

The Queen of Sheba's Tattoos

Catherine Cartwright-Jones © 2005 TapDancing Lizard



Throat, chin and forehead patterns done with harquus paint from mehandi.com

Henna on hands and nails

This tattoo is adapted from a nineteenth-century Ethiopian illuminated manuscript of the legend of Solomon and Sheba in the collection of Dr. Richard Pankhurst, Royal Asiatic Society, London.

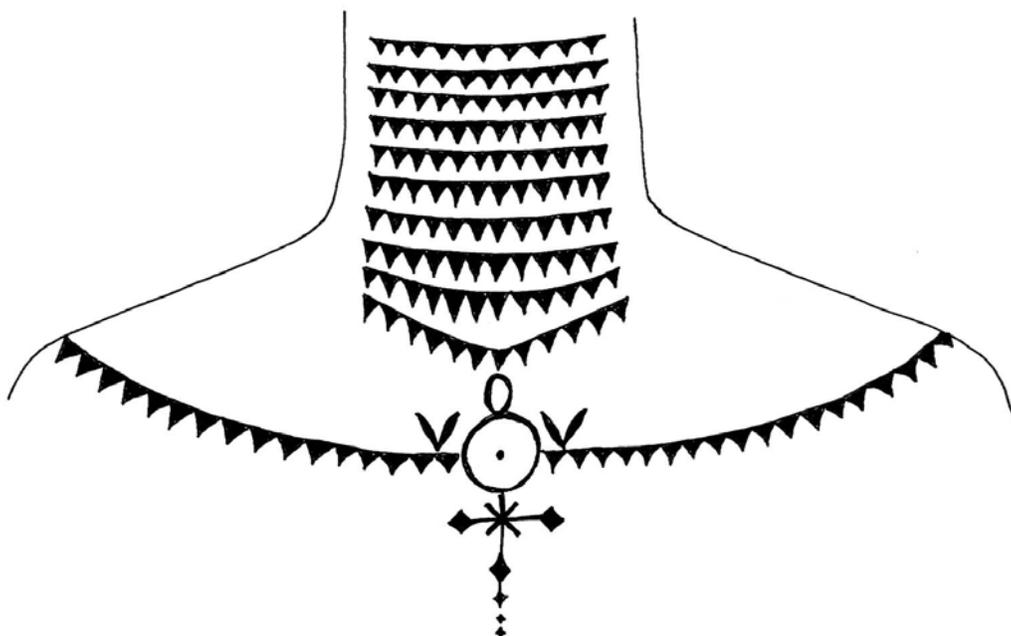
There is no particular reason to assume that the manuscript is a historically accurate document about the Queen of Sheba's appearance, but since the pattern is corroborated by written descriptions of Ethiopian women and the identical tattoo tradition exists today in Ethiopia, it certainly is representative of Coptic Christian Ethiopian women's tattoos.

These patterns may have served as ornament for exposed skin, proxy for jewelry, an ethnic identifier, or a sensuous enhancement. Each woman probably felt her reason for being tattooed was some combination of these elements. Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry praised women's tattooed throats as graceful and sensuous. When you see these patterns on a living woman's throat, you, too, will be mesmerized! The model in the above photograph fell asleep as I was painting her. As she drifted into sleep her breathing

slowed and deepened. The patterns fluttered over her pulses, rose and fell with her breath. When she swallowed, the patterns rippled. As her head dropped to the side, the parallel lines arched gracefully.

A man watching his tattooed wife sleep beside him could not help but be enchanted watching the patterns echo her breath and life. When she sang, wept, or laughed ... her throat tattoos would dance to her emotions!

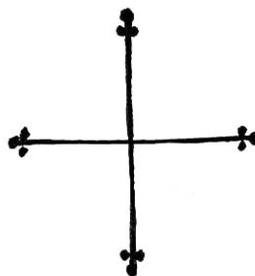
Patterns:



Throat tattoo from image of the Queen of Sheba: early nineteenth-century Ethiopian sacred manuscript illumination of the legend of Solomon and Sheba, Collection of Dr. Richard Pankhurst, Royal Asiatic Society, London



Jawline tattoo from photograph of Ethiopian woman, 1997, author's collection



Forehead tattoo from photograph of Ethiopian woman, 1997, author's collection