

THE HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE ROMAN *FLAGRUM* : SOME CLARIFICATIONS

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The analysis of the imprint on the Turin Shroud allowed recognizing traces of different kind of corporal injuries. Many of these traces have been identified with bloodstains¹, which are placed all over the body surface of the Man of the Shroud: some of them are on the face; others can be seen, even with the naked eye, on the surface of the head; other ones are visible on the wrists, and a large bloodstain covers part of the right side of the thorax.

On the imprint of the long Sheet are also clearly visible a number of marks, falling all over the surface of the body, from the shoulders to the lower extremities of the legs: scholars interpreted those signs like the result of a terrible scourging, which was inflicted on the Man of the Shroud before crucifixion. The marks of flogging and crucifixion, like the great part of the wound marks visible on the cloth, strengthened the hypothesis of the identification of the Man of the Shroud with Jesus of Nazareth: the tortures suffered by the Man of the Shroud can be totally assimilated to the ones that, according to the Gospels, were inflicted on Jesus.

Mark and Matthew openly say that Jesus was flogged (they use the term *fraghellôsas*, **Mk 15, 15**; **Mt 27, 26**); Luke only talks about a chastisement (*paideusas*, **Lk 23, 25**), while John uses the word *emastîgosen* (**Jh 19, 1**), coming from the Greek term *mastix*.

The hypothesis of the identification of the tortures suffered by Jesus and the ones of the Man of the Shroud requires verifying if the marks on the Shroud are really compatible with the tortures adopted in the Roman world in the 1st century, which is the context of Jesus' trial and sentence. Are the

¹ See in particular J. H. HELLER, A. D. ADLER, "Blood on the Shroud of Turin", *Applied Optics*, vol. 19, n. 16, 1980, pp. 2742-2744; ID., "A chemical investigation of the Shroud of Turin", *Canadian Society of Forensic Science Journal* 14 (n. 3) (1981), pp. 81-103; J. H. HELLER, *Report on the Shroud of Turin*, Houghton Mufflin and co., Boston, 1983; AA. VV., "A Comprehensive Examination of the Various Stains and Images on the Shroud of Turin", *ACS Advances in Chemistry No. 205, Archaeological Chemistry III* (1984), J. P. Lambert Editor, pp. 447-476; C. BRILLANTE, *La fibrinolisi nella genesi delle impronte sindoniche*, in *La Sindone: scienza e fede*, Atti del II convegno nazionale di sindonologia, Bologna, 27-29 novembre 1981, ed. by L. COPPINI, F. CAVAZZUTI, CLUEB, Bologna, 1983, pp. 239-241; P. L. BAIMA BOLLONE, M. JORIO, A.L. MASSARO, "La dimostrazione della presenza di sangue umano sulla Sindone", *Sindon*, 30 (1981), pp. 5-8; P. L. BAIMA BOLLONE, M. JORIO, A.L. MASSARO, "Identificazione del gruppo delle tracce di sangue umano sulla Sindone", *Sindon* 31 (1982), pp. 5-9.

scourge marks of the Turin Shroud really compatible with the tools used in that period and in that place by the Romans?

This question prompted many researches, which started at the beginning of the 20th century with P. Vignon², who believed that the Man of the Shroud had suffered a scourging typical of the Roman world, and would have been hit with a Roman *flagellum* made of three lashes ending with two lead balls put one after the other.

This interpretation was confirmed by many scholars (see in particular N. Noguier de Malijay³, A. Tonelli⁴, R.W. Hynek⁵, G. Judica Cordiglia⁶); P. Barbet⁷ supposed that the scourge lashes ended with animal bones (astragals, talus bones), and this hypothesis was soon accepted also by many other researchers, such as G. Ricci⁸, P. Baima Bollone (who defined those marks as ‘laceration and bruise wounds’, and supposed that the Man of the Shroud was hit also with other tools, such as thin sticks⁹), G. Zaninotto¹⁰, F. T. Zugibe¹¹ and recently by B. Faccini and G. Fanti¹², who supposed that the Man of the Shroud was scourged with three different tools (a Roman *flagrum* and flexible rods or rigid leather cords). Many of the quoted scholars often used a specific word to define the *flagrum* that would have been used for the Man of the Shroud: *taxillatum*.

The analysis of this theme may appear as concluded, since Historiography is unanimous. Nevertheless, some new elements seem to emerge from the examination of this matter: in fact, a particular datum that can be inferred from the exegesis of these studies is that the word *taxillatum* is used only starting from the 1980s. Before this time, scholars used to talk about a generic Roman

² P. VIGNON, *Le Saint Suaire de Turin: devant la science, l'archéologie, l'histoire, l'iconographie, la logique*, Paris 1938, pp. 56-60 (see fig. 27).

³ N. NOGUIER DE MALIJAY, *La Sindone di Torino*, translation by P. VALETTI, Libreria del Sacro Cuore A. e G. Sismondi, Torino, 1930, pp. 67-68.

⁴ A. TONELLI, *La Santa Sindone: esame oggettivo*, Società editrice internazionale, Torino, 1931, p. 14.

⁵ R.W. HYNEK, *La passione di Cristo e la scienza medica*, Milano, 1950, p. 99.

⁶ G. JUDICA CORDIGLIA, *La Sindone contro Pilato*, 1944, p. 87.

⁷ P. BARBET, *La passione di N.S. Gesù Cristo secondo il chirurgo*; translation by G. BELLARDO, LICE, Torino, 1951, p. 109f.

⁸ G. RICCI, *L'Uomo della Sindone è Gesù*, Cammino, Milano, 1985, pp. 139f, pp. 481-481; see also ID., *La flagellazione secondo la Sindone*, Edizioni Fondazione Pellizza, Chiari (Brescia), 1975, p. 8.

⁹ P. L. BAIMA BOLLONE, P. P. BENEDETTO, *Alla ricerca dell'Uomo della Sindone*, A. Mondadori, Milano, 1978, p. 151; P. L. BAIMA BOLLONE, *Gli ultimi giorni di Gesù*, Mondadori, 1999, p. 71; P. L. BAIMA BOLLONE, “Il segno della sofferenza”, *Sindon N.S.*, Quad. 4, pp. 35-42.

¹⁰ G. ZANINOTTO, *Flagellazione romana*, Centro Romano di Sindonologia, Roma 1984; ID., *La flagellazione romana*, s.d.

¹¹ F. T. ZUGIBE, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Forensic Inquiry*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

¹² B. FACCINI, *Scourge bloodstains on the Turin Shroud: an evidence for different instruments used*, in *The Shroud of Turin: Perspectives on a Multifaced enigma*, ed. by G. FANTI, Ohio State University Blackwell Hotel, 2009 (Proceedings of the Ohio Conference on the Turin Shroud, August 14-August 17 2008), pp. 228-245; B. FACCINI, G. FANTI, *New Image Processing on the Turin Shroud Scourge Marks*, Proceedings of the International Workshop on the Scientific approach to the *Acheiropoietos* Images, ENEA Frascati, Italy, 4-6 May 2010, pp. 47-54.

flagrum, without any further specification. This unexpected element aroused the curiosity about the use of this term in primary sources, but this research led to an unforeseen answer: Latin sources never mention a *flagrum taxillatum*. But how does this information reconcile with the hypothesis of the great scholars who analyzed this particular issue of the Shroud? Why do they always talk about an object that sources never mention? And if there is no evidence of an instrument corresponding with the one which originated the wound marks on the Shroud, is it possible to state nonetheless that the traces on the cloth are compatible with the torture practice of the Roman world in the 1st century AD?

