Aksum: No Questions

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**Overview:** Students will map the rise and fall of an ancient African empire and explain contributing factors.

**Essential Questions:**
- What is the difference between a kingdom, civilization, and empire?
- What factors can cause the rise and fall of a civilization?

**Objectives:** Students will:
- Describe the components of a kingdom, civilization, and empire
- Describe the factors that can contribute to the fall of a kingdom/civilization/empire
- Create a timeline of Aksum events
- Map the rise and fall of Aksum
- Use World GeoHistoGram/creation of Aksum Civilization on a handout for inquiry

**Subject/Grade Level:** World History/Geography, 6-12

**Duration:** 1-3 class periods depending on activities and extensions

**Student Materials:** Colored pencils, Student worksheets (timeline activity, mapping activity), student atlases, World GeoHistoGram (MGA), Map of NE Africa/SW Asia

**Teacher Materials:** Teacher Background Notes; Aksum PowerPoint; C3 Strand References

**References:** CIA Factbook, [www.historyteacher.net](http://www.historyteacher.net), archeology.about.com/od/ethiopia/Ethiopian_Culture_History_and_Archeology.htm

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**National Geography Standards:**

**Standard 11:** The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth’s surface

**National World History Standards:**

Explain the connections between maritime trade and the power of the Kingdom of Aksum in Northeast Africa.

**Modes of Spatial Thinking:**

**Region:** Identify groups of places that are close to each other and have similar conditions and connections.

**Modes of Spatial.Temporal Thinking:**

**Diffusion:** Compare maps from different times, describe changes in the extent of something, and predict possible future spread or shrinkage.
C3 Strands

D2.eco.1.6-8. explain how economic decisions affect the well-being of individuals, businesses, and society.
D2.eco.14.6-8. explain barriers to trade and how those barriers influence trade among nations.
D2.Geo.2.6-8. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between
the locations of places and regions, and changes in their environmental characteristics.
D2.Geo.2.9-12. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between
the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.
D2.Geo.3.6-8. Use paper based and electronic map- ping and graphing techniques to represent and analyze spatial
patterns of different environmental and cultural characteristics
D2.Geo.5.6-8. Analyze the combinations of cultural and environmental characteristics that make places both
similar to and different from other places.
D2.Geo.5.9-12. evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and
environmental characteristics of various places and regions
D2.Geo.7.6-8. explain how changes in transportation and communication technology influence the spatial
connections among human settlements and affect the diffusion of ideas and cultural practices.
D2.Geo.7.9-12. Analyze the reciprocal nature of how historical events and the spatial diffusion of ideas,
technologies, and cultural practices have influenced migration patterns and the distribution of human population
D2.His.1.6-8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
D2.His.1.9-12. evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time
and place as well as broader historical contexts
D2.His.12.6-8. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to identify further areas of inquiry and
additional sources.
D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and
investigate additional sources
D2.His.14.6-8. explain multiple causes and effects of events and developments in the past.

Lesson Procedure
1. Warm-up – What do you know about Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti? Use Teacher Background to
discuss this area in Africa)

2. Vocabulary Review-What is the definition of kingdom, civilization, empire?
   • Kingdom: Area ruled by an inherited ruler, often a king or queen
   • Civilization: A society that has the following characteristics – produces a surplus of food;
establishes towns or cities with some form of government; division of labor.
   • Empire: Form of government in which an individual or a single people rules over many other
     peoples and their territory

3. Guided Practice Part I- Hand out the timeline activity. Have students:
   • Read the events silently and number them in chronological order.
   • Reread events and circle key verbs in each. What do the context clues tell us about this
civilization?
   • Place the events in chronological order. How did you accomplish this?
   • Hold a class discussion of the events, noting how they relate to the definition of a civilization
   • Create the timeline. Complete first date with students as example.
   • Have students complete the activity and check together.
4. **Guided Practice Part II**- Hand out student atlases or use google earth/web maps, etc. Have students:
   - Find the location of historical Aksum.
   - Describe current geographical features of the area (landforms, bodies of water, climate, vegetation, natural resources)
   - What might Aksum have been able to trade? Using teacher notes, provide students with actual Aksum trade materials.
   - Hand out the Mapping Activity. Model the labeling activity (one label, one arrow)
   - Complete the mapping activity.
   - Discuss/correct the map and questions
   - Discuss some of the factors that allowed Aksum to grow. (see teacher notes)
   - Discuss some of the factors that led to the decline of Aksum.

