

Chapter XII

Mythology and Religion

Eye, vision and blindness play an important role in nearly all religious beliefs.

IMHOTEP (I-em-Hetep)

(ca. 3500 B.C.)

He was one of the gods of medicine in ancient Egypt and was called the “good physician of gods and men” and the “god, who looks after the sick”. He was the son of Ptah, another deity of medicine in Memphis.

Imhotep may have been a real person, maybe a priest of Ra, during the third dynasty. His first temple was erected in Memphis and soon developed into a center of healing, chiefly dedicated to the blind and the deaf.

Reference

Power, D.A. and Thompson, C.J.,S.: *Chronologia Medica*; John Bale Sons and Danielsson, Ltd., London 1923.

Egypt 1928; # 153 (International Congress of Medicine) (Fig. 12.1a)
1968; # 740 (World Health Organization) (Fig. 12.1b)

THE EYE OF HORUS

According to Egyptian mythology two brothers, **Osiris** and **Seth**, married their sisters, **Iris** and **Nephtys**. Osiris and Isis had a son, **Horus**, who became the king of Egypt.

Seth, jealous of his brother, locked him into a coffin and threw him into the Nile. When **Isis** heard about it she searched for her husband, found him and hid him in a dense field of papyrus. Seth, however, found the corpse, dissected it and strew its limbs over the countryside.

Then **Thot**, the god of science, came and helped **Iris** to collect the parts of **Osiris**. Osiris regained his life and became the god of the dead in the other world.

Horus wanted to revenge the murder of his father. He battled **Seth**, won over him, but lost one eye. **Thot** put this eye together again and this eye of **Horus** has become the symbol of a healthy and safe eye.

The different parts of the reconstituted eye have a numerical value, adding up to 63/64, the last 1/64 was furnished by the magic of **Thot**.

On the stamp from Somali the pharaoh worships **Horus** and **Hathor**.

Reference

Potts, A. B.: *The World's Eye*; The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1982.

Egypt 1976; # 1007 (Prevention of Blindness) (Fig. 12.2a)

Somali 1964; # CB1 (UNESCO) (Fig. 12.2b)

AESCULAPIUS

The Greek god of medicine was the son of **Apollo** and the nymph **Coronis**.

Homer calls him a “*blameless physicaian*”. He was the most famous pupil of the centaur, **Chiron**.

His healing power rested on oracles and miracles. **Aesculapius** is usually presented with a club-like staff and a serpent coiled around it. He had two daughters: **Panacea**, who was omnipotent as a healing goddess and **Hygeia**, the guardian of health. His two sons were physicians and attended the Greeks during the siege of Troy. **Aesculapius** could not only cure the sick, but he could even resurrect the dead. This irked **Zeus** who killed him by a bolt of lightning, but placed him later among the stars.

The miracles which **Aesculapius** performed in **Epidaurus** have been preserved in votive tablets dedicated by thankful patients. A number of these are concerned with eye diseases: A woman, who had been blind in one eye, regained vision; the same happened to a one-eyed man. A number of completely blind persons were also made seeing again.

References

1. **Gordon, B.L.:** *Medicine Throughout Antiquity*; F. A. Davis Co., Philadelphia, 1949.

2. **Graves, R.:** *The Greek Myths*; George Braziller, New York, 1957.

3. **Hirschberg, J.:** *The History of Ophthalmology* (Translated by F. C. Blodi), Volume I, Wayenborgh, Bonn 1982



Fig. 12.1 a



Fig. 12.1 b



Fig. 12.2 a



Fig. 12.2 b



Fig. 12.3 a



Fig. 12.3 b

Algeria 1955; # 262 (French Congress of Medicine) Fig. 12.3a)
Cyprus 1968; # 318 (20th anniversary of WHO) (Fig. 12.3b)
Greece 1959; # 658 (Fig. 12.3c)
Spain 1948; # RA25, 26 (Fig. 12.3d)

OEDIPUS

At his birth it was predicted that he would kill his father and marry his mother. He was therefore cast away and brought up not knowing his parents. He fought with and killed his father whom he did not know. He liberated Thebes from the Sphinx and was asked to marry the queen. When he found out that she was actually his mother he went mad and gouged his eyes with his mother's brooches.

Oedipism is a form of self-mutilation (focal suicide) aimed at the eyes. The patients are usually psychotic (frequently schizophrenic) or under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

References

1. **Khan, J.A., Buescher, L., Ide, C.H. and Pettigrove, B.:** *Medical management of self-enucleation*; Arch. Ophth. 103:386, 1985.
2. **Kinnas, S.J. and Brady, H.R.:** *Oedipism and Down's Syndrome*; Ann. Ophth. 17:431, 1985.
3. **Krauss, H.R., Yee, R.D. and Foos, R.Y.:** *Autoenucleation*; Survey Ophth. 29.:179, 1984.
4. **Stannard, K., Leonard, T., Holder, G. and Shilling, J.:** *Oedipism reviewed*; Brit. J. Ophth. 68:276, 1984.

Dahomey 1967; # C50 (Fig. 12.4)

POLYPHEMOS AND THE CYCLOPS

Cyclops (actually "round eye") are according to Greek mythology the one-eyed sons of **Uranos** and **Gaia** who forge arms for gods and heroes helping **Hephaistos** while working in the fire-spewing mountains, like Etna.

