

Litomyšl (Czech Republic)

No 901

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Litomyšl Castle
<i>Location</i>	Province of Bohemia, East Bohemian Region
<i>State Party</i>	Czech Republic
<i>Date</i>	29 June 1998

Justification by State Party

The castle at Litomyšl is one of the foremost representatives of the Bohemian and Moravian arcade castles built in the 16th century, which developed this architectural idea of Italian origin and brought it to an incomparable grandeur. It was an architectonic analysis of Litomyšl Castle which led to the new and convincing knowledge that the arcade castles in the Czech lands are an independent genre within the European Renaissance style and that these arcade castles are rooted deeply in the Italian Renaissance, but conceived independently and with great creative originality. Litomyšl Castle has an important place in the large group of these castles not only because of its high artistic level but also because of the considerable extent to which the original Renaissance architecture has been preserved. An almost intact appearance of the exterior with richly articulated gables and both ornamental and figural *sgraffiti* is not to be found in any other building whose style approaches that of Litomyšl Castle. The exceptional level of its plastic arts and architecture, together with the authenticity and originality of the whole and the details is the reason for the leading position of this castle within central European – or, indeed, all European – architecture.

Criterion i

A comparison between Renaissance arcade castles in central Europe, Germany, the Alpine countries, the Danube basin, and Poland is especially important.

Germany, whose arcade castles have an architectonic structure different from that in the Czech lands, is excluded from this group of countries for that reason. Austria, however, remains in the group because it has several valuable examples that came into being in parallel with the development in the Czech lands, but only rarely attained the high level of the key buildings in the Czech lands. Polish examples are rare. In central Europe the Czech Republic has undoubted re-emergence as to the great number, the great variety, the architectonic wealth, and the high level of the works of plastic arts.

The most complicated problem remains, namely a comparison between the arcade castles in the Czech lands and architectonic examples in their country of origin, Italy. It would seem at first glance that the quantitative superiority, great variety, and the highest architectonic level of the Italian arcade palaces is unique beyond any doubt and cannot be questioned as regards certain priorities of style. This was the problem on which intensive interest focused and extensive comparative study was carried out. It has become evident that, owing to their wonderful purity of style, the Moravian and Bohemian castles link directly to Italian examples, yet without their relationship being that of provincial epigons. They represent architectural works directly linking with older Italian examples and developing them. The arcade castles of the Czech lands represent the complete architectonic culmination of Italian examples. The development of the motifs of vaulted arcades to embrace two storeys, which is rare in Italy, is very impressive.

Litomyšl is not unique among the Bohemian and Moravian castles with arcaded courtyards: many of them have splendid architectonic features and excellent purity of form. However, among them only Litomyšl Castle has preserved its unimpaired appearance with admirable gables, whose silhouettes are complicated and which also have distant Italian roots, but which were given new dynamism and endless variety of form in their Czech home.

From these points of view, Litomyšl Castle has to be considered a unique masterpiece within European Renaissance architecture and one with a full inalienable claim to being put on the World Heritage List. This masterpiece excels in itself, but also represents a monumental ending to the all-European development of a certain kind of Renaissance palace and castle. **Criterion ii**

Litomyšl Castle represents a monumental key link in the all-European development of a certain kind of Renaissance palace and castle. The castle does not stand alone, but is surrounded by all the facilities needed to accomplish the prestigious as well as the economic mission of the whole complex. A garden and a park are contiguous with the castle, and a brewery, a riding-school, stables, and a coach-house are in the first courtyard, all of them compactly laid out. The whole is testimony to the life of the aristocracy from the 16th to the 19th century.

