

DESCRIPTION
of the
VIGNALI COLLECTION
of
RELICS OF NAPOLEON

Brought from Saint-Helena by
Napoleon's Chaplain
Abbé Ange Paul Vignali



THE ROSENBACH COMPANY
1320 Walnut Street 273 Madison Avenue
PHILADELPHIA 1924 NEW YORK

RELICS OF NAPOLEON

brought back from

ST. HELENA

by

Napoleon's Chaplain, Abbe' Vignali.

PLATE I.



NAPOLEON I

His silver cup, used by him in his dying moments.

Engraved with Imperial Coat of Arms.

(From Vignali Collection of Napoleon Relics).

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ABBÉ VIGNALI'S NAPOLEON RELICS.

Ange Paul Vignali was one of the two Corsican priests who were sent out by Cardinal Fesch (Napoleon's uncle) to St. Helena in order to establish a chapel at Longwood and to conduct religious services therein. The eldest of the two priests, Bonavita, only stayed a very short time at St. Helena and returned to Europe, whilst Vignali remained with the Emperor Napoleon up to his death and returned to Europe together with all the other companions of the exile.

Vignali was in charge of the chapel at Longwood for over a year, and he it was who administered the last sacrament to Napoleon, and conducted Napoleon's funeral ceremony.

In his will Napoleon left him a sum of 100,000 francs with the wish that he should utilise this money for building a house in his native village, Bisinchi, near Porto Nuovo, and he also entrusted him with a number of objects belonging to the chapel at Longwood, mostly silver and gold church vessels, altar cloths, etc., which Vignali was to remit to Napoleon's son, the Duke of Reichstadt in Vienna. As is well known, none of Napoleon's companions in exile were ever allowed to communicate with the Duke of Reichstadt, and Vignali was not able to carry out the Emperor's orders. The fate of the objects entrusted to him was a very peculiar one, as through the dishonesty of a Corsican lawyer, Peraggi, they finally landed in the State Pawnbroking Office in Paris (Mont de Pieté) and after long litigation were repurchased from it by the Duke of Padua, who returned them to the Emperor's family. These objects are now in the possession of Prince Victor Napoleon. Frederic Masson has described these objects in one of his volumes dealing with the St. Helena period, but rather incompletely, because not all the documents were at his disposal.

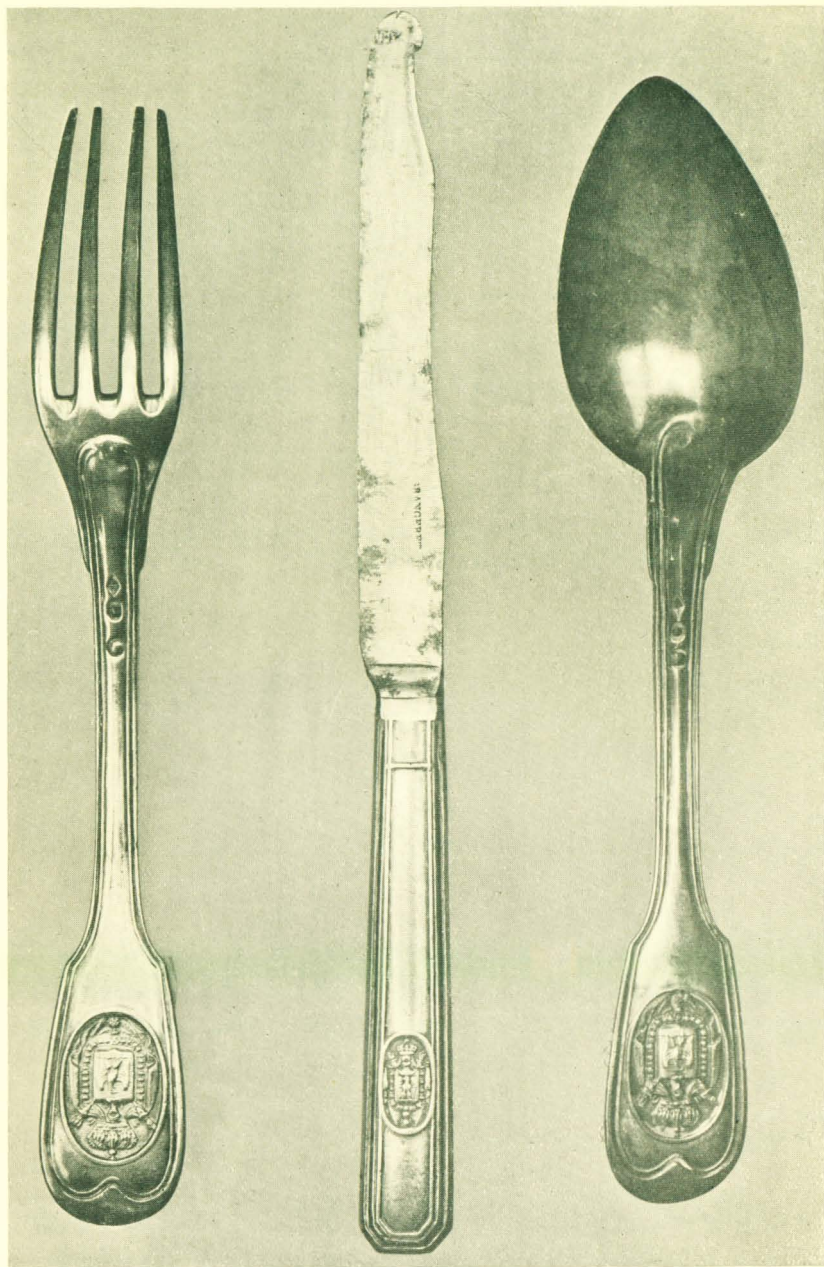
ABBÉ VIGNALI'S NAPOLEON RELICS.

