

AperTO - Archivio Istituzionale Open Access dell'Università di Torino

## The Scourge of Jesus and the Roman Scourge. Historical and Archaeological Evidence

### **This is the author's manuscript**

*Original Citation:*

*Availability:*

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1647176> since 2021-05-12T00:37:31Z

*Published version:*

DOI:10.1163/17455197-01501006

*Terms of use:*

Open Access

Anyone can freely access the full text of works made available as "Open Access". Works made available under a Creative Commons license can be used according to the terms and conditions of said license. Use of all other works requires consent of the right holder (author or publisher) if not exempted from copyright protection by the applicable law.

(Article begins on next page)

# The Scourge of Jesus and the Roman Scourge

## *Historical and Archaeological Evidence*

*Andrea Nicolotti*

Department of Historical Studies, University of Turin, Italy

*andrea.nicolotti@unito.it*

### Abstract

According to the Gospels, Jesus suffered the flagellation before his crucifixion. The texts do not clarify the form and materials of the scourge that was utilized. Since the beginnings of the modern era, several commentators have speculated about the scourge's form, on the basis of the Greek-Roman literary evidence and with reference to flagellation relics. In the last few centuries, scholars have provided new indications that are exemplified in great dictionaries and encyclopedic works of Greek-Roman archaeology and antiquities, as well as in the consultation works available to biblical scholars. However, a close re-examination of the whole evidence compels us to dismiss nearly all data and to conclude that we know almost nothing about the materials and form of the scourge used at Jesus' time.

### Keywords

scourge – scourging – whip – flagellation – flagellum – flagrum – taxillatum – passion – Jesus – Shroud of Turin – relics

### The Scourging

Flagellation was one of the many corporal punishments carried out by the Romans, included in the criminal law and used in domestic, military, and public domains as a mechanism of punishment.<sup>1</sup> Sources attest to various different

---

<sup>1</sup> On the scourging, see Theodor Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1899), pp. 47, 983–985, Ugo Brasiello, *La repressione penale in diritto romano*

types of beating instruments, including the *lorum* (whip, thong), *habena* (strap, whip), *scutica* (lash, whip), *stimulus* (goad, sting), *fustis* (staff, cudgel) *virga* (rod), *catenae* (chains) and, finally, the *flagrum* and *flagellum* (scourge). Additionally, there were other milder punishments such as the *ferula* (stick) that school teachers used as an alternative to eel skin.<sup>2</sup> At home, the master could choose between the stick, lash and scourge to beat his slaves.<sup>3</sup> Some punishments were more painful and humiliating than others; some were inflicted on the naked body, while others were not. In one of his *Satires*, Horace advocates for the existence of ‘a rule to assign fair penalties to offences, lest you flay with the terrible scourge (*horribili flagello*) those who are only deserving of the lash (*scutica*)’ precisely because, as Seneca the Elder also points out, the scourge caused deeper wounds and could even lacerate the flesh.<sup>4</sup> As early as the age of the Law of the Twelve Tables, there are sources that document traitors, magicians and people who committed special crimes, such as patricide, betrayal of the State and the violation of Vestal virgins, being flogged to death.

In Jesus’ times, there had long been the provision that free Roman citizens were exempt from scourges and rods, which were to be used on foreigners, slaves and gladiators instead.<sup>5</sup> Even in the military sphere the rod could be

---

(Napoli: Jovene, 1937), pp. 386–400, 483–485; Urban Holzmeister, ‘Christus Dominus flagellis caeditur’, *VD* 18 (1938), pp. 104–108; C. Schneider, ‘μαστιγῶν-μάστιξ’, in Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *TWNT*, VI (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1942), pp. 515–519; Josef Blinzler, *Der Prozeß Jesu* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1969), pp. 236–248; Manfred Fuhrmann, ‘Verbera’, in Konrat Ziegler (ed.), *PW*, Suppl. IX (Stuttgart: Druckenmüller, 1962), coll. 1589–1597; Wolfgang Waldstein, ‘Geißelung’, in Franz Joseph Dolger and Hans Lietzmann (eds.), *RAC*, IX (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1976), coll. 470–490; Eva Cantarella, *I supplizi capitali. Origini e funzioni delle pene di morte in Grecia e a Roma* (Milano: Feltrinelli, rev. edn, 2011), pp. 215–232; Luis Rodríguez Ennes, ‘Algunas cuestiones en torno a la verberatio’, *RIDA* 59 (2012), pp. 177–196.

2 Cf. Pierre Paris, *Ferula*, in Charles Victor Daremberg and Edmond Saglio (eds.), *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, II.2 (Paris: Hachette, 1896), pp. 1094–1095. According to Martial, the *ferulae* are ‘schoolmaster’s sceptres’, ‘hated by children and dear to schoolmasters’ (Martial, *Epigrammata* 10, 62, 10; 14, 80, 1); according to Juvenal, they were used to beat the hands of young men (Juvenal, *Saturae* 1, 15). Horace, *Saturae* 1, 3, 120–121 also reports that the *ferula* was less brutal than other instruments: ‘ut ferula caedas meritum maiora subire verbera, non vereor’.

3 Juvenal, *Saturae* 6, 479–480: ‘hic frangit ferulas, rubet ille flagello, hic scutica’.

4 Horace, *Saturae* 1, 3, 117–119; Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 2, 5, 4–5: ‘flagellis caeduntur artus ... scissum corpus flagellis’.

5 Cicero, *Pro Rabirio* 4, 12: ‘Porcia lex virgas ab omnium civium Romanorum corpore amovit’. Cf. *Digesta* 47, 9, 4, 1 (Paulus): ‘liberos fustibus, servos flagellis caesos dimittere poteris’; 48, 2, 6 (Ulpian): ‘vel fustibus castigare vel flagellis servos verberare’; 48, 19, 10 (Macer): ‘et ex quibus causis liber fustibus caeditur, ex his servus flagellis caedi et domino reddi’.

used only when the soldiers did not hold citizenship, while for citizens *castigatio* was carried out using the dry grapevine (*vitis*) centurions carried.<sup>6</sup> In 70 BCE, Cicero raised a fierce accusation against Verres in the courtroom, claiming that the former governor of Sicily had illegally beaten Roman citizens with rods.<sup>7</sup> This rule was also applied in Judea: when the tribune in Jerusalem had the soldiers bind the apostle Paul with straps so he could be interrogated under the scourge, Paul objected on the grounds of his Roman citizenship and was immediately freed.<sup>8</sup> At times, however, exceptions were made<sup>9</sup> and again in 68 CE the Roman Senate proposed that Nero be killed by *mos maiorum*, that is, beaten to death with rods.<sup>10</sup>

Flagellation was much feared due to its brutality: it produced deep wounds and, in some cases, could even lead to death.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Jewish law, which established a ceiling of forty lashes,<sup>12</sup> Roman law did not provide for any limitations. Flavius Josephus offers various accounts of flagellations carried out in Palestine in which the strokes were delivered with such strength that they exposed the bowels and bones of the unfortunate sufferer, and confirms that the practice of scourging, as occurred with Jesus, was used as a sort of prelude to crucifixion: this was the case with a large number of Jews on orders from the procurator Gessius Florus, general Titus and legate Bassus.<sup>13</sup>

---

iubetur'; 47, 10, 45 (Hermogenian): 'servi quidem flagellis caesi dominis restituuntur, liberi vero humilioris quidem loci fustibus subiciuntur'; Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 21: 'gladiatorem ad homicidium flagellis et virgis compellat'. Cf. Giovanni Pugliese, *Appunti sui limiti dell'«imperium» nella repressione penale* (Torino: Istituto giuridico, 1939), pp. 22–45.

6 Tacitus, *Annales* 1, 23: 'fracta vite in tergo militis alteram clara voce ac rursus aliam poscebat'; *Digesta* 49, 16, 13: 'nam eum, qui centurioni castigare se volenti restiterit, veteres notaverunt: si vitem tenuit, militiam mutat'. Livy, *Periochae* 57: 'quem militem extra ordinem deprehendit, si Romanus esset, vitibus, si extraneus, virgis cecidit'.

7 Cicero, *In Verrem* 2, 5, 140.162–163.

8 Acts 22.24–25.

9 For example, Julius Caesar had Sextus Papinius and others aristocrats scourged (Seneca, *De ira* 3, 18, 3–19, 1); Caligola had a quaestor scourged (Svetonius, *De vita Caesarum. Caligula* 26, 3).

10 Svetonius, *De vita Caesarum. Nero* 49, 2: 'nudi hominis cervicem inseri furcae, corpus virgis ad necem caedi'.

11 For instance, Horace, *Sermones* 1, 2, 41, describes an adulterer being scourged to death (*flagellis ad mortem caesus*).

12 Cf. Deut 25, 3; 1 Cor 11, 24, Josephus, *Ant.* 4, 248, and *M. Makk.* 2, 10 attest to the custom of stopping at thirty nine lashes.

13 Josephus, *War.* 2, 612; 6, 304; 2, 306–308; 5, 449; 7, 200–202. See also Livy, *Ab Urbe condita* 33, 36, 3, which provides an account of a praetor who captured many slaves, the majority of which he killed and 'the others, after having them whipped, hung them to the crosses.'

## The Scourging of Jesus

We know nothing about the progression and intensity of the scourging of Jesus because the evangelists dedicate only minimal space to this event; so minimal, in fact, that someone even claimed this scourging was so mild as to fail to produce consequences significant enough to be described.<sup>14</sup> And yet, despite the scarcity of information, it is not uncommon for modern commentaries of the narratives about Christ's passion and Biblical dictionaries to provide a fairly accurate description of the tool used to scourge him, and even some explanatory drawings [fig. 1].<sup>15</sup> With this study I aim to demonstrate the unfounded and inaccurate nature of these descriptions and drawings, confirming, three centuries later, the words of Prospero Lambertini, the future Pope Benedict XIV:

The sacred evangelists did not mention whether Jesus was scourged with rods, or with tree branches tied together, or with whips or cords; if he was naked or dressed, tied to a column, how many flagellants were there and from which nation; and how many strikes were delivered to the sacred body.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, there were many different types of scourges. Did Pilate's soldiers use an instrument made of cords, leather, chains, wood, or some other material? In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, the laconic Greek verb φραγγελλῶ is used to describe the scourging of Jesus, a calque of the Latin *flagellum*, while in John's Gospel μαστιγῶ is used.<sup>17</sup> The two terms are interchangeable: in the passage in which Jesus predicts his passion and death, the Gospels of Mark and Luke use μαστιγῶ, the same as in the Gospel of John, and Matthew himself uses the same verb when Jesus announces the scourging of his followers in the synagogues.<sup>18</sup> Another synonym, μαστιζῶ, is found in the Gospel of Peter.<sup>19</sup>

---

14 Chaim Cohn, *Processo e morte di Gesù* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), pp. 245–246.

15 For example Herbert Haag and Adrian van dem Born, *Bibel-Lexikon* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1956), p. 527; James D. Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary* (London: Inter-varsity Press, 1962), p. 1150; Willibald Bösen, *L'ultimo giorno di Gesù di Nazaret* (Leumann: Elledici, 2007), p. 282.

16 Prospero Lambertini, *Annotazioni sopra le feste di nostro Signore e della beatissima Vergine*, I (Bologna: Longhi, 1740), pp. 204–205.

17 Mark 15.15; Matt 27.26; John 19.1.

18 Mark 10.34; Luke 18.33; Matt 10.17; 23.34.

19 *Gos. Pet.* 3, 9: καὶ τινες αὐτὸν ἐμάστιζον.

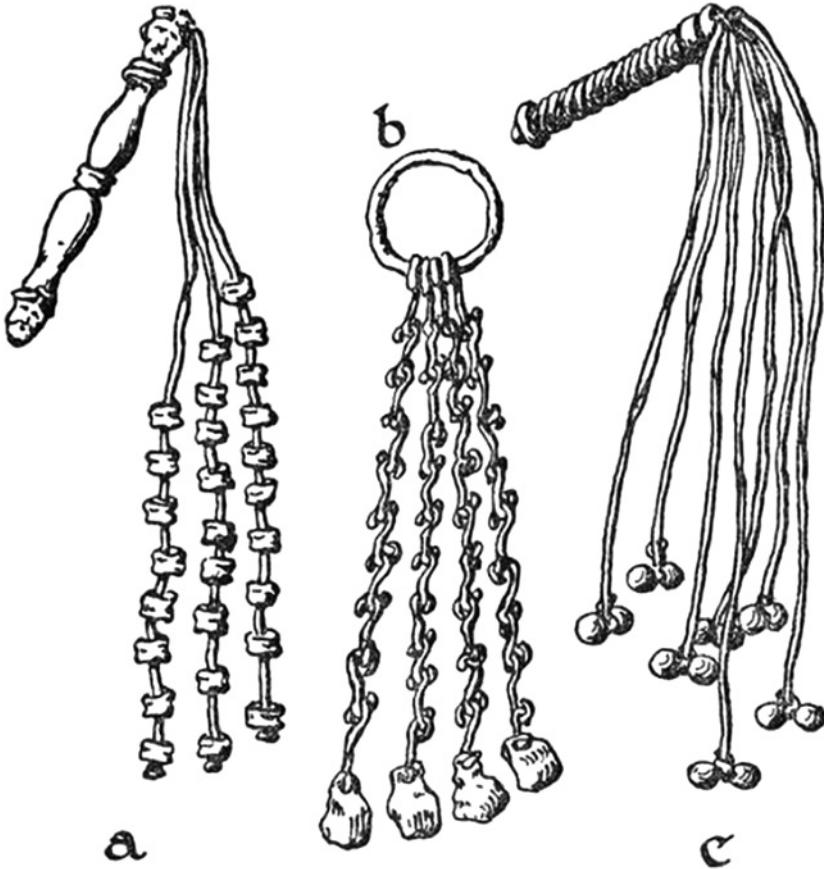


Abb. 45: Römische Geißeln, mit Knochenstücken durchsetzt (a) und mit Bleikugeln versehen (b, c).

FIGURE 1 Herbert Haag and Adrian van dem Born, *Bibel-Lexikon* (Einsiedeln, Benziger, 1956), p. 527.

Unfortunately, there is no information about the shape of the scourge; there is only another passage in which John narrates that when Jesus ‘had made a scourge of cords, he drove them all out of the temple’<sup>20</sup> and this shows that, according to the evangelist, an object made of only cords could also be defined as *φραγέλιον*. In contrast, there is much more information about the flagellation that the Jews carried out in the synagogues, which involved the use of a strap of calf leather divided into thongs.

<sup>20</sup> John 2.15.

