THE COLLECTION OF MUSSCHENBROEK SLIDES IN THE STEDELIJK MUSEUM DE LAKENHAL, LEIDEN, THE NETHERLANDS

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Fig. 1

THE MUSEUM DE LAKENHAL IN LEIDEN is currently displaying its collection of magic lantern slides in a temporary exhibition. Among the slides that the museum possesses, one collection stands out: 75 Dutch slides from the 18th century and a lantern. The latter has every characteristic of an 18th-century bull's eye lantern, and there is no reason to assume that it was made in Leiden or the Netherlands.[1] Most of the slides, however, are unmistakably from the Leiden workshop of the Musschenbroek family. This short article aims to give a brief introduction to this collection.

The provenance of the collection can be traced back no further than February 1884, when Museum De Lakenhal, the Leiden city museum, bought it at an auction. At the time, the Museum had a keen interest in collecting objects from everyday life, and in the eyes of the committee in charge of the museum, the 18th- century lantern with slides fitted into this collecting policy. There is little documentation surrounding the acquisition. The Museum's annual report of that year, and subsequent catalogues, do mention the 18th- century lantern and stained-glass slides, but there is no indication that the Museum was aware that the slides had been made in the workshop of the famous Leiden instrument makers.

The collection was subsequently partly exhibited at various exhibitions about magic lanterns and optics, among them the exhibition *Toverbeeldverhaal* in De Lakenhal itself in 1975, and the exhibition *Magische Optica* in Museum Boerhaave, the Dutch national museum about the history of science, in 1996. The slides were, however, not recognised to be Musschenbroek in these exhibitions. The 1975 catalogue does not even mention the Musschenbroek workshop in its short history of the magic lantern. Apparently this important episode in the history of the magic lantern was at the time largely forgotten, even in the very city where the Musschenbroeks had had their workshop.[2]

During an extensive inventory and registration project in 2010, the collection was rediscovered, and the late Willem Albert Wagenaar was asked to look at the slides. He recognised them to be from the Musschenbroek workshop, and made the Museum aware that the collection was quite special.

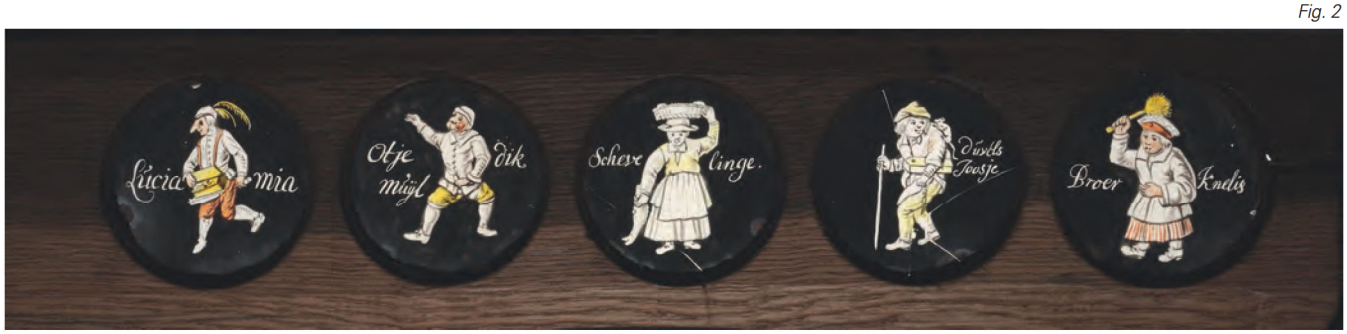
The subject matter of the slides is varied but generally speaking is very characteristic of 18th-century Dutch slides. Among them we find images from *Het Menselyk Bedryf* (Human Industry), an emblem book by Jan Luyken depicting 100 crafts, which first appeared in 1694. (Fig. 1)

This theme was evidently popular in 18th-century lantern slides, since many surviving Dutch slides, both from the Musschenbroek workshop and others, depict arts and crafts from this book. There are also landscapes, ships, dwarves and *comedia dell'arte* figures. Interesting in the collection are several slides with written text, which seem to identify the figures as characters in a farce. This is interesting because information about the content of magic lantern shows in the 18th century is scarce, so any information coming from the slides themselves is more than welcome. In one slide the various characters have names such as Otje Dikmuijl ('fat-faced Otje') and Broer Knelis ('brother Knelis'), both of which are archetypical stereotypes which often made their appearance in Dutch comedies.[3] (Fig. 2)

In another slide (Fig. 3, overleaf), we even find vague hints of a story written in the images themselves.

The woman to the far left, so the text around her tells us, 'very much likes to stay healthy, and therefore takes pills for her stomach'. The figure on the next image is identified as a 'dokter malmuil', which might be translated liberally as 'doctor weird

Fig. 2



NOTES

1. For this type of lantern and its most probable provenance: Deac Rossel, 'Some thoughts on the Bull's Eye magic lantern' in: TMLJ vol. 9 (2009), n. 6.
2. Ingrid Moerman and Hans van Oosterom, *toverbeeldverhaal* (Stedeljik Museum de Lakenhal, Leiden 1975); *Magische optica: toverlantaarns, kijkdozen en andere vermakelijkheden* (Museum Boerhaave, Leiden, 1996).
3. For example, Otje Dickmuyl appears as a funny character in G. A. Bredero's *De Spaansche Brabander* (1617). Broer Knelis was a character harking back to an apparently historical 16th-century Franciscan monk Cornelis Adriaansen, who was particularly hostile to the protestant 'heretics'. When Calvinst Dutch Reformed Protestantism later became the dominant religion in the Netherlands, Broer Knelis became an icon for Catholic intolerance.

