IMAGES OF VIOLENCE:

JACQUES CALLOT'S *MISÈRES ET LES MAL-HEURS DE LA GUERRE*

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June 2008

ABSTRACT

As one of the first artistic series to represent the agonies of war, Jacque Callot's *Misères de la guerre* has captivated audiences since its creation in 1633. This print series, which seems to have been created solely for personal motives, depicts the life of the soldier and the violence surrounding his profession. Taking a unique non-partisan stance throughout this series, Callot describes violent abuses of power in order to illustrate an interest in moral authority and the progressive sense of humanity that flourished during the Renaissance. In this article, I propose to examine the *Misères de la guerre* prints, explore how one is to look at such images, and discuss the significant impact these prints have made to the history of art.

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As one of the first artistic series to represent the agonies of war, Jacque Callot's *Misères de la guerre* has captivated audiences since its publication in 1633. This print series, which appears to have been created solely for personal motives, depicts the life of the soldier and the scenes of violence surrounding his profession. Taking a unique non-partisan stance throughout this series, Callot describes violent abuses of power in order to illustrate an interest in moral authority and the progressive sense of humanity that flourished during the Renaissance. By bypassing the popular inclination to create propaganda—even though Callot's hometown Nancy, a small duchy of Lorraine, was at war with France during the creation of these prints—this series foregoes the traditional role of a temporal historical record in favor of appealing to a broader audience and depicting an artistic representation of timeless issues and concerns.

Callot's *Misères* consists of 17 prints and a title-plate published—with privilege of the King in Paris—by Israel Henriet. Printed in series of 1500, these prints were sold together as a small booklet where the individual sheets were often combined with other prints under a hard cover or trimmed and added to a collector's album.[1] Beneath each image are descriptive verses written by the avid collector Michel de Marolle, Abbé de Villeloin. Though historians frequently criticize these phrases for their failure to clarify Callot's personal impetus and intentions for the series, de Marolle's prose works harmoniously with the prints to reemphasize the theme of war as a dreadful yet unwavering part of life during the 1600s.

During the 17th century, a great increase occurred in the size of armies and the scale of warfare that was possible. Only seven years of this century passed with

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[1] Anthony Griffiths, "Callot: Miseries of War," in Disasters of War: Callot, Goya, Dix, by Anthony Griffiths, Juliet Wilson-Bareau and John Willet. [exhibition catalogue] (Manchester: National Touring Exhibitions, 1998), 13.

relatively no wars between European states.[2] Callot had been born in the midst of this war torn Europe in the duchy of Nancy in 1592. Nancy, a flourishing cosmopolitan town during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), was the scene of the largest conflict in Callot's time. It was also a crossroad of typhus, smallpox, syphilis, and plague as French, German, Italian, and Spanish Netherland troops marched across the city *en route* to their next battle. These steady tracks of violence, experienced as regular conditions and sights throughout Lorraine, surely left an impression on Callot that served as a prominent inspiration for the *Misères* series.

Published only a few months after Nancy capitulated to France, the *Misères* went beyond simply depicting the "miseries and misfortunes" of war—as the title implies. Instead, this unique linear series represents the non-heroic life of soldiers: from their enrollment as mercenaries of a foreign conflict, to their crimes against peasants, and their deaths by public torture, sickness, or disfigurement. Each plate emphasizes Callot's observation that the soldier's life is an experience surrounded by cruelty. New military treatises of "just wars" were gaining interest in Europe, conceivably inspired Callot's resounding implication: daily morals should be applied to military practices. Lacking any bias, Callot's *Misères* indicate no specific conflict, site, army, or politic.[3] As a result, they are open to explore humanistic concerns regarding the value of the individual as they show complete destruction applying to both sides of the war. "Look… *this* is what it's like," they seem to say. "This is what war *does*. And *that*, that is what it does too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War ruins."[4]

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[2] G.N. Clark, *The Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clardon Press, 1929), 99.

[3] Diane Wolfthal, "Jacques Callot's Miseries of War," *Art Bulletin* Vol. 59 (1977): 224.

[4] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 8.

