



History

Finding Blue
Copyright © 2007 by Catherine Cartwright Jones

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. The patterns in this book may be freely used as inspiration for artists in their own hand-drawn work.

For more information, contact TapDancing Lizard; 4237 Klein Ave, Stow, Ohio, 44224.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Cartwright-Jones, Catherine.
Finding Blue

1) Wording 2) Indigo 3) Body Art

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
‘Like’ Ancient Blue on Facebook!

Finding Blue



I want to thank Alex Morgan¹ for her work in “finding blue.” She recovered the lost biotechnology of using precursor vat to stain skin blue. Because of her intelligence, persistence, and willingness to be “varying shades of moldy gray for most of a year,” we can now be blue.

For the purpose of this book, I use the words “blue,” “woading,” “indigo,” and “Ancient Blue™” interchangeably with slight variations of meaning. Both woad and indigo vats stain skin blue with the same process and molecule, though they come from different plants. Blue dye from woad and indigo are interchangeable in the same way as sugar from sugar cane and sugar beet. For the purpose of recreating Celtic body art, there is little or no difference between woad from woad vat and woad from indigo vat. Ancient Blue™ is a specific form of vat, naturally derived from indigo, and is more convenient, easier to prepare and use than a woad vat. There are no synthetic chemicals in Ancient Blue™: it is brewed from the indigo plant. Though Ancient Blue™ is alkaline and should be handled responsibly, there are no recorded problems from skin contact with indigo vat.

¹ Alex Morgan: <http://www.indigopage.com> and <http://www.spellstone.com>

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 ‘Like’ Ancient Blue on Facebook!



Foreword to Blue

I have worked as a professional artist since 1967. I worked as a henna artist since 1990. In my research into the history of henna, I found records of indigo being used as a skin dye along with henna, but no indication of how it was done. I began working with Alex Morgan to find out how to dye skin blue with natural dyes in 2004. After much experimentation, we found Ancient Blue™, a ready-to use natural indigo vat, would stain the skin the same way as woad vat, with the benefit of being easier to prepare, store, and manage than woad.

The greatest obstacle to overcome in finding blue is that one is inclined to apply it in the same way as henna. The technique of blue is completely different from henna: it is not applied as a paste, nor does prolonged contact improve the stain. It does not favor the same body parts.

Blue body art is unpredictable and every application is different. When working, you must be mindful of the character of the skin as it absorbs and resists the stain. You must constantly be mindful of the oxidation of vat and brush. You must be willing to improvise the pattern to accommodate the nuances of the stain. It is not possible to completely predict and control blue.

This is a romance of artist, living skin, chemistry, and blue.

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
‘Like’ Ancient Blue on Facebook!

Index:

Part One: History of Blue

Foreword	4
Lost Celtic Blue	6
The Miracle of Saint Brigid	15
Indigo as Body Art Beyond the Celtic World	18
Step Forward into Blue	20
References.	22

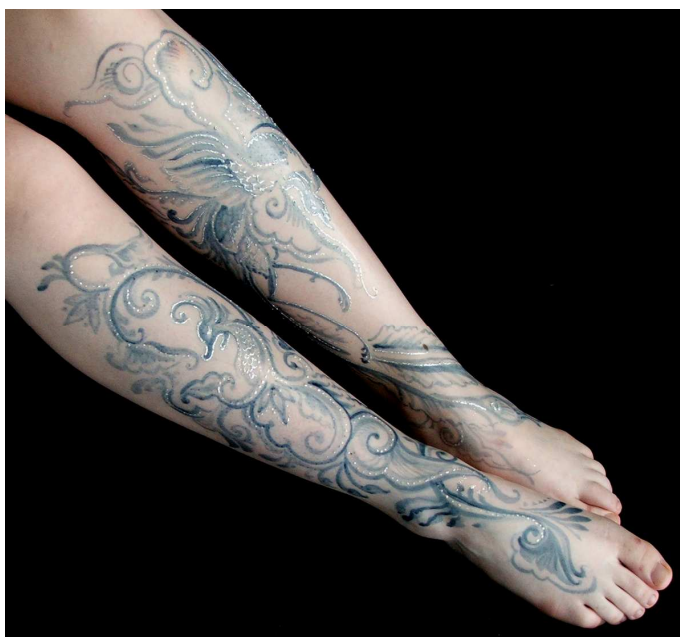
Part Two: How to Find Blue

The Vat: the secret of Blue	2
Why Was Blue Lost?	3
Make the Vat	4
What Do You Need to Find Blue?	5
Use the Vat	7
Apply Blue	10
Stain and Skin	13
Darker Skin	16
Full Body Blue	17

Part Three: Learning to Blue

Practicing Blue	2
Begin with Simple Motifs: Spirals	3
Leaves	4
Use Diminishing Stain as a Creative Tool	10
Flowers	11
Knots	13
Beasts	22
Gilding and Gems	25

Part Four: Patterns



Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 'Like' Ancient Blue on Facebook!

