



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

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This castle, known as *Schloss Lohr am Main*, contains a special mirror. The artifact may be the "Mirror Mirror on the Wall" (in the story of Snow White). Photo by Sven Teschke. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0 DE](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/de/)

The Bavarian town of [Lohr am Main](https://www.lohr-am-main.de/) (Lohr on the Main River) may be the hometown of the real Snow White.

In the middle of the eighteenth-century, a Prince named Philipp Christoph von Erthal lived in a Lohr-area castle with his family. On the 15th of June, 1729, the prince and his wife had a baby daughter.

According to records in the local town hall, the von Erthals named their child Maria Sophia Margaretha Catherina. (People often used lots of names in those days.)

At some point - historians believe it was in 1741 - Maria Sophia's mother died. Prince Philipp married again (likely in 1743). His new wife - Maria's stepmother - was Claudia Elisabeth von Erthal.

German historians tell us that Claudia von Erthal was a domineering woman who clearly favored her own children - from her first marriage - over Maria Sophia. She moved into [Prince Philipp's castle](https://www.lohr-am-main.de/) in Lohr am Main.

Lohr is located near a heavily forested part of Bavaria known as the [Spessart](https://www.spessart.de/) ("Woodpecker") Forest. When the von Erthals lived there, the town was also famous for a glassworks company called *Kurmainsische Spiegelmanufaktur* (the Lohr Mirror Manufacturer).

[Glass-making businesses](https://www.spessart.de/) were often located near forests, particularly during the Middle Ages, since trees were needed for the [glass-making process](https://www.spessart.de/). The Lohr glassmaking company is still in business.

Eighteenth-century mirrors, produced by Lohr's glass company, were famous for their extraordinary quality. The glass was so good that people said the mirrors "always spoke the truth."

Perhaps that reputation caused some of the mirrors, made by the glassworks company, to be called "Talking Mirrors." Historians believe that Prince Philipp bought one of those [talking mirrors](https://www.spessart.de/) for his second wife, Maria Sophia's stepmother Claudia.

The mirror, which the Brothers Grimm may have incorporated into their story, survives at the von Erthal castle. So does a pair of child's shoes - now 200 years old - found in the family's home (which has now been transformed into the Spessart Museum).

So far, the evidence linking Snow White to Maria Sophia seems fairly compelling, but what about the seven dwarfs? What clues do we have about their existence in the Lohr region of Germany?

As it happens ... there are persuasive clues about that issue, too.

The general area, in and around Lohr, is known as ["The Spessart."](https://www.spessart.de/) In addition to the great forest - among the last of Germany's virgin trees - the Spessart has seven mountains. Some of [the mountains](https://www.spessart.de/) contain rich natural resources which were previously mined.

The town of Bieber - located west of Lohr, at the [northwest border of the Spessart](https://www.spessart.de/) - was once the [region's mining center](https://www.spessart.de/). The area mines were [very productive](https://www.spessart.de/) and [economically significant](https://www.spessart.de/). They were best-known for their [copper](https://www.spessart.de/) and lead.

Mine seams, shafts and tunnels were usually very narrow, so only the [smallest of miners](https://www.spessart.de/) could move around in them. Many of the miners in Bieber - just like miners in other places throughout Europe (and Germany) - were [children](https://www.spessart.de/).

The Brothers Grimm - who were born in Hanau, on the western edge of the Spessart - likely knew all about these stories and goings-on. They likely knew about something else, too.

A poisonous plant, commonly known as "Deadly Nightshade," grows throughout the Spessart region. In addition to its berries, which can be deadly to people, the plant is the basis of atropine. Such a substance, when applied to a peddler's wares or injected into an apple, could cause someone to become extremely ill - or die.

If Snow White (whom the Brothers Grimm called *Schneewittchen*) * really was Maria Sophia, she certainly had access to a deep forest if she ran away from home. If she ran to a home maintained by miners, would those miners have been dwarfs - or - could they have been children?

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS TO PONDER: Given the information you now have, do you think the story of "Snow White" could be based - at least in part - on real people? Why, or why not?