In order to understand if those doubts can be solved, we will try to retrace, through the witness of original sources and in the light of the most recent bibliography, some information about Roman scourging, in order to understand if there is any compatibility between the scourging modalities of the Roman period and the traces visible on the Turin Shroud.

SCOURGING IN THE ROMAN ERA

We have many Historical and Literary witnesses about scourging in the Roman time, even if, in most of cases, they are brief hints and we never have a clear and precise description of the instruments used to inflict this punishment.

The origins of the torture which led to the beating and often, as a consequence, to the laceration of flesh, are unknown; probably, it was carried out by all the primitive populations. It was doubtless carried out by the Greeks, both as bodily punishment (**Xenophon, Ἑλληνικά, III, 3, 11**), especially towards slaves (**Plato, Νόμοι, IX, § 872b-c**), both as a form of incitement for the troops (**Herodotus, Ἱστορίαι, VII, 56; Thucydides, Περὶ τοῦ Πελοποννησίου πολέμου, IV, 47; Xenophon, Κόρου παιδεία, VIII, 3, 9; Xenophon, Ἀνάβασις, III, 4, 25**).

The use of flogging was adopted by the Romans, and probably it had been introduced during the Etruscan reign¹³. It was soon regulated by civil laws, and it was carried out both in the context of the civil justice and in the one of private and domestic jurisprudence¹⁴.

In the Roman time the punishment through flesh beating could be inflicted for several reasons: it could be a chastisement for lesser crimes, as a sort of warning, a punishment to get prisoners to

¹³ E. CANTARELLA, *I supplizi capitali. Origine e funzioni delle pene di morte in Grecia e a Roma*, Universale Economica Feltrinelli, Milano, 2005, p. 220. In the Roman sources there is not always a clear differentiation between the flogging in a strict sense (made with flexible tools) and the beating (with sticks and rods). In late sources there is a clear differentiation among the instruments used to inflict this torture, depending of the social status of the criminals and from their belonging to the Roman citizenry (**Cth. 8, 5, 2; Digestum, 47, 9, 4.1; 47, 10, 9, 3; 48, 2, 6; 48, 19, 10**); probably these rules where the reflex of more ancient traditions (see for example **Terence, Adelphe, 182: Ad necem operiere loris. Loris liber?**).

¹⁴ F. DI BELLA, *Storia della tortura*, Odoja, Bologna, 1961, p. 58.

confess (*Acts of Apostles*, 22, 24-29), or a chastisement part of a sentence of death (it often preceded crucifixion: **Livy**, *Ab Urbe Condita libri CXLII*¹⁵, XXXIII, 36, 3; **Flavius Josephus**, **Ἱστορία Ἰουδαϊκοῦ πολέμου πρὸς Ῥωμαίους**, II, 14, 9). Sometimes the sentenced died because of the scourge blows (**Horace**, *Satiras*, I, 2, 41).

The Roman criminal law distinguished those who could be flogged: in the age of the Republic, Roman citizens were protected by specific laws, which forbade to carry on scourging against citizens before the *provocatio ad populum*¹⁶, unless the crime was very serious, like in the cases of betrayal of the fatherland (**Livy**, *Ab Urbe Condita*, I, 26), patricide, attempt to restore monarchy (**Valerius Maximus**, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX*, V, 8, 2), violence against the Vestal Virgins (**Livy**, *Ab Urbe condita*, XXII, 57, 3; XXVIII, 11, 6; **Dionysius of Halicarnassus**, **Ῥωμαϊκὴ Ἀρχαιολογία**, I, 78, 5; VIII, 69; IX, 40; **Suetonius**, *Vita Domitiani*, 8, 5). During the Empire, protections for Roman citizens ceased, and also those who had the Roman citizenry could be scourged and beaten (**Suetonius**, *Vita Caligulae*, 26; **Seneca**, *De ira*, 3, 18, 3; 3, 19, 1).

No protection was provided for those who were not citizens, and even more so for slaves, who, together with foreign people, were the main victims of scourging (**Plautus**, *Persa*, 4, 8; *Truculentus*, 4, 3; *Pseudolus*, 1, 2; **Martial**, *Epigrammata*, XIV, 79; **Juvenal**, *Saturae*, VI, § 678; **Tertullian**, *De spectaculis*, 21; *Digest*, LXVIII, 19, 10; **Aelius Donatus**, *Commentarius in Terentium*, p. 37).

If scourging was a domestic punishment, it could be carried out in the house; when it was inflicted against someone who had transgressed the public law, it was usually carried out in a public place (**Philo of Alexandria**, *In Flaccum*, 10, 75; **Flavius Josephus**, **Ἱστορία Ἰουδαϊκοῦ πολέμου πρὸς Ῥωμαίους**, II, 14, 9; VII, 6, 4; **Suetonius**, *Vita Divi Titi*, 8, 5; *Vita Domitiani*, 8, 5). The sentenced was bared (**Livy**, *Ab Urbe condita*, II, 5, 55; **Suetonius**, *Vita Caligulae*, 26, 3; **Apuleius**, *Metamorphoseon libri XI*, VIII, 173), tied to a pole (**Dionysius of Halicarnassus**, **Ῥωμαϊκὴ**

¹⁵ From now on: *Ab Urbe condita*.

¹⁶ F. DI BELLA, *Storia...*, p. 58; see also E. CANTARELLA, *Fatto flagellare Gesù, lo diede nelle loro mani, affinché fosse crocifisso (Matth. 27,26): il supplizio*, in *Il processo contro Gesù*, ed. by F. AMARELLI, F. LUCREZI, Jovene Editore, 1999, pp. 211-228: «i romani identificavano la morte onorata con la loro dignità di cittadini. Il *civis romanus* era tale fino all'attimo estremo della sua vita, nulla e nessuno poteva privarlo del legittimo orgoglio con cui per tutta la vita aveva portato questo titolo», p. 213. A first regulation goes back to 509 BC, when P. Valerius Publicola introduced the *Lex Valeria de provocatio*, which forbade magistrates to flog citizens before they had appealed to the people (*provocatio ad populum*; see in particular L. AMIRANTE, *Sulla provocatio ad populum fino al 300*, in *Studi di Storia Costituzionale Romana*, Jovene Editore, Napoli, 1988, p. 89f.); in 195 BC M. Porcius Cato issued the *Lex Porcia del tergo civium*: according to some scholars, this law sanctioned the total abolition of the use of rods against the Roman citizens (B. SANTALUCIA, *Diritto e processo penale nell'antica Roma*, Giuffrè, 1989, p. 71; see also **Cicero**, *Pro Rabirio perduellionis reo*, 3, 8, 12; **Livy**, *Ab Urbe condita*, X, 9, 4-5; **Sallust**, *De coniuratione Catilinae*, 51, 21, 22; *Acts of the Apostles*, 22, 24-29).

Ἀρχαιολογία, VII, 69) or a column (Plautus, *Amphitruo*, 4, 2, 10; Plautus, *Bacchides*, 4, 7, 25) or simply thrown on the ground.

Juvenal states that there was a specific category of slaves who executed the torture, called *tortores* (Juvenal, *Saturae*, VI, 479; Martial, *Epigrammata*, II, 17, 12); in Plautus' comedies they are called *lorarii* (Plautus, *Captivi*, 1, 2; 2, 1; see also Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Acticae*, X, 3).

