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Effective Objects: Ethiopian Pectorals and the Body

Sarah Mathiesen

Of the thirty-six Ethiopian objects in this catalog, seventeen are small-scale, pendant objects: sixteen yangät mäsqäl (literally “cross of the neck”), or neck crosses, and one kuk mawča, or ear spoon. This essay takes these seventeen objects as a point of departure to demonstrate a more inclusive grouping of objects based on a shared relationship with the body, specifically the chest, or core, of a person. Recent art historical scholarship on Ethiopian Christian material culture focuses on formal typologies of objects and tends to present internal arguments about object groups. This is particularly true in the case of scholarship on Ethiopian crosses, in which crosses are primarily put in conversation with other crosses. As I argue in this essay, these fundamental studies enable us to look beyond classifications based on form to more fluid categories based on shared functions and meanings. In so doing, we can find meaningful connections between formally disparate objects. I suggest that the neck crosses and the ear spoon can be grouped together with a variety of devotional material culture, including pendant icons, magic scrolls, and the askema, or monastic scapular. Together they can be described as enkolpia, a term that more accurately reflects their status as Christian devotional objects.

I begin with a brief overview of the significance of the cross in Ethiopia and of the history and meaning of yangät mäsqäl. I then provide a short state of the literature on Ethiopian crosses, focusing on yangät mäsqäl, as well as my methodology for approaching these objects. In addition to methodology, this section provides a rationale for my use of terms such as “pectoral” and “enkolia” to describe different objects. These introductory sections lay the groundwork for three successive sections on classification, significance, and intermateriality. I close with several suggestions for future avenues of inquiry and an introduction to the catalog entries that follow.

The Cross and the Yangät Mäsqäl in Ethiopian Christianity

The cross as a Christian symbol represents the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and victory over death. The ur-apotropaic Christian device, the cross serves as a sign of faith, protection, and membership in the Christian community. One of the most distinctive elements of Ethiopian Orthodox visual culture is the sheer variety of forms the cross may take, which produces a stunning array of designs and objects (fig. 7.1). The cross as an object in Ethiopian Christianity can be divided into four general categories: architectural, processional, hand, and

1 In this essay and the following catalog entries, I begin with the transliterated Amarañña (Amharic) term yangät mäsqäl, or “neck cross,” to describe these smaller, personal devotional objects that can be suspended from the neck in order to restore some level of original, Ethiopian context and lived experience to these otherwise decontextualized objects. I also use the Amarañña term kuk mawča to describe the ear cleaner or earpick. Later, I provide a rationale for my use of the term “pectoral” to describe these same objects as part of a more inclusive art historical category. See Chojnacki 2006, pp. 17–20, 26–27 for an overview of cross nomenclature and classification in scholarship. See Chojnacki 2006, p. 35; and Pankhurst and Pankhurst 1979 for kuk mawča.


3 Horowitz 2001, p. 75. For more information on the symbolic meaning of the cross, see the chapter by C. Griffith Mann titled “The Role of the Cross in Ethiopian Culture.”

4 Langmuir et al. 1978, p. 27. See Lynn Jones’s essay (ch. 6) for a treatment of the processional and hand crosses.
neck. This study focuses on the neck crosses — the yangät mäsqäl.

By far the largest category are personal crosses, a number that attests to the important position of the cross in the daily lives of Ethiopian Christians. The practice of wearing neck crosses likely began in the early centuries of Ethiopian Christianity, though the tradition fell out of use until its revival in the fifteenth century during the rule of the nəguș (king) Zăr’a Ya’eqob (r. 1434–68). Textual sources indicate that Zăr’a Ya’eqob decreed that all Christians tattoo themselves on the forehead with the name of the Trinity, as described in the Book of Revelation. This mark would serve to identify the elect at the end of days. In reality, Zăr’a Ya’eqob’s decree likely was understood as marking the body with the sign of the cross, not necessarily with a tattoo. The practice of suspending a cross from the

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5 Horowitz 2001, p. 92.
7 See Kaplan 2002 on the role of visual culture, from tattoos to monumental projects, in consolidating and maintaining Zăr’a Ya’eqob’s rule.
9 A European account documenting neck crosses is provided by the early sixteenth century travel narrative of Francesco Alvarez, the chaplain of the Portuguese embassy to Ethiopia from 1520–26; see Alvarez 1961, p. 1:170.
matāb, a blue cord worn around the neck and often gifted at a child’s baptism, began at this time as a means to fulfill this decree.\textsuperscript{10} The earliest surviving neck crosses are dated to the fifteenth century and are made of bronze and copper, though examples made of less durable materials, such as leather or grass are known from later centuries.\textsuperscript{11} The majority of extant neck crosses are made of metals, many out of silver; those produced today are primarily made out of metal.\textsuperscript{12} Most metal crosses are created in molds using the lost wax method; copies and applied and incised decoration help create the variety of forms and decorative motifs seen today.\textsuperscript{13} The Blick-Harris Study Collection (BHSC) neck crosses are all metal.\textsuperscript{14} Though it is widely accepted that a special symbolic and spiritual meaning is attached to the constituent parts and design motifs of Ethiopian crosses, such as neck crosses, efforts to assign singular meanings to these elements remain elusive.\textsuperscript{15} Ethiopian crosses of all types are multivalent objects; a range of accepted meanings accompany the most basic design motifs and limited figural motifs seen on neck crosses. The elaborate latticework and intertwined lines can represent everlasting life and the rejuvenating power of the cross.\textsuperscript{16} Horn-like flourishes, sometimes identified as the “Ram’s horn” can, among other meanings, simultaneously represent wings, flames, or foliage as visual referents to Ezekiel’s vision, the Four Beasts of Revelation, or the Tree of Paradise.\textsuperscript{17} Small birds, symbolizing spiritual wisdom or possibly heralds of the Resurrection, are found on some neck crosses, often placed at the interstices between crossbars (fig. 7.1, lower left; cat. 21).\textsuperscript{18} Depictions of human figures, however, and especially that of Christ on the Cross, are uncommon and mainly reserved for the larger, liturgical hand and processional crosses.\textsuperscript{19} Due to the variety of possible forms and materials of neck crosses, each object is a unicum. Yet these unique objects also fit into a coherent class based on three primary characteristics: 1) they are non-liturgical, 2) they are small-scale items that can be

\textsuperscript{10} Horowitz 2001, p. 75; Chojnacki 2006, pp. 56–58. Neck crosses can be suspended from the matāb, though not all neck crosses are so suspended nor does the matāb require a neck cross to function as a devotional item. The matāb alone is recognized as a sign of Christian identity and faith.

\textsuperscript{11} Chojnacki 2006, pp. 67, 105, 120, 145; Di Salvo 2006, pp. 110n27, 120n20. More investigation is needed to date the earliest surviving examples and shed more light on the revival of the practice during the fifteenth century.

\textsuperscript{12} Silverman and Sobania 2004.

\textsuperscript{13} Horowitz 2001, p. 92; Di Salvo 2006, p. 97; and Silverman and Sobania 2004, p. 338. According to Silverman and Sobania, the use of technologies such as filigree (cats. 16, 26) and granulation (cats. 12, 24) are indicators of a modern date of manufacture as these metalworking technologies were introduced later in Ethiopia.

\textsuperscript{14} Silverman and Sobania 2004; Di Salvo 2006, p. 97; and Chojnacki 2006. Di Salvo and Chojnacki share a similar concern for the diachronic evolution of Ethiopian crosses. Both publications include considerations of the decoration and materials of crosses, though with different methodologies and focuses.

