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### LEPROSARIA IN MEDIAEVAL WEST POMERANIA\*

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Since Robert Virchow, in 1860, spoke of the necessity of studying the history of leprosy in mediaeval Germany—he himself having published some papers about it—this subject has repeatedly been given attention. For some parts of Germany there are, therefore, thorough studies already available. It is desirable to fill the gaps so that we may judge the distribution of leprosy and leprosaria in the whole country, and the following study may serve to advance this aim. It is limited geographically to that part of the present-day province of Pomerania which extends from the river Ryck, near Greifswald, to the border of Mecklenburg and—including the island of Ruegen—corresponds to the mediaeval principality of Ruegen.

At a time when in the rest of Germany people were already taking care of their lepers, the country east of the Elbe was not yet Christianized. The Christianization of Mecklenburg and Pomerania began in the middle of the 12th century. The entrance of German culture into those regions was followed by the foundation of larger settlements, which were favored and subsidized by the native Wendian-Slavonian princes and soon obtained the rights of free towns. The rulers of Ruegen followed their example and brought into their country German colonists whose diligence and pluck gave rise to a number of flourishing towns. Among these towns there were, first, Stralsund, which got its town rights in 1234; then Greifswald, which was founded by the monks of Eldena; and then Barth, Grimmen, Tribsees, Richtenberg, Damgarten, Loitz,

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Bergen, and Garz. The last two are situated on the island of Ruegen.

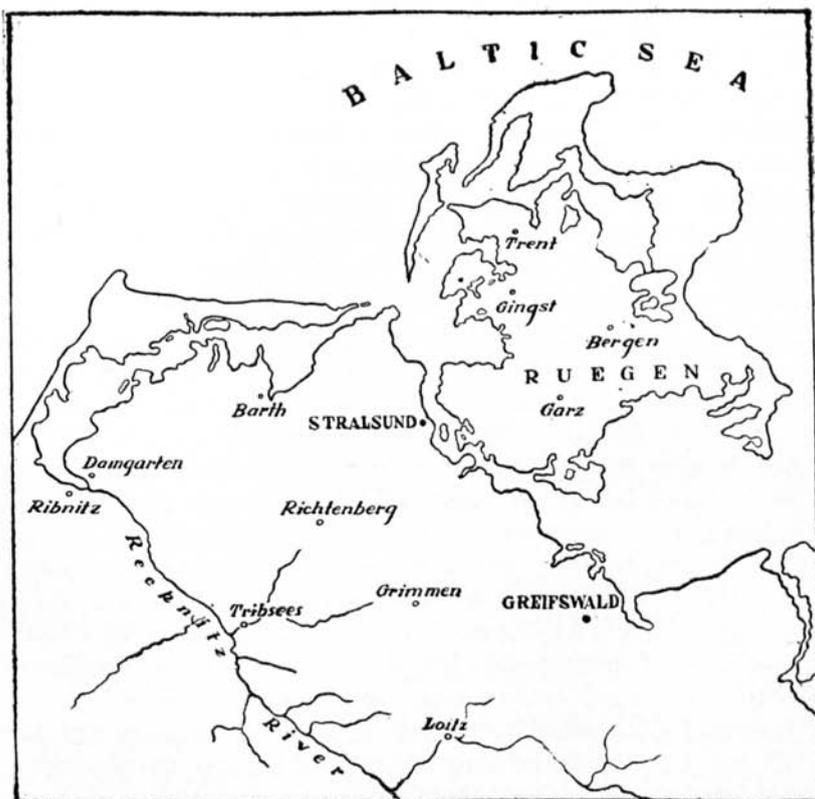
These young towns had very soon to face the question of what to do with their lepers. In those times scarcely any human settlement was free from leprosy, and the victims led a deplorable existence outside the walls. For Stralsund we can prove that there was a leprosarium there forty years after its foundation. In the other towns, which got such institutions sooner or later, the situation was probably similar.

All of the leprosaria of West Pomerania were civil institutions and were administrated—at least when situated near the towns—by special council members called *provisores*. There were other leprosaria, some of them rather important, in the country districts, but the circumstances of their development cause some doubt as to whether or not they were independent institutions. The question of their probable relationships will be discussed.

In only one instance can we fix definitely the exact year of founding of a West Pomeranian leprosarium—that of the St. Juergen House near Rambin, in Ruegen. The reason for the difficulty is that these institutions began on a very small scale. The lepers of a town, excluded from civil and social life, were at first left to themselves and settled down as best they could outside the city walls. There they depended entirely upon the charity of the citizens, but the latter did so well by them that ultimately their miserable huts could be improved and enlarged. More lepers came to the place, which in time reached such a size that the town council had to provide for its orderly administration. Often they found a patron who gave the money needed for the necessary buildings.

