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Body Marking Within New France: A Contemporary Perspective

Carolyn Christina Cross

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

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ABSTRACT

Body Marking Within New France: A Contemporary Perspective

Carolyn Christina Cross

This study is an exploration of body markings and the culture surrounding them within New France during the French Regime dating from 1608-1763. The emphasis will be on early modern European writings, which have created the discourse that has been used to construct meanings for such body decorations. The approach comes from a contemporary perspective, giving contemporary interpretations of body markings within New France. Some of the issues to be addressed are: the prevalence of the practice among the First Nations peoples, the nature of the representations as well as interpretations of their meaning, European writers' understandings of the practice from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, and the appropriation of the practice by the early colonists. Conclusions are formulated by elaborating and assessing the terms in which a specific aspect of Amerindian history — body marking — has been written in order to trace the mutual historical implications of European and aboriginal cultures. The study gathers the widely dispersed information that surrounds this topic in order to lay a factual and interpretive groundwork on which subsequent studies may build.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore body markings and the culture surrounding them within New France during the French Regime dating from 1608-1763. Using historical writings as my basis, I am writing from a contemporary perspective giving a contemporary interpretation of such markings. I am particularly interested in the discourse that has been used to construct meanings for these body decorations. Whose writings formed these meanings, whose enforced them, and whose altered them? I am concerned with the changing understandings of tattooing and body painting in New France as well as the way the historical accounts written, during this period (especially in Europe) have affected subsequent historiographical interpretations of body marking.

The importance of such a study lies primarily in its originality. In recent years there has been much interest in, and subsequently with research on, the ethnohistory on Native cultures and societies Canada, but none of this research deals specifically with body markings. It is my aim to gather the widely dispersed information that surrounds this topic in order to lay a factual interpretive groundwork on which subsequent studies may build.

The types of body markings that will be examined in the thesis include both tattooing and body painting. These were the two prevalent forms of body

decoration found among Native peoples in North America at the time of European encounter. The First Nations peoples whose body markings and body marking practices will be discussed in this thesis are, for the most part, the Woodland Natives.¹ In this study, New France is defined as all those areas in northeastern North America under French control or influence before the British Conquest of 1763, when New France was ceded to Great Britain. The nature of these two body marking practices in relation to the First Nations peoples found in New France during the French Regime dating from 1608-1763 will be addressed.

The term 'body marking' is generally used to include such practices as tattooing, body painting, scarification, and piercing. In North America, the prevalent forms of body decoration, as found among the First Nations peoples, are tattooing and body painting. There are some general definitions and characteristics of Native body marking practices that should be considered before beginning this study. The most common technique of tattooing in Native North America was by pricking the skin with sharp points, sometimes arranged on a special comb-like implement. As in the less widely practiced scratching technique, designs were usually first sketched with charcoal paste, then rubbed into the breaks in the skin that were made by sharp tools such as bones and pine needles. In northern and northwestern North America, threads covered with soot

¹ Practical groupings of First Nations peoples must be done carefully. Several of the nations discussed in this work, such as those that inhabited the lands on the limits of New France's boundaries are not included in the general grouping of the Woodland Natives. Examples would include tribes belonging to the Plains Natives and the Southern Natives.

were drawn through punctures made by needles to apply the pigment beneath the skin.²

In face painting, mostly mineral pigments (but sometimes including charcoal for black, or pollen for yellow) were mixed with water and/or grease before being applied to the skin with fingers, paintbrushes, or wooden paint sticks. Dry painting was much less common. Negative techniques, such as that of painting solid areas and then partly removing the paint, were used among the Thompson of the British Columbia plateau, among others, who used deer jaws to scratch parallel lines. Painting was generally done by the wearer (with occasional help from the others, and with the exception of some ceremonial painting), but tattooing, on the other hand, was done by others who tended to be specialists.³

Problems do arise when trying to distinguish between the two body marking practices within the literature. In many written testimonies, the French referred to tattoos as “paintings” but go on to describe tattooing procedures. It is sometimes only through the descriptive passages explaining the procedures used to execute the markings that allows us to distinguish between the two practices.

² Information pertaining to the general characteristics of body decoration was gathered and summarized from various sources including the testimonies written in the *Jesuit Relations* and all other first hand accounts mentioned in this study that refer to Native body marking. Christian F. Feest, *Native Arts of North America* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992); Wilfrid Dys Hambly, “Ancient and Modern Tattooing”, *Nautical Magazine* (May 1921): 420-429; Hambly, *The History of Tattooing and its Significance* (London: H. F. & G. Whitherby, 1925); Re/Search. *Modern Primitives: Tattoo, Piercing, Scarification: An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment and Ritual* (San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1989); Robert Brain, *The Decorated Body* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979); J. A. Teit, *Tattooing and Face and Body Painting of the Thompson Indians of British Columbia*, ed. Franz Boaz in 1930(Seattle: The Shorey Book Store Facsimile Reproduction, 1972); Michel Thevoz, *Le corps peint*, (Geneva: Skira, 1984).

³ Ibid.

The name New France was first used to designate the lands claimed by France in North America. The approximate boundaries of New France were the areas surrounding the Hudson Bay to the north, the region of the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico to the south, the shores of Cape Breton to the east, and to the plains of the Great West to the west. (Fig. 1) Within this huge geographical area, my focus will gravitate towards the specific areas surrounding the St. Lawrence Valley as the majority of written testimonies emerged from this area. Jacques Cartier claimed the lands in the St. Lawrence Valley for France in 1534 and 1535, but the colony's real beginning dates from the establishment of a permanent post at Québec by Samuel de Champlain in 1608 and continued to 1763 when New France was ceded to Great Britain. I limit myself to this time frame for two reasons. First, the cross-over to another colonizing power gives a solid cut off date. Second, I chose not to continue the study into the nineteenth century as imported European influences tended to influence Native practices, dramatically increasing the complexity of the analytical task.

When the Europeans arrived in North America, they found it occupied by hundreds of autonomous aboriginal bands and tribal groups, who differed in customs and dialects, many speaking languages that were wholly unrelated to one another. Of these many different groupings, I will focus in this study on seven major tribes: the Mi'Kmaq who were called the Souriquois by the French

and who occupied what is now northern New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward and Cape Breton Islands; the Iroquois who lived in the upper and central part of the Mohawk Valley and around the lakes of central New York, and who at that time were composed of five nations known as the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk; the Attiwandaronk (known to the French as the Neutrals) who were related to the Iroquois and lived north of Lake Erie; the Huron who were a confederation of four clans who were related to, but generally at war with, the Iroquois and who lived south and east of the Georgian Bay in what is now Ontario, the Ojibway (Chippewa) who located themselves along both shores of Lake Superior by the seventeenth century; the Ottawa who originally lived on the northern shore of Georgian Bay and nearby Manitoulin Island; the Sioux whose name came from the French version of the Chippewa name for the Dakotas which was Nadouessi, who lived on and near the Mississippi in northeastern Iowa, southern Minnesota, and northwestern Wisconsin; and the southern Native tribe of the Cherokees who occupied the country between the Tennessee River and the Gulf of Mexico.⁴ (Fig. 1) Taken together, European accounts of these primarily Woodland Native peoples provide the most substantial sources of information on body marking practices within New France.

⁴ The general description of the native tribes present in New France and their locations was a compilation of information collected from: Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Kingston and Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985); J. H. Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage in New France* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1971); James T. Moore, *Indian and Jesuit: A Seventeenth-century Encounter* (Chicago: Loyola University Press); Patricia Olive Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1992); Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press,

This leads me to discuss the Europeans who began to inhabit New France. The earliest European inhabitants were the explorers who sought to discover and colonize New France. Travellers followed, for various reasons. Other inhabitants include missionaries who sought to convert the aboriginals of the 'new land'. For this purpose, the French began by recruiting the Récollets, a mendicant Franciscan order, who came to New France in 1615. However, poverty, lack of manpower, and an obdurate philosophy of "civilizing" before Christianizing hamstrung the friars and led them to call for Jesuit assistance ten years later in 1625. The Jesuits, by contrast, were numerous, financially well-endowed, highly educated, and culturally flexible. The actual pioneers of New France, however, could possibly be considered the *coureurs de bois*, who, due to their involvement in the fur trade, travelled to the most remote areas of the colony. It is through the relations of the First Nations peoples mentioned above with the European explorers, travellers, missionaries and *coureurs de bois* who inhabited New France that the discourse surrounding Native body marking practices within New France begins to emerge.

To delineate the terms of this discourse, I have chosen to structure my analysis in three main chapters. The first chapter seeks to establish basic factual information about the body markings of the First Nations peoples in Canada at the time of contact and at the early stage of encounter with the Europeans. While remaining sensitive to the methodological difficulties that a

1984); Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Vols. 1-73 (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1896-1901).

postcolonial approach carries, it is important to gather together the factual information that is available. The main purposes of this chapter are fourfold: to demonstrate the prevalence of tattooing and body painting among Native people; to show various representations employed by looking at both written and pictorial accounts that demonstrate Native use of both figurative and abstract depictions; to offer speculative interpretations of the designs and depictions; and to discuss the significance of these permanent and non-permanent body markings. The methodology within this chapter is of two different natures. The first, is the gathering of descriptions written by the early colonists without making any definite commitment to their accuracy. The second, draws hypotheses through the extrapolation of ideas from other cultures and other Native decorative arts as they can be interpreted in relation to one another.

Chapter two will concentrate on European writers' understandings of the practice of aboriginal body marking from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Drawing on the published accounts of early colonists, especially the Jesuits, I explore European settlers' initial reactions to body marking, placing these reactions within the broader content of their attitudes to aboriginal bodies and social behaviors in general. These reactions combine empirical observation with ideologically determined pre-conceptions. General historical factors that may have shaped the discourse of "the Native", such as Catholicism, the Counter-Reformation, and the Enlightenment, will be addressed. It is important to examine colonists' first-hand responses in light of the predetermined ideas that they had formed about "the Natives" through literature available to them in

Europe before their travels that may have been affected by the European social climate of the time. How did these pre-formed views affect their testimonies? One method of study is through the examination of literature published in Europe prior to and during the period of colonization paired with the study of European writings produced in New France focusing on “the Native.” From a broadly postcolonial perspective, the ambiguities plaguing Europeans’ descriptive characterizations of “the Native” will be discussed.

The third chapter discusses body marking within New France as a custom practiced by both the First Nations peoples and the European colonizers. During the process of colonization changes occurred pertaining directly to the practice of tattooing and other methods of body marking within the newly colonized land. This chapter examines the appropriation and alteration of tattooing by the French, particularly the *coureurs de bois*, missionaries, and the government. With regard to the *coureurs de bois*, appropriative practices can either be viewed negatively, as a form of cultural theft for Western advantage, or positively, as a demonstration of genuine cross-cultural identification. The subsequent reactions against the *coureurs de bois* by the colonizing centre forces (missionaries and government) will be examined as a possible cause for the re-definition of body marking within New France. Simultaneously, the increased use of branding and tattooing within a European framework as a ‘mark’ of conviction within New France will be discussed, as will some possible causes that may have eventually led to the abandonment of body marking.

The structure of the three chapter analysis, as stated, was chosen in order to delineate the terms of the discourse surrounding Native body marking practices in New France as consulted in the literature available on the subject. To undertake such a project, whose aim is to gather any relevant information on Native body markings within New France in order to present the nature of the discourse that exists on the subject, both secondary and primary sources have been consulted. Researching the topic proved to be a daunting task due to the scarcity of literature on the subject; secondary resources dealing specifically with Native body markings within New France do not exist. Relevant secondary information, however, was gleaned from a variety of related areas, and so in researching this thesis I had to cast a broad net that would cover several disparate fields. These include: general histories of tattooing and other body ornamentation practices, studies of other forms of Woodland Native art and decoration, ethnohistory, missionary history, and the history of New France.

Due to the lack of literature dealing specifically with Native body marking within New France I set out to study worldwide tattooing and body painting practices for comparison purposes. While remaining ever conscious of the important differences of time and place involved, I have nevertheless found the technique of cross-cultural extrapolation to be helpful in establishing some basic hypotheses about body marking practices in New France. The work of Wilfrid Dys Hambly in *The History of Tattooing and its Significance*, a worldwide survey on the varying ornamentation practices and their significance, aided me in doing

just this.⁵ Hambly offered much information on the uses and meanings behind the body decoration of peoples throughout the world, including North America, which in turn allowed me to consider possible significance within the body markings of the Native people in New France. A Re/Search publication entitled *Modern Primitives: Tattoo, Piercing, Scarification: An Investigation of Contemporary Adornment and Ritual* provided me with the same sort of background material to better formulate ideas surrounding the significance of my specific topic.⁶ As I attempted to study the body decoration of autonomous peoples that inhabited the New World before the arrival of colonizing forces I found that *Modern Primitives* proved to be of interest in its worldwide concern with pre-contact aboriginal cultures.

Looking at a more immediately relevant geographical area and context, A. T. Sinclair's 1909 research on "Tattooing of the North American Indians" proved to be the only valuable source written at the beginning of the twentieth century that dealt with this specific subject.⁷ Sinclair's survey of previously published literature draws attention to the difficulty in treating this topic as he noted with dismay that "the details, or even mention, are so often absent when the practice must have been common. Even the slightest hint is sometimes of value."⁸ The nature of Sinclair's survey of tattooing practices taken from each geographical region of North America made it the first source to focus on the tattooing of

⁵ Hambly, *History of Tattooing*; in the same respect I used: Arnold Rubin, *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human Body* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1988); Jeff Jaguer, *The Tattoo: A Pictorial History* (Horndean: Milestone, 1990); Jean-Thierry Maertins, *Le dessein sur la peau* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1978).

⁶ Re/Search, *Modern Primitives*.

⁷ A. T. Sinclair, "Tattooing of the North American Indians", *American Anthropologist* 2, no. 3, (1909): 362-400.

Native people in North America. It allowed me to substantiate some of the hypotheses made from the preceding literature that dealt with aboriginal body ornamentation practices found outside of North America. His survey was conducted at an earlier date than the previous sources listed above, based on historical accounts appropriate to this study, thus also rendering it more useful in terms of the time frame being considered in this thesis.

In order to study tattooing practices and designs of Native Peoples' of New France I turned to Philippe Dubé's *Tattoo-tatoué*, which is a fairly recent comprehensive history of tattooing in Canada.⁹ Dubé devotes a chapter to early tattooing practices in Québec that included some information on Native tattooing in the St. Lawrence Valley region during the time frame considered in this thesis. Dubé's first chapter dealing specifically with Native tattooing practices in New France was particularly of value in this study as he generally discussed the use of the tattoo during the first two centuries of New France. The limitations of the work are that it is a very general history that quickly jumps into a more contemporary study of tattooing in Québec. More importantly still, some of his assertions regarding the symbols used by the First Nations peoples must be approached with caution and questioned.

In order to discuss the semiotic significance of Native body markings it is imperative to study the iconographic repertoire of the Woodland Native peoples by looking at their various art forms. To serve as an accurate means of comparison, the examination limits its range in considering very early objects

⁸ Ibid., 368.

⁹ Philippe Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoué* (Montréal: Jean Basile, 1980).

and collections. Ideally the objects should pre-date 1840 as objects more recent than that tend to use motifs strongly influenced by Victorian aesthetics. Written sources that aided in my search for points of comparison between Woodland body marking aesthetics and other decorative arts are Franz Boaz's *A Wealth of Thought: Franz Boaz on Native American Art*, Bruce Trigger's chapter on the northeast within *Handbook of the North American Indians*, and *Patterns of Power* by Ruth Phillips.¹⁰

A general treatment on the subject of New France that provided excellent factual information are the writings of the American historian Francis Parkman whose collected works were first published in 1911.¹¹ The works were helpful in gaining knowledge of the history of New France but the corrective works of historian William Eccles supplemented the dusty scenarios of the French story.¹² The histories of the two types of peoples that inhabited New France also had to be studied: Native and European.

Recent publications have begun to look at the First Nations' role in New France from a less colonial vantage point and have been attempting to offer a Native perspective within the context of Canadian history.¹³ Two of Patricia Olive Dickason's publications were exceptional sources for my study of the interaction of these two disparate cultures during colonization in New France;

¹⁰ Franz Boaz, *A Wealth of Thought: Franz Boaz on Native American Art*, ed. Aldona Jonaitis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); *Handbook of the North American Indians (North-east)*, Vol. 15, ed. Bruce G. Trigger (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978); Ruth B. Phillips, *Patterns of Power* (Kleinburg: The McMichael Canadian Collection, 1984).

¹¹ Francis Parkman, *Works*, 11 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1911).

¹² William Eccles, *France in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), and others.

¹³ James Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Axtell, *Beyond 1492: Encounters in Colonial North*

Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times, and *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas*.¹⁴ These works provided me with precise accounts of colonists, companies, commerce, First Nations peoples, social relations, political situations, religious beliefs and organizations, while considering the integral role of Amerindians within the forming country. Arthur J. Ray's *I Have Lived Here Since the World Began* offered similar discourse, and provided me with a good contemporary examination of the history of the First Nations peoples of Canada to the present day.¹⁵ Other sources that I used are Diamond Jenness' *Indians of Canada*, Calvin Martin's (ed.) *The American Indian and the Problem of History*.¹⁶

Turning to the Europeans, the pivotal discussions in this thesis are based on missionary testimonies written in New France in relation to First Nations' peoples. Many histories have been written on missionary activity and the encounters in colonial North America. For a general history on the Jesuit relations with Native Peoples of New France, J. H. Kennedy's *Jesuit and Savage in New France* served me well.¹⁷ For an accurate picture of the formation of the image of "the Native" within European literature from the sixteenth century to the present, Donald B. Smith's "*Le Sauvage*" was invaluable.¹⁸ Among the most relevant studies for the consideration of how to read, interpret, and assess

America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992; Axtell, *The European and the Indian Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁴ Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*; Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*.

¹⁵ Arthur J. Ray, *I Have Lived Here Since the World Began* (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1996).

¹⁶ Diamond Jenness, *Indians of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Calvin Martin, ed., *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁷ Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage*.

Récollet and Jesuit texts are those written in recent decades. Sources that demonstrate the changing attitudes in regards to French/Native relations include James Axtell's *Beyond 1492* and *After Columbus*, Cornelius J. Jaenen's *Friend and Foe* and *Natives and Newcomers* written by Bruce Trigger.¹⁹

The actual pioneers of New France were the *coureurs de bois*, with their involvement in the fur trade. In this thesis, I will consider the appropriation of Native body marking practices as used by the *coureurs de bois*. And so the history of their involvement and interaction with Native societies plays a major part in the following analysis. An excellent contemporary study of the *coureurs de bois* in New France that dealt specifically with these issues is Daniel Scalberg's "Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century Perceptions of Coureur de Bois Religious Life."²⁰

Unfortunately problems do exist within the secondary source material. As with any study, some authors have treated some subjects better than others have. Sins of commission encompass factual errors, ineffective use of visual material, insensitive characterizations, and insidious half-truths. Virtually no text is immune to errors of fact. As James Axtell points out "some subjects seem especially susceptible, particularly those that demand acquaintance with an

¹⁸Donald B. Smith, "Le Sauvage": *The Native People in Québec Historical Writing on the Heroic Period (1534-1663) of New France*, (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1974).

¹⁹Axtell, *Beyond 1492*; Axtell, *After Columbus*; Cornelius J. Jaenen, *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-American Cultural*, (McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1976); Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*.

²⁰Daniel A. Scalberg, "Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century Perceptions of Coureur de Bois Religious Life", *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History*, Vol. 17, ed. Gordon C. Bond (Auburn: Auburn University, 1990).

extensive and active historiography.²¹ More than errors and misconceptions mar the average account of the Age of Discovery. It must be noted that studies in inter-ethnic conflict are full of moral judgements, which are sometimes difficult to detect and often go unnoticed. By recognizing the shifting feelings about Native/White relations it is possible to explore the literature in terms of 'normative judgements' in historical thought.²² A study such as this one that considers Native and European colonial cultures must always strive to recognize the distinctive human faces on both sides of the historical frontiers.

It is always difficult to seek to look at both sides of various frontiers while trying to maintain a North American perspective on sources dealing with the interactions of colonial France and Native peoples. For example, Philippe Dubé in *Tattoo-tatoué* suggests that European symbols began to be incorporated into Native iconographic themes of body decoration.²³ He gives a figural example of an Amerindian man supporting two images of the cross on his chest. (Fig. 2) Yet it must be noted that upon the arrival of the early missionaries, the Mi'Kmaq already employed the symbol of the cross within their artistic repertoire. The semiotic significance of the cross within many Native cultures is said to symbolize the four directions (North, South, East, and West). I found references that stated how such depictions caused considerable astonishment among the early missionaries who took this to mean that the Mi'Kmaq had had previous

²¹ Axtell, *Beyond 1492*, 201.

²² Issues addressed in: Axtell, *Beyond 1492*; Axtell, *After Columbus*.

²³ Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoué*, 186.

contact with Christians.²⁴ Dubé's assertion cannot be entirely trusted, as it is impossible to establish where the original inspirations for the inclusion of the cross within First Nations body decoration stems.