\textsuperscript{15} Chojnacki 2006, p. 79.

\textsuperscript{16} Fletcher 2005, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{17} Mercier 1997, pp. 71, 90; Fletcher 2005, p. 16; and Korabiewicz 1973. Korabiewicz supplies the term kornebege ("Horns of the Ram"), though it is unclear what language tradition this term reflects.


\textsuperscript{19} Heldman 1993, cat. 1, p. 91; Mercier 1997, p. 72; and Korabiewicz 1973. Mercier notes that depictions of the Crucifixion do not appear on neck crosses and are limited only to larger crosses commissioned for churches. However, a neck cross and ear spoon from Korabiewicz 1973 (figs. 200 and 207) both feature a crucified figure. Another example now held at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African Art (no. 2004-7-47) displays an incised human face at its center; https://africa.si.edu/collections/objects/16723/pendant-cross. Examples of human figural imagery on the larger hand crosses can be found in the BHSC. A metal hand cross (cat. 6) displays four human faces in the arms of the cross at the center of its design, as well as a half-length figure in the rectangular panel at its base, while another metal hand cross includes two angels (cat. 10). Larger neck crosses can accommodate figural compositions, such as images of Mary, the Mother Church, and the Virgin and Child as seen on a cross pendant dated to the fifteenth century and now held in the Church of the Archangel Gabriel in Tigray and featured in the \textit{African Zion} catalog; Heldman 1993, cat. 1, p. 91.
worn suspended from the neck, and 3) they have a consistent socio-religious function as personal devotional objects and talismans. Neck crosses are worn by the Ethiopian Orthodox faithful of all ages, genders, and classes, though they are more commonly seen on women. These same social categories can influence the number and material of crosses that one wears.\(^{20}\)

These objects are still produced and worn by the faithful. Inscriptions bearing valuable social data, such as name, date, etc. are rare.\(^{21}\) The agency of the owner, or wearer, also affects study of these objects since they can dictate how a viewer might interact with the object, if at all. The owner can hide or display the object on their body with their clothing; they can also decide which side is visible at any given time; and they can invite someone else to hold or handle the object — to feel its weight and the lines, edges, and bumps of the design work and contemplate its meaning.

State of the Literature: Ethiopian Crosses

Neck crosses serve as the organizational center of this essay, whose primary argument focuses on the categorization of Ethiopian material culture.\(^{22}\) Stanisław Chojnacki provides a cogent state of the literature in his book on the cultural history and chronology of Ethiopian crosses.\(^{23}\) Here follows a brief summary of the state of the literature specific to studies on Ethiopian crosses, with a focus on the treatment of neck crosses, studies without which my own would not be possible.

First, the terms used to describe small-scale, personal crosses are inconsistent among scholars; the conventional terminology vacillates between “neck,” “pectoral,” or “pendant,” with “neck” being most frequently used.\(^{24}\) In his album of Ethiopian crosses, Waclaw Korabiewicz also uses the Greek term “enkolpia” as a descriptor for neck crosses to refer to these objects as a late stage in an evolution from earlier pectoral reliquaries.\(^{25}\) Each of these terms have their merits and are used to specific effect. Usually, only one term is used at a time or, in the case of Korabiewicz’s enkolpia, is used very narrowly. Such uses of the terminology privileges one aspect of neck crosses over others and does not convey the multivalency of these objects as they are at once “neck,” “pectoral,” and “pendant.” For this reason, this essay uses, and differentiates between, all of the above terms throughout. To acknowledge the original, Ethiopian context of these objects, I follow Chojnacki, who in turn follows Getatchew Haile, in using the Amarăñña (Amharic) term, yängät mäsqäl, to refer to a cross with the distinct characteristic of being suspended from the neck via an attachment to a cord or necklace.\(^{26}\)

Several themes in scholarship on Ethiopian crosses can be summarized as follows. Within the formal category of crosses, the fundamental categorization is based on function, with the resulting three categories: processional, hand, and neck.\(^{27}\) Other categorizations — such as by material, style, morphology, etc. — are also found. These studies focus primarily on formalist concerns, particularly morphology, and emphasize the role of neck crosses as symbols of identity, aids to prayer, and/or instruments of protection in Ethiopian Christianity.\(^{28}\)

\(^{20}\) Chojnacki 2006, p. 163–64.

\(^{21}\) This neck cross (cat. 13) is one of the few examples of inscribed neck crosses that I have been able to locate in publications and museum collections.

\(^{22}\) Moore 1971. Eine Moore’s catalog of processional crosses is the first comprehensive attempt to examine and classify the nomenclature, typology, and chronology of Ethiopian crosses.

\(^{23}\) Chojnacki 2006, pp. 17–35.

\(^{24}\) Chojnacki 2006, p. 20; and Korabiewicz 1973. The definition associated with each term is also fluid; Korabiewicz, for example, further limits this category to crosses measuring 1–10 cm.


\(^{26}\) Chojnacki 2006, pp. 23–27. Other Amarăñña terms used in scholarship include yällbō (pectoral cross) and yáddārēt mäsqäl (lit. “chest cross”), though the latter largely refers to the crosses worn by women of the elite social class.

\(^{27}\) Langmuir et al. 1978, p. 19. At times a fourth category, focused on architectural crosses, is added.

Emblematic of these trends is the work of Mario Di Salvo, who focuses on cross forms and traces the developments of cross iconography. Di Salvo’s study provides a detailed description and categorization of cross forms, which in turn provides important insights into dating concerns and the interpretation of meaning. Chojnacki offers a new approach to the evolution of Ethiopian cross design by integrating written records, dated crosses (or at least those whose date can be reasonably assumed), as well as visual depictions of crosses across various media (when both are available and dated). Chojnacki’s study, particularly his use of visual depictions of crosses in manuscripts, wall paintings, and icons, as well as physical crosses, provides a valuable cross-media consideration of the these objects and allows us to see the cross as both motif and object in different visual contexts. Maria Evangelatou contributes a contextual reading of Ethiopian crosses in which she argues that their visual language and possible meanings both reflect and reinforce specific socio-cultural values for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.

The contributions of these studies, so fundamental to establishing a chronology and macro perspective of the cross, provide the infrastructure for this essay, which takes a micro perspective focused on neck crosses. A side effect of the macro view that should be addressed is the privileging of the larger, more ornate, liturgical processional and hand crosses. This privileging is due, in part, to the greater number of datable examples of these two types and their public, social, and ritualistic importance in the Church. Within this, at least partially, artificial academic hierarchy, the agency of neck crosses is minimized in comparison with other cross types. While these studies narrow their focus to crosses, they also open the door for further cross-media dialogue. Using this scholarship as a basis for further discussion, we may ask: what happens if we privilege the neck crosses as distinct objects in their own right and examine their relationships with other Ethiopian Christian material?

Methodology for a New Classification

Korabiewicz uses the Greek term *enkolpia* to describe the Ethiopian neck cross, but does not make an argument for its use. I suggest it can serve as the basis for a new classification of Ethiopian Christian material culture. This study employs scholarship on the visual and material culture of Byzantium to complement the Ethiopian material, while also recognizing the limitations of using one culture to describe another. The goal is to let the objects speak for themselves in order to reflect, as much as possible, the Ethiopian Orthodox understandings and uses of these objects. I apply a two-fold approach: first, a theoretical framework using Byzantine *enkolpia* to describe and group Ethiopian devotional objects of different types and, second, visual analysis. By doing so, I hope to offer a new perspective and invite further discussion about these meaningful objects.

