

Conserving the History of Leprosy in Italy

Dr Sunil Deepak



Conserving the History of Leprosy in Italy

© Dr Sunil Deepak, April 2017

Presented at “International Symposium on Hansen’s Disease History as Heritage of Humanity”, 22-24 April 2017, Setouchi city, Okayama Prefecture, Japan, organised by the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation (SMHF)

Cover: An old hut used by a leprosy affected person near the leprosy department of San Martino hospital in Genoa (image by Dr Sunil Deepak)

Images: Majority of images used with different Italian cities are from different websites.

Conserving the History of Leprosy in Italy

Dr Sunil Deepak

Introduction

Every society and culture has its own specific ways of conserving the memories of its past. Leprosy had arrived in Italy about fifteen hundred years ago. It reached its peak in early medieval period. Over the next seven-eight hundred years, slowly it became less common. This history of leprosy in Italy and the different ways in which the memories of this history are conserved can be understood, in the specific context of Italian culture.

This paper looks at the different ways in which leprosy and its history have been conserved in Italy and what can be done to conserve this memory for the future.

Leprosy in Italy

One of the earliest mentions of leprosy in Italy is from 643 CE, when the Lombard king Rothari issued an edict in which mentioned need for isolation and loss of civil rights of the persons affected with leprosy. The prevalence of leprosy in Italy reached its peak around 12th and 13th centuries.

At that time, there were around twenty thousand leprosariums or leprosy villages in Western Europe. We do not know how many of these leprosariums were in Italy but almost all the Italian cities had at least one. So there must have been hundreds of leprosariums.

These leprosariums were known as “San Lazzaro hospital” or “Lazzaretto”. Usually they were hostels with separate buildings for men and women. The institutions included agricultural activities, some house animals and other income generating activities. Usually they were managed by church-persons.

After 14th century, slowly the cases of leprosy started decreasing. In the beginning of 20th century, every year there were 50-70 new cases of leprosy. By late 20th century, the number had decreased to about 10 new cases per year. For example, between 1970 to 1999, a total of 290 new cases of leprosy were diagnosed in Italy (an average of 9.6 new cases per year).

Now (2017), new cases of leprosy among Italians are rare (1-2 cases every few years) and almost all the new cases are among immigrants.

Factors Affecting Attitudes Towards Leprosy in Italy

When we talk about leprosy in Italy and the conservation of its history, different factors have influenced it. These include the following:

- Role of the Catholic church: Catholic church has played a dominant and active role in setting up and running of the leprosariums in Italy. The Catholic church is a hierarchical body with its norms and guidelines about management of its institutions. All its activities need to be documented and accounted, thus usually there are written and detailed records about each leprosarium.

- Persons affected with leprosy in the Bible: Bible has many references to leprosy. It also includes the story of Lazarus and how his leprosy was cured by Jesus. These stories and mention of leprosy continue to be talked about and discussed among the persons going to the church services. Persons affected with leprosy also played an important role in the life-story of St. Francis, when he lived with them near the village of Rivotorto. The stories of Bible and other saints, continue to influence popular attitudes and ideas towards leprosy.
- Mixing up with other persons in need: Often the church played a role in care of other sick persons as well. For example, during the big plague epidemic in 1347 to 1352, the church played an active role in looking after the persons sick with plague. In 18th to 20th centuries, the church played an active role in care of persons with tuberculosis and mentally ill persons. Often the same persons, who took care of persons affected with leprosy, also took care of other needy persons. Thus, histories of these institutions are not limited only to leprosy but they are also linked with other conditions.
- Immigrations and attitudes towards immigrants: Over the last twenty-five years, in Italy leprosy is increasingly seen as a disease of immigrants. Thus, general attitudes towards immigrants also influence how persons in Italy look at leprosy affected persons.

When we think of history of leprosy in Italy and how to conserve this history, we need to keep in mind these factors.

Discovering the History of Leprosy in Italy

It is easy to discover the stories about leprosy in different cities of Italy simply by:

- Checking if a city has an area called San Lazzaro or Lazzaretto
- Asking Parishes of these San Lazzaro areas/churches if they have records of any leprosariums in their books.

