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Essays in Honour of Ingvild Øye on her 70th Birthday

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How Archaeology Saved Bryggen

In 1976, Bryggen's Museum opened its doors to an audience that for more than twenty years had heard reports of extraordinary discoveries and rare objects found during the archaeological excavations at Bryggen. Following a fire in July 1955, a long-term project had produced scientific results which had been expected to clarify the validity of earlier hypotheses on how the harbour town of Bergen had developed from c. 1100 and through the medieval period. The fire in 1955 took place at a time when public opinion to Bryggen as cultural heritage could, at best, be described as indifferent, if not strongly in favour of redeveloping the entire area. After the Second World War, most people were more concerned with creating a better future rather than contemplating the past, and as many as 85% of the citizens of Bergen are likely to have been in favour of demolishing and redeveloping the area in 1946 (Lidén 2012, 50). The archaeological excavations after 1955 were a landmark enterprise, and soon became renowned within the international community of urban archaeologists. On the one hand, when evaluating the outcome in retrospect, perhaps one of the most important results was the extent to which archaeology came to influence public opinion on the question of preserving the remaining parts of Bryggen. On the other hand, to the scholarly community it was a confirmation of the hypothesis of Bryggen's significance as an historical monument. The characteristic tenements rebuilt after the catastrophic town fire in 1702 had been left almost untouched until the southern half was demolished and redeveloped in the years 1900-12. Not so well known is that the redevelopment provided an opportunity for the director of Det hanseatiske Museum (the Hanseatic Museum), Johan Christian Koren Wiberg, to conduct pioneering urban archaeological research, which one could argue was crucial for saving the remaining tenements and protecting them under the Cultural Heritage Act as early as 1927. In the following, I will try to shed some light on Koren Wiberg's achievements and how his interpretation of his archaeological observations contributed to The Cultural Heritage Act of 1927.

The Origin of the Idea of Bryggen as Medieval Heritage

The idea that Bryggen held a special position in the fabric of the townscape of Bergen goes back a long way, and has been advocated in both academic and popular circles. The first written history of Bergen, *Bergens Fundas*, has Bryggen as its focal point. When it was written in the 1560s, the author, whose identity is unknown, was in no doubt that this was the core of the oldest part of Bergen. *Bergens Fundas* complies with the sagas' versions of how Bergen was founded. However, it gives a more lively description of how the area around the little inlet called Vågen was part of the royal farm of Alrekstad. We are told that in the reign of King Magnus Olavsson (1035-42) a group of shepherds from Alrekstad was watching the king's

flock down by Vågen. They heard voices whispering, sermons being read and pipes playing, and the master at Alrekstad interpreted this as a foreboding that in a few years a large town, a centre of prosperous trade, would be founded at the spot. The author continues by writing that twenty-four years later, in the year 1070, King Olav Kyrre founded Bergen, and the reason for this was that God, in his grace, had blessed the area with an abundance of herring on these coastal shores. Except for King Olav Kyrre being given the role as founder of Bergen, the rest is not found in the older sagas, and it is actually Bergens Fundas that presents 1070 as the founding year (Bergens Fundas, 29).

The author of Bergens Fundas also elaborated on how German merchants from Hanseatic towns had settled in Bergen and established their Kontor at Bryggen in the late Middle Ages and had driven off the local population. The story of the Kontor is actually a central motif in Bergens Fundas, and has a strong anti-Hanseatic bias (Bergens Fundas, 47-63). This can also be said for *Die Nortsche Saw* (Den Norske So), which was probably written in the 1580s. The learned lecturer at the Bergen Cathedral School, Edvard Edvardsen (? -1694), wrote a momentous history of Bergen, and he drew a map of how he perceived Bergen to have looked in the Middle Ages. He states that the first houses in Bergen were erected in the outer Bryggen area towards the castle, in the area that is today called Dreggen (Edvardsen I, 60; Erslund 2011, 46-47). Ludvig Holberg is, in large part indebted to Edvardsen when it comes to the description of Bryggen, and since he wrote the first history of Bergen to be printed (1737), he also disseminated to a wider audience the belief that Bryggen represented the oldest core of Bergen and how it was related to the colony of German merchants and their Kontor (Holberg 1737, 150-212).