The greatest challenge is to obtain a Native perspective on body marking within New France. Because they were oral, rather than literate, peoples (even those who did possess a form of writing did not use it as a widely shared form of communication), reconstructing their pre-contact history in the Western sense of the term is a daunting task. In recent years, Native voices have contributed to the recording of Canadian history. Aboriginal people had cultures in which the elders had the primary responsibility for the oral passing on of histories and traditions to succeeding generations. The ravages of European disease — which often had their most devastating impact on the elderly — government and missionary assimilation programs, and the near obliteration of a number of Native languages have made it extremely difficult for many First Nations peoples to continue this custom.²⁵ Capturing aboriginal impressions of the early contact experience in Eastern Canada becomes especially problematic. Europeans arrived in the region thirteen to sixteen generations (four hundred to five hundred years) ago. This means that historians have relied heavily on archaeology and the accounts of European explorers, travellers, missionaries, traders and government officials to generate images of Native societies at the time of initial

²⁴ Chrestien Le Clercq, *New Relation of Gaspesia by Father Chrestien Le Clercq*, ed. William F. Ganong (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1910). He wrote at some length on the topic (chapters 10 & 11).

²⁵ Ray, *I Have Lived Here*. Compiled from introduction.

contact with Europeans. These are uncertain pictures, however, because the voices of Native people are highly filtered through the documentary records, which were overwhelmingly written by European men and mostly about Native men. Recent oral history research is beginning to tell the untold aspects of Native history from a Native perspective.²⁶ Unfortunately, I found no references made to Native tattooing within New France told from a Native point of view.²⁷

Faced with the absence of primary sources by Woodland Natives themselves, I examined first hand accounts written by Europeans in America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Much information had to be extracted from these testimonies written by European explorers, travellers, and missionaries. Despite the fact that the *coureurs de bois* were the pioneers of

²⁶ Some examples of perspectives from oral tradition might include: Jennifer S. H. Brown & Elizabeth Vibert, *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1996); Alice B. Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1989); Kehoe, "The Giveaway Ceremony of Blackfoot and Plains Cree", *Plains Anthropologist* 25, no. 87 (1980): 17-26; John S. Long, "The Cree Prophets: oral and documentary accounts", *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* XXXI, no. 1 (1989): 3-13; Long, "Narratives of Early Encounters between Europeans and the Cree of Western James Bay", *Ontario History* LXXX, no. 3 (1988): 227-45; Toby Morantz, "Oral and Recorded History in James Bay", in *Papers of the Fifteenth Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1984); Norval Morrisseau, *Legends of My People the Great Ojibway* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1965); Penny Petrone, ed., *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988)

²⁷ Apart from the above mentioned type of resources that put oral histories into words, there are other forms of literature written by Natives as well as non-Natives that do consider the Amerindian point of view. I looked at many of these sources (many of which deal with culture, politics, economy, diplomacy, etc.). As I have stated, I found no reference to Native tattooing within New France, but the material proved to be very important in gaining a Native perspective in the respects mentioned above. Some of these sources might include: Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*; Dickason, "From One Nation in the Northeast to New Nation in the Northwest: a Look at the Emergency of the Metis", *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Metis in North America*, by Jaqueline Peterson & Jennifer S. H. Brown (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*; John A. Dickinson, "La guerre iroquoise et la mortalité en Nouvelle-France, 1608-1666", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 36, no. 1 (1982): 31-47; Ray, *I Have Lived Here*; Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: their role as trappers, hunters, and middlemen in the lands southwest of Hudson Bay 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

New France, the *coureurs de bois*, for obvious reasons, seldom kept records. Nevertheless, much about their presence in North America is known through the writings of other European inhabitants of New France.

The majority of relevant writings are those of French missionaries. The Récollets, due to reasons mentioned earlier, were not as prolific as the Jesuits and therefore it is through the publications of Jesuit annals that the wealth of information pertaining to New France emerges. The Jesuits performed a great service in publishing their annals, which are, for historian, geographer, and ethnologist, among the first and best authorities on New France. These reports were forwarded to Paris each year and compiled into volumes entitled *Jesuit Relations*.²⁸ Beginning with Le Jeune's annual report from the mission field in 1632 and continuing for the next forty years, the reports, or *relations*, of the Jesuit fathers would be published in Paris. Reporting on all mission news from everyday events to accounts of the martyrdom of men whom many immediately viewed as saints, the *Jesuit Relations* kept before the French public the trials and

²⁸ The complete editions of the original *Jesuit Relations* was consulted from preserved microfilmcopies in both the McGill University and University of Toronto libraries. I also found complete writings as well as edited and translated versions of the *Jesuit Relations* in many sources: Francesco Guiseppe Bressani, *Les jesuits – Martyrs du Canada* (Montréal: Compagnie d'Imprimerie Canadienne, 1877); Bressani, *Relations abregée des quelques missions* (Montréal: Des Presses a vapeur de John Lovell, 1852); Pierre de Charlevoix, *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France*, Tome 3 (Paris: Rollin, 1744); Francois du Creux, *Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1664); Du Creux, *The History of Canada or New France*, ed. James B. Conacher, trans. Percy J. Robinson (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1951-52); J. H. Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage*; Joseph-Francois Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians Compared With The Customs of Primitive Times*, ed. & trans. William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore), Vols. 1-2 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1974-1977); Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages Amériquains comparées aux moeurs des premiers temps*, Tome 1-2 (Paris: Saugrain L'Aine, 1724); Gabriel Theodat-Sagard, *Histoire du Canada et voyage que les frères mineurs Récollets y ont faits pour la conversion des infidèles*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Tross, 1866); Theodat-Sagard, *Le grand voyage du pays des Hurons, sité en Amérique vers la mer douces, és derniers confins de la Nouvelle France dite Canada*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Tross, 1865), reprint from 1632; Theodat-Sagard, *The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons*, trans. H. H. Langton (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1939).

triumphs of the missionaries and their neophytes.²⁹ These letters, in essence, are the only records of the early Amerindians.

In conducting the research for this thesis I have consulted the original texts of the relations themselves, but I have also had recourse to later collections and editions of missionary writings that supplement these original sources. Two in particular stand out: R. G. Thwaites', edition of *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents* (1896-1901) contain almost the entire body of Canadian Jesuitica.³⁰ It gives the most comprehensive bibliographical information concerning the Jesuit writings that issued from New France. It also lists Jesuit and related material known to exist that was not included in the series. The series is a model of translation, editing and textual reproduction. Pierre Margy's *Memoires et documents pour servir a l'histoire des origines françaises des pays d'outre-mer* (1888) is another example of a valuable work that published many missionary documents.³¹ Both sources offered primary documentation bound into easily accessible volumes with additional documentation.

The 15th of June 1625 was a significant day for the colony of New France. On that morning a vessel with Jesuit passengers cast anchor at the base of the great cliff at Québec. The Jesuits had been sent to the aid of the Récollets, the first of the followers of St. Ignatius of Loyola to enter the St. Lawrence. These black-robed priests were the forerunners of an army of men who, bearing the

²⁹ Moore, *Indian and Jesuit*, 11.

³⁰ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*.

³¹ Pierre Margy, *Memoires et documents pour servir a l'histoire des origines françaises des pays d'outre-mer (1614-1754)*, Vols. 1-6 (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1888).

Cross instead of the sword and labouring at their tasks in humility and obedience but with courage and zeal, were to make their influence felt from Hudson Bay to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the shores of Cape Breton to the plains of the Great West.³² Unlike the English, French, and Dutch traders and explorers, the Jesuits came to North America not for furs or political conquest, but to save the souls of those whom they called “the Savages.” To succeed, the Jesuits had to learn Native languages.

The accounts of missionary activity in New France may be divided into three periods. From their arrival in 1625 until before 1632 the Jesuit priests tried in vain to secure a permanent foothold. The period from 1632 to 1690 was marked by a vigorous Jesuit expansion radiating in all directions from the axis of the St. Lawrence; this fervor of activity is mirrored in the written documentation, as the Jesuits seem to have been the most prolific during this period. After 1690 the impulse to expand subsided; the missionaries concentrated on strengthening the posts they had already established.³³ For the most part, the missionaries mentioned in this thesis fit into one these three periods, although some remained in New France for longer periods of time and therefore belong to more than one specific period of missionary activity. To facilitate the introduction of the missionaries whose testimonies I have relied upon, I introduce them here according to the dates of their testimonies, beginning with the earliest account.

The earliest missionary account describing First Nations tattooing was a description originally written circa 1614 reinterpreted by Joseph Jouveny.

³² Thomas Guthrie Marquis, *The Jesuit Missions: A Chronicle of the Cross in the Wilderness* (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook & Company, 1916), 10.

Jouvency never visited Canada, but wrote a general history of the Jesuit Order from missionary reports that produced generalized accounts of the "Indians."³⁴ His publication is of great value in this study as references to the tattoo are present in his testimonies.

Quotes as early as 1623 discussing the body markings of Native people are found in the writings of the most prolific Récollet historian, Gabriel "Theodat" Sagard. He wrote with a genuine missionary purpose: to edify his readers. But Sagard, who spent a year in New France, did not recount simply his own experiences and impressions; his books represented compilations of all that his brethren had learned from 1615-1629.³⁵

Jesuit Paul Le Jeune's (1591-1664) testimonies of New France were of value to my study as well. His first mention of Native tattooing in New France dates from the year 1632. He travelled to New France in that year and remained for seven years directing a mission. In addition to his ability as an organizer, Le Jeune also brought initiative and imagination to his task; the *Relations* that he sent back to France contained a mass of information about the Natives.³⁶

In 1653 Francesco Bressani (1612-1672), the lone Italian in the Jesuit-French mission field, compiled a *Relation* in his native tongue because he wished

³³ Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage*, 38.

³⁴ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*.

³⁵ Theodat-Sagard, *Histoire du Canada*; Theodat-Sagard, *Grand voyage du pays des Hurons*; Theodat-Sagard, *Journey to the Country of the Hurons*, trans. H. H. Langton; Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, excerpts from the writings of Gabriel Theodat-Sagard.

³⁶ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*.

to make the work of the missions known in as many languages as possible.

Bressani, in this *Relation*, made reference to the tattoo within New France.³⁷

Francois du Creux, another Jesuit missionary, gave invaluable information on the custom of the tattoo in the form of pictorial material dated 1656. Du Creux wove his experience with the Amerindians into a narrative depicting the growth of the missions, and issued the whole as a history of Canada (*Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae*).³⁸ He gave the study a wider currency with the addition of representations of First Nations bearing tattoos.

Jesuit Joseph-Francois Lafitau (1681-1746) wrote a book on “Indian” customs after having served a tour of duty as a Jesuit priest in New France from 1700-1725. It was during this period that I found testimonies written by him pertaining to First Nations’ tattoos. The scholarly Lafitau produced much more than a compendium of American customs: he attacked the opinion that the “savages” were beasts simply because they were pagans. He scanned Indian legends and customs for intimations of God, compared his findings with similar aspects of ancient primitive societies, and offered the fruits of his study as historical corroboration of the validity of Christianity. The nature of his book on Amerindian customs is very useful for the purpose of this paper as he gives much insight into Native culture in New France at the time of colonization.³⁹

³⁷ I found french translations of his works which were originally published in Italian: Bressani, *Jesuits – Martyrs du Canada*; Bressani, *Relations abregée*; as well as English translations found in: Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*.

³⁸ Du Creux, *Historiae Canadensis*; Du Creux, *History of Canada*; Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, excerpts from the writings of François du Creux.

³⁹ Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians*, ed. & trans. William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore; Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages Amériquains*; Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*.

Pierre de Charlevoix (1682-1761) also spent several years in Canada writing Jesuit annals. The testimonies written by him fit into the last period of missionary expansion, after 1690. Following his years of travels in North America, he returned home and wrote prolifically of America.⁴⁰ His books achieved a widespread commercial success and left an indelible stamp on the European concept of the "American savage."⁴¹

Like the secondary source material, the primary source material also raises questions and poses problems for the contemporary cultural historian. Can colonial writings be taken at face value from a postcolonial perspective? There are different levels of information within missionary sources including the factual and the interpretive. The daunting task when dealing with such literature is how to separate the description of facts and events from the interpretation of these facts and events. Details of Native life are perceived through colonial writings. The knowledge we may acquire stems from within the boundaries of the Europeans' own world, and the validity of this knowledge, is characterized by varying degrees of objectivity. An example of this type of problem is seen in the first visual accounts of the types of body markings possessed by the First Nations peoples. Engravings published by Francois Du Creux in 1656 in *Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae* meant to expose the general characteristics of the "savage man" and therefore caution must be taken before

⁴⁰ Charlevoix, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*; Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, excerpts taken from the writings of Pierre de Charlevoix.

⁴¹ Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage*, 59.

concluding that the representations of the tattoos are authentic.⁴²(Fig. 3-5) The *Codex Canadensis* published in 1701 is another source of early representations of tattoos, in some respects, this work proves to be of better quality as the work refers more specifically to particular Nations through the inclusion of Native implements and tools.⁴³ The poses, however, suggest that the later work was based upon the earlier work, and therefore approaching the designs must be done carefully and assumptions cannot be made that they are accurate or reliable depictions of the tattoos created by First Nations peoples.

My aim in this thesis is to explore body markings and the culture surrounding them within New France during the French Regime. The thesis looks primarily at the views recorded by European colonizers concerning the body marking practices of the First Nations peoples of New France. Bringing pieces of information together that pertain to the subject from a myriad of groups that span from the sixteenth to the twentieth century can shed light on how meanings were constructed for these body decorations and how these meanings were formed, enforced, and altered.

⁴² Du Creux, *Historiae Canadensis*; Du Creux, *History of Canada or New France*.

⁴³ Undetermined Author, *Codex Canadensis ou Raretez des Indes* (Paris: 1701; reprint, Paris: Librairie Maurice Charmonal, 1930); this work can be dated with a good degree of accuracy, but the author is harder to identify. Many hold the belief that this is the work of Charles Bécart de Grandville, illustrator and cartographer, who lived in Québec from 1675 to 1703. The text of the book, however, seems to have been written by Louis Nicolas, a Jesuit missionary in New France from 1667 to 1675, and there is speculation as to whether or not he executed the drawings.

CHAPTER 1

Keeping in mind the methodological difficulties that a postcolonial approach has alerted us to, this chapter brings together certain pieces of objective data by gathering descriptions, making no definite commitments to their accuracy, but nevertheless proposing a tentative groundwork for a history of body marking practices in New France. I will assess the ideological, social, cultural and political issues around the accumulation of this information in the chapters to follow. The main objectives of this chapter are to demonstrate the prevalence of tattooing and body painting among Native people in New France, to show various representations employed, to offer speculative interpretations of the designs and depictions, and to discuss the significance of the tattoos and body paintings. Reconstructing factual characterizations of Native body marking within New France is a daunting study as there are few visual representations, and the written accounts, as already mentioned, are sometimes plagued with insensitive characterizations and insidious half-truths.

The most expedient way to approach the issues being addressed in this chapter is to examine the testimonies of the Jesuits. The Jesuits were regarded by the European population as the soldiers of God. They practiced doctrinal uniformity and were taught to think alike, in conformity with the Apostles' teaching.⁴⁴ With a formidable education in logic, languages, and the arts of verbal argument and persuasion, the Jesuits were the best and most rigorously trained minds in Europe.

While they were morally and doctrinally unbending, their anthropology in the field was consciously flexible, and to a point, culturally relative as they insinuated themselves into Native life. Unlike other colonizing forces, they were quick to learn Native languages, which allowed them a better system of communication and perhaps understanding. This concern with communication and understanding makes the Jesuits' descriptive accounts of Native culture of special interest since meaningful communication must be based on common knowledge. The *Relations* were an effort to accumulate that knowledge, and in this regard were intended as accurate testimonies. I believe in the factual value of their descriptions which can be reinforced by the credibility given to them by other scholars, but also in part due to the Jesuits concern with the truth, with logic, with rationalism, and with communication. In order to be able to communicate with the Native Peoples of New France, the Jesuits had to understand them. To understand them, the Jesuits most likely strove to find and write as many objective facts as possible. However, although in most cases I use more than one account to support my ideas and arguments, in the hope that comparative confirmation will bolster the accuracy of the descriptions.

My first goal is to demonstrate the prevalence of body marking among the First Nations peoples by examining first hand accounts written by Europeans in America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A 1653 account by F. G. Bressani supports Sinclair's previously quoted assertion that the practice must have been common. Bressani wrote: "This custom is so prevalent among these people that we could not find a person of the Petun or Neutral Nation who did not possess

⁴⁴ Axtell, *Beyond 1492*, 156.

some body painting.”⁴⁵ Similar claims were made by Joseph Jouvenay, who described body painting, or tattooing, as an “established” custom, basing his statement in part on a reinterpretation of a 1614 testimony to the same ends.⁴⁶ Similar observations continued into the first decades of the eighteenth century; Joseph-Francois Lafitau, who lived among the Iroquois from 1712-18, saw the “paintings on human skin as an ornamentation custom estimated to be universal among the savage people.”⁴⁷ All three observers employ the term “custom”, a word which implies a certain tradition and history. Specifically, their descriptions emphasize the widespread nature of the practice within the Woodland Native tribes of the Iroquois, Petun, and Neutral Nations.

Accepting that tattooing was probably a common practice among these First Nations peoples, the next step is to examine the types of designs and images they used. Written and pictorial documents exist that both show and describe the attributes of these tattoos and body paintings. In 1653 Francesco Giuseppe Bressani reported how the Amerindians in New France “used instruments to pierce the skin and trace images of animals or monsters. Representations included eagles, serpents, dragons, or any other figures they liked, which they engraved on their faces, their necks, their chests, or other parts of their bodies.”⁴⁸ The testimony clearly describes the use of figurative representations where images were taken from both our natural world, as well as the imaginary one. In *La grande voyage du pays*

⁴⁵ Bressani, *Jesuits – Martyrs du Canada*, 72-73.

⁴⁶ Margy, *L'Histoire des origines françaises*, 3: 349

⁴⁷ Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages Américains*, 2: 38-39.

⁴⁸ Bressani, *Jesuits – Martyrs du Canada*, 72-73.

des Hurons (1623-24), Gabriel "Theodat" Sagard observed similar depictions and wrote of how many Natives "have their body and face etched in compartments, with images of snakes, lizards, or squirrels and other animals" and described how "the Petun nation cover almost all of the body and face."⁴⁹ The reiteration of the same sort of artistic repertoire is present in another description of tattoo design executed by the Woodland Natives which is recounted in a passage written by Joseph Jouvenay who describes how the Neutral and Petun Natives "in many colours....depict fixed representations of birds or animals like snakes, eagles or toads on their skin."⁵⁰

Body marking of Woodland Native peoples also possessed abstract forms. In a late seventeenth-century testimony written by Pierre Margy while travelling the Mississippi River, as recorded in *Memoires et documents pour servir a l'histoire des origines franaises des pays d'outre-mer* (1614-1754), he alludes to the imagery found on First Nations peoples' skin. He wrote how "men paint birds and animals, while others inscribe half of their body with zig-zags", and stated that "women engrave their breasts in little compartments" while "on their shoulders, they possess images of large decorative flowers and other ornamental depictions."⁵¹ In this account we again see references to figurative representations, but not only to the already mentioned fauna; now we see the addition of floral representations as well. More importantly, the repertoire includes abstract patterns such as zig-zags and other 'ornamental' designs.

⁴⁹ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 38: 253.

⁵⁰ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 1: 279-281.

⁵¹ Margy, *L'histoire des origines franaises*, 3: 349.

A 1632 testimony written by Paul Le Jeune reports yet another abstract genre of body marking among the First Nations peoples in New France. Le Jeune described the Natives as follows:

It seemed to me that I was looking at those maskers who run about in France in Carnival time. There were some whose noses were painted blue, the eyes, eyebrows and cheeks painted black, and the rest of the face red; and these colours are bright and shining like those of our masks; others had black, red and blue stripes drawn from the ears to the mouth. Still others were entirely black; except the upper part of the brow and around the ears, and the end of the chin; so that it might have been truly said of them that they were masquerading. There were some who had only one black stripe, across the eyes, and three little stripes on the cheeks.⁵²

The one passage gives several detailed pictures of Native facial paintings sometimes alluding to large areas of skin being coloured, at other times mentioning the use of a specific abstract motif — stripes. Le Jeune's specificity in naming the colours, as well as the facial localities to which they were applied, aids in creating a visual picture.

Father Simon Le Moine who was on a mission where he encountered the Iroquois in 1654 reiterates the same findings. He describes how the Iroquois people paint their faces: "some with black, some with red, and some with various other colours, each having in this matter his own style of livery, so to speak, which he retains through life."⁵³ The reference to the longevity of this decoration make it difficult to determine whether Le Moine is describing tattooing, or whether he wishes to indicate that an individual Iroquois man or woman would maintain the same pattern of paint application over the course of a whole life. A similar conjuncture of painting and tattooing is made by Bressani in 1653:

⁵² J. H. Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage*, 37.

⁵³ Edna Kenton, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1925), 252.

