberly, an official placed at the bier a wreath from Philippe Pétain, President of the État Français. But shouldn't there have been one, equally ostentatious, from the Fuehrer, whose brilliant initiative this had been? It seems that indeed a late night delivery had been made, before the chapel had been opened, and a wreath with the name of Adolf Hitler prominently displayed had been left outside the gate. The wife of the Invalides's caretaker saw it, quickly removed it, and burned it in her fireplace. Her husband took the wires that had formed its scaffolding, and buried them on the grounds. So, there was no wreath from the magnanimous Hitler.

The next day Parisian newspapers described the arrival and the disposal of the remains, and there were long lines of French and Germans to see the coffin for a few days, but over all, this meticulously planned spectacular had, as Pétain knew it would, little

impact on the French. "We have asked them for coal, and they sent us ashes," was a typically Parisian response.

Just as his father's had, poor Napoleon II's casket lay in a side chapel until 1970 (37: alone), when it was moved downstairs to lie at the feet of his father's statue, marked only by a stone in the floor, a few feet away from his Napoleon's magnificent sarcaphogus. (38: Nap II marker [2])

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Napoleon wanted to be remembered as he had been represented in these two portraits of David, (39: St. Bernard) (40: Study) done about a decade apart. But other artists insisted on their own images. Ingres did this portrait of the recently crowned Emperor, which he loathed. (41: Emperor)

And the Italian sculptor, Canova, also went to far. He created a statue that so deeply embarrassed Napoleon that he had it hidden in the Louvre.

After the Battle of Waterloo, and the return of the Bourbons, Louis XVIII made a gift of the offending statue to none other than Arthur Wellesley, the new Duke of Wellington, (42: Apsley House/Wellington) who placed it in the entry to his mansion, Apsley House, known as Number One, London, and sited at Hydes Corner and Piccadilly Street.

On the anniversary of Waterloo, Wellington would invite all of the officers who had served with him on the battlefield for a massive banquet. (43: banquet)

On the way up the stairs to the ornate dining room, they would pass this statue, most likely with smiles on their faces, as they contemplated "Boney's Parts." (44: Naked Nap)