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Architectural History as a Dynamic Process

Povijest arhitekture kao dinamički proces

ABSTRACT

Renate Wagner-Rieger focused her research on Austrian medieval architecture in addition to her studies of the "Wiener Ringstrasse" especially when she participated in significant public Middle Ages art exhibitions. The shows were supported by catalogue essays, which were finally collected in her final book. As a response, she covered a wide range of architectural history in her lectures.

KEYWORDS

architecture, art history, university, middle ages, history

APSTRAKT

Renate Wagner-Rieger, uz „bečki ring”, usmjerila je svoja istraživanja na austrijsku srednjovjekovnu arhitekturu. Sudjelovala je u pripremi značajnih izložaba posvećenim srednjem vijeku za koje je pisala tekstove u katalozima, a koji su sabrani u njezinoj posljednjoj knjizi. U svojim predavanjima na fakultetu pokrila je širok raspon povijesti arhitekture.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

arhitektura, povijest umjetnosti, sveučilište, srednji vijek, povijest

Apart from her prominent researches on the "Wiener Ringstrasse" Renate Wagner-Rieger continuously occupied herself with studies on medieval architecture in Austria, especially when she was invited several times to take part in great public exhibitions of art in the Middle Ages. In this way, she studied and discussed the most important monuments of medieval architecture in Vienna, Lower and Upper Austria and Styria, publishing her conclusions in her articles in the exhibition's catalogues.

In her studies on the Ringstrasse she was in the position to exploit newest research results from her own projects, but in case of medieval studies she initially depended on secondary literature, which often proved to be contradictory or unreliable and made it difficult to draw a coherent interpretation. In particular, controversial chronological dating complicated to follow the historical lines of development.

But to overcome these difficulties Renate Wagner-Rieger could help herself relying on her own experience in studies on medieval architecture in Italy, which dealt with the transition from Romanic to Gothic style, published in 1956/1957¹ as her habilitation's thesis, as well as her studies on gothic chapels in Lower Austria, being her contribution to the commemorative publication in honor of Karl Maria Swoboda², once master of her studies.

In her series of lectures at the Vienna University, she consequently tried to display large fields of local architectural history³, especially as she was appointed professor of Austrian Art in 1964. Building fruitful scientific contacts with Austria's neighboring countries she succeeded to draw up comprehensive studies on medieval architecture in Central Europe. A general overview on medieval architecture she presented in her contribution to the *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* in 1969.⁴ Her voluminous catalogue articles accompanied the Austrian exhibitions on medieval art in 1967⁵, 1971⁶, 1976⁷, 1978⁸ and 1979⁹, and finally found their recapitulation in her last book, published *post mortem* in 1988, basing on her series of lectures of 1977.¹⁰ Already during her studies at the Vienna University, following her professor K. M. Swoboda, her methodology based on scientific historiography. The studies of Art History required attending a course at the Institute for Research of Austrian History¹¹, and that established the significant value of the historical sources and documents in her personal assessment. She never considered herself satisfied with fragmentary views of history, but always tried to find a context.

Renate Wagner-Rieger focused her interest on dynamic processes in history, as historical kinks and

breaking points, political changes of power, rise and fall of dynasties. On these points in history, she was able to localize stylistic transformations or the spread of newest artistic influences.

During her researches on the medieval church of Klosterneuburg¹² she recognized the coincidence between the biography of its founder Leopold III, margrave of Austria, and the appearance of new representative architectural forms after his marriage with Agnes von Waiblingen, daughter of emperor Heinrich IV, which opened him an immediate approach to the Reich's high aristocracy.