We report the common use of face and whole body painting as well as tattooing. The colours used are black (taken from the bottom of cooking pots), and red of various hues (taken from the earth). In addition, the Indians have a custom of covering their body with oil and grease.⁵⁴

To further study the body marking representations, we can turn to visual accounts, which both support and expand the information provided in written testimonies. The first visual account of the types of body markings possessed by the First Nations peoples, appeared in 1656 in the form of engravings published by Francois Du Creux in *Historiae Canadiensis seu Novae Franciae*⁵⁵ (Figs. 3-5). The *Codex Canadensis* (1701) is another source of early representations of tattoos.⁵⁶ (Figs. 6-9) The tattoos seen in these illustrations possess all of the above mentioned designs. Immediately evident are the use of abstract forms, mainly consisting of geometric patterns such as linear bands, zig-zags, cross-hatching, triangles etc., which have been executed on the skin and cover large surfaces of the body including the legs, arms, chest, neck and face. The use of such geometric design is apparent in all of the illustrations (Figs. 3-9). Figurative designs are also present in these works. Each publication contains an illustration depicting the form of the sun on the chests of the figures (Figs. 3 & 6). Another celestial representation, possibly the moon, is found on one of these same figures (Fig. 6), positioned on the shoulder. Two depictions illustrate realistic animal forms: turtles are located on the chest of figure 8 and on the torso of figure 9, and serpents are depicted on the upper chest of figure 9. Another illustration supporting the written descriptions of tattoos

⁵⁴ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 38: 253.

⁵⁵ Du Creux, *Historiae Canadiensis*; Du Creux, *History of Canada or New France*.

⁵⁶ Undetermined author, *Codex Canadensis*.

representing fauna is an anonymous European illustration of 1717 of an Amerindian man clearly bearing a tattoo of an animal centre-chest and stylized representations of serpents on both legs.⁵⁷ (Fig. 10)

A pictorial record in the form of a drawing of a northeastern Native warrior (possibly Huron), by Jesuit Missionary Francesco Guiseppe Bressani in *Novae Franciae accurata delineatio* (1657), gives further glimpse of Native body marking design.⁵⁸ (Fig. 11) The main purpose of this representation was to show the juxtaposition of a European gun with the ancient wooden slat armor, yet the artist clearly included the presence of body ornamentation on this figure. A cross-hatching pattern seems to cover the majority of the figure's skin surface including the arms, legs, feet, face, neck, buttocks and chest. Thus, this representation shows the use of purely abstract design forming more of a pattern by the use of line. Another seventeenth-century illustration of a Native warrior (possibly Huron or Montagnais) possessing body markings is one by Joannis De Laet in his Latin publication describing the New World — *Americae utriusque descriptio* (1633).⁵⁹ (Fig. 12) Once again, the use of line creates a pattern covering the back, arms, and buttocks of the central figure, but this time the decorative pattern is that of scroll-like, whirlpool designs.

One of the clearest pictorial examples of Woodland Native tattooing in New France has been recorded in an oil portrait of Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow, painted in 1710 by the English artist John Verelst.⁶⁰ (Fig. 13) Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow was

⁵⁷ Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoué*, 33.

⁵⁸ Axtell, *Beyond 1492*, 141.

⁵⁹ Illustration was found in Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 125.

⁶⁰ Public Archives of Canada, Art and Photography Division, Ottawa (c-92418).

one of four Mohawk chiefs who visited London in 1710 as a part of a delegation led by Peter Schuyler. Schuyler was a member of the New York Indian Commission who hoped to persuade Queen Anne to assist the British colonials in their conflict with French Canada.⁶¹

In the painting, Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow's entire face, neck, chest and the visible parts of his arms are covered with body markings. All the designs appear to be geometric, both linear and curvilinear, again creating pattern. His upper face is covered in a type of cross-hatching design forming a diamond-like pattern, while the lower face appears to have distinct circular representations and a horizontal zig-zag band running the entire width of his face. (Fig. 14) The neck and upper chest designs consist primarily of horizontal bands and two hatchet-like representations on both shoulders. The mid-chest designs resemble pointed arrows as vertical bands lead into triangular tips pointing upward towards his face. Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow possesses an interesting figural representation that appears center-chest, between the sections of pointed arrow-forms. As I shall explore later, examination of the Woodland Native peoples' artistic repertoire suggests that this formation may actually be a simplified depiction of a horned serpentine.

Similar patterns continue to appear in later sources. A late eighteenth-century illustration of an Ottawa Native shows personalized body painting designs consisting of broad lines of coloured pigment applied to the face, chest, arms, torso and legs.⁶² (Fig. 15) Geometric design of another nature is represented in the body marking of an eighteenth-century Iroquois warrior, engraved by J. Laroque, after Jacques

⁶¹ Steve Gilbert, "Tattoo History Source Book", <http://www.tattoos.com>, (1996), 3.

⁶² Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*, 95.

Grasset St. Sauveur, which illustrates two rows of dots applied to the figure's forehead.⁶³ (Fig. 16)

After having cited the prevalence of body marking, as well as the various designs employed, the next phase to be discussed is the cultural significance of these markings. Why were the First Nations using these forms of body decoration and what significance did they hold? Can the semiotic meaning of these markings be ascertained through the examination of how certain signs and symbols were used? The body markings of the Native peoples being discussed in this thesis display a great range of design. In most cases interpretation of their significance and the ideas that inspired the designs is speculative, as little reliable information is available on the reasoning behind Native body markings within the specific era of New France. In the remainder of this chapter I will suggest that the decorative designs used by the Woodland Native peoples do not serve purely aesthetic ends, but suggest certain definite concepts. They are not only decorations, but are symbols of ideas. To commence, an attempt will be made to support this thesis by extrapolating from the established social and cultural significances of body marking practices within other aboriginal cultures — beginning with worldwide examples, then considering North America more specifically, and finally narrowing in on the Woodland Native cultures considered in this thesis.

The style of decoration by means of which ideas are expressed differs widely in various parts of the world. Almost everywhere, designs, no matter how simple their forms may be, are significant. Franz Boaz suggests that straight lines, triangles,

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 117.

rectangles, curves, and spirals can be interpreted as representing certain natural forms.⁶⁴ Designs exhibiting symmetrically disposed patterns of regular geometric forms suggest forms of leaves, markings of plants, fruits, animals, birds, insects, the scales of fishes, spiral shells, and many other objects that produce culturally specific meanings.⁶⁵ The groups of ideas that are expressed by ornamental designs are also different, according to the characteristic culture of each tribe.⁶⁶ Generally, the conceptual content of body markings can be divided into nine general categories: totemism; puberty, marriage, sex, and the fertility of women; tribal and clan distinctions; social status and heraldry; hunting; mourning ceremonies; medicine men; general amuletic and prophylactic practice; ideas concerning deity, heaven, and a spirit life apart from the body.⁶⁷ In Australia the animal forms used by the Urabunna, serve as a form of totemism where the selection of an animal as a badge or emblem represents a particular social group.⁶⁸ Another use of tattooing is evident in the designs of Kayan tattooing where the number of lines that compose the tattoo represent class distinction among the women.⁶⁹ Body markings also function as symbols denoting rites of passage. In Paraguay girls at puberty are tattooed at intervals with straight lines on the chin.⁷⁰ On the second largest island of China, in the South China Sea, the Island of Hai-Nan has a custom of tattooing the faces of young girls at the time of marriage with pictures representing flowers, butterflies and

⁶⁴ Franz Boaz, *Wealth of Thought*, 174.

⁶⁵ Hambly, *History of Tattooing*, 266.

⁶⁶ Boaz, *Wealth of Thought*, 175.

⁶⁷ Indeed, these categories are more relevant to my own late twentieth-century Euro-American perspective, than they were to the Woodland peoples of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

⁶⁸ Hambly, *History of Tattooing*, 86.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

insects.⁷¹ After childbirth the Fijian woman is ritually marked with a semi-circular patch, which is tattooed at each corner of her mouth as an indication of matronly reserve.⁷² The Burmese have a strong faith in tattooed charms. At first glance, 'tattooed charms' suggest sacred characteristics, but these 'charms' also serve a secular use with an aesthetic purpose to render the body sexually appealing. The signs adopted include birds, mystic words, squares, rings, images of Buddha, dots between the eyes, over the ears and on the chin.⁷³

In North America too, body marking served various purposes. A striking example of the symbolic importance that the Plains Natives attach to the body ornamentation is proved by the nature and the colour of the pigments in Pawnee body painting. During the dedication of a young child to a particular deity — as for example the offspring of the Pawnee infant to Tira-wa-atius, giver of all life and ruler of all things, who dwells in the sky — a geometric semi-circular mark is made on the forehead. This represents the arch of the sky above and is a symbol of the sky god. The blue pigment of the mark also has specific symbolism as it represents both the sky and the blue vault of the heavens.⁷⁴ The Osages (Plains Native tribe) tattoo realistic designs of sacred pipes on the chest of the keeper of the sacred pipes, by means of which visions are obtained. Some Native cultures seek magical protection in some form of body marking, for example when embarking on a perilous enterprise. The Inuit who is embarking on a whaling expedition marks his face with a broad

⁷¹ Ibid., 38.

⁷² Ibid., 217.

⁷³ Ibid., 126.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 81-83.

streak of black lead, and the Kadiaks will paint their faces before undertaking the crossing of a wide arm of sea, or indulging in the dangerous pursuit of the sea otter.⁷⁵

Amerindians used tattooing to establish unity of the social group. The tribal markings of the Urabunna used for this purpose are also seen among the Haida. They have their family names and crests marked upon their bodies, and each member receives on the body a representation of the bear, wolf, eagle, or some family of fishes. A chief who exacts allegiance from several others tattoos each of their emblems on his own body, so assimilating various virtues, and at the same time giving expression to his feelings, which involve pride and a sense of ownership.⁷⁶ Even the tattoos of the keeper of the Osages' sacred pipes, also carry a secular purpose; if the keeper has cut off heads in battle, the skulls of enemies are represented by tattoos. Tattooing the skull of a slain enemy on the body of the victor draws to the wearer all the strength and unexpected years of the foe, so that the tattooed man has his life lengthened by appropriating the un-expired days of his enemy.⁷⁷

The use of body marking in conjunction with warrior cultures of North America is very common, although the ornamental properties of the markings, vary greatly from one culture to another. Use of paint during warfare was widely used by Native tribes throughout North America, but there is little evidence as to its exact significance.⁷⁸ Such body markings were often executed to act as a symbol of warrior pride with a visible and tangible sign attesting to the bearer's courage.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 141.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 193.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 222.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 144.

Tattooing was used to honour warriors who had distinguished themselves by bravery in combat. Tattoos become true markers or labels used to inform others of the bearer's history and past exploits. An example of warrior tattooing is demonstrated in the 1742 writing of the Reverend John Heckwelder of Pennsylvania, which describes an aged warrior of the Lenape Nation and Monsey Tribe:

This man, who was then at an advanced age, had most striking appearance, and could not be viewed without astonishment. Besides that his body was full of scars, where he had been struck and pierced by arrows of the enemy, there was not a spot to be seen, on that part of it which was exposed to view, but what was tattooed over with some drawing relative to his achievements so that the whole together struck the beholder with amazement and terror. On his whole face, neck, shoulders, arms, thighs, and legs, as well as on his breast and back, were represented scenes of the various actions and engagements he had been in; in short, the whole of his history was there deposited, which was well known to those of his nation, and was such that all who heard it thought it could never be surpassed by man.⁷⁹

The markings employed were not always recognizable as battle scenes to European eyes. These scenes were not abstract marks without significance. It can be assumed that the prevalence and repeated use of certain designs, built up a particular iconographic repertoire, making the markings depicted easily understood within the nation. Whether these visible signs were figural or not is difficult to say, but even if the markings were mere abstract 'marks', their significance appears to have been recognizable among the people employing the depictions. This certainly was the opinion of James Adair, who, in 1720, wrote of the Chikasas (Plains Native tribe) that: "they readily know achievements in war by the blue marks over their breasts and arms, they being as legible as our alphabetical characters are to us."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ John Heckwelder, "Indian Nations". *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania* 12 (1876): 74.

⁸⁰ James Adair, *History of the American Indians* (1775), ed. Samuel Cole Williams, 1930, 63.

Not all of New France's Native tribes can be considered 'warrior societies', but there are examples of their use of paint during warfare. Evidence of the nature and significance of Woodland Native warfare body marking is found in the *Jesuit Relations* for 1663 where it was reported that an Iroquois chief known to the French as Nero bore on his thighs sixty tattooed characters, each of which symbolized an enemy killed with his own hand.⁸¹ Woodland Native peoples, such as the Sioux, apparently for the same reasons of warrior pride, would circle wounds acquired in combat with red paint as a marker drawing attention to their wounds.⁸² Le Moine in a 1654 *Relation* on the Iroquois stated the importance of face painting in relation to war. He wrote "that it is the custom of the warriors here never to go into battle without having their faces painted."⁸³ Father Le Petit reiterates Amerindian use of war facial painting while on a mission in Louisiana in 1730 where he wrote an account describing Native war rituals in the southernmost region of New France. He describes the rituals that follow the Nation's sending out of a detachment for war and states that "those who wish to join the party, after having ornamented and daubed themselves in different colours, come to harangue the war-Chief."⁸⁴ Bressani in his 1653 *Relation* offers another use of body marking in relation to battle, but for another purpose altogether: as a mask of disguise. In combat, facial paint hid both extreme youth and old age in warriors, and also masked visible expressions of fear, thereby making them more intimidating to their enemies.

⁸¹ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 49: 172.

⁸² Thevoz, *Le corps peint*, 48.

⁸³ Kenton, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 252.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 415.

Other uses of tattooing include physical protection and beautification. In the same 1653 publication, Bressani describes a purely functional use of body marking, explaining that the covering of the face with paint, oil and grease served as an excellent mask in the winter as protection against the cold and ice.⁸⁵ This same usage of body marking serving as a protection against the cold is described in a passage written by Charlevoix in August of 1721.⁸⁶ Charlevoix, in the same 1721 testimony, demonstrates how body markings served as a means of physical protection as the marks were believed to have helped ward off mosquitoes from biting.⁸⁷ According to a seventeenth-century description retold by Jouvency, the people of Labrador “painted their bodies to appear beautiful.”⁸⁸ This was reaffirmed by Alexander Henry the Elder in relation to the Swampy Cree during the 1760-76 period. He wrote : “The women, like the men, paint their faces with red ochre; and in addition usually tattoo two lines, reaching from the lip to the chin, or from the corners of the mouth to the ears. They omit nothing to make themselves lovely.”⁸⁹

Within New France body markings were also employed on a less material level than the above mentioned uses, and both painting and tattooing were frequently associated with religious practices. Before studying the uses of marking practices in relation to the spiritual world it must be stated that the basic tenet underlying the worldview of the Woodland Native peoples was the belief that the natural world was

⁸⁵ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 38: 253.

⁸⁶ Charlevoix, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*, 3: 327-328.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 1: 285.

⁸⁹ Alexander Henry, *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories Between the Years 1760 and 1776* (Toronto: G. N. Morang, 1901), 248.

animated by a multitude of spirits, called *manitos*.⁹⁰ Humans, animals and plants were believed to possess soul or spirit, as were many other phenomena that we regard as inanimate. The sun, moon, stars, winds, waters, and even certain rock formations and climatic conditions were thought of as persons rather than as things, beings with power to affect the fortunes of individual humans. There were two classes of great *manitos*: the *manitos* of the upper world; and the *manitos* of the underworld. Both classes of *manitos* had power over all that human beings wished to control.

Uses of body markings based on such religious beliefs is evident the First Nations peoples' tradition of totemism. There is justification for believing that animal tattoos were the outward signs made to signify that there is a strong relationship between the wearer and the spirit parts of the animals represented. The colour symbolism of body painting also demonstrated the sacred relationship between the bearer of body markings and the spiritual world. The Sioux believed that the use of paint was taught to them by the gods.⁹¹ The Sioux employ a broad blue band to represent the earth; red paint is the symbolic colour of war, success, and strength acquired by spiritual protection; green symbolizes fertility; yellow denotes water, west, and the setting sun. Among these people there is a story of a boy who painted himself yellow when going to visit the water spirit with whom he wished to be *en rapport*. Among the Cherokee there is a special association of colours, cardinal points and mental states arising from several common human experiences. The East is associated with red, success, and triumph, the North with blue, defeat, and

⁹⁰ Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 23.

⁹¹ Hambly, *History of Tattooing*, 150.

trouble, the West with black and death, and the South with white, peace, and happiness.⁹²

Bressani in his same 1653 *Relation* wrote of how body painting was used during celebrations and public gatherings, as well as that such body markings were executed upon their dead.⁹³ Hambly mentions that particular First Nations peoples believed that they would be searched for their tattoo marks after death by the spirit guarding the way to the many lodges, and death paint showing the clan marks was needed to ensure recognition.⁹⁴ An example of such body marking is found among the Sioux, who believed that after death the spirit of the warrior mounts a ghostly horse and sets forth on its journey to the 'Many Lodges' of the afterlife. Along the way the spirit of the warrior meets an old woman blocking their path and demands to see their tattoos. If none are possessed, she turns them back and condemns them to return to the world of the living as a wandering ghost.⁹⁵ Tattoos seem to have been used as a powerful tool of body magic.

Bressani is once again useful in the examination of other uses for body marking among Woodland Native peoples. For the first time, in 1653, reference is made to the use of body marking in conjunction with prisoners (a topic to be addressed in chapter 3). According to Bressani Natives tattooed prisoners who were destined to the flames, as victims consecrated to the God of war.⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 38: 253.

⁹⁴ Hambly, *History of Tattooing*, 235.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 51; Light, *Tattooing of the Cree Indians*.

⁹⁶ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 38: 253.

An account written in 1721 by Pierre de Charlevoix in his *Journal historique d'un voyage de l'Amérique* informs us of another use of body marking; he states that women often pierced themselves and made tattoos on the jaw and chin to ward off evil spirits and tooth aches.⁹⁷ This may be seen as a type of therapeutic healing — invoking pain prevented further pain. The Woodland Ojibwa, practiced ritualized tattooing for the same purposes. They tattooed the temples, forehead, and cheeks of those suffering from headaches and toothaches believed to have been caused by malevolent spirits. Pairing the tattooing procedure with ritualistic ceremony of song and dance was held to exorcise the demons.⁹⁸ Tattooing seemed to serve a multitude of healing purposes, from improving eyesight, aiding the mending of broken bones, to both the prevention of and protection against illness.⁹⁹

In most instances body painting, rather than tattooing, seems to be more often associated with ritual and ceremony. Facial painting seems to aid in the dehumanization, depersonalization, de-figuration, and masking of the natural form. The designs in paint are usually geometric marks of straight lines, circles, and other rigid geometric forms that are extreme counterpoints to supple anatomical traits, the skin's elasticity, and the curves of muscle. The colours used tend to be just as unnatural, live and contrasting. Body painting, as opposed to tattooing, can be considered more of a ritual mask for special circumstances involving ceremony.

⁹⁷ De Charlevoix, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*, 3: 328.

⁹⁸ Light, *Tattooing of the Cree Indians*, 6.

⁹⁹ These hypotheses for tattooing purposes came from pieces of information gathered from several source including: Francois Boucher, *20,000 Years of Fashion: The History of Costume and Personal Adornment* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1967); Brain, *Decorated Body*; Lynne M. Darroch, "All Dressed Up: Adornment Practices, Identity and Social Structure", (Thesis, 1993); De Charlevoix, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*; Light, *Tattooing of the Cree Indians*; Hambly, *History of Tattooing*; Rubin, *Marks of Civilization*; Sinclair, "Tattooing of the North American Indians"; Levi-Strauss, "Modern Primitives", *Modern Primitives*.

Tattooing, on the other hand, offers a more permanent form of body decoration and tends to be less ritual oriented. Tattoos seem to act as symbols of identification, distinguishing marks, creating pictographs of sorts attesting to the bearer's history or beliefs. The colours employed were primarily red and black, taken from natural elements that were readily available such as red ochre and carbon dust.

To find further support for these interpretations of Woodland Natives' body marking practices, it is possible to turn to an examination of the other kinds of decorative arts practiced by them. The intricate designs of Woodland hair and porcupine quill embroidery and beadwork are better researched and documented than the body marking practices of the same peoples. Nor is the comparison merely justified by convenience. Early writers such as the Jesuits, Récollets, travellers and explorers grouped these other arts together with tattooing under the general Native word *matachias*.¹⁰⁰ Adopting this historical mode of classification, it may be that parallels will emerge that will shed light on the meaning and use of Native Woodland body marking, in comparison to some of the best historical examples of the old patterns persist on woven pouches and mats housed in museum collections.¹⁰¹

To parallel the previous discussion of the uses of body markings and their cultural significance, symbolic elements of *matachias* must be discussed. The images of natural world spirits, called *manitos*, used on power objects, such as medicine bags, supposedly transferred some of their power to individual people.

¹⁰⁰ Dickason refers to this term but gives no further explanation or translation as to its original and linguistic meaning.

