

## Re-evaluating City Margins through correct Documentation Questions of Time, Social and Spatial Aspects in Archaeological Storytelling.

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**Abstract:** New technology have a great potential in how it may come to facilitate and renew the way archaeologist deal with the past during excavations, recordings and surveys. It may generate more correct, detailed and thorough ways of documenting. As pointed out in the call for papers, there is probably no point to talk about “correct documentation” but rather depending on what you want to achieve, more or less usable ways of documentation. Technology, new or old, may help us in exploring better or find more suitable ways of recording the data.

In this presentation however, we want to stress other factors, which together with better methods and technologies are important for more correct and adequate archaeological field work, documentation and storytelling. Better documentation techniques and methods may not just improve our work but also move limits for what is possible to examine. However, for an adequate documentation and storytelling, not just “hard values” like technology, but also “soft values” like aspects of time, space and social questions are important. These aspects together with modern techniques of surveying, excavating, documenting and storytelling may catch more variations and present a more multi-faceted picture of our cities examined. Throughout the history of archaeological research, particular layers of time, space and social strata have been marginalized. Exclusions of certain time periods, people or areas can occur unconsciously or consciously, but the result is the same: the city as an object have not been examined or discussed to its full extent. We want to refer to these neglected aspects as physical and social margins, i.e. “peripheral” in a wider meaning. The point is that we have to think about whose history is emphasized and who and what remain invisible. New technology alone will not automatically solve issues of inclusion and representativeness, and a blind trust in the abilities of technologies is precarious. After all, any technology - new or old - is the archaeologists’ tool for reaching an understanding of a past. Technology by itself will not generate good archaeological research, but needs to be conducted by the firm hand of an aware archaeologist.

We will discuss the issues of inclusion and representativeness thematically followed by a final summarising discussion. As base for our discussion we will have Sweden, with some views towards other parts of the world. Situations might vary between countries but the questions at issue should be of relevance overall.

**Keywords:** city margins, time, space, social variation, periphery, centrality, methodology

## Time

### Stressing certain time periods – ignoring others

Time as a factor is a defining and crucial part of archaeology. It should be of major importance in every archaeological endeavour, but it paradoxically often plays an inferior role. Instead of considering larger time spans to detect continuities and changes over time, narrower views and subjects of interest have been more rule than exception. This may of course lead to more limited and misleading results, not representing a statistical depth in time. It is no exception that during archaeological excavations, what is considered more exciting and important “in vogue” time periods are in focus while others are ignored. This can be the result of different reasons, like politics, traditions or personal interests. A major factor has though been the division between subject of research for the historical and the archaeological discipline. Post-medieval periods have by tradition been dedicated to historical research and history writing (the medieval time period in Scandinavia is set around the year 1050 until the reformation).

The Swedish historical and urban archaeology has to a large extent been formatted in the University City Lund in southern Sweden. During the 1960's archaeology functioned as a complement to what you did not already know from written documents, or archaeology worked as a confirmation of what historians already knew (FAGERLAND & PAASCHE 2012:70). The archaeological research questions were also formulated from historical discourses when it came to views on the past and definition of an urban space (THOMASSON 2011). During the 1970's rescue archaeology became professionalised. The purpose was to document while research was supposed to be conducted at the universities. The same decade, a large Swedish project called the “Medieval town” (*Medeltidsstaden*, executed between 1976-1984) also contributed to make city archaeology a discursive field in archaeology, and formed an understanding of urbanization and the medieval cities in what is today Sweden (THOMASSON 2011). The interest clearly lay in the medieval periods and indications on urban foundations. Critique directed later towards the project concerns its notion of definition of an urban place, the fact that the term “city” (*stad* in Swedish) actually did not exist as we know it today in the medieval, nowadays-Swedish territories, and that the project therefore was guilty of an anachronism, which simplified the urban diversity and variation.

During excavations especially in 1960's to the 1980's but even in our days, in order to reach down to the medieval deposits, several meters of post-medieval cultural layers were removed with machines and thrown away without any or closer documentation (LARSSON 2000; SÖDERLUND 1986; KIHLEBERG 1986).

Despite the fact that archaeology has been conducted in many cities with early modern backgrounds as long as in the cities from the medieval period, an overview does not exist of the post-medieval cities. The knowledge of early modern cities in Sweden is thus fragmented and still absent of large work of synthesizing and comparative character (ERSGÅRD 2013).

