

Press event

Chemnitz, 24/25 October 2024

smac
staatliches
museum für
archäologie
chemnitz



Key visual of the exhibition © Haus E, haus-e.de

TREASURES & TRAGEDIES

Mining in Saxony

Greeting

Dr. Sabine Wolfram

Director of the smac

Tour of the exhibition

- **Dr. Jens Beutmann**
director of exhibitions at the smac, head curator of the exhibition
- **Dr. Anton Gontscharov**
member of the exhibition project
- **Dr. Christian Landrock**
member of the exhibition project

Other figures of interest | interview partners

- **Wolfram Thiemer** wearing the traditional parade uniform of the smelting worker
- **Siegbert Kranz** wearing the mining official's uniform from the Freiberg miners' association Historische Freiburger Berg- und Hüttenknappschaft e. V.

Director

Dr. Sabine Wolfram

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The smac is an institution of
the Archaeological Heritage
Service of Saxony.

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Facts

Title	TREASURES & TRAGEDIES. Mining in Saxony
Duration	25 October 2024 - 29 June 2025
Website	www.smac.sachsen.de/bergbau
Opening hours	Tuesday - Sunday, 10 am - 6 pm Thursday, 10 am - 8 pm Closed on Mondays, except public holidays Closed on 24, 25, 31 Dec. 2024 and 1 Jan. 2025
Admission prices	Regular: 9 € Reduced: 6 € Families: 14 € Groups (of 10 or more) per person: 6 €
Project management	Dr. Jens Beutmann, archaeologist specialising in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, head of exhibitions at the smac
Project members	Dr. Anton Gontscharow, archaeologist specialising in mining archaeology Dr. Christian Landrock, historian
Exhibition design	VERDANDI Ausstellungs- und Museumsplanung GmbH, Salzburg
Inclusive offers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Screens with text in simple German and videos in German sign language, listening points▪ Tactile tour with audio guide and tactile objects for blind and visually impaired people
Exhibition area	1000 m ²
Number of exhibits	380
Number of lenders	67, from Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and France
Oldest exhibit	Pieces of red ochre from Greece, c. 20,000 before the present
Heaviest exhibit	400 kg gravestone of Nicol Korb from 1509 with the oldest Saxon depiction of hammers and picks, Freiberg Cathedral
Most valuable exhibit	Drinking goblet made of pure silver from the Grünthal liquation plant, 1625

On loan from Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche
Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Most inconspicuous exhibit (and the second most valuable!)

A piece of pure, native silver, according to tradition part of the 400-centner block of silver on which Duke Albrecht is said to have dined underground in the St. Georg mine in Schneeberg in 1477.

Senckenberg Naturhistorische Sammlungen, Dresden

The most political exhibit

The last piece of hard coal mined, on loan from the Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Media information

Chemnitz, 24 October 2024

[↗ view press photos](#)

TREASURES & TRAGEDIES

Mining in Saxony

Special exhibition 25 October 2024 – 29 June 2025 at the smac

The major special exhibition **Treasures & Tragedies. Mining in Saxony** opens on Friday, 25 October 2024 at the smac – Staatliches Museum für Archäologie Chemnitz.

The exhibition is being held under the **patronage of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier**.

It is part of the main programme of the **European Capital of Culture Chemnitz 2025**.

The exhibition title **TREASURES & TRAGEDIES** refers firstly to the hope and promise but ultimately also to human greed for the glittering metals found underground. Mining creates wealth and power, but also new knowledge and new technologies to dig deeper and deeper into mountains and to extract metallic raw materials more and more effectively. Secondly, the title alludes to the dark side of mining: the ruthless exploitation of people, animals and the environment. (The German title references Kumpeltod, "buddies' death" – the name of a 20th century miners' schnapps.)

With **380 exhibits** and around **1,000 square metres of exhibition space**, Treasures & Tragedies brings to the surface what went on underground for thousands of years. The exhibition thus interprets the motto of the European Capital of Culture Chemnitz – "C the Unseen" – in a very special way, because only insiders knew and know what really happened in the tunnels and shafts. Our focus is on the **Ore Mountains**, which extend along the German-Czech border south of Chemnitz. This old mining region is particularly well researched archaeologically and historically.

