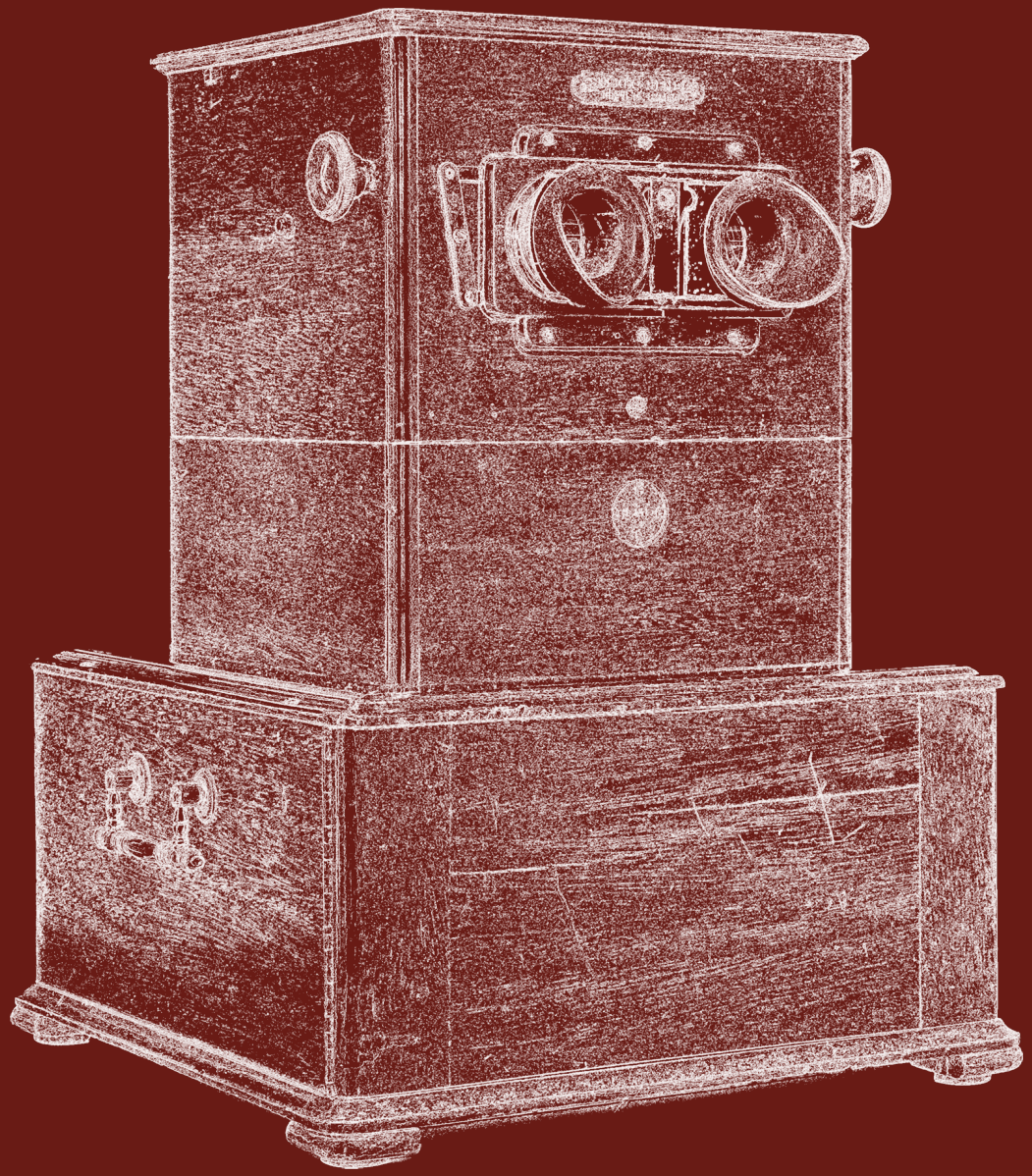


Stereoscopy History Series

Designers & Manufacturers

Hemdé

ANDRÉ RUITER

Hemdé

While Paris dominated the production of French stereoscopes in the early 1900s, the Hemdé stereo viewers were made in Lille. Their history is a narrative of success and tragedy.



The *Stereoscopy History Series* explores the history of stereoscopy in Europe between 1850 and 1930, unveiling the stories of the people, companies and their remarkable instruments and images that captured the imagination of an era.

