

## CASTLES, SMALL CASTLES AND STRONGHOLDS IN THE STRAKONICE, BLATNÁ AND VODŇANY REGIONS

### *Introduction*

Medieval fortified feudal residences, in particular castles and castle ruins, often form an integral and characteristic part of the Czech landscape, are documents of and monuments to the relevant region's often-dramatic history, and are evidence of the artistic and cultural level of the particular era's society. With a view towards their required functional properties, the castles of lords and nobles were all built on sites enabling an effective defence, whether on high promontories or on terrain permitting an effective defence in the form of water. Depending on the castles' location, we thus differentiate between hill castles or lowland (marshland) castles.

Castles usually featured a complicated defensive system that over the ages was continually improved and expanded. Their layout – which included a residential palace with chapel, kitchen, stables and agricultural buildings – was often dominated by one or more towers that served as lookouts, defensive structures, or in some cases as a last refuge. By comparison, smaller fortified feudal residences in the countryside or attached to small towns – called *tvrz* (stronghold) and *hrádek* (“small castle”) – form another noteworthy category of this country's medieval and Renaissance architecture, the study of which is also more or less in its beginnings. Generally, the core of such strongholds was an isolated residential building with nearby curtes (agricultural estates) directly controlled from the feudal residence. As compared to strongholds, the term *hrádek* is used to describe small fortified compounds where the feudal lords' residences are often located in a less accessible location and which feature a more complex setup and defensive system. The line between stronghold and “small castle” is often quite unclear, and even written records from the era in question cannot be used to precisely define the difference between a larger *tvrz* and a smaller medieval *hrádek* or Renaissance *zámček* (“little chateau”); in some localities, the words *tvrz*, *hrádek*, and *hrad* (“castle”) are used interchangeably. The actual residence building itself usually possessed one or more upper floors, was of a rectangular layout or in the form of a tower, and was positioned either independently or along the circumference of the fortified area; in some cases, it consisted of a more complicated setup. The feudal family's residential spaces were most commonly located on the upper floors, while the cellars and ground floor were predominantly used for storage and other auxiliary functions. The construction of fortifications was required by the turbulent state of society at the time, which included not only military campaigns, but also conflicts among the feudal lords, especially between neighbouring lords. Thus, where possible and if the landscape near villages allowed them to do so, they established medieval strongholds on naturally protected promontories, on the edges of terraces, and along waterways. Naturally protected sites often determined the residences' layout, whereas lowland sites allowed for a more regular layout surrounded by moats, newly built ponds or lakes, or earthen bulwarks. Access to strongholds and small castles was similar to that of regular castles – most commonly via a bridge across the moat, with the portion near the gates designed as a drawbridge. The fortifications themselves usually consisted of stone ramparts or palisades, and the exterior of the stronghold buildings. Apparently, palisades were often used on the crown of the outer bulwarks. Differences in wealth among the builders of strongholds were reflected in the size of the residences and the complexity of their fortifications, as well as in the construction material used.

Castles, small castles, and strongholds were built in the Czech lands over a period of approximately 400 years – from the 12<sup>th</sup> century until the Thirty Years' War. This period saw changes in lifestyle, agricultural methods, and military technology. All these changes were reflected in the construction of castles, strongholds and small castles, and in their additional facilities. Nevertheless, during this period such compounds' basic configuration – as determined by their function as a fortified residence – persisted. In the later Modern era, the location and generally more modest size of strongholds led to their conversion into granaries or other agricultural facilities. In some cases, they were incorporated into newer chateaus, while many disappeared altogether, their locations commemorated only by the remnants of the earthen bulwarks, local place names, written records, or oral tradition.

The strongholds, small castles, and castles in the studied region form a representative cross-section of these types of medieval and Renaissance structures. Next to the more narrowly defined Strakonice region, the progressively adjusted historical boundaries also include the Vodňany region and the adjoining Blatná region to the north. While the rolling landscape along the Otava and Volyňka rivers near Strakonice and Volyně anticipates the nearby foothills of the Bohemian Forest, the area around Blatná – with the small Lomnice River, numerous small ponds, and wooded hillocks – is significantly less so. The Vodňany region in the district's southeastern spur – whose main watercourse is the Blanice River and which opens up onto the Budweis Basin – has its own specific character. There are more than 143 smaller feudal residences within the district's current borders that were built from the Romanesque period until the conclusion of the Renaissance. The district is also home to four castles: Strakonice, Střela, Blatná and Helfenburk.

