



Blue Transfer Cup Plate "Battle of Marengo" showing Napoleon astride a chair, backwards.

The Napoleon Series by Charles James Mason

By Len Kling

During his lifetime, Napoleon Bonaparte was widely feared by the people of Britain. That he was a danger was a well founded belief, as at one time he was on the verge of attempting an invasion before events elsewhere in Europe distracted his attention. If the image of Napoleon appeared in print or on pottery, it was nearly always as a caricature or to be ridiculed. Nearly a generation would have to pass, with the Little Corporal long dead and safely a part of history, before the firm of Charles James Mason would issue a series commemorating his victories, and depicting

him not as a monkey or buffoon, but as the seemingly invincible military leader he was until overreaching himself.

The dinner service on which these patterns are found was probably produced in the late 1830s and into the 1840s. Pieces are variously marked "Napoleon"; "Napoleon's Battles" with the C.J.M. & Co. maker's mark; or not marked at all. Individual titles were sometimes included at the bottom of the scenes themselves - but often not. An elaborate rococo border which includes figures of goddesses leads to this series often being confused with the very similar looking Texian Campaign series,

which also features goddesses in its border design. But where the Texian Campaign series has an alternating design of military accoutrements, Napoleon's border features a ewer with other elements. Due to these similarities, the beginning collector is cautioned to take care, as prices for the Texian Campaign patterns tend to be much higher.

While the scenes and sources for the Texian Campaign series have not yet been satisfactorily identified, the views in the Napoleon series are nearly all based on prints and other images that have been identified and were available at that time. My interest in the series began when, as edi-

tor of European themes on the TCC database, I entered the collection of member Henri Gadbois of Houston. There are currently eleven patterns represented in the database, most are from Henri's pieces. The events depicted span most of Napoleon Bonaparte's military career, and the views are listed here in chronological order.

1. "Siege of Toulon" Reticulated tray, 11 by 9.25 inches. This engagement of September to December 1793 was the first in which Napoleon distinguished himself and came to the attention of the elite of Paris. After the battle, he was promoted from major to brigadier general.

2. "The Bridge of Arcole". Handled dish, 11.5 by 7.5 inches (on which the alternate spelling "Arcola" is found). A dramatic moment from a November 1796, battle in Italy, after "La Bataille du Pont d'Arcole", painted by Horace Vernet in 1826.

3. "Battle of the Pyramids". Platter, 21.5 by 17.5 inches. This depicts one of numerous Mameluke cavalry charges against Napoleon's disciplined troops. Fought near Cairo in

July 1798, Napoleon named the battle for the pyramids visible on the horizon, exhorting his men that "Forty centuries look down upon you!"

4. "The Revolt of Cairo". Undertray, 12.5 by 10.25 inches. A revolt of the Mamelukes in Cairo against their French occupiers, occurring in October, 1798.

5. "Bonaparte Crossing the Alps" or "Napoleon at the Saint-Bernard Pass." Plate, 7 inches. After the painting by Jacques-Louis David, showing Napoleon's crossing of the Alps in the spring of 1800 in an effort to surprise the Austrians then besieging Genoa in Italy. In fact, Napoleon made the crossing on a mule or donkey.

6. "Battle of Marengo". Platter, 20 by 17 inches. This depicts a battle from July 1800 in Italy.

7. "Marengo" Dish, 5.9 by 4.7 inches, and cup plate, 3.75 inches. Both of these pieces show Napoleon straddling a camp chair backwards, a telescope in his hand, following the progress of the battle. The cup plate is the only one titled.

8. "Ulm". Plate, 8 inches. A series of small skirmishes in October 1805, a prelude to the major Battle of Austerlitz later the same year.

9. "Battle of Austerlitz". Plate, 10.5 inches. This December 1805 battle is considered perhaps the most important of Napoleon's career, as he defeated the combined forces of the Tsar of Russia and Emperor of Austria, forcing major concessions from both. This scene is after "Bataille d'Austerlitz", painted by Francois Gerard in 1810.

10. "Battle of Jena". Plate, 9 inches. The Prussians were convinced to join the fight against Napoleon after Austerlitz. Complacent, and overconfident due to their past military greatness, the Prussian army fell to Napoleon in this battle in October 1806.

11. "Napoleon at the Tomb of Frederick the Great". Covered box, 4 by 3.25 inches. Though untitled, this scene shows Napoleon contemplating the sarcophagus of the great Prussian king at his burial place in Potsdam, soon after the Battle of Jena. It is after a painting by Marie Nicolas Ponce-Camus, executed about 1810.

Continued on next page



Source Print for the "Battle of Austerlitz" plate.



10 1/2" Brown Transfer Plate showing Napoleon at the 1805 Battle of Austerlitz.

12. "Return from Elba". Platter, 16 by 12.5 inches. After his disastrous Russian campaign of 1812, Napoleon was forced to abdicate by his political opponents and exiled to the island of Elba in 1814. He soon tired of his confinement and managed to escape, meeting his former troops at Grenoble in March 1815, the scene shown here. Though sent to intercept and seize Napoleon, the troops instead rallied behind him, leading to the Hundred Days, Napoleon's second reign, which ended at Waterloo in June, 1815.

Mason's was not the only company to use these designs. William Smith & Co. of Stockton-on-Tees, Durham, used The Bridge of Arcole pattern on a wash ewer in its Napoleon's Victories series, as did its successor, George Skinner & Co. Examples of this pattern on these ewers can be found in the database; the wash bowl from the same set is also illustrated in Coysh & Henrywood, Vol. 1, pg. 257, bearing The Revolt of Cairo.

In common with other historical Staffordshire series, Mason's Napoleon was taken from printed sources that reproduced the original paintings and drawings illustrating these events. McGill University in Mon-

treil maintains a large online database of books and prints pertaining to Napoleon Bonaparte, and their generosity in allowing the re-use of their images has helped enormously in researching this article, as well as illustrating it. What became clear in searching their website is that the majority of these prints were produced by more than one publisher. Many of them were, naturally enough, originally issued in France, and then used by other publishers on the continent and in England. What I wanted to pin down was the source actually used by the Mason firm. I now believe that source (or at least one of them) to have been the four volume Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte by his Private Secretary M. de Bourrienne, published by Richard Bentley in London in 1836. While I have not been able to trace every image to this publication, several of them match. We illustrate two here: The "Revolt of Cairo" on an undertray, with the same image from Bentley and "Battle of Austerlitz" on a plate, with the print of this event pictured.

The Mason factory issued another series using the same border, illustrating views in the Holy Land. Though no series name has yet been discovered, five views ("Anti-

och in Syria", "Hebron", "Laodicea", "Mosque of Omar", and "Nineveh") are recorded in the database under the provisional title "Biblical Cities". Researchers affiliated with the Mason Collectors Society in England were able last year to establish that these images came from the book Landscape Illustrations of the Bible by the Reverend Thomas Horne, published by John Murray, London, in 1836 - the same year that Bentley produced de Bourrienne's memoirs.

Obviously, research into this fascinating series is only beginning. There are dinner service pieces yet unaccounted for and undoubtedly more views that have not been documented. The Marengo cup plate and the covered box clearly suggest the existence of a tea service and other transferware items that this researcher, at least, doesn't know about. I'm hopeful - indeed, confident - that other collectors do, and that our knowledge about the Napoleon and Napoleon's Battles series will grow, as will its representation in the TCC pattern database. I became so intrigued while researching and entering Henri's collection that I've begun collecting these patterns myself. As if I needed one more thing on which to spend my money!



Source Print from Bentley showing the "Revolt of Cairo"



Brown Transfer dish, "Revolt of Cairo"