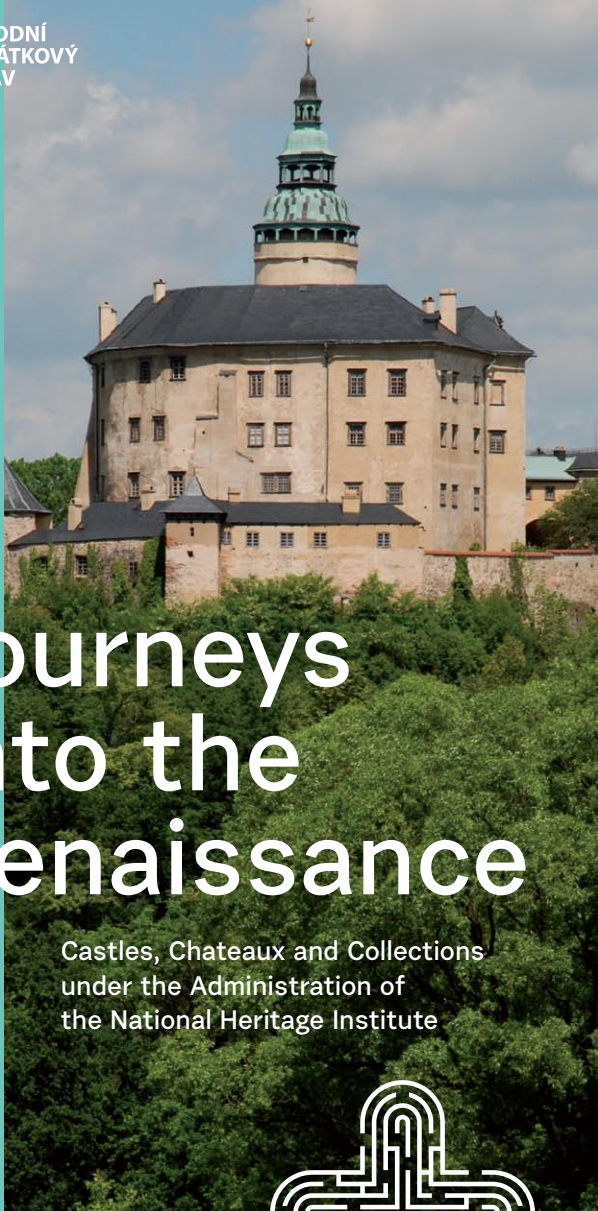




NÁRODNÍ
PAMÁTKOVÝ
ÚSTAV



Journeys into the Renaissance

Castles, Chateaux and Collections
under the Administration of
the National Heritage Institute



Rok
renesanční
šlechty



Dear visitors,

the Renaissance Age left a lasting trace in the appearance of a number of seats of the nobility that are now under the administration of the National Heritage Institute. It is not only the outstanding architecture and rich art collections that attest to the extraordinary Renaissance legacy, but also the considerable interest regularly paid to them by the visitors. Apart from the famous aristocratic residences that still bear distinct marks of the Renaissance stamped into them by the great aristocratic houses of the age, such as Český Krumlov and Litomyšl, sites that have been inscribed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage, a key part in the cultural heritage of our country is also played by a number of other Renaissance monuments, many of which are yet to be discovered. In this context I would like to mention the noteworthy castle complex in Uherčice, the remarkable chateaux in Velké Losiny and Horšovský Týn, as well as the castle in Vimperk, which only passed under the administration of the National Heritage Institute in 2015.

This modest volume, released at the occasion of the *Year of the Renaissance Aristocracy*, an event arranged by the National Heritage Institute for the 2017 season within the popular, long-standing cycle *In the Footsteps of Aristocratic Houses*, intends to introduce the most significant architectural monuments of the Renaissance and great works of Renaissance art from former aristocratic collections which are today, for the most part, included in the collections of castles and chateaux under the administration of the National Heritage Institute. At the same time it aims to remind its readers of the historical, cultural and also social and economic legacy of the age which has left a lasting trace in the history and architecture of our country. In the 2017 season the monuments that are open to public will offer you a number of exhibitions and other cultural events which will culminate in late June in the opening of a new exhibition bearing the title *A Moravian Aristocrat in the Labyrinth of the World* at the chateau in Bučovice, and in the autumn exhibition *Portraits and Stories* held in collaboration with the National Gallery on the premises of the Sternberg Palace in Hradčanské náměstí in Prague.

Dear visitors, I hope you will come and see at least some of our Renaissance monuments, so that we can experience *The Year of Renaissance Aristocracy* together.

Ing. arch. Naděžda Goryczková
General Director of the National Heritage Institute

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Benešov nad Ploučnicí Castle

A Pearl of Saxon Renaissance

The brothers Johann, Friedrich and Joachim of Salhausen, descendants of old German minor nobility, came to Bohemia in the first half of the year 1515 and in the very same year they purchased a vast Děčín estate from Mikuláš Trčka of Lípa. Seven years later the brothers divided their property: Friedrich acquired the territory with the towns of Benešov and Česká Kamenice as his portion. Shortly afterwards a vigorous construction project commenced in Benešov. Already during the year 1522, Friedrich had a stately castle built – the so-called "Horní zámek" (Upper Palace) – in the north-western section of the town. The construction of another aristocratic edifice – the "Dolní zámek" (Lower Palace) – followed in 1540, and in the years 1550–1552 the castle complex was expanded in its eastern part with the Starschedel and Konojed House. He also initiated the completion of a parish church with a family burial chapel in their vicinity. After Friedrich's death in 1562 his offspring carried on with the construction works, raising the last significant Salhausen Renaissance edifice – known as the Wolf's Palace – right next to the Lower Palace in 1578. Over the following centuries the aristocratic buildings were spared from significant architectural interventions and have retained their strictly Renaissance form up to the present. The noble houses of Benešov consist of a group of autonomous buildings; each has its own courtyard and their integration into the municipal complex makes them more akin to urban palaces. They were designed mostly in the style of the "Northern" or "Saxon" Renaissance but they bear distinct features of Bohemian Gothic style practised under the rule of the Jagellonian dynasty; the castle complex in Benešov is the most significant aristocratic architectural work representing this style in Bohemia.



