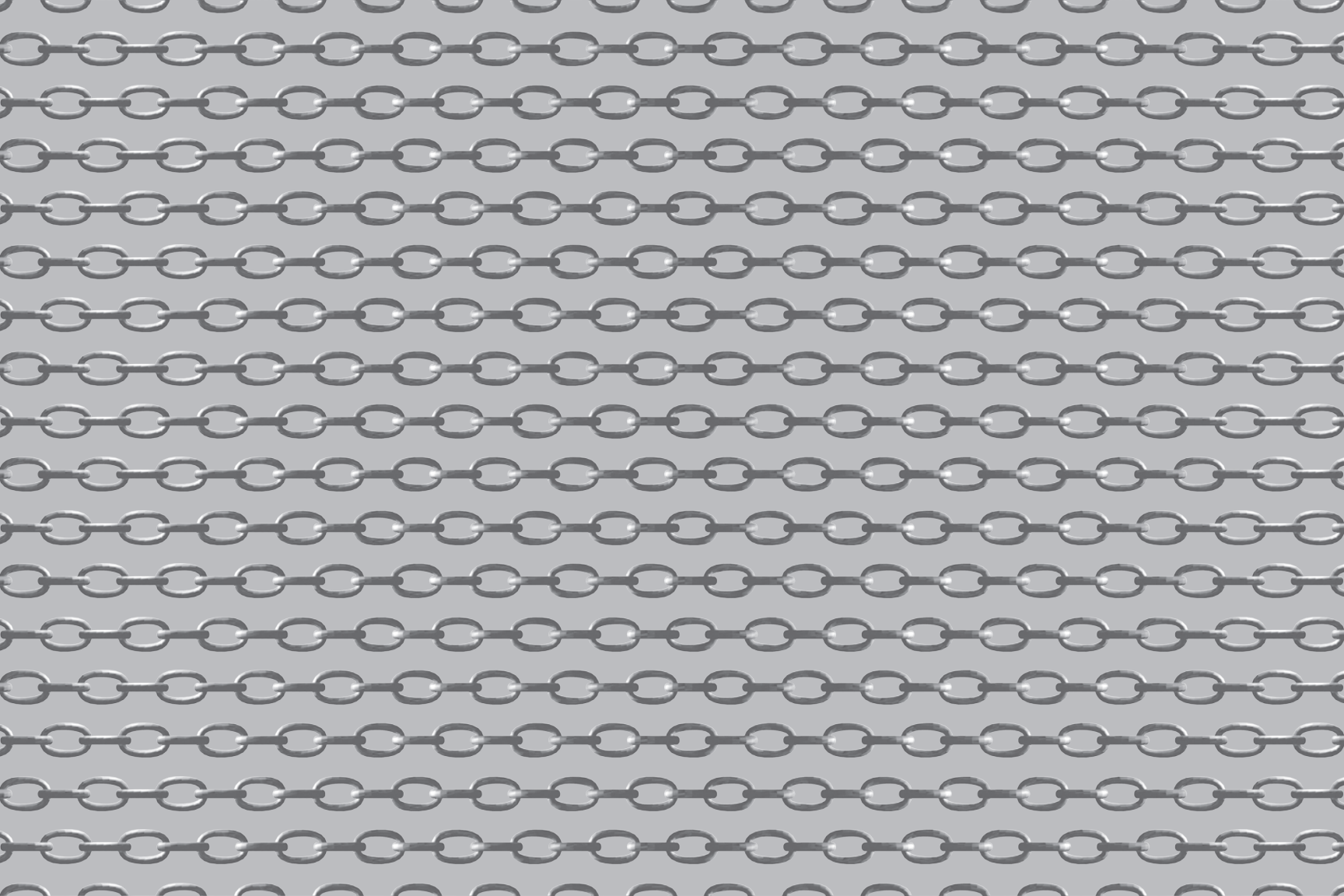

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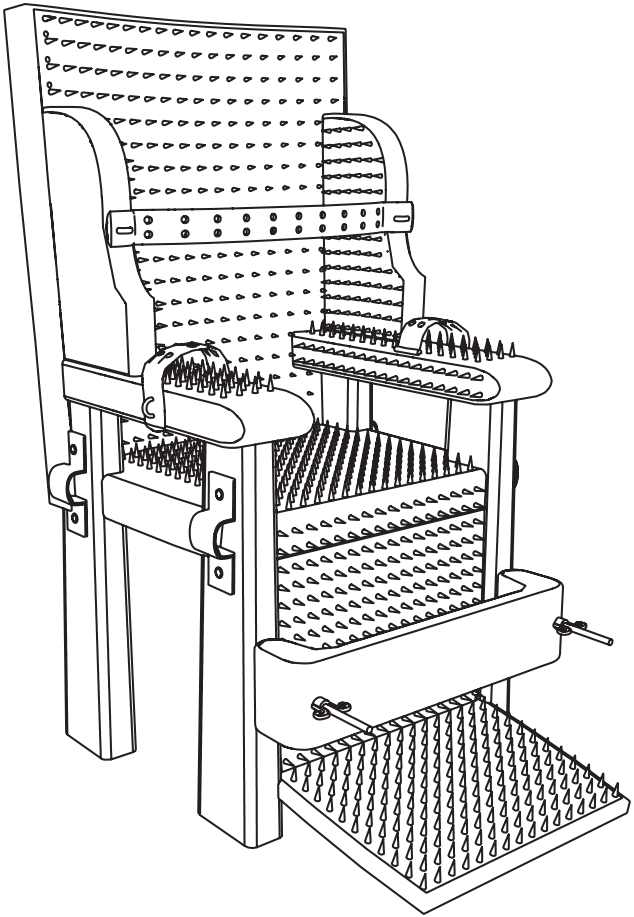

INFERNAL DEVICE

THE MACHINERY OF TORTURE AND EXECUTION

ERIK C. RÜHLING

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“pity this busy monster, manunkind...”

— e.e. cummings

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I would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance and support, in words and deeds, given to me by my family and friends during the creation of this book. A great deal of thanks is also extended to the many visitors to the website who offered suggestions, criticisms, and sometimes simply thoughtful correspondence throughout this project. There's a surprising number of people out there in the world interested in this subject. I promise not to reveal your names.

You know who you are.

PREFACE

I began collecting information about the devices in this book over ten years ago with the intention of creating a book that presented them to the reader in a visual style that was more accessible and descriptive than the various museum photographs, line art drawings, woodcuts, or verbal explanations that had been duplicated throughout most of the accessible research materials. It seemed as if once there was a halfway decent drawing or photograph of a particular device that it was forever destined to reproduce itself, virus-like, throughout the literature. These devices were in dire need of new visual representations.

