



# CASTLE ROAD – AN EVENTFUL HERITAGE



I am very pleased that now, forty years after the founding of the Castle Road, it has been possible to publish a magazine summarizing the historical development of the region and the castles that make up this route. Since its beginnings as an association of fortifications in Styria and southern Burgenland, the Castle Road has developed over the years into something quite extraordinary.

As European history unfolded, at its heart a region began to emerge with an unusually dense concentration of fortresses and castles, so that today it can boast of one the highest number of such historical buildings worldwide. Gradually, most of the fortresses, which initially had been built in response to military threats from the east, were transformed into grand noble residences exhibiting architectural styles from the Romanesque to the Romantic.

Today, magnificent buildings situated at the far reaches of the now long-since extinct Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation form a route with 41 members that bring history to life, uniting tradition with the modern world.

The idea behind the cross-border Castle Road is to look beyond current borders.

Therefore, the Road was extended from Austria to Slovenia in 2018 and then on to Croatia in 2020. The history of the border region situated between past European empires simply cannot be convincingly told without looking at the castles and palaces in these three neighboring countries.

I would like to extend my particular thanks to historian Franz Suppan and journalist Franc Milošič, who have worked together to bring these three countries' common history into a holistic picture.

Our castles and palaces are impressive witnesses of an almost thousand-year-old defensive line that stretches over 1,001 kilometers. Time and again they have provided the setting for European historical developments, and in the process have become the heirs of eventful times.

Let this magazine take you into the world of knights, witches, and envoys, who together tell a story – namely ours, the history of our region.

Best regards  
Consul Mag. Andreas Bardeau  
Chairman of the Castle Road





# LIVING ALONG A BORDER UNDER DISPUTE FOR TWO MILLENNIA

Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, and Croatia form a common border region that has been fraught with invasions, feuds, and plunderings over a period of almost two thousand years. At times there were also periods of peaceful coexistence that created the opportunity for peoples and cultures to interact with one another in more productive ways. Whether with or against each other, whether under a common state structure or as separate nation states, the course of history was one fraught with many ups and downs.

important trade route that led from the Baltic coast through the Germanic region to Carnuntum and then on to Aquileia on the upper Adriatic. Numerous Roman towns were built along this road, such as Scarbantia (Sopron/Ödenburg) in what is today Hungary and Ptuj (Poetovio) in present-day Slovenia.

For about a hundred years, the people in this Roman province lived in peace, but then several invasions by the Marcomanni between 166 and 180 B.C. put an end to the tranquility. With great difficulty Rome was able to push back this Germanic tribe, which originally inhabited the area later to be known as Bohemia. Other Germanic tribes, however, were also involved in these military conflicts. Noricum was severely affected by the hostilities, and the city of Flavia Solva in today's Styria was completely destroyed. The country and its people recovered only slowly from this devastation and looting. Under Emperor Constantine (306–337 B.C.), the region experienced a last economic and cultural flowering, after which the Roman Empire slowly began to disintegrate. The centuries that followed are less well documented.

During the Migration Period, a number of Germanic tribes settled in the area that later became Hungary, but only until the Avars displaced them. Under this pressure, the Slavic tribes also moved west into the valleys of the Drau, Mur, Mürz, and Enns. There they formed the principality of Carantania, which in the 8th century sought assistance from the Bavarians against the Avars. The Frankish-Bavarian expansion towards the east that followed actually led to the collapse of Avar rule. As a result, Carolingian armies as well as Bavarian and Slavic settlers occupied the area as far as Lake Balaton. What is today eastern Austria was integrated into the margravian organization of the Carolingian Empire. A by-product of this process was the Christianization of the area by the Bavarians.

## Castle road – regional encounters

This peaceful time did not last very long, because soon the Hungarians pushed in from the east, and their

The Lafnitz is one of the oldest border rivers in Europe. Already during the Urnfield Period (starting around 1300 B.C.), a line of fortified hilltop settlements, probably originating as a defense against horsemen from the east, existed in Eastern Styria. In the Hallstatt Period (from 800 B.C. on), the Scythians attempted to expand westward, but their advance was effectively stopped at this border. Around the beginning of the Common Era, the Lafnitz River was the eastern border of the kingdom of Noricum and later, of the Roman province of the same name. From the year 991 on, it formed the border of the Styrian Mark and thus also of the East Frankish-German Empire of the Ottonians. The river remained the eastern border of the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation” until the latter's demise in 1806. In the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, the Lafnitz formed the border between the two halves of the empire. Finally, in 1921 it was proclaimed the internal border between the Federal States of Styria and Burgenland when the later was incorporated into the new Austrian Republic.

The ancient border between the Roman provinces of Noricum and Pannonia corresponded approximately to the present-day border between Styria and Burgenland. Around the year 16/15 B.C., the Celtic kingdom of Noricum became part of the vast Roman Empire, in a peaceful way for a change. For the next several decades, Noricum enjoyed an autonomous status. It was not until Emperor Claudius (41–54 B.C.) that the former Noric kingdom was established as the civilian province of Noricum and annexed to the Roman Empire. Along this peaceful border ran the Roman Amber Road, an



victory over a Bavarian army at Bratislava in 907 led to the loss of the Avar Margraviate. The Duchy of Bavaria recovered from this shock surprisingly quickly. In 943 the Bavarians and Carantans defeated the Hungarians on the Welser Heide Plain and followed up that victory with another at Lechfeld near Augsburg in 955. The Hungarian expansion was thus halted, and what is today eastern Austria, including the area of Central and Lower Styria, regained the status of a frontier march with significant support from the Empire.

In the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, ongoing military threats from the Hungarians led to the fortification of the Styrian eastern border. In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, an intensive period of castle-building began. Castles and fortified knightly manors were built, and walled cities such as Friedberg, Hartberg, Fürstenfeld and Radkersburg were expanded. It is to this period that the origins of today's Castle Road can be traced. The vernacular expression "Kruzitürken", an amalgam of crucifix and Turks, still describes two of the

"main enemies", who posed a threat from the east beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the common folk, however, it did not much matter whether it was rebellious or feuding nobles, robbers and highwaymen, Hungarians, Hajduks, Kurucs or Turks who threatened life and limb. The times were fraught with uncertainty and destruction. That was particularly true of the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, though surprisingly the Thirty Years' War barely affected the region.

Towards the end of the Second World War, the region along the border once again became a battle zone. And more recently, the disintegration of Yugoslavia led to this frontier region in the southeast again becoming a "hot border". Fortunately, all this now lies in the past. The borders are open, and regions connected by a long, shared history are growing together again. The people here are building bridges to one another once more.

Stone witnesses of this often uncertain and war-ridden past are the many

castles and palaces, fortified towns, monasteries, and convents of the region. They bring the past to life and invite one to explore and discover, because they all breathe history in the truest sense of the word. They connect that history with us in the present, and the end of their story is still far from being reached.

#### The six functions of castles

It is difficult to clearly determine which function served by castles was once the most important or the most valuable. What is not subject to doubt is that fortified buildings first consisted of towers with wooden palisades and fences, which were later reinforced with defensive walls. There was a political element to all this, as well. Someone put up a fight and others had to be defended, one tribe against another, a territory against foreign invaders who were greedy for land, one leader against other leaders ...

Each fortress or castle also had, to one degree or another, also an administrative function, even if it was only rudimentary. It was built along the border of some





sort of political entity, whether it was a manor, a country, a duchy, a diocese, or the seat of a parish. It had an economic purpose – the defense of the land, as well as the protection of the people who cultivated, owned, or leased it. Furthermore, each castle took on a cultural function over time, even if everything else connected with castles might appear uncultured by today's standards. With their development, these castles also assumed a historically significant position, because some events occurred as they did only because the castles existed at a particular location and not somewhere else.

Every single fortress, every fortified tower, and every hard-to-reach castle, as well as each palace on the plain fulfilled all these tasks. In some periods one function was perhaps more prominent than the other, one perhaps was temporarily neglected or even forgotten. For example, during a siege, when one had to fear for one's life, the cultural function took a back seat to the defensive one. After a successful defense and the withdrawal of the attackers, culture could come to the fore again during a victory celebration. Even today, these historic buildings fulfil all these different roles, only that some are in the foreground, while others remain hidden, waiting to be rediscovered in the future.

Instead of revenue from thousands of acres of manorial property around the castle, from socage, tolls, court taxes, and other forms of income, the upkeep of castles today must be financed from other sources. Nonetheless, that upkeep is of extraordinary importance. When a single castle disappears—when a castle is abandoned—its history also disappears under its ruins—or at least a significant part of it. If one function is lost, so are others.

#### Castles and art

Today, more than ever before, we value the cultural function of castles above all the rest. This is nothing new, only that not all of us were aware of it—at least not all at the same time and not in the same way. Since we have already talked about the defensive function and the economic functions of castles, we will now shift our focus to what fascinates us today and, above all, what has survived within and around the castles.

In the Middle Ages many castles were centers where culture flourished as in a greenhouse. Life in them was certainly often not very idyllic, not even for their owners and lords, who always had to demonstrate defensive strength to ward off potential enemies. This meant ensuring that storerooms were always well-stocked, that there were sufficient livestock within



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the castle walls, and enough soldiers, gunpowder, armor, water, and heating material, etc. But every difficult season was followed by a better one, in which knights competed in tournaments, itinerant musicians and actors were guests, where in warm rooms a round of chess or a hopping game was enjoyed. In the latter, the object was to knock over one's opponent. If she happened to be a woman, a stolen glimpse of a bit of white skin above the knee might provide an additional thrill.

As for art itself, it is not so important what the lord's actual motive for becoming a patron of the arts might be, what was more decisive was what this patronage produced and what has remained of it for later generations. A majestic church could have been built out of pure piety, as an intercession for good fortune and a peaceful death, or as a plea to the Almighty not to let the noble family die out without a male descendant to continue the lineage. Many castle lords founded monasteries for different orders, supported them financially, leased or even bequeathed parts of their property to them. The ministeriales of ecclesiastical estates contributed to the construction of churches either of their own volition or because of decisions taken by others. Sometimes they even built chapels themselves to fulfill a vow.

For all this, master builders had to be commissioned. The lord's dependents provided the manual labor. These ecclesiastical spaces, as well as most of the residential rooms in the castle were all decorated with paintings and statues of differing quality. And when one noble family decided to become patrons of the arts, their peers felt compelled to keep up, or even exceed them in munificence. Today we can hardly imagine the differences that existed between the nobles, kings, and emperors back then. The Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus, for example, was a great admirer of the Italian Renaissance, which flourished during his lifetime in the 15th century. Through his building activities, he insured its influence in the countries of Eastern Europe. In more than a hundred different localities of his realm, he had castles, palaces and other buildings

constructed or renovated in this new architectural style. He founded the famous Bibliotheca Corviniana with over two thousand books and spent at least a hundred thousand forints on art and scholarship annually. He spoke excellent Latin, which was the common language of the European educated elite of the time, in addition to at least six other languages.

It is perhaps surprising that, as a descendant of a Romanian family and king of Hungary, it was Hungarian that he spoke least well. His annual expenditure for art almost reached the expenditures for his standing army, which was not exactly a small group. It included 20,000 cavalymen, 8,000 infantrymen, 9,000 combat vehicles and 8,000 soldiers who were permanently stationed at the castles and fortresses in the Turkish-occupied area. In the same century, the lords of Pettau/Ptuj in Ptujška Gora/Maria Neustift commissioned an extraordinary example of Gothic art, St. Mary's Church with its exquisite statue of the Virgin of Mercy. Despite such shining examples of cultural development, some castle lords at that time could neither read nor write.

### **The spirit of the past cannot be reawakened when a castle disappears**

In medieval and early modern times, however, the castles were, in fact, not especially popular among the people, except for the nobility and the powerful, of course. It was not the fortifications' imposing form that commoners objected to, but the fact that the lords of the castles built these structures on the backs of their subjects. There were exceptions, however.

The previously mentioned King Matthias Corvinus was renowned for his severity and ruthlessness, but even he was willing to listen to the most oppressed among his subjects and help them in their need. Once, when the noble lords refused to concede that their subjects needed time to rest up, the king took the lords out into the fields and made them do the work. He became very angry when the noblemen rolled their eyes after only a little time spent hoeing, lamenting that the work was too tedious for them.

Because the times before and after Corvinus were even more desperate, people forgot the bad sides of the king and only remembered the good ones – the glory was all that remained. In at least eight present-day countries, he became a legendary figure in tales and national myths. The Slovenes know him as King Matthias, who withdrew with his army after the battle against the Turks and took shelter in a mountain cave (according to legend on the Petzen in the Slovenian region of Koroška), where he sleeps until his beard grows long enough to circle the stone table therein nine times. Then he will come back and free his people. The Hungarian king became a part of the lore of the Slovenes, Hungarians, Slovaks, Czechs, and Romanians, among others. Understandably, Austrians and Germans did not hold him in such esteem, since for four years he prevented the Holy Roman Emperor from actually residing in Vienna, his capital city.

The greatest value of the castles that remain preserved for us down to the present lies in the history and spirit of the past that is associated with them. Above all, it is this spirit that cannot be reawakened when a castle ceases to exist, even if we were able to build a similar structure on the same spot using today's knowledge and technology.





# BAD RADKERSBURG



Herberstorff Palace in Bad Radkersburg.

Situated close to the border, Radkersburg was founded as a defense against possible invasion from Hungary, as well as to facilitate cross-border trade with that country. Later, when the threat from the Turks increased, in the 16th century Italian master builders were hired to reinforce the town's fortifications. The location on the Mur River and on other trade routes also made Radkersburg an important center of trade: wine, honey, Hungarian cattle, iron, salt, and other goods changed hands here. Even at times when defensive considerations were not so paramount, the preservation of the fortifications was of great importance. The walls were kept in good repair, even when there was not an imminent threat, because one could never be certain when an enemy might appear at the gate. So, this defensive belt around the city has been preserved almost completely down to today.

It is not clear whether the city was founded by Ottokar II or by the Habsburg king Albrecht I towards the end of the 13th century. In any case, there was a concrete construction plan from the very beginning, the implementation of which can still be seen in the city's look and feel. On the other side of the Mur River in Slovenia lies the castle of Oberradkersburg, which

was built before the city was founded. The urbarium of 1285/90 already lists 17 noblemen as guardians of Bad Radkersburg, and in 1299 the settlement was already listed as a city. In the following years, the sovereign granted the town a number of trade privileges. Around 1320 the privilege of duty- and toll-free movement of goods through the whole of Austria was granted, which was extended to Carinthia, Carniola and the Windic March in 1342. This was followed in 1383 by the right to stack goods, which obliged all travelling merchants to offer their goods for sale in the city for three days. The town is conveniently located on the road to Hungary at an intersection of important trade routes. In the Middle Ages, the Mur River provided an important transportation alternative to the dangerous and often impassable country roads. It made possible extensive trade relations between Upper Styria and Southern or Lower Styria. In 1469 and 1470, in the course of the feud between Andreas Baumkircher and Emperor Frederick III, the town was battered and besieged.

The period that followed was not much better. In 1480 under the rule of King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, the city was said to have been captured, plundered, and devastated. This, however, cannot be documented with





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certainty. The fact that the privileges of the city were confirmed by Corvinus might lead one to assume that he would want to take advantage of the economic wealth of the city rather than destroying it. His methods were, in any case, not especially gentle. In order to extort ransom money, he had wealthy citizens of the town kidnapped and deported to Ofen in Hungary. For the following ten years, in the town itself, Jakob Szekely set the tone as commander. It was not until after the death of the Hungarian king that Szekely handed over the city without a fight to the Habsburg Maximilian I. After Radkersburg had shaken off this “occupation”, its economy recovered rapidly. The town reached its economic peak in 1498, when its tax assessment level among Styrian towns was second only to that of Graz.

### The Fortification of Bad Radkersburg

From the beginning, the fortress of Radkersburg was strategically important. Its purpose was to prevent possible invasions and thus keep enemies from advancing up the lower Mur valley to the provincial capital of Graz. At first the city was protected only by a simple circular wall and a moat. Later nine defensive towers were constructed to make the town more impregnable, four of which remain today. Beginning in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman threat increased significantly. When the Turks besieged Vienna in 1529, if it had not been clear before, it was now obvious to everyone in the eastern part of the Habsburg territories that massive investment in new fortifications was necessary. Medieval city fortifications were simply not up to the task of withstanding modern siege techniques. Radkersburg was no exception in this regard, though the need for new fortifications was already recognized before the Siege of Vienna. The town had lured Martino Allio, a native of Lugano, to work on the fortifications as a master mason as early as the 1520s. His son, Domenico dell'Allio (also Aglio, del Alio, de Lallio), went on to plan and build numerous new fortifications in the region, including at Radkersburg. There, he equipped the town with bastions, implementing the most modern system of the time. The medieval city wall was extended and reinforced with a strong protective belt of ditches, ramparts and six bastions.

Radkersburg thus became the most important Styrian border fortress, and in 1588 an armory, an arsenal, and a storehouse were added as a supply base for the nearby Military Border. In 1582 during the Reichstag in Augsburg, Radkersburg was elevated to the status of an imperial fortress, and in the following period a garrison was stationed in the town.

The effectiveness of the fortification was still evident in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1704 the citizens successfully defended their town against the onslaught of the Kurucs. Even though it was not conquered by outside forces, the town and its inhabitants were, nevertheless, repeatedly threatened. Since Radkersburg was the last mustering point for soldiers bound for the Croatian-Slavonian Military Border and because military discipline was not very well developed during those times, on more than one occasion Radkersburg and its environs was plundered by domestic, rather than enemy troops. To make matters worse, the peasant population of the surrounding area was not only subject to raids and terrorization by the Ottomans, the Hajduks and the Kurucs, they were also subjected to exploitation by the landlords, who imposed ever higher tax burdens on them. Three town fires in 1680, 1713 and 1750 also caused considerable damage.

As a border town, for centuries Radkersburg had to contribute to the defense against potential attackers from the east. Even today traces of chartaques dating back to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century can be found near Kutschenitza Brook. The term chartaque has its origin in Persian and can be roughly translated as “four logs” –



the basic structure of a watchtower. These fortifications, as well as so-called abatis, entrenchments, and redoubts, starting from the Mur River near Bad Radkersburg and extending via Sichel-dorf, Dedenitz, Goritz, Pöltzen, Hasel-dorf, Gruisla to St. Anna am Aigen and then further to the north, were set up to defend the border with Hungary. While there is little left of many of these border fortifications, those from the Renaissance still dominate the appearance of the city. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the conflict with the Ottoman Empire came to an end, and along with it the importance of Radkersburg as a fortified town. In 1773 the fortress was abandoned. In 1838 the “Ungartor” (Hungarian Gate) was demolished, and the “Grazertor” (Graz Gate) met the same fate in 1878.

The river’s importance for trade, together with the town’s border location and the implications of that location for political and military issues helped determine Radkersburg’s status for centuries. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Mur’s trading significance declined dramatically. The region’s roads were improved, and the introduction of the railway made it much less attractive to ship goods on the river – rail transport was simply cheaper and much faster. Furthermore, the north-south trading route to the Adriatic grew in importance, and Radkersburg lay off the beaten track for that trade. As a consequence, it was necessary for the city’s merchants and tradesmen to focus on a more local market provided by the surrounding countryside. The economic boom taking place elsewhere in the Empire in the second half of the century was much less pronounced here, because the region simply lacked the needed preconditions, both geographic and infrastructural, for rapid industrialization. On the plus side, some economic development was provided by the reestablishment of a garrison in the town in 1842. Radkersburg came to resemble many other such provincial garrison towns in the Monarchy at the end of the nineteenth century.

### Radkersburg at the crossroads of languages and nations

Developments in Radkersburg also resembled that in other late-nineteenth century border towns in another, less positive respect. Located in a linguistically





## The Styrian hot springs region & the Vulkanland



The town of Radkersburg, Georg Matthaeus Vischer (Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, 1681).

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mixed area, the language question raised its ugly head with rising nationalism in the 1880s. What language should be used in administration and education? What measures should be taken to assure political representation for national groups? This nationality conflict escalated during the First World War. Then, with the collapse of the monarchy after the war, Radkersburg was occupied temporarily by SHS (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes) troops on December 4, 1918, before the peace treaty of St. Germain settled the border between the new Yugoslavian state and Austria. With the drawing of this new demarcation, Radkersburg's status as a border town was more pronounced than ever, because now Styria was divided into an Austria part north of the Mur and a Slovenian part south of it. Radkersburg's hinterland to the south now lay in another country.

During the Second World War the national dispute was carried to extremes by the National Socialists. Atrocities and a brutal Germanization campaign in the region of Lower Styria (i.e., present-day Slovenia) gave rise to hatred and revanchism. Military conflict during the war left the city devastated. Only four of the 321 houses in the town were left unscathed. It is no wonder that after the war a climate of mistrust characterized cross-border relations. The Austrian State Treaty of 1955 led to the city experiencing a first modest upswing, and a relationship of good neighborliness gradually developed with Yugoslavia. During the 1970s, the city was able to redefine itself as a spa town, and with it came a new economic boom.

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, the political development on the other side of the border was rapid. Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence on

June 25. The leadership in Belgrade sent troops to the two republics two days later, and the Balkan war began. Unlike in the rest of Yugoslavia, the fighting in Slovenia fortunately lasted for "only" ten days. Despite the short duration of hostilities, fighting did take place directly on the Austrian border, especially in the area of Bad Radkersburg. At the beginning of July 1991, Yugoslavian troops withdrew from Slovenia, and in December Slovenia received a democratic constitution. In January 1992, this new state was recognized by Austria, which marked the beginning of a new chapter of cooperation with the town's neighbors on the other side of the Mur River. The new partner was the Republic of Slovenia. In 2015, the border on the Mur was once again the focus of public attention. The war in Syria had driven millions of people to flee, many of whom made their way to Europe, a dramatic event that was to change attitudes toward the border once again.

### Bad Radkersburg as a health resort

During exploratory drilling in search of crude oil in 1927, a mineral water source was discovered near the town park. Emerging from a depth of 280 meters, the mineral water has a high magnesium content and is now sold under the name "Long Life". In 1963 the current sports pool was constructed with a spa center following in 1965. Medical services were then expanded and supplemented with various sports facilities. Owing to the water's healing properties, the word "Bad" (spa town) was added to the city's name in 1975.

In 1978, a rich source of thermal water was discovered at a depth of 2,000 meters – at the very last minute, so to speak. The drillers were just about to give up their search, when on January 23, 1978 a fountain of hot water came bubbling up, which convincingly reinforced Bad Radkersburg's reputation as a spa town. The water comes out of the ground with a temperature of 80° C. This makes it one of the hottest thermal water sources in Styria, as well as one of the most mineral-rich. This drilling success laid the foundation for the establishment of a municipally owned company to exploit this natural resource, the Kur- und Bad Radkersburg GesmbH. In 1987, majority ownership was taken over by the Federal State of Styria, but in 2003 the municipality retook full financial control. In 1989 the spa was given the name "Parktherme". Since the 1970s, numerous construction and renovation initiatives have created a multifaceted health and thermal landscape which is complemented by a biosphere park on the Mur.

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# OLD CASTLES – WARM SPRINGS – HOT BATTLES



The Imperial Couple of Bad Gleichenberg at the Biedermeier Festival.

The region of Bad Gleichenberg has been a popular place of settlement for thousands of years, which is clear from prehistoric and ancient archaeological remains. Naturally, the Romans also took a liking to this lovely location and its hot springs. South of Bad Gleichenberg in Merkendorf, for example, there was a Roman villa rustica. The area was also highly favored as a location for fortifications, castles, and palaces, as there were no less than five castles and palaces in the immediate vicinity: Kornschlössl Castle, the castles of Alt-Gleichenberg and Gleichenberg, the Waldsberg Fortress and Trautmansdorff Palace. Alt-Gleichenberg Castle

was built in 1170 by the lords of Wildon on a strategically favorable narrow spot at the southern exit of the Klausenbach gorge. Today little remains of this castle site, which is popularly known as “Meixnerstube”. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Lords of Walsee built the “Neu-Gleichenberg” Castle on the other side of the deeply cut Klausen gorge, which was expanded into a palace in the 17th century. The Scotsman Basil Hall described his visit to Gleichenberg Castle around 1836 as a romantic and adventurous journey: “We [...] set off next day to visit Gleichenberg, which lies about a league and a half amongst the valleys south of Hainfeld, and, unlike that place, really looks its character of a





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Spa Park and main square of Bad Gleichenberg.

castle, being built on the top of a steep rock, inaccessible on three sides. In other respects, too, it is beautifully situated, and in the season when we first visited it nothing could be more striking than the scene viewed from the windows of the inhabited part of the building. The lustre of the decaying foliage, like the colours of the dying dolphin, almost dazzled the sight; and the thick woods on every side crowded so close upon the castle, that until we came near it we could scarcely see even the turrets. In this respect Gleichenberg differs from its opposite neighbor Riegersburg, which is seen from every part of the surrounding country. Like that once famous stronghold, however, poor Gleichenberg is allowed to fall into a wretched state of neglect, and we could not help sighing to think that even a very little expense and a very little trouble might check the process of ruin and render it one of the most charming places in the world. As it was, we had to make our way, as best we could, amongst piles of rubbish, and along roads, which though formed in the solid rock, had been so worn out, that they were barely passable, and over bridges scarcely strong enough to bear the weight of a cat.

It is always painful to see the ancient residence of magnificence turned to base purposes. We can look with picturesque complacency on a good honest ruin, covered with ivy, and tenanted only by owls and foxes; but there is little or no pleasure in wandering through the deserted courts, damp staircases, and empty rooms

of a huge palace, where half a dozen meagre retainers occupy the establishment which might have lodged as many hundreds. With these feelings and expecting nothing but the desolation we had seen enough of at Riegersburg, we clambered up to the second story, and there most unexpectedly, came upon a very pleasantly lighted, well furnished, small suite of the snugest possible apartments, occupied by the accomplished proprietor of the castle.” Basil Hall’s forebodings of the castle’s decline were unfortunately to come true about 150 years later.

For some time, the castle remained in the possession of the Counts of Trauttmansdorff, until Count Maximilian Philipp, the last male representative of the Trauttmansdorff-Weinburg family, died in 1933. With his death, the Styrian line of this old family became extinct. Maximilian Philipp’s sister inherited the property and passed it on to her daughter, Countess Anna Maria von Stubenberg in 1943. Thus, this equally important noble family came into possession of the castle, which remained completely intact until the end of the Second World War. Only in the very last days of the fighting did the building suffer significant damage. This calamity alone would perhaps not have posed a death sentence for the castle, because the historic walls could have been saved. But in the 1980s, a fire destroyed any hopes of restoration. Only the so-called witch’s tower is still visible above the lush green foliage of the surrounding forest. Now it feels as if the place





## Bad Gleichenberg

has been abandoned for centuries, time has done its work and nature has almost completely reconquered the place.

### Gleichenberg as a spa town

The hackneyed expression, “Already the ancient Romans...” could be used as an appropriate lead-in for this section, because the healing springs of Gleichenberg were already known in ancient times. Indeed, the entire region was already densely populated more than 2,000 years ago. The Römerbrunnen (Roman Well), which can be seen today next to the spa museum (housed in the former drinking hall), is an indicator of an early use of the healing water, even if it was originally located somewhere else. The well-preserved Roman well curb was discovered in 1845 during construction work. On the ground numerous Roman coins and some fossilized hazelnuts from the 1st to the 3rd century A.D. were found, possibly votive offerings.

After Roman rule came to an end, however, the Gleichenberg thermal springs were largely forgotten for the next millennium and a half. It was not until 1834 that the governor of Styria, Mathias Constantin Reichsgraf von Wickenburg and the Graz physician Ignaz Werlé brought about the springs’ renaissance. Werlé, a brother-in-law of Archduke Johann of Austria, drew Count Wickenburg’s attention to the springs and their healing properties. The count was so taken with the healing properties of the water, the beauty of the landscape, and the area’s mild climate that he decided to develop Gleichenberg as a health resort and make it generally accessible to the public. Wickenburg laid the foundation for the Curbad Gleichenberg on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1834. In 1841, the construction of the church (completed in 1845) and the Gleichenberg monastery was started. Both buildings were handed over to the Franciscans in 1888.

Even before the renewed use of the springs in the 18th and 19th centuries, however, efforts had been made to sell medicinal water from Gleichenberg’s wells. Already in 1632, the Brunn zu Stradn was mentioned, and in 1678 the Johannesbrunnen (then still referred to as Stradnerquelle) could be found on a map of Styria by Georg Matthäus

Vischer. In 1772 the district physician of Radkersburg, Hermann von Gleisner, reported on the springs known at that time. His report also attracted attention in Vienna. Empress Maria Theresa commissioned the gynecologist Heinrich Johann von Crantz to analyze all the healing springs in the monarchy, in order to compile a catalogue of healing spas. This was the first scientific study of the healing waters of Gleichenberg. In 1777 Crantz published the book, “Die Gesundbrunnen der österreichischen Monarchie”. In the very year that work was published, the owner of Gleichenberg Castle, Count Joseph Trautmannsdorff, had the mineral water from the Klausenquelle bottled and sent to customers in search of relief from diverse ailments.

But let us get back to the actual founding of the spa. It was Count Matthias Constantin of Wickenburg who took the initiative. On May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1834, he founded the “Gleichenberger und Johannisbrunnen Aktienverein” which had set itself the task of acquiring springs and land and taking the necessary measures to establish a spa. One thousand shares with a nominal value of 100 guilders each were issued, and within a very short time they were all sold. With this capital it was possible to start the planning for the establishment of a spa and mineral water distribution. Doctors and chemists started to work intensively on the springs. Starting in 1836 several publications appeared on the healing effects of the water, and the new spa increasingly attracted an interested public hoping for health benefits from

## Only the Witches’ Tower is visible above the forest’s verdant green.

Fifty years later these ideas about the supra-regional use of the healing water were taken up again. Johann Sailer began selling the mineral water as “stahlwasser” in his Graz pharmacy. In 1817 Johanna Reybauer from Marburg leased the Stradnerquelle and Sulzleitenquelle, and subsequently started a lively mail-order business with the mineral water, mainly in what was at that time Lower Styria (today Slovenia). In 1819 she received permission from Archduke Johann to name the water from the Stradnerquelle after him – a wise choice, because thereafter the mineral water experienced a rise in sales. The bottling plant in Hof bei Straden, where the water was filled into clay jugs, was quickly expanded, while the one by the Sulzleitenquelle in Gleichenberg was closed. Even back then, sales success encouraged imitators to engage in “brand theft”. A master baker from Trautmannsdorf, for example, wanted to jump on the bandwagon with water from the Karlsquelle, which he had tapped. But his success was short-lived. Since he had not secured the necessary licenses, he was soon forced to discontinue distribution.

the water. The brochures about the new spa were in great demand, especially in the bookstores in Graz. Even back then, city-dwellers longed for idyllic country life and nature. Within a few years Gleichenberg, became a popular spa and vacation resort for the people of Graz. The effect soon radiated beyond Styria, first to Vienna, then to Hungary, Italy, France, and England. The attractiveness

The bottling station for Gleichenberg Healing Water from the Johannisbrunnen Well, second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.





## The Styrian hot springs region & the Vulkanland

of the spa was further enhanced by the twenty-hectare spa park which had been planned by Count Wickenburg's wife, Countess Emma of Wickenburg, née d'Orsay. The two main springs still bear the couple's names: Constantinquelle and Emmaquelle. The aforementioned Carlsquelle was named after their son.

The success of the first years was also due to the numerous prominent guests who discovered Gleichenberg for themselves. Members of the Austrian ruling family, members of the high nobility, but also doctors, scientists and poets enjoyed the healing powers of the water, as well as the lovely area and the mild climate. In 1846 the spa was visited by the future emperor, Franz Joseph, for the first time, and the following year by Emperor Ferdinand and Archduke Johann. Noblemen and high-ranking officers also came from Hungary, Poland, Italy, and Russia to be cured here, to recuperate and, of course, to socialize. In 1883 Emperor Franz Joseph once again honored Bad Gleichenberg with a visit.

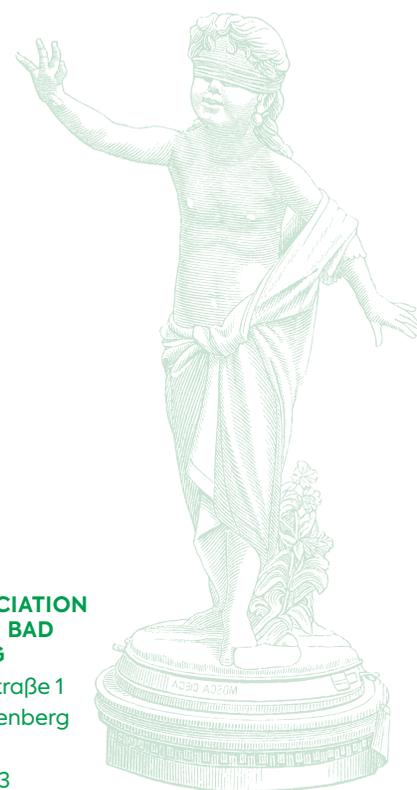
Already in the first spa season, the guests could use a rain and shower bath and 16 tubs in a bathhouse, the water for which came from the Werlé-Quelle. From the very beginning, the shipment of medicinal water was also a huge success. Beginning in 1845 the Römerquelle was also used, and until 1964 the Werlé-Quelle was used for bathing. In 1855 the Maria Theresa-Quelle was added (previously called the Bachquelle). At present seven springs are used. The thermal water from the Mariannenquelle and Maxquelle is a "sodium hydrogen carbonate chloride thermal sourling." The Styrian poet, Peter Rosegger confessed in 1906: "I love this corner of the earth. Gleichenberg is a soft, flower-covered palanquin, where one can indulge in the comfort of a few weeks of undisturbed idleness and nothingness." Rosegger spent his summer vacations for many years in Bad Gleichenberg, where he found complete relief from his asthma.

The First World War brought a decline in the number of visitors, but this was followed by another boom with over 8,000 guests in 1928. Since 1926 the spa town, now rich in tradition, has been allowed to call itself "Bad" Gleichenberg. The spa saw an even more dramatic downturn as a result of the Second World War, and especially the last year of the war in 1945 brought much suffering and destruction to the area. For about five weeks, Bad Gleichenberg was a war theater, and some of the most beautiful and representative buildings, such as the large Kurhaus, the Villa Wickenburg or the Vereinshaus (later Parkhotel) fell victim to the war and went up in flames. After the end of the war, all damage was repaired as quickly as possible, and the spa gradually began to operate again.

In 1948 the health resort could already boast of 5,000 spa guests and a total of 102,000 overnight stays. From the beginning of the 1950s until the mid-1970s, the Bad

Gleichenberg spa center was built up, and all the spa buildings were combined into a single ensemble. In 1972, an indoor pool with thermal mineral water was built, and in 1984 the outdoor pool was constructed. After some years of stagnation, in 2003 a new project was undertaken to build the most modern health resort in Austria. On January 22nd, 2007, the Bad Gleichenberg Therapy Center was opened in a first construction phase, followed by the spa and hotel in the second phase. The center of the health resort is now more beautiful than ever, and since 2015 the main square shines in new splendor. As a meeting place, it invites one to enjoy the unique ambience. Its revitalized and newly restored historic buildings and new architecture offer particularly pleasant views. A fountain makes the element of water tangible – the fountains dance daily to the sound of waltzes!

Expertise in the field of health continues to play a central role in Bad Gleichenberg. Special therapies are available for the treatment of respiratory problems and skin diseases, and the Gleichenberg Brine, for example, has proven its worth. The Therme der Ruhe (Thermal Spa of Rest) is located directly within the traditional spa park. Here, the harmony of this unique "corner of the earth", which has grown over a span of 180 years, can be experienced better than ever.



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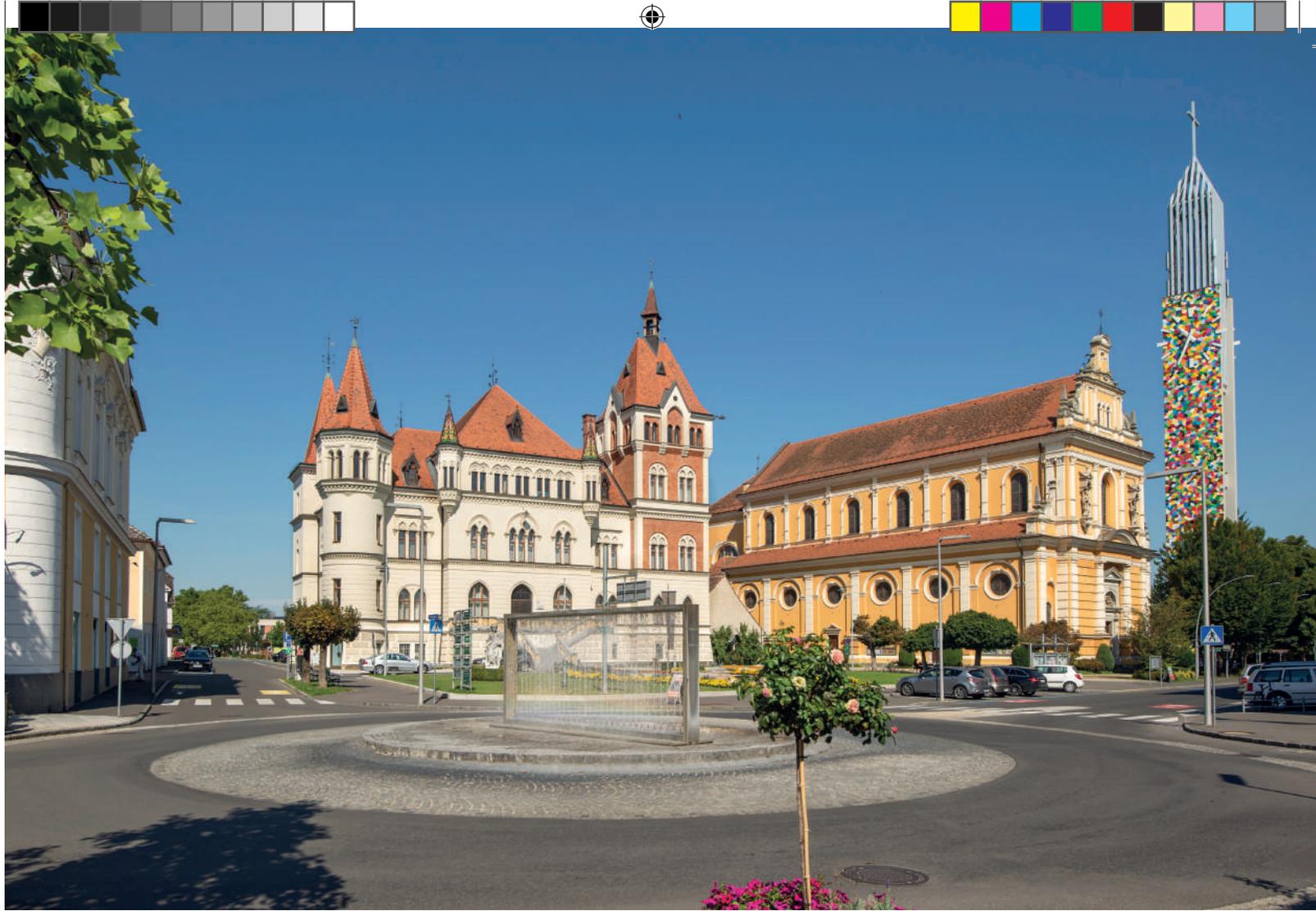
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Hold Villa, Parish Church and Church Tower of Feldbach.

## THE FELDBACH TABOR

The tabors on the plain stood together next to churches and in such a way that the churches were surrounded by strong walls, towers and ditches, and many of them are still standing today” – so reported Johann Weikhard von Valvasor in his “The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola” in 1689. He goes on to say: “All over the country those tabors that were not near churches have all been abandoned since border houses were erected at the Turkish frontiers, for since then it is much calmer and safer in the country than before.” How necessary it was to build a fortification for the town of Feldbach is already evident when looking at a topographical map. Feldbach lies completely unprotected in the wide Raab valley at an intersection of connecting routes between north and south, west and east. For a long time, the town had to manage without fortifications, an unsatisfactory state of affairs,

particularly in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the proverbial plagues had become a real threat to the countryside: migratory locusts, the plague, but increasingly also feuds and invasions by the Hungarians and Turks. Times were uncertain, and it was best to take precautions, especially when the landlords and the provincial princes refused to or simply could not provide for the safety of their subjects. Feldbach undertook to fortify the town for several reasons. Since its elevation to the status of a market between 1230 and 1260, the provincial prince was particularly interested in an unhindered collection of his revenues, such as tolls, customs duties and taxes in kind. That required control of the merchants and transportation generally on the connecting road between Hartberg and Radkersburg, which crossed the Raab River in Feldbach. In addition, there was also the connecting road to

Hungary. The first mention of barriers to control the roads dates back to 1423, and this is the first record of at least a modest fortification of the village.

In 1469, the previously unfortified market town of Feldbach was invaded and occupied by the troops of Andreas Baumkircher in the course of the so-called Baumkircher Feud. This event apparently also provided the immediate impetus for the construction of a fortification in the form of a tabor, which is commemorated by an inscription from 1474. In the process, the parish church of St. Leonhard in Feldbach was provided with a high, gated wall, and a double moat was dug, which was fed by water from the Raab River. The wall was equipped with weirs and embrasures. On the inner side of the wall, there were eleven small, two- to three-story so-called Gaden or Tabor



## The Styrian hot springs region & the Vulkanland

houses each with a cellar, living quarters, storehouse and stable. The individual burgher houses of the market town were each assigned one of the Gaden to provide its residents with a place of refuge should the town be attacked. The parish gate, on which the aforementioned inscription stone is located, had three cellars, two living rooms and a granary. In the tabor's walled-in area, the population of the market and its environs could also find shelter in times of trouble.

The fortification of the entire market became a very serious priority in the 16th century after the Turks invaded the area around Feldbach in 1583. At that time, the tabor was already in poor condition, so efforts were made to repair and reinforce it. In addition to the tabor buildings, a moat protected the modest fortification. The tabor was accessible from the south, i.e., from the market side, protected by a drawbridge and a strongly fortified gate. To have a better view of the outer walls, at the corners of the building there were projections, as can still be seen on the northern side of the tabor today.

