

0. SNOW WHITE - COULD SHE BE MARGARETE? - Story  
Preface

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In this portrait, by an unnamed artist, we see Margarete von Waldeck, a German girl who lived during the 16th century. Some historians think Margarete was the real "Snow White."

It's impossible to be sure, but scholars think the Brothers Grimm may have used real people as the basis for some of their stories. Did these tellers of tales dig into history for the [story of Snow White](#)?

We have some clues that the answer is "yes."

The first clue takes us back to the 16th century. A beautiful girl - [Margarete von Waldeck](#), who was born in 1533 - lived near a small town in northwestern Germany. The town - where a [leading occupation was mining](#) - shared Margarete's last name.

Children worked in [the Waldeck mines](#), just like they did elsewhere in Europe. [Crawl spaces](#), in [mine seams](#) and shafts, were frequently so small that [only children could get through them](#).

A surviving portrait of Margarete reveals her beauty. Wearing a gorgeous dress, the dark-haired girl with a pretty face looks like the princess she was. Her father was Count Philipp IV von Waldeck-Wildungen. Her mother - Margarethe von Ostfriesland - died when her second daughter was only four years old.

Margarete von Waldeck thereafter had a stepmother - Katharina von Hatzfeld. Although facts about their relationship are lost in time, Margarete left [the family home](#) - near the picturesque town of [Bad Wildungen](#) - when she was about sixteen. She didn't just leave home, however. She left her country.

Traveling over the seven mountains of the Spessart, she arrived in [Brussels](#) where Margarete, and her beauty, caused quite a sensation. Her father had sent her to live under the care of [Maria von Kastilien](#) with a specific objective in mind: His daughter needed a suitable husband.

Before long, [Philip II](#) - the future King of Spain - was smitten by Margarete's appearance.

The legends of history tell us that Philip wanted to marry the girl from Germany. However, Philip - like other European royals who sat on thrones - was expected to marry for political reasons (not love or infatuation). If love entered such a marriage of convenience, that emotion was a benefit (although one could not expect it).

Margarete had nothing meaningful to offer Philip by way of a political alliance. Someone - perhaps to protect Philip, perhaps to harm Margarete - made sure that no marriage would ever take place between the man from Spain and the girl from Germany.

While still living in Brussels, Margarete became extremely ill. People who knew her thought she'd been poisoned.

When she wrote her Last Will and Testament - not long after falling ill - her handwriting seemed shaky. Shaky handwriting could be the sign of someone with tremors. Among other causes, tremors is a sign of poisoning.

Whatever her illness, Margarete von Waldeck died in 1554. She was just [21 years old](#). If someone caused her death by poisoning, it couldn't have been her stepmother, however.. She had died eight years earlier, in 1546.

Although this tale has some elements of Snow White - a prince, a [beautiful girl](#), a stepmother and little mining people - there is another candidate with seemingly better credentials. To learn more about it, we need to investigate some eighteenth-century clues.

Once again, we have to take a trip to Germany.

**ISSUES AND QUESTIONS TO PONDER:** Does it ever make sense to marry someone just to cement a political alliance? What assurances would you have that the political alliance would be a lasting one?

If being "a royal" meant that you had to marry for political convenience, not for love, would you want to be a royal? Why, or why not?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/SNOW-WHITE-COULD-SHE-BE-MARGARETE-Snow-White>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/SNOW-WHITE-COULD-SHE-BE-MARGARETE-Snow-White>

## Media Stream

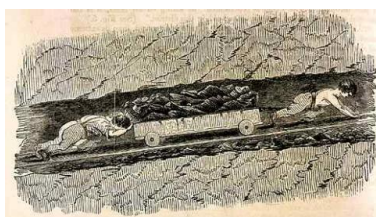


### Margarete von Waldeck - Snow White?

Image of Margarete von Waldeck, online courtesy Wikipedia.de.

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### Child Miners - Working in Confined Spaces

Illustration from Lord Ashley's 1842 report on child labor, depicting child miners. Image online, courtesy U.K. National Archives - Catalog reference: ZHC 2/79.

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### Child Miner - Pushing Coal in Narrow Seam

Illustration from Lord Ashley's 1842 report on child labor, depicting child miners. Image online, courtesy U.K. National Archives - Catalog reference: ZHC 2/79.

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### Child Miners - Heavy Labor

Illustration from Lord Ashley's 1842 report on child labor, depicting child miners. Image online, courtesy U.K. National Archives - Catalog reference: ZHC 2/79.

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### Margarete von Waldeck - Family Castle

Image of Schloss Freidrichstein, online courtesy Wikipedia.de

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### Bad Wildungen - Fairy Tale Town

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### Philip II of Spain and Margarete von Waldeck

Painting of Philip II of Spain, after the famous Titian painting, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Brussels - Map Locator

Map locator, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Snow White - The Heroine

Cover of *Mein erstes Märchenbuch* ("My First Fairy Tale Book"), with illustrations by Carl Offtenderinger and Heinrich Leutemann. Published by Wilhelm Effenberger (F. Loewes Verlag), Stuttgart, end of 19th century. Image online, courtesy Wikipedia.de

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