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Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

AÉ	*Annales d'Éthiopie*, Paris 1955ff.
ÄthFor	Äthiopistische Forschungen, 1–35, ed. by E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, 36–40, ed. by S. UHLIG, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (1–34), 1977–1992; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (35–40), 1994–1995.
AethFor	Aethiopistische Forschungen, 41–73, ed. by S. UHLIG, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2011; 74–75, ed. by A. BAUSI and S. UHLIG, *ibid*., 2011f.; 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI, *ibid*., 2012ff.
AION	*Annali dell'Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"*, Napoli: Università di Napoli "L'Orientale" (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London 1917ff.
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.
EAe	S. UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: *A–C*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003; II: *D–Ha*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005; III: *He–N*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007; (in cooperation with A. BAUSI), IV: *O–X*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010; A. BAUSI (ed. in cooperation with S. UHLIG), V: *Y–Z*, *Supplementa*, *Addenda et Corrigenda*, *Maps*, *Index*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014.
EFAH	Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung, Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, herausgegeben im Auftrag des Instituts von NORBERT NEBES.
EMML	Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
IJAHS	*International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Boston, MA – New York 1968ff.
JAH	*The Journal of African History*, Cambridge 1960ff.
JES	*Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*, Manchester 1956ff.
NEASt	*Northeast African Studies*, East Lansing, MI 1979ff.
OrChr	*Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig – Roma – Wiesbaden 1901ff.
OrChrP	*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Roma 1935ff.
PICES 15	S. UHLIG – M. BULAKH – D. NOSNITSIN – T. RAVE (eds.) 2005, *Proceedings of the XVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, *Hamburg July 20–25*, *2003* = AethFor 65, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
PICES 16	H. ASPEN – BIRHANU TEFERRA – SHIFERAW BEKELE – S. EGE (eds.) 2010, *Research in Ethiopian Studies*: *Selected papers of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Trondheim July 2007* = AethFor 72, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
PO	Patrologia Orientalis, 1903ff.
RIÉ	É. BERNAND – A. J. DREWES – R. SCHNEIDER 1991, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, I: *Les documents*, II: *Les planches*, Paris: [Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres] Diffusion de Boccard.
RSE	*Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma 1941–1981, Roma – Napoli 1983ff.
SAe	Scriptores Aethiopici.
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig – Wiesbaden – Stuttgart 1847ff.

Churches Built in the Caves of Lasta (Wällo Province, Ethiopia): A Chronology

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An as yet untouched question in the field of Ethiopian architectural history is when, in the Lasta region and in the Lasta region alone, churches were built in caves. There are no definitive answers. Five such churches have been recorded by western scholars; several other sites have been mentioned by locals familiar with the area, but remain otherwise unknown. Those that are known have been attributed to the 12th through 15th centuries, the majority belonging to the late 13th and early 14th centuries. The chronology of the phenomenon may be questionable.

It is the church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos (plate 1 and fig. 1), whose construction and patronage has been said to belong to an eponymous 12th-century Zagʷe king, which was the source of inspiration for the others.[1] The church is built in the mouth of a large cave. The height of the church (6.55 m in the interior) takes full advantage of the vertical space available, leaving little room between the ridge of the structure and the cave ceiling. Because the cave provided natural protection against the elements, there was no need to cover the building with a roof, leaving it with a somewhat undressed appearance. Its external measurements are 12.7 m. long by 9.2 m. wide, compared to the interior space of 10.6 m. by 7.9 m. The walls are constructed both internally and externally of alternating horizontal layers of stucco-covered, squared-rubble stone and slightly indented wooden sidings holding stone, random-rubble fill. There are ten layers of each to the roof-

[1] **Sources**: BECKINGHAM – HUNTINGFORD 1961: 202–05; MARRASSINI 1995; VITTORI 1552; **Literature**: BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA 2007: 82; BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA 2009–2010: 121, 128f., figs. 1, 19, 22f.; BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA –GERVERS 2001: 9–47 and figs. 1–16; BIANCHI-BARRIVIERA 1963: 81–91, 115ff. and figs. 55, 57f.; BOSC-TIESSÉ 2009: 124f., fig. 8; BUXTON 1947: 14–21 and plates ivf.; CHOJNACKI 2005: 177f., figs. 141f.; GERVERS 2007: 53f.; GERSTER 1970: 109–114 and figs. 110–129; GIRMAH ELIAS – LEPAGE – MERCIER 2001: 311–334; HEIN – KLEIDT 1999: 112–119; JÄGER – PEARCE 1974: 149; LEPAGE 1975: 40f., 44; LEPAGE 1972: 93; LEPAGE –MERCIER 2006: 13ff.; LEROY 1973: 108, figs. 44f.; MENGISTU GOBEZIE 2004: 42–46; MERCIER – LEPAGE 2012, *passim*; MIQUEL 1959: 143 and pl. LXVIIIc/d, LXXIVc, LXXVIc; MONTI DELLA CORTE 1940a: 154–166, pl. XXXVII–XXXVIII; MONTI DELLA CORTE 1940b: 363–368; MUNRO-HAY 2002: 225–230; MURPHY 1968: 228–232; PANKHURST 1960: 225–228; PASHER 2005: 76–80 and figs. 57–62; PHILLIPSON 2009: 74–81, 85, 105, 188f.; PLAYNE 1954: 118ff.; SAUTER 1963: 262; STEVENS 2003: 79–83, pl. IV; TROMP 2007: 67–71, fig. 11.

line, excluding what is visible of the base, which is constructed of two rows of ashlars. To support this layered construction, there are tower-like buttresses at the four corners,[2] which serve as 90° angle clamps, and an additional buttress in the centre of the north and south walls. The vertical indentations correspond to the un-buttressed parts of the walls.

To accommodate the building it was necessary to level the cave floor and to allow for the passage of moisture from an underground source. This levelling was achieved by the construction of a heavy timber base, a solution which provides meaning to a passage in the late 15th-century *gädl*, or *Vita*, of King Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos himself. According to the account, the king was directed to the site by the Archangel Gäbrəʾel. Having cleared an olive grove before the 'rock' (as the *gädl* describes the cave), the king then had to deal with the interior of the cave: … [56a, 8] "Yemreha cut down all the trees and grass and burnt (them) by fire. When he burnt (everything), he found in that rocky ground a large pond of water. He said: 'How can I build anything in this water?' The Voice said to him: 'Put wood on the water, and on this wood, put straw, and over the straw put mud. Then [56b] when you have covered it with some earth, build a monastery.' He did everything that (the Voice) told him to do and then there appeared to him among the rocks an empty surface,[3] very wide and long. [There] the blessed man laid the foundation …".[4] In the same way that the church did not need a roof, its construction on a wood and earth platform obviated the need for the traditional stepped foundation which from Sabean times[5] (plate 2) had been used in buildings exposed to the elements to deflect moisture and, perhaps, to provide additional support in the event of an earthquake.[6]

In part because of the somber cave environment and in part for aesthetic balance, the church is endowed with 26 windows.[7] There are three portals,

[2] These corner buttresses are invariably referred to in the literature as towers because they rise 93 cm above the parapet. They are, however, 130 cm lower than the top of the saddleback roof over the nave, which they also support.

[3] "Empty space", Eth. *GIGL*, an unrecorded derivative of the verb *GIGL*, – 'be bare, empty'.

[4] "… on the 13th of the month *sebt yulyos*". MARRASSINI 1995: 86 (English trans. by W. Witakowski).

[5] See for example the foundations of the Sabean temple at Yəḥa.

[6] Such a foundation would, further, have added unnecessary weight to be supported by the wood and earth underpinning.

[7] Two such windows (in the upper levels of the north and south central buttresses), and probably the four in the upper level of the eastern buttresses, are blind. The space within the buttresses above the aisle ceilings is about 225 cm at the east end and 120 cm at the west end.

one each in the north, south and west façades (fig. 1: 2A, 2C, 1B); each has a substantial wooden frame with a decorated lintel. Together, windows, doors and lintels provide the walls with a significant population of transversal square-headed ties. Along the edges of the buttressed corners, the wooden sidings are held in place by quoin blocks (plate 3). The structure neither uses nor needs the transversal round-headed ties, known as 'monkey-heads', which in early Aksumite architecture were introduced within the walls to clamp the wooden sidings.[8] That purpose, which is well documented by the architectural features of the Aksum stele, had given way to the quoin system even by the time of Däbrä Dammo, thought to be the oldest standing church in the country.[9] The absence of the 'monkey heads' and of the four or five recessed steps common to the foundations of Sabean and Aksumite architecture, emphasize the light and dark horizontally divided appearance of the structure. Compared to the neighbouring and at least partially contemporary rock-hewn architecture of Lasta, the church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos stands out as being noticeably 'modern' in its external, supposedly 12th-century appearance, reminiscent, moreover, of Lalibäla Amanuʾel with its horizontal layering and its projecting and recessed walls (plate 4 and fig. 2).[10]

The interior is built on a basilica plan with two aisles and a central nave (fig. 1). It consists of three bays and a central sanctuary with north and south side rooms, commonly referred to as *pastophoria*. All the ceilings are flat, with the exception of those in bays two and three of the nave which are covered by the saddle-back roof, and of the domed sanctuary. The flat ceiling above the west entrance endows the church with a 'return aisle', a feature otherwise rare, or heretofore unstudied, in Ethiopia, but common in the medieval Coptic churches of Egypt.[11] Its status is confirmed by a heavy wooden lintel, rather than an arch, which crosses the central aisle at the start of the nave. Two sets of stone pillars separate the three bays and support

[8] A church with monkey-heads, built in the mouth of a cave at Bäräknaha (Sanafe, Eritrea), would appear to belong to a different architectural tradition; s. MORDINI 1961: 131–138.

[9] For a recent account and bibliography, see TSEGAY BERHE G. LIBANOS – RED. 2005: 17b–20b.

[10] Unlike Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, however, the pillars inside Lalibäla Amanuʾel are not indented.

[11] GROSSMANN 2002: 605: *Westumgang.* One might also refer to the first bay as a 'pseudo-narthex', that is, a contraction of the west end of the nave and a narthex, there being no narthex to speak of in the absence of a separating wall between it and the body of the rest of the church. The concept of the 'return aisle' is particularly meaningful with respect to the floor plan, in which the aisle and first bay represent a continuous, uninterrupted space.

arches rising from bracket capitals across and along the length of the aisles. A triumphal arch stands at the entrance to the sanctuary. A reading platform is situated between the pillars separating the nave from the north aisle (fig. 1, between 2A and 2B).

There is a clearstory of sorts consisting of windows alternating with blind windows on the north and south sides above the nave, becoming a frieze at the east and west ends of the same. Unlike Däbrä Dammo, Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos lacks the gallery which typifies the classic, vaulted basilica and provides the need for the traditional clearstory which allows light to penetrate into the nave. At Däbrä Dammo, a staircase situated in a small enclosed space on the north side of the narthex provides access to the gallery (fig. 3). Given the severe limitations on height dictated by the cave ceiling, a gallery would have been unproductive at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos as there was no room to raise a clearstory above it.[12]

Of particular significance in any study of Ethiopian ecclesiastical architecture are the rooms, if any, which flank the sanctuary on the one hand, the *pastophoria,* and those which stand in corresponding positions at the west end of the church.[13] Their presence is as obvious in the oldest churches, as is their absence in later ones. A fuller understanding of their purpose, and subsequent disappearance, helps to explain the chronology of change in the form and function of the Ethiopian church. The existence and placement of an altar or altars in the *pastophoria* provides further evidence for dating.

