

Body Art in Ancient Egypt

May Farouk

Sadat City University

Abstract

Body art is an important expressant of personality, religious beliefs and social habits in any society. Ancient Egypt was no exception to the rule. The aim of this article is to research the ways our ancient ancestors practiced body art and the purpose of such physical decorations. We have evidence that body art was practiced in ancient Egypt since the Pre-dynastic period in the form of tattoos which were applied mostly to women and in some rare examples to men as well. Cosmetics were widespread in all classes of society and along all historical stages. Henna was used for colouring hair , balms, feet and nails of mummies. Piercing and earlobe stretching of ears was practiced, especially during the New Kingdom. Branding was a cruel measure taken mostly against criminals and war prisoners. It was concluded that body had different purposes like beautifying, protection, connection to certain gods and marking for identification or punishment.

Keywords: body, art, tattoo, piercing, branding, ancient Egypt

Introduction

Body art is a visual language that communicates social class; displays achievements; and includes memories, aspirations, and life histories. (Schildkrout, 2014, p.4). All ancient and modern cultures had their expectations of a certain range of appearance of its members consistent with gender, age and status. In ancient Egypt, a highly iconographic civilisation, the human body was but another surface that can receive decoration, motifs and symbols. Ancient Egyptian clothes allowed more areas of the body as well to be visible leaving plenty of opportunity for body art.

There are two categories of body art in ancient Egypt: temporary (make up, and Henna) and permanent (tattoos, branding and piercing). The later category is often named body modification in literature.

Cosmetics

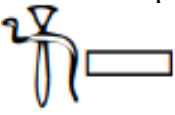

Cosmetics are defined as any preparation that is applied to the human body for cleansing, beautifying, promoting attractiveness or altering appearance (Kantiry, 2008, p.98- Getachew and Tewelde, 2018, p.717). The earliest archaeological evidence of cosmetics in the world is an Egyptian ceremonial Pre-dynastic palette that was used for grinding and mixing cosmetics (El-Kilany and Raof, 2017, p.2). There are countless occurrences of other cosmetic tools that were found in tombs like eyeliner applicators, mirrors, combs and hairpins which suggests that cosmetics were not only used for beauty purposes but also for magical and religious purposes (Odler, 2015, p.50).

El-Kilany and Raof (2017, p.3) listed 4 scenes that show how cosmetics were applied. Dating from the Old to New Kingdoms, all such depictions show a woman holding a mirror and adding cosmetics to her face sometimes by the help of a maid and by the means of a pad or a reed brush (fig.1)



Fig. 1: Lady Ipwet applying cosmetics to her face with a powder puff, 11th Dynasty, stela in British Museum. From *Studies in Ancient Technology*, vol. III (p. 20), by R.J Forbes , 1993, E.J. Brill

Ancient Egyptian art, during all periods and in all its forms of expression, shows men, women and even children with thick black or dark green borders around the eyes. Eyeliners seem therefore to have been a daily practice for all people. The two main forms of eye

makeup were malachite, (wAD)  and black kohl (msdmt) .

The former was a copper carbonate pigment that came from mines of Sinai and the latter was made from galena, a dark gray ore found in the eastern desert (Lucas, 1930, p.41). Interestingly modern research shows that kohl forms a thin film on the eye lens against the direct contract of harmful UV radiation (Habib Ullah et. al, 2010, p.49). The galena also helped to keep insects away from the eyes (Kreston, 2012). Thus, the purpose of makeup here was not only cosmetic but also practical.

The lips and cheeks of ancient Egyptians were tinted red. The colour was added to the cheeks by a powder -puff and to the lips using an applicator consisting of a reed ending by a small piece of ochre (El-Kilany and Raof, 2017, p.3). Red was the most accessible colour in ancient Egypt since the prehistoric times since naturally occurring red minerals, or clays, were abundant (Pokorska, 2018). The main source was ochre which is an iron oxide. In addition, some plants, like madder plant and Henna, were also used to produce red colour (Pokorska, 2018).

Other cosmetics applied to the face included ceruse, a white lead pigment used to lighten skin and saffron which was an expensive yellow spice employed as eyeshadow (Kantiry, 2008, p.109). Different types of fats were used as a medium to mix and apply pigments (El-Kilany and Raouf, 2017, p.5). Kohl and other cosmetics were kept in small pots that were made of granite, basalt, alabaster, ivory or wood (Durrani, 2018). Coming in a variety of shapes, they were usually sealed with a piece of leather around the neck of the container. An interesting Wooden cosmetic pot is displayed in the British Museum (fig. 2). It belongs to Ahmose of Peniat who was an overseer of works between the reigns of Amenhotep I to Thutmose III. The pot consists of 5 cylinders attached to each other to form a rounded edge square. The text on one cylinder reads 'fine eye paint for every Day' while text on other three cylinders contains the beginning and the end of the three year Egyptian seasons, implying that different types of the unguent might have been used at each season (Kantiry, 2008, p.107).



