

## THE 'FLAGRA' OF THE VATICAN MUSEUMS

The analysis of the imprint on the Turin Shroud allowed recognizing traces of different kind of corporal injuries: some of them fall all over the surface of the body, and scholars identify them with the result of a terrible scourging.

The marks of scourging and crucifixion, like the great part of the wounds visible on the cloth, reinforce 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 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 *mastix*, scourge.

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 1<sup>st</sup> century. This question gave life to many researches, and scholars came to the substantially unanimous conclusion that the Man of the Shroud was scourged with a Roman *flagrum* made of two or three lashes ending with heavy objects. This interpretation was reached by many scholars, such as Vignon<sup>1</sup>, Barbet<sup>2</sup>, Ricci<sup>3</sup>, Baima Bollone<sup>4</sup>, Zaninotto<sup>5</sup>, Zugibe<sup>6</sup> and recently Faccini and Fanti<sup>7</sup>, who supposed that the Man of the Shroud was scourged with two different tools (a Roman *flagrum* and some flexible rods or rigid leather cords). Many scholars often use a specific word to define the *flagrum* that would have been used for the Man of the Shroud: *taxillatum*.

The analysis of this theme could appear to be concluded, since Historiography is unanimous. Nevertheless, some new elements seem to appear from the examination of this matter: in fact, a particular datum deduced by the exegesis of these studies is that the word *taxillatum* is used only starting from the 80s. Before this time, scholars used to talk about a generic Roman *flagrum*, without any further specification. This unexpected element aroused the curiosity of searching the origin of this term in the original sources, but this research led to an unforeseen answer: Latin sources never talk about the *flagrum taxillatum*.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> P. BARBET, *La passione di N.S. Gesù Cristo secondo il chirurgo*; translation by G. BELLARDO, LICE, Torino, 1951, p. 109f.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> G. ZANINOTTO, *Flagellazione romana*, Centro Romano di Sindonologia, Roma 1984; ID., *La flagellazione romana*, s.d.

<sup>6</sup> F. T. ZUGIBE, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Forensic Inquiry*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005

<sup>7</sup> 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 Internazional Workshop on the Scientific approach to the *Acheiropoietos* Images, ENEA Frascati, Italy, 4-6 May 2010, pp. 47-54.

But how does this information reconcile with the hypothesis of the great scholars who analyzed this 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 however that the traces on the cloth are compatible to the torture practices of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman world?

In order to try to understand if those doubts can be solved, we will try to retrace, through the witness of original sources, 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

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 his nationality.

The lowest level of this punishment was carried out in schools, against undisciplined students: in this case it was used an instrument called *ferula*, which was a thin stick or a flat leather strip<sup>8</sup>. Another instrument which could be used for the domestic punishment was the so called *virga*<sup>9</sup>; in case of serious crimes, it could become an instrument of death. It was made of small rods, which could be used singularly or joined together; *virgae* were also carried by the lictors as symbols of the authority of magistrates, because *virgae* were used to flog criminals<sup>10</sup>. We have many iconographical witnesses of the *virgae* used as symbol of the magistrates' power: often representations can be found on tombs, on coins or even on isolated monuments.

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<sup>11</sup>.

According to the analysis of Faccini and Fanti, the Man of the Shroud could have been beaten with a bundle of *virgae*.



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

<sup>8</sup> Martial, *Epigrammata*, X, 62; 14, 79; Juvenal, *Saturae*, I, 15

<sup>9</sup> Juvenal, *Saturae*, VII, 210; see also E. CANTARELLA, *I supplizi capitali. Origine e funzioni delle pene di morte in Grecia e a Roma*, Universale Economica Feltrinelli, Milano, 2005, p. 171

<sup>10</sup> Cicero, *In Verrem*, 2, 5, 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

<sup>11</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, V, 27, 18.



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



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

The Romans often used whips made of a unique lash<sup>12</sup>. 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 whip.



