

INTRODUCTION

# Marking Skin

A Cutaneous Collection

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Deliberate, permanent, meaningful marks on human skin are as old as humanity itself. But the early modern period opened a new era in the history of cutaneous marking. Beginning in the fifteenth century, intensifying global travel and trade, especially the slave trade, forced bodies and dermal practices into contact as never before. The distinctive skin cultures and marking practices of Asia, Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania began to circulate and reshape one another. While much of our evidence of this circulation and transformation comes from texts and images created by Europeans, the phenomena they document were global. Dermal marking had its place in diverse cultures around the world, and early modern people experienced “skin contact” from multiple perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

As this new age of dermal encounters began, Europeans understood the skin as a ready surface for inscription by political, natural, and supernatural forces. The belief that these inscriptions could elevate, protect, or exclude the marked person could not have been more deeply rooted in the Western tradition. Cain was “cursed from the earth,” condemned to be “a fugitive and a vagabond,” but marked for protection as well: “And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him” (Genesis 4:10–15).<sup>2</sup> At the Apocalypse, the damned and the saved were imprinted respectively with the mark of the Beast (Revelation



Fig. I.1 Ifa divination tray showing scarified figures, Aja/Fon, seventeenth century. Wood, height 34.4 cm; width 55.7 cm. Photo © Ulmer Museum & Bernd Kessler, Ulm (CC BY-NC).

13:16–17) and the mark of God (Revelation 7:2–8), sealing their destinies. Early modern Europeans wove Judeo-Christian traditions that cast the mark on skin as a sign of election, protection, punishment, or damnation together with their knowledge of cutaneous marking in antiquity—notably the tattooing or branding of prisoners, servants, and enslaved people—and their own complex astrological systems that framed human skin as literally signed by the universe. This fabric of contrasting conceptions of skin marking provided the backdrop for the early modern explosion of new cross-cultural dermal interactions.

Early modern Europeans wrote and illustrated fascinated accounts of the tattooing, cutting, painting, circumcision, and other skin marking traditions they encountered across the globe, just as the Native inhabitants of these contact zones recorded and transmitted the marking practices that were part of their everyday lives through textual and artistic representations as well as through oral tradition. In West and West-Central Africa, for example, rich and complex scarification and tattoo traditions were reflected in material culture, as seen on a seventeenth-century Ifa divination board (fig. i.1). The eight human figures on the board all display scarification on the torso and face similar to the marks the Yoruba placed on their bodies, reflecting the important roles of voluntary dermal marking in many cultures of West Africa, the Americas, Southeast Asia, and Oceania. As Europeans described, misunderstood, and adapted the new dermal practices they encountered, they integrated their observations into existing beliefs and assumptions

about the marked body and its meanings in medical, astrological, religious, and legal realms.

They also created new hybrid forms of dermal marking to meet new economic and political demands. Foremost among these was the branding of enslaved Africans upon purchase in Africa or arrival in the Americas. This marking practice, used by slave traders from all European nations, was fundamental to the early modern Atlantic economy. Based on the pioneering work of Katrina H. B. Keefer, we can estimate that at least four million Africans and people of African descent were branded by slave traders, customs officials, plantation owners, or local authorities in the period from 1500 to 1800.<sup>3</sup> Like the judicial branding practiced in Europe and its Atlantic colonies to identify repeat criminal offenders, the branding of the enslaved created an archive on the skin, one that could be “read” to identify, control, and punish.<sup>4</sup> Branding became the material manifestation of the inscription of power upon the body. In his postmodern reframing of the human body, Michel Foucault famously argued that “power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.”<sup>5</sup> As a practice essential to the triangular trade, branding was imposed on Black skin until the abolition of slavery.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, Europeans were examining systematically their own cutaneous practices in relationship to those they observed around the world. In 1647, the first treatise entirely devoted to signs on skin, the voluminous *De stigmatismo, sacro et profano, divino, humano, daemoniaco* by French theologian Théophile Raynaud (1583–1663), was published in Grenoble.<sup>6</sup> Raynaud’s treatment of stigmata, as its title suggests, examined a wide variety of marks imprinted on the human body, from the bleeding wounds of saints to the devil’s mark on witches. Three years later, English physician John Bulwer (1606–1656) published his weighty *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform’d, or the Artificial Changeling*, which cataloged, illustrated, and condemned body marking and modification practices from every region of the world, including his own.<sup>7</sup> Far from representing isolated scholarly endeavors, the works of Raynaud and Bulwer—though very different from each other—reveal a new interest in dermal marking both as a topic for historical investigation and as a modern global phenomenon. Their works point to a novel conceptualization of body marking as a cross-cultural phenomenon that could be understood through history and by comparison or analogy. Across the early modern world, the cutaneous sign was being deployed, observed, and theorized in novel ways.