5. **Guided Practice Part III**-
   - Using the timeline, map, and previous knowledge, create a student version for Aksum on the GeoHistoGram blank sheet. (group work)
   - Students will place time periods and location of the Aksum civilization over time on the blank sheet.
   - Look at the Overview of the GeoHistoGram and have students analyze their blank copy in comparison to the overview. Lead them into the inquiry process with questions and discussion.
   - Look at your diagrams of empires and possibly intercontinental bridges and decide whether Aksum spread and declined along with a particular empire, bridge or even a religion.

6. **Concluding Discussion:** View and compare the student sheet of Aksum with the GeoHistoGram and discuss the aspects of culture, ie. religion and the push/pull factors that affected Aksum. (View the GeoHistoGram Clickable PDFs on line or hard copy to demonstrate the aspect of religious perspective and compare to the larger GeoHistoGram. Guide students to further knowledge: Why Aksum is placed in the “Roman Civilization”?)
   - Discuss some of the factors that allowed Aksum to grow and decline. (see teacher background)
   - Have students hypothesize and write a paragraph or two comparing other civilizations they have studied to see show similarities or differences of civilizations both current or those in the past.

**Assessment of Activity:**
   - Completion of timeline
   - Completion of mapping activity
   - GeoHistoGram Inquiry
   - Paragraph – compare rise and fall of Aksum to other civilizations/empires
   - Paragraph – what aspects of the decline of Aksum might be influencing this region of the world today?
   - Students will read newspaper articles or research off the web that describe Ethiopia, Egypt and Africa in general today. The information will elucidate how various people view Africa and Ethiopia. Attention should be given to whether Ethiopia is seen as a unique African country in a full continent as opposed to just part of a single African “country”. Students must determine whether Ethiopia is portrayed in a positive light
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Adaptations:

• Work in pairs
• Fill dates in on timeline for students – students fill in events (vice-versa)
• Placing Numbers chronologically on timeline
• Direct instruction for timeline and map activity
• Label locations on map for students
• GeoHistoGram (Dates filled in, Religion aspects filled in)

Extensions:

• Research the ivory trade of 100 C.E. and compare it to the ivory trade of today. Why has the ivory trade changed?
• Follow the history of Christian Ethiopia from the fall of Aksum to present. What has happened to this group?
• Research the coinage of Aksum. How does a coinage system change a trading system?
• Compare the Aksum civilization to other civilizations of the time, for example, the Maya. Why did the Aksum civilization fade away relatively quickly while the Mayans continued to influence Central America until C.E. 1500’s?
• Research the Aksum using the primary document, Inscription of Ezana, King of Aksum, circa 325 C.E. Compare Aksum’s relationship with its trading partners to that of the Mayan.
**Teacher Notes**

**Definitions:**

**Kingdom:** Area ruled by an inherited ruler, often a king or queen

**Civilization:** A society that has the following characteristics – produces a surplus of food; establishes towns or cities with some form of government; division of labor.

