

Voices from the past defending Criminal Anthropology

Silvia Iorio

Department of Molecular Medicine, Unit of History of Medicine, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Abstract. From the second half of the nineteenth century the anthropometric identification system has been used to analyze not only the crime itself but also to investigate and to construct anthropological criminal categorization.

Key words: criminal anthropology, skull of criminals, anthropometry

Criminal anthropology from the second half of the nineteenth century took the first steps towards the analysis of the criminal, reserving him the highest attention. The focus to analyze not only the crime itself but also to investigate the kind of criminal, because the penalty should not be perceived as a means to fight crime but a means of defense against the real enemy, the criminal (1).

In the chronicles of this period, as in all periods, even in the current one, an increase in criminality and in particular in recidivism was recorded. Not only the growth of the army of criminals was considered a threat to civil society but also the increase of resistance of the individual criminal.

For the followers of Criminal Anthropology, it was therefore necessary to proceed with the identification of the criminal. From the anthropological point of view, morphological analysis of the physical anomalies could diagnose a particular psychiatric disorder especially if related to a criminal tendency (2). Among those who defended a rigorous scientific method at the service of identifying the criminal type was Raffaele de Notaristefani (Naples, 20th October 1861 - Rome, 13th December 1933), an Italian magistrate and deputy prosecutor of the King (3).

The author pronounced that already in his time there were sure, infallible, even if at the same time experimental, means to establish the identification of an individual with the one who had a conviction. With

sure means, he referred to the anthropological measures. The author claimed, like so many others, that it was necessary to become familiar with these tools in order to create a public conscience.

Anthropometric measures had to fit within scientific investigations and legislative provisions.

Many scholars of the time were not open to news. Others, on the other hand, confused the anthropological measures aimed to identify the criminal with those anthropometric and physiognomic signs that Lombroso and his followers believed to be characteristic of the criminal. Others, as Luigi Lucchini and Enrico Ferri, wanted to introduce the application of Bertillonage in Italy.

The system planned by Alfonso Bertillon, presented at the Rome Penitentiary Congress, had been applied with great success in Paris since the year 1883. This system obtained very successful results that the American doctor Paolo Riccardo Brown enthusiastically exclaimed:

“Quételet and Bertillon are among the greatest benefactors of the human race and the jurists and criminologists of future centuries will be amazed when they read about the [...] ignorance of those nations, which do not immediately adopt this wonderful anthropometric identification system. As recorded by Notaristefani, the Bertillonage system was based on the same way in which naturalists of the time classified the animal and plant kingdoms, or rather in iden-

tifying the characteristic elements of the specimen, considering that, in humans, bones which belonged to adult individuals, represent the maximum immutability among the anatomical districts.

Furthermore, Bertillon affirmed that within 100,000 individuals only 10 might have the necessary similarity in the proportions of the principal measurements of their body [...].”

It is clear that anthropometry had to take this into consideration for the identification and recognition of criminals.

Brown also quotes Quételet, the Belgian scholar who also participated in the creation of a work on anthropometry. While trying to perfect the morphological-anthropological and anthropometric investigative method, several objections were raised by a faction of the scientific community, in a specific psychiatric way of that time.

In particular, in the *Experimental Journal of Phreniatry and Legal Medicine* of 1901, we found an interesting contribution by Professor Angelo Zuccarelli who defended Criminal Anthropology from several critics exposed by a part of psychiatry (4, 5). In particular, he reported that for Criminal Anthropology, through the discovery of degenerative features during the autopsies of criminals it was possible to counter the objections addressed to the discipline, but these degenerative features were also found in many socially normal individuals (6,7). The author also reported the work of Dr. Motti on the diagnoses (8) of the skulls of criminals, which clearly showed the degenerative evidence expressed by Criminal Anthropology. In particular, the presence of the internal occipital or wormian dimple, enormous thickness of the cranial dimples and complete intraparietal parietal bones, were the features that better represented the criminal type.

References

1. Iorio S, Larentis O, Licata M. Show Me the Shape of your Face and I Will Tell You What Crime You Have Committed. *Am J For Med and Pathol* 2018; 39 (3):282-3.
2. Licata M. A pyramid skull of an epileptic (1901). Anthropological diagnose of a positivistic physician. *Neurol Sci* 2018; 39(4):773-5.
3. Notaristefani VR. L'identificazione del delinquente (Bertillonage). *Rivista di Psichiatria Forense, Antropologia Criminale e Scienze Affini* 1898; 8-9:242-85.
4. Penta P. Sul meccanismo patogenetico, il significato ed il valore clinico delle anomali antropologiche in *Psichiatria ed in Antropologia Criminale* (Dalle lezioni di Psichiatria e di Antropologia Criminale dettate agli studenti di Medicina e di Giurisprudenza nell'anno scolastico 1899-1900). *Rivista di Psichiatria Forense, Antropologia Criminale e Scienze Affini* 1900; 3:193-6.
5. Penta P. Sulla necessità di applicare il metodo positivo e la ricerca psico-fisica, nello studio del dritto. *Prolusione al corso di Psichiatria forense e Antropologia criminale. Tip. Tribuna Giudiziaria: Napoli; 1895.*
6. Zuccarelli A. Anomalie craniche come contributo all'importanza dei caratteri degenerativi somatici. *Rivista sperimentale di Freniatria e Medicina Legale delle alienazioni mentali* 1901; 27:325-6.
7. Iorio S, Licata M, Ciliberti R, Gazzaniga V. Cranial Trepanation: An Ancient Neurosurgical Therapy? Thoughts of a Follower of Positivist Medicine and Anthropology. *Journal of Craniofacial Surgery* 2019; 30(6):570-3.
8. Piccioli A, Gazzaniga V, Catalano P, Caldarini C, Marinozzi S, Spinelli MS, Zavaroni F. Bones: Orthopaedic pathologies in Roman imperial age. *Bones: Orthopaedic Pathologies in Roman Imperial Age. Springer* 2015:1-154.

Correspondence:

Silvia Iorio
 Unit of History of Medicine,
 Department of Molecular Medicine
 Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy
 E-mail: silvia.iorio@uniroma1.it