

# [Aksumite its prime times to the present day](https://assignbuster.com/aksumite-its-prime-times-to-the-present-day/)

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AKSUMITE CIVILIZATION AND ITS LEGACYAksum was an AncientAfrican civilization that existed between 100-940 A. D.(9)                                                             OriginKingdom of Aksumwas originally confined to the territory of present day Eritrea and NorthernEthiopia.

Its first capital city was Mazaber and was built by Ityopis, Son ofCush.(10)The capital of theempire latter moved to town of Aksum and remained there throughout. Aksum, however, was at the western part of the future (expanded) Aksumite kingdom whichincluded the Red Sea Coast and even extended in its prime times to the presentday Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Somalia. The choice ofAksum as empire’s capital in the beginning was due to its economicallystrategic location. Aksum lies at thecenter of important interior trade routes.

Some of these trade routes include: The routeconnecting Nile and Adulis, the route connecting to Cataracts eventuallyleading to Egypt, the Southern route to Somali Coast and the route that runstowards Agaw lands and Sasu which was known for its gold trade. Besides the trade, Aksum and its surrounding environment had favorable climate for agriculture. Ithad fertile soils and access to water resources throughout the year due to theabundant rainfall.(2)Another town ofthe empire worth of mentioning is Adulis. Adulis , the chief of Aksumite portson Red Sea played an important role in the kingdom’s international trade.                                                      Language and ReligionOriginalinhabitants of Aksum were speakers of a language that resembled a Semiticdialect of South Arabian language. The alphabets usedin writing were modified versions of South Arabian script and contained onlyconsonants. The direction of writing was from left to right unlike the South Arabianone.

The new anddifferent script containing vowels was first depicted in the Great inscriptionsof King Ezana. The syllabisim used in these scripts became the basis for subsequentEthiopic script. King Ezana’s greatinscription was written by a language of Semitic origin called Geez. It was theofficial language Aksumite civilization and it is still used as liturgicallanguage of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church. InitiallyAksumites were Polytheists.

They practiced religions related to religions inSouth Arabia. The use of crescent disc shaped symbol in coinage verified these. The resources fromfourth century indicates that the Aksumite kingdom adopted a new religion, Christianity. This recorded in inscriptions of King Ezana and his coins. King Ezana’s inscriptionindicates reference to phrases such as Holy Father, Son, Holy Ghost (Holytrinity in Christian belief) not previous gods.(2)In the coinage ofEzana’s reign the previous crescent shaped disc symbol was replaced by Cross, the symbol of Christian faith.

King Ezana wasconverted to Christianity by the teachings of Frumentius. It is believed thatFrumentius taught the king while he was young and later the emperor made Christianitythe official religion of the kingdom. After the adoption of Christianity asofficial religion of Aksum, Frumentius was anointed as the first archbishop ofthe church.

He is accepted as the Father of Ethiopian Orthodox Church and reverencedwith the name Kasate Birhan Aba Selama( The Light Bearer).(6)In (4) it isproposed that King Ezana adopted Christianity with the ambition of unifying hiskingdom under one religion and with the ambition of trading with ChristianRomans. These are, however, unlikely reasons for the adoption of Christianity by King Ezana. It is obvious that religion is a toolfrequently used by rulers to consolidate power and eliminate disobedience. Butin the case of Aksumites, they were not diversified in religion before theadoption of Christianity. They were all polytheists worshipping common gods. There is no plausible reason to assume that a new religion (Christianity) canunify Aksumites If they were already homogenous society in terms of religion.

Moreover KingEzana’s conversion to Christianity might have gained him a new trading ally, Roman Empire. But if this (getting new trade ally) in fact was Ezana’s mainmotive of converting to Christianity, by this logic, on the other hand, hecould have lost South Arabia, the main trading partner of his kingdom. King Ezana adoptedChristianity most probably because he believed that what Frumentius taught wascorrect. He converted neither for the sake of strengthening his political powernor for the sake of friendship with Roman Empire.

In fact when the Christianchurch divided on the issue of doctrine at Fourth Ecumenical Council ofChalcedon, The Aksumite church sided with Oriental Orthodoxy rejecting theteaching of Roman counterpart.                                                                                                             EconomyAs mentioned inMonumentum Adulitanum inscription, the land route to Egypt and the defense ofthe Red Sea Coasts on both the African and the Arabian sides were objects ofvigilance to the Aksumite kingdom.(2)Aksum kingdomoccupied a strategic location in Red Sea Coastal line thus obtaining majorproportion of its wealth from international trade.

