

Carl Heinrich von Heineken (1707-1791): His Origin and His Dresden Years

Carl Heinrich von Heineken was baptised in Lübeck on 24 December 1707. He was descended from a family in which the arts were deeply rooted. His parents, Paul Heineken and Catharina Elisabeth (née Oesterreich), were portrait painters and his mother additionally engaged in the art trade. His younger brother, Christian Heinrich who was baptised on 27 June 1721, was widely known as the “Lübeck Child Prodigy”.

Heineken studied law and literature at the universities of Leipzig and Halle from 1724 onwards. Around 1730 he took up the position of a private tutor, first in the household of his friend Johann Ulrich König, a court poet in Dresden, and subsequently with Minister Alexander Count von Sulkowsky. In 1739 Heineken was appointed private secretary and librarian to Cabinet Minister Heinrich Count von Brühl, administering the count’s extensive possessions. Following this, Heineken was made *General Accise Sekretär*, *Kammerrat*, and *Oberamtsrat* at the Saxon Court. After the death of the court physician Johann Heinrich Heucher in 1746, the Polish King Augustus III appointed him Director of the Royal Cabinet of Prints and Drawings. One of Heineken’s main duties was to supplement the Royal Collection by major acquisitions. In doing so, he established a broad network of art agents across Europe, consisting of diplomats, art dealers, painters, scholars, and connoisseurs. Heineken also acquired many important paintings for the Royal Picture Gallery. As a result, premier works of art from across Europe arrived in Dresden, including Correggio’s *La famosissima Notte* and Raffael’s *Sistine Madonna*. In 1754, at the height of his career, Heineken was received at the French court with great civility. In his honour even the famous water games of Versailles were set in motion. Already several years prior to this, in 1749, Heineken had been knighted and made a *Reichsritter* in recognition of his various merits.

Heineken lived in a house in the very centre of Dresden, next to the Taschenberg Hill southeast of the Zwinger. This dwelling was directly attached to the Zwinger and a door which Heineken had deliberately broken through between both buildings gave him immediate access to the Royal Cabinet of Prints and Drawings.

However, the Seven Years’ War impaired Heineken’s fortune. While the King and Count Brühl fled to Warsaw, the Prussians arrested Heineken – Brühl’s closest confidant – in 1756 and held him captive in the Dresden town hall. After the war, the Saxons themselves arrested Heineken. He was deposed from his offices and prosecuted for embezzlement. By then his two important patrons, the King and Count Brühl, had passed away. The verdict of the protracted trial eventually saw Heineken (then already in possession of Altdöbern Palace) acquitted but only on the condition that he permanently leaves Dresden.