Today the trend in Sweden is much improved and large, thorough excavations on early modern remnants are conducted in several parts of the country. Though, a problem still remains from previously conducted excavations: only a few excavations have been made from “top to bottom”, which has created a “hole” in the history. In this case, the medieval past and our contemporary time have not successfully been connected, and the medieval period has become distant and therefore more different and exotic. Since the archaeology during the 1970's and 1980's never addressed the question of transformations from medieval to early

modern traits, there also remains lack of knowledge of continuities and discontinuities in the epochs and archaeological remains (LARSSON *forthcoming*; LARSSON 2000:256).

One factor that contributes to exclusion of some time periods might be the strict time limits in contract archaeology. This could not however be the whole truth, and traditions and habits in the scientific performance must play the largest role. Though, the quality of trial trenching might affect the final excavations: it is important to know before the final excavation what kind of remnants are in the ground, in order to make a preliminary plan for the extent of the excavation. Here we can also see how personal interest of the archaeologist and also county administrations in charge may decide on what to examine and what not to prioritize, but also the pressure on prizes due to the competing situation in contract archaeology. This is also reflected in a very diverse price tag on archaeology in different parts of Sweden, where the same type of survey may cost twice or three times as much in the vicinity of the capital as opposed to the rest of the country (cf OTTANDER 2012).

### **Impact of legislations**

Later centuries have been considered not as important to excavate, since the perception that you already know what they are about, have been prevailing. Norway is an interesting example of how legislation affects the archaeological discipline in practice. The Norwegian ancient monuments act from 1905 decided that, to be considered worthy of preserving, ancient monuments should be of national interest and preferably reflect the heydays of the nation. Monuments from before the reformation were considered more important since they were rarer. Consequently, a total protection was applied to all remnants older than 1537, and a very loose protection on those from after the reformation (FAGERLAND & PAASCHE 2012:61). It would seem as though anyone is entitled to conduct a survey or treat the early modern and modern remains in any way they please, and this remain a problem as long as it is not an accepted field of research.

Another complication is the division of responsibility and administration between NIKU (Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research) and the University Museums. Where NIKU bears the responsibility for city excavations and conservation of standing buildings, the University Museums are responsible for all prehistoric surveys and archaeology outside the cities. Consequently, this division of specialization in time periods between institutions can make remains from historic periods invisible if found outside of the city as well as prehistoric remains inside the city limits.

It is important to note that what is considered to be relatively close in time and known today will progressively move back in time and probably increase in interest in the future. This will especially be problematic in countries such as Norway, where remains from after 1537 have no effective protection and therefore liable to be removed without documentation and thus impossible to return to now or in the future (FAGERLAND & PAASCHE 2011). These factors will affect comparative studies of, in this particular case, the early modern in general.

Building conservation and even history as disciplines traditionally work with other issues and methods than archaeology. Therefore, the outcome of the research is not always a natural extension of archaeological questioning. Archaeological studies may on the other hand point to aspects of social life and material remains, which are less clear or reachable through the studies of other types of source material. However,

there is every opportunity to work out a common methodology which could strengthen future interdisciplinary studies for all involved disciplines.

## Space

In a physical aspect, the peripheral regions of a city may be constituted in many ways but often function as economic lifeblood for the survival of the city, for instance in shape of harbors, gardens, farmlands, mines and residence for a large quantity of occupations. The social diversity was probably large in these kinds of outskirts, and makes an exciting topic for research and a great platform for implementing and enriching methodologies. A tendency in archaeological research, when it comes to urban environments, is the focus on centrality, based on what we consider to be the 'real' city. City walls or boundaries, and planned urban areas are considered to stipulate the actual limits of the city, and what is inside is normally locus for our investigation. Large areas outside the city walls are part in the city activities but excluded from sometimes both cultural heritage laws and interest of investigations. In this way research misses both interesting and vital parts of the urban space.

City parts outside the core or walls are to a higher extent home to common people, often in settlements built beyond an official and regulated city plan. A majority of the city population may live and work outside the city cores, but might never be visualised through archaeological excavations and thereby never be part of the official writing of history and cultural heritage we as archaeologists are part in creating, which ensures that their stories never will be told nor heard. In Swedish urban archaeology during the 1960's to the 1980's, focus was not only on pre-reformative periods, but also on specific remains. Monuments like monasteries, churches, cathedrals and strongholds were in focus but above all, city cores (LARSSON 2000:251).