Ivan Drpić focuses on Byzantine Christianity and material culture, and provides a useful framework for understanding Ethiopian devotional objects worn over the chest, such as neck crosses. *Enkolpia*, literally “in the bosom,” describes the manner in which the object is worn and encompasses a diverse

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30 Di Salvo 2006.
31 Chojnacki 2006.
34 Evangelatou 2018, p. 19.
35 Mercier 1997 does put Ethiopian medico-religious objects from several different media in conversation with each other. His study provides support for my approach when analyzing concepts that connect disparate objects.
Figure 7.2. *Yangät mäsqäl* (cat. 15), side 1 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Figure 7.3. *Yangät mäsqäl* (cat. 19), side 1 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Figure 7.4. *Yangät mäsqäl* (cat. 21), side 1 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Figure 7.5. *Yangät mäsqäl* (cat. 23), side 1 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.
array of Orthodox Christian material culture. The Byzantines understood *enkolpia* as pendants with an unambiguously Christian character. What defines an *enkolpion* is its “devotional, prophylactic, and/or apotropaic role” and its suspension from the neck, from which the object hangs down over the chest. Drpić convincingly demonstrates that the power of *enkolpia* — typically small enough to fit in the hand and constantly present and accessible when hung around the neck — stems from their intimate association with the body, and that they are far more than instruments of protection and aids to prayer. Drpić also notes the historiographical devaluing of *enkolpia* within Byzantine studies and the overemphasis on differences in typology and manufacture, arguing that we must study them as a group.

The Byzantine category of *enkolpia* is a useful way to describe a range of Ethiopian material and visual culture, which includes *yangät mäsqäl*, *kuk mawča*, monastic *askema*, magic scrolls, and pendant icons. This essay is not concerned with the dating, materials, or development of *yangät mäsqäl* or other objects; instead, it argues for a group of objects united by their shared function and relationship to the body, specifically the chest. Descriptors such as “neck,” “pectoral,” or “pendant” only refer to an object’s location with respect to the body or its relation to another object. Using *enkolpia* as a descriptor for these objects, while inherently artificial, pointedly identifies them as Christian and speaks to their function and meaning within Ethiopian Christianity. This methodological approach to Ethiopian religious material culture is inherently transhistorical and multi-media, featuring objects and representations of objects from the fifteenth through twentieth centuries in both visual and textual sources.

**Ethiopian Enkolpia**

The category of Ethiopian *enkolpia* is not restricted to neck crosses, but also includes several different types of Christian devotional objects worn over the chest. What follows are case studies of the following object types: neck crosses, ear spoons, the *askema*, magic scrolls, and pendant icons. All of these Christian objects can be worn over the chest, and thus can be seen as “pectorals.” These pectorals, already unified by their common positioning on the body, are further unified by their intimate scale, personal function, and their devotional, prophylactic, and/or apotropaic role.

**Yangät Mäsqäl**

Glenn Peers’s work on pectorals and “framing” the meaning of devotional objects in Byzantium demonstrates the potentially powerful mediating effect of these pectoral objects on the self. Peers argues for a union between the divine and the viewer created by the boundaries, or frame, of a cruciform pectoral, which both enclose the image (of the Crucifixion) and complete it. Ethiopian neck crosses, including those in the BHSC, function in a similar way, particularly those that display open-work designs. Open-work designs make visible light or, when worn, the body through the object, making the body a fundamental part of the object itself (figs. 7.2–7.5; cats. 15, 19, 21, 23).

An inscription on a neck cross in the BHSC further amplifies this connection between wearer-object-divine, in a manner that reflects Ethiopian textual sources and iconographic trends concerning the Crucifixion (fig. 7.6; cat. 13).

The inscription on this cross reads, “Let it be pleasing for Bərhan” across the horizontal cross bar and “Joy” down the lower vertical arm. An Ethiopian homily dated to the early fifteenth century reads, “Today the cross, which came in splendour, turns our mourning into joy, and renders
our enemies mournful and languishing.” Absent of additional translated neck cross inscriptions, using Peers’s argument, it may be suggested that the word “joy” is meant to direct a specific emotive response in the wearer-reader.

No extant neck cross bears an image of the Crucifixion. As we have seen, this iconography is only found on the largest of crosses, such as the processional, and even then is quite rare. The BHSC inscribed cross reflects this iconographic practice. The form of the inscription on the cruciform object is thus significant. The inscription covers only the horizontal and lower vertical arms of the cross. The name of the wearer, Barhan, is centered on the object at the intersection of the horizontal and vertical axes. The name invokes Barhan’s physical body while the inscription as a whole mimics the form of the physical crucified body with arms outstretched wide and legs pointed downward. Barhan’s body thus becomes, and is united with, that of Christ’s. In this way Barhan symbolically shares with Christ the “joy,” or victory over death, and offers the promise of resurrection. The inscription collapses time and space and invests a performative and emotive force into the object, causing the wearer to identify with the object, which in turn makes present the events of the Crucifixion and subsequent Resurrection.

**Kuk Mawča**

Like the neck crosses in the BHSC, the ear spoon (cat. 16) is a pendant object, as indicated by the suspension loop (fig. 7.7). Used for the extraction of ear wax, this object, unlike the neck crosses, does not have a secondary devotional function. The BHSC example lacks any iconography or motif, such as a cross, that could link it with Christianity. Some ear spoons, however, can be devotional objects as they are decorated with, or take the form of, the cross; others, both with and without cross iconography, are worn on necklaces alongside neck crosses (fig. 7.8). As such, ear spoons are often included with neck crosses in studies of Ethiopian crosses. Due to their repetition of forms and their medicinal function, Mercier considers ear spoons that are decorated with crosses as medico-religious objects that collapse the boundaries between the two areas and evidence the close relationship between art, religion, and healing.

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42 Gnisci 2014, p. 217 (emphasis mine).
44 Mercier 1997, p. 72. See also Gnisci 2004 for a study on the iconographic trend of the absent and dead Christ scenes of the Crucifixion in Ethiopian art.
45 Hostetler 2012.
46 Drpić 2018, p. 211.
47 Another example of an ear spoon with a cross motif incorporated into the form of the object can be found in Chojnacki 2006, p. VIII, fig. 14.
48 Korabiewicz 1973; and Chojnacki 2006.
49 Mercier 1997.
crosses, or worn on a necklace alongside crosses, ear spoons thus share a formal similarity and devotional function to neck crosses. In this way, ear spoons also double their relation to the body of the wearer (relating to both the chest as a pectoral object and the head as a medical device), which in turn doubles their efficacy as healing devices.

The Askema

The monastic askema, or scapular, is not usually included in discussions of pectoral, neck, or pendant objects, but they are also closely associated with the body. Composed of two bands, typically made of leather, draped over the shoulders and forming an “X” pattern on the chest, the askema is sometimes adorned with twelve small crosses. The askema visually declares two related elements of the wearer’s identity: first, their group identity as a monastic and, second, their individual identity as a high-level monastic, as only the most “perfect” of monks may wear the askema. Visual representations of the scapular in Ethiopian art are, to my knowledge, limited to representations of two of the most famous local monastic saints: Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus and Täklä Haymanot.

