

Are they monsters or entertainment?

The position of the disabled in the Roman Empire.

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Introduction

One of the most beautiful and important days in the life of parents is the birth of their child. They are unable to contain their excitement because they will meet the 'perfect' product of their love. They will love it no matter what or will they? What if they find out their child is not 'perfect', but perhaps disabled?

According to the first World Report on Disability from the World Health Organisation (WHO) from 2011 15% of the current world population has a disability.¹ Disabilities are a part of the human condition. "Almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life and those who survive to old age will experience increasing difficulties in functioning."² In our modern age we are able to help those who are born with or because of an accident become disabled. But what about those unfortunate disabled who lived in the Roman Empire where hygiene and medical science were less developed and many people who were disabled perished at birth or had to live with their condition without the help of modern science. What exactly is the definition of a disability? According to the WHO:

Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.

Disability is thus not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers.

People with disabilities (...) may experience a narrower margin of health, both because of poverty and social exclusion.³

The birth of a disabled child was regarded by the Romans as a great misfortune. A high percentage of disabled children were abandoned outdoors immediately after birth and left to die, because many Romans felt it was pointless to prolong lives that

¹ WHO (World Health Organization), *World report on disability* (Geneva 2011) 4.

² Ibidem 3.

³ WHO, <http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/>, 28-12-2016.

would prove to be a practical and financial burden on the rest of the family. Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote about the laws made by the founder of Rome, which mentioned the birth of a disabled child:

In the first place, he obliged the inhabitants to bring up all their male children and the first-born of the females, and forbade them to destroy any children under three years of age unless they were maimed or monstrous from their very birth. These he did not forbid their parents to expose, provided they first showed them to their five nearest neighbours [sic] and these also approved. Against those who disobeyed this law he fixed various penalties, including the confiscation of half their property.⁴

Roman religion also encouraged parents to 'expose' their offspring. Just as physical fitness and health were believed to be signs of the gods' favor, so was disability a mark of the gods' displeasure.

Why write about disabilities and not use or mention impairment? "In antiquity there was no clear distinction between deformity and a disability nor were there any precise Greek or Latin equivalents to these modern designations."⁵ In this essay the term disability will be used. The choice of using the term disability instead of impairment also needs an explanation. The term disability refers to the social aspect of the condition where impairment refers to a biological and physical comparison between people with the same condition. A Roman blind man and a modern day American blind man have the same impairment, but they do not have the same disability.⁶

According to the report of the WHO a negative attitude towards disability can result in negative treatment of people with disabilities.⁷ This means that even in our modern age there is still a problem.

With the term disability the focus is on a bodily handicap and not a mental handicap. Mental handicaps are not included in the WHO report on disabilities from 2011. To control the size of this research mental illnesses and illnesses which are temporarily by nature will not be mentioned. In the ancient diagnoses of doctors it is not always certain if the illness of a patient was only temporarily by nature or a

⁴ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman antiquities* 2.15.2 (transl. E. Cary, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1937) 354-355).

⁵ L. Trentin, 'Deformity in the Roman imperial court' *Greece and Rome* 58.2 (2011) 195-208, at 195.

⁶ C. Laes, *Beperkt? Gehandicapt en in het Romeinse rijk* (Leuven 2014) 17.

⁷ WHO, *World report on disability*, 6.

mental illness. This makes it difficult to look at mental disabilities as part of this research. On the other side, dwarfs are mentioned in this thesis, but in the Roman times they were not seen as disabled.

Another distinction that needs to be made is the difference between being born with a disability and becoming disabled after a certain event in someone's life; an accident, getting hurt in a war, as the result of a sickness and other events after one's birth which could result in a person becoming disabled. Both types of disability will be used in this thesis to investigate disabilities in the Roman Empire.

Ancient Roman disabilities

According to Christian Laes there are differences between our modern categorization of disabilities and the categorizations of the ancient Roman Empire. If the modern categorization was used in the ancient Roman Empire there would have been more disabilities in the Roman Empire.⁸

Laes explains this by stating that in the modern society incurable diseases, bone fractures which have not been taken care of and infections are seen as disabilities or handicaps, which the Romans did not see as disabilities.⁹

In the Latin language there are multiple words to describe a crippled or blind man, but the Romans did not have a single word to describe the disabled. When looking for a definition a reoccurring term used by the Romans was *ostentum* (monster).

What happened if a disabled child was born? Christian Laes and other historians, such as Woods and Parkin, use modern *Life Tables* which are calculations that simulate the life expectancy of the Industrial age to determine the mass child death in ancient Rome.¹⁰ A *Life Table* is a mathematical table which shows, for each age and gender, what the probability is that a person of that age and gender would die at a yet unknown point of his or her life. An example would be: "What is the probability that a man aged 30 years will survive to his retirement age?"¹¹ Even though the historians may disagree on the exact percentage of children dying before

⁸ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 15.

⁹ *Ibidem* 15.

¹⁰ R. Woods, 'Ancient and early modern mortality: experience and understanding' *Economic History Review* 60, 2(2007) 373-399, T. Parkin, 'Life cycle' in: M. Harlow and R. Laurence (eds.) *A cultural history of childhood and family in antiquity* (Oxford 2010) 97-114, 199-201, at 112-113, Laes, *Beperkt?*, 35.

¹¹ K. Namboodiri and C.M. Suchindran, *Life table techniques and their applications* (London 1987) 2.

the age of ten, they all agree that ancient Roman parents saw their children die at a frequent rate.¹²

The result of the *Life Table* is a mass child death, because of the large amount of poor citizens. From the estimated 60 million Roman citizens, 40 million were to have been poor according to Laes. Many children were abandoned at birth and were left to be found, because their parents were poor or did not want to take care of a disabled child. Laes goes as far as to suggest that one out of three women within the Roman Empire had left her child, disabled or not, to be found by others.¹³

After all that, as mentioned before, the Roman law recorded in the Twelve Tables from the fifth century B.C.E. even stated that parents had to kill their disabled children.¹⁴

But there were survivors. How else do the different ancient sources and archaeological evidence show the presence of disabled citizens and slaves. Reasons for letting the disabled child live could be multiple. The disability was not apparent at birth, the child is their only heir or perhaps they saw the child as a gift from the gods. The child could also be sold as a slave.¹⁵

Latin literature contains numerous references to disabled slaves. While some slaves were discarded as soon as they had developed an impairment and were no longer useful, others were regarded as a highly desirable status symbol. No fashionable household was complete, it seems, without a few hunchbacks, dwarfs and lame people in its midst. However, at the same time others had less positive ideas about people with disabilities. Plutarch wasn't a doctor or physician, but a historian and philosopher. In one of his works *Moralia* he describes the disabled as being a prized possession.

Therefore just as at Rome there are some who take no account of paintings or statues or even, by Heaven, of the beauty of the boys and women for sale, but haunt the *monster-market*, examining those who have no calves, or are weasel-armed, or have three eyes, or ostrich-heads, and searching to learn whether there has been born some commingled shape and misformed prodigy.¹⁶

¹² Laes, *Beperkt?*, 35.

¹³ Ibidem 36.

¹⁴ Lucilius, *The twelve tables* 4.3.

¹⁵ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 39-40.

¹⁶ Plutarch, *Moralia* 520C (transl. W. C. Helmbold, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1939) 500-501).

Soranus of Ephesus was a Greek physician in the 1st and 2nd century C.E. who worked in Alexandria and Rome. Soranus wrote medical books and one of those was *Gynaecology*. In it Soranus wrote that not every child was worth raising. There were tests one could do in order to check if a child had any undesirable qualities or if they were disabled.¹⁷

By the fact that it has been born at the due time, best at the end of nine months, and if it so happens later; but also after only seven months. Furthermore by the fact that when put on the earth it immediately cries with proper vigor; for one that lives for some length of time without crying, or cries but weakly, is suspected of behaving so on account of some unfavorable condition. Also by the fact that it is perfect in all its parts, members and senses; that its ducts, namely of the ears, nose, pharynx, urethra, anus are free from obstruction; that the natural functions of every (member) are neither sluggish nor weak; that the joints bend and stretch; that it has due size and shape and is properly sensitive in every respect. This we may recognize from pressing the fingers against the surface of the body, for it is natural to suffer pain from everything that pricks and squeezes. And by conditions contrary to those mentioned, the infant not worth rearing is recognized.¹⁸

With both the citations taken from Plutarch and Soranus, it is clear that among the Romans there were different definitions about when one was disabled and what needed to be done with them. Were they a prized possession or needed the disabled to be killed at birth? This made for an interesting question. The WHO adds to this question with the following statement.

Environments – physical, social, and attitudinal – can either disable people with impairments or foster their participation and inclusion. The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) stipulates the importance of interventions to improve access to different domains of the environment including buildings and roads, transportation, information, and communication. These domains are interconnected – people with disabilities

¹⁷ O. Temkin, *Soranus' Gynecology* (London 1956) 79-80.

¹⁸ *Ibidem* 79-80.

will not be able to benefit fully from improvements in one domain if the others remain inaccessible.¹⁹

Problems with the physical environments are for example, a curb without a curb cut or a ramp, which make the mobility of a person from point A to point B impossible.²⁰

The social aspect of environments is the way the we as a society stigmatize those with a disability. In the eyes of their social group they are seen as less capable and therefor are excluded from activities. In the modern era this should no longer be an issue.²¹

The final environment, attitudinal, is meant to describe that negative attitudes towards the disabled can produce non-physical barriers, which can give feelings of insecurity and even not being able to feel safe. To overcome the ignorance and prejudice surrounding disability within society, education and awareness-raising is required according to the WHO.²²

The debate and main question

Lisa Trentin wrote that disabled individuals were displayed for popular entertainment in ancient Rome as a part of an established tradition in the Roman culture of displaying the anomalous bodies of humans and animals.²³ If this is true, why was there a Roman law recorded in the Twelve Tables from the fifth century B.C.E. that required parents to kill their disabled children?²⁴

Why were the disabled treasured by some, but murdered by others? According to Lisa Trentin “over the past two decades the study of deformity and disability in the ancient world has stimulated intense scholarly debate.”²⁵

This *disability history* is not a new way of examining history, as historians agree on, but it did however change.²⁶ It started, because the sociologist named David Johnstone wanted to change the perception of the disabled. The disabled “are

¹⁹ WHO, *World report on disability*, 169.

²⁰ Ibidem 169.

²¹ Ibidem 169.

²² Ibidem 169.

²³ Trentin, ‘Deformity in the Roman imperial court’, 197.

²⁴ N. Kelley, ‘Deformity and disability in Greece and Rome’ in: J. Schipper, J.S. Melcher and H. Avalos (eds.) *This abled body: Rethinking in Biblical studies* (Atlanta 2007) 31-46, at 38-39.

²⁵ Trentin, ‘Deformity in the Roman imperial court’, 195.

²⁶ C. Laes, C.F. Goodey and M.L. Rose, *Disabilities in Roman antiquity. Disparate bodies a Capita ad Calcem* (Leiden 2013) 3-4.

either pathetic victims, arch villains or heroes. The stereotype of the disabled child is either that of the brave little lost boy/girl overcoming personal tragedy, or of the scheming malcontent determined to take revenge on society for the misfortune that has befallen him/her.”²⁷ Different organizations tried to help the disabled without a medicalized approach and as a result *disability history* came to exist.

In the 1980’s this type of disability history research focused on “complex interactions among cultural values, social organization, public policy and professional practice regarding people with impairments.”²⁸ In the 1990’s the current type of research developed, focusing on the concept of otherness.

Disability studies has [sic] been able to contribute to our understanding of the way western [sic] cultures constructed hierarchy, social order and (as ‘progress’) the process of social change.²⁹

That did not mean however, that historians had to agree with each other’s descriptions of this understanding. As an example of the debate the Roman god Vulcan will be examined. He was a god who was born disabled and at a certain point tried to defuse tension between his father and mother by playing the part of a wine steward at a feast and the other gods laughed at Vulcan. Walter Burkert³⁰ and Christopher G. Brown³¹ both agree that the gods laughed with Vulcan, rather than at him, because Vulcan intended to provoke the laughter. Nicole Kelley, author of *Deformity and disability in Greece and Rome* uses the story of Vulcan as a way of explaining that “congenitally deformed infants were not rejected as often as the extant literary evidence might suggest at first glance.”³² Nicole Kelley shows by analyzing different ancient sources, that more career options were available to the disabled than literary representations might imply.³³ Martha Lynn Rose argues that the reason for the surviving material not mentioning a physically handicapped person earning a living, because it had not been a remarkable sight. A person was

²⁷ D. Johnstone, *Further opportunities: Learning difficulties and disabilities in further education* (London 1995) 5.

²⁸ Laes, Goodey and Rose, *Disabilities in Roman antiquity*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibidem* 4.

³⁰ W. Burkert, *Greek religion* (Cambridge 1985) 168.

³¹ C. G. Brown, ‘Ares, Aphrodite. and the laughter of the Gods’ *Phoenix* 43.4 (1989) 283-293, at 290-291.

³² Kelley, ‘Deformity and disability in Greece and Rome’, 45.

³³ *Ibidem* 41.

characterized in ancient literature by his or her “permanent physical characteristics”³⁴ as they established a person’s identity. Rose mentions multiple examples in her book, such as Odysseus his limp or Oedipus his pierced ankles. She concludes by stating that the economic outlook of the disabled was not bleak or characterized by the dependence on friends and family.³⁵ “A physically handicapped person earning a living would not have been a remarkable sight.”³⁶

These aforementioned historians tried to argue the fact that disabled, were not shunned or murdered, but that they too had a role within the Roman society.

There are however historians who disagree with them. The most prominent one among them was Robert Garland. According to Garland the gods mocked Vulcan, laughed at him not with him.³⁷ In both interpretations Vulcan is a source of entertainment for others, but Burkert and Brown state that his social position was not a part of the laughter. Garland also states that in the antiquity people believed impairments were associated with lack of self-discipline and the abandonment of other important virtues.³⁸

Christian Laes can more be seen as the middle ground between the two sides. It depended on the type of disability and their heritage if a person was able to obtain a position within society. In his book *Beperkt. Gehandicaptten in het Romeinse rijk* Laes argues that even in the Roman era there was a difference made between being called a man a monster or a handicapped person and the stages in between. He describes it as that everyone will admit that beards exist and that facial hair exists, but how much facial hair does one need for it to be called a beard?³⁹ Laes agrees partially with Garland and writes in his conclusion that three words that described the thoughts of Romans about the monstrous or disabled. These three were shame, fear and intrigue.

I find myself also more pulled towards the middle ground, but I do not agree with the last statement of Laes in which he stated that fear played a large role in the acceptance of the disabled. It would have concluded in more sources mentioning this fear and less sources written with the goal of ridicule and derision.

³⁴ M.L. Rose, *The staff of Oedipus: Transforming disability in Ancient Greece* (Michigan 2003) 39.

³⁵ Ibidem 39-40.

³⁶ Ibidem 39.

³⁷ R. Garland, *In the eye of the Beholder* (New York 1995) 79.

³⁸ Ibidem 29.

³⁹ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 19.

The main question this thesis will focus on is: What was the position of the disabled within the Roman Empire? In trying to answer this question there will be five different sub questions which will each have their own chapter.

First, an attempt will be made to create a definition of the different disabilities within this thesis. What exactly is a disability and were the disabilities mentioned within this thesis the same in the Roman era as they are known now?

Secondly, sources and literature will be examined to see if the disabled were able to play a positive part within society and thus create a position for themselves within society as entertainers?

The third chapter will focus itself on the Roman religion and the parts disabled had within this religious context.

Next in the fourth chapter the daily lives of the disabled in the Roman Empire will be discussed. How did their daily lives look like in the Roman Empire? What other jobs could the disabled participate in and how dependent were they on their family?

At the end, in the fifth chapter, the most negative sources and literature, like emperor Claudius who was called a monster by his own mother, will be examined. These sources illustrate the negatives of the treatment and social position of the disabled in the Roman Empire.

This thesis focusses on the position of the disabled and the aforementioned physical, social, and attitudinal environments will be taken in account with each of the four disabilities, because it will show the consideration of the Romans for the disabled.

Geographical and chronological demarcation

The geographical and chronological demarcation in this essay should be explained to its readers. The Greco-Roman world around 600 B.C.E. will be the start in time where the Romans were confronted with written texts on the disabled. Stories of the disabled Greek god Hephaistos or the blind Homer. The Romans used these stories as models for their own gods and myths. The end will be the year 313 A.D. with the Edict of Milan of emperor Constantine the Great. This year has been chosen because of the many changes Christianity brought to the way with which the disabled were taken care of. Christian authors wrote that every living being and that the disabled, just like themselves, were a creation of God and should be treated as such. They created hospitals and places to take care of the disabled. Sources writing about the

disabled grow exponentially during in the late antiquity.⁴⁰ The focus of this essay will be on the period before the Christian interference, but comparisons might be made with earlier or later sources to prove a certain point.

The Roman Empire covered the earth from the deserts in the south of Egypt to the south of the Rhine in the Netherlands, from the corners of Britannia to modern day Iraq.⁴¹ According to Laes, it is impossible to do justice to geographical diversity, because all ancient authors exclusively focus on the Hellenistic-Roman culture.⁴² As stated before, social interactions and culture determines what is considered a disability. When confronted with a cultural difference between to different locations within the Roman Empire, concerning the treatment of a disabled person, this will be examined. Examples of treatment outside of the Roman Empire will only be used as an example.

Use of sources

The main source of information will be written sources. Problems are to be expected when working with ancient sources. Disabled people were seldom mentioned in most of the ancient literature and if they were, the type of disability they had was not mentioned. One of the other main problems that could be encountered, is the fact that within these sources, the disabled were not used to show a social relationship between a master and his disabled slave, but rather on the implications of their representation.⁴³ These texts focus on how disabled slaves within the imperial house could say something about a good or bad emperor. This, however, does not interfere with this thesis. This thesis is about the status of the disabled slaves within the Roman Empire. Even though the disabled were used in a satirical way to portray a certain view of a Roman emperor or citizen, it still shows how the author of that particular source viewed the disabled and thus still provides the necessary information.

⁴⁰ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 24-25.

⁴¹ *Ibidem* 24-25.

⁴² *Ibidem* 25.

⁴³ Trentin, 'Deformity in the Roman imperial court', 196.

Chapter 1. The definition of disabled

In this chapter the four different disabilities, which are the center of attention within this thesis, will be described. First, a modern description of the disability will be given. It is important to define what the Roman culture, perceived and defined as disabled and therefor secondly there will be some evidence of ancient sources, such as literature to proof that these types of disability match the modern descriptions.

Dwarfs

What exactly does it mean for someone to be a dwarf? Véronique Dasen discusses clinical dwarfism, which she describes as “a condition characterized by a significantly short stature, over three standard deviations below the mean height of a population of the same age and sex.”⁴⁴

Restricted growth is the medical term for dwarfism. But what is dwarfism? According to the Little People of America (LPA) group, dwarfism is defined “as an adult height that is below 4 feet 10 inches (147 cm) and the average height among individuals with dwarfism is 4 feet (122 cm).”⁴⁵

There are more than 200 different disorders that can result in restricted growth and the symptoms vary between each individual diagnosed. These 200 different disorders are categorized between two different forms of dwarfism. The first is Proportionate Short Stature (PSS), which as a result of abnormal bone growth, results in an overall disproportionate short stature and lack of growth. The majority of those who have dwarfism have Disproportionate Short Stature (DSS) which is mostly caused by *achondroplasia*.⁴⁶

Proportionate Short Stature (PSS): A person diagnosed with Proportionate Short Stature has a body that in its entirety is in proportions only shortened. Disorders that are the cause of PSS are growth hormone deficiency or genetics by having small parents.⁴⁷

Disproportionate Short Stature (DSS): If PSS is compared with DSS, some body parts are larger than a non-disabled person, while other body parts are smaller.

⁴⁴ V. Dasen, *Dwarfs in ancient Egypt and Greece* (Oxford 1993) 7.

⁴⁵ D. Bostwick and J. Crimaldi, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:bBvxTdc3PSkJ:psyc.jmu.edu/school/documents/GrowthHormoneDeficiency_Dwarfism_.pdf+&cd=1&hl=nl&ct=clnk&gl=nl, 05-01-2017.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

Most people who have Disproportionate Short Stature have an average sized trunk and have smaller limbs, in some occasions the opposite had taken place. Also their head may be larger compared with their body size.⁴⁸

“As individuals who fell outside the prevailing norms of society, dwarfs were often regarded as prodigies in antiquity: living amulets as well as instruments of private and public entertainment.”⁴⁹

The Roman culture had a certain fascination with height. Being tall was a positive attribute. “It suggested power and attractiveness in men, dignity and beauty in woman.”⁵⁰ The gods, who were the embodiment of perfection, are mostly described as tall.

The poet Statius describes a gladiator battle in the Amphitheatrum Flavium fought by a group of dwarfs, who are playing the role of pygmies. First they had to fight each other and in the second phase they had to fight the natural enemies of pygmies, cranes. They were imitating a famous battle from the *Iliad* written by Homer in which pygmies and cranes are mentioned.⁵¹ This is what Statius wrote about the gladiator fight:

Then comes a bold array of dwarfs,
Whose term of growth abruptly ended has
Bound them once for all into a knotted lump.
They give and suffer wounds,
And threaten death – with fists how tiny!
Father Mars and Bloodstained Valor laugh
And cranes, waiting to swoop on scattered booty,
Marvel at the fiercer pugilists.⁵²

Within this example and others which will be used within this thesis, the Romans do not differentiate between Proportionate Short Stature and Disproportionate Short Stature. Whenever there is a description of the disability dwarfism both PSS and DSS

⁴⁸ D. Bostwick and J. Crimaldi, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:bBvxTdc3PSkJ:psyc.jmu.edu/school/documents/GrowthHormoneDeficiency_Dwarfism_.pdf+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=en, visited on 03-01-2017.

⁴⁹ M. Garmaise, *Studies in the representation of dwarfs in Hellenistic and Roman art* (Hamilton 1996) iii.

⁵⁰ Ibidem 17.

⁵¹ Homer, *Iliad* 3. 1-8.

⁵² Statius, *Silvae* 1.6. 57-64 (transl. D.R.S. Baily, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 2015) 90-94).

could equally be what the source material is describing. This thesis will therefore only mention the disability dwarfism as a whole and not differentiate.

Blind

According to the WHO, 285 million people currently have a visual handicap in the world. Of those 285 million, 39 million are completely blind and 246 million have low vision. 90% of those with a visual handicap live in third world countries where bad health care and contagious diseases are the most common reasons for the high number of people with a visual handicap. The WHO categorizes the status of a person his or her ability to see in; 'normal view', 'moderate visual impairment', 'severe visual impairment' and 'blindness', the 'moderate visual impairment' and 'severe visual impairment' are known as 'low vision'. Even if one is able to see a little, they are sometimes labelled under the category of 'blindness.' The WHO also states that only 1% of the adults who are categorized as blind are born blind. In third world countries this average is estimated to be higher.⁵³

What are these modern percentages able to tell us about the Roman Empire? Comparing numbers is a risky undertaking. The numbers given from the WHO research do not reflect the Roman Empire, because the current world population gets older, 65% of those with a visual handicap are 50 years or older.⁵⁴ The average life expectancy at birth of the population of the Roman Empire as a whole was in the range of 20 to 30 years.⁵⁵ But what about the situation the citizens had to live in in the Roman Empire? Are we able to compare this to third world countries? Some of the eye disorders known in third world countries caused by infections are suspected to have existed in ancient times.

According to the WHO Trachoma is the leading infectious cause of blindness worldwide. It is caused by an obligate intracellular bacterium called *Chlamydia trachomatis*. The infection is transmitted through contact with eye and nose discharge of infected people. It is also spread by flies that have been in contact with the eyes and noses of infected people.⁵⁶

Environmental risk factors influencing the transmission of the disease include; poor hygiene, crowded households, water shortage and inadequate latrines and

⁵³ WHO, <http://www.who.int/topics/blindness/en/>, 28-12-2016.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ T.G. Parkin, *Old age in the Roman world: a cultural and social history* (Baltimore 2003) 49.

⁵⁶ WHO, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs382/en/>, 28-12-2016.

sanitation facilities. Overall, Africa remains the most affected continent.⁵⁷ There are references within the ancient literature, Plutarch and Herodian, both of them write about more than 50% casualties by diseases within their army.⁵⁸

What did it mean in ancient times to be blind? According to Laes there were about 150 different Latin and Greek terms describing blindness. Blindness and having a troubled view got a lot of attention in ancient literature.⁵⁹ The amount of different terms did not mean there was not a single and complete definition of what it meant to be blind. Aristotle defined blindness (*tuphlos*) as a complete lack of view. Laes goes as far as describing the difference between the Latin words *caecitudo* and *caecitas*, as written by the 7th century writer Isidorus of Sevilla.⁶⁰ *Caecitudo* described temporal lack of sight, caused by an infection, for example. *Caecitas* meant blindness as a permanent handicap.⁶¹ Other forms of partial blindness due to Cyclopic malformation, also known as *synophthalmia*. It is a rare birth defect, currently 1 in 16.000 born animals and 1 in 200 miscarries fetuses.⁶² This is a condition where one or both eyes is grown near or at the foot of the nose.⁶³ Another reason why one would lose sight could have been an accident or at war. For this essay I will agree with Aristotle and I will focus on the complete lack of sight when researching blindness.

Lame

In the World Report on Disability made by the WHO, issues around mobility take an important place in the report.⁶⁴ In a world where everything needs to go fast and everybody is in a hurry in their daily lives, it is clear why the WHO sees this as an important issue.

Measurements of activity and participation outcomes assess the individual's performance across a range of areas – including communication, mobility, self-care, education, work and employment, and quality of life.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ WHO, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs382/en/>, 28-12-2016.

⁵⁸ Herodian, *History of the Empire* 3. 9. 5-6, Plutarch, *The life of Antony* 50.

⁵⁹ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 99.

⁶⁰ Ibidem 99.

⁶¹ Ibidem 99.

⁶² A.M. Leroi, *Mutants: on genetic variety and the human body* (New York 2005) 73.

⁶³ Garland, *In the eye*, 7.

⁶⁴ WHO, *World report on disability*, 24.

⁶⁵ Ibidem 97.

What exactly does it mean to be lame? Lameness is known was another description of a mobility disability. There are multiple medical diagnoses which can be seen as a mobility impairments: clubfoot, incurable bone fractures, (born) lameness, malnutrition, missing limbs through birth or an amputation caused by an accident.⁶⁶

How can the information given by the WHO translate to the Roman Empire? The largest number of the disabled in the Roman Empire consisted of the lame. What does it mean to be lame? What made the Romans call someone lame? According to Garland, the lame are unable to walk without difficulty as the result of an injury or birth defection affecting the leg(s) or foot (feet). What different terms are known in Roman Latin to describe someone with a mobility impairment. In Latin exists *mancus* and *claudus* which both mean cripple, *trancus* which means mutilated, *scaurus* translates to clubfoot and *valgus* means crooked-legged.⁶⁷ There are a multitude of these terms within Latin, but both Laes⁶⁸ and H. Horstmanshoff, author of *Klein gebrek geen bezwaar. Over de klompvoet in de oudheid* describe the difficulty for a complete list within the Latin Lexica.⁶⁹

It is therefore important to keep an eye on the context in the interpretation and not to read the word meaning. We should also note that the terms in antique texts are sometimes used in a vague, ambiguous manner or that the deviations are considered from a different frontal position than usual. Thorough lexicographic research is desired here.⁷⁰

Did the Romans have a word for mobility problems? According to Laes all known Latin terms describing mobility handicaps could be categorized in three categories. First there are those who are completely unable to move because they are paralyzed, which means they would be unable to work.

An example of this was written about by Pliny the Younger. *In a letter to Rufinus*, Pliny wrote about Tullus, a rich and paralyzed Roman citizen.

⁶⁶ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 167.

⁶⁷ Ibidem 167.

⁶⁸ Ibidem 167-168.

⁶⁹ M. Horstmanshoff, 'Klein gebrek geen bezwaar. Over de klompvoet in de oudheid,' *Lampas, tijdschrift voor de classici* 46.2 (2013) 203-221, at 205-206.

⁷⁰ The author of this thesis made this translation. Original text found in: Horstmanshoff, 'Klein gebrek geen bezwaar', 209.

He had so entirely lost the use of all his limbs that he could not move himself in bed without assistance; and the only enjoyment he had of his riches was to contemplate them. He was even (sad and disgusting to relate) reduced to the necessity of having his teeth washed and scrubbed by others: in allusion to which he used frequently to say, when he was complaining of the indignities which his infirmities obliged him to suffer, that he was every day compelled to lick his servant's fingers.⁷¹

Secondly, there are those who are in a constant pain throughout their body which also makes them unable to function in a work environment. Finally there are those who were able to move strangely through their disability, but became the center of mockery.⁷² Within this essay the focus will be on those who were able to function within the Roman society, even though they had a mobility impairment, but also those who were unable to do so.

Hunchback

What exactly is a hunchback? The identity of a hunchback is recognizable, because a hump on the back of a person is the most prominent physical feature.⁷³

The medical term of having a hunched back is *Kyphosis*, which comes from the Greek word *Kyphos*. *Kyphos* translates to having a hump. It is a condition with which the spine in the upper back of the body starts to curve. The human body is supposed to have an upper back with a small natural curve, with the emphasis on small, around the ranging from 20° to 45°. To help absorb shock and to support the weight of the head, the human spine curves naturally in the neck, the upper back and the lower back. When this arch is larger than the natural arch, the before mentioned range of 20° to 45°, someone is diagnosed with *Kyphosis*.⁷⁴

People who have *Kyphosis*, have a visible hump on their upper back. When they are looked at from the side, their upper back may be noticeably rounded or protruding. To the unknown eye they appear to be slouching and have a noticeable rounding of their shoulders.⁷⁵

Not only does someone's physical appearance change, as the arch in the upper spine increases it can lead to extra pressure on the spine, which as a result

⁷¹ Pliny the Younger, *Letters* XCII (transl. B. Radice, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1969) 52-57).

⁷² Laes, *Beperkt?*, 99.

⁷³ L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 16.

⁷⁴ A. E. Gabbey, <http://www.healthline.com/symptom/kyphosis>, 12-01-2017.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

causes pain. This extra pressure may also result in *Kyphosis* causing difficulty to breath by creating extra pressure on the longs.⁷⁶

People of all ages can be affected by *Kyphosis*. The most common cause of *Kyphosis* is having a bad posture, which is called postural *kyphosis*. Other causes of *Kyphosis* are: aging (combined with having a bad posture), the muscles in the upper back are too weak, spine injuries and slipped spine discs can also cause *Kyphosis*, Scheuermann's disease, Polio and tumors can result in *Kyphosis* and finally birth defects can result in the spine growing wrong within the fetus.⁷⁷

According to Lisa Trentin, even though "corporeal deformity and physical disability has become a topical theme of study"⁷⁸ the hunchback has received relatively little scholarly attention, resulting in a gap that needs to be filled.⁷⁹ This overlook stems from the fact that, in Trentin's opinion, scholars seem to group hunchbacks together with other representations of physical deformities such as dwarfs.

Within the ancient literature there are no reasons given for why someone became a hunchback, they just are. So within this thesis, the cause of *Kyphosis* will not be analyzed, only if someone had it and what position they had within the Roman society.

He did not even refrain from gibes at men of distinction; for when he was still obscure and was giving testimony in a crowded court-room, being asked by Varro, the advocate on the other side, what he did and what his profession was, he replied: "I remove hunchbacks from the sun into the shade." Now Murena was hunchbacked.⁸⁰

Suetonius wrote this about Lucius Orbilius Pupillus, a Latin grammarian who taught at a school in Rome. It is clear that Lucius was mocking his own profession with this statement, but it also meant that hunchbacks were a common sight within the city of Rome.

Another example has only recently been discovered. A new discovery was made in an ancient Roman Necropolis called Torrenueva in the south of Spain, near

⁷⁶ A. E. Gabbey, <http://www.healthline.com/symptom/kyphosis>, 12-01-2017.

⁷⁷ Ibidem.

⁷⁸ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 1.

⁷⁹ Ibidem 1.

⁸⁰ Suetonius, *Grammarians* 9. 8-9 (transl. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1914) 394-395).

Granada. The remains of a young man, who has lived around the late 3rd century or early 4th century CE have been discovered by archaeologists. This young man had suffered a condition known as Scheuermann's disease. This disease resulted in giving the young man a hunchback. The skeleton of the young man was discovered in 2008 in the Roman Necropolis, but the results of its study are now published in an article⁸¹ '*Hunchback of Torrenueva*' unearthed in Roman cemetery in southern Spain written by Léa Surugue and published in the International Journal of Paleopathology.⁸²

Conclusion

With this chapter it has become clear that in our modern age, disabilities have been analyzed and researched in such a way that we are unable to label a person with a umbrella term such as dwarfism and blindness. There are a lot more different types of a certain disability distinguished than in ancient times. But the definitions of the four disabilities that are the center of this thesis have been analyzed and it is clear what should be searched for within the archaeological evidence and ancient literature, such as terracotta figures with a hunchback or the description of the dwarfish slave of emperor August by Pliny the Elder.

A point of interest within the following chapters will be the three different environments mentioned before. Physical environments to show if the Romans made changes within the physical world to help the disabled.

The social aspect of environments to see if the disabled were seen as less capable and were excluded from certain activities.

The attitudinal environment shows if there were negative attitudes towards the disabled which made it impossible for them to function within the Roman society.

These three will be used throughout the other chapters to show how the social environment accepted the disabled and will return for a complete analyses within the final conclusion.

