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# Cross cultural exchanges in the ancient world: Early connections between Azania and diverse civilizations of the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean basin and distant regions in the African continent

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## Abstract

In the Roman time, Azania and its capital Rhapta had cultural and economic connections with diverse civilizations of the world, including those in the Mediterranean basin, the Middle East, India, the Far East, and the deep interior of Africa. Information about Azania was first provided by the Romans – Pliny the Elder, Claudius Ptolemy, and sources such as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. Apart from the Romans, other people of the Middle East, including the Homerites or Himyarites, were found to have lived and traded in Azania. Pliny the Elder reported that Azanian received spices from the Far East and sent them to the Great Lakes' region where they were ferried via the Nile to the Mediterranean basin. The *Periplus* also reported other exported and imported trade goods. Indian and Chinese records provided evidence of connections with Azania. The most recent evidence of these connections is archeological. Materials recovered include beads and ceramics from Rome, the Middle East, and India. Archeology of submerged Rhapta also uncovered architectural remains of Roman technology. Material remains from the deep interior of Africa have been found on the coast of Azania. Roman connections with the deep interior of Africa are believed to have created caravan routes that facilitated cultural and technological exchanges.

**Keywords:** Azania; Rhapta; Indian Ocean; Mafia archipelago; Rome

## Azania

The term Azania has recently been discussed by this author (Chami 2021). According to Claudius Ptolemy, Azania was an ancient African territory during the Roman period on the modern region of East Africa. However, using the Roman records and archeology, it has been possible to conjecture that ancient East Africa or Azania had cultural and



**Fig. 1.** Map of the Indian ocean showing ancient cultural and economic connections between Azania/modern East Africa and the rest of the ancient world civilizations (from Chami, Bita & Bushozi 2024).

economic ties with the whole region of central and southern Africa. Trade connections are extended to the Nile Valley (Chami 1999c).

Modern fascination with Azania emanates from the fact that Azania was economically linked to other civilizations of the ancient world, from the Mediterranean basin to India and Southeast Asia (Fig. 1).

### Roman documents about Azania

The earliest document that mentions Azania is provided by Pliny the Elder in the early first century CE. Pliny wrote with the aim of questioning the theory advanced by Greek and earlier Roman scholars that spices such as cinnamon and cassia that reached the Mediterranean world via the Nile River originated from the modern East Africa or the territory he cognized for the first time in history as Azania. He argued instead that the spices that reached Azania were brought there by people who had sailed for years from a region far east of the Indian Ocean. The people he recognized as cave dwellers of the coast of Azania sailed for some distances to receive the spices and transported them to the interior of Azania from where they were ferried via the Nile River to the Mediterranean world (Miller 1969).

The second document to mention and show the route from the Mediterranean world to Azania is the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, authored by an anonymous person of the mid first century CE. In this document, an island known as Menuthias (and resembling Zanzibar) is discussed. It was said that a day's sail from there, one

would reach the emporium of Rhapta, the capital of Azania located at a navigable river (Casson 1989).

Another document is that of Claudius Ptolemy of the third century CE. His work was rather on the geography of Africa; Azania appears on modern East Africa. Ptolemy is given credit for providing latitudes for various places of Azania (Huntingford 1980; Berggren 2000; Freeman-Grenville 1962). However, since Ptolemy is known to not have traveled to the places he reported about, other individuals such as Marinus of Tyre, Diogenes the merchant, Theophilus, and Dioscurus who sailed to Azania and traveled to its interior several times have been given credit for the information. Diogenes must have been in a caravan route to Lake Victoria region where he saw the source of the Nile and Ruwenzori Mountain which he called the Mountain of the Moon. It is definitely in this area where spices reported by Pliny were brought to be ferried to the Mediterranean region. He also reported about a snow-capped mountain that had three peaks – clearly referring to Mount Kilimanjaro on the north of Tanzania (Chami & Silayo 2023) – and about Rhapta, noting that it was on a promontory. The area south of the cape of that promontory was a swamp that extended to river Rhapsion (Allen 1949: 52; Chami, Bita & Bushozi 2024).

### Sociocultural and economic aspects of Azania

The sociocultural and economic aspects of Azania have been discussed in detail by Chami et al. (2021). Key issues are those reported by the Roman documents, now with supporting archeological evidence.

Probably the earliest one is the report by the *Periplus* that the people of Azania were big bodied, soil tillers, and hence regarded to be agricultural, as translated by Casson (1989). Casson's translation was challenged by Horton (1990) and Sutton (1994), but the issue has now been resolved by Giada Manzinali, a specialist in Greco-Roman literature. She has confirmed Casson's reading of the Greek word ὄρατοι (16: 6.7) as ἄρόται (cultivators) and not πειραταὶ (pirates) as thought by Horton, Sutton, and other scholars who translated the *Periplus* before Casson (Chami et al. 2021: 108). McLaughlin (2018: 127) has also accepted the translation by Casson.

It has been noted that the Greek skippers who visited the region of Azania 300 years earlier and recognized the region as Panchaea (Παγχαῖα) also reported that the people of the region were agricultural, cultivating rice, coconut, and a variety of other crops, and that they domesticated chicken (Chami et al. 2021; Chami 2004).

Archeological works in various open sites and limestone caves have recovered remains of domesticates including coconut, rice, cow pea, and millets. There is evidence of domestication of all sorts of animals such as chicken, dogs, ovicaprids, and cattle. These remains are found in Roman contexts of the local Early Iron Age as well as in Neolithic period contexts (Chami 2009a, 2006; Chami et al. 2021).

