The Northern Group:

* [Biete Medhane Alem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biete_Medhane_Alem) (House of the Saviour of the World), home to the [Lalibela Cross](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lalibela_Cross).
* [Biete Maryam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biete_Maryam) (House of Miriam/House of [Mary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary,_mother_of_Jesus)), possibly the oldest of the churches, and a replica of the Tombs of Adam and Christ.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lalibela#cite_note-unesco-1)
* [Biete Golgotha Mikael](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Biete_Golgotha_Mikael&action=edit&redlink=1) (House of Golgotha Mikael), known for its arts and said to contain the tomb of King Lalibela)
* [Biete Meskel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biete_Meskel) (House of [the Cross](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_cross))
* [Biete Denagel](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Biete_Denagel&action=edit&redlink=1) (House of Virgins)

The Western Group:

* [Church of Saint George](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Saint_George,_Lalibela), thought to be the most finely executed and best preserved church

The Eastern Group:

* [Biete Amanuel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biete_Amanuel) (House of [Immanuel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel)), possibly the former royal chapel
* [Biete Qeddus Mercoreus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biete_Qeddus_Mercoreus) (House of [Saint Mercurius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Mercurius)/House of [Mark the Evangelist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_the_Evangelist)), which may be a former prison
* [Biete Abba Libanos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biete_Abba_Libanos) (House of Abbot Libanos)
* [Biete Gabriel-Rufael](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biete_Gabriel-Rufael) (House of the angels [Gabriel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel), and [Raphael](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_(archangel))) possibly a former royal palace, linked to a holy [bakery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bakery).
* [Biete Lehem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biete_Lehem) ("[Bethlehem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethlehem)", [Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language): בֵּית לֶחֶם‎ "House of Bread").

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[**Video sequence**](http://www.selamta.net/Downloads/LALIBELA.wmv)Video stream about Lalibela

**The legend of Lalibela**  
Ever since the first European to describe the rock churches of Lalibela, Francisco Alvarez, came to this holy city between 1521 and 1525, travellers have tried to put into words their experiences. Praising it as a “New Jerusalem”, a “New Golgotha”, the “Christian Citadel in the Mountains of Wondrous Ethiopia”. The inhabitants of the monastic township of Roha-Lalibela in Lasta, province of Wollo, dwelling in two storeyed circular huts with dry stonewalls, are unable to believe that the rock churches are entirely made by man. They ascribe their creation to one of the last kings of the Zagwe dynasty, Lalibela, who reigned about 1200 A.D.  
  
The Zagwe dynasty had come to power in the eleventh century, one hundred years after Queen Judith, a ferocious woman warrior had led her tribes up from the Semyen mountains to destroy Axum, the capital of the ancient Ethiopian empire in the north.  
  
The charming Ethiopian folklore pictures telling the story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, which are sold in Addis Ababa, give a popular version of how not only the dynasty of ancient Axum (and present day Ethiopia) descended from King Solomon, but also the medieval Zagwe dynasty. The Queen of Sheba gave birth to Menelik, who became the first King of Ethiopia. But the handmaid of the Queen, too, gave birth to a son whose father was King Solomon, and her son was the ancestor of the Zagwe dynasty.  
  
The Zagwe kings ruled until the thirteenth century, when a famous priest, Tekla Haymanot, persuaded them to abdicate in favour of a descendant of the old Axumite Solomonic dynasty.

However, according to legend before the throne of Ethiopia was restored to its rightful rulers, upon command of God and with the help of angels, Lalibela’s pious zeal converted the royal residence of the Zagwe in the town of Roha in to a prayer of stone.  
  
The Ethiopian Church later canonized him and changed the name of Roha to Lalibela. Roha, the centre of worldly might, became Lalibela the holy city; pilgrims to Lalibela shared the same blessings as pilgrims to Jerusalem, while the focus of political power drifted to the south, to the region of Shoa. Legends flower in Lalibela, and it is also according to legend that Lalibela grew up in Roha, where his brother was king. It is said that bees prophesied his future greatness, social advance and coming riches. The king, made jealous by these prophecies about his brother tried to poison him, but the poison merely cast Lalibela into a death like sleep for three days. During these three days an angel carried his soul to heaven to show him the churches which he was to build. Returned once more to earth he withdrew into the wilderness then took a wife upon God’s command with the name of Maskal Kebra (Exalted Cross) and flew with an angel to Jerusalem. Christ himself ordered the king to abdicate in favour of Lalibela. Anointed king under the throne name Gare Maskal (Servant of the Cross) Lalibela, living himself an even more severe monastic life than before, carried out the construction of the churches. Angels worked side by side with the stone masons, and within twenty four years the entire work was completed.