Early *pastophoria* communicate only westwards towards the aisle, as in Qoḥayto (fig. 4), Mäṭära or even Gazen.[14] Ministers were thus seen by the congregation while passing from the *prothesis*, usually the northern *pastophorion,* through the triumphal arch to the sanctuary.

Other *pastophoria* have doorways leading only to the sanctuary, as of necessity at Bäraqit Maryam, Ḥawzen Täklä Haymanot, and the two churches of Dəgum, as well by liturgical development at Wəqro Mäsqäl (Säqoṭa) (fig. 5)[15] and Gännätä Maryam (plate 5 and fig. 6). It is likely that at these sites the communion gifts were carried in a simple and discreet manner from the *pastophorion* to the altar.

[12] However, the absence of a window at the west end of the lower south wall of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos allows for minimal speculation that a staircase might have been planned in the south-west corner of the interior, but the space was allocated instead to the return aisle.

[13] The following discussion of communication between the sanctuary and the *pastophoria* appears at greater length in FRITSCH – GERVERS 2007: 9–16.

[14] ANFRAY 1974: 761–765; HELDMAN 2003: 737b (ground plan based on data from R. Paribeni).

[15] GERVERS 2002: 99–113.

Some *pastophoria*, like those at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos and Lalibäla Amanuʾel, communicate directly both with the aisles and the sanctuary (figs. 1 and 2).[16]

Churches like Lalibäla Libanos (fig. 7) and Bilbala Qirqos (plate 6 and fig. 9) also have *pastophoria* which communicate with the sanctuary only. The west faces of their western walls, however, display blind doorways towards the aisle, recalling what had become an unnecessary door, while still maintaining aesthetic balance. This feature points to a later period of disuse.

At some point, probably in the 13th century and following Coptic precedent to increase the number of altars available for conducting simultaneous masses, the sanctuary was extended across the full width of the church. In Ethiopian churches constructed with *pastophoria* (which all of them were up to that point), small, often monoxyle wooden, altars were introduced to them. Four such altars survive at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos (plate 7) and, while they have long lost their sacred role, their presence indicates that the eastern side rooms were either used for the celebration of the Eucharist from the start, or that they followed the trend and were converted into extensions of the sanctuary at some later date.[17]

The logical continuation of this process saw new churches being built with full-width sanctuaries and, consequently, no *pastophoria*. Prime examples of this change can be seen in the Däbrä Sina–Golgota–Śəllase complex in Lalibäla (fig. 8), which I have argued elsewhere belongs to the late 14th, if not early 15th century.[18] At Däbrä Sina, the space previously covered on the ground plan by the *pastophoria* has been left free. The level of the eastern bay, now the sanctuary, is raised and there are no dividing walls. Nevertheless, the central area usually retained its priority, particularly because, unlike in Coptic Egypt where the Eucharist could be performed simultaneously on multiple altars, in Ethiopia only one altar was used on a given day. Once the custom of having multiple altars was introduced there, the side altars were generally used for the celebration of specific saints, while the high altar was reserved for the principle celebration.

Extant evidence for the use of multiple altars in Ethiopia is to be found on the one hand in the small, wooden altars previously mentioned and, on the other, in the 14th- and 15th-century rock-hewn churches such as Abba

[16] As at Zaräma Giyorgis, Däbrä Dammo, Qirqos Agobo, Abrəha wä-Aṣbəḥa, Wəqro Qirqos, Mikaʾel Amba, Däbrä Sälam Mikaʾel, Yəmrəhannä Krəstos, Lalibäla Maryam, Lalibäla Mädḫane ʿAläm, Lalibäla Amanuʾel, etc. The doorways of the *pastophoria* opening toward the aisles are accessed by steps and have single-panel doors opening inwards.

[17] Today, the northern side room still holds a large and what may be a disused altar; the southern counterpart serves, or continues to serve, as a storage room.

[18] GERVERS 2003: 23–49.

Yoḥanni and Gabrəʾel Wäqen in Däbrä ʿAśa (Tämben), Däbrä Ṣəyon in Gärʿalta, and Lalibäla Śəllase (plate 8), each of which contain up to three monolithic altars, some of them monumental. With the introduction, apparently in the late 15th or early 16th century, of the square and round churches with a central, built sanctuary, the use of multiple altars disappears.

It is clear that the liturgy determines the use and appearance of the interior space of a church, and that as changes are made to the liturgy, those changes are reflected in the arrangement of that interior space, not to mention in the architecture of the church as a whole. We have seen how the *pastophoria* in the earlier churches were converted into extensions of the sanctuary when the full-width sanctuary came into being, and possibly before. While the eastern side rooms, or *pastophoria,* at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos may originally have been purpose built for the preparation of the *prothesis* and/or as service rooms, by the late 13th century at least they were most likely being used for the celebration of the Eucharist.

Another intriguing and as yet unresolved question concerning the chronological sequence to which Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos belongs is whether or not it had a *bema*. This was a raised space reserved for the priesthood in front of the triumphal arch and on a level with the sanctuary. The *bemata* are common in the ancient churches, but disappear by the 13th century.[19] Judging from extant remains, the extent of this space was determined by a chancel barrier, such as is to be found at Amba Mikaʾel, Däbrä Sälam Mikaʾel (plate 9), and Abrəha wä Aṣbəḥa, among other early churches. There is no obvious sign of such a barrier at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, unless the argument could be made that the often intricately carved panels which are used as shutters in a number of lower level windows derive from it (plate 10). There is a low rise which might be considered a step in the easternmost bay of the nave, but it is not convincing as an architectural feature, particularly in a structure where liturgical features are otherwise clearly defined. A local priest is said to have affirmed that the stonework in the central section of the third bay before the triumphal arch is a relatively recent addition.[20] Had there been a chancel barrier, there would have been post holes in the floor to support it. There are none visible in the current flooring, which would have covered an original surface on a level similar to that of the rest of the nave. If this flooring is ancient, the absence of post holes strongly suggests that here, as in all the churches of Lalibäla, there was

[19] Fritsch 2012: 103.

[20] The flagstones here certainly differ from those which everywhere else cover the church floor.

no chancel screen. Given the scant evidence, it is unlikely that Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos had a *bema.*

The next architectural feature to consider is the so-called 'return aisle', in which the aisles and the first bay represent a continuous uninterrupted space, in this case running from the entry of one *pastophorion* to the other (fig. 1: 3A>1A>1C>3C). Any particular use of such space in the Ethiopian context is undocumented, although it would appear to be perfectly suited for processions. The formula is rare among early extant churches in Ethiopia, Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos being, in fact, one, if not the, earliest example known. On the other hand, it is quite common in Coptic Egypt of the 5th through 8th centuries.[21] When it was introduced to Ethiopia is not known, but churches such as Lalibäla Däbrä Sina (fig. 8) have it, as also Yoḥannəs Mätməq in Gazen.[22]

The alternative to the return aisle at the west end of numerous 13th century rock-hewn churches is a narrow vestibule opening into the nave with rooms on either side (fig. 2). Access to the north room is sometimes had from this vestibule and sometimes from the north aisle. Entry to the southwest room is invariably from the south aisle. In some cases these entrances have doorways, while in others they are entirely open to the aisles. Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos has no western rooms, no vestibule and hardly anything to be described as a narthex, unless one accepts the possibility that the cave interior at the west end of the building served that purpose. Alternatively, as mentioned above, the central portion of the first bay might be considered a pseudo-narthex as, from the ground plan at least, there is no obvious separation between the first and subsequent bays. Its ceiling, however, is flat, and shares a common height with the aisle ceilings, while the nave ceiling of the second and third bays rises upwards by another 2.5 m under a saddle-back roof.

Interestingly, all of what I consider to be the earliest churches of Lalibäla have western side rooms. These include the monoliths of Betä Maryam, Mädḫane ᶜAläm, Abba Libanos (fig. 7), and Amanuᵓel (fig. 2). Others such as the Golgota–Däbrä Sina–Śəllase complex (fig. 8) and Betä Giyorgis clearly belong to a later period, while in my opinion and that of an increasing number of researchers, Betä Dəngəl, Märqorewos, Gäbrəᵓel, Rufaᵓel and

[21] See the ground plan of the al-ᶜAḏrāᵓ church of Dayr al-Baramūs, published by GROSSMANN 2002: fig. 118, *et alia*, such as Abu Sarga (Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus) in Cairo; also, ID. 1991: 194a–226a.

[22] The latter, it has been proposed, belongs to the supposedly earliest churches known as *églises de vallée*, such as Dəgum, although the absence of Aksumite features in Gazen points to a date of construction in the early Solomonic period. For arguments favouring an early date, see LEPAGE –MERCIER 2005: 90–93; HENZE n.d.: 10f.

Betä Ləḥem were very likely not originally hewn out to be churches.[23] There are other significant sites in the region which include western side rooms, such as Bilbala Qirqos and Gännätä Maryam (fig. 6), not to mention Wəqro Mäsqäl Krəstos in Säqoṭa (fig. 5).[24] In some of these churches, namely those with a gallery as Lalibäla Betä Maryam, Amanuʾel, and the previously mentioned Däbrä Dammo (fig. 3), the north-west side room is reserved for a staircase to the upper level.[25] The others do not have galleries, and hence no staircase, but the space is allocated as if there were. What we have in these western side rooms of the Zagʷe period, which serve as counterparts to the eastern *pastophoria*, is an attachment to previous form and function. The form has ancient precedents which may be identified from as early as the sixth century among the archaeological remains of the earliest Ethiopian churches. Both the original function and the subsequent use disappear by the end of the Zagʷe period, that is, the late 13th century, together with the *pastophoria.* The Solomonic 'restoration' seems to have been contemporaneous with a major remodeling of the architectural form of the Ethiopian church, due undoubtedly to significant changes to the liturgy.

Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos was without a doubt the first of the churches to be built in the caves of the Abunä Yosef, and Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ʿAläm (located several hours walk above and beyond the monolithic church of Gännätä Maryam) the second (plate 11, fig. 10). While the former has been known since it was first described by Alvarez in 1520,[26] Ǝmäkina Mädḫaneʿ Aläm did not enter the scholarly literature until 1954.[27] Based on the architectural form of the building and of the style of the richly distributed murals which adorn the interior, the general consensus is that the church belongs to the late 13th century.[28] The determining factor is the absence of *pastophoria* on the north and south sides of the sanctuary which, as just mentioned, seems

[23] FAUVELLE-AYLMAR et al. 2010: 1135–1150, esp. 1146*;* HELDMAN 2003: 738); MUNRO-HAY 2002: 131f., 134, 136f., 146, 174, 177ff. For ground plans of these churches, see BIANCHI-BARRIVIERA 1963, plates 13, 24, 31.

[24] GERVERS 2002: 99–113.

[25] At Lalibäla Mädḫane ʿAläm there are steps leading up from the north-west corner to two small chambers. These may originally have been meant as the start of lofts over the vestibule which were never completed. A gallery appears never to have been meant; see PHILLIPSON 2009: 159; MERCIER – LEPAGE 2012: 47f.

