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The Stone Buildings Around St Mary's Church in Bergen – a Reassessment

Between 1920 and 1968, a number of stone buildings were excavated in the Bryggen area of Bergen. Already during the excavation work, three of these stone buildings were identified as medieval buildings known from written sources. These identifications have later been repeated in the archeological and historical literature and, until today, have acquired the status of an accepted truth. In this article, I will look at the historical and archeological knowledge about these buildings and suggest a new interpretation.

Stone building in medieval Bergen

Bergen developed on a narrow strip of land at the foot of a steep hillside along the north-eastern side of the harbor of Vågen. During the twelfth century, a large number of stone churches were built in the town. The two large churches of St Mary and Holy Cross still stand on the gravelly flats flanking this strip of land. Midway between them, at the foot of the mountain, stood the large St Nicholas's Church and in the same area there were at least four smaller churches: St Peter's, St Lawrence's, St Martin's and St Michael's. At Holmen stood Christchurch Cathedral and the Lesser Christchurch; on the western shore of the harbor Vågen stood the abbeys of St John and St Michael while the nunnery of Nonneseter was established on the peninsula between the lakes Store Lungegårdsvann and Lille Lungegårdsvann.

The stone church building continued unabated through the thirteenth century. The foundation of Dominican and Franciscan convents, two hospitals, several new parish churches and the stone-built residences for the king, the archbishop of Nidaros and the bishop of Bergen all date from this century. The stone churches dominated the urban landscape and its skyline, towering above the low wooden houses. Around 1300, the great stone building period in Bergen came to a halt. This coincided with the completion of the three last great building projects: the new chancel of the Franciscan church of St Olav (the present cathedral) in 1301, the Royal Chapel of the Holy Apostles at Holmen in 1302 and the enlargement of the chancel of Christchurch Cathedral in 1312.

A few small churches or chapels might have been built in Bergen after 1300, but the stonemasons were occupied mostly with the repair and rebuilding of the many churches after the many fires that regularly destroyed Bergen. The most important of these fires occurred in 1332 when most of the town and the churches were burnt, in 1393 when German pirates

attacked, plundered and partly burnt the town, in 1413 when eight churches were burnt, in 1429 when the royal residence and some of the town was burnt, in 1455 when Munkeliv Abbey was burnt, in 1476 when four or five churches were burnt, in 1489 when Stranden opposite Bryggen burnt, in 1527 when the northernmost part of Bryggen burnt, and in 1528 when the Dominican Friary was burnt (Helle 1982, 698-703).

During the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, several of the smaller churches disappear from the written sources. Many old churches were not rebuilt after a fire, as the cost became too high and the congregation had usually diminished in size. In addition, as this part of Bergen became dominated by the Hanseatic merchants the Norwegians gradually moved across the harbour to Stranden, leaving many churches without a congregation. This trend was completed and cemented with the Lutheran Reformation in 1537 after which only four churches were still in use in Bergen.

Koren Wiberg and Herteig

In the archeological history of Bergen, two people tower above most. The founder of the archeological observations and excavations in Bergen was the local antiquarian and artist Christian Koren Wiberg (1870-1945). He carried out a number of archeological investigations from 1899 until World War II, but his work generally suffers from an over-reliance on written sources and a lack of archeological insight. From 1955 to 1968, the archeologist Asbjørn Herteig (1919-2006) led the large excavation of the northern area of Bryggen that had burnt in 1955, and he worked until his death on the publication of this vast material. One of his most important results was to demonstrate that the property boundaries in most tenements dated back to the Middle Ages and that Bryggen was the result of constant backfilling, so that the waterfront had been moved about 130 m into the harbor from the eleventh-century beach. Like Koren Wiberg, Herteig had a strong belief in the written sources, which often led him to immediately interpret and date the archeological material according to these sources. He also relied heavily on the writings of Koren Wiberg, especially the method of giving an absolute date to the various fire layers already during the excavation work, according to the historically known town fires. This method has later caused problems during the analysis of the excavated material as there were more fire layers than recorded fires, and there were clearly also local fires which affected only a part of the excavated area.

In this paper, I will discuss Herteig's interpretation of two stone buildings he excavated – Building 48 and Building 50 – together with three ruins excavated by Koren Wiberg: the so-called St Peter's Church and the two buildings flanking it, which I will here call Building A and Building B (Fig. 1).

