Caricatures from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the Paris Commune

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The Universal exhibition of 1867 showed the Paris of Napoleon III at the height of its glory. King Wilhelm of Prussian and his Chancellor, Count von Bismarck, enjoyed the exhibition, and laughed at the audacious Offenbach operetta *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein*, which poked fun at the military pretensions of a small German state, whose forces were led by General Boum. Unfortunately, the French did not appreciate the threat of the new fifty-ton Krupp cannon which was shown at the Exhibition, and were so confident of the superiority of their own small arms, that many were eager to rush into war with Prussia, confident of a quick victory.

The spark for the war between Prussia and France was the candidature of Leopold of Hohenzollern to be King of Spain after the deposition of Isabella II. Even though this was withdrawn, there was public anger in France against Germany, and a war party was formed within the government, supported by the Empress Eugénie and the Parisian public. Napoleon III was too ill to resist, and Bismarck was also eager for war. Prussian cannons and the military genius of Moltke, who led the Prussians and their south German allies, resulted in a crushing defeat at Sedan. Napoleon III surrendered to avoid a massacre. Following his abdication, a government of National Defence was formed, presided over by General Trochu.

The Prussians surrounded and besieged Paris during the terrible winter of 1870-1871, beating off French armies raised in the rest of the country. Parisians suffered starvation, bombardments and disease; balloons and pigeon post providing the only contact with the outside. In the nineteenth century, as a result of the Napoleonic wars, France was considered the most bellicose nation in Europe, and Britain judged the French to be dangerous, immoral and frivolous, in spite of their contribution as an ally in the Crimea. British public opinion supported Protestant Prussia, whose Crown Princess was the daughter of Queen Victoria. But the hardships of the Siege of Paris swung British public opinion around to sympathy for the French. Paris was surrendered and the Prussians entered the city on 1 March 1871. The new government of President Thiers, who had been a minister under King Louis-Philippe, passed legislation demanding arrears in rents which had not been paid during the siege by Parisians, and withdrawing the pay of the National Guards. The mood of insurrection in Paris came to a head when the government, established at Versailles, tried to seize cannon being held in Montmartre. Parisians fought off the Government troops and kept their cannon. The Commune was proclaimed on 28 March, with its seat in the Hôtel de Ville, and its symbol the red flag. A civil war was fought between the Commune and the troops of the Versailles government.

The Commune was suppressed by government troops during the last week of May 1871, known as the 'Semaine sanglante'. Parisians fought in vain at barricades, and many were shot without trial. The palace of the Tuileries, situated at the eastern end of the Louvre, the Palais Royal, the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais de Justice, the Finance ministry and police headquarters were burned down. Parties of British tourists came to view the smoking ruins. One hundred and forty-seven Communards were shot in the Père Lachaise cemetery, and hundreds of Communards were buried in a ditch there. Many more were shot after courts-martial. Between 20,000 and 30,000 Communards were killed, and after a further 35,000 arrests, many were deported to New Caledonia in the Pacific.

As a result of the Treaty of Frankfurt which ended hostilities between France and Prussia, most of Alsace and part of Lorraine passed from France to the German Empire, and the French inhabitants could only retain their nationality if they left the area. France also had to pay huge war reparations. Thiers fell from power and was replaced by Marshal Mac-Mahon, the military hero who had led the Versailles army against Paris. He was supported by the Royalists, whose hopes of returning to power came to nothing as the Third Republic became firmly established.

The British Library holds two collections of caricatures from this turbulent period. These are mostly in the form of coloured lithographs, or engravings coloured by hand, and provide a magnificent treasury of graphic art, as well as a fascinating historical record. It seems surprising that it was possible to produce so many series of prints under siege conditions. As well as the caricatures, there are narrative pictures of the events of the war, some published in Germany. The two sets duplicate each other to a considerable extent.

The collection at shelfmark 14001.g.41 was donated on 9 March 1889 by Frédéric Justen, noted in the acquisition record as living in Soho Square. In fact a check of the 1881 census reveals that Frederick Justen, bookseller, aged 49, lived in St Anne Street, but was born in Bonn, Germany. His wife Maria, aged 44, was born in Islington. His son Frederick W. is a bookseller's assistant, and his daughter is aged 12, and was born in Regent's Park. St Anne's Street is now St Anne's Court, as the end has been closed to traffic. The French Protestant Church is still in Soho Square. One can speculate that Justen's forbears might have been French Protestants who emigrated to Germany and that he attended the French Protestant church near his shop.

