

**The Archaeology and Anthropology of Body Modification**  
**International conference – Musée de l’Homme (Paris), 28 and 29 November 2024**  
**FINAL PROGRAM VS. 3.0 – 27 November**

**10h00 - 10h45 Registrations (Musée de l’Homme, 17 Place du Trocadéro, Paris)**

**Thursday, November 28 -- Opening session (10h45 – 13h00):**

10h45-11h10 Culturalizing the Human Body: Evolutionary Insights from Clothing, Body Painting, and Personal Ornaments -- [Francesco d’Errico](#)

11h10-11h35 Permanent Body Modification: Archaeological and Early Historical Evidence -- [Brea McCauley](#) and [Mark Collard](#)

11h35 – 12h00 Earliest evidence of Artificial Cranial Modification in Epigravettian site Arene Candide 12 (12,620-12,104 Cal BP, Italy) – [Tommaso Mori](#)

12h00-12h25 The Archaeology and Anthropology of Body Modification: Current perspectives [Franz Manni](#)

*12h25 – 13h00 Questions and general discussion*

**13h00 - 14h00 Complimentary lunch offered to speakers and poster presenters**

**14h00 - 15h00 Visit of the Body Modification collections of the Musée de l’Homme (for speakers and poster presenters)**

**Thursday, November 28 -- Afternoon session “Past body modification practices” (15h00 – 17h00):**

15h00 – 15h25 Dental ablation criteria, false positives, and base rate neglect – [Scott Burnett](#)

15h25 – 15h50 A few uncertain pages of the (pre)history of labrets in Africa -- [Olivier Langlois](#)

15h50 – 16h15 Untangling the Threads of Ancient Andean Tattooing Along the Peruvian Central Coast: New Possibilities and Revelations – [Benoit Robitaille](#)

16h15 – 16h40 Body modifications in pre-Columbian Andes, an introduction considering the findings from the Musée de l’Homme (MdH) Paris – [Robin Gerst](#)

16h40 – 17h05 Fashion trends, sewing, and body ornamentation in the Upper Paleolithic of South West Germany [Josh London](#)

*17h05 – 17h30 General discussion*

**Thursday, November 28 -- POSTER session (17h30 – 18h00):**

→Geometric morphometric of intentionally modified skulls from pre-Hispanic Peru -- [Giorgia Ciappi](#), [Tommaso Mori](#), [Irene Dori](#), [Alessandro Riga](#), [Jacopo Moggi-Cecchi](#)

→The contribution of 3D geometric morphometrics to assessing the variability of artificial cranial modification practices at the pre-Hispanic site of Pachacamac, Peru -- [Lucas Holbrecht](#)

→Dental Inlay and Identity in the Pre-Columbian Central Andes -- [Celeste Marie Gagnon](#)

Labrets on the Northwest Coast: from archaeological artifacts to contemporary art -- [Shauna LaTosky](#)

→Identifying pre-Columbian tattoo motifs from the Peruvian Central Coast -- [Danny Riday](#)

→Pain in the skin: the meaning of tattoos as a form of memory and a tool for processing grief -- [Susanna Sadari](#)

→Technical Aspects of Body Painting and Tattooing in Pre-Hispanic Central Andes: An Interdisciplinary Approach -- [Judyta Bak](#)

**18h00 - 19h30 Complimentary cocktail reception offered to speakers and poster presenters**

10h00 - 10h30 Registrations (Musée de l'Homme, 17 Place du Trocadéro, Paris)

**Friday, November 29 -- Morning session "Contemporary body modification practices" (10h30 – 13h00):**

10h30 – 10h55 Body Modifications among San Hunter-Gatherers: A Relational Practice -- [Vibeke M. Viestad](#)

10h55 – 11h20 Ritual, Magic and the Aesthetics of Tattooing in Southeast Asia – [Antonio Guerreiro](#)

11h20 – 11h45 Changing practices of scarification in Mela and Mursi (Ethiopia) -- [Lucie Buffavand](#) and [Marion Langumier](#)

11h45 – 12h10 The Enduring Nature of labrets in Southern Ethiopia -- [Shauna LaTosky](#)

12h10 – 12h35 Body piercing ornaments – [Franz Manni](#)

12h35 – 13h00 *General discussion*

**Friday, November 29 -- POSTER session (13h00 – 13h30 -- same as in the previous page):**

13h30 - 14h30 *Complimentary lunch offered to speakers and poster presenters*

**Friday, November 29 -- Afternoon -- (14h30 – 16h30):**

14h30 – 15h20 PANEL DISCUSSION (In French)

*"Modifications corporelles : entre ancestralité et tourisme de masse"* with [Antonio Guerreiro](#), [Christian Coiffier](#) and others

15h20 – 16h00 BRAINSTORMING

*"Networking perspectives to promote and finance the academic study of body modification"*.