**Fig. 4:** Apollo Helios driving horses with a whip made of a unique lash (Naples National Archaeological Museum, 1<sup>st</sup> century AD).

In the Roman time there was also a widespread use of whips made of several lashes, often represented: we can mention a *denarius* attributed to the moneyer *Titus Deidius*<sup>13</sup>. Here we can see a man who is beating another one with a whip made of three lashes.

---

<sup>12</sup> **Plautus, *Epidicus*, 5, 1; *Mercator*, 5, 4; *Persa*, 4, 8; Horace, *Epodi*, 1, 16, 47**



**Fig. 5:** *Denarius* of T. Deidius, 113/112 BC. Fighting scene where one fighter is scourged with a whip made of three lashes.

A particular type of whip made of several lashes was the so called ‘Spanish cord’, quoted by Horace<sup>14</sup>: it was made by several leather straps starting from a handle. According to Faccini and Fanti, the Man of the Shroud could have been beaten with an instrument like this<sup>15</sup>.

We have an interesting witness of this tool from the Roman world: it can be seen on the lid of a sarcophagus found in the cemetery of *Pretestatus* (in Rome) dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>16</sup>: here is represented a woman (*Aelia Afanasia*) who is being scourged by another woman. The whip used by the second woman seems of the same type of the one that Faccini and Fanti connected to the scourging of the Man of the Shroud.



**Fig. 7:** 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).

Archaeological bibliography considers all the instruments that we have seen up to now as associable to the concept of *flagellum*. Nevertheless, in the same bibliography can be found a clear differentiation between the *flagellum* in the strict sense of the word and the *flagrum*: even if sometimes these terms are considered as synonymous (from an etymological point of view, *flagellum* is the diminutive of *flagrum*), *flagrum* is considered a more destructive *flagellum*. 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 flesh<sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>13</sup> M. H. CRAWFORD, *Roman Republican Coinage*, Cambridge University press, Cambridge - New York, I, p. 308, n. 294.

<sup>14</sup> *Epods*, 4, 3

<sup>15</sup> B. FACCINI, *Scourge bloodstains...*, Fig. 16A, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Aurea Roma: dalla città pagana alla città cristiana*, by S. ENSOLI, E. LA ROCCA, L'Erma di Bretschneider, Roma, 2000, p. 594.

<sup>17</sup> A. RICH, *Dictionary of Roman and Greek antiquities*, 1890, London, 5 ed., s.v. *flagellum*, s.v. *flagrum*.

According to the sources of the first centuries, the Romans used a *flagrum* made of small chains starting from a handle and ending with metal balls. They are quoted, for example, in Prudentius<sup>18</sup>, in the *Theodosian Code*<sup>19</sup> and in Zosimus<sup>20</sup>, who talk about *plumbum* and *plumbata*.

There are not many iconographical witnesses of this tool, which was used mainly to chastise serious crimes and was not suitable for mythical and religious representations. But, 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 Literary sources. Nevertheless, sources never define it with the word *taxillatum*. So, what does this word 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.

Plutarch talks about this tool in the work *Contra Colotem*, where he states that the priests of the *Magna Mater* were punished with a μᾶστιξ ἀστραγαλωτῆς<sup>21</sup>. Plutarch referred to rituals of self flogging which were 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 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC<sup>22</sup>. Cybele and Attis' priests used to flog themselves with a *flagrum* provided with astragals, and it is confirmed also by Athenaeus of Naucratis, who talks about whips defined ἀστραγαλωτοῖς<sup>23</sup>. The same object is described by Lucian in the work *Lucius* or *The Ass*, where the protagonist is beaten with a ἀστραγάλων μᾶστιγι<sup>24</sup>. Also Julius Pollux in his *Onomasticon* talks about a ἀστραγαλωτή whip<sup>25</sup>. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Apuleius, in his *Metamorphoses*, clearly describes this object, which he connects to the rituals of the Syrian goddess Atargatis, who was often assimilated to Cybele. Apuleius states that the *flagrum* used by priests for self flogging was *multi iugis talis ovium tesseratam*<sup>26</sup>; shortly after Apuleius defines this object *pecunis ossibus catenato*<sup>27</sup>.