By coincidence, the builders and owners of small residences were primarily members of the lower rural nobility known as *zeman* or *vladyka* (both akin to baronet or the landed gentry), *rytíř* (knight), or *panoš* (squire), and often bore distinctively Czech surnames or monikers such as Mazanec (Easter cake), Želízko (iron), Slepec (blind man), Mládenec (young man), Bejček (little bull), Kočka (cat) or Sádlo (lard), among others. The builders and owners of these residences originated from the old clan-based nobility and from members of the ducal retinue who had been given the land, along with the people who lived and worked on it, for their military or other services. In exchange for the acquired assets, some of them had to perform “acts of fealty” towards a nearby royal or noble castle, or towards a church institution. Elsewhere, they served lower feudal lords in various capacities, for instance as burgraves. The higher feudal classes – both secular (Blatná, Bavorov, Křikava) as well as religious (Volyně, Zábोř) – constructed strongholds and small castles in the Strakonice region to a significantly lesser extent, and only Všechlapy near Předslavice offers the possibility of a stronghold established by the king. Also, unlike regions located in close proximity to large royal towns, there is no evidence in the Strakonice region of a stronghold built or owned by rich burghers. On the other hand, the large differences in wealth among medieval landowners meant that many minor feudal lords – despite the fact that their name contained an epithet based on the location of their residence – did not have the finances to build a fortified stronghold, and they lived on and administered their curtes as yeoman farmers.

A surface study of the individual sites, combined with the study of written sources, literature, earlier illustrative documentation and maps, brought together information on 143 locations in Strakonice District that were home to medieval feudal residences – whether strongholds, small castles and castles, but also simple dwellings or various transitional forms of housing. Especially in those instances where the residences have disappeared without a trace, written sources do not allow us to reliably determine the extent to which these were fortified compounds, or which residences were simply part of a rural curtis. Also, this number is most certainly not final. In some municipalities, the location of the feudal residence changed with time (Bělčice, Mladějovice, Radomyšl, Slaník, Štěchovice). The example of the otherwise unknown castle near Petrovice shows the frequent lack of basic written documents for several

sites. On the other hand, the curtes of religious feudal lords or higher secular lords may have had a bailiff nearby the residences (as in Litochovice) that might have been at least partially defensible.

The focal point of this work is to provide a catalogue of feudal residences in the Strakonice, Vodňany and Blatná regions that describes not only the history of the individual sites on the basis of written sources and the often scattered literature, but also presents their current state and an outline of their transformation over the course of history. Future archaeological studies and excavations, a detailed study of archival materials, and monographic publications based on precisely focused work will certainly provide additional important details. Nevertheless, it can be said that the findings of the surface study of medieval and Renaissance strongholds, castles, and small castles performed in Strakonice District expand our knowledge today regarding the character and form of these types of structures, offer new insights and conclusions, and in many cases correct or clarify claims made in the earlier literature.

### *The emergence and beginnings of feudal residences in the Strakonice, Blatná and Vodňany regions*

The beginnings of settlement of today's Strakonice district reach back deep into prehistory. According to archaeological investigations, by the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries the area was home to a large number of Slavic sites. A report that Duke Bretislaus gave the town of Škúdra to Břevnov monastery in 1045 reminds us that even quite remote areas of today's district had been settled by the 11<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. The basic plans of settlement were undoubtedly laid down during the Early Middle Ages, and from the beginning were significantly influenced by ancient long-distance trade routes. Passing along the margins of the region and leading north from Prachatices via Vodňany and Písek was the Golden Road, whose beginnings can be dated to as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Definitely of great importance to the central Strakonice region was the road's Vimperk branch, one of whose variants led via Strakonice to Blatná. Also associated with the Golden Road was the "Březnice" (or Vintřov) road to southwestern Bohemia. Another road that should be mentioned is the road to Linz, which led from the pass at Vyšší Brod towards Netolice. Important intersections of long-distance roads with local roads associated with river fords existed in Strakonice, Volyně, Vodňany and Blatná. After the destruction of the Slavníks' domain, in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century the area fell into the hands of the Přemyslids, who in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries gave extensive property holdings to church institutions: settlements of the Knights Hospitaller in the broad surroundings of Horažďovice, the Prague chapter's *újezd* (territorial units) near Volyně, and the assets of Prague's Monastery of St. George in the northwestern part of today's district and near Vodňany, among others. The Bavars, a south Bohemian feudal dynasty, settled in the Strakonice region around the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and rapidly acquired an exceedingly important position in the region, where they established an enormous estate that, in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, even included Blatná.