Fig.2.: Cosmetic pot of Ahmose in the British museum. From Google Arts & Culture <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/wooden-cosmetic-pot-of-ahmose-of-peniati/6wGs97SeCe4zMw>

During the Old Kingdom, every aspect of the king's grooming and appearance was controlled by an organized hierarchy of employees under a state department called the house of morning (Blackman, 1918, p.150). We have titles like keeper of the kilt, keeper of the diadem, director of the royal headdress and manicurists (Riefstahl, 1952, p.10). While those roles were done originally by dignitaries and princes, Forbes (1966, p.21) believes that after the Sixth Dynasty it was slaves and artisans who carried out these functions.

Tattoo

Egyptian art and text do not show any tattooed men except for one doubted representation on a stela dating to Dynasty XII on which a male is depicted with marks over the chest. Yet the bad condition of the stela does not confirm the representation (Tassie, 2003, p. 88). Until recently no tattooed mummies of males were found but in 2018 infrared examination was carried out on seven natural Pre-dynastic mummies (3017-3050 B.C) that are kept in the British museum and that had been discovered in Geblien on an unspecified date before 1900 (Friedman et. al, 2018, p.1). Some tattoos were detected on one of the mummies that belongs to a man (EA 32751). Such tattoos depict a wild bull (*Bos primigenius*) and a Barbary sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*) on the upper arm (fig.3), both common elements in pre dynastic iconography . Friedman et. al (2018, p.5) suggests that the man, who seems to have died between the age of 18 and 21 as a victim of interpersonal violence, may have worn the tattoos as symbols of strength. Not only is this the only tattooed male mummy found, but its motifs also suggest a gender specific role. While tattoos of women suggest themes of fertility and birth, those of males carry the meaning of power and status.



Fig. 3. . Tattoos on the Predynastic male mummy in the British museum. From “Natural mummies from Predynastic Egypt reveal the world’s earliest figural tattoos” by R. Friedman et al, 2018, Science Direct, Volume 92, p. 116.

We have plenty of physical and artistic evidence of tattooing females in ancient Egypt. As for artistic sources, God Bes was depicted on New Kingdom dancers' legs. Keimer (1948, p.40) compiled 5 examples of New Kingdom dancers with God Bes inked on their thighs. Among these is a scene from tomb 341 in Thebes which shows the bottom part of a female dancer with tattoos representing God Bes on the right thigh (fig.4).



Fig. 4. . Female musician from the tomb of Nakhtamon (341 in Thebes) with a Bes tattoo on the thigh. From *Remarques sur le tatouage dans l'Égypte ancienne* (pl. XX) by L. Keimer, 1948, Imprimerie de L'institut Francais.

Female figurines are small nude figures around 15 cm in height, usually made of clay, faience, ivory, stone, and wood (Waraksa, 2008, p.1). They occurred from the Pre-dynastic period in burials of adult men, women, and children, domestic and temple areas (Insoll & Stevenson, 2017, p.67). Their exact function is unclear, but they seem to have been used for their healing powers either in fertility related diseases or other (Waraksa, 2008, p.3). Poelina-Hunter (2019, p. 305) identified several patterns of abstract motifs in black paint in these figurines including dotted diamonds, dotted areas in pubic triangle, diagonal lines, lines of dots on the arm; and dots on the face. Because these tattoos were found on 16 Pre-dynastic female figurines, some speculated that the practice of tattooing began in the Pre-dynastic period, a speculation that was confirmed by the examination of the two Gebelein mummies in the British museum (Friedman et. al, 2018, p.2). (see below).

More tattooed mummies come from Nubia than Egypt, especially during the Nubian C-Group (Tassie, 2003, p.85). Thus the practice of tattooing might have been borrowed from Nubia through the extensive contact that happened during that period. A tattoo of Bes on the thigh of a female mummy from Aksha in Nubia, dating to the fourth century BC was discovered resembling the artistic evidence found in Egypt (Vila, 1967, p.542).

Libyan prisoners on monuments of Dynasty 19 and 20 show blue tattoos. Keimer, (1948, p.46) compiled 7 such scenes from Thebes, Tell Alamarna and Madinet Habu. Among these is a scene from tomb number 120 in Thebes with a tattoo on the arm and abdomen consisting of dots (fig.5).



Fig. 5: A Libyan prisoner from tomb number 120 in Thebes with a tattoo on the arm and abdomen consisting of dots. From *Remarques sur le tatouage dans l'Égypte ancienne* (p. 47) by L. Keimer, 1948, Imprimerie de L'institut Français.

