

The Tattoos of Morocco

The High Atlas mountain range has the highest peak in northern Africa. It is also home to many indigenous tribes, living in huts scattered along the mountainsides, where the older Berber women have tattoos on their faces and bodies.

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Before the modern desire for self-expression, tattoos showed stories about tribes, relationships with the land, and families. From an early age, Berber girls would get tattoos for protection from demons and disease. With each milestone in life, the women would get more – on the chin, on the cheeks, or between the eyes. Tattoos on the arms marked marriage and motherhood. These tattoos were usually dots, triangles, and circles, but the most precious was associated with the moon goddess Tanit. It had a diamond shape, like an eye protecting from evil, and was a symbol of fertility and considered the most beautiful symbol a woman could have on her face. The tattoos also made the Berber women feel different from men.

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Yet the practice fell out of favour during the French occupation and with the spread of Islam in Morocco. Today, the oldest women are the last generation to follow this tradition.

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Where do the Berber women live?

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What shapes are usually used in their tattoos?

What has caused the practice of tattoos to fall out of favour among the Berber women?