The collection at shelfmark Cup. 648.b.2 was not stamped at the time of donation, so it is not possible to establish whether it came from the same donor. Justen also gave to the British Museum three collections of press cuttings as follows:

Three volumes of press cuttings relating to the French emperor Napoleon III entitled Napoléon III devant la presse contemporaine en 1873, shelfmark 1764.c.21.

Cartoons and cuttings from newspapers, entitled *Napoléon III et la caricature anglaise de 1848 à 1872*. Collected by F. Justen in 1873, shelfmark 1761.a.12.

Newspaper cuttings about Pope Pius IX (1792-1878), entitled *Pio Nono e la stampa contemporanea nel 1878*. Collected by F. Justen in 1878, shelfmark Cup.651.f.1.

Summary listing of contents

Each volume of the collection at shelfmark 14001.g.41 has a printed title page, Collection de caricatures et de charges pour servir à l'histoire de la guerre et de la Révolution de 1870-1871. Justen probably had these printed.

Volume 1 consists mainly of caricatures of Napoleon III and his family. Napoleon is referred to as Badinguet, the name he had used as a disguise in his earlier attempts to seize power. His Empress is called Badinguette.

A comic strip by Louis Jaugey *Les aventures illustrées de Louis Verhuel dit Bonaparte*, sold at l'imprimerie Talons, 19, place du marché St Honoré. This refers to the rumours that Napoleon III was illegitimate, showing Queen Hortense of Holland, his mother, greeting her husband after an absence of two years. The pictures also show Napoleon III as a womanizer, who aped the great Napoleon his uncle, and was exiled after previous attempts to gain power. *Badinguette* is a scurrilous song about the Empress.

Nos despotes consists of cartoons of the imperial family. Faustin (whose full name was Faustin Betbeder) portrays Napoleon III as a monkey and his wife as Madame de Framboise. Their son, the Prince Imperial is Titi-Louis, i.e. 'Little Louis'.

Affiliation de Badinguet by Morsabeau. Cartoons by various artists of the Emperor's family and friends, including Princesse Mathilde, Emile Ollivier, Baron Haussmann and Napoleon III himself (fig. 1), sold by Grognet and De La Tramblais. The daisy (marguerite) which Napoleon sniffs is an allusion to his mistress, Marguerite Bellanger.



Fig. 1

La menagerie impériale is a series of cartoons with large heads on small bodies. Napoleon is depicted as a vulture, his wife as a *grue* ('crane' but also slang for 'prostitute'), their son as a canary, the emperor's mistress Marguerite Bellanger as a cat, his cousin, Prince Napoleon, known as Plon-Plon, as a hare, Haussmann as a beaver and Emile Ollivier as a snake.

Les châtiments by Faustin, depicting the 'punishments' inflicted on France as a result of the war with Prussia.

Many caricatures by Faustin, E. Pepin and Gaillard on the disasters of the war. The German emperor is depicted as a vulture, and Napoleon is shown being dragged off to Prussia as a prisoner. Faustin imagines him being shot for betraying the French, in company with Maréchal Bazaine. There are some anticlerical cartoons, and attacks on the ex-Queen of Spain. Some non-satirical patriotic lithographs depict French troops. The volume concludes with four fine and very large lithographs by E. Cheval, printed by Edmond Guillaume in Brussels, *Le génie de la mort*. Against black backgrounds they depict Bismarck, the German Emperor, Napoleon III and the Pope as macabre skeletons.

Volume 2

Assorted lithographs about the Siege of Paris, and anti-German caricatures published by Grognet, at 16, rue des Ecoles. Artists include Paul Klenck, De La Tramblain, Renaud, Rosambeau and Alfred Le Petit.

Lithographs of French soldiers by Draner, published 'au Bureau de l'Eclipse'.

