The Marquesas Islands are a group of Pacific islands originally settled by Samoans between the first and fourth centuries. Like many other Polynesian islands, the Marquesas are known for their tattoo traditions, which were most likely brought to the islands by the first inhabitants. First explored in the late 16th century by Spanish navigator Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira, and later visited by Captain Cook in 1774, the islands were later claimed by France in the 19th century. Cook's visit, and his reports of tattooing traditions, were significant in that they played a major role in the exposure of Polynesian tattooing to the Western world, and also in the change and destruction of those same practices.   As with other Polynesian tattoo traditions, Marquesan tattooing was used to mark important features connected with status, wealth, and gender, but unlike other islands, the tradition was not restricted to chiefs and their families. Tattoos marked one's affiliation with any number of groups, such as warriors, graded associations, or entertainers called *ka'ioi*, as well as one's genealogical position. Because the tattoo recipient had to pay for the tattoo, wearing a tattoo demonstrated one's wealth, and for men, the ability to withstand pain. For women, tattoos were a sign of beauty. For men and women tattoos also served other purposes, like protecting against evil and marking important events, and receiving a tattoo was a rite of passage for young men and women. Tattoos ultimately represented both individual and group identity, and allowed for the participation in important social and religious rituals.   Tattoo tools were similar to those used on other Pacific islands, and included primary tools made out of wood, with sharpened bone combs of different widths protruding from the end. This tool would be tapped into the skin after being dipped into ink by a mallet, inserting the ink into the skin.   Tattoos were first given to boys and girls in their teens, but for men especially, tattooing could continue throughout their lives; men were tattooed far more extensively than women. Women's tattoos were typically on the face, the lips, the ears, the feet, and the hands, while men's tattoos could eventually cover their entire bodies.   As in the Marshall Islands and among the Maori of New Zealand, the male body is divided into a number of zones, each of which is further subdivided. Tattoo designs are then created for each zone, with the result being an overall symmetry in design. Designs are primarily made up of straight and curved lines in a very abstract pattern, which together often gave the impression of fine black lace. Each individual had a different overall set of tattoos, and no two people looked the same.   Tattooing in the Marquesas Islands, as in the rest of Polynesia, was strongly influenced by European contact. For example, Marquesan tattooing at the time of first contact was based on abstract fine lines and other patterns, yet after European contact, lines became darker and broader, somewhat closer to the Maori style. Also, tattoos progressively became more a mark of prestige, losing some of their magical and religious connotations.   Marquesan tattoos also influenced Western tattooing, as well as Western understandings of "primtive man." The Frenchman Jean Baptiste Cabri and an Englishman named Edward Robarts were tattooed on the Marquesas after deserting a British whale hunting expedition at the end of the 18th century. Found by a Russian explorer in 1804, Cabri ended up traveling to Russia where he displayed himself as the first European tattooed attraction, ushering in a new career for many men and women, and bringing tattooing to people who had never before seen such a thing.   Starting in the 1840s, Protestant and Catholic missionaries arrived and began to stamp out tattooing, along with other cultural traditions, and while the tradition was not wiped out entirely, it changed forever. Today, some Marquesan Islanders still get tattooed, but with a tattoo machine and in a context entirely divorced from traditional practices.

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