Starting approximately in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century, numerous smaller feudal residences arose between (and even on) the territorial holdings of the religious feudal lords and the House of Strakonice (the Bavars). In the Late Middle Ages, the number of such residences continued to increase and became an exceptional feature of the entire area of today's country.

The oldest examples of early medieval Slavic feudal residences in the Czech Republic are found on the territory of Greater Moravia, where smaller feudal residences existed from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, delineated within hillforts by separate fortifications. The natural continuation of the Greater Moravia culture in Bohemia resulted in the use of similar, smaller fortified settlement forms at Přemyslid and Slavník hillforts. According to an archeologically documented

example from the 10<sup>th</sup> century at the Slavník settlement of Libice near Poděbrady, the oldest feudal residence consisted of a storied, predominantly wooden, building connected by a footbridge to an adjacent proprietary church. One can imagine a similar layout for the oldest residence at Radomyšl (located on the edge of a slope on the southern face of the Church of St. Martin), whose wooden foundations were partially identified by archaeological excavations. A Romanesque residence was probably founded here sometime after the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. A similar linkage to small churches definitely existed at later residences from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, such as those in Újezdec near Bělčice, Čestice, and Dobrš.

In the Strakonice region, two examples of smaller fortified rural compounds from the early Přemyslid era that, in terms of location and character, are based on fortified structures from the Hillfort Period are Srdov and Radošovice. The fortified location above the Volyňka River in the middle of Radošovice was encircled by bulwarks; according to the Late Hillfort pottery found on the site, it dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> century. The only slightly smaller stronghold site of Srdov near Štřekeň has an irregular oval shape defined by moats and the steep banks of the Otava River; the site's earlier Slavic settlement layers from the Late Hillfort period are dated to the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Entirely unique evidence of the existence of a Romanesque water castle in Strakonice district is offered by the remains of a structure found in the courtyard of Blatná Chateau, which was probably built as early as in the final third of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and which is thought to have consisted of a central storied chapel with four apses built above a quadratic layout of the ground floor. The chapel formed part of the palace wing that enclosed today's courtyard.

On the cusp between the Romanesque and Gothic styles, and during the early Gothic era in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the region saw the construction of several small castles on elevated promontories, including what is probably the oldest construction phase of Volyně's capitular stronghold (identified by archaeological excavations), the residence of Bavor III above the Blanice valley in Bavorov, the "Slepičí hrádek" (Chicken Castle) near Bělčice, and the defunct *hrádek* above Mladějovice. As part of the early Gothic renovation of the church in Radomyšl in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the residence of the by then high church authorities was apparently moved beyond the eastern end of the extended church, which has been partially preserved in the masonry of today's parish granary. The residence had the nature of a protected monastic chancery that also functioned as a parish house. The residences of the Strakonice region's landed gentry towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century were probably predominantly wooden—whether they started out as fortified structures as in Doubravice near Volyně or in Strunkovice, or whether they consisted of curtes buildings as they did perhaps in Blanice, Jinín, Střídec, Nebřehovice, Truskovice and Víška.

The water castle in Strakonice represents an important separate chapter. It was built starting in the 1220s on the site of an earlier Early Middle Ages burial site and Romanesque proprietary church. As early as in 1243, the residence's builder, Bavor I of Strakonice, dedicated half of the castle complex to the Knights Hospitaller. Later in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the owners of both halves of the castle expanded their shares independently to what forms today's layout. The eastern half was taken up by the knights' commandry with a church today consecrated to St. Prokop, an ambulatory, a capitular hall and other required operations. The Bavors' early Gothic palace with a corner tower was built in the corner of the castle's western half on top of the earlier remains, and in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the massive outer ramparts with the tower known as "Rumpál" ("winch") were constructed on the western side.

The beginnings of nearby Střela Castle may date back even further than the castle in Strakonice, but the site is still awaiting at least elementary archaeological excavations.

*The 14<sup>th</sup> century – the peak period in the construction of medieval fortified residences*

During the generally fruitful period of Luxembourg rule during the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the short period before the Hussite Revolution, there was an unprecedented increase in the number of strongholds and castles in the studied area, built predominantly of stone, and their characteristic massiveness altered the picture of the landscape. Within the diverse typological mixture of newly-built strongholds and small castles, several earlier forms continue to be found – for instance, those with lower circumferential buildings within a ring of ramparts. The predominant type, however, are strongholds and small castles whose core is formed by a massive residential tower or a distinctive palace building predominantly rectangular in shape. With both these basic types of new small-scale feudal residences, the dominant buildings stood in the middle or along the edge of the castle or stronghold site. In addition to these basic types, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century there also naturally existed other, more complicated forms resulting from the renovation of or addition to earlier compounds that, depending on the builder's wealth or political status, included additional structures such as tower gates, chapels, or other residential, agricultural, or defensive structures.

