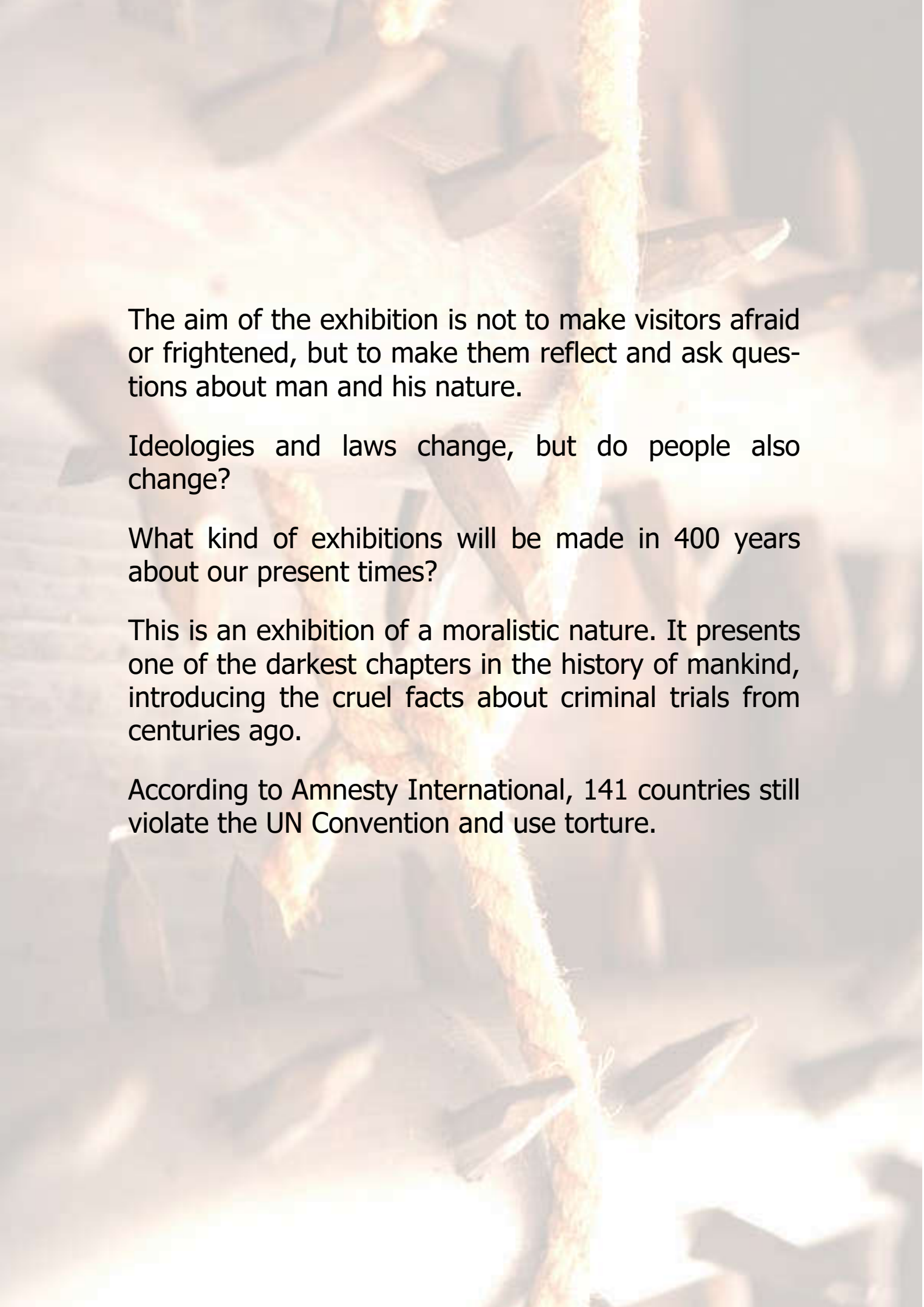


Special Exhibition

# Medieval Torture Instruments





The aim of the exhibition is not to make visitors afraid or frightened, but to make them reflect and ask questions about man and his nature.

Ideologies and laws change, but do people also change?

What kind of exhibitions will be made in 400 years about our present times?

This is an exhibition of a moralistic nature. It presents one of the darkest chapters in the history of mankind, introducing the cruel facts about criminal trials from centuries ago.

According to Amnesty International, 141 countries still violate the UN Convention and use torture.

# The Interrogation Chair

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In Nuremberg and Regensburg, the chair was used during the "regular" court hearings until 1846. The accused was seated naked on it and every, even the slightest, movement caused the spikes to pierce painfully into his body. The torture lasted many hours and often the executioner would add to the miserable person's suffering by flogging him, tearing his body with pliers, crushing his fingers or branding him. The chairs came in different sizes, shapes and variations. However, they were all equipped with spikes and fastening devices to keep the victim motionless.



## The Virgin of Nuremberg (Iron maiden)

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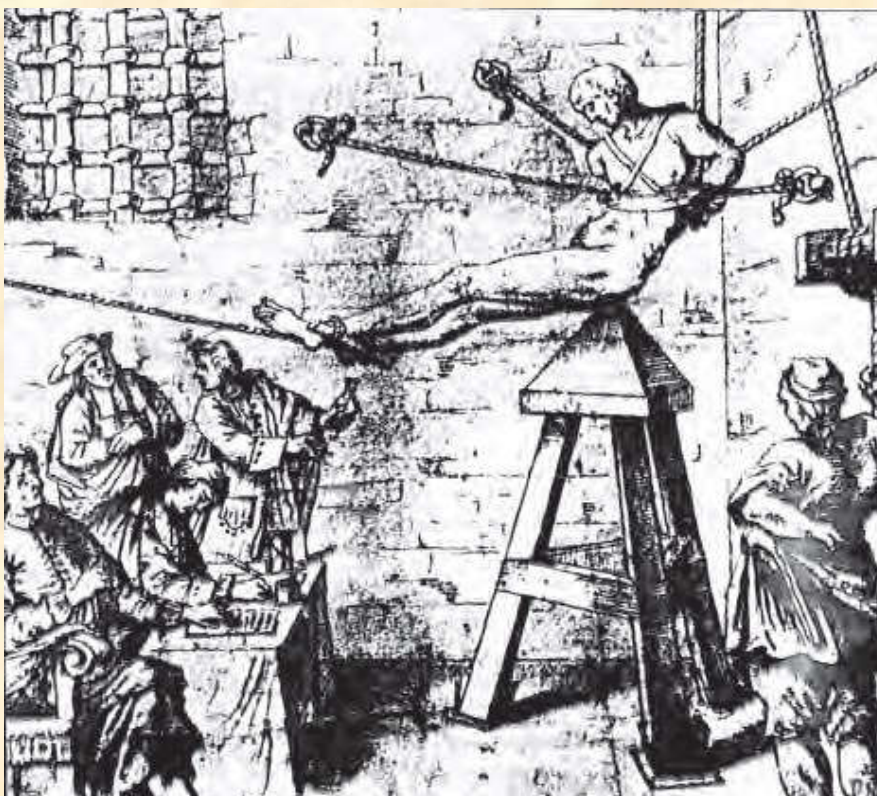
The idea of mechanizing torture was born in Germany where the 'Virgin of Nuremberg' has its origins. The device was named so because its appearance is reminiscent of a Bavarian girl and because the prototype was built and set up in the basement of the Nuremberg courthouse. The condemned person was locked up inside, where sharp blades or spikes pierced his body. The arrangement of the blades was carefully thought out. They were intended to injure various parts of the body without damaging vital organs, subjecting the victim to a long and painful agony. The first written evidence of the Nuremberg Virgin's use dates from 1515, as reported by Gustav Freytag in "Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit" (*Pictures from the German Past*) from 1859: A forger was locked in such a sarcophagus for three days and suffered terrible muscle spasms.



## The Judas Cradle or the Vigil

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In Italy this device was called "veglia", which means "to force someone to stay awake". In Germany it was known as the "Judas Cradle" or the "torture of the sleepyheads". The intention of its inventor, Ippolito Marsili, was to "humanize" interrogations in such a way that the human body was not subjected to cruel torture. The tortured person was undressed, tied up, entered into an iron harness, then using a winch, chains and pulleys suspended in the air above a sharp wooden pyramid. He was then lowered several times onto the sharp tip of the wooden frame, which penetrated the anus (for men) and the vagina (for women). The victims often passed out from pain. After they were brought back to consciousness, the torture was continued. A skilful executioner masterfully managed to prevent the condemned person from falling asleep until he made a confession.