New interest brought with it new terminology. Though today we know the Latin plural term *stigmata* as merely describing wounds resembling those of Christ, early modern writers gave *stigma* and *stigmata* a far greater semantic reach, referring to a wide range of marks on skin made by nature, supernatural forces, or human beings. *Stigma* is drawn from the Greek word στίγμα,

meaning a “mark made by a pointed instrument, brand,” which in turn derives from the Greek *στίζειν*, meaning “to prick or to puncture.”<sup>8</sup> As these origins suggest, early modern *stigma* encompassed not only signs that carried infamy, as we use the word in our present time, but all marks made upon—or by penetrating—the skin. Among these forms of stigmata, one has attracted special attention due to its extraordinary cross-cultural spread in the modern era: the tattoo. But a permanent mark on skin made with ink was not known as a “tattoo” outside Polynesia until the late eighteenth century. The Polynesian word *tatu* entered European languages in the 1770s through the published narratives of the South Sea voyages of the French admiral Louis-Antoine de Bougainville and the English captain James Cook.<sup>9</sup> Yet while the word “tattoo” was new to the European lexicon in the eighteenth century, the practice of permanently marking the skin with pigment definitely was not.<sup>10</sup> In addition to flourishing in the Americas, South Asia, and Oceania, tattoos had existed in Europe for centuries; in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, they could be found on the bodies of pilgrims, alchemists, mystics, lovers, servants, and sailors. They figured prominently in the written accounts of cultural go-betweens and world travelers.<sup>11</sup> Better known to Europeans as “marks,” “pricks,” or “figures” (in French *marques*, *picqueures*, *figures*; in German *Figuren* or *Markierungen*) and described through the verbs “mark,” “prick,” “engrave,” “pounce,” and “race/rase/raze” (in French *marquer*, *piquer*, or *graver*; in German *kratzen*, *stechen*, or *bemalen*), terms for skin marking were borrowed from those used to describe other material marking practices that proliferated in this period.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the terminology used by modern European vernaculars for naming deliberate, permanent, meaningful marks on human skin expanded from the Greek and Latin *stigma*, with its classical and pejorative associations, to include, by the early nineteenth century, the words *tattoo*/*tatouage*/*Tätowierung*—signaling a new familiarity with body marking as a global phenomenon.

Until recently, scholarship on early modern dermal marking has focused on particular types of marking, such as Native North American tattoos or Christian stigmata. This tendency to examine cutaneous signs in isolation from each other is, in part, a result of disciplinary boundaries that have compartmentalized the study of body-marking practices: historians of religion have examined devotional marks, legal historians have investigated judicial branding, anthropologists have analyzed Indigenous tattooing, and so on.<sup>13</sup> But early modern markers of skin and “readers” of marked skin did not think about different kinds of dermal signs as separate from each other: they frequently cross-referenced the growing variety of known marking traditions to inform their understanding or use of any particular type of skin mark. For example, Mordechai Lewy notes that when Europeans first described tattooing among the Huron, in the Siamese capital of Ayuttaya, and in the Philippines, they all referenced the tattoos received by some Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem or Bethlehem, which were presumed

familiar to the readers of these travel accounts.<sup>14</sup> And in another well-known instance, Augustine of Hippo compared the invisible dermal mark of baptism to the permanent mark placed on a Roman soldier or enslaved person as a sign of allegiance or belonging.<sup>15</sup> When explaining the devil's mark on witches, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians claimed it was an inversion of holy marks such as baptism or divine stigmata; they also compared it with birthmarks and branding marks on both livestock and people.<sup>16</sup>

It is the early modern recognition of the fundamental comparability of dermal marking that informs this collection. Together we follow the lead of these observers of cutaneous marks and theoreticians of skin signs by bringing together analyses of a wide variety of dermal marking practices deployed and described in Europe and the wider world from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. To do this, our contributors examine both dermal marks that moved across cultures and those that developed primarily within a specific culture. Our collection reveals a rich and dynamic history of skin in early modern Europe and points the way to similar histories for other regions. By bringing diverse practices, contexts, and approaches to the marked body into dialogue, we highlight the deeper cultural foundations of beliefs about the body, the marking of its surface, and the specific early modern forces that put marked bodies in motion.

This project joins a growing corpus of exciting scholarship on the history of signs on skin. Over the last decades, scholars have begun to document past practices of corporeal marking in Europe and the Atlantic world, questioning long-standing assumptions about the history and meanings of the cutaneous sign. Publications include Nicole Nyffenegger and Katrin Rupp's collection *Writing on Skin in the Age of Chaucer* (2018) and Jane Caplan's germinal collected volume on the tattoo in the West, *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History* (2000), as well as edited volumes on divine stigmata by Dominique de Courcelles, *Stigmates* (2001); by Barbara Menke and Barbara Vinken, *Stigmata: Poetiken der Körperinschrift* (2004); and by Carolyn Muessig, *The Stigmata in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2020). Moreover, the skin itself has come to the fore as a meaningful object of study across time and disciplines, inspiring scholarship, conferences, exhibitions, and collective projects.<sup>17</sup> Claudia Benthien's *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World* (2002) and Steven Connor's *Book of Skin* (2004) reveal diverse and complex meanings of human skin in Europe from ancient times to the present, while Nina Jablonski explores its biological anthropology in *Skin: A Natural History* (2006) and *Living Color: The Biological and Social Meaning of Skin Color* (2012).<sup>18</sup> Led by historian Evelyn Welch and funded by the Wellcome Trust, the Renaissance Skin Project at King's College, London, has made crucial contributions to the study of early modern skin. Katherine Dauge-Roth's *Signing the Body: Marks on Skin in Early Modern France* (2020) brings an unprecedented range of methods and materials to bear on the question of dermal marking in the sixteenth through



