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THE ICONOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF BERGKNAPPSCHAFTSALTAR ARISING FROM THE HANS HESSE'S WORKSHOP

*Annaberg, Hans Hesse, Miners' Altar,
The prophet Daniel*

Afterwards rich silver veins were discovered under the Schreckenbergr Mountains (1491-1492) as well as settlement related to the other activities. The silver and tin mining industry in the Ore Mountains range began in the early 12th century. With the further settlement of the Ore Mountains in the 15th century new rich ore deposits were eventually discovered around Schneeberg (1470-1477) and Annaberg (1491-1492). In 1496, a settlement was found on the site of the "Schreckenbergr" silver mine called the New Town. Master Ulrich Rülein von Calw helped during its location. This settlement was promoted to the status of a city by the decision of Duke Georg der Bärtige and the new town was named Annaberg. The city centre was going to be St. Anne's Church founded by the Duke which was meant to become the heart of the Saint's cult in the Ore Mountains. Conrad Pflüger, who started the building in 1499, participated in the construction, and Jacob Heylmann von Schweinfurt completed the project in 1525. This church, ranking itself among the most important late gothic buildings, was a clear manifesto of Duke's wealth and power ever since it was erected.

The interior is decorated with three gorgeous altars including the Bergknappschaftsaltar with the reverse side adorned with paintings originating from the Hans Hesse's workshop (past 1521). The central idea of these paintings, dedicated to mining industry at first glance, is the legend of the prophet Daniel that was very popular in the German milieu (its literary adaptation written by Ulrich Rülein von Calw was reprinted several times – one of them not long before the discussed paintings came into existence).

The legend itself talks about the angel giving Daniel advice on where the underground concealed treasure (precious metals) could be found. Master Rülein added the character of Daniel's apprentice Knapius to whom, in this adapted version, Daniel handed over all his knowledge on mining industry. Apart from the figures of an angel, the prophet Daniel and his apprentice Knapius we can see St. Wolfgang, saint patron of mineworkers, walking among miners with his attribute, an axe.

The remainder of the altar-boards are dedicated to particular mining operating procedures. The "predella" depicts the process of cleaning silver which is an important evidence of women's role in the mining industry. The left altar wing bears the image of people at a melting furnace and the right wing is a mint with the scene of mintage. In the background of the middle panel there are the gallows reminding the viewer to follow laws and warning that any law breaking shall be deservedly punished.

The message of the Bergknappschaftaltar was closely connected to important events in history. The city, as well as its ruler, refused to accept Martin Luther's ideas and held on the 'old' faith while at the same time, the local society had to face up the huge expansion of the recently founded city of Jáchymov which, following in the footsteps of the family of Earl Šlik, adopted the Luther's doctrine from its onset. Today the Bergknappschaftaltar can be understood as an expression of the Annaberg mining workers' respect to traditions on two levels, the sacred and the profane.