# The Rack

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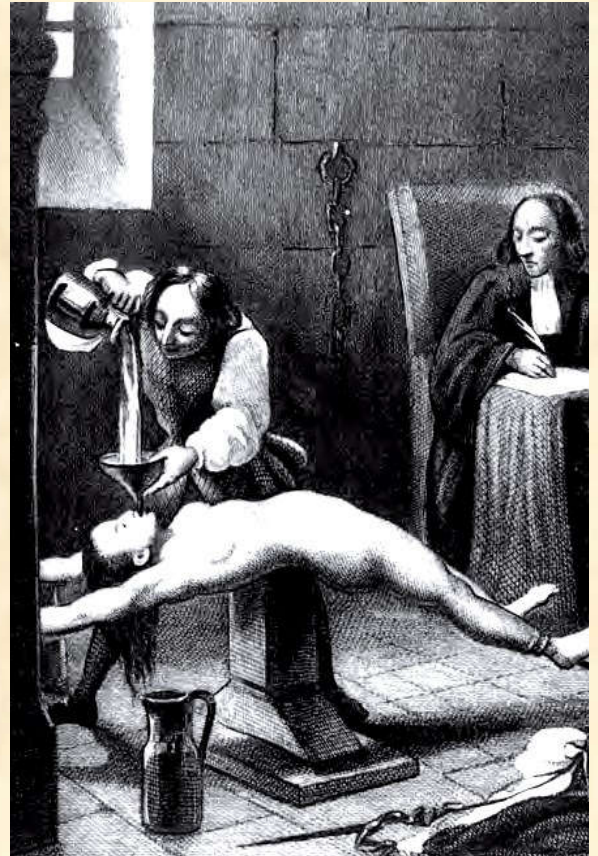
This is one of the most frequently used interrogation tools in history. It was present in almost all torture chambers in Europe. Without exception, the rack was used in all European nations that felt affected by the phenomenon of black magic. The torture victim, lying on a long table, was tied by the arms and legs. In such a position he was stretched until his muscles tore, causing excruciating pain. Especially sophisticated models were equipped with rotating spiked rollers.



# Torturing with Water

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The victim would be tied with hands and feet to a bench for the various kinds of water tortures to begin. In some cases a special funnel was put into the victims mouth through which large quantities of water were poured into him. The stomach filled until near bursting, swelling up and was beaten by the tormenter. Another common torture was for the victim to be forced to swallow a pipe or strand, they were then force fed water down the pipe. As the pipe expanded the victim began to choke and this feeling would mimic suffocation. On some occasions the pipe would then be brutally pulled from the victim causing huge damage to the internal organs. Often the naked victim was exposed to a constant stream of ice cold water, for hours or days at a time. It is worth noticing, that this method was considered as a "light" form of torture and in trial documents the extracted confessions were described as "spontaneous and voluntary" and obtained "without the use of torture".



# The Throne

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This instrument was a form of the pillory-chair, sarcastically called the throne. The accused was placed upside down and his feet were fixed with wooden blocks. Since the law of the time did not allow more than one session on the throne, the interrogation could even last ten days. For those accused of witchcraft, this torture was coupled with the use of red-hot irons to burn the victims or water torture.

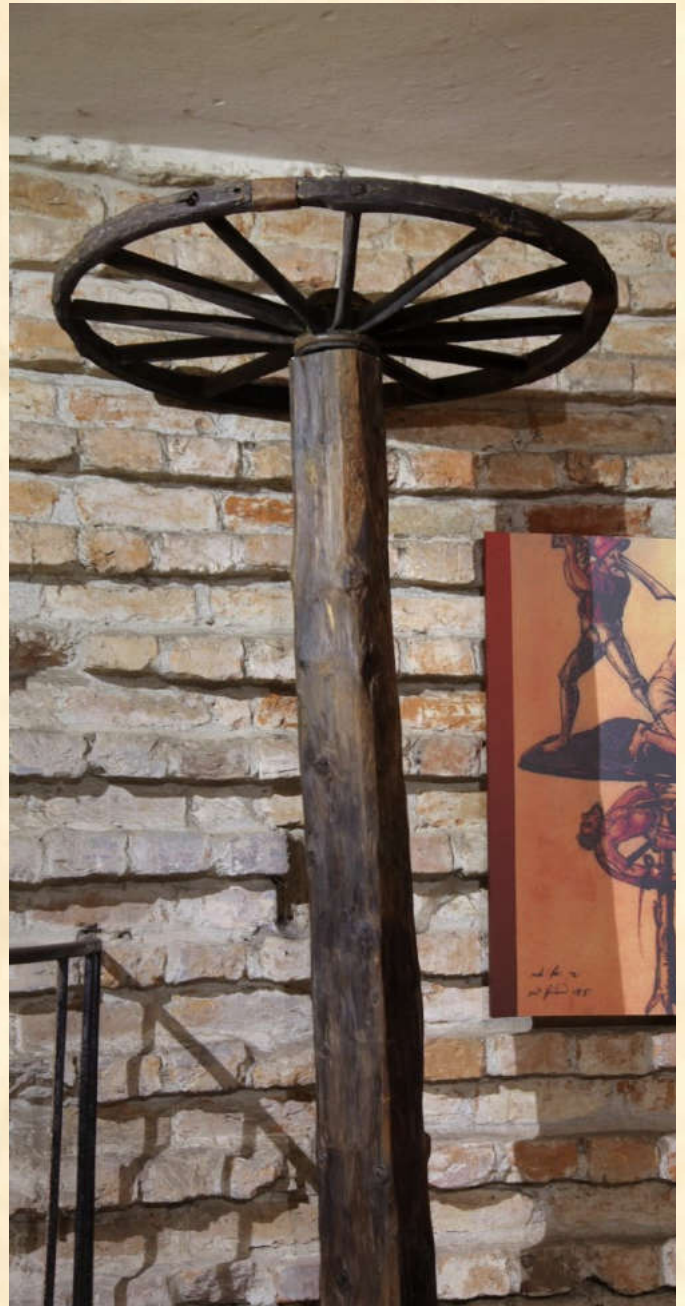




# The wheel

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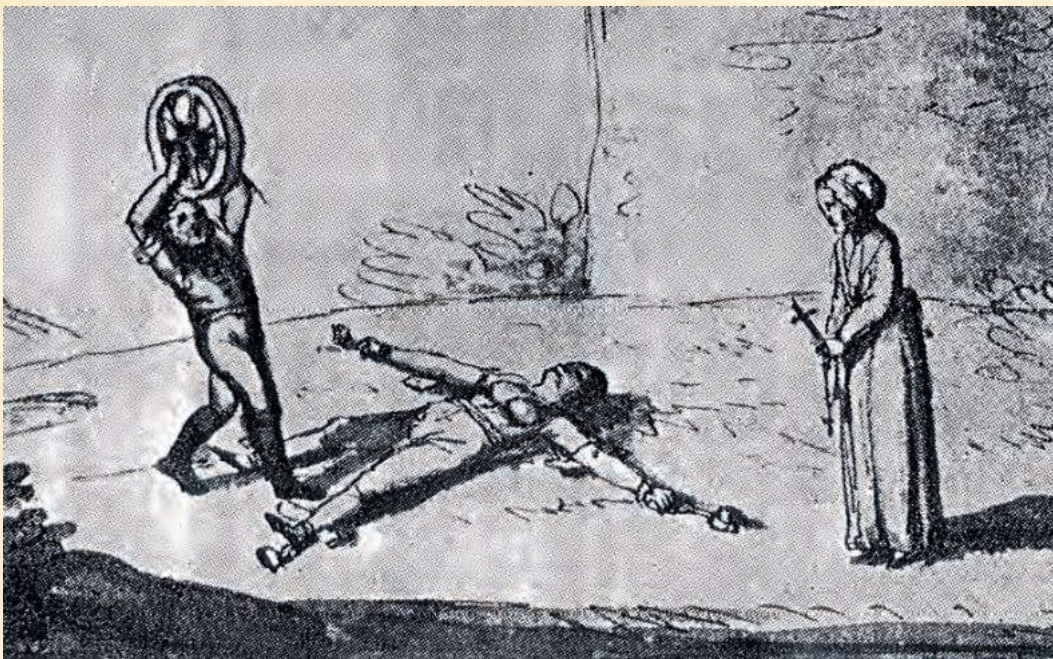
This instrument was very widely used, both for torture and capital punishment. The whole process consisted of two equally painful phases. The first was aimed at breaking as many bones and joints as possible with the help of a small wheel equipped with various iron attachments on the outside. Then, after the death sentence was imposed, the second phase began. The maltreated body was pulled onto a long pole with a cart wheel at the top, where the condemned person was left to die.