Due to the story of Lazarus in the Bible, most leprosy villages and leprosariums in Italy were known as San Lazzaro or Lazzaretto. In older times in Italy, leprosy was also known as “Male di San Lazzaro” (disease of St Lazzarus).

Sometimes the old leprosariums are known to people as places where they used to keep persons with tuberculosis or with mental illness. This is because with the decrease in the number of persons affected with leprosy, these leprosariums were also used for tuberculosis or mentally ill persons.

Usually, these areas were located in old peripheries of the cities, though today they may not seem to be very far from the city-centres.

If you go to the parish churches of these areas and ask the Parish priest about the history of the area, you can easily discover that they have documents about the period when they had a leprosarium. Many times, some of the old documents, including maps and illustrations, are kept in the local museum. Often some local persons have already carried out some kind of research about the history of leprosy in their parish. A wealth of such information is available in Italy, though often it is in old books which may not be available on internet.

Sometimes, the old leprosarium-hospitals were converted into general hospitals and are still active. Even in this case, often we find that they have recorded information about the past use of the hospital as a leprosarium.

In the Annex of this document, some examples of brief histories of leprosariums from different parts of Italy are provided.

Keeping Alive the Memory of Places Linked with Leprosy in Italy

A few places in Italy continue to remember the stories of places linked with leprosy and organise tourist visits to these places. Four examples of such places are provided below:

(1) **The church of Rivotorto near Assisi**, where St. Francis spent a few years as a young



man, living together with persons affected with leprosy. There is a reconstructed leprosy village in Rivotorto, that can be visited by pilgrims coming to Assisi.

In 2012, AIFO and the Franciscan friars of Assisi together organised a conference on role of leprosy and persons affected with the disease had played in the life of St. Francis.

In the same year, following the conference, Franciscan monks organised a “Leprosarium tour” when they took pilgrims to visit different places associated with leprosy in the area and discussed with them about the role played by persons affected with leprosy in helping to bring illumination to St. Francis. (In the image on the left, a statue of St. Francis doing the dressing of a leprosy affected person outside the Rivotorto church).

(2) **The island of Armenian monks in Venice** is a small island that is open to public once a week. The monks arrived in this island in 18th century.



When you visit the Armenian island in Venice, during the guided tour they explain that before becoming an Armenian monastery, it was a place for keeping persons with mental illness. Before that it was used as a tuberculosis sanatorium and even before that, as a leprosarium.

However, there are no old buildings in the Armenian island from the time when it was a leprosarium.

(3) **In the periphery of Rapallo** (Liguria) in the north-west of Italy a medieval house along the state road has frescoes painted on its wall and is publicised in the tourist guide books as the “old leprosarium of Bana” and is one of the tourist places of the area.



(4) **Valloncello (Umbria)**, a mountain commune in the Appenines, publicises the old leprosarium of San Lazzaro as one of the places to be visited in the area. The website of the municipality of Valloncello presents this site as part of their tourist places.



Challenges in Conserving the History of Leprosy in Italy

There are different challenges in keeping alive and conserving the history of leprosy in Italy. These challenges include the following:

- History of leprosy in Italy is mainly about the church and the saints taking care of persons affected with leprosy. It rarely mentions who were the affected persons themselves and about their lives. Its approach is also about charity, compassion and helping the needy persons and not about human rights and dignity of persons.
- The places associated with leprosy in the past, were also associated with many other conditions such as plague, tuberculosis and mental illness. This means that they can be seen as the “places of exclusion”, where leprosy is only one part of the story.
- The local administrators of the cities are not always keen to publicise leprosy-related sites, because they see it as a negative publicity. Partly this is also related to prejudices against immigrants from poor countries.
- Local persons affected with leprosy are not so many and they are not willing to come out and acknowledge in public that they had leprosy. They say that the transactional cost of acknowledging (cost versus benefits) is too high and they will lose all their friends and neighbours.

Conserving the Memories for the Future

This is the digital age and technology allows us to create online museums where life-stories of persons in their own voices can be added along with pictures, videos and documents about the history of leprosy in Italy. Thus, even when local histories are difficult to maintain and human right approach is not always accepted, it is possible to create online museum site which can bring together information about sites from different sites, encouraging students and other interested persons to discover similar sites in their own areas and to critically explore their histories.