The illustrations surrounding the title on the front-plate [Fig. 1] set the tone for the overall series. Rather than exhibiting arduous toil or distress, Callot's soldiers are portrayed in this plate with as much respect as his portraits of noblemen. In proud stances, they stand handsomely clothed surrounded by symbols of military honor: drums, canons, trumpets, banners, and medallions.[5] The combination of these elegant soldiers with the terms "miseries" and "misfortunes"—openly contradicts the type of idealized and heroic war imagery that occupied the art of Callot's contemporaries.

In "Recruitment of Troops" [Fig. 2], Callot depicts the regimented enlisting process and drills that became commonplace to soldiers. To the right, soldiers collect their payments as they enlist, and to the left, a clerk checks the soldiers' names off of a list and assigns each a weapon—a musket, pike, carbine, or lance—and a squadron. The soldiers' matching uniforms and the geometric formations of the squadrons further describe the organization and standardization that became a necessity of the massive armies activated by political leaders. Many troops of this time either were independent mercenary soldiers or leased out by their own ruler to a foreign country. As a result, traditional ideas of a knight's sense of personal autonomy and his allegiance to his King were antiquated and replaced by a duty of the poor to serve whatever country hired their services.[6]

In the next plate, "The Battle" [Fig. 3], Callot has displayed his mastery at controlling large animated crowds of people. As the only plate in this series

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[5] Hilliard T. Goldfarb "Callot and the Miseries of War, in *Fatal Consequences: Callot, Goya, and the Horrors of War*, by James Cuno, Hilliard T. Goldfarb, and Reva Wolf [exhibition catalogue] (Hanover: Dartmounth College, 1990), 16.

[6] Peter Paret, *Imagined Battles: Reflections of War in European Art* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 31-39.

depicting soldiers actively in battle this plate provides an essential aspect of the soldiers' life, yet contextually emphasizes that this series is not about battle scenes.

"Scene of Pillage" [Fig. 4], describes soldiers attempting escape from a house they have just raided. Angry tenants chase the looters towards a group of armed soldiers who protect the village. An anticipated response to this print might be sympathy for the villagers, but Callot investigates a more complex issue through his awareness of the soldier's life. An expert on the Thirty Years War, Henry Langer, describes that the sacking of towns became an expected reward for poorly compensated soldiers who were frequently called to work without provisions or pay for long spans of time.[7] Looting was not only acceptable; it was an expected solution to their problems. This type of behavior provided temporary relief to the army and thus went widely unpunished, even by the few commanders who expressed disgust at the way soldiers treated their own countrymen.

Set inside of a house such as that in the previous plate, "Plundering a Large Farmhouse" [Fig. 5] illustrates a pandemonium of violent scenes committed by soldiers upon its occupants. Starting from the left, a woman runs with her child from a soldier. Her unbuttoned bodice and raised arms express her distress as the soldier grabs at her hair and heaves his sword into the air—clear indications of the impending rape. Nearby, an old man begs for his life at the sword point of three soldiers as an old woman standing nearby holds a small sack, possibly containing a bribe. Behind this scene, a group of soldiers is raiding the wine storage. Back at front, a soldier has pinned a man down under his sword's threat. Behind this pair, soldiers are raiding the pantry of food and house wares. In the far background, framed by the bed canopy, is a woman being raped by two men. She is held down on

[7] Herbert Langer, *The Thirty Years War* (New York: Dorset Press, 1978), 9.

a bed, her hair loose, her breast exposed, as a soldier straddles her legs. Her attempts to push and kick at him are shown, but he has captured her tightly at the waist. Further to the left, a man has been strung up by his feet to the rafters and set afire. Soldiers watching nearby patiently wait with their next victim, who is surely witnessing the events in horror. A third rape is depicted, to the far right, through an open door. There is no justice to be seen here and no honorable soldiers are present to offer salvation.

The various rape scenes depicted in this plate are an important aspect of Callot's concerns surrounding ethical warfare, and were of particular interest to Diane Wolfthal in her publication, *Images of Rape*. Throughout the Renaissance, rape scenes—such as Nicolas Poussin's "heroic rape" from the *Rape of Sabine Women* (1636-7)—gained popularity due to the opportunity they gave to show highly eroticized women being overpowered by gods or heroes of war. During this time, rapists were lightly punished, if at all, and in many images—such as the judgment paintings that emerged in legal courts during the 1600s— women were portrayed as power hungry liars and malicious seductresses instead of victims. Images of rape were commonly utilized in early war imagery as national propaganda to raise fears towards foreign assailers and fuel political hatred towards specific enemies.[8] The surrounding community offered the surviving victim few solutions: mourning, isolation, or an honorable suicide. In Callot's plates, however, the rapist is depicted as a dishonorable villain. Callot denounces rape was an act of violence and a punishable crime that should be brought to an end. According to Wolfthal's scholarship, this type of imagery does not have a predecessor.