This being said, the depiction of thunderbirds (upper world *manitos*) and underwater panthers (underworld *manitos*) are often displayed on such medicine bags.¹⁰² (Fig. 17) The three spatial zones incorporated in the design of these bags correspond to the three levels of the universe, being the underworld, the upper world, and the heavens . Not all woven bags display images of both classes of *manitos*. Many combine representations of thunderbirds or underwater panthers on one side with abstract geometric patterns on the reverse.¹⁰³ (Fig. 18) While these patterns have been seen as purely decorative, they were probably intended to express the energy and power that emanated from the supernatural beings.¹⁰⁴ Other meanings have also been associated with what seems to be abstract design. For example, zig-zag lines have been interpreted as thunder and lightening, wavy or castellated lines as water (possibly whipped up by underworld deities), whirlpool designs as the presence of an underwater panther (as in nature whirlpools mark the place where human beings can channel their prayers to the underworld *manitos*), and patterns of concentric circles, polygons and squares as images of the underworld.¹⁰⁵ (Figs. 19-20) Not only are the designs important, but also is their spatial relationship to each other. The placement of each design in conjunction with the use of patterned line puts the object within the proper context of the three levels of the universe. It may be possible to assume that the distribution of body marks on the body have a similar function. The spatial placement (as well as their interpretive meaning) may be key to

¹⁰¹ Such examples of old patterned woven pouches and mats might be found in the American Museum of Natural History. A section devoted to the Plains and Eastern Woodland Natives is found on the first floor, hall 102.

¹⁰² Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 62 & 68.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 66 & 78.

the semiotic significance of the designs. It is particularly evident in figures 6 to 9 that the body is divided by horizontal bands of wavy or castellated, as well as straight lines. Other representational depictions are placed within the compartmentalized figure.

The practical pouches worn by hunters and warriors as containers for tobacco, personal medicines and implements used in hunting and war, were usually worn folded over the belt and were decorated with quill embroidery, beads, and ribbon.¹⁰⁶ They possessed embroidered dream representations, therefore allowing them to be imbued with sacred qualities. Like the tattooed designs of guardian spirits, pouches were portable art. They kept the potent representations of spirits on the body during travel, hunting, and war. In this art form as in many types of Woodland Native art, there is a tendency toward an extreme stylization of form that has symbolic connotation. For example, a line of semi-circular motifs is common in Woodland Native art as a schematic representation of the dome of the heavens, and curve or scroll decorations are primarily representations of celestial, geographical, and mythical phenomena, such as sky dome, world tree, scroll or helix, sun, and chief's horns.¹⁰⁷ Within the same work of art, multiple images of a *manito* often range from the clearly representational to a minimalist reduction to pure geometric form.¹⁰⁸ (Fig. 21) In quillwork and weaving, for example, explicit images of thunderbird families often depict the smaller figures as simple hourglass shaped torsos.¹⁰⁹ (Fig. 22) Although these forms would have been recognizable shorthand for images of the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁷ Frank Gouldsmith Speck, *The Iroquois: A Study in Cultural Evolution* (Michigan: Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bulletin No. 23, 1955), 60.

¹⁰⁸ Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 70.

manitos to people within the culture, they are less easily read by the modern viewer. It has also been suggested that the stylized animals depicted on the circa 1780 Ojibwa pouch shown in fig. 23 may be representations of the horned serpentine companions of the underwater panther.¹¹⁰ They closely resemble the stylized centre tattoo in Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow.(Fig. 13)

We have seen flat abstract design in Woodland Native art associated with dream representation is probably symbolic rather than decorative. The need to maintain the privacy of dream experience and to find visual form for the expression of a variety of sensory experiences gave rise to this type of representation.¹¹¹ The tendency toward extreme stylization and the use of abstract symbolic motifs creates a certain ambiguity in individual works of art.

In wearing clothing ornamented with the same nervous, energized patterns of wavy and zig-zag lines used to represent the powers of the supernatural world, an individual alluded to his own links to the *manitos*. Closely related to this interpretation is the idea that throughout the Woodlands of North America richly decorated clothing was intended to 'please the spirits' and protect the wearer against harm from evil *manitos*.¹¹² Can the same interpretation be applied to the body markings of the Woodland Native peoples? Body paints and tattoos of the same patterns have been considered throughout this chapter and may have had the same function. The cross-hatching pattern on a pair of Western Great Lakes garter pendants (Fig. 24) closely resembles the all-over cross-hatching design seen in the body markings of a Huron

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 27.

¹¹² Ibid., 29.

warrior.¹¹³ (Fig. 11) Ceremonial body painting worn at feasts and dances that imitated the appearance of the *manitos* that had been revealed to the wearer in his visions, may not have been merely mementos of his vision. Such body markings that were being offered to the spirits during feasts and dances were thought to have been imbued with power received from the *manitos*.¹¹⁴ The sun was widely revered by Amerindians and the prominent red disk above the upper world motif seen on the Cree or Metis bag (Fig. 25) could represent the powerful sun manito.¹¹⁵ The two tattooed images of the sun (Figs. 3 & 6) that were already mentioned in this chapter might also have had the same powerful significance.

This closes the first chapter on the use of tattooing and body painting among the First Nations peoples in the New France at the time of contact with the first European colonizers. By comparing written accounts with visual representations, a general sense of the body markings of the First Nations peoples is formed. Native body marking was a common practice in New France at the time of European 'encounter'. It is evident that the designs and images used by Native Peoples at this time were both numerous and varied. Generalizations about the depictions are possible. There are images of naturalistic representations of flora and fauna as well as figures borrowed from the imagination; there are also abstract representations such as geometric designs, both linear and curvilinear, which sometimes form a pattern. Tattooed designs are all basically linear, with simple symmetrical, non-representational designs on the face, and forms of greater complexity on the body.

¹¹³ Ibid., 75.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 62.

Tattooing is black (with rare red/black exceptions); but painting is frequently bichrome or polychrome, with solid colour areas as important as lines. Asymmetrical and representational designs also occur in face painting. By looking at other forms of *matachias* some hypotheses as to the semiotic significance of Native body markings can be made. Extrapolating from the designs employed in these other art forms paired with general cultural significance, much is revealed about the semiotic meanings of the images. Despite the methodological difficulties that arise in a postcolonial approach to colonial discourse, it is possible to gather useful information pertaining to Native body marking within New France even if no concrete commitment to their accuracy can be made. Now that a place has been found on firmer historical ground, I will assess the ideological, social, cultural and political issues around the accumulation of this information in the chapters to follow.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

In chapter 2 the emphasis will shift away from the attempt to summarize what is known about Native body marking practices to analyze the European discourse around body marking. The position of European writers within the context of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries will be discussed. Generally I will be looking at the writings of European missionaries (primarily Jesuits), explorers, travellers, and a French army officer. It is important to examine how these writings were affected by the preconceived ideas they had formed about Native societies through the literature available in Europe prior to coming to New France. How did these pre-formed views affect their testimonies? My focus will be on the tracing the development of the European discourse of “the Native.” To properly address the discourse of aboriginal body marking I will examine how the European accounts described “the Native”, “the Native body” (or other physical attributes), and finally the cultural practice of “Native body marking.” I will consider the dynamics taking place between Native peoples and the colonizers in relation to body marking at the moment of contact. How did the recently landed colonizers view the body markings of the First Nations peoples of New France?

When the invasion of North America began, explorers, travellers and missionaries flocked to New France with colonization as their primary goal. Upon their arrival, they were exposed to a new culture bearing its own customs and systems of belief. The Native people puzzled the French (and vice-versa).

Explorers, missionaries, and travellers made conflicting reports on their character. Lescarbot and Champlain, for example, visited the same area at the same time, yet discovered different people. In Acadia, the well-read Parisian barrister Lescarbot found the noble savage, in many respects superior to civilized man himself. The sailor-explorer Champlain, in contrast, encountered what he described as poor people, rude and of little interest.¹¹⁶ The length of observation, the villages visited, the authors' own social backgrounds and personalities, the particular motivations leading them to record their thoughts, all of these factors played a part in European travellers' interpretations. Europeans never interpreted "Native" societies without preconceptions. What was the state of the literature being published in France on the subject of "the Native" before and during the missions in New France that would have affected the chronicles being written there? Even the first European explorers sought to make sense of what they saw in terms of diverse and often contradictory medieval speculations about what the inhabitants of far-off regions of the world might be like.

To Europeans, "others" might appear in an infinite variety of shapes, hues, and habits, but they were always and distinctly unlike Europeans and, for the most part, therefore regarded as inferior. Because of their own recent experience of peoples and places and to the rediscovered libraries of the ancient world, Europeans had a rich "cabinet of curiosities" accumulated over many centuries on the three continents.¹¹⁷ From Marco Polo's thirteenth-century travels in particular, they continued to learn of immense empires and fabulous

¹¹⁶ Smith, *Le Sauvage*, . 4

¹¹⁷ Axtell, *Beyond 1492*, 31.

riches in the Far East. Despite the growing knowledge of cultures and geographies, before the sixteenth century, the occidental wall between “them” and “us” was high. “The Native” had taken his place as a minor personage in French literature with the 1580 publication of Montaigne’s *Cannibals*.¹¹⁸ “The Native” appeared only in fictional literature as a character imbued with all the attributes of classical primitivism.¹¹⁹ Throughout the century “the Native” remained a curious creature of fancy. Most surprising to the early writers was their failure to encounter the monsters with which the medieval imagination had populated such lands. Yet rumors persisted for a long time about tribes of people with one foot or with their heads fused to their chests in the interior of the newly discovered continent.¹²⁰

After 1607 “the Native” assumed flesh and blood when the writings of those in Canada, the Jesuits in particular, began to circulate throughout France. As “the Native” became more real to the European reader, the First Nations peoples of New France took on larger proportion in the popular imagination. They entered into the consciousness of the literate French public, winning the studious attention of the curious. In the seventeenth century, the writers of Catholic-dominated France, who described “the Natives” placed them in the framework of their own orthodox conceptions. Thus, while “the Natives” portrait was taking shape, they played a primarily spiritual role as an increment to the

¹¹⁸ Montaigne’s *Cannibals* as described by: Smith, “*Le Sauvage*”, 8.

¹¹⁹ The word primitivism was originally derived from the Latin *primus* (‘first’), *primitive* meant ‘having the quality or style of that which is early or ancient; simple, rude, or rough’. But since then it has acquired more pejorative connotations.

¹²⁰ Bruce Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*, 21.

zeal of the faithful.¹²¹ The Catholic Church revived under the menace of Protestantism and set out to win the world. It found one outlet for its crusading energy in the New World, where heathenism made “the Native” a prize.¹²²

As “Cartesian rationalism overwhelmed the spirit of the Counter Reformation” in the eighteenth century, “the Native” ceased to be the property of devout Catholics.¹²³ Dissent from established codes of religion, philosophy and social theory grew, swelling the ranks of the Cartesians and skeptics.¹²⁴ “The Native” seemed to offer living proof for many of the arguments of the enemies of the church. Memoirs published in 1703 by a French army officer named Louis-Armand de Lom d’Arce, baron de Lahontan (1666-1715), consist of three volumes based on his seven years of residence in New France, expressing his dissatisfaction with the religious dogmas and social injustices of his time.¹²⁵ He created the direct prototype of *philosophe* Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s noble savage. The message of his dialogues was that it was the Natives that were truly free and not the Frenchmen.¹²⁶ By 1758, twenty-five editions or condensed versions of his three books had appeared. Lahontan fixed the character of the “good savage”, of the “man of nature” whose figure was to dominate the entire literature of the coming century. The favourable descriptions of the Native people in Lahontan’s work, supplied French social critics with an ideal vehicle for

¹²¹ Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage*, 175.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage*, 175.

¹²⁴ Smith, “*Le Sauvage*”, 8.

¹²⁵ Baron de Lahontan, *New Voyages to North America* (The Hague, 1703), ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1905).

¹²⁶ Lahontan in: Smith, “*Le Sauvage*”, 8.

their own primitivistic ideas.¹²⁷ French free-thinkers in the mid-eighteenth century, like Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, went several steps beyond this. Rousseau raised “the Native” to his highest eminence as a model of human perfection and praised him particularly for his freedom and equality. “The Native”, for him, owed his virtue to instinct unspoiled by corroding reason. Rousseau in the *Discourse on Inequality* drew heavily on the accounts from New France for his conception of “the Native.”¹²⁸ Voltaire’s deism led him to concede a sort of equality, as well, to “the Natives.” When Voltaire’s *L’Ingénu* appeared in 1767, the characterization of “the Native” in France was complete.¹²⁹ “The Natives” conduct showed them as a model of what a man should be. Rousseau and Voltaire jettisoned all the horrifying vices listed by the early missionaries, crediting “the Natives” with real, and all kinds of imaginary virtues. Their “noble savage,” a model of human perfection, a believer in freedom and equality, provided the example of what all men could become if they reformed their society.¹³⁰

Two eighteenth-century Jesuit commentators in New France, Lafitau and Charlevoix, reflected the new intellectual mood of the French Enlightenment. While still claiming that Christianity remained essential for “the Natives” virtue and happiness, they emphasized, far more than their seventeenth-century predecessors, their positive qualities. Lafitau in 1724 criticized the early Jesuits saying they had written hastily on matters of which they were insufficiently

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941).

¹²⁹ Taken from a brief discussion on Voltaire’s works by: Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage*, 189.

informed.¹³¹ Lafitau, to a much greater degree than the earlier Jesuits, compared Iroquois customs and beliefs with those of the people of Antiquity.¹³² This view is also reflected in Charlevoix's *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France* (1744).¹³³ Charlevoix, who had come into contact with First Nations peoples during his stay in Québec and his 1721 journey from Québec to New Orleans, lauded their free life, their absence of preconceived ideas, their liberty from an oppressive government, and the absence of privileges in their society. To him "the Natives" appeared naturally more virtuous than the Europeans.¹³⁴ When Charlevoix completed his journal, "the Native" was becoming a subject of discussion. During the years of earliest contact, the discourse of "the Native" remained almost exclusively the property of devout Catholics. But by Charlevoix's day, the firsthand accounts written by the Jesuits in New France were propagating a wider fame. At the same time, dissent from the established codes of religion, philosophy, and social theory was spreading. Scientific discovery was making the world more anthropocentric, and rationalizing a revived classical pantheism into a new deism.¹³⁵ Travel and exploration stimulated rather than dispelled curiosity about the primitive and the exotic.¹³⁶

The previous paragraph demonstrates the ambiguity of the Jesuits' position. On the one hand the missionaries flocked to New France to fight against heathenism. Nearly all the colonial charters granted by the French

¹³⁰ Smith, "Le Sauvage", 10.

¹³¹ Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages*, 1: 5.

¹³² Ibid.: This was one of Lafitau's main intentions in this publication (vols. 1-2).

¹³³ Charlevoix, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 3: 306.

¹³⁵ Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage*, 187.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

monarchs in the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries assign the wish to extend the Christian Church to save the souls as a principal, if not the principal, motive for colonization.¹³⁷ On the other hand, the Jesuits were forces within the Age of Enlightenment because of their formidable education in logic, reason, languages, and the arts of verbal argument and persuasion. During this period, the Jesuits were the best and most rigorously trained minds, in the classical sense, in Europe. The missionaries tended to believe that “the Natives” were educable. This view that saw Native peoples possessing the ability to be educated made them potentially convertible. The Jesuits were drawing on the humanist’s faith in the reforming power of education, which reflected one of the key ideas of the Enlightenment where optimism for the conviction that the human race was perfectible through improved education. According to Le Jeune, the Jesuit superior of Québec, it was optimism such as this that caused “a great many people [to] imagine that all we have to do is open our mouths and utter four words, and behold a Savage is converted.”¹³⁸ While “the Natives” were felt to be ultimately redeemable, there was one crucial problem: they were still in a state of “savagery” or “barbarism”, which every civilized person knew to be an “infinite distance from Christianity.”¹³⁹ The Jesuits were organized hierarchically in an international order, freed from parish work to attack heresy and paganism wherever it flourished. From the middle of the seventeenth century, when they gave up the idea of “Frenchifying” “the Native”, the Jesuits took their missions into the remote corners of New France, west to Lake Superior, north to Hudson’s

¹³⁷ Axtell, *European and the Indian*, 43.

¹³⁸ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 9: 91.

Bay, south to Louisiana. Without condemning everything “Native” as deficient or sinful, they attempted to insinuate Christianity into Native lives with methods learned less in the scholastic classrooms of France than in the inhabited forests of America. While ingratiating themselves by learning aboriginal languages, the Jesuits began to practice their order’s worldwide technique of acculturating themselves to “the Natives” way of life to win their trust for the task ahead. The Jesuits acted as major exponents of learning and antiquity and despite being morally and doctrinally rigid, their fieldwork within Native societies was flexible.

This ambiguity of position may explain the seemingly contradictory views discernible even in the works of a single Jesuit author. Many of the first recorded impressions of First Nations peoples in New France were very favorable. They were not only described as being physically handsome and virtuous, but also reasonable, alert and apparently capable of intellectual development. Reports also characterized “the Native” by such traits as emotional restraint, stoicism, practicality, personal resourcefulness, individualism and bravery.¹⁴⁰ Often they were depicted as superior to Frenchmen in physical stature, in strength, agility, and speed.¹⁴¹ This superiority was said to result from the natural benefits of the climate, land and water rather than from any innate Native superiority. These descriptions placed them almost between men and angels in the great chain of being along with giants, who were superior in size and strength. Frequently the

¹³⁹ Axtell, *European and the Indian*, 44.

¹⁴⁰ Neal Salisbury, “American Indians and American History”, *The American Indian and the Problem of History*, ed. Calvin Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 24.

¹⁴¹ European accounts often described the natives in a heroic, idealized fashion. While relating hunting, fishing and trapping stories the European’s depicted the Amerindians as having superior physical capabilities and generally described the natives as physically formidable: Jaenen, *Friend and Foe*, 22.

fathers transformed the First Nations' peoples into figures closely resembling citizens of the Roman Republic, or the founders of the Christian Church. In Le Jeune's 1636 *Relation* he stated that in appearance "the Natives" resembled the famous men of Antiquity, and their intelligence was greater than that of the average French peasant.¹⁴²

The European views of the First Nations peoples vacillate between the Europeans' contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in, or fear of, novelty. Subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of similar fantasy and defense – the desire for an originality which is threatening by virtue of the differences of race, colour, and culture.¹⁴³ There is a theory of encapsulation or fixation that moves between the "recognition of cultural and racial difference and its disavowal", by identifying the unfamiliar to something familiar or "established", in a repetitious fashion and "vacillates between delight and fear."¹⁴⁴ This being said, the dichotomies present in European testimonies become quite clear. Their testimonies are saturated with opposing characterizations of "the Natives." The Jesuits' writings have a push and pull effect as they alternatively describe "the Natives" as being physically similar to themselves and physically different from themselves. "The Natives" are characterized as being both "beautiful" and "grotesque." The accounts also tend

¹⁴² Paul Le Jeune in: *Le père Paul Le Jeune: textes choisis et présentés par Léon Pouliot*, (Montréal: Fides, 1957), 45.

¹⁴³ Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism" in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minha-ha, and Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art), 80.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

to give completely opposite attributes to “the Natives” as they describe them as both “heathens” and “noble.”

Thus, there were two problems facing these early European writers: first, the basic task of how to comprehend the New World and its people (which was just addressed); second, the subsequent problem of how to relate what was observed and understood in terms intelligible to their European readers.¹⁶⁴ Jean de Léry admitted to having problems depicting Native Peoples justly, and wrote: “their gestures and countenances are so different from ours, that I confess to my difficulty in representing them in words, or even in pictures.”¹⁴⁵ This dilemma of colonial articulation results in opposing schemes of characterization. “The Native” assumes either one of two images: one that possesses traits of equivalences, samenesses, and familiarity; or else one that possesses traits of differences, otherness, and even perverseness.

This same ambiguous play may be examined specifically in the European discussions of the Native body. The Jesuits seem to have faced the same problems in depicting First Nations peoples in pictures. This may be examined in through the surviving illustrations of Amerindian tattoo designs in Francois Du Creux's *Historiae Canadensis seu Novae Franciae* and the *Codex Canadensis*.¹⁴⁶ (Figs. 2-8) The need to rationalize New World peoples, to incorporate them into Europe's scale of values was important. This task must have been tremendously loaded for the Jesuits with their association with the

¹⁴⁵ Jaenen, *Friend and Foe*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ Undetermined Author, *Codex Canadensis*; Du Creux, *Historiae Canadensis*.

Enlightenment and Paganism as well. One method for achieving this was to identify “the Natives” with peoples of Europe’s classical antiquity. We must remember that the poses and body forms are not typically representative of First Nations peoples, and neither is the landscape that of North America. The European-style poses, capes and backgrounds make it clear that the artists worked from imagination and from written descriptions rather than from life. The purpose of *Historiae Canadensis*, was to expose the general characteristics of “the Native.” These works pose a problem within postcolonial discourse. These are the typically distorted, partial and inaccurate images so common of early representations of the indigenous people of Canada. These representations conjure up images of classical Greek and Roman poses: statuesque, ideal and blatantly European. Roland Barthes uses a phrase that describes these types of misrepresentations perfectly: Barthes sees “representations as formations” that in the end become total “deformations.”¹⁴⁷ The obviously made up or idealized images present in the publications under debate do become blatant deformations, straying from their supposed initial purpose which was to represent the First Nations peoples of Canada. To examine these poses, we can look towards Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of the stereotype:

We see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat of some established view of things the threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things

¹⁴⁷ Taken from Roland Barthes as quoted in Bhabha, “The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism”, 78.

to itself as either “original” or “repetitious.”¹⁴⁸

Denying the play of difference (i.e. the idealized engravings of First Nations people) constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject.

