

Les Remarquables

VISIT
BOOKLET



NAPOLEON'S WILL

EXHIBITION FROM 4 MARCH TO 29 JUNE 2026

ARCHIVES NATIONALES
60 rue des Francs-Bourgeois
75003 Paris



www.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr

Napoleon's will page 5 [detail], 15th april 1821 © Archives nationales, AE/113/21/a

Les Remarquables

GLOSSARY

CODICIL

deed subject to the same formalities as a will, which it completes or modifies

EXECUTOR

person responsible for ensuring that the testator's last wishes are respected.

CIVIL LIST

part of the State budget made available to the sovereign for his personal expenses.

SENATUS-CONSULTE

text voted by the Senate with the force of law

HOLOGRAPHIC WILL

will written entirely in the testator's handwriting.

The exhibition series "Les Remarquables", begun in Autumn 2023, presenting documents and people from French history that the public has chosen to highlight, continues in 2026 with the exhibition of Napoleon's will.

The public chiefly associates Napoleon with his final wish, engraved in gold at the entrance to his mausoleum at Les Invalides: "It is my wish that my ashes [mortal remains] may repose on the banks of the Seine, in the midst of the French people, whom I have loved so well." Beyond this famous line, Napoleon's will is a fundamental primary source for countless historical works devoted to the First French Empire. Fewer studies, on the other hand, have taken a comprehensive look at this document which is as extraordinary as was the life of its author.

The exhibition sheds light on overlooked and largely unknown elements related to the will. For several decades of the Nineteenth century, this body of documents captured the attention of legatees, lawyers, politicians, and diplomats. It eventually entered the *Armoire de Fer* [Iron Cabinet] at the Archives Nationales [French National Archives], where it has remained ever since.

I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the curators of this special exhibition, Benoît Morant and Christophe Barret, and wish you an excellent visit.

Marie-Françoise Limon-Bonnet
Director of the French Archives Nationales

INTRODUCTION

From battle wounds to failed assassination attempts, from suicidal thoughts to grief-stricken mourning, for more than twenty years Napoleon was constantly and very directly confronted with death. In his writings, he frequently weaves a close link between death, glory and posterity, as in this extract from correspondence written a few days after his coronation: “Death is nothing, but to live defeated and without glory is to die every day”.

During the first years of his exile on St Helena (from 1815), he did more than just write memoirs to ensure that his fame would live on. In fact, several texts smuggled into England and published anonymously bear witness to a Napoleon who was still fighting on the political front. In 1818, with the *Manuscrit de l'île d'Elbe* [*Manuscript from Elba*], he dealt in particular with the imprescriptible nature of imperial dignity.

But in March 1819, when the news of the Congress of Aix-La-Chapelle reached him, he increasingly seriously considered the possibility of death in captivity. In August, shortly before his fiftieth birthday, he sent his Grand Maréchal du palais [Grand Marshal of the palace], General Bertrand, his first testamentary dispositions. Then, for over a year, he quite literally tended to his own garden at Longwood, abandoning the pen for the spade. On learning of the death of his sister Élisa in December 1820 and his own worsening state of health, he asked Bertrand for the will he had written the previous year.

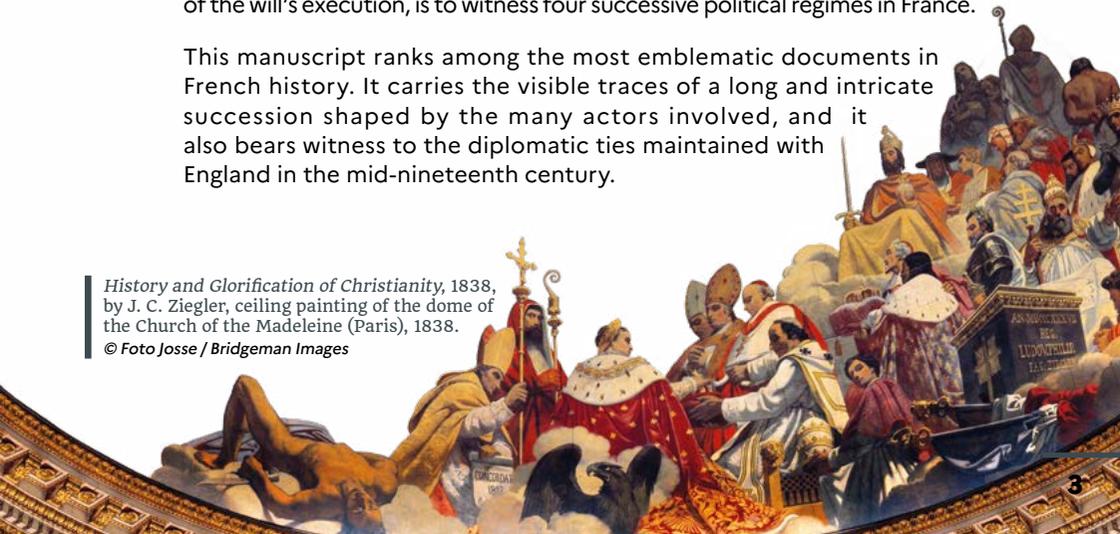
It was not until a few days before his death, much weakened by illness, that he finally drew up a new holographic will, between 15 and 27 April 1821, copied out by hand after having dictated it to Montholon, his chamberlain.

