

Silver Mining and History of mining in Příbram



**Thomas Straka
Daniel Rys**

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History

The might of silver coin

Probably the most important thing made of silver were coins. Let us realize that consignment of state's own coin was highly important in a medieval society. After 1210, bracteates become the main sort of payment, apart from older denars. Bracteates were coined on one side a silver lame. As the time went on the value of coins went down gradually. New coins, which were replacing the old ones, contained less silver as copper was replacing pure silver. Because of this, the royal treasury and coiners grew richer in a very dishonest way.

Consequently people didn't believe in the value of coins. Disbelief to money, which was needed mainly in town's marketplaces for buying the most different types of goods, caused a big harm to the business in the country.

King Václav II. was trying to stop the fall of value of coins. During 1300, he closed all mints in Bohemia and moved the coinage to Vlašský Dvůr in Kutná Hora. Many workshops, where the silver from the rich mines of Příbram, Jihlava and Kutná Hora was modified and melted, were appertained to Vlašský Dvůr. Pure silver was consequently compiled to thin lames, from which coins were made in the coinage halls.



DENAR

Probably the oldest Czech coins were denars. Denars were quite small silver coins stamped during the first Přemyslovci reign.



BRACTEATE

A coin used in Czech countries before the Prague rap started to be made. Bracteates were thin lames of silver and copper. Mixing them with other metals nearly caused a failure in trades with foreign countries.



PRAGUE RAP

Prague rap was being coined after the decision of King Václav II at the beginning of 14th century. It was a very strong and valuable coin which was appreciated throughout Europe, which had not happened before. On one side of the Prague rap was the king's crown with a text formed in round shape in Latin. On the other side there was a picture of a lion with a crown and another Latin circumscription.

History

Important events



Silver mining in Příbram was mentioned for the first time in 12th century, when king Vladislav II was at reign. Ores with content of silver were processed in the Birch mountains at least from the 13th century. This is documented by multiple archaeological findings. In the twenties of the last century three graves were discovered. In these graves from 12th century several silver items were found, including two earrings, some ceramics and a silver denar were found in one of them. Unfortunately, none of these things was conserved until present.



The fame of Příbram mining belongs to 19th century, when this area was only a huge corporation of mining which profited so well that it could stand against the cheap American silver. A big change in mining happened in 1780, when a new mining pit was founded. Two others were added soon. Another expansion of silver mining took place in 19th century when a steam engine was invented. In 1875, the Vojtěch mine reached the depth of 1000 m underground.



A fire started on the 29. floor of Marie mine in Birch mountains on the 31 st May 1892, which was the biggest mining accident in the world and has been the biggest in central Europe so far. 319 miners died during this fire. Silver mining in Příbram mines was definitely closed up in 1978

History

Working in a mine



The Czech kingdom was very well-known in Europe for its silver. But before 1750 there were no advanced technologies to help mining, so miners had to get into mines only by the mean of ladders and simple tools. The only tools they had for their tough work was a hammer and a sharp piece of iron. Where the rock was too hard miners made fire heated the rock and than spilled cold water on the warm rock. The rock cracked and they could remove it much more easily.



New chances of silver mining occurred after the invention and the setup of steam engines in the 19th century. Even in 1750 mining was in progress only with some simple tools, in depths around 100 m. The expansion came in 1879 with the usage of a steam engine with very high performance, when for the first time in the world depth of 1 km was broken. This record was not broken for a long time.



One of the biggest problems in mines was lighting. Mines often contain explosive gases, which means that a single spark causes a disaster. Nevertheless, till the first half of 19th century, only oil lamps or torches were used for lighting. A great breakthrough in lighting was brought with Davy's mining safety lamp. Sir Humphrey Davy created this lamp for work in mines with atmosphere containing very dangerous gases. The lighting problem was fully solved in 1886 when a light-bulb was invented.

Silver

Occurrence, usage, findings

Silver, in Latin Argentum („bright“) is found in several forms. Mostly in mixtures and sometimes as pure silver. In most cases, it is only near a lode of another metal. Colour of this ore is usually brown, gold or dark yellow. Silver is often found near crystal lodes.



Silver is glossy, noble metal, which is a very good conductor of electricity and heat. This quality is a good reason for usage in science, healthcare and electronics. It is the best electric conductor of all. Nearly one third of silver production is used in photography. Silver is also used in jewellery. Mirrors, wide sort of decorations and coins are still made of silver. Also dentists use it.