[26] BECKINGHAM – HUNTINGFORD 1961, I, 202–205.

[27] PLAYNE 1954: 160–163. Further architectural description was provided by MIQUEL 1959 ("Reconnaissance", pp. 145–148 and plate LXXV) and by GERSTER 1970: 129–130 and plates 100–108.

[28] BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA 2004: 9-29, esp. 14; GERVERS 2006: 92–112, esp. 93. Marilyn E. HELDMAN (2007: 84–105, esp. 94) suggests a mid-13th-century date for the paintings.

to coincide with the period during which Zagʷe rule gave way to the Solomonic dynasty under King Yəkunno Amlak (1270–85). This church bears witness to an early stage, perhaps the earliest stage, in the development of the sanctuary type which occupied the full width of the building in order to accommodate additional altars.

Other indications of late 13th-century (if not post-Zagʷe) construction include the presence of a reading platform,[29] the absence of a narthex or vestibule, of western side rooms, of a stepped foundation, of a *bema*, of 'monkey heads' as wall binders, and of alternating horizontal courses of stone fill and indented timber wall construction. Instead, and unlike Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Ǝmäkina uses stone ashlars in the place of the indented timber courses (plate 12).[30] After Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, in fact, these timber courses are not used again in the churches built in the caves of Abunä Yosef.

Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm shares a fundamental characteristic of churches built in caves: flagstone flooring. These structures are never built directly on the cave floor, because of the unevenness of the natural stone and of the tendency for water to collect in the nether areas. Consequently, the architect's first consideration was the construction of a firm foundation upon which the church could be built. This is immediately apparent today in the level cave interior around the churches in question.

Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm has three bays,[31] a sanctuary and two aisles flanking a central nave. Height is added under a saddle-back roof over the nave,[32] and a cupola over the sanctuary. The aisle ceilings are flat. The church measures 8.75 m long, 6.4 m wide and 5.2 m high. It is belittled by the enormous cave in which it resides, a space measuring approximately 57.36 m deep, 29.6 m wide and 14.33 m high. The church could have been built bigger and higher than Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, and had ample room for a gallery, but by this time, staircases and galleries, like the west end rooms, were a thing of the past.

[29] Like Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm has none of the western chambers common to a number of churches in Lasta which predate the Solomonic dynasty. There is, however, a raised, ashlar-framed rectangle in the south-west corner which would appear to have served as a reading platform.

[30] The ashlar rows would have served to maintain the level and to support the split stone and mortar courses above and below.

[31] The bays are delineated rather by the lateral beams than by the pillars, of which there are only two.

[32] The saddle-back roof over the nave is born by four tie beams, one at each end of the nave and two others supporting kingposts evenly spaced along it. This arrangement differs from the roofing structure of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, where a single queen post is placed above the centre of the nave.

On the interior, the supporting elements for the superstructure are stone, while the superstructure itself is wooden (the clerestorey is covered with stone and stucco). The wooden surfaces are painted throughout, for the most part with cross and geometric motifs sometimes similar to those found at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos. Unlike Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, however, the only arch to be found in the building is that at the entrance to the sanctuary. The weight of the superstructure is largely carried on heavy beams which run the full length of the church on either side of the nave.[33] They in turn are partially supported by two nave pillars.[34] A so-called "Aksumite" frieze stands above the nave beams, with moldings above and below. Above it is the clerestorey, decorated in its entirety with murals depicting Old and New Testament scenes, and figures of saints, monks and archangels.

The sanctuary itself consists of a single, undivided space running the full width of the church. The presence of the altar directly below the cupola, the cupola painting of the *maiestas domini*, and murals of the Annunciation and of St. Märqorewos on the east wall, clearly distinguish the central section to which they are confined; that central space is defined to the north and south by the two massive supporting beams which run the entire length of the church. The remainder of the sanctuary space to the north and south is undecorated and is presently used for storage. The distinction between sacred and storage space is undoubtedly indicative of the nearly contemporary transition from earlier architectural form under the Zagʷe when sanctuaries were commonly flanked by *pastophoria*. Their absence in a church, whose paintings are stylistically related to those in the rock-hewn church of Gännätä Maryam in the valley below, and which are dated to the reign of Yəkunno Amlak, point to Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm being an early construction of the Solomonic dynasty. This chronology points again to the conclusion that it was around the time of the transition from Zagʷe to Solomonic rule that the liturgy changed, and with it the shape and extent of the sanctuary. The presence of two, small, monoxyle wooden altars in the church points to the use of the northern and southern portions of the sanctuary for the celebration of the Eucharist (plate 13).

Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm is a rare example of a built 13th-century church and, like Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, owes its excellent state of preservation to

[33] The beams bear a series of cross-beams which rest on corbels located at the string course level.

[34] The two nave pillars have the sole purpose of holding up the great nave beams. They consist of two stone sections: a longer base with a slightly wider square upper capital. The beams only partially cover the top surface of the pillars, making them appear incomplete and unfinished. It is possible that they are reused stone.

having been constructed in a cave. In this context it is second only in size and lavishness to Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, which in many aspects it copied. Its architects were clearly aware of the method used at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos to prepare a flat, dry surface on which to build. Despite its innovative sanctuary, the church's construction is otherwise conservative, particularly in the use of heavy beams to support the nave walls rather than the general employment of arches as at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos and the neighbouring rock-hewn church of Gännätä Maryam. As I have mentioned, there are no known examples of the full width sanctuary from the Zagʷe period and before. The change towards the expanded sanctuary was on the way with Gännätä Maryam, where there is evidence in the form of a *maiestas domini* painted over the door leading from the south *pastophorion* to the sanctuary that this side room at least was used as an extension of the sanctuary.[35] At Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm, the east-west beams supporting the sanctuary frieze and cupola reflect the earlier division of space to the north and south, which the presence of the two wooden altars indicate beyond a doubt were also used for the occasional celebration of the Eucharist when the expanded sanctuary was introduced. This major architectural change followed a significant change in the liturgy (when the preparation of the *prothesis* was transferred from the *pastophorion* to the sanctuary itself) and provides a clear chronological marker for church building before and after the period of Zagʷe rule. It would appear that Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm is among the first, if not the first, example of the new style.[36]

The churches of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Gännätä Maryam and Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm are pivotal in our discussion of Zagʷe versus Solomonic churches. The 'old' style appearance of Gännätä Maryam, that is, with side rooms (*pastophoria*) flanking the sanctuary and three-quarter enclosed spaces flanking the vestibule at the west entrance (fig. 6), might suggest that this was a Zagʷe monument taken over by Yəkunno Amlak.[37] He could then have had the murals applied and it would have been under him that the sanctuary was expanded to the south *pastophorion*. A dedicatory inscription on the wall of the south aisle indicates that the king was responsible for the

[35] The paintings are by necessity later than the church, however. See BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA 2007: 134–137; FRITSCH – GERVERS 2007: 35ff.; see also BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA 2004: 22 and n. 69.

[36] The church could well have been another foundation of Yəkunno Amlak who, it has been argued, may have sought legitimacy for his new regime by borrowing from old forms while at the same time supporting the Church in its establishment of new ones (GERSTER 1970: 116).

[37] Cf. BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA 2007: 120ff.

building of the church and presumably for its decoration.[38] It would be prudent to take the evidence at face value and to see where it leads.

If the ground plan of Gännätä Maryam is 'old' style and closely related to the early monolithic counterparts at Lalibäla, then it could reasonably be argued that Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos was further on its way to the new style. That new style was realized at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos in its full-width, open western bay and its wooden altars which would have been used in the north and south *pastophoria* for the celebration of the Eucharist. Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm would have taken the process one step further by eliminating walls and doorways in the eastern bay thus making a full-width sanctuary, while using the cupola, beams and mural paintings to delineate and confirm the primacy of the central space. The process would, over the next century, lead to the opening up of the entire sanctuary, as in the church of Lalibäla Däbrä Sina and such Tigraen churches as Abba Yoḥanni (Tämben; fig. 11) and Däbrä Ṣəyon (Gärᶜalta; fig. 12). This scenario would lead, once again, to the obvious conclusion that the later churches of Lalibäla, namely the Däbrä Sina–Golgota–Śəllase complex and Betä Giyorgis, were Solomonic.[39]

Facing west on the opposite side of Ǝmäkina mountain lies the little church of Lədätä Maryam, also built in a cave (plate 14 and fig. 13).[40] The exterior has recently been covered with stucco, making the nature of the wall construction invisible. The church is smaller than Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm, with two bays and one set of monolithic, possibly reused Aksumite, pillars which support the heavy beams running along each side of the nave. There is a steep saddle-back ceiling supported by a king post and pitched trusses at either end. The drop arch above the sanctuary entrance is off-centred towards the north on the nave axis and is set behind the truss beam rather than below it, indicating that it is probably a later repair. That assumption is further corroborated by the absence of a cupola over the sanctuary, which might have collapsed. In its present state, the sanctuary itself is separated into two parts with a doorway leading to a southern room. There was once access to this room from the south aisle, but the doorway has been blocked. Without knowing whether the current sanctuary wall with three entrances conforms to the original, it is probable that the sanctuary itself once ran the full width of the building and that the interior wall creating the southern room was a later addition. The fact that the east-west aisle beams

[38] Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972: 291; Mercier – Lepage 2012: 100; Phillipson 2009: 116.

[39] Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos and Gännätä Maryam might then be seen as Solomonic satellite churches of Lalibäla, from which they are approximately equidistant.

[40] Balicka-Witakowska 2005: 269b–270b.

supporting the saddle back roof do not continue across the sanctuary, as they do in Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm, provides further evidence for a unified and uninterrupted horizontal east end space. This arrangement would bring Solomonic church building one step closer to the open sanctuary concept which was current by the late 14th or early 15th century.

The next example, at Walye Iyäsus, is new to the list of churches built in the caves of Abunä Yosef, having only recently been introduced by Jacques Mercier and Claude Lepage.[41] It is a small rectangular structure built on a flat surface and appearing somewhat like Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm except that it is constructed entirely of rows of ashlar blocks, alternately indented in acknowledgment of the wood- and stucco-faced layers of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos (plate 15). There is a saddle-back roof over the nave, but no extant cupola. The one interior photograph published is taken towards the north east and shows an ashlar pillar without a capital supporting a long nave beam, which in turn carries an ashlar clerestorey wall with one visible window. This wall bears the wooden saddle-back ceiling, described as being constructed "in three sections, forming a kind of half hexagon, over trusses resting on corbels".[42] Corbels in the ashlar wall carry a tie beam with queen posts. A wooden coffered vault rises above the central sanctuary. A wall separates the nave from a full-width sanctuary[43] with flat ceilings to the north and south on a level with those of the aisles. While generally in keeping with the churches in caves previously discussed, the overall construction appears rough and unfinished. It is nevertheless important as it bears two characteristics, the largely ashlar construction and the semi-hexagonal ceiling over the nave, which identify it as a close forerunner to the last known example of the group: Žämmädu Maryam (plate 16 and figs. 14a–b).

Although Žämmädu Maryam has been known since the publication in 1540 of Alvarez's sojourn in Ethiopia,[44] only Irmgard Bidder is recorded as having entered the church.[45] Bidder's few photographs, published in 1959, are all that we have of the interior.[46] The church is made entirely of large, red sandstone ashlars, a manner of construction which relates it to the 15th-

41 MERCIER – LEPAGE 2012: 28, 33, 70, 84, 89, 98, 102. What is known about this building derives from that book, and from personal correspondence with Fr. Emmanuel Fritsch, who examined the exterior during an expedition in 2013.