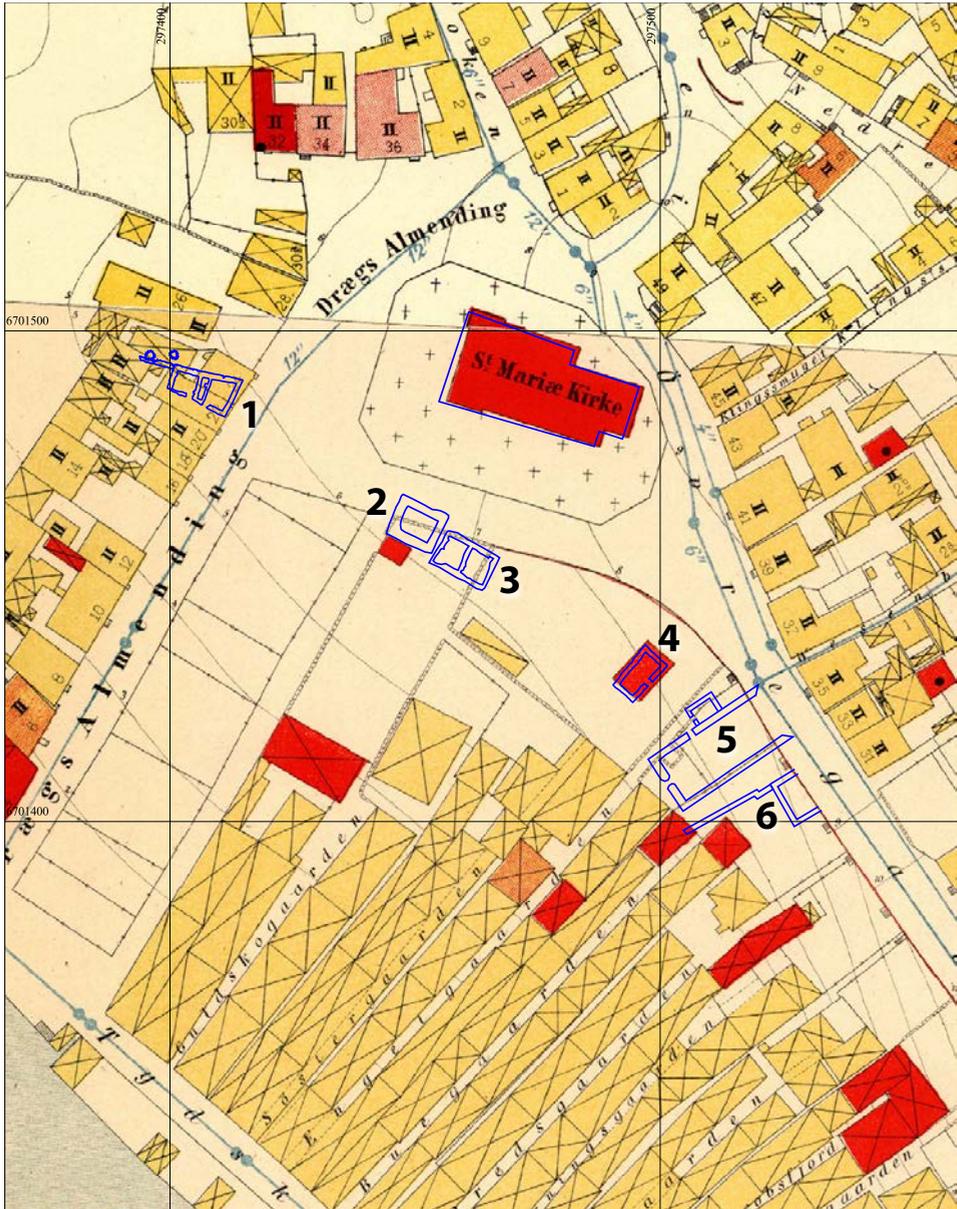


Figure 1. Detail of the 1880 map of Bergen with the buildings discussed in the article interpolated (blue lines). From the left to the right 'St Catherine's Hospital' (1), Building 50 (2), Building 48 (3), Building A (under the later stone cellar (4)), 'St Peter's Church' (5) and Building B (6). The two last buildings are partly covered by Øvregaten (The High Street). (Map courtesy of ©Byantikvaren, Bergen)

Building 50 – ‘St Lawrence’s Church’

In the northernmost part of the 1955-68 excavation area, c. 25 m south of St Mary’s Church, the ruins of two stone buildings were excavated in 1967-1968. The buildings stood side by side, separated by a narrow space of only 20-30 cm. The eastern one is called Building 48 and the western one is called Building 50 (Fig. 1, no. 2 and 3).

