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THE LIGHTHOUSE BURNS, THE SEA TURNS GOLD

PROBST'S PHAROS OF ALEXANDRIA, AN AUGSBURG OPTICAL VIEW PREPARED TO TURN DAY INTO NIGHT

[Vue d'optique.] PROBST, GEORG BALTHASAR (1732-1801), publisher. *Pharus Aegypti Alexandrina, miraculum mundi septimum. Phare de l'Egypte, septième miracle du Monde. Pharo d'Egitto, settimo miracolo del Mondo. Der hohe Egyptische Feuer Thurn, siebende Wunderwerck der Welt*. Augsburg: Georg Balthasar Probst, ca. 1770.

Hand-coloured etching and engraving on paper, the sheet trimmed within the plate mark (405 × 295 mm) and laid down on thick card with perimeter strips. Only the first line of the four-language caption remains below the image, in Latin and Italian; the French and German line, the series designation and the imprint found on full-margined impressions are trimmed away, and of the reversed title and plate number above the image only the feet of the letters survive. Prepared on the verso for transmitted light: the arches, cornices and spiral ramp of the lighthouse are opened with rows of small triangular cuts, the sky is pricked with stars, the fire, the moon and the whole surface of the sea are made to carry the light, and rows of short slits open behind the windows and along the parapet on the right, many of them washed over on the verso with red and blue-green. Early manuscript title in brown ink on the verso, "Phare des L'Egÿpte Septieme miralle [sic] du monde".



The same sheet lit from the front and from behind.

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A hand-coloured optical view of the Pharos of Alexandria, the seventh plate of Georg Balthasar Probst's Augsburg series of the Wonders of the World, prepared at an early date as a day-and-night transparency. Lit from the front, the harbour lies in daylight, the lighthouse burning on its rocky island above a winding causeway and ships at anchor. Lit from behind, its fire blazes, the sea turns to gold, the tower is traced in points of white light and the windows of the town glow red, green and white. The preparation survives intact and still works.

On the left, on a rocky island, rises the lighthouse: a broad round base opened by arches carries a cylindrical tower wound by a spiral ramp and crowned by a domed lantern, from which great flames stream to the right and a cloud of smoke to the left. At the foot of the rock a village stands on a green hill and a walled town with a spired church opens its arched gates onto the water. From a round tower with an arched door at the end of the town, a long causeway on piers, with a few walkers, winds across the harbour towards a fortress on an island. Beyond lie a town on islands, with domes and towers, and a range of mountains. On the right, ruins with a standing column crown a green cliff, a lookout waves a red banner from a tower, and a high wall opens in an arched gate.

In the harbour a great ship with a carved stern lies moored at a stepped quay, where a porter carries a bale on his head and a man at the foot of the steps raises his arms towards the vessel. On a terrace in the foreground three figures turn towards the harbour: a warrior with a shield, seen from behind, a knight in a plumed helmet and red sash, and a bearded old man in a green robe; on the left, under a tree, soldiers with a halberd and a woman raising her hand watch the scene. An anchor and other ship's gear lie at the lower right, and a moon with a human face hangs in the sky.

Like every *vue d'optique*, the print was designed to be seen through a lens, in the drawing-room zograscope or in the showman's box. This impression can also be shown by night. Lit from the front, it shows the harbour by day; when the front is darkened and a candle or lamp is placed behind the sheet, the scene turns to night. The fire on the lighthouse blazes, the moon glows and the whole sea fills with golden light, against which ships and causeway stand out as dark silhouettes. Rows of white points trace the tower and stars appear in the sky, while the windows of the town, the ruins and the great ship, and the parapet of the wall on the right, shine red, green and white. Sky, mountains and figures stay dark.

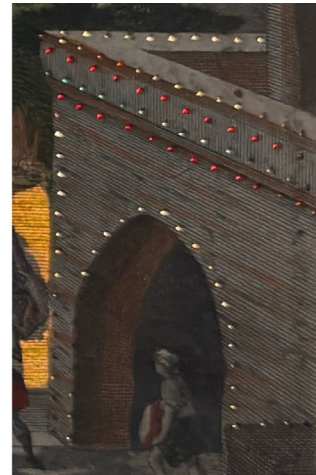
The effect was obtained on the verso, where the colour behind the windows and along the parapet is laid directly over the cuts. The manuscript French title on the back allowed the operator to identify the view from behind, where the subject cannot be seen, while preparing or changing the display.



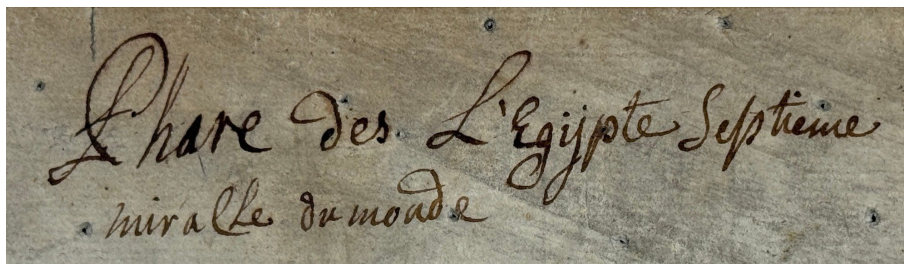
The lighthouse lit from behind: rows of small triangular cuts along the arches and the spiral ramp.