In the sixteenth century, the Jesuit and exegete Juan de Maldonado (†1583) believed that, owing to the silence of the Gospels, attempts to identify the form of the scourge of Jesus was an ‘inane curiosity’.<sup>21</sup> Other scholars, however, unwilling to give up, developed various conjectures. In 1416 Vincent Ferrer preached that Jesus was scourged by the soldiers with switches with thorns and brambles, then by whips the tips of which bore nodules with sharp spikes attached, and finally by chains with hooks at their ends.<sup>22</sup> The belief that these three types of scourges were used became fairly widespread.<sup>23</sup> The idea that this scourging involved spikes and hooks might have been suggested by some sources which, since the beginning of the third century CE, refer to the use of a sharp torture instrument called a “claw” (*ungula* – ὄνυξ),<sup>24</sup> a whip for animals with a small spike at one end<sup>25</sup> and stinging scourges called *scorpiones*.<sup>26</sup>

- 
- 21 Juan de Maldonado, *Commentarii in quatuor evangelistas* (Lugduni: Cardon, 4th edn, 1602), col. 648: ‘Quale flagellum fuerit, minime constare potest, et inanis curiositatis est quaerere’.
- 22 Clovis Brunel, ‘Le sermon en langue vulgaire prononcé à Toulouse par saint Vincent Ferrer le vendredi saint 1416’, *Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes* 111 (1953), pp. 5–53 (36): ‘Milites autem qui flagellabant eum secundum aliquos erunt quatuor, quorum primi duo secundum Hieronymum in Glosa virgas de spinis et vepribus acutissimis habuerant confectas quibus cutem aperuerunt. Illis vero fatigatis, alii duo flagella habuerunt in quorum summitate erant nodi aculeis acutissimis transfixi, carnem sanctam scindentes. Alii autem duo habuerunt catenas habentes uncos in summitatibus et quasi carnem extraxerunt’. In the sixteenth century printed edition: *Beati Vincentii natione Hispani [...] Sermones hymales* (Lugduni: apud haeredes Iacobi Giuntae, 1550), p. 513.
- 23 Cf. Johann J. Seyppel, *De ritu flagellandi apud Romanos* (Wittembergae: in officina Fince-liana, 1668), §33.
- 24 Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 12, 4: ‘Ungulis deraditis latera Christianorum’; Id., *De ieiunio* 12, 3: ‘paucis unguis titillatus’; Cyprian, *Epistulae* 10, 2, 2: ‘Steterunt torti torquentibus fortiores, et pulsantes ac laniantes unguas pulsata ac laniata membra vicerunt’; 21, 4, 2: ‘in poena unguarum fortiter est confessus’; Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 16, 8: ‘Nihil adversus te verbera, nihil unguae, nihil ignis, nihil ferrum, nihil varia tormentorum genera valuerunt’; Augustine, *Confessiones* 1, 9, 15: ‘eculeos et unguas atque huiuscemodi varia tormenta’; Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 3, 133–134: ‘latus unguula virgineum pulsat utrimque et ad ossa secat’. In Greek: *Martyrium Ignatii Antiocheni Romanum* 9, 2: τοῖς ὄνυξι τὸν νῶτον αὐτοῦ καταξάνατε. Cf. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 5, 27, 20: ‘Ungulae dictae quod effodi-ant. Haec et fidiculae, quia his rei in eculeo torquentur, ut fides inveniatur’.
- 25 *Codex Theodosianus* 8, 5, 2: ‘nullus in agitando fuste utatur, sed aut virga aut certe flagro, cuius in cuspidi infixus brevis aculeus’ (law of the year 316).
- 26 The Latin translation of 1 Kings 12, 14 groups *scorpiones* together with scourges: ‘pater meus cecidit vos flagellis et ego caedam scorpionibus’. A sixth century *passio* (Wilhelm Wattenbach, ‘Über die Legende von den heiligen Vier Gekrönten’, *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 47 [1896], pp. 1281–1302) contains

However, there is no evidence that these really existed in ancient Rome at the time of Jesus.

### The Shroud of Turin

At one point, someone had the idea of finding out more about a cloth relic that, at the time, was considered to be the shroud that wrapped the body of Jesus in the sepulchre. Since 1578 this Shroud, owned by the Duke of Savoy, has been located in the city of Turin.<sup>27</sup> It bears the image of the tortured body of a man whose lacerations clearly resemble the ones that the crucified Jesus would have had, being almost entirely covered in small reddish marks that undoubtedly suggest the wounds of flagellation. From the sixteenth century onward, various authors sharing the belief that the marks visible on the Shroud belonged to Jesus of Nazareth have tried to identify the shape of the scourge from the shape of those marks. This gave rise to a bias that prompted them to search for an artifact that, among the many possible types of Roman scourge, could have caused wounds similar to those visible on the fabric and that had *this* very specific shape, excluding all others. This bias, additionally, gave rise to consequences that persist to this day.

The first printed book dedicated to a description of the marks on the Shroud of Turin dates back to 1598 and was written by Alfonso Paleotti, the archbishop of Bologna.<sup>28</sup> Eight years later, the book was translated from Italian into Latin with lengthy commentary by the Hieronymite father Daniele Mallonio. Mallonio himself was the author of the first attempt to provide a description of the scourge of Christ deduced from the marks on the image visible on the Shroud.<sup>29</sup> He had read Vincent Ferrer's description and tried to verify if the wounds of the man seen on the Shroud – that is, according to him, the wounds

---

references to tortures 'verberibus scorpionum' and 'scorpionibus mactari' (Chapters 7 and 8, p. 1301); in the seventh century, Isidore of Seville developed an explanation (*Etymologiae* 5, 27, 18): 'Switches (*virgae*) are the tips of branches and trees, so called because they are green (*viridis*), or because they possess the power of persuading (*vis arguendi*); if it is smooth, it is a *virga*, but if it is knotty and has points, it is correctly called by the term *scorpio*, because it is driven into the body, leaving a curved wound'.

27 Cf. Andrea Nicolotti, *Sindone: storia e leggende di una reliquia controversa* (Torino: Einaudi, 2015).

28 Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Lenzuolo ove fu involto il Signore* (Bologna: Rossi, 1598).

29 Alfonso Paleotti and Daniele Mallonio, *Iesu Christi crucifixi stigmata Sacrae Sindoni impressa* (Venetiis: apud Baretium, 1606), pp. 67–69.



of Christ – might match those types of scourges. He was also familiar with the *Revelations* of St. Bridget of Sweden (1303–1373), who talked about a scourge with spikes attached to its cords that served to lacerate the body of Christ, not rending the flesh but gouging wounds each time they were dug in and torn out again.<sup>30</sup> Mallonio includes a picture of a *flagellum aculeatum* in his book [fig. 2] and concludes as follows: ‘the countless wounds that the Shroud received from the body of Christ show that scourges of that type were used for the flagellation of Christ’.<sup>31</sup>

For historical information on ancient scourges, Mallonio consults the famous treatise from 1593 *De Cruce* by Justus Lipsius.<sup>32</sup> Drawing on the testimony of Athenaeus of Naucratis (second century CE) and Eustathius of Thessalonica (twelfth century), he described, among others, a particular type of scourge used in the East called ἀστραγαλωτός in Greek, that is, “made of astragalus bones”.<sup>33</sup> The astragalus (ἀστράγαλος) or talus bone (*talus*), is a small bone in the foot. Due to their almost-cubic shape, the astragalus bones of sheep lend themselves to various uses, including decorative, and were primarily used to play dice.<sup>34</sup> If strung on the cords of a scourge, these small bones had the task of rendering more heinous the blows unleashed on the sufferer’s skin. There are other historical references to scourges made of astragalus bones: the Greek comic actor Crates (fifth century BCE) mentions this, as does Strabo (first century BCE), according to whom the temple of Dodona hosted a statue of a man with a bronze scourge and three chains with dangling astragalus bones hanging from its handle.<sup>35</sup> Between the first and second centuries CE, Plutarch wrote that an unworthy person does not deserve to be punished with the scourge of free men, but rather with the obviously more painful one made of talus bones and used by the Galli, the priests of Cybele, who self-scourged

30 Birgitta Birgersdotter, *Revelaciones* 4, 70, 3: ‘flagellis aculeatis infixis aculeis et retractis non avellendo, set sulcando totum corpus eius laceratur’.

31 Paleotti and Mallonio, *Iesu Christi crucifixi stigmata*, p. 69: ‘Fuisse autem eiusmodi flagella Christi flagellationi adhibita, infinita vulnera quae ex Christi corpore S. Sindon accepit ostendunt’.

32 Iustus Lipsius, *De cruce libri tres* (Antverpiae: ex officina Plantiniana, 1593), p. 37.

33 Athenaeus of Naucratis, *Deipnosophistae* 4, 38, 7, actually a quote from Posidonius, who lived between the second and first centuries BCE: Posidonius, *Fragmenta* 114 [Theiler]: ῥάβδοις καὶ ἰμάσιν ἀστραγαλωτοῖς μαστιγοῦνται; Eustathius of Thessalonica, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem* 3, p. 680, ll. 5–6: ἐκ τοιούτων ἀστραγάλων καὶ τὸ ἀστραγαλίζειν καὶ μάστιγες ἀστραγαλωταί; 4, p. 690, l. 10: αἱ ἀστραγαλωταὶ μάστιγες.

34 Some dice and astragalus bones used in gaming have been found: Cf. *Riscoprire Pompei* (Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1993), pp. 200–201.

35 Strabo, *Geographica* 7, fragm. 3.

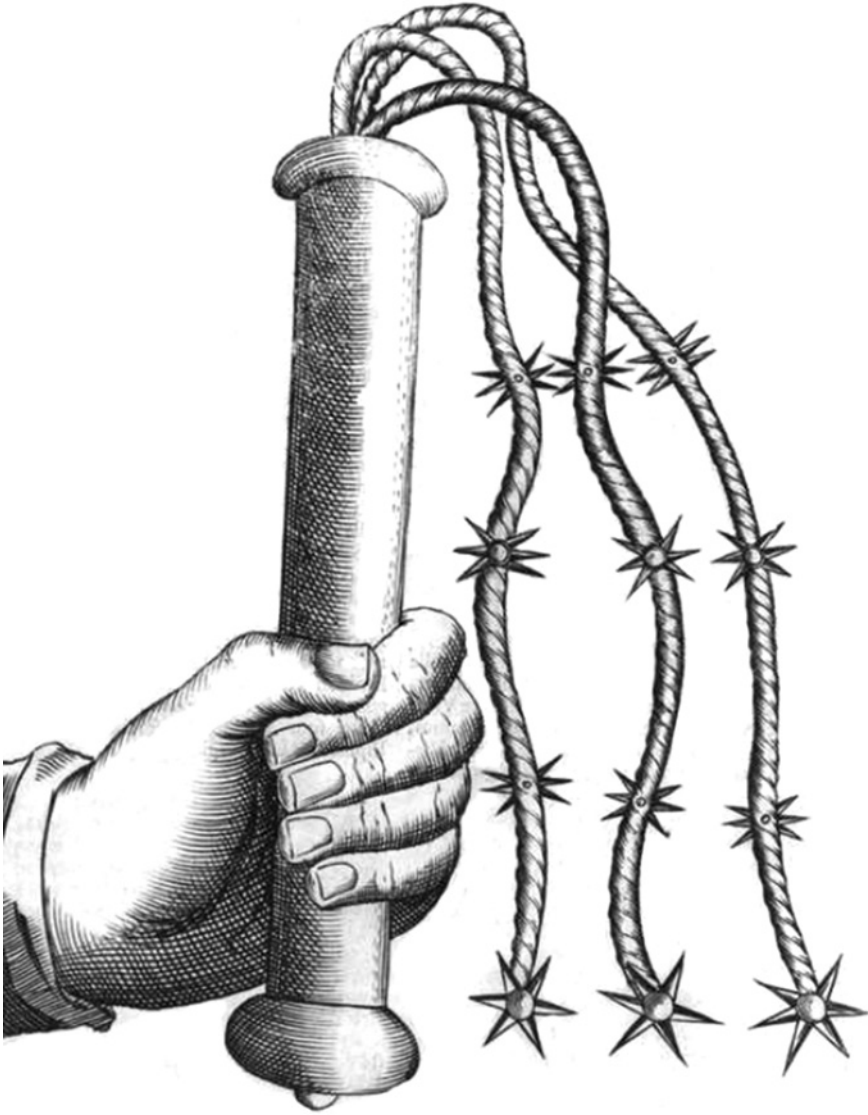


FIGURE 2 *Alfonso Paleotti and Daniele Mallonio, Iesu Christi crucifixi stigmata Sacrae Sindoni impressa (Venetiis: apud Baretium, 1606), p. 68.*

every year on March 24th.<sup>36</sup> The epigrammatist Erucius confirms this: the Galli used a type of scourge with many astragalus bones (*πολυαστράγαλος*).<sup>37</sup> Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (second century CE) provides the best description: the

36 Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 33 (*Moralia*, 1127c).

37 Erucius, in *Anthologia palatina* 6, 234.

*flagrum* used by the priests of the Syrian goddess Atargatis is ‘tasselled with cattle bones (*pecuinis ossibus catenato*)’ and ‘abundantly fringed with twisted lashes of woolly skin and strung with various sheep knucklebones (*contortis taenis lanosi velleris prolixae fimbriatum et multiiugis talis ovium tesseratum*)’.<sup>38</sup> Fortunately, the Greek version of this passage is also available: Apuleius was indeed translating into Latin an excerpt of the Greek novel *The Ass*, which was about a ‘scourge of astragalus bones’ (ἐκ τῶν ἀστραγάλων μάστιξ).<sup>39</sup>

This gives rise to two issues. The first is that, when quoting this Latin passage by Apuleius, Justus Lipsius used a different Latin text than the one contained in modern critical editions: the *flagrum* was supposedly not *tesseratum* (i.e. strung with *tesserae*, that is to say dice, cubes, small cubes) but rather *tesselatum* (made up of little tiles, small square pieces, little cubes). This error is due to the fact that the printed editions available at the time reported *tesselatum* or *tessellatum*,<sup>40</sup> an emendation that was mistaken and not found in any of the manuscripts.<sup>41</sup>

The second issue is that, to translate these Greek passages containing the term ἀστραγάλωτος (indicating scourges of plaited animal bones) into Latin, Lipsius interchangeably employed two adjectives that refer to a talus (which is precisely the astragalus), i.e. *talaris* and *taxillatus*. While the *talaris* is documented in ancient Rome, however, there is no evidence of the *taxillatus* (from *taxillus*, i.e. small die, little cube) to be found in any ancient Latin occurrence.<sup>42</sup>

Oblivious to the fact that the term *taxillatus* was not present in Latin sources, being a neologism translated from Greek, many authors followed Lipsius

---

38 Apuleius, *Metamorphoseon libri* 8, 30 e 28.

39 Pseudo Lucian of Samosata, *Asinus* 38: τῇ ἐκ τῶν ἀστραγάλων μάστιγι παίοντες ὀλίγον ἐδέησαν ἀποκτείναι.

40 For example, *Commentarii a Philippo Beroaldo conditi in Asinum aureum Apuleii* (Veneziae: apud Sim. Papiensem dictum Bivilaquam, 1501), p. 153r (*tessellatum*); *L. Apuleii Metamorphoseos, sive Lusui asini libri XI* (Venezia: eredi di Aldo Manuzio, 1521), p. 87; *L. Apuleii Madaurensis philosophi platonici quae quidem extare novimus monumenta* (Basileae: Henricus Petrus, 1533), p. 213 (*tesselatum*).

41 This has been noticed already by Franz Oudendorp, *Appuleii opera omnia*, I (Lugduni Batavorum: Van der Eyk et Vygh, 1786), p. 584: ‘Dein in nullo manuscripto est *tessellatum*’.