Březnice Castle

The Scene of a Clandestine Imperial Wedding

Originally a Gothic fortress owned by the House of Zmrzlík of Svojšíň and the House of Malovec of Chýnov in Březnice witnessed its prime after a Silesian aristocratic House of Lokšan of Lokšany purchased the surrounding estate in 1548. It did not take long before the first Lokšan owner, Jiří, the vice-chancellor of the Kingdom of Bohemia, the royal counselor and secretary to the King Ferdinand I Habsburg, embarked on the project of rebuilding the fortress into a Renaissance castle, which is the form that the structure still has today. The designers of the new house were in many respects inspired by other significant architectural projects of the time, such as the Pernštejn residence in Pardubice, from which they borrowed not only the irregular arrangement of the buildings surrounding the courtyard and the shape of the square tower, but also the extensive fortifications furnished with bastions. Březnice kept its significance even after the death of Jiří Lokšan, when it was inherited by his widow, Kateřina Adlerová, who came from the German city of Augsburg. In the years 1555–1560 the castle served as an amorous resort of her niece Filipína Welser and Archduke Ferdinand, the second-born son of the emperor, who later also celebrated his clandestine wedding to Filipína at Březnice. The *mésalliance* wrested from the couple's parents turned out to be one of the happiest marriages in the history of the House of Habsburg. The period when the castle was under Lokšan rule is documented by the exceptionally well-preserved interiors; standing out among these is the so-called Lokšan Library with the oldest aristocratic library hall in the Czech lands, dating back to 1558. The castle collections hold, among other works, *the Kolowrat Wedding*, a rare cycle of Renaissance engravings made around 1558 by Sigmund Elsässer, the court painter to Ferdinand II of Tyrol. After the uprising of the Bohemian estates Březnice was confiscated from the Lokšans and became the property of Přebík Jeníšek of Újezd, an infamous royal prosecutor who indicted and condemned the twenty-seven leaders of the revolt who were executed in 1621 at the Old Town Square in Prague.



Bučovice Chateau

A Masterpiece of Jacopo Strada

The chateau's builder and simultaneously the last male descendant of an ancient Moravian aristocratic house, Jan Šembera of Boskovice, decided to raise a new chateau on the site of a mediaeval fortress in 1575. The decision was presumably related to his second marriage – to Anna Kajřová of Krajek – after which an expansion of his family and the *hofstadt* was to be expected. In the summer of the same year he signed a contract with Pietro Gabri, an Italian architect settled in Brno; before long, Gabri's company started the construction of a four-wing chateau with splendid arcading in the inner courtyard. Apparently, from the very outset the chateau was intended as a part of a large and, in the Czech lands, unique architectural project which also included an enclosed garden modelled on the pattern book by the Italian Renaissance architect Sebastiano Serlio, surrounded, along with the aristocratic buildings, by extensive fortifications and a moat. The overall form of the chateau as well as the appearance of its quite extraordinary interiors were fundamentally influenced by Jacopo Strada, the imperial antiquary, architect and a leading intellectual at the courts of the emperors Maximilian II and Rudolf II, whom Šembera had probably met during his studies in Vienna. The original architectural design has only survived in a fragmentary form; yet the lavish mural, sculptural and stucco decorations dating back to the 1580s that have been preserved in five chambers of the western wing of the chateau are of equal importance. Their relation to the imperial projects and their outstanding artistic value reach well beyond Moravian borders: they represent one of the most perfectly realized instances of High Mannerist courtly art in central Europe.

A photograph of Buchlov Castle, a large, multi-story stone structure with a prominent tower and a green roof, situated on a hillside with autumn foliage in the foreground.

Buchlov Castle

A Witness of Fleeting Moments of Joy

Buchlov Castle, a place shrouded with legends, was bought in 1543 by Jan Ždánský of Zástřizly, a descendant of an old noble family, whose wealth and influence entitled him to hold important provincial offices in Moravia. Shortly after the purchase he initiated an extensive reconstruction of the castle, the purpose of which was to turn the Gothic fortress into a comfortable and stately Renaissance residence. In addition to the alterations he had a brand new building raised towards the end of the 1540s – a structure clinging to the rock at the south-western corner of the castle core. Before long, however, the family was hit by a chain of disasters. After Jan's death, the estate was inherited by Zikmund Prakšický of Zástřizly, who died in 1581 in a duel with Jan Šembera Černohorský of Boskovice. The next owner of the castle, Zikmund's younger brother Jindřich, met a similar end, having been murdered under obscure circumstances the following year. The appearance of the newly erected building remained unchanged until the beginning of the next century, when the castle and the estate were the property of Jiří Zikmund Prakšický of Zástřizly. In 1602 the university-educated aristocrat, well known for his purchase of the extensive library of a famous Swiss theologian Theodore Beza, married Eliška Kotvrdovská of Olešnička. To celebrate the occasion he had a large festive hall built in the upper part of the new house; the hall was accessed from the castle terrace through an opulent entrance with the Zástřizl lily and an inscription. The rare set of Anabaptist faïence and painted glass cups manufactured for the event that have survived until today attests to the importance that the young protestant aristocrat attached to the planned wedding. The wedding guests sat at tables laden with food on which they feasted in a bright and spacious, white-walled hall under a beamed ceiling, which, however, no longer exists. The unique large painted benches also date back to the period.

A photograph of Červená Lhota Chateau, a large, red-brick building with a prominent tower and a red roof, situated on a hillside with a stone bridge and a pond in the foreground.

Červená Lhota Chateau

Life Beyond Time

North of Jindřichův Hradec, set in the landscape where the south Bohemian flatland rises to meet the first mountaintops of the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, there is a pond with an islet occupied by a picturesque chateau known today as Červená Lhota. The first aristocratic residence was built on the site probably in connection with the mid-thirteenth century settlement of the surrounding land by the House of Hradec, and gradually became the centre of the neighbouring estate. Sometime around 1530 the House of Kába of Rybňany, a minor noble family, came into possession of the property; probably in the years 1542–1555 they fundamentally extended and rebuilt the existing mediaeval buildings, turning them into a four-wing chateau with a regular inner courtyard and a gateway tower. Despite the subsequent alterations of the chateau, the original Renaissance ground plan has been preserved, as have some of the period details such as the Renaissance vaults, several beamed ceilings and murals in the interiors, uncovered and restored during the severely Historicist remodelling of the chateau in the years 1909–1910 after the project by Humbert Walcher of Moltheim. The timeless beauty of the building reflected in the surface of the pond with the surrounding romantic landscape and a simple chapel from the times of the Kábas of Rybňany is most aptly expressed in the words of Zdeněk Kalista about a place where *"life passes beyond time."* The chateau interiors contain several remarkable Renaissance objects. The works of Czech origin are for instance the 1568 epitaph of Zikmund Kába, the tombstone of his father Jan dating back to the year 1564, and especially a child double portrait depicting Jáchym and Zachariáš of Hradec, a 1529 work by Jakob Seisenegger. Among the most important works acquired by the chateau's last owners, the princes of Schönburg-Hartenstein, are the portrait of Grand Duke Francesco I de Medici from the workshop of the Florentine painter Alessandro Alori, a painting called *A Bouquet with a Book and Spectacles* by George Flegel painted not long after 1604, and a fine woodcarving of enthroned Madonna made around 1500.