[8] Diane Wolfthal, *Images of Rape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 92.

In "Destruction of a Convent" [Fig. 6], Callot shows a scene of violence unfolding as a convent is pillaged and burned. Nuns have been gathered at the lower left of the scene—two of whom are being carried off by force to be raped— soldiers fill a large cart with their loot, and religious articles from the demolished altars are laid out in front and center of the scene like trophies. According to official war doctrines of the time, religious leaders, professional traders, foreign travelers, women, children, and the impoverished were to be passed over and unharmed by combatants. Yet these "innocents" are exactly the types of victims that Callot portrays.[9] The most striking part of this scene is the officer on horseback to the far right who seems to be commanding the troops with an overall sense of organization. The bishop of the convent, captured by two soldiers, is brought to the officer's attention as one soldier raises his arm in proud triumph. Nearby another soldier gestures in mockery with the bishop's holy robe draped over his uniform and the holy book in hand. Perhaps inspired by the religious persecution and hatred that fueled the Thirty Year War, this plate examines the most detailed atrocities against religion found in the series.

As opposed to the villainous gangs of troops depicted previously (in "Scene of Pillage" and "Plundering a Large Farmhouse"), the soldiers in "Plundering and Burning a Village" [Fig. 7] appear to be "disciplined troops," systematically carrying out orders to assembling livestock and prisoners—to be sold—and setting fire to churches and houses. Two rape victims are shown at front: one held captive under a tree to the left, her dress raised as a soldier leans over her with a knife to her throat, the second lies lifeless at right center showing two standard signs of rape—disheveled hair and a raised dress.[10] Once again, Callot takes a humanist position by

[9] Wolfthal, "Jacques Callot's," 232.

[10] Wolfthal, *Images of Rape,* 94.

showing these women not as beautiful seductresses or as just another form of loot that the soldiers have a right to but as victims of intense suffering whose violation often leads to death. He presents the women with their clothes rumpled and torn, yet still intact, effectively defying the historical artistic inclination to undress and eroticize the bodies.

"Attack on a Coach" and "Discovery of the Criminal Soldiers" [Figs. 8-9] prelude the next five plates, which depict the punishments of criminal soldiers: "The Strappado," "The Hanging," "The Firing Squad," "The Stake," and "The Wheel" [Fig. 10-14]. In each image the soldiers publicly suffer punishments for their crimes against the peasants. The verse beneath each image continues to narrate the images in cruel description. Under "The Strappado": *It is not without cause that great captains have well-advisedly invented these punishments for idlers, blasphemers, traitors to duty, quarrelers and liars, whose actions, blinded by vice, make those of others lax and lawless*. For "The Hanging": *Finally these infamous and abandoned thieves, hanging from this tree like wretched fruit, show that crime (horrible and black species) is itself the instrument of shame and vengeance, and that it is the fate of corrupt men to experience the justice of Heaven sooner or later*.[11]

Once more, Callot spares his viewers no detail in their role as witnesses to the punishments that follow. These acts, demonstrated publicly to provide an example to others, are perhaps justly given as consequence of the inflictions these soldiers impressed onto peasants. Nonetheless, it is horrific to see these violent scenes so faithfully attended by such large masses of spectators. Echoing this horror is the fact that Callot's *Misères* maintained a strong audience at its creation, evitable due to the relatively large quantity of reproductions made of these etchings in Paris. In fact,

[11] Russell, *Jacques Callot*, 257.

