

TRADITIONAL JEWELLERY OF AGĪKŪYŪ OF CENTRAL KENYA: MATERIAL AND USE.

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Abstract

Background: 'Betterness' is one of the predicted global trends of 2020. Businesses and individuals will join forces to practice 'betterness', such as radical openness and social responsibility and make a positive impact for the greater good of all. The trend argues that mindful consuming informs the 21st century business models. Cultural storytelling, authenticity and craftsmanship are in demand as we return to local sourcing and manufacturing.

Objectives: The main purpose of this research was to identify as much as possible, the jewelry worn by the traditional AgĪkŪyŪ people of Kenya before the colonial period that lasted roughly 68 years having begun in the late 19th Century. It aimed at ascertaining the purpose of the jewelry, the wearer and the materials used to make the jewelry.

Subjects: the traditional AgĪkŪyŪ people of Kenya before the colonial period that lasted roughly 68 years having begun in the late 19th Century.

Design/ Methods: A record of when the jewelry was worn, be it in a ceremony or in everyday life, is recorded. A visual representation where possible, was also sought of each jewelry item identified. This study utilized descriptive ethnography and desk research methods. It relied on historical information and extensive observation of the relics collection of The British Museum and National Museum of Kenya, while looking at the possibility of a non-exhaustive study on AgĪkŪyŪ jewelry.

Results/ Findings: Among the findings is that the jewelry used by this community has similarities with those of their neighboring communities like the Maasai. It also revealed that there are influences emanating from the communities they had contact with like the Akamba.

Conclusion: From the historical visual representation and information gathered, a sizable number of jewelry may never be discovered nor identified as no record was ever made. This is probably due to the fact that changes have taken place over the years, cultural lifestyles have changed; they no longer wear traditional jewelry and the traditional AgĪkŪyŪ wearers have passed on, taking with them valuable information.

Key words: AgĪkŪyŪ, jewellery, traditional, ornament, design

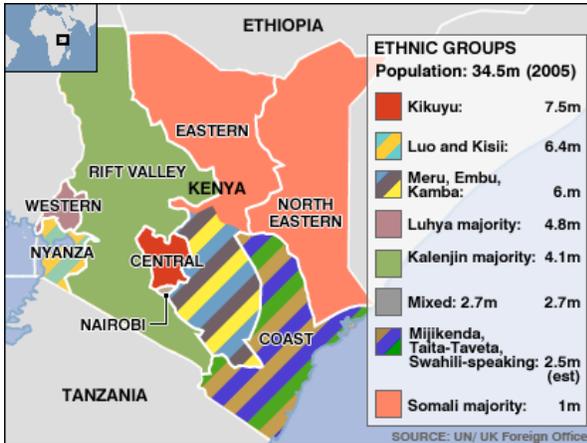
Introduction

The makers of AgĪkŪyŪ jewelry varied. According to Routledge (1910) young boys are said to have made their own jewelry,

while iron and wire jewelry was made by blacksmiths and wire makers. The principal materials used by the AgĪkŪyŪ were iron and in the late 1800's copper and brass were introduced by the Akamba who were

long distant traders. Other materials used for their jewelry include wood, ivory, horn, bone, leather, gourds, beads, shells, seeds from trees and even leaves.

Among the Agîkûyû certain items were crafted by specialists, who were usually confined to particular families but not to



special clans. On the other hand, many crafts such as basket making, hurdle work and woodwork were practiced by nearly everyone or by such a large proportion of the population that they could not be regarded as professions. Although the list of all objects of material culture made and used by the Agîkûyû which is given is not **Figure 1**. Map showing settlement of Southern Agîkûyû.

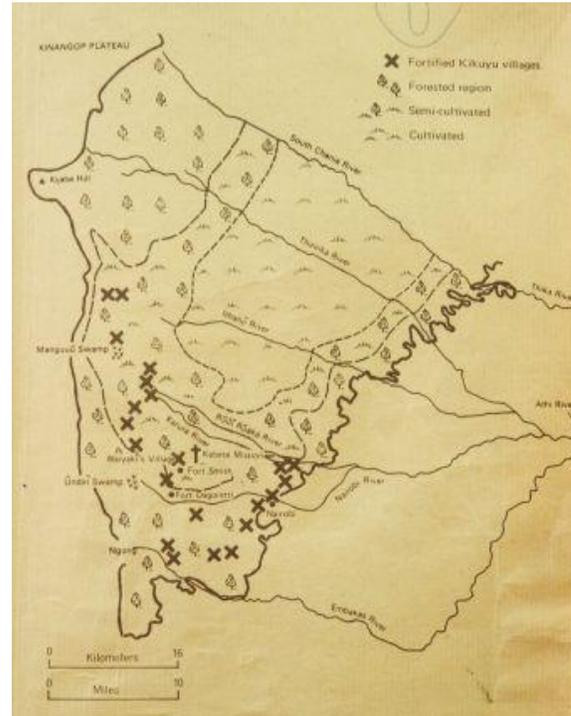
Source:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7168551.stm> Retrieved in March 2016.

Ear ornaments

The first thought of a *mûgîkûyû* was to ornament his ears. The cartilage, in the case of men, had three holes made in its upper convex border to support three quills in

complete, it is at least comprehensive enough to show something of the variety achieved. The principal materials used by the Agîkûyû were iron, copper, brass, wood, bark, vegetable products, leather, clay, gourds, beans, shells, feathers, hair, horn,



ivory bone and stone, Leakey (1977).

Figure 1a. Map of Kenya showing Agîkûyû settlements.

Source: Leakey (1977).

erect position. The researcher has seen these three holes in a 90-year-old man's ears in 2016. Sometimes another hole was made in it lower down, but this was to carry

some other form of ornament, for quills that were not projecting horizontally. Some Agîkûyû wore 5 quills (*nyori*) instead of three. Five quills were usually worn by women. Leakey (1977) however recorded girls as having three holes and boys rarely

had more than two such holes in each cartilage. Ear ornaments were divided into; Those attached to the edge of the cartilage (*dû-ge-ra*) of the ear and Those supported by the lobe (*gû-tû*).



Figure 2a, 2b, 2c Agîkûyû men wearing ear ornaments attached to the edge of the cartilage (*dû-ge-ra*) of the ear. Figure 2a, 2b lower arrows shows ear ornaments supported by the lobe (*gû-tû*).

Source: Wambugu, Ngarariga, Kariuki 2006. Consolata Fathers (N.D). www.oldeastafricanpostcards.com retrieved in March 2016



the cartilage (*dû-ge-ra*) of the ear. Figure 3a, 3b, 3c lower arrows shows ear ornaments supported by the lobe (*gû-tû*)

Source: www.delcampe.net retrieved in 2012. www.oldeastafricanpostcards.com retrieved in March 2016.

Ornaments of the arms, wrists, fingers, waist and legs

On the upper arm some of the many special ornaments for the purpose were almost

invariably worn. There were different sorts of bracelets, some shapes extending halfway to the elbow. On the fingers may sometimes be seen rings formed of fine

wire or lozenge shaped plague of iron forms. Round the waist, a form of fringe was worn and the character varied with occasion. Above the swell of the calf was usually some form of ornament, whilst the ankle was commonly encircled with a thong on which were threaded a number of little bells which pleasantly mark the wearer's otherwise silent tread. Each age of each sex wore the ornaments peculiar to it. Custom even prescribes, too, the manner in which an article shall be worn according to the occasion. For instance, the belt that is edged with a fringe of chain must be worn, and was usually worn, as a sash, passing over one shoulder and under the opposite arm when herding the goats.

Jewellery and Ornaments

Various neck ornaments among the Agikuyu were made in iron work, wire drawing, leatherwork and some even included techniques and materials that were employed in their basketry technique. An array coloured beads, shells and discs that were acquired by trade with the Akamba who obtained them from the coast of Kenya, were used in various necklaces. Other materials as mentioned by Routledge (1910) were ostrich shells. It is explained in detailed that any person who could get a hold of a complete ostrich egg, *itumbi rira Nyaga*, would have a hole bored in it at both ends. A leather thong would be strung in it and the egg would be used as an ornament held in the hand while dancing certain dances. Leakey (1977) mentions a *makenye* necklace which was made with small disc beads from ostrich egg-shell. These were worn by un-initiated boys when dancing, if they could get them as they were very rare as there were no ostriches in Kikuyu country. There were various leather, beaded, chain, wood or plant head and

neck ornaments that have been observed from the Museum collections and Desktop research were identified in this research.

Methods

This research used data collected through desk research and ethnography, gathering the relevant information from historical books, articles on the population and observational research from Museum relics collection. The research seeks to identify the traditional jewelry of the Agikuyu people, its purposes and overall significance to the wearer during the late 1800's. The Agikuyu had settled in the different regions of central Kenya, their settlements having been demarcated by rivers into different geographical regions. The population studied was spread vastly in the central highlands and the samples selected for the purpose of this study are two. The study has looked at the Southern Agikuyu who were settled in Waiyaki's village around Fort Smith, Fort Hall and also dealt with some aspects on the Northern Agikuyu who were settled at Nyeri. The hypothesis of this research is that the traditional Jewelry of the Agikuyu was of importance. The knowledge on the manufacture, materials used, significance and purposes may have been lost in time as there are few records on the subject and oral sources are no longer available.

Data collected was descriptive and photographs of the items and wearers have also been used to identify the jewelry. Clustered sampling was applied in the data collected was from a selection of an intact group. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) mentions that all members of such an intact group are then included in the sample and each member becomes a unit of observation, as is the case in this research.

This research aims at identifying and describing the body jewelry of the traditional Agíkúyú. It will include information from secondary sources such as books written on the history of the Agíkúyú, mainly from sources such as Routledge 1910, Leakey L. S.B. 1910, Wambugu, Ngarariga, Muriuki 2006, Cagnolo 1933, The British Museum collection of Agikuyu jewellery, National Museum of Kenya; Culture and Heritage catalogue collection and other written articles on the subject.

It is important to consider some aspects that the authors have mentioned in regards to the information they gathered. (Routledge 1910) mentions in the preface of his book that:

Much information regarding native custom was gathered from my various retainers during long rides and shooting expeditions about the country, when the conversation naturally turned on the objects around us; but the most fruitful season was in the evening, when I made it a practice to have a big fire in front of my tent and everyone was welcome. They sat around it in order of social consideration, talking amongst themselves. I presently joined in the conversation, perhaps asking a question, and so induced a one man to give an explanation which would be corrected and amplified by the others. In this manner I also got in touch with local gossip, and learnt what was going on in the

neighborhood- festivals, dances, markets and the like. Invitations would be given and expeditions made to be present, and these in their turn opened out "fresh fields and pastures new." Going to England for a while in 1904, I again returned this time with a wife, and on presenting my native friends to her she found them so interesting that she devoted herself to gathering information in directions that I had passed over, for doing which she was particularly favorably placed. Hence the following pages may be taken as dealing with matter carefully collected and noted with a special view to accuracy. The extend over a period of some five and a half years in all, between two and three of which were spent in intimate touch with the Agîkûyû. The methods of collecting information were much the same during the later visit as those described but it was in addition possible for my wife to visit among the huts and thus come in touch with the women and domestic life.