The total number of strongholds within the borders of today's Strakonice district more than doubled in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The small-castle type, featuring a massive residential tower inside the fortified compound, is represented in particular by Křikava, founded around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps also the small castle near Petrovice featuring a similar basic layout. Of other tower strongholds in the Strakonice region, the most distinctive are those in Buzice and Dobrš, featuring dominant towers along the circumference of the fortified stronghold sites. The Buzice stronghold, which was built on a rocky promontory along the Lomnice sometime towards the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, still features the original four-storied trapezoidal tower in the corner of the almost square-shaped ramparts. A large part of the stronghold's quadrangle is surrounded by a deep moat bordered by a bulwark. By comparison, the square tower at Dobrš – also built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century – was apparently not enclosed within the quadrangle of the tall stone ramparts until later. The preserved tower and adjacent sections of ramparts in Doubravice near Volyně probably date to the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but it did not form the residence's main living quarters. The tower was originally entered via a footbridge on the first storey above ground level from the no longer extant palace. Based on the remains of a corner fireplace and a niche for a privy, the tower's top floor contained a residential room. At the stronghold in Kalenice, known as Hvíždalka, which is still surrounded by a double moat, the tower's 14<sup>th</sup>-century core was probably preserved within later renovations.

Of palace-type strongholds in the Strakonice, Vodňany and Blatná regions, especially notable is the massive stronghold in Volyně, which undoubtedly reached today's extent even prior to the Hussite Revolution. This stronghold of the Prague provost, located on an ancient settlement site on the edge of a raised terrace above the banks of the Volyňka River in the immediate vicinity of a church, was defended in part by steep slopes and in part by deep moats that can still be made out today. Archaeological excavations have shown that in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, today's structure was adjoined to the north by a second wing that had been built below the level of the rocky terrain.

Other palace-type strongholds in the region include the former feudal residence in Uzeničky, whose core expanded gradually until the second half of the subsequent century. A similar basic residential building apparently formed the core of the strongholds in Cehnice and Kadov as well. Also dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century is the "Old Chateau" in Libějovice, whose quadripartite layout comes close in size to being a castle. The palace and agricultural wings adjoined the outer fortifications, with the main building probably preserved within the masonry of today's western wing. The originally expansive complex of the medieval stronghold and curia in Lnáře also had the features of a water castle.

Built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century on a promontory still enclosed by large ponds, its preserved sections include the massive outer masonry of the lower portion of the tower gate and segments of the northern ramparts with a fragment of the round rampart tower.

Also dating without doubt to the 14<sup>th</sup> century are today's chateau in Škvořetice – the successor to a regular quadrangular water stronghold originally surrounded by moats and bulwarks – and the strongholds in Čestice, Čichtice, Drahonice, Chelčice, Kraselov, Lažany, Tažovice, Předslavice, Slaník, Sodoměř and many other localities whose remains have survived or that are recorded in written sources. Because of their later destruction or radical renovation, we for now know nothing about their original form.

The group of villages in the district's southernmost region which received a so-called *královácké privilegium* (privileges for a group of free farmers) from Elizabeth of Bohemia in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century (1315) apparently had a unique character. The administrative centre of these villages consisted of the residences of bailiffs and reeves, and sometimes may have taken the form of strongholds, such as in Všechlapy near Předslavice.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the map of the studied area comes to include also the massive newly built noble castle of Helfenburk near Bavorov. The need for this castle first appeared around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the Bavors' domain was acquired by the Rožmberks and it became necessary to create a new administrative centre. Thus in 1355, brothers Petr, Jošt, Oldřich and Jan of Rožmberk asked Charles IV for permission to build a new castle. The High Middle Ages castle was erected in a dominant position not far from Bavorov. Its rectangular core with two lateral palaces echoes the twin-palace layout of Maidštejn (or Menštejn) Castle near Český Krumlov, which Charles IV had permitted the Rožmberks to build six years earlier. Adjoining Helfenburk's core section was an almost semi-circular segment of ramparts consisting entirely of agricultural buildings. A similar irregular fortified section was attached to the northern side of the palace core with its round isolated recessed tower. Construction activities in the 14<sup>th</sup> century also included work on the two earlier water castles in Strakonice and Blatná. While Strakonice Castle, still jointly owned by the Knights Hospitaller and the Bavors, saw the construction of additions to the circumferential structures and a strengthening of the fortifications, Blatná grew from its Romanesque beginnings to approximately that of today's layout. The castle compound apparently was significantly altered during the second half of the preceding century, when Blatná had been acquired by the Bavors of Strakonice. The Bavors held Blatná for the entire 14<sup>th</sup> century. After the castle's core was renovated, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the outer ward's fortifications were replaced by a new stone rampart that defined today's circumference of the castle compound, although today's massive gateway tower was still missing. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the castle core at Blatná thus took the shape of two palaces facing one other; between them was an earlier wing with a Romanesque chapel. To the east was a separate outer ward situated at a level nearly three meters lower.