16h00 – 16h30 Conference dispersal

**!!! ABSTRACTS FOLLOW IN THE SAME ORDER AS IN THE PROGRAM !!!**

**Thursday, November 28 -- Opening session (10h45 – 13h00):**

### **Culturalizing the Human Body: Evolutionary Insights from Clothing, Body Painting, and Personal Ornaments**

Francesco d'Errico

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The culturalisation of the human body refers to the processes by which individuals and societies imbue physical bodies with cultural meanings, values, and symbols. These practices include non-permanent modifications like clothing, body painting, personal ornaments, hairstyles, and embroidery as well as permanent alterations such as tattooing, scarification, amputation, body piercing, implants, bone shaping as well as genital and dental modifications. It is clear that by understanding the evolutionary implications of these practices, we can better apprehend who we are and what makes human societies different in many ways from those of our close relatives. Current research on the evolution of our lineage reveals, on the one hand, a large and ever-increasing number of fossil species and, on the other hand, the observation, confirmed in the last decade by palaeogenomic data, that several of them, such as Neanderthals and Denisovans, appear more and more as the phenotypic expressions of populations that, over long periods, constantly exchanged their genes with modern populations, themselves the result of a long evolutionary process within the African continent. How do we integrate the culturalisation of the body into this changing evolutionary scenario, which support both an ancient and complex origin of our species and its genetic and cultural proximity to other fossil populations? Did the culturalisation of the human body experience recognizable tipping points in the way humans culturally transformed their body, possibly corresponding to speciation events, or are we facing a gradual process with different past populations described in the past as different species sharing comparable practices? In this presentation I will summarize what we know about the origin and evolution of three key technologies for modifying the appearance of the human body: clothing, mineral pigments for body modification, and personal ornaments. The analysis of these three cultural proxies shed light on the emergence and evolution of other fundamental practices the culturalisation of the human body. We propose that the emergence of clothing was triggered by climatic changes during the Middle-Upper Pleistocene transition. As biological adaptations became inadequate, humans developed cultural innovations to cope with harsh environments, which gradually evolved from utilitarian uses to expressions of identity and social affiliation. Evidence from Middle Stone Age sites in Africa, including the increasing use of ochre for various protective and symbolic purposes and the production of personal ornaments, suggests these practices were well established by at least 160,000-140,000 years ago. They became more complex and diversified after 50,000 years ago.

**Thursday, November 28 -- Opening session (10h45 – 13h00):**

**Permanent Body Modification: Archaeological and Early Historical Evidence**

Brea McCauley and Mark Collard

*Simon Fraser University, Canada*

Today, permanent body modification (PBM) is very popular. Studies suggest that billions of people have experienced one or more types of PBM. But what is the history of PBM? When did the different types originate? Were they invented recently, or do they have a long history? Did they appear simultaneously or at different times? In this presentation, we shed some light on these questions. We begin by considering whether there is any evidence of PBM in non-human animals or our extinct hominin relatives. From there, we discuss the early archaeological and historical evidence of seven of the main types of PBM practiced by modern humans: tattooing, scarification, amputation, piercing, genital modification, dental modification, and bone shaping. We first outline some of the earliest possible evidence of the types, followed by some of the later, yet more secure, evidence for them. There is, we show, strong evidence indicating that humans have been practicing PBM for at least 15,000 years. We also show that there is weaker but still intriguing evidence suggesting that PBM has a much deeper antiquity in human history, perhaps dating as far back as 80,000 years ago.