Almost forty years separate the drafting of this will in 1821 from its entry into the *Armoire de Fer* at the Archives Nationales in 1860. To examine the different phases of the will's execution, is to witness four successive political regimes in France.

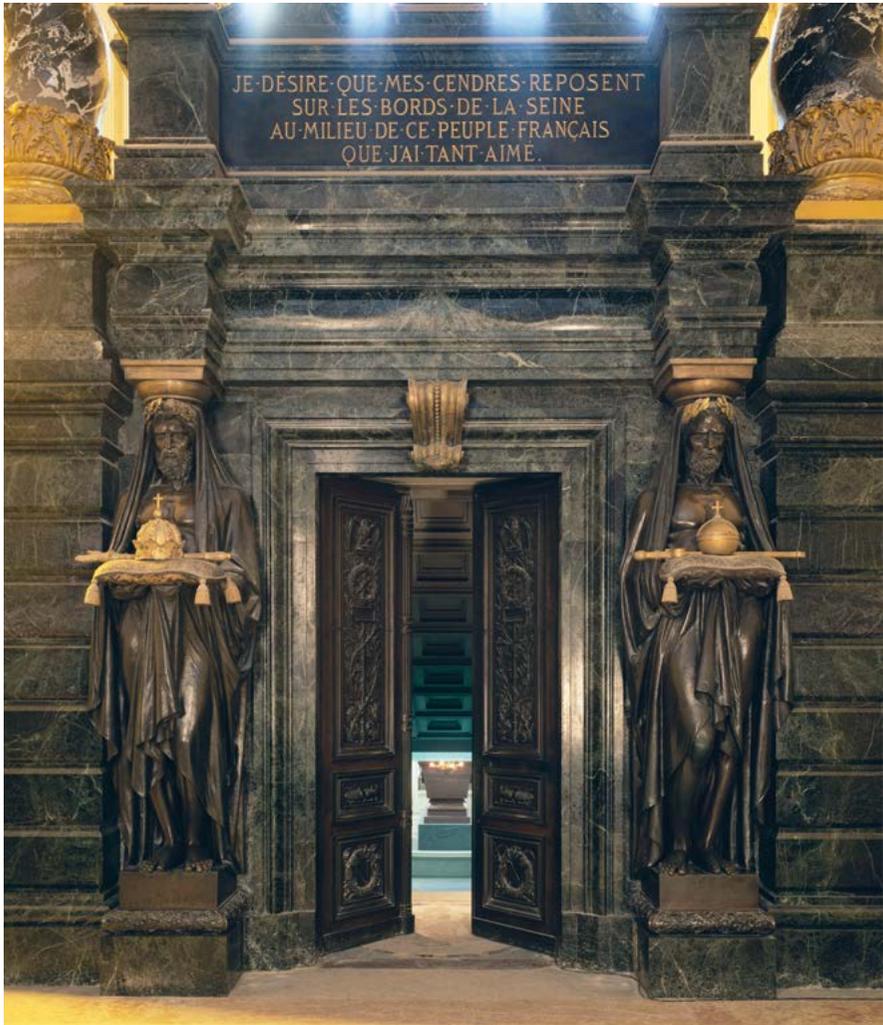
This manuscript ranks among the most emblematic documents in French history. It carries the visible traces of a long and intricate succession shaped by the many actors involved, and it also bears witness to the diplomatic ties maintained with England in the mid-nineteenth century.

History and Glorification of Christianity, 1838,
by J. C. Ziegler, ceiling painting of the dome
of the Church of the Madeleine (Paris), 1838.

© Foto Josse / Bridgeman Images



A SOVEREIGN'S DEATH



Door to the crypt of Napoleon's tomb at Les Invalides,
designed by Louis Visconti between 1842 and 1853.

© Paris - Musée de l'Armée, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Anne-Sylvaine Marre-Noël

In the absence of a notary, Napoleon had to make a holographic will in order to comply with the provisions of the Napoleonic Code. This respect for formal requirements did not, however, overshadow his desire to make a sovereign's will. He began his will with a series of proclamations, giving this legal text a particularly strong spiritual and political character.

First of all, he declared that he was dying in the Roman Catholic tradition. In fact, the first four points echo the sacraments of the Church. As he prepared to receive the last rites from Abbé Vignali and reflected on his burial, he expressed the wish to be laid to rest "on the banks of the Seine, in the midst of the French people, whom I have loved so well." Inscribed over the entrance to the mausoleum at Les Invalides, seen by nearly a million visitors every year, these words are undoubtedly the best-known part of the will.

He then talks about his second marriage and his wife Marie-Louise, whom he asks to look after their son. Napoleon advised this heir "never to forget that he was born a French prince" and not to serve in any way the powers that "oppress[ed] the nations of Europe". By this he meant: Britain, Austria and Russia, who had caused the loss of the Empire.

The following statements were more overtly political, with the Emperor unambiguously expressing himself.

He makes two overt attacks. One was against the external enemy, Britain, accused of "assassination", through its hired assassin, Hudson Lowe, then Governor of St Helena. The other was aimed at Frenchmen, singling out four traitors. Though he granted them pardons, he deliberately left to posterity

the names of Auguste de Marmont, Charles-Pierre Augereau, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, and Gilbert du Motier de La Fayette.

