

HISTORY ON SKIN

A STORY OF TATTOOS THAT COMMUNICATE HUMAN
EXPRESSION SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME

VOLUME 1



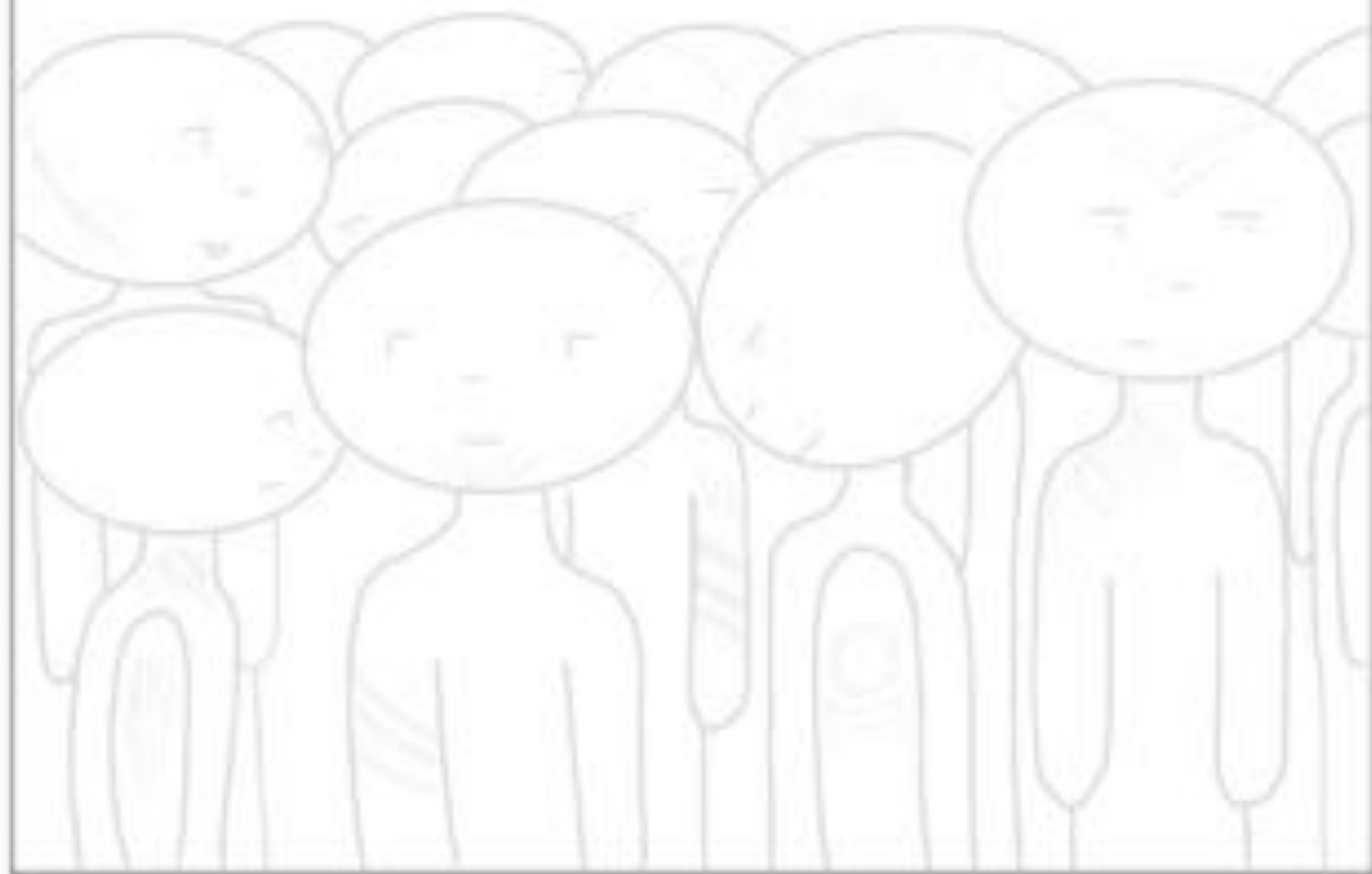
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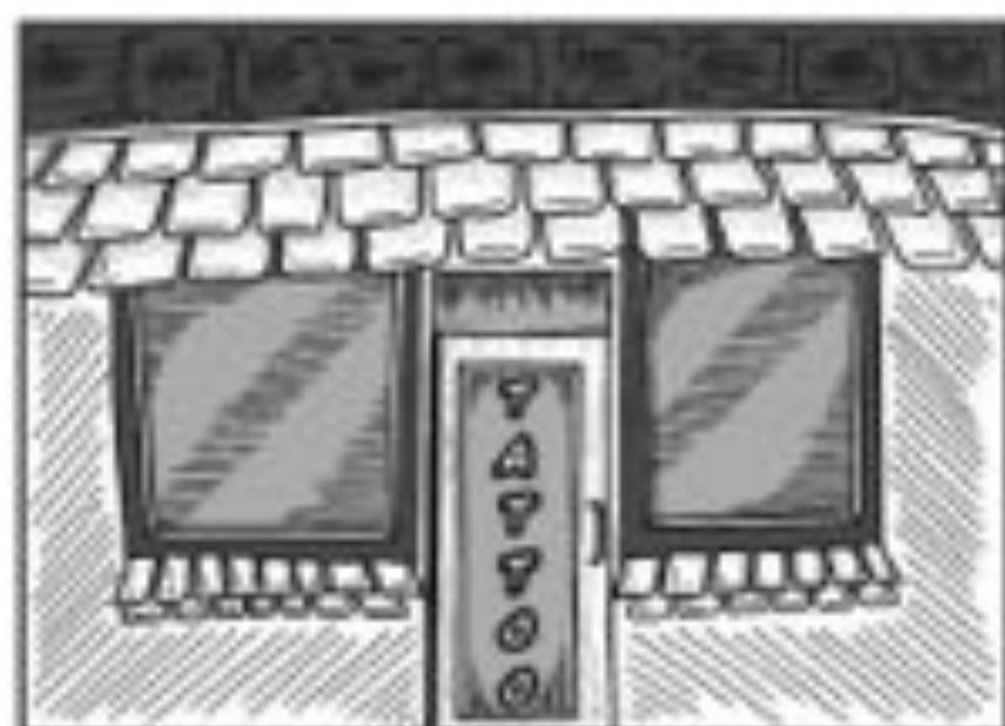