The easiest way, it seemed, for me to recreate these contraptions would be to construct them in a virtual space. In this way, the items could be rendered from any view, capturing the essence of the machinery in a way that woodcuts and drawings cannot. To that end, I taught myself how to use a 3D software package, gathered up my best drawings and photos, and set out modeling and rendering DVPDQ[PDFKLQHVRIWRUWXUHDQGH[HFXWLRQDV,FRXOGÀ]G7KLVUHVXOWHGLQWKHGDWDEDVHIRXQGDWZZZRFFDVLRQDOKHOOFRPLQIGHYLF Over the years, this database has proved to be immensely popular and renderings have been used in such wildly diverse publications as a book on Polish law to an article in *Maxim* magazine. I again picked up the original vision of a printed work, considering that this was a subject in which many people were guiltily interested, like the rubberneckers at a car wreck.

Three years later, here are what I consider the best and most interesting of the results—a menagerie of machines that are both cruel and unusual.

INTRODUCTION

[illegible]

to the most complex of atomic particle accelerators, the story of humanity is the story of humanity's machines. Humanity's history of course, has taken its fair share of dark turns. Wars, slavery, genocide, torture—these are the idiomatic skeletons in humanity's closet, displaying, if nothing else, the dual nature of mankind. It is no surprise, then, that man has invented and repurposed both new and old tools and machines in pursuit of these darker labors.

The machines in these pages range from the dreadfully simple (the chain scourge), to the needlessly elaborate (the brazen bull), but they all have been invented exclusively to cause physical or mental pain, or, in some cases, to end life. There are plain, austere devices born of immediate necessity, like the torture shears, and there are extravagant works of art, like the branks, that display a technical skill and attention to detail that belie the true purpose of the device. There are screws, levers, pulleys, wheels, and axles—all pressed into the service of torture and execution.

Each device is presented herein with a short description and one or more three-dimensional renderings. Information has come IURPERWKÀVWDQGVHFRQGKDQGDFFRXQWVGUDZLQJVDQGSKRWRJUDSKV,QVRPHFDVHVWKHOHJHQGDVVRFLDWHGZLWKDSDUWLFXODUGH may have overstepped the facts, and where appropriate, this is noted—however, this should not detract from the curiosity of the object, as sometimes the myth tells more about the minds of men than the truth.

In ancient Greek drama, a Latin phrase was used to describe a divine being emerging from a highly-wrought machine, indubitably to eliminate catastrophe, tie up loose ends, and bring the play to a close. This phrase was *"deus ex machina,"* or "god from the machine," as the benevolent spirit arose from the plot mechanism. The machines in this book, however, lack any hint of the divine, and if anything are imbued with the dark urges of humanity. If properly named, they would be declared *"infernus ex machina,"*—hell from the machine.

I. PUNISHMENTS VILE

"Let the punishment match the offense."

—Cicero

BARREL PILLORY

The town ne'er-do-well would have been familiar with the embrace of this portable instrument of torture, known variously as the "barrel pillory," the "drunkard's cloak," or the "Spanish[1] mantle." This pillory was often reserved for those disposed to excessive drinking, and what better object to use than the barrel which may have previously contained similar spirits which led to the accused's XQGRLQJ,PDJLQHWKHWRZQGUXQNSHUKDSVLQWKHWKURHVRIDUDJLQJKDQJRYHUIRUFHGLQWRWKHFRQÀQHVRIDFXPEHUVRPHRDNHQFDVN fermenting with latter-day tipple and present-day bodily excretions. Not an enjoyable way to spend the day, to say the least.

Like the more recognizable stationary pillory or "stocks" (ubiquitous among re-creations of old-country and colonial villages), the purpose of the barrel pillory was to subject the unlucky occupants to torment by their peers. Along with verbal epithets, the tormentors also hurled solid objects, generally rotten, at the victim's head. Rotted vegetables were always popular, along with manure (animal and human), and small rocks.

7KHGHYLFHZDVFRQVWUXFWHGOLNHWKLV'DODUJHEDUUHOÀWRYHUWKHHQWLUHERGZLWKWKHXQIRUWXQDWHRFFXSDQWVKHDGSRNLQJRXWIUR the hole in the top like a "mantle," a sleeveless robe worn by the clergy. From there, the pillory could take alternate forms—an enclosed barrel forced the victim to stand in place for hours (most likely in the heat of the town square), while an open barrel with holes for the DUPVDQGDQRSHQERWWRPDOORZHGWKHYLFWLPWRURDPDERXWWRZQ$QH[DPSOHRIWKHVWDWLRQDU\EDUUHOVSHFLÀFDOOQDPHG'WKH6SDQLVK mantle" sported an enclosure for the head made of small iron bars, much like a catcher's mitt. Presumably this was for the safety of

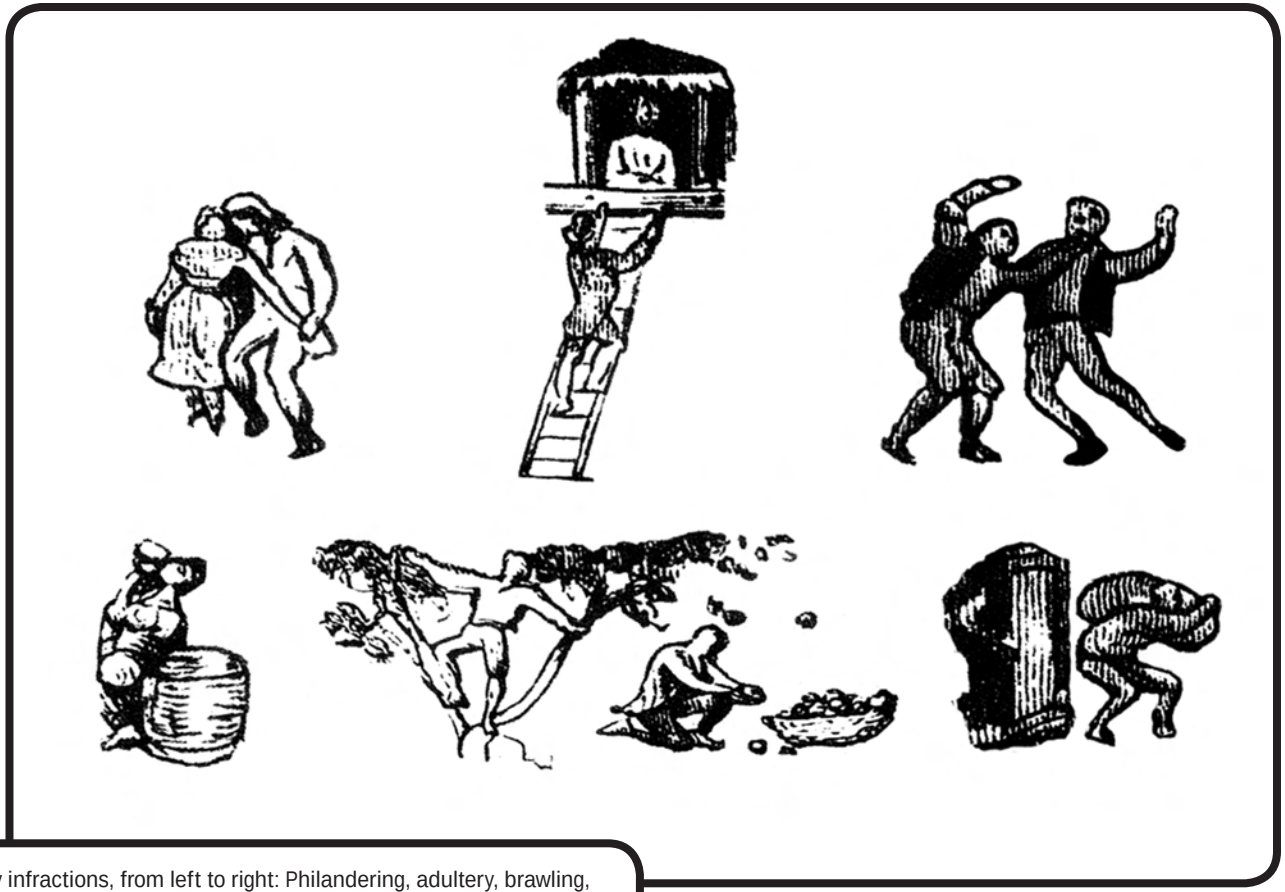
1 The Spanish really got the short end of the stick when it came to the naming of torture devices, as we shall see. It may have been that whole "Inquisition" thing.

