

The

POLYNESIAN TATTOO Handbook

PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CREATING MEANINGFUL POLYNESIAN TATTOOS



spear heads motif

the warrior, courage
valiance, fighting for
your beliefs

shark teeth motif

protection on water,
strength, adaptability



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	FOREWORD	p. 4
2	PLACEMENT ON THE BODY	p. 12
3	SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS	p. 20
4	QUICK REFERENCE	p. 68
5	CREATION PROCESS	p. 86
6	BASIC DESIGNS	p. 122
	APPENDIX - MAORIGRAM CREATION	p. 136
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	p. 150

“Mate atu he tetekura, ara mai he tetekura.”

—When a fern frond dies, another will take its place:

Life continues in our children.

Polynesia is a subregion of Oceania, comprising of a large grouping of over 1,000 islands scattered over the central and southern Pacific Ocean, within a triangle that has New Zealand, Hawaii and Easter Island as its corners. The people who inhabit the islands of Polynesia are termed Polynesians and they share many similar traits including language, culture and beliefs.

Polynesian languages may actually vary slightly from each other, or even a great deal, depending on the distance between the groups of islands and the frequency of their contacts. There are some words which are basically the same throughout all Polynesian languages, reflecting the deepest core of all Polynesian cultures.

Two emblematic ones are moana (ocean) and mana (spiritual force, energy).

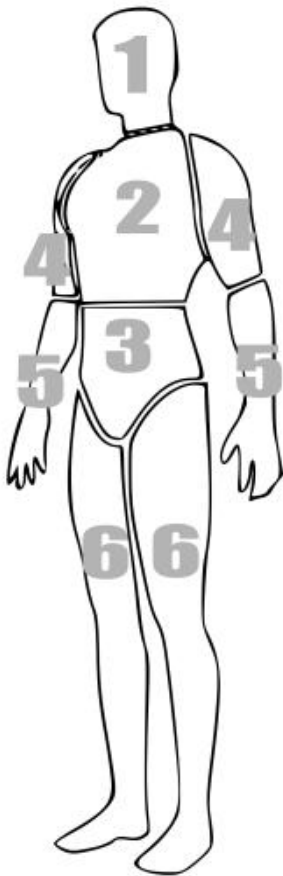
It’s interesting to note how similar these two words are and this should not be a surprise once we understand the relation between Polynesian cultures and the ocean.

The ocean guarantees life.



left leg could be matched by another one on the right arm and so on.

Let's see the body in detail:



1. Head

It's our contact to Rangī and as such it is related to *spirituality*, *knowledge*, *wisdom* and *intuition*.

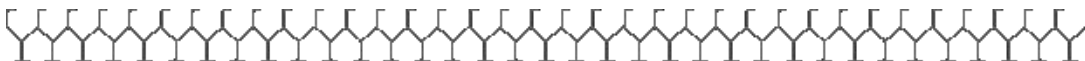
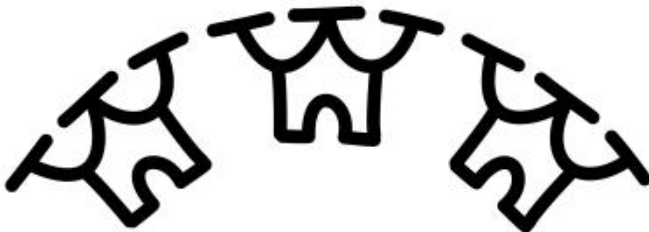


Second simplification:



Overstylized enata joined together in a row of people holding hands form the motif called *ani ata*, which translates to "cloudy sky":

Rangi (Heaven) and Papa (Mother Earth) once laid closely embraced together and their children lived between them in darkness until deified men forced them apart by pushing Rangi up to let the light in. This concept of a row related to the sky is present throughout all Polynesian languages and a row of enata in a semicircle is commonly used to represent the sky as well as the ancestors guarding upon their descendants:





PROTECTION

STRENGTH

ADAPTABILITY

SUCCESS

JOY

PROSPERITY

DIFFICULTIES

FRIENDSHIP



adaptability: octopus, shark

adventure: canoe

adversities: eels

affection: seashell

alertness: seagulls

ancestors: ipu, aumakua, cord

awakening: koru

B

balance: Marquesan cross, manaia, tiki

be prepared: adze, fish hook

beauty: hibiscus, manta, tiare flowers

beyond: waves

birth: koru, ipu

blessing: ti leaves, kava

boldness: spear heads

bonds: braid, ani ata, twist (eternal love), dolphin



Mountains: stability

Twist: eternal love

All-seeing eye: protection from evil

+ 2 non Polynesian symbols:

Paw print: dog

Sailboat: sailing

step 2: deciding how to dispose them

Since fire is Poulomi's ruling element, reflecting much of her character and the passion she puts into her beliefs, we decided to shape her tattoo like a flame going up the arm. Similarly to her life, which is made of the moments lived with her dear ones, the flame was made by the union of smaller flames representing them.

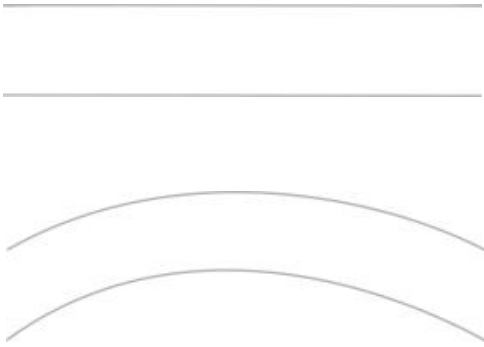
The three frangipani flowers symbolize femininity and represent the three women of the family; a touch of colour may be added to them to represent the beauty of life.

The main flame represents Poulomi and from bottom to top (from matter to spirit) we find: hammerhead shark motif (determination and tenacity, strength), manta (freedom, protection and elegance), turtles (family; a Marquesan cross inside the first one is for harmony and the flax leaves are for union, with a tiki hand for protection). The birds represent freedom, watching the world from a higher perspective and they



Let's see how to proceed creating a maorigram step by step.

1. Create a path where the Maorigram will go, usually two parallel lines (but of course any shape can be used). This will help you make all the letters the same size. This path will give the final shape to your Maorigram:



2. Start composing the word with the letters you created. We'll recreate the name Bianca using the given letters. During this step, just use the simple version on the left for each letter.

Place the letters close to each other, leaving a little more space between each word if you have more than one; giving a light colour to both the path lines and the letters will help keep the final elements clearly identifiable:

