

The Great Migrations

The story of the populating of Polynesia is an account of a long voyage, a maritime epic. Audacious seafarers traversed the Great Ocean aboard swift but fragile double canoes of wood and reeds. Experts in the art of navigation, they crossed the "blue continent" to find lands where they could establish their civilization.

Their long voyage from islands to atolls began in New Caledonia where the most ancient traces of a population have been found with the Lapita potteries. The dating of the occupation of the Pacific islands, even today, is a matter of controversy. Nonetheless, it is possible to retrace approximately the Great Voyage of this migratory people: Vanuatu 3300 years ago; Fiji 3000 years ago; the Marquesas Islands 1000 years later. The presence in this archipelago of ani-

mals (pig, dog, jungle cock) typical of native species found far to the West lends credence to the thesis of a migration originating in Southeast Asia. After a pause of a few centuries, a new migratory wave left the Marquesas to explore what has become the Polynesian Triangle. They reached Easter Island about 1500 years ago, Tahiti and Hawaii about 200 years later and, finally, New Zealand, less than 900 years before the present day. Awareness of the magnitude of these migrations allows better understanding of the geographical and cultural expanse of the practice of tattooing in the South Pacific, and the singularities unique to each archipelago. Even more important are the extraordinary similarities found among the motifs and symbols that decorate the bodies of the Polynesians.

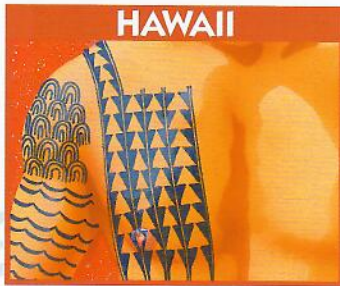


POLYNESIAN TATTOOS

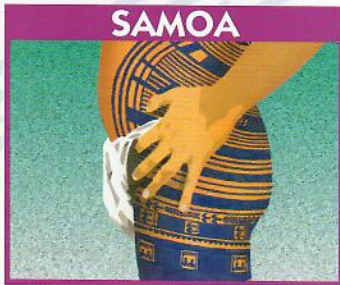
The common patterns of tattooing in Polynesia are essentially geometric. They are arrangements of small triangles in blocks or intricate designs. There are checkerboards on the torso; dotted or solid lines, straight, in arches or in spirals, on the belly, back, arms and legs. Equally popular were representations of humans (ancestors, heroes...), animals and plants, all designs simple in the extreme. With the men of the Society Islands, the Tuamotu and Hawaii, their torsos



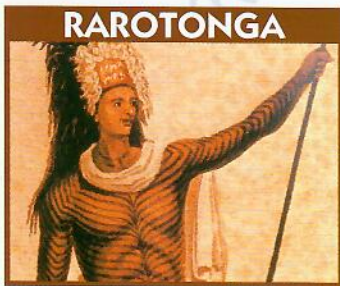
From the Museum of Tahiti and its Islands Collection



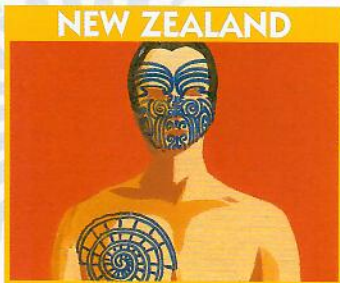
HAWAII



SAMOA

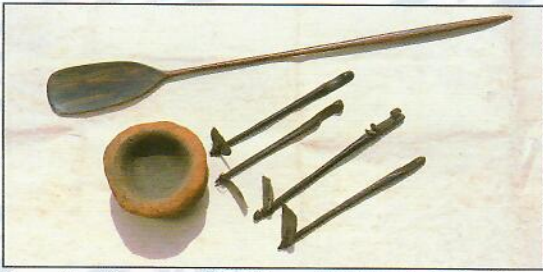


RAROTONGA



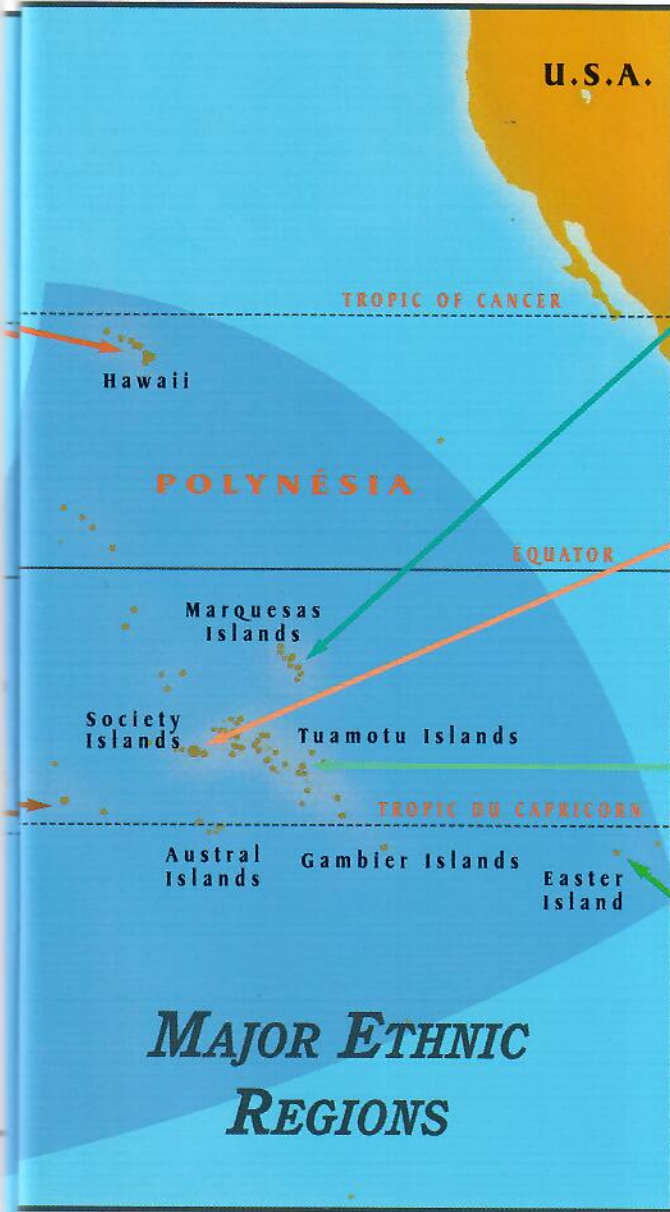
NEW ZEALAND



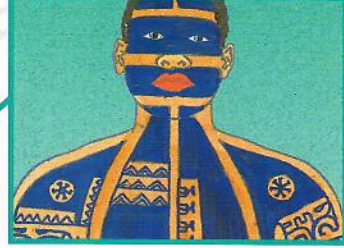


From the Museum of Tahiti and its Islands Collection

were the most heavily tattooed, while in New Zealand and the Samoas the faces and the legs were the most densely decorated. In the Marquesas, as well as on certain islands in Micronesia, and doubtless on Easter Island, the men's entire bodies were covered with intricate tattooing. On the other hand, the women were more commonly tattooed on their lips, their hands, buttocks, sex, the calves of their legs and only occasionally on the breast, belly and thighs.



MARQUESAS ISLANDS



SOCIETY ISLANDS



TUAMOTU - AUSTRALS - GAMBIER



EASTER ISLANDS



The First Contacts in between Europeans and Tattoos

A LITTLE HISTORY

For thousands of years, and in nearly all civilizations, men have pierced their skin and injected pigment.

A sign of recognition, a treatment for illness or a protection against natural or supernatural threats, traces of this practice are found among the most ancient and diverse peoples: Neolithic hunters, Siberian princesses, ancient Greeks, Japanese grooms... This technique, found throughout human history, reached a surprising intensity in the Polynesian Triangle. Marquesan tattooing could be considered the culmination of the art, given the quality and intricacy of their designs. Bodies totally covered with motifs of such diversity that certain observers believed they discerned the rudiments of a form of writing. The early European "discoverers" of these islands were so impressed that lavishly tattooed "volunteers" were sought to accompany them on their return to Europe. In a sense, they were considered specimens in the collections of local artifacts. In this manner, Omai, the first Tahitian carried back to the West by Captain James Cook, rapidly became famous. He was frequently a guest in the most sophisticated salons of London, where he would show his tattoos to the assemblage. The President of the Royal Academy himself sought to paint his portrait. Europe demonstrated at this time a growing interest in these islanders on



Omai, the first Tahitian to discover Europe



the other side of the world, at the same time as developed the Rousseauist myth of the Noble Savage. Moreover, a large number of seamen, crew members of these expeditions into the South Pacific had themselves tattooed during their stopovers in the islands, thus beginning the tradition of the tattooed sailor.

Jean-Baptiste Cabri, a Frenchman who deserted ship in the Marquesas around the end of the eighteenth century, had his body completely tattooed in the tradition of these islands. When he returned to Europe, he made his living exhibiting his tattoos in country fairs. Upon his death, his skin was removed, preserved and exhibited.

The most memorable accounts concerning the Polynesian tattoos are doubtless those of the so-called "Beachcombers", those European castaways among the islands of the South Pacific who, by wish or by force, were covered with the tribal motifs of their hosts. Another European, John Rutherford, was forced into having his face tattooed while he was beachcombing in New Zealand, around 1880. Nicknamed the White Chief, he decided that, before returning to Europe, he would complete his tattoos. He visited the Society Islands where he had his torso completely covered. He realized that adding other motifs to his original "moko" would make his appearance even more sensational on his return to England. What's more, his efforts were crowned with success.

O'Connell, known as the tattooed Irishman, lived 11 years in Micronesia following a shipwreck. Widely known as a dancer and storyteller, once back in America, he dramatized his capture by the natives and described his experience with tattooing.

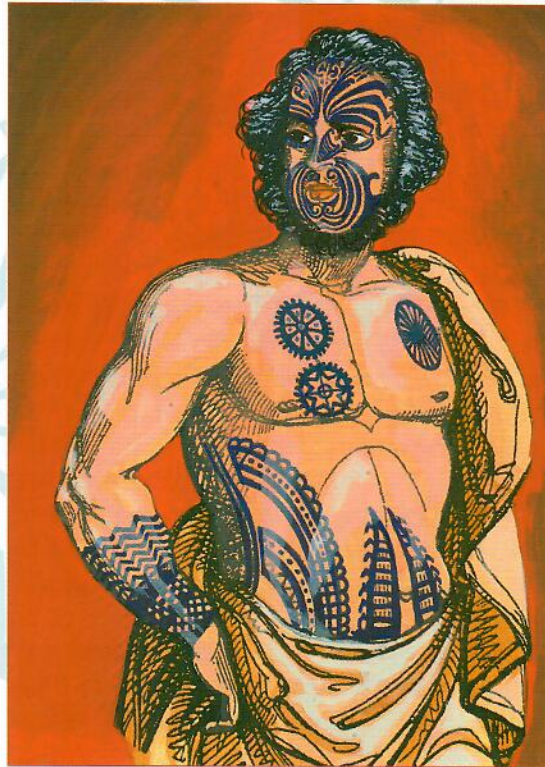
In his words, "It took eight days of work on the different parts of my body — my back, my legs and my abdomen were also tattooed — until I resembled a rhinoceros, by the skin but not by my shape".

O'Connell, once back in America, joined the "Lion Circus", then the circus of P. T. Barnum, becoming the first tattooed man exhibited in an American circus. He was working in the Dan Rice circus when he died, in 1850.