Building 50 consists of 1.5m wide stone walls surviving to a height of 90cm, and with remains of a flagstone floor above the level of the plinth course. In the western part of the south wall are the remains of a doorway with a width of 1.25m. The building measures externally 9.7-9.8 m x 8.2-8.3 m and internally c. 6.7 x 5.2 m (35 m²) (Herteig 1991, 74).

The building had several floor layers and the oldest floor was contemporary with the building. It consisted of flagstones laid level with the internal wall base, and it rested on a tightly packed layer of small stones and soapstone chips (Lidén 1980, 148). This layer probably derived from the construction of the building. Interestingly, the west wall of Building 50 aligns with the west facade of St Mary’s Church. In addition, the building was placed only a few meters from the twelfth-century beach line and thus situated as close to the harbour as possible while still having a solid foundation for its thick and heavy walls.

Some graves pre-dating the ruin were uncovered under the northernmost part of the building, showing that Building 50 was placed inside the existing St Mary’s Churchyard. Herteig dated it to the phase before Fire VI (AD 1198) and ‘before the late 1180s at the latest’ (Herteig 1991, 74). However, Herteig admitted that the archaeological dating was difficult in this area because of later disturbances. In addition, his dating of the building rests partly on its identification as St Lawrence’s Church (Lafranzkirkiu/ecclesia sancti Laurentii Bergis), and the earliest written references to this church dates to 1206 (Herteig 1991, 73).

Herteig’s identification of this ruin as St Lawrence’s Church was also accepted by the art historian Hans-Emil Lidén, who incorporated it into Vol.1 of ‘Norwegian Churches. Bergen’. However, Lidén also refers to the doubts voiced by the historian Bernt Lorentzen about the identification of this ruin as St Lawrence’s Church, which Lorentzen believed was situated somewhere to the northwest of St Mary’s Church instead (Lidén 1980, 148). The last written source of St Lawrence’s church is a document from 1438 (Lidén 1980, 147). If the church was restored after the 1413 fire, it was certainly hit again hard by the fire of 1476 and was definitely not rebuilt after this fire.

Lidén describes the ruin’s masonry as more Gothic than Romanesque, thus implying a date after the 1248 fire rather than before the 1198 fire. The only portal of Building 50 sits in the south wall so far to the west that its left jamb aligns with the internal west wall of the building. Lidén refers to the opinion of the excavators that the portal was secondary, but without indicating where the primary portal might have been situated (Lidén 1980, 148). Its position might also suggest that it did not lead only into the ground-floor room, but also served an internal wall staircase starting on the right hand side of the portal and leading up through the wall to the upper floors. As the building had been vaulted, the upper floors could also be accessed from such a staircase or from an outside gallery. However, in spite of the ruin’s hitherto accepted identification as St Lawrence’s Church, which is known to have been situated somewhere in the vicinity of St Mary’s Church, there is in fact no solid evidence for this identification.

Indeed, not a single feature of Building 50 indicates that this was a church at all: there were no graves contemporary with the building inside it, nor any features that normally are found in chapels, e.g. an altar base or a screen between a choir and a nave. In fact, not a single object was found which could be related to an ecclesiastical function. No other known churches in Bergen have a ground plan or design similar to this ruin. The sole decorated feature of the building is the left jamb of the doorway which is decorated with a smooth roll. In small one-cell Norwegian churches with a single entrance, the doorway is always placed in the west wall directly facing the altar. In this building, a north portal facing the churchyard might also have been expected. A portal in the south wall, opposite St Mary's Church and facing the harbour, is a very unusual position for a single entrance.

The internal floor space is also very small for a church, especially when considering the thickness of the walls. It must also be remembered that all written sources talk about St Lawrence's as a *church*, never as a *chapel*, indicating it had a certain size. Its churchyard is also mentioned several times in the sources, but there is no indication that Building 50 had its separate churchyard. In addition, this building occupies a low point in the landscape and stands next to the c. 25 m wide beach area of the twelfth century (Helle 1982, 121, 130; Solberg 1985, 41). This is an uncommon position for a church of that period, as they usually stand on a high point in the landscape. The conclusion is therefore that this was no church at all.

But then what kind of building was it? Since the early twentieth century, Koren Wiberg had searched for the remains of St Lawrence's Church in this area. His starting point was a 1568 deed describing a stone building situated in this area. It was a dwelling house by then, but Koren Wiberg became convinced that it was identical with the former St Lawrence's Church which had been converted into a private residence after the Reformation (Koren Wiberg 1908, 14). When the 1955-1968 excavations thus yielded a ruin in the same area where Koren Wiberg had searched in vain for the church, Herteig immediately identified this ruin as St Lawrence's Church. Koren Wiberg's hypothesis was immediately accepted and still is.