**Empire:** Form of government in which an individual or a single people rules over many other peoples and their territory

Some factors in the rise of Aksum:
- Location – Blue Nile, Red Sea for trade
- Forests – for charcoal used in metal work
- Fertile soil – agriculture
- Trade Goods – ivory, skins, metal work, emeralds, grains, slaves
- Currency – first African currency outside of Roman sphere

Some factors in the decline of Aksum:
- Movement of Persian Empire into the Arabian Peninsula
- The expansion of Islam
- Deforestation
- Soil degradation
- Movement of trade routes from Red Sea to Persian Gulf and east

**Timeline Notes for Ancient Aksum Civilization**

- **c. 4th cnt. BCE-1st c. BCE** possible beginnings of Aksum and the Region
- **c. 1st cnt. BCE**- the City of Aksum is established
- **c. mid 1st cnt. BCE**- the Ruler Zos(c)kales is established as King
- **c. 3rd cnt. CE**- Aksum begins interfering in South Arabian affairs
- **c. late 3rd cnt.(270-610) CE**- Aksum begins minting their own currency
- **c. 325-328 CE**- By order of King Ezana, Aksum converts to Christianity
- **c. 320-330 CE**- Aksum begins using the symbol of the “Cross” on their coinage
- **c. 350 CE**- Aksum conquers the Kingdom of Kush.
- **c. late 4th cnt. CE**- Aksum controlled land in what is present day Northern Ethiopia, Eritrea, Northern Sudan, Southern Egypt, Djibouti, Western Somaliland, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia totaling around 1.25 million km²
- **c. 5th-6th cnt. CE**- Aksum is believed to be a quasi-ally of Byzantium against the Persian Empire —also beginning of their 2nd Golden Age
- **c. 6th cnt. CE**- Due to economic isolation and the increase and spread of Islam, the Kingdom of Aksum begins to decline
- **c. early 7th cnt. CE**- Aksum ceases production of coins
- **c. 950 CE**- Aksum dissolves with an invasion from the south of pagan or Jewish peoples, possibly the Jewish Queen Gudit
- **c. 10th cnt. CE**- Dark Ages begin
- **c. 11th-12th cnt. CE**- Aksum civilization is replaced by the Zagwe Dynasty
Interesting Facts About Ethiopia’s History and Current Affairs

Unique among African countries, the ancient Ethiopian monarchy maintained its freedom from colonial rule with the exception of the 1936-41 Italian occupation during World War II. In 1974, a military junta, the Derg, deposed Emperor Haile SELASSIE (who had ruled since 1930) and established a socialist state. Torn by bloody coups, uprisings, wide-scale drought, and massive refugee problems, the regime was finally toppled in 1991 by a coalition of rebel forces, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). A constitution was adopted in 1994, and Ethiopia's first multiparty elections were held in 1995. A border war with Eritrea late in the 1990's ended with a peace treaty in December 2000. Final demarcation of the boundary is currently on hold due to Ethiopian objections to an international commission's finding requiring it to surrender territory considered sensitive to Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is a landlocked - entire coastline along the Red Sea was lost with the de jure independence of Eritrea on 24 May 1993; the Blue Nile, the chief headstream of the Nile by water volume, rises in T'ana Hayk (Lake Tana) in northwest Ethiopia; three major crops are believed to have originated in Ethiopia: coffee, grain sorghum, and castor bean

Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa and one of the oldest in the world - at least 2,000 years

Ethiopia's poverty-stricken economy is based on agriculture, accounting for almost half of GDP, 60% of exports, and 80% of total employment. The agricultural sector suffers from frequent drought and poor cultivation practices. Coffee is critical to the Ethiopian economy with exports of some $350 million in 2006, but historically low prices have seen many farmers switching to qat (kahat) to supplement income. The war with Eritrea in 1998-2000 and recurrent drought have buffeted the economy, in particular coffee production. In November 2001, Ethiopia qualified for debt relief from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and in December 2005 the IMF voted to forgive Ethiopia's debt to the body. Under Ethiopia's land tenure system, the government owns all land and provides long-term leases to the tenants; the system continues to hamper growth in the industrial sector as entrepreneurs are unable to use land as collateral for loans. Drought struck again late in 2002, leading to a 3.3% decline in GDP in 2003. Normal weather patterns helped agricultural and GDP growth recover in 2004-06.