When Leopold III sent his son Otto to France for attending studies in Paris, this opened contacts to the Cistercian Order and in consequence provoked the foundation of the monastery of Heiligenkreuz, which became a centre of Cistercian architecture in Central Europe.¹³

Hundred years later, when Vienna, situated at the crossroad of the main traffic routes in Central Europe, had already reached the second position among the most important cities of the Holy Roman Empire, the dukes of Austria used their cultural and political relationships to engage qualified architects and artists from France and Germany for building monasteries and castles. Subsequently they created a specific style, which Wagner-Rieger called "Babenbergische Sondergotik".¹⁴

Renate Wagner-Rieger had an attentive sense to detect artistic repetitions. At the gothic tower of Maria Strassengel near Graz in Styria, built 1355/1366, she recognized a freeze in Romanic style, combined with the coat of arms of duke Rudolf IV. In fact, this prince had paid for the construction of the church and wanted to express the long tradition of the Austrian dominion in the province of Styria since 1192 in stylistic forms.¹⁵ Also among the architecture of 15th century Wagner-Rieger saw many retrospective aspects, for which using the term "*Historismus*" (historicism) seemed her appropriate.¹⁶ In fact she did not hesitate to use this term, which she had defined so perfectly for the art of the 19th century, for the Middle Ages as well. An outstanding example she found at the castle of emperor Frederick III (Friedrich III) at Wiener Neustadt. Particularly this Habsburg ruler tried to evoke records of the glorious past during the reign of the first members of his dynasty (Rudolf I and Albrecht I) by stylistic repetitions in architecture.¹⁷ In 1453 the emperor's architect Peter von Pusika used as source the *Austrian Chronicle of the 95 Ruler* by Leopold Stainreuter to decorate the entrance front of the chapel with reliefs of 107 coats of arms reconstructing an ancestry of the

dukes of Austria deducing them from biblical kings. But Renate Wagner–Rieger found evidence of historicism also among the monastic architecture of this time, resulting from the Benedictine reforms at Melk, (1418) with their intention to express a spiritual return to the pure obedience of earlier days, using an antiquated architectural style.

Wagner–Rieger always had special interests in large compositional forms of architecture as the extended choirs of the Mendicant Orders or the late-gothic hall churches. She did not pay so much attention to myopic details to be used as means of chronological dating, as it is considered today by many architecture historians. Occasionally she expressed her mistrust in dogmatic deductions as Rudolf Pühringer’s system of Romanic profile details from 1931.¹⁸

On the contrary, certain details required her full attention, when they fulfilled constructive functions. She frequently studied the phenomenon of “quincunx” settings of pillars, for example in the ground plan of the Franziskanerkirche at Salzburg¹⁹, or points of articulation between consecutive rooms.

Often she used controversial discussions as crystallization points for her own new researches, so as to put her finger on the weak spot of some theories in question. Confronted with new theses she tried to avoid prejudices but firmly demanded proofs and discussion about opposite views. I think, all her followers owe her thankfulness for this example as perfect teacher. She obviously suffered, when she had to lay aside research problems without finding a convincing solution. On many occasions she complained that archaeological excavations at St. Stephen’s cathedral in Vienna (1945–1948) had been documented insufficiently, leaving in doubt many important questions.

Her strict confidence in historical documents, which have to be interpreted with scientific methods sometimes hindered her instinctive talent to judge facts according to their visual appearance. This was the case in a discussion on the chronological dating of the church at Pöllauberg in Styria, one of the outstanding monuments from 14th century, in comparison with the Wallsee–Chapel at Enns (Upper Austria). R. K. Donin stated that according to its ground plan the church of Pöllauberg must have been the model for the chapel at Enns because of its clear functionality as a pilgrim church, whereas the Enns–chapel fails to fulfill these qualities.²⁰ Wagner–Rieger contradicted, presenting documents which would reveal the earlier construction of the Enns–chapel (1343–1357) than that at Pöllauberg (1375–1384).²¹ But there exists also a document that is giving proof of the foundation

at Pöllauberg by Katharina von Stubenberg already in 1339. Today we know that the Stubenberg family belonged to the same inner court circle of the Habsburg rulers like the Wallsee family, so that an exchange of the architectural project is obvious.

In her latest investigations Renate Wagner–Rieger paid much attention to the dynamic inner mechanism of medieval artist associations, especially mason’s lodges (*Bauhütten*), which quickly transferred new architectural ideas and principles from one country to the other. She also found out that progressive varieties of design were not limited only on the sphere of influence of the court but were also open to circles of the local aristocracy. In her last contribution to an exhibition on medieval art in 1979 at Wiener Neustadt she expressed that and dealt again with this problem of dating of Pöllauberg, comparing it with other pilgrimage churches in Styria as Mariazell and Pettau (Ptujška Gora).²² Obviously, the fate took away the pen from her hand too early.