Fig. 3

face.' To his right, a funny dwarf-like figure is used to personify a character who is apparently very angry, as he reaches for his sword and shouts 'stay, stay, dog!' The figure to his right is not accompanied by text, but then the far-right figure is once again a dwarf-like figure, saying 'What do you think about it, cousin?' Although the specific story that these images tell eludes us, it nonetheless seems clear that they were meant to tell a comical story of some sort.

Many of the slides followed the design of prints that were popular at the time, and in many cases we were able to find these. The print that served as the source for an image may in some cases provide clues as to how the slides were used in shows, and often also helps to date the slides more precisely, as they often provide an earliest possible date at which the slides could have been made.[4] The current exhibition therefore also sports a display with 18th-century print books that served as sources for the slides.

Fig. 4

An example that merits attention here is the beautiful set of three monkey satires in the collection. Monkey satires, in which scenes from everyday life were depicted with monkeys and cats instead of humans, were very popular in the Low Countries in the early modern period. The slides in the Lakenhal collection turn out to have been copied after a series by Leonard Schenk, *'t Aapenspel in de Werelt*, which was first published around 1720. The slides have the exact same composition as the prints and also the same size, except that the upper and lower part of the image was 'cropped' so as to have an image which was the right size for the lantern. This makes it more than likely that these slides were not in fact copied but simply traced by laying a glass plate over the print and then tracing the lines.[5] (Compare the print, Fig.4 with the slide Fig. 5.)

The slides therefore also leave out the funny poems that accompany each of the prints. For the slide shown here the poem, liberally translated, runs: 'Oh monkey, you are in danger, you should quickly be administered a clyster! A broth after the French manner will turn your suffering around.' And indeed we see the doctor standing ready with a large clyster syringe. Clysters, liquids introduced into the gut via the rectum to supposedly restore equilibrium in the body, were all the rage in 18th-century medicine, and of course an obvious target for satire.

Fig. 5

4. More about the imagery used in Dutch 18th-century prints will be published in the forthcoming book by Willem Albert Wagenaar and Annet Duller, to appear in 2013.
5. Prints were often used in a similar manner in the Netherlands. Many of the images on Dutch blue delftware, for example, were made by making pinpricks in the lines on a print, after which the print was put on the piece of ceramic. A piece of chalk or charcoal was then used to create a rough outline of the print on the ceramic, and this outline served to create the image in blue glazing.

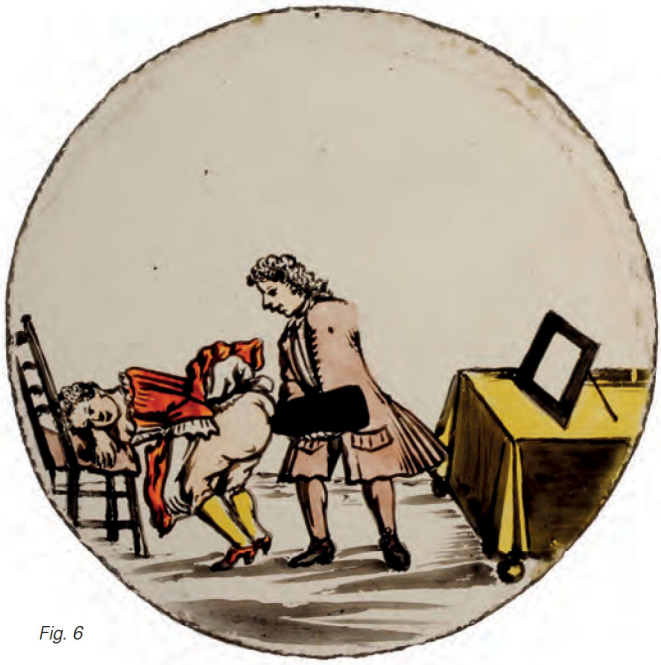


Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Perhaps the most intriguing slides in the collection are several erotic images – an indication that the magic lantern was used for showing erotica at a relatively early stage. Most spectacular among them are several movable images (now removed from their original frames) of a rather explicit erotic nature.[6] In the exhibition we have given these a separate corner; I will here show one of the less explicit images, which however does give an impression of the material.

This particular slide (Fig. 6) was apparently censored, since a large dark blot obscures part of the image. In this case it seems likely that the subject of the slide was in fact less sexual than we might expect: the slide and the movement that can be made with it suggests that the man is operating a clyster syringe rather than performing a sexual act. (Fig. 7) But as the area was blotted out with paint that is blacker than the pigment used on the rest of the slide, suggesting censorship after the slide was made, it is impossible to tell. That (self-)censorship of these kinds of collections took place is also made very clear by another slide, in which we vaguely recognise a man and a woman on a bed, but most of the image has been entirely scratched off. (Fig. 8)

We can only guess how much material of this nature was thrown away, but it seems likely that relatively more erotic slides have been lost than slides with less controversial subjects. Erotic subjects might not have been as rare as the very few surviving slides from this period now seem to indicate.

Fig. 8

The various slides discussed in this brief article, and many more, will be on display in the De Lakenhal Museum until 12 August 2012.

6. Most of these erotic slides are clearly Musschenbroek, judging by their wooden frames and their style. With the moveable ones this is slightly less certain as the frames are missing. The style in which they were made, however, is so consistent with the rest of the collection that it does seem highly likely that these are also Musschenbroek slides.

Tristan MOSTERT is a historian with an interest in a wide range of subjects, including optics and magic lanterns. He guest curated the current exhibition in De Lakenhal, and currently works in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam as a junior curator and educator. For this article he is greatly indebted to Annet Duller, who is currently editing the book that she co-wrote with Willem Albert on 18th-century Dutch magic lanterns and slides.