Paris assiégé. Scènes de la Vie Parisienne pendant le siège par Draner. Au Bureau de l'Eclipse, 16, rue du Croissant. This portrays the hardships of life during the Siege of Paris. People eat cats and dogs, actresses act as nurses, and the artist imagines how a proposed force of armed women, the 'Amazones de la Seine', might appear.

The *Album du siège* by Cham (Amédée, comte de Noë) and Daumier, published in *Charivari*, includes the famous image by Cham of hungry residents looking in the drains for rats to eat. Prostitutes carry lamps so that they can be seen in the absence of gas street-lighting, the statue of Henri IV watches his horse being taken to the butcher, and a medal of Waterloo shows Sedan on its reverse.

Other lithographs by Faustin suggest a tax to be levied on those who fled the siege, and caricature Thiers, and the Comte de Paris, depicted as a butterfly.

Volume 3

Nos grrands [sic] généraux, caricatures by Piloteau, Faustin and R. Belloguel, portray French generals, including Ducros, Vinoy and Chauzy, in a mostly unflattering light. The late Ducrot is praised, as is the Italian hero Garibaldi. Faustin blames Trochu for the surrender, and Paul Klenck draws him with donkey ears. Thiers is criticized for compromising with the Germans, and another cartoon shows him going to cut the claws of a recalcitrant lion on Montmartre and being savaged.

Souvenirs comiques de l'Armée de l'Est en Suisse by A. Meylan. 2nd edn. 1871. Line drawings.

Assorted cartoons by Ernest Picard.

Hugo and Garibaldi pictured by Faustin.

Le Lampion, no. 1. Cartoons criticizing the payment of reparations and supply of provisions to the Prussians.

Caricatures of Thiers favouring the Orléans family, or flirting with the duc d'Aumale, the comte de Paris, the duc de Chartres and the prince de Joinville, all possible contenders to be a new monarch. The duc d'Aumale is also caricatured by Moloch. Aumale, the fourth son of King Louis-Philippe to survive into adulthood, might have become President, but refused to command an army of Versailles against Paris. He continued his army career until he was exiled in 1879.

Volume 4

Paris bloqué by Faustin. En vente chez Duclaux, 2, pl. du Château d'Eau. 24 plates on the siege of Paris, including cartoons on the food problem. A sailor is prepared to eat 'chien de mer' (dogfish), but draws the line at 'chien de terre' (fig. 2).



Fig. 2.

Assorted cartoons including drawings by Paul Klenck of Napoleon III, the German Emperor and Bismarck, and a drawing of Bismarck, 'L'homme à la boule' by Draner. Pilotell (real name Georges Labadie) draws patriotic images of how the Germans will suffer as besiegers of Paris. (The German command was quite concerned at their long lines of communication with Germany, but the French lacked the communications and organization to cut these and lift the siege.) Faustin depicts the German Emperor as *Le chevalier de la Mort*.

Nos vainqueurs 1870-1871 by Gédéon and H. Demare. Chez Deforet & César. It includes satires on fat Prussians and images of the Légion des amis de la France, foreigners who wanted to defend Paris.

Fleurs fruits et légumes du jour par Alfred Le Petit. Légendes de H. Briollet. Au bureau de l'Eclipse, 16, rue de Croissant. 31 plates of politicians depicted as flowers. Trochu, the military governor of Paris, is a carnation; Gambetta, who travelled out of Paris in a balloon to organize the national defence from Tours, a sunflower; Faidherbe, a general who successfully resisted the Prussians in Northern France, as a prickly rose; Félix Pyat (journalist and fiery member of the Conseil de la Commune) as a radish; Littré (lexicographer) as a dried flower pressed between the pages of a dictionary (fig. 3); Thiers as a pear (the symbol of King Louis-Philippe whose minister he was); Garibaldi as a laurel; and Edgar Quinet, the anti-clerical historian, as a violet.



Fig. 3.

Le Musée Homme, ou le jardin des Bêtes by Faustin, published by Saillant, rue du Croissant, and dated 1871. 16 caricatures of prominent personalities, including Garibaldi and caricatures of female fashions. The Italian hero is shown as a lion in allusion to his soubriquet 'The Lion of Caprera' which he took from his home off the coast of Sardinia (fig. 4).

