



PRESS INFORMATION

LES INVALIDES, PARIS

HISTORY

www.invalides.org

In 1670, Louis the 14th decided to erect a building able to house disabled soldiers, or those too old to serve in his armies. The war minister, Louvois, was entrusted with the project, and he chose the architect Libéral Bruant for the construction of the hotel, the design of which is a reminder of the Escorial palace by Philippe II (Spain). This project was part of the social and charitable trend of the 17th century, and the Hôtel des Invalides became an example to follow for many other European countries. The construction of the military complex was over in 3 years only and the first residents entered as soon as October 1674. The life of the 4000 residents (end of the 17th century) was ruled in the same way as in barracks and monasteries. The soldiers were divided into companies and worked in workshops, making uniforms, shoes, tapestries and book illumination, so as to fight idleness. The severely injured ones, about 100, were taken care of in the hospital, set in the South-east section. This hospital is still active today, whereas the pension for old soldiers around the courtyard now hosts the museum rooms.

In 1676, the church project, in the south, was given to Jules Hardouin-Mansart, who built the great royal church, or Dome Church (using the blueprints of his great-uncle François Mansart). He also finished the church used by the residents for the daily cult, the Soldiers Church. The Dome Church is a masterpiece of French classical architecture; its decoration was given to the finest artists of Louis XIV (Charles de la Fosse, Jouvenot, Girardon) who also worked at Versailles. Reaching 101m at the top of the spire, it is a reference in the landscape of Paris, and was inaugurated on August 28th 1706 by the king. Under Napoléon I, the Dome became the pantheon of France military glories, by housing the tomb of Turenne and the heart of Vauban. In 1989, for the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, the Dome was regilded for the 5th time since its creation; 550 000 gold leaves were used, that is to say more than 20 pounds.

The Soldiers Church, also called «choir of the residents», was meant for the daily cult and services, and was over by 1679. The Church Saint Louis des Invalides, the vault of which was decorated with the military trophies of France, houses the governors crypt, where many governors of the Invalides, marshals of France and great military leaders lie. Dedicated to Saint Louis and consecrated to the Holy Trinity, the Church is administratively attached to the Musée de l'Armée since its creation in 1905. It is now the French armies curacy see, and is used every year for commemorative masses, among which the anniversary mass for the death of Napoléon, on May 5th, and the anniversary mass for the founding of the Hôtel, in September. The great organs were designed between 1679 and 1687, and restored from 1955 to 1957. The case was made by Germain Pilon, the king carpenter, upon a drawing by Hardouin-Mansart.



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FOCUS

TOMB OF NAPOLEON / DOME CHURCH

On May 5th 1821, Napoléon I passed away on the island of St Helena, where he had been in exile ever since 1815. He was buried close to a spring, in the shadows of a few weeping willows, in the "Geranium valley". His remains rested there until October 15th 1840. In 1840, King Louis-Philippe decided to transfer the body of the Emperor. French sailors, under the Prince de Joinville command, brought back the coffin to France, aboard the "Belle Poule" ship.

National funerals followed the return of the Emperor Napoléon I remains, transferred to the Invalides on December 15th 1840, while the tomb was being constructed. It was commissioned in 1842, by Louis-Philippe, to the architect Visconti (1791-1853), who made vast transformations by excavating largely the inside of the Dome church, to host the tomb. The body of the Emperor Napoléon I was laid there on April 2nd 1861.

The tomb, crafted in red porphyry from Russia, placed on a green granite base from the Vosges, is circled by a crown of laurels and inscriptions, reminders of the great victories of the Empire. In the round gallery, a series of low-relief, sculpted by Smart, represent the main actions of the reign. A statue of the Emperor, bearing the imperial emblems, was erected at the back of the crypt, above the tombstone under which the King of Rome lies.

The Dome Church also houses the sepultures of two of Napoléon's brothers, Jérôme and Joseph Bonaparte, Napoléon's son, the so-called eaglet, as well as the more recent ones of marshals Foch and Lyautey. The Musée de l'Armée is responsible for those.

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