

WITCHCRAFT

METHODS OF TORTURE

A person suspected of witchcraft was usually arrested at night, not informed of his charges, and was thrown into a dark, stinking, dank dungeon. All suspects were tortured; a freely given confession was considered insufficient by law. The accused had to give his testimony while in a state of torture.

Before torture began, the prisoner was stripped and shaved of every vestige of hair in case some protective charm rendering him immune to pain had been concealed on the body. They also inspected the body for the Devil's mark.

These techniques were used to "soften" the suspect:

1. **Rack**
2. **Thumbscrews**
3. **Water** - Water by the jugfuls were funnelled into the victim's swelling body as he or she was stretched between iron rings secured to the wall and the floor.

These were the real tortures:

4. **Strappado** - The victim was suspended by his arms which were tied behind his back and huge weights, often as heavy as 600 lbs., were attached to his feet. This treatment usually caused shoulder dislocation.
5. **Squassation** - This torture is similar to strappado except that the rope is suddenly released and then checked before the prisoner's feet touched the floor. It was also done to dislocate limbs and it sometimes caused death.
6. **Red-hot pincers** - used to tear flesh.
7. **Severing of limbs**
8. **Iron chair** - The prisoner was bound to an iron chair with a hole in its seat; then a fire was lit beneath the chair.
9. **Lime** - Stubborn prisoners were thrown into pots of scalding lime and then scrubbed with wire brushes.
10. **Tongue** - It was common to tear out the tongue after the confession if the suspect had been especially stubborn.
11. **Boot** - The suspect's legs were enclosed in a wooden "boot" and then wedges were driven down through the top. This technique smashed the legs.
12. **Stake** - All guilty were burned at the stake. Cooperative prisoners might be strangled in advance, but most were burned alive.

MAGICAL SELF-PROTECTION

1. Drive a nail into the witch's footprint in a dusty road; this act will cause a similar wound in the foot itself.

2. Tear a witch's forehead above the brow until the blood runs, and this act will neutralize her spell.
3. Nail a horseshoe above the front door.
4. Attach a "hag-stone" (a holed stone) to the keys of the barns to protect farm animals from bewitchment.
5. Hide a pair of scissors or knife under the doormat.
6. Place a witch ball, a glass sphere filled with colored stones, near a window to combat the evil eye.
7. Place long glass tubes with colored pebbles up the chimney.
8. S-shaped wall-ties were thought to guard a house from storms.
9. A "rowan" tree planted in the garden wards off witches.
10. Parsley planted around the house foundation protects it from evil.
11. Paint a hex (anti-witch symbol) on barn doors.

SUPERSTITIONS

IMAGES

- 12. Handshake** - Originally a gesture to show that one did not have a weapon. It has always been done with the right hand because it is considered the lucky hand.
- 13. Evil Eye** - It is believed that one can control others with a glance or different sort of look. It can kill, blight, maim, cripple, paralyze, etc. In the 1930s, a New York man earned his living by renting his evil eye to prize-fight managers. He would sit at ringside and stare at opposing fighter. Their ignorance and superstitions often stunned them enough to set them up for a knock-out.
- 14. Easter Eggs** - These symbols stem from a rite for the "hatching" of spring.
- 15. Bread and Butter** - This counter-spell is used to deny a separation by naming things that belong or stick together.
- 16. Charm Bracelet** - This item stems from the worship of carved deities. e.g. totem poles

CHARMS

- 17. Amulet** - a carrying piece used to protect one from accident, illness, or others' malice
- 18. Talisman** - an object carried to bring good fortune
- 19. Charm** - an object that gives one power to inflict harm on others or to influence others
- 20. Rabbit's foot** - (amulet) valued because a wild rabbit drums an alarm with its hind foot when danger threatens. (Most sold in today's stores are front paws because they make a neater item - thus are technically worthless.)
- 21. Dimple** - gives one magical powers because it is a scarce marking.
- 22. 4-leaf clover** - brings good luck because it is scarce. (However, novelty manufacturers have bred a strain that is all 4-leafed.)

- 23. Trees** - Men have worshipped trees as a nature spirit. Hence, “knocking” on wood gives a protective feeling. e.g., tree as “home-safe” in the game of hide-and-seek; Decorating a Christmas tree is a form of tree worship.
- 24. Salt** - In early times salt was too valuable and scarce to be used as a seasoning. It was a preservative of meats and food. From being the foe of decay, salt gradually became symbolic of never-dying life. Thus, witches, sorcerers, and devils supposedly feared it. To spill salt was to leave oneself unprotected; so one quickly tossed it over one’s shoulder to fight over any nearby demons.
- 25. New Year’s Eve** - Horns and noisemakers originally were used to frighten demons of the old year and keep them from following into the new year.
- 26. Yawn** - One covers one’s mouth to keep demons from entering the body.
- 27. Sneeze** - It was believed at death the soul escaped the body by way of the mouth or nose. Thus, when one sneezed, he momentarily blew his soul out of his body and one said “god bless you” to protect him and keep demons from entering his body at this point. The Romans said “Jupiter preserve you.” The Malay, Zulu, Moslem, Samoan, German. Jew, Hindu, etc. all have similar phrases.
- 28. Bride** - It was believed demons delighted in hurting anyone beginning a “new life.” So brides were not allowed to see anybody before the ceremony. The veil she wore was originally meant to disguise her from these same prowling demons. The horn-honking procession after the ceremony is an echo of the wild clamor of shouts and bell ringing meant to scare away demons.
- 29. Church bell** - It was rung to scare away demons at the beginning of the ceremony.
- 30. Mirror** - Early man felt he could be harmed when an image of him was broken. He would not even dare stir the pond water which reflected his face.
- 31. Death messenger** - It is a sign or person sent to notify of a death. It is generally believed to be in the form of a bat, bird, or any uncommon animal lurking in the house. Some people also believe a death occurs if: a clock stops, a mirror cracks, or a picture falls from the wall for no apparent reason. A howling dog or rooster crowing at night are also signs, The ancient Greeks thought it a bad-luck omen if a rabbit crossed one’s path. This belief combined with the universal fear of the color “black,” and the mistrust of cats evolved into our current superstition of the bad luck if a black cat crosses one’s path.

