



THE TRADITION OF COPTIC TATTOOING

Information about Tattooing and Coptic Church in Egypt

- ❖ Tattooing is an ancient tradition in Egypt, dating back to at least 2000 BC.
- ❖ The word "Coptic" comes from a Greek word meaning "Egyptian," and describes a person from Egypt.
- ❖ The race of Copts
- ❖ The Coptic language originated from the language spoken in Ancient Egypt
- ❖ Coptic Christianity began in Egypt at about 55 A.D, making it one of the five oldest Christians churches in the world.
- ❖ The **Coptic cross** is widely used in the **Coptic** church and the Ethiopian and Eritrean churches. The **Coptic cross**, in its modern and ancient forms, is considered a sign of faith and pride to the **Copts** The Ethiopian Christians wear it as a **symbol** of faith.



Tattoos aren't just fashion statement for Egypt's copts

- ❖ As a testament to their faith, Egypt's Coptic Christians traditionally have a cross tattoo on their right wrist. In earlier times, this was a symbol of the hardships they faced. Today, it's a symbol of resistance.
- ❖ When Egypt was conquered by Muslims around 640 AD and placed under Islamic control, the practice of tattooing increased dramatically.
- ❖ The people were forced to convert to Islam and those who didn't were marked with a cross on their wrist – and forced to pay a religious tax. It was a sign of ostracism back then, but today, the cross carries a positive meaning.
- ❖ They're not just a symbol, but also a form of ID. Churches Stations security personnel at their doors to check that those entering have the tattoo to guarantee that they are, in fact, Christians.





- ❖ Coptic parents usually have their children's wrists tattooed with a cross symbol at a very young age, a few months or a few years old.

The Coptic Church was not only active in Egypt, but also in Ethiopia

- ❖ It is important to remember that the Coptic Church was not only active in Egypt, but also in Ethiopia, which was under the control of Orthodox Christian emperors.
- ❖ Ethiopian Christians were, in the early 15th century.
- ❖ Till today many Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Christians continue the tradition of tattooing the cross on their forehead.



The woman with the cross tattoo. (2020, October 9). YouTube. <https://youtu.be/6nbrBHDEwgl>

Coptic tattoos. The triangle of tradition. Between religion, culture and history. <https://www.tatuaggilauretani.it/en/coptic-tattoos-the-triangle-of-tradition-between-religion-culture-and-history>

- ❖ *While these tattoos have become part of the copt's Christian identity, they have also caused harassment towards this minority group in majority Muslim Egypt.*