

1517-2017: EXPLORING RELIGIOUS HERITAGE IN BERGEN AND HORDALAND

Summary

This project aims at experiencing the fascinating religious landscape of Bergen and Hordaland half a millennium ago. Bergen has been appointed as Norway's official 'reformasjonsby' as part of the European commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017. Although churches still define Bergen's townscape, much of its religious history remains hidden to modern Bergeners and visitors of the city. This project invites people to pay an imaginary visit to Bergen and Hordaland 500 years ago. The late Medieval infrastructure of cathedral, monasteries and parish churches and chapels in and outside the city limits is taken as the starting point from where developments in the era of the Reformation are explored.

Target audience

Bergeners, Hordalanders and other Norwegians (particularly schoolchildren) as well as tourists/visitors and academic researchers

Objectives of the project

This project aims at raising awareness of Western Norway's religious heritage in connection with the Reformation and its impact. With Unesco-listed Bryggen, Bergen successfully presents itself as a Hanseatic town with a rich Medieval heritage. However, the focus on merchants and trade has resulted in the religious history being underrepresented. On the Eve of the Reformation, the city possessed 27 churches, chapels and monasteries, to which many parish churches in the surrounding region should be added. Of all these sanctuaries, due to the Reformation and other developments, only a fraction stands today.

This threefold project evokes the now largely hidden church landscape in Bergen and surrounding Hordaland (places of special interest would include Eidfjord, Fana, Fantoft, Holdhus, Kinnsarvik, Lysekloster, Moster, Rosendal/Kvinnherad, Røldal and Voss). People are invited to take a city walk and embark on tours further afield visiting historic churches, church locations and museums with the help of an attractive ground plan and a website which functions as a mobile app. In addition, at the launch of these tools a conference will be held where academic research of religious developments around the North Sea is presented to the wider public.

Project description

Occasion

In 2017, the 500th anniversary of Luther's posting his 95 theses on the doors of Wittenberg's castle church is marked in large parts of Europe in a variety of ways. Bergen has officially been appointed by the Lutheran Church of Norway as the country's Reformation City, tying it into a network of European sister towns such as Geneva, Zürich, Strasbourg, Heidelberg, Augsburg, Wittenberg, Berlin, Vienna, Venice, Dordrecht, London, Västerås and Turku.

In 1517 it would last for another twenty years for the Reformation to reach Norway (in 1536-1537). This means that this anniversary in Bergen and Hordaland takes us back to a context that was still Catholic, but where the heralds of Protestantism were increasingly felt.

The University Museum of Bergen and Bergen City Museum together with the diocese of Bjørgvin wish to mark this anniversary with a threefold project that presents the Reformation process between c. 1500 and c. 1550 as a dynamic process of cultural and religious transition in Bergen and Hordaland. In March 2017 a conference hosted at Bryggens Museum will be organized where academic research is presented to the wider public. At this event a tool will be launched that will put (and keep!) Bergen's religious heritage on the map during subsequent years.

Detailed description of the different components

1) Conference

On 6 March, 2017, Bryggens Museum (part of the Bergen City Museum) will host a one-day conference in which academics from Norway and abroad present their research into the impact of the Reformation in art and architecture. In order to provide a better understanding of the specific local developments in Bergen and Norway several speakers from countries around the North Sea will be invited. This 'North Sea perspective' is particularly relevant for a city that was so closely connected to Europe via sea connections.

The countries bordering the North Sea together provide a substrate of thousands of Medieval churches whose Catholic religious unity was subsequently disrupted during the sixteenth century. Interestingly, the full range of confessions originating in the Reformation era can be found here: Lutheranism (in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Northern Germany), Calvinism (in the Netherlands and Germany), Counter-Reformation Catholicism (in Flanders and Northern France) and Anglicanism (in Britain).

Speakers will be asked to focus on the ways in which Medieval church buildings and their interiors were treated through the Reformation and how they were adapted to new forms of Protestant worship. In this way, the many varieties of 'accommodating Protestantism' will be discussed, in which Lutheranism stands out as a particularly preserving tradition.

