

2-2022

### Variations on a Theme: Hand and Processional Crosses

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#### Recommended Citation

Jones, Lynn. "Variations on a Theme: Hand and Processional Crosses." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 8, 1 (2022): 67-111. <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol8/iss1/8>

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## 6 Variations on a Theme: Hand and Processional Crosses

*Lynn Jones*

Of the thirty-six Ethiopian objects in the Blick-Harris Study Collection (BHSC) in the Department of Art History at Kenyon College, eleven are hand and processional crosses (cats. 1–11). It seems reasonable to suggest that David P. Harris saw Ethiopian religious art as an extension of his connection to, and collection of, Greek Orthodoxy and Greek and Russian religious art. Harris converted to Greek Orthodoxy as an adult, and I suggest that this is one of the motivating factors for his interest in, and acquisition of, Ethiopian religious art — that it too is Orthodox. As a convert he would be aware of the theological similarities and differences between the Greek and Ethiopian churches, and also of the pivotal historical role played by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.<sup>1</sup>

The bequest contains sales receipts for all but one of these crosses (cat. 11), and so allows us to piece together when and where they were purchased. Harris purchased his first hand cross in 1975 (cat. 1); his last was purchased in 1989 (cat. 10). All were bought in the United States, first in the Northeast, likely reflecting his residence in Washington, DC, and then later purchases were made in California, specifically in and around San Francisco. We have no indication that he sold any of his Ethiopian purchases before his death; they seem to have been acquired, cataloged, and kept, for his pleasure. As is discussed in the essay by Brad Hostetler, we have little information as to how these objects were acquired by the sellers.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay I ask two questions of these hand and processional crosses. First, what is recognizably Ethiopian about them — what makes an Ethiopian cross recognizable as such when it is purchased outside of Ethiopia? My second question focuses more specifically on Harris — what can these objects tell us about him as a collector? In what follows, I take what Harris wrote in his catalog entries to be accurate reflections of the ways in which he saw the works he purchased. As with the other object-based essays in this volume, my conclusions are often limited due to the lack of information. There are many questions that I can raise but not answer, and it is my hope that the publication of these objects spurs more research.

I begin with a brief overview of the role of the Cross in Ethiopian culture. The key word here is “culture,” as the cross is ubiquitous in Ethiopia today.<sup>3</sup> Ethiopian textiles are decorated with crosses of all shapes and sizes; liturgical vestments are embroidered with crosses.<sup>4</sup> Crosses are featured in contemporary wall paintings, icons, and religious texts.<sup>5</sup> Cross tattoos provide visual statements of faith and also function to protect the faithful (fig. 6.1). Cross pendants are worn by children and adults, strung around the neck or wrists; they too are found in a wide array of forms, sizes and materials.<sup>6</sup>

There is ample evidence of a sustained history of this ubiquity. The cross appears on the reverse of a mid-to-late fourth-century silver coin, and this representation on coinage continues into the later

<sup>1</sup> For more on this topic, see Neal Sobania’s essay (ch. 5).

<sup>2</sup> See the essay by Brad Hostetler (ch. 2).

<sup>3</sup> Mann 2001, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> See the collection of Marilyn Heldman photographs in the Smithsonian Online Virtual Archives, in particular, “A man partaking in a procession of altar tablets, Addis Ababa,

Ethiopia” (EEPA 2013-013-0035), <https://sova.si.edu/details/EEPA.2013-013> (accessed December 19, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> See the collection catalog, Sobania et al 2018.

<sup>6</sup> See the essay by Sarah Mathiesen (ch. 7).



Figure 6.1. Leta BirhanSelassie wearing traditional jewelry and a cruciform tattoo, Aksum. Photo: Neal Sobania and Raymond Silverman (1998).

medieval period.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most famous medieval example is the rock-cut church of Betä Giyorgis, in Lalibäla, dated to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which was carved in the shape of an equal-armed cross.<sup>8</sup> Perforated windows in this and other churches in the complex are carved in the shapes of a variety of crosses.<sup>9</sup> Wall paintings and manuscripts also feature crosses, both as decorative patterns and as representations of objects, including

<sup>7</sup> Munro-Hay 1993. See also Sobania's essay (ch. 5).

<sup>8</sup> Heldman 1995.

<sup>9</sup> For the windows at Betä Maryam and at the complex of Betä Däbrä Sina, Betä Golgota, and Šällase, see Di Salvo 2006, p. 32, figs. 19, 20, 21.