There is no doubt that Building 50 is identical with the stone building mentioned in the deed of 1568. This deed says that the stone building was situated 'at the bottom of Our Lady's Churchyard, next to the tenement of Gullskoen (*i.e.* 'the Golden Shoe', ØE), measuring 36 Norwegian feet in length and 30 Norwegian feet in width' (Herteig 1969, 106). These measurements are identical with the size of this ruin, but Koren Wiberg's misconception was that Building 50 was identical with the former St Lawrence's Church. However, no written sources describe what happened to this church after 1438. Reading the full description of the building in the deed of 1568 fuels the suspicion that this was no remodelled church:

... mit Stenhuuss og Grund, som staar neden wed wor froe Kircke Gaard, nest op till Guldskois Gaard og Grund, Er udi sin rette lengd atten Alne Norske, udi Bredden femten Alne Norske, som nu denne Dag er een fuldferdig Kielder, under med Dørre og Ferdig Laas. Sammeledes derofen faare en Skion ferdig Huelving med ferdige Dørre og Laase derfor, og skjøne Ierngether i winduerne og derofenforre een Sommerstue med Glarwindue og gulved lagd med Astrag disligeste med et Got Sper og tag (Koren Wiberg 1908, 14).

My stone building ... which now this day [10 July, 1568] is a complete cellar, under [i.e. on ground floor level, ØE] with doors and finished locks, above this a beautiful vault [i.e. a vaulted room, ØE] with doors and locks, and beautiful iron grilles in the windows, and above this a summer living room with glass windows and the floor covered with glazed tiles and also with a good roof [i.e. attic and roof construction, ØE] (author's translation).

This is clearly a description of a building with three floors, not a former church. There is a small possibility that St Lawrence's Church was vaulted and divided into two floors, but even then another stone-built floor must have been added on top of it, which sounds highly improbable. It's also worth noticing that no windows are mentioned on the ground floor level, the next level has windows with iron grilles while only the top floor has proper windows. The remains of a large log-built privy measuring 1.8 x 2.0 m externally were also found during the excavations, and there was a gap of 1.0-1.1 m between the privy and the wall of the stone building (Herteig 1991, 25). This indicates that a wooden gallery existed at the first-floor level which could be reached by an external stairway. A privy was always placed as far from the entrance as possible, at least around the corner. Unless there was a built-in wall staircase, the entrance to the upper floors must therefore have been placed in the north wall.

But what kind of building was this then? In my opinion, an almost square building with three floors and only one room on each floor (one of them vaulted), has to be called a tower-house. From the description in the 1568 deed it sounds newly renovated and modernized. We know that the owner Erik Rosenkrantz, who was also the governor of Bergen 1560-1568, built a large tower-house at Bergenhus castle and a private residence of stone on the opposite side of the harbour, today known as *Muren*. When leaving Bergen in 1568, he sold or let out his substantial properties in the town, among them this house, and the deed is fortunately preserved.

Building 50 has parallels in other towns like Trondheim/Nidaros and Skien where detached watchtowers were placed at the entrance to the harbour, and similar towers are also found in the residences of kings and bishops, e.g. in Oslo and Hamar (Ekroll 1997, 131-147). The real St Lawrence's Church must therefore have been situated somewhere further to the west or to the north.

Building 50 was destroyed at the latest by the 1702 fire, but more probably long before that. In 1675, there was a fire in this area, and the roof of St Mary's Church caught fire. Several houses were blown up with gunpowder to prevent the fire from spreading, and the buildings 48 and 50 might have been among those destroyed.

Herteig does not mention the artifacts found inside the ruin. However, in his master thesis, the archeologist Ole-Magne Nøttveit analyzed all weapon finds from Bryggen, and he discovered that in Building 50, as many as five weapons were found, more than in any other single building in the excavated area. Three daggers, an axe and a crossbow arrowhead were found in the floor layers dating to the fifteenth century or later. All of the weapons were found above two fire layers that the excavators dated to 1198 and 1248 respectively. In the same layer as the weapons lay two coins, one was a German coin minted c. 1390-1400 and the other was a Danish coin from c. 1405-20 (Nøttveit 2000, 94, 96). It is possible, but not very likely, that these coins circulated for a long time after they were minted. It is thus very unlikely that Building 50 was a church c. 1400, when written sources document without doubt that St Lawrence's Church was still functioning as a church.

