

TOY GHOST MACHINES MADE IN NUREMBERG

PART 2: SURVIVING MACHINES AND SLIDES

Helmut Wälde



1. Tinplate toy lantern with aperture for vertical slides (Salzburg Museum)



2. Label on the box in Fig. 1 (Salzburg Museum)



4. Label on the box in Fig. 3 (Salzburg Museum)

IN THE FIRST PART OF THIS ARTICLE (*NMLJ* Vol. 10 No. 4, 69–73) I examined some of the historical evidence for a particular style of German toy lantern known as the 'Geister-Maschine' (ghost-machine) or 'Geister Erscheinung' ('ghost appearance'). Now we can take a look at some of the surviving examples of these toys and their 'ghost raising' slides.

One of the two examples of a tinplate toy ghost-machine that I have found so far is in the collection of the Salzburg Museum, Austria (Fig 1). This has an aperture only for vertical slides. It is complete with its original box, which has a label reading 'Geister Erscheinung' and includes the maker or distributor's initials 'G.T.G.' with an orb trademark (the letter T is hidden in the orb) and a skull with crossed bones (Fig. 2). There is also a matching box with slides (Fig. 3) with a similar label (Fig. 4). Both boxes are covered with paper of the red-and-white chequered design typical of the early lantern and slide manufacturers in Nuremberg.

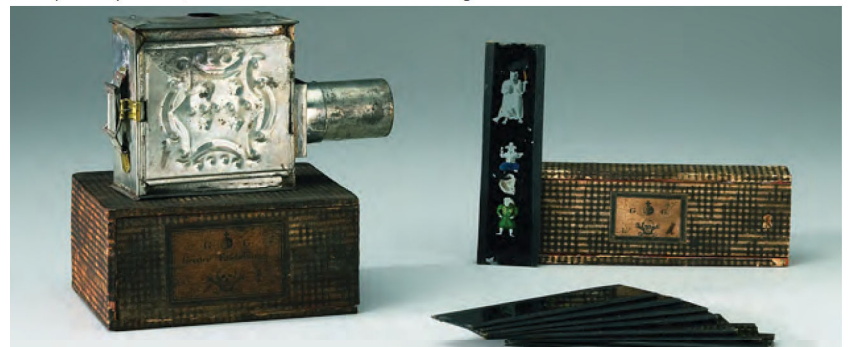
The slide which is displayed in the lantern in Salzburg shows the typical black opaque background (Fig. 5). If this is compared to the description of item 682 in the Bestelmeier catalogue, reprinted in Part 1 of this article, it seems quite certain that the ghost-machine in the Salzburg Museum is more or less of the same pattern. However it has to be dated some decades later, probably around 1840–50, as I shall discuss later.

The other known ghost-machine example is a lantern in the collection of François Binetruy (Fig. 6). This is of a higher quality and earlier than the Salzburg lantern, on the



5. Detail of the slide shown in Fig. 3 (Salzburg Museum)

3. Tinplate toy lantern, with box of vertical slides (Salzburg Museum)



7. The slide box and a detail of its lid (François Binetruy Collection)



6. Two views of the second ghost-machine lantern (François Binetruy Collection)





9. Details of the slides shown in Fig. 8 (François Binetruy Collection)

basis of the details of the embossed patterns on both the body and the chimney. As a special feature it has two apertures so it can be used for projecting either vertical or horizontal slides, opened or closed by small flaps with ring-shaped handles. With the lantern are the original slide box and twelve vertical and one horizontal hand-painted slides (Fig. 7). On the lid of the box the word 'Geister' ('ghosts') is written by hand, and there is also a hand-painted image of a winged woman holding maybe a laurel crown.

The slides are mounted in wooden frames and measure 102 x 490 mm, which may be almost the largest size for the toy ghost-machines of Nuremberg origin (Fig. 8, with details of some slides in Fig. 9). There are five images on each slide, and in general the subjects look like those that were later shown on smaller slides. The horizontal slide in this set is remarkable because it has a black-painted opaque background, the only example of this technique of Nuremberg origin and from this period of which I am aware.