<sup>10</sup> See Hecht et al 1990, p. 6 for the dating of the oldest known cross, without further citation; p. 8 for a discussion of the dates assigned to the development of different cross forms; and p. 18 for the problems of dating created by continuity and repetition of form.

hand crosses (fig. 6.2). There are liturgical crosses in Ethiopian museums dated to the twelfth century; these iconographical types have been replicated over centuries.<sup>10</sup>

Wooden hand crosses are created by clerics and skilled artisans for liturgical and personal use, and for the tourist market; an example is that purchased by Harris at the United Nations Gift Center (cat. 7; fig. 6.3).<sup>11</sup> They are carved from a single piece of wood, and their iconography reflects both tradition and innovation. This is evident in Harris's collection, in which no wooden hand cross is identical to another.<sup>12</sup> In their religious context, these crosses function in motion, between two people. The one who is blessing raises the cross and then extends it to the one being blessed. This physical extension of a cross between two people sets up a relational interplay in which both parties take part in, and benefit from, the blessing and the cross's protective functions.

Metal hand crosses serve the same purpose as their wooden counterparts — they too function in motion. They were traditionally made by the lost wax method and by cutting and punching decorations in a sheet of metal. The double-mold method has become more popular, as it allows for the copying of metal crosses made by any of the other methods.<sup>13</sup> The final step is the addition of incised embellishments, both figural and aniconic. As with their wooden counterparts, the metal hand crosses display both continuity of form and variation in size, shape, and iconography. Two of the metal crosses collected by Harris are similar in shape, and they are also the simplest, in terms of design, with minimal punching, cutting, or incising

<sup>11</sup> See Sonia Dixon's essay (ch. 8) for a discussion of market economy and authenticity of these objects. For the pamphlet describing the types of objects solicited by the United Nations Gift Center (BHSC, 2021.26), see the essay by Hostetler (ch. 2).

<sup>12</sup> Hecht et al 1990, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Hecht et al 1990, pp. 8–9. This may be the manner in which cats. 3 and 9 were produced. They are similar in form, but different enough to suggest that the form was popular for iron hand crosses, and so that molds were created in different sizes, with slightly different components.

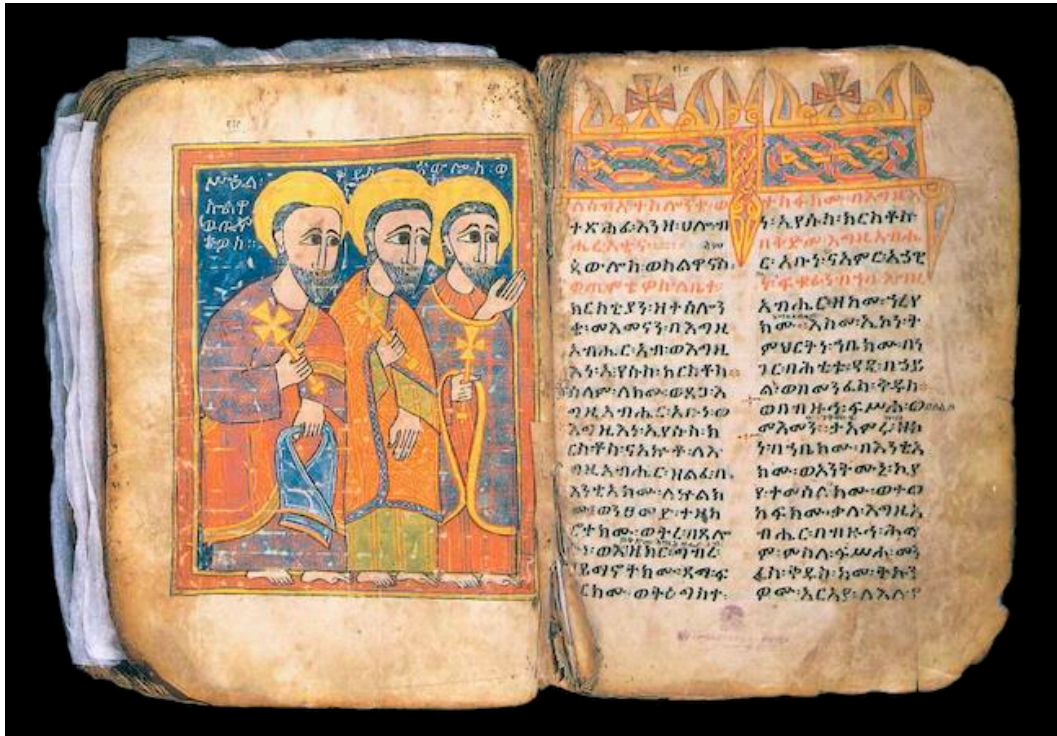


Figure 6.2. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy in the Pauline Epistles. National Library, Addis Abäba, no. 27, fols. 99v–100r. Photo: after Grierson 1993, cat. 68.