Building 48 – ‘St Mary’s Guildhall’

The walls of Building 48 (cf. Fig. 1, no. 3) were partly preserved to a height of 0.70m but only the foundations of the north and south walls were preserved. The building had two rooms and a doorway in the east gable wall facing a passageway, which was identified during the excavations as being the ‘Old Church Road’ which is described in written sources and believed to be identical with the medieval street called ‘St Mary’s Almenning’ (Herteig 1969, 72; Helle 1982, 236). A door in the internal wall connected the two rooms and in the northwest corner of the ground floor there was a fireplace. There was no trace of a doorway in the north wall facing the churchyard and no door in the west wall because of the proximity to the other stone building. Its south wall was so destroyed that it was impossible to ascertain whether there had been a door here, but this is unlikely. A latrine pit found here indicates that this was the back of the building. The north wall facing the church and the churchyard must have been the building’s main facade, together with the east wall facing the public passageway (Herteig 1969, 104).

According to Herteig, Building 48 was built in his Period 5.1, which was an un-burnt phase following the fire of 1248 and ending before the fire of 1332 (Herteig 1991, 49). Under the building, 3-5 levels of graves were found, showing that Building 48 was built inside St Mary’s churchyard, which originally had been far more extensive than in later centuries.

Herteig immediately interpreted Building 48 as being the remains of St Mary’s Guildhall (*Maria Gildeskåle/Mariu gilldi skala i Biorgvin*) which is mentioned in Bergen’s Town Law of 1276 as the meeting-place for the town council (NgL II, 187). Written sources also mention that once a year the town moot was set at St Mary’s Churchyard (NgL III, 134; NgL IV, 360). The size and plan of this building and its situation inside the perimeter of the churchyard may support the interpretation of this building as a meetinghouse.

However, this building could also have been the dwelling of one of several priests serving St Mary’s Church. Building 48 must have had an upper floor, built of either of wood or stone, containing several smaller rooms or a large room or hall of c. 50 m². In view of the importance of St Mary’s Guild and its high social position in Bergen, and the fact that the guildhall also functioned as the first town hall of Bergen, this building is surprisingly small. The immediate interpretation of this ruin as St Mary’s Guildhall is therefore somewhat premature, especially as this interpretation partly rests on the misinterpretation of a medieval document.

Koren Wiberg and later Herteig built much of their argument on a letter dated to January 21, 1480. According to Koren Wiberg, this letter stated that ‘Our Lady’s and St Michael’s Guildhall’ had been converted into a priest’s house for St Mary’s Church (Koren Wiberg 1908, 12). However, the full text of the letter has never been published, and Koren Wiberg only refers to an excerpt of the letter printed in 1858 (Nicolaysen 1858, 575). He does not even quote this excerpt in full and unfortunately he completely misinterpreted it, and this misunderstanding was later repeated by Herteig (1969, 107).

By checking a transcript of the original letter in the National Archive in Oslo, its original meaning becomes clear. Four lay judges (*lagrettesmenn*) issued this letter concerning the history and ownership of the plot on which the guildhall of Our Lady and St Michael stood in 1480.

Ollum Mannom Them som thette Breff Seer eller hører, Sender Eileff Segurssenn Anders Olssenn, Joen Snarissenn, Albrit Hangnessenn, Suor(n)e laugrettis mendt, Q: G: och sinne kundicht giøre mett thette wortt offne breff, Att wy wore bedne aff hedrlige mend Herre Simen, Mester Erick, kanicker i Bergenn, att høre widnisbyrd om then tufft, och Rom, som nu staar aa paa gillis skollen wor frue och stij Mickils, kom tha for osz och flere gode mendt, hedrlig quinde hustru Gurrøn Morthensdotter, Gunnild trundtzdotter, lyste och sagde, og bade sig saa gudt till hielpe, att tha the wore smaa piger, tha stod paa forskreffne tufft, stoffue, forstue, lofft mett koier paa baade sider saa wit som nu er gildstuen, Och westen fraa ildtofften, Och wor tha kaldit prestehussz, Och bode ther tha Sire tore, som tha wor sogne prest ad wor frue kircke, End thett er nu Mer end femtie aar sidenn Sire tore døde (gud hans siell Naadhe), Till ydermere sandhed her Om henge wy wortt Jndsegell for thette breff, Som giort wor aa aar effther wor herris Jesu Christj burdtz tiid Mcdlxxx:º aa scte Angnes dagh