Also Known As:
Spanish Mantle
Drunkard's Cloak

A barrel pillory with a starburst shaped collar. Should the occupant fall over, the head is protected and the barrel will not roll, demonstrating that even in a torture device there is room for safety.

the occupant, although it was just as likely a way to ensure he or she would not be knocked unconscious, a catastrophe which would have robbed the townspeople of their entertainment. A version in Berlin measured 1' 8" diameter at the top, 2' 11" diameter at the bottom, and 2' 11" tall, no doubt being an example of the ambulatory model (our ancestors being shorter, but not that much shorter).

,IDWRZQZDVLQSRVVHVVLRQRIDQ´RIÀ ALDOµ EDUUHOSLOORUW KHUHPDK DYHEHHQVFHQHVSDLQWHGRQWKHVLGHRIWKHEDUUHOGHSLFWLQJ the transgressions of which the victim was accused. Public drunkenness, brawling, petty theft, and scandalous romancing were popular themes, all punishable offenses in those days, but just another typical evening at, say, Mardi Gras in New Orleans.



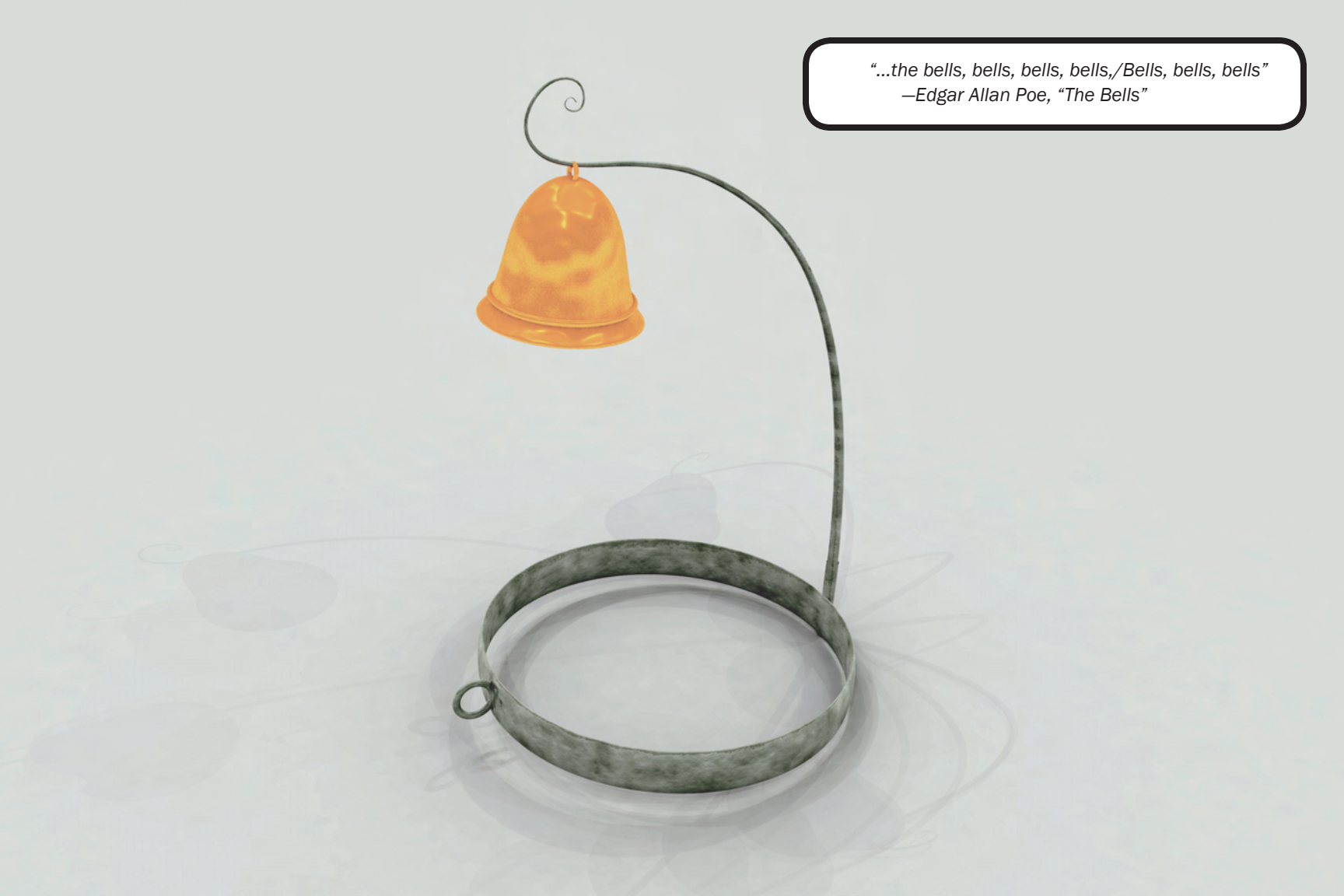
Blameworthy infractions, from left to right: Philandering, adultery, brawling,
GULQNLQJWKHIWDQGUREEHUGDSWHGIURP+HOGÀ

BELL COLLAR

A subtle yet insidious form of torture, the bell collar was valued for the fact that it allowed wardens to keep tabs on their prisoners while tormenting them with the ringing of a bell hung just above the head.