copies of this series were created by later artists such as Claude Lorrain and Gerrit Lucasz van Schagen. These images of pain and violence both repel and captivate viewers. It is not uncommon to experience a sort of pleasure in looking—much as the macabre audiences in the prints—to absorb the images without blinking at the cruelty. Certainly equal to this pleasure is the ability to close one's eyes to the pain that Callot depicts.[12] In the 18th century, Edmund Burke attempted to explain the social phenomenon of the public punishments, which has occurred throughout history. In his publication *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke describes a facet of human nature that takes exceptional pleasure in experiencing the pain and suffering of others. [13] Such realistic illustrations as Callot's draw us near and cause reflection, inspiring a delight in the *idea* of pain and danger. A delight that may not exist in the same degree if the scene was fantastical, or if we had any sense that we ourselves were within harm's reach. According to Burke, this experience of conceptual wonder without the physical threat is precisely the experience of the sublime. Another possible explanation behind the strong appeal of this series can be described by a sort of empathy one experiences when looking upon the pain of others. Such empathy was certainly shared by American troops during WWII who, after capturing Nancy, sent home postcards depicting images from Callot's *Misères* as they fought through France into Germany.[14]

Following the fate of the non-criminal soldiers is "The Hospital" [Fig. 15] and "Dying Soldiers by the Roadside" [Fig. 16]. In these succeeding plates, Callot is

[12] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 41.

[13] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958). 1st ed. (1757), 45.

[14] Esther Holden Averill, *Eyes on the World; the Story of Jacques Callot* (New York: Funk & Wanalls, 1969), 1.

perhaps most persistent in his declaration that the soldier is no longer a hero who spends his life in battle and dies with honor. These survivors of war lead a pitiful existence—battered and mutilated, left to beg for alms and rely on the charity of peasants. These illustrations provide grounds to speculate if the triumphant survivors of war are not worse off then their peers killed in battle or publicly tortured as criminals.[15] The verse underneath this plate observes, *When the war is over, his misfortune starts again. Then he is compelled to go begging, and his poverty arouses the laughter of the peasant, who curses him when he asks for alms and considers it an insult to see before him the object of the afflictions he endures.*[16] Perhaps there is justice in images of soldiers who caused pain receiving it in turn, but there is no justice in the depiction of victorious soldiers receiving the same hard fate through injuries, illness, and poverty. In these two plates we are witnesses to Callot's theme: the cruel wheel of fortune that deals blow upon blow to the peasant and the soldier alike.

"Revenge of the Peasants" [Fig. 17] depicts a scene that could fall upon any soldier. The soldiers' baggage train is seen here under vicious attack. Camp followers—consisting of wives, whores, and servants—perceived by officers as fulfilling crucial balance of the soldiers' social and economic needs. Trailing about an hour behind the troops the members of the baggage train carried carts, supplies, and spare horses [Fig. 18]. The nomadic occupants of the baggage train were essentially equal to a city's population and they raided populated areas along the route, living off the requests of the soldiers, and answering to calls of supply shortages.[17] At times, town officials would try to gain protection from these parasitic

[15] *Fatal Consequences,* 17.

[16] Russell, *Jacques Callot,* 260.

[17] Langer, *The Thirty Years War*, 97.

groups, when this failed, peasants took matters into their own hands and attacked soldiers and their baggage trains without mercy. Thus, in the turmoil of political wars the soldiers had to face an everlasting private war between themselves and the peasants whose villages they passed through.[18]

The final plate of Callot's *Misères*, the "Distribution of Rewards" [Fig. 19], was perhaps inspired by the *Instructions sur le faict de la guerre*—a popular treatise on military justice that details the proper moral conduct of soldiers during war. Though neither were so optimistic to propose an end to wars, they offered hope that—through a didactic disbursement of punishments and rewards—abuses of power could be eliminated. Whether Callot intended this plate as a display of irony—as the rewarded troops do not appear to have ever seen a day of battle—or as an optimistic endnote of hope, we cannot say. With this suggestion in mind, Callot finishes his series with the proposal of the "just war."[19]

There have been many interpretations of these images and opposing arguments by art historians regarding Callot's intentions. Some of the more prominent theories can be found in Diane Wolfthal's 1977 article in *Art Bulletin* where she introduces interpretations that the series was created to protest the invasion of Lorraine by France, to illustrate the history of the Thirty Years War, to advocate a peasant revolt, or to allude to Biblical history. All of these suggestions are promptly discredited by Wolfthal with swift references to clear elements described in the prints.[20]

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[18] Ibid., 106.

[19] Wolfthal, *Images of Rape*, 96.

[20] Wolfthal, "Jacques Callot's," 224.

