

APROPOS 33 JAMES COOK LANTERN SLIDES

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IN THE LATTER PART of the 18th century, European knowledge of the world was increased dramatically by the discoveries of the English seafarer Captain Cook. James Cook (1728–79) undertook three voyages of discovery around the world: in 1768–71 in the *Endeavour*; in 1772–5 in the *Resolution* and *Adventure*; and finally in 1776–9 in the *Resolution* and *Discovery*. In the course of this final expedition Cook met his death, murdered by Hawaiian islanders.

On each occasion he took with him an artist-draughtsman, whose task was to produce a pictorial record of his discoveries with the greatest accuracy and fidelity. During Cook's final voyage, he engaged John (or Johann) Webber (1750–93), a tireless worker of great talent, who produced almost 1,000 drawings (see, for example, 3). The drawings made by Cook's artists – mainly Webber but also Hodges and Parkinson – became a fantastic source of inspiration for draughtsmen and painters of this time. The publication of Cook's memoirs and other works¹ had phenomenal repercussions throughout the world.

The taste of the time was for knowledge, science and novelty. In the 50 years following Cook's expeditions, numerous publications, engravings and drawings were published and reprinted many times. Webber's work was particularly plundered, with sometimes surprising results. For example, taking advantage of the public interest for panoramas, in 1804 the French publisher Joseph Dufour of Macon published the first of his *Papiers Panoramiques*, entitled *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique ou encore Les Voyages de M. Cook* (The Savages of the Pacific Ocean, or the Voyages of M. Cook) (see 4).

Cook's explorations also gave rise to imitators. In France, for instance, King Louis XVI (1754–93; succeeded to the throne 1774) developed the idea of organising his own expedition of discovery to the unknown oceans. Louis was a passionate enthusiast for geography and was fascinated by Cook's voyages. Even though England was at that time the enemy of France (who had taken the side of the Americans in their War of Independence), Louis gave orders that French ships, if they came into contact with Cook's vessels in the course of their voyages, should render them every possible assistance. They were to consider Cook's ships as those of a neutral country, even of a friendly country. 'The discoveries that one could expect from such an expedition are of interest to every nation,' declared the King. His aim was to organise a single voyage which would allow discovery of parts of the world to which Cook had not been. But it was clear that in many places their routes would intersect. This expedition was entrusted to Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse (1741–88), and it finally set sail from France in August 1785. La Pérouse never returned to France, perishing with his companions and vessels in a storm near the island of Vanikoro in the Solomon Islands.



1. Captain James Cook (1728–79)



2. Jean-François de Galaup, Comte de La Pérouse (1741–88)

La Pérouse made preparations for his expedition with the greatest possible care. He surrounded himself with scholars, and he too engaged a draughtsman-painter. He assembled a considerable amount of equipment, including some magnetic compasses which had been used by Cook and presented to France in recognition of the assistance given to his expeditions. La Pérouse compiled a very detailed inventory of all the items he took on board, and this inventory is preserved today in the Archives Nationales in Paris.

One particular entry in the inventory reads '33 verres de Lanterne Magique tirées du 3e Voyage de M. Cook (33 Magic Lantern Slides taken from the 3rd Voyage of M. Cook). Where did the magic lantern slides which La Pérouse took with him come from?

In French, the term *tirées* used in the inventory suggests 'inspired by' rather than 'bought' or 'taken from'. It seems most likely that a French artist was asked to paint some lantern slides after the landscapes by Webber, probably showing those places which La Pérouse was likely to pass through, and making those locations easier to recognise.

But could there be another explanation? Might the slides have been acquired from a 'publisher'? Is it possible that Webber's landscape views had already been produced as slides and were commercially available? Considering the importance of the engravings which had been published or which had excited the imagination of the artists and the public of the time, this is not inconceivable. But at this time (around 1790) were there 'publishers' who produced lantern slides, like those producing *vue d'optique* prints?

On this subject there exists a curious document originating from the Comte de Paroy.² Paroy was a fascinating character. In 1789 he was a Lieutenant-Colonel of the French army; he was also a painter and engraver in his own right, a friend of the Duc d'Orléans (the brother of Louis XVI) and a self-styled defender of the Royal Family (although he did not do much to help them during the Revolution). He also prided himself as something of an educationalist, and was very interested in the magic lantern.

His memoirs make two references to the lantern. The first of these concerns Etienne Gaspard Robert, now better known as Robertson, who was then still a priest. Paroy claimed that Robert came to see him one day and confided that he did not know what would become of him in future, since his engagement as tutor to the son of M. Chevalier was coming to an end. 'In your position,' Paroy allegedly told him, 'I would set up Philidor's magic lantern and create a small show for the children, more entertaining for them than the shadow show [*ombres chinoises*].'³

Paroy also claimed to have worked with Robert to give the lantern more



3. Native Village, engraving after illustration by Webber



4. *Les Sauvages de la Mer Pacifique* ou encore *Les Voyages de M. Cook*, engraving formed of 20 strips, each 54cm in width. The strips are interchangeable and their images connect up to form a type of panorama. In houses, they could be used to cover the upper part of the walls.

powerful illumination and to create a 'trolley mechanism to allow it to make objects come closer, grow larger, shrink and disappear at will', and to have suggested that Robert should add 'son' to his surname ('this method always succeeds with the public').

