

# STORIES FROM LUCERNA

## – or how people find lantern slides they did not even know they were looking for

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About a year ago, I took over the task of answering the emails that are sent through the 'contact us' form of the Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource. It is a very rewarding task and often is the first step in some smaller or larger joint venture. Roughly half the emails come from descendants of people related in some way to the lantern. Some of them find out via Lucerna that a former family member was involved in the lantern trade, lantern production or was a lantern performer, and share their excitement about their discovery. Sometimes they provide additional details about their relative that I then add to the record.

As someone who mostly contributed information and images of lantern slides to Lucerna, I am particularly interested when people inquire about those items. Such questions prove that the information we put online is actually found and that the research and effort put into creating an accurate description (including metadata and indexing) help people – and computer search engines – find what they are looking for and other relevant material. I would like to congratulate Richard Crangle on designing the database in such a way that we achieve this.

In the following, I wish to share two recent cases that demonstrate how unpredictable and broad the general public's interest in lantern slides can be.



1. 'Memphis and the Sphynx', unnumbered slide from an unknown set (collection of Chetham's Library, Manchester). Lucerna ID 5133561

### THE GIZA SPHINX

A researcher contacted us because she wanted to study the lantern slide in Fig. 1 of the famous Egyptian statue of the Giza sphinx. Had you asked me to bet on a slide that people wanted to re-use, I would not have chosen this one – a photographic image of the Sphinx? There are thousands of them online, and many with a better image quality. Curious about what was so special about this slide, I emailed the researcher, and she answered:

"I am writing about the sphinx as an

image and as a set of ideas in the period around 1900. The attached slide is of great interest in that context. Perhaps it comes from a slide set on the Old Testament? Technically it is also intriguing, since it acknowledges its source in photographs, and perhaps even a photographer, or collector." After a closer inspection of the slide, the researcher added: "I find the techniques used in the image very intriguing – it seems to be a photograph that has been 'improved' by adding drawing and painting. Thank you for explaining that it probably came from a book. That makes sense."



2. 'Beschiessung von Semendria', slide 4, and 'Semendria', slide 5, from set Der Weltkrieg: Die Eroberung Serbiens (Projektion für Alle, 24 slides, in/after 1915) (Collection of Eye Filmmuseum, Netherlands). Lucerna IDs 5105583 and 5105584



### SMEDEREVO

The other inquiry was about two photographic slides showing the siege of the city of Smederevo (now Republic of Serbia) by German troops during the First World War, in 1915 (see Fig. 2). As you probably noticed, they are from the *Projektion für Alle* series – a cheaply-produced set known among collectors and performers for the relatively poor quality of the emulsion. These slides are from the collection of Eye Film Institute Netherlands and I digitised them myself in 2016.

Miroslav P. Lazic, senior curator and historian of Smederevo's museum, was looking for illustrations that he could use for a book about the local history of the city during WWI. "You have several photos from Smederevo made during the First World War" he wrote, "they are of great value for our research". In the end, these two images



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3. Miroslav P. Lazic, Smederevo and its region in the First World War 1914-1918, Museum of Smederevo, 2018, p.7 (Acknowledgements)

were published in the not-for-profit publication by the museum and thus contributed to their work on local history. As Eye Filmmuseum Netherlands does not claim copyright on digital copies of out-of-copyright material, we could make the high-resolution photographs available free of charge. This may have led to the first credit for the Magic Lantern Society in a Serbian publication (see Fig. 3)!

### BENEFITS OF SHARING

These two cases illustrate that Lucerna is more than a database that documents our knowledge: it is a valuable tool for bringing together lantern enthusiasts and those who were not aware that they, too, have a connection to lantern culture and history. In return, I have learned about the local history of a city that I had not heard about before. These examples further demonstrate the transnational character of lantern culture in the past and in the present: a German slide set, held in a Dutch archive, used by a Serbian museum. A slide of a site in Egypt, held in a British archive, used by a researcher based in the US.

Cases such as these show that probably all slides are of value to someone, even the 'cheap' slides, and that we cannot predict which slide is worth documenting (and which is not). I want to thank everyone who has contributed to Lucerna for making it such a valuable resource, and I wish to encourage more members to consider sharing their knowledge on people, organisations, lanterns and slides too. Contact me via the Lucerna info button or directly via [lanterns-and-slides@runbox.com](mailto:lanterns-and-slides@runbox.com) for help and advice – and encouragement!

These two cases demonstrate the benefit of sharing: it was the right decision to give free access to our collected information and to publish the database under Creative Commons Licences (i.e. publish online without copyright). Let's see which funders also believe in the impact of Lucerna and contribute to developing this resource further. As for me, I am curious to see who will contact us next, and what I will learn.

Thanks to Fergus Wilde, Senior Librarian at Chetham's Library Manchester and Soeluh van den Berg, Curator of film-related collections at Eye Filmmuseum Netherlands, for granting permission to publish the images.