

# ACT II – OBELISK OF AXUM

## REFERENCE – AXUM

### **HISTORY**

- Kingdom of Axum existed from 100 AD until 960 AD.
- Converted to Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by a missionary named Frumentius.
- Kingdom of Axum overthrown by a female monarch named either Gudit (Judith) or Bani al-Hamwiyah (who burned churches and literature).
- 1140 AD: Zagwe Dynasty takes control of the area.
- 1270 AD: Solomonic Dynasty (precursor to the Abyssinian Empire) takes control Axum.

### **TODAY**

- Holy Capital of Ethiopia.
- Located near the Adwa Mountains. Elevation of 2,131 metres.
- Contains less than 2,000 houses (supposedly occupying only a small portion of the area covered by the ancient city.)

### **BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS**

- The land is brown and mounded. The mountains hazy in the distance.
- The terrain is curved and liquid, as if the earth itself were a flowing river.
- Harsh, air-stripped rocks jut out of the dust.
- The buildings of pale brown stone and desiccated wood tumble down into a depression, as if some careless giant had emptied a box of toys in a dry and barren cistern.
- The obelisks of the Northern Field jut into the sky, towering above the town that half-curls around them.

## REFERENCE – THE STELAE OF AXUM

- 120+ stelae are primarily found in an expansive field on the northern edge of Axum.
- Originally erected between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.
- Range in size from rough-hewn stone blocks 3 feet in length to a fallen *tour de force* that would have stood 97 feet high.
  - Most of the stelae were, in fact, unstable and collapsed early in their existence.
- Common assumption is that the stelae are commemorative memorials signifying the various tombs in the area.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STELAE:

- Carved from solid blocks of nepheline syenite: A holocrystalline plutonic rock that consists largely of nepheline and alkali feldspar. Has an appearance similar to granite.
- Large obelisks appear to depict 10-to-13 story tall buildings, although actual Aksumite buildings never exceed 3 stories in height.
- Architecture is accurate to the time (or perhaps inspired the architecture of the time).
  - Stone doors carved at the feet of the stelae simulate wooden ones, some even incised with locks.
  - Further up the monoliths, false four-holed windows have been hewn into the rock.
  - Fake “structural supports” are recalled by the square beam-ends that seem to project from the stelae “walls”.
  - The back of stele is completely plain except for one circle carved near the apex. At the center of the circle is four spheres grouped together, with a fifth sphere touching the group’s outer edge.

**THE SEVEN KINGS:** The tallest stelae in the Northern Field. They were all erected shortly before or after Axum’s court adopted Christianity.

- **Obelisk of Axum (82 feet, fallen):** See *True History of the Obelisk*, below.
- **King Ezana’s Stele (70 feet):** Possibly the last stele erected. First king to convert to Christianity. A carving on this stele may refer to this event.
- **The Great Stele (108 feet, fallen):** Local legend claims it covers the grave of the Queen of Sheba. It most likely fell and broke during construction.

**BARTOLO ACUNA’S THEORY:** Based on a study of the *Revelations of Glaaki*.

- Obelisk of Axum was the original stele. The other stelae were modeled on it and marked burial chambers, but the Obelisk of Axum is the “earthly pillar” that serves as a foundation for the “wall” behind which the fabled “Prisoner of Glaaki” was imprisoned.
- One or both of the “false doors” at the base of the Obelisk actually conceal a real entrance to a chamber hidden within the Obelisk. This is the “Chamber of Silence” (or, more literally, “the room in which the mouth is shut”) – an earthly model of the Prisoner’s unearthly cell.
- *GM Note: Basically none of this is true.*