One of the earliest interpretations surrounding this series is a theory, shared by biographers Meume and Levertin, that the prints were created to protest the French invasion of Lorraine. This belief was perhaps deduced from the proximity of the publication of *Misères* to the date of the invasion. Yet, Callot's refrain from any definite reference to any particular political group, event, or location throughout the entire series makes this theory unconvincing. This avoidance towards specificity on Callot's part also discourages Nasse's theory that the series is a report of Thirty Years War. Though *Misères* does depict many factual events and details, Callot's strong artistic and compositional interests certainly precede the type of record keeping that a historical chronicle would entail.

Art historian Sadoul subscribes to the social realist notion that the intention behind this series is to encourage the poor to raise arms against their oppressors and start a revolution. Yet, if Callot had intended such a reading the "Revolt of the Peasants" would have surely been the concluding plate. Furthermore, though Callot waited until the last minute to sign an obligatory alliance to the French king, no proof exists to align Callot with revolutionary aims—rather, Callot seemed preoccupied during his life in Lorraine to return to Italy, where he spent his early career.

Another popular theory, based on the claims of Russell and Jacobs, is that the series references Biblical history. Both of these historians point adamantly to the shape of the tree in "The Hanging" as evidence—a shape that they describe as an allusion to the Crucifixion. However this shape is not precisely cruciform, and these hanged men cannot be paralleled to the innocence of Christ—as their weapons laid out in front of the tree and the accompanying verse below the print proclaim that

these convicted soldiers are guilty. Moreover, any observation of references to biblical history rests solely on this single plate rather then the entire series.

All of these theories seem to overlook the significant innovation that Callot initiated when he chose to avoid creating political propaganda for a greater interest in expressing more humanistic concerns throughout the entire series. The trend of overlooking Callot's conceptual originality does not stop here though; it is followed by several critiques and misconceptions that have long undermined his accomplishments.

One popular critique of Callot's series has grown from his technical accomplishments and developments in etching techniques. Such skill allowed him to adopt the courtly elegant and whimsical style of drawing associated with Late Italian Mannerism. Each print—measuring about 3" by 7 ¼"—declares his expertise and boldness as a draftsman. Yet his use of such delicate line work formally contradicts the disorder and violence experienced throughout the series, inspiring contemporary viewers to distress in their appreciation of the beautiful distraction that the details of each image provides.

Another issue that historians often note is the false impression that the images in Callot's series are the first to depict such subject matter. Although this observation has been widely stated, there are numerous influences for his work. Most prominent were the genre scenes of cavalry combats, the pillaging of farms, the denouncing of soldiers' crimes by peasants, and soldiers' punishments that appeared often in Dutch and Flemish prints during Callot's career. [Figs. 20-21] These prints—which he was exposed to, if not in Nancy, then when he when visited the Netherlands in 1627—served as thematic influence and "objective spirit" for scenes of crime and

punishment in *Misères*.[21] It is important to maintain though that these predecessors had not created an organized sequence of these scenes, such as Callot has in his *Misères*.

Finally, Callot's journalistic observation and reserved emotion have regularly been mistakenly interpreted as representing the absence of any message. This critique of Callot's intentions—only applicable if one disregards *all* of the plates except "Scene of Pillge," "Plundering a Large Farmhouse," "Destruction of a Convent," and "Burning a Village"—contributes to the largely popular oversight of Callot's larger aim to depict the miseries of the soldier. This misperception also stems from the natural comparison of Callot's *Misères de la guerre* with Francisco Goya's passionate *Los Desastres de la Guerra* [Fig. 22]. There is a striking difference between the artists' intent in these two series. Created between 1810-1820, Goya's series was an impassioned protest against a particular group—the French army—during a particular conflict—the Peninsular War, whereas Callot's *Misères* reveals a larger interest in depicting the utter misery brought to individuals regardless of specificities. Rather then portraying glorious victories in contradistinction to devastation, Callot presents the desolation as absolute.

By depicting unconditional disgust with war's ability to infiltrate every facet of society, *Misères de la guerre* highlights the disturbing results of its impact on our perceptions of civilization. Callot's trepidation regarding the value of the individual and his interests in ethical warfare are just as relevant today among our present reflections on the atrocities resulting from worldwide military conflicts. Nearly 400 years later, his concerns regarding moral authority and the fragility of humanity remain largely unresolved. In the end, such images of violence are destined to

[21] Ibid., 223.

conclude, "with both cynicism and sorrow, *we are all compromised*." [22]

[22] [emphasis added] James Cuno, "Preface," in *Fatal Consequences* (see note 5), 10.