Also Eustathius of Thessalonica talks about the μᾶστιξ ἀστραγαλωτάς<sup>28</sup>.

On a 2<sup>nd</sup> century bas relief found at Lanuvio, this torture tool is represented in all its terrible features<sup>29</sup>.

---

<sup>18</sup> *Liber Peristephanon*, X, 116, 121

<sup>19</sup> C.Th. IX, 35, 2.1

<sup>20</sup> *Historia Nova*, V, 2, 7; See also Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XXIX, 1, 23.

<sup>21</sup> p. 1127c

<sup>22</sup> P. SACCÀ, *Cibele e Attis. Dalla Frigia a Roma*, Intilla Editore, Messina, 2012, p. 23; pp. 45-49.

<sup>23</sup> *Δειπνοσοφισταί*, 4, 38

<sup>24</sup> 38

<sup>25</sup> 10, 54

<sup>26</sup> *Metamorphoseon libri XI*, VIII, 28

<sup>27</sup> *Metamorphoseon libri XI*, VIII, 30

<sup>28</sup> *Commentary on Iliad*. p. 1289, § 52

<sup>29</sup> P. SACCÀ, *Cibele e Attis. Dalla Frigia a Roma*, Intilla Editore, Messina, 2012, p. 23; pp. 45-49, Fig. 42



**Fig. 8:** Bas relief of Cybele and Attis' priest (the so called *Arcigallo*) holding a *flagrum* provided with astragals (Rome, Capitoline Museums, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD).

Those sources, which talk about a whip provided with animal astragals, seem to recall the *flagrum taxillatum* often mentioned by the Shroud scholars starting from the 80's. But also in this case sources never use the word *taxillatum*. So where does this adjective come from?

The answer to this question comes from a work published in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the philologist and humanist Justus Lipsius: in his work *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* provided with astragals.

Here he translates the passages of the authors mentioning the *flagrum* in different ways: Plutarch's μάστιξ άστραγαλωτῆς becomes *flagri illius taxillati*; Athenaeus' άστραγαλωτοις whips become *virgis et loris taxillatis*; Eusthatius' μαστιξ άστραγαλωτάς become *flagra talaria*, while Apuleius' Latin passages become *flagro ... fimbriatum, et multiiugis talis ovium tessalatum* and *flagrum pecunis ossibus catenatum*<sup>30</sup>.

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 the Latin translation of the term astragal, which is *talus*: it could be translated both as 'astragal' (bone), both as 'game dice'<sup>31</sup>. Lipsius considers *taxillus* (small dice) as a diminutive form of *talus*. Dices in Latin were also called *tesserae*<sup>32</sup>: it was a type of dice slightly different from the *talus*. From *tessera* comes the word *tesseratus* used by Apuleius, and translated by Lipsius with *tessalatum*. The phonetic resemblance among those words probably led Lipsius to consider them as synonymous, variously inflected.

So the word *flagrum taxillatum* used by the several Shroud scholars seems to come from Lipsius' work, which has been translated in the 80's from the famous sindonologist Gino Zaninotto<sup>33</sup>. After this translation, Lipsius' work started circulating in the world of the studies about the Turin Shroud, and, as a consequence, the word *taxillatum* started to be commonly used.

<sup>30</sup> I. LIPSIVS, *De Cruce libri tres. Ad sacram profanamque historiam utiles*, Ex Officina Plantiniana, Apud Iohannem Moretum, 1597, p. 52.

<sup>31</sup> *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*.

<sup>32</sup> **Isidore de Siville, *Etymologiae*, XVIII, 63:** *Tesserae vocatae quia quadrae sunt ex omnibus partibus*; see also *Latin dictionary*, s.v. *talus*.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

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 better, *tesseratum*.