The suffering meted out by this instrument was not physical, but rather mental, as the victim experienced the distinctive chime of the bell triggered by any movement, however slight. Sleeping, already complicated by the collar (and most likely some sort of binding to keep hands away from the bell), was near impossible while the bell jangled mercilessly just out of reach in front of and above the prisoner's face.

The collar was also useful when multiple prisoners were being transported, the collars could be linked together by a chain, PDLQWDLQLQJWKHSUR[LPLW\RIWKHSULVRQHUVZKLOHDOHUWLQJDZDUGHQLIRQHVKRXOGKDSSHQWRHVFDSH:KDWDVLJKWWREHKROGDÒWK\ mass of squalid prisoners being led from their pens, a single brass bell ringing out distinctly from above each head in a cacophony of sound and misery that would have left John Cage green with envy.



"...the bells, bells, bells, bells,/Bells, bells, bells"
—Edgar Allan Poe, "The Bells"

DUCKING STOOL

“Of members ye tonge is worst or best,
An yll tonge oft doth breed unrest.”

Loosely translated, this means, “If you don’t have anything good to say, don’t say it at all.” Of course, this was coming from a time when the decision of what was good or ill was decided by the men in the community. It is no wonder then that many a “temperamental” ZRPDQIRXQGKHUVHOILQWKHGXFNLQJVWRRODVSXQLVKPHQWIRUKHUVFROGLQJDQGRUJHQHUDOVKUHZLVKQDWXUH:LWKWKH5DOSK.UDPGHQVRI the day, it would have not been as much, “Bang! Zoom! To the moon!,” as “Bang! Zoom! To the stool with ye!”

Resembling a chair more than a stool, this device was fairly common throughout all of Europe; in fact, the Domesday Book of 1084 mentions a chair belonging to the village of Chester, used to immerse scolding women in water. Its use grew from the “cucking” stool or “night chair,” which was a simple stationary chair in which the scold was forced to sit for a period of time while open to public ridicule. This gradually evolved into various designs of chairs hanging from a fulcrum and beam positioned over a body of water; rivers were popular, as were cesspools, and in some cases the community well was used, which doesn’t say much for the villagers’ ideas of cleanliness.

:KHUHWKHYLOODJHGLGQRWKDYHDÀGGXFNLQJVWRROWKHSRSXODFHPDGHGRZLWKWKHSRUWDEOHPRGHOORRNLQJTXLWHOLNHWKHVLHJH weapon known as the trebuchet. Using this “treebucket,” as it was sometimes called, allowed the shrew to be paraded through the town on her way to her dunking. From time to time, this humiliation would be deemed punishment enough, and the victim would be given a reprieve, undoubtedly with a warning to change her wicked ways.

Communis rixatrix was the legal term for “common scold”—an infraction that was punishable by the ducking stool.

Also Known As:
Cucking Stool
Treebucket
Night Chair

The “ducking” would unfold much as anyone would imagine—the scold forced into the chair, the chair hung over the water, and the chair levered into the water. Three dunkings seems to have been the prescribed punishment for most victims, although the elderly may have often escaped the entire dosage, as they were the ones who were in the most danger of perishing during the ritual.

Like the barrel pillory, the ducking stool would often be ornamented with scenes, a trendy one being of the scold on her way to hell in the arms of a devil. Also featured were pithy quotes, like the one above, which itself takes quite a scolding tone. The villagers’ sense of irony seems not to have been well-developed.

Lest you think this a quaint contraption used in the old world hundreds of years ago, it should be noted that the last recorded ducking was in 1818 in the United States, and that the punishment was still on the books in Jersey City until 1889.[1]

1 This is not the kind of dunking that Jersey City is historically known for. That usually involved a long walk off a short pier and cement shoes.