Červené Poříčí Chateau

A Chateau of Hidden Treasures

Červené Poříčí, originally called just "Poříčí" like a number of other Bohemian towns and villages, had a squire's seat already in the first half of the fourteenth century. A sales contract from 1569 mentions a fortress, which passed from the property of Squire Hendrych Mladota of Jelmanice into the ownership of Lord Mikuláš Šic of Drahenice. After a fire in 1606 which burned down the fortress in Poříčí, Mikuláš II Šic of Drahenice had a luxurious Late Renaissance chateau built upon the river Úhlava. The new residence was partially provided with a castle-front with a gateway leading into the courtyard. A stone tablet with an engraved inscription above the main entrance from the courtyard dates the chateau in Poříčí, originally a one-wing, one-storey structure with an oblong ground plan, a polygonal tower and lofty Lombardy-Saxon gables, to the year 1611. While the chateau was under construction the project was perhaps already undergoing changes, and a short lateral wing with a cellar with a groin vault was added to the main building. Until the early eighteenth century the dining hall with a Renaissance vault located on the ground floor of the chateau was used as the main premise. The basic arrangement of the chateau interior has survived despite later modifications carried out by the subsequent owners of the estate. The new Renaissance chateau lent its name to the adjacent village: owing to the vast surface area of its roof whose red fired roofing shone into distance, it became known as "Červené" (Red) Poříčí. Shortly after the Battle of White Mountain two thirds of Mikuláš II's property were confiscated for his involvement in the revolt of the Bohemian estates and as soon as 1623 the chateau and the estate were acquired by the Bavarian nobleman Filip Adam, the Baron of Kronenberg. Since then Poříčí stayed in the hands of various Bavarian noble families until it passed into the ownership of the Tuscan branch of the reigning House of Habsburg.



Český Krumlov Castle

The First Residence of the House with a Rose Coat-of-Arms


The monumental castle complex in Český Krumlov is located on a tall, elongated rock promontory with the river Vltava running along its southern and the brook Polečnice along its northern bank. The original Gothic castle was founded at some point before 1250 by the House of Krumlov, one of the branches of the powerful House of Vítek, whose heraldic sign was a five-leaf rose. In 1502 the castle was inherited by their relatives, the House of Rožmberk, who resided there until 1602. The heyday of the castle and town of Český Krumlov is associated with their last Rožmberk rulers – Vilém and Petr Vok. Vilém was dazzled by the beauty and refinement of Renaissance Italy in his youth: in the years 1551–1552 he traveled to Genoa with a group of central European aristocrats to welcome Mary of Spain, the wife of the future Emperor Maximilian II. Shortly after his return to Bohemia he initiated a generous reconstruction of the old family seat conducted by Italian builders. The modifications and expansion of the so-called "Horní hrad" (Upper Castle) were designed by the Italian architect Antonio Ericer, nicknamed "the Vlach" (the Italian), and later by Baldassare Magni of Arogno, a court architect to the Rožmberks. The sophisticated mural paintings in the castle interiors, courtyards, the so-called "Hrádek", and the tower were made by the Rožmberks' court painters Gabriel de Blonde and Bartoloměj Beránek-Jelínek. Vilém of Rožmberk had the last major modifications of the castle carried out in 1588. Vilém's successor, Petr Vok of Rožmberk, found himself in a financially dire situation, which was the main reason why he – with a heavy heart – decided to sell the family residence to Emperor Rudolf II, and moved his court to the castle in Třeboň. Owing to the quality of its architecture, cultural tradition and the magnitude of its area, the state castle Český Krumlov ranks among the most important historical monuments in central Europe; as such it was, quite rightfully, inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.



Frýdlant Castle

The Ruler's Seat in the Land of Fortune

The magnificent castle towering above the town of Frýdlant was one of the most potent centres of power on the northern border of the Kingdom of Bohemia from mid-thirteenth century. The castle, from which a powerful House of Bibrštejn governed over its vast estates on both sides of the land's border, was acquired in 1588 by the imperial councillor Friedrich of Redern. Under the rule of his house the Frýdlant area witnessed unwonted economic growth and the refined lords of Redern took advantage of the favourable situation to carry out widespread modifications of their seat. The next owner of the castle, Friedrich's university-educated son Melchior of Redern, the president of the courtly military council and a favoured courtier to Rudolf II, invited to Frýdlant in the early 1580 the Italian architect Marco Antonio Spazio of Lanzo, who raised a new High Renaissance edifice, the so-called "Horní zámek" (Upper Palace), on the site of an old Gothic palace. The castle tower and almost all of the roofs, furnished with graceful volute gables, gained their present-day appearance at the time. During the following stage of the reconstruction at the turn of the seventeenth century a new building, the so-called "Dolní zámek" (Lower Palace) was added to the castle; it was provided with a tower decorated with sgraffiti on its front, and an adjacent, newly founded chapel devoted to St. Anne. Yet these costly and artistically demanding Renaissance modifications, done in part by the Rudolphine painter Bartolomeus Spranger, had no detrimental effect on the defensive potential of the building. After the defeat of the revolt of the Bohemian estates in 1618 Frýdlant was acquired by the famous Albrecht of Valdštejn who made it the centre of his newly established dukedom. Under his rule the surrounding land, untouched by the ravages of the Thirty Years' War, became the legendary *terra felix* – a land of fortune, whose symbol was Frýdlant Castle, which had mainly due to the extensive Renaissance modifications, the appearance of the most outstanding monarchical residences.



Grabštejn Castle

A Mannerist Treasure on the Land's Border

The ancient castle of Grabštejn was purchased along with the whole estate in 1562 by Jiří Mehl of Střelice, an intellectual with humanist education, a royal counselor and German vice-chancellor of the Kingdom of Bohemia. He acquired the castle from the, originally Saxon, House of Donín. Shortly afterwards he initiated a project for its reconstruction which gave it features of the so-called "Saxon" Renaissance typical of this part of Bohemia inhabited by predominantly German population. At the same time the modifications reflected Mehl's close connection to the cultivated milieu of the imperial court and its artists. The castle interiors still bear inconspicuous yet fundamental Renaissance features such as sgraffito decorations which covered the castle front; the very first use of a service corridor connecting two residential wings, and an imposing mantelpiece supported by lion's feet with volutes modelled on a pattern published in the fourth volume of *Regole generali di architettura* by the Italian architect Sebastiano Serlio. Jiří Mehl of Střelice may have gained access to the book through his close connections with Jacopo Strada, the imperial antiquary and architect at the imperial courts of Maximilian II and Rudolf II. The apex of the architectural and artistic work in the age of Jiří Mehl of Střelice at Grabštejn was the built-in chapel devoted to St. Barbara whose impressive Mannerist sacred space houses a statue of the saint while providing a "canvas" for unique mural decorations ascribed to the Salzburg artist Heinrich Bocksberger. The round medallions on the chapel vaulting depict scenes from the last days of Christ and a scene of the Last Judgement; the buttresses are decorated with life-sized pictures of Christ's followers. Owing to Bocksberger's riveting paintings and its fine architecture, St. Barbara's chapel at Grabštejn is justly considered to be a first-rate work of art, a superb document of the refinement of High Mannerist courtly culture in central Europe.



Hluboká nad Vltavou Castle

Beauty under the Sign of the Twelve Months

Hluboká Castle was rebuilt by its owners, the Schwarzenbergs, in the years 1839–1871 in Neo-Gothic style, being modelled after the English Windsor Castle. They turned the structure into a romantic-looking castle, whose snow-white facade was shining into the distance. The radical reconstruction did permanently erase the building's previous character, a blend of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque architectural features, yet its art-loving owners accumulated an outstanding collection of valuable artworks regardless of the time of their creation or geographical provenance, and placed them in the castle interiors; thus, masterpieces of previous ages were gracefully incorporated into the new interior furnishings following the tastes of the period and the owners. Hence twelve small-size allegorical paintings of Dutch origin depicting the cycle of the months that date back to the period around the year 1600 became a part of the monumental wainscoting of the so-called "Ranní salón" (Morning Drawing Room) at Hluboká. The motifs of human activities changing over the seasons are complemented by signs of the zodiac in the celestial sphere and abundant *staffage* depicting dozens of people and animals busy at work typical for each particular season. The villagers are collecting firewood, the aristocrats are occupying themselves with hunting, the burghers are gathering in a marketplace, other figures are tending to their gardens, picking fruit, reaping corn, shearing sheep and tilling their fields; scenes of a wedding procession, carnival celebrations, and a pig-killing feast are likewise rendered in the paintings. A close inspection offers the spectator a view of dozens of scenes from the daily life of all strata of the society at the turn of the seventeenth century.



