

The History and Iconography in La Fortune de la France

Molly Hakopian



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Abraham Bosse was one of the leaders of the print-making genre in his day. Prints were becoming the easiest way to share propaganda with the masses. Many people could not read or write and so prints were a way to make statements about life in the seventeenth century accessible to a wide variety of people. Throughout his career, Bosse's engravings and etchings were a consistent way to understand the everyday lives of French citizens similar to Baroque Era genre paintings¹. Examples include *La Galerie du Palaise* (Abraham Bosse, *La Galerie du Palaise*, 1634, Museum of Fine Arts-Boston) and *Le Barbier* (Abraham Bosse, *Le Barbier*, 1632, Metropolitan Museum of Art). Both of these prints depict seemingly insignificant occurrences such as patrons observing works of art in a gallery or getting a haircut. His print *La Fortune de la France* (*Fortune Favoring France*) (Abraham Bosse, *La Fortune de la France*, 1635, Fleming Museum at University of Vermont), was created to commemorate an event with a political tone aimed at the enemies of France at the time, with specific emphasis placed on Spain. Battles and wars were often summarized in prints to aid the process of history making². *La Fortune de la France* depicts the Franco-Spanish War and French victory in 1635.

The foreground on the left shows clean, well dressed and regal figures. They are bathed in rays of sunshine and standing under a tree with leaves. One of the figures sits majestically on a horse and another man gestures to the warfare in the background as the woman looks on. These figures are assumed to be the French King Louis XIII and Queen Anne as well as the king's

1 Maxime Préaud, "La Taille-douce à Paris au XVII siècle ou "La fortune de la France"". *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. <http://expositions.bnf.fr/bosse/reperes/>, paragraph 1

2 Maxime Préaud, "La Taille-douce à Paris au XVII siècle ou "La fortune de la France"". *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. <http://expositions.bnf.fr/bosse/reperes/>, paragraph 1

brother Gaston d'Orléans³. Bosse creates an authoritative tone on the left side of the print because the two men and the woman are directly represented. A viewer at the time would know exactly who the figures were. At the time of the print's creation in 1635, France had declared war and thus initiated the Franco-Spanish War. The French Bourbon monarchy was not a dominant world power and because of this, was eager to expand. At this time, the expansive Spanish Hapsburg territory was slowly weakening. Long before France officially declared war on Spain it began to support Spain's enemies, such as the Swedes, to coax them into aiding the French and by doing so, further weaken the Spanish Hapsburg territory. This would provide an opportunity to expand as the Bourbon monarchy intensified⁴. As the French grew in strength, the balance of power in mid-17th century Europe was changing. This nationalist depiction of France at war in this print served to reinforce the idea that France would be victorious in all endeavors regardless of the power of the enemy.

The foreground on the right side is depressing and sparse. The tree is bare, the clouds are dark and thickening and the figures are ragged. There is a man with a peg leg, a woman wearing tattered clothes with barefoot children and a man is pleading for help from Fortune in the sky as his donkey cowers away from a vicious dog from the left side. Because of their distinctly styled top hats, these figures are recognizable as Spaniards⁵. Spain was the leading world power of the time period and controlled much of the territory in Europe. Two of its most pivotal territories were the Spanish Netherlands and Northern Italy, which were necessary in operating Spain's

3 Abraham Bosse, P. von Baldinger-Seidenberg, and Roland Leblond. 1635. *La Fortune de la France*. Trans. Birdie MacLennan.

4 Randall Lesaffer. *Defensive Warfare, Prevention and Hegemony*. Journal of the History of International Law 8, no. 1 (January 2006): 102

5 Abraham Bosse, P. von Baldinger-Seidenberg, and Roland Leblond. 1635. *La Fortune de la France*. Trans. Birdie MacLennan.

main supply route⁶. In the 1620s and 1630s, Spain was involved in numerous political and ideological wars mainly with the Dutch Republic. The Swedish military continually conquered lands in Germany and fought aggressively⁷. The Spanish Empire was spreading its resources to various areas it controlled to try and quell the fighting. The addition of France as an enemy called for double the resources and troops to fight in all the necessary areas. The bare tree symbolizes a lack of knowledge, the tattered clothes represent declining trade with other countries and the barefoot children are symbolic of the devastation Spain's current policies will cause for future generations. The woman with a child on her back and another by her side is a symbol of charity. In this case, the Spaniards are receiving no charity from Fortune and they are bedraggled. Throughout childhood tales across cultures, donkeys are known for their stubbornness. Bosse included this to show that the Spaniards are too arrogant to realize that the territory they have is too much to handle and that stubbornness will be their downfall. Each of these elements show what Bosse is predicting for Spain as a result of its imperialism.