42 *Ibid*. 102, fig. 5.27.

43 *Ibid*. 165, n. 58.

44 BECKINGHAM – HUNTINGFORD 1961, I, 199–202.

45 BIDDER 1958: 39f., 132 and plates 63–68.

46 *Ibid*. plates 65ff. We also have David Buxton's comments about what he was able to ascertain by looking through the windows (BUXTON 1947: 21f.), and exterior plans made by Zara Thiessen in 2007.

century church of Betä Ləḥem in Gayənt (plate 17).[47] The entrance vestibule and aisles are flat roofed while the nave and clerestorey are surmounted by a barrel vault and the sanctuary is domed. Construction to the top of the clerestorey is stone, with the exception of wooden pillars without capitals which support straight, wooden lintel beams. There are two bays, but no arches. Also of wood are all ceilings, including the vault and dome, and corbels. Every centimetre of the woodwork is painted with geometric interlace based on the cross and, along the first row of vault panels, with angels and saints. The style of the figural decoration is similarly of the 15th century and thus undoubtedly of the same period as the building.

As we have seen, all five churches discussed are decorated with ceiling paintings and most with murals. A consideration of the more significant paintings provides further evidence for chronological progression and evaluation. To start with, the church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos has a series of murals in the north aisle depicting scenes from the Life and Passion of Christ (plate 18).[48] These are the finest Coptic, or Coptic inspired, mural paintings known in Ethiopia and are comparable, if not superior, in quality and preservation to extant works from Egypt. Although Gawdat Gabra has claimed upon a cursory view of photographs that the style is not, in fact, Coptic,[49] the round, compass drawn faces (plates 19a and 19c) would appear to be very much in line with counterparts from the churches of Abu Sarga in Cairo (plate 19b)[50] and St. Paul the Hermit near the Red Sea (plate 19d), dated to the second quarter of the 13th century.[51]

The ceiling paintings of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos are of an entirely different order, belonging to what is commonly referred to as the Arabo-Coptic style. This connotation applies to all Christian art in, or emanating from, Muslim controlled regions from the mid-seventh century onwards, regardless of whether the traditions from which it derived were predominantly Christian. Be that as it may, the ceiling art of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos can be divided into

[47] The sanctuary and entrance vestibule at Žämmädu Maryam are extensions of the nave, while the length of the aisles is determined by that of the nave alone. This arrangement makes the building appear cruciform from the outside, although it is not as the aisles serve as aisles rather than as equidistant arms of a cross. On the church of Betä Ləḥem in Gayent, see GERSTER 1970: 137–140 and plates 196–208; BOSC TIESSÉ 2003: 560.

[48] BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA – GERVERS 2001: 20–47 and figs. 7–16.

[49] Verbal communication, University of Toronto, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilization, 20 September 2004.

[50] Mäzgäbä Səəlat (*http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca*, UserID and Password: student): MG-2007.024:015; for dating see: LYSTER 2008: 176 and fig. 9.20.

[51] *Ibid*. 180, fig. 10.2 (lower portion) and Mäzgäbä Səəlat: MG-2007.008:030.

two categories: figural motifs and geometric design. The figural motifs are all to be found in the ceilings of the return aisle above the north and west portals. The great majority appear in the 17 rondels set in an integrated intarsia pattern above the west portal (plate 21).[52] They include human and equestrian figures, as well as animals, birds and trees, and a manned sailing ship. All have parallels in Coptic and Arabo-Coptic art and frequently too among the arts of Islam.[53] It would seem that there was by the 12th century if not before, and for some time thereafter, a large repertory of iconographical subjects available to artists of all religions in Egypt and the Mediterranean world and which were used by them somewhat indiscriminately, depending upon the context in which the images were to appear.[54]

The north portal ceiling is composed of a series of duodecagons arranged in interlocking cross formations. Within these are 25 hexagons, each containing a circle (plate 20).[55] There is nothing identifiably Christian about most of the figural ceiling images but, taking the individual elements of the north and west portal paintings as a whole, we find numerous stylistic and iconographical similarities with surviving Coptic painting from the Wādī n-Naṭrūn, Old Cairo and the monasteries of St. Antony and St. Paul on the Red Sea, which point to the 13th century as a time of composition.[56]

Strong arguments have been made for attributing all of the painted decoration of this church to the late 12th century, including the geometric painting on the saddle-back ceiling, on the arches, and on the other aisles ceilings. Mat Immerzeel's familiarity with comparative material from Egypt has led him to suggest instead that these forms are in fact much closer to the art of the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt, which began in 1250. His argument is based on "the interlace pattern of the frames, consisting of broad bands forming geometric patterns". These he finds first in Syriac manuscripts of the 1220s, a form which found popularity among Copts and Muslims under

[52] See GERVERS in preparation.

[53] In the same manner as the individual images hidden among the ceiling crevices in Roger II's Capella Palatina in Palermo, they belong to a phenomenon similar to what Jeremy Johns has referred to as an international school of Fatimid ceiling painters (personal email dated 1 October 2012). The phenomenon cannot have been limited to the Fatimids, however.

[54] BAER 1965: 2, 82; GELFER-JØRGENSEN 1986: 12, 14, 17, 177; GRABAR 2008: 130–132, esp. 132; GRUBE – JOHNS 2005: 17, 25; SKALOVA – GABRA 2001: 100.

[55] Here, figural motifs fill only four of the circles and represent a lion with a bird, a bird with a snake in its beak, an elephant and an equestrian.

[56] BOLMAN 2002: figs. 4.19 and 4.20 (pp. 49f.), fig. 12.7 (p. 201); LEROY 1978: 323–337; LYSTER 2008: 198f., 216, 236 and fig. 22.6, p. 238; WESTPHALEN 2007: fig. 13, p. 105; ZIBAWI 2003, fig. 7 (p. 20), fig. 203 (p. 158), fig. 226 (p. 172), fig. 277 (p. 207).

the Mamluks. As an early example, he cites a Coptic carpet page from manuscript *Bibl. 92* in the Coptic Museum, Cairo, dated 1272 (plate 22),[57] which imitates the front cover of a contemporary Koran.[58] He also identifies Early Mamluk patterns in the paintings of the architraves in Abu Sarga Church in Old Cairo, for which reason he places the paintings in the second half of the 13th century, if not later.[59]

A related question concerning the painted decoration of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos is whether it is contemporary with the original construction of the church, or whether it was applied later. If later, it would have entailed a full reroofing as all the ceiling paintings appear to have been applied to boards before they were raised to their current positions. If the application was concurrent with the building itself, and if the source of influence can be traced to the Mamluk Sultanate rather than to the Fatimids, there is every reason to doubt that the patron of the church was the eponymous king with which it has been associated since the 15th century.

Whether or not the interior murals of the church of Gännätä Maryam are contemporary with the rock-hewn monolith to which they were applied, it is nearly unanimously agreed that these paintings belong to the period of Yəkunno Amlak's rule, from 1270 to 1285. The ground plan has particular aspects in common with such early Lalibälan examples as Betä Libanos (fig. 7) and Mädḫane ᶜAläm, which may suggest that when Yəkunno Amlak defeated the Zagʷe in 1270 he took over an existing monument to which he merely applied the paintings. We have noted above that strong stylistic similarities have also been remarked between the figural murals of Gännätä Maryam and those of neighbouring Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm, to the point where all but Marilyn Heldman agree they were painted by the same workshop. She argues, however, that neither the same artist, nor even the same atelier were responsible for the murals in these two churches. Instead, she attributes the paintings of Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm "to the mid-13th century", thereby drawing the two churches closer together chronologically and suggesting that the Ǝmäkina paintings, and the church, were a generation earlier than those of Gännätä Maryam.[60] Without confirming the relative

[57] From LEROY 1974: 65 and plate 9/1; see also: HUNT 2009: 105–132.

[58] Personal email dated 17 July 2013, in which he adds that "Unfortunately there is no good overview of the introduction of Mamluk motifs in Coptic manuscript illumination …".

[59] His example shows that so-called 'Mamluk' geometric patterns were reproduced in Coptic manuscripts and woodwork from the 14th century, as well as in interior paintings.

[60] HELDMAN 2007: 94.

chronology of the murals, the ground plans (figs. 6 and 10) would argue otherwise for the reasons set out above.

At Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm the geometric patterns painted on wood are comparable to counterparts in Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, except that the workmanship is far less accomplished. The style is continued at Ǝmäkina Lədätä Maryam, where the product is even further simplified, not to speak of Walye Iyäsus. The tradition is perpetuated at Žämmädu Maryam,[61] where the quality is somewhat improved, although at a stage which is far removed from the point of departure two or three hundred years before.

The underlying question is whether the church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, the inspiration for churches built in caves in the Lasta region, was built three hundred, or two hundred years before Žämmädu Maryam. That is, was it built before the monoliths of Lalibäla, or at some point during the 13th century when the monoliths were being hewn from the rock? A Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos of the 12th century is noted as being the first known Ethiopian church to be without a *bema*, or raised chancel area;[62] the first to use arches to carry the walls of the nave;[63] and the first to be recorded with a reading platform (derivative of the Coptic *ambo*).[64] Furthermore, it has no monkey head binders in the walls, no identifiable Aksumite-style stepped foundation and, for want of a staircase and galleries, no west rooms. Most such characteristics would all have seemed to be totally normal a century later in the built churches of Lasta; namely those constructed in caves like Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos itself. Despite the absence of a stepped foundation and the west rooms, it is otherwise fully compatible with the later monoliths of Lalibäla: Betä Amanuᵓel (fig. 2) especially, and Abba Libanos (fig. 7), which it may well precede if only by a brief period, and Gännätä Maryam. The major difference in the Lalibälan context is the lack of western side rooms at Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, but that could be explained by the fact that, without stairs and galleries, there was no practical need for them. Furthermore, the geology of the cave in which the church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos was built may have imposed limitations on any western extension of the building. As it is, the ground rises noticeably at the west end of the structure and there is no visible rock-hewing here or elsewhere in the cave.

The greatest impediment to researchers, accepting a 13th-century date of construction for the church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, is the name itself. According to the king's 15th-century *gädl*, or *vita*, the site was previously called

61 Bidder 1958: 132.
62 Fritsch 2012: 103.
63 Mercier – Lepage 2012: 87.
64 Fritsch 2012: 105.

Wagra Səḫin, formerly Gəṣot, and the church was dedicated to St. Qirqos.[65] It is more than likely that the change of dedication took place around the mid-15th century, when it also seems that the name Lalibäla was given to the former Wärwär or Roḥa;[66] at a time, that is, when there was a combined effort on the part of Church and State to legitimize if not to rehabilitate the Zagʷe predecessors of the Solomonic dynasty. This move was undoubtedly a political effort to unify the country by appeasing the long-standing differences between Lasta and the Amhara region which were overtly played out in the controversy over the celebration of the Sabbath, resolved by King Zärʾa Yaᶜəqob at the Council of Däbrä Məṭmaq in 1450.[67]

The dating of the so-called church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos at Wagra Səḫin, as also of Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm, remains a matter of conjecture, but the signs point markedly towards a late Zagʷe construction for the former and an early Solomonic one for the latter. Closely between them would have lain the rock-hewn examples of Lalibäla Amanuʾel followed still under the Zagʷe by Gännätä Maryam. In this case, the introduction of the full-width sanctuary which characterizes all the known churches built in the caves of Abunä Yosef, except Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, could have been an innovation connected with the royal support of Alexandrian orthodoxy under the rule of Yəkunno Amlak (1270–85).