Homer describes them as a primitive, cannibalistic tribe of giants who believe they are stronger than the gods.

Polyphemos was the most famous cyclops. He is mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey* as the son of **Poseidon** and **Thoosa**. He lived alone in a cave with sheep and goats when **Odysseus** entered with 16 comrades-in-arms. Six of them were devoured by **Polyphemos**; **Odysseus**



Fig. 12.3d



Fig. 12.3c



Fig. 12.4



Fig. 12.5a



Fig. 12.5b



Fig. 12.6a



Fig. 12.6b

made him drunk and blinded him by plunging a hot stake into his only eye. He escaped with his friends by hiding under the belly of sheep (Fig. 10.1j).

Greece 1969; # 940 (Fig. 12.5a)
1983; # 1480 (Fig. 12.5b)

THE BLINDNESS OF TOBIAS

The book of Tobias was written sometime between 180 A. D. and the birth of Christ and takes place during the Babylonian exile (6th century B.C.). In this legend we learn that the elderly **Tobit** had been blinded years before by the dung of sparrows falling into the eyes while nobly trying to bury the body of a murdered Jew.

One day **Tobit** asked his son, **Tobias**, to collect an old debt. On this journey the son was joined by another young traveler, **Azarias**, who in fact was the disguised archangel **Rafael**. When resting along the River Tigris, a fish was caught and upon the suggestion of Azarias the gall and liver were carefully removed and saved. These fish entrails helped to break the evil spell of Tobit's second cousin and future wife, **Sara**, and the three of them (**Sara**, **Tobias** and **Azarias**) returned to Nineveh (Assyria) where the angel revealed his true identity and instructed Tobias to annoint his father's eye with the gall so that the whiteness shall fall away. Indeed, the 66 year old man could see again after he had been blind for eight years.

In the text, Tobias' blindness is described as due to "*tá leukómata*". This could mean dense corneal scars, chronic trachoma or possibly pterygia.

Luther erroneously translated these Greek terms into German as "Star", i.e. a cataract. Luther's error may be due to the fact that he used not only the Greek text of the bible, but also a Latin translation in which we find "albugo" which had been used to designate a cataract.

This interpretation was accepted by a number of artists and especially by **Rembrandt von Rijn** who was all his life fascinated by blindness and by biblical legends. No less than 55 of his drawings, sketches and paintings depict scenes from the book of Tobias. In contrast to the legend Rembrandt shows Tobias either examining his father's eyes or performing an operation on them.

These pictures were painted and drawn between 1626 and 1650.

G. Albertotti was the first who discovered in 1897 that a Tobias picture by Rembrandt in Modena was depicting the cataract operation. This is in contrast to other paintings and etchings depicting the restoration of vision (e.g. **Antonin de Bellis** in Madrid, **Andrea Vaccharo** in Barcelona, etc) in which usually eyes on a plate are presented to Tobias. **Greeff** of Berlin described this later extensively on the basis of a painting in Brussels. In most of the pictures by Rembrandt the



Fig. 12.6c



Fig. 12.6d



Fig. 12.7a



Fig. 12.7b



Fig. 12.7c



Fig. 12.7d

surgeon stands behind the sitting Tobias operating with his right hand the right eye. In some drawings the cataract needle used for couching can be recognized.

The stamp is made after an etching of 1641 "*The angel disappearing in front of the family of Tobias*" (Benesch, No. 43).

It is, of course, possible that Tobias dislocated his cataracts when rubbing his eyes or actually suffered from corneal scars produced by an ammonium-like caustic in the bird's excrements. The fish bile containing salts could have acted as a chelating agent clearing the cornea within a few minutes.

References

1. **Greeff, R.:** *Rembrandt's Darstellungen der Tobias-Heilung*, Stuttgart, 1907.
2. **Held, J. S.:** *Der blinde Tobias und seine Heilung in Darstellungen Rembrandts*; Brausdruck, Heidelberg, 1980.
3. **Hirschberg, J.:** *The History of Ophthalmology* (Translated by F. C. Blodi), Volume III, Wayenborgh, Bonn, 1984
4. **Sudarsky, R. D.:** *Tobit and Chelating Agents*; Amer. J. Ophthal. 57:963, 1964.

Netherlands 1956; # B292, 294, 295 (Fig. 12.6a,b)
Spain 1953; # RAC13 (Tobias and the archangel) (Fig. 12.6c)
Vatican 1948; C16, C17 (Fig. 12.6d)

SAMSON

This Hebrew folklore is recorded in the Book of Judges (XIV-XVI). **Samson** belonged to the tribe of Dan and was renowned for his exploits against the Philistines.

The story is faithfully retold in the opera "*Samson et Dalila*" by **Camille Saint-Saens**. The text is by **Ferdinand Lemaire** and the opera was first performed in 1877 in Weimar.

The Hebrews rallied under Samson who had killed the **Satrap Abimelech**. **Samson** is bewitched by **Delilah** and when he falls asleep, Delilah cuts his hair which is the secret to his strength. Samson is captured by the Philistines and blinded (Judges 16:21). In chains he is led into the temple, but for a brief time his former strength returns and he tumbles the pillars of the temple so that the roof comes down killing Samson and his enemies.