Hemdé

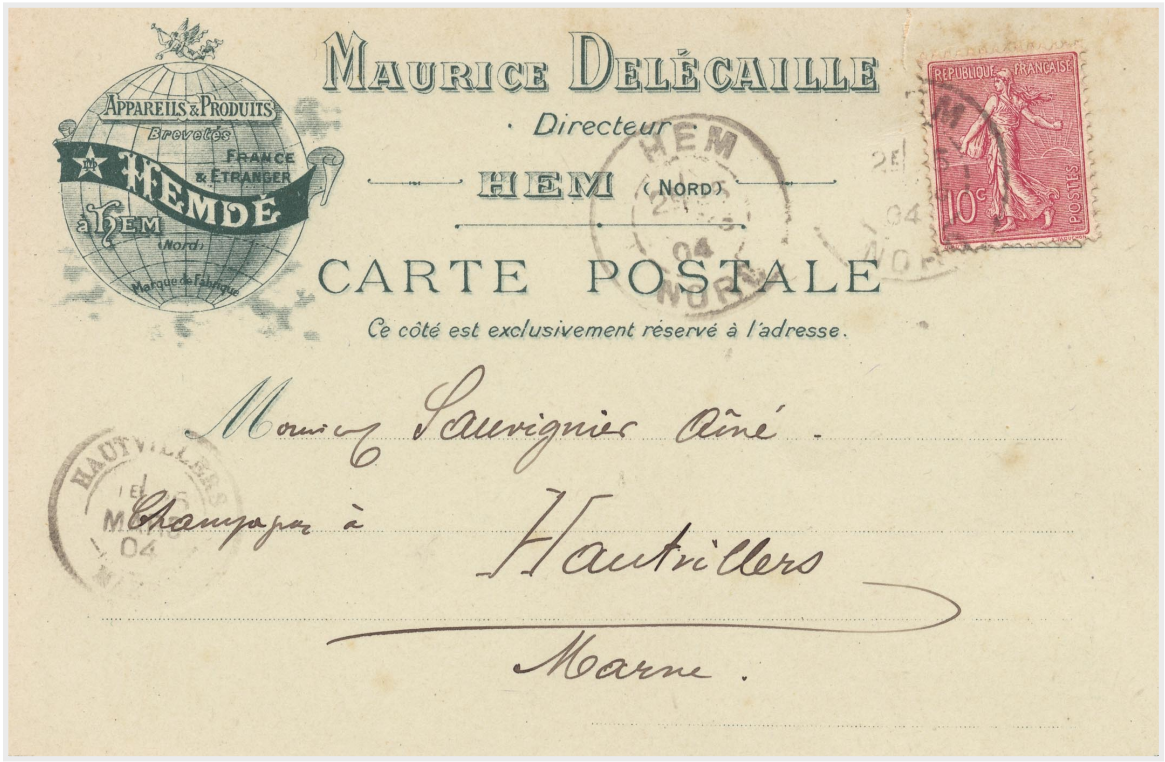
Hemdé was a trademark for photographic accessories and stereoscopes. The brand was registered by Maurice Delécaille in 1902[1]. His company was based in Hem, near Lille in northern France. The name Hemdé was a combination of the company's location and letters from Delécaille's surname. Delécaille became a promoter of the slow development process for photographic glass negatives ("développement lent"). This process allowed photographers greater control over the final result. To support this technique, he patented and introduced both a development tank and a chemical developer. In 1908, he launched La Marbach, a tank designed specifically for developing autochromes[2]. Delécaille also became the exclusive agent for the La Giorno camera in France.

Paul Sorel, owner of the Photo-Lux photography shop in Lille, joined Delécaille's business in 1907[3]. The company was renamed to Société Delécaille et Sorel. That same year, together with Émile Cuny, they patented a design for a mechanism used in an advanced tabletop stereoscope. This marked the beginning of Hemdé's stereoscope production.