HISTORY ON SKIN VOLUME I

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PRINTED IN DENVER, CO 2024
FIRST EDITION





HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?

TATTOOS ARE A VISUAL LANGUAGE, SO WE CAN LEARN A LOT ABOUT THEM AND THE PEOPLE THAT WORE THEM IN CONTEXT TO CULTURE THROUGHOUT HISTORY

LET ME JUST SHOW YOU!





CHECK OUT THIS MAN FROM THE MAORI CULTURE OF NEW ZEALAND. THESE TATTOOS HAVE BEEN DONE FOR 2000 YEARS AND ARE CALLED "MOKO". EACH INDIVIDUAL'S STATUS, RANK, ANCESTRY, AND ABILITIES ARE CONVEYED THROUGH THEIR TATTOO. THE PERSON'S FACIAL FEATURES AND INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITIES WERE ALSO CONSIDERED WHEN DESIGNING THESE MARKINGS- WHICH CREATED THE MOST EXPRESSIVE TATTOOS UNIQUE TO EACH INDIVIDUAL PERSON.

SO, THEY COULD BE IDENTIFIED BY THEIR FACIAL TATTOOS? LIKE AN ID OR PASSPORT?



THAT'S RIGHT! IN SOME CASES, IT'S HOW THEY COULD PROVE THEIR IDENTITY TO OTHERS!

I NEVER KNEW THAT!



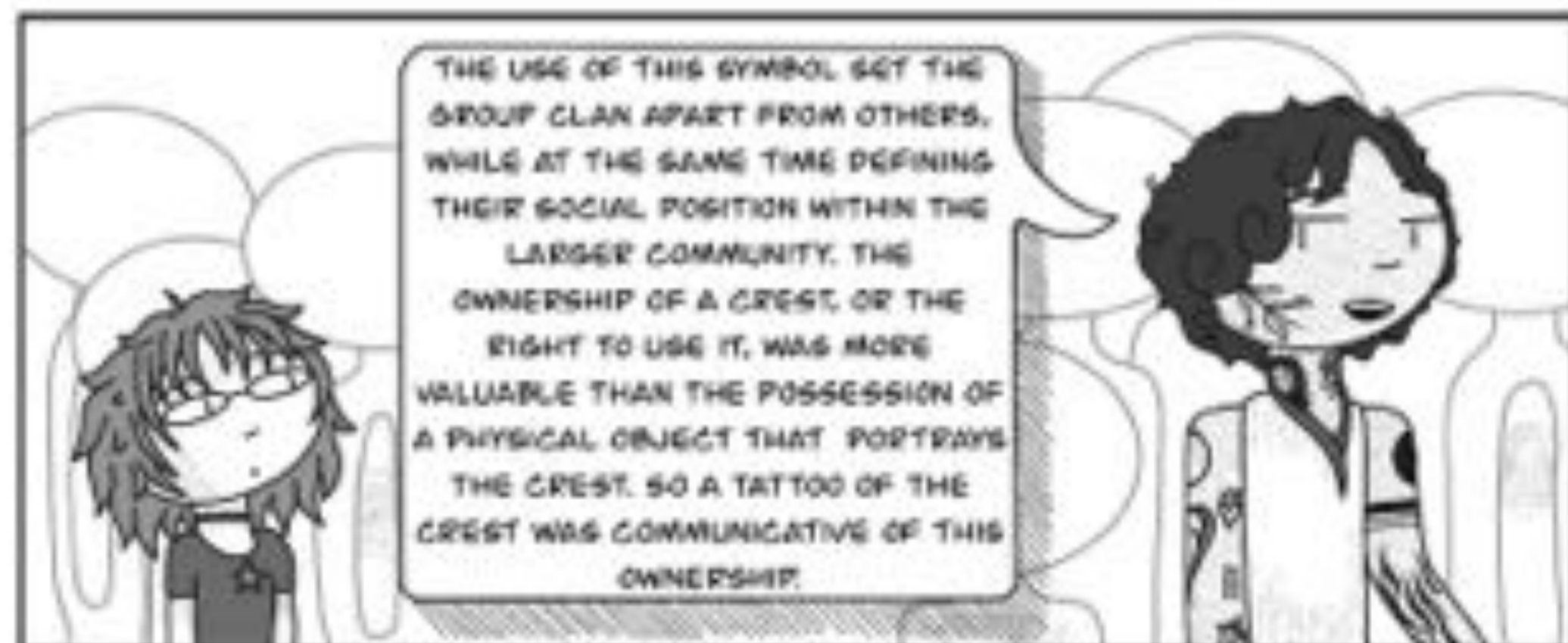
ANOTHER WAY PEOPLE USED TO DO THIS WAS BY MELDING MULTIPLE ASPECTS OF THEIR IDENTITY INTO A CREST TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES TO OTHERS



