BIRDS

Manu: (Panpolynesian) m. bird.

Manu is a common word in Polynesian languages to indicate birds. Some specific representations have different names based on their characteristics and particular meaning.

Birds are an ever present symbol in Polynesian tattoos, enjoying a prominent role in many traditions throughout the whole Pacific Ocean. It's easy to understand why if we think that the observation of the migratory routes of some birds like the golden plover and the arctic tern inspired Polynesian navigators to embark on the oceanic voyages of exploration that led them to discover every land scattered throughout the whole Pacific area, reaching north to the Hawaii and possibly Canada, south-west to New Zealand and south-east to Chile.

Birds are seen as messengers and emissaries of the gods, often having divine powers themselves. In Samoa the golden plover is considered an ancestor of humans: when the world was still only water and darkness, the golden plover was flying over it on a journey to explore this new world, until he got tired and asked for a place to rest. Tagaloa then threw some rocks, which became the land. There, when the bird pecked on a worm, breaking it into pieces, humans were born.

On this account a chevron pattern that resembles the legs of the plover, called fa’avaetuli (like the plover’s legs), is used to represent ancestors, while a zigzag symbol called fa’aanufe (like the caterpillar) representing the chunks that the worm was split into, is used to represent people.

a: fa’avaetuli motif and b: fa’aanufe motif

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