

# Aleijadinho (1738-1814)



- 1738 Aleijadinho ("Little Cripple;" *aleijado* > Portuguese = cripple) is the professional name by which Antônio Francisco Lisboa was born in Vila Rica (later changed to Ouro Preto, "dark gold") in the state of Minas Gerais (General Mines), Brazil. To locate Ouro Preto on a map of Brazil, click here: => [Brazil map](#).  
His father was a Portuguese carpenter and architect, Manoel Francisco Lisboa.  
His mother, Izabel, was a black slave, who was given her freedom at the birth of her son, little Aleijadinho.
- 1738-1765 The boy suffered a terrible disease in childhood (Portuguese: *zamparina*), which caused his limbs to be atrophied throughout his entire life. Due to this handicap, his slaves (Maurício, Agostinho, Januário) held the tools he used to create his sculptures.  
His education consisted in music, Latin, reading, writing, design, and architecture.
- 1766 The Order of St. Francis of Assisi hired him to build the church of São Francisco de Assis. This church was his masterpiece, and it was built in the baroque-rococo style.
- 1777 His disease (leprosy?) caused him to lose the use of both hands. When he continued working and sculpting despite this terrible disability, especially for a sculptor, he was given the nickname of Aleijadinho
- 1777-1812 Rich patrons throughout the state of Minas Gerais awarded him with many commissions. His best works dates from this period. Among them are Carmelite churches in Sabará and Ouro Preto, the façade of São Francisco de Assis da Penitência in Ouro Preto, the sanctuary of Bom Jesus de Matozinhos (also in the state of Minas Gerais).
- 1780-1790 He sculpted the gigantic project of 67 statues of the Passion of Christ at Morro do Maranhão.
- 1800-1805 He sculpted his masterpiece, 12 Old Testament prophets, in Congonhas.

- 1812 He became totally paralyzed.  
1814 He died a pauper. He was buried in the Mother Church of Nossa Senhora da Conceição (Our Lady of the Conception).

Aleijadinho is known principally as the single most important genius and the greatest colonial sculptor in colonial Brazilian culture, art, and the humanities. He was known as "the little cripple" by his contemporaries. Among his most significant works is the "ballet of stone" that he created in the statues on the external balusters of a church stairway at Congonhas. This ballet of stone has statues of Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Ezekiel, Johan, Joel, Daniel, Hosea, and more. One of the statues is of himself. These statues demonstrate psychological penetration into the individual character of each figure, and the entire group of twelve statues is perfectly organized as a complete whole. In Morro do Maranhão, there are statues on different levels with 67 statues of pilgrim stations of the cross; each station comprises a complete scene. Aleijadinho has been depicted in films and television: *Cristo de Lama* (1966), *Aleijadinho, Paixão, Glória e Suplício* (2003), and a Brazilian TV special. An on-line comment in Portuguese says the following about his masterpieces: "*Quando uma obra isolada do mestre escultor está diante de nossos olhos, ficamos com a impressão de que nela existe vida* (When each separate one of the master sculptor's works is placed before our eyes we are struck with an impression that life exists in it.).

For a photographic tour of some of Aleijadinho's works, click on the following image:



[WTL Home](#)

[Context Index](#)

[Hum 2461 Home](#)