Hungary 1970; # 2023 (Painting by Michele Rocca) (Fig. 12.7a)
Israel 1961; # 208 (Fig. 12.7b)
1971; # 440 (The opera) (Fig. 12.7c)
Spain 1966; # 1342 (Painting by Sert) (Fig. 13.11)
Sweden 1971; # 894 (The art of medieval stone masons in Gotland;
saint on horseback and Samson with the lion in the Hogrån
church) (Fig. 12.7d)

JESUS CHRIST

Blindness and eye diseases were widespread in biblical Palestine. The infectious ophthalmia (probably acute and chronic trachoma) blinded many people, including children. On the other hand, there was the senile blindness (probably cataract and glaucoma) affecting older persons.

Jesus in his ministry was often in touch with blind patients. Many of them were sitting at the roadside and begging.

One of his declared purposes was to recover the sight of the blind (Luke 4:18 – 22). He performed many miraculous cures of blind people.

He cured a man who was born blind (John 9:1 – 41) which led him to the declaration “*I am the light of the world*”. He performed a gradual healing of a blind man (Mark 8:24) and healed two men simultaneously thereby rescuing them from permanent poverty (Matthew 9:27 – 31). He healed a blind man who was also dumb and possessed by the devil (Matthew 12:22) and cured two blind men who were sitting at the way-side (Mark 10:46 – 52) and healed many blind men at the same time (Luke 7:21).

All of these miracles were performed by touching of the hand.

The stamp issued by Ethiopia is a manifestation of the influence of the Abyssinian church which was founded around 330 A.D. and then was for many centuries isolated from the main body of Christianity. The church is closely related to the Coptic church of Egypt in ritual and practice.

The stamps from Bophutswana show **Jesus** on the way to Jerusalem just after he had cured blindness. These men and the lame went before Him and some followed Him.

Reference

Miller, M. and Miller, J.L.: *Harper's Biblical Dictionary*; Harper & Brothers, New York, 1961.

Bophutswana 1985; # 8508 (Matthew 21:8) (Fig. 8a) and
8509 (Mark 11:9) (Fig 8b)
Ethiopia 1975; # 728 (Fig. 12.8c)

OJO de DIOS

This symbol originated in the southern Sierra Madre Occidental of Mexico, in the sparsely inhabited interior of the Nayarit, where the Huichol tribe has lived for many centuries.

These Indians produce concentric rows of colored threads which are tied to sticks at right angles. These objects are called sikuki in the Indian dialect, meaning eyes. The assumption is that the eyes of gods look out through these center spots watching the action of man.

The symbol is now well known all through Latin America and as Ojo de Dios is supposed to protect the wearer against the Evil Eye.

Recent findings have shown that the thread-cross rhombus symbolizing an eye may occur in many other cultures and civilizations.

Reference

Potts, A.M.: The World's Eye ; The University Press of Kentucky, 1982.

Mexico 1982; # 1131 (Fig. 12.9)

THE TEMPORARY BLINDNESS OF ST. PAUL

Paul was born as Saul in Tarsus, now Turkey, not far from the southern shore. His parents were Jews, but Roman citizens. Saul witnessed the stoning of St. Stephen, the first deacon of the Christian church. He was on his way to Damascus with the commission to destroy its small Christian community when he was overcome by a great light from heaven by which he was struck blind. Saul's companions led him into Damascus. There he was visited by Ananias, who by the laying of his hands restored his vision. Saul arose, was baptized and was henceforth known as Paul.

This acute loss of vision has been interpreted differently by theologians and physicians. Numerous authors have attributed these events to, e.g. epilepsy, malaria, migraine, arthritis, subarachnoid hemorrhage, catatonic convulsions, hallucinations, and ocular conversion reactions.

The story in the bible has five basic elements: 1) seeing a bright light, 2) falling down, 3) awakening blind, 4) being blind and abstaining from food and drink for three days, and 5) return of vision after three days.

Manchester and **Manchester** reviewed the situation from an ophthalmological point of view. They excluded the following possibilities: optic neuritis, pituitary apoplexy, homonymous hemianopia, supraclinoidal aneurysm, and occlusion of a remaining carotid artery. These authors also present evidence that St. Paul had a persistent decreased vision following this attack. They suggest radiation injury to the eyes as the most likely diagnosis.

Bullock recently analyzed the situation carefully and suggested the following six additional possible etiologies: 1) vertebro-basal artery occlusion, 2) occipital contusion, 3) vitreous hemorrhage secondary to a retinal tear, 4) lightning injury, 5) digitalis poisoning, and 6) thermal corneal burns.

References

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2. **Manchester, P.T. and Manchester, P.T., Jr.:** *The Blindness of St. Paul*; Arch. Ophthal. 88:316, 1972.

