

FACT SHEET #9: Sword Testing on Criminals



Swords were tests were performed on materials such as bundles of tied bamboo laden with mud, matting rolls, helmets, horn, iron and even the human body – dead or alive. A corpse was sometimes hung up and cut through either sideways or downwards.

The practice of using live human bodies is believed to have begun as a means of crime control. The sentence for a convicted thief would probably be the loss of a hand or arm.

The type of strokes was based on the severity of the crime committed.

Stroke #1, RIO-KURUMA, (Pair of Wheels), being the most difficult to perform as the blade must pass through both hip bones at the thickest area, was the least often successful with one stroke. RIO-KURUMA was prescribed for only the most serious of crimes.

The ease of performance increases with the number, #18 being the least difficult.

Swords were tested only by licensed testers at official testing grounds. The results of the test along with the date and name of the tester were then inscribed on the tang of the sword.