The devastating military expedition of the Turks in 1480 had particularly affected Eastern Styria. In the period from 1479 to 1490 alone, a quarter of Feldbach's population died as a direct or indirect result of the Turkish incursions. After their unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1529, the Turks again ravaged Eastern Styria during their retreat. Feldbach itself was spared, but these events led to efforts to repair the tabor, since it had again fallen into disrepair. As early as the spring of 1530, the Styrian Diet voted to repair the tabor by mandating that local farmers provide four days' labor for the construction work. Already in autumn of the same year, the wisdom of this measure was demonstrated by renewed Turkish raids in the Gleisdorf area. Although the Raab Valley and Feldbach were largely spared in this new incursion, attempts were made to further reinforce the tabor and equip it with weapons. In 1600 a patent was issued to all towns and markets in Styria to allow them to maintain stockpiles of food to last a month. A special storage building, as well as a warehouse for ammunition, were erected for this purpose near the tabor in Feldbach.

This turned out to be another well-needed measure taken none too early, for already in May of 1605 rebellious nobles from Hungary, known as hajduks, invaded the Raab Valley for the first time. Before daybreak on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1605, a strong force attacked Feldbach. The market's garrison retreated to the tabor, which was then fired upon by the enemy from the houses and the vicarage in the vicinity. After setting fire to some farm buildings and houses, the hajduks retreated again. The surrounding area was plundered, the Church of the Holy Spirit outside the Grazer Gate and the Church of St. Anne on Calvary Hill were robbed and devastated.

In November of that year, plans were made to station larger military detachments in Feldbach, however, this proved impossible because of the degree of devastation, the lack of accommodation and the lack of provisions, oats, and hay. It was simply not possible to provide sustenance for the troops and associated crew. Therefore, only one cavalry detachment remained in the city. The remaining weapons and ammunition left after the withdrawal of the rest of the military were kept in the tabor. These events led to a concerted effort to fortify the entire market, so ramparts and ditches were constructed. However, the quality of the work does not seem to have been very high, because after a few years many of the ramparts had collapsed and had to be repaired. Due to the lack of money and workers, the work progressed very slowly, though work on three gates to secure the city was eventually completed. During this fortification work, the tabor was also restored, which then served as a prison for those accused of witchcraft in the great Feldbach witch trials from 1673 to 1675. The so-called Hexenkeller of the Tabor Museum is a reminder of this dark episode of the market's history.

The danger of a Turkish invasion became acute again only in the 1660s. Not until the victory over the Turks at Mogersdorf in 1664 was the danger largely overcome. The borderlands continued to be threatened by bands of Turks until the siege of Vienna in 1683 brought about a final turnaround. The Raab Valley was not endangered again until 1704 to 1711, when plundering Kurucs roamed the area. Dragoons were stationed in Feldbach, and military preparedness was expanded again. The Kurucs' attacks did not go much beyond the Fehring area, however. It was rather the movements of their own troops, including those stationed directly in the town that posed the biggest danger to the residents. Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the tabor became less and less important, until finally in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it completely lost its defensive function. For a long time, the tabor houses served as schoolrooms, storerooms, magazines, and storage cellars for ice and vegetables.



Historical view of the Feldbach Tabor, Gouache Malerei,  
© Municipality of Feldbach



## Tabor Feldbach



Local History Museum in the Feldbach Tabor.

“Feldbach is situated in the beautiful Raab valley, right between two of the most beautiful points of Styria, the Riegersburg Castle and Gleichenberg. It has a constant, fairly high annual temperature and generally stable weather interrupted only by short thunderstorms, which makes this lively little town with its good accommodation facilities suitable as a summer resort. There are pleasant valleys and hills in all directions, most of them offer a surprisingly magnificent panorama even at a low elevation. There are simple but relatively good inns along all the paths; it is best to drink a light Styrian wine, which, when enjoyed with mineral water, is a very refreshing drink. Fried chicken can be had almost everywhere.” So enthused Ferdinand Krauss in his travel guide “Die nord-östliche Steiermark. Eine Wanderung durch vergessene Lande” in 1888.

During the First World War, Feldbach was home to a huge prisoner-of-war camp that housed up to 50,000 people. This camp then developed into one of the largest military hospitals in the monarchy, and at the same time a well-organized infrastructure with production facilities was created. Feldbach was severely affected by the Second

World War. The front reached Eastern Styria in the last weeks of the war. In the last hours of the war, Feldbach’s church tower was blown up. The exact circumstances were never clarified. In any case, after the rest of the damage to the town had been repaired, Feldbach got a new, concrete campanile. Built between 1961 and 1964, the imposing tower is now a friendly, colorfully painted landmark in the city. As the capital of the district of the same name, Feldbach developed very well after the war. Since the Styrian government undertook a major consolidation of municipalities in 2015, Feldbach is now the fifth largest municipality in Styria, with a population of about 13,300.

### The Tabor Museum

After a long period in which the tabor was largely neglected, a museum of local history was opened in this historic building complex on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1952. Since 1985 it has been maintained by the Southeast Styrian Association for Local History in cooperation with the municipality. In the decades that followed, the museum has continuously expanded. Today, it occupies almost the entire building. In more than forty rooms, various departments allow young and old visitors to discover life

in times past. Since 2014 it has been called: “Heimat. Museum im Tabor”. The collection was supplemented by exhibits on “World War II” and “The Fire Brigade”. The entire west side and about half of the north and south sides of the Tabor in Feldbach, which once surrounded the old churchyard in a quadrangle, have been preserved. There are eleven adjoining houses, the core of which dates back to the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Each of them consists of a vaulted cellar, one or two stories as a storage building, and its own gable roof. The width of the houses is about four to eight meters, the depth about eight meters. On the outside there are small cellar windows and embrasures, which were often enlarged in the recent past. They remain as signs of the tabor’s former defensive function.

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Current drone view of Kornberg Castle.

## KORNBERG CASTLE

**K**ornberg Castle sits high on a hill in the Auersbach valley north of the town of Feldbach, on the road to Riegersburg Castle. Although it was originally built on this site as a strategic outpost of Riegersburg Castle, Kornberg for many centuries was largely spared from attack. It was only occupied in the last weeks of the Second World War, and so over the centuries the building was largely unscathed by the ravages of military conflict. Ferdinand Krauss wrote about Kornberg in his travel guide from 1888: “The immensely picturesque Kornberg Castle with its numerous towers rises on a rounded, densely wooded hilltop at the end of the valley radiating north from Feldbach. It is one of the most beautifully situated castles in northeastern Styria.”

The knights of Riegersburg-Wildon are responsible for the castle being located where it is. They commissioned their lieges, the lords of Kornberg, with the construction of a castle in the second half of the 12th century. In 1284 a Friedrich von Kornberg is mentioned as a liege

of the Wildons for the first time. After the Wildons, the Kornbergs served as lieges of the lords of Walsee. In 1308 Ortolf von Kornberg got into financial difficulty and as a consequence had to sell the castle to his liege lord, the Duke of Styria. Kornberg and Riegersburg shared the same liege lord. Duke Otto then granted Kornberg to Ulrich von Walsee in 1331. He, in turn, passed it on as a so-called “after-fief” to Ulrich von Graben, whose descendants held the castle for over 200 years. During these two centuries, they continued to add to the fortifications. Andrä, Knight of Graben, bequeathed the “Veste and Geschlos Khornberg” to his cousin Helfrich von Kainach in 1543. A protracted dispute then arose between the Kainach family and the Lords of Stadl, who also laid claim to the Graben inheritance. The Stadl family eventually prevailed in 1584. In 1627 the domain fell temporarily to the barons of Kollonitsch, because Gottfried Freiherr von Stadl’s will had stipulated that only Catholic descendants of his family could take over the property. At that time this posed a serious difficulty, since almost all Styrian



## Kornberg Castle

nobles had converted to Protestantism. In 1638 the Stadl family succeeded in taking over Kornberg Castle again through a settlement. These inheritance disputes apparently did not have a very positive effect on the preservation of the building, because Kornberg Castle was described in 1660 as “quite dilapidated.”

In 1666, Hans Rudolf von Stadl, then but 25 years of age, married 66-year-old Katherina Elisabeth von Galler, the owner of Riegersburg Castle. This marriage, however, was not a happy one. After only three years of marriage, Katherina Elisabeth von Galler divorced her young husband. Franz Leopold von Stadl wrote his nine-volume historical work “Hellglänzender Ehrenspiegel des Hertzogthumb Steyer” at Kornberg from 1732 to 1741, a very special treasure which is still housed there.

The Lords of Stadl expanded Kornberg in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and gave it its present appearance. It remained in the family until 1825. After the death of Leopold von Stadl – the last of his line, Prince Johann I Joseph of Liechtenstein acquired the domain together with a whole series of other castles and palaces in Styria, including Riegersburg. In 1871 the Liechtenstein family then sold Kornberg Castle to Charles François Conte Bardeau, who had the somewhat neglected building restored and furnished in the style of the time. The

brothers Charles and Francois Bardeau had left their French homeland in 1826 and settled first in Venice and later in Trieste. Owing to their great economic aplomb, the family acquired considerable wealth. Furthermore, Charles Bardeau made a very lucrative match in 1829 with Johanna von Dembscher, the daughter of a wealthy fleet-owner. Active economic and personal ties with the papal court led to Charles Bardeau receiving the title of Comes Romanus from Pope Pius IX in 1865.

### The family’s crest consists of a blue horse on a silver background.

Charles and Johanna’s only son, Charles François, continued the family’s rise. He was made an honorary knight of the Military Order of Malta in 1869. In 1870 he married Emma Countess of Bellegarde in Rome, and the young family moved first to Graz and shortly thereafter to Kornberg Castle, which, as already mentioned, had been acquired from the Liechtenstein family. In 1887 the family was granted the title of “Conte” by the King of Italy, but this was only valid in the countries of the Italian

crown. In 1911 Emperor Franz Joseph I then elevated the Bardeau family to the rank of Austrian counts. The family coat of arms shows a blue horse on a silver background and can be found in several places in the castle.

In contrast to other properties in the area, Kornberg was spared attacks by the Turks and Hungarian irregulars. Nonetheless, it still retains its fortified character today, even though some structural extensions were made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as the crenelated perimeter wall. The castle has an irregular shape with four corner towers. The massive northeastern octagonal corner tower may have been the original location of the medieval keep. The entrance to the castle and its courtyard is on the east side over a low stone bridge. To the right and left of it, there are still walled bastions. Above the gate, the coat of arms of the Counts of Bardeau may be seen. The square courtyard is surrounded by two-story residential wings with Renaissance arcades. A fountain with an ornate wrought-iron crown is located in the courtyard. The two-story chapel, dedicated to St. Andrew, is integrated into the building. A predecessor building existed already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century but was destroyed in 1566 as a result of riots during the Reformation. In 1638 the present chapel was rebuilt by the Stadl family. It also contains the Stadl family crypt and several tombstones from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The private and presentation rooms are located on the second floor and are partly used for exhibitions. The castle is furnished in historicist style. Many of the furnishings were made by the carpenter Johann Kern at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The embossed leatherlike paper wallpaper gives the rooms a unique flair. And the quarters are still lively today. Concerts and receptions are held here, guided tours by the lord of the castle take place regularly, as well as gala banquets. From the old furniture stock, some masterly crafted cupboards from the 18<sup>th</sup> century have been preserved. The gatehouse near Feldbach is not as old as it seems. It was built by Karl Heinrich Graf von Bardeau in 1922 according to his own plans, using a building in Nuremberg as a model.

Riding Club at Kornberg Castle in 1975.





Medieval festival at Kornberg Castle.



A castle tour with Consul Mag. Andreas Bardeau.

### Hard times during the Second World War

During the Second World War, as well as in the immediate post-war period, numerous dangers had to be braved in Southeastern Styria. This was also the case at Kornberg Castle, and Eleonore Bardeau recorded her memories of these events in the family chronicle. The area was caught up in a maelstrom during the last weeks of the war. Members of the SS murdered helpless Jews in Feldbach, and chaotic conditions prevailed. The tradition of chalk fires and warning shots lived on.

On Holy Saturday in 1945 the church bells announced the approach of the Russians, and during the night the German army blew up the bridge over the Raab River in Feldbach. SS troops and Russians were alternately “guests” in Kornberg Castle. There was great uncertainty, especially because there were also Jews in the castle and in the Meierhof, the estate’s large agricultural building in the valley below the castle. Some of the Jews could be saved from a terrible fate by the Bardeau family. When conditions became untenable, the Bardeaus themselves found refuge with the Lafer family. Valuables, including the famous Stadl chronicle, were packed into suitcases and buried. In April 1945, the SS Viking Division took up quarters in Kornberg Castle, then only about 400 meters away from the front. With a lot of luck, however, the destruction of the building was averted. Even after the end of the war on May 8th, there was no real peace. Only on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1945, when the Russian occupiers finally left the area, did things become calmer. Thus, the most serious danger was averted.

### The way to the present

Since the gruesome war period and the difficult times that immediately followed, the castle as well as the former stable building and the Meierhof at the base of the castle hill have developed into a first-class event and exhibition center. The current owner of the castle, Consul Andreas Bardeau, is the driving force behind the castle’s economic and cultural development. Furthermore, in his capacity as president of the Castle Road, he is tirelessly on the road to promote the association. The castle is known for weddings, knights’ dinners, exhibitions, and events. A gallery, Europe’s largest carpet exhibition and seasonal arts and craft shows, as well as a riding club complete the current offerings of the castle.

In 2018, the castle was expanded to include the exhibition center, “Meierhof zu Schloss Kornberg”. There you can find, among other things, “The Small World of Great Castles”, a unique exhibition of scale models of fortresses and castles from all over the world. In addition, annual special exhibitions are mounted.

#### SCHLOSS KORNBURG

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Riegersburg Castle

# RIEGERSBURG CASTLE



Current view of Riegersburg Castle





The “landmark of Styria”, or the “strongest bastion of Christianity”—these are just two of the superlatives that were and still are used for this extremely impressive fortress. Riegersburg Castle perches majestically high on a basalt rock, rising steeply above the valley floor. This basalt ledge must have seemed a good settlement site for our ancestors thousands of years ago. This has not changed until today, even if the reasons for the fascination may be partly different. Fortunately, defensive considerations no longer are in the foreground, but the wide panoramic view from the castle rock is still inspiring. The silhouette of Riegersburg Castle serves as the logo of the Styrian Vulkanland, which provides an indication of just how important the castle still is to regional identity. As a landmark in southeastern Styria, the castle and the castle rock look back on an adventurous and eventful history.

The village of Riegersburg developed as a typical castle settlement at the foot of the protecting fortress. In 1170 the main parish church was mentioned for the first time. The original Romanesque church stood on the eastern side of the rock but, unfortunately, it was demolished in 1832. Only a few fragments of it have been preserved, and today they are kept in the parish courtyard. In the late Gothic period, construction began on the present parish church, which is located on the southern side of the rock. The church, dedicated to St. Martin, has a unique atmosphere due to its walls of non-plastered basalt blocks, which results in a rather dark and gloomy interior. At the time of the so-called Urnfield Culture around the 8th century B.C., there was a settlement on the elongated plateau of the castle hill sloping down towards the south, where hut foundations from this period have been uncovered. Other finds date back to the Neolithic Age, the Copper and Bronze Ages, the Iron Age, and the period of Roman settlement. The rock on which Riegersburg Castle is located thus can look back on a continuous history of settlement that stretches back more than 3,000 years.

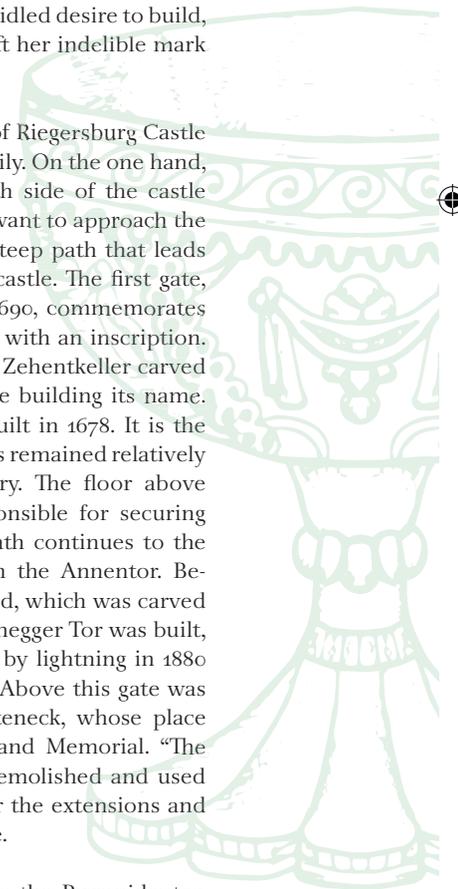
The large fortifications of Riegersburg Castle that still exist today can be traced back to two castles which were originally built separately from each other. Kronegg, the older of the two fortifications, was located on the site of today’s stronghold and was built as a settlement base by Rüdiger von Hohenberg after 1122. Until 1249 Kronegg Castle was owned by the Lords of Riegersburg-Wildon, and then by the Khuenring-Dürnstein family. The younger Lichtenegg Castle, which was situated below the present castle, stood on the flat grass-covered area where the Borderland Memorial is located today. It was built as a ducal castle at the end of the 13th century. Between 1301 and 1478, both castles were owned by the Lords of Wallsee-Graz. In the course of the Walsee feud between Reinprecht II of Walsee and Duke Ernest I (the Iron) of Habsburg beginning in 1411, the surrounding

countryside and the population suffered greatly. This led Ernest the Iron to besiege the castle in 1412 and force its capitulation. Although the surrounding area was repeatedly ravaged in the Baumkirchen feud, as well as by the Hungarians and Turks, since 1412 the castle was never again besieged.

After Reinprecht von Reichenburg and his descendants, the castle came into the possession of the Lords of Stadl in 1571, who commissioned reconstructions and extensions in the style of the late Renaissance. After a short interlude when the Urschenbeckh family (also Ursenbeck) owned it, the castle was taken over by Seifried, Baron von Wechsler from Radkersburg. A niece of the last of the male Wechslers, Baroness Elisabeth Katharina von Wechsler married a Galler and inherited the castle in 1648. This ushered in the era of the probably best known and most multifaceted mistress at Riegersburg – the so-called “Gallerin”. Less as a result of her belligerence, which was considerable, than as a consequence of her unbridled desire to build, Elisabeth Katharina von Galler left her indelible mark on the castle to this day.

If you want to conquer the cliffs of Riegersburg Castle today, you can do so relatively easily. On the one hand, an inclined elevator on the north side of the castle offers comfortable access. If you want to approach the castle more slowly, there is the steep path that leads through many gates to the high castle. The first gate, the Steinkellertor, built around 1690, commemorates Johann Rudolf Count of Purgstall with an inscription. Behind this gate you can find the Zehentkeller carved into the rock, which also gave the building its name. The next gate, the Cillitor, was built in 1678. It is the only one of the many gates that has remained relatively unchanged since the 17th century. The floor above it was used by the guards responsible for securing the path up to the castle. The path continues to the Leopoldibastei and then through the Annentor. Behind it you can see the horse pond, which was carved out of the rock. In 1679 the Lichtenegger Tor was built, which was completely destroyed by lightning in 1880 and then only partially restored. Above this gate was the former low fortress of Lichtenegg, whose place is now occupied by the Borderland Memorial. “The Gallerin” had this lower castle demolished and used the stone as building material for the extensions and reconstructions to the main castle.

The next gate is framed by vines: the Pyramidentor. The sixth gate is the Wenzelstor through which one enters the outer castle. There you can see the armory and, if you are lucky, the castle blacksmith will be at work when you visit. The first moat protects the castle, and then after crossing a second bridge over a deep moat hewn directly from the basalt, you come to the next gate. Behind the large portal lies the elongated first courtyard from which you enter the actual castle.



The second courtyard is much larger and has a 27-metre deep well. A horseshoe is carved into the magnificent wrought iron vine lattice above the fountain. Tradition says that whoever finds this horseshoe will be blessed with good fortune.

Exploring the interior of Riegersburg Castle is a real adventure. Exhibitions and magnificent rooms, as well as a breath-taking view of the surrounding area make the visit an unforgettable experience. Many myths and legends abound about the castle and the witch trials that took place in its environs. One of them involves Katharina Paldauf, the wife of an administrator of the castle in the mid-seventeenth century. This alleged “flower witch” is depicted in the Sybillenzimmer of the castle as a serious-looking woman who rests her right hand on flowers while holding another small bunch of flowers in her left hand. According to legend she was able to make flowers bloom in winter and was condemned as a witch and executed because of that.

#### “Bad Liesl” or “The Gallerin”

The last representative of the Urschenbeckh family at Riegersburg, Anna Margaretha, bequeathed the castle to Hans Wilhelm and Elisabeth Katharina von Galler who was to shape the history and face of the castle as “The Gallerin”. “The Gallerin” was ambitious at first and filled with considerable self-confidence and a strong sense of status. She also had a combative streak and was involved in countless legal disputes. But she could also be a very generous mistress who was not blind to her subjects’ needs. She came from a rich Radkersburg merchant family that was knighted in the 16th century. Due to the death of her closest male relatives, she inherited an enormous fortune within a few years.

When she inherited the Riegersburg, the castle was not in a good condition, a circumstance she immediately set out to rectify. She had the outer castle, the arsenal, and the officers’ quarters built. In 1658 the Baroque “White Hall” was completed by Mathis Lenz and craftsmen from Italy according to a design by Antonio Solar from Graz. It represents



The White Hall of Riegersburg Castle.

a contrast to the knights’ hall in which wood dominates. Since the White Hall could not be heated, it was mainly used in summer as a dining room. However, “The Gallerin” was by no means solely concerned with making the castle more comfortable and splendid. What was even more important to her was the construction of the numerous bastions, gates, and walls along the ascent to the castle. She did not live to see the completion of all these measures--that was left to her son-in-law. Nonetheless, “The Gallerin” is remembered as the builder of Riegersburg Castle, and she also confidently made sure that people knew just how much money she had invested in the construction work. In the White Hall one can read: “Building is a beautiful pleasure, what it costs me, I know full well.” Above the Wenzelsator, she had the following self-assured inscription affixed: “What I had built here in 16 years can be admired without regretting the coin invested, since I did so for the good of the fatherland. Anno Domini 1653.”

In 1630 she married Hans Wilhelm von Galler, later president of the Inner Austrian Court War Council, from whom she got a daughter, Katharina Regina. After the death of her first husband (1650), she was anxious to protect her rights, so spent years in litigation against other heirs, including her own daughter

and son-in-law, but above all against the main parish priest of Riegersburg. The reason for this dispute, during which both sides went to extremes, was the patronage right claimed by “The Gallerin”. The main parish priest in turn denounced the lady of the castle to the government because of her allegedly scandalous lifestyle. “The Gallerin”, on the other hand, supported by her steward and lover, accused her adversary of various disgraceful deeds and even incited parishioners to openly protest against him. The baroness of Galler obviously enjoyed arguing and litigating nearly as much as she did building.

After the death of her first husband, in 1661 she married Colonel Detlef von Kapell, who soon after was killed in the Battle of Saint Gotthard against the Turks in 1664. Then in 1666, the widow married Baron Hans Rudolf von Stadl, who was forty-one years her junior and owner of the neighboring domain of Kornberg. The marriage with this irascible baron, who treated both servants and subjects badly and even beat them, was very unhappy. So in 1669, “The Gallerin” filed for divorce, a highly unusual and brave step for that time. She listed a total of no less than 37 reasons to justify the divorce. She proclaimed that her husband had only spent a total of five or six days with her since the marriage, that he beat her staff, got drunk every day and



Riegersburg Castle, Georg Matthaeus Vischer (Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, 1681)

showed contempt for the Church by eating meat on fasting days. Finally, in February 1669, a settlement was reached. Neighboring Johnsdorf Castle, which she had had expanded explicitly for their honeymoon, was granted in the settlement to her divorced husband. It remained in the possession of the von Stadl family until 1675. Thanks to her wealth and perseverance, “The Gallerin” managed to hold her own against her male counterparts. It was also her wealth that allowed her, at least temporarily, to live a freer life than most other women of her social class, in defiance of prevailing conventions.

In 1655 “The Gallerin” received the sole patronage right over the parish of Riegersburg and its eight branch parishes. The clergy did not recognize this decision and protested vehemently, because they feared she would use parish funds for her own purposes, rather than the maintenance of the church buildings and the remuneration of parish priests. When “The Gallerin” learned that the main parish priest, a man named Strobel, had been caught in bed with his cook, she became active once again. She stormed the vicarage with twenty armed men and had the cook arrested and handed over to the district court of Feldbach. Father Strobel then complained to the government. In response, as she was to do twenty years later in her divorce proceedings, “The Gallerin” wrote a long list of complaints that Strobel’s parishioners had brought to her attention. The dispute lasted for eight years and eventually involved the provincial governor, the Archbishop of Salzburg and two emperors, Ferdinand III and Leopold I. After lawsuits against her own family began, in which her property and thus her livelihood were at stake, she reached a settlement with Father Strobel in 1661 by renouncing the right of patronage over the branch parishes and reimbursing him for the encroachments. “The Gallerin” died in 1672, one year before the beginning of the great witch trial in the neighboring town of Feldbach. The most important achievement of “The Gallerin” undoubtedly

was the fact that within a few years she had, at her own expense, expanded Riegersburg Castle into one of the largest fortresses in the realm. This is all the more significant, because many of her peers preferred to flee to the safety of the cities when there was danger of an enemy attack, leaving their subjects in the lurch. The beneficiaries of “The Gallerin’s” building activity were therefore her subjects, who found protection from the Turks and Hungarians in the fortress. It was not for nothing that her contemporary, Field Marshal Raimondo Montecuccoli, called Riegersburg Castle “the strongest fortress of Christendom.”

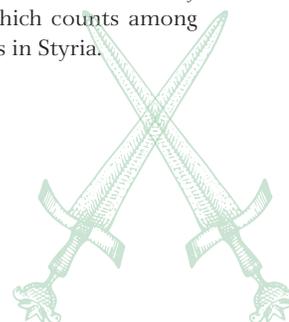
The enormous outlying estates, the six gateways and the eleven bastions with the four-kilometer-long fortification wall were, however, only completed after the death of Katharina Baroness von Galler in 1676 by her son-in-law, Count Purgstall. He had taken over the lordship of the castle as a result of his marriage to her daughter and heir, Regina von Galler. After the extinction of the Riegersburg Counts of Purgstall in 1817, the inheritance was divided among 17 persons, including the Counts of Sauer and Lanthieri and the Stubenbergs, who then sold the domain to Prince Johann of Liechtenstein in an open auction in 1822.

In 1845 Baron Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall wrote the following about the castle in his novel “Die Burgfrau und das Erbfräulein”: “It is a thousand steps from the bottom of the valley where the ponds are to the church in the marketplace, and just as many from the church to the top of the castle, the upper part of which is called Kroneck, because it is the crown of it all. The mountain is crowned as if with a triple tiara, the first hoop of which is the Riegersburg market, the second the middle castle, and the uppermost, Kroneck.”

The castle remains in the possession of the Liechtenstein dynasty, who saved it from imminent ruin after the destruction caused by the war in 1945. In the years that followed, the castle was extensively renovated, an inclined elevator was completed in 2003, and the castle tavern was renewed. A special experience is offered by a falconry show, a climbing path, and regularly organized knight festivals. At present the impressive castle complex is owned by a collateral branch of the Liechtenstein family. Since 2009 Emanuel von und zu Liechtenstein and his family have been successfully working to preserve the castle, which counts among the most famous tourist attractions in Styria.

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# PFEILBURG CASTLE



Inner courtyard of Pfeilburg Castle after renovation.

Fürstenfeld sees itself as the center of the hot springs region in eastern Styria and is a thriving commercial and shopping city. The opening of the borders to the east in 1989 shifted eastern Styria and the former border and fortress town of Fürstenfeld into the center of Europe. It was founded around 1170 by Margrave Ottokar IV as a sovereign town to secure the imperial border to the east. It was first mentioned in a document dating back to 1178. At that time, the market was protected by walls and towers and nestled up against the castle built high above the Feistritz River and the Commandery of the Order of Saint John. The Order of Saint John owned the parish rights of Altenmarkt and Übersbach and dominated the region on the Lafnitz border very early.

The Pfeilburg fortification is the only remaining part of Fürstenfeld's medieval ring wall. It was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century for additional protection of the town and is one of the oldest secular buildings in

Fürstenfeld. Today, the building houses a museum that brings the town's diverse history to life. The core of the building is one of the oldest preserved medieval residential towers in Styria. This tower was probably the most important fortification point in the Fürstenfeld city wall. It dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, protrudes slightly beyond the wall line into the moat and reinforces the old city wall. The Gothic central tower of the castle may already have been a burnt-out ruin in 1480 when the Hungarian troops began their decade-long occupation of Fürstenfeld. At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the tower was rebuilt and then called the "Schwarzturn" (Black Tower) – either because of the effects of the fire, or possibly because black powder was stored there.

### Threats to the town in the 15<sup>th</sup> century

During the Baumkircher feud the Styrian nobility, led by Andreas Baumkircher and his son-in-law Hanns von

Stubenberg, occupied the towns of Hartberg, Fürstenfeld, Feldbach, Marburg, Slovenska Bistrica and Slovenske Konjice, as well as Wildon Castle. The town of Fürstenfeld had been taken by treachery on February 2nd, 1469, and on July 21st there was a bloody clash at the gates of the town between the forces of Jan Holub, a mercenary commander, and those of Andreas Baumkircher. Holub, as an imperial field captain for Emperor Frederick III, commanded a troop of Bohemian mercenaries and about 600 armored cavalymen. Andreas Baumkircher and his troops, which also included Bohemian soldiers, managed to repel Holub's vanguard before the main imperial force arrived. The surprising intervention of Baumkircher's Moravian mercenaries and horsemen decided the outcome. Holub, who was seriously wounded, retreated to Graz. The Battle of Fürstenfeld is considered extremely bloody by the standards of the time. Despite his victory, Baumkircher suffered heavy losses: more than 300



## The Styrian hot springs region & the Vulkanland

dead, about 500 seriously wounded, and about 400 of his (allegedly 1,600) horsemen were captured. On the imperial side, several noble captains were taken prisoner. As a result of the fighting, many houses in the town were destroyed or burned down, and some of its residents were also wounded.

Shortly before Christmas of 1469 the town was captured by the imperial troops, but already on February 2nd, 1470 Baumkircher regained the upper hand. This back-and-forth ended on April 11th, 1470 when the imperial troops retook the market, which had been badly damaged in the meantime.

When the town's fortifications were extended in the 16th century according to plans drawn up by the Italian Domenico dell'Allio, Pfeilburg castle was incorporated into these new defensive facilities. Adjoining the tower was a palace that served as a manorial residence for the noble family entrusted with the care of the tower. The large two-story building retains its L-shaped form still today. The castle was protected by the nearby bastion, as well as by the wall and moat. The current German name of the building, Pfeilburg Fürstenfeld, originated with Hans Pfeilberg, who acquired the property in 1490 and began its reconstruction after the Hungarian invasion of 1480. Various owners followed, Maximilian Ruepp and Jonas von Wilfersdorf being the most famous. In the 16th century Fürstenfeld Castle was a noble residence which was exempt from taxes and had the right to serve wine. In 1664 (Battle of Mogersdorf/Saint Gotthard) the fortifications to the southwest of Fürstenfeld Castle - the so-called "Kavalier" - were reinforced according to plans by the Imperial Court War Council. This was intended to provide additional protection for the fortress wall and to make sure gunfire from the castle could reach the hills to the west of the town.

The defense of the town was often burdensome, because despite all the dangers, the subjects' willingness to cooperate in building the fortifications was not very great. At the beginning of the 17th century, the Fürstenfeld town governor, Christoph von Wilfersdorf, sent one appeal for help after another to the court in Vienna, describing the situation of Fürstenfeld as precarious. A rampart with a palisade fence was to be erected, but hardly a hundred peasants were available to perform the task, and many of them fled during the night. Under such circumstances, the fortification could not be completed. Seventy burghers and forty peasants kept watch day and night, but even many of these fled. In the end only four guards were left. It is reported that there was also "a lot of riffraff" in the area. The city governor wrote to the government that just ten hajduks would be enough to capture Fürstenfeld. And so it came to pass, that although some weapons and tools for the entrenchments were finally delivered, they came too late. On May 26th,

1605, Hungarian rebels crossed the border and on May 28th, a Pentecost Saturday, Fürstenfeld was taken by the hajduks without any resistance. Not even the drawbridges had been raised. The town was looted, fires were set, cattle and people alike were killed or carried off. Not only the city was affected, but the countryside as well. Tartars, who were allied with the Hungarians, especially targeted children, kidnapping or killing them. People back then were not much better than we are at learning from history, so almost a hundred years later the same tragedy happened again under slightly different circumstances. When 20,000 Kurucs crossed the border at the village of St. Gotthard and approached Fürstenfeld, the inhabitants sought to flee the town, because the armory did not contain any supplies of gunpowder and lead. The Graz government, however, strictly forbade them to flee. And again, the surrounding area was looted and burned, and the town of Fürstenfeld paid an enormous sum in order not to be looted.

In 1691, Johann Christoph Liscutin bought the castle and in it established the first tobacco factory in Austria, a significant milestone in the economic life of the town that resonated until the 20th century. In 1725 the town acquired Pfeilburg Castle, and beginning in 1782 a "normal school" was housed there. Finally, in the 19th and 20th centuries a barracks, a military hospital, a poorhouse, and a prisoner-of-war camp were located there. After that, there was no appropriate use for the building and it increasingly fell into disrepair.

In 1975 the Museum Society saved the complex from demolition, and from 1995 to 1999 it underwent extensive renovations. With the help of donations and public funds, the roof truss, roofing, bay window and archways were renovated during this time, thus preserving the building structurally. In 1996, after decades of efforts, the municipality began the revitalization of Pfeilburg Castle in compliance with historic preservation guidelines and using historically accurate building materials. The preservation efforts have paid off, and the building is now home to a museum which has been awarded the Austrian Museum Prize for its rich inventory, successful historical interpretation, and handicapped-accessible facilities. Within these historic walls, the history of the city is documented on three floors and around 700 square meters of exhibition space.

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# WELSDORF CASTLE



Silvia und Clemens Sadnik – Welsdorf Castle

Only a short distance east of the town of Fürstenfeld lies Welsdorf Castle. Two wings of the originally rectangular shaped building are still preserved. It was once part of the Stein domain in Fürstenfeld and a fiefdom of the Teuffenbach-Mayerhofen and Perner families. At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Christof Perner sold the small holding to Barnabas Kornpeckh, who built a Meierhof there to supply his household in the town of Fürstenfeld. Around 1550 this farm was acquired by Wolf von Wilfersdorf. Shortly thereafter this wealthy Fürstenfeld citizen also built an agricultural estate outside the city walls. These properties, as part of the Stein domain, was technically owned by the sovereign and only administered by Perner and von Wilfersdorf. However, devotion to the interests of the sovereign were not what motivated them to establish these farms. Doing so gave the fief holders an opportunity to increase their revenue, because by establishing the farm, the serfs attached to it had to provide more labor service, “because necessity demanded it.” So said the law. Now and again the Fürstenfeld landlords

tried to get the Styrian Diet to release them from servitude obligations to the sovereign. Jonas von Wilfersdorf, Wolf’s son, also applied for the detachment of his property from sovereign ownership. He justified his request to the archduke by arguing that his former grounds in and around Fürstenfeld had been destroyed by the construction of the city’s fortress. In 1556 the reconstruction of Fürstenfeld’s fortifications began in order to better defend the city against the Turkish threat. The land used for this purpose belonged to the Wilfersdorf family, which meant it could therefore no longer be used for agriculture in support of the family.

But only after a palace had been built next to the Meierhof in “Wolfsdorf”, was Jonas von Wilfersdorf’s request that his “Wolfsdorfer” (or also “Welsdorfer”) property be freed from servitude obligations honored. March 19<sup>th</sup>, 1603 also marks the foundation of the quite young domain of Welsdorf. Jonas von Wilfersdorf also had property in the town itself. In 1582, for example, he bought the “Pfeilburg”, the middle tower of the fortified town of Fürsten-

feld. This quite successful landlord subsequently acquired other buildings in the town and in 1575 also Stein Castle of the Fürstenfeld domain. Jonas was economically successful, but this also had its price. He burdened his subjects with excessive labor service, so that his subjects in Fehring, felt compelled to complain about it to the sovereign. Jonas von Wilfersdorf demanded more than thirty days of work per year instead of the usual eleven, plus running errands and assistance from the peasants when he went hunting. His women subjects had to spin two pounds of flax annually for free. In addition, he demanded wine, grain, and livestock without compensation, over and above the usual duties. Jonas did not tolerate resistance to these demands, and he brutally chastised anyone who rebelled against them. In the conflict with his peasants over these unusually heavy demands, Jonas von Wilfersdorf saw himself in the right. So, he also complained to the provincial government that his subjects did not want to pay taxes or perform their obligatory labor service. When his subjects





Historical view of the entry gate of Welsdorf Castle.

finally came up with the money that he had demanded in 1577, he had to give up the Stein domain again and the archduke appointed an administrator in his place. These disputes did not prevent Jonas von Wilfersdorf from being appointed commissioner for signal fires in the Vorau district, an important position. He was also an avowed supporter of Protestantism and sheltered its endangered followers from harm.

When the Hajduks invaded Eastern Styria in 1605, the only just completed Welsdorf Castle was badly affected. The building was still in poor condition in 1616. In that year, Carl Freiherr von Sartrau, as guardian of Jonas von Wilferdorf the younger, asked for a commission to be sent, because he wanted to have various repairs made to the dilapidated castle. Jonas's descendants were not exactly gently natured either. They also made excessive demands for labor service from their peasants, had disputes with the local parish priest and did not shy away from physical chastisement of their subjects. Today, the Wilfersdorfs in Fürstenfeld are still remembered by their coat of arms in the Augustinian church, which shows a head of grain and a wreath of straw.

The lords of Wilferdorf were followed by various other castle owners. In 1701 the Augustinian Monastery at Pöllau bought Welsdorf Castle as a summer residence for its provosts. Around 1716 Provost Johann Ernst Orttenhofen extended the castle. His coat of arms above the portal still reminds us of that time. The castle remained in the possession of the monastery until it was secularized in 1785. Three of the former four massive square corner towers are still preserved. Welsdorf Castle was once surrounded by a wall and bastions. Today, however, only fragments of the former fortifications remain. As in the case of so many castles and palaces, there was a story about a secret underground passage leading from the chapel of the castle to the Augustinian monastery in Fürstenfeld. This connecting passage has never been found, however.

In October 1828, the Loipersdorf parish chronicle reported that the then owner of the manor (Heinrich

Philipp Lackenbacher von Salomon) had established an inn in the castle and that there were plans to open a brewery and distillery there as well. "The distillery is ready in Welsdorf, every kind of fruit gives good brandy. Produced by steam at anywhere from 30 to 42 degrees, it is made so beautifully and so artfully that there is not the like of it anywhere in Styria and perhaps any other province of the Empire." Be that as it may, the success of this enterprise cannot have been very great, because in 1841 the Welsdorf estate was again sold, this time to a lawyer from Graz, Dr. Franz Bayer. In the middle of the 19th century, there were also efforts in Fürstenfeld to go into silk production. To provide fodder plants for the silkworms, mulberry bushes were planted in the Fürstenfeld commend as well as at Welsdorf Castle. Nothing is known about the success of these efforts.

As with so many castles and chateaus, ownership changed frequently. For some time during World War II, the castle was used as the headquarters of the female branch of the Reich Labor Service (RAD). In 1945, Welsdorf Castle was severely damaged by military conflict, and later it was also plundered. For a time, the Russian front passed through the middle of the castle park, and the damage was severe. A landmark of the chateau and landscape was the beautiful acacia avenue, which led from Dreikreuzberg to Welsdorf. In 1949, to the regret of the entire population, the trees were cut down.

In 1968, the castle was acquired by the Aizetmüller-Sadnik family, under whom the castle flourished again. At present, it is owned by Silvia and Clemens Sadnik, who have given the place a noble touch for celebrations and weddings. In 1976, the Sadnik family had a new chapel built in the northern wing of the castle, as the old one had been destroyed in 1945. The altarpiece and the ceiling mosaic were created by Vladimir Zagorodnikov, who was born in 1896 in Chernivtsi and died in 1984 in Graz. Today the castle can accommodate up to 110 people in the tavern and the so-called coachman's vault, as well as offering exclusive vacation apartments.

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Not open to the public.  
Only for weddings and events.



Kapfenstein Castle

# KAPFENSTEIN CASTLE



Current view of Kapfenstein Castle.





## The Styrian hot springs region & the Vulkanland



The geologist Prof. Arthur Winkler Hermaden did research on volcanism in southeastern Styria.

The first documented lords of “Caphenstain” were the Hochfreien von Waldstein – St. Dionysen - Gutenberg in the 12th century. But they were by no means the first to use and appreciate the view of the surrounding countryside from atop the Kapfenstein Kogel. People had already settled near the Herz-Christi-Kapelle in the Urnfield period (about 1,300 to 800 B.C.). A settlement in the Iron Age and in the Roman period left archaeological remains, such as the large burial ground south of the present-day village of Kapfenstein. The castle probably got its name from the fact that it was a good place to watch for enemies – in German “gaffen” means to look. As with many castles, the history of “Caphenstain” begins in the second half of the 12th century, when a fortress was built by the Lords of Kapfenstein on the foothills on the eastern slope of the volcanic hill. The first Kapfensteins appear in the documentary record as witnesses for the Gutenberg family and the Archbishops of Salzburg. In 1197, a “Ludwinus de Chaphenstain” is mentioned as a witness, and in 1214 a “Ludwicus” certified a donation to Elisabeth von Gutenberg, as a result of which the castle was built on Gutenberg freehold land. That first castle building was already destroyed in 1238 by an army of King Béla of Hungary, but it was soon afterwards rebuilt. The lords of the castle did not always

distinguish themselves as protectors of the population. Especially the early Kapfensteins were known for their ruthlessness and devastated the land in such a way that the Styrian magistrate sentenced them to high compensation payments.

