



Room 1

We warmly welcome you to the minaret in Lednice.

In a moment, you will walk through the eight halls on the first floor. To protect the precious mosaic floors, please wear the slippers provided. During the tour, please do not touch the exhibits and walls and follow the tour directions. Photography is permitted. Please note that the halls are under CCTV surveillance.

Room 2

The minaret, the most famous and most curious structure of the castle park in Lednice, was built between 1797 and 1801 at the request of Prince Alois I. of Liechtenstein by Josef Hardtmuth, director of the princely building office. It served as a lookout tower for the princely family and visitors to the park, from which they could view the newly built English park and the many small buildings in the surrounding area. The appearance of the minaret and mosque was strongly influenced by similar structures built in important European gardens. These included the pagoda and mosque in the English Royal Gardens at Kew, the mosque in the garden of the Duke of Hesse-Cassel at Schwetzingen and the viewing pagoda in the park of the French Chateau of Chanteloup. While Prince Liechtenstein saw most of these buildings during his travels, the architect Hardtmuth was inspired mainly by the extensive pattern literature, such as the designs of Georges-Louis Le Rouge and Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld.

In this context, it should be added that the term "oriental" at the end of the 18th century included almost everything that came from the East, regardless of whether it was a Muslim, Chinese or Japanese influence. The fact that hardly anyone attached much importance to the precise distinction between the different styles can best be seen from the

contemporary designations of the minaret itself: oriental tower, eastern tower, mosque or tower of Babel.

Don't forget to notice the chess table in this room, which is one of the few original artifacts from the Liechtestein family's oriental collections.

Room 3

The minaret served the princely family and the guests of the park not only as a lookout tower, but also as a comfortable summer palace where the Liechtensteins liked to spend their leisure time. Each room on the first floor of the mosque was painted and decorated in a different colour under the supervision of the architect Hardtmuth. The walls were covered with quotations from the Koran and decorative ornaments painted in gold. Great attention was paid to the floors, which, as in the case of later Liechtenstein buildings in the area, may have been worked on by the firm of the famous Italian marble designer Giuseppe Geatan Martinetti. The floor consists of mosaics made of Venetian terrazzo.

After the minaret was rebuilt in 1868, the Viennese academic painter Josef Geyling painted the interiors in the Moorish style. Prince John II. of Liechtenstein had part of his extensive Oriental and Arabic collections installed in the interior, which were complemented by exotic trophies of animals that had been hunted during the travels of members of the princely family to Africa and Asia. In the 1980^s, the rooms were closed off due to poor statics and the walls and floors were severely damaged. They were reopened to the public in 2017 after a painstaking restoration.

Room 4

We entered to the hall, which is furnished with Moorish-style furniture – ebony wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Furthermore, this room is decorated with a lamp from the early 19th century, which most likely served as a model for other decorative lighting in oriental style buildings. The domes of the four corner rooms and the ceilings of the remaining four interior rooms are decorated entirely in the Ottoman tradition. In particular, the decoration of the domes appears to be a very successful

copy of their Turkish predecessors. Both floral and geometric patterns, especially the tendril and star ornament, are present, matching in shape and colour. However, the gold inscriptions in blue cartouches visible on the lower edge of the domes have no meaning. They are a common decorative element in imitation of the calligraphic rendering of Arabic script that was, and still is, widely used throughout Islamic art. Furthermore, the ceilings were originally decorated with semi-precious stones, which have now been replaced by glass replicas.