Keywords: permanent body modification; cross-cultural survey; archaeology

**Thursday, November 28 -- Opening session (10h45 – 13h00):**

**Earliest Evidence of Artificial Cranial Modification in Epigravettian Arene Candide 12 (12620-12104 Cal BP, Italy)**

Mori Tommaso<sup>1,2</sup>, Sparacello Vitale Stefano<sup>3</sup>, Riga Alessandro<sup>1</sup>, Ciappi Giorgia, Seghi Francesca<sup>4</sup>, Zavattaro Monica<sup>2</sup>, Di Vincenzo Fabio<sup>5</sup>, Peresani Marco<sup>6,7</sup>, Fontana Federica<sup>6</sup>, Moggi-Cecchi Jacopo<sup>1</sup>, Dori Irene<sup>1</sup>

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Arene Candide (AC) 12, a skull of an adult individual from Arene Candide Epigravettian necropolis, is an important find for studying ancient cranial modification practices. In 1979 P. Messeri suggested the evidence in AC12 of intentional cranial modification. However, this claim was questioned by V. Formicola and C. Scarsini (1987).

This study re-examines the hypothesis of artificial cranial modification (ACM) in AC12 using virtual anthropology methods. Through medical CT-scan imaging, the skull was virtually reconstructed. Applying 20 landmarks and 139 semi-landmarks to quantify cranial shape, AC12 morphology was compared with reference samples, including 21 Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic Italian individuals, 18 skulls artificially modified in historical times, and 7 modern pathological skulls from the Museum of Anthropology of Florence.

Geometric morphometric methods, encompassing a sliding procedure, generalized Procrustes analysis, and principal component analysis (PCA), were employed to scrutinize and visualize morphological variations. Total Procrustes distances and Canonical variate analysis (CVA) were utilized to explore AC12 groups' affinities.

Results indicate AC12 reconstructions closer to or within the cluster of specimens with ACM, making it the earliest known evidence of this cultural practice in the bioarchaeological record. This discovery provides valuable insight into the antiquity and spread of ACM in human history.

Keywords:

Body modification, Palaeolithic, Geometric Morphometric, Italy.

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**Thursday, November 28 -- Opening session (10h45 – 13h00):**

**The Archaeology and Anthropology of Body Modification: Current perspectives**

Franz Manni

*CNRS UMR 7206, National Museum of Natural History, France*

Body modifications are ubiquitous in human history: body painting, piercing, tattooing, scarification, cranial deformation, male or female circumcision, breast implants, teeth whitening, rhinoplasty, etc. All eras are concerned with the voluntary modification of the body. These modifications correspond to various beliefs (religious, medical), to gender, to the social hierarchy, to proprioception. Body modifications vary over time, but many are based on know-how that is transmissible in time and space, inherited. This point is important to understand them, because a heritable anthropological fact is necessarily linked to a demographic history, to migrations. This presentation is an opportunity to report on the state of progress of knowledge in this field. Examples concerning the archaeological history and anthropological interpretations of this form of human culture will be contextualized in order to outline research perspectives in the anthropological field. The aim of this presentation is to familiarize anthropologists with a new theme that embraces several fields of research: anthropology, archaeology, history, art history, sociology, medicine, linguistics.

Keywords:

Body modification, archaeology, anthropology, ethnology.

**Thursday, November 28 -- Afternoon session "Past body modification practices" (15h00 – 17h00):**

**Dental ablation criteria, false positives, and base rate neglect**

Scott E. Burnett

*Department of Anthropology, Eckerd College (USA)*

Intentional non-therapeutic removal of teeth, known as dental ablation, avulsion, or evulsion, is a body modification practiced in many geographic regions at some point in time. However, teeth can be missing from the dentition for many reasons, including decay, periodontal disease, unintentional trauma, and dental agenesis, posing a challenge for those studying dental ablation in the past -- how do we distinguish intentional from unintentional tooth loss? Overall, recent methodological research on dental ablation indicates that using more diagnostic characteristics can reduce the number of false identifications, but that not all characteristics are equally powerful. Another important factor for interpreting results is the relevance of the potential background rate of ablation in the samples under study. Even when diagnostic criteria are thought to yield relatively high accuracy for correctly identifying when ablation is present (true positive) and absent (true negative), individual cases identified as ablation in societies with low ablation frequencies may be more likely to be false positives than actual cases of ablation. The results indicate that clear methodological descriptions are necessary for proper interpretation of ablation studies, and caution may be warranted if few ablation cases are expected or identified.

