

HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT PILLOW-LACE MAKING IN THE BOHEMIAN ERZGEBIRGE

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From about 1561 on pillow-lace making spread from Annaberg in the Saxon Erzgebirge not only on the Saxon side, but was also taken up rapidly by women and girls among the mountain-dwellers in the Bohemian mountain villages. Around 1600 St. Joachimsthal was an important lace-making place, and its traders marketed their wares by way of Prague, where Saxon lace-sellers also traveled. There were many lace-dealers among the Exulants who fled to Saxony around 1660. Girls from Bohemian villages made lace-work for merchants from Annaberg, and for a long time Bohemian and Saxon lace-making were very closely connected. Lace-dealers were at first peddlers with „lace knapsacks“, and later were for the most part the most respected merchants in the small mountain towns. Their trade connections extended to Hungary and Tirol, but also „into the Empire.“ Thousands of women and girls worked for them for low wages. In the 18th century Graslitz and Neudek were leading places for lace. In accordance with mercantilist ideas, Maria Theresa promoted lace-making through bounties, encouraged the establishment of lace-making schools, sent for a mistress of this craft from the Hapsburg Netherlands, and had a manufactory established in Prague. Lists for the year 1786 reveal large numbers of lace-makers for most of the mountain districts and many indi-

vidual villages. After the loss of the Netherlands, Austria tried to domesticate Brussels lace. Twenty-two girls from the Erzgebirge were trained in Vienna, and they established lace-making schools in their home villages. By 1818 there were fifteen schools. Brussels-type pillow-lace was made in ten larger places from Graslitz to Kupferberg, and needle-point lace was made in Gossengrün. Flax cultivation and flax dressing were supposed to ensure fine thread. In 1822, however, the schools were dissolved, since cheap machine-made lace had in the meantime come into use. In the struggle against it, handmade lace turned to silk lace. In 1845, in spite of extremely low wages, 31,731 lace-makers could still be counted, but the real number can be set much higher. From 1834 on the Graslitz lace school became important, and girls from Gossengrün produced point lace in the Belgian style, just as many other mountain villages developed special styles. Much lace was delivered to Saxon merchants. Austria won prizes with Erzgebirge lace at international expositions, and its lace trade extended to Russia and America. In 1905, 15,000 lace-makers were still recorded in the Bohemian mountain area. In 1920 Neudek, Graslitz, Sebastiansberg and Weipert were the main centers of the lace art. A state school was in existence from 1903 to 1918 in Vienna, and later in Prague. The First World War brought most severe hardships to the lace-makers. Afterwards there was a long period of prosperity. In 1945 thousands of Sudeten German lace-makers brought their beloved lace bags with them into the Federal Republic.

At the end some information on the folklore of the lace bag is presented, and the lace names as well as the customs of the lace-women are described.