Among the buildings which were provided a chapel was never lacking, for in 1179 the leprosaria had been granted the upkeep of churches and priests of their own. In West Pomerania this grant had the effect that expelled lepers preferred to settle down near chapels, which were situated near the main roads. Whenever, later, private or official interests undertook to start a leprosarium they always built a chapel or a church, too. In Northern Germany it was the custom to submit these churches, and with them the leprosaria, to the protection of Saint George—St. Juergen in North German dialect—and the fixation to this patron saint went so far as to change to St. Juergen the names even of chapels that had been called otherwise before they became chapels of leprosaria.

In time the terms "leprosarium" and "St. Juergen" were entirely identical and substituted each other. The founder of the one near Ramin on Ruegen called it "Sunte Jurien" even before construction had begun. This fact is of importance: road names, village names and others that are connected with St. Juergen trace definitely to old leprosaria that have now disappeared, and any old St. Juergen church was once attached to such a place.



TEXT-FIG. 1. Map showing the part of Pomerania discussed, corresponding to the Medieval principality of Ruegen.

As a rule a leprosarium consisted of one or more lodging houses for the lepers and a building for the nursing and administration staff. As soon as the settlement church had been allowed a priest of its own, there was a house attached which produced food for the inmates. Admission to a St. Juergen Home depended on payment of an entrance fee, but that did not exclude the poor because there were always sufficient funds from charitable grants

to afford them the fee. Each leper was housed, clothed and fed for his lifetime, and he also shared in the benefit of grants and testamentary gifts. A young and not too incapacitated leper had to work on the farm. In the early times the inmates used to will all their property to the institution, and that became compulsory later.

When the 14th century was passing into the 15th the drastic measure of isolating all lepers began to prove beneficial. The incidence of fresh cases decreased to such an extent that the leprosaria became emptied, and they were finally changed into invalid homes. The same thing happened to the secularized monasteries after the Reformation, and therefore after that most of these invalid homes were called "monasteries." Thus we find in Stralsund the "Monastery St. Juergen on the Strand," and in Ruegen the "Monastery St. Juergen of Ramin." These terms are not exact in that there never were in these former leprosaria any person who belonged to monks' orders.

The documentary basis of the study of the West Pomeranian leprosaria is rather scattered. There are no difficulties with towns like Stralsund and Greifswald; the records of the former contain a large quantity of documents and manuscripts. In the smaller towns the names of roads or villages often help to trace old institutions. The most important source of information is the collection of mediaeval testaments in the town archives of Stralsund. In nothing else is the manner of thinking of the mediaeval man made so impressively clear as in his last will, which reveals a deep concern for the spiritual future. In the first line for grants were the churches and monasteries; but among the humanitarian institutions that followed, the leprosaria prevail. Naturally, those near Stralsund got the bulk of the grants—St. Juergen am Strande and St. Juergen of Ramin, the latter of which was founded by a patrician of Stralsund. But those of neighboring towns also got grants, and the number and size of the bequests is sometimes conclusive of their importance. At least these wills give important indications of the existence of leprosaria in other places, especially in the open country, where all traces of them have disappeared.

The necessity of such countryside lazarets does not seem very convincing under the conditions on the continent. With regard to the towns themselves, each of the eight in this small area had its own leprosarium; their sizes cannot always be made out exactly, but presumably they were proportionate to the towns.

On the other hand the parishes around the towns were very scantily populated, and the incidence of lepers in them cannot possibly have justified special institutions. Nevertheless, again and again these countryside leprosaria got grants, even large ones, from citizens of Stralsund.

Though the impetus behind these charitable grants was chiefly the religious tendency of the times, the citizens of Stralsund were realistic enough to give preference in this matter to institutions with which they had some personal relationship. A lazaret in which a good friend or a relative was living got the first grant. Considering the many gifts made to countryside leprosaria, one wonders if there were not living in them many leprous citizens from the towns. The existence of a chapel in each of them, which is conclusive evidence of a certain size, makes it especially doubtful that these institutions arose solely from the necessities of the small parishes. One is inclined to conclude that there must have been more or less close connections between the countryside leprosaria and those of the neighboring towns; that is, that they were really quasi branches to which lepers could go whenever the original lazarets were crowded. Whether that conclusion is correct or not, it does not affect the fact that, besides the township leprosaria, there were also important ones in the parishes. Such institutions are created of necessity, and their relatively large number in a small and limited area can only be explained by a considerable spread of the disease.