Austria 1969; # 831 (Statue in St. Steven's Cathedral) (Fig. 12.10a)

France 1965; # 1114 (Damascus Road, window, Cathedral of Sens) (Fig. 12.10b)

Greece 1951; # 535 (Altar and sword), # 536 (Statue) # 537 (Painting by El Greco), # 538 (Preaching) (Fig. 12.10c,d,e,f)

Italy 1961; # 837, 838 (Miniature from the bible of Borso d'Este) (Fig. 12.10g)

Malta 1960; # 275 (St. Paul's shipwreck, painting in St. Paul's church, Valetta); # 277 (St. Paul leaving Malta, painting in St. Paul's church, Valetta), # 278 (St. Paul's grotto, Rabat), # 280 (St. Paul and St. Paul's bay islets) Fig. 12.10 k – n)

Netherlands 1971; # B471 (Wood sculpture of the XVth century) (Fig. 12.10h)

Spain 1963; # 1154 (Painting by El Greco) (Fig. 12.10i)

1966; # 1346 (Painting by José Maria Sert) (Fig. 12.10j)

ST. LUCIA (Died 304 A. D.)

St. Lucia was born in Sicily. Her father died early and her mother betrothed her to a young gentleman who was a heathen. When Lucia grew up she refused to marry and dedicated her life to Jesus. When her mother was sick she had a dream in which St. Agatha appeared to her and the next morning her mother was cured. Thereupon her mother joined Lucia in her faith.

She was accused by her fiancé of being a Christian and was tried and tortured by the tyrant **Paschase** in Syracuse. During the torture she asked the prefect what on her pleased him most. He responded "your eyes". Whereupon she herself plucked out her eyes and sent them on a silver dish to her torturer. According to other authors her ocular mutilation was actually either apocryphal or part of her martyrdom.

From then on she was also the patron saint of the blind. She is frequently depicted holding in her hands a precious dish containing eyes. Her name day is December 13. She is buried in the church St. Geremia and Lucia in Venice.



Fig. 12.8 a



Fig. 12.8b



Fig. 12.8 c



Fig. 12.9



Fig. 12.10 a



Fig. 12.10 b



Fig. 12.10 c



Fig. 12.10.d

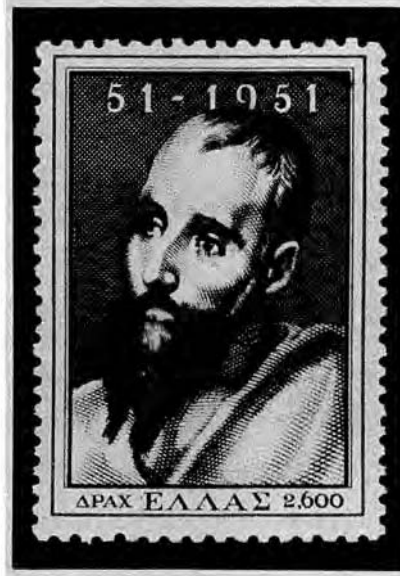


Fig. 12.10.e



Fig. 12.10.f



Fig. 12.10.g



Fig. 12.10.h



Fig. 12.10.i



Fig. 12.10.j

The Caribbean island, St. Lucia, is also named in honor of the Sicilian saint as it was discovered by Columbus on December 13, 1494 on his second trip to America. This West Indian Island was in the past a French, then an English colony. Since 1967 it has been an independent state.

The name "*Lucia*" itself is related to *lux* (Latin), *luce* (Italian), *luz* (Spanish), the light. In Sweden the winter solstice (which on the Gregorian calendar falls on December 13) is celebrated by festivities emphasizing the return of the light.

References

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2. **Hermans, R.:** *Légende des saints du 13 décembre et ophtalmologie*; L'ophtalmologie des origines à nos jours (Laboratoires Faure) 2:125, 1979.
3. **Jesse, C.:** *Outlines of St. Lucia's History*; The Voice Publishing Company, St. Lucia, 1964.
4. **Smith, R.G.:** *Apologia pro Sancta Lucia*; Arch. Ophth. 103:1282, 1985.

Anguilla 1984; # 596
St. Lucia 1971; # 308, 309, 310, 311 (Fig. 12.11a)
Sweden 1972; # 953 (Fig. 12.11b)

ST. ODILIA (about 663 – 720 a. D.)

Odilia was born blind. Her father was a Frankish nobleman, Duke **Adalric of Alsace**, and his wife was **Bereswindis**. Her father was quite incensed about the defective child and tried to do away with her. The mother, however, succeeded in saving the child and through a wet nurse placed her in the convent Palma, probably near Besançon (France).

At the age of 12 when she was baptized she suddenly regained her sight. From then on she dedicated her life to charity.

Her father continued to persecute her, but finally they reconciled and he established monasteries for her. She became an abbess and worked under the Benedictine Order. Her convent was the Hohenburg (on what is now called the Odilienberg) near the Rhine.

She has become the patron saint not only of Alsace, but also of the blind and of patients with eye diseases. Her name day is December 13. She is often presented with eyes in her hands, on a shell or a dish, or in a book she is holding. When holding the claws (or scissors) of a crab, allusion is made to the so-called "crab's eyes" (oculi cancrorum), calcified stomach contents which were pulverized and also used to remove foreign bodies from the eye.



Fig. 12.10k



Fig. 12.10l



Fig. 12.10 m



Fig. 12.10 n



Fig. 12.11 a



Fig. 12.11 b

References

1. *Encyclopedia of Catholic Saints* 12:67; Chilton Books, Philadelphia and New York, 1966.
2. **Grossmann, Th.:** *Die heilige Ottilie, Patronin der Augenkrankheiten*; Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenkrankh. 178:480, 1981.
3. **Keller, H.I.:** *Reclam Lexicon der Heiligen und der biblischen Gestalten*; Philipp Reclam June., Stuttgart, second edition, 1970.