We owe the English word "tattoo" to the seamen in the crew of Captain James Cook. Its roots are found in the Polynesian word "tatau", stemming from "ta", meaning to strike or collide with.



J. B. Cabris, a Frenchman in the Marquesas, 1795 to 1804



J. Rutherford - 1905





Hawaiian dancer



Marquesan woman - K. von Steinen

The Women

Although banned by Pomare Vahine at the insistence of the missionaries, the practice of tattooing was an integral part of the life of a Polynesian from birth. The missionaries, however, saw in it only an obvious association with pagan beliefs and their attendant debaucheries.

Tradition demanded that each newborn baby, coming out of Po (the original night where were found the spirits and the gods) should be tattooed with various signs through its entire childhood. This would render it, little by little, less taboo.

The first signs were tattooed on the elbow. Without these, the baby was not freed of the taboo relative to its nourishment. It could neither eat at the family table nor consume any other food, than that prepared exclusively by its mother.

Later, the girls were made to submit to the tattooing of their hands, in order to be able to prepare the family meal. Finally, with the appearance of the first signs of puberty, the young Polynesians were obliged to submit

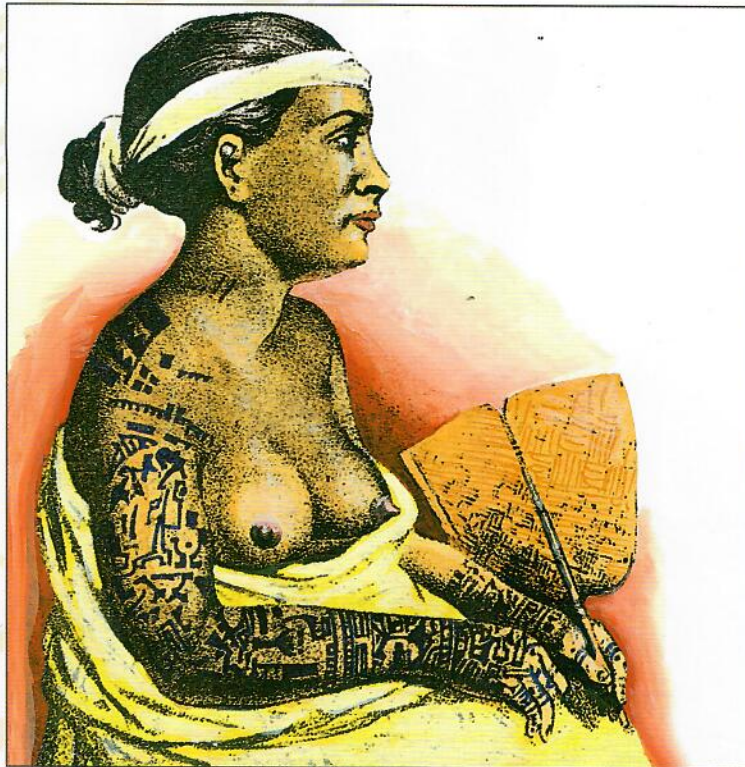


Marquesan woman





Tattoo motifs for the ears - Marquesas



Paetini, Marquesan woman descendant of a chiefly family of Nuku Hiva



Maori woman of New Zealand

to all the ritual tattooing prerequisite to participating in the daily activities of the village, and, particularly, to marry.

The young girls were tattooed on their buttocks, with graceful arches covering the haunches.

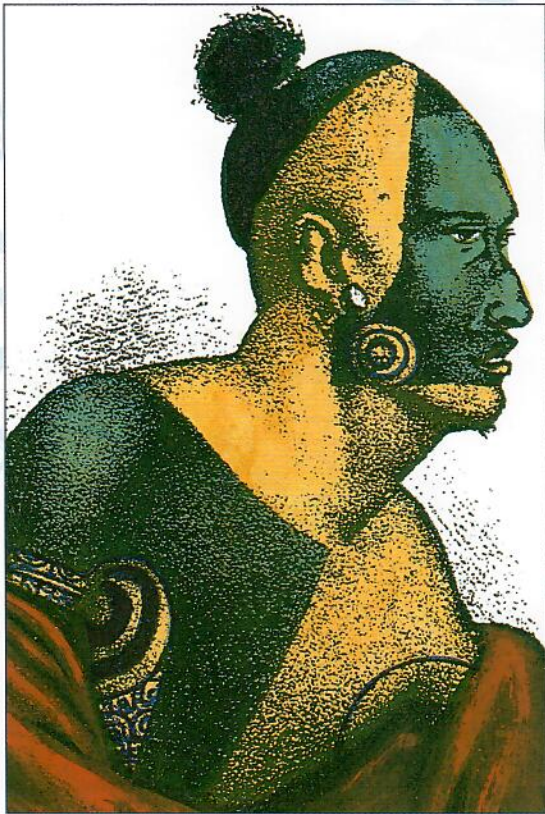
The young boys were expected to submit to the trial of extensive tattooing without flinching before the considerable pain involved, to demonstrate their courage.

After these first tattoos of a quasi-obligatory nature, the Polynesians continued adding to their tattoos throughout their lives, the objective being more esthetic than ritual.

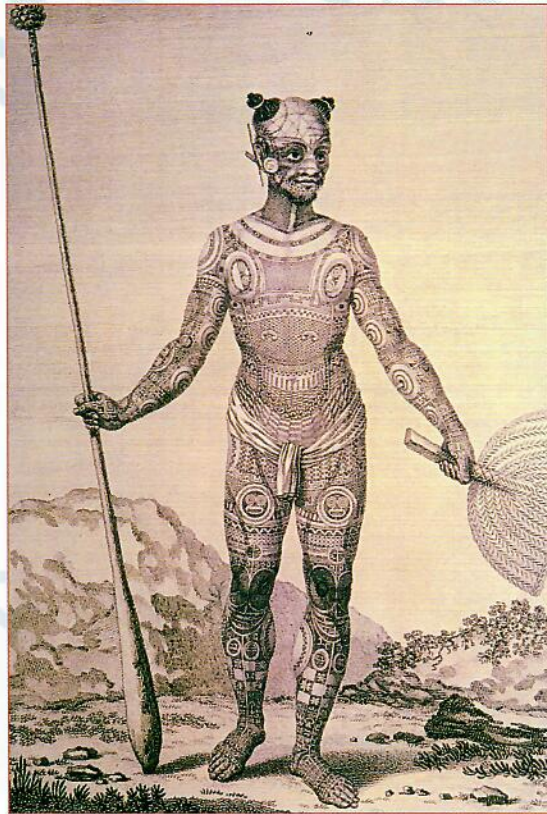
The young girls were expected to refuse the advances of a not yet tattooed suitor, as he did not wear the signs of his strength and his courage. Furthermore, considered as an erotic stimulant, tattooing became even more readily bearable, and very few young people sought to escape it.

Finally, certain motifs of an indeterminate symbolism were applied to the skin simply for the pleasure of having them. The women decorated themselves with indelible jewelry — earrings, necklaces or finger rings...





Man of the Marquesas Islands - B. Le Guillou



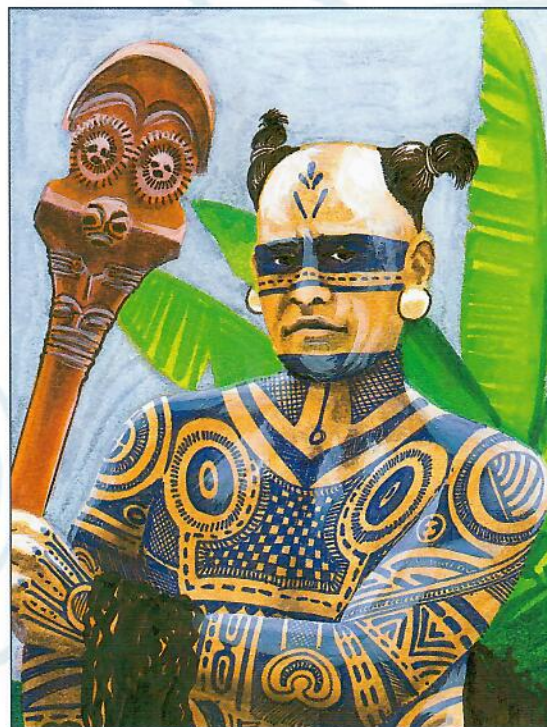
Marquesan from Nuku Hiva

The Men

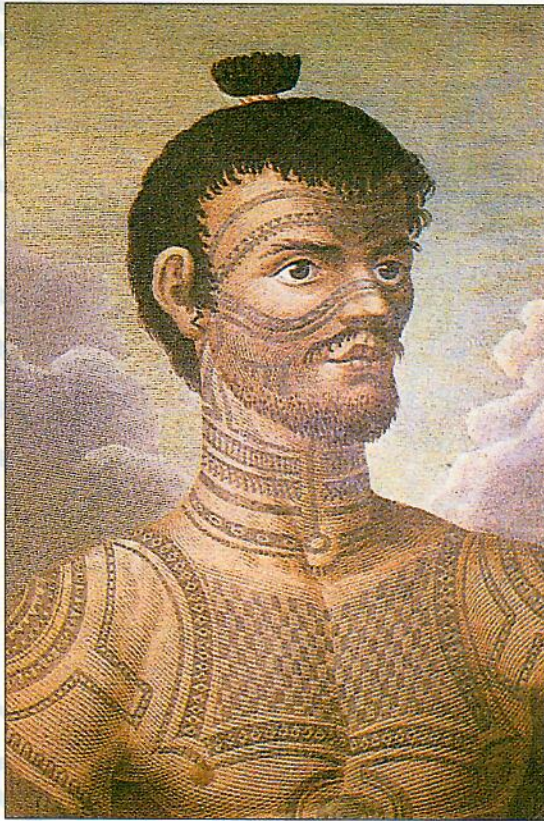
The men, for their part, often ornamented their bodies from the perspective of warriors, using hypnotic motifs believed to reinforce the resistance of body armor. They also had their eyelids tattooed, supposedly to increase their power. Certain symbols were even tattooed with an eye toward weakening the "mana" of an adversary, or to attract it to the advantage of the tattooed.

In the Marquesas Islands the tattoo motifs were remarkably graphic, following all the curves of the body, while those of the Society Islands were more representational. It is said that certain chiefs sported coconut palm designs on their legs or even had scenes of battles they had won delineated on their torsos.

Tattooing also had, in all the archipelagos of the Polynesian Triangle, a talismanic significance. Certain tattooed figures were believed to confer on the bearer both protection and power.



Marquesan warrior



Marquesan from Nuku Hiva



Hawaiian warrior

In the Hawaiian Islands, the fishermen believed themselves protected against shark bite by a row of points tattooed around the ankle.

In the Marquesas, a motif resembling the swells of the Great Ocean, if tattooed on the shoulder gave the canoe paddlers exceptional vigor to combat high running seas. At the time of the first contacts, the early explorers concluded that the more numerous and varied a man's tattoos were the higher the rank he held in his social hierarchy. Also, certain motifs served to differentiate the various social castes.