In the Roman world the number of strokes that could be given was not fixed (differently from the Jewish world, where the number of lashes was fixed to 39¹⁷); if scourging was just a punishment not connected to a death sentence, the executioners had to avoid the death of the sentenced.

Scourging could have various consequences, and they depended on the kind of tools that were used (which was probably chosen by the judge: Horace, *Satiras*, I, 3, § 117-125)¹⁸.

THE TOOLS OF ROMAN SCOURGING

In the Roman world many different instruments were used to inflict chastisements through flesh beating. The use of the different tools was determined by the gravity of the crime, but also by the social class of the prisoner and by its nationality.

The lowest level of this punishment was carried out in schools, against undisciplined children: in this case was used an instrument called *ferula*, which was a thin stick or a flat leather strip (Martial, *Epigrammata*, X, 62; 14, 79; Juvenal, *Saturae*, I, 15).

Another instrument which could be used for the domestic punishment was the so called *virga* (Juvenal, *Saturae*, VII, 210); in the case of serious crimes, it could become an instrument of death¹⁹. It was a small rod made of elm or birch, which could be used singularly or joined together; in this form, *virgae* were also carried by the lictors as symbols of the juridical and administrative authority of the magistrates, because they were used to flog criminals (Cicero, *In Verrem*, 2, 5,

¹⁷ There is not a total agreement among students about the number of scourge wounds visible on the Turin Shroud; according to someone, the Man of the Shroud received 40 blows; according to others, much more than 39 scourge marks can be counted on the sheet. Recent studies seem to confirm this second hypothesis (see in particular B. FACCINI, G. FANTI, *New Image Processing...*).

¹⁸ About the physical consequences of scourging see in particular G. JUDICA CORDIGLIA, *La Sindone...*, p. 89f; M. A. DINA, *Indagine Anatomo-patologica della Passione*, in *L'Uomo della Sindone*, preface by F. ANGELINI, Edizioni Orizzonte medico, 1978, pp. 131-143, p. 135f; E. BERNARDI, *Le varie cause di morte nei crocefissi e il meccanismo della morte per crocefissione*, in *L'Uomo della Sindone*, preface by F. ANGELINI, Edizioni Orizzonte medico, 1978, pp. 144-204, p. 162f; G. LARATO, *L'ignominiosa flagellazione secondo la Sindone: rilievi di fisiopatologia clinica*, in *La Sindone, nuovi studi e ricerche*, Atti del III Congresso Nazionale di Studi sulla Sindone, Trani, 13-14 ottobre 1984, Ed. Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), 1986, pp. 191-218, p. 200f.

¹⁹ See E. CANTARELLA, *I supplizi...*, p. 171.

140; Livy, *Ab Urbe conditam*, II, 5; XXVI, 15-16; XXVIII, 29; XXIX, 9; Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XVI, 30, 75; *Acts of Apostles*, 22, 24-29).

We have many iconographical witnesses of the *virgae* used as symbol of the magistrates' power: often representations can be found on tombs (like on the sepulchral monument of M. Caelius Dyionisus (Vatican Museums, **Fig. 1**)²⁰ and on the tomb of T. Aquinius Proculus (Naples National Archaeological Museum, **Fig. 2**)²¹), on coins (see for examples the denarius of M. Junius Brutus, dated to 59 BC²², **Fig. 3**) or even on monuments (like on Trajan' Arch in Benevento²³).



Fig. 1: Monument of the lictor M. Caelius Dionysus, bearing a bundle of *virgae* (Rome, Vatican Museums).



Fig. 2: Detail from the tomb of T. Aquinius Proculus; isolated bundles of *virgae* (Naples National Archaeological Museum, 2nd century AD).

²⁰ *Il fascio littorio*, by A. M. COLINI (?), Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Roma, 1932, fig. 31.

²¹ *IBID.*, fig. 37, p. 99.

²² *IBID.*, tav. I.4.

²³ *IBID.*, fig. 21, p. 36.

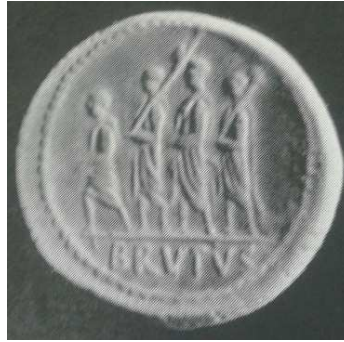


Fig. 3: *Denarius* of M. Junius Brutus; parade of lictors with *virgae* (59 BC).

Sometimes the lictors are represented while holding single *virgae*, like on a bas relief coming from Nîmes²⁴ (**Fig. 4**).



Fig. 4: Fragment of monument from Nîmes; lector with a single *virga* (Nîmes, National Archaeological Museum).

Isidore of Seville states that from the *virgae* could originate an even more terrible torture tool, called *scorpio*: if *virgae* were nubby and full of quills, their destructive strength grow up and they could inflict deep wounds (**Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, V, 27, 18**). It is not possible to exclude that some of the scourging marks visible on the Shroud (in particular, the double-shaped marks called Type 1 by B. Faccini and G. Fanti) could have been caused by an instrument like this.

²⁴ IBID., fig. 59 p. 176. Another interesting representation of the use of the single *virga* can be found on a fresco of the Villa of the Mysteries of Pompeii (dated to the 70 BC): here a woman is being flogged by a winged demon (probably this is a scene of initiation to the Mysteries of Dionysus, see G. SAURON, *Il grande affresco della Villa dei Misteri a Pompei. Memorie di una devota di Dioniso*, Jaca Book, Milano, 2010, pp. 87-107).

The Romans often used whips made of a unique lash, which could be called with several words (like *lorum* or *habena*: **Plautus, *Epidicus*, 5, 1; *Mercator*, 5, 4; *Persa*, 4, 8; Horace, *Epodi*, 1, 16, 47)**²⁵. There are many iconographical witnesses attesting the use of this tool: we can quote, for example, the iconography of Apollo Helios, often represented while he drives horses with a whip²⁶ (**Fig. 5**).



Fig. 5: Apollo Helios driving horses with a whip made of a unique lash (Naples National Archaeological Museum, 1st century AD).

On a mural painting from Pompeii, we can see the troops of the Persian army incited by a man with a whip made of a unique lash²⁷.

In the Roman time were widely used also whips made of several lashes, and they are often represented in art: we can mention, for example, the painting of a house of the *Regio VI* of Pompeii, where Apollo Helios keeps in his hands a globe and a whip provided with two lashes²⁸ (**Fig. 6**).

²⁵ See *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, by CH. DAREMBERG, EDM. SAGLIO, Reprint Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1969, 10 voll. (Ripr. of the ed. Hachett, Parigi, 1877-1919), Tome 3, Vol.2, s.v. *lorum*, by G. LAFAYE s.v. *lorum*; Ibid., Tome 3, Vol. 1, s.v. *habena*, by G. LAFAYE.

²⁶ See for example L. BARRÉ, *Ercolano e Pompei: raccolta generale di pitture, bronzi, mosaici, ec. fin ora scoperti e riprodotti dietro le antichità di Ercolano, il Museo Borbonico e le opere tutte pubblicate fin qui*, Giuseppe Antonelli ed., Venezia, 1841-1845; Vol. VII, pl. 95, p. 196; see also Vol. I, pl. 14; Vol. IV, pl. 9; Vol. IV, pl. 39, 40, 47.

