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Abstract
This annotation describes how a small scribal error in a late medieval Danish document led to that document being left out of the later printed source edition, because the scribe's correction of his own mistake was not recognized by the man who registered the document later on in the city archives in Copenhagen. It talks about how this sealed the fate that the document remained unknown and unpublished until a registration project at Copenhagen City Archives rediscovered and redated it in 2017 finally resulting in the making of the first-ever printed source edition in 2019. It also discusses the implications this has had for the intellectual knowledge of the history of Copenhagen and even for the understanding of modern cultural heritage in the streets of Copenhagen.

Keywords
medieval ruins, source editions, scribal errors, thingstead witness, tax building, town wall, Copenhagen, Denmark, Scandinavia, medieval

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In Copenhagen, medieval manuscripts can be found at five different institutions: the University of Copenhagen, the Royal Library, the National Museum of Denmark, the National Archives, and the Copenhagen City Archives. By the standards of Danish municipal archives, the medieval portion of Copenhagen’s city archive is unusually well preserved, notwithstanding the various wars and fires that have ravaged Copenhagen over the centuries.

However, by the summer of 2017, the existing historical catalogue covering the collection of diplomas (original documents containing, for example, royal privileges granted to the town) in the city archive had long become obsolete; a new, modern catalogue was much overdue. The collection of diplomas currently consists of documents covering a time span from 1275 to 1943 and includes, among other things, royal privileges granted to Copenhagen. Even today, the only catalogue in existence covering this collection is one that was produced in 1786: in the intervening quarter-millennium, the collection has never been systematically examined, and the old catalogue was not even close to acceptable modern standards. Its revision was no small task.
During the 1870s and 1880s, Danish archivist Oluf Nielsen (1838–1896) published a monumental collection of source material for the history of Copenhagen before the great city fire of 1728. Altogether, these ten volumes presented a vast quantity of documentation hailing from the city archives.\(^1\)

Since Nielsen’s time, it had been assumed that this huge compendium of sources accurately presented the complete wealth of preserved medieval documents from Copenhagen. However, in studying selected parts of the collection of medieval documents for the purpose of making a new catalogue, it soon became clear that this was not at all the case.

In the late Middle Ages, Copenhagen was undertaking one of its largest building projects to date: the fortification of the entire town through the construction of a defensive wall.\(^2\) In late medieval Denmark, the construction of fortifications was the responsibility of a town itself, although from time to time some degree of help or support could be obtained by applying to the king or to the bishop.\(^3\) Needless to say, such projects were expensive, and the efforts strained Copenhagen’s finances. Solutions needed to be found. Wealthy local citizens would thus participate financially in the construction project. However, as Copenhagen subsequently became indebted to these individuals, such debts were reimbursed in a practical way by letting these same citizens buy some of the properties belonging to the town in exchange for the money that Copenhagen owed them. One such deal is likely documented by a deed from 1523, in which local merchant

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2 The following paragraph is based mainly on a forthcoming article by Svend Clausen, “Københavns middelalderlige sisehus og dets nærområde på Gammel Strand.” Thanks to cooperation between Copenhagen City Archives and the Museum of Copenhagen on this project, an unfinished draft from March 2018 is available in the archive of the Museum of Copenhagen.

Anders Ludvigsen received the so-called Sisehus building from the town (i.e., the octroi building where wine and beer taxes were paid). A transcription of this deed had been printed by Oluf Nielsen in his nineteenth-century source collection.4

However, prior to the elaboration of a new catalogue, which made a modern study of the archival collection necessary, a second, earlier document connected to this very same transaction had gone unnoticed. Already on 11 August 1522—that is, a year earlier than previously thought—twelve citizens of Copenhagen had been present as witnesses on the town thingstead (the location where the governing assembly convened) when the town, represented by the mayor, the town bailiff, one town councilor, and two selected citizens, transferred the abovementioned Sisehus building to Anders Ludvigsen. Ludvigsen, not personally present on the thingstead that day, was represented by the town scribe, Jørgen Mikkelsen. This very same town scribe, Jørgen Mikkelsen, also issued a handwritten tingsvidne (a legally binding record) in medieval Danish to certify the proceedings on the thingstead that day (fig. 1).

