

# Iconography of Blindness



Images of blindness in western art

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Sampson Blind: St Chapelle 1248



*The Apotheosis of Homer*, by Archelaus of Priene. Marble relief, C3rd BC, British Museum.



*The Apotheosis of Homer* 1827 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Louvre



Centrepiece of Roman mosaic depicting the muses; Vichten, Luxembourg. Calliope: muse of epic poetry, with Homer 240 AD





Lucas Cranach the younger; c. 1545

Giovanni Bellini; 1472; oil on canvas; Musei Civici, Pesaro.

Michelangelo, 1542-45: Cappella Paolina, Vatican Palace



## "Ananias restoring the sight of Saint Paul"

Pietro Da Cortona – 1631

Capuchin church of S. Maria della  
Concezione: Rome

God asks Ananias, a Christian from  
Damascus, to go to the house where  
Saul lives.

And Ananias went his way, and entered  
the house; and putting his hands on  
him said: "Brother Saul, the Lord  
Jesus, who appeared to you on the way  
as you came, has sent me, that you  
might receive your sight, and be filled  
with the Holy Ghost."

And immediately there fell from his  
eyes as it had been scales: and he  
received his sight at once and arose,  
and was baptized ;

*And when he had received food, he was  
strengthened. (The Acts of the Apostles  
9:3-18)*





## Blinding as punishment

**Lucius Sergius Paulus** Proconsul of Cyprus under Claudius

Paul had been invited to preach but is heckled by **Elymas**, a "magus",

Paul states that God has decided to make him temporarily blind.

A cloud of darkness immediately begins blocking his sight; after this Sergius Paulus is converted to Christianity

*The Blinding of Elymas* (Acts 13:6-12).

Set of ten cartoons commissioned by Pope Leo X for tapestries for Sistine Chapel hung below Michelangelo's ceiling.

Michelangelo had worked behind locked doors.

Whilst away, his relative, architect **Bramante** let Raphael see the unfinished ceiling frescos.

Raphael quickly changed his figure of Isaiah he had been working on in the St. Agostino church

Conscious that his work would be seen beside the recently completed ceiling

With Michelangelo's ceiling became most famous and influential designs of the Renaissance, and were well known to all artists of the Renaissance and Baroque.

Admiration peaked in C18th and 19th centuries; described as "the Parthenon sculptures of modern art"



Elymas the Sorcerer is struck blind before Sergius Paulus.  
Painting from Raphael Cartoons.





# Belisarius

Jean-François Marmontel's novel *Bélisaire* (1767), revived interest in **Belisarius**--a popular general of Byzantine Empire career was sabotaged by the jealous Emperor Justinian I.

In the novel, the emperor has General blinded becomes a beggar.

Later recognised and aided by former officers and his family.

1710: Legend used as a metaphor in a pamphlet to highlight poor treatment of disgraced Marlborough by ungrateful state.

This dramatic tale of patriotism, injustice, and redemption popular in revolutionary and post-revolutionary France

Antiroyalist elements in French society found parallels in the court of Louis XVI, which was coming under increased criticism.

Common subject for painters and sculptors



Court of Emperor Justinian with archbishop Maximian Belasarius officials & Praetorian Guards; Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Born in Germana (Bulgaria) becomes commander.

Campaigns increase Byzantine Empire.

Puts down riot in Hippodrome.

563: Accused of plotting to kill jealous Justinian probably innocent, was disgraced.

Restored to favour left in peace until his death.



**Nicholas-René Jollain**  
**“Belisarius Begging Alms” 1767**

(b Paris, 1732; d Paris, 1804) pupil of  
Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre.

2<sup>nd</sup> in 1754 Prix de Rome competition.  
1765: approved at the Académie Royale  
Soldier horrified seeing his old  
commander begging.

Louis Petit de Bachaumont, admired the  
composition and the motif of the child  
begging with an upturned soldier's helmet.

Denis Diderot, on the other hand,  
dismissed the work as ‘a bad sketch’.



Later legend Justinian ordered Belisarius' eyes to be put out, and reduced to homeless beggar near the Pincian Gate of Rome,

**Jean-Baptiste Stouf**  
*Bust of Belisarius 1785 Getty*

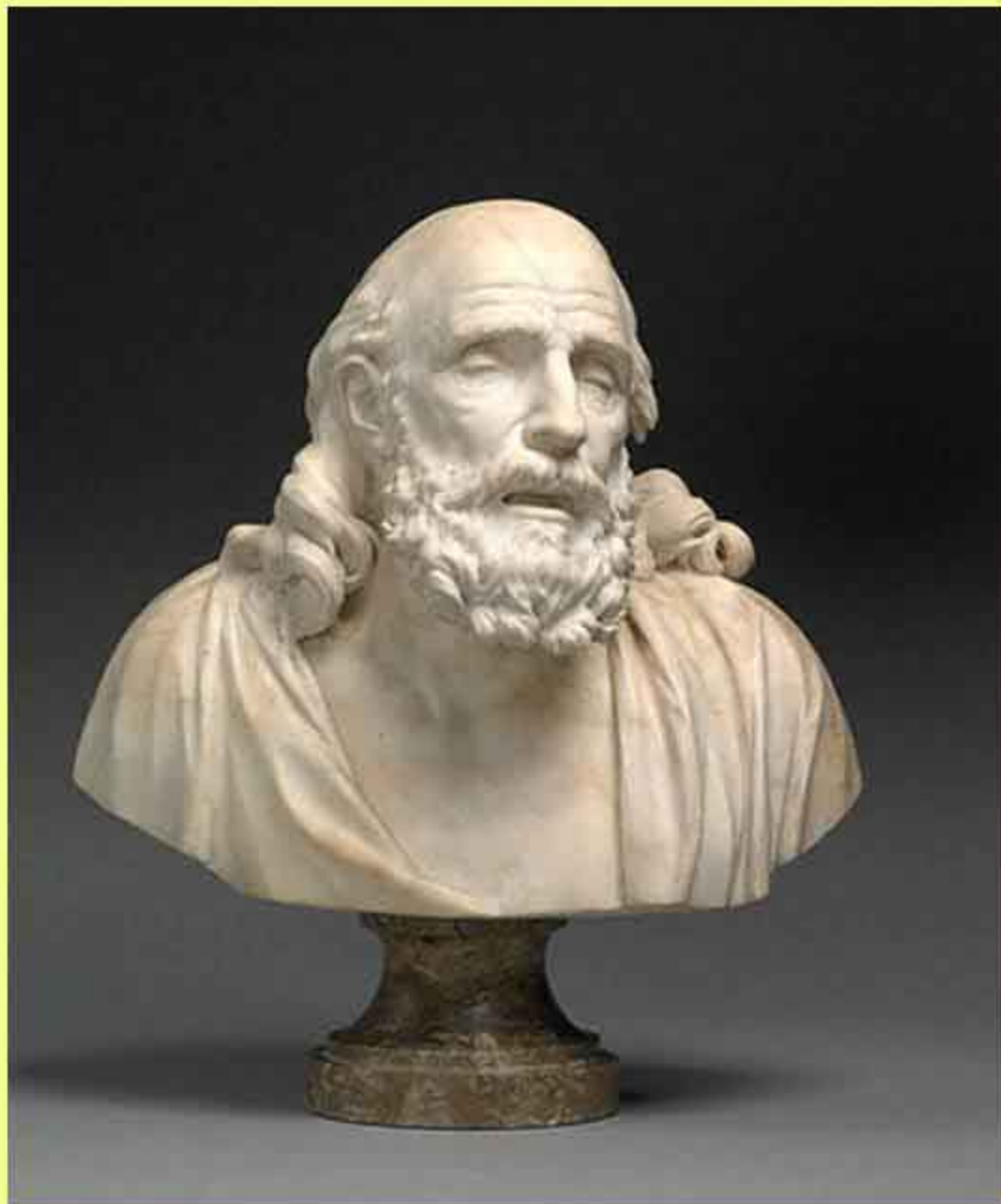
Heavy eyelids almost completely cover his blind eyes,

Deeply set eye sockets, encircled by wrinkles, caused by enophthalmos, the shrinking of an eye blinded by trauma

Stouf's mastery of marble carving.

Beautifully sculpted beard and hair, wrinkled skin.

Echo classical and Baroque sculpture but also anticipate the Romantic movement of the 1800s.





**François-André Vincent (1746–1816)**  
*Belisarius* 1776

son of the miniaturist François-Elie Vincent studied under Joseph-Marie Vien.

won the *Prix de Rome* in 1768.

1771-75 studied Académie de France Rome.

secular saint, sharing the suffering of the downtrodden poor



François-André Vincent  
by Adélaïde Labille-Guiard,  
painted 1795



**Jacques-Louis David:**  
*Belisarius asking for alms 1781*

David had just returned to Paris after his sojourn in Rome when he submitted this painting to gain admission to the French Academy (sole right to public exhibitions).

First example of new heroic and austere style Neoclassicism.

Parallels between the actions of Justinian and the repression imposed by contemporary rulers.

'this could happen to anyone traitor to the crown'

Man of virtue destroyed by envy, and David's painting stands as a warning against a corrupt, envy-infested State

1768: Political Register: Franklin uses dismembered Britannia: captioned *date obolum Belisario*; highlighting unfair treatment of American colonies



asking passers-by to "give an obolus to Belisarius"

date obolum Belisario



Combines themes of charity (the alms giver), injustice (Belisarius), and the radical reversal of power (the soldier who recognises his old commander)

*Bélisaire demandant l'aumône*  
**Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille,**



**Belisarius and His Guide**  
**1794: Bronze Metropolitan**  
**Antoine Denis Chaudet 1763–1810:**

1791: terracotta model for this group was exhibited at the Salon

contrast between the forms of the sightless but ever-proud mendicant and his weary young guide.

The quality of the bronze led early commentators to suppose Chaudet carried it out himself,

more likely he turned to a professional foundry for the expertise needed to give the metal its range of surfaces





**Belisarius**  
**Baron François Gérard**  
**French, 1797: Getty**

Blind Belisarius carries his guide who is near death bitten by a snake.

The general's young companion is present in Marmontel's novel. But to stress the pathos, Gérard introduced the snakebite.

Gerard's Belisarius does not beg standing and erect, his muscular form in sharp contrast to his guide's weakening body.

The helmet emphasizes the general's heroic past emphasizing the injustice of his fall from grace.







Early Greek sculpture in bronze and porous limestone,  
Later used Marble

**Naxos** – Best close-grained and sparkling,

**Parian** (from Paros) - rougher grain and more translucent,

**Pentelic** (near Athens) - more opaque turns yellow with age  
(iron content).

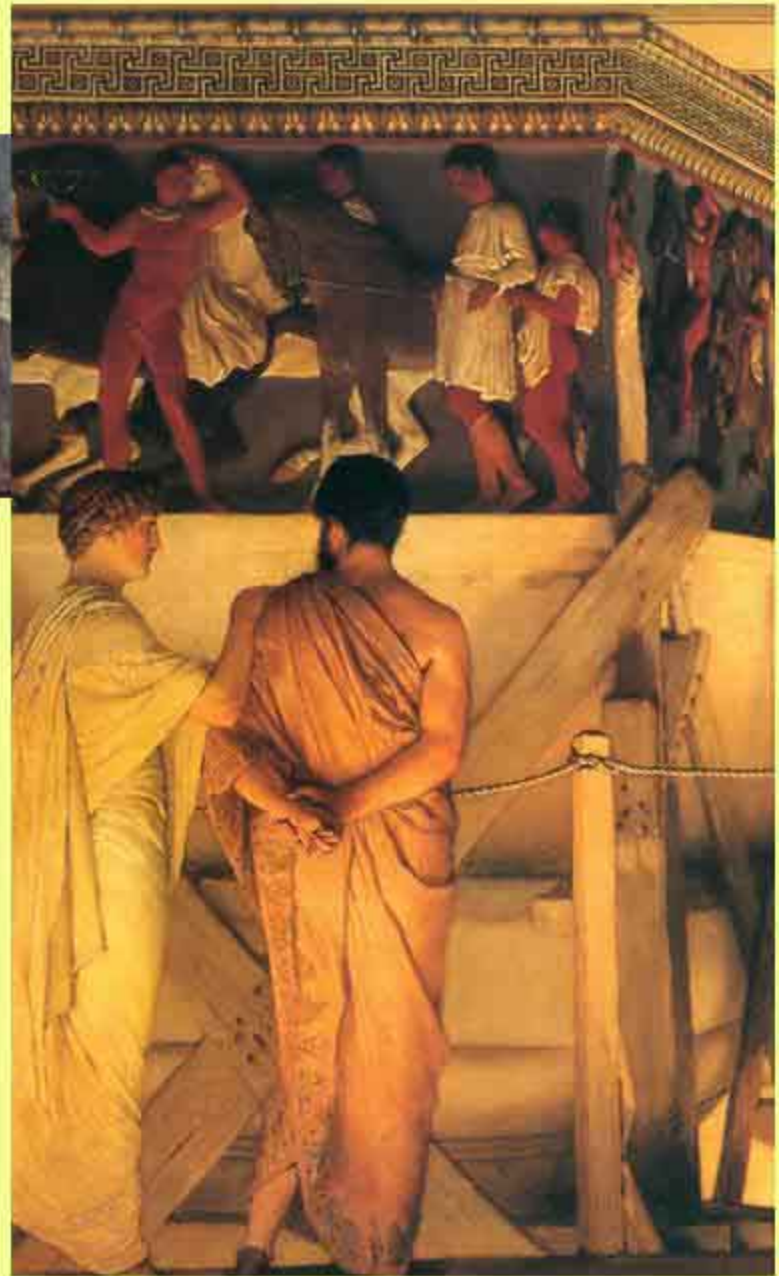
Greek sculpture was not polished but painted

Skin, hair, eyebrows, lips, and patterns on clothing were added  
in bright colours.