Information gathered from the elderly required a translator and it is possible the sometimes accurate information would have been lost in the process. In other aspects information retrieved from these books is however bound to differ in some aspects such as spelling as the authors are not from the Agîkûyû tribe. They may he

have lived among them, observing, interviewing the people on their culture, customs and way of life, but the people always saw them as strangers. Information gathered is however accurate but was never given in totality. The Agíkúyú saying below;

'Mûkamî ní atígáiria njaû' - the one who milks saves some for the calf.

The secretiveness of the Agíkúyú from strangers is further emphasized by another saying that implies that personal information deemed important was not for strangers.

'kagûtúe ka mûcî katîhakagûo agenî' - the oilskin of the house is not for strangers.

Information was given to the writers quoted in this research report but not in totality. Sometimes even the names of one particular item mentioned by one author will differ in description in another book by a different author. Most of the jewelry worn was observed in use and the records of its use will therefore be assumed accurate. However, some ornaments and their uses may never be known as they were not visually recorded and one can only imagine from the descriptions given. The origins and inspiration behind the ornaments creation was largely influenced by ceremonies, available materials acquired constantly wearing in it a succession of rings of gradually increasing size, until an object the size of a large orange could be passed through easily. To achieve this condition, it was said to take about four months. Together with dilatation of the aperture, hypertrophy of the lobe took place, until it

through trade and even adapted from other tribes like the Maasai and Akamba. The researcher has gathered the information recorded as visual representations and the given descriptions from the different authors and sources. In some instances, descriptions were recorded but there are no visual representations. The Museum collections have been catalogued and additional information on owner, location of settlement and how old the jewellery relic is recorded. The researcher took photographs of the relics and identified photographs taken of the Agíkúyú people and of their ornaments as per descriptions that have been recorded earlier sources. Assumptions can be made that not all jewellery ever owned by the Agíkúyú was identified and recorded and in other instances we will never know how some items looked like.

Routledge (1910) and Leakey (1977) mention that they recorded the information on the Southern Agíkúyú. The information on those of other regions may differ as they may have had regional differences in their ways of life. Lack of recorded information and existing authentic Agíkúyú jewelry are some of the major limitations of this study.

Analysis

Some months before time for the circumcision rite was performed, the lobes of the boys' ears were pierced. The aperture was gradually dilated, by became like a round rubber cord the size of a stout lead pencil, and often reached as a loop down the shoulder. When not in use for the support of an ornament, the dilated lobe was loosely twisted up and the eye, thereby formed at the end, passed over the

cartilage so as to hang it up and to prevent it getting torn.

Some of the ornaments worn by men in the cartilage were;

1. Ear quills, *rûnyorî*, plural, *nyorî* also *chîûma*. In the simplest form these were single stems of grass having a bead of gum at the base. The free end was passed through the hole in the cartilage. It could not slip out backwards because of the bead of gum. It did not slip out downwards because of the position it assumed in consequence of its length. The same ornament in a different form consist of a strip of leather placed in the hollow of the upper edge of the ear, into which are fitted the larger ends of the stems of three feathers. Each rachis passes through a

corresponding hole made in the upper border of the cartilage. On each shaft are placed six dark blue beads, and the tip is finished off with one small white bead and a whipping of thread and gum. See Figures 2a, 2b, 2c and Figure 4 and figure 7 below for the *rûnyorî*.

2. A helix of brass wire, *hûrahûrî*, forming a boss, worn in the lowest aperture made in the edge of the cartilage. See figure 2b earring indicated by arrow on the right.
3. A ring of the very smallest coloured beads, threaded on a fiber of tendon, worn in the fourth and lowest aperture made in the cartilage (no Agîkûyû name given).
4. A tassel of the finest beads (no Agîkûyû name given).



Figure 4.

Young Agîkûyû warriors seen wearing ear quills are seen in their ears. Warrior on the left is wearing a triangular ornament (*n'gî'rî*) attached to hair and rests on the forehead.

W.S.R. Photo Source; Routledge (1910)

5:British Museum PHOTSource; Routledge (1910)

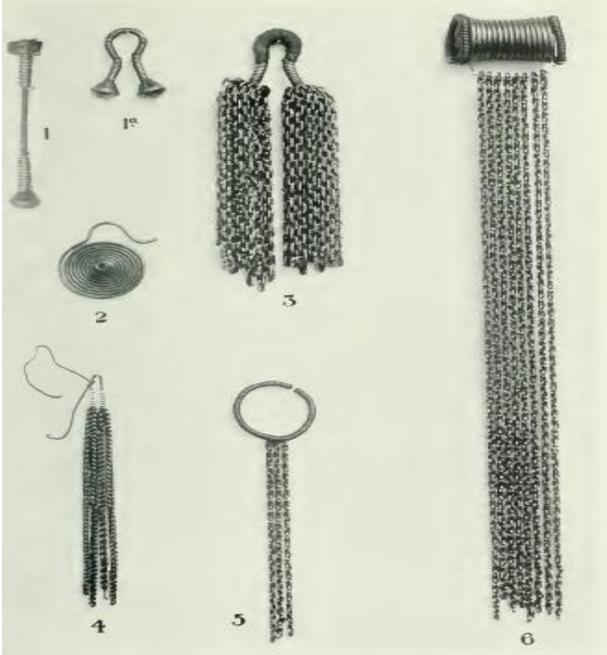
Figure

Item 1.*Mîindo* when straight length: 3 in. When shaped: 1 ¼ in. **Item 1a.***Mîindo*, worn

by men on the ear lobe. One could wear as many as 6 pieces.

Item 2.*hûrahûrî*, ear ornaments worn by anybody in the lowest of the perforations in the cartilage. See figure 2b and figure 12.

Item 3.*Mîindo* ornamented with short lengths of chain worn by elderly men only.



at either extremity. Described by Leakey (1977) as *gíchûîkîa rîtîena*.

Figure 6

Source; Leakey, L.S.B. (1977)

A Portrait of Karúr'i, one of the most prominent Paramount chiefs of the Agíkûyû. He is seen wearing *Kíchûî or gíchûîkîa rîtîena and gíchûîhî gîa gûtû* ear ornaments.

For comfort the wearer added a wrapping of leather at the top. Length from top of curve to the bottom of fringe, 4 ¾ in. Described by Leakey (1977) as *mîndo*. Formerly it was worn by the old men. Diameter, 9/8 in. The center stands above the surface 6/8 in.

Item 4. Lengths of iron chain attached to the cartilage, made with Akamba chain. Length, 4 ½ in.

Item 5. Open ring of iron wire whipped with fine copper wire to which is attached lengths of fine chain. Ornament is worn in the cartilage. Described by Leakey (1977) as *gíchûhî gîa gûtû*.

Item 6. *Kíchûî* (a ring) is an ornament of the lobe. A spiral of iron wire, in the form of a cylinder, is whipped with fine copper wire



Figure 7a,7b. Agíkûyû men seen wearing ear ornaments. In figure 7a, the man is wearing several *Mîndo*. In figure 7b, the man wears ring of the very smallest coloured beads. Lower lobe shows a tassel of the finest beads.

Source: www.oldeastafricanpostcards.com retrieved in May 2018

In men, the dilated lobe could support-

1. A cylinder of wood (*mûtî wa gûtû*) which was either plain or ornamented.



2. A disk of wood usually ornamented with inlaid beads, *nde'-be*. See figure 10 3a, 3b 3c.
3. Hoops of various sizes. They were carved from wood, and had a deeply concave border, in which the rope-like lobe of the ear lies.
4. An oval disc (*gûsûreîî*) of lead. Europeans say that these were originally beaten out of Maria Theresa dollars, former currency used at the Kenyan coast. See figure 9c.
5. A cylinder made of twisted wire, shape and size of a small cotton reel- from these hang short lengths of chain, *gîchûîkîa rîtîena*. See figure 6 of Chief Karuri's ornaments.
6. The nose, the nostrils and both the lips are never in any way pierced or ornamented.

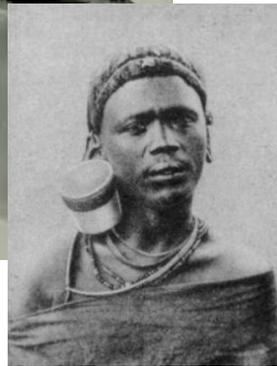
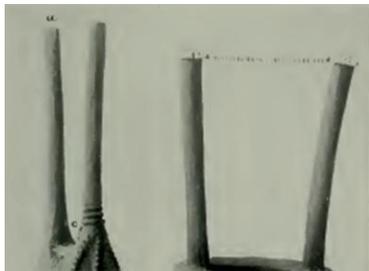


Figure 8 *mûti wa gûtu*.

Source; *British Museum* Routledge (1910)

Item 1. Carved ornament of wood *mûti wa gûtu*. The spike *a*, is passed through the distended lobe of the ear. The lobe is then slightly stretched to allow it to be slipped over the lower point *b*. Extreme length 6 ½ in. Length of prong *a-c*, 2 ⅞. in. Circumference in groove, *b, c*, 7 ¼ in.

Item 2. A common form of ornament for the lobe *mûti wa gûtu*. A hollow wooden cylinder carved into form indicated. The extremities of the spikes are united by a string of beads. The lower end of the cylinder is thrust into the slightly stretched loop formed by the hypertrophied lobe, which lies around it at the level *d-e*. When worn, the spikes maintained a position directed upwards and slightly forward. The total length, 5 ½ inches, the length of prong, 2 ¾ inches and the interval between prongs, outside, 2 ⅞ inches.

Figure 9a,9b,9c Agîkûyû men wearing themûtî wa gûtûto stretch the earlobes .Figure 9d shows the oval disc shaped lead ornament gûsûreîî



Figure 9e, 9f 9c Agîkûyû young girls wearing themûtî wa gûtûto stretch the lower earlobes.

Source:www.oldeastafricanpostcards.com

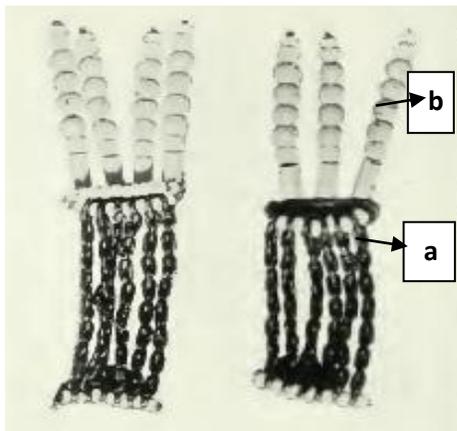


Figure 10

Source; British MuseumRoutledge (1910)

Ear sticks, *Rûnyorî*, which Leakey(1977)referred to wrongly as *rûnîûrî*were worn in the ear cartilage. *Nyorî*, as pronounced by the Agîkûyûlanguage was one of the most typical ornaments. The essential thing is the spikes, which rise above the upper border of the cartilage. The pieces of Leather (a) into which the sticks are set, lies in the upper external border of the cartilage. Its function is merely to support the sticks.