Three Egyptian mummies bearing tattoos are most quoted in literature. One of them is a priestess of Hathour from Dynasty XI who was discovered in Dier Al Bahri. She was called Amunet and also carried the title of 'King's Favourite Ornament' (Tassie, 2003, p.90). Two other mummies, found in Pits 23 and 26 of the same cemetery, who were dancers of Hathour in the court of King Mentuhotep II (Keimer, 1948, p.13). The tattoos on the three mummies are in dark blue colour and consist of lines of dots spreading over the shoulders, arms, stomach, thighs in elliptical, diamond and rectangular patterns (Figs. 6,7,8,9). It seems that these tattoos, covering large areas of the body, were applied along the life of the deceased rather than on one occasion.



Fig.6 Tattoo over the chest of a mummy From Dier Albahari. From *Remarques sur le tatouage dans l'Égypte ancienne* (pl. VI) by L. Keimer, 1948, Imprimerie de L'institut Français.



Fig.7 Tattoo over the arm of a mummy From Dier Albahari. From *Remarques sur le tatouage dans l'Égypte ancienne* (pl. VII) by L. Keimer, 1948, Imprimerie de L'institut Français.

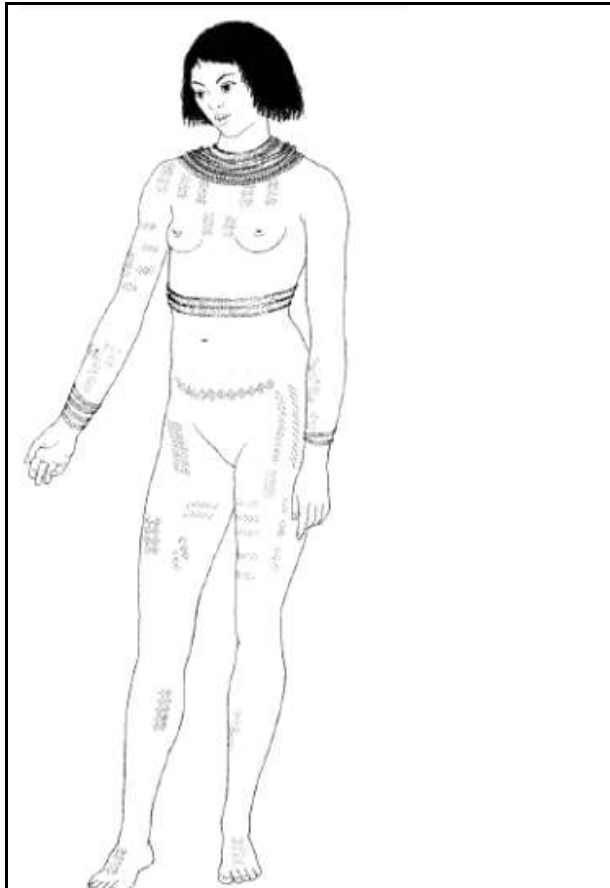


Fig.8 Drawing of the tattoos found on the body from Pit 23. From *Ae Ink : Investigating the Mechanics and Meanings of Ancient Egyptian Tattoos* (dissertation)(fig.8) by J. Paszik, 2017