In contrast, he then mentions his closest political entourage, thanks the members of the imperial family, and forgives his brother Louis for the 1820 publication of *Documents historiques et réflexions sur le gouvernement de Hollande* [*Historical Documents and Reflections on the Government of Holland*].

Finally, Napoleon was keen to "disavow" the St Helena Manuscript, published in 1817, of which he was not the author. Before sealing his will, he returned to this point, adding in a smaller, terse handwriting, in which he assumed responsibility for the abduction and execution of the Duc d'Enghien.

In the second part of his will, Napoleon listed 36 bequests of objects and money. Taking into account the various codicils, the total number of bequests amounts to 76.

He named four main financial sources to ensure payment. In the end, only one would actually be available, namely, the bank account Napoleon mentioned in a letter to the banker Laffitte on 25 April 1821.

By devoting the third part of his will to his private domain, he affirmed the will's sovereign character. Napoleon divided his private estate in two equal parts: he granted one half to the soldiers of the French Revolutionary and Imperial campaigns, and the other to the French territories ravaged by the invasions of 1814 and 1815. Through this gesture, he appears to enlist a portion of the French people as creditors standing against the ruling powers.

Napoleon not only signed the will in his sovereign name, sealing each document with his coat of arms, he also referred explicitly to his private estate. Through these acts, he sought to ensure that authorities considered the provisions of the *senatus-consult* of 30 January 1810 alongside those of the Napoleonic Code. This text, which deals with the endowment of the crown, re-establishes the monarch's private domain, an inalienable and imprescriptible right that had been abolished during the French Revolution.

Napoleon explicitly referred to this imprescriptible dimension in the third part of his will when he remarked: "My private domain being my property, of which no French law has deprived me, as far as I know..."

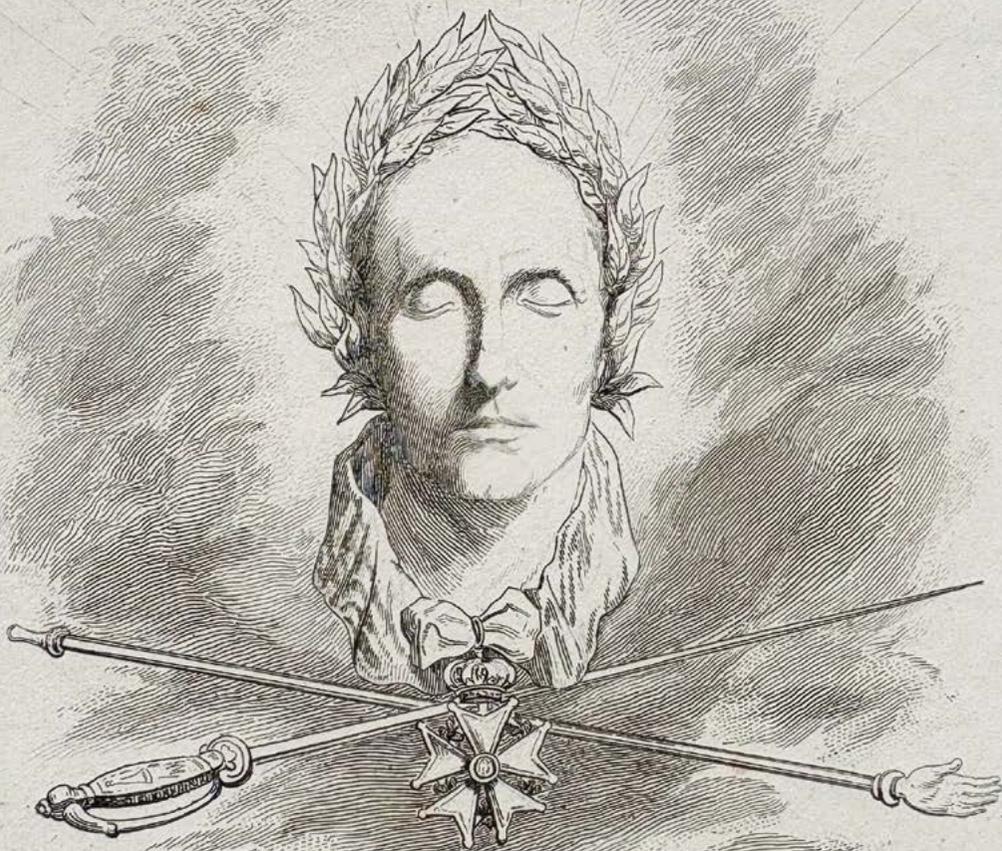
In his fifth codicil, Napoleon appealed to Marie-Louise for payment of bequests totalling 2 million francs. He said that in 1814 he had given her a certain sum, which he thought he could still use. However, after becoming Duchess of Parma in 1816 and losing daily contact with her son, the Duke of Reichstadt,

raised in Vienna, Marie-Louise could not act freely and remained dependent on her father, the Austrian Emperor Francis I.

Having been crowned King of Italy in 1805, Napoleon's sixth codicil called on his adopted son Eugène Napoléon (Eugène de Beauharnais) in his capacity as Viceroy of Italy. The aim here was to liquidate the Italian civil list.