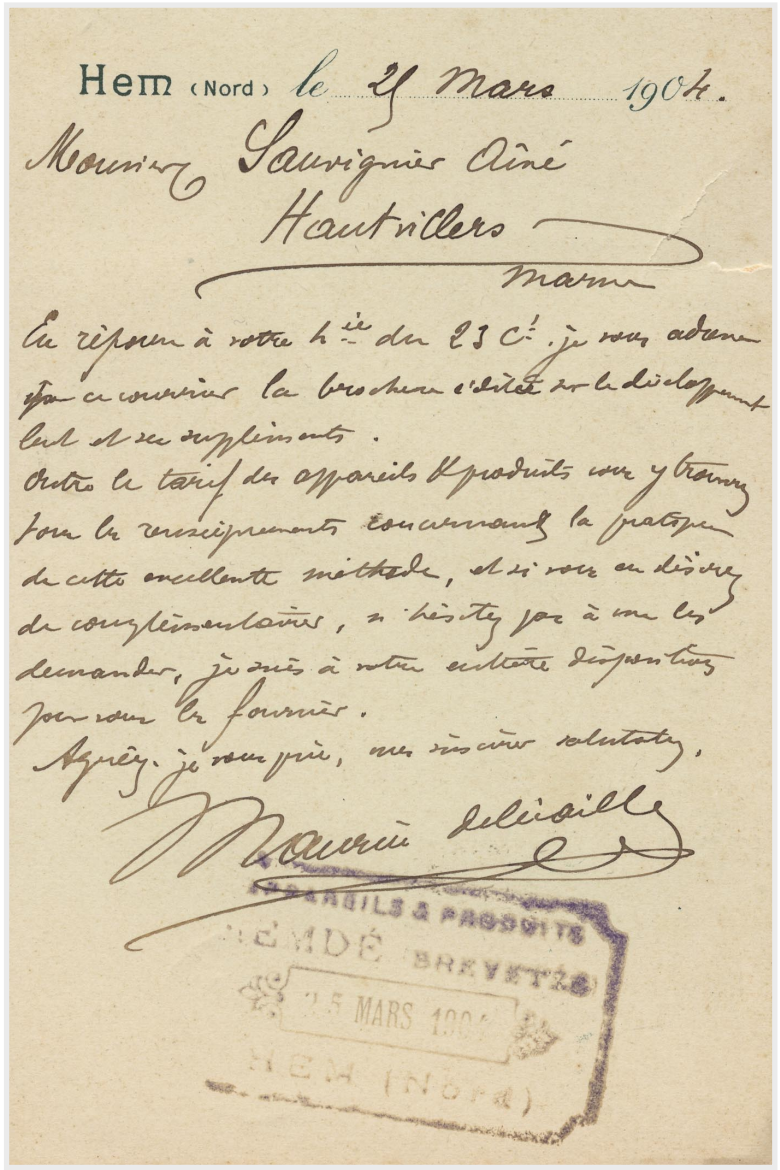
Société Delécaille et Sorel was dissolved in December 1909[4]. Delécaille continued his career as a photographer, specialising in the making of autochromes[5]. Sorel independently carried on the Hemdé business, relocating operations to his Photo-Lux premises in Lille. However, Sorel died prematurely in 1913. His obituary was published in *Le Nord Photographe*:

> With great sadness, we have learned of the passing of our colleague, Mr Paul Sorel, who, at such a young age, has been taken from his many friends. Our chairman has spoken on behalf of l'Union Photographique to convey our heartfelt condolences to his family. Mr Sorel was a dedicated member of our association and made contributions that were greatly valued by his colleagues.

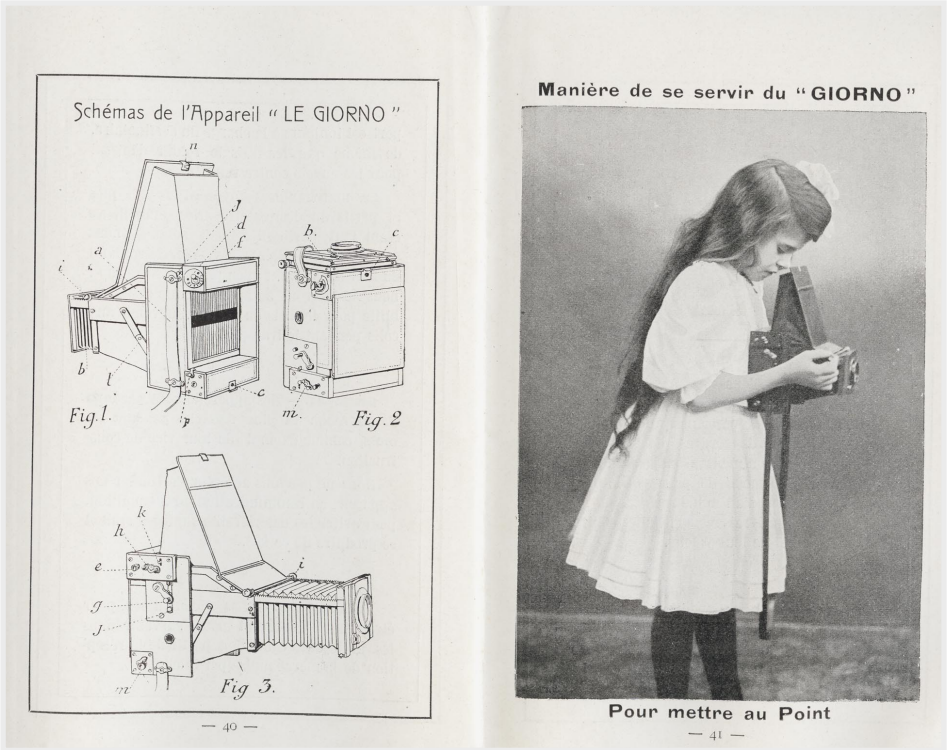
Following Sorel's death, Photo-Lux was sold to Léon Hamy, while Sorel's widow, Rose Sorel, continued the Hemdé business[6].



Postcard dated 29 March 1904, bearing the handwriting and signature of Maurice Delécaille. It was sent in response to a request for a brochure on Hemdé's development process.







Catalogue for Le Giorno, a roll film camera for which Hemdé was the exclusive agent in France. The camera was designed by Felicien Blanpain in 1904.

A stamp was added to the cover of the catalogue by Sorel after the company's relocation from Hem to its new address in Lille.