²⁷ IBID., vol. IV tavv. 13, 14, 15.

²⁸ *Pompei: pitture e mosaici*, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, Roma, vol. 4, p. 450, fig. 2.



Fig. 6: Apollo Helios with the globe and a whip made of two lashes (Naples National Archaeological Museum, 1st century AD).

Another interesting witness comes from a coin: on a denarius that can be attributed to the moneyer T. Deidius (consul on 98 BC) we can see a man on the left who is beating another man with a whip made of three lashes. The coin is dated to 113/112 BC²⁹ (**Fig. 7**).



Fig. 7: *Denarius* of T. Deidius, 113/112 BC. Fighting scene where one fighter is scourged with a whip made of three lashes.

Scholars supposed many explanations for this scene: according to someone, it would represent a fighting between two gladiators³⁰, while according to others it would be an episode of the civil wars which were fought in Italy in the 2nd century BC. Even if we do not know anything about the attendance of a member of the *gens Didia* to those fights, probably the moneyer wanted to commemorate one of his ancestors with this representation³¹.

²⁹ M. H. CRAWFORD, *Roman Republican Coinage*, Cambridge University press, Cambridge - New York, I, p. 308, n. 294.

³⁰ A. BANTI, L. SIMONETTI, *Corpus Nummorum Romanorum, Monetazione Repubblicana, Cornvicia-Gallia*, A. Banti Editore, Firenze, pp. 93-94.

³¹ E. BERNAREGGI, *Eventi e personaggi sul denario della Repubblica Romana*, Mario Ratto Editore, Milano, 1963, pp. 37-38; this interpretation is proposed also by Fougères (cf. *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et*

Latin sources also mention the *scutica*, a whip made of several lashes (sometimes of ox skin, **Plautus, *Mostellaria*, 4, 1, 26**³²), which could be twisted. A representation of this instrument can be found on a lead jug from Pompeii³³.

Another particular kind of whip with many lashes was the so called ‘Spanish cord’, mentioned in the Horace’s *Epods* (**4, 3**). According to B. Faccini, this tool was made of a handle and several leather straps, and it could be one of those that were used to flog the Man of the Shroud³⁴.

We have an interesting witness of a tool like this from the Roman world³⁵: it can be seen on the lid of a sarcophagus found in the cemetery of Pretestatus, dated to the 3rd century³⁶ (**Fig. 8**): here is represented a woman (Aelia Afanasia, as it is written on the surface of the sarcophagus) who is being scourged by another woman. It was initially interpreted as the scene of martyrdom, but scholars now state that this it could be the scene of a ritual initiation³⁷.



Fig. 8: Sarcophagus of Aelia Afanasia; the defunct is being scourged with a tool that can be assimilated to Spanish cords (Rome, Museo Classico delle Catacombe di Pretestato, 3rd century AD).

A similar instrument is represented on a mosaic found in a villa in Rome, now preserved at Villa Borghese, dated to the 4th century AD: here we can see a man, a little distant from some fighting

romaines..., Tome 2, Vol. 1, s.v. *flagellum*, by G. FOUGÈRES, see in particular footnote 9, p. 1115: «Sur une monnaie de la gens didi, le préteur T. Didius, vainqueur de esclaves rebelles en Sicilie, est représenté, un fuet double à la main, frappant un hommé armé». See also E. BABELON, *Description Historique et Chronologique des Monnaies de la République Romaine*, I, Arnaldo Forni Editore, Bologna, 1963, pp. 455-456.

³² According to Rich, the *scutica* was made of a unique lash (see A. RICH, *Dictionary of Roman and Greek antiquities*, 1890, London, 5 ed., s.v. *scutica*, p. 289).

³³ S. TASSINARI, *Il Vasellame bronzeo di Pompei*, L'Erma di Bretschneider, Roma, 1993, p. 31 (vase n. B1222).

³⁴ B. FACCINI, *Scourge bloodstains...*, Fig. 16A, p. 18.

³⁵ *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, by S. ENSOLI, E. LA ROCCA, L'Erma di Bretschneider, Roma, 2000, p. 594.

³⁶ G. WILPERT, “Fustigazione rituale”, *Roma. Rivista di Studi e di Vita Romana* XVII (febbraio 1939), pp. 49-53, p. 52.

³⁷ *Aurea Roma...*, p. 594.

gladiators, with a whip formed by several lashes in his hand³⁸ (probably he was one of the *incitatores*, who had to incite tired or coward fighters).

The chastisement through the flesh beating could be inflicted also with sticks of various diameter: insubordinate soldiers could be punished with *fustis*³⁹ (Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, V, 6, 14; Cicero, *Philippicae orationes*, 3, 14; Tacitus, *Annales*, XIV, 44; sometimes they were also used to hit Roman citizens, Suetonius, *Vita Caligulae*, 26), *stimulus* (a stick ending with a goad; often it was used to spur animals, Tibullus, *Elegiae*, I, 10; Columella, *De re rustica*, II, 2, 26; Plautus, *Menecmi*, 951; Plautus, *Mostellaria*, 1, 1, 56; Plautus, *Pseudolus*, § 1240⁴⁰), but sometimes chains were used too (Suetonius, *Vita Caligulae*, 27, 4)⁴¹.

THE TERRIBLE *FLAGRUM*

Archaeological bibliography considers all the instruments described up to now as associable to the concept of *flagella*, generally defined as «plusieurs instruments don't les anciens se servaient pour frapper les animaux et certaines classes d'individus [...] Des noms different étaient appliqués a ces objets, suivant leur forme et leur destination special»⁴².

Nevertheless, in the same bibliography can be found a clear differentiation between the *flagellum* in the strict sense of the word and the *flagrum*: although these terms can be considered as synonymous (from an etymological point of view, *flagellum* is the diminutive of *flagrum*, see Isidore of Seville, *Etimologiae*, V, 27, 14), *flagrum* is considered a more destructive *flagellum*. According to A. Rich, the main difference between the two objects is their structure: while the *flagellum* was a whip made of leather and flexible lashes, the *flagrum* had blunt endings, which could beat and rip flesh⁴³.

Also G. Fougères, in the Dictionary of Roman and Greek Antiquities by Daremberg and Saglio, points out the mayor destructivity of this tool: «Mais les plus terrible de ces instruments était le *flagrum*, qui, dans ce cas, ne doit pas être confondu avec le *flagellum* propement dit»⁴⁴. According to this scholar, the Romans used *flagra* made of a short handle from which originated twisted, little chains ending with metal balls. We have some hints at this tools in sources like Prudentius (*Liber*

³⁸ F. GUIDI, *Morte nell'Arena. Storia e leggenda dei gladiatori*, Mondadori, Milano, 2010, figg. 30 e 31.

³⁹ A. RICH, *A dictionary...*, s.v. *fustuarium*, p. 310.

⁴⁰ IBID., s.v. *stimulus*, p. 622.

⁴¹ For other torture instruments used to beat flesh in the Roman world see Isidore of Seville, *Etimologiae*, V, 27, 18-23; G. ZANINOTTO, *La flagellazione...*, p. 2.

⁴² *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines...*, Tome 2, Vol. 1, s.v. *flagellum*, by G. FOUGÈRES, p. 1152.

⁴³ A. RICH, *A dictionary...*, s.v. *flagellum*, s.v. *flagrum*.