Horšovský Týn Castle

A Castle of Courtiers and Rebels

Originally a mediaeval episcopal residence turned in mid-thirteenth century into a strong Gothic castle of the *castello* type was acquired in 1535 with the surrounding estate by the House of Lobkovice, who founded their own family line there. The most important member of this branch was Jan Popel the Younger of Lobkovice, the president of the Bohemian Chamber, the highest chamberlain and finally the highest burgrave of the Kingdom of Bohemia, who as an owner of over ten estates ranked among the wealthiest noblemen of Renaissance Bohemia. The social success of Jan Popel of Lobkovice was mainly predicated on his loyalty to Emperor Ferdinand I Habsburg whom he staunchly supported during the first revolt of the estates in 1557. Prior to the middle of the sixteenth century he hired the Italian architect Agostino Galli of Massagno who first drafted the plans for his splendid palace at Prague Castle and subsequently also for the modification of the most important country seat the family had in west Bohemia. Out of the four wings that had been planned only two wings were raised at Horšovský Týn – the eastern wing with a spectacular facade facing the town, and the southern wing with arcades facing the courtyard. Galli's original style, which ranks him among the most important architects of Renaissance Bohemia, is distinguished by lunette cornices, charmingly varied attic gables, and uncommon designs of the tall chimneys inspired by contemporary pattern books. After Jan's death Horšovský Týn was bequeathed to his son Vilém the Elder Popel of Lobkovice, who, like his father, frequented the courts of the emperors Maximilian II and Rudolf II. The fortunes of the house took a turn for the worse at the time of the revolt of the Bohemian estates, after which Vilém the Elder was elected one of the directors of the rebel government. Following the Battle of White Mountain his property was completely confiscated and before long Horšovský Týn was acquired by the Emperor's adviser and elite diplomat Maximilian of Trauttmansdorff.



Jaroměřice nad Rokytnou Chateau



Jindřichův Hradec Castle

Renaissance Treasures of a Baroque Chateau

The chateau in Jaroměřice nad Rokytnou lost its Renaissance appearance in the first half of the eighteenth century, when the then owners, the Questenbergs, re-fashioned it into a luxurious Baroque country seat, complete with a vast library, picture gallery, theatre, and a resident musical band. The collections of the majestic Baroque house still hold a unique cycle of Late Renaissance paintings. These canvases by Gillis van Valckenborch, an outstanding painter of Dutch origin who worked in Germany, depict the allegories of four countries that had a strong influence over Europe's political, military and cultural situation at the turn of the seventeenth century. In these paintings Spain, Germany, Italy and France are represented by allegorical figures of the rulers dressed according to the contemporary fashion and accompanied by their female counterparts. Symbolical objects, for instance the imperial and the royal crown, arms, books, clocks, coffers filled with treasures, armillary spheres, musical instruments, a paintbrush and a palette, ripe fruit, sheep's wool and other attributes serve as reminders of the spiritual and material wealth and power of each particular country and its inhabitants. Thus, in an indirect manner, they document the existence of contemporary symbolical codes that were connected to the individual cultural areas and nations. The paintings, which were rendered as engravings by Jan Sadeler, were loosely inspired by models by Hans von Aachen, a prominent Rudolphine court painter. Apart from Valckenborch's cycle the collections at Jaroměřice Chateau contain a splendid portrait of count Collatus by Paolo Veronese, one of the principal representatives of Venetian Mannerist painting. The canvas belonging to the Collatus collections that were housed in the chateau in Uherčice until the Second World War is one of the most important and artistically valuable paintings under the administration of the National Heritage Institute.

A Residence of the Country's Highest Officials

The inimitable charm of the castle in Jindřichův Hradec consists mainly in its flawless blend of various architectural styles. At its beginning are the still extant buildings of an imposing mediaeval castle which had for centuries been the main seat of the House of Hradec. Its members had the residence rebuilt a number of times as it was always intended to play the role of one of the largest and most important aristocratic seats in the Kingdom of Bohemia. The transformation of the mediaeval castle into a Renaissance one began in the 1520s during the reign of Adam I of Hradec, and it was also instigated by recurrent visits of the Emperor Ferdinand I Habsburg. After Adam's premature death in 1531 the interrupted construction works were taken up in the late 1550s by his son Jáchym I who had the so-called "Jáchym's House" erected at the second castle courtyard. Jáchym summoned into his service the Italian architect Antonio Ericer, who is probably also the author of the original project for another part of the castle, the so-called "New House". The completion of this palace and at the same time the culmination of the Renaissance stage in the remodelling of the castle complex falls within the period of the reign of his son, Adam II of Hradec, in the last third of the sixteenth century. The architects Adam II enlisted, Giovanni Maria Faconi and particularly Baldassare Maggi of Arogno, were chiefly involved in shaping the appearance of the third castle courtyard. In addition to the completion of the New House, the Larger and the Lesser Arcades connecting the individual wings of the castle were erected there. The splendid architecture was crowned with the construction of a garden pavilion, called "the Rondel", on the site of old fortifications. The Renaissance appearance of the castle in Jindřichův Hradec had such timeless qualities that it has, with some exceptions, been preserved until the present day. Thus the residence in Hradec is one of the most significant examples of Renaissance castle architecture in the country.



Konopiště Castle

Treasures of An Italian Ducal Armoury

Konopiště Castle, the main family seat of Franz Ferdinand d'Este, the successor to the throne of Austria-Hungary, was the place where the Archduke had a part of his extensive collection moved in the final years of the monarchy. A substantial part of the collection consists of an outstanding armoury, which was, along with a number of other works of art, bequeathed to him by František V d'Este-Modena, the last in the line of the dukes of Modena. The history of the armoury of Modena's dukes of the House d'Este dates back to the early sixteenth century; it was originally placed in the ducal palace in Modena, and during the nineteenth century it was augmented by the equally important armoury of the noble House of Obizzi from Catajo Castle. Owing to its sheer size and the quality of the arms and armour it holds, the Konopiště collection ranks among the largest both in the Czech Republic and in Europe. The core of the collection, counting nearly a thousand pieces of arms and armour, consists mainly in the Renaissance period exhibits. The weapons the visitors of Konopiště may see include polearms, for instance intricately etched halberds, partisans and glaives; firearms such as pistols, rifles, carbines and muskets inlaid with ivory, and also small bronze cannons. A substantial part of the collection consists of etched and engraved defensive and decorative shields. Konopiště also showcases a quantity of armour, including several hundreds of unique sixteenth-century painted pieces that were used in court feasts and spectacular tournaments. This part of the display features fourteen completely preserved suits of armour, over sixty chanfrons and dozens of elaborate shoulder and arm plates, gauntlets, shields, saddle guards and helmets, presented in an original early twentieth-century installation. The arms collection at Konopiště documents not only the high status that weapons and armour enjoyed in Renaissance aristocratic culture, but also the exceptional sophistication of the manufacturers, whose products may be considered genuine works of art.