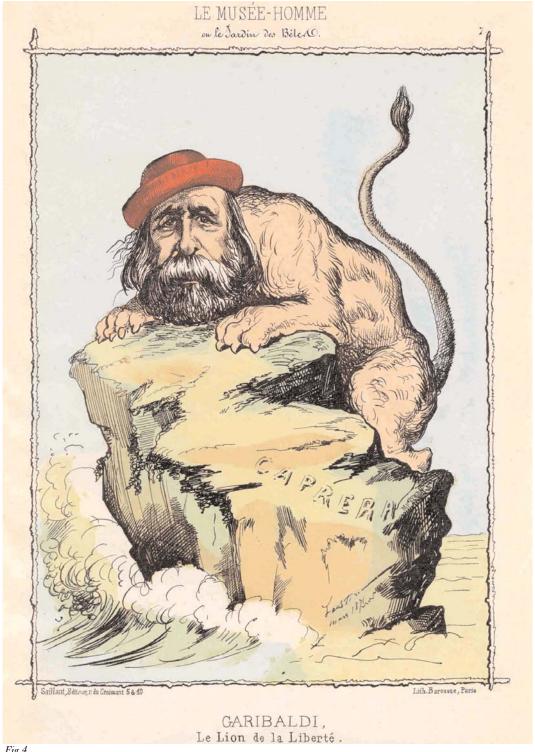


Fig.4.

The last item in the volume is a map of the walls and defensive bastions of Paris.

Volume 5

The plates in this volumes are all in small format.

Règne de l'Avenir. Cour de Polyte 1er. A single plate of people of disreputable appearance.

La Commune. 55 plates by E. C. and F. M. Rigault (fig. 5).

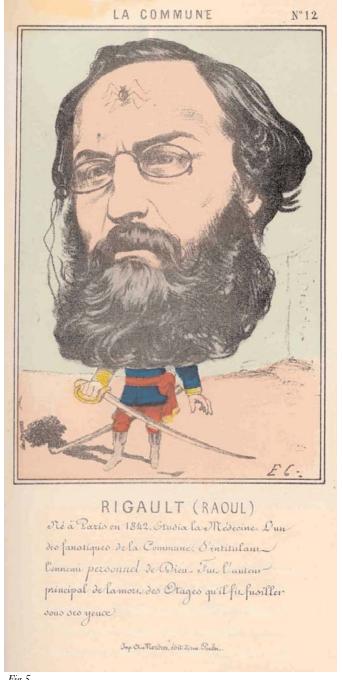


Fig. 5.

La Commune by Paul Klenck. 67 plates, including 'un pétroleur' and 'une pétroleuse', people who allegedly set fire to buildings, but whose activities, if they ever took place at all, were greatly exaggerated.

Les signes du Zodiaque by Nérac. Famous supporters of the Commune, including the painter Courbet depicted as Taurus, the bull, balancing the Vendôme column, for whose destruction he was blamed (fig. 6). Le Scorpion depicts the Club de l'emancipation des femmes.

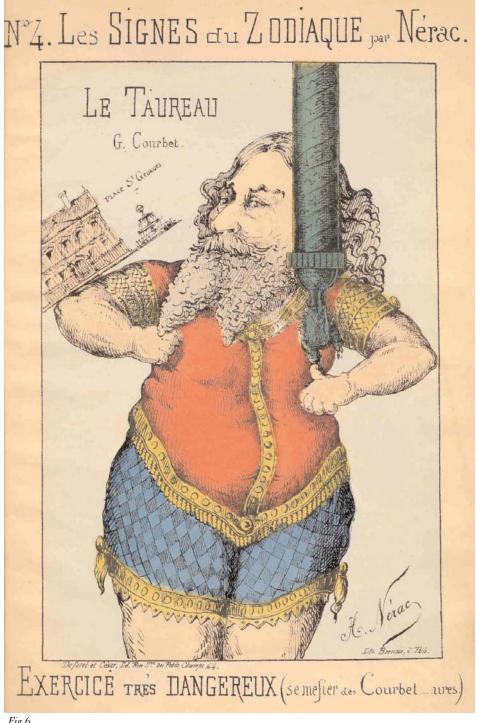


Fig. 6.