⁴⁴ *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines...*, Tome 2, Vol. 1, s.v. *flagellum*, by G. FOUGÈRES.

Peristephanon, X, 116, 121), the *Theodosian Code* (IX, 35, 2.1; here this instrument is called *plumbatae*, because the balls were made of lead) and Zosimus (*Historia Nova*, V, 2, 7)⁴⁵.

There are not many iconographical witnesses of this instrument: it was used only to inflict terrible chastisements, unlike other tools which could have a symbolic value as well as a punitive one. In the classical world, artistic subjects usually convey an idea of a reality which is filtered through the symbol: for this reason, scenes representing scourging are always of a mythological type (for example in the representations of Apollo Helios), or can be related to cult and religion (like in the cases of ritual flogging) or to the world of games (gladiators fighting, for example, which had strong symbolic values). Violence episodes have always to be filtered through the lenses of myth, game and cult.

Nevertheless, it can be supposed that on a bas relief dated to the 2nd century BC, preserved at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, is represented a sort of *flagrum* ending with metal knobs (Fig. 9): on the left of the monument we can see a man who is beating another one with an object with round (but quite elongated) endings.



Fig. 9: Bas relief with scene of comedy. A man beats another one with an instrument which could be identifiable with a *flagrum* ending with rounded knobs (Naples, National Archaeological Museum, 2nd century BC).

It could be a *flagrum* of the kind mentioned above. This is the representation of a theater comedy: also in this case, a scene of violence is conveyed through a playful vision of life.

So, the existence of the *flagrum* ending with metal balls, which, according to some scholars, was used to hit the Man of the Shroud, is witnessed by Historical and probably also by Iconographical sources. Nevertheless, these sources never define this *flagrum* 'taxillatum'. So, what does this word

⁴⁵ See also *Ammianus Marcellinus*, *Res Gestae*, XXIX, 1, 23.

refer to? To answer this question, it is necessary to go back to some older sources, which talk about another type of *flagrum*, made of a handle from which started some lashes provided with animal bones (astragals).

Plutarch talks about this tool in the work *Adversus Colotem*, where he states that the priests of the *Magna Mater* were punished with a μάστιξ ἀστραγαλωτῆς (p. 1127c). Probably in this case Plutarch referred to rituals of self flogging which were widely practiced by the priests of the Syrian divinities Cybele (that was the *Magna Mater*) and Attis, whose cult was introduced in Rome from Asia Minor in the 3rd century BC⁴⁶. The cult of Cybele and Attis was officiated by a category of priests called *Galli*, whose head was the *Archigallo*. They carried out a series of rituals which required bloodshed, and scourging was one of them; it was put into practice through the *flagrum* provided with astragals. The existence of this tool is confirmed also by Athenaeus of Naucratis, who states that the Parthians used to beat people with tools (ράβδοις καὶ ἰμασιν) defined ἀστραγαλωτοῖς (*Δειπνοσοφισταί*, 4, 38). The same object is described by Lucian in the work *Lucius* or *The Ass* (Λούκιος ἢ ὄνος), where the protagonist is beaten with a ἀστραγάλων μάστιγι (38). Also Julius Pollux in his *Onomasticon* talks about a ἀστραγαλωτή whip (10, 54).

In the 3rd century Apuleius, in his *Metamorphoses*, clearly describes this object, which he connects to the rituals of the Syrian goddess Atargatis (in Rome known as Syria), who was often assimilated (in cult and in iconography) to Cybele. Apuleius states that the *flagrum* used by her priest for self-flogging was *contortis taenis lanosi velleris prolixae fimbriatum et multiugis talis ovium tesseratum* (*Metamorphoseon libri XI, VIII, 28*); shortly after, in the same work, the protagonist himself will be beaten with this tool, defined *pecunis ossibus catenato* (*Metamorphoseon libri XI, VIII, 30*).

Also Eustathius of Thessalonica, in the Commentary on Iliad (p. 1289, § 52), talks about the μάστιξ ἀστραγαλωτάς.

On a 2nd century bas relief (found at Lanuvio (RM) and now preserved at the Capitoline Museums), this torture tool is represented in all its terrible features, with its lashes garnished with several bones⁴⁷ (Fig. 10).

⁴⁶ P. SACCÀ, *Cibele e Attis. Dalla Frigia a Roma*, Intilla Editore, Messina, 2012, p. 23; pp. 45-49.

⁴⁷ IBID., p. 143, Fig. 42.



Fig. 10: Bas relief of Cybele and Attis' priest (the so called *Archigallo*) holding a *flagrum* provided with astragals (Rome, Capitoline Museums, 2nd century AD).

The witnesses talking about a whip provided with animal astragals seem to recall exactly the *flagrum taxillatum* often mentioned by the Shroud scholars starting from the 80s. But also in this case sources never use the exact word *taxillatum* to describe the torture tool. So where does this adjective come from? The answer to this question comes from a work published in the 16th century by the philologist and humanist Justus Lipsius: in his *De Cruce*, he analyzed the practice of scourging and flogging in the Roman time, and he examined all the sources which talk about the *flagrum* that he considered the most destructive one, which was the whip provided with astragals. Here he translates the passages of the authors mentioning this *flagrum* in different ways: Plutarch's μάστιξ άστραγαλωτῆς becomes *flagri illius taxillati*⁴⁸; Athenaeus' άστραγαλωτοις whips are *virgis et loris taxillatis*; Eusthatus' μαστιξ άστραγαλωτάς become *flagra talaria*, while Apuleius' Latin passages are quoted as *flagro ... contortis taeniis lanosi velleris prolixè fimbriatum, et multiugis talis ovium tessalatum* (VIII, 28) and *flagrum pecunis osibus cathenatum* (VIII, 30)⁴⁹.

So Lipsius freely translates the words referred to the presence of astragals through the various forms of the word *taxillatus*, but also with *talaria* and *tessalatum*. Clearly he adapted to the various lexical forms and contexts the Latin translation of the term astragal, which is *talus*: it could be translated both as 'astragal' (bone), and as 'game dice'⁵⁰. Lipsius considers *taxillus* (small dice) as a diminutive form of *talus*. Dices in Latin were also called *tesserae*⁵¹: it was a type of dice slightly different from the *talus*, since it was marked on the six faces from 1 to 6. From *tessera* derives the

⁴⁸ I. LIPSIUS, *De Cruce libri tres. Ad sacram profanamque historiam utiles*, Ex Officina Plantiniana, Apud Iohannem Moretum, 1597, p. 52.

⁴⁹ IBID.

⁵⁰ *Latin Dictionary*, founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary, revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten by Charlton T. Lewis and C. Short, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975, s.v. *talus*.

⁵¹ Isidore de Siville, *Etymologiae*, XVIII, 63: *Tesserae vocatae quia quadrae sunt ex omnibus partibus*; see also *Latin dictionary*, s.v. *talus*.

word *tesseratus* used by Apuleius, and translated by Lipsius with *tessalatum*. The phonetic resemblance of those words probably led Lipsius to consider them as synonymous, variously inflected.

So the word *flagrum taxillatum* used by several Shroud scholars seems to come exactly from Lipsius' work, which has been translated in the 80s by the famous sindonologist G. Zaninotto⁵². After this translation, Lipsius' work started circulating in Turin Shroud studies, and, as a consequence, the word *taxillatum* started to be commonly used⁵³.

