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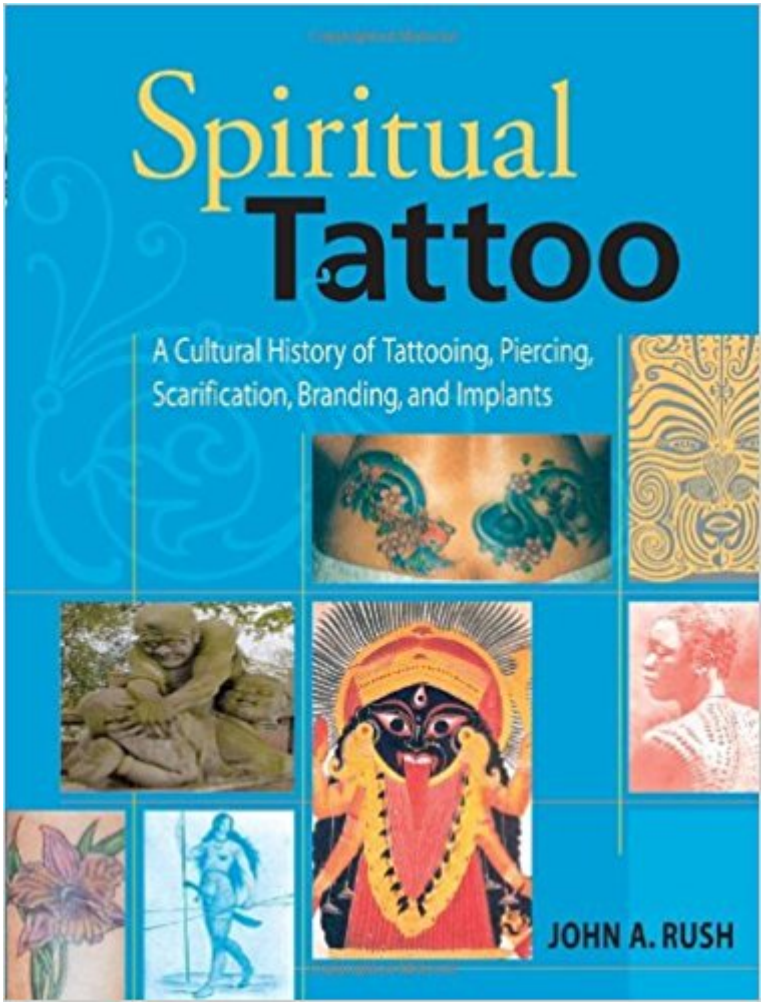
# Spiritual Tattoo: A Cultural History Of Tattooing, Piercing, Scarification, Branding, And Implants

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## Synopsis

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 sacrification, 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Tattooings 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

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.

Interesting history of the tattoo and modification of the skin. A little off beat for most reader.

I enjoy reading about the art and history behind the art of tattooing. It is enjoyable. I was able to glean some fairly interesting facts from it.

Changed my views on things, was a great read.

I bought this book for my 15 year old son who is obsessed with tattoos and writing on himself random things. He is so into hip hop culture, which in itself is not a problem, but it can be very influential on a young mind. With that said, I myself have always had an interest in the art behind tatooing so I thought it was important that my son see it's not just about some rapper writing Cash Money on his forehead! This book is very interesting, it covers the history of tattooing very well, and discusses the cultural significance and evolution of tattooing and piercing. I would highly recommend for those who want an accurate account of the evolution of tattoos! There is one caveat, the pictures can be explicit in the piercing section so just be advised of that if you want this book for a younger reader or if you are the squeamish type! Overall, this is exactly what I was looking for!

This is one of those books I had waiting for me to read in retirement, which has been five years now! There were two things that intrigued me about tattoos and I wanted to learn more. One, I began hearing about women with mastectomies using tattoos as a way of healing and helping and saw some seriously stunning pictures (google image mastectomy tattoos if you haven't seen any).

Secondly, I read about the disturbance in relationships between generations of Maoris in New Zealand when Christian missionaries taught them to stop tattooing. Particularly, the relationships between fathers and sons were harmed. At the time I was also looking at U.S. gang tattoos and hadn't even considered this perspective and wanted to understand more.John Rush is an anthropologist who teaches at a community college in northern California and that is the perspective that attracted me to this particular volume. Anthropology is my favorite perspective from which to learn about many issues.Rush writes about the history of tattooing, scarification, and piercing as well as branding and implants. The common thread between these behaviors that Rush covers is their use as a rite of passage of some type, whether it involves, aging, illness, group affiliation or something else. My favorite part was that he included his own culture, the U.S. with what I considered to be a fairly objective comparison. He examines the specific practices e.g. why paint the lips red, why get breast implants or as some men do now, calves implants, as well as the purpose the behavior serves and other methods used to achieve similar purposes. For example he compares the use of psychotherapy for healing (e.g. cancer survivor groups), athletic accomplishments such as a survivor running a marathon, to the use of tattooing. It is an interesting topic.Most of this book satisfies my longing for "proof" meaning peer reviewed research as much as possible, but the author does drift into more personal beliefs and behavior occasionally. That of course can be easy to do especially with anthropology. Additionally, parts were a little dry and could have been livened up with more case studies. Therefore, three stars.

I read numerous books on tattooing prior to my own adventure but Spiritual Tattoo tops them all. Dr. Rush presents some very interesting information about tattooing and scarification in ancient societies, concluding that the behavior is very, very ancient and is probably analogous to marks naturally acquired. Purposes include rites of passage, group identity, and in more recent time, the use of tattoos and scars by governments to mark the body for control purposes. What I found most interesting is the procedure he details for using pain to purge limitations and traumas in history. As our monotheistic religious myths focus on pain and suffering, this work fits right in! I also enjoyed the connection he made between tattooing, yoga, chakras, and spirituality. There also appears to be a great deal of coding in the book, which relates to this book's sequel, The Twelve Gates. For example, in the page headings for Chapter Five, Trauma is spelled Trama--Dr. Rush is saying he "takes U (you) out of your trauma." This is a very readable work that will appeal to a wide audience. I'm looking forward to The Twelve Gates.

I found Rush’s research and presentation of information to be extremely interesting and well-presented. However, the real value of this book for me was in the suggestions for dealing with psychic and physical pain.As I had my own tattoo work done, I used many of Rush’s suggestions and techniques on breathing, relaxation, and "embracing the pain."Prior to getting my tattoo, many of my peers described their own experience with the pain of tattooing in terms of bravery "it didn’t hurt at all" or annoyance "it is really irritating."By properly channeling the pain--rather than fearing, putting up with, or obsessing about it, however, I found the entire tattooing process to be so much more pleasant, profound, and meaningful. I can truly say that I felt serene throughout the entire three-hour experience.I highly recommend this book for people interested in experiencing tattooing on all levels-the intellectual, the emotional, and the spiritual.

I was fortunate enough to have Dr. Rush as a professor in school, and so I bought this book to go along with what we were speaking about in class. And I have to say, I couldn’t put it down! I’ve bought several copies for friends since.As someone who is strongly into the spirituality associated with body modification, I have to say that I really appreciated the professional voice this book lent to the various subcultures and communities associated with body mod. It covers a variety of topics with depth and understanding. You can tell Dr. Rush is passionate about the topics he writes. Highly recommended to everyone with an interest in tattooing and body mod.

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