FOUND ON THE MUMMIFIED REMAINS OF THE NORTHWEST COAST OF NORTH AMERICA, THESE "CLAN CREST" TATTOOS WERE HOW PEOPLE COMMUNICATED THEIR SOCIAL IDENTITY. EACH CREST EMBODIED AN INTANGIBLE PROPERTY OR IDEA, SUCH AS FAMILIAL NAMES, STORIES, SONGS, AND PLACES BELONGING TO THE WEARER OF THE CREST.



THE USE OF THIS SYMBOL SET THE GROUP CLAN APART FROM OTHERS, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME DEFINING THEIR SOCIAL POSITION WITHIN THE LARGER COMMUNITY. THE OWNERSHIP OF A CREST, OR THE RIGHT TO USE IT, WAS MORE VALUABLE THAN THE POSSESSION OF A PHYSICAL OBJECT THAT PORTRAYS THE CREST. SO A TATTOO OF THE CREST WAS COMMUNICATIVE OF THIS OWNERSHIP.



OK, I SEE THAT PEOPLE HAVE BEEN USING TATTOOS FOREVER TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES. BUT WHAT ELSE DO THEY COMMUNICATE?



WELL, ANOTHER WAY IS HOW THEY COMMUNICATE THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE WEARER.



IN ANCIENT SAMOA, THEIR USE OF THE TATTOO IS SEEN AS AN INITIATION INTO MANHOOD- AND IS DONE AS A SPIRITUAL OCCASION IN WHICH THE RECIPIENT'S FAMILY GATHER TO WATCH THE TATTOO BE DONE.



THERE ARE MANY TATTOOS THAT SIMPLY BELONG TO A PARTICULAR CULTURAL TRADITION OR ETHNIC GROUP. THIS COMMUNICATES THEIR ROOTS AND AFFILIATIONS TO OTHERS, AS WELL AS BEING AS ENTIRELY INTEGRAL TO THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY TO HAVE THESE TATTOOS.

THIS IS ACTUALLY STILL DONE TODAY, THOUGH THE PRACTICE IS MODERNIZED IN SOME WAYS FOR A LESS PAINFUL ALTERNATIVE- THERE IS A CONTINUED INTEREST IN TRADITIONAL TATTOOING OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES. THERE DOES STILL EXIST PEOPLE WHO ENTIRELY PRACTICE THE TRADITIONAL METHOD STILL!



WOW! I DIDN'T REALIZE THE SPIRITUALITY THAT EXISTS BEHIND TATTOOS! ARE THERE ANY HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF TATTOOS COMMUNICATING A RITE OF PASSAGE FOR WOMEN?



THERE WERE PLENTY OF WOMEN WITH TATTOOS THAT COMMUNICATED THIS! ALASKA FOR INSTANCE IS HOME TO MANY DIVERSE TATTOOING TRADITIONS THAT HAVE BEEN PRACTICED FOR MILLENNIA, LIKE THE NATIVE IÑUPIAT AND YUP'IK WOMEN. INUIT TATTOOS THROUGHOUT THIS REGION WERE MADE BY WOMEN, FOR WOMEN.