For philological accuracy, it would be better to refer to this specific kind of *flagrum* not with the word *taxillatum* (which is the result of a free terminological interpretation), but with the expression 'provided with astragals', or *tesseratum* (see Apuleius).

Also the connection of this tool with the scourging of the Man of the Shroud seems not exact: this type of *flagrum* is always connected by sources to customs that were not Romans, but typical of foreign religions. To connect this tool to the Roman practices of 1st century Palestine does not seem much likely. Furthermore, the marks on the Shroud recall a scourge whose lashes end with only two weights (or one weight for each lash), while the *flagrum* of Cybele's priests was provided of several astragals.

Shroud scholars not always connected the adjective *taxillatus* to an instrument made of astragals: sometimes, *taxilli* were identified simply with blunt objects placed at the end of the lashes. Nevertheless, the *flagrum* with astragals was an object specifically connected to the cult of Cybele and Attis, provided with a specific shape, and the use of this term for the description of other kind of whips is improper. And similarly improper seems to be the comparison between this kind of whip and the Turin Shroud.

Nevertheless, this information does not undermine historical and iconographical witnesses talking about scourging tools compatible with the Shroud marks. In order to have further confirmations about this datum, it is necessary to examine also the field of Archaeology.

⁵² G. LIPSIO, *Il supplizio della croce (De Cruce), Trattato storico-letterario sul supplizio della croce dalle origini fino all'abolizione*, Introduction, translation, notes by G. ZANINOTTO, Roma, Ed. Giovinezza, 1987, p. 80.

⁵³ Lipsius himself stated that the *flagrum* provided with astragals was the one that had been used to scourge Jesus: «Era di questo modello il flagello con il quale fu colpito il nostro Cristo? Taluni, spinti dal sentimento religioso, così immaginano e dipingono. Non sono io ad asserirlo, ma il brano famoso dell'Evangelista Matteo, in cui è narrato che fu battuto, per di più con un flagello», G. LIPSIO, *Il supplizio...*, pp. 84-85.

Are there any Archaeological witnesses of the Roman time confirming the use of whips similar to the ones used to scourge the Man of the Shroud?

It is necessary to state that the great part of the instruments used to scourge the prisoners have not been preserved, since they were made of natural (and so perishable) materials, like leather or wood. For this reason, it will be very difficult to find specimens of *virgae*, *ferulae*, *scuticae* or *Spanish cords*.

The same applies to the *flagrum* with astragals, although it is possible that single parts of it are preserved, like for example the bones: in many museums it is possible to find series of astragals. In most of the cases they were probably used as game dices, but it is not possible to rule out that they were parts of a *flagrum*. Often they are pierced in the center, and it is usually interpreted as a result of the fact that they were worn as jewels because considered apotropaic objects⁵⁴, but in many cases it is possible to suppose that they were parts of a scourge.

For what concerns *flagra* made of chains and metal balls, we have some indications about the existence of such kind of tools in some dictionaries of Archaeology: we can quote a specimen mentioned in the Dictionary of Rich, which, according to the author, was found at Herculaneum, «in the house of which city other specimens have been found, with two or three tails, but otherwise of similar character to the present»⁵⁵. This information is reported also in the dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities by W. Smith⁵⁶, in the dictionary of Roman and Greek Archaeology by Daremberg and Saglio⁵⁷ and in the dictionary of Christian Archaeology by Cabrol and Leclercq⁵⁸. In all the previous cases, the specimens are reproduced with images taken from xylographies⁵⁹ (**Fig. 11**).

⁵⁴ See for example *Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti*, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, Vol. V, Roma, 1930, s.v. *astragalus*, by B. B. M.

⁵⁵ A. RICH, *A dictionary...*, p. 289, s.v. *flagrum*.

⁵⁶ W. SMITH, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1859, s.v. *flagrum*.

⁵⁷ *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines...*, Tome 2, Vol. 1, s.v. *flagellum*, by G. FOUGÈRES, fig. 3092, p. 1155.

⁵⁸ *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, by F. CABROL, H. LECLERCQ, Librairie Letouzey et Ane, Parigi, Vol. V, s.v. *flagellation (supplice de la)*, by H. LECLERCQ, c. 1642, fig. 4474.

⁵⁹ A. RICH, *A dictionary...*, p. 289; *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie...*, Vol. V, s.v. *flagellation (supplice de la)*, by H. LECLERCQ, fig. 4474; *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines...*, Tome 2, Vol. 1, s.v. *flagellum*, by G. FOUGÈRES, fig. 3092, 3093.

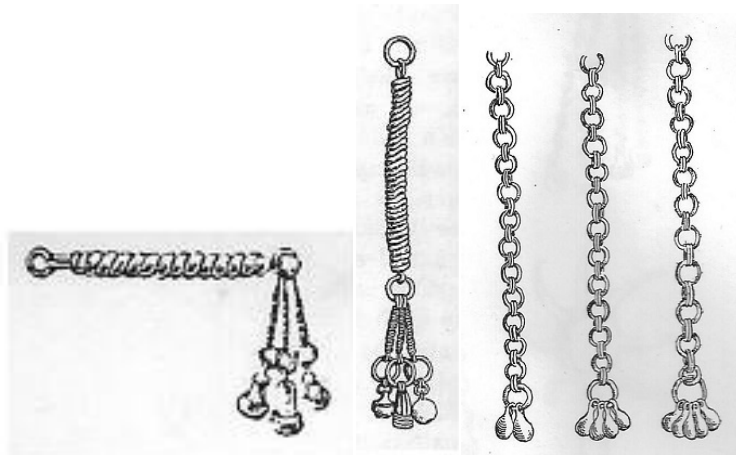


Fig. 11: Reproductions of specimens of *flagra* found at Herculaneum; the first image comes from the Dictionary of Greek and Roman antiquities of A. Rich (p. 289), the second one from the Dictionary of Roman and Greek antiquities of Daremberg and Saglio (fig. 3092) and the last one from the Dictionary of Christian Archaeology of Cabrol and Leclercq (fig. 4474).

In the dictionary of Daremberg and Saglio is stated that, beyond the *flagra* found at Herculaneum (made of chains and ending with metal knobs) other similar specimens were found in the Roman catacombs⁶⁰. The information is reported also in the dictionary of Christian Archaeology⁶¹, where are provided several illustration of objects interpreted as torture tools (fig. 4475) (**Fig. 12**).

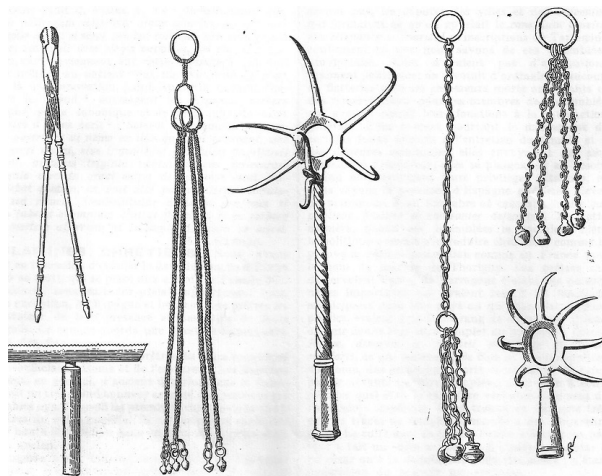


Fig. 12: Reproduction of objects interpreted as torture tools, coming from the Roman catacombs (Dictionary of Christian Archaeology of Cabrol e Leclercq, fig. 4475).

