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Pioneering in Industrial Medicine

The classic description of metalliferous mining in the sixteenth century is to be found in DE RE METALLICA by Georg Bauer (1494-1555) who was more commonly known as Georgius Agricola. He was born in Glauchau in Saxony. Between the ages of thirty and thirty-three he studied philosophy, medicine, natural sciences in Italy attending the universities of Bologna, Venice and perhaps Padua. In 1526 he was appointed official physician to the mining town of Joachimsthal, DE RE METALLICA was published in 1556, a year after the death of Agricola. It is a scholarly work consisting of twelve books which deal with every aspect of mining and with the associated smelting and refining of gold and silver. The sixth book ends with an account of the diseases and accidents prevalent among the miners and the means available to guard against them. To protect the miners against dust Agricola advises purification of the air in the mine by ventilating machines and the use of loose veils over the faces of the miners.

Hunter, D: The Diseases of Occupations,
Boston, Little, Brown, 1962

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