Discover cultures
Understand history
www.smac.sachsen.de

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The oldest metal find from Saxony is an earring that was made from solid copper in the Neolithic period around 5,000 years ago. In the **12th and again in the 15th century** there was a mining boom on the discovery of rich silver deposits. News spread rapidly and led to a rush, drawing large numbers of miners and service providers such as charcoal burners and blacksmiths to the then inhospitable Ore Mountains. Around the mines, towns grew up, Freiberg with its mining academy and Annaberg with its mining altarpiece being the most famous among them today. A third boom occurred in the **1950s** with the mining of uranium by the Soviet Union.

Exhibition design

VERDANDI Ausstellungs- und Museumsplanungs GmbH from Salzburg designed the exhibition. Its Prologue is a funnel-shaped entrance that “sucks” visitors into the mine. Depending on the subject matter, spacious rooms (Power & Wealth, A Select Group) then alternate with narrow, tunnel-like passages (Knowledge & Skills, Extraction & Exploitation). A continuous element in the wall design is a geometric grid. This evokes the crystalline structures of metal and minerals as well as representing specific mining features: rock layers, seams, ore veins, and individual inclusions of ore or crystal. In addition, the grid is a reference to the geometric principles of surveying, which were of great importance in exploration both above and below the ground. The end of the exhibition leads visitors into a bright room back above ground. Here, the future of mining is discussed.

Quotes

Minister of State Barbara Klepsch, Saxon State Ministry of Culture and Tourism:

"Mining and the hard work done in the Ore Mountains made Saxony great. Over the centuries, Chemnitz and the surrounding area developed into the 'Gateway to the Silver Ore Mountains'. Treasures & Tragedies explores the history of mining and allows guests but also locals to get to know our Saxon roots again. This history is so important that the mining region of Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2019. Therefore there could be no more fitting contribution to the programme of the Capital of Culture of the Year 2025 than an exhibition on the history of mining."

Dr. Sabine Wolfram, director of the smac – Staatliches Museum für Archäologie Chemnitz:

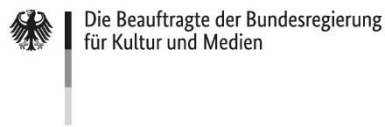
"C - the Unseen: from the smac's point of view there couldn't have been a better motto for the European Capital of Culture, Chemnitz 2025. Making the unseen visible is everyday scientific practice for archaeologists. Layer by layer, we uncover the past and make hidden things visible. And the same applies to mining: what's unknown and often also inconspicuous underground is brought out for the exhibition and presented to the people of Chemnitz, Saxony, Germany, Europe and the world, and interpreted for them. We hope that everyone greatly enjoys seeing and understanding the unseen."

Dr. Jens Beutmann, head curator of the exhibition and director of exhibitions at the smac:

"In essence, the history of mining is a story about all of us. About the way we live, the way we do business, the way we attempt the impossible, driven by hope and faith. It's about how we fail, how we succeed, and how we often pursue our desire for prosperity with scant consideration for our fellow human beings and the natural environment. Yet the history of mining is at the same time a history of progress. Without the belief in progress there would have been no mining; and without mining, no progress."

Funding

"TREASURES & TRAGEDIES. Mining in Saxony" is part of the main programme of the **European Capital of Culture, Chemnitz 2025**.



Diese Maßnahme wird mitfinanziert durch Steuermittel auf der Grundlage des vom Sächsischen Landtag beschlossenen Haushaltes und durch Bundesmittel der Beauftragten der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien sowie Mittel der Stadt Chemnitz.



We would like to thank **Sparkasse Chemnitz** for support in producing the exhibition catalogue.



The 6 topics of the exhibition

1_ All that glisters

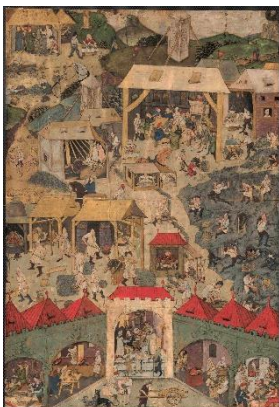
We cannot know for sure what motivated people to dig into mountains thousands of years ago to extract mineral resources. Evidently it was beautiful things – **glittering minerals**, pigments for dyeing – that attracted people’s attention. The first metals were solid, i.e. “pure” copper and gold, which stood out for their lustre.