⁸¹ L. Surugue, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/hunchback-torrenueva-uneearthed-roman-cemetery-southern-spain-1622094>, 17-05-2017.

⁸² J. Viciano, S. López-Lázaro, Á. Pérez-Fernández, A. Amores-Ampuero, R. D'Anastasio and J. M. Jiménez-Triguero, 'Scheuermann's disease in a juvenile male from the late Roman necropolis of Torrenueva (3rd–4th century CE, Granada, Spain)', *International Journal of Paleopathology* 85 (2017) 239-240.

Chapter 2. The disabled as entertainers

As with the term 'disabled', which had to be defined within this research, so too does the term 'entertainment.' What makes someone an entertainer? Does it require the entertainer to make the audience laugh, either being paid to do so or out of his own personal gain? Does it require a stage with a large audience or could it also be just the entertainer and a single target who wanted to be entertained?

Even though freeborn Romans looked at waged labor with revulsion, this was not true for the disabled. For both the freeborn and enslaved disabled, entertainment was the most lucrative form of employment for the talented among this minority. As archaeological evidence, statuettes and vase-paintings depicting dwarfs, hunchbacks and obese women, show that the disabled were in high demand as singers, dancers, musicians, jugglers and clowns.⁸³

What is the definition of an entertainer. The modern definition is: something affording pleasure, diversion, or amusement, especially a performance of some kind.⁸⁴ With this definition in mind, what different kinds of entertainment can be recognized in the ancient Roman era? According to E. Togo Salmon Papers I, the Roman era, such as modern society offers a lot of ways of making money. One way to become rich is and was to perform on stage. Besides being paid, there are other benefits in show business. Male and female actors, dancers, or singers could also profit from sexual relationships.⁸⁵

The four types of entertainers described by E. Togo Salmon Papers I will be used within this chapter to see if different groups of the disabled were able to get a profession within the entertainment business. These four types are; actors, dancers, singers and sexual pleasures.

Within these four types of entertainment there will also be a selection made between the different groups of disabled. The four groups that are distinctively different from each other are; Dwarfs, the blind, the lame and hunchbacks.

These four are chosen, because there are multiple representations of them within archaeological evidence and literary evidence. Each of these four groups will

⁸³ Garland, *In the eye*, 32-33.

⁸⁴ Dictionary.com, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/entertainment>, 10-04-2017.

⁸⁵ W.J. Slater, *Roman Theater and society* (Michigan 1996) 29.

each have their own subchapter and in these subchapters the four different kinds of entertainment will be discussed if there are any representations of them.

An example of this is written by the satirist Lucian. He describes a man called Satyrion, who was a clown. Satyrion was described as an ugly, unshaven little fellow with only a few hairs on his head. Satyrion his act was “dancing by bending himself double and twisting about as to appear more ridiculous, and beat time while delivering ribald verses in an Egyptian accent, and ended up mocking the guests.”⁸⁶

Lucian was known for writing parody, but according to Gardner there is “hardly doubt that clowns were chosen in part for their ugly and misshapen appearance.”⁸⁷ This influences the attitudinal environment for those disabled with a misshapen appearance, because they would have been unable to remove the given stigma from themselves, according to M.L. Rose. Rose states that a disability, in this case an ugly and misshapen appearance, was part of a person’s character trait.⁸⁸

Displaying deformed individuals for the amusement of those who are not, can be disturbing for modern readers, but do not forget that this phenomenon still existed in the modern era and were known as ‘Freak shows’.⁸⁹ These shows consist of new ‘freaks’ such as Siamese twins, bearded ladies and living skeletons.⁹⁰ During the twentieth century, medicalizing human abnormalities made the ‘freak shows’ end.⁹¹

Several ancient authors, such as Cicero and Quintilian, suggested that the deformed were funny to look at. They each stated that the deformed were the ideal targets for ridicule and derision.⁹² This, according to Lisa Trentin, is the reason why the deformed individuals became performers and entertainers onwards from as early as the Hellenistic period.⁹³

Trentin writes that by making the hunchback and the dwarf a permanent medium in the Roman society, by creating mosaics, wall paintings, and statuettes, it created a space for hunchbacks to live in among the ‘normal-bodied’.⁹⁴ These ‘miniature hunchbacks’ functioned as a stimuli among the Roman citizens, to change

⁸⁶ Lucian, *The carousal (Symposium)* 18 (transl. A.M. Harmon, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1913) 432-433).

⁸⁷ Garland, *In the eye*, 33.

⁸⁸ Rose, *The staff of Oedipus*, 39.

⁸⁹ R. Bogden, *Freak shows. Presenting human oddities for amusement and profit* (Chicago 1988) 67.

⁹⁰ Trentin, ‘Deformity in the Roman imperial court’, 208.

⁹¹ Bogden, *Freak shows*, 67.

⁹² Cicero, *De oratore* 2.239, Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*. 6.3.7-18.

⁹³ Trentin, ‘Deformity in the Roman imperial court’, 202.

⁹⁴ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 92.

their attitude and promote conversations about the place in society not only the deformed, but all bodies should be given.

As for deformed slaves, a great example would be Clessipus, who was a deformed slave, who was given as a gift, when his mistress bought a chandelier from his former master. More on Clessipus in the subchapter of the hunchbacks.⁹⁵

Dwarfs: actors, dancers, singers and sexual pleasures

According to Michael Garmaise, dwarfs were used as entertainment for wealthy households and their guests, but also for public audiences. Ancient literature and archaeological evidence shows that the main proficiency for dwarfs was their ability to entertain.⁹⁶ “They were reciters, dancers, musicians and mimes; ceremonial performers for religious cults; household pets and confidants; attendants at symposium and they worked at a circus.”⁹⁷ Dwarfs could also be boxers and gladiators.⁹⁸ Dwarfs as entertainers were depicted in a lot of different types of archaeological evidence, such as lead paintings, bronze, knife handles, hanging charms, on vases and lamps, but could also be displayed as the vases and lamps.⁹⁹

Lisa Trentin wrote that another reason why the deformed became entertainers was because displaying the deformed body was popular entertainment in ancient Rome. It was part of a tradition of displaying the anomalous body of both human and animals in Roman culture.¹⁰⁰ In Augustan Rome the emperor was a benefactor to show anomalous bodies to the populace.¹⁰¹ Suetonius has written that emperor Augustus himself “shunned dwarfs, the deformed, and all things of that kind as evil omened mockeries of nature.”¹⁰² However, other sources like Pliny the Elder, show us that even the great emperor Augustus owned a deformed Jester named Gabba, and once gifted his granddaughter with a dwarf names Conopas.¹⁰³

Suetonius wrote that emperor Augustus despised the disabled because of the omens they brought with them.¹⁰⁴ More on this attitude in chapter two. He must have

⁹⁵ Trentin, ‘Deformity in the Roman imperial court’, 206.

⁹⁶ Garmaise, *Studies in the representation of dwarfs*, 173.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem* 173.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem* 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem* 1-2.

¹⁰⁰ Trentin, ‘Deformity in the Roman imperial court’, 197, Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 89-90.

¹⁰¹ Trentin, ‘Deformity in the Roman imperial court’, 197.

¹⁰² Suetonius, *The defied Augustus* 83 (transl. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1914) 248-251).

¹⁰³ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7.75.

¹⁰⁴ Suetonius, *The defied Augustus* 83.

had some fascination for the deformed, because emperor Augustus let a dwarf called Lycius perform in the theatre. Lycius was not only a dwarf, but had a very deep singing voice. According to Suetonius, emperor Augustus chose to let Lycius perform out of a desire to show him to the public. Lycius came from Lycia and from a good family. Lucius is an example of a dwarf who entertained and was not made a slave.¹⁰⁵

Emperor Augustus his daughter, Julia Caesaris maior, had a slave called Andromeda. She was the, at that time, smallest known woman and was eventually released by Julia maior.¹⁰⁶ The granddaughter of emperor Augustus, Vipsania Julia Agrippina, had a slave who was the smallest man known at that time, which was named Conopas. The Loeb classical Library translates the text of Pliny as though Conopas was the pet (*deliciae*) of Vipsania Julia.¹⁰⁷ Pliny does not describe Conopas as a slave, but describes him more as a possession, which probably meant he was a slave.

Other Roman emperors also had dwarfs as entertainers at the imperial court. The emperor who succeeded Augustus, emperor Tiberius, had multiple dwarfs who served as court jesters.¹⁰⁸ Gaius Suetonius Tranquilus was a biographer and was known as the protégé of Pliny the Young. Suetonius was known for writing gossip within his books, but because of his prestige, it is plausible this gossip was based on true events. Suetonius wrote of what an ex-consul encountered at a dinner-party of emperor Tiberius:

Tiberius was suddenly asked in a loud voice by one of the dwarfs that stood beside the table among the jesters why Paconius, who was charged with treason, remained so long alive; that the emperor at the time chided him for his saucy tongue, but a few days later wrote to the senate to decide as soon as possible about the execution of Paconius.¹⁰⁹

Another Roman emperor, who was interested in human curiosities was emperor Nero.¹¹⁰ Emperor Nero had a dwarf named Vatinius living at the imperial court.

¹⁰⁵ Suetonius, *The defied Augustus* 83.

¹⁰⁶ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 6.130.

¹⁰⁷ H. Rackman, *Pliny Natural History* Vol. II (Cambridge 1942) 555.

¹⁰⁸ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61.

¹⁰⁹ Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61 (transl. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1913) 380-381).

¹¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annales* 15.34.2.

Vatinius was born to be a shoemaker, but emperor Nero wanted him to become an entertainer at the court.¹¹¹

The man was one of the most conspicuously infamous sights in the imperial court, bred, as he had been, in a shoemaker's shop, of a deformed person and vulgar wit, originally introduced as a butt. After a time he grew so powerful by accusing all the best men, that in influence, wealth, and ability to injure, he was pre-eminent even in that bad company.¹¹²

Vatinius is also mentioned in other classical literature. Tacitus mentioned Vatinius in his other work, *Dialogus de oratoribus* and Martial wrote about him in *Spectacula*.¹¹³

Each new Roman emperor had to satisfy the needs of the Roman citizens. To earn the trust and loyalty of the people, he had to entertain them with spectacles even larger than those of his predecessors, or at least not smaller than them. One of those emperors who had to solve this problem, was emperor Domitian, who was emperor of the Roman Empire from 81 to 96 C.E. Emperor Domitian wanted to appease the fascination of his people with the unknown and the *monstra*. The wealthy Romans, had started to 'collect' disabled slaves and were prepared to pay a higher price for deformed slaves than they would physically perfect slaves.¹¹⁴

This statement contradicts Laes his statement that the Romans feared the disabled, the Romans preferred them over a normal bodied slave and with this I agree.

Emperor Domition had to find some new way to entertain his people and according to Lucius Cassius Dio, he did. Emperor Domition would organize gladiatorial fights at night and would have dwarfs and women fight each other.¹¹⁵

Dwarfs trained in the Roman Empire as boxers and the sport *pankration*, and could be hired for demonstrations of these sports. Pankration was a sport in which athletes used both boxing and wrestling techniques, but the athletes were also able

¹¹¹ Tacitus, *Annales* 15.34.2.

¹¹² Ibidem (transl. J. Jackson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1937) 266-267).

¹¹³ Tacitus, *Dialogus de oratoribus* 11, Martial, *Spectacula* 14.96.

¹¹⁴ S. Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine history and society* (Abingdon 2008) 27-28.

¹¹⁵ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 67.8.4.

to use other fighting techniques, such as kicking and holds, locks and chokes on the ground. Only biting and gouging the opponent's eyes out was forbidden.¹¹⁶

As archaeological evidence there were representations found of boxing dwarfs in small figurines. The terracotta figurines, found in different places within the Roman Empire, suggest that boxing or dancing dwarfs existed in both the Hellenistic and Roman era. This became the standardization of portraying dwarfs and would be partially responsible for the growing role of dwarfs as entertainers within the eyes of the Roman citizens.¹¹⁷

The terracotta figurines were intended for general consumption and for its creation the creators gained their inspiration from the entertainment world.¹¹⁸

According to Brunet, the artists made figurines or portraits of dwarfs look like they would have during a boxing match or when dancing, because the artists thought their customers would recognize them this way as dwarfs.¹¹⁹

Brunet goes against the opinions of other historians who argued that the terracotta figurines were meant as caricatures of boxers which were 'normal' in size.¹²⁰

As an example Brunet shows a figurine of a bronze made dwarf from around 25-50 C.E. The dwarf figurine had *caesti*, which were ancient boxing gloves, and a leather helmet, which was used to prevent boxers from pulling each other's hair. With the detailed execution of the figurine Brunet believes that the artist did not want to ridicule boxers, but wanted to give a truthful representation of a boozing dwarf.¹²¹

Rose her argument that a disability was seen as a character trait does not work when the size of the terracotta figure itself removes this character trait (example dwarfs being small) and thus a profession was seen as a character trade.¹²²

Within a thesis from Michael Garmaise for the MC Master University, he created a corpus of figurines depicting dwarfs from the Hellenistic and Roman era. In total there were 185 representations and of those there were 95 which depicted dwarfs as dancers and musicians. Another 80 were seen as the category of fighters

¹¹⁶ A.V. Georgiou, 'What is Pankration and what are the Qualities of a Pankration Fighter?' in: R.W. Young (ed.), *Black Belt Magazine* 46.4 (2008) 92-97, at 92.

¹¹⁷ S. Brunet, 'Dwarf Athletes in the Roman Empire,' *Ancient History Bulletin* 17 (2003)17-32, at 23.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem* 24.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem* 17.

¹²⁰ C. Blümel, *Sport der Hellenen: Ausstellung griechischer bildwerke* (Berlijn 1936) 130.

¹²¹ Brunet, 'Dwarf Athletes in the Roman Empire', 17.

¹²² Rose, *The staff of Oedipus*, 39.

according to Garmaise, but with certainty 30 were boozing dwarfs, because they carried *caesti*.¹²³

Also according to Brunet, a one- on one match with dwarfs within the arena would have made it look rather empty, he suggests that it would have been more plausible for a larger number to have had fought at the same time. This also comes from a text written by Publius Papinius Statius which will be discussed more in chapter 4. Publius Papinius Statius did not write how many Dwarfs fought, but Brunet states it could have been as much as 50 to even 100 professional boxers in the arena.¹²⁴

To summarize there is evidence of dwarfs who performed as singers, dancers and actors. What about sexual pleasures? Disabled slaves were also ideal targets for sexual use. In some households they were expected to be constantly available to satisfy the sexual demands of their owners.¹²⁵ The granddaughter of emperor Augustus, Vipsania Julia Agrippina, slave was referred to as her *deliciae*. As mentioned before the Loeb Classical Library translates this as pet, but Michele George translates it in her book as:

Deliciae were a form of luxury goods, specially selected child slaves often from Alexandria (or advertised as such) who were bought and kept by elite as a kind of pet. (...) Given the sexual undertone that suffuses much of the textual evidence for *deliciae*, carnal pleasures must be acknowledged as a possible aspect of the appeal of representations of young children. Sexual abuse by masters and slaves, including slave children, was not only permissible but regarded as normal in the Roman era.¹²⁶

I disagree with the use of the word abuse by Michele George. Even though it may be viewed as such by our modern standards, it is unclear if these slaves experienced it as abuse. Therefore, we must avoid using our modern judgement on such situations. I would describe it as that it means that the possibility remains that slaves who were dwarfs could be used for sexual pleasures.

¹²³ Garmaise, *Studies in the representation of dwarfs*, 56-113.

¹²⁴ Brunet, 'Dwarf Athletes in the Roman Empire', 25.

¹²⁵ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7.75.

¹²⁶ M. George, *Roman slavery and Roman material culture* (London 2013) 209-210.

The blind: actors, dancers, singers and sexual pleasures

There were those among the disabled who found an art form which was not the subject of ridicule among the Romans. The blind had a few options within entertainment, such as becoming a bard, seer, poet or musician.¹²⁷ Garland describes blindness as an essential attribute of a poet in ancient times according to popular imagination.¹²⁸ Garland compares this to our modern blind blues singers, such as Blind Blake and Blind Boy Fuller.¹²⁹ Even though Garland describes blindness as an essential attribute, Chad Hartsock writes that only very few examples can be found to substantiate the claim.¹³⁰ Hartsock describes Homer as the “quintessential blind poet.”¹³¹ A Greek philosopher named Dio Chrysostom, who was banished from Rome by emperor Domitianus, thought that blindness was not unique to Homer, but that all poets should be blind. “Moreover, all the poets are blind, and they do not believe it is possible for anyone to become a poet otherwise”.¹³² Dio Chrysostom also claims that all bards were blind, because of Homer and his likeness.¹³³ As mentioned before, Garland wrote that blindness was a prerequisite “at least in popular imagination”¹³⁴ and thus creating a social environment in which only the blind could work.