There is no doubt that the final castle compound of Střela near Strakonice also underwent clear architectural alterations during the High Gothic period and later that have been preserved in parts of today's masonry work of the castle core, beneath its upper earthwork and in parts of the retaining wall of the outer ward (the lower castle).

### *Late gothic residences in the Strakonice, Blatná and Vodňany regions*

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the greater Strakonice area was witness to several socio-political struggles and changes. During the Hussite Revolution, the territory belonging to the Order of Malta was an island of Catholicism. On the

Hussite side during this time were Vodňany and Horažďovice, the latter on the boundaries of today's district. Střela Castle to the west of Strakonice was home to another follower of the Hussites, Heřman of Landštejn, and Řepice and Sudoměř belonged to the Hussite hejtman Chval of Řepice. Near Sudoměř to the east of Strakonice, Jan Žižka led his first successful battle against the Catholic nobility. When the Order of Malta's grand priory in Prague was burnt down in 1420, it moved its seat and the residence of the grand prior to Strakonice, which the Hussites failed to conquer. Although the Hussite regiments passed through the Strakonice region several times, the order maintained its authority throughout the entire period and eradicated any attempts at threatening its assets on its estates and on those of the allied nobility.

At the outset of the Hussite Revolution, direct actions also affected Volyně, which the Hussites conquered in 1420, and possibly also the small castle near Petrovice and Křikava and apparently also the Srdov stronghold, which at that time disappear from written records.

In 1432, the office of Strakonice's grand prior was taken up by Václav of Michalovice, a Catholic hardliner with support from the strongholds in Miloňovice and Nebřehovice, who provided significant enforcements for the noblemen's alliance that fought at the tragic Battle of Lipany.

The subsequent era in the Strakonice region is marked by numerous internal conflicts, and in 1443–1444 Vodňany and its surroundings suffered significant damage. In 1449, the so-called Strakonice Union headed by Grand Prior Václav of Michalovice, Oldřich of Rožmberk and his son Jindřich was established in opposition to George of Poděbrady. The relatively short war, during which the stronghold in Uzeničky was burnt down (belonging to Racek of Dlouhá Ves), came to an end with the Union's defeat near Rokycany in 1450. In the 1460s, new conflicts erupted between members of the anti-Poděbrady Zelená Hora Alliance (founded in 1465) and supporters of George of Poděbrady, which led to the destruction of the strongholds in Mladějovice, Droužetice and Kraselov. During further battles in 1467–1468, the forces from Strakonice invaded the estate of Zachář of Štěkeň; Vlach of Březí set fire to the Nihošovice stronghold near Volyně; and troops from Vodňany burnt down the village of Jinín. At some point in the early 1480s, Racek of Kocov ransacked Radomyšl, was named a scourge on the land, and was besieged in Horažďovice. At approximately the same time, the stronghold in Chelčice (1471) was burnt down by troops from Vodňany.

The situation in the Strakonice region settled down somewhat after 1490 under the new king, Vladislaus II (1471–1516). After a quarter century of peace, minor unrest accompanied by acts of aggression and breaches of the peace erupted again in the 1520s and 1530s under the weak rule of Louis II (1516–1526). In 1520, punitive expeditions against scourges on the land from Vodňany, Tábor, Budějovice and Písek marched past Strakonice and burnt down the stronghold in Doubravice near Volyně (belonging to Václav Přeč), Kalenice (belonging to Václav Sádlo of Kladrubce), and nearby Vojnice. That same year, the stronghold in Nestánice was destroyed as well. The unrest continued, however, and because the rebuilt strongholds in Doubravice and Kalenice were again settled by "scourges," a decade later in 1530 the regional hejtman ordered them neutralized. Almost 300 men from Písek, Sušice and Vodňany again conquered both strongholds, burnt them down, and took their garrisons captive. By royal decree, the owners of the destroyed strongholds were compensated 500 threescore of Bohemian groschen.

