'*For My Descendants and Myself, a Nice and Pleasant Abode*'

Agency, Micro-History and Built Environment

Buildings in Society International BISI III, Stockholm 2017

edited by

Göran Tagesson, Per Cornell, Mark Gardiner,
Liz Thomas and Katherine Weikert

Archaeopress Archaeology

Archaeopress Publishing Ltd
Summertown Pavilion
18-24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-78969-581-6
ISBN 978-1-78969-582-3 (e-Pdf)

Cover: Rhyzeliusgården, the deanary in Linköping, Sweden, built by the dean Andreas Rhyzelius in 1723.
Photo: Göran Tagesson

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Preface

'Gud låt henne varda för mig och mina efterkommande en rolig och lycklig boning'

'God, let it for my descendants and myself become a nice and pleasant abode', so ends the proud memoires of the dean, later bishop, of Linköping, Andreas Rhyzelius, when writing about the erecting of the new deanery in the year 1723. The learned Rhyzelius is known to have been a keen builder, apart from his ecclesiastical obligations and antiquarian interests. His endeavours have left an important built cultural heritage in the bishop's town of Linköping, southern Sweden; for its time, comprising some highly modern and grand houses, partly forming the introduction of a new building practice. The history of Rhyzelius and his building activities is a history focusing on different significant themes; the importance of buildings in connection to individual actors, building processes and building techniques, buildings in a societal context and buildings as memories and personal commitment.

Building studies (ancient and modern) too often fall between the gaps of the disciplines of architectural history, archaeology, and social anthropology. The multi-disciplinary conferences *Buildings in Society International* (BISI) are an attempt to bridge these gaps. The first event in the series was organised by the University of Aarhus, Denmark in 2010. Four years later this was followed by another conference in Queen's University, Belfast, UK, and in 2017 the third interdisciplinary conference took place in Stockholm, Sweden.

The BISI events have convincingly shown that the study of medieval and early modern buildings benefits from an interdisciplinary approach, and also a broad perspective, in terms of time and space. They have furthermore demonstrated the importance of social, economic, political and cultural contexts when working with built environments.

The contributions in this volume examine how people have been making, using and transforming buildings and built environments in general, and how the buildings have been perceived. It also considers a diversity of built constructions – including dwellings and public buildings, sheds and manor houses, secular and sacral structures.

We find the comparison between different regions and parts of the globe important when addressing buildings from a social perspective. This volume presents studies from the UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Germany, and Mexico; and the chronological framework spans from the classical Byzantine period, over the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, and ends in 20th-century Belfast.

BISI also encourages cross-disciplinary studies. Two of the articles present studies accomplished by archaeologists and historians in close cooperation. In the small Norwegian town of Son, the archaeologists Reidun Marie Aasheim and Marianne Johansson managed to make the changes occurring in the physical structure and layout of the historical town possible to interpret, in part thanks to the close cooperation with the historian Finn-Einar Eliassen. The Norwegian authors state that mutual trust, respect and ambitions, as well as close connection and friendship, are an advantage and a prerequisite in order to be successful in developing inter-disciplinary research.

This inter-disciplinary perspective is closely connected to another important strand in the articles, i.e. the connection between buildings and individuals. The possibility and opportunity to connect building activities with particular individuals helps in addressing the role of agency in the building process. In Norwegian Son, the buildings documented may be connected to historical persons, letting them come to life; the merchant Mikkel Bendtsen, the rich widow Madam Maren Solgaard, and her son Jonas.

A similar cooperation between archaeology and history appears in Göran Tagesson's paper on Swedish source material, presenting the research project *House and Household in Early Modern towns 1600–1850*. In this project, residential buildings, both below ground and preserved above ground, are studied in connection with detailed studies of owners and residents, via household reconstructions. The close study of buildings from a household perspective, together with detailed studies in building technology and high-resolution dendro-chronological dating, make it possible to discern the builders of the houses. Based on this information, the author points to the prospect of studying gender aspects, since the study has facilitated the detection of certain women, previously anonymous, who were key actors in the construction of particular houses. However, women constituted a minority among builders, according to the case studies, suggesting that to construct and order the construction of houses was gender biased. But the study also states that many women, mostly widows, were quite often the head of a household and ran workshops, during the 18th and early 19th centuries. The results show gender and other social aspects of agency to be vital and an important task for future studies.

Sarah Kerr discusses English examples, and addresses the connection between the building programme and architecture in connection with individual lords from a certain aspect – medieval constructions known as lodging ranges. The late medieval period was a time of great change and great social mobility, and in this turbulent period, the construction of identity and new hierarchies was manifested in architectural programmes. The lord's household comprised a variety of people and followers of the lord with different ranks and roles. To build lodging ranges, a type of high-status communal-living building, may intentionally be displaying the status of the retainers who lived there, but also constructing an element of social distance in the lord's household.

The dichotomy of private and public space is an important subject discussed by Anna Bergman, using examples from medieval Stockholm. The 15th- and 16th-century Swedish capital was situated on a small island, becoming more and more cramped and densely populated. During the late medieval period, numerous irregular building extensions were constructed, but, later, the boundaries between private and public space became more rigid, the influence of house owners on the streetscape declined, and central regulation was becoming more important.

