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ḴĀLKUBI

ḴĀLKUBI (or *ḵāl kubidan*, *kabud zadan* "tattooing"), that is, making a permanent mark on the skin by inserting a pigment, is one of the oldest methods of body ornamentation. The earliest evidence of tattoos in the Iranian culture area is the almost completely tattooed body of a Scythian chief in Pazyryk Mound (a burial area in the Altai Mountain in Siberian Russia), which dates from the 5th century BCE (Rudenko and Thompson, pp. 107-14, figs. 51-54, 121, 123-24, 126-34; images available at http://artmagik.webs.com/pazyryktattoochieftan.htm). Tattooing also occurred early in the Persian Empire. Under the Achaemenids slaves wore a brand or mark that indicated the deity or the worldly master that owned them. The identification mark could be a sign or a letter of the alphabets. The names of the successive owners were also marked. According to Herodotus, Xerxes had his slaves and Greek prisoners of war tattooed or branded (Briant, tr., pp. 458, 945). During the Parthian period, Pomponius Mela reported that the custom of tattooing was also found among the neighbors of the Scythians, the Agathyrsi (Rudenko and Thompson, p. 114).

In medieval, if not earlier, times, tattoos were quite popular among both men, and more so among women. Persian poetry abounds with references to beauties, whether male or female, who had beauty spots (*ḵāl*). However, in some cases it seems that these spots were tattoos, such as when Rumi wrote that "the dots linked the two eyebrows," (Rumi, Padshah, pp. 151-52), which indeed was a very common tattoo. Indigo, collyrium, or ink was used to produce a blue spot or image (Foruzānfar, pp. 1231-32). Thus Rumi refers to

tattooing as *kabud zadan* in the story of a man who wants the image of a lion to be tattooed on his shoulder (Rumi, I, pp. 183-85, tr. Nicholson, I, pp. 163-64, tr. Bark; Moḥammad, pp. 151-53). Moḥammad-Reżā Šafiʿi Kadkani, quoting a verse of Šaraf-al-Din Šafrova (fl. late 12th cent.) as evidence, maintains that the custom of tattooing, particularly of the image of a lion, on the body has its roots in the *fotowwa* organization of *ayyār*s (Šafiʿi Kadkani, p. 161, n. 17).

According to Charles J. Wills, referring to the 1880s, "Tattooing is common among the poor and villagers, and is seen among the upper classes" (Wills, p. 323; Häntzsche, p. 414). However, according to Jacob Polak, having images and flowers tattooed "on the chin, neck, breast and around the navel" in the public bath was on the wane in the 1850s (Polak, I, p. 360). Polak's remark agrees with the observation of Percy Sykes, who, writing at the turn of the 20th century, reported: "Until the last generation, tattooing was almost universal in Persia. Ladies of the best families had designs pricked on the forehead to connect the eyebrows: also on the chin, on one cheek, on the lip, on the throat, and on the breasts. Imitations of anklets and bracelets, too, were frequently tattooed. During pregnancy, tattooing, more especially on the sole of the foot, was practiced, with the idea that the mark would be transferred to their offspring. Women generally had birds, flowers, or gazelles tattooed; but occasionally verses from the Qurʾān. Men, on the other hand, had lions and Yā Ali Madad, or 'Help, O Ali,' on their arms" (Sykes, p. 177).

The practice had all but disappeared among the urban population by 1900. According to Sykes, "tattooing is rare among the upper classes, but is still affected by the lower classes, more especially in Southern Persia. The nomads of Fars of both sexes tattoo. Prostitutes in Kerman are said to be tattooed with a tree guarded by two chained lions covering the front part of the body" (Sykes, p. 177). The custom indeed continued to be practiced among nomads and villagers. Jacque de Morgan observed that Kurdish women wore tattoos made with a needle and a powder or soot to make it indelible. Old women had most tattoos and often of interesting designs, and sometimes they were tattooed over their entire body. Men rarely had tattoos, and if they had, it was only on their arms and rarely on their faces (de Morgan, II, p. 56, see ills. on pp. 54-56). In Kermānšāh and Kurdistan, tattooing was still practiced in the 1950s (Dādāši, p. 186; Field, passim). Bluish tattoos were normal for women among the Pāpi tribe of Lurs in the 1930s. The most common designs were those that recalled a fleur-de-lis or a cross just at the base of the nose, but designs on the chin were also quite common. The women either made the

tattoos themselves, using a needle and indigo, or itinerant musicians would do it (Feilberg, pp. 128-29, 131, with designs). Similarly, the women of the Baḵtiāri tribe had tattoos on their faces, hands and ankles. The designs in blue were mostly geometric, dots, crosses, lines emphasizing the eyebrows or the locations of bracelets, rings, and the like. Men sometimes had tattoos on the forearm, with their forename or *Yā ʿAli*, the phrase invoking Imam ʿAli (q.v.). The tattoos were mostly made by barbers (*dallāk*; Digard, pp. 121, 123, designs on pp. 124-25). Tattoos were common also among the rural population of Khorasan and Kerman (Merritt-Hawkes, p. 167 [between the eyes, trefoil design]; cf. Šakurzāda, p. 274;). Tattooing was very popular among the *luṭi*s (street entertainers). They had tattoos on their hands and arms and sometimes allover their upper body with the names and portraits of famous paladins (*pahlavān*) and their friends and lovers in various colors. Some even had tattoos displaying heroes engaged in battle. Women had tattoos on their wrists, ankles, hands, breasts, chins, noses, and/or between the eyes (Šahri, V, pp. 421-22; Dādāši, p. 187).