Figure 6.3. Hand cross (cat. 7). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 6.4. Hand cross (cat. 3). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 6.5. Processional cross (cat. 4). Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 6.6. Processional cross (cat. 2), detail of the front. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 6.7. Processional cross (cat. 2), detail of the back. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 6.8. Hand cross (cat. 6), detail of base, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 6.9. Hand cross (cat. 6), detail of base, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

of the metal (cats. 3, 9; fig. 6.4). Processional crosses are identified by their shafts, which are cone-shaped and open in order to accommodate a rod; there are two in Harris's collection (cats. 2, 4; fig. 6.5). They vary in size, and in the type of metal(s) used. All have a support, or holes, just below the upper cross and on either side at the top of the shaft, in which cloth symbolizing the *sudarium* of Christ can be draped. These crosses are used in the liturgy, and so they too are viewed in motion.

I do not identify a front or back, obverse or reverse for ten of Harris's eleven crosses in the catalog entries. I instead use "side 1" and "side 2," chosen at random, for discussions of iconography and for reference to photographs. If, however, we define "front" and "back" according to the religious hierarchy seen on the one cross with figural decoration that differs on the two sides (cat. 2), we can then use "front" for the side that features the Virgin and Child, and "back" for the side that features an image of an angel (figs. 6.6, 6.7). There are other crosses that feature figural imagery that is similar on both sides. The brass hand cross (cat. 6)

features small faces in the arms of the central cross, and figures on the base that represent an angel on one side and possibly a saint on the other (figs. 6.8, 6.9). A second metal hand cross (cat. 10) features depictions of angels directly below the cross on both sides, and on both sides of the base. The figures of birds, created by the form of the metal and inscribed "eyes" are traditional religious symbols, and are found on one processional cross (cat. 4; fig. 6.5).<sup>14</sup>

Hand crosses consist of three parts: the cross, the handle, and the base. As described by Dorothea Hecht, Brigitta Benzing, and Girma Kidane, there is a symbolic meaning to each part, no matter the medium, form, or iconography.<sup>15</sup> We begin with the lowermost part, the base. It is most frequently square or rectangular, and can be representative of Adam's tomb or of the *tabot* — the Tablets of the Law.<sup>16</sup> The handles of all crosses collected by Harris are either undecorated, feature incised geometric patterns, or were carved or cast with differing

<sup>14</sup> See Hecht et al 1990, pp. 15–16 for bibliography on the interpretation of form.

<sup>15</sup> See the illustration and discussion in Hecht et al 1990, pp. 15–17.

<sup>16</sup> The bases of cats. 6 and 10 also feature protruding elements on the sides, which can be termed finials. Both are metal; no such embellishment is found on the wooden crosses in Harris's collection. See also Sobania's essay (ch. 5).



Figure 6.10. Hand cross (cat. 10), detail of side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 6.11. Hand cross (cat. 7), detail of side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

components, and are of differing sizes.<sup>17</sup> The upper part, the cross, is the largest element, and is symbolic of redemption. Several crosses feature “ram’s horns,” a curling volute, which have many interpretations, including Christ as the Lamb of God.<sup>18</sup>

All crosses, created for any Christian confession, are recognizable *as* crosses — their function depends upon their recognizability. Broadly speaking, crosses feature a single vertical bar with horizontal bars of varying length and number. Most crosses are similar, if not the same, in form during a particular time and place for a particular Christian confession. Ethiopian crosses also display consistency, but this consistency co-exists with variability of form. Some types of crosses, made in a particular way, in a particular form, with particular formal elements,

have been produced since the medieval period.<sup>19</sup> New types then developed from these older forms, and other new types were introduced, persisted, and then were further developed into new — or newer — types.<sup>20</sup> Thus, while the majority of Ethiopian crosses have arms equal in length, this core standard is accompanied by a kaleidoscope of variants.

Mario Di Salvo maps out a system for classifying the morphology of Ethiopian crosses.<sup>21</sup> For the uppermost part alone — the cross — he identifies three main divisions based on form: type, subtype, and group. These are then further subdivided: types A–D are based on arm length, subtypes 1–5 on arm form, and groups I–IV on the shape of the enclosing profile. Each type, sub-type and group are therefore representative of only the basic cross forms. Each type, for example, can be composed of different sub-

<sup>17</sup> Handles can be anthropomorphic, carved or cast as a figure. An example is found on a wooden hand cross in the collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, no. 4518; see Hecht et al 1990, p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> For the interpretation of “ram’s horns,” see Hecht et al 1990, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Hecht et al 1990; and Di Salvo 2006.

<sup>20</sup> See Hecht et al 1990, pp. 2–6 for a discussion of the origins of the differing cross forms in Ethiopia.

<sup>21</sup> Di Salvo 2006. See also Evangelatou 2018.

types and of formal elements associated with different groups, resulting in a potential 150 different possible forms for each cross in one type. Di Salvo presents similar classifications for the handles and bases, further expanding possible forms. Add the finials, which are found on some crosses and and/or on the bases, and the number of variations further expands. According to Di Salvo's classifications, it is possible to have any combination of approximately 600 formal elements in a single hand or processional cross.