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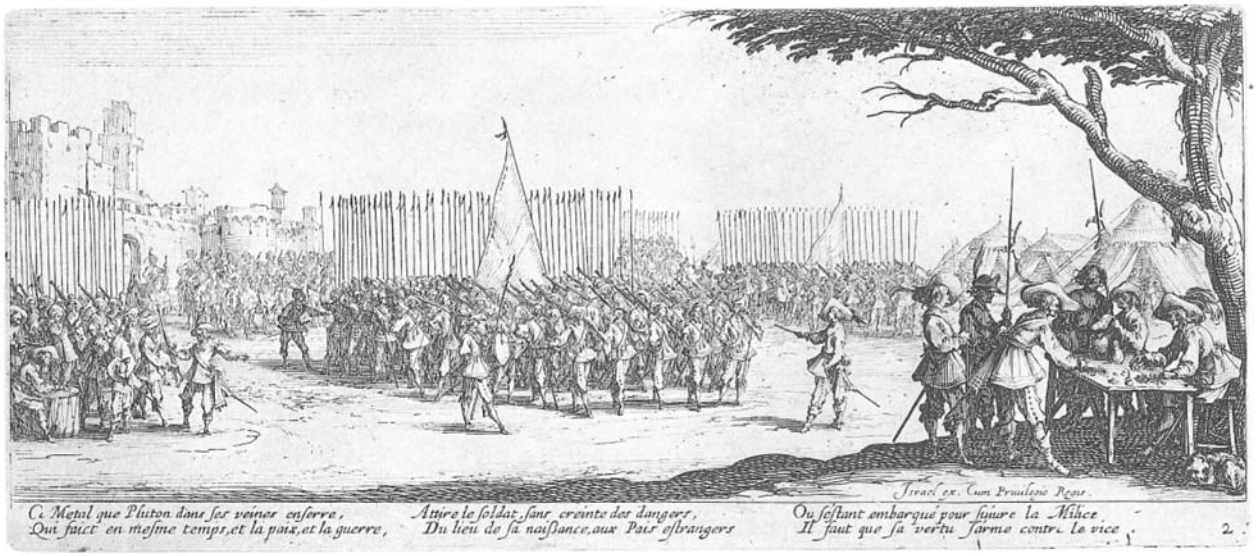

2. Jacques Callot, "Recruitment of Troops," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

3. Jacques Callot, "The Battle," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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6. Jacques Callot, "Destruction of a Convent," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