# The Breaking Wheel

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This device was created by attaching nails or a metal edge to an ordinary cart wheel. The victim's arms and legs were easily broken, and in most cases he was then burned alive at the stake. It is not clear whether the wheel was associated with any particular symbolism or whether it simply proved to be practical.



## The Heretic's Fork

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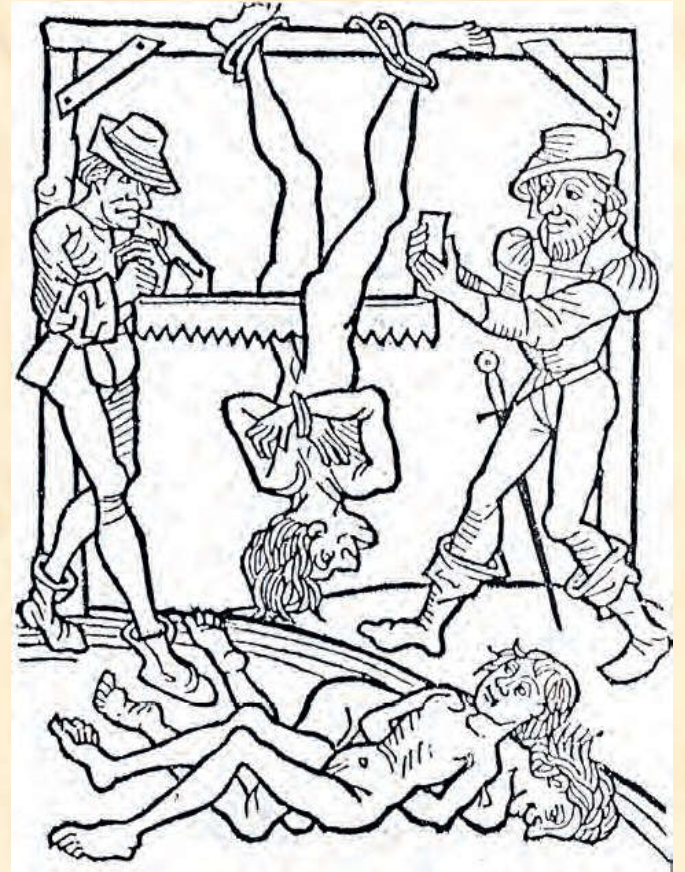
This device was fastened around the victim's neck with a leather strap. Even the slightest movement caused the four prongs to pierce through the skin into the chin or upper body, causing excruciating pain. Usually the fork was used to punish people accused of heresy.



## The Hand Saw

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As far as the use of this lethal device is concerned, no lengthy explanation is necessary. The long and agonizing death that it caused was one of the most cruel fates. The condemned hung upside down and was cut in half with an ordinary wood saw. This position caused the blood to flow into the head and the victim was conscious for a very long time.



# The Axe

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This task for the executioner with an axe, was often the conclusion of witch trials, and was only surpassed by the stake in the frequency of use. If a person accused of witchcraft was only charged with minor offences — decapitation with an axe was considered sufficient, but if there were aggravating circumstances, such as physical contact with the devil or a blood pact made with him — the decapitation had to be carried out at the stake, the remains of the victim were burned and the ashes scattered.



## Weapons commonly used by Lawmen and Prison Wardens

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These weapons were used to control and tame rebellious prisoners, who were often naked or half-naked. Of particular interest is a specific collar consisting of a ring with spikes on the inside and a snap lock on the front. In this way, a prisoner hiding in the crowd could easily be immobilized, and with a collar around his neck, he had no chance of freeing himself and thus no choice but to follow the guard peacefully. A similar object is also used today, but in electrical form, and it is used to give electric shocks.



# The Gridiron

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Burning on the gridiron was often used to get someone accused of heresy or witchcraft to confess. The suspect was tied up, placed on a kind of metal grid and rubbed with grease. A fire was lit under the grid. Over time, this type of torture was abolished, firstly because death occurred too quickly and secondly because simpler but equally effective interrogation methods were used.



# The Cross

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This device dates back to the 16th / 17th century and was most likely invented in Austria, as can be seen from an entry in the work "Justiz in alter Zeit" (Justice in old times), which is owned by the Medieval Crime Museum in Rothenburg ob der Tauber. According to the author, Christoph Hinckeldey, a similar cross was found in the Salzburg castle tower.

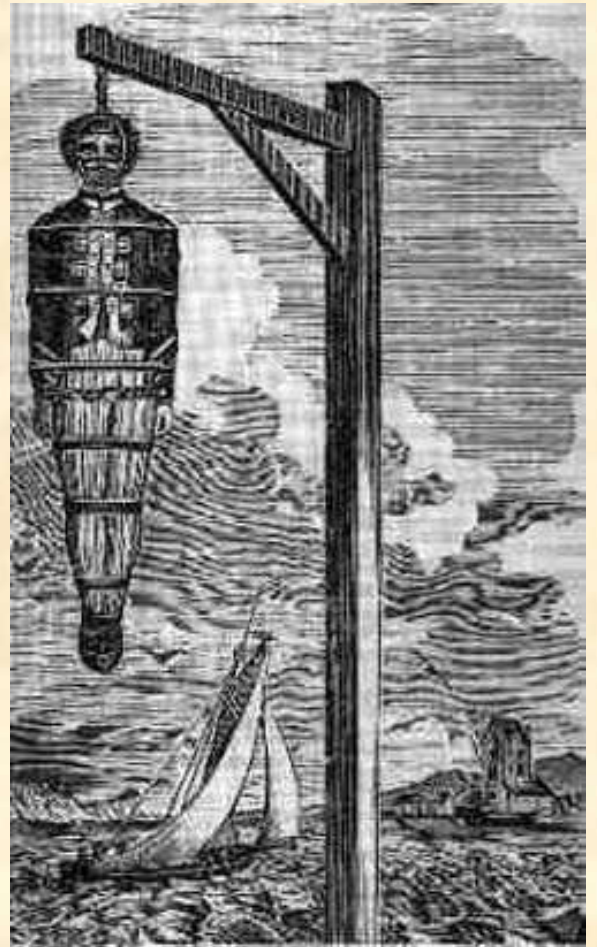




# The Cage

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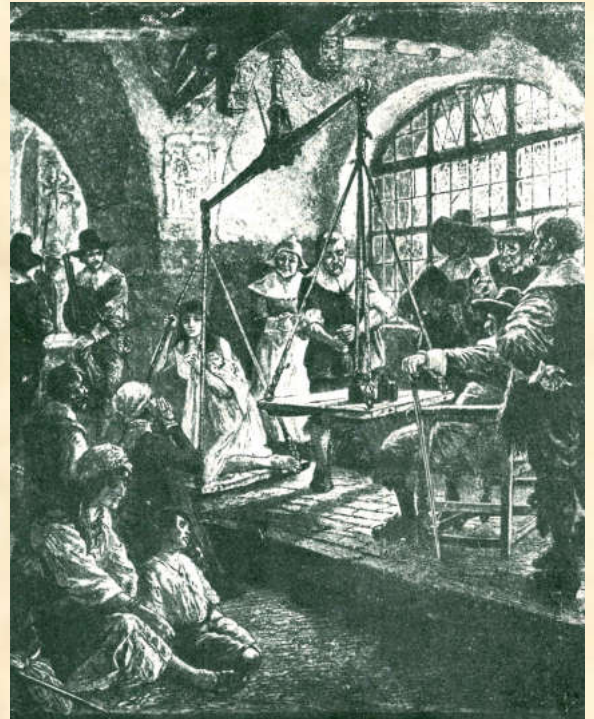
The sight of hanging cages was quite common in European cities until the end of the 17th century. They were usually placed in the market square or at crossroads. Some of them have been preserved until today, e.g. on the wall of St. Lambert's Church in Münster (Germany). A person locked up in a cage died of hunger, thirst, cold or heat. He was also often tortured and mutilated. The body was left there until it rotted.



# The Witches' Scale

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Weighing tests were made all over Europe, but mainly in Belgium and the Netherlands. According to priests, lawyers and doctors of the time, only light women could be witches because the flying broom could only carry 49.5 kilograms. A woman accused of being a witch was stripped completely, her hair was braided up and then she was examined to make sure that she had not hidden any heavy objects. If the result was below the established maximum, the suspect was interrogated in torture rooms, where she usually confessed to all her crimes and misdeeds committed in conspiracy with the devil.