'To all who see or hear this letter we, lay judges Eileff Segussenn, Anders Olssenn, John Snarissen and Albrit Hangnessen, send God's and our greeting. Sir Simen and Master Erick, canons in Bergen, requested us to hear witness statements about the plot where the guildhall of Our Lady and St Michael now stands. Two honourable matrons, Gurrøn Morthensdotter and Gunnild Trundtzdotter, swore by God and stated to us and other good men present that when they were young girls the so-called Priest House stood on this plot. It consisted of a dwelling room, an entrance room and a loft with beds on each side, and there lived sira Tore, the parish priest of St Mary's Church. It was now more than fifty years ago since sira Tore died (may God give mercy to his soul). To confirm this statement we add our seals to this letter, which is issued 1480 years after the birth of Our Lord on St Agnes Day' (author's translation).

In other words, the letter tells the opposite of what Koren Wiberg and later Herteig claimed: the guildhall had not become a priest's house but instead, sometime between c.1430 and 1480, a guildhall was built on the site where the houses of a priest formerly were located.

This letter gives no indication that the guildhall was identical with the stone building identified today as St Mary's Guildhall (Building 48). In fact, the new guildhall could well have been a wooden building, but it was probably situated near St Mary's Church as it stood on the site of a priest's house. Nor is the guild of St Mary and St Michael which are mentioned in this letter necessarily identical with the guild of St Mary which is mentioned in the Bergen Town Law in 1276, but it might be an amalgamation of two older guilds into one with a new guildhall built on this plot, most probably after the great town fire of 1476. Other new guilds also appeared in late medieval Bergen, e.g. the guilds of St Anne, St Dorothea and St Catherine (Helle 1982, 590, 750).

According to Koren Wiberg and Herteig, this building was destroyed in the great 1702 fire or perhaps already in the more limited 1675 fire. This interpretation seems to be correct even though it rests on the mistaken assumption that Building 48 is identical with the later residence in the same area of the Lutheran minister of St Mary's Church, which it clearly is not.

Building A – The ruin underneath Schøtstuene

In 1935, the site southeast of St Mary's Church was excavated by Koren Wiberg in order to erect the Schøtstuene complex. During the work the ruin of a medieval stone house was found c. 50m from the church (Building A) (cf. Fig. 1, no. 4). It was summarily excavated by Koren Wiberg and enclosed inside a concrete cellar beneath the Dramshusen Schøtstue. The house was originally built above ground with a 1.2m wide doorway and two narrow windows in the east wall (Fig. 2). The ground floor consists of a single room with c. 1.0m thick walls, externally measuring 10.3 x 5.5 m and internally c. 8.0 x 3.8 m (30.4 m²), and without a fireplace (Melle 2011).

