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Blindness, Discipline, and Reward:  
Louis IX and the Foundation of  
the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts

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This article will examine the history of a medieval institution of considerable privilege in light of not only theories of institutionalized control of subjects but also recently proposed models of disability. In 1256 Louis IX, better known today as Saint Louis, founded a residential hospice for the blind called the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts, literally the Hospice of Fifteen Twenties signifying the 300 residents whom it was meant to house. Associated with the National Center for Ophthalmology in Paris, this institution still survives today.

For the residents the hospice offered basic care and some protection on the streets of Paris, but it was also meant to show that they had undergone institutional discipline that reconstructed the meaning of their disability in such a way as to be valuable to the institution. For other Parisians the hospice became the subject of considerable social anxiety, partly associated with the historical stereotypes of blind people but partly relating to the hospice's unique institutional identity as largely separate from the Church which had previously laid claim to the institutionalized care of the disabled.

For at least 500 years a romantic foundational legend about the hospice has circulated sometimes abetted by institutional administrators and historians. It served as part of the reconstruction of the social meaning of blindness, especially in relation to the institution that was constantly frustrated by the special nature of the hospice, the Church.

Before Louis's foundation of the Quinze-Vingts, the Church largely controlled the discursive terrain of illness and disability. Doctrinally the church's interest in the disabled was based on Jesus's role as miraculous healer and spiritual "physician." His most significant encounter with a blind person is described in John 9.

1. And Jesus passing by, saw a man, who was blind from his birth.

2. And his disciples asked him: Rabbi, who hath sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind.  
3. Jesus answered: Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.<sup>1</sup>

With his saliva and dust from the ground Jesus makes clay that he applies to the blind man's eyes, and he tells the man to wash it away at the pool of Siloe. After washing, the man can see. The Jews who learn of this miracle are skeptical that the man had ever been blind (skepticism about disability that is typical of medieval Christians, as we will see later). Ultimately they turn against the cured man telling him to be Jesus's disciple.

This passage alludes to the conception of blindness as punishment for sin but recasts it as a site for divine intervention and miraculous cure. It also offers the opportunity to test the faith of the community affected by the miracle. Thus disabled Christians who put themselves in the care of Jesus's institutional representative, the Church, could feel closer to him, allowing them to hope more optimistically for recovery.

However, another passage from John problematizes the connection between disability and true Christian belief; it was quoted in the one of the widely reproduced canons of the influential Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which regularized the practice of confession.

Since bodily infirmity is sometimes caused by sin, the Lord saying to the sick man whom he had healed: "Go and sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee" (John 5:14), we declare in the present decree and strictly command that when physicians of the body are called to the bedside of the sick, before all else they admonish them to call for the physician of souls, so that after spiritual health has been restored to them, the application of bodily medicine may be of greater benefit, for the cause being removed, the effect will pass away.<sup>2</sup>

Here spiritual health became the requisite for physical health as the Fourth Lateran Council tried to circumscribe the nascent practice of medicine within the conventions of Christianity.

This canon and related Christian teaching allowed for more reactionary voices to emerge among the clergy. Among those was the thirteenth-century cleric Conrad of Zurich who wrote, "...the blind...are people too vile to be mentioned before people of propriety and honor; if nature has brought them down and marked them with a stigma, it is because they have an offense for which to atone."<sup>3</sup> Conrad seems nervously aware that his victimization of the disabled contravenes the teaching of John 9; it is not God, but rather God's agent "nature" that metes out disability as punishment. Nevertheless, blindness is constructed as a spiritually

pathological condition or a spiritual deficit, and cure is equated with expiation of sin.

The control of the dominant cultural discourse surrounding illness and disability had important economic consequences for the Church. The care of the ill and the disabled earned generous gifts and bequests for religious institutions, particularly monasteries and convents. Hospitals founded by kings, lords, merchants, guilds, and municipalities were generally owned and staffed by religious orders, some of which were founded specifically to care for the infirm.<sup>4</sup> Treatises written by and for clerics practicing medicine abjured payment from the poor but encouraged acceptance of payment from the wealthy.<sup>5</sup>

The foundation of the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts revised the discourse surrounding blindness; although the institution included a chapel under the control of at least one chaplain, and residents had license to beg at the doors of Parisian churches, the general *raison d'être* of the organization was not religious but rather social. It was not a hospital in which clerics took care of residents, but rather a community in which the blind and the sighted lived and worked together on every aspect of communal life from agriculture to governance. And the archives of the institution in its first centuries never suggest that it held before its residents either the implication that their blindness was punishment or the false hope of miraculous cure.

In examining the unique cultural dynamics of the Quinze-Vingts and its effects on the meaning of blindness in the Middle Ages, I would like to employ and modify terms from the contemporary field of disability studies. One of its most eloquent scholars, Simi Linton, bases much of her book *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* on defining the distinctions between the medical model of disability and the social model. She argues that much of the meaning of disability has been appropriated by the medical profession with unfortunate results for people with disabilities.