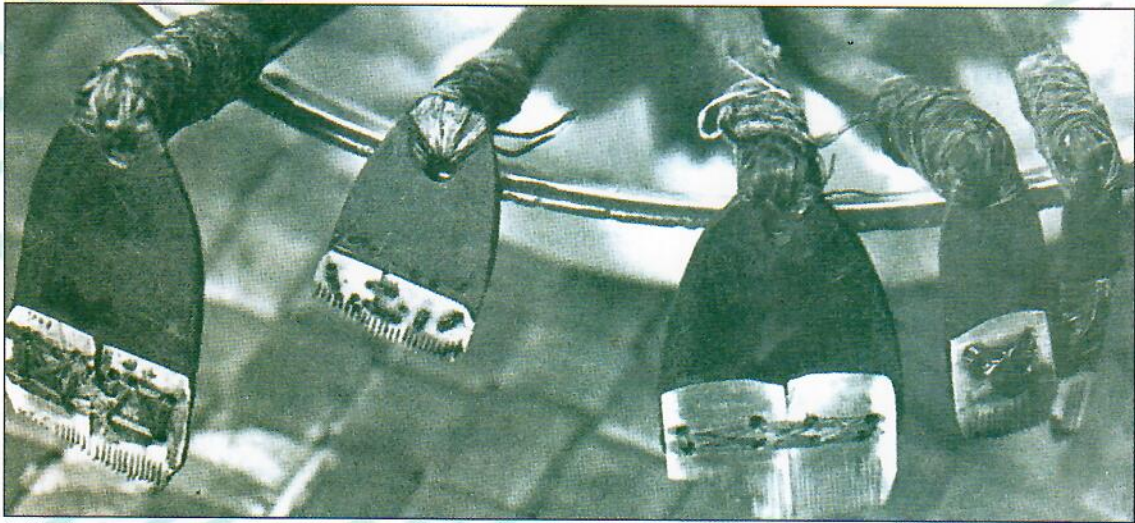
The example of the Arioi, a privileged group, traveling from island to island to lend their prestige to the celebration of major festivals such as a bountiful harvest or the investiture of a new chief, provides a case in point. Each degree of initiation was accompanied by tattoos specific to the occasion, and those of the most exalted rank were almost totally covered by these intricate designs.

Alain BABAZAN thus described the distinctive tattoos denoting the ascending grades of the Arioi :

"1. Small marks on the backs of the knees — 2. A ring around the ankle — 3. A thin line on the left flank — 4. Two or three small points on each shoulder — 5. Light designs on the backs of the hands and wrists, and more accentuated designs on the arms and shoulders — 6. Tattoos of curves and straight lines running obliquely from the base of the spine outward to the flanks and as high as the middle of the back — 7. Filigree tattoos originating in the armpits and running down the front of the body — 8. Legs tattooed up to the tops of the hips. For the highest rank, Morrison mentions also 'a black oval tattooed on the left breast and another one below the right shoulder blade. The legs and haunches are blackened from the ankles up to the floating ribs and the arms from the fingers to the shoulders'."



GENERAL INFORMATION ON TATTOOS AND TATTOOING



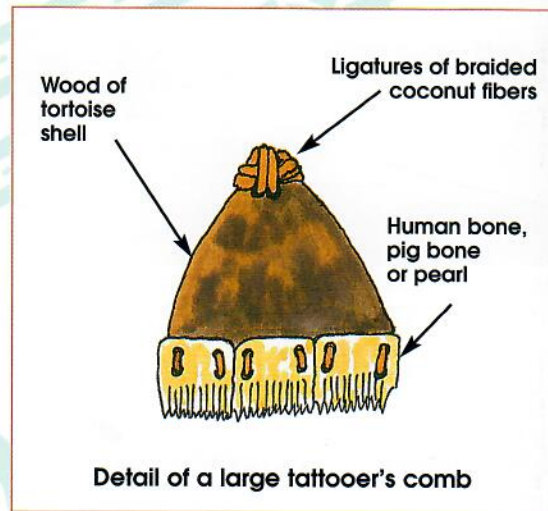
Tattooing combs (photos by B. Moos; extracts from "Polynesian Tattooing" by A. Taylor - from OTAC library)



Demonstration of traditional tattooing

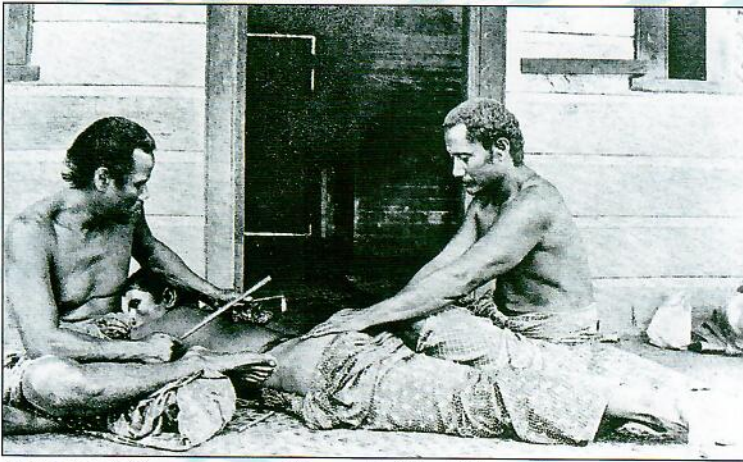
Tattooers, Techniques and Instruments

The tattooers were important and respected personages in the ancient Polynesian society. Artisan priests, holders of ancestral knowledge, their art was indispensable to the proper development of community life. They played as much a part in the important ceremonies that brought together the entire village as they did in the intimacy of normal village life. Access to the art of tattooing was open to any one who expressed a desire to learn it. It was necessary to serve a long apprenticeship at the side of



one of the masters of the art to learn all its secrets. These secrets combined a vast knowledge of the religious rituals with a highly developed manual dexterity in the manipulating of the instruments involved. These tools of the trade consisted of "combs" of bones, pearl shell or animal teeth. Dipped in a black dye, they were driven into the flesh by sharp blows from a long mallet, tapped in cadence.

In New Zealand, tradition demanded the use of small adzes or chisels which "sculpted" the flesh before the dye was introduced. As soon as the novice mastered enough of his trade, he began to practice on the women and the members of the lowest class of society. Later, having acce-

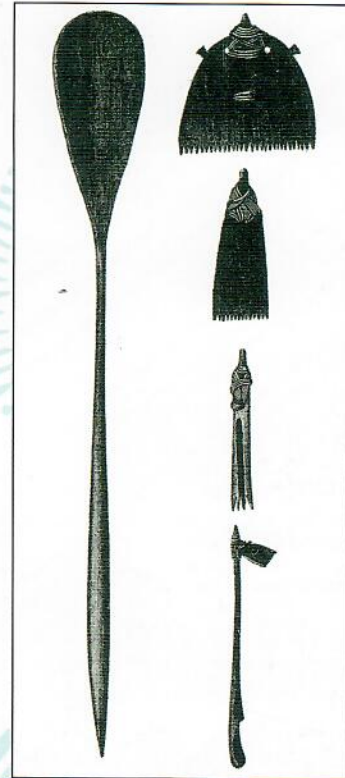


Tattooing in Samoa around the end of the 19th century

Tricia Allen: "A father was obliged to economize for several years to pay for the tattooing of his eldest son. It was nothing so simple as just paying the master tattooer, the Tuhuna. There were also the considerable expenses involved in feeding the artist and his assistants as well as a large group of ka'ioi, the non-tattooing aides who erected a special building for the occasion." Payment frequently took the form of pigs, tapas, finery, war clubs and, more recently, rifles. The tuhuna were paid for their decorations according to the quality of their work and the time spent completing it. The process of tattooing was long and periods of rest were necessary. In addition, a tattoo often required retouching or a deepening of its color, which faded with the passage of time.

ded to the rank of master tattooer, his services were paid for by gifts of tapas, food, weapons...

Father Garcia, who was a missionary to the Marquesas from 1839 to 1842, in his letters to the Marquesas Islands (1843) described, as follows, a tattooing seance. "The patient reclined on a straw pallet, surrounded by several companions who held him down as if for most painful surgery. The young tattooer, leaning over him, with his pots of colors and his bradawls — bits of needle sharp fish bones — at his side, designed a thousand very pretty figures, laces, embroideries, drawings of fish. Then, once the overall design was traced, he sank in the skin the needles dipped in the indelible inks." The tattooers had little opportunity to create or innovate. The motifs and their locations on the body were codified by a mass of tradition. Any variation from ancient wisdom could be sanctioned only by a tribunal of master tattooers. All the same, the great master tattooers, knowing perfectly the tradition, managed to create arrangements of the motifs through which their work could be recognized without defiling tradition. At the time of the operation, the tattooer



*Tattooing instruments
mallet and combs*

surrounded himself with several assistants. They were charged with restraining the subject, drawing his skin tight and wiping up the blood that was never to be allowed to fall on the ground. The gods were invoked to aid healing and that they give their blessings to the tattooer and the tattooed. When the tattooing of a chief's son was finished, for example, all the taboos relating to the operation were lifted. The entire village participated in the grand ceremonies that marked the completion of the ordeal.

INSIGNIA AND MOTIFS

Thanks to the descriptions of the naturalists Joseph Banks and Charles Darwin, and to the analyses of Karl von den Steinen who was especially interested in the Marquesas Islands, the traditional art of Polynesian tattooing is relatively well known to us. The tattoos copied by the artists who accompanied the explorers of the 18th and the early 19th century have made it possible for today's anthropologists to develop a certain knowledge of this important mode of artistic expression in ancient Polynesia.



Tattoo patterns

Windward and Leeward Islands

As concerns the Society Islands, there remain to us but a few descriptions by Joseph Banks and sketches of F. Marant-Boissaveur to help us imagine the development of the art of tattooing in this island group. We do know that the face was never tattooed. The women wore a motif consisting of a string of Z's around the articulations of fingers and toes, as well as on the upper surfaces of the feet.

For both sexes, the most common motifs were expressed in geometric figures (circles, crescents, rectangles...) and were used to decorate arms, legs and, on occasion, the shoulders.

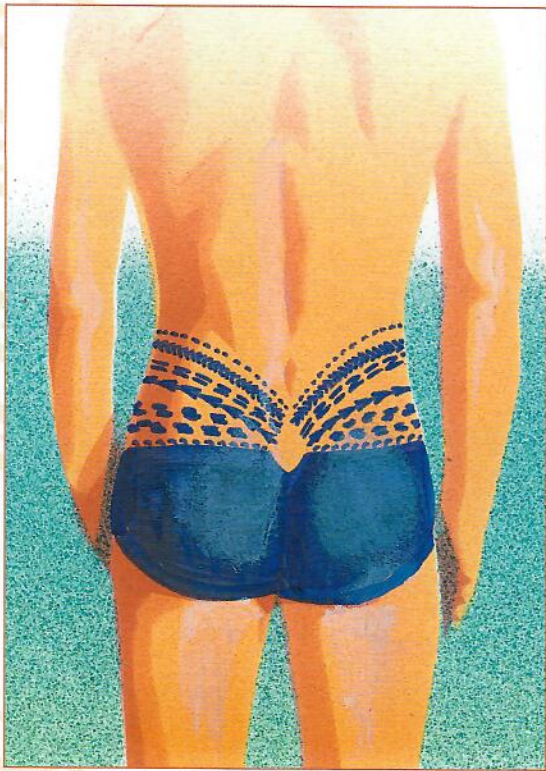
Another trait characteristic of the Society Island motifs: representational subjects (animals, plants, fish...), were reserved for the men.

