

666

the antichrist's

almanac

2000 ONLINE EDITION

© D CHRISTIE SINTON ("ARNOUME")

Inquisitional torture (1252)

Catholic Church (WLD)

Pope Innocent IV (1243-54) was the first pope to sanction the use of torture in the extraction of confessions of heresy during the Inquisition.

In 1252, he issued a bull called *Ad extirpanda* - "to be exterminated" - which ordered all secular rulers to arrest and execute non-Catholic Christians.

"When those adjudged guilty of heresy," the bull said, "have been given up to the civil power by the bishop or his representative, or the Inquisition, the podesta or chief magistrate of the city shall take them at once, and shall within five days at the most, execute the laws made against them ..."

During heresy and witchcraft trials, victims often were submitted to the most diabolical tortures the Christian mind could conceive.

In cases of heresy, the victim often was stripped naked prior to torture; in witchcraft trials, the victim was dry-shaved to make finding the mythical "Devil's mark" easier.

Finding the Devil's mark, or a spot on the victim body deemed "impervious to pain", generally meant the victim was subjected to extensive pricking from a large bodkin or needle, which in itself was a form of torture ...

In *The History of Torture*, George Ryley Scott described the pulley - either strappado or squassation - as the first torture of the Inquisition.

The victim was stripped naked with his wrists tied securely behind his back.

"A stout rope was then fastened to his wrists and carried over a pulley fixed to the roof of the torture chamber.

"The executioners then drew the victim up with this rope until he was suspended about six feet from the floor.

"In this position, heavy iron weights, usually amounting to about 45 kg (100 lbs), were attached to his feet.

"At this juncture he was asked once more to reveal the truth.

"Refusal meant the infliction of a number of stripes with a whip upon his naked back.

"The questions were repeated.

"Failure to confess was the signal for the torture to start in real earnest.

"The executioners pulled on the rope, raising the victim almost to the ceiling.

"Suddenly allowing the rope to slack for several feet, they then brought this rapid descent to an abrupt termination before the weights reached the floor.

"The shock to the body, of this suddenly terminated fall, was

sufficient to jar every bone, joint and nerve in the system.

"In most cases it entailed dislocation.

"The process was repeated again and again until the culprit confessed or became unconscious ..."

Another form of torture designed to prolong the body was the rack or its cousin, the ladder.

"Rack, n. An argumentative implement formerly much used in persuading devotees of a false faith to embrace the living truth."

- *Ambrose Bierse, "The Devil's Dictionary"*

The rack, standing about a metre from the floor and consisting of a stout wooden framework, was mandatory in almost any ecclesiastical dungeon.

It has been said that a victim could be prolonged by up to 30 centimetres during the question of the third degree.

In the question of the first degree, the victim suffered dislocation of the shoulders as the result of his arms being pulled up behind his back.

In the second degree, the victim's knee, hip and elbow joints were forced from their sockets; muscle was ripped from the bone causing severe agony and permanent maiming.

In the third degree, joints were separated "very audibly"; the victim was dismembered and paralysed and, gradually, over hours and days, the life functions ceased one by one ...

Legally, torture sessions lasted up to two hours; however,

sessions of between three and four hours were not uncommon, as different methods were employed.

Church-sanctioned instruments often were sprinkled with holy water and blessed before use.

In both heresy and witchcraft trials, commonly-used tortures included the boot which crushed the foot, ankle and leg bones "until the blood and marrow spouted forth".

Thumbscrews, toescrews and knee-splitters also were used to crack, pop or break the joints or splinter the bones of a suspect.

Flesh was ripped, nipped, sliced or pierced with cold or red hot pincers, skewers, knives or hooks.

Toenails and fingernails were broken and torn out with a *turkas* or tongs, either red hot or cold.

Tongues were pierced, cut or rooted out and eyes were extinguished by gouging, plucking, bursting or burning.

Ears, noses, hands and feet were sawn, cut or hacked off; toes and fingers were amputated - sometimes joint by joint over several days.

Teeth were extracted with pliers or chisels - and the raw tooth sockets probed with cold or red hot needles to add to the pain.

Men had their genitals cut away, crushed or burnt off with balls of flaming brimstone.

Woman had their nipples torn out with cold or red hot pincers; or their entire breasts sliced off with shears or torn by a device called the "spider".

"Let the women gaze on this horrible piece of ingenuity, the spider. It is a cluster of steel hooks pointed like needles. It is designed to be spread over the breast of the woman; the hand of the torturer grasps the central ring, drawing the points together, and then the flesh is torn away."

- *Fr Marianus de Luca, "Thumbscrew and Rack"*

Vaginas, rectums and mouths were mutilated with the "pear" - a device that was used on blasphemers.

"It is made of two small iron plates," wrote Fr Marianus de Luca in *Thumbscrew and Rack*. "These are inserted between the upper and lower teeth and spread apart by turning the deadly screw.

"The jaws being thus forced open molten lead was poured down the throat or the tongue caught with pincers and either slitted, torn out, or cut off.

"The pincers used for this purpose have hooked teeth like the fangs of a serpent. The vicious little group which I have labelled "a trinity" includes the pincers for removing the tongue.

"The second member is a mask (put on red-hot), and the thing that looks like the skeleton of a snake is a metal scourge.