eighteenth centuries, part of a whole wave of new research on early modern skin undertaken by empirically driven historians, literary scholars, art historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists.<sup>19</sup> Parallel to this research on skin and its marks, vital scholarship on skin color both in Europe and in the Atlantic world has begun to examine the construction of race and color in scientific, medical, aesthetic, and legal contexts.<sup>20</sup> This work is creating new opportunities to theorize and study skin color as the culminating form of early modern and modern dermal marking. But all this scholarship only scratches the surface of the global history of skin: for most early modern cultures, dermal marking remains a ubiquitous but underresearched phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> There is much more work to be done, and it is an exciting time to study the history of marks on skin.<sup>22</sup>

This growth in scholarship has made it possible to survey a wide range of early modern dermal discourses and practices within specific cultures and across cultural contact zones.<sup>23</sup> The chapters in this collection follow travelers journeying, whether by choice or by force, through diverse geographies: from the coasts of West Africa to the Caribbean; from mainland China to Taiwan; from Europe to North America, the Middle East, and Asia; and from one European principality to another. These essays examine marks burnt on the bodies of enslaved African captives, European convicts, and animal-bite victims, as well as the marks, wounds, and scars made on the bodies of heroic soldiers and devout Christians. They bring to light the significance attributed to tattoos pricked into the skin of Algonquians, Indigenous Taiwanese, and European pilgrims and consider the potent instability of the decorative paste-on beauty marks fashionable Europeans placed upon their skin. Interrogating the histories and meanings behind marks both hidden and displayed, immaterial and material, natural and artificial, permanent and transient, chosen and imposed, these interdisciplinary contributions reveal hidden connections between identity and effacement, belonging and exclusion, election and punishment, slavery and freedom, and wounding and healing.

We have grouped these diverse investigations of the marked body from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries in three parts: first, three essays on "Marked Encounters" interrogate dermal interactions and interpretations in contact zones across the globe; second, the contributions in "Marks of Faith" highlight the importance of religious belief and spiritual practice in thinking about the marked body and giving it meaning in the early modern era; and third, the chapters in "Standing Out" examine the ways in which marks on skin functioned in this period diversely to honor, shame, or beautify the body. Yet across these groupings and the range of contexts examined in the contributions assembled in this volume, some unifying themes emerge: the studies collected here show how old and new forms of dermal marking coexisted, how the power to mark the skin was adapted to serve new economic and political systems, and how the early modern cutaneous mark promised self-evidence and social legibility but often proved unstable, unreliable, or deceptive.

Age-old marking practices endured in the early modern period, even as new signs emerged or old signs were redirected to new ends. Signs on skin in this period were both conservative and innovative: they affirmed traditional roles and beliefs in the face of new challenges. As the contributions to this volume reveal, the Christian mark of baptism, God-given stigmata on the bodies of saints, and penal branding were all long-standing marking practices that still held intense significance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Used to maintain old social and cultural orders and expressive of enduring beliefs, these dermal practices faced new interpretations and were adapted to new ends in this period of profound transformation, modernization, and epistemological upheaval. Even as belief in the invisible mark of baptism and in the miraculous appearance of the stigmata of Christ persisted into this new age, their traditional meanings were confronted by new cultural and intellectual contexts. As Ana Fonseca Conboy shows, the sacred sign of Christian baptism, a permanent but unseen mark of grace and belonging, became doubly invisible in French martyr plays of the seventeenth century as new rules of *vraisemblance* and *bienséance* banished from the stage the all-important ceremony of baptism that confirmed conversion and acceptance into the Christian community. Dramatic strategies for making visible this profoundly transformative sacrament, now absent from view, took on paramount importance for the accomplishment of the didactic ends of hagiographic theater in this period. Catholic belief in miraculous stigmata also faced challenges in the mid-seventeenth century when confronted with ascendant Cartesian mind-body dualism, as Allison Stedman investigates. But Descartes's refusal to admit the ability of a spiritual force to effect change within the human body opened the door to a new mechanistic explanation of these increasingly frequent somatic phenomena. New theories celebrated the power of the human imaginative faculty, which, when moved through intense pious contemplation, could physically impress Christ's wounds upon the believer's skin. Similarly, the physical branding and incisions used in popular healing practices for rabies and other diseases—offered by the Church from at least the sixth century and informed by enduring belief in the power of relics and sacred touch in the early modern era—came under fire in the seventeenth century as well. As Dauge-Roth shows, these healing marks raised significant controversy in a climate of intense religious reform and rising empiricism. However, despite charges of superstition, practices of curative ritual branding and cutting to ward off rabies showed remarkable persistence, continuing through the early modern period and well into the nineteenth century.