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**Rock hewn churches**  
Walking through the village you will see the mountainous landscape of the region of Lasta, where the peasants labour to cultivate their patches of stony fields with the traditional hook-plough. Strolling across a gently undulating meadow, you will suddenly discover in a pit below you a mighty rock - carefully chiselled and shaped -the first rock church. None of these monuments of Christian faith presents itself to the visitor on top of a mountain as a glorious symbol of Christ’s victory, to be seen from far away by the masses of pilgrims on their road to the 'Holy City', they rather hide themselves in the rock, surrounded by their deep trenches, only to be discovered by the visitor when standing very close on top of the rock and looking downwards.   
  
In Lalibela itself you will find two main groups of churches, one on each side of the river Jordan and one other church set apart from the rest. The town of Roha-Lalibela lies between the first and the second group of churches. It is situated on the higher part of a mountain-terrace on a vast plateau of rock. At Timkat (Ethiopian Epiphany. ca. January 19) a vivid ritual unfolds before the spectator: here the dances of the priests take place after the annual repetition of mass baptism in the river Jordan.   
  
There are twelve churches and chapels, including various shrines. Four churches are monolithic in the strict sense; the remainder are excavated churches in different degrees of separation from the rock. The walls of the trenches and courtyards contain cavities and chambers sometimes filled with the mummies of pious monks and pilgrims.

**Types of Churches**  
There are three basic types of rock churches in Ethiopia:   
1. Built-up cave churches, which are ordinary structures inside a natural cave (Makina Medhane Alem and Yemrehanna Krestos near Lalibela are examples of this style).  
2. Rock-hewn cave churches, which are cut inwards from a more or less vertical cliff face sometimes using and widening an existing natural cave (Abba Libanos in Lalibela).  
3. Rock-hewn monolithic churches, which imitate a built- up structure but are cut in one piece from the rock and separated from it all round by a trench. Most churches of this type are found in or near Lalibela (Bet Medhane Alem. Bet Maryam. Bet Giorgis, and others). Nowhere else in the world are constructions of this particular kind found.  
  
There are some fairly obvious technical details to prove the high standard of technical knowledge the architects of Lalibela must have had: the churches in a group are set on several levels, in order to carry off the heavy summer rains. The trenches serve also as a drainage system to the river Jordan. With churches whose placing conforms to the slope of the terrain, the ridge of the roof, gutter edges, the base of the plinth, are slanted in line with it.  
  
Whoever has experienced the "rainy season" in Ethiopia will appreciate the great skill shown by these early builders. The rains are so heavy that Lalibela is inaccessible in the rainy season; landing at the airport as well as an approach by Land-Rover from the main road are impossible.

Authorities claim that the rock churches in Ethiopia have two roots:   
  
(1) the Axumite architecture with its palaces of wood and stone construction and with its monolithic stelae, and   
(2) the early Christian basilica.  
  
The rock churches reflect the blending of Axumite tradition and early eastern Mediterranean Christianity: Yet they are an entirely new creation of early Christian art on Ethiopian soil.  
  
**The First Group of Churches**  
The churches of the first main group lie in their rock cradles one behind the other north of the river Jordan. The original approach might well have been from the river Jordan up to the churches Golgota-Debre Sina (Mika'el) in the west. The whole complex, seen in an east-westerly direction, may be divided into three smaller groups:  
Bet Medhane Alem in the east, the Bet Maryam group in the centre, and the twin church Golgota- Debre Sina (Mika'el) with the Selassie Chapel in the west.  
While each sub-group has a courtyard of its own, the whole complex is surrounded by a deep outer trench.  
  
**Bet Medhane Alem**  
Approaching the most eastern church of this group, Bet Medhane Alem (House of the Redeemer of the World) , you first catch a glimpse of the roof, decorated with relief crosses connected by blind arcades, and the upper part of the solemn colonnade surrounding the church: The roof still shows traces of the plaster remains of the restoration efforts of the early 1930's. The tuff, from which the church is carved, glows a typical deep pink colour in striking contrast to the brownish-yellow earth and green-leaved trees of the landscape. Standing in the courtyard you face the largest of the rock-hewn churches.   
It has been cut free from a block of stone 33.7 m. in length, 23.7 m. in width and 11.5 m. in height. It is a noble structure, standing on its plinth with its pitched roof and surrounding external columns, somewhat reminiscent of ancient Greek temple architecture.  
  