Figure 11Agîkûyû woman wearing ear ornaments *hangî*, where a similar earring to the *Nyorî*is seen attached to the numerous rings of the *hangî*.

Source:www.oldeastafricanpostcards.com

Figure 12Earlobe ornaments

EAR ORNAMENTS-LOBE ONLY

Item 1.A pile of rings (*nde'be*) of different sizes for expanding the lobe of the ear. Worn by girls and young married women, also by



warriors and men of all ages, but never by boys and girls until preparing for initiation.

Items 2, 2a, 2b. Examples taken from pile 1 viewed from different angle. Circumference of the smallest, 4in.; of the largest, 8 ½ in.

Items 3, 3a, 3b. Solid discs of wood, ornamented with beads on outer face, worn for ornament in the distended lobe.



Figure 13.

Photograph showing *nde'be*, an ear ornament made from ivory.

Collected by William S. Routledge in 1908 and donated by John Harrington in 1951; 1951.10.21

Source: [Pitt Rivers Museum Body Arts | Ear spoils](#) Retrieved March 2012

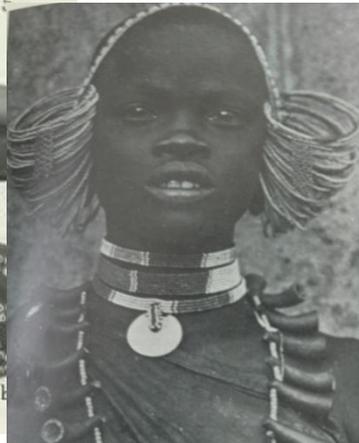
Item 4. Similar to Figure 5 but slightly ornamented.

Item 5. Plain solid cylinder of wood, shaped at the ends (*kilorígîti kîa gûtû*). The two points that come next to the neck are somewhat shortened. a-b= 1 7/8 in. Not worn in pairs.

Item 6. Similar to 5 and 4, made out of solid ivory. Referred to *asmútî wa gûtû*. The lower inside tip has been shortened.

Items 7, 7a. *Kîlîngîti kîa gûtû*. A beautifully modeled wood ornament

into which the rope-like lobe is slipped. It was not common and was worn by warriors only. 7a, position when in use. 7 lay on its side to show construction. Length, 7a, a-d-b= 3 ¼ in. Depth, 7a, d-c= 1 7/8 in.



Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

Figure 14a 14b, 14c Agíkúyú warriors wearing *nde'-be*, ear ornament. Figure 14d shows a Kíkúyû betrothed

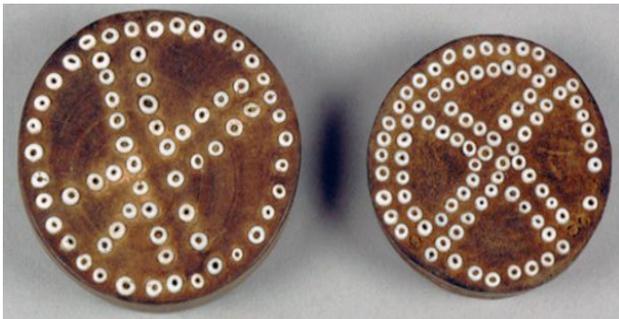


bride as identified by

her head ornaments. **Source:** Wambugu, Ngarariga, Kariuki (2006), www.oldeastafricanpostcards.com, <http://www.superstock.com>, retrieved March 2012, www.delecampe.net retrieved in March 2018

Figure 15

Agíkúyû decorated *earlobe ornaments* as seen in colour. Ornaments collected by William Scoresby Routledge and donated by John Harington in 1951

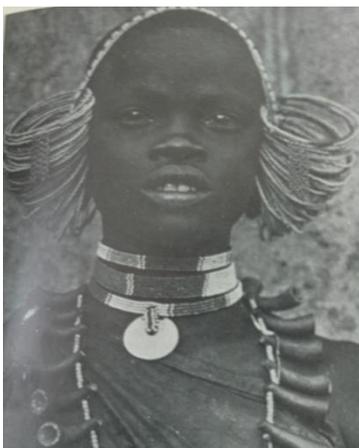


Source: Pitt Rivers Museum Body Arts | Reed necklace and pair of ear ornaments Retrieved March 2012

FIGURE 16 Woman wearing *hangí earrings*

Source: Wambugu, Ngarariga and Kariuki (2006)

Prominent ear ornaments worn by Agíkúyû women wore the *Hangîor Rûhangî* which was a bunch of circular iron wire beaded earrings. They are seen as worn in the below photographs in Figure 16 and Figures 17.



Earrings *hangî*, item 5 in Figure 45 below, was worn in the cartilage of the ear by women. Made of very small beads threaded on fine wire. Each end of the wire is turned back to form a hook. The spring of the wire keeps each hook straining against its fellow. About thirty could be worn in one ear, but fifteen was the more usual number.

Leakey (1977) refers to them as *hangí*, which were circles of thin iron wire on to which were threaded very small pink, red, dark blue, black and white beads. The very thin

gauge wire used for *hangí* was called *thíimo*. Diameter of each hoop: 3 ¾ in. Thirty hoops weigh exactly 4 oz.



Figures 16a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h, showing the *Hangí* earrings as worn by the Agikuyu women.

Sources: <http://www.superstock.com>, www.stereoskopie-shop.com

Figure 18 shows a kikuyubetrothed girl is wearing *hangí* in a different manner. There is no record on why the ornaments are worn in that way.



Source: Wambugu, Ngarariga and Kariuki (2006)



Figures 18a, 18b, below shows the *hangí* in color. These colored photographs were taken in the mid 1900's and the ornaments could be a collection what was made and used in the earlier years.



Figure 18c shows *hangî* earring collection from the 1940s.

Source: Consolata Fathers (N.D), www.info2singkiang.com retrieved in May 2018

Figures 19

A pair of *hangî* as observed from the National Museum of Kenya Heritage Department collection.

Source: Researcher February 2019.

The above pair of ear ornaments in **Figure 19** was collected in 1969 from Mûomo in

Wangige Kikuyu, Central Kenya. The pair was reported to have been made about 15 years before then (1954). Information from the Museum catalogue states that the *Hangî* were worn by married women usually about 100 pieces in each ear. They were fixed in holes in the helix of the ear and supported over the head by a beaded leather band. The beaded loops were made by the men who threaded the beads on the wire. The colour pink was preferred and explanation given was that it was the colour of the soil. A distinctively similar pair of *Hangî* earrings were observed in online collection. See **Figure 20** below. This piece was however wrongly identified as Kikuyu beaded armlets, that belonged to a New York collection and were acquired in the 1970s. From comparison with the above ornaments in **Figures 18** and 19 above that are dated around the same period, these are clearly *Hangî* ear ornaments. They may have been mistaken as armlets as there is a missing leather strap that was tied around the head used to hold them in place when worn



Figure 20: *Hangî* earrings were observed in online collection that were wrongly identified as Kikuyu beaded armlets.

Source: www.amayas.net retrieved in March 2019





The same copper earrings were also borrowed and worn by her son(s) for the initiation ceremony. This is a similar practice that was also observed by the Maasai community. She is also seen wearing traditional jewelry including copper armbands and elaborate ear decorations.

Figure 21. Agikuyu woman

Source: <http://www.superstock.com>, retrieved March 2012

Photograph of Agikuyu woman from Nyeri, Kenya seen wearing elaborate spiral copper earrings that were a sign she had an initiated child.

Figure 22

Agikuyu Warrior seen wearing the mothers copper earrings.

Source: africaafricatumblr.com, Retrieved in March 2019.

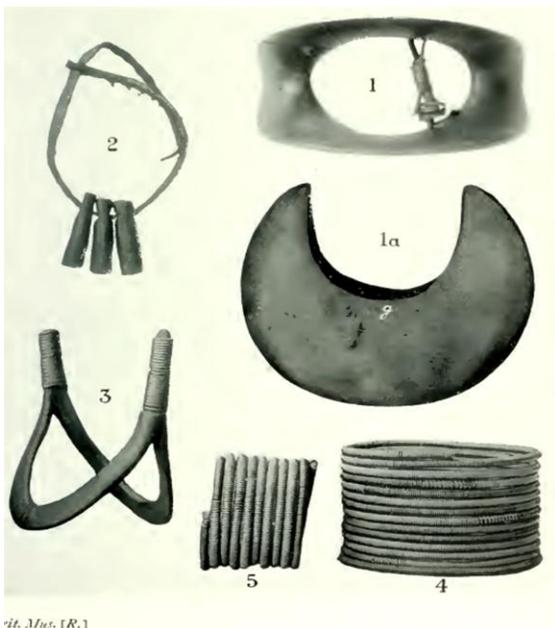


Figure 23 Source Photograph: British Museum; Routledge (1910)

The Agikuyu had ornaments that were worn on the arms, wrists, waist and legs. On the

upper arm some of the many special ornaments for the purpose were almost invariably worn.

Arm ornaments included Ivory ornament which Leakey (1977) refers to as *ng'otho*. It is for the lower and upper arm, placed on its side to show shape, and the leather thong (d) where the opening (1) can be adjusted to the exact size of the upper arm.

1a. A similar ornament to figure made out of wood. It represents the appearance of item 1 when in use. It is worn as high as possible on the upper arm. The ends are directed forwards and backwards.

2. A charm worn round the ankle to obviate fatigue in joint when travelling.

Figure 24

Source Photograph: www.sothebys.com Retrieved April 2019

Ivory ornaments *ng'otho*, photograph from the Sotheby's collection of Oceanic and African Art. Similar ornament is observed in

Figure 58.



Figure 25

Source: Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

Image showing how the ornament **item 3 (in figure 23 above)** appears when worn.

An armband carved in one piece out of buffalo horn and having its anterior and posterior extremities ornamented with coarse copper wire. It was worn slipped up the arm as close to the shoulder as possible, and similarly to 1a. Also see figure 14b.

Leakey (1977) indicates its name as *haco* and mentions that it was also made from

Rhino horn. As similar ornament called the *errap* was worn above the elbow by warriors the Maasai Tribe who have killed a man in battle. See **Figure 80**



Each person usually had about eight *ndanga*, some of them iron and some copper and brass.