Why the churches discussed here were built in caves remains unexplained and calls for further enquiry.

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[65] MARRASSINI 1995: 85f.
[66] HELDMAN 1995: 25–38, esp. 33–38.
[67] TADDESSE TAMRAT 1972: 225–231, 235f.

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Summary

The five churches of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm, Ǝmäkina Lədätä Maryam, Walye Iyäsus and Žämmädu Maryam are all built in caves in the massif of Abunä Yosef, situated in the Lasta region of Wollo. Changes in their architectural forms suggest that they were constructed over a period of several hundred years in the order listed and as such represent a significant chronological model against which many of Ethiopia's rock-hewn churches may be compared. Until the publication of this paper, it has been universally accepted that the church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos was built in the second half of the 12th century under the sponsorship of an eponymous king. Aspects of the church's architecture, namely the absence of a raised space reserved for the priesthood before the triumphal arch (the *bema*), of any sign of a chancel barrier around it, of western service rooms, of a vestibule and narthex, and of the presence of a reading platform (representative of the Coptic *ambo*), of a full-width open western bay (allowing for a 'return aisle'), and of arches carrying the aisle ceilings, all point to a date of construction around the mid-13th century. In fact, the closest parallels to Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos may be found in Lalibäla's second group of monolithic churches, Amanuᵓel and Libanos. Closely associated also is the church of Gännätä Maryam. A painting of the *Maiestas Domini* in the south-east side room (*pastophorion*) of the latter suggests that the room served as an extension of the sanctuary. By the end of the 13th century, as witnessed by Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜAläm and the other churches built in caves, the full-width sanctuary becomes a characteristic which endures throughout 14th- and 15th -century Ethiopian church architecture. Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos and Gännätä Maryam stand on the cusp of a major liturgical change which coincides with the transfer of royal power from the Zagʷe *dynasty* to their Solomonic successors, who sought legitimacy by following Coptic practices.

Figures and plates[68]

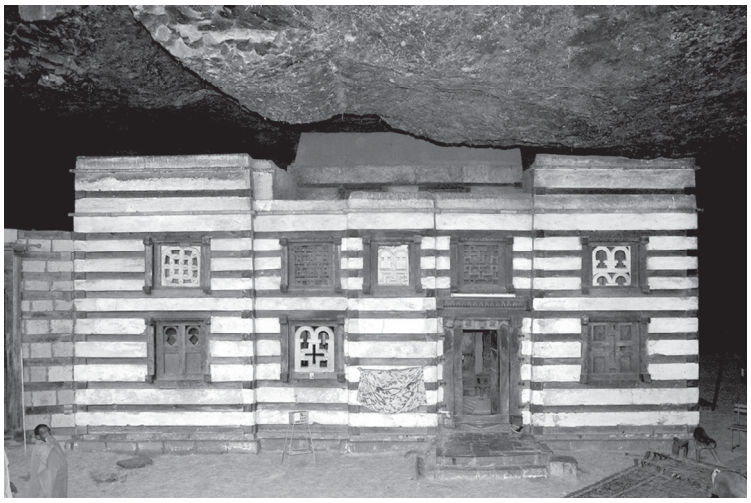

Plate 1: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, north façade; photo: MG-2007.231:001

Plate 2: Yəḥa Temple, Təgray, north façade showing stepped foundation; photo: MG-2006.009:014

[68] Photos by M. Gervers (MG) unless otherwise indicated. Ten digit numbers refer to images on the internet site Mazgaba Se'elet: *http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca* User ID & Password: student.

Plate 3: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, quoin block, photo: MG-2013

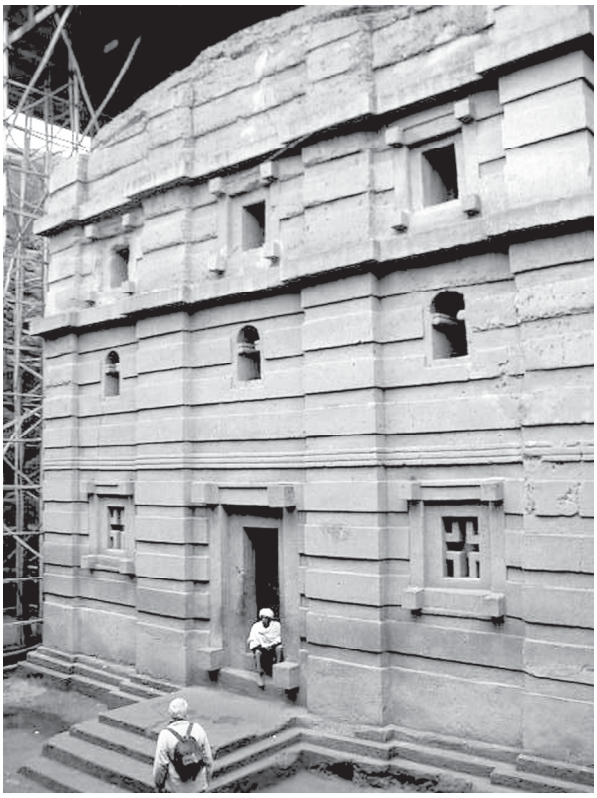

Plate 4: Church of Lalibäla Amanuʾel, Wällo, west façade; photo: Philippe Sidot

Plate 5: Church of Gännätä Maryam, Wällo, west and south façades; photo: MG-1993.028:027

Plate 6: Church of Bilbala Qirqos, Wällo, blind sanctuary door in north aisle; photo: MG-2000.016:012

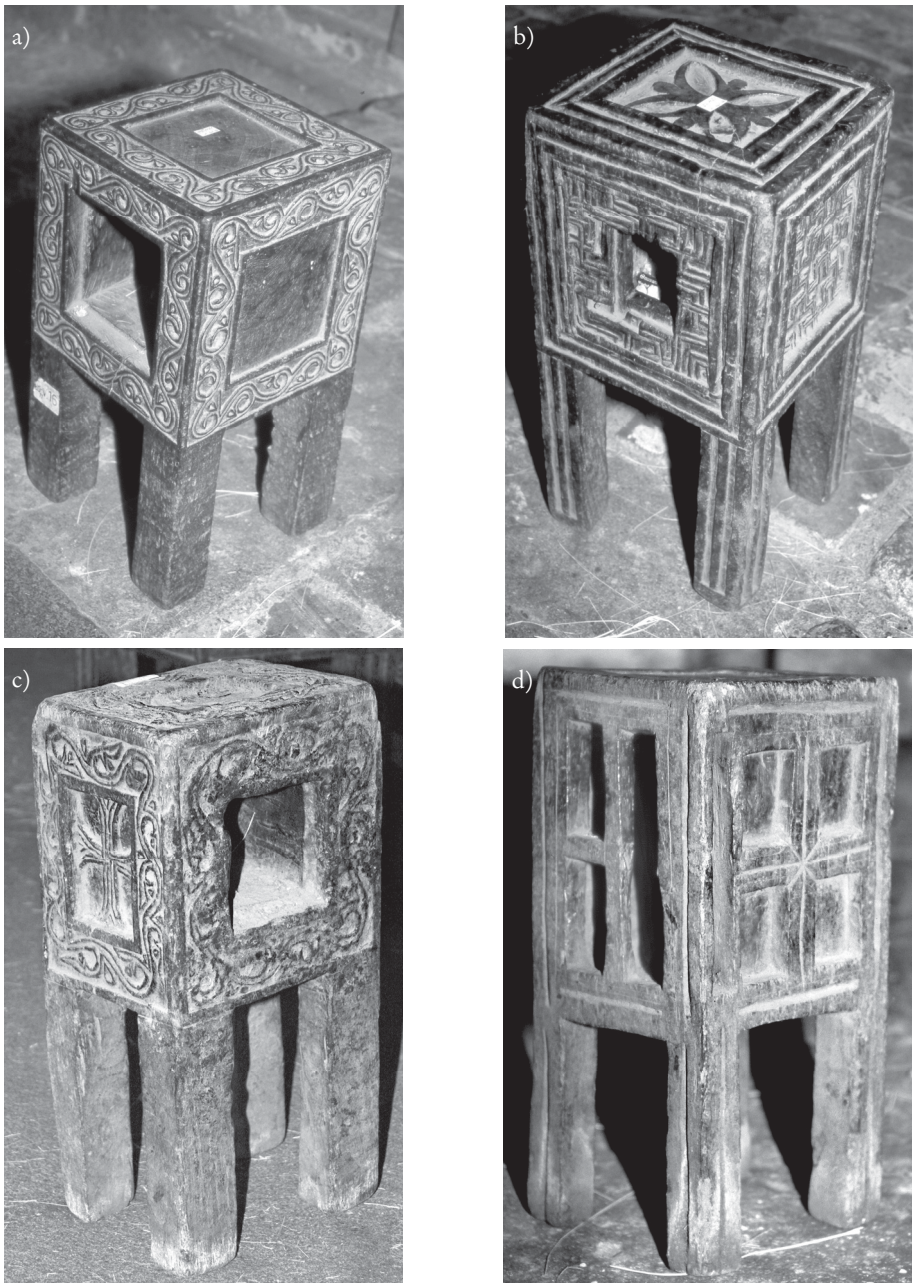

Plate 7a–d: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, four portable wooden altars (*mänbärä tabot*-s); photos: a) MG-2002.106:028; b) MG-2002.106:027; c) Diane Laville, 2009; d) MG-2002.106:030

Plate 8: Church of Lalibäla Śəllase, Wällo, three monolithic altars; photo: MG-1993.037:008

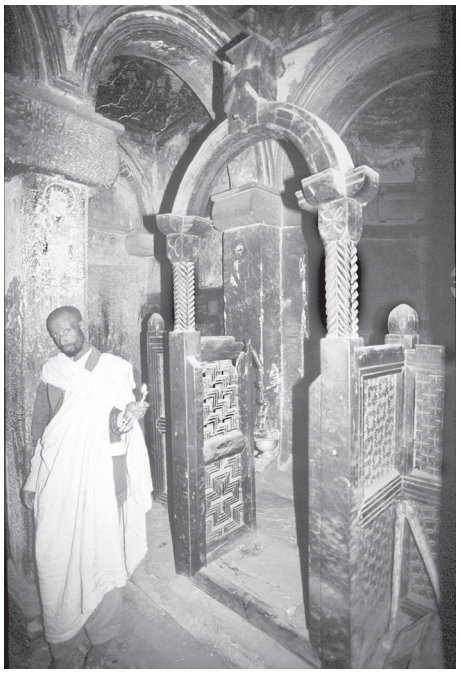

Plate 9: Church of Däbrä Sälam Mikaʾel, Təgray, chancel barrier; photo: MG-2000.080:033