And it seems not exact neither connecting this tool to the flogging of the Man of the Shroud: 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 use of the Romans in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine does not seem much likely. Furthermore, the marks on the Shroud recall a scourge whose lashes end with only two weights, while Cybele and Attis’ *flagrum* was provided of several astragals.

Probably, the *flagrum* used to scourge the man of the Shroud was a rough object, made of chains or lashes ending with heavy knobs, maybe of the type quoted before (so the *plumbum* and *plumbata*). As we have seen, the use of these tools in the first centuries of the Roman world is witnessed by historical, literary and iconographical sources.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL WITNESSES

But what about Archaeology? Are there any Archaeological witnesses of the Roman era confirming the use of whips compatible 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 criminals can not have preserved, since they were made of natural (and so perishable) materials, like leather or wood. For this reason, it will be very unlikely to find specimens of *virgae*, *ferulae* or *Spanish cords*.

The same matter applies to the *flagrum* with astragals, even if it is possible that single parts of it have preserved, like for example the bones.

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 Antony Rich, dated to 1890, which, according to the author, was found at Herculaneum and so was surely dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century<sup>34</sup>. This information is reported also in the Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities by William Smith<sup>35</sup>, in the Dictionary of Roman and Greek Archaeology by Daremberg and Saglio<sup>36</sup> and in the dictionary of Christian Archaeology by Cabrol and Leclercq<sup>37</sup>. In all these cases, the specimens are reproduced with xylographies.

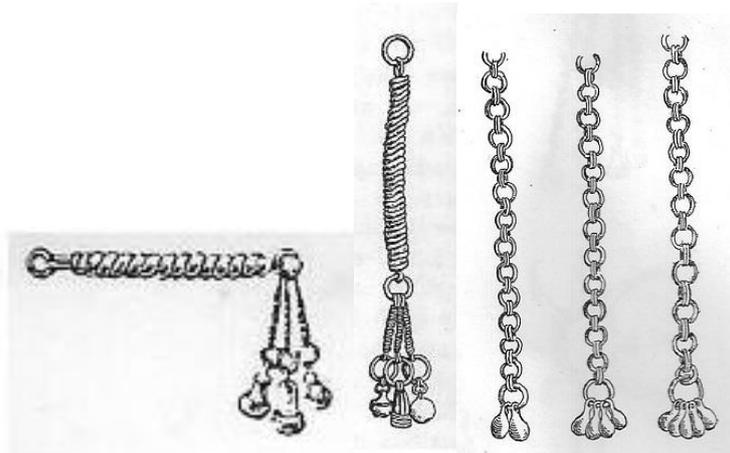
---

<sup>34</sup> A. RICH, *A dictionary...*, p. 289, s.v. *flagrum*.

<sup>35</sup> W. SMITH, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1859, s.v. *flagrum*.

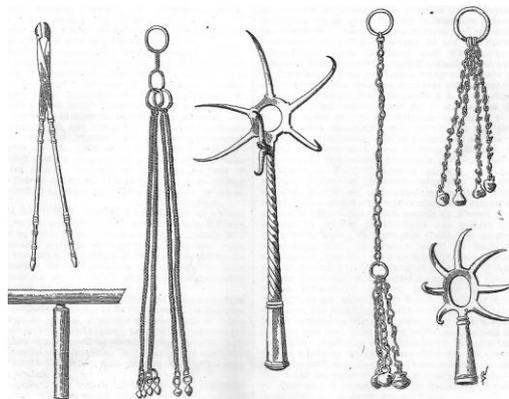
<sup>36</sup> *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, by CH. DAREMBERG, EDM. SAGLIO, rist. Anast. Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1969, 10 voll. (Ripr. facs. dell'ed. Hachett, Parigi, 1877-1919).

<sup>37</sup> *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.