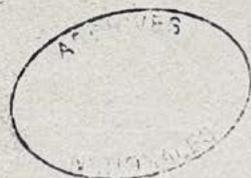
Lastly, in the instructions he addressed to the executors of his will – Charles-Tristan de Montholon, Henri-Gatien Bertrand, and his first valet de chambre, Louis-Joseph Marchand – Napoleon again mentioned the six million euros deposited in an account opened with Laffitte.

In these same instructions, Napoleon specified the spirit of the measures taken in the various documents drawn up and signed by him. The articles addressed to his son, or detailing the matrimonial strategy to be adopted by the members of the imperial family, show the extent to which dynastic principles occupied his thoughts just a few days before his death.



NAPOLÉON APRÈS SA MORT.

NAPOLÉON POŚMIERCI.



Paris le 11 novembre 1821 a Paris vers 8h De St Helene
1

ceci est mon testament ou acte de mon dernier vœu
de même dans l'histoire apostolique et romaine dans le sein de
celle de son vœu de cinquante ans

Je désire que mes lettres soient sur les bords de la Seine
ou ailleurs ce que je fais tout comme

Je suis très malade et je ne puis écrire que ce que je veux
Je suis en proie jusqu'à présent de douleurs dans les reins
tantôt je suis en proie de douleurs dans les reins tantôt

Je recommande à mon fils de ne jamais oublier qu'il est un
peu français et de ne jamais se prêter à la

indifférence sur les maux de l'humanité qui expriment
les points de l'humanité il ne doit pas oublier un

mot en aucune manière de prouver et de rendre ses vœux
tout pour le bien de l'humanité

Je meure prématurément assés par la fatigue
malin et son caractère le plus anglais de l'Europe
par son voyage

les 2 issues de maux de l'humanité de la France les 2
ans de son tour de France sur son tour de France

de marit, ouvrier, tout est la fatigue
Je suis pauvre par la suite de ma vie, tout
s'adresse à mon vœu

Je meure en bon état de santé sur
ce point, mes parents sont, tous les jours
peut-être les uns, peut-être les autres, les uns
de l'autre que vous savez. Je recommande à mon fils
de ne pas oublier un mot de ce que j'ai dit et de le faire

Je recommande à mon fils de ne jamais oublier qu'il est un
peu français et de ne jamais se prêter à la

indifférence sur les maux de l'humanité qui expriment
les points de l'humanité il ne doit pas oublier un

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les 2 issues de maux de l'humanité de la France les 2
ans de son tour de France sur son tour de France



TRANSCRIPTION OF THE FIRST PAGE

Napoleon

This 15th April, 1821, at Longwood, Island of St Helena.

This is my Testament, or act of my last will.

1° I die in the Apostolical Roman religion, in the bosom of which I was born more than fifty years since.

2° It is my wish that my ashes [mortal remains] may repose on the banks of the Seine, in the midst of the French people, whom I have loved so well.

3° I have always had reason to be pleased with my dearest wife, Maria Louisa. I retain for her, to my last moment, the most tender sentiments. I beseech her to watch, in order to preserve, my son from the snares which yet environ his infancy.

4° I recommend to my son never to forget that he was born a French prince, and never to allow himself to become an instrument in the hands of the triumvirs who oppress the nations of Europe: he ought never to fight against France, or to injure her in any manner; he ought to adopt my motto: "Everything for the French people."

5° I die prematurely, assassinated by the English oligarchy and its assassin. The English nation will not be slow in avenging me.

6° The two unfortunate results of the invasions of France, when she had still so many resources, are to be attributed to the treason of Marmont, Augereau, Talleyrand, and La Fayette. I forgive them—May the posterity of France forgive them as I do.

7° I thank my good and most excellent mother, the Cardinal, my brothers, Joseph, Lucien, Jerome, Pauline, Caroline, Julie, Hortense, Catarine, Eugene, for the interest they have continued to feel for me. I pardon Louis for the libel he published in 1820: it is replete with false assertions and falsified documents.



Napoléon François Joseph Charles Bonaparte, Duke of Reichstadt (1811-1832), by L. Bucher. 1832.

© GrandPalaisRmn (Musée National des Châteaux de Malmaison et Bois-Préau) / André Martin, inv. no. M.M.40.47.3245.

“HOPE AND GLORY,”

Long before drafting his will, in 1809 — during the campaign in Germany and Austria, after suffering a gunshot wound to the right heel — Napoleon made decisions that would shape the future of his dynasty.

The Peace Treaty of Schönbrunn had not yet been signed when, in October of the same year, he finalised the redefinition of the monarch’s private domain: “The Emperor may dispose of it inter vivos; he may give everything to one of his heirs

and nothing to the other [...], and all these provisions must have a force independent of the [Napoleonic] Code, since the private domain is exempt from the provisions of the Code". These considerations led to the promulgation of a dedicated *senatus-consult* on 30 January 1810.

Meanwhile, on 15 December 1809, he annulled his marriage to Empress Josephine. Contracted on 9 March 1796, no children were born of this union.

On 1 April 1810, Napoleon remarried, this time to Marie-Louise. Less than a year later, the Empress gave birth to the crown prince, Napoleon François Joseph Charles Bonaparte, known as the "Roi de Rome" [King of Rome], born on 20 March 1811, who would become Napoleon II for only a few days in 1815.