#### LEPROSARIA ON THE MAINLAND

*Stralsund.*—The leprosarium of Stralsund, which later got the name of "St. Juergen am Strande," was already in existence in 1278; the first report on leprosy at all is of 1275. The lazaret could be reached by a dyke from the hospital gate. The Lord Mayor Albert Hoevener, who became provisor of it in 1337, proved to be a good patron by providing money for building a solid lodge house, the "long house," with accommodations for 40 lepers, and a church and a cemetery. It was destroyed by fire in 1435, but rebuilt on the same scale. The entrance fee was 6 marks at first but was increased later. Each leper got bed linen, cloth for a suit, a pair of trousers, a jacket, shoes, two linen cloths; and each day he received a certain amount of bread, an egg, and two pints of beer. There are no reports that indicate whether both sexes were admitted or not. The documents of the first third

of the 15th century no longer contain the words "lepers," etc.; in their place the "poor" are designated. The lazaret had become an invalids' home, and the number of inmates had decreased. In 1547 the church was torn down and the stones were used for fortifications. During the siege of Stralsund by Wallenstein in 1628 the long house, too, was destroyed. The landed property of the institution, together with the name, was transferred to an invalids' home inside the town, which institution still exists. Ceremonial clothes from the leprosarium of pre-Reformation times are still to be seen in the town museum of Stralsund.

*Greifswald.*—The leprosarium of Greifswald is first mentioned in the town book of 1301 under the name: "Domus leprosum ad sanctum Georgium extra ciuitatem Gripeswold." How very seriously the citizens took the strict segregation of lepers is shown by the following resolution of the council in 1321:

Noverint universi, quod nos consules civitatis Gripesvold sub anno incarnationis domini MCCCXXI, feria sexta proxima ante dominicam Quasimodogeniti in unum convenimus, et in hoc nobis omnibus consencientibus et arbitrantibus concordavimus, quod nulls de domo sancti Georgi nostre civitatis, sive dives sive pauper, debeat suam sepulturam alias eligere, sed eo mortuo in cymiterio ibidem sepeliri debet et humari, et istud modis omnibus firme volumus observari.

The administration of the lazaret was in the hands of council members. It soon owned land, and its financial position became so favorable that in 1326 it was able to make a loan of 600 marks to the township. After leprosy had disappeared it was transformed into an invalids' home, which was destroyed in the Thirty Years War by the Emperor's troops. It was situated before Mill Gate, and its former place is still called St. Georges Field, and on it are the new dermatology clinics of the university.

*Barth.*—In 1317 the Prince of Ruegen, Witzav the Second, gave the St. Juergenhaus at Barth about 90 acres of land and a chapel, which later on is even mentioned as ecclesia. Citizens from Stralsund first gave grants to the leprosarium in 1343. It seems remarkable that another document as late as 1493 speaks of lepers who were bathed and cleaned in the St. Juergen house of Barth, because according to testamentary grants the house must have been transformed into an invalids' home as early as 1400. The house was destroyed during the Thirty Years War and was not rebuilt, though the chapel still remains.

*Grimmen.*—The first documentary mention of a lazaret at Grimmen appears in a testament dated 1346. The house with

chapel was situated before Stralsund Gate, and was still mentioned in 1499, though at that time it probably no longer served as a leprosarium, as from 1393 the testamentary grants are only made to the "poor." It seems, however, that the house did not serve as an invalids' home for long, for it must have been destroyed before 1566, in which year a cemetery took its place. The chapel still existed in 1685 but was described by contemporaries as desolate, and subsequently it disappeared.

*Damgarten.*—Literature reports that the chapel of the leprosarium at Damgarten got the altars of some neighboring land-chapels in the 16th century, while the house and its inmates are mentioned in testaments of the 14th century. Until 1371 only lepers got grants, but from 1406 they are entirely replaced by the poor. Neither house nor chapel has survived.

*Loitz.*—At Loitz a St. George's chapel, built in the 16th century, reminds one that there was a leprosarium there. Legacies were granted to its inmates as early as 1359. As an invalids' home later it gave accommodation to 12 poor people, and it seems reasonable that that was the original size as no further changes of the building are reported. Today the house has disappeared.