The initiator of the construction of the minaret was the reigning Prince Alois I. of Liechtenstein (1759–1805), who was one of the richest aristocrats in the Habsburg monarchy at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. The upbringing of the somewhat unmanageable young prince was initially handled by the extremely well educated Angelo Soliman, originally a black slave from the Kanuri tribe, who rose from a page to one of the key figures of the princely court in the Liechtenstein service. The life of the educated and sophisticated prince was particularly influenced by his travels to Western Europe. He spent the late 1780^s and early 1790^s in France and England, where he became acquainted not only with the fledgling Industrial Revolution but also with the lifestyle of the highest British aristocracy, which was closely linked to his fondness for English gardens. Shortly after his return to the monarchy in 1794, he began the landscaping of Lednice Park, which was to become the most important English park in Central Europe. In addition to the minaret, during his lifetime the park also included a number of other exotic-looking buildings designed by the architect Josef Hardtmuth: a Dutch fisherman's house, an Egyptian bath, a Roman aqueduct, a Chinese summer palace and a replica of a wooden Slovakian hut.

Room 5

In the original inventory of the minaret, you can also find a very popular oriental item - carpets. These are among the oldest human handicrafts, with a long history going back thousands of years. Their evolution reflects changing tastes and aesthetic preferences as well as technological innovation and cultural exchange between people. The first carpets were

probably made from available natural materials such as animal skins or plant fibres. In the early days, they were mainly used to protect against cold and dust. However, they were created not only for practical purposes but also with an eye to visual appeal, leading to the first simple designs inspired by natural shapes and colours. Over time, rug making became a more sophisticated and highly valued craft skill. The region of Persia, known for cultural richness, developed techniques that perfected dyeing and weaving. Persian carpets are renowned for their high quality and intricate designs, often incorporating geometric shapes, floral motifs and symmetrical ornaments. Weavers used natural materials such as plants, minerals or various insect products to achieve vibrant and durable colours. In the medieval period, the art of carpet making spread to the Islamic world, where carpets played an important role not only in religious ceremonies but also in everyday life. They were often decorated with calligraphic inscriptions and intricate arabesques. They also became an important trade item, which led to their spread to Europe, where they became a highly prized commodity.

Room 6

The construction of the minaret is shrouded in several rumours:

"In 1795, in order to expand the gardens in front of the castle, the prince bought the existing thatched-roof cottages, the old town hall and the church, with the intention of having them newly built for the village on another municipal or his own land. He made a contract with the municipality about this, which was very advantageous for Lednice. The Purkmistr had only to arrange with the Passau bishopric for the consent to build and consecrate the church. Then the Bishop of Passau, however, still delayed with his statement, so Prince Alois I. decided to deal with the construction of something else for the time being. He still intended to build an obelisk with a lookout tower in the area of the Blatské Pastures. Lednice is situated in the plain and has no hill from which to view the landscape. But something happened that the prince did not expect. The lord mayor claimed that the land did not belong to the manor, that it was a municipality and that he did not want such a building on his land. The

prince and the municipality got into a dispute over the land, everything dragged on and the municipality, in order to be free to decide about the pastures, finally backed out of the previous agreement with the prince to build a church. It is said that the construction of the new church in Lednice never took place. When the prince could not build on the Blatské Pastures, he decided to build a lookout tower on his land by the Chateau Pond. The story goes that the prince's architect, Josef Hardtmuth, drew up the plans for the Turkish tower, or minaret as we say today, in just one night."

Apart from legends, information about the construction of the minaret is provided by a publication from 1840:

"In the autumn of 1797, under the direction of the architect Hardtmuth, the gigantic work began, employing of a thousand workmen, who during the winter dug a pit one hundred square fathoms in extent and sixty feet deep. While the pump was continually removing the water that was entering the hole from the Dyje, the workmen drove into it five hundred alder pillars eighteen feet long, on which they laid ninety-six oak grates, thus forming a solid foundation. The foundations of this block were filled in with soil to the height of the ground, and on it was finally built a tower two hundred and eighteen feet high. By 1800 the structure was complete, but the scaffolding itself was remarkable. Its structure, wrapping twelve times in a spiral around the tower, had guard rails and was so strong that blocks of stone weighing ten cents could be carried up it. One cavalry corporal even rode it to the top, the horse showing little fear."