When Holberg spent his early years in Bergen by the end of the 17th century, the Hanseatic Kontor at Bryggen was still vital, but the numbers of German merchants had been in sharp decline since c. 1700, and the Hanseatic Kontor was suspended in the 1760s. In a topographical description of Bergen published in 1824, the local antiquarian, Lyder Sagen, valued Bryggen as a place of special interest and an outstanding historical monument, and wrote: 'After the fire in 1702, the Kontor was erected as it is today and with only minor changes to its former outline' (Sagen and Voss 1824, 348-49). This was an acknowledgement of the idea that has been refined ever since – that the building fabric of Bryggen represented a continuation of past centuries. Yngvar Nielsen, the author of the first modern monograph on the history of Bergen, *Bergen fra de ældste tider og indtil Nutiden* (Bergen from the outset and until (the) present), published in 1877, advocated the view that Bryggen actually represented medieval urban architecture, of which written sources give hardly any information:

The impression we get from these (written sources) is far too incomplete, and would be even more so if were it not for the fact that the houses at The German Warf (Bryggen), in spite of reoccurring fires, still have their main architectural features preserved, and in this way they give an insight into the appearance of medieval Bergen (my translation). (Nielsen 1877, 132).

Nielsen's interpretation of Bryggen as constituting a part of Bergen's historical townscape was further developed by the antiquarian Nicolay Nicolaysen in his work *Om de norske Kjøpstæder i Middelalderen, Deres oprindelse, Indretning og Bygningsskik* (On () Norwegian towns in the Middle Ages, their origin, physical structure and architecture), published in 1890. Here he

used Bryggen extensively as an example for the architecture of Norwegian medieval towns (Nicolaysen 1890; Lidén 2012, 24). In this respect, it was no surprise that when the *Bergen Historical Society* was founded in 1894, its first publication was the Hanseatic statutes of *Jakobsfjorden* and *Bellgarden*, two of the prominent tenements at Bryggen. The oldest part of this manuscript dates back to the year 1529 and the statutes regulated daily life amongst those living inside the complex.

Documentation and Historical Recording

This historiographical overview shows that until the 1890s there had been a long tradition of antiquarian interpretation of Bryggen, which in turn had secured it a special standing as an historical monument. By the end of the 19th century, Bryggen had been established as the cradle of Bergen. It was regarded as a fact that the town had been founded within the Bryggen area, and that commerce had been thriving there for centuries. It held a prominent position as a field of interest for official state antiquarians, Nicolaysen, and the Bergen Historical Society. However, they did not take any measures to secure Bryggen against those who viewed the area as a prospect for profitable redevelopment.

For years, an investment company had been systematically buying all the property in the southern part of Bryggen and, in 1899, they succeeded in getting the Town Council's approval of a redevelopment plan which paved the way for demolishing the entire southern half of Bryggen and rebuilding it within a new street grid. However, at the southernmost corner there was a small exception to this great scheme. Here, the Hanseatic Museum was left standing as a torso of the tenement *Finnegarden*. The museum was a private enterprise. The founder had died in 1898 and his son Koren Wiberg took over. He had studied painting and drawing and tried to embark on a career as an artist. Unlike those who usually engaged in the field of cultural heritage, he had no academic qualifications.

When Koren Wiberg took over the Hanseatic Museum, the plan for redeveloping the southern half of Bryggen was well under way, and hardly anybody doubted that this was the beginning of a total demolition of the old quarter. Except for his father's initiative to create the Hanseatic Museum, Koren Wiberg thought little of the proprietors' efforts. They lacked both knowledge of, and interest in, the history of Bryggen. The architecture of the tenements had been neglected, highly valuable objects had been lost, and written sources destroyed (Koren Wiberg 1998, 18). On his own initiative, Koren Wiberg used his skills as an artist to document the old tenements. Each tenement was depicted in black and white drawings of the facades, both towards the seafront and along the narrow internal passageways. He had no resources to undertake accurate measurements of architectural details, and for the ground plot outlines he used sketches and descriptions found in the archive of the Bergen Municipality Planning Department. He also collected archival information documenting the history of the tenements and their owners, which was mostly from the last two hundred years and far from complete. In 1899, the work was published and titled *Det tyske kontor* (The German Kontor).