If "Snow White" is based on historical reality, which of the two candidates - Margarete or Maria Sophia - do you think is more likely to be the "real" Snow White? Why?

* Follow the *Schneewittchen* link to hear the "Snow White" story in its original language - German.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

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

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

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

Media Stream



Castle Holding Snow White's Mirror

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Castle-Holding-Snow-White-s-Mirror>



Lohr am Main - Hometown of Snow White

Photo of Lohr am Main, online via lastfm.de

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lohr-am-Main-Hometown-of-Snow-White>



Snow White - Real Home

Photo of the von Erthal castle, currently home to the Spessart Museum, online via Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Snow-White-Real-Home>

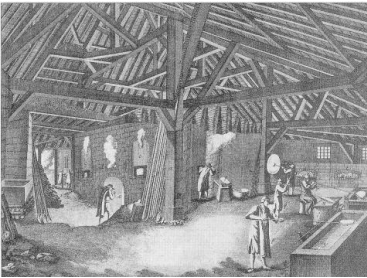


Snow White - Spessart Forest

Photo of the Spessart Forest, online via Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Snow-White-Spessart-Forest>



Glass-Making in the Spessart

Image online, courtesy Wikipedia.de

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Glass-Making-in-the-Spessart>

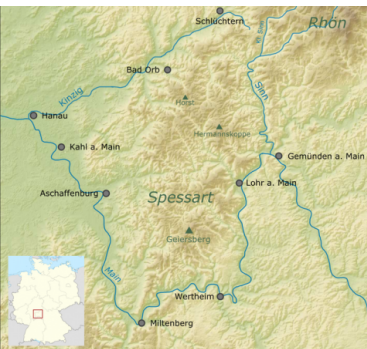


Snow White - Actual "Talking Mirror"

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia.de

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Snow-White-Actual-Talking-Mirror->



Spessart - Map Locator

Map locator online, courtesy Wikipedia.de.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Spessart-Map-Locator>

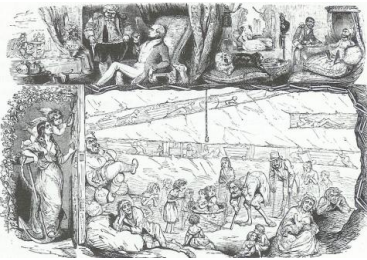


Child Miner - Pulling Coal

Image online, via UK National Archives. Quoted passage, as noted above.

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View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Child-Miner-Pulling-Coal>

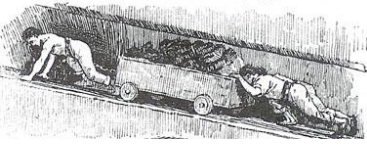


Child Miners - Punch, Political Cartoon

Illustration from *Punch* online, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Child-Miners-Punch-Political-Cartoon>



Child Miners - Moving Coal Up a Steep Slope

Image online via UK National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Child-Miners-Moving-Coal-Up-a-Steep-Slope>



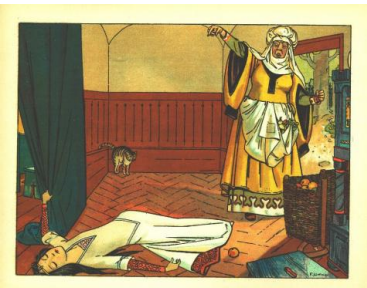
Child Miners - Working by the Light of a Candle

Illustration of candle-lit mine scene, online via UK National Archives.

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Child-Miners-Working-by-the-Light-of-a-Candle>



Snow White - Poisoned by an Apple

Drawing by Franz Jüttner (1865-1925), included in *Sneewittchen*, Scholz' Künstler-Bilderbücher, Mainz 1905. Image online, courtesy Wikipedia.de.

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Snow-White-Poisoned-by-an-Apple>



Snow White - Visit by Stepmother

Image from *Mein erstes Märchenbuchs* - "My First Fairy Tale Book" - with illustrations by Carl Offterdinger and Heinrich Leutemann. Published by Wilhelm Effenberger (F. Loewes Verlag), Stuttgart, end of the 19th century.

Image online, courtesy Wikipedia.de

View this asset at:

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