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Tracing Stigma: The Evolution of the Tattoo in the Middle Ages

Isabella Fusillo
University of Dayton

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Abstract

In the Western world, tattooing began as a mechanism for marking slaves and prisoners in Ancient Greece and Rome. As a result of changes in religion and philosophy, the period between 1100 and 1600 CE set the stage for the tattoo to transform from something that was forcibly done to represent a communal identity into an individual expression of self. This project traces the use and meaning of tattooing from the ancient world into the 1600's.

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University *of* Dayton

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Tattoos are one of the most prevalent forms of self-expression in Western culture today. Their origins in the West, however, promote an idea quite contrary to their use today. The turning point of the tattoo from representing a communal identity to becoming the individualized expression that we see today happened during the late Middle Ages into the Early Modern period. From its origins in ancient Greece (adopted from the Persians) to its standardization under the Roman empire, the tattoo was reserved for prisoners and criminals: a forced mark that replaced their individual identity with a permanent symbol of shame. Through the Middle Ages, as a result of the belief in symbolic power, the rise of "the self" amongst Europeans, and the exposure to groups considered barbaric practicing tattooing outside of the Graeco-Roman punitive intent, the tattoo began its transformation amongst Europeans into a more voluntary symbol. By the late Middle Ages and into the early modern period (from about 1100 to 1600 CE) the tattoo became a voluntary act that represented one's individual identity, first as a declaration of faith in the form of tattoos received on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, a practice introduced by Coptic Christians, then as a more personalized way to express loyalty and identity.

The history of tattooing once promoted was that the tattoo was not discovered until Captain James Cook's return from his voyage to the Pacific Islands in 1771. There, he discovered the tradition of "tatau" and brought the practice back to Europe, from whence the English word "tattoo" evolved.[1] The truth of the tattoo in Western culture, however, is much more detailed. Tattooing existed before the practice was introduced to

[1] Anna Felicity Friedman, "The Cook Myth," tattoohistorian.com, April 5, 2014, https://tattoohistorian.com/2014/04/05/the-cook-myth-common-tattoo-history-debunked/.

the Greeks, but for the purposes of this paper, we will start there. The Greeks of Athens were originally exposed to the tattoo from the Thracians but rejected it as a barbarian act until the Persians used the tattoo for Greek prisoners during the Persian War in the 4th century BCE. The Greek tattoo evolved from a marker of prisoners to an identifier of any criminal or slave. From the Greeks, the Romans inherited the punitive tattoo and continued to implement it for criminals, prisoners, and slaves. The Romans standardized the process a bit more and shifted to a more lexical design with tattoos that contained phrases or acronyms. The Roman tattoo continued until later, when Constantine became emperor and outlawed the punitive tattoos that had originally been placed on the forehead because they insulted the likeness of God that humans were created in. This did not end punitive tattooing as a whole but lessened the psychological effect of having a tattoo one one's forehead that replaced their identity with the label of prisoner.

Though the punitive tattoos of the Graeco-Roman world were involuntary and represented a communal identity, there were a few outlier groups of the Graeco-Roman world whose tattoos represented a communal identity but were voluntarily received. Christian cults like the Montanists tattooed themselves in reference to the Book of Revelations. Greek records also mention some Syrian cults whose temple slaves--some who entered willingly--were tattooed as a symbol of their ownership by the deities, Hadad and Atargatis. The most important outliers are the Coptic Christians of Egypt, whose tattoos were used, and continue to be used today, as an identifying feature and outward expression of their faith and whose tattoo traditions ultimately helped change the tattoo in the Middle Ages.

The Middle Ages saw their own groups practicing the voluntary communal tattoo. The Britons, a broad term that represents groups of peoples like the Picts and Celts who were present in the modern-day United Kingdom, were recorded as decorating their bodies. Some Saxon kings were also known to tattoo themselves as a symbol of loyalty to their kingdom. Records of Viking people describe images of trees and boars believed to induce supernatural powers and strengths.

What made the Middle Ages unique and set the scene for the turning point in tattooing from representing a communal identity to an individual expression of self were the changes in culture and religion. Specifically, the value placed on symbolism and the self. With the birth of the university in the Middle Ages, scholarship introduced advancements in philosophy, especially the rise of "the individual". The search for and awareness of "the self" sprouted from multiple aspects of medieval life. Marriage laws written by the church and tales of love from courts across Europe both limited and expanded the medieval idea of marriage. Christianity was universal in Europe, but the experience of Christianity shifted to the internal and literal. Personal responsibility for one's own actions and afterlife combined with the belief in the realness of symbols, relics, and architecture to make religion a very physical and individual experience. Churches, for example, were designed to serve as a literal bridge between heaven and Earth. The power of symbols, objects, and places also manifested itself in medicine, as physicians used words and phrases written on the skin to treat patients. Part of this personal responsibility for the afterlife and belief in the power of holy things was the importance of pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage tattoo that, as historian Juliet Fleming writes, became a "common sight"[2] in Europe by the fifteenth century developed from the 12th to 15th centuries as a result of the shifts in religion and society in the Middle Ages. This new tattoo was a voluntary action that did have aspects of communal identity but was beginning to have a far more individual connotation.

By the 17th century, the tattoo had become completely voluntary and individual. Similar to the medieval medical use of symbols and words, astrological physicians continued to implement symbols for the stars and planets as medical treatments. Simon Forman, an English physician, took the practice a step further and permanently marked his body with the symbols of the planets that ruled his horoscope at specific times. This was an example of the practice of permanent body marking becoming completely personalized. The pilgrimage tattoo also continued to become even more individual. After the Reformation swept through Europe in the 16th century, the Catholic belief in the realness of symbols and the value placed in holy objects began to fade, but the practice of taking pilgrimage to the Holy Land and receiving a tattoo did not. European travelers, like William Lithgow, recorded their travels and many included their description of receiving a tattoo or interacting with people who had done so. Lithgow's tattoo represents the solidification of the tattoo as a voluntary expression of individuality because he not only personalizes his design, but he does so in a way that completely rejects the historical connection of the tattoo to the Catholic church. Overall, the tattoo in the Western world went through three stages of evolution: its origin as an involuntary mark of a communal

[2] Juliet Fleming, "The Renaissance Tattoo," in *Written on the Body*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 79.

identity, its use as an identifier of a group whose voluntary tattoos represented their communal identity, and as an individual choice to express oneself and one's own identity.

In the ancient world, the primary purpose served by tattoos was that of punishment. The Greeks and Romans implemented this practice of forcibly applying tattoos as a method of labelling prisoners and slaves, like one would brand cattle. Though some translations of Greek and Roman texts mentioning tattoos (*stigma*) translate the word to brand, the process described as pricking the skin with a needle and rubbing ink into the wound is clearly different. As one would assume, these tattoos were not voluntary, nor were they done out of the tattooed person's desire for self-expression. Punitive tattooing was about control. When a crime had been committed and the perpetrator was sentenced, it was not uncommon for a combination of three things to be tattooed on their body (usually the forehead): the name of the crime, the name of the victim (either the name of one's master or the name of the emperor), and the sentence. As the tattoo further evolved in the West until the Middle Ages, tattooing was a practice usually involuntarily done that labelled the person as a member of a group, though there were exceptions.

Our understanding of the connection between the root *stig*- and our modern conception of the tattoo comes from Aetius Amidenus' medical encyclopedia, *Tetrabiblon*: "They call *stigmata* things inscribed on the face or some other part of the body and they use the following ink. Apply by pricking the places with needles, wiping away the blood, and rubbing in first the juice of leek, and then the preparation."[3]

[3] C. P. Jones, "Stigma and tattoo," in *Written on the Body*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

Tattoos in the Graeco-Roman world were central to authority. More specifically, removing one's autonomy and identifying them as one of many. Who was claiming or being given that authority depended on who was receiving the tattoo, who was "giving" it, and under what circumstances. Tattoos were either used to claim authority and power over an ostracized, imprisoned, or enslaved person or they were self-inflicted as a symbol of giving over authority to someone else (either a deity or a group). The significance of the tattoo during Late Antiquity is to be understood within the context of the belief that physical objects and symbols held spiritual powers. Tattoos permanently altered one's body, but the body was seen as sacred. For Christians, one's physical body was the divine copy of God's image. (Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.") For Christians and non-Christians alike, the body was an extension of one's internal self and to modify the body was to modify the self. When forcibly tattooed, the victim no longer owned themselves but were owned by their master. The "master" might be the owner in the master-slave dynamic, but it could also be represented by the crime in terms of penal tattooing. The removal of the power believed to be held in autonomy of the body through the involuntary tattoo was intended to further alienate the marked prisoners and slaves from other humans. They were no longer individual people; their tattoo replaced their identity, making them one of many.

