

# The Bony Mug

By Royce E. Walters

*Editor's Note: At the Annual Meeting in Williamsburg in October, 2008, Judie Siddall brought a mug for identification to the 'Show & Tell' session. Royce Walters, 19th Century European History Scholar, took it upon himself to research the piece and write this article for the "Bulletin."*

At first look, this propaganda mug, dated 1842 under the glaze, appears to be an anachronism. In 1821 Napoleon I died on St. Helena amidst allegations that he was being poisoned by the British, and in 1832, his son, known as L'Aiglon and King of Rome in France and the Duke of Reichstadt in Vienna, died as well. Those deaths might logically have heralded the end of Bonapartism. Such, however, was not the case.

The mantle of Bonapartism was picked up by Prince Louis Napoleon, the nephew of Napoleon I, who later became Prince-President of the Second Republic and Napoleon III of a restored empire. Before his successful accession to power, Prince Louis Napoleon attempted two coups d'etat, one in 1836 and the other in 1840: both failed. Between these two coups attempts, Louis Napoleon spent some time in exile in Britain, where his activities came to the attention of the politically aware.

Despite putting down both coups d'etat, Louis Philippe, King of the French (1830-48) treated the Bonaparte pretender leniently. He did so to try to co-opt Bonaparte's followers into supporting his flagging regime. To that end, the French government successfully petitioned the British government to return the emperor's body to France. Returned in 1840 with great pomp by a party led by the Prince de Joinville, Louis Philippe's son, Napoleon's remains were re-interred in the chapel of the Hotel des Invalides in Paris. As the cortege made its way through the Arch de Triumph and down the Champs Elysee to the chapel on a



**Caricature of Napoleon on the Bony Mug.**

chilly December day, the "sun of Austerlitz" burst forth, as the train of the former Imperial Guard passed by. For the first time in twenty-five years, shouts of "Vivre l'empereur!" arose from the crowd. Louis Philippe's attempt to use Bonapartism to shore up his unpopular regime failed abysmally.

The specter of a revived empire helped to remind Britain of the threat that a French Empire posed. Additionally, in the 1830's and 1840's, British fears and suspicions of French motives were fueled by a series of disputes: the French annexation of Algeria and France's increasing industrialization.

The nature of Bonapartism remains a subject of disagreement among historians today, so we need not examine it here.. To the British, however,

Bonapartism represented militarism, a threat to the peace and stability of Europe and a threat to traditional political freedoms and personal liberties, a theme very common in anti-Bonapartist propaganda during the First Empire. The British drew the contrast between their freedom of speech, assembly, and parliament and the authoritarian nature of the Napoleonic Empire.

The Bony mug captures these fears and suspicions very forcefully. The inscription, "Forget me not," inside a cartouche, and "Prosper" and "Freedom" on the handle remind the viewer of the First Empire and represent their view of Bonapartism and the perceived threat to their free society. A stern, menacing looking Bonaparte wearing a cockade dominates the sides of the mug. The green birds close to the figure appear to represent his remains' removal from St. Helena. The mug's decoration also shows Bonaparte holding a green sprig in his mouth, one without leaves, the other one with two leaves. The latter may possibly be a sprig of tea, representing the British national drink and emblematic of Britain. The initials "D" and "B" remain unidentified.

"Bony" is a fine example of a political statement, as well as political propaganda as seen on transferware.



**Inscriptions with Political Implications found on Bony Mug.**