Eyes were often inlaid using bone, crystal, or glass.

Bronze spears, swords, helmets, jewellery, and diadems, some  
had bronze disc (*meniskoī*) suspended over the head to prevent  
bird soiling

West frieze, XLVII, 132–136, British Museum



Phidias showing the frieze in the Parthenon to friend  
Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912), 1868



## Truth Illuminating Human Blindness

Volterrano: Italian, red chalk about 1650  
Red chalk, heightened with white gouache  
drawing for a fresco in a palazzo in Florence:  
Getty

Female personification of Truth removes veil  
from eyes of an allegorical figure  
representing intellectual and spiritual  
Blindness. Holds sceptre and crown

Luminous highlights in white lead. Touches  
of lead white, and chalk shading define the  
cushions but also create the form of left arm.

Not just using contour lines. In 1636:  
Medici family commissioned frescoes on the  
family history for their villa in Florence;  
Volterrano finished them twelve years later



# Lady Justice

**(Iustitia**, Roman goddess of Justice, = Greek goddesses Themis and Dike)

Allegorical personification of the moral force in judicial systems

Iustitia depicted carrying scales and a sword, and wearing a blindfold.

Iconography courthouses blends the attributes of several goddesses

**Roman blindfolded Fortuna** (fate)

**Hellenistic Greek Tyche** (luck),

**Nemesis** (sword carrying vengeance).

**Justitia** was only commonly represented as "blind" since end of the 15th century.

The first known representation of blind Justice is Hans Gieng's 1543 statue on the *Gerechtigkeitsbrunnen* (*Fountain of Justice*) in Berne.



Lady Justice with sword, scales and blindfold on the Gerechtigkeitsbrunnen in Berne, Switzerland—1543



Themis: sword and scales (Legislative Council Building, Central, Hong Kong)



Gerechtigkeit, Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1537



## Blind justice

**“Thrones”** Angels of Third Order

Humility, Peace and Submission.

Reside in the area of the cosmos where material form begins to take shape.

The lower Choir of Angels need the Thrones to access God.

**Tradition:** God's Spirit is shown in a certain manner to these angels, who in turn pass on the message to men and the inferior angels

**Thrones:** in scripture the bringers of justice

their status in hierarchy is confused, sometimes placed above the Seraphim, sometimes placed at level of Cherubim.

Their position makes them some of the most powerful angels

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, they carry out the divine justice



church of St Lawrence in Harpley - west window

## George Frederic Watts Hope 1886

One of a series of allegorical subjects intended for a decorative scheme the 'House of Life'.

Hope is usually identified by an anchor  
Watts more original approach.

Blind Hope seated on a globe and playing on a lyre which has all its strings broken except one.

Mood of desolation may reflect death of his adopted daughter Blanche's one-year old child







Blindness and War: James Collinson (1825 – 1881) **Returning Home (Home Again)** Tate Gallery  
The return home of a soldier who was blinded in the Crimea.

## Blindness of war

Dix, Otto (1891-1969)

Streichholzhaendler I - The Match Vendor  
I. 1920: Kunstmuseum, Stuttgart

Dix, Otto (1891-1969) Cripples (45 % Fit  
for Service), 1920. Oil on canvas.

Shown at the Nazi Exhibition

"Degenerated Art" in the Galeriegebäude  
am Münchener Hofgarten (July 19, 1937),  
later destroyed







Gassed: 1919 John Singer Sargent



Die Blinden: Albin Egger-Lienz, 1918



The blind leading the blind - after Hieronymus Bosch  
Pieter van der Heyden, c.1561



The blind leading the blind - engraving after  
Tintoretto, 1767



Les aveugles dans le fossé: James Tissot, 1886



## Sentimentality

Victorian sentimentality and pity, led to the establishment of institutions for blind  
1791: First The Royal School for the Blind in Liverpool by Edward Rushton.

End of C19th over 50 such institutions, educated, employed and fed over 1,000 people.

Without education and employment blind children a drain on the poor rates

Useful toil for blind meant the 'Blind Trades'. basket weaving, brush making, piano tuning.

David Blunkett Former Labour cabinet minister advised best career he could hope for was a piano tuner.

Blind and deaf Institutions 'depressed the expectations of all their pupils',

1889: Report of the Royal Commission on the Blind, Deaf and Dumb, &c., of UK  
Trades employed by institutions for the blind across the UK

This gentleman is self sufficient, generating enough money to start a family



Michael Frederick Halliday,  
The Blind Basket Maker and  
his First Child, 1856

### FEMALES.

Brush-drawing.	Mattress-making.
Brush-making.	Needlework.
Chair-caning.	Netting.
Crotchet work.	Sash line-making.
Firewood bundling.	Sewing.
Hair tearing.	Sewing mattress covers.
House work.	Wool work.
Knitting.	
Massage.	

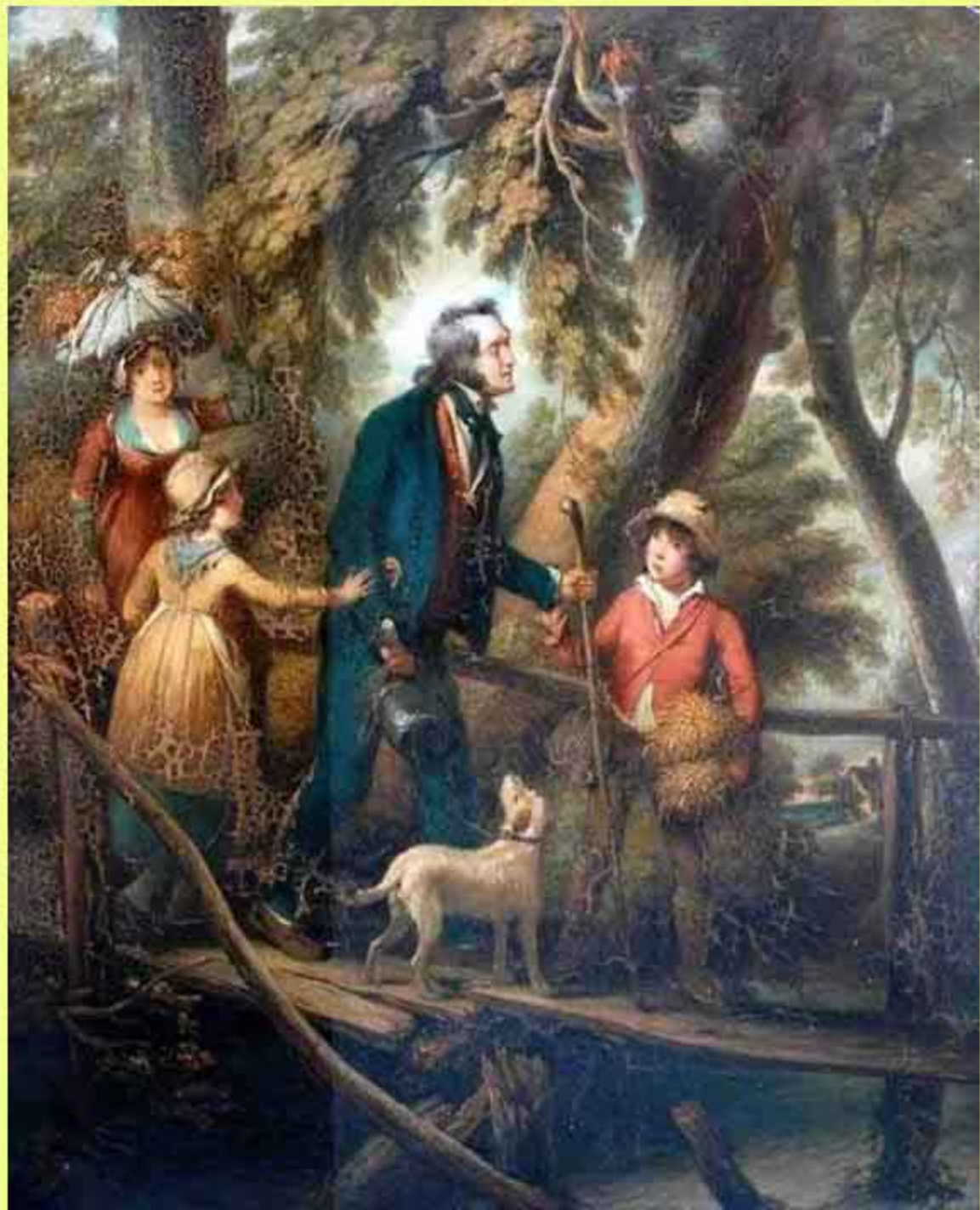
### MALES.

Basket-making.	Matting-weaving.
Bedding-making.	Mattress-making.
Bedding purifying.	Netting.
Bottle envelope-making.	Palliasse-making.
Brush-making.	Piano-repairing.
Brush setting in pitch.	Piano-tuning.
Chair-caning.	Porters (working as).
Chair rush-seating.	Reed work.
Cork cushion-making.	Rug-making.
Cork fender making.	Sacking.
Firewood-splitting.	Sash line-making.
Feather-picking.	Sheep net-making.
Game bag-making.	Ship's fender-making.
Handloom weaving.	Skip-making.
Mat-making.	Twine-spinning.
Mat-weaving.	Weaving.
Matting-making.	Willow-seating.
	Wickerwork.

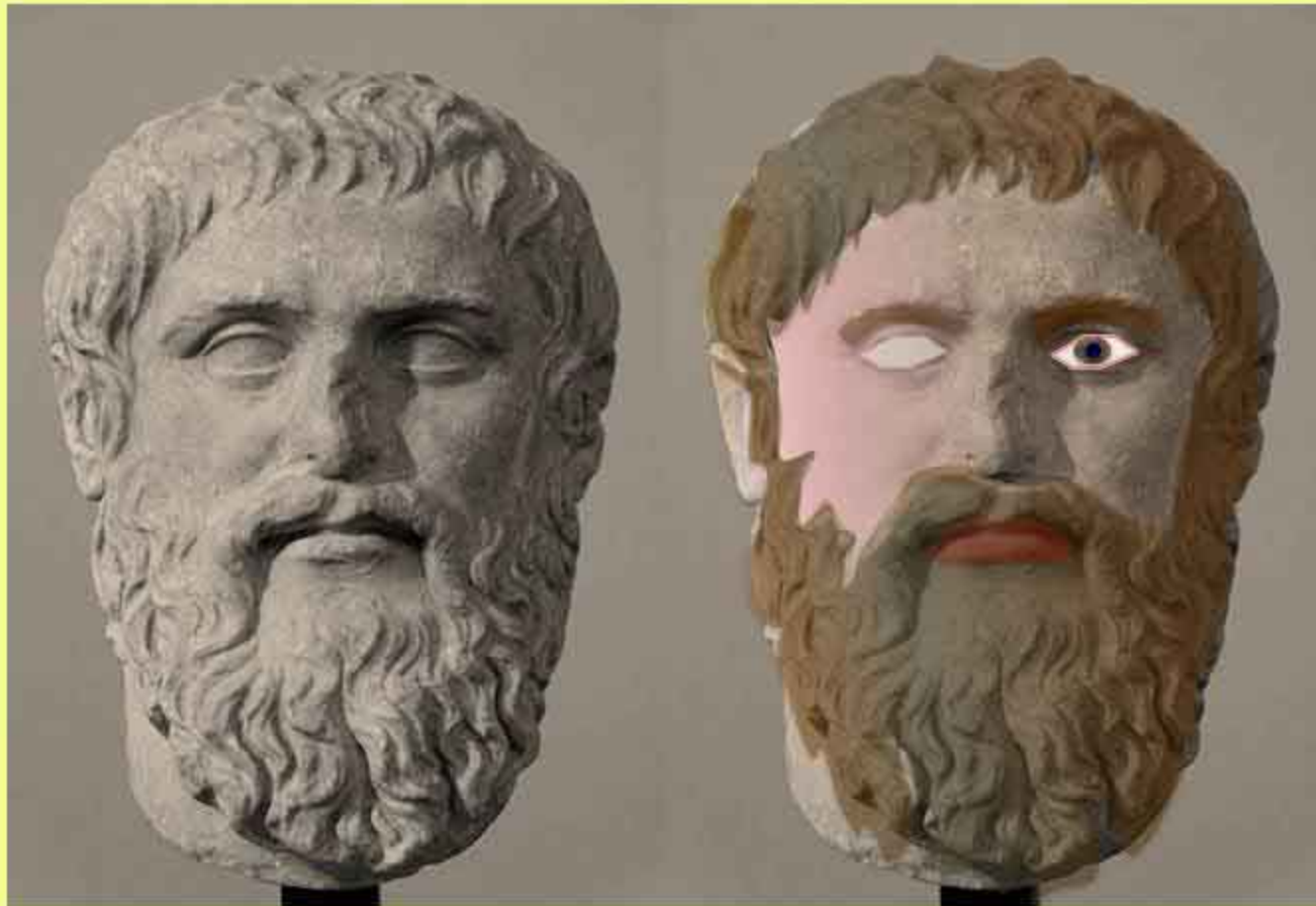


Children Guiding Their Blind Father  
Over The Bridge

**William Redmore Bigg (1755 – 1828**







Funery portrait  
Roman Egypt C2nd AD  
Houston



Bronze age coloured sculpture  
Capitoline Hill

## **The Blind Girl (1856)**

### **John Everett Millais**

Two itinerant beggars, one of whom is a blind musician, with concertina

They are resting by the roadside after a rainstorm, before travelling to the town of Winchelsea, visible in the background.