Briefly, the medicalization of disability casts human variation as deviance from the norm, as pathological condition, as deficit, and, significantly, as an individual burden and personal tragedy. Society, in agreeing to assign medical meaning to disability, colludes to keep the issue within the purview of the medical establishment, to keep it a personal matter and "treat" the condition and the person with the condition rather than "treating" the social processes and policies that constrict disabled people's lives. The disability studies and disability rights movement's position is critical of the domination of the medical definition and views it as a major stumbling block to the reinterpretation of disability as a political category and to the social changes that could follow such a shift.<sup>6</sup>

I would argue that if institutionalized religion were substituted for institutionalized medicine in Linton's analysis - - i.e., if we replaced each use of the adjective

"medical" with the adjective "religious" - we would have quite a precise picture of how the meaning of disability, including blindness, was controlled in much of Europe during the Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> The medieval Church's institutionalized relationship to disability was roughly analogous to institutionalized medicine's control of disability in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: both institutionally segregate and disempower the disabled. I will call the late pre-modern era's institutionalized construction of disability the religious model.

The medical and religious models are constructed in opposition to the social model which "refram[es] disability as a designation having primarily social and political significance."<sup>8</sup> The social model of disability, which, like the medical model, was originally theorized by Michael Oliver,<sup>9</sup> deemphasizes the medical or religious definition by demanding redefinition of "able-bodied" and "disabled" in such a way that society can acknowledge and include the full spectrum of physical types.

Disability is no longer individualized as a condition "belonging" to a person but one of a number of possible physical states in society. Although the social status of the residents of the Quinze-Vingts as licensed beggars would have been quite low, nevertheless the ordinances of the hospice guaranteed them a visible, recognizable place in society, a place whose use-value was determined by the spiritual systems of exchange and commerce that helped to buy eternal life. This visibility differed greatly from the cloistering of the ill and disabled in religious institutions.

In one sense the foundation of the Quinze-Vingts displaced one type of institution with another, but nevertheless it granted its blind residents greater autonomy and self-governance than they would have had in religious institutions. The irony of the direction that the Hospice ultimately followed lies in its economic exploitation of the very institution against which it defined itself - the local Church - and thus tensions arose between the institutions. These tensions gave rise to the need to "revise" the foundational history in the way discussed below.

The late medieval revision of Louis IX's motivation for founding the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts was facilitated by the fact that the ordinances of its foundation were lost. However, episodes describing Louis's charitable impulses toward the poor and disabled survive in chronicles; an episode showing Louis's concern for the blind appears in the hagiographical biography by Guillaume de St. Pathus, who was also confessor of Louis's wife, Marguerite de Provence. Guillaume writes of a meal to which the king invited the poor.

Et se il y avoit entre ces povres aucuns ou mal voianz,  
li benoiez rois li metoit le morsel de pain en la main a  
ses propres mains, ou il menoit la main du povre jusques  
a l'escuele. Et encore plus quant il y avoit un mal  
voiant ou non puissant et il avoit poissons devant lui,

li benoiez rois prenoit le morsel du poisson et en treoit les arestes diligaument a ses propres mains, et le metoit en la saune, et lors le metoit en la bouche du malade.<sup>10</sup>

[And if there was any visually impaired person among these poor people, with his own hands the blessed king would put a morsel of bread into [the poor man's] hand, or he would guide the hand of the poor man to the plate. And furthermore, when there was a visually impaired or weak person there and he had fish before him, the blessed king would take the piece of fish, carefully remove the bones from it with his own hands, dip it in the salt, and then put it in the mouth of the ill person.]

The quasi-eucharistic nature of this scene reinforces Louis's holiness while highlighting a group in which he was particularly interested. In Guillaume's sequel to Louis's biography, *The Miracles of Saint Louis*, the writer describes four episodes in which the saint's relics cure the blind (though here blindness is only one of a number of disabilities and illnesses cured by the king's body).<sup>11</sup>

Guillaume's authorized version of both the quick and the dead Louis's interest in the blind elides a different concern: control of the population of marginalized people in Paris.<sup>12</sup> In 1254, only two years before the foundation of the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts, Louis IX expelled beggars from the city ostensibly because of their dishonesty and unruliness.<sup>13</sup> While some of these exiles may have been blind, there would certainly have been beggars perceived as a far greater social threat: those feigning disabilities, including blindness.<sup>14</sup>

Fear of such beggars, and particularly of those pretending to be blind, gave rise to a literary character type that appeared frequently in European literature of the Middle Ages.<sup>15</sup> Anxieties about able-bodied beggars tricking unwitting alms-givers would have contributed to Louis's motivation in founding the Hospice whose residents wore institutional uniforms identifying them as fully licensed, genuinely disabled members of a royally sanctioned institution. And the sites of their mendicancy would have given them added legitimacy: the privilege of begging at churches both within and outside of Paris was granted to the residents of Quinze-Vingts first by Pope Clement IV in 1265 and then confirmed by three subsequent popes and the Council of Trent. From 1312, the privilege of licensed begging in Parisian churches belonged exclusively to the residents of Louis's hospice, causing on-going friction between the Hospice and Parisian churches.<sup>16</sup>

But along with the privileges granted to the residents of the Quinze-Vingts, the differentiation of officially licensed blind beggars from unlicensed ones necessitated new forms of discipline for the blind. Early twentieth-century sociologist Pierre Villey, in what remains one of the few books to examine the construction of blindness in the sighted world, describes

the goal of early European hospitals for the blind: "le but est de rogler la mendicite en ropartissant les zones et en imposant une discipline"<sup>17</sup> ("...the goal is to regulate begging by dividing up zones and imposing discipline").