8. Twelve vertical and one horizontal hand-painted slides accompanying the second ghost-machine (François Binetruy Collection)





10. (above) Eleven vertical hand-painted slides for use in a toy ghost-machine (Ivo Gilbert Collection). To give a better view of the figures some scratches in the black background of the original slides have been removed digitally.





Another set of eleven vertical painted slides for a toy ghost-machine, probably from an original set of twelve, exists in the collection of Ivo Gilbert (Fig. 10). The painting – or to be precise, the colouring – is less detailed but more intense than that of the Binetruy set. This might be because of the smaller size of the slides, which are a bit less than half the size at 53 x 213 mm.

When I first looked at the Binetruy and Gilbert sets of slides I recognised that they mainly show figures which are a combination of animals and humans. After a second look I recognised some similar figures appearing on the slides of both sets. So I decided to have a closer look at these figures. I found – to my surprise – as many as 32 matching figures (out of 65 in the Binetruy slides and 44 in the Gilbert set). A selection of these comparisons is shown in Fig. 11 (with apologies for the quality of a few of the images – *Ed.*).

What at first looked like just a collection of weird creatures suddenly turned out to be a subject with a deeper meaning. It seemed unlikely to me that all these figures were ‘invented’ for the toy ghost-machines, and from that realisation I became interested in trying to identify the figures. I first examined all sources I could find on ghost raising and phantasmagoria, hoping to find similar figures on the ‘professional’ slides shown there, but the result was not satisfying. However it has been possible to identify some figures, for example the Centaur Chiron with young Achilles (first pair of images in Fig. 11), an Ichthyocentaur (third pair), a Nereid (fifth), Justitia or Dike, goddess of justice (seventh), Achelous, a river deity (ninth) and Heracles (eleventh). These all are figures from Greek mythology. From that conclusion it was not difficult to identify the figure on the lid of the box of the Binetruy set as Nike (Greek goddess of victory). The research turned out to be not easy, but I am certain that nearly all the figures on the slides are based on originals in literature. Perhaps this will be the subject of a future article.

What we can learn from this is that the ghost-raising toys were obviously not solely produced and purchased to create frightening shows. These toys also had a strong educational aim. With this meaning, the toy ghost-machine finds its place in the context of a strong development of education among upper-class citizens, which in Germany took place especially from around 1750 onwards and lasted long into the nineteenth century.

One further reference to this type of slide is found in a German article from 1937 referring to the history of the magic lantern, which includes an illustration of another vertical painted slide for a toy ghost-machine (Fig. 12).¹ The ‘ghosts’ on that slide, whose source and location are now unknown, have a slightly comical touch, but one figure might also come from Greek mythology: the third image looks very much like the god Zeus sitting on a cloud holding lightning bolts in his hands.

One final example is a set of eleven slides (again, probably from an original set of twelve) for a toy ghost-machine, which is in the



12. (above) Illustration of a vertical hand-painted ghost-machine slide (*Westermanns Monatshefte*, no. 974 of October 1937)

11. (left) Comparison of figures shown in the Binetruy (left column) and Gilbert (right column) slide sets

NOTES

1. The article and illustration appeared in *Westermanns Monatshefte*, no. 974 of October 1937.



13. Eleven vertical hand-painted slides for use in a toy ghost-machine. The titles in German (from top to bottom and left to right) are:— (1) Louis XVI King of France / Queen of France / Dauphin; (2) Journey of the witches to the Blocksberg; (3) Selected Ghosts; (4) and (5) Ghosts; (6) Voltaire / Rousseau /

Robespierre ; (7) Emperor Augustus, Emperor Charles IV, King Alexander; (8) Emperor Joseph II, Emperor Leopold II; (9) Murder; (10) Emperor Julius Caesar, Emperor Maximilian, Emperor Constantine; (11) Emperor Nero, Emperor Theodosius, King Tarquinus.

author's collection (Fig. 13). The vertically arranged figures are hand-painted and the slides have the typical black-painted background. Like the boxes of the toy ghost-machine in Salzburg, they have the typical red chequered paper of Nuremberg origin on their edges. The titles of the figures are written onto the slides in an opaque red colour and would not have appeared in the projected image. The dimensions of the slides are 50 x 230 mm, with three figures on each slide.