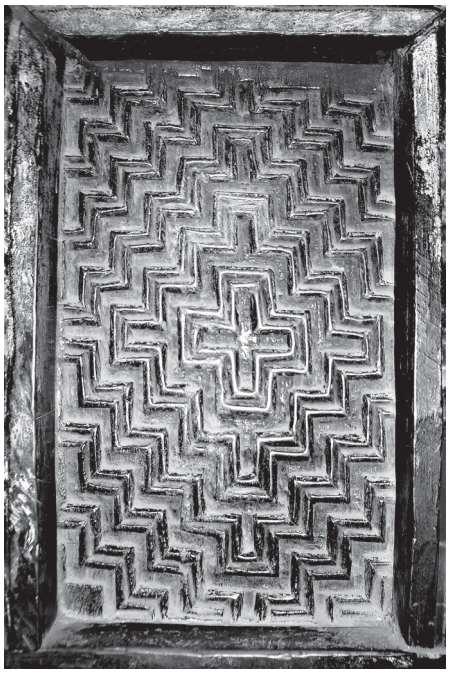

Plate 10: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, carved shutter from sanctuary, east end lower window (Fig. 1:4b; photo: Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, 2007)

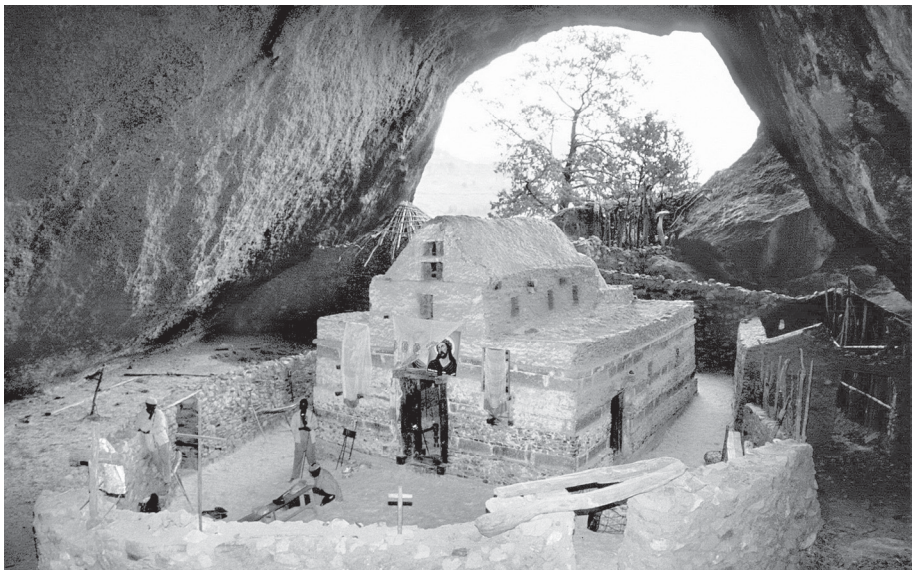

Plate 11: Church of ƎmäkinaMädḫane ᶜAläm, Wällo, view towards northeast; photo: MG-2004.125:032

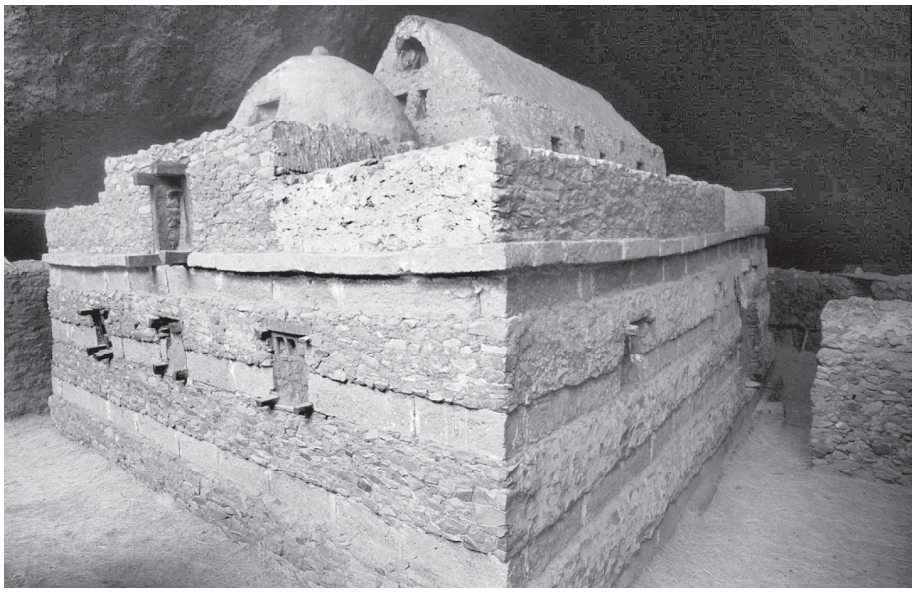

Plate 12: Church of ƎmäkinaMädḫane ᶜAläm, Wällo, east and north façades showing layered rubble stone and ashlar construction; photo: MG-2002.118:001

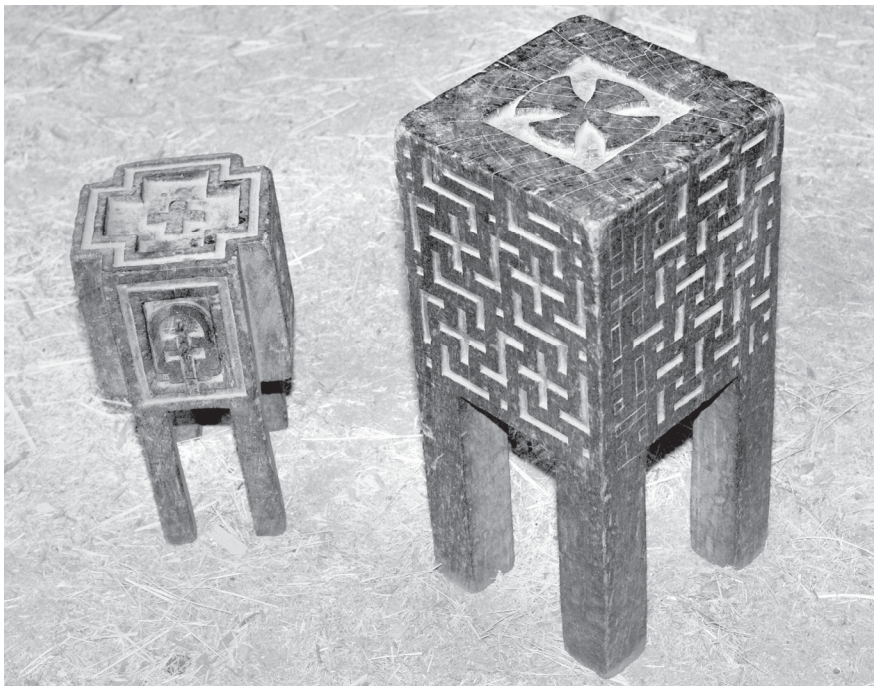

Plate 13: Church of Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ʿAläm, Wällo, two portable wooden altars (*mänbärä tabot*-s); photo: MG-DSC00239

Plate 14: Church of Lədätä Maryam, Wällo, west façade; photo: MG-2002.119:016

Plate 15: Church of Walye Iyäsus, Wällo, west façade; photo: Emmanuel Fritsch, 2013

Plate 16: Church of Žämmädu Maryam, east façade; photo: MG-2007.054:054

Plate 17: Church of Betä Ləḥem, Gayent, south façade; photo: MG-2005.108:001

Plate 18: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, mural of the Entry to Jerusalem from the east end of the north aisle; photo: MG-2007.243-031

Plate 19a: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, mural of the head of Christ, detail from plate 18; photo: MG-2007.244:068

Plate 19b: Church of Abu Sarga, Cairo, Egypt, mural of the head of Christ, c. 1232; photo: MG-2007.024:015

Plate 19c: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, head of a winged figure from the ceiling at the west portal; photo: MG-2007.239:002, detail

Plate 19d: Church of Paul the Hermit by the Red Sea, Monastery of St. Paul (Egypt), mural of Mary and an angel, before 1250; photo: MG-2007.008:034

Plate 20: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, ceiling at the north portal (Fig. 2:2A); photo: MG-DSCF1694

Plate 21: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, ceiling at the west portal with intarsia design (Fig. 1:1B); photo: MG-2007. 244:050

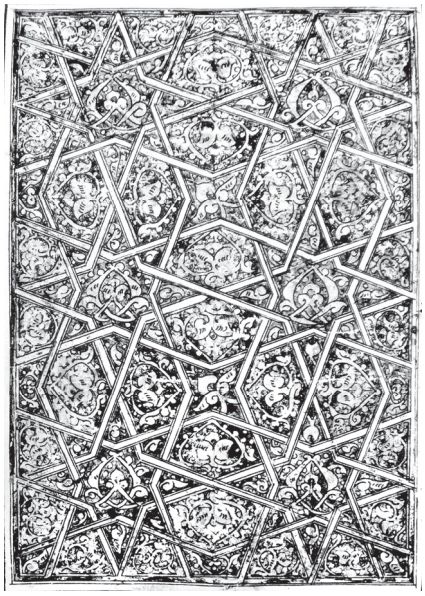

Plate 22: Carpet page with intarsia design from a Coptic Bible dated 1272; Coptic Museum, Cairo, *Bibl.* 92

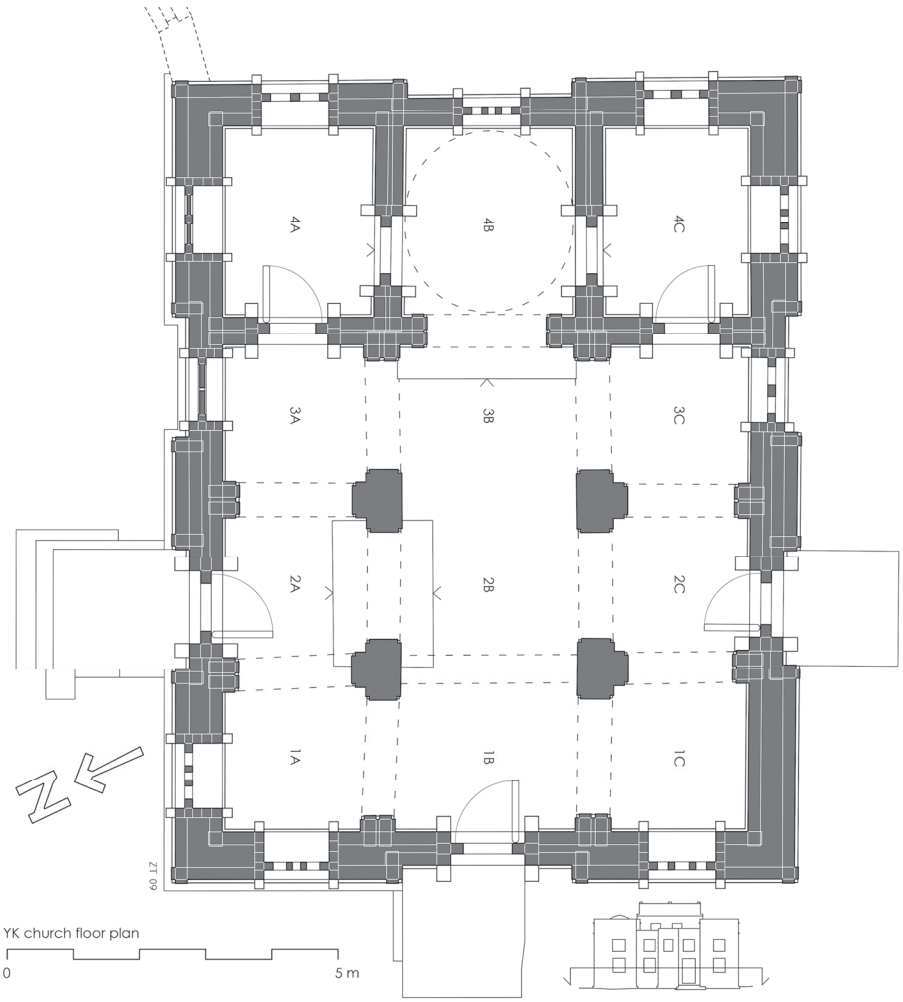

Fig. 1: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Wällo, floor plan; drawing by Zara Thiessen