**Fig. 9:** 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 Roman Antiquities it is said that, beyond the *flagra* found at Herculaneum, some other specimens were found in the Roman catacombs<sup>38</sup>. This information is reported also in the Dictionary of Christian Archaeology, where are provided several illustrations of those torture tools<sup>39</sup>.



**Fig. 10:** Reproduction of objects interpreted as torture tools, coming from the Roman catacombs (Dictionary of Christian Archaeology of Cabrol e Leclercq, fig. 4475).

The information about those specimens was taken back also from many scholars of the Shroud<sup>40</sup>: the shape of the Herculaneum *flagrum* seems to be compatible with the great part of the scourging signs visible on the Sheet, such as the one of the catacombs *flagra*.

The indications about the existence of *flagra* connectable with the Shroud marks, and dated exactly to the 1<sup>st</sup> century (so the Herculaneum *flagra*) or to the first centuries of the Christian era (so the

<sup>38</sup> *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines...*, Tome 2, Vol. 1, s.v. *flagellum*, by G. FOUGÈRES, p. 1155.

<sup>39</sup> *Dictionnaire d'archeologie chretienne et de liturgie...*, Vol. V, fig. 4475.

<sup>40</sup> See for example G. ZANINOTTO, *La flagellazione...*, p. 2 and F. T. ZUGIBE, *The Crucifixion...*, p. 19.

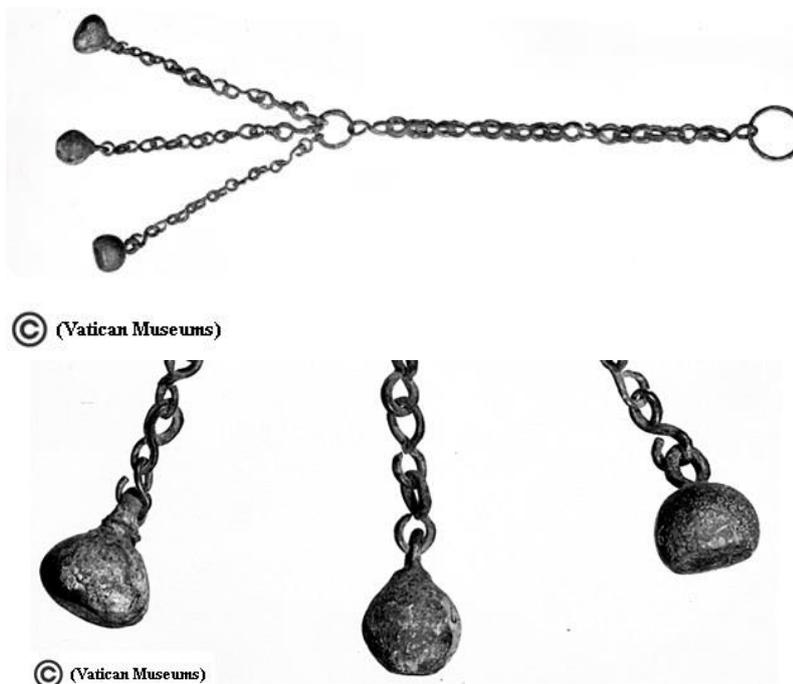
catacombs *flagra*), seem to remove every doubt about the possibility that the Man of the Shroud came under a Roman scourging, not far from the period when Jesus lived. Nevertheless, the dictionaries are very old witnesses, and they lack of any indication about the preservation places of the specimens: for this reason, it was necessary to verify if today it is possible to go back to those objects and to understand where they are located.

So I got in touch with the main Institutions related to the archaeological excavations of Herculaneum and Rome.

For what concerns the *flagrum* of Herculaneum, the research in the database of the site was made by the General Direction for the Cultural Heritage of Campania, it did not give the expected results: it was not possible to find any evidence of the *flagra* mentioned by the dictionaries. The same result came from the research in the databases of the Naples Archeological Museum. Nevertheless, the scholars who made this research underlined the difficulty of finding specimens lacking of an inventory number. The General Direction pointed out that probably those objects 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 even to private collections. So the research about the *flagra* from Herculaneum did not give the expected results.