On the pendant icon in the BHSC (cat. 29), Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus is shown wearing a plain version of an askema (fig. 7.9), whereas on a processional cross from Gondär now in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Täklä Haymanot wears two straps that meet in the center of his chest forming a quatrefoil design (fig. 7.10). Describing a similar image, Marilyn Heldman and Stuart C. Munro-Hay identify the straps as heavy chains used in the ascetic mortification of the saint’s body.

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50 Chojnacki 2006, pp. 56, 68.
52 Grierson 1993, cat. 116 and p. 251. Another possibility is that the straps convey the rope which the saint is said to have
While such straps could represent the chains worn by an ascetic, they also match the form of the *askema* and could be interpreted as such. The combination of the iconography of the straps placed across the chest with the specific saints who wear them aids the viewer in understanding the *askema* as object and its socio-religious importance.

Once the *askema* is identified, the meaning attached to the object is significant to our consideration of the relationship between the body and pectoral religious objects. As neck crosses can collapse the boundaries between object and body, particularly those with open-work designs, so too does the *askema*. On the Walters cross, the image of Täklä Haymanot makes visually explicit his angelic nature. The saint, recognizable by his lame leg, not only wears the *askema* but also has six angelic wings. These wings are a key part of Täklä Haymanot’s *vita*, in which he, desiring to come down from the mountain upon which he lives, falls and plunges to his death, only to be given wings and saved on behalf of his devotion to God.

The phrase *askema zämäla ’skt* means “appearance [likeness] of an angel.” *Askema*, “appearance” or “likeness,” can be understood as a quality or the physical appearance of a being. This fluidity can be further extended to the relationship between *askema-as-object* and *askema-as-“likeness.” Only the purest and highest-ranking monastics obtain the *askema* and this “angelic nature.”53 The representation of Täklä Haymanot on the Walters processional cross plays on this fluidity; the wings are an iconographic feature connected to the saint’s life but are also the *askema zämäla ’skt* of Täklä Haymanot made manifest. This representation thus refers to the saint’s angelic nature — explicitly and symbolically — via both body and object.

What is additionally intriguing about this representation of Täklä Haymanot’s scapular is that

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it terminates on his chest in a form that resembles a neck cross. However, in my opinion, the object worn by Täklä Haymanot is an askema as there is a consistency between the shape of the cross florets with those in other images of the saints, the placement on the chest, and the type of owner — an ascetic holy man and saint. Its identification as an askema, though, is not mutually exclusive with that of a neck cross. The potential visual ambiguity of this object — is it neck cross or askema? — is part of the point. The key difference then is based on who can wear a neck cross and who can wear the scapular; saints such as Täklä Haymanot and Gäbrä Mänfäs Qaddus can wear both, while the ordinary Ethiopian Orthodox person would only be allowed the neck cross.

Magic Scrolls

Magic or healing scrolls produced by dābtāra — unordained clerics — also fit within the proposed definition of Ethiopian enkolpia (cats. 34, 35).54 These objects, which function to heal or prevent an ailment, usually take the form of long, narrow vertical strips of parchment measured to the height of the patron and are covered with text and images designed to combat the illness or evil plaguing the patron.55 Mixing orthodox imagery with heterodox elements, magic scrolls blur the boundaries between religion and magic, official and popular religion.

The production of magic scrolls requires the body. Preparation of the parchment begins with a ritual in which the animal’s body substitutes for that of the afflicted patron’s body. The finished scroll substitutes for the human skin as a container and site of potential power. This symbolic relationship engenders a close connection between scroll and its owner, a relationship in which the scroll symbolically is the owner. The Amarāña term for magic scrolls, yābranna katāb, literally “written on skin,” cues this ontological relationship between these objects and the animal, then human, body.56 Though focused on Western, European Christianity and western-produced manuscripts, Sarah Kay’s work on the materiality of manuscripts offers an interesting methodological comparison; her work explores the fraught connection between the medieval reader and parchment as skin and object, and the act of flaying as both torture and manner of book production.57

As apotropaic objects, magic scrolls bear a functional similarity to neck crosses, ear spoons, and the askema. Like all three of the above objects, magic scrolls, too, can be pectoral objects. When worn on the chest, they then double their relationship with the body of the owner. The magic scroll is sewn into a leather case which is then suspended over the chest;

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54 Drpić 2018, p. 198.
55 Mercier 1997, p. 46; and Windmuller-Luna 2015.
56 Windmuller-Luna 2015.
57 Kay 2006.
the case can also be worn on a longer cord over the shoulder and across the chest (fig. 7.11).\(^8\) Like the askema and inscribed neck cross, then, magic scrolls symbolically represent the “likeness,” or body, of the person on which they are worn, though in more physical terms.

**Pendant Icons**

Pendant icons are the final object type to consider (cat. 29, fig. 7.12).\(^9\) Worn suspended from the neck on the chest, these objects can also be defined as pectorals. The practice of wearing a devotional image of the Virgin Mary on one’s chest is documented in fifteenth-century sources. Among them, the legend of Saint Krastos Šamra recounts that Christ appeared to the saint and hung a painting around her neck.\(^6\) Other saints such as Täklä Ḥawaryat and Mäba’a Şayon also wore images of the Virgin, or the Virgin and Child, on their chests. Steven Kaplan notes that Mära Krastos wore a small prayerbook containing a religio-magic text known as the “Prayer of Mary at Bartos” around her neck. Other accounts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries corroborate the practice of wearing prayer booklets of the “Rampart of the Cross” (Hājurā māsqāl) suspended from the neck.\(^6\)

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\(^8\) Mercier 1997, p. 46; Windmuller-Luna 2015; and Winslow 2011.

\(^9\) See Sonia Dixon’s essay (ch. 8) for the issues of applying “icon” terminology to Ethiopian panel paintings.

\(^6\) Heldman 1994, p. 171.


Part of the genre of personal devotional objects, the double-sided pendant icon worn as a pendant became popular in the seventeenth century and remained common until the nineteenth century. Many of the surviving double-sided pendant icons have cruciform designs enhancing the exterior surfaces of the icon’s wooden protective covers — the side of the object that, when closed, would be visible — therefore combining the symbolic power of the cross and the efficacy of the image inside (cat. 29; figs. 7.12, 7.13, 7.14).  

The Meaning of Ethiopian Enkolpia

The above examples demonstrate that, if we expand beyond the boundaries of formal categorization, a range of objects are thus aligned with neck crosses in fundamental and meaningful ways. These connections in turn can create the foundation for a new category of objects tentatively described here as Ethiopian enkolpia. Each enkolpion has, or is centered on, a cross motif; while all are not neck nor pendant objects, all are pectorals; all elide the boundary between object and body. These characteristics aid in fulfilling the devotional and prophylactic functions of enkolpia.

Across Christian confessions, the cross is a potent symbol of triumph and hope of resurrection. By dying on the cross, Christ’s blood sanctified it. This sanctification of object and sign thus confers upon all crosses the infinite power to heal, bless, and protect. In the Ethiopian Orthodox confession, the cross is not only that of the Crucifixion. It is also the seal of the Father and the “Cross of light” first given by God to the Archangel Michael as a means to defeat the devil; this cross then passed from the archangel to King Solomon. According to an Ethiopian tradition, both the cross and its sign act as protection from external and internal enemies.  

sixteenth-century text of the prayer of the Rampart of the Cross, owned by a certain Gäbrä Måsqäl (“Servant of the Cross”), says that Gäbrä Måsqäl made the sign of the Cross on his face, forehead, and back so that it would be a shield and a force for him always. By drawing the above objects together in a new category, we see that the devotional, prophylactic, and apotropaic functions of Ethiopian enkolpia all converge on a person’s core — “in the bosom” — and consequently highlight the body as a significant nexus of meaning, power, and transformation in Ethiopian Christianity.