The materials obtained in this way initially had little practical purpose. People used them as embellishments and adornments for themselves. Until well into the modern era, silver ore was economically the most important raw material extracted from mines – not just in the Ore Mountains. Particularly impressive minerals and ores found their way into princely collections from the 15th century onwards. Silver and other precious metals were worked into valuable showpieces.

2_ Knowledge and skills

To transform non-descript rocks into shiny metal, miners have to face various challenges and perform many work procedures. The search for ore, the construction and operation of mines, the processing and smelting of the ore all require a great deal of **knowledge and skill**. Thanks to their ingenuity, the specialists have been able to dig deeper and deeper and extract more and more metal from the ores.

For thousands of years, experienced miners and master smelters have passed on their know-how through imitation and repetition. In the Middle Ages, scholars began to record and collect this knowledge. Later the first practical mining books were written, many of them in the Ore Mountains. The founding of mining academies in the 18th century turned mining knowledge into mining science, though practical skills remain very important today.



The picture shows in exceptionally rich detail the extraction of silver at the end of the 15th century. All the stages of the process – mining below ground, ore trading, ore refining, melting and casting, and finally coin minting – are reproduced in the illumination. The building at the bottom of the picture in which the coiners are working is the Italian Court, the mint in the royal palace at Kutná Hora.

3_ Power and wealth

Whoever controls raw materials can use them to exercise **power**. In the Margravate of Meissen, this link was already abundantly clear in the Middle Ages. Then the most important mining product was silver, and the ruler of the territory (the margrave) had the right to mint coins from it. This was very much the equivalent of today's "licence to print money". But who, apart from the princes themselves, benefited from this **wealth**?

With the invention of the atomic bomb, the connection between mining and power took on a new dimension, as uranium became the key to global power after the Second World War. More than 200,000 people worked in the Ore Mountains for the uranium mining company Wismut extracting a raw material that enabled the Soviet Union to catch up with the USA in the arms race.

4_ Extraction and exploitation

Mineral deposits are **exploited** – not a negative term per se in mining – and the amount of a mineral resource extracted by mining is referred to as the yield. Once exploited, the mineral resource cannot be extracted a second time.

There was an awareness even at an early stage that mining also "consumes" other natural resources and people, too. Traditional mining was extremely hazardous to health and the life expectancy of miners was consequently low. Working animals such as horses were exploited ruthlessly. The impact of ore mining and processing on the environment is still clearly identifiable centuries later.

Over the centuries, technical innovations have made work safer and miners have fought in solidarity for better conditions. More care is taken today of nature and the environment. In many countries around the world, however, mining is still dangerous work.

5_ A select group

Mining leaves its mark not only on miners' bodies but also on their minds. In former mining areas, a strong identification with mining can still be found today. The Pit Foreman's Song (Steigerlied) is sung at Christmas markets in the Ore Mountains, as it is in the football stadiums of the Ruhr valley in western Germany. The traditions of mining entered the collective consciousness because very many people were employed in the mining industry.

For centuries, members of the mining and metallurgical guilds formed a **select group**. They had their own specialised terminology and special clothing, demonstrating the exclusivity of their profession. With the discontinuation of mining and the gradual passing of contemporary witnesses, the heirs and inhabitants of the mining regions have taken over the legacy.

6_ Another "ore rush"?

Our world is still dependent on mining. All human-made products today require raw materials obtained by mining. Artificial Intelligence and renewable energies cannot exist without natural resources from the ground. That is why countries and companies around the world are searching for new deposits.

The Ore Mountains are in the focus of attention once again. The Wismut company stopped mining operations in 1991, but today there are efforts to revive the mining industry to extract rare elements such as tin, silver and lithium. The Saxon state government committed to the mining of critical raw materials in the Ore Mountains with its new Raw Material Strategy in 2023. But what will the impact be if the natural resources of the Ore Mountains become important to the world again? Who will profit and who will bear the burden?