**Exterior**The low-pitched saddle-backed roof lies directly on the order of columns, so that there is no entablature as there would be in a Greek temple. A frieze of round arches in relief decorates the vertical edges of the roof. The gallery running round the four sides of the church between the colonnade and the outer wall of the church itself is only 70 cm wide. While most of the slender pillars, which are square in cross-section, are still the original ones some of them had collapsed and have had to be replaced by new built-up structures. Note the fine sarcelly cross relief on the slabs of stone which connect the four corner pillars with adjacent pillars about two thirds of the way up. Traditional sarcelly crosses like the ones seen here have been copied in modern buildings in Addis Ababa, e.g., the entrance pillar stumps of the Municipality.  
  
**Interior**Around the high walls of the nave runs a frieze of blind windows framed by protruding beams at each corner. Along the sides, the windows are either blind windows with decorations or actual openings between the "galleries" and the nave. The "galleries" can be reached from a cell to the left of the narthex. The doorways inside again exhibit Axumite framework style.   
  
One particular pillar in the centre is covered with a cloth. This is the "amd" - the symbol of the unity of faith. The priests explain that Christ touched the pillar when appearing to King Lalibela in one of his visions. Since that time the past and the future of the world are written on it. Since man is too weak to bear the truth revealed by God the pillar is covered.  
  
In the nave the shafts, capitals and corbels of the columns and pilasters as well as the arches are carved in bas-relief some of them painted. There is a great variety of crosses.   
Paintings proper can be found on the spandrels, the string-courses above the arches, the area of friezes of the blind windows and the barrel vault.  
  
**Bet Maskal**  
The chapel of Bet Maskal(The House Of The Cross) has been excavated in a bulge in the northern wall of the Bet Maryam courtyard. It is a broad gallery of 11 m. length and 3.4 m. width. A row of four pillars divides the space into two aisles spanned by arcades. The doorways show imitation of monkey-head framework. Beams of light deflect downwards into the chapel from two windows, one of them having a swastika design through which is pierced a Greek cross, while the sanctuary window opening has a Maltese cross motif. A frieze of arches between two projecting horizontal courses finishes the facade on top.  
  
**Bet Danaghel**  
Bet Danaghel (The House Of The Virgins Or Martyrs). Jutting out at the south of the Bet Maryam courtyard is the little chapel of Bet Danaghel (8.6 m. length and 3.6 m. height). This tiny chapel is connected with one of the most fascinating legends of Lalibela. Priests will tell you that the chapel was constructed in honour of maidens martyred under Julian. The memorial day of the maidens is the 10th of Hedar (November) in the Ethiopian calendar.   
  
Located just outside the southern wall of the courtyard proper is the twentieth century memorial to Ras Kassa Darge. Ras Kassa was the governor of central and northwestern Ethiopia, prior to the Italian occupation. He died in 1956.  
  
**Bet Debre Sina and Bet Golgota with the Selassie Chapel and the Tomb of Adam**  
This is the most mysterious complex in Lalibela, housing its holiest shrine, the Selassie Chapel, and according to the whispers of the priests - perhaps even the tomb of King Lalibela himself. While the ancient entrance to this group was probably from the west, passing the hollowed block of the Tomb of Adam, the courtyard is now entered from the south, being connected by the trench leading to the Bet Maryam churches. A side door leads to the first church, Bet Debre Sina or Bet Mika'el.  
  
**Bet Debre Sina**  
Bet Debre Sina(House Of Mt. Sinai) displays a proper east-west orientation and has a raised chancel. The holy of holies is in the east. Thus, we may assume that it has always been an independent and separate church. It is a semi-monolithic creation measuring 9.5 X 8.5 m. and resting on a steep plinth 3 m in height. On three sides it is exposed by excavation to a trench, the northern side leading to Bet Golgota.  
  
**Exterior**The exterior walls are smooth, with two rows of windows. In the bottom row of the south facade there are window openings in the shape of key-holes.  
  
**Interior**The interior is simple and solemn in atmosphere. It is divided by pillars into a nave and two aisles with five bays each. Round arches connect the pillars and pilasters in the walls. Cruciform in section, the pillars support round arches; their pseudo-capitals are decorated with Greek crosses in relief, which are also found on the blind arches and on the ceiling.  
  
**Bet Golgota**  
Leaving Bet Debre Sina you enter its northern twin church, Bet Golgota (The House Of Golgotha). Bet Golgota represents the type of excavated church with one worked facade (the west face).  
  