Apart from those personal objects belonging to Napoleon which were expressly and specifically willed to the various persons of his entourage, a great number of objects remaining and not dealt with under the will were, according to the mutual decision of his companions, divided among them. A share went to Vignali, and it is this share which forms the items constituting the Vignali collection.

AUTHENTICITY OF THE COLLECTION.

Vignali returned to Corsica at the end of 1821 and settled down in his native village, where he reconstructed his house with such funds as he could secure from Napoleon's executors. Several years afterwards (in 1828) he was killed in a vendetta. His sole heir was his sister Roxane Vignali Gianettini; she inherited the entire estate of the Abbé Vignali, including the present collection. After her death this collection descended to her only son Charles-Marie Gianettini, and from this latter the present collection was acquired. Charles Gianettini, who is still alive, is now 96 years old, and has testified in a special notarial act that all the items brought in 1821 by his uncle, Abbé Vignali, have been kept in their integrity at the family house at Bisinchi and that they have been religiously preserved up to the time of their sale. A notarial document was executed in 1916 in favour of the last owner, giving a full list and description of all the items in this collection.

PLATE II.



NAPOLÉON I.
His knife, fork and spoon in silver. Engraved with Imperial Coat of Arms.
(From Vignali Collection of Napoleon Relics).

L'ABBÉ VIGNALI'S COLLECTION
of
NAPOLEON RELICS.

Brought back by Vignali from Saint-Helena.

(a) Relics of Napoleon.

1. Napoleon's knife, fork and spoon in silver, engraved in deep relief with the Imperial Coat of Arms of Napoleon, and forming part of the famous great dinner service, most of which was broken up at St. Helena and sold as silver in order to supplement Napoleon's funds. (*See Illustration.*)
2. Napoleon's silver cup, engraved with the Imperial Coat of Arms, forming part of one of Napoleon's travelling dressing-cases. (*See Illustration.*)
3. A packet containing three kinds of hair of Napoleon (hair of the head, of the body, and of the beard). The packet is inscribed in Vignali's handwriting and there is a letter by Vignali referring to the origin of this hair.
4. A shirt of Napoleon's in very fine holland marked with the Imperial cipher, and according to tradition worn by him during the last days of his illness.
5. A handkerchief of Napoleon's marked with his cipher.
6. The famous white breeches won by Napoleon.
7. A white piqué waistcoat worn by Napoleon.

ABBÉ VIGNALI'S NAPOLEON RELICS.

8. A coloured handkerchief (so-called bandana) habitually worn by Napoleon at St. Helena.
9. A mummified tendon taken from Napoleon's body during the post-mortem. (The authenticity of this remarkable relic has lately been confirmed by the publication in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of a posthumous memoir by St. Denis, in which he expressly states that he and Vignali took away small pieces of Napoleon's corpse during the autopsy.)
10. The church register of the chapel at Longwood of St. Helena, registering one marriage and two deaths, written and signed by Vignali's predecessor, Bonavita.
11. An altar cloth trimmed with lace from the chapel at Longwood.
12. Two small altar cloths marked with Napoleon's cipher.
13. Another altar cloth trimmed with lace.
14. Three chalice cloths marked with Napoleon's cipher.
15. A surplice trimmed with lace.
16. Vignali's church vestments of green silk trimmed with silver braid.
17. A length of white silk curtain (trimmed with green) used in Napoleon's study at St. Helena.

(b) Documents.

18. Vignali's diary, his diploma of Rome University as Doctor of Medicine, his diploma of theology and his passport with British visa.
19. A card of invitation signed by Sir Hudson Lowe, Governor of St. Helena
20. Six letters of Count de Montholon, Napoleon's Companion at St. Helena
21. Five Letters of Comte de Bertrand, Napoleon's Companion at St. Helena.

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22. Three letters of Marchand, Napoleon's Valet and Executor.
23. One letter of Cardinal Fesch (Napoleon's Uncle).
24. Two letters of Coursot, Napoleon's Butler at St. Helena.
25. One letter of Las Cases, Napoleon's Companion at St. Helena.
26. One letter of Bonavita, Napoleon's Chaplain (Vignali's predecessor).
27. One letter of Maret Duke of Bassano
28. One letter signed by the three executors of Napoleon (Bertrand, Montholon and Marchand) and a signed copy of the codicil in favour of Vignali.
29. Accounts of salary to Vignali signed by Bertrand.
30. Accounts of legacy signed by Montholon.
31. Two accounts of the distribution of the legacies signed by the banker Lafitte.
32. One volume of Las Cases' memoirs with author's autograph.
33. A letter of Paoli, a letter of Bertrand, a letter from Madam Mère, signed by Rosa Mellini.
34. A draft of a letter by Vignali referring to the hair of Napoleon.
35. A copy of Napoleon's will by Vignali made at St. Helena.
36. Most important documents referring to the affair Peraggi (the above refer to the episode with regard to the objects left to the Duke of Reichstadt).
37. A letter from Frederic Masson addressed to Gianettini (Vignali's nephew) constituting a further proof of the authenticity of the collection.