Lost Celtic Blue:

When the Julius Caesar invaded Britain in the first century, he reported seeing people with blue body markings. Very few historical records of the “blue people” still exist from the Roman period, and none from earlier eras. What little remains gives a tantalizing glimpse into what may have been a widespread, complex and culturally significant ancient tradition in the Celtic world.

A few scholars have recently turned their attention to the Roman records describing insular Celtic (Britain, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales) skin decoration. The texts clearly describe people with blue markings, but there is no consensus of whether these were paint, tattooing, staining, or a combination of these.



Figure 1: “Omnes vero se Britanni vitro inficiunt, quod caeruleum efficit colorem’. Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico V*

Gillian Carr, (2005) in “Woad, Tattooing and Identity in Later Iron Age and Early Roman Britain” provides evidence that woad was the source of Celtic blue body art. This work also cites Roman manuscripts which mention the color and character of Briton body art and provides the following translations from the Latin:

Caesar, De Bello Gallico V, xiv mid-1st c. BC ‘All the Britons dye their bodies with woad (vitrum), which produces a blue colour, and this gives them a more terrifying appearance in battle.’

From a first century Celtic warrior’s point of view, woad may have been functional, as well as a cultural tradition. Woad is anti-bacterial (Hamburger, 2002) and anti-microbial (Yang, Wang, Yang et al 2004). Though some translators of ancient text believe Caesar’s account refers to warriors being completely stained blue, I believe climbing into a woad vat would be unlikely (that would require a great deal of woad to prepare a tub-sized vat) and daunting to climb into (a vat made fresh from woad, *isatis tinctoria*, has an unpleasant smell). In comparison, one ounce of

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 ‘Like’ Ancient Blue on Facebook!

woad vat (one shot glass full) provides enough dye to cover an adult's body with patterns. A small amount of dye is more easily prepared, and a small amount of stench is easier to bear. A patterned body surface in combat, such as is provided with camouflage paint and clothing, provides cover by disguising the body's dimensions and movements. Warriors patterned in blue would have been obscured if approaching from woodland towards an enemy, more effectively invisible than solid blue warriors. A group of patterned warriors would have been disorienting in battle, in the same way that one in a group of zebras is difficult to track because patterning camouflages individuals moving within the group.

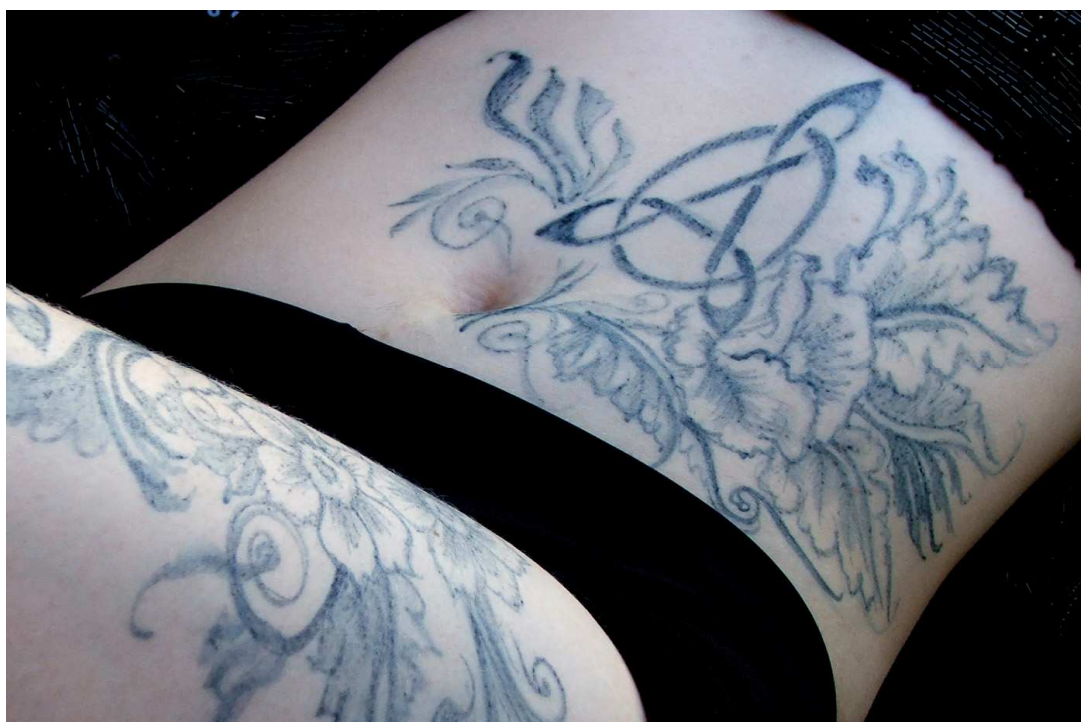


Figure 2: Is azure beauty to be desired?