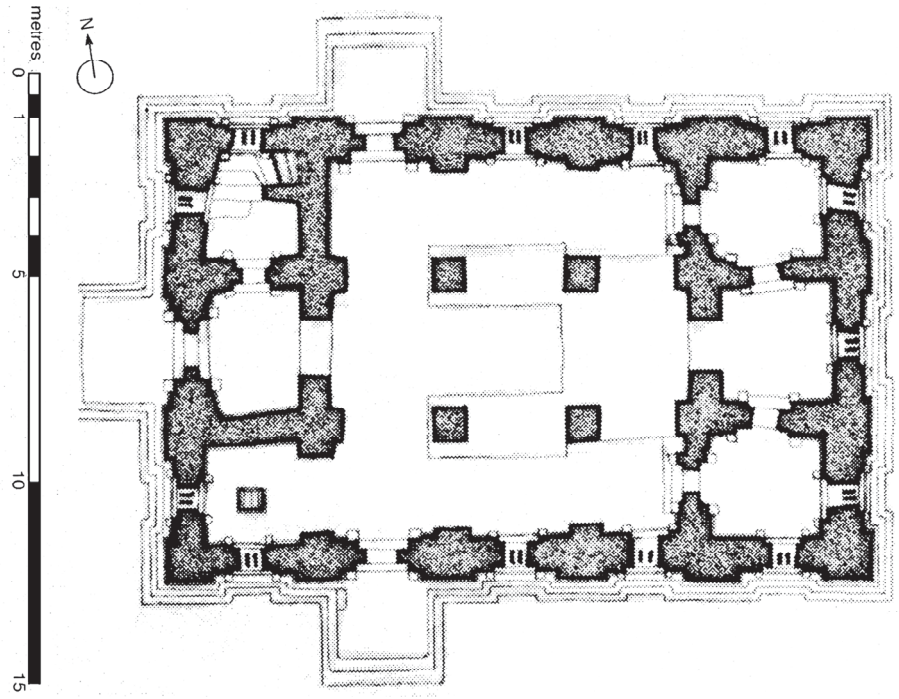

Fig. 2: Church of Lalibäla Amanu᾽el, Wällo, floor plan; after L. Bianchi Barriviera

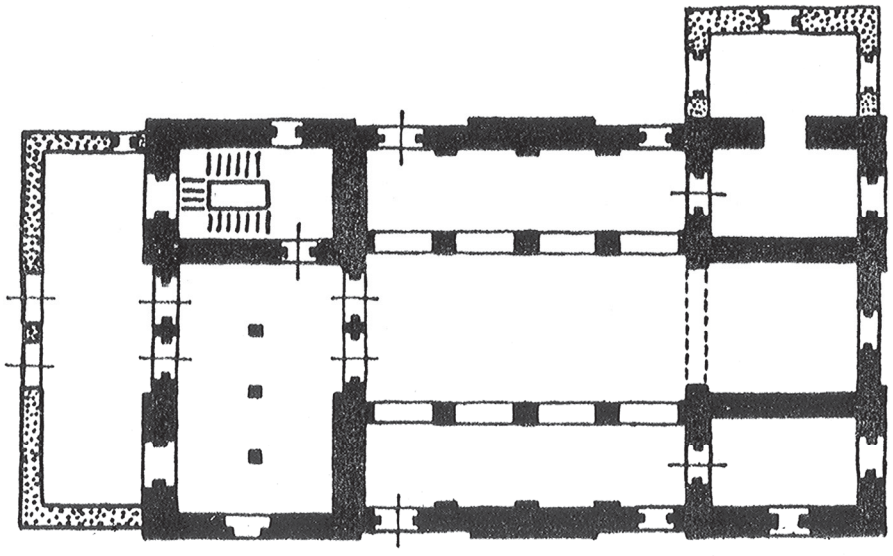

Fig. 3: Church of Däbrä Dammo, Təgray, floor plan; after *Deutsche Aksum Expedition*

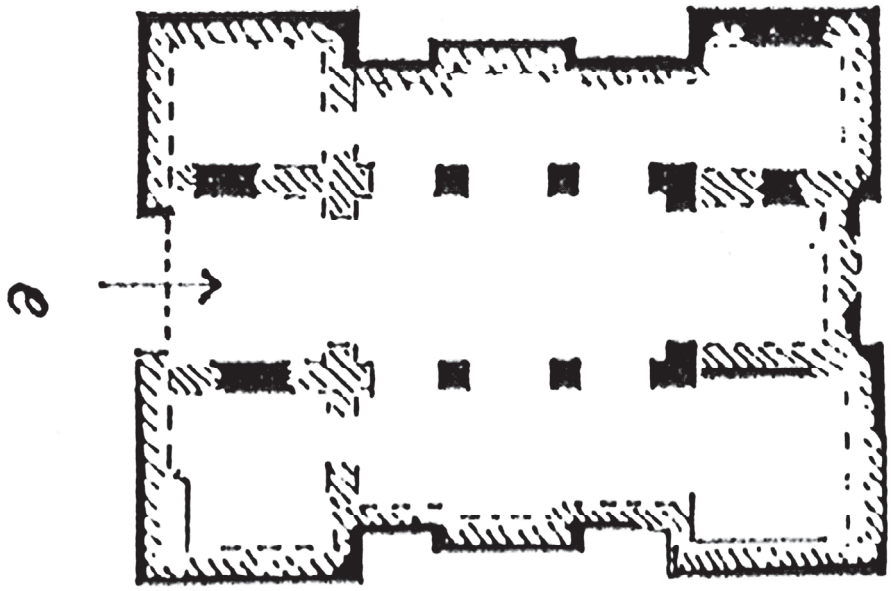

Fig. 4: Church of Qoḥayto, Akkälä Guzay, Eritrea, floor plan; from Buxton, after Krencker

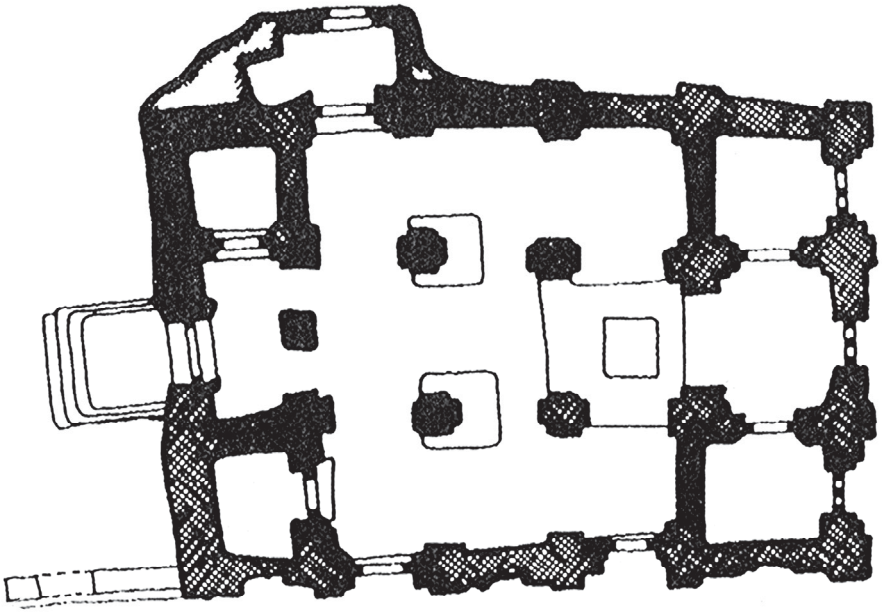

Fig. 5: Church of Wəqro Mäsqäl, Säqoṭa, Wällo, floor plan; after L. Bianchi Barriviera

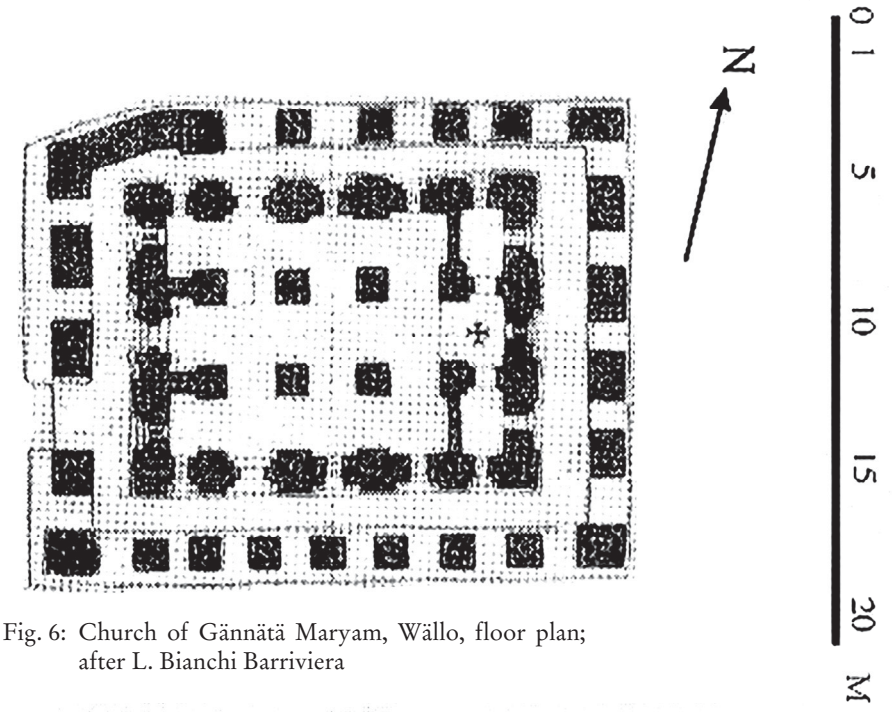

Fig. 6: Church of Gännätä Maryam, Wällo, floor plan; after L. Bianchi Barriviera

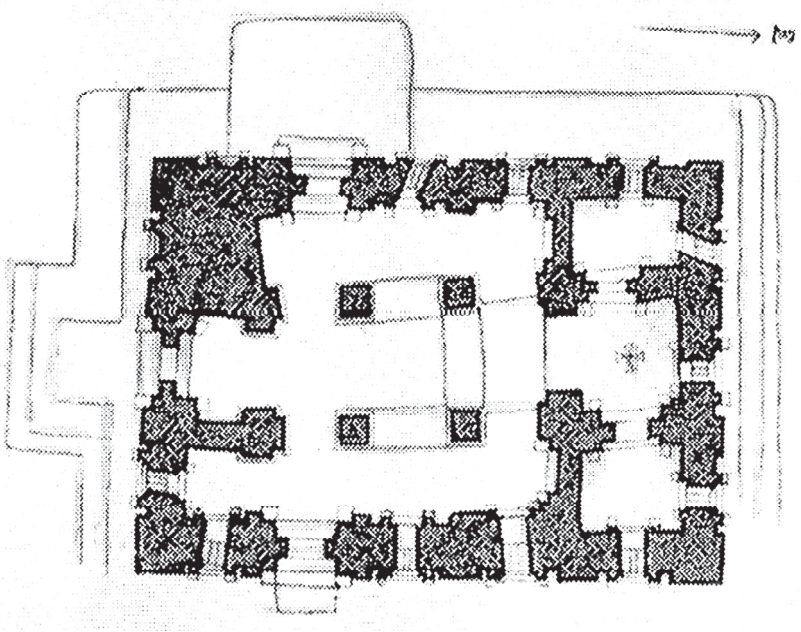

Fig. 7: Church of Lalibäla Libanos, Wällo, floor plan; after L. Bianchi Barriviera