Criterion iv

Litomyšl played an important role in the cultural development of the Czech state, especially in the Middle Ages and in more recent times. Jan of Středa, an eminent personality at the court of the King-Emperor Charles IV in the third quarter of the 14th century, was Bishop of Litomyšl and the initiator of the creation of works of art of European importance. In 1567 the Litomyšl domain was acquired by the Pernštejns, one of the most prominent aristocratic families in the Czech state. Litomyšl was also the castle where the last member of this family, Lady Frebonie, died in 1646. Bedřich Smetana, one of the best Czech composers of all time, was born in the Litomyšl castle brewery in 1824; his compositions are still played in the concert halls of cultural countries throughout the world.

Criterion vi

[Note The “Justification” section in the dossier goes on to detail the qualities of the first courtyard of the castle and its buildings, but these will be treated as integral with the castle itself in this evaluation.]

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

History and Description

History

There has been a settlement since at least the 10th century at Litomyšl, which is located at an important communications junction on the main road between Bohemia and Moravia, with its fortified core on the hill where the castle now stands.

There is known to have been a small church dedicated to St Clement on this site, and a Premonstratensian monastery was founded in the town in the first half of the 12th century. The monastery was closed when the bishopric was created in 1344, its buildings being shared out between the bishop and the chapter. The document of 1398 relating to this partition contains the first reference to an “old palace” and castle at Litomyšl. Archaeological and historical investigations have revealed remnants of the medieval structure beneath and within the Renaissance castle.

In 1425 the town was conquered after a siege by the Hussites, who razed all the ecclesiastical buildings to the ground. Restoration was undertaken at the end of the Hussite Wars by the new owners of Litomyšl, the Kostka family of Postupice, and details of this building have also been shown by recent investigations. It was damaged by fire in 1460 and again in 1546; after the second fire, the castle was confiscated by the king, but it was almost completely gutted after a third fire, in 1560.

The ruined structure was granted in 1567 to the Vratislav family of Pernštejn, who received a royal grant to reconstruct it. Work began in 1568 under the supervision of Jan Baptista Avostalis (Giovanni Battista Avostalli), who was joined by his brother Oldřich (Ulrico). Most of the work had been completed by 1580.

A fire in 1635 caused only slight damage to the upper storey of the castle and this was quickly repaired. The architect František Maximilián Kaňka was responsible for considerable modifications from 1719 onwards in the High Baroque style. Fire struck yet again in 1775, and the repairs involved some remodelling. Major alterations took place in the interior in 1792-96, to the designs of Jan Kryštof Habich, but he was careful to preserve the fine Renaissance gables. Since that time there have been no changes of any consequence in the structure, design, or decoration of the castle.

The first courtyard formed part of the original fortified settlement. The buildings associated with it were all built or rebuilt during the course of the modifications that the castle underwent over time, and this is reflected in their architectural styles.

Description

The castle is a four-winged, three-storeyed structure with an asymmetrical disposition. The western wing is the largest, whilst the southern wing is no more than a two-storeyed arcaded gallery to close the square second courtyard (a feature that is unique to Litomyšl). This groin-vaulted arcading continues round the western and eastern sides of the

courtyard. The south-eastern corner of the eastern wing contains the castle chapel. A smaller oblong courtyard is enclosed within the northern wing, which has a slender polygonal tower in its north-eastern corner.

All the external facades have Renaissance articulation. They are mainly uniform and so only generalized descriptions are given here. Biforate windows with reveals and stone lintels are located above the plinth on the ground floor.

The main portal is situated off-centre on the south façade. It has a semicircular arch and is flanked by double rusticated embedded columns. The flat lintel over the entrance is surmounted by the coats of arms of the Pernštejn and Manriques de Lara families.

The first and second floors also have biforate windows with decorated stone reveals and hood mouldings retained by volute brackets. On the southern wing the second-floor windows are replaced by an open arcaded gallery. The polygonal end of the chapel, which protrudes on the east façade, has twin triforate lancet windows. A low fragment of a polygonal turret with a pyramidal roof has been preserved alongside the chapel. All the facades are covered with *sgraffiti*, imitating diamond and rusticated ashlar, in varying states of conservation

A lunette cornice has been restored on the southern facades of the eastern and western wings and on the western façade; traces can also be discerned on the other facades. Above the cornice is an attic gable articulated by pilasters with small windows; this is interrupted only over the arcaded gallery on the southern wing. Highly decorated broken gables articulated by embossed pillars are set into an attic gable. The finials are set on squat bases, short pillars, and in the vertices of small attachments.