Finally, the tattoos applied during the ceremonies of passage from adolescence to adulthood completely covered the buttocks in blue, with geometric motifs being drawn in arcs from the base of the spine to the hips.

During his stay on Tahiti, Banks had numerous opportunities to observe the Polynesian tattoos. He recorded his observations in his "Endeavour Journal". "They insert the color black under their skin in such a manner that it is indelible. All are decorated on different parts of their bodies, in all likelihood as their fantasies dictate, or inspired by momentous events that have marked their lives. Certain have representations of men, birds or dogs, but the majority of the women wear only the figure Z on their finger joints, their toes and on the upper surfaces of their feet. Other motifs — squares, circles, crescents — decorate the arms and legs of both sexes.

In general, the faces were exempt from all tattooing. I saw only one example. A very few of the older men had their bodies almost entirely covered with large black plaques edged in a saw-toothed design.

Those with whom we were talking told us that they were not native to Tahiti, but from a low island [atoll] called Noouora."



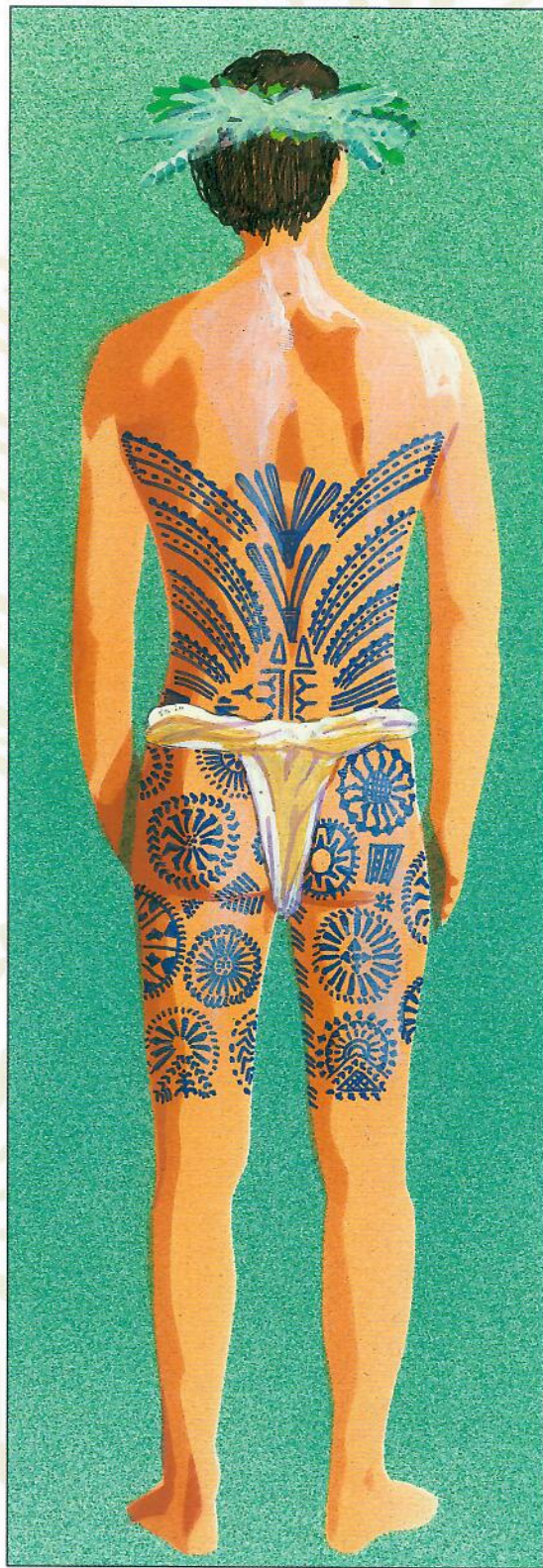
Tahiti - "The blue buttocks" (S. Parkinson - 1769)

The Men

("Tahiti Autrefois — Bengt Danielson)

Each man followed his fantasies in the number of lines or in the design, some having only one wide line, others having four or five narrower bands decorated with small stars, leafy twigs, etc. The men also had their feet, legs, thighs, arms tattooed, but the women had only a little tattooing around the ankle and rarely on the arms. Otherwise, they had only small decorative tattoos on their hands, as, for the women, it was considered ridiculous to have tattoos other than the ritual motifs on buttocks, feet and hands. For the men, however, no one paid attention to their decorative excesses.

The ornaments around the ankle and across the arch of the foot often gave the impression that the men were wearing elegant Western sandals. The sides of their legs were occasionally tattooed, beginning at the ankle, again giving a false impression that they were wearing trousers with decorative stitching. Beginning at the base of the spine, straight, undulant or zig-zag lines paralleled the length of the spinal column, branching regularly and



Man of the Society Islands, Tahiti (W. Smyth - 1826)

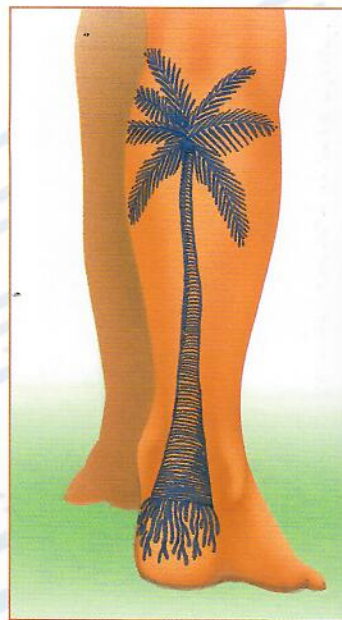
TAHITI AND THE SOCIETY ISLANDS

symmetrically to both sides and toward the shoulders. The chest was the most tattooed part of the upper torso.

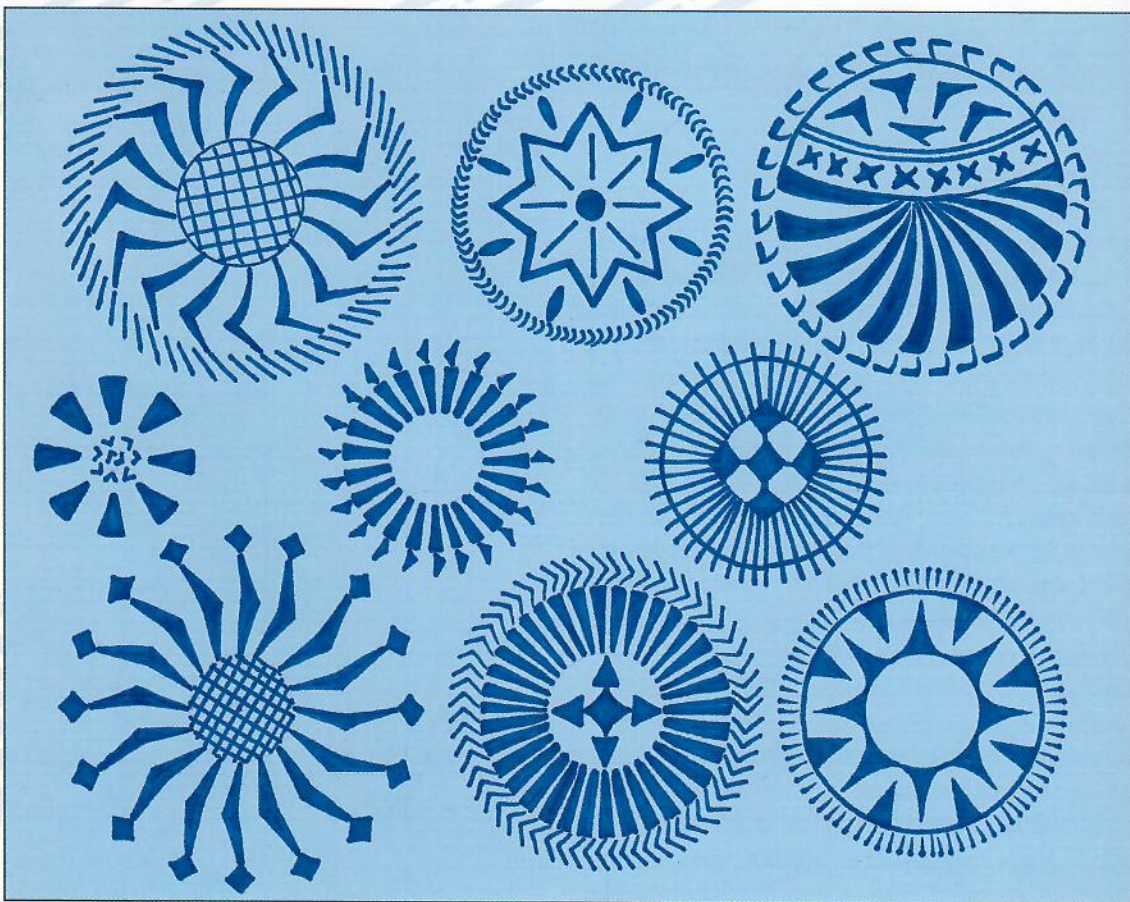
According to W. Ellis,
"The coconut palm is a favorite subject, and I often admired the taste shown in the tattooing of the legs of the chiefs. There, I saw a coconut palm accurately and precisely depicted, the roots spreading out over the heel, the supple trunk following the lines of the tendons, the graceful fronds spreading around the calf of the leg. On occasion, several trunks were intertwined at the heel and ankle, spreading out at the calf, each crowned with its plume of leaves and fruit."