Ten years later, when Napoleon I had definitively renounced all claims for himself and drew up his will, Napoleon placed his son at the centre of his attentions and concerns. His son was the future of his dynasty, the man in whom he now placed all his hopes. The will runs to 58 pages. They are today conserved in the Iron Cabinet at the French National Archives. Eleven pages concern this "Roi de Rome", the man the courts of Europe recognized as the Duc de Reichstadt [Duke of Reichstadt]. Napoleon left him no money. What were passed on were the values and symbols of the *Maison impériale* [imperial house].

Firstly, Napoleon urged his son to adopt his motto "everything for the French people".

On a material level, he was to inherit personal effects that recalled the memory of a father with whom he had little contact. He was also to receive objects imbued with the glory of the Empire. The will includes two appended lists.

Inventory "a" includes clothes, linen, and the "necessaire de toilette" [dressing case] — personal items for which Marchand was to serve as custodian. Inventory "A" lists the objects intended to pass from generation to generation. The objects and items were arranged in six sections and each section had a specified custodian, who was required to hand over the items in their care to Napoleon's son when he reached the age of sixteen.

Abbé Vignali was entrusted with the "sacred vessels of the Longwood chapel."

Next come the attributes of the warlord. Bertrand was made custodian of the arms which include the sword of Austerlitz, that Napoleon called "my sword." It was up to Marchand to keep and pass on the "necessaire de Campagne" [dressing case].

The will entrusted the medals, silverware, and porcelain service — items that could retrace the chronology of the imperial epic — to Montholon.

Like the monarchs who preceded him, Napoleon attached great importance to hunting. He entrusted Noverraz, his hunting valet, with his spurs and guns.

Lastly, the valet Saint-Denis, who acted as librarian during the exile, had to ensure the transmission of volumes from the Emperor's last library.

In addition to these legacies, his instructions to the executors confirmed his intentions and hopes for his heir. The document contains 37 articles. Sixteen directly concern the Duke of Reichstadt.

Three of them express Napoleon's wish that his heir should one day regain his place on the throne of France: "When my executors see my son, they will speak to him plainly. They will correct his thinking about events and realities and set him straight.";

"Press my son to reclaim the name Napoleon."; "If fortune ever turns again and my son returns to the throne..."

The thirteen other articles explain how to favour a return to prominence of the Bonaparte dynasty. This undertaking rested, first and foremost, on the unification of the imperial family around the heir. Napoleon made his intention explicit:

"As soon as my son reaches the age of reason, my mother, my brothers, and my sisters shall write to him and pledge themselves to his cause, whatever obstacles the House of Austria may seek to oppose."

On the other hand, a whole re-education programme needed to be undertaken. Napoleon identified numerous sources from which would be assembled for his son



*Ouvré près de moi — par un zèle sincère
Tu me contais alors l'histoire de mon père.
Tu sais combien mon âme, attentive à ta voix,
Réchauffait au récit de ses nobles exploits.*

The Duke of Reichstadt before the bust of his father, by Moritz Daffinger, 1831

© Châtillon-sur-Seine, Musée du Châtillonnais

a collection of originals, plans, manuscripts, and iconographic documents, so as to give him the closest possible insight into the imperial epic.

This history and these images were to be embodied by an entourage made up of Napoleon's loyal followers, who would be devoted to serving his son. "I would like to see some of my officers or servants serve my son — Bertrand's children or Montholon's"; "My nurse in Ajaccio has children and grandchildren whom the great fate I have given her has enabled her to bring up well; they would not be suspect to the Austrian authority; try to put some of them in the service of my son".

A letter preserved in the *Armoire de Fer* at the Archives Nationales shows that Napoleon's hopes were not in vain. Written by the Duke of Reichstadt in French, dated 22 September 1827 and addressed to a general whose identity remains unknown, it shows a keen interest in his father: "I placed this language at the heart of my studies. My father employed it to command in every battle where he won renown. Even in his final moments, he impressed upon me his wish that I never disregard the nation in which I was born."

In frail health, the Duke of Reichstadt died of tuberculosis on 22 July 1832, aged 21. He received his first burial in the Capuchin Crypt in Vienna. Then, on the initiative of Adolf Hitler, his remains were received in Paris at a ceremony beneath the dome at Les Invalides near his father's final resting place.

Looking to the future, placing his son at the heart of his last wishes, Napoleon also recalled the decisive encounters that marked his life.

From the memory of his nanny in Ajaccio to the bequest to "Ladie Hollande" [Lady Holland], the dozens of names mentioned give his last act an autobiographical feel. Ajaccio, Auxonne, Toulon, the Italian and Egyptian campaigns, Austerlitz, the campaigns of 1814 and 1815 - a whole life spent wielding the sword reappears through his pen.

Although he reportedly told Montholon during his captivity, "My glory does not lie in having won forty battles [...] what will live forever is my Civil Code; the minutes of my Conseil d'état [State Council]; the collections of my correspondence with my ministers...," only three senior "conseillers d'état" [state clerks] joined the ranks of the "faithful servants" at the time he Napoleon drafted his will: Antoine Marie Chamans de Lavalette directed the Postal Service; Pierre-François Réal served as rapporteur to the Conseil d'état during the drafting of the Napoleonic Code; and Édouard Bignon, a diplomat, undertook the writing of a History of French Diplomacy from 1792 to 1815.