Thus, it is reported that Ludwig von Kapfenstein severely plundered the estates of the Teutonic Order in the surrounding area around 1250. In 1362, the castle came into the possession of the Walsee family, and in 1422 it went to Sigmund von Wolfsau, who made it a base for his raids into the surrounding areas, which he undertook in the course of a dispute with the Archbishop of Salzburg. He also got help from Hungarian noblemen, which was not very wise. He was therefore condemned for breach of the peace, and Duke Frederick V confiscated the castle and then passed it on as a fief. From 1584 to 1800 the castle was occupied by the Lengheim family, who extended it significantly, as they did at Bertholdstein, which they also owned.

In the period of conflict with the Turks and the Kurucs, an important warning fire station was located here. Georg von Lengheim was responsible for the easternmost warning fire stations in Styria from 1588





## Kapfenstein Castle

to 1590. In 1587 he reported that about 300 Wallachians from “Turkish soil” were hiding in the forests and ditches around Kapfenstein, and he asked for help. In 1588, Georg von Lengheim reported that the warning fire station in Kapfenstein was in excellent condition and had plenty of wood, but that there was a shortage of ordinance and powder for the signal shots. So, he asked the commissioners of warning fire stations in the Voralpe district for their help, since he himself was not in a position to buy ammunition. He apparently received little assistance, however, because two years later the situation had hardly improved. Matchlocks were available, but there was a shortage of mortars, ordinance, powder, and lead.

After the hajduk invasion in June 1605, Lucia von Lengheim reported that 16 houses had been burned down in the Pertlstein and Kapfenstein domains. Dozens of people had been murdered or taken away by the Hajduks, as well as numerous horses, cattle, and sheep. Therefore, the appeal went out to the provincial military authorities for help and protection for the castles of Pertlstein and Kapfenstein. For a long time, the Lengheims also acted as war commissioners for the Voralpe district.

In addition to the Turks, from 1704 on the Voralpe district was also threatened by the Kurucs, Hungarian rebels who were dissatisfied with imperial policy in Vienna. On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1704, mounted Kurucs invaded the domain of Kapfenstein and robbed the village of Neustift. Apart from all the livestock, some farmers were also taken or wounded. Subsequently, following plans drawn up by Field Marshal Heister, efforts began to secure the border.

Nevertheless, in the year 1706 the worst incursions happened in Styria, and on March 31<sup>st</sup> all the villages between St. Anna am Aigen, Straden, Radkersburg and Mureck were in flames within a very short time, only Kapfenstein itself was spared. A contemporary reported as follows on the devastation: “The whole area is full of fire, smoke and great thunder, which is certainly frightening to behold. But it is even more frightening to see that they are

destroying every living thing. I cannot describe sufficiently the lamentation, screaming and running that is to be seen among the peasants. Oh God, the egg that Steier is receiving this Easter is one red with blood!” On August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1706 it was the Gleichenberg, Trautmannsdorff, Stein and Kapfenstein domains that were severely affected. It took many years for the population to recover. The domain was granted tax reductions until 1712 because of the damage. The rule of the Lengheim family lasted until 1800 at Kapfenstein. Surprisingly, no references to this family have been preserved in the castle, although some family members were certainly buried there.

A much more pleasant report about Kapfenstein may be found in Karl Reichert’s collection of lithographs from around 1860: “The mountain is adorned with rich gardens and excellent orchards, on the top of which stands the Herz-Jesu Kapelle (renovated in 1838), a beautiful rotunda with a simple crucifix in a pleasing form. It is a place of devotion for the hiker, but above all it is worthwhile because of the view, a panorama that is hardly surpassed by that in Riegersburg. Hungary’s distant fields above St. Martin, Jennersdorf, and St. Gotthard lie rolled out at your feet. The lovely mountains which surround Gleichenberg stretch out in gentle gradations. Vineyards, bright farm buildings, and nice farmhouses stretch out before you; and truly, only a pilgrimage day is needed to attract colorful groups of pilgrims to this hill. That would make the picture complete and fill the hiker with joyful enthusiasm for the scene.”

Starting in 1800, ownership of the castle changed hands repeatedly. From 1800 to 1810 the Sertenthal family owned it, from 1810 to 1877 Johann and Wilhelm Piebetz, and then Ludwig Arendt followed. The latter died childless in 1918, bequeathing the castle and the manor to his landlady, Magdalena Kobula. She married Arthur Winkler-Hermaden on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1919, and since then Kapfenstein has been owned by their descendants. The frequent changes of ownership between 1877 and 1918 were not conducive to regular maintenance – only absolutely essential repairs were carried out

in the castle. Once the Winkler-Hermaden family took over, the castle was systematically and carefully restored.

Arthur Winkler-Hermaden was born in Vienna on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1890, the son of a field marshal of the same name and Emma, born Hofmann von Wellenhof. He later made a name for himself as a geologist, writing his dissertation on eastern Styria, which at that time attracted little academic interest. After a thorough renovation, a wine tavern was opened in the castle at the end of the 1940s. In the 1960s the castle was converted into a restaurant and hotel. Today three generations lovingly take care of the castle hotel, restaurant, and garden.

A beautiful view of the countryside can be enjoyed from the Herz-Jesu Kapelle. Built around 1700, it is also where some of the former castle owners’ funerals took place. On the occasion of a visit there while taking a cure in Bad Gleichenberg in 1937, the Styrian poet Hans Klopfer described Kapfenstein Castle as follows: “A castle block, massive and unstructured, rises imperiously and haughtily above the low waves of fields in a remote meadow-covered valley. It thrones atop a basalt block glowing high and free in the golden autumn evening light. Over centuries of settlement, moss and lawn, tree and shrub, ivy and rose bushes have spread out like a great,

Chapel in the vineyard.





## The Styrian hot springs region & the Vulkanland



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green carpet. Gables gaze out of it, as well as a black-brown wooden roof, and a simple little church sits in the circle of some houses on the steep, green slope. A lower circular wall encloses the space in a forbidding, strict manner. The ringing of several bells is followed by only a sunny, dreamy silence. But for a good hour we had a view of a wonderful world of walls that have defied the centuries in the shade of spruces and floral exuberance of the bailey garden. [...] The Styrian autumn hangs high and cloudless over a so richly blessed eastern Styria. The view extends far beyond Burgenland into Hungary, to the distant battlefield of St. Gotthard.”

Once again, however, this idyll was to be destroyed. During the Second World War, fighting also arrived in eastern Styria, as the horrific Nazi era came to a close. At Easter 1945, the Russians entered Kapfenstein, plundering the castle and the farm. Over a hundred farm animals were slaughtered and all the furniture was destroyed. In addition, many documents, dishes, machines, and tools were destroyed or stolen.

Thus, it was a very rocky start after the war, but with the growing popularity of the Buschenschank, a first step towards tourism could be made. Over the past decades the Winkler-Hermaden family has successfully turned Kapfenstein into a popular excursion destination and

the home of fine wines and excellent cuisine. Today the former fortress attracts visitors with a small family hotel and a fine restaurant for romantic, pleasurable moments. Rest, relaxation, culinary adventures, and a wonderful ambiance for celebrations—all are on offer at the castle. Sixteen individual guest rooms invite you to extend your stay. In the Winkler-Hermaden Winery, forty hectares of vineyards on volcanic soil are cultivated organically. Half of the vineyards, some of which are very old, are used to produce rich red wines such as “Olivin”. For the white wines, great importance is placed on aromatic expression and the influence of the soil, the climate, and the individual signature of the winery.

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# FEUDAL RULE AND CASTLE-BUILDING IN BURGENLAND

In the landscape of today's Burgenland, the builders of castles and fortifications found particularly favorable conditions. Until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, there still were ruins and usable buildings from the Roman period, such as the remains of Roman villae rusticae (agricultural estates) that could be used as a source of building material. There were also remains of Carolingian settlements with church buildings or their ruins. After the Hungarian occupation, the area was characterized by the establishment of the "Gyepüelve", a border strip dedicated to military tasks and inhabited exclusively by a few Magyars. After the year 996, knights, mainly from the German-speaking area, were enfeoffed with landed property by King Stephen I, his wife Gisela of Bavaria, and their successors. These immigrants brought their way of life and especially their building techniques to their new homeland.

In response to the construction of a belt of castles on the Styrian and Austrian borders since the second half of the 12th century, individual buildings were also erected on the Hungarian side. The castles of Güssing, Landsee, Mattersdorf, and Bernstein had already existed

before the Mongol invasion, and Lockenhaus was mentioned as "besieged" in 1242. After the immediate threat of the Mongols had ended, the construction of permanent castles was intensified. A large number of buildings were erected, but some of them were short-lived, as there were repeated disputes between the Hungarian King Béla IV and Duke Frederick II, who was not entirely unjustly nicknamed "the Quarrelsome".

The years from 1246 to 1260 until the Battle of Kroissenbrunn, in which the Hungarians suffered a severe defeat and had to renounce their claims to the Babenberg inheritance, were also a turbulent time for western Hungary. In the Peace of Ofen in 1254, King Béla of Hungary renounced his claim on Styria. From 1260 on, the relations between Hungary and Austria improved decisively. But then under the reign of Béla's son, Stephen V (1271/72), fierce battles on the border broke out again. Under Emperor Sigismund of the Luxembourg family, who was also King of Hungary, the foundations were laid for the union between Austria and Hungary, which then finally was consummated in the 16th century. Even

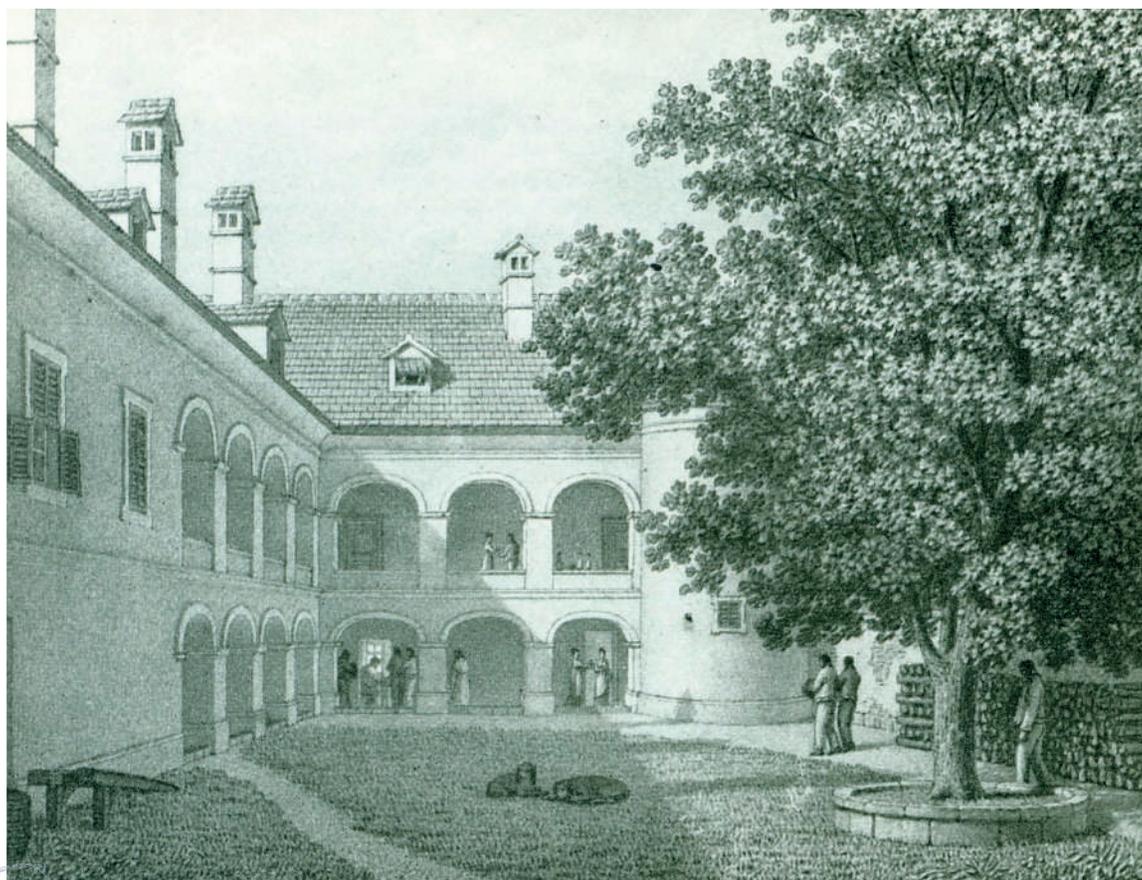
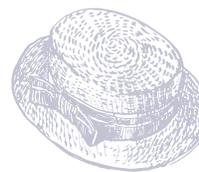
if this first attempt under Sigismund was not successful, it had decisive consequences for the history of the western Hungarian-Burgenland area. The West Hungarian domains came into the hands of the Habsburgs and so became closely connected with Austria, which they remained for the next period.

The affiliation of the West Hungarian domains to Austria ended in the 16th and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries with the emergence of new Hungarian magnate families whose help the emperor needed in the fight against the Turks and Protestants. In 1524 the Batthyány family received the domain of Güssing, and subsequently they acquired the southern Burgenland domains of Bernstein, Schlaining, Rechnitz, Gerersdorf and Neuhaus, as well. In 1622 the county of Forchtenstein and the domain of Eisenstadt were pledged to Nikolaus Esterházy, and in 1626 they were reassigned to Hungary. Finally, the Imperial Baron of Stotzing was declared unfit for possession and forcibly expelled. Protests of the Lower Austrian estates were ineffective. For the next period, the Nádasdys were, apart from the Batthyánys and Esterházy, one of the most important families in this region.





# TABOR CASTLE



The inner courtyard of Tabor Castle during the Biedermeier period.

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One of the most beautiful and romantic places in southern Burgenland is Tabor Castle in the municipality of Neuhaus am Klausenbach. The first mention of the building dates to 1469. Embedded in the Neuhaus hills and the border triangle of Austria, Hungary, and Slovenia, today Tabor Castle provides a setting for art and cultural events. It functions as a hub for communication between tradition and modernity, regionality and internationality. The castle is a platform and meeting place for young and old and is the starting point of the “Three Castles Tour”, which connects Tabor, Grad and Murska Sobota. For many years, the “JOPERA Jennersdorf Festival Summer” has been one of the important cultural institutions in the region. The area around Tabor Castle has always been a border region where different peoples, spheres of power, languages, and religions met. That situation on the border has led to military conflicts for centuries.

Very close to Tabor Castle are the ruins of the Castle of Neuhaus am Klausenbach, from which the once adversarial Kapfenstein Castle can also be seen. The wide view of the surrounding area gives an idea of how people in centuries past kept watch for the approach of enemies. At Neuhaus lie the origins of Tabor Castle. Between 1242 and 1270, Neuhaus Castle was a royal fortress (also *Castrum Dobra*) under the direct control of the Hungarian ruler Béla IV. Neuhaus Castle was handed over to the brothers Miklós and István Geregye, whose family was based in Egervár. From 1326 Neuhaus was again a castle of the king, and then a little later it became the property of the Széchy family. Johann Széchy was involved in the election of the Habsburg Frederick III as counter-king to Matthias Corvinus in 1459, which was to have a direct impact on Neuhaus. The mercenary leader Andreas Baumkircher, lord of the castle of Schlaining, began his feud against



the Habsburg emperor Frederick III in 1469. Ulrich Peßnitzer (Pesnitzer), the Styrian lord of the castle of Weitersfeld and Baumkircher's henchman, attacked the border castle of Neuhaus in this campaign. At the same time, he built a defensive fortification in the style of the Hussite Wars, a so-called tabor. The origin of Tabor Castle is said to lie in this provisional fortification of Ulrich Peßnitzer, which he probably had built as a fortification against Emperor Frederick III. However, there is no clear historical evidence that this fortification stood on the exact spot where Tabor Castle is located today.

The wedding of Franz II. Batthyány and Eva Popel-Lobkowitz in Neuhaus on July 16th, 1607 marked the beginning of the formative period of the Batthyány family at Tabor Castle. The building served as an alternative residence to the dilapidated Neuhaus Castle. During the Thirty Years' War from 1618 to 1648, it also served as a place of refuge for many Styrian Protestants.

The Battle of Mogersdorf in 1664 also had its effects on the Neuhaus area. In the run-up to that conflict, Turks and Tartar auxiliary troops roamed the areas south of the Raab. During these raids, farms and whole villages were plundered. The castellan of Neuhaus Castle reported to his lord, Adam I Batthyány on August 10th, 1664, "The Meierhof in Zemming was burned by the Turk. Welten, Kuzma-Bergen, Zemming as well as the Neu-markt court are completely devastated. The poor population has fled to Styria." On August 9th, 1664, the day before this report, peace had been proclaimed between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans in Eisenburg, which ended the conflicts, but did not bring the hoped-for liberation for Hungary. This in turn led to uprisings of the Hungarian high nobility.

The castle remained a favorite residence for the Batthyány family. It was particularly favored by Ludwig (Lajos) Count Batthyány of Némétújvár, who was executed in 1849. Born in 1807 in Bratislava, he was a Hungarian magnate and, among other things, lord of Schlaining and Neuhaus and the first minister-president of the Kingdom of Hungary. He fought for the national rights of the Hungarian



Opera performance of "Carmen" in the inner courtyard of Tabor Castle.

people and called for an independent government and constitution for Hungary. Unlike the more radical rebels, he wanted to achieve this goal through negotiations with Vienna, rather than warfare. In the aftermath of the events of the March Revolution of 1848, however, Batthyány was accused of being a rebel by Field Marshal von Windisch-Graetz on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1849 and arrested a short time later. Although Lajos Batthyány paid homage to the new emperor Franz Joseph I to prevent further bloodshed, he was shot in Pest on October 6<sup>th</sup> at the insistence of the imperial commander-in-chief in Hungary, Baron Julius Jacob von Haynau. Along with him another 13 generals died, who were later called the "Martyrs of Arad". This execution caused great indignation all over the world. After Hungary's reconciliation with Austria in 1870, a mausoleum was built for Lajos Batthyány, where he was solemnly reinterned. An eternal light burns in his memory at the place of his execution to this day.

Even before the trial of Lajos Batthyány, his estates had been confiscated, and the estate of Neuhaus (Dobra, from 1898 Vasdobra) came under the forced administration of the imperial and royal tax authorities. In the course of the handover of the property to the responsible public prosecutor from the Hungarian county of Eisenburg, a detailed list was made of the entire extensive property, which included, among other things, nine villages, two market towns and three Maierhofs. For 385

years Tabor Castle had been an estate of the Batthyány family. The Hungarians called the castle Lanczut (Landshut), while in Styria it was called Schulzenegg. The manor, also called Tabor Castle, received its Baroque appearance in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The two-story building has a hook-shaped ground plan. A gateway leads into the inner courtyard which is open to the west. During the renovation of the round-arched arcades in 1968, the coat of arms of the Batthyány counts was uncovered.

In the period after the Second World War, when Burgenland was occupied by Russian troops, the castle suffered severe damage. Thomas Batthyány was the last representative of his family in Neuhaus, and in 1992 he finally sold the already dilapidated building to the municipality of Neuhaus. Between 1992 and 1998 Tabor Castle was owned by Andreas Coutinho, and after that it became the property of the Raab Nature Park. After 2017, the castle was briefly owned by the non-profit EFIS before finally becoming the property of the Federal State of Burgenland in 2019.

#### TABOR CASTLE

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Southern Burgenland

# GÜSSING CASTLE – A NATURE PARK IN A WINE PARADISE



Güssing Castle – a mighty fortress visible high above the town and region of Güssing.

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## Güssing Castle

Let us begin with the words of Ferdinand Krauss, who enthusiastically reported in his travel guide in 1888 as follows: “Güssing indisputably is the most scenic among the Hungarian towns bordering Lower Austria in the north and then on south to the Raab River in Styria. Güssing is for Hungary what Riegersburg Castle is for Styria, a proud border guard that majestically raises its rocky head above a mighty horizon.” The beginnings of this castle complex, which is still visible from afar, date back to the 12th century. In the years between 1140 and 1150, the Hungarian king Géza II enfeoffed the brothers Wolfer and Hedrich, who were brought to the border area by him, with the land around what is today Güssing. They were descendants of the Counts of Hainburg and became the progenitors of two important noble families themselves, the Counts of Güssing and the “Hedervár”. Together they first built a wooden castle secured by a palisade ring on the castle hill called “Quisin”, to which a Benedictine monastery was added in 1157.

Quisin eventually became Güssing, the oldest castle in Burgenland. Like Riegersburg or Kapfenstein, the dramatic hill on which it is located is a remnant of former volcanic activity. It is no surprise that the basalt rock rising from the plain and surrounded by water and swamp was already settled in prehistoric times, just like the volcanic rock of Riegersburg. In 1198 Güssing was called “Novum Castrum”. The Hungarian name for Güssing is derived from Nemétújvár (German Neuburg). The castle was part of a defensive belt (Wieselburg – Ödenburg – Lockenhaus – Eisenburg), which stretched along the Hungarian western border and replaced an earlier, not very effective border fortification. Only some remains of the quarry stone masonry in the northern ring wall of the stronghold have survived from this earlier construction.

In the first half of the 13th century, the southern ring wall was built, as well as the eastern tower whose two lower floors housed the first castle chapel. Güssing was one of the few Hungarian castles that the Tartars failed to capture in 1241/42. However, the bloody events of that time triggered increased efforts to deal with the constant threat of

conflict. When Hungary pledged three border counties to Duke Frederick II for his support against the Tatars, Güssing temporarily came into Austrian possession. In 1263 King Béla IV then bequeathed the castle to his treasurer and chief cupbearer Mauricius Pok, who greatly expanded it. Güssing formed the Hungarian counterweight to the fortifications at Fürstenfeld and Riegersburg. In 1273 Güssing defied the attacks of King Ottokar of Bohemia.

As with almost all castles, ownership of the castle changed again and again. Towards the end of the 13th century, the

kingmaker. Two weeks later, Frederick III solemnly announced that he accepted the election as King of Hungary. He then chose Ujlaky to be the godfather of his new-born son, who would later reign as Emperor Maximilian I.

Things did not go entirely smoothly with Frederick III's elevation to the throne, however, for only two months later, the Counts of Kanizsay knelt before Matthias Hunyadi and begged forgiveness for having betrayed him, which proved to be a turning point in the story. Within a few years all the former conspirators switched to the camp of

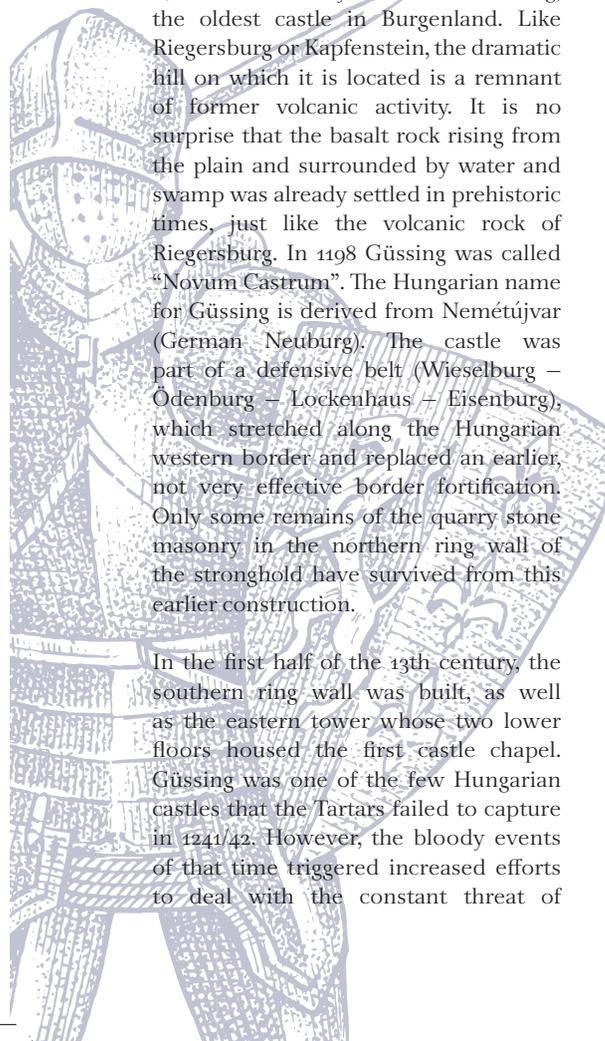
## Güssing Castle was the Batthyánys' main residence.

counts of Güssing brought the fortress back into their possession. At that time, they were at the peak of their power and owned seventy villages, as well as almost all the castles in Western Hungary. Henry I Kőszegi was palatine, ban and supreme judge of the country and even had the right to mint coins. In the following years, ownership of the castle changed hands many times, and it was extended and rebuilt again and again. Around 1500, the fortress was completed and was considered impregnable. In the meantime, a settlement had developed at the foot of the castle, which in 1427 was called a civitas, or town.

In the first days of 1459, a number of influential lords met at the invitation of Nikolaus Ujlaky, Lord of Güssing Castle, to make a joint decision on an important matter, namely who would be the next king of Hungary. On February 17th, 1459 a total of 25 magnates and nobles, including Andreas Baumkircher from Schläining, Berthold Ellerbach from Eberau, but also the de Gara family from Rechnitz and the Kanizsay family from Lockenhaus met at Güssing and elected Emperor Frederick III as King of Hungary. Matthias Hunyadi, who went down in history as Matthias Corvinus, thus at least temporarily, was passed over. Nikolaus Ujlaky was soon to be rewarded for his efforts as a

Matthias Hunyadi-Corvinus. Frederick III had to come to terms with this turn of events, because this energetic man now also began to act as the true king of Hungary. Although Frederick retained the official title and coat of arms of King of Hungary, the Crown of St. Stephen and large estates around Ödenburg were lost to him.

In 1524 the chief royal cupbearer, Franz I Batthyány, and his nephew Christoph Batthyány received the domain of Güssing as a gift from the Hungarian King Louis II in gratitude for their engagement against the Turks in the Battle of Jajce. The Batthyánys had already been among the oldest and most important landowners in Hungary. They had supported Matthias Corvinus against Frederick III and were zealous fighters against the Turks. The fortress of Güssing became their main residence. Francis I Batthyány distinguished himself in the battle of Mohacs, which was so fateful for Hungary. He commanded the right wing of the Hungarian army with 3,000 cavalrmen and 1,000 infantrymen, but was unable to decide the battle for the Hungarian side. However, during the orderly retreat he did manage to save the Hungarian war flag and brought it to Güssing Castle. A war flag from that time can still be admired in the castle





## Southern Burgenland



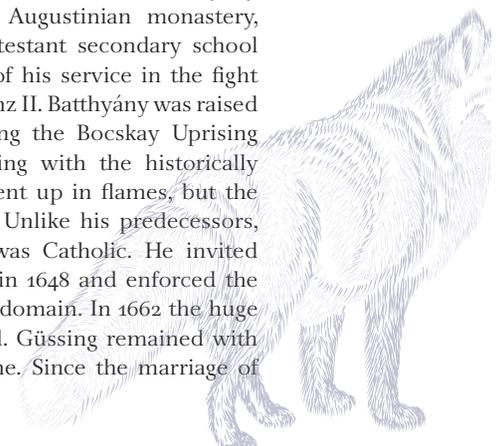
Güssing Castle and Pond—a Burgenland landmark.

museum. After the death of King Louis II at Mohacs, there was a double election of Ferdinand of Habsburg and Johann Zápolya. Since the latter laid claim to Güssing, Franz Batthyány sided with the Habsburg. In return, he was enfeoffed with Schlaining and Rechnitz in 1527. When Sultan Soliman moved against Vienna again in 1532, Batthyány came to terms with the Turks. His possessions were nevertheless devastated, whereupon he brought numerous Croats into the country as new settlers.

In order to be able to repel the ever-advancing Turkish troops, the outer fortifications of Güssing Castle were significantly extended between 1540 and 1580. In the late 16th and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Batthyány family continued the massive expansion of the defensive fortifications. The hope was that any potential attacker would be able to see from a distance that the castle was impregnable. A siege would have been extremely tedious and not very promising, so opponents preferred to give the fortress a wide berth and were content with massacring the peasants in the surrounding area. So, whenever they could, the peasants sought shelter behind the strong castle walls. For the defense of this stately multi-part castle, a very large garrison was needed. For cost reasons this garrison was usually moved here

only in case of danger. It was partly provided by the Batthyánys, who had a private army and, if necessary, it was reinforced by imperial soldiers.

Under the Calvinist-minded Balthasar Batthyány, Güssing became an important cultural center of the country. Carolus Clusius, for example, worked as a botanist at the Batthyány court. From 1595 to 1597 Johannes Manlius worked as a Protestant itinerant book printer at the castle. Balthasar acquired a large library which is now kept in the Franciscan monastery in Güssing. It originally consisted of more than 4,500 books, which formed the basis of the famous Batthyány library. In the abandoned Augustinian monastery, Balthasar established a Protestant secondary school for young nobles. Because of his service in the fight against the Turks, in 1603 Franz II. Batthyány was raised to the rank of count. During the Bocskay Uprising in 1605, the town of Güssing with the historically important town archives went up in flames, but the castle remained unscathed. Unlike his predecessors, Adam I Count Batthyány was Catholic. He invited the Franciscans to Güssing in 1648 and enforced the Counter-Reformation in his domain. In 1662 the huge family property was divided. Güssing remained with the older (later princely) line. Since the marriage of





## Güssing Castle

Adam II Count Batthyány to Eleonore, the daughter and heir of the last Count Strattmann, all of his descendants have borne the double name Batthyány-Strattmann until today.

In 1683 the castle served the population as a refuge from the approaching Turks. The castle's warning fire tower is still a reminder of the signal fire system that was used to warn the population to seek shelter when danger was approaching. At that time, the system of warning fire stations reached as far as Vienna. In the 17th century, 200 to 400 people lived permanently in the castle, most of them soldiers. For Vienna and many places in eastern Lower Austria, and ultimately also for the Turks themselves, 1683 was a fateful year. In and around Güssing, however, things remained relatively quiet, since Paul Batthyány, in order to save his domain from further devastation, had paid homage to the Turks. But this did not prevent him from eagerly hounding them after their defeat.

During the Kuruc uprising of 1704/06, Count Karoly surrounded the town. However, he did not succeed in conquering the castle. It served the imperial forces as an arsenal to supply their troops. In 1708 the castle was equipped with 67 guns, 24 of which were of heavy caliber. In 1749 Karl Josef Count Batthyány-Strattmann was appointed educator of the future Emperor Josef II. In 1764 he was elevated to the rank of an imperial prince. In the meantime, due to the development of more modern weaponry, the castle began to lose its military importance. In 1777 all the guns were removed and partly sold to a Viennese iron merchant. Due to the high maintenance costs and the roof tax, which had been introduced in the meantime, the partial demolition of the defensive installations began a year later. Because it had been inadequately maintained, the armory, still filled with weapons and equipment, collapsed in 1784.

Prince Philipp Batthyány-Strattmann (1781–1870) made a testamentary endowment for the preservation of the castle. When he died childless in 1870, a share was also inherited by his niece Elisabeth, who had married Karl Count Draskovich. As a result,

large parts of the manor became the property of the Draskovich family. One of the most famous members of the widely branched family was Ladislaus Batthyány-Strattmann (1870–1931). As an ophthalmologist he performed more than a thousand cataract operations on needy people free of charge and built a hospital in Kittsee in the north of Burgenland at his own expense. On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003, the “Doctor of the Poor” was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Rome. His reliquary lies in the Basilica of Güssing, where the tomb of the Batthyány family crypt in Güssing, together with the Capuchin Crypt of the Habsburgs in Vienna, are the two most important crypts in Austria. Many pilgrims and pilgrimages from the Pannonian region, especially from Hungary, come to the relic shrine of Blessed Ladislaus in the Basilica of Güssing throughout the year, seeking relief from their eye diseases or other ailments.

In 1949 the castle was placed under monument protection by the Federal Monuments Office. It was not until 1958 that a general restoration program was drawn up. In 1969 a small museum was established in some already restored rooms. Between 1982 and 1990, there was a comprehensive restoration of the castle, which had already begun to deteriorate into a semi-ruin. The regional exhibition of Burgenland in 1990 with the theme “The Knights” brought numerous visitors to the castle.

Both Güssing Castle and the Franciscan monastery of Güssing, with the basilica and the Batthyány family crypt, are the property of a foundation. Although many buildings of the former castle area are no longer preserved, Güssing Castle with its imposing stronghold and the mighty castle tower still gives the impression of a medieval fortress. There is even a castle guard.

For some years now, summer festivals and children's musicals have been held in the castle courtyard. The stronghold houses an important castle museum with a comprehensive collection of art objects from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as porcelain and glass works. Special exhibitions on various themes are also



Musicals, fairy tale performances, summer theater – Güssing Castle comes alive!



The Batthyány Estate – a princely passion for collecting in the Castle Museum.

organized every year. The castle is also particularly popular with bridal couples. The “Dream Wedding Castle Güssing” with its knights' hall, the Clusius herb garden, Batthyány vaulted cellar and the castle chapel “Maria Schnee” is almost always fully booked from May to October.

Below the castle lies the Batthyány Fort, built by Count Adam Batthyány in 1647. This fort is still owned by the widely branched Batthyány family. The family includes about sixty bearers of the name, mostly living in Austria, Hungary, Germany and even in Uruguay.

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Current view of Lockenhaus Castle.

# LOCKENHAUS CASTLE



**L**ockenhaus Castle is one of the oldest castles in Burgenland and, from an art-historical point of view, probably the most interesting fortified building. The castle is surrounded by numerous legends in which the Templars and the “Blood Countess” Erzsébeth Báthory (1560–1614) play an important role. One legend is about the defense of the castle by the Templars, and their murder on the so-called Totenhauptwiese near Bernstein. But there is not a single document that proves the presence of the Templars at Lockenhaus or in Burgenland, for that matter. However, like all unsolved mysteries, this one has sparked the imagination of many people.

According to another legend, a Roman watchtower once stood on the site of the castle, the stones of which were later used to build the castle keep. Around

1200 reference was made to a castle under the name “Leuca”. The fortified building erected above the Güns valley is mentioned in documents for the first time in the year 1242, when the building was extended because of the danger posed by the Mongols. In 1260 the Hungarian castle was defended against Austria in a bloody battle. Between 1270 and 1336, it was owned by the Counts of Güssing, and later it passed to the Kanizsay family. Subsequently, after 1535 the Nádasdy family owned it, and under their tenure, the so-called “outer” or “lower” castle was built.

Erzsébeth, née Báthory, the daughter-in-law of Thomas Nádasdy, who had been victorious over the Turks, went down in history as a bloodthirsty and cruel mass murderer. As so often, however, verifiable facts are mixed with a multitude of myths and tales. She still





## Lockenhaus Castle

lives on today as the “Blood Countess” in many stories that tell of her allegedly perverse passion for bathing in the blood of young girls to preserve her youth. It is difficult to separate truth from fiction. Today, however, renowned scholars are convinced of Erzsébeth Báthory’s innocence. This thesis was first put forward in 1984 by László Nagy. He sees the smear campaign against the countess as part of a political intrigue initiated by the House of Habsburg, who long been at odds with the Báthorys. Despite an abundance of documents, doubts remain as to how the actual events unfolded. But it is probably exactly this mixture of facts and conjectures from which legends arise.

Like many fortified buildings in the region, the castle changed hands often. And with each change in ownership, the respective enemy might be Austria or Hungary. Under the Esterházy family, who held the domain beginning in 1676, the mostly uninhabited castle fell into disrepair. The first restoration work was carried out between 1902 and 1906. The castle was then badly damaged during the Second World War. The castle remained in the possession of the Esterházy family until 1968, when Paul Anton Keller and his wife Margaret purchased the run-down castle. They then set vigorously about putting Lockenhaus in order again.

### The poet’s castle – Paul Anton Keller as lord of the castle

Paul Anton Keller, born on January 11th, 1907 in Bad Radkersburg as the offspring of an actor couple, always had a penchant for historic buildings. The writer first acquired the Flamhof farm near St. Nikolai im Sausal, then, in 1939 an estate in Petersbergen near Graz and then a vineyard near Leibnitz. Finally, he and his wife undertook the restoration of Lockenhaus Castle after purchasing it in 1968. Keller died in Graz in 1976, and a foundation was subsequently set up to ensure the continued preservation of the castle.

Paul Anton Keller wrote the following about his experience during the renovations in 1970: “During the occupation after the end of the war, the castle – also the high castle and in particular the keep’s wooden

installations, suffered great damage. Destructive-minded elements (up until just last year) demolished the unprotected building to the point where all windows and much flooring were lost. A valuable Baroque stove, decorated with many coats of arms, was completely smashed – ‘atomized’, so to speak, and other furnishings were also demolished. [...] None of these investigations and plans were taken note of at the start of the restoration work (summer 1969), and it can be stated that the building is now (spring of 1970) secured for the long term, i.e., the most serious structural damage has been repaired. This has been made possible by intensive planning over a long period of time and the efforts of mostly good workers. But by no means everything is done!” Above all, the roof was renovated--the castle had a future again.

In 1980 the Prof. Paul Anton Keller Foundation was charged with preserving Lockenhaus Castle and using the existing premises for cultural and scientific purposes. To this day, the foundation is an exclusively charitable organization. The Prof. Paul Anton Keller Foundation – Lockenhaus Castle is inextricably linked with Honorary Consul General Eugen Horvath, who served as its head for many years. Under his supervision, the castle was completely renovated with the support of the Federal State of Burgenland and the help and personal commitment of numerous sponsors and institutions in cooperation with the Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments.

In 2015, thanks to a monument preservation initiative of the Federal State of Burgenland and the European Union, important renovation and historic preservation work could be carried out at Lockenhaus Castle at a cost of 640,000 Euros. Today the Prof. Paul Anton Keller Foundation – Lockenhaus Castle is managed by a six-member board of trustees under the leadership of Roman Horvath. All members of the board, the auditors, and the management of the hotel exercise their functions on a voluntary basis. The “good souls” of Lockenhaus Castle are the employees of long standing. They invest heart and soul in serving guests on site and in

implementing cultural projects. Their craftsmanship ensures that Lockenhaus Castle is maintained in top condition.

During a guided tour you can explore the exhibitions and the historical rooms (knight’s hall, torture chamber, the so-called cult room) or learn about the history of the castle and its former inhabitants, from the legendary Knights Templar to the allegedly bloody countess to the bats that live in the attic. The castle is also a beautiful and romantic place for weddings.

The historical ambience, a tastefully furnished castle hotel, informative and interesting castle tours, numerous cultural events, and the castle tavern with its hearty cuisine make Lockenhaus Castle a unique place for excursions, events, seminars, and vacations in the heart of Burgenland. In addition, you can get to know the castle in a special way during theater performances.



Medieval goings-on at Lockenhaus Castle.

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Southern Burgenland

# THE CASTLE OF THE “ENGLISH PATIENT”



Inner courtyard of Bernstein Castle.

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## Bernstein Castle

It is not known exactly when the first fortress was built on the site of the present Bernstein Castle. In any case, around the year 860, the surrounding area belonged to the Archbishopric of Salzburg. A fief of the Archbishop then gave the land located on the Pinka River to his servant, Jacobus. It is possible that a simple first wooden fortification already existed at that time.

At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Bernstein belonged to Hungary and served as a border fortress against Austria. The castle high above the Tauchen Valley made it possible to spot enemies from afar. Around 1200, the first stone buildings were erected, though a large part of the fortifications still consisted of earthen ramparts with wooden palisades. Soon the castle had to pass its first test: Duke Frederick II of Austria occupied the castle, but it was recaptured in 1236 under King Béla IV. He then gave Bernstein as a fief to the Counts of Güssing, a gift that was to bring little joy to the Hungarian king, for Henry II of Güssing again allied himself with the Austrians and opened the castle to them.

This back and forth seems confusing not only to us today, at that time it seems to have been no different. The garrison of Bernstein often changed sides, once siding with the Hungarians, then later with the Austrians. In the following years, the castle and its garrison experienced many sieges and battles. In 1289, during the Güssing feud, Bernstein alone remained steadfast among the 34 castles conquered by Duke Albert. After the settlement of this feud, the Bernstein domain was confiscated as a Hungarian crown estate. The last lord of Güssing entered the Austrian nobility as Iban von Pernstein in 1339, after which the castle began to decay, because no one bothered to maintain it. But this was soon to change again.

In 1388, King Sigismund of Hungary gave the castle as a pledge to the Archbishop

of Gran, Johann Kanizsay von Chorna, who immediately began an extension. He built defensive walls, a fortress and a high round keep, and an additional floor was added to the residential building. These investments were to pay off for the Kanizsay family, as they had increased the value of the castle to such an extent that the king was no longer interested in redeeming it. So, in 1392 the family finally received the manor as a gift. When in 1440 a small war broke out between the city of Ödenburg (Sopron) and the West Hungarian castle lords, Emperor Frederick III intervened and conquered Bernstein as well. It was to be the last time that the castle was successfully stormed.

immediately began to build a powerful outer ring of fortifications. They invested large sums of money in these military improvements and so tried to purchase the castle outright, i.e., against cancellation of the pawn debt. Since the Königsbergs were Protestants and were unwilling to renounce the Protestant preachers appointed by them, their plan for gaining direct ownership of the castle was not immediately successful.

After the fall of the Kanizsa fortress, Bernstein along with Schlaining and Güssing were the only border castles capable of resisting the onslaught of the Turks. In 1529 and 1532, the Turks unsuccessfully laid siege to the castle,

## Lightning, of all things, almost entirely destroyed the castle.

### Lightning, of all things, almost entirely destroyed the castle

The pattern of changing sides between Hungary and Austria was to continue for the next centuries. Thus, Bernstein reflects this torn and often tangled time. In 1446 Emperor Frederick sold the castle in the name of his minor ward, King Ladislaus the Posthumous, to his minion Walter Zebinger, but the latter's son had to cede Bernstein to the emperor again in 1471, because the Zebingers got involved in the Baumkircher feud on the wrong side. For some time, the castle was administered by keepers, briefly becoming Hungarian and then Austrian again at the Peace of Pressburg in 1491.