⁶⁰ *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines...*, Tome 2, Vol. 1, s.v. *flagellum*, by G. FOUGÈRES, p. 1155.

⁶¹ *Dictionnaire d'archeologie chretienne et de liturgie...*, Vol. V, fig. 4475.

The information about those specimens was acknowledged also by many scholars of the Shroud⁶²: the shape of the Herculaneum *flagra*, such as that of the catacombs ones, seems to be compatible with the scourging marks visible on the Sheet.

Another indication about a specimen of a *flagrum* can be found in a work of G. Maggioni, who states that a sample of a tool similar to the one used to scourge the Man of the Shroud would be today preserved at the National Museum of Rome⁶³.

The indications about the existence of *flagra* connectable with the Shroud marks, dated to the 1st century (the Herculaneum *flagra*) or to the first centuries of the Christian era (the catacombs *flagra* or the ones of the National Museum of Rome) seem to remove every doubt about the possibility that the Man of the Shroud came under a Roman scourging, not far from the period when Jesus lived. Nevertheless, those dictionaries are very old witnesses, and they lack of indications about the preservation places of the specimens: for this reason, it was necessary to verify if it is possible to go back to those objects and to understand where they are located today.

Since the information from the dictionaries refer to *flagra* found in Herculaneum and Rome, we got in touch with the main Institutions related to the archaeological excavations of those areas. For what concerns the *flagrum* of Herculaneum, the research in the database of the site, made by the General Direction for the Cultural Heritage of Campania, did not give the expected results: it was not possible to find any evidence of the *flagra* mentioned by Rich. The same result came from the research in the databases of the Naples National Archeological Museum (where we can find many evidences coming from Herculaneum). Nevertheless, the scholars who made this research underlined the difficulty of finding specimens lacking of an inventory number, even more so because they have been found in the 19th century. The General Direction pointed out that probably they have been registered in archives under a different nomenclature, or maybe they lay forgotten in some depository, or, more probably, they have been sold to other museums or private collections or even dismembered in their main parts (in museum we can find many examples of twisted chains, handles or metal knobs, which could be part of a *flagrum*).

So the research about the *flagra* from Herculaneum did not give the expected results.

At this point we tried to have some information about the *flagrum* of the National Roman Museum mentioned by G. Maggioni, but the answer was the same: no samples of *flagra* are today preserved in this Institution.

Finally, the research concentrated on the information about the *flagra* found in the catacombs: we turned to the Vatican Museums, where, during the past centuries, were collected specimens coming

⁶² See for example G. ZANINOTTO, *La flagellazione...*, p. 2 and F. T. ZUGIBE, *The Crucifixion...*, p. 19.

⁶³ G. MAGGIONI, *La Sindone*, <http://www.rotarymilanoportavittoria.org/Archivio/Sindone.pdf> (last consultation: 27/08/2014).

from the most important sites from all over the world. In this case, the answer of the Institution was positive: in fact, in the Vatican Museums are today preserved four objects classified as bronze Roman *flagella*, catalogued with numbers 60564-60567. On September 16th it was finally possible to go and see them in their current place of preservation.

The object number 60566 (**Fig. 13, 13a**) is made of a long chain ending with other three small chains which finish with round knobs. It is represented in the Dictionary of Christian Archaeology (fig. 4475), and it is very similar to the one number 60564 (which is represented also in the Dictionary of Daremberg and Saglio, fig. 3093), which ends with irregular metal knobs too.



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Fig. 13, 13a: Bronze *flagrum* from the Vatican Museums (inv. 60566), whole picture and detail.

The object number 60567 (**Fig. 14, 14a**) is made of four bronze chains starting from three rings and ending with triangle-shaped small objects, joined to the chains with a small ring⁶⁴. This specimen is represented in the dictionary of Cabrol e Leclercq (fig. 4475).



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Fig. 14, 14a: Bronze *flagrum* from the Vatican Museums (inv. 60567), whole picture and detail.

The last object is similar to 60567, but it is made only of two chains, and it is not represented on any dictionary⁶⁵.

⁶⁴ The photos of the *flagella* number 60566 and 60567 were kindly provided by the Photographical Services of the Vatican Museums.

⁶⁵ Similar specimens are quoted by A. LEGRAND (*Le Liceul de Turin*, preface de R. LAURENTIN, Desclée De Brouwer, Parigi, 1980, p. 116): according to the author, these objects are preserved at the Musée du Cinquanteenaire of Bruxelles, where they are classified as ‘phalères’ (horse ornaments). Nevertheless, the author himself supposes that they could be the extremities of *flagella* (p. 116). It is necessary to point out the resemblance of these specimens also with some objects of the Iron age, found, for example, in some Villanovian and Etruscan tombs (see for example M. E. TAMBURINI – MÜLLER, *La necropoli del Campo del Tesoro-Lavatoio di Verucchio (RN)*, Bologna, 2006, Tav. 50), described as pendants. Future researches will

None of these specimens is exposed at the Museum, but they are all preserved in the store. They were part of the Christian Museum (established in 1757 by pope Benedict XIV), where were collected objects of various places and times, from the 1st to the 16th centuries. In 1999 the collection was taken to the Vatican Museums⁶⁶.

Even if there are no sure indications about the provenance of the *flagra*, we know that they were exposed in the Christian Museum together with other torture tools and they were defined «*uncus ex aere ... sive singula ad excarnificanda corpora SS. Martyrum adhibita*»⁶⁷.

These specimens are not dated to the Medieval times (unlike other objects that were preserved in the same case⁶⁸), but to the first centuries of the Christian era. Actually, their provenance is unknown: clearly it got lost, in the course of time, the connection between these objects and the information of the archaeology dictionaries: both Daremberg and Saglio and Cabrol and Leclerc state that these exact specimens come from the catacombs, as we have seen⁶⁹. This is an important datum, which allows dating these tools, with more certainty, to the first centuries of the Christian Era (in fact, the catacombs were used only until the 4th - 5th century⁷⁰).

So now we have more elements to suppose that in the first centuries of the Christian era *flagra* with heavy knobs existed in the Roman world. The shape of these specimens seems to be compatible with some of the scourging marks visible on the Shroud, in particular with the traces defined «of the Type 1» by Faccini and Fanti, which consist in «two small round marks connected by a little trail»⁷¹: they may be the result of a flogging made with a tool provided with a couple of round knobs (like the ones of specimens n. 60566 and 60564) or, even more likely, with a *flagrum* similar to n. 60567, whose endings are made of two extremities (one slightly triangle-shaped and the other one rounded) connected by a thick metal piece (**Fig. 15**).

allow clarifying the connections among these specimens and the ones of the Vatican Museums and also their use in the ancient times.

⁶⁶ About the History of the Christian Museum see C. LEGA, *La nascita dei Musei Vaticani: Le antichità cristiane e il museo di Benedetto XIV*, from the *Bollettino*, Vol. XXVIII, Tipografia Vaticana, 2010.

⁶⁷ IBID., pp. 159-160.

⁶⁸ «Assieme ad oggetti di epoca medievale [...] erano qui sistemate cinque lucerne bronzee biclini [...] Ad esse si affiancavano tutti quegli oggetti considerati strumento di tortura e di martirio: tre *flagella*, due graffioni [...]», IBID., p. 159.