The constant unrest in the Strakonice region during almost the entire Late Middle Ages clearly influenced the construction and renovation of strongholds. The more peaceful situation in the Blatná region allowed for large-scale construction activities both on the castles as well as in town. In other parts of today's Strakonice district too, the more complex social conditions did not prevent an additional limited increase in the number of strongholds, accom-

panied by the renovation, completion, and expansion of earlier structures, often with the addition of more advanced defensive equipment. As a result, in the Late Gothic period the earlier stronghold in Volyně was surrounded by a new defensive system with a corner bastion. Large-scale construction also affected strongholds and small castles in Dobrš, Lnáře and Libějovice. The Late Gothic construction phase in Dobrš gradually resulted in high ramparts with a protruding tower gate near the quadrangle's old tower, with the later addition of further wings and additions. A possible new addition to the dense layout of the stronghold in Libějovice was the tower gate and the angularly situated corner bastion. During the Late Gothic era, the Drahonice stronghold, which had been built sometime during the reign of Wenceslaus IV, reached the size of a large quadrangle delineated by palace buildings and ramparts with a round corner tower. Written records document the extensive Late Gothic renovation of the stronghold in Řepice at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, which resulted in numerous new vaulted residential rooms and stables, a new courtyard and a brewery. There is also no doubt that renovations also took place at the strongholds in Cehnice, Škvořetice, Vojnice and the earlier feudal residence below the church in Záboř.

In the Late Gothic period (i.e., from the end of the Hussite Revolution until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century), new stronghold compounds were built in Bělčice, Čekanice, Droužetice, Hostišovice, Kladruby, Mladějovice and Slaník, among other places. The new stronghold in Bělčice, which was apparently built in conjunction with the granting of town rights in 1484, is preserved in the masonry of the curtis' former residential building. Similarly preserved are the Late Gothic stronghold at the curtis in Mladějovice (later renovated in the Renaissance style) and the tower core of the stronghold in Hostišovice (converted into a granary). In 1476, King Vladislaus gave Markéta of Dvorec permission to build a new stronghold in Slaník. This building and other Late Gothic strongholds in the Strakonice region have all disappeared or been radically renovated.

Several large castle compounds in the studied region underwent significant changes in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. After 1402, the massive impregnable castle in Strakonice was fully owned by the Knights Hospitaller. This consolidation of ownership led to the renovation and expansion of the original Bavor palace into the new residence of the grand prior. Also, according to archaeological excavations in the large courtyard, the transverse dividing wing was later torn down. The move of the grand prior's residence from the order's home in Prague's Lesser Town (destroyed by the Hussites) to Strakonice Castle must surely have led to the feverish strengthening of its defensive capabilities, and so Jan Žižka's later attempt to take the castle proved unsuccessful. Later, however, the fortifications of the northern outer ward along the banks of the Otava were renovated with the construction of a new western gate and a round artillery bastion.

The surviving portals in the lower part of the castle in nearby Střela date to the era bordering on the Early Renaissance.

The feverish development of artillery was accompanied by extensive architectural changes in the defensive structure of the High Gothic Helfenburk Castle near Bavorov. These were undoubtedly the work of the famous military expert Václav Vlček of Čenov who, over the course of his relatively brief ownership of the castle (1477–1483), renovated the outer ward in front of the palace compound into a protruding fortress with a series of artillery bastions. He also reinforced the fortifications of the large rear courtyard with the addition of stonework on top of the merlons of the earlier battlement. The most significant Late Gothic changes, however, took place at Blatná Castle. During the Hussite Revolution and the later civil wars, increased attention was surely paid to the defensive system of this Catholic foothold. A particularly important act during the Late Gothic era was the construction of today's entrance tower with its remarkable painted decoration. The agricultural buildings behind the entrance tower were gradually replaced

by palace buildings including a new castle chapel. The Late Gothic construction activities at Blatná culminated in Benedikt Ried's grandiose renovation of the eastern palace in 1515–1530. The unique architectural composition with two-sided bay windows is one of this architect's greatest works.

### *Castles, small castles and strongholds in the Strakonice, Blatná and Vodňany regions during the Renaissance*

The Renaissance made itself quite significantly felt in the region under review. The first traces of the new style soon appeared with Benedikt Ried's work at Blatná Castle. Its impact on rural strongholds, however, was quite uneven – at first only in minor details and only later via typical architectural elements such as multi-story gables, arcades and “*hřebínkový*” vaults (a type of ribbed vault decorated with stucco crests). The Renaissance's most distinctive manifestation in the region, however, is in the form of sgraffito façades, often with ornamental motifs, that began to cover earlier as well as newer buildings at feudal residences and did not shun even agricultural buildings and fortifications. In many places, the Renaissance does not find full expression until deep into the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the new style was often not fully developed at rural feudal residences until after the failed uprising of a part of the nobility against Ferdinand I in 1547, which resulted in the confiscation of several villages belonging to the royal town of Písek, including Petrovice, Rojice, Brusy, Malá Turná, Velká Turná, Škúdra, Vojnice, Strašice, and Vítkov near Štěkeň.