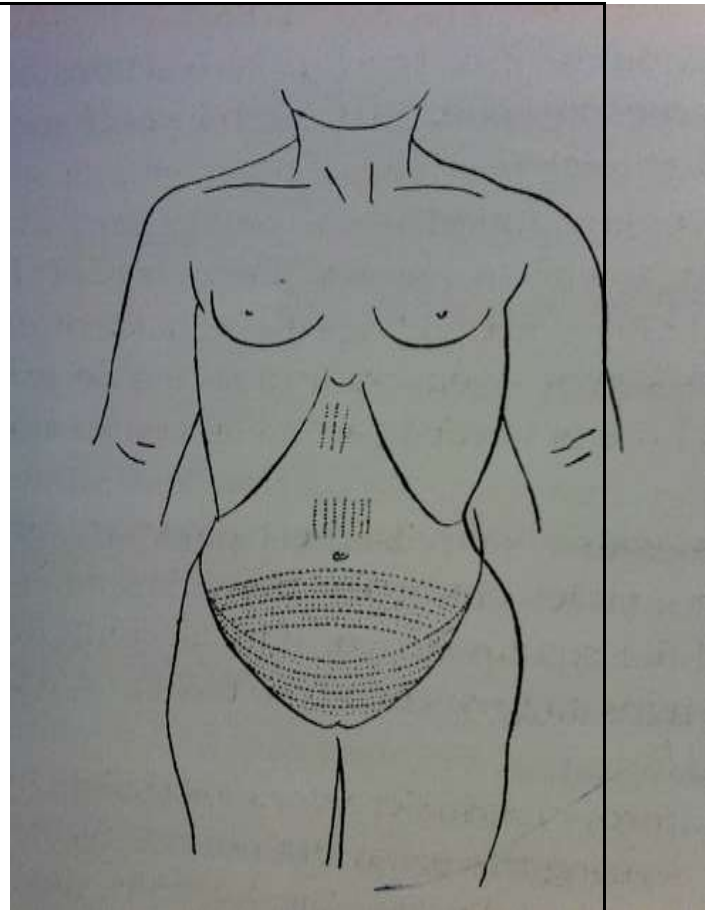


Fig.9 Tattoo over the Torso of the mummy of Amunet. From *Remarques sur le tatouage dans l'Égypte ancienne* (p.11) by L. Keimer, 1948, Imprimerie de L'institut Français.

In addition there are some recently discovered tattoos on mummies. In 2014 the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology discovered a torso of a woman who was buried in tomb TT 291 in Dier Al Madina, a cemetery that dates between the 19th and 21st dynasties (Austin and Gobeil, 2017, p.25). The subject died between the age of 25 and 34. Archeologists Anne Austin and Cédric Gobeil used infrared light to examine the mummy, finding 30 individual tattoos, many of which invisible to the naked eye due to resins used in mummification . The body was adorned with designs across the shoulders, neck, arms and back including *nfr nfr* sign of beauty (Erman et al, 1971, p.252), lotus blossoms, Ureus, cobras, scarabs, Hathour cows, seated baboons and hieroglyphics. The most prominent ones were a multitude of wadjet eyes all over the torso (fig.10). The tattoos were generally inked in visible areas of the body, in contrast to earlier examples which were placed on thighs and abdomen, spots not usually seen by the public. The symmetrical tattoos on the neck of this mummy must have been painful since it is the most sensitive skin area to engrave.



Fig. 10 : a pair of Wadjet eyes and two baboons on the neck of a female mummy discovered in Dier Almadina. From “Embodying the Divine: A Tattooed Female Mummy from Deir el-Medina”, by A.Austin and C. Gobeil, 2017 *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* (116), p. 30.

In 2018 a mummy of a Pre-dynastic female known as Gebelein Woman exhibited in the British museum (EA32752) was re-examined by infrared (Friedman et. al, 2018, p.3) detecting what was branded “the world’s oldest figurative tattoos”. Four small ‘S’ shapes, also elements of Predynastic pottery decoration, were inked in greenish colour on her right shoulder (fig.11). Underneath them is a linear shape with a right angle. An irregular dark line is also depicted horizontally across the abdomen, below the level of the navel (Friedman et. al, 2018, p.3) .



Fig.11: Tattoos on the shoulder of a Predynastic female mummy from Gebelein (EA 32752). From “Natural mummies from Predynastic Egypt reveal the world’s earliest figural tattoos” by R. Friedman et al, 2018, Science Direct, Volume 92, p. 116.

As for the purpose of Egyptian tattoos, one is inclined to think that they exceeded the mere decoration function. Before the recent discovered of iconographic motifs on mummies, the tattoos of Egyptian females were usually considered for women of lower class, namely dancers and prostitutes. This interpretation came from early Egyptologists’ prejudices concerning body art in their modern societies. The three female mummies mentioned above were nevertheless discovered at Deir el-Bahari, an area known of royal and elite burials. Another interpretation is the association of tattooed women and the worship of Hathor, who, among her many duties, was also goddess of fertility (Keimer, 1948, p.8). These tattoos might have been drawn for protection during pregnancy and childbirth. This is probably why the tattoos were largely distributed around the abdomen, on top of the thighs and the breasts. Since God Bes was a protector of childbirth (Bunson, 2012, p.88), some scholars assumed his depiction on dancers thighs was for the protection against sexually transmitted diseases (Mark, 2017). Tattoos were not mentioned in textual sources like medical papyri which prescribe many amulets and magical formulas, but magical spells sometimes demand that images should be depicted on the patient’s hand and then licked off by them (Austin and Gobeil, 2017, p. 28). This suggests that the function of iconographic tattoos was the healing and protection of the owner.

