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Publishing: what tattoos tell about Oceania in a new book





Tahiti, September 20, 2026 - With **Le Tatouage en Océanie**, Anne Lavondès and Véronique Mu-Liepmann have written a reference book on the history of tattooing. A book that is meant to be accessible. Richly illustrated, it restores tattoo to its status as a language.

The book "Tattooing in Oceania", published by Au Vent des Îles is already available on the shelves. It is based on the research of Anne Lavondès and completed by Véronique

Mu-Liepmann. The book does not only talk about patutiki, which means "to engrave Tiki": it shows that tattooing was practiced in many archipelagos of Polynesia, but also in Melanesia and Micronesia, with social, sacred, identity and ritual functions.

Before being an ornament, the tattoo was an identity. It marked the young person's entry into adulthood, his geographical origin, his place in society and the highlights of his life. *"It is a canvas that accompanied the individual throughout his or her existence,"* says co-author and former curator of the Museum of Tahiti and the Islands, Véronique Mu-Liepmann. At the time, *"it was a bit like his CV on him"*. Where the West displayed rank through clothing and jewelry, in Oceania it was inscribed in the skin. Thus, *"the first tattoo received by a young man who ceases to be considered a child is a dolphin on the hand, for example"*.

The proof in pictures comes from a mission from the Natural History Museum, sent between the two wars to an island in the Solomon Islands, Rennell Island, populated by Polynesians. Véronique Mu-Liepmann reports that a designer notes the female tattoos one by one, *"according to their status and personal situation"*: the young girl not yet tattooed, the teenager, the married woman, the woman of high rank. The same series among the men, up to the village chief. *"It proves that people knew how to read these signs,"* adds Véronique Mu-Liepmann. (See page 96)

The book combines archaeology, history and ethnography. We start with a geographical map and the book is read archipelago by archipelago, from Polynesia to Melanesia and Micronesia. The settlement of the Pacific, tattoo combs, tools, motifs, similarities from one archipelago to another: the table of contents invites us to compare and unify.

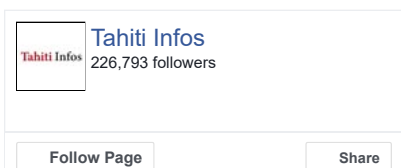
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The first in the series but maybe not the last

As for the sources, there are many – oral tradition and themes conveyed by myths, the stories of navigators and traders. It's *"all that Westerners have brought back in terms of knowledge,"* says the co-author. It was the navigator James Cook who, in 1769, introduced the word "tātau" to Europe, which became tattoo. There are *still "uncertainties, especially about the motives themselves,"* says Véronique Mu-Liepmann.

The book was born from a text by Anne Lavondès, curator and director of the Museum of Tahiti and the Islands, who had organized the development of the permanent rooms in the 1970s. Véronique Mu-Liepmann took her manuscript and completed it with articles of which her co-author was not aware. More than 160 engravings and drawings accompany it, including those by Parkinson, the naturalist and draughtsman on board with Cook, and those of the illustrator of "Sur le chemin des étoiles" by Éric Conte, who signs nearly a third of the illustrations.

The two authors have documented *"the fragility of these traditions in the face of colonization as much as their contemporary revival."* The book is presented as the first test *"to know if the subject is of interest"*. If so, this edition of "Tattooing in Oceania" is the first book in a long series.



Practical:



Tattooing in Oceania

Publisher Au Vent Des Iles

Collection Beaux Livres

Number of pages 160

On sale: on site at Au Vent Des îles in Fare Ute, at the Odyssey bookstore, in Carrefour



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