Harris's hand and processional crosses exhibit this variety. Only one takes the form of two intersecting bars and only this one is uncircumscribed (cat. 5). The other ten are contained, with profiles that are (roughly) that of a square, lozenge, or circle. Further distinctions can be made. Four have figural decorations (cats. 2, 4, 6, 10); one has similar decorations on both sides (cat. 4) while seven do not (cats. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11); seven are perforated or formed with openwork (cats. 1, 2, 4, 6, 10, 11), while four are solid (cats. 3, 5, 7, 8, 9). All have finials, but all finials differ in placement, form, and decoration.

The cross, or crosses, at the core of these Ethiopian hand and processional crosses are created and connected by trellises and interlaces (fig. 6.10) or are present as distinct cross forms, but are contained *within* the decoration (fig. 6.11). In contrast, non-Ethiopian crosses in Harris's collection are characterized by iconography and embellishments that are placed *on* the cross. I offer as comparanda three Greek and one Slavic example from his collection. In the Ethiopian crosses, the cross is most frequently one formal element in the midst of, and/or created by, other formal elements. In the Greek and Slavic crosses, the decoration is placed on the cross, or, in the case of the Greek standing cross, forms a framing device in which the cross remains the dominant element. This cross is given further visual emphasis by the coral beads, which are placed in such a way as to outline, and emphasize, the form of the cross (fig. 6.12, second from left).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> For Harris's identification of the Slavic cross, see the essay by Hostetler (ch. 2); in figure 6.12 it is the first cross, on the left.

This, then, provides an answer for my question on the recognizability of Ethiopian hand and processional crosses: they are identifiable as Ethiopian because the cross is most frequently created by, and/or surrounded by, the fundamental decorative elements, to the extent that it can be difficult to visually locate. They function in motion, and their form and embellishments are designed to be seen in this context. For this catalog, we have endeavored to photograph them in ways that allow for the best recreation of their original visual context.

A secondary characteristic of Ethiopian crosses is the repetition of crosses on a single object. The large processional cross, for example, features numerous crosses. The central cross is flanked by multiple crosses of differing sizes (fig. 6.5).

Of the eleven hand and processional crosses in Harris's collection, two are identified on the sales receipts as being Ethiopian (cats. 2, 3); one "Coptic Cross Ethiopia" (cat. 10); three as "Coptic" (cats. 1, 4, 8); three as "Cross" (cats. 9, 5, 6); one is unidentified (cat. 7).<sup>23</sup> Harris recognized all of these crosses as being Ethiopian — demonstrated by his type-written emendation on the receipt for two crosses (cats. 5, 6). These were each identified by the seller as "cross," but were corrected by him to "Ethiopian." The documentation of Harris's cataloged Ethiopian crosses — hand, processional, and pendant — are grouped together in one sub-collection, labeled "Ethiopian Crosses."<sup>24</sup>

It is instructive to re-create the timeline of his purchases. Harris purchased his first hand cross on December 13, 1975, from Nuevo Mundo in Alexandria, Virginia (cat. 1). At this time in his life, Harris was living in Washington, DC and teaching at Georgetown University. His second cross, a small processional cross (cat. 2), was also purchased from Nuevo Mundo, two months later. While his first purchase was limited to only one cross, his second was for five objects: a cross identified on the sales receipt as a "head of scepter" (cat. 2), a "slate book"

<sup>23</sup> Cat. 11 has no receipt.

<sup>24</sup> See the essay by Hostetler (ch. 2).





Figure 6.12. Selection of four Greek and Slavic crosses from Harris's collection. BHSC (from left to right), 2020.365, 2020.363, 2020.293, 2020.364. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Figure 6.13. Comparison of the Mother and Child on a processional cross (cat. 2) and the stone diptych (cat. 30). Photos: Birhanu T. Gessese.

(cat. 30), an “antique scroll” (either cat. 34 or 35), a “seal,” and a “doll bead.”<sup>25</sup> The figural decoration of two objects in this group, the cross and the “slate book,” feature the same style of exceptionally large eyes and wide, prominent noses; this style is not present in any other Ethiopian objects in Harris’s collection (fig. 6.13). This raises many questions: did Nuevo Mundo have a connection with an Ethiopian workshop? Did they buy pieces from immigrants, who came to Washington, DC from an area in Ethiopia where this style was common?

Harris collected Ethiopian art from 1975 until 1991, but the majority of the collection was acquired from 1975 to 1979. While he purchased pendant crosses in London, all hand and processional crosses were bought in the United States. Between 1975 and 1977 he patronized shops and galleries of all types in Virginia, Washington, DC, and New York City. In 1977, he made a single purchase in San Francisco. His last purchase of a hand or processional cross was from the New Davenport Cash Store, Pottery Gallery & Restaurant in California, and was made in 1989 (cat. 10), twelve years after his previous purchase of any type of Ethiopian hand or processional cross. This “last” cross is an exceptional work, and, at \$115.00, is the most he paid for any of the ten crosses for which we have receipts. That said, it seems to be a purchase of opportunity — he bought it because it was there, and because he recognized it as being Ethiopian.

