

AKTIENGESellschaft ARISTOPHOT



The exact date when the **Aristophot photographic printing (Ltd.)** company from Leipzig-Reudnitz was set up and by whom, is still unclear to me. Guess it was some time around the turn of the century, probably early 1901. On July 1, 1902 they bought the local **"Anstalt für vervielfältigende Künste Otto Lienekampf"**. Joint-stock company **Aristophot AG** was set up on Dec. 23, 1903 and included the business of **"Adolph Engel, Vereinigte Photolithographische und Papierwaren-Industrie GmbH"** from Berlin. The latter firm remained at Berlin ('Aristophot, Abt. Berlin') and was not moved to the new erected factory at Taucha (not far off Leipzig), Weststr. 11. The A. Engel logo (see ill.) is also found on a number of postcards. A typical for the time (establ. 1848) chromolitho printing company, publishers of colouring / children's books, games, and various deLuxe paper articles. Above mentioned Engel Ltd. was the successor to the old business, and run by *Hermann Engel* and *Alfred Wulf*. Shortly after Aristophot was taken over by A & M, the A. Engel company went bankrupt by late 1909. — Part of the Engel business, which was of some size, was moved to Thuringia. The major part taken over later by big local E. A. Schwerdtfeger company, who continued to use the former Engel facilities for some time. Another founding member had been *Otto Lienekampf*, Leipzig. He appears to have sold his shares earlier, as he formed „Phototech-

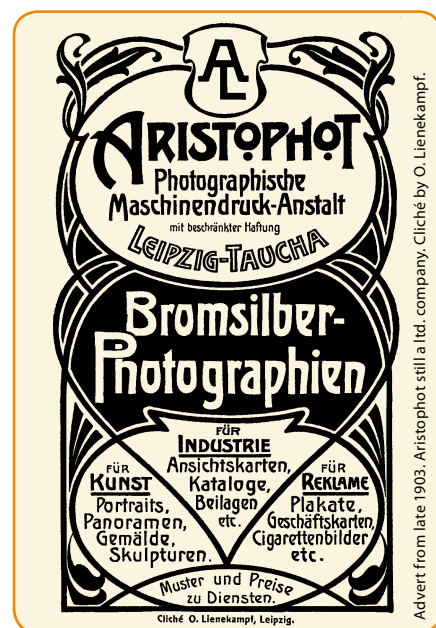
nische Gesellschaft m.b.H., Berlin, fine arts photographic printing company, together with a *Paul Giese* (Schöneberg) early March 1908. Company capital 200,000 Marks. —

The capital stock of the new Aristophot AG amounted to 2,000,000 Marks. Reduced to 1,200,000 Marks by 1905. But it was sort of an ill-fated business. No matter what the (ever changing board of directors) tried to improve the situation, it did not work out.

Management mistakes and misjudgement, general postcard overproduction, bad luck with some customers and choice of representatives abroad, strikes etc. By the end of 1906 the entire company was re-organized and the stock-capital reduced to 900,000 Marks. I guess at that time already there had been first business agreements between Aristophot and Albrecht & Meister AG.

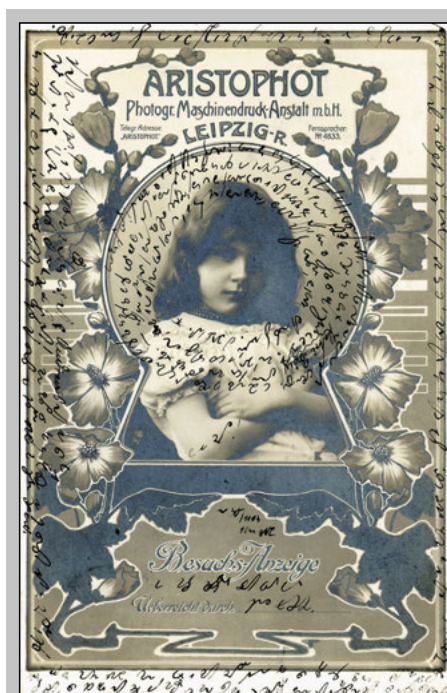
The next setback took place in Feb. 1907. The bankruptcy of the long-established Austrian firm 'Kunst- u. Verlagsanstalt Würthle & Sohn', Salzburg (with collotype printing works in Germany). Aristophot and Würthle had a joint-venture business. A series of some 6,000 (real photo) views/cards, mostly mountain topics. Many of these carry Aristophot's 'AGA' (photo paper) trademark.