Ovid, Amores II, 16, 39 25 BC+ 'I can't think this is my home, this healthy Sulmo, my birthplace, my ancestral countryside, but wastes of Scythia or woad-blue Britain (viridesque Britannos) or the wild rocks Prometheus' red blood dyed.' (Carr, 2005)

Propertius, Elegies II, xviiiD, late 1st c. BC 'Do you still in your madness imitate the painted Britons 1-4 and play the wanton with foreign dyes upon your head? All beauty is best as nature made it: Belgic² colour is shameful on a Roman face. If some woman has stained her forehead with azure dye, is azure beauty on that account to be desired?' (Carr, 2005)

Ovid links Britain with blue-staining woad, but the statement has other implications. The Celts continued their blue body art traditions during Roman occupation. Ovid places the speaker as an expatriate in a foreign place, uncomfortable with the blue stained people and the British climate. Romans stationed in outlying regions of the empire (by government position, commerce or military endeavor) seem to have not been pleased to be away from home, and were often disdainful of those whom they had conquered and colonized.

² Belgic refers to the Belgae, a Celtic group living in what is now Belgium

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
'Like' Ancient Blue on Facebook!

The verse from Propertius' Elegies indicates that while most Romans disdained the blue body art as "shameful and unnatural", against the Roman cultural norm, some Roman women living in the colonial outposts were trying out their neighbors' woad, perhaps associating it with exotic, wanton, uncivilized sexuality or with freedom from Roman codes of female virtue. He mentions patterns on the face: woad vat stains the face easily and the stains can last for three weeks³.



Figure 3: ... play the wanton with foreign dyes upon your head

Pomponius Mela, de Chorographia III, 6, 51, c. AD 43 (Britain) bears peoples and kings of peoples, but all are uncivilized, and the further away they are from the continent, the more they are acquainted with its other blessings: so much that, rich only in livestock and

³ Though woad vat seems to have been widely used for facial patterning, Ancient Blue™ is a highly concentrated, very alkaline form of the vat and should not be used near the eyes, mouth, or on sensitive skin.

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 "Like" Ancient Blue on Facebook!

their territory – it is uncertain whether as an embellishment or for some other reason – they dye their bodies with vitrum.’ (Carr, 2005)



Figure 4: ... they dye their bodies with vitrum

Pomponius Mela’s description indicates that the Romans were familiar enough with the appearance of Celtic blue body art, but that they did not understand the dyeing process or the reason for it. Carr (2005) explains the interpretation of the word Latin *vitrum* as woad:

“Vitruvius (VII, 14, 2) tells us that, because of the scarcity of indigo, stucco painters ‘make a dye of chalk from Selinus, or from broken beads, along with woad (which the Greeks call *isatis*), and obtain a substitute for indigo’. ‘Woad’ was chosen as the translation of Vitruvius’ term *vitrum*, as we might expect, but we are also given the Greek term *satis*. Pliny (20, 59) tells us a ‘third kind (of wild lettuce) growing in the woods is called *isatis*. Its leaves pounded up with pearl-barley are good for wounds. A fourth kind is used by dyers of wools. Its leaves would be like those of wild sorrel, were they not more numerous and darker. By its root or leaves it staunches bleeding . . .’ Not only, then, is *isatis*, like woad, good for wounds and staunching bleeding (as discussed later) but, when compared, the leaves of the common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) are indeed similar to those of the woad plant (*Isatis tinctoria*), just as Pliny indicated; both plants have leaves that are arrow-shaped and clasp the stem. Finally, a closely related plant is used for dyeing. This, then, would seem to back up the link between *vitrum* and *Isatis tinctoria* or woad.”

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 ‘Like’ Ancient Blue on Facebook!

This seems to me to support Pomponius Mela and others not being privy to the dye and application process, and applying the word “vitrum” in error. A hard ball of composted woad or indigo looks very much like a rough copper-blue glass bead. Mela may have mistaken one for the other. Or, because they look similar, the word for one may have been simply applied to the other.



Figure 5: ... she is sprung from the sky-blue Britons ...

Martial, Epigrams XI, LIII AD 98 'Claudia Rufina, though she is sprung from the sky-blue Britons, how she possesses the feelings of the Latin race!' (Carr, 2005)

By late first century, Martial and Propertius describe people in the colonial regions blending Celtic and Roman culture. Their point of view seems to be that for a Celtic woman to express Roman values was admirable, but for a Roman woman to take on Celtic habits and appearance was scandalous. There must have been more than a few women moving between cultures and attracting attention for these authors to have developed a strong opinion and comment.

Tacitus, Agricola 29 AD 98 'Already more than 30,000 men could be seen, and still they came flocking to the colours – all the young men, and famous warriors whose old age was fresh and green⁴, every man wearing the decorations he had earned.' (Carr, 2005)

⁴ Carr demonstrates that under certain conditions a woad vat may stain green (such as when mixed with weld), blue-green or indigo blue, so “green” does not preclude woad as a source of color.

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
‘Like’ Ancient Blue on Facebook!

If Tacitus observed thousands of men decorated *green* (and this may be open to an alternate translation), perhaps these people were very freshly stained with a nearby live woad vat and their color still in the process of oxidizing from green to blue. Skin stains from a fresh woad vat take half an hour or more to mature from green to blue. If a large vat were seasonally prepared, a large group could be woaded at once, and a month later, all would have plain skins again. If the people were tattooed, the adornments might have been more frequently mentioned, as they would have always been in place.