In conclusion, what can these crosses tell us about Harris as a collector? As other authors in this volume have noted, the paucity of information makes it

difficult to reconstruct or assign specific meanings to his purchases of individual objects. Harris’s personal catalog confirms that Harris viewed all Ethiopian crosses — hand, processional, pendant — as linked. Why did he buy eleven Ethiopian hand and processional crosses, and why did he buy examples that differ from each other?<sup>26</sup> Their variety reflects that which characterizes Ethiopian cross morphology, and his collection suggests that he valued the differences that characterize this artistic tradition.

I suggest too that these purchases reflect the way he viewed the art of the Orthodox traditions in many countries, from Russia to Ethiopia. Harris’s collection of Greek and Russian icons, so identified in his own catalog, suggests that he viewed Orthodox art through a specific cultural lens, and that he connected Greek and Russian Orthodoxies with icons. Presumably, he could have purchased many different types of Ethiopian religious objects. Why crosses? His Ethiopian collection contains two icons (cats. 29, 30) — but, as we have seen, the majority of objects are crosses of all forms and types. As discussed by several authors in this volume, the Cross is ubiquitous in Ethiopian culture. For Harris, I suggest, the Cross was emblematic of Ethiopian Orthodoxy, and he therefore targeted his purchases of Ethiopian art to reflect this — he bought crosses.

In the catalog entries that follow, I aim only for description, hoping that this publication, and the related documents and photographs that are available on the BHSC website, lead to further research.<sup>27</sup> The crosses are presented in the order in which they were purchased.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> For the identification of the objects listed on this receipt, see the essay by Hostetler (ch. 2). We identify the “slate book” as the stone icon (cat. 30) discussed in Dixon’s essay (ch. 8). The “doll bead” was not part of the bequest to Kenyon College. The seal’s accession number is BHSC, 2020.230.

<sup>26</sup> He could have bought what was available — we cannot know.

<sup>27</sup> <https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/>

<sup>28</sup> The purchase date of cat. 11 is unknown. I have placed it at the end of the catalog of hand and processional crosses.

## 1. Hand Cross

Wood, possibly olive, acacia, or ebony

11 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 4 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (28.5 × 11.8 × 1.1 cm)

2.33 oz. (66.2 g)

CONDITION: Darkening of the wood, especially on the handle.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from Maria Teresa O’Leary (Nuevo Mundo) in Alexandria, Virginia on December 13, 1975. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.29).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/645/>

This wooden hand cross consists of a circumscribed lozenge, above two lateral projections, and a shaft that ends with a rectangular lower base and diamond-shaped finial. The wood is tan in color and is lightweight, with discoloration on the shaft.

The two sides of the cross are similar in design. A twisted line motif begins on the cross and repeats on the shaft. The cross encloses a cruciform design made of curved and looping lines. The negative space around the cross allows light to pass through. A small cross is inscribed on the lower finial.

The two sides differ in small details. On side 1 (cats. 1A, 1C), the lateral projections below the cross are inscribed with a four-leaf motif, while on side 2 (cat. 1D) this motif is missing. The twisted-line motif of the shaft continues to the base of side 1, looping at the corners to create leaf-like shapes, framing a central cross. On side 2, the base features a grid-like pattern of squares, some of which contain a four-leafed cruciform motif.

The pierced, lozenge-shaped cross is comparable to that of other hand and processional crosses in this catalog (cats. 4, 6, 10, 11). In each case, the piercings allow for the central cross to become illuminated by the negative space that defines it (cat. 1B).



Cat. 1A. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 1B. Hand cross, detail of side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

MGD



Cat. 1C. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 1D. Hand cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

## 2. Processional Cross

Metal alloy

$6\frac{7}{8} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{9}{16}$  in. (17.5 × 8.9 × 1.4 cm)

3.62 oz. (102.7 g)

CONDITION: Minor scratch marks on cross head. The conical shaft is slightly dented along the long vertical seam.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from Maria Teresa O'Leary (Nuevo Mundo) in Alexandria, Virginia on February 28, 1976. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.44).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/660/>

The small processional cross is made of three sections that appear to have been cast in one piece: the cross, an oval panel with two circular holes, and a conical shaft. The cross takes the general form of a large square with rounded corners, and three cruciform protrusions along the left, right, and upper edges. The perimeter of the square is articulated with additional details. The four rounded corners feature smaller crosses that are similar in form as the finials. Each of these is made of four arms of equal length, rounded and notched at the ends and converging to a single point at the crossing. Each arm of these crosses is also decorated with an incised circle.

