



WHERE ARE THEY NOW: DICTATORS EDITION

The afterlives of supreme leaders are often nasty, brutish, and long

BY BESS LOVEJOY

ON OCT. 25, SOMETIME before dawn, the body of longtime Libyan dictator Moammar Khadafy was buried in an unmarked, secret location in the Libyan desert.

For a man of great personal grandiosity, whose image was everywhere throughout the country and for four decades was symbolic of independent Libya, this might seem a particularly obscure—even humiliating—ending.

But given the treatment that corpses of other fallen supreme leaders have endured, Khadafy's burial was nothing unusual. An ex-leader's body is nearly always a tricky problem for the new regime: at once a potentially dangerous icon of the past and a human being with a family, community, and belief system. As a brief tour of history shows, how these bodies are handled is wildly unpredictable—and often just the beginning of the story.

Adolf Hitler

ON APRIL 30, 1945, even before the Germans surrendered to Allied forces, the most reviled leader of the 20th century shot himself in his bunker. Per his instructions, his body was carried upstairs to the garden of the Reich Chancellery, where it was doused in gas and set aflame.

When invading Russian troops reached the Chancellery on May 2, Stalin was determined to know whether his archnemesis was really dead. According to Soviet accounts, counterintelligence officers attached to the shock troops found what they suspected were Hitler's remains, but the body was charred beyond recognition. They decided to try identifying Hitler by his teeth, and an official carried the Führer's jaw around Berlin in a cheap jewelry box for days until his former dental assistant could be found.

Hitler's posthumous journey just got more complicated from there. Soviet files that came to light in the 1990s revealed that intelligence officials repeatedly moved remains they believed to be Hitler's: He was buried in three different spots in Germany in 1945, and then at a military base in Magdeburg in 1946. When that base returned to German control, the Soviets feared the remains would be discovered, so in 1970 they exhumed them again, fully cremated them, and dumped the ashes into a river, determined to avoid creating a potential shrine. Of course, the absence of a body means conspiracy theories about Hitler's escape are still swirling.



FRED RAMAGE/KEystone

1945: War correspondents are shown the grave where Adolf Hitler's charred body is alleged to have been buried, behind the Chancellery in Berlin.

Haile Selassie

THE LAST EMPEROR of Ethiopia first gained international attention protesting the invasion of his country by fascist Italy in the 1930s, and served for many years thereafter as a respected, if not entirely uncontroversial, world leader. He is also worshipped as a divine being by Rastafarians, who take their name from his pre-imperial title, Ras (Prince) Tafari.

In 1974, Selassie was overthrown by a military coup, and imprisoned in his palace. He died under mysterious circumstances a year later. Despite his distinguished rule, he was given no funeral; his remains were buried in a secret location. In 1992, they were rediscovered by workers—underneath a palace latrine.

It wasn't until 2000 that Selassie was formally buried, in Addis Ababa's Trinity Cathedral. Despite the presence of the bones, some Rastafarians still believe that as a divine being, Selassie never died—his purported demise was just a hoax.

Juan Perón

FIRST ELECTED president of Argentina in 1946 and elected twice more before his death in 1974, Juan Perón was arguably Argentina's most influential modern politician, though he was derided by his critics as a dictator. In 1987, anonymous vandals broke into Perón's family tomb in Buenos Aires and sawed off both his hands. The leaders of his political party later received a ransom note demanding \$8 million, which they refused to pay, arguing that Perón's ideas mattered more than his bones. The hands have never been recovered.

Some anthropologists interpreted Perón's hands as a symbol of his power, and saw their amputation as an attempt to destroy the legacy of his influence. But considering that the recently reelected president of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, is a Perónist, it would seem that the hand-snatching had little political effect.



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The bodies of Juan Domingo Perón and his first wife, Eva Perón.

Oliver Cromwell

AFTER VIOLENTLY abolishing the British monarchy in 1649, Cromwell ruled England as its "Lord Protector." He died in 1658 and was buried, but when the monarchy was restored in 1660, the new king, Charles II, still wanted his head—literally. In 1661, the bodies of Cromwell and several associates were exhumed from their coffins and hanged at Tyburn, the London execution site reserved for common criminals. They dangled there until the late afternoon, when the hangman cut them down and hacked off their heads. The heads were impaled on spikes and mounted on the roof of Westminster Hall, where they remained as a warning for at least 20 years.



HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

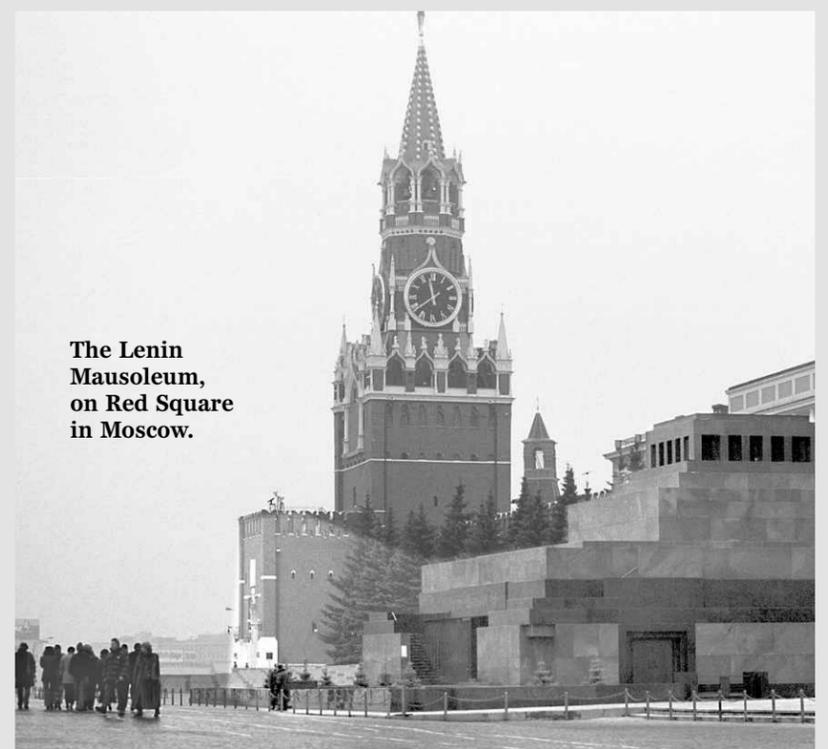
Cromwell's death mask

Legend has it that Cromwell's head, mummified by the elements, blew down in a gale sometime around the end of the 17th century. It ended up on the curio market, but its final owner eventually got sick of the attention surrounding it and contacted Sidney Sussex, the Cambridge college that Cromwell attended. In 1960, college officials buried the head in a secret location on campus grounds.

Vladimir Lenin

IT MUST HAVE seemed like a good idea at the time: After he died in 1924, the corpse of the founder of the Soviet Union was embalmed and placed on display in a Moscow mausoleum. But today, for Russians no longer in thrall to Bolshevik ideals, the waxy-looking body is an unsettling sight. This January, an unofficial poll set up by a member of Russia's ruling party found that the majority of Russians want the corpse buried. Indeed, Boris Yeltsin vowed to do that during his presidency. But Yeltsin failed to carry out his plans, and the current Russian leadership has thus far declined to take action.

Meanwhile, Lenin's body still does its part for Russia: His mausoleum, in the middle of Red Square, is one of Moscow's top tourist attractions



The Lenin Mausoleum, on Red Square in Moscow.

OLEG NIKISHIN/NEWSMAKERS