Paths Forward: Intermateriality

The use of the cross motif shared by many of these objects is not only a case of reduplication or, simply put, the more crosses the better. Instead, the crosses on these objects also enact charged moments of intermateriality — a closed pendant icon is both a pendant icon and a neck cross. As we have seen, many of the protective covers of these icons are embellished with cruciform designs; many of these designs are recognizable as hand crosses (figs. 7.13, 7.14). This intermaterial relationship between pendant icons and hand crosses establishes a link between a personal object and a liturgical object. Hand crosses are not simply liturgical artifacts, but also powerful symbols of office, social position, and, ultimately, authority of the priesthood. As liturgical artifacts used to bless the faithful they are also actors in a complex ritual of social interaction.

While this final point regarding intermateriality compares crosses with crosses — an approach this essay has so far sought to avoid — it demonstrates the need to redefine the classifications of Ethiopian Christian objects by centering the wearer/body rather than the object. A unifying characteristic of
all the objects discussed — neck crosses, the *askema*, ear spoons, pendant icons, and magic scrolls — is how fluid they are when we try to impose academic categories upon them.

Future investigations may involve closer examination of the textual sources and the language used to describe such objects. Tattoos, as well, should be included in the conversation, thus moving beyond a consideration only of physical artifacts worn on the body to incorporate signs inscribed directly onto the body.

This study has argued that neck crosses possess their own form of monumentality and agency distinct from that of the larger hand and processional crosses, and that they demonstrate the multi-faceted nature and efficacy of Ethiopian “enkolpia.”

### The BHSC: Catalog Entries

I offer several observations that apply to the group of seventeen small-scale, pendant objects in the BHSC. The catalog entries are organized by accession number rather than any iconographic, morphological, or other organizational scheme. Each entry offers a description of both sides of the individual object; when applicable, images and citations of closely comparable objects are also provided. In order to avoid assigning a hierarchy to the sides of each pendant object, my entries do not identify a front or back, obverse or reverse. Instead, “side 1” and “side 2” is used for discussions of decoration and for reference to photographs; “upper” is designated as the end with the suspension loop. Formal descriptions move along the vertical axis, starting at the upper end, then across the horizontal unless the decoration is the same across the entire object.

Each of the seventeen objects that follow are composed of at least two elements: the suspension loop and the body of the object. On the ear spoon and thirteen of the neck crosses, the suspension loop is directly connected to the upper end of the body of the object (fig. 7.15; cats. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20). On the painted pendant icon (cat. 29) also has a suspension loop and so could be worn.

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69 Drpić 2018, and Nosnitsin 2009. The second half of Drpić’s study provides a model for this type of investigation. An examination of the “Waimahtar qoba wa’askema...” in relation to the *askema*, for example, is potentially revealing.

70 Chojnacki 2006, p. 59. A longstanding tradition of tattooing that began under Zär’a Ya’eqob continues to this day. The custom of women tattooing crosses on their foreheads, hands, or both, is still widely practiced in the north of the region.

71 Included in each entry is the material(s) of each object with the caveat that no scientific tests have, as yet, been undertaken.

72 In the case of the inscribed cross (cat. 13), the lack of additional decoration may indicate that the inscribed side is the “primary” one, though without contextual information it is unclear which side would be displayed outward (what we might consider the “front”) and which would be against the body (the “back”). However, in the case of the cross with projecting elements (cat. 12), the protrusions may determine which side was worn against the body and which was worn facing outward, as the protrusions would be uncomfortable pressed against the skin. We may thus suggest that side 1 on cross cat. 12 is the “front,” and side 2 the “back.”

73 See Dixon’s essay (ch. 8). The painted pendant icon (cat. 29) also has a suspension loop and so could be worn.
20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28). In the case of the neck crosses, the suspension loop is attached to the upper arm of the cross, and, when finial decoration is included as part of the cross’s decorative scheme, the loop often takes the place of the finial decoration found on the other three cross arms. Three of the BHSC neck crosses (cats. 12, 21, 26) are tri-part objects, with a hinge element added between the suspension loop and cross (fig. 7.16).

The following logic informs the separation of the objects into the three constituent parts: suspension loop, hinge, and body. The loop is what allows the object to be suspended from the owner’s neck or waist; the hinge allows the cross to move independently from the suspension loop. These components act in different, though related, ways. It is the suspension loop that defines these objects as pendants, and consequently neck and/or pectorals when a person’s body is involved, and that thus unites them by function as objects worn on the body. The hinge imbues an active quality to a neck cross, as the cross can now be set in motion and move from the body when worn. In the case of larger neck crosses, such as the bronze BHSC (cat. 12), this movement makes it possible for the wearer to view, and possibly kiss, the cross as it is worn.

As a final observation, readers will notice that the open-work design of six of the neck crosses produces a certain effect: the interplay of visible positive and negative spaces (figs. 7.2–7.5; cats. 15, 19, 21, 22, 23, 27). This effect, part of the overall decoration of these particular crosses, is created via the removal of portions of the metal body of the object — cutouts. As seen in the photographs, these cutouts allow light to stream through and to be visible through the openings. Elaborate latticework and cutouts are also found, often to a much greater degree, on processional and hand crosses, including examples from the BHSC (cats. 1, 4, 6, 10, 11). In this manner, the neck crosses can be related to crosses of different sizes and functions. However, as explored above, there is an additional effect specific to the neck crosses: when the cross is worn, it would be the body of the wearer that is now made partially visible through the cutouts. The body is then not only the backdrop for the cross but is also actively a part of the object, completing the decorative scheme, and thus expanding and amplifying the semiotic range of meaning associated with the object.

The following seventeen catalog entries offer a sampling of the possible forms of Ethiopian pendant objects. No matter their form, size, or decoration, each object is both a testament to the importance of the cross for Ethiopian Christians and an intimate reminder of the wearer’s part in a living, centuries-old practice.

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74 See Jones’s essay (ch. 6).
75 Peers 2004. For a discussion of possible meanings and visual referents of the open-work designs of Ethiopian crosses, see Evangelatou 2018, p. 132.
12. **Yangät Mäsqāl (Neck Cross)**

Bronze  
Cross: $4\frac{3}{16} \times 3\frac{3}{8} \times \frac{1}{16}$ in. (12.5 × 8.5 × 0.2 cm)  
Loop: $1\frac{9}{16} \times 1 \times \frac{9}{16}$ in. (3.9 × 2.5 × 1.4 cm)  
Projecting Elements: $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (0.5 cm)  
1.70 oz. (48.3 g)

CONDITION: Several of the applied projecting elements have been damaged. There is some patina on side 2.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from Christopher Martin (Portobello Galleries) in London in 1975. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.30).  
https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/646/

One of three hinged, multi-part neck crosses in the catalog (cats. 20, 26), this example is the only one with dark coloring, suggesting that it is made of bronze. The circular hinged segment at the upper end and connected to the suspension loop is decorated on side 1 with a protruding round boss encircled by four layers of dotted wire ornamentation (cats. 12A, 12B). Below the hinge is a large cross with a long vertical axis. The lower arm of the cross features two large bosses, the other three arms feature a single, central, boss. Each boss is encircled by decorative wire ornamentation. A ball is attached to each interior corner of the cross; three triangular groupings of three circular globules project from the finials of the left, right, and lower arms. At the center of this side is a rectangle of unidentified transparent material, flanked by two small bosses.

