# EXPLORING MAGIC LANTERN CATALOGUES ONLINE

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As part of the collaborative research programme *A Million Pictures: Magic Lantern Slide Heritage as Artefacts in the Common European History of Learning* (http://uu.nl/a-million-pictures ), a project to digitise catalogues of magic lantern and slide sellers, producers and retailers is underway. The online *Magic Lantern and Lantern Slide Catalog Collection* was launched in August 2016 on the Media History Digital Library and is accessible via http://mediahistoryproject.org/magiclantern/.

Why catalogues? To collectors, archivists and researchers alike, catalogues are precious material for the identification and dating of lanterns and slides in collections. The illustrations of slides, accessories and lanterns help us reconstruct the way in which the apparatus worked, and to date technological innovations and other developments.

However, catalogues allow for so many more questions to be asked and (partially) answered. They are more than contemporary witnesses of a growing media industry during the nineteenth century. They document the special position of the magic lantern not as a niche product but as an established mainstream device for education and entertainment. The promotional tone in the descriptions for the apparatus might not tell us exactly how the lanterns worked or how the slides looked, but the details in these texts give a wealth of information about audience expectations, the wishes of lanternists, and technological problems that the new products had supposedly solved. We can also learn what producers and vendors thought about their apparatus, and in the endorsement section we can learn about users and their backgrounds – even if the more critical voices are, as one would expect, absent in promotional material. But what we can learn definitively within such texts is the correct wording historically for the different pieces of apparatus and how it developed over time, in some cases becoming the recognised and accepted term.

A good collection of many catalogues allows for comparison and, through this, we can assess the geographical and chronological prominence of lantern hardware and different sets of slides. Sometimes we can trace distribution networks, developments in the history of prominent companies and estimate how popular a certain slide set was, according to social trends and contemporary special events. We also can witness advancements in wholesale and retail marketing and distribution practices, observing how producers and vendors optimised their strategies and services over time, making it easier and more tempting for customers to order their products.

Another aspect is the variation in slide sets containing the same subjects or images. They make it possible, for example, to identify a coloured version of a black and white slide set. By noting what other equipment is advertised in the same catalogue, we can learn about the various spheres of activity in which lanterns and slides were sold. Looking at the detail of the text and illustrations within an entry also reveals what assumptions the vendors make about the skills and knowledge of their customers with respect to the goods on offer. This covers the whole spectrum from amateur enthusiast to professional showman as well as from private to public performances. From catalogues covering educational lantern slides we can deduce what pupils and students would see – and trace, for example, the popularity of particular topics in disciplines such as art history. And, of course, we can simply enjoy turning the pages to delve into and immerse ourselves in the past world of magic lantern culture.

Some institutions and collectors have digitised lantern catalogues already but there was no central point for storing and accessing this material, often leaving the discovery of such resources to chance. The *Million Pictures* team is convinced that collectors, archivists and researchers alike will benefit from such a facility. In the Media History Digital Library (MDHL) (www.mediahistoryproject.org) we found a

dedicated and enthusiastic partner that promotes sustainable and long-term preservation of digital copies of printed materials with public access. On this platform digital catalogues can be accessed free of charge in various ways, without user accounts or paywalls.

MHDL digitises material connected to the history of media – mostly cinema and film, broadcasting and recorded sound. Their aim is to provide full access to cultural heritage for anyone who is interested – collectors, scholars, people who browse the web, fans of past film stars, etc. The majority of material currently available is fan magazines and trade press periodicals. With the *Magic Lantern and Lantern Slide Catalog Collection*, MHDL now has another sub-collection on a subject of prime importance to media history. MHDL only publishes material that is out of copyright – they check this carefully – so you are free to use everything that you access at MHDL for your own purposes.

## ACCESSING THE CATALOGUES VIA LUCERNA AND MHDL

There are two ways to search for digitised catalogues – via Lucerna or MHDL.