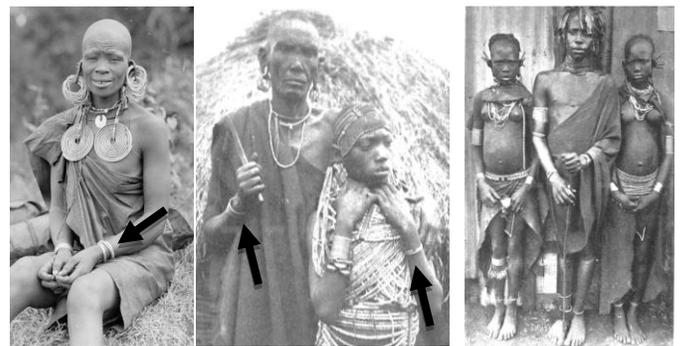


Figure 27a, 27b, 27c shows both men and women of various ages wearing the *ndanga* wristlets.

Source: www.oldeastafricanpostcards.com, retrieved March 2018

Figure 26a, 26b Source: Photograph forumbiodiversity.com retrieved March 2018

Images showing how the ornament item 5 (in figure 23 above) appears when worn.

The *gîtûro* was an ornament of iron wire. It was made with about eight coils and was worn by men on the right arm just below the armpit. It was never worn by women and was made that it could be slipped on and off again without having to be unwound. *Ndanga* which were Iron, copper or brass wristlets, were made and consisted of small length of thick wire bent round so that the ends met. This ornament was by young men and young girls.

Gíchuhi gía kara – Finger rings were worn mainly by women and girls; usually men had at most one finger ring, although wire workers and smiths often wore a number of rings like women. These rings were single circles of iron wire with the ends joined. The wire was sometimes beaten to flatten it slightly, Leakey (1977). *Gícomoya* – Iron “tape” about ¼. In in width was sometimes



used to make a ring with this name, Leakey (1977).

Figure 28 Source: Consolata Fathers (2007)

A groom, seen wearing, *nyorí* also *chîûma, hûlahûlî* ear ornaments and two finger rings, *Gíchuhî*.



Figure 29 shows a group of Agíkûyû witchdoctors or diviners on the intestine of a sacrificed goat. Man

with the outstretched hand has a number of rings.

Figure 29 Agíkûyû witchdoctors divining.

Source: Leakey (1977)

Ngome – This was a special form of iron or brass ring that was worn only by rich men and medicine men. They were shield shaped and sheath like with an incised pattern.

Figure 30a, b, c Kikuyu girls wearing *mûrînga* on their upper arms.

Source: Leakey (1977), Consolata Fathers (2001)





Armllet, *mûringa* as described by Leakey (1977) and bracelet formed from a single stout wire, whipped over with fine brass and copper wire. It had to be fitted to the limb by a professional expert found at all markets. He first straightened out the coil and then by means of an iron tube 9 in. long, slipped over it, he closely and smoothly molded it to the arm or wrist. These ornaments couldn't slip off when worn. The *Mûringa* appeared as coiled iron wire bracelets of up to 20 coils. Girls wore them on the right and left arms and on the legs below the knees whereas the men wore them on the left arm below the elbow and down to the wrist. See **Figure 31** below.

Figure 31.

A Portrait of Karûr'î, below in figure 31 one of the most prominent of the Agîkûyû.

Source: W.S.R. PHOTO Routledge (1910)

He is seen wearing a pair of iron armllets known as *mûhûnyo*. This ornament was similar to the *mûringa*. They were made of thick iron wire round which copper and iron wire of thick gauge had been tightly bound for a decorative effect. A *mûhûnyo* was worn on the arm between the wrist and elbow, and was worn only by rich men, being a definite sign of wealth (*ûtonga*). Rich men sometimes gave their favorite

wives *amûhûnyo*. It could be taken off only by uncoiling it. See **Figure 32** below.

Figure 32 *Mûringa* bracelet



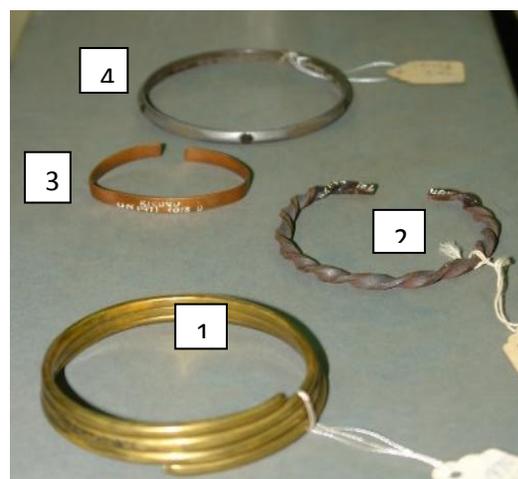
Source: Researcher, March 2019

Photograph of a *Mûringa* bracelet in the National Museums of Kenya, Cultural Heritage collection. This is how the brass

bracelet appears after removal by uncoiling it from the arm.

Figure 33

Source: Researcher, March 2019



Îcagocîa moko as seen in figure 34a was collected in 1970 at Local 12 (present day Kabirwa) and was made in the 1940s.

Item 1 shows one piece of a pair of arm ornament, **Îcagocîa moko**. It was mostly worn as a pair by outstanding women. The other piece for the pair is in **Figure 34a,b**. This piece was collected in 1970 at Local 12 (present day Kabirwa) and was made in the 1940s.

Item 2 shows a **Mûthiôre** iron bracelet, collected from Gitaru village in 1971. This piece was worn by blacksmiths and was made from iron sand. It was collected from a blacksmith who had inherited it from his blacksmith father.

Item 3 shows a copper **Ndanga** bracelet as worn and explained in **Figures 27**. This is one of four bracelet pieces collected from Fort Hall (present day Muranga Town) in 1971 and is recorded to have been made in the 1930s.

Item 4 shows a **Mûkanga** wristlet that was collected in 1969 from Kiriko, near the current Thika Town. It belonged to a 90 year old woman. Who acquired it when she was 20 years old. The wristlet is made from aluminium wire that has inlaid hard bits of gum (appears as a black circular dot). These small dark bits are charms (**Gîthîû**) that guard against all forms of witchcraft. The ornament was made by a male craftsman and was worn by married men and women.

The second piece of a pair of arm ornament, **Îcagocîa moko** as seen in figure 34a and 34b. It was mostly worn as a pair by outstanding women. The other piece for the pair is in **Figure 33, item 1**. This piece



Figure 34a,34b Îcagocîa moko bracelets.

Source: Researcher, March 2019. www.oldeastafricanpostcards.com, retrieved March 2018

Njîngîrî, were Iron ornaments with bells worn as armlets by both men and women for dances. Some of them had one cent pieces added onto them.



Figure 35 Njîngîrî

Source: Researcher March 2019

These particular pieces were collected in Fort Hall Current day Muranga) in 1971. These were photographed from the National Museums of Kenya, Cultural Heritage collection. See **Figure 27b** of when worn.



Figure 36

Kiûma armlet

Source: Researcher March 2019

Kiûma armlet that was acquired in 1971 at Local 6 (current day Nginda, Muranga) and is reported to have been made in the 1950s. The armlet could either have a blue bead a red bead on chain that was either copper, brass or aluminium.



identified as **Nyarûrûng'a**. Girls

sometimes wore an anklet made one of iron circlet of thick wire to which were threaded many iron rings about 1inch in diameter.

Prior to initiation, there were various wrist and arm ornaments made from colobus monkey fur.



Figure 38a, 38b mang'ang'û ornaments worn by young boys as they prepare for dance prior to initiation to manhood.

Source; Consolata Fathers 1930, Routledge (1910)

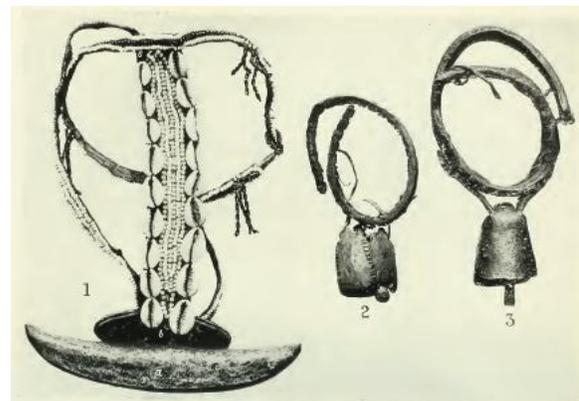
These were worn by the boys for the pre-initiation ceremonies and never worn by men. The ornaments were known as the **mang'ang'û**, worn during certain dances



Figure 37a, b, 37c, d Nyarûrûng'a.

Source W.S.R. PHOT; Routledge (1910), Wambugu, Ngarariga, Kariuki 2006.

Figure 37a, 37b, 37c and 37d shows girls wearing the lowest ornament around the ankle which is a thong. It is strung rings the size of a crown piece, made of stout wire. These jingled with each step. These are



and later removed and fastened to a staff called the *ndorothî*, which was carried by them for other dances. See **Figures 38a, and 38b** above. They are also seen wearing the colobus monkey ornaments, *mang'ang'û*, the thigh rattle as it was worn on the upper outer side of the thigh above the knee. **Figure 39**

Source: Routledge (1910)

Item 1. A thigh bell or rattle worn in certain dances on the outer side of the thigh just above the knee. The rattle, (item 2 and 3) which is the bottom part contains iron bullets roll up and down its interior. The leather shield was to maintain the rattle in place and to protect the skin and the knee when worn. See Figures 38 above.

Jewelry and other Ornaments



worn on the neck and the waist among the Agîkûyû were of several types. One pronounced waist girdle worn by women was the *Mûnior'ô wa îtîna*.

Figure 40

Photograph of one of the wives of Wanang'a, a Kikuyu Chief.

W.S.R. PHOT Source; Routledge (1910)

It shows the



girdle (*Mûnior'ô wa îtîna*) and how it was worn. Leakey (1977) refers to the ornament as *cîûma cîaitîna*.

It shows the girdle (*Mûnior'ô wa îtîna*) and how it was worn. Leakey (1977) refers to the ornament as *cîûma cîaitîna*.

She is also seen wearing a leather skirt, *Mûthûrû*, (which was sometimes beaded) that measured 24 in. by 21 in. oblong in shape and pointed at the end of the lower corners; it was fastened by strings around the waist. It is seen in the **figure 41** below when opened up.

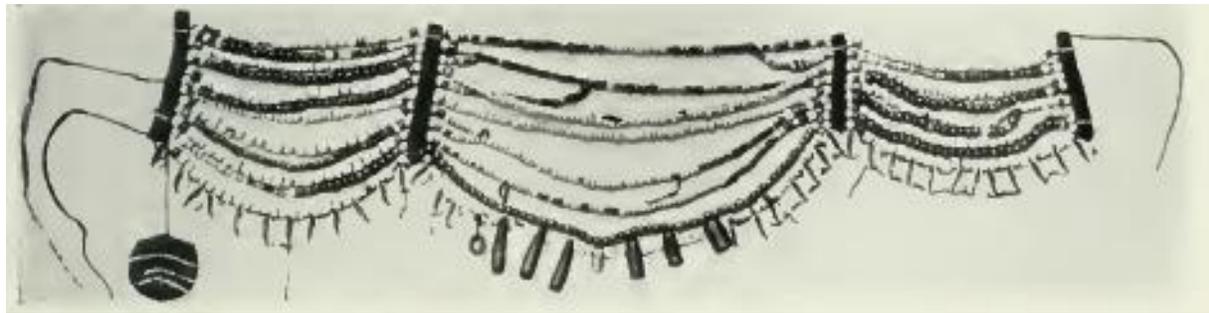


Figure 41

Mûthûrû skirt when opened up.