## REFERENCE – TRUE HISTORY OF THE OBELISK

- **302 AD:** Wazeba and Ousanas rule Axum as twin kings.
- **305 AD:** Following the writings of Teklombrouthes (the God-King of the previous century), Wazeba travels “west for three days and a year”. On his journey, he reaches and is indoctrinated into a Gol-Goroth cult venerating a Black Stone.
- **306 AD:** Wazeba returns to Axum. He brings with him the Obelisk of Axum and erects it. Wazeba creates a cult of Gol-Goroth in Axum.
- **310 AD:** Frumentius (age 10), a native of Tyre, travels with his uncle Meropius’ to Hungary. There he sees the Black Stone described in *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*.
- **316 AD:** Frumentius (age 16) travels with his uncle Meropius and his brother Edesius to Ethiopia. Locals at a port along the Red Sea slaughtered everyone onboard their ship except for the two boys, who were taken as slaves to the King Ousanas. Frumentius recognized the connection between Wazeba’s cult and the rites he had seen as a young boy in Hungary and he suspected a connection between the Obelisk of Axum and the Black Stone. He and his brother gained favor with Ousanas.
- **325 AD:** Wazeba is secretly assassinated by Edesius, but his cult remains strong. Frumentius and Edesius are freed by Ousanas.
- **326 AD:** King Ousanas dies. The widowed queen prevails upon Frumentius and Edesius to remain and instruct her son, King Ezana. Frumentius, in particular, uses his influence to begin spreading Christianity while continuing to lead a war against the Cult of Wazeba.
- **332 AD:** The power of the Cult of Wazeba is broken in the aftermath of a failed assassination attempt on King Ezana. The Obelisk of Axum is pulled down. Edesius returns to Tyre. Frumentius accompanies his brother as far as Alexandria and requests that Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, send a bishop and priests as missionaries to Axum. Athanasius consecrates Frumentius as a bishop and sends him back as the church’s envoy.
- **333 AD:** Frumentius returns to Axum and erects his Episcopal see. He baptizes King Ezana and comes to be known as *Kesate Birhan* (Revealer of Light) and *Abba Salama* (Father of Peace). He is the first *Abune* of the Ethiopian Church.
- **351 AD:** King Ezana wages war on Kush, where remnants of the Cult of Wazeba have taken hold. The Kingdom of Kush is broken, the Ezana Stone is erected, and the Cult of Wazeba is wiped out.
- **383 AD:** Frumentius dies. During the latter years of his life he developed Ge’ez from an *abjad* script (consonantal-only) to an *abugida* script (syllabic) and translated the New Testament into it. He is venerated as a saint on August 1<sup>st</sup> by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

## **REFERENCE – CULTS IN AXUM**

As described in *Cults of the Aksumite Empire*, there were Maw of the Mouth cults that sprang up along the Red Sea Coast in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (which gave rise to the site in Dallol). These cults had a resurgence in Lalibela in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century during the Zagwe dynasty, but were destroyed by the Guardians before they could manifest a Major Mouth.

The Cult of Wazeba, on the other hand, is a cult dedicated to Gol-Goroth. Its beliefs were carried out of western Africa and its practice in Axum was so thoroughly wiped out and covered up by the efforts of Frumentius that it never had a resurgence. It is not referenced (even obliquely) in the *Cults of the Aksumite Empire*. (Whether or not remnants of the Cult of Wazeba survive in the lands of ancient Kush is certainly an interesting question.)

## **REFERENCE – THE ANTI-INVESTIGATORS**

The Anti-Investigators have been the primary expedition team for Savitree Sirikhan in her effort to locate and identify sites that will provide clues to the true identity of the Liar From Beyond:

- Severn Valley (heading here next)
- Mt. Kailash (been there, nothing of interest)
- Sunken City of Nan Padol (Tomb of Twin Sorcerers – Olishpa and Olosohpa)
- Great Sandy Desert of Australia (trying to join the 1935 expedition planned by Miskatonic University; in contact with William Dyer)
- Isle of Pillars (Poyang Lake, China)
- Hang Maden (Cave of Black Specters, Vietnam)
- Tunguska Crater (previous group of investigators lead by Carsten Braunlich accompanied Kulik's expedition; it ended poorly for them)
- Wind Cave (South Dakota, United States; the frostworks of the cavern are actually a chillbane)
- Catacombs of the Pompeii Basilica

Operating locally under the name “Emporium of Bangkok Antiquities”.