First, and most comprehensive, is the list on Lucerna. All catalogues that we found or put online ourselves are listed in Lucerna with a web link to the digital copy. To obtain a list go to the Lucerna website (http://slides.uni-trier.de) and select the 'Texts' button from the left-hand menu. Then choose 'catalogues' in the 'type of text' field and 'only show texts with an online digital copy' in the 'Online digital copy available' field (Fig. 1).
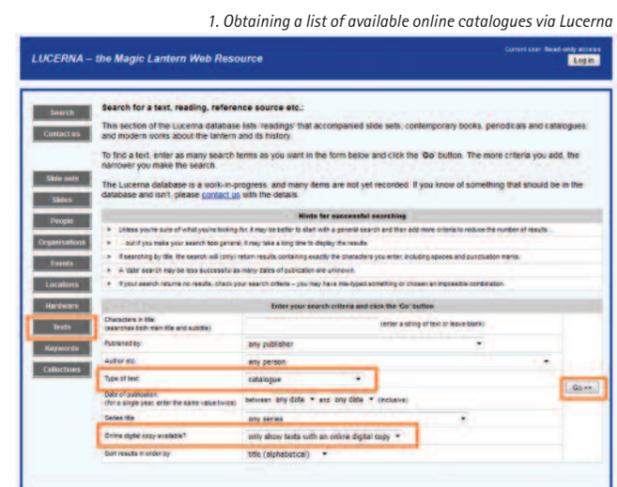
*1. Obtaining a list of available online catalogues via Lucerna*

*2. The home page for magic lantern catalogues on MHDL*

The second option is to go to the *Magic Lantern Slide Catalog Collection* on the MHDL site http://mediahistoryproject.org/magiclantern/

(Fig. 2). Here the catalogues are organised by country. When you click on the triangle to the left of the title you will be offered options of 'Read', 'Download' or 'IA Page' – the latter is the internet archive page where you will find additional information about the catalogue. When you select a catalogue via 'Read' or 'IA Page' it will be displayed in a book reader (Fig. 3). The pages turn when you click on them, giving an experience similar to perusing the real thing. Various options are available, including a full-text search, although the accuracy of this depends on the quality of the scanning so it is best treated as an indicator only.
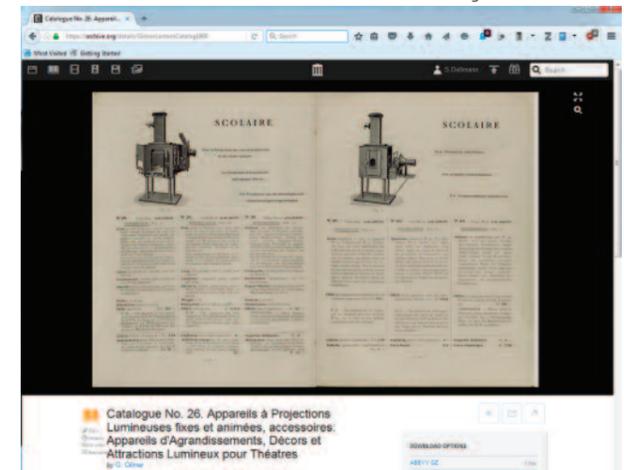
*3. A catalogue in the book reader*

MHDL has two tools available for search and analysis of the catalogues – one called 'Lantern' that might confuse magic lanternists! Fig. 4 shows the results of a search on 'Rock of Ages' – a mention in nine catalogues. Looking at these could help you identify which version of the slides you have in your collection, for example. The other tool, 'Arclight', gives a full-text search and also analyses the results. Fig. 5 shows an example of a search for the terms 'magic lantern' (green) and 'stereopticon' (red) between 1885 and 1940. Clicking on the points of the graph gives you a list of all the articles published that year in which the term appeared. Arclight can do much more – if you are interested in this tool, read the step-by-step guide (www.projectarclight.org/arguments /the-arclight-guide-getting-started).
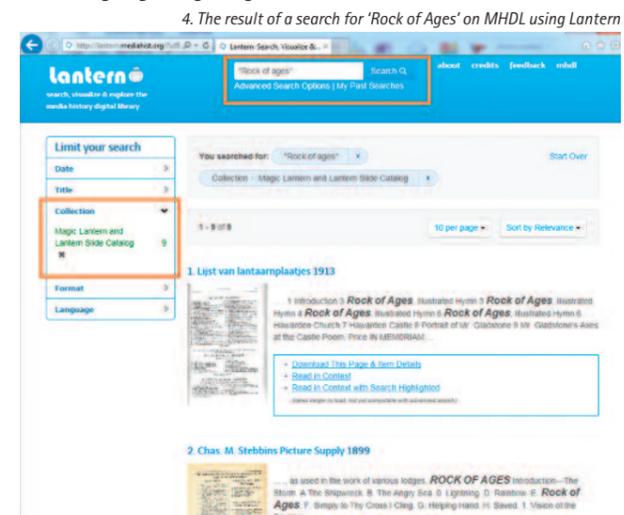
*4. The result of a search for 'Rock of Ages' on MHDL using Lantern*