During their war with the Persian Empire in the 5th century the Greeks were exposed to punitive tattooing, although this was not their first ever encounter with

tattooing as a whole.[4] According to Herodotus' *Histories*, the Greeks were first exposed to the practice of body marking by their neighbors: the Thracians and Syrians.[5][6] Herodotus doesn't refer to the Thracian act specifically as *stigma*, the Greek word known to refer to what we today call tattooing.[7] Derived from the root *stig*-, meaning "to prick", *stigma* (plural: *stigmata*) translates to "tattooed". Other similar words, such as *stixon*, *stizontai*, and *estigmenous* are also used to reference marked or decorated people. For the Thracians, body marking was used as a symbol of nobility. Herodotus referenced the high-born Thracians as "marked" or *estichthai*, and the low-born, unmarked, or *astikton*. The *Dissoi Logoi*, written anonymously around 400 BCE, also references Thracian women who were marked (*stizesthai*) and compares it to the use of punitive tattooing, "Among the Thracians it is an ornament for young girls to be tattooed but with others tattoo-marks are a punishment for those who do wrong".[8] Another reference to the knowledge of tattooing amongst the Thracians comes from Dio Chrysostom's *Orations*. Speaking on the concept of freedom amongst kings and slaves, he says, "Have you ever been in Thrace?...Then you have seen the women there, the free women, covered with branded marks, and having the more such marks and the more elaborate in proportion to their social standing and that of the families to which they belong?"[9] He continues, "That, as it seems, there is nothing to prevent a queen from being tattooed; but do you think that there is anything to prevent a king?". Chrysostom continues, comparing the marking of

[4] This was not, however the first time they were exposed to tattooing in general, just punitive. The Thracians, discussed later in this section, practiced tattooing as a sign of nobility.
[5] Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, trans. G. C. Macaulay (Project Gutenberg, 2008), 2-6.
[6] Rosamond Kent Sprague, "A Translation of the Dissoi Logoi or Dialexeis," *The Society for Greek Philosophy*, no. 12 (1966).
[7] C. P. Jones, "Stigma and tattoo," in *Written on the Body*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6.
[8] Sprague, "A Translation of the Dissoi Logoi or Dialexeis."
[9] Though this translation says "branded", the original text says "stigmata"

Thracians as a symbol of nobility to those who brand their cattle, as in both cases the marks serve as an identifier, though with very different meanings. The Greeks did not adopt the Thracian tattoo practice because it was deemed "barbarian", but they did, later, adopt the Persian tattoo practice because of its association of the tattoo with barbarian practices, thus fitting for slaves and prisoners.

The Persian Wars spanned from 492 to 449 BCE when Darius I attacked Greece[10]. After losing the Battle of Marathon, he returned to Persia. In 480, the new Persian leader, Xerxes I attempted an invasion. Xerxes and his army defeated the Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae, leading to the fall of Athens in 480. He was ultimately defeated and driven from Greece in 479 at the hands of a military effort comprised of all of Greece.[11] Herodotus, in his *Histories*, mentions Xerxes' sending of *stigees* (tattooers) to the Hellespont, the narrow strait between the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara.[12] He also mentions that the Persians tattooed their Theban prisoners of war with royal tattoos (*estixan stigmata basileia*).[13]

The Greeks were slow to adopt the Persian practice of tattooing their prisoners, as anything Persian was described as barbaric or uncivilized. According to historian C.P. Jones, the Samians (of Samos) were the first recorded people to adopt the Persian *stigmata* in the sixth century BCE.[14] In 440, the Athenians and Samians were at war after

[10] Though Greece did not unify as one nation until 337 BCE, the city-states with a shared language and culture which identified them as "Greeks". Greece was not unified and though they shared a culture and language with other city-states in the region, Athens sided with Persia over their fellow-Greek-speakers.
[11] Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Greco-Persian Wars," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 4, 2021. https://www.britannica.com/event/Greco-Persian-Wars.
[12] Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, 7, 35.
[13] Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, 7, 35.
[14] Athenaeus, "Elegy and Iambus, Volume I, Asius," ed. J. M. Edmonds (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931).

Samos revolted and tried to leave the Athenian empire. According to Plutarch's histories, it was common practice on both sides to mark prisoners of war with tattoos on their foreheads.[15] Shortly after, in 413 BCE, the Sicilians successfully defended themselves against Athenian attack. Again, Plutarch describes the Sicilian practice of tattooing Athenian prisoners of war and selling them as slaves.[16] These early prisoner of war tattoos were usually symbols that represented groups of people: the Samian symbol was a ship (the *samaina*), the Athenian was the owl, and the Sicilian was a horse. Prisoners of war, especially those sold into slavery, were tattooed as a symbol of ownership. These tattoos could also be considered a punitive practice, as if prisoners are being punished for picking the wrong side. The tattoos continued to develop and become much more lexical. This development can be seen in Greek literature.

Especially in comedies from the fifth and fourth centuries, Athenian writing commonly references tattooed slaves, implying the regularity of the punitive tattoo practice. One of the most influential works that centers around the tattoo is the 3rd century story of Bitinna and Gastron from Herodus' *Mimes.*[17] The fifth of these short comedies, "The Jealous Woman" is about Bitinna and her slave Gastron, with whom she was having an affair. Bitinna accuses Gastron of sleeping with another woman and threatens to have him beaten. She also calls for Kosis and his "needles and ink". Bitinna threatens to tattoo Gastron as a form of punishment, "Since he doesn't know what sort of man he is, he will

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http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0479%3Avolume%3D1%3Atext%3D3.

[15] Plutarch, *Life of Pericles* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL065/1916/volume.xml.

[16] Plutarch, *Life of Pericles*.

[17] Herodas, *Mimes* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 189. https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL225/2003/volume.xml.

know very soon, when he reads the inscription on his forehead".[18] Luckily for Gastron, another slave, Kydilla, steps in and convinces Bitinna not to do so. The presence of the penal tattoo in Herodus' story shows the normalcy of tattooing slaves, especially when a crime had been committed. Nobody believed Bitinna's demand that Gastron be tattooed was strange, and the fact that Kosis' occupation centers around being a tattooer (or "brander") shows that this practice, once condemned as "barbaric" by Herodotus as an example of Persian uncivility, was now quite common amongst the Greeks as early as the third century BCE.

According to historian C. P. Jones, the Greeks are responsible for the transmission of the tattoo to the Romans, as seen in their adoption of the word *stigma* to denote a tattoo. However, they referred to the act of tattooing not with the Greek verb *stizo* but with the Latin ones *inscribo* ("inscribe"), *imprimo* ("imprint"), and *inuro* ("brand").[19] As with the Greeks, many of the earliest references to tattooing that we have from Rome are from literature. The one hundred and third chapter of Petronius' *Satyricon*, written in the late 60's CE and taking place in southern Italy, features an escape plan, formulated by the poet character Eumolpus, in which the characters mark their foreheads with ink to simulate the tattoos of slaves. "I will mark my inscription so cleverly upon your foreheads that you will be mistaken for slaves…Eumolpus covered our foreheads completely, with large letters and, with a liberal hand, spread the universally known mark of the fugitive over the face of each of us". Later in the story, they are discovered and their faux inscriptions are referenced, "If only they had really blotched up their foreheads

[18] Herodas, *Mimes*.
[19] C. P. Jones, "Stigma and Tattoo," in *Written on the Body*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11.

with those inscriptions, it would be some satisfaction to us, at least; but as it is, we are being imposed upon by an actor's tricks, and hoaxed by a fake inscription!". [20] The "universally known mark of the fugitive" that Eumolpus speaks of was the letter *F* or the letters *FUG*.[21]

The design and placements of the punitive tattoos themselves also had meaning. As we can see in the Greek story of Bitinna's slave and Eumolpus' escape plan, the majority of the tattoos were done on one's forehead. There is arguably no other place on the body as representing of a person than their face, and a tattoo on the face was the perfect way to permanently alter and replace one's identity to others and themselves. The Greeks evolved from marking their prisoners of war with symbols like the Athenian owl towards a more lexical-based design, and the Romans continued to develop and standardize the content of a punitive tattoo. According to historian Mark Gustafson, these Graeco-Roman tattoos tended to contain at least one of the following: an abbreviated label of their crime (example: *fur* meaning "thief"), the name or symbol of the emperor/master, or the name of the punishment inflicted upon them (example: the words *metallica* or *metallum* or the abbreviation *MT* or *MD*, meaning they were condemned to the mines).[22]

The main connection between the Greeks and Romans and their tattooing is the meaning of the tattoo and what it does to the marked person. Like the Greeks (who saw the Thracian nobility tattoos as barbarian but were more willing to adopt the Persian punitive tattoo), the Roman world saw tattoos as a symbol of degradation involuntarily

[20] Petronius Arbiter, *The Satyricon, Complete*, trans. W. C. Firebaugh (Project Gutenberg, 2006).
[21] Mark Gustafson, "The Tattoo in the Later Roman Empire and Beyond," in *Written on the Body*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 25.
[22] Gustafson, "The Tattoo in the Later Roman Empire and Beyond," 25-28.