**Exterior**The facade is smooth and scantily decorated. Piercings are functional, providing the church with light and air. A few protruding beams frame the uppermost windows, while the lower ones, semicircular and cruciform in shape display a few mouldings only  
Yet there are two harmoniously designed window openings in the southern wall which give light to two shrines, the one on the left to the "lyasus-Cell" (Cell of Jesus) of Bet GoIgota; the right-hand one to the Selassie Chapel.  
  
**Interior**Entering the church proper you will find that it is divided into two "naves" by three cruciform pillars that display no decoration apart from the usual corbels. Flattened arches connect the pillars with the corresponding pilasters at the wall.   
The "Iyasus-Cell" at the east end of the right-hand nave and the "tomb of Christ", an arched recess in the northeast corner of the church, add an air of sanctity. The church with the name of Golgota is dedicated to the passion and Death of the Saviour.  
  
The church, simple in its architecture, houses, however, some of the most remarkable pieces of early Christian Ethiopian art: figurative relieves, rare elsewhere in Ethiopia. The "tomb of Christ" displays behind a wrought-iron grille a recumbent figure in high-relief with an angel in low-relief above its head. The figures of seven saints, mostly larger than life, decorate arched niches in the walls.  
  
**The Selassie Chapel**  
From Bet Golgota a doorway at the east end of the right-hand nave next of the one leading to the "Iyasus-Cell" opens on to the Selassie Chapel - the place of greatest sanctity in Lalibela.   
A curtain covering two thirds of the wall will offer you only a glimpse inside the shrine. The ribs decorating the ceiling in the shape of a cross might also be discernible. This holy place is rarely open even to the priests themselves, and very few visitors have been permitted to enter it.  
The shrine is completely imprisoned in the rock. A single pillar supports the roof with its barrel-vault in the rear section and flat-arch above the platform with the three monolithic altars. This pillar, which has no base, rises up more than five metres to the apex of the vault.  
  
**The Tomb of Adam**  
Impressive in its simplicity, a huge square block of stone stands in a deep trench in front of the western face of Bet Golgota. This is the Tomb of Adam. The block has been hollowed out, the ground floor serving as the western entrance to the first group of churches. The upper floor houses a hermit's cell. Again it is a cross that is the only decoration of this "tomb ". The large opening in the eastern wall provides light for the cell and has the shape of a harmonious croix pattee with flat-pitched finials.  
  
**The Second Group of Churches**  
This second group comprises from east to west, the churches and sanctuaries of Bet Emanuel, Bet Mercurios, Bet Abba Libanos, the Chapel of Bet Lehem and Bet Gabriel-Rufa'el.   
Approaching the town of Roha-Lalibela from the south, you will see, south of the river Jordan, a bastion of red tuff severed from the rock plateau in the north, east and south by a broad artificial outer trench, eleven metres deep. Another deep central trench cuts this area into two parts, leaving at its end a cone-shaped hill. An old entrance led from this central trench to the sanctuaries mainly by way of narrow subterranean passages. The 'Original function of this complex of churches has not yet been clarified. Two of them were certainly planned as such, Bet Emanuel and Bet Abba Libanos. They have a proper church plan and are oriented to the east.  
  
**Bet Emanuel**  
Art historians consider Bet Emanuel to be the finest and most impressive church in Lalibela. Looked at from above, its mighty, flat- pitched roof can be seen glistening from the rock cradle that houses the church. It is the only true monolithic structure of this group, carefully sculptured from a block 18 X 12 X 12 m. The church offers an almost classic example of Axumite style despite the fact that the floor and side plans follow the true basilica pattern with a proper east-west orientation.  
  
**Exterior**Entering the courtyard you will see this fascinating church on its stepped platform shining in the bright red colour of the Lalibela tuff. The imitation of Axumite wood and stone construction is striking, its walls built in horizontal and vertical bands, alternately recessed and projecting. At the three entrances, in front of which the stepped platform widens into landings, the church has a framework of protruding beams; genuine monkey-heads are missing. There are three rows of windows, the bottom and top ones having frames with corner posts. The bottom windows are pierced in that shape of straight Greek crosses; those in the top row have no fillings.  
  