Saar 1931; # B19 (Painting by **Feuerstein**) (Fig. 12.12)

ST. CLARE OF ASSISI (1193 – 1253)

Clare was born in Assisi as the daughter of a noble family, the **Offreduccio**. She grew up as a very pious child and came soon under the influence of St. Francis of Assisi.

In 1212 she fled from her parents' home and was invested by **St. Francis** who cut her long hair and sent it back to her family.

In some previous secret meeting with St. Francis, she had become convinced that she would join a convent. She finally settled in St. Damiano where she founded the order of "*The Poor Clares*" dedicated to permanent poverty. She defended her convent against foreign military assaults and was called the "*little flower of St. Francis*".

Her younger sister, **Agnes**, followed her later into the convent, also against the will of their parents.

St. Clare became the patron saint against sore eyes. She helped several blind people miraculously.

The Swedish physician and humanitarian, **Axel Munthe**, invoked her when his vision began to fail. He had lost his right eye when he was not yet 50 because of a retinal detachment and secondary glaucoma. When a cataract developed in his only eye he prayed to St. Clare, whose legend he had gotten to know when he worked in Paris at the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul Hospital. In addition, **Munthe** felt himself close to **St. Francis** because of their love for animals and because St. Francis also had an eye operation. Munthe's cataract was successfully extracted by Prof. **A. Vogt** in Zurich in 1934 on the feast day of St. Francis (December 4). Her feast day is August 12.

References

1. **Koch, F. L. P.:** *Patron Saints of the Eye*; Am. J. Ophth. 28:160, 1945.
2. **Green, J.:** *Frère François*; Seuil, Paris, 1983.
3. **Munthe, G. and Uexküll, G.:** *The Story of Axel Munthe*; E. P. Dutton, New York, 1953.

Italy 1953; # 625 (Fig. 12.13a)
Vatican 1953; # 169, 170 (Fig. 12.13b)

SANTA ROSA of LIMA (1586 – 1617)

She was born of Spanish parents in Lima, Peru, and had been baptized **Isabella**, but her mother saw a rose on her face and from early childhood she was called **Rosa**.

From early youth she dedicated her life to Jesus Christ and did everything to decrease her feminine charms and beauty. She cut her hair and put a crown of thorns on her head. She repeatedly injured her eyes which she thought were too seducing and admirable. She mistreated her hands which she thought were too fine and delicate.

Her life seemed to be a replica of that of **St. Catharine of Siena**. She lived in solitude and hardly spoke to anybody and became a member of the Dominican Order. She died young and was canonized in 1671 as the first American born saint. She became the patron saint of Latin America and the Philippines, but also of eye diseases.

Reference

Bargellini, P.: I santi del giorno; fourth edition, Valeochi Editore, Florence, 1961.

Ecuador 1972; # C497 (Statue by Bernardo de Legarda)
Peru 1936/37; # C39 (Fig. 12.14a)
1937; # RA28 (Fig. 12.14b)
1967; # C213 (Painting by **A. Medoro**), # C214 (Painting by
C. Maratta), # C215 (Painting by **A. Medoro**) (Fig. 12.14c,d,e)

ST. HEMMA (EMMA) (Circa 980 – 1045)

Hemma was on her mother's side related to the German emperor **Heinrich II**. She later married **William Landgraf of Friesach**. Their two sons were killed by rebellious miners. Thereupon her husband went on a pilgrimage to Rome, but died before returning home (a second marriage and another son are both in doubt).

As a widow Hemma founded numerous religious houses, especially the Benedictine Monastery of Gurk in Carinthia (southern Austria), which is now the seat of an archbishop.

Though she is usually called St. Hemma, she has never been officially declared a saint, but has only been beatified, She is well



Fig. 12.12



Fig. 12.13 a



Fig. 12.13 b



Fig. 12.13 e



Fig. 12.13 f



Fig. 12.14 a



Fig. 12.14 b



Fig. 12.14 c



Fig. 12.14 d



Fig. 12.14 e



Fig. 12.15



Fig. 12.16 a

known for her help against eye diseases and with her ring she can give special benediction to the eyes.

Her name day is either June 19 or 29.

The stamp was issued when the bishop seat celebrated its 900th anniversary. The head depicted on the stamp does not represent the saint, but a figure on her tomb drawing special attention to the eyes.

References

1. *Butler's Lives of the Saints*; H. Thurston and D. Attwater, editors; Burns and Oates, London, 1956.

2. Harsch, O.M.: *Christliche Krankenpatrone in der Philatelie*; Münster, 1979.

3. Sales Doyé, F.v.: *Heilige und Seelige*; Vier Quellen Verlag, Leipzig, 1929.

Austria 1972; # 921 (Fig. 12.15)

ST. LOUIS (KING LOUIS IX OF FRANCE) (1215 – 1270)

Louis was born in Poissy near Paris. In 1226 he acceded to the throne, but first ruled under the regency of his mother, **Blanche of Castile**. He reigned for 44 years and was an extremely intelligent, humane and successful king. He showed himself most considerate for his people, especially for the poor.