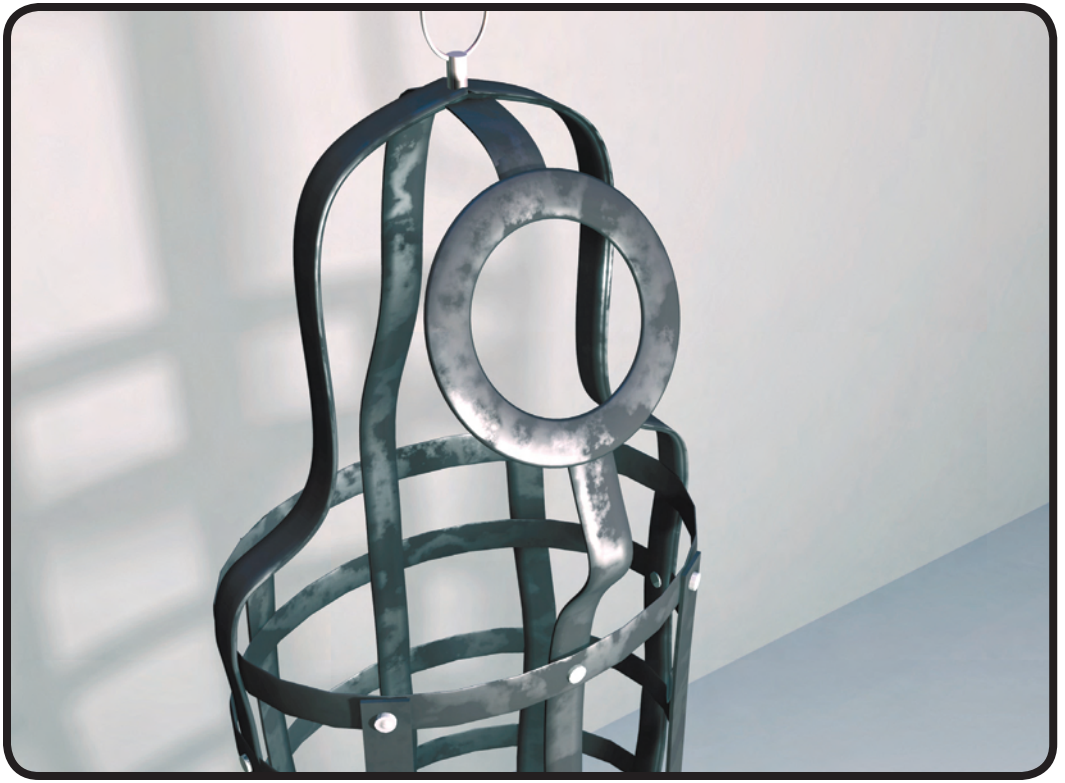
THE GIBBET

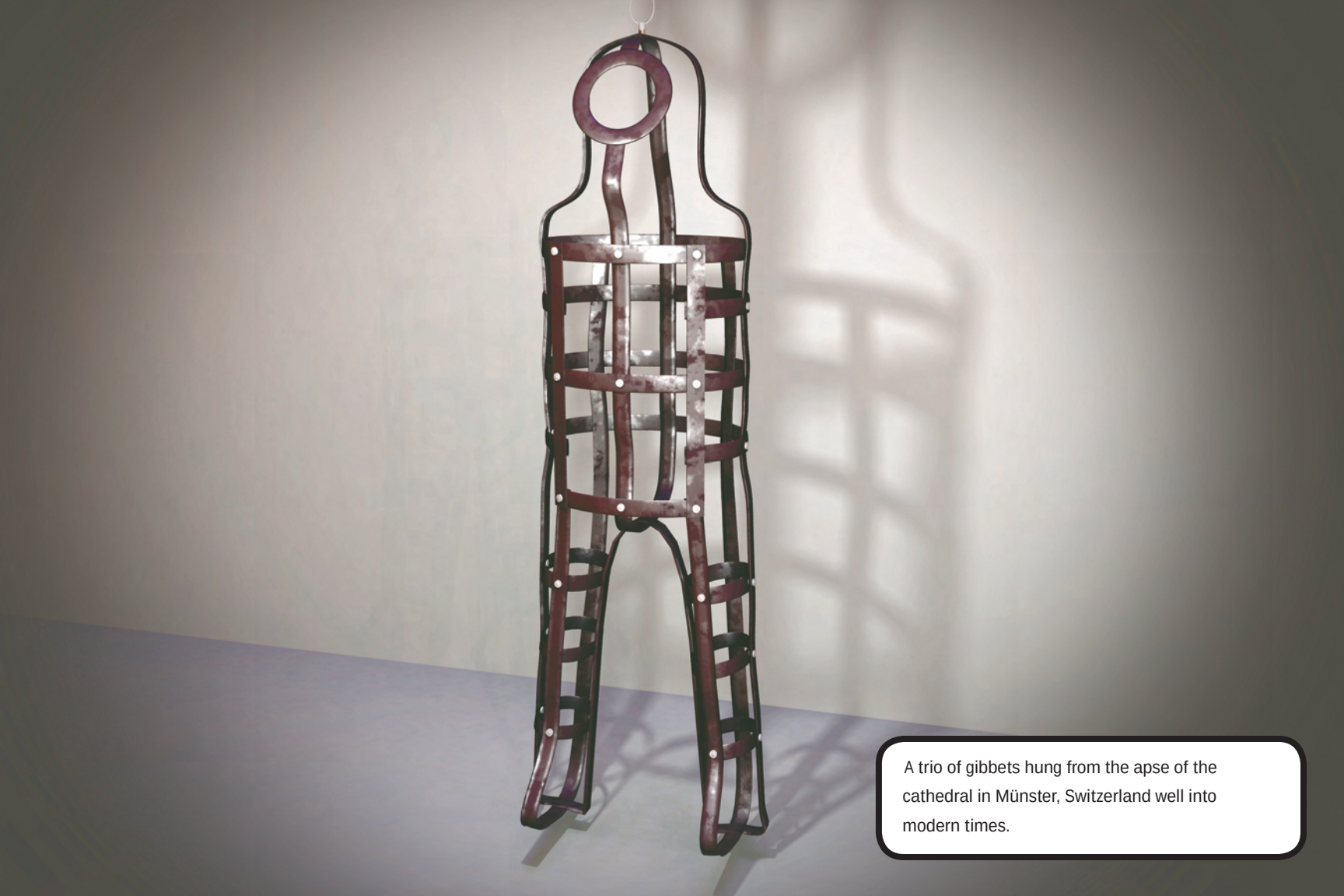
Travel through Europe during the Middle Ages and the gibbet, or “hanging cages” would have been an omnipresent sight, frequently displayed on the approaches to a town or near the site of a crime. Crow-picked corpses swayed in the wind, staring down XSRQWKHSDVVHUVEXQWLOUHGXFHGEWKHHOHPHQWVWRELWVRIFORWKDQGERQH1RWDQRIÀFLDOSXQLVKPHQWXQWLOWKHMXVWLFH VVWHPKDGDWWLPHVUXOHGWKDWH[HFXWLRQZDVQRWDVLJQLÀFDQWGHWHUUHQWIRUVRPHFULPHVDQGUHDVRQHGWKDWWKHPRUWLÀFDWLR perpetrator’s corpse would discourage all but the most hardened and ruthless criminals. After execution, the judge could decide WRGRQDWHRXUFRUSVHWRDQDWRPLVWVZKRKDGTXLWHDGLIÀFXOWWLPHREWDLQLQJERGLHVIRUGLVVHFWLRQEXWZKRZHUHRIWHQREOLJHG resurrectionists, i.e. body snatchers, but that is another, albeit interesting, story), or to hang you from a gibbet as a warning to others. 7KHRFFDVLRQDOVODWKHULQJLQWDUHQVXUHGWKDWWKLVFXULRVLWZRXOGKDYHDVLJQLÀFDQWOLIHWLPHµ

The body was either hung “in chains,” meaning a tight wrapping in iron bonds; or it was deposited in a slatted cage made of wood or iron. Either way, the resulting object was hung in a conspicuous location as a warning to all. The effectiveness was debatable, as one judge noted the practice was useless as a way to deter crime but an excellent way to frighten children. To be sure, the sights did IULJKWHQTXLWHDIHZSHRSOHLQVRPHZDRUDQRWKHUWKHSRHW:LOOLDP:RUGVZRUWKZDVVDLGWRKDYHÁGDWWKHVLJKWRIDJLEEHW7KH gibbet apparently was empty, but he ran nonetheless.

In some cases, mostly having to do with piracy, the criminal was gibbeted while still alive. *Vivum excoriari*, “alive in chains,” was a slow, painful death in which the lawbreaker lingered for days, starving and dehydrated. On the bright side, the executioner would not KDYHWRPRYHWKHERGRQFHWKHYLFWLPKDGSHULVKHG+HRUVKHZDVDOUHDGLQVWDOOHGLQWKHLUÀQDOUHVWLQJSODFH

Finally, there was another unrelated device which took the name of “gibbet”—the Halifax Gibbet was an early version of the guillotine, which was less effective at cleanly separating the head from the body, but enjoyed the same infamy as its descendant, with many beggars supposedly steering clear of Halifax for fear of being gibbeted.