Allegory of the senses, contrasting the experiences of the blind and sighted sisters.

Blind feels the warmth of the sun on her face, and fondles a leaf of grass,

Sighted shields her eyes from the sun and rain  
Double rainbow incorrectly coloured when first exhibited in 1856

Inner rainbow inverts the order of the colours.  
Later corrected.

The sheet around her neck is captioned "Pity the Blind".





August Sander  
Blind Girls 1930,  
Blind Children 1930

August Sander made this portrait at a home for the blind in Düren, just west of Cologne.

The younger man on the left was apparently of interest to Sander, who made a detailed enlargement of him, entitled *Blind Man, Congenitally Afflicted*.



# THANK YOU

Ancient times: Blind people heroic or victims of punishments

**Tusculan Disputations** Cicero. "The soul may have delight in many different ways, even without the use of sight.

Christian era: Religious models and church control

Hospitals received endowments became rich.

Most blind however probably lived without charity in their communities.

Rich source of fascinating images

Some give insights to the cultural perception of disability

Mark P O'Toole: *Caring for the Blind in Medieval Paris: Life at the Quinze-Vingts, 1250—1430*

Robert A. Scott *The Making of Blind Men: A Study of Adult Socialization* 1969

Sabina Zonno: *Image of the blind or blindfold man in some c13-14 european manuscripts*

Eric Moormann *Representations of Homer in modern times*

*The Blind in French Society from the Middle Ages to the Century of Louis Braille:* Zina Weygand

*Crime and Punishment in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age:* edited by Albrecht Classen

*"Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Disability:* Pauline A. Otieno

*The Armenian Gospels of Gladzor: The Life of Christ Illuminated* By Thomas F. Mathews

Mary V Orna: *Artists' Pigments in Illuminated Medieval Manuscripts: Tracing Artistic Influences and Connections—A Review*





## Evidence for painting

Terracotta column-krater (bowl for mixing wine and water) Group of Boston 00.348. Greek, Late Classical, ca. 360–350 B.C.

Artist in cap and exomis tunic bare torso painting a statue of Herakles (club, bow and lion skin)

Encaustic technique: mixture of mineral-based pigments & wax heated colour applied with spatulas kept warm in the charcoal brazier

Zeus, ruler of the gods, and Nike, personification of victory, oversee as Invisible Herakles wanders in on right



Under Hadrian: return to idealised images of Classical Greek sculpture

Important innovation: Sculpting of pupil rendering a more realistic illusion of the eyes in marble.

Previously, pupil and iris had only been painted on to the sculpture

Now sculpted



*Head of Constantine*, from the Basilica of Constantine, A.D. 313,





## **Aristotle with a Bust of Homer** **Rembrandt van Rijn 1606–69**

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) rests his hand on a bust of Homer.

Philosopher, wears the jeweled belt given to him by his pupil Alexander the Great,

Contemplating the life of the poor blind bard

Homer's blindness is generally considered as a mark of wiseness, spiritual richness,

Not as disabling lack of sight.

Homer's busts gaze up toward the Olympic heaven where the gods live

Similar gaze in Hellenistic statues of princes, generals philosophers



# Sir Thomas Lawrence Homer Reciting his Poems 1790

Early work was exhibited in 1791.

Painted for the connoisseur, Richard Payne Knight, subject and style to suit his classical taste.

In a woodland glade, Homer is shown reciting his Iliad to an admiring audience.

The nude youth in the foreground was drawn from a famous pugilist named Jackson.





## Tiresias (Τειρεσίας)

Blind prophet of Apollo at Thebes, lived as woman for 7yrs

Two versions of his blindness.

1. **Pherecydes of Syros**: Athena blinds him after he stumbled on her bathing. His mother a nymph begs reversal.

Cannot but cleans his ears instead so he hears the birds.

**Gift of augury**: interpret<sup>n</sup> the Will of gods by studying the flight of the birds.

2. **Hesiod**: Struck copulating serpents with staff, transformed into woman.

7yrs later, same place she/he tramples on them and released from curse back into a man.

**Zeus** and **Hera** arguing over who had more pleasure in sex, the man or the woman:

**Zeus** said the woman, **Hera** said men.

They consulted **Tiresias**, had life as both sexes, sided with Zeus.

Angered, Hera struck Tiresias blind. Zeus could not undo the act of another deity, he gave gift of **prophecy** in compensation.



Johann Füssli 1780-1785:  
Theresias erscheint dem Ulysses während der  
Opferung  
(Tiresias appears to Ulysses during the sacrifice)

Frederick Edwn Smith: Unionist and lawyer  
Judge: I've listened to you for an hour and I'm none wiser.



*Oedipus and  
Antigone being  
exiled to Thebes*  
(1843) by Eugène-  
Ernest  
Hillemacher  
Musée des  
Beaux-Arts,  
Orléans

SOPHOCLES' DRAMA *OEDIPUS THE KING*,

Oedipus, King of Thebes, consults Tiresias, to learn why Thebes is ravaged by plague.

Tiresias, knows the cause is Oedipus' murder of his own father and incestuous marriage to his own mother, reluctant to reveal his knowledge: *'It is but sorrow to be wise when wisdom profits not.'*

Oedipus demands the answer: *"Your silence accuses you."* Tiresias replies *"Miserable man, I speak, because you accuse me, I speak.... The King is the King's murderer."*

Blinds himself with pins from his hanged wife & mother



## Orion Ὠρίων



Told in a lost work by Hesiod. Giant born in Boeotia,  
Served King Oinopion of Khios (Chios) as huntsman,

Nicolas Poussin 1594-1665)  
"Landscape with blind Orion seeking the sun"  
Metropolitan Museum Art

Blinded and exiled from the island after raping the king's daughter Merope  
Orion stumbled to Lemnos where Hephaestus — the lame smith-god — had his forge.  
Hephaestus told his servant, to guide Orion to the uttermost East where Helios, the Sun, healed him

**ICONOGRAPHY**= to write with images  
Ancient images of blindness surprisingly common  
Less frequent to depict disability nowadays  
Musicians  
Poets  
Pilgrims and beggars  
Punishment blinding  
Religious Punishment  
Miraculous cures

**Medical model** alone does not help us understand concept of blindness

**Religious model** of meaning of blindness in medieval world.

Unfortunately no information from the blind themselves.

John Audelay Mentions his own blindness

Gilles le Muisit: Praises cataract surgery

John of Luxembourg: Heroic

**Impairment:** The sight malfunction

**Disability:** The added social and political circumstances that make the person with poor eyesight disabled

These constructs may **not** be shared with modern disabled people  
e.g forced begging, institutions

**Ancient depictions**  
**Medieval concepts**  
**Biblical Inspiration**  
**Healing the blind**  
**Penal Blinding**  
**Modern Images**





## Mediaeval depictions of blind

Disability a sign of sin or spiritual imperfection.

1215: 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran council required hospital patients to confess

Trust in church and belief in miraculous cure pilgrimage etc.

However more complicated than just a consequence of sin

Portrayed as a divine gift (insight, prophecy, or musical talent)

In medical treatises: physical impairment in need of a cure,

Blindness metaphorically associated with spiritual blindness

Source of humour being deluded, mistaken, or deceived

Jews, pagans, depicted as blind (or wearing blindfolds) incapacity or refusal to recognize the truth

Blindness indicated by

- Closed eyes,
- Dog on a leash.
- A walking stick,
- Poverty (blind beggars) Rags (loques) and a pot for alms
- Abject postures suggesting a plea for aid or healing (in the case of miracle stories).

Some of these iconographies pre-date mediaeval



Drawing of a blind beggar: Pieter Bruegel the Elder holds a small ceramic pot for alms.



Robert A. Scott *The Making of Blind Men*.

Sociological view: Agencies for the blind, “made” blind people; Blind clients were socialized to become dependent and conscious of their apparent deficit; they learned that they properly occupied a subordinate position.

this did not have to be the case.

**Edward Wheatley.** *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability.*

“Crippling the Middle Ages, Medievalizing Disability History” models of disability

**Social**, which demands the recognition of the abilities of all

**Medical**, which regards disability as pathological and thus requiring correction.

**Religious**, sees disability as evidence of sin and therefore eligible for cure through spiritual redemption.

Proof that a potential saint had performed miracles while alive needed for canonization paramount among those was the cure of impairments

A measure of holiness is the success with which a saint can relieve a cripple of impairment.



blind man guide has bread in folds of his robe.





Medieval Christianity often constructed disability as a spiritually impoverished state of absence of the divine where “the works of God [could] be made manifest.”

Modern medicine possibility of cures through developments in research;

Medieval Christianity held out the possibility of cure through freedom from sin and increased faith

Blind had many roles

Poets

Musicians

Beggars

Deserving and undeserving

Increasing suspicion in C14th

Objects of humour

Warriors



John of Luxembourg & Bohemia  
(Jean l'Aveugle) =  
Jacques le Boucq 1520-73



Jean Froissart, Chroniques (Vol. I):  
Edward III counting the dead on the  
battlefield of Crécy



## Musicians and poets

C13th singing enhanced the liturgy.  
Polyphonic music in the Medieval  
Hospitals

5/93 Legacies to Quinze-Vingts blind  
hospital give payment to inmates for  
singing deceased mass.

Legacy of Marguerite: 25 sous (x12= 1  
dernier for each of 300 inmates)

Blind singers

**Poetry own blindness:**

**John Gower** (d. 1408)

**John Audelay** (d c. 1426).

**Blind Harry, the Minstrel**, c.1440-  
1493 Blind from birth. Records of  
payments for performances at court  
1473-1492.

Manuscript of *Blind Harry's Wallace*  
(National Library of Scotland)

**Francesco Landini:** C14th Blind  
musician and poet was active in  
Florence, where he was famed as a  
virtuoso on the organetto and the harp



Group of musicians Some of whom may be blind: musician to  
the left with a satchel and dog holding a begging bowl



## Later medieval blind singers and poets

Suspicion of begging and blindness

Blind singer beggars (immoral blind beggar in C13th farce le Garçon et l'aveugle

William Langland's Piers Plowman,

**Allegorical figure of Hunger** miraculously "cures" beggars feigning blindness when the Black Death renders begging useless.

Local beggars marked by badges

Fleur de lile: Quinze Vingts

**Parri Ddall, Rhiwabon** *Blind Parry of Ruabon*) blind from birth.

Modern harp started in Italy, 2 rows of strings (**Arpa Doppia**).

1629: Jean le Felle was appointed 'musician for the harp' at the King's court. The triple harp adopted by the Welsh harpers living in London during the C17th. By C18th generally known as the "**Welsh harp**"



John Parry (1717-1782), Welsh blind harpist.  
Painted by Son William Parry 1775-1782

## The Musicians' Brawl: Georges de La Tour French 1625 - 1630



Two street musicians fight. The man on the left, carries hurdy-gurdy, defends himself with a knife and the crank of his instrument.

The man in the center hits him with a shawm, early oboe, squirts lemon juice to test if truly blind.

Other musicians enjoy the fight. An anguished old woman prays for them to stop.

Composition of figures compressed to create a sense of closeness to the action.

great detail: rotting teeth, leathery skin, and wild, unfocused eyes.

Textures--fabrics, wood, hair and flesh--realistically painted.





**Blind Fiddler Jan Victors (1619–1676)**



The Blind Fiddler Sir David Wilkie: 1806

An itinerant fiddler is playing for a country family.

Only the children pay attention, one imitating the fiddler on bellows.