According to Sykes (p. 177), "Tattooing was apparently practised by women (a) to embellish their charms, (b) to avert the evil eye, (c) to hide a scar or blemish, and (d) to cure a malady." Evidence for these end-uses is indeed found in the literature. The rural population of Khorasan has maxims that indicate the meaning of the location of moles, or probably tattoos, ranging from the spiritual to wealth and the nature of death. (Šakurzāda, pp. 274-75). Lur women did it to look attractive or to be fertile and so did Baḵtiāri women. (Feilberg, p. 129; Digard, p. 121). Sykes quotes Captain Franklin who had "a patient who stated that she had tattooed herself above her eyebrows as a cure for granular lids, the chronic form of conjunctivitis" (Sykes, p. 177; Dādāši, p. 187). Rumi's story of the lion tattoo seems to bear out Sykes supposition that "Probably the devices originally possessed a meaning, the lion being obviously the symbol of bravery; but, to-day, nothing of this is known, except that the devices on the forehead and cheeks are calculated to ward off the evil eye" (Sykes, p. 178). According to Sykes, "In the case of men, wrestlers and gymnasts especially affected the art, it being customary for the winner in a wrestling match to have a lion tattooed on his arm." However, Ḡolām-Reżā Enṣāfpur, a modern researcher of the *zur-ḵāna* (traditional Persian gymnasium) history and traditions, denies this and asserts that these stories about the use of tattoos in the past were spread by people who wanted to put *pahlavān*s in disrepute (Enṣāfpur, p. 235; but see Šafiʿi Kadkani, p. 161, n. 17; Dādāši, pp. 186-87).

Thus, it seems that it was fashion rather than religious tenets that almost eliminated tattooing in Iran, although tattooing is considered to be forbidden by the olama, based on various Traditions (Boḵāri, "Oppressions," bk. 43, chap. (*bāb*) 654 (re-mutilation), "Dress," bk. 72, chaps. 815 (cursing the practice of tattooing or getting tattooed), 827 (forbidding tattooing), "Sales and trade," bk. 34, chap. 299 (forbidding the profession of tattooing or getting tattooed). This ban continues to be ignored by modern Iranians, for tattoos have become a popular fashion accessory among athletes and the well-to-do youths, both male and female. The new tattooed generation consists mostly of teenagers and people in their early twenties in the most affluent districts of Tehran. The average cost of getting standard designs (interwoven flames, a burning cross, butterflies, flowers, and unicorns) is an average of 800,000 riyals (about $90). Usually they are done on the arm or back, but even breasts and the small of the back are now tattooed, that is, locations that are normally covered in public. In an effort to reduce the spread of AIDS through the use of non-sterile needles, the government of Iran banned tattooing on 26 November 2000, but a newspaper report from 2006 indicates that it remains popular (Murphy). Athletes with tattoos have been forbidden since about 1998 to practice in public with bared body (Dādāši p. 187).

The technique of tattooing has not changed for centuries. According to Sykes, "The tattooing is generally done by a gypsy woman, and the gypsies also bleed all classes at certain seasons. The procedure is to rub over the place with two Chinese herbs known as jadwar [*jadvār-e ḵeṭā'i*, *zoronbād-e ḵeṭā'i*; zedoary, a root of genus *cuwuma*] and *tanzu*, famous for healing properties, to paint the design, to prick it in with a needle and then to rub in antimony. Ink, indigo, and charcoal are also employed and, very rarely, a yellow dye, either turmeric or *zalil*, a local herb" (Sykes, pp. 177-78). In Rumi's poem tattooing was done by the barber (*dallāk*), which was also the case in urban Iran during the 19th and early 20th century. In the rural areas, people either did it themselves or had itinerants (e.g., gypsies) perform the operation, but among the Baḵtiāris it was done by the barber. In all cases pigments were used, mostly blue (indigo, collyrium, soot, or other; see Polak; de Morgan; Feilberg; Digard). In athletic circles, usually old tattooed men performed this service (Dādāši, p. 187). In 2006, in Tehran, the work was done in clandestine back-room tattoo parlors using ink and a needle-tipped pen, because professional tattoo equipment was nearly impossible to procure (Agence France-Presse).

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