Petrie uncovered two types of ancient tattoo tools in Egypt. The first type was found in Abydos. Dating to the Pre-dynastic period (3000 B.C) it consisted of a wood handle and a sharp metal end (Mark, 2017). The second type of tattoo kit, dating to the New Kingdom and discovered in Gurob, was made of bronze and it looked similar to needles (Booth, 2001, p.173). Additionally, five metal rods were discovered in a Pre-dynastic grave in Kafr Hassan Dawood (Tassie, 2003, p. 97) and were interpreted as tattooing tools. The modern tattoo tools include a flat brush that consists of several thin needles attached to one handle. This might have been the case in Egypt too and many needles may have been braided together in a bundle. The brush would have been soaked in charcoal soot or indigo powder as pigments for black or green pigments (Paszik, 2017, p.45).

Piercing

Artistic and physical evidence indicates that piercing was done only to ear lobes in ancient Egypt (Mudry, 2006). Women are more often shown with earrings that require ear piercing but also men and children decorated their ears. Ancient Egyptians used earrings since the Pre-dynastic period as documented in statues, but this piece of jewelry is seen more frequently since the Second Intermediate Period (Mudry, 2006). The first attested king wearing earrings was Thutmose IV, since his mummy found in Valley of kings (KV35) had pierced ears (Smith, 1912). Sometimes there was more than one piercing on each ear. A mummy thought to belong to Queen Nefertiti, shows two piercings in each ear (ABC Science, 2003). Mummies of Tutankhamun and Ramesses II had pierced ears as well (Mudry, 2006). During the later half of the New Kingdom, gods, mostly female like goddess Bastet, were depicted with pierced ears (Bunson, 2012, p.84).

It isn't clear what tools would have been used to pierce ancient ears. Before the invention of the piercing gun, piercing was done with needles directly pressed against the earlobe. The same method is likely to have been used in Egypt. Flinders Petrie found Pre-dynastic copper sewing needles at Naqada and gold needles at Giza (Nunn and Rowling, 2001 p. 171). In addition other needles were made of fine fish bone (Shaw et al., 2009, p. 280).

Some statues, especially of the New Kingdom, show bigger holes in the ear lobes, which is an indication that stretching of the ear lobe was practiced in ancient Egypt . For example, all statues of king Tutankhamon (figs. 12, 13, 14) show him with round ear holes, larger than what would be achieved by a needle. The mummy of the king sports big holes as well (fig.16). Moreover, the mummy of Tutmosis IV has large earlobe holes (fig.15). Finally, the mummy of Ramses III (mummy of Ramsis III, 2022), found in Dier Bahari cashette, had large ear holes similar to those present on the mummy of Tutankhamon (fig.17). Again, we have no evidence on how ear stretching, also known as ear gauging, was done in ancient Egypt, but in other cultures it was generally achieved by wearing gradually increasing size of round earrings inside the earlobe hole (Wekimedia, 2022). No piercing of other body parts was attested in ancient Egypt .

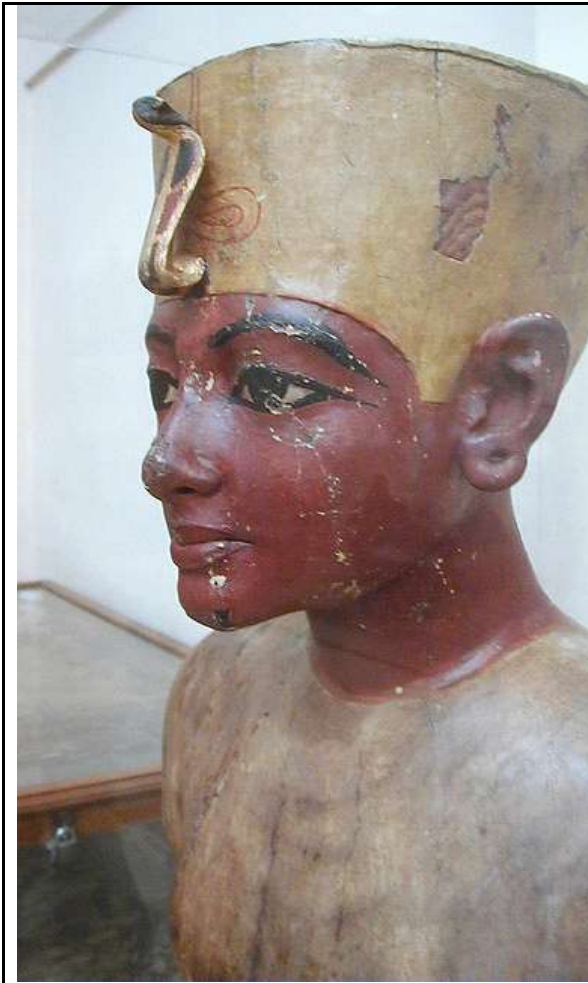


Fig.12: Manikin of king Tutankhamon From Wikimedia Commons, by J. Bodsworth, 2007, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mannequin_of_Tutankhamun.jpg



