

Accompanying materials
to the tour

EN

Royal chapel and Prismatic Tower



M
M

Muzeum města Brna

hrad Špilberk

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the National Cultural Monument, Špilberk Castle and Fortress, the seat of the Brno City Museum. Špilberk has been an inseparable landmark of the city of Brno for more than seven centuries and also a symbol of both sovereign power and human suffering. During that time, it has been rebuilt many times and its function has changed as well. During our tour we will briefly get acquainted with its rich history.

If you have any questions now or later, I will be happy to answer them.




The square tower after the reconstruction for the purposes of the Wehrmacht between 1939 and 1941.

Square tower


The square tower was an important part of the defence system of the original medieval Špilberk Castle. The rectangular structure with dimensions of 13×14 metres protected the eastern entrance gate to the castle and at the same time, thanks to its strong walls, it could serve as the last line of defence for the castle's defenders. Originally, several floors were built into the tower, and the virtually windowless space could look very gloomy. However, the safety of the inhabitants of Špilberk required such a solution.

During the baroque reconstruction of the fortress, a practical use was sought for the dark rooms with extremely thick walls. In the end, the decision was made to turn them into prison cells for soldiers of the Špilberk barracks serving sentences. These rooms then served the same purpose in 1939-1940, when the Wehrmacht and the Gestapo took control of Špilberk. The cells in the former square tower served as solitary confinement cells for detainees who needed to be isolated from other prisoners.

During the reconstruction of the eastern wing of the castle in 1999-2000, it was decided to partially rehabilitate the original function of the defensive tower. The baroque floors of each storey were removed in an attempt to highlight the monumental open space of the building. To strengthen the incomplete medieval perimeter walling, an interesting modern element was used, namely the completion of brick strips in the shape of a parabolic arch  iconically referring

to the construction of Pavilion A of the Brno Exhibition Centre.

Nowadays the interior of the square tower gives the impression of a well-protected „treasure room“ and is therefore used for museum presentations of significant collection items.

On the floor there is a map of the Bohemian Kingdom and other territories in the domain at the time of Ottokar II of Bohemia.  At the forefront we see the personal emblems of the monarch. The individual countries are marked with landmarks: Carniola, Carinthia, Styria, Austria, Moravia and Bohemia.

Three are blank. Cheb, the Mark of Vindice and the city of Pordenone. This is because, according to heraldists, there are no known coloured coats of arms from these areas from the time of Ottokar II of Bohemia. The map is oriented towards the south, i.e., towards Rome, as was the custom at that time. The “north-up” orientation of maps appeared in Europe with the spread of compass in the 14th century.



Moravian Eagle

One of the museum's interesting collection items is displayed on the wall in the square tower. It is a Moravian eagle from the first half of the 18th century. It is carved from lime wood and has an interesting design, where the necessary volume for the eagle's body was obtained by assembling wooden parts. The wings are attached at the root of shoulders by a system of wedges and screws.

From the way the colours are used, it can be assumed that it comes from the interior of one of the prominent

buildings in Brno.

The artefact was restored in 2008 by Jindřich Jurča, the preserver of the Brno City Museum.



Artistic representation of symbols of the reign of Ottokar II of Bohemia inspired by the so-called crests of the monarch.



Carniola



Carinthia



Styria



Austria



Moravia



Bohemia



During the reconstruction, a keystone **1**, which is bricked up here, was found in the backfill of the vault. Originally, the ceiling space might have been topped with a cross vault, similar to the one in the Gothic hall we visited.

View of the eastern wing of the castle from the small courtyard during the reconstruction. Photos from the second half of the 1990s.

Space above the passageway

The original function of the superstructure above the eastern gate to the castle could not be ascertained either from written sources or during building-historical research. It is very likely that the space was divided into several floors. However, one hypothesis considers the use of the hall as it is open now, without horizontal divisions. This theory claims that in one of the construction phases of the medieval castle, a castle chapel was situated here. This would be consistent with the longitudinal orientation of the room, where the position of a possible altar faces the east, which is one of the conditions for the construction of a Christian sanctuary. However, in the environment of medieval castles often standing on exposed positions, their builders often did not have the possibility to orient the chapel correctly. Therefore it was allowed by the Church to deviate from the prescribed scheme. The assumption of a sacral place immediately adjacent to the prismatic tower cannot be confirmed or refuted.

The chapel is also mentioned in the oldest surviving document concerning the Špilberk Castle, which originates from the 4th September 1277 and was issued by Ottokar II of Bohemia. in Prague which says:

“... that our chapel in Brno, which we had built and ordered to dedicate in honour of the blessed John the Baptist...”



The royal chapel after the reconstruction for the purposes of the Wehrmacht between 1939 and 1941.

Royal Chapel

The so-called “royal chapel” is the key area of the eastern wing. It was originally vaulted with two diversely-sized bays of cross vaulting and lit by tall windows with a characteristic pointed arch. From the small courtyard it is possible to see the entrance portal to the room, decorated in an exceptionally elaborated manner, which was accessed from the courtyard by a wooden gallery indicated in the perimeter of the masonry. Nowadays the whole space has essentially two functional interpretations. Either it was the main meeting hall where the relevant monarch or his representative granted an audience, or it was actually the main chapel of the castle dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

During the reconstruction of the castle in 1997-2000, it was decided to uncover the preserved relics of the medieval masonry and to complete the missing structural elements into the form of the chapel mentioned above. A choir loft ❶ was built into the southern part of the room, covering an early Gothic window with seats in the thickness of the masonry ❷. The arcades with sedilia ❸ along the longer walls of the room were also reconstructed. The vault was not completed, so the room opens vertically into the roof trussing ❹ and enhances the impression of the most monumental room of Špilberk Castle.

Although we do not know the exact original appearance or function of the hall, it is likely that this room belonged to the luxurious part of the medieval castle used for the representation of its owners. Undoubtedly, Bohemian kings

and Moravian margraves spent time here, including for instance John Henry of Luxembourg, his son Jobst, Ottokar II of Bohemia and Charles IV with his first wife Blanka of Valois, who was banished to Brno by her unfriendly mother-in-law. Whether they prayed or received visitors in this part of Špilberk cannot be decided today, but the royal splendour emanates from the preserved remains of the Gothic architecture of the eastern wing to this day.



Stained glass in the east

The renovation of the oldest part of Špilberk Castle, the eastern wing, was completed in 2003 with the installation of new stained glass windows designed by *Stanislav Libenský* and *Jaroslava Brychtová*.

It was not a classical multicoloured stained glass, where individual panes are separated by metal, but each window is tinted in a shade of one colour. The leaded glass was coloured with unusual oxides of even golden tones to result in a shade corresponding to the importance of the historical site. The glass was then cut, polished and shaped to precise formats. The only similar works in our country is located in the St. Wenceslas

Chapel of St. Vitus Cathedral and in the Gothic chapel in Horšovský Týn. This was the last work of the famous glass designer Stanislav Libenský, who unfortunately did not live to see it unveiled. His wife Jaroslava Brychtová thus took over the completion of the commission for Špilberk.



Brno City
Museum

Facebook → @Muzeum.mesta.Brna @Spilberkzije
Instagram → @hrad.spilberk

#hradspilberk #vilatugendhat
#meninskabrana #arnoldovavila

spilberk.cz ↗