

MANGOS, Therese and UTANGA, John *Patterns of the Past; Tattoo Revival in the Cook Islands* Auckland: Punarua Productions, 2011, 220 pages, Bib. Colour plates, glossary, col. map ; index; PRICE NZ \$ 49.95 (Soft cover)

Tattooing was once a strong practice in the Cook Islands but by the early 20th century it was disappearing from the cultural and social life of the region. By the 1990s and in the first decade of the 21st century a revival began partially inspired by the Festival of Pacific arts held on Rarotonga in 1992. *Patterns of the Past* documents what is recorded about Cook Islands tattooing, the history of the current revival and the stories of tattooists and tattooed people who have been involved in this process.

Patterns of the Past has been a long time in the making and it is published when the interest and production of tattooing in Cook Islands communities is growing. I recall meeting one of the authors, Therese Mangos, in the mid 1990s when she visited Te Papa to view an old vaka (canoe) called A'ua'u from Mangaia in the collections. She was researching Cook Islands tattooing and the vaka made around 1906 was said to be decorated with motifs based on tattoos worn by Taniera Tangitoru who was one of the carvers. Over the years, I heard little bits of news about this project and to finally see it in print is a welcome surprise. Mangos and co-author John Utanga have produced the only book on Cook Islands tattooing after two decades of research, commitment and passion for the subject.

The book is beautifully illustrated with around 250 images and the content is fascinating. The text is written in a clear, interesting and flowing style, and will be accessible to a broad readership. The book is organised in three major sections with appendices. It is prefaced with the legend of 'Ina, an origin myth about tatatau that reminds of us of the ancient origins of the art form. The first section is then a brief overview of Cook Islands society and culture in the period of initial European contacts. It covers the forms of leadership, religion, ceremonial life and other cultural connections between the different communities across the Cook Islands archipelagos. The second section, titled Tatatau, introduces readers to the tools and practice of Cook Islands tattooing. It reviews the historical processes that have shaped the development and contributed to the demise of the art form. This section ends with a discussion of the current renaissance and a series of pen portraits of five key tattoo artists involved in the revival. The third section is titled Patterns, and explores the wider meaning of tatatau – “to dress, adorn, decorate”. The authors put tattooing in a larger context of cultural production and examine the interconnectedness of patterning practices across the social and material world of the Cook Islands. They do this through a wonderful collection of images and artifacts and a careful reading of the archival and published sources. For example, the authors' analysis of the sources related to Tangitoru and the markings on the vaka A'ua'u (that I mentioned above) throw up some interesting questions and anomalies in the published records. The review of patterning in the material cultures of the communities of Aitutaki, Mangaia, Nga-Pu-toru and Rarotonga is a revealing and most valuable overview. The final section is the appendices. This is a feature I always look for in survey books of this kind. Here the authors have provided a glossary, endnotes, picture references, bibliography and an index. The inclusion of this material makes *Patterns of the Past*

more than just a beautifully illustrated coffee table book. It is evidence of the scholarship in the authors' work and forms a solid paper trail for future researchers and scholars to follow and revisit.

The book is elegantly designed by Cypress Vivieaere. Her restrained use of a Pacific colour palette fills the pages with a feel and character that avoids cliché. So often with books on Pacific arts graphic designers can't resist the urge to over embellish the pages with cultural motifs and colour in an effort to make the book somehow more Pacific, when the art forms and people (as in this book) do the job more than adequately. Of course it is the photography by Kirsty Griffin that helps brings the words and personal narratives of artists and tattooed people to life. Vivieaere has used Griffin's photography well and it is obvious she had a rich selection of portraits and close ups of tattoos to choose from. These photographs are complemented by a large number of reproductions of archival images, historical prints and drawings from museum collections around the world. The careful placement of carvings, textiles and other cultural treasures from museums, illustrates how patterning and decoration has been deeply embedded across Cooks Islands culture through time.

The book complements other recent significant studies of tattooing in the Pacific including Nicholas Thomas (et al) *Tattoo; Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West* (2005), Makiko Kuwahara's *Tattoo: an anthropology* (2005) and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (et al) *Mau Moko: the world of Maori tattoo* (2007). It brings history, material culture, tattooing and tattoo artists' stories together in a most successful way. An interesting addition for a future edition might be an exploration of the personal stories of tattooed individuals. What meanings do tattooed Cook Islanders give to their tattoos? How do they make these images work for them in their lives?

In *Patterns of the Past*, the authors have uncovered some of the little known past, but also created a fresh detailed record of the present. It is a collaborative effort that will be a key reference point for generations to come. However, in creating this book the authors too have become an important part of the revival they have documented. Their contribution, through this timely publication will ensure that the lines of Cook Islands tattooing remain dark and strong. Meitaki Ma'ata!

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