In my experience, half an ounce of vat is more than enough to pattern a person from shoulder to foot, and I can do it in an hour. Preparing enough woad vat to ornament thirty thousand people would not be too difficult: at one half ounce per person, one hundred gallons of vat would be sufficient: the size of a modern barrel is forty-two gallons. A few large vessels of vat would be sufficient. If small cups of vat were passed around for people to apply to each other, the job would be done quickly, and thirty thousand “wearing the decorations (they) had earned” could be achieved in a few hours. On the other hand, if thirty thousand people were to be dipped full body in vat, the operation would be logistically impossible.

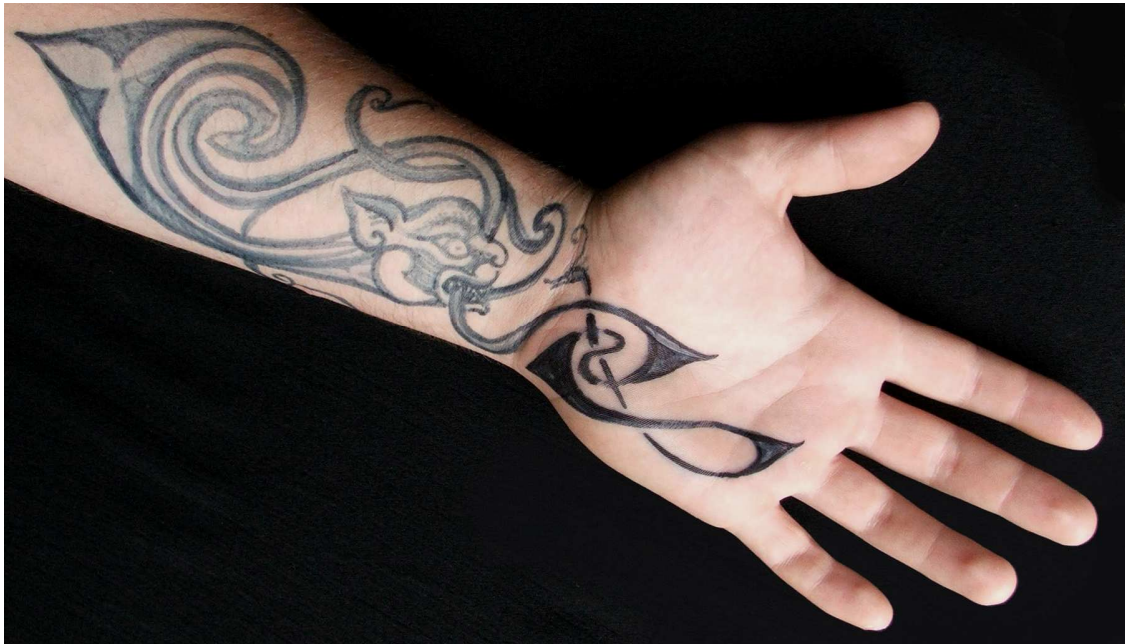


Figure 6: “every man wearing the decorations he had earned”

Some scholars argue that Caesar’s mention of “blue” only once indicates that the practice was not widespread, or that it may not have existed at all. If the color was from woad, the stain is temporary, and applied only for special occasions, that could be the reason for the relatively scarce mentions in historical record while being a widespread practice. One may compare this with the statement “all Indian women wear henna” with the fact that it is rare to see Indian women wear it in their daily lives, because henna is primarily associated with celebrations, and fades from their skin soon after the event.

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 ‘Like’ Ancient Blue on Facebook!

