



VIRTUAL LECTURE SERIES
WEDNESDAYS AT 16:00BST
27 APRIL TO 1 JUNE, 2022
FREE



Sacred Ink

BODY MARKING THROUGH THE AGES

We are pleased to announce that the Department of Hebrew & Jewish Studies, University College London, is hosting the Sacred Ink eLecture series, which focuses on body marking for ritualistic, aesthetic, and other benign purposes throughout the ages, from Ancient Egypt up to the present day. The eLectures take place each Wednesday from 27 April until 1 June 2022 from 16:00 until 17:00 BST (London) via Zoom. We are delighted to invite you to this free online event and we look forward to seeing you in one of the meetings.

Please note the lectures will not be recorded.

**CO-ORGANIZERS: DR ALINDA DAMSMA, PROF LILY KAHN,
MX CASEY MACKENZIE JOHNSON**

Lecture Schedule

27 April 2022

The Masculine Body as Property of His God

Dr Sandra Jacobs
(Leo Baeck College/King's College London)

[**book here**](#)

4 May 2022

From Property to Belonging and Beyond: Mesopotamian body marks revised

Julia Giessler
(University of Helsinki)

[**book here**](#)

11 May 2022

Tattoos in Jewish Languages

Prof Lily Kahn
(University College London)
Prof Aaron Rubin
(The Pennsylvania State University)

[**book here**](#)

18 May 2022

Edward VII's Jerusalem Pilgrimage Tattoo in the Context of British Tattoo History

Dr Matt Lodder
(University of Essex)

[**book here**](#)

25 May 2022

Is There Such Thing as a Kosher Tattoo?

Rabbi Emily Reitsma-Jurman
(West London Synagogue)

[**book here**](#)

1 June 2022

Revealing the Practice of Tattooing in Ancient Egypt

Dr Anne Austin
(University of Missouri—St. Louis)

[**book here**](#)

Abstracts

The Masculine Body as Property of His God

Dr Sandra Jacobs

(Leo Baeck College/King's College London)

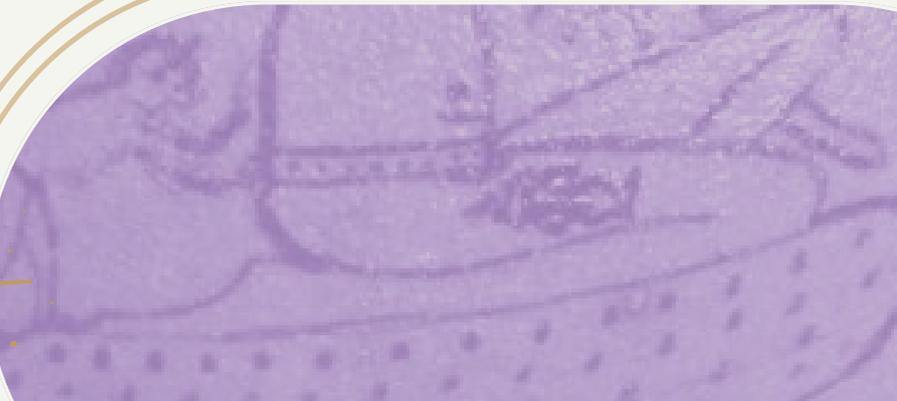
With man modelled on "the image of God" (Genesis 1:27) what was the purpose of the circumcision for new-born males? As with all other body cuts and tattoos mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, such rites contravene the prohibition of gashing flesh and skin marking in Leviticus 19:28. Yet the marking of the male body was, nonetheless, clearly understood as a visible sign of an Israelite's devotion to his deity. This lecture will explore some of these physical marks in biblical sources, in light of the consecration formula for oblates (širku) to temples in the Neo-Babylonian period—and which illuminate the purpose of such conventions.

From Property to Belonging and Beyond: Mesopotamian body marks revised

Julia Giessler

(University of Helsinki)

Body modification in the Ancient Near East is mainly known as a gruesome means to support slavery. Besides depictions of captives bound, pierced and shaven, also textual evidence for unfree individuals with ownership marks tattooed or brand marked on their hands can give us the impression that the modified body counted as a sign of humiliation and misery in Mesopotamia and neighbouring regions. Yet, in fact, cuneiform sources present a more complex picture, according to which ownership marks on human bodies can indicate devotion towards higher authorities. From pious tattoos to body modification in higher social classes, this paper walks you through outstanding cuneiform sources towards a new perspective on body modification in the Ancient Near East.