Koren Wiberg had engaged in a private enterprise to document Bryggen within the means that he himself was able to allocate. He had asked for the assistance of the Bergen Historical Society, but despite offering encouragement, this was not followed by any financial support. The publication was financed by subscriptions organised by a local publishing house (Koren Wiberg 1899, foreword). However, the municipal authorities welcomed Koren Wiberg's

efforts, and argued that through his work, important antiquarian information had been secured. This was perhaps a consequence of his labours for which Koren Wiberg had not calculated. It can hardly be argued that he was in favour of demolishing the area, and using his work as a pretext for the argument that it was appropriate to destroy Bryggen might have felt ironic to him.

Koren Wiberg's position became much the same as that of the architect Jens Zetlitz Kielland. Kielland had been given the task of presenting a concept for the entire facade of the new blocks. This was without doubt related to his engagement as a prominent spokesman for cultural heritage. His draft for the new facades at Bryggen was clearly inspired by late medieval and early modern architecture from Hanseatic towns in northern Germany (Nordhagen 1982, 177-78). Kielland's and Koren Wiberg's endeavours became useful for the large redevelopment project at Bryggen. They both became engaged in documentation and historical recording in a way that suited those who wanted to redevelop the entire Bryggen area into a modern town quarter. Both were probably convinced that there was no other alternative. In his introduction to *Det tyske Kontor*, Koren Wiberg wrote that one could not expect Bryggen, any more than any other part of the historic town, to be left untouched by the increasing number of redevelopment schemes. Bryggen represented a large and valuable site that could not escape the eyes of investors (Koren Wiberg 1899, foreword).

Koren Wiberg's Field Documentation

As soon as the old tenements were torn down, work on excavating the plots began. The purpose of these excavations was to facilitate solid foundations and basement levels for the new buildings and had no archaeological purpose. However, this was a time when such work had, in large measure, to be done manually, and it was possible to discover interesting artefacts during the process. Furthermore, members of an enthusiastic public were given the opportunity to observe from the sidelines as work progressed. Koren Wiberg went further and in 1908 he writes that he made daily inspections and measurements at the building site (Koren Wiberg 1908, 4).

For a further insight into Koren Wiberg's archaeological efforts and methods, one has to search through the archival records in *Byarkivet* (Bergen Municipal Archive) where the majority of the older archival records from the Hanseatic Museum are kept. Private papers that were not kept at the museum when Koren Wiberg died in 1945 are found in The Manuscript Collection at The Bergen University Library. However, these contain almost nothing about his archaeological work.

At the Bergen Municipal Archive there are two large books containing Koren Wiberg's notes from archaeological observations and fieldwork. One is concerned with the excavation of the Wine Cellar, the search for the *Church of St Peter*, and the *Church of St Columba*, and also includes a few drawings and notes from scattered observations at Koengen in 1922, probably related to the remnants of the medieval *Bishop's palace*.¹ The other notebook contains observations made during the excavations for the redevelopment project in the southern half of the Bryggen quarter. It is called *Journal from the Demolishment (Demolition) of the Kontor*, and here Koren Wiberg presents a diary of his observations, or inspections, as he calls them. The first is dated 17 November 1899 and the last 16 September 1900. On the first page we

read that Koren Wiberg started working on the journal in January 1900 and this might suggest that he made observations in the field, and then registered them in the journal sometime later. All in all, the notebook includes seventy handwritten pages illustrated with some sketches and a few photographs.² In 1908, Koren Wiberg published a map showing 15 minor excavations that he had conducted. However, there seems to be little correspondence between this map and what is actually found in the handwritten journal (Koren Wiberg 1908, 150; Erslund 2010, 20). Since this notebook was compiled between November 1899 and September 1900, it is of course possible that other notebooks or records have been lost.