As shown in the annex, knowledge about places where persons affected with leprosy lived in Italy is widespread across a large number of cities and is relatively easy to access. Thus if an online museum can be created, more information about other leprosy-related sites can also

be collected and then shared with school students to create awareness as well as, local projects about “history of leprosy”.

At the same time, an ongoing dialogue with those places that already publicise local sites related to the history of leprosy, is needed to ensure that persons visiting these places can learn about persons and their lives, instead of just looking at them as “needy persons”.

Leprosariums in Italy were mostly organised as hostels. To run these hostels, they depended upon donations from individuals and from state and religious authorities. At the same time, they had some agriculture and income generation activities. While we know that men and women were segregated, we don't know if in these centres persons could create and live as families. We don't know about the attitudes of the authorities towards their children. We don't know what kind of access they had to their families of origin.

So much information about daily lives of people is missing – I am not sure if it is because such information is not there in the records or if it has not been analysed in this direction. This is an area that would benefit from research.

An international online/virtual museum of leprosy can also be important, because here visitors can compare the different ways in exclusion and isolation were organised across countries and cultures, the different laws and norms governing them and the impact these had on the people's social, affective and family lives.

ANNEX 1

Brief Information About Some Leprosy-Related Sites in Italy

1. Leprosy Sites in Bologna

The Chapel of the Condemned: The earliest sites linked with leprosy in Bologna is a corner of the main city square called Piazza Maggiore, where next to the Palace of King Enzo built in medieval period, is a much older old chapel going back to Roman times, known as the “Chapel of the Condemned”. The area around the Chapel was the site not only for persons affected with leprosy but also for the sick and the poor persons.



San Michele Leprosarium: The first leprosarium of Bologna was in a tiny square in a side street of Strada Maggiore (Major street). This square is known as San Michele square because of the San Michele de Leprosetti church.

Originally this place was around 200 metres outside the first walls of the Roman town. By 14th century, when the medieval walls were built, the town had expanded much further and by that time the leprosarium was already shifted to the Commune of San Lazzaro, outside the city limits of Bologna.

Later, this place became known as an animal market – il Mercato degli Asini (Ass market). However, in spite of all the changes, the old church of the leprosarium never changed its name and even today remembers its history.

San Lazzaro leprosarium: San Lazzaro to the east of Bologna is today part of the city. In older times it was a separate commune 6 km away from the medieval town. A San Lazzaro church along with a leprosarium and a leprosy cemetery were built here around the end of 12th century.

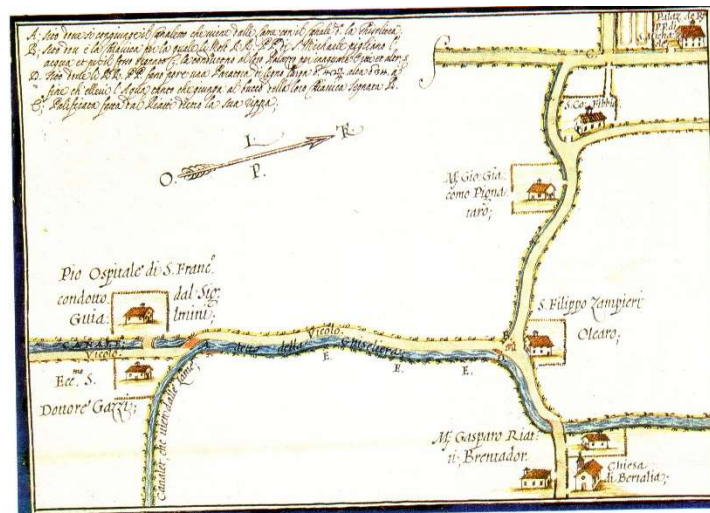
The leprosarium was closed in 1801 during the occupation of Napoleon in Bologna. In 1828, some of its old buildings were used as the office of the municipal government. During the second world war, on 15th April 1945, the old buildings were destroyed. After the war, a new municipal building was built in that place.

In 2015, during the reconstruction of a road in the area, some remains of the old church as the old cemetery were discovered.

