

BOOK REVIEW

PROJECTIONS LUMINEUSES: MOLteni, RADIGUET & MASSIOT SUCCESSEURS 2 – Vues et Conférences

Patrice Guérin

Club Niépce Lumière
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This is the second part of Patrice Guérin's comprehensive account of both the Molteni lantern, slide and optical equipment making business that first opened a shop in Paris in 1782, and the wider story of image projection. Eventually in 1900 Alfred Molteni sold the business to Arthur Radiguet and his son-in-law Gaston Massiot and the book covers their output too. At this time they were adding cinematographic equipment to their range. The first volume of Patrice's work covered Molteni's projection equipment and accessories (see *TML* 14). This second volume looks principally at the images and slides produced, and the different types of public lectures and performances with which they were involved.

The book begins with a brief history of projected images, from Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave' to the camera obscura and magic lantern. After discussing 18th-century sources and Robertson's *Phantasmagoria*, we arrive at the 'Projections Molteni'. By the end of the 19th century that mark had become a guarantee of quality of projection, whatever the occasion. The first chapter looks at the rise of public education, including the science writer Abbé Moigno, and the role of spectacular projected presentations, such as those by magician Henri Robin, combining 'science' with entertainment. The next chapter features hand-



Painted and mechanical slides of all types – including early long slides, slippers, astronomical, a choreutoscope and animated phenakistiscope, special effects, biological subjects, etc. This is followed by a chapter on photographic images including stereoscopic views. Throughout these chapters there are extracts from catalogues, lists from Molteni, background

history, information about how the slides were made, related artefacts and devices, stories of people involved and all sorts of other additional material.

The book moves on to public lectures illustrated by magic lantern slides. These were enjoying unprecedented popularity by the mid-19th century, when Molteni was a well-established supplier and Alfred Molteni himself was a skilled lantern projectionist much in demand. Examples here include astronomy, polar exploration, world travel, biology and anthropology. There are sections on the Société française de Photographie (SFP) and their events, stereoscopic projection and colour effects using filters. The book

concludes with a look at the state of play at the end of the 19th century

and all the new types of slide and projected effects available by then, including a brief mention of film.

Throughout the book is lavishly illustrated with high-quality images woven into the text on each page. The text is in French but the story is told largely through the illustrations and the accompanying passages can be understood with a moderate knowledge of the language (like mine). The book covers the history of magic lanterns and related media with informative inserts throughout, so a more extensive index would be useful. Congratulations to Patrice on an extraordinary achievement with these two volumes of *Projections Lumineuses Molteni*.

For more details see: www.club-niepce-lumiere.org/publications/livres/564

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