Hartsock disagrees with Garland, because the only two known blind poets was the before mentioned Homer and Xenokritos of Lokri, who according to both Garland and Hartsock, was “rather insignificant.”¹³⁵

The blind also were qualified as choir singers in the temple and funerary feasts. They were also entertainers for the elite by playing the harp or singing.¹³⁶ According to Aylward Blackman, they were even preferred above other entertainers, because the blind were less likely to seduce the women whom they were meant to entertain.¹³⁷ In some archaeological evidence the blindness of musician may be symbolic, as it is meant to represent the piety of the musician. As an example Dasen

¹²⁷ Garland, *In the eye*, 33.

¹²⁸ Ibidem 33.

¹²⁹ Ibidem 33.

¹³⁰ C. Hartsock, *Sight and blindness in Luke-acts: The use of physical features in characterization* (Leiden 2008) 78.

¹³¹ Ibidem 78.

¹³² Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 36.10.10 (transl. J.W. Cohoon and H.L. Crosby, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1940) 430-431).

¹³³ Ibidem 432-433.

¹³⁴ Garland, *In the eye*, 33.

¹³⁵ Hartsock, *Sight and blindness in Luke-acts*, 78.

¹³⁶ Dasen, *Dwarfs in ancient Egypt and Greece*, 102.

¹³⁷ A.M. Blackman, *The rock tombs of Meir* (London 1915) 12-13.

mentions a tomb at which the diseased is depicted in one scene as blind playing music to two deities and in the next has regained his eyesight.¹³⁸

To conclude this part about the blind the observation must be made that no remaining literature or archaeological evidence about the sexual pleasures the blind performed among the Romans or any known evidence of adjustments having been made to theaters to help the blind within the physical world currently exists.

The lame: actors, dancers, singers and sexual pleasures

The lame had no role in entertainment within the Roman Empire as far as current known ancient literature and archaeological evidence can describe. There were other professions more suited for the lame and those will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4. This could show that the social and attitudinal environment towards the lame excluded them from being able to work within entertainment, but if this was true and the Romans liked to ridicule the lame, why not mention the suffering of them wanting to be entertainers within their texts? As stated before Cicero and Quintilian stated that the deformed were the ideal targets for ridicule and derision.¹³⁹

Hunchbacks: actors, dancers, singers and sexual pleasures

In her book *The hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman art* Lisa Trentin writes that as the same as with Dwarfs, Hunchback were “represented in a variety of ways; such as mosaic floors, statues and necklaces.”¹⁴⁰

The most compelling piece of evidence to show that hunchbacks were entertainers, was found in a Roman villa in the Rhône Valley, from the first century CE, in the shape of a small bronze vase.

¹³⁸ Dasen, *Dwarfs in ancient Egypt and Greece*, 102.

¹³⁹ Cicero, *De oratore* 2.239, Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*. 6.3.7-18.

¹⁴⁰ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 48.

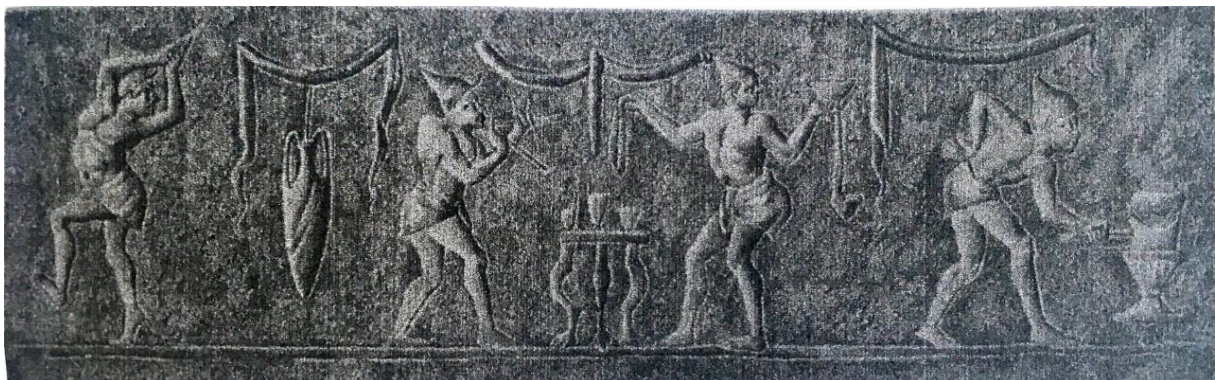


Egyptian styled vase

Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 115.

The central panel depicts a feast with four deformed individuals, amongst whom is a hunchback, dressed in loincloths and pointed caps, the outfit for clowning and foreign entertainers.¹⁴¹ The overall decoration of the vase, with its Egyptianizing theme, was meant to remind both slave and master of their place in the Empire, where there was a defined hierarchy. “Thus the hunchback’s position as an entertainer, especially when represented in a miniature sculpture, but also in a small-scale relief painting, became symbolic of his domestication.”¹⁴²



Detail of the central panel of the bronze vase from Rhône Valley

Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 115.

¹⁴¹ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 48.

¹⁴² *Ibidem* 50.

At the representation from the vase painting found at the Roman villa in the Rhône Valley, the hunchback is not alone. Accompanied by three dwarf figures and the four of them all are dressed similarly. They appear to be performing at a feast. The hunchback appears to be “part of an entertaining group.”¹⁴³

Among the archaeological evidence categorized as portraying hunchbacks, there was a small group of representations of hunchbacks dancing, consisting of statuettes, wall paintings and a mosaic pavement.¹⁴⁴ In two of these representations the dancing figures also carry rhythm sticks. In ancient representations the rhythm sticks appear with dancing figures.¹⁴⁵ Rhythm sticks (*idiophone*) are an instrument that creates sound by vibrating the instrument as a whole. It is used to mark rhythm and it is used to emphasize the poses from the dancers. The first representation is a sketch made by F. Carelli, who excavated the ruins of Herculaneum which was found in the kingdom of Naples (Italy).



Sketch of multiple Hunchbacks in a boat mosaic

Found in F. Carelli, *Le antichità di Ercolano eposte* (Naples 1779) 299.

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 114.

¹⁴³ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 18.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem* 18.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem* 18.



Hunchback with rhythm sticks mosaic

Hatay Arkeoloji Müzesi, Antakya

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 114.

One of the most repeated poses among dancing figures on vase paintings and in sculptures was the turning of a figure's head, looking over its shoulder and thus distinguishing if a figure is dancing.

With the rise of a new art form called *Mimus* and *Pantomimus* (mime), which originated in Sicily, a new career path opened up for ugly and deformed entertainers, since some mimes appear to have relied exclusively on facial and other peculiarities, rather than on masks and makeup, for dramatic effect.¹⁴⁶ The Greco-Roman mime was not as the modern reader knows it, the Roman version stressed mimetic action but included song and spoken dialogue. The *pantomimus* wore various masks, which identified the characters but deprived him of speech and of the use of facial expressions. Thus his art was primarily one of posture and gesture, in which hand movements were particularly expressive and important.¹⁴⁷

A discussion that has been going for more than a 100 years among historians which is that the actors who were mimes, actually were all deformed. When archaeological evidence has been found of mimes, their bodies are also misshapen, when mimes should only need to relay on their masks. The first historian to point this

¹⁴⁶ J. Masségla, *Body language in Hellenistic art and society* (Oxford 2015) 317.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem 318.

out was Gisela M.A. Richter¹⁴⁸, who used a statuette from the Metropolitan museum in New York to prove his point. The person depicted in the statuette is a hunchback whose feet are also larger and out of proportion.



Statuette of a hunchback

Metropolitan museum, New York

Found in G.M.A. Richter, 'Grotesques and the mime,' *American journal of archaeology* vol. 17, no.2. (1913) 150.

Another historian who supported Richter was Margarete Bieber, author of *The sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*. In it she states: "The actors of the farce were often people with abnormally ugly bodies, extremely lean and small or excessively tall or fat for comic contrast."¹⁴⁹ In more recent and modern studies, Jane Masségli, agrees with Richter, but not for Richter her use of archaeological evidence, which Masségli disagrees with, but because of its plausibility. "Of course, we cannot discount the possibility that some of the figures discussed here depict professional mimes. Alongside dancers and musicians, it is highly plausible mode of employment for the physically disabled or deformed."¹⁵⁰ That is also the opinion of the author of this thesis. If the disabled played parts in all other forms of entertainment, it does stand to reason that pantomime would be an obvious inclusion to their possibilities within the entertainment branch.

It seems that singing was not one of the many ways Hunchbacks were able to entertain their own or their masters guests. There are no, currently known,

¹⁴⁸ G.M.A. Richter, 'Grotesques and the mime,' *American Journal of Archaeology* 17.2 (1913) 149-156, at 154.

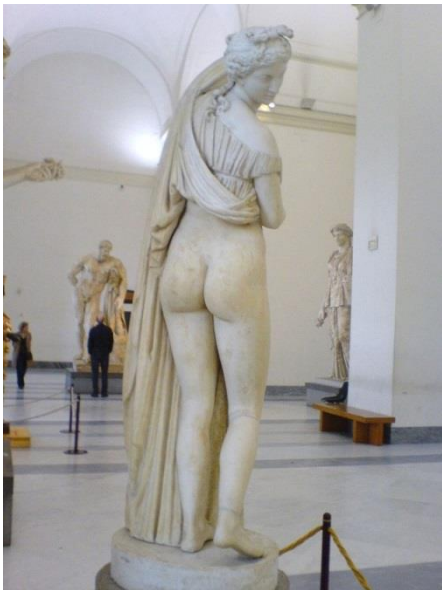
¹⁴⁹ M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age* (New York 1961) 248.

¹⁵⁰ Masségli, *Body language*, 318.

descriptions in Latin literature or depictions in archaeological evidence of singing hunchbacks. But that was not why they were interesting to the Roman citizens. Their hump was what made them unique, characterized them according to Rose¹⁵¹ and even made them sexual appealing.

Perhaps the most striking case was that of the slave Clessipus who is described by Pliny as “an ugly hunchback”. When a rich woman called Gegania decided to buy an expensive Corinthian chandelier for the enormous sum of 50,000 sesterces, the auctioneer threw in Clessipus as well so she purchased both as a job lot. Gegania exhibited him at parties, ordering him to parade naked for the enjoyment of her assembled guests. However, she also fell passionately in love with him and changed her will to his advantage. On her death, Clessipus inherited his mistress’s vast fortune.¹⁵² Clessipus does appear again in Roman texts, but the second time as an inscription from a tomb dedicated to by the freedman Clessipus Gaganus.¹⁵³

Another example is when Trentin tries to compare hunchbacks painted on vases with Venus, the goddess of sex and sexual love.¹⁵⁴ Main example of this is the Venus Callipyge, “Venus of the beautiful buttocks.”¹⁵⁵



A statue of the Goddess Venus with naked buttocks

National Archaeological Museum, Naples

Found on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_Callipyge, visited on 03-05-2017

¹⁵¹ Rose, *The staff of Oedipus*, 39-40.

¹⁵² Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 34.6.

¹⁵³ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 69.

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem 22.

¹⁵⁵ N. Clarck, *Aphrodite and Venus in myth and mimesis* (Cambridge 2015) 19.

In this statue of the goddess, she displays herself as a sexual object. “The goddess is depicted semi-exposed; although she wears a long garment to conceal her body, she lifts it up and away from herself to reveal her bared buttocks, a movement which causes her right shoulder strap to fall, exposing part of her right breast, thus further heightening her sexual attraction. Looking back over her right shoulder and admiring her own bottom, she leads the viewer’s gaze there too, and thus invites him/her to admire it also.”¹⁵⁶

The dancing hunchback takes a similar pose as Venus, drawing attention to his most outstanding physical feature, the hump on his back. By looking at his own hump, the hunchback tries to make the viewer admire it too. Perhaps in the same erotic way as the goddess? Added are three examples of statuettes which depict a hunchback looking over its shoulder at its own hump.



Bronze statuettes of dancing hunchbacks

Bardo National Museum, Tunis

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 23.

The story of Clessipus and multiple representations within Roman art and literature truly suggests that deformity had an erotic appeal in ancient Rome. Although any

¹⁵⁶ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 22.

slave had to be submitted to the sexual demands of his or her master, it seems it was common in Latin literature to accuse wealthy woman of using deformed slaves for their sexual pleasures.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

According to Soranus his work *Gynaecology*, disabled babies were not meant to be raised. With all the examples given within this Chapter it is clear that the disabled were raised and were able to become more than just beggars on the streets of Rome.

There was a place within the Roman society created especially for the deformed as the interest of the Roman society for these curiosities grew. It grew even to such a size, that the emperors saw the need to entertain their guests and the Roman citizens with a display of the deformed.

Archaeological evidence and written sources seem both to contain proof that their where some among the deformed to be successful and even gave advise to the Roman emperors at the imperial court.

The entertainment business was especially good to those of the disabled whose bodies made them the focus of attention. Both the dwarfs and the hunchbacks were the embodiment of entertainment within physical representations of parties and theatres in mosaic floors and wall paintings, vase paintings, statuettes and charms.

There was no known change made within the physical environment of the disabled to help them, but within the attitude and social environment, it is clear that an exclusive spot was created for the disabled and their experiences.

In the next chapter the religious aspects of the lives of the deformed will be discussed.

¹⁵⁷ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 69.

Chapter 3. Mythology and representations

Each of the four aforementioned disabilities will be looked at within the context of religion. Within a pantheon which allows new gods to be added frequently, the Romans did not have a god specifically for the disabled. There were gods seen as doctors, such as Vediovis, but he was only able to cure diseases. There were disabled gods such as Bes. With the conquering of Egypt, the Roman pantheon grew with new gods, or new iterations of old gods. One of them was the Egyptian dwarf god Bes, “he has dwarfish proportions, with short bent limbs, a head-dress of feathers, and a lion’s mane and tail.”¹⁵⁸ To the Romans, Bes was an oracular god, because of the power Bes had over the spirits of the night. Visitors would sleep in the temple in the hopes of receiving an oracular dream.¹⁵⁹ The most prominent elements within the Roman religion that features disability was mythology and the fire god Vulcan. This Roman god Vulcan and the Greek god Hephaistus are both different and the same. This thesis focusses on the Roman era and gods, but the origin of the god Hephaistus has been copied by the Romans for their god Vulcan and thusly their origin stories are almost identical.

Vulcan was the fire-god and god of volcanos, he was a divine smith and gifted crafter who could give life to inanimate objects. He is the only god who has a profession as the humans he helped create. In contrast to the other immortals who are distinguished by their physical beauty, Vulcan is crippled, because one of his feet is limp and he was considered ugly even by his own mother. The myths surrounding Hephaistus and thus also Vulcan are among the earliest writings in the Western poetic tradition related to disability.¹⁶⁰

Why did a Roman god (or Greek god for that matter) need to have a disability? The gods where meant to be the physical embodiment of perfection. Historians have created multiple theories surrounding this question. Garland also tries to answer this question by explaining as if it was a compensation. Vulcans’ lameness was compensated for by a special gift. This gift was that Vulcan had the power “to infuse life into inanimate materials and forge armor of incomparable excellence.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 55.

¹⁵⁹ Ibidem 76.

¹⁶⁰ C. Kerényi, *The gods of the Greeks* (1974 London) 150-160.

¹⁶¹ Garland, *In the eye*, 61.

But how did this fire-god became disabled, at birth or because of an accident? The classical literature all mentioned that Vulcan was thrown down from Mt. Olympus. According to Homer in the *Iliad*, Vulcan his lameness is non-congenital, caused by his fall from Mt. Olympus.¹⁶²

Hera was angry and spoke thus among the assembled gods : “. . . See now, apart from me he [Zeus] has given birth to bright-eyed Athene who is foremost among all the blessed gods. But my son Hephaistos whom I bare was weakly among all the blessed gods and shrivelled of foot, a shame and a disgrace to me in heaven, whom I myself took in my hands and cast out so that he fell in the great sea. But silver foot Thetis the daughter of Nereus took and cared for him with her sisters: would that she had done other service to the blessed gods!”¹⁶³

According to Hesiod, Vulcan was born from Juno without the goddess having intercourse with Jupiter. She did this because she was envious of the solo creation of Minerva by Jupiter. She sought to compete with her husband and give birth to a glorious son who could rival the bright-eyed goddess.¹⁶⁴ According to Garland this story could have been created, to avoid insulting Jupiter by making him the father of a cripple.¹⁶⁵

Juno her rejection of her crippled son was a response which could have been normal to an average Roman mother who had discovered she had given birth to a disabled child. The Roman mothers had the option of killing their own child or leaving it to be found, but Juno had no such option.¹⁶⁶ She tried to get rid of Vulcan by throwing him off the mountain (in some iterations, in others it was Jupiter who threw Vulcan off the mountain). The only problem for Juno being that her son was immortal and could not be killed. The other gods had to bring him back among them, despite Vulcan his “inferior status as an artisan.”¹⁶⁷

The god Vulcan was not alone in his underground volcanic workshop within the volcano Mt. Etna. He was assisted at the forge by different disabled figures. This race of mythical smiths are set apart by some physical defects. Vulcan has

¹⁶² Homer, *Iliad* 1.600.