Leprosarium of Bertalia: Today Bertalia area is part of Bologna city. In older times, it was a separate commune, 5 km outside the medieval town to the south. There is still a road called Via di Leprosetti that remembers the leprosarium located here. The leprosarium (Lazzaretto) was used for keeping different groups of persons including mentally ill persons and persons affected with tuberculosis. The residential structure was closed in the 1930s. Till a few years ago, this building was used by a theatre group. A few years ago, all the old buildings were demolished and new apartment blocks have come in its place.

Some news about the leprosarium is available in the records of the Parish church of Bertalia. For example, a report says, *“In 1629 there were 437 persons living in this rural commune. in March 1630, they had the first case of plague death. In one year, by March 1631, 142 persons had died due to plague including Dr Vincenzo Duglioi, the doctor at Lazzaretto.”*

The report also mentions that the Lazzaretto was used to keep the persons sick with plague. An old map from 1623 shows the location of the “ospital” and the house of its doctor (Dr Gazzi) near it.



III - Bertalia nel 1623, mappa a penna acquerellata. Archivio di Stato, Bologna: Demaniale, S. Michele in Bosco, vol. 101/2273. Autorizzazione n. 237 del 20.3.1992.

2. Leprosy sites in Venice

Mendicanti church of Mocenigo: The San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti (St Lazzarus of Beggars) is a beautiful church in Baroque style on one the main islands of Venice, not very far from the Civil Hospital. Its name is the reminder that initially it was the church of a leprosarium.

Later on, as their number came down, the remaining persons affected with leprosy living here were transferred to the Armenian island.



St Lazzarus of Armenians Island of Venice: This is a small island (7000 sq metres), occupied entirely by a Mechitarist monastery of Armenian monks.

In the 9th century it was called St Hillary (Sant Ilario) island and Benedictine monks lived here. In 12th century it became a leprosarium. This was because it was not very close to the main islands of Venice and it could be used as a quarantine area to keep persons in isolation.



In 16th century when persons affected with leprosy were few, it started being used for hosting other sick and poor persons. In 17th century Dominican priests from the Crete island in Greece came to live here.

In 18th century, after the Turkish invasion of Armenia, in 1717 a group of Armenian priests came and occupied it. Since then, it continues to be an Armenian monastery. Over the past two centuries, it became an important centre for keeping alive the Armenian language and culture.

The monastery is open to public every day for one visit at 3.25 PM. However, over the past centuries, it has been completely rebuilt and has no original buildings from the era when it was a leprosarium.

3. Sites of Leprosy in Florence

A history of the leprosarium-leprosy hospital in Florence was written by Dr Silvio Berti in 1928. Dr Berti was born in Tuscany and had studied medicine in Florence, before



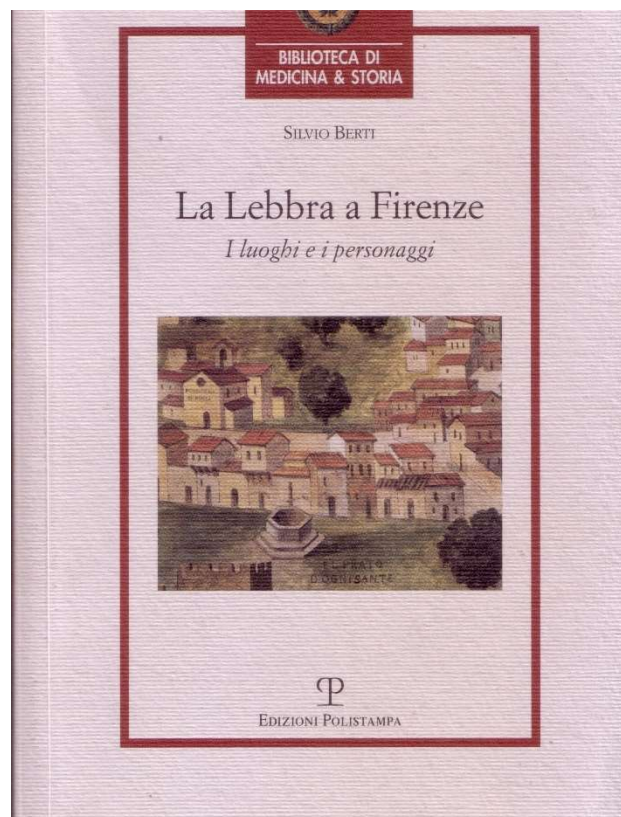
immigrating to San Paulo in Brazil, where he established himself as a dermatologist and came in contact with persons affected in leprosy.

