Sarah Lynch
Princeton University
Munich, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte

‘Ein liebhaber aller freyen khünst’: Bonifaz Wolmut and the Architecture of the Renaissance in Prague and Europe

Prague’s chief architect in the sixteenth century, Bonifaz Wolmut (c. 1500-1579), was among the most important European architects of his era. Wolmut’s projects, including the Belvedere, ball court, and Diet Hall at Prague Castle, and the tower and organ loft of St. Vitus cathedral, set a new direction for northern Renaissance architecture with an innovative mix of classicizing and gothic forms. Additionally, Wolmut owned a large collection of books on astronomy, astrology, mathematics, and history, many of which are extant, thus shedding light on the architect’s reading habits and participation in the intellectual communities of Vienna and Prague. Despite his contributions to sixteenth-century architecture, Italian-focused studies of the Czech Renaissance ensured that the German-born Wolmut was treated as peripheral to the development of Renaissance architecture. This dissertation constitutes the first complete study of Wolmut’s life, oeuvre, library and context and will establish his place in the history of architecture.

Born and trained in Überlingen, Wolmut undertook his first major commissions in Vienna, where he worked on the fortifications and city gates. He also produced the first complete, ichnographic city plan, the 1547 Vienna Plan, in collaboration with Augustin Hirschvogel, and began to collect books on astronomy and mathematics. When he arrived in Prague in 1554, he became the center of the city’s architectural community and the most important architect for his Habsburg patrons, Archduke Ferdinand of the Tirol, Emperor Ferdinand I, and Emperor Maximilian II. Wolmut was chosen over his Italian counterparts to design the most prestigious architectural projects of the era: the Belvedere, the organ loft in St. Vitus, and the Diet Hall and tribune at Prague castle. At the tower of St. Vitus, Wolmut built one of the earliest onion domes in Central Europe, while in the same period, his design for the Diet Hall reflected the castle’s gothic precedent. Wolmut’s designs demonstrate his facility in a variety of styles and an interest in the latest innovations as well as the region’s gothic tradition.

My dissertation is divided into four chapters. Each addresses an aspect of Wolmut’s

career and its impact on our understanding of Renaissance architecture as a whole. The first chapter surveys Wolmut's oeuvre and resolves problems with attributions. I also address the history of scholarship on Wolmut and Central European Renaissance architecture. In this I focus on the development of Central European architectural history in the late nineteenth century and the effects of Soviet restrictions on scholarship.

The second chapter places Wolmut at the intersection of artistic and intellectual life in the Holy Roman Empire. In an inscription in a newly acquired book, Wolmut wrote, 'Bonifaz Wolmut of Überlingen, stonemason, citizen of Vienna in Austria, a lover of all the liberal arts commissioned this translation from Latin into the German language.' This volume is a manuscript translation of Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, and forms only a small part of the architect's library, which included numerous specially commissioned translations of Latin texts. Wolmut's intellectual interests brought him into contact with prominent humanists and university figures including Wolfgang Lazius and Georg Tanner in Vienna and Georg Barthold Pontanus von Braitenberg in Prague. By tracing the routes Wolmut took in acquiring books and in hiring a translator, I examine how a stonemason-architect moved in the intellectual circles of German-speaking courts.

The third chapter builds on these themes by exploring the significance of Wolmut's relationship to architectural theory. The Renaissance is often regarded as the period in which the intellectual labor of the architect separated from the manual labor of the mason, and Wolmut's library indicates the wide-ranging interests that characterize the ideal architect described by the Roman author, Vitruvius. Wolmut was familiar with the Latin term *architectus* and its implied connection to antiquity and rejection of manual labor. However, Wolmut, his fellow architects, and their patrons all preferred the term stonemason, a fact which demands a reassessment of the relative importance of design and construction in the Renaissance. Wolmut's designs and library indicate that he participated in the discourse on architectural theory, but in the mid-sixteenth century in the German-speaking world, published theoretical discussions of architecture took place without the input of architects. Central-European architectural publications were produced by draftsmen, engravers, painters, and printmakers, and in the case of Walter Ryff's *Vitruvius Teutsch*, a doctor. That Wolmut was familiar with the age's architectural literature is indicated by two of his designs; the upper floor of the Belvedere and the organ loft in St. Vitus are both derived from and playfully invert works illustrated by Sebastiano Serlio in his *Terzo libro*. Yet, in writing to Ferdinand I about the design for the Diet Hall, executed in the same period, Wolmut argued that a gothic vault would be more appropriate for this

politically significant space. Wolmut's ability to work in both styles and apparent preference for gothic demand a reexamination of the role of architectural publication on building practice in the sixteenth century. This section examines the impact of architectural literature on architectural design in Wolmut's career and across the region.

The final chapter considers Wolmut's use of the gothic style. Although trained as a gothic master mason, Wolmut demonstrated exceptional facility with the new, Renaissance architecture as well. He used both, often in combination, throughout his career. For the Diet Hall, the emperor selected Wolmut's gothic-Renaissance design over the purely classical model offered by Giovanni Maria Aostalli. Although recent scholarship has begun to address the phenomenon of sixteenth-century gothic as more than a sign of provincialism, Wolmut's work presents an opportunity to explore the choice of this design intensively. Most studies of the meeting of Renaissance and gothic end around 1540 when the increase in Renaissance architectural literature changed northern architecture irrevocably. However, gothic continued to develop alongside its new counterpart through the end of the century. The wealth of information about Wolmut's designs and their later date, in the 1550s, offers an opportunity to examine the use of gothic in the mid-sixteenth century. Conceiving of gothic as a legitimate stylistic preference for the Renaissance, rather than as a sign of atavistic provincialism, sheds new light on Wolmut's work at the Diet Hall and the organ loft and tower of St. Vitus, where the use of both Renaissance and gothic styles creates a commanding visual drama. In turn, a careful study of Wolmut's designs in context improves our understanding of this pivotal moment in Renaissance architecture.

My research on Wolmut illuminates the career of one of the foremost architects of the Renaissance and contributes to larger discussions of the role of artists in intellectual circles in Central Europe, the separation between design and labor in Renaissance architecture, the relationship between published architectural theory and practice in Central Europe, and the role of gothic in Renaissance architecture. I place Wolmut as both an architect and reader in the context of the greater Central European cultural region, connecting this material to the history of Renaissance architecture.