This neck cross is one of the few in the catalog that features different decoration on each side. That on side 2 closely resembles that of side 1 on another neck cross (cat. 24) — solid bars alternate with lines of circular dots along the length of each crossbar (cat. 12C). The decoration on the vertical crossbar is continuous, thus bisecting that on the horizontal.

A distinctive aspect of this object is its decidedly three-dimensional, sculpted nature (cat. 12A). When viewed in profile or at an angle, the six large circular bosses that decorate the arms and the suspension loop project outward from the body of the object, creating six distinct peaks.
Cat. 12B. *Yangät mäṣqāl*, side 1. Photo: Birhana T. Gessese.
Cat. 12C. Yangät mäqäl, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.
Cat. 13A. Yangät mäṣaḥāl, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gesese.
13. *Yangät Mäsqäl* (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy
2\(\frac{1}{8}\) × 1\(\frac{11}{16}\) × \(\frac{1}{8}\) in. (6.7 × 4.3 × 0.3 cm)
1.62 oz. (45.8 g)

INSCRIPTIONS: “Let it be pleasing for Borhan” (horizontal crossbar); “Joy” (lower arm).

CONDITION: No damage to side 1; minor abrasions to side 2.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from Christopher Martin (Portobello Galleries) in London on October 25, 1975. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.31).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/647/

The only decoration on this cross, attached to a beaded necklace, is an *Amarānñña* (Amharic) inscription that spans the horizontal arms and lower half of the vertical arm on side 1 (cat. 13A). Speaking on behalf of one “Borhan,” likely the owner of the object, the inscription evokes such feelings as (religious) pleasure and joy in connection with the Crucifixion and Christ’s Resurrection. Side 2 is undecorated.

Two comparable inscribed neck crosses demonstrate alternative possibilities for inscription type and composition. The first displays only a name, “Zewde Kassaye,” — again, likely that of the owner — across its horizontal crossbar, while diagonal lines of incised dots decorate the upper and lower arms of the vertical axis (fig. 7.17). Though the inscription on the cross in the BHSC is more complex, adding another textual-visual element with the word “Joy” perpendicular to the rest of the inscription, both of these examples place the name of the invoked person on the crossbar.

The other neck cross, now at the Dallas Museum of Art, is inscribed with a Coptic version of the Latin “Sator Square,” a four-way palindrome (fig. 7.18). The inscription covers all four arms of the cross and is the only source of decoration on the object. Reading clockwise, beginning on the upper arm of the cross, this inscription reads: Alador, Rodas/Sador (sharing the right arm; Rodas being read from left to the right, and Sador from right to left), Danat/Adera (sharing the lower arm), and Alador, repeated on the left arm. Inscriptions on neck crosses are rare and do not follow a single standard form or type, but these examples, along with the neck cross in the BHSC, show different ways in which words could not only adorn the object but also convey meaning by their arrangement.

1. One of Harris’s photographs of this neck cross does not include the necklace. It is not clear whether the necklace was purchased with the cross or was added later by Harris.
2. Korabiewicz 1973. I thank Felege-Selam Yirga for his translations of the three inscriptions in this entry and their meanings.
3. Chojnacki 2006, p. 89. This palindrome is a common motif on pendant crosses that feature the nails with which Christ was crucified; each word names one of the five wounds Christ suffered.

Figure 7.17. Neck Cross.
Location unknown.
Photo: after Korabiewicz 1973, fig. 186.

Photo: Dallas Museum of Art.
14. *Yangät Mäsqäl* (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy  
1 3/4 × 1 1/16 × 1/8 in. (4.4 × 2.7 × 0.3 cm)  
0.62 oz. (17.6 g)

CONDITION: Incised decoration on both sides of cross is obscured by aging of the metal.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from Christopher Martin (Portobello Galleries) in London on October 25, 1975. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.32).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/648/

This cross retains a gold sheen over the incised decorative patterns on each side, as well as on the lower edges of the suspension loop. The gold-colored material indicates that this cross may have originally been gilded or was otherwise decorated to imitate gold. Whether real or imitation, the final visual effect was meant to be seen as gilding. This object then is the only gilded metal cross — neck, hand, or processional — in the catalog.

The vertical length of this cross is greater than the horizontal. The decoration on side 1 takes the form of an incised X-shaped interlace pattern with rounded edges that fills each arm of the cross (two on the lower arm) and, at its center, a circle around a design of radiate curved lines (cat. 14A). Side 2 features a similar decorative schema (cat. 14B). The incised patterns on the arms of this side, however, are cross-shaped quadrilobes with lancet-shaped projections at the corners.

SEM
15. Yangät Mäsqäl (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy
2 7/8 × 1 7/8 × 1/32 in. (6.6 × 4.1 × 0.1 cm)
0.49 oz. (13.8 g)

CONDITION: There is no visible damage.


https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/649/

Intricate interlacing knotwork fills this cross. The deep, delicate nature of the incision work calls attention to the X-shaped negative space at the center, which is further articulated when suspended and light is allowed to stream through (cat. 15C). At the upper end of the cross is a box-like element enclosing a four-lobed knot. The upper and lower ends of this box extend beyond the width of the vertical arm; a short projection extends from the middle of the left and right ends of the box. Short projections also extend from the left and right edges of the lower arm. Semicircular finials attached to the left, right, and lower arms of the cross are incised with a square and an interior “X.” Side 1 (cat. 15B) is differentiated from side 2 (cat. 15A) by the increased incised detail of the interwoven latticework on the interior of the body of the cross and in the boxed-in section near the suspension loop. Two additional incised lines on the threads of side 1 give a sense of movement and of a woven texture to the decoration.
Cat. 15B. *Yangät mäsqäl*, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Cat. 15C. *Yangät mäsqäl*, side 1 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Cat. 16A. *Kuk mawu'a*, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Cat. 16B. *Kuk mawu'a*, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.
16. **Kuk Mawča (Ear Spoon)**

Metal alloy
2³⁄₄ in. x 1¹⁄₁₆ in. x 3¹⁄₄ in. (6.5 x 1.7 x 0.5 cm)
0.39 oz. (11.0 g)

CONDITION: There is some patina and aging of the metal, and several sections of the rope-like filigree decoration are missing or damaged on both sides.


https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/650

Known in Amaroña as *kuk mawča*, this distinctive type of object was used for the extraction of earwax and can be identified by the tiny spoon at the end of the arm that extends out from the body of the object (cat. 16C). Though utilitarian in nature, the ear spoon can also double as an object of personal adornment, and is today commonly worn suspended from the neck or, sometimes, the waist. The tradition of using ear spoons is corroborated by textual and archeological evidence stretching back centuries, though these same historical sources do not always indicate how they were worn.