W.S.R. PHOT Source; Routledge (1910)

Source: British Museum Routledge (1910)

Figure 42 *Cîûma cîaitîna* girdle as described by Leakey (1977)

In figure 42 is another type of girdle, which Leakey (1977) refers to also as *cîûma cîaitîna*. It was a girls bead belt made of four to six strings of blue and white beads. These were not sewn on leather, but were kept in correct position as a belt by their division into sections by strips of hard leather made from rhino or buffalo hides.

The beads next to the leather strips on either side were always white. The girdle in the picture has a little bag used to contain a few beads the equivalent of money is attached. On its lowest central row are threaded odd component parts from other articles of ornament. Length of girdle, 28 ½ in.



Figure 43 *Miringu* beaded waist girdle

Source: Researcher March 2019

The *Miringu* (see figure 43), as observed by the researcher was another beaded girdle that has similarities in bead colour and make. It was observed to have blue and white beads that have been strung on *Migio* fibre and passed through the Elephant hide spacers. The beads next to the hide strips on either side are white. It has hanging chain ornaments that are attached to the bottom line of beads. The piece was 40 years old when it was collected in 1971 from Local 12 (currently the Kaïrathe, Mûringaini, Ìyego areas of Muranga in Central Kenya).

Similar girdles were observed in the collection. In the image below in **Figure 44**. **Figure 44a** *Kiinî* waist ornament.

Source: Researcher March 2019

The corset was worn by women for the *kibata* dance.

The girdle was identified as a *Kiinî* waist ornament worn by women for dancing. It was also worn by girls going for the circumcision operation. The Cowrie shells, white, blue and red beads were bought from the Kamba Tribe. This one was collected from Kanyenyaini village in Muranga central Kenya in 1961 and was recorded to be more than 40 years old.



Figure 44b,c in the images below show how the *Kiinî* waist ornament as was worn. See women in Figure 27c also wearing the same waist ornaments.



waist. They were usually kept hung up in the mothers house as an ornament. The terminals of the fringe of items 1 and 2 are ***mahûn'gû***, the claws of the antbear. They are very light, being thin and hollow and they jingle like sleigh bells.

1. 7 ½ x 8 ½ in. fringe 3-4 in.
2. 6 x 5 ½ in. fringe 3 in.
3. 8 x 4 ½ in. fringe 1 ½ in.
4. A very thin sheepskin leather apron (***mwên'gu***), such as is invariably worn by every female.

A similar beaded ***Mwengû*** apron was observed by the researcher from the National Museum of Kenya Heritage collection. As seen in **Figure 46** below, Blue and white beads are sewn on leather. Chain fringe pieces are added onto the bottom row.

Source: www.vintage eastfrica.com retrieved March 2019



Figure 45

British Museum PHOT Source; Routledge (1910)

Items **1**, **2** and **3** are examples of ***rîra***, an ornament worn by initiated women and by girls when dancing prior to the initiatory ceremony. Two are worn, one in front and one behind by means of a strap round the



Figure 46 ***Mwengû*** apron

Source: Researcher March 2019

Mwengû apron that was collected by the National Museums of Kenya in 1971 from Local 12 (currently the Kaîra the, Mûringaîni, Îyego areas of Muranga in Central Kenya).

Agikuyu boys had a beaded belt, ***ndoho ya ngûnyî*** like the girls ***scûma cîâtîna***,



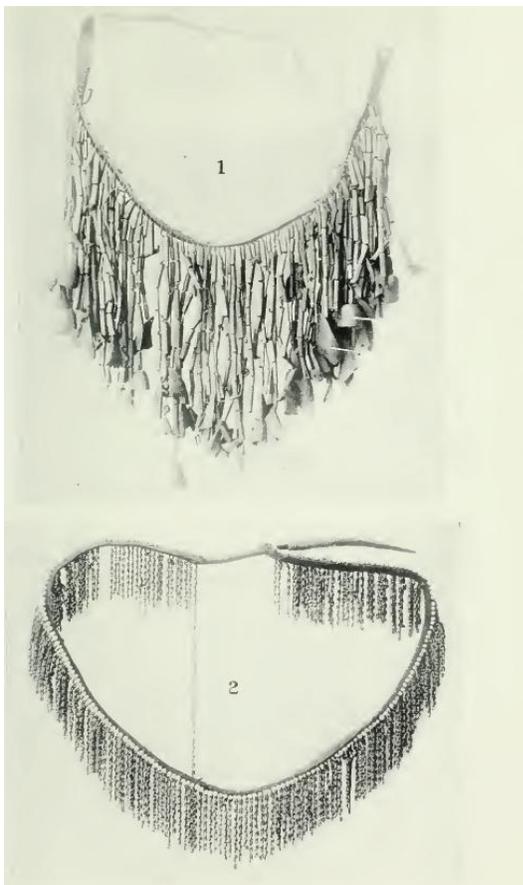
but instead of glass bead it was made of black Ngûnyî seed beads.

Figure 47 Agîkûyû boys belt

Source: Researcher March 2019

The Agîkûyû boys dance belt made from seed pods that make a sound when shaken. No Agîkûyû name is given for this piece, but it could possibly be the *ndoho ya ngûnyî*, as no other belt made from seeds has been documented in the research investigated.

It was collected in 1912 and has been in the Nairbi National Museum collection since



then.

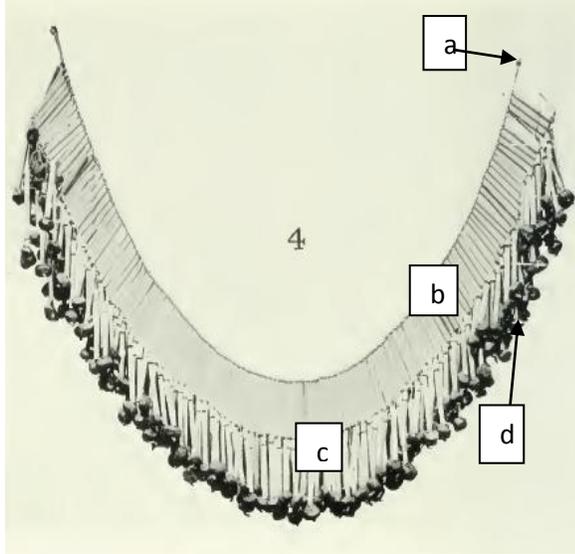
Other Waist fringes worn by warriors are described in figure 48 below.

Item 1; An un-ornamental leather strap to which is attached a fringe of cord, 85 in number. Each of these average 8 in. in length and are composed of short pieces of grass stem 1 in. Each cord is terminated either by the addition of the upper extremity of the fruit of the gourd or with a claw of the ant bear, which is hollow. On movement a chinking sound was produced.

Figure 48 Waist fringes

Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

Item 2. The *Mûnior'o*, a waist fringe worn by warriors and by middle aged men. From a leather strap, ornamented with a double row of blue and white beads, depend short length (2 ¼ in.) of chain. The pattern and ornamentation of the *Mûnior'o* did not vary. It was fastened by passing the pointed thong through a hole pierced in the other end. The spiral of brass wire that slid along the pointed thong acted as a stop. Length of thong, 13 in. Length of fringed belt, 30in.



with the seeds of the wild banana. This particular form of girdle is said to have been worn by their now extinct predecessors, the **Agûm'ba**. Excavations made in the reputed sites of the **Agûm'ba** dwellings result in the finding of these seeds.

a = cord passing around the waist: to it is attached b = upper row of grass stems: to these are attached c = lower row of grass stems: to the lower ends of these d = seeds of wild banana (**ngobo**).

Figure 49 *thîra* waist fringe

Photography R.K. PLCVI, **Source:** Routledge 1910.

A form of fringe that worn around the waist. It was part of the ceremonial dress worn prior to circumcision. Leakey (1977) names it as **thîra**.

It is made of grass **thage**, stems, tipped

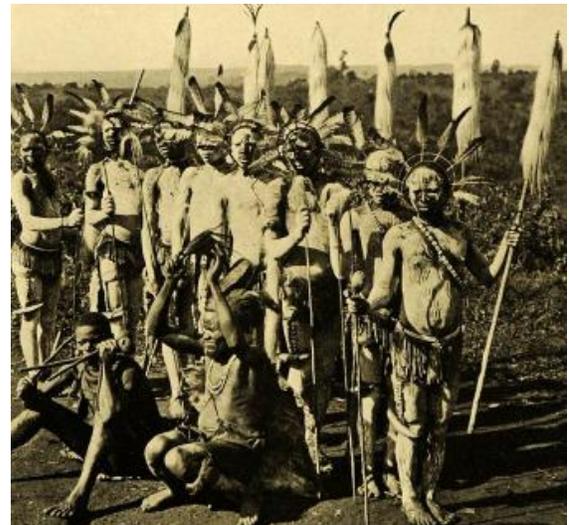
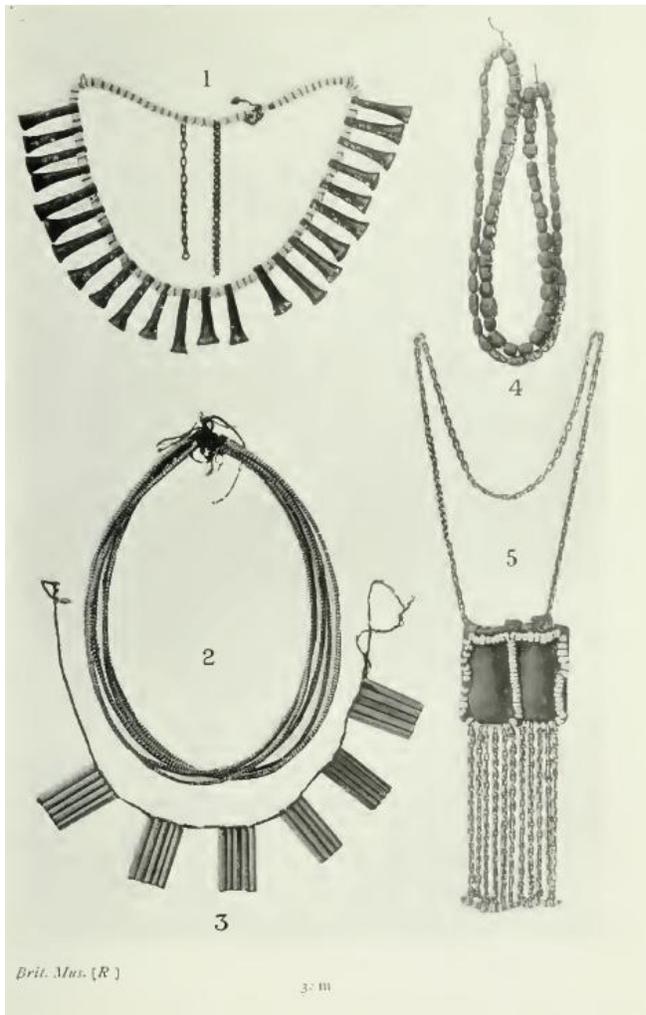


Figure 50

The **thîra** waist ornament that was made and used by boys for the pre initiation dance.