assigned. Tattoos always had an underlying connotation, whether it be one of nobility or shame. The Romans continued with the connection between degradation and tattoos that the Greeks had started. In the Roman world, a forcibly-tattooed person (whether they be criminal or slave, or both) could not escape the identity and stigma of their status because the mark was permanent. This was widely acknowledged, as the Augustan manumission law from 4 CE, *lex Aelia Sentia*, says that any slave, criminal, gladiator, or tattooed person (*quibusue stigmata inscripta sunt*, meaning "inscribed on"), upon their manumission, would be part of the lowest class, with the same citizen status as foreigners who had surrendered (*peregrini dediticii*).[23]

The *lex Aelia Sentia* is an example of the development of the legality of tattooing in the Roman world. In Greece, there seems to be no reference to legal policy on punitive tattooing; it was left to the discretion of the master. Though published much later, in 438, Emperor Constantine's *Theodosian Code* condemns the punitive tattoo, but only partially:

> "If anyone has been in a game [gladiators] or in the mines [*metallum*] for the character of those who have been found guilty of crimes, it is not to be written on his face, while the penalty of condemnation may be included in both the hands and the legs of one inscription, in which the face, which is figured in the likeness of heavenly beauty, is not to be stained."[24]

[23] "Lex Fufia Caninia and Lex Aelia Sentia," Roman History 31 BC - AD 117 (Roman Imperial History Resource, October 26, 2018), https://ancientromanhistory31-14.com/augustus/reform-and-order-19-18/moral-reforms/lex-fufia-caninia-and-lex-aelia-sentia/.
[24] Alexandr Koptev, ed., "Codex Theodosianus," The Roman Law Library (Y. Lassard and A. Koptev, 2012), 9.40.2, https://web.archive.org/web/20120831060912/http://web.upmf-grenoble.fr/Haiti/Cours/Ak/.

Constantine does not abolish the entirety of the practice, just adapts it to align more with his Christian values. If the practice were not so common, might he have felt he had the power to abolish it completely? Or was the tattoo so influential in the reinforcement of identity that he wanted to keep it? The tattoo was not simply a customary practice for labelling prisoners and slaves, it emphasized the new (and permanent) identity of the wearer. Constantine's acknowledgement of the connection between one's face and their status as being a creation of God demonstrates the power the punitive tattoo held in terms of the individual. When forcibly done, the tattoo removed one's individuality and replaced it with a communal identity. Even when one was no longer a prisoner or slave in the legal sense, their tattoo continued to reinforce their new identity.

As mentioned earlier, the punitive tattoos that came to prominence in Greece were very reliant on language. Very rarely were the tattoos of symbols anymore but instead, as Bitinna says, they tell of what "sort of man" the offenders are from the inscription on their foreheads. Slaves who attempted to escape had their foreheads inscribed with "Stop me, I'm a runaway" (*kateche me, pheugo)*.[25] It is also important to note that tattooing was primarily reserved for non-citizens. *Stigmata* as a punishment had the purpose of evoking shame, a feeling of "otherness", and humiliation. Not only were the criminals, forced laborers, and slaves not considered people, they were now permanently marked with shame. Their crime became their defining characteristic; it became who they were. After tattooing, the body—specifically the face—and therefore, the person was now permanently stigmatized, both literally and by our modern understanding of the word "stigma". As Emperor Valerius Maximus said, the tattooed man became an "image of his

[25] C. P. Jones, "Stigma and Tattoo," 9.

own penalty".[26] His crime was his identity. And that identity was reinforced by the involuntary application and cultural significance of his tattoo, his stigma.

Though the majority of tattoo practices in the ancient world were applied involuntarily, religious groups started the transformation of the tattoo into a voluntary practice that reached its pinnacle in the late Middle Ages, though theirs was still one that represented a communal identity. According to Herodotus' *Histories*, the Greeks were first exposed to the practice of body marking by their neighbors: the Thracians and Syrians.[27][28] The Thracians, as previously discussed, practiced tattooing as a symbol of nobility, which seemed barbaric to the Greeks. As for the Syrians, we see the usage of tattooing as a symbol of slavery. Records from as far back as the second century BCE describe slaves at the temples of Atargatis and Hadad (two Syrian deities) bearing tattoos on their wrists or necks with the initials of the two gods.[29] The writing describes a runaway slave from the sanctuary of Atargatis as "tattooed (*estigmenos*) on the right wrist with two barbarian letters", believed to be the Syriac initials of Ataragatis and Hadad, her consort god. These slaves did not serve human masters, nor did they belong to humans. According to Herodotus, "If a slave belonging to any human owner and takes refuge here and assumes the sacred tattoos [here he uses *stigmata*], giving himself to the god, no-one may touch him."[30] The origins of these slaves varied, as some were given as gifts to the temple by their masters, while some entered on their own volition. Whether they

[26] Imogen Tyler, "The Ancient Penal History of Stigma," stigmamachine.com, January 20, 2020.
[27] Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, 7, 35.
[28] Sprague, "A Translation of the Dissoi Logoi or Dialexeis."
[29] Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, 2, 113.
[30] Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, 2, 113.

willingly entered the temple or were given by their previous masters, the tattoos signified that they belonged to the gods.

The Copts are arguably the most recognizable source of voluntary tattoos that represent a communal identity, particularly because they still do it today. According to Coptic histories, when the Muslims took over Egypt around 639 CE, they forced all Christians[31] to get tattoos as an identifier of their status as a lower-class citizen because of their religion. As described in Coptic tradition, the Muslims enforced large taxes on the Christians and if they could not pay, their eldest son was taken and converted to Islam and serve in the military. To prevent a total removal of their faith and remind their children of who they are if such a situation arose, the Coptic Christians began applying the tattoos to their children at a young age.[32]

Though the children themselves may not necessarily be volunteering for their tattoo, their parents (and the larger community itself) deciding to tattoo their own as opposed to submitting to tattoos as subordinates, demonstrates the voluntary process of tattooing that represented a communal identity and continues to do so.

The Montanists (also called Cataphrygians) represent another group that utilized the religious tattoo for ascetic and ritual purposes. Founded in Phrygia (present-day Turkey) by Montanus in the 2nd century CE, the Montanists believed that the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) spoke through Montanus and his two fellow prophets, Priscilla (or Prisca)

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[31] "Copts" and Christians mean the same thing, the word "Copt" is actually the word for "Egyptian", but it was adopted by the Christians as an identifier.

[32] Alessandra Bishai, "The Meaning of Our Coptic Cross Tattoo" Coptic Orthodox Church of Archangel Michael and ST. Tekla, September 2, 2019. https://sttekla.org/posts/youth/the-meaning-of-our-coptic-cross-tattoo/.

and Maximilla. As for how the practice of religious tattooing came to the Montanists, Susanna Elm suggests it is a combination of Phyrgian pagan practices (the cult of Cybele and Attis, who branded members and covered the fresh burn with gold (Prudentius' Peristephanon)) and early Christian practices of tattooing.[33] The central beliefs of Montanists were neither controversial nor problematic to the church, as prophecy was seen as an honorable thing and was allowed. Montanism began to grow in popularity across Asia Minor throughout the second century, and their popularity became evident by the number of people who abandoned their homes to move to the Montanist settlement. The Montanists believed that a second Jerusalem was set to descend from heaven between the two Phrygian villages of Pepuza and Tymion, so they established a settlement there. The other essential belief of the Montanists was moral rigorism and righteous suffering. The time of fasting was lengthened, followers were forbidden to flee from martyrdom, marriage was discouraged, and second marriages were prohibited.[34]

The Montanists did not become a heretic group until around 177, when the bishops of Asia Minor excommunicated them because of their growing power as a separate sect from Catholicism. However, Montanism continued to spread west, attracting the attention—and ultimate conversion—of the well-known theologian, Tertullian, who believed that Montanism represented the strict code of conduct that Catholic leaders were failing to follow.[35] The movement eventually died out around the sixth century, when Emperor Justinian I enacted legislation against practicing

[33] Susanna Elm, "Pierced by Bronze Needles," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, no. 4 (1996), 412.
[34] Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Montanism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 27, 2007. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Montanism.
[35] Roger Pearse, trans., "The Montanists," Tertullian (The Tertullian Project), accessed April 22, 2022, https://www.tertullian.org/montanism.htm.

