BACKGROUND · PDF · VOLUME 02

The Ore Mountains during the Food Crisis

Historical overview of living conditions, food supply, social order and Carl's immediate world, 1770–1772.

Why this sheet?

The hunger years cannot be explained by "bad weather" alone. What mattered was how tightly harvests, prices, work, reserves and social rights were connected. Pietzonka's account links these levels particularly clearly with Scharfenstein and the youth of Carl Stülpner.

Even before the crisis: little room for error

Pietzonka describes Scharfenstein as a place with only a few fields, surrounded by forest and dominated by castle and manor. Many people had to combine several occupations to earn enough. Children also contributed to the family livelihood from an early age. For poor households, rising food prices therefore met very limited reserves.

1770: weather becomes inflation

In January 1770 there is thunder and lightning, and the Zschopau carries high water. Snow falls from 18 to 22 March and the winter crop is spoiled. The summer remains wet and the harvest is poor. Pietzonka explicitly makes the connection: this crop failure becomes the cause of the beginning price surge.

1771: the crisis deepens

After an unusually mild winter, snow returns in May. Rain then continues into August. Pietzonka describes the damage as enormous and the harvest as destroyed. In July, the rye price reaches 10 thalers per Scheffel.

1772: hunger, emergency food and disease

In January 1772 Bohemia blocks grain exports to Saxony. Pietzonka describes bread and flour becoming scarce and people selling their possessions. He lists field greens, plant stalks, grass, tree bark and roots as emergency foods. He then describes fever, exhaustion and mass mortality.

The great wandering

Pietzonka writes of hundreds of people on the roads. Old people left their children and children left their parents so as not to become a burden. His account shows that hunger crises change not only diets and prices, but families, work and ties to home.

Forest and game: food – but not freely available

The forest helped poor people with wood, mushrooms, berries, beechnuts and acorns. Game, however, was not simply available to everyone. Pietzonka describes it as bound to manorial rights and reports that poor people nevertheless turned to the abundance of game during the crisis. The hunger years thus already touch a conflict that later becomes important in Carl's life: food, forest, hunting rights and social order.

Scharfenstein: social differences become visible

Pietzonka contrasts the people's hunger with provisions held by castle and manor. For 1772 he also cites a Scharfenstein court repertory entry concerning Marie Sophie Stilpner, her son Carl and her son-in-law Gottfried Mehner in connection with theft of meat and grain. This reference is particularly important for Volume 02 because it connects the hunger crisis directly with Carl's family.

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Carl's father

Pietzonka states that one can say "with all probability" that Johann Christoph Stilpner became a victim of the famine. For the series, this is not treated as the same degree of certainty as an unambiguous register entry. It is therefore marked as a reasoned historical conclusion.

1770–1772 in five sentences

- A sequence of weather events and crop failures causes the food situation to collapse.
- Grain and bread become dramatically more expensive within a short period.
- Hunger leads to emergency food, disease, high mortality and migration.
- Scharfenstein source references connect the crisis directly with Carl's family.
- When grain from outside finally reaches the Ore Mountains, bread prices fall again – but social hardship does not disappear immediately.

SOURCE NOTE

Working basis: Johannes Pietzonka, Karl Stülpner – Legende und Wirklichkeit, 2nd edition, Sachsenbuch 2006, especially pp. 17–22 and the chronology. The classification follows the source; no unsupported general claims have been added.

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