ABBÉ VIGNALI'S NAPOLEON RELICS.

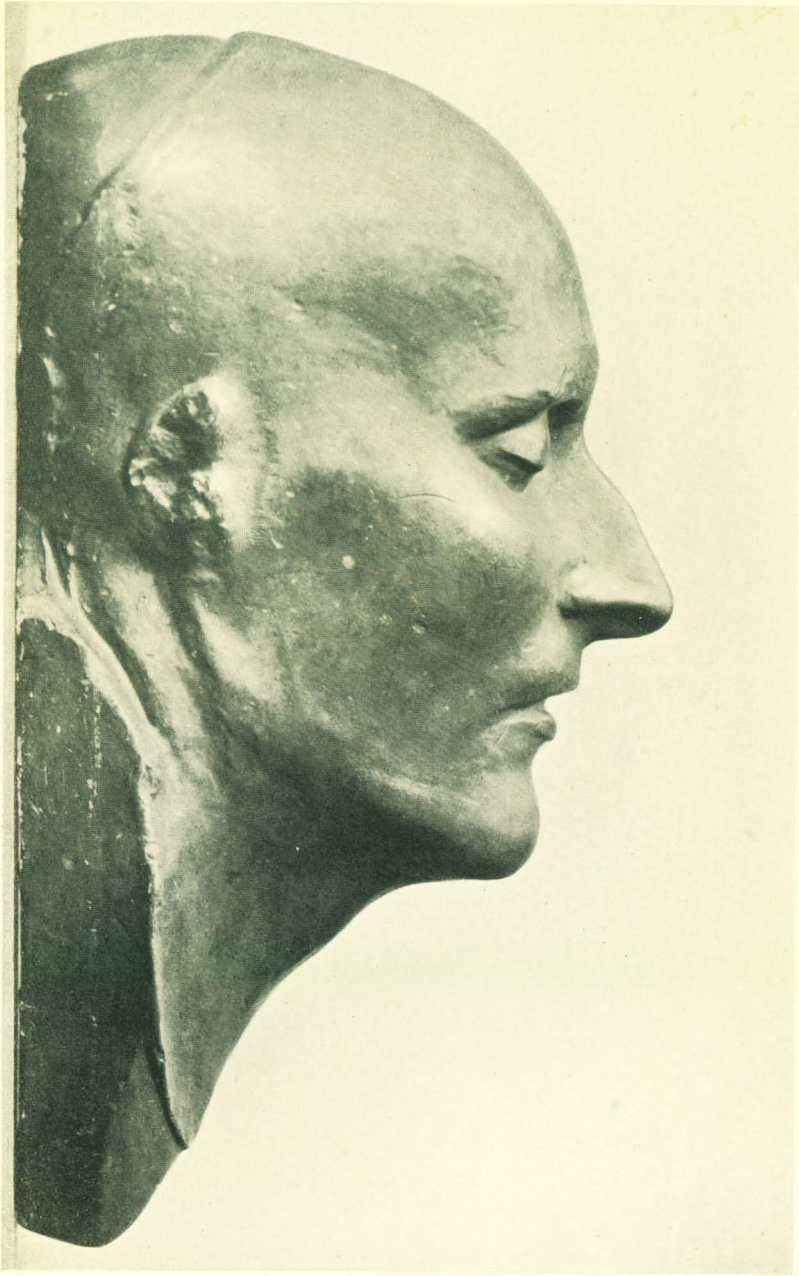
(c) Napoleon's Death Mask.

38. **NAPOLEON I.** DEATH MASK FROM THE MATRIX MOULDED AT ST. HELENA FROM THE FACE OF THE DEAD HERO BY NAPOLEON'S DOCTOR, AN TOMMARCHI.

This matrix Antommarchi retained till 1833, when he made and issued a few masks from same, each bearing his stamp at base (the matrix was then handed to the French Government, and is now in the Hotel des Invalides, Paris). This mask is of exceptional interest, being the one owned by Napoleon's Chaplain (L'Abbé Vignali), who administered the last Sacrament to Napoleon at St. Helena. (See Illustration.)

39. Accompanying the death mask is a highly important autograph letter from Dr. Antommarchi to Abbé Vignali, sending him a printed prospectus of the former's intention to issue to a few subscribers the "Plâtre ou Masque de l'Empereur Napoléon," and requesting Vignali's help.

40. Antommarchi's printed circular relating to the Death Mask, to which he refers in the above letter.



NAPOLFON'S DEATH MASK.