Kratochvíle Chateau

A Pleasure Palace of the Rožmberks

In 1569 Vilém of Rožmberk bestowed a fortress and a farmstead Leptáč in the vicinity of the town of Netolice on Jakub Krčín of Jelčany, the regent of the Rožmberk estates and a smart economist. There Krčín set up a game enclosure and began to rebuild the fortress. When he presented the results of his efforts to Vilém of Rožmberk the future destiny of the place was decided: Vilém was determined to get it back. Subsequently he had a hunting lodge modelled on Italian Renaissance country villas built there. Baldassar Maggi of Arogno was commissioned with the architectural design of the project. Thus, over the years 1583–1589, in the centre of the flatlands studded with ponds and lakes, a unique edifice of the Rožmberk pleasure palace, named "Kratochvíle" (Pastime) in accordance with its purpose, was raised. The basic element of the composition of the whole building was a rectangle. Maggi used the rectangular form for the arrangement of the ground plan of the palace building, which was incorporated into an oblong, elongated garden fenced in by a wall. The regularity of the whole composition was further emphasised by a decorative moat which encloses the main building on all sides. The walls of the inner spaces of the palace are embellished with luxurious mural paintings and stucco ornaments made by the painter Georg Widman of Braunschweig and the plasterer Antonio Melana. The majority of the tableaux depict hunting scenes, exotic animal motifs and figures from classical mythology and Roman history which were very popular at the time. The artistic ornamentation also refers to the glory of the House of Rožmberk, as the motif of their heraldic sign – a red five-leaf rose – reappears throughout the property and in a graceful manner constantly reminds the visitor of the fact that all its splendour was created here to entertain, please, and show the prestige of the members of the House of Rožmberk. Kratochvíle, inspired by Italian architectural pattern books, represents the most superb instance of Italian villa architecture in the Czech lands.



Kynžvart Chateau



Litomyšl Chateau

Cosmology of the Age of the Saturnine Emperor Rudolf II

The summer residence of the chancellor Clement Wenzel Lothar of Metternich is renowned not only for its graceful early nineteenth-century Empire style architecture and its extensive grounds, but also for its vast collections and its equally famous libraries containing nearly thirty-four thousand volumes. Like other nineteenth-century aristocratic book collections, the Kynžvart libraries consist of a number of scientific books on natural history and the humanities. The set of almost one hundred humanist and Early Baroque prints on cosmology and astronomy dating back to the period between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries is a truly outstanding item in the local collection. What one may find among these, for instance, is the first edition of Johannes Kepler's famous *Astronomia nova*, printed in 1609 in Prague under the Emperor Rudolf II's patronage. In the book Kepler published his first two laws of the elliptical movement of celestial bodies and formulated his idea about the Sun's rotation around its own axis. Hartmann Schedel's richly illustrated incunabulum, the 1493 work *Liber chronicarum*, is an interesting interpretation of cosmology, presenting contemporary understanding of the universe through the story of Creation followed by the history of Nuremberg and other European cities and countries. Other rare works of European cosmological literature are deposited in the library – a copy of a classical treatise, Gaius Iulius Hyginus's *Poeticon astronomicon* dating back to 1483, which contains Ptolemaic maps of the stars; the first edition of *Uranometria*, a famous book by Johann Bayer, dating back to 1603; the first modern celestial atlas; and the 1564 *Cosmographia* by Peter Apianus with mobile models of celestial cycles and practical instructions for angular measurements. The whole set of books at Kynžvart represents a most extraordinary collection attesting to the high level of development of Renaissance science, whose direction was frequently determined at the Prague court of the saturnine Emperor Rudolf II.

The Residence of the Highest Chancellor

The chateau in Litomyšl was built in the years 1567–1582 for Vratislav Nádherný of Pernštejn, an extravagant aristocrat, eminent courtier to the Habsburgs and the highest chancellor of the Kingdom of Bohemia; it was designed by the imperial architect Giovanni Battista Aostalis de Sala, who was later replaced by his relative Ulrico Aostalis de Sala. The majestic edifice reflected Pernštejn's privileged position among Bohemian and Moravian estates; its appearance was the result of the individual ingenuity of the designers, both of them prominent personages of Renaissance architecture in the Czech lands, but many of its details were derived from contemporary architectural treatises. The immense High Renaissance four-wing chateau with an arcaded courtyard consists of two opposing palaces connected by an entrance wing with an open loggia and a northern residential wing with an adjacent slim tower. The architectural design of the chateau with picturesque attics is renowned mainly for its facades, covered with "envelope" sgraffiti with delicate ornamental patterns, renovated by prominent Czech artists in the twentieth century. The most important part of the sgraffito decorations – depictions of grand martial scenes referring to the triumph of Christianity – covers the courtyard-facing wall of the northern palace. Owing to Pernštejn's Spanish consort Marie Manrique de Lara, Litomyšl became one of the main centres of the Roman Catholic faction in Bohemia in the aftermath of the Battle of White Mountain. Although it is no longer possible to view the original Renaissance interiors, the unmistakable Renaissance spirit has left its lasting trace there. As "a unique example of Italian Renaissance architecture adapted to the conditions of the countries beyond the Alps and of a distinctive arcaded chateau type developed in central Europe in the sixteenth century" the building was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

A photograph of Náchod Castle, a large white stone building with a prominent tower and red-tiled roof, situated on a hillside with green trees in the foreground and mountains in the background.

Náchod Castle

The Stately Seat of the Last Smiřickýs


The transition of Náchod from a late Gothic castle to a Renaissance one was carried out by the House of Smiřický of Smiřice, one of the wealthiest Czech aristocratic houses of the turn of the seventeenth century, who owned Náchod in the years 1544–1620. Owing to their education, diplomatic skills, domestic and foreign contacts and their vast properties, the last Smiřickýs ranked among the elite of Bohemian society at the time. Albrecht Jan was affiliated with the radical wing of the anti-Habsburg estates, he was personally involved in the 1618 defenestration of the Lords Regent, he became the youngest of the Thirty Directors, and the contemporary press indicated him as a possible future king of Bohemia. The impulse for the Renaissance reconstruction was probably the fact that the castle tower was severely damaged by a lightning strike in 1570. The work was entrusted to the Italian architects who had previously worked in Nové Město nad Metují for the Pernštejns. During the first stage the old palace was modified and its two separate wings were joined together; it is likely that a building in the third courtyard on the site of today's Piccolomini Wing and the wall with battlements west of the *torion* were also newly erected at this point. A grandiose transformation of the castle took place under Albrecht Václav and Albrecht Jan of Smiřice in the years 1594–1618. A two-storey wing with an arcaded gallery was added on the southern side, the second floor was occupied by the connecting wing and the present-day Kuron Wing. The area of the inner courtyard was, due to its height, divided into an upper and a lower courtyard with a clock tower. The large tower was furnished with an arcaded gallery with a double roof lantern; the terrace of the southern face was embellished by a picturesque *loggieta*. The majestic Renaissance residence in Náchod ranks among the most important Renaissance castle in the Czech lands.