In 1928, while he came back to Florence for a few years, he carried out a research on the old hospital at Prato di Ognisanti, which was a leprosarium in the past between

13th to 16th century (Image left: The hospital of Prato di Ognisanti in a map from 1470 CE).

He looked at all the old documents of hospital to see how the hospital was run and how its uses changed as prevalence of leprosy came down. Thus, the hospital was used for mentally ill persons and for persons with tuberculosis.

After a few years, Dr Berti returned to Brazil where he died. His old papers were brought to Italy by his son and were published as a book – *La lebbra a Firenze* (Leprosy in Florence).



Similar books have been written about other old leprosy hospitals in Italy. For example, a book was also prepared for the San Martino leprosy hospital of Genoa.

4. Sites of Leprosy in Messina

The first leprosarium of Messina, along with St. Agatha church, were built at Casale di Faro, outside the old town, in 12th century. It was known as the “House of infected men”. In 1542 CE, it was placed under the administration of the central hospital of Messina (Santa Maria della Pieta hospital). It continued to be active as leprosy centre till 18th century.

A second leprosarium, known as “San Lazzaro hospital for infected women” was built at Casale di Briga (today known as “Briga Marina”) around 1450. Later it was converted into the Santa Maria della Pieta hospital (An incision from 1542 showing the Santa Maria della Pieta hospital in the image on the left). It was also active in care of leprosy affected persons till 18th century. This hospital was destroyed during a big earthquake in 1908.



A third leprosarium was built in Messina in 1575. It was a wood building near the sea at Falce del Porto. In early 17th century it was destroyed in a fire and was rebuilt. Around 1674, during the revolt against the Spanish rule, the building was destroyed once again and was rebuilt in 1694. At the end of 1800, this building became a warehouse for carbon and other goods.

Even today at the Civil hospital of Messina, there is a regional centre for diagnosis and treatment of leprosy.

5. Sites of Leprosy in Perugia

The Hill Leprosarium (Lebbrosario del Colle) of Perugia was probably built around 1209 CE. The legend says that St Francis had stayed here. There are different mentions of the leprosarium in the records of the local Commune. For example, a document from 1279 says, “*Qualiter potestas et capitaneus menutenerere e defendere res et bona leprosorum de hospitali de Colle*”, (Authorities and captains are asked for maintenance of the Hill leprosarium for its good functioning).

The leprosarium had three buildings, each with its own church. The central building with a tower and along with St. Mary church was for the priests, administrators and persons not affected with leprosy. A second building with San Lazzaro church and agricultural land was for men affected with leprosy. Finally, a third building with St. Martha church was for women affected with leprosy.

The number of leprosy affected persons living there was not very high. For example, in 1334 CE, there were 8 women and 15 men affected with leprosy were living in this leprosarium.



6. Leprosy sites in Trento

In a 1980 book published by the Archdiocese of Trento, there are details about the old leprosarium of Trento. The leprosarium along with St Nicholas church were built in 1191 CE. It was built next to Adige river, around 2 miles away from the Cathedral.



The buildings of the leprosarium included a church, two houses (one for leprosy affected persons and other for non-affected persons), a courtyard, a vegetable garden, a flour mill and a cemetery. (The image on the left shows the buildings existing in that place in 1970).

Around 1340, the centre was no longer being used as a leprosarium. A document mentions that the mill is broken and not in use anymore.

Apart from St Nicholas leprosarium of Trento, there were other leprosariums under Trento administration – St Ilario in Rovereto, St. Thomas between Arco and Riva, and

St Lazzarus at Lavis.

7. Leprosy sites in Rome

Very little is known about the history of leprosy in Rome. Considering the importance of Rome in its relationships with different countries and people of the world and its large population, it must have needed some places to host persons affected with leprosy.

There is an area called San Lazzaro in Rome with a church dedicated to St Lazzarus. It is said that a leprosarium was present here in the 15th century. However, it did not start as a leprosarium. Originally the San Lazzaro church was dedicated to St Mary Magdalene and it was part of the pilgrimage circuit for people coming to visit St Peter's church.

