

LOTHAR MEGGENDORFER AND THE MAGIC LANTERN

Willem A. Wagenaar

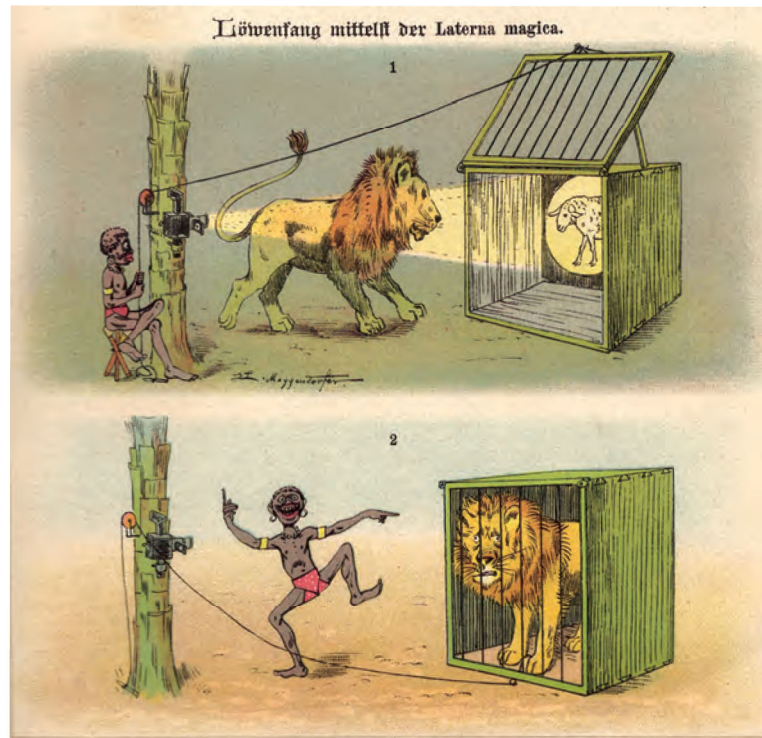
LOTHAR MEGGENDORFER (1847–1925) was the celebrated Bavarian designer of more than 140 children's books, most of which are passionately collected 'movables'. The best-known examples are probably his three dimensional circus and his unfoldable doll's house, but in particular the hand-printed picture books published between 1879 and 1889 by Braun & Schneider (in England by Grevel) are masterpieces of draughtsmanship and engineering. Meggendorfer also designed a huge volume of penny pictures, children's games and cartoons, which were published mostly in his own weekly magazine *Meggendorfer Blätter*.

Since he lived at the time of the height of the German toy lantern industry, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Meggendorfer also made designs for producers in Nuremberg or elsewhere. Strangely enough his name has not appeared in the magic lantern literature, and no slides have surfaced bearing his well-known signature. Many designs of the popular slide series by Plank and Bing remind us strongly of Meggendorfer's style and selection of topics, but that is of course not enough for a positive identification.

I own an almost complete collection of Meggendorfer books; hence I can state with a certainty close to 100 per cent that the magic lantern does not feature in them. This is surprising because, as we know, the ever-changing image of a lantern show was often represented in movable books and postcards. Nonetheless I can describe two connections between Meggendorfer and the magic lantern: two cartoons that involve the lantern, thus demonstrating that he was aware of its existence; and a number of slides that can be attributed with certainty to his designs, even though perhaps they were used without his consent.



2. Lothar Meggendorfer, *Gelungene Ausrede* ('A successful excuse'), 1891



1. Lothar Meggendorfer, *Löwenfang mittelst der Laterna magica* ('Catching a lion with a magic lantern'), 1892

TWO CARTOONS

The *Meggendorfer Blätter* was first published in 1889 and continued to appear as a weekly until 1929. Between 1929 and 1944 the magazine was amalgamated with the other famous German weekly *Fliegende Blätter*. The combined magazine appeared under the latter name, so technically the *Meggendorfer Blätter* ceased to exist. Initially Meggendorfer was the only contributor, but very soon other talented German draughtsmen became involved, who managed to turn the magazine into an example of German avant-garde art. After 1900 the relationship between Meggendorfer and his publisher J.F. Schreiber became gradually troubled, with the result that the artist discontinued his contributions around 1907.