The Periplus of EritreanSea, the first century travel note written by Egypt Merchant, accounts forAksum’s practice of exporting Ivory and importing cloth and glassware fromEgypt. Another early document by Pliny points out that Aksum exported mainlyanimal or human resources. These include rhinoceros’s horn, hippopotamus hides, tortoise shells, monkeys and slaves.(2)Salt was also aprominent good in internal trade of the kingdom.

Salt was brought from EasternDanakil region in the forms of blocks locally called Amole. Taxation fromcitizens and foreign traders who uses the route (port) was another source ofincome for the kingdom. Tax is generally paid in kind or Money. Agriculture wasthe source of income and food for the majority peasant population of Aksum. Thefertile land abundant rainfall helped in twice a year cultivation of somecrops. Some of the coins of Aksum depict a drawing of crop (most likely wheatstalk) emphasizing the importance of agriculture to the kingdom. Animal husbandrywas also part of the economy. Cattles sheep, camels, elephants, etc.

were usedfor various purposes such as ploughing, food, transportation, ivory, etc. In pre-ChristianAksum some animals were sacrificed for deities.                                                                                                                CoinageAksum was thefirst Sub-Saharan civilization to mint its own coinage. The coins were struckin gold, silver and bronze.(1) As indicated in  (2) the necessity for such currency stands in a direct ratio tothe complexity of the society which has developed. That is the ability to issueits own currency is an indicator of Aksum kingdom’s wealth/ status. Anothersignificance of Aksum coinage is that, as an archaeological objects they aresources of some important of information about the kingdom.

For instance, thecomplete list of kings of Aksum kingdom is made from the texts and drawings onthe coinage of the kingdom.(5)Coins before thereign of King Ezana have a drawing of crescent shaped disc. Whereas the coinsduring king Ezana’s reign depict a drawing of cross. By examining these twocoinage alone, one can arguably speculate that it was during King Ezana’s reignthat the Aksumites converted to Christianity from polytheism. At the late stagethe Aksum coinage was used as a propaganda tool by rulers.(2) Coinageof each King appeared with a motto on a reverse side. For instance a bronzecoin by King Ezana or his successor had a Greek motto TOYTOAPECH meaning ‘ Maythis please the people.

‘ Other mottoes usedby Fifth Century Kings include religious themes such as ‘ By the grace of God’,’Christ is with us’, etc. King Kaleb’s motto reads ‘ Son of Tazena’. The wordingthis motto sounds that King Kaleb wanted to affirm his legitimate succession tothe throne.

(2)                                                                                                                                               Monumental ArchitectureOne piece ofmonumental architecture that features Aksum civilization is the stelae. Stelae aretall stone towers used to mark the location of graves of the nobles. Thenotable stelae of Aksum includes the Great stelae (108 feet), The king Ezanastele and the Obelisk of Aksum. The Obelisk wasdiscovered by Italian soldiers in 1935’s conquest of Ethiopia. The soldiersbrought the 160 ton stele as a loot to Rome in three pieces and reassembled it. The UN condemned Italy’s action and ordered the return of Obelisk to Ethiopia. However it was finally in 2007 the obelisk returned to Aksum.(8) Thedesigns of the obelisk represent a multi-storey palace with fake windows andfake doors.

Decline of the CivilizationVarious factorsare attributed to the downfall of Aksumite civilization. These include externaland internal conflicts, exploitation of resources and natural climate factors. In 6th century thetrade route of Red Sea and Nile was controlled by the new Islamic empire. Thisisolated Aksum from its international trade, a major blow to the kingdom’sprestigious economy.(2) After weakening its economy the kingdom gradually stoppedproducing coins.

It also further moved its territory inland for a protectionfrom external aggressors. Domestic rivals probablytook advantage and waged attack on already declining kingdom. It is believedthat a Jewish Queen Yodit Gudit defeated the empire and burned its churches andliterature.

Another tale isthat a Queen from South ended the empire in 10th century.                                                                               Aksum in legends and old literature As depicted inEthiopian book of Kibre Negest( Glory of the Kings) and Bible, Queen of Shebatravelled to Jerusalem to visit King Solomon. According to Kibre Negest Sheslept with King Solomon and conceived a son who upon the birth named asMenelik. When Menelik grew up he went to Jerusalem to see his father, KingSolomon, and returned home with the Arc of the Covenant, the sacred biblical tabletcontaining the Ten Commandments. (7)Since then The Arc of Covenant is believed to bekept inside the church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in Aksum.

Najashi is an Abyssinian(Aksumite) king who is mentioned in Islam scriptures (Quran). He welcomed andprotected the Muslim emigrants who fled the persecution of pagan Mecca.