Keywords: intentional tooth removal, dental modification criteria, methodology

**Thursday, November 28 -- Afternoon session "Past body modification practices" (15h00 – 17h00):**

**A few uncertain pages of the (pre)history of labrets in Africa, and the questions they raise about the archaeological visibility of the wearing of lip adornments**

Olivier Langlois

*CEPAM - UMR 7264 – CNRS France*

Along with the Americas, Africa is probably the continent where labrets have been used most extensively. Until recently, over a large part of the continent, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, labrets of varied materials and shapes were worn by women and/or men from very diverse populations speaking a wide variety of languages. However, the history of African labrets, which has little interested scholars, remains poorly known.

To trace this history, we can rely on two types of evidence: the labrets themselves and the consequences of their use on the teeth. As both types of evidence have their own potential and limitations as clues of the use of lip ornaments, we would expect them to provide complementary information on the ornamental practices of past societies. In practice, however, as shown by the earliest African contexts, they are not always been recognized jointly. This fact is all the more worthy of mention and discussion given that, as things stand at present, archaeological artefacts and anthropobiological traces of their use respectively tell us about different moments in the prehistory of African labrets, where very different processes may have taken place.



**Thursday, November 28 -- Afternoon session "Past body modification practices" (15h00 – 17h00):**

**Untangling the Threads of Ancient Andean Tattooing Along the Peruvian Central Coast:  
New Possibilities and Revelations**

Benoit Robitaille (Independent Researcher, Bonsecours, Québec, Canada)

Aaron Deter-Wolf (Tennessee Division of Archaeology, USA)

Danny Riday (Ancestral Arts. Les Eyzies, France)

Rhoda Fromme (Berlin Heritage Authority / Museum for Prehistory Berlin -- Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz)

The hundreds of tattooed remains recovered from archaeological contexts along Peru's Pacific coast provide a unique opportunity to understand the cultural importance and circumstances of Pre-Columbian Andean tattooing. Today many of these remains are held in South American and European museum collections. Largely overlooked by modern scholars until recent years, these remains bear witness to a remarkable tattooing tradition of great cultural importance.

Recent research in the collections of the Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin led to documentation of hundreds of preserved tattoos on at least 83 individuals dated ca.1000-1470 CE. Most of these remains consist of disarticulated limbs collected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and few retain meaningful contextual data. Nevertheless, through a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates careful interpretation and analysis by archaeologists, researchers, and professional tattooers, we are able to reconstruct important contextual information which provides clues about the identities of these individuals and their role in Pre-Columbian society. Herein we present our efforts to reconstruct the living context of these body parts that belonged to tattooed people focusing on revelations regarding the "who" and "why" of this vibrant tattooing tradition.

**Thursday, November 28 -- Afternoon session "Past body modification practices" (15h00 – 17h00):**

**Body modifications in pre-Columbian Andes - an introduction considering the findings from the Musée de l'Homme (MdH) Paris**

Robin Gerst

*Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt, Germany*

The unique environmental conditions in the Andean regions provide excellent conditions for the preservation of perishable materials, including human remains. In addition to burial customs, these mummies also preserve the practices used by pre-Columbian societies to modify the human body. This lecture summarizes, contextualizes and compares the common practices of body modification in the pre-Columbian Central Andes. Special attention will be paid to the human remains of the MdH.

Due to the excellent degree of preservation, statements can also be made about features that are otherwise hardly represented in archaeology, as they usually decompose. These include modifications of hard tissue (bones), but also rare finds of soft tissue such as hair and skin.

These body modifications are presented here in detail. The focus is on the tattoos found on ten of the human remains. Based on their iconography, an attempt is made at a cultural association.