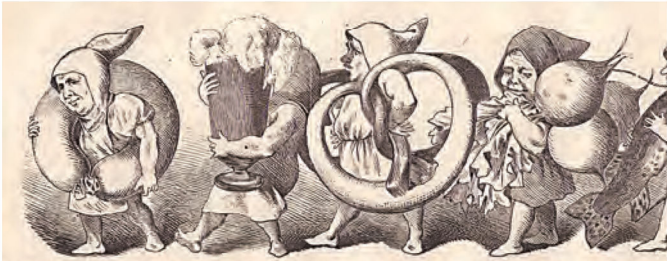
A complete overview of the development of Meggendorfer's designs can therefore be obtained from the first 71 volumes of *Meggendorfer Blätter* (four volumes were published each year, each comprising 13 *Hefte* or issues; altogether some 640 pages per year).¹ Meggendorfer contributed 1,843 drawings during these almost 20 years, which I have inspected systematically. In this total there are just two illustrations featuring the magic lantern, albeit in an indirect way.

The last issue of Volume 9 (1892) opens with a cartoon titled *Löwenfang mittelst der Laterna magica* ('Catching a lion with a magic lantern', Fig. 1).² The idea is clear and presumably successful: the lion is deceived by the projected image of a sheep and walks into the cage. It should be noted technically, however, that by stepping into the beam of light the lion would block the projection, and therefore never enter the cage. It would have been better to use back projection, as phantasmagoria showmen knew very well! The lantern shown looks like a small Bing, Falk, or other typical product of the Nuremberg industry.

A more interesting cartoon is found in Volume 7 from 1891: *Gelungene Ausrede*, which translates as 'a successful excuse', shows a drunken farmer and a vicar (Fig. 2).³ The vicar says: 'But Jacob, need you then be drunk every day?' The farmer replies: 'Yes, you know, Reverend, for my entire life I have been fond of *Nebelbilder* [i.e. dissolving views, literally 'fog pictures' in German]. And indeed the picture shows a background of a badly registered dissolving view projection with two moons, two signs above the inn, two streetlights, everything doubled. Logically, there is no lantern to be seen in the picture.

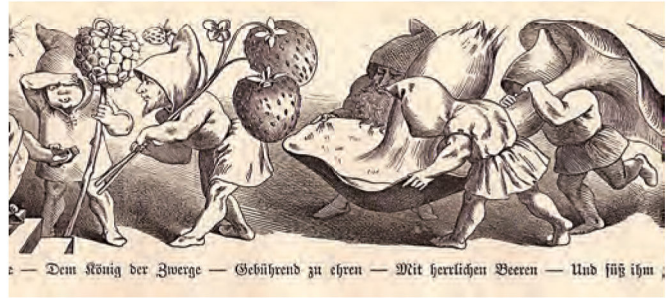
NOTES

1. For more on Meggendorfer's work see Helmut Herbst, *Die Illustrationen der 'Meggendorfer Blätter'* (Stuttgart: Apostroph Verlag, 1983).
2. *Meggendorfer Blätter* Band 9 (1892), Heft 78. The individual issues were only numbered from volume 4 onwards.
3. *Meggendorfer Blätter* Band 7 (1891) Heft 44, 40.



Es folget der Wurst — Das Bier gegen Durst — Salzbretzeln und Rettich — Daß Jeder denkt: „Hätt' ich —

3. Lothar Meggendorfer, *Des Zwergenkönigs Geburtstagsfeier* ('The dwarf king's birthday celebration'), c.1866-7



— Dem König der Zwerge — Gebührend zu ehren — Mit herrlichen Beeren — Und süß ihm

HOFFMANN OF DRESDEN

Meggendorfer started his career as a designer of penny prints ('Bilderbogen') for various publishers. The best-known of these are the prints published by Braun & Schneider in Munich, which came, as was usual in this trade, either black and white or coloured. Meggendorfer designed 65 of these pictures. One of these is *Münchener Bilderbogen* No. 684, 'Des Zwergenkönigs Geburtstagsfeier' ('The dwarf king's birthday celebration'), which shows a long procession of dwarfs bringing presents to their king (Fig. 3). It must have been designed around 1866-7, when Meggendorfer was aged 19 or 20. The accompanying poem reads:

<i>Im Dunkel der Berge</i>	<i>In the darkness of the mountains</i>
<i>Dem König der Zwerge</i>	<i>To rightfully honour</i>
<i>Gebührend zu ehren</i>	<i>The king of the dwarfs</i>
<i>Mit herrlichen Beeren</i>	<i>With very good berries</i>
<i>Und süß ihm zu schmeicheln</i>	<i>To flatter him sweetly</i>
<i>Mit Schwämmen und Eicheln</i>	<i>With mushrooms and acorns</i>
<i>Mit blühenden Dorn</i>	<i>With blooming thorns</i>
<i>Und mit Kirschen und Korn!</i>	<i>With cherries and wheat!</i>
<i>Wie sie haftig sich mühen</i>	<i>How hard do they slave</i>
<i>Und schleppen und ziehen</i>	<i>And drag and haul</i>
<i>Die niedlichen Buben</i>	<i>These very small people</i>
<i>Gewaltige Ruben</i>	<i>Enormous turnips</i>
<i>Und Birnen und Schoten</i>	<i>And pears and pods</i>
<i>Für ihren Despoten!</i>	<i>For their despot.</i>
<i>Das Geburtsfest zu feiern</i>	<i>To celebrate the birthday</i>
<i>Sie kommen mit Eiern</i>	<i>They come with eggs</i>
<i>Mit Spargel and Nüssen</i>	<i>With asparagus and nuts</i>
<i>Und leckeren Bissen.</i>	<i>And delicious titbits.</i>
<i>Es folget der Wurst</i>	<i>Then follows a sausage</i>
<i>Das Bier gegen Durst</i>	<i>And ale against the thirst</i>
<i>Salzbretzeln und Rettich</i>	<i>Bagels and winter radish</i>
<i>Dass Jeder denkt: 'Hätt' ich</i>	<i>So everyone thinks: 'If I also had</i>
<i>Doch auch solche Jungen</i>	<i>The same sort of boys</i>
<i>Das wäre gelungen!'</i>	<i>That would be nice!'</i>
<i>Auch Fische und Krebs</i>	<i>Also fish and lobster</i>
<i>Bringt de lustige Plebs.</i>	<i>Is brought by the jolly folks.</i>
<i>Dem Wein und den Speisen</i>	<i>After wine and food</i>
<i>Als Ehrfurchtbeweisen</i>	<i>As signs of reverence</i>
<i>Folgt auch die Musik</i>	<i>Follows the music</i>
<i>Mit grossem Geschick,</i>	<i>With much skill</i>
<i>Dem herrlichen feste</i>	<i>To give to the magnificent feast</i>
<i>Das Schönste und Beste</i>	<i>The most beautiful and the best</i>
<i>Die Weihe zu geben.</i>	<i>Dedication.</i>
<i>'Unser König soll leben!'</i>	<i>'Long live the King!'</i>

A part of the procession, or possibly the entire design, was reproduced on lantern slides by Wilhelm Hoffmann of Dresden (Fig. 4). Hoffmann's slides are easily identified by the purple marbled paper used for the binding, and sometimes by his trademark consisting of a golden eagle and the letters HD.

The Hoffmann slides are 'copperplate sliders': the black outline is printed and transferred onto the glass, with the other colours then added manually. It can easily be seen that the outlines are new designs, even though Meggendorfer's original has been closely followed. This suggests that perhaps Meggendorfer or Braun & Schneider did not cooperate in this re-use of the design. Were more Meggendorfer designs pirated by Hoffmann? There are more Hoffmann slides showing dwarfs that are reminiscent of Meggendorfer, but I could not find originals from which they may have been copied. Could Meggendorfer have designed these images especially for use in the magic lantern?

Possibly more insight in this matter can be obtained from the better-known slides from drawings by Wilhelm Busch (1832-1908), mass-produced by Liesegang in Düsseldorf. Braun & Schneider owned the rights to many of these stories, and *Max und Moritz* especially made them extremely rich. Busch did not share in these profits, because he had sold the rights for a fixed sum, as was common practice in those days. The Liesegang slides are photographic copies of the original Busch pictures, unlike the Hoffmann's redrawn pictures. It is not so likely that Liesegang just pirated the Busch designs, especially since Kaspar Braun was known for his shrewd commercial instinct.

What were the financial arrangements between the original publishers of the drawings and the German lantern industry? A similar question can be raised with respect to the use of Busch designs by the British industry, such as W. Butcher & Sons, who issued many Busch stories in their Primus series: *The elephant's revenge*, *Diogenes and the naughty boys of Corinth*, etc.; and *Ice Peter*, issued by York and Bamforth. All these slides were redrawn, which might mean that the original publishers were not involved in their production. Clearly this economical aspect of slide production deserves some further study.

4. Procession of dwarfs: details from lantern slides by Wilhelm Hoffmann of Dresden



WILLEM WAGENAAR started to collect magic lanterns and slides as a schoolboy in the 1950s. All his friends thought he was crazy. Since then he has managed to assemble a typical European collection, and gained the insight that culturally, the content of magic lantern slides is even more

interesting than the technique of the lanternist. In daily life he is a retired professor of experimental psychology at Leiden University, where he also served as Rector Magnificus.