If you want to download a catalogue – bearing in mind that all MHDL material is free for personal use and even commercial use under certain conditions – various formats are offered. You can also copy and paste an extract but you will need to check that the characters have transcribed accurately. Each catalogue entry contains a link to the contributor's website or will say 'private collection' if they have decided to stay anonymous.
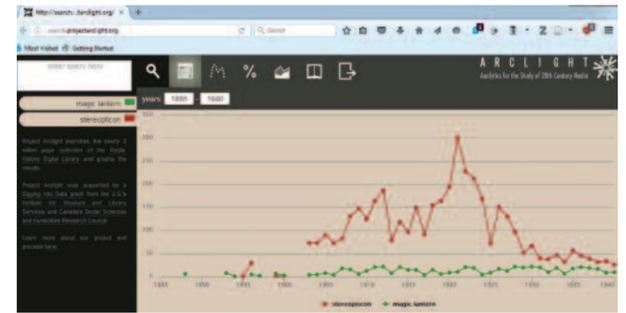
*5. Analysis of search on MHDL for the terms 'magic lantern' (green) and 'stereopticon' (red) between 1885 and 1940 using Arclight*

Each entry also links to the same catalogue on Lucerna where you will find more contextual information. This gives a starting point to explore its connections – for example to find out about the publisher (usually the vendor or producer of the lanterns and slides), other catalogues by the same publisher, or about the slide sets mentioned (Fig. 6). Again this is work in progress.
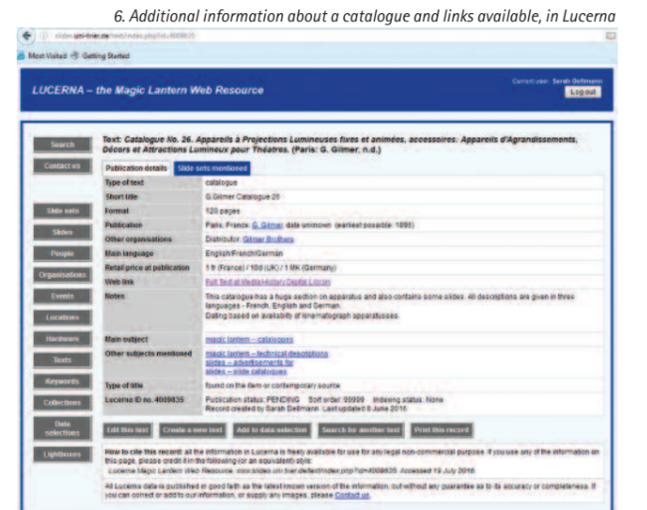
*6. Additional information about a catalogue and links available, in Lucerna*

## HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE

To date, we have put more than twenty catalogues online, ranging from two pages to over a hundred. Another dozen are waiting to be processed. Most are in German and Dutch with a few English and French examples too. All are from private collectors – many are members of the Magic Lantern Society – and we are very grateful for these. If you have material that you would like to make available on MHDL, this is how you can contribute:

- If you spot a digital catalogue on the web, send us the link.
- If you have scanned catalogues, send us the file(s) and we will adapt them for MHDL. If they have been published online already we can link to that too.
- If you have unscanned catalogues and are able to scan them, contact us for guidance on the best way to do this for presentation on MHDL.
- If you are unable to scan them, we can do this for you in Utrecht (the Netherlands) using a flatbed scanner. We will take every precaution to avoid any damage.
- And finally, if you use the online collection of catalogues and make some interesting discoveries, let us know your stories. We are curious!

Anyone providing catalogues for inclusion can choose to be credited by name or remain anonymous. Contact me with any questions, comments or offers (s.dellmann@uu.nl). I will conclude by saying a big 'thank you' to the team behind Media History Digital Library – Eric Hoyt, Derek Long and David Pierce – as well as to Daniela Müller-Kolb for her contribution to the discussion on catalogues and Joe Kember for proofreading. Finally I wish to thank Liselotte Westerterp for her wonderful work, and patience, in preparing the digital files.