Patterns in friezes



Tattoo of a coconut palm on the calf of a Tahitian chief



Circular tattoo patterns

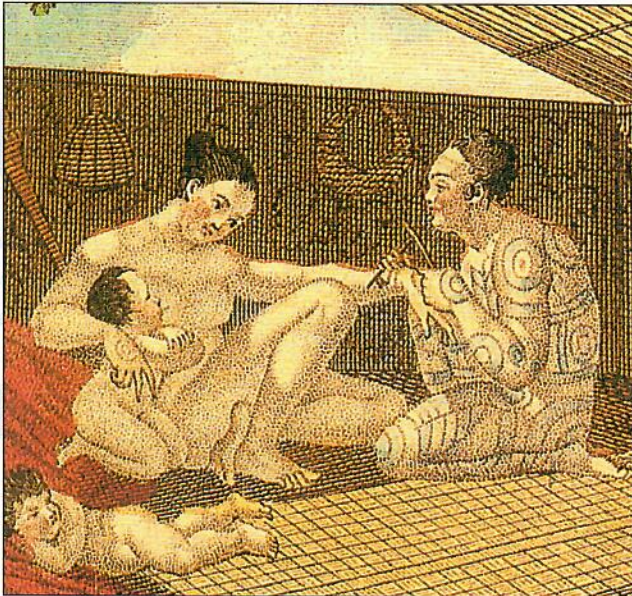


Tattoos on the legs and feet of Tahitian women

The Women

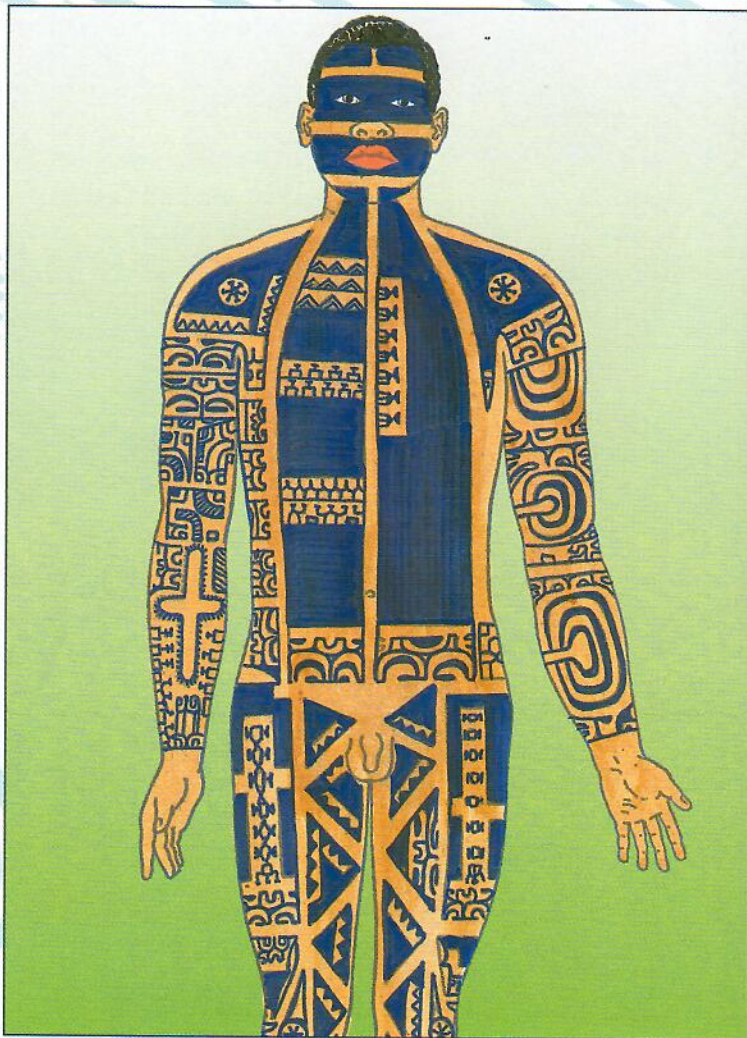
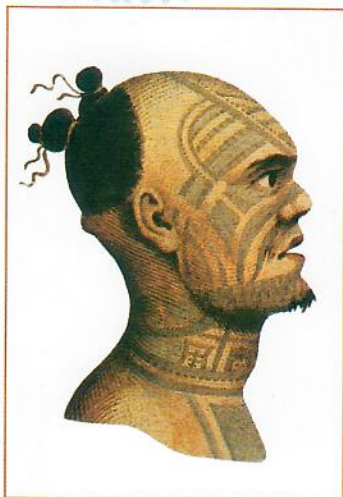
"I personally witnessed the tattooing of the buttocks of a girl about 14 years old on 5 July (1769). At the beginning, she supported the operation with great determination, but, later on, she began to complain. Very rapidly the pain became so atrocious that all the threats and strength of her friends barely managed to oblige her to continue the operation. I happened to be in an adjoining house for more than an hour after the operation had begun. I left well before it was finished, and it was a matter of blackening only one buttock, the other one having been tattooed some weeks previously."

European engraving - a fantasized and toned down perception of a session of tattooing - 1813



Woman of the Society Islands, drawn by W. Smyth 1826





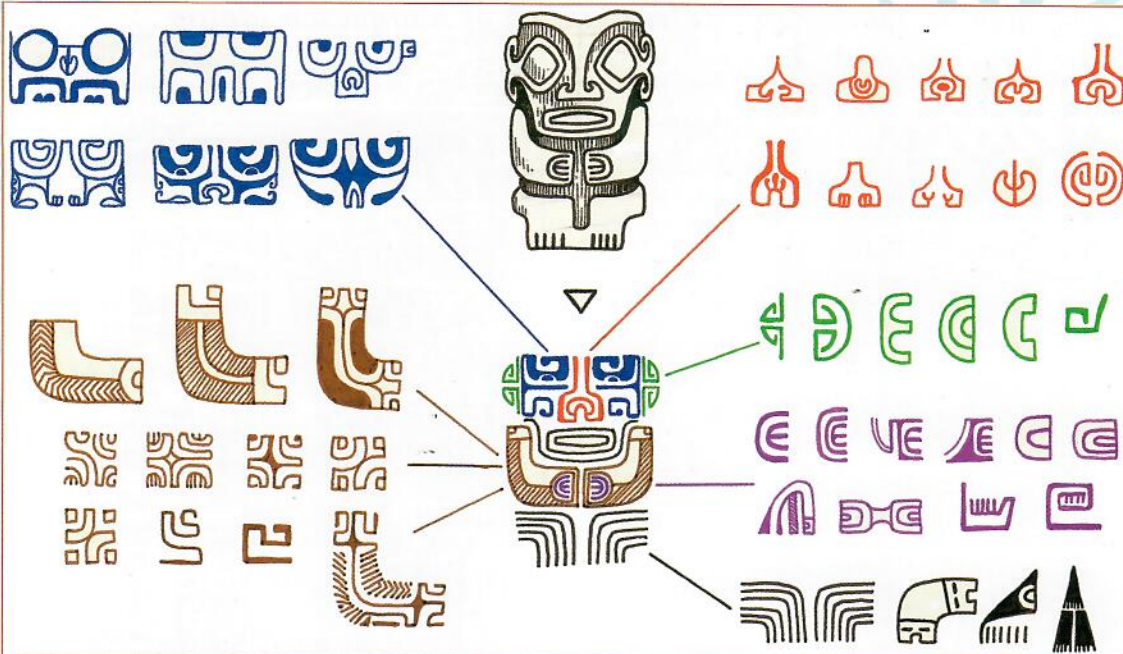
Marquesan tattoos, as drawn by K. von Steinen

The Art of Tattooing

The isolation and remoteness of the Marquesas Islands have lent effective protection to their ancient traditions. With space as its buffer, this archipelago was best able to resist the cultural frictions occasioned by the consecutive arrivals of the Western Powers and the missionaries.

It is for this reason that, at the beginning of the 20th century, a large number of individuals tattooed in the traditional manner were still to be found in the Marquesas. This explains our far more extensive knowledge today of the art of tattooing practiced in these islands than of that performed in the rest of Polynesia.

The bodies of both men and women, including their faces, were completely covered with complex geometric motifs. The motifs proliferated prodigiously, but it is possible to distinguish some large decorative families. In



"The features of the Tiki became traditional symbols representing the eyes, the ears, the nose... all used to construct more important, or intricate, figures, or to fill in a background with a pattern that was purely decorative. Using the double whorl of the tiki's ear as a basic figure, the tattooers gave themselves over to endless fantasies. One finds the visage of the tiki faithfully reproduced in tortoise shell or wood, but, little by little, it has become stylized in tattooing. A true copy is never made. The mouth, is generally left out completely, and the upper part of the face is usually simplified to the point where it is no longer recognizable for what it is." (according to W. Handy)

Tattoo motifs derived from a classic face of a tiki

first place comes the Tiki, the deified ancestor. All its features were utilized separately. The ears, the nose, the eyes were highly stylized or, to the contrary, became the objects of sheer fantasy. The face of a Tiki was occasionally recomposed from animal and plant motifs into a very complex ensemble that was generally tattooed on the knees or calves of the legs. The symbols derived from the extremities of the Tiki were numerous. The symbol of the hand perhaps has generated the most motifs for tattoos.

The motifs inspired by the animal kingdom are also numerous. The lizard (mo'ho) and the turtle (kea) both hold prominent places. In the past, the lizard was tattooed on the faces of men of high rank. It is very likely that an identical motif gave its name to the Moko of the Maoris of New Zealand. As concerns the turtle, it is often used but one has difficulty recognizing it, so much have the tattooers symbolized or simplified it.

THE ART OF OCEANIA - Nicholas Thomas

In the Marquesas, the extensive use of the turtle and anthropomorphic designs in their tattooing indicate that they are a source of strength.

Occasionally, a turtle was sacrificed in place of a human being. Its special status can be explained by the ambiguity of its amphibious nature. Its travels between land and sea bring to mind the voyage of the dead who cross the sea to reach the other world. These animals were suited even better for their symbolic representation in the tattoos because their carapaces suggested strongly the armor, that protective skin the tattoos were believed to furnish.

The tattooer's art is also exemplified by representations of the cliff swallow and the tropic bird. The first was tattooed traditionally on the shoulder of the men and the second on the index finger of the women, without

Symbolism of the Motifs - Interpretation of Marquesan Motifs



**LEGENDARY
MAN AND HEROS**

ENATA - Enata - The living man, the flesh and blood descendent, as opposed to the ancient deity that is the tiki

POHU - With his house
His brothers and sisters, without legs

TEFIO - The wife of Kena whom this hero sought in the nether world by diving into the waters of Kena or the pool of Kena

ANIMALS

Fish heads

MO'O OU KAKAA - Lizard

HONU OU KEA - Turtle

HAHAVA - Giant ray and
VAU - White ray

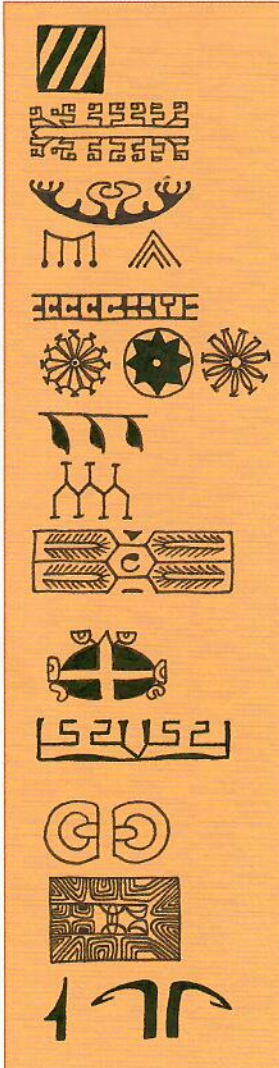
PA'A'OA - Whale

PAKIEI - Crab

PAKAA - Small shrimp

PUHI - Eel

TOAKE ou KOTAE - Tropic bird



PLANTS

KOTAA - Aerial roots of the banyan tree

KOHE - Bamboo

FA'A ou FARA - Branches and roots of the pandanus

PAPA HUETU - Stalk of wild bananas

PUA HUE - Pumpkin blossom

ATIU - Melon

ANIATA - Sugar cane

KOUA'EHU - coconut palm fronds held in the hand of the priest

DOMESTIC IMPLEMENTS

PU - The chief's conch shell blown to call the villagers into important assembly

PATEA - Forked sticks on which food was hung to protect it from rats

IPU - Bowls and goblets of coconut shell

TAA - Harpoons and Metau -

METAU - fish hooks

which insignia the ladies were excluded from participating in certain ceremonies. The Marquesan tattoos of course included many motifs drawn from the fauna of the ocean, element to which the Polynesians were strongly attached. Fish, detailing teeth, scales, skeleton, fins..., whale, giant ray, shark, crustaceans, crab or coquillage. Many of these motifs were so stylized that often they could be identified only by their names, their appearance having become unrecognizable.

An entire series of motifs illustrated the daily occupations and activities of the Polynesians: The fish hooks of the fishermen, their spears and nets, the fields and tools of the farmers, the carved bowls and cups used for the preparation and storage of food, the conch shell used by the chief to call his people together, the mats and baskets and the rolls of tapa cloth... All the daily life of the Marquesans could be found depicted on their skins.