Between 1970 and 1980 Renate Wagner–Rieger, being for many years head of the *Institut für Kunstgeschichte* at the Vienna University, was practicing a lively exchange of ideas and experiences with scholars in our neighboring countries, east and west. In Italy it was her cordial friendship with Angiola Maria Romanini (1926–2002), in Germany she had good relations with Ernst Schubert (1927–2012) or Ernst Ullmann (1928–2008), in Yugoslavia a fruitful cooperation with Marijan Zadnikar (1921–2005), in Hungary with Melinda Tóth (1939–2013), in Czechoslovakia with Dobroslav Líbal (1911–2002) as well as in Poland with Marian Kutzner. All these scientific contacts not only created a new friendships, but these contacts helped to escape from isolation and to promote a reciprocal interest on our common history and cultural heritage of Central Europe. As she was accustomed in team work from her long lasting projects on the *Ringstrasse*, in some modern way she revitalized the idea of the medieval communication among artists in a productive discussion on architectural history.

NOTES

- 1 Renate Wagner-Rieger, *Die italienische Baukunst zu Beginn der Gotik*. Teil 1: Oberitalien; Teil 2: Süd- und Mittelitalien (Publikationen des Österreichischen Kulturinstituts in Rom, Abteilung für historische Studien I/2), (Graz-Köln: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachf., 1956/1957).
- 2 Renate Wagner-Rieger, "Gotische Kapellen in Niederösterreich," in *Festschrift Karl M. Swoboda zum 28. Januar 1959* (Wien: Rohrer, 1959), 273-307.
- 3 1956/1957: Mittelalterliche Architektur in Österreich. 1957: Österreichische Architektur der Gotik. 1960/1961: Frühmittelalterliche Architektur mit besonderer Berücksichtigung Österreichs. 1961/1962: Spätromanische Architektur. 1962: Architektur der Gotik. 1962/1963: Spätgotische Architektur. 1963/1964: Architektur des 15. Jahrhunderts I. 1964: Architektur des 15. Jahrhunderts II. 1964/1965: Architektur des Quattrocento in Italien. 1971/1972: Klosterbaukunst des Mittelalters. 1976: Kunstgeschichte des Abendlandes II Gotik. 1977: Österreichische Kunst des Mittelalters I. 1977/1978: Österreichische Kunst des Mittelalters II. Hermann Fillitz, Peter Haiko, Walter Krause, ed. *Renate Wagner-Rieger. 10. Jänner 1921 – 11. Dezember 1980* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1981), 39-41.
- 4 Renate Wagner-Rieger, "Architektur (Dokumentation)," in Hermann Fillitz, *Mittelalter I (Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 5)*, (Berlin: Propyläen, 1969), 170-230.
- 5 Renate Wagner-Rieger, "Architektur," in *Gotik in Österreich*. Katalog der Ausstellung (Krems, 1967), 330-406.
- 6 Renate Wagner-Rieger, "Die Architektur von Krems und Stein," in *1000 Jahre Kunst in Krems*. Katalog der Ausstellung (Krems, 1971), 88-130.
- 7 Renate Wagner-Rieger, "Architektur," in *1000 Jahre Babenberger in Österreich*. Katalog der Ausstellung im Stift Lilienfeld 1976 (*Katalog des Niederösterreichischen Landesmuseums 66*), (Wien, 1976), 141-154.
- 8 Renate Wagner-Rieger, "Gotische Architektur in der Steiermark," in *Gotik in der Steiermark*, Katalog der Ausstellung im Stift St. Lambrecht 1978 (Graz, 1978), 43-93.
- 9 Renate Wagner-Rieger, "Bildende Kunst: Architektur," in *Die Zeit der frühen Habsburger. Dome und Klöster 1279-1379*. Katalog der Ausstellung in Wiener Neustadt 1979. (*Katalog des Niederösterreichischen Landesmuseums n.F. 85*) (Wien, 1979), 103-126.
- 10 Renate Wagner-Rieger, *Mittelalterliche Architektur in Österreich*, ed. Artur Rosenauer and Mario Schwarz (Sankt Pölten: Niederösterreichisches Pressehaus; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988).
- 11 Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, Wien.
- 12 Renate Wagner-Rieger, "Zur Baugeschichte der Stiftskirche von Klosterneuburg," in *Jahrbuch des Stiftes Klosterneuburg 3* (Wien, 1963), 137-179.
- 13 Wagner-Rieger, *Mittelalterliche Architektur in Österreich*, 68-73.
- 14 Wagner-Rieger, *Mittelalterliche Architektur in Österreich*, 90-107.
- 15 Wagner-Rieger, "Bildende Kunst: Architektur," 122.
- 16 Renate Wagner-Rieger, "Die Bautätigkeit Kaiser Friedrichs III.," in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte XXV* (Wien: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachf., 1972), 128-153.
- 17 Wagner-Rieger, *Mittelalterliche Architektur in Österreich*, 180, 181, 184-187.
- 18 Rudolf Pühringer, *Denkmäler der früh- und hochromanischen Baukunst in Österreich* (Denkschriften der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Phil.-Hist. Klasse 70/1) (Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1931).