Mary Magdalene church was an important place. King Charles V of Bohemia (1355) and king Fredrick III of Austria (1452) had stayed here. Ambassador of the Grand Duke of Lithuania (1501) and Ambassador of Japan (1615) had also stayed here.

However, in 15th century, a rich person having a big house next to the church asked in his testament that his house should be used for making a house for pilgrims affected with leprosy. According to the local law, all pilgrims coming to visit St Peter's church were examined by health-inspectors and persons suspected of having leprosy were stopped here.

In 1645, the house for leprosy affected pilgrims was placed under the Sassia Hospital. Later, it was abandoned and the building collapsed in 1937. Today, in its site there is a parking place for the high court building, while the old church is still there.



San Lazzaro church in an old painting



San Lazzaro church

The archives of Vatican City and Rome have detailed information about every aspect of the city. Thus, specific research can show which other leprosy related sites were present in Rome and their histories.

8. Leprosy Sites in Genoa



San Martino leprosy hospital of Genoa: It started as a leprosy home in 1150 AD. The whole area around Genoa was known to be a leprosy-endemic area and new cases of leprosy among local persons were frequent till a couple of decades ago. In the 18th century, when the railway station of Genoa was built, parts of San Martino building were demolished to make way for railway tracks, and the hospital was shifted to a hill. (The new St. Martin leprosy hospital/home in 1950 in the image on the left).

During the centuries of San Martino's existence, there were numerous occasions when residents of the leprosy home wrote letters to the Popes and to archbishops, to complain about the persons managing the home and to ask for better living conditions. All these have been

documented in a book.

During the second world war, between November 1943 and April 1945, a group of persons working with the local church to save Jew citizens of Genoa, had used the leprosy home to hide them from the Nazi officers. While some of the persons involved in this initiative were caught and killed, the German forces never came inside the leprosy home.

A request for renovating the hospital was made by Prof. Raedeli in 1920s, but the work was completed only in 1935 when the new leprosy department was inaugurated by Mussolini.

Inside the hospital, leprosy part was kept separately from the rest of the hospital and persons lived in it till 1980s. After that, during early 1990s there was an attempt to shift the residents to another building outside, the old hospital for persons with mental illness. However, persons affected with leprosy living there, did not like it and protested. After the protests, the plans of shifting were given up.

Now, the building is used mainly as a hospital, though old residents are free to come back to stay inside, if they wish.

An area where persons affected with leprosy had built their huts and lived independently, has been closed to public and is maintained as it was, along with a separate passage that allowed persons to come and go from the hospital without coming out on the street.



The hospital also has a small chapel, where persons affected with leprosy could participate in the prayers from a balcony on the first floor, without coming in contact with other persons. Even this has been maintained.



9. Leprosy Sites in Benevento

The Leprosy Bridge: An old bridge in Benevento is known as the leprosy bridge. It is a Roman period bridge, probably built in 3rd century BCE, on the Sabato river. The original bridge was destroyed many times, the last being in 18th century during an earthquake, and then rebuilt.

During medieval period, persons affected with leprosy were forced to live outside the city, near this bridge. Persons affected with leprosy, who were not allowed to enter the city, usually came to this bridge to ask for food and help from the city persons. There are no traces of the old leprosarium but the name of the bridge still remembers the old history.



10. Leprosy Sites in San Sepolcro (Tuscany)

San Sepolcro is associated with the life of St. Francis, who had stayed in the leprosarium of San Sepolcro. This episode is told in one of the earliest biographies of the saint, “Memoriale in desiderio animae”, written by Tommaso da Celano in 1247.

San Lazzaro leprosarium was located to the south, outside the San Niccolo gate of the medieval town, in a place called Doglio. The first official mention of the leprosarium occurs in a document from 1256 CE, though the leprosarium was there for many centuries before that. Like other leprosariums in this part of Italy, it had probably started as a group of leprosy affected persons who had joined together to form a community.

The leprosarium had a San Lazzaro church. A document from 1362 CE shows that a woman called Angela (also known as Ricciola or “Curly hairs”), who was resident of the leprosarium had donated 3 Fiorini for a painting for the church. Another document from the same year, a testament, mentions different buildings inside the leprosarium, including parts reserved for persons who did not have leprosy, including family members. According to this document, men and women had separate areas in those buildings.