**Interior**Inside you will find the true basilica plan: aisles and a mighty vaulted nave. Yet Axumite style is here again: the in- dentations in the outside walls, in which all the doors and windows are placed, reflect the internal division, as do the mouldings, the number of aisles and bays, the position of the galleries and the height of the vault. In the hall there are four complete and four three-sided pillars. A rock staircase leads from a side room by the main entrance to a second storey, here little rock chambers surround the hall. The striking interior feature is the double frieze of blind windows in the vaulted nave, the lower frieze being purely ornamental, the upper one consisting of windows alternating with decorated areas. In the rock floor of the southern aisle a hole opens into a long, subterranean tunnel leading to neighbouring Bet Mercurios.  
Chambers and cavities for sacred bees in the outer wall of the courtyard are reminder of the bees that prophesied kingship to Lalibela. Some of the chambers, however, are the graves of monks and pilgrims who wanted to be buried in the "holy city. In this outer wall two further underground passages have been discovered leading to Bet Mercurios.  
  
  
**Bet Mercurios**  
The church is neither orientated nor conventionally planned. The part serving today as a church occupies the eastern end of a subterranean hall which opens to a courtyard. The interior appears to be void of decoration although there is a fine mural on the lower pan of a pillar, depicting six kings or saints in royal apparel, holding in their hands beautifully shaped hand- crosses, reminiscent of late Gondarene processional crosses.  
  
Rich paintings once adorned the church but for preservation they have been removed and are now to be seen in the National Museum in Addis Ababa.  
  
**Bet Abba Libanos**  
Lalibela's wife, Maskal Kebra, with the help of angels, is said to have created this church in one night. It is dedicated to one of the most famous monastic saints of the Ethiopian Church, Abba Libanos.  
  
**Bet Abba Libanos (The House Of Abba Ubanos)**  
**Exterior**The facade is reminiscent of Axumite architecture, although here - unlike Bet Emanuel - the horizontal bands are missing. It is a good example of a cave church. The roof is not separated from the rock, but the other three sides are detached by a tunnel.  
  
**Interior**The aisles and the nave of the church run exactly from east to west. The priests will tell you that there is a "little light'; in the middle of the altar-wall shining day and night "by its own power: Conjectures by visitors run from "a piece of phosphorescent stone" to "a hole in the wall" trying to give a more "natural" explanation and at the same time robbing the phenomenon" of the charm of its mystery.  
  
**Bet Lehem (The Chapel Of Bethlehem)**  
You may reach Bet Lehem by a passageway 50 m. long that starts at the right-hand aisle of Bet Emanuel, and passes Bet Mercurios and the courtyard of Abba Libanos. The shrine has been shaped into a cone by the central trench: the tunnel still winds up in spiral form within the hill and ends in a low, round room. A tree-trunk in the room serves as a central pillar.   
The original function of this shrine is not known. Visitors may not be allowed to enter the interior of Bet Lehem.  
  
**Bet Gabriel-Rufa'el (The House of Gabriel And Raphael Or The House of the Archangels)**  
Bet Gabriel-Rufa’el (The House Of Gabriel And Raphael Or The House Of The Archangels). This church is more difficult to describe in character and situation than the others. Its disorientation and unusual plan suggest that it was originally not intended to serve as a church. Instead, the floor plan is labyrinthine: three angular halls with pillars and pilasters are squeezed between two courtyards. The most impressive part of the church is the monumental facade.  
The church is usually entered from the top of the rock near Bet Emanuel in the east, by a small bridge of logs leading over the central trench.   
You may also approach from the east by a series of small tunnels, a gallery like passage and another log bridge 10 m, above the courtyard.   
The triangular floor of the northern courtyard is enclosed by walls whence, high up, the facade of the church and the gallery opposite can be seen. Down in the courtyard there is a well and an underground cistern. Steps lead down to a subterranean hall of pillars, where the water sinks or rises, according to the dry and rainy seasons.  
  
**Exterior**The monumental front of the church can only be properly examined from the opposite gallery in the north. This truly royal façade is another example of a survival of the Axumite style; pilasters and niches give the impression of breaking the line of the wall into projections and the niches themselves.  
  
**Interior**The interior of the church, which is far smaller than the exterior suggests, is carefully hollowed out forming a hall divided by pillars. Three straight Latin crosses are incised into the wall, the only decoration discernible.  
The floor in the church has a number of partly covered holes of various sizes which are said to go down to great depth. Drains run across the floor and little grooves surround the holes.

**Bet Giorgis**

The monolithic Bet Giorgis - dedicated to the national saint of Ethiopia is isolated from the other two groups of churches. It is located in the southwest of the village on a sloping rock terrace. In its deep pit with perpendicular walls it can only be reached through a tunnel which is entered from some distance away through a trench. Small round caves and chambers have been found in the walls of the courtyard graves for pious pilgrims and monks.  
  