A reason for this centrality focus might be an over-reliance on historical plans, maps and blueprints. However, much of what is depicted on maps was never realized (NILSEN 2013; LARSSON *forthcoming*). It is only through archaeological investigations that conclusive verification can be established of what actually was built. Maps and plans are also good examples of polished realities. Certain undesirable environments and city parts can easily be excluded from the maps, but still remain to be found archaeologically. Historical documents as the *City of London* from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, looks to direct orders to clear away all unwanted buildings - in many cases probably meant as temporary settlements in the outskirts of the city. How we actually define a city or town will of course affect how we perform research and excavations. The project *Medeltidsstaden*, had quite a narrow view of what constitute a city, resulting in a history written from the above and missing out on other urban formations which did not have city privileges. There are examples in Sweden of privileged towns that are much smaller than urban like villages, that have not been considered in archaeological research as towns or cities, for example the early modern village Kungslena, which occupied an area about the same size as it's contemporary town Bogesund (ROSEN 2013). Other traditional views of the city claim they should not be based on agrarian resources or not have areas for agriculture within the city core. However, this idea is not corresponding to the archaeological reality. Orchards, herb gardens, vegetable patches, tobacco cultivations, flower beds and even farmland on a minor scale occupies large parts of many Swedish towns as well as a presence of farm animals living within the towns (ROSEN 2013).

Legislations and protections of cities do not usually cover the city in its full extension. The idea that the city equals what is found inside its walls, that the core is where everything happened, has a part in this as well as different definitions of what constitutes a city. This is evident in the picture of the Norwegian city Bergen, where the monument protection covers only a small part of the city center. The map (fig. 1) shows the city extension in medieval laws, including surroundings under the town administration. The smaller, inner figure shows the nowadays-protected area, based on medieval sources but only including the central, densely populated area (WALAKER NORDEIDE 2005:12).

A city often goes through cycles of expansion and stagnation over the centuries (GOODY 1958). This fact is often more apparent in a different way in the archaeological record than in the historical. Outside the city walls are ongoing activities that can be attached to the entry and exit of people and goods, flammable operations, control and agrarian activities as well as activities connected to the harbor. These activities are directly linked to the city and the city's domain but the areas fall into a gray zone between city and countryside and are rarely investigated (WALAKER NORDEIDE 2005).