Fig. 13: Mask of Tutankhamon. From Wekipedia, by R. Unger, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mask_of_Tutankhamun#/media/File:CairoEgMuseumTaaMaskMostlyPhotographed.jpg



Fig. 14: Head of Nefertem with Tutankhamun's facial features. From Wikimedia Commons, by J. Bodsworth, 2007, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_Nefertem#/media/File:Tutankhamun_emerging_from_lotus_flower.jpg



Fig. 15: Mummy of Thuthmosis IV. From University of Chicago, by G.E. Smith, 1912, http://www3.lib.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/eos/eos_page.pl?DPI=300&callnum=DT57.C2_vol59&object=155



Fig. 16: Mummy of Tutankhamon. From Historical Eve. 2018, <https://historicaleve.com/tutankhamun-tomb-digging-for-a-king/>




Fig.17: Mummy of Ramsis III. From Wikimedia Commons, by G. Elliot Smith, 2010, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ram ses III_mummy_head_profile.png

Henna

Henna is a dye extracted from the plant *Lawsonia inermis*, also known as the Egyptian privet, that grows naturally as a shrub or small tree in tropical and subtropical regions like India, Egypt, Sudan and Morocco (Wikipedia, 2022). The pigment is made by crushing the leaves and younger shoots producing colour that ranges from brown to orange-reddish. In addition, Ancient Egyptians increased the variety of henna colours by adding in various natural elements present in the surroundings. Then it is speculated that they used to dye their hair and nails with these different colours. Henna was also used by Egyptians for dyeing textiles (Shaw and Vogelsang-Eastwood, 2003, p.279).

Several words were suggested to name Henna in ancient Egyptian texts. The closest

candidate is 'nh-imi-plant written by  and its variations which were mentioned in recipes of Berlin and Broklyon medical papyri (Germer, 2008, p. 42). The literal translation means "what has life within". Since the same word was mentioned in the Book of Dead in connection with the feet and hands of the deceased (Scalf & Lowry, 2017, p.91), some Egyptologists connected it to henna, although there is no mention of any colouring attribute for the plant. Some scholars suggested that henna was mentioned in Ebes papyrus as a remedy against skin, eye and teeth diseases, (Cartwright-Jones, 2004). However, the original publication of the text translates the ancient word to Cyperus (a type of papyrus) rather than Henna (Joachim, 1890, p.22).

Henna is said to have been used to tint nails as an ancient manicure, given the great care Egyptians gave to grooming of hands (Ancient Pages, 2018). Many titles are connected to nail grooming in ancient Egypt. For example, Khnumhotep and Niankhkhnum (Fifth Dynasty) were chief manicurists of the king and the palace (Vasiljevic, 2008, p.363). As for art evidence for the use of Henna as a manicure, Borchardt (1897, p.169) noticed that out of 250 statues that the Kairiner Museum possessed, 12 which represent men and women of the Old Kingdom show red tinted nails of hands and feet. Nunn (1996, p.133) drew attention to a unique scene in the tomb of Ankhmahor and Kehtika (6th Dynasty, Saqqra) which shows some men holding the hands and feet of others (fig. 18). The text states "making pleasant, not causing pain". One of the explanations of the scene is performing manicure and pedicure to fingers and toes, probably with Henna, since it is the only pigment shown on hands and feet of mummies.



Fig. 18: Manipulation of fingers and toes from the tomb of Ankhmahor and Kehtika. From Ancient Egyptian Medicine (p. 133), By J.F. Nunn, p. 133, 1996, University of Oklahoma Press

The earliest physical evidence of henna was on the hairs and nails of mummies who must have received it as a part of their preparation for the afterlife. The mummy of Ramses II was noted to have hennaed fingertips and toes as well as strikingly red-blond hair (Balout et al., 1985, p.448). Having lived for at least 8 decades, the hair of the aging king must have been white at the time of death. Yet archeologists were able to determine the original colour of hair from its roots. Examined micro- scopically, Ramses' hair was proven to have once been red. Brier (1996, p.200) believed that ancient Egyptians would have seen this as a connection to God Seth, a confirmation of the king's divinity. By applying Henna, the embalmers wanted to restore the king to his youth and to emphasize the divine connection. A mummy proven recently to belong to queen Tiye by DNA analysis, also sports brown reddish hair that might have been dyed with Henna (NBC News, 2011). Mummy of Hatnefer, the mother of Senmut who the vizier of queen Hatshepsut had henna tinted nails too (Buckley, 2001, p.13). Abdel-Maksoud and El-Amin(2011, p.141) who reviewed the materials used during the mummification process in ancient Egypt concluded that Henna was used in the New Kingdom as some of its compounds have antibacterial effects. Forbes (1966, p.109) among many scholars assumed that the red colour often applied to hands, palms, nails and soles of feet was made from Henna. A mummified hand of an unidentified 19th Dynasty princess displayed in the Gregorian Egyptian Museum shows nails that were painted red with Henna (fig.19).



