



Icons of Courage - The last Kayin men with traditional leg tattoos

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Tattooing is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of Myanmar. Prior to British colonisation, it was common for men of the Bama, Shan, or Kayin to adorn their skin from the waist to below the knees with mythical or animal figures. A completed tattoo on both legs served as a visual expression of manhood and courage. Moreover, the tattoos showed their devotion to Buddhism and served as protection against evil forces. Men of all classes, from laymen to aristocrats, adopted the practice of leg tattooing. Suppressed by the colonial administration, the custom eventually ceased to exist by the mid-20th century. This book is a tribute to the last old men still bearing these traditional marks.

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