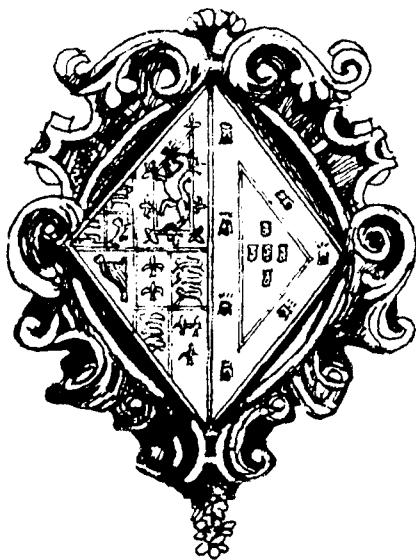


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## NAPOLEON IN MADEIRA

by Duarte Ivo Cruz

Strictly speaking Napoleon never set foot on Portuguese soil but he was twice in Portuguese territorial waters, off Funchal on August 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> and near Cape Verde on September 1<sup>st</sup> in the same year. The Madeira incident however deserves to be recorded as it was the last European territory seen by Napoleon and he was fully conscious of the fact. Before dropping anchor in Funchal, biographers are unanimous in recording a dialogue with sailors and Italians when their ships crossed on the high seas. Said Napoleon:

“Where are you coming from?”

“From Madeira

“Where are you going?”

“Naples.

“Well, let it be known in Rome that on August 22<sup>nd</sup> you met Napoleon at sea, proscribed and deported to Saint Helena”.

That same evening the ex-Emperor on board the British ship *H.M.S. Northumberland* “a fantastic ship full of ghosts ... a floating tomb, of English wood, plated with English copper...”, according to the symbolist poet Teixeira de Pascoais, (*Napoleão* pag. 293 and 295) came in sight of Porto Santo and then Madeira where it anchored offshore and where they didn’t allow him to disembark. He therefore completes a curious geographical and historic circle which starts and ends with an island.

Baring the fact that he was addressed as General Bonaparte and not by Your Majesty, a protocol which later will have its importance in Madeira, British relations with “Bonaparte” and his entourage, during the long crossing to Saint Helena were always cordial and respectful. French and English witnesses are unanimous in this respect.

On August the 22<sup>nd</sup> 1851, *Northumberland* sailed off Porto Santo and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> dropped her anchor in front of Funchal. We have several direct sources which witnessed the British fleet's stay in Madeira: Gourgand, Las Casas and J.R. Glover, this last one, Secretary of Admiral Cockburn left personal impressions.

So on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, Napoleon, forbidden to land, observed the coast at length. The weather was very hot and a storm blew up. Somebody told Napoleon that the locals attributed to his presence the damages resulting from the storm. Las Casas states "the air was excessively hot and full of sand exceptionally fine: they were the terrible winds from the African desert which brought to us such emanations". Glover confirms: "the wind steered West and became very disagreeable. Bonaparte that evening did not walk before dinner. That night he seemed pensative and in a bad mood".