The oval panel is pierced with two holes and is notched around the perimeter.<sup>1</sup> The conical shaft is marked with parallel rings at the upper, middle, and lower ends. It appears that this shaft was initially cast flat, and then later rolled to create the conical shape. The faint seam is still visible where the two ends were welded and hammered together, a detail that is most evident in the interior of the cone. This shaft would allow the cross to be mounted on a pole and processed in liturgy.

The cross is incised with figural and non-figural decorative elements on both sides. The front features, at the center, the Virgin and Child (cats.



Cat. 2A. Processional cross, front. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

2A, 2B). Mary, to the left, is nimbed, and is shown with short hair, indicated by striations, large circular eyes with pupils, and a broad nose. She holds her son to her left side, wrapping him in her cloak. Her right hand grasps the hem of her garment that covers him. Christ is shown with short cropped hair, indicated by a hairline, wide eyes, and a broad nose. To the left and right are images of angelic figures, represented with schematic heads, bodies, and a single wing each. The upper frame features three haloed faces, each of which consist of a brow ridge, two dots for eyes, a rectangular nose, and vertical striations to indicate a beard.

The back of the cross features an angel at the center of a dotted background pattern (cat. 2C). Its face is similar to that of Mary: wide open eyes with pupils, a broad nose, and a small semi-circular shape to indicate a mouth. The halo is marked by striations. Wings emerge on either side of the halo, and are marked by three layers of lines to indicate



Cat. 2B. Processional cross, front. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 2C. Processional cross, back. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



feathers. The angel has a squat body that is also schematically represented. Emphasis is placed on its large-scale hands, and on the triangular-shaped sword that it carries in its left hand. The left and right margins also feature haloed figures of the same style.

The style of these figures, with their wide and accentuated eyes, broad noses, and large hands, is similar to that found on the stone diptych (cat. 30), and is in sharp contrast to the more Italianate style found on the painted icon (cat. 29). This similarity in style suggests a shared artistic tradition for these two objects, if not a shared workshop.

LJ

1. These holes would allow cloth to be threaded through, meant to represent the sudarium of Christ. See also cat. 4.



Cat. 3A. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

### 3. Hand Cross

Metal alloy

$7\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{5}{8} \times \frac{5}{16}$  in. (19.6 × 8.5 × 0.7 cm)

0.40 oz. (6.5 g)

CONDITION: Vertical cut running along the length of the shaft on side 2.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from the Endicott-Guthaim Gallery Inc. in New York on March 5, 1976. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.28).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/639/>

This small hand cross, cast in one piece, consists of a cross, a shaft, and rectangular base. The cross has four arms of approximately equal length, and four small triangular-shaped protrusions at the crossing. Each arm flares into a pair of volutes, each pair taking a form that closely resembles a prayer stick. The cross is incised with five circles at and around the crossing, and a circle on each of the volutes. A beaded line outlines the outer contours of each arm. The small cruciform finials are defined by rounded arms articulated by shallow notches and five circles inscribed onto the surface.

The rectangular base is incised with a beaded and solid-line border. At the center is a design that consists of a rectangle inscribed with an X and four circles at the corners. The upper and lower edges of the base feature crosses that resemble those used for the finials on the cross.

LJ



Cat. 3B. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 3C. Hand cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 4B. Processional cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

#### 4. Processional Cross

Brass with copper rivets

13<sup>9</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 8<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 1<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (34.5 × 21.1 × 3.4 cm)

24.34 oz. (690.0 g)

**CONDITION:** The lower rivet connecting the cross to the shaft is slightly loose. The metal around the upper rivet on side 2 is partially lost. The shaft has been repaired multiple times; cracks and holes have been filled with a metal alloy of a different color.

**PROVENANCE:** Purchased by David P. Harris from Maria Teresa O’Leary (Nuevo Mundo) in Alexandria, Virginia on October 11, 1976. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.27).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/640/>

This processional cross is composed of four different brass pieces soldered or riveted together and fastened by copper pins: the large lozenge-shaped cross, two rectangular “handles” directly beneath it, and the shaft.

The lozenge-shaped cross features the same decoration on both sides.<sup>1</sup> At the center is a cross with its arms and crossing articulated by a beaded outline. This cross is also marked by two intersecting hatched lines that suggest the depiction of rope that binds the vertical and horizontal arms together.<sup>2</sup> The four ends of the cross are adorned with cross-shaped finials incised with lines and dots that form additional cross patterns. This central cross is encircled by a complex lattice-work of abstract bird forms that are organized in groups of three, and punctuated at the left, right, and upper points by a motif consisting of two birds flanking a cross.

The cone-shaped shaft is hollow, allowing for it to be placed on a pole and processed in the liturgy.<sup>3</sup>

LJ

1. The left arm of the cross, on side 2, features a small engraved mark.
2. For a similar cross with this suggested depiction of a rope, see Dallas Museum of Art, 1991.352.161, <https://collections.dma.org/artwork/3324642>
3. These holes would allow cloth to be threaded through, meant to represent the sudarium of Christ. See also cat. 2.