In addition, some bequests include an expressed wish, such as this one concerning Abbé Vignali: "I want him to build his house near Pontenovo di Rostino". Other provisions carry a mark of esteem, as in the cases of the "brave Labédoyère" and the "virtuous General Travot." An emotional memory is evoked about Muiron: "Killed alongside us at Arcole, covering us with his body". In Colonel Marbot's case, it is a moral obligation: "I want him to continue writing in defence of the French armies' glory and to counter slander and apostasy".

THE TESTAMENTARY ENSEMBLE PRESERVED AT THE FRENCH NATIONAL ARCHIVES



The set of testamentary provisions preserved in the Iron Cabinet at the French National Archives consists of 11 documents (fig. 1 to 11), totalling 58 pages, written in pen and ink.

The fallen Emperor signed each document, "Napoleon," and sealed it with his coat of arms. He used a red ribbon for the will and the first two codicils, then adopted a green ribbon for the following documents. The imperial eagle is still partially visible on a seal from the fifth codicil.



Signature of Napoleon and seal showing the imperial eagle. Fifth codicil.
French National Archives, AE/1/13/21/f



Stamps and signatures of Montholon, Marchand, Bertrand and Vignali. First codicil.
French National Archives, AE/1/13/21/b



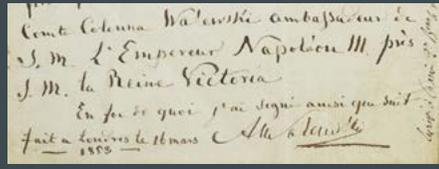
Napoleon's will.
French National Archives, AE/1/13/21/a

Alongside these elements, present from the outset, new annotations were added over time. In December 1821, a note in English, on one of the sheets left blank by Napoleon records the registration of the will and six codicils, by Montholon in London at the Doctor's Commons Prerogative Court of Canterbury.



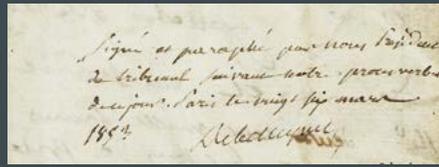
Remarks in English. Napoleon's will, page 6.
French National Archives AE/I/13/21/a

Thirty-two years later, a new generation of men would add their signatures to the document. Alexandre Walewski, Napoleon's illegitimate son and French ambassador to London, would take custody of the document on 16 March 1853.



Walewski's signature. Napoleon's will.
French National Archives AE/I/13/21/a

Ten days later, on 26 March 1853, Debeylleme, President of the Tribunal de la Seine [Civil Tribunal of the Seine], numbered, initialled, and registered the will before handing it over to Mr Noël, Napoleon III's notary.



Registration by the President of the Tribunal de la Seine. Fifth codicil.
French National Archives AE/I/13/21/f

Only in 1860, seven years later, would Napoleon III (Napoleon's nephew) decree that the will be deposited in the *Armoire de Fer* [Iron Cabinet] of the French National Archives after authorities declared the estate closed.



Stamp of the Imperial Archives. Napoleon's will.
French National Archives AE/I/13/21/a

Napoleon's will
15/04/21
French National Archives, AE/I/13/21/a
14 pages



Six codicils
16 April – 24 April 1821
French National Archives, AE/I/13/21/b-g
28 pages



Six codicils

16 April – 24 April 1821

French National Archives, AE/1/13/21/b-g



Letters to the banker Laffitte, and to La Boullerie, treasurer of the private domain

23 and 25 April 1821

French National Archives, AE/1/13/21/j-k
8 pages



Instructions for executors

26 April-27 April 1821

French National Archives, AE/1/13/21 i
4 pages



Alongside the eleven items from the Armoire de Fer, the archive also holds a copy of the seventh codicil; the original has disappeared. The French National Archives hold a number of copies, including this one, consisting of three pages from the Murat collection. This codicil, dated 25 April 1821, was to remain secret. Article 5 deals in particular with Napoleon's illegitimate sons. Napoleon made a bequest to Léon, the son of Éléonore Denuelle de La Plaigne, born in 1806. If this bequest could not be honoured, it would be transferred to Alexandre Walewski, born in 1810, Napoleon's son from an affair with the Polish noblewoman Marie Walewska.

French National Archives, 31AP/28
3 pages



THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CODICILS



In 1938, the 8th codicil was sold at auction in London. Since then, the French National Archives holds a copy in the form of a photographic print. The current location of the original is unknown.

A private collector currently holds the ninth codicil and presented it to the public for the first time in 2021 at the Musée de l'Armée in Paris.

These two documents were not part of the will deposited and registered in London in December 1821.

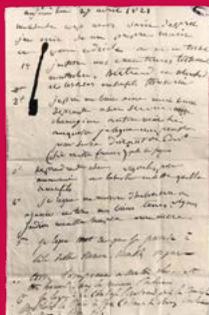
The 8th codicil, dated 27 April 1821, does not follow the forms expected of a holograph will, because it is unsigned and only partly in Napoleon's own handwriting. It was dictated by Napoleon and completed by Montholon. Unofficially however, Napoleon's executors ensured that the last wishes contained in the will were respected. This applies in particular to article 2.

It concerns the payment of a legacy to the surgeon Antommarchi, who carried out Napoleon's autopsy on St Helena. Article 4 is the last trace of Napoleon's hand, who finally put down his pen after writing: "I bequeath my house in Ajaccio and all my possessions, land, vineyards, garden, furniture and livestock to my mother".