Some documents from 14th century mention problems between the religious persons managing the leprosarium and some “rebels”. During the 14th century, the number of leprosy affected persons living in the leprosarium was small – for example, in 1338 CE, there were 8 persons affected with leprosy living there (4 men and 4 women), while in 1347 there were 11 persons (5 women, 6 men).

Persons affected with leprosy coming to live in the leprosarium gave up all their possessions and incomes to congregation managing the leprosarium. For example, a document explains that on 14 August 1317, a person affected with leprosy whose name was Mrs Bella, and who was the widow of Rosso di Giuliano from Sigliano had a ceremony in the leprosarium church where she promised to give all her present and future possessions to God and promised to live in the leprosy community expecting equal benefits like all other leprosy affected persons without expecting anything additional for herself. In the same ceremony, the rector of the community agreed that in September of each year she will receive 25 Soldi (money) from the church for her personal use. Other persons living in the community including the workers and the leprosy affected persons, were witnesses in this ceremony.

Such documents show that persons affected with leprosy had some community roles though they did not have any governing roles in this leprosarium. No traces of the old buildings remain today. There is a San Lazzaro youth centre (oratorio) in the area which had the leprosarium, but it is a new building.

There are other documents showing that in that period there were similar leprosariums in nearby cities such as Citta del Castello and Arezzo.

11. Leprosy Sites in Arezzo (Tuscany)

The first mention of the San Lazzaro leprosarium of Arezzo are found in a document from



1278 CE. It was located outside the medieval town on the antique road Cassia Vetus which connected Arezzo to Rome. Today that road is called Via Romana. Over the centuries, the area of Via Romana between La Mossa and Pontalto was known as San Lazzaro because of the old leprosarium.

Documents show that the leprosarium had extensive repairs and reconstructions in 1431. As number of persons affected with leprosy

decreased, the building was used for persons needing some care when they were discharged from the city hospitals. In 1623 its management passed to one of the city hospitals (Santa Maria del Ponte hospital).

In 1784 the building was sold to the Dini family. Today the building belongs to Gudini family and has apartments. In some parts of the buildings, old columns and other structures are still visible.



12. Leprosy Sites in Reggio Emilia

The San Lazzaro leprosarium of Reggio Emilia was located outside the medieval town on Via Emilia, coming from Bologna. Officially it started in 1217. The rector of the leprosarium was nominated by the Bishop of Reggio Emilia.

Documents about the leprosarium show that persons affected with leprosy took part in decision-making of their community. One 13th century document explains that “Rector together with the patients, through one or more meetings, take the decisions”.



Gradually as the number of leprosy affected persons decreased, other sick and needy persons were accepted in the centre.

In 1755, the Duke of Este, made the law which converted the old leprosarium into a hospital for persons with mental illness. Today new buildings have been added to the old structures of the leprosarium and the whole area is known as the Neuro-psychiatry hospital. The image from early 20th century on the left shows the building used for housing the men in the mental hospital (and probably in the old leprosarium).

A cup from the San Lazzaro church from 1420 is kept in the civic museum of Reggio Emilia.

13. Leprosy Sites of Lucca

The first leprosarium of Lucca was located in a place called Flesso (today known as Montuolo). It was destroyed by the floods of Serchio river in 1158.

A second leprosarium of Lucca was built in a place called Ruota. It is first mentioned in documents from 1187.

A third leprosarium called “New Leprosarium” was built in 1232 on some agricultural land donated by Mr Benedetto in a place called Coda di Prato outside the city walls, the bridge of Leo Buzi. A document from 1272 shows that one Mr Gualtrotto Stiatta donated all the income from his fields to this leprosarium.

Apart from donations and patrimonies left to the leprosarium in the testaments, persons affected with leprosy also paid a “dowry” to be admitted there. Thus, the leprosarium had land and properties in different parts of local territory and it was a rich institution with a significant income. However, there are documents from the Bishop explaining that poor persons who were unable to pay for their stay in the leprosarium, still received free oil, vine and food from the rector.