So what did Koren Wiberg take notes of during his observations between November 1899 and September 1900? Most of the pages in the notebook concern observations of buildings being demolished, and he refers to architectural details and overall construction principles as he perceived them at the time of destruction. At one point he laments the process, and remarks how sad it is to see the buildings of the Hanseatic Kontor being torn down one after the other. However, on the next page he resigns himself to the process and proclaims that this has to be endured even though the most interesting cultural heritage in Bergen is being lost.³

It took several years to clear the entire area designated for the project, and Koren Wiberg's journal covers the first phase, which had as its primary goal making way for the new streets, Rosenkrantzgate from southeast to northwest and Lodin Leppsgate from northeast to southwest. The two streets intersect at a right angle in the middle of the projected quarter. In order to make room for Lodin Leppsgate the southern row of houses in the *Leppen* tenement and the northern row of houses in the *Bratten* tenement were demolished along their entire length, while Rosenkrantzgate cut across the rear section of the rows of houses in the adjacent



Figure 1. Koren Wiberg's map of Bryggen before the demolition of the southern part in the years 1900-1911. This part was located between Nikolai Kirkens Almanning and Vetrilids Almanning. Cut from map in Koren Wiberg 1908 between pages 16-17.

tenements (Fig. 1).

Koren Wiberg found little of interest in most of the buildings in the southern part of Leppen. He comments that the floors were laid in layers three or four deep on top of each other as a result of repairs, which had taken place without removing the older floors. He found the foundations to be of more interest. The front house towards the harbour was set on solid timber bulwarks, but higher up such bulwarks were made of more modest materials with rocks and rubble between the logs in some parts. As the excavations went deeper, he concluded that there seemed to be older foundations underneath those constructed after the fire in 1702, and that the oldest of these were made of larger logs. He also remarks that the passageway belonging to the tenement corresponded with the pre-1702 passageway. Further up in the cross section, between the two projected streets, the digging went deeper into the ground, and Koren Wiberg was amazed by the amount of building debris being uncovered. It seemed that building parts that had survived fires had been reused, and layers of ashes were found underneath the rebuilt houses. He was now of the opinion that he had been investigating the site down to the level necessary to ascertain the old plot structure, and he concluded that the tenement was re-erected on its former plot, even though the number of houses might have differed. Several sketches illustrate his findings in this part of Leppen, and he even mentions a drainpipe made of wood running partly underneath the tenement. A similar drainpipe was also found in the tenement of *Dramshusen*.⁴

Observations of plot structure, foundations, and the layers of ash from previous fires are also mentioned for the tenements of *Dramshusen* and *Finnegarden*. He concludes that the finds of pieces of glass along the *Dramshusen* tenement indicate the outer line of the tenement prior to the 1702 fire. The adjacent plot was left open after the fire in 1476 and this made it possible for the neighbouring tenement to have windows along the side, and is further evidence of how tenement borders were left unaltered when the tenements were being rebuilt after a major fire. The *Finnegarden* tenement was of special interest to Koren Wiberg since this was part of the same tenement as The Hanseatic Museum. Here, he was also able to investigate the common room, or *schoøstue*, which was a regular feature of all the tenements during the days of the Kontor, and which is where the tenement inhabitants ate their meals during the winter season. To his surprise, Koren Wiberg observed that the old floor from the previous common house made out of slate was found intact underneath the floor from after 1702. Similar floors are also found under the kitchen, or *ildhus*, where all the preparations for cooking in the tenement were carried out. Here, he also found a well.⁵

Besides observing the excavations in the tenement plots, Koren Wiberg collected building stones thought to be of medieval origin. Most such finds were uncovered when larger, partly two-storey tall, so-called *stone cellars* in the tenement of *Bratten* were torn down. Several samples of soapstone with decorative elements were found to have been used in the cellar walls, and one was also found in the foundations of the tenement of *Dramshusen*. Koren Wiberg drew the conclusion that these stones probably originated from nearby churches that had fallen into decay in the later medieval period.⁶

The information we get from reading Koren Wiberg's journal complements the picture we get from the published version of his archaeological reports. His publication from 1908 is less detailed and, as such, the journal gives a better insight into his methodology and how he argued for his interpretations. One of his main concerns seems to have been the investigation

of the old plot pattern and to what extent this had been preserved through the centuries, with his conclusion being that this had, in fact, been preserved. He also observed changes in the foundations where later rebuilding consisted of thinner timber compared to the use of logs with larger dimensions in earlier centuries. Another vital discovery was the layers of ash, and one should also take note of his remarks about the large amount of building debris amassed through the centuries.