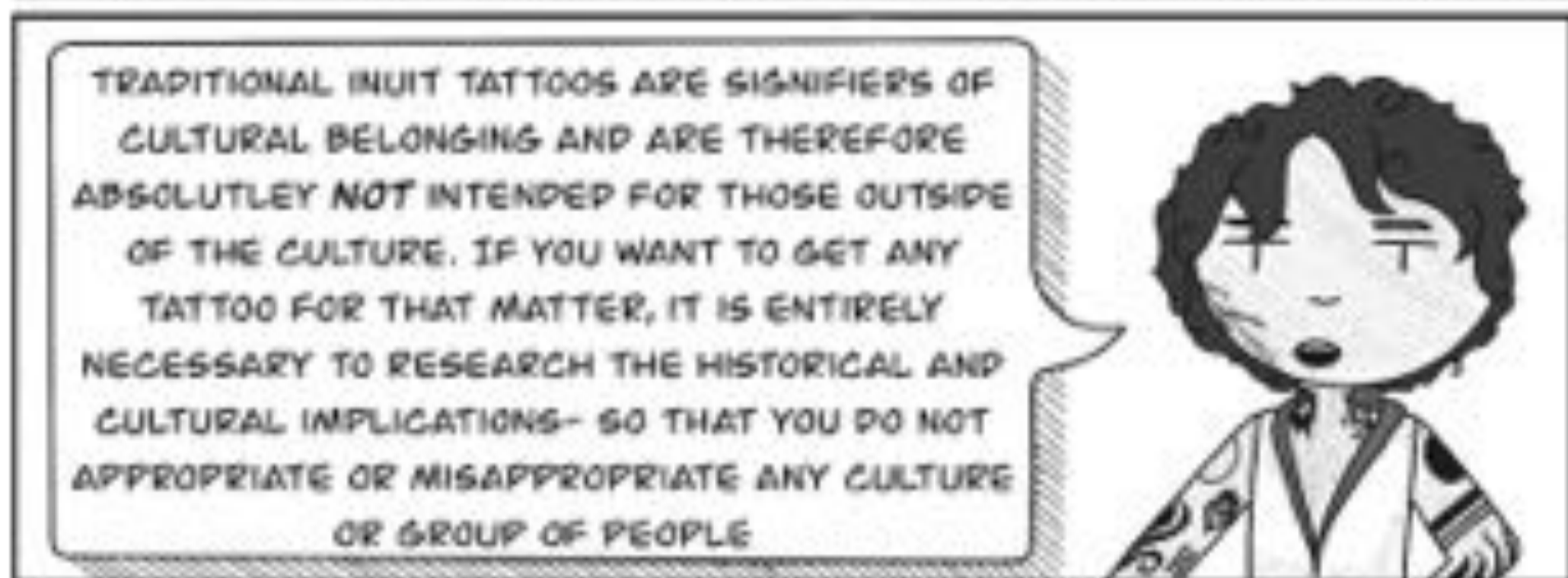
RECEIVING TATTOOS WAS A CEREMONIAL RITE OF PASSAGE THAT MARKED EVENTS IN A WOMAN'S LIFE OR COMPONENTS OF HER PERSONALITY, FOR EXAMPLE THE TRANSITION FROM GIRL TO WOMANHOOD

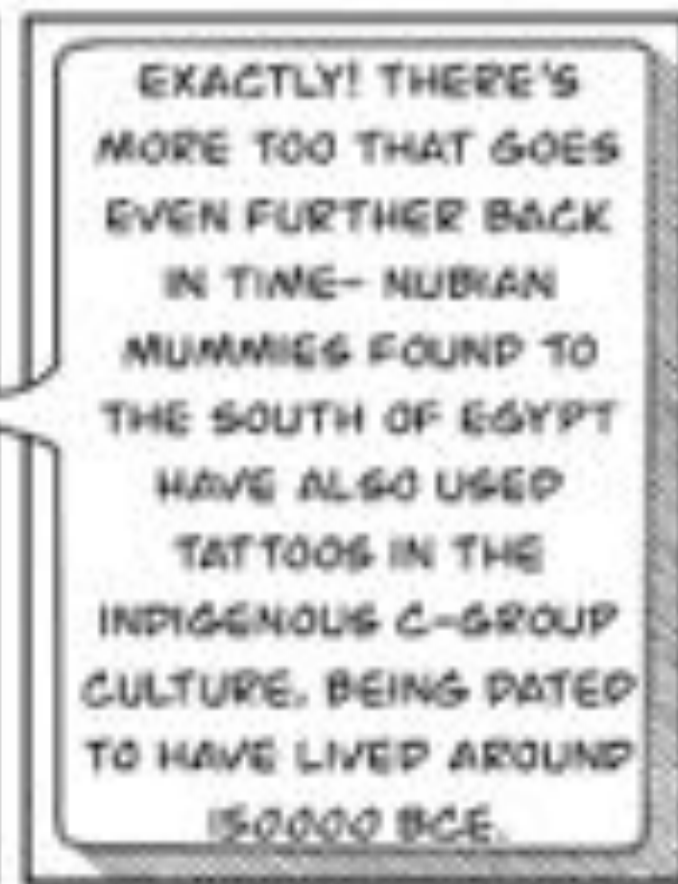


THAT'S SO COOL! DO THESE WOMEN STILL PRACTICE THIS TODAY?



WELL, THESE WOMEN'S CULTURAL TATTOO PRACTICE WAS AFFECTED BY COLONIZATION, JUST LIKE MANY OTHER NATIVE COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT HISTORY. IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES, MISSIONARIES ARRIVED IN ALASKA AND FORBODE MANY TRADITIONAL PRACTICES INCLUDING INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, DANCES, AND THIS INCLUDED THE TATTOO. FROM THIS, GENERATIONS OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCED DEEP DRAMA FROM THIS FORCED LOSS OF CULTURE.





THESE MUMMIES WERE ADORNED WITH BLUE TATTOOS THAT WERE ALSO DEPICTED ON THE PERSON'S TOMB AFTER DEATH

THAT'S SO LONG AGO!
HOW DID THEY DO THEM?



ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE HAS FOUND THAT MANY OF THESE INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES USED A SOOT-BASED PIGMENT, AND WOULD TAP IT INTO THE SKIN- OR INTO A DESIGN CARVED INTO THE SKIN BEFOREHAND WITH A BONE.



THAT SOUNDS PAINFUL! BUT IF THE PURPOSE THE TATTOOS SERVED WAS FOR THEIR IDENTITY, I BET IT WAS WORTH IT!

WELL, WE'VE ALREADY SEEN HOW PEOPLE IN HISTORY USE BODY MODIFICATION TO SERVE A GREATER PURPOSE- SO WE CAN ASSUME YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THAT!



BUT, MAKE NO MISTAKE,
TATTOOS HAVE NOT ALWAYS
BEEN USED TO ENACT
POSITIVE OR PERSONAL
COMMUNICATION.

THERE IS A HISTORY OF
THE TATTOO WHICH IT'S
BEEN USED TO
COMMUNICATE
OPPRESSION ANOTHER
GROUP OF PEOPLE.
THERE ARE LOTS OF
EXAMPLES OF THIS THAT
PRESERVE THEIR OWN
STORIES, AND SHOULD
BE STUDIED ALONGSIDE
POSITIVE TATTOO
RESEARCH.

IS THAT WHY THEY CAN BE
TABOO? I THOUGHT IT WAS
BECAUSE PEOPLE WRONGLY
ASSOCIATE THEM WITH
COMMUNICATING CRIME

THAT'S TRUE. MANY SOCIAL ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE
TATTOO HAVE BEEN WITH CRIMINALS OR OUTCASTS,
PARTICULARLY WITHIN PRISON SUBCULTURES. THE
FUNCTION OF TATTOOS SERVED TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES
OR COMMUNICATE IDEOLOGIES OR THE PAST OF THE

WEARER.
FOR EXAMPLE, THE
CZECH REPUBLIC HAS
MANY EXAMPLES OF
TATTOOS BEING FOUND
ON PEOPLE WHICH
TELLS THE WEARER'S
LIFE STORY.

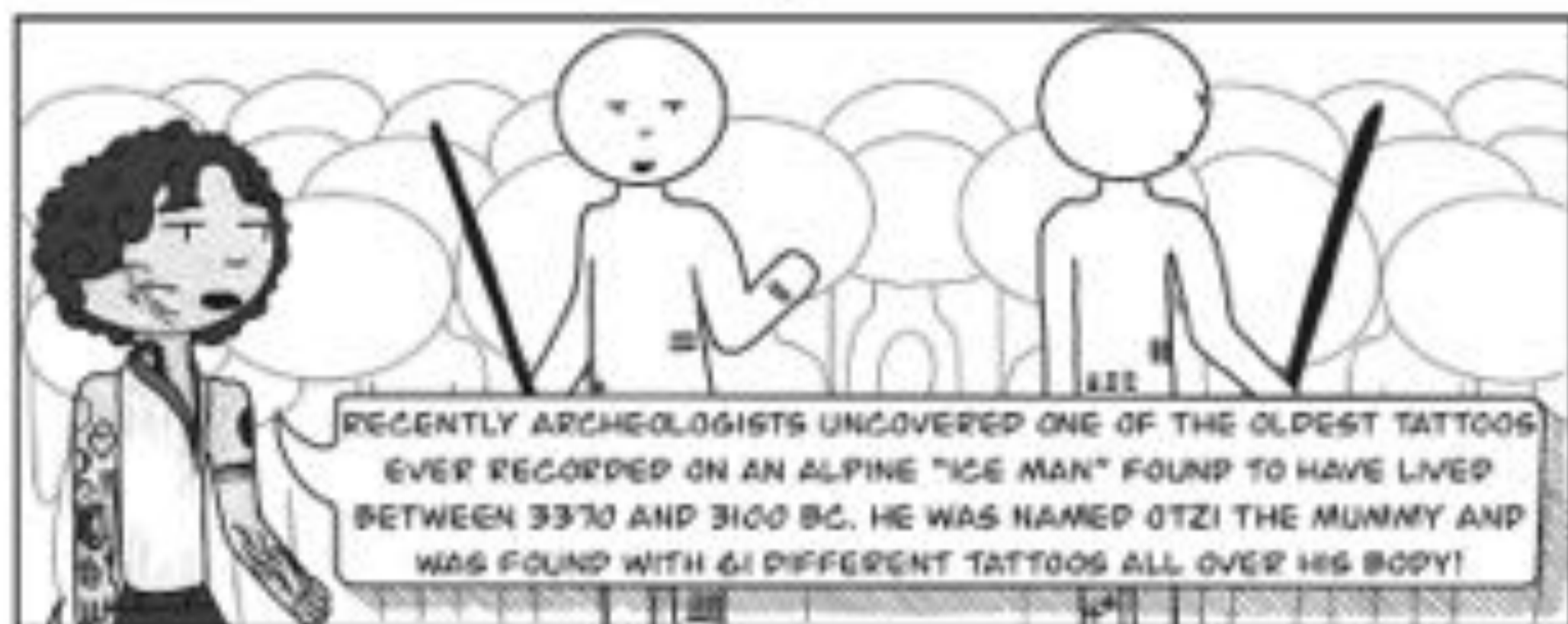
THE INTENT IS THAT WITH
THE TATTOO SELECTED BY
THE INDIVIDUAL, IT ALLOWS
INFORMATION ABOUT THE
INDIVIDUAL TO BE
COMMUNICATED TO OTHERS