SAYINGS

32. If you get out of the wrong side of the bed in the morning, your whole day will go wrong.
33. If you accidentally put on an article of clothing inside out, you would do well to wear it that way all day. Doing so brings good luck.
34. If you sing before breakfast, you’ll cry before night.
35. If you put on your hat backwards, you’ll have bad luck.
36. If you step on an ant, you will cause a rainstorm.
37. If you open an umbrella inside the house, you are inviting bad luck.
38. It is unlucky to meet a cross-eyed woman, but lucky to meet a cross-eyed man.

39. If you have to patch a tear in your clothing while wearing it, be sure to hold a pin in your mouth during the sewing or risk bad luck.
40. For good luck, touch a hunchback's hump.
41. A person born with webbed toes will have good luck all his life.
42. To ward off rheumatism, carry a small potato in your pocket at all times.
43. To cure asthma, swallow a wad of crumpled-up spider web.
44. If a person steps over a baby crawling on the floor, the child will stop growing.
45. If one has empty pockets on New Year's Eve, one must look forward to a whole year of poverty.

NUMBERS

46. Seven - Has even been used to set limits to some laws. To this day some crimes cannot be prosecuted and certain debts are not collectable if action is not taken on them within seven years.

- ◆ Seven years of bad luck occur when a mirror is broken.
- ◆ Lucky seven of dice games
- ◆ Lifelong luck - follows the man who is the seventh son of a seventh son.

50. Nine - signified truth to ancient Hebrews because they believed that truth is always triumphant over falsehood. Also, the number 9, however it is multiplied, always reasserts itself.

- $3 \times 9 = 27$ ($2 + 7 = 9$)
- $1,234,567 \times 9 = 11,111,103$ (these digits add up to 9)
- $999 \times 9 = 8,991$ (you have two nines and $8 + 1$, equaling 9)

51. Forty - Noah's flood lasted forty days and nights. Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Moses spent forty days and nights copying the Ten Commandments.

- In the 1600s, frequent plagues and epidemics caused port cities of Europe to quarantine all incoming ships. Nobody knew how long a ship should wait to prove it was not bringing a new disease, so forty days was arbitrarily picked. This practice began in Italy and the Italian word for forty of *quaranta* so we got the word *quarantine*.

52. Thirteen - This superstition began back in prehistory when the first men learned to count. They counted with the only computer they had: their ten fingers and two feet (they did not count toes). These digits added up to twelve. Beyond twelve was the incalculable Unknown, which man did not like to think about.

- Many Christians associated the number with the Last Supper when Christ dined with the twelve apostles.
- Many hotels, apartment houses and even office buildings have no thirteenth floor.

53. Rx - In many old medical manuscripts, all the R's were x-ed. The symbol appears to represent an invocation to the Roman god Jupiter Rex, asking his help in making the prescription work as intended.

FORTUNE TELLING

- 54. Catoptromancy** - In ancient times the outcome of an illness was foretold by the appearance of a sick person's face on a plate of burnished metal which had been suspended over a sacred stream.
- 55. Hydromancy** - Symbols in a pool or stream suggested future events.
- Loaves of bread were given to Ino. If the loaf sank, the action meant the goddess accepted the offering. If it floated to the surface, the goddess had rejected it. This practice became "ducking the witch" to determine guilt or innocence.
- 56. Smoke-reading** - Smoke rising from a sacrifice was a good omen if it rose vertically; a bad omen if it were thick and slow to disperse.
- 57. Involuntary omens** - It was believed sneezing, trembling, twitching, itching, and other involuntary actions betrayed the future.
- 58. Astrology** - The future was determined according to the movements of the planets through the twelve signs of the Zodiac.
- 59. Chiromancy** - The lines and other configurations of the human palm were consulted for signs of events to come.
- 60. Necromancy** - The future was disclosed through contact with the dead.
- 61. Alectryomancy** - A chicken (rooster) was set down in a circle divided into 24 sections, each containing a letter of the Greek alphabet and a seed. As the rooster ate the grains, the pattern of the future was revealed. The letters corresponding to the missing seeds provided the answer to the questions asked.
- 62. Dice-throwing** - Used by Greek magicians to tell the future.
- 63. Bird flight** - Patterns of take-off, flight, etc., were interpreted.
- 64. Entrail-reading** - The innards of a fowl were thought portentous.
- 65. The Sound of Thunder** - Each burst and interval had its meaning.
- 66. Spider's web** - The design of each web revealed a different future.
- 67. Onirocriticism** - This practice is the art of interpreting dreams.
- 68. Rhabdomancy** - Hebrew art of throwing down a handful of sticks, rods, or twigs, and "reading" the pattern they fall into." E.g., 23 Psalm - "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." is interpreted as he has cast the sticks and read good omens in them.
- 69. Crystalomancy** - One can foretell the future with a crystal ball.
- 70. Rhapsodomancy** - The opening at random a book of verses, usually the Bible.
- 71. Gastromancy** - By listening to the rumblings of the belly, one can foretell the future.
- 72. Phrenology** - One can make predictions by reading the bumps, bulges, and contours of the skull.