The social significance of space, as well as buildings as symbols of a changing society, is discussed in several papers. Linda Qviström presents different aspects of visibility, the art of seeing and being seen, in her study of windows and light in medieval buildings on the Swedish island of Gotland. Differences in window size, their position, and the presence of glazed windows are interpreted as representing quite different purposes.

The presence and absence of windows, and the aspects of light and darkness in historic buildings is also in the forefront of a study of the medieval stave church in Hemse, Gotland, Sweden. Gunnar Almevik and Jonathan Westin present an inter-disciplinary study and a re-evaluation, with the help of modern digital techniques and virtual reconstruction. Their study focuses on sensory and visual aspects of the medieval building, and looks at movement and dwelling in relation to the building.

The social and collective significance of an individual building is apparent in another, almost contemporary example. St Joseph's, a quite ordinary, catholic church situated in the harbour area in Belfast, Northern Ireland, was built in the late 19th century. Liz Thomas states in her article that the church in the latter half of the 20th century was a central community focal point in the harbour district. Later on, due to industrial decline and population decline, the church was secularised and closed. However, since St Joseph's played an important role in the socio-economic and topographical changes of the district, the building was taken over by a local community group. The Belfast case is a good example of the symbolic and social importance of individual buildings, and here the concept of topophilia, the importance and love for physical entities and topographical places, comes to life.

The Belfast study also demonstrates the importance of discerning the different stages in the story of the individual building; from their first construction in a certain historical context, with different modes of use and functions, to rebuilding in new social contexts and with new actors, until their eventual destruction. The life-course of an individual building is an important aspect and a major task in contemporary and future research agendas. These tendencies, almost biographical in their complexity, are apparent in many of the articles, discussing the metamorphosis of buildings. Norwegian stave churches have been in the forefront of historical research in Norway, but Linn Willets Borgen states in her paper that the major research agenda has focused on the medieval construction period, while neglecting later periods. She convincingly shows that stave churches were important in the local society, even after the reformation period. The medieval building technique retained its relevance, and was used well after other forms of wooden construction gained prevalence in the early modern period. The author interprets these tendencies as being part of an architectural memory, representing sanctity and community.

A similar pattern is found in more humble buildings in Swedish Småland, where a medieval building tradition was still alive in the 18th century. Gunilla Gardelin focuses her study on buildings, now moved and preserved in an open-air museum, *Kulturen*, in Lund. She clearly demonstrates the scientific potentials in this kind of source material, in Scandinavia often considered to be inferior as sources, as the buildings have been moved from their original context. The buildings were studied at the same time as conservation work was accomplished, and here the co-operation between archaeologists and professional carpenters stands out. The analysis of historical timbering is a constantly developing kind of cross-disciplinary cooperation (also highly important in Tagesson's study). The possibilities to understand and scrutinise local timbering techniques and local building traditions, and the importance of studying craft and artisans is apparent, representing an important theme in many of the articles in the volume (i.e. the papers of Borgen, Qviström, Almevik and Westin).

The importance of materiality, and building material is stressed in many of the articles; for example, the importance of stone when building social hierarchies (Kerr) or the sensory experience in the difference between stone and wood (Almevik and Westin). Different building materials are, however, considered in different contexts. Brick is a construction material with quite extraordinary qualities. In Scandinavia,

brick is considered to be an exclusive building material, signifying wealth and social importance. Jeroen Bouwmeester, describes the introduction of brick in the Netherlands during the Middle Ages in a quite different way. Tuff was considered the most exclusive building material, but became more and more expensive, due to long transports from Germany. When re-introduced, brick was first used as a secondary building material, found in less visible places, and, when possible, tuff was used for the most visible parts of the buildings.

Many of the contributions in this volume highlight the importance of close studies of individual buildings and households, in order to understand the significance of agents, building traditions and local settings. These research methods are often referred to as micro-studies, and are especially apparent in Miriam Steinborn's article, focusing on small and simple structures in the Early Byzantine city of Iustinia Prima (in today's Serbia). These building constructions have not hitherto been in the forefront of research, on the contrary being considered inferior or trivialised. Instead, Steinborn shows that these structures were created by common people, in order to arrange their everyday lives. The advantages of micro-archaeological studies are also demonstrated in several other papers in the volume.

The challenge of studying the resemblances, as well as the uniqueness of medieval houses has led Antoinette Huijbers to a new relational approach. The text addresses both continuity and change over time. It is an example of interesting possibilities that combine contract archaeology with an attempt at using a wide palette of theoretical approaches.

Another example of studies comprising wider efforts and regional studies, is presented in Per Cornell and Adriana Velázquez' article, a study of built environment in a special Maya context in Yucatan, Mexico. In their study, the intense use of the landscape is stressed, including the use of the surface as well as subterranean caves for intense edification. This study demonstrates the need for fresh approaches in addressing Maya houses and the built environment more generally, accepting major regional and local variability.

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