"This trinity was in its time of material service in stimulating the worship of that heavenly trinity in whose name the implements were manufactured and applied.

"There was a perforated iron spoon for dropping hot lead upon naked bodies. ..."

Many women were raped, anally and vaginally, by their

filthy Christian captives while men were flogged with chain scourges or flails for the slightest breach of regulations, including speaking or making sounds.

Leather or corded scourges, called skinning cats, also were used; their thongs often were stiffened by being dipped in melted pitch, which tore away flesh at every stroke until the back became one large ulcer ...

To stifle screams within the torture chamber, victims had their mouths stuffed with cloth and the walls themselves often were lined with heavy quilts ...

Forced feeding with salted fish (which induced thirst) was another popular torture as was pouring water or molten lead down the victim's throat.

Victims also were forced to take either freezing cold or scalding hot baths, the latter laced with lime that seared the flesh.

These often were followed by scouring with a device resembling a wire brush.

Others had their naked bodies raked or shredded to the bone with a device known as the "cat's paw".

Roasting on a spiked iron chair was a favourite in all Christian dungeons; so too was scorching the skin of the armpits or groin with burning feathers dipped in sulphur.

Feet were coated with lard or oil before they were slowly roasted over a fire; the bones cracking and popping as the marrow dripped into the flames.

If the victim did not confess after this, the hands were the next to go ...

Another popular torture used by both Roman Catholics and Protestants was "thawing", which involved the victim being jerked roughly about by means of a rope tied securely around the head.

Some victims were forced to kneel on a prayer stool studded with nails while others were branded with a red hot cross.

Others suffered the torture of the slipper - a large metal boot that fried the foot if red hot or dissolved the flesh if filled with boiling glue ...

"The boots, or 'Spanish boots' ('bootikins' in Scotland) comprised two vices shaped to enclose the legs of the victim - or, in simpler form, four strong lengths of wood bound together lengthwise with the top and bottom left open. These could be tightened cruelly by hand or by knocking in wedges with blows from a mallet in order to crush the bones and flesh of the accused with excruciating pain. Records exist of the boots being employed in many countries, including Scotland, Germany and France."

- *David Pickering, "Dictionary of Witchcraft"*

Another favourite torture was to place small bags of gunpowder in the mouth or armpits of the victim which were then set alight.

Others had burning matches or tapers placed between their fingers and toes.

One gruesome torture involved a large bowl filled with rats which was turned upside down on a victim's bare stomach.

A fire was lit on top of this container, causing the rats to

panic and burrow into the victim's bowels ...

A grim device that was widely used in Germany was the iron maiden which crudely resembled the Virgin Mary.

Fr Marianus de Luca in *Thumbscrew and Rack* said that "as the church made a virgin the vehicle for bringing its alleged founder into the world, it naturally made another one the instrument for putting its enemies out of the world".

"Hence was invented the Iron Virgin ... She wears a cloak of wood and iron, which opens in front, revealing an interior lined with spikes shaped like harrow teeth, seven or eight inches in length and sharp as bayonets.

Iron handles swing the virgin open and disclose the spikes.

"The figure stood above a trap-door opening into a moat or ditch, so that when the spikes let go of it the corpse dropped into the water and floated away ...

Two (spikes) are apparently intended to enter the eyes, others the chest, and still others the abdomen. The virgin was the avenger of offences against the Church such as doubt or unbelief."

It was said the victim could survive up to two days pinned in this device if left to expire ...

Homosexuals sometimes found themselves being lowered naked on to a red-hot spike in a torture known as the *chambre chauffee*.

This was the church-approved method for interrogating gays until 1816.

Those convicted of sodomy, male or female, were tied

upside down and their bodies sawn through until the navel was reached.

An inverted position ensured oxygen reached the brain so the victim remained conscious throughout the ordeal ...

Those who survived the torture chamber invariably found themselves convicted of their crimes - rarely was the accused ever acquitted.

In many cases, particularly in Germany, victims suffered further torments on their way to the stake or gallows.

At Bamberg, women had their breasts ripped off by red hot pincers while elsewhere others had their hands chopped off at the place of execution ...

In many cases the executions were tortures in themselves: burning at the stake; breaking with the wheel; skinning or flaying alive.

Fr Marianus de Luca in *Thumbscrew and Rack* said the instruments for flaying did not indicate that a victim was skinned after the fashion adopted by butchers of cattle.

"The man or woman was strung up by the hands or feet, while the skin, with the flesh adhering to it, was dragged off with pronged hooks ..."

Many victims were drawn or disembowelled, whereby the intestine was slowly pulled out through an incision made above the solar plexus ...

Most of the torturing was performed by members of the

Dominican order, whose monks were called the "black friars".

To the Dominicans, the screams of their victims were like music to their ears - as it meant "one soul was drawing closer to God ...".

In time, admitted the Holy Inquisitor Von Spee, it would dawn on the sadistic and barbaric Christian judges that torturing witches and diviners was futile.

"Treat the heads of church, the judges, or me, as you treat these unhappy ones; subject any of us to the same torture, and you will discover that we are all sorcerers ..."

Read on ...

666

*"Civilisation will not attain to its perfection
until the last stone from the last church
falls on the last priest"*

(Emile Zola)

[HOME PAGE](#)

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[CONTENTS](#)