Fig. 19: An ancient Egyptian mummy - in Gregorian Egyptian Museum, Vatican Museums, Rome, Italy. Vatican shows henna on nails. From Real Shrunken Heads, 2016 <https://www.realshrunkenheads.com/tumblr.com/post/142210428434/ancient-Egyptian-princess-mummy-hand-with-painted>

However, whether Henna was used as well as a part of everyday grooming is uncertain since there is no depiction in Egyptian art of people with or in the process of applying henna, either in hair or on skin.

Branding

Branding is defined by the practice of pressing a heated metal against the skin of animals or humans with the intention of leaving an identifying mark (*Welfare implications of hot-iron branding and its alternatives*, 2011). In ancient Egypt, branding was written by different



variations of the word *Abw* that contained determinatives of smoke, metal and knives referring to tools used during the branding process (القوي عبد, 2013 p.474). Cattle branding with a hot iron was attested in Egypt since the Old Kingdom as a sign of economic control (Valerio, 2020).

Branding was spotted in chapter 385 of Pyramid Texts and in chapters 135 A and 146 of the Book of the Dead in the context of punishment (Matić, 2019, p.34). Many textual sources mention the branding of war prisoners and slaves. In Papyrus Westcar and in the context of punishment of a woman for adultery, we read "Then [the majesty of the King of Upper and] Lower Egypt Neb-ka, justified, caused that this wife of Weba-iner be taken to the northern field of the Residence. Then he placed fire on her". While usually interpreted as the woman being burned to death, Lorton (1977, p. 15) believed that the wording of the expression *rdi xt m* "to place fire on", was a reference to branding for the purpose of punishment or torture.

The boundary stela of the Abydos cemetery dating to Dynasty XIII and preventing people from accessing its grounds, mentions branding as a punishment for anyone who crosses the limits (Lorton, 1977, p.18), although Leahy (1989, p.43), believed that the word *wbd*



on this stela means to burn, not to brand.

The Harris papyrus I, which dates to the reign of Ramsis II, narrates that the Lybian war prisoners, their wives and children were made slaves by branding them with the name of the king (Breasted, 1907, p.202). On a stela in the temple of Abu Simple, King Ramsis II states too that he branded the enemies of Egypt "the people of the Nine Bows" with the name of God Ptah as a sign of their submission (Breasted, 1906, p.182).

King Ramesses III also refers to branding at Medinet Habu as a sign of superiority over enemies. After describing the king's victories over the Libyans, the text reads "their leaders were made into family groups after the triumph and branded with the great name of His Majesty (Janzen, 2013, p.243).



Fig. 20: Celebration of victory scene, "Sea-Peoples" naval battle. From "The Battles between Ramesses III and the "Sea-Peoples" : When, Where and Who? An Iconic Analysis of the Egyptian Reliefs " by S. Ben-Dor Evian, 2016, *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, vol. 143, p. 156

The only scene that shows branding of humans in ancient Egypt is found in the temple of Madinet Habu within the context of the victory of Ramsis III over sea people (Redford, 2018, p.76) (fig. 20). The relieves represent four standing scribes writing while an Egyptian is branding a Peleset. To the left there is another Egyptian branding four Pelesets. On the ground we can see a flaming brazier. The shape of the branding tool is not clear nor are the signs being branded.

As for the archeological evidence of branding tools, some examples of branding irons survive from the New Kingdom. Among these is an iron dating to the 18th Dynasty (fig.21) currently exhibited in the British museum (EA57321). It takes the shape of the aegis of Sekhmet. and was probably intended to brand cattle that will be presented as offerings to the goddess.



Fig. 21. . Branding iron in the British museum (EA57321). From https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA57321

In addition, a scene in the Qurna tomb of Qenamun (TT 93), who was the overseer of the cattle of Amun and chief steward of Amenhotep II, shows 3 copper branding irons which resemble seals with a triply twisted handle. One of these was shaped after the words *pr nfr* (fig.22). Qenamun was chief steward of the king in the estate *pr nfr* but the exact nature of the place is unknown. The publisher of the tomb Davies (1930,p.12) believed it would have been a pleasure palace or country residence of the king or the crown prince. It seems therefore that the cattle were branded with its name. Another iron of the same collection has the cartouche of king Amenhotep III, thus it might have been used to brand slaves who used to serve in the same place.