## Blind as source of ridicule

**Romance of Alexander** (Bodley 264 fol. 74v), copied 1339 illuminated 1344 Jehan de Grise

Broad-brimmed hats over a hood; a loose tunic-like overgarment with shoulder-length sleeves over a fitted long-sleeved garment; On the left side of fol. 74v, four blind men armed with a club, are led by a boy.

Paris in 1425, an anonymous bourgeois chronicler recorded the following "entertainment."

Last Sunday took place an amusement at the residence called d'Arminac in the Rue Saint Honore, four blind people, armed with a stick, were put in a park, where there was a strong pig ... a very strange battle, because they gave themselves so many great blows with those sticks that it went worse for them, because when the stronger ones believed that they hit the pig, they hit each other. On the evening before, the blind people were led through Paris all armed, a large banner in front, where there was a pig portrayed, and in front of them a man playing a bass drum.





## Exploitation of blind

The 'lepre', the 'blynde', the 'dumbe', the 'deaff', the natural fool', the 'creple', the 'lame' and the 'lunatick'

Constantly present in everyday life.

Blind made pilgrimages on foot to holy sites in search of relief. Among highest % of people cured. Miracle Registers

Blind relied on charity

Victims of abuse (French farces, illuminations)

### Le Garçon et l'Aveugle

Short play Blind man needs a guide, persuades a boy to take the position. The boy, dislikes blind (earlier aside)

He disguises his voice in order to slap the blind man incognito and then steal his money and clothes. Humiliation delights audience.

Blind considered unworthy of alms

Scene of a man stealing food from a blind beggar's bowl, through a tube.





# Representing blindness

## Eyes:

Closed eyes

Whitened eyes,

Hollow orbits (enophthalmos, phthisis)

Asymmetry of eyes or direction of gaze

Eyes opened after healing;

Pointing, touching eyes;

## Stance

Uplifted head; arms held out

Unsteady gait

Bedridden figure

Seated unoccupied figure next to busy person

## Props:

Cane

Musical instrument

Led by a Guide

Child or dog

Use of dark glasses

Thickened lenses

Blindfolds



François Gérard  
Belasarius 1797



Joash Shooting the Arrow of Deliverance 1844  
William Dyce 1806-64 Hamburg Kunsthalle



Marefumi Komura, Blind Fold 2010

## Guide dogs

Pompeii  
poor condition

He faces two women in a market  
Not certain the man is blind.

Maiuri, curator of Naples Museum, argues that the man's posture is that of a beggar.

Holds a walking stick in front suggests using stick to find obstacles not a walking aid.

The leash is, loose, and attached a wide collar.

The dog, looks back at the man  
Ears pointed like a terrier.

Mural Painting from Pompeii Market scene: blind man with dog Museo Nazionale - Naples







**Beggars and Street Characters (流氓圖)**  
Zhou Chen (周臣, ?-1535), Ming Dynasty



**Along the River During the Qingming (清明) Festival – *shanghe tu* 上河圖** “going-along-the-river-picture”. a panoramic 5m long painting by Zhang Zeduan AD 1085-1145

Painted on light-colored silk bearing Emperor Huizong's signature it depicts life in Capital Bianjing during Northern Song period: 814 humans, 28 boats, 60 animals, 30 buildings, 20 vehicles, nine sedan chairs and 170 trees. Famous because of its geometrically accurate images of boats, bridges, shops, and scenery. "China's Mona Lisa".



## Seeing eye dog

Blind beggar.

Closed eyes, dog and a stick

Brown patched tunic, pendant sleeves;

Broad-brimmed black hat over a light  
brown hood,

Carries a satchel and a long cane



Smithfield Decretals (British Library Royal 10 E IV), c. 1340

Folio 110r: bas-de-page scene of a blind beggar and his dog.

France, ?Toulouse



Romance of Alexander (Bodley 264 fol77v), 1338-1344 Two images of a man, holding a staff and the leash of a dog.



MS M.456 fol. 89r  
Avis aus roys.  
France, probably  
Paris, 1347-1350

Blind beggar

- eyes closed,
- wearing wide-brimmed hat,
- He carries bowl in right hand
- walking stick, held in left hand
- Led by Guide dog





## Josaphat Meeting a Blind Man and a Beggar

Tempera colors and colored washes on paper

As in the story of Prince Siddhartha (Buddha), the young privileged prince had wished to see outside Palace.

His father King Avenier persecuted the Christian Church founded by Thomas in India.

Prince Josaphat rides out, witnesses physical maladies for the first time.

His horse stops just before a blind man being led by a dog.

Closed eyes yet the naïve prince waves at him.

Note Buddha like hand position.

A lame man, lifts a cup for alms.

In the upper right, Christians martyred man is hanged another is tortured on the wheel.



J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig XV 9, fol. 31v  
Follower of Hans Schilling of Hagenau, 1469.





Pieter Bruegel the Elder 1568 Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, Mat 15:14  
Distemper: Glue binds pigment to linen



Ein Wegzeiger schneid ich dir ab/  
Tritt stüllich fallst mir sonst ins Grab/  
Du armer blinder alter Stock/  
In deinem bösen blechten Rock.



Der blind Mann:

In blinder Mann ein armer Mann/  
Ein Muß vnd Dredt nicht g'winnen kan/  
Köndt nicht ein Tritt gehn ohn mein Hund:  
G'Du sey g'lobt/ daß hie ist die Stund D iij

**Death:** I cut you off from your guide;

**The blind man:** I cannot take a step  
without my dog

Dance Macabre

Matthaus Merian, 1649

# Blindness in the Old Testament

**Eyesight failed in old age.** (Deut. 34:7 makes a point Moses' eyesight had not failed in old age.)

**Isaac** (Gen. 27:1), **Jacob** (Gen. 48:10), **Eli** (I Sam. 3:2; 4:15), and **Ahijah the Shilonite** (I Kings 14:4),

## Helplessness and exploitation

blind, lame, helplessness Sam. 5:6; Isa. 35:5–6; Jer. 31:7, )

warned against exploiting (Lev. 19:14; Deut. 27:18; Job 29:15).

Disqualified priests from sacrificing or approaching altar (Lev. 21:17–23)

Sacrificial animals unacceptable (Lev. 22:21; Deut. 15:21;

**"the blind and the lame shall not come into the house"** (II Sam. 5:8)

**Metaphoric:** Lack of understanding (Isa. 29:9–10)

Judges warned: gifts blind the eyes of the discerning (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19).

Isaiah: mission to cloud the eyes of Israel so that it will not "see" and repent and be healed (6:10).

Isaiah 56:10 blindness refers to negligence,

Metaphor for oppression and injustice Deut 28:28–29 Isa59:9–10

Derived from Mesopotamian association of sun-god & justice.

Blindness to describe those who dwell in the darkness of prison or captivity (Isa. 42:7, 16–19; 43:8; 49:9; 61:1; cf. Ps. 146:7–8; Also has roots in Mesopotamian royal inscriptions).

(Jeffrey Tigay)



**Jeroboam**, king of northern 10 tribes of Israel, Son **Abijah** became sick. Sent wife to, **Ahijah**, disguised since Jeroboam had forsaken the Lord.

*"I will bring disaster on your dynasty and will destroy every one of your male descendants, slave and free alike, anywhere in Israel. I will burn up your royal dynasty as one burns up trash until it is all gone."* (1 Kings 14:10)

**The Wife of Jeroboam and the Blind Prophet**  
**George Henry Grenville Manton 1888 Guildhall**



"an eye for an eye" Exodus and Leviticus (עין תחת עין, ayin tachat ayin)

**Punishment by human** "an eye for an eye" in talion formula (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21)

**Samson** blinded by Philistines and **King Zedekiah** by Nebuchadnezzar (Judg. 16:21; II Kings 25:7; Jer. 39:7;

**Nahash the Ammonite** demanded blinding right eye of the Jabesh-Gilead for sparing the city (I Sam. 11:2).

### **Blindness punishment inflicted by God:**

Threatened for Israel's violation of the covenant (Deut. 28:28–29; "negligent shepherd" of Zechariah 11:15–17;

Leviticus 26:14-16, punishment for Israel's disobedience "I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life."

The Lord will inflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of the mind. At midday, you will grope about like a blind man in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything that you do, day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you (Deut. 28:28-29).

Proverbs (30:17) the eye which is disrespectful to parents will be plucked out by birds of prey ,

God protects His servants' from assailants with blinding flashes (Gen. 19:11; II Kings 6:18–20)

or permanent blindness of enemy horses (Zech. 12:4)

People: May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. (Ps. 69:24)



c587BC: Zedekiah is chained and brought before Nebuchadnezzar: 1670: Petrus Comestor's "Bible Historiale" Bodleian



# Egypt the land of the blind

Blindness common in the ancient Near East.

Preventive ointments, especially kohl

Deliberate depiction of blind eyes

Painted

Inlaid

Copper rim opaque quartz, rock crystal.

Private images

Not meant to be viewed as art



limestone and stucco portrait of Nefertiti,  
1345 BC, Berlin



5<sup>th</sup> dynasty BC 2300: sycamore Statue of Kaper: chief lector priest, reciting prayers for dead. Masterpiece of the Old Kingdom.



Princess Nofret. Painted limestone. Mastaba of Rahotep in Meidum.  
IVth dynasty, King Sneferu (2575-2551 B.C. .  
Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Crystal eyes





# Tobit

**Jacob van Maerlant** (c.1230-c.1288)  
greatest Flemish poet of the C13th.

Dog has no part in narrative but is ubiquitous in medieval iconography of story.



Jacob van Maerlant, Rhimbeible  
Utrecht, Michiel van der Borch (illuminator); 1332  
Vellum, ff. 194.



Tobias heals Tobit from blindness by putting the gall of the fish on his father's eyes







## Chartres Tobit

Tobias on journey with dog and angel

Tobias catches fish

Meeting of Tobias

and Raguel Sarah's father

Tobias and sarah his wife praying

Raphaël binding demon Asmodeus

Tobias curing his father

A crowned head

Tobit blesses son. Angel appears

Tobit sends son with letters to Gabelus

Tobit conversing with wife

Tobit becomes blind

Tobit burying a jew

Tobit & Son preparing feast

A crowned Head



## Caladrius birds

Common in medieval bestiaries.

Lived in the courts of kings,

Usually pure white 'like the swan'.

Sometimes black

The dung of the Caladrius believed to cure blindness,

Direct application of guano in the eyes of the afflicted.

Prognostic abilities.

Brought into a sickroom if it turned away, that person would die.

If caladrius kept his gaze on the ill person then flew away would take the illness with it, patient recovery.



Tobit stretching out his hands towards a flying bird, C13th Bible France, Harley MS 616, f. 259r



Raphael and Tobit (and a caladrius bird?). Stowe MS 12 f. 128r



Utrecht, Master of the Feathery Clouds (illuminator); c. 1467



Miniature of caladrius perched on the bed of a king, bestiary, Giraldus Cambrensis on Irish birds, England (Salisbury?), C13th y, Harley MS 4751, f. 40r



**Tobit - Rembrandt, 1630: Anna and the Blind Tobit: National Gallery**





**Abraham de Pape (circa 1620–1666): Nat Gallery:** spinning-wheel reference to Anna working for money; bare cupboard to their poverty. Interpreted as a genre scene with an old couple. However, comparison with a similar painting by Rembrandt suggests Tobit Story

C17th- Holland, paintings sometimes protected by curtains, and illusionistic representations of them.



## Isaac tricked blesses Jacob

Isaac and Rebekah two sons: Esau then Jacob.

Old blind Isaac is about to die, he wants to bless his elder son, Esau, but is tricked by his mother's favourite Jacob

Isaac sent Esau out to hunt for food, But Rebekah instructs Jacob "Go kill two of our goats from the herd, and I'll prepare the meal just the way Isaac likes it, Then you can give it to your father and tell him you're Esau returning from the hunt.

Esau selling his birthright to Jacob; REMBRANDT; 1645, drawing; British Museum



W atten die vader vande tu  
O chri iet twifelde van esau  
A erne heeft hi voer hem gheset  
E n hi leide vader nu et  
C n leme mi mittien lo sprac  
W at hi rehem quame vstaet  
H i wilde calten oft esau ware  
J acob was betast mit vare



W at esaus hant en iacobs luut  
Sprac hi en at die spise al vut  
E n we hi hadde gedronken wijn  
S o cultri den sone sijn  
E n benedidene en leide mede  
S od die moete di geue volghede  
A er weeldicheden van ardrthe  
E n des daus van hemelrthe

Jacob receives Isaac's Blessing; Jusepe de RIBERA; 1637; oil on canvas; Museo del Prado, Madrid



Isaac blessing Jacob; Govert FLINCK; 1639; Oil on canvas; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam





## Jacob blesses Ephraim

Severe drought in Canaan, Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt at the time when his son Joseph was viceroy.

Over 17 years Jacob (Israel) grew old and blind.

This time, it is Jacob who is asked to bless his grand-sons, Manasse and Ephraim, children of son Joseph.

Servant supports the aged patriarch as he performs the blessing.