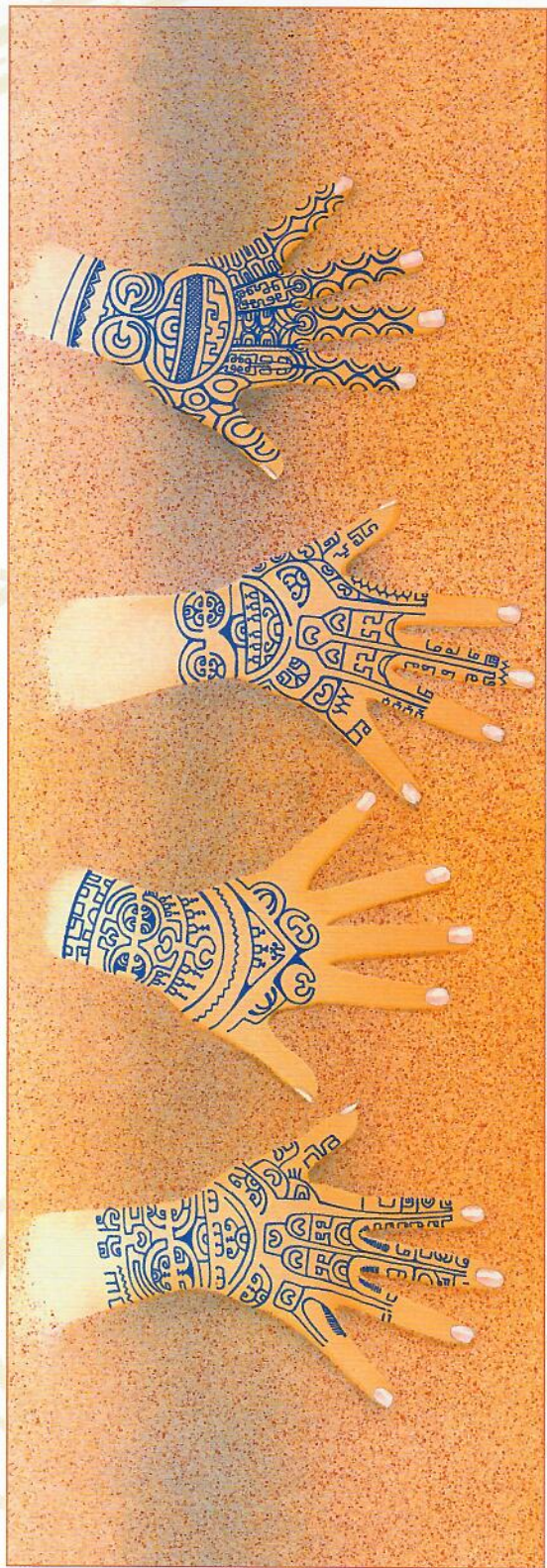
The tattooed legs and sex of a woman
K. von Steinen

The Women

recounted by Tricia Allen

The tattooing of the women was less ceremonial. In general, there was no period of preparation and no ritual accompanied it. The women were able to have themselves tattooed in their own homes. Sometimes a wealthy islander, for reasons of generosity or of love of his wife gave a feast in her honor when she had a new bracelet tattooed on her arm or an ornament on her ear. It was one of the rare occasions when women were authorised to eat the flesh of the pig.

The tattooing of the women was more of an obligation than a mark of distinction. There were a certain number of taboos concerning the tattooing of the hands, the preparation of food and its consumption in particular. Young girls were obliged to have the right hand tattooed at the age of 12 years. Once done, she could assist in the preparation of poi-poi. An un-tattooed hand was not permitted to prepare the poi-poi or to eat from the same bowl as the other members of the family. The tattooing of the women's hands was also prerequisite to the anointing of the bodies of the dead with coconut oil.



Hands of Marquesan women

THE MARQUESAS ISLANDS

Legend recounted by R. P. SIMEON DELMAS

"Hamatakee encountered the god Tu who appeared unusually sad. 'Why so much sadness?', he asked him. 'It is because my wife has abandoned me and given herself over to the pleasures of the libertines.' 'If you want to bring her back, make yourself more attractive with some tattoos. She will find you so wonderfully transformed that she will take you for a new person and will come back to you.' 'In that case, get to work!'" Hamatakee tattooed him, and because of this, Tu seemed a new man and so attractive that all the women wanted to have him. Seeing this, his wife hastened to come back to him. From that time on, everyone wanted to be tattooed."

Manners and customs of the ancient maoris of the marquesas islands

Dr Louis ROLLIN

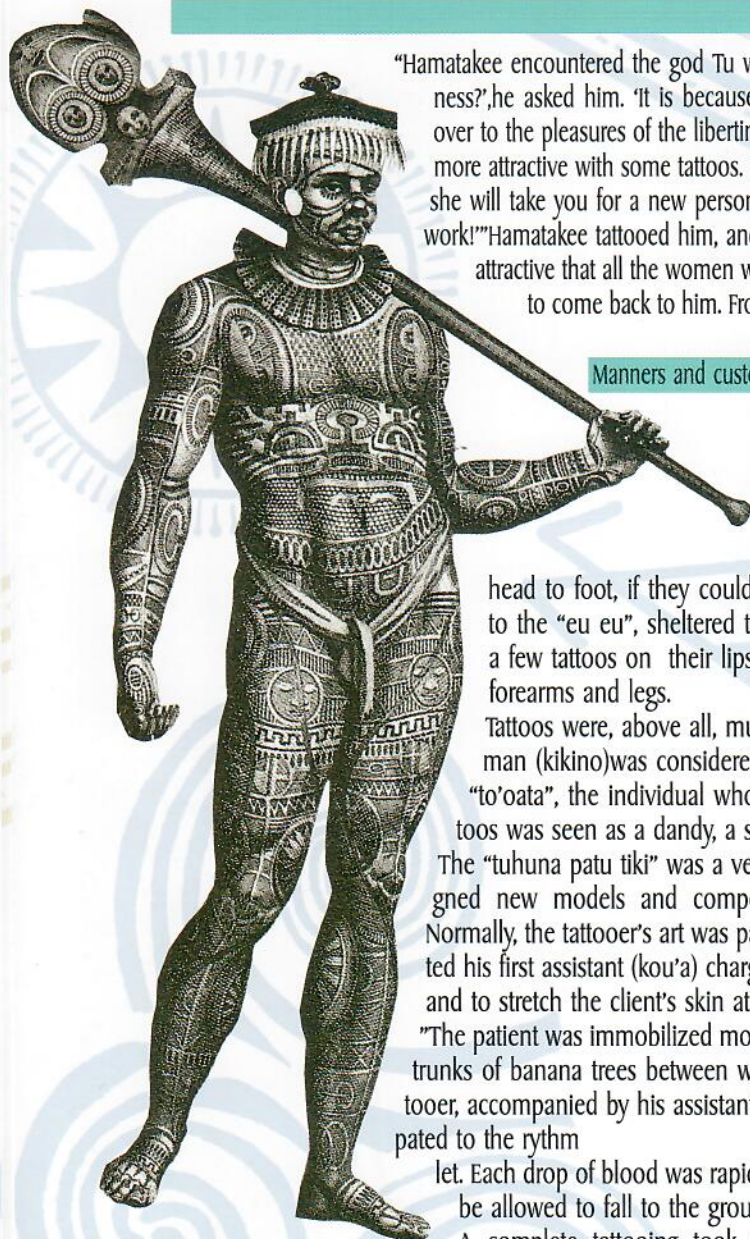
"Tattooing was at the same time a garment and a decoration. It was a garment since the men who, on ordinary days, wore only the "hami", covered themselves from head to foot, if they could afford it, while the women who, in addition to the "eu eu", sheltered their bodies under a "kahu", usually had only a few tattoos on their lips, ears and, among the more elegant, on their forearms and legs.

Tattoos were, above all, much admired ornaments, and the non-tattooed man (kikino) was considered beneath contempt. On the other hand, the "to'oata", the individual whose body disappeared behind his mass of tattoos was seen as a dandy, a sort of Beau Brummel of an extreme elegance.

The "tuhuna patu tiki" was a veritable artist who, when between clients, designed new models and composed the motifs on mannequins of wood. Normally, the tattooer's art was passed from father to his son whom he appointed his first assistant (kou'a) charged with the preparation of the ink, the combs and to stretch the client's skin at the time of the tattooing.

"The patient was immobilized most frequently in a sort of vise composed of two trunks of banana trees between which he was attached and held tight. The tattooer, accompanied by his assistants, sang a sort of chant of the occasion syncopated to the rhythm of the tapping of his little mallet. Each drop of blood was rapidly wiped up with a scrap of tapa, so that none be allowed to fall to the ground."

A complete tattooing took years to accomplish, as there were several months of interruption between the creating of major tattoos. The slate gray color obtained finished by dissimulating nudity and providing a costume as light as it was unencumbering — ideal for these hot countries.



Man of
Nuku Hiva
1813

J. A. GRANER (text dating from 1819)

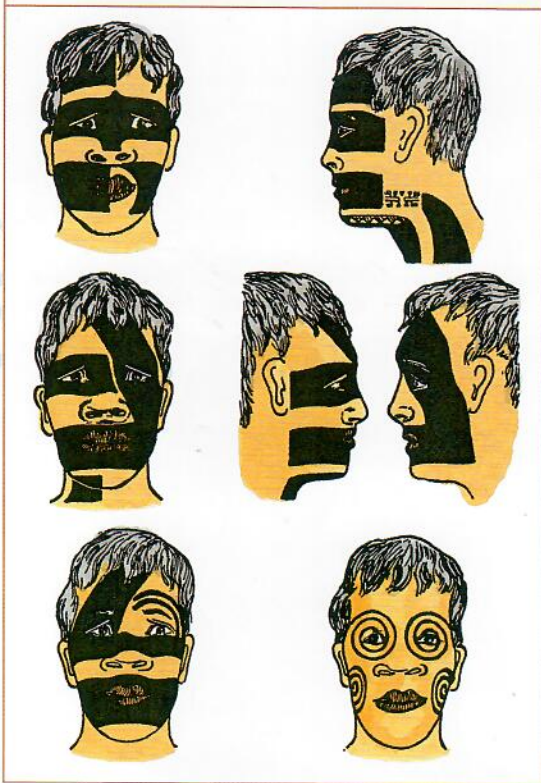
"There exist a certain number of feasts to which are allowed entry only those persons tattooed in a certain particular way. I was witness to one such feast during my sojourn on the island. Those who were authorised to take part in this feast of which I speak, and to partake of the ceremonial roast pork, were all tattooed with a solid dark ring around the left eye."

The Men

The spiral around the eyes is characteristic of the warriors of ancient times. The kakoata spirals on the cheeks and the haunches were reserved for the chiefs, as were the minute dots on the interior of the left ankle.

The facial tattoos indicated tribal membership. The Paheke was characteristic of Nuku Hiva; two horizontal bands were the mark of Hiva Oa; a central, horizontal band covering the nostrils was typical of Fatu Hiva.