¹⁶³ Homeric Hymn, *To Apollo* 310 (transl. A.T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1924) 94-95).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem* 310.

¹⁶⁵ Garland, *In the eye*, 62.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem* 63.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem* 63.

metalworkers and miners who are depicted as dwarfs. He also had giant one-eyed Cyclopes who did the heavy lifting.¹⁶⁸ According to Garland this natural kinship between disabled persons, exists irrespective of the type of disability these persons have.¹⁶⁹

As mentioned before there exists a disagreement among historians about the role Vulcan had among the other gods. Burkert¹⁷⁰ and Brown¹⁷¹ both agree that the gods laughed with Vulcan, rather than at him, because Vulcan intended to provoke the laughter. But Garland disagrees with Burkert and Brown. According to Garland the gods mocked Vulcan. Laughing at him not with him.¹⁷² In both interpretations Vulcan is a source of entertainment for others, but Burkert and Brown show that his social position was not a part of the laughter. But if we follow Garland his statement, how were the disabled supposed to fare any better within the harshness of the Roman society?

Why use mythology as a source of information for this thesis? N. Kelley describes this as follows: "Though these accounts are obviously mythological in nature, they did point us towards an interesting set of issues: what attitudes did the Greeks and Romans have toward congenitally deformed infants, and what did they do with them?"¹⁷³

Religious life

The Roman gods existed of flawless beauty and it is only understandable that the Romans thought that the victims which were offered in sacrifice had to be perfect and without blemishes.¹⁷⁴ Priests also had to undergo strict regulations. The before mentioned Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote that the founder of Rome, Romulus, wanted bodily perfection above the priesthoods to be bought or assigning it by lot.

He would not allow the priesthoods to be either purchased for money or assigned by lot, but made a law that each curia should choose two men over fifty years of age, of

¹⁶⁸ Homeric Hymn, *To Apollo* 46-79.

¹⁶⁹ Garland, *In the eye*, 63.

¹⁷⁰ Burkert, *Greek religion*, 168.

¹⁷¹ Brown, 'Ares, Aphrodite. and the laughter of the Gods', 283-293.

¹⁷² Garland, *In the eye*, 79.

¹⁷³ Kelley, 'Deformity and disability in Greece and Rome', 36.

¹⁷⁴ Garland, *In the eye*, 63-64.

distinguished birth and exceptional merit, of competent fortune, and without any bodily defects.¹⁷⁵

Another example of bodily perfection were the qualifications one had to meet in becoming a Vestal Virgin.

Those who have written about "taking" a Vestal Virgin, of whom the most painstaking is Antistius Labeo, have stated that it is unlawful for a girl to be chosen who is less than six, or more than ten, years old; she must also have both father and mother living; she must be free too from any impediment in her speech, must not have impaired hearing, or be marked by any other bodily defect; she must not herself have been freed from paternal control, nor her father before her, even if her father is still living and she is under the control of her grandfather; neither one nor both of her parents may have been slaves or engaged in mean occupations.¹⁷⁶

These requirements reflect the care and precision with which the tasks of the priests and Vestal Virgins needed to be done, if even a speech or hearing defect could result in a ritual gone wrong.¹⁷⁷ Garland goes even as far as stating that "it would hardly be surprising if the more distressing cases were excluded from participation in the processions and festivals which were such a prominent feature in the civic life of ancient communities in order not to offend the gods."¹⁷⁸ This is a clear reference to the social environment which stated that exclusion was a way of stigmatizing the disabled. If the disabled were to be excluded, than why, for example, was there a blind Vestal Virgin?¹⁷⁹

Dwarfs: Positive omens, negative omens

What the Romans truly feared, was revealed with the practice of the state religion and its many rites, but also with the individuals practice of magic by so called magicians. The rituals of the state religion were used to protect themselves against all that threatened life. Examples were illness, infertility, war and even death. Clarke gives the example of when the Romans experienced the threat of famine, because of

¹⁷⁵ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman antiquities* 2.21.3 (transl. E. Cary, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1937) 372-373).

¹⁷⁶ Gellius, *Attic nights* 1.12.1-5 (transl. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1927) 58-59).

¹⁷⁷ Garland, *In the eye*, 64.

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem 64.

¹⁷⁹ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 54.24.

so called wheat rust, the Roman priest would create a goddess with her sole purpose to protect them against it.¹⁸⁰

It is understandable that the Roman state religion focused itself on preventing big threats such as war, famine and plagues and it was up to the individual themselves to protect themselves against smaller and day to day life threats. Clarke writes that the Romans were “superstitious” and compared the way the Romans protected themselves with the use of amulets and the way they looked out for omens from the gods. But they also avoided the glances of other citizens.¹⁸¹ They might have the evil eye. But what exactly was this evil eye? “Ancient Romans believed that a person who envied or otherwise disliked them could emit particles from his/her eyes that could enter them and make them sick or even die.”¹⁸²

In 1983 Dunbabin and Dickie wrote an article in which they examined the evil eye and how it is a manifestation of someone’s envy which is directed at another person in order to cause that person harm.¹⁸³ The evil eye still exists in the modern era as a superstitious threat. After researching bath mosaics which functioned as *apotropaia*, Dunbabin concluded that the evil eye not only represented the envy of mortal men. It also represented demons and mortals with dark magical powers. The before mentioned *apotropaia* was a warning to the Roman bathers to warn them that demons could be lurking around in the bath houses and that baths were the ideal place for individuals to work on their black magic.¹⁸⁴

The belief that demons were everywhere was one as much at home in ancient Rome as it was in the medieval world. Just as we believe (on the basis of modern science) that the world is filled with bacteria and viruses, so the Romans believed that demons surrounded them.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ J.R. Clarke, ‘Three uses of the pygmy and the aethiops at Pompeii: decorating, “othering”, and warding off demons’ in: L. Bricault, M.J. Versluys and P.G.P. Meyboom (eds.), *Nile into Tiber. Egypt in the Roman world. Proceedings of the IIIrd International conference of Isis studies, faculty of archaeology, Leiden University, May 11-14 2005* (Leiden 2007) 155-169, at 157.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem 157.

¹⁸² Ibidem 157.

¹⁸³ M.W. Dickie and K.M.C. Dunbabin, ‘Invidia rumpantur pectora: The iconography of Phthonos/Invidia in Graeco-Roman art’ *Jahrbuch Für Antike und Christentum* 26 (1983) 7–37.

¹⁸⁴ K.M.D. Dunbabin, ‘Baiaurum Grata Voluptas: Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths’ *Papers of the British School at Rome* 57 (1989) 6-46, at 35-38.

¹⁸⁵ Clarke, ‘Three uses of the pygmy and the aethiops at Pompeii’, 157.

What was a mortal Roman citizen to do to protect themselves against these three different types of supernatural threats. According to Clarke the answer for the Romans was to surround themselves with Phalluses. “Our modern word “fascinate” comes from the Latin *fascinum*, the term for the phallic object that could avert evil by distracting, confusing, attracting, or repelling a demon.”¹⁸⁶ There were all different kinds of phalluses in the Roman society made with different materials and in different sizes. For example the Romans made bronze *tintinnabula* which were meant to be hung in a bedroom. A *tintinnabula* was a wind chime or an assemblage of bells.¹⁸⁷

What is important for this thesis was that not only can the representation of a phallus on itself protect its owner against the evil eye or demons. If the phallus was attached to a living person, it will become a better *fascinum*.¹⁸⁸ The combination of the large phallus upon a deformed figure, for example a dwarf or a hunchback, would provoke laughter and according to both Levi¹⁸⁹ and Trentin¹⁹⁰, laughter would have helped protect the viewer from the evil eye and other unknown dangers.

An example of this is a mosaic pavement depicting a dwarf with a large phallus. Next to the dwarf are various animals attacking an evil eye. The eye has also been stabbed with different kinds of weapons. The Phallus of the dwarf is twisted between his legs, which makes it point towards the evil eye, as if it is attacking the eye as well.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ C.A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton 1993) 95–98.

¹⁸⁷ C. Johns, *Sex or symbol: erotic images of Greece and Rome* (New York 1982) 72.

¹⁸⁸ Clarke, ‘Three uses of the pygmy and the aethiops at Pompeii’, 160.

¹⁸⁹ D. Levi, ‘The evil eye and the lucky hunchback’ in: R. Stillwell (ed.), *Antioch-on-the-Orontes* 3 (Princeton 1941) 225.

¹⁹⁰ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 54.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem 56.



Mosaic pavement depicting an ithyphallic dwarf and the evil eye, second century CE.¹⁹²

Now at Hatay Archaeology museum, Antakya

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 57.

The position of the dwarf his phallus is also known as the 'tuck for luck' position.¹⁹³ Not only was it meant to show that the dwarf himself could play music or dance to ensure laughter from the viewer, but Trentin argues that it had another purpose. She writes that the 'tuck for luck' position was meant as the rubbing of a hunchbacks hump. Rubbing the phallus could have worked as a charm to boost sexual potency.¹⁹⁴

With the use archaeological evidence it is shown that dwarfs played the role of guardian against the evil eye, demons and dark magic. About dwarfs themselves it is unknown what role they played within religion, but with the known popularity of owning a disabled slave. It is plausible that those Romans who owned a real live dwarf enjoyed the same protection as a person would have owning an *apotropaia* shaped as a dwarf. Being able to receive protection for being around a deformed person, why would they not be allowed to participate in the processions and festivals of civic life? There is also no known mentioning of excluding dwarfs from religious participation, except for the aforementioned law. Perhaps the position within the Roman religion of the other disabilities answers this question.

¹⁹² Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 57.

¹⁹³ Ibidem 59.

¹⁹⁴ Ibidem 61.

Blind: Positive omens, negative omens

Not only were the blind great musicians, also within religious context did the blind play a big role. Seers and prophets, who could decipher the hidden meaning behind an omen, were better at deciphering when they were blind, at least in myths. The best known example was Teiresias, the seer of Theban. Teiresias was punished by the goddess Juno and became blind, but was gifted with the power of prophecy by the god Jupiter.¹⁹⁵

The Romans believed that, such as with the god Vulcan, if one lost his eyesight, they would get compensated with the gift of poetic creation, song and the ability to see prophecies.¹⁹⁶ Thus was the case with Teiresias.

Another example of a blind person having a place within the Roman religious world, but this time not being a mythological example, was a blind Vestal Virgin from 14 B.C.E.¹⁹⁷

The Basilica of Paulus was burned and the flames spread from it to the temple of Vesta, so that the sacred objects there were carried up to the Palatine by the Vestal Virgins, — except the eldest, who had become blind, — and were placed in the house of the priest of Jupiter.¹⁹⁸

As mentioned before, to become a Vestal Virgin, one had to meet certain requirements, but blindness was not mentioned. This thus far shows that blindness was a disability with which a person was not excluded from participating in Roman religion. It supposedly enhanced one's ability to prophesize. Or did it?

Blindness was a curse or punishment which the Roman gods used to punish the mortals of the Roman Empire. A Roman politician who was blinded after having made the mistake of enraging the Roman gods was Publius Clodius Pulcher. He stood at the center at one of Rome's biggest scandal, which even involved Gaius Julius Caesar.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Garland, *In the eye*, 34, R. Hard, *The Routledge handbook of Greek mythology* (London 2004) 329, Apollodorus, *The library* 3.71 (transl. J.G. Frazer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1921) 366-367).

¹⁹⁶ Kelley, 'Deformity and disability in Greece and Rome', 43.

¹⁹⁷ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 112.

¹⁹⁸ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 54.24 (transl. E. Cary Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1925) 344-345).

¹⁹⁹ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 110.

Bona Dea was a festival only meant for woman only. “From the ceremonies in honor of the goddess, celebrated in secret and by night, not only men are barred – indeed the master of the house spends the night of the festival elsewhere – but also all things male are excluded and representations of anything male are to be covered.”²⁰⁰

Clodius, even though he was a man, intruded on this festival, disguised as a woman, because he was in love with Pompeia (the first wife of Caesar). Cicero wrote that by witnessing the *Bona Dea* festival Clodius became blind.²⁰¹ A punishment from the gods, where a Roman loses his eyesight by witnessing something not meant for their eyes of mortals and as a result loses their eyesight. Clodius did not lose his eyesight, but became blind in his mind. Brouwer states that Clodius did become blind, with which he means that Clodius lost his eyesight.²⁰² There are other historians who believe that Clodius did not lose his eyesight, but lost his sense of justice and arrogance, because after the *Bona Dea* scandal, Clodius became Julius Caesar his loyal follower.²⁰³

The final example of a Roman losing his eyesight as a consequence of witnessing that which is not meant for the eyes of mortals was Lucius Caecilius Metellus. In 241 B.C.E. there was a fire and Metellus lost his eyesight, when he saved the Palladium statue from the temple of Vesta.²⁰⁴

Religion and losing one's eyesight are within ancient sources intertwined with one another. Teiresias, Clodius and Metellus all three saw that which was not meant to see by mortals, Clodius enraged the gods and all four lost their eyesight. Teiresias was gifted with the ability to see prophecies, but the others did not. This meant that blindness above all could be seen as a divine punishment. At the beginning of this chapter Garland was mentioned with stating that “it would hardly be surprising if the more distressing cases were excluded from participation in the processions and festivals which were such a prominent feature in the civic life of ancient communities in order not to offend the gods.”²⁰⁵ But within this chapter it is also shown that a blind Vestal Virgin functioned among them, disproving this statement.

²⁰⁰ H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea. The source and a description of the cult* (Leiden 1989) 255.

²⁰¹ Cicero, *De Haruspicum Responsis*.

²⁰² Brouwer, *Bona Dea*, 261.

²⁰³ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 110.

²⁰⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7.139-140.

²⁰⁵ Garland, *In the eye*, 64.

According to Garland it stands to reason that not every blind person in the Roman Empire who was able to do poetry, make music or was a seer. And if they were, only the most talented were employed. Most blind people, as Garland describes, depended on charity.²⁰⁶ It is still uncertain at this point if this was true, but even if the before mentioned examples do not reflect the experiences of the everyday Roman citizens, are these accounts still relevant in answering the question about the attitudes of Roman citizens towards the blind and disabled? According to Nicholas Vlahogiannis it does. "On one hand, heroes and protagonists are marginalized, debased and disempowered by their disability, and on the other they are protected, empowered and privileged in their natural state."²⁰⁷

Lame: Positive omens, negative omens

Nicanor, a lame man. While he was sitting wide-awake, a boy snatched his crutch from him and ran away. But Nicanor got up, pursued him, and so became well.²⁰⁸

Nicanor is an example of a lame man who with the power of the divine, was cured. According to E.J. Graham the people of the Roman Empire looked to the divine world for help in healing their disabled bodies, but they also feared punishment from the divine for their wrongdoings.²⁰⁹ Garland only wrote about disabilities as a metaphor for the anger of the gods, but Graham disagrees in that the gods were also able to heal.²¹⁰

In the Hellenistic era, there was an abundant amount of epigraphic evidence depicting divine healing, of which Nicanor was an example. This does not exist for the Roman era, but other evidence does exist. Clay and bronze gifts, mostly in the shape of human body parts, were meant for the divine. These so called *votives* are known as offerings of thanks in the shape of living bodies or body parts that represented the injured, impaired or malfunctioning body part the giver asked the

²⁰⁶ Garland, *In the eye*, 34.

²⁰⁷ N. Vlahogiannis, 'Disabling bodies' in: D. Montserrat (ed.) *Changing bodies, changing meanings, studies on the human body in antiquity* (London 1998) 19-20.

²⁰⁸ Inscriptions Graecae 4.1.121-122, E.J. Edelstein and L. Edelstein, *Asclepius: Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* Vol. 1 (London 1945) 233.

²⁰⁹ E.J. Graham, 'Mobility impairment in the sanctuaries of early Roman Italy' in: C. Laes (ed.) *Disability in antiquity* (New York 2017) 248.

²¹⁰ Garland, *In the eye*, 59, Graham, 'Mobility impairment', 248.

divine to cure. When a request to heal a person has been fulfilled, the healed person would provide an offering in return, the so called *ex-voto*.²¹¹

Graham describes the fact that the *votives* reminded the Roman citizens of the power of the deity in the sanctuary, the more *votives*, the more powerful the deity was.²¹² Why though, of all the *votives* found in the Roman Empire, to the date this thesis was written, at Ponte di Nona, a sanctuary 13 km east of Rome, 8000 *votives* discovered depicting feet and lower limbs.²¹³ These types of *votives* have also been found at 110 other locations scattered across the Roman Empire.²¹⁴

According to O'Sullivan, walking was one of the most important aspects of mobility in the Roman Empire.

