

0. HANGING, CAT PAWS AND CRUELTY - 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



In the medieval world, "The Devil" was sometimes depicted as a frightening character who visited someone who had died (among other things). In this image, we see a miniature of "a dead man and the devil." It appears in Justinian's *Digestum Vetus* (Arundel 484 f. 245), circa 1300 - 1310. The British Library maintains a [copy of this work](#) which originated in France (perhaps in Toulouse). Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

In the Middle Ages, nobles and people of the ruling class who were convicted of heresy, treason or other capital offenses were executed quickly. The object was a painless death.

That was not true for the common people, however. For them, the longer the death process, the better the entertainment value for those inflicting punishment (and those watching it occur).

Hanging was common - even for stealing. But medieval hanging was not the type of execution which occurred in the 19th century, for example, where the neck and spinal chord are quickly severed (in "the English drop").

In the Middle Ages, a hanging could last several hours - or more - before death occurred. It was the type of hanging where a body was left to slowly strangle. It was hanging where the victim was sometimes positioned upside down, with a stone around his neck.

To inflict even greater punishment on the "convicted" heretic or criminal, authorities used "cat paws" to rip the victim's flesh to shreds. With hands unavailable to ward off flies and other insects, the accused would suffer even more as blood flowed from a shredded body.

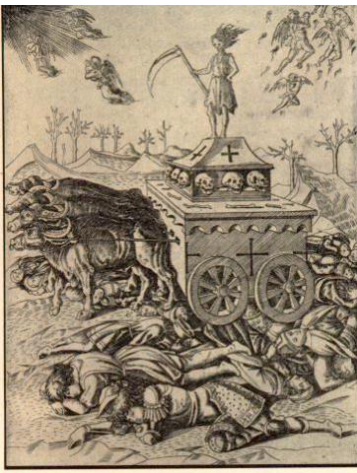
In really heinous cases (like the story of William Wallace), the conscious victim would be taken down before death and disemboweled. In other cases, the victim's body would be racked with pain - before the hanging - by instruments of torture like the head crusher.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/HANGING-CAT-PAWS-AND-CRUELTY-Torture-Instruments-from-Medieval-Times>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/HANGING-CAT-PAWS-AND-CRUELTY-Torture-Instruments-from-Medieval-Times>



Medieval Times - Execution for the Ruling Class

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Medieval-Times-Execution-for-the-Ruling-Class>



Medieval Times - Death by Hanging Upside Down

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Middle Ages - Emphasizing Punishment

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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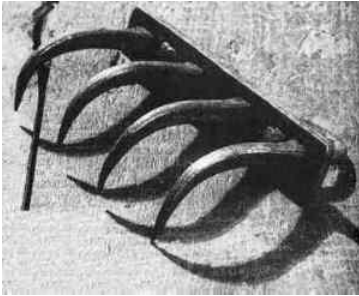
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Medieval Torture - Cat Paws

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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Medieval Torture - Cruelty Applied

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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