A trio of gibbets hung from the apse of the cathedral in Münster, Switzerland well into modern times.

noisemaker's fife

s ctkpı pkeɡn k keɡt u ɡfke c ɡ r pku oɡp u nf ɡ etkoɡ ɡ p kuɡocmɡt u hɡ cpf ukoknct rtɡuetk ɡf cu c n h rɡpcpeɡ h t uɡ cf e ook ɡf etkoɡu u e cu fku t kpı ɡ rɡceɡ h n ncpı cıɡ e tukp

degree" (taking the Lord's name in vain), "revelry and din" in front of a church during services, and litigiousness.[1]

There were quite a few varieties of this device, the overarching theme being one of a musical instrument—trumpets, recorders, RERHVDQGÀGOHVZHUHDOOVWOLVKVKDSHV7KHFRQWUDSWLRQZDVVKDFNOHGRQRQHVLGHDURXQGWKHQHFNZKLOHIXUWKHUGRZQWKH LQVWUXPHQWµWKHKDQGVRUÀQJHUVZHUHVHFXUHGEHLWKHUDSLOORUWSHORFNZKLFKHQFORVHGWKHZULVWVDQGKHOGWKHPÀGEHIRUH WKHVXEMHFWRUDQDGMXVWDEOHFODPSZKLFKFORVHGRYHUWKHÀQJHUVOLNHWKXPEVFUHZV,IWKHUHZDVDFKRLFHLWZRXOGEHZLVHWRFKRRVH the locking pinion over the clamp—the bar was easily tightened or loosened on the whim of whoever was in charge of securing the prisoner. Wood, brass, or iron were used in construction, and a great deal of craftsmanship went into some, as evidenced by the ornate woodworking in some of the German "*Halsgeiges*" or "neck violins."

$ZLWKPDQSXQLWLYHPHDVXUHVWKHÀHVDQGÀGOHVDFFRPSDQLHGÚLWLVKFRORQLVWVWRWKH$HULFDV+HUHKRZHYHUWKHZHUH DGDSWHGWRDQDOOLURQFRQVWUXFWLRQDQGZHUHXVHGSULPDULOVRUWUDQVSRUWDWLRQDQGGLVFLSOLQHRIVODYHVIDYRULQJWKHFRQÀQLQJIXQF over the musical instrument form.

1 Modern society should be thankful that this offense is not prosecuted in this way today. The courthouse would contain what looks like half a symphony orchestra.

Also Known As:
Shrew's Fiddle

BRANKS

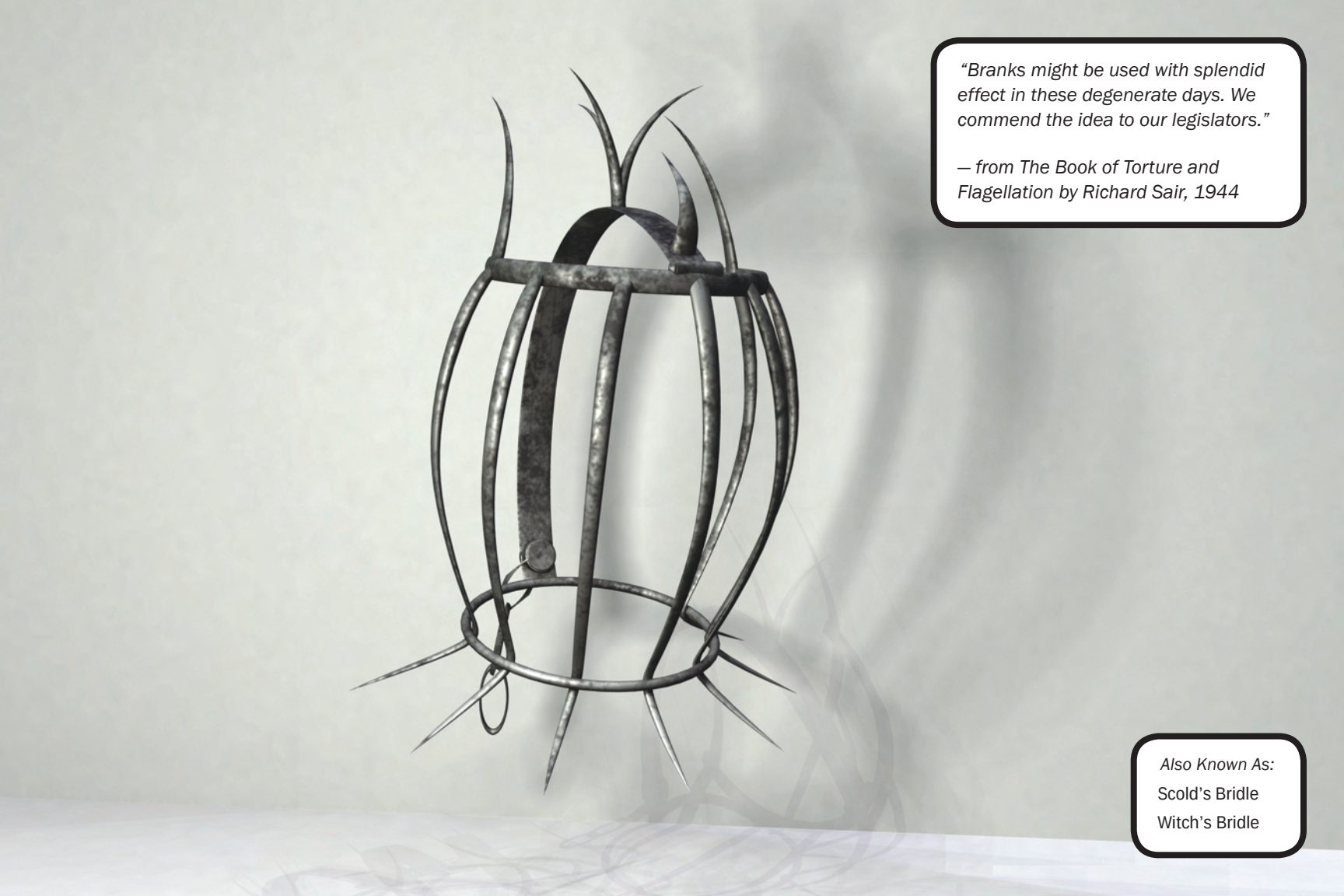
“Chester presents Walton with a bridle
To curb women’s tongues that talk too idle”
—Inscription on a brank, 1633, Walton-on-the-Thames

Branks were yet another way to punish the scolds of the time, and could have been seen as an escalation in the “war against the shrews.” The old ducking stools and pillories, after all, allowed the prisoner to verbally harass the prosecutors between dunks and while on display. The branks not only served the stools’ similar purpose of humiliating the accused, but many models also featured a way to silence the overbearing “hussy” so that there would be no chance of any back talk.

The branks appeared in Scotland in the early 1500s and their use spread quickly throughout the kingdom and subsequently DOORIW%LWDLQEHFRPLQJVRFRPPRQWKDWVRPHSULYDWHKRXVHVLQ(QJODQGIHDWXUHGDQLURQKRRNEXLOWLQWRWKHVLGHRIWKHÀUHSODFHWR accommodate the brank’s chain. The man of the house, when overly nagged, simply had to send for the gaoler and he would embark on a sort-of “torture house-call,” taking the brank to the homestead, locking the scold into the apparatus, and chaining it to the hook IRUDWLPHSHULRGMXGJHGVXIÀLHQWEWKHJDROHU

Branking quickly became a popular way to not only discipline scolds and shrewish women, but also as a way to punish “suspected witches,” “fornicators,” and “blasphemers.” These latter categories opened the ranks of men to a chastisement that was formerly reserved for women, literally demonstrating that “what’s good for the goose is good for the gander.”[1] Witches entered the fold because

1 Although it is hard to imagine that there were any men demonstrating for their right to be “brankit.”



"Branks might be used with splendid effect in these degenerate days. We commend the idea to our legislators."