Montanism. In his collection of laws and interpretations from 529-565, Justinian's *Corpus Juris Civilis* addresses the Montanists under Section 5 of Book 1, "Concerning heretics, Manicheans, and Samaritans".[36] Amongst other groups deemed heretical, like the Arians, the Montanists "are to be classed as guilty of the worst of all heretical crimes, shall never have the power to assemble or reside in the Roman Empire".[37]

Most of the information we have today comes from Eusebius' *Historia ecclesiastica*. The history of the church is quite obviously anti-Montanist, referring to Montanus and his followers as "venomous reptiles".[38] Eusebius also cites the historian Apollonius of Hierapolis and his account of his own work against the Montanists.[39] Apollonius claims Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla "gave the adversary opportunity", which caused their prophetic "frenzy and ecstasy". He also refutes their prophecies, proving them false, and criticizes their martyrs:

"His actions and his teaching show who this new teacher is. This is he who taught the dissolution of marriage; who made laws for fasting; who named Pepuza and Tymion, small towns in Phrygia, Jerusalem, wishing to gather people to them from all directions; who appointed collectors of money; who contrived the receiving of gifts under the name of offerings; who provided salaries for those who preached his doctrine, that its teaching might prevail through gluttony."[40]

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[36] S. P. Scott, trans., "The Code of Justinian," The code of Justinian: Book 1, (Cincinnati: The Central Trust Company, 1932) https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Anglica/CJ1_Scott.htm#5.
[37] Scott, "The Code of Justinian".
[38] Eusebius, "The Church History of Eusebius," trans. Arthur McGiffert, Eusebius Pamphilius: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine - Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 470 (Grand Rapids, MI) accessed April 22, 2022, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.html.
[39] Eusebius, "Church History", 473.
[40] Eusebius, "Church History", 473.

He continues with his criticisms of the Montanist leaders, especially their appearances: "Tell me, does a prophet dye his hair? Does a prophet stain his eyelids? Does a prophet delight in adornment? Does a prophet play with tables and dice? Does a prophet lend on usury? Let them confess whether these things are lawful or not; but I will show that they have been done by them."[41]

Eusebius also cites Serapion, bishop of the church of Antioch, who calls the Montanists "an abomination to all the brotherhood throughout the world".[42]

Criticisms of the Montanists amongst Catholic leaders focused on their accepting of gifts, false prophecies, satanic influence, and character of their leaders. Another practice their critics accused was ritual child murder. According to Susanna Elm in her article, "Pierced by Bronze Needles: Anti-Montanist Charges of Ritual Stigmatization in Their Fourth-Century Context", many fourth century authors cite and elaborate on Cyril of Jerusalem's initial accusations of ritual child murder in a series of lectures from 350 (almost 100 years after Montanism had died out).[43] Elm cites two of the most notable claims against the Montanists, Epiphanus and Augustine. Epiphanus, in *Panarion Haereses*, claims that they would "pierce a young boy in every part of his body with needles and take his blood to use at sacrifice" while Augustine adds to this, claiming, "they are said to confect their eucharist from the blood of a year-old infant which they squeeze from tiny punctures all over its body; they mix it with wheat and make bread from it. If the child dies, he is regarded by them as a martyr, but if he lives, he is regarded

[41]Eusebius, "Church History", 475.
[42] Eusebius, "Church History", 478.
[43] Elm, "Pierced by Bronze Needles", 400.

as a great priest".[44] However, as Elm points out, the word used by both Epiphanus and Augustine is *stigmata*. So, were the Montanists truly practicing child murder? Unlikely. Accusations of child sacrifice were not an uncommon attack by Christian groups. "Blood libel" especially began to catch on around the 12th century as an accusation that Jews sacrificed Christian children to make unleavened bread from their blood. As for the Montanists, James B. Rives argues that the charges originated in the mid-second century when early Christian groups were labelling each other as pagan. Rives writes, "It is not surprising that among other strategies they [Christians] should try to deflect the charges onto groups they considered heretical". [45] As the Montanists were deemed heretical after they had essentially died out, it follows that the blood libel would be applied to their rejection from Christianity. The description of the practice as *stigmata* as well as their emphasis on the book of *Revelation* all point to some form of tattooing in their practice.

According to Elm, the Montanists reclaimed and redefined the tattoo by making it voluntary. Elm continues to examine the power in marking the body, writing, "Thus, markings, even the most horrendous, may be reversed into something positive, and patterns of social dependence symbolized by such markings, including slavery, may be transformed to represent ultimate authority—not despite, but because of their negative association."[46] Voluntary stigmatization meant making the authority the one implementing the tattoo over another holds the authority of the person being tattooed. In other words, penal tattooing in the Graeco-Roman world (a practice recognizable to Christians by this time), by design, took authority from the criminal being tattooed and

[44] Ronald J. Teske, trans, *The Works of Saint Augustine: Arianism and Other Heresies*, (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 1995).
[45]James B. Rives, "The Blood Libel against the Montanists," *Vigiliae Christianae*, no. 50 (1996), 120.
[46] Elm, "Pierced by Bronze Needles,"414.

gave it to those who forced their tattoo on them. For the Montanists, tattooing oneself (or voluntarily receiving a tattoo) meant that the authority over their bodies and their selves stayed with them. This is likely the same for the Copts.

But why did the Montanists tattoo? The Book of Revelation is central to Montanist beliefs, as seen in their focus of the Second Coming of Jesus and the new Jerusalem. In the Book of Revelation, there are many references to "seals" of God. (Rev. 3. 10-13 and Rev. 7. 2-3) Revelation 14 references Jesus standing on Mount Zion with 140,000 people, all with Jesus and God's names written on their foreheads. In contrast, Revelation 20 tells of the followers of the Antichrist (the Beast) who also have marks that signify their loyalty to him. The Montanists were operating in a world where tattooing was not an uncommon practice. Pagan religious sects across the Middle East practiced some form of body marking as a symbol of loyalty and devotion, while the Greeks and Romans were using tattooing as a means of punishment, specifically tattooing the forehead. Therefore, though there is not enough conclusive evidence to prove that Montanists routinely practiced tattooing and most references to any form of body-puncturing come from accusations from critics, it is possible to argue that the Montanists associated the marks referenced in the Bible with the practice of tattooing in their world. Furthermore, the righteousness associated with martyrdom and punishment in Montanism combined the association of tattooing with criminal punishment, it follows that tattooing would be an attractive practice. Finally, the tattoo represented a shared identity amongst not only Montanists, but what they believed to be an association with the 140,000 standing with Jesus in the Book of Revelation.

The "Vikings" or more general, northern and eastern tribes were another group know to practice voluntary tattooing as a part of their culture. Though also a negative association of tattooing, the connection to "pagans" and "barbarians" greatly differed from the criminal and enslaved connotations of the Graeco-Roman world. As Minjie Su writes, tattoos were used as a distinguishing, "othering" tool to separate the "civilized" from groups like Germanic peoples and Vikings, connecting tattooing with nudity and nudity with barbarianism. There are also the pagan beliefs, in which some groups believed tattooing an animal or deity could allow the warrior to invoke its powers.[47] Su cites examples of what are believed to be tattoos of boars worn by the Aestyans meant to honor and invoke protection from the Mother of the Gods mentioned in Tacitus' *Germania* from 98 AD. As Tacitus writes, "As the characteristic of their national superstition, they wear the images of wild boars. This alone serves them for arms, this is the safeguard of all, and by this every worshipper of the goddess is secured even amidst his foes".[48]

Ahmad Ibn Fadlan describes his encounters with another group, the Russiyyah, in 922 in *Mission to the Volga*. Though he does not use the English word "tattoo" (because it didn't enter the English language until the late 18th century) nor the Greek word *stigma*, he does refer to the men as "dark, from the tips of their toes, right up to their necks—trees, pictures, and the like." The women, though not tattooed, also decorated their bodies in ways that represented the wealth of their husbands. Every woman wore a small box made of iron, brass, silver, or gold tied at their breasts along with gold or silver neck

[47] Minjie Su, "Tattooed Vikings? A Look at Medieval Body Art," Medievalists.net, May 6, 2018, https://www.medievalists.net/2018/05/tattooed-vikings-a-look-at-medieval-body-art/.
[48] Tacitus, *Tacitus on Germany*, trans. Thomas Gordon (Project Gutenberg, 2006), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2995/2995-h/2995-h.htm.

rings, each representing ten thousand dirhams.[49] Though it is not entirely clear whether the marks on these "barbaric" peoples were permanent or not, the association of having an image on the body that connected to a god or divine force was enough to form a negative connotation. Especially in Ibn Fadlan's work, which continues in the next section to describe the Russiyyah as "the filthiest of all God's creatures" who are "addicted to alcohol".[50]

The Britons, an umbrella term used to describe the many tribes in the British Isles, were first recorded in history by the Romans in 55 BCE. Groups like the Picts and Celts were among the many recorded by Caesar in *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*. Much to the surprise of the Romans, who only knew of tattoos in the punitive sense, these peoples decorated their bodies. As Caesar wrote in his account of the Gallic Wars, "All the Britons dye themselves with woad, which produces a blue colour, and makes their appearance in battle more terrible." Such was the effect of their appearance that they became known throughout Europe as the Pretani, a Celtic word meaning the 'painted' or the 'tattooed' ones. From that, the name Britain was eventually derived.[51]

The Celts were another group that Charles MacQuarrie cites the following translation of *The Cambrai Homily*, the earliest known Irish homily, as evidence of devout Christian tattoos dating as far back as the 7th century: "that he may receive the stigmata and signs of the Cross for Christ's sake".[52] MacQuarrie notes that it isn't clear

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[49] Ibn Faḍlān et al., *Mission to the Volga* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 56.
[50] Ibn Faḍlān et al., *Mission to the Volga*, 56.
[51] David Cox, "The Name for Britain Comes from Our Ancient Love of Tattoos," BBC Future (BBC, November 10, 2016), https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20161110-the-name-for-britain-comes-from-our-ancient-love-of-tattoos#:~:text=As%20Caesar%20wrote%20in%20his,the%20'painted'%20or%20the%20'.
[52] Charles W. MacQuarrie, "Insular Celtic Tattooing: History, Myth and Metaphor," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 38.

what exactly is meant by "stigmata" (marks, scars, or tattoos), but argues that the inclusion of receiving stigmata in this prayer speaks to the concept of body markings seen as a blessing. While this further exemplifies the holiness of stigmata in European Christianity.