A photograph of the inner courtyard of Náměšť nad Oslavou Castle, showing a two-story arcaded gallery with stone columns and arches surrounding a paved courtyard.

Náměšť nad Oslavou Castle

A Residence of the Lords with a Lion Coat-of-Arms


The development of the Renaissance form of Náměšť Castle began in 1565: at the time Jan the Elder of Žerotín had most of the original early-thirteenth century Gothic castle pulled down and he initiated the construction of a monumental palace with an arcaded inner courtyard and a square ground plan on its site. The building of the courtyard, a valuable monument of Renaissance architecture in Moravia, was carried out in 1573, as indicated by an inscription tablet on one of the spandrels; the whole construction was finished in 1578, which may be deduced from an inscription above the portal of the square tower of the chateau entrance wing. Excepting the nineteenth century annexe of the entrance wing, the ground plan and the outer architectural design of the castle has barely changed from the time of the Žerotín reconstruction. The building was clearly designed by an architect well-versed in the style of Italian Renaissance; it is, however, impossible to conclusively prove his identity – possible candidates are Leonardo Garovo da Bisono, Giorgio Galdi, or another architect of Italian origin who was working in Moravia at the time. In any case the influence of Italian Renaissance is undeniable and the participation of Italian craftsmen and architects very probable. During the time of Karel the Elder of Žerotín Náměšť castle became an important centre of contemporary culture and learning. Valuable Renaissance prints including the Kralice Bible issued from a printing shop run by the Unity of the Brethren on the nearby Kralice estate. Even in the aftermath of the unsuccessful Czech Revolt the chateau owners preserved the Žerotín cultural legacy which was altered in terms of creed, yet in essence they maintained the recognition of Náměšť as an organic cultural and scholarly centre of the whole surrounding area.



Opočno Castle

A Renaissance Jewel of East Bohemia

The Czech aristocrat Vilém Trčka of Lípa became closely acquainted with Renaissance Italy in 1552, having spent several months there as a member of the retinue of the future emperor Maximilian II Habsburg. Still under the spell of Renaissance culture eight years later he initiated a generous reconstruction of the Gothic castle in Opočno, the most important family residence. Following the design of unidentified Italian architects he had the original mediaeval palace extended by two wings whose sides facing the courtyard were furnished with three-storey arcades. In 1567, after the three-wing castle was finished, Vilém Trčka of Lípa commissioned the Italian architects with the building of a triple-nave church of the Holy Trinity. The structure, which was quite unique in the Czech lands, was also intended as a burial chapel for the members of his house. The Renaissance style construction works that continued with the building the brewery and farm buildings lasted until the beginning of the seventeenth century. In 1607 Jan Rudolf Trčka, the next owner of the castle, had a luxurious pleasure palace built in the chateau's vicinity, modelled on a similar *lusthaus* of the Emperor Rudolf II in the Prague district of Bubeneč, and, shortly after, also a ball game hall. The later modifications of the castle respected the character of the architecture and they did not interfere with the intentions of its sixteenth-century architects. The last owners, the princely House of Colloredo-Mansfeld, enriched the castle's art collections by a number of outstanding Renaissance works. These include for instance the famous Žerotín epitaph dating back to 1575, the painting of *Madonna with Infant Jesus and John the Baptist* by Andrea del Sarto, a renowned painter of Florentine Mannerism, and a portrait of a nobleman by a follower of Lucas Cranach. A number of the weapons in the notable castle armoury are likewise of great artistic and historical value. Due to its significance and the qualities of its architecture the Opočno Castle remains one of the most distinguished Renaissance residences in east Bohemia.



Pernštejn Castle

The First Hints of the Renaissance

From its foundation in mid-thirteenth century the mediaeval Pernštejn castle, the cradle of one of the most renowned and powerful houses in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, underwent a complex architectural development. The greatest expansion of the castle took place after a fire in 1460 during the reign of Jan I of Pernštejn, when it basically acquired its present-day Gothic appearance. During the life of another Pernštejn ruler, Vilém II, who became the wealthiest and the most powerful man in the kingdom, the centre of the house's power was relocated to east Bohemia, particularly to their new main seat in Pardubice, where the Pernštejns erected a large castle with Renaissance features. Construction work returned to the castle only towards the close of Vilém II's life and the first years of the reign of his son Jan II of Pernštejn. In mid-1520s a new two-floor palace was erected at the castle, thus concluding its architectural development. The formal architectural arrangement of the newly built wing with a spacious hall on its first floor and residential rooms on the second, remotely reminiscent of the work of the royal architect Benedict Ried, closely corresponds to the style of Late Gothic period. However, the overall effect of the comfortable and bright rooms neighbouring on the knight hall, furnished with a tiled stove, a *garderobe*, and a partially preserved painted suspended ceiling, heralds Renaissance lifestyle. The New Palace represents one of the first tokens of the forthcoming style in Moravia and at the same time attests to the highly developed architectural culture in the first years of the Habsburg reign. The stirring design of the Pernštejn burial temple in the nearby Doubravnik emerged approximately at the same time, possibly with the involvement of the same Italian architects.



Rájec nad Svitavou Chateau



Rožmberk nad Vltavou Castle

The Fragile Beauty of Mannerist Crystal

The art collections of the princely House of Salm-Reifferscheidt at the chateau in Rájec nad Svitavou belong to the most prestigious ones under the administration of the National Heritage Institute. In addition to the extensive picture gallery and library, the visitors of the chateau may see a quite unique set of cups and other objects made by gem cutters out of mountain crystal. According to tradition the collection, founded by altgraf Anton Karl Josef of Salm-Reifferscheidt, the highest chamberlain to Emperor Josef II, was gradually assembled from the late eighteenth century through purchases and gifts. A crystal tray engraved with scenes from Ovid, made in the 1580s in the Milan workshop of the brothers Saracchi, stands out among the rare cups that had been a part of Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque aristocratic *kunstkammers*. The majority of the crystal vessels at Rájec is, however, linked to the Milan gem cutter family of Miseroni whose members worked at the imperial court of Rudolf II, and whose descendants carried out their business in Prague up to the close of the seventeenth century. The most artistically significant crystal vessel is a tall goblet with a lid from the workshop of Gaspar Miseroni, whose name stands at the beginning of the famous family tradition. The set of pieces cut from mountain crystal that were produced either in Milan or in Prague is complemented by two Early Baroque works made in Czech and German workshops. In addition to crystals, the treasury of Rájec Chateau holds a very rare amber domestic altar with a small Passion Cycle manufactured around 1680 in the Gdańsk workshop of Michael Redlin and the Orders of the Golden Fleece and the Chamberlain's keys of the Salm-Reifferscheidts. A set of Renaissance figural tombstones of the House of Drnovský of Drnovice, the seventeenth century owners of the estate, had been moved to the chapel of the chateau.