# The Noisemaker's Fife

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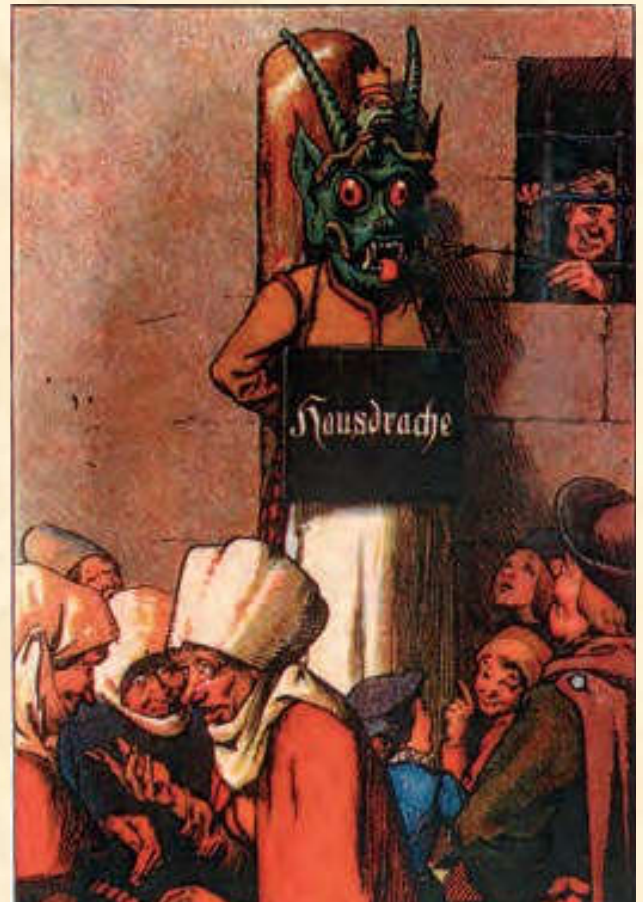
This "instrument" had a metal ring at the end and was placed around the delinquent's neck, after which his fingers were clamped in a metal ferrule. In this way, "bad" musicians or those who behaved inappropriately in church were punished. It was invented in the Netherlands.



# The Masks of Infamy

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The public wearing of masks of infamy for several days was ordered to show the local community that breaking the law is being punished. In those days, many minor offences were punished in a similar way, i.e. by defiling the good name. The masks existed in different, often extravagant, forms. Their artistic design depended entirely on the imagination of local blacksmiths. Today it is difficult to say whether the masks were intended to remind us of the nature of the offence committed.



## The Restraining Belt

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This distant predecessor of today's "straitjacket" was worn around the waist, and the wrists were enclosed in rings attached to both sides.

This device not only effectively restrained the convict, but also took away his desire to resist the prison guards. Long-term wearing of the restraining belt caused deep and painful wounds, which, given the hygienic conditions of the time, could lead to blood infections and subsequently to death.



# The Violin of Disgrace

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This device is a miniature version of the pillory. In its shape it resembled a violin, but of course you cannot play it. To attract and entertain the audience, it was often equipped with bells. A special form was the double violin, in which two condemned stood face to face.



# Frocks of penance

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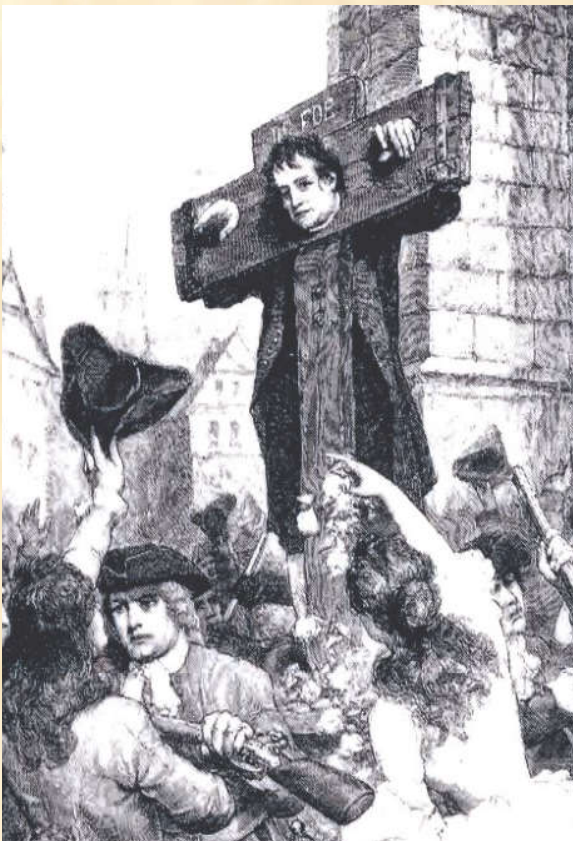
These garments were not a physical torture but a form of public humiliation commonly used for minor offences. They were made of huckaback linen, with one or more red crosses embroidered on them. The condemned had to wear them on forced foot pilgrimages to holy places, during Holy Mass or at other official celebrations. In addition, the penitents often had to wear heavy stone or iron rosaries over their clothes.



# The Pillory

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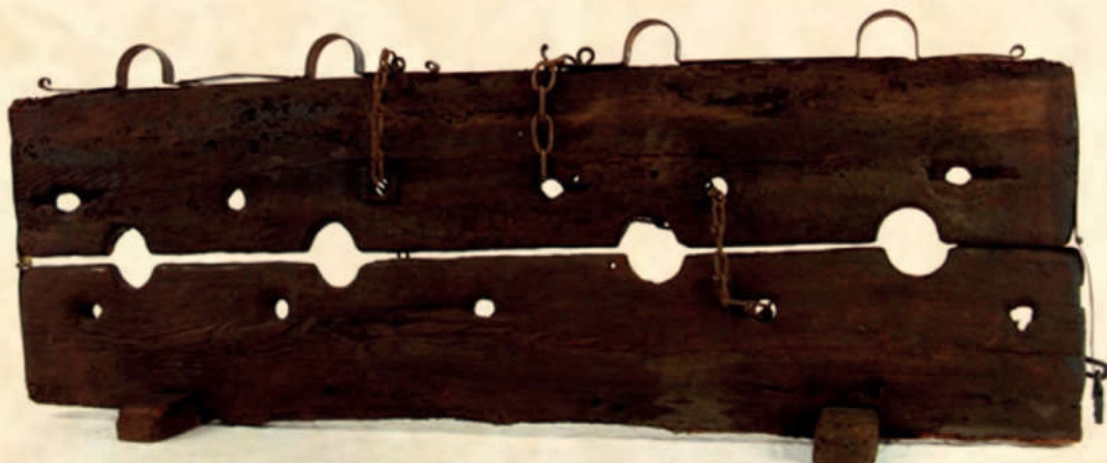
Pillories were set up in market places, near the city gates. They were mainly intended for fraudsters, thieves, drunkards and quarrelsome women... Standing in the pillory could last from a few hours to several days. It was actually considered a mild form of punishment, but it could also become a real torture if the victim was exposed with fixed arms and neck to a scornful public, who beat him with sticks, slapped him, threw stones or mud at him, poured boiling water over him and often injured him. Even tickling could turn this "mild" punishment into a horrible and unbearable torture. In this respect, the line between the demands of public order and the sadistic tendencies of the people of the Middle Ages was blurred.





## Pillory II

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# The anchor

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This instrument was brought to Poland by the Teutonic Knights who often used it in the dungeons of the castles in Malbork or Kwidzyn. This metal cross made it impossible to adopt a natural position, which over time caused enormous pain in the spine. It also forced the victim into a humiliating and submissive position towards the torturer.