The early modern period also saw the emergence of innovative and hybrid approaches to skin marking with roots—but no real predecessors—in earlier periods. In ancient Greece and Rome, tattoos and brands had occasionally been imposed on the bodies of enslaved people, convicted criminals, soldiers, and servants, but branding became ubiquitous in the seventeenth-century Atlantic

world, adapted to the needs of new labor regimes in European colonies and increasingly centralized administration at home. As the Atlantic trade in enslaved men and women gained its devastating momentum and judicial systems across Europe developed more systematic responses to crime, African captives and European convicts found themselves tracked and identified through signs painfully burned into their skin, as chapter 3 by Katrina H. B. Keefer and Matthew S. Hopper and chapter 9 by Craig Koslofsky show. In the New World, where labor was scarce and mobile, brands visibly marked African captives as signs of their commodification and as aids in their recapture if they fled. European colonial authorities and slave masters relied on this marking practice for more than four centuries: it was a horribly effective method of controlling human labor.<sup>24</sup> But in England and Western Europe, the growing free-labor market relied on a large pool of employable surplus labor. The disfiguring facial brands known since antiquity made convicts so marked unemployable, and thus they were replaced by branding on the hand, the shoulder, or other discreet locations. To counter to this trend, in 1699, the English Parliament introduced more stigmatizing facial branding for some property crimes. But this new facial branding was short-lived: six years later the law was repealed when authorities agreed that it served only to remove convicts from the labor market. While chattel branding continued for enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Atlantic colonies, more discreet branding was the answer for white bodies within the labor regime of eighteenth-century England. Retooled to serve new commercial and legal ends, ancient marking practices were hybridized to become essential components in vast systems built upon the violent coercion and control of labor.

As these examples suggest, a second overarching theme that unites the marking practices of the early modern era is the tension between being marked oneself and the power to mark the skin of another. In this period of intensified material and cultural exchange, early modern Europeans, intimately familiar with past marking traditions that conveyed religious and social identity, placed them in parallel with the novel dermal marks they encountered globally, giving new prominence and visibility to signs on skin as markers of difference and belonging, election or exclusion. From the baptismal mark to the brand, from battle scars to stigmata, from tattoos to beauty marks, marks on skin had the power to communicate their bearers' identities and declare their place both within their own communities and in relationship to other communities they encountered. For some persons, dermal marks affirmed and projected a desirable, positive identity—indicating belonging to God, to a community, or to a distinguished group of travelers. But others bore “stigmatal” marks considered signs of savagery or deviance or as reflections of their status as property.<sup>25</sup> Dermal marking could proudly showcase one's identity—or encase and limit it. Exercising the power to mark the skin never merely reflected some timeless tradition: our studies show



how early modern people adapted dermal marking to serve or resist new economic and political systems.

Cast simultaneously as a mark of belonging and of difference, the tattoo held particular prominence as sign of identity in this period of unprecedented global movement. As Xiao Chen shows, Qing Chinese officials in Taiwan chose to describe Indigenous tattooing as an ancestral practice reflecting filial piety, thus imagining a Confucian value shared between colonizer and “barbarian.” European travelers to the Holy Land observed the diverse body marking practices prevalent among its cosmopolitan population during their stay and adopted Levantine Christian tattooing for their own purposes. As shown in Mordechai Lewy’s chapter on European pilgrim tattoos, the Jerusalem mark served some Christian pilgrims quite literally as a sign of identity, displayed to gain them safe passage through otherwise hostile territories on their routes home. More profoundly, pilgrimage tattoos held both spiritual and social significance, signaling a pilgrim’s devotion as a person who had braved the challenges of travel to the Holy Land and followed in the very steps of Christ.

Despite their familiarity with tattoos on Christian or white skin, early modern European travelers and settlers saw the tattoos and other markings on the bodies of Indigenous people they encountered as manifest signs of alterity and barbarity. But they also sought to understand the significance of these novel cutaneous marks, just as the Native peoples they encountered examined European skin and costume for distinguishing marks in order to make sense of them. English colonists entering Algonquian land in the late sixteenth century saw their hosts’ tattoos and other bodily accoutrements as signs of difference that required translation for their European audience. As Mairin Odle argues, the English saw the body markings of the Native inhabitants of coastal Carolina as functionally similar to—though not the equal of—alphabetic writing; understanding these marks required a reversal of lessons in literacy, as Europeans attempted to gain dermal knowledge deemed essential to the success of the colonial enterprise. Xiao Chen’s comparative study of Dutch, Spanish, and Chinese writing about tattooing among Indigenous Formosans in Taiwan and Indigenous Bizayas in the Philippines reminds us that “othering” people of different nations by interpreting their body markings and skin color as signs of savagery was not unique to the European imperial gaze. Nor was the attempt to understand tattooing in relationship to the colonizer’s own material practices and cultural norms: European and Chinese officials read Indigenous dermal marking as signs of social rank, bravery, barbarity, or filial piety.