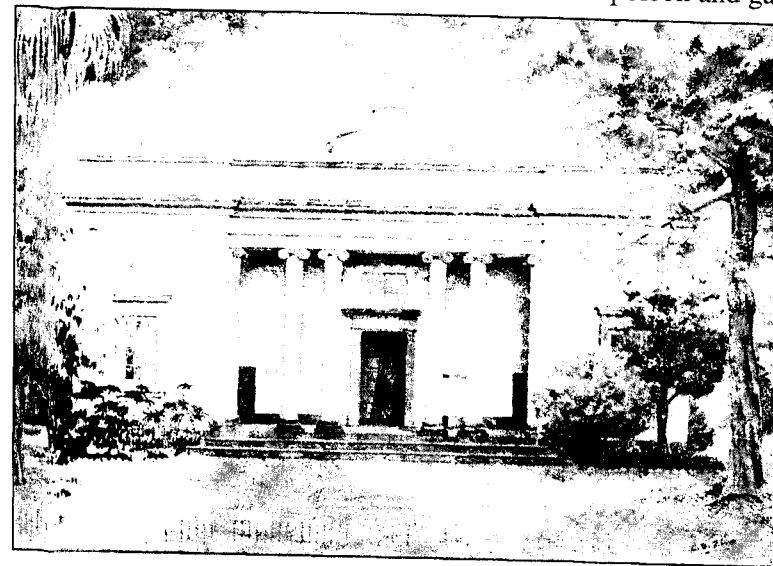
He asked a few questions from the Admiral in relation to the island. Concerning its extension; when it had been discovered and by whom. Immediately after dinner he went to the bow and observed the Island, especially when we sailed along the coast, until we arrived to Praia do Funchal, when it was already dark (ref.: Padre Fernando Augusto da Silva and Carlos Azevedo de Menezes, *Elucidário Madeirense*, Vol. II, pag. 403).

Las Casas also says: "on the 24<sup>th</sup> we took on board some cattle and other provisions like green oranges, bad peaches, pears with no taste but excellent figs and grapes" (*Memorial* Vol. I). They also brought books, painting materials and a beautiful tea set, which belongs today to the *Fundação Medeiros de Almeida*, in Lisbon. They posted letters which arrived at their destiny!

The Emperor's entourage enjoyed Funchal even with the bad weather. Albine Montolov compares it to the town of Nice. On the 25<sup>th</sup> says Glover, "we had a continuation of the violent and very disagreeable sirocco which started when we sighted Madeira; the inhabitant's superstition was such that they attribute this destructive

wind to Bonaparte who was in port; they were very apprehensive for their harvest which, almost ripe, would be lost in half ... the heat from the East, the disagreeable nature of the wind, the rolling of the ship which was considerable, obviously affected the General. At dinner he eat very little and was dispirited. That evening he played "Vint et Un" for about half an hour and retired to bed".

The most relevant fact during this stay was a visit of the British Consul, Henry Veitch. He had been appointed Agent and Consul General in Madeira in March 1809 and here he stayed until December 1835, with an interruption of three years (September 1829 to December 1831). He was a friend of Admiral Cockburn and, using this contact, he came on board the *Northumberland*. According to Lit. Colonel H. N. Newell -("The English Church in Madeira". Oxford O.P. 1931, pag 8 and 9) which is corroborated by the *Elucidário da Madeira*, the Consul was careful to address Napoleon by "Your Majesty" which greatly pleased the Emperor whose good relations with his gaolers were only, as stated, marred by the problem of how he was addressed. The Consul dined with Napoleon and gave



The Church of Holy Trinity, Madeira

him some Madeira wine, stating he could send him some books according to a long list supplied by the actual prisoner. These books arrived in St. Helena, Paulo Geniéve registers, about one year later: 450 volumes carried in 6 boxes, according to Gourgand, or in 7, according to Betrand. The minutia of the detail documents the monotony of life in Long Wood.

But regarding the Madeira wine offered by Veitch to the Emperor there are two curious stories. According to Newall, quoted above, Napoleon paid for the wine with gold Napoleons which, many years later, Veitch would deposit in the foundations of the new English Church of Madeira. On the contrary, André Simon tells us that the Emperor never paid for the wine, which according to the British subject Michael Grobbalum in 1933, was brought back from St. Helena in 1822 after Napoleon's death, bottled in Funchal in 1840 by John Blandy. Dr. Grobbalum celebrated his well conserved 93<sup>rd</sup> year with XVIII produced wines! (Madeira and Malmsey Wine, pag. 35 and 36).

In any case, Northumberland. anchored off the Desertas Islands in front therefore of Funchal, weighed anchor on August 25th 1815 and on September 1<sup>st</sup> sailed by Cape Verde. Says Las Casas "the horizon was covered. at night we saw nothing" (op. cit. pag. 108). Napoleon would not again enter Portuguese territorial waters.

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