Villey anticipates the work of Michel Foucault, whose *Discipline and Punish* describes the discipline imposed in eighteenth-century France by such institutions as the penal system and the military. Foucault describes the creation of disciplined, "docile" bodies as a mechanism resulting in the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes [the body] more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A "political anatomy," which was also a "mechanics of power," was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, "docile" bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an "aptitude," a "capacity," which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.<sup>18</sup>

Both the internal structure of the Quinze-Vingts and its function in society prefigure the institutions that, according to Foucault, have structured the modern world. Residency at the Quinze-Vingts and licensed begging in its uniform was economically useful inasmuch as donors knew that their alms, which would ultimately help them to heaven, were going to verifiably disabled people; in other words, their money was well-spent. Thus, in Foucault's terms, when blind people submitted to the discipline of the Quinze-Vingts, their economic utility increased, guaranteeing that donors' charitable contributions would be valid and the institution would continue to function; however, the personal power of the institutional subjects declined.

Of course many medieval institutions imposed similar kinds of discipline on the people under their aegis, most notably the Church, not only in its convents and monasteries but in its parishes as well. The monastic arm of the Church also generally controlled most of the hospitals in the Middle Ages. In one sense the foundation of the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts represents only one more disciplining institution, but in another it creates a rupture in the history of care-giving institutions for the disabled simply because it was not associated with the Church, but rather, it was a largely independent institution under royal patronage.

## Institutional Organization and Discipline at the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts

Although Louis IX's original hospice functioned under defined rules of operation, the first generations of administrators left them undocumented. The almoner of the Quinze-Vingts from 1351 to 1355, Michel de Brache, wrote during his administration that numerous statutes and ordinances had been observed since the foundation of the hospice, but they had never been written down or committed to reliable memory; furthermore, some rules had been added during the first century of the institution's existence. So de Brache took it upon himself to transcribe the rules,<sup>19</sup> codifying them so strictly that the reading of the ordinances became central to the swearing-in ceremony for new residents.<sup>20</sup> They were also carved into a large wooden plaque that hung in the pediment of the chapter house,<sup>21</sup> a perpetual reminder to sighted residents and visitors of the discipline in the hospice.

As described by de Brache, most of the duties of administration were shared by the almoner, appointed by the king whose authority he represents, and the master of the Quinze-Vingts, also officially appointed by the king but nominated by the almoner.<sup>22</sup> The almoner served as general director, setting rules, determining the daily schedule of the residents, serving as judge in disagreements among them, and meting out penalties for rule-breakers. The master attended to some matters external to the hospice such as commercial transactions and court cases; he also presided over the meeting of the chapter, described below.

Third in the chain of command was the minister, elected for life by the residents of the hospice (although his term of office was reduced to one year after 1493). The minister was responsible for receiving the alms collected by the residents and dispensing them for use within the community. All three of these men had to be sighted, and although the almoner could be a cleric, the master and minister needed to be married, because their wives were also assigned specific duties.

Also elected from and by the community were so-called jury members, who were to counsel residents; as was the case with the election of the minister, both male and female residents voted for the jury. In 1321 there were six jury members, though the number was reduced to four in 1362. In 1562 it was deemed that half should be blind and half sighted; the archives do not suggest whether the rule was added in order to redress an imbalance in either direction, but the addition of the rule implies that blind residents had served as jury members earlier. Jury members earned a small stipend, and their wives held a special status as well.<sup>23</sup>

Once a week, all residents held ordinary chapter meetings chaired by the master; the group heard financial reports, fielded questions from brothers and sisters, heard requests for admission, and judged such issues as engagement to marry and distribution of inheritances. General chapter meetings

were held once a year to discuss larger issues of governance and finance.<sup>24</sup>

The daily schedule for residents as delineated by de Brache resembled in its most basic outlines the schedule of a religious community. Residents were awakened by a ringing bell and were to begin their day with five paternosters and five "Ave Marias" for the king, the almoner, and donors to the hospice; each day ended with the same series of prayers. It is significant that although various popes granted special privileges to the hospice, they are not named specifically in this list - a further indication of the basically secular nature of the institution.

De Brache exhorted residents not to miss the regular fasts of the church unless poor health prevented them. They were to attend masses in the chapel belonging to the Quinze-Vingts, services under the officiation of the hospice's chaplain. De Brache understood that mass would not be said more than once a day there.<sup>25</sup>

De Brache's rules allowed residents of the hospice to move out of the community at any time, but if they had lived there for more than a year and a day, half of their goods were to be turned over to the Quinze-Vingts. Residents whose stay had been shorter were to give "une petite portion" to the organization, with the exact amount to be determined by the almoner, the master, and the minister.<sup>26</sup>

One of the important differences between the Quinze-Vingts and monastic institutions was the fact that residents of Louis's foundation were generally allowed to marry and have their families with them while in residence. However, it was easier for male residents to bring their wives than for female residents to bring their husbands:

[The blind man's] wife will be a non-sister, and can be received quite soon after (his admission) and if she is worthy, as much for herself as in consideration of her husband, and to help him. But no sighted man can will be given residency except by election, as it is said, unless it is by a very urgent command of the king or the well-informed almoner.<sup>27</sup>

The suspicion of sighted men as residents grew out of the fear that they might victimize the blind residents; sexual violence toward blind women was particularly feared. The strict admission policy toward sighted men that is implied in the rule above suggests that the almoner would seek to become "well-informed" before considering any sighted man; if so, candidates for residency had their first taste of organizational discipline before they even entered the hospice.