## The Chastity Belt

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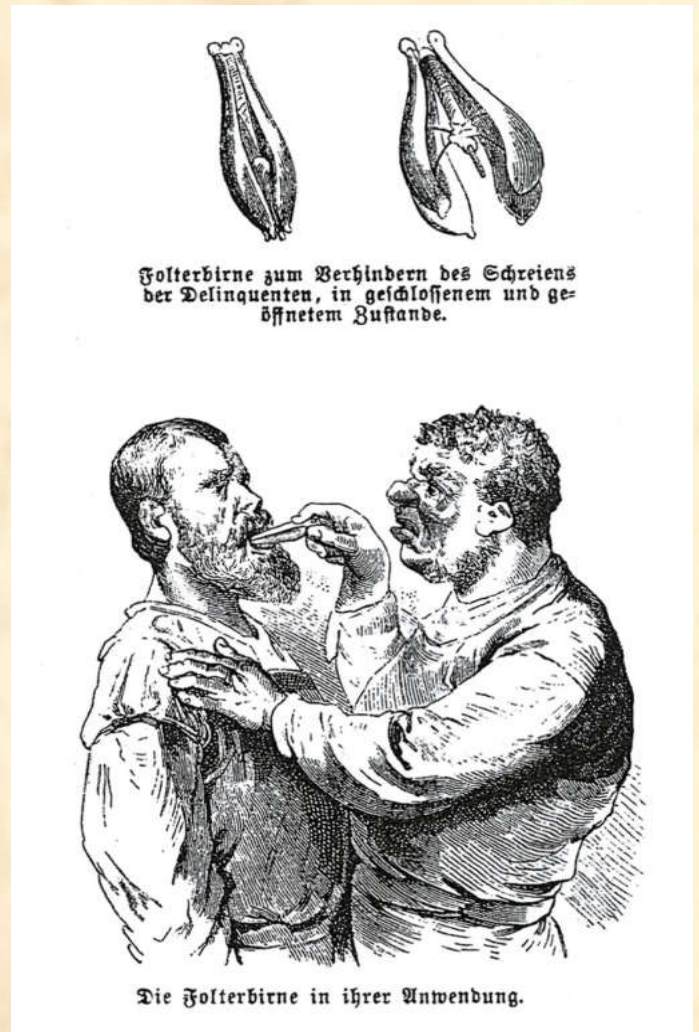
Wearing the chastity belt over a longer period of time caused painful abrasions, skin irritations or chafing for the women. In addition, it was also difficult to meet ones physiological needs and maintain hygiene, which could lead to infections and eventually death. Researchers disagree whether the chastity belt was actually used or if it is just a myth about the Middle Ages.



# The Pear of Anguish

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The shape of this tool was reminiscent of a fruit. It was constructed in such a way that it could be stretched like an umbrella with the help of a thread. It could be inserted into different parts of the body: orally (for blasphemers), vaginally (for women who consorted with the devil) or rectally (for homosexuals).



# The Garrote

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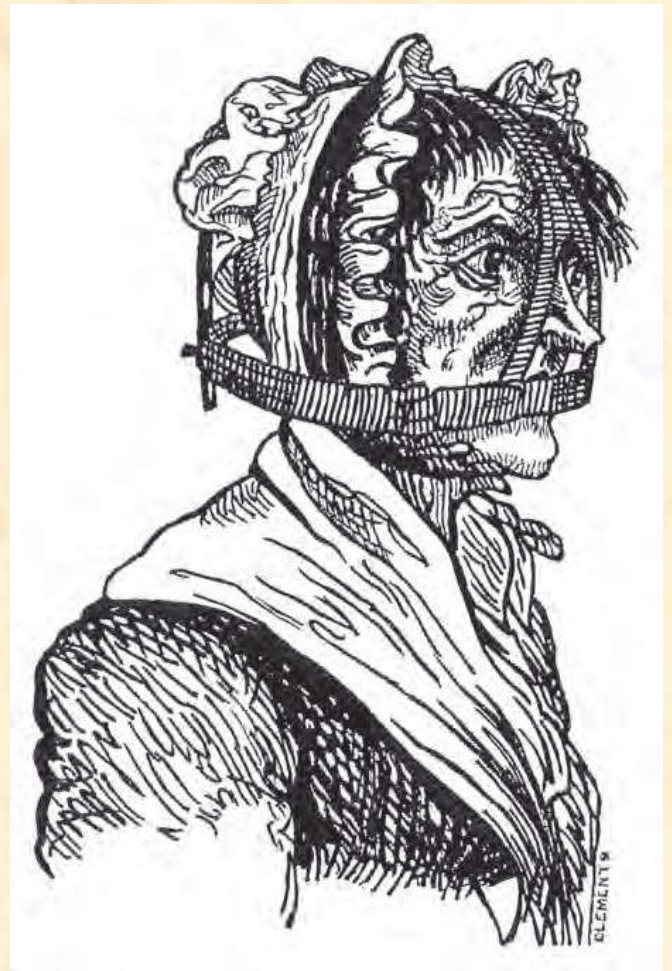
This tool has often been used in Spain and Portugal to carry out the death penalty. The condemned man sat on it with his hands tied behind his back, his head fixed by an iron collar, while the executioner slowly screwed an iron screw into the back of his head. A version still in use today consists of stretching a metal wire around the neck, which leads to death by suffocation.



# The Iron-Gag

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This object was used during the ceremony of the inquisition to prevent the accused from interrupting it with his irritating screams.



# The Break-Knee

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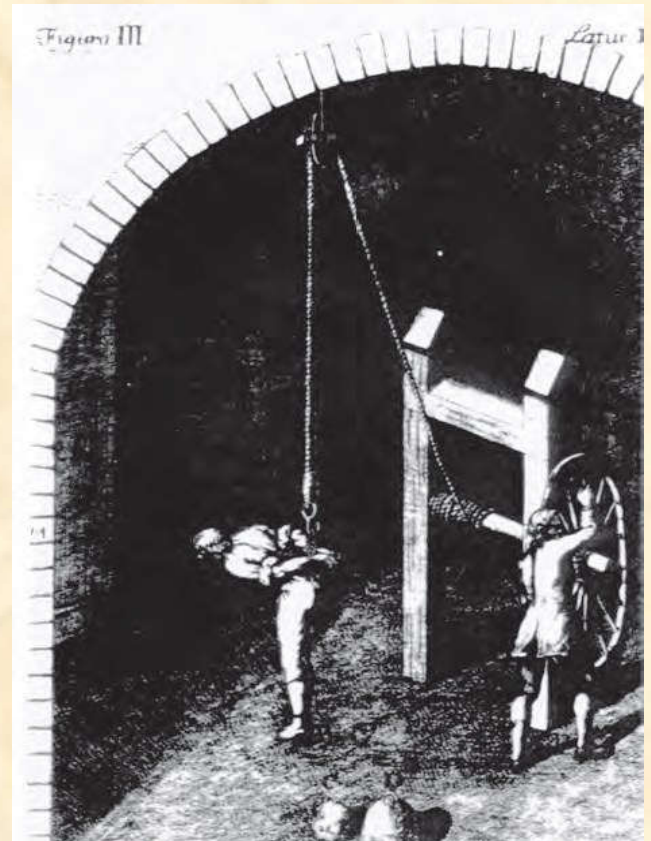
This machine was used to break knees. If this had no effect and the tortured person still did not want to confess, other parts of the body, such as elbows, shoulders or shins were broken.



# The Strappado

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This method of torture was often used in witch trials. The accused woman's hands were tied behind her back and then she was pulled up by a winch. This position resulted in extremely painful ruptures of muscle fibres and ligaments and often caused the skin to burst. To intensify the effect, heavy weights were placed on the tortured person's ankles.





# The Alsatian Shoe

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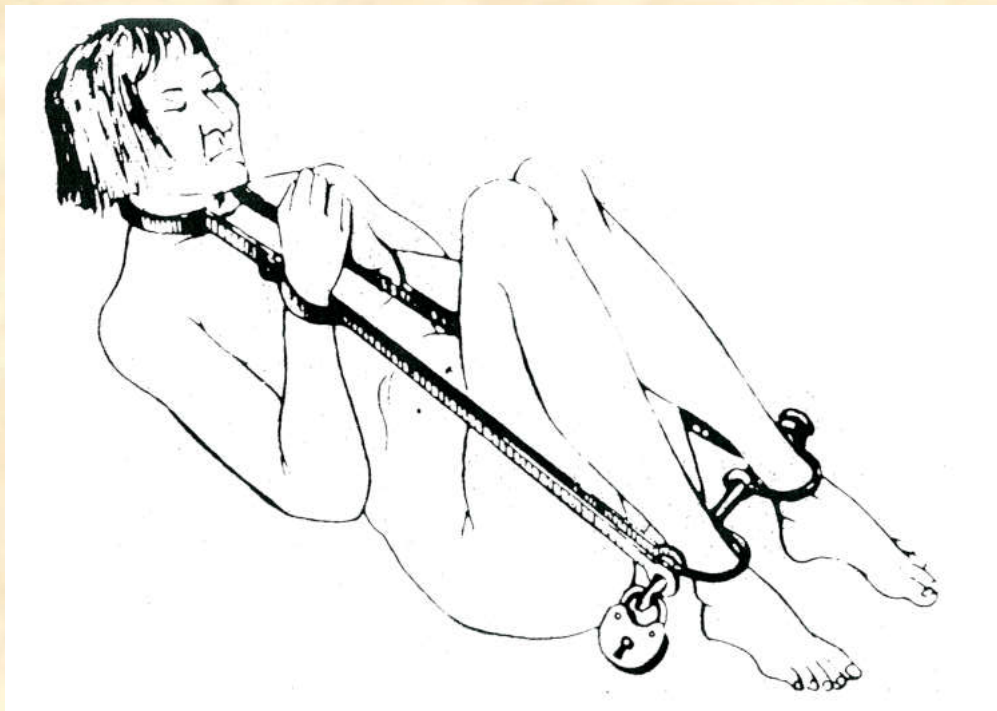
The pleasure that the inquisitors once found in making life difficult and unpleasant provided many great craftsmen with constant work on ever newer tools that were used to restrict the movement of the interrogated victims. This tool is unique among many similar instruments whose purpose was to effectively immobilise the victim's legs. The Alsatian shoe, as its name suggests, most probably originated in France at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries.