In 1517 Emperor Maximilian I pawned the domain to the brothers Erasmus, Conrad, Christoph, Panthaleon and Ehrenreich von Königsberg. Since the danger from the approaching Turks was by now quite great, the Königsbergs

and although the domain suffered heavy damage, from then on the fortress lived up to its reputation as impregnable. But what the attackers did not achieve, nature did. In 1536 lightning struck the Bernstein gunpowder tower, of all places, and the ensuing explosion almost completely destroyed the castle.

Ehrenreich von Königsberg, however, was undaunted and began to rebuild the castle, surrounding it with mighty bastion walls up to 36 meters high. Bernstein served at that time not only as a place of refuge for the population in case of war, but also as a warning fire station. The fortification work, which was led by Italian master builders, was only finished around 1590, after which the castle was in excellent defensive condition.

When the Hajduks tried to take Bernstein Castle in 1605, they left again having achieved nothing. Unfortunately,





The novel, *The English Patient*, was based on the life of Count Laszlo Almasy

history repeated itself. The powder magazine was again struck by lightning, and the explosion was so devastating as to render the castle uninhabitable. But the Königsbergs seem to have been a stubborn sort, so reconstruction was begun anew. Between 1625 and 1627 Ludwig von Königsberg had the largely destroyed keep demolished and the remaining buildings rebuilt in the Baroque style. The Gothic main castle was thus transformed into a Baroque palace. The family does not seem to have suffered from financial worries at least initially, for in addition to the money needed for the construction effort, Ludwig von Königsberg also raised a troop of 400 foot soldiers and a contingent of a hundred Walloon horsemen against the advancing Turks at his own expense.

However, these high expenditures were soon to exhaust the family treasury. Although Ehrenreich Christoph von Königsberg was finally able to purchase Bernstein outright in 1635, his indebtedness forced him to sell it and other domains in 1644 to Adam I, Count Batthyány. Adam's widow Eleonora had the southern wing of the castle, which had once again become Hungarian in 1647, rebuilt in 1703. Bernstein then became a separate domain of the younger Pinkafeld line of the Batthyány family. In 1864 Gustav Count Batthyány sold the domain to his administrator, the Irish-born Edward O'Egan. From his heirs, in turn, Eduard Count Almásy acquired the estate in 1892. Subsequently, the castle passed to Eduard's grandson, János Almásy, the elder brother of László Almásy. The latter was born there on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1895 – but more on this “English Patient” in a moment. Subsequently, the castle passed to János's adopted daughter Maria della Pace (née Kuefstein), who henceforth bore the name Kuefstein-Almásy.

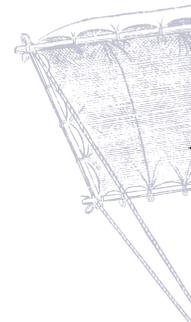
The descendants of the family established a hotel in parts of the building in 1953. Currently, Anna Hase-Almásy and Erasmus Almásy are the owners of the castle, and the nine painstakingly restored guestrooms of their hotel provide a comfortable haven for those in search of peace and quiet.

### The English Patient: The Adventurous Life of László Almásy

László Almásy was probably influenced early on by his father György Ede Almásy, a well-known ethnologist and zoologist. He was brought up and educated in Eastbourne in the United Kingdom, where he spent the period from 1911 to 1914. There he also got to know the Boy Scouts and became enthusiastic about their ideas. During the First World War, Almásy served with the Austrian aviation troops, and in 1921 he was a commissioner of the Hungarian Boy Scouts Association. In April 1921, he served as the former Emperor Karl I's chauffeur on his incognito journey from Switzerland to Budapest, where Karl hoped to be reinstated as King of Hungary, an attempt that failed.

László Almásy then went back to England and worked as an agent for the Steyr automobile company and as a racing driver, winning several car races. He was also a pioneer in the organization of hunting trips, bringing Europeans to Egypt to hunt. There he discovered his love for Africa and the Sahara, and in 1932 he set out with three Britons to search for the oasis of Zerzura, the legendary “Oasis of Little Birds”, travelling by car and plane. He learned Arabic and published accounts of his adventures in several books. With the outbreak of the Second World War, he worked as a spy under Rommel in the African campaign, as well as in Italy and Greece. He was later helped by the British MI6 to escape the clutches of the Russian secret police, which is an indication that he had not just worked for the Germans during the war.

Returning to Budapest, he managed to save some Jewish families, and then after the war ended, he went back to Egypt. There he fell ill with amoebiasis, so he returned to Austria in 1951. He sought medical treatment in Salzburg, since he did not dare to go to Bernstein, because it was in the Russian zone, and he feared he might be taken prisoner again. In that same year he died in Salzburg, where he is buried. His tomb, erected by Hungarian donors in 1995, honors him as a pilot, Saharan explorer, and discoverer of the Zerzura Oasis. As early as 1958, this dazzling personality figured in the movie “Operation Salaam”. A much better-known treatment of László Almásy's exploits is the very successful Hollywood movie from 1996, “The English Patient”. Based on the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this version of his adventures only remotely reflects the historical record.





## Bernstein Castle



### The garden of Bernstein Castle

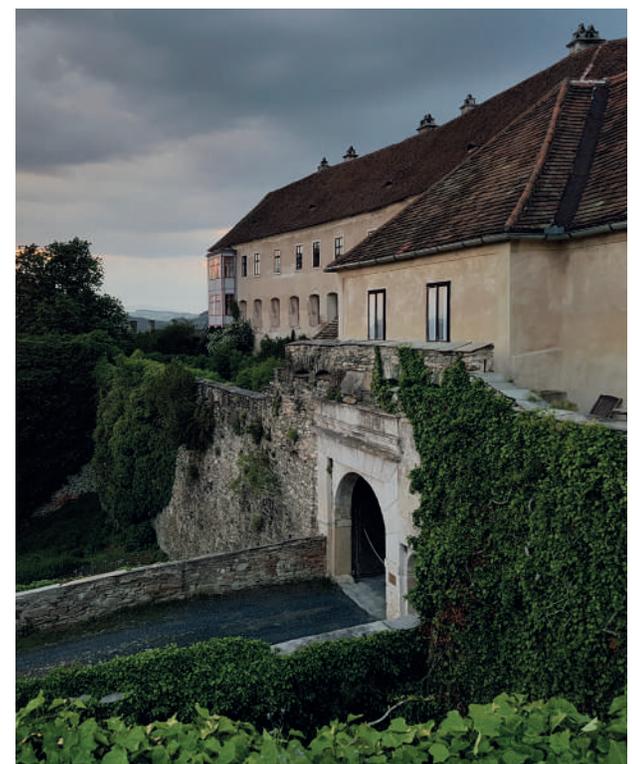
When in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the danger from the Turks subsided and thus the defensive fortifications had become superfluous, they were transformed into a natural and rock garden, which is the oldest and the last of its kind in Burgenland. The most formative personality in the construction of the garden in its current layout was certainly Professor Kleiner, a trained landscape architect who lived at Bernstein Castle for two years of his life in partial payment for his work. On the lookout bastion there is one of the oldest living horse chestnut trees with an estimated age of about 250 years. The garden, the chapel, the ramparts, and the knights' hall can be visited at selected times, exclusively in the course of a guided tour.

### BURG BERNSTEIN

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The castle is not open to the public, but it can be visited on a guided tour. The hotel of the castle offers the possibility to experience the flair of the last century in lovingly restored rooms with original furniture – an ideal place to rest and relax.

Current view of Bernstein Castle.





# ONCE HOTLY DISPUTED – TODAY A CASTLE OF PEACE



Schlaining Castle, view of the bastion towards the south, colorized postcard from before World War II.

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The origins of Schlaining Castle are obscure, but it is likely that a castle was first built there as early as the end of the 11th or in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by retainers of the Styrian sovereigns and subsequently lent to the lords of Güssing. An ideal location was chosen for the construction of the fortress, a formerly strategically important point at the intersection of several trade routes from Steinamanger to Graz, Wiener Neustadt and Ödenburg. The castle was first mentioned in a document in 1271 as “castrum Zloynuk” and thus dates to the period of turmoil over the Babenberg succession. At that time, the castle was in the posses-

sion of Henry II, Count of Güssing. He was later forced to turn Schlaining over to King Ottokar II of Bohemia, either because he was afraid he would lose it to the Hungarians if he did not, or because, as reported in other sources, he was involved in an unsuccessful uprising of the Styrian nobility. Whichever of the two versions is true, Ottokar was able to defend Schlaining against King Ladislaus IV of Hungary. The castle then changed hands again numerous times, until in the peace treaty of Hainburg in 1291, it was agreed that the Güssings should get their most important possessions back, among them Schlaining.



## Schlaining Castle

In 1327 the castle became royal property and was given to the Kanizsay family. In 1445 the troops of the future Emperor Frederick III, acting on behalf of his ward, Ladislaus the Posthumous, conquered a number of castles in western Hungary, including Schlaining. Frederick finally gave Schlaining Castle to his vassal, Andreas Baumkircher, who at that time was still loyal to Frederick. The name Baumkircher is still entwined with many traditions, stories and legends. The so-called “Baumkircher feud”, a revolt against Emperor Frederick III that lasted from 1469 to 1474, finally ended in the execution – or rather murder – of Baumkircher in Graz. But we will come back to that episode in a moment.

Under Andreas Baumkircher, the castle's defenses were considerably expanded. A mighty, deep moat controlled entry to the first gate of the castle, which was secured by two drawbridges, via an impressive bridge. Access to the second gate was again over a second moat equipped with a drawbridge. Today, the coat of arms of Andreas Baumkircher, as well as that of the Stubenberg family, adorn the second gate. But even then, one was yet in the interior of the castle. Beyond an outer bailey, a third gate, again secured by a moat, barred the way. Only after passing through this third gate did one gain access to the inner courtyard of the castle. It bears the date 1550, and on the side of the gate there is a magnificent memorial stone to Andreas Baumkircher. Particularly impressive is the mighty tower made of quarry stone, which you have to climb via a ring-shaped staircase. To the west various residential and farm buildings were erected on an older fortification wall that was extended to form a bastion in the 15th century. In the southwest corner rises the Gothic square tower, the height of which was added to in the 16th century. To the east of the outer bailey is the core castle, dominated by the mighty keep.

In the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the castle came into the possession of the Batthyány family who remained the owners until the 19th century. One of the members of this family, Lajos Batthyány, became famous for sad reasons. In 1812 he became the heir to Schlaining and

later became Prime Minister of Hungary. During the Revolution of 1848, as a Hungarian patriot, he took a stand which the Austrian ruling house interpreted as traitorous. He was accordingly shot on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1848, and his possessions fell to the crown.



Postcard showing Schlaining Castle in 1930.

During the First World War, the castle served as a POW camp for Russian officers. And then in the Second World War, POWs were again housed in the castle, as well as forced laborers from eastern European countries. From 1945 to 1947 the castle was home to a detention and forced labor camp, as well as the prison of the Oberwart District Court, where “heavily incriminated” National Socialists were imprisoned. At the time of the Hungarian crisis in 1956, refugees from Hungary were also housed there for a short time. In 1957 the former Minister of Trade, Udo Illig acquired the castle, and he had extensive renovation work done. Most importantly, Illig restored the castle's furnishings from his rich private collection, as all the inventory had disappeared before the Second World War. Since 1980 the castle has belonged to the Federal State of Burgenland. In 2000, the castle was the site of an exhibition mounted by

the Burgenland government with the theme “War or Peace – From the Cult of Violence to the Culture of Peace”. It operates now as a museum. Several seminar and conference rooms, which were completed in the course of the aforementioned exhibition, are available for meetings.

In 1983 the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR) was established in Schlaining Castle. The ASPR sees itself as a place of respectful encounter and shared learning. Enlarged space for the center was created starting in 1986 by renovating the former granary. In addition, further areas of the building were handed over to the university activities of the Peace Center. In 1992 the second International Conference of Peace Museums was held at Schlaining Castle, and in 2000 the ASPR established the European Peace Museum at the castle. In 2018, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of Future Workshops was held there with guests from Germany, Austria, Spain, Syria, and Hungary. “Building Bridges, Creating Peace – Against the Division of Society” was the central theme.

Currently, the castle is being renovated again. The upper floor of the castle houses the extensive folkloristic “Ludwig Toth Collection” on the history of the Oberwart district, which is managed by the municipality and the Friends of Schlaining Castle Association. Under the title, “Work and Life around 1900”, one can gain insight into the living and working conditions of the past. In this context it is perhaps interesting to note that until the end of the 20th century, the castle was supplied with water through three large-scale cisterns, the largest of which has a decorative enclosure from 1648.

### The castle

The moat has been expanded and reconstructed in recent years. On the “Forbidden Path”, which leads around the castle, various places to sit and rest have been created. The moat itself serves as a venue for events with a stage and grandstand. The start and finish of the Alpannonia long-distance hiking trail are also located here. Surrounding the castle lies the village of Stadtschlaining (Hungarian: Városszalónak), which



## Southern Burgenland

currently has about 2,000 inhabitants. The settlement, founded in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, is surrounded by a strong, fortified wall, part of which is still preserved today.

### Rebel and mercenary leader

But now back to Andreas Baumkircher, Baron of Schlaining, whose name is inseparably connected with Schlaining Castle. This figure can be encountered again and again on a journey along the Castle Road, so it is worth exploring his biography in more detail. Born around 1420 in Wippach (Vipava), which is now in Slovenia, he was executed on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1471 in Graz. The son of an imperial steward, he spent his youth at the court of Emperor Frederick III. He was a dazzling figure of the late Middle Ages, famous for his extraordinary strength and height. As a mercenary leader he rendered great service to Emperor Frederick III on several occasions, in particular defending Wiener Neustadt against an army of the Estates in 1452. He was rewarded princely for this and received the right to mint his own coinage, as well as permission to establish a town next to Schlaining Castle. From 1453 to 1457 he served the Hungarian-Bohemian king Ladislaus the Posthumous. Baumkircher and his men then sided with Emperor Frederick III, both in his election as Hungarian king and in an uprising of the Viennese burghers (1462). In 1469, however, he turned against his sovereign and organized an uprising of the Styrian nobility together with the Hungarian king

Matthias Corvinus in what was to become known as the Baumkircher Feud.

The Baumkircher Feud began with the delivery of a feud letter from the Styrian noble alliance to Frederick III on February 1st, 1469. Complicating the matter was the fact that the emperor owed Baumkircher a great deal of money and was slow to pay it back. This was one of the reasons for the feud and ultimately for Baumkircher's end. The noble alliance led by Baumkircher and Johann von Stubenberg occupied the Styrian towns of Hartberg, Fürstenfeld, Feldbach, Marburg, Slovenska Bistrica, Slovenske Konjice and Wildon Castle. In March 1469, Baumkircher's troops occupied the Mürz Valley, but in April 1469, they lost Scheifling, Oberkapfenberg, Schwanberg, and Oberradkersburg to imperial forces. On July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1469, the troops of Baumkircher and Emperor Frederick III clashed at the Battle of Fürstenfeld, where Baumkircher inflicted a heavy defeat on the imperial forces. Baumkircher's troops made raids as far as the area around Graz.

In October 1469, a truce was agreed between Frederick III and Baumkircher, which was followed on June 30th, 1470 by a treaty, in which Frederick promised Baumkircher complete amnesty and a payment of 14,000 florins. But Frederick still failed to pay up, so in the fall of 1470 Baumkircher again rose up against the emperor. On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1471 Baumkircher and his ally Andreas von Greisenegg went to Graz for negotiations, after they had been promised free escort until the sounding of the vesper bell. On that day, however, the bell conveniently sounded an hour earlier than usual, and both were arrested. Already that same evening they were publicly beheaded without trial in front of the city's Mur Gate.

Current aerial view of Schlaining Castle.



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Rotenturm Castle

# ROTENTURM CASTLE



Historical photo of Rotenturm Castle



Rebirth of an architectural jewel” is the title of a brochure published by the Schinner family, who actually made the seemingly impossible a reality: The building, already in ruins when the family took it over, destined for demolition already decades earlier, was saved from destruction and now shines again in new splendor. Unique among all the castles on the Castle Road, Rotenturm was constructed in the Moorish-Oriental style in the 1860s by the Erdődy family. But the history of the castle goes back much further than the 19th century.

Historian Harald Prickler described that development as follows: “In the High Middle Ages there was a moated castle in Rotenturm, which is assumed to have been in the castle park. In 1424, Stephan de Vöröswár (which means Rotenburg) pledged Rotenturm (Castrum Wereswar) to Johann von Ellerbach, who rebuilt the castle which had fallen into disrepair.” Throughout four more centuries, the Erdődy family then determined the fortunes of Rotenturm, with an interruption only from 1557 to 1613. The historian and castle researcher Karl Ulbrich distinguishes four different representative buildings at this location, from which today’s Rotenturm Castle finally emerged. The oldest is a water castle from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which was located in the northwest corner of the castle park. This was followed by the former “Old Castle” which represents a reconstruction of the moated castle from the period between 1775 and 1780. This building is usually called “Castle” in the older literature and “Old Castle” after its demolition around 1810.

Another building, the “Kastell”, built around 1820 to 1825, was simply called “Castle” before the construction of the new building, and “Old Castle wing” or Gesindehaus after the construction. It stood in the southwest corner of the castle park and was demolished in 1972.

The last to be built (between 1862 and 1866) was the “New Castle” which was erected to the north of the old castle wing on the park boundary towards the town in Historicist style and is the only building that still exists today. This new building was realized according to the plans of the Hungarian master builder Antal Weber in the style of Romantic Historicism. The construction manager was Johann Lang from Pinkafeld. The result was a harmonious combination of Romanticist forms with those of the Gothic and Renaissance in the Moorish-Byzantine architectural style.

The red façade plaster with the structure of oversized bricks of the three-story castle contrasts with the rich façade decoration of light sandstone with Moorish-Romanesque elements. Noteworthy are the corner wings with their stepped gable and the square tower in the eastern corner, which has a columned gallery on the upper floor. The semi-circular apse in the western corner of the chateau provides an outward indication

of what may be found within – namely a two-story chapel. The chapel is decorated with frescoes, which like those in the vestibule of the upper floor were created by the painter Károly Lotz. The old Baroque landscape garden was laid out as an English park at that time.

The castle experienced its heyday in the first decades of the 20th century. It housed the valuable collections of the art-loving couple, Count Julius and Countess Emilie Erdődy, née Countess Széchenyi. The heyday did not last long, however. In 1924 a fire destroyed a large part of the valuable interior furnishings and the irreplaceable historical family archives of the Erdődy family, as well as the secret archives of the Hungarian



Rotenturm—The wedding castle.

hero, Prince Francis II Rákóczi. He was the leader in the Kuruc War from 1704 to 1711, and his records were kept in the tower, which also fell victim to the flames.

With Ludwig Erdődy, the Rotenturm branch of the family died out. The rest of the collections were auctioned off in 1929, and for a short time the castle was the residence of violin virtuoso Jan Kubelik. During the Russian occupation after the Second World War, it declined further. Acquired by the Federal State of Burgenland in 1971, the building became a welcome adventure playground for young people, but this was less conducive to its preservation.

And here we come full circle to the present. In 2008 the Viennese real estate insurance expert Heinz Schinner acquired the dilapidated building, including the castle park. In consultation with the Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments and with the help of skilled craftsmen, he endeavored to carefully restore the building to its original form. In addition to the conservation of the basic substance, numerous doors and windows also had to be renewed. Countless other tasks had to be carried out before the castle could once again stand out as a landmark and jewel of the region. By 2015 the miracle had been accomplished. One would wish the same for many other historic buildings.





## Rotenturm Castle



Current view of Rotenturm Castle.

The “Old Castle” originally included an approximately 460-hectare zoo, the “Teichwald”. Today the park is about eleven hectares in size. When the Schinner family took over the castle, the park was severely overgrown. It was finally revitalized after years of effort. The grounds have the form of an English landscape garden in which several trees have been preserved as natural monuments. One of them is a plane tree whose trunk is so large that it takes seven

people to reach around it. Just as with Neuhaus Castle near Stubenberg, an energetic family has made a resurrection from the ruins possible. The building literally shines in new splendor, and for this achievement Prof. Heinz Schinner was awarded the Commander’s Cross by the Federal State of Burgenland in 2015. The unique ambience of this castle and the park make it ideal for weddings, corporate events, for private parties and as a film and photo location.

### **ROTENTURM CASTLE**

Privately owned,  
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# THE VORAU CANONS' PICTURESQUE CASTLE



Current aerial view of Festenburg Castle.

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**O**n its website Festenburg Castle is described as an insider tip. Indeed, it is located somewhat off the beaten track in the northern part of eastern Styria, hidden in the midst of a forest on a high mountain spur. All the more surprising are the first glimpses of this impressive fortress complex, which only gradually reveals itself to the visitor.

Even before the year 1200, the lords of Stubenberg had a first castle built on this site, probably to secure the mule track across the Wechsel Pass. It was relatively later, in 1353, that the castle shows up for the first time in the documentary record. By then, it had already been in the possession of the Counts of Mattersburg-Forchtenstein for over a century. Most likely it was acquired by Simon von Mattersdorf after 1220 through

his marriage with a daughter of the Stubenberg family. At that time the castle consisted of two parts, which were gradually sold off to the Lower Austrian Pergau family. Towards the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the castle came into the possession of the Counts of Montfort who came from Vorarlberg. Hugo von Montfort had been of great service to the royal court, and after coming to Styria, had held the office of provincial governor for two years. As a poet he left behind a body of work that reflects chivalric ideals in the Minnesang tradition. A late 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscript containing one of Montfort's works is preserved at Vorau Abbey. The intermezzo of the Montforts at Festenburg Castle did not last long, however. In 1416 they sold the castle to the Saurau family, who retained it for exactly two centuries.



In 1529 the Turks moved via Friedberg and St. Lorenzen am Wechsel against Festenburg Castle and besieged it. All attacks were beaten back by the small, brave garrison, however, and the Turks had to leave in haste, even leaving behind a piece of ordnance large enough for a man to crawl into. Some stone balls remain embedded in the walls of the castle to remind us of the failed siege. While quite a lot of damage was done elsewhere in 1532, that time the Turks did not advance as far as Festenburg Castle. Around the middle of the 16th century, the castle was already divided between numerous members of the Saurau family. In 1540 it was owned in equal shares by the brothers Christof, Friedrich and Michael von Saurau.

On June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1616, Andreas Siegmund von Saurau sold Festenburg Castle with all its furnishings to the Augustinian Abbey of Vorau for 18,000 gulden and 200 ducats. Provost of the abbey at that time was Daniel Gundau. The terms of sale granted Saurau's mother lifelong residence rights in the castle. This caused some disagreement between her and the canons, since she remained true to her Protestant faith, and her servants were also Protestants.

Provost Daniel Gundau was an avid builder, which earned him the honorary title as the second founder of Vorau Abbey. He did not limit his building activities to the abbey, however, but also immediately began remodeling Festenburg Castle. The castle chapel (the present Kreuzkapelle) was remodeled and consecrated anew. The higher, eastern part of the fortress, the so-called high castle, was rebuilt, and the knights' hall was transformed into a church dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria. The lower, western part was rebuilt into a residential wing. Between 1707 and 1723, under the then reigning provost Philipp Leisl and his successor, the castle underwent its second Baroque enlargement with the addition of further living quarters and the Calvary which, together with the castle church, still characterizes the appearance of Festenburg Castle today. During this period, numerous living quarters were converted into chapels, and the castle was decorated with magnificent

frescoes. In the 18th century, it served as a retirement residence for Vorau canons, though a canon from Rottenmann and a secular priest also spent their twilight years there. Ten Vorau canons and two other priests were buried in the castle crypt from 1721 to 1781. Nevertheless, the ravages of time gnawed away at the building to such an extent that in a description from 1815 it was described as "an old, dilapidated mountain castle with manor and town". Then, in the first half of the 19th century, the castle was renovated again. In 1892 Festenburg



High altar of the church in Festenburg Castle, with frescos by Vorau Abbey's resident painter, Johann Cyriak Hackhofer

Castle was elevated to a parish of its own. The romantic cemetery, consisting exclusively of wrought-iron crosses, some with motifs from the professional world of the deceased, was named the most beautiful Styrian mountain cemetery in 2019. It still serves as a burial place for Festenburg parishioners.

#### A sacred visual composition

The aforementioned 18<sup>th</sup>-century Provost of Vorau, Philipp Leisl, commissioned his monastery painter Johann Cyriak Hackhofer and the Salzburg woodcarver Johann Fenest to create a kind of Calvary depicting the mysteries of the Sorrowful Rosary. After the death of Philipp Leisl in 1717, his successor, Count Webersberg, expanded the theme to include the mysteries of the Joyful and Glorious Rosaries and also had the legend of Saint Catherine put in mystical relation with the life of Jesus. The result was a dense program

of strong expressiveness, consisting of several cycles, which, masterfully arranged, makes the essence of Baroque piety tangible in a way that one can seldom encounter anywhere else.

Through a Gothic gate, one enters the forecourt with two Baroque fountain niches in which the statues of Christ and St. Catherine of Alexandria form the thematic prelude. From there the visitor enters the large courtyard of the castle, where the sacred tour begins with the Loretokapelle on the second floor. An inscription in rhyme from the Baroque period gives visitors a programmatic hint of what awaits them: "He who's literate should here begin, and go the whole way through, so will he wonderfully win, of salvation's story a view, so with Catherine thus akin." Adjacent to this is the Krippenkapelle. These two chapels represent the Joyful Rosary.

Then follows the Calvary Hill with its four chapels: Ölbergkapelle (sometimes called Blutschwitzungskapelle), Geißelungskapelle, Krönungskapelle and Kreuzkapelle. Finally, in the parish church dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, Hackhofer masterfully rendered the Glorious Rosary. A special feature of the church is the so-called "Festeburger Frauenhimmel", since in the heaven depicted on the church's ceiling there are only women. The heavenly choir sings and plays music for the reception of St. Catherine of Alexandria into paradise. Thus, today this unique castle presents itself as a true church-castle whose fortified character is, however, still clearly recognizable. The castle and its art treasures can be experienced during extensive or short guided tours.

#### FESTENBURG

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# FROM A LOTTERY JACKPOT TO A HAVEN OF MODERN ART



Aichberg Castle in 1900



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The first written record mentioning the Eichberg area can be found in documents from the 11th century. There we learn that the region had been in the possession of the Counts of Formbach since about 1050. After 1158 the Margrave of Styria owned the area. As part of a larger effort to fortify the border, he also had the castle built, and later the village of Eichberg (Aichberg), as well. But as was the case almost everywhere—people already inhabited the area of Aichberg before their presence was noted in the historical record. Traces of early settlement, for example from the Roman period, have been preserved in archaeological remains. In 1043 the nearby Lafnitz River became the border between the Holy Roman Empire and Hungary. In the course of the construction of a belt of castles as a defense against attacks from the east, a fortification was probably also built in Aichberg before anyone thought it necessary to write about it.

Around the middle of the 13th century, an “Aichberger”, Konrad von Aichberg, is mentioned in documents for the first time. Under this family, the stone-built castle’s chapel, which was erected in 1378, became the parish church that still exists today. After a short intermezzo

of ownership by the Welzer family, in 1412 the castle passed to the Steinpeiß family, who were to determine its fate and that of the attached domain for the next 350 years. The first Steinpeiß came from a vassal family of the Stubenbergs, who were based in Anger near Weiz.

Legend has it that Seifried Steinpeiß was so strong that he could hurl a hundred kilo stone ball several meters. In 1860 Karl Reichert wrote about the Steinpeiß family: “Here is a curiosity, which shows how legendary the physical strength of the family was: Next to the main gate of Eichberg Castle there are two egg-shaped stones of considerable size and of about four hundredweight, to which iron ring handles are attached. Whenever he got angry, a certain Steinbeiß (sic) ancestor supposedly lifted the two stones and then smashed them together as a way to cool his blood.” Whether all the descendants of the Steinpeiß also possessed this boundless prowess is not clear. However, it is a fact that Seifried’s grandsons Andreas and Seifried were on the wrong side during the noble uprising under Andreas Baumkircher in 1468/70 against Emperor Frederick III — namely on Baumkircher’s. After the uprising had been suppressed, a loyal follower of the emperor, Captain





## Aichberg Castle

von Tierstein, captured the castle. The two brothers were imprisoned in Wiener Neustadt, and the castle was temporarily turned over to the emperor. It was later returned to the Steinpeiß family, however.

Around the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Eichberg domain was severely affected by the Turkish invasions, though the castle itself was not attacked. The Turks were not the only ones to make the times uncertain, however. In 1605 the Hajduks attacked the village and castle and devastated them. The Steinpeiß family managed just in time to escape to Vorau Abbey. In 1621 the Hajduks came again and caused more severe damage. But then there was a ray of hope for the family. In 1640 Emperor Ferdinand III raised the brothers Hans Christoph and Siegmund to the rank of barons. Another improvement in the status of the Steinpeiß family followed in 1675, when they were given the hereditary Falkenmeister office in the Duchy of Steyer, and in the following year they were made Imperial Counts.

At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the castle and its inhabitants were again put to the test. Although it had been initially possible to breathe a sigh of relief in 1683 because the Turks had passed Aichberg by, later about 500 of Christoph Batthyány's men attacked the castle and caused damage amounting to more than 10,000 gulden. The repairs plunged the lord heavily into debt. To make matters worse, in 1699 the castle was plundered by Hungarian hussars, which was a reason to renovate the castle and to equip it with the façade that still exists today.

An extremely interesting and rather adventurous representative of this family was Johann Josef Count Steinpeiß. After stabbing an opponent in 1697, he sought salvation by fleeing abroad. He subsequently sailed around the world for several years before returning to Aichberg. He wrote detailed memoirs about his experiences, but these, along with the rest of the Steinpeiß archive, were lost forever in 1945.

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Aichberg was once again the scene of

battles when the Kurucs attacked and damaged the castle in 1704 and 1708. In order to strengthen the defenses, an outer castle with a tower was built in 1715, but this annex was also destroyed in 1945. After the death of the last Steinpeiß at Aichberg in 1772, ownership repeatedly changed hands in the years that followed. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the castle was owned by the Barons of Waidmannsdorf, who were heavily indebted. They pondered how to save themselves from this precarious situation and came up with an unusual solution.

They secured permission from the emperor to offer the castle as the main prize in the state lottery with a ticket price of 15 gulden. The drawing took place on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1817 in Vienna under the supervision of the Imperial and Royal Court Chamber and the Imperial and Royal Lottery Directorate. The jackpot and with it the castle and manor of Aichberg went to the ticket with the number 50,516. The winner was the Prague paper merchant Donat Hartmann, but he had no real interest in Aichberg, and so sold the manor on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1817. Its value was estimated at 368,328 gulden, a handsome profit on an investment of 15 gulden. The buyer was the 26-year-old k.u.k. cavalry captain Ludwig Graf von Schönfeldt, who then also acquired the neighboring estate of Reitenau. He was not to enjoy his new properties into old age, however, for in 1828 he was killed in a riding accident.

In the 1860s Aichberg was described in Karl Reichert's collection of lithographs "Einst und Jetzt" as follows: "With its many irregular annexes and extensions, turrets, brattices, asymmetrical windows and hatches, it gives the impression of a solid and right medieval 'Purgstall'." Due to high debts, the castle and the manor changed hands again and again, though the manor of Aichberg remained in the possession of the Counts of Wimpffen for 100 years.

From the beginning of 1915 until the autumn of 1917, several refugee families from Galicia were housed in the castle, a total of 37 people, most of whom were quite weak. Two of them tragically died during this time. More than half of these



The renovated facade of Aichberg Castle.

refugees were Jews, to whom the local population was quite hostile. Though most were exhausted, the refugees were conscripted to work. Starving and freezing, they used the slats of the roof trusses as heating material, traces of which can still be seen in some places today. It was a particularly cynical fate that many of these Galicians became victims of cruel military justice and subsequently of Bolshevism after their return home. The documentation of this dark part of the castle's history is a special concern of Cajetan Gril, the current owner.

During the Second World War, Aichberg Castle was a place of refuge for the local population and served as quarters for the German army. In addition to the attendant human suffering, this was also not good for the state of the building, which slowly began to decay. Fortunately, Cajetan Gril was able to buy the castle in 1986. With a lot of effort, the ruinous building became a stately castle again, shaped by the owner's character and artistic sensibilities.

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Eastern Styria

# VORAU ABBEY



Current view of Vorau Abbey

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For over 850 years Vorau Abbey has been a center of culture and pastoral care in the region of the Styrian Joglland, with origins dating back to the 12th century. Out of gratitude for the birth of a long-awaited heir, the Styrian Margrave Otakar III of Traungau gave the property between the Wechsel Pass and Masenberg to the Archbishop of Salzburg Eberhard I on the condition that a monastery be built here. The first Augustinian canons came from the cathedral monastery of St. Rupert in Salzburg, and the first provost of the new monastery came from the Styrian Augustinian monastery of Seckau, which had already been founded in 1140. Since 1163 the convent of the Augustinian canons has been located in Vorau. The canons were not only charged with spreading the faith and preserving culture, their abbey also had a challenging defensive role to play. During the turbulence of the 15th century, Provost Leonhard von Horn ordered the construction of a deep moat which could be filled with water, and the erection of a defensive wall. This gave the monastery the character of a monastic castle. In the equally turbulent 17th century, Provost Daniel Gundau recognized the need to renovate the monastery building once again and expand it into a strong fortress.

Franz Attems writes about Vorau in “Kirchen und Stifte der Steiermark”: “When one enters the large monastery complex of Vorau under the high gate tower, which is crowned by irregular buildings and towers of different heights, one feels, on the one hand, welcomed and, on the other hand, protected. The fortified character of this complex with the almost Spartan-looking façade of the collegiate church – the two interesting towers having different wedge-shaped roofs – becomes physically palpable. At first, one is surprised by the contrast between the plain towers and the richly decorated western façade, and perhaps even more so a second time – when one enters the church under the towers and comes face to face with the splendor of one of the most important Baroque churches in the country. It really takes some time to get used to this magnificence.”

The plague that raged in Vorau parish from 1503 to 1505 killed 800 people. Emperor Maximilian I assigned the monastery

responsibility for the district court with the right to inflict corporal punishment and death by the gallows. After the death of Provost Geyer in 1542, the monastery was threatened with extinction during the Reformation, as there was only one canon left. This existential crisis was ended only in 1544 with the appointment of a new provost. A renewed outbreak of plague claimed 611 lives in Vorau in 1598. Extensive new buildings were erected by 1635. Provost Matthias Singer established a pharmacy for the population in 1651. From 1660 to 1662 the new collegiate church was built. The old prelatore was demolished in the course of the new construction of the west and north wing in 1727. In 1736 the monastery reached a historic high with 46 canons.

From 1700 the church was remodeled by Matthias Steinl in the style of the Viennese High Baroque. Particular treasures are the pulpit, constructed in 1706, which deals thematically with Jesus Christ's teaching, and the high altar, built from 1701 to 1704, which depicts the Assumption of Mary, who is the patron saint of the church. Both were designed by Matthias Steinl and executed by the sculptors J. F. Caspar and G. Niedermayr. The church thus represents a Baroque synthesis of the arts. The monastery established a secondary school in 1778, which proved of immense importance, because it spared the abbey from being secularized under Joseph II in the 1780s. From 1812 to 1817 the canons also operated a grammar school and from 1839 to 1843 a private grammar school with a choir boys' institute. The fortress walls were demolished in 1844, and the moat was partially filled in, whereby the monastery lost its fortress character.

#### Difficult times for the monastery: The National Socialists move in

Despite all the threats in the centuries before, Vorau Abbey did not experience its bitterest times until the 20th century. While the monastery had already been forced to sell numerous art treasures during the economic crisis of the 1920s, the National Socialists dealt probably the heaviest blow. Whereas the Vorau Canons' Monastery did not suffer any immediate repercussions after the “Anschluss of Austria” in the spring of 1938, in the fall of that year, the NS regime's

approach changed dramatically. Precisely on the eve of Hitler's birthday, on April 19th, 1940, Vorau Abbey was abolished. It was renamed “Vorau Castle” and a party school (NAPOLA = National Political Institutes of Education) was established there. The canons had to leave the monastery. Apart from three canons who were allowed to remain in the village, all of them were “expelled from the county and the gau.” They had to look for new accommodation themselves. This seemed to spell the end of the monastery for all times.

A representative of the new rulers made this self-satisfied entry in the monastery's memorial book on that April 19th, 1940: “But now there is an end to these ‘high’ visits, the trustee of Vorau Monastery vouches for it: Hubert Erhart, SS Lieutenant Colonel.” The National Socialists were in quite a hurry to take possession of the monastery. Already on May 7th, 1940 a preliminary detachment of the Theresianum NAPOLA arrived from Vienna. The young boys were now educated according to National Socialism values. They were split into several classes called “platoons” – very much in the militaristic spirit of the times. From June 30th to July 9th, 1940 to prepare them for their coming war service, the pupils took part in a training maneuver in Vorau, during which participants from other educational institutions of the “Ostmark” were guests in the monastery. Shortly after the Nazi takeover, there was even a plan to turn the collegiate church into a sports and swimming hall, which today seems ludicrous.

The monastery historian Ferdinand Hutz has shed light on the history of that strange project. In March 1941, a representative of the Reichsbauamt (planning and construction office for the Third Reich) in Graz reported to the Office for Historic Preservation: “1. the students of the NAPOLA are collecting all kinds of printed matter from the library for destruction: even if this is probably new literature, a removal or destruction of valuable old holdings cannot be ruled out. 2. The management of the institution intends to turn the library hall into a banqueting hall. 3. gentlemen of the institution's management declared



Vorau Abbey, Georg Matthaeus Vischer (Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, 1681).

that the church is to be converted into a swimming and sports hall.” Alarmed by this report, the Office for Historic Preservation again intervened with the responsible authorities, so that on March 20th and 21st, 1941 a commission of high-ranking representatives of the Ministry of Finance in Berlin inspected the monastery. Also on site were envoys of NAPOLA, as well as representatives of the Reich Building Authority in Graz and the Styrian State Conservator, Walter von Semetkowski. Semetkowski then wrote a detailed letter to the Reich Governor in Styria, Gauleiter Sigfried Uiberreither, in which he vehemently advocated the preservation of the monastery as a “cultural asset of the highest order.” Whether it was Walter von Semetkowski’s letter or whether the project was put on ice for other reasons, the ill-fated plan was thankfully not implemented. In any case, the war had a devastating effect on the region, the village, and the monastery. Despite their military bravura in training up soldiers for the Führer, the NAPOLA administrators proved not to be particularly heroic when it came down to it themselves. They fled the monastery as the front approached at the beginning of April 1945. Their charges were perhaps grateful for this mercy.

In April and May 1945 there was still heavy fighting in and around Vorau. On April 24, low-flying Soviet planes bombed the area, and the Vorau monastery and market were badly hit. Parts of the monastery burned down. A lack of water, as well as desolate extinguishing equipment hindered fire-fighting efforts, and the flames continued to wreak devastation for days. Especially the farm building and some towers were severely damaged. Numerous incunabula, documents, books, and art objects had been removed from the library during the Nazi regime. The restitution after the end of the war turned out to be quite complicated and protracted. Some objects from the abbey’s possession were only found decades later in other museums, others have not been found to this day.

### Rebirth after the war

Despite the bitter years before, a joyful day came for the canons when they could move back into the monastery as early as May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1945. New life emerged from the ruins, and in the following decades, Vorau Abbey developed into a pearl of the Joglland region, where faith, education, art, and culture are at home. In the monastery’s jubilee brochure from 1988, looking back on the time of reconstruction, it says: “The spiritual and material reconstruction of our monastery, which was started by Provost Berger with the calmness and maturity of old age, was continued by his successor Gilbert Prenner and completed with great financial sacrifices. For him and all his fellow canons there could not have been a more beautiful and fitting conclusion to the entire reconstruction process than the 800th anniversary of our monastery in 1963. All traces of war had been removed, and the monastery once again stood in its former splendor and beauty. With the painful abolition of the monastery, the smoky ruins of 1945, and the laborious reconstruction in mind, at the 800-year celebration the Te Deum laudamus resounded through the hall of the monastery church, with thanksgiving to God and full of inner joy from the throats of all members of the monastery as well as the population.” The reconstruction efforts can be seen, and they continue today. The monastery shows itself as a flourishing community which now, more than ever, shines as the region’s spiritual and cultural center. Bernhard Mayrhofer currently serves as provost of Vorau Abbey, while Gerhard Rechberger and Rupert Kroisleitner are the abbey’s prelates.

As part of the Castle Road, the magnificent collegiate and parish church invites visitors to contemplate and pray. Known as the monastery with the most towers in Austria, Vorau impresses with its unique architecture, historic library, Baroque splendor, pictorially designed sacristy, and wonderful outdoor facilities in the middle of nature. The Education Center of Vorau Abbey combines adult education with a monastic atmosphere. With its twenty rooms, the Baroque hall, the princes’ room and another three seminar rooms, it has provided a comfortable venue for learning since 1977. In addition, it is possible to hold events and seminars lasting several days or to rent the rooms for private celebrations. For events, there is room for up to 200 people. Currently, the Education Center is managed by Sonja Romirer-Maierhofer.

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Pölla Castle/Abbey

# PÖLLAU CASTLE – THE STYRIAN ST. PETER'S BASILICA



ORF Radio Steiermark Hiking Day / Helmut Schweighofer.