De Brache forbids marriage between two blind residents or between two sighted residents. Young sighted widows were encouraged to marry blind male residents, but they were not expelled from the community if they refused. All marital engagements had to be announced to the master and minister or

to the community as a whole; fiances who failed to do so would be expelled from the community.<sup>28</sup>

Aside from gifts and bequests from non-residents, the primary sources of revenue for the Quinze-Vingts were monies collected through begging and levies upon the estates of residents. The licensed beggars from the hospice were generally blind, each accompanied by a sighted resident; the pair would position themselves at church doors next to money-boxes the contents of which were designated for the needs of the parish. All alms had to be turned over to the minister at the end of each day though the archives show that residents occasionally tried to keep a portion for themselves, and one master was dismissed in 1521 for stealing hospice funds.<sup>29</sup>

Michel de Brache devotes a good deal of energy to describing a complex system of division of inheritances between residents and the hospice. Residents with children who are older than 14 or married must leave all of their goods to the hospice, unless the three chief administrators deem that the children are so poor that some of the inheritance should go to them. In the case of a childless couple, when one spouse dies the surviving spouse has full rights to all of the inheritance during the remainder of her or his life if the survivor remains in residence; if the survivor leaves, she or he must forfeit half of the inheritance.<sup>30</sup> The gifts and bequests that blind Christians might have willingly given to church-related care-giving institutions in order to speed their souls to heaven were evidently less willingly given to a secular institution with direct ties to royalty.

In spite of the ability of the multi-layered bureaucracy to take care of misconduct among the residents, De Brache's rules define personal comportment in a strongly disciplinary tone: seventeen of them (numbers 55-71) begin with the words "Nul ne..." (No one [may]), and they forbid villainous speech, talking back to administrators, drinking in excess, fornication, and leaving the enclosure without permission. As summarized by Brigitte Gauthier, "...in accepting the regulation of the hospice, [the blind person] gave up part of his liberty to the community. All the acts of his life, even the most important, would be subordinated to the will of the community."<sup>31</sup> In Foucauldian terms, we see how de Brache's rules make the disciplined bodies of the Quinze-Vingts's residents more economically useful both within the institution and to benefactors outside while also diminishing possibilities for disobedience.

The clearest evidence that the impoverished blind people of Paris may have resented the disciplinary strictures of the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts lies in the fact that it seems not to have lived up to its name in its first centuries - that is, it never housed 300 residents. While some may have been begging for lengthy periods outside of Paris, it seems significant that there were only 159 residents at the Quinze-Vingts in 1302,<sup>32</sup> 99 boarders in 1502, only 84 two years later, and 116 in 1519.<sup>33</sup>

## The Quinze-Vingts versus Local and Regional Clergy

While popes in far-away Rome could afford to be generous to the Quinze-Vingts, first in cooperation with and then in memory of the sainted crusader king Louis IX, the papal indulgences and privileges evidently rankled clerics in Paris. When the Quinze-Vingts was founded, the Bishop of Paris agreed that the curate of the parish of St. Germain l'Auxerrois would officiate at mass in the institution. However, at the request of Philippe V in 1320, Pope John XXII officially granted the institution the right to have its own chaplain serve as curate of a parish comprising the institution alone; the chaplain was more answerable to the almoner - the king's representative, and not always a cleric - than to the Bishop of Paris.

In 1387 Pope Clement VII compensated the Chapter of St. Germain l'Auxerrois with three pounds for the removal of the Quinze-Vingts from their administrative control. However, the curate of St. Germain found the sum insufficient and after a trial in 1399 Parliament judged that the parish should be compensated 18 pounds per year.<sup>34</sup> In a sense the clerical isolation of the hospice from its parish further secularized the Quinze-Vingts by removing it (and its revenues) from the hierarchy of the Parisian church; in tandem with the nascent idea of a social model of disability, the institution thus threatened the Church in two important ways.

Two incidents documented in the archives of the Quinze-Vingts will serve to show how tensions between Parisian church officials and the institution flared in the first half of the fifteenth century forcing the throne to intervene on behalf of the institution. On December 13, 1414, the abbot of Saint Germain des Pros called before him representatives of the Bishop of Paris to explain why they had imprisoned one of the chaplains of the Quinze-Vingts who resided in the abbey. (Aside from the head chaplain, others were employed to recite masses for the souls of benefactors.)<sup>35</sup> This caused the Bishop of Paris to send a summons for a representative of the Quinze-Vingts to appear before the Pope.<sup>36</sup> In January 1415 the abbot of St. Germain, perhaps cognizant of the special privileges that the papacy generally granted the Quinze-Vingts, agreed to turn the entire affair over to the papal court.<sup>37</sup>

In the same month, King Charles VI sent patent letters to one of his top officials ordering him to protect the Quinze-Vingts from the bishop and to prevent any further annoyances from him.<sup>38</sup> Later in the month a session of Parliament ordered that the imprisoned chaplain be sent to la Conciergerie, a prison in Paris;<sup>39</sup> this document suggests that the chaplain may have been guilty of wrong-doing, but nevertheless the decision removed him from the power of the bishop. Only in June 1415 did three official representatives of the Quinze-Vingts visit Rome in response to the bishop's summons;<sup>40</sup> the tardiness of their trip suggests that they did not feel unduly pressed to respond to the bishop, once the immediate cause of the conflict had disappeared.