VIEW PRESS PHOTOS

Press photos can be downloaded here: <https://www.smac.sachsen.de/presse.html>

You are free to use the press photos in connection with a report on the mining exhibition TREASURES & TRAGEDIES. We have obtained authorisation for this purpose.



20241026_smac_Bergbau_AUS-01.jpg

View of the entrance area of the exhibition.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20241026_smac_Bergbau_AUS-02.jpg

The model of St. Anne's Church and its surroundings before the Annaberg town fire of 1604 is in the "Power and Wealth" section.

© LfA/smac, Laura Frenzel



20241026_smac_Bergbau_AUS-03.jpg

The bronze sculpture Bergmannskuh ("miner's cow") – actually a goat – is a tactile object in the "Power and Wealth" section.

© LfA/smac, Laura Frenzel



20241026_smac_Bergbau_AUS-04.jpg

View of the Prologue to the exhibition, "Glittering Prospects", with various minerals.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20241026_smac_Bergbau_AUS-05.jpg

The drinking goblet in the shape of a miner made of gilded silver is displayed in the exhibition's Prologue.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20241026_smac_Bergbau_AUS-06.jpg

The children's tunnel in "A Select Group" displays treasures under black light.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20241026_smac_Bergbau_AUS-07.jpg

Rescue suits and equipment in "Extraction & Exploitation" shows the dangers of mining.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-01.jpg

Label: Book illustration from Kuttenberg, Bohemia, early 16th century

Description: The Kutná Hora Illumination presents silver mining, smelting and coin production in Kuttenberg, Bohemia, at the beginning of the 16th century.

© GASK – The Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region, Kutná Hora



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-02.jpg

Label: Ornamental miner's axe, c. 1635

Description: The Prince-Elector's axe, a miner's parade axe, was presented by Freiberg council to the later Elector Johann Georg II in 1635.

© Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Rüstkammer,

Foto: Jürgen Karpinski



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-02-freigestellt.jpg

Label: Ornamental miner's axe, c. 1635

Description: The Prince-Elector's axe, a miner's parade axe, was presented by Freiberg council to the later Elector Johann Georg II in 1635.

© Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Rüstkammer,
Foto: Jürgen Karpinski



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-03.jpg

Label: Miner's drinking jug from the Upper Harz, made of partly gilded silver, 1732

Description: This jug was made from silver extracted from the Rammelsberg near Goslar. The three exterior illustrations show scenes from mining and related industries, such as forestry. The jug holds approx. five bottles of wine and was used at miners' association festivals for communal drinking as a sign of solidarity.

© Richard Borek Stiftung, Braunschweig



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-04.jpg

Label: Scrooge McDuck

Description: A prominent figure who became rich through mining is Scrooge McDuck. According to his own legend, he prospected successfully for gold in North America in the late 19th century.

© LfA/smac, Foto: Laura Frenzel



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-05.jpg

Label: Baron von Heynitz in a parade uniform designed by himself, c. 1772

Description: Friedrich Anton von Heynitz (1725-1802) gazes at the viewer proudly in a magnificent uniform which he designed himself. He embodies the professional pride of the officials who had organised the mining industry in Saxony for over 200 years. Heynitz was for a time the chief mining officer and was involved in founding the Bergakademie (mining school) in Freiberg.

© TU Bergakademie Freiberg, Foto: W. Rabich

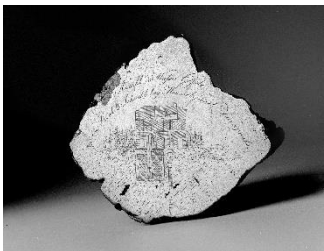


20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-06.jpg

Label: Group photo of the Prasse Brigade, undated

Description: After the Second World War, Charlotte Prasse (1912-1966) was faced with the choice of either clearing away rubble from bomb sites or going to work at the Wismut uranium mine. She chose the latter because the food supply was better. Initially a labourer, the single mother rose to become foreman, district foreman and finally district director of opencast mining at the Annaberg-Buchholz works.

