

Yearly Sums Paid to Those Claiming Damages from Air Pollution near Freiberg in Saxony (1855–67)

Abstract

The Ore Mountains [*Erzgebirge*] ran along the border between the Kingdom of Saxony, in Germany, and the Bohemian territories of the Habsburg Empire. Silver mining in and around the city of Freiberg had been a great source of wealth for the Saxon state long before the nineteenth century. But as smelting works grew larger and more numerous during the course of that century, environmental damage occurred and citizens filed claims for state compensation. Among the worst polluters were the smelting works in Halsbrücke and Mulden, near Freiberg. One of the works had a woefully inadequate 60-meter smokestack. (An image of a 200-meter smokestack, erected in 1889, is included in this volume.) In 1855, the Saxon state parliament formed a commission to investigate compensation claims. After visiting the Halsbrücke and Mulden sites, the members of the commission designated four “damage zones” [*Schadensgebiete*]. Compensation to pollution victims varied according to their proximity to the plants. The table below shows that compensation payments from 1855 to 1867 amounted to almost 137,000 Thaler.

Source

Compensation for Damage from Smelting Plant Smoke

Year	Total sum [in Thaler]	Halsbrücke smelting works	Mulden smelting works
1855	4,884	4,481	403
1856	5,520	4,722	798
1857	5,552	4,231	1,321
1858	5,413	3,789	1,624
Voluntary supplementary payment	980	725	255
1859	6,449	5,049	1,400
1860	9,774	7,229	2,545
1861	12,722	8,622	4,100
1862	9,809	6,965	2,844
1863	8,746	6,746	2,000
1864	14,383	10,620	3,763
1865	10,015	7,690	2,325
1861-65 Supplementary payment for forest damages	24,785	1,479	23,306
1866	8,426	6,176	2,250
1867	9,181	7,124	2,057
Total	136,639	85,648	50,991

Source: *Jahrbuch für das Berg- und Hüttenwesen im Königreich Sachsen* (1890), Table 1; reprinted in Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, *Das unendliche Meer der Lüfte. Luftverschmutzung, Industrialisierung und Risikodebatten im 19. Jahrhundert*. Essen: Klartext, 1996, pp. 171.

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