Trojan ounces are used for the measurement of its pure mass. One Trojan ounce weights 31.1034 g and it is worth about \$ 8. In the past another measurements were used for measuring.



In the past, silver was one of the most used means of payment and it was used in different shapes – coins, jewels, etc. It has been known since antiquity, even the old Egyptians knew silver as precious metal. It is very important nowadays too.

Silver

Silver jewels

Production of silver jewels and decorations is one of the most usual ways how to use silver. Bright white is the typical colour of silver, so it is very suitable for jewellery. According to the fact that it is a noble metal, it doesn't corrode very much, moreover, it is very durable. Many types of jewels are made of silver – for example: rings and bracelets, medals and cups. Gold is more precious than silver, but many people prefer silver to gold because of its colour especially when it is combined with precious stones since all colours matches with silver. Another advantage is its low price.



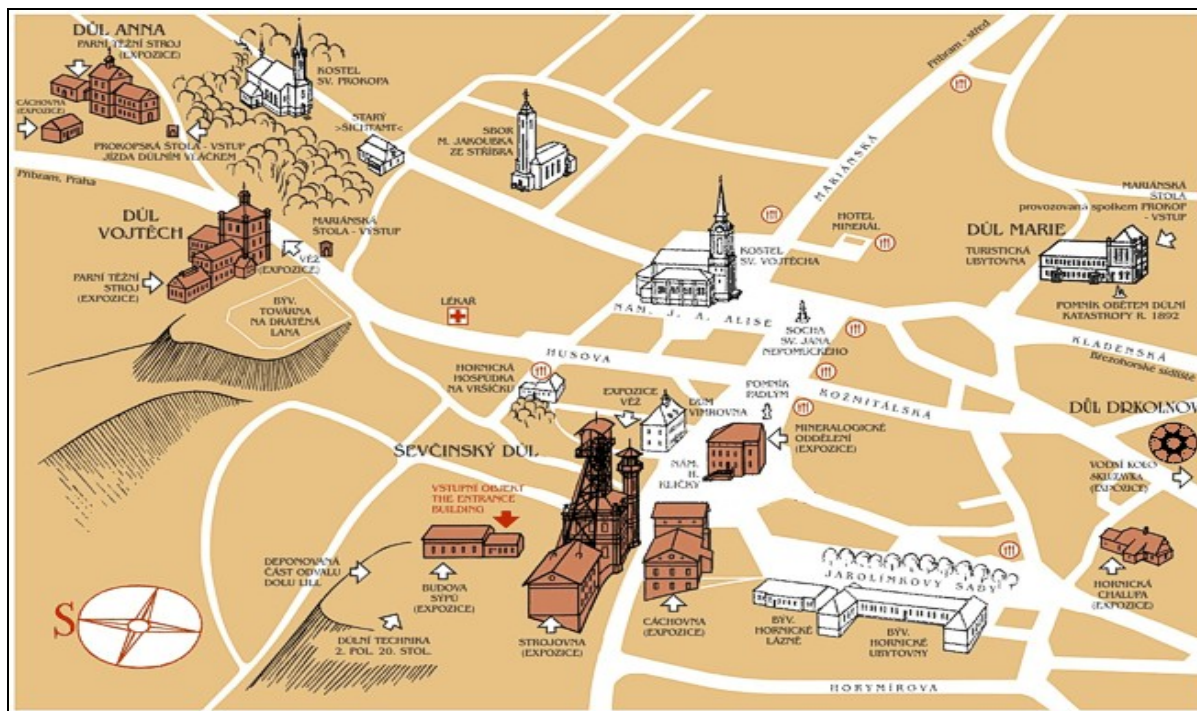
Rings are used for different occasions – it is possible to use them as a gift, they can serve as a kind of accessories for everyday wearing,... There are also wedding rings, it's probably the most usual way of using rings. In the past, rings were often used to make seals and rich people usually had some silver rings with them to have something to pay with.



Necklaces are not used so often as rings in the ordinary life, but it's no disadvantage of their art, estetic and material value. Necklaces usually consist of a chain and a pendant. In past, the beauty of a necklace could reveal social and religious position of the owner.

Medals are usually used to honour some heroic or benefiting deeds. Medals can be used in several fields, for example in sport, competitions, as a reward for heroic deeds, memorial medals etc. There are also Olympic medals. The Olympic medal in the picture is from the Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City in 2002.





Sources of information and used literature:

<http://www.muzeum-pribram.cz/>

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