7. Jacques Callot, "Plundering and Burning a Village," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

8. Jacques Callot, "Attack on a Coach," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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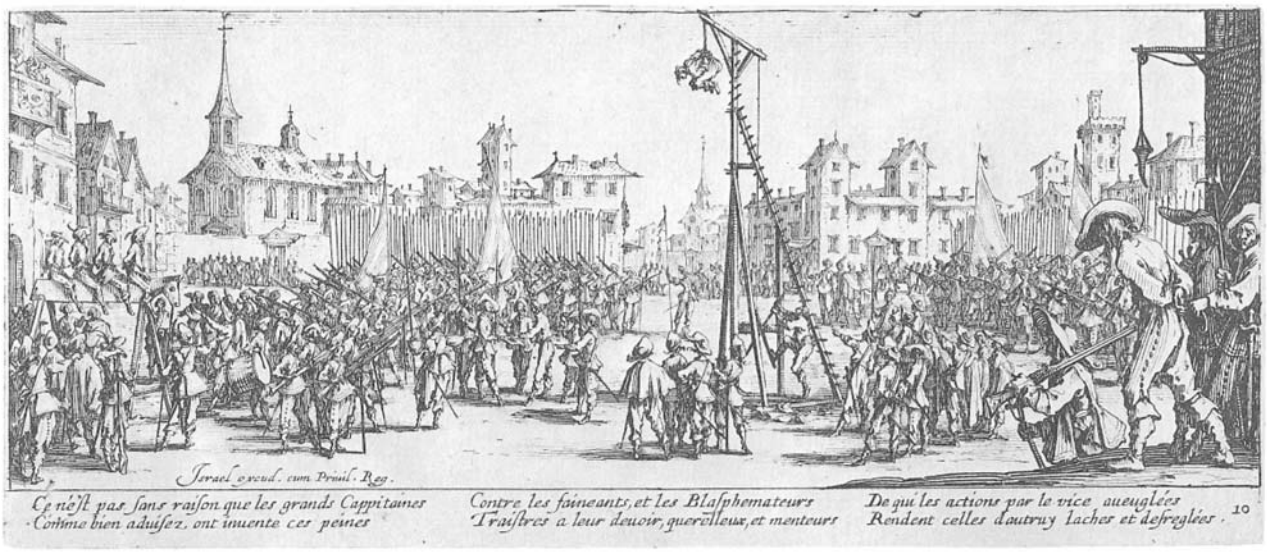
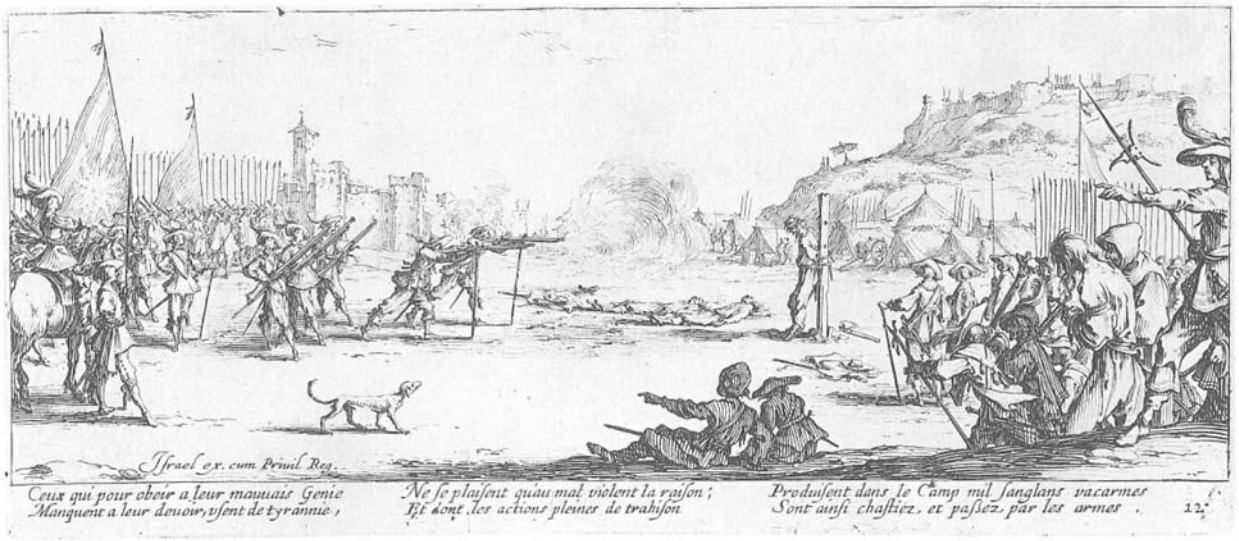


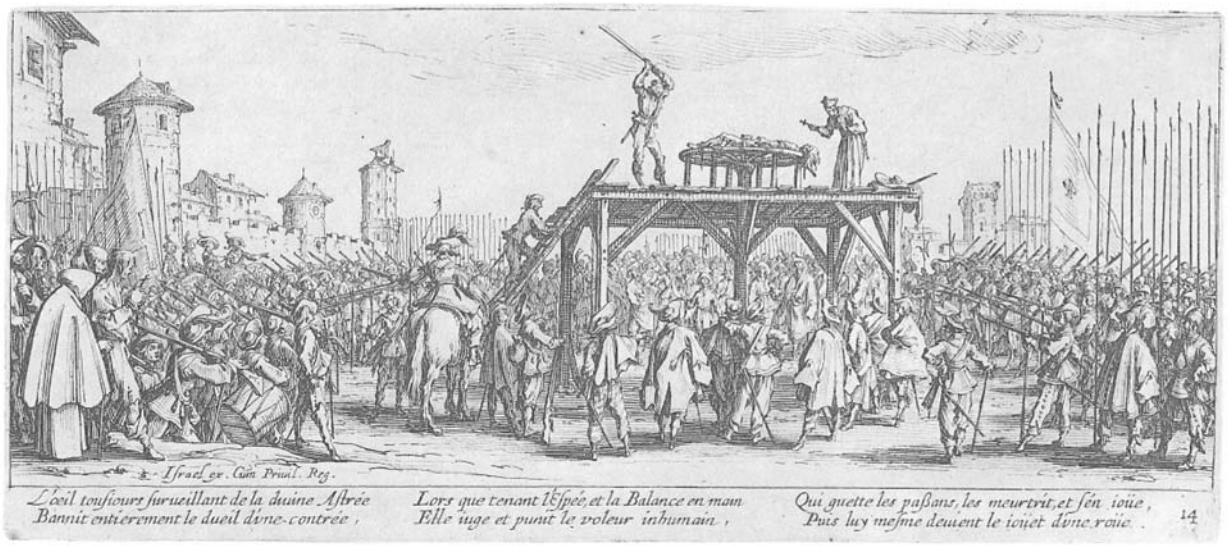
10. Jacques Callot, "The Strappado," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