At the initial stage of contact, other European accounts concentrated on describing obvious physical attributes and cultural patterns or customs of the First Nations of Canada.¹⁴⁹ According to traveller Antoine Du Perier, they resembled the French in height and facial features more than any other foreigners he had seen.¹⁵⁰ Contrary to this statement, the focus of the majority of writings centre on recording the differences of culture between the Europeans and the newly encountered indigenous people. Explorer Sieur de Cobes, who visited New France in 1605, gave a correspondent his impressions in a letter dated February 13, 1608 and subsequently published:

Now to describe the nature of those who inhabit it, you should know that they are very handsome men, white as snow, who let their hair grow down to their waists (both men and women), with high foreheads, eyes burning like candles, strong in body and well proportioned. The women too are very beautiful and graceful, well formed and dainty, so much so that given the fashion of their clothes which is somewhat strange one would say they were Nymphs or some goddesses...¹⁵¹

Another description of the physical attributes of “the Native” is present in a 1630s passage written by Pierre d’Avity:

Moreover, they are as handsome young men and beautiful young women as may be seen in France. They are great runners and swimmers, and the women too have a marvellous disposition. They are usually more slim and nimbler than we and one finds none who are paunchy, hunchbacked, deformed, niggardly, gouty or stony...¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Salisbury, “American Indians”, 46.

¹⁵⁰ Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*, 145.

¹⁵¹ Jaenen, *Friend and Foe*, 25.

Francesco Guiseppe Bressani in a 1653 report also describes several physical traits possessed by “the Natives”:

All go bareheaded, men and women; their hair which is uniformly black, is long, greasy and shiny, and is tied behind, except when they wear mourning... Furthermore, they have good figures, their bodies are well made, their limbs very well proportioned, and they are not so clumsy as I supposed them to be...¹⁵³

In another *Relation* describing the First Nations peoples, Bressani delves deeper into the physical description by including sensory traits:

The colour of their skin is brown, their bodies are well proportioned, with excellent vision, very fine hearing, very sensitive sense of smell which allows them to distinguish different combustible traces and detect the presence of fire from a very long distance. Touch and their skin in general is very delicate, no doubt due to the frequent use of oils on their bodies...¹⁵⁴

From these accounts it seems that during the period of early contact skin colour and racial factors were considered less important than cultural differences. A very early account written in 1542 by Roberval, an early traveller to Canada, alludes to the Amerindians as being “white” but it was their custom of dress that was said to separate them from the European:

To declare to you what is the condition of these savages, it is necessary to say on the subject: that these people are of good stature & well proportioned. They are white, but go about completely naked; and if they were dressed in the fashion of our French, they would be just as white, and would look as well; but they paint themselves with diverse colours.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Kenton, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 19-20.

¹⁵⁴ Bressani, *Relations abregée*, 115.

¹⁵⁵ Jaenen, *Friend and Foe*, 22.

So firmly attached were reports of Europeans to the theory that skin colour was the result of climate that they had difficulty in accepting what they saw in the New World. The climate for vast areas of these lands was very similar to that of Europe. Why were the inhabitants not white? Several testimonies written in New France state that “the Natives” were born white and turned *basané* (a term used with strong connotations of rusticity and lack of sophistication) through exposure to the sun and the use of oils and paints.¹⁵⁶ Pierre d’Avity, for example, noted that Native peoples were olive-hued or bronze, because “they rub themselves with oil against flies.”¹⁵⁷ Jesuit Julien Perrault wrote from Cape Breton Island in 1634-35: “Their skin is naturally white, for the little children show it thus; but the heat of the sun, and the rubbing with seal oil and moose fat make them very swarthy, the more so as they grow older.”¹⁵⁸ According to Olive P. Dickason, the belief in the whiteness of Amerindians at birth was shared by figures such as founder of the Ursuline convent in Québec City, Marie de l’Incarnation, who persuaded an Amerindian father not to oil his baby, so that it would be left to its natural whiteness.¹⁵⁹ Other reports do exist that support the opinion that colour could not be changed by the application of paints and oils, but myths were hard to kill, and so a belief in the essential whiteness of Natives continued, reinforced by the observation that Europeans who lived in the New World did not change

¹⁵⁶ Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*, 145.h

¹⁵⁷ Sagard, *Journey to the Country of the Hurons*, 136.

¹⁵⁸ Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*, 8: 159.

¹⁵⁹ Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*, 145.

colour, not even after several generations. Therefore, if climate was not the cause of Natives' colour, then it must lie in their customs and practices.¹⁶⁰

As body marking is a visible physical trait upon the skin that is imbued with cultural significance, descriptions of the customary practice were included in some of these early descriptions of the First Nations peoples. An abundance of material may be extracted from European first hand accounts, the majority of which are passages written by the Jesuits. Once again, particularly from within a Jesuit worldview, the topic is riddled with ambiguities. The ideas present in some of the early reports that characterized the Amerindians as having such traits as emotional restraint, stoicism, practicality, personal resourcefulness, individualism and bravery are carried through in the testimonies relating to Native body marking.¹⁶¹ Joseph Jouvenay (c. 1614) writes of Native tattooing:

With arrowheads or pine needles they perforate the neck, chest or cheeks to trace contours of objects. They then introduce a black powder of pulverized carbon to the wound which mixes with their blood and marks the living skin with drawn figures that even a lifetime will not erase. Some practice this established custom most dangerously in cold seasons and when they are physically weak. Hit with extreme suffering, they sometimes fall to their death.¹⁶²

In *Le grand voyage du pays des Hurons* (1623-24), Gabriel Theodat-Sagard writes:

The Petun nation cover almost all of the body and face which make

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 147.

¹⁶¹ The earliest accounts I read included European descriptions of "native" physical attributes such as hair, skin colour, bodily physique, etc. as well as describing customs practiced by the First Nations including ritual ceremonies (eg. magical, spiritual and sacred), hunting patterns and abilities, living conditions, family relations, etc.: Salisbury, "American Indians and American History", 46.

¹⁶² Thwaites, ed., 1: 279-281.

them frightening and hideous to those who aren't accustomed to it. These piercing cause great pain and the inhabitants often fall sick with fever and loss of appetite.¹⁶³

Here is another example by Sagard exploring the procedure and its attributes:

What I find the most strange, is that those who wish to be viewed as courageous and feared by their enemy, took a bird's bone or fish bone and afflicted themselves using the bone as a razor, with which they engraved and decorated the body, with diverse lines and depths, like we do with the burin. They demonstrate courage and patience admirable to man. They must feel the pain as they are not insensitive, but to see them immobile, and mute is a serious mystery as the blood pours from the incisions in which they insert black powder and the engraved images become permanent marks upon their skin, which can never be erased.¹⁶⁴

Finally, another written description recorded by Joseph-Francois Lafitau, who lived among the Iroquois from 1712-1718, writes of the "paintings upon human skin":

It is not only an art to do these sorts of paintings on the skins that the savage inherited from their forefathers: there are some who have learnt to do magnificent embroideries on living skin, and to do work that will last as long as they will. The work and technique is the same that some do on leather.... The operation is extremely painful when being done, after the first piercing though, the skin becomes numb, like a weaver who gets so involved in his work, it seems as if one is too concentrated to feel the pain. But after the colour is introduced, the wounds become irritated by the dyes and the skin begins to swell, fever comes next and could last for several days: there is even danger of death if one does not take the proper precautions and wait for the appropriate warm and mild temperatures.¹⁶⁵

While the previous testimonies describing Native body marking clearly allude to positive traits of Native peoples such as stoicism, bravery, and emotional restraint, the ambiguities of their position is evident once again as

¹⁶³ Sagard, *Le grand voyage*, 133-134.

other examples remark at Native body marking customs as bizarre and one plagued with vanity. Bressani writes:

To paint oneself in an in-erasable manner, one must suffer a great deal. They use needles, and other pointed objects and with these instruments they pierce their skin, tracing on their necks, faces, and other parts of their bodies. On the fresh bloody incision, which form the design, they throw on carbon dust or other black substances which mix with the blood and penetrate the wound. The drawing is permanently marked upon the skin. This operation is so dangerous, especially when carried out in cold temperatures. It brings death to many, either by a kind of spasm it invokes, or for other reasons. These people are martyrs of vanity and a bizarre custom.¹⁶⁶

The passages previously quoted not only describe the techniques of tattooing, but also make allusions to the physical pain caused by the procedure. This emphasis on suffering surfaces in almost all of the European testimonies; it is as if the pain element is an integral aspect of the tattooing practice. We must try to understand the nature of this custom by looking at the sensory aspect. The whole premise behind the pain and danger involved in the process brings forth a sensorial aspect foreign to western art. The tactile nature of the procedure is integral to the ceremony itself. I find a phrase written by David Howes appropriate in this context: "The body is man's first and most natural instrument."¹⁶⁷ This elaboration of a body technique, used as a social faculty, is absent in the occidental hierarchy of sensing. The Europeans give quick and un-detailed descriptions of the actual depictions, as the visual is the "sensory specialization" in the West. Rather, they call specific attention to the foreign

¹⁶⁴ Sagard, *Histoire du Canada*, 346-347.

¹⁶⁵ Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages Américains*, 38-39.

¹⁶⁶ Bressani, *Relations abrégée*, 72-73.

¹⁶⁷ David Howes, *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 182.

aspects of this practice, particularly the pain and suffering. This discussion around the sensorial aspect relates to a passage by theorist Walter J. Ong who believes that:

Relationships between the senses must not be taken abstractly but in connection with variations in cultures. It is useful to think of cultures in terms of the organization of the sensorium. By the sensorium we mean the entire sensory apparatus as an operational complex.¹⁶⁸

Immediately evident is the fact that the techniques and the sensorial nature of the custom were deemed an important aspect of the practice. It must be kept in mind that the missionaries' reactions were typically Eurocentric views that marveled at the actions and consequences. Theorist David Howes would probably conclude "they are approaching the culture through 'western eyes' and are unlikely to do justice to the total system of communication taking place."¹⁶⁹

The Jesuits seem to be doing just this, "approaching the culture through western eyes." Perhaps relating their views to existing European practices might be helpful in understanding their position. The missionaries belonged to a tradition that venerated martyrdom and practiced self-flagellation as a means of Christian penance beginning in twelfth century Italy. Perhaps the missionary accounts pertaining to First Nations body marking within New France may have considered the practice an individual gesture of expression rather than a social rite, making it plausible that the missionaries did not deem "the Natives'" motives for their suffering appropriate. Supporting this idea are the words of Bressani,

¹⁶⁸ Ong as quoted by Howes in *Sensory Experience*, 167.

¹⁶⁹ Howes, *Sensory Experience*, 181.

who, in a previous quote saw Native peoples as those who were “martyrs of vanity and a bizarre custom.”¹⁷⁰

Although the Jesuits considered tattooing to be a “vain” and “bizarre” custom, it was not a practice that was totally foreign to them. The tradition of tattooing is ancient in fact, but the word itself more recent. Up until the nineteenth century, words like, “*dessins gravé*”, “*stigmaté*”, “*empreinte*”, “*graphisme*”, “*hiéroglyphe*”, and “*piquage*” were used in French Europe to refer to the practice. The modern word “tattoo” is a simple onomatopoeia derived from a travel log written by Captain James Cook in 1769 from Tahiti where he mentions the word “tattow.”¹⁷¹ At this point in history, explorations frequently brought Europeans into contact with aboriginal peoples who possessed such body markings. Many navigators remarked on the heritage of such body markings among the aboriginal peoples they encountered. Even in Europe, before the disappearance of cultural memory and from an epoch prior to Christianity, tattooing flourished among ancient pagan societies such as the English, Picts, and Scots. It was only with the spread of the Judeo-Christian tradition that body marking became to be seen as transgressive. This is seen in Leviticus 19:28 that states: “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead or tattoo any marks upon you.”¹⁷² In the eighteenth century, despite the disapproval of the church, the age of discovery and exploration reintroduced the tattoo to the European population through the tattooed representations worn by sailors.

¹⁷⁰ Bressani, *Relations abrégée*, 72-73.

¹⁷¹ Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoué*, 43 & 95.

Jean de Léry's description of his difficulty in knowing how to represent "the Native" may allow us to view the European testimonies, written as well as pictorial, in a different light. Writers and artists may not have meant to idealize, misrepresent, or deform the representations, but may have been working in a manner they were accustomed to and a manner in which their audiences back home would have readily understood. Even if the Europeans' intentions were not to misconstrue "the Native", such representations did just that in their falsifications of the First Nations peoples. The major problem facing these early European writers was how to comprehend the New World and its people. As their desire and dread of and for the "other" is evident in the conflicting testimonies written by early European writers, I have tried to shift my intentions while reading the colonial discourse available on Native body marking. In offering the development of the European discourse of "the Native", discussing the ambiguous place the discourse of Native body marking holds within a Jesuit worldview, and by looking at and the push and pull effect of Jesuit intentions that ultimately resulted in the conflicting characterizations of "the other", I tried to shift from the "identification" of the images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the process of "subjectification" in order to better understand the true essence of the writings and illustrations of Native body markings within New France.

¹⁷² Levi-Strauss, "Modern Primitives", *Modern Primitives*, 157.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter three explores the use of body marking in the newly colonized territory under the French Regime. The tattooing practices of the First Nations peoples in New France were quickly appropriated by the French colonizers, thus altering the definitions of the practice. The integration of European explorers and travellers into North American life eventually led to the breakdown of many original Native cultures and practices. With the advent of the traders and missionaries, body marking as well as other Native practices such as dressing habits, hunting patterns, etc. were changed and sometimes even obliterated.¹⁷³

The meeting of Europeans with First Nations resulted in an influence on the customs of each respective group. The French began to appropriate indigenous manners, as the First Nations peoples had to adjust to the arrival of the colonizing force. The adoption of Native tattooing practices by the *coureurs de bois* and the French *voyageurs* may be seen, to a certain degree, as an imitation of a Native practice. Europeans who lived among various First Nations peoples year round began to copy the customs of the peoples with whom they shared a way of life.¹⁷⁴

Following the examples of the First Nations peoples, the French in Canada first began to adorn themselves with tattoos at the beginning of the

¹⁷³ Light, *Tattooing of the Cree Indians*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Other examples of European's sharing Amerindian life patterns would include the tendency of certain groups (specifically the *coureurs de bois*) to chose to live a more nomadic existence like

eighteenth century.¹⁷⁵ The commercial agent Diereville, who spent less than a year in Acadia is probably the first traveller to remark that it was not only the “savages” who had permanent paintings upon their bodies:

A thing of ornament, the savage marks the skin on various parts of the body, including the face; but they show great patience and courage: it takes long to do and there is a lot of suffering. Some French have taken the test, they have become witnesses by undergoing such torment, for I was not curious enough to carry out such a procedure. The vermilion and canon powder are applied to the punctured wounds and the colours are differentiated under the skin in the designs of crosses, Jesus, flowers and anything else they wish, and these marks never erase.¹⁷⁶

It seems that these customs especially had an impact on the *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois* of New France. Testimony to this is made in Pehr Kalm's journal written in 1749. Kalm was a Swedish naturalist who visited America and wrote this passage while in Canada:

The savages paint on their bodies. They all carry different images. They are done so that they last a lifetime. They even paint their faces. Many French, especially the voyageurs, who often travel across Canada for the fur trade, take pleasure in following the example of the savages; the white man never tattoos his face like the savage man, but only other small parts of their bodies like the chest, back, arms and especially their legs. These drawings represent the sun, our Savior on the Cross or other objects of their fancy. The French ordinarily let the savages execute the work as they are the masters of the art...¹⁷⁷

their First Nation counterparts and take part in ritual ceremonies such as chanting and smoking pipes etc.: Scalberg, “Perceptions of Coureur de Bois Religious Life”, 85-86.

¹⁷⁵ Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoué*, 25.

¹⁷⁶ M. Diereville, *Relation du voyage du Port Royal de l'Acadie ou de la Nouvelle France*, (Amsterdam: chez Pierre Humbert, 1710), 175-176.

¹⁷⁷ Peter Kalm, *Voyage de Pehr Kalm au Canada en 1749*, (Montréal: Pierre Tisseyre, 1977), 569.

A testimony making reference to the *coureurs de bois*' tattoo images exists in a passage recorded by Tonti, a *voyageur* and trading post commander, who explained that:

The fur traders often adopt tattooing, covering nearly their entire body with pictures Indian style. Some mixed Christian symbols with Indian, using an image of the Virgin, Christ Child, and a large cross on the stomach.¹⁷⁸

This adoption of Native body marking practices by the *coureurs de bois* and *voyageur* is reiterated in an excerpt taken from Marquis de Montcalm's journal. On October 8, 1758 Montcalm stated:

We found nine hundred and fifty Canadians and this detachment was of a good sort, almost all *voyageurs*. We easily recognized them due to their size and that they all had tattooed their bodies images of some plant or animal. The image was traced by pricking the skin with a needle and printing was done by burning powder in the holes...¹⁷⁹

What may have attracted the Europeans to practice this form of body marking? We must be cautious about the reasoning behind the appropriation of the tattoo by the French Canadians. Adopting Lawrence Grossberg's formulation of cultural influence, we could consider the adoption in either of two ways. The *coureurs de bois* could have been "passively consuming" the Natives' cultural practice or "actively appropriating" it "to give [it] new and original significance."¹⁸⁰ On the one hand, Europeans' appropriation could be seen as a negative exploitation where by they were merely 'stealing' cultural heritage and using it to their advantage. On the other hand, European adoption of the tattoo shows

¹⁷⁸ Scalberg, "Perceptions of Coureur de Bois Religious Life", 85.

¹⁷⁹ Louis Joseph de Montcalm, *Journal du Marquis de Montcalm durant ses campagnes en Canada de 1756 à 1759* (Québec: L. J. Demers et frère, 1895), 465.

positive signs of a genuine cross-cultural interlinkage as a means of bridging a gap between two distinctly different cultures.

There is evidence for diverse readings of appropriation. A negative interpretation might take as proof of the imposition of Christian symbolism on a Native practice. This is obvious in light of the fact that the iconography of artistic repertoire differed as the Europeans tattooed themselves with crosses, the name of Jesus and other Christian symbols obviously absent in the tattoos of the indigenous peoples.¹⁸¹ (Fig. 26) Meanwhile, the techniques the colonizers adopted were identical to those of Native people.

While exploring the dynamics of the fur trade of both the French and Amerindian, more evidence for this first reading came to light as another use of the tattoo emerged. The *Handbook of the North American Indians (North-east)* reproduces a page in the account book of Enert Wendell where a tattoo design appeared on a contract in the early eighteenth century.¹⁸² (Fig. 27) The reproduction of a Native tattoo served as a means of identification on a business contract without the use of letters. In this case, the tattoo was put into the service of capitalism imported from Europe.

A related factor that may have drawn the European to tattooing might be examined through an interpretive framework proposed by Kobena Mercer.

Mercer writes:

¹⁸⁰ Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom", in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 52.

¹⁸¹ Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoué*, 25.

¹⁸² Trigger, ed., *Handbook of the North American Indians (North-east)*, 431; Enert Wendell's book is dated 1706.

Approbation of inter-culturation when these cultural forms are made use of by other social groups, then, in turn, are all incorporated into mainstream culture as commodities for consumption that they [the *coureurs de bois* in this case] would benefit from financially.¹⁸³

Using this idea of economic motivation for the purpose of the appropriation, it is evident that the French were trying to live like the Natives among the First Nations people in order to facilitate commerce with Amerindians for the creation of the fur trade. With close and constant contact between the two cultures, the colonizing Europeans were surely aware of the First Nations peoples' attitude towards kinship and their wanting close ties with their white trading partners. The issue of colonial power includes aspects of both commerce and religion. Therefore, their actions may have been spurred by economic considerations in addition to religious reasons on the part of the church. The *coureurs de bois* embraced elements of Native religion that would facilitate their membership into fur trading societies. "Amerindian society" writes Olive P. Dickason, "with its stress on kinship, much preferred close a relationship as a basis for trading alliances."¹⁸⁴ Body marking was used not only as a way to create a sense of kinship, but may also have been employed to appease the Amerindians, as the "French were so concerned about maintaining the trade that they were in greater fear of offending the Amerindians than the Amerindians were of offending the French."¹⁸⁵ As Montcalm stated in his diary: "We wouldn't

¹⁸³ Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair / Style Politics", in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992), 258.

¹⁸⁴ Dickason, "Emergency of the Metis", 24.