He was successful in his policies. He defeated King **Henry III** of England at Taillebourg in 1242.

He participated in two crusades. During the first he was taken prisoner in Egypt and during the second he died of dysentery before Tunis. He was canonized in 1297.

He is of interest to us because he founded the "*Quinze Vingts*", the first asylum for the blind. It was supposed to admit 300 (15 x 20) blind soldiers and was established in 1265 in Paris to serve "*the poor blind of the king*". They were organized as a fraternity and directed by the chief almoner to the king. The blind were granted many privileges, e.g. begging in churches.

The asylum has been transformed into the French Institute of Ophthalmology, comprising a hospital, outpatient clinics, laboratories and, still, a domicile for 300 blind French.

The American city was founded by **Auguste Chouteau** in 1764 under **Louis XV** and named in honor of his patron saint **Louis IX**.



Fig. 12.16b



Fig. 12.16c



Fig. 12.17a



Fig. 12.17b



Fig. 12.17d

References

1. **DuBois – Poulson, A.:** *The Quinze Vingts in Paris*; Hist. Ophth. Internat. 1:119, 1979.

2. **Guérin, P.:** *La vie des Saints* 3:533; Victor Palme, Paris, 1899.

Egypt 1957; # 402 (Mansourah 1250 A.D. King Louis as a prisoner; Egypt is called the tomb of invaders) (Fig. 12.16a)

France 1954; # B285 (Fig. 12.16b)

1967; # 1201 (Fig. 12.16c)

THE FIRST MIRACLE OF LOURDES

Lourdes is a small town in Southwestern France at the foot of the Pyrenees.

In 1858 a 14 year old poor peasant girl, **Bernadette Soubirons** (Fig. 12.13a,b) had several apparitions in the nearby grotto of Massabielle (Fig. 12.13c). Roman Catholic authorities authenticated these apparitions and the pope authorized the cult of “*Our Lady of Lourdes*”. The spring water in the grotto is believed to have healing powers.

In the same year **Pierre Bouriette** experienced a miraculous recovery of vision in his injured eye (Fig. 12.13d). Bouriette had always worked in the quarries and 20 years earlier one eye had been perforated during a blasting accident. This eye had become blind immediately. Bouriette went to the grotto and sprinkled water from the spring into his orbit whereupon he promptly regained vision.

A statue of the Virgin now stands on a rock projecting above the grotto and a basilica was built above it (Fig. 12.13e). Unusual and unexpected medical events are now first screened by the Medical Bureau of Lourdes and then referred to a medical commission in Paris. Merigot de Treigny of the St. Joseph’s Hospital in Paris was for a long time the ophthalmologist of that committee.

Bernadette was canonized December 8, 1933 (Fig. 12.13f).

References

1. **Agnellet, M.:** *I Accept These Facts*; Max Parrish, London.

2. **Cranston, R.:** *The Miracle of Lourdes*, McGraw-Hill, New York-Toronto-London, 1955.

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4. **Trochu, F.:** *St. Bernadette Soubirons (1844 – 1879)*; Pantheon, New York, 1957.

Monaco 1958; # 412 – 422 (Fig. 12.17a, b, c, d, e, f)

Color section on pages 277 – 287

CHAPTER XIII

THE FINE ARTS

The eyes, blindness and vision have always played an important part in literature, painting and sculpture. A few of them are represented on stamps.

FABLES AND LEGENDS

Aesop (Aisopos) wrote numerous fables, mostly about animals. He was apparently born a slave, but was later set free and became quite well known. He was killed in Delphi. Legend also has it that he lived for a time in Croesus where he met **Solon**.

Some of his fables deal with blind people. In one of them a blind man is asked to recognize a fox cub by touch. He could not tell whether this was a young fox or a young wolf, but declared that it would be unwise to have this animal take care of a herd of sheep.

In the stamp we see a blind man carrying a lame. Together these two cancel their physical defects and present a complete and well-functioning unit.

The most sarcastic fable concerned with vision is about an eye doctor who steals furniture and other goods from an old lady whom he had operated on and whose vision he had restored. The patient then refused to pay and won her case in court because she could not see her furniture and goods which had previously been in her house.

The other stamp is a figure of a blind boy. These santons are clay figures and are part of the crèche at Christmas time in the Provence.

Reference

Fables of Aesop; Translated by **S.A. Handford**; Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1956.

Burundi 1977; # 524d (Fig. 13.1a)

Monaco 1984; # 1449 (Fig. 13.1b)

PIETER BRUEGEL, THE ELDER (1525 – 1569)

This Flemish painter was born in Breda and died in Brussels. He painted landscapes and compositions of large and many figures. He also made many pen and ink drawings of landscapes.

The painting now in the Museo Nazionale (from the collection Capodimonte) in Naples illustrates the biblical parable of the blind leading the blind (Matthew XV, 14 and Luke VI; 39 – 40), showing that they shall fall into the ditch. **Brueghel** depicts accurately several clinical conditions leading to blindness, anophthalmus, atrophic eyeball, corneal scars, photophobia, etc. Brueghel has six blind people, not two as in the Bible; the first one fell and the others, following in Indian file, will soon do the same. The second man already has his cane caught between his legs and is about to stumble. The stamp shows only part of the picture.

The picture has recently become the subject of a word by G. Hofmann.