It is also highly interesting to read about his finds of remnants from medieval buildings. The cellars in Bratten were massive constructions, and the walls probably contained many more stones from medieval churches than the few decorative elements found by Koren Wiberg. The Church of St Peter, the Church of St Columba and the Church of St Nicolaus were located fairly close by in the 14th century, but had fallen into ruins by c. 1500 at the latest. Special attention should therefore be paid to Koren Wiberg's notes where he informs us that the pile of stones from the cellars in Bratten was used to fill the harbour as a foundation for the extension of the wharf outside Finnegarden. A similar case is the use of stones from an old bastion at the Bergenhus Castle to fill in the intersection between the two new streets, Rosenkrantzgate and Lodin Leppsgate.⁷

Koren Wiberg's Archaeological Achievements

When evaluating Koren Wiberg's archaeological achievements in retrospect, one should keep in mind two factors. Firstly, at the time there existed no textbook method on how to undertake archaeological excavations in urban medieval townscapes. Previously in Bergen, there had been a few such undertakings following the more classical approach of digging out remnants from stone structures, like the monastery *Munkeliv* by N. Nicolaysen (1860) and the Church of St Nicolaus by B. E. Bendixen (1895). On a national level, Koren Wiberg's undertakings took place at the same time as the sensational *Oseberg* finds in Vestfold, and locally he was met with support from Bergen Museum and his close friend, Professor Håkon Shetelig, a specialist in Norwegian pre-historic archaeology.

Secondly, Koren Wiberg was working at a building site where he had to rely on the developer's good will when conducting his research. No authority backed his efforts, and his sole drive was his own enthusiasm for the cause. He mentioned this later when, in 1908, he published his main conclusions and stated that his research was based on trying to follow the redevelopment scheme as closely as possible as it pushed forward, and was limited by the extent to which he was able to free himself from other professional duties (Koren Wiberg 1908, 149).

Koren Wiberg's investigations, as he described them in the journal from November 1899 to September 1900, were a starting point for his career as a pioneer in medieval urban archaeology. It later included excavating parts of the medieval Wine Cellar (1908), the Church of St Peter (1908-09 and 1912), and the lower parts of the wall of a stone building at the site where Schötstuene were erected (1935). He also made an energetic, but fruitless, search for the Church of St Columba (1908). He had been encouraged by Bergen Museum to take on such tasks in 1908, after he had, for some years, been handing over to the museum artefacts found at the building site for the redeveloped Bryggen area (Koren Wiberg 1908, 148-158). Archaeological supervision also became part of his official duties when Bergen Municipality bought the Hanseatic Museum in 1916, and engaged Koren Wiberg as its director. However, little is known of any activity after this year (Erslund 2010, 19-27).

Koren Wiberg had located both the medieval Wine Cellar and the Church of St Peter, and he had succeeded in producing new facts that were important for the interpretation of the medieval townscape of Bergen. Yngvar Nielsen hailed this as a momentous achievement in the Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang* in 1908, and thought it equivalent to the excavations of Troy, Carthage and Forum Romanum. Such recognition from an expert on the history of Bergen, who was also a professor at the University of Oslo, surely strengthened Koren Wiberg's local authority in antiquarian matters. The results of the excavations of the Wine Cellar and the Church of St Peter were published in 1908 and 1921.⁸

A Theory of Historical Continuity – Making Bryggen Medieval

In the following decades, Koren Wiberg became a prominent and highly respected spokesman for the preservation of Bryggen as cultural heritage of national importance. However, in 1941, Koren Wiberg was confronted with his work from 1899 and it was used as an argument that he too could be seen as in favour of redevelopment. This he regarded as a malicious allegation, and replied that it would have been outright nonsense to propose any kind of preservation c. 1900.⁹ At this point, there is little reason for doubting Koren Wiberg's argumentation, not least since there was no legal support for such preservation. In the 1890s, when the plan of demolishing the southern part of Bryggen was under way, there were two alternative solutions for how to protect Bryggen. The first would entail a private and idealistic venture of the kind that Koren Wiberg's father had taken on when he established his Hanseatic Museum. The second alternative would rely on a non-profit organisation buying the whole area with the purpose of securing it for the future. *The Society for the Preservation of Norwegian Cultural Heritage* had previously carried out such ventures on a smaller scale. However, for Bryggen both alternatives were totally unrealistic.

