# SPECIAL ARTICLES

## THE OLD LEPROSY HOSPITALS IN BERGEN

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In the Middle Ages leprosy seems to have found good conditions for its spread in western Norway. Our knowledge of leprosy in Norway after that time is attached mainly to the history of Bergen, located in the center of the western Norwegian coast and at that time the biggest Norwegian town, and to the "leper hospitals" there.

After a big fire in Bergen in 1248, King Haakon Haakonson rebuilt some of the burnt churches. Among these were All-Saints' Church (Allehelgenskirken), which he decided should be attached to a hospital (Ospitale pauperum apud omnes sanctos), and St. Catherine's church, which was to be joined to a hospital for leprosy (Ospitale sancte Catherine leprosorum). We do not know for how long patients with leprosy were received in these two hospitals. All-Saints' Hospital (Allehelgenshospitalet) fell into decay, and the church was demolished in 1552. Now the name All-Saints' Street (Allehelgensgaten) remains as a memorial.

St. Catherine's hospital was mentioned as late as the 16th century as a "leper hospital," but at the end of that century it was taken over by "The Office" (Det Bergenske Contoir), i.e., that part of Bergen inhabited by the Hanseatic merchants.

Of all the known Norwegian hospitals for leprosy, the hospital called St. Joergen's hospital (St. George's hospital) in Bergen gives us the most comprehensive information. It is mentioned for the first time in a will of 1411, and was apparently established by the so-called Antonius brothers. As a result of the fires that have devastated the wooden residences in Bergen throughout the ages, St. Joergen's hospital has several times disappeared in flames, but it has been rebuilt each time on the same site. In 1701 the hospital was demolished and a new building was constructed, because the old building was scattered and too small. A year later a big fire broke out in Bergen, and St. Joergen's hospital was again laid in ashes. It was again rebuilt, however, but so badly that in 1745 it was necessary to make considerable alterations.

These old buildings and the adjacent wooden church still exist in Bergen. The hospital is built as a quadrangle with the church on the eastern side of the courtyard, the hospital buildings in the southern part, the chaplain's house in the northern, and the outbuildings on the left side. The largest hospital building, a two story structure, 140 feet long, 32 feet wide, and 16 feet high, forms the southern side of the court-

yard. There are two kitchens in the center of this building, and on both sides of these are working rooms which also functioned as living and dining rooms. Both rooms go through the two floors with a gallery running around the walls. Surrounding these two rooms are several small cells that served as sleeping apartments and depositories for food and clothes. In the largest wing on the eastern side, between the kitchens and the church, there are 40 cells on the ground floor and in the gallery; in the other wing there are 16 cells. The cells are all of the same size, measuring not more than 8 x 6 x 7 feet. Each has its own entrance from the work room, and a small window in the opposite wall. The cells had a bed on each side with a narrow gangway between. They were not heated, but there were stoves in the work rooms.

It is clear that the leprosy patients lived under poor conditions in