© Privataarchiv Maritta Prate



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-07.jpg

Label: Hand-stone from the Reichelt shaft of the Himmelsfürst mine, native silver, 1818

Description: "Hand-stones" (Handsteine) are ore specimens small enough to hold and used as showpieces. They soon found their way into princely collections. Some of these naturally occurring objects were elaborately crafted. Displayed in cabinets of curiosities, they demonstrated the prince's strong attachment to mining.

© Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-08.jpg

Label: Traditional canary cage, 1850-1900, probably made in St. Andreasberg, Harz Mountains

Description: Today often seen as a symbol of the exploitation of animals, canaries would be taken into mines. If oxygen was scarce, the birds fell from their perch and the miners were able to escape.

save. In fact, the use of canaries in the traditional German mining industry is not proven.

© Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-08-freigestellt.jpg

Label: Traditional canary cage, 1850-1900, probably made in St. Andreasberg, Harz Mountains

Description: Today often seen as a symbol of the exploitation of animals, canaries would be taken into mines. If oxygen was scarce, the birds fell from their perch and the miners were able to escape.

save. In fact, the use of canaries in the traditional German mining industry is not proven.

© Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-09.jpg

Label: Drinking vessel in the shape of a miner, gilded silver, 1680

Description: Mining officials, councillors of mining towns, mining guilds and companies had fine drinking vessels made with which to welcome guests. This vessel, made by Freiberg goldsmith Andreas Müller, was a gift from the Freiberg municipal councillor to the Elector of Saxony. The miner's hat served as the lid.

© Stadt- und Bergbaumuseum Freiberg



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-10.jpg

Label: Wood chip light in a holder of bone, 13th-9th century BC.

Description: The simplest light source that early miners could use was a burning chip of resinous wood. This was held between the teeth or placed in a simple holder. In the case of this find, the holder was an animal's vertebral bone. This meant that the light could be put down in a convenient place.

© Museum Kitzbühel | Sammlung Alfons Walde



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-11.jpg

Label: Joachimsthaler, Stefan v. Schlick & Brüder, Münzstätte Joachimsthal (Jáchymov), 1520-1526

Description: In silver mining regions, coins could be minted in great quantity and circulated widely thanks to trade. The names of the coins were widely diffused, too. The coin known as the Joachimsthaler and later the taler ultimately became the dollar.

© Münzkabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

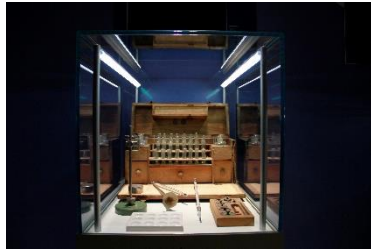


20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-12.jpg

Label: Divining rod, Saxony, 19th century

Description: To this day, some old miners swear by the efficacy of the divining (or dowsing) rod. The scholar Georgius Agricola, 500 years ago, no longer believed in it. Modern science proves Agricola right.

© Museum für Sächsische Volkskunst, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-13.jpg

Label: Chemical field laboratory, 1945-1960

Description: The Soviet-made field laboratory was used by Wismut AG's prospectors to quickly analyse rock samples at the extraction site.

© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-14.jpg

Label: J.C. Teller: Arch-shaped candelabras showing the Fall, the expulsion from Paradise, and two miners, 1740

Description: Christmas in the Ore Mountains is unthinkable without arch-shaped candle holders. The oldest specimen is displayed here, made by blacksmith J.C. Teller in 1740. In it, two miners are surrounded by biblical scenes: on the right Adam and Eve (Fall of Man), on the left the subsequent expulsion from paradise, above them the characteristic arc of lights.

© LfA/smac, Laura Frenzel



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-15.jpg

Label: Figure of St. Barbara, 1475-1505

Description: In the Late Middle Ages, Saint Barbara was one of the most popular saints in the (then still Catholic) Ore Mountain region. She was venerated by miners, too, but became a genuine mining saint only in modern times. In the 20th century, worship of her among the mining community was encouraged by the Catholic Church in the Ruhr region.

© LfA/smac, Laura Frenzel



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-16.jpg

Label: Ornamental surveying compass, 1561

Description: This compass was commissioned by the Dresden court as a decorative instrument since Augustus, Elector of Saxony, had a great interest in science. A surveying compass was used for clarifying ownership issues underground. On the lid are allegories of the celestial bodies: heaven and Earth were believed at that time to belong together.