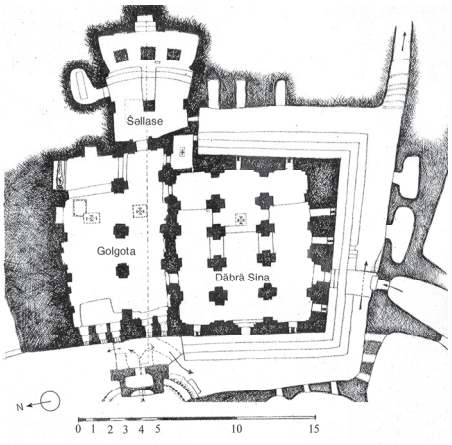

Fig. 8: Churches of Däbrä Sina, Golgota, Śəllase, in Lalibäla, Wällo, floor plans; after L. Bianchi Barriviera

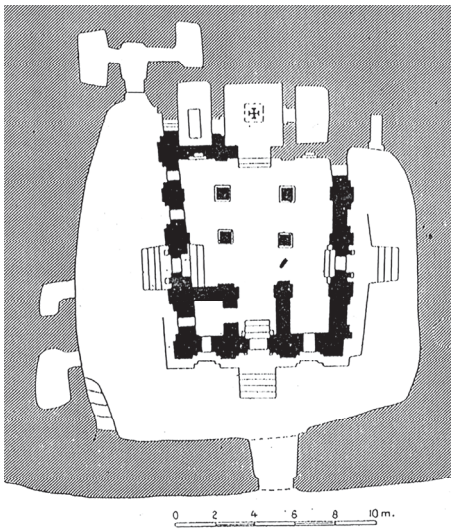

Fig. 9: Church of Bilbala Qirqos, Wällo, floor plan; after Monti della Corte

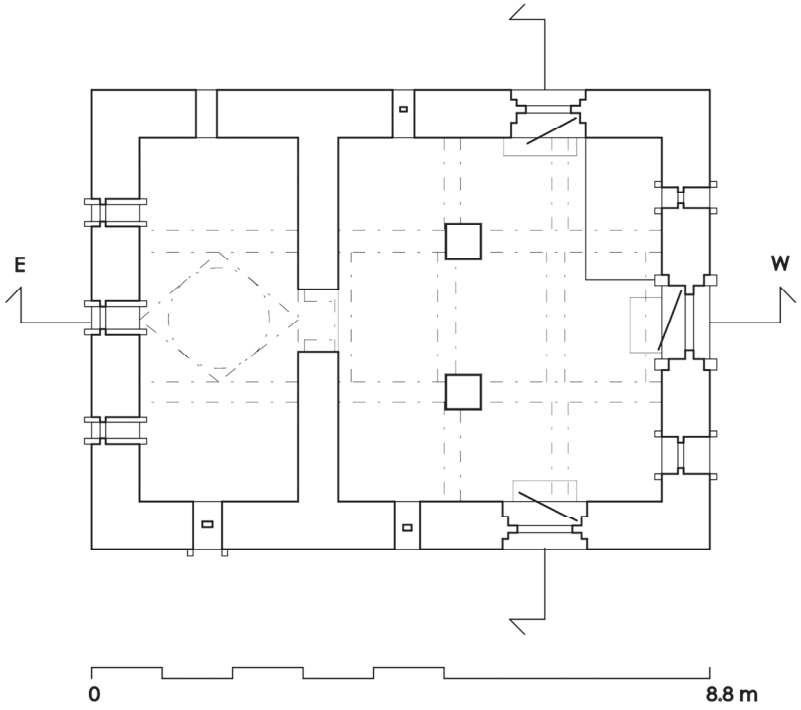

Fig. 10: Church of ƎmäkinaMädḫane ʿAläm, Wällo, floor plan; drawing by Zara Thiessen

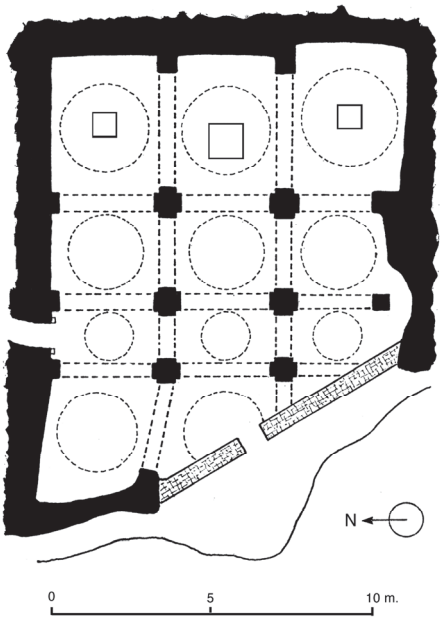

Fig. 11: Church of Abba Yohanni, Tämben, Təgray, floor plan; after R. Plant

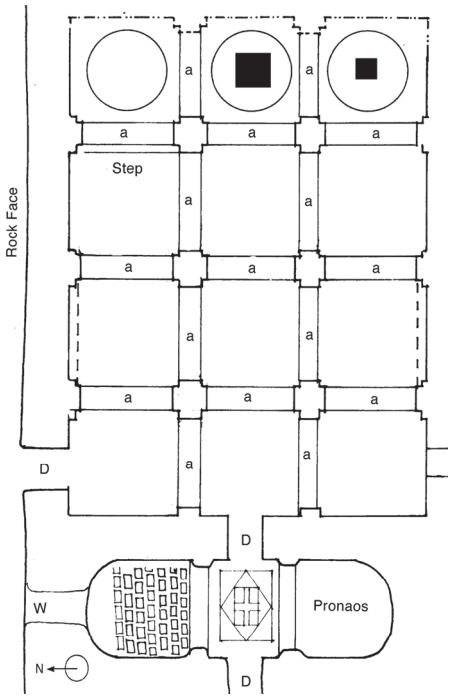

Fig. 12: Church of Däbrä Ṣəyon, Gärᶜalta, Təgray, floor plan; after R. Plant

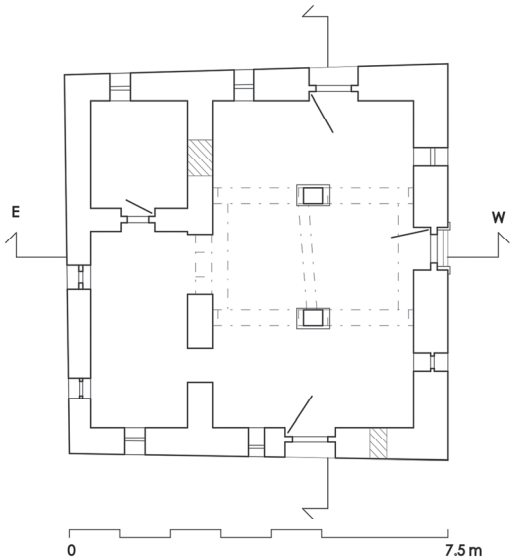

Fig. 13: Church of Lədätä Maryam, Wällo, floor plan; drawing by Zara Thiessen

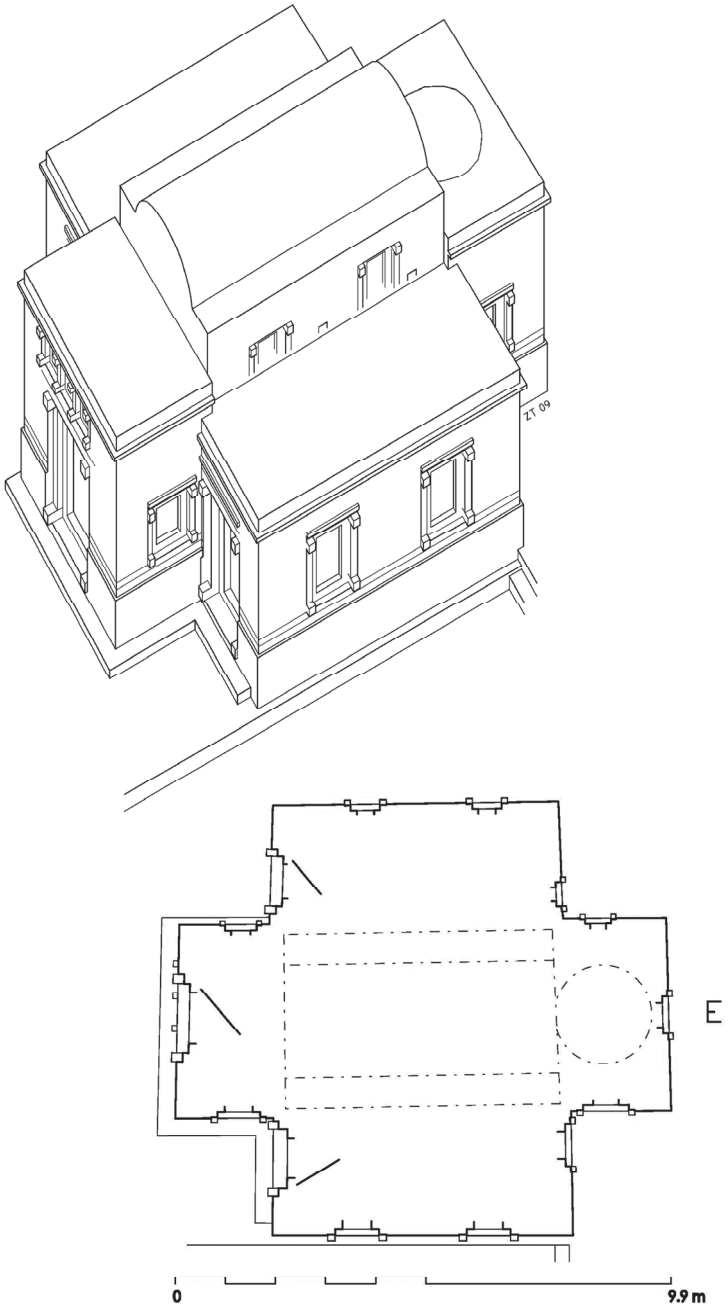

Fig. 14: Church of Žämmädu Maryam, Wällo; isometric drawing and floor plan by Zara Thiessen