⁶⁹ see in particular *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines...*, Tome 2, Vol. 1, s.v. *flagellum*, by G. FOUGÈRES, see in particular p. 1155 footnote 1, where the author relates this information to the work *Catacombes de Rome* by Perret.

⁷⁰ See V. FIOCCHI NICOLAI, F. BISCONTI, D. MAZZOLENI, *Le catacombe cristiane di Roma. Origini, sviluppo, apparati decorativi, documentazione epigrafica*, Schnell & Steiner, Regensburg, 1998, p. 59.

⁷¹ B. FACCINI, *Scourge bloodstains...*, p. 232.

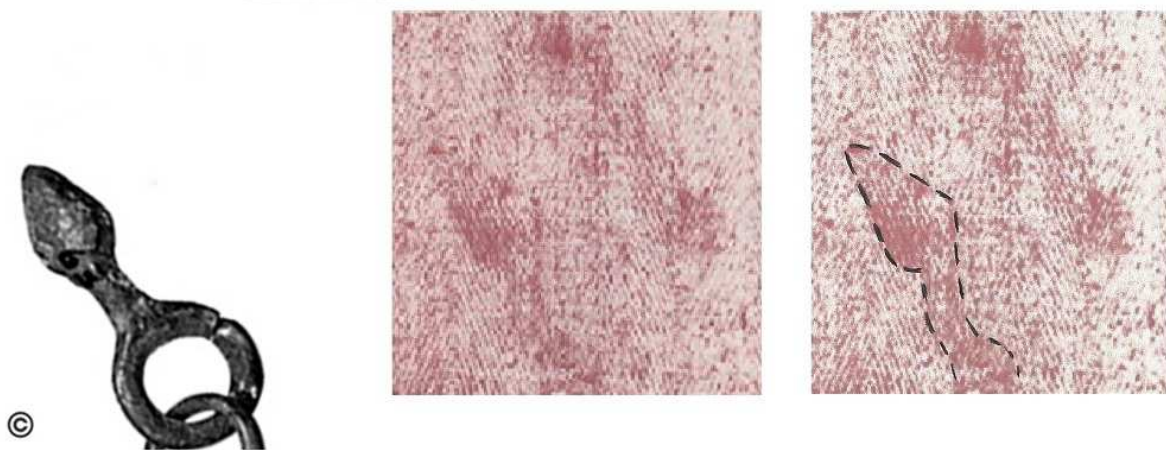


Fig. 15: Comparison between the shape of the endings of one of the *flagra* of the Vatican Museums (inv. 60566) and a scourge mark on the Turin Shroud.

Furthermore, the existence of the specimens mentioned in the 19th centuries archaeology dictionaries confirms the reliability of those witnesses, and so confirms indirectly the truth of the information about the *flagra* found at Herculaneum: even if today we do not know anything about the collocation of those specimens, they probably existed, and maybe in the future they will be re-discovered in a museum or in a private collection (exactly as it happened with the *flagra* of the Vatican Museums). This is also a demonstration of the fact that in the 1st century (Herculaneum and Pompeii disaster happened on 79 AD) existed *flagra* ending with round knobs, compatible with the marks of the Turin Shroud.

Another statement of *flagra* with the features of the ones that must have been used on the Man of the Shroud comes from an even more ancient context than the Roman one: the Etruscan world. In one of the numbers of the *Bullettino dell' Instituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica*⁷², dated to 1859, the Italian Etruscologist G. Conestabile reports about the recovery, in the area of Volterra (Tuscany), of a bronze scourge made of six long thin chains starting from a handle; each chain finishes with a small ball: «Consiste in sei lunghe catenelle che vanno a riunirsi tutte in un' asta serpeggiante, per la quale l' oggetto medesimo si tiene in mano; tre di quelle catenelle sono doppie,

⁷² This is a science magazine published by the Instituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica, an International institution created in 1828 by J.J Winckelmann and Frederick William I of Prussia. The *Bullettino* aimed to collect and broadcast all the information about archaeological recoveries through the activity of the partners who worked in the different countries. The Institute became later the Associazione Internazionale di Archeologia Classica (AIAC), still existing and operating (url: <http://www.aiac.org/>; last consultation: 21/09/2014).

e tre semplici, formate da anelli e fornite in punta di una pallina»⁷³. The scholar states that this object had to be used in a domestic or ritual context.

The news of the *Bullettino* is confirmed in an issue of the same review dated to 1860, where it is affirmed that in 1857 the Etruscan Museum Guarnacci of Volterra purchased a *flagrum* similar to the one found in 1859⁷⁴. We asked information to the Museum about this specimen, but they told us that today this object is not preserved there anymore; probably it was sent to other collections, like in the case of the Herculaneum *flagra*.

CONCLUSION

The body of historical, literary, iconographical and archaeological witnesses allows deducing that in the Roman world several instruments were used to scourge people, and their shape and destructivity depended on the gravity of the crime and on the social status of the sentenced. Some of those objects can be related to the one that was used on the Man of the Shroud, because their shape (as we know it from historians' descriptions and from iconography) is compatible with the scourging marks visible on the cloth.

Some of these marks seem to have been left by some *virgae*: they are often mentioned by Roman authors and represented on monuments too, since they were carried by the lictors as a symbol of the magistrate's authority. Probably, it will not be possible to find any archaeological witnesses of them, since they were made of perishable materials.

It is not possible to exclude that some marks have been caused by the 'Spanish cords', witnessed by written sources (in particular Horace) and by iconography (sarcophagus of *Aelia Afanasia*).

Other scourge marks are ascribable to the action of a more destructive tool, a *flagrum*. Some scholars who studied the Shroud state that it was a *flagrum taxillatum*, whose lashes were provided with several animal bones. But the use of the adjective *taxillatum* is not totally correct, since it comes from a free interpretation of sources by the 16th century humanist Justus Lipsius. To define this type of *flagrum*, it will be better to call it *tesseratum* (an expression used by Apuleius) or simply 'provided with astragals'. And it is probably not correct to relate this instrument to the Shroud, since this scourge was used only in religious contexts which were external to the Roman one.

⁷³ *Bullettino dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 4 (1859), url: http://archive.org/stream/bullettinodellin1859inst/bullettinodellin1859inst_djvu.txt (last consultation: 28/8/2014).

⁷⁴ *Bullettino dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 9 (1860), url: https://archive.org/stream/bullettinodellin1860inst/bullettinodellin1860inst_djvu.txt (last consultation: 28/8/2014).

Probably, the *flagrum* used to hit the Man of the Shroud was a rough object, made of lashes or chains ending with blunt objects of different types. The use of similar tools by the Romans in the first centuries is confirmed not only by Iconography, but also by Archaeology. In the Vatican Museums are preserved four specimens classified as bronze Roman *flagella*, ending with heavy metal knobs: they are mentioned also in the archaeological literature, which states that they were found in the Roman catacombs.

Their existence seems to confirm the reliability of the information about the recovery in Herculaneum of *flagra* ending with heavy terminations: as a consequence, it confirms the possibility that the Man of Shroud was scourged with a Roman *flagrum* compatible with those used in the 1st century.

Certainly this can not be considered the definitive proof that the Man of the Shroud is Jesus; the custom of flogging was diffused in every century, in the classical world as in the medieval and in the contemporary one: it was not a prerogative of the Roman times. But the witness of the sources allows confirming the compatibility among the marks on the Shroud and the context of the tortures which were inflicted in the time and in the places where Jesus of Nazareth lived and underwent the harder trial for the human Salvation.

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