Aksum was the name of a city and a kingdom which is essentially modern-day northern Ethiopia (Tigray province) and Eritrea. Research shows that Aksum was a major naval and trading power from the 1st to the 7th centuries C.E. As a civilization it had a profound impact upon the people of Egypt, southern Arabia, Europe and Asia.

Aksum developed a civilization and empire whose influence, at its height in the 4th and 5th centuries C.E., extended throughout the regions lying south of the Roman Empire, from the fringes of the Sahara in the west, across the Red Sea to the inner Arabian desert in the east. The Aksumites developed Africa's only indigenous written script, Ge'ez. They traded with Egypt, the eastern Mediterranean and Arabia.

Very little is known about Aksum. Written scripts existed, but no histories or descriptions have been found to make this African civilization come alive.

**A counterpoint to the Greek and Roman worlds**

Aksum provides a counterpoint to the Greek and Roman worlds, and is an interesting example of a sub-Saharan civilization flourishing towards the end of the period of the great Mediterranean empires. It provides a link between the trading systems of the Mediterranean and the Asiatic world, and shows the extent of international commerce at that time. It holds the fascination of being a "lost" civilization, yet one that was African, Christian, with its own script and coinage, and with an international reputation. It was arguably as advanced as the Western European societies of the time.

The society was hierarchical with a king at the top, then nobles, and the general population below. This can be discerned by the buildings that have been found, and the wealth of the goods found in them. Although Aksum had writing, very little has been found out about society from inscriptions. It can be assumed that priests were important, and probably traders, too, because of the money they would have made. Most of the poor were probably craftsmen or farmers. In some descriptions, the ruler is described as "King of Kings." There is evidence of at least 10–12 small towns in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>around 3000 - 750BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kush</td>
<td>around 750BC - 350AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aksum</td>
<td>around 340-650AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>around 400 -1200AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>around 1235 -1502AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songhai</td>
<td>around 1375 -1591AD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Little or nothing is known about such things as the role of women and family life.

**Christianity**

Aksum embraced the Orthodox tradition of Christianity in the 4th century (c. 340–356 C.E.) under the rule of King Ezana. The king had been converted by Frumentius, a former Syrian captive who was made Bishop of Aksum. On his return, Frumentius had promptly baptized King Ezana, who then declared Aksum a Christian state, followed by the king's active converting of the Aksumites. By the 6th century, King Kaleb was recognized as a Christian by the emperor Justin I of Byzantium (ruled 518–527) when he sought Kaleb's support in avenging atrocities suffered by fellow Christians in South Arabia. This invasion saw the inclusion of the region into the Aksumite kingdom for the next seven decades.

**Judaism**

Although Christianity had a profound effect upon Aksum, Judaism also had a substantial impact on the kingdom. A group of people from the region called the Beta Israel have been described as "Black Jews." They adhere to religious beliefs and practices set out in the Pentateuch (Torah), the religious texts of the Jewish religion. Although often regarded by scholars/academics as not technically "Jewish" but instead a pre-Christian, Semitic people, their religion shares a common ancestry with modern Judaism. Between 1985 and 1991 almost the whole Beta Israel population of Ethiopia was moved to Israel.

**Solomon and Sheba**

The Queen of Sheba and King Solomon are important figures in Ethiopian heritage. Traditional accounts describe their meeting when Sheba, Queen of Aksum, went to Jerusalem, and their son Menelik I formed the Solomonic dynasty from which the rulers of Ethiopia (up to the 1970s) are said to be descended. It has also been claimed that Aksum is the home of the Biblical Ark of the Covenant, in which lies the "Tablets of Law" upon which the Ten Commandments are inscribed. Menelik is believed to have taken it on a visit to Jerusalem to see his father. It is supposed to reside still in the Church of St Mary in Aksum, though no-one is allowed to set eyes on it. Replicas of the Ark, called Tabots, are housed in all of Ethiopia's churches, and are carried in procession on special days.
Choose the Best Answers

1. ______ 1. Where was the Aksum Empire located?
   A. Southwestern Africa
   B. Northeastern Africa
   C. Western Africa
   D. North Africa
   E. Southeast Asia

2. ______ 2. What body of water bordered the Aksum Empire to the East?
   A. Congo River
   B. Niger River
   C. Nile River
   D. Amazon River
   E. Yangtze River

3. ______ 3. One of the great Aksum Kings was King Ezana. What religion did he establish in Aksum?
   A. Christianity
   B. Islam
   C. Buddhism
   D. Hinduism
   E. Sikhism

4. ______ 4. How many small towns do historians believe were established in the Aksum Kingdom?
   A. 10-12 small towns - an Urban Society
   B. 20-25 large cities - an Urban Society
   C. 5-6 small villages - a rural society
   D. Historians know little or nothing about the cities established by the Aksum

5. ______ 5. Which statement is True about Aksum’s history?
   A. Aksum is one Africa’s most well known and famous kingdoms
   B. Unlike other African Kingdoms, Aksum did not trade very much with other kingdoms. They were isolated and alone
   C. Islam was established in Aksum by King Ezana around 340-356AD
   D. Aksum did not have its own script and coinage, they used the Kush system.
   E. Aksum was as advanced as the Western European societies of the similar time period.

6. ______ 6. Who were the “Black Jews” of the Aksum Kingdom?
   A. They followed the religious beliefs and practices set out in the Hebrew Torah.
   B. They were a Semitic people, that shared many religious ideas with modern Jewish folks.
   C. They are from a region often referred to as “Beta Israel”
   D. Between 1985 and 1991 almost the whole Beta Israel population of Aksum (now called Ethiopia) moved to Israel
   E. All of these

7. ______ 7. The famous King Solomon of Israel was married what woman of Aksum (Ethiopian) heritage?
   A. Princess Laia
   B. Duchess Jasmine
   C. Menelik I
   D. Queen Elizabeth II
   E. The Queen of Sheba

8. ______ 8. The fabled Ark of the Covenant is said to be hidden in the Aksum Kingdom’s famous Church of St. Mary. What religious relic is said to stored inside the Ark?
   A. The remains (bones) of Jesus of Nazareth
   B. The knife that Abraham was going to use to sacrifice his son Isaac
   C. The answer to this week’s extra credit question
   D. Joseph’s (Jesus’ human father) set of carpentry tools. Jesus used them as a young boy before becoming the Messiah
   E. The original stone tablets of the Ten Commandments

9. ______ 9. What modern African countries are located where the Kingdom of Aksum was found?
   A. Somalia and Kenya
   B. Egypt and Libya
   C. Kilimanjaroland and Saharaland
   D. Ghana and Mali
   E. Ethiopia and Eritrea

10. ______ 10. According to the chart which empire listed below is oldest?
    A. Kush Empire
    B. Empire of Mali
    C. Songhai Empire
    D. Ghana Empire
    E. Aksum Empire

Name: ____________________________