**F**ranz Attems described the origin of Pöllau Castle as follows: “Three hundred years ago, in the valley between the mountain ranges of the Rabenwald and the Masenberg southwest of Hartberg, one could still see a water castle next to the parish church of the market town of Pöllau. The Stubenbergs had built it, founded the market in 1440 and given the fortress to their vassals as a fief. From this church and its proprietary church, dedicated to St. Vitus, the Augustinian monastery later developed, the foundation of which, however, was the work of another knightly dynasty – the Lords of Neuberg (Nitperc, Neidberg) who acquired the domain in 1459. Hans, a confirmed bachelor, and his resolute sister Elisabeth donated their property for an Augustinian priory in 1482, in accordance with the wishes of their dead father, Heinrich. They, however, did not live to see the fruits of their generous donation. Hans was the last of his line, and he died in 1485. His red marble tomb slab on the right choir wall of the collegiate church shows him as a life-size figure in armor with a flowing beard. The Neubergs are also remembered by the coat of arms granted to the monastery by Emperor Maximilian I, to which the emblem of the St. Jörgen family was added. Thus, the multiform Pöllau coat of arms is also a symbol of the complicated history of the foundation’s origins.”

At first, however, there were difficulties with the execution of Hans von Neuberg’s will. The first canons were supposed to come to Pöllau from Vorau, but everything was a bit slow to get started. Emperor Frederick III had confiscated the goods of the last Neuberg, because he had been on the wrong side in the Baumkircher Feud, so now it was up to Frederick to find a provost for Pöllau. The search proved difficult. The first candidate disappeared, while another did not have the nerve to hold out against the inheritance disputes that had flared up around Pöllau. It was not until 1504 that the foundation was realized, and the first provost, Ulrich von Trautmansdorff from the mother monastery Vorau, could move in. The dominance of Vorau was so great that Pöllau subsequently stood mostly in its shadow.

The construction of the monastery could not immediately begin, because in the 16<sup>th</sup> century completely different problems demanded attention: Turkish invasions, conflicts with the Protestants, and other calamities. The Pöllau monastery therefore got off to a rather poor start, and in the short term the idea of Protestantism even seems to have taken hold there. An ecclesiastical visitation in the time before 1585 showed that only three members of the order were living in the provostry in Pöllau, plus three concubines, a wife and four children. It was not until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that these conditions improved again. The man responsible for this turnaround was Provost Peter Muchitsch († 1600), a spirited speaker and scholarly writer, as well as a gifted organizer. A true giant in stature, he does not seem to have been very gentle to

his fellow human beings, however. His energetic use of profanity earned him unflattering nicknames, such as “The Sow,” “stockfish” or “Doctor Sick Brain”.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the monastery was finally able to establish itself as a strong community. A prosperous period began, and work was vigorously undertaken on reconstructing the church and the outbuildings. The construction costs were mostly borne by young noblemen who had joined the monastery. Under the artistically inclined provost Michael Maister, a new church was built, which is one of the key examples



Pöllau Castle, Georg Matthaeus Vischer  
(*Topographia Ducatus Stiriae*, 1684)

of the late Baroque in eastern Styria. The first major undertaking of Provost Maister was the demolition of the old water castle. Maister lived to see the completion of the new buildings in 1696. They were probably erected by Jakob Schmerlaib from Leibnitz. Under the new provost Johann Ernst Ortenhofen, the church was completed in 1709. Foreman for the construction work was Remigius Horner of Pöllau. Even though Joachim Carlone is named as the master builder of the church in documents, the real architect was probably Carlo Antonio Carlone, who must have drawn up the plan for it sometime after 1680. It was presumably Joachim who “modernized” the plan somewhat by order of Provost Ortenhofen. The new St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome served as a model for the construction. Originally, two towers were planned, but only the south tower was actually built.

In 1747, outbuildings were erected in place of the former fortifications, which are adorned by late Baroque illusionist wall paintings on the side facing the inner courtyard. The two gateways on the south and west sides are crowned by stone figures of St. Augustine and Maria Immaculata, attributed to the Graz sculptor Veit Königer. With its imposing dimensions, the Pöllau Collegiate Church is the largest Baroque church building in Styria, with a total length of 62.25 meters and a width of 27.20 meters. The height of the dome is 42 meters. However, neither the successful efforts



Chapter house of the former Augustinian Abbey of Pöllau.



Stag Pear Schnapps

to beautify the monastery buildings nor the magnificent building prevented the dissolution of the monastery under Joseph II, for in contrast to Vorau, Pöllau did not have a monastery school and was furthermore in financial difficulties. After secularization of the abbey, the church served as a parish church, and the monastery buildings were acquired by the Lamberg family and remodeled into today's castle, which has been owned by the municipality of Pöllau since 1938.

Anyone who enters the church, which has since been raised to the status of a basilica, will be impressed in equal measure by the sheer size of the space and by the Baroque paintings. Together they form a harmonious whole. The paintings are the work of Matthias von Görz, who began the fresco cycle in 1712. The painter immortalized himself in a painting, but finding his portrait is not easy. He began with the dome vault with the nine choirs of angels venerating the Trinity, from there the artist unfolded his rich work in all directions. The artist did not come from Italy, as his name suggests, but from Gleisdorf, but he took inspiration from the south where he had become acquainted with the works of Pietro

da Cortona and Domenichino during study visits to Rome. The interior of the church originates from the late Baroque and Classicism, the side altars were designed by Joseph Adam von Mölck.

The parish church and the eastern wing currently belong to the diocese of Graz-Seckau. This part of the building is home to event rooms, the Large and Small Fresco Halls, refectory, seminar and exhibition rooms, the Pöllau-Vorau-Joglland Music School, the rehearsal rooms of the town's marching band, and the tourist office. Pöllau Abbey and the pilgrimage church on the Pöllauberg, to which a path leads along stations of the cross, form a spiritual and visual unit.

#### The Styrian Don Camillo: Father Raimund Ochabauer (1935–2009)

In front of the church stands the bronze statue of a Pöllau original: Father Ochabauer. He was known far and wide as the Styrian Don Camillo owing to his appearance and warm-heartedness. Born in 1935 to a farming family in Fischbach in eastern Styria, he soon made up his mind to become a priest. Ordained in 1959, he was active in numerous Styrian parishes until he became pastor of Pöllau in 1975. His

great resemblance to the French actor Fernandel – the unforgettable actor who played Don Camillo – earned him his nickname. But it was not only his appearance that connected him with the figure of Don Camillo: philanthropy, openness and his commitment to the public good distinguished Ochabauer. He was a priest with a passion, a book author, a media star, an actor, and chairman of the local tourist association. The bronze statue in the courtyard of the basilica, designed by Hannes Fladerer in 2012, is an extremely successful reminder of Raimund Ochabauer, man and priest.

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# NEUHAUS CASTLE NEAR STÜBENBERG



The coachman of Neuhaus Castle.

Like so many historic buildings on the Castle Road, Neuhaus Castle has had an eventful history – but it was one of the very few to experience a resurrection from the ruins. In his hiking guide from 1888 Ferdinand Krauss describes the path from Stubenberg up to Neuhaus Castle, which was still in ruins at the time: “[...] through a shady forest over a rushing brook, which sends its clear water to the valley in many cascades, then up past vineyards to the old knight’s vault. [...] The defiant castle with its huge walls and the massive keep was destroyed by a lightning strike at the beginning of this century, whereby the owner, Count Wurmbrand, could only save his

life by jumping out of the window.” Neuhaus Castle is located in the center of the Apfelland-Stubenbergsee region high above the Feistritzklamm gorge with a wide view over the Stubenberg basin, including the swimming lake. The castle was built around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century by the Counts of Stubenberg. In order to distinguish it from their ancestral castle on the nearby Kögerl hill near Stubenberg, which was destroyed in an uprising of the Styrian nobility in 1269, it was called “Neues Haus”. The castle was first mentioned in 1375 as the noble residence of a Hans von Neuhaus. Neuhaus was mostly administered by vassals of the Stubenbergs. Like most of the numerous castles in



## Neuhaus Castle

eastern Styria, Neuhaus had the task of protecting Styria from invasions by the Hungarians and Turks. However, there are no reports that the castle was ever conquered or even seriously attacked. In 1455, Hans Drachsler, who had previously been Stubenberg's administrator at Kapfenberg, had his residence there. In 1506, Neuhaus castle passed to Sigmund Drachsler. It later burned down in 1541, when the archives were also destroyed. Bernhard Drachsler had the complex rebuilt and modernized, giving it its final form. However, an old legend tells the story differently.

### The legend of the fall of the castle

Once upon a time three rather wild brothers lived in the castle, real ruffians and bullies, who treated their serfs quite inhumanely. One day they rode to Stubenberg and stole a barrel of communion wine from the priest. Soon thereafter Easter Sunday came, and when the people had gone to church, the three brothers stayed behind in the knight's hall, where they drank, feasted and made ungodly speeches while drinking up the stolen wine. Completely drunk, they then staggered down to the castle courtyard to throw the rest of the consecrated Easter meat to the kennel dogs. Just as the bells of Stubenberg rang for the consecration, the castle suddenly shook to its foundations and out of a clear sky a bolt of lightning struck the keep and killed the three brothers. The castle went up in flames, and no one dared to rebuild it. So much for the folk tale—fortunately, the bit about the castle not being rebuilt did not come true, as we shall see.

But first back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century: when Anna Maria Drachsler died in 1613, the castle passed to Maria Rosina Isabella, Baroness von Katzianer via her granddaughter. In 1663 Georg Andree Freiherr von Wurmbbrand-Stuppach acquired the domain. He also made several changes to the castle. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Neuhaus was united with Schielleiten, which also belonged to the Wurmbbrand family. In 1800 a lightning strike triggered a devastating fire that largely destroyed the castle. Since the administrative tasks had long since been taken over by Schielleiten Castle, Neuhaus Castle was not

restored and soon became a ruin. In Karl Reichert's collection of lithographs, "Einst und Heute", Neuhaus is described around 1860 as follows: "The so-called Freienberger Klamm, which stretches southeast from Kilbel Castle near Anger to Stubenberg along the thundering Feistritz River for 1 ½ hours, is one of the most beautiful mountain gorges in this part of the country, and in places resembles Upper Styria's grotesque 'Gesäuse'."

As soon as we enter this lonely, grey gorge, we see an imposing ruin on a high mountain ridge. Soon, however, protruding mountain slopes and dense forests cover the view, and we only see it again after ¾ of an hour, shortly before we step out of the gorge. Here Neuhaus presents itself in a quite picturesque, romantic way. [...] The ruin is very dilapidated and especially dangerous to visit in strong winds. The high tower, as well as most of the walls, are broken down and are not particularly worth a visit, because except for two coats of arms above the inner castle gate, nothing reminds us of the once splendid past." Over a century later, that was to change.

### The metamorphosis: from ruins back to a stately castle

In 1982, the Vetter von der Lilie family acquired the ruin. At that time, trees were already growing in the castle ruins on five-meter-high piles of rubble. The rubble was removed, a new roof truss was put on, and the residential wing was reconstructed, largely true to the original. Vacation apartments have been set up on the third floor of the building, which can be rented in summer. The castle is situated high above the Feistritz Gorge on a spur of the Rabenwald Woods between the towns of Stubenberg and Anger. The ridge drops steeply on three sides, partly with rock walls. Neuhaus is a typical house castle built in quarry stone masonry, whose original character has been largely preserved. The mighty palas is located in the north of the castle area. It measures about thirty by twelve meters. The four residential floors are topped by a high attic. The walls of the palas are up to three meters thick. There are window openings only on the storm-free south and east sides. On the north side there are some light

slits. Each floor was divided into four rooms of approximately equal size, which were accessible through a central staircase. Characteristic of Neuhaus is the 32-meter-high shield wall built in front of the western narrow side, which is up to 4.5 meters thick. It reaches up to the height of the roof ridge. This strong wall was necessary to compensate for the high level of the adjoining terrain. A rectangular courtyard extends to the south. Apart from the palas, it is bordered by two one-story outbuildings. In one of these buildings there used to be the dungeon and the Gothic chapel. From the courtyard a once vaulted staircase leads to the entrance of the palas. Towards the north-western hillside, the complex was secured by a wide and deep moat, as well as by a defensive wall. Here lies a round-arched portal from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Above it there is a projecting defensive gallery. The coats of arms above the gate are those of Bernhard Drachsler and his wife Lucia Mürzer zu Moos. In a corner of the courtyard there is a 13-meter-deep cistern.

Until the last restoration, it was completely filled with rubble. When it was cleared out, the old stone wreath of the well from 1570 was found, as well as two coats of arms identical to those on the castle gate. A part of the bailey walls was preserved and restored by the current owners. After about thirty years of painstaking restoration by the Vetter von der Lilie family, Neuhaus is no longer marked on maps as a "ruin" but once again as a "castle".

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Eastern Styria

# THE GARDEN CASTLE OF HERBERSTEIN



Current view of Herberstein Castle

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## Herberstein Castle

Approaching Herberstein Castle has a very special charm, because unlike most other castles and palaces, Herberstein initially hides its beauty from the observer due to its geographical location. Only when one has taken the path down into the gorge of the Feistritz River, does the castle show itself on a rocky spur. Hidden in the valley and yet high above the river, which forms a loop here and thus additionally protects the house, it has survived the centuries without major destruction and today flourishes more beautifully than ever. Ferdinand Krauss, author of a travel guide to eastern Styria, raved as early as 1888: “so it stood before us, the chivalrous Burgveste, with gate and tower, pinnacle and oriel, just as back then in the dreams of our youth.” The castle, now inhabited by the 21<sup>st</sup> generation of the Herberstein family, offers a rich variety of attractions, ranging from a large zoo and garden art to exhibitions of modern art in the Bruno Gironcoli Museum. In the castle itself you can learn about the history of the family and follow the history of the castle’s development.

The beginnings of the structure date back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The castle was named after its builder Herwig von Krottendorf, a vassal of the Stubenberg family, who had the first Romanesque building erected. Herwigstein later became Herberstein. The first small castle passed from Herwig to Ulrich der Rosenecker, who then sold it to his brother-in-law, Otto von Hartberg. The latter succeeded in transforming the former fief of the Stubenbergs into free property against payment of fifty silver marks. He then named himself after the castle and is therefore considered the ancestor of the Herbersteins. Since then, the fortress has been passed in the same family from one generation to the next, one of the longest records of continuous castle ownership by a single family in Austria.

In his history of castles in Styria, the Styrian historian Robert Baravalle considered Herberstein to be particularly important: “situated on a narrow rocky outcrop protruding far into the gorge-like valley, the rocky slopes of which drop almost vertically to the Feistritz valley, the elongated castle, surrounded

by forest, forms a fortification that can only be described as unique. The entire history of the development of Styrian castles from the Romanesque fortifications of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the magnificent palaces with rich galleries and archways and the magnificent courtyard of the 17<sup>th</sup> century can be seen in this one castle, because here one building was joined to the other and the old stock was preserved for the most part. Each builder preserved with love what his ancestors had built and to it added his own construction, so that the castle seems to have grown like a living thing. The reason for this organic growth can be found in the fact that since the 13<sup>th</sup>

century the castle has been inhabited by a single family that never stumbled, but continually advanced through times of hardship, war, pestilence, and turmoil. Not even the Stubenbergs, once the lords of Herberstein, can boast of having had a castle in their possession for so long a time without interruption. The history of the Herberstein family is closely connected with the history of the castle. Over the centuries, the Herbersteins have owned many castles in Styria, but none has gained such importance in the development of the dynasty as the castle bearing their name, their ancestral home.”

The oldest part of the complex is the two-story building, the palas, built around the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century near the western abyss overlooking the Feistritz. On the upper floor there is a hall, which can be reached through a spiral staircase on the outer wall. A tower was built in front of this original castle around 1300 and secured by a neck ditch on the eastern side. The entrance was on the first floor, below which the dungeon was located. Above were three residential floors and a battlement. From here, the building continued to develop on the rocky plateau from west to east into the present-day complex. Around

the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the outer castle was built with farm buildings and a wall. Access to it was through the strong shield wall on the east side. The St. Catherine’s Chapel was built to the south of it. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the outer castle was extended and supplemented by a northern and southern wing, as well as the outer house attached to the shield wall. This created a narrow courtyard, and on the southern side a fortification was built with a bailey and towers. The extension in Renaissance style goes back to Georg III von Herberstein (1529–1580), who was not only governor of Styria, but also father of 22 children – and they needed to be

## The Herbersteins were always great patrons of the school.

accommodated somewhere. Archduke Ferdinand I had appointed Georg von Herberstein to high offices in his court, and this elevation in status needed to be reflected in his residence. An agricultural building, which stood on the site of today’s Florentinerhof, was demolished and rebuilt on its present location. It was also he who commissioned the construction of the five-story south wing and the cannon tower.

Disputes arose after Georg’s death in 1584, because his inheritance had not been clearly spelled out, and these differences could not be settled until 1604. The eventual heir, Bernhardin II von Herberstein served Archduke Ferdinand as Lord Great Chamberlain. He had the outer moat built over and continued the work on the Florentinerhof already begun by his father. However, this was only completed by his son Johann Maximilian I. The latter was vice governor of Inner Austria and governor of Styria. In 1648 he commissioned the master builder Anton Solar, who also built the Church of St. Johann, with the further extension of the Florentinerhof. Already in 1644, the family had been elevated to the rank of count, which was connected with an improvement of the coat of arms.





Sigismund von Herberstein (b. 1486 in Wippach)

The Herbersteins are among the few Austrian nobles who managed to rise from peasant origins to the rank of imperial counts. They divided into different lines and owned estates not only in Austria, but also in what is today Slovenia, Silesia, Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. They began their career as simple vassals, but quickly rose in service to the sovereign. Over time, the family took on a wide variety of functions of steadily growing importance. They were, among others, cupbearers, court masters as well as war and court chamberlains. One of the Herbersteins even became a state minister. They also proved themselves in military service and were very successful on the battlefield. Six governors of Styria were Herbersteins. There were also important scientists among them, and several scions of the family had ecclesiastical careers, six of them becoming bishops. The most important scientist was Sigismund (also Siegmund) von Herberstein (1486–1566), who wrote one of the most important works on regional studies and geography. He also served as a diplomat at the Viennese court and was sent on a particularly delicate mission to Poland and Russia in 1516. In 1527 further travels to the empire of the tsar followed. He also used the experiences and observations on these journeys for his studies and publications. With good reason he can be called one of the first explorers in the modern sense.

In 1557 he published his great work on Russia, first in Latin and later in German. To this day this book is considered the most important source for the history of Russia in the first half of the 16th century. The portrait of this great member of the Herberstein family can be found in the ancestral gallery of the knight's hall. In 1945 this Sigismund von Herberstein actually saved the castle and the cultural assets housed there from looting. These included invaluable pieces such as the Strettweg cult chariot, which are now part of the collections of the Joanneum Museum in Graz. How can someone long since dead save a castle? When the Russians reached the castle towards the end of World War II, the officer in charge had heard of Sigismund von Herberstein, because of his important work on Russia, and he posted guards in front of the castle to prevent it from being looted.

But back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century: In 1644 the Herberstein family acquired the title of count in the Habsburg hereditary lands, and in 1710 they were elevated to the rank of imperial counts. And these elevations in rank went hand in hand with continued construction work on the castle complex. Under Count Johann Maximilian of Herberstein († 1680), a large tournament court (Florentinerhof) was built between the main and the outer castle. In 1690 the more than 400-year-long building history of Herberstein Castle then finally was brought to a close with the construction of the Meierhof and the gardener's house. "First ponder it, then

dare to do it, whether night or day” is the family’s motto. This phrase is engraved on a 16th-century executioner’s sword. But the work on the estate was not limited to the construction of buildings. Already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century there were important gardens in Herberstein, and then in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century under Johann Maximilian I, a pleasure garden with geometrically arranged beds was laid out, in the center of which was a pavilion. The heyday of this garden was in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over time it was neglected, until it was finally completely destroyed after the First World War. In 1997 the gardens of the castle were brought back to life based on an engraving by Georg Matthäus Vischer from 1684.

The zoo in Herberstein can also boast of a long pedigree. Fallow deer have been kept since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the meantime, Herberstein Zoo has become the fourth internationally recognized zoo in Austria, with numerous international breeding programs which thus ensure the protection and preservation of many species threatened with extinction. Even though Schönbrunn Zoo, created in 1752, is officially considered the oldest zoo in the world, that title could certainly also be attributed to Herberstein.

In 1817, Josef August Kumar reported on the history of the Herberstein castle and family. He euphorically described the landscape and the romantic impression of a hike to the castle, a sentiment that can still be understood today: “The path winds its way up through ash and beech trees in a lovely manner, and the higher you get, the more magnificent the view becomes down into the Feistritz flat lands. Like a second Eden, here lies the long meadow-covered valley with its noble farms and mills, drovers’ trails, grasslands, and fruits. Proud groups of trees and plantations stand out everywhere. The horizon unfolds before one. [...] A rotten footbridge over the torrential Feistritz River finally brought us up the castle hill of Herberstein.” On his hike Kumar was accompanied by an Augustinian hermit from St. Johann. He continues: “A solemn silence rolled toward us with a sinister dominion. We only occasionally heard the court dog’s hoarse barking at the somewhat distant



The Florentine Courtyard of the Garden Castle of Herberstein.

workshop of a blacksmith, proud to be the only protection to shield this place from nocturnal raids.”

Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, another report attested to the charms of Herberstein Castle and the close relationship between the family, the castle, and the local population. It also provides an insight into the aristocratic life of the time, in this case especially in connection with matrimony. Maximilian Reichsgraf zu Herberstein and Comtesse Alice Bardeau were married on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1895 in the chapel of Eggenberg Palace, at that time another Herberstein property. The “Grazer Volksblatt” of August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1895, reported on their return to Herberstein after their marriage as follows: “The noble couple, who had just returned from their honeymoon, so richly endowed with qualities of mind and heart, entered their future domicile of Herberstein Palace. They were accompanied by the esteemed father and the generous husband’s lovely sister. Her young son, dressed as a Magyar, was sweet enough to kiss. [...] The long driveway from the Feistritz Bridge, the forecourt of the castle and the courtyard with the huge fountain were tastefully decorated. Since the house of Herberstein has always been a great patron of the local school, the school youth, led by its good teachers, formed a wonderful guard of honor. The best

pupil of the last class recited a poem, and the adorable little daughter of the head teacher presented a bouquet. [...] With visible joy and emotion, the couple – so warmly welcomed – received these manifestations of esteem with gratitude to one and sundry, especially the officials gathered in corpore and the service personnel for these so beautiful events. [...] May the Herberstein family tree put out many noble shoots and bear blossoms and fruits for many centuries to come. May God grant it!”

This wish has come true, as the castle is now inhabited by the 21<sup>st</sup> generation of the family. The program at Herberstein Castle is extremely diverse: castle tours, historical garden, the Gironcoli Museum, changing exhibitions in the Herberstein Art House, a circular hiking path through the Feistritz Gorge, Herberstein Animal World and much more.

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# SCHIELLEITEN PALACE



Current view of Schielleiten Castle

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**S**chielleiten Castle was built between 1720 and 1730 by the imperial counts of Wurmbrand-Stuppach. The building is also called Neu-Schielleiten, because there are sparse remains of an older castle in the vicinity. On an engraving from 1681, the earlier structure, located to the north of the present one, presents itself as a square building fortified with towers, surrounded by a high defensive wall with further towers and outbuildings. Unfortunately, only ruins and an outbuilding remain of this once mighty structure. The old castle was strategically located on the slope of the Buchkogel hill. Built by the Stubenbergs in the late 13th century, it had the task of protecting Stubenberg

Castle by warding off enemies from the east. The Lords of Schielleiten, mentioned already in 1328, were vassals of the Stubenbergs.

### The legend of the hostile brothers

The two brothers Radbold and Friedel von Schielleiten were the lords of a proud estate. For a long time, the two lived peacefully side by side at Schielleiten Castle, although they were of quite different temperaments. Radbold, the elder, was a sinister, secretive, and quick-tempered character. Friedel, the younger, was a mild and affable lord who was much more popular with the castle's servants and subjects than his sinister brother.



## Schielleiten Palace

Radbold became engaged to the beautiful Gisela von Herberstein, which led to many cheerful celebrations in the castle. But soon Gisela turned her heart to the friendly, good-natured and cheerful Friedel. Radbold grew suspicious that his brother wanted to take his bride away from him. He therefore decided to get his brother out of the way, but Friedel was warned by friendly inhabitants of the castle and thereafter sought to avoid Radbold. One evening, however, when Friedel was standing in the courtyard near a large cauldron of boiling water, his evil brother seized the opportunity. Radbold approached him from behind and pushed him into the cauldron, where Friedel met his agonizing end. Gripped by horror at his own deed, Radbold left the scene of his crime, remorse and despair gripping his heart. He could no longer undo the terrible deed, but he still wanted to atone for it. He gave his father's ancestral castle and

estates as fiefs. Under the Rindschaidts the castle of Old Schielleiten was slowly but gradually expanded, until it became the mighty structure shown in Vischer's engraving in 1680. In 1629 the female heirs of the Rindschaidts had to leave Styria owing to their Protestant faith. As a consequence, they apparently were forced to sell the castle to the provincial governor, Count Carl Saurau. In 1694 the castle and manor then passed to the counts of Wurmbrand-Stuppach. The old walls soon became too uncomfortable for the family, and so they began to build a new Schielleiten Palace in the valley. Construction of the new Baroque structure sealed the fate of the old one. To avoid having to pay the roof tax, the roof of the old building was removed, and the building fell into ruin. All usable building material was sold.

Fate – or perhaps it was hubris – did not favor the new building project, however.

leiten had finally become a ruin. Today, a small part of the ruin is still inhabited, but tours are not possible.

### Neu-Schielleiten

The construction of the new castle in the style of the Viennese High Baroque was started in 1720. The forementioned financial difficulties meant that individual rooms could be completed only gradually. In 1731 at least some of them could be used. On the second floor was the “banquet hall, picture gallery, servants' room, master bedroom, cabinet, large guest room, chocolate chamber, as well as the hall.” Also, on the ground floor at least some rooms were finished and usable. Soon, the first weaknesses of the construction became apparent. The new palace had a flat roof, and this was clearly unsuitable for the climate of northeastern Styria. Water damage quickly occurred, and the gutters were also far too small. Karl Reichert, who has already been quoted several times, wrote about Neu-Schielleiten around 1860: “[...] a palace built in the Italian style in an extremely friendly area. The bones of the mother – namely of the old Schielleiten Castle – were taken as the foundation for this child of our days.” The castle remained in the possession of the family until 1906. In that year it passed into the possession of Marchese Tacoli through his marriage to Anna Maria Baroness of Wurmbrand-Stuppach. In 1921 his heirs sold it to Frank Whitehead, a business partner in the Lammer Bank. Whitehead was the son of the industrialist and arms manufacturer, John Whitehead, who was based in Fiume (Rijeka). Frank Whitehead's sister was Agathe Whitehead, the first wife of Georg Ludwig von Trapp, who would later enjoy success with the world-famous Trapp Family Singers.

After Frank Whitehead lost much of his fortune as a result of the Great Depression in the 1930s, and the Lammer Bank then went bankrupt, the estate was divided up and sold to the Republic of Austria in 1935. The government then established a federal sports school in the palace. At that time, an avant-corps (building projection) was added to the eastern part of the castle in the style of the existing building. The athletes from

## Still today this baroque jewel is devoted to sports.

all its possessions to the Order of the Templar Knights and set off for the Holy Land. The last lord of Schielleiten went missing and found his grave in a foreign land. But even then Radbold was not to find peace, for his ghost still haunts the walls of the castle today. Years ago, a copper cauldron with a human skeleton is said to have been found in the ruins of the castle.

So much for the legend. The records do not substantiate it. Frederick (Friedel), who was supposedly murdered in 1377, was still alive in 1384; there is never any mention of a violent death in the documents, not even later. There is not even documentary evidence of a Radbold von Schielleiten, nor of a Gisela von Herberstein.

The last of the Schielleiten family was Wulfgang, and with him the family died out around 1400. After the passing of this family, from 1400 to 1629 the Rindschaid family took over the task of holding the castle as vassals of the Stubenbergs. The family held a number of Stubenberg

High construction costs of the ambitious new palace put the Wurmbrand-Stuppachs deep into debt. Serious consideration was given to tearing down the still unfinished palace and making the old castle habitable again. Experts, such as the master mason Josef Carlone were consulted to find a solution, which included the aforementioned removal of the old castle's roof. Through this cost-saving measure, the construction could be continued on Neu-Schielleiten. However, the cellars of the old castle remained in use. In the middle of the 18th century, a military record has the following to tell about the old castle: “Old Schielleithen's chambers are decaying, but it is provided with a very strong, eight foot thick and eighteen foot high wall. This wall has strong defense towers at the four corners, everything is very well set up in a state of defense, it lies on an advantageous hill of considerable height, has a good view, and could certainly defend a battalion very advantageously.” However, with the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Alt-Schiel-





## Eastern Styria



Postcard showing Schielleiten Castle before 1907, © Landesarchiv Steiermark

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the school were enlisted for the remodeling work, and by March of 1936 the new school had been completed to such an extent that the participants in the Berlin Olympic Games of that year were able to set up their training camp here in eastern Styria.

When the National Socialists came to power, they continued, at least initially, to use the building as a sports school, albeit in the spirit of the party. Towards the end of the war, the castle was converted into a children's hospital, and then in the immediate postwar period it was occupied first by the Russians and then by the British. Physically, the palace survived the unfortunate period of National Socialism and the war relatively unscathed. On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1947, the school was ceremoniously reopened. At that time there was room for eighty athletes, and the school was already fully booked when it resumed operation.

### Today the Baroque jewel of the Castle Road is still dedicated to sports

Fortunately, the spirit of National Socialism has been banned at Schielleiten, though the emphasis on sports remains. On the 43 hectares covered by the school's grounds, everything an athlete's heart could desire is available: tennis courts, soccer fields, basketball

and volleyball courts, an athletics facility and much more. Thus, Schielleiten Castle is the largest and oldest facility of this kind in Austria. It is also the venue for the concert series "schielleiten Baroque Evenings" and the setting for performances as part of the Styriarte Festival. Schielleiten has also been the venue of several European and World Hot Air Balloon Championships for several times.



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# OBERMAYERHOFEN CASTLE



The Garden Salon of Obermayerhofen Castle.

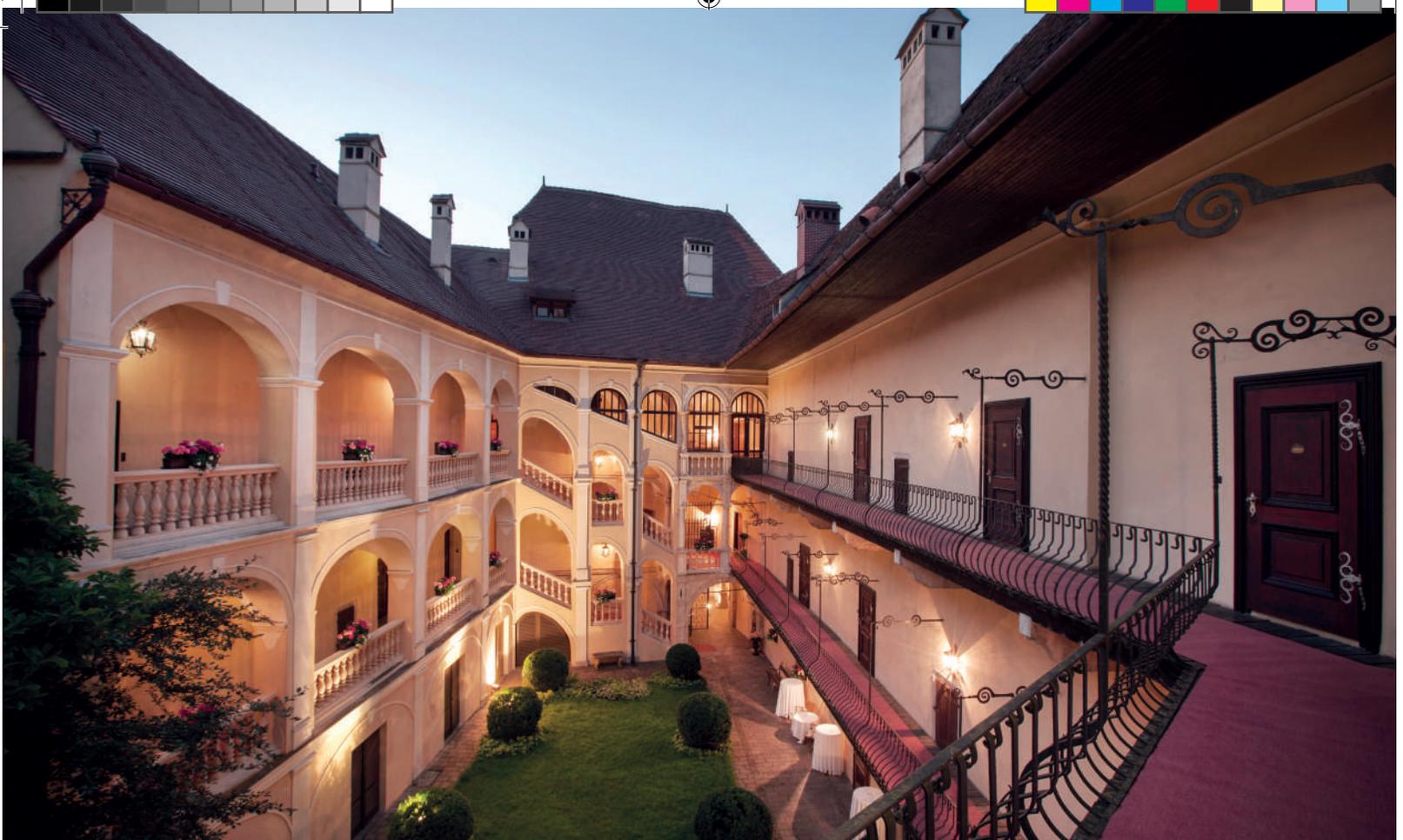
On the site of today's Obermayerhofen Castle, a manor farmhouse was established very early as the economic center of this section of the Safen valley, probably by Sigiboto, the founder of Sebersdorf. In 1377, the knight Härte! von Teuffenbach acquired the property, and under Bernhard von Teuffenbach, the noble seat became the center of an extensive manorial estate. After his death in 1540, it was given to his four sons, but Servaz von Teuffenbach redeemed his brothers' shares and began the construction of Obermayerhofen Castle. His brothers built new dwellings nearby – and this was soon to lead to a dispute. When his brother Andrä was out of the country, Servaz procured tools and limestone from his brother's construction site, as well as so many bricks that a new house could have been built

from them alone. The “robbed” brother was skeptical about the new construction of Obermayerhofen anyway, calling the castle under construction an “unruly, strange building.” Servaz does not seem to have been overly respectful of the law in other respects, either. He also illegally obtained wood for the construction in his brother Balthasar's forest. Apparently, in the course of these disputes, the son of Andrä von Teuffenbach killed Servaz's caretaker in Obermayerhofen.

The construction seems to have been completed only in 1574, because this date is found above the entrance, provided with the coat of arms of Servaz von Teuffenbach, his first wife Judith, daughter of Niklas Rauber and his second wife Katharina von Herberstein. Servaz had probably acquired

the money for the construction of the castle mainly through his position as a provision master on the Windic border. According to the chimney tax register of 1573, the castle, together with the manor house and the mill, had twenty fireplaces.

In 1605 the castle was inherited by the Herbersteins. In that same year, the Hajduks burned down 45 houses on the estate, 59 people were slain or abducted, and fifty horses and 123 head of cattle were stolen. After that, ownership changed repeatedly. The damage seems to have been repaired soon, because in 1636 in the land register of manors, Obermayerhofen is described as being as well-built as hardly any other castle in the country, equipped with respectable rooms and chambers. The land register



The inner courtyard of Obermayerhofen Castle.

specifically mentions the newly renovated chapel, which had been rather neglected under the Protestant Teuffenbachs, as well as the deep well with delicious water, the large, walled garden, a small “Pleasure Vineyard” with a press, and the garden house. Even the mill, the ponds and all other parts of the property were described as well-built. Subsequently, ownership of Obermayerhofen changed again several times. When it was owned by the Counts of Colloredo, the manor was severely damaged during the invasions of the Kurucs in 1704. The castle was completely looted, and the outbuildings, as well as the houses of numerous subjects, were burned down.

After a short intermezzo of Herberstein ownership, the Kottulinsky family acquired the castle in 1777, retaining possession until 1924. The nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century were happy years for the castle, but then during the Second World War, trouble came once more. The house was plundered and was practically left to decay, and again ownership changed several times. In the 1960s there were even plans to establish a shoe factory in the castle. Fortunately, this did not happen, because in 1977 Harald Count Kottulinsky was able to buy back the castle. In 1986, after extensive renovation, the family opened an exquisitely comfortable castle hotel. Thirteen years later the adjacent castle park was extended by 120,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Romantic, stylish and noble, Obermayerhofen Castle currently presents itself as an ideal venue for weddings. Over 1,800 couples have said “Yes” to each other here in recent years. Obermayerhofen Castle, with its enchanting

wall paintings showing exotic landscapes and animal depictions from the late 18th century, makes a most attractive setting for such festivities. A fragmentary fresco in the courtyard of the castle tells the eerie story of a young lady of the castle who is said to have been smashed against the wall by the devil on Christmas Day.

Leaving the castle through the wrought-iron garden gate, and passing a mighty copper beech tree, the view opens to green meadows, the vineyard and the historic “Gaisrieglhof”, a farmhouse dating from 1758. Two original parlors give this listed building a special atmosphere. In the park of Obermayerhofen Castle, an area of 15,000 m<sup>2</sup> has been divided into individual garden plots. These are made available to companies for a specific period of time, so they can design and use their own company garden.

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# HARTBERG CASTLE



Entry Gate of Hartberg Castle

Long before the castle and town of Hartberg were built at the foot of the Ringkogel hill, people had settled on its heights, first on the summit during the Neolithic period. And then later Celts lived there in a settlement fortified with a ring wall. This ring-shaped fortification is also the origin of the name of Hartberg's landmark hill. Excavations on the hill have brought numerous remnants of past settlements to light, a Roman temple complex on the summit, for example. At the time of the Kuruc invasions, it served as a fire signal

station. On the south-facing slopes of the hill, the remains of the Roman Villa Rustica of Löffelbach and Neuberg Castle may be found.

In the town of Hartberg there are also traces of settlement from Roman times. As an example, remains of buildings from the second century AD have been found under the town's parish church and the vicarage. The village of Hartberg was laid out and developed between 1125 and 1128 according to a plan by Margrave Leopold I of Steyr, and in 1286 the settle-

ment is first mentioned in documents as a town. In the 12th century, when a series of fortified buildings were erected in eastern Styria to secure the border, the Traungaus built the castle on behalf of the sovereign at the highest point of the town. This castle was first mentioned in 1147 and included the Johanniskapelle, as well as a farm and a mill.

In the late Middle Ages and early modern times, the town and castle were an important bulwark against the Hungarians, Hajduks, Kurucs and Turks.





Current view of Hartberg Castle.

It was captured in 1469 by Andreas Baumkircher. As the leader of a Styrian noble alliance dissatisfied with imperial policy, Baumkircher attacked the town and castle of Hartberg and abducted the lord of the castle, Anton von Herberstein and took him to his castle in Schlaining. In 1470 the town was reconquered by order of Emperor Frederick III. In 1487, the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus took the town again, after which Baumkircher's son Wilhelm received the town and castle of Hartberg as a fief, which he kept until the Holy Roman king and later emperor Maximilian I reconquered the town in 1490. Hartberg remained the property of the sovereign until 1529, when it was sold by Emperor Ferdinand I to the Styrian governor Siegmund von Dietrichstein. Acquired in 1572 by the Paar family and rebuilt in the Renaissance style, it was extended by an arcade wing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. After the Paars, ownership changed in rapid succession from the Herbersteins, Sauraus, Lengheimbs and then back to the princes of Paar again.

Only the three-story palas with its ogee-arched gate remains from the former castle of the Styrian sovereign. The northern part dates back to the Middle Ages. The outer entrance on the courtyard side with a bay window and a Renaissance biforium window bears the date 1576. On the second floor is the large "Knights' Hall" with a Renaissance stone fireplace and the double coat of arms of Paar-Haim. Some traces of wall paintings from the Baroque period have also been preserved. The adjacent wing to the east, which protrudes towards the north, is in essence medieval, but was rebuilt in the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The outer wall of the east wing, which is attached at right angles, dates from the same construction phase, but it was not extended until the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Painted coats of arms from the Baroque period were discovered on the second floor in 1958.

The inscription plaque of Johann Baptist von Paar and his wife Afra, née Haim, attached to the gateway to Herrengasse and dated 1584 and 1598, comes from the demolished castle chapel. Remains of the town wall date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. It runs from the Reckturm across the terraced city park to Hartberg Castle to the north, then further east to Franz-Schmidt-Gasse. To the east, the Schölbingerturm has been preserved. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city gates facing the north and west were demolished.

in his statistical-topographical encyclopedia of Styria (1878–85), Josef Andreas Janisch reported this about the castle: "The old castle building, dilapidated and uninhabited; [...] the new castle building inhabited, with beautiful arcades on the courtyard side both on the ground floor and the first floor. At the eastern corner of this building lies the entrance to an underground passage, which, however, must first be examined and cleared out. In the old courtyard of the castle there is a pumping well, the inflow of which is so strong that it is impossible to use all the water. So, the water is led to the detention yard by means of pipes laid underground. It is the best drinking water in Hartberg." As early as 1850, Prince Karl Paar had offered to sell the castle to the municipality, but the deal failed because the price was considered too high. It was not until much later, in 1881, that the sale to the city of Hartberg was finalized.

The castle, which has since been completely renovated, offers a pleasant ambience for concerts, weddings, conferences, seminars, company presentations and much more with its knights' hall and an impressive backdrop for open-air events in the castle courtyard.

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The Hartberg Museum is located in the historic Steinpeißhaus at Herrengasse 6.



Seggau Castle

# SEGGAU –THE BISHOPS’ CASTLE



Current view of Seggau Castle





## Southern and Western Styria



Current view of Seggau Castle from the Kreuzkogel Lookout Tower.