Marrons sculptés (a pun since marron is a chestnut, but as an adjective it means dishonest or unqualified), by F. D. Caricatures of Thiers and his protégés the comte de Paris and the duc d'Aumale, and of the Bonaparte family.

Le Pilori by H. Mailly, en vente chez Strauss, 7, rue du Croissant. 31 plates attacking Bonapartists and other non-Republicans.

Les Hommes de la Commune, by Alfred Lepetit. Portraits and biographies of leaders of the Commune, including Ferré, Assi, Grousset, comte Henri de Rochefort, Verdure, Courbet and Charles Lulier. There is a second set without a title.

Les Silhouettes de 1871 by Moloch. (This pro-Commune artist took his name from the malevolent god of Old Testament times.) Illustrations depict the money crisis.

Badingoscope by Moloch. 6 plates attacking Napoleon III.

LL.EX.EX. Les automédons by Moloch. 24 plates; visual jokes about cabs and coachmen. There are thin horses which fall down, accidents and drunks.

Les Fils de Cerbère by Moloch. 19 plates on tyrannical concierges. (Cerberus is the doorkeeper of the Underworld).

Binettes parisiennes (Parisian faces) by H. Demare. 1872.

A travers Paris (Across Paris) by H. Demare. This series includes satirical images of British tourists looking at the ruins of Paris.

La puce en colère (The angry flea) by F. D. 4 plates.

Volume 6

Assorted posters praising the Commune, and attacking the government and Thiers. In one by W. Alexis, Paris personified tells Thiers and the German Emperor that she wants to be free and will defend herself.

L'Actualité by G. Gaillard fils. Avril 1871, plates 3, 4, 17 and 18. Thiers is shown as executioner of the Republic.

Profils et binettes by E. Rosambeau. 6 plates.

Actualités Croquis du jour by Louis Balsamo.

La prise de Paris (mai 1871) by L. Scherer, J. Corseau and others. 19 pictures of fighting on the barricades, the burning of the Tuileries palace, the storming of barricades, and the shooting of the Archbishop, the triumph of Thiers and the pacification of the city.

La Grande Crucifiée by E. Courtaux. 1871. 9 plates. Republican France as Marianne is crucified but takes revenge. Maps show in red the area of France which was invaded.

Nos Impôts by H. Demare. 'Our taxes' are levied on staples including matches, coffee and salt.

1 caricature on the events of 1871 by George Cruickshank.

Volume 7

All the illustrations in the volume depict the Commune.

Le départ de la Commune, a cartoon by Marcia.

Les communards. Portraits of Pyat and Courbet.

Les communeux by H. Nérac. 6 plates.

Paris sous la Commune. 12 plates.

Paris dans les caves by Moloch. Chez Deforet & César. 39 plates depicting the horrors, and more amusing moments, of having to live in cellars to avoid shelling. People are eaten by rats and sprout mushrooms, and rubbish is thrown in on top of them. Plate 16 shows rats dancing while people have a soirée.

Les Folies de la Commune by Cham. Au bureau du journal l'Eclipse (fig. 7). 19 lithographs depicting the ruins of Paris. One illustration shows a suggested punishment for the artist Courbet who was blamed for the destruction of the Vendôme column; making him its guardian after its reconstruction.

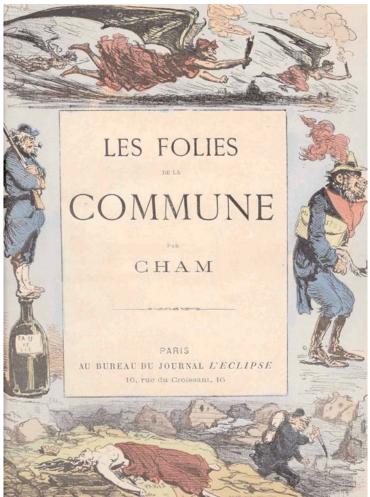


Fig. 7.

Souvenir de la Commune (plate 7 onwards entitled Souvenirs de la Commune) by Léonce Schérer. 28 plates. Chez Deforet & César, 1871.

Agonie de la Commune by G. de Marcilly. 1871. 16 plates.

Communardiana by Nix. 15 plates

Paris Garde nationale. Souvenir des 2 sièges. 9 plates signed F. D. Published by Duclaux.