The “reading” of marks on skin presumes access to them. For early modern Europeans, the condition of being marked raised the fraught question of control over one’s own skin—one’s own self. On the dramatic stage, Shakespeare transformed the story of the Roman hero Martius Coriolanus from the fifth century BCE into a struggle over access to dermal marks. All of Shakespeare’s sources for

the play *Coriolanus* describe its protagonist as willingly following the Roman custom of displaying one's battle wounds as a sign of service to Rome. But Shakespeare's Coriolanus refused to expose his wounded body, triggering a personal and political crisis. To whom did the scars of Coriolanus belong? To the hero himself, who could withhold them from public display? Or was he marked by his service to Rome and thus obligated to show his marked skin to the Roman people? As Nicole Nyffenegger shows, in Shakespeare's retelling, Coriolanus will not let his wounds speak for themselves as a public display, and he would rather let his wounds heal into scars than allow his social inferiors to talk about them or speak for them. His wounds should be his to display or conceal. The play thus poses the deeper question of who may "read" someone's dermal marks and make meaning of them in an age of increasingly self-fashioned social identity. On the courtly stage, Claire Goldstein shows how the paste-on cosmetic beauty mark, or *mouche*, found itself reinvested and redeployed from its Ovidian roots onto the skin of aristocrats and into the new periodical press. These versatile and mobile imitation moles provided not only a welcome enhancement of the much sought-after whiteness of the skin—by creating a point of dark contrast—but also a potential means of signifying one's amorous status or intentions. Produced of black taffeta, the *mouche* counterfeited the natural, permanent birthmark so invested with meaning by Renaissance astrology, offering instead an artificial permanence in a new signifying system. Instead of a stable, natural sign of the bearer's identity and destiny, this temporary dermal mark allowed its bearers to direct and modulate their self-presentation, much as Coriolanus sought to do.

European and Chinese observers sought to interpret the dermal signs they encountered when they traveled outside their cultural core regions—but they also wondered whether accurate readings were even possible. This imperial-colonial interest in skin points to a third question that plagued all attempts to make Indigenous dermal marking practices "speak" in the early modern period. In a time of extraordinary and unprecedented change, early modern individuals and regimes sought to anchor identity, authority, and truth in indelible signs made on skin. Colonization, new regimes of violently coerced labor, and the mobility of people and goods across imperial borders led to an increasing reliance on dermal marks to recognize allies, runaways, and coreligionists, from Taiwan to Virginia. Building new empires on Indigenous land with enslaved labor, Europeans invested the cutaneous mark with stability, creating fantasies of permanence and legibility.

But just how reliable was the cutaneous mark? Time and again, marks on skin proved themselves ambiguous, unstable, and even subversive; they resisted reading or were concealed. Chinese scholar-administrators in Taiwan reported that, bafflingly, some Indigenes were tattooed with "the scripts of red barbarians [i.e., the Dutch]." <sup>26</sup> What could such doubly foreign marks mean? Other native Taiwanese bore dermal marks that might be an unsettling record of their

successful head-hunting. European colonists in the Americas worried over their inability to accurately read dermal signs they construed as political and thus crucial to their relations with Native tribes regarding land, loyalty, and trade. Stigmata on the bodies of devout Christian women inspired conflicting interpretations as theologians and philosophers struggled with the inadequacy of their existing theories to explain their appearance. Birthmarks signifying healing ability were regularly faked by con men and thus unreliable, just as artificial beauty marks proved subversive in their mobility, impermanence, and promiscuous indeterminacy. Authorities relied on the branding of African captives and European convicts, but even these practices were inconsistent, and searches for previous brands were sometimes inconclusive, futile, or did not take place at all. On stage, Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* refused to offer his wounds up for public reading and definition, preferring to keep them hidden under his clothes and thus rendering them illegible. The mark of baptism, itself invisible, was even more elusive, requiring its presence to be made manifest through other means. The early modern cutaneous mark promised self-evidence, permanence, and visibility, but the scholarship collected in this volume shows how often such marks proved unreliable, ambiguous, or undecipherable.

From birthmarks to brands, stigmata to tattoos, battle scars to beauty marks, signs on the skin took on new prominence in the early modern period. These cutaneous marks moved across discourses and cultures, difficult to contain in any one frame or interpretation. But the early modern dermal theories and practices surveyed here reflect a common context: a world of increased trade, intensified cultural contact and exchange, and epistemological upheaval. Under these conditions, early modern people relied on dermal marks to uphold traditional authorities and identities. But they also saw in skin marking new opportunities, creating novel hybrid dermal practices to serve new economic and political systems or to forge new identities. Early modern men and women also resisted the power to mark and the condition of being marked by concealing their marks or choosing new ones. Despite increased investment in its legibility and stability, the cutaneous mark sometimes proved unstable. Each of the chapters in this study reflects these varied aspects and meanings of early modern dermal marking: conservative and innovative forms of marking side by side, reflecting both the power to mark and resistance to marking, even as these embodied marks claimed to provide a solid basis for knowledge about groups of people or specific individuals.