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-17.jpg

Label: Safety helmet provided for Erich Honecker's visit to a mine, 1978

Description: The first miners in the Ore Mountains protected themselves from injury by leather clothing and padded caps. With industrialisation, helmets became mandatory underground, even for high-ranking visitors.

© LfA/smac, Laura Frenzel



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-18.jpg

Label: Miniature mine in a nutshell

Description: Since the 17th century, former miners in the Ore Mountains have made wooden toys for sale, resulting in a unique form of folk art. The tradition remains deeply rooted amongst the population.

© LfA/smac, Laura Frenzel



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-19.jpg

Label: Baroque miners' parade at the festival of Saturn in 1719, reconstruction by Siegfried Werner, 1980-1990

Description: In 1719, the Prince-Elector of Saxony, Frederick Augustus, married Maria Josepha, daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor. This enabled his father, Augustus the Strong, to forge an alliance between the House of Wettin and the imperial family. The arrival of the bridal couple in Dresden was consequently celebrated with a festival parade of approx. 1,600 mine workers.

© LfA/smac, Laura Frenzel



20241022_smac_Bergbau_EXP-20.jpg

Label: Board with instructions on knocking signals in the event of mine collapse, 1947-1990

Description: This information board was recovered from a Wismut mine. It reminded miners before descending of the knocking signals to use to attract attention if the mine collapsed.