— from The Book of Torture and Flagellation by Richard Sair, 1944

Also Known As:

Scold's Bridle

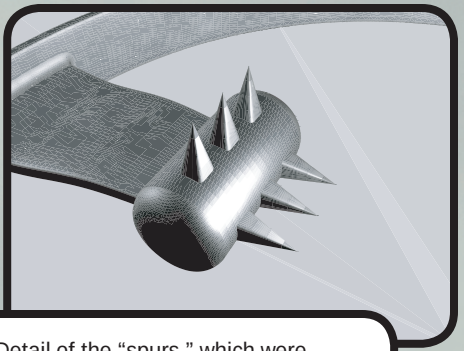
Witch's Bridle

there was a belief that they could cast spells while on trial—the brank took care of any utterance. Fornicators were those who had fathered or borne bastard children, and the blasphemers were those who had said something critical of the clergy or church. These suffered a literal superfecta of punitive measures—“brankit, stockit, dukit and banisit.”

The mechanism resembled an iron framework helmet with a lockable collar. Within the frame an iron shaft extended into the captive’s mouth. This shaft acted as a gag, pressing against the tongue and making any kind of intelligible speech impossible. To further dissuade the wearer from speaking, the gagging device could be studded with short spikes or “rowelled like a spur.” Any attempt at talking would lacerate the tongue and interior of the mouth, so most unfortunate captives would stand in silence.

7RDGGLQVXOWWRLQMXUPDQEUDQNVZHUHÀWWHGZLWKDFKDLQIRUOHDGLQJWKHRIIHQGHUWRWKHWRZQVTXDUHIRUDJRRGGRVHRISXEOLF ULGLFXOH2IWHQWLPHVDEHOOZDVÀWWHGWRWKHWRSWRDOHUWWKHWRZQVSHRSOHRIWKHDSSURDFKLQJPLVFUHDQWUHVXOWLQJLQPRVWOLNHOD stampede of citizens eager to humiliate the prisoner.

Anyone believing that torture devices were not built with a great deal of craftsmanship and ingenuity would have been disavowed RIWKDWEHOLHIDIWHUHDPLQLQJWKHPDQFRQÀXUDWLRQVRIWKHEUDQNV7KHGHVLJQVUDQJHIURPWKHSXUHOXWLOLWDULDQWRWKHIDQFLIXOZLWK the representation of asses and pigs dominating the latter. A village took great pride in the appearance of their brank and accordingly hired skilled blacksmiths for their construction.



Detail of the “spurs,” which were inserted into the mouth.

PIETY BELT

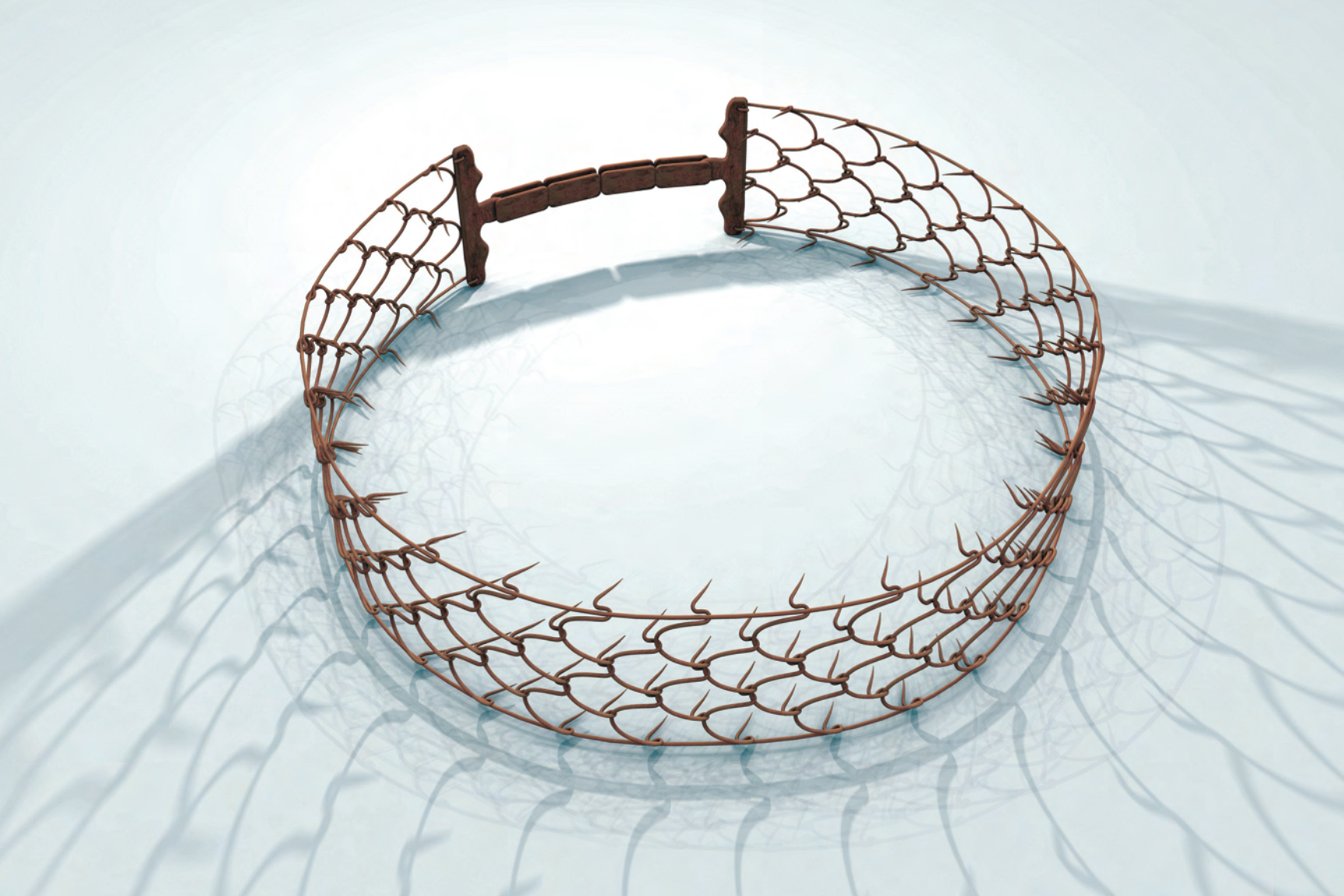
[illegible]

further and to actively seek out pain and discomfort, which would in theory allow the participant to experience a spiritual awakening.