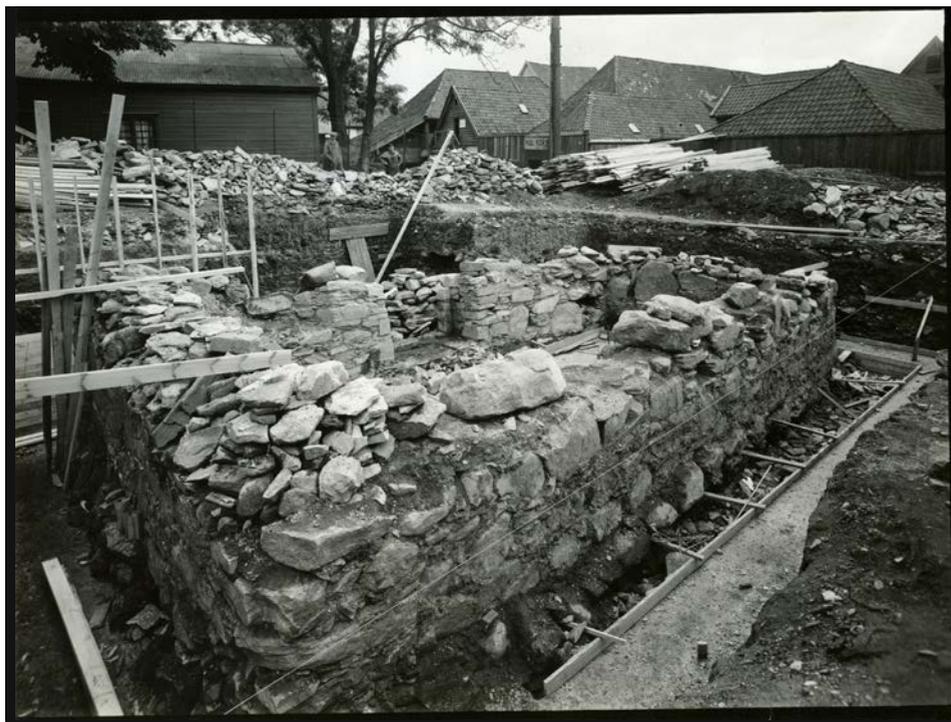


Figure 2. Photo of Building A after excavation in 1935, seen towards the southeast. The portal in the east wall is well visible, and to the left of it one of the two window niches flanking the portal. In the background some of the Bryggen tenements. (Photo: ©Byantikvaren, Bergen)

The doorway is wider than usually found in Bergen, indicating that large objects were moved in and out through the doorway. The doorway and the only preserved window frame are professionally carved out of soapstone and the only decoration consists of a chamfer. Building A clearly had an upper floor, either of stone or timber. According to the 14C-datings the building was constructed around AD 1280-1290 (Melle 2011, 15). It is important to note that the building's entrance and windows face towards the southeast, away from St Mary's Church, and towards the church ruin which will be described in the next chapter. A narrow stretch of cemetery was situated between Building A and this church ruin (Koren Wiberg 1921, 137). Building A was thus entered from the cemetery and it must therefore have had some kind of relation to this church, perhaps as a priest's house.

The church ruin – St Peter’s Church?

In 1920, Koren Wiberg conducted an excavation to the east of St Mary’s Church to search for the ruin of a church that he identified as St Peter’s Church (cf. Fig. 1, no. 5). He had made this identification through a deed from 1563 that he had discovered some years earlier in the Lübeck City Archive. By crosschecking the various measurements, he had managed to pinpoint the probable location of the church site, and when his excavation yielded the ruin of what was undoubtedly a church he did not hesitate to identify it as St Peter’s Church. St Peter’s Church or rather its churchyard is first mentioned in 1183 during an armed struggle in Bergen, and it is last mentioned in written sources in the 1520s (Koren Wiberg 1921, 133-147).

However, one of the measurements given in the 1563 deed was that the distance from the quayfront to the churchyard measured 192 ells (384 feet). To make this fit, Koren Wiberg claimed that the quayfront in 1563 was situated 20m further into the harbour than it was in 1920 (Koren Wiberg 1921, 134), a claim that the later excavations has shown to be totally wrong. Later excavations and new analyses of sixteenth-century deeds have proved that the quayfront did not expand between the Late Middle Ages and c. 1900 (Helle 1982, 704). The identification of this church ruin should therefore not be regarded as a closed case.

The church ruin is oriented NNE-SSW, indicating that it was placed into an already existing street and property structure in this part of Bergen. If the church had been older than the surrounding properties, it would surely have been aligned more along the E-W axis which was the norm for medieval churches.

The modern street Øvregaten (previously *Øvrestrete*, meaning The High Street) covered the eastern end of the church ruin, but Koren Wiberg estimated that the church was c. 24-25 m long. Its choir gable had probably bordered the medieval street without any stretch of churchyard between the church and the street. The church had a rectangular plan and it was externally 11.9 m wide, i.e. it was circa twice as long as it was wide. It had a large portal in the west wall and two smaller entrances in the north wall, one to the nave and one to the choir, which was situated three steps above the floor of the nave (Koren Wiberg 1921, 138). Strangely enough, there was no portal in the south wall of the church, which was otherwise the norm in medieval Norway.

In 1936, according to a newspaper report, the north churchyard wall, running almost parallel to the church, was found at a distance of c. 12 m north of the church (Lidén 1980, 173). This information has formerly not been combined with other observations in this area, but interestingly enough this line is almost convergent with the east wall of Building A. The portal and the windows of this building must then have faced the churchyard of St Peter’s Church, and in some way or other this stone building was connected to the churchyard and consequently also to the church. However, this ‘churchyard wall’ might also have been the eastern boundary of St Mary’s Churchyard. In that case, like the buildings 48 and 50, Building A was located inside the original perimeter of St Mary’s Churchyard. The portals of Building A and St Peter’s Church face each other and between them lay a strip of churchyard. The position of the portals in Building A and the church strongly indicate that these two buildings have a close connection.

