

Research Findings: Medieval Period (Zagwe and Solomonic Dynasties)

Zagwe Dynasty (c. 1137–1270)

- **Overview:** An Agaw monarchy that ruled from Roha (Lalibela). They are credited with a religious and architectural renaissance.
- **Key Rulers:**
 - **King Lalibela:** The most famous Zagwe ruler, credited with building the rock-hewn churches.
 - **King Gebre Meskel Lalibela:** Often associated with the peak of Zagwe power.
- **Monuments:**
 - **Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela:** 11 monolithic churches carved from solid rock (e.g., Biete Medhane Alem, Biete Ghiorgis).
 - **Yemrehana Krestos Church:** A built-up church in a cave, predating the rock-hewn ones.
- **Government Structure:**
 - **Agaw Monarchy:** Transitioned power from the Aksumite elite to the Agaw people.
 - **Religious Legitimacy:** Despite not being “Solomonic,” they emphasized their Christian devotion to maintain rule.
- **Culture:** Strong emphasis on Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and Ge’ez literature.

Solomonic Dynasty (1270–1974)

- **Overview:** Founded by Yekuno Amlak, claiming descent from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This dynasty restored the “Solomonic” line.
- **Key Rulers:**
 - **Yekuno Amlak:** Overthrew the Zagwe dynasty.
 - **Amda Seyon I:** Expanded the empire significantly and established a strong military.
 - **Zara Yaqob:** A philosopher-king who centralized authority and reformed the church.
- **Monuments:**
 - **Monasteries:** Debre Libanos, Debre Hayk Istifanos.
 - **Mobile Capitals:** The “Katama” or royal camps that moved with the Emperor.
- **Government Structure:**
 - **Imperial Absolutism:** The Emperor held supreme power as the “Elect of God.”
 - **Gult System:** A feudal land tenure system where land was granted in exchange for military service and tribute.
 - **Kebra Nagast:** The national epic that provided the ideological and

legal basis for Solomonic rule.

- **Culture:** Flourishing of Ge'ez literature, hagiographies, and religious art.
- **Conflict:** Ongoing struggles with Muslim sultanates (e.g., Ifat, Adal).