Six of the eleven slides show dead but real historical persons. The remaining five slides are titled 'Geister' ('ghosts') twice, 'Aus erwählte Geister' ('selected ghosts'), 'Mord' ('murder') and 'Der Hexen Farth nach den plocks berg' ('the witches' journey to the Blocksberg'). These six slides were clearly intended exclusively for 'pure' ghost raising. The other figures may again suggest an educational purpose for the ghost-machine, but perhaps even so in the context of 'raising the ghosts of figures from history'. It is worth recalling Bestelmeier's description of the Zauberggrab ('Magic Grave') device as being for the showing of 'well-known dead persons', quoted in Part 1 of this article.

The female ghost on the fourth slide illustrated looks a bit like the ghost shown in the Krünitz and Bestelmeier references discussed in Part 1 of this article. Considering, in addition, that two of the slides

were probably produced almost unchanged until around 1850–60, as a watercoloured illustration in a contemporary sample book shows (Fig. 14). In the foreword of the modern reprint of this book a date of about 1850 is supposed, but the dating of the illustration is not certain and it might be earlier.² In the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg is an original lithograph showing two magic lanterns very similar to those in the sample book mentioned above. According to the museum's notes there is an assumed date of 1840–45.

One of the sample book illustrations shows again the typical red-patterned paper covering of Nuremberg origin on the slide box. According to the modern editor's description, the ghost-machine was offered with twelve slides in different sizes numbered 0–12, showing figures on a black-painted background. Interpreting the details of other known original Nuremberg slide boxes in connection with their contained slides, I assume that the size 0 possibly stands for slides of a width of around 3 cm and 12 for slides of around 11 cm, but this will require further research.

From the embossed design of the tinsplate magic lantern shown in the sample book it can be assumed that the toy ghost-machine in the Salzburg Museum can be dated to around 1840–50. On the vertical painted slides with the black-painted background partly shown in the sample book, once again mythological figures can be seen with a strong relationship to the slides shown in Figs 8 and 10.

As a final note to finish off this discussion (but possibly open up other avenues of research), I have found another vertical slide of Dutch origin showing two ghosts (Fig. 15). It is not clear whether it is a slide for a toy ghost-machine; it might be used rather for a private show in a lantern of conventional size. Its size is about 90 by 220 mm. It was found in a lot of matching hand-painted panoramic slides of a very fine quality, one of which was dated 1832 in the painting. These slides all have a similar black-painted opaque background.

HELMUT WÄLDE is a civil servant working for the German government. He has been collecting optical toys, daguerreotypes, stanhopes and stereo photography for over 25 years, and has been an MLS member for 16 years. He is especially interested in the history of early German tinsplate toy magic lanterns (the different patterns of the bodies, sizes and boxes) and their matching slides, and would welcome any information on this subject.

2. Christa Pieske (ed.), *Schönes Spielzeug aus alten Nürnberger Musterbüchern* (Munich: Morion Verlagsproduktion, 1984). The illustration reproduced here is on p.131.



14. Two ghost-machine toy lanterns with boxes of slides, shown in Nuremberg sample book c.1850, with details of the vertical slides shown behind the lanterns

show the figures of Voltaire (1694–1778), Rousseau (1712–78) and Robespierre (1758–94), and of Louis XVI (1754–93), his wife Marie Antoinette and the Dauphin, they probably can be fairly confidently dated around 1800 to 1820, because they were presumably produced while there was still some contemporary connection to these well-known persons. In contrast to the slides shown before, there is no mythological meaning behind the figures.

Apart from the examples discussed here, I have so far found no other toy ghost-machines or their slides. Those featured here are all certainly of German origin.

The toy ghost-machines of this Nuremberg style, with embossed designs on their bodies,



15. Vertical slide showing two ghosts (Dutch, possibly 1830s)