In 1914, the outbreak of the First World War and the occupation of Lille by the German army almost certainly brought operations to a halt. Nevertheless, the company survived the war—or was revived shortly thereafter. On 31 August 1919, the following advertisement appeared in *Le Grand Écho du Nord de la France*:

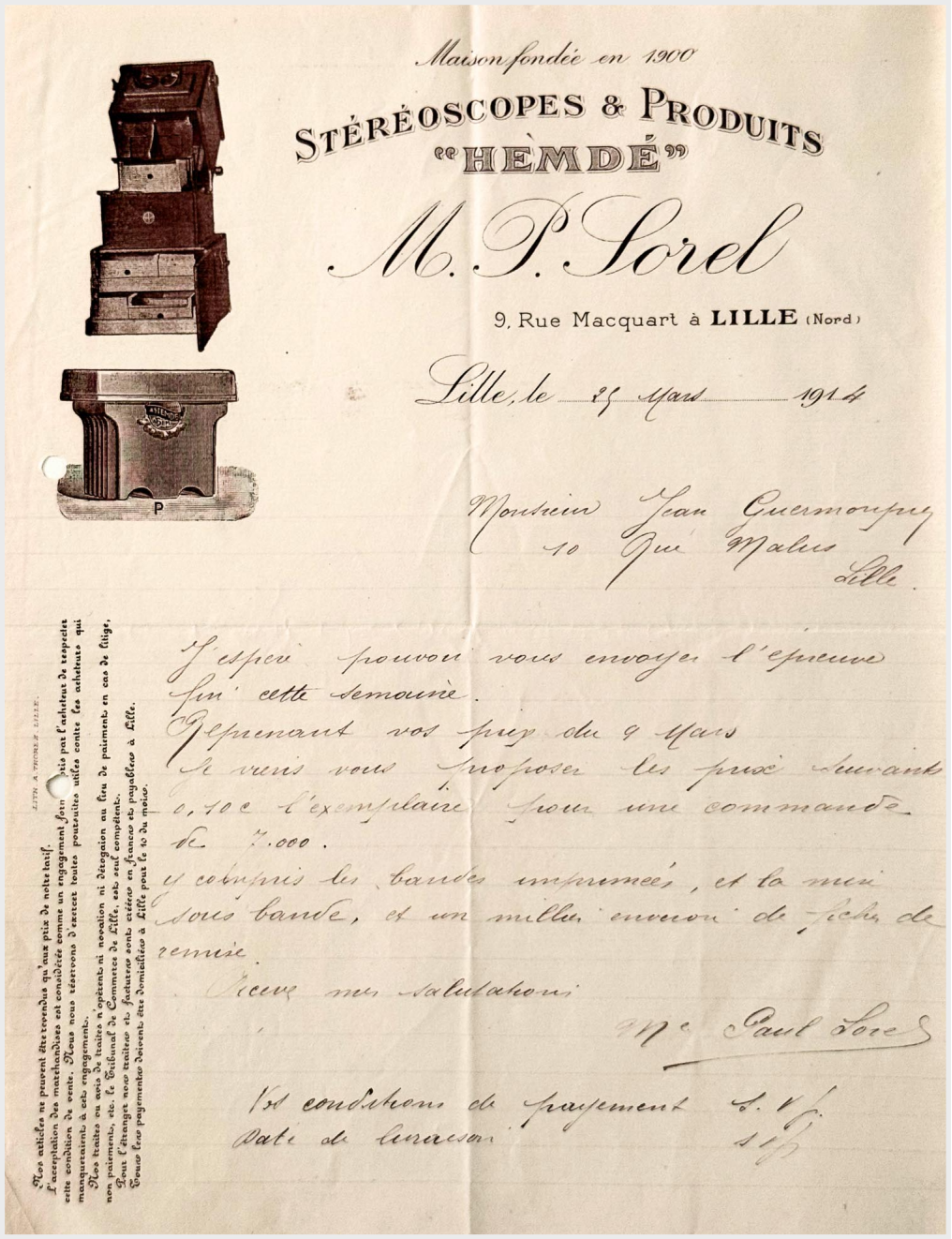
> Hemdé Stereoscopes. Available at all respectable photography stores or at P. Sorel, 3 Rue Macquart, Lille. Wholesale and retail – Office open from 3 to 6.

Rose Sorel married Irénée Cauchois in 1921. Together they continued the business under the name Sorel et Cauchois[7], based on Place de la République in Lille. A 1922 advertisement suggests that the company had likely shifted its focus solely to the photographic development accessories sold under the Hemdé brand. The selling of stereoscopes appeared to have ceased by this time.

Sorel et Cauchois probably operated for only a short period, as no further mentions are found after 1922. However, Hemdé's development accessories remained available until at least 1930, indicating that the brand was carried on by another company.



Manual of the slow development process, 1903.



Maison fondée en 1900

STÉRÉOSCOPES & PRODUITS
"HEMDÉ"

M. P. Sorel

9, Rue Macquart à LILLE (Nord)

Lille, le 25 Mars 1914

Monsieur Jean Guermonprez
10 Rue Malus
Lille.