In early 1445 letters patent from Charles VII to the

Bishop of Paris state that church officers had arrested a chaplain of the Quinze-Vingts; the king appointed arbitrators who would report to an officer of Parliament.<sup>41</sup> The Quinze-Vingts' archives include nothing more about that event, but in July 1445 the Bishop's men again imprisoned a member of the hospice, this time one of the brothers. Charles sent patent letters reiterating the privileges of the residents of the hospice.<sup>42</sup> An officer of the king reported on the incident on July 2, 1445,<sup>43</sup> and on August 23, the king ordered the brother released from the bishop's control. Significantly, this letter exists in the archives in two contemporaneous copies.<sup>44</sup>

The documents preserved in the archives describe only the most litigious altercations between the Parisian church and the Quinze-Vingts, nearly all of which were initiated by the bishop; Guillaumat and Bailliart describe the on-going tensions as follows: "Episcopal petitions were difficult to deliver for bishops desiring to have themselves paid. Of the seventy trials between bishops and the Quinze-Vingts, the latter always ended up winning."<sup>45</sup> The last trial that the historians mention, dating from 1553, resulted in the bishop of Saintes paying back the 300 pounds that he had demanded for delivering petitions for alms within his diocese, again an example of parish funding skimmed off by the hospice.<sup>46</sup>

The altercations between French bishops and the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts must have been familiar to priests in the parishes of Paris and beyond. Therefore, more tensions are likely to have played themselves out in individual churches where the blind begged, especially since the position of the beggars next to the parish alms box necessarily created competition between the Church as dispenser of charity and the apparently self-interested blind people.

#### A Legend and Its Longevity: The Quinze-Vingts and the Crusaders

In the late Middle Ages, a legend arose to give definition not only to Louis's motivation for founding the hospice but also to the number in its name (which represents nothing more than a system of counting by twenties, widely used in Old French and exemplified in the modern language by the term for 80, "quatre vingts."). A version of the legend first appears in written form in a letter from Pope Sixtus IV, dated October 7, 1483. The letter describes Jean d'Aigle (Johannis de Aquila), master of the Quinze-Vingts, presenting a petition on behalf of the hospice and provides this rather sketchy synopsis of the legendary incident.

... sanctus Ludovicus etiam Francorum rex, postquam cum magna militum et armigerorum multitudine ad partes infidelium, ut ab eorum manibus, adjuvante Altissimo, Terram Sanctam eripere posset, se transtulerat, et inimici crucis Christo multos ex eisdem militibus captivos detinuerant, et eos diversorum tormentorum generibus afflixerant, ac a tricentis ex militibus

hujusmodi oculos eruerant, et totaliter excecaverant...<sup>47</sup>  
[...after Louis, saint and king of France, conveyed himself with a great multitude of soldiers and arms-bearers to lands of the infidels in order to rescue the Holy Land from their hands, with the help of the Most High, [and] the enemies of the Cross of Christ detained many captives from those soldiers and afflicted them with types of diverse tortures, and they tore out the eyes of three hundred of those soldiers and totally blinded them...]

According to the letter Louis returned to France and erected the Hospice (which Sixtus wrongly says is named for him) in order to receive three hundred blind people of both sexes. This abbreviated form of the legend was reproduced in a papal bull granting indulgences to donors to the hospice, written by Alexander VI in 1500 and sent to all the bishops and prelates of France in order to obtain authorization for begging in all dioceses. Thus it was read in all the parishes of the country, and le Grand notes that if the indulgences were renewed annually, the legend would have received further repetition.<sup>48</sup>

Le Grand raised but then dismisses the possibility that d'Aigle, the first knight to serve as minister of the Quinze-Vingts, may have invented the legend in order to "ennoble" the foundation of the hospice; however, le Grand believed that d'Aigle's other charitable work, which was unaccompanied by stories of martial sacrifice, argues against this hypothesis. The legend received its first literary treatment in 1499 in Pierre Desrey's *Genealogie de Godefroy de Bouillon* (ca. 1499), a self-styled chronicle that also partakes of motifs from chansons de geste and romance; because it has not appeared in any modern edition, I will reproduce the story at length here. Louis, who has been captured by the Sultan of Babylon, has sent to France for his ransom. Although the sultan has not allowed the emissaries long enough to reach such a distant country, he is nevertheless angered by a delay in the arrival of the money.