42 For *talaris*, see for instance Seneca, *De ira* 3, 19, 1. *Taxillatus* is present between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Lawrence of Brindisi: *S. Laurentii a Brundisio opera omnia*, X.1 (Patavii: ex officina typographica Seminararii, 1954, p. 284, in relation to garments (*taxillatis vestibus*); other medieval writers used *taxillator* or *taxillatorius* in relation to dice games.

in using this denomination.<sup>43</sup> One of them was precisely Daniele Mallonio, who unwittingly aided in circulating the false idea that the Romans actually had something called *flagrum taxillatum*. At any rate, of all possible scourges which may have been used on Jesus, the instrument with astragalus bones is perhaps the least likely, as it originated in the East and was used by the priests of a specific cult. Joachim Kühn acknowledged this fact as early as 1706:

What is certain is that our Savior was not beaten with that kind of scourge, as some imagine and paint to persuade the eyes of old ladies to release a tear or two: in fact, the saving Passion was accomplished in accordance with Roman customs, neither Phrygian nor Parthian.<sup>44</sup>

In any case, this kind of scourge would not have left the marks we see on the man in the Shroud. So, what was then the exact shape of the *flagrum* of Jesus? Mallonio reports the existence of a fragment preserved in Rome as a relic of the Passion, in the church of Santa Maria in Via Lata; this fragment, however – I went looking for it – is only a tiny piece of thin chain with a kind of twisted nail attached, encased in a cross-reliquary together with other strange relics.<sup>45</sup>

---

43 Cf. Juan Luis de la Cerda, *Adversaria sacra* (Lugduni: Prost, 1626), p. 184; Giuseppe Laurenzi, *Polymathia sive variae antiquae eruditionis libri* (Lugdunii: Anisson, 1666), p. 242; Caspar Sagittarius, *De flagellatione Christi* (Jeane: typis Banhoferianis, 1674), cap. 1, §12; Cornelius O. Jansen, *Tetrateuchus sive Commentarius in Sancta Iesu Christi Evangelia* (Lugduni: Beaujollin, 1676), p. 256; Thomas Godwy, *An English Exposition of the Roman Antiquities* (London: White, 1680), p. 203; Johann J. Hofmann, *Lexicon universale* (Leiden: Hackius, 1698), pp. 269–270; Samuel F. Bucher, *Antiquitates biblicae ex Novo Testamento selectae* (Vitembergae et Lipsiae: apud Ionam Korte, 1739), p. 975; Johann G. Carpzov, *Apparatus historico criticus antiquitatum sacri codicis et gentis Hebraeae* (Francofurti: ex officina Gleditschiana, 1748), p. 125.

44 Joachim Kühn et alii (eds.), *Julii Pollucis Onomasticum Graece et Latine* (Amstelaedami: Wetsten, 1706), p. 1210: 'Illud autem certum est, Salvatore nostrum non eo flagri genere caesum esse, ut quidam fingunt et pingunt ad exorandos anularum oculos, ut unam et alteram velint exspuere lachrymulam: nam τὸ σωτήριον πάθος non Phrygiis, non Parthicis, sed Romanis moribus peractum est'.

45 According to Fioravante Martinelli, *Primo trofeo della S.ma Croce eretto in Roma nella Via Lata da S. Pietro apostolo* (Roma: Tinalsi, 1655), p. 164, a squared and golden reliquary, with crystal, held fragments 'from the sting and small iron chain (*de acu et catenella ferrea*) with which the sacred body of our Lord was scourged'. Today these are located in the reliquary-cross along with fragments of the Virgin Mary's hair and dress, some of her breast milk, pieces of the cross of Jesus, his towel, robe, and various relics of saints. As early as over a hundred years ago, the canon Luigi Cavazzi, *La diaconia di S. Maria in Via Lata e il monastero di S. Ciriaco* (Roma: Pustet, 1908), p. 125 expressed his doubts about this

Mallonio also resorts to a miracle-like argument: several objects of the passion of Christ were found inside the heart of the Blessed Clare of Montefalco, examined after her death (in 1308), including a nerve in the shape of a scourge with nodes. This is the description provided by Berengar of Saint-Affrique in approximately 1310–1316:

The upper part of the nerve had five small separate nerves, and with nodes, which were not made with hands but created by the flesh, which in some points exceeded the normal diameter of those fine nerves to become somewhat larger in thickness, forming a kind of node, as if some knots had been made along the cords of a scourge or a whip. This is why that nerve seemed to represent in all its features the whip used to scourge Christ.<sup>46</sup>

### Paul Vignon's Encyclopedies

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the sindonologist Paul Vignon reinvestigated the issue of the shape of the scourge of Jesus.<sup>47</sup> Vignon appropriately included no mention of the adjective *taxillatus* because his sources – which were no longer Latin, but French – never mentioned this word. He did

---

matter: 'the authenticity of several elements is doubtful, such as the Virgin's milk and hair, the chain used to beat the Redeemer, his band, etc'. In the archive of the church I found two documents of authenticity for various relics, including *ex acu et catenula quibus verberatus fuit* and *ex flagellis*, dated 1806 and 1812 and drawn by Giuseppe Bartolomeo Menochio, papal sacristan and the confessor of Pius VII.

- 46 Michele Faloci Pulignani, 'Vita di S. Chiara da Montefalco scritta da Berengario di S. Africano', *Archivio storico per le Marche e l'Umbria* 1 (1884) pp. 557–649; 2 (1885) pp. 193–266 (235): 'Nervi autem illius summitas habebat quinque nerviculos divisos ab invicem et nodatos, non quod in ipsis nodi manualiter essent facti, sed quia caro in aliquibus locis equalitatem comunem nervicilorum illorum subtilium in grossitudine ad modum nodi aliquantulum excedebat ac si nodi in alicuius flagelli seu fruste funiculis essent facti. Ex quibus nervis illa(m) frustam qua Christus flagellatus extitit representare per omnia videbatur'. It does not matter whether or not this is true or if, as father Tommaso Bono of Foligno said, there is a strong suspicion that a nun artificially created the objects later found in the cardioscopy: what is interesting to note is that, at the time, *this* was believed to be the shape of the scourges of Christ. The deposition of Tommaso Bono can be found in Enrico Menestò, *Il processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco* (Scandicci: La nuova Italia, 1984), p. 435.
- 47 Paul Vignon, *Le Linceul du Christ* (Paris: Masson, Paris, rev. edn, 1902), pp. 110–116; Id., *Le Saint Suaire de Turin* (Paris: Masson, Paris, rev. edn, 1939), pp. 55–60.

cite Apuleius' passage, but in the erroneous version: *flagrum talis tessellatum* instead of *tesseratum*.<sup>48</sup>

Vignon, like Mallonio before him, felt the need to confirm the circular shape of the whip marks that he had noticed on the Shroud. On the basis of this, he went in search of a very specific scourge, one with more or less spherical blunt objects attached to the ends of its lashes. Unlike in Mallonio's time, in his day Vignon was able to consult some designs for Roman scourges printed in several important sources such as the *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines* by Charles Daremberg and Edmond Saglio and the French version of the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* by Anthony Rich.<sup>49</sup> Of these, the most striking is the faithful reproduction of an example of the *flagrum talis tessellatum* mentioned by Apuleius, based on a marble bas-relief from the second century: three strings dangle from a handle and pass through a series of twenty-four astragalus bones positioned in a row [fig. 3].<sup>50</sup> However, this is the ceremonial *flagrum* of Cybele's priests, not a scourge used to carry out corporal punishment on the condemned; furthermore, it does not match the Shroud marks either in terms of form or in the arrangement of the bones. What about the archaeological evidence, then? Vignon was obliged to trust the drawings he found in the books, unaware that precisely these drawings were destined to mislead him.

Rich and Daremberg-Saglio's dictionaries reproduce in a drawing the decoration on the handle of a bronze jug found in Pompeii, depicting a silenus whipping a satyr [fig. 4].<sup>51</sup> Looking at the drawing, it appears that the silenus is using a three-rope scourge with sinkers, bones or nodes attached to the ends of the cords, which would suggest similarities with the Shroud model

---

48 This occurred because Rich, the source Vignon drew on, was adhering to an old edition of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* that corrected the *tesseratum* present in the manuscripts, despite the fact that others had already restored the original lesson some time before: see for instance Franz van Oudendorp (ed.), *Appuleii opera omnia*, I (Lugduni Batavorum: Van der Eyk et Vygh, 1786), p. 584 (incorrect reading); Gustav F. Hildebrand (ed.), *L. Apuleii opera omnia*, I (Lipsiae: Cnoblochii, 1842), p. 737 (correct reading).

49 Gustave Fougères, *Flagellum*, in Daremberg and Saglio, *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, II.2 (Paris: Hachette, 1896), pp. 1152–1156; Anthony Rich, *Dictionnaire des antiquités romaines et grecques* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1859), pp. 273–274.

50 Rome, Musei Capitolini, Inventario Sculture, s 1207: it depicts a priest of the *Magna Mater* Cybele with cult objects including a scourge of astragalus bones that the priests of the goddess used to hit themselves. Cf. Serena Ensoli and Eugenio La Rocca, *Aurea Roma. Dalla città pagana alla città cristiana* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2000), p. 515.

51 Rich, *Dictionnaire des antiquités*, p. 273; Daremberg, *Dictionnaire des antiquités*, II.2, p. 1154, fig. 3090.



FIGURE 3 *Rome, Musei Capitolini, Inventario Sculture, s 1207.*  
PHOTO: VALERIA PEZZI



FIGURE 4 Anthony Rich, *Dictionnaire des antiquités romaines et grecques* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1859), p. 273.

Vignon was seeking; unfortunately, however, the illustrator had incorrectly reproduced what is only a whip, with nothing visible attached to its ends [fig. 5].<sup>52</sup> This is a recurring decoration type that is also seen in two other similar findings (in one of which “a long lace, made of rope or leather” can be easily

52 Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, n. 69500.





FIGURE 5 Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, n. 69500.

PHOTO: VALERIA PEZZI

identified),<sup>53</sup> as well as in a marble sarcophagus in Rome: here, the silenus likewise beats the satyr using a simple “doubled strap” [fig. 6].<sup>54</sup> In the *Dictionnaire des antiquités*, Vignon also found the image of a man on horseback holding

53 Suzanne Tassinari, *Il vasellame bronzeo di Pompei* (Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1993), I, p. 147 (plate cxlv,4) and II, p. 35; cf. Ead., ‘Pots à anse unique’, *Cronache pompeiane* 1 (1975), pp. 218–219. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, nn. 10758 and 69501.

54 Henry Stuart Jones, *A Catalogue of the Ancient Sculptures Preserved in the Municipal Collections of Rome. The Sculptures of the Museo Capitolino* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912), p. 118. Sarcophagus with raised designs illustrating Dionysus’ education, Rome, Musei Capitolini, inv. s 260.



FIGURE 6 *Sarcophagus, particular: Rome, Musei Capitolini, inv. s 260.*

PHOTO: ANDREA NICOLETTI

a stick in his hand with two cords ending in two small circles hanging from it. In this case, the circles are also visible in the original, however, their location is not the same as the alleged Shroud scourge and, in addition, the context reveals the error: as a matter of fact, this is not a scourge at all but a horse whip (certainly not designed to tear the skin of the horse) drawn rather schematically: as for those circles represented in the image, we do not know what they were (leather tabs, as in modern whips? Knots? Something else?). In addition,

the depicted horseman is not Roman and neither is the illustrator, seeing as the figure is painted on Greek pottery dating from 340–330 BCE.<sup>55</sup>

In the *Dictionnaire* there is also a drawing of a first-century bas-relief depicting a carter brandishing a whip in the air. Trusting the encyclopedia drawing in this case as well, Vignon identified large circular weights at each end of the three strings of the whip [fig. 7].<sup>56</sup> However, direct observation of the bas-relief shows that these weights are not present: the cords just display a barely noticeable bump, at the most small knots and definitely not the circular objects that appear in the drawing [fig. 8].<sup>57</sup> Due to unfortunate circumstances,

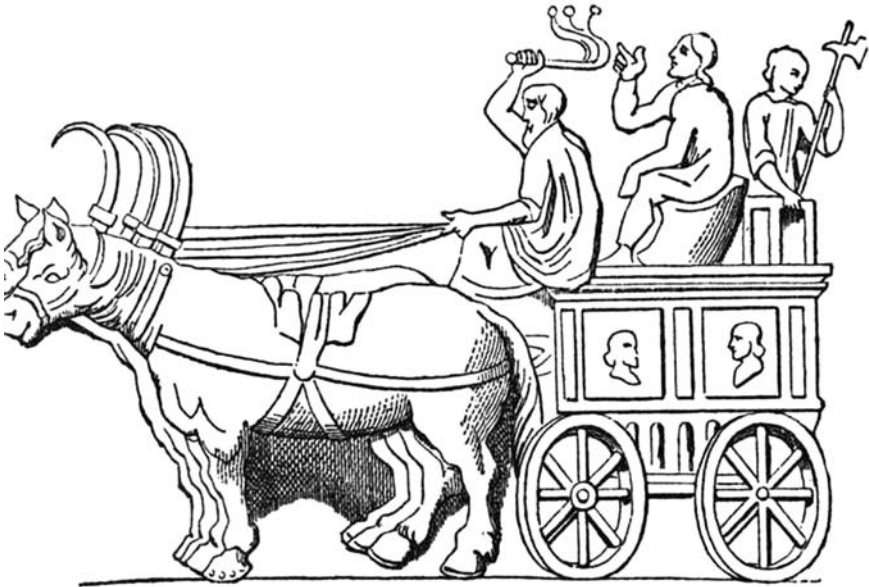


FIGURE 7 Charles Victor Daremberg and Edmond Saglio (eds.), *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, II.2 (Paris: Hachette, 1896), p. 928, fig. 1197.

55 Foot of Apulian krater by Darius Painter: Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 81667 ('Vase of the Amazons' or 'Big Amphora from Ruvo'). Cf. Andrea C. Montanaro, *Ruvo di Puglia e il suo territorio* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2007), §163.1. The original was viewed by my colleague Roberto Alciati (October 26, 2012).

56 Vignon, *Le Saint Suaire de Turin*, p. 55, note 1, quoting Daremberg, *Dictionnaire des antiquités*, II.2, p. 928, fig. 1197.

57 Avignon, Musée Calvet, Bas-relief de Maraudy. Cf. Auguste Allmer and Paul Dissard, 'Trion. Antiquités découvertes', *Mémoires de l'Académie des sciences, belles-lettres et arts de Lyon. Classe des lettres* 25 (1888), pp. 1–253 (244); Émile Espérandieu, *Recueil général des bas-reliefs de la Gaule romaine*, I (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1907), pp. 222–223. I would like to thank Odile Cavalier, Conservateur en chef du Patrimoine, for her autoptic description and for sending close-up photos (March 21, 2012).



FIGURE 8 *Avignon, Musée Calvet, Bas-relief de Maraudy.*  
PHOTO: ODILE CAVALIER

all the designs that Vignon was able to consult were unreliable precisely regarding the details that he was looking for; it is really a shame, however, that in the following decades neither he nor anyone else thought to go and take a look at the original objects or request a photograph of them.

Another scene depicted on a bas-relief, a first century copy of a Hellenistic original, seemed to show a man whipping his servant, holding a scourge in his hand [fig. 9];<sup>58</sup> in fact, however, the scene depicts a drunk man dancing to the sound of a flute, staggering, supported by his servant while holding in his hand not a scourge but the garland people wore during banquets: it does not have the form of a scourge, nor hanging protuberances.<sup>59</sup> It would be more

58 Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 6687; a cameo created in the first century BCE was also made following the same model: Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire, 21133.

59 Cf. J. Richard Green, 'Drunk Again: A Study in the Iconography of the Comic Theater', *AJA* 89/3 (1985), pp. 465–472; Thomas B.L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1995), I, p. 95; II, p. 373; Salvatore Monda, 'Callidamate e i suoi amici: scene di ubriachi nella commedia nuova e nella palliata', in Renato Raffaelli and Alba Tontini (eds.), *Lecturae Plautinae Sarsinates XIII. Mostellaria* (Urbino: Quattroventi, 2010), pp. 91–93; Eric Csapo, 'The Iconography of Comedy', in Martin Revermann (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 117–119. The scene is as follows: a drunk young man, who tries to dance to



FIGURE 9 Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 6687.