These viewers [Romans] see someone walking (or imagine him or her, through literature) and are immediately able to appreciate something about that individual's identity – whether because he is walking alongside others like him; or because he walks at the center of a group of acolytes; or because he walks in a certain place, at a certain time, or on a certain occasion; or because he sits in a litter, and lets his slaves do the walking.(...) Roman walking, in other words, was not only a way of moving through space but also a performance of identity.²¹⁵

The identity of a Roman was connected with the way they moved. This made it so that someone's social status was linked with their mobility.

Let us take a closer look at the sanctuary Ponte di Nona and its 8000 *votives*. It was located close to the *Via Praenestine*, a long road in central Italy. The sanctuary did not have a temple but did have a *temenos*. There was no evidence found for the deity which presumably was worshipped at the sanctuary.²¹⁶ Did the sanctuary itself provide proof that the *votives* were placed by the lame or mobility impaired Romans?

The answer according to Graham it was around 50 meters of the road, a visitor would had to have walked a slight rise to reach it. "For those whom walking was challenging or physically demanding this would have entailed a strenuous effort

²¹¹ Graham, 'Mobility impairment', 249.

²¹² Ibidem 249.

²¹³ Ibidem 254.

²¹⁴ Ibidem 253.

²¹⁵ T.M. O'Sullivan, *Walking in Roman Culture* (Cambridge 2011) 7.

²¹⁶ Graham, 'Mobility impairment', 258.

at the end of an already potentially arduous road.”²¹⁷ Those visitors who had mobility impairments would have needed help to reach the sanctuary. They would had to be carried by slaves or family and friends. Perhaps it was to be expected at sanctuaries that those with mobility problems needed help. Graham even goes as far as stating that not only did the power of the deity influence the dissension of a person in search for aid with their illness, but also the amount of real life disabled people present at the sanctuary and the amount of *ex-votives* they had left behind.²¹⁸

Another subject which is important to discuss is the way this sanctuary and others were made with the accessibility of the visitors in mind. As mentioned above, the disabled with a mobility impairment were unable to access this specific sanctuary, but is plausible others were the same.

The Roman solution according to Laes, was that those who were unable to walk and able to afford it could use the help of their slaves, a carrying chair or a car pulled by a horse or ox.²¹⁹

Hunchbacks: Positive omens, negative omens

Since 1903 historians have been discussing the underlying meaning of small figures of hunchbacks, made in multiple different types of materials, such as bronze, terracotta and even ivory. In 1903 archeologist A.J.B. Wace stated that the representations of the grotesques were used as charms to ward off the evil eye. His argument for this was that the living counterparts of these representations also had magical powers.²²⁰ According to co-authors Grmek and Gourevitch of the monograph *Les Maladies dans l'art Antique* from 1998, the representations of hunchbacks are meant to show specific spinal diseases. Others, such as Perdrizet, believed they were *votives* for the god Asclepius.²²¹ Shapiro argues the representations were meant to increase sexual potency.²²² With all these different types of ways to view these miniature representations of hunchbacks, they all have in common that they were supposed to show the beholder of it a certain message. These objects were both practical and had an aesthetic appeal.

²¹⁷ Graham, 'Mobility impairment', 258.

²¹⁸ Ibidem 259.

²¹⁹ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 177.

²²⁰ A.J.B. Wace, 'Grotesques and the evil eye', *Annual of the British school at Athens* 10 (1903) 103-114, at 109.

²²¹ P. Perdrizet, *Bronze Grecs d'Egypte de la collection fouquet* (Paris 1911) 58.

²²² H.A. Shapiro, 'Notes on Greek dwarfs', *American Journal of Archaeology* 88 (1984) 391-392, at 391.

According to Trentin, the common underlying motive behind the production, purchase and display of hunchbacks was rooted in an ancient superstition that still holds strong till the modern day.²²³ This superstition is that hunchbacks and rubbing the hump of a hunchback is considered lucky.²²⁴ A good example of this was the Roman author Suetonius and his written work *Life of Domitian*. This Domitian had a dream before his death. He dreamt that a golden hump grew on his back and Domitian saw this as a sign. A sign that “the condition of the Empire would be happier and more prosperous after his time”.²²⁵ Domitian would be right.

Domitian himself, it is said, dreamed that a golden hump grew out on his back, and he regarded this as an infallible sign that the condition of the empire would be happier and more prosperous after his time; and this was shortly shown to be true through the uprightness and moderate rule of the succeeding emperors.²²⁶

Those who did not own a hunchback as a slave were able to use representations of hunchbacks with the same purpose. One of these purposes as mentioned before was using them as *apotropaion*. The evil eye is a curse believed to be cast upon an unknowing victim by a malevolent glare given by someone who wanted to harm the victim. Many cultures still to this day believe that receiving the evil eye will cause misfortune or injury for its victim.²²⁷ An *apotropaion* is meant to protect its owner against the evil eye. By “wearing apotropaic charms and applying apotropaic inscriptions and images in areas where misfortunes of the envious eye were thought to be particularly dangerous.”²²⁸

One of the key elements of these *apotropaia* was that it had to have an exaggerated long and/ or erect phallus.²²⁹ The phallus itself, which has taken human forms, was regarded to avert evil. According to Trentin this is why multiple representations of hunchback possessed also an exaggerated phallus.²³⁰ Besides the long phallus, the hunchback representations possessed other elements which

²²³ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 90.

²²⁴ Ibidem 92.

²²⁵ Suetonius, *Domitian* 23.2.

²²⁶ Ibidem 23.2 (transl. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1914) 384-385).

²²⁷ C.A. Ross, ‘Hypothesis: The Electrophysiological basis of evil eye belief’, *Anthropology of Consciousness* 21.1 (2010) 47-57, at 47.

²²⁸ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 52.

²²⁹ D. Orrells, *A history of the critical theories and approaches regarding the phallus in antiquity: the Greeks and modern masculinity* (Cambridge 2005).

²³⁰ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 52.

made them part of the *apotropaia*. It was the hump on its back that made the hunchback stand out from others and this is what made them different from the Roman standard of beauty. “The body of the hunchback seems to have been widely recognized as particularly efficacious in warding off evil; this is borne out in both the literary and visual records.”²³¹ For the literary examples, the before mentioned Roman author Suetonius and his written work *Life of Domitian* is one of those examples where the emperor himself gets a golden hump in his dream and this meant great fortune.

In the visual records, with which archaeological evidence is meant, there are multiple statuettes found who were meant to protect a person or even work places. The Greek grammarian Phrynicus of Bithynia from the second century CE, wrote that man shaped creatures, but also creatures different from men, were hung by craftsmen at their work places.²³²

An example of this could be a terracotta hunchback, the largest one known in the current corpus of statuettes. The statue is 19.0 centimeters in height. With this size it is unlikely that it was hung around a person’s neck or other body parts. With the text from Phrynicus of Bithynia in mind, it is understandable that this statue would have hung in a shop or workplace as a *apotropaion*.



Terracotta hunchback with a hole through the hump on its back.

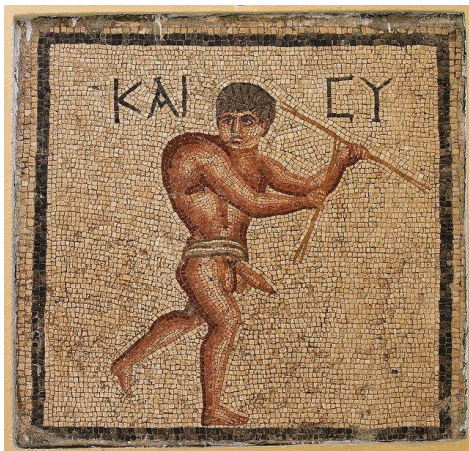
Staatliche antikensammlungen und glyptothek, München

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 111.

²³¹ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 52.

²³² Phrynicus, *Testimonia and Fragments* 53. 6-10.

Another and even better example of a *apotropaion*, portraying a hunchback with an exaggerated long phallus is a mosaic pavement dating from the second century CE.²³³ Again the hunchback in the mosaic floor looks over his right shoulder, and thus directing the gaze of the viewer to his hump as seen earlier in chapter 2. Above the hunchback the text *et tibi, et tibi sit* is written functions as a threat or a curse.²³⁴ According to Cimok the phrase was meant as a warning to visitors of the Roman villa it was placed at²³⁵, but Slane and Dickie suggest that the phrase was meant as a prophylactic curse.²³⁶



Mosaic decorating the main vestibule to the peristyle court of a Roman villa in Jekmegeh, south-west of Antioch, second century CE.²³⁷

Now at Hatay Archaeology museum, Antakya

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 114.

What makes this mosaic even more fascinating is the fact that it was paired with another mosaic, this time not of a disabled person, but of the half-god Hercules. It features Hercules as he strangles the snakes, the goddess Hera sent to kill Hercules. Snakes are an example of creatures who attack the evil eye and thus according to Levi, the mosaic of Hercules strangling the snakes was meant to compliment the mosaic with the hunchback and his large phallus.²³⁸

²³³ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 54.

²³⁴ Ibidem 133.

²³⁵ F. Cimok, *Antioch mosaic: a corpus* (Istanbul 2000) 34.

²³⁶ K. Slane and M.W. Dickie, 'A Knidian phallic vase from Corinth' *Hesperia* 62.4 (1993) 483-505.

²³⁷ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 54-55.

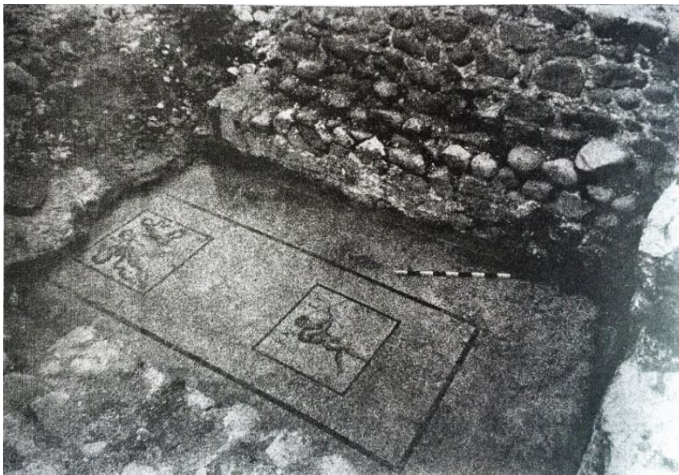
²³⁸ Levi, 'The evil eye and the lucky hunchback', 230-232.



Mosaic pavement depicting baby Hercules strangling snakes, second century CE.²³⁹

Now at Hatay Archaeology museum, Antakya

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 56.



A photograph showing the positioning of the hunchback mosaic and the Hercules mosaic.

Now both at Hatay Archaeology museum, Antakya

Found in L. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London 2015) 58.

Trentin describes that placing these two mosaics, who depict both extremes of appearance next to each other could have had another meaning. One depicting physical strength and the other physical deformity. This comparing ask the viewer, according to Trentin, that he or she thinks about his or her own “position along a sliding scale of divine and debased.”²⁴⁰ These two are later replaces by a mosaic described at the dwarf section.

²³⁹ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 56.

²⁴⁰ Ibidem 58-59.

As mentioned before with the dwarfs part of this chapter there also exist 'tuck for luck' hunchback miniature statuettes. With the hunchback however it is thought that the hump protects the backside of the hunchback and his large phallus protects the front side.²⁴¹

These representations used as good luck charms is the closest evidence of hunchbacks and their connection with Roman religion. It is unclear if actual living hunchbacks were treated the same way an *apotropaia* was. What is clear is that there are a lot of different types of *apotropaia* depicting hunchbacks in order to protect its owner against the evil eye. As mentioned before, the popularity of deformed slaves was at its height in the Roman Empire and there was the existence of the so called "monster markets".²⁴² Perhaps owning a representation of a hunchback was just as powerful of an *apotropaia*, as buying a highly priced and demanded real-life hunchback.

Conclusion

The disabled and their disabilities were seen as something divine, either positive or negative. The origin of a disability was divine wrath or a punishment. Their birth was an omen from the gods, but owning one as a slave gave good luck. Buying representations of hunchbacks or dwarfs were meant to give luck to its owner. As mentioned before, even if these examples do not reflect the experiences of the everyday Roman citizens, these accounts still relevant in answering the question about the attitudes of Roman citizens towards the disabled. "On one hand, heroes and protagonists are marginalized, debased and disempowered by their disability, and on the other they are protected, empowered and privileged in their natural state."²⁴³

The physical limitations around sanctuaries were solvable for the disabled who were able to own slaves themselves, or could afford a carrying chair or a car pulled by a horse or ox and so they would need to have wealth. The social exclusion of the disabled seems also limited, since dwarfs and hunchbacks were seen as the embodiment of good luck, according to the archeological evidence, and some fortunate blind were able to become seers. Only for those who were lame, there was

²⁴¹ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 61.

²⁴² Ibidem 45.

²⁴³ Vlahogiannis, 'Disabling bodies', 19-20.

no known role within religion. Exactly how many Romans had a representation of a hunchback or dwarf at their home or around their neck is unknown, but the amount of physical evidence found and multitude of representations shows that it is plausible to think the owners as the majority within Roman society. It must have been difficult to abide the law which excluded the disabled from religious participation, with all the different connections between the disabled and the Roman religion, and again the difficulty of terminology arises, because Romans differed in their opinion of what exactly a bodily defect was.

Chapter 4. Middle ground

With the birth of a disabled child, the parents had a tough choice to make. It was hard enough to take care of themselves and perhaps a 'normal bodied' child. Would they kill their new born but disabled child, leave it behind to be taken care by someone else, or would love conquer all and they would become a happy family? As mentioned before, one of the ancient laws of Romulus stated that misshapen children should be killed, unless they were the first born man.²⁴⁴ However, no other ancient source has evidence that parents who chose to let their child live, were punished. There is however evidence of parents leaving their child behind. A man was sentenced by Seneca the Elder, who deformed abandoned children (or deformed the children more) on purpose, so they could become beggars for him.²⁴⁵ Seneca stated that the man robbed the Empire of healthy new citizens, but Seneca also saw good in what the man did by stating that it would scare parents in preventing them from leaving their new born behind.²⁴⁶

What happened to those children, of which the parents did not want to murder them? To those who were left behind or were raised by their parents?

Dwarfs

In the Roman Empire dwarfs were sought after slaves and thusly parents were able to sell their new born child. To meet these demands dwarfish slaves were 'produced' according to Longinus. Children and small people were put into cages, in trying to stop their growth and turning them into dwarfs.²⁴⁷ Deformed slaves with a special malformation were more expensive than ordinary slaves.²⁴⁸

Dwarfs who were slaves who served within rich families got names which emphasized their small size, such as Magnus or Atlas.²⁴⁹

Hunchbacked or dwarf slaves also had another function, They acted as a living talisman for their owners, as mentioned before in chapter 3. Dwarfs were mostly known in Roman times because of their dance and fighting skills. These sports were practiced by free dwarfs who were professional entertainers, and could

²⁴⁴ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman antiquities* 2.21.3.

²⁴⁵ Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 10.4.

²⁴⁶ Ibidem 422-423.

²⁴⁷ Longinus, *On the Sublime* 44.5-9.

²⁴⁸ Martial, *Epigrams* 8.

²⁴⁹ Juvenal, *Satire* 8.32-34.

be hired for private and public festivals. This profession as entertainer has been discussed earlier within this thesis.

Another option however would be politics. There are no dwarf magistrates known from the Roman Empire, but the attitude towards others disabled magistrates can help to study the attitude that the Romans must have had towards dwarfs in a higher positions. Disabled aristocrats were only mentioned exceptionally in the ancient sources. Currently there are only twelve blind magistrates known about for over a thousand years Roman history, even though as mentioned in chapter one blindness was a large concept, because even having only one eye or having bad eyesight was seen as being blind. This makes it understandable why there is no known information about dwarf magistrates. The disabled magistrates who are well known within ancient literature, could have functioned as an example for aristocrats without a disability, in the sense of 'if they can do it, you can definitely do that.'

Dwarfs, as mentioned before, were especially good as entertainers and thusly were sought after by the Roman imperial court and Roman high society. Dwarf born babies were saved from starvation when abandoned, to become high priced slaves. As a consequence, children without disabilities were forced within small cages to become deformed. The possibility exists that dwarfs became magistrates, but there exists no known evidence.

Blind

What about the blind men and women who had to live their day to day lives? Did they have to wonder around without the help of others, not knowing where they would end up? According to Seneca the Younger, the answer is no. He wrote about Harpaste, the households disabled slave.²⁵⁰

Yet the blind ask for a guide, while we wander without one, saying: "I am not self-seeking; but one cannot live at Rome in any other way. (...)"²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ E. Gloyn, 'My family tree goes back to the Romans: Seneca's approach to the family in the *Epistulae Morales*', J. Wildberger and M.L. Colish (ed.) *Seneca Philosophus* (Berlin 2014) 242.

²⁵¹ Seneca the Younger, *On our blindness and its cure* 50.2-3 (transl. R.M. Gummere, Loeb classical library Cambridge 1917) 330-331).