Source: www.vintage eastfrica.com retrieved March 2019

Necklaces among the Agikuyu were of various types.

Figure 51 Assorted necklaces

Source; With the southern Kikuyu, **Source:** Leakey 1977

Item 1 *Mîti*, a necklace of beads with a fringe trumpet shaped pieces of hardwood. Such was worn by boys and by old men.

The trumpets may have also been made from gourd tops, and necklace named *mbûtû cîa ngîngo* or *Mîbûthû* as mentioned by L.S.B. Leakey 1977.

Total length, 15 in. Length of trumpet, 1 in.

Item 2. Hoops of fine grass plaited over a core of string. *Marîgîrîgî* were made by little girls when bird scaring and used by them only. The hoop is formed by tying together the two ends of twine. Some half-dozen was worn. Length, 19 ½ in.

Item 3. *Kîban'dîa* neck ornament made and worn by boys. Five lengths of grass stem 1 ½ in. are brought together by a double string passing through the cavity of each. Another cord forming the neck string is at the same time passed through each bight projecting at the upper end. The string passing through the grass stems is then drawn tight and secured.

Figure 51, Item 4 is a single string of beads of graduated sizes. The larger beads are formed of the wood *mûhû'tî*. Leakey (1977) describes it as *Hûtî*. These were the bright red seeds of the *mûhû'tî* tree and were used both for a necklace called *hûtî*, and to attach to the hair. Only warriors used them in these forms and only for the *ngûrû*

dance, but boys used them as anklets for the *ngûcû* dance. The smaller ones are of the *kîra'go tree*. They were valued for the scent they are considered to give off when rubbed together in wear. Leakey describes it as the *îrago* necklace made from the roots of the *kîrago* plant, which were like small tubers and made excellent beads, much favored because of their sweet scent. Total length of string, was 60 in. Circumference of the largest bead, 2 ½ in.; of smallest, 1 ¼ in.

Figure 51, Item 5. *Mon'do*, satchel worn round the neck by boys, warriors, and elderly men. Each compartment contains a "medicine" i.e., a variety of different drugs as compounded for the wearer by the medicine-man to form a charm. The design and workmanship of the article was that of the wearer. Size, 2x2 in. Fringe, 3 in.



Figure 52a, 52b, 52c, 52d *Mîgathi ya Mîtî*, wooden necklaces in various forms.

Source: Researcher March 2019

These are similar to the necklace in Figure 51 item 1 and are shoulder ornaments that were collected by the National Museums of Kenya in 1971. They are recorded to have been more than 50 years old. These were obtained from an area Local 12, Fort Hall (Murang'a) which is current day Kambirwa, Muranga. The wooden trumpet like beads were made from the *Mubage* tree and each piece had a burnt inverted "v" shape decoration on it. The coloured beads that were strung in intervals could have been blue, white and green as seen in Figure 52a. The pieces observed in Figure 52b has yellow and white beads while that in Figure 52c has wooden beads only. The bottom necklace in Figure 52 d is similar necklace, observed to have been made with flat rectangular beads only. Figures 16c shows a woman wearing the above ornament.

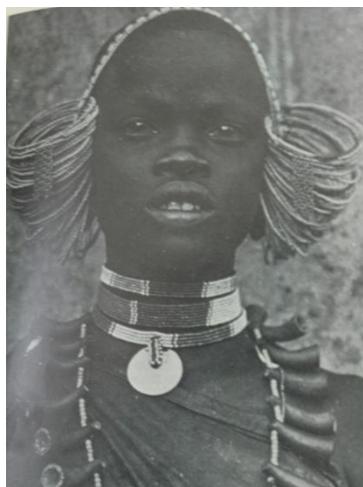


Figure 53

Mîmbûthû necklace as mentioned by Leakey (1977).

Source: Consolata Fathers (2001)

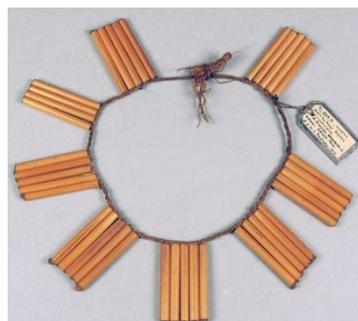
This was a gourd necklace that had the long tops of bottle shaped gourds cut off. The tops are pierced horizontally with a red hot awl and then threaded to make necklaces for girls and young men. Total length, 15 inches.

Length of trumpet, 1 inch.

Necklace is seen worn in Figure 16b. The girl is also seen embroidered collarettes.

wearing the *Kîni'a'ta*,

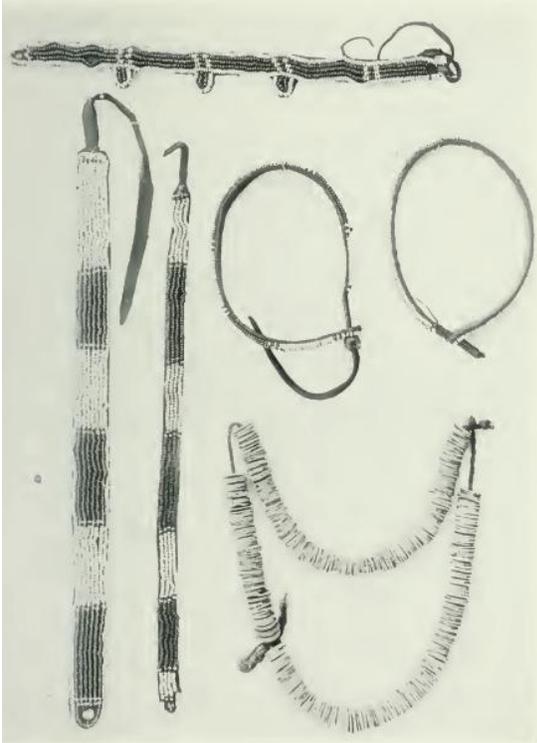
Figure 54 *Kîban'dî* necklace



Source: Pitt Rivers Museum Body Arts | Reed necklace and pair of ear ornaments, Retrieved march 2012

Photographs of **Item 3**, In figure 51 *Kîban'dî* that was Collected and donated by William Scoresby Routledge in 1913 for the Pitt Rivers Museum collection. It is described by Leakey (1977) as *kîbatî* and was worn for the *mûmbûro* an Initiation dance.

Figure 55 *Kîni'a'ta* ornaments



Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

Above ornaments are *Kinia'ta*, embroidered leather bands worn by boys, unmarried women and warriors. Girls wore them on the upper arm and on the neck. See figure 53.

Boys and men wore them above the calf, above the swell of the biceps, *ngagûana*, as

mentioned by Leakey (1977) and around the neck. A similar ornament was also worn around the ankle named *ndarîtû* by (Leakey 1977), worn by warriors only.

Below in figure 55, in the right hand corner is a rare necklace formed of discs of bone. Each disc is ½ in. in diameter and concavo-convex.

Figure 56 Necklaces

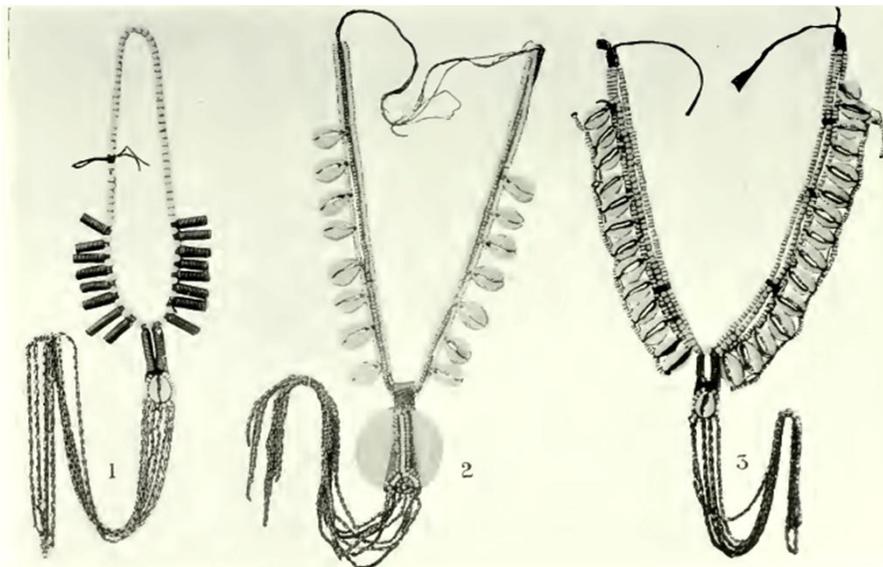
Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

Item 1. *Mareîme'li*, an ornament of fixed design worn by boys only up to time of circumcision. A string of beads (16 in.) has betwix each bead in its anterior portion eighteen tabs of leather folded over it and whipped with copper wire. A



cowrie shell, to which are attached six lengths of iron chain (14 in.) forms the pendant.

Item 2. *Ikenîa*, collarette worn by girls and mature women. Length of necklace, 21 in, Pendant, 3 in., Chain, 11 in. Necklace: beads, two outside rows, milk white. Pendant, center row, red. Pendant two outside



rows, red. See figure 44c when worn by a girl.

Ikeniã collarette, as described by Routledge (1910) formed of a treble row of beads; centre row dark blue, outer rows milk white. To this attached row of cowrie shells, their extremities united by a single row of milk-white beads. The treble row of beads is maintained in ribbon form by strips of leather pierced by three holes to carry the three threading strings. Length of collarette, 18 ½ in., Pendant 1 ¾ in., chain, 11 ½ in., pendant of one worked with blue beads while the other with white beads.

The researcher observed a similar ornaments in figure 57 that are catalogued as the Ikenye neckbands. These were collected in 1969 from Kagio village. The bottom neckband has blue and white beads sewn on a leather neckband with two conus shells pendants, while the other has mixed colour beads. The ornaments were made by women and worn by both sexes.

Figure 57. Ikenye neckbands.