PHOTO: ANDREA NICOLOTTI

appropriate to examine a scene of the ritual flagellation of a woman during the *lupercalia* depicted on the lid of a Roman sarcophagus crafted in the last quarter of the third century; the tool is composed of a rigid handle with a single pendant of unidentified material [fig. 10].<sup>60</sup> The same scene is also found in mosaic flooring of the same period in El Jem, Tunisia [fig. 11].<sup>61</sup>

---

the sound of a flute, must be supported by a slave lest he fall; his angry father approaches him in a threatening manner with the intention of punishing him, and is barely held back by another figure.

- 60 Sarcophagus of Aelia Afanasia, in Rome, Museo Classico delle Catacombe di Pretestato, inv. PCAS Pre 273. Cf. Heikki Solin and Hugo Brandenburg, 'Paganer Fruchtbarkeitsritus oder Martyriumsdarstellung? Zum Grabrelief der Elia Afanacia im Museum der Prätexat-Katakombe zu Rom', *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1980), pp. 271–284; Fabrizio Bisconti, 'Dentro e intorno all'iconografia martiriale romana', in Mathijs Lamberigts and Peter van Deun (eds.), *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), pp. 247–250; Raffaella Giuliani, 'Alzata frammentaria del sarcofago di Aelia Afanasia', in Ensoli and La Rocca, *Aurea Roma*, pp. 593–594.
- 61 Cf. L. Foucher, *Découvertes archéologiques à Thysdrus*, II (Tunis: Institut National d'Archéologie et d'Art, 1962), pp. 48–49, fig. 20.



FIGURE 10 *Sarcophagus of Aelia Afanasia, in Rome, Museo Classico delle Catacombe di Pretestato, inv. PCAS Pre 273.*

PHOTO: VALERIA PEZZI

## Archeological Finds

If none of these scourges are reinforced with small metal globes, where can we find a parallel that matches the Shroud? To justify the marks visible on the Shroud, some scholars have turned to the so-called *plumbatae*, defined as an instrument of torture in some laws of the fourth century CE<sup>62</sup> and often

62 *Codex Theodosianus* 9, 35, 2, 1: 'plumbatarum ictus'; 12, 1, 80: 'ab ictibus plumbatarum habeantur immunes'; 12, 1, 85: 'plumbatarum cruciatibus'; 2, 14, 1: 'adfecti plumbo perpetuis metallorum suppliciiis deperentur'; see also 11, 7, 7; 12, 1, 80; 12, 1, 117; 16, 5, 40. Regarding the *plumbatae* and other torture instruments used in the era of martyrs, the following might be useful: Karl Gottfried von Winckler, *De supplicio plumbatarum media aetate usitato* (Lipsiae: ex officina Langenhemiana, 1744), and Pietro Lazeri, 'De tormenti de' santi martiri', *Annali delle scienze religiose* 12 (1854), pp. 79–102; 397–418; 13 (1854), pp. 51–77 (68–73). Rodríguez Ennes, *Algunas cuestiones en torno a la verberatio*, p. 179 note 17, quotes Ovidius, *Metamorphoses* 10, 227 as a reference text for the *plumbata*, but the quote is incorrect and I could not find anything fitting in any of Ovid's work. When I contacted him, Prof Rodríguez Ennes himself acknowledged the mistake but he was no longer able to trace the source he had originally drawn from.





FIGURE 11 *El Jem, mosaic flooring.*  
PHOTO: GAMIL HABIB

mentioned in writings of the same era describing the torment suffered by the Christian martyrs.<sup>63</sup> In the middle of the fourth century, Libanius spoke

63 Zeno of Verona, *Tractatus* 1, 39, 6: 'Viluerunt ungulae, inutiles ictus visi sunt plumbatarum, stetit contemptus eculeus, crebri fustium imbres maioris poenae contemplatione neglecti sunt'; *Passio sanctae Felicitatis et septem filiorum eius* (BHL2853) 4: 'iudex primum fratrem plumbatis occidit'; *Passio Isaac et Maximiani* (BHL4473): 'postquam plumbatis nihil valere, tormenta similiter admovit'; *Acta Tryphonis et Respicii* (BHL8337) 6: 'Plumbatis eos tundite' (is a late Latin translation from the Greek word of the same period, πλούμβατον, a synonym of μόλιβδος [BHG1856]); Basil of Caesarea, *In Gordium martyrem* 4: Ποῦ δὲ αἱ μόλυβίδες; ποῦ δὲ αἱ μάστιγες; the use of the verb πλουμβατίζω is documented (Hesychius, *Homiliae* 20, 8, 2).

of strikes delivered with “lead balls”;<sup>64</sup> also in the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus speaks of torture with lead weights associated with racks, cords and whips: these were, perhaps, simple weights used to dislocate the limbs while the body was lying on a rack (*eculeus*).<sup>65</sup> Zosimus provides an account of the killing of the *comes Orientis* Lucianus with “lead balls” as late as the very end of the century.<sup>66</sup> In the early fifth century, Prudentius describes continuous blows delivered to the back of the head with lead, comparing them to hail.<sup>67</sup>

It would be inaccurate, however, to use sources dating to after the fourth century to claim that this instrument of torture was already in use in first-century Palestine: the sources do not enable such an assertion. The matter is complicated by the fact that the term *plumbatae* (or *mattiobarbuli*) also indicates arrows that had an egg-shaped lead lining at the lower end to increase their weight and penetrative capacity, arrows that the Roman army began to use in the second or third century CE.<sup>68</sup>

- 
- 64 Libanius, *Orationes* 14, 15: ἔλαβε δὲ οὐδὲ τόδε, πληγὰς μέντοι πολλάς καὶ χαλεπὰς καὶ πολλαχοῦ τῆς γῆς ταῖς ἐκ μολιβδίου σφαιραῖς, ἃς ἠγγήσατο Παῦλος εἰς θάνατον ἀρκέσειν.
- 65 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 29, 1, 23: ‘The racks are made taut, the leaden weights are brought out along with the cords and the whips (*intenduntur eculei, expediuntur pondera plumbea, cum fidiculis et verberibus*); the passage could be compared with *Codex Theodosianus* 11, 7, 3: ‘*plumbatarum verbera aut pondera*’. Ammianus also was familiar with leads for hitting: *Res gestae* 28, 1, 29: ‘killed with vigorous blows of lead’ (*plumbi validis ictibus interemit*); 29, 1, 40: ‘torments, lead and spherical forms’ (*tormentis et plumbo et verberibus*).
- 66 Zosimus, *Historia nova* 5, 2, 4: σφαιραῖς δὲ μολιβδίναις αὐτὸν κατὰ τοῦ τένοντος ἐνεκελεύετο παίεσθαι.
- 67 Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 10, 116–125: ‘«Let his back be beaten with many strokes, and his shoulders swell up with the blows of the leaded lash...». So the martyr received that hail of blows. Amid the leaded strokes he voiced a hymn, and then raising himself said ... (“*Tundatur – inquit – terga crebris ictibus plumboque cervix verberata extuberet...*” *Pulsatus ergo martyr illa grandine postquam inter ictus dixit hymnum plumbeos, erectus inquit...*).
- 68 Cf. Philip Barker, ‘The *plumbatae* from Wroxeter’, in Mark W.C. Hassall and Robert Ireland, *De Rebus Bellicis* (Oxford: BAR, 1979), Part 1, pp. 97–99; Thomas Völling, ‘*Plumbata – Mattiobarbulus – Martzobarboulon?* Bemerkungen zu einem Waffenfund aus Olympia’, *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1991), pp. 287–298; Rudolf Degen, ‘*Plumbatae: Wurfgeschosse der Spätantike*’, *Helvetica archaeologica* 23 (1992), pp. 139–147; Maurizio Buora, ‘Nuovi studi sulle *plumbatae* (= *mattiobarbuli*?). A proposito degli stanziamenti militari nell’Illirico occidentale e nell’Italia orientale nel IV e all’inizio del V secolo’, *Aquileia nostra* 68 (1997), pp. 227–246.



What might these lead weights have been like? Large, small, tied by cords or chains, single or multiple? Do we have any copies? At one time several of these weights were thought to have been found in the Roman catacombs. According to the old descriptions by Antonmaria Lupi and Giovanni Battista De Rossi, they were lead or bronze balls hanging from chains.<sup>69</sup> A few years later, however, in preparing to inventory the only *plumbata* found at the Cemetery of San Callisto in Rome, De Rossi himself catalogued it as a simple spherical weight.<sup>70</sup> The heart of the problem lies in the task of precisely identifying these objects: in the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries there was a certain hagiographic tendency that led scholars to attribute the value of martyrdom to several archaeological findings; on successive investigation, however, these proved to be objects used for completely different purposes. This was true not only of these *plumbatae* but also of the so-called “scratchers”, harmless tools which for a time were interpreted as devices for stripping the limbs of the martyrs.<sup>71</sup> The collection of the Vatican Museums includes three of these scratchers, along with four objects already catalogued as “scourges” in the inventories as from the eighteenth century<sup>72</sup> and, as such, replicated in the publications of past centuries [fig. 12]. The “scourges”, made entirely of bronze, comprise one or more rings from which one or more chains hang, the ends of which hold a number of small pendants attached close together, ranging from

69 Antonmaria Lupi, *Dissertazioni, lettere ed altre operette*, 1 (Faenza: Archi, 1785), pp. 265–266; Giovanni Battista De Rossi, *La Roma sotterranea cristiana* (Roma: II Cromo-litografia pontificia, 1867), p. 164.

70 Vatican Museums, inv. 67821, described in Giovanni Battista De Rossi, *Catalogo del Museo Sacro Vaticano*, at the Vatican Apostolic Library, location Arch. Bibl. 66 (nr. 210). The catalogue dates to the years 1878–1894. It was made of lead and bronze and the weight has a diameter of 6.3 cm.

71 Cf. e.g. Maurizio Sannibale, *La raccolta Giacinto Guglielmi*, 11: *Bronzi e materiali vari* (Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2008), pp. 150–157; David Caccioli, *The Villanovan, Etruscan, and Hellenistic Collections in the Detroit Institute of Arts* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 84–85.

72 Vatican Museums, inv. 60822–60824 (scratchers) and 60564–60567 (scourges). Three scourges are mentioned in the inventory from 1762 (preserved at the Vatican Library, location Arch. Bibl. 70, nrr. 6 [current 60567] 6a [current 60564] and 44 [unidentified]) and in the inventory that is undated but prior to April 9th, 1764 (ibid. Arch. Bibl. 51, ff. 62v nrr. 8–10 and 65v nr. 113). Since the days of De Rossi there has been doubt as to whether these “scourges” were the result of a modern *pastiche*. This information was kindly provided by Guido Cornini, of the Vatican Museums, and Claudia Lega, who showed me the objects on May 8th, 2012.



FIGURE 12 *Louis Perret, Catacombes de Rome, IV (Paris: Gide et Baudry, 1852), plate XIV.*

two to five for each chain.<sup>73</sup> In the second half of the eighteenth century they were on display in the second cabinet of the Pio Cristiano Museum in the Vatican, together with scratchers;<sup>74</sup> as in the case of the scratchers, scholars realized that these objects were not scourges, and they were consequently moved to the storage room. In reality, these objects – when not *pastiches* assembled in the modern era by mixing heterogeneous authentic materials and modern remakes – were items of daily use, such as supports for lamps or scales, or fragments of the remains of pendants and metal decorations with ornamental and funerary functions. In pre-Roman Italy, these chains with pendants were widespread, especially in the Etruscan, Villanovan and Italic areas: they were

73 Louis Perret, *Catacombes de Rome*, IV (Paris: Gide et Baudry, 1852), plate XIV; drawings republished in Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq (eds.), *DACL*, V (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1923), coll. 1640–1642, fig. 4474 (from Caylus) e 4475 (from Perret).

74 Cf. Claudia Lega, 'La nascita dei Musei Vaticani: le antichità cristiane e il museo di Benedetto XIV', *Bollettino dei monumenti musei e gallerie pontificie* 28 (2010), pp. 95–184 (159).

almost always ornaments worn for special occasions, to be attached to clothing, or harnesses for horses, and were often placed in graves. Tomb excavations furnished many of these: charms, chest plates, rattles, necklaces, decorations for harnesses, chains, tubular spirals, “saltaleoni” spirals and various pendants, sometimes also used to fasten the cloths that were wrapped around ossuaries and funerary objects.

An example of this type of object is the pendant with a spiral engraving and three chains with charms that is reproduced in Rich’s dictionary (the one Vignon consulted): Rich erroneously classified it as a *flagrum*, asserting that the illustration “is copied from an original found at Herculaneum, a city the houses of which have also furnished other specimens with two and five tails, but otherwise of a similar character to the one in question” [fig. 13].<sup>75</sup> However, nothing similar has ever been found, either in the storage facilities at Pompeii and Herculaneum or at the Naples Archaeological Museum where all the materials were sent, or even among the materials not currently on display and held in storage facilities.<sup>76</sup> As early as 1986 attempts were made to locate this supposed scourge of Herculaneum, but without success;<sup>77</sup> despite this fact, books dedicated to the Shroud of Turin have continued to assert that the *flagrum* was

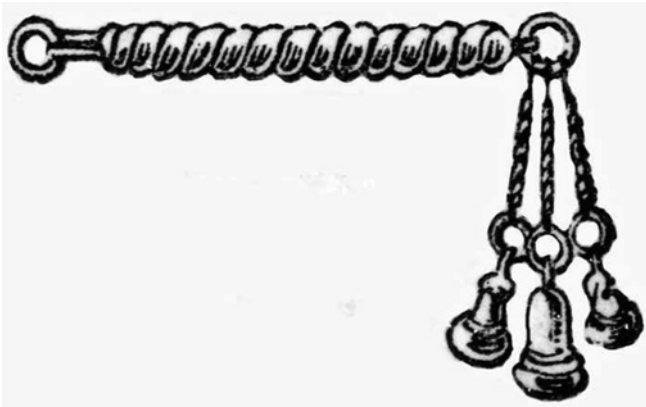


FIGURE 13 Anthony Rich, *Dictionnaire des antiquités romaines et grecques* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1859), p. 273.

75 Rich, *Dictionnaire des antiquités*, p. 273.

76 I would like to thank for their investigative help Teresa Elena Cinquantaquattro, superintendent of the Naples and Pompei archeological areas, Maria Paola Guidobaldi, director of the Herculaneum site, and Marinella Lista of the Archeological Museum of Naples with whom I delved into the bronze, iron and lead collections from top to bottom (February 15, 2012).