*Richtenberg.*—A large number of testaments mention the St. Juergen's House at Richtenberg; from 1340 to 1403 it received no less than twenty-two bequests from citizens of Stralsund. Until 1380 these legacies were made only to lepers, but after that an increasing number was devoted to the poor and after 1400 there is no mention of lepers at all. It is not known when the house and chapel were destroyed.

*Tribsees.*—About the St. Juergen's House at Tribsees there is very little information. The literature, however, records that it was situated before Stone Gate and that its foundations were still to be seen in 1800—the chapel was destroyed about 1790—but there is no trace of it now. Recorded testaments show that it was in existence in 1346, and that lepers were still living there in 1400.

*Countryside leprosaria.*—Besides these eight leprosaria before the gates of the towns, the needs of which they specially served, there were, as has been said, a number of others in the countryside. The largest of these were between Puette and Pantelitz, and at Cristow. The house at Cristow is mentioned in literature, but nothing is known about the one at Pantelitz-Puette; only a thorough study

regarding the St. Juergen House at Stralsund brought to light some notes about this house, which was situated near Stralsund.

Puette and Pantelitz are two old parishes, situated an hour's walk from Stralsund. Between the two there is a place which is still called Chapel's Mountain. This is probably the old site of the leprosarium, which was a dependency of the one at Stralsund. The number of bequests made to it by Stralsund citizens is as large as that for the Stralsund establishment itself. The first one dates from 1336, and from then on there was scarcely a year without grants to this establishment. Until 1356 the documents mention only the St. Juergen house of the lepers at Puette, but in later papers this name is entirely replaced by "at Pantelitz." There is no doubt that the two names apply to the same house, for these two villages lie too close together for there to have been two institutions. Besides, there is no reason why the one at Puette should have disappeared suddenly in 1356 and given room to one named Pantelitz, never mentioned before.

The Pantelitz-Puette leprosarium can be followed up until the first half of the 15th century. It is important that until then the bequests were for the benefit of the "Leprosen, Seeken, oder Kranken." Decades before that, the grants to Stralsund leprosarium were only for the poor, or the "gadehuus." It seems highly probable that Stralsund sent her lepers to Puette-Pantelitz as soon as possible, in order to increase the distance between them and the healthy citizens, and in order to make room for the poor and invalids at Stralsund. It is not known when the Puette-Pantelitz house disappeared. Probably Wallenstein's troops destroyed it during the siege of Stralsund in 1628. The last document, dating from 1559, reports that this institution, like the others, was later used as an invalids' home.

The leprosarium at Cristow seems to have served for Greifswald in the same way as the one at Puette did for Stralsund, an opinion that is strengthened by the fact that in 1362 the documents report that a lord mayor from Greifswald was among its *provisores*. It is remarkable that even this one received several bequests from citizens of Stralsund. Provided that these grants were nearly always given in thanks for the care of relatives, we must believe that the Cristow asylum was for some reason preferred by the lepers from Stralsund. It cannot be decided if its situation near the sea was the reason, or if there were so many lepers in the town that neighboring institutions were not large

enough to care for them. The Cristow leprosarium is first mentioned in 1319, which is before the enlargement of the Stralsund one by the Lord Mayor Albert Hoevener. Up to the end of the 14th century the grants for lepers at Cristow speak of the "leprosi," after which this term is changed to the "poor." It is not known when the house and chapel were destroyed; they are last mentioned in 1558.

The (probable) leprosarium at Luedersshagen might, following the ideas expressed, be considered as an annex of the one at Barth. There are, however, no documents or testaments relating to it, and the existence of such an institution in olden times can only be concluded from the early Gothic church, called St. Juergen, that is there.

Similar conditions are met with concerning the lazaret at Starkow, in that we cannot trace its connection with a town. There is, however, no doubt that it existed, there being abundant documentary proof in testaments. From 1353, the date of the first grant to it, to 1420 the number of bequests, all of them for the "leprosi," amounts to twenty-three. Nothing could be found about the ultimate fate of this St. Juergen house, of which all traces have disappeared.

#### LEPROSARIA ON RUEGEN ISLAND

Matthias Normann, court clerk on the island of Ruegen from 1554-1558, paid special attention to the leprosaria of the island in his book "Wendisch-Ruegianischer Sprachgebrauch." He called them hospitals, wrote a special section on the one at Ramin, and mentioned those at Bergen, Garz, Gingst and on the peninsulas of Wittow and Jasmund. For all of them further documentary proofs have been found.

There are two towns only on Ruegen, namely, Bergen and Garz, and both of them had special leprosaria. It would seem that these were not sufficient for the needs of the whole island, for in spite of the foundation of the large one at Ramin in 1334, smaller ones appeared in the neighborhood at Gingst and Trent. The name of the founder is known only for Ramin, but it seems likely that the others were established by the noble landowners of these districts.