Ethiopian ear spoons are produced in several different forms and exhibit a variety of decorative motifs. Some are cylindrical in shape, others square; many, such as this one, have a triangular body onto which decoration can be added, such as rope-like filigree spirals. On side 1 of this ear spoon, two connected spiral bundles fill the wider upper end, while only one is needed to fill the space toward the pointed end (cat. 16A). Four spirals fill the triangular space on side 1, while only three are found on side 2 (cat. 16B). A fourth may have once decorated the point of the triangle on side 2, but, if so, is no longer extant. Subtle additional differences distinguish one side from the other. Two layers of the rope-like filigree surround the triangular body on side 1, while side 2 has three layers. On side 1, two sets of double-spiral wire bundles open upward, and on side 2 one double-spiral wire bundle opens downward.

Many Ethiopian ear spoons incorporate crosses into their designs, and can be worn on the same necklace as a cross. The Christian function of the cross can thus combined with the health benefits of the ear spoon into one object, reminding us of the close connection between religion and health. The decoration of the ear spoon in the BHSC is not explicitly religious in nature, making it the one secular object in the catalog.

1. Pankhurst and Pankhurst 1979. This study remains one of the few dedicated to Ethiopian ear spoons.
3. See, for example, the ear spoon at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2012.383; figure 7.7 in my essay.
17. *Yangät Mäsqäl* (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy  
$1\frac{7}{8} \times 1\frac{7}{16} \times \frac{3}{16}$ in. ($4.7 \times 4.0 \times 0.5$ cm)  
0.73 oz. (20.6 g)  

**CONDITION:** Good condition aside from some aging of the metal on both sides.

**PROVENANCE:** Purchased by David P. Harris in London in June of 1979. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.35).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/651/

This cross of approximately equal arms exhibits rounder edges and a plasticity that sets it apart from the hard-edged crosses in this catalog. Side 1 features an “X” incised onto a raised rectangular panel at the crossing (cats. 17A, 17B). Side 2 does not have any markings (cat. 17C).

SEM

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18. *Yangät Mäsqäl* (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy  
$1\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{15}{16} \times \frac{1}{16}$ in. ($3.8 \times 2.4 \times 0.2$ cm)  
0.33 oz. (9.3 g)  

**CONDITION:** Some patina on the incised decoration on the upper arm of the cross on side 1. Several small cracks in the same incised decoration on both sides of the upper arm.

**PROVENANCE:** Purchased by David P. Harris from the Guthaim Gallery Inc. in New York on October 23, 1978. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.36).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/652/

This cross is composed of a single piece of metal, with a vertical arm that is longer than the horizontal crossbar. Both sides display this same decoration of incised triangles on the short upper arm, and an incomplete, or worn, incised circle at the crossing.

SEM
Cat. 17B. Yangät mäsqäl, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Cat. 17C. Yangät mäsqäl, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Cat. 18B. Yangät mäsqäl, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Cat. 18C. Yangät mäsqäl, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.
19. *Yangät Mäsqāl* (Neck Cross)

**Metal alloy**

\[ \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{16} \text{ in. (4.1} \times \text{3.0} \times \text{0.1 cm)} \]

0.39 oz. (11.0 g)

**CONDITION:** Similar condition on both sides of the cross: patina on the metal around the cutout sections, some corrosion of the metal on the upper arm, and multiple, significant scratches, which may be part of original, now-damaged decoration.

**PROVENANCE:** Purchased by David P. Harris from the Guthaim Gallery Inc. in New York on October 23, 1978. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.37).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/653/

Damage or wear on this cross has obscured the incised line decoration that once covered the majority of both sides. The extant lines once extended across all arms, and on both sides forming a weave-like pattern. Similar incised decoration is found on other neck crosses in the catalog (cats. 15, 23). An additional decorative effect is created by five cutouts in the metal: a square at the center of the cross, and four triangles in the middle of each arm.

SEM

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20. *Yangät Mäsqāl* (Neck Cross)

**Metal alloy**

\[ \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{16} \times \frac{1}{16} \text{ in. (3.3} \times \text{2.8} \times \text{0.2 cm)} \]

0.13 oz. (3.6 g)

**CONDITION:** The rope-like decoration on the upper arm of side 1 is worn down.

**PROVENANCE:** Purchased by David P. Harris from the Guthaim Gallery Inc. in New York on October 23, 1978. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.38).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/654/

This cross has arms of equal length that are narrowest in the center and flare outward, ending in rounded edges that are articulated by applied globules — two on the upper arm and three on the other arms. Circular bosses are applied on each arm and at the crossing of side 1 (cats. 20A, 20B). A single strand of rope-like wire extends from the center, circular boss and wraps twice around those on the arms. Side 2 (cat. 20C) is undecorated and displays a slightly different profile than that of side 1. The applied globules makes the edges of each arm appear straighter on side 2, giving them a pointed, rather than a rounded, profile. A raised diamond-shaped panel is affixed at the crossing of this side.

SEM

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https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol8/iss1/9

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21. **Yangät Mäsqäł (Neck Cross)**

Metal alloy  
Cross: $5 \times 3 \frac{7}{16} \times \frac{1}{32}$ in. (12.7 x 9.5 x 0.08 cm)  
Loop: $1 \frac{9}{16} \times \frac{15}{16} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. (4.0 x 2.4 x 1.3 cm)  
1.38 oz. (39.2 g)

CONDITION: No visible damage.


https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/656/

One of three hinged, multi-part neck crosses in the catalog (cats. 12, 26), this example is also the largest of the neck crosses and is the only one with figural decoration. The hinge attached to the upper arm takes the form of a “cross pattée,” decorated on both sides with incised outlines and a circle on each arm.¹ The complex main body of the object is composed of three compounding cross designs (cats. 21A, 21B).² Beginning at the center on side 1, is a small, straight-bar cross with an incised “X” at the crossing and circles on each arm. This central cross is embedded within a larger, intricately woven pattern of lines that create the overall cruciform shape of the object — the second of the three compounding cross designs. Each arm of the cross terminates in a straight edge; the left, right, and lower ends are appended with the third cross design: cross-like quatrefoils. Each quatrefoil is decorated with an incised “X” across the middle and circles in each lobe. In the interstitial space between each arm of the main cross is an abstract profile representation of a bird, identifiable by the pointed beak. Each bird faces inward, toward a vertical arm of the cross.

The latticework body of the cross is emphasized on side 1 by straight incised lines down each “thread” of the design. The three compounding cross designs described above for side 1 are also visible on side 2, though side 2 lacks the incised decoration that further articulates each design. On side 2, the only incised articulates a simplified design of two perpendicular lines running through two diamond shapes (cat. 21C). These lines intersect with several of the cutout holes and continue into the curved ends of the cross arms. Additional visual information, such as the beaks and wings of the birds, are conveyed with incised lines on side 1. Side 2 lacks these details — the birds, for example, can be described on side 2 as crescents appended to the corners of the cross and linked to the upper and lower cross arms by a short bar.

A nearly identical neck cross at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art displays the same composition of four birds at the corners of a large central cross.³ This object, too, is hinged and would be prominent against the chest of the wearer.

Birds may be interpreted specifically as doves symbolizing the soul liberated from death and as a sign of the Resurrection, or more generally as symbols of spiritual wisdom.⁴ This iconography can also be found in a variety of religious images, from processional crosses (cat. 4) to manuscripts and monumental painting.

