

0. THE HERETIC'S FORK - Story Preface

1. MAN IN THE STATE OF NATURE

2. THE HERETIC'S FORK

3. BREAKING WITH A WHEEL

4. THE JUDAS CRADLE

5. THE IRON MAIDEN OF NUREMBERG

6. HANGING, CAT PAWS AND CRUELTY

7. HEAD CRUSHERS, THE RACK AND WATER TORTURE

8. THE HANGING CAGE

9. BEHEADING

10. BURNING AT THE STAKE



During the Elizabethan era, Catholic priests were in danger of being captured (leading to other bad things). To avoid this, a building might have what was known as a "priest hole." It was a place where priests could hide - sometimes for several days. This image (by Sjewells53) depicts a "priest hole" located on the second floor of Boscobel House in Shropshire (England). Online via Wikimedia Commons; license CC BY-SA 3.0.

Hobbes was born April 5, 1588 - the year of England's battle with the Spanish Armada.

Elizabeth I was queen. Her father, Henry VIII, had closed (and looted) the monasteries in England not long before Hobbes was born.

Queen Mary, Elizabeth's half-sister, had spent her short reign trying to reinstate the supremacy of the Catholic Church in Britain. People called her "Bloody Mary" because religious persecution took place during her reign. (Persecutions, of course, took place during the reign of her father, too.)

Stocks were the "mildest" form of persecution and torture. Yet, it could not have been easy for someone in stocks to endure the public humiliation and disgrace - like chamber pots being dumped on them. But what happened when a person was accused of being a heretic and the Inquisitors of the Catholic Church entered the scene?

Take a look at this "heretic's fork." It's prongs were thrust into the accused's chin and sternum.

Once the heretic's fork was firmly imbedded in a victim's body, he could not move his head. He could only breathe the phrase that was inscribed (in Latin) on the inside of the fork: "I recant."

Maybe - if he recanted - he would be spared. More likely, the fork was just the first step in the torture process.

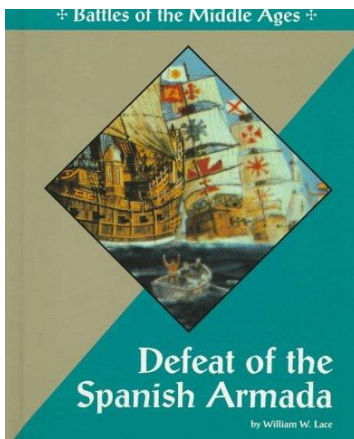
Death - often by burning - would not occur until later, after the victim endured much more anguish. Profound anguish like that produced by "the wheel."

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THE-HERETIC-S-FORK-Torture-Instruments-from-Medieval-Times>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THE-HERETIC-S-FORK-Torture-Instruments-from-Medieval-Times>

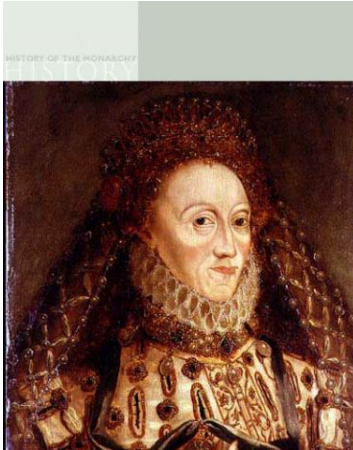


Defeat of the Spanish Armada - by William W. Lace

Image online, courtesy amazon.com website.

View this asset at:

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Elizabeth I - Later Years

Courtesy, the Royal Monarchy web site.

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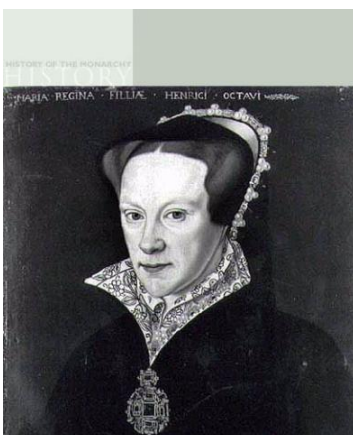
Henry VIII - Hans Holbein the Younger

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Queen Mary - "Bloody Mary"

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons website.

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Stocks - A Tame Torture Device

Image online, courtesy the [Loyola University New Orleans](#) website.

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Pillory - Uncomfortable Punishment

Image online, courtesy Colonial Williamsburg via [Schools of California Online Resources](#) for Education website.

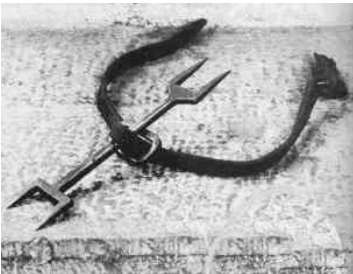
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Heretic's Fork - Invasive Torture

Image online, courtesy Medieval Criminal Museum collection, in [San Gimignano, Italy](#).

This instrument of torture, like others profiled in this story, is part of a collection owned by a group of independent scholars. The objects themselves - which have been viewed in numerous venues throughout the world - are maintained at the Medieval Criminal Museum [in San Gimignano, Italy](#).



The curator of the exhibition [tells us more](#):

The collection is owned by Italian independent scholars who have made these instruments available for traveling exhibits on the subject of torture.

...

Our commitment, which we share with all who are interested in combating violence, torture, and capital punishment against living beings, is to show how throughout the centuries human beings have been tortured, both in body and soul, in the name of the truth, its only justification often being submission to the authorities.

All over the world, in the past and in the present, torture has been practiced both against the body and the mind of the victim.

It is devastating and inhuman, in its effect. It certainly cannot be called a punishment, but is merely an exercise in brutality and savagery, akin to the crime often only allegedly committed by the offender.

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Heretic's Fork in Place

Image online, courtesy Medieval Criminal Museum collection, in [San Gimignano, Italy](#).



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Mary Tudor - A Plot to Prevent Her Reign

From *The Lion's Cub*, episode one of Elizabeth R (a 1971 series of six plays, each eighty-five minutes in length) [starring](#) Glenda Jackson as Elizabeth and Daphne Slater as Mary.

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