Cat. 4C. Processional cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 4D. Processional cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 4E. Processional cross, detail of side 1 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 5A. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.





Cat. 5B. Hand cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 5C. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

## 5. Hand Cross

Metal alloy

$9\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{16} \times \frac{3}{8}$  in. (24.8 × 10.2 × 1.0 cm)

5.30 oz. (150.1 g)

CONDITION: Surface exhibits pitting throughout.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from Michael and Vivian Arpad (Arpad Antiques) in Washington, DC on January 19, 1977. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.24).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/643/>

This hand cross, cast in one piece, consists of a flat cross, a rounded shaft, and a flat rectangular base. The cross has arms of approximately equal length and size. Each arm flares outward; the left, right, and upper arms are adorned with finial disks. A similar finial design is attached to the lower edge of the base.

LJ



Cat. 6A. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

## 6. Hand Cross

Brass

$15\frac{1}{16} \times 7 \times \frac{3}{8}$  in. (38.2 × 17.8 × 1.0 cm)

25.54 oz. (723.9 g)

CONDITION: There are small spots of red paint on the cross, on side 1, and areas of green surface corrosion on side 2.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from Michael and Vivian Arpad (Arpad Antiques) in Washington, DC on January 19, 1977. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.25).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/642/>

This heavy hand cross consists of a lozenge-shaped cross, a shaft with piercings at both ends, and a rectangular base with a cross-shaped finial at the lower end. The cross was cast in three distinct pieces — cross, shaft, and base — and affixed together; the unpolished surfaces from the casting process are visible along the interior edges.



Cat. 6B. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 6C. Hand cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 6D. Hand cross, detail of side 2 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

The cross features, at the center, a cross with arms of equal length. Each arm is triangular, inscribed with an abstract face, and adorned with a knotted finial. These finials are articulated with smaller lobes on the contours. While the outline of the cross is that of a lozenge, the numerous cut-outs allow for light to pass through the negative spaces, and bring greater definition of, and emphasis to, the central cross shape (cat. 6D).

The shaft is marked by a cross-hatching pattern, and the base is inscribed with figures on both sides. On side 1 (cats. 6A, 6B), the winged figure is decorated with crosses on its body; dots and straight lines comprise its wings. The concentric circles surrounding the head suggest a halo. The figure on side 2 (cat. 6C), features two palm branches, rather than the wings featured on the opposite side of the base. Below the base a cross-shaped finial consists of four triangular-shaped arms of equal length, with the left, right, and lower arms each additionally adorned with a three-lobed finial.

The multi-part construction of this cross is similar to others in this catalog (cats. 4, 10), and is comparable to a hand cross at the Dallas Museum of Art.<sup>1</sup> These objects speak to the artistic processes involved in casting the individual pieces and affixing them together by welding, soldering, or the use of rivets.

LJ

1. Dallas Museum of Art, 1991.352.155, <https://collections.dma.org/artwork/5220773>

## 7. Hand Cross

Wood, possibly olive, acacia, or ebony

16 × 4 1/2 × 3/4 in. (40.6 × 11.5 × 1.9 cm)

5.33 oz. (151.2 g)

CONDITION: One corner of the cross is missing; the edges are smooth.



Cat. 7A. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from the United Nations Gift Center in New York on February 20, 1977. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.39).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/655/>

This hand cross consists of a lozenge-shaped circumscribed cross. The lower end of the shaft terminates in a rectangular base with a cross-shaped finial. This hand cross is not straight; the plane of the lozenge tilts and twists toward the side with the broken corner, preventing the cross from lying flat.

The cross on side 1 (cats. 7A, 7B), features a narrow border consisting of a beaded line between two plain lines. The wider border on side 2 (cat. 7C) includes a beaded line enclosed by cross-hatches, resembling a basket-weave pattern. The differing border widths on each side result in different sizes of the central cross design. Multiple perpendicular and diagonal lines intersect to create several smaller crosses within the larger cruciform design.

MGD



Cat. 7B. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 7C. Hand cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.





Cat. 8A. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

## 8. Hand Cross

Metal alloy

$6\frac{1}{16} \times 2\frac{5}{16} \times \frac{1}{8}$  in. (15.4 × 5.8 × 0.3 cm)

2.67 oz. (75.7 g)

CONDITION: Surface exhibits pitting throughout.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from the Guthaim Gallery Inc. in New York on August 15, 1977. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.43).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/659/>

This hand cross was cast in one piece. The form of the cross consists of four triangular-shaped arms of equal length and size converging at a single, central point, which itself has four small pointed protrusions. Each arm features a cruciform finial with elongated and rounded lateral arms articulated by small notches. Variations on these finial-cross forms are found at both ends of the shaft. The base includes a two-bulbed finial attached to the lower edge.