J'espère pouvoir vous envoyer l'épreuve
fin cette semaine.
Reprenant vos prix du 9 Mars
je vous propose les prix suivants
0,10c l'exemplaire pour une commande
de 7.000.
y compris les bandes imprimées, et la mise
sous bande, et un millier environ de fiches de
remise.
Veuve mes salutations.
Mme Paul Sorel

Vos conditions de payement
Date de livraison

Nos articles ne peuvent être revendus qu'aux prix de notre tarif. L'acceptation des marchandises est considérée comme un engagement formel pris par l'acheteur de respecter cette condition de vente. Nous nous réservons d'exercer toutes poursuites utiles contre les acheteurs qui manqueraient à cet engagement.
Nos traites ou acceptations ne opèrent ni novation ni délégation au lieu de paiement en cas de faillite, nos paiements, etc. le Tribunal de Commerce de Lille, seul compétent.
Pour l'étranger nous traitons et factures sont établies en francs et payables à Lille.
Toutes les payements doivent être domiciliés à Lille pour le 10 du mois.

Hemdé delivery confirmation and price quotation. It is signed by Rose Sorel as "Madame Paul Sorel".

The letterhead states the founding year as 1900. This probably referred to the establishment of Delécaille's company, but it could also be Sorel's Photo-Lux shop.

© Collection Martiné

Appareils & Produits "Hemdé"

Brevetés France & Etranger

Le Développement Lent

des Clichés Photographiques

3ème ÉDITION

PRIX 50 CENTIMES

PRIX 50 CENTIMES

Appareils & Produits
" HEMDÉ „
A HEM (Nord)

Maurice Delécaille
à Hem (Nord)

APPAREILS & PRODUITS

"HEMDÉ„

BREVETÉS FRANCE & ÉTRANGER

Le Développement Lent

DES CLICHÉS PHOTOGRAPHIQUES

PRIX : 50 CENTIMES

Appareils & Produits
" HEMDÉ „
A HEM (Nord)





Hemdé Série I stereoscope for 45 x 107 mm glass stereoviews with a cabinet for 12 slide trays. This model was manufactured between 1907 and 1910.

The manufacturer

It is unlikely that the Hemdé stereoscopes were manufactured by Delécaille or his successor, Sorel. In various publications, the brand did not present itself as a manufacturer. Moreover, the different locations of Hemdé in Lille do not suggest the presence of a factory or workshop.

It is very likely that the Hemdé stereoscopes were produced by Émile Cuny, whose name is linked to the patent for the stereoscope's mechanism. Cuny's company was established in 1888 and was from 1898 located on Rue Jeanne-d'Arc in Lille[8,9]. Cuny advertised himself as a photographer, furniture maker and a manufacturer of photographic products. His business survived the First World War and remained active until at least 1929[10]. The company was maybe continued by Etienne Cuny sometime after the war[11].

Stereoscopes with the same mechanism as the Hemdé models exist marked with the name "Cuny". This indicates that he also sold stereoscopes under his own brand. Cuny's viewers are characterised by the use of the same patented mechanism, while differing in other features and external design. It is possible that these were prototypes or custom-made products produced on demand.



Header of an invoice from 1903

Companies and people

	Maurice Delécaille	Delécaille and Sorel	Paul Sorel
Duration	1900–1907	1907–1910	1910–1913
Address	Hem	Hem	89, Rue Nationale, Lille
People	Maurice Henri Louis Delécaille * 30-05-1859, Lille † 11-06-1917, Vincennes Member Société française de photographie	Maurice Henri Louis Delécaille Paul Alphonse Émile Sorel * 17-10-1876, Arras † 03-02-1913, Lille	Paul Alphonse Émile Sorel

Companies and people

	Rose Sorel	Sorel and Cauchois	Émile Cuny
Duration	1913–1921	1921–c. 1922	1888–c. 1930s
Address	9, Rue Macquart, Lille (1913–c.1919) 3, Rue Macquart, Lille (c.1919–1921)	Place de la République, Lille	*Address unknown* (1888–1898) 10, Rue Jeanne-d'Arc, Lille (1898-c. 1930s)
People	Rose Octavie Sorel (née Dejonghe) * 21-10-1882, Lille † 15-05-1949, Beuvry	Rose Octavie Sorel Irénée Robert Cauchois * 23-03-1899, Le Tréport † 20-12-1964, Billy-Montigny	Émile Cuny *(no birth or decease information)* The company was maybe continued by Etienne Cuny sometime after the war.



1. Paul Sorel - 89, Rue Nationale
2. Rose Sorel - 3 and 9, Rue Macquart
3. Sorel and Cauchois, Place de la République
4. Émile Cuny - 10, Rue Jeanne-d'Arc

Hemdé stereoscopes

Most information about Hemdé stereoscopes can be found in the *Notice et prix courants des stéréoscopes classeurs Hemdé*, published in April 1914. This brochure includes a catalogue, user instructions, and a price list. The opening page describes the company's stereoscopes as follows:

> An instrument of high precision, with a simple and flawless mechanism that incorporates all the improvements of its counterparts, while offering significant advantages. It stands apart from similar devices due to both its extreme simplicity and the robustness of its components, as well as its absolutely unbreakable mechanism, protected against dust and moisture.