Among themselves, they speak French. (Collectively they can speak and read most modern – and dead – languages.)

## PROACTIVE NODES

### **PROACTIVE 1: ALEX KRAMER AND HIS THUGS**

- Any interaction with the Anti-Investigators.

### **PROACTIVE 2: TRAILED BY PHAJOL**

- Any interaction with the Anti-Investigators.
- Phajol is likely to trail them to the Ezana Stone.

## REVELATION LIST – NODES

### **NODE 1: OBELISK OF AXUM**

- ETHIOPIA: Questioning Bartolo Acuna
- *BANGKOK: Savitree's Expedition Plans*

### **NODE 2: RITUAL AT KING EZANA'S STELE**

- Arriving at *Node 1: Obelisk of Axum*.
- Research: Asking around town about the obelisk field or local superstitions.

### **NODE 3: AXUM MINISTRY OF CULTURE**

- Talking with Luc Fauche
- Emporium of Bangkok Antiquities Digging Permits (at dig site)
- Research: Authority Controlling the Obelisk

### **NODE 4: CATHEDRAL OF TSION MARYAM (ST. MARY OF ZION)**

- Trailing Husain Soliman
- Husain's Site Report
- Records at the Axum Ministry of Culture (Emporium of Bangkok Antiquities)

### **NODE 5: EZANA STONE**

- Questioning at Axum Ministry of Culture (other sites of interest)
- Secret Book of Aksum (True Testament of King Ezana)
- Following Husain Soliman (after he's finished researching at the Cathedral)

## THE ANTI-INVESTIGATORS

**HUSAIN SOLIMAN** – The Expert

**PHAJOL KHADPO** – The Mystic

**LUC FAUCHE** – The Negotiator

**ALEX KRAMER** – The Leg-Breaker

## **PROACTIVE 1: ALEX KRAMER AND HIS THUGS**

**ALEX KRAMER (THE LEG-BREAKER):** Athletics 12, Firearms 9, Health 22, Interrogation 3, Intimidation 5, Scuffling 20, Weapons 7

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Weapon:** +2 (elephant gun), +1 (9mm pistol), -1 (brass knuckles)

### **THUGS**

**BRUTES (x4):** Athletics 8, Driving 6, Firearms 5, Health 5, Scuffling 6, Weapons 6

**Weapons:** -1 (brass knuckles, pipes, knives)

**BOSS:** Athletics 8, Driving 4, Firearms 10, Health 13, Scuffling 7, Weapons 6

**Weapons:** -1 (brass knuckles, the scenery), +1 (pistol)

## PROACTIVE 2: TRAILED BY PHAJOL

**PHAJOL KHADPO (THE MYSTIC):** Assess Honesty 3, Athletics 4, Cthulhu Mythos 1, Firearms 2, Health 7, Occult 5

**Alertness Modifier:** +3

**Weapon:** +0 (double Derringer)

Phajol is currently staying with a local family

## NODE 1: OBELISK OF AXUM

### RESEARCH: THE OBELISKS

- **Oral History / Anthropology:** There's a large body of contradictory superstition and legend concerning the obelisks: Some claim that they were raised by the Queen of Sheba when she declared Axum to be the capital of her kingdom. They are "sinkholes of ill fortune"; like giant magnets that collect bad luck. They were the last monuments raised by the heathens before Christ came to Abyssinia. Or they were the first monuments raised by King Ezana and Saint Frumentius after they founded the truly holy church. Rubbing the afterbirth on a monument will grant totemic powers to the child. Or a child who views the obelisks before their first birthday will be granted the sixth sight and be doomed as a witch.
  - There is a ritual irregularly held at King Ezana's Stele which is believed to "cleanse the community of ill fortune". There are plans for it to be performed within 1d6 days (see *Node 2*).

### THE NORTHERN FIELD

- Seven Kings and a collection of smaller obelisks
  - *Prop: Photo of Northern Obelisk Field*
- A large tent has been erected over the base of the Obelisk of Axum.
  - *Prop: Photo of Collapsed Obelisk*
- Diggers are idle. (*GM Background:* The anti-investigators have concluded that this site is of no interest to them, but are keeping the diggers on hand in case they end up needing them.)