Tricia Allen recounted W. Handy

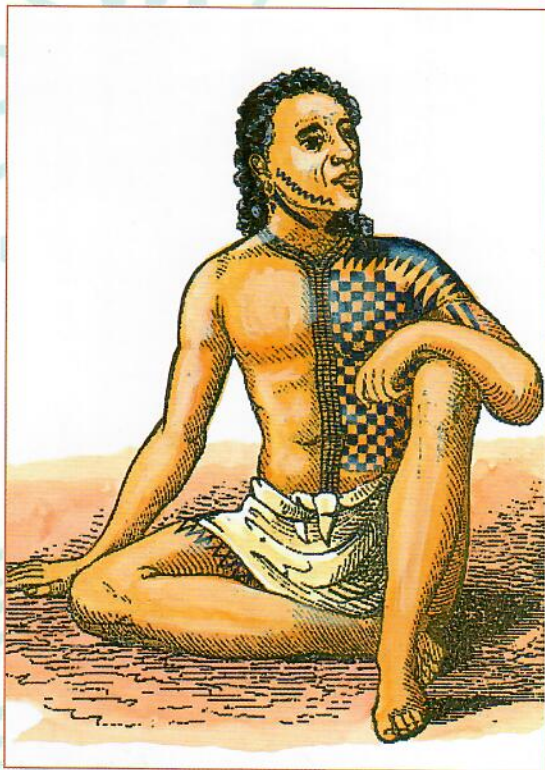


W. LE BLANC, seaman aboard the "Boussole"
Nuku Hiva, 1842 to 1845

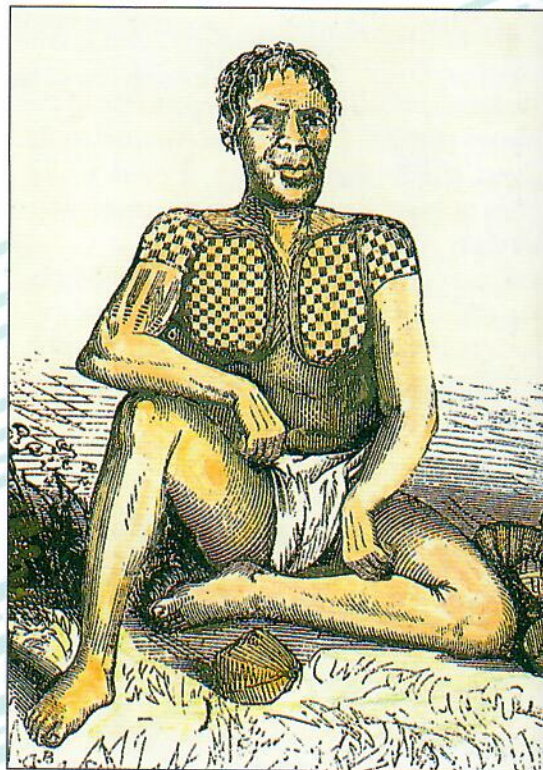
"When an enemy chief is taken prisoner, he is stripped of his ornaments, and his tattoos are reproduced on a piece of wood carved to imitate the human form as closely as possible. Subsequently, this wooden statue became an ornament in one of the huts.



Tattoos of a man of the Marquesas Islands



Man of the Tuamotu Islands



Chief of Raraka, Tuamotu Islands - C. Wilkes

Tuamotu Islands

Tattooing was practiced only in the Western part of the Tuamotu archipelago. According to Dr. K. P. Emory, the women wore blue bands on the shoulders, the buttocks, the legs and the arms. Their hands were covered with tiny geometric designs. As for the men, they were frequently tattooed from head to foot, faces included, with various and irregular motifs — saw teeth, curved lines, concentric circles, checkerboard and motifs suggestive of the braiding of vegetable matter. These last two motifs were reserved for men who had performed memorable exploits as warriors.

The Austral Islands

The tattoos of the Austral Islands differed only slightly from those of the Society Islands, except that, according to Joseph Banks, the Rurutu Islanders were not tattooed on the back. However, the entire length of the arms and torso were marked with wide parallel black bands.



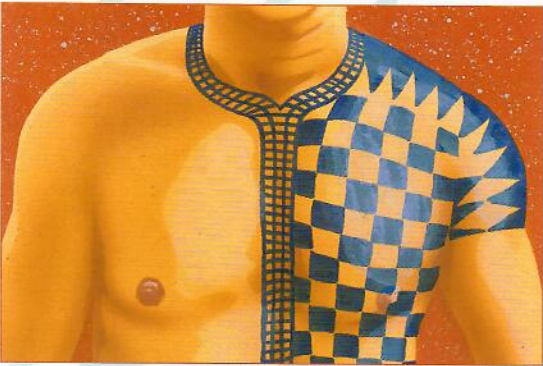
Man of Rurutu, Austral Islands - J. Webbert - 1777



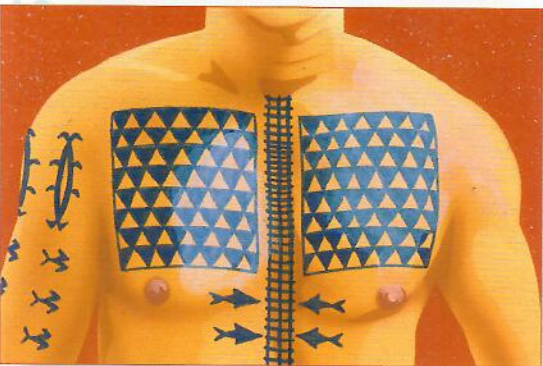
Tattoos of Mangareva, Gambier Islands



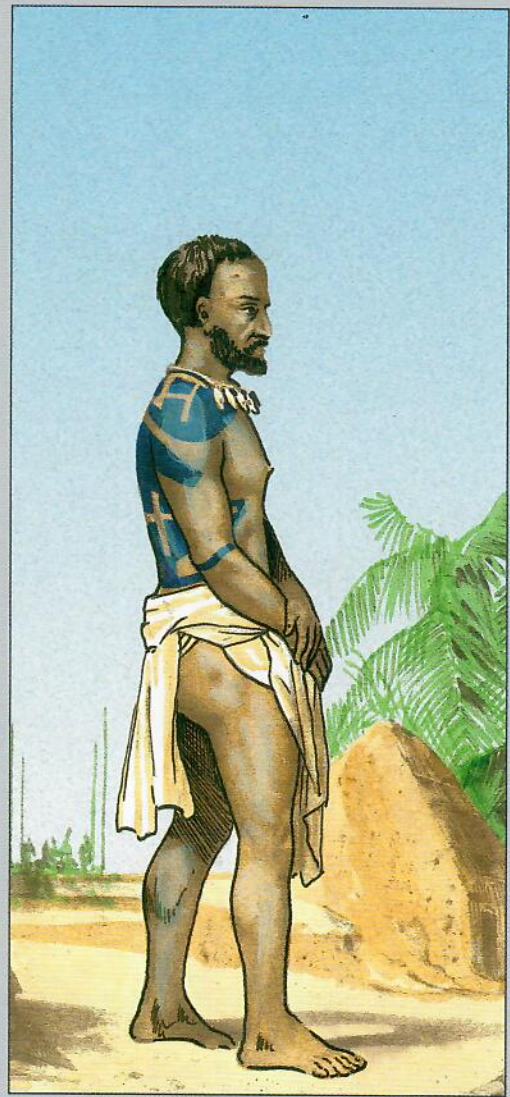
Tattoos of Raraka, Tuamotu Islands



Tattoos of the Tuamotu Islands



Tattoos whose origin is uncertain



Man of Mangareva
drawing by Marescot
1838

The Gambiers

In the Gambiers, tattooing (called ko'iko) was a required ornament for the men. Where the women of Mangareva displayed very little tattooing, the men sported a heavy ring on the shoulder. It was darkened a little more each year, finally allowing a lighter colored cross to appear in its center.



Authenticity

Tattooing in Samoa has never ceased to be practiced. In spite of the influence of the missionaries in the 19th century, this art managed to survive without every having known interruption. The traditional tattooing with comb and mallet is practiced today in these islands. By thus conserving the authenticity of their art, the Samoan communities in various Pacific countries, such as New Zealand, California and Hawaii, have provided stimulus to an awakening of interest in traditional tattooing. The traditional motifs bear strong resemblance to the designs found on the ancient Lapita potteries.

SONG ACCOMPANYING A TATTOOING

Your necklace may break,
The fau-tree may burst,
But my tattooing is indestructible.
It is an everlasting gem that you
will take to your grave

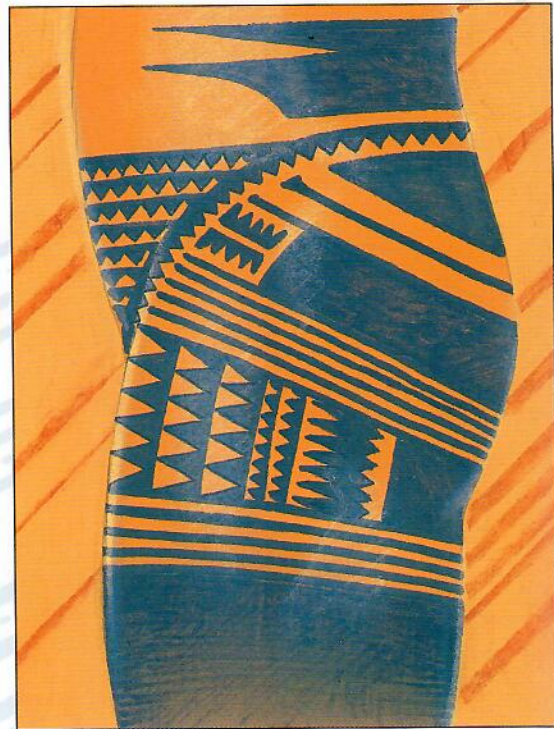
The Men

On the men, the motifs extend from hips to knees, occasionally extending to slightly below the knee. All the chiefs are obliged to be tattooed to affirm their authority. The tattoos normally consist of a series of lines, stylized images and solid black geometric forms.

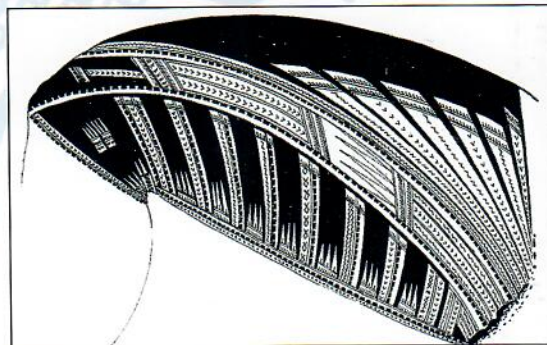
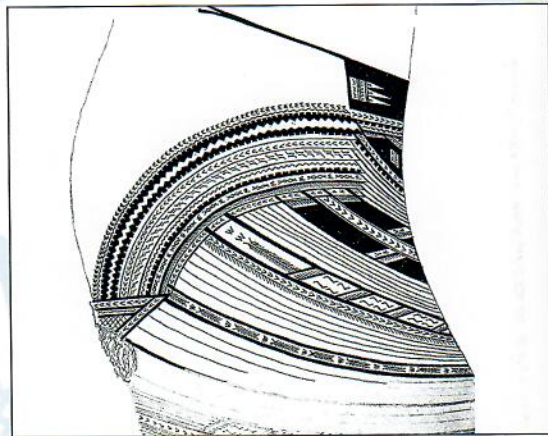
Each part of the final design carries a name, and each area is tattooed in a precise order, from the waist to the knees. The genitalia are also tattooed. The ensemble, very elaborate, comes together in such a manner that the subject appears to be clad in Bermuda shorts.