2) Religious heritage map of Bergen and Hordaland 1517/2017

A second product of this project is an attractively designed folding city plan to be distributed through the Bergen Tourist Office, churches, museums and other cultural institutions in Bergen and Hordaland. It will show the ground plan of Bergen today featuring the locations of historic churches connected to the Reformation (both monuments that are still standing and vanished churches).

Since the Reformation of 1536 resulted in the monasteries being dissolved (with the exception of the Franciscans' church, which now serves as Bergen domkirke) and chapels demolished, it is mainly the parish churches that have survived to date. To these a number of museums should be added, which together possess an impressive amount of religious art (the Bergen University Museum even having one of the best collections of Medieval church art in northern Europe).

Together these sites will function as the coordinates in a walking tour that evokes the rich ecclesiastical infrastructure of late Medieval Bergen which would subsequently undergo such radical changes in the age of the Reformation. The ground plan will make a

connection between the structure of the modern city and its situation some 500 years ago. All coordinates are accompanied by one or several pictures and a short text summarizing the monument's Medieval history and post-Medieval vicissitudes. While the front of the folder shows the Bergen town plan, the back side features the Hordaland hinterland with a number of suggestions to explore that region's religious heritage too.

This map of the German town of Emden as Reformation-town provides a suitable model:



3) Website serving as a digital guide

Accompanying the map a website will be developed that serves as a digital tour guide providing concise information on specific monuments that can be downloaded on the spot. On every coordinate shown on the map short texts, ground plans and pictures are provided which together give an account of the religious art and history connected to them – the spatial setting of the monuments, their art and architecture with corresponding ground-plans (if possible), their position and significance in late Medieval and Post-Reformation Bergen and Hordaland, their fate after the Reformation and their current state.

In addition, surviving monuments or locations where the remains of monuments are clearly visible will be presented in short films of 1-3 minutes which can be easily downloaded via smartphone. The primary applicant has gained considerable experience with a similar project in the Netherlands in 2015 which resulted in the website

www.protestantsecultuurschatten.nl. This project, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), was aimed at raising public awareness of the cultural treasures found in Protestant (=Calvinist) churches in the Netherlands and includes a pilot of five short films recorded in Dutch historic churches.

Images recorded on the spot, drawings and photographic material explained by a voice-over will all work together in evoking the religious history of the monuments. The website will draw a compelling picture of a vibrant Medieval town which would subsequently become a prominent bastion of Protestantism.

Broader aims of the project

The tools will help identifying Bergen as the true Norwegian 'reformasjonsby' in 2017, and the map and app will continue functioning beyond that year too. The city walk will also be extremely suitable for schools to take pupils on a field trip to the city and its surroundings, both in 2017 and afterwards. Although the city walk is designed as a self-guided tour, it will be integrated in the menu of existing guided tours offered by the Bergen City Museum, of which the sustainability would be significantly strengthened. The map and website will also invite people to explore the religious heritage in the Hinterland of Bergen, namely Hordaland.

In addition to the already mentioned 'underrepresentation' of religion in the portrayal of Bergen's history, the focus on religious heritage has a special relevance in an age of secularization in which the role of the church in peoples' lives becomes increasingly less self-evident. In 2017 (!), the church of Norway will be officially separated from the state after almost half a millennium of official unity. The church's rich heritage is only one asset that can be used to prevent it from becoming marginalized: much of Norway's history and indeed its national and European identity can be found deposited here, in the architecture of the buildings, their furnishings and in the imagery displayed.

With fewer people attending church services every year, we run the risk that many Norwegians will lose acquaintance with these cultural treasure troves. This project provides valuable tools to compensate for that loss. Also, the inclusion of Hordaland in the project can induce some of the many visitors to Bergen to venture out further inland too. An increase of cultural tourism to Hordaland, which is still relatively poorly developed to date, will have a positive effect on the region's economy.