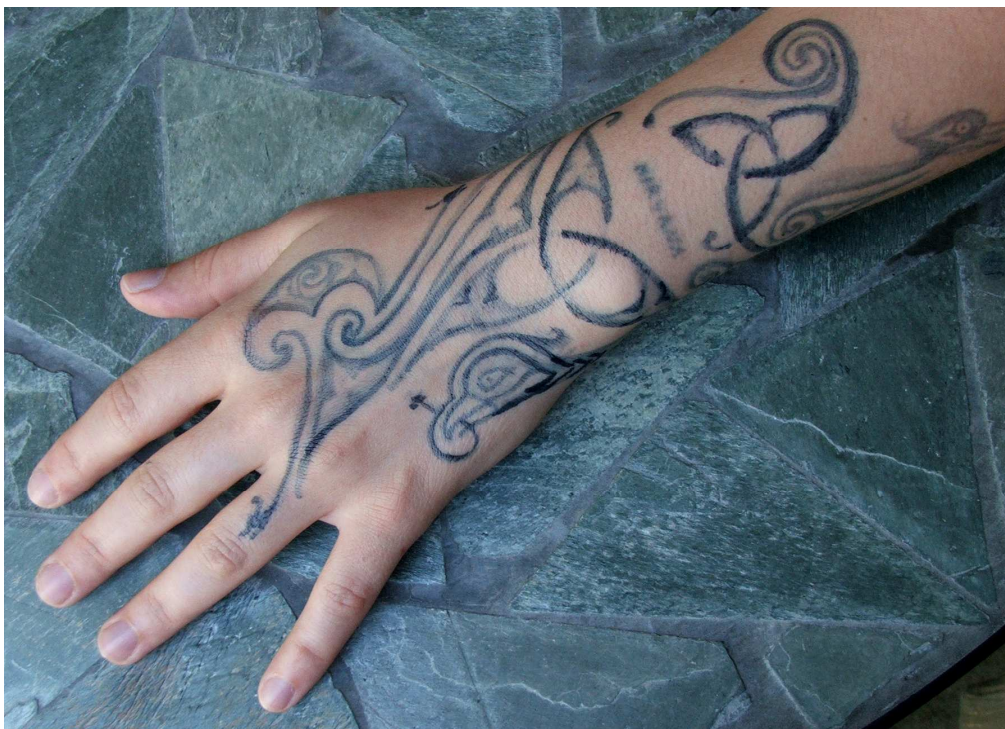


Figure 7: A comparison of a needle-pricked carbon tattoo (the word “nirvana” at the wrist) and woading

The model in Figure 6, tattooed the word “nirvana” onto her wrist with lampblack and a needle a few years prior to the this photograph. I stained her skin with Ancient Blue the day of the photograph. The appearance of the tattoo and the blue stain are identical. Romans, or any other observer, would not be able to tell just by looking whether body markings on Celts were made by tattooing with a needle and carbon, or by staining with woad. Therefore, to determine whether Celtic markings were made by tattoo, stain, or paint, one must look for corroborating evidence. The Lindow Man, recovered from a bog, has colored patterns on his skin, but as yet, there is no firm conclusion about the source of these patterns. Text corroborations supporting woading rather than tattoo would be appearance of the markings at significant occasions, such as rituals, military actions, and celebration, and absence of mention at other times.

Romans and others were certainly familiar with carbon and needle tattoos. Lampblack gathered from a bit of crockery held over a flame, mixed with breast milk is one of the oldest and safest forms of tattooing. As this tattoo ages, it appears blue. Modern black tattoo inks remain a more vivid black. I believe many scholars have assumed too quickly that body markings described by the Romans must be tattoos, or paint: because they were not familiar with the appearance of woading.

I also believe that for centuries, academics have had a blind spot for body markings as an important part of cultural reproduction, biotechnology, and social communication. I believe that evidence of body markings, such as secondary artifacts, may have been overlooked or misinterpreted. Gillian Carr’s work (2005) examines crescent shaped objects found only among the insular Celts, which she believes are woad grinders, which were previously interpreted as “horse trappings”. The following quote from Pliny is an instance of probable mistranslation and misunderstanding. .

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 ‘Like’ Ancient Blue on Facebook!



Figure 8: Potential reconstruction of Roman period Ethiopian women's tattooing: adapted from mummified remains of tattooed women in Nubia and Egypt (Hierakonpolis) and Ethiopian women's traditional tattoos

Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 1st c. AD 'In Gaul there is a plant like plantain, called *glastum*; the wives of the Britons, and their daughters-in-law, stain all the body and at certain religious ceremonies march along naked, with a colour resembling that of the Ethiopians.'

A young woad plant resembles plantain. I believe that "*glastum*" may refer to the living plant which other authors called "vitrum". When Roman observers saw woad as a hard, glass-like composted lump, they did not see the connection between the plant and the lump.

Though other scholars have interpreted this as the Britons staining themselves brownish black, I think the text supports a different possibility. I believe Pliny is comparing the Britons' appearance to tattooed light-skinned Ethiopians, or North Africans. There is evidence from mummies and paintings that many female Egyptians, Tunisians, and Nubians had tattoos during the Roman period. Light-skinned regions of Ethiopia have had distinctive women's tattoo traditions for centuries, and they may have been tattooing during the Roman period. A tattoo made by pricking soot into the skin, as would have been done in the Roman period, heals to a gray-blue color seen in Figure 6, unlike modern tattoo inks which remain near black for years. The blue-gray color is identical to the color of indigo stained skin. When Pliny described Briton women as staining all their body with a color resembling the Ethiopians, he may have intended to describe women woaded with full body patterns, as light skinned North Africans were tattooed on their bodies, not that they appeared to be African blacks.

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
'Like' Ancient Blue on Facebook!



Figure 9: various patterns and pictures of all sorts of animals

Herodian III, xiv, 7 AD 208 'They also tattoo their bodies with various patterns and pictures of all sorts of animals. Hence the reason why they do not wear clothes, so as not to cover the pictures on their bodies.'

As stated before, I believe that the word "tattoo" is moot, because the Romans (and the scholars who translated them) were more familiar with "in the skin" tattoos. The Romans tattooed criminals and runaway slaves, and were aware of other groups of people who tattooed. They would not have been able to tell the difference between woading and tattooing by the appearance.