The history of the area surrounding Seggau Castle dates back to the time of the Celts and the Romans. Numerous finds and the lapidarium (collection of Roman stone tablets) on the outer wall of the upper castle bear witness to this. The only Roman city on the territory of what is today Styria was not far away: the municipium Flavia Solva. Even before that, however, there was a settlement on the neighboring Frauenberg, as well as a Celtic settlement. Finds from this early community can be viewed in the carefully designed Tempelmuseum. The importance of this Iron Age settlement must have been quite great. The discovery of so-called dotted plates suggests that it had its own mint. These plates were used for casting the coin blanks. Metallurgical examination revealed traces of gold in the plates from Frauenberg.

When Flavia Solva was elevated to the rank of a city in 70 A.D., Frauenberg developed into a religious center. A total of three temple buildings probably stood there. The relatively well-preserved temple was probably dedicated to the goddess Isis-Noreia. The foundation walls were used many centuries later as the foundation for a school building, the present museum building. The area was also settled in the Migration Period and in the centuries thereafter. The Slavs called their settlement Lipnica (linden tree), and today's Leibnitz developed from this settlement. Around 850, King Louis the German gave the area around Leibnitz to the Archbishopric of Salzburg. Starting in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the first buildings of Leibnitz Castle, today Seggau

Castle, were built. The castle complex is thus older than the diocese of Seckau, which was not founded until 1218. The first written record of a castle is to be found in the vita of the Konrad I., Archbishop of Salzburg, (1106–1147). There it states that he started the construction of the castle, then called Leibnitz, but did not complete it. However, since we know that the castle was already besieged by the Styrian Margrave Otakar III in 1164, it must have been completed under Archbishop Eberhard I. This prelate was considered a saint of reconciliation, whose will it was to die while working for peace, a wish that was fulfilled in Leibnitz, of all places. During the aforementioned siege, he personally ventured through the fighters to the castle and ended the feud between his burgrave and the margrave. But then on his way home to Salzburg, he became seriously ill and was taken to Rein Monastery near Graz, where he died.

Thus, in the biography of this saint, Leibnitz Castle plays an essential role. The building, erected under Konrad, today forms the southern wing of the castle. Already in 1219, an "old tower" is mentioned as being part of the castle, so it must have existed for quite some time before. This part of the building could also have housed the chapel mentioned almost fifty years earlier. Throughout all the centuries, the castle underwent alterations and extensions; the name of the diocese of Seckau, but spelled Seggau, was now commonly used for the castle instead of the old name. Polheim Castle is to be distinguished from the bishop's castle. It was





## Seggau Castle



Seggau Castle, Georg Matthaeus Vischer (Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, 1681).

## Seggau Castle houses Styria's largest historical bell, the "Seggauer Liesl".



Collection of Roman stone tablets at Seggau Castle.

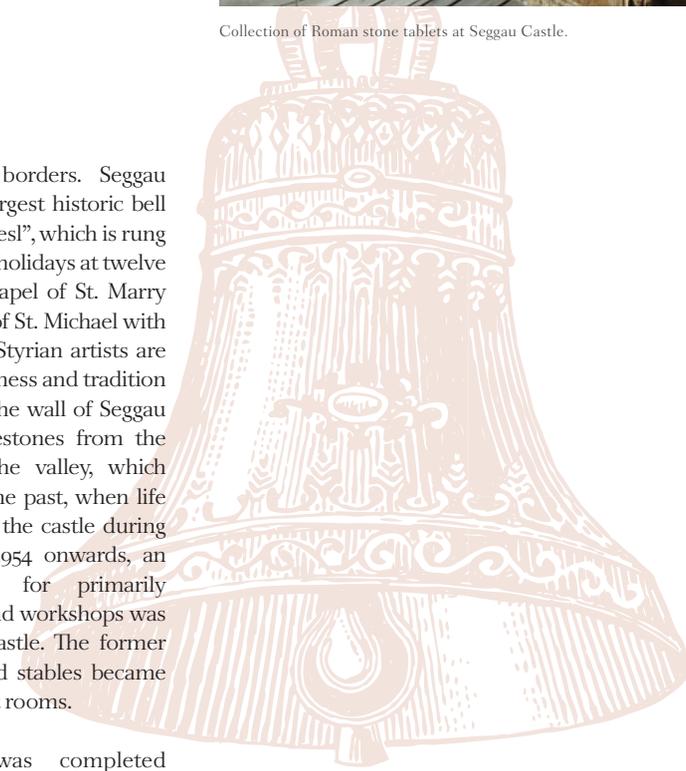
built to the south of the High Castle by the Burgrave of Leibnitz. It was erected as an outer castle on the most vulnerable part of the ridge. Next to it is a large granary from the 17<sup>th</sup> century which today houses the elementary school. In the valley below the castle are the remains of Grottenhofen Castle. Its renovated parts are home to the Nature Park Center, among other things. Seggau Castle was the representative seat of the Styrian bishops until 1786 and their summer residence until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For many centuries, the castle served as an episcopal refectory for the maintenance of the respective bishop of the diocese of Seckau and his representational duties. In this function it was also a central employer for the region and a meeting place on many occasions.

### Seggau Castle houses the largest historic bell in Styria: the "seggauer Liesl"

The High Castle contains outstanding architectural jewels, such as the so-called "Fürstenzimmer" (Princes' Chamber) with its rich furnishings. These representational rooms of the prince-bishops with their complete Baroque furnishings are a true artistic treasure that is well-known far

beyond the country's borders. Seggau Castle also houses the largest historic bell in Styria: the "seggauer Liesl", which is rung by hand on Sundays and holidays at twelve o'clock. The Baroque Chapel of St. Mary and the modern Chapel of St. Michael with works of contemporary Styrian artists are witnesses of the religiousness and tradition of the house. Built into the wall of Seggau Castle are Roman gravestones from the former necropolis in the valley, which provide a glimpse into the past, when life flourished at the foot of the castle during the Roman era. From 1954 onwards, an educational institution for primarily ecclesiastical seminars and workshops was established in Seggau Castle. The former agricultural buildings and stables became seminar rooms and guest rooms.

The reconstruction was completed in 2009, so that today, next to the contemporary congress and conference center, there is a modern hotel that meets 21st-century standards and harmoniously combines tradition with modernity. In the bishop's wine cellar, which is over 300 years old and one of the oldest and largest in Europe, wine-tastings featuring the production from the castle's own vineyards are held regularly.



### SEGGAU CASTLE

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Southern and Western Styria

# ROMANTIC OTTERSBUCH CASTLE



Current view of Ottersbuch Castle and garden.

78  
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79





## Ottersbach Castle

The Baroque Ottersbach Castle is located near Großklein in the Sulm valley in an area that has been settled for thousands of years. Right behind the building rises the Burgstall hill with a settlement from the Hallstatt period and numerous burial mounds. The village takes its name from the old Mantrach Castle. Ottersbach Castle is probably the successor building, which was not erected on the site of the old castle, but in the valley.

In 1593 Hans Murn bought the ruins of the old castle from Wilhelm von Gera. It was he who started the construction of the castle in the valley, whose old name, interestingly enough, was not transferred to the new building. In 1616 Hans Murn received the right to call himself “von und zu Ottersbach”. He himself did not live there, so he entrusted his relative Elias Hemetter with the administration of the estate, but the latter does not seem to have managed it properly. Since he failed to pay the rent for several years, the sons of Hans Murn again took over the manor. In 1650 there was a murder of a descendant of the builder of Ottersbach Castle. Hans Wilhelm Murn von Ottersbach died at the hands of his ward, Christof Andree von Gleintz. This murder ended the Murn family’s time at Ottersbach.

Three years after the murder, Hans Georg Adam Adl von Adlstein acquired the castle, but shortly thereafter it passed to the Counts of Khünburg, and then again in 1692 to Niklas Count Lodron. But luck was also not with the new owner; due to tax debts, the property was seized and resold in 1700.

In the 18th century, the east wing adjoining the north wing to the south was added. In the apex of the angle are the gate and the chapel including the Baroque ridge turret. In the south, the farm buildings are located. A highlight of the interior is the barrel-vaulted Baroque hall in the northern wing, which occupies the entire depth of the building on the second floor. The windows, doors and the mirrored vault are richly decorated with stucco. The ceiling is decorated with a number of medallions depicting some cities of what used to be Inner Austria, such as Graz,

Marburg, Cilli, Pettau and Voitsberg. On the walls there are portraits of former owners of the castle and members of the Habsburg family. On the upper floor there is also the chapel, whose altar dates back to the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The altarpiece depicts the birth of Christ. The stucco ceiling of the fireplace room comes from the Sereni workshop and was made around 1680. Josef Andreas Janisch reported about Ottersbach Castle around 1865: “The castle lies [...] on a hill engulfed by the Sulm River, on the side road branching off from the Gleinstätten-Leibnitz road to Klein. There is nothing remarkable except for a very simply built chapel with an altarpiece of the Nativity. In the immediate vicinity of the castle, on a large meadow called the Katzelwehr-Wiese, are the remains of a small castle. It has yet to be determined from which time this building originates.

According to oral tradition, the parish church of Gleinstätten was built from the ruins of this fort. The aforementioned meadow was owned by the Ottersbach estate until about the middle of the last century and passed to the lordship of Arnfels through a lost bet, which revolved around the success of a fight between a dog belonging to Baron Hingenau and a cat belonging to Count Schönborn, owner of Arnfels. On the wooded hill rising above the moat and the redoubt, which, on closer inspection appears as a double hill surrounded by a small circular rampart, the foundations of the old building can still be seen under bushes and moss, according to the locals. Near this fort, on a low hill, are several Celtic graves, one of which was opened on Naturalists’s Day on September 20th, 1875 but yielded only scanty archaeological finds.”

Ownership of Ottersbach Castle changed frequently. The estate could obviously hardly be run successfully from an economic point of view. Auctions followed, and the castle visibly fell into disrepair. A turning point came only in 1925, when the Abel family acquired the building and began to renovate it. The age of electricity arrived in Ottersbach Castle in 1931. At that time, the Sulmtal Railway also ran near the castle. Unfortunately, this railroad line from Leibnitz to Pöfling-



Ottersbach Castle, Georg Matthaeus Vischer (Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, 1681).

Brunn was discontinued decades ago. Although the castle survived the first part of World War II reasonably unscathed, it was partially destroyed by Tito partisans, Russians, and Bulgarians towards the end of the war.

After the war, the Abel family continued their efforts to renovate and restore the building. In 1977 a general renovation was carried out, and in 2005 the Castle Museum was opened. In the meantime, all the work has borne rich fruit, because currently Ottersbach Castle presents itself as a beautiful romantic castle which is open for celebrations, weddings, and festivities. The park and the castle are now also in great demand as a film set.



### OTTERS-BACH CASTLE

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Southern and Western Styria

# DEUTSCHLANDSBERG CASTLE



Historical view of Deutschlandsberg Castle, colored illustration (1662).

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81





## Deutschlandsberg Castle

On a rocky outcrop on the northwestern edge of the Laßnitz valley lies the impressive castle of Deutschlandsberg, with the town of the same name at its feet. The origins of settlement in this area date back many millennia. In the immediate vicinity of today's castle lies the Tanzplatz, also known as Tanzkogel or Tanzboden, where people already settled in pre-historic times. Archaeological finds at this site date back to the Neolithic Age (Bronze Age) and the Celtic Age (Latène Culture). In the area of the parking lot and on the southern slope of the castle, buildings from the Latène period were found, as well as traces of structures from the Roman period and the early Middle Ages.

Around the year 970, Emperor Otto donated the area around Deutschlandsberg to the Archbishopric of Salzburg. The "Nidrinhof", as it was then called, was probably located on today's Ulrichsberg near Frauental. In any case, it has been shown that at that time the area was still inhabited by subjects of the Archbishop of Salzburg. There is also evidence that Bavarian settlers had already settled there.

In the 12th century the first part of the castle was built of stone, which was given to the ministerial Lonsperg dynasty, after whom the village at the foot of the mountain is named. A certain Fridericus de Lonsperch was mentioned in a document from 1153. In that year, the chapel of St. Laurence in the castle was also consecrated. The site is first mentioned in documents as *Castrum* (castle) Lonsperch in 1188, even though it almost certainly existed before 1147. As a fire layer found during excavations shows, the castle must have been destroyed once in the course of the 13th century.

The castle became the scene of a far-reaching conspiracy at the end of the 13th century. At the beginning of the year 1292, leaders of the Styrian nobility and representatives of leading houses from Carinthia met there. Together they did something quite unheard of – they planned open resistance to the sovereign. Ulrich von Pfannberg, Friedrich von Stubenberg and Hartnid von

Wildon acted as leaders, and others joined this alliance against the sovereign Duke Albrecht I, a son of Rudolf von Habsburg, in what was called the "Landsberger Bundesbrief". At the Imperial Diet of Augsburg ten years earlier, Albrecht had been installed as Duke of Austria and Styria, together with his brother Rudolf.

How had this conspiracy come about? The Archbishop of Salzburg and the nobles of Styria and Carinthia felt disadvantaged in their privileges. They demanded concessions from Albrecht, who obviously gave preference to supporters from his Swabian homeland in an attempt to strengthen the Habsburgs' domestic power. These were by no means the only reasons for dissatisfaction, but there were also tensions with Salzburg, Bavaria, Hungary, and also Switzerland. In any case, Duke Albrecht remained deaf to the nobles' demands, and they decided to retaliate. A broad front was formed against the Habsburgs, which included, among others, the German Prince-Elector, Wenceslaus of Bohemia, the Metropolitan Bishop of Salzburg, Duke Otto of Bavaria and the Patriarch of Aquileia.

Now the Styrians and Carinthians were also among the opponents of Albrecht I of Habsburg and his brother-in-law Meinhard II, Duke of Carinthia. In January 1292, the Styrian nobility struck, attacking Voitsberg, Bruck, Knittelfeld, Graz, Judenburg, Leoben and Wildon in

order to expel the Habsburg occupiers. Albrecht frustrated the conspirators' plans by defeating the Archbishop of Salzburg. The rebels were captured or bowed to the king voluntarily. Albrecht showed himself to be a generous victor, however. Before the year was out, he confirmed the legal status of Styria and generally showed leniency. All this apparently paid off in the end, because in 1298 Albrecht became King of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

In the early 14th century, extensions to the imposing Gothic castle began, part of which still exists today. A document from 1408 reports that another mighty tower was built on top of Landsberg Castle. Access to the castle was possible by using the path leading from the gorge entry to the Tanzboden, which could also be used by horses and carts.

In the 15th century, in addition to the conflicts within the country, there was the Turkish threat from outside. In December 1479, the Hungarians managed to get their hands on Deutschlandsberg Castle without a fight. The occupation was to last for some time, and it was not until 1490 that the tide was turned, when the Hungarian king died, and King Maximilian took back the Salzburg possessions in the country.

However, times were not always so gloomy. Time and again the Archbishops of Salzburg came to visit their castle. Festivals were celebrated, court was held, and even hunting may have captivated

Current view of Deutschlandsberg Castle.





Game rally in the Deutschlandsberg Castle Museum.



The Archeo Norico Exhibit in the Museum of Deutschlandsberg Castle.

one or the other of the ecclesiastical dignitaries. Under Hans Jacob von Kuenburg, the construction of the castle chapel began in 1597 and was completed in 1608. It was consecrated to St. Rupert, the patron saint of Salzburg.

In 1532 the castle withstood an attack by the Turks. Sensitized by this renewed threat, numerous reconstructions and new construction activities were carried out. In 1595 the Kuenburgs acquired the castle, but the Archbishopric of Salzburg bought it back in 1635. Thereafter, the castle became the center of Salzburg's landholdings in western Styria. In 1803 the castle passed into state ownership, and in 1811 it was purchased by Count Moritz von Fries, until it finally passed into the hands of the Princely House of Liechtenstein in 1820.

Around 1860, Carl Reichert saw Deutschlandsberg Castle as a building in progressive decay: "Deutschlandsberg Castle is in a sad state of disarray – despite its favorable location and magnificent surroundings. Although it would be possible (...) to stop the complete ruin, its owners seem to have unsympathetically decided to let this beautiful castle disintegrate. If the roof collapses first, then in the next decade, travelers will only have the ruins of the former Landsberg Castle to tell about!" Fortunately, this gloomy outlook on the future of the building did not come true, because eventually things were turned around. But at first things did not look good at all for the castle. In 1876 the round tower was demolished, and in the same year the Romanesque tower with the remains of the castle chapel was blown up altogether. Finally, in 1932 the municipality of Deutschlandsberg acquired the castle from the Liechtensteins. It was only after the Second World War, however, that there was again reason for hope for the increasingly decaying building.

In the years after the Second World War, the castle was secured by volunteers who helped revitalize the building with their work and money, and by castle festivals. The rubble in the courtyard was removed, and the difference in height in the castle courtyard of almost three meters was compensated by terraces and steps. Starting in 1988, the municipality of Deutschlandsberg converted the site into the Archeo Norico Museum and event rooms, while retaining the structure of the building. The Romanesque tower was rebuilt in 2011/12 according to plans from around 1803, and the castle cistern, which was extended around 1634, was also made accessible again.

The Steffan brothers played an outstanding role in this, not only creating the magnificent castle museum, but also tirelessly pushing the renovation and reconstruction of the castle forward. Thus, the tower could be rebuilt and provided with a tent-like roof. The Romanesque core castle and the ring wall have also been restored. In 2017 the keep was provided with a solid roof. The castle has once again become a real gem.

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Stainz Castle

# STAINZ CASTLE



Current View of Stainz Castle

Stainz was founded in 1229 by Leutold von Wildon and his wife Agnes as the third Styrian Augustinian monastery after Vorau and Pöllau. This monastery was by no means founded in a deserted region. Quite the contrary, the area had already been populated for thousands of years. The lord of Stainz, Leuthold von Wildon, who belonged to one of the richest and most powerful ministerial families in Styria, had a small church built in 1229 on the hill where the castle was later located, from which the later monastery complex developed.

Some historians assume that there had already been a fortified complex on the site of this small church. The monastery, although it had been granted the right to conduct a legal court of lower jurisdiction, was not very important at first. Dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, the Augustinian abbey reached its heyday during and after the Counter-Reformation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century

under Provost Jakob Rosolenz. He and his successors enlarged the church and had it expanded in the Baroque style. The old buildings had to make way for a new monastery building. In the following years, the monastery focused on intensive expansion. One domain after the other was acquired: Rohrbach in 1602, Hornegg in 1621, Leonroth in 1629, Lankowitz in 1635 and Herbersdorf in 1648. This heyday was to come to an end in the 18th century, when Emperor Joseph II secularized the monastery in 1785. It became state property and was temporarily used as a military hospital and barracks until it was acquired by Anton Ritter von Wittmann in 1826. Archduke Johann of Austria, a son of Emperor Leopold II and brother of Emperor Franz, bought the estate in 1840 and had the already neglected castle restored. Although he had his main residence in Meran Palace in Graz, he stayed in Stainz for several months a year. How popular the democratically

minded archduke was can be seen from the fact that he was elected mayor of Stainz in 1848 after the abolition of the manorial system. After his death the castle remained in the possession of his descendants, the Counts of Meran, who still live there. The current owner is Franz Count of Meran. When the Styrian Provincial Exhibition “Archduke Johann of Austria” was held in the castle in 1982, the opportunity was taken to restore it extensively. At present the castle serves as a venue for exhibitions and events, including collections of the Styrian Universalmuseum Joanneum.

A picturesque, wide staircase leads up from the market to the castle. The regular, three-story building is dominated by the collegiate church. The façades are strongly structured horizontally and vertically by cornices and flat pilasters. The lower west wing adjoining the church tower probably originally housed the prelatore and the guest wing. It was



rebuilt in the first quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and then remodeled again in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1785 it has housed the parish rectory. The east wing with the staircase and the south wing were added to this first abbey courtyard with pillar arcades between the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, by 1720, the representative second monastery courtyard was created, which has three-story pillared arcades on two sides, that are now closed by windows. On the ground floor of the south wing is the former refectory with stuccoes and paintings from the period 1696 to 1700. The stuccoes depict, among other things, Jesus Feeding the Multitude, the Wedding at Cana and the Last Supper. The corridors of the castle are decorated with numerous portraits from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, especially of the Counts of Lamberg. In front of the castle there is a large garden, and vineyards surround the building. On its lower border there are two octagonal garden pavilions, built around 1730. Little of the defensive elements of the original complex have been preserved.

#### The Styrian Prince: Archduke Johann of Austria

On the main square in Graz on the pedestal of the fountain dedicated to Archduke Johann, is written: “Unforgotten lives in the people, he who never forgot the people.” And this is exactly how Habsburg’s “green rebel” went down in history. Archduke Johann was born in Florence on January 20th, 1782, the thirteenth child of the Grand Duke of Tuscany and later Emperor Leopold II and his wife Maria Ludovika. Already in his youth, the Archduke often visited Styria, whose natural treasures and people had touched him early on, in addition to his beloved Tyrol. After 1809 he settled down here and served the duchy in his own way. Archduke Johann left an indelible mark, not only at Stainz Castle, but also at Schenna Castle in South Tyrol and the Brandhof near Mariazell. He founded the Styrian Universal Museum that bears his name (Joanneum), the Styrian Provincial Archives, the Styrian Agricultural Society, the Grazer Wechselseitige Insurance Company, the University of Mining in Leoben, the Vordernberg Wheel Works, as well as helping to initiate construction of the railroad line over the Semmering pass – and all this without formally being the ruler of the province. Archduke Johann found his private happiness with the postmaster’s daughter Anna Plochl from Aussee. In 1823 Emperor Franz II initially gave his consent to the marriage, but revoked it again due to the difference in the pair’s status. This date is also engraved on the wedding rings, which are still in the Brandhof Museum. It was not until 1829, however, that Archduke Johann was finally allowed to marry his beloved Anna in the chapel of the Brandhof, but the price was the renunciation of all his claims as a member of the imperial house. In 1834 Anna Plochl was elevated by the emperor to the rank of Baroness of Brandhofen and later to the rank of Countess of Meran. The marriage produced a son, Franz von Meran.



Leopold von Wildon, the founder of Stainz Monastery.



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Piber Castle

# THE CASTLE OF THE WHITE HORSES



Lipizzaner mare, postwar period





## Southern and Western Styria



Current view of Piber Castle

They are still a source of Austrian identity: the world-famous Lipizzan horses. Piber Castle, where the white horses begin life, is the starting or ending point of the Castle Road. Even in the 21st century, the elegance and beauty of these horses is inspiring. They have been connected with the history of Austria for centuries and also became the plaything of various events after the end of the monarchy, until they finally found a new home in Piber. The stud farm stables the foals and the stud stallions. The young animals are housed in four outlying stables.

The oldest domesticated horse breed is bred here, whose representatives show their art in the Spanish Riding School and then return to Piber Castle for their “retirement”. But before Piber became associated with the Lipizzans, the castle already had 900 years of history behind it. As early as around the year 1020, there was a fortified courtyard on the site, which was probably built at the same time as the church. The beginnings were probably very modest. It may have been only a small complex secured by a wall and a moat. In the year 1000, Emperor Otto III donated the area around Piber to Margrave Adalbero of Eppenstein, who then

immediately began to settle and colonize the land. When St. Lambrecht Abbey was established in 1103, Piber was given to this newly founded monastery as an endowment by Henry of Eppenstein, Duke of Carinthia. He appointed vassals to administer the Piber estate, and soon they named themselves after the small, fortified building. In 1145 a certain Otto von Piber is mentioned. When, in 1219, the Archbishop of Salzburg granted Piber to new the diocese of Seckau, there were protracted disputes between the Bishop of Seckau and the monastery of St. Lambrecht over the ownership rights to Piber. The disputes lasted almost two centuries until St. Lambrecht was able to prevail in 1414. After that, a provost’s court was built in Piber, which housed the administrative center for the entire domain of St. Lambrecht Abbey in Western Styria. However, the Bishop of Seckau still did not want to accept the decisions of Duke Ernest and the pope in favor of St. Lambrecht. He finally gave up his claim to Piber only in 1492. A new dispute between the monastery and the Hollenegg family could only be settled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The administration of the manor had long been handed over to secular nobles. Despite all these dis-





## Piber Castle

putes, Piber was not only one of the largest, but also one of the most sought-after parishes in all of Styria in the Middle Ages, so that there were even disputes among the aspirants for the parish. In 1596 the monastery decided to manage the manor itself. The old castle, which was still protected by a belt of fortifications, was demolished in that year and replaced by the present building, which served as a summer retreat for the abbots and their monks. When the monastery of St. Lambrecht was secularized under Emperor Joseph II in 1786, Piber became the property of the state religious fund. Piber Castle and the church are situated on a low hill with relatively steep slopes, some of which are artificial, thus providing a natural shield against the hinterland. The castle had to be additionally protected by a wide ditch only towards the north. Very little remains of the former fortification. Only some parts of the walls have been

### How the horses came to Piber

The tradition of horse breeding in Piber began in 1798. In that year, a stud farm was established there to raise military horses. In 1867 it came under the governance of the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Ministry for Agriculture. Between 1878 and 1890 the stud farm in Piber was dissolved as a consequence of the reorganization in the course of the Compromise with Hungary. Piber was run as an imperial stud and was used for breeding stallions for state horse breeding, but not yet for Lipizzan horses. The only contact with white horses was between 1856 and 1869, when Lipizzan horses were bred for the imperial state stud at Radautz. The herd was so small that it was left there in 1869. When all horses were evacuated from Lipica in 1915 due to the war, the herd was divided. The smaller part was transferred to the imperial stud at Kladrub on the Elbe, the other part came to Laxenburg near Vienna. After the end



Piber Castle is presently home to the famous Piber Lipperzaner Stud.

## Knowledge about the breeding of Lipizzan horses is part of Austria's immaterial cultural heritage.

preserved. The castle presents itself as a stately Baroque building with an almost square footprint. Four regular, three-story wings, which enclose a large, arcaded courtyard, are equipped with three-axis corner risalites. The façades are divided by painted pilasters, extending over all floors. The windows likewise have painted borders. Ornamental fields below the windows separate the individual floors horizontally.

The castle has a main and a side portal. A chronogram above the main gate on the west front indicates that the new building was completed in 1728 and that Abbots Franz von Kaltenhausen and Anton Strotz were the builders. Inside the building, only a few historically furnished rooms have survived. Some halls in the south wing have Baroque stucco ceilings from the beginning of the 18th century. Remarkable is the large ceremonial hall, which is decorated with numerous paintings of coats of arms.

of the First World War and the loss of the court stud, after long negotiations with the Italian Armistice Commission, 109 animals returned to Lipica (which by then was on Italian territory).

But even during the Second World War the horses were not left in peace. Towards the end of the Second World War, the Lipizzan studs at Piber, Dimir Kapija and Lipica, which was controlled by the German army, were evacuated to Hostau in Sudetenland. Although the Sudetenland was awarded to the Soviet Union according to the Yalta Agreement, it had not yet been occupied. Thus, in an adventurous coup under the initiative of the Americans Colonel Reed and General Patton, the herd was brought to Upper Austria in the area of Bad Wimsbach and Lambach on April 28th, 1945, quite contrary to explicit instructions of the American High Command. Hollywood, of course, could not let such a good story go to waste.

Twenty years later Walt Disney made a film about the return of the horses, titled "Miracle of the White Stallions". After the war, the mares and their descendants were reassigned to their respective pre-war studs based on their brandings and pedigrees. The descendants of the Italian horses have been bred at the State Stud in Monterotondo since 1952, and the stud in Lipica was sent eleven horses in 1947. Today Piber is again a significant stud for breeding with its own riding school.

As the only state stud in Austria, Piber currently has the task of breeding those stallions that perform at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. In 2003 the Styrian state exhibition "The Mythical Horse" took place here. This once again increased the public's awareness of these horses. In March 2016, UNESCO added the knowledge of how to breed Lipizzan horses in Piber to the list of intangible cultural heritage in Austria.

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Slovenian Styria

# THE CASTLES OF PTUJ, ORMOŽ, VELIKA NEDELJA AND SLOVENSKA BISTRICA

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89



Current view of Ptuj Castle





Ptuj Castle, Georg Matthaeus Vischer (Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, 1681).

Legend has it that on the morning of Easter Sunday in 1199, Frederick III of Ptuj jumped off his horse, hoisted the banner of the Order of Teutonic Knights on a high flagpole and thrust it with all his might into the sandy earth. To commemorate his victory over the Hungarians, this place has since been called Velika Nedelja (Great Sunday). Two days earlier, at Ptuj Castle, which he had received as a ministerial of the German Emperor, he had entertained with great relief a delegation of Teutonic Knights. This religious military order had been founded in Palestine only a few years before (1190) by Frederick I, Duke of Swabia. The knights rode in from various Styrian, Austrian, and Carniolan castles to put a stop to King Emeric's hostile Hungarian troops, who were again advancing in a westerly direction. Frederick would have fared badly, had he not received this military help, as the castle of Ptuj was then a border fortress between the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and the Hungarian King-

dom. There were some historically attested strongholds on the Ptuj field and in the Slovene Hills, but their defensive capacity was more that of armed sentinels than a serious obstacle to the Hungarian army. The fortified wooden huts and the isolated archers hiding behind wooden palisades could perhaps briefly interrupt the westward advance of this army, but certainly not stop it.

Incidentally, the victory at Velika Nedelja was not the only triumph of the Counts of Ptuj. Almost half a century before they had already conquered the river valleys of the Pesnica River and the area up to Trgovišče, thus increasing the possessions of the Archdiocese of Salzburg. The first territories in Lower Styria were already taken possession of at the beginning of the 9th century. Until then, the town of Ptuj with its immediate surroundings was Hungarian. Ptuj was occupied by the Hungarians as early as around the year 900, and they remained for almost three quarters of a century.

Later, the Hungarians came to the town on their raids, until Archbishop Konrad I concluded a truce at the beginning of the 12th century and handed town and castle over to the Ptuj ministerial. The Salzburg Archdiocese remained the owners of the town and its surroundings until 1555. Only the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus managed to wrest it from them for a period of eleven years beginning in 1479. After his death, the castle and city became property of the Emperor again. Because the Emperor needed money, however, they were temporarily impawned to the Archbishops of Salzburg, but the Emperor was soon able to redeem them.

Frederick's battle with the Hungarians at Velika Nedelja was nothing new, as they had often invaded the territory of Styria before. Ottokar III, the first Styrian Margrave, had already driven out the intrusive eastern neighbors almost a century before. The border area of the former Lower Styria was tempting for the





Current view of Ormož Castle

powerful from all directions. In the middle of the 13th century, when Austria and Styria had to manage without a proper ruler for almost four decades (the period of the Interregnum), the Czech king Ottokar II and the Hungarian king Béla IV competed for power. The pope himself intervened with the German noble families, and so a Solomonian solution was reached in 1254: Styria was given to the minor Stephen (the son of Béla IV), Austria to Ottokar II Přemysl. Stephen's replacement was expelled from Ptuj soon after his arrival, which is why the young son of the king later personally marched into the city to subdue it. He even chose it as his residence. Just one year later (1259), the people of Ptuj fought back and drove him out. Ottokar remained in power for several years.

The complicated successions of power show that there was no unity among the individual regions or countries and their leading estates at that time. The entire Middle Ages are characterized by actions of kings and emperors that are difficult to understand. On the one hand, they intermarried for power-political reasons and to gain new territories, but in the years that followed they attacked each other or stole territories, crowns and thrones from each other. This cost the common people dearly – after all, they had to comply with each of these rulers' preferences, demands and desires for new taxes and labor service, including for the torturous and dangerous building of castles and defense walls. For the common people, it did not much matter who was in power at any given time, all that mattered was the harshness and greed with which they ruled.

### Origin of the Styrian castles and their development

The rules governing whether a castle could be built were recorded in a special codex, the *Sachsenspiegel*. It was written by Eike of Repgow from Saxony/Germany around 1230, and only four copies have survived in the whole of Europe. The rules were so binding that some illegally built castles had to be demolished if they did not comply. Castles as defensive structures were only built in strategically important and carefully chosen places, from whence enemy movements could be controlled and one could defend oneself most easily.

Each territory had a dual power structure at that time. The rule of the Church was shared in Lower Styria by the Archdiocese of Salzburg (north of the Drava, left bank) and the Patriarchate of Aquileia (south of the Drava). The pope in Rome also had a say with his interests, his favor or his dislike of individual noble families. He was the highest ecclesiastical authority in the Holy Roman Empire, while the emperor was the secular head. Secular power was divided among several levels. From the emperor downwards, the individual countries were ruled by sovereigns, who in turn could transfer part of their powers to their vassals or ministeriales, to whom they leased castles with large feudal estates and subjects, or to whom they enfeoffed them. The lords of the castles or feudal lords also had almost complete power to dispose of their subjects as they wished. Some were even entrusted with land courts for their territories or for towns they administered.



To the west of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation lay the Frankish Empire, which was the first to become involved in a crusade for Jerusalem that lasted two centuries. Soon the Holy Roman Empire joined it in these “holy” wars. In November 1095, Pope Urban II called on all Christendom to spread the holy faith by fire and sword. This became a sacred duty and task of the nobles. Because of the dual power structure in the empire (religious and secular), this meant not only spreading the faith but also conquering and occupying foreign territories, i.e., colonization. The Order of Teutonic Knights, whose main task was to subjugate pagan tribes and conquer entire regions, was established in the castles, palaces and manors.

The Teutonic Knights were particularly prominent on the eastern and southeastern borders of the Empire. The Order received rich possessions in return for its battles with the pagans, not only in Germany but as far away as Greece, Poland and elsewhere. The white crusader coat with the black cross became the symbol of Christian piety. It was not until the beginning of the 19th century that the Order was banned by Napoleon, whereupon it was re-established in Austria a quarter of a century later and still exists today. Velika Nedelja Castle was the property of this order until the Second World War. After the war it became state property and was restituted after Slovenia’s independence.

#### PTUJ CASTLE

Ptuj Castle was built on a hill overlooking the entire Drava plain from Slovenska Bistrica to Ormož. Even in Roman times, an important road here led from west to east, which intersected with the Amber Road on this plain. At the foot of the hill was the forum of the Roman town of Poetovio, and before the castle was built, there had probably already been a Roman fort there. Sandwiched between the hill and the wide Drava valley lay the then town, while the legionaries had set up the camp Gemine XIII in the plain on the other bank. It is assumed that the two were connected by a bridge.

We do not know exactly what happened on that castle hill during the Migration Period. However, it was certainly best

suited for the first fortification on the southeastern border of the Holy Roman Empire. The border to the territory of the Patriarchate of Aquileia ran along the Drava, and the Ptuj base was like a lighthouse. On the other side of the river, only a few kilometers downstream, Borl Castle was also built on a rocky elevation. The chain of castles from Slovenska Bistrica, Ptuj, through Borl and Velika Nedelja as well as Ormož already proves by its density (there are five castles in just forty kilometers) how important this border was and how tightly it was closed and defended. It was, however, constantly breached by frequent incursions and armed conflicts. Moreover, the exact course of the border was unclear because of the frequently changing owners of castles and palaces: at one time there were Hungarian feudal owners on the Styrian side, at another time there were Styrian or Austrian nobles on the Hungarian side.

The Castle of Ptuj had most likely stood there already decades earlier, but it was rebuilt and fortified after 1120 by Salzburg’s Archbishop Konrad I. (he ruled for a full 41 years, from 1106 to 1147). Although Konrad had concluded a truce with the Hungarians under Stephen II, he apparently did not believe in it himself, as he used the time of peace to fortify the border. He enfeoffed the lords of Ptuj with the castle and the town and stipulated that other nobles from near and far were to assemble there with their troops when needed by the archbishop.

#### ORMOŽ CASTLE

The conquered settlement of Velika Nedelja only began to grow when Frederick IV of Pettau convinced the Teutonic Knights to build their base here, but their castle is only mentioned in documents for the first time around 1321. The rules stipulated that only the emperor or the sovereign could approve the construction. Thus, around 1278, King Rudolf authorized Frederick IV to erect a building in today’s Ormož on the Hungarian border. This was probably the first fortification to be called “Friedau” after Frederick. The settlement had already been mentioned in documents ten years earlier and was then called Holermuos. A Christian church is said to have stood in it as early as Carolingian



Velika Nedelja Castle, Georg Matthaeus Vischer (Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, 1681)



Ormož Castle, Georg Matthaeus Vischer (Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, 1681)

times. Until their extinction in 1438, the Lords of Ptuj were the actual owners of the castle and the possessions of Ormož. However, they did not live here themselves, but had it administered by different castellans.

In the years that followed, it was sold or confiscated several times by higher authorities, and in addition, it was also occupied and stolen by the Hungarians. Towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the castle became the property of a Croatian magnate from the Frankopan dynasty who married Barbara von Schaunberg, the sovereign sent his army to prevent a Hungarian advance. When the army retreated, the young Michael Frankopan was taken prisoner as a hostage in Negova. The Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus offered the countess money to ransom her son out of captivity, and in return she gave the castle to the king. The king then sold it to his commander Jakob Székely for half again as much as he had given the countess – a favorable deal under any circumstances. Incidentally, Friedau





Current view of Slovenska Bistrica Castle.

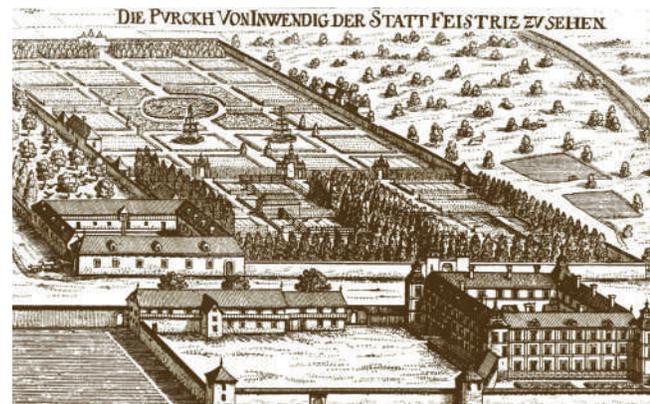
fares much better under Corvinus than the nearby castle of Borl/Ankenstein on the opposite bank of the Drava. Corvinus had it razed to the ground by his army seven years before.

Velika Nedelja Castle was first mentioned in a document in 1321. Remodeling during the Baroque period almost completely disguised its medieval structure, and it remains hidden behind the Baroque facade to this day. The Crusaders gained and bought more and more territory over the decades. They also owned the vicariates in Ormož, Miklavž and Središče ob Dravi. The originally modest commandery, with an original value estimated at barely 500 pounds, was later reconstructed and became one of the most beautiful castles in this part of Styria, with its two round corner towers on the east side and two corner bastions on the west side.

### SLOVENSKA BISTRICA CASTLE

The Hungarians pushed ever more forcefully into Styria. Via Ptuj they also invaded “Vustrica” (Feistritz), today’s Slovenska Bistrica. The Lords of Feistritz were mentioned already in 1170, and by the 13<sup>th</sup> century the town already had its own charter. In the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Ottokar sent the widow of the Bohemian Prince Ladislaus into exile to Feistritz, as she was his rival and opponent.

Feistritz/Slovenska Bistrica was a sovereign town, which, for a time, was even administered by Meinhard, Count of Gorizia before he became Duke of Carinthia. Afterwards, the Habsburgs became owners of the town and castle in 1313, but only for about four decades. Later, the Counts of Wallsee and, after them, the Counts of Celje, the most powerful noble family in Styria, emerged as owners. This lineage developed from the



Slovenska Bistrica Castle, Georg Matthaeus Vischer (Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, 1681).

high free noble Sanneck family, who owned extensive possessions in Carinthia and Styria and, of course, the town of Celje. In 1311 the fortress is mentioned for the first time in a document as “burkh” (castle). However, the history of the castle as such did not begin until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Until then, it was only one of the defensive towers in the strongly fortified town, which was surrounded by a moat and a double dam (Paolo Santonino). The fortification of Slovenska Bistrica was constructed in connection with wars and conflicts amongst the nobles, not because of the Turkish threat. From 1436 to 1443 the Habsburgs engaged in battles against the Counts of Celje there. The Counts of Celje also had to defend their possessions several times against Hungarian attackers.

The Hungarians found it difficult to swallow defeats or failures. They returned to Slovenska Bistrica in 1445 to take revenge. King Ladislaus sent his army under





the legendary leader John Hunyadi, who was also palatine at the Hungarian court and father of the next Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus. When they arrived, they had to turn back immediately, as Jan Vitovec came to the aid of the people of Slovenska Bistrica with his troops from Celje. In 1529, however, despite the wall, the town was unable to successfully defend itself and was destroyed. Only the castle was not taken. The Counts of Celje died out in 1456, and the castle and the town of Slovenska Bistrica again became the property of the province of Styria. Matthias Corvinus later advanced into Styria much further than his father ever did, subduing the whole of Styria and Carinthia and later the whole of Austria with his strategically well-thought-out battles and with his own professional “black army”.

#### Plague and locusts, floods, earthquakes, and famines

As if the incessant military pressure, once on this side of the border, then again on the other, was not enough, Styria suffered further terrible blows from natural sources. Voracious locusts and disastrous harvests inflicted terrible damage. Due to the constant military movements, many crops were trampled, and the people later lost what they had been able to harvest and bring under cover. Despite indignation and hunger, they had to be grateful if they escaped with their skins intact or were able to stay in their homes. To make matters even worse, in some years the plague also set upon the people. It spared neither rulers nor soldiers. No one knew how to resist or defend against it. Today, it is almost impossible for us to imagine how bad the situation was for common people at that time.

Swarms of locusts also plagued the land frequently. Chroniclers recorded that they eclipsed the sun at least ten times, but, of course, they also raged in between when most of this region was spared other calamities. During the locust attack in 1309 in the vicinity of Slovenska Bistrica, Ulrich von Sanegg and his servant were attacked. What happened to the master is not known, but the servant was swarmed by them and died, the insects gnawing him to the bone. The locusts came for the first time to Styria,

Carinthia, and Austria as early as 872, when they devoured all the greenery, only to be killed by strong winds. The mass of dead insects clogged the streams and spread a strong stench. They were then said to also cause the plague, which spread immediately afterwards. The last two attacks of these voracious insects in the Middle Ages happened in 1474 and again, four years later, the locusts devoured the crops and greenery.