In 1905, the Norwegian Parliament passed a law protecting all cultural heritage monuments dating back to before the Reformation. In the case of Bryggen, this had no effect on its status, since the built environment consisted of wooden structures erected after the town fire of 1702. The argument that the tenements at Bryggen represented a type of Norwegian medieval urban architecture, as put forward by Yngvar Nielsen and Nicolay Nicolaysen, had no bearing as long as it was the object itself that was protected by law. The architectural tradition at Bryggen had been even more strongly emphasised by Koren Wiberg in 1899, when he stated that the rebuilding after the fire in 1702 had been carried out according to the same layouts as after previous fires as far back as 1476 (Koren Wiberg 1899, 25).

In his publication from 1899, *Det tyske Kontor*, Koren Wiberg had to some extent been referring to archival sources when describing the period of Hanseatic settlement. However, these were of early modern origin. In his next work, *Bidrag til Bergens kulturhistorie*, published in 1908, the scope is widened. Here, he presents what can perhaps best be described as a topographical and architectural analysis, in which he presents detailed studies of decorative elements from previous centuries and from contemporary architecture. However, his main focus is on Bryggen and its role in the evolution of Bergen (Koren Wiberg 1908, 22, 28-29; 1921, 36-37, 56; 1932, 23, 44-45, 51; 1939, 36; Ersland 2010, 20).

In 1908, we find a radical change in how Koren Wiberg perceives the Bryggen area compared to his work from 1899. His ambition is no longer confined to an attempt to document an old quarter soon to be demolished, but to present an overarching model for the urban development of Bergen from earliest times and into the present. As already mentioned, this was not new. As far back as the historiography of Bergen can be traced it had been believed that Bryggen was the cradle of the town. However, how this was to be understood within a topographical or morphological framework was quite another question. An established hypothesis was that the present architecture could be used to describe the medieval built environment. This rested on an analogical use of terms for naming different parts of buildings, wharfs, and passageways, as well as the fact that the rows of houses, organised in individual tenements, could, in large part, be recognised by their medieval names which were still in use. The empirical data needed in order to prove that this analogical reasoning was more than a well-argued guess had not been presented so far. This, in essence, is what Koren Wiberg did in 1908, when he presented a series of hypotheses and welded them into a theory that might be termed his *theory of historical continuity*. Though he does not call it this himself, this title captures the essence of his arguments.

In a later work, *Bergensk kulturhistorie* (1921), he developed the theory of historical continuity on a full scale. He starts by postulating a *pre-urban settlement* (Norw. strandsted), and goes on to describe how the morphological elements at this stage laid the foundations for the further expansion of a more densely built urban community in the following centuries (Koren Wiberg 1921, 45-51). This could still be read in the structures of the surviving tenements at Bryggen, and it was to be explained on the basis of a form of German conservatism. The medieval tenements were ideally suited for the commercial needs of the Hanseatic Kontor, and written regulations forbade changes in the construction or use of houses, passageways or wharfs (Koren Wiberg 1921, 12-13).

Koren Wiberg's construction of a theory of historical continuity from Bryggen's earliest stages and his perception of Bryggen as an historical monument still to be observed in situ, rested on his archaeological research. He was convinced that his observations proved that the tenement plots had been rebuilt after every town fire according to their previous layout, which could be traced back to the early origins of Bergen (Koren Wiberg 1908, 22-28; 1921, 14-17). It was Koren Wiberg's pioneering archaeological research, in which he showed concern for the medieval town and its daily life, which produced the evidence that linked the tenements at Bryggen to Bergen's medieval past.

