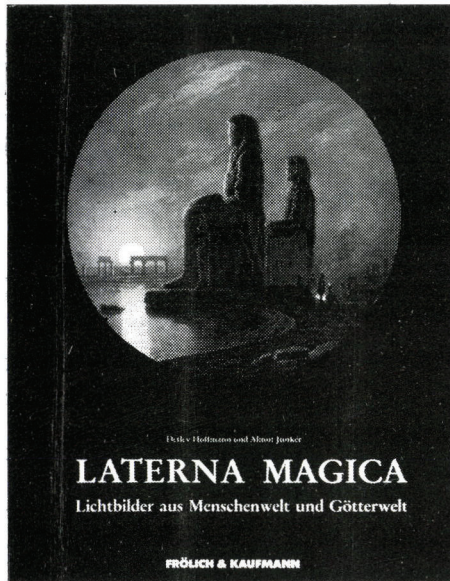


# LATERNA MAGICA

## Lichtbilder aus Menschenwelt und Götterwelt



### Laterna Magica: Lichtbilder aus Menschenwelt und Götterwelt

Detlev Hoffmann und Almut Junker;  
(edited and introduced by Winfried Ranke).  
Berlin: Frölich & Kaufmann, © 1982  
123, (131)p: (329) ill, (216 coll); 31 cm.  
ISBN 3-88725-090-7

There is a sort of busy worm,  
That will the fairest book deform,  
By gnawing holes throughout them,  
Alike, through every leaf they go,  
Yet of its merits naught they know,  
Nor care they aught about them.  
*J. Doraston*

With this part of a rhyme in my mind I started to read the book and very soon I concluded: 'This book is not for everybody'. But, for the friends of the magic lantern, it is one of the exceptional publications with which we do not have many encounters. Especially if the publication comes from such an unexpected source as the Historisches Museum at Frankfurt.

The book is based on research on a part of the legacy of Paul Hoffmann, which consists of about 500 mostly handpainted lantern plates. Hoffmann (1829-1888) was one of the itinerant elocutionists of the years 1850-1880 but with a many-sided repertoire and a versatile background, so an interesting lanternist. The value of this book lies mainly in the reflections about the lantern plates and in bringing into the picture the lanternist who had used those slides.

The editor, Winfried Ranke, has written an introduction of 42 pages on the history of the magic lantern to place the book in the desired context. At first this follows the general line of evolution, beginning with *Magia Naturales* which loses in time its magic and becomes *Physique amusante*, and after gaining knowledge it grows out to *Science*. In the scope of this book, which mainly concerns lantern slides, Ranke remarks on the way people interpreted pictures. The story of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* comes to my mind, wherein T.E. Lawrence wrote about his experiences with pictures on people during an Arabian campaign in World War 1. Lawrence's observations reflected that the accessibility of the human mind to the picture depends on background or culture.

Ranke also makes a good remark by noticing that film historians usually misused the magic lantern history for their own purposes.

The introduction, annotated with many references, some of which mentioned our Society and Journal, contains, besides the generally known, a few not so familiar prints from German museums.

The main authors are Detlev Hoffmann, who is not related to Paul Hoffmann and has studied arts, and Almut Junker, who has studied history. They have selected about 184 lantern plates from the collection and placed them in several groups of interest to the reader. The three principal groups are: Natural Science, Land & People and Literature.

They have made an analysis of the slides and produced a picture of a lanternist who was practising around 1850. Sometimes the thread with reality becomes thin, but the side-steps are acceptable and interesting. In research on painted slides the important question is: 'Who was the maker?' If I may make a remark on this subject, then no one can say something about the artists who did the painting of the lantern plates according to style or technique. An artist should follow of course his own ideas. However, the comparison with contemporary book illustrations shows in some cases a more than accidental similarity. An example is shown in figure 1. The illustration from Unger's *Die Urwelt in ihren verschiedenen Bildungsperioden* (Munich 1852) and the lantern slide are obviously similar and the authors found a handful more.



It is a well-known fact that even book illustrators had imitated often original tableaux. I must confess that I am impressed by the easy way the book illustrators and the lantern slide painters ignored the copyrights by such a straightforward imitation of well-known illustrations. In the case of Hoffmann's plates one can observe that sometimes a little accent is given to the light effects. With some restrictions one can say that the composition or the idea is used, without necessarily copying all the detail.

An unsigned painting points at an imitator, even if the slide comes from an established slidemaker. Therefore I suppose that gifted technicians in the ateliers of slidemakers produced the slides according to examples. I got the impression that Hoffmann did not himself paint any of the lantern plates shown; everyone who has tried to do so knows some of the difficulties. Further it must be realised that the preparations for a tour along theatres demanded a lot of time. Nevertheless I think the argument is of interest in that someone has tried to recover the name of the maker.

The reader becomes quite familiar with the publicity house of Otto Spamer in Leipzig, who loved to illuminate his books with woodcuts. Another source was Karl Baedeker, who in 1872 started with his famous travel guides. Paul Hoffmann showed his 'not travelling' public the world by means of Baedeker's information. Yet another example, but not the least, was Gustave

Doré, who had influenced the painters and can be recognised in the Dante slides (*The Divine Comedy* of 1861). But there is still doubt about Hoffmann himself as a lantern slide painter.

The series of 'The Miracles of the Polar Sea' shows the fascination with expeditions and explorations of unknown territory. The resulting images can be seen as a working up of scarce material by a rich imagination. The fascination of the authors for this group of slides (32 numbered pieces) is noteworthy.

Another source of information has been found in the posters that Paul Hoffmann used for theatres (2). From this and others we get some insight into the way he had given his performances. He obviously used a biunial lantern with a limelight adaption and projected probably on the back of a linen screen of ten feet square.

About half of the book covers the reproductions of the slides. The print quality is high. There are 10 prints of landscape and architecture, 18 on astronomy, 18 on geology, 14 about the polar expeditions, 14 on Egypt, 18 on Africa, 22 on Siberia and Central Asia, 26 on *Odyssey*, 30 on Dante's *Comedy* and 14 on Wagner's *Nibelungen*. Most of them are printed in a circular form with a diameter of about 10cm and some with a diameter of about 17cm. Every group is accompanied by an introductory text and each print by a short commentary.



There have been 3,000 copies of the book printed, and, as I have said, 'It is not a book for everybody', this number placed an unsolved riddle: who, apart from the friends of the magic lantern, will buy all these copies? *William Tebra*

Im Saale des Hôtel de Prusse.  
Donnerstag, d. 10. November 1887.

**Paul Hoffmann's**  
grosse Vorstellung:

**Die Nibelungen**

(aus dem Bahrother Festspiel)

in zwei Abtheilungen dargestellt in den prächtigen künstlerisch ausgestatteten Tableau, mittels des stärksten Hydro-oxygen-Gesammpresen.  
Zur Erleichterung der Besucher (Hörn. Zuhörer) gehalten von Frau Minna Hoffmann.

PROGRAMM:

**Der Ring des Nibelung.**

1. Abth.: Rheingold. Die Walküre. Siegfried.

2. Abth.: Die Götterdämmerung.

3. Abth.: Landschaftliche und architektonische Tableau.