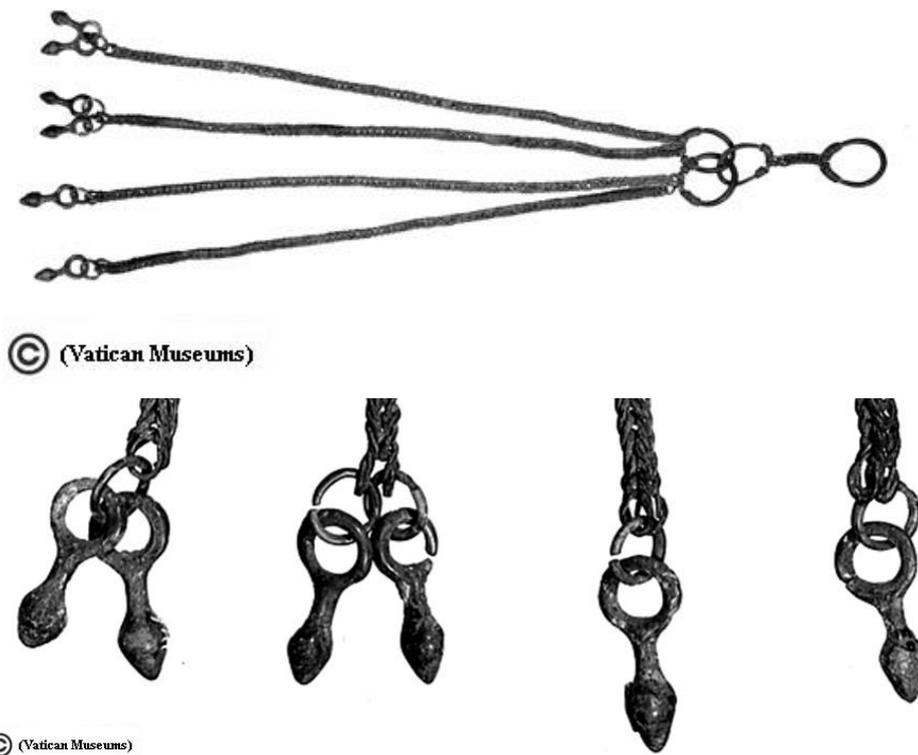
At this point the research concentrated on the area of Rome, in order to try to understand where the *flagra* from the catacombs are preserved today. For this purpose, I got in touch with the Vatican Museums. In this case, the answer was positive: in fact, at the Vatican Museums are preserved four objects classified as ‘bronze Roman *flagella*’, inventoried with numbers from 60564 to 60567. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, it was possible to go directly to the Museums in order to analyze the specimens.

The *flagrum* number 60566 is made of a long chain ending with other three small chains which finish with round knobs. This is represented in the Dictionary of Christian Archaeology too, and it is very similar to the one number 60564 (which finishes with irregular metal knobs).



**Fig. 11, 11a:** Bronze *flagrum* from the Vatican Museums (inv. 60566), whole picture and detail.

The object number 60567 is made of four bronze chains starting from three rings and ending with triangle-shaped small objects, joined to the chains with a small ring. The last specimen is similar to 60566, but it is made only of two chains.



**Fig. 12, 12a:** Bronze *flagrum* from the Vatican Museums (inv. 60567), whole picture and detail.

None of these objects are exposed at the Museum, but they are all preserved in the depository. The existence of these specimens, whose collocation seemed to be lost, should allow drawing the line at the complicated matter of the compatibility of the instruments used to scourge the Man of the Shroud and the Roman scourging tools; nevertheless, there are still some unclear points about this issue.

In fact, the Archaeological origin of these objects is unknown: we only know that they were part of the Christian Museum (established in 1757<sup>41</sup>), but we don't have any indication about their exact origin.