Paroy was also said to be a skilled educationalist. As an associate of the Duc d'Orléans, in around 1791 he was presented to Queen Marie-Antoinette (1755–93).³ Her son the Dauphin, the heir to the throne (who was never to become Louis XVII), was then six years old and not at all disposed to study.

*'My son,' the Queen explained, 'is so lively that he cannot apply himself. He remembers well what he hears but, if he has to concentrate on a book, that disgusts him immediately. There must be another way of teaching children.'*⁴

Paroy advised her to use the magic lantern, whose images would strike the Dauphin's imagination and engrave themselves on his memory.

'Do you imagine, sir, that I am speaking seriously to you,' replied the Queen with dignity, 'and you are suggesting the ridiculous magic lantern to me?' – 'Yes, madame, until now it has only been in the hands of ignorant Savoyards, who travel the streets with their marmosets ... [but their lanterns] please the children and make them laugh.'

But the remainder of their conversation might give a possible answer to our question as to whether there was in France at that time a 'publisher' of magic lantern slides from whom it was possible to buy slides at retail. Paroy continued, addressing himself to the Queen:

'I have always been struck by the lively taste of children for the magic lantern, and this has inspired in me the idea of making use of it, by changing its subjects and by multiplying them by a process which I possess of transferring the engraving of a print onto the glass.'

'In this manner, I could have a great many examples of the same subject and could distribute them at a modest price.'

'Production would be expensive, if it were necessary to draw each subject onto the slides and subsequently to paint them; but the price would be greatly reduced by multiplication. ... One may add to this pamphlets explaining the subjects, with information about books which supply more precise details. ... A small payment would allow the directors [of schools] to have a considerable number of these glasses. This method of education would spread from China to Canada.'

Paroy added:

'And I should be still more gratified if its starting point was the education of the Dauphin. My project would already have been partly carried out, had I not lost my fortune through the Revolution.'

Finally, the Queen responded:

'It is perfect, I am very satisfied with your method and your

*reasons. It is absolutely necessary to put your ideas into practice and to begin with the Bible and the History of France, which I have a mind to teach to my son in this way.'*⁵

'I am at the orders of Your Majesty,' said Paroy, 'as soon as she will furnish me with the means.'

And the Queen gave him permission to put the idea into practice. Alas, she did not have time to see the scheme come to fruition, since she was guillotined in 1793.

Paroy's memoirs were notoriously unreliable and self-serving, written long after the events described above supposedly took place, and on this basis alone it is less than likely that there were any commercial lantern slide 'publishers' in France in the 1790s. But suppose Paroy were telling the truth about his process for 'transferring the engraving of a print onto the glass'? Of course he may simply have 'recycled' what he had heard of Philip Carpenter's, or a similar, process for printing onto glass (Carpenter's 'copper-plate sliders' had appeared by the early 1820s; Paroy died in 1824). But if there were any truth in his claim, it would be at least theoretically possible that in the 1780s a commercial producer might have republished Webber's engravings as slides.

Which returns us to our question: where did La Pèrouse's '33 verres de Lanterne Magique tirées du 3e Voyage de M. Cook' come from?

5. Nicolas André Monsiau, "Louis XVI donne des instructions à La Pèrouse" (Musée de Versailles).



Translated from the French by Richard Crangle.

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NOTES

1. Numerous accounts of Cook's voyages appeared from the late 18th century onwards, in English, French, German, Italian and other languages. Some, such as *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (London, 1784) and *Troisième voyage abrégé du capitaine Cook, dans l'océan Pacifique* (Paris, 1785) were drawn from Cook's own observations and quickly went through several editions.
2. Jean-Philippe-Gui Legentil, Comte de Paroy (1750–1824) was an artist and a soldier, and also an ardent royalist. His memoirs, published posthumously, were titled *Souvenirs d'un défenseur de la famille Royale pendant la Révolution* (Recollections of a defender of the Royal Family during the Revolution, edited by Etienne Charavay; Paris: Plon, 1895).
3. Paroy, op. cit., 278. Most of the English translations from Paroy here are quoted from Laurent Mannoni, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema*, ed. and trans. Richard Crangle (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 84.
4. On this subject, see Jacques Perriault, *Mémoires de l'ombre et du son* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981).
5. Paroy, op. cit.
6. *ibid.*
7. *ibid.*