At the far right stands Asenath, Joseph's wife daughter of an Egyptian priest.

Cool, muted palette; simplicity of form and composition.

The resemblance to antique art

Use of classical garments and accessories, and the arrangement of figures within a shallow, frieze-like space, before an architectural backdrop

American-born painter of religious, and mythological subjects historical painter to George III (1772-1801), a founder of the Royal Academy (1768), and in 1792 he succeeded Sir Joshua Reynolds as its president.



Illustration by Owen Jones from "The History of Joseph and His Brethren" (Day & Son, 1869)



Jacob Blessing: Benjamin West; Society of Artists London 1768

## Blind Jacob blesses younger grandson Ephraim Rembrandt 1656 Kassel



Joseph presents the elder Manasse, Jacob chooses the younger, Ephraim.

In order to reverse the benediction, crosses his hands above the heads of the children.

See Genesis, Chapter 48, verses 13-22

translucent glaze over paint use of light and shadow (Chiaroscuro) draws attention to the main characters while obscuring the background. Creates a halo surrounding Ephraim as he is being blessed. Palette of yellows, browns, and reds



# Ancient Egyptian blind harpists

1768: James Bruce discovered tomb of Ramesses III, two images of a blind harpist

Common theme in Egyptian art.

47 tombs in the Theban necropolis depict blind harp players.

Harpist sang of death and life after death.

Reassuring deceased: Tomb a joyful place dead are happy

- 1: Eye represented without an iris.
- 2: Slit-shaped eye with/without an iris.
- 3: Upper curve only

Blind musician playing harp tomb of scribe Nakht

1422-1411 BC



The three musicians, Tomb of Nakht, Thebes. Wall painting. Section. c. 1422-1411 BCE.



*Inherkhau listening to a blind harpist.*  
20th Dynasty overseer of the craftsmen Ramesses III and IV at Deir el Medineh. Valley of the Kings.



Blind Harpists in the Gardens of Senaquerib in Niniveh  
C7th BC



# Healing of blind

## ONE BLIND MAN: OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE OF BETHSAIDA

Told only in **Mark:8:22-26**

Jesus took his patient out of town, put some spittle on his eyes, and laid hands on him. "I see men like trees, walking." Jesus repeated the procedure, resulting in clear and perfect eyesight

## JESUS HEALS TWO BLIND MEN IN GALLILEE

Only in **Matthew: 9:27-31**

Early in Jesus' Ministry as Jesus left the home of Jairus after raising the little girl and returned to the place He was staying

## JESUS HEALING THE BLIND NEAR JERICHO

Each of the three synoptic gospels tells of the third episode of healing on the road to Jerusalem shortly before his passion

**Luke 18:35-43** one **unnamed blind man**, as Jesus approached Jericho.

**Matthew 20:29-34** similar account of **two unamed blind men** being healed outside of Jericho

**Mark 10:46-52** - **Blind Bartimaeus** (Son of Timaeus) as Jesus left Jericho, the last healing in Mark

## JESUS HEALS THE MAN BORN BLIND

**John 9:1-7** - Near the Temple of Jerusalem. (Celidonius), "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

After saying this, he spat on the ground, made some mud, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam" So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.



Curing the two blind men of Jericho  
James Tissot, 1896



## Mark:8:22-26

'They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him.

He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village: and when he had put saliva and laid his hands on him, he asked him, can you see anything?'

And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people but they look like trees, walking.' Then Jesus laid his hand on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly."



4th century sarcophagus





## Matthew 9:27-31

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

**28** When He had gone indoors, the blind men came to Him, and He asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied.

**29** Then He touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you."

**30** And their sight was restored.

Jesus warned them sternly: "See that no one knows about this."

**31** But they went out and spread the news about Him all over the region.



Christ Heals the Two Blind Men on the Road to Jericho;  
Basilica di Santa Pollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy; 6th century



## Luke 18:35-43

And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging:

**Egbert** (ca. 950 – 9 December 993)

chancellor of Otto II in 976

Archbishop of Trier

Trier rivals Mainz and Cologne as the artistic centre of the Ottonian world.

Egbert given illuminated manuscript **Codex Egberti**,

Early form of Romanesque style, probably produced at Reichenau



## Matt 20

And while they were departing from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

**30.** And, lo, two blind men sitting near the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried aloud, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.

**31.** And the multitude rebuked them, that they might be silent; but they cried out the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.

**32.** And Jesus stood, and called them, and said, What do you wish that I should do to you?

**33.** They say to him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.

**34.** And Jesus, moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.



C12th: Anonymous. Christ Heals the Two Blind Men on the Road to Jericho. Duomo di Monreale. Monreale (Sicily)



## Chora mosaics

Church of the Holy Saviour Outside the Walls,  
rebuilt C11th

Edirnekapı neighborhood of İstanbul  
“Chora=outside the city”

interior decoration dates from 1312 funded by  
Theodore Metochites, a poet and man of letters  
who was auditor of the treasury under Emperor  
Andronikos II (r 1282–1328).

Mosaic, above door to the nave, depicts  
Theodore offering the church to Christ.

Chora monastery location important necropolis  
relics of St Babylas, martyred AD298, with his  
84 disciples, in Nicomedia (İzmit), buried C4th

The Chora monastery built 536, by Emperor  
Justinian (527-565) on the ruined cemetery  
chapel.



**Christ Healing Two Blind Men (Inner narthex):**On the NW pendentive of dome,  
St Peter the Apostle next to Jesus healing two seated blind men Inscription,  
“Christ healing two blind men”.









Cecus sive Cecitas, Omne Bonum  
(British Library Royal 6 E VI, fol.  
245), c. 1360-1375

Illustration accompanying definition of  
blindness.

In an illuminated **letter C**,  
Christ heals two blind men.

Not wearing hats or cloaks No sticks



# Gladzor Gospels

Armenia run as Persian Aristocratic feudal society vassal of Roman Empire. C4th Christianised under King Trdat

Alienated by council of Chalcedon, linguistic independence forms idiosyncratic development.

**Gospel of Mark** in Armenian, Commissioned by abbot Esayi Ncēeci. Gladzor, Armenia, (ca. 1300-1307).

Written and decorated by monks

Outside village of Bethsaida, Christ leads the blind man of Mark 8:27-34 and anointing his eyes with spittle. Toros

**Monastery of Gladzor:** vibrant artistic center  
Toros (Theodore) of Taron: Best known painter at Monastery of Gladzor. Signed his work

Faces painted as cream background with green and white details

Painter of the Green ground: Completely covered the green under-painting with brown, red and white.

Painter of Olive ground: (fourth painter)

Faces painted over a drab olive background overlaid with milky-white and brown-pink highlights enhanced with grey shadows

brush stroke is similar to the Painter of the Green Ground, but colours are brighter and faces are lighter.





## White sticks

"The Fourth Painter of the Glajor Gospels." (ca. 1300-1307

Christ holding a scroll blesses two seated blind men

blind men, eyes tightly closed, hold light-colored canes with both hands and each wears a satchel. Their background is a wordly cityscape.

**Painter of the Olive Ground (the Fourth Painter)**





**Alcaeus**, aristocratic, warrior poet of Mytilene, city-state on Lesbos; most influential of North Aegean Greek cities, strong navy and colonies  
*holy/pure, honey-smiling Sappho* Poetess listens as he plays kithara.

Alma-Tadema copied the marble seating of the Theater of Dionysos in Athens, substituting names of members of Sappho's sorority for the Athenian officials  
Walters Art Museum.; Baltimore

**Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912)**  
"the worst painter of the 19th century" John Ruskin,  
paintings were "about worthy enough to adorn bourbon boxes." consigned to obscurity: 1881.



## Mark's Bartimaeus the blind beggar of Jericho

Christ and Peter halos, background of gold over green.

Young disciple ultramarine background takes hand of the seated blind beggar

Bartimaeus holds eyes tightly closes, Satchel and hat.

recipients of healing, are usually anonymous

“Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus” (ὁ υἱὸς Τιμαίου Βαρτιμαῖος, *ho huiòs Timaiou Bartimaios*).

‘bar’ is Aramaic for ‘son of’ suggests that ‘son of Timaeus’ is the partial translation of ‘Bartimaeus’.

Alternative root could be Aramaic word ܟܡܘܪ (*tmā*), meaning ‘unclean’, ‘impure’, ‘abominable’.

In this sense, ‘Bartimaeus’ could mean ‘son of blind (impure) man’

Bigotry against those with disabilities that they inherited a parental fault or sin.

Injunction against the blind sacrificing as priests (Lev. 21.18-20).

Book of Isaiah several references to blindness indicating a lack of spiritual understanding.



## The Healing of the Blind; The Healing of the Possessed

Armenian, Lake Van, Turkey, 1386  
Black ink and watercolors on paper  
Getty





## Matthew 12:22-28

- Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.

The Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry,  
A book of prayers to be said at canonical hours  
Commissioned by Jean, Duc de Berry painted by the  
Limbourg brothers.

Scene set in a chapel

Christ blesses the possessed youth struggling in his  
mother's arms,

Demon leaves the boy's head as a dragon.

Paul de Limbourg Dutch, fl. 1385–1416 two brothers, Jean  
and Herman.

1411: Limbourgs permanent members of Berry's  
household.

They all died in 1416



**Comunica terra in re**

**D**omi nica terra in re  
tali mei semper  
ad dominum qz  
ipe cueller de la qo

pedes meos respice in me et  
misere mei quoniam in  
mias et pauper sum ego. **p**  
**A**dit domine laudat ai

## Mark:8:22-26

**Duccio di Buoninsegna** ca. 1255 – 1319

**The Healing of a Blind Man;** Nat. Gall

Christ is centre of composition

Same man shown as blind then healed (throws away his stick).

Part of the artist's grand altarpiece, the **Maesta**, Siena Cathedral.

The back predella illustrated scenes from Christ's life and ministry.

**Predella:** lower part of a **retable**

Rear part of an altar,

Figures are becoming more individual than flatter iconography of Byzantine art.

Evolution of Gothic art reaches a transitional stage here: Byzantine characteristic gold leaf background – is pushed out by architecture and believable scenery.





## El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos)

b. Heraclian 1540–1614 d. Toledo:

*Dormition of the Virgin* 1567 standard Byzantine formula depicts Mary's death and the *transitus* of her soul into heaven. Small used for solo contemplation  
1567: Cretan icon painter arrives in Venice to master colour, he went to Rome influenced by Michaelangelo  
Giulio Clovio letter Nov 16, 1570, introduces to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese a "young *discepolo* of Titian from Candia" recently arrived in Rome.

### *Christ Healing the Blind*

Popular subject in Counter-Reformation because the healing of blindness is emblematic of the revelation of the true faith.

manifestation of light as divine grace.

Theatrical effects gestures and perspective make religious narrative a story as well as a devotional image.

Intelligent use of ancient Roman architecture in the Parma *Christ Healing the Blind*

1576 denigrates Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel, suggests tearing fresco to the ground and to replace a better more decent version.

fled to Spain: Paravicino, "Crete gave him life and his paintbrushes; Toledo gave him a better country, where he began with his death, to attain eternity."



Venice's Cretan population largest ethnic minority in Italy.  
Construction of San Giorgio dei Greci 1539-73, Greek artists worked for both Venetian and Cretan clients



The earliest, an unsigned panel in Dresden, generic motifs of a dog, sack and pitcher in the foreground, eliminated in subsequent versions.  
Parma version, has been cut and the group on the right is incomplete.





The third and largest version, in Metropolitan is Roman period, after 1570.

