

Kamil Hilbert, An Architect – Conservator

The main terms:

Kamil Hilbert, preservation of monuments, St. Vít's cathedral, historismus, secession

Kamil Hilbert (\*12. 2. 1869 Louny – †25. 6. 1933 Praha) was a Czech architect in the late 19th and early 20th century, most widely known as the last master builder of the St.

Vít's cathedral in Prague. His work was mostly focused on historical monument preservation. At the same time, he worked as an architect and builder himself. He was not

only creator and preservationist, but also an archeologist and, in its way, even an art historian. He published several interesting studies covering results of archeological excavations at building sites; he was also keen on art topography. Furthermore, he was one

of the founding members of "Ústřední památková rada za české země", an agency established in 1911 in Wien whose mission was protection of historical monuments in Czech kingdom; he also acted as a supervisor and advisor at individual restoration projects.

Working closely with an important Czech art historian Max Dvořák (a student of Riegel

who introduced the modern historical monument preservation concepts), Hilbert built the

foundations of modern historical monument preservation in the Czech lands.

Up to now, neither Kamil Hilbert as a person, his life-long care for historical monuments,

nor his own creations were covered in a single summarizing work. Several articles from

notable Czech art historians focused on his individual creations or preservations, but none

of them provided an overall picture that would connect the covered material with the rest

of Hilbert's production. In my master thesis, I try to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive summary of Hilbert's work and detailed characterization of his individual

projects.

The thesis is divided into three parts that correspond to three important stages of Hilbert's

professional life. The first of these stages is his stay in Wien. The second stage starts when

he is elected the master builder of St. Vít's cathedral. Since then, he becomes an

influential person in many Prague committees and institutions – such as the archeological committee of Czech Academy, Christian Academy, and the innovative fellowship “Mánes”. Evenly important chapter of his life is formed by Hilbert’s own creations in the early 19th century, when he is regarded as an experienced architect. There are not many Hilbert’s own buildings. Most of them show that they were designed by a mature craftsman with knowledge and experience not only from his own architectonic blueprints, but also from studying historical connections. Even though some of the works are connected by usage of similar motives and architectonic elements, each realization comes as a result of unique thoughtful and precise design. When closely examined, it becomes clear how much effort Hilbert spent on achieving consistent art usage on the entire building and its neighborhood. While Hilbert’s early buildings were designed in historicist styles, those designed at the turn of the century are influenced first by folk art, later by secession, and finally, at the end of Hilbert’s life, by modernism. A significant portion of the thesis focuses on documenting and summarizing Hilbert’s own work, which is mostly concentrated in three cities: Louny, Plzeň, and Prague. This summary is probably the main benefit of the thesis. In this stage of Hilbert’s life, it is even possible to trace down his contacts with modernists – which witnesses Hilbert’s attitude to the rapid art evolution. His most important achievements, historical monument preservation (in particular, St. Vít’s cathedral completion), is mentioned only briefly to provide connections, since it is already covered in a paper by Eva Fantová.