### LOCATIONS OF THE ANTI-INVESTIGATORS:

- Luc Fauche and Alex Kramer are here pretty much all the time.
- Husain sleeps here, but is at the Cathedral every day for a week after the PCs arrive in Axum.
- Phajol is staying with a local family.

### INSIDE TENT

- *Prop: Hussain's Site Report*
- *Prop: Telegram from Lowman to Fauche*
- Digging permits issued by the Axum Ministry of Culture.
  
- Writing desk with field typewriter.
- Traveling bench of wood and canvas, designed to fold up.
- Drafting tables covered with various diagrams of the Seven Kings, other obelisks, and the tomb they're excavating.





### IN THE TOMB

- *Prop: Photo of the Inside of the Obelisk Tomb*
- **Near Entrance:** A ge'ez cartouche (not to be mistaken for Egyptian cartouches) that can be loosely translated as, "By the hand of Royal Ezana, open not this cursed/doomed tunnel/worm-work."
- **Anti-Investigator Camp:** Luc, Husain, and Alex have made camp in the first two burial chambers.
- **Second Symbol:** The name "Wazeba" in pre-Ge'ez script.
  - *Prop: Aztec Symbol in Obelisk Tomb*
  - **Archaeology / Anthropology:** To recognize the symbol as being the Aztec symbol for "flint" or "sharp stone" or "dagger". Its presence in an African tomb complex is completely anachronistic.

## NODE 2: RITUAL AT KING EZANA'S STELE

**TRIGGER:** Returning to the obelisk field.

### RITUAL OF CLEANSING

- *Prop: Photo of Ritual at King Ezana's Stele*
- Large crowd gathers at King Ezana's Stele and perform a ritual in which water taken from the fountain of the Cathedral of Tsion Maryam is mixed with water taken from the "Queen of Sheba's Bath" (a reservoir north of the obelisk field) and then "painted" onto the sides of the obelisk.
- The gathered crowd believes that this ritual cleanses the community of bad luck. They're performing it due to the looming hostilities with Italy.
- **Occult / Theology:** Although the chants of the ritual are laced with overtly Christian references, these are clearly forming a light patina over a ritual which is wholly other. The nature of the original ritual, however, has been thoroughly corrupted by the more modern practices.
  - If the investigator has experience with Gol-Goroth worship, they may be able to pick up overtones or references suggestive of the Forgotten God. (A use of Cthulhu Mythos could suggest the same.)
  - *GM Background:* This ritual is actually a vestige of a ritual that was designed to cleanse the site of the influence of the Cult of Wazeba. The original form of the ritual was effective centuries ago and has since degraded with the passage of time.

### NODE 3: AXUM MINISTRY OF CULTURE

- **Bureaucracy:** The Emporium of Bangkok Antiquities has digging permits for the Northern Stelae Field (see *Node 1*). Its specialist of record, Husain Soliman, has also recently requested access to the rare documents library at the Cathedral of St. Mary of Zion (see *Node 4*).
- **Other Sites of Interest:**
  - **Queen Sheba's Baths:** A reservoir on the north edge of town which is reached by a stair of long, broad stone. Local legend has named it the bathhouse of the Queen of Sheba. (Any cursory examination will reveal that it was never a bathhouse.)
  - **King Bazen's Tomb:** A megalith which is probably one of the oldest structures in Axum. Local legend believes that it is the tomb of King Bazen, who they identify as Balthazar (the wise man who gave a gift of myrrh and brought word of Christ to Ethiopia).
  - **Ezana Stone:** The inscription on this standing stone documents the conversion of King Ezana to Christianity and the subjugation of various heathen kingdoms. Written in Ge'ez, Sabaean, and Greek it serves as a local Rosetta Stone.
  - **Cathedral of St. Mary:** See *Node 4*. The cathedral is said to be the repository of the Ark of the Covenant. The *Kebra Nagast* tells how the ark was brought to Ethiopia by Menelik I while a forgery was left in the Temple in Jerusalem.

