Katherine Hadgis

A Brief World History of Tattoos Documentation

A Brief World History of TATTOOS

1900 CE - Japan
When the Meiji disarmed the samurais, the samurais tattooed themselves to replace their now obsolete armor.

1800 CE - North America
After exploring South America and the South Pacific, American sailors began tattooing themselves with sea themes and memories of home.

1769 CE - New Zealand
It is unknown when Maori tattooing traditions began, but they were first documented by the Dutch. Each line is a testament to an attribute of its wearer: such as age, ancestry, and prestige.

1475 CE - Greenland
Five of six men buried in a fiord grave were found to have linear face tattoos. Chin stripes were common for Inuit women, which indicated their maturity.

1200 CE - Persia
It is a famous tale, Rumi writes of a self-proclaimed hero who proudly asked for a large lion tattoo, only to succumb to the pain and give up before the tail was even complete.

1000 CE - Peru
Farmers of the Chimu/Mochica culture were found to have intricate tattoos on their hands.

700 CE - Egypt
A mummy of an ancient woman was found with this design on her inner thigh. Written in ancient Greek, it is translated to “Michael,” an angel from the Bible.

300 CE - Siberia
The Pazyryk Man mummy was found to have arguably the most well-preserved tattoos of the ancient world.

500 BCE - Greece
Ancient Greeks often branded owls on the foreheads of convicted prisoners as a form of punishment and as a way to alert the public of their crimes.

800 BCE - Egypt
In Ancient Egypt, only women received tattoos, usually on the lower back. These tattoos served many purposes, such as medical treatment or honoring the gods.

1800 BCE - China
In the Tarim Basin, several mummies of the bronze age have been found with geometric tattoos. However, it is unclear what culture they belonged to.

2000 BCE - Samoa
The ancient tradition of Ni’i is still prevalent in Samoan culture today. Both men and women (receive these tattoos) as a recognition of maturity and high standing.

3200 BCE - Alps
The oldest mummy with evident tattoos is Ötzi, “The Iceman.” He is covered in over 50 small, linear tattoos that were most likely a form of early acupuncture.
Sources:

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Notes:

1. 5000BC: Otzi the Iceman – Oetz Valley, Alps Mtns.
   a. 57 carbon tattoos
   b. Dots and lines of lower spine, behind left knee, right ankle
   c. Healing & acupuncture
2. 4000BC – 30BC: Egypt
   a. Mummies are found with tattoos / colored scars from a treatment of pelvic peritonitis
   b. Found usually on females to tell their status, geometric patterns. Back and thighs
   c. Spread with Egyptian empire from Egypt to SE Asia
   d. Mummy women w tattoos c. 2000 hard evidence
   a. Europoids w/ western tattoos
4. 800BC: Mummy Amunet – Egypt
5. 600BC-500BC: Greece
   a. Tattoos among slaves
   b. May have been motivation for banning pagan tattooing in Leviticus
6. 475BC: St. Lawrence Island, Bering Sea – woman w/ tattoos of dots, lines, and hearts on arms and hands
7. 300BC – 400AD: Picts – NE Scotland, north of Forth-Clyde
   a. 297AD – First called this by Eumenius in Latin, means “painted or tattooed people” (pingere)
   b. War depictions, black /dark blue woad/copper
8. 300BC: The Man of Pazyryk – permafrost of Argos, Siberia
   a. Scythian chieftain
   b. Detailed tattoos of fish, monsters, dots on the spine (lumbar) and around right ankle
   c. Siberian Ice Maiden, Princess Ukok
   d. The Pazyryks also believed the tattoos would be helpful in another life, making it easy for the people of the same family and culture to find each other after death
9. 1000AD: Peru tattooed inca mummies have been found
   a. 900-1350: Peru
      i. Chiribaya farmers mummies have tattoos
10. 1200’s Persia
    a. Rumi describes proud man wants a large lion tattoo, backs out after experiencing pain
11. 1475: Qilakitsoq Greenland
    a. 5/6 Inuit women have tattooed line over eyebrows, along cheeks, lines on chin
12. 1500s: Spanish conquest lands in Mexico, horrified at “Satanic” tattoos
13. 1652: Ontario & Erie
    a. French Jesuits observe bloody and painful tattoos amongst Petun and Neutral people. Say everyone has them.
14. 1700s: European exploration of south pacific
    a. 1722 – Dutch visits Samoa
       i. Dutch didn’t even know they were tattoos
       ii. Tattoo traditions in Samoa have been around for 2000+ years
       iii. Tattoos used for status & coming of age
    b. 1769: James Cook visits Majori, NZ; Tahiti; Samoa
       i. Face tattoos: symmetrical spirals (M) - ta moko
       ii. Chisels, not needles, leaves grooves in skin (M)
       iii. Status, rank, age, ancestry, abilities; described as id card (M)
       iv. Then decorated further to be attractive to opposite sex (M)
       v. Male: full face, Women: Lips and chins, also other parts of body (M)
       vi. Christians try to make them stop, women argue it keeps them young. They keep doing it until ~1970s
       vii. Visits tahiti first, brings word tattoo with him tatau > tattaw > tattoo (T)
       viii. Sailors get tattoos on themselves and bring them back home
15. 1800s: England & Europe
    a. Tattoos still mostly associated with sailors from origin, also low class & criminals
    b. 1840s public schoolboys try it
    c. 1861: French navy and army ban tattooing in ranks bc of Maurice Berchons medical study on the complications caused by tattoos
    d. 1870’s becomes popular with upper class people
    e. Royalty tattoos spread across Europe monarchies
       i. Edward VII followed George V’s lead in getting tattooed; King Frederick IX of Denmark, the King of Romania, Kaiser Wilhelm II, King Alexander of Yugoslavia and even Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, King Alfonso XIII
       ii. Usually coat of arms or royal family crest
       iii. Expensive and painful: good image for a royal person
16. Early 1800s USA
a. Sailors tattoo themselves as a personal barcode, to identify themselves and keep their possessions, if they were lost at sea also
b. Protection papers against impressment document tattoos birthmarks, scars, race, height, etc.
c. Men marked their arms and hands with initials of themselves and loved ones, significant dates, symbols of the seafaring life, liberty poles, crucifixes, and other symbols.
d. “clear evidence that individual was a seafaring man; rarely did members of the general public adorn themselves with tattoos” Tattooed people were feared
e. 1861-1865: First professional USA tattoo artist Martin Hildebrandt of Germany for Civil War.

17. Late 1800s: Meiji Japan
a. Samurai (Shizoku) disband after losing WWII, begin tattooing to identify themselves – replaces samurai armor – form (good) Yakuza
b. Later, tattoos are banned and tattooed people are frowned upon. Yakuza turns to crime. Tattoos = mafia in Japan today basically

Organization Ideas:

• anatomy:
  ○ otzi: knee, back, right ankle
  ○ egypt: legs, back
  ○ china: left hand
  ○ greece: face
  ○ alaska: arms, hands
  ○ siberia: shoulder, arms chest
  ○ peru: hands
  ○ persia: back
  ○ greenland: eyebrows, cheeks, chin
  ○ maya: men-arms legs back face, women-upper body, but not breasts
  ○ south pacific: face, legs
  ○ europe/usa: arms
  ○ japan: full body, back, shoulders, thighs

• continents:
  ○ Red NA: St.Law, Ontario, Mass, Greenland
  ○ Orange MA + SA: Peru, Maya
  ○ Yellow EU: Celts, Picts, France, England, Oetzi
  ○ Green AF: Egypt 1 + 2
  ○ Blue AS: Persia, Siberia, Tarim, Japan
  ○ Purple OC: South Pacific