Keywords:

Andean Archeology, Musée de l'Homme, Mumies, Body Modification, Prehistoric Tattoos, Piercings, Hairstyle

**Thursday, November 28 -- Afternoon session "Past body modification practices" (15h00 – 17h00):**

### **Fashion trends, sewing, and body ornamentation in the Upper Palaeolithic of South West Germany**

<sup>1</sup>Joshua London, <sup>1,2</sup>Sibylle Wolf and <sup>2,1</sup>Nicholas J. Conard

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The Upper Palaeolithic of southwestern Germany dates to 42,000 to 12,000 years before present and is represented by three major cultural phases, the Aurignacian, the Gravettian and the Magdalenian. Each of these phases produced characteristic personal ornaments. Regionally distinct double perforated beads made from mammoth ivory dominate the archaeological inventory of the Swabian Aurignacian, hinting to local fashion trends and preferred bead forms in this early phase of *Homo sapiens* in Central Europe. The subsequent Gravettian assemblages are dominated by tear-drop shaped ivory beads. After the LGM raw material preferences for carving personal ornaments shifted mainly to jet and shells. Ivory figurines are another specialty of the Aurignacian of the Swabian Jura. The female figurine from Hohle Fels Cave near Schelklingen counts among the oldest figurative artworks worldwide. A fragment of a second female figurine as well as human-animal hybrids are known from other sites in the Swabian Jura. Many of these artworks bear decorations and incisions which have been variously interpreted as representing clothes, tattoos or body painting. These finds hint at the imaginative representation and physical appearance of the bodies of our ancestors. We present this material culture and give insights into the Upper Palaeolithic lifeways of southwestern Germany.

Key words:

Upper Palaeolithic, Southwestern Germany, Personal ornaments, Figurative artworks, Perforated batons

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**Thursday, November 28 -- POSTER session (17h30 – 18h00):**

**Geometric morphometric of intentionally modified skulls from pre-Hispanic Peru**

Giorgia Ciappi<sup>1</sup>, Tommaso Mori<sup>1</sup>, Irene Dori<sup>1</sup>, Alessandro Riga<sup>1</sup>, Jacopo Moggi-Cecchi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Department of Biology, Anthropology Laboratory, University of Florence, Florence, Italy.*

In this study, we aimed to use geometric morphometrics (GM) to investigate Artificial Cranial Modification (ACM) in cranial remains from the Lima region and Cuzco (Peru), housed in the Anthropology Museum, University of Florence. The GM analysis included 79 modified and unmodified crania, 59 from Peru and a control group of 20 unmodified individuals from Europe, Asia, and Africa. Two types of ACM were identified: tabular and annular. Landmarks, surface semilandmarks, and curve semilandmarks were recorded on 3D digital models. The data were analyzed to assess variations in cranial vault shape using *Principal Component Analysis* (PCA) and *Canonical Variate Analysis* (CVA).

The GM results showed that the neurocranial shapes clustered into three groups, corresponding to tabular, annular, and non-ACM. Frontal shapes showed less distinction between ACM and non-ACM. For the occipital region, the two types of ACM were well separated, although non-ACM specimens overlapped with ACM individuals. CVA confirmed, for most specimens, the classification into the different types of modification. Specimens with uncertain occurrences of ACM were classified using the CVA discriminant function. This approach provides a quantitative and objective tool for classifying ACM with GM, and it can aid in interpreting isolated calvaria with possible ACM.

Keywords:

Modified skulls, Peru, geometric morphometrics

**Thursday, November 28 -- POSTER session (17h30 – 18h00):**

**The contribution of 3D geometric morphometrics to assessing the variability of artificial cranial modification practices at the pre-Hispanic site of Pachacamac, Peru**

Lucas HOLBRECHT

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Artificial cranial modification (ACM) is a practice designed to shape a child's cranial vault into a permanent shape. The choice of this shape has often been interpreted as a marker of sociocultural identity. Studying the variability of these shapes within the funerary contexts of the Peruvian site of Pachacamac provide a better understanding of the identity of the deceased and the population dynamics at the site. Traditionally, MCAs have been identified and classified using typological systems. The aim of our study is to explore the morphological variation of these practices at the Pachacamac site and to question the relevance of typological systems for their characterization. Using 3D surface acquisitions from 33 crania, we address the morphological variation in our sample using geometric morphometrics. Our results show a morphological variability within the sample and highlight the limitations of traditional typologies. This variability is best displayed in the varying degrees of expression for the same major ACM type (tabular erect), as well as in the marginal shapes of certain individuals. In relation to possible large-scale population movements, our results suggest a possible diversification of ACM forms during the Late Horizon period (1470 - 1533 AD).