Through the Early Middle Ages, opinions of tattoos were a bit controversial. Some associated them with the barbarians and pagans, while the Christian tattoo was beginning to gain popularity as groups like the Celts converted to Christianity. William of Malmesbury also wrote negatively of Briton practices in *Chronicles of the Kings of England*, writing, "In fine, the English at that time, wore short garments reaching to the mid-knee; they had their hair cropped; their beards shaven; their arms laden with golden bracelets; their skin adorned with punctured designs"[53]. Malmesbury uses these characteristics, along with rashness, drunkenness, and wanton, to exemplify their savagery. At the same time, tattoos amongst Christians were growing in popularity. A great example of the conflict in Christian tattoos are the Papal Legates of Pope Hadrian in 786. The legates addressed members of the church of Northumbria who had been tattooed and compared their act to that done by "the pagans by devilish prompting"[54]. Hadrian says that those who tattoo their bodies disrespect God, however "if anyone were to undergo this injury of staining for the sake of God, he would receive a great reward for it". Hadrian continues, "But if anyone does it from the superstition of the pagans, it will not contribute to his salvation any more than does circumcision of the body to the Jews without the belief of the heart."[55] The tattoo in itself was not inherently condemned or

[53] William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, ed. J. A. Giles (Project Gutenberg, 2015), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/50778/50778-h/50778-h.htm.
[54] Charles W. MacQuarrie, "Insular Celtic Tattooing: History, Myth and Metaphor," 36.
[55] MacQuarrie, "Insular Celtic Tattooing," 38.

seen as disrespectful to God; what mattered was the intention behind the individual who received it.

The voluntary tattoos had a shared intention amongst all the groups that participated: loyalty. Whether it be to a deity or a people, the tattoo, when willingly received, was a symbol of loyalty to someone or something. The British history with tattoos continued to develop into the Middle Ages, especially amongst leaders. For Saxon kings, like Harold II, tattoos represented loyalty to the country they served and ruled. The body of Harold II, who ruled England from 1065 until his defeat at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, was identified by his wife Edith Swan Neck by his tattoos of "Edith" and "England" over his heart.[56]

The Middle Ages is when we see the tattoo begin its change from a forcibly-done mark that represented a communal identity into a practice of self-expression and individual choice on a greater scale, especially between 1100 and 1600. This is due to the rise of awareness of "the self" in the Western world and exposure to tattooing in other, non-punitive forms. From this time, tattoos took on a more personal significance. Though the majority of the tattoos were still representative of a communal identity, the tattoo-wearer used the mark to identify themself as an individual within that group. As opposed to being forced into an identity and thus losing themselves, the Middle Ages saw people willingly identifying themselves with a group. The former idea of the tattoo from the classical world was fading, although very slowly. The influence of the Coptic Christians who brought their use of the tattoo into the Holy Land, combined with the increased

[56] "Tattoos in Europe: From Slaves and Sailors to Kings and Tsars," Royal Museums Greenwich

value of symbolism in the medieval Christian world and the exposure to other peoples' such as the Vikings and Britons use of the tattoo in non-punitive forms, led to this evolution of the tattoo that serves as the turning point for the tattoo in Western culture.

Prior to the Middle Ages, the tattoo served as a method of control. The involuntary application of tattoos on prisoners, criminals, and slaves in the Greek and Roman world created a new identity for them. Tattoos on the face, arms, or calves were visible to all and were intended to overshadow any other identifying features. That is, the tattoos replaced one's individual identity and autonomy over their body with a symbol that marked them as just one of many sharing a communal identity. They were no longer themselves, but a criminal, a slave, a prisoner, all in all: a marked person. The other side of tattooing prior to the Middle Ages, the side that eventually comes to the forefront, is the voluntary tattoo. Though these tattoos, like the punitive tattoo, were still usually representing of a communal identity, there was some level of individual choice in terms of deciding to become tattooed. In the High Middle Ages, we see the turning point of the tattoo in Western culture. Individuals and their decisions to get tattooed for their own self-expression largely replace the derogatory nature of the antique tattoo, though the stigma of the punitive tattoo remained and was joined by the resurrection of the view of tattoos as "barbarian", this time from northern European peoples instead of the Persians and Thracians.

The High Middle Ages brings us the introduction of the university. With the earliest universities opening in Bologna in 1088 and Paris in 1150, advancements were

being made in the fields of science and philosophy.[57] The beginnings of what we would call "individualism" are based in medieval scholarship. Individualism, at its core, is the acknowledgement and distinction between the self and others. From there, the basis of political and social philosophies rooted in the belief and value of individuality and relationships with other individuals.[58] As the church controlled most aspects of life in the Middle Ages, with strict hierarchical systems, the awareness of self formed within these social groupings. Medieval man sought integration in the group he belonged to and was only able to become aware of himself, his individuality, within his social group. Individualism also stemmed from Christian beliefs of life, death, and the afterlife. With the possibility of heaven and hell based on their own choices, not the actions of the group, the seeds of individualism were planted. For the early Christians, identifying as a Christian was unique; being a Christian was something that separated an individual from the masses. However, being a European in the Middle Ages meant being a Christian. It was no profound, self-realizing, experience. In a society where kings established a national religion, which had been Christianity since the time of Constantine, one's religious identity was not a source of individual awareness. The awareness of self did exist at this time, however, in the form of individual responsibility for one's own actions.

Many historians credit the church's involvement in familial affairs for the rise in individualism. In the 800's, the church began releasing a series of laws and regulations, many of which led to a more personal attachment to Christianity. Arguably one of the most impactful reforms in terms of the development of individualism and personal

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[57] Rodney Stark, *Bearing False Witness: Debunking Centuries of Anti-Catholic History* (Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2016), 144.
[58] Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 3.

awareness were the marriage laws. Roman civil law banned familial marriage within four degrees in the *Tituli Ex Corpore Ulpiani*.[59] By the early 9th century it was extended to seven degrees of relation (second cousins once removed; first cousins three times removed), as outlined in the Gracian Decretum. It was, however, changed back to four in 1215 by the Fourth Lateran Counsel, but by different standards that labelled four degrees as up to third cousins.[60] Life became more condensed and immediate for the average Christian individual. The change in marriage laws undermined the traditional familial clan loyalties. The marriage laws served as a power play by church officials, as family ties were leading to corruption amongst clergy. Now, the idea of a more nuclear family was being born, shifting focus towards the individual as a member of a community rather than one of many.

Why did the church want to get involved with family and marriage? There are two contrasting, or overlapping, views. First, the church was genuinely concerned with incestuous marriages and wanted to limit them as much as possible. By extending the ban on marriage within seven degrees of consanguinity, they were subsequently avoiding marriage with two or three degrees. The other view, the one I believe as more likely, was that the church wanted to expand its power past familial loyalties. Nepotism was a common occurrence amongst clergy when it came to assigning leadership positions in the church. For example, the concept of a cardinal-nephew (a relative of the pope that

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[59] "Tituli Ex Corpore Ulpiani.," Tituli ex Corpore Ulpiani., accessed April 22, 2022, http://ancientrome.ru/ius/library/ulpianus/tituli.htm. 5.6: "There is no marriage between parents and children of any degree. Among relatives, however, marriages could not have been contracted even until the fourth grade; but now it is permissible to get married from the third grade; but only a brother's daughter, not even a sister's daughter, or aunt, although they are of the same degree. We cannot marry her, who was our stepmother or step-daughter or mother-in-law."

[60] Jone Johnson Lewis, "How Did Consanguinity Work in Medieval Marriages?," ThoughtCo (ThoughtCo, March 9, 2019), https://www.thoughtco.com/consanguinity-and-medieval-marriages-3529573.

became a cardinal because of his relation) originated in the Middle Ages. According to historian Colin Morris, "great families" separated themselves from the peasantry and maintained control for generations.[61] By prohibiting incestual marriage, an act that was done to keep power within an extended family, clan loyalties were becoming intermixed, thus redistributing the power that used to be held by a handful of families.