Small decorative elements are visible on both sides, including horizontal bands and X-shaped incisions on the shaft, incised circles on the base, and small accent dots on the cross, shaft, and base.

LJ



Cat. 8B. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 8C. Hand cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 9A. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

## 9. Hand Cross

Metal alloy

$5\frac{1}{4} \times 1\frac{15}{16} \times \frac{1}{4}$  in. (13.3 × 4.9 × 0.6 cm)

1.60 oz. (45.4 g)

CONDITION: Surface exhibits rust concentrated in the corners and crevices.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from the African Gallery in San Francisco on November 26, 1977. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.23).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/644/>

This small hand cross, cast in one piece, is similar in shape to that of another hand cross in this collection (cat. 3). The cross consists of four arms of equal length, each flaring at the ends into two volutes. Each arm is also adorned with a three-lobed finial. The transition between the lower arm of the cross and the shaft is marked by three bulbous “cushions.” These are also present at the lower end of the shaft, connected to the base. The three-lobed finial attached to the lower edge of the base is similar in form to those on the cross head.

LJ



Cat. 9B. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 9C. Hand cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

## 10. Hand Cross

Metal alloy

12 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 4 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (31.1 × 11.1 × 1.6 cm)

8.42 oz. (238.7 g)

CONDITION: On both sides, the head is darker around the perimeter, and appears to have been polished at the center.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from Bruce and Marcia McDougal (New Davenport Cash Store Pottery Gallery & Restaurant) in Davenport, California on June 23, 1989. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.26).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/641/>

The metal cross was constructed in three pieces that were soldered or welded together: the cross, shaft, and base. The cross, which consists of a complex knot pattern surmounting a panel incised with angel-like figures, is affixed to the upper end of the handle by two prongs. The lower square base is likewise affixed to the handle by two prongs. This square panel is adorned with two open triangles on the lateral edges and a three-lobed, open-work knot attached to the lower end.

There are minor differences in decoration of the two sides. On side 1, a cross emerges from the central knot-work through the hatching of specific “threads” (cats. 10B, 10D). These hatched threads are concentrated at the center, and extend outward to form a general cross shape. This hatching is absent on side 2 (cats. 10A, 10C).

The figures on the panel below the lozenge are each composed of the same outline — a central figure flanked by two slightly detached wings — but differ in details. On side 1, the figure appears to wear a feathered or fur mantle. Its hands emerge at waist level, and grasp a sword in its right and a spear in its left hands. The figure’s wings are spread outward, filling the square shape of the panel. On side 2, the figure wears a striated mantle with a cross at the



Cat. 10A. Hand cross, detail of side 2 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

chest. Unlike the figure on side 1, this is without hands, sword or spear.

The surface decoration of the base of the handle also differs on the two sides. Side 1 features a small head, flanked by and what appears to be two wings. Side 2 is inscribed with a cruciform design, consisting of two perpendicular lines with small circles at each end.

The complex knotwork found on this cross is a design found on other crosses in the collection (cats. 1, 6, 11, 15, 23). These examples demonstrate the many ways in which knots were used to not only adorn, but also create, the form of the cross.

LJ



Cat. 10B. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.





Cat. 10C. Hand cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 10D. Hand cross, detail of side 1 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 11A. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

## 11. Hand Cross

Wood, possibly olive, acacia, or ebony  
13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (34.0 × 15.9 × 1.8 cm)  
5.85 oz. (165.9 g)

CONDITION: A hole is drilled through the upper end of the shaft.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris. Date, receipt, and supplemental documents are unavailable. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.199).

<https://digital.kenyon.edu/arhistorystudycollection/664/>

This lightweight, dark wooden hand cross consists of a lozenge-shaped cross, a smooth shaft topped by three horizontal lines, and a rectangular base with a cross-shaped finial at the lower end. The lozenge features a circumscribed equal-armed cross. The interstitial areas between the arms are pierced,

allowing light to pass through the negative space. The contours of the lozenge are articulated with three-lobed finials that alternate with triangular projections. There are slight differences in the carved decoration of each side. On side 1, the crossing is marked by a small cross made of four triangles, and the arms are decorated with beaded lines (cats. 11A, 11B). On side 2, the small cross at the crossing is made of four diamond shapes, and the arms are filled with interwoven lines (cat. 11C). On both sides, the small cross at the crossing is carved with an X, possibly meant to imitate the insertions found on many metal hand and processional crosses.

The base is, on side 1, carved with small squares along the perimeter, and at the center a tilted cross inside of an inscribed square with smaller squares lining the upper and lower edges. On side 2, the base is carved with a border of jagged lines. At the center is a large, tilted cross enclosed within a border made of small squares.

MGD



Cat. 11B. Hand cross, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 11C. Hand cross, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.



Cat. 11D. Hand cross, detail of side 2 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

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