The business year 1907-08 ended with a loss of the tremendous sum of 1,035,112 Marks (the year before it had been only 257,664 Marks). A not before mentioned daughter company 'Photos AG', Wädenswil, Switzerland was closed. The capital stock had been 390,000 Francs. I guess 'Photos AG' was a photographic (raw) paper factory(?). There was the threat of further massive losses as Aristophot's representatives in USA, Eng-

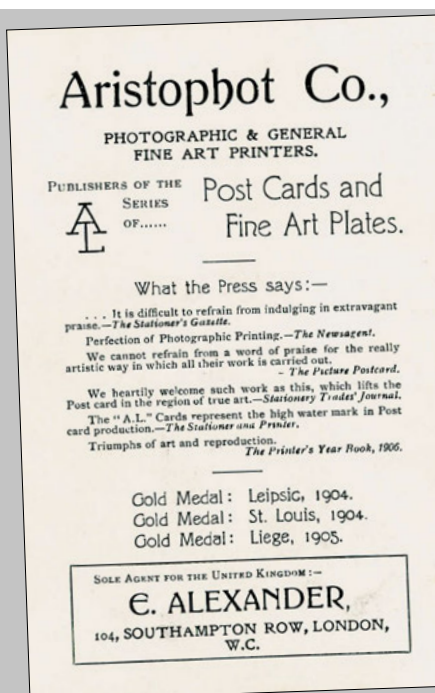


land, France and Russia refused payments. The background of this conflict is unknown. The British market appeared to be of special importance as Aristophot (re)opened an branch under own direction in London under the name **Aristophot Co. Ltd.** in spring 1908.

A final re-organization together with a capital stock reduction down to 526,000 Marks did not help much any more. One of Aristophot's directors came from A & M already. From Sept. 9, 1909 former Aristophot AG became part of the Albrecht & Meister AG, Berlin. The production remained at Taucha/Leipzig for a couple of years, the production facilities were even brought up to date.



Aristophot Ltd. (pre Dec. 1903 date) card for travelling salesmen to inform of date of visit. Heavy (shorthand) writing dated 1904/private use. Interesting design of the time with floral art nouveau style artwork.



Aristophot Co. promo card for E. Alexander, their sole agent for the United Kingdom. Proudly listing the Gold Medals won at Leipzig, St. Louis and Liege exhibitions. Including some quotes from British trade publications. "Perfection of Photographic Printing"? Well, not this sample. It shows a number of new issues (incl. card numbers), mostly woman/child studies as well as crowned heads. Nevertheless a fine card for research. Believe to date from c. mid 1906.





"Greetings from the Coast" - A large letter design which was either a bestseller (to male customers) or put the firm in trouble. The photographic/painted illustrations inside the letters are views of women in swimming suits and, many of them semi-nude, or even more bizarre poses.

The card carries a small "Aristophot AG Abt. Berlin SW, 1904" imprint on picture side (= Adolph Engel). Card no. 2033/76. Message dated August 26, 1904. - I have seen identical designs (but not erotic) published for foreign markets as London and Vienna. Large letter cards were popular for some years (and decades later again) published by other firms, too.



Aristophot 3874/4. Children in a garden. Excellent handcolouring, image plate sunk, glossy finish. Mailed from Spain to Germany in 1910.



Aristophot 1013/4. Chromolitho, embossed floral artwork, gilded and inserted photo. DeLuxe paper article. P/u February 1905.

Reliable figures of Aristophot's business size, exact date the company was set up, view of factory etc. appear to be difficult to locate. Figures /information found in literature are always vague, but there must have been several hundred employees, with a steady up and down of course. Their photographic (bromide) printing plant is described in 1905 as second-largest in Germany (NPG Berlin was the leading firm of course). Not to forget Aristophot's (chromo)litho and letterpress plant and other machinery.

Although A & M is said to have had its own bromide photo printing before integrating Aristophot, there is a chance that the printing of the early A & M photo cards was done at Taucha / or done on machinery bought from there. With Aristophot's many bromide photo printing machines at hand, A & M became soon one of Germany's bigger real photo card manufacturers (Amag trademark).

ARISTOPHOT POSTCARDS

During the approx. 9 years of business, Aristophot published and printed many, many 1000's of cards/designs. Not to forget that they were also contract printers for customers worldwide. The majority were bromide photo cards. Plain, matt or heavy glazed, sepia, hand- or stencil coloured etc. 'Lychnogravüre' was one of their trademarks. It had nothing to do with gravure printing process, but photography. Many of these cards are looking unusual somehow, the colouring often done in a sort of surrealistic way.

Aristophot came up with new series monthly. Usually advertised and often reviewed in "Papier-Zeitung". I guess it would need at least two pages to list all advertised cards/series. Interesting was the note from a spring trade fair at Leipzig. Aristophot introduced here some **400 new cards at a time**. Plus new poster designs, other advertising articles.