# The Stork

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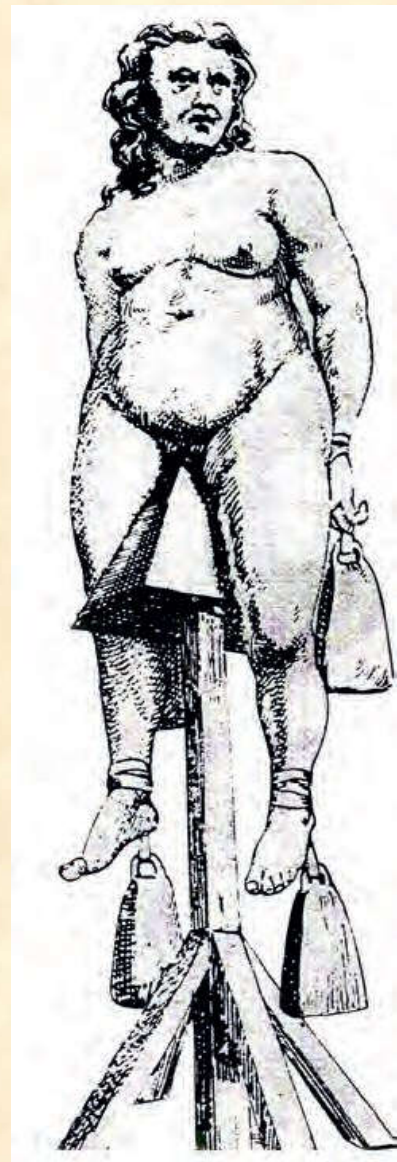
The construction of the "stork" was designed in such a way that the victim experienced severe and painful cramps in the area of the abdominal muscles and the rectum and then in the chest, neck and extremities after only a few minutes. These cramps led to an inevitable, long and extremely painful agony. The victim, who was suffering in this terrible position, could be additionally tortured with the help of a red-hot iron, by beating or otherwise. Often the iron, which rubbed the body even with the slightest movement, also caused infections, which led to gangrene and consequently to death.



## Buck or Witches Billy Goat

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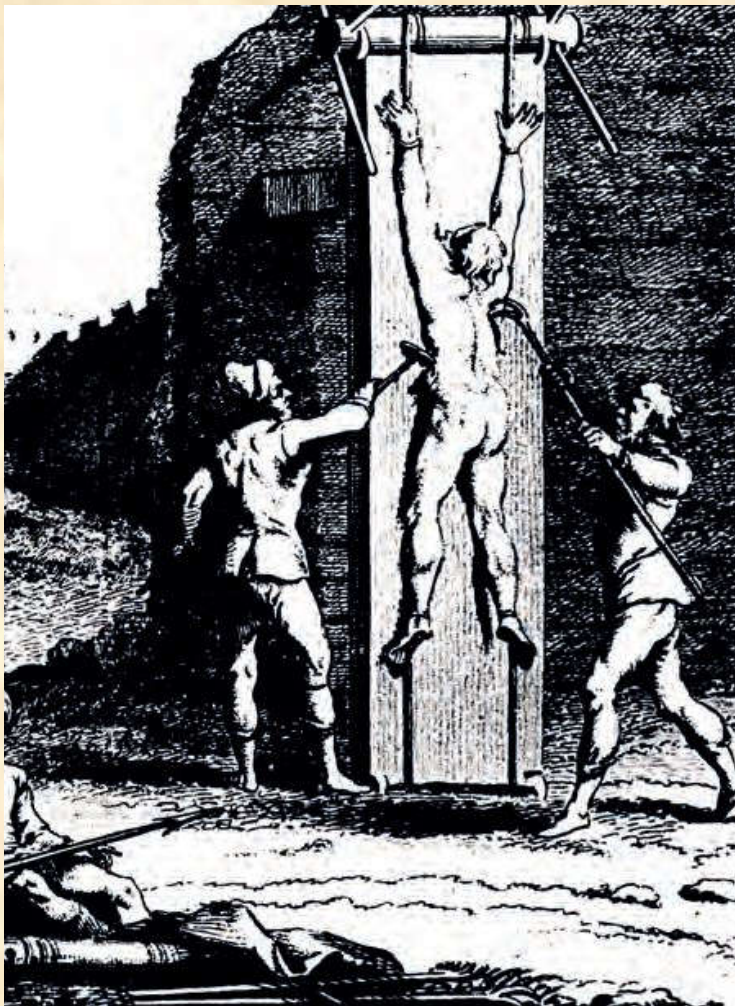
This instrument was mainly used to torture people accused of witchcraft or heresy. The suspect was placed astride on the instrument in such a way that the tip and then the edges of the buck bore into the body, causing often permanent genital mutilation. Almost always additional weights were hung on the ankles and torches and glowing coal were placed under the feet. In the files of a witch trial against Maddalena Lazari in 1673 in Bormio (Italy) it is described that the accused was probably tortured in various ways for four months, but did not make a confession. The town council then sentenced her to 15 hours of sitting on the goat. Although Lazari had endured other tortures before, she admitted everything she was accused of after only 3 hours on the goat. In the end she was sentenced to death.



# The Spanish Tickler

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Behind this innocent-sounding name a monstrous instrument of torture is hidden. The Spanish Tickler is a kind of rake with iron prongs. The victim was hung by the hands and the flesh and muscles were ripped off down to the bone.



## The Witch's Chair

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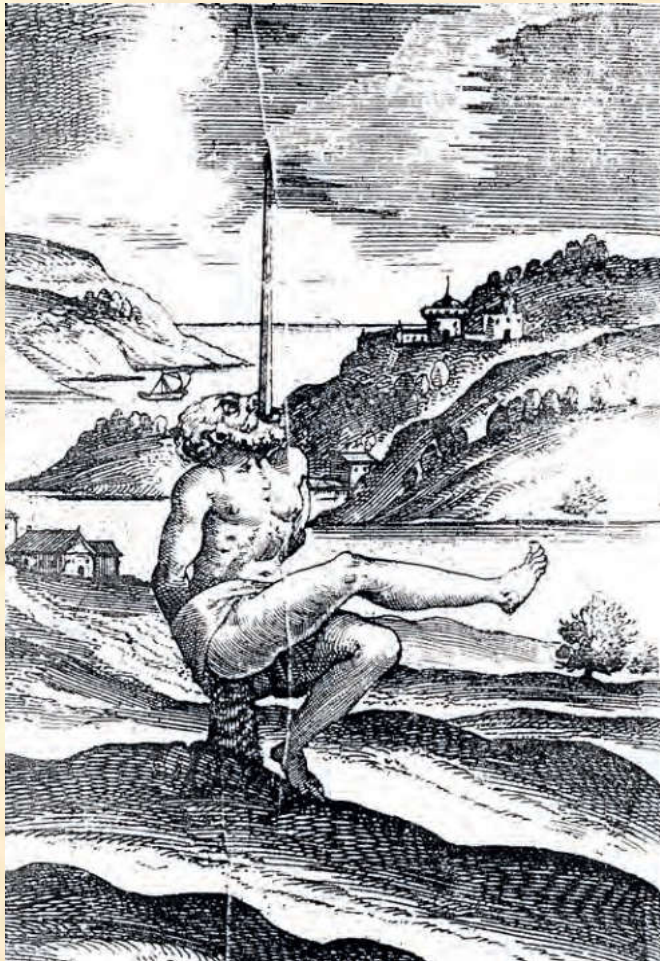
The witch's chair was a highly valued means of breaking the will of stubbornly silent women accused of witchcraft. Witches' chairs came in various sizes and shapes, but all of them had sharp spikes and devices to strap the victims down. Some designs also had iron seats that could be brought to glow. In Gutenhag, Austria, a witch trial against the 57-year-old Marina Wukinetz took place in 1693 under the presidency of judge Wolf Lämpertitsch. The woman was forced to spend eleven days and nights on a chair, her feet being burned by red-hot plasters made of tallow, so-called "Insletplasters". She lost her mind in pain and died during this horrible torture without making a confession.