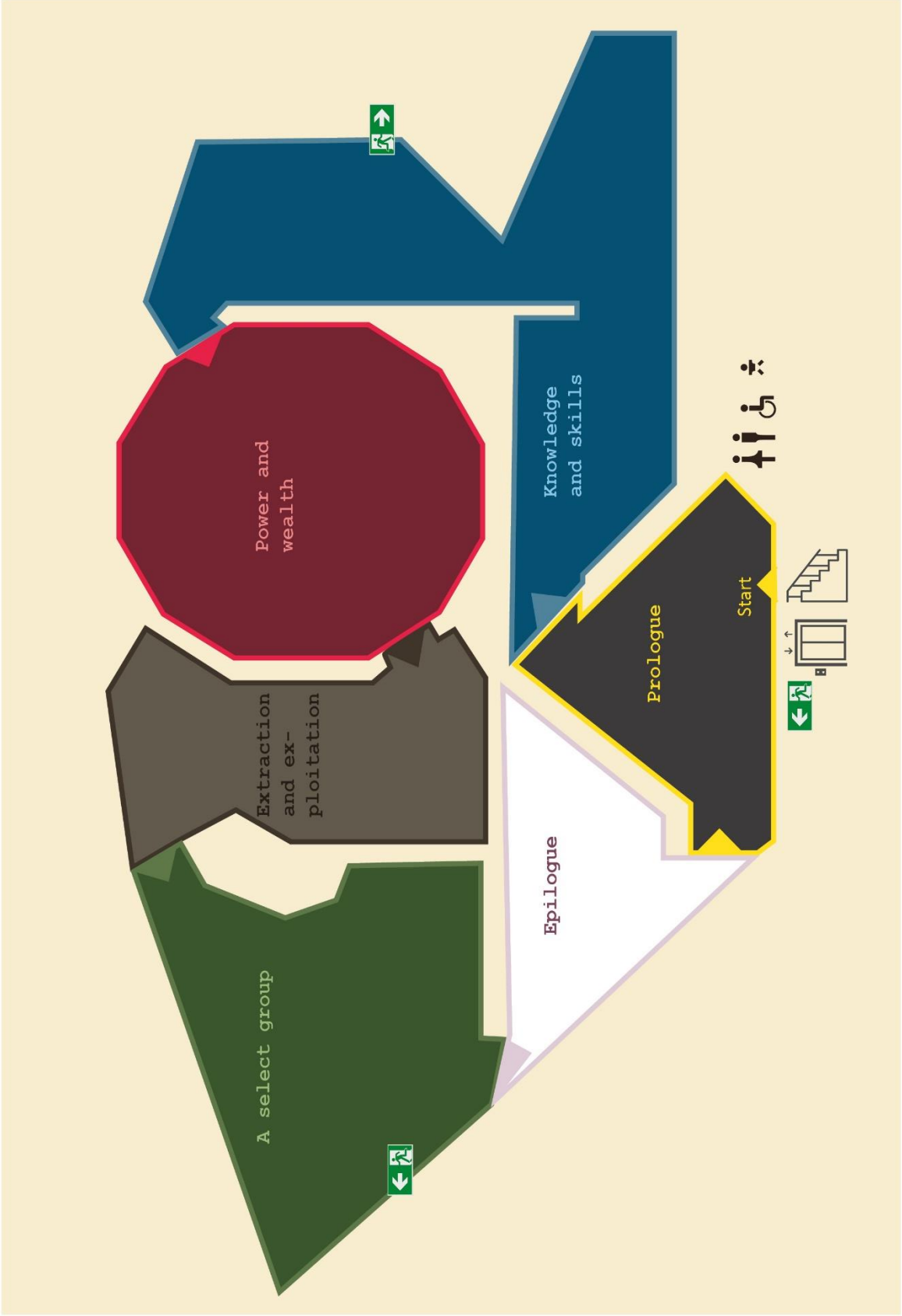
© LfA/smac, Annelie Blasko

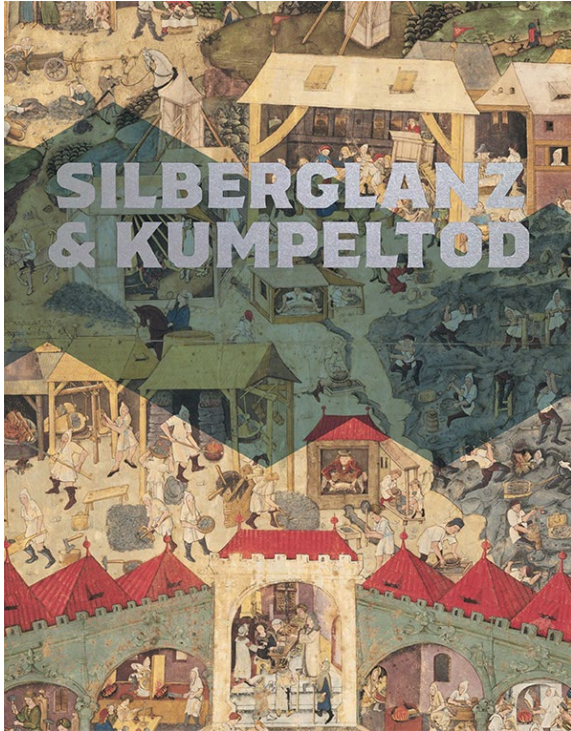


smac_01_Key-Visual-Silberglanz-und-Kumpeltod.jpg

Label: Key visual for the mining exhibition Treasures & Tragedies by the State Museum of Archaeology, Chemnitz (smac)

© Haus E, Chemnitz





SILBERGLANZ & KUMPELTOD (TREASURES & TRAGEDIES)

Catalogue accompanying the mining exhibition

By Jens Beutmann, Anton Gontscharov, Christian Landrock and Sabine Wolfram
Exhibition catalogues of the State Museum of Archaeology, Chemnitz, vol. 7 (Dresden 2024)

Thread-stitched hardcover
21 x 27 cm
180 Pages
Printed in Germany
ISBN: 978-3-943770-83-4
ISSN: 2567-7152
24,90 €

Our entire civilisation is based on mining. For thousands of years, people have used metals in all areas of life, whether to make jewellery, weapons or microchips. The exhibition catalogue with 16 articles explores the 4,000 year history of mining, revealing both its glittering and dark side.

The authors tell a story of power and wealth, pioneering spirit and ingenuity, solidarity, faith and tradition. But extraction also means exploitation: mining underground harms human health and above ground it harms the environment.

The articles are illustrated by exhibits from the mining exhibition **Treasures & Tragedies** (25.10.2024 to 29.06.2025).

Authors:

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Available from 25 October 2024 in the smac museum shop and in the [online shop of the Archaeological Heritage Office in Saxony](#)