Ethiopia is the transit hub for heroin originating in Southwest and Southeast Asia and destined for Europe, as well as cocaine destined for markets in southern Africa; cultivates qat (khat) for local use and regional export, principally to Djibouti and Somalia (legal in all three countries); the lack of a well-developed financial system limits the country's utility as a money laundering center.

Religions: Christian 60.8% (Orthodox 50.6%, Protestant 10.2%), Muslim 32.8%, traditional 6%, other 1.8% (1994 census)

Exports: $17.65 million f.o.b. (2006 est.)

Partners: Germany 15.5%, China 10.5%, Japan 8.5%, Saudi Arabia 6.9%, Djibouti 6.8%, Switzerland 6.4%, Italy 5.9%, US 5.5%, Netherlands 4.2% (2005)
Commodities: coffee, qat, gold, leather products, live animals, oilseed

Imports: $4.105 billion f.o.b. (2006 est.)

Partners: Saudi Arabia 14.7%, China 12.6%, US 12.4%, India 6.7%, Italy 4.6% (2005)

Commodities: food and live animals, petroleum and petroleum products, chemicals, machinery, motor vehicles, cereals, textiles

Interesting Facts About Eritrea’s History and Current Affairs

Background Information: Eritrea was awarded to Ethiopia in 1952 as part of a federation. Ethiopia's annexation of Eritrea as a province 10 years later sparked a 30-year struggle for independence that ended in 1991 with Eritrean rebels defeating governmental forces; independence was overwhelmingly approved in a 1993 referendum. A two-and-a-half-year border war with Ethiopia that erupted in 1998 ended under UN auspices in December 2000.

Eritrea currently hosts a UN peacekeeping operation that is monitoring a 25 km-wide Temporary Security Zone on the border with Ethiopia. An international commission, organized to resolve the border dispute, posted its findings in 2002. However, both parties have been unable to reach agreement on implementing the decision. In November 2006, the international commission informed Eritrea and Ethiopia they had one year to demarcate the border or the border demarcation would be based on coordinates.

Geographic Note: strategic geopolitical position along world's busiest shipping lanes;
Eritrea retained the entire coastline of Ethiopia along the Red Sea upon de jure independence from Ethiopia on 24 May 1993

Religions: Muslim, Coptic Christian, Roman Catholic, Protestant

Exports: $17.65 million f.o.b. (2006 est.)

Partners: Italy 31.4%, US 11.9%, Belarus 5.9%, France 5.1%, Germany 4.6%, Turkey 4.4%, UK 4% (2005)

Commodities: livestock, sorghum, textiles, food, small manufactures (2000)

Imports: $701.8 million f.o.b. (2006 est.)

Partners: Italy 15.1%, France 11.8%, US 9.5%, Germany 8.6%, Taiwan 7.3%, India 7%, Ireland 6.1%, Turkey 4.4%, Jordan 4.2% (2005)

Commodities: machinery, petroleum products, food, manufactured goods

Source: CIA World Fact Book (July 17, 2007)
**The Rise of Axum**

Ethiopia is one of the oldest inhabited areas on Earth so naturally, Axum arose from a series of influential ethnic and cultural groups. Major influences include the Sabaean people from Southern Arabia, the local Da'amot people, and the declining Kingdom of Kush in modern-day Sudan. As Kush lost power, it presented the people of Axum an opportunity to grow and they took it. Various Axum kings slowly expanded their influence in the first several centuries AD, formally conquering Kush by 350. With this, they became the political and economic power of the region. In fact, the Iranian prophet of the 3rd century, Mani, named Axum one of the four great powers of the time, along with Persia, Rome, and China. Axum interfered in the Arabian Peninsula and northern Africa, expanding its control to an area of almost a million square miles that included parts of modern Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Axum adopted Christianity around 325 AD under the powerful King Ezana as well, connecting it culturally to a growing number of Christian kingdoms.