77 Letter from superintendent Baldassare Conticello to William Meacham (December 16, 1986, prot. 21989).

discovered in Herculaneum, and even that it had been put on display.<sup>78</sup> Taking a close look at the drawing of Rich's object, it is clear that the author copied an old eighteenth-century drawing belonging to the collector Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, Count of Caylus (1692–1765); Rich recreates this drawing nearly identically (the French nobleman provided the measurements for the object, stating that the handle is about 21 cm long and the chains about 8 cm, much too short to be used for scourging) [fig. 14]. Caylus reports having bought the scourge together with some other items from a seller in Rome, but erroneously identifies them as scourges and dating to the Roman period.<sup>79</sup> Writing in 1905, the archaeologist Giovanni Pinza was the first to correctly recognize the proper function of Caylus and Rich's "scourge", confirmed by the fact that Caylus displayed this fragment with clapper-shaped pendants alongside other



FIGURE 14  
*Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises, supplément, VII (Paris: Tilliard, 1767), planche LVII.*

78 For example, Ian Wilson, *The Blood and the Shroud* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), p. 42 (reaffirming the arguments made years earlier by the English sindonologist David Willis); John C. Iannone, *The Mystery of the Shroud of Turin* (New York: Alba House, 1998), p. 53; Marco Tosatti, *Inchiesta sulla Sindone* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 2009), p. 135. Massimo Centini, *Breve storia della Sindone* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1998), p. 132, nota 13, claims that there is a *flagrum taxillatum* at the National Roman Museum of the Baths, but there is no trace of this, either.

79 Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises*, supplément, VII (Paris: Tilliard, 1767), plate LVII and pp. 213, 215.

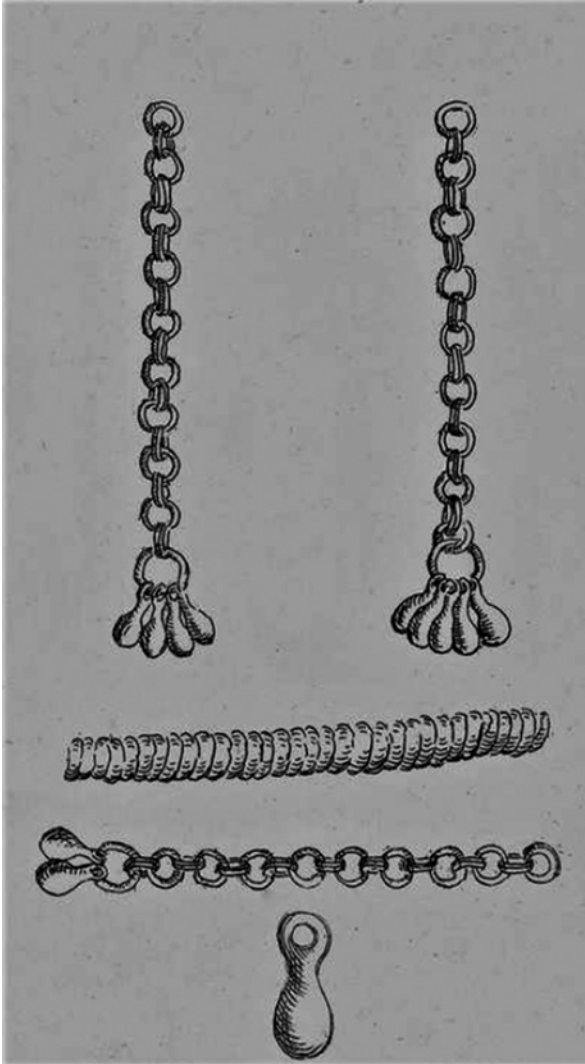


FIGURE 15 *Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises, supplément, VII (Paris: Tulliard, 1767), planche LVII.*

pieces from the same collection and also belonging to the usual type of Italic pendants; these other artifacts had double chains with drop-shaped pendants, “saltaleoni” and spirals, a type which is represented in hundreds of examples [fig. 15].<sup>80</sup> It is likely that all of this material came from a single set of funerary gear.

80 Giovanni Pinza, ‘Monumenti primitivi di Roma e del Lazio antico’, *Monumenti antichi pubblicati per cura della Reale Accademia dei Lincei* 15 (1905), coll. 447–450. Pinza cited



FIGURE 16  
 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques, inv. bronze 1836.  
 PHOTO: RENÉ-GINOUVÈS

Fortunately, the Caylus collection has survived and I was able to track down all of the objects: the 29 cm-long supposed scourge of Herculaneum, in copper alloy, is located in Paris and is currently catalogued as a “piece of tack” of Italic origin dating to the Iron Age [fig. 16],<sup>81</sup> while the other alleged “chain scourges”

---

the example of a necklace in the Warrior Tomb in Tarquinia (in *Monumenti inediti pubblicati dall'Istituto di corrispondenza archeologica*, x [Roma: Istituto di corrispondenza archeologica, 1874–1878], plate Xb), and of another one found in Vetulonia (in Isidoro Falchi, *Vetulonia e la sua necropoli antichissima* [Firenze: Le Monnier, 1891], plate x111,7).

81 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques, inv. bronze 1836; described at the page <http://caylus-recueil.huma-num.fr>: ‘Pièce d’harnachement en alliage à base cuivre (patine verte), composée d’une tige torse, munie d’un anneau à chacune de ses extrémités. A l’un de ces anneaux sont suspendues trois chaînettes avec de petites boules pleines’. The “scourge” included in the collection of Alessandro Castellani was undoubtedly a similar object: *Catalogue des objets d’art antiques, du moyen âge ou de la renaissance dépendant de la succession Alessandro Castellani* (Paris: Imprimerie de l’art, 1884), p. 39: ‘Flagellum à trois boutons suspendus à des chaînettes. Long. 15 cent.’; ‘The Castellani Collection’, *The Architect* 31 (1884), p. 233: ‘Flagellum or scourge, consisting of a handle to which three knobs were attached by small chains’.



FIGURE 17  
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques, inv. bronze 1837.

PHOTO: RENÉ-GINOUVÈS

with drop-shape pendants, 13.5 cm long, are identified as part of a *parure*, perhaps originating in the Tarquinia area and dating to the ninth-eighth century BCE [fig. 17].<sup>82</sup> It is not necessary to look any further than the bronzes from the Etruscan and Italic excavations, scattered among various museums, to find many examples that are useful for comparison [fig. 18–29].<sup>83</sup> The same form

82 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques, inv. bronze 1837; described at the page <http://caylus-recueil.huma-num.fr>: 'Ces chaînettes appartenaient à la parure masculine ou féminine. Il s'agit d'un type d'objet géographiquement très répandu dans plusieurs régions d'Italie et sur une période assez longue. Ces pièces ont été découvertes en grand nombre dans les sépultures. Cette chaînette rappelle cependant davantage les productions de Tarquinia pour la forme des pendentifs bouletés.'

83 See for example the images in Felice Barnabei, *Antichità del territorio Falisco esposte nel Museo Nazionale Romano a Villa Giulia*. Atlante (Milano: Hoepli, 1895), plates 9–11; Isidoro Falchi, 'Vetulonia', *Notizie degli scavi di antichità comunicate alla R. Accademia dei Lincei* 25 (1900), pp. 469–497 (491); Edith Hall Dohan, *Italic Tomb-groups in the University Museum* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942), plates 12, 22, 24, 45; Ferrante Rittatore Vonwiller, *Como preromana e le sue necropoli* (Como: Nosedà, 1962), plates 29–30; Hugh Hencken, *Tarquinia, Villanovans and Early Etruscans*, 1 (Cambridge:



FIGURE 18 Various bronzes from Etruscan and Italic excavations.

Peabody Museum, 1968), pp. 118, 124, 132, 140, 328; Rosanna Pincilli and Cristiana Morigi Govi, *La necropoli villanoviana di San Vitale*, II (Bologna: Istituto per la storia di Bologna, 1975), plates 58, 59, 61, 104, 110, 111, 115, 125, 132, 181, 227, 230, 269, 270, 290, 292; Maria Teresa Falconi Amorelli, *Vulci. Scavi Bendinelli (1919-1923)* (Roma: Paleani, 1983), pp. 188-192, 196-199; *Piceni: popolo d'Europa* (Roma: De Luca, 1999), pp. 258-260; Jean MacIntosh Turfa, *Catalogue of the Etruscan Gallery of the University of Pennsylvania Museum* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 2005), pp. 96, 104-105, 126, 131; Fritz Jurgel, *Die etruskischen und italischen Bronzen* (Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 1999), pp. 283, 286, 290; Alessandro Mandolesi, *Materiale protostorico: Etruria et Latium Vetus* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2005), pp. 48, 423-428; Maria Eleonora Tamburini-Müller, *La necropoli Campo del Tesoro-Lavatoio di Verucchio* (Bologna: Comune, 2006), pp. 245, 247, 251, 271, 310, 311; Patrizia von Eles, *Le ore e i giorni delle donne* (Pazzini: Verucchio, 2007), pp. 40, 41, 79, 91, 121; Valentino Nizzo, 'I materiali cumani del Museo





FIGURE 19  
*Various bronzes from Etruscan and  
Italic excavations.*



FIGURE 20–21 *Various bronzes from Etruscan and Italic excavations.*

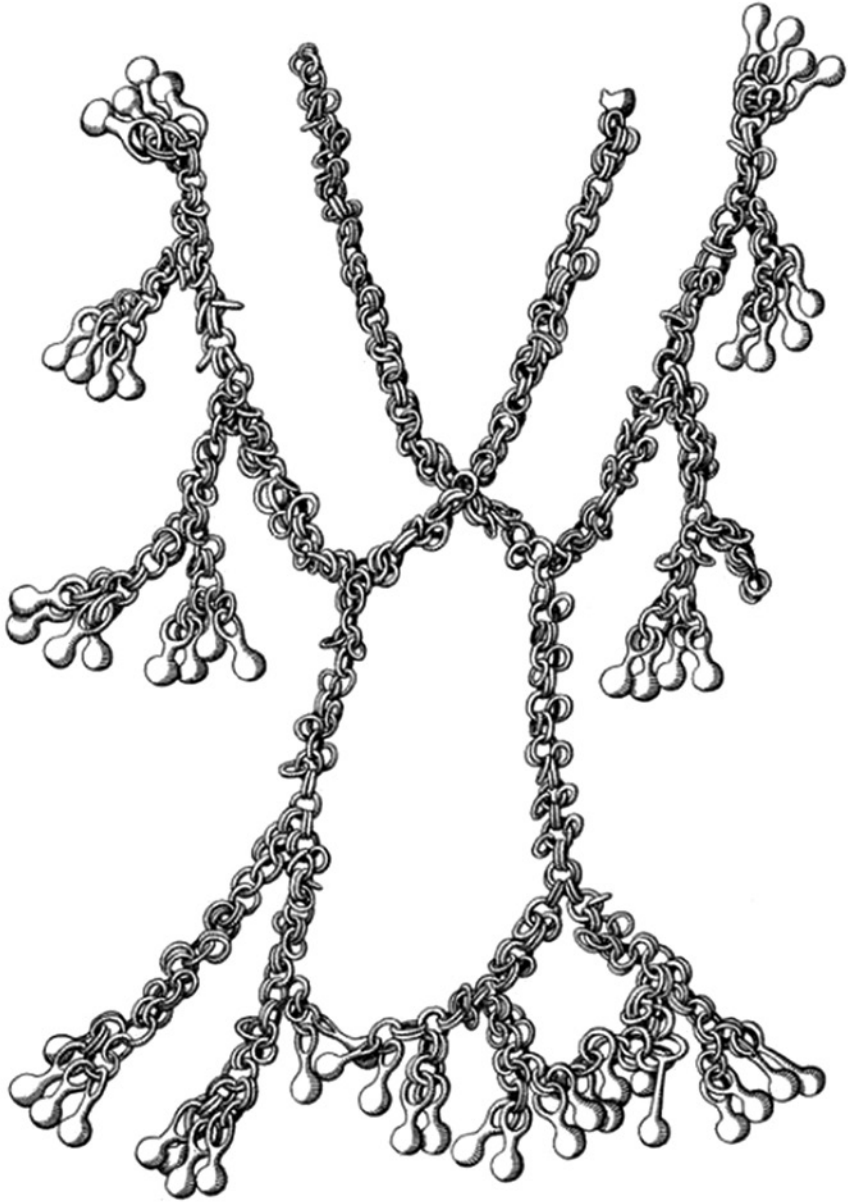


FIGURE 22 *Various bronzes from Etruscan and Italic excavations.*



FIGURE 23 *Various bronzes from Etruscan and Italic excavations.*



FIGURE 24 *Various bronzes from Etruscan and Italic excavations.*

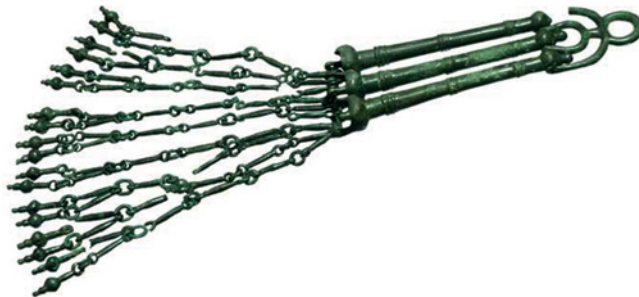


FIGURE 25 *Various bronzes from Etruscan and Italic excavations.*



FIGURE 26  
*Various bronzes from Etruscan and Italic excavations.*



FIGURE 27 *Various bronzes from Etruscan and Italic excavations.*



FIGURE 28  
*Various bronzes from Etruscan and  
Italic excavations.*



FIGURE 29  
*Various bronzes from Etruscan and Italic excavations.*

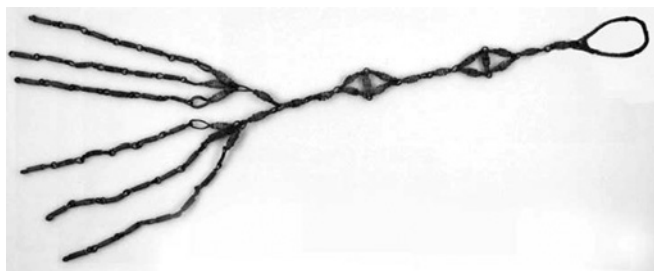


FIGURE 30 *Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology inv. 1948.1189 Arch.*  
PHOTO: ROZ SHERRIS.

is also found in some pendants preserved at the Musée du Cinquanteaire in Brussels, which in 1980 Antoine Legrand suggested was part of a scourge despite the museum catalogue having identified it as a *phalerae*, that is, a horse tack.<sup>84</sup>

The discoverer of an alleged bronze “scourge” made of tightly-wrought chains dating from the second half of the fourth century CE that was found among the remains of a Roman villa in Great Chesterford classified it as ‘part of the trappings of a horse’ in 1847 [fig. 30] and other scholars later interpreted it as the hanging chains for a lamp, jar or straight-beam balance (40 cm long).<sup>85</sup> In the nineteenth century, several weights and pendants attached to chains that were preserved in Madrid were classified in the same way.<sup>86</sup> Other chains

---

Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico «Luigi Pigorini», *Bullettino di paleontologia italiana* 97 (2008) pp. 165–276 (197–206); Andrea Babbi and Uwe Peltz, *La Tomba del Guerriero di Tarquinia* (Mainz: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 2013), pp. 113, 322–325, tav. 50.

84 Antoine Legrand, *Le Linceul de Turin* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1980), pp. 116–117, with picture. Legrand’s hypothesis was later transformed into a certainty in Jean-Christian Petitfils, *Gesù* (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo, 2013), p. 318. At one time, it was classified as a bronze scourge made up of a handle with three ornamental pendants (inv. R.696): Émile de Meester de Ravestein, *Musée de Ravestein* (Bruxelles: Bruylant-Christophe, rev. edn, 1884), p. 317: 1069 (635). Flagrum, trouvé près de Tivoli’.