On 29 April 1821, Marchand wrote the ninth codicil on the back of a playing card at Napoleon Bonaparte's dictation. "I bequeath to my son my residence in Ajaccio and its appurtenances, two houses near the salt pans with a garden, and all my property in the territory of Ajaccio, yielding him an income of 50,000 livres. I bequeath to my son...". Marchand confirms in his memoirs that he stopped there.

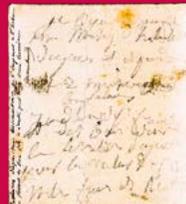
With these words: "To my mother", "to my son", and this family home in Ajaccio linking the generations, Napoleon's last wishes come to an end.

Photographic prints of the 8th codicil, dated 27 April 1821
French National Archives,
2 pages



9^e codicil, dated 29 April 1821 [recto/verso].
Private collection

© Paris - Musée de l'Armée, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn / Anne-Sylvaine Marre-Noël



“ THE EMPEROR IS NO MORE! BUT HIS SPIRIT IS NOT DEAD ”

On their return to France, the executors of the will set to work in the autumn of 1821.

Neither Marie-Louise nor Eugène de Beauharnais would pay anything. After recovering and distributing the effects previously held in Paris by the Comte de Turenne, Louis-Joseph Marchand failed to gain admission in Vienna and therefore could not deliver the Duke of Reichstadt's share of the inheritance. Furthermore, by prohibiting the filing and registration of wills in France, Louis XVIII cut short the question of Napoleon's private estate.

On the financial front, efforts centered on the account opened with banker Laffitte. After an initial reluctance, officials deposited the will and codicils in England on 10 December 1821 for authentication. Secondly, officials deposited a few extracts dealing solely with the payment of monetary legacies with a Paris notary on 4 April 1822. Arbitration followed. The press carried exchanges. Lawsuits ensued. The difficulties lasted until 1826, when the executors signed an agreement with Laffitte, who finally released the funds. The money was then divided between the various legatees. Only Cantillon, a former mounted chasseur of the Imperial Guard, received his entire bequest.



Louis-Joseph Marchand (1791-1876),
photographed around 1857.
© Musée d'Orsay, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn/Patrice
Schmidt, inv. PHO1995-5-40

Between 1823 and 1825, in addition to the difficulties encountered in executing the will, Montholon and Gourgaud fulfilled their moral obligation to publish

the memoirs dictated by Napoleon during his captivity.

Finally, during the Bourbon Restoration, only Marchand fully honoured one of Napoleon's wishes, by marrying the daughter of General Brayer on 15 November 1823. Napoleon had written: "I wish him to marry a widow, sister, or daughter of an officer or soldier of my Old Guard."

A new chapter began on 22 July 1832, the day the Duke of Reichstadt died. A few days later, the city of Paris marked the commemoration of the "Trois Glorieuses" [July Revolution] by unveiling a statue of Napoleon atop the column in Place Vendôme. The reign of Louis-Philippe, which had begun two years earlier, represented a major political change for the Bonapartist movement.

Napoleon's mother, Madame Mère, the heiress by descent, maintained — without regard for Marie-Louise — that all the objects bequeathed to her grandson rightfully belonged to her. On the advice of her son Joseph, she commissioned a close relative of the family, Jean-Thomas Arrighi de Casanova from Padua, to bring together the effects kept by the various custodians.

It would take more than three years for a large majority of the objects to be assembled. Only Noverraz and Bertrand refused to hand over the items in their possession. Madame Mère died on 2 February 1836, and only in December of that same year did the surviving members of the Bonaparte family receive a share of the bequest.

Marchand played an active role in this phase of the will's execution. He worked in particular to draw up a new inventory of the assets. At the same time, he fulfilled a further moral obligation by

publishing *Précis des guerres de César* [*Precis of Caesar's Wars*], which Napoleon Bonaparte had dictated to him.

The year 1836 — marked by the inauguration of the Arc de Triomphe — was key in the development of Napoleon's succession and the rise of Bonapartism. Bertrand was elected to Parliament in 1831 and, by refusing to hand over the objects in his possession to the Bonaparte clan, signaled his allegiance, at that moment, to the July Monarchy.



Henri-Gatien Bertrand (1773-1844),
by P. Delaroche. 1842.

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He confirmed this stance in June 1840, when he handed over the sword of Austerlitz and the other belongings he had retained to Louis-Philippe.

1836 was also the year that Napoleon's nephew, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, made his first attempted coup, or seizure of power, in Strasbourg. He did it again four years later, landing at Boulogne-sur-Mer in the summer of 1840. Montholon was at his side, while Bertrand and Marchand were on board the frigate *La Belle Poule*.

They were sailing to St Helena to bring Napoleon's mortal remains back to France. The French Parliament had passed a law in May 1840, approved by Louis-Philippe, making the execution of this final wish possible.

Bertrand died in 1844. Napoleon's dictated memoirs, which recount the Egyptian campaign, did not appear in print until 1847. That same year saw the publication of Montholon's memoirs, *Récit de la captivité de l'Empereur Napoléon à Sainte-Hélène* [*History of the captivity of Napoleon at St Helena*].

