

Shroud: are those wounds inflicted by Roman scourges?

The signs of torture visible on the Shroud (some scholars counted 123 of them) would be compatible with the forms of the instruments used at the time of Jesus. The results of the research.

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by **Lorenzo Montanaro**

The signs of torture visible on the Shroud (some scholars have counted 123 of them) would be compatible with the forms of the **scourges used at the time of Jesus**. This was revealed by an analysis conducted by **Flavia Manservigi, a research doctor at the University of Bologna** and member of the **CISS (International Center of Shroud Studies)**. We know from the Gospels that, before the crucifixion, Jesus underwent scourging. And we know, from numerous historical sources, that in the ancient world this was a brutal practice, a particularly bloody form of torture, so much so that it could not be inflicted on Roman citizens, but only on criminals and slaves, that is, men considered almost as animals. So this is the fate that Jesus suffered in the terrible hours of the passion. And of this fate the shroud kept in the cathedral of Turin could give us a testimony, in the form of an image.

For believers, the Shroud (i.e., the sheet, which, according to tradition, wrapped the body of Jesus after being deposited from the cross) is first of all an icon, that is, a spiritual reference, which should be read with the eyes of faith. But what does archaeology say about it? Trying to answer means opening up a world of questions. Yes, because the **authenticity (but the term is already problematic) of the Shroud is a constantly debated issue**, which sees distinguished specialists lined up on opposite sides: there are those who consider it a **document compatible with the era of Christ**, who, on the contrary, those who claim it is a **medieval artifact**.

The CISS (International Center of Studies on the Shroud) has always avoided taking sides on preconceived positions and tried, instead, to approach the shroud with a look that is as rigorous as possible and free from prejudices. And it is in this context that recent studies on flagellation are placed. Let's find out, in more detail, what it is.

Comparative research on the scourges of the Vatican Museums and documents: Flavia Manservigi's study on the signs impressed on the Shroud.

Manservigi began his research by **comparing the signs on the Shroud with the shapes of some flagella preserved in the Vatican Museums** and found **a possible compatibility**. In recent months he has chosen to expand the study, looking for other sources. Testimonies belonging to different eras and scattered throughout Europe are gradually emerging: ranging from Verucchio (small town near Rimini) to London, where, at the Museum of London, some Saxon scourges are preserved.

"We move on delicate terrain," says the young Bolognese scholar. We are talking about tools made with perishable materials: for this reason the testimonies that have come down to us are few. But also the iconographic sources are scarce: **objects of this kind were rarely represented in the ancient world, unless they had a symbolic value or were associated with some myth.**

And yet **the data available so far, although not very abundant, allow us to believe "that in the ancient world scourges with globular terminations, like spheres, were widespread"**. And it is precisely to instruments of this kind that the Shroud traces would seem to be postponed. Among other things, a detail emerges that makes you think: "Some of these objects are actually classified as goads for horses, but it is possible that they were also used to inflict torture on **slaves and convicts, people who in the mentality of the time did not have a fully human status**, but they were almost assimilable to animals. This also leads us to question the role that Christianity has had in promoting the dignity of the person".

The debate on the blood traces of the Shroud: are they human or of other origin? Kelly Kearse's doubt

With regard to recent Shroud studies, the debate on the traces of blood present on the cloth reopens. In an article published in February in the journal *"Forensic Science International: reports"*, the American immunologist **Kelly Kearse questions the claim that it is human blood, a conclusion which was reached by some studies conducted in the 1980s** (someone had even driven to identify the blood type: AB), According to Kearse, however, **the identification of the species would be somewhat doubtful** : in fact, with the methods of analysis used at the time of the studies, due to the so-called **cross reactions** similar results could have been obtained even from non-human blood. Be careful, however : **to settle the issue by speaking of "fake blood", as**

sometimes happens in these cases, would be a serious mistake. **Kearse is by no means saying that blood is "fake" (however the word makes sense in science), but only that the methods used so far do not allow to reach certain conclusions.**

The testimony of **Walter Memmolo**, surgeon and member of the CISS, helps us understand how difficult it is to conduct studies on blood traces of that kind. **"We assume that the blood begins to degrade as soon as it comes out of the body. In the case of ancient blood, it is very difficult to identify the species, unless the blood has been preserved in optimal conditions"**. And this is certainly not the case with the Shroud, subjected over the centuries to various contaminants, including high temperatures. Moreover, the samples available on the Turin sheet are extremely small **"and it is not even whole blood, but clot prints, with serum halos"** clarifies Memmolo.

In his article, Kearse also proposes to adopt **and a rapid test for the identification of the species on the traces of Shroud blood, an idea that however raised doubts**, for the same reasons as mentioned above, i.e., smallness and deterioration of the samples available. However, serum tests show results compatible with human blood. And the question, therefore, remains open. In any case, it should be noted that the blood traces are associated with the image of a tortured and crucified man. A mysterious imprint, of which we do not know the origin (surely it is not a painting, nor a print, nor an image obtained from a bas-relief or with other known techniques), on which no one has been able to say last word.