In 1201 a strong earthquake destroyed houses, burying people. Many churches were destroyed. The first castle to be destroyed by an earthquake in 1266 was Kindberg in what is now Upper Styria. The worst earthquake occurred in 1348, affecting the whole of Austria, Carinthia and Styria and destroying forty castles. Only the castles on the outermost edge of Styria used for defense against the Hungarians were spared. For the common people, the earthquake was God’s punishment for the mercilessness and viciousness of the castle lords. Soon after the earthquake, every third person was covered with black spots. The chronicles reported that the plague came from Italy via Carinthia. At that time, it was believed there had never been such a concentration of terrible events in the world since the Flood.

#### THE LORDS OF PTUJ

The castellans of Ptuj were not capable locals, but former Bavarian ministeriales of the Salzburg Archbishops. Frederick of Bavaria became the ancestor of a powerful noble family and called himself Frederick I of Ptuj. The spread of the Christian faith and the acquisition of new territories went hand in hand with Germanisation. The first Frederick was originally castellan of Stein Castle in the Lavant Valley, and his family retained the official office of castellans in Ptuj until they died out in 1438. However, their function, influence and wealth far surpassed their official status. They ruled in Ptuj for all of three centuries, both in the castle and the town. The castle with the associated buildings on the castle hill was called Upper Ptuj. The town between the southern slope of the hill and the Drava was called Ptuj. Alongside the Counts of Celje, in the course of time the “Ptujers” became the most influential noble family in Lower Styria.

In 1131, the archbishop entrusted the important border fortifications to Frederick I, because the unsettled Hungarian border required a firm defense and militarily capable ministeriales. Frederick II was also considered quite bellicose, though he failed to shift the border eastward. It was not until his son Frederick III that considerable military successes were achieved. In 1192 near Friesach, Frederick III attempted to capture the English king Richard I, who was on his way back from the Third Crusade in the Middle East. Because of the conflicts at home, Richard made his way secretly north of Aquileia with some companions disguised as a common pilgrim. He escaped from Frederick of Ptuj, but the latter was able to capture some of his helpers. Afterwards, Frederick probably also revealed where King Richard was hiding and where he was travelling to, so that he could easily be captured near Vienna. Frederick then also achieved the aforementioned victory at Velika Nedelja. To increase his fame, he set off for Palestine in 1217 and took part in the Crusades. The Third Crusade had already ended by then, so he helped besiege Egyptian cities and returned after a year and a half to make the Ptuj dynasty even more powerful.

The family’s well-considered marriage policy meant that its social class could be advanced from one generation to the next. Thus, the Ptuj family married their daughters into Italy, Austria, Germany, Croatia, Slovakia and even Hungary (against whom they had to fight during the invasions), or else their wives came from these countries. In this way they increased their wealth, although sometimes a castle had to be given away as a dowry for a daughter who was married off to another place.

The calculating nature of the Ptuj family in terms of politics and fortune is best seen in Frederick V, who was even infamous among contemporaries as a political turncoat. Be that as it may, he always managed to find himself on the “right” side. When Béla IV escaped from Hungary with difficulty, the young Frederick immediately sided with him, which earned him the position of Styrian marshal, along with three castles





Current view of Velika Nedelja Castle.

as feudal property (Središče ob Dravi, Dranek and Borl). When the Hungarian king was defeated by his rival for the Babenberg inheritance, the Bohemian king Ottokar II, Frederick V was again on the side of the victor. The Bohemian king placed little trust in this political alliance, however, and brought Frederick's son to his court as a hostage. The father therefore soon joined Ottokar's campaign against Prussia. The Styrian nobles, who were forced to join this campaign, planned a conspiracy against Ottokar but were apparently betrayed by Frederick of Ptuj. Despite his help to the king, Frederick was punished just as severely as the conspirators. Apart from being thrown into prison, at least one castle of each nobleman was destroyed. In the case of Frederick V, for example, these were Vurberk and Schwanberg. After a little more than a year, however, the king and the nobles were reconciled again. A decade later we find Frederick V at Rein Abbey near Graz, where he swore eternal allegiance to the

next monarch, namely Rudolf I of Habsburg. Rudolf was already Frederick's third king. Soon afterwards Frederick mustered two mounted units and helped drive Ottokar II out of Vienna. He joined in the famous Battle of Marchfeld, where the Czech king, to whom Frederick had once sworn eternal allegiance, was killed in 1278. After the battle, the Habsburgs began their European ascent to power, with the lords of Ptuj on their coattails. Frederick V became the pledge holder of the castle of Ptuj, and King Rudolf also allowed him to build Ormož Castle on the Hungarian border. By the time of his death in 1288, Frederick V had managed to incur the enmity of the Salzburg archbishops. He tried to seize the castle of Oberpettau and the town, but the citizens opposed this, and so he still kept the castle of Ptuj only as a fief. After their father's death, his sons Hartnid III and Friedrich VI were able to divide ten more castles among them. The dynasty then split into a Wurmberg and a Friedau line. By the death of





the last lord of Ptuj, Friedrich IX, in 1438, the estate had grown to 29 castles on the Sava, Drava and Mura rivers.

In the life of a single lord of the castle, namely Friedrich V, there was thus a rich palette of relationships at different levels of power. His life is a textbook example of the unstable, hypocritical, and upwardly mobile interests and almost incomprehensible actions of the powerful. It was a life that oscillated between strong feelings on the one hand and assassination on the other. It should not be forgotten, however, that the legal system of the time provided for the so-called right of feud. Every nobleman had the right to solve a specific conflict by force if peaceful settlement failed or was not possible at all. For example, Frederick II of Ptuj and his cousin attacked their own uncle militarily over his inheritance. They robbed him and burned down his property, because the uncle did not agree to the proposed division of his estate after his death, and this was a legitimate feud.

**Castle owners as patrons of the arts, builders, and donors**

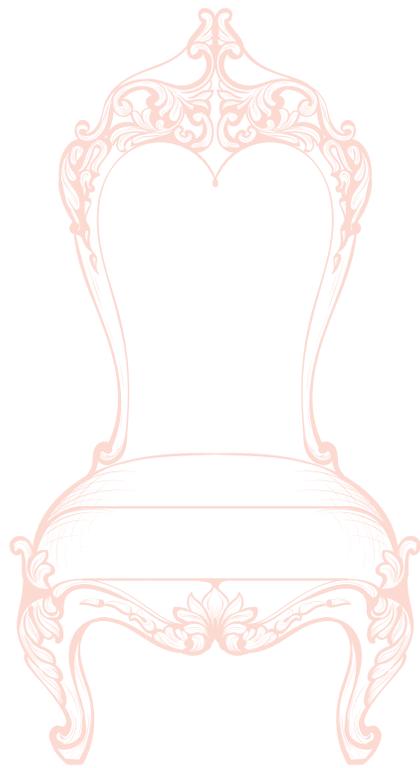
Christianity had absolute primacy in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The archdiocese leased out huge estates or enfeoffed the most loyal and deserving nobles with them. Out of gratitude and even more out of their own religious conviction and piety, these nobles then built sacred buildings according to their possibilities. Thus, not only churches but also chapels were built throughout the country and became an integral part of every important castle and palace.

With the building of churches, many nobles became important patrons. They not only commissioned the best master builders, whom they brought from faraway countries, if necessary. They also employed the best artists of the time, who created masterly artistic carvings, sculptures and paintings for the new churches, chapels, and pilgrims' hostels. Often it is only on the basis of art-historical analyses of these objects that it is possible to identify not only the artists but also the patrons. For the church of St. Jacob in Ormož, for example, there is no firm evidence of

when it was built or who built it, nor for who commissioned it or paid for the expensive interior decoration, but it is very likely that it was the Lords of Ptuj.

When they granted the town charter to Ormož in 1331, the church stood already. The patronage was held by the Teutonic Knights of Velika Nedelja. In the first third of the 13th century, the Lords of Ptuj donated the castle to the Teutonic Knights. As early as 1247, however, the local commandery is mentioned, which means that there was already a crusader command. The feudal noble families even competed to see which one made a better impression on the Church by building churches. At the same time, this was a way to show the outside world how wealthy and powerful one was.

Among Lower Styrian castle lords, the Ptuj family was particularly prominent. Their connections to the Viennese Court became closer and closer, and they bought two beautiful palaces in the center of Vienna. These connections were particularly important, because permission for new ecclesiastical facilities and the building of churches



had to be obtained from the very highest authorities. Mathilde, the widow of Friedrich III of Ptuj, founded the Dominican monastery in Ptuj probably in 1230, with the help of the then Bishop Eberhard II. She turned over her house on the Burgberg hill to the monks, which was confirmed by experts a few years ago when this monastery was thoroughly renovated.

The monks named it Mathildenhof in her honor. It became the first cornerstone of the later attached rectangular monastery with an inner courtyard, which was bordered on the north side by a Dominican church that was huge for the town at that time. The Lords of Ptuj were able to negotiate with the monks to get permission for a family crypt under the presbytery. This included the regular saying of prayers by the monks over their graves. Soon afterwards, the building complex of the monastery was incorporated into the defensive wall of the medieval town of Ptuj.

The interaction of politics and religion was clear in other monastic foundations, as well. When the Minorites came to Ptuj soon after the Dominicans (1239), it was clear who supported them: King Rudolf I of Habsburg, the Bohemian King Ottokar II and, of course, the Styrian nobles who were devoted to them. Frederick V of Ptuj could not be left out! He immediately had a Minorite monastery with a church built in the south-eastern part of the town, and also provided the order with a fixed annual income from his family's funds. Six decades later, however, the monks celebrated the next Lord, Bernard of Ptuj, as their founder. This was because he bequeathed them large vineyards in the Kollos (Haloze) at that time. It goes without saying that both monasteries also received valuable artistic furnishings, paintings, and exceptional sculptures as gifts.

However, the Lords of Ptuj's greatest donation was the Basilica of the Virgin of Mercy and pilgrimage church in Ptujška Gora. Bernhard von Ptuj began to build the church dedicated to the Virgin of Mercy with his cousin Ulrich IV von Walsee. They were not satisfied with the next-best builders and interior decorators but secured the most





respected craftsmen in Europe for the construction work. In Prague, exceptionally skilled stonemasons and sculptors had built St Vitus Cathedral, and then the so-called Parler workshop (after Wenzel Parler) subsequently moved to Vienna to the construction site of St. Stephen's Cathedral. Both noblemen owned palaces in Vienna and went to great lengths to convince these builders to come to Ptuj.

Finally, around the year 1400, the prominent sculptors' workshop in Ptujška Gora began its work, which not only created the interior decoration for the church at that time, but also numerous works of art in the late Gothic, so-called beautiful style (or soft Gothic style) for many other churches in the area: the commendam in Velika Nedelja, the church in Ormož, and the chapel in Breg.

The relief of the Virgin of Mercy is breathtaking. The Mother of God shelters 82 people under her outspread cloak. Among them, art experts have recognized many people who actually lived at that time. They were symbolically gathered under the cloak to pray and intercede for health, peace and prosperity. In the right-hand corner under the cloak, Bernhard of Ptuj kneels humbly, his hands folded.

On the other side, his wife Wilburga is absorbed in prayer with a rapt expression on her face. Also kneeling in the crowd is the Hungarian King Sigismund of Luxembourg, who had strong ties with the Counts of Celje, since he married Barbara of Celje, the daughter of Hermann II of Celje, who saved Sigismund's life in the battle against the Turks at Nicopolis in 1396. For this he was richly rewarded, and since only land ownership really counted at that time, Hermann Varazdin received the entire Croatian hill country of Zagorje with the region of Podravina, the region of Medjimurje with the town of Čakovec, and the administration of the diocese of Agram (Zagreb).

### The Turkish Invasions

Disunited and embroiled in constant conflict with one another, the powerful families in Hungary and Styria did not even suspect that military conditions would change thoroughly, and that the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation would soon cease to expand politically towards the east, taking the Christian faith with it. No one suspected that soon military pressure from the south would push it back towards the north and west. When the Turks first set foot on European soil in 1356, they made rapid progress. They reached Hungary via the Amsfeld, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Wallachia. King Sigismund resisted with his army, but was unable to crush the advancing enemies, indeed he seems to have only irritated them. Apparently, he had no idea of the power of the army he was facing. His victory was more symbolic and at best aroused the wrath of Sultan Bayezid.

To prevent the Ottomans from advancing northwards, King Sigismund gathered a hundred thousand soldiers and led them to Nicopolis. There they were met by the Turkish army, which was divided into three separate military units. Due to a deceptive tactic, Sigismund fell into a trap, leaving twenty thousand of his men dead on the battlefield. Almost as many were sold into slavery by the Turks, and many were only killed after the battle. Sigismund and Hermann II of Celje saved themselves and returned home.

This first, truly relentless, and cruel battle only egged the Ottoman soldiers on. Immediately afterwards, individual armies roamed through Hungary, along the Danube and between the Drava and Sava rivers, plundering and murdering. There is reliable evidence that the Turks entered Styria for the first time at that time, and it was precisely Ptuj that they plundered and burned down. The town was completely unprepared and an easy target. According to contemporary sources, as many as sixteen thousand people were kidnapped and sold into slavery (surely a very exaggerated figure). This first Turkish raid demonstrated to the rulers of the time, the pope, the emperor, and the dukes, that they now had a powerful, heartless enemy with a different faith on their borders. All who were deemed "infidels" had to be killed, just as the Christians had done in previous centuries, as a justification for their wars in the Orient and as an excuse for the bloody and protracted Crusades surrounding the Holy Sepulcher.

The fierce Ottoman troops invaded Styria at least 26 times until 1704. The Turkish invasions were the greatest misfortune for the entire area as far as Vienna in the 15th and 16th centuries. Styrian castles and towns were fortified, additional castles and town walls were built, sturdy buildings were integrated into the fortifications and the castles were given a decisive defensive function. During this period, real fortresses were built with defensive towers, meter-thick stone walls were raised, armories and powder towers were built, permanent guards were hired, and obligatory water and food supplies were collected in case of a Turkish attack or siege. Today, it is difficult to imagine what life was like in these fortresses, where servants and maids, soldiers, livestock, weapons, and supplies for survival were crammed into a very confined space.

As if to encourage themselves in the face of Turkish superiority, after the battles with them at Radkersburg in 1418, the locals counted over nineteen thousand Turks dead with their leader Ahmed Beg. Archduke Ernst the Iron provided decisive help to Count Nikolaus Frankopan and his cavalry in this battle. After the battle there was peace





with the Ottomans for four decades, but then they advanced again, and more and more frequently into Styria.

Six years after his death Ernest the Iron of the House of Habsburg was succeeded by Frederick III. Although he was not strong enough to break horseshoes as his predecessor was alleged to have done, Frederick III remained Duke of Styria for a full 69 years and was also German emperor for 54 of those. With his death in 1493, the Middle Ages ended for all of Austria and the lands of Carinthia, Carniola/Krain and Styria. The Turkish invasions, however, did not end. In that same year, at least eight thousand Ottoman cavalymen came to Styria, to the area around Celje and Ptuj, who again are said to have abducted close to ten thousand Christians into slavery and killed just as many. And again, mainly Styria, Carinthia and Carniola were affected by the Turkish invasions. Even when Suleiman I unsuccessfully besieged Vienna in 1539, the Ottomans, wounded in their pride, vented their rage on the country people, villages, and towns on their way back.

In the various towns of the region, those who were responsible for defense discussed how to better protect themselves from the Turks. In 1530 it was decided to fortify Radkersburg, Maribor, Ptuj, Ormož, Celje, and Rogatec. However, this meant even higher taxes for area residents. These towns hired expert builders for the construction of defensive walls and fortifications. Ptuj, for example, received plans for a defensive wall around the town with a round tower on the Drava, a bastion in the east, a connection to the castle wall and a wall in the west up to the Dominican monastery. Building such sophisticated defenses was not nearly as easy as talking about it. Meanwhile, heavy battles had to be fought against the Turks, for example at Szigetvár, Sisak, and Kanizsa. A huge number of soldiers fell on the Hungarian, imperial and

Ottoman sides. Simply by merit of their superior numbers, the Turks were able to defeat the solidly organized armies of the Styrians and other nobles and subdue the ever better fortified towns and castles. On several occasions, up to 200,000 Ottoman soldiers are said to have crossed the border. Their opponents could not even hope to muster such large armies. If their plans of attack against the towns and castles failed, the Turks then vented their rage all the more cruelly on the population of the surrounding countryside. The Turkish invasions led the Styrian and Austrian nobles to make peace with their century-old enemies, the Hungarians and the Croatian nobles, especially with the powerful Lords Zrinski, the natural allies of the Hungarians. So now, all those who had fought each other only a decade or more before stood shoulder to shoulder, heroically engaging a common enemy. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, these forces were joined by numerous Frankish soldiers, which only confirmed how great the Turkish danger was to Christian Europe.

Because the danger had been so great, the brilliant victory of Austria and especially Styria over the Ottomans in 1664 at Mogersdorf on the Raab was celebrated in a big way. In this battle the Ottoman army of 200,000 soldiers was opposed by 80,000 men on the Austrian side. The imperial army routed the Ottomans in a fierce assault, killed tens of thousands and robbed them of the rich loot they had seized in Hungary. They crushed the Ottoman troops and scattered them in all directions. Those who fled to Ormož were met near Jerusalem in the Slovene Hills by the women of the Prlekija with hot water and stones at Babji Klanec Hill (Women's Hill), where the Turks were killed or put to flight.

Now the fortified towns and castles celebrated and erected monuments to the saints and the Mother of God in gratitude for this victory. An example is the column of the Virgin Mary in Ptuj in front of the Minorite monastery, which was erected by Count Friedrich Sauer von Ankenstein. The next year, in 1665, Austria and the Ottoman Empire concluded the Peace of Vasvar, which lasted a little under 20 years. Then the

Hungarian magnate Emeric Thököly asked the Ottomans for help against the Habsburgs, and 200,000 immediately came to besiege Vienna. The Polish King John (Jan) Sobieski helped the Imperial troops to drive the enemy from the city. This was the first cooperation of the Ottomans with the discontented Hungarian peasants (the Kurucs), who ravaged the area around Radkersburg on their retreat and devastated Ljutomer.

### The Kurucs on the Styrian Eastern Border

When everything indicated that the greatest Turkish danger had been averted, the inhabitants of the border region on the edges of the Slovene Hills, the Prekmurje and the region further north were still not granted peace. A curse seemed to weigh on the bloody border. In the years that followed, the people here were tormented by the cruel Kurucs, who either passed over them or plundered them right away. They had originally joined forces to drive out the Ottomans, however, in reality they ruthlessly took everything that they could lay their hands on. The truth is, the Ottomans were their allies. They appeared at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and no one could have guessed then that the inhabitants of the border region between Hungary and the Holy Roman Empire would tremble before them and suffer under them for no less than two centuries, until 1710, before they advanced into Styria for the last time.

At the time of Emperor Leopold I in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, discontent was at its highest in Hungary. The Kurucs were led by Count Emeric Thököly, whom the Ottomans had crowned King of the Kurucs. After the defeat of the Ottomans before Vienna, the Kurucs plundered around Veržej, in the Murfeld, in Središče, and in Ormož in the years that followed. After they had settled in Središče, they attacked the surrounding area. The lord of the castle of Ormož, Franc Anton Pethe, fled with his family before they could plunder the castle and the town.

During those centuries, witch trials also spread. In addition to their defensive function, some castles were also given





Medieval games on the Tournament Grounds of Ptuj Castle.

the function of an Inquisition court and thus had the task of judging what threatened the Christian faith and who had sinned against it in an unacceptable manner. At about the same time, the three greatest scourges of the people of that time disappeared: The Ottomans no longer invaded Hungary and Styria, the Kurucs had let off some steam and were now scattered, and common sense recognized that torturing and burning witches was nothing but a cruel means of keeping the broad Christian masses in hand.

**Fortresses become residences and palaces; castles become museums**

Due to these changes, the castles also lost their defensive function and their almost thousand-year-long military importance. The noble families slowly and carefully began to convert the castles into more pleasant country residences or spacious palaces. From now on, castles no longer had to be built on steep and difficult-to-access strategic points. The new palaces now blended pleasantly into the plains and their lords new palaces now blended pleasantly into the plains, and their lords took exemplary care of the landscaping of the surroundings, with green and flowering gardens and walkways, garden pavilions and artistic outdoor sculptures.

Ormož Castle was given one of the most beautiful castle parks in this region, and as a counterpoint to the fortified castles mentioned above, smaller or larger palaces were built on the plain, for example Dornava or Muretinci on the Ptujsko Plain. The castle of Ptuj was rebuilt into a pleasant country residence by the

new owners, the Leslie family. In accordance with the new times and the new social conditions, noble families shook hands and overcame their greatest fears of the cruel invaders and cultivated a lifestyle that allowed them to educate themselves in everyday life and to devote themselves to hunting, arts and, of course, entertainment.

After the end of the Second World War, the castles in Lower Styria were nationalized and the extensive feudal estates were first worked by cooperatives and later divided up among local farmers. The castles not only lost their lords, but also the lands on which their economic survival depended. Many were abandoned and then plundered. Many art treasures were lost. The castle of Ptuj is an exception. Despite its nationalization under the last owners, the Herbersteins, its interior decoration was preserved. Since a museum was established and opened soon afterwards, it also remained in solid condition all this time, a vivid and an almost undamaged monument to a millennium that had been full of struggles, danger, and entanglements.

The fact that border areas cannot simply be erased or relocated was shown in 1991 as a distant echo of the battles and struggles of the past. Slovenia seceded from the Republic of Yugoslavia, which the latter in turn did not recognize. In reality, it was again about border issues. The Yugoslav People's Army sought with force of arms and with great historical symbolism to prevent Slovenia's succession. With the first cannon shots that were fired, it attacked Ormož Castle, one of the fortresses in the probably the most unstable border regions in history.





### SLOVENSKA BISTRICA CASTLE

SI-2310 Slovenska Bistrica  
Grajska ulica 11  
T +386 2 805 53 50  
tajnistvo@zavod-ksb.si  
[www.zavod-ksb.si](http://www.zavod-ksb.si)

First mention: 1313  
Status: Monument of national importance  
Administrator: Zavod za kulturo Slovenska Bistrica  
Current use: permanent exhibitions (archaeology, folklore, prayer books, petroleum lamps, cottage glass, fossils and minerals, memorial room, dolls in traditional costumes from all over the world, vintage cars, historical classroom), frescoes, gallery, knights' hall, ceremonial staircase, chapel, wedding hall, vinotheque, souvenir store, café, castle park.

### CASTLE OF PTUJ

SI-2250 Ptuj  
Na gradu 1  
T +386 2 748 03 60  
ptujski.grad@pmpo.si  
[www.pmpo.si](http://www.pmpo.si)

First mention/year of construction:  
70s of the 12<sup>th</sup> century  
Status: Monument of national importance  
Administrator: Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj – Ormož (regional museum)  
Current use: Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj – Ormož (Regional Museum)  
Museum collections: weapons, musical instruments, feudal home decor, turquerie, tapestries, castle gallery, traditional carnival masks.

### VELIKA NEDELJA CASTLE

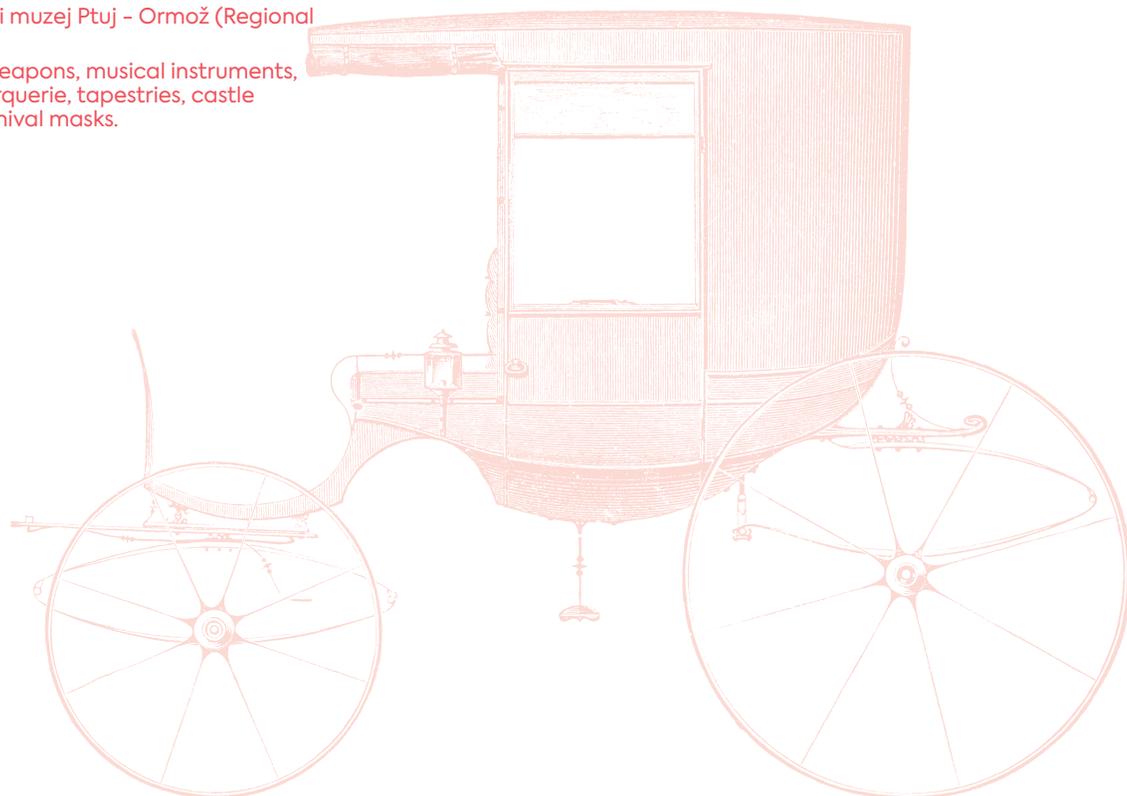
SI-2274 Velika Nedelja  
Velika Nedelja 9  
T +386 2 741 72 80  
muzej.ormoz@pmpo.si  
[www.pmpo.si](http://www.pmpo.si)

First mention/year of construction: 1321  
Status: Monument of local importance  
Owner: Order of the Cross  
Current use: folklore collection, historical exhibition "Velika Nedelja through the centuries".

### ORMOŽ CASTLE

SI-2270 Ormož  
Grajski trg 1  
T +386 2 7417290  
muzej.ormoz@pmpo.si  
[www.pmpo.si](http://www.pmpo.si)

First mention/year of construction: 1278  
Status: Monument of local importance  
Owner: Municipality of Ormož  
Current use: Museum collections (archaeological, historical, folkloristic bequests of Marko Sluga and Dr. Otmar Majerič).



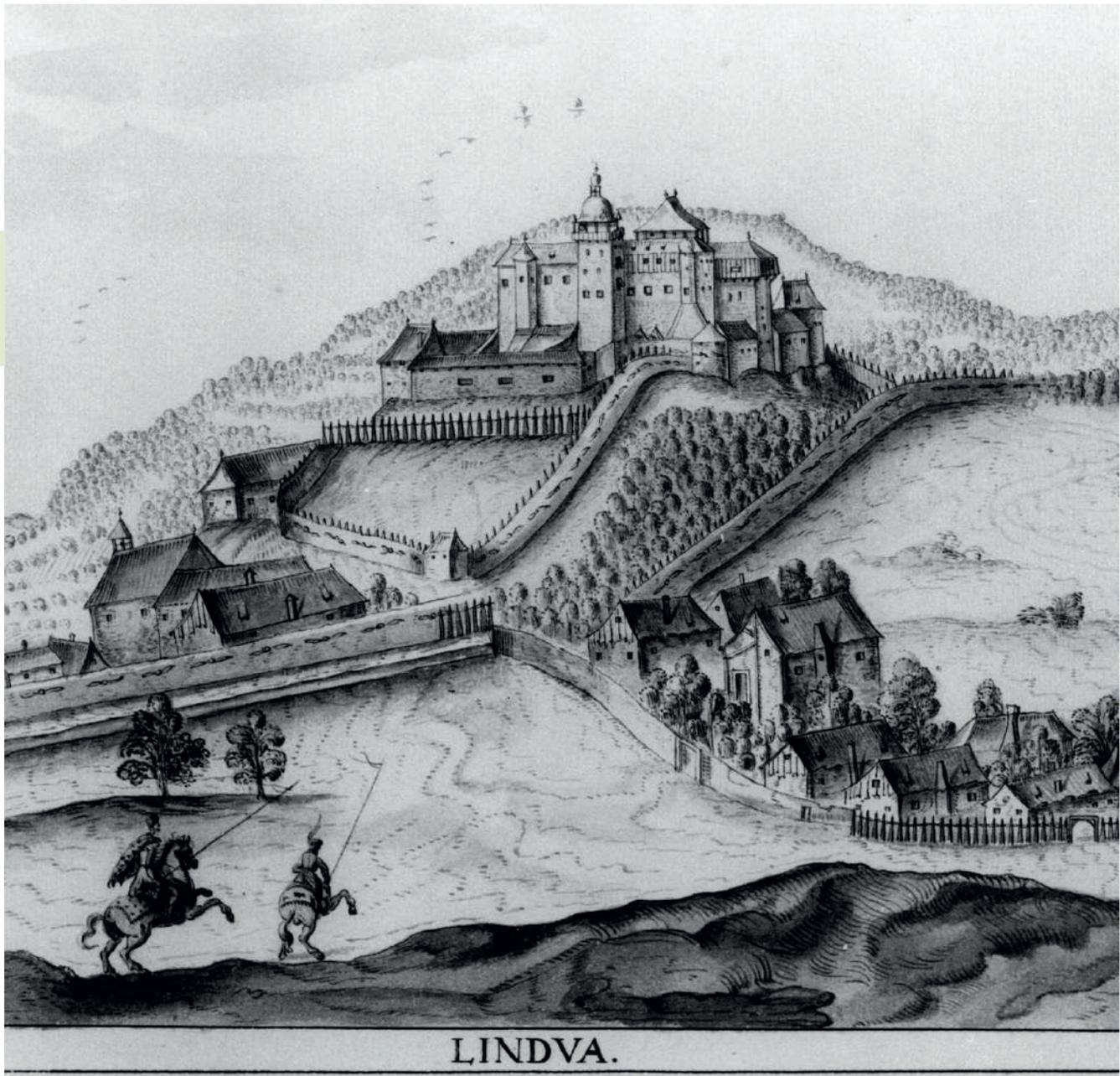


Pomurje

# CASTLES IN POMURJE

The castles of Grad, Lendava, Murska Sobota, Negova, Rakičan

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Historical view of Lendava Castle, copper engraving by Johannes Ledenttu from 1639.





The mighty knight Miklós Bánffy, at the head of his cavalry unit, was growing increasingly impatient as the procession of men from faraway Naples in Italy across the Mure Plain drew ever closer to the fortified base in Rakičan. Here they would water and feed the horses one last time before finally arriving at his castle in Spodnja Lendava. We can assume that he was driven by the desire to finally get home. He also no longer had to fear an ambush by robber barons or being met by the cavalry of a regional Austro-German nobleman. The Tross (support staff) he was leading had already entered the territory of its ruler, the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus the day before. In the middle of the Tross were three manorial carriages. In one of them, accompanied by bodyguards, sat two important ladies.

While the horses were being watered, he inspected the carriage wheels and tightened the straps. In passing, he estimated how tired the armed horsemen were. He bowed deeply and humbly as the ladies dismounted the carriage and were surrounded by horsemen, he then contentedly walked up to the guards of Rakičan Castle. He was told that it had been quiet here for the past several days, for the long arm of the stern king reached anyone who tried to stir up trouble or plunder on his own. Only a few trade caravans had passed, the guards told him. As far as they knew, they had been transporting exquisite furniture, fabrics, and tableware to the east. They had returned in a westerly direction, loaded with hay and piles of straw, although it had been impossible to make out what was hidden inside.

The dust from the royal road Via Regna was stirred up as the unit started moving again in order to arrive in Lendava by dusk. All of them would then be able to sleep in Miklós' well-guarded castle without any worries and without additional guards for the first time in two months. The first, already somewhat older lady, Erszébet Szilágyi, the mother of King Matthias Corvinus, had a large bedroom waiting for her on the second floor. Candles burned everywhere on copper candelabras, poured from wax and tallow by the castle servants. This time the candles smelled of

added rosemary. Such candles were also burning in the bedroom of the second lady travelling with them, Beatrice of Naples (of Aragon), so that the scent reminded her a little of her Mediterranean home in Italy. The spruce and juniper branches placed in stands crackled in the corridors, their rich aroma of pitch filling the entire castle. For such important guests, every detail had to be considered. The lord naturally reckoned that this would secure him the favor of the ladies and the powerful king.

The bed chamber for the exceptionally beautiful and educated Beatrice was located at the other end of the long corridor. It was only because of her that the long journey from Buda to Naples and back had been necessary. King Matthias had long sought to marry a woman of high noble standing in Europe. He had asked in all neighboring countries for the hand of a young, eligible noble lady, but was rejected by all the noble families. By some, because he was not a descendant of an old famous noble family, by others out of fear of his unpredictable and sometimes unexpected political moves and his readiness to fight, which did not let anyone sleep peacefully, no matter how good his relations were. The king's first fiancée, Elizabeth II of Celje, had died before the marriage could be finalized, and he was already widowed in the second year of his marriage to Catherine of Poděbrady in 1464. So, he had had to court another bride in faraway Naples. In fact, he got one of the most desirable women of that time.

However, he did not accompany his chosen one on her way to her new home. He had other royal business to attend to in Naples and Italy and did not doubt the devotion of the Bánffys, who were one of the most powerful noble families in Hungary throughout the Middle Ages. At the height of their power, they owned at least eighteen other castles and chateaus in addition to Lendava, from present-day Slovakia to Croatia. The members of this noble family held the highest offices with the greatest responsibility during this long period. They were active at the royal court, were Župans and even Bans of the Croatian Banate. Since the position of a ban can be compared to

that of a viceroy at that time, the ban was the King's legal representative in his banate. That honorable title became part of a noble family's name from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The first to be given the honor of being called a ban was Nikolaj, who bore the same surname as his father, namely Hahót. Nikolaj was a versatile man, first a cupbearer at the royal court, then a Župan of Zala County and finally a Croatian-Dalmatian ban. His four sons honored the function of their father, and with him the honor of their family, by making up the name Bánffy, which is an amalgum of Hungarian words, meaning "son of Ban" or "sons of Ban". Since their ancestral seat was in Dolnja Lendava, they also included that in the name: Bánffy de Alsólendva. Miklós, who brought the king's mother and the bride to the Hungarian court, was able to add even more riches and prestige to the family and its already considerable fortune, as he received gifts for his services.

This brief episode demonstrates clearly how the castles in Pomurje and the families that were attached to them were caught up in a far-reaching network of European-wide politics by the late medieval and early modern period.

### Medieval Storms

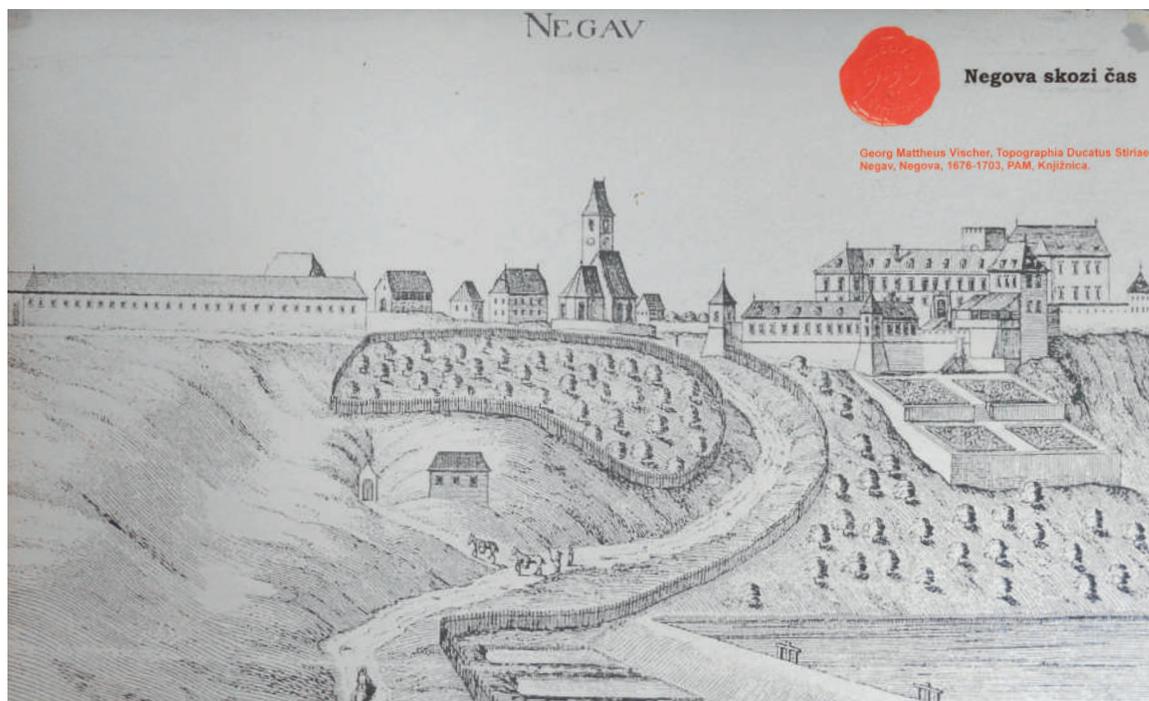
The area of today's Prekmurje was highly exposed in the first millennium. The region was the scene of constant heavy fighting and countless warlike conflicts, which had only one goal: to conquer as much fertile land as possible for permanent settlement. Various tribal groups, coming from the east, took the land by brute force from those who had already settled there. The borders in this region changed so frequently that one can hardly keep up. They were indeed drawn with blood and suffering, but none of them remained fixed for long.

Originating from the steppes north of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, the nomadic Asiatic Huns had been a constant threat since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. During the reign of their most famous and greedy king, Attila, they advanced across the Pannonian Plain and through the Danube, Mur, and Drava valleys





## Pomurje



Georg Mattheus Vischer, *Topographia Ducatus Stiriae*, Negav, Negova, 1676-1703, PAM, Knjižnica.

Negova Castle, Georg Mattheus Vischer (*Topographia Ducatus Stiriae*, 1681).

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into the Roman Empire, bringing nothing but lootings and death to the territories and the people there. During his twenty-year reign, Attila and his warriors succeeded several times in advancing far to the west and returning on occasion. The suffering the Huns brought doubled with each campaign. In 451, however, the united army of the Western Roman Empire on present-day French soil dealt him a previously unimaginable blow. Three years later, when the united Germanic legions also destroyed the remnants of his army under the leadership of Attila's son Ellak (who fell at that time), the Huns scattered in all directions and vanished from history.

When the Lombards left the province of Noricum, which included Prekmurje and the southern part of Styria, and migrated to Italy, they left a void that literally invited tribal groups from the East to conquer the land. The Avars first occupied the river basin of the lower Danube and subjugated most of the Slavic tribal associations by the end of the 6th century. These had come to the area at about the same time. They also subjugated Bulgarian and some Germanic tribal associations, which were dominated by them thereafter. For three and a half decades (623–658), Samo, who had twice successfully defeated the entire Frankish army, united the Slavic tribal unions in the northwest and saved them from the Avars.

Surrounded by enemies, the Slovenian Duke Boruth (Slov. Borut) asked the Bavarians to come to his

aid against the Avars. Together with the Croats and the Slovenes they attacked the Avars in 796 and defeated them. After Boruth's request for help, the Slovenes acknowledged the Bavarian superiority and thus opened the door to Christianization and Germanization. How far to the west and north the Slovenian tribal union intruded is still visible today in the names of many places, rivers, and fields, which are demonstrably based on Slovenian archetypes. Samo's tribal union is said to have had its seat in Bohemia or even in Vienna, a proof of the spread of the Slovenes.

The second attempt at a Slavic state was made by the Moravian prince Pribina, later count of Lower Pannonia, which was raised to the status of a principality by his son Kocel (Slov. Kocelj). According to historical sources, Pribina not only built numerous churches from Pécs to Ptuj, but also the first fortified castle on the Zala River in present-day Zalavár, Hungary. There, as early as 850, the Archbishop of Salzburg consecrated the first of three churches built during Pribina's rule. Since the area of today's Prekmurje and Slovenian Styria was part of Pribina's border land, he probably built more than one fortified castle there. It would be interesting to find out where and when the first castle was built in that area.

### The coming of the Hungarians

The hereditary principality of Lower Pannonia was established by the Franks between the rivers Raba and Drava as early as 828. Prekmurje and the southern





part of Styria were also part of this principality. As long as the Moravians and Bavarians met with weapons only, the Pannonian Plain was left undefended. So, in 887 the Hungarians were able to come in for the first time, and thereafter mercilessly plundered the land west of their territory for more than a century. They intruded very far into today's Austrian and German lands for several decades. It was not until 955 that their army of a hundred thousand men was defeated by Emperor Otto I at Lechfeld near Augsburg. After some time, the border between Styria and Hungary became relatively stable, and today's Prekmurje became part of the Hungarian state for a long time. The pagan Hungarian tribal units were slowly Christianized.

Changes to the borders in this region were so frequent that it is hard to keep track of them all.

In the year 1000, the Hungarian electors crowned Stephen as their first king, and the splendor of his crown, allegedly bestowed upon him by Pope Sylvester II, shone over the Prekmurje Plain and Goričko (the hill country of Prekmurje) for a whole millennium. Only after the First World War, according to the Paris Peace Treaty, did this area again become a part of the Slovenian territory within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. At that time Slovakia also seceded from Hungary, and later Vojvodina followed. Despite being part of Hungary for a thousand years, the whole of Prekmurje was involved in all border disputes and wars, as well as in all the complicated friendship relations, alliances and enmities between the communities and states that surrounded it.