Occasionally there were difficulties between the management and the persons affected with leprosy. For example, in 1365 the Bishop asked the rector of the leprosarium, clarifications regarding complaints of inadequate food and of having sent away some poor persons.

There are also documents about persons affected with leprosy who were not staying in the leprosarium and who wandered about with a bell, ringing to announce their condition and ask for charity. For example, a document from 1319 mentions “the heartless people of Lucca” who do not take care of leprosy affected persons.

There is no mention of a separate cemetery for the leprosy affected persons. A document from 16th century seems to suggest that they were buried inside the hospital building.

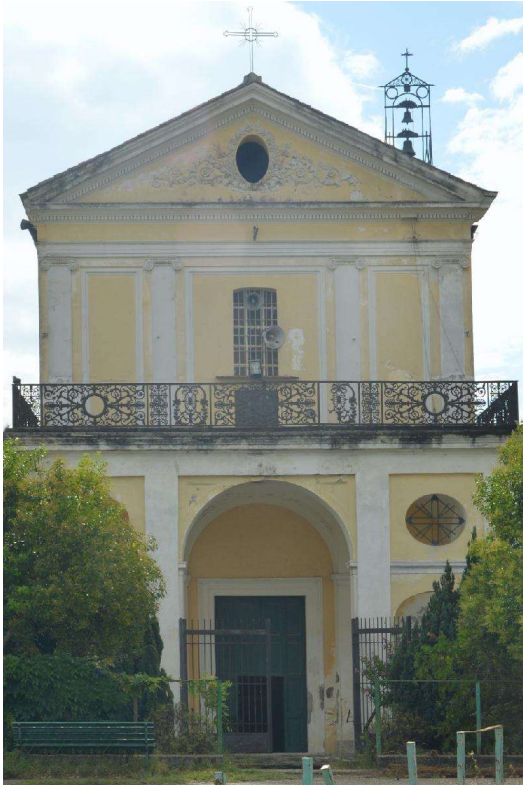
In 1480, a procession in the honour of Madonna del Soccorso (The Helping Madonna) was started during which, people from the city came out and passed in front of the leprosarium.

In the 15th century, the building of the leprosarium was damaged during the war between Florence and Lucca, and needed extensive repairs. In 16th century, the leprosarium administration came under that of the hospital of San Luca. At that time the leprosarium included cultivated and grazing lands, rooms, houses for the staff and areas reserved for animals.

By 17th century, other poor and homeless persons were also being accepted in the Lazzaretto. In 1745, it became a hostel for sick Spanish soldiers. All the traces of the old buildings are lost. In their place there is the church of San Concordio, built in 1779 (rebuilt around 1850).

14. Leprosy Sites in Capua

San Lazzaro Leprosarium of Capua was started in 1228 through a donation of Lazaro di



Raimo. An annual donation of 250 Ducats was guaranteed including 50 Ducats for running of the leprosarium and a centre for the Order of Cavallieri of San Lazzaro (Horsemen of St. Lazzarus). The leprosarium was located around one-third of a mile away from the walls of the city centre, on the road going towards Santa Maria Maggiore.

Over the years, the Order received support from different Popes and kings and was asked to look after the leprosariums of other cities in the south of Italy such as Palermo and Messina.

There were some problems and Pope Innocenzo III (12th century) ordered the closure of both the Order as well as the hospital. However, this order was revoked by Pope Leon X (15th century).

Their work was supported by King Roberto (12th century) who made a law imposing compulsory admission of all leprosy affected persons in the leprosariums, if needed through the use of force” and their separation from non-affected persons. In 1525, this law was expanded and asked for compulsory confiscation of houses and all the material possessions of leprosy affected persons, which belonged to the State after their death.

A letter of Gran Maestro (head) of the order of Cavallieri di San Lazzaro, from 1560 explained that the situation of leprosy affected persons was bad, they were forced to go around with “chiacarelle” (two pieces of wooden sticks for making sound) and ask for charity. The letter also complained about the poor quality of food given to them.

The old San Lazzaro church and leprosarium were destroyed in 1799 by the French forces. The new building of the church was built a few years later. However, there are no traces of the old leprosarium today. However, it is important to remember that by hosting the Order of Cavallieri di San Lazzaro, historically it played an important role in organising services for leprosy affected persons in the Mediterranean countries.