

The bastion system of fortifications is a method of building fortresses used mainly from the 16th to the 18th century, which was based on the mutual arrangement of bastions and curtain walls. The concept originated at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries in the Apennine Peninsula. Among the important Baroque bastion fortresses in the Czech Republic, in addition to Špilberk, are primarily the fortresses of Josefov and Terezín in Bohemia. In Slovakia, there is the former fortress Leopoldov.

Bastion is a pentagonal fortress structure, the two sides of which have their tip protruding into the moat of the castle. A curtain wall is the straight section of a fortification wall between firing positions. From the bastions, flanking and oblique fire was conducted, while from the curtain walls, frontal fire was used. Further defensive elements could be advanced further into the trench and into the outfields. This method of fortification was developed in a number of European engineering schools.

A bastion allows for firing at the enemy at the base of the wall without excessively endangering one's own shooters and cannons; it also supports the neighbouring bastion. The flanking and oblique fire from the bastion defended the adjacent curtain walls.

The beginning of the construction of the early Baroque fortification on the western side of Špilberk falls on the period of the Thirty Years' War. The Moravian capital Brno, the seat of important provincial authorities and the military advance unit of Vienna, was in immediate threat from the enemy. In the 1630s the condition of the fortress was dire in terms of construction, especially on the western side of Špilberk towards Úvoz. Contemporary sources state that the curtain wall on this side was in such poor condition that it was possible to ride up onto it on horseback. Around 1639, reconstruction was to begin on this side. This included the repair of the curtain wall, the construction of a bastion, and a ravelin (a detached bastion in the castle moat). However, it is very likely that construction began only in the period between the arrival of the Swedish troops in 1643 and 1645. This fortification was intended to defend the entrance, the western side of the castle.

The construction of the Southwest Bastion probably began between 1643-1645. Historical sources refer to the building as the New Bastion or Peroni Bastion (Gieronimo Peroni was an important Italian military engineer who probably participated in the construction). In parallel with the construction of the southwestern bastion, a secondary, northwestern bastion was

also built. Both new four-sided bastions projected diagonally into a point. The flanks of both bastions were connected by a higher brick curtain wall, which likely overlapped a lower Renaissance curtain wall. In front of this curtain wall, facing Úvoz, there was a ditch, and in front of it stood an unfinished ravelin.

The present appearance of the underground space dates from the period after the Thirty Years' War, when the bastion was repaired and improved. In front of us is the perimeter gallery (the so-called ENVELOPE) with original early Baroque masonry. From the same period also come the underground listening tunnels (the so-called ÉCOUTES), which are 3 to 5 meters long. They extend into the foreground of the fortress and were used by defenders to monitor the enemy's earthworks. At the end of the tunnel, a drum filled with peas was placed; when the peas on the drum's membrane began to move, it was a clear sign that the enemy was attempting to tunnel under the fortifications nearby. The enemy was attacking the most sensitive part of the bastion — the top. In case of threat, the tunnel could be extended, and at its end, a so-called mine chamber filled with gunpowder was created. This room could be walled up and blown up. Thus, the enemy could be neutralised even before approaching the bastion immediately and could not threaten it. At the end of the tunnel, whose floor is made of modern bricks stamped with duty stamps (marks) from Brno brickworks, there is a new staircase (located where the original wooden one once stood). A staircase connects the underground passages with the surrounding terrain.

In 1809, the bastion was shelled on the orders of Emperor Napoleon. Since the 1960s, Špilberk has housed the Brno City Museum, which had a long-term shortage of storage space for collection items. At the beginning of the 21st century, it was decided to build a new depository on the site of the former southwest bastion. In 2002 earthworks were carried out under archaeological supervision. At this time, it was found that not only the foundations of the bastion but also the perimeter gallery and the listening tunnels had been preserved. It was therefore decided that the underground section would be opened to the public as a unique testament to fortress construction. At the top of the new building, which reaches a height of 13 meters above the surrounding terrain (completed in **2006**), a three-story depository for museum collections was created, with a usable area of 1621 square meters. The double shell of the bastion ensures an optimal climate for storing mainly art collections — sculptures, paintings and historical furniture.

The siege of Brno by Swedish troops is considered one of the most significant chapters in the city's history and falls within the final phase of the Thirty Years' War (1635–1648). It began in 1618 on our territory with the so-called uprising of the non-Catholic estates against the Catholic Habsburgs and was the first Europe-wide as well as the last religious conflict. Two coalitions of feudal states stood against each other. The Catholic League (which included the Habsburg Monarchy, and therefore the Lands of the Bohemian Crown) and the Protestant Union (for example, the Kingdom of Sweden).

Preparing for the Siege

The situation before the arrival of the enemy troops was unfavourable. In addition to some of the nobility, the city's military commander, Baron Schönkirch, also fled the city. That is why Colonel Jean Louis Raduit de Souches was appointed military commander of the Moravian capital Brno on 14 March 1645. His appointment was met with hesitation by the people of Brno. They pointed out that he was French (France was then Austria's main enemy), a Protestant by religion, and had fought in the Swedish army just a few years earlier. However, the emperor made the decision, and De Souches began preparations for the city's defence very vigorously the very next day.