SEM

1. A “cross pattée” is a form in which the arms are narrow at the center and flare outward, often with flat end edges.
2. For a discussion of the compound nature of Ethiopian cross designs, see the essay by Lynn Jones (ch. 6).
3. Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, no. 72-10-10. For another similar example, see Di Salvo 2006, p. 88, fig. 11.
Cat. 21B. Yangät mäŋgal, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.
Cat. 21C. Yangäti mäŋäáli, side 2. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.
22. Yangät Mäsqāl (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy
2 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 1 $\frac{13}{16}$ × $\frac{1}{32}$ in. (6.6 × 4.6 × 0.1 cm)
0.50 oz. (14.2 g)

CONDITION: Object shows considerable wear. Some patina of the metal is visible on both sides around the circular cutouts on the interior of the body of the cross.

PROVENANCE: Purchased by David P. Harris from the Endicott-Guthaim Gallery Inc. in New York on February 18, 1977. Harris bequest, The Blick-Harris Study Collection, Department of Art History, Kenyon College (2020.41).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/657/

The form of this neck cross resembles that of a basilica-plan church with transept and chapels radiating from the apse. The semicircular upper end meets the suspension loop at the middle and has five radiating semicircular finials. Triangular points emanate from the inner corners of the cross, and each arm terminates in quatrefoils flanked by two circular finial disks. Only the lower arm has an additional pair of disks at the midpoint of each outer edge.

Incised decoration and perforations define the surface of this cross. The upper arm encloses a cross formed by the negative space created by the perforations in the metal. Side 1 (cat. 22A) features a grid of dots connected by incised straight lines with incised circles in the interstitial areas. The quatrefoils at the ends of the left, right, and lower arms are each decorated with an incised “X” across the middle and circles in each lobe. Side 2 (cat. 22B) is undecorated, or no longer retains its incised decoration. The only evidence of previous decoration is an incised “X” across the body of the lower quatrefoil. When this particular cross is suspended, and light is visible through the cutouts in the metal, it is apparent that the grid of dots were likely meant to be perforated; only some are fully punched out.

Cat. 22A. Yangät mäsqāl, side 1. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.

Cat. 22B. Yangät mäsqāl, side 2 backlit. Photo: Birhanu T. Gessese.
23. **Yangät Mäsqāl (Neck Cross)**

Metal alloy
2 3/4 × 1 3/4 × 1/16 in. (6.0 × 4.5 × 0.2 cm)
0.54 oz. (15.4 g)

CONDITION: Minor scratching on the surface of side 1.


https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/658/

This cross is formed from a single piece of metal. The woven pattern is created by the combination of diamond-shaped cutouts and incised lines in the metal. Side 1 (cats. 23A, 23B) features an additional incised line down the middle of each “thread” in the weave-like pattern, while side 2 (cat. 23C) does not.

![SEM](https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol8/iss1/9)
24. Yangät Mäsqäł (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy
2\(\frac{7}{16}\) \(\times\) 1\(\frac{3}{16}\) \(\times\) 1\(\frac{1}{16}\) in. (6.2 \(\times\) 4.0 \(\times\) 0.2 cm)
0.36 oz. (10.1 g)

CONDITION: Several of the round dots on side 1 have worn away, and the upper end of the cross exhibits some damage. Side 2 possesses some shallow nicks, as well as a white elliptical sticker with “24,—” written on it.

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 (2020.45).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/661/

The suspension loop and the vertical bar are longer than the horizontal. On side 1 (cat. 24A) the applied decoration on the vertical bar features a continuous design, which bisects that of the horizontal bar, a design similar to that on side 2 of cat. 12. This applied decoration consists of pairs of solid lines that alternate with a line of circular dots. Small circular attachments decorate the central corners and ends of the cross. Side 2 is without decoration, though the crossing is obscured by a price sticker (cat. 24B).
25. Yangät Mäsqäl (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy
1 \(\frac{3}{16}\) \(\times\) 1 \(\frac{3}{16}\) \(\times\) 1 \(\frac{3}{16}\) in. (3.0 \(\times\) 2.1 \(\times\) 0.5 cm)
0.30 oz. (8.4 g)

CONDITION: Minor abrasions to the cross.

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 (2020.46).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/662/

One of the smallest crosses in the catalog, this cross is molded and composed of arms of equal length. They narrow at the center and flare outward, ending in a slight curve. Neither side is decorated.

26. Yangät Mäsqäl (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy
Cross: 3 \(\frac{7}{16}\) \(\times\) 1 13 \(\frac{1}{16}\) \(\times\) 1 \(\frac{3}{16}\) in. (8.7 \(\times\) 4.6 \(\times\) 0.2 cm)
Loop: 1 15 \(\frac{1}{16}\) \(\times\) 13 \(\frac{1}{16}\) \(\times\) 5 \(\frac{1}{16}\) in. (3.3 \(\times\) 2.1 \(\times\) 0.8 cm)
0.70 oz. (19.7 g)

CONDITION: The cross and suspension loop are in good condition aside from some discoloration of the metal alloy. The surface metal on side 2 is beginning to pull away from the edges of the left and right arms, and displays some rippling on the lower arm. The upper arm on side 2 preserves a white elliptical sticker with “24,—” written on it.

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 (2020.47).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/663/

One of three hinged, multi-part neck crosses in the catalog (cats. 12, 21), this example is composed of a
triangular hinge with a suspension loop attached to a four-lobed cross. The lower arm is wider and longer than the other three. Rope-like, twisted wire decorates the face of the hinge and cross on side 1 (cat. 26A). Three concentric circles of wire fill the triangular hinge; concentric wire teardrops fill each lobe of the cross. Six circular bosses decorate side 1; they are placed at the center of the triangular hinge, on the four lobes, and at the crossing. Fourteen small circular disks are attached to the contours of the object: the hinge has four, the upper and left arms each have two, and the right and lower arms each have three. Side 2 lacks any decoration; the upper lobe of the cross is partially obscured by a price sticker (cat. 26B).²

1. The left lobe of the cross has only two small circular disks, while the left and lower lobes have three each. I could not find any clear physical indication that a third disk was lost from the left lobe, but there is also no evidence or comparanda, that I have found, for a neck cross with a purposefully asymmetrical design like this. I suggest, then, that it is likely that a third disk originally decorated the left lobe.

27. **Yangät Mäsqäl (Neck Cross)**

Metal alloy

1 ³⁄₄₀ × 11⁄₄₀ × 1⁄₁₀ in. (3.0 × 1.7 × 0.2 cm)

0.16 oz. (4.4 g)

CONDITION: Slight corrosion on the lozenge-shaped element on side 1. Some minor patina is visible on side 2 around the perforated triangles on the circular element.

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 (2020.212).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/665/

The upper end of this pendant cross — the section directly below the suspension loop — is decorated with a cross of equal arms, created by four triangular cutouts in the metal, and inscribed within a circle. The lower part of the object is lozenge-shaped. Triangular points articulate the edge where the circle and lozenge merge. Neither side is further decorated.
28. *Yangät Mäsqāl* (Neck Cross)

Metal alloy  
2 3/4 × 1 11/16 × 1/8 in. (6.9 × 4.3 × 0.3 cm)  
1.04 oz. (29.5 g)

CONDITION: There is slight corrosion of the metal around the inscribed decoration on side 1 of the cross. Damage has partially obscured the decoration on upper end of vertical cross bar. Side 2 exhibits some minor abrasions.

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 (2020.213).

https://digital.kenyon.edu/arthistorystudycollection/666/

This cross consists of a straight vertical bar intersected by a shorter horizontal bar. Incised onto side 1 is a single, repeating oval motif. Each oval-shaped swirl is composed of three elements: a central circle enclosed by two curved lines. There is no decoration on side 2.

SEM
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