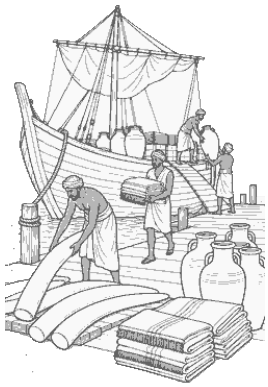
Name: _____

Date: _____

Aksum and Ethiopia



More than 2,000 years ago, sailors on the Red Sea watched for the low buildings of Adulis, a port that traded with three continents. Ships arrived from Egypt, Arabia, Persia, and across the Indian Ocean, all seeking the same African ivory, tortoiseshell, rhinoceros horn, and gold carried up from the interior.

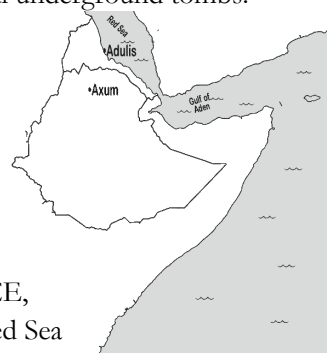
Aksum

Traders unloaded wine and olive oil from the Mediterranean, glass and metalwork, and fine cloth from India and Egypt. Sailors, merchants, and translators from a half-dozen lands crowded its docks and markets, making Adulis one of the most cosmopolitan places in the ancient world.

Adulis and Aksum grew together into one kingdom. Aksum, about 100 miles away from Adulis in the highlands, needed a sea outlet for trade. Adulis, on the coast, needed goods to trade and a food source, since the coast could not grow enough on its own. Over time, the two became parts of the same kingdom, with Aksum as the capital and Adulis as its port.

Great Wealth

By the 500s, trade had transformed Aksum into a capital worthy of a powerful king. Its royal palaces stood on high stone platforms above the surrounding city. One palace complex was nearly the size of two football fields. Inside were paved floors, courtyards, painted rooms, and columns that supported upper stories. Nearby stood towering stone stelae, giant carved obelisks that marked royal underground tombs. The kingdom was so formidable that the Persian prophet Mani ranked Aksum alongside Rome, Persia, and China as one of the four great powers of the world.



Christianity

In the early fourth century CE, Christianity traveled the same Red Sea routes that had brought wealth to Aksum. According to Christian tradition, a young Christian named Frumentius was captured after his ship stopped along the Red Sea coast. Taken to the royal court, he became tutor to the young prince Ezana. When Ezana became king, he adopted Christianity. Christianity had spread through Egypt and the Roman world, and now had one of its earliest African kingdoms.

Decline

During the seventh century CE, the trade network that had made Aksum rich began to break apart. Muslim states gained control of much of the Red Sea, and trade routes that had once passed through Adulis shifted elsewhere. The port declined, and Aksum gradually lost its political power. The city did not vanish, however. It remained a holy Christian center, and emperors continued to be crowned there for centuries.

Ethiopia

Cut off from the Red Sea, the Christian kingdom retreated south into the rugged highlands. Over time, the name Ethiopia, first used by Greek writers for lands south of Egypt, came to describe the highland kingdom that grew from Aksum. There, a new highland dynasty rose, and one of its kings ordered eleven churches carved straight out of solid volcanic rock at Lalibela. The complex showed that Ethiopia's rulers still had the wealth, skilled workers, and authority to undertake enormous building projects. A later dynasty governed Ethiopia for seven centuries, until its final emperor, Haile Selassie, was overthrown in 1974.

Two Cities, Two Countries

European countries controlled nearly all of Africa. Ethiopia remained independent except from 1936 to 1941, when Italy occupied the country. Decades of conflict led to coastal independence in 1993, creating modern Eritrea. Aksum remained in Ethiopia, while Adulis became part of Eritrea—finally severing the ancient relationship between the highland capital and the sea.

©Mike Dowling, mrdowling.com. All Rights Reserved.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Fill in the Blanks

More than 2,000 years ago, Adulis was a busy p_____ on the R__d S__a. Ships came from E__y__t, Arabia, P__rs__a, and I__d__a, seeking African i__o__y, and g_____. They brought c__o__h, glass, m__t__l goods, o__i__e oil and wine to trade in return. Aksum was a city in the h__g__l__n__s, about _____ miles from Adulis. Aksum needed ★s__a__o__t, and Adulis needed food and goods from ★i__la__d. In time, the two became one k__n__d__m, with Aksum as its c__p__t__l. Aksum's kings built large p__l__c__s and tall stone m__n__m__n__s.

A young man named F__u__e__t__us was taken to Aksum's royal court and became t__t__r to a p__i__ce named E__a__a. When Ezana became king in the 300s CE, he adopted Frumentius' C__r__s__i__n faith. In the 600s CE, trade on the R__d S__a changed. A__u__is declined, and Aksum lost ★p__w__r. The highland kingdom later became known as E__h__o__ia. Ethiopia remained i__d__p__n__e__t while most of Africa was controlled by E__r__p__an colonial countries. In 1993, Eritrea broke away from E__h__o__ia to become i__d__p__n__e__t. Aksum is now in E__h__o__ia, while A__u__is is in Eritrea.

Answer in Complete Sentences

★1. How was Adulis' location a factor in it becoming a center of trade?

_____

_____

_____

★2. Why do you think Adulis formed a partnership with Aksum?

_____

_____

_____

3. According to Christian tradition, how was the faith introduced to Aksum?

_____

_____

_____

4. Why are Adulis and Aksum now in different countries?

_____

_____

_____

_____

★ This is a higher order learning problem. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

©Mike Dowling, mrdowling.com. All Rights Reserved.