Room 7

We are in a room where the only preserved painting is the one designed by Josef Hardtmuth. The architect Hardtmuth chose quotations from the Qur'an, which have been a fundamental element of Islamic art since time immemorial, to decorate the interior. The only liturgical language of Islam is Arabic, despite the fact that the Islamic world encompasses a plethora of ethnicities. That is why the Koranic inscriptions in the minaret are depicted in Arabic. The incorrect order of the verse parts and punctuation marks leads us to believe that the architect Hardtmuth had templates with parts of the text that were assembled to fit formally on the wall rather than

to contain meaning. Such stencils may have been custom-made in the Ottoman Empire and imported to Lednice or purchased at European art auctions. The gilded texts are lined with floral decorative bands that are entirely in keeping with European taste, even though Ottoman art is renowned for its great fondness for floral decoration. Ottoman designs are based consistently on local flora: carnations, cornflowers, tulips, hyacinths, bells, lilies and roses. Such floral patterns then became a popular and very common subject for ceramic tiles, which were used to line entire walls and then became one of the typical features of Middle Eastern architecture.

Architect Josef Hardtmuth (1758–1816), one of the most important creators of the landscape between Lednice and Valtice, began his career as a mason in the firm of his uncle Josef Meissl, who worked in the service of the Princes of Liechtenstein. The popularity of Muslim, or rather Turkish, motifs, which had existed in aristocratic and bourgeois circles since 1782, when Mozart's opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio* premiered, may have played a role in Hardtmuth's design of the minaret. The fact that noble society really gravitated towards these motifs is evidenced not only by the composer's other famous work, the piano rondo *Alla Turca*, but also by the numerous portraits of aristocrats in Turkish costumes, the popular drinking of coffee or exotic scenes on rococo porcelain figurines. It is possible that the intention to build a minaret in Lednice may have been influenced by the memory of Angelo Soliman, a learned African who guided the prince through parts of his youth. In 1790, Josef Hardtmuth became the court architect of Liechtenstein and director of the princely building office, which designed buildings on all the extensive estates. In addition to the Vienna palace and other buildings in Austria, Hardtmuth built a number of churches, castles and small buildings in the vicinity of Lednice and Valtice, such as the famous John's Castle, Diana's Temple and the Colonnade at Rajstno, for the Liechtensteins in Moravia. One of the most famous Austrian architects of the early 19th century and an important representative of neoclassicism, he devoted himself to inventions after leaving the service of the princes. One of his greatest discoveries was the pencil. The firm bearing his name still exists today.

Room 8

The minaret was one of the basic elements of the sentimental and masonic phase of the Lednice Park. Light, enlightenment or enlightenment as a celebration and synthesis of emotion and reason became the central motif here. The gilded crescent moon on the tower also relates to this. In terms of view, the building terminated one of the eight passages of the neighbouring Hvězda preserve, as well as the main axis from the castle.

Lednice Castle, the park and the minaret have always been open to the public. One piece of evidence is an extract from the diary of Countess Maria Anna Maxmiliania of Hardegg from 1821:

"...The highest point of the Tower of Babel with three hundred and two steps offers a panoramic view. On the first floor, there are eight very charming rooms, each of them painted in a different colour and nicely furnished in a matching shade. I especially liked the blue room. From the tower we went to the grotto or cave, then to the baths and finally to the chateau where we could see sixty-five rooms, most of them very beautifully and some even magnificently furnished."

Just like the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, Emperor Franz Joseph I., the famous Austrian mountaineer Josef Kyselak, the son of Queen Victoria Prince Arthur, the painter Ferdinand Runk, the poet Petr Bezruč, Princess Mona of Oman, Crown Prince Alois of Liechtenstein and many other famous personalities, take the opportunity to climb to the minaret's galleries, from where you have a unique view of the English park and the surrounding area. As you walk through the park, discover the picturesque corners and on the way to the castle, you will also meet small buildings that, like the minaret, recall the magic of old times. Each season brings its own unique beauty. Enjoy it.

Thank you for your visit.

For more detailed information about the minaret, please see the brochure available for purchase at the ticket office.

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