Tattoos in Jewish Languages

Prof Lily Kahn & **Prof Aaron Rubin**
(University College London) (The Pennsylvania State University)

This talk will explore the role of Jewish languages as a component of secular Jewish identity through the lens of tattoos. Many non-observant Jews in the contemporary world choose tattoos as a way of expressing their Jewish identity. While common Jewish symbols such as the Magen David, Hamsa, Menorah, and others are popular choices for tattoos signalling the bearer's Jewishness, many tattoos feature text in Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, and other Diaspora Jewish languages. Jewish-language material appearing in tattoos includes citations from the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, Zohar, and other traditional Jewish texts in Hebrew and Aramaic, in addition to Yiddish proverbs, folk sayings, and songs, as well as individual words in a Jewish language referencing additional aspects of the bearer's identity. In some cases the tattoos reflect the bearer's familiarity with and strong connection to the language in question (e.g. tattoos in Yiddish chosen by Yiddishists and other individuals with a significant investment in Yiddish language and culture), while in other cases they are rooted in a symbolic desire to express a particular Jewish identity (e.g. Mizrahi, Ashkenazi, etc.), rather than a particular affiliation with the language in question. In this talk we will explore the various aspects of Jewish language tattoos, including the choice of language, the use of Hebrew script in various contexts, and the types of texts selected. Tattoos in Jewish languages offer us a fascinating insight into the powerful role that language and script plays in this quintessentially secular way of expressing Jewish identity.

Edward VII's Jerusalem Pilgrimage Tattoo in the Context of British Tattoo History

Dr Matt Lodder

(University of Essex)

On April 1st 1862, Queen Victoria's eldest son Albert, the future King Edward VII, recorded in his diary that he had been tattooed. 'In the evening', he wrote, 'I was tattooed by a Native, and so was [one of my party], Keppel'. This tattoo begins the story of what would eventually become today's thriving British tattoo industry. It is but a trickle, but it is the stream from which much of the expansion into today's torrent of British tattooing can be traced. Like many streams, it is itself simply the manifestation of a much deeper well whose source lies buried deep in historical time. In this talk, Dr Matt Lodder will explore the proximate and distant histories of religious and pilgrimage tattooing in Britain, and the impacts of Edward VII's decision to be tattooed on fashions and perceptions of tattooing in Britain in the 150 years which followed.

Is there such thing as a kosher tattoo?

Rabbi Emily Reitsma-Jurman

(West London Synagogue)

There is a long history in Judaism of prohibiting tattoos. Many believe the tattoo taboo is biblical, stemming from Leviticus 19:28. Legal codes and modern response similarly disapprove of the practice. However, when we take a close look at this verse, we can see that things are far less clear-cut than they appear. Yet even in the Progressive Jewish world, which has a long tradition of challenging and redefining law and practice, tattoos remain a source of disdain. In recent years, Jews across the globe have been defying this ancient rule. In this talk, we will start by examining the legal texts and then will move on to how this practice is impacting the Jewish community today. Why are some Jews choosing to embrace tattooing? Why do some respond to tattoos with disgust and anger? What role does class, gender, and politics play in the attitudes towards the topic? Can tattoos be a source of spiritual devotion, and if so, how?

Revealing the Practice of Tattooing in Ancient Egypt

Dr Anne Austin

(University of Missouri—St. Louis)

The practice of tattooing in ancient Egypt is rarely attested. Egyptologists have identified tattoos on only a handful of mummies spanning 3,000 years of Pharaonic Egypt. Texts are virtually silent on the practice and artistic depictions are often ambiguous. During my research in 2014 through the mission of the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO) we made an incredible discovery: an extensively tattooed woman from the necropolis at Deir el-Medina. With over 30 tattoos, this woman completely redefined what we knew about tattooing in ancient Egypt. Since then, we have identified dozens of new tattoos among the many unpublished human remains at the site. These additional tattoos indicate that many more individuals were likely tattooed at Deir el-Medina. Coalescing the physical and art historical evidence, this talk offers some of the most comprehensive evidence we have to date on the practice of tattooing in ancient Egypt.

Image: Faience wine bowl with female lute player. Egypt, around 1400–1300 BC, Egypt, Faience, National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden AD 14. (Photo: (c) National Museum of Antiquities)

