



Spiritual Tattoo: A Cultural History of Tattooing, Piercing, Scarification, Branding, and Implants

By John Rush

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Say "body modifications" and most people think of tattoos and piercings. They associate these mainly with the urban primitives of the 1980s to today and with primitive tribes. In fact, as this fascinating book shows, body mods have been on the scene since ancient times, traceable as far back as 1.5 million years, and they also encompass sacrifice, branding, and implants. Professor John Rush outlines the processes and procedures of these radical physical alterations, showing their function as rites of passage, group identifiers, and mechanisms of social control. He explores the use of pain for spiritual purposes, such as purging sin and guilt, and examines the phenomenon of accidental cuts and punctures as individual events with sometimes profound implications for group survival. *Spiritual Tattoo* finds a remarkable consistency in body modifications from prehistory to the present, suggesting the importance of the body as a sacred geography from both social and psychological points of view.

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Spiritual Tattoo: A Cultural History of Tattooing, Piercing, Scarification, Branding, and Implants By John Rush Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #756226 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Frog Books
- Published on: 2005-03-17
- Released on: 2005-03-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.20" h x .65" w x 6.95" l, 1.12 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Tattoos are not only ornaments... they are not only emblems of nobility and symbols of rank in the social hierarchy; they are also messages fraught with spiritual and moral significance... not only to imprint a drawing onto the flesh but also to stamp onto the mind all the traditions and philosophy of the group."

- Claude Levi-Strauss

"And this tattooing has been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the Earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but those mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them."

- Herman Melville

About the Author

John A. Rush, Ph.D., N.D., is a Professor of Anthropology at Sierra College, Rocklin, California, teaching Physical Anthropology and Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion. Dr. Rush's publications include *Witchcraft and Sorcery: An Anthropological Perspective of the Occult*, *The Way We Communicate*, *Clinical Anthropology: An Application of Anthropological Concepts within Clinical Settings*, and *Stress and Emotional Health: Applications of Clinical Anthropology*. He is also a Naturopathic Doctor in private practice.

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Dorcas Starling:

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