I believe it is also debatable whether the statement "they do not wear clothes" applies to year-round nudity. The Celts had clothing. Rather, I believe this refers to specific occasions of body decoration, and occasions when they celebrated nude to show off their decorations. The specific mention here of animals does give us some clue as to what patterns the Celts might have used. Further mentions of Celtic body art in the later Christian and medieval period provide more information on the imagery in Celtic body art.

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 'Like' Ancient Blue on Facebook!

The Miracle of Saint Brigid

In "*Vita Sanctae Brigidae*," an early account of the life of Saint Brigid of Ireland, there is an incident which may be a description of the conflict between pagan woad and Christianity in fifth century Ireland. A rebellious son of a king and his associates came to Saint Brigid, a holy woman, and asked her to bless and permit a raid on their enemies. She saw they had "evil markings," *stigmatibus malignis*, on their bodies. She refused to bless them, and said she would pray not for their victory, but that they would harm no one and no one will harm them. She also said she would pray that God would remove the evil signs, "*signa diabolica*," through baptism and conversion. God removed the markings (MacQuarrie, 2000). If the Irish men's markings were woad, they would have disappeared in a few days, perhaps with a vigorous scrubbing sort of baptism.



Figure 10: "*signa diabolica*"

In another version of Saint Brigid's miracle, she meets king Connallus and his followers who are marked by *stigmatibus malignis*. They tell her they cannot remove the marks because they have vowed to go on the murderous raid; Sharpe (1991) interprets this to imply that "they cannot remove the marks until they have *completed* the raid. If these marks were woad, actions bound by ritual marking would have to be completed within a ten days, before the marks disappeared. Marking with woad would not be simply a statement of intent, but the intent to complete a vow promptly. The marked person would be under the protection of the symbols, and bound to a particular purpose only as long as the symbols remained. When they vanished, the vow completed or abandoned, and the magic released.

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 'Like' Ancient Blue on Facebook!

In his analysis of this text, MacQuarrie approaches insular Celtic body art as tattooing rather than woading, though I believe evidence supports that Celtic blue body art was occasion-specific and transitory (woading) rather than permanent (tattooing). Tattooing and woading can easily be mistaken for the other, as seen in Figure 6, and the descriptive words are often ambiguous. I don't believe that "tattooing" is the only possible translation for *stigmata*. A *stigmata* is a significant, meaningful mark. There are many means of creating a significant mark.

In the eighth century poem, "The Cauldron of Poesy", the passage translated as, "I being white-kneed, blue-shanked, gray-bearded, Amairgen, (Jones, 1987)" may refer to a man with a woaded leg, though "blue-shanked" has been interpreted as a tattooed leg, or an otherwise mal-colored leg. Amairgen was a judge and a prophet, a respected man of high status, so if he had blue body markings, it did not designate him as a criminal or renegade, as tattoos did in Roman and Christian culture.

Some Medieval glosses on Leviticus (the Biblical scriptures forbidding tattooing) allude to Irish body art traditions. One describes, "*Stigmata id picture in corpore sicut scotti faciunt*", or "to put pictures on the body as the Irish do." Another is more specific about the nature of the patterns: "*Stigmata ... diuersas picturas in corpibus uestris draconum uel serpentium ut multi faciunt*," or "Marks: to put various tattooed pictures on your body of dragons or serpents, as many people do." (MacQuarrie, 2000)