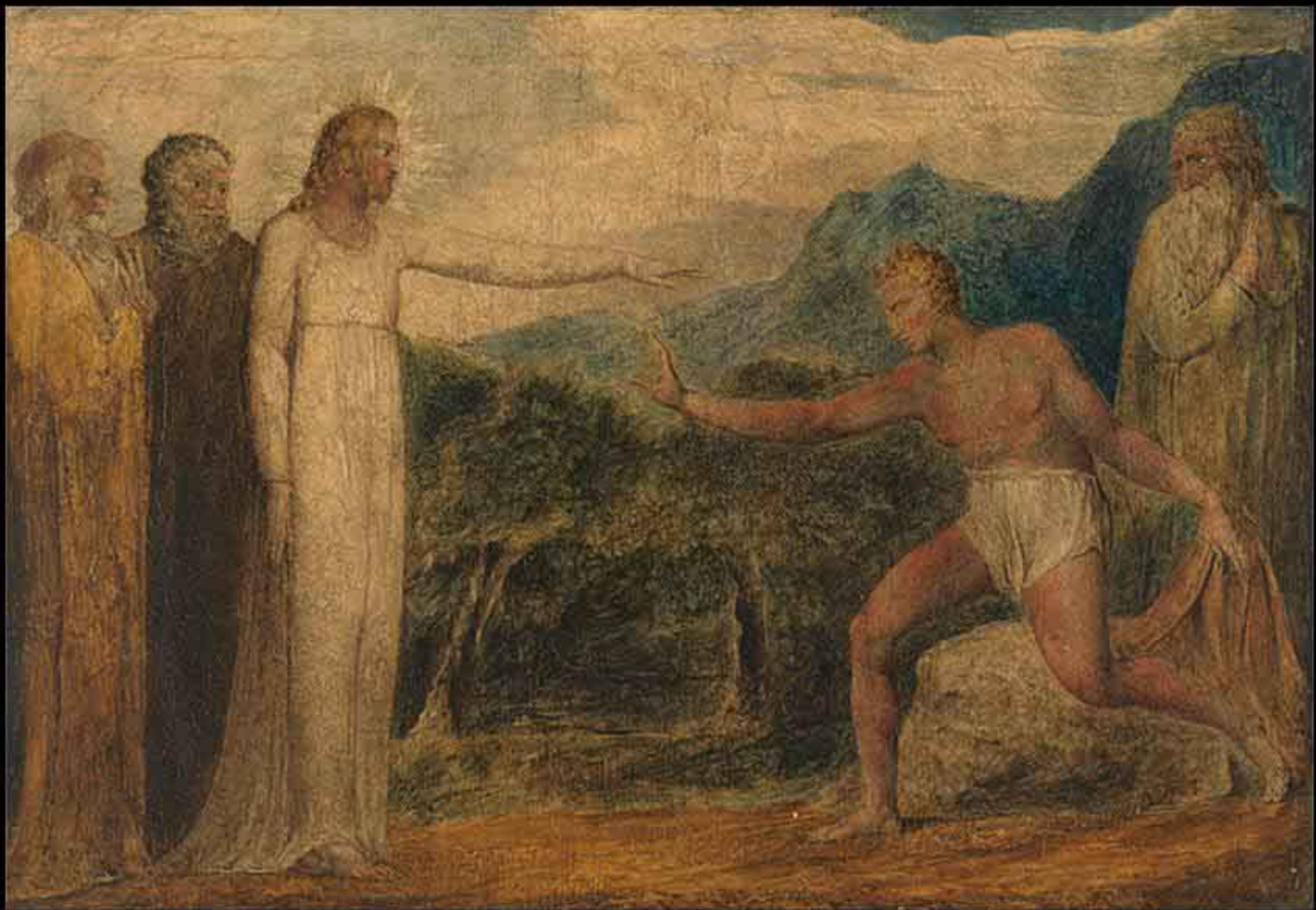
Christ healing a blind man by anointing his eyes. The two figures in the foreground the blind man's parents. The upper left unfinished.

C16th Italian style: Use prints for compositional inspiration The inspiration is from Venice. The dramatic use of recession behind the figures in the foreground is Tintoretto's invention. Knowledgeable use of Roman architecture Borrowing some ideas, but using an original composition On extreme left, is young El Greco.





"Jesus Healing the Blind of Jericho": Nicolas Poussin - c1650 Louvre



William Blake (1757–1827) *Christ Giving Sight to Bartimaeus*

1799 Yale





**Gioacchino Assereto (1600–1649)** *Christ Healing the Blind Man* 1640

# Christ Heals the Blind Man Bartholomeus Breenbergh 1635

Liechtenstein State Art Collection, Vaduz.



Jesus violates four rules of Sabbath: **plowing** (spittle rolling on the dirt), **kneading** (making the clay), **anointing** (putting clay on the man's eyes), and **healing** (illegal unless a life-threatening emergency).

Healing in this manner purposefully violated Sabbath rules to wake up the Pharisees.

However they metaphorically remain blind



## Blind Homer?

**Homer** 750-700 BC. Bronze age author of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, epic poems of heroes Achilles and Odysseus.

Passage describing blind bard, **Demodocus**, in the court of the Phaeacian king, stories of Troy to the shipwrecked Odysseus *"the muse stripped of sight but gave the man the power of stirring, rapturous song"*. Self-portrait?

Age before realistic portraiture.

Homer portrayed for the first time 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter C5th BC, Greeks started to make portraits of important persons from the past

Standardised images, an ancient could even tell which school of philosophy an idealised portrait represented.

Popular image: 13 surviving copies in marble.

The poet (Head turn and slightly parted lips) is represented as a blind man.

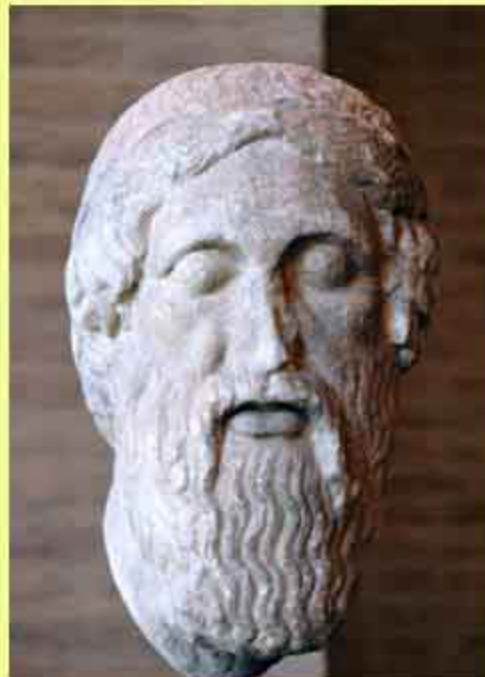
Dignified not decrepit.

Hair held by **fillet** (often denoted a poet) and knot prevents forelocks coming down.

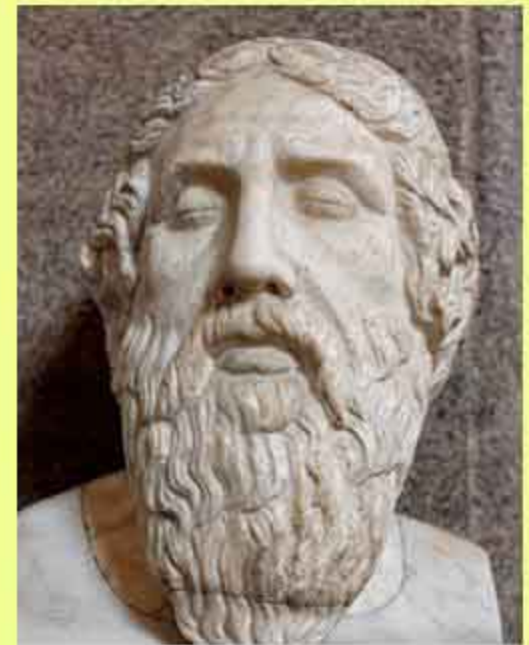
Bronze statue was the original

One of which was present in the Baths of Constantinople as late as 500AD.

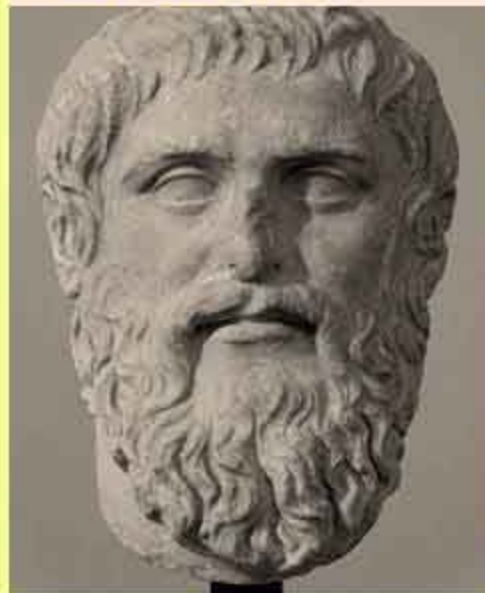
Christodoros "He was like an aged man but his age was mild for an infinite grace suffused him



Homer's image in marble (460 BC), Sculpture Museum of Munich. "Kalos Geron"



Vatican Museum  
Bust of Homer of the Epimedes type. Marble, Roman copy after a Greek original. C5th BC



Antikenmuseum 2008 Basle

Plato: marble, copy of the portrait made by Silanion ca. 370 BC for the Academia in Athens. Capitoline Museum





The Blind Man Washes in the Pool of Siloam James Tissot, 1886-94 Brooklyn Museum



Pennington and Bridgen

*Christ healing a blind man* 1886

Rectangular terracotta panel of seven figures

189 cm high x 305 cm long approx

Royal Eye Hospital, Manchester



Ceremonial bronze door, St. James Cathedral, Seattle, by Ulrich Henn.





## Careful interpretation

**The parish church of Saints Ippolito and Cassiano** Pieve dei Santi Ippolito e Cassiano SE of Pisa.

970, rebuilt 1180. **Biduino** famous sculptor makes and signs the architrave of the central portal.

3 scenes: "healing of the blind" raising of Lazarus and entry into Jerusalem.

Stories that occur sequentially in John.

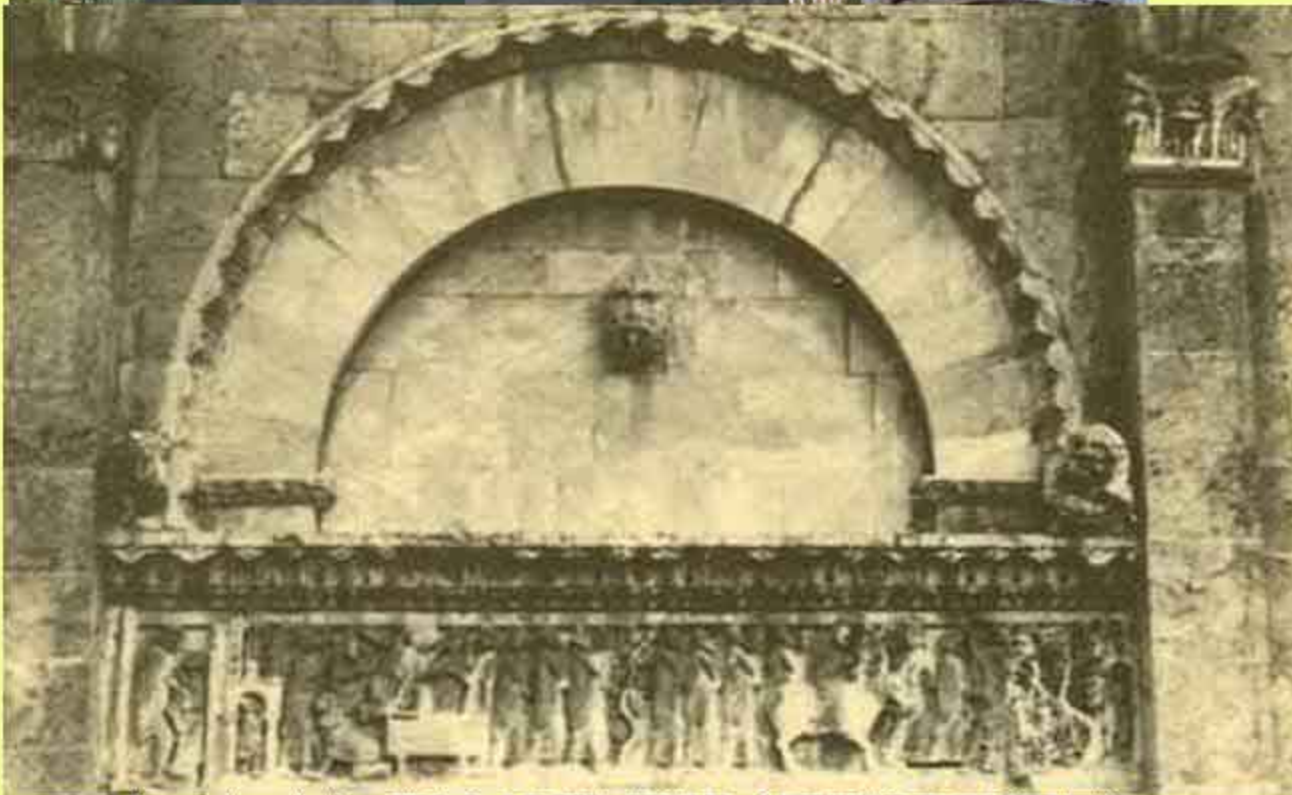
Scene in the box on the left a bearded man extends an arm to two smaller figures

In fact pulling hair and one is reading! Similar to sculpture of a female Grammar holding a flail (1 of 7 liberal arts) on the west façade of Chartes.

**St Cassian of Imola** teacher refused to worship at pagan alters put to death by his students stabbing him with styli ie the patron saint is being honoured

Cf St Angelo in Campo Lucca and San Leonardo al Frigido also in Western Tuscany. Major pilgrim routes.

Dorothy Glass in **Reading medieval images** Sears Michigan



sarcophagus inscription **HOC OPUS QVOD CERNIS BIDVINVS DOCTE PEREGIT**. Biduinus did this work in a learned fashion.



## Medieval Hospices for blind

Hospitals almshouses set up to give care.

Archbishop Lanfranc St John's Canterbury, care to men and women 'oppressed by various kinds of infirmities'.

