

Islands, and later to the Americas, by way of India, China and Japan. By 3,000 years ago it was found almost everywhere, and today remains rare only in sub-Saharan Africa.

As permanent body art, similar to scarification, tattoos typically marked permanent or semi-permanent aspects of social position, such as rank or marital status. Today, they still serve this purpose, among others. As I wrote in *Bodies of Inscription* (Duke University Press, 2005), when the middle classes began getting tattoos, they also began to create “tattoo narratives”: stories relating why they got the tattoo, how long they had thought about it, the genesis of the design and its meaning, the tattooing experience and what the tattoo means to them now.

For professionals, these narratives are particularly important. As trailblazers in their class, they need to create new meanings for their tattoos; underworld or working-class narratives are not relevant to them. New narratives are important for personal as well as social and ‘tribal’ reasons — the scientists don’t want their choices to seem random or impulsive.

Many of the scientists’ designs are not easily understandable without knowing the story behind them. For example, the tattoo that inspired Zimmer’s quest was a double helix acquired by one of his friends, a neurobiologist. But it isn’t just any DNA: it also spells out the name of that friend’s wife. Another couple featured in the book have matching tattoos of chromosomes splitting during meiosis; those with no basic understanding of biology would have a hard time grasping the literal or metaphorical meaning of their squiggles without a narrative.

*Science Ink* is packed with fascinating stories. One of the most moving is Abigail’s. A chemistry student, she sent in a photo of her tattoo — the word ‘entropy’ inked on her back. A few months later, her mother sent Zimmer a note saying that Abigail had died in a car accident and that she was getting her daughter’s tattoo replicated on her own body. That blog post and the comments it generated became a memorial for Abigail, and eventually led to a posting by a woman whose mother had received Abigail’s lungs after her death.

We call tattoos permanent, but they last only as long as the body that wears them survives. Abigail’s tattoo has a life beyond her own: the design now adorns the headstone marking her grave. And it is there in the pages of *Science Ink* — one of many signs of an enduring fervour for science, and a new chapter in the age-old history of body art. ■

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## Books in brief



### Missing Links: In Search of Human Origins

John Reader OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 350 pp. £25 (2011)

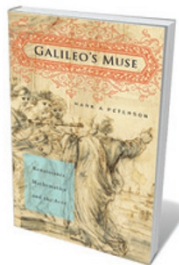
The cast of ancient superstars in palaeoanthropologist John Reader’s book has grown significantly in the 30 years since the first edition. Neanderthal Man, Lucy and other early hominin fossils are joined by finds from *Homo floresiensis* to *Ardipithecus* in a stunningly illustrated update. Powered by enthusiasm and peppered with controversy, the search for human origins is laid out clearly and succinctly, from the first fossils and Victorian revelations, to frauds such as Piltown Man and triumphs such as the ‘world’s oldest child’: the *Australopithecus afarensis* fossil unearthed in Ethiopia and called Selam (‘peace’).



### American Madness: The Rise and Fall of Dementia Praecox

Richard Noll HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS 390 pp. £33.95 (2011)

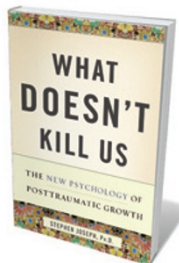
Between 1895 and the 1930s, tens of thousands of Americans were diagnosed with dementia praecox — an ‘incurable’ psychosis described by German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin. The diagnoses then petered out. Psychologist Richard Noll traces the trajectory of this near-forgotten disorder, showing how it became the first specified disease of psychiatry, legitimizing that field’s place in medicine. Noll also shows how the debates today around the successor to dementia praecox, schizophrenia, are leading to a trend in psychiatry towards diagnoses that could fit better with genetics.



### Galileo’s Muse: Renaissance Mathematics and the Arts

Mark A. Peterson HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS 336 pp. £21.95 (2011)

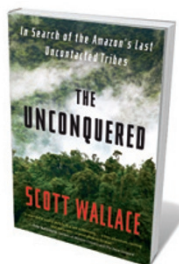
The great scientist Galileo Galilei was also a gifted draftsman and accomplished musician, steeped in Renaissance poetry. But art was no side interest for Galileo, physicist Mark Peterson claims. The mathematical inspiration for his findings, such as four of Jupiter’s moons, was fished from the humanist stream then flowing so powerfully in Italy. So it was Dante’s *Inferno*, Filippo Brunelleschi’s great domes and artist-innovators from Piero della Francesca to Leonardo da Vinci, not the medieval tag ends of science, that inspired Galileo and ignited the Enlightenment, Peterson argues.



### What Doesn’t Kill Us: The New Psychology of Posttraumatic Growth

Stephen Joseph BASIC BOOKS 288 pp. \$26.99 (2011)

Tsunamis, assault, near-death accidents: such experiences are popularly imagined to scar victims ‘for life’ and leave them in thrall to post-traumatic stress disorder. After two decades of research, positive psychologist Stephen Joseph argues that, for many, these traumas can become an “engine for transformation”. Backed by case studies, he covers trauma’s emotional toll, the underlying biology, the realities of resilience and the array of therapies on offer, such as trauma-focused cognitive behaviour therapy. This is a thorough and common-sense look at the psychology of survival.



### The Unconquered: In Search of the Amazon’s Last Uncontacted Tribes

Scott Wallace CROWN 512 pp. \$26 (2011)

Conquering civilizations have ebbed and flowed through Latin America, but uncontacted tribes such as the *flecheiros* (or Arrow People) still survive deep in the Amazon rainforest. Now their home and culture are threatened by deforestation, epidemics and marginalization. Journalist Scott Wallace takes us on a journey through a warzone where irreplaceable habitats and the knowledge of traditional peoples are the casualties.