## NODE 4: CATHEDRAL OF TSION MARYAM (ST. MARY OF ZION)

### CHAPEL OF THE TABLET

- Supposedly contains the Ark of the Covenant.
- A separate building from the Cathedral itself. The Ark was moved here because the divine “heat” from the Tablets had cracked the stones of its previous sanctum.
- The Ark can only be viewed by the Caretaker, a single monk who’s appointed for life by his predecessor. (If the predecessor dies before an appointment is made, an election is held to name a successor.)
  - The caretaker is confined to the Chapel of the Ark for the rest of his life, praying before it and offering incense.
- Getting access to the Ark is basically impossible (and also irrelevant to this scenario). If the PCs circumvent the security on the Chapel of the Tablet (probably killing the caretaker in the process), they’ll discover that the Ark contains a variant Colour Out of Space, possibly a senescent Colour which is at the opposite end of its life-cycle from the pupating Colours more familiar from Lovecraft’s story.
  - This Colour has similar effects on its surrounding environment (when not contained and restrained by the Ark and the rituals of the caretaker), but doesn’t expand aggressively.
  - It features a rich psychological effect, as if trying to communicate (or perhaps inculcate) complex and alien memetics into the consciousness of those coming in contact with it. Mass conversion? Yes. Mass conversion to *what* is perhaps a more subtle and insidious question.
  - Whether this is *actually* the Ark of the Covenant (and whether the Colour was an integral part of the original Covenant or has merely infested it) is a decision left to the Keeper.

### CATHEDRAL OF ST. MARY

- *Prop: Photo of Cathedral of St. Mary (x2)*
- Repository to the crowns of some of Ethiopia’s former emperors.
- **QUERELLOS IV:** Current abune of the Church. He’s served in that role since 1926. (Historically continues to be abune, with a break during the Italian occupation from 1936-1945, until his death in 1950.)

## BOOK OF AKSUM

- Records dating back to the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century during the early decades of the Solomonic Dynasty. (Although the records often describe events older than that.)
- First part describes the founding of the Church of Tsion Maryam by Saint Frumentius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Ordained by Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, Frumentius returned to Axum and became the first *Abune* of the Ethiopian Church. He was later known as *Kesate Birhan* (Revealer of Light) and *Abba Salama* (Father of Peace). This includes the holy rites and services of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.
- Second part dates to the early-17<sup>th</sup> century and contains a hundred or so historical and legal texts, many dealing with land grants and the like.
- Third part dates to late-17<sup>th</sup> century and contains various legal and historical texts regarding Axum's history. These records were supplemented with additional documents in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Bureaucracy:** Hussain Soliman of the Emporium of Bangkok Antiquities requested access to the Cathedral's rare records through the Ministry of Culture and has been every day studying the Book of Askum.
- **Library Use 1:** The histories presented in the *Book of Aksum* are clearly incomplete. Initially this appears to be merely a matter of old records being missing or damaged, but a deeper study quickly reveals that the records seem to have been deliberately expurgated.
  - Proper questioning of church officials will reveal the existence of the *Secret Book of Aksum*.
  - *Prop: Secret Book of Aksum*
    - Pannonia was a province of the Roman Empire which was in modern day Hungary.
    - Batsi is a historic name for Massaua.

## NODE 5: EZANA STONE

The Ezana Stone stands in a building of rough stone which serves to guard it from the elements.

- *Prop: Photo of the Ezana Stone*
- *Prop: Inscription of the Ezana Stone*
- The stone is covered in an inscription written in Ge'ez, Sabaeen, and Greek (thus serving as an African Rosetta Stone). It testifies to King Ezana's conversion to Christianity and his subjugation of various heathen kingdoms surrounding ancient Axum.

**EXCAVATING THE EZANA STONE:** Will reveal that there is a "lower half" to the Ezana Stone, depicting a broad, frog-like mouth with razored fangs reaching up with a grasping tongue as if seeking some nameless form to devour. (The body to which the mouth would have belonged has been fashioned into the Ezana Stone.)