Keywords: Biological anthropology; artificial cranial modification; morphology; geometric morphometrics; typologies; socio-cultural identity ; Pachacamac ; Peru

**Thursday, November 28 -- POSTER session (17h30 – 18h00):**

**Dental Inlay and Identity in the Pre-Columbian Central Andes**

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Intentional dental modification has been documented most commonly in the Americas among the Pre-Columbian Indigenous Peoples of Mesoamerica and northern South America. Among these groups, dental inlay has been recorded both ethnohistorically and archaeologically in what is today Ecuador. In this poster we assess the first case of decorative inlay identified in an individual recovered from Peru in the central Andes. Interestingly, the inlay composition (silver-dominated electrum alloy) would have been distinct in appearance from most known cases of inlay in Ecuador, which are golden in color. However, assessment of stable isotopic signatures, including  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ,  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ,  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  suggests that this inlaid individual was born, and raised to adolescence in Ecuador and only later traveled to Peru where they died and were buried. Their internment in a ritually and symbolically meaningful location with local elites suggest they were perceived to be of high status by their new community, perhaps in part because of their unique appearance and migrant status.

Key words: Dental Inlay, Osteobiography, Pre-Columbian Andes, Isotopic Analysis, Metallurgical Analysis

**Thursday, November 28 -- POSTER session (17h30 – 18h00):**

**Labrets on the Northwest Coast: from archaeological artifacts to contemporary art**

Shauna LaTosky and Finnigan Gouger-Davis

*University of North British Columbia, Canada*

Before the smallpox epidemic that ravaged the Haida Gwaii in the early 1860s, labrets were associated with powerful women. Similarly, Tsimshian labrets of various materials, shapes and sizes were also worn to signify social status, gender and identity in multiple ways. While this ancient body modification practice is said to have ‘disappeared’ soon after it came to be regarded as an indicator of ‘backwardness’ by European missionaries, traders and colonial administrators, it has lived on in these First Nations communities through the archaeological artifacts that continue to be found locally, or repatriated from collections and museums found abroad, to contemporary artistic works of indigenous artists. For example, Haida and Tsimshian carvers along the Northwest Coast of British Columbia still emulate the labrets made and worn by their ancestors today. In this poster presentation we draw on La Salle’s typology of labrets to consider the types of technologies that would have facilitated the creation of a variety of labrets, suggesting a demand for more refined, decorated labrets and what these refinements might have signified then. We also consider the different expressive forms and similar and different meanings of labrets today through the artistic works of contemporary indigenous artists who incorporate them into their artwork, reclaiming, as we argue a practice that continues to exist through the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Haida and Tsimshian.

**Thursday, November 28 -- POSTER session (17h30 – 18h00):**

**Identifying pre-Columbian tattoo motifs from the Peruvian Central Coast**

Danny Riday

*Ancestral Arts. Les Eyzies, France*

With:

Benoit Robitaille (Independent Researcher, Bonsecours, Québec, Canada)

Aaron Deter-Wolf (Tennessee Division of Archaeology, USA)

Rhoda Fromme (Berlin Heritage Authority / Museum for Pre-History Berlin (Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz))

Tattoos preserved on naturally and deliberately mummified remains provide an invaluable opportunity for studying archaeological cultures. In particular, understanding the specific motifs used in tattooing allows for comparison with other crafts such as weaving and ceramics, and can lead to insights regarding the agency of individual artists, the intent and function of tattoos, and the role of tattooing within immaterial cultural frameworks.

Unfortunately there are few or no examples of preserved tattoos from most archaeological societies, and therefore little data available for reconstructing the full iconographic catalog of ancient tattoo traditions.

In 2023 our team used digital infrared and DStretch imaging to document preserved tattoos on the remains of ancient Andean individuals dated ca.1000-1470 CE in the collections of the Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Those 83 individuals from sites along Peru's Pacific Central Coast comprise one of the largest collections of tattooed archaeological remains documented in any single repository. Through stylistic analysis of thousands of individual motifs, we are able to present the most detailed catalog to date of pre-Columbian Andean tattooing. This effort lays the groundwork for future explorations of the iconography and artistry of this unique regional tradition.