Hemdé sold only stereoscopes based on its patented mechanism. The viewer was designed for examining glass stereoviews mounted in wooden trays.

Three models were available, crafted in either waxed walnut or polished mahogany:

- Série I was intended for the 45 × 107 mm stereoview format and came with a wooden cabinet capable of storing up to 12 trays.
- Série II was available for the 6 × 13 cm, 7 × 15 cm, 9 × 14 cm, 10 × 15 cm, and 8.5 × 17 cm formats, also including a cabinet for up to 12 trays.
- Série III was compatible with all formats but was sold without a cabinet.

On certain Série I and II models, the wooden cabinet could be detached from the viewing unit.





Hemdé Série I



Hemdé Série II

APPAREILS & PRODUITS "HEMDÉ"

M. P. SOREL

9, RUE MACQUART, 9 — LILLE (NORD)

NOTICE

ET

PRIX COURANTS

DES

STÉRÉOSCOPES

CLASSEURS

"HEMDÉ"

ACCESSOIRES DIVERS

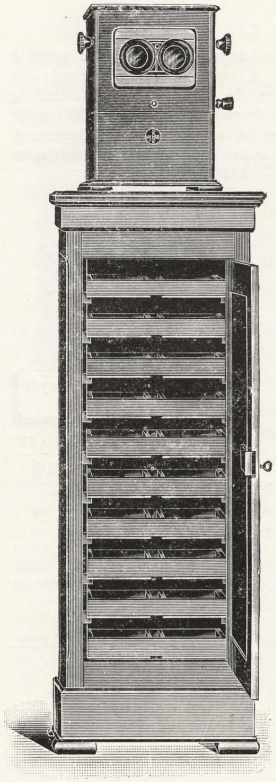


Fig. 7
Stéréo de la Série III
sur colonne
permettant de regarder étant assis

SOCLES DÉMONTABLES

45×107 — 6×13

Socle contenant 8 paniers de 25 vues avec 2 tiroirs poignée élégante, porte avec serrure de sûreté.

N° 1. — Noyer ciré .. .. **50** fr.
2. — Noyer verni .. **55** fr.
3. — Acajou ciré. .. **55** fr.
4. — Acajou verni .. **60** fr.

7×15	9×14	8 1/2×17
10 fr. en sus de chaque numéro		

COLONNE - MEUBLE

Pour regarder étant assis *(fig. 7)* avec tiroirs pour :
1200 vues -- 1000 vues -- 700 vues

Noyer ciré :

45×107	6×13	8 1/2×17
100 fr.	**120** fr.	**160** fr.

Verni **10** fr. supplément.

Acajou ciré :

45×107	6×13	8 1/2×17
120 fr.	**140** fr.	**180** fr.

Verni **10** fr. supplément

TABLE ACAJOU VERNI

Modèle très élégant, très solide pour placer les Stéréos de la série I et II et examiner les vues étant assis, avec tablette tirante pour placer les paniers. .. .. **45** fr.
Noyer verni. .. .. .. **40** fr.

CADRES MÉTALLIQUES

Pour plaques en couleurs sans les doubler :

8 1/2×17	6×13	8 1/2×17
La pièce	**0 60**	

MIROIR RÉFLECTEUR

Recommandé pour les couleurs
Pour prendre le jour par en haut
Acajou verni. .. .. **20** fr.
Noyer ciré .. .. **15** fr.

LANTERNE SPÉCIALE

Pour plaques en couleurs avec verre bleu, lampe électrique, prise de courant pour :

45×107	6×13	8 12×17
20 fr.	**20** fr.	**25** fr.

JEU DE BONNETTES INTERCHANGEABLES

Foyer ordinaire.. .. .. **20** fr. | Court foyer . .. . **30** fr.

Brochure from April 1914

Support for the 7 × 15 cm, 9 × 14 cm, and 10 × 15 cm formats was notable, as these were rare stereo formats. Hemdé may have addressed a niche demand overlooked by most other manufacturers (with the exception of Mattey).

Another distinguishing feature was the use of wooden trays, which contrasted with the more common bakelite or metal trays favoured by other makers. A standard tray could hold 25 glass plates. Special trays for the thicker autochrome plates were also available, with a capacity of 12 plates.

Hemdé additionally offered furniture to position the stereoscope at eye level, storage cabinets for large collections, lighting for viewing autochromes, and projection equipment that allowed the stereoscope to be used as a projection device.