Along with change in marriage law came tales of courtly love. These stories had the unique element of discussing individuals and their feelings. As scholarship continued to investigate "affection" as a psychology that scholars like Anselm of Canterbury and Aelred of Rievlaulx based on Augustinian thought that feelings moved people toward God and applied it to concepts such as love. In William of Saint Thierry's *Nature and Dignity of Love*, he describes five levels of love that each build up to godliness. The book taught that self-reflection and analysis of one's own feelings was the path to God.[62] Courtly love was centered on this self-reflection of feelings towards another. In *The Art of Courtly Love*, written by Andreas Capellanus in the 12th century, the rules of love are outlined and follow what William of Saint Thierry writes about the reflection and acknowledgement of feelings required to understand love for another. Rules such as "He who is not jealous cannot love" and "Love can deny nothing to love" emphasize this awareness of feelings.[63] The story of Alexander and Soredamors from Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligés* features the individualism expressed in popular stories of courtly love. The narrator describes both characters "looking into their hearts" to process their love

[61] Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200,* 40-41.
[62]William of Saint Thierry, *The Nature and Dignity of Love* (Kalamazoo, Mich. : Cistercian Publications, 1981), http://archive.org/details/naturedignityofl0000will.
[63] Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

and repeatedly references "two hearts becoming one".[64] Stories like these turned medieval audiences towards their own internal reflection and individuality.

Christian architecture also emphasized a shift in focus towards the individual experience of God. Gothic architecture was immersive; it was meant to enhance the experience of the person standing in the church, not just visually entertain them. Gothic churches served as the connection between heaven and earth (heaven being understood as a literal place in the sky) and aimed to create this bridge through the senses. As Otto G. von Simson describes in his article, "The Gothic Cathedral: Design and Meaning", "If the Gothic architect designed his sanctuary according to the laws of harmonious proportion, he did not only imitate the perfection of the visible world but also created an image, in as much as that is possible to man, of an invisible one."[65] The geometric perfection in the design was inspired by the Augustinian connection as geometry or reflective of God's design. The experience of a cathedral was also intended to point people to heaven, literally. High ceilings and pointed arches guided the eyes upwards, toward heaven. Von Simson writes that the cathedral is "perhaps best understood as a 'model' of the medieval universe".[66] This "model" allowed those in the church to experience their own place in the medieval universe.

The medieval world can be understood through an emphasis on the realness of symbols, and tattoos follow this trend. Relics from saints were believed to possess power and marks on the body received from God, like the stigmata, were seen as blessings. The

[64] Chretien de Troyes, *Cliges: A Romance*, trans. L. J. Gardiner (Project Gutenberg, 2009).
[65] Otto von Simson, "The Gothic Cathedral," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, no. 11 (1952), 13.
[66] von Simson, "The Gothic Cathdral," 16.

mindset of the medieval world centered around understanding connections between literal and metaphysical. Churches had symbolic meanings in terms of structure, but they were also believed to serve as physical connectors between humans and the divine. Physical objects were believed to hold power, as the belief was that a representation of something was, in some way, a part of the thing it represented. For example, the image of the cross held at least some of the power that the literal cross did. When it came to tattoos in the Middle Ages, especially those received by Christians on crusade or pilgrimage, the marks were more than a symbol of their devotion, they were believed to invoke divine power and protection.

The concept of religious pilgrimage is not a uniquely medieval Christian practice. However, events like the First Crusade cemented its place in their culture. The Crusades, a series of wars between 1095 and 1291 aimed at reclaiming the Holy Land for the Catholic church, emphasized the importance of the Holy Land in medieval Christianity. As described in *Guide-Book to Palestine*, written anonymously around 1350 and translated by J. H. Bernard, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and other places that make up the Holy Land (Nazareth, Acon, Cana, etc.) [67] is more than just a tourist trip. As Bernard mentions in his introduction, guidebooks similar to the one he translated were passed out amongst pilgrims all along the path from Europe to Israel and around the Holy Land itself. Though many copied information almost exactly from other guidebooks, this guide specifically is on the more detailed end of the spectrum.[68] The author directs the reader from town to town but has multiple sections depending on where the pilgrim decides to

[67] J.H. Bernard, tran., *Guide-Book to Palestine Circ; AD 1350* (London, UK: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1894).
[68] J. H. Bernard, *Guide-Book to Palestine*.

center their travels. These sections each have a landmark or well-known town as their base and describe the stops one should make in that area, acting as a handheld Christian tour guide. Within the borders of the must-see towns included in the guidebook, the author describes attractions and artifacts one must visit if they were to call themselves a true Christian and fulfill their pilgrimage. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is, what the author calls, "the chief place among the holy and memorable sites"[69] because, the author explains, it is the place where Jesus' body laid until his resurrection on the third day.

Prior to Saint Francis, the stigmata were important in Christian culture. Although the wounds of Jesus weren't labelled as "stigmata" until Francis became marked, the importance of marks on the body was evident. In 1300, Francis received a vision from God of a man with six wings on a crucifix as marks began to form on his hands, feet, and side, matching the man in the vision's. Thomas of Celano's biography solidifies the sanctity of the stigmata when he refers to Francis' seeing himself as "adorned with many costly pearls as if with precious gems, and marvelously decked out beyond the glory and honor of other men".[70] Whether it be the suffering endured by Jesus at the crucifixion or the connection of biblical references to marks on the body of Jesus and his people, Christian groups like the Montanists believed in tattooing as a reflection of that. After Francis received the stigmata, the practice of body marking to mirror it grew in popularity. Reports of people cutting, burning, or branding themselves to either copy or claim divine stigmata became more common. For those who went on pilgrimage,

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[69] J. H. Bernard, *Guide-Book to Palestine*.
[70] "Medieval Sourcebook: Thomas of Celano First and Second Lives of Saint Francis," Internet History Sourcebooks Project (Fordham University), accessed April 16, 2021, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/stfran-lives.asp.

receiving a tattoo was a way of mirroring the stigmata, both in pain and because it was a visible symbol of their faith.

The literal was central to religion in the Middle Ages Christians went on pilgrimage to be in the physical space they believed closest to God. They traveled for to be physically in the presence of holy relics or places. Pilgrimage continues past the Middle Ages, as it does today. And, as today, people loved souvenirs. Whether it be to show off about a visit or as a reminder of one's travels, souvenirs serve a purpose. In the Middle Ages, Coptic tattoo artists, trained in the skill that represents a critical part of their religion, moved to Jerusalem and Bethlehem to set up shop there in order to tattoo fellow Copts who came for pilgrimage and used the tattoo as evidence of pilgrimage.[71] They soon began attracting European pilgrims in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well. By the start of the fifteenth century, tattooing had begun its saturation into European Christian culture.

The process of applying a tattoo was carried out by carving images of Jesus, Mary, saints, the Coptic cross, and more into blocks of olive wood.[72] These blocks were then coated in ink and pressed onto the skin, acting as a stamp. The outline was traced with a needle (usually a sewing needle) dipped in ink resulting in the tattoo. By using the stamping method as opposed to hand drawing stencils or free handing the tattoo, the artists were able to work quickly and see multiple clients in a row. This was especially useful during the Easter season, when pilgrimage and tourism rates were at their highest. According to Jacob Razzouk, owner and tattoo artist at one of the longest-running

[71] John Carswell, *Coptic Tattoo Designs* (Beirut: American University of Beirut), 1958.
[72] For images, refer to *Coptic Tattoo Designs* by John Carswell, 1958

pilgrimage tattoo shops in Jerusalem, the most common of these medieval designs was the Jerusalem cross.[73] This design, "a cross potent between four crosslets or a cross of equal arms, each terminating in a cross bar", is reported to have first appeared around the First Crusade in 1096 on Godfrey of Bouillon's armor and was soon after incorporated into almost every pilgrimage tattoo design.[74]

Though the practice of pilgrimage tattoos didn't gain serious popularity until the 14th century and into the Early Modern Period, the societal conditions that set the stage for the tattoo developed in the Middle Ages. According to historian Juliet Fleming, the "Jerusalem tattoo" had become popular in Europe by the 15th century as "it was common practice for pilgrims to have themselves tattooed in Jerusalem, returning home bearing indelible marks as evidence of both their journey and of their commitment to the service of God". [75] Although the tattoo had faced criticism from some Christians in the Early Middle Ages from leaders like Pope Hadrian mostly due to the complex associations with both religious devotion and the negative historical connotation with crime and barbarism, the criticism did not outweigh the practice. On one side, they have a connection to the stigmata, while the other side placed them closer to pagans and barbarians. We know, however, that the reputation of the tattoo didn't hinder the success of the practice in the medieval West. As a Christian society, the belief in the power of symbols and representations of the divine was common. As was the case when it came to images of the cross. The most famous example of the donning of the cross for protection, power, and identification was the crusaders.

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[73] "History," RazzoukTattoo, accessed April 2021, https://razzouktattoo.com/pages/history.
[74] "History," RazzoukTattoo.
[75] Juliet Fleming, "The Renaissance Tattoo," 79.