Mortal enemies on the battlefield became neighbors in matters related to manorialism or even became related through marriages among their families. Even the first Hungarian king, Stephen

I married a German, namely Gisela of Bavaria, as if his Hungarian kingdom and her empire would get along in the greatest harmony and mutual respect. Noble families arose from the Hungarian tribal unions, and the majority of the nobility, pagans at that time, became Christians. They received the Prekmurje plain and the hill country with villages and castles as fiefs, or simply as gifts. There were still enough uninhabited areas, and whoever was the first to claim possession of an area, became the owner. Like the Bánffy family, the German nobles were even ready without hesitation to become Hungarians in order to gain riches.

After each war, battle and campaign, whole villages were left devastated. The population decreased dramatically because of the murders and the deportation into slavery by the victorious army, and so there were large empty areas of land that lay fallow. In Prekmurje, the population was decimated several times in the Middle Ages, so that the region looked desolate, uninhabited, and overgrown. Some settlements disappeared forever, only because people simply had nowhere to retreat to and nowhere to hide after the looting. In the intervening quiet periods, however, people recovered and were able to resume farming and trading.

Two historically important trade routes intersected here: the route from the Balkans to the Alpine countries, and the route from the Danube region to the Mediterranean.

### First castles and fortresses

Among the Prekmurje castles on the Castle Road there are some that can look back on a much older predecessor than the undisputed historical documents indicate. That is why rummaging in historical sources and searching for new evidence will never end. It can be concluded from indirect sources that, for example, there had already been a fortress on the hill above Lendava before the construction of the Bánffy Castle or the Hahold Castle.

Ivan Stopar, the greatest Slovenian castle and chateau expert, states that wooden castles were built as early as the 9th century. Prekmurje was no exception, if only because of its location at the historical intersections of different tribal groups. A fortified base with a defensive tower in Rakičan is mentioned for the first time in 1431, although the village of Rékythe certainly existed there as early as 1322. The castle in Negova is documented since the year 1425. The castle in Murska Sobota is mentioned as early as 1398. The castle Grad in Goričko is said to

Postcard from 1939 showing Murska Sobota Castle (original in safekeeping by Z. Vidic)





have been built by the Knights Templar at the time of the Crusades, but it is historically mentioned under the name Limbuh only in 1271. Lindva Castle (Dolnja Lendava) is mentioned as early as 1278. Since the first castles were usually made of wood, and the construction of stone castles began only in the twelfth century, Gornja Lendava (Grad) and Dolnja Lendava (Lindva) are evidence that they stood in an important area and that their defensibility and power were also important in the hinterland of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

Moreover, castles with large possessions with which secular and ecclesiastical rulers enfeoffed German nobles, also meant a fortification of the captured territory, which is why fiefs on the border were of utmost importance. And that is also why the nobles on the border had fewer feudal obligations to the emperor. Those castles were the bearers of the German Eastern settlement in the High Middle Ages, as historians call it, which reached its peak in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. From the year 1180, the independent Duchy of Styria itself held the fiefs. As a consequence, the fief connections with Bavaria and Carantania were cut. The northern part of Styria was slowly settled by Bavarian peasants, while south of the ducal town of Graz, only the larger cities became German.

In this zeal for faith and expansion of the borders, no one expected that the power of the Ottoman Empire from the south would very clearly put a stop to these efforts for an extended period. The Hungarian kingdom became a bulwark of the empire, which successfully resisted for a long time. The father of King Matthias Corvinus, John Hunyadi, had already gained great prestige as a talented Hungarian army commander, including in the legendary defense of Belgrade in 1456. His second son Matthias came to the Hungarian throne based on his aspirations. Hunyadi's dynasty acquired the throne and the crown not on the basis of succession, but by direct election. Therefore, Matthias Corvinus was the only one of the family on the Hungarian throne. Like his father, he successfully repelled the Ottomans for several decades on the Danube and in Bosnia. That is probably why the Empire had not noticed that he was also preparing to conquer the imperial crown. He had already possessed the Bohemian crown since 1469.

Even though Matthias Corvinus saved many a town and castle in Styria and deep within Inner Austria by repelling the Turks, he also destroyed and annihilated many castles and towns himself with his army. What he did not achieve by force of arms, he wanted to achieve by negotiations, by cunning, deception, and diplomacy. When he was elected, the Hungarian crown was held by Emperor Frederick III. Matthias declared war to force its return. Finally, in 1463, the king and the emperor concluded a truce that today

seems difficult to understand. The emperor received 80,000 gold florins from Matthias for the crown, though neither relinquished his claim to the throne. If one of the thrones (the Hungarian or the Imperial Throne) became vacant, it would pass to the survivor. Frederick III even tactically accepted Matthias "in his son's stead" in the negotiations, though that did not satisfy the latter's aspirations.

Since the Christian countries did not assist Matthias Corvinus in his fight against the Turks in the middle of the Balkan Peninsula, he made a cleverly calculated peace agreement with the Ottomans as early as 1465.

## The Kingdom of Hungary all at once became the Empire's bulwark.

This allowed him to devote himself even more to his plans to conquer the imperial throne. When the Styrian nobles revolted against the ever-increasing taxes for the imperial army, Corvinus immediately sided with the rebels.

The peace with the Turks enabled him to prepare for his greatest military enterprise. He circled Vienna and Frederick III. The emperor's acceptance of Matthias in "his son's stead", thus had brought him neither peace nor respect. Vienna surrendered after long resistance in June 1485. Corvinus organized his entry into the city as a great spectacle. He had 32 bulging carts full of food paraded in front of the tortured and hungry Viennese. Two thousand festively dressed horsemen and, as an exotic addition, 24 camels, which he had acquired from the Turks, took part in the solemn procession. The ecclesiastical authority was represented by 24 bishops, followed by added flag-bearers with the military trophies of Matthias' victorious battles, and only after them did the legendary Hungarian king ride in, accompanied by his most loyal knights. In order to endear himself to the city's citizens, a thousand fattened oxen were brought along at the end of the procession, and the Viennese were able to feast on them without restriction on that very afternoon.

Matthias Corvinus had himself proclaimed emperor. Frederick III, who had not been in the city for a long time, visited the lords of the German castles and asked them in vain to help him expel Matthias Corvinus from Vienna and to reconquer the part of Austria that the latter had appropriated. Corvinus immediately declared the city the capital of Hungary and spent most of his time there, until he died a sudden and somewhat mysterious death at the beginning of April 1490, at barely 47 years of age, at the imperial court in



View of Grad Castle from an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century postcard.

Vienna, so to say, in the imperial bed of the Habsburgs.

### **The Turks at the gates and the Kurucs behind them**

As long as Matthias Corvinus, with his diplomacy and his paid mercenary army, was able to hold the Turks south of Hungary on the border between the Danube and the Sava, and further in Bosnia to the Adriatic for several decades, it was still believed that the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation could resist the Ottomans and push them back down the Balkan peninsula. But Matthias Corvinus was neither omnipotent nor immortal, so this was at best a temporary solution. Ultimately, building castles and fortresses was the best solution to the problem of the bloodthirsty enemies from the southeast. And the cost would

be high, both in lives and resources, before this enemy was permanently banned.

Who could count them, the many incursions into towns, cities and attacks on castles or in the castles? In how many churches with valuable paintings and sculptures were destroyed, and how many churches were used as horse stables? And who could count the corpses they left behind? Even Vienna was besieged more than once, only, unlike Matthias Corvinus, the Ottomans never managed to break the city.

As if the Hungarian and German estates did not have enough to deal with holding off the bloodthirsty enemy from the south, they also created an enemy at home. The Hungarian commoners, and also the lower nobility, were very

unhappy, because there were constant tax increases and tax collections. More and more often they had to render war services to their feudal lords, and with the Turkish invasions their lives became completely unbearable and, indeed, hung by a thread. As a result, they banded together. As Kurucs, they first wanted to drive out the Turks, but first they turned against their masters and began to plunder their castles, which attracted more and more malcontents. However, history took a turn when soon thereafter the Kurucs became allies of the Turks. The Kurucs were also supported by the French until their decline at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today, in the popular tradition of that difficult period, the stories about the Kurucs and their incursions, for example, are often even more vivid and frightening than those about the Turks.





Pomurje

# LENDAVA CASTLE – STRONGER THAN TURKS AND KURUCS



Current view of Lendava Castle.

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## Lendava Castle

The present appearance of Lendava Castle on the picturesque hill above the town of the same name dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A deed of donation from 1492 testifies that the members of the Hahót-Buzád family received the castle as a fief. The first nobleman of this family from Lendava already called himself Dominus de Lindau Hahót III. His son also received the Castle of Lenti as a fief, and then also renewed or extended the castle in Lendava. As in the case of most other castles and chateaux, every lord of the castle that took care of imperial or archepiscopal castles and possessions was engaged in their renewal, extension and/or fortification. The fortification of Lendava Castle was all the more important, because it was attacked both by the Tartars and by the army of the Bohemian king Ottokar II as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

However, the oldest family roots of the Hahót or Hahöld knights are not Hungarian. The family apparently came to the Pannonian Plain from Thuringia in Germany or from Graz. The king himself enfeoffed the knight with possessions in the area of Hahót in Hungary. The Hungarian king Lajos or Louis I (the Great) himself testified to the influence and importance of the dynasty when in 1366 he granted Lendava the same market rights as Buda. Since the whole family was an ally of King Matthias Corvinus, it is also documented that in 1480 the king stayed in Lendava Castle, as some years before his mother and his bride Beatrice of Naples had done. They would probably have lost the king's favor, however, had Corvinus lived to see the Bánffy family convert to Protestantism during the Reformation.

This fact is also significant because Miklós Bánffy VI founded and established a printing plant in Lendava Castle as early as 1573, where he hosted the itinerant laborer, Rudolf Hochalter, who was persecuted in some neighboring countries for helping to spread the new religious ideas by printing Protestant books. Thus, the first printing plant within the territories of present-day Slovenia was located at this castle. Three Protestant books were printed there over a space of two years. The Protestant preacher and teacher

György Kultsár from Lendava wrote the books in Hungarian. Their titles show what issues were of great importance to the members of the Reformed Church at that time. The first book was a brief guide to preparations for death. It is the first book ever printed on Slovenian soil. The second book also had an interesting title: "Trial of strength between the devil and a penitent and teachings of hope in the midst of despair." Only the third book was a more typical basic Protestant sermon.

The Bánffy de Alsolendva family, as the members of the family had called themselves since the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, maintained and extended the castle until their extinction around the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, expanding it mainly in a vertical direction. Even today, the central tower is the most prominent element, and it was added under the Bánffys in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Due to its location, the castle gained extraordinary strategic importance during the Turkish invasions, especially after the fall of Kaniža (1660). There are only few castles that could keep their gates firmly closed during the centuries of Turkish invasions. Few managed to withstand the Ottoman invaders and besiegers and so were saved the fate of having their gates unhinged and their chambers set ablaze. When the Turks destroyed and burned down Kaniža and Szigetvár in 1603, they then made their way to Lendava. The castle was defended by 800 soldiers and 300 locals with all their strength, and so they thwarted the Turks plan to penetrate further into Europe during this invasion. The Ottomans returned to the Sultanate in a rage.

More than four decades after this victory, the Bánffy family had to bow to a less visible, but nonetheless potent enemy. The family failed to produce a male descendant, so their chapter in the history of the Lendava Castle was closed. The castle began to decay, although for a long time it was the most defensible and most secure among the 19 fortresses owned by the widely branched Buzád-Hahót (Bánffy) dynasty. The castle then passed to the Nádasdys and after them to the Esterházy. Because of its poor state of repair, the new owner, Prince Esterházy, a ministerial of the Austrian



"Giants of World Fine Arts" in the inner courtyard of Lendava Castle.

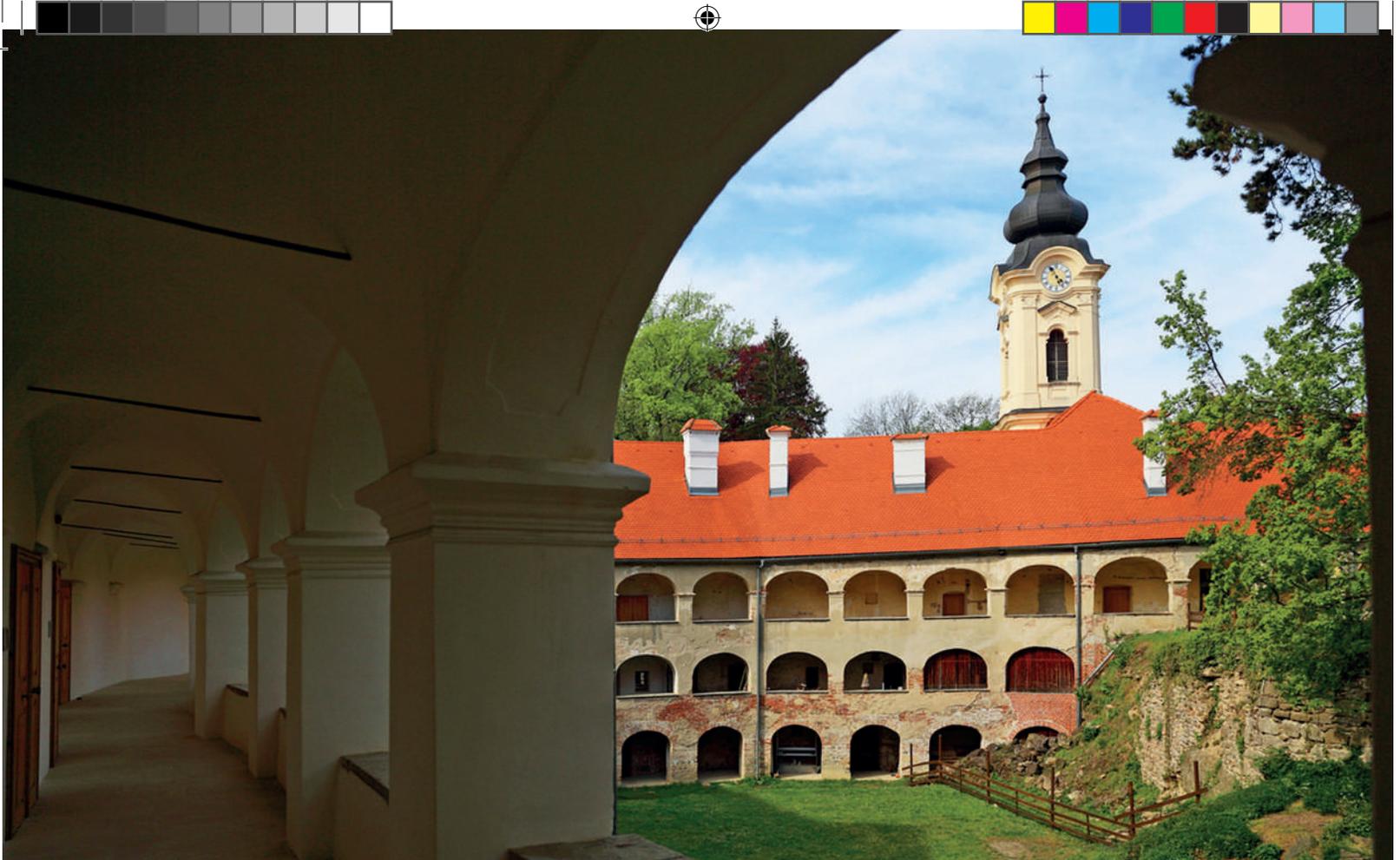
Emperor Leopold I, had no choice but to renovate it between 1712 and 1717. As a sign of his devotion to his emperor, he had it rebuilt so that the ground plan had an L-shape, the initial of his lord Leopold. The Esterházy did not regularly live in the castle, and in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it housed the Bürgerschule (secondary technical and vocational school). In the interwar period it was nationalized. Since 1972 it has housed a museum and a gallery of fine arts.

### LENDAVA CASTLE (GER. UNTERLIMBACH)

Bánffyjev trg 1 – Bánffy tér 1  
SI-9220 Lendava  
T +386 2 578 92 60  
info@gml.si  
www.gml.si

First mention: 1192  
Status: Monument of national importance  
Administrator: Galerija – Muzej Lendava, Galéria-Múzeum Lendva  
Current use: Gallery, museum, exhibition center





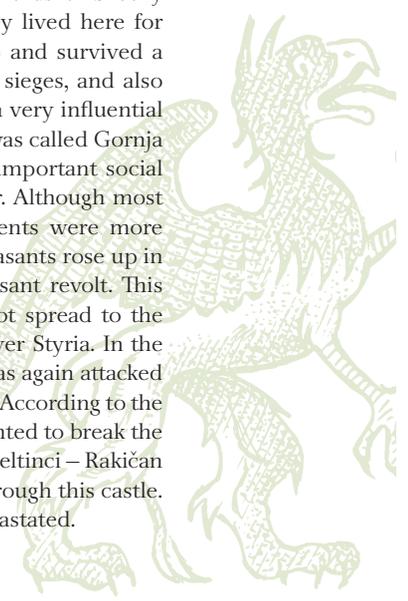
Current view of Grad Castle.

## GRAD CASTLE – THE LARGEST CASTLE IN SLOVENIA

Lyndua Castle (Castrum Lyndua) was the first fortress that is known to have stood on the site of today's Grad Castle in Goričko. In historical documents it is mentioned for the first time in 1271. However, the Knights Templar are said to have built the first fortress here already at the time of the Crusades, at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, it was not built by the knights themselves, who were in fact professional soldiers, but by master builders, who had to be commissioned and also paid. However, the knightly campaigns, battles and crusades provided enough opportunity to accumulate and rob so much wealth that it was possible to sell goods to itinerant merchants and to pay the master builders with the profits.

King Andrew II enfeoffed Count Andreas von Eisenburg with the whole territory of today's Goričko in 1208. Castle experts are convinced that there was already a castle in Gornja Lendava at that time, although there is no written evidence of it (or has not yet been found).

After six decades already Bohemian noblemen under the rule of Ottokar II took over the castle. The feudal lords changed often, and in 1366 the lords of Széchy became the owners of the castle. They lived here for three and a half centuries (until 1684) and survived a whole series of uprisings and attacks, sieges, and also some plunderings. The Széchys were a very influential noble family, and Grad Castle, which was called Gornja Lendava at that time, also played an important social role on the Hungarian-German border. Although most attackers were repelled, some insurgents were more successful. In 1515, for example, the peasants rose up in the first great Slovenian-Croatian peasant revolt. This revolt is interesting, because it did not spread to the rest of Prekmurje or the whole of Lower Styria. In the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the castle was again attacked and plundered by the unfree peasants. According to the latest historical research, the Turks wanted to break the Prekmurje defensive line (Lendava – Beltinci – Rakičan – Murska Sobota – Grad) precisely through this castle. In 1588, for example, the castle was devastated.



## Grad Castle

Whatever happened to the local insurgents and looters is not documented. We know that captured Turkish soldiers were gladly exchanged by the lords of the castle for their serfs who had been captured and taken away by the Ottoman army. In that way the other side got rid of those prisoners who had not been killed immediately. The situation was different with the local rebellious serfs. No historian knows how many of them starved, froze, or were otherwise tortured by henchmen in the deep castle dungeons. In one of those dungeons under Grad Castle a wooden board with a lock on it was found, to which insurgents and prisoners were chained. Fragmentary documents of that time prove that the lawless serfs were thrown in the dungeon not only for gross misdeeds, such as taking over and plundering the castle, or stealing cattle or the fruits of fields from the lords at night. They might also be thrown into the castle dungeon if, for example, they were summoned by the lords to the castle orchard to pick cherries high up on the trees and did not whistle loud enough while doing so.

Today Grad still shows its Renaissance origin in some places. The vault of the courtyard is not supported by stone but by brick columns, because few stones were to be had in the area, though there

was enough clay for bricks. Enough clay remained to supply present-day potters in Prekmurje with their raw material. The vaulted wall of the castle also had a defensive function. According to a description of the castle from 1541, when Margareta Széchy was the lady of the castle, there was a fortified earthen wall in front of it.

Despite the frequent attacks in that century and the one that followed, the lords of the castle, together with their serfs and the commissioned builders, managed to patch up the castle again and again. This, however, increased the tensions between the lords of the castle and the serfs because of the lords' increasing demands for labor service. The Turkish invasions were successfully repelled, but then in 1685 the Ottomans once again broke through the castle's defenses, entered the interior, and plundered the castle. We do not know today whether the Széchy family witnessed this attack or whether they left the castle shortly beforehand. Grad was so badly hit by the Turks that the rapidly changing owners were unable to restore the castle for at least half a century. When it became the property of the Széchenyis, it was renovated according to the plans of the architect Josef Hüber and so received its present appearance. Based on these plans, it became the

largest castle on Slovenian soil. The perimeter of the outer walls was 360 meters, and it numbered a total of 365 rooms.

The ground plan of the castle in the shape of a pentagon is a peculiarity. The present Baroque appearance from the 18th century hides not only the many rooms, but also a huge cellar. Much space was given to the castle dungeons. In the courtyard, a fountain was carved into the rock and, of course, there is also a chapel. A high Baroque bell tower with a multi-part onion dome offers a panoramic view of the surroundings.

The surroundings of the park were designed according to the criteria of the time. To this day, there are still huge tulip trees here, which are among the oldest and largest in Slovenia. In the interwar period the castle was furnished with many valuable objects. Its owner was the industrialist Geza Hartner from Murska Sobota. After the Second World War, Grad experienced more looting: paintings, tableware and furniture were stolen, the tiled stoves in the numerous rooms were dismantled and carried away or destroyed, even the parquet floor was removed. Not much remained. For the people of the time, castles were symbols and relics of centuries of hostile exploitation by foreigners.

View of the exhibit hall of Grad Castle.



**GRAD CASTLE**  
**(GORNJA LENDAVA)**  
**(GER. OBERLIMBACH)**  
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Grad 191  
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vodniki@goricko.info  
www.park-goricko.org

First mention /building time:  
1271/ 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century  
Status: Monument of national  
importance, October 6, 1999  
Administrator: Public-legal  
Goričko Nature Park (Krajinski  
park Goričko)  
Present use: Three-country-in-  
formation center, seat of the  
Goričko Nature Park, wedding  
hall, reconstruction within the  
"Phare" program  
Owner: Republic of Slovenia



## A FORTRESS ON THE PLAIN



Current view of Murska Sobota Castle.

While the castles of Spodnja and Gornja Lendava were built on a hill, the other castles and chateaux of Prekmurje are located on the plain of the Mur valley. The castles were intended as fortresses in exposed places of the landscape, but they were also the centers and administrative seats of the feudal estates (manors). On a fertile plain, a castle or a fortress is geographically exposed. This required a different construction method and, above all, a different fortification. There were also not enough stones in the Mur plain, so the castles were built of bricks. Instead of the mostly round stone columns, square columns made of bricks and plastered with mortar supported the arcade arches. Such castles on the plain are usually low, so that they could not be hit by besiegers with catapults or cannons from a safe distance.

One of these typical castles on the plain was built in Murska Sobota. A historical document from 1255 mentions the Bel Mura castle, but it is not certain that it refers to the area of today's Murska Sobota. In this document, the Hungarian palatine (who was in charge of the royal court) and the Slavonian Ban Roland laid out the feudal obligations related to the castle. The Hungarian kingdom enfeoffed the developing nobility

with large estates already in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Prekmurje fief Bel Mura (i.e., the fief on the Mura River) was one of the large Hungarian fiefs. Important trade routes between Hungary and the countries of the Holy Roman Empire ran through here. On the largest of these trade routes, the Slavic settlement of Sobota (also called Sombatha, Zombota, Szombata in different documents) was established, whose name was merely "magyarized" by the Hungarians when they arrived and took over.

The castellum in Belmura is mentioned by name only in 1487. Some historians are convinced that it was first mentioned already in the year 1308 when it was referred to as Mura Zombotha Castle. However, we know for sure that the Széchy noble family took possession of the castle in 1365–1366, and that it remained in the possession of this family for almost two centuries without any major changes. When the Turkish invasions endangered the town and the castle more and more, the Széchys decided to renovate it and extend it into a real fortified Renaissance castle. That meant a plan according to patterns laid out by Italian architects: rectangular, almost square, with an inner courtyard surrounded on all sides by residential wings, connected at the corners



by square and somewhat protruding towers. Since the Széchyts owned more than half of the town, a dispute arose with the owner of the other half of the town, Eva Popel-Lobkowitz, as to who should contribute how much to the better fortification of the defensive wall in Murska Sobota. The need to do so was obvious from the severe consequences of the Turkish invasions. The Ottomans cut off the heads of the inhabitants of Sobota for fun, cut their bodies up as a warning and destroyed their houses. As long as the Turks could collect the taxes without any problems, which they themselves had set for the conquered territories, life was at least bearable for the subjugated. But when the locals could no longer pay the taxes, the Ottomans took their revenge on them.

From the Hungarian village of Szàpar (it now belongs to Veszprém County) came the rich Szàpary family and bought Murska Sobota Castle, the small town of Murska Sobota and about forty more villages in the surrounding area. The Szàparys had already shown that they were very wealthy when they paid the ransom for their family member Peter. He was a brave man who had been steeled in the battles against the Turks. One day, however, he was taken captive. He spent four whole years in Turkish camps and probably in prisons. To buy his freedom, the family paid the Turks the (for that time) horrendous sum of 22,000 gold ducats. As a result, he was released in 1661. After some time (1687), he bought the huge estate of Murska Sobota, some other estates on its borders and also the market of Martjanci. Thereafter, the castle of Murska Sobota appeared at its best.

During the expansion and reorganization, a ten-hectare park was newly laid out, the castle was extended on the south side, and its interiors were richly furnished. The great fighter against the Turks, Peter Szàpary, was lucky that the Turks did not show themselves in Prekmurje after the year 1684. The newly reconstructed castle became a comfortable home for the castle owners. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the entrance was embellished by an extraordinary Baroque portal, which connoisseurs claim is the most beautiful in all of Slovenia. The two stone carved atlases on the portal were brought here



Baroque Salon in Murska Sobota Castle.

from a Budapest palace. The first floor was converted into a “bel étage” during the “Baroqueization” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and there was a mezzanine above it. To the left of the entrance, a palace chapel was added at the corner. The whole complex became a palatial residence.

Every noble family throughout Europe faced at least one of two major problems. When one generation had no male descendant to take over the estates and castles, the entire property passed into the hands of another, related family. Contracts were often negotiated between related families to regulate who would get which estate and castle if one of them failed to produce a male heir. The second problem was money, of which there was always too little. The maintenance of castles and palaces, the numerous staff, and soldiers with their equipment – all this was expensive, and there had to be enough food and supplies for everyone. Sometimes the money ran out, and noble estates experienced economic ruin.

This is what happened to the once so important and wealthy Szàparys. Count Geza still had a handful of state functions, he was, for example, master of ceremonies at the royal court, member of the imperial-royal chamber, hereditary member of the Hungarian House of Lords and even privy councilor of the Hungarian king. His son László followed a no less successful path. He was Hungarian attaché in London and governor of Rijeka, as well as ambassador in London. However, and to no surprise, he also had financial difficulties when

his needs exceeded his means. Consequently, the valuable interior of the castle was sold at auction. Finally, due to over-indebtedness, he had to sell the whole castle and all the land in 1934. The castle was bought by the Municipality of Murska Sobota, which is still the owner today. László died in Vienna before the beginning of the Second World War. Today the castle houses the museum “Pomurski muzej Murska Sobota” with its collections, exhibitions, and cultural events. So, it spreads the best part of the spirit that for centuries prevailed in the walls, buildings, and interiors of the castle rooms. These always coexisted with the basic defensive function of the castle, and with time they constantly developed, surviving now long after the defensive function has become no longer necessary.

#### MURSKA SOBOTA CASTLE

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SI-9000 Murska Sobota  
T +386 2 527 17 06  
info@pomurski-muzej.si  
www.pomurski-muzej.si

First mention/building period:  
1398/16<sup>th</sup> century

Status: Monument of local 29<sup>th</sup>  
of March 1991

Administrator: Pomurski muzej  
Murska Sobota

Present use: Museum collections,  
permanent exhibitions,  
temporary exhibitions  
information, cultural and youth  
club (Mladinski informativni in  
kulturni klub)



# THE ESTATE THAT SUPPORTED A PALACE IN GRAZ



Current view of Negova Castle.

For four centuries the carriages had already been travelling on the bad roads from Negova Castle to Graz for three to five days, before always stopping in front of the same city palace. The Trauttmansdorffs (at least the Austrian branch of that noble family) lived there most of the year, if they were not strolling through Vienna or attending musical evenings or parlor games there, where they also owned a palace. The palace in Negova on a slightly undulating hill was just one of many they owned or administered as a fief. At the best of times, the noble family owned almost thirty castles.

The peasants, who had to provide the transport service as part of their labor obligations, moved all the necessary food and goods, which the local administrators had collected from the serfs, from Negova to Graz. In the deep cellar of the castle, hundreds of barrels with the wine produced from the vineyards were stored, the granaries were filled to the brim with wheat and oats, in wrought-iron lockboxes many

handfuls of guilders were stored, and carp and pike teemed in nine fishponds. More than two thousand serfs on their farmsteads, smallholders, and herdsmen always produced so much food that there was enough for thirty castle servants in Negova and for the spoiled stomachs in the Graz palace. Surplus produce was then sold, which brought in even more cash.

In the preserved rent-rolls, the production of the Negova estate is described even more clearly, as is the case today in many large enterprises. For example, of the income from the manor in 1607, which exceeded four thousand guildens, almost three thousand came from the serfs. Wine was sold for almost 800 guildens, grain sales (which was also mainly produced by the serfs) brought another 270 guildens. Some of it was grown on the fields of the estate that were directly worked by the administrator, using peasant and paid day laborers. In that year, as in most other years, the castle was well-managed, since only a little more than 3,240 guildens were used for all the expenses of the



## Negova Castle

castle, which included the annual salaries of the castle masters and servants, as well as the construction work on the castle. One fifth of the annual earnings remained as a surplus for the owners. Along with the savings from the previous years (and of course the income from the other castles) they could fall back on this surplus to plan needed renovations to Negova Castle, which had been devastated by the enemy Hungarians in a massive attack only two years before.

Negova was not lucky with the Hungarians. Already one and a half centuries before the mentioned attack, namely in 1487, three thousand Hungarians camped in front of the castle wall under the leadership of Matthias Corvinus. The owner of the castle at that time was not yet a Trauttmansdorff, but Bartholomew of Pernegg. A year before he had led the campaign against the castle of Ormož, which at that time was owned by the Croatian noble Frankopan family. They were allied with the Hungarian king. Ormož Castle was captured and the young Frankopan was taken prisoner. Matthias Corvinus advanced a sum six thousand guldens to the Countess of Ormož so she could ransom her son, but apparently, negotiations did not go well, because Corvinus attacked Negova to free the boy. It is not known how exactly the Hungarians managed to free him, but according to existing records, Pernegg's head would have

rolled down the castle courtyard had not two important knights from Graz come to his aid with their troops. The chroniclers report that they had ridden without resting from Wednesday to Saturday and arrived just in time. The lord of the castle was spared his head, but not his property. Corvinus left again with his soldiers, because after all, they had achieved what they had come there for – to save Frankopan-Zrinski and to conquer Negova. Corvinus also received the castle and town of Ormož from the Countess of Frankopan in return for providing the ransom money. He quickly sold it to his commander Jakob Székely. Thus, the Hungarian captain became the lord of the castle and Baron of Ormož. At that time Borl Castle belonged to him, as well. However, already in the following year, the Hungarian king enfeoffed the son of the famous Jan Vitovec, Josef Vitovec, with the castle of Negova. Krapina, the castle of the Vitovec family, had also been taken by Székely. Negova therefore represented a kind of compensation for the family of the commander of the troops of the Count of Celje.

At first sight, the triangle relationship between the Counts of Celje, Emperor Frederick III and the Hungarian King Corvinus seems incomprehensible and in fact, it does not get much more logical or less tangled the closer one examines it. Within a period of less than three

decades, they all fought against each other, and at other times they were allied with one another. For most of that time, Jan Vitovec, blind in one eye, was always at the forefront, from the capture of Ptuj. He led Corvinus' army against the Turks on the Neretva River in Bosnia and held countless titles. Thus, he was Baron of Krapina, Count of Zagorje, etc.

But Negova did not remain in Vitovec's hands for long. When Matthias Corvinus died in 1490, Székely backed the King of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, Maximilian I of Austria, who then enfeoffed him with Negova. Only two years later Maximilian took the castle back from him and gave it back to Bartholomäus von Pernegg. Székely now received the castle, which was originally the property of his family, on lease. In 1542, however, the entire property passed into the hands of the Trauttmansdorffs, where it remained until the end of the Second World War. This castle is one of the most beautiful in Slovenia and is now slowly being restored. Within its walls, according to legend, the ghost of a Turkish soldier roams the halls. He was captured by the defenders of the castle during an attack and walled in alive. Sometimes, when the wind blows, so the story goes, he can still be heard sighing. Perhaps he will find peace when he is invited to the former dance hall of the castle, once it is restored to its former glory.

Renaissance Hall in Castle Negova .



### NEGOVA CASTLE (GER. NEGAU)

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info@gradnegova.si  
[www.kultprotur.si](http://www.kultprotur.si)

First mention: 1425  
Status: Cultural monument of national importance  
Administrator: Zavod za kulturo, turizem in promocijo (Cultural, Tourism and Promotion Center) Gornja Radgona  
Current use: Information center, conference center, educational events, cultural events, wedding ceremonies



Current view of Rakičan Castle.

## A BASE ON THE KING'S HIGHWAY

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In the seemingly endless plain around Rakičan Castle and the village of the same name, it was quiet and hot at the end of August 1705. Only the oak and acacia forests still offered shade with their leafy canopy. In the passages between them and on the cleared plains, the wheat and oat fields had already been harvested. These two types of grain were the main ones cultivated on the manorial estates of the time. Already half a century before, the Baththyánys had additionally fortified the castle located on the so-called *via regna* – the king's highway, because of the constant danger of Turkish invasions. Wherever the Turkish troops advanced to in the north, in the course of almost every attack a part of their cavalry and infantry broke off from the main force and crossed the plain on the left bank of the Mur River. And even if they left their scimitars, which caused so much bitterness and suffering, in their sheaths, they still trampled or destroyed the crops on the fields. They slaughtered and consumed the cattle that grazed on the edges of the forest and, for fun, quickly chopped off someone's hand or head if they could not hide fast enough.

In 1705, things seemed quiet at first, although there was unrest among the people because of the constant threat from the Turks. The lords of the castle feared for their lives and for their valuable possessions at every step. A year before, the Kurucs had already been on the warpath. Furious as never before, they turned east across the Prekmurje plain to Nedelišče and Središče ob Dravi, while another force rode

to Veržej. They plundered from Ormož to Gornja Radgona. Consequently, that year it was to be expected that they would appear in Murska Sobota before late summer. That August, near Rakičan Castle, about 300 horsemen rode out to meet the Kurucs, followed by about 700 infantrymen. In the frontline rode, along with distinguished knights, Captain János Draškovič, a loyal supporter of the Hungarian king. This time he led the Austrian army against the angry Hungarian peasants and lower nobility. The Kurucs were opposed to the excessive exploitation by the landlords. The Slovenian subjects of both the Austrian and Hungarian landlords fared no better. Therefore, it is not surprising that this time they helped the Kurucs and many Prekmurje (Hungarian Slovenes) were among the attackers and looters. However, their plan did not work out on the plain. Count János of Trakošćan, the fourth and last Croatian ban from the Draškovič family, a sub-marshal in the Habsburg army, quickly and unceremoniously defeated the Kurucs and Prekmurje, forcing them to flee back to Hungary. Already a year before he had been able to test his military skills in the war against Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II Erdély, who, as the wealthiest landlord in Hungary, was very dissatisfied with the Hungarian nobility and the king and wanted to establish an independent state in Transylvania.

On the field in Rakičan in that August, there were also some Styrian nobles and their soldiers on the side of the Austrians, who had to secure the border.



## Rakičan Castle

Thus, in this instance, Slovenes faced each other in a fratricidal war. After the bloody battle, in which many Kurucs and their helpers died, the Kurucs again assembled an army in the following years, which was able to plunder on an even larger scale. The raids across the Mur River into Styria did not end until 1710. In the following year, they gave up their rebellion, swore allegiance to their emperor, and parted peacefully for good. Rakičan remained the place where one of the last victories over the Kurucs was won.

Today we know that at the time of that important battle, the castle, in addition to the farm building on the edge of the park, also had a manor house located on the south side, which, together with the side buildings, formed a rectangular footprint, as it still does today. The fact that the vaulted entrance to the farm building had a drawbridge suggests that there was a moat for defensive purposes (which was not always filled with water), making the castle an important fortress on the plain. In this place, a first manorial base is mentioned in the historical record as early as 1322. The “Rékythe” of that time was probably only a defensive tower, as they were common in that part of Europe at that time. In a written document from 1431, we learn for the first time that the fortress served as a defense against the Turks. However, no document has yet been found that would shed light on when the castle passed into the hands of the Protestant noble Batthyány family, where it remained until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

According to the latest findings (Darja Kerec), in 1636 a special commission met in the castle to settle disputes between the landlords in Murska Sobota (between the Széchys and Countess Eva Popel-Lobkowitz), which proves that the owners of Rakičan were trustworthy and respected gentlemen. In 1641 some locals returned from Kanizsa, who had been in Turkish captivity there. They revealed that the Turks were planning an attack on Rakičan, Martjanci and Murska Sobota. The Batthyánys immediately began to make plans for additional fortification of the castle, which they implemented already in the following year.

At the end of the century, they prepared for a comprehensive renovation of the castle along entirely different lines. In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was “Baroqueized” and lavishly furnished. The threat from the Turks (during their last attack on Prekmurje in 1684 they had burned down Dolnja Lendava) and the Kurucs had been banned by then, and the approach to defense had changed in the previous decades as well. Instead of thick walls, embrasures were used for defense, through which attackers could be shot at. Rakičan became a spacious, pleasant country castle of the Batthyánys, used for residential purposes. In the surrounding plain, 1,200 hectares of property were added, from which the castle lived. This allowed the owners to live a carefree and pleasant life, which seemed mysterious to outsiders.

Grad Castle in Goričko is associated with a legendary countess, who is said to have bathed in the blood of her young servants, because she wanted to stay young. However, this story is also attached to Elisabeth Báthory, the lady of the castle in Čachtice, so perhaps someone mixed up the similar surnames (Georgina Batthyány and Elisabeth Báthory). Georgina Batthyány also came from the branch in Rakičan. Or perhaps the noble ladies were said to have magic powers, because they were well-groomed, arrogant, and beautifully dressed, which the hard-working, poor, and worn-out serf women and maids could not explain otherwise. So, whose spirit is being summoned at the annual gatherings and witches’ festivals on the grounds of Rakičan Castle? The spirit of Georgina or that of the serf peasants and maids? And what spirit is behind the witches’ festivals at Grad Castle?

Georgina was the last owner of Rakičan with that surname. During her lifetime, the neo-Gothic round chapel was built in the castle park, which became the family crypt. Georgina married the Austrian Count Clemens Count Saint-Julien Wallsee, which brought an end to yet another powerful Hungarian noble family. Their children Helena and Albert rejuvenated the family tree of the Saint-Julien Wallsee family. Helena became a widow at a young age and chose a solitary monastic life in Austria,



Equestrian and coach tourism and the opulent Festival Hall at Rakičan Castle.

while Albert chose a bride from the surroundings of Salzburg, Countess Rose-Marie von Wartenburg. The castle was in her possession until the end of the Second World War. Nobody knows where all the valuable inventory disappeared to after the owners left. The empty rooms were first turned into a retirement home, then into apartments. Since 1999, the Municipality of Murska Sobota has been thoroughly renovating the castle. The Rakičan Research and Education Center makes sure that there is life on the premises.

### RAKIČAN CASTLE

Lendavska ulica 28, Rakičan

SI-9000 Murska Sobota

T +386 2 535 18 96

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First mention/building period:  
1431/17<sup>th</sup> century

Status: Monument of local importance – 29.3.1991

Administrator: Research and Education center Mansion Rakičan.

Current purpose: research and educational center, carriage exhibition, equestrian center, gastronomy, events





# CASTLES IN NORTHERN CROATIA

The Castle Road was founded in Austria more than forty years ago and in 2018 crossed the border to Slovenia, where it includes the regions of Pomurje and Štajerska. Its expansion has now continued into Croatia, which is why we present four castles in the north of that country.

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The Varaždin City Museum today includes several buildings in the center of Varaždin. One of them is Stari Grad Castle, built at the crossroads of medieval streets in Varaždin. Over the centuries, there were many owners, including the noble families of the Counts of Celje, Vitovec, Matthias Corvinus and Ungnad. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the castle came into the possession of Tomaž Erdödy. Today the castle houses some of the museum's collections: guild objects, furniture, historical portraits, weapons, paintings, clocks, porcelain, and glassware, as well as numerous other objects from the everyday life of the Varaždin nobility and wealthy bourgeoisie.

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The Museum of the Medžimurje Čakovec region is located in a wonderful Renaissance Baroque palace, also called Zrinski Palace. It was named after the famous knightly family of Zrinskis, the Bans of Croatia, who built it in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and lived there. The palace has two floors and four wings. Inside the wall lies a spacious atrium with a lapidarium and an exhibition hall for theme-based exhibitions. There are five separate exhibition departments: Archaeology, Ethnology, Cultural History, History and an Art Gallery.

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Oršić Castle, which houses the Museum of Peasant Uprisings, was built in Baroque style by the Oršić family, or more likely, by two of their representatives, namely Krsto and Josipa. The museum shows the history of the Croatian hill country of Zagorje from the Middle Ages to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The castle is surrounded by an ornamental garden and a nature park, where there is a monument to the peasant uprisings and Matija Gubec, a work of sculptor Antun Augustinčić.

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The late medieval Veliki Tabor Castle is located in the municipality of Desinić in the northwestern part of Zagorje, not far from the Slovenian border, and is one of the most important cultural and historical monuments of secular architecture in the continental part of Croatia. Numerous cultural events are held here: Easter Monday at Veliki Tabor, Tabor Film Festival, Legends and Fairy Tales Festival, Apple Days and Advent in Veliki Tabor.

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