85 Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology inv. 1948.1189 Arch. Cf. Richard Cornwallis Neville, *Sepulchra exposita* (Saffron Walden: Youngman, 1848), p. 69; ‘Antiquities and Works of Art Exhibited’, *The Archaeological Journal* 6 (1849), p. 196; William R. Powell, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. A History of the County of Essex*, 111: *Roman Essex* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), plate ix b; Maria Medlycott, *The Roman Town of Great Chesterford* (Chelmsford: Essex County Council, 2011), p. 244.

86 *Diccionario Enciclopédico Hispano-Americano*, IV (Barcelona: Montaner y Simón, 1888), p. 98: ‘Nuestro Museo Arqueológico Nacional posee varios ejemplares de cadenas romanas; una de grandes eslabones, y otra, cuyos eslabones son anillos pequeños, cerrados

with pendants found in Sutton Courtenay were initially described as scourge fragments, but were then incorporated into the collections of the British Museum under the generic identifier “chains”.<sup>87</sup> A bronze “scourge” from London once considered Roman has since been reclassified, in view of its workmanship, as dating from the Middle Ages, and the curators of the museum where it is held are very skeptical about its really being a scourge.<sup>88</sup>

Indeed, modern archeology is far more cautious in attributing meaning to these kind of objects: it is extremely difficult to find and identify actual scourges in a good state of preservation because some of the materials used to make them were perishable (the strings and usually the handle as well, if made of wood) and they lack a canonized identifying type, as well as, in most cases, aesthetic refinement: an object destined for slavish and bloody purposes was not worthy of precious or complex craftsmanship. Archaeologists can only make a positive identification when the context of discovery is very explicit, and must take great care in accepting certain inadequate classifications made in the past, especially when the artifact was subject to arbitrary additions and restoration attempts, the typical *pastiches* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries carried out in particular by certain diggers and private collectors. Even having discovered the artifact in the context of the catacombs cannot be considered conclusive, as it has now been established that the Roman catacombs were used for a second time beginning in the Late Middle Ages, which resulted in the addition of a number of more recent objects.<sup>89</sup>

---

á martillo; la última lleva pendiente de un extremo una esferilla de bastante peso, pues sin duda debió usarse esta cadena como azote. Hay también otros azotes ó flagelos, de los que empleaban los romanos para castigar á los esclavos, compuestos de un tallo, de cuya extremidad penden tres cadenillas en la mayor parte de los ejemplares que sostienen los nudos ó perillas erizadas de salientes ó puntas para herir; dichas cadenillas están soldadas, y son espesas y finas en unos, y en otros consisten en barritas engarzadas por los extremos. These objects are inventoried under the numbers 8733, 8734, 18071, 9259 and 9285 along with other similar objects that are no longer classified as scourges. I would like to thank Margarita Moreno Conde at the Museo Arqueológico Nacional for having sent photographs.

87 ‘Proceedings at the Meetings of the Archaeological Institute’, *The Archaeological Journal* 8 (1851), pp. 87–427 (190–191); Harold Peake, *The Archaeology of Berkshire* (London: Methuen, 1931), pp. 109, 233.

88 Museum of London, inv. 1600. Cf. *Catalogue of the Collection of London Antiquities in the Guildhall Museum* (London: Blades, rev. edn, 1908), p. 54 §97 and plate xxviii §19. I would like to thank Roz Sherris and John Clark, curators at the Museum of London, for the information they provided (October 4, 2012).

89 This explains, for example, why objects of more recent manufacture have sometimes been found in the catacombs: cf. Umberto Utro, ‘Testimonianze inedite dei primi secoli cristiani’, *Bollettino dei monumenti musei e gallerie pontificie* 24 (2004), pp. 155–185 (185).

It is therefore very strange that Flavia Manservigi, who is aware of these false identifications from the past, recently stated that there is ‘an interesting attestation of the use of a whip ending with round knobs’ because, in 1858, ‘the Italian Etruscologist Gian Carlo Conestabile states that in the area of Volterra was found a bronze flagellum’.<sup>90</sup> To begin with, this information is not accurate: Conestabile speaks of a bronze object from the Riparbella excavations composed of

six long chains that all come together in a serpentine staff that serves to hold the object in the hand; three of these chains are double and three single, formed of rings and equipped with a small ball at the ends; to give a clearer idea, the entire object bears a certain resemblance to some of the corporal scourges that can be seen in use even today by monks or highly devoted people.

It is therefore clear that Conestabile did not claim to have found a scourge, he simply spoke of ‘a certain resemblance’ to aid the reader in understanding. Conestabile adds that the chains resemble certain decorations for horses but appear to be too long and finally, unable to establish what ‘domestic or sacred purposes’ the bronze might have been used for, he refrains from taking a position. Rather, he leaves identification to ‘the eye and experience of the real erudites’:<sup>91</sup> in 1858, scholars still had a limited understanding of

---

90 Flavia Manservigi, ‘The “flagra” of the Vatican Museums’, in *Aggiornamento sulle principali tematiche sulla Sindone di Torino. Incontro Centri di Sindonologia per la festa liturgica della S. Sindone 2 Maggio 2015* (Torino: Centro Internazionale di Sindonologia, 2015), p. 79, online: [www.shroud.com/pdfs/duemaggiolandout.pdf](http://www.shroud.com/pdfs/duemaggiolandout.pdf) [accessed 5 October 2016]; see also Enrico Morini – Flavia Manservigi, ‘The Hypotheses About The Roman Flagrum: Some Clarifications’, in *St. Louis Shroud Conference. The Controversial Intersection of Faith and Science. St. Louis, October 9th-12th, 2014*, pp. 22–23, online: [www.shroud.com/pdfs/stlman-servigipaper.pdf](http://www.shroud.com/pdfs/stlman-servigipaper.pdf) [accessed 5 October 2016];

91 Gian Carlo Conestabile, ‘Di alcune novità e varietà in fatto di etrusche anticaglie’, *Bullettino dell’Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* (1859), pp. 71–84 (71–72): ‘Oggetto di bronzo presentatomi in Volterra appo il cicerone negoziante di etruschi oggetti, Giuseppe Callai, e del quale non mi sembra aver trovato esatti confronti fra le anticaglie in bronzo che esistono nei musei, almeno d’Italia, compreso anche il Campana e il Gregoriano. 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 di anelli e fornite in punta di una pallina, con una certa rassomiglianza nell’insieme, per darne più chiara idea, ad alcuno de’ corporei flagelli, che veggonsi anche oggidì usati da’ cenobiti, o da’ supremamente devoti di religione. Pel luogo del ritrovamento insieme ad armille ed altri oggetti metallici mi s’indicò Riparbella, piccolo luogo situato in collina presso le campagne marittime attraversate dal fiume Cecina, e





FIGURE 31 *Verucchio, Museo Civico Archeologico, Necropoli Lippi 2005, tumb 8, rep. 18.*

pre-Roman Etruscan forms and types of metals. There is even a modern catalogue that speaks generally of ‘an object made up of six chains attached to a curving rod’ without, appropriately, any mention of scourges.<sup>92</sup> In fact, judging from its description this item – whose location is unknown – would appear to be more similar to the Etruscan and Italic decorative chains discussed above (it is interesting to compare it to a six-chain Villanovan pendant from Verucchio [fig. 31]<sup>93</sup>). The fact that the object was found together with *armillae*, i.e. bracelets, confirms its decorative funerary use and context. The length and number of the chains do not represent a problem: when they were attached to the wearer’s shoulders and allowed to hang down along the body,<sup>94</sup> these

---

circostanti alla grossa borgata denominata il Fitto, vicino alla quale ergeasi la famosa villa di Albino Cecina. Sebbene il detto oggetto non sia improntato di assoluta novità, potendo ravvicinarsi a qualche più picciol gruppo di catenelle che altrove incontrai, siccome, a mo’ d’esempio, nella bella raccolta del gentilissimo barone Meester de Ravestein, pure non vorrei così facilmente per la sua grandezza metterlo nel novero degli ornamenti equini, fra’ quali si soglion riporre quelle minori produzioni dello stesso genere. Dall’altro canto però non sentendomi in grado, né essendo mio costume di avventurare sentenze, me ne starò, pel giudizio sull’uso domestico o sacro di quel bronzo, all’occhio ed all’esperienza de’ veri dotti, i quali mi basta infrattanto di aver messo in notizia della sua esistenza’.

92 Mario Torelli et alii, *Atlante dei siti archeologici della Toscana*, II (Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 1992), p. 180, §49.

93 Verucchio, Museo Civico Archeologico, Necropoli Lippi 2005, tumb 8, rep. 18.

94 Alfedena, Museo archeologico Antonio De Nino, inv. 17049. Cf. Lucio Mariani, ‘Aufidena’, *Monumenti antichi pubblicati per cura della Reale Accademia dei Lincei* 10 (1901), coll.



FIGURE 32 *Alfedena, Museo archeologico Antonio De Nino, inv. 17049.*  
PHOTO: ERIKA IACOBUCCI

pendants sometimes exceeded one meter in length (such as the *châtelaine* of Alfedena, which also has six chains [fig. 32]) and there are even some pendants

---

225–638 (324), plate 12e. This type was widespread in various parts of Italy; for instance, the small chains of Alfedena resemble those of Belmonte Piceno: cf. Silvestro Baglioni, 'Belmonte Piceno: oggetti preromani', *Atti della della Reale Accademia dei Lincei – classe di scienze morali* 9 (1901), pp. 227–238 (234).

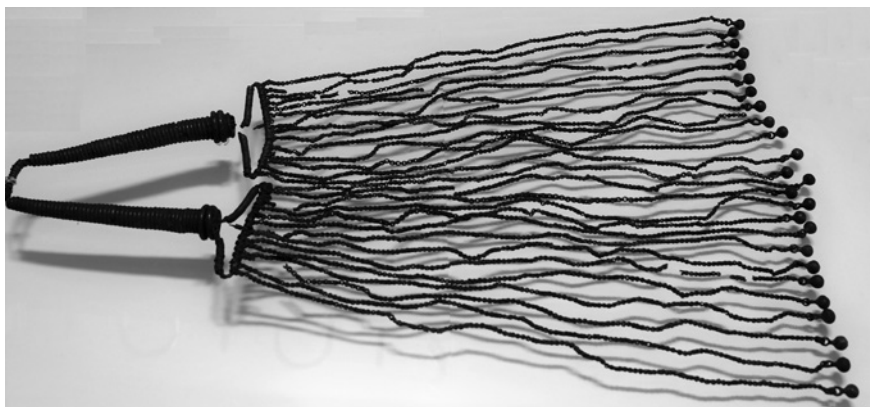


FIGURE 33 *Museo Civico di Sesto Calende, inv. ST23775.*

that have as many as fifteen or so chains, as in the example discovered in the Tomb of the Tripod in Sesto Calende, set with the usual drop-shaped pendants at the ends of the chains [fig. 33].<sup>95</sup>

It is therefore wholly unjustified to claim that ‘in the Etruscan age whips ending with round knobs were used’ on the basis of a description of an object that is no longer available and which not even its discoverer was able to evaluate with certainty, and seeing as dozens of similar objects were found in the tombs and interpreted as having had purposes other than scourging. Furthermore, it is pure unfounded conjecture to add that ‘this usage probably passed to the Roman world’.<sup>96</sup>

Manservigi herself provides us with an interesting element. Annibale Cinci, custodian of the Guarnacci Etruscan Museum of Volterra, says in 1860 that his museum has just purchased an item like the one described by Conestabile in the previous year.<sup>97</sup> Manservigi attempted to track down the object at the Guarnacci Museum, but she failed. I, instead, have succeeded.<sup>98</sup> The object is one of the usual Etruscan decorative pendants, that at the time of the purchase was considered to be a ‘bronze scourge’ [fig. 34].<sup>99</sup> Conestabile’s object,

95 Museo Civico di Sesto Calende, inv. ST23775 (ca. 530 BCE – ca. 470 BCE).

96 Manservigi, ‘The “flagra” of the Vatican Museums’, p. 80.

97 Annibale Cinci, ‘Scavi di Volterra’, *Bullettino dell’Istituto di corrispondenza Archeologica* (1860), p. 187.

98 With the aid of Elena Sorge, Alessandro Furiesi and Lisa Rosselli. I thank them.

99 Museo Guarnacci di Volterra, *Registro dei donativi ed acquisti di antiquaria fatti al pubblico Museo Guarnacci di Volterra 1731–1899*, p. 21: “Un flagello di bronzo composto di dieci fili o catenelle terminata ciascuna da due globuli dello stesso metallo”. Now inv. MG 6196.



FIGURE 34 *Volterra, Museo Guarnacci, inv. MG 6196.*  
PHOTO: ALESSANDRO FURIESI

therefore, looked like this. But, as already mentioned, objects like this were not scourges, and the experts I have interviewed are of the same opinion.<sup>100</sup>

The only object I have been able to identify that might possibly be considered a scourge, from Rome but undated, has a handle of approximately 17 cm and 29 bronze balls strung onto two cords (these cords were, however, added in the modern era) [fig. 35].<sup>101</sup> This is a fairly simple and functional structure in which the numerous spheres, with a diameter of up to 2 cm, are much larger than those of the Shroud as well as being positioned differently; the spheres of the Shroud are fewer and positioned in pairs, and measure approximately 0.8 cm (therefore proving unsuitable for an act of torture that was meant to cause considerable damage, even death). This might actually have been a later *plumbata* made, as the sources report, of such a large number of lead balls as to lend credence to Prudentius' metaphor of a "hail of blows". However, since this item was purchased from a collector and not excavated from a secure archaeological

100 Valentino Nizzo of the Authority for Archeological Goods of Emilia Romagna (February 10, 2012); Alessandro Naso, professor of Italic Etruscology and Antiquity at Naples' Federico II University (February 5, 2012); Angelo Ardovino, former archaeological superintendent in the Ministry of Cultural Heritage (July 4, 2015).

101 British Museum, Greek and Roman Antiquities, Bronze 2694. Also at the British Museum (Prehistory and Europe, AN274047001) there is a late-era scourge (?) made up of 50-cm-long plaited gold cords from the Christian period (ninth century) used for ceremonial purposes: Davis M. Wilson and Christopher E. Blunt, 'The Trewiddle Hoard', *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity* 98 (1961), pp. 75–122 (84, 92–93).



FIGURE 35  
British Museum, Greek and Roman  
Antiquities, Bronze 2694.

setting, there is always the risk that it is yet another example of the widespread modern *pastiches*, perhaps put together by the collector himself.<sup>102</sup>

None of the numerous ancient images proposed so far depict a shape that is similar to the hypothetical scourge of the Shroud: there are scourges and whips with multiple cords – the oft-cited image on a Roman coin is highly exemplary – but they do not have pendants [fig. 36].<sup>103</sup>

102 The British Museum purchased this object from the collector Alessandro Castellani in 1873. The Castellani family traded in and collected art objects, but they also produced reproductions; it is known that, at times, they also circulated counterfeited objects. At any rate, the custom of restoring, supplementing and combining different pieces in order to grant the artifacts a finished (or presumably finished, according to the opinion of the restorer) shape was quite widespread. For a discussion of Castellani as a maker of *pastiches* or merchant dealing in non-authentic objects see Anna Maria Moretti Sgubini (ed.), *La collezione Augusto Castellani* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2000), p. 11; Elizabeth Simpson, 'Una perfetta imitazione del lavoro antico: gioielleria antica e adattamenti Castellani', in John Davis (ed.), *I Castellani e l'oreficeria archeologica italiana* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2005), pp. 192–196; Ida Caruso, 'Il principio della "falsificabilità" nella bottega Castellani', in Mauro Cavallini and Giovanni Ettore Gigante, *De re metallica: dalla produzione antica alla copia moderna* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2006), pp. 129–139.