The church is described as Lalibela's "most elegant" and "refined" in its architecture and stonemasonry. Although its floor plan is of a cross with nearly equal arms the church is properly orientated, the main entrance being in the west, the holy of holies in the east.  
  
**Exterior**Like a tower the cruciform church cut out of the pink tuff rises from its triple-stepped platform, the regularity of which is broken only by the landings in front of the three doorways in the west, north and south. The roof decoration, often represented as the symbol of the Lalibela monuments on photographs and postcards, is a relief of three equilateral Greek crosses inside each other. On the north, south and west sides, gutters and spouts drain the water from the roof.  
  
One of the more sophisticated details of Bet Giorgis is that the wall thickness increases step by step downwards but that the increase is cleverly hidden by the horizontal bands of mouldings on the exterior walls.  
  
**Interior**Despite the orientation you will find that the interior of the church follows the cruciform floor plan of the church. There are no genuine pillars; instead four three-sided pilasters with. corbels support the arches. The dome above the sanctuary in the eastern arm of the church is decorated with a croix pattee in relief, while the flat ceiling of the other arms display a straight relief cross: The ceiling of the intersection is left without decoration.  
  
**Other Churches Near Lalibela**  
There are several other churches in the vicinity :   
the churches of the Bilbala district, including the beautiful built up cave church of Yemrehanna Krestos, the tiny rock church Arbatu Entzessa, Bilbala Gioris and Bilbala Cherqos. Also the church of Sarsana Mika'el.  
  
**Yemrehanna Krestos**This remarkable church is located six hours by foot and mule to the northeast of Lalibela, on the mountain ridge the peak of which is Abuna Yosef. It is a built-up cave church in Axumite wood and stone construction. The church has become famous for the decoration of its interior. The flat-span roof displays paneling richly adorned with .geometrical designs. The ceiling over the sanctuary is domed and displays carvings and paintings. The founder of the church is said to have been King Yemrehanna Krestos, a predecessor of King Lalibela.  
  
**Arbatu Entzessa**can be reached from Yemrehanna Krestos proceeding to the southwest. This tiny monolithic sanctuary is detached from the surrounding rock on two sides. It shows remains of old ornaments; pillars, capitals and doors are chiselled in Axumite style. The name suggests that the church is dedicated to the "four beasts", symbols of the Four Evangelists following the vision of St. John. The Ethiopian synaxarium dedicates the 8th of Hedar (November) to these four beasts.  
  
**Bilbala. Giorgis**Proceeding from Arbatu Entzessa to the west you find Bilbala Giorgis, of which only the facade is visible. The other sides are surrounded by a tunnel: the roof is not separated from the rock. A frieze with emblems of the vault of heaven decorates the facade. Legend says that holy bees live under the roof rock in niches.  
  
**Bilbala Cherqos**Bilbala Cherqos. West of Bilbala Giorgis is this semi-monolithic church, one day's travel by mule to the northwest of Lalibela. The church is properly orientated and has been worked from a piece tuff from east to west. The careful stone masonry on the facade is reminiscent of the facade of Bet Gabriel-Rufa'el.  
  
**Sarsana Mikaél**The tiny monolithic church lies in a grove of euphorbia trees in the Sarsana plains and is scarcely visible in its bed of rock. Through a passage you reach a deep trench running round the church. Three sides are exposed revealing influences of the Axumite style.  
  
**Crosses In Lalibela**  
The two basic types are the Greek cross, which has equal straight arms, and the Latin cross, which has straight arms with the inferior one longer than the other three. These have been developed into a great number of very elaborate and artistic designs.   
The favourite form in Ethiopia is the croix pattee -a Greek cross with flaring arms - and its rich variations.   
In the Zagwe sphere a special kind of elongated processional cross has been developed.   
Lalibela crosses very often have bird heads at the sides and have a crown of stylized human figures as symbols of the twelve apostles; the finial cross then represents Christ. Birds (doves) are often depicted together with the cross.   
The swastika shapes found in Lalibela should not be confused with the old sun symbol found for example in Europe and in India. The Lalibela swastikas were developed from the Greek cross with bent arms and were often combined to form interwoven patterns as was the case in Christian art and in the Middle Ages.   
The priests have developed a rich symbolism, every pattern having a different meaning. Three- tipped crosses refer to the Trinity; five incised circles or indentations represent the wounds of Christ. However, these decorative patterns often are interpreted differently according to the schooling of the individual priest.