The blind needed a guide to help them get around town. According to Laes, such a guide could best be a close family member. An example of this was Appius Claudius and his sons.²⁵²

Finally Appius Claudius, surnamed the Blind (because he had lost his eyesight from old age), commanded his sons to lead him into the senate-chamber, where he said: "I was grieved at the loss of my sight; now I regret that I did not lose my hearing also, for never did I expect to see or hear deliberations of this kind from you."²⁵³

Another option could have been a carried chariot and even better yet, the chariot was payed for by the state. Only one Roman was heroic enough to have earned that right and he was named Quintus Metellus. Metellus had lost his eyesight while rescuing the Palladium from the temple of Vesta.²⁵⁴

Others used slaves if they owned them to guide them. For those who were blind and had no relatives or slaves able to take care of them, the only option left would have been to walk around the streets with the help of a stick and others getting out of their way. "It's the one thing that links the wretched and the blessed, that it's usual to offer courtesy to both: we give way to the blind, and those for whom the purple stripe, and the lictors' rods and cries, demand reverence."²⁵⁵

Laes writes that is odd that there are no known references to guide dogs from the Roman era, when in the Middle ages it was common to portray the blind in the company of a dog.²⁵⁶ The Romans were well aware themselves that wealth was necessary to help the blind attain comfort in their lives. Cicero described this as well.

They relate of Asclepiades, a native of Eretria, and no obscure philosopher, when someone asked him what inconvenience he suffered from his blindness, that his reply was, "He was at the expense of another servant." So that, as the most extreme poverty may be borne if you please, as is daily the case with some in Greece, so blindness may easily be borne, provided you have the support of good health in other respects.²⁵⁷

²⁵² Laes, *Beperkt?*, 111.

²⁵³ Appian, *Samnite history* 10. 4-5 (transl. H. White, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1913) 84-85).

²⁵⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 7.141.

²⁵⁵ Ovid, *Trista* 5.6 (transl. A.L. Wheeler, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1924) 189-199).

²⁵⁶ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 111-112.

²⁵⁷ C.D. Yonge, *Cicero's Tusculan disputations : also treatises On the nature of the gods, and On the commonwealth* (New York 1877) 204.

Jobs within entertainment and religion, such as blind seers, poets musicians have already been discussed earlier within chapters 2 and 3. There were also jobs for the blind within Roman politics.

Often the blind aristocrats continued to function in the senate. Some blind aristocrats include the praetor Aufidius from 107 B.C.E. Aufidius became blind at later age, but continued to participate within the senate nonetheless.²⁵⁸ Starting as a censor in 312 B.C.E. Appius Claudius Caecus had a long career ranging from censor and eventually becoming a dictator in 285 B.C.E. After becoming blind Appius Claudius Caecus retired from public life, only to return for one final famous speech in 279 B.C.E. The senate wanted an alliance with Pyrrhus of Epirus., but in the end the senate decided against the alliance thanks to the speech of Appius Claudius Caecus.²⁵⁹ Blind aristocrats even still functioned as lawyers, known examples of this are Senator Publilius and the knight Pontius Lupus.²⁶⁰ All the before mentioned examples had one common point, they all became blind after they had started their career and there are no known examples of blind born magistrates. What did the blind born do as a job?

A different approach to the way the blind were able to function within Roman society was the *Community concept*. The *Community concept* has been discussed within disability studies starting with Rose in 1997.²⁶¹ It meant that everyone was expected to help within the community in any way they could. Even those who were completely blind, could do different jobs within a trusted environment. Jobs such as milking animals, harvesting or stomping grapes, household jobs, mining within dark caves and even crafts.²⁶²

A person's environment has a huge impact on the experience and extent of disability. Inaccessible environments create disability by creating barriers to participation and inclusion.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.112.

²⁵⁹ Cicero, *Letters to Brutus* 55.61.

²⁶⁰ Valerius Maximus, *Memorable doings and sayings* 8.7.5.

²⁶¹ M.L. Edwards (Rose), 'Constructions of physical disability in the ancient Greek world: the community concept,' D. T. Mitchell and S.L. Snyder (ed.) *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* (Ann Arbor 1997) 35–50.

²⁶² Laes, *Beperkt?*, 114.

²⁶³ WHO, *World report on disability*, 3.

On the other side, life on a farm community differs from that in a big city. Roman authors did not shy away in describing the bad life blind beggars had. According to Laes even the Bible, which thus far has not been referenced, describes the life of a blind beggar and the way his disability was seen as a divine punishment.²⁶⁴

With the help of their family the blind had a lot of options to participate within society. Wealth was also a factor which decided how one's life could be as a blind person, with the option to buy slaves to guide them and chariots to bring them to their destination. Those without wealth would have to be helped by those around them and the stick in their hand to guide them.

Lame

Professions such as shoemaker and potter could easily be done by people with a mobility disability.²⁶⁵ Laes states that there was even a lame butcher. Even though they were disabled, evidence shows that the lame were well adjusted within society. Marriage with a lame person was common according to Laes, although he continues by stating that the only known mention of this can be found in Herodotus his *Histories*.²⁶⁶

Working with the hands was frowned upon by the upper class and is compared to Vulcan the lame god, who was mocked by other divine beings for his disability and his profession. "He is a simple, dirty craftsman."²⁶⁷ Stahl continues with stating that the profession and the disability belonged together, but that either one individually was bad enough. "As to how disabled craftsmen were viewed by their non-disabled peers in the profession, that is a question that must remain open. Our sources simply reveal nothing in this regard."²⁶⁸

Having a mobility problem was not something that only happened to the lower classes, the rich also became lame because of birth defects or accidents and war. During a chariot race, the Roman emperor Vitellius was injured and had a bad hip for the rest of his life. Emperor Claudius and his lame walk has already been discussed.

²⁶⁴ John 9. 1-8. King James Version.

²⁶⁵ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 175.

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem* 175.

²⁶⁷ J. Stahl, 'Physically deformed and disabled people', M. Peachin (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of social relations in the Roman world* (Oxford 2011) 720.

²⁶⁸ *Ibidem* 720.

He was in fact abnormally tall, with a face usually flushed from hard drinking, a huge belly, and one thigh crippled from being struck once upon a time by a four-horse chariot, when he was in attendance on Gaius as he was driving.²⁶⁹

Spurius Carvilius Ruga was an example of a Roman soldier who was harmed during a war and became lame. He was ashamed of it, but his mother told him to be proud.²⁷⁰

Those who were unable to walk to a certain location could use the help of a carrying chair or a car pulled by a horse or ox.²⁷¹ A walking stick or other objects to help a person walk was a cheaper option for the lower class of the society.²⁷² There were also known lame magistrates that could participate in the public life.²⁷³

According to Livy, one was admitted to a magistrate *cum imperio*. This meant that as long as a Roman citizen his physical condition allowed it even slightly, one could be admitted.²⁷⁴ This meant that there were no restrictions within the social environment, but their disability was used against the magistrates.

Cato, the leader of the senate and a man of great sagacity, thereupon remarked in the senate: "We are sending out an embassy without feet, without head, and without heart." His shot was well aimed and became the talk of the town.²⁷⁵

Without the help of family members and slaves the lame had it difficult, as was seen with the blind. The known sources do not describe the lives of those without wealth. Laes points out the fact that being lame is a known stigma for beggars and again there are known references where parents mutilate their own children to make them lame and thus earning more as beggars.²⁷⁶

Hunchback

In the chapters before the hunchback has been thoroughly been discussed and its role within Roman society as a luck charm and their entertainment purposes, but as

²⁶⁹ Suetonius, *Vitellius* 17.

²⁷⁰ Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.249.

²⁷¹ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 177.

²⁷² *Ibidem* 177.

²⁷³ Diodorus Siculus, *The library of history* 32.20 (transl. F.R. Walton, Loeb classical library (Cambridge 1957) 432-433).

²⁷⁴ Livy, *History of Rome* 7.39.12.

²⁷⁵ Diodorus Siculus, *The library of history* 32.20 (transl. F.R. Walton, Loeb classical library (Cambridge 1957) 432-433).

²⁷⁶ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 178.

with the other three handicaps, a hunchback was also able to move beyond that within politics and even rise as far as a consul. The hunchbacked Marcus Terentius Varro Gibba, became tribune in 43 B.C.E.²⁷⁷

Again, Marcus Terentius Varro was a man who had given no offence, but his name was identical with that of one of the proscribed, except for the agnomen, and he was afraid that he might because of this suffer a fate similar to that of Cinna; therefore he issued a statement making known this fact (he was tribune at the time) and for this he became the subject of amusement and ridicule.²⁷⁸

Another hunchback who rose high within the Roman politics was Gaius Sulpicius Galba, who even made it as far to become consul.²⁷⁹

A hunchback had little influence for someone's ability to perform most occupations. The bigger the hump, the more a person was prevented from fully functioning within that occupation. As mentioned with the other disabilities discussed in this chapter, wealth and their status also played a role in the ability of being able to do a certain profession.²⁸⁰ Gaius Sulpicius Galba and Marcus Terentius Varro Gibba are both examples of hunchbacked man who rose within the Roman politics, but also came from an already prominent family. Lower classed hunchbacked citizens had a few options for an occupation. They could become entertainers or become household pets and as living luck charms.²⁸¹

The final option as was with the other three disabilities, was that they could become beggars and live of the charity of their fellow citizens.²⁸²

Conclusion

Within this chapter it has become clear that the disabled were able to rise and fall within the Roman society career wise. With the help of their family they had many different ways to participate within society. Wealth was also a factor which decided how comfortable the life of a disabled person could become, with the option to buy slaves to help them and chariots to bring them to their destination or occupation.

²⁷⁷ Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 47.11.3.

²⁷⁸ Ibidem 47.11.3 (transl. E. Cary Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1925) 138-139).

²⁷⁹ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 70-71 and Suetonius, *Galba* 3 (transl. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1914) 186-187).

²⁸⁰ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 82.

²⁸¹ Ibidem 82.

²⁸² Ibidem 83.

Modern scholars agree that those without the help of family members, slaves and the poor had it a lot more difficult, however they are also a more unknown group which ancient authors only rarely described. That there was a group of disabled beggars is known, because there is evidence of healthy children being purposefully disabled so that they could earn more as beggars. The circumstances in which they lived however are still unknown.

Another point of interest is the accessibility of different jobs within the social environment. Even though the disabled were criticized and mocked, in the Roman politics none were excluded. The disabled were able to function as high as consul.

Chapter 5. 'Monsters'

What exactly did it mean to be called a monster and what exactly was a monster according to the Romans? "It is already clear how the term 'monster' can cover a wide range of meanings, applied in a rather loose way but always pointing to a certain transgression of moral or physical norms."²⁸³ What does Laes mean with this statement? Creatures who would be thought of in the modern day, when thought of monsters, were also thought of in the Roman Empire. Creatures such as the cyclopes, giants, pygmies and others known from myths and were referenced by poets. *Monstrum* and its synonyms were not only a word used to reference or describe monsters, they were also to describe misshapen and monstrous looking people, or even strange looking animals. This meant that *Monstrum* and its synonyms could also be used as an insult.²⁸⁴

Even the Roman law mentioned the birth of monstrous children and how the parents should be treated of such children.

Where a woman brings forth a child that is deformed, or a monster, or defective, or which has something unusual in its appearance or its voice, and which has no resemblance to a human being, but seems to be rather an animal than a man, someone may ask, will it be any benefit to her to have brought such a creature into the world?

According to Gevaert and Laes the possibility of a link between the belief in monstrous races and real life impairments was plausible.²⁸⁵ But were the different kind of disabilities, who have been discussed thus far within this thesis, viewed as monsters or were these disabled Roman citizens or slaves called monsters to be insulted?

Dwarf

According to Dasen there are four known categories of dwarfs or dwarfish beings found within myths.²⁸⁶ Two of these categories are well researched, because both of

²⁸³ Laes, *Beperkt?*, 212-213.

²⁸⁴ Gevaert and Laes, 'What's in a monster', 212, Martial, *Epigrams* 7.38.

²⁸⁵ Gevaert and Laes, 'What's in a monster?', 224.

²⁸⁶ Dasen, *Dwarfs in ancient Egypt and Greece*, 175.

them are well documented within ancient texts and within archaeological evidence. These two are the “the exotic pygmies, and the mischievous Cercopes.”²⁸⁷ The other two are lesser known deities and are only mentioned within ancient texts. These are the helpers of Vulcan with his smith craft and the last category is the anonymous Kourotrrophic demons.²⁸⁸

For this research only pygmies will be analyzed, because although modern scholars describe Cercopes as dwarfs or gnomes²⁸⁹, I agree with Dasen that no ancient text describes the Cercopes as being shorter than a normal human from that era. They transform into smaller animals, but are not small themselves.²⁹⁰ Vulcan his helpers have already been mentioned within the religion chapter. The popularity of the anonymous Kourotrrophic demons, which were demons derived from the Egyptian god Bes, lasted only for a short period of fifty years, according to current archaeological finds and only within the Greek Empire around 600 B.C.E.²⁹¹ So I will only look at pygmies.

What exactly for ‘monsters’ were pygmies? With depicting pygmies, the emphasis was on their small size and not on their ethnicity. According to Dasen, the thick lips and flat noses of dwarfs were a feature within Greek and Roman paintings of their dwarfism, not of their origin.²⁹² Elements of pygmies and dwarfs are fused together, both are the same figure within Greek and Roman paintings.

Greek and Roman artists used the same features, thick lips and flat noses, to depict black people. These features were also used to emphasize their 'black' appearance.²⁹³ If Greek or Roman paintings are researched, only the context could make us understand if it is depicting a dwarf or a black person of low status, the painted figure does not contain differences between the two.²⁹⁴

In the past it was assumed that depictions of pygmies within Greek and Roman art were caricatures of barbarians from Libya. However, in Greek and Roman art barbarians were never depicted smaller than their Greek or Roman counterparts.²⁹⁵

²⁸⁷ Dasen, *Dwarfs in ancient Egypt and Greece*, 175.

²⁸⁸ *Ibidem* 175.

²⁸⁹ J.M. Edmonds, *Fragments of Attic Comedy* Vol 1 (Leiden 1957) 27.

²⁹⁰ Dasen, *Dwarfs in ancient Egypt and Greece*, 189.

²⁹¹ *Ibidem* 200-204.

²⁹² *Ibidem* 187.

²⁹³ F.M. Snowden, *Blacks in antiquity* (Cambridge 1970) 47.

²⁹⁴ W. Raeck, *Zum Barbarenbild in der Kunst Athens* (Bonn 1981) 219.

²⁹⁵ *Ibidem* 164-213

Around the 5th century B.C.E., an idea emerged that the human race had gone through an evolution. The pygmies were seen as to have been an early stage of the development of humanity, before the titan Prometheus brought fire to the earth and created civilization.²⁹⁶ According to myth, humans were transformed into pygmies because of hybris. A beautiful woman called Gerana, was worshiped by her people as a goddess. As a punishment for her hybris, her people were transformed into pygmies by the goddess Juno and Gerana herself was transformed into a crane. When she returned to her people shaped as a crane, the small pygmies were frightened and repelled her away brutally. After this, cranes waged war on the pygmies.²⁹⁷

Other attributes given to pygmies aside from their small size were given to them by Ctesias. Pygmies were snub-nosed, they dress in their own long hair, and have over-large genitals, so large that their genitals hang down to their ankles.²⁹⁸

The Roman arena holds another example of evidence of pygmies. Within the chapter of entertainment, it was already mentioned that dwarfs fought boxing matches within the arena against each other. What is important for the current chapter was another event organized by emperor Domitian, written down by Publius Papinius Statius. Emperor Domitian wanted a group of dwarfs to play the part of pygmies and re-enact a famous battle from the *Iliad*²⁹⁹ in the Amphitheatrum Flavium.³⁰⁰ Dwarfs and pygmies have become one and the same within the eyes of emperor Domitian and the attendants at the Amphitheatrum Flavium. Strabo even wrote in *Geographica*, that pygmies were invented by looking at dwarfs.

And perhaps it is from the natural smallness of the people that men have conceived of Pygmies and fabricated them; for no man worthy of belief professes to have seen them.³⁰¹

Because of their seize, dwarfs were seen as a mythical race known as pygmies and thusly represented pygmies within figurines and paintings, but also in real live shows

²⁹⁶ Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines* 2.22.1.

²⁹⁷ Aelian, *Characteristics of animals* 15.29.

²⁹⁸ Ctesias, *The Persika* Vol.13, F45, A. Nicholas, *The complete fragments of Ctesias of Cnidus: translation and commentary with an introduction* (Florida 2008) 112.

²⁹⁹ Homer, *Iliad* 3. 1-8.

³⁰⁰ Gevaert and Laes, 'What's in a monster?' 225.

³⁰¹ Strabo, *Geography* 17.2.1 (transl. H.L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1932) 126-129).

with the example from Publius Papinius Statius. Dwarfs were only seen as pygmies within the representation of them, but there is no mention of dwarfs being called pygmies outside of this. Thusly I can conclude that they were called monsters as an insult and not actually were seen as monsters.