Source; Researcher March 2019

The colour significance of the beads used for the above ***Ikenye*** neckbands were explained in the catalogue as follows; Red signified the stars, white for the moon, blue for the sky. If a girl was beautiful, she is like the moon and so she wears blue and white. Men often said to the girls, “are you like the moon or the stars? Stars are beautiful but useless, they don’t give light.” The conus shells were obtained from the Akamba who traded in the coast of Kenya.

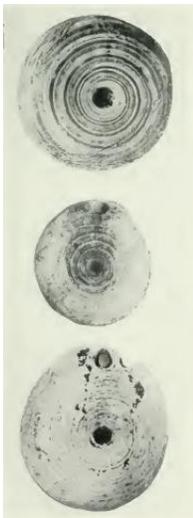


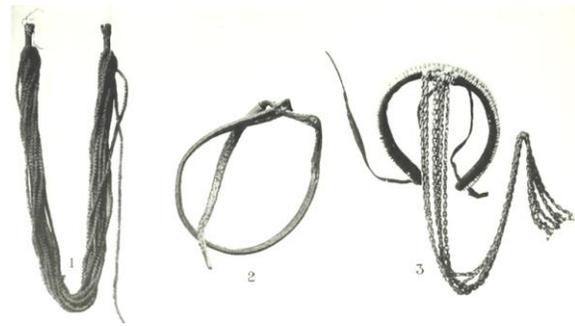
Figure 58 Ikeniã beads

Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

Ikeniã, a milk white disc, size of a crown piece, formed from a sea shell rubbed down and pierced. It is flat on its posterior and somewhat convex on its anterior surface. They were obtained by trade with the Akamba. The two larger specimens are 2 ¼ in. diameter, the smaller 1 6/8 in.

It was highly valued for making the ornament known as ***Ikeniã*** collarette.

Figure 59 Necklaces



Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

Item 1. *Mangoiã*, a form of necklace made from lengths of a peculiar round cord woven with the fingers from bark. The ends of the cords are whipped together to form one necklace. From two to six such necklaces may be worn at the same time. Number of cords in one necklace, 9-14. It was worn by boys, warriors, girls and young married women.

Item 2. Armlet formed of leather strap whipped with copper wire. On the inner aspect, throughout its entire length, a cut (b) has been made with a chisel through

each turn of the wire. Terminal tongue (a,b,c) passes through terminal hole (f) and carries the usual wire stop (d). Extent of wire whipping = a,b,c = 11 in.

Item 3. N'gita, a collar worn by boys up to time of circumcision, but never afterwards. Length of dependent chain, 14 in.



Figure 60 Necklace, no Agíkúyú name referenced.

Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

The beads of the string are a dark blue which was the most valued colour. The extremity of each length of the fringe of chain is terminated by two milky white beads tied to it.

Length of necklace, 15 ½ in.

General length of fringe throughout, 2 ¼ in.



Figure 61

Collar necklaces

Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

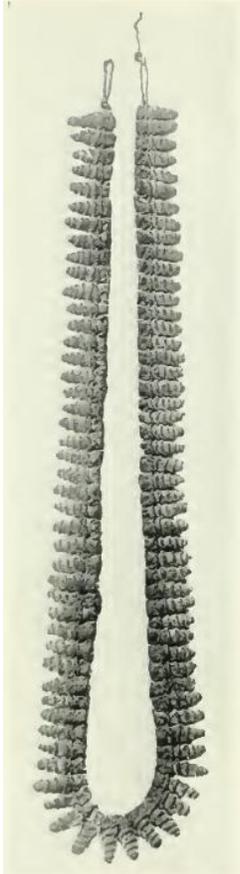
Top: Mûhînio, a collar formed of a single rod of stout iron wire whipped around with fine iron wire. Over the center (where there is no whipping) lengths of chain are laid and then over them two pieces of flat iron are folded. These are compressed laterally, converting them into a tube four lengths of fine iron chain depend to the waist. See figures 7a, b, Figure 9c, Figures 16f,g and Figure 22.

It was one of the most common neck ornaments worn by men and women. Circumference of collar, 7/8 inch.

It was one of the commonest gifts of a father to his daughter on her marriage. If a man was well off he made a point that the collar was made of wire made by hand by the wire maker and not of trade wire. Leakey (1977) names this necklace as **mûrûmbo**.

Bottom: Figure shows a flat, ornamental collar of flexible iron. It was made by binding a core of a smaller gauge wire with other much stouter, leaving a considerable and even interval between each turn. It was then flattened and rendered homogeneous by a hammering. Each turn thus rests against its fellow at an angle of 45°. One extremity of the whipping wire terminates in a hook and the other an eye. The above collar is referred to as **mûkûnjû (mûhûnyo wa ngîngo)** by Leakey (1977).

The leaves of a certain plant, *Mûrîcûa*, Leakey (1977), much appreciated for their scent. They are said to have come from the country near Lake Naivasha, and hence were obtained through the Maasai by trade. The Agîkûyû made necklaces with these leaves. Each element consists on



section one or more leaves compressed into a solid cone. The appearance of an open wire whipping is due to the midrib. Each cone is held tightly against its neighbor by a knotted cord encircling its larger end ¼ inch. from the base.

Leakey describes the necklace as *Mang'oîo*, but (Routledge 1910) gives the same name to another ornament (see figure 59).

Length of each element, 1 in. Total length of necklace 28 inches.

Figure 62 *Marîrîcûa* necklace

Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)

Mûnîor' o wa mûtûî was worn by girls at the ceremony of their initiation and afterwards until they are married. It consisted of a strip of leather 2in. long pierced with holes, through which pass the threads (made of bark) on which the rows of beads are strung. The ends of the threads are then brought together and whipped. The

specimen consists of nine rows of beads while others had eleven rows. The back area with the leather strip consisted of white beads exclusively. The top row consists of white beads and the next and every alternate row of blue beads.

Figure 63 *Mûnîor' o wa mûtûî* Photograph: British Museum Source; Routledge (1910)



The nine rows retained in position as a flat band by means

of a lacing that is indicated as a fine black line.

The fringe is about 3 in. deep and is of equal length throughout. Every alternate cord is of chain and terminated by a

concavo-convex disc of bone, which varies from the size of a sixpence to that of a shilling. The intermediate cords are of milk-



white beads with no terminal. The length of each headband is 18in. Each row of beads of headband is very slightly shorter than the one below it. Accuracy of



fit is essential for use, and this obtained by straining on cords through leather piece.

Figure 64 Girls ready for initiation dance

Photography R.K. PLCXI, **Source**; Routledge 1910.

Photograph shows girl candidates at dance prior to initiation. They are seen wearing the **Mûnior’o wa mûtûi**, head band, bands of cowrie shells and rope of beads, girdle, waist fringe **Mûnior’o waitîna** and waist ornament, **Rîra**.



All girls at initiation wore the brow band of beads and shell discs. This ornament indicated maidenhood and was worn up till the time of marriage. The ornaments of the Agîkûyû had definite association with the particular stages in life.

Figure 65

Head ornament

Source: <http://www.superstock.com>, retrieved March 2012

Leakey (1977) refers to this ornament as **cîuma cîa mûtwe**. He mentions that the southern Agîkûyû did not include strings of beads in the fringe **Mûnior’o wa mûtûi** head band, as shown in figure 64, in the but the other design aspects were the same.

The collar iron necklace, indicated by the bottom arrow was a betrothal present, commonly the wedding present of the father to the bride. It was similar to the

Mûkûnûgû neck ornament in figure 66 below.

Figure 66

An Aluminum **Mûkûnûgû** neck ornament.

Source; Researcher March 2019

An Aluminum ornament collected from Local 9 in Fort Hall (present day Kanyenyaini/Kiruri area in Muranga). It was often worn by a prominent man to show he was rich. See figure 6 and figure 31 of Karuri, a prominent Agîkûyû chief.



Figure 67 shows Clothing items such as **N’gu-o**, the one and only garment of boys and men, when folded to show manner of wearing it.

Source; Routledge

(1910)

Size of the **N’guo** was 44 x 22 ½ in. Below image of the specimen is spread out flat to show the cut.

It was decorated with beads along the edges and on the insides in some linear patterns.



Figure 68 **Gîcoco**, a girl’s pubic apron.

Source: Consolata Fathers (2001)

Gîcoco, a girl’s pubic apron worn for its

ornamental effect instead of the ordinary garment called *Mwengû*.

See figure 45 and figure 46.

It was made of a rectangular piece of soft leather decorated with beads and with a fringe made of little lengths of beaded string ending in the hooves of dik-dik. Sometimes cowrie shells were sewn on instead of beads.

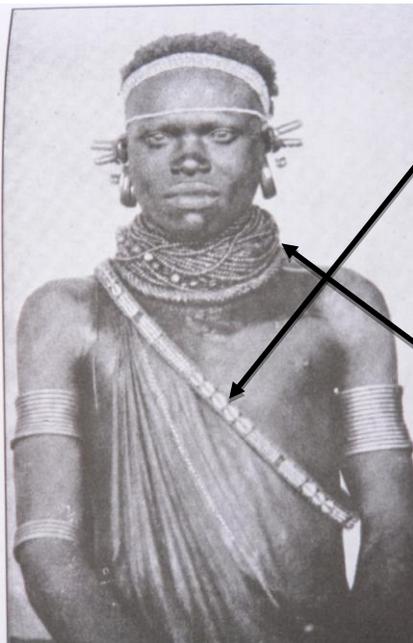


Figure 69

A groom seen wearing a *Mûtotîa wa Anake (Maîtai)*.

Source: Wambugu, Ngarariga, Kariuki 2006

This was a leather belt with

cowrie shells sewn on it at intervals of about 4 in, the intervals being decorated with a double row of beads (the one in picture has 3 rows). This ornament was worn by warriors over one shoulder and under the other.

He is also seen wearing *Gîthîoro*, a neck ornament worn by warriors made of *ngúnyî* seeds (black seeds of the *mûkúnyî* plant). When a man had threaded about 10 yards of these seeds, they were wound round and round his neck. Boys made ordinary necklaces of *ng'únyî* seeds to wear round their necks but not in the form of *gîthîoro*.

A betrothed girl in figure 70 is seen wearing a *Mûtotîa wa Airîtu* similar to the men's *mûtotîa*, but the cowrie shells were put on end to end, touching each other and with no bead intervals.

The soon to be bride is also seen wearing *Mûnioro wa mûtuî* (head ornament), *hangî* (round loops ear ornaments), *Mûhûniô* or *Mûrûmbû* (necklaces) and *Mûkûjû* (armlets).



Figure 70

Source: Wambugu, Ngarariga, Kariuki 2006



Njûûgû accessory

Source: Researcher March 2019

Njûûgû- this was a spiral of iron wire about 1 in. long and ¼ in. in diameter, which was used for fastening leather thongs used as accessories to ornaments (Leakey 1977). This



accessory is as observed on the end part of the *Ikenye* neckbands in Figure 57.