Bryggen Becomes a Cultural Heritage Site

In 1912, Harry Fett was appointed the first director of the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage. He started a process to widen the scope for protection of monuments, and in 1920, the Norwegian Parliament passed a law that made it possible to also protect post-medieval monuments. This was the legal framework behind the Cultural Monuments Act under which Bryggen was protected in 1927 (Norsk biografisk leksikon; Lidén 2012, 39-40). In less than thirty years – from 1899 to 1927 – Bryggen went through the most dramatic period in its history. The change in attitude towards Bryggen as a cultural heritage site was a result of a re-evaluation of its importance in the representation of Norwegian cultural history. This was clearly accentuated by Harry Fett in 1937:

In its present form, Bryggen was erected after the great fire in 1702. The tenements were rebuilt according to their previous layouts, in accordance with the older Norwegian medieval tradition, due to factors such as complicated ownership structures and traditional trading systems, amongst others. Therefore, Bryggen is not only - not even first and foremost – an historical monument to commercial life in Bergen during the Hanseatic period, when this town was a focal point in the Nordic region. Due to the conservatism of the Hanseatic merchants, we have, in the only place in the Nordic region, preserved an entire medieval urban quarter. This makes Tyskebryggen the most important urban quarter in Norway, both in an historical and national perspective (my translation) (Fett 1937).

This statement clearly sums up Koren Wiberg's theory of historical continuity, as he had presented it in 1908 and 1921. However, it was also inspired by Professor Yngvar Nielsen's statement from 1877, when he wrote that the scattered evidence found in medieval written sources should be interpreted in the context of the still-standing architecture at Bryggen. What had been a hypothesis put forward by Nielsen was now presented as part of a theory by the Director of Cultural Heritage. Hypotheses are built into theories by research producing empirical evidence supporting them. Koren Wiberg had taken on the task of producing such evidence.

Koren Wiberg's theory of historical continuity was based on his interpretations of observations made during the foundation work for new buildings in the southern quarter of Bryggen. The theory placed Bryggen under the heading of medieval cultural monument and this provided the basic argument for extending legal protection to the northern half as a cultural heritage site. However, the law did not designate who was to carry the cost of protection, and since the tenements consisted of separate private properties, the decay of the old buildings rapidly made the situation critical.

By the end of the 1930s, new plans for redevelopment schemes were introduced, which were similar to those that had been carried out in the southern part of Bryggen. The historian Bernt Lorentzen, who professed that Koren Wiberg's views were not built on historical documentation, but relied on his imagination, also voiced criticism of Koren Wiberg's theory of historical continuity (Lorentzen 1938). In 1952, Lorentzen presented his doctoral thesis where he advocated that the Hanseatic rebuilding after the devastating fire in 1476 introduced fundamental changes to the architecture and layout of Bryggen, and in this way he refuted Koren Wiberg's theory. By now, popular support for the area was at an all-time low, probably strengthened by strong anti-German sentiments after the war, and Lorentzen's was an academic alternative to Koren Wiberg's theory of historical continuity. On 4 July 1955, the northern part of Bryggen was ablaze, and when the fire was put out, half of what was left after 1912, was lost.

In the area damaged by the conflagration, an opportunity similar to the situation after the destruction of tenements in the southern part more than fifty years earlier arose, and this time proper archaeological excavation was instigated. Preliminary dissemination of results opened the public eye to the value of Bryggen as an historical site. Koren Wiberg's assumptions that the tenements at Bryggen represented the medieval tenement structure seemed to be confirmed. However, he had contended that the tenement structure, consisting of long rows

of houses, was the result of ever more houses being built at the back as soon as the space along the shoreline was taken. However, the archaeological excavations showed that the rows of houses had been created by filling out the harbour basin little by little, rather than by building houses at the back of the wharf.

For the understanding of the development of Bergen as a medieval town and of Bryggen as a cultural heritage site today, the discovery of the large areas of reclaimed land was probably one of the most ground-breaking discoveries. The dynamics in the development were based on the need for more building space and proximity to the harbour that represented the main communication line in and out of the urban area. To the archaeologists, this also showed that Bryggen and Bergen are not to be understood in a local perspective, but as a typical example of a medieval harbour town in an international perspective. What is extraordinary in the case of Bergen is that the medieval urban structure at Bryggen is still preserved and that the built tenement area, the wharf and the interface with the harbour front are still intact. In this perspective, the broadening of the wharf that took place from 1900 and into the 1930s was in accordance with urban development that had been going on for centuries.