11. Jacques Callot, "The Hanging," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



12. Jacques Callot, "The Firing Squad," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

13. Jacques Callot, "The Stake," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



14. Jacques Callot, "The Wheel," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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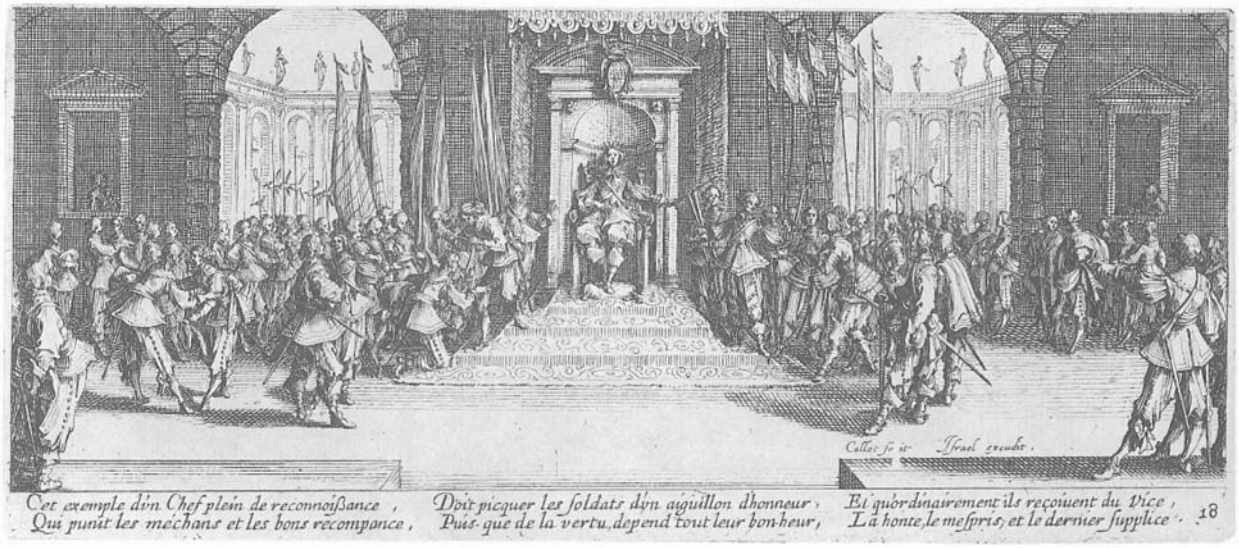

19. Jacques Callot, "Distribution of Rewards," *Misères et les mal-heurs de la guerre*, 1633, etching, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

20. B.A. Bolswert after David Vinckboons, "The peasant tyrannized in his home," *Boerenverdriet*, 1610, engraving, Amsterdam Rijksmuseum, Prentenkabinet.

21. Romeyn de Hooghe, "Mine des Turcs sous la Cour Impèriale, dècouverte et dèfaite," *Siège de Vienne par les Turcs*, 1683, engraving, Belgium, Université de Liège.

22. Francisco Goya, "Tampoco," *Los Desastres de la Guerra*. 1810-1820, etching, Boston, Museum of Fine Art.