## **Pain in the skin: the meaning of tattoos as a form of memory and a tool for processing grief**

Susanna Sadari

*Network Italiano Morte e Oblio*

Tattooing is an ancient drawing technique applied to the skin, with evidence found all over the world. Tattoos could be designed as animals or symbols with spiritual significance. Among the memory preservation techniques, tattooing is not one of the most well-known in connection to grief. Grief can have many facets, from the loss of a loved one with different degrees of relationships, to the loss of an animal. Tattoos can also be used as a memento of those who are no longer there, such as transcribing the name of the deceased person/animal, writing it in the handwriting of the deceased, or tattooing a paw print or a photo. The principle is always the same, to transpose what has now become transcendent into something physical that remains linked to the person. Furthermore, the choice of the point where to execute the tattoo can for many people have a meaning in itself and it must be remembered that this entails a "blood" bond, engraved in the skin. In addition to the function mentioned above of remembering those who are no longer, in some way it helps to soothe the pain of loss, in different steps that I have identified:

- 1) The choice to tattoo, the awareness of absence
- 2) The choice of the point, to see or not see
- 3) The act, at the moment of tattooing one feels pain and exorcises the "pain"
- 4) Healing, both physical and psychological, through pain one purifies oneself
- 5) Union, this remains a moment of sharing and remembrance.

The choice of the location: if visible, it can raise questions about its meaning, which involves an interaction, an exchange of emotions and memories, otherwise observing it remains an intimate moment. In the West, in the last century, there has been a removal of the places of death, remembering that unfortunately, very often, one does not live where the deceased is buried, creating further distance, or following the end of the burial period, when the tomb is removed, nothing remains, no support.

Choosing to get a tattoo means wanting to continue living by perpetuating a memory, and in some cases exorcising the pain of loss, always carrying with oneself who has been loved.

The methodology chosen to use in addition to existing literature is ethnographic anthropological study, conducted through semi-structured interviews, both with tattooed individuals and tattoo artists, who play the important role of listeners to clients who tell their stories. A small sample of people and tattoo artists who have chosen tattoos as a form of expressing pain will be surveyed.

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**Thursday, November 28 -- POSTER session (17h30 – 18h00)**

**Technical Aspects of Body Painting and Tattooing in Pre-Hispanic Central Andes:  
An Interdisciplinary Approach**

Judyta Bąk

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Body painting and tattooing were significant cultural practices among pre-Hispanic societies in the Central Andes, with evidence dating from the Preceramic Period to the Late Intermediate Period. These traditions, preserved in mummified human remains, offer a unique opportunity for interdisciplinary research into ancient customs. The aim of this study, part of a doctoral dissertation, was to identify tattooing techniques and the coloring substances used in pre-Columbian cultures, with a particular focus on their social and cultural significance. One of the main challenges in this field is reconstructing the pigment formulas used to create permanent skin patterns. To address this, a series of non-invasive and invasive analyses were carried out.

The initial phase involved pilot studies using the non-invasive method of energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (ED-XRF). The research focused on 130 mummified human remains from the Chancay, Yschma, Moche, and Chimu cultures, including both pigmented and non-pigmented skin samples. The results of the analyses were ambiguous, confirming the validity of the research procedure and significantly influencing the approach and selection of subsequent methods in the ongoing research focused on the pigments used in pre-Hispanic Andean traditions.

**Friday, November 29 – Morning session “Contemporary body modification practices”  
(10h30 – 13h00):**

**Body Modifications among San Hunter-Gatherers: A Relational Practice**

Vibeke M. Viestad

*Honorary Research Fellow, Rock Art Research Institute, University of Witwatersrand*

Body modifications are a well-known aspect of various cultural practice among the San hunter-gatherers of Southern Africa. Recently, such practices have been analyzed within an interpretative framework that suggests that they were mostly performed to ensure harmonious relationships—between humans and other-than-human sentient beings and identities. This chapter provides an overview of relevant published literature and primary source material on the body modifications of the San communities of the recent past, in order to systematize the existing documentation and to synthesize what appear to have been the most important contexts for the performance of cuts, tattoos, and scarification. This will demonstrate that body modifications in San hunter-gatherer contexts were a relational practice, suggesting a close cultural discourse between the alteration of the body and other material cultural practices—such as incised, burnt, and painted patterns in skin- and woodwork, as well as rock engravings.