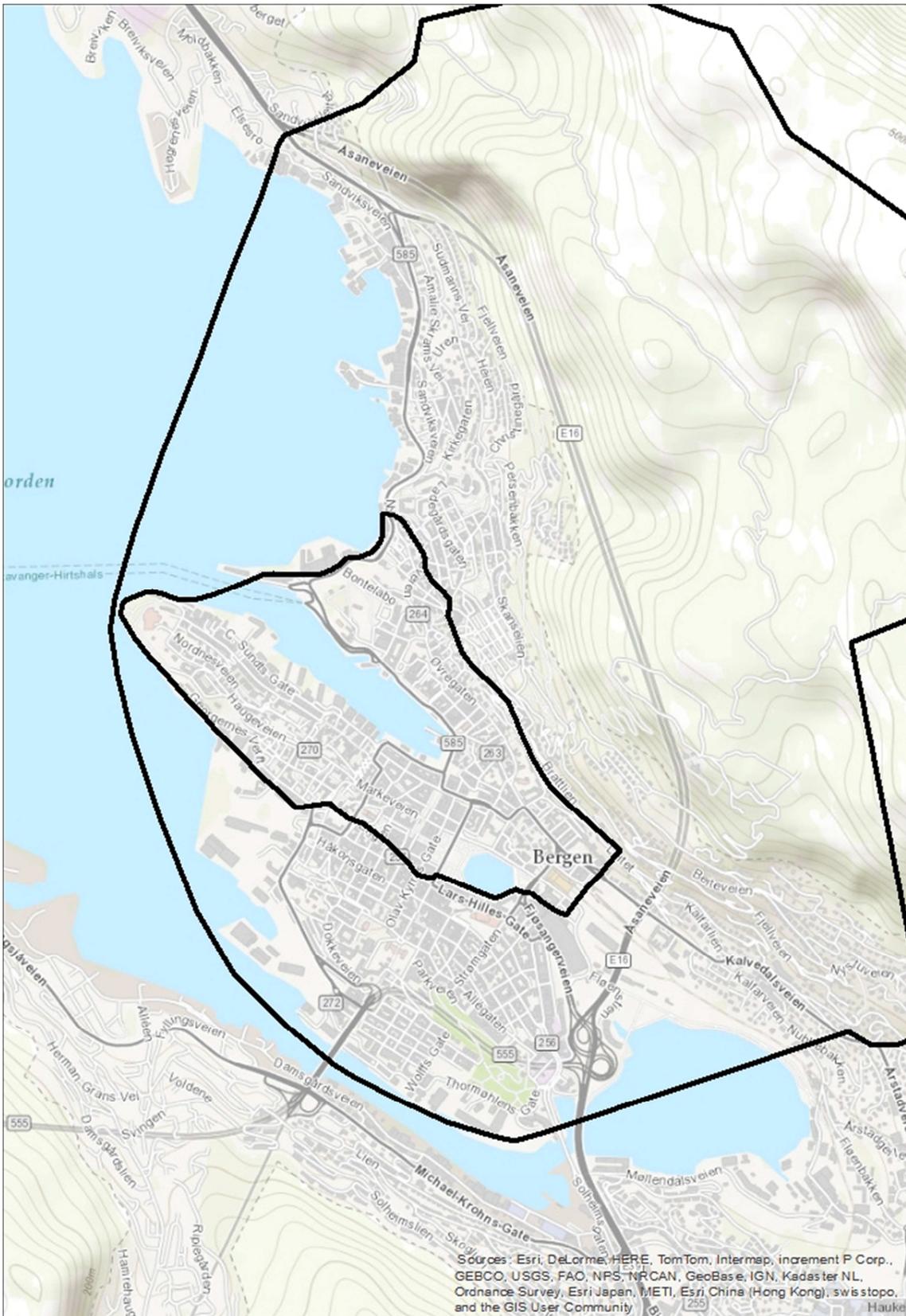


Fig. 1 – Map of the city Bergen. The outer polygon approximately marks the area of the city extension in medieval laws, while the inner, smaller figure, approximately marks the nowadays protected area according to the ancient monuments act. Scale circa 1:45 000. (Map by Bengt Westergaard after maps in WALAKER NORDEIDE 2005: 5,12).

## Social aspects

As pointed out before, many previous urban excavations have focused only on monuments and city cores - even so large ones that have formulated our knowledge and understanding of civilizations. Example of this could be the archaeological research in Mesopotamia, where excavations mainly have taken place within walled city centers, where spectacular finds most likely are to be found. In this way, archaeological investigations have missed out all those suburbs, harbor districts and adjoining settlement areas once integrated in the city (VAN DE MIEROOP 1997: 65, 68f). One-sided focuses like this will not only affect our understanding of how cities and societies are built, structured and lived, but will clearly also exclude a large quantity of people who worked and lived in urban areas but just outside the very cores. These people are seldom part in historical records or official writings of history. In the future there is a big potential in tracing these lost stories through archaeological methodology.

An enlightening example of the relations between city core and unplanned city parts can be found in historic Gothenburg in western Sweden. The deep-water harbour and shipyards of the 17-19<sup>th</sup> century city of Gothenburg were located some kilometres west of the fortified city. This land was royal property and could legally be rented out. During early 18<sup>th</sup> century, a suburb named Majorna started to grow around the port, inhabited mostly by low-wage workers, which were depending on the seasons of the sailing ships. Majorna was originally two villages belonging to two different parishes making it difficult to get a proper representation towards the city of Gothenburg. The area that lacked plan and privileges grew to a densely populated area, which was in contemporary sources compared to a town, but an unsafe one lacking of fresh water and sewers. Without being a town in formal meaning, it grew to be the fifth largest town in Sweden in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Renting in second hand was common and official tax records had trouble detecting how many inhabitants actually lived there. The rich flow of goods through the harbour did not make the poor suburb Majorna any richer, since taxations passed into the city Gothenburg. Majorna has been called a “gateway without a network”. Gothenburg and Majorna were however dependent on each other: the owners of the trade goods were dependent on the poor labourer in Majorna, which were in their turn dependent on receiving poor reliefs (HALLÉN forthcoming).