Construction efforts in the Strakonice, Blatná and Vodňany regions during the 16<sup>th</sup> century were focused primarily on increasing the level of habitation of a large number of local strongholds. To this end, several strongholds were radically renovated – e.g. in Dobrš (including a wide range of agricultural facilities), Libčovice, Lnáře, Hostišovice, Kadov, Tažovice, Ohrazenice and elsewhere. The use of typical ornamental sgraffito in Dobrš in 1597 and concurrently in Ohrazenice and Štěchovice is reminiscent of the work of the same façade group. Around the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the stronghold in Tchořovice was converted into a grandiose four-wing residence decorated with rich sgraffito work containing figural as well as ornamental motifs. The various types of sgraffito on the façades of the stronghold in Cehnice, combined with the clearly visible joining, indicate that Renaissance alterations were done in several phases. In Sedlice in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the old stronghold was expanded and converted into a three-wing chateau with an enclosed forecourt that was defended by regular moats and bulwarks, and a pond.

The earlier residence of the Hodějovský family in Řepice near Strakonice was converted into an exceptional Renaissance compound, of which only fragments remain today. As a result, the extraordinary nature of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century alterations is documented only by the massive granary with its storied gables, the corner tower of the “botanical garden”, the Renaissance gable on the ground-floor agricultural building, and the fragmentary remnants of other buildings in the various farmsteads at the core of today's settlement. The renovations of and additions to the strongholds in Lnáře, Kadov, Libějovice and Mladějovice are felt in the landscape and townscape primarily through their multi-story gables.

The few newly-built small feudal residences in the Strakonice and Blatná regions during this period consist of, for the most part, storied buildings with less distinctive fortress-like elements that are more reminiscent of chateaus. Out of habit, written records continue to call these small residential structures “strongholds” because they do not possess the typical characteristics of chateaus. These new buildings also differ from earlier isolated defensible fortresses and later baroque chateaus in that they are directly tied to the operations of an adjoining agricultural curtilage and are located

within it or in one of its corners. The approximately ten identified newly-constructed buildings – most of which were later further renovated and altered – include the stronghold (noble house) in Bratronice near Záboř from the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which was built at the same time as the surviving agricultural buildings of the adjoining curtis, which feature traces of sgraffito rustication, Renaissance-era multi-story gables and bossage portals. The massive building of the converted stronghold in Čepřovice, with its preserved “*hřebínkový*” vaults, surprises one with the remains of unusually large-scale sgraffito squares on the courtyard façade.

A classical example of a Renaissance stronghold – essentially a small chateau without any fortification elements – is the former feudal residence in the ancient village of Pole, first mentioned in 1227 as the property of Prague’s monastery of St. George. To this day, this massive building with articulated gables erected at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century looms over the rest of the village and forms a dominant feature in the landscape. The original layout included a large central hallway similar to the one in Bratronice, with a stairway and rooms symmetrically situated on either side. The floor plan of both strongholds emulates the layout used previously at the Rožmberks’ Kratochvíle.

Any overview of Renaissance-era construction activities in Strakonice district must include the unique form taken by the small feudal residence of the bailiff of the Prague chapter, which has survived in Litochovice. The “bailiff’s house” (no. 1) – apparently built before the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – is an unfortified one-storey structure with a cellar underneath part of the building and a chapel that was added at a later date.

As elsewhere in Bohemia, the Thirty Years’ War led to the decline of the original function of most strongholds in this region as well, and marked the beginning of their physical disappearance from the local landscape.

Like smaller feudal residences, castle compounds in the studied region also gradually lost their function as defensible feudal residences. The latest of these, Helfenburk, was still a well-armed fortress as late as in 1547, but less than a half-century later it is described as “abandoned” and had begun to turn into a ruin.

The remaining three castles, all of them completed in the Late Gothic style, were not altered significantly with the addition of Renaissance elements. If anything, greater attention was focused on additions to the interiors. Exterior alterations include sgraffito rustication at Blatná and fragmentary rustication on the outer shell and over the courtyard gallery in the lower part of Sřela Castle.