...par faute de payer au terme qui luy estoit assigne:  
dist le soudan au roy saint loys: que pour chascun iour  
quil seroit deffaillant de la en avant: quil feroit  
crever les deux yeulx a vingt de ses chevaliers estant en  
prison avecques luy. Et tellement fist le dict souldan  
par la crudelite que lespace de quinze iours durant fist  
chascun iour crever les yeulx a XX chevaliers: quilz  
furent durant les dictz quinze jours: quinze vingts  
chevaliers: mais au chef de quinze jours luy survint  
aultre chose comme il sera dict. Porquoy il cessa de sa  
crudelite. Et quant le bon roy saint loys veit la pitie  
de ses pures chevaliers ainsi privez de lumiere  
corpor[e]lle: il fut moult dolent: combien que toujours  
louoit dieu en son adversite. Mais il luy estoit advis  
quilz estoient chez en cest occident par sa faute et

coulpe: par quoy il voua et promist a dieu denfaire satisfacion se son plaisir estoit de luy donner espace de vie. Et pour ceste cause fist il fonder lostel et hospital des quinze vingts aveuglez de Paris quant il fut retourne en france.<sup>49</sup>

[...for lack of payment in the term that had been given to him, the sultan said to the king Saint Louis that for every day that he defaulted from then on, he would put out the two eyes of twenty of his knights in prison with him. And thus did the said sultan in his cruelty, so that over the space of fifteen days, he had the eyes of twenty knights put out every day, and there were during the said fifteen days three hundred [fifteen twenties] knights. But at the end of fifteen days something else happened to him as it is said, because of which he ceased his cruelty. And when the good king Saint Louis saw the woe of his poor knights thus deprived of corporal light, he was very sad - so much so that he constantly praised God in his adversity. But he was advised that this accident had befallen them because of his fault and blame, for which he vowed and promised to God to do satisfaction for this if it were His pleasure to give him time in his life. And for this reason he caused the hostel and hospice of the Quinze-Vingts to be founded when he had returned to France.]

Desrey goes on to describe the pardons and indulgences granted to the institution by popes, and he concludes by stating that the institution is a daily reminder of the three hundred knights blinded "to sustain the honor of God and the holy Catholic faith."

In his *Fleurs des Antiquites de Paris* (1532), Gilles Corrozet does not include the elements of the ransom and the two-week delay, but his account states that the Quinze-Vingts was founded "to feed and house three hundred knights that [Louis] brought back from overseas, whose eyes had been put out by the Saracens" [...pour nourir et loger trois cens chevaliers qu'il ramena d'oultre-mer, ausquelz les Sarrazins avoient creve les yeux.]<sup>50</sup> Whether indebted to Desrey's account or another source, Corrozet's version eschews the lower-class "milites" of the papal bull in favor of higher-class "chevaliers."

Paintings relating to Louis in the chapel of the hospice attest to the complicity of the administration of the Quinze-Vingts in perpetuating the legend of the crusaders. When the hospice was moved from the rue Saint-Honore to its current location in the rue Charenton, the paintings were cleaned and restored by a certain Le Brun, who left a description of the works in a document dated August 4, 1780 and housed in the archives of the hospice.<sup>51</sup>

Quatre tableaux de Person, representant saint Louis qui rachote des prisonniers; le sacre de saint Louis; saint Louis recevant la couronne d'opine de l'Empereur Baudoin;

representant Soliman qui fait crever les yeux aux Captifs.<sup>52</sup>

[Four paintings by Person, representing Saint Louis who buys back the prisoners; the coronation of Saint Louis; Saint Louis receiving the crown of thorns from Emperor Baudoin; (a painting) representing Suleiman who had the eyes of the captives put out.]

Also in the archives, an undated description of the paintings lists the same subjects;<sup>53</sup> this document was written by one Poincelot, who was probably Le Brun's workman in charge of the project, according to one historian.<sup>54</sup> For visitors to the Quinze-Vingts, the paintings would have reinforced the validity of the legend, and the blind residents attending mass in the chapel would have learned of them from their sighted counterparts or from the sermons of the clerics assigned to the hospice. Le Grand cites historians who repeated the legend of the blinded crusaders from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth; the story became a part of institutional history.<sup>55</sup> Its longevity is attested by Abbot J.H.R. Prompsault, chaplain of the Quinze-Vingts from 1829 to 1855 and author of *Les Quinze-Vingts: notes et documents recueillis par feu l'abbe J.H.R. Prompsault*. As late as the 1860s he asserted that in spite of the protests of some historians, the Quinze-Vingts was founded in honor of three hundred blinded crusaders, though not as a residence for them.<sup>56</sup>

There are numerous reasons why the legend of the blinded crusaders cannot be true. In relation to the historiography of the sixth crusade, an incident of these proportions would not have escaped the attention of the French chronicler and eye-witness John of Joinville, whose description of Louis's captivity is quite detailed.<sup>57</sup> None of the early documents housed in the archives of the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts mentions crusaders, but several use the phrase "pauvres aveugles" [poor blind people], alluding to an economic status inappropriate to knights.<sup>58</sup> And most convincingly, papal bulls allowing the residents of the Quinze-Vingts to beg are among the earliest extant documents in the archives; however, knights would not have engaged in this activity.

The longevity of the legend shows that it was ideally suited to nearly every party interested in the Quinze-Vingts. Its dissemination can largely be credited to the popes, whose willingness to repeat the legend must have grown from its inclusion of the crusades in the foundational history of the Quinze-Vingts. Although Louis was the military leader of the crusaders, they were soldiers of the Cross, serving the Pope and the Church Militant; in the papal bulls the infidels are described not as Louis's enemies but as enemies of the Cross. Thus if the generosity of successive popes to the institution needed justification (perhaps before the bishops and parish priests), the legend offered it.