The medical field also utilized the power of religious symbols and words as an evocation of divine healing powers. John Carswell's book, *Coptic Tattoo Designs*, first released in 1956 and including prints and descriptions of a collection of Coptic tattoo designs from Jerusalem, notes that not all tattoos done were religious. In 1956, while exploring the city of Jerusalem, John Carswell happened upon the Razzouk tattoo shop that doubled as a coffin maker. Carswell spoke with Jacob Razzouk, whose son now runs the business, and learned of the Coptic tattoo tradition. With Razzouk's permission, Carswell printed his tattoo blocks and published them in his book. The tattoos depict biblical scenes, like the resurrection of Jesus, and symbols, like the cross or a lamb. Tattoos representing a completed pilgrimage are essential in Coptic culture, but Carswell includes other groups that participated in the practice, namely European pilgrims.

Aside from their purpose as proof of pilgrimage, Razzouk explains to Carswell "therapeutic tattooing".[76] On injured or "physically vulnerable" areas, Carwell writes, tattooing a band of dots was believed to strengthen or heal that part of the body. The symbolism of the flower, found in images of flowers in pots as well as in the hand of a mermaid, was believed by both Christians and pagans to enhance fertility dating back to the Middle Ages.[77] For example, John of Gaddesden's popular 1304 *Rosa Anglica practica medicine a capite ad pedes*. Gaddesden was a well-known English physician who studied at Oxford. Gaddesden was famous for successfully treating King Edward II's son for smallpox as well as being the inspiration for Geoffrey Chaucer's *The*

[76] Carswell, *Coptic Tattoo Designs*, xiv-xv.
[77] Carswell, *Coptic Tattoo Designs,* 2.

Canterbury Tales.[78] In *Rosa Anglica*, Gaddesden writes of a cure for toothaches: "Again, write the words on the jaw of the patient: 'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Amen. + Rex + Pax + Nax + in Christi Filio', and the pain will cease at once as I have often seen." As an alternative method, Gaddesden recommends the patient write the words on a piece of parchment and touch the tooth with the other hand as he does so.[79] While pilgrims used the tattoo as a symbol of devotion, both Coptic Christians and European physicians relied on the power of marking the body.

The pilgrimage tattoo continued to evolve throughout the late Middle Ages and into the Early Modern period. Throughout the 16th century, Europe was undergoing religious changes. As political and religious leaders began to clash with the Catholic church, a new form of Christianity rose across Europe, Protestantism. Protestant denominations, like Calvinism, Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, and Anglicanism rejected the Catholic beliefs in the realness of symbols and acts like pilgrimage as sources of redemption, instead emphasizing a more personal faith.[80] Even though the Reformation drastically altered Christianity in the Western world, the pilgrimage tattoo did not fade. Protestants continued to make journeys to the Holy Land. The Holy Land was still held in high regard by Protestant Christians, however, the belief in the literal power held there was replaced by a spirit of adventure. European travelers, like Henry Maundrell and William Lithgow, note the pilgrimage tattoo in the records of their journeys. Both tales

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[78] "John of Gaddesden," Science and Its Times: Understanding the Social Significance of Scientific Discovery, Encyclopedia.com, March 28, 2022. https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/john-gaddesden

[79] Jennifer Allen Rosencrans, "Wearing the Universe: Symbolic Markings in Early Modern England," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 52.

[80] Robb S. Harvey, Protestant Reformation, https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1064/protestant-reformation.

reference the tattoo as a common practice amongst European travelers—both Catholic and Protestant—to the Holy Land.

Edward Terry recorded his travels from England to India, where he served as a chaplain for the English embassy. *A Voyage to East India* was written in 1622 and published as an extended travelogue in 1655. Terry describes the tattoo of his friend and fellow traveler, Thomas Coryat, a Catholic, who "would pride himself very much in the beholding of those Characters, and seeing them would often speak those words of St. *Paul* written to the *Galatians, Gal.* 6. 17. (though far besides the Apostles meaning) *I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*"[81] Coryat's tattoo reflected the traditional pilgrimage designs: on the left wrist he had the Jerusalem cross and on the right, a cross with three nails and the words "Via Veritas Vita". Terry seemed to look down on the tattoos, as if they were a barbaric practice reserved for Catholics. Many other Protestant travelers, however, were able to separate the tattoo from the Catholic association.

Another English and Anglican chaplain and traveler, this time to Syria, recorded his travels through the Holy Land. Maundrell began his service in Aleppo in 1695 and two years later went on an Easter pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where his diary eventually became published as *A journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter, A.D. 1697*. Maundrell describes the events of he and his fellow pilgrims on March 27, 1697, at the Holy Grave: "The next morning nothing extraordinary happened, which gave many of the pilgrims leisure to have their arms marked with the usual ensigns of Jerusalem".[82]

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[81] Edward Terry, *A Voyage to East India* (London: T. W., 1655; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A95658.0001.001?view=toc.
[82] Henry Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter, A.D. 1697* (Wellcome Collection) Date Accessed March 17, 2022, https://wellcomecollection.org/works/k6jw7vtu/items?canvas=2.

Maundrell notes that this was the day before Easter, a popular time for pilgrimage and the tattoo industry. He describes the process of how the "Artists" apply each tattoo: "They have stamps in Wood of any figure that you would desire; which they first print off your Arm with powder of Charcoal: Then taking two very fine Needles ty'd close together, and dipping them often, like a Pen, in certain Ink, compounded, as I was informed, of Gunpowder and Ox-Gall, they make them small punctures all along the lines of the figure which they have printed; and then washing the part in wine, conclude the work."[83] Though Maundrell himself did not receive the tattoos, he did not seem to have any disdain for the practice or look down upon it as Catholic.

The pilgrimage tattoos that became a popular souvenir in the Middle Ages were voluntary, but not necessarily individualized. The more personalized side of tattooing in the Early Modern period came in two forms. The first example, Simon Forman, inspired by medieval medicinal practices implemented permanent body marking in his own astrological medical practice. The second example, which I argue is the pinnacle example of the complete individualization of the tattoo, comes from William Lithgow, a man who completely rejected the Catholic associations of the pilgrimage tattoo and personalized his own design.

Early Modern medicine and science was especially centered around the planets. Medical astrology is attributed to Ptolemy in 150 BCE and continued to lead medical practices into the Early Modern period. Medical astrology assigns zodiac signs based on the moon to rule each part of the body: Aries ruled the head while Pisces ruled the feet.

[83] Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo*.

Positions of the moon and planets were believed to affects one's health. The body was described as being affected by the earth, air, water, and fire, which correspond to the humors (blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile) and their qualities (hot, cold, wet, and dry). Medical books translated to Latin from Greek discuss how the planets at an individual's time of birth affect their characteristics and health. In the 13th century, Christian interpretations were applied to the Zodiac, assigning the signs to biblical characters while still using them as omens for medical practice and life decisions: Aries, the ruler of the head, was Abraham while Virgo, ruler of the stomach, was Mary. [84]

Simon Forman continues the medieval tradition of body marking, like Gaddesden, as well as the principles of astrological astrology in his medical practice but adds the permanence of the tattoo. Forman was a renowned English physician and astrologer who notably tattooed himself with astrological symbols specific to him. He began practicing magic around 1596. The practice of magic at this time wasn't necessarily anti-Christian. As the Catholic and Protestant churches clashed and struggled for power, people clung to the belief in the power of signs and symbols.[85] The belief that the stars were a way to interpret God's will was common, and astrologers were highly trained in sciences like astronomy and mathematics. Just as Crusaders believed the cross would invoke power years earlier, astrologers like Forman believed in personalized symbols as power to control, or at least treat, one's health and life path based on an individual's zodiac. While treating medical issues, Forman also routinely made sigils, symbols engraved on rocks or

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[84] Charles Clark, "The Zodiac Man in Medieval Medical Astrology," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 3 (January 1982): 13–38. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=202116454678&site=eds-live.
[85] Jennifer Allen Rosencrans, "Wearing the Universe: Symbolic Markings in Early Modern England," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 52.

rings, for people seeking love, protection, etc., as his casebooks from 1596 to 1603 indicate up to 2000 consultations per year.[86]

What is interesting about Forman's practice is his use of body marking. It was not necessarily new or groundbreaking; as we know, the tattoo had been around for centuries and the belief in symbols on the body having life-altering powers was also not new. Forman, however, makes no note of using magic in any Christian sense, only astrological.