Key words: body modification, San hunter-gatherer, Southern Africa, relational practice, human-animal relations, social relations, tattoo, scarification, material culture, rock engraving

**Friday, November 29 – Morning session “Contemporary body modification practices”  
(10h30 – 13h00):**

**TALK Ritual, Magic and the Aesthetics of Tattooing in Southeast Asia.**

Antonio J. Guerreiro

*IRASIA; National Museum of Natural History, France*

Some authors (Lévy, 1941 ; Nguyễn Xuân Nguyễn, 1941, and others) have posited the antiquity and unity of Southeast Asian symbolism in *tattooing*, thus playing down its variations, in Mainland and Insular areas. In relation to tattooing patterns, they distinguished Indian and Chinese influences emerging from a common archaic substratum.

With respect to Southeast Asian Indianized and tribal societies, I will review the placements of tattoo motifs on the body and the ritual aspects of tattooing, and its aesthetics. Based on this overview I will suggest a general interpretation connecting the ritual practice of tattooing with both gender and magic ideas. In relation to the social functions of tattooing, changes and adaptations are also noticeable in the practice.

**Friday, November 29 – Morning session “Contemporary body modification practices”  
(10h30 – 13h00):**

**Changing practices of scarification in Mela and Mursi (Ethiopia)**

Lucie Buffavand\* and Marion Langumier\*\*

*(\*) Institut des Mondes Africains; (\*\*) University of Paris Nanterre*

This communication explores the recent evolution of scarification practices among the Mela and the Mursi, two small groups of agro-pastoralists in the southwestern lowlands of Ethiopia. Until the 2000s, men and women followed strict conventions for cutting patterns into specific areas of their skin. For young women, this practice was mostly aesthetic, while for men, the most elaborate designs signified the status achieved after killing an enemy. In the past decade, the brutal penetration of the state in these formerly rather autonomous societies has coincided with a radical transformation in scarification practices. Today’s scarifications are characterised by constant innovation and a tendency toward excess. Teenagers have incorporated the new images flowing into their world, and the once non-figurative and curved patterns have been gradually replaced by angled forms and figurative designs. Virtually every part of the skin can now be scarified, with the exception of the face. We will explore how these changes reflect the profound challenges faced by these communities and examine the gendered dimensions of the practice. Young women are the most prolific scarifiers and challenge gender norms by appropriating patterns that were previously reserved for men. I will also approach scarification as a form of doodling, identifying parallels with emerging drawing practices that utilise newly accessible materials.

Keywords: scarification, social change, gender, drawing, doodle, Mela, Mursi

**Friday, November 29 – Morning session “Contemporary body modification practices”  
(10h30 – 13h00):**

**The Enduring Nature of labrets in Southern Ethiopia**

Shauna LaTosky

*University of Northern British Columbia*

Materiality in anthropology involves the exploration of the situated experiences of material life and the shaping of human experience by objects. In this cross-cultural study of the material culture of labret-wearing groups in Southern Ethiopia, the focus will not only be on labrets, their properties and materials, but their changing roles in society in relation to gendered and social relations, body politics and modern development. Although a lot of ethnographic research has been conducted on Mursi and Suri labrets in Southern Ethiopia, comparatively less attention has been given to the evolution of labrets in other agro-pastoralist groups in Southern Ethiopia (e.g. Me'en, Nyangatom, Kara and Daasanech) and their changing technologies and socio-cultural significance. This concept paper is also call for future interdisciplinary research that draws on archaeological evidence, museum artifacts, archives, material culture and contemporary ethnographic findings, with a focus on understanding the enduring nature of labrets in Southern Ethiopia.

**Friday, November 29 – Morning session “Contemporary body modification practices”  
(10h30 – 13h00):**

**Body piercing ornaments**

Franz Manni

*CNRS UMR 7206, National Museum of Natural History, France*

This presentation addresses typical ornaments used in enlarged perforations at the ears, nose, and near the lips. Basic guidelines are provided throughout to aid interpretation of museal collections and during archaeological fieldwork.

To conclude, three research examples of morphometric analyses done on archaeological and ethnological ornaments used in enlarged ear and the lip perforations are also provided (Mursi people in Ethiopia; pre-Hispanic populations in Mexico; prehistoric Kamchatka).

**Keywords:** body piercing, body modification, enlargement, stretching, plug, spool, labret, archaeology, ethnology