There is a series of cards (women studies, actors etc) that comes along in a bright, faint appearance. First I had though they had aged, or any photographic chemicals not washed out correctly. But there are too many, from various years, and it appears that Aristophot people wanted it look this way. Most likely one of many postcard novelties thrown on the market during the boom years.

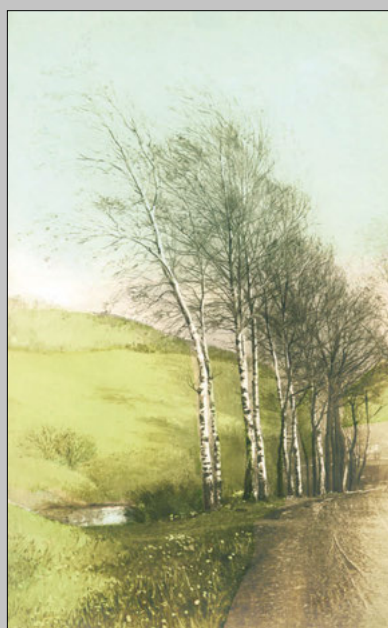
Other cards were done by chromolithography, embossed, gilded and a photo inserted. Typical deLuxe paper factory product.

Another major production line was their "Aristochrom" printing process. An "Autochrome" process, the image printed by halftone, the colouring (3-5 colours) done by litho process. With or without lacque or heavy glossy finish. We find typical topo cards (have

some from Germany and Austria) as well as art reproductions, but the majority are greeting / landscape designs. The minimum order was 3,000 cards. A & M continued to use the "Aristochrom" process later.

Aristophot's card production covered almost any topic. Royalty, flags, actors, all types of greetings, topography, art reproductions, fairy tales... you name it. Recently I have seen shipping cards with the AL logo on. Not to forget the various stereo card series.

Identification of cards published/printed by Aristophot is usually easy. Their AL logo with series/card number turns up either inside/next the image or imprinted on address side. On picture side easily to overlook, quite small or faint / sometimes covered by hand-colouring. The mention of "Lychnogravüre"



Lychnogravüre (photography), standard as well as sometimes odd (hand-) coloured. Left: series/ card no. **144/3**, not p/u, undiv. back = pre-1905 origin. Right: series/ card no. **1252/1**, p/u Feb. 1907



is also good for clear identification. The same goes for their "AGA" (photopaper) trademark. Sometime the entire name is imprinted. Later card issues show name imprinted inside the stamp box/ or typical stamp box position, however. When postally used not easy to identify.

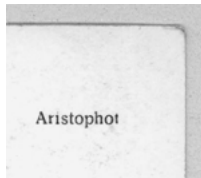
Card Numbering: I have given up to understand their system(s). Some series/ makes appear to have individual codes. In general you find a three or four digit series number followed by the card number. With or without a single/two letter prefix/ suffix. And other variations.

Aristophot AG belonged definitely to the group of the bigger German postcard (export) manufacturers during the so-called postcard boom years, with customers in various countries worldwide. Besides plenty of common stuff they published/ printed also unusual, interesting designs well worth being collected nowadays.

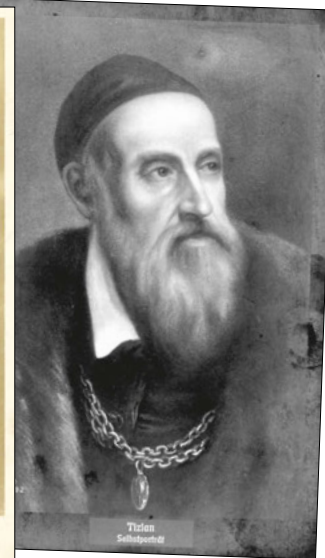
Some Aristophot logo versions:



Aktien-Gesellschaft Aristophot



Especially later issues show the (full) name only at typical stamp box position; often seen on topo cards.



From left: Blätterbauer Gizela, 1040/6, not p/u, pre-1905 · Empress Victoria Auguste, B 165/1, strange faint impression, p/u Nov. 1904 · Tizian - self-portrait Aristophot B. 192, not p/u.



From left: Cinderella series, 3673/3, p/u May 1905 · Vienna, series W 55, Aristochrom with heavy glossy finish, not p/u · Church / rural landscape, not signed, series A 172/2, p/u Aug. 1909.



View of the Aristophot stall at the Leipzig spring fair 1906.

Detail from an half-page advert in: 'Papier-Zeitung', no. 30 (April 15), 1906.
Coll. H. Luers