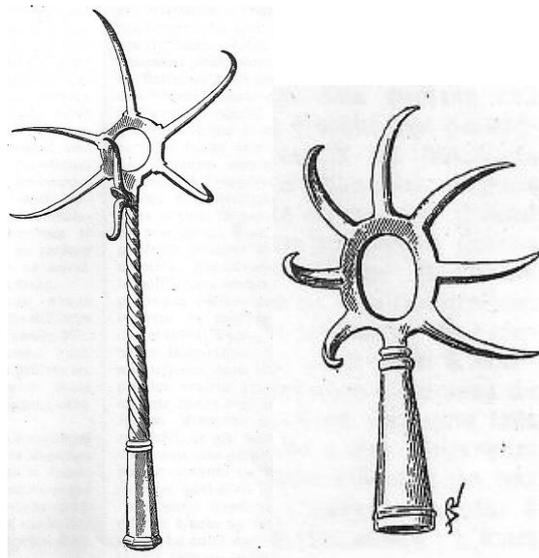
The four *flagra* were exposed at the Christian Museum together with other torture tools and they were defined "*uncus ex aere ... sive singula ad excarnificanda corpora SS. Martyrum adhibita*"<sup>42</sup>; two of those objects were defined "graffioni" (instruments used to strip flesh); all these objects are represented in the Dictionary of Christian Archaeology by Cabrol and Leclercq, where it is stated, as we have seen, that they came from the catacombs.

But it must be clarified that some of these specimens are not dated to the Roman era, and they can not be considered torture tools: in particular, the two 'graffioni' are actually Etruscan oil lamp cases<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> 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.

<sup>42</sup> *IBID.*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>43</sup> M. Sannibale, *La raccolta Giacinto Guglielmi. II. Bronzi e materiali vari*, Roma 2008, pp. 150-157, see in particular p. 151, where we can find a hint at "l'anacronistica interpretazione come strumento di tortura corrente nel primo Ottocento e che verrà accolta in una lunetta dipinta nel Museo Chiaromonte in



**Fig. 13:** Etruscan oil lamp cases wrongly interpreted as “graffioni” (instruments used to strip fleashes) (M. Sannibale, *La raccolta Giacinto Guglielmi. II. Bronzi e materiali vari*, Roma 2008, pp. 150-157, in particular p. 151).

The wrong identification of these tools probably comes from an erroneous interpretation of the book *Catacombes de Rome* by Louis Perret, quoted in the Dictionary of Daremberg and Saglio and used as main witness by the other authors.

So it seems possible to suppose that also the objects classified as ‘Roman *flagra*’ could actually be objects that were used for other purposes. This doubt is strengthened by the fact that there is a strong resemblance among the ‘*flagella*’ ending with triangle – shaped terminations and some objects of the Villanovian age, found in some tombs near the city of Verucchio (RN), which are classified not as ‘*flagra*’, but as decorative ‘pendants’<sup>44</sup>, or as tools to spur horses<sup>45</sup>.



**Fig. 14:** Villanovian ‘pendents’ similar to the endings of the ‘*flagella*’ with triangle – shaped terminations of the Vatican Museums (E. TAMBURINI – MÜLLER, *La necropoli del Campo del Tesoro-Lavatoio di Verucchio (RN)*, Bologna, 2006, Tav. 7 p. 251 and p. 121).

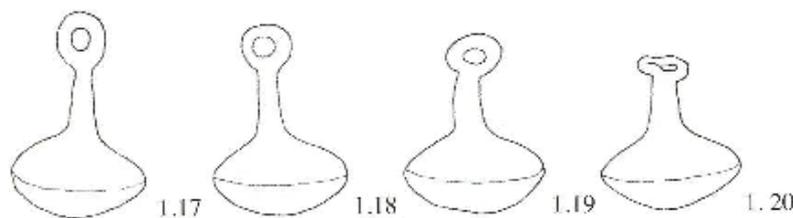
---

Vaticano...” (...the anachronistic interpretation as torture tool of the beginning of the 19th century, which will be recalled also in a depicted lunette of the Vatican Chiamamonti Museum...).