Reference

Jedlicka, G.: *Pieter Bruegel*; Eugen Rentsch Verlag; Erlenbach-Zürich and Leipzig, 1938, p. 370.

Belgium 1976; # 960 (Fig. 13.2)

JACQUES CALLOT (1592 – 1635)

This French painter and engraver was born and died in Nancy. He spent some time in Italy, especially in Florence, where he worked for Prince **Cosimo II**. He then lived for a time in Paris working for **King Louis XIII**.

When he returned to Lorraine he was impressed by the devastations which followed the Thirty Year War and the plague. He produced a series of pictures depicting the great miseries of the war. Among them was a series on beggars (*Les gueux or mendiants*). This is a series of 25 etchings and the plates which were painted 1622/23 are now at the Musée Lorraine in Nancy. Many of the beggars depicted are blind, lame or one-eyed.

Etching # 693 shows a blind man and his companion who guides him by holding his left hand. In his right hand the blind man, wearing a bonnet, holds a hat for begging.

Another etching (# 706) in this series shows a blind man with both hands on his stick while his dog sits at his feet.

References

1. *Encyclopaedia Universalis*; vol. III, page 797, Paris, 1968.
2. **Löffler, P.:** *Jacques Callot, Versuch einer Deutung*; Winterthur 1958.

3. **Meaume, E.:** *Recherches sur la vie et les ouvrages de Jacques Callot*; Jules Renouard, Paris 1860.

France 1957; # B318 (Fig. 13.3)

GONZALES COQUES (1618 – 1684)

This French painter lived in Antwerp and had **David Ryckaert**, the older, and **Pieter Bruegel III** as his teachers, but he seemed to take **Van Dyke** as his model so that many people called him “*the little Van Dyke*”.

He painted for many courts and spent some time with **Charles I** in England, with the **Duke of Brandenburg**, with the **Prince of Orange** in the Netherlands and with the **Emperor Leopold I**. He became active in public life and was a leader of the artists’ guild. His successful political life was unfortunately not complemented by his private life. All members of his family (his first wife and children) died before him.

He painted mainly portraits, but also a series on the senses and the stamp represents vision.

Reference

Siret, A.: in: *Biographie Nationale IV*:382, H. Thiry, Brussels, 1873.

Romania 1970; # 2218 (Fig. 13.4)

MICHELE ROCCA (1670 – 1751)

This Italian painter was born in Parma and died in Venice. He is frequently referred to as “*Il Parmigianino*”.

He painted many religious motives and this one depicts **Delilah** cutting the hair of **Samson** before he was overpowered by the Philistines and blinded.

Hungary 1970; # 2023 (Fig. 12.7a)

B 258

JOSEPHUS LAURENTIUS DYCKMANS
(1811 – 1888)

This Belgian painter was born in Lier. He was a pupil of **Thieleman** and **Wappers** and became professor at the Academy of Antwerp where he also died.

This picture of the blind beggar was finished in 1852.

Saar 1928; # B9, B10, B11 (Fig. 13.5)

SOMA ORLAI-PETRICS
(1822 – 1880)

This painter was born in Mezöbereny (Hungary) and died in Budapest.

He studied in Vienna with **Waldmüller** and in Munich with **Kaulbach**. He became known as an illustrator of historical scenes, like the one depicting the blind **Milton** dictating to his daughter.

Hungary 1967; # 1819 (Fig. 10.11a)

FRANCISCO VEGA Y MUÑOZ
(1840 – 1868)

This Spanish painter was born and died in Seville. His brother was a famous architect. He painted a number of altar pictures and the one depicted is called "*The Blind*".

Reference

Ossorio y Bernard: *Gal. biogr. de arte español*; XIV; 1883/4.

Cuba 1957; # 566 (Fig. 13.6)

WALTER WILLIAM OULESS
(1848 – 1933)

This painter was born in St. Heliers, on the island of Jersey. As of 1881 he was a member of the Royal Academy. He painted mostly portraits. This one is called "*The blind beggar*" and shows a blind old man with a young girl.



Fig. 13.1 a



Fig. 13.3



Fig. 13.5



Fig. 13.1 b



Fig. 13.4



Fig. 13.7



Fig. 13.2



Fig. 13.6

It is of ophthalmic interest that it was Oules who painted the portrait of Sir William Boroman, which was dedicated in 1889. A copper etching of this painting was made by Webb.

Jersey 1971; # 60 (Fig. 13.7)

MARTIN FEUERSTEIN (1856 – 1931)

This German painter was born in Barr, Alsace, the son of the sculptor **J.M. Feuerstein**. He was a painter and designer who used frequently religious motives and painted mostly church pictures.

He studied at the Munich Acedemy and lived then for a long time in Paris. He later returned to Munich where he became in 1898 professor of religious painting of the Academy. He also died in Munich.

The picture of **St. Otilie** is found in the chapel of the hospital of the Niederbronner Sisters in Strasbourg.

Saar 1929; # B19 (Fig. 12.12)

ALPHONSE ETIENNE DINET (1861 – 1929)

This French painter was born and died in Paris.

In 1884 he went to Algeria on a stipend from the Order of St. John the Hospitaller. He became an expert orientalist and a connoisseur of Arabian customs and civilization. He painted many pictures concerned with Arabian life and history, among them this one concerned with blindness.