- 19 Wagner-Rieger, *Mittelalterliche Architektur in Österreich*, 175.
- 20 Richard Kurt Donin, *Die Bettelordenskirchen in Österreich. Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der österreichischen Gotik* (Baden: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1931), 193.
- 21 Wagner-Rieger, "Gotische Architektur in der Steiermark."
- 22 Wagner-Rieger, "Bildende Kunst: Architektur."

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SAŽETAK

Povijest arhitekture kao dinamički proces

Renate Wagner-Rieger osim istraživanjem „bečkog ringa”, bavila se proučavanjem srednjovjekovne arhitekture u Austriji što je vidljivo kroz njezino sudjelovanje na pripremama velikih izložaba umjetnosti srednjeg vijeka u Austriji. Proučavala je glavne spomenike srednjovjekovne arhitekture i objavljivala zaključke svojih istraživanja u katalozima izložaba. Ti su tekstovi skupno objavljeni u njezinoj posljednjoj knjizi, objavljenoj nakon njezine smrti 1988. godine. U predavanjima na Sveučilištu u Beču Renate Wagner-Rieger nastojala je prikazati koliko je široko područje povijesti arhitekture. Njezina metodologija temeljila se na znanstvenoj historiografiji. Nikada se nije zadovoljavala fragmentarnim pogledima na povijest, već je uvijek nastojala stvoriti kontekst. Svoj interes usmjerila je na dinamičke procese u povijesti, kao što su povijesne prekretnice, političke promjene vlasti, usponi i padovi dinastija. Na tim određenim trenucima u povijesti uspjela je lokalizirati stilske preobrazbe u arhitekturi. Renate Wagner-Rieger imala je istančan osjećaj za otkrivanje umjetničkih ponavljanja. U arhitekturi 15. stoljeća prepoznala je mnoge aspekte koji se ponovo pojavljuju i za koje joj se korištenje izraza *Historismus* (historicism) činilo prikladnim. Posebno su je zanimale velike arhitektonske kompozicijske forme. Mnogo pozornosti posvećivala je pojedinim arhitektonskim detaljima koji su imali kontruktivnu funkciju. Nerijetko je koristila nekonvencionalne rasprave kako bi zaključila svoja istraživanja i prepoznala slabu točku neke tvrdnje. Renate Wagner-Rieger aktivno je provodila živu razmjenu ideja i iskustava s kolegama i znanstvenicima u susjednim zemljama na istoku i zapadu. Njezini kontakti pomogli su joj da se izvuče iz izolacije i promiče zajednički interes za kulturnu povijest srednje Europe.

Translation into English provided by the author.

MARIO SCHWARZ, PhD, born 1945 in Vienna. Studied architecture, archaeology and art history at the University of Vienna, completed a dissertation there in 1975. Lecturer at the Technische Universität Wien since 1980, at the Vienna University since 1985, professor since 1994. Lectures and seminars at the universities of Graz, Bratislava, Rome, Prague and Palermo. More than 150 publications.

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