BACKGROUND · PDF · VOLUME 01

The Ore Mountains around 1762

Historical overview of the region, living conditions and Carl's immediate world.

WHY THIS SHEET?
Carl's life did not begin in an empty landscape in 1762. Behind the Ore Mountains lay centuries of mining, forest use, war, craftsmanship and adaptation. This sheet brings together the background that matters most for Volume 01.

A region shaped by work

By 1762, the Ore Mountains were no longer a remote wilderness. Since the High Middle Ages, clearing, settlement and mining had transformed the landscape. The discovery of silver near Christiansdorf/Freiberg in 1168 drew miners, craftsmen and traders into the region. Tin mining followed in the 13th and 14th centuries; by the 15th and 16th centuries, mining had acquired exceptional technical and economic importance. The name “Erzgebirge” is first documented in mining records in 1527.

Ore was only part of the story. Generations of people in the Ore Mountains learned to cope with steep valleys, long winters, limited farmland and changing opportunities for work. Mining, forestry, agriculture, mills, crafts and home-based work overlapped. When one livelihood was no longer enough, another often had to be added.

Forest: livelihood and source of conflict

Wood was fuel, building material and an indispensable resource for mining. At the same time, the forest was wildlife habitat and a resource that not everyone was free to use. Forest and hunting rights formed part of the manorial order. For families living with little, the sight of game in the forest alongside food scarcity could therefore become a bitter contradiction.

In 1713, the Saxon mining official Hans Carl von Carlowitz published his “Sylvicultura oeconomica”, the first German-language specialist book devoted entirely to forestry. His thinking was also connected with the enormous demand for timber created by Saxon mining.

1762: Carl is born into a war

The Seven Years' War lasted from 1756 to 1763. Prussian troops occupied Saxony from the beginning of the war; civilians and towns were burdened by billeting, contributions, plundering and troop movements. Pietzonka records Prussian quarters in Zschopau from 4 September 1756 and reports excesses by hussars in Großolbersdorf in 1761.

It was during this war that Carl Heinrich Stilpner was born in Scharfenstein on 30 September 1762. Pietzonka's chronology gives the time as four o'clock in the afternoon. His parents, Johann Christoph Stilpner and Marie Sophie, née Schuberth, did not belong to the wealthy classes. Pietzonka describes the Scharfenstein branch of the family as poor; the father appears as a mill worker, shoemaker and small householder.

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Scharfenstein: castle above, village below

The family's small property lay in the Gänsewinkel at the foot of the castle hill. According to Pietzonka, Carl's parents bought a house, garden and a piece of high forest for 26 talers in 1745. Above the village stood Scharfenstein Castle, for centuries the seat and administrative centre of a lordship. The physical closeness makes the social order visible: castle, forest, mill, small houses, a few fields and the River Zschopau all lay close together.

HISTORICAL CLASSIFICATION

Volume 01 tells a literary scene. The war, the Black Hussars, Carl's birth and the family's living world are historically anchored. The specific rescue scene involving the smoke-filled room belongs to tradition and is not treated as an archival eyewitness account.

1762 in five sentences

Saxony is in the seventh year of the Seven Years' War.

The Ore Mountains have been a region of settlement, mining and crafts for centuries.

Forest and game are economically important, but their use is legally regulated.

Carl's family lives in modest circumstances at the foot of Scharfenstein Castle.

Carl is born on 30 September 1762 – only a few months before the war ends.

Sources & evidence

Selection of evidence used for this sheet. Status: September 2026.

• Johannes Pietzonka: Karl Stülpner – Legende und Wirklichkeit, 2nd ed., Sachsenbuch 2006, especially pp. 14–17 and the chronology.

• Montanregion Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří: mining history – beginning of mining in 1168; first documented use of the name “Erzgebirge” in 1527.

• Saxon State Office for Archaeology: High Medieval silver mining in Dippoldiswalde – possible beginnings around 1185/1200; depths of 15–26 m around 1210/30.

• Sächsische Biografie / ISGV: Hans Carl von Carlowitz (1645–1714) and “Sylvicultura oeconomica” (1713).

• History of Saxony: Saxony in the Seven Years' War, 1756–1763.

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