103 The *denarius* of T. Deidius from 113–112 BCE, with a whip including four loose ends. Another image can be viewed on the cover of *Bollettino di numismatica* 14–15 (1990). This coin is



FIGURE 36 Denarius of *T. Deidius* (113–112 BC). *Particular.*

At this point, all that remains is to state the unmistakable conclusions: just as with the scratchers and alleged *plumbatae* found in the catacombs, many items that were previously identified as scourges have since been recognized as having an authentic and alternative function all their own. Even some of the images included in old encyclopedias have proved of limited accuracy. Neither the *flagra taxillata*, whose name simply did not exist, nor these decorative items with charms attached to the ends of chains that scholars have relied on so heavily, can serve as typological examples of Roman scourges. This scarcity of archaeological data does not exclude the possibility of *imagining* that there might *theoretically* have existed somewhere in Roman antiquity a scourge with rounded pendants at the ends capable of leaving the kind of marks envisioned by mystics or imprinted on the Shroud; however, this reasonable consideration must not prevent us from recalling that, so far, there is no actual evidence of its existence. Scourges were probably made differently from case to case, depending on the materials available, the geographical site, the customs and the whims of the executioners; different types of scourges may have co-existed in Roman times and continued to exist in the following centuries as well. No archetype can be identified.

### Sindonologists' Conjectures

Let us return to Paul Vignon. He was wholly unaware of the “reclassification” of decorative objects mistakenly interpreted as instruments of torture that archaeologists were obliged to carry out between the nineteenth and twentieth

---

famous because it is included under the heading *flagrum* by William Smith, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., rev. edn, 1859), p. 540.

centuries. On the other hand, the most important concern for him was not studying the archeology of Roman scourges but authenticating the Shroud of Turin. Thanks to photographs from 1898 and 1931, he had a faithful reproduction of the relic he could use to observe the shape of the scourging marks and then, proceeding on the basis of an unfounded induction, imagine the form of the scourge that caused them.<sup>104</sup> The type of marks supposedly left by the movement of the ends of this scourge seemed to be regular and clearly visible: cords or straps, each ending in a lead weight capable of leaving the mark of two side-by-side balls, as if in the shape of a small dumbbell [fig. 37]. Having imagined the form of the scourge, Vignon sought to reconstruct the direction of the strikes, venturing to establish the position the torturers assumed when inflicting their beating. He even put together a facsimile of this hypothesized three-strap instrument of torture and published a photograph of it in his second book [fig. 38]; at the end of each strap, however, he does not imagine the small dumbbell mentioned in his first book but rather two rounded weights, like bullets, set at a distance of at least three centimetres one from the other.<sup>105</sup>

In essence, of the many types of possible Roman scourges – made of cords, leather, chains, plain or reinforced with knots, bones or metal pieces, involving one, two or more straps – Vignon was not able to locate a single one, either existing in real life, drawn or carved, that would leave marks matching those visible on the Shroud; for him, however, it was enough to know that it could have existed, at least in theory. And so he invented it himself.



FIGURE 37 *Scourge invented by Paul Vignon, ending in a lead weight in the shape of a small dumbbell.*

104 In reality it has not been proven that the Shroud contained a real body or that the reddish marks visible on the fabric are to be attributed to the work of a scourge; indeed, it is more likely that they are not.

105 Vignon, *Le Linceul du Christ*, p. 111; Id., *Le Saint Suaire de Turin*, p. 56.



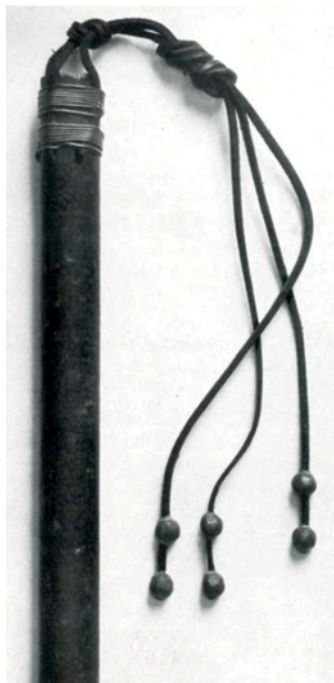


FIGURE 38  
*Scourge constructed by Paul Vignon.*

The effect this had was even more deleterious, however: some people began to claim that this hypothetical Roman scourge imagined by Vignon – never yet located, and if it had been, only as one of many possibilities – constituted the *typical* Roman scourge, perhaps dusting off the erroneous definition of *flagrum taxillatum*. Antonio Tonelli was the first to make this argument, stating that Vignon's reconstruction 'corresponds exactly to the shape that the Romans were wont to give the *flagrum*';<sup>106</sup> he was followed by Pierre Barbet, who spoke of the *flagrum* as a 'typically Roman instrument' and described it in a way that would coincide with the traces found on the Shroud and with Vignon's model.<sup>107</sup> Vignon had offered two different versions of the shape at the ends of his scourge, first imagining dumbbell-shaped weights and then moving on to simple rounded weights, all the while excluding the possibility

106 Antonio Tonelli, *La Santa Sindone. Esame oggettivo* (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1931), p. 15.

107 Pierre Barbet, *La passion de N.-S. Jésus-Christ selon le chirurgien* (Montréal: Éditions Paulines, 10<sup>th</sup> edn, 1982), p. 75.



of small bones. Some followed his shift, others did not. There were those who imagined weights, those who imagined small bones, those who hypothesized two straps and those who claimed three or more, with two or three points, those who counted a hundred strikes, those who counted more or fewer. Giulio Ricci in particular dedicated a great deal of effort to establishing the precise form of the scourges (which he held to consist of three straps, each with two weights), the number and direction of the strokes (approximately 120), the way Jesus was positioned against the column and the number of flagellators (two, one on the right and one on the left).<sup>108</sup> In this case as well, however, no agreement has been reached;<sup>109</sup> nonetheless, the writings inspired by the Shroud have been filled with descriptions and drawings of scourges modelled on the Shroud marks, suggesting that these correspond to a *typical* or even *unique* model used in Roman times and well-known and documented by archaeology, a claim which is simply untrue.<sup>110</sup> Specimens have been materially reconstructed, as Vignon had done, and displayed as if they constituted a copy of an ancient original despite the fact that there is no trace of such an original. One such reconstruction is exhibited at the Shroud Museum in Turin,<sup>111</sup> and many others are in exhibitions dedicated to the passion of Christ:<sup>112</sup> there are craftsmen whose field of expertise is precisely to make these objects for the exhibitions. Their efforts notwithstanding, the ‘documentary, technical and historical accuracy of the wounds’ imprinted on the Shroud and the ‘very

---

108 Giulio Ricci, *L'uomo della Sindone è Gesù* (Roma: Studium, rev. edn, 1969), pp. 113–127; Id., *La Sindone santa* (Esopus: Holy Shroud Guild, 1976), pp. 13–32.

109 Tarquinio Ladu states that the strikes numbered 180 and that Jesus was not tied to a pillar down low but rather with his arms raised: ‘Le colate di sudore di sangue nella Sindone di Torino’, in Arnaud-Aaron Upinsky (ed.), *L'identification scientifique de l'homme du Linceul Jésus de Nazareth* (Paris: Guibert, 1995), pp. 177–182.

110 Cf. Pierluigi Baima Bollone – Pier Paolo Benedetto, *Alla ricerca dell'uomo della Sindone* (Milano: Club degli Editori, 1978), p. 151; Kenneth E. Stevenson and Gary R. Habermas, *Verdetto sulla Sindone* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1982), p. 135; Maria Grazia Siliato, *Indagine su un antico delitto* (Milano: CDE, 1983), pp. 74–77; Rodney Hoare, *The Turin Shroud is Genuine* (Channel Islands: Guernsey, 1994), plate 16; Barbara Frale, *La sindone di Gesù Nazareno* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), p. 87. Also in medical articles, like William D. Edwards et alii, ‘On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ’, *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 255 (1986), pp. 1455–1463 (1455).

111 The audio guide in the museum states: ‘the flagellation in Roman times was carried out with instruments like the one shown here, which has been faithfully reconstructed’.

112 It is not difficult to find facsimiles of Shroud scourges: I was able to handle and photograph them at the church of San Lorenzo in Turin (January 11, 2012).

precise structure of a *flagrum taxillatum* being used by Roman troops in the conquered territories'<sup>113</sup> is, simply put, pure fantasy.

Nevertheless, this argumentative vacuum has been transformed into proof of the authenticity of the Shroud. Gaetano Intrigillo – among many others – poses the following question: how could a hypothetical forger 'have known about the Roman *flagrum taxillatum* forgotten for centuries and rediscovered in the era of archaeology, and leave traces of it as clearly visible as they are on the Shroud?'<sup>114</sup> He could not have known, the author wants us to admit. And we can certainly agree, in part: he could not have known, because the *flagrum taxillatum* in question has been neither forgotten nor rediscovered: it is simply that, so far, no one has ever seen it.

### Medieval Scourges

It would be more interesting to ask, where did it come from, the form of these alleged scourges that supposedly left the marks of their shape on the Shroud? A few years ago, geologist Barbara Faccini presented, at two different sindonological conferences, two studies investigating the scourge traces visible on the Shroud.<sup>115</sup> Faccini claims to be able to locate three kinds of marks on the relic: more than a hundred produced by an object that left two or three circular marks connected by an intermediate bar (the double or triple metal dumbbell previously described by Vignon); other more numerous and larger marks in the form of stripes; and finally some traces, numbering fewer than fifteen, that are very faint and present only in the leg, calf and ankle area, which have the appearance of scratches arranged in a fan shape. In addition to confirming the use of the scourge ending in lead rounds previously drawn by Vignon, Faccini believes that the second and third type of marks she describes were caused

---

113 Siliato, *Indagine su un antico delitto*, p. 77. Mentions the *flagrum taxilatum* [sic] also Petitfils, *Gesù*, p. 317.

114 Gaetano Intrigillo, *Sindone. L'istruttoria del secolo* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1998), p. 111.

115 Barbara Faccini, 'Scourge Bloodstains on the Turin Shroud: An Evidence for Different Instruments Used', in *The Shroud of Turin: Perspectives on a Multifaceted Enigma*, Ohio Conference 2008, online: <http://ohioshroudconference.com/papers.htm> [accessed October 2016]; Ead. and Giulio Fanti, 'New Image Processing of the Turin Shroud Scourge Marks', in *International Workshop on the Scientific Approach to the Acheiropoietos Images*. ENEA Research Center of Frascati (Italy) 4-5-6 May 2010, [www.acheiropoietos.info/proceedings/FacciniWeb.pdf](http://www.acheiropoietos.info/proceedings/FacciniWeb.pdf) [accessed October 2016].

by a kind of scourge that is rarely considered:<sup>116</sup> a bundle of flexible, thin rods tied together at the base. The author compares this scourge to *virgae* which, tied together with straps, formed the *fasces lictorii* (“bundles of the lictors”) that lictors (and others) used to deliver floggings since ancient Roman times.<sup>117</sup> However, these latter were made of relatively thick elm or birch branches,<sup>118</sup> while Faccini used very thin pear tree boughs in her experiments; furthermore, she mixes up *bucaedae* and *Hiberici funes* and continues to repeat the erroneous definition of *flagrum taxillatum*.<sup>119</sup> Beyond these errors, however, the element that elicits interest is precisely the alleged presence of marks consistent with these two types of scourge.

Medieval artistic representations of the scourging of Christ offer us a lengthy iconographic tradition portraying the soldiers in the act of striking Jesus with two different shapes of scourge: one is made of cords with knots or spherical weights, sometimes spiked, while the other is constituted by a cluster of switches.<sup>120</sup> The scourge ending in knots or spherical metal weights can already be found in a depiction from the first half of the ninth century [fig. 39],<sup>121</sup> both types can be seen, for example, in the scourging depicted in an ivory panel (approximately 1075) [fig. 40]<sup>122</sup> or, in the thirteenth century, in the *Biblia de San Luis* [fig. 41].<sup>123</sup> In the fourteenth century, examples include a

116 It has been already noticed by Emilio Giudici, ‘Considerazioni medico-biologiche sulla Passione di Cristo’, *ScC* 78 (1950), pp. 144–151 (146).

117 Cf. Livy, *Ab Urbe condita* 2, 5, 8: ‘The culprits were stripped, scourged with rods, and beheaded’; also 26, 15, 8 (a proconsul); 28, 29, 11 (Scipio Africanus); 29, 9, 5 (a lieutenant).

118 Cf. Antonio Maria Colini, *Il fascio littorio ricercato negli antichi monumenti* (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1932); Elena Tassi Scandone, *Verghe, scuri e fasci littori in Etruria* (Pisa – Roma: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2001), pp. 146–152.

119 In her 2008 article (pp. 17 and 19), Faccini speaks of *bucaedae* and “Spanish cords” as if these were the names of a certain type of scourge; in reality, however, *bucaeda* is a humorous term meaning “killer of bulls” used to indicate someone who receives so many lashes that he wears out the cow leather (Plautus, *Mostellaria* 884), while “Spanish cords” are simply cords to which Horace adds the terms “Iberian” (Horace, *Epodi* 4, 3) because the esparto grass used to weave them often came from Spain (cf. Pomponius Porphyrio, *Commentum in Horati Epodos* 4, 3: ‘Hibericos autem funes ideo dicit, quia in Hiberia, id est in Hispania plurimum spartum nascitur’).

120 For iconographic examples, see Curt Schweicher, ‘Geisselung Christi’, in Engelbert Kirschbaum (ed.), *LCI*, II (Rom: Herder, 1970), coll. 127–130; Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, II: *The Passion of Jesus Christ* (London: Lund Humphries, 1972), 66–69.

121 Stuttgarter Psalter, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod.bibl.fol.23, f. 43v.

122 British Museum, Prehistory and Europe, 1903, 0514.5.

123 *Biblia de San Luis*, Catedral de Toledo, vol. III, f. 6iv.



FIGURE 39 *Stuttgarter Psalter*, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod.bibl.fol.23, f. 43v.



FIGURE 40 *British Museum, Prehistory and Europe*, 1903,0514.5.



FIGURE 41 *Biblia de San Luis, Catedral de Toledo, vol. III, f. 6r.*

famous painting by Duccio di Buoninsegna (1308–1311) [fig. 42],<sup>124</sup> the miniatures in three books from France, Westphalia and Prague [figg. 43–45]<sup>125</sup> and many other representations that are easy to locate and become increasingly numerous in the following centuries.<sup>126</sup> A fifteenth century French miniature

124 Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.

125 Heures da la Passion du Christ, Bibliothèque de Troyes, ms.1905, f. 23v; *Speculum humanae salvationis*, Darmstadt, Hessische Landesbibliothek, Ms. 2505, f. 36v; Prague, Národní knihovna České republiky, XIV.A.17, f. 3r.