*Bergen.*—The date of the foundation of the St. Juergen House in Bergen, which lay outside the city on the old high-road to Stralsund, is wrapped in obscurity. The chapel is first mentioned in

records of 1380, but it is pretty certain that the dwelling house was built earlier. Despite people's desires in the matter, it was often necessary to postpone the construction of churches in the leper homes; thus the St. Juergen House at Stralsund was in existence as early as 1278, while the building of the church was not commenced until after 1335. The Bergen institution consisted of four separate buildings, in the midst of which stood a chapel. The place was surrounded by a moat—so far as is known the only one in this district that had one. For the support of the institution there was a farm with 15 morgen of land; and it also received some income in kind and in money. It was managed by two provisors, one of whom seems to have been the incumbent of the chapel. The entrance fee was regulated according to the circumstances of the leper, who, further, was obliged to sign away to the asylum whatever property he brought into it. As the number of lepers gradually decreased the places left free were given to weak old people, but at last the St. Juergen House came completely to an end, especially after the farm was sold in 1538. As time went on the chapel fell into ruins, and in the second half of the 18th century it was demolished along with the rest of the buildings.

*Rambin.*—In 1334 a very rich citizen of Stralsund, Gottfried von Wickede, founded “promotu affectu anime sue ob salutem” a St. Juergen House on his property near the village of Rambin. By the deed of foundation it was expressly intended for the inhabitants of Ruegen. Because from the beginning he endowed this home generously, with a large farm and also a very considerable income drawn from other villages, its financial position was thoroughly satisfactory. The later provisors, who according to the provisions of the founder's will filled gaps in their ranks from members of the city council of Stralsund, were fortunate in their administration of the undertaking and an income was realized which allowed of profitable investment in further landed property. Of all the leper establishments in the entire region this one controlled the most valuable property. It is the only mediaeval foundation of the kind that still exists today on its original site—still, as was the design of its founder, serving charitable purposes though in a different form, and still possessed of the whole of its former landed estate. With the exception of the ancient chapel the original buildings have all disappeared, having been replaced by new ones suited to the needs of a home for the

aged. As a result of the financial independence of the institution, it was possible in early days to get on without levying an entrance fee, but later, when it had been turned into a home for the aged, those who were taken in were obliged to pay for admission. In return, however, they enjoyed very considerable advantages in the matter of produce and ready money. In the secularization period this institution became the property of the city of Stralsund, and its rich estate still forms a considerable portion of the landed property of the city.

*Other leprosaria.*—We have very scant information about the other leper establishments in Ruegen. They were probably of no great importance, and today no visible trace of them remains. The St. Juergen House at Garz, the second largest town in Ruegen, is mentioned only once in the city records, but there is also the will of a citizen of Stralsund who left a sum of money to the leprosarium in the year 1390. We have no knowledge of when it originated or came to an end, or if like the other asylums it served for a time as a home for the aged.

We are similarly situated with regard to the leprosaria in Gingst, Sagard and Trent. The lepers of the house in Gingst were remembered with legacies in 1346, and those of the house at Sagard in the year 1352. The latter is probably identical with the leprosarium on Jasmund mentioned by Normann. All we know of the one in Trent is that it was demolished between 1560 and 1570.

The one on Wittow mentioned by Matthias Normann was situated near the village of Wiek, and its inmates are remembered in a will dated 1352. In the city museum at Stralsund there is still a piece of mediaeval wood-carving from the old chapel, representing the knight St. George on horseback.

Finally must be mentioned a gift made in the year 1413 for the benefit of the inmates of all of the St. Juergen Houses of Ruegen.

#### SUMMARY

To sum up, one may say that in the limited territory of the former principality of Ruegen in the first third of the 14th century there were 19 leprosaria or St. Juergen's Houses, many of them having originated as early as the 13th century. No regulations for the conduct of these mediaeval leper establishments have been preserved, and in most cases it is not known whether or not

lepers of both sexes found asylum in them. With regard to the conditions of admission, nothing can be said except with regard to the entrance fee. There is no information whatever about the other conditions imposed, which doubtless included a diagnosis of the stage of the disease. Nor can it be said whether or not the city medical officers were actively concerned, although we know that both Stralsund and Greifswald had medical men attached to their city councils. In concluding, attention is drawn to the fact that the amazingly large number of leprosaria in this small area points to a fairly high incidence of leprosy there.