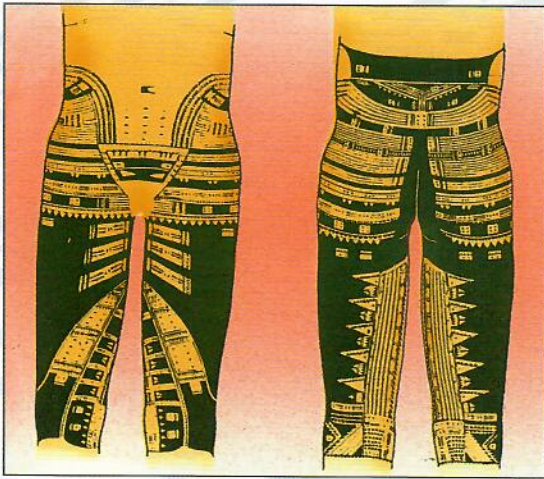
And yet, these tattoos are sacred, and for this reason one rarely has the opportunity to observe them, as they are usually concealed by the traditional "skirts" that the men wear even today in Samoa. When dances were performed to accompany the "taupou" (the enthroning of the son of a chief) or on occasions of other important traditional ceremonies, the lavalava, or wraparound skirt of the men, was lifted, exhibiting the splendid tattoos to the assemblage.

One of the most impressive aspects of Samoan tattooing is the rapidity with which it is done. Contrary to the tat-



Samoaian tattoos





Drawn by Petelo Suluape

toos of the other islands of the Pacific who sometimes require several months to cover the entire body, the dexterity of the Samoan artist tattooers is extraordinary.

In spite of the complexity of the motifs and the surface to be covered, a young Samoan man can be tattooed from head to foot in one week.

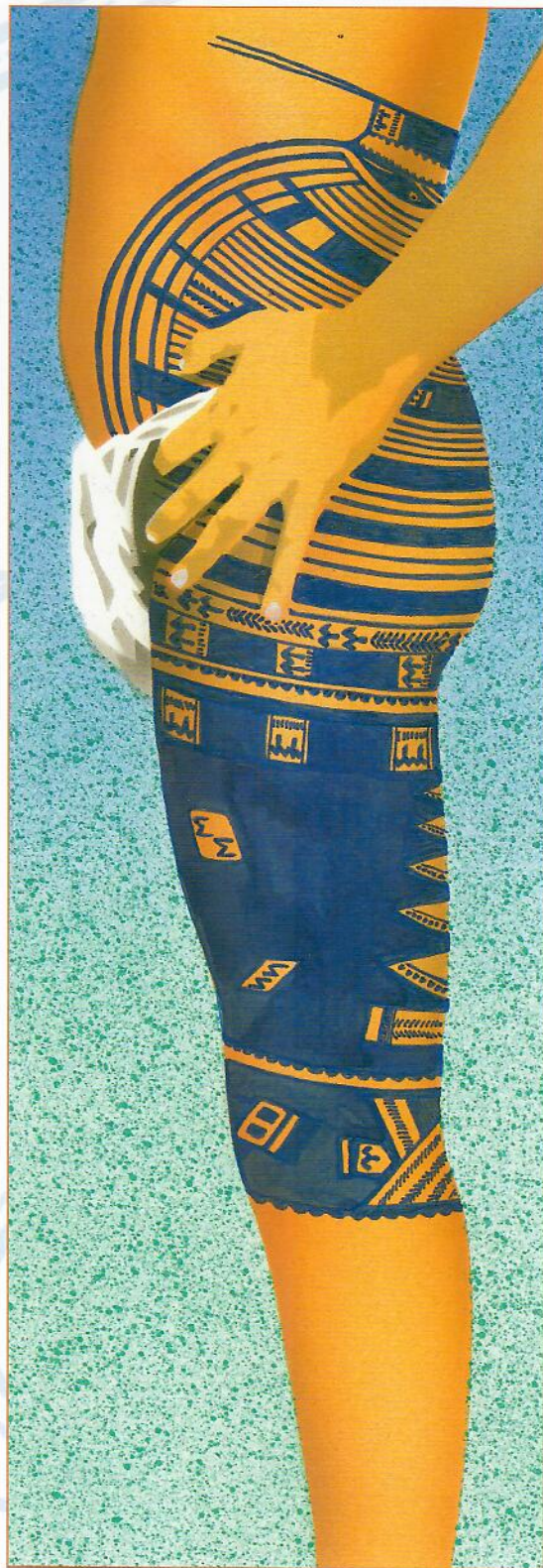
A triangle, traditionally tattooed at the height of the kidneys and below the waist, symbolizes the bat or "flying dog". This motif marks the location of the Mongolian spot, a bluish discoloration of the skin that is visible for about six days after birth before it fades away.

In Samoan mythology, the art of tattooing is attributed to the goddess Taema.

The legend, as reported by Allan Taylor, tells that it was originally brought in from Fiji. The goddess Taema and her twin sister, visiting Fiji, were very impressed with the tattoos worn by the women of those islands. During their voyage home to Samoa, they sang to remind themselves of the Fijian custom, a melody whose refrain was, "Only the women are tattooed, not the men."

However, their return voyage was fraught with so many dangers (they were nearly devoured by the giant tridacna clams) that they forgot the initial refrain of their song and began to sing,

"Only the men will be tattooed, not the women." Doubtless it is for this reason that the Samoan men are much more completely covered with tattoos than the Samoan women.



Tattooed Samoan man



Meanings of Samoan



FETU
Star



MALU
Protection



GOGO
Frigate bird



AIVALY
Jelly fish



AVEAU
Starfish



TOLUSE
Cross



ANUFE
Caterpillar



VAEALI
Head support
used by
Samoans
for sleeping



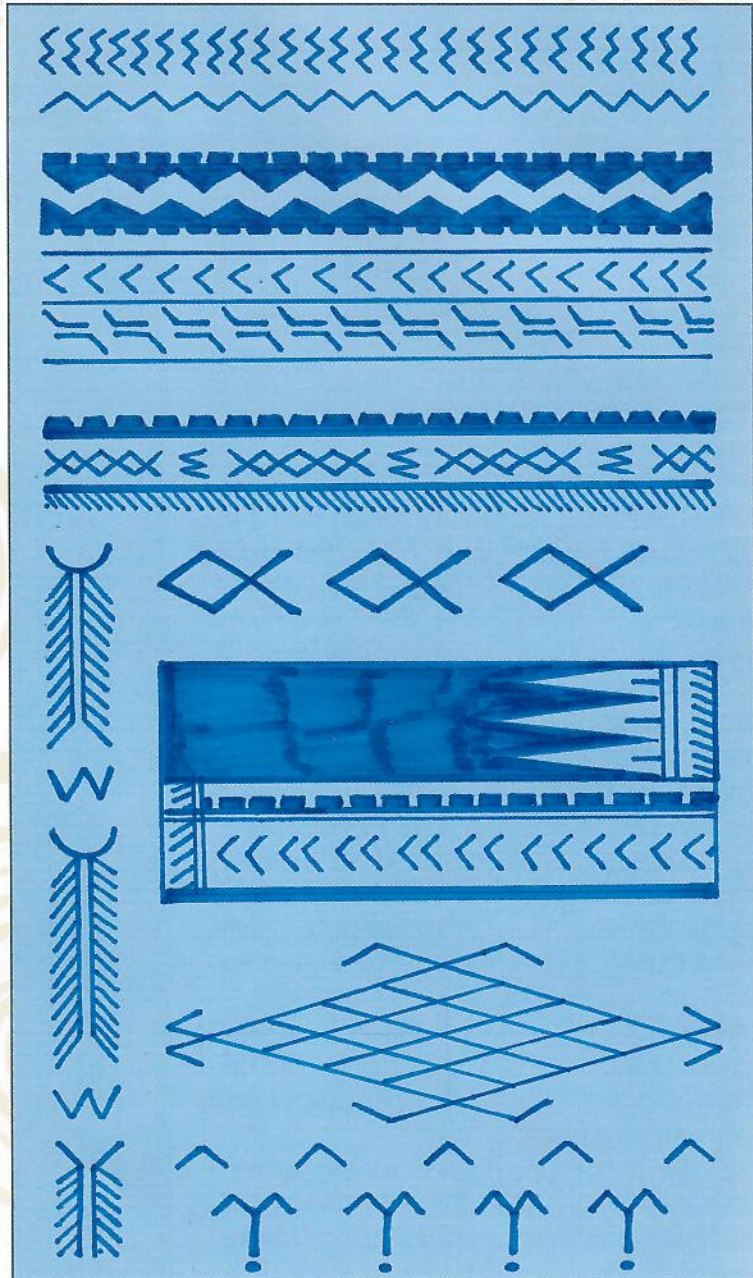
All the same, the song of Taema is still repeated during tattooing ceremonies.

Tupu le tane, ta le tatau

Tupu te fafine, fanafanau

When a male grows up, tattoo him

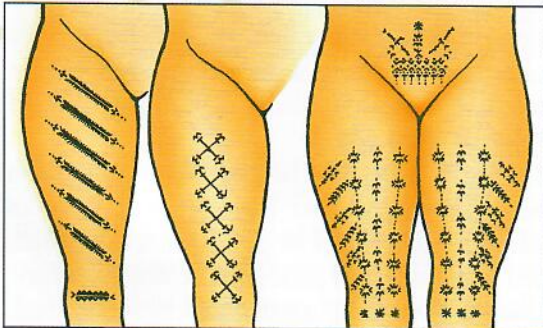
When a woman grows up, let her bear children



Samoan motifs



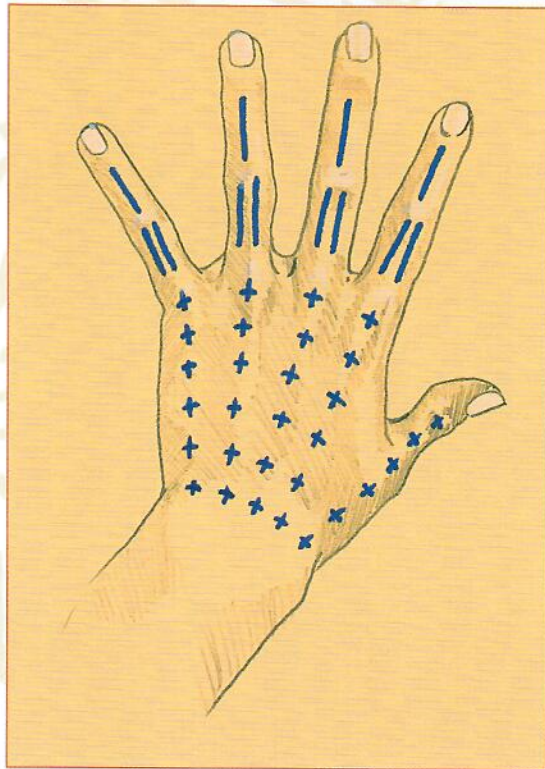
A Samoan woman's tattooed legs - photo P.Steve. Inset: tattoo motif for a woman's sex.



Different tattoo motifs on women's legs

The Women

The women, very little tattooed, occasionally carry delicate geometric designs. The motifs are more spaced out and more graceful than those of the men. Laid out in a very regular manner, they dress the legs with finesse and elegance from the groin to the knees. The hands and the abdomen from the Mount of Venus to the navel are tattooed with equal grace. These designs are composed of geometric arrangements of motifs in form of a cross, a Z, a W or a V, in triangles, in stars or symbolizing flowers. These lines often appear stippled.



Tattooed hand of a Samoan woman



Portrait of a New Zealand native (Original wash drawing by Sydney Parkinson - 1770)

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