On the other hand: if the wall found in 1936 really marked the northwestern border of St Peter’s Churchyard, how far towards the southeast did the churchyard of St Mary’s originally

reach? Did the churchyard extend all the way to Building A, or was there an open area between them? The answer is still buried somewhere in the unexcavated area between Building 48 and Building A.

Today, streets surround St Mary's Churchyard on all sides, and compared to the Middle Ages, the churchyard is much reduced in size. As the excavations demonstrate, in the twelfth century the churchyard extended towards the south as far as and including the sites of buildings 48 and 50. It is still uncertain how far towards the east, north and west the churchyard extended, but the seventeenth-century maps give at least a minimum size. At that time, the southeast corner of the churchyard ended in a right angle, which may indicate an old property border. This leaves an opening of 8-10 m between St Mary's Churchyard and Building A, and this may be where the elusive 'Mariaalmenning' (St Mary's Common Street) once ran towards its junction with Øvrestrete.

Building B

To the south of the church, Koren Wiberg uncovered a 4-5 m wide strip of churchyard enclosed by a wall. This wall breaks in a right angle before it abuts onto the 10.1 m wide Building B (cf. Fig. 1, no. 6). Like the church ruin, the modern street covered the east end of this building but it must have been at least as long as it is wide, which makes it a substantial building in size. Building B was constructed of soapstone ashlar, which also indicates it was an important building, and it contained several floor layers, the oldest ones of wood and the youngest of bricks. Koren Wiberg's plan indicates that the north wall of this building originally could have extended a further 3.7m towards the west to the otherwise unexplained break in the churchyard wall, and on his plan he also indicates that the south wall had once extended over a similar distance further towards the west (Koren Wiberg 1921, 138).

Koren Wiberg interpreted Building B's function as a priest's house (Koren Wiberg 1921, 136-138). However, there was no portal in the excavated part of the building, nor were there any portals in the south wall of the church facing Building B. It is therefore just as likely that the entrance and windows of Building B faced south towards the hitherto unexcavated area occupied by the Bugården and Bredsgården tenements. Perhaps it was connected with one of the as yet undiscovered churches in this part of Bergen?

Concluding remarks

The five stone buildings dealt with here indicate that during the Middle Ages, a number of other stone buildings, both churches and secular buildings, surrounded St Mary's Church. It is worth noticing that although only a small part of St Mary's Churchyard was excavated in the 1960s, buildings 48 and 50 were found exactly in this limited area. It is therefore reasonable to assume that more stone buildings lie undetected in this area and may turn up in the future.

I find it highly unlikely that the ruin of Building 50 ('St Lawrence's Church') was a church at all, but rather that it was a stone tower, originally erected for the defence or protection of this part of Bergen.

Nor can the ruin of Building 48 ('St Mary's Guildhall') be the guildhall mentioned in the 1480 letter, and it is also highly doubtful whether this building really was the St Mary's Guildhall mentioned in the Bergen Town Law of 1276. In my view, it is far too small for this purpose. Perhaps it was originally built as a priest's house for St Mary's Church.

The identification of 'St Peter's Church' may be correct, but there are still many unanswered questions about this church and its strange topographical setting and orientation. Building A is oriented towards St Peter's Church, and it was perhaps built as the residence of its priest. The well-built Building B does not face the church but the opposite direction, indicating that there are still many undiscovered important buildings further to the east.

Seeing all these buildings in context creates an impression of an area with a large number of stone buildings surrounding St Mary's Church, among them two twelfth-century stone churches. This is a very dense concentration, even in Bergen. If we include the ruin called 'St Catherine's Hospital', which is situated further to the SW of St Mary's in this map (cf. Fig. 1 no. 1), we notice that the south walls of all these stone buildings more or less align along a slight curve, indicating the 'solid ground' or moraine and, thus, the original beach line. There is every indication that there must have been many more stone buildings along the moraine ridge to both sides of St Mary's Church. This points to a different urban landscape of far more stone buildings and churches in Bergen before 1300 than imagined earlier, an urban landscape that began changing during the late Middle Ages and was irretrievably lost in the early sixteenth century.

The use of written sources is integral to medieval urban archeology, but only if used consciously. Written sources can give a completely new understanding to an archeological find but, as this article demonstrates, an uncritical repetition of older interpretations and theories can lead one seriously astray. The only possible guiding principle must be *ad fontes* – a critical assessment and interpretation of every written source in its oldest known version. The archeology and history of Bergen still hides unknown quantities of valuable source material.

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Author's note about geographical directions: For the sake of simplicity I regard the churches as oriented east-west, in order to be able to speak about their east, north, west and south walls.

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