In December 1848, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, the first President of the Republic elected by universal suffrage, appointed Jérôme — the last surviving brother of Napoleon — as Governor of Les Invalides: "Napoleon's brother belongs beside this sacred resting place, near his brother's ashes [mortal remains]. He also stands at the head of that noble phalanx of veterans, where generations of brave soldiers gather and become one."

During his presidency, Louis-Napoléon paid close attention to the veterans who had crossed Europe with his uncle. His concern was both benevolent and self-interested. Although it was not yet time to settle Napoleon's bequest, the "Grogards" [Veterans of Napoleon's Old Guard] were the subject of a special decision. Following a series of circulars and commissions, the work of the Ministry of Justice culminated on 14 December 1851 with the promulgation of a decree granting assistance to former servicemen of the French Revolution and First French Empire. This fund was managed by the Grand Chancery of the Légion d'Honneur.

It operated separately from the relief fund normally included in the Ministry of War's budget.

Independently of the initiatives undertaken by Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, it was during the French Second Republic that the final volumes of the *History of France*, which Napoleon had commissioned through his bequest to Édouard Bignon, were published posthumously.

After the coup d'état of 2 December 1851, and the restoration of the imperial dignity one year later, Napoleon III sought to assert the legitimacy of the Second Empire by drawing on the legacy of his uncle. As the keystone of this ambition, the Archives Impériales [Imperial Archives] became the heart of a three-dimensional project. On the one hand, it was monumental, with the construction of large repositories to house the



Napoléon III (1808-1873), by É. Disdéri. S. d. .
© Fondation Napoléon, inv. no. 288.22



Charles-Tristan de Montholon (1783-1853), pastel by E. H. T. Pingret. 1853. .

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Archives of the Empire. Secondly it was editorial, with the publishing of the correspondence of Napoleon I. Finally it was historical, with the creation of a Musée de l'Histoire de France [Museum of French History], with Napoleon's will as its centrepiece.

On 16 March 1853, the will was handed over to the French authorities. Montholon died in Paris in August of the same year. At the same time, the first commission responsible for executing the will submitted its report to Napoleon III. An exceptional budget was voted. Over the next three years, the executors completed all the bequests, adhering as closely as possible to the letter

of the will. Authorities examined the military files according to the distinctions Napoleon established: veterans of the Revolutionary and Imperial wars, members of the battalion on the island of Elba, and those wounded at Ligny and Waterloo. Authorities also handled the legacies listed in the seventh codicil separately, as Napoleon had initially intended them to remain secret.

Finally, the towns of Brienne and Méry, and 26 departments that suffered from the invasions of 1814 and 1815, also benefited from this budget.

These financial provisions then give way to a more symbolic and honorary intention.



The Armoire de Fer [Iron Cabinet] of at the Archives Nationales, made by the locksmith Marguerit in 1790-1791 at the request of the French National Assembly.

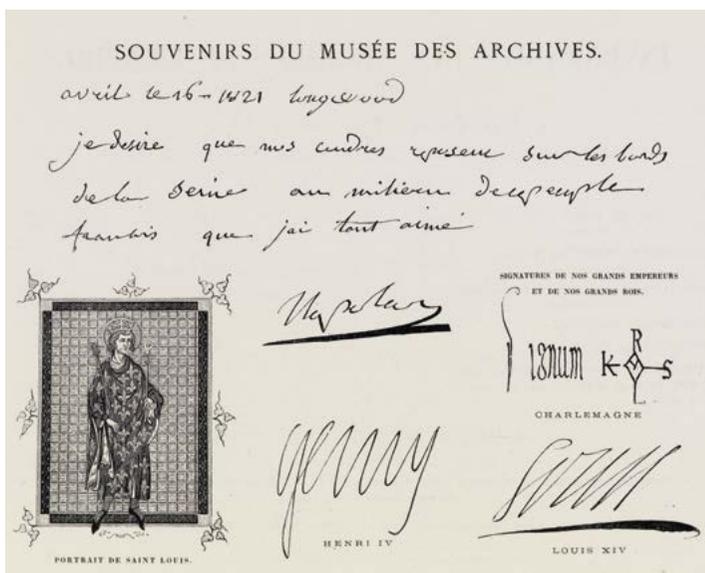
On 12 August 1857, Napoleon III decreed the creation of the St Helena medal. This distinction was intended to be awarded to all of Napoleon's "companions in glory", veterans of the wars of the French Revolution and Empire who were still alive.

After the French authorities declared the estate closed, a decree dated 28

April 1860 ended the will's extraordinary journey by ordering its deposit at the Imperial Archives. A few months later, Marchand, the last surviving companion from St Helena, attended the transfer of Napoleon's remains from the Saint-Jérôme chapel at Les Invalides to the sarcophagus under the dome.

The will's inclusion in the National "Iron Cabinet" shifted the focus from political exploitation to historical and patrimonial significance. The Bonaparte dynasty was thus elevated to the rank of its predecessors. During the summer of 1867, the newly opened "Musée des Archives" [Archives Museum], welcomed its first visitors. It displayed what archivists of the period described as "a chronological collection of original records tracing the history of France, from the donations of Dagobert and Charlemagne to the will of Napoleon I".

Leaflet presenting the musée des Archives nationales, [French National Archives Museum], distributed by the publisher Plon. 1867. Archives nationales, AB/XII/4



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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