But while the legend undergirds the foundation with religion, it remains relatively true to Louis's negation of

the religious model of disability. The crusaders' blindness was clearly not due to their sinfulness - indeed, they were doing God's work - but rather due to the sinful sultan, an agent of anti-Christianity. And the tale obviates not only the need for but the possibility of miraculous cure: the crusaders' blindness would have been a badge of Christian martyrdom that promised a greater reward in the afterlife than mere sight during their earthly life. The social attitudes toward subsequent generations of residents of the Quinze-Vingts, the metonymic replacements of the crusaders, would have been at least partially structured by the narrative: they were good, deserving blind people, inheritors of largesse initially earned by crusading martyrs.

For the residents and administrators of the Quinze-Vingts, the legend displaced an aspect of the social model of disability - that impairment is simply a fact of life that requires no elaboration or justification - with a narrative that recasts disability as personal tragedy for each crusader. However, the story of group sacrifice in time of holy war demands a social response: the crusaders' blindness (and that of the later residents of the Quinze-Vingts) becomes a social responsibility, and inasmuch as any alms given to individual blind residents went to the collective of the hospice, only social responses were possible.

Guillaumat and Bailliart see the legend as valuable primarily for the residents of the hospice: the story is "an instrument of propaganda - today we would say a publicity coup - to increase the yield of begging."<sup>59</sup> However, they do not describe why the story should have this effect. While the legend "ennobles" the first generation of Quinze-Vingts residents, it concomitantly erases the history of discipline of impoverished disabled people from the foundation of the Quinze-Vingts by transforming the residents from a potentially unruly minority to privileged but maimed nobility. Instead of prefiguring Foucauldian discipline, then, the institution commemorates martial sacrifice, and in Corrozet's version, rewards it directly. People familiar with the hospice's unique self-government would presumably have understood it to have resulted from the high status of the original residents.

Inasmuch as the Crusades represented colonizing forays into Palestine, the narrative of the crusaders would have justified the project in light of the savagery of the Sultan of Babylon. It is noteworthy that the first secular publication of the legend took place at the beginning of the age of French expansion. During that period and the centuries that the legend was repeated by Prompsault and others, it gave the implicit message that the king would care for those who undertook the work of colonization.

The legend's link between nobility and France's martial prowess was exploited in the eighteenth century by aristocrats led by a Monsieur Duvernay who wanted to establish a military school for five hundred young nobles. Marquis Rene-Louis d'Argenson, Minister of Foreign Affairs under Louis XV, wrote in his journal entry for January 12, 1751 of how the tale was

deployed in order to justify military education based on class.

On parle aussi d'y appliquer la fondation des Quinze-Vingts, disant que Saint Louis ne l'avoit faite que pour des gentilshommes aveugles par les Sarrasins pendant la croisade, et qu'on l'a tres-mal appliquee e des pauvres aveugles roturiers.<sup>60</sup>

[They also talk about applying there the foundation of the Quinze-Vingts, saying that Saint Louis had done it only for the gentlemen blinded by the Saracens during the crusade, and that it was very poorly applied to poor blind commoners.]

For d'Argenson's contemporaries the supposed motivation for founding the Quinze-Vingts must be rescued from its current debased incarnation in order to serve as a model for future aristocratic institutions. D'Argenson's passing mention of the legend suggests that it was known to Parisians with no ostensible connection to the hospice.

The brief history outlined above shows some of the ways that Louis IX's innovative foundation, l'Hospice des Quinze-Vingts, made itself appear less innovative, both internally and externally, during the first centuries of its existence. The codification of de Brache's rules within a century of the foundation imposed a discipline within the institution that was carried by the residents into Paris and farther afield in France; if the rules of the institution were in some ways surprisingly liberal, the residents nevertheless showed themselves to be fully disciplined subjects, a fact doubtless appreciated by donors.

And Louis's reasons for founding the institution also acquired the veneer of religiosity through a legend with remarkable staying power. The tale not only aligns the institution more closely with the Church, making a gesture toward giving the Church discursive control over the meaning of blindness yet again, but during centuries of colonial expansion it also suggested that the king owed a special debt to those who served him. Thus an institution serving a particular set of social needs gains power by acquiring both social and historical significance well beyond its original history.

#### Endnotes

1. Holy Bible (Douay-Rheims Translation; Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1899).

2. Qtd. in "The Medieval Catholic Tradition," Darrel W. Amundsen, pp. 88-89, in *Caring and Curing: Health and Medicine in the Western Religious Traditions*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Darrel W. Amundsen (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

3. Qtd. in Dufournet, intro. to *Le Garton et l'Aveugle*, 53. Conrad also believed that the disability of lameness is a

punishment.

4. Amundsen, 86.

5. Ibid., 85

6. New York: New York University Press, 1998. p. 11.

7. I am not overlooking the existence of medicine and medical discourse in the Middle Ages; however, its lack of institutionalized power, exemplified most strongly by the fact that physicians did not treat the ill or disabled in hospitals, gives it minor importance in relation to larger social constructions of disability.

8. Linton, 2.

9. See *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 30-42; this chapter provides both a summary of Oliver's earlier theory and some elaboration upon it.

10. *Vie de Saint Louis*, 80.

11. Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Les Miracles de Saint Louis*, ed. Percival B. Fay (Paris: Honore Champion, 1932); 26, 153, 179-84 (Miracles LVIII bis. and LIX).