By the later Middle Ages, London and York 35 hospitals each, Norwich 15, Exeter 10 and Canterbury 9 Some specialised

Medieval religious orders cared for their own sick. In the C7th century, the monastery of Whitby, a building 'to which they used to take those who were infirm, or who seemed to be at the point of death'.

Archbishop Thurstan (1114-40) **Hospital of St Mary Magdalen in Ripon, blind priests.**

1250: Louis IX Quinze-Vingts: 300 blind residents and their sighted guides

Attitudes to disability were mixed.

- Punishment for sin,
- Serendipity: born under the hostile influence of Saturn.
- State of Grace: disabled people were closer to God - suffering purgatory on earth rather than after death and would get to heaven sooner.
- Exploited: 1297: residents of the leper house in West Somerton mutinied against the thieving abbot



# Healing of the blind

Roman Sacophagus of an Eye Doctor

Ravenna, San Vittore 100AD

Ophthalmology Tradition kept up in Byzantium

Lapsed in Western provinces

Increasingly dependent on the Church for alms and occasional cures

Deserving poor: Widows, orphans aged and those who gave up wealth for religious reasons

Non-deserving: those vagabonds capable but refusing to work

Driven by ethical obligation of Christians to relieve the poor and suffering

Eschatological motivation: Charity could cleanse sin at end of world.

In absence of coherent medical system blind sought out itinerant magicians, holy people or went on pilgrimage



Miracles de Nostre Dame (BNF NAF 24541, fol. 160v), c. 1330-40 scene of pilgrimage a blind boy with a white staff walks towards a golden reliquary on a cloth-covered stand.

Adult in travelling clothing (hat, hood & long overgarment like a gardecorps).



## St Remy heals Blind Hermit with his mothers milk

Chartres C13th

In C5th Laón: A blind saintly hermit concerned over the situation of Religion in France, devastated by the Vandal persecution.

Old Celina doubted his words “Know this, you will give birth to a son and while you are nursing your child, you are to anoint my eyes with your milk, and so restore my sight.”

As predicted. St. Remigius was born into the noble house of his parents, Emilius, Count of Laón & St. Celina,

The hermit's sight was restored.

The pulpit everywhere dwelt with unction on the reality of fetish cures,





**Annibale Carracci (Bologna 1560–1609)**

*Healing the Man Born Blind* 1605

Mural Fresco from Herrera Chapel transferred to canvas

**Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya**

Admired painter in his time

1602: Juan Enriquez de Herrera dedicated chapel in Santiago, to Diego de Alcalá.

1604 began preparatory cartoons, became ill work was finished by his collaborators. With his cousin Ludovico (1555–1619) and his older brother Agostino (1557–1602)—transformed Italian painting, artificiality of Mannerist painting, challenged by return to nature

Combining naturalism of Renaissance northern Italian painters Correggio, Titian, and Veronese creates **Baroque style**.

Contemporary in Rome Caravaggio, unsuited to large compositions and fresco





## Religious model

Religiosity dominated Medieval life

Multi-sensual experience of the pilgrims

burning incense,

Ringling bells,

Kissing of relics

Chants of priests, plainsong

Magical lighting through stained glass

Dazzling images

Gold reflecting candle light

St. Augustine's De Genesi as litteram (401-415),

St. Gregory's 8th edict on use of images

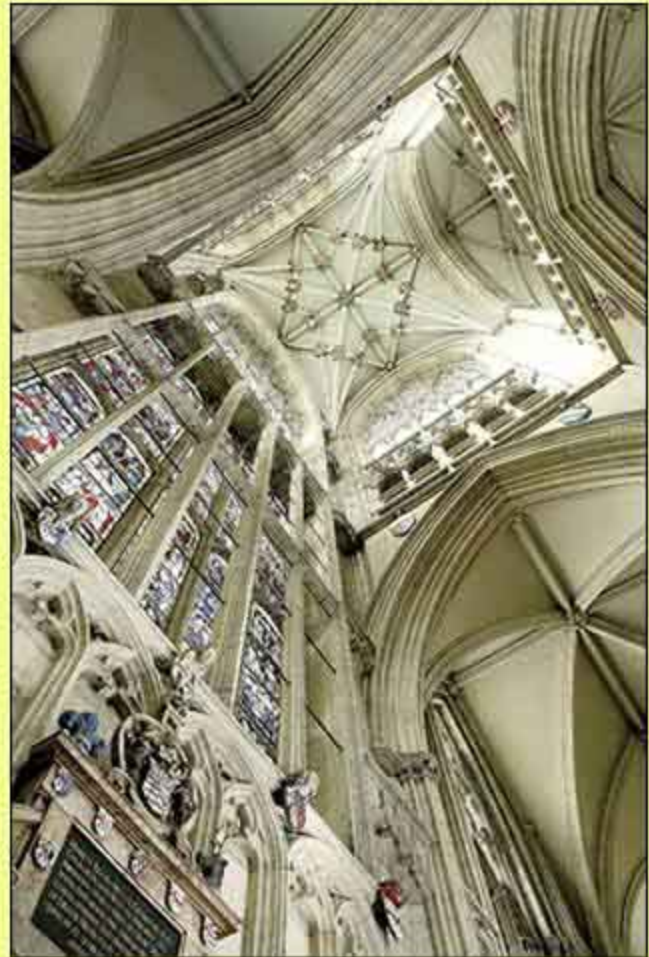
St. Bernard's Cantica (1088-1102);

Medieval seeing was thought to provide the beholder with the sense of touching the object of their vision, creating an affective power.

As the pilgrim entered gorgeous imagery communicated the identity and power of the saint

Authenticating holiness of the relics.

Reinforced by imagery of the windows, walls and ceilings surrounding the reliquary.



**1414: St. William Window** North Quire Aisle of York Minster

one of the most important pieces of medieval stained glass in the world. 72 x 14 feet

100 panels illustrating the life and miracles of William FitzHerbert constitute one of the largest pictorial cycles of the life of a saint ever



## Making a saint from a controversial man

**William Fitzherbert** York Minster's treasurer; relative of King Stephen elected Archbishop 1141-47 and from 1153-4.

Political football between factions squabbling for the throne of England during the Anarchy (1135-54).

Unsavoury character appointment was controversial but it ended in miracles and sainthood.

Opposition from Cistercians, after election of Cistercian Pope Eugene III, deposed in favour of unpopular austere Cistercian **Murdac** died 1153

Re-elected returns in triumph but poisoned by wine at Mass a month later

Osbert de Bayeux, archdeacon accused. Due to death of King Stephen trial never took place

**Miracles:** Sweet-smell from tomb during a fire  
Body not decayed or burnt in the fire.

The papal bull lists the miracles "oil flowing from the tomb which had healed many people of their infirmities; three dead people brought back to life; **five blind people** given their sight; and **new eyes given to a man** who had been unjustly defeated in a duel and blinded"

1227: canonised in Rome by Pope Honorius III



Triumphant return to the city, stopped at Ouse Bridge. So crowded collapsed. William called on God to save the drowning. Miraculously no one was



'William heals a blind woman' York Minster



## Healing the blind

**St. Bernard heals a blind boy**, Jörg Breu the Elder, c. 1495-1505 The boy, long loose red gown (similarly dressed children in C15<sup>th</sup> art) and carries a red hat with a folded brim. He wears simple black shoes; by his feet sits a small white dog.

St. Bernard, also shown healing a boy on crutches;

**Le petit aveugle**: Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Vie et miracles de Saint Louis*; C15<sup>th</sup> BnF, département des Manuscrits

Illustration combines episodes

Thomas is dressed in typical boys long russet gown wears a pilgrim's broad-brimmed hat (pilgrim's badge, shell of Santiago de Compostela?)

Eyes closed

carries a wooden cane and a wooden bowl for alms.

a brown bag around his waist (similar to a shepherd's budget) and a costrel is hung around his neck.

- Thomas and a pilgrim walk in the street;
- the man guides Thomas to the shrine
- a bearded man holds something out to Thomas;
- Thomas kneels near an altar, next to a reliquary.





## Hellenistic portrayal of Homer

334-323 B.C., Alexander conquered much of the known world, to India.

Exposed Greek artistic styles to new exotic influences.

25 surviving Roman copies of this 'portrait' were made in the Roman period.

Curly hair frames face in the ancient style,

Fillet holds the hair: Full, heavy beard

The deep-set eyes, furrowed brow.

Copies of highest quality may be least like (lost) original: Later artistic interpretations and represent Roman taste of the age.

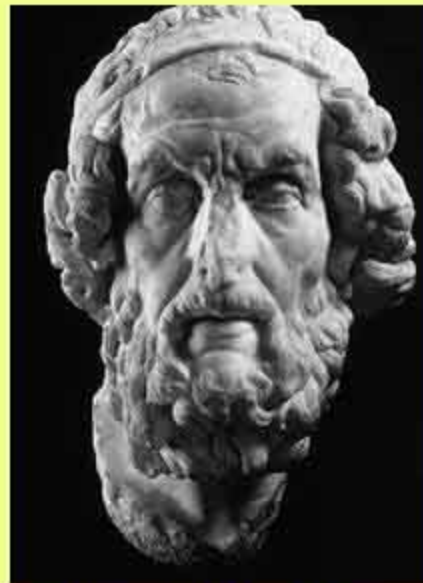
This type of copy emphasizes the intricate forms of hairstyle, archaizing rounded locks at temples  
Intentional attempt depict unkempt mass of hair.

Boston, Flavian date, active features

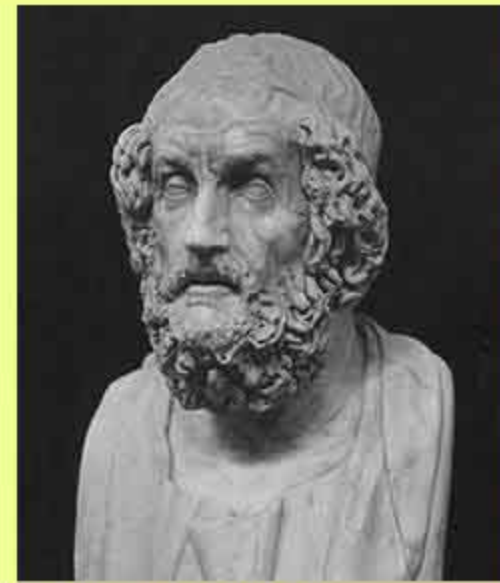
Naples: Late Antonine copy, impression is of the frailty of old age

*Το γὰρ ὄραν το φῶς ἡλίου ζῆν ἐστὶ* (living is to see the light of the sun) Homer, Iliad

Homer was not born blind, descriptions of colours



50 B.C. to 50 A.D. Marble  
Museum of Fine Arts,  
Boston,



ca. 100 BC-ca. AD 79  
Naples Farnese Collection (Type)



Charioteer of Delphi, also wears a  
fillet headband, bronze statue (478-  
474 BCE).



Head of a prophet  
St Denis 1140





Three Miracles of Saint Zenobius: c1500 **Sandro Botticelli**

The panels illustrate episodes from Fra Clemente Mazza's 'Life of Saint Zenobius', first printed in 1487.

5th bishop Zenobius, one of Florence's patron saints, made as domestic decorations for a patrician family (two other panels survive).

Painted in the last decade of Botticelli's life in abstract style

Florence was under influence of mad monk Savonarola:

Exorcises devils from two youths possessed as a result of their mother's curse;

resurrects a dead boy, here lying in the lap of his wailing mother;

restores the sight of a blind pagan who had promised to convert to Christianity.



## Pilgrimage

Blind are depicted in similar clothes to pilgrims

Are these blind people on pilgrimage  
in some cases, they are

or does it represent a generic sort of  
beggar's clothing?

Are they disguised as pilgrims to obtain  
marginal benefits?

C14th increasing hostility to beggars and  
disabled

**Archbishop Jacques de Vitry:** Story for  
the use of preachers: "Two lazy beggars,  
one blind, the other lame, try to avoid the  
relics of St. Martin, borne about in  
procession, so that they may not be healed  
and lose their claim to alms.

The blind man takes the lame man on his  
shoulders to guide him, but they are caught  
in the crowd and healed against their will."



(BNF NAL 868, fol. 28v: A blind pilgrim healed at the tomb  
of St. Elizabeth of Thuringia)



1271-1282: Posthumous Miracle of St Louis IX

**Agnès of Pointoise:** Domestic servant until  
1271 Blinding eye disease begs for a living  
4 years later cured and started work as a spinner.

3 scenes; Agnès (wears green hairnet)

First scene, sitting on a bench, examined by 2  
?oculists/barbers.

Second, wears a dark blue kirtle with a pink  
sideless surcoat; with one hand, she holds the  
dress of an older woman (who touches Agnès'  
shoulder and whispers in her ear) and with the  
other, she holds part of her surcoat to raise the  
hem, making it easier to walk.

Third, Agnès (now wearing a simple red kirtle,  
and sitting with a young boy) raises her hand  
Priest raises communion wafer during Mass.