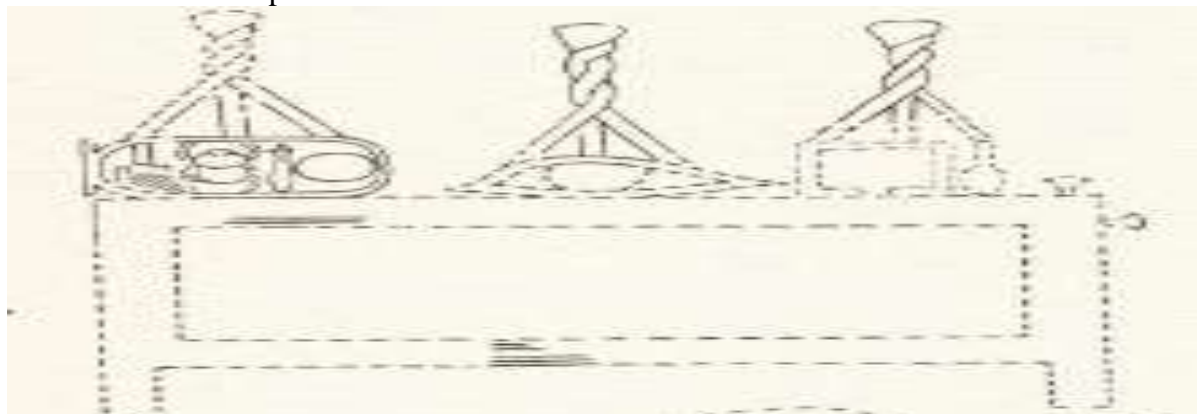


fig.22: Three copper branding irons in the tomb of Qenamun. From *The tomb of Ken-Amun at Thebes*. BY Davies, N. de G. pl. XVIII, 1930.

Conclusion

From the above display of materials and discussion , the paper concludes that:

- There is evidence that body art was practiced in ancient Egypt since the Pre-dynastic period in the form of Tattoos. We have plenty of artistic evidence of tattoos for females in ancient Egypt including patterns of dots all around their bodies and figures of God Bes on their thighs. On the other hand, the only evidence of tattooing males is a Pre-dynastic mummy that came from Gabablien. The current paper showed that there is a certain association between female worshipers of Hathour and the practice of tattooing. Early female tattoos which consisted of dots might be connected to fertility and child birth because of their placement on the pubic triangle.
- Applying cosmetics was a daily habit of Egyptians of all ages and genders. The purpose of facial cosmetic might have been practical too since the eyeliners which were made of Kohl and galena are proven to protect the eyes from harmful sun rays.
- The only body part that was subject to piercing in Egypt during antiquity was the earlobe which used to be pierced since the Pre-dynastic period. Many mummies show holes larger than those needed for earrings which indicates that ancient Egyptians practiced earlobe stretching too.
- Henna was detected on hair, hands and feet of ancient Egyptian mummies but its use during the lives of owners is not confirmed since we do not have any scene showing the application of henna during daily life.
- Branding was a cruel practice done mainly to punish criminals or mark war prisoners in ancient Egypt. Textual and artistic evidence implies that motifs used in branding of people were the king's name and names of certain places where prisoners worked.

فن الجسد في مصر القديمة

المستخلص

فن الجسد هو نوع من التعبير المرئي الذي يستخدم فيه الإنسان الأشكال أو الألوان على جسده لإظهار جوانب شخصية أو معتقدات دينية أو عادات اجتماعية . وقد مارست الحضارات القديمة والحديثة هذا النوع من الفن ولم تكن مصر القديمة استثناء للقاعدة . ذلك أن الحضارة المصرية القديمة بطبيعتها كانت زخرفية تبرز بالتفاصيل كما أن الملابس المصرية القديمة كشفت أجزاء كبيرة من الجلد مما يسمح بمساحة من التعبير . ويمكن تقسيم فن الجسد في مصر القديمة إلى نوعين رئيسيين : مؤقت ويندرج تحته مساحيق التجميل والحنة , ودائم ويشمل الوشم والوسم والثقب . كان المقال الحالي يهدف إلى عرض الطرق التي مارس بها قدماء المصريين فن الجسد وأهداف تلك الممارسات . وقد عرض المقال ان فن الجسد قد تمت ممارسته منذ عصور ما قبل الأسرات وعبر التاريخ الفرعوني وكانت أقدم مظاهره الوشم الذي ظهر على اجساد النساء غالبا وفي حالات قليلة مارسه الرجال . أما مساحيق التجميل فكانت تستخدم من الجنسين وكان لها فوائد عملية مثل حماية العين من الشمس والحشرات .

الكلمات الدالة: ثقب الجسد، الفن، الوشم، ثقب الجيد، الوشم، مصر القديمة

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