12. Louis's goal of disciplining particular groups of the urban poor is also evident in a slightly later foundation, the *Maison des Filles-Dieu*, which opened in 1260. According to Louis's chronicler Joinville, it served "a great number of women...who, because of poverty, had committed the sin of lechery." (Qtd. in Louis Guillaumat and Jean-Pierre Bailliart, *Les Quinze-Vingts de Paris: Echos Historiques du XIIIe au XXe Siecle* [n.l.: Societe Francophone d'Histoire de l'Ophthalmologie, 1998], 7). The *Quinze-Vingts* and the *Filles-Dieu* were seen as comparable institutions by at least one medieval artist, who depicted Louis founding both of them in a stained glass window in the church of *Sainte-Madeleine* in Troyes; see Phillip Lanthony and Paul Bonnin, "La fondation des Quinze-Vingts par Saint Louis dans un vitrail de Troyes," *L'ophtalmologie des origines a nos jours* (Annonay: Laboratoire Faure, 1983), vol. 4, p. 17-20.

13. Jean Dufournet, intro. to *Le Garton et l'Aveugle*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Champion, 1989), 66.

14. In a number of medieval European cities, licensed beggars wore identifying badges to differentiate them from unlicensed (and possible fully able-bodied) beggars; see Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 152. In the fifteenth century Charles VII again expelled beggars from Paris, and the decree mentioned specifically the simulation of corporeal infirmities as one of the reasons; see Jean Dufournet, intro. to *Le Garton et l'Aveugle*, ed. Mario Roques (Paris: Champion, 1989), 67.

15. Erik von Kraemer, *Le type du faux mendiant dans les litteratures romanes depuis le moyen Age jusqu'au XVIIe siecle* (*Societas Scientiarum Fennica: Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum XIII.6*; Helsingfors, 1944): see Part II, "Le mendiant aveugle et son valet dans les litteratures francaise et espagnole depuis le moyen Age jusqu'au XVIIe siecle," 41-83.

16. Guillaumat and Bailliart, 38-39.

17. Villey, 93.
18. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 138.
19. Roques, ed., Le Garton et L'Aveugle, 137. Roques includes a complete text of the rules of the hospice.
20. Guillaumat and Baillart, 12.
21. Guillaumat and Bailliart, 7.
22. Ibid., 17-21.
23. Ibid., 19.
24. Ibid., 20-21.
25. Ibid., 138, 147.
26. "Roglement donne aux Quinze-Vingts par Michel de Brache, aumsnier du roi Jean (1351-1355)," 137-47 in Le Garton et l'Aveugle, ed. Mario Roche.
27. Ibid., 140.
28. Ibid., 141.
29. Guillaumat and Bailliart, 39-40.
30. Ibid., 143-44.
31. "Les `Aveugleries' Medievaes," Cahiers d'histoire (Lyon) 29 (2-3), 1984: 97-118; p. 106.
32. Leon le Grand, "Les Quinze-Vingts depuis leur fondation jusqu'a leur translation au faubourg Saint-Antoine (XIIIe-XVIII siecle)," Memoires de la Societe de l'Histoire de Paris et de l'Ile-de-France, vols. 13 and 14; p. 115.
33. Guillaumat and Bailliart, 25; this source does not include earlier records of the number of residents.
34. Guillaumat and Bailliart, 37.
35. Doc. 388.
36. Doc. 390.
37. Doc. 391.
38. Doc. 393.
39. Doc. 395.
40. Doc. 392.
41. Doc. 404.
42. Doc. 408.
43. Doc. 409.
44. Docs. 410 and 411.
45. p. 37.
46. Ibid., p. 37.
47. Qtd. in le Grand, p. 117.
48. Ibid., 118.
49. Pierre Desrey, La genealogie avecques les gestes et nobles faitz darmes du trespreux et renomme prince Godeffroy de boullion... (Paris: Jehan Petit, 1504), pp. ?.ii.v and ?.iii.r. (This signature, which is designated by a symbol that resembles the Greek ?, follows the signature designated by "z.")
50. Le Fleur des Antiquitez, Singularitez, et excellences de la noble et triumpante ville et cite de Paris, Capitale du royaulme de France (Paris: ...la rue neufve nostre Dame a l'enseigne saint Nicolas, 1539), Section III, f. xxv, v.
51. A. de Montaiglon, "Tableaux de l'Eglise des Quinze-Vingts," in Revue de l'Art francais 6 (June 1886), 163-64.
52. Ibid., 165; quoted from doc. 6386., Archives des

Quinze-Vingts.

53. In Poincelot's list of seventeen paintings, number 8 is "Un tableau, representant Solimans, qui fait crever les yeut aux captifs Francais...de Person," and number 14 describes, "Un tableau representant saint Louy padant la ranton des captifs de Saladins." Doc. 5565, qtd. in de Montaiglon, 166-67.

54. Ibid., 164.

55. Le Grand, 115-16.

56. Carpentras: E. de Rolland (1863), 13.

57. Le Grand, 117.

58. Le Grand, 123.

59. 9.

60. Memoires et Journal Inedit du Marquis d'Argenson, ed. M. le Marquis d'Argenson (Paris: P. Jannet, 1868), vol. 4, p. 8.

Editor's Note: Due to technical problems in changing the manuscript from one word processing format to another and sometimes back to the original one, non-English letters were often mistransliterated. The Editor regrets this unavoidable result.