Blind

Of all the known mythological monsters from the ancient world, one of the most famous was the cyclops. And of the cyclops, the most famous of all was Polyphemos. In the *Odyssey* of Homer, the hero Odysseus lands on the island of the Cyclops during his journey home from the Trojan War. Odysseus and his men are low on provisions, and find a cave filled with sheep. The owner of these sheep was the cyclops Polyphemos. According to B.E. Wilson, Polyphemos was the mythological embodiment of a vision impairment.³⁰² Not only because he just had one eye, but Polyphemos is stabbed by Odysseus in his eye with a handmade spear.

And his eyelids wholly and his brows roundabout did the flame singe as the eyeball burned, and its roots crackled in the fire.³⁰³

“With this act, Odysseus brings together the complex interconnections between the unmanly “other”(i.e. monster and barbarian) and physical “imperfection,” as well as “bodily penetration.”³⁰⁴

Polyphemos represents the fears the Roman citizens had when losing their vision. They had to be able to defend the boundaries of their body. They were afraid of invasive assaults, being beaten and sexually penetrated.³⁰⁵ Becoming a Roman citizen came with the status of “bodily autonomy and protection from outside bodily invasion.”³⁰⁶ Those without a citizen status did not have bodily protection and autonomy from the elite. Even going as far as the bodies of slaves being the property of their master. The Roman play writer Plautus went as far as writing that a scarred back was a characteristic of a slave.³⁰⁷

³⁰² B.E. Wilson, *Unmanly men: Refigurations of masculinity in Luke-Acts* (Oxford 2015) 51.

³⁰³ Homer, *Odyssey* 9.385-395 (transl. A.T. Murray, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1919) 342-347).

³⁰⁴ Wilson, *Unmanly men*, 51.

³⁰⁵ Ibidem 51.

³⁰⁶ Wilson, *Unmanly men*, 51.

³⁰⁷ Plautus, *Amphitruo* 446, E. Segal, *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus* (Oxford 1987) 139.

The blind would not have been able to protect themselves and thus were able to be seen the same as the cyclops Polyphemos, who was blinded and thus penetrated by the hero Odysseus.

According to the satirist Juvenal, emperor Domitian seems to have had a trusted and powerful informer in the form of a blind and deformed slave.³⁰⁸ Again only as an insult are the blind called monster, and not seen as real monsters. They are compared to Polyphemos, but not seen as his monstrous equal.

Lame

Emperor Claudius was the only living heir of emperor Augustus after the murder of emperor Caligula. He reigned from 41-54 C.E. His mother was known to refer to Claudius as “a monster of a man, not finished by nature but only half-done”.³⁰⁹ Gardner also writes that Claudius his sister Livilla prayed out loud that the Roman citizens never would have to suffer such a cruel fate as having her brother as their emperor.³¹⁰ What the exact origin of Claudius his disability was and what symptoms he had, is still discussed to this day. Ruth concludes that the emperor his symptoms are the cause of him being born prematurely. The symptoms were: partially paralysis in his legs, slobbering, stuttering, partial deafness and trembling of the head and hands.³¹¹ Other theories include cerebral palsy and infantile paralysis.³¹² Which of these symptoms made this emperor the monster described by Seneca the Younger?

But Hercules, the first glimpse he got, was really much taken aback, although not all the monsters in the world could frighten him; when he saw this new kind of object, with its extraordinary gait, and the voice of no terrestrial beast, but such as you might hear in the leviathans of the deep, hoarse and inarticulate, he thought his thirteenth labour had come upon him. When he looked closer, the thing seemed to be a kind of man.³¹³

³⁰⁸ Juvenal, *Satire* 4.113-122.

³⁰⁹ Garland, *In the eye*, 41.

³¹⁰ *Ibidem* 41.

³¹¹ T. de C. Ruth, *The problem of Claudius, some aspects of a character study* (Baltimore 1916) 15-38.

³¹² Garland, *In the eye*, 189.

³¹³ Seneca the Younger, *Apocolocyntosis* 5.1-9 (transl. W.H.D. Rouse and M. Heseltine (Cambridge 1913) 446-449).

Claudius is not recognized by Hercules as a human. Besides from describing Claudius his disabled body, Seneca also mentioned a lot of political acts done by Claudius.³¹⁴

As I say, he was born at the sixteenth milestone from Vienne, a native Gaul. So of course he took Rome, as a good Gaul ought to do.³¹⁵

This prose satire was written by Seneca the Younger around 54 C.E. shortly after emperor Nero ascended to power. Claudius was presented by Seneca as “a distorted and contorted specimen – both a monstrous beast and a ridiculous buffoon.”³¹⁶ Did Seneca write this only just to make fun of Claudius his disabled appearance or did it have another reason? Braund and James agree that when the prose satire is placed in its “contemporary ethical and political context”³¹⁷ the monstrous appearance of Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis* had a much broader ideological meaning. This also became clear earlier within *Apocolocyntosis*.

Four and sixty years it is now since he began to pant for breath. What grudge is this you bear against him and the whole empire? Do let the astrologers tell the truth for once; since he became emperor, they have never let a year pass, never a month, without laying him out for his burial. Yet it is no wonder if they are wrong, and no one knows his hour. Nobody ever believed he was really quite born. Do what has to be done: “Kill him, and let a better man rule in his empty court.”³¹⁸

According to Lowe, it is unsurprising that the elite individuals who were the most associated with abnormal bodies were the emperors. “Suetonius set a trend for physical portraits in imperial biography, applying a nontechnical “folk Physiognomy” in which ‘Bad Emperors’ show their vices in their bodies.”³¹⁹ Lowe continues by giving multiple examples of Roman emperors who were given metaphorical deformities.

³¹⁴ Seneca the Younger, *Apocolocyntosis* 5.1-9.

³¹⁵ Ibidem 5.1-9 (transl. W.H.D. Rouse and M. Heseltine (Cambridge 1913) 446-449).

³¹⁶ S.M. Braund and P. James, ‘Quasi Homo: Distortion and contortion in Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*’, *Arethusa* 31 (1998) 285.

³¹⁷ Ibidem 285.

³¹⁸ Seneca the Younger, *Apocolocyntosis* 3.4-9 (transl. W.H.D. Rouse and M. Heseltine (Cambridge 1913) 440-441).

³¹⁹ D. Lowe, *Monsters and monstrosity in Augustan poetry* (Michigan 2015) 61.

Emperor Caligula was called extremely ugly, emperor Vitellius was lame and emperor Galba was herniated and had gout.³²⁰

With these examples it is clear that Seneca wanted to portray Claudius as a bad emperor who had a lack of self-control over his body with his trembling hands and ever panting for breath after his birth. This lack of self-control is also shown in acts Claudius did as an emperor. By the commands of executions given by Claudius and how he “took Rome, as a good Gaul ought to do.”³²¹ Claudius was portrayed by Seneca as having a misshapen body as well as his mind and both were intertwined. “He is monstrous, inside and out.”³²² So with emperor Claudius the was not just insulted by being called a monster, he was seen as a monster after his death.

Hunchback

There are no known references where a hunchback is specifically called a monster within the currently known Roman literature. They are called many things but not monsters. Trentin believes that when Plutarch wrote about the monster markets in Rome, he also meant for hunchbacks to be there.³²³

The other mention of hunchbacks and monsters is when emperor Commodus served two hunchbacks smeared in mustard at a party.

It is claimed that he often mixed human excrement with the most expensive foods, and he did not refrain from tasting them, mocking the rest of the company, as he thought. He displayed two misshapen hunchbacks on a silver platter after smearing them with mustard, and then straightway advanced and enriched them.³²⁴

Presenting hunchbacks smeared in mustard on a silver platter, could be associated with a monstrous act according to Trentin.³²⁵ Such deeds were also seen with emperor Claudius by Braund and James.³²⁶ Emperor Claudius was seen as monstrous inside and out, and Commodus only from the inside.

³²⁰ Suetonius, *Caligula* 50.1, Suetonius, *Vitellius* 17.2, Suetonius, *Galba* 21.

³²¹ Seneca the Younger, *Apocolocyntosis* 5.1-9 (transl. W.H.D. Rouse and M. Heseltine (Cambridge 1913) 450-451).

³²² Braund and James, ‘Quasi Homo’, 290.

³²³ Trentin, *The Hunchback*, 45.

³²⁴ *Historia Augusta*, *The life of Commodus* 11.1-2 (transl. D. Magie, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge 1921) 290-291).

³²⁵ Trentin, ‘Deformity in the Roman imperial court’, 203.

³²⁶ Braund and James, ‘Quasi Homo’, 290.

Modern scholars do not use hunchbacks when discussing the subject monsters within the Roman Empire. A reason for why hunchbacks were not seen as monstrous could be, because they are seen as bringers of luck.

Conclusion

Foul monster or good saviour, the judgment has little to do with the physical attributes of the being in question and much to do with the prevailing social pattern of rules and meanings which creates anomaly.³²⁷

After analyzing all four of the disabilities, the concept of monster and its connection to disabilities has become clear. Within ancient texts, the disabled are called monsters or monstrous, because they represent aspects of mythological monsters, but are not seen as monsters themselves. They are called monsters as a way of shaming them and insulting them. “They became transgressive anomalies, interstitial figures who crossed the boundary between monster and man.”³²⁸

Even though the hunchback has a disability which makes it one of the most prominent physically visible disabilities, it did not have a connection to monsters for the Romans while blindness did. This shows that the connection to mythology played a part in who was seen as a monster and who was not.

With emperor Claudius he was not only portrayed as a monster for his appearance, he had done some ‘monstrous deeds’ during his lifetime. Other Roman emperors who were normal bodied, were also seen as monsters.

This shows that deformity was used as a metaphor for authors to attack emperors who, in their eyes had been bad or tyrants. It also shows that the literal meaning and the metaphorical use of the term *monstrum* were not sharply separated from each other. This is also still true in modern times.

³²⁷ M. Douglas, *Implicit meanings: essays in anthropology* (London 1975) 285.

³²⁸ Trentin, ‘Deformity in the Roman imperial court’, 205.

Final conclusion

This thesis started with the question if parents in Roman times would be able to love their child, even if it turned out the child was disabled. The Roman law recorded in the Twelve Tables from the fifth century B.C.E. stated that parents had to kill their disabled children for the good of the Roman citizens.³²⁹

Lisa Trentin however, wrote that disabled individuals were displayed for popular entertainment in ancient Rome as part of an established tradition in the Roman culture of displaying the anomalous bodies of humans and animals.³³⁰

How can children be killed at birth and yet be displayed for popular entertainment? In this thesis I have placed myself within a debate about disability history. The debate is about what the social position was of the disabled within an ancient society, in this thesis the Roman era. The main question for this thesis therefore became: What was the position of the disabled within the Roman Empire? In order to answer this question there were five chapters, each with its own sub question.

First, an attempt was made to create a definition of the different disabilities within this thesis. These disabilities were; dwarfism, blindness, lameness and hunchbacked. The question of this chapter was: What exactly is a disability and were the disabilities mentioned within this thesis the same in the Roman era as they are known now?

In chapter one it has become clear that in the current and modern age, disabilities have been analyzed and researched in such a way that it is not as easy to label someone with a certain type of disability. There are a lot more different sub categories of a certain disability than was the case in ancient times. Even though a person was only partially blind, they would have been called blind in the Roman Empire and not in the modern era. As a result of this, the requirements to use a certain texts or piece of archeological evidence as evidence within this thesis was determined. This answered the sub question.

³²⁹ Kelley, 'Deformity and disability in Greece and Rome', 38-39.

³³⁰ Trentin, 'Deformity in the Roman imperial court', 197.

In the second chapter the four groups of disabled were examined within the role of entertainers. Different types of entertainment were researched; actors, dancers, singers and sexual pleasures. The question was, were the disabled able to play a positive part within society and thus create a position for themselves within society as entertainers? With the examples given within this chapter it has been made clear that the disabled were able to become more than just beggars on the streets of Rome, as the fear for the disabled dwindled and interest by the emperors of Rome grew to entertain themselves and their guests with the deformed. The higher class of society also wanted to do the same and there was a high demand for disabled slaves, so high that even perfectly healthy children were mutilated just so they could be sold for more as slaves.

The entertainment business was especially good to those of the disabled whose bodies made them the focus of attention. There were boxing dwarfs, blind musicians and hunchback dancers at parties. Only the lame were not mentioned within sources as entertainment. With multiple representations of the disabled as entertainers (especially dwarfs and hunchbacks) within archeological evidence and ancient texts it is clear that the disabled played big parts within the Roman entertainment and thus answering this chapters question.

The third chapter focused on the parts disabled played within Roman mythology and the religious use of their representations. The origin of a disability was linked to the divine, according to the Romans as a form of divine punishment. Even one of the gods, Vulcan, had become disabled by the wrath of another god, Jupiter.

The disabled themselves and representations of disabled people were meant to bring luck to its owner. Especially representations of dwarfs and hunchbacks were popular among the Romans. They were meant to protect their owners against the evil eye and other curses. With the existence a disabled god within the Roman Pantheon, multiple representations found showing the disabled as good luck charms and protectors against curses, references were made within ancient texts of disabilities in combination with the divine, it is clear that the disabled had their own place within the Roman religion.

In the fourth chapter, the daily lives of the disabled in the Roman Empire were looked at. In order to research this, this chapter looked at what other jobs the disabled could participate in and how depended they were on their family.

One argument made by modern scholars made in answering the sub question was applicable to all four disabilities. With the help of their family, and having a considerable amount of wealth, the disabled had many different ways to participate within society. Family was able to help the disabled and provide for them. Wealth gave them the option to buy slaves to help them and chariots to bring them to their destination or occupation. The disabled however were also able to work themselves.

The *Community concept* has been discussed in this chapter. It meant that everyone was expected to help within the community in any way they could. Even for those who were disabled, there were different jobs in a trusty environment to do. Even within Roman politics the disabled were able to rise in power, even as high as a consul. The group unknown within ancient texts, the poor, would have ended up eventually as beggars on the street, but this was also the case for a 'normal bodied' poor person.

The answer to the sub question can thus be answered by stating that there were some disabled who went through the day with the help of family, slaves, and there were those who were able to work within a trusted environment. These two groups were able to still function within society and the poor, 'normal bodied' and disabled, ended up as beggars on the street.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, the concept of the Latin word *monstrum* and its meaning was researched. In order to understand the concept of *monstrum*, the connection of all four disabilities with this concept had to be analyzed.

Within the chapter it was concluded that the disabled represented different concepts of monsters and were identified with them. Trentin described it as if the disabled crossed the boundary between monster and men. Another way the Romans used the word *monstrum* was as a way of shaming and insulting a 'normal bodied' person who acted monstrous. Their actions were reflected on the descriptions of their bodies.

Having answered all five the sub questions, I am able to answer my main question: What was the position of the disabled within the Roman Empire? The disabled were treated differently, but this does not mean that they were treated bad.

At a certain point within the Roman Empire, bodily abnormalities changed from horror and disgust into fascination and curiosity. They became a showing of wealth and taste. The owning of a disabled slave became a sought after form of luxury and

entertainment for those who could afford it, but the disabled also meant divine punishment and monstrous emperors to others.

Disabled slaves became sought after, with higher prices than a normal bodied slave and some disabled slaves became a households lucky charm. Those who were unable to buy a disabled slave, bought representations of the disabled.

Freeborn disabled Romans had the ability to function normally within society with the support of family, their slaves, wealth and a trusted environment. It is true that they were made fun of and the Roman laws stated multiple times that disabled children should be killed at birth, but their existence and the multitude of references of the disabled made it clear they had earned their place within the Roman society. The normal bodied and disabled were not equal to each other, but I have shown that the disabled were more sought after then one might assume.

In this thesis the treatment and position of the disabled within the Roman Empire during its rise from 600 B.C.E. until the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D has been discussed. Within the thesis the treatment on multiple levels of four different types of disabilities was analysed with the use of archaeological evidence, ancient literature and secondary literature. The added value of this form of research was to provide insight into the thinking and the views of Romans about the disabled or *ostentum* controversy that arose as a result of the unclear definition of what made a person disabled or a monster according to the Romans. Ancient literary sources and archaeological evidence were combined and were able to complete each other to create a clear answer.

By using written and physical evidence of the Roman Empire, historians will be able to find out why a disability, whether it was the blind, lame, dwarfs or hunchbacked, was treated in a particular way and why certain language choices to describe the disabled (whether or not consciously) were made. This will enable us to describe a more precise retelling of history. The results of this thesis show that within the debate about *disability history*, historians should not only try to prove if the disabled were treated correctly in answers as yes or no. Deformity was not defined in the Roman Empire and thus there was no collective identification.

Further studies within *disability history*, should try to focus on a more precise turning point within the history of the Roman Empire when the attitudes changed towards the disabled as horror turned into fascination. Dunston Lowe mentions this subject but does not go into further detail. In addition, the differences between the

treatment of the disabled between the early republican and the early imperial periods would therefore also be interesting to study.

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