Maîtai– was a waist belt worn by girls. It had three rows of beads, above and below which a row of cowrie shells, the lower being pendant, but the upper row sewn tightly to the belt.

Figure 72Maîtai Belt

Source: Researcher March 2019

Figure 71 below shows the *Mînyoro* bead string that was collected from Local 9 in Fort Hall in 1971 (current day Kanyenyaini/Kiruri area in Muranga).

The ornament was catalogued as a string of white and blue beads made and used by women for dances. The beads were bought from the Akamba tribe who were trade partners. The string used was from the fiber of the *Migio* shrub bark (microfollae triumphetta).



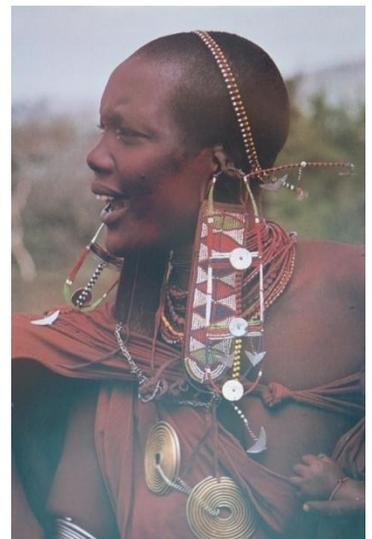
Source: Researcher March 2019

Ornaments discussed below have just been described by the various authors but there is no visual record of them that the researcher has found.

Mûthanga wa Matemo- a leg ornament that was made by winding iron wire spirally round a special tool called *kagera ka matemo*, which was a thin iron ruler, slightly concave on one side. This ruler, after being bound round with iron wire, was laid with its concave side upwards on the anvil and the coils were all cut with the chisel (*ngeeca*). They were then slipped off the ruler and were threaded onto a piece of leather thong cut to the same size and thickness as the ruler. This leather thong bound round with the iron wire was then used as an ornament below the knee by men, next to the ornament *mûthanga wa kûhakwo* Leakey (1977).

Mûthanga wa kûhakwo- This was made in a similar way to the above, but after the iron wire had been wound round the *kagera ka matemo* it was not cut, but slipped off as a spiral spring, through which a leather thong was passed (Leakey 1977).

Ngîtatî- was a woman's waist belt made of leather with three rows of cowrie shells sewn on it. The cowrie shells were called *ngûgûtû* and were obtained by barter from the Akamba. These belts were worn by girls, but they did not discard them when they married as they did so many other ornaments(Leakey 1977).



Conclusion

The Agikúyú indeed had a wide array of jewelry for wearers of all ages and sexes. The jewelry served specific purposes such as signifying the wearer, their age group and their status in society. Different sections of the Agikúyú indicate that in some instances the jewelry may have been different as per family or even regions.

There are other jewelry items seen to worn by the Agikúyú people in the photographs but have not been identified. Other jewelry items have been identified by different sources, sharing an identical description but different names are given. Example is the **Marírichúa** necklace (see figure 62) that is referred to as **Mong’oio** by Leakey (1977). One cannot ascertain what name was used for the particular necklace. Routledge (1910), Leakey (1977) mentions that the **Cíuma cíá Mútwe** or **Mûnior’o wa mûtûi** among the southern Agikúyú differed slightly from that of the northern Agikúyú. A comparison of the two can be noted, See figure 64 and figure 65. In another instance, the description given for a man’s belt worn over the shoulder, **Mûtotía wa Anake (Maítai)** differs in that Leakey (1977) mentions that it has two rows of beads at intervals with the cowrie shells while the belt worn in the picture has three rows (See figure 69).

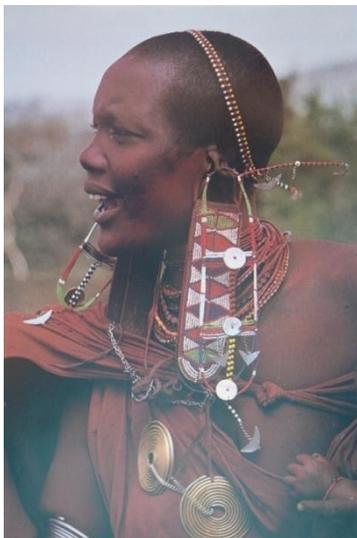


Figure 72 Maasai ornaments

Source: Fisher (1984)

A number of ornaments worn by the Akikuyu are seen to be similar with that of other tribes. The **hangi** for example are similar to the ear ornaments of the Maasai. There are differences however on the shape, length and probably color. On page 39, Figure 34 shows kikuyu woman wearing elaborate spiral neck ornament that is almost (if not) identical to the **surutia** of the Maasai seen in this photograph figure 55. The significance of wearing the ornament in both communities was similar as it indicated that the wearer had an initiated child.

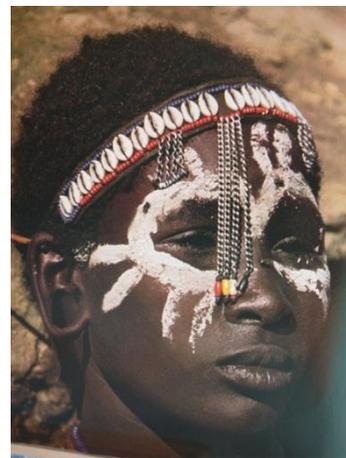
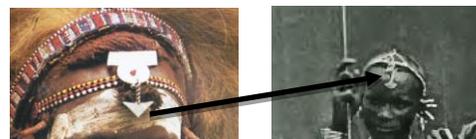


Figure 73
Maasai
initiated girl.

Source: Fisher (1984)

Image shows an initiated Maasai girl with a similar headband as that of the Agikúyú girls.

The ornament **ciuma cíá mutwe** (see figure 65) however is made out of beads and has chains and beads dangling all along the forehead while the Maasai ornament has



cowrie shells and chain dangling in only in some sections.

Figure 74 Head Ornaments

Source: Fisher (1984)

Figure 74 shows a Maasai warrior wearing a head ornament similar in concept to that of the Agîkûyû warrior as seen in figure 4.

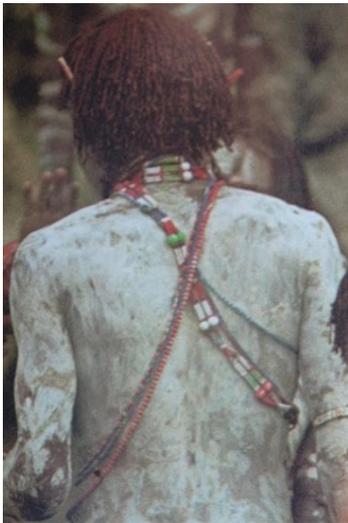


Figure 75 Maasai shoulder ornaments

Source: Fisher (1984)

A Maasai warrior wearing a ornament similar in concept to that of the Akikuyu

warriors belt the **Mûtotia wa Anake (Maîtai)** seen in figure 69 .

The Akikuyu warriors however wore only one piece of this ornament over one arm

and under the other while the maasai warrior as seen in the picture have worn these ornaments over both arms.

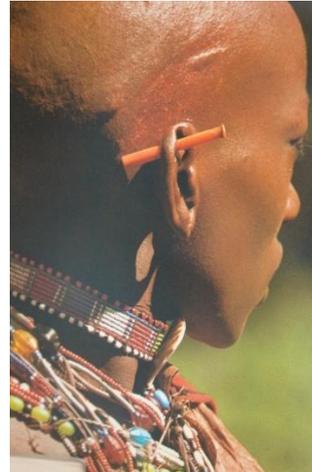


Figure 76 Maasai ear ornament

Source: Fisher (1984)

A Maasai warrior seen with an ear piercing similar to that of the Agîkûyû men and women. Differences are in that Agîkûyû had two or three of these piercings on each ear unlike one as seen in this picture. See figures 2a,b,c and figure 77 below.

Figure 77

Source: Consolata Fathers (N.D.)

Agîkûyû young woman is seen with the three ear piercings **Rûnyoîrî** in her ear. The holes are called **ndûgîra** and the three of them means that the young woman has received all the relevant education required for an adult. She is also seen wearing ear plugs, **Munîûro wa mûtwé** or **cîûma cîa**

mûtwé, iron necklace, cowrie shells and armlets.



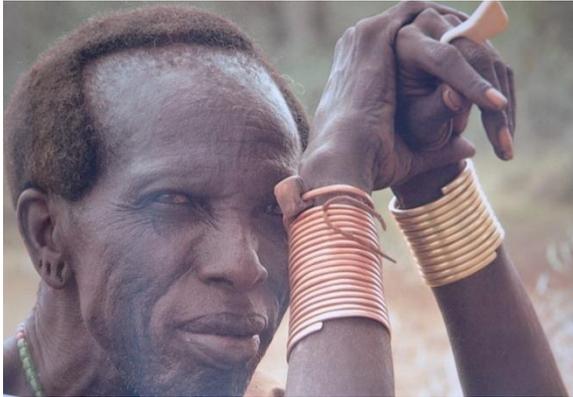


Figure 78 Toposa man wearing ornaments
Source: Fisher (1984)

Toposa men and women, who are the neighbors of the Turkana and Pokot wore bracelets similar to the Agikúyû *Muringa* (Figures 30a,b,c and Figure 31) bracelets worn by the men and women.



Figure 78 Ivory ornaments

Source: Fisher (1984)

A selection of ivory arm ornaments from different communities. From the extreme left; ivory bracelet from the Fur tribe of Dafur, top right is a Shilluk ivory bracelet;

bottom left is a bone bracelet from East Africa and bottom right is an ivory armlet from the Agikúyû. There is a similarity in the use of materials and the reference to organic shapes of the ornaments.



Figure 79

Source: Consolata Fathers(N.D.)

Agikúyû warrior adorned in jewellery. Above arrow shows warrior wearing the *hûlahûli*, ear ornaments worn in the lowest of the perforations

in the cartilage. The lower arrow shows the un-identified jewelry pieces that are today unknown as they were never documented.

Figure 80



Maasai arm ornament *Errap*

Source: Borel F., Taylor B.J. 1994

Errap was made of horn, glass beads and copper wire. Length 26 cm. It was worn above

the elbow, only by warriors who have killed a man in battle. The ornament is similar if not identical to the Agikúyû *haco* as seen in figure 25.

Agikúyû jewelry was of importance to the community and served important roles in the community. Information on the jewelry

that can be found currently serves to inform the current reader on historical uses, descriptions, visual representations, the various methods of making and wearing the jewelry that were practiced by the Agíkúyú community. The information may no longer be known to the current world as it is limited and has not been further explored for purposes of knowledge and reference.

The research could further be explored by investigating other sources of historical information such as International Museum collections that may have material culture that one could further study. Further research would also clarify some of the issues that arise such as the different spellings of the jewelry in the native language as well as in the specific names where it is not clarified or stated.

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