

Recent Excavations at Nya Lödöse

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Founded in 1473, the town of Nya Lödöse was situated on the Swedish west coast, a few kilometres northeast of present-day Gothenburg. Today the site is a part of Gothenburg called *Gamlestaden* (the Old Town). Nya Lödöse served as a port and a hub for commerce from several parts of Europe, connecting goods and people from Denmark, the Netherlands, and German towns with the inland areas of western Sweden. With a population of 1200, Nya Lödöse was a quite large town in the Swedish context. But with insufficient defence, it was razed several times during periods of war, relocated for a while, and finally deserted in 1624, when the inhabitants were moved to the newly founded Gothenburg (Cornell et al. 2018; Öbrink & Rosén 2018).

As part of a large city development project, large areas of Nya Lödöse were excavated from 2013 to 2018 (Rosén et al. 2018). Excavated areas include several streets, house plots, a marketplace, a church, a cemetery, and a waterlogged area on the shore of the Göta river. The archaeological data cover the periods 1473–c.1550 and c.1570–1624 while the archival data are mostly limited to the period c.1580–1620. Between 1547–c.1570 the town was moved to the Älvsborg castle for better protection during the Danish–Swedish wars. The archaeological data suggest, however, that some people stayed behind to protect their houses and goods.

The results from the 2013–2015 excavations showed quite small differences between plots when it comes to size, organization, and building techniques. The excavations 2016–2017 seem to give us a more nuanced picture, with a somewhat larger variability in plot sizes and construction of houses, possibly also an area with a concentration of artisans working with metals. These results are highly preliminary, but they tend to indicate that certain parts of the town were built with wood-only houses of



Figure 1. Streets and courtyards in Nya Lödöse. Photo Markus Andersson.

a rather uniform size and plot organization while other areas might have had more houses built on stone foundations. Other areas seem to have had slightly larger plots, though with wood-only houses. Most houses had only one floor, though a few houses with lofts have been recorded. From the mid-sixteenth century features such as glass windows became much more common. The period 1547–1570 with the move to Älvsborg marked a break in the organisation and structure of the plots. When the town was re-established around 1570, the overall layout stayed the same, but some plots were joined to form larger ones.

There were gaps between the different plots, about half a metre wide, sometimes used for temporary disposal of refuse and latrine. The buildings on the plots were separated by a central courtyard. Most plots had one or two shops facing the street, with entrance directly from the street. Behind this were the living quarters with a *stuga* (heated main room/kitchen), an entrance room, and a storage room or chamber that received some indirect heat from the fireplace and chimney in the *stuga*. The living quarters were never adjacent to the street but placed further inside the plot, only accessible through the main gate and courtyard. Behind the living quarters, there could be another storage room or a workshop. On the other side of the courtyard, there was a stable and/or barn plus open areas for small vegetable patches, an animal pen or, in a few cases, waste disposal. The larger vegetable plots were probably placed in the outer parts of the town, near the embankments.



Figure 2. House under excavation in Nya Lödöse. Photo: Markus Andersson.

At first glance, the archaeological results seem to suggest a rather homogenous town, contrary to the huge economic variety indicated by the historical records (Larsson & Rosén 2018). The overall physical structuring of the different plots has several similarities and there seems to have been a common understanding about how houses and other buildings should be constructed and situated on the plots. To what extent this was due to formal regulations from an authority such as the king or if it mirrored a common tradition among the burghers is not known (Öbrink et al. 2018).

The archaeological data comprise a large amount of redware cooking and storage vessels, as well as everyday wooden and iron objects, such as knives, which show large similarities all over the excavated area. There are also a lot of objects that occur much less frequently and which vary considerably between the plots. These are Continental white-wares, Dutch redwares, Venetian glassware, religious objects, pilgrim badges, a small clock possibly from Nuremberg, and more. Substantial animal osteological material was collected (Maltin ms). From the cemetery c.1200 individuals were retrieved and this material is currently being analysed.

It is quite clear from both archaeological and archival data that Nya Lödöse, although a small town, was highly socially and economically stratified. The population consisted of people from different geographic areas, most probably from nearby towns and the surrounding countryside, but also from several parts of northern Europe. In the late 1500s and early 1600s, around 15 to 20 percent of the burghers were immigrants, which is a very high number compared to other towns in western Sweden. We

know less about the early years in the town's history, but the archaeological data suggest that complete households moved in from early on (Larsson & Rosén 2018).

The city's development project is still ongoing and we can expect more excavations in the near future.

References

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