THERE ARE OF COURSE
MANY CASES WHERE AN
INDIVIDUAL'S TATTOOS
ARE OUTDATED OF WHAT
THEY BELIEVE

YOU CAN REALLY SEE HOW
ATTITUDES OF THE TATTOO
CHANGE, EVEN INDIVIDUALLY!



YES! IN FACT, WE ONLY RECENTLY HAVE MANY OF THESE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES OF HISTORICAL TATTOOS DUE TO OVERALL SOCIETAL ACCEPTANCE OF THEM CHANGING. EVEN 50 YEARS AGO, TATTOOS AS A PRACTICE WERE NOT CONSIDERED A VIABLE STUDY IN ANTHROPOLOGY.



RECENTLY ARCHEOLOGISTS UNCOVERED ONE OF THE OLDEST TATTOOS EVER RECORDED ON AN ALPINE "ICE MAN" FOUND TO HAVE LIVED BETWEEN 3370 AND 3100 BC. HE WAS NAMED OTZI THE MUNNIE AND WAS FOUND WITH 61 DIFFERENT TATTOOS ALL OVER HIS BODY!

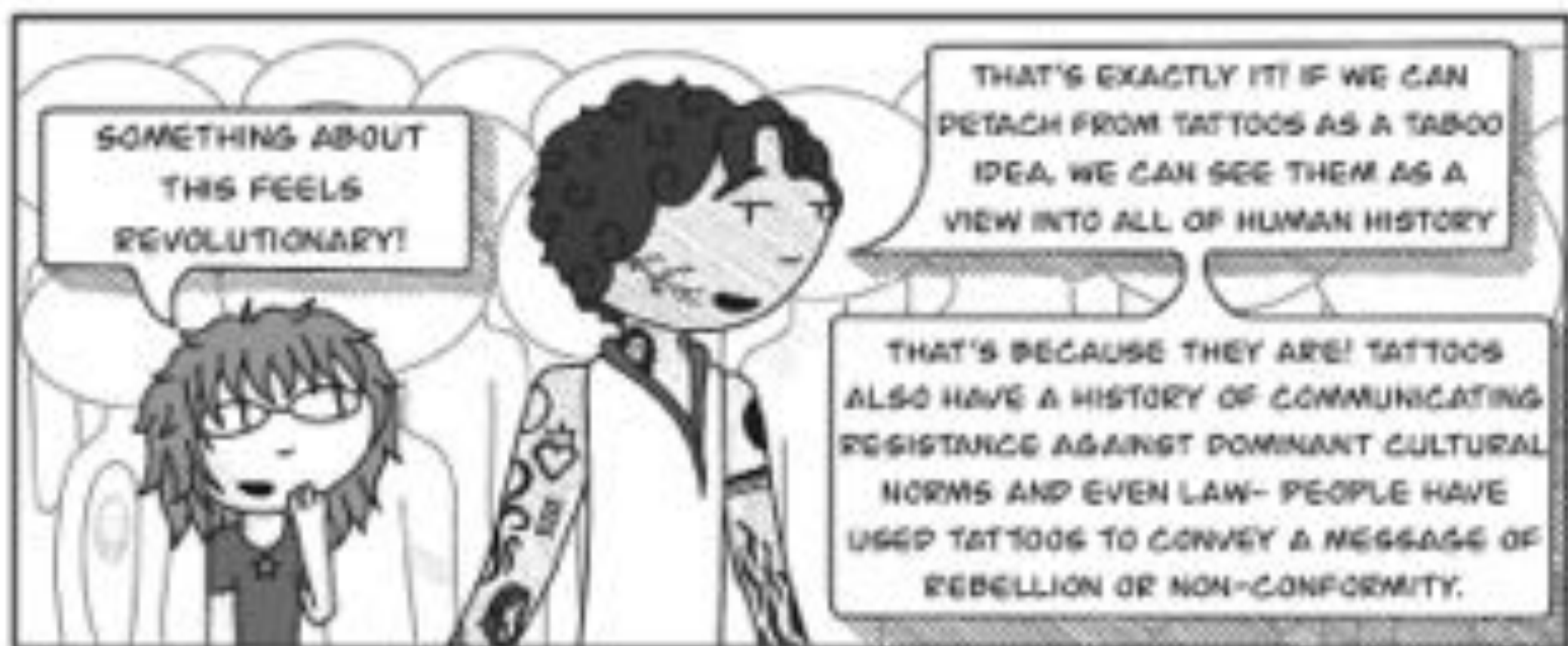
WHEN WE ARE ABLE TO SEE TATTOOS AS A FORM OF VISUAL STORYTELLING AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION, WE CAN FURTHER ALLOWING INDIVIDUALS TO SHOW ASPECTS OF THEIR LIVES ADORNED ONTO THEIR BODY AND LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE PEOPLE THROUGH THE STORIES ON THEIR SKIN.