## Initial T: The Healing of the Blind after Touching the Body of Saint Anthony

Master of the Brussels Romuléon, Illuminator Flemish, Brussels or Bruges, 1465 - 1470 Getty Tempera colors, gold leaf, gold paint, and ink on parchment

Manuscript of the *Romuléon*, a French text concerning Roman history, Royal Library in Brussels.

Stylized figures with wide-set eyes and pointed chins, dressed in exotic costumes,





# Deliberate Blinding

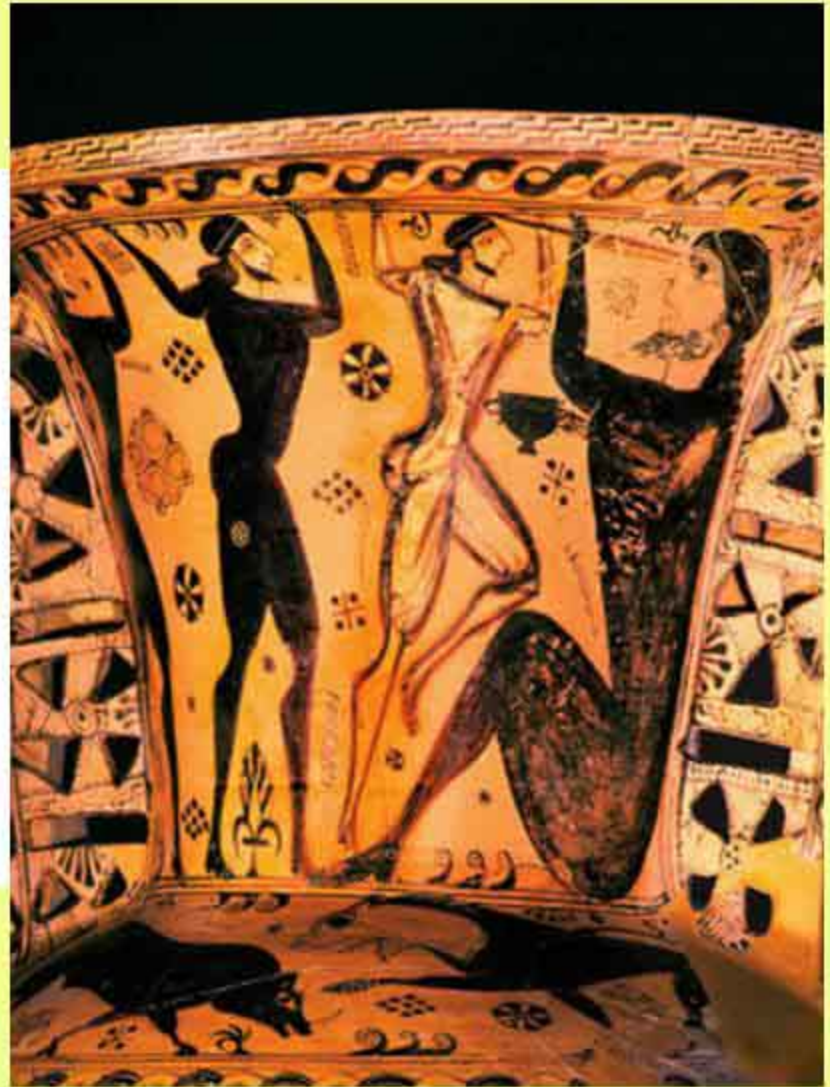
Warfare  
Gladiators  
Punishment

Legal Blinding

The Blinding of  
Polyphemus

Greek Amphora C7th  
BC.

**Polyphemus Painter:**  
670-640BC innovator in  
Attic art, introduced  
several mythological  
themes.



*Eleusis Amphora Athens*  
Odysseus and his companions blinding Polyphemus.  
Detail of a proto-Attic amphora. 660BC

## Blinding

C7th BC Aristonothos crater, made for mixing wine

One side the blinding of the Cyclops by Odysseus and his men, and on the other a naval scene.

Blinding of the Cyclops (resulted from Odysseus tricking him to drink wine)

Oldest pot to bear the maker's name.  
"Aristonothos made me".



The Aristonothos Crater: Capitoline Museum



Black-figure pottery. Hydria depicting blinding of Polyphemus; Etruscan: 530BC: fuseum



The Odyssey, Detail of Polythemus, 1554-56  
Pellegrino Tibaldi Palazzo Poggi Bologna



## Punative blinding

Babylonians, Assyrians and Persians blinded prisoners. left hand he holds a cord with a hook inserted into the prisoners lips. thrust the point of spear into the eye.

**Cyrus the younger**, blinded criminals became spectacles along the highway. 488AD: Persia; Kavādh blinds his deposed uncle as he takes the throne.

**Diocletian** 303AD introduces blinding for Christians, abolished by Constantine.

**Justinian II** 705AD has the Patriach of Constantinople Kallinikos blinded before expulsion to Rome.

Used to prevent succession.

**Bernard King of Lombards** revolts against his uncle Louis the Pious and is blinded along with fellow conspirators.

Process of blinding (carried out by means of pressing a red-hot stiletto to the eyeballs) proved so traumatic that Bernard died in agony two days after the procedure



Capture and blinding of Leo Phokas the Elder Byzantine General, and his presentation to Admiral Romanos Lekapenos *History of John Skylitzes* (Biblioteca Nacional de España) C13th



## Biblical blinding

Age 21 Zedekiah made king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar.

revolted against Babylon, allied with Egypt.

Nebuchadnezzar siege of Jerusalem in 589 BC. lasted 30m, "every worst woe befell the city, which drank the cup of God's fury to the dregs".

Zedekiah and his followers attempted to escape, captured on the plains of Jericho and taken to Riblah.

after seeing his sons killed, Zedekiah was blinded, bound, and taken captive to Babylon, where he remained a prisoner until his death.



Zedekiah is chained and brought before Nebuchadnezzar: 1670  
Petrus Comestor's "Bible Historiale" Bodleian Library



**Frideswide** (d.727) daughter of the king became an abbess, pursued by the lecherous king Algar of Leicester.

Frideswide went into hiding, when Algar tried to enter Oxford he was struck blind.

The punishment (*l'abbacinare*) Italian origins red hot metal over eyes, until blind, eyes destroyed.

Penal blinding introduced by a statute of William I Rarely used.

More common in Ireland and France.

French, "**aveugle**" *ob oculus* = "deprived of eyes."

No cognates in any other Romance language, Connected blinding as legal punishment in France

**1036: Alfred** brother of Edward (later confessor) blinded by hot pokers on orders of Earl Godwin, sent to Ely dies of wounds.

**1107:** King Henry I orders blinding of Robert, Duke of Normandy after a failed attempt to escape imprisonment from Cardiff

Late C12th and 13th, groups of judges sent from central courts at Westminster to all the counties of England, except Durham and Chester where the royal jurisdiction did not extend, to preside over local courts.

Counties were grouped into circuits, with a group of justices assigned to each one, and the circuits, as well as the courts themselves, were known as **eyres**.

The Eyres Rolls show that blinding was rarely enforced in England



Frideswide: Burnes Jones



# Legal Blinding

## 1166: Assize of Clarendon:

Angevin King Henry II of England:  
"anyone, who shall be found, on the oath of  
the aforesaid [jury], to be accused of being  
a robber or murderer or thief, or a receiver ...  
be taken and put to the ordeal of water."

## Ordeal of boiling water

Requires the accused to retrieve a stone  
from boiling water

The depth from which the stone had to be  
retrieved was up to the wrist for one  
accusation and up to the elbow for three.

In church, witnesses, praying God to reveal  
the truth.

Hand was bound and examined after three  
days to see whether it was healing or  
festering.

If God had not healed his wounds, the  
suspect was guilty of the crime

1248: Blinding of Sampson: St Chapelle





Marble terminal bust of Homer. Roman copy of a lost Hellenistic original of the 2nd c. BC. From Baiae, Italy. BM

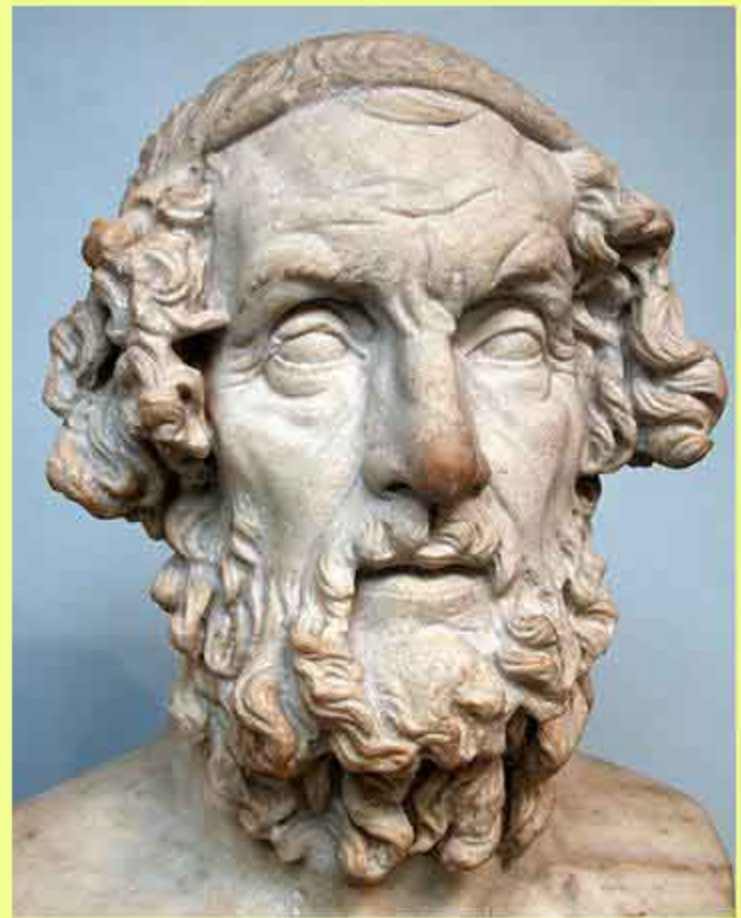
The Hellenistic blind-type portraits similar style to figures of the Pergamon Altar

Pliny the Elder (AD 24-79) Hellenistic blind-type portrait invented in BC for the library of the Attalid kings of Pergamon.

Third popular type, probably Late Classical in origin, showing Homer with the wide-open eyes of the seer and long hair at the nape of the neck (Apollonios type)

5th Blind men allowed to discuss politics in the Athenian Assembly

Plato and Aristotle argued they should have no place in the polis because they couldn't serve in the army.



bronze coin head of Homer issued by city of Amastris: 101 and 200 AD. *Apollonius of Tyana* Type Homer







North Aisle, Trinity Chapel, Window 5, medallion 3:

**Eilward of Westoning**, steals from his neighbour, Fulk, to pay off his debts, and is brought before the magistrate.

Sentenced to blinding and mutilation.

St. Thomas appears, makes the sign of the cross over his bed, restoring Eilward's sight. Miracles took place in 1171-3, recorded by William and Prior Benedict and used by the glaziers 1213-20.







Monreale, Cathedral Cloister, Capital, Blinding of Samson.

## Blinding of Sampson

Popular theme for sculpture and painting





**Rembrandt (1606–1669)**

The Blinding of Samson

1636 Frankfurt

Painted in Amsterdam in 1636,  
one of the artist's most ambitious and  
dramatic works.

Violence in this painting as we see a  
Philistine gouges Samson's right eye.

The artist himself looking on in horror.



## **Punishment blinding**

The act of watching the violent destruction of someone else's eyes is unsettling

Many Nurses prefer to work in other departments because of this deep rooted cultural attitude to eye injury.





## Bay of Martyrs: Chartres

St Thos of Canterbury

St Blasius flayed alive

**Saint Leger blinded**

St Vincent washes ashore

St Lawrence on gidiron

St Cheron with his head

**Leodegar of Poitiers:615-679:** Martyred Burgundian Bishop of Autun: opponent of Ebroin, leader of the faction of Austrasian nobles in the struggle over the waning Merovingian dynasty.



The blinding of St. Leger, Bishop of Autun:French Bible of c. 1200



Roundel with Martyrdom of Saint Leger. Date: ca. 1490. Upper Rhineland. Colourless glass, vitreous paint and silver stain. Cloisters Museum





The Conversion of St Paul; Fra ANGELICO; c. 1430; missal illumination

Saul, who persecutes the Christians, asks to go to Damascus to arrest a few of them.

As he came near Damascus: suddenly there shined around him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying to him : "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" –

Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drink.







Tintoretto, Jacopo: Venetian, 1518 – 1594: The Conversion of Saint Paul c. 1545: National Gallery, Washington

## Blinding by God

The Conversion of St  
Paul; **PARMIGIANINO**; c. 1552; oil on  
canvas; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna,





The Conversion on the Road to  
Damascus; CARAVAGGIO; 1601; oil  
on canvas;

Cerasi Chapel: Santa Maria del Popolo,  
Rome.