Avant et après l'incendie. By Victor Coindre. 1871. 12 plates of buildings and streets damaged by fire during the Commune.

Les nouveaux Impôts (New taxes) by Faustin. 8 plates.

Volume 8

Illustrations of military operations, many from German publishers.

Humoristisch-satyrisches Kriegs-Album 1870-1871 by A. Matthis. 28 large lithographs, and 42 smaller ones. These include satires of Napoleon III, and of women soldiers.

En Neutral Herres Resa. Lith. Krigsskadeplatsen. 1870.

Assorted French cartoons, including L'Equilibre européen 1871 by Pipp.

Assorted Italian cartoons, including Vittoria e Vilja by Manganaro. The Prussian lion is shown tearing up France.

Volume 9

German illustrations of the war: most are factual engravings of events in the war, but some are satirical cartoons.

Humoristisches Kriegs-Album 12 Federzeichnungen von Chr. Förster. Hamburg; Boyes & Geisler, 1870.

Gallerie deutscher Heerführer

Kriegs und Schlachtenbilder

Der Krieg in Bildern.

Volume 10 (at Cup.1001.i.1)

Assorted satirical prints, many at the expense of Napoleon III, which include naked women and indecent images. Napoleon was an easy target, as his womanizing was legendary. There are also images of the empress Eugénie, suggesting improprieties with Emile Ollivier, a former Republican, who wanted to compromise with the Empire in order to introduce liberal reforms. He took virtual control of the government in January 1870. Although opposed to war, he was unable to oppose it and ended up by taking responsibility for defeat. Other prints depict the Republic as a naked woman, without erotic intent, in heroic mode, or as the victim of the politicians who suppressed the Commune, or in defiant attitude. At the end of the volume are some anti-clerical lithographs. (The shelfmark range Cup was and is given to material which is considered to be at special risk of defacement or theft, but there are no restrictions on requesting such items in the reading rooms.)

Collection at Cup.648.b.2

This series contains many duplicates of the above. The 39 very slim volumes are labelled on the spine 'Franco-German war and the Commune', and are not numbered.

The following are duplicates of 14001.g.41, but in some cases the sets have fewer prints, and are therefore incomplete.

French caricatures 1870-71, 2 vols, 210 plates, many duplicates of the set at 14001.g.41. Individual lithographs by Le Petit, Pyat and Faustin. *L'Aquarium* depicts all the Bonapartes in a tank, and there are attacks on Napoleon and Thiers. *Le Décrotteur du roi Guillaume* by Alfred Le Petit shows Napoleon cleaning the boots of the German Emperor (as he was declared as part of the victory celebrations at Versailles).

Agonie de la Commune. By G. de Marcilly. 1871. 16 plates. Chez Deforet & César.

Les Fils de Cerbère by Moloch. 16 plates. Chez Deforet & César.

Les Silhouettes de 1871 by Moloch. 10 plates. Chez Deforet & César.

La Grande Crucifiée by E. Courtaux. 1871. 8 plates. Chez Deforet & César.

Paris bloqué by Faustin. 24 plates. En vente chez Duclaux, 2 pl. du Château d'Eau.

Les folies de la Commune by Cham. 24 plates. Au bureau du journal de l'Eclipse.

Affiliation de Badinguet by Morsabeau. En vente chez Grognet & De La Tramblais.

Fleurs fruits et légumes du jour par Alfred Le Petit. Légendes de H. Briollet. 31 plates. Au bureau de l'Eclipse, 16 rue de Croissant.

Les signes du Zodiaque by Nérac.

Le Pilori by H. Mailly. 31 plates. En vente chez Strauss, 7 rue du Croissant.

La Ménagerie impériale. 31 plates Chez Rossignol. The first one depicts the Prince Imperial riding a bicycle.

Marrons sculptés. Signed F. D. 24 plates. En vente chez Duclaux. The first depicts Thiers as nurse to the Comte de Paris and the duc d'Aumale.

La Commune. 40 small plates by E. C. and F. M. Printed by A. Mordret (no publisher given).

LL.EX.EX. Les automedons par Moloch. 24 plates. En vente chez Deforet & César.