The wide-ranging pressure on the marked skin to reliably signify legal status, authority, or community succeeded in some areas: the European branding of enslaved Africans was brutally effective and widespread, carried out over four centuries on millions of persons. And as the early modern period created and solidified notions of whiteness and Blackness, the dermal practices and discourses surveyed in this volume contributed to a new and fateful role for skin

in the modern world. The assembled scholarship places the emergence of early modern skin color in a new context: it arose not just from nascent European science or more long-standing prejudices but from a multitude of dermal marking practices and discourses that circulated around the world. The following chapters illuminate these interconnected practices and discourses and so provide new ways to understand historically how skin color became such a powerful marker of human identity and difference today.

## Notes

1. As several of the essays in this volume attest, much can be gleaned about Indigenous marking practices around the world from early modern European written and printed sources. But to write a more complete and less Eurocentric history of the marked body, we need more research and study of both material artifacts and orally transmitted narratives and traditions related to skin and its marking.
2. Christian scripture quotations are from the King James Bible. On Cain and early modern punishments, see Sarah Covington, "Law's Bloody Inflictions': Judicial Wounding and Resistance in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Structures of Feeling in Seventeenth-Century Cultural Expression*, ed. Susan McClary (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 279–80.
3. Katrina H. B. Keefer, "Marked by Fire: Brands, Slavery, and Identity," *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 40, no. 4 (2019): 659–81. See also Keefer and Matthew S. Hopper's contribution to this volume.
4. Conversely, Keefer's major ongoing project to catalogue, identify, and track brands made by slave traders and owners uses the reading of this corporeal archive instead as a means for reconstructing family histories, establishing ancestry, and retracing the lives of enslaved individuals. This project, "Violence in Iron and Silver: Data Visualisation and the Reconstruction of Identities through Slave Brands," is funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. See also "Decoding Origins: Creating a Visual Language of Marks," <https://languageofmarks.org>.
5. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 25.
6. Théophile Raynaud, *De stigmatismo, sacro et profano, divino, humano, daemonicano*, 2nd ed. (Grenoble: Apud C. Bureau, 1647; Lyon: Antoine Cellier, 1654).
7. John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform'd: Or, The Artificiall Changling, Historically presented*, 2nd ed. (1650; London: William Hunt, 1653).
8. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Stigma," 2nd ed. (1989), <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/190242>, and Alain Rey, *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (Paris: Le Robert, 1992), "Stigmate." For further discussion of the terms used to describe marks on skin in this period, see Katherine Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body: Marks on Skin in Early Modern France* (New York: Routledge, 2020), esp. 3–4.
9. The journals of James Cook and his fellow captains were published by John Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere*, 3 vols (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1773). Bougainville's account appeared as the *Voyage autour du monde, par la frégate du Roi La Boudeuse, et la flûte L'Étoile; En 1766, 1767, 1768 & 1769* (Paris: Saillant & Nyon, 1771). The OED records the first appearances of "tattoo" as a noun and a verb in 1769, and "Tatouer," "Tatoué, ée," and "Tatouage" first entered the French dictionary at the close of the eighteenth century. See *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 5th ed. (Paris: J. J. Smits, 1798), 2:634.
10. Historian Anna Felicity Friedman discusses and debunks the "Cook myth" that the tattoo was an exotic import, first brought to Europe on the backs of Cook's sailors—an idea that persists despite overwhelming evidence disproving it. See Anna Felicity Friedman, "The Cook Myth: Common Tattoo History

Debunked," April 5, 2015, [www.tattoohistorian.com/2014/04/05/the-cook-myth-common-tattoo-history-debunked](http://www.tattoohistorian.com/2014/04/05/the-cook-myth-common-tattoo-history-debunked), as well as her dissertation, "Tattooed Transculturites: Western Expatriates Among Amerindian and Pacific Islander Societies, 1500–1900" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2012).

11. On Holy Land pilgrim tattooing, see Juliet Fleming, "The Renaissance Tattoo," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 61–82; Mordechai Lewy's contribution to this volume (first published in Hebrew under the English title "Towards a History of Jerusalem Tattoo Marks Among Western Pilgrims," *Cathedra* 95 [2000]: 37–66; and in German as "Jerusalem unter der Haut: Zur Geschichte der Jerusalemer Pilgertätowierung," trans. Esther Kontarsky, *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 55, no. 1 [2003]: 1–39; Robert Ousterhout, "Permanent Emphemera: The 'Honourable Stigmatisation' of Jerusalem Pilgrims," in *Between Jerusalem and Europe: Essays in Honour of Bianca Kühnel*, ed. Renana Bartal and Hanna Vorholt (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 94–109; and Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*, 171–205. On devotional tattooing in Loreto, Italy, see Guido Guerzoni, "Notae divinae ex arte compuntae: Prime impressioni sul tatuaggio devozionale in Italia (secoli XV–XIX)," in "La Peau humaine / La pelle humana / The Human Skin," special issue, *Micrologus: Natura, Scienze e Società Medievali* 13 (2005): 409–37, and Guido Guerzoni, "Devotional Tattoos in Early Modern Italy," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 6 (2018): 119–36. On tattoos by alchemists, see Jennifer A. Rosecrans, "Wearing the Universe: Symbolic Markings in Early Modern England," in Caplan, *Written on the Body*, 46–60, and Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*, 262–63. On lovers' tattoos, see Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*, 263 and 270 n. 22. On Native American and Indigenous Canadian tattooing as described by the French and English and their borrowings of it, see Arnaud Balvay, "Tattooing and Its Role in French-Native American Relations," *French Colonial History* 9 (2008): 1–14; Céline Carayon, *Eloquence Embodied: Nonverbal Communication Among French and Indigenous Peoples in the Americas* (Williamsburg: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2019), 195–99; Friedman, "Tattooed Transculturites"; Michael Gaudio,