¹⁸⁵ Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 105.

pass for men with the savages in the Higher lands if we didn't possess body markings."¹⁸⁶

Using the tattoo to establish a sense of kinship in order to make the Amerindian feel comfortable with them had the ultimate goal of greater financial gain through ease of trade. Certainly it could be argued that this kinship never extended to a genuine identification because the Europeans did not permit their hands and faces to be tattooed which are the major sites of subjectivity. Looking back to Kalm's passage, it not only states that the practice was mainly carried out by the *voyageurs*, but it also gives us an idea of how the Europeans viewed this practice. Europeans who were tattooed in New France restricted the designs to less conspicuous parts of the body (such as the legs, chest, back, and arms) that could easily be covered by clothing. We might assume that the Europeans saw the tattooing as a purely Native tradition that would be deemed unacceptable to European society, and thus depictions on the face would be much too blatant as facial skin is the most obvious, cannot be hidden and is value laden as the face and hands are key sites of identity and subjectivity. Within the contemporary understanding of the tattoo, the area that the markings were deliberately omitted from by the French, usually above the neck and below the wrist, is referred to as "public skin."¹⁸⁷ Therefore, the tattoo recipient's body location choice reveals much about their attitudes and acceptance of this Amerindian practice

¹⁸⁶ Montcalm, *Journal*, 465.

¹⁸⁷ Clinton R. Sanders, *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 78.

There is also support for a second reading that looks at the appropriation of Native tattooing by the Europeans in a more favourable light. It could be argued that the French were actively appropriating the body marking practices, reinterpreting them to depict Christian symbols. "As cultural forms are continuously reconstructed" this "enables people to interpret these practices so that they can be taken up and experienced on a personal level."¹⁸⁸ The Europeans used spiritual symbols from their own religion, and although the religions of these two distinct cultures were not the same, the idea of the tattoo as a sacred sign holding magical powers may well have held the same significance. The signs and symbols used by both groups seem to fulfill fetishistic needs; whether the depiction is that of the cross, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or supernatural animal images representing *manitos*, they all held the same function of empowering the bearer with a sense of protection. It was, however, the material and social aspects of Native life that the French adopted, more than the spiritual values. This being stated, the fact that the *coureurs de bois* incorporated symbols from their own religious background could be read as especially positive for the depictions probably held significant meaning to their bearer and it was not a practice adopted as mere imitation of a Native tradition.

Since Native spiritual values were not as widely adopted by the French as were social values, it is difficult to discern what Native rituals did attract the participation of the *coureurs de bois*. Few descriptions are available and none make reference to the tattooing custom. Many written sources state that the *coureurs de bois'* association with the Natives of New France seems to have

¹⁸⁸ Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?", 52.

involved ritual ceremonies.¹⁸⁹ In Chapter 1, it was seen that ritual ceremonies often accompanied the body marking of individuals within certain tribes, particularly in association with war. The participation of the *coureurs de bois* in such rituals reveals something of the Native perspective. The mere participation in a purely Native tradition suggests that indigenous people of New France accepted and included the *coureurs de bois* into their culture. Perhaps, the mingling of these two cultural groups did create a sense of kinship between the two groups acting as a means of identification. There is much evidence in recent research of the intermarriages between the *coureurs de bois* and Native women who raised families and obviously had strong emotional ties to the Native culture.¹⁹⁰ Montcalm's statement revealing the necessity of the European to bear a tattoo in order to pass for men with the Amerindians, opens up a more positive interpretation of European appropriative practices than that of economic benefit. It may be that this whole process was not so much a borrowing of Native belief as it was a means of bridging a gap between two distinctly different cultures. If this is true, the adoption becomes a much more positive act and we might look again to Kobena Mercer and see where the "logic of style manifested across cultural surfaces of everyday life, reinforced the terms of shared experiences and thus a sense of solidarity and belonging."¹⁹¹ The early French colonists learned

¹⁸⁹ Some sources that mention the participation of the *coureurs de bois* in the rituals of the First Nations peoples include: Axtell, *After Columbus*; Axtell, *Beyond 1492*; Axtell, *The European and the Indian*; Jaenen, *Friend and Foe*; Scalberg, "Perceptions of Coureur de Bois Religious Life"; Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers*.

¹⁹⁰ Examples include Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 169-173; J. B. Brebner, "Subsidized intermarriage with the Indians", *Canadian Historical Review* 6, 1 (1925), 33-36; many missionary reports also give historical evidence of intermarriage, such as: Thwaites, ed., *Jesuit Relations*; Charlevoix, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*.

¹⁹¹ Mercer, "Black Hair / Style Politics", 257.

to use canoes, toboggans, and snowshoes; they dressed in moccasins and buckskins; they learned how to ice-fish and portage; they acquired new foods and ways of preserving and preparing them; they travelled along Native water routes and forest trails, relying on Native guides and maps.¹⁹² Was this knowledge mere appropriation by a force that remained fundamentally unchanged, or might it have significantly affected the *coureurs de bois*' own patterns of self-conceptualization? Was this adoption spurred by the basic question of *coureurs de bois* survival?

Even though they were from separate cultures, the *coureurs de bois* aligned themselves more closely with the Eastern Woodland tribes than they did with the Government or the Church.¹⁹³ It was a wiser alliance in terms of survival. The *coureurs de bois* might have used the tattoo as a liberating symbol. Throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, colonial authorities and missionaries characterized the fugitive voyageur as a man "without religion", who "never speaks of God", a "libertine who acknowledges no superior, no judge, no law, no police, and no subordination."¹⁹⁴ In other words, the authorities believed the fur traders had a tendency to become "savages and vagabonds." The colonizing powers, the Government and the Church, eventually stepped in as the *coureurs de bois* were becoming so numerous that the governors applied laws to limit their activities. The administrators and the clergy had a common goal: to force the *coureurs de bois* into becoming sedentary and to raise stable,

¹⁹² Martin, ed., *The American Indian*, 65.

¹⁹³ Scalberg, "Perceptions of Coureur de Bois Religious Life", 82.

¹⁹⁴ NAC, MG1, série C11A, Vol. 22, folios 362-364, Memoire à Pontchartrain, 12 Dec., 1705.

virtuous Catholic families.¹⁹⁵ Le Petit characterized the French living among First Nations peoples as “frivolous and dissolute.”¹⁹⁶ The missionaries thought the *coureurs de bois* were rejecting Catholicism and did not accept their adoption of Native customs: “No civilized person in possession of his faculties or free from undue restraint would choose to become an Indian.”¹⁹⁷ The *coureurs de bois* opposed sedentary life and chose to live a more nomadic existence. This caused great opposition among the colonizers; there was a split between those who chose to cultivate their new homeland, embracing the new territory, and the *coureurs de bois* who (to the Government and the Church) showed civil disobedience.

Body marking within Western society had come to be viewed as a somewhat transgressive practice, as already demonstrated in Chapter 2. As the *coureurs de bois* became immersed in the fur trade of New France, where they were often located in remote areas of the expanding colony, it is possible that they felt their position held no limitations in their having tattoos. Free from the constraints of European society, this act might also be viewed as a liberating gesture.

What can be concluded about the appropriation or adoption by the *coureurs de bois* of Native body marking practices? The true intentions of these men can never be known, and certainly these intentions were not universal, but varied from person to person. The *coureurs de bois* were most likely torn, just as the Jesuits were torn. In one sense, Amerindians held a powerful position in

¹⁹⁵ Scalberg, “Perceptions of Coureur de Bois Religious Life”, 87.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

relation to the *coureurs de bois*. According to Daniel Scalberg, Native people did not deplore the lifestyle and values of the *coureurs de bois*.¹⁹⁸ The *coureurs de bois* made no attempt to destroy the wilderness, because their way life required its preservation. They merely established depots at remote points to collect the local products and make them ready for the return journey to Montréal. Moreover, they were always a minority among the First Nations peoples and dependent on them to a large degree; in their own self-interest, they dared not behave in a manner too offensive to their Native partners.¹⁹⁹ Tattooing in the New World became a mark of stigmatization, when the French Government and the Church identified the *coureurs de bois* bearing tattoos as deserters. To use Kobena Mercer's terminology, tattooing functioned as an "ethnic signifier."²⁰⁰ A marker, in this case, highlighting the European *coureur de bois* who aligned themselves with a Native ethnicity.

Missionaries and Christian beliefs were responsible for the phasing out of tattooing, partly as a reaction against the *coureurs de bois*. The decline of the tattoo among Native tribes probably coincided with the increase of Native conversion to Catholicism. The effectiveness of the missionaries stemmed at least in part from the fact that, traditionally among Amerindians, the most highly respected leaders were also shamans. Their identification of the centrality of religion in Native leadership and their enlistment of these sentiments in their

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 82.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Mercer, "Black Hair / Style Politics", 250.

favour were major factors in the success of the French in their Amerindian alliances. Despite the ritualistic aspects still present in Native life, the Judeo-Christian belief system that regarded tattooing as transgressive probably had much to do with the disappearance of the art form. Due in part to its biblical proscription, body decoration had come to be taken in Western societies to be a sign of deviance, marginality and perversion. The active campaign of the missionaries against body marking had its effects, especially among converts. The clergy thought the practice was inspired by the Devil; body painting represented a refusal by man to be a reflection of the divine image.²⁰¹

The definitions related to the body marking within New France changed dramatically. The original significance of the practice, imbued with the traditions and cultures of the First Nations peoples, was quickly appropriated, altered and abandoned. In this context, John Verelst's 1710 portrait of Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow is of special interest because he was one of the last Mohawk chiefs to be tattooed, thus making it possibly among the last images of Eastern Woodland Native tattoo design before the demise of the practice among these Natives.

Along with the missionaries' and Christian's aim to eliminate Native body marking practices in New France there was, simultaneously, the growth in use of branding and tattooing within a European framework of degeneracy, deviance, and crime. Body marking became a form of punishment — a marker of crime in New France. The function of this imprint was to pronounce the fugitive as a criminal in the eyes of the justice system. A permanent symbol was made with a

²⁰¹ Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*, 94-95.

hot iron in the form of a fleur de lys, which was branded on criminals as punishment. It was called a *fletrissure*.²⁰² (Fig. 28) The *fletrissure* was an obligatory mark inflicted on the skin of the delinquent. It was an indelible signifier, easily visible to all. The branding itself served as a punishment as the process was extremely painful, while the physical mark provided a permanent souvenir of the crime. It was a simple measure for social security, a definite way of recognizing unlawful actions. The mark was originally inflicted upon the forehead but towards the end of the seventeenth century the infliction was moved to the right shoulder.²⁰³ There are many accounts of this treatment until a Legislative Act in Upper Canada abolished it in 1802, with the exception of its use for involuntary manslaughter. In Lower Canada, a mark was inflicted upon the hand up until 1835.²⁰⁴ After the conquest in 1759, the British Army also employed a branding imposed to deserters. Until 1871, a tattoo of the letter “D” made with a copper instrument was forced upon any deserter of the army.²⁰⁵ (Fig. 29)

The use of body markings as a stigmatization was not new to New France. Other societies and cultures around the world used body marking techniques to act as signifiers. Examples might include the marking of the body as a mark of membership executed at the time of admission to a secret society and some of these societies, like the Duk Duk of New Guinea and Melanesia, were

²⁰² Scott Claver, *Under the Lash: A History of Corporal Punishment in the British Armed Forces* (London: Torchstream Books, 1954), 179.

²⁰³ Raymond Boyer, *Les crimes et les chatiments au Canada Français du XVIIe et XXe siècle* (Montréal: Le Cercle de Livre de France, 1966), 164.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁰⁵ Claver, *Under the Lash*, 226.

considered anti-social tyrannical organizations.²⁰⁶ The nature of the secret society and its use of the tattoo, illustrates an anti-social use of tattooing. During the days of native rule in Burma, an offender was tattooed on the forehead with the name of his crime in blue. Under the authority of Burmese kings incorrigible offenders were tattooed on the cheek with a circle, or perhaps they were marked across the chest with the title of the offence.²⁰⁷ There has been a practice of tattooing criminals in France, England, Russia, and in China where the criminal was tattooed on the left temple with an account of his crime. Therefore the use of tattooing as a means of preserving order is not seen for the first time in New France, but rather had a long European tradition. Body marking in association with crime evolved even further in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries where tattooing became seen by some as an act belonging to latent criminals. Here is the Austrian modernist Adolf Loos, from a 1908 essay entitled “Ornament and Crime”:

The Papuan tattoos his skin, his boat, his oars, in short everything he can get his hands on. He is no criminal or degenerate. There are prisons in which 80% of the prisoners are tattooed. Tattooed men who are not behind bars are either latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats. If someone who is tattooed dies in freedom, then he does so a few years before he would have committed murder.²⁰⁸

This cross-cultural comparison draws attention to the perceived difference between tattooing in Europe and other cultures. Loos’ disapproval would extend more towards the *coureurs de bois* in New France who adopted Native body marking practices than it would to the First Nations peoples within New France.

²⁰⁶ Hambly, *History of Tattooing*, 225.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

²⁰⁸ Rubin, *Marks of Civilization*, 96.

Within New France, it was primarily the *coureurs de bois* who were seen as “disobedient” in their split with their European counterparts, and European soldiers within the army tradition who were branded. The tattoo as stigmatization and punishment in New France might therefore be seen as a practice confined to the colonizers who made their home in the New World. In doing so, the use of the body markings as signs of criminality, in a sense, became signifiers confined to European cultures whose poignancy was carried into future centuries, without having invaded or tainted the associations made by European societies in regards to Native body marking practices.

With the changing demographics of Canada during the French Regime (1608-1763) and this new use of the tattoo enforced by the government and clergy, it is not surprising that the practice became almost obsolete. This should not be taken to mean that there was an instant abandonment of Native body marking, or that aboriginal life was totally transformed within a generation or so. It is possible that the transcendental, sacred, and secular significance of the tattoo and body painting as used by the First Nations peoples in New France was gradually conflated with the secular power that colonized their homeland. We must keep in mind that just as Europeans benefited from Amerindian technology (toggling, harpoons, moccasins, maize), so did the Amerindians from that of Europeans. In both cases, adaptations were selective and within established cultural patterns.²⁰⁹ It is only in the twentieth century that the tattoo saw a dramatic resurgence. North American and European culture has successfully

taken the tribal art form of the tattoo from cultures it objectified and modified it to fit its own needs. Like many objects of Western material culture, meaning of the tattoo was altered during the act of colonization and war, demonstrating that there is a correspondence between changing social and economic realities and the meaning assigned to body marking.

²⁰⁹ Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 110 & 179.

CONCLUSION

When dealing with the meeting of disparate Native civilizations, I have described various theories without attempting to nail down the “truth.” It is my belief that we cannot impose our own universals on the data and present them as factual, as so much of Canada’s early history remains to be discovered.

Like most people, Europeans tended to conceive of the ‘new’ in terms of the ‘old’, to classify novelties according to conventional wisdom. Most European’s in New France, therefore, began to cope with the newness of “the Natives” by putting them in constructs determined by ancient precedent and proximate experience. This had the added advantage of helping the homebound readers of their New World narratives to learn by comparison with the known and the familiar.

“The Natives”, to the people in France, were thought to possess all the traits that the explorers, travellers, missionaries and colonists had claimed for them in their writings. At least the French, and Europeans generally, accepted this version of their character, which continued until the scientific re-examination of Native culture in the nineteenth century.

The primary source materials of New France, in particular the *Jesuit Relations*, contain conflicting images of the Native people. In reality the Jesuit reporters were two men in one: humanist and priest. Consequently, they had an ambivalent view of the First Nations peoples. As humanists, classically educated, they believed them to be the Romans of the Republic, the Christians of

biblical times. As priests, who had crossed an ocean to Christianize a continent, they saw only depraved “pagans” in Satan’s grasp.²¹⁰ The religious men of the seventeenth century had seen “the Natives” as an end in themselves, souls to be saved for their own sakes, and only secondarily for European’s own spiritual benefit and for the triumph of the church.²¹¹

When the Counter Reformation stood on the defensive, Jesuits lost strict control of the discourse of “the Native” to the enemies of their church. The *philosophes* and their forerunners did not regard “the Natives” primarily as an end in themselves but rather as a weapon for the benefit of natural men in their struggle against the enemies of rational reform. The Jesuits, conscious of the menaces to orthodoxy, desired to refute atheists and deists by establishing the universality of divine revelation. Influenced by the Enlightenment, the Jesuits of the eighteenth century (particularly Lafitau and Charlevoix) went out of their way to note favourable aspects of Native life.²¹²

In order for the Native peoples’ past to be realistically portrayed, detailed knowledge of their beliefs and customs is essential but may prove to be impossible. For those who have left little or nothing in the way of written records, recognition must be made of their surviving oral history. A more objective understanding must be based on detailed insights into the social, political, and economic relations, as well as acknowledging the differing cultural values that

²¹⁰ Ibid., 100.

²¹¹ Conclusion drawn primarily from: Smith, “*Le Sauvage*”.

governed the reciprocal interactions between specific groups of Native peoples and European settlers.

What type of conclusions can be made on the discourse surrounding body markings and the culture surrounding them within New France given the documentation available in these areas of study? In New France the practice was probably universal among the First Nations peoples. The symbols employed by these peoples were primarily representations of flora and fauna including snakes, turtles, birds, flowers and leaves, as well as other natural elements like the sun, and the moon. Along with such representational depictions were abstract markings. It is more difficult to discern the semiotic significance behind the markings than it is in other cultures like the Denes of Western Canada whose totemic beliefs are more thoroughly documented and reliable. In examining other cultures from around the world, North America, and from a select few accounts pertaining to Woodland Natives, ideas as to the cultural significance of these body markings emerge.

The missionaries, who wrote of the prevalence of the designs found on “Native” bodies could not comprehend the true significance of the practice, and they questioned why Native peoples went through such torment in the execution of such markings. The ambiguity of the missionaries’ position affected their reactions to body marking, adding to the mystery that already surrounded Native customs. The Europeans were faced with the difficult task of representing a culture and peoples they did not fully comprehend. By tracing the development

²¹² Ibid.

of the European discourse of “the Native” and by considering the push and pull effect of the Jesuit intentions, it is possible to understand, to a certain degree, the essence of the European writings and drawings pertaining to Native body marking. Successively the *coureurs de bois* and the *voyageurs* adopted the custom. As to the terms of their appropriation, we can speculate upon either positive or negative readings.

What became of this Native custom that has been documented in the first two centuries of the colony? Is it not surprising that, after the conquest, no documents have been found which make reference to the survival of this art? What factors attributed to the abandonment of Native body marking within New France? The dynamics that took place among the colonizing peoples within New France was a contributing factor in the demise of the practice. Within the social context of New France, the *coureurs de bois* were seen as deserters of a civilization by the colonizing forces. Body marking was deemed unacceptable to the Christian church (missionaries) and became a stigmatization (in the eyes of the government) signifying of deserters of the colony. These two colonizing powers are in some part responsible for the phasing out of tattooing, partly as a reaction against the *coureurs de bois*. The disappearance of Native tattooing is no doubt the effect of sedentarianism, which saw Native peoples as well as the *coureurs de bois* lose their way of life. Native body marking in New France may be described as an eroding practice due to its confines within a conquering culture. The form of body marking as a corporal punishment in the form of branding, which was present in New France, lasted into the nineteenth century.

Finally, as a practice transported from Europe, tattooing was used as a mark inflicted upon lawbreakers within the army tradition.

It is a point of some irony that just as Europeans succeeded in suppressing body marking practices within New France, the expansion of global colonialism led to renewed European contact with aboriginal body marking traditions in newly explored regions of the world. Despite a strong tradition of Judeo-Christian disapprobation, many Europeans transgressed the biblical and cultural proscription, and tattooing saw a resurgence in the West through travellers. From the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, body marking was the purview of sailors, soldiers and adventurers — by definition the unrooted. Through this association, tattooing became a manifestation of anti-social sentiment in the industrialized West, as it had been in New France. If the tattooed *coureurs de bois* were represented as deserters, so too have tattooed individuals of the twentieth century been seen as unrooted within modern society (including prisoners in concentration camps).

Twentieth-century tattoo culture embraced this link with its own heritage, but only through ethnic and cultural stereotyping, as images of Native peoples who originally bore and developed tattoos, re-emerged during the 1960s and 1970s as fetishistic symbols of liberty in contemporary tattoo representations (Figs. 30-32). While Native peoples in Canada were attempting to transform official Indian policy in order to secure autonomy and self-determination in the

face of Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau's infamous White Paper,²¹³ tattoo parlors were using stereotypical images of the "Wild West Indian" in feathers and buckskins as a liberating and positive symbol.

There is an intriguing, if distorted, parallel here between the disaffected 'counter culture' movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the *coureurs de bois* of the eighteenth century. For both, the tattoo acted as a symbol of freedom, detaching the bearer from society's centre forces. The liberating symbol's aim was to provoke change, however inexplicably, in an external world of the social. Yet there is a judgmental difference between the two cases, for while the *coureurs de bois* adopted aboriginal cultural technique, bearers of twentieth-century Indian tattoos adopted a cultural stereotype. In the attempt to free up a creative part within themselves — to tap into some fundamental aspect of their essence — the bearers of such tattoos 'essentialized' the aboriginal peoples of North America through the perpetuation of a romanticized and unrealistic image. The repeated use of such a representation may reveal a profound need on the part of non-Natives to connect to North America by association with one of its most enduring symbols, the 'Imaginary Indian.'²¹⁴

Events since 1969 have transformed official Indian policy in Canada. Native peoples proved that they too could break up the country. If this is what it took — confrontation, roadblocks, constitutional impasse, threats of secession — Natives proved as adept at it as any White politician.²¹⁵ Native peoples now

²¹³ Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian In Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), 223.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

have unprecedented political power. Their representatives sit with the Prime Minister and the provincial premiers. Aboriginals are now recognized as one of the founding peoples of Canada. All of this came about because Native peoples refused to live within the stereotypes White people fashioned for them. With the change in consciousness, the stereotypical image of “the Native” is now largely disappearing from the contemporary tattoo repertoire.