The glass slides were placed in a tray, which was then inserted into the device. A half-turn of the lever lifted one of the slides from the tray and positioned it in front of the lenses. Another half-turn returned the slide to the tray while advancing it to select the next image. The mechanism was bidirectional, allowing the user to navigate forwards and backwards through the slides—an ability that was not available in well-known stereoscopes such as Richard's Taxiphote Standard[12] or Gaumont's Stéréodrome. The stereoscope's lenses could be focused, and the distance between the lenses was adjustable.

Hemdé stereoscopes can be dated with considerable precision. Models bearing only the Hemdé logo were produced between 1907 and 1910. After Sorel continued the company, a secondary logo featuring Sorel's name and address was added. The company's changing addresses serve as key indicators of the different production periods (see: *companies and people*).

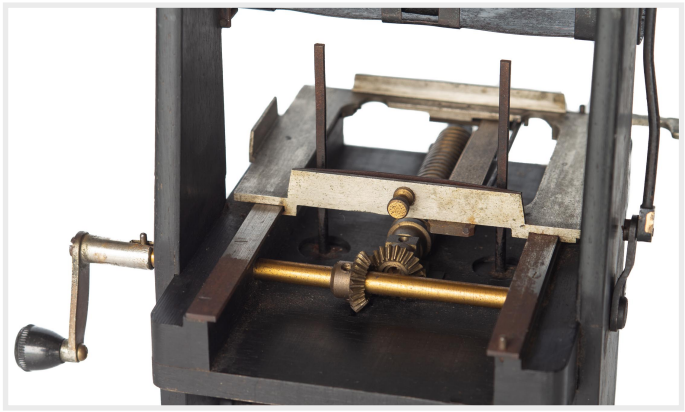




The mechanism, removed from its housing, and a wooden tray containing 25 glass slides in the 45 x 107 mm format.



When the crank is turned, the rear glass slide is lifted from the tray by two metal fingers at the bottom. The slide is then positioned in front of the lenses for viewing. As the handle is turned further, the slide is returned to the tray. With the same motion, a screw shifts the tray holder backward, selecting the next slide.