7KHEHOWZDVFRQVWUXFWHGRILQWHUORFNLQJPHWDOORRSVZKLFKWXUQHGLQZDUGVOLNHÀ KKRRNVRUEDUEHGZLUHRYHUWZRKXQGUHGLQDO
7KHLQWHQWZDVQRWWRSHQHWUDWHWKHÁ VKEXWWRLUULWDWHDQGFDXVHJUHDWGLVFRPIRUWOLNHWKHKDLUVKLUWVZRUQE\ SHQLWHQWV+RZH
there are claims that the belt was also used on unwilling participants as a means of torture.

An unsourced story tells of a Spanish bandit who kidnaped a French woman and locked her within a particularly sharp
PRUWLÀ DWLRQEHOWS WKRXJKDEDQGLWKHDSSDUHQWO\ GUHZWKHOLQHDWUDSHK\ SRWKHVL] LQJWKDWWKHSDLQRIWKHEHOWFRXSOHGZLWK
FRQÀ HPHQWZRXOGFDXVHKHUWRJLYHKHUVHOIZLOOLQJO\ WRKLP7KHDQHFGRWHGRHVQRWUHODWHZK\ KHWKRXJKWWKDWVKHZRXOGIHHOYHU\
amorous after being perforated with the tines of the belt.

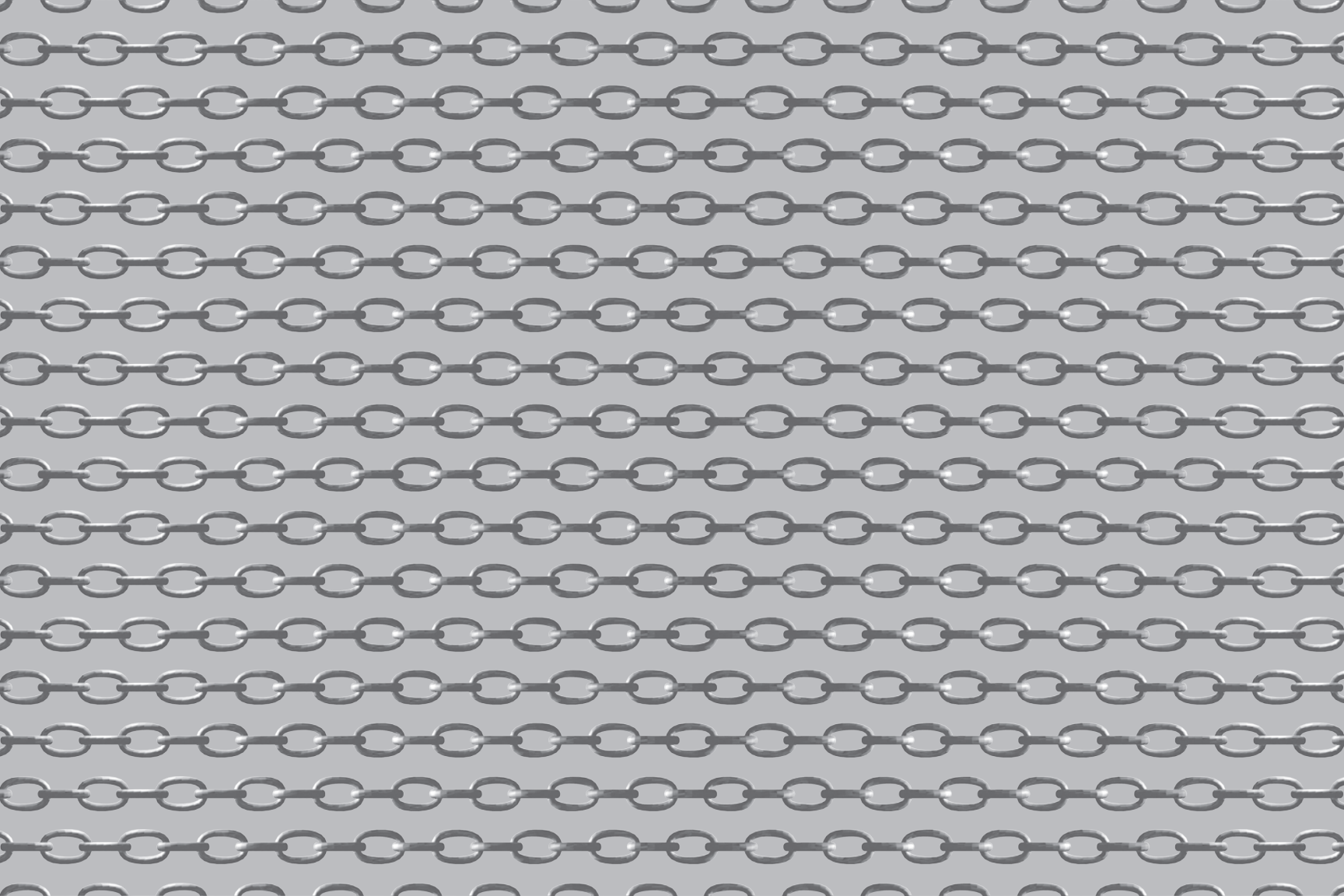
In modern times, Opus Dei (a personal prelature of the Catholic Church) does in fact allow some members to wear smaller
EHOWVZKLFKDUHÀ WWHGDURXQGWKHXSSHUWKLJK7KH\ DUHSUHVFULEHGWREHZRUQDERXWKRXUVSHUGDH[FHSWRQIHDVWGDV7KH\ DUH
absolutely not meant to break the skin, but to cause irritation.



CHAIN SCOURGE

[illegible]

have been used throughout time and throughout the world.

:KLSSLQJRUÁJJLQJKDVORQJEHHQDSXQLVKPHQWERWKHDVWRSUHVULEHDQGHDVWRLQÁFWGHVLJQDWHGIRUVXFKYDULRXVFULPHVDV thievery, illegitimate births (both for fathers and mothers), drunkenness, and blasphemy. In the military it was the long-standing cure-all for just about every infraction, and in just about every case, both military and civil, it was a public spectacle, with dedicated “whipping SRVWVZKHUHWKHSXQLVKPHQWZDVIXOÀOHG

This particular example was in use in the castle of Nuremburg. It consisted of a sturdy wooden handle carved with indentations for DEHWWHUJULSDQGWKUHHFKDLQVRIVHYHQOLQNVHDFK7KHOLQNVZHUHIRUJHGZLWKÁWVKDUSHGJHVLQRUGHUWRPRUHTXLFNOUHPRYHWKHÁVK from the back, a feat which even a leather or rope whip could easily accomplish.