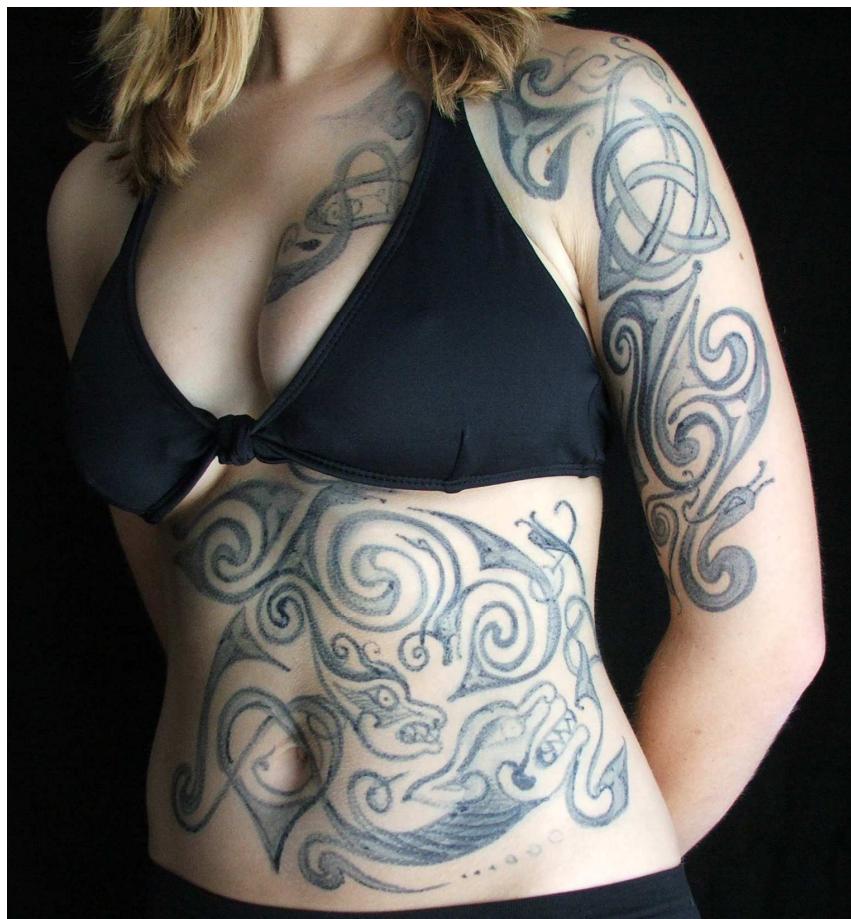


Figure 11: "*draconum uel serpentium*"

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 'Like' Ancient Blue on Facebook!

These accounts tell us several things: the Irish patterned their bodies, these body patterns were done before attacking an enemy, the patterns were associated with pagan pre-Christian traditions, and the pagan patterned body was not acceptable to the Christian church.

"*Vita Sanctae Brigitae*" also states that once the men's mark were erased, and they were converted to Christianity, Brigid blessed them with new signs . . . did she repaint them with blue "Christian" markings? There may have been a gradual shift from pagan body markings to Christian body markings, and later to an absence of markings. Certainly, serpents, animals and dragons appear in the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Books of Kells and Durrow. Pagan Celts who applied blue patterns to bodies were the ancestors of those who converted and ornamented early Celtic Christian manuscripts. The patterns of the new faith may have been adapted from patterns of the old faith.



Figure 12: "Blue-shanked"

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
'Like' Ancient Blue on Facebook!

Indigo as Body Art Beyond the Celtic World

Wherever there was a live indigo or woad vat, there was the potential for blue body art.

Jews in Kurdistan celebrated the night before a newborn son's circumcision with indigo body art. The celebration was called the *lel sheshe*, and it included music, dancing, singing, gifts of sweets for children, and ornamenting the mother, child and guests with blue and yellow. The purpose of the *lel sheshe* was specifically to protect the mother and son from Lilith, the queen of demons, who preyed upon women during their childbirth and lying-in period. Lilith might steal the child (cause stillbirth or neonatal death), or kill the mother (maternal death during or after childbirth).



Figure 13: Kurdish Jewish patterns adapted in Indigo

The mother's female friends or family went to the dyer to get indigo vat and yellow dye. First the midwife struck the mother three times on the temples, saying "Depart Lilith!" Then she painted the mother with indigo, called "rang kolekhila," or, "dye they are making" (indicating that the indigo (rang) was in the vat stage.) She painted blue, black, and yellow patterns on her face, her hands, her feet, and her vulva. She painted the infant with a little yellow and indigo. She also painted patterns on the wall opposite the lying-in bed. When the mother was painted, the visiting women protected themselves from Lilith by marking their own foreheads, hands and feet with blue, black and yellow patterns.⁵

⁵ If you wish to emulate traditional facial woading and indigo, please use safe, approved blue body paints and cosmetics, and NOT Ancient Blue™. Ancient Blue is a highly concentrated, very alkaline form of the vat and should not be used near the eyes, mouth, or on sensitive skin.

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
'Like' Ancient Blue on Facebook!

In the 1930's Freya Stark saw a bride's hands stained with delicate patterns in indigo in the Hadraumat of Yemen, as would have been done in henna (Stark, 1936).

In Iran, there was once a tradition that if a woman had lost a child and seemed unable to conceive another child, friends might think she was so possessed with grief that a malevolent spirit was within her, preventing a new pregnancy. This was remedied by painting her womb (presumably referring to belly and vulva) with indigo to repel the intruding spirit. (Masse', 1954)



Figure 14: Indigo as used in Qajar Iran

During the 19th century, Iranian women stained graceful crescents between their eyebrows with indigo. Qajar paintings of beautiful women, such as “Embracing Lovers” attributed to Muhammad Sadiq, Shiraz, 1770 – 80 and “Woman Holding a Rose”, first quarter of the nineteenth century.

A different form of indigo vat, *vashma*, was used in combination with henna to dye hair and beards jet black across Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant. Indigo leaves which have gone through their initial composting and fermentation, and are then dried and powdered, are called *vashma*. This indigo powder looks like henna powder. To dye hair lustrous blue-black, first dye the hair with henna. When the henna is rinsed out, mix the green indigo powder⁶ with water and immediately put that paste into the hair for at least an hour, the same as henna. When the indigo has oxidized, the hair will be black. This process only works for hair, and not for skin.

Do not use Ancient Blue™ to dye hair. Ancient Blue vat is highly concentrated, very alkaline, will damage hair, and will also dye everything else it touches. *Vashma* indigo is poor skin dye.