The second (interior) courtyard is lined on the eastern, southern, and western sides with semicircular arcades. On the ground floor they rest on rusticated square pillars and the arches and spandrels are also rusticated. The first and second floors have column arcades: columns with *entasis* are set on feet, plinths, and block socles, the capitals on the first floor being Tuscan and those on the second volute (Ionic). Parapet walls articulated by central pilaster strips run between the plinths. The northern façade is covered with sets of monumental *sgraffiti* in four bands between the window sill of the first floor and the cornice. They depict scenes from the Old Testament, from classical history, Roman and Renaissance virtues, and hunting scenes. Busts of warriors and heroes are shown in scrollwork cartouches in the lunettes.

Of the features in the interior of the castle one of the most striking is the fine Neo-Classical theatre from 1796-97 in the western wing. Constructed entirely of wood, it can seat 150 spectators in nine loggias and its lower floor. The original painted decoration of the auditorium, stage decorations, and stage machinery have survived intact. The Renaissance main staircase of the castle is located in this wing, which houses some finely proportioned Renaissance rooms decorated for the most part in Neo-Classical style in the 18th century.

The other two wings have comparable interiors, basically Renaissance in form and with lavish late Baroque or Neo-Classical ornamentation in the form of elaborate plasterwork and wall and ceiling paintings. The paintings simulate three-dimensional compositions with ornamental mouldings from Roman antiquity. The paintings are coordinated from one

room to the next. The entire interior is in a homogeneous style, a short-lived transition between Baroque and Classicism at the end of the 18th century, to which the name “Late Baroque Classicism” has been given.

Access to the chapel from the eastern wing is through an elegant portal. The interior, with its barrel-vaulted nave, retains most of its original Renaissance features. It is now relatively plain, painted in *grisaille*, but traces of earlier paintings have been found on the walls.

Among the ancillary buildings, the most interesting is the Brewery, which lies to the south of the first courtyard. Originally constructed as a counterpart to the castle, with *sgraffito* decoration, it was substantially reconstructed after the 1728 fire and received what is its present appearance, which blends elements of High Baroque and Neo-Classicism, after the 1775 fire. However, analysis of the structure itself reveals component parts from the Gothic period onwards.

The riding stable is contiguous with the brewery and forms part of the Renaissance counterpart of the castle. It has undergone various vicissitudes as a result of the fires to which the castle was prone, and now complements the brewery in external appearance.

The stable closes the first courtyard on its eastern side. It is a single-storey building, originally in High Baroque style but transformed, like the other buildings around the first courtyard, in the 18th century. The regular façade has nine sections, with the main portal in the centre, flanked on either side by windows and lateral entrances. There are four dormers evenly disposed along the gambrel roof.

Other elements of the ensemble are the Lord’s House on the western side of the park, the coach-house, the former stable, a small house or cottage, the formal garden in the French style with its Baroque *saletta* (pavilion), and the park (in the English style, from the late 18th century).

Management and Protection

Legal status

Individual properties in the Litomyšl Castle ensemble are protected under Law No 20 on state conservation of the cultural heritage (1987). The whole ensemble is registered as national cultural heritage by Government Resolution No 251/1962. The ensemble forms part of the urban conservation area of Litomyšl, which covers the historic centre of the town (including the castle), as defined in Ministry of Culture Decree No 16417/97-VI/1.

All of these measures ensure that all interventions must be authorized by the competent institutions at central and local government level.