A Story Written into the Walls

Rožmberk Castle, located on an elongated promontory on the river Vltava, was founded by the House of Rožmberk in the first half of the thirteenth century. It stayed in the Rožmberks' hands even at the time when it was not the main family seat. Towards the close of the Renaissance age the last member of the house, Petr Vok, bestowed it on his nephew Jan Zrinský of Seryn, who in 1600 married Marie Magdaléna Novohradská of Kolovraty. Jan Zrinský decided to refashion his new residence in the style of Late Renaissance and carried out major modifications of both its exteriors and interiors. Among these stand out the exceptionally fine wall paintings in the Knight Hall which served as a banquet hall, whose early-seventeenth century appearance remained intact even during the extensive Romantic modifications of the castle in the nineteenth century. Jan Zrinský stamped his philosophical ideas and reflections about human existence and its transience in contrast to the world of art and the immortal muses into its mural decorations. He had ten ages of man painted in the window jambs; the features of their protagonist apparently bear close resemblance to those of the castle's master. The hall also houses a niche furnished with a gilded and polychromed lattice which opens up a view into the picturesque landscape of the mountain of Parnas with the goddess Athena and a group of Muses playing musical instruments. The mural paintings are complemented by a coffered ceiling which was, like them, designed after graphic models by Dutch and Italian masters. Additional embellishment is provided by easel paintings depicting allegories of the seven planets in the form of classical deities and their children. Love, Hope, Astrology and symbols of Life and Death are projected into stories told by the banquet hall at Rožmberk Castle.

A photograph of the Slatiňany Chateau, a large, light-colored stone building with a prominent tower and multiple windows, situated on a hillside under a clear blue sky.

Slatiňany Chateau

A Minor Work of a Major Architect

The building of the Renaissance chateau in Slatiňany was commissioned by Knight Bohuslav Mazanec of Frymburk, whose excellent education allowed him to pursue a career in provincial administration. Not later than 1563 he assumed the office of the scribe of Bohemian "menší zemské desky" (lesser land registry). As he was a high-ranking official with legal education, well-versed in Latin and the languages of the land, he was admitted into the society of Bohemian noblemen and other courtiers, due to which he enjoyed considerable social advantages. His ambitions are perhaps best evidenced by the fact that he decided to build a new chateau on his newly-acquired estate of Slatiňany. He enlisted the help of the imperial architect Ulrico Aosallis de Sala, among whose designs belong the residences of the Knight's superior, the highest chancellor Vratislav of Pernštejn: the chateau in Litomyšl and the chancellery at the Prague Castle. Apparently, Mazanec's choice of architect was motivated by an effort to, at least partially, imitate Pernštejn's lavish lifestyle. In its original Renaissance form, as portrayed in a later Baroque *veduta*, the chateau in Slatiňany consisted of two connected wings with sgraffito decorations, a massive lunette cornice below the roof, and a particularly impressive terraced gable with cornices, pilasters and sculptural details reminiscent of the design of decorations on the facade and the attic of the chateau in Litomyšl; the metal clock tower above the western wing also bears resemblance to Pernštejn's chateau. Although there is no record listing the craftsmen who assisted the architect, one may assume that the work was carried out by the customary Italian bricklayers and stonemasons, over whom one of the *capomaesters* of the Aostallis' construction enterprise was in charge. The chateau in Slatiňany underwent a major reconstruction in the nineteenth century when it served as a summer residence for the princely House of Auersperg. The later modifications in the spirit of strict Historicism, however, reverentially emphasised the Renaissance essence of its architecture.



Šternberk Castle

A Castlefull of Renaissance

The ancient castle of Šternberk, which has for centuries been overlooking the fertile lowlands of Haná, ranks among the most important Moravian mediaeval structures. During the sixteenth century, when it was owned by the House Berka of Dubá and later by the princes of Mistenberk, descendants of the King Georg of Kunštát and Poděbrady, Renaissance modifications were carried out at the castle; from the period the so-called "Visiting-Card Hall" with a unique shallow diamond vault has survived to this day. More important than Šternberk's architecture, however, is the extraordinarily fine set of Renaissance paintings acquired at the turn of the twentieth century by the then owner of the castle and a renowned art aficionado, Prince Johann II of Liechtenstein. The premises of the castle that are open to the public house, among others, a panel painting depicting the flight into Egypt, made around 1500 in Brussels by a painter from the circle around the famous Jan Cornelisz Vermeeyen. Another large painting from the Southern Netherlands in the Šternberk collection, *The Annunciation* by a notable Flemish painter Juan de Flandes, dates back to the same period. Dutch Renaissance painting is represented at Šternberk by two landscapes by Pauwels Franck, who worked at the court of Emperor Rudolf II. In the castle collections there are also works of German Renaissance painters, such as the portrait of merchant Hans Schmid by Hans Maler, and a picture of St. Margaret from 1518 by one of the apprentices to Lucas Cranach. The Italian *quattrocento* paintings that are exhibited at Šternberk are likewise of very high quality: the beautiful head of a girl by Raffelin del Garbo or the scene showing *Orpheus Playing to the Animals* by the renowned artist Baldassar Peruzzi. A substantial set of Italian Renaissance sculptures and fine masonry works complement the art collection at the castle. Together with their Late Gothic and Baroque pieces, the collections at Šternberk Castle rank among the most important in the Czech Republic.



Telč Castle

A Residential Chateau and a Town on the Bohemian-Moravian Border

Zachariáš of Hradec, one of the most distinguished Bohemian and Moravian aristocrats, had the Gothic castle in Telč remodelled in magnificent Renaissance forms in the second half of the sixteenth century. The reconstruction was substantially influenced not only by Zachariáš's journey to Italy in the years 1551–1552, but also by the close connection maintained between his family and the imperial court, a nexus of the most current Renaissance artistic trends. The wealthy aristocrat and smart entrepreneur started to rebuild Telč shortly after the century's midpoint; at the time the workshop of the Slavonice-based master builder Leopold Esterreicher expanded and substantially modified the original mediaeval buildings. The influence of the courtly culture on the reconstruction of Telč is manifested for instance by the use of motifs from the architectural pattern book of the French theoretician Jacques Androuet de Cerceau, which was accessible mainly to the circle around the most educated intellectuals of the monarchy. Following his marriage to Kateřina of Valdštejn Zachariáš of Hradec began the second stage of the reconstruction conducted by the Italian architect Antonio Ericer, which went on until late 1560s. Over its course two new palaces were erected in Telč, both of them housing luxurious interiors, for instance the still extant Golden Hall with a beautiful coffered ceiling. The architectural development of the extraordinarily spacious residence was concluded by a third stage of the construction work, during which the individual palaces were joined by open arcaded galleries and colonnades. The walled-in garden enclosed by a ground-floor arcade in the style of the Italian *giardino segreto* probably dates back to this period. In 1580 a fascinating burial chapel of All Saints was set up in the southern palace; Zachariáš of Hradec was buried there in 1589. The castle in Telč has kept its Renaissance appearance intact until today. Owing to its extraordinary artistic value it was, along with the historical centre of the town of Telč, inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1992.



