

Napoleon not Poisoned, Italians Researchers Say

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Napoleon Bonaparte was not poisoned by French and British conspirators worried that he still posed a threat to their power, Italian researchers have concluded.



Using a small nuclear reactor, researchers from the universities of Pavia and Milan examined several strands of the French emperor's hair, preserved since his death in 1821.

Hairs from various stage's of Napoleon's life were tested and not just those from his last six years on the remote south Atlantic island of St Helena.

The researchers also examined hairs from some of Napoleone's relatives including his wife Josphine and his son Napoleon II.

As well as these historical locks, taken from various French and Italian museums, ten hairs randomly taken from people alive today were tested.

The hairs were put inside the core of the nuclear reactor, which is able to find traces of substances - even in samples that are extremely small - by a process called "neutron activation".

The researchers found that, in general, hairs from 200 years ago had a basic arsenic level that was 100 times that found today.

This result corresponded to previous research which has highlighted that arsenic was more widely used in the 18th and 19th centuries, in a variety of compounds and products.

But the study did detect a higher concentration in the hair of the older Napoleon than in that of the boy preserved in a museum in Corsica.

Angelo Santagostino, a toxicologist from Milan's Bicocca University, said this did point to "a chronic exposure of mild entity" on St Helena.

But he added: "It appears highly unlikely that Napoleon's death can be attributed to premeditated criminal poisoning".

Claims that the French leader was poisoned, perhaps by an official posing as a friend, have circulated regularly since he died, officially of stomach cancer, at the age of 51.

They were rebutted by researchers who argued that a high arsenic content in his hair was probably due to his hair tonic - and also perhaps to the high proportion of arsenic used in wallpaper during his time. In 2001, the poison theory resurfaced when two French scientists said new findings proved he was killed with arsenic. Pascal Kintz, a toxicologist who studied five samples of Napoleon's hair, claimed the analysis showed there was "major" exposure to arsenic. Compared to the accepted natural upper limit of arsenic concentration in hair of one nanogram per milligram of hair, the concentration in one of the samples was 38 nanograms, Kintz claimed. Paul Fornes, a forensic pathologist working alongside Kintz, said the original diagnosis of stomach cancer was not supported by the autopsy performed on the defeated emperor's body a day after his death. Napoleon proclaimed himself emperor in 1804 after a swift ascent through the ranks of the revolutionary French army.

He conquered much of Europe until a disastrous Russian campaign forced his first exile in 1814, but



he returned with renewed support the following year - only to face final defeat at Waterloo. Some have argued that the British governor of St. Helena conspired with French count Charles de Montholon to assassinate Napoleon for fear he would escape and return to France. These conspiracy theorists say the plotters had to make it look like Napoleon's health was deteriorating gradually.

Kintz told Reuters But Baudoin de Witt, a descendant of the emperor, voiced doubts that all the "supposed" locks of Napoleon's hair scattered around the world are authentic.

(ANSA NEWS)

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