SO, THESE TATTOOS FOUND ON HUMANS FROM THE BEGINNINGS OF CIVILIZATION NOT ONLY TAUGHT THE CURRENT TATTOO WORLD THE CULTURES THAT PRECEDE IT, BUT ALSO SHOW VALUABLE ANTHROPOLOGICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PERSON THE TATTOO IS FOUND ON!

WOW TATTOOS CAN COMMUNICATE HISTORICAL AND CURRENT HUMAN CULTURE SO BEAUTIFULLY!





THROUGH THE RESISTANCE AGAINST THE OPPRESSIVE FORCE OF SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS FOR INSTANCE THAT THESE PEOPLE CREATE VISUAL DEPICTIONS OF THAT STRENGTH- AS WELL AS FEEL FURTHER EMPOWERED BY THEIR TATTOO ITSELF.

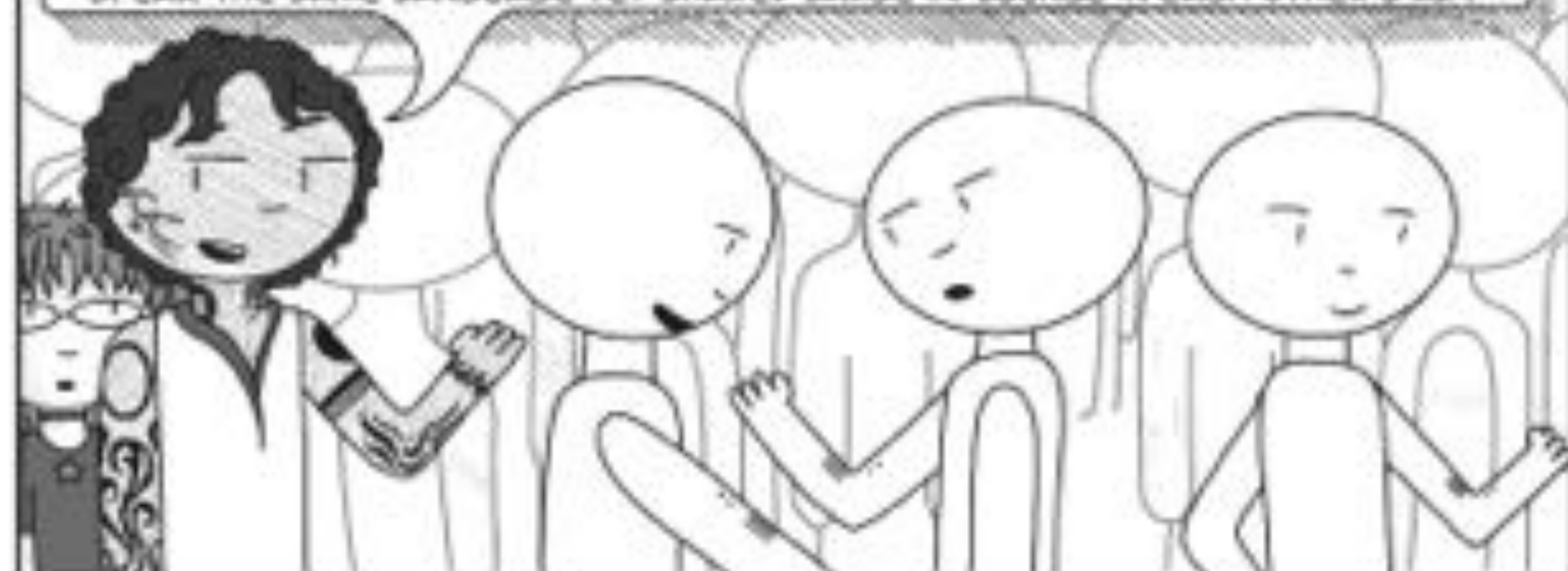
WOW! SO PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS TOOK INSPIRATION FROM EACH OTHERS ART?



TATTOOS THROUGHOUT HISTORY AND TODAY ACTUALLY REFLECT THE ADAPTATION OF PREVIOUS TATTOO STYLES OR IMAGERY, AS THESE FUSIONS ARE HOW SPECIFIC TATTOO STYLES HAVE DEVELOPED OVER THE YEARS. IT'S LED TO THE CREATION OF MANY UNIQUE TECHNIQUES AND IMAGERY THAT COMMUNICATES A BLEND OF CULTURAL INFLUENCE, SOCIAL TRADITION, AND HUMAN LIVED EXPERIENCE.