Perhaps it was a long day on the thingstead. Writing the document, Jørgen Mikkelsen made no fewer than two mistakes when supplying the document with an official date. The first one could be easily overlooked as it causes no trouble at all: when writing the Danish word Jomfru (virgin) to signify the day of the Virgin Mary’s Ascension, he repeated the word by mistake. His second error was far more serious: writing the Roman numerals representing the year, with his thoughts perhaps elsewhere, he actually wrote “MDL” (1570) instead of “MDX.” He did correct this, though—changing his erroneous “L” into a heavily stylized “X” instead, in this way ending up with the correct year, “MDXXII” (1522). The town of Copenhagen kept the document in its archives afterwards as a testimony to the event. It remained there from that point onward, and thus ended up being included in the modern-day city archives. A second copy

4 Nielsen, Kjøbenhavns Diplomatarium, 1:217.
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Figure 1. This medieval parchment document was kept in the Copenhagen archives for five hundred years, but remained unpublished and largely unknown until a cataloguing project in 2017 unearthed it and finally made it possible to publish a source edition in 2019. The five seals preserved in the figure have never been examined, but are likely to represent the signatures of the five present town officials mentioned, who represented Copenhagen in the deal: town bailiff Anders Lauritsen, mayor Niels Stemp, town councillor Peder Kempe, as well as citizens Kort Bærmand and Jep Olsen. The text certifies that Copenhagen handed over the Sisehus building to the representative of local merchant Anders Ludvigsen before 12 witnesses on the town thingstead. Among these witnesses is the otherwise unknown Copenhagen citizen Hans Kødmongrer (meaning Hans Kødmanger, i.e. Hans the Fleshmonger).
of the document was likely to have been issued to Ludvigsen himself, but no such personal copy of the document has survived.

In the late eighteenth century, an attempt was made to organize the documents in the city archives in a more orderly manner as the initial catalogue was being made. However, the problem was that the individual who read the document while making the 1786 catalogue misread the year as including the “L” instead of Jørgen Mikkelsen’s correction. Thus, the document was registered as stemming from 1572 rather than 1522. In this way the cataloguer erroneously classified the document as a later Renaissance-era item instead of as an older medieval one. When compiling his vast source edition a century later, Oluf Nielsen must have been content to follow in the footsteps of the 1786 catalogue, believing the oldest document concerning the Ludvigsen deal to be the abovementioned deed from 1523. The messily dated 1522 document was thus omitted from his printed source collection, likely because it was thought to be 50 years younger than it really was.

As a result of this error, no scholars doing research since then seem to have referred to the document or to have even taken note of its existence. Thus, in this case, studying the actual manuscript collection at Copenhagen City Archives, instead of just relying on the printed source edition, became essential for understanding not only the Anders Ludvigsen deal itself, but also the old Sisehus building: the manuscript collection contained important original material omitted from the printed source edition that had been considered highly reliable. Moreover, the document from 1522 turns out to be the oldest surviving mention of the very existence of the Sisehus building. It is actually the oldest surviving manuscript in that entire archival series: thus, the initial dating of this part of the diploma collection had to be changed from 1523 to 1522.5