# Impalement

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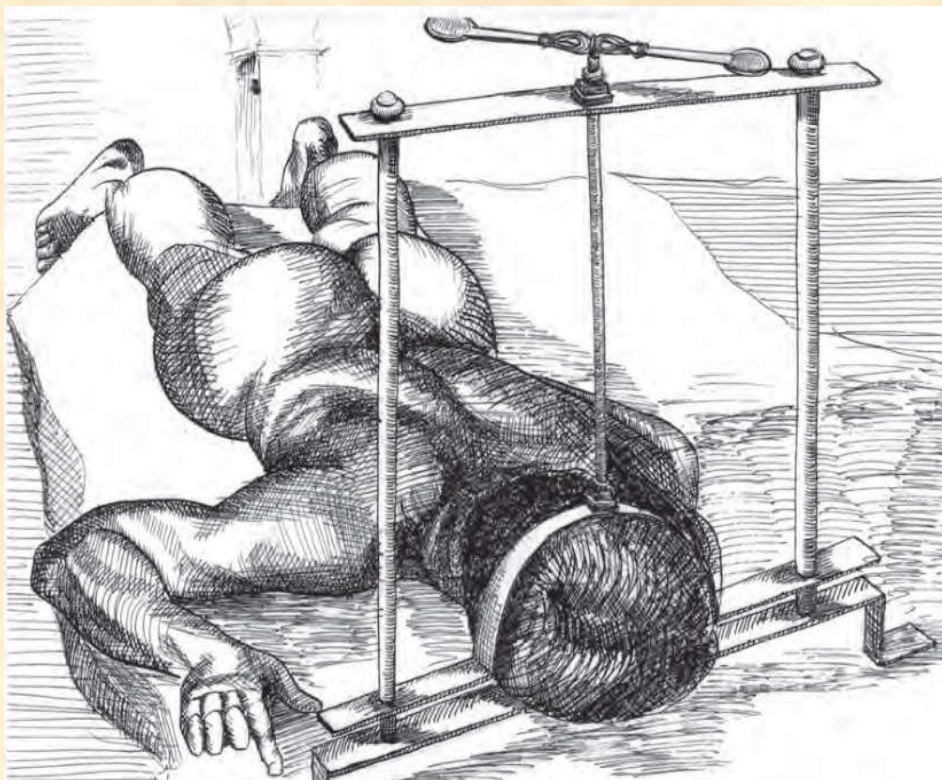
Impalement is one of the most brutal and primitive punishments of Assyrian-Babylonian origin, typical for countries in the Middle East. It was usually used in Turkish wars against "infidels", against those who were taken prisoners of war with a weapon in their hands. The naked captives were impaled on thin, sharpened stakes. The hillsides of conquered fortresses or the areas opposite the walls of conquered cities were "decorated" in this way. This was intended to weaken the enemy's will to fight. It may seem incredible, but death on the stake often took several days.



# The Head Crusher

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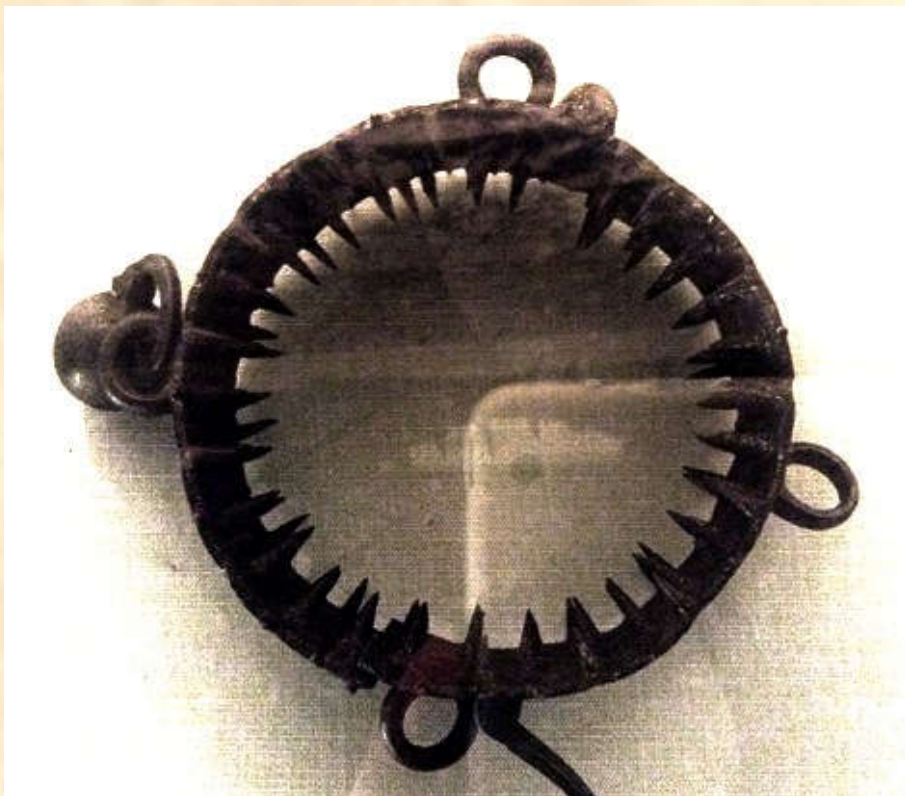
This device was highly regarded, especially in northern Germany. Its operation was extremely simple, the victim's head was placed between a lower beam and a bowl lowered by a screw mechanism. The jaws and cheekbones were crushed first, followed by the brain. In the course of time, the use of this instrument for inflicting death was abandoned and it began to be used for interrogations. In some Latin American countries very similar devices are still used today, but in a modified version, the lower bar and the bowl are lined with soft material so as not to leave visible torture marks on the body. Victims are usually ready to cooperate after only a few turns of the screw.



# The Collar

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In former times, prisoners awaiting trial were often kept in special iron collars. The construction consisted of a ring around the neck, which was chained to the wall.

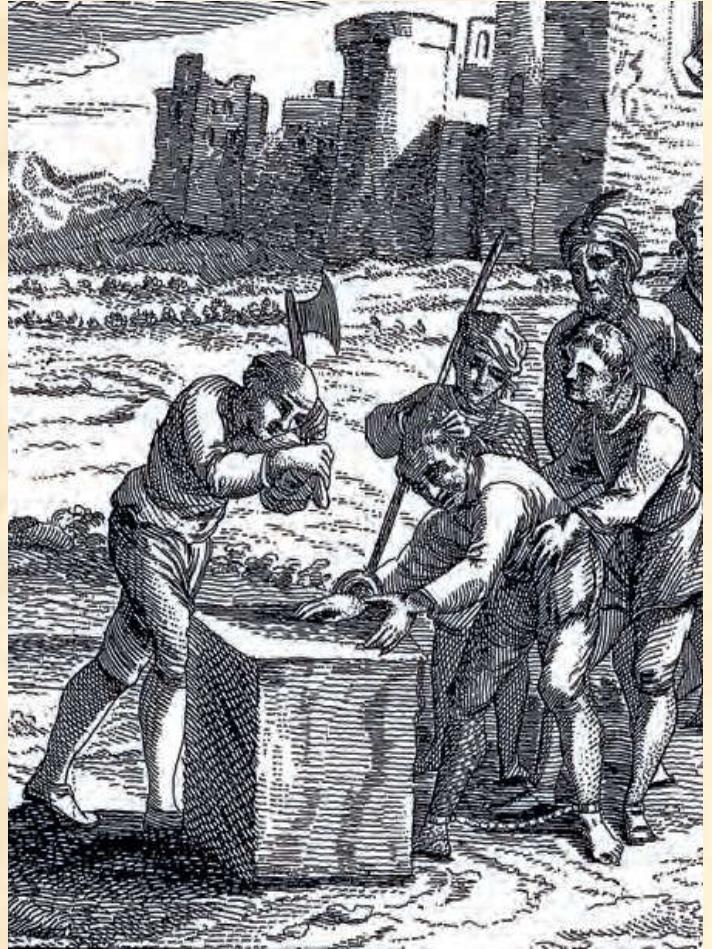




# Mutilation of the hand

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This tool was not only used to punish minor offences such as theft, but was also used during interrogations.



