



The Fort of Graça

Elvas, Portugal

The Fort of Graça is located near the Portuguese border town of Elvas, occupying an important strategic position. Elvas was strongly fortified in the seventeenth century, during the Portuguese War of Independence, and two major outlying forts were later constructed on hills overlooking the town, offering a strong position from which to defend against attack. Designed to withstand intense bombardment, the Fort of Graça was constructed between 1763 and 1792. It was built on massive earthworks and it consists of three heavy lines of defense, with deep ditches between them, in the tradition of Vauban. Long considered an exemplary work of military engineering, the fort helped resist the Spanish advance into Portugal in the brief War of the Oranges, and it later saw action during the Napoleonic Wars.

Even though its strategic importance declined over time, and the fortifications gradually became obsolete, the town maintained its military aspect and the army only left Elvas at the end of the twentieth century. Demilitarization has provided new opportunities for the reuse of this important heritage, and the “Garrison Border Town of Elvas and its Fortifications” were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2012. The Fort of Graça remains under the ownership of Portugal’s Ministry of National Defense, but the municipality of Elvas has taken steps to protect the site. Cooperation is needed among the Ministry of National Defense, the municipality, and heritage professionals to implement a management plan for this well-preserved fort and to realize its potential for heritage tourism and adaptive reuse.