Algeria 1976; # 578 (Fig. 13.8)

GEORGE ROUAULT (1871 – 1958)

This French expressionist concerned himself often with social and religious issues. He was called "*the monk of modern art*".

In a 58 print cycle entitled "*Miserere*" there is one that depicts a blind man consoling his seeing friend (*l'aveugle parfois a consolé le voyant*). Two war survivors are depicted. The blind man has his head up. His eyes are mere black patches. The seeing holds his head down, but seems to guide the blind with his elbow.

References

1. **Getlein, F. and Getlein, D.:** *George Rouault's Miserere*; Bruce Publishing Comp., Milwaukee, 1964.
2. **Roger-Marx, C.:** *Maîtres de XIXe et XXe siècles*; P. Gailler, Geneva 1964.

France 1961; # B357 (Fig. 13.9)

JOSÉ MARIA SERT Y BADIA (1874 – 1945)

This Catalan painter was born and died in Barcelona, but lived mostly in Paris. He came from an austere Catholic Catalan family and was educated by the Jesuits. **King Alfonso XIII** was a friend of the family and obtained for him gigantic commissions. He remained loyal to **Franco** and during World War II he became the Spanish ambassador to the Vatican.

In Paris he became a hedonist and dedicated egotist. He enjoyed morphine and absinthe; he married **Misia**, the Polish emigrée (1920) and achieved tremendous worldly success. He became the friend of **Proust, Guide, Caudel** and many others.

He painted many pictures for churches, especially for the Cathedral of Vich. He also painted murals for the Rockefeller Center in New York, for the League of Nations in Geneva and in Argentina; he made the designs for the Ballets Russes.

This picture "*Audacity*" (la audacia) depicts the blind **Samson** tearing down the pillars of the temple.

Like **Picasso Sert** had on other occasions selected a blind person for his drawing; so for instance "*the blind man*", a design for tapestry ordered by France, a picaresque story about the disadvantages of blindness.

References

1. **Castillo, Alberto del, with Pellicer, A. Curici:** *José Maria Sert: Su Vida y Su Obra*; Editorial Argos, Barcelona, 1949.
2. **Gold, A. and Fizdale, R.:** *Misia*; Alfred Knopf, New York, 1980.

Spain 1966; # 1342 (Fig. 13.10)



Fig. 13.8



Fig. 13.11



Fig. 13.9



Fig. 13.12



Fig. 13.10



Fig. 13.13

PABLO PICASSO
(1881 – 1973)

Picasso was born in Malaga and was of Catalan extraction. His father had been a professor of fine arts in Barcelona. Picasso lived nearly all his life in France and became a French citizen. He initiated Cubism and had a paramount influence on all aspects of modern art.

The picture "*El Guitarrista Ciego*" (in English frequently referred to as the "Old Guitarist") was painted in 1903. It is representative of Picasso's "*blue period*" between 1901 – 04 when he tended to paint downtrodden, pathetic characters who reflected a kind of fin-de-siècle, despair and isolation. In this picture the blue accentuates the coldness and hunger of the subject. Only the guitar brings some relief to the monochrome and adds warmth and life to the painting's icy palette.

The picture is in the Art Institute of Chicago (Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection, 1926.253).

Reference

The Art Institute of Chicago (J.J. Feldstein, editor); Rand-McNally Co., New-York-Chicago-San Francisco 1978.

Equatorial Guinea 1973; Michel # 319-326 (Fig. 13.11)

ANTOINE VICTOR (ANTO) CARTE
(1886 – 1954)

This Belgian painter was born in Mons and died in Brussels. He was professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels and painted many landscapes and religious scenes.

This picture depicts a blind man and a paralytic.

Belgium 1954; # B572 (Fig. 13.12)

JOSÉ GUTIÉRREZ SOLANA
(1886 – 1954)

This Spanish painter lived most of his life in Madrid or in the vicinity of the city. He was a pupil of **José Diaz Palma** and became a realist and sharp observer. His main topics were poor people of and around Madrid, especially the crippled, the lame, the prostitutes, the beggars and drunkards. He was called the "*Black knight of Spanish painting*". He was always concerned with the plight of destitute people. Solana

himself was a bizarre individual, a painter possessed with the macabre, the ugly and the grotesque. He produced not only paintings, but also a few drawings, etchings and sketches. He was also a writer in his own right.

The painting depicted on the stamp is called "*El Ciego de los Romances*" (The Blind Balladeer). The man is depicted as a dry and long-legged individual with a face marked by scars as green as the gunpowder of the bomb which exploded near him in the African war leaving him blind. **Solana** continues the description of his painting: his wife is lame and very dark; she hands out copies of the histories told by her husband (the abductress of children, a young girl found raped and strangled with a stone in her mouth). The audience to which these prurient pamphlets are handed is also physically and morally deformed. A poster on the back wall bears the painter's name (instead of a signature).

The painting was finished between 1914 and 1917 and its present location is unknown. **Solana** used it as the cover for his second book.

Reference

Barrio-Garay, José Luis: *José Gutiérrez Solana, Paintings and Writings*; Lewisburg, PA, Bucknell University Press, 1978.

Spain 1972; # 1706 (Fig. 13.13)