Třeboň Castle

The Last Residence of the Last of the Rožmberks

Members of the House of Rožmberk had paid close attention to their residence in Třeboň since the Middle Ages. The stronghold in close vicinity of one of the house's most important liege towns which had been expanded already in the second half of the fifteenth century was, however, refashioned in the Renaissance style only after a fire during the reign of Vilém of Rožmberk in the years 1565–1575. Antonio Ericer, the Italian architect hired by the Rožmberks, turned the mediaeval structure into a comfortable four-wing Renaissance castle with an inner courtyard and a clock tower whose facades were decorated with sgraffiti and charming lunette cornices. Subsequently a brewery and a malt-house were built on the castle grounds. After he sold off Český Krumlov in 1602, Petr Vok, the last of the Rožmberks, chose the prosperous Třeboň for his main seat. Domenico Cometta, his architect, then expanded the castle premises by a number of buildings that surround the outer courtyard, and was also substantially involved in the construction of the castle proper. He, for instance, built two large halls on its ground floor and a new two-floor structure housing Rožmberk's extensive library and picture gallery. Alongside the castle the Renaissance town was also undergoing changes; it was walled in by a faultless system of fortifications which later resisted several enemy onslaughts. During the reign of the ageing Petr Vok Třeboň became one of the most important centres of political and social life of the estates in the Czech lands; representatives of predominantly protestant nobility from nearly all corners of the monarchy would assemble there for their sessions. After the death of the last Rožmberk ruler in 1611 Třeboň was inherited by the House of Švamberk, whose members, until the property was confiscated in the aftermath of the defeat of the Czech Revolt, carried out several minor alterations designed by the Italian architect Paolo Sarcelli. Třeboň, one of the largest castle complexes in the Czech lands, ranks among the most notable examples of Rožmberk Renaissance architecture and among the most important early modern aristocratic seats in central Europe.



Uherčice Chateau

A Moravian Seat of Austrian Nobles

Uherčice Chateau, a long neglected monument on the Moravian-Austrian border, ranks among the most significant Renaissance aristocratic buildings in the Czech lands. The appearance of the vast structure was shaped mainly by its owners the House of Krajiř of Krajek and subsequently by the Streins of Schwarzenau, whose estates were located on both sides of the land's border. Wolf the Elder of Krajiř, the chateau's builder, found models for the earliest stage of its construction in Prague, where he held the post of the highest chancellor and later the office of the highest burgrave. In addition to the impulses from the refined courtly *milieu*, the appearance of the chateau was also influenced by the nearby residence of Zachariáš of Hradec in Telč. The chateau, erected in mid-sixteenth century, probably with participation of the employees of the Slavonice-based workshop of a master builder Leopold Esterreicher, was purchased in 1564 by Wolf Strein of Schwarzenau, an Austrian nobleman. His son, Hans Wolfhart, an influential courtier to Emperor Maximilian II, later initiated another stage of reconstruction during which two new parallel wings copying the model of Austrian stately houses were built; these were connected in the middle by a crosswise wing opening into the inner courtyard with a ground floor arcade and an impressive colonnade on the first floor. During the 1580s an arcaded entrance courtyard with a square gateway tower was added to the southern part of the already extensive castle complex. The construction, conceived by an architect from the circle around Antonio Ericer, the designer of the castle in Telč, culminated in the foundation of a garden with a corner tower. The generous Renaissance layout of the chateau has survived despite all the major modifications the building witnessed over the subsequent centuries. Although the chateau complex was considerably damaged during the twentieth century, it is undergoing gradual restoration which is bringing back the spirit of its Renaissance makers.



Velké Losiny Chateau

A Late Renaissance Chateau in North Moravia

The fortress which had already been standing in Velké Losiny by the beginning of the sixteenth century was extended and rebuilt in High Renaissance style by Jan the Younger of Žerotín, a descendant of an old Moravian aristocratic family and the founder of the family line based in Velké Losiny. The imposing building was meant to represent not only the rank of Jan the Younger among the Moravian estates but also his office as an assessor at the Olomouc provincial court. The construction of the chateau probably began shortly after 1557, the year in which the records mention the Losiny fortress for the last time, and it was concluded in 1605 when the roof trussing of the chateau tower was made. It is possible that the project was conceived by the Italian master Antonio Doma, sometimes also named Thoma, who also built the Renaissance style town hall in Staré Město and several churches in the Šumperk area, out of which the parish church in Sobotín is particularly noteworthy. The main castle building consists of three wings with massive arcades in the Tuscan order. The outer facades are decorated with sgraffito "envelopes", an ornament customary in the Czech lands. As the work on the main stately house was coming to a close, the construction of additional wings housing the chateau's agricultural facilities began. A Mannerist garden fenced off by a castle wall with embrasures was raised alongside the road leading towards the chateau from the west. Renaissance features have also survived in the chateau interiors. These include fragments of stucco decorations on the vaulting of the western wing, and particularly the unique furnishings from the time around Jan's 1585 marriage to Andělína Ryšanka of Modřice. A painted ceiling, parquet floors, a large tile stove with the coats of arms of the chateau's owners, and a stepped-tier wooden buffet have survived in the hall until today.



Vimperk Castle

A New Home to the House Novohradský of Kolovraty

Vimperk Castle, founded in mid-thirteenth century in the deep border forests, was supposed to protect the land border and especially the important trade routes used by merchant caravans that had been bringing cargoes of salt and other goods from Passau to Bohemia since the Middle Ages. The castle had been changing owners until it was acquired by the House of Rožmberk in mid-sixteenth century; under the Rožmberk rule the town below the castle further flourished and got richer from the salt trade. Vilém of Rožmberk grew very fond of the castle and paid occasional visits to it, for instance when he sought refuge from the plague epidemic. He initiated significant architectural modifications to the castle due to which it is nowadays largely perceived as a Renaissance chateau. In the years 1565–1569 Petr Vok of Rožmberk resided at the chateau. In 1601 he sold the Vimperk estate to Volf Novohradský of Kolovraty. Jáchym Novohradský, Volf's son, chose the castle for his permanent seat and carried out further costly modifications to its architecture. The so-called "Dolní Zámek" (Lower Palace), whose pride was the large stately hall with extravagant figural wall decorations and a monumental painted wooden ceiling, was probably built in the period of his reign. However, Jáchym's efforts were thwarted by the events of the Thirty Year's War. On several occasions Vimperk Castle was ravaged and plundered by the advancing armies. After 1620 Jáchym Novohradský returned to Vimperk and did his best to repair the ruined residence. That was when he had the so-called Kolovrat Wing with an arcaded ground floor and an access to the rear courtyard and the courtyard of the "Horní zámek" (Upper Palace) built. Presumably, the arcaded wing in the Lower Palace was also erected at the time. A game enclosure, three orchards, and a terraced garden with decorative plants, a pond, a cherry bower, and a pavilion with fig trees near the Lower Palace were also a feature of the castle grounds. The attempt at a generous reconstruction of the Vimperk Castle left Jáchym Novohradský financially drained, which ultimately forced him to sell the estate.



Published by the National Heritage Institute
at the Occasion of the Year of the Renaissance Aristocracy
Kroměříž 2017
Graphic design: Martin Hrdina
ISBN 978-80-87231-48-7