The majority of their wealth came from the rise of a new sailing technique that used seasonal winds to cross the Red and Arabian Seas, increasing the amount of trade that could pass through that region. Axum was right at the intersection of trade routes between the Mediterranean and these seas and was able to dominate the market on international trade.

**The Decline of Axum**

In the 7th century, the new religion Islam began spreading extremely quickly across the Middle East and Africa. The new Islamic powers grew in power and size and constantly clashed against rival Christian kingdoms. Axum, however, maintained good relations with their Islamic neighbors, since the city had safely harbored the early followers of the religion back in the year 615. Nevertheless, as the Islamic kingdoms grew in prominence they came to economically dominate the region, undermining the power of Axum. As Islamic powers gained control of the most important ports, Axum began a gradual decline near the end of the 7th century. As the kingdom lost wealth, the cities became more vulnerable to raiders and eventually the capital city was abandoned as people moved into stronger kingdoms. The southern region of the kingdom was still connected to overland trade routes with the Arabic kingdoms, but they never had quite the same power.

According to local legends, a Jewish queen finally defeated the last Axum cities in the late 10th century, bringing an end to the kingdom. Scientists have also identified signs of climate shift around this time, leading to the decline of once-abundant resources, soil erosion, and drought.

**Natural resources**

Despite its recent tragic reputation, parts of Ethiopia are rich in natural resources, and Aksum was well placed to exploit them. Timber was needed to make charcoal for the production of iron tools and weapons, and this was abundant. Cereal crops grew easily in the well-watered, fertile soil – the growing season could be as long as nine months, and two crops a year could be grown on the terraces cut into the hillsides. There was good pasture for cattle. The population was therefore well fed. While one of the greatest worries of the rulers of Rome was how to feed their population, the kings of Aksum had no such problem. And if the rains failed, they had a secret weapon – teff.

Teff is a grain that grows nowhere else except Ethiopia. Not only is it a crop that is far more nutritious than other cereals, it needs very little water.
Mapping Activity

You will be mapping the rise and decline of the Aksum Kingdom. You should have the following materials to complete the activity:
1. Your timeline worksheet
2. Map of northeast Africa/southwest Asia (Aksum and Kush already labeled)
3. Colored pencils
4. Student atlas, book, technology

Locate and label the following on your map with a brown pencil: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, Red Sea, Blue Nile, Nile, Gulf of Aden, Ethiopian Highlands

Use the information on your timeline to complete the rest of the map activity.

Rise and Expansion of Aksum
Using a red pencil, draw arrows from Aksum to areas/countries conquered by Aksum. Label the appropriate date. Mark the location of the areas/countries, that traded with Aksum. Label the appropriate date.

Decline of Aksum
Using a purple pencil, draw arrows back to Aksum showing the effect of Persia on Aksum trade. Label the arrow with the appropriate date.

Using a black pencil, draw an “X” over Aksum and Kush, and label the date each moved or fell.

Map Thinking Questions: When you are finished with your map, complete the following questions in complete sentences.

What did Aksum gain by conquering Kush?

List ways the Aksum civilization’s location helped in their development of trade.

Looking at the map, list some possible means of transportation/trade.

How did trade affect the development of the Aksum civilization?
Aksum Timeline Activity

Put the following events in chronological order starting with one for the earliest to eight for the most recent. Then complete the timeline.

1. Aksum completes conversion to Christianity, 330 C.E.
2. Persians force Aksum out of Arabian Peninsula, 575 C.E.
3. Evidence of Zoskales and city of Aksum, 50 C.E.
4. Coins minted in Aksum, 270 C.E.
5. King Kaleb of Aksum conquers Yemen, 525 C.E.
6. End of Aksum as capital city, 619 C.E.
7. Aksum Kingdom trade with Egypt, Arabia, Rome, India, 500 C.E.
8. King Ezana of conquers Kingdom of Kush, 350 C.E.