Despite the changing figural repertoire, the tattoo is more prevalent than ever. In our modern cities, we are seeing the popularization of an age-old tradition being projected as a new, highly personal art form. Gaining social acceptance, in most Western cultures,²¹⁶ in the late 1990s, the tattoo has made its way onto fashion show runways, is seen frequently in fashion magazines, and ‘stick-on’ replicas are sold everywhere from corner stores to main department stores. This being true, as a new millennium begins, the tattoo does not seem to function as a mark of otherness but rather as a socially accepted fashion statement.

In a purposefully contradictory conjunction, these late twentieth and early twenty-first-century tattooing practices have been referred to as “modern Primitivism.”²¹⁷ Rejecting the pejorative and romantic cast of nineteenth-century usage of the term, proponents of a fully modern “primitivism” propose the tattoo as an un-romanticized marriage of contemporary life and technologies, and

²¹⁶ It must be noted that among the Jewish population, the tattoo has not achieved full social acceptance as it remains a “sign” of the Holocaust.

aboriginal historical tradition of liberty, spirituality, and power. This thesis has been an attempt to elaborate and assess the terms in which a specific aspect of that history — body marking — has been written. By analyzing the discourse of early modern Europeans in reaction to this specific form of “primitivism” it is possible to trace the mutual historical implications of European and aboriginal cultures.

²¹⁷ Re/Search, *Modern Primitives*.

FIGURES

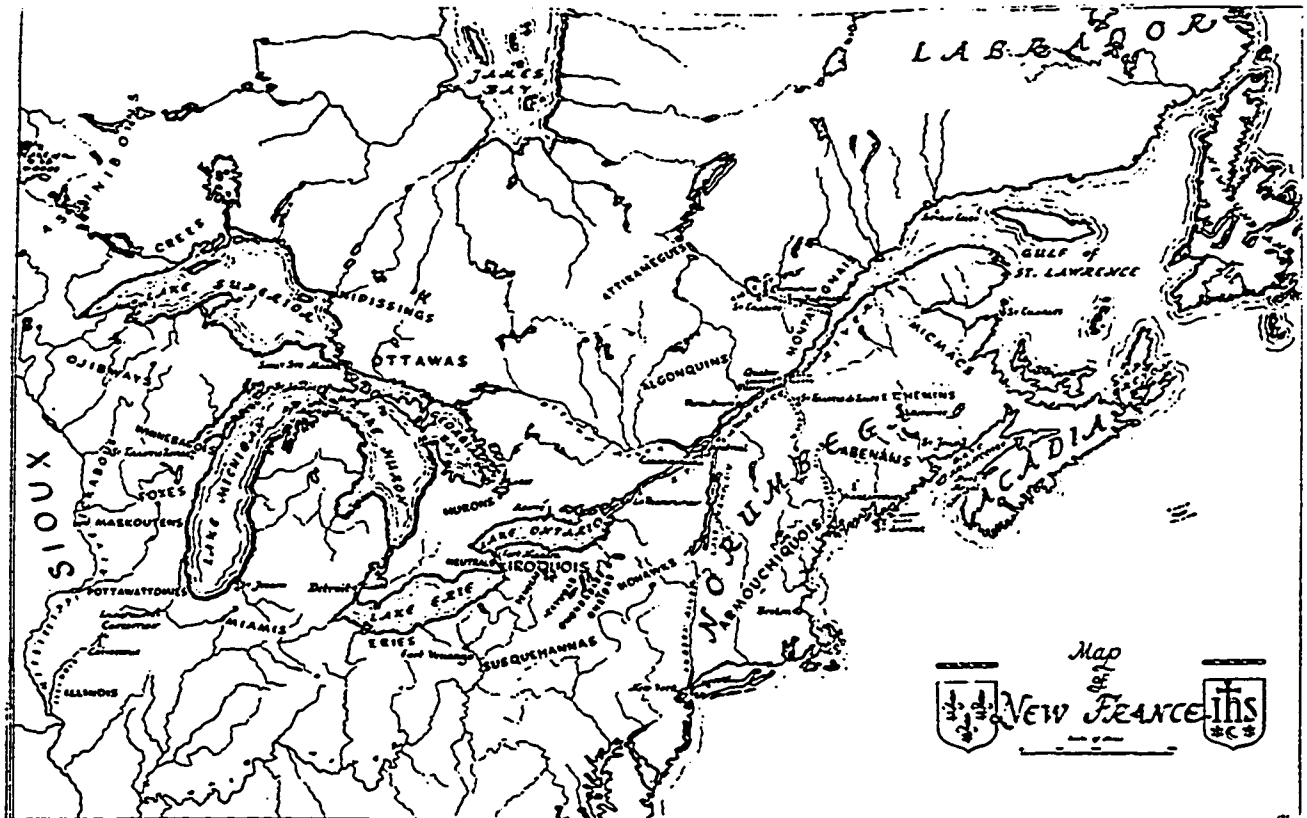


FIG. 1 Map of New France. Image taken from Kennedy, *Jesuit and Savage in New France*, (Hamden: Archon Books, 1971).



FIG. 2 Example of First Nations tattooing drawing on Christian symbols as means of decoration. Image taken from Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur, *“Encyclopedie des voyages contenant l’abrege des moeurs, usages, habitudes domestiques, religions, fêtes, supplices, funerailles, sciences, arts, et commerce de tous les peuples”*, Tome. 2 (Paris: chez Deroy, 1796), 7.

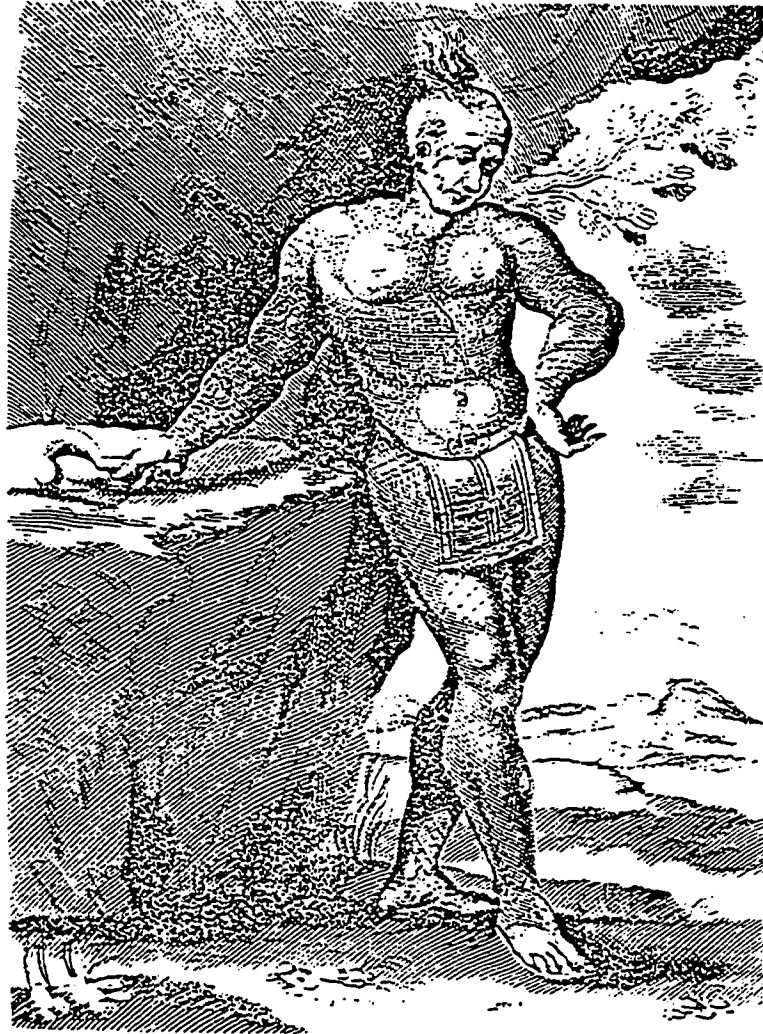


FIG. 3 Engraving depicting First Nation Native of New France in Jesuit François Du Creux's publication, *Historiae Canadiensis* (1664). Image taken from François Marc Gagnon and Nicole Cloutier, *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle France*, Tome II (Québec: Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, 1976), 78.



FIG. 4 Engraving depicting First Nation Native of New France in Jesuit François Du Creux's publication, *Historiae Canadiensis* (1664). Image taken from Gagnon and Cloutier, *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle France*, 88.

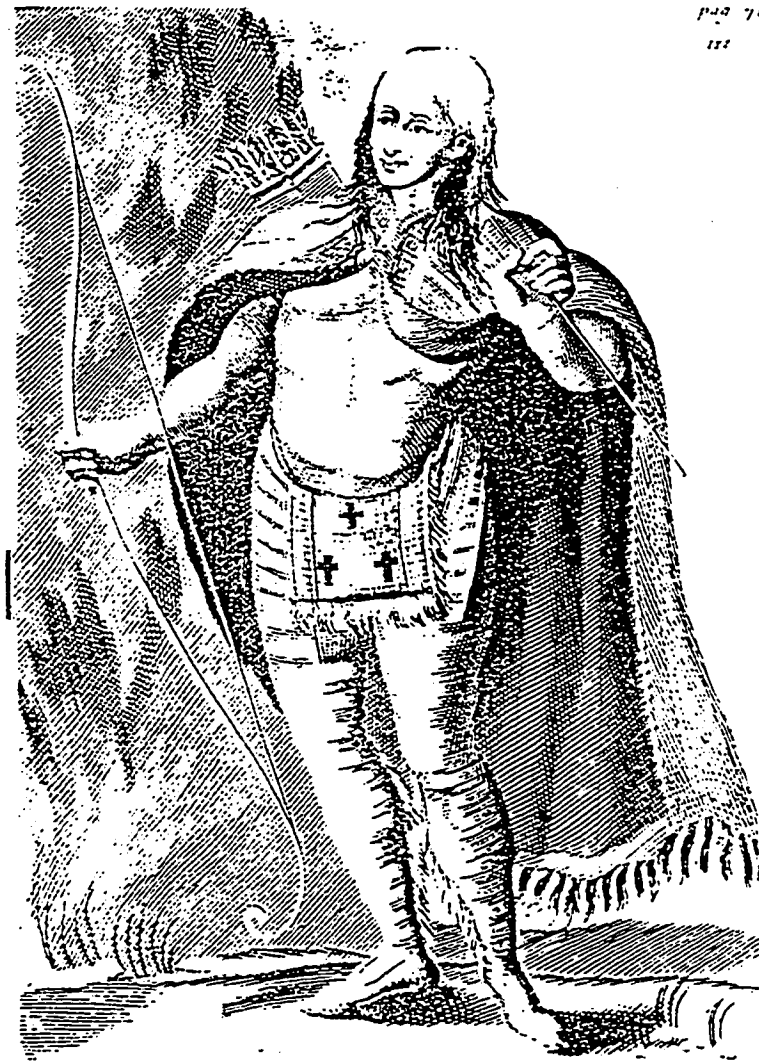


FIG. 5 Engraving depicting First Nation Native of New France in Jesuit François Du Creux's publication, *Historiae Canadiensis* (1664). Image taken from Gagnon and Cloutier, *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle France*, 82.

Roy de La grande Nation ^{p. 8}
des Nadoussiouek, *est armé. 12. de sa Ma. prie. de quince*
qu'on nomme. pazumagan. Il Regne. dans un grand Païs.
au d. fl. de la mes. 7. mil.



FIG. 6 Representation of First Nation Native of New France as depicted in the *Codex Canadensis* (1701). Image taken from Gagnon and Cloutier, *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle France*, 79.

Portrait d'un homme de la
Nation des Noupiming-dach¹³ = Timonok.

oua Racouathache deguira



FIG. 7 Representation of First Nation Native of New France as depicted in the *Codex Canadensis* (1701). Image taken from Gagnon and Cloutier, *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle France*, 89.

*Le Sauvage hyroquois de la
Nation de gandawoufuktagu la virginie.*



*attouguwa ache de
quere*

*Ce jeune homme a fait Enma. Les sauu. son l'espay
de quere se faisant arracher des ongles. Les peul le l'ont de
noy pas se commodes qui le menent comme l'atriphes
le ...*

FIG. 8 Representation of First Nation Native of New France as depicted in the *Codex Canadensis* (1701). Image taken from Gagnon and Cloutier, *Premiers peintres de la Nouvelle France*, 83.



FIG. 9 Representation of First Nation Native of New France as depicted in the *Codex Canadensis* (1701). Image taken from Olive P. Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984).



FIG. 10 Example of Native American Tattoo design. Image taken from Philippe Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoué* (Montreal: Jean Basile, 1980), 33.



Fig. 11 Drawing of a northeastern Indian warrior (possibly Huron), by Jesuit Missionary Francesco Guiseppe Bressani in from *Novae Franciae accurata delineatio* (1657). Image taken from James Axtell, *Beyond 1492* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 141.



FIG. 12 Seventeenth-century representation of Natives from New France as depicted by Joannis De Laet, *Americae utriusque Descriptio* (1633). Tattoo designs are visible on the central figure. Image taken from Patricia Olive Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1992), 125.

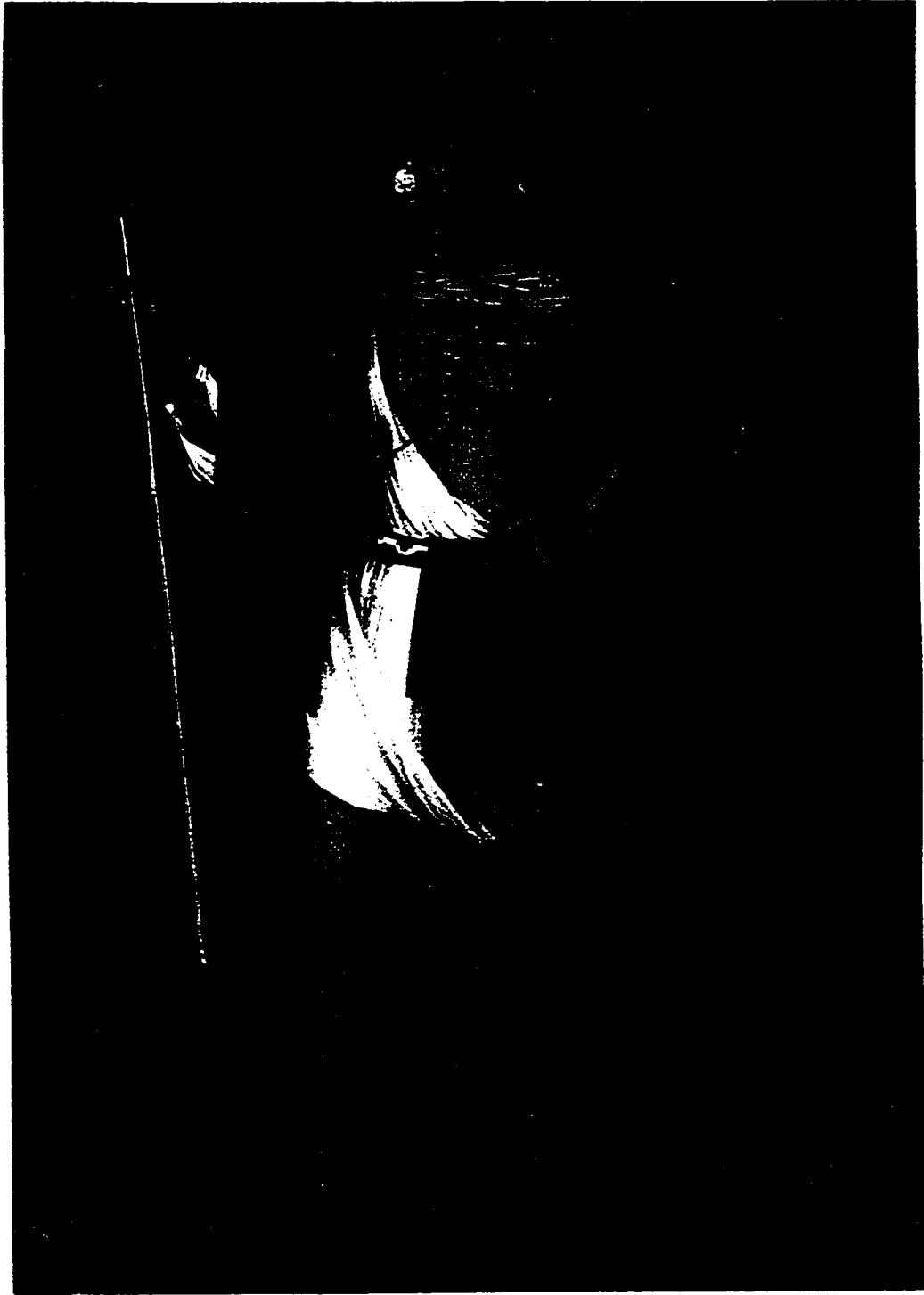


FIG. 13 Jan Verelst, Sa Ga Yeath Qua Pieth Tow, 1710 (c-92418). Photo from the Public Archives of Canada, Art and Photography Division, Ottawa.

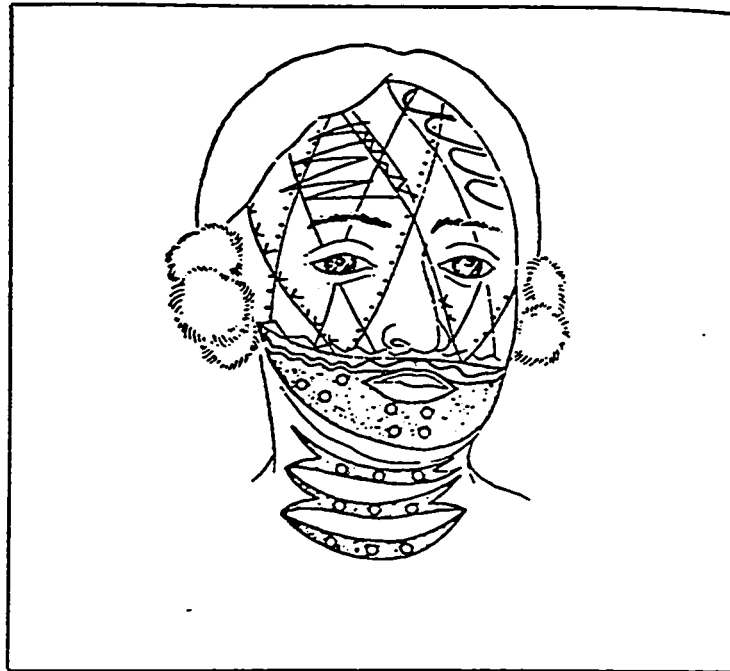


FIG. 14 Detail of figure 13.



FIG. 15 Late eighteenth-century illustration of a Ottawa Native. Image taken from Olive P. Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*.



FIG. 16 Eighteenth-century Iroquois warrior engraved by J. Laroque after Jacques Grasset St. Sauveur. Image taken from Olive P. Dickason, *Myth of the Savage*.