<sup>44</sup> E. TAMBURINI – MÜLLER, *La necropoli del Campo del Tesoro-Lavatoio di Verucchio (RN)*, Bologna, 2006, Tav. 7 p. 251 and p. 121.

<sup>45</sup> IBID., p. 24.

The same doubts concern the ‘*flagella*’ ending with round knobs, very similar to some specimens found in the same tombs of Verucchio, which are not identified with torture tools, but with terminations of decorative chains<sup>46</sup>.



**Fig. 15:** Villanovian ‘pendents’ very similar to the endings of the ‘*flagella*’ with round knobs of the Vatican Museums (E. TAMBURINI – MÜLLER, *La necropoli del Campo del Tesoro-Lavatoio di Verucchio (RN)*, Bologna, 2006, Tav. p. 245 and p. 111).

So, the *flagella* of the Vatican Museums could have been wrongly interpreted, even if it must be stated that this hypothesis has not been taken into account by the archaeologists of the Museums themselves.

In any case, this matter will have to be examined in depth in the future times, preferably with the help of the members of the Vatican Museums, in order to clarify if there has been a wrong reading of old and not updated sources.

Nevertheless, it can be doubtless stated that the use of tools ending with heavy knobs, so compatible with the marks of the Turin Shroud, was practiced in the Classical era, during a period that was not far from the time when Jesus lived: first of all, this fact is witnessed by Historical and Literary sources (like the *Theodosian Code* and Zosimus), as we have seen.

Furthermore, we have an interesting attestation of the use of a whip ending with round knobs in an issue of the *Bullettino dell’Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica*<sup>47</sup>, dated to 1859, where the Italian Etruscologist Gian Carlo Conestabile states that in the area of Volterra was found a bronze *flagellum*; he describes this object as made of six long chains ending 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, e tre semplici, formate da anelli e fornite in punta di una pallina*”<sup>48</sup>).

The same information is reaffirmed in an issue of the *Bullettino* dated to 1860, where it is stated that at the Etruscan Museum Guarnacci of Volterra a bronze *flagellum* was preserved from 1857, and it was similar to the one found in Volterra («*flagello di bronzo simile ad un altro già veduto in Volterra*»<sup>49</sup>, that is the one described in the issue of 1859).

<sup>46</sup> IBID., Tav. 1, p. 245 and p. 111.

<sup>47</sup> This is a science magazine published by the Istituto 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).

<sup>48</sup> *Bullettino dell’Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 4 (1859), url: [http://archive.org/stream/bullettinodellin1859inst/bullettinodellin1859inst\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/bullettinodellin1859inst/bullettinodellin1859inst_djvu.txt) (last consultation: 28/8/2014).

<sup>49</sup> *Bullettino dell’Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 9 (1860), url: [https://archive.org/stream/bullettinodellin1860inst/bullettinodellin1860inst\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/bullettinodellin1860inst/bullettinodellin1860inst_djvu.txt) (last consultation: 28/8/2014).

I personally went to the Etruscan Museum to verify if the *flagellum* is still preserved there, but also in this case the specimen can not be found any more; the Direction pointed out that probably it is stored in the depository, or it was probably given to another Institution.

In any case, in the Etruscan age whips ending with round knobs were used, and this usage probably passed to the Roman world (which took from the Etruscans many scourging tools, like *virgae*, as witnessed by historical sources).

So, even if there are still doubts about the archaeological witnesses that we own, it can be stated that there is a full compatibility among the instruments used to scourge and flog criminals in the period between the first centuries BC and the first centuries of the Christian Era and the marks visible on the Turin Shroud.

Certainly this fact can not be considered the definitive proof that the Man of the Shroud is Jesus; the custom of scourging was diffused in every century, in the classical world so as in the medieval and contemporary one; it was not a prerogative of the Roman time. 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.