In the 1611 medical book *Volumen Primum*, Forman notes that he marked his left arm and right breast with the "characters" of Venus, Jupiter, and Cancer on the 24th and 26th of March 1609. Why these symbols at why so specific of the dates? Forman writes that if "in a special hour observing the course of heaven, [a man] will better his constellation and impress in his body the character of a planet star sign, or angel that it shall there abide and be seen ever after". [87] According to him, the planets of Venus, Jupiter, and Cancer governed his horoscope. By marking his body when Cancer was ascendant, Forman believed he could invoke the powers of his horoscope and therefore alter his life. Though Forman never describes the marking process as *stigma*, he does imply permanence in the words "shall there abide and be seen ever after". The process Forman explains is the making of the ink (dissolving gold in sodium chloride) and the testing of it, which was composed of him rubbing some onto his hand and washing it off

[86] Lauren Kassell, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, and John Young, 'Simon Forman (1552–1611)', *A Critical Introduction to the Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634*, https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/reading-the-casebooks/who-were-the-practitioners/simon-forman, accessed 16 April 2022.
[87] Jennifer Allen Rosencrans, "Wearing the Universe: Symbolic Markings in Early Modern England," 48.

when it dried. After a few hours, the area turned "reddish tawny or purple"[88] and would not wash away, even after four days of washing. After the testing process, Forman writes: "It is the only way to make characters with in ones body in an hour of any planet"[89]. If he knew of the tattooing process, which I believe is likely, he may have found an alternative method due to the value of time in the act. Like the medieval physician Gaddesden's practice of using Christian words and symbols to heal, which relied on the day and planetary rule of the patient along with the divinity of the symbols[90], the effectiveness of Forman's "treatment" depended on the individual. Whether he pricked his skin and rubbed in the ink or, more likely, simply stained it, the permanence of the astrological marking made at the right time was believed by Forman to be the significance of the power.

The second example of the individualization of the Early Modern tattoo, William Lithgow, was a self-proclaimed professional traveler who recorded his notes on prices, food, women, natives, and personal anecdotes for future travelers.[91] In the prologue of *Rare Adventures and Painful Peregrinations*, Lithgow explains that his aim for the book is not only to educate and inspire historians and travelers, but to also describe his imprisonment and torture in Spain at the hands of the Inquisition. Lithgow's book was intended for Catholics to "clearely see therein, as in a Mirrour, their owne blindness, and the damnable errours of the blind Guiders, Deceavers, and Idolators"[92]. Lithogw's disdain for the Catholics is evident throughout the book. In 1609, Lithgow left Paris on

[88] Rosencrans, "Wearing the Universe,", 48.
[89] Rosencrans, "Wearing the Universe,", 48.
[90] Rosencrans, "Wearing the Universe, 58.
[91] William Lithgow, and Gilbert Phelps, *The Rare Adventures and Painful Peregrinations of William Lithgow* (Folio Society, 1974), 14.
[92] Lithgow, *Rare Adventures*, 19.

his journey across Europe and into the Middle East, with the first stop being in Italy. As the center of Catholic faith, Lithgow did not hold back on his opinions of Rome, referring to it as "shamefully defrauded"[93]. Before leaving Rome and continuing through Italy, Lithgow reflects on his experience and continued criticism of Catholic faith: "Would God all the Papists in Britaine had the like eie-witnessing approbation as I have had, I am certainly perswaded, with tears & sighes, they would heavily bemone the terrible fal of that Babylonian whoore, which in a prophane estimatione is their holy mother Church."[94]

When Lithgow and his companions arrived in Palestine on April 20, 1612, the Armenian caravan he had joined stopped at the ruins of the house Mary lived in when the angel Gabriel visited her and announced that she would give birth the Jesus. As we saw in *Guidebook to Palestine*, the holiness of places was what made pilgrimages so important. Lithgow claims they must have taken "five thousand pounds weight, to keep in a memorial thereof"[95]. Lithgow mocks the Armenians, asking if they believe in the power of symbolism like the Catholics, which they deny. Lithgow replies that he also rejects the power of the ruins, calling it "a devilish invention, to deceive the blind-folded people, and to fill the Coffers of the Romane Priests".[96] The caravan continues on to Jerusalem, arriving on Palm Sunday. Lithgow continues to emphasize that he was "no Popish Catholicke"[97] to all he interacted with, though he followed all the pilgrimage customs. One such custom occurred on his last night in Jerusalem before setting off for

[93] Lithgow, *Rare Adventures*, 28.
[94] Lithgow, *Rare Adventures*, 29-30.
[95] Lithgow, *Rare Adventures*, 133.
[96] Lithgow, *Rare Adventures*, 133.
[97] Lithgow, *Rare Adventures*, 147.

Egypt, as he recounts receiving the pilgrimage tattoo that historian Juliet Fleming claims was common by this time.

> "Earely on the morrow there [the Holy Grave] came a fellow to us, on Elias Areacheros, a Christian inhabitour at Bethlehem, and purveier for the Friares; who did ingrave on our several Armes up Christs Sepulcher the name of Jesus, and the Holy Crosse; being our owne option and desire: and here is the Modell thereof."[98]

Lithgow continued, however, to pay Elias to personalize his tattoo to represent his loyalties to King James, a notorious anti-Catholic. As we have seen, Lithgow himself also had much disdain for the Catholics, referring to them as snakish Papists.

> "But I, deciphered, and subjoined below mine, the four incorporate Crowns of King James, with this Inscription, in the lower circle of the Crowne, Vivat Jacobus Rex: returning to the fellow two Piasters for his reward."

Although the tattoo was a symbol of loyalty, it was Lithgow himself who chose what loyalties to tattoo on his body as an individual. This, he writes, first infuriated Elias Areacheros, the tattooist, because Lithgow "polluted that Holy place, with the name of such an Arche-enemy to the Romane Church"[99] but Lithgow claims his fury soon transformed into genuine interest. Lithgow writes that Elias told him the Catholics never paid him or his people for preserving the monuments in Jerusalem.

The tattoo received by Lithgow is an example of the total personalization of the tattoo. William Lithgow took the traditional Christian pilgrimage tattoo that already

[98] Lithgow, *Rare Adventures*, 163-164.
[99] Lithgow, *Rare Adventures*, 163-164.

represented a combination of communal and individual identity and made it his own. Though it may seem that Lithgow's act would count as voluntary and representative of a group identity, he did not personalize his tattoo as a member of a group who also received similar tattoos. Lithgow's tattoo was a symbol of the multiple groups he identified with: Protestant, as anti-Catholic as King James, and as an Englishman. In such an individualization of the tattoo, he continued in his rejection of its association with Catholicism. Although Simon Forman was using the tattoo in a non-religious sense, his methods are derived from the Catholic physicians in the Middle Ages, like Gaddesden. William Lithgow, however, abandons the religious nature of the pilgrimage tattoo as a rejection of Catholicism.

Forman and Lithgow bring this paper back to the times of the Cook Myth. So why, then, is Cook credited with the introduction of the tattoo to Europe? As Felicity Friedman explains, Cook's significance is twofold: first, he brought the word "tattoo" to the English language, replacing words like "marked", "stained" or "stigmata" and second, Cook and his sailors brought sailors into the tattooed community, something that becomes even more popular than the pilgrimage tattoo.[100] Cook's voyage was important to the tattoo, but as I have demonstrated in this paper, the tattoo had been around since the ancient world. The cultural changes in the West from 1100 to 1600 are what cleared the path for Cook's tattoo to integrate into society.

Prior to the Middle Ages, the tattoo served as a method of control. The involuntary application of tattoos on prisoners, criminals, and slaves in the Greek and

[100] Friedman, "The Cook Myth."

Roman world created a new identity for them. Tattoos on the face, arms, or calves were visible to all and were intended to overshadow any other identifying features. That is, the tattoos replaced one's individual identity and autonomy over their body with a symbol that marked them as just one of many sharing a communal identity. They were no longer themselves, but a criminal, a slave, a prisoner, all in all: a marked person.

The other side of tattooing prior to the Middle Ages, the side that eventually comes to the forefront, is the voluntary tattoo. Though these tattoos, like the punitive tattoo, were still usually representing of a communal identity, there was some level of individual choice in terms of deciding to become tattoos. These tattoos come from groups like the Copts, Britons, and Vikings. The Copts are responsible for the rise of the pilgrimage tattoo that replaces the connotation of tattooing with crime, barbarism, and paganism in Europe.

As European travelers, Catholics, made pilgrimages to the Holy Land, they received tattoos that served as a sign of their devotion to God, as a Catholic, and as a personal stigmata. From 1100-1600, awareness of "the self" rose from changes in church laws, psychological studies in universities, the popularity of courtly love stories, and the religious belief in the power of symbols and physical objects. As the Reformation spread through Europe, Protestants refuted many Catholic beliefs, including the importance of pilgrimage, but English travelers continued to take pilgrimages in order to record their travels. William Lithgow took the traditionally Catholic pilgrimage tattoo and completely personalized it as a marker of his own identity. Though the Reformation changed many aspects of Western life, science and medicine were still based in medieval studies. As the tattoo was becoming common in Europe, it found its way into the astrological medicine

field, where Simon Forman used the method to harness the power of his zodiac. In order for the tattoo to evolve from an involuntary symbol of communal identity into a voluntary act with the same intention and fully develop as a voluntary and personal for of self-expression by the time Captain Cook returned from the Pacific Islands, the changes in the Western world from 1100 to 1600 were essential.

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