For strategic reasons, he ordered the tearing down of all structures within 600 paces of the city walls, ordered to level the terrain unevenness, had old ditches deepened around the walls, and dug new ones. He obtained building material to repair the walls by dismantling several towers. Just before the arrival of the Swedes, he ordered the burning of the suburbs Cejl, Trnitá, and Nové Sady. To supply the population, he had an ox-drawn mill built and ordered all the wells in the city to be cleaned. He also connected Brno with Špilberk by a so-called strada coperta (covered passage). It stood—and to some extent is still preserved—between the former Brno Gate (which stood at today's Šilingr Square) and Špilberk. There was also a shortage of weapons and ammunition in the city, so the people of Brno had to work feverishly to produce them.

Numbers of defenders and enemy forces

Besides poor technical and material equipment at the start of the siege, the number of defenders was also far from ideal. At the beginning of May, de Souches had a total of 1,475 men under arms, of whom only 426 were professional soldiers, including 40 musketeers

from the Špilberk fortress. The other companies were made up of Brno townsmen, nobility, students, craftsmen, and journeymen, who had to be trained in arms.

The deployment of the defenders was as follows. There were 389 soldiers at Špilberk, 259 men guarding the Jewish Gate, 265 men at the Brno Gate, 202 at the Veselá Gate, 133 defenders stationed at Petrov, and 66 students defending the area around the Church of St. Thomas. The remaining defenders were assigned to mining operations and repairs of the damaged fortifications.

This small group of defenders faced overwhelming odds, as the Swedes had up to 28,000 soldiers at their disposal at the time, and their numbers were later reinforced by an additional 12,000 men.

The situation and fighting around Špilberk

Since the 1630s, Špilberk was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Jacob George Ogilvy, of Scottish origin, who was directly subordinate to the city commander, Colonel de Souches. Reportedly, they did not get along well at first, but given the desperate situation, they began to cooperate exemplarily. Just before the start of the fighting, he had the roof of Špilberk torn down and began constructing a covered passage and modifying the fortifications.

The fortress was one of the strategic points most heavily attacked by the Swedish troops, particularly the covered passage and the western fortifications (Southwest Bastion).

On May 13, 1645, it was discovered that Swedish sappers had dug their way right up to the bastion and planned to tunnel under and mine the wall. As a result, Jean-Louis Raduite de Souches had a counter-mine (an underground gallery with a mine chamber) constructed and summoned builders, masons, and carpenters from Brno.

The general attack on the city on August 15, 1645

Torstenson set the date for the main attack as August 15. The actual combat action was preceded by intense artillery preparation from 5:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with two short breaks forced by heavy rain. The artillery fire heavily damaged the fortifications, especially at Petrov.

Between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., the Swedes launched a general assault at six points: at Petrov, around the Jewish Gate (now the mouth of Masaryk Street near the main train station, where a KFC restaurant is located today), behind the Jesuit college, behind the Church of St. Thomas, at Špilberk, and on the covered passage. The battle for Petrov lasted a full two hours, during which the defenders repelled three Swedish attacks. The defenders were just as successful at the Jewish Gate and at Špilberk. The worst situation was at the Church of St. Thomas. Here, some of the attackers managed to overcome the city walls. At the last moment, fifty dragoons intervened and halted their victorious advance. The fierce fighting ended in the evening hours, and the Swedes began to slowly withdraw the following day.

The outcome and consequences of the siege of Brno by the Swedish army in 1645

After an incredible 112 days of siege, Brno ultimately defended itself against the significant Swedish superiority, and on August 23, the enemy withdrew from Brno. During the fighting, about 250 defenders and 8,000 Swedish soldiers were killed. The city itself was severely damaged as a result of the fighting and the related fires, and some surrounding villages (including what are today the city districts of Zábřehovice, Maloměřice, Židenice, and Juliánov) were burned down and depopulated. Thanks to Brno's successful defence, Vienna was saved. Emperor Ferdinand III of Austria did not forget this heroic act of Brno and generously repaid the defenders and the city.

In 1646, the emperor issued the so-called Swedish Privilege, under which Brno received 30,000 gold coins from the land tax, was exempted from debt repayments for five years, and was also relieved from the obligation to billet military garrisons. The city was granted an enhanced coat of arms, which, in a simplified form, is still used today by the Brno-centre district.

Jean Louis Raduit de Souches was promoted to the rank of general and awarded 30,000 gold coins. He used part of this money to buy a house on today's Freedom Square (the so-called House of the Lords of Lipé). Jacob George Ogilvy was promoted to colonel and appointed lifelong commander of Špilberk. The participants in the defensive battles, both townspeople and serfs, were exempted from all taxes and obligations for six years. Brno became the administrative centre for the whole of Moravia.