## HUSAIN SOLIMAN

### The Expert

**APPEARANCE:** Wears pale, linen jackets. Gold-rimmed glasses. Fastidiously pared nails.

**ROLEPLAYING NOTES:**

- Unconsciously dusts surfaces with his hands.
- Squints and sniffs when speaking with those he considers distasteful.
- Never steps on a door's threshold.
- Paranoid.

**BACKGROUND:** Extremely knowledgeable intellectual. Attended Oxford College and has a Doctorate in Classical Studies.

**CLUES:**

- Is going to the Cathedral each day to research the *Book of Aksum* (see *Node 4*).

**HUSAIN SOLIMAN (THE EXPERT):** Anthropology 3, Archaeology 2, Athletics 4, Cthulhu Mythos 4, Evidence Collection 2, Health 8, History 4, Interrogation 1, Library Use 6, Scuffling 3

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Weapons:** -2 (fists)

## **PHAJOL KHADPO**

The Mystic

**APPEARANCE:** An Indian gentleman. Dresses in crisp Western suits, but wears a *pagri* (turban).

### **ROLEPLAYING NOTES:**

- Constantly touching those he speaks with.
- Always hungry and always eating.
- Does not laugh. Ever.

**BACKGROUND:** Phajol is possessed of a sixth sense. He alerts the team to strange threats and verifies the otherworldly nature of some artifacts. He was found on the streets of Bangkok by Luc Fauche who recognized his talents.

**PHAJOL KHADPO (THE MYSTIC):** Assess Honesty 3, Athletics 4, Cthulhu Mythos 1, Firearms 2, Health 7, Occult 5

**Alertness Modifier:** +3

**Weapon:** +0 (double Derringer)



## **LUC FAUCHE**

The Negotiator

**APPEARANCE:** Black hair slicked back. A thin, pencil moustache. Cold eyes.

### **ROLEPLAYING NOTES:**

- Always has a toothpick at hand; cleans his teeth frequently but unobtrusively in a pocket mirror.
- Never says “yes”; always “of course”.
- Sits with his legs crossed and picks lint off his pants while doing so.

**BACKGROUND:** The second husband of Luc’s father was an Englishman who moved the family to India. Luc attended Muir Central College (the Oxford of the East) in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India.

**LUC FAUCHE (THE NEGOTIATOR):** Athletics 8, Bargain 5, Cop Talk 2, Disguise 6, Firearms 4, Health 11, Flattery 3, Locksmith 2, Forensics 2, Oral History 2, Preparedness 12, Reassurance 4, Scuffling 4, Streetwise 4, Weapons 6

**Alertness Modifier:** +2

**Weapon:** +0 (automatic pistol), -1 (gold-plated switchblade)

## **ALEX KRAMER**

The Leg-Breaker

**APPEARANCE:** Broad, muscular, with a thick neck. Looks like a bouncer. Has a tattoo of a massive beetle on the back of his right hand, which disappears into his cuff.

### **ROLEPLAYING NOTES:**

- Stops to listen to buskers.
- Exhales loudly a lot.
- Hunches his shoulders lightly to increase his sense of bulk.

**BACKGROUND:** Alex is from Sioux Falls, SD. When Hal Becker was killed by the chillbane in Wind Cave, the team needed to add some muscle and they found it in Alex. He's accepted the strange things he's seen since joining the team with a relatively stoic resolve and quickly earned the trust of everyone. (He's saved each of their lives at least once and they trust his sense of necessity whenever it comes to security.)

Alex prefers to hire lots of local muscle and overwhelm anyone who looks like a potential threat. He'll keep the others isolated from it if he can.

**ALEX KRAMER (THE LEG-BREAKER):** Athletics 12, Firearms 9, Health 22, Interrogation 3, Intimidation 5, Scuffling 20, Weapons 7

**Alertness Modifier:** +1

**Weapon:** +2 (elephant gun), +1 (9mm pistol), -1 (brass knuckles)