In the center of the sky the allegorical figure of Fortune (a woman) is facing left with flowing hair. The clouds are parting and medicine, laurels, crowns and scepters are descending from the sunbeams to the entire left side of the etching. These gifts of fortune were being sent to the warriors shown fighting valiantly in the background of the scene as well as the figures in the foreground on the left side. Her body is positioned away from the right side of print and it is dark and gloomy behind her. As consistent with the title, literally and figuratively above all else, Fortune is favoring the French. The inscription at the bottom of the print translates as follows⁸:

6 Randall Lesaffer. *Defensive Warfare, Prevention and Hegemony*. Journal of the History of International Law 8, no. 1 (January 2006): 102.

7 R.A. Stradling. *Olivares and the Origins of the Franco-Spanish War, 1627-1635*. The English Historical Review, Vol. 101, No. 398 (Jan., 1986), Oxford University Press. 69.

8 Bibliothèque nationale de France. *La Fortune de la France*. Trans. Birdie MacLennan. <http://expositions.bnf.fr/bosse/grand/148.htm>

La Fortune de la France	Lady Fortune of France
Nos Ennemis meurent de voir Qu'ils n'ont ny force, ny pouvoir Sur la Fortune de la France Et que l'Invincible LOUYS	Our enemies die to see That they have neither strength, nor power On the fortune/destiny of France And that the invincible king
Dont elle entreprend la defence Rend leurs projets esvanouys	which she [fortune] undertakes to defend Leads their projects to fade
Sur ce Chef des plus grands Guerriers Elle fait fleurir les Lauriers, Dont la victoire le couronne ; Et soustient si bien ses desseins Que les sceptres qu'elle luy donne Sont tousjours fermes dans ses mains	On this Chief, the greatest of Warriors She (fortune) makes flourish the Laurels Whose victory crowns him And will sustain so well his designs The scepters that she gives him Are still firm in his hands
Ce cavalier estropié reduit au train des gens de pié Et cet autre sur sa Bourrique; Font des voeux inutilement A celle qui leur fait la nicque Et qui les joue à tout moment	This crippled rider Reduces to followers the people on foot And this other on his donkey Makes wishes in futility to she (fortune) who mocks them And who plays them at a moment [at any time]
La Fortune que dans les cieux Les fuit et qu'ils suivent des yeux Avec une mine hypocrite Se mocque deux dans les combats Et plus leur vanité l'irrite Plus Elle aime à les mettre bas.	Fortune in the heavens flees from them, and they follow with their eyes With a hypocritical appearance is mocked twice in the fights And the more their vanity irritates her The more she likes to put them down.

The inclusion of this description in a print with an already explicit meaning further emphasizes the nationalist views portrayed by Abraham Bosse⁹. The first section explains that the Spanish are powerless in the hands of fate. As depicted in the battle scene in the background of the print, the Spaniards realize they do not have enough power to win and as a result they perish. In essence, the actual battle is simply reinforcing the symbolism of the figures in the foreground. King Louis XIII is aided by Fortune. Fortune crowns him with victory and adds to his power.

⁹ Sophie Join-Lambert, Maxime Préaud, *Abraham Bosse: Savant Graveur*, ed. by Sue Welsh Reed. Print Quarterly Publications. 217. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41826453>

The inscription then begins to describe the Spanish side of the print. The Spanish plead with Fortune to be charitable but she only mocks them. Her face is upturned and away from them which shows her pointed rejection of Spain. They are helpless and can only follow with their eyes. The Spanish are endlessly mocked by Fortune and they have made a mockery of themselves with the attempt to defeat France. In essence, they have defeated themselves because of their presumptuous vanity. Through this description, Bosse has made an allegorical lampoon of Spain.

Through his imagery Bosse shows that France is a force to be reckoned with. Though Spain is the greatest world power, France has luck and good fortune on its side. As Bosse depicts it since fortune is uncontrollable and it supports France, France will prevail. As history shows, at the end of the Franco-Spanish War France was victorious. Bosse's print proved correct.

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