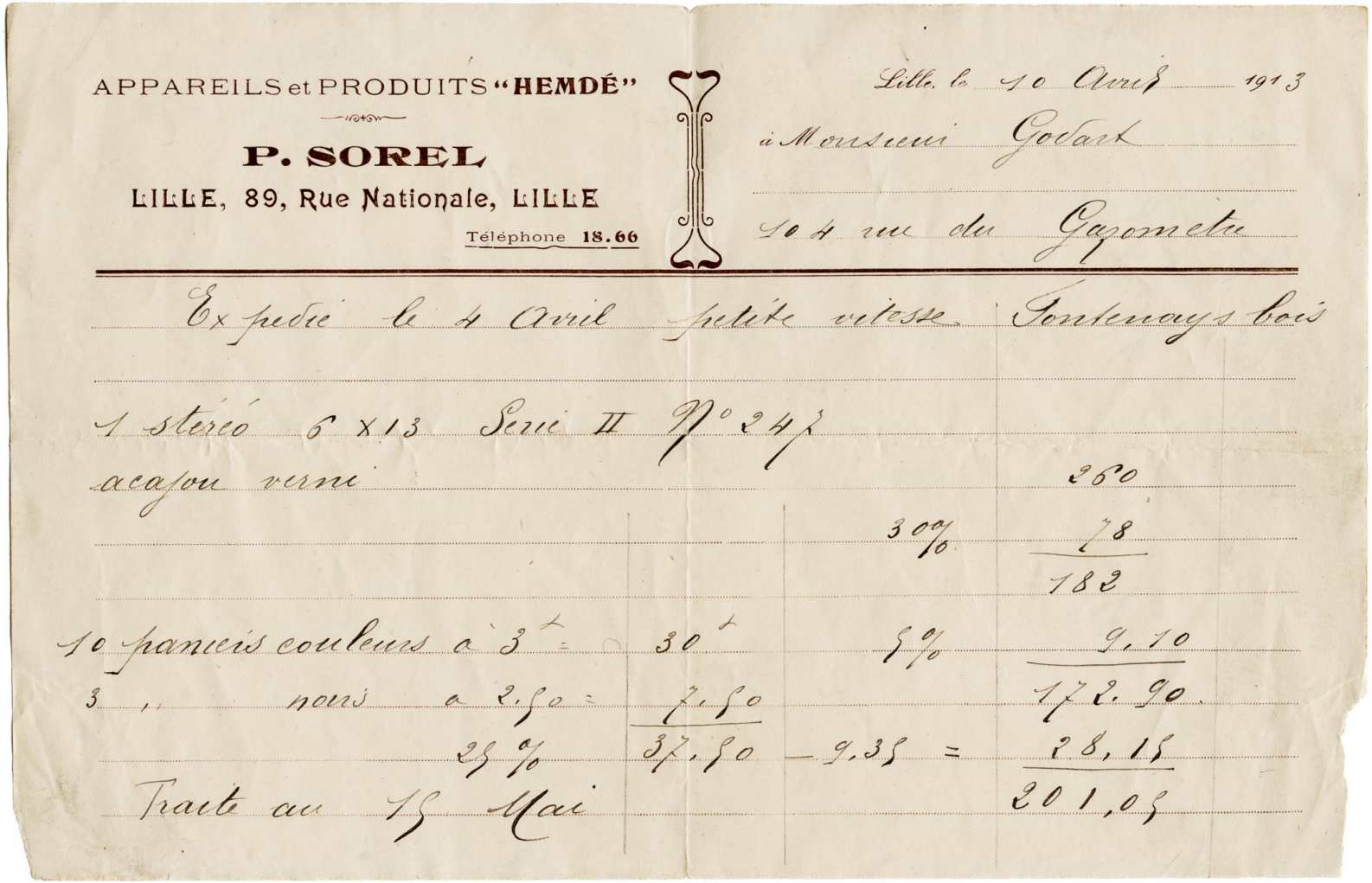






Hemdé Série III with a decorated base plate. The decoration may have been made at a customer's request.

© Collection Martiné



APPAREILS et PRODUITS "HEMDÉ"

P. SOREL

LILLE, 89, Rue Nationale, LILLE

Téléphone 18.66

Lille le 10 Avril 1913

à Monsieur Godart

104 rue du Gazomètre

Expédié le 4 Avril petite vitesse Fontenoy s/ bois

1 stéréo 6 x 13 Série II N° 243

acajou verni 260

30% 78

182

10 paniers couleurs à 3f = 30f 5% 9.10

3 " noirs à 2,50 = 7,50 172.90

23% 37,50 — 9.35 = 28,15

Traite au 15 Mai 201,05

Invoice, dated 10 April 1913, for a Hemdé Série II stereoscope, 10 autochrome trays, and three standard trays. It is noteworthy that an older invoice template was used, bearing the address 89, Rue Nationale, even though the company had already relocated to 9, Rue Macquart following the death of Paul Sorel.



This 6 × 13 cm autochrome stereoview depicts a Parisian living room from the 1920s. To the woman's left, a Hemdé Série II stereoscope can be seen. It is the very same stereoscope referenced in the invoice on the previous page.





An unbranded 45 x 107 mm stereoscope made by Émile Cuny. The mechanism is based on the patent registered by Cuny together with the owners of Hemdé.

This model features a distinctive focusing mechanism in which the entire internal mechanism moves forwards or backwards by means of a control knob located on the front of the instrument.





A stereoscope made by Émile Cuny. Its most distinctive characteristic is that the tray is inserted into the viewing section through a side door.

The front panel features a nameplate of Photo Comptoir Artistique, a photography shop in Roubaix that was operated by Madame Dendievel from at least 1899 to 1912.

© Collection Martiné

Patents

Number	Title	Filing	Publication	Applicants	Application
FR349591	*Appareil photographique à miroir avec soufflet*	24-12-1904	24-12-1904	Felicien Blanpain	Le Giorno camera
FR317871	*Appareil à développement lent des clichés photographiques*	-	20-01-1902	Maurice Delécaille	Device for the slow development proces
FR380115	*Vis perfectionnée*	22-07-1907	29-11-1907	Émile Cuny, Paul Sorel, Maurice Delécaille	Mechanism for the Hemdé stereoscope

Notes and references

1. *L'Information photographique* (1902), p. 81. The earliest known reference of Hemdé.
2. *Le Nord photographe* (01-07-1908), p. 55. The autochrome photography process was introduced in 1907 by the brothers Louis and Auguste Lumière. Autochrome was the first practical and commercially applied colour photography process in history.
3. *Bulletin de la Société française de photographie* (1908). Delécaille and Sorel were mentioned as owners of Hemdé. Since the yearbook was published only once a year, it is assumed that the collaboration began in 1907.
4. *Archives commerciales de la France* (16-02-1910), p. 316.
5. Delécaille's death certificate mentions his occupation as “autochromiste”.
6. *L’Information photographique* (1913), pp. 175, 210.
7. *L'Indicateur de l'industrie photographique* (1922), p. 324.
8. *Annuaire du commerce et de l'industrie photographiques* (1902), p. 135.
9. *Le Nord photographe* (01-05-1898), p. 71.
10. *L'Indicateur de l'industrie photographique* (1929), p. 197.
11. *Le Grand écho du Nord de la France* (31-10-1910). A register of recorded marriages mentioned: “Etienne Cuny, mécanicien de précision, Rue Jeanne-d’Arc, 10”. Etienne was probably Émile Cuny’s son.
12. Richard’s Taxiphote Modèle Simplifiée also supported bidirectional navigation.

Revisions

1.2	06-06-2026	Images added. Update Cuny.
1.1	06-08-2025	Updates Rose Sorel and Émile Cuny
1.0	27-07-2025	First edition

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Special thanks to Pascal Martiné, who shared his knowledge and images from his collection.

Website: stereoscopyhistory.net