⁶ Additional information on indigo as hair dye is available at <http://www.mehandi.com/shop/hennahairbook/index.html>

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 ‘Like’ Ancient Blue on Facebook!

Step Forward into Blue



Figure 15: Bringing blue into now

We may never be certain what pre-Christian Celtic body art looked like or how it was done. Perhaps blue body art with dragons and serpents was used for significant events, for vows, and for magical protection. Perhaps it remained a practice into the early medieval era, kept up by those who were proud of their pagan Celtic heritage and resisted assimilation by the Roman Empire and later Christian conversion. If we take up blue body art, we cannot claim to be continuing an ancient tradition, because the tradition was broken for at least twelve centuries. If we create blue body art now, it will reflect our aesthetics and needs, not those of Celts two thousand years ago. However, we can bring new life into something old, something borrowed, and create something beautiful ... and blue.

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
"Like" Ancient Blue on Facebook!



It has been less than three years since Alex Morgan⁷ discovered the secret of blue body art, based on the chemistry of woad and indigo vats, and the potential of Ancient Blue™. From the first few successes, the art has moved from small tentative hand pieces to full body indigo patterns done on exuberant people willing to experiment and hoping to touch something of their Celtic heritage. If you can learn from this book ... and take into your own hands the unpredictable beautiful romance of blue ... there may be a renaissance of an ancient and magnificent art after a fifteen-hundred-year slumber.

⁷ Alex Morgan, <http://www.indigopage.com> and <http://www.spellstone.com>

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
"Like" Ancient Blue on Facebook!

References:

- Balfour-Paul, J. 1998: Indigo. British Museum Press, London
- Brauer, E. 1993: The Jews of Kurdistan. Patai (ed.) Wayne State University Press, Detroit.
- Carr, G. 2005: Woad, Tattooing and Identity in Later Iron Age and Early Roman Britain Oxford Journal of Archaeology; Vol. 24 Issue 3, p273-292, 20p
- Carr, G. 2003: Creolisation, pidginisation and the interpretation of unique artefacts in early Roman Britain. In Carr, G., Swift, E. and Weekes, J. (eds.), TRAC 2002: Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Canterbury 2002 (Oxford), 113–25.
- Carr, G. forthcoming a: Creolising the body in early Roman Britain. In Hingley, R. and Willis, S. (eds.), Promoting Roman Finds (Oxford).
- Carr, G. forthcoming b: Creolising the Body? Changing Identities in the Later Iron Age and Early Roman Period in Essex and Hertfordshire. Oxford, British Archaeological Reports).
- Connelly, S. (1989): Vita Prima Sanctae Brigitae: Background and Historical Value. Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland CIX 1 - 40
- Cowell, M.R. and Craddock, P.T. 1995: Addendum: copper in the skin of Lindow Man. In Turner, R.C. and Scaife, R.G. (eds.), Bog Bodies: new discoveries and new perspectives (London), 74–5.
- Cramer, P. 1993: Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c 200 – c1150, Cambridge
- Diba, L. ed. 1999: Royal Persian paintings, The Qajar Epoch, 1785 – 1925. I B Taurus Publishers, Brooklyn Museum of Art,
- Hamburger, M. 2002: Isatis tinctoria – From the rediscovery of an ancient medicinal plant towards a novel anti-inflammatory phytopharmaceutical. Phytochemistry Reviews Volume 1, Number 3 333-344
- John, P. 2006: Indigo reduction in the woad vat: a medieval biotechnology revealed. Biologist, Vol. 53 Issue 1, p31-35
- Jones, C.P. 1987: Stigma: tattooing and branding in Graeco-Roman antiquity. Journal of Roman Studies 77, 139–55.
- MacQuarrie, C. 2000: Insular and Celtic Tattooing: History, Myth and Metaphor. In “Written on the Body: the Tattoo in European and American History, Caplan (ed) Reaktion Books, London
- Masse', H. 1938: Croyances et Coutumes Persanes. Librairie Orientale et Americaine, Paris
- Nicholson, S. K., John, P. 2005: The mechanism of bacterial indigo reduction. Applied Microbiology & Biotechnology, Vol. 68 Issue 1, p117-123
- Sharpe, R. 1991: Medieval Irish Saints' Lives. Oxford.
- Stark, F. 1936: A Winter in Arabia, London
- Thomas, C. 1963: The interpretation of the Pictish symbols. The Archaeological Journal 120, 31–97.
- Yang, Zai-Chang; Wang, Bo-Chu; Yang, Xiao-Sheng; Wang, Qiang; Ran, Liang. 2005: The synergistic activity of antibiotics combined with eight traditional Chinese medicines against two different strains of Staphylococcus aureus. Colloids & Surfaces B: Biointerfaces, Vol. 41 Issue 2/3, p79-81

Finding Blue

Purchase Ancient Blue® indigo for body art from <http://www.mehandi.com> or call 1-855-MEHANDI
 Copyright © 2007 Catherine Cartwright-Jones TapDancing Lizard® LLC
 "Like" Ancient Blue on Facebook!