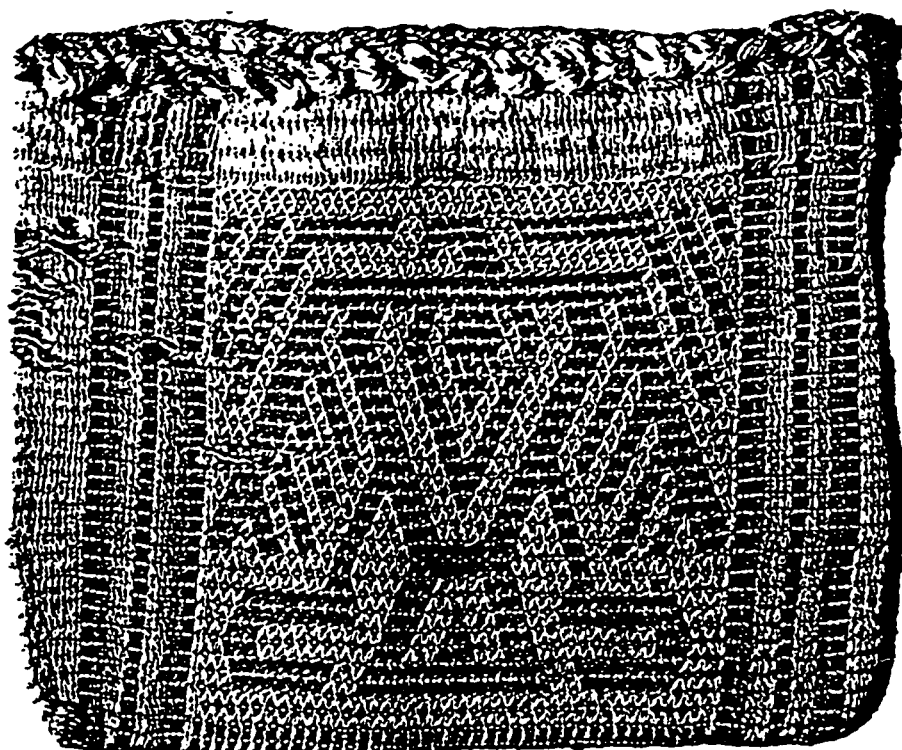
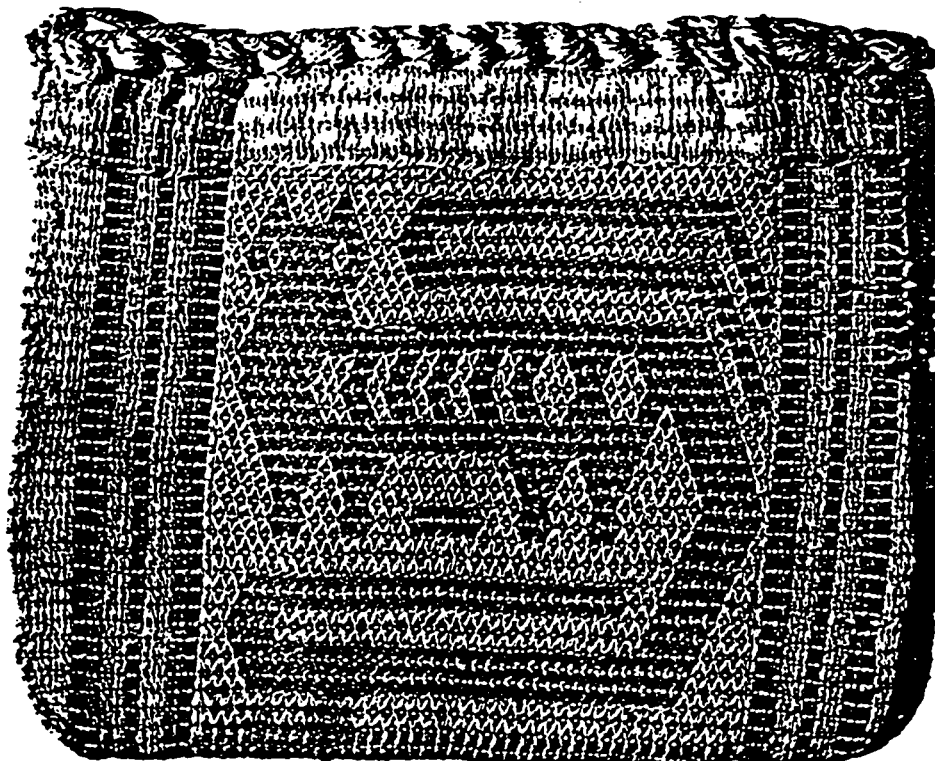


FIG. 17 (recto & verso) *Woven Bag*, Central Great Lakes, collected between 1800-1809. Image taken from Ruth B. Phillips, *Patterns of Power* (Kleinburg: The McMichael Canadian Collection, 1984), 62.

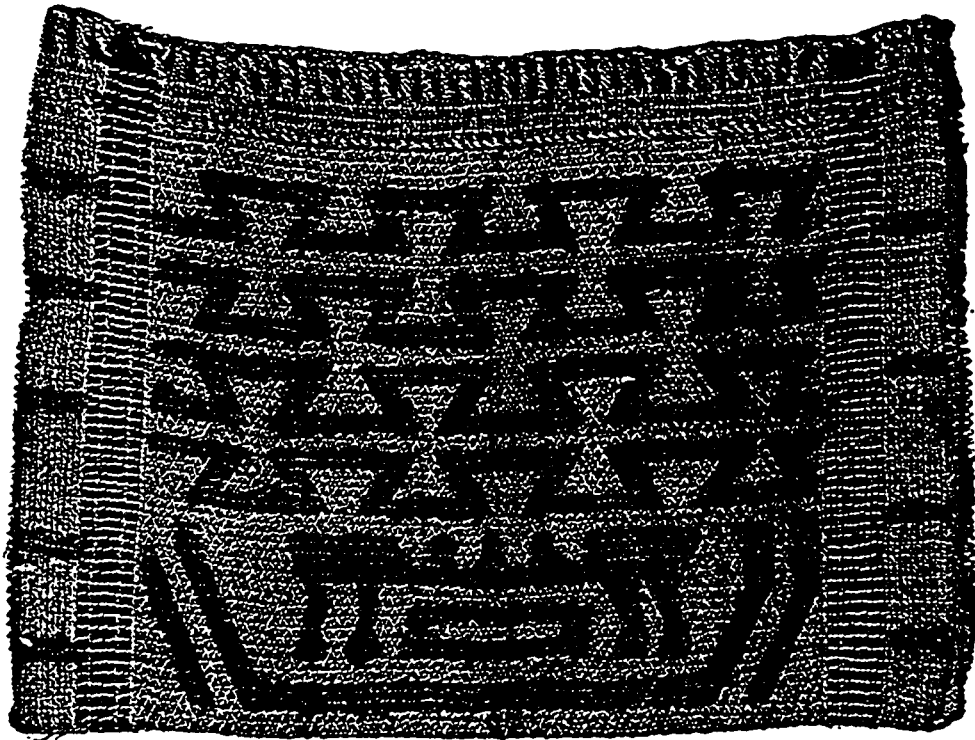


FIG. 18 (recto & verso) *Woven Bag*, Central Great Lakes, collected between 1800-1809. Image taken from Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 64.



FIG.19 (recto & verso) *Woven Bag*, Central Great Lakes, collected between 1800-1809. Image taken from Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 66.

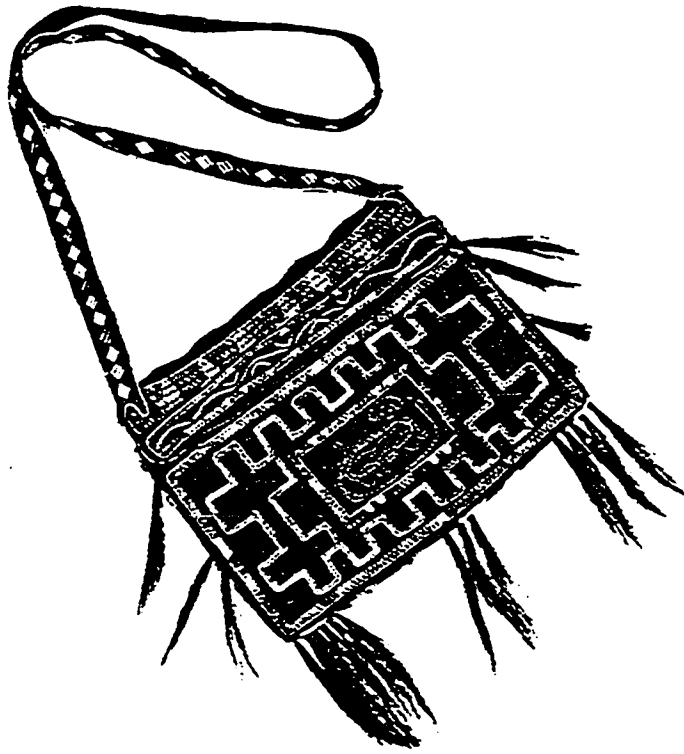


FIG. 20 *Pouch*, Eastern Great Lakes, c. 1800. Image taken from Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 78.

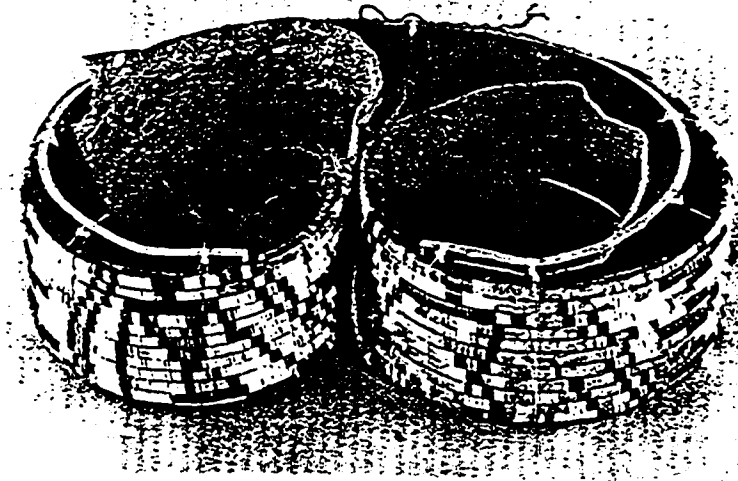


FIG. 21 *Belt*, Western Great Lakes, collected between 1800-1809. Image taken from Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 70.

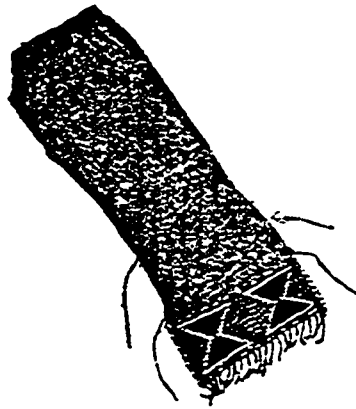


FIG. 22 *Pouch*, Winnebago, late eighteenth century. Image taken from Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 77.

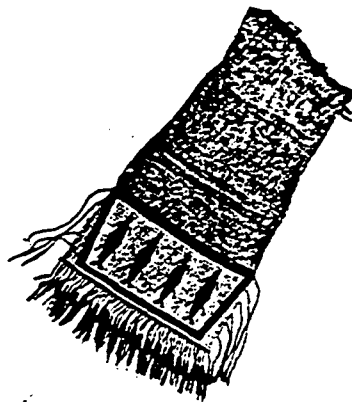


FIG. 23 *Pouch*, Eastern Ojibwa?, c. 1780. Image taken from Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 77.

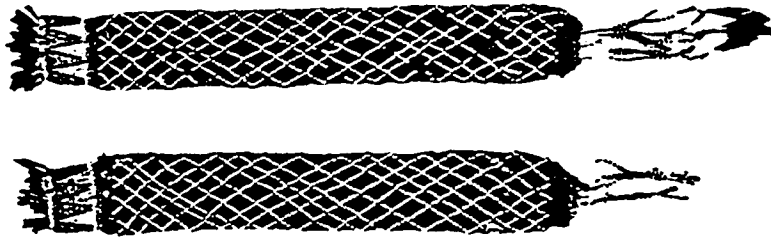


FIG. 24 *Garter Pendants*, Western Great Lakes, before 1800. Image taken from Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 75.

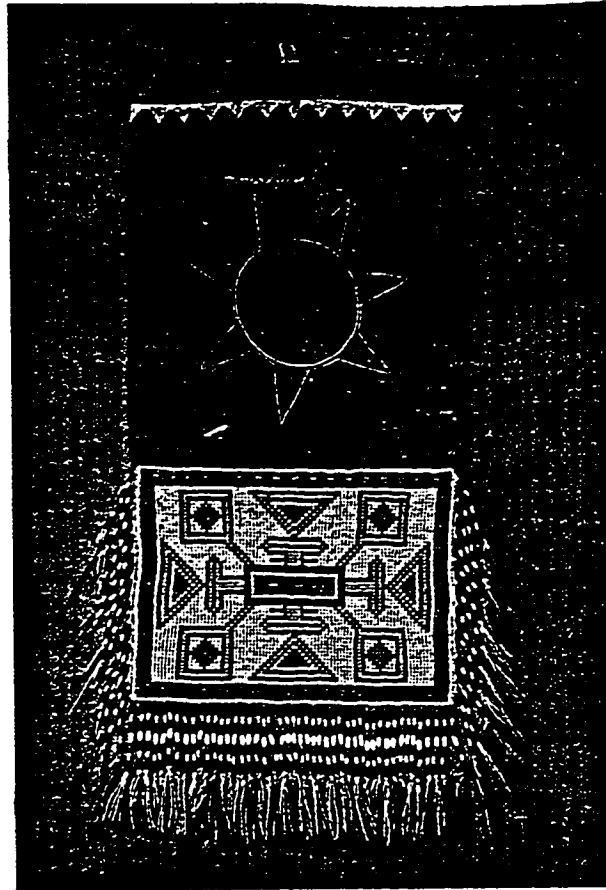


FIG. 25 *Pouch*, Cree or Metis, collected between 1800-1809. Image taken from Phillips, *Patterns of Power*, 62.

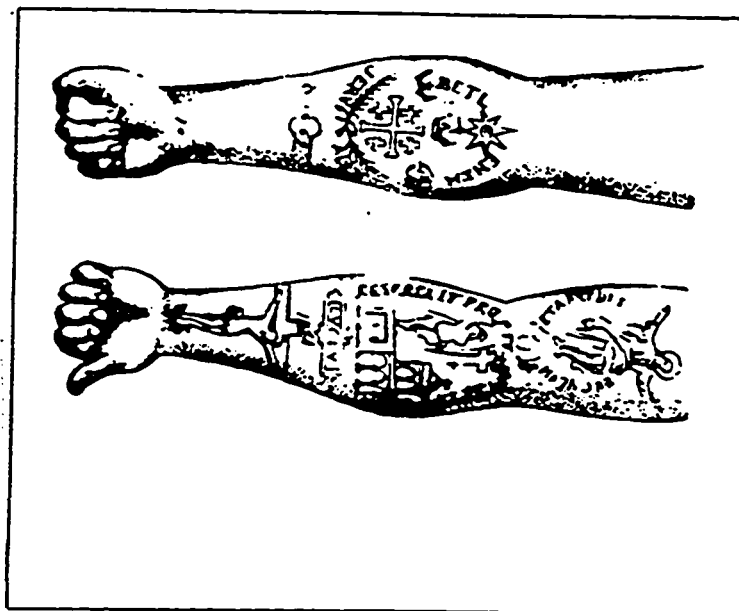


FIG. 26 European examples of Christian images as tattoo designs. image taken from Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoue*, 25.

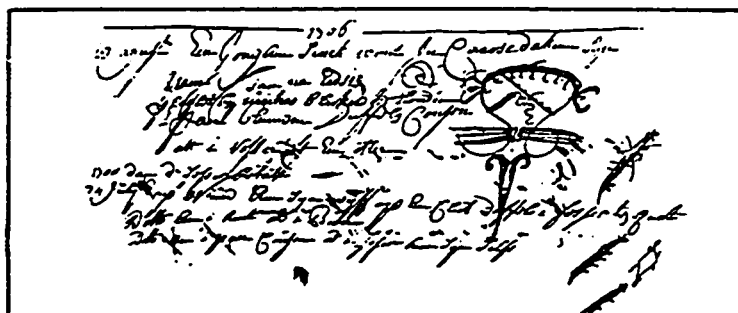


FIG. 27 Example of a tattoo design being used as a form of identification as a signature on a trade contract (1706). Image taken from the *Handbook of the North American Indians (North-east chapter)*, Vol. 15, ed. Bruce G. Trigger, (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 431.

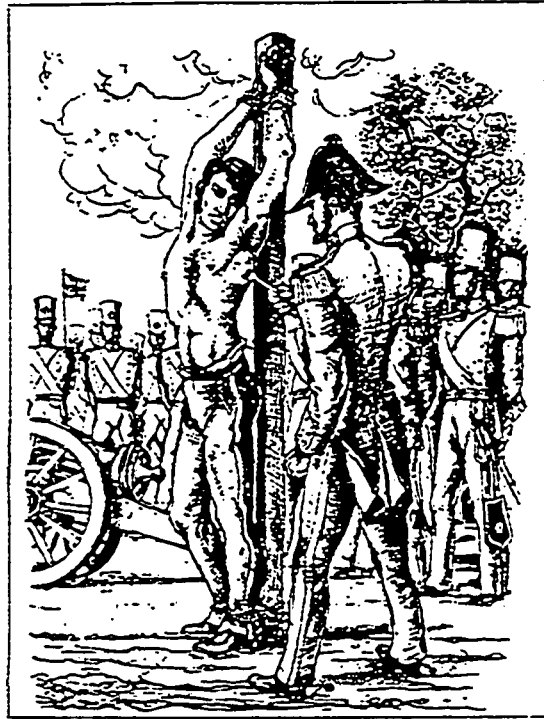


FIG. 28 Illustration by Robert Hunt showing the implementation of the *Fletrissure*. Image taken from Scott Claver, *Under the Lash: A History of Corporal Punishment in the British Armed Forces* (London: Torchstream Books, 1954), 179.

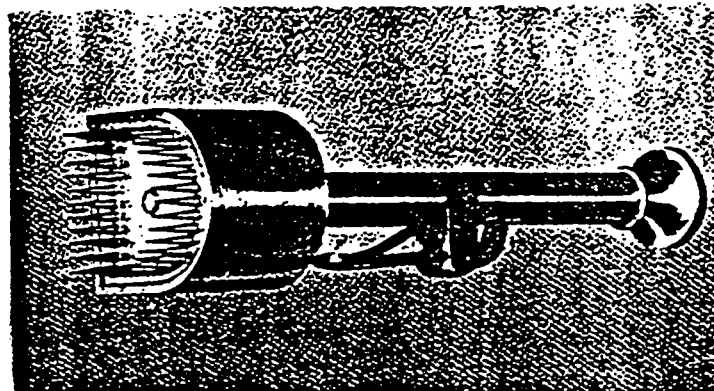


FIG. 29 Illustration of the copper instrument used to tattoo the letter "D" to deserters of the army. Image taken from Claver, *Under the Lash*, 226.

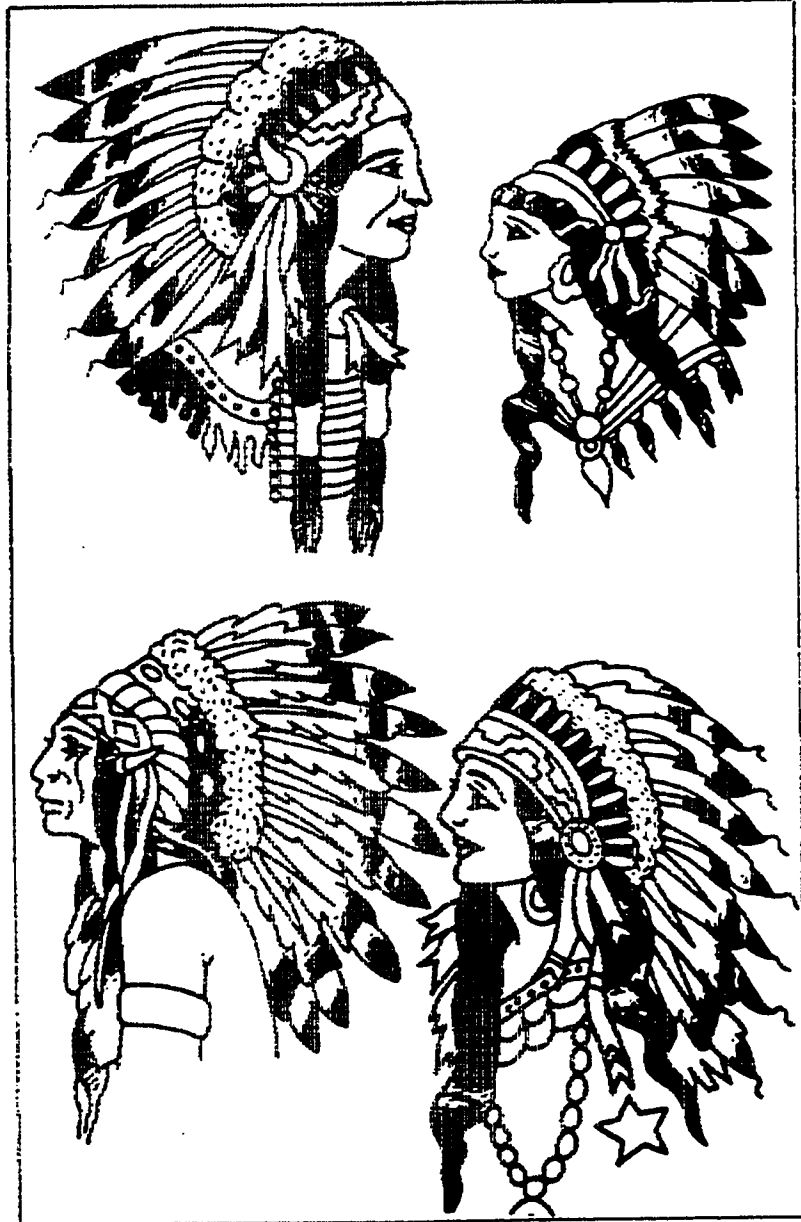


FIG. 30 Examples of twentieth-century tattoo depictions. Image taken from Dubé, *Tattoo-fatoué*, 112.



FIG. 31 Other examples of twentieth-century tattoo designs (note the Native representation in the centre). Image taken from Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoué*, 172.



FIG. 32 Tattooed arm possessing an image of a Native head. Image taken from Dubé, *Tattoo-tatoué*, 188.

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