Management

The castle is in public ownership. It was state property until 1995, when part of the ensemble was transferred to the municipality of Litomyšl. At the present time, therefore, ownership of the castle, Lord’s House, coach-house, *saletta*, second and third courtyards, garden, and park is vested in the Conservation Institute at Pardubice, whilst the brewery, the riding school, the stable, the small house, and the first courtyard are owned by the municipality.

Management of their respective properties is in the hands of these two bodies. Overall supervision of conservation is exercised by the Conservation Department of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and by the State Institute for the Care of Historical Monuments.

Intensive studies on different aspects of the castle complex, in order to prepare programmes for conservation and management, have been carried out during the 1990s at both local and national level. Programmes for the regeneration of the urban conservation area, the preservation of the architectural heritage, dilapidated parts of the complex (roofs), and the restoration of movable cultural heritage objects have been financed by the Ministry of Culture.

The management plan is based on two studies carried out in 1995. Its objectives are presentation of the castle, demonstrating its European and international significance, improving the presentation with the installation of a cultural and social centre and an art gallery, completing the reconstruction of the brewery and the installation of a museum of ancient sculpture and architecture, and improving technical standards generally.

The nominated property covers an area of 4.4ha, and the surrounding conservation area 209ha. The conservation area, which is strictly controlled, constitutes an effective buffer zone, as required by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. However, in 1987 the District Administration Council of Svitavy proclaimed a buffer zone of a further 94.9ha around the Litomyšl conservation area, in accordance with Law No 20/1987. The setting of the nominated property is therefore endowed with very complete protection in this way.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The castle was owned by the Thurn und Taxis family until 1945, when it came into state ownership. Litomyšl was one of 130 comparable properties that were chosen for preservation in their original state because of their special architectural quality and artistic contents. The whole ensemble was managed by the Pardubice Institute until 1995 according to internationally accepted conservation standards.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the ensemble is high. The individual components remain physically integrated with one another in their original state, whilst the complex retains its spatial relationship with its historic urban setting. The successive modifications and reconstructions that have taken place over several hundred years have been respected. No attempt has been made to select a particular period to display, but instead the organic evolution is presented in its entirety. Care has been taken to ensure that authentic materials and techniques have been used in all conservation and restoration interventions.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Litomyšl in January 1999.

Qualities

Litomyšl Castle is an exceptional work of central European Renaissance architecture derived from Italian models which has preserved its original historic fabric intact, along with the high-quality and historically significant additions and modifications made in the 17th and 18th centuries, most notably in its interior.

Comparative analysis

The justification by the State Party rightly points to possible comparisons between Litomyšl and other castle complexes, both in Italy, where the arcade castle originated, and elsewhere in central Europe.

A comparison with Italian examples is not considered to be appropriate in this case, since the form was taken over by Czech architects, in whose hands it evolved considerably.

In central Europe there is a number of castles of this type in the Czech lands (the Belvedere summer palace in Prague, Kaceřov, Moravský Krumlov, Bučovice, Opočno), and Austria (Spital). However, none of these preserves the full range of original features that distinguishes Litomyšl (the completeness of the ensemble, the intact plan of the main building), its high artistic quality (the formal logic of the three-storey arcaded galleries, the scenic *sgraffiti*, the “Late Baroque Classical” interior decoration), and the integral relationship with its urban setting.

Brief description

Litomyšl Castle is in origin a Renaissance structure, an arcade castle of the type developed originally in Italy and adopted and greatly developed in central Europe in the 16th century. Its design and decoration are of high quality, including the later High Baroque features added in the 18th century, and it preserves intact the range of ancillary buildings associated with an aristocratic residence of this type.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

Criterion ii Litomyšl Castle is an outstanding and immaculately preserved example of the arcade castle, a type of building first developed in Italy and modified in the Czech lands to create an evolved form of special architectural quality.

Criterion iv Litomyšl Castle illustrates in an exceptional way the aristocratic residences of central Europe in the Renaissance and their subsequent development under the influence of new artistic movements.

ICOMOS, September 1999