# The Breast-Ripper

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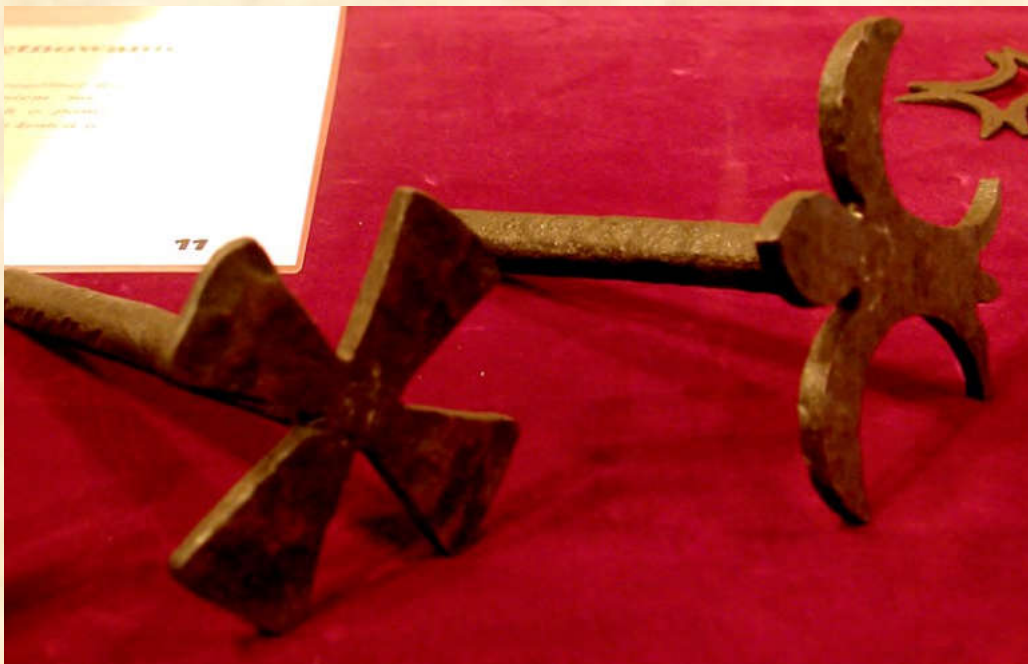
In some regions of France and Germany this device was known as the "Tarantula" or "Spanish Spider" until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was used on women who were accused of witchcraft, heresy, blasphemy or adultery and designed to tear off their breasts.



## Iron brands

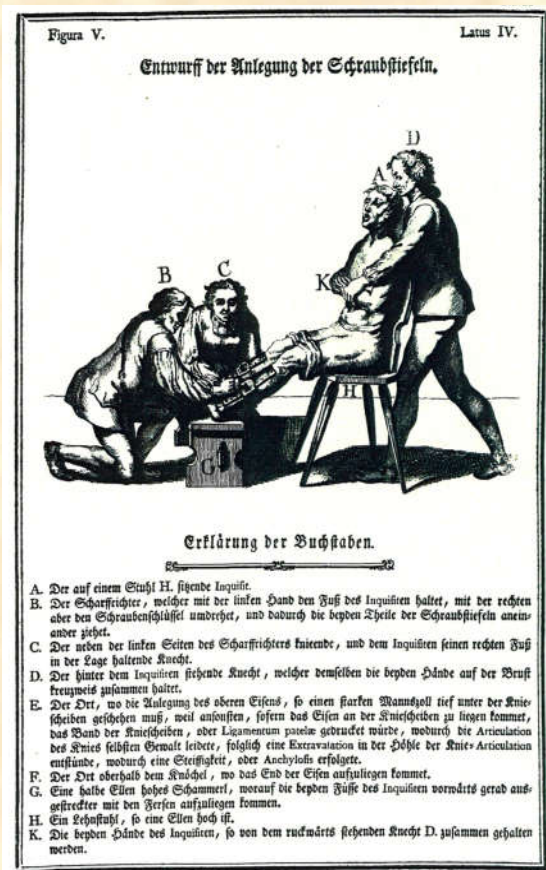
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Crimes of exceptional gravity were additionally punished by branding the victim with marks informing about the punishment. The brands remained visible for the rest of their lives.



# The Iron Shoes

These shoes are of Austrian origin. They were available in various designs, all of which served to crush or break the bones of the legs and feet.



## Pliers and Pincers

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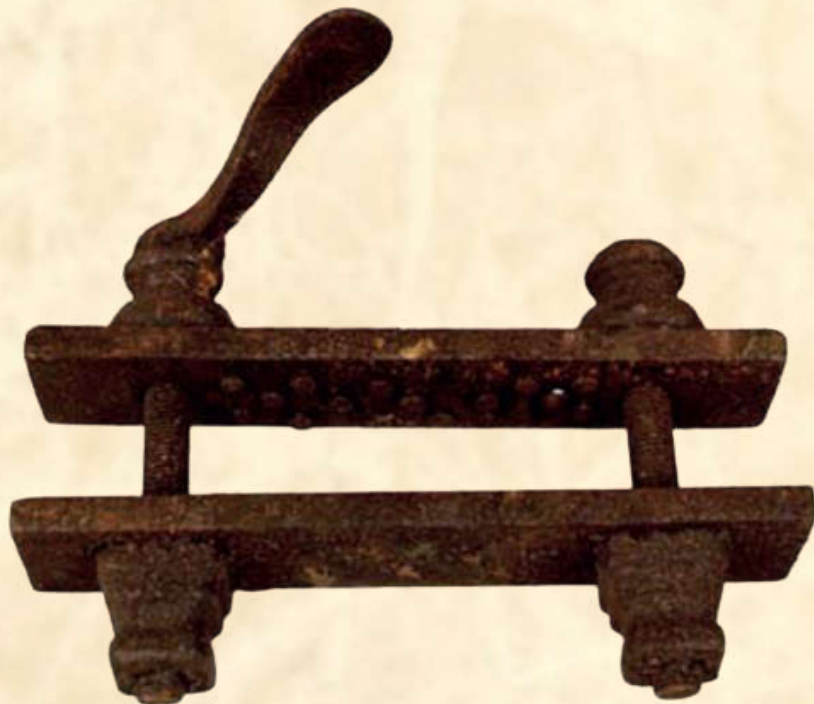
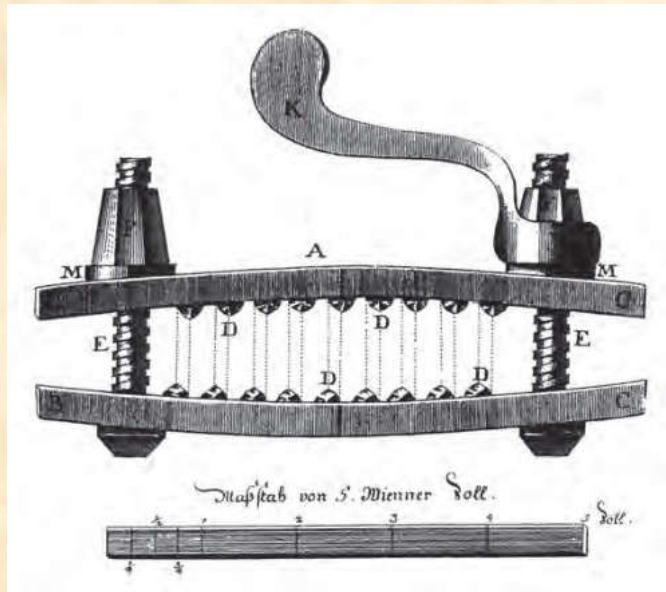
All kinds of pincers and pliers were indispensable parts of the equipment of any torture chamber. Their appearance often deceptively resembled ordinary craftsman's tools. Before use, they were often made red-hot, which was supposed to facilitate the tearing of flesh from bones.



# The Thumbscrew

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This device consists of two metal plates on long screws. The prisoner's fingers were placed between them and the screws were gradually tightened, causing the iron to clench on the prisoner's bones.



# The Whip

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How can you achieve maximum effect with minimum effort when flogging? Simply attach several thongs to the wooden handle. In this way, one sweep of the hand is accompanied by several strokes.



# Shackles

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Shackles were usually made of iron, but there were also wooden versions of this instrument. They were helpful during interrogations. The hands or legs of the interrogated person were cuffed and then hung in any position chosen by the inquisitor in order to extract a confession by means of torture.