The windows of the town: cuts washed with red and blue-green on the verso (reversed), and the same windows lit from behind.



The parapet of the wall on the right: a band of red and blue-green over rows of cuts on the verso, and the lights at night.



The manuscript title on the verso.

Optical views were printed in large numbers and sold widely in the second half of the eighteenth century. Produced chiefly in London, Paris, Bassano and Augsburg, they served as entertainment and as a window on distant places, enjoyed at home through the zograscope and in the streets through the *mondo nuovo* of itinerant showmen. Augsburg became a major centre of the genre from the mid-1760s, and its publishers addressed a European clientele.

Ordinary views were often turned into night scenes. Pricking, cutting and backing the sheets with coloured silk or translucent paper, then alternating light from the front and from behind, allowed one sheet to show the same scene by day and by night. A set of sixty-nine views, assigned by the library to Augsburg and mounted as a roll in the second half of the eighteenth century, now in the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome, is entirely prepared for night viewing in this manner, and a Milanese *mondo nuovo* of 1792 in the Cinémathèque française still holds its fifteen hand-coloured engravings, most of them perforated, together with the shutters that let in the light from front and back.

The lighthouse raised on the island of Pharos under the first Ptolemies had long since vanished, and the plate owes nothing to its actual appearance. Its composition recalls

the second plate of Philips Galle's *Octo mundi miracula*, engraved after Maarten van Heemskerck and published in Antwerp in 1572, which already shows the lighthouse on a rocky island to the left, the round arcaded base carrying a tower wound by a spiral ramp, the town at the foot of the rock with its arched gates on the water, a long causeway winding across the harbour, a round tower and the mountains closing the view. The Augsburg plate leaves out Galle's seated king, shown a tablet by his architect, and fills the foreground with soldiers and a quay where a great ship is moored. In Galle the tower only gives off smoke; here its lantern is in flames.

GEORG BALTHASAR PROBST (1732-1801) belonged to the Augsburg family of print publishers descended from the business of Jeremias Wolff (1663-1724), continued by his son-in-law Johann Balthasar Probst (1673-1750). After Johann Balthasar's death in 1750 the business passed to several successors, and Georg Balthasar gradually enlarged his share, publishing under his own name with an imperial privilege. His optical views, numbered and lettered in several languages, run to more than 400 sheets; they are catalogued by S. von Kapff (2010).

The Wonders of the World comprise seven plates numbered 161 to 167: the Walls of Babylon, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, the Roman amphitheatre and the Pharos of Alexandria, each caption stating its place in the sequence. Impressions with lettered margins, such as those in the Bibliothèque nationale de France and in the Wellcome Collection, carry above the image the reversed title "PHARE DE L EGYPTE" and the number 167, and below it the lower line of the caption, in French and German, "Med. Fol°. N° 43" and the imprint of Georg Balthasar Probst with the imperial privilege.



The first line of the caption, in Latin and Italian; the second line is trimmed away.

CONDITIONS: Trimmed within the plate mark, through the reversed title above and just below the first line of the caption; five small round holes from early fixings in the caption band, touching a few letters; a small brown stain in the upper left margin; a small light abrasion in the sky below the moon; edges slightly irregular with small losses, margins reinforced on the verso. Colour fresh and bright; the night effect in full working order.

PROVENANCE: Early manuscript title in French on the verso, indicating use in a French-speaking context.

CENSUS: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Estampes et de la photographie, LI-72 (9)-FOL, with lettered margins, trimmed close at the foot (gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69495897); London, Wellcome Collection, 2977797i, full-margined impression (wellcomecollection.org/works/e5cedg7x).

REFERENCES: S. VON KAPFF, *Guckkastenbilder aus dem Augsburger Verlag von Georg Balthasar Probst (1732-1801): Gesamtkatalog*, Weißenhorn: Konrad, 2010; P. GALLE after M. VAN HEEMSKERCK, *Octo mundi miracula*, Antwerp: Philips Galle, 1572, pl. 2 (New Hollstein Dutch, Galle, 479); C. A. ZOTTI MINICI (ed.), *Il mondo nuovo: le meraviglie della visione dal '700 alla nascita del cinema*, Milan: Mazzotta, 1988; A. MILANO (ed.), *Viaggio in Europa attraverso le vues d'optique*, Milan: Mazzotta, 1990; R. BALZER, *Peepshows: A Visual History*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998; R. HYDE, *Paper Peepshows: The Jacqueline and Jonathan Gestetner Collection*, Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2015.



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