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Myths and mythical creatures in mining history and culture of the Ore Moun- tain/Krušnohoří

Annaberg Myths:

The night before Corpus Christi the miner Caspar Nitzelt went to a nearby stream just to go fishing. When he poked around in the water with a stick, a little bit of earth detached itself from the shore and underneath it Nitzelt saw a greenish rock. An experienced miner, he took his find in hand and noting that it was unusually heavy, he kept some of it. An examination of the rock in Geyer (the small town nearby) showed that it contained plenty of silver. Nitzelt began to dig at the site. Over the years, the Corpus Christi Tunnel, as it was called, yielded 400,000 guilders.

The miner Daniel Knappe was a hard-working and honest man who had got into financial difficulties through no fault of his own and hardly knew how to feed his sick wife and their seven children. One night an angel appeared to him in a dream and said, "Go tomorrow into the dense forest at the foot of the Schreckenberg. There, in the branches of the tallest fir tree, you will find a nest with golden eggs." First thing the next morning the miner set out and soon found the tallest fir tree. He climbed to the top of the tree and searched all around – but in vain – a nest with golden eggs was nowhere to be found. Deeply disappointed, he descended again then suddenly, it occurred to him that he had perhaps misinterpreted the dream, and that in reality the roots of the tree could be the place to search. He got his tools, started digging, and soon came upon a rich silver vein.

These two stories are said to have taken place in 1491. The rich finds prompted Duke Georg the Bearded to have a new mountain town built at the site. The "new town at Schreckenberg" received its town charter already in October 1497 and was renamed Annaberg in 1501.

Quote: <http://www.geschichten-aus-sachsen.de/erzgebirge.html>

Gregorius Agricola (1494-1555), The Book of Subterraean Life:

The most important research work of Gregorius Agricola appeared as a complete edition only one year after his death. *De re metallica libri XII* is the first book to systematically describe mining and metallurgy based on empirical research. For two centuries it was regarded as the definitive scientific standard reference on the subject, and posthumously earned its author the title, "Father of Mineralogy;" he is considered the founder of this field. In his book *De animantibus subterraneis liber – The Book of Subterranean Life* from 1549, he describes in detail and very scientifically all possible kinds of beings that live constantly or temporarily underground, but at the very end of his treatise he writes about the "living beings underground or, as the theologians say, the number of creatures that are considered spirits that can be encountered in some

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pits." Agricola does not assign these beings to the realm of fables or the like; on the contrary, he meticulously pursues them, too. He subdivides them into two different groups.

One is comprised of the *daemon subterraneus truculentus*, the mountain demon (*truculentus* = wild, grim, unfriendly, harsh, and coarse). He describes these creatures as follows: "Some are wild and frightening to behold and they are mostly unfriendly and hostile to the miners. There was one such creature at Annaberg who killed. His breath gushed out of his throat. His neck was said to have been long like that of a horse and his eyes were wild. The one at Schneeberg was said to be of the same kind, clothed in a black frock, who gathered the manual tools off the ground in the St. George pit and, not without physical exertion, carried them to an elevated stretch of the mine once the richest silver mine in the region. [...] Some philosophers consider these and similar spirits, which are harmful and by nature malicious, stupid and without reason."

But there are also the good mountain spirits; Agricola calls them *daemon subterraneus mitis*, little mountain men or goblins (*mitis* = mild, soft). Agricola writes: "But there are also good spirits that many in Germany call goblins, as the Greeks do, because they imitate humans. They giggle in cheerfulness and pretend to do many things while they are actually doing nothing. Some also call them little mountain men; they have the shape of a dwarf and are only three spans long. They look very old and are dressed like miners, that is, with a coat tied together and a leather apron hanging around their thighs. They do not harm the miners, but roam around in shafts and tunnels. And although they don't actually achieve anything, they act as if they want to practice any kind of work; that is, they dig corridors, pour the excavated material into vessels and turn the winch. Sometimes they tease the workers with gold grains, but they rarely harm them. They don't hurt anyone, either, as long as they haven't been laughed at or provoked by swearwords. They are therefore similar to good spirits, which rarely appear to humans, but which do part of the daily chores and take care of the cattle. The Germans have given them the name "goodle," since they do good things, are of a human nature, or at least appear as friends; about the "trolls" who seem to be of both female and male sex, it is reported that they are kept as servants by some peoples, especially by the Scandinavians. The mountain spirits prefer to work in mines where metals are extracted or where there is hope that metals will be found. The miners therefore see in the mountain spirits a good sign and do not let themselves be deterred by their presence; instead they stay cheerful and keep on working all the more diligently."

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgius_Agricola

Quote: <http://www.geschichten-aus-sachsen.de/erzgebirge.html>



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