Croquis du jour. Signed Louis [Balsamo]. 5 plates. Saillant.

Paris dans les caves by Moloch. 39 plates. Chez Deforet & César.

Paris Garde nationale. Souvenir des 2 sièges. Signed F. D. 9 plates. Published by Duclaux.

La calotte by Klenck. 4 plates. En vente chez Duclaux.

Souvenir de la Commune (plate 7 onwards entitled Souvenirs de la Commune) by Léonce Schérer. 29 plates. Chez Deforet & César, 1871.

Le Musée Homme, ou le jardin des Bêtes by Faustin. 1871. Published by Saillant.

Les nouveaux Impôts by Faustin 8 plates. En vente chez Duclaux.

Communardiana by Nix. 15 plates. Published by Duclaux. Portraits of personalities of the Commune.

Paris assiégé. Scènes de la Vie Parisienne pendant le siège par Draner. 31 plates. Au Bureau de l'Eclipse.

La Prise de Paris (mai 1871) by L. Scherer, J. Corseau and others. 14 plates. En vente chez Deforet & César.

Actualité. 44 assorted plates by Faustin and others, in colour and black and white, published by Saillant, Madre and others.

Gallerie deutscher Heerführer. 1870. 28 plates. Stuttgart: Gustav Weiss.

Kriegs und Schlachtenbilder. 1870. 16 plates. Stuttgart: Gustav Weisse. No. 9 (fig. 8) shows Strassburg after the bombing. No. 12 (fig. 9) shows the French postal balloons leaving Paris.

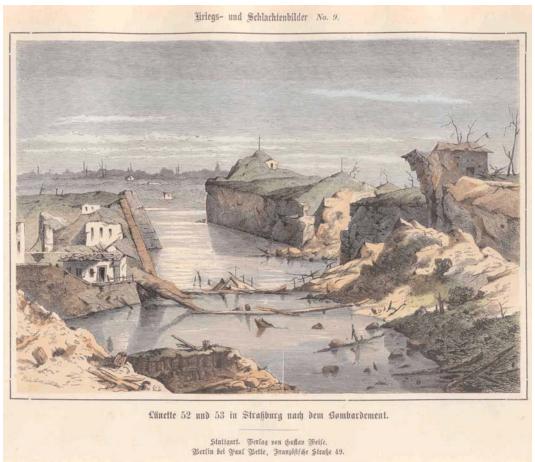


Fig. 8.

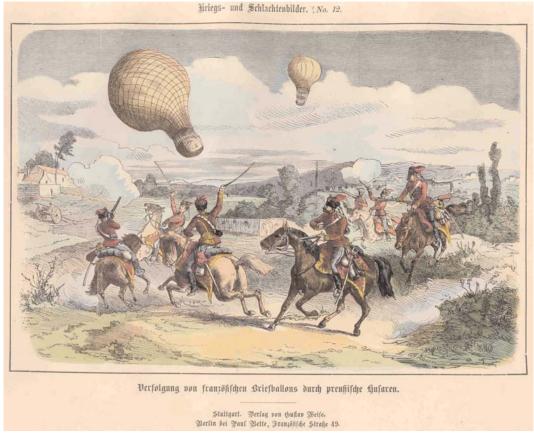


Fig. 9.

Der Krieg in Bildern. 1870. 27 plates. Stuttgart: Gustav Weisse. No. 6 depicts Bismarck and Napoleon, and no. 21 the burning of St.Cloud palace.

The following are not duplicates of the collection at 14001.g.1.

Types du jour. Signed G. B. 8 plates. En vente chez Grognet & Farolet.

Pilori-phrénologie by A. Belloguet. 12 plates lithographed by Fraillery. Large caricature heads, referring to the interest in phrenology (the study of the shape of people's heads which was supposed to indicate character) (fig. 10).

Pilori-éternel by A Belloguet. 3 plates. Deforet.

Les Soldats de la République. L'armée française en campagne. By Draner. 31 plates. Au bureau de l'Eclipse. French soldiers on campaign.

Les femmes de Paris assiégé by Faustin (fig. 11). 8 plates. Saillant.