126 For example, Ingeborg Psalter, Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. 9, fol. 26v (about 1195); Ugolino di Nerio, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. 1635A (years 1320–1325); Bible moralisée, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, ms. 2554, f. 7v (first half of the thirteenth century); Panel depicting Flagellation, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 64.27.21 (fourteenth century); Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms. Gough.liturg.8, f. 49r (1300–1310); Depicted glass, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. 5460–1858 (1200–1220, only rounded



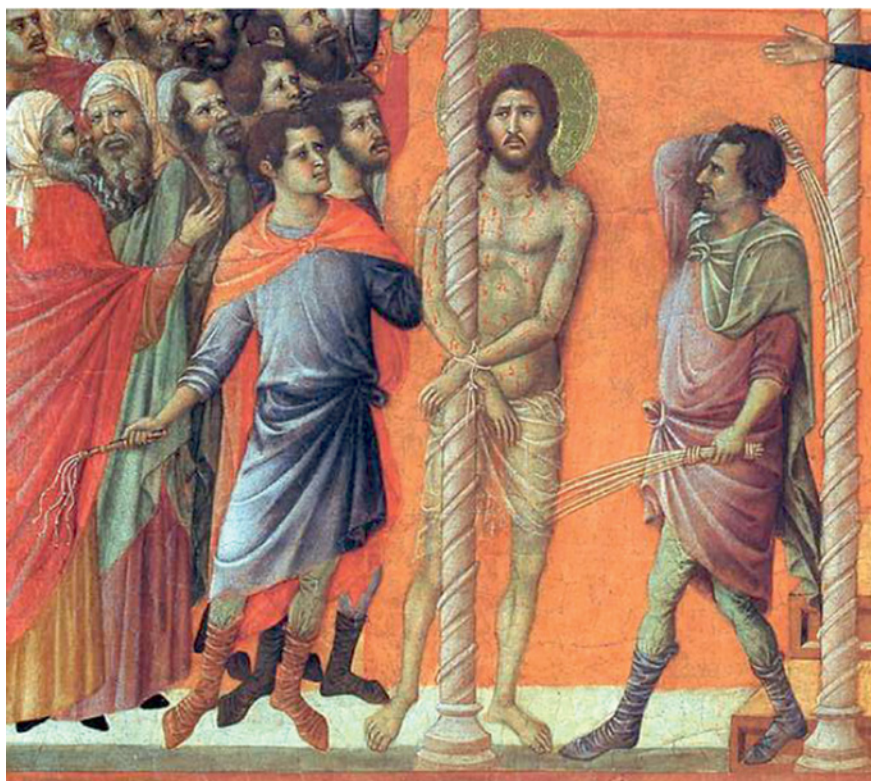


FIGURE 42 *Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.*

PHOTO: ANDREA NICOLETTI

sums up all the possibilities: scourges made of switches, straps, and cords both knotted and bearing metal spikes [fig. 46].<sup>127</sup> A miniature from approximately 1330 depicts not only the two types of scourge but also the “figurative” wounds that they were thought to leave, reflecting the shape of the object causing the injury, as seen on the Shroud [fig. 47].<sup>128</sup> Contrarily to what has been said, the presence of these figurative wounds all over the body, including back and legs, is not at all unusual.<sup>129</sup>

---

weights); British Library, Winchester Psalter, Ms. Cotton Nero C. iv, f. 21 (thirteenth century, only rounded weights). Many drawings of scourges can be found among the *arma Christi*: cf. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, II, pp. 184–197; *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture*, I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 150–151.

127 British Library, ms. Harley 1892, f. 67r.

128 Holkham Bible, British Library, ms. 47682, fol. 29v.

129 T. De Wesselow, *The Sign: The Shroud of Turin and the Secret of the Resurrection* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 123: ‘Once again, though, it differs dramatically from anything envisaged in the Middle Ages. The vast majority of medieval images of the dead or dying



FIGURE 43 *Bibliothèque de Troyes, ms.1905, f. 23v.*

These images confirm that there is no need to go all the way back to the first century in search of scourges with lead weights and whips made of switches:

---

Christ fail to depict any scourge marks at all. This may be because it was generally assumed that the flogging affected only Christ's back.... To attribute the marks on the Shroud to a provincial unknown working in the mid fourteenth century is therefore ridiculous'. As a matter of fact, without much in-depth research, I have found depictions of the flagellation that show marks all over the body in many a medieval work of art. Almost the entire book by De Wesselow is based on second hand sindonological sources that have not ever been verified. The book puts forth theses that cannot be supported, as it is usual in dozens of other sindonological books that it is not the case to mention here, however, being the work of a scholar, this one is particularly disappointing.

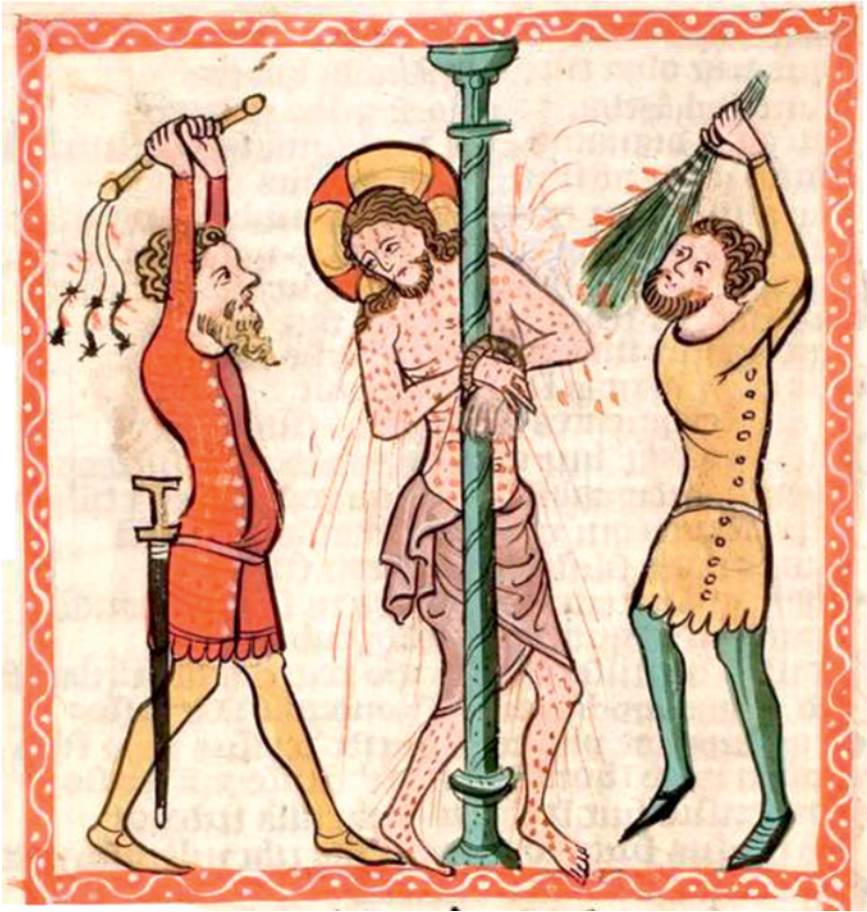


FIGURE 44 Darmstadt, Hessische Landesbibliothek, Ms. 2505, f. 36v.

rather, the use of these two different types of scourge is documented in medieval art, not in Roman practices. Even the mystic Gertrude of Helfta (1256–1302) speaks of two flagellators flanking Jesus, one striking him with thorn-covered branches and the other with a knotted scourge.<sup>130</sup> It should not be forgotten, moreover, that the Flagellants movement began to spread widely and intensely

130 Gertrud von Helfta, *Revelationes*, 4, 15, 4: 'Apparuit ei Dominus Iesus tali dispositione qua ad statuam est flagellatus, stans inter duos vincitus, quorum unus videbatur eum caedere spinis, alter vero flagello nodoso' (ed. Jean-Marie Clément, *Gertrude d'Helfta. Le Héraut* [Paris : Cerf, 1978], p. 170).



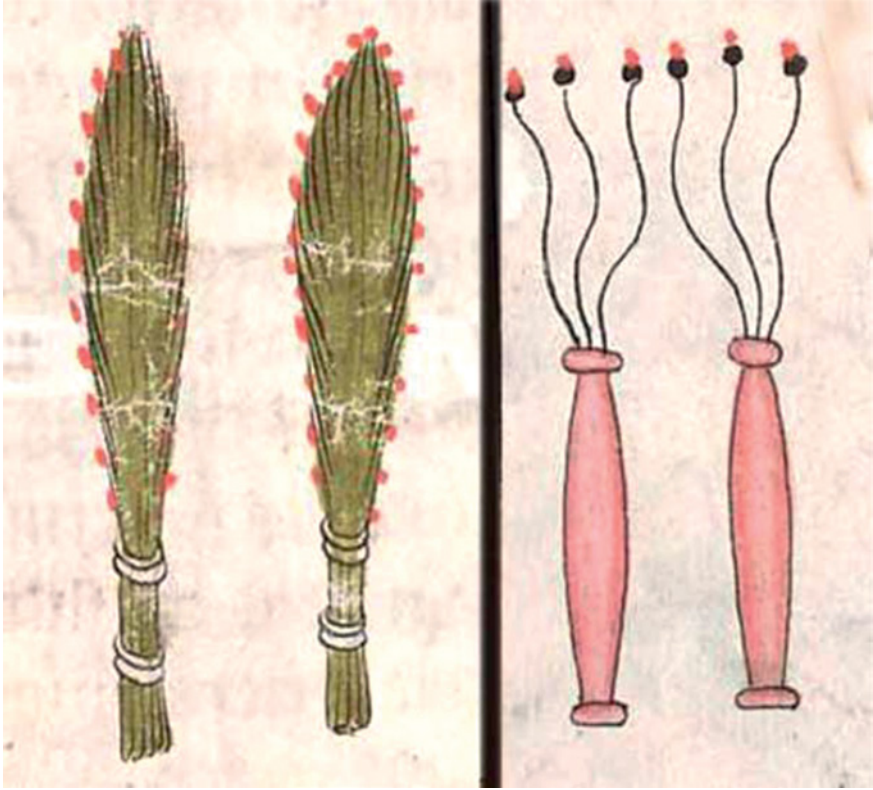


FIGURE 45 Prague, Národní knihovna České republiky, XIV.A.17, f. 3r.

precisely in the middle of the fourteenth century.<sup>131</sup> A description of the tool used by the Flagellants used in a German setting in 1349 specifies 'a sort of stick with three cords hanging from it, each with large knots as well as iron pieces on each side like sharp needles that intersect in the middle of the knots in the form of cross, they extend for the length of half a grain of wheat or a little more'.<sup>132</sup>

131 Cf. Étienne Delaruelle, 'Les grandes processions de pénitents de 1349 et 1399', in *Il movimento dei disciplinati nel settimo centenario del suo inizio* (Spoleto: Panetto & Petrelli, 1962), pp. 109–145. The novel by René Swennen, *Le roman du linceul* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), uses precisely this phenomena of Flagellants to reconstruct the origins of the Shroud.

132 August Potthast (ed.), *Liber de rebus memorabiliioribus sive Chronicon Henrici de Hervordia* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1859), p. 281: 'baculus quidam, a quo tres cordule in extremitatibus suis, nodos magnos habentes, dependebant, sic quod utrimque duo ferramenta, sicut acus acuta per medios nodos in modum crucis transeuntia, ad longitudinem medii grani tritici vel parum plus nodos ipsos exhibant'.

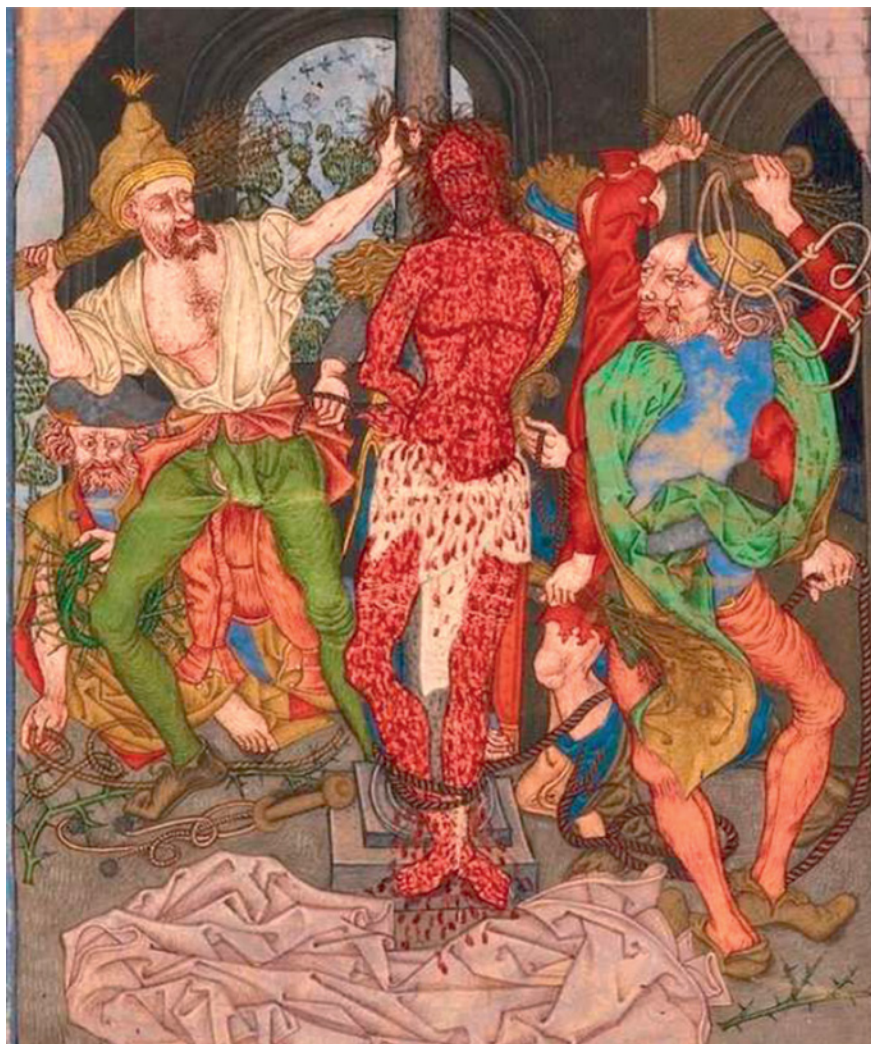


FIGURE 46 *British Library, ms. Harley 1892, f. 67r.*

The marks on the body of the man wrapped in the Shroud therefore coincide with the forms of the scourges that men of the Middle Ages were familiar with and artists were accustomed to representing. Everything is fully compatible with the timeframe in which the Shroud was created, the first half of the fourteenth century.<sup>133</sup>

133 Cf. Nicolotti, *Sindone: storia e leggende di una reliquia controversa*; Id., 'La Sindone, banco di prova per esegesi, storia, scienza e teologia', *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 33/2(2016), pp. 459–510.



FIGURE 47 *Holkham Bible, British Library, ms. 47682, fol. 29v.*

### Conclusion

It would be appropriate to go through Bible dictionaries, tools of consultation and studies on the passion of Christ and remove any reference to a specific form of alleged Roman scourge, particularly one with pendants or circular weights at its end, seeing as this is actually the modern product of an overlapping among medieval beliefs, erroneous archaeological identifications and Shroud-related conjectures from the twentieth century.

### Acknowledgements

This article is based on research the author carried out between the end of 2011 and the spring of 2013 and presented for the first time on May 2, 2013 at

the *Falsi e falsari nella storia delle religioni* conference, in a speech entitled *Flagrum taxillatum: l'inesistente flagello della Sindone di Torino* (University of Turin – Palazzo del Rettorato), and later on, in an abbreviated form, in the Annual Meeting of the Italian Centre for Advanced Studies on Religions in Bertinoro on September 30th, 2016. After his 2013 presentation, unpublished, some people asked him for information and further details about this topic, which he always provided; successively, a debate developed in certain spheres along with some publications. Finally, he has the chance to publish his work with few non-substantial updates.