

Body art is a common practice that serves not only to decorate, but also to express beliefs or feelings (both individual and group). Tattooing is one of the most characteristic of these methods and arguably the most popular procedure for body modification and decoration. Today, a tattoo is seen primarily in aesthetic terms, while in archaic (traditional, pre-industrial) societies, it was perceived within an integrated social and cultural system. Therefore, the study of body art provides a variety of information not only in relation to the art of tattooing itself (i.e., the technique of execution, the pigments used to create the patterns, the iconography of representations), but more important about the intangible meanings of body decoration. Single signs or their complex figural representations are not only patterns per se; they convey specific ideas, thoughts, and meanings; allows us to perceive the phenomenon of tattooing and body painting in various contexts and to see its various functions. Pre-Columbian South America is one of the regions of the world where the custom of tattooing was widely widespread. The long tradition of body decoration in this area is evidenced by abundant archaeological material presenting what are probably images of tattoos or body paintings on anthropomorphic pottery and isolated iconography, stone carvings, textiles and mummies, whose skin is covered with this kind of ornamentation. Traces of body decorations can be found on the mummified remains of people from of the Chinchorro fishing tradition in the desert coast of southern Peru and northern Chile (7000–1500 BC). Moreover, in later times, this custom was practiced in almost every culture along the pre-Columbian coast of Peru. One example of the wonderful and meticulous work of ancient tattooists is – discovered several years ago – the body of the *Lady de Cao*, who belonged to a priests the Moche people's elite (1st-7th century AD) from northern Peru. Her skin is covered with body decorations depicting images of snakes, spiders, and butterflies. Despite the prevalence of the preserved material, the issue of body painting and tattooing is a subject that has not been addressed thus far in a systematic manner.

The main task of the project is to study in a technical, and consequently socio-cultural aspect the art of tattooing, based on the analysis of a mummified human remains from the collections of Museo Arturo Ruiz Estrada's in Peru. The project involves research conducted via a range of methods drawn from various fields of science, including archaeology, anthropology, chemistry, and forensic science. Therefore, it transcends the traditional understanding of humanities, and is the first time that such a comprehensive approach has been proposed regarding this category of sources. The interdisciplinary studies (e.g., chemical-biological) will focus mainly on recreating the pigments recipe and the technique of decorating. Moreover, the planned considerations on the origins of tattooing from the perspective of the art involved in making them will not only be based on purely academic hypotheses and interpretations, but also on the professional insights of contemporary tattooists.

The project consists of five research stages. The first involves the creation of a complete database of tattooed and painted mummies in the collection examined. The second stage will be conducted with the use of non-invasive and invasive techniques and will focus on body ornaments. The next stage includes will analyses of the decoration on mummies from a biological perspective; the fourth step focuses on tracing changes in the patterns used in body decoration within the Chancay culture (1000-1470 AD). The final, fifth stage will help to produce data relating to the purpose of the patterns made and their utility in the world of pre-Hispanic indigenous societies. Furthermore, by using a wide range of specialized techniques, their validity will be determined in terms of future research on body decoration preserved on mummified human remains. This work will yield a universal way of proceeding when researching this topic. Research based on various sources as well as the output of interdisciplinary work and analyses will offer a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of body art, including the related non-material aspects of culture among the indigenous societies of the Andean Area. Based on the research performed, it will be possible to analyse and develop what to date has been a rarely explored topic, enriching our knowledge of not only the societies of pre-Columbian Peru, but also in relation to the phenomenon of tattooing in general. The proposed project will certainly yield valuable information not only for researchers of American cultures, but also to contemporary residents of the Central Andean Area (modern Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile). Thanks to the universality of the topic of body decoration in the contemporary culture and the popularity of tattooing, it can be expected that the project outcomes will also be of interest to a wider audience.