60 assorted plates of A3 size. The first *Actualité*, by Faustin, shows Napoleon and Trochu in front of a firing squad. Near the end of the volume is a striking image, *Le depart de la Commune*, showing Death on a horse.

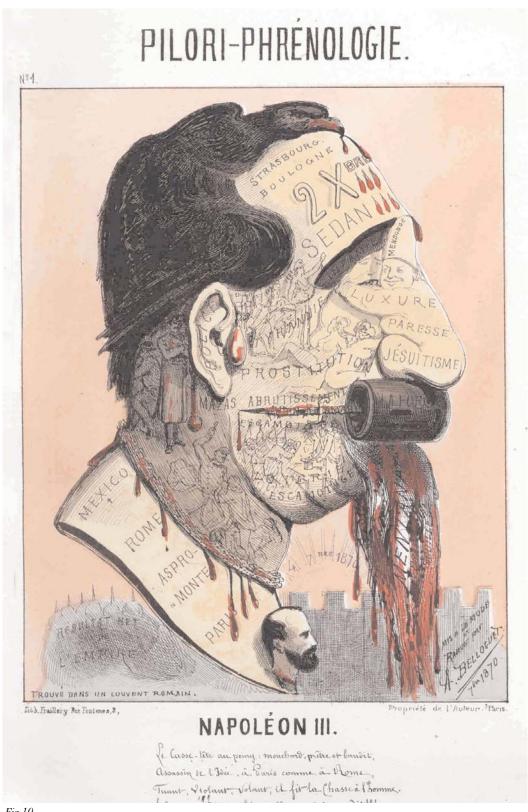


Fig. 10.

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Souvenirs du Siège de Paris by Draner. 31 plates. Au bureau de l'Eclipse. Souvenir du Siège by J. Corseau and G. Bar (fig. 12).

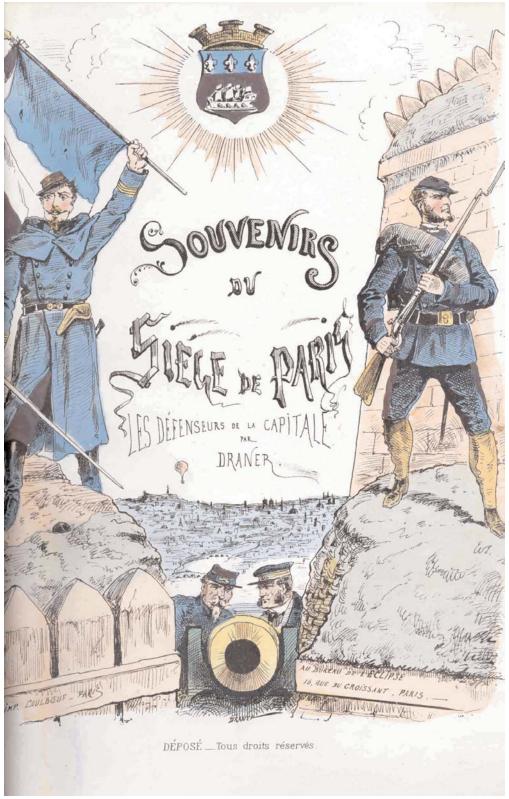


Fig. 12.

Les Prussiens à Paris by L. Deniau. Plates 4-6. J. Meandre.

Flugblatt 27-41. A4 size drawings in black and white by A. Matthis. Elberfeld: J. Loewenstein.

Further reading

John Leighton, Paris under the Commune (London: Bradbury, Evans and Co., 1871)

Paul Delion, Les Membres de la Commune et du Comité Central (Paris: P. A. Lemerre, 1871) (biographical notes)

Jean Berleux, La Caricature politique en France pendant la Guerre, la Siège de Paris et la Commune (1870-1871) (Paris: Labitte, Em. Paul et Cie, 1890)

Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris. The Siege and the Commune 1870-71* (London: Macmillan, 1965)

Robert Tombs, The Paris Commune 1871 (London: Longman, 1999)

John Milner, Art, War and Revolution in France 1870-1871 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000)

La Commune photographiée. Exhibition, Musée d'Orsay (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000)

Gérald Dittmar, *Dictionnaire biographique illustré de la Commune de Paris de 1871* (Paris: Dittmar, 2004)