One further aspect to consider is the relations between physical or cartographic limits and perceptions of these. Relying only to maps, historic information or conceptions of a city, will also hinder archaeologist to reach different social realities in that city. Social borders could have played an equally important role as physical borders. There are also examples of what in official sources are considered slum – for instance because the inhabitants don't live after social dominant norms or because the area is wanted for more lucrative business - while the inhabitants' view of the area might be middle class and respectable (cf SOLARI 2001). Relying only on official documentations could generate a double exclusion of these areas, both in their contemporary society as well as in later research.

There are examples of archaeological investigations conducted in informal areas, sometimes referred to as slums. Excavations have for instance taken place in the slums of Manchester, (once studied by Friedrich Engels), in Manhattan, Melbourne etc. (cf. for instance NEVELL 2011; SNEDDON 2006; MAYNE & MURRAY 2001; YAMIN 1997) Even so, choice of subject in these excavations are rarely norm. Rather they are based on smaller-scale initiatives possible to conduct through research excavations, but still missed out

on a regular basis. One archaeologist who actively have searched the archaeological material for urban poor and people or groups from different social strata, is the archaeologist Steve Roskams. He means detecting these groups, thus a social variability, is largely dependent on, not only searching in the right place, but also how we see and interpret the material. Rescue, or contract, archaeology, according to Roskams, have a certain potential to make detailed as well as widespread excavations in city cores and surrounding outlands, without being too locked up by pre-defined periodised frameworks which sometimes may make us blind for variations not corresponding to the frameworks (cf. ROSKAMS 2006). All in all, detecting, documenting and including different social strata - especially those in certain ways socially, economically and culturally marginalized, with few or any traces passed on in written sources - is to a very large extent dependent on methodological questions and inquiries. Both when it comes to people living in outlands and surrounding areas of a city as well as those living and working more “invisible” inside richer urban environments, as servants, maids, craftsmen and so on.

## Discussion

Our archaeological storytelling is dependent on good documentation, excavation, surveys, interpreting and so on and may benefit greatly from the help of new or old technologies. We have stressed however, that for a better documentation and storytelling, archaeologist also have to be careful in the choice of object of study, and balance the choice of time periods, areas and social groups. Neither personal nor institutional interest should govern what is examined and documented and what is not.

To analyze a time period, it is important not to isolate it, but relate it to previous and following eras. One of the real strengths of archaeology as a discipline is the possibility to study physical remnants from a variety of periods to see changes and continuities in one single place. In this way we may catch, for instance, urban and social variations not corresponding to prevailing definitions and frameworks of how they “should” look. The question remains as to how we may use existing techniques to improve methods for inclusive surveying, excavations, documentation and storytelling, both when it comes to research as well as contract archaeology.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed different ways of documentation and above all, tried to show how unreflected choices of what to study and document, will affect the final result and thereby archaeological storytelling. We argue that what “hard values” like technology may represent, will reveal more when it’s combined with “soft values”, such as aspects of time, space and social dimensions. New and refined technology is not a goal in itself, but a tool among many other which may facilitate archaeological documentation and analysis. After carefully considering what to excavate and determining why and for whom, the importance of how to document the findings emerge. How can we find marginal areas and marginal groups in different societies? Is new technology the only answer or are there other aspects to consider? Time, for example, is a complex issue often forgotten. Larger time spans have been neglected in favor of shorter and narrower periods of interest, thereby missing out on vital information of continuance or change in a wider perspective. It also means that some periods have been favored before others and that

has given us a distorted view of the past. Legislation in some countries has contributed to the idea that some time periods are more important than others. We have also questioned whether archaeological investigations of the city inside its walls can give the whole picture. Centrality has long been in focus with all of its implications. Peripheral areas outside the city walls were very often economically vital to the prosperity of the city. People and the activities in the periphery have been overlooked in the archeological research and it is time to more methodologically include these areas and their inhabitants in the picture. A better awareness of the complexity of social questions, dimensions of time and space, combined with new and more refined ways of documentation in the field, will enable a wider multifaceted and a more including story to be told.

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