5 The parchment document from 11 August 1522 is preserved with five seals in the collection of Copenhagen City Archives: Københavns Stadsarkiv, Diplomsamlingen (1275– ), Privilegier vedr. Magistraten 1522–1842. The 1786 catalogue that erroneously describes the document as a deed from 1572 can be found as no. 15 (with an older, not entirely precise correctional note) at https://www.starbas.net/bestillingsenhed.php?bestillingsenhed_id=103595.
The consequences of this cataloguing initiative were even wider, though; the dating of yet another source previously published by Nielsen now also had to be backdated from 1523 to 1522. This held further implications that proved important for understanding the actual construction process of the late medieval town wall. Crucial for understanding these events is the fact that a short civil war broke out in Denmark in 1523 and Copenhagen thus came under siege. Based on the 1523 dating of the abovementioned Ludvigsen deed which he did include in his publication, while not being aware that the older, still unpublished thingstead witness document in fact proved the Ludvigsen deal to have happened the year before, Nielsen concluded that debts stemming from the siege of 1523 were the principal reason for which the authorities in late medieval Copenhagen had to sell off so much property. However, as the date of the unpublished thingstead witness document had to be revised to 11 August 1522 (i.e. no longer 1572), the sale of the Sisehus building thus must have also happened in 1522; i.e. one year earlier than believed by Nielsen. As the re-dated thingstead witness document proves that the Sisehus building was sold in August 1522, the transaction happened long before the civil war and the siege of 1523 even began. Thus the sale of the Sisehus building could not have been caused by debts incurred by the town during the siege. As comparisons with further extant sources corroborate, it is now much more evident that the debts leading to the large-scale disposal of town properties stemmed not from the siege but from the expensive town wall construction project.

Today, Copenhagen’s town wall has vanished. For the most part, it was demolished in the nineteenth century as a result of redevelopment projects. Only a single tower from the late medieval town wall, the Jarmers Tårn or Jarmer’s Tower, is still visible in modern-day Copenhagen, and it is in a degraded state. In the end, the study of archival manuscripts has

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7 The following paragraph is based mainly on Clausen, “Københavns middelalderlige sisehus og dets nærområde på Gammel Strand.”
8 Cf. the introductory text to Nielsen, *Kjøbenhavns Diplomatarium*, 1:232.
led to a better understanding of an essential part of Copenhagen’s visible cultural heritage.

Following its omission from Nielsen’s publication, the thingstead witness document remained marginalized, existing in a sole surviving manuscript copy. The omission of this document was not discovered until the summer of 2017, when the advancement of the new cataloguing project made it necessary to read the document thoroughly. Its dating was subsequently read correctly and recorded as being from 1522. Thus, after almost 500 years, the first-ever printed source edition of this medieval manuscript could finally be made. The older document was acknowledged and made available at last—a mere 150 years after its “sister” document from 1523 was published by Nielsen. The discovery of an additional medieval document housed within the Copenhagen City Archives was an unexpected benefit of the cataloguing project.

Finding or acknowledging a hitherto unknown medieval document is not an everyday occurrence in Denmark, where the scholarly consensus holds that surviving medieval sources have generally either been published or are at least known to specialists. Thus, the new discovery was judged worthy of being mentioned in Danish news media. This finding also underlines the value and potential importance of carrying out new cataloguing projects that involve investigating collections much more thoroughly and systematically than was possible in the past, or even in more recent times. This is doubly true for Copenhagen, which has one of the most extensive and substantially preserved medieval civic archives in Denmark.

Even though the actual sale of the Sisehus building was known previously, the re-dating of this unpublished document proved to be significant for a better understanding of some of the finer details of the history of Copenhagen. A clearer understanding of the late medieval process of town wall construction is particularly significant, as the wall remained a prominent urban

9 Clausen, “Et hidtil utrykt middelalderdokument om Københavns Sisehus.” An official online edition of this source edition was not yet available before the deadline of the present article, but it is expected to be made available at a later date at https://danskeselskab.dk
feature in the Copenhagen cityscape for centuries, in addition to being a key element for the defense of the town. Similarly, the wall’s construction seems to have been a major event in the late medieval city.

It remains to be seen whether other unpublished documents of interest might be unearthed during the course of such a cataloguing project, but it is still too early to answer such a question. Other surprises may potentially turn up along the way. The production of an ex-novo catalogue of the diploma collection at the Copenhagen City Archives has barely begun, but it has recently hit an unfortunate financial dead-end. The existing catalogue from 1786 will have to serve its purpose for awhile longer.