"Savage Marks: The Scriptive Techniques of Early Modern Ethnography," in *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1–43; Mairin Odle's contribution to this volume and her *Under the Skin: Tattoos, Scalps, and the Contested Language of Bodies in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming); Gorden M. Sayre, *Les Sauvages Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 165, 175; and Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*, 121–69. On the material culture of Native American tattooing, see Aaron Deter-Wolf and Carol Diaz-Granados, eds., *Drawing with Great Needles: Ancient Tattoo Traditions of North America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), and Aaron Deter-Wolf, Tanya M. Peres, and Steven Karacic, "Ancient Native American Bone Tattooing Tools and Pigments: Evidence from Central Tennessee," *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 37 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2021.103002>.

12. On resemblances between body-marking practices and other premodern material-marking practices, see the essays in Nicole Nyffenegger and Katrin Rupp, eds., *Writing on Skin in the Age of Chaucer* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); Joel Konrad, "'Barbarous Gallants': Fashion, Morality, and the Marked Body in English Culture, 1590–1660," *Fashion Theory* 15, no. 1 (2011): 29–48; Jane Caplan, introduction to *Written on the Body*, xi–xxiv; Fleming, "Renaissance Tattoo"; and Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*.

13. On stigmata, see Dominique de Courcelles, ed., *Stigmata*, Cahiers de l'Herne 75 (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 2001), especially Jacques Le Brun's essay in that volume, "Les discours de la stigmatisation au XVIIe siècle," 103–18; Barbara Menke and Barbara Vinken, eds., *Stigmata: Poetiken der Körperinschrift* (Munich: Fink, 2004); Carolyn Muessig, *The Stigmata in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Nicole Pellegrin, "Fleurs saintes: L'écriture des stigmates (XVIe–XVIIIe siècles)," in *Femmes en fleurs, femmes en corps: Sang, Santé, Sexualités du Moyen Âge aux Lumières*, ed. Cathy McClive and Nicole Pellegrin (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2010), 101–22. On judicial



branding, see Covington, "Law's Bloody Inflictions"; Marc Vigé, "La Flétrissure des forçats au XVIIIe siècle: Un exemple de justice emblématique," *Revue de science criminelle et de droit comparé* 3 (July–September 1986): 809–17; Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*, 217–56; and Craig Koslofsky's contribution to this volume. On Indigenous tattooing in North America, see Carayon, *Eloquence Embodied*, 195–99; Deter-Wolf and Diaz-Granados, *Drawing with Great Needles*; Friedman, "Tattooed Transculturites"; Gaudio, "Savage Marks"; Balvay, "Tattooing and Its Role"; and Marin Odle's contribution to this volume as well as her forthcoming monograph, *Under the Skin*.

14. See Mordechay Lewy's contribution to this volume; Ousterhout, "Permanent Ephemera"; and Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*, 171–215.

15. See Ana Fonseca Conboy's contribution to this volume.

16. See Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*, 32–43.

17. Museum exhibitions include *My Skin*, curated by Mienke te Hennepe, Boerhaave Museum, Leiden, 2007; *Skin*, curated by Javier Moscoso, Wellcome Collection, London, June 10–September 26, 2010; *Skin/Peau*, Musée de la Main, Fondation Claude Verdan, Lausanne, June 16, 2011–April 29, 2012; *Tatoueurs, tatoués*, Musée du quai Branly, May 6, 2014–October 18, 2015, with the catalog *Tatoueurs, tatoués* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2014); and *Les signes du corps*, Musée Dapper, September 23, 2004–April 3, 2005, with the catalog Christiane Falgayrettes-Leveau, ed., *Signes du corps* (Paris: Musée Dapper, 2004). Conferences addressing the history of skin and/or body marking include "La Peau humaine / La pelle humana / The Human Skin," at the universities of Lausanne and Geneva, 2002, with its papers collected in an issue of *Micrologus: Natura, Scienze e Società Medievali* 13 (2005); "Nella Pelle / Into the Skin: First International Conference on the Identity, Symbolism, and History of Permanent Body Marks," organized by Mordechay Lewy at the Università Pontificia Ubaniana, Vatican City, December 5–6, 2011; "The Porous Body in Early Modern Europe," November 30–December 1, 2017, and "Global Skins in Early Modern Europe, 1400–1700," September 19–20, 2019, organized by the Renaissance Skin Project at King's College, London, in addition to many

other events sponsored by this research group (see <https://www.renaissanceskin.ac.uk>).

18. Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and Other*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004); Nina Jablonski, *Skin: A Natural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Nina Jablonski, *Living Color: The Biological and Social Meaning of Skin Color* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

19. For work on skin and skin marking specific to the early modern era, see, for example, François Delpech, "Les marques de naissance: Physiognomonie, signature magique et charisme souverain," in *Le corps dans la société espagnole des XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, ed. Augustin Redondo (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1990), 27–49; François Delpech, "La 'marque' des sorcières: Logique(s) de la stigmatisation diabolique," in *Le Sabbat des sorciers: XVe–XVIIIe siècles*, ed. Nicole Jacques-Chaquin et Maxime Préaud (Grenoble: Millon, 1993), 347–68; Marie-Luce Demonet, "Les marques insensibles, ou les nuages de la certitude," *Littératures Classiques* 25 (Fall 1995): 97–134; Mienke te Hennepe, "Of the Fisherman's Net and Skin Pores: Reframing Conceptions of the Skin in Medicine, 1572–1714," in *Blood, Sweat and Tears: The Changing Concepts of Physiology from Antiquity into Early Modern Europe*, ed. Manfred Horstmannshoff, Helen King, and Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 523–48; Hannah Murphy, "Skin and Disease in Early Modern Medicine: Jan Jessen's *De cute, et cutaneis affectibus* (1601)," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 94, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 179–214; Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*; and Craig Koslofsky, "Knowing Skin in Early Modern Europe, c. 1450–1750," *History Compass* 12, no. 10 (2014): 794–806.

20. See, for example, Guillaume Aubert, "'The Blood of France': Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," *William and Mary Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (July 2004): 439–78; Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Elsa Dorlin, *La matrice de la race: Généalogie sexuelle et coloniale de la Nation française* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006); Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Andrew S. Curran, *Who's Black and Why? A Hidden Chapter from the Eighteenth-Century Invention of Race*

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022); Rana Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackness: Making Racial Difference in the Atlantic World, 1780–1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Colour in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Anne Lafont, *L'art et la race: L'africain (tout) contre l'œil des Lumières* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2019); Anne Lafont, "How Skin Color Became a Racial Marker: Art Historical Perspectives on Race," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017): 89–113; Christina Malcolmson, *Studies of Skin Color in the Early Royal Society: Boyle, Cavendish, Swift* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002); Christina Malcolmson and Sujata Iyengar, eds., "Race and Skin Marking in the Early Modern Period," special issue, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 18 (2018): 134–212; Hannah Murphy, "Skin Before Colour in Early Modern Europe," *Historian's Watch, Histories of the Present*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/earlymodern-skin-colour>; Jessica Pierre-Louis, "La couleur de l'autre: L'altérité au travers des mots dans les sociétés coloniales françaises du Nouveau Monde (XVII–XVIIIe siècle)," in *Poétique et politique de l'altérité: Colonialisme, esclavagisme, exotisme (XVIIIe–XXIe siècles)*, ed. Karine Bénac-Giroux, *Rencontres: Le dix-huitième siècle* 31 (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 143–54; Angela Rosenthal, "Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture," *Art History* 27, no. 4 (2004): 563–92; Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Megan Vaughn, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Roxanne Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); and

Craig Koslofsky, "Superficial Blackness? Johann Nicolas Pechlin's *De Habitu et Colore Aethiopicum Qui Vulgo Nigritae* (1677)," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 18 (2018): 140–58. Unfortunately, some scholarship on the role of skin in early modern European ideas of the body and the self limits its focus to an abstract or unmarked human skin, as if this era did not give birth to enormously powerful and lasting categories of human difference based on skin color. The formation of racialized skin color from early modern ways of knowing and marking skin is the focus of Craig Koslofsky's current project: *The Deep Surface: Skin in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

21. Archaeologist Aaron Deter-Wolf (see n. 11 above) has led the way in the study of the physical tools of Native American tattooing, but there is more to be done on the intangible ritual practices that accompanied almost all tattooing and other forms of dermal marking in the early modern era.

22. The history of skin marking and of tattooing, in particular, has also drawn lively popular interest. Web-based work such as the Renaissance Skin Project's site, <https://www.renaissanceskin.ac.uk>, and Friedman's <https://www.tattoohistorian.com> helps bridge the gap between popular interest in marks on skin and ongoing scholarship in the field.

23. On other forms of embodied expression and communication in early modern contact zones, see Carayon, *Eloquence Embodied*.

24. The earliest records of the branding of enslaved Africans stem from the 1440s, when Portuguese traders on Arguin Island, off the coast of Mauritania, recorded branding their African captives. See Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 388–97.

25. This term comes from Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis*.

26. See Xiao Chen's contribution to this volume.