FOR INSTANCE, THERE IS A LARGE CROSS CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF THE TATTOO THAT EXISTED BETWEEN THE EGYPTIANS AND NUBIANS, AS MANY MUMMIES FOUND IN THESE VERY SEPARATE LOCATIONS WERE FOUND WITH THE EXACT SAME DESIGN AND PLACEMENT OF TATTOO. THE SAME HAPPENED WITH KUBBAN MUMMIES FOUND WITH THE SAME ARRANGEMENT OF DOTTED TATTOOS THAT WERE FOUND ON MUMMIES FROM DEIR EL-BAHARI. FROM OTHER RESEARCH WE KNOW THAT THESE TWO CULTURES DIDN'T SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE YET SHARED LARGE INFLUENCE IN EACH OTHER'S ART



I DIDN'T REALIZE PEOPLE WERE INFLUENCED BY EACH OTHER'S TATTOOS WAY BACK THEN TOO! AND TATTOOS COMMUNICATE ACROSS LANGUAGE BARRIERS TOO?

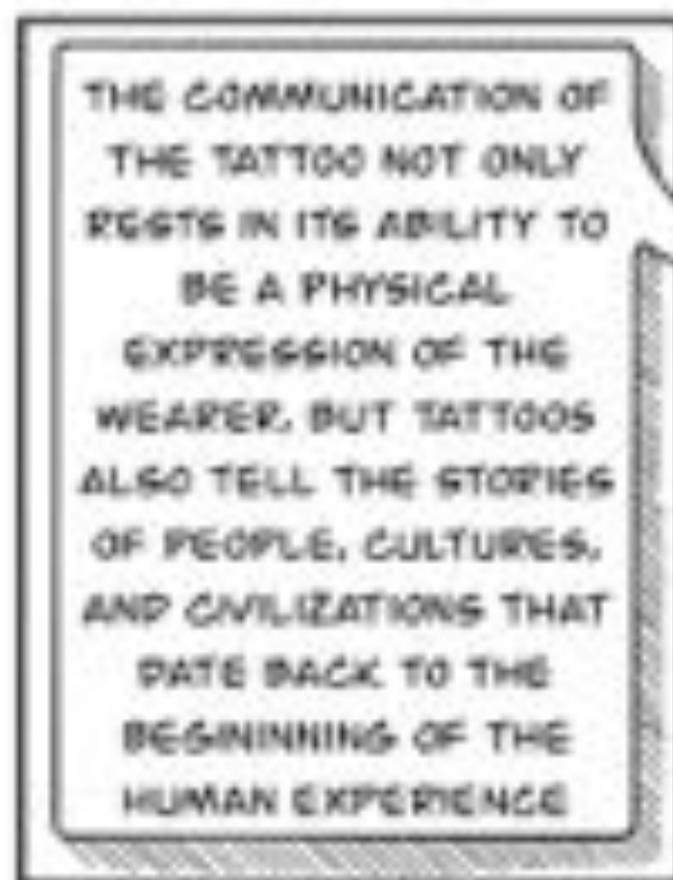
ANOTHER PROMINENT EXAMPLE OF THIS TOO IS FOUND WITHIN THE CURRENT PRACTICES OF NATIVE HAWAIIANS, WHICH SHOWS THE FUSION OF POLYNESIAN AND ASIAN INFLUENCES

EXACTLY, TATTOOS ARE HISTORICALLY AND CONTEMPORARILY A MEANS OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION!



THE EVOLUTION OF HAWAIIAN TATTOO PRACTICE IS AN ART WHICH HAS ITS ROOTS IN TRADITIONS AS ANCIENT AS POLYNESIAN ART THAT CURATES SYMBOLISM, MEANING, PLACEMENT ALONGSIDE PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTARY. SOMETIMES THIS IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CONTACT AND FUSION WITH THE WESTERN WORLD. LIKE I SAID BEFORE, IT'S IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COLONIZATION ON NATIVE TATTOO PRACTICES

THIS IS SIMPLY ANOTHER REASON WHY STUDYING THE HISTORY OF THE TATTOO IS SO IMPORTANT- BECAUSE IT CAN UNCOVER STORIES OF PEOPLE AND TRADITIONS OF PEOPLE THAT USED THEIR BODIES TO TELL THEIR STORIES.





THE END...

HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO LEARN ABOUT TATTOOS, BUT DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START?

TATTOOS HAVE BEEN A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION THROUGHOUT ALL OF HUMAN HISTORY, YET ARE NOT OFTEN REGARDED AS SUCH TODAY. WHILE TATTOOS CAN CERTAINLY BE AN ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF HUMAN EXPRESSION, THEY ALSO CARRY A PLETHORA OF CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE THAT CAN TEACH US LOTS ABOUT THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE US. THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE HISTORY ON SKIN SERIES FOCUSES ON ASH, A TATTOO ARTIST TEACHING THEIR CLIENT ABOUT HISTORICAL COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICES THAT INFLUENCE TATTOO PRACTICES TODAY.



"SUCH A FUN WAY TO LEARN ABOUT ART HISTORY!"
-CREATIVE WEEKLY

"MAKES ME WANT TO GET ANOTHER TATTOO!"
-TATTOO MAGAZINE

BELLA AMES IS AN ASPIRING ARTIST
LOCATED IN DENVER. HER VISION TO
MAKE ART MORE ACCESSIBLE COMES
THROUGH IN HER NETWORKS AND
RESEARCH OF THE HISTORY OF THE
TATTOO