As for Strakonice Castle, also conserved in its medieval form, written records document Renaissance renovations to the interior of the grand prior’s palace and apparently more extensive construction activities in the castle’s northern wing. The medieval fortress’s appearance in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century can be seen in Willenberg’s woodcut and can be deduced by comparison with texts from visitations made during this era.

### *The further fate of strongholds, castles, and small castles in the Strakonice, Blatná and Vodňany regions*

The studied region felt the impact of the Thirty Years’ War as early as in 1618–1620, when the imperial armies began to occupy southern Bohemia. The imperial campaigns (including the Hungarian cavalry) particularly ravaged the estates and residences of members of the nobility that had been loyal to the estates – among others, Štěkeň and Cehnice (the Malovec family), Sřela Castle near Horažďovice (Boubínský of Újezd), Osek and Kbelnice (Čejk of Olbramovice), Řepice (Bernard Hodějovský of Hodějov) and Čestice (Jan Jiří of Hodějov). Subsequent punishments and confiscations following the Battle of White Mountain especially affected non-Catholic lords and members of the landed gentry (*zemans*), several of whom quickly emigrated – among them Jan Vilém of Malovice and Krejnice, Smil

Hodějovský of Hodějov, and the owner of Kraselov, Bohuslav Boubínský of Újezd. Only a small number of estates in the region were not confiscated – the Order of Malta’s Strakonice, the domain of Volyně (which was returned to the Prague chapter), and the properties belonging to the houses of Šternberk and Chřepický of Modlíškovice. Abandoned residences of lesser architectural and economical quality were left to their fate, with the ruin material eventually being used for the construction of new agricultural or residential buildings. The majority of newly built purely Renaissance strongholds or earlier residences that had been radically renovated during the Renaissance continued to be operational and could be adapted as chateaus in the baroque or later styles (Bratronice, Čekanice, Dřešínek, Lažany, Libějovice, Sedlice, Škvořetice, Tažovice, Vojnice). Most of these compounds continued to serve various residential, social and administrative purposes. The greatest chance for continued physical survival was by strongholds whose core consisted of solidly built Gothic towers and palaces; after (in most cases) the demolition of ramparts, bulwarks and moats, they were almost without exception converted into granaries. These adaptations involved in particular the demolition of the structure’s interior dividers (both horizontal and vertical) and the construction of new, low-slung stories with wooden ceilings and small rectangular windows. In this form and with new agricultural utilization, several strongholds and small castles that are among this country’s most important examples of their kind were preserved in the Strakonice region. These include former feudal residences, or portions thereof, in Buzice, Kadov, Doubravice near Volyně, Tchořovice, Uzeničky and Hostišovice. These buildings continue to perform the function they were given (in most cases) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; today they await renovation. Only the stronghold in Volyně has been adapted to a different use – as the local museum. Besides residences that were converted into chateaus and important medieval complexes that have survived as granaries, fragments of varying sizes have been preserved from another ca. 20 strongholds and for approximately the same number of residences we at least know their former location. For more than 30 small feudal residences within the district, the location is not reliably known.

Of the region’s castle compounds, the one most affected by the Thirty Years’ War was Sřela. After being plundered in 1619, towards the end of the war the castle was burnt down by the Swedes. Since then, the upper castle has remained a ruin, while the lower portion was rebuilt as a Jesuit residence, with the subsequent addition of a visually dominant chapel. Today, the lower castle is privately owned. The water castle in Blatná was renovated under the supervision of preservationists. Here, the Thirty Years’ War left the castle interior plundered and devastated. The compound’s current appearance is the result of baroque renovations and additions that culminated in architectural alterations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These changes were performed by the members of the Hildprant noble family, whose heirs received the castle during restitution after 1989.

The massive castle compound in Strakonice was also plundered during the Thirty Years’ War and had to be repaired afterwards. It was owned by the Order of Malta until 1925. The castle was opened to the town with the construction of a new grand prior’s residence in front of the castle, but other architectural alterations affected almost exclusively the northern wing. Since 1945, this important cultural heritage site has been owned by the town of Strakonice, and its remarkable features continue to be renovated to this day.

The survey and closer study of castles, small castles and strongholds in the Strakonice, Blatná and Vodňany region have allowed for the identification and summary of the architectural, historical, cultural and documentary value of fully or partially preserved medieval feudal residences, but have also helped to locate numerous other residences that have completely disappeared from the landscape. The work has also shown that, since these structures are often the only reminders of our ancestors’ life and culture in the relevant communities, they or their former sites urgently require greater attention and preservation.