At two decisive moments separated by little more than 56 years, in 1899 and 1955, the numbers of tenements at Bryggen was reduced by 75%. In 1958, another fire threatened to end it all. Luckily, the fire was brought under control and it affected only a minor part. The fire in 1958 is thought to have been a watershed for the status of Bryggen in popular opinion. From now on, the preservation cause gained momentum and Bryggen soon became a positively laden symbol and a major emblem of Bergen. This process peaked in 1979, when Bryggen was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. The main argument behind the inclusion was that Bryggen commemorated a lost trading culture, with reference to the Hanseatic Kontor and probably also its successor, which had been exporting Norwegian goods, mostly dried fish from northern Norway, to the British Isles and continental Europe.

Conclusion

Since the 1960s, the preservation of Bryggen as a cultural heritage site has not been seriously questioned. The last couple of decades have seen an ever-growing interest from the public and a steadily growing effort in preservation. This effort has focussed on restoring of the tenements and securing the archaeological deposits beneath them. To Koren Wiberg, archaeological interpretation was of decisive importance in underpinning his theory of historical continuity, which was, in large part, confirmed by the extensive and thorough excavations in the northern part of Bryggen after the fire in 1955. Koren Wiberg's archaeological skills and methods did not meet the technical and professional standards of the present day. However, his ability to build a consistent theory, based upon interpreting observations made in the field and combining them with written sources, calls for admiration. There can be little doubt that this was vital for the decision in 1927 to protect Bryggen as a cultural monument. He was the first to discover and describe the vast deposits to be found under the old tenements, and he established that these could be dated as segments between layers of ash from fires that had ravaged Bryggen throughout its history. On the basis of his observations, he was able to underpin the argument that the remaining tenements represented the medieval architectural style. When explaining the reason for this, he gave the Hanseatic merchants and their Kontor, which had dominated the quarter since the late medieval period, a pivotal role. It is they who should be credited with

preserving the medieval style of living, and passing it on into modern times. Convincingly, Koren Wiberg combined the history of the medieval Norwegian past with Bergen's Hanseatic history. Some of his points of view are no longer valid in light of current research, especially his interpretation of how the tenements had developed into long rows of houses. Koren Wiberg had little knowledge of the reclamation of land from the harbour basin, which was one of the major findings during the Bryggen excavations after the fire in 1955. However, more emphasis should be put on the fact that the Bryggen excavation confirmed many of Koren Wiberg's observations, such as the fire layers and the huge deposits of debris containing artefacts from medieval everyday life. Koren Wiberg's pioneering archaeological efforts paved the way for Bryggen to be protected by law as a cultural heritage site in 1927. The excavations after the fire in 1955 started at a time when resentment towards Bryggen was at its peak and produced more evidence of Bryggen's importance as a cultural heritage site and also verified vital premises of Koren Wiberg's theory of historical continuity.

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Endnotes

- 1 Bergen byarkiv (Municipal Archive of Bergen) Kat. Nr. 646 Hd. 5. For a further description, see Erslund 2010: 22–25. Two smaller notebooks with corresponding information to that found in this notebook, are found in Kat. Nr. 646 Hd. 4.
- 2 Bergen byarkiv (Municipal Archive of Bergen) Kat. nr. 646 Hd. 4. The first 30 pages are numbered, the next 40 are unnumbered.
- 3 Bergen byarkiv (Municipal Archive of Bergen) Kat. Nr. 646 Hd. 4: 36 and 37.
- 4 Bergen byarkiv (Municipal Archive of Bergen) Kat. nr. 646 Hd. 4: 17–19, 24, 31–35, 59.
- 5 Bergen byarkiv (Municipal Archive of Bergen) Kat. Nr. 646 Hd. 4: 22–23, 29, 37, 52–53, 55–59.
- 6 Bergen byarkiv (Municipal Archive of Bergen) Kat. Nr. 646 Hd. 4: 11–13, 48–49, 58.
- 7 Bergen byarkiv (Municipal Archive of Bergen) Kat. Nr. 646 Hd. 4: 42, 64.
- 8 Koren Wiberg's notes from these excavations are found in the second of the two notebooks at the Municipal Archive of Bergen Kat. 646 Hd. 5. Erslund 2010: 22–25.
- 9 Letter from Koren Wiberg to the chairman of the Tyskebryggen committee, Einar Oscar Schou, 1941. Det hanseatiske Museums arkiv.