Other economic aspects mentioned in Roman documents include fishing and iron smelting. Azania did not only export its local products but is reported to have also imported various kinds of goods as discussed in Chami (2021) and Chami et al. (2021).

### Rhapta

Rhapta is presented in the Roman documents as either the main port or the capital of Azania. In the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, it is reported to be an emporium, meaning



Fig. 2. A neck of Roman amphora (from Bita, Bushozi & Chami 2023).



Fig. 3. Roman terra sigillata pottery with inscription (from Bita, Bushozi & Chami 2023).

a trading settlement with several other settlements around it competing for power. The *Periplus* gives account of foreign people, particularly Homerites, who inhabit the area, intermarry with local people, and speak the local language. The Romans seem to have colonized Rhapta: 200 years after the *Periplus*, Claudius Ptolemy reports that Rhapta has become a metropolis (Freeman-Grenville 1962; Berggren & Jones 2000). By that time, the city was well-built using Roman technology. Roman pottery (Fig. 2, 3, and 9) was also found scattered in many areas of the Mafia archipelago (Shikoni et al. 2019; Mandela & Chami 2021).

Although there are several translations of the Roman documents that provided insight into Azania and its ports (Chami, Bita & Bushozi 2024), research and discussion on the location of Rhapta took many years from 1945 until evidence of its definite

location was provided in 2021 (Bitá, Bushozi & Chami 2023; Bitá, Chami & Bushozi 2022; Chami, Bitá & Bushozi 2024).

Baxter is recorded as the first person who suggested that Rhapta was located at the delta of the Pangani River on the northern coast of Tanzania (Allen 1949) (Fig. 4), a claim accepted by Allen. Scholars that continued the search for Rhapta such as Mortimer Wheeler and Anthony G. Mathew also suggested Pangani as the location of ancient Rhapta (Mathew 1975). Surprisingly, the Pangani location continued to be accepted without clear evidence by scholars that followed, such as Datoó (1970) and Kirwan (1986). This was contrary to Claudius Ptolemy's geographic reports of aspects such as latitudes (discussed in Chami, Bitá & Bushozi 2024). At the same time, scholars such as Huntingford (1980), Chittick (1982), and Casson (1989) proposed the Rufiji River Delta as the location of the ancient port.

It has been pointed out elsewhere why scholars preferred to place Rhapta on other points of the East African coast rather than the Rufiji River Delta and its offshore islands of the Mafia archipelago (Fig. 4) that has now been established as the location of Rhapta (Chami, Bitá & Bushozi 2024). It is on these two coinciding places that I decided to conduct my archeological research since 1995 in search of Rhapta. In that research, Roman beads, glasses, and pottery from different parts of ancient civilizations, including the Nile Valley, the northern Indian Ocean seaboard, and India, were discovered on many sites. The findings of this ancient Indian transoceanic trade system were published in various peer reviewed journals and books (Chami 1999a, 1999b, 2004, 2006; Gupta 2016, 2021). It should be noted here that additional research on Rhapta that continued after 2019 has discovered both the emporium and the metropolis of Rhapta in the Mafia archipelago.

Recent research on the Mafia islands intensified because of, firstly, the discovery of the Ukunju Cave and the recovery of many ancient imported artifacts in it (Chami 2004, 2006; Shikoni et al. 2019); and secondly, the discovery of the underwater site by a diver, Alan Sutton, who invited me to assist in identifying the site. I did identify it as the elusive metropolis of Rhapta, pending recovery of Roman artifacts and built structures. Researches that followed have confirmed the view that the underwater site was the location of Rhapta and hence the capital of Azania. Several theories were advanced to facilitate the understanding of the Roman documents and the discovered archeological materials.

The first theory proposed that the modern delta of the Rufiji River is not the one referred to in the Roman documents. We realized that the ancient Rufiji River and its delta extended eastward to cover the southern part of the main Mafia island at Chole Bay where the river bulged its water to the main ocean close to the Miewe islands. In this area, evidence of the ancient delta features is observable today. According to this theory, then, the emporium of Rhapta reported by the *Periplus* was at the Chole Bay area, and many local archeological sites of the Roman period studied since 1999 (Chami 1999b) are the settlements reported by the *Periplus* as those competing with Rhapta for power (Casson 1989)<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 5).

The second theory proposed that the metropolis of Rhapta that was first reported by Claudius Ptolemy was at the northwestern part of the main island of Mafia where its

<sup>1</sup>See Bitá, Bushozi & Chami (2023); Chami, Bitá & Bushozi (2024).



Fig. 4. The coast of Tanzania showing places thought to have been the ancient location of Rhapta.

coral reef extended to the ocean for several kilometers to form a promontory since the Neolithic period or even before. The Romans, together with the local people, decided to move the capital of Azania from Chole area to that promontory that came to be named by the local people as the ‘hard-built wall’ or *mwamba ukuta* in local Swahili language (Fig. 6). This theory agrees well with the Roman reports of Ptolemy’s time that Rhapta was on a promontory. It is this report that made some scholars think that Rhapta was on the Dar-es Salaam peninsula (Datoo 1970; Kirwan 1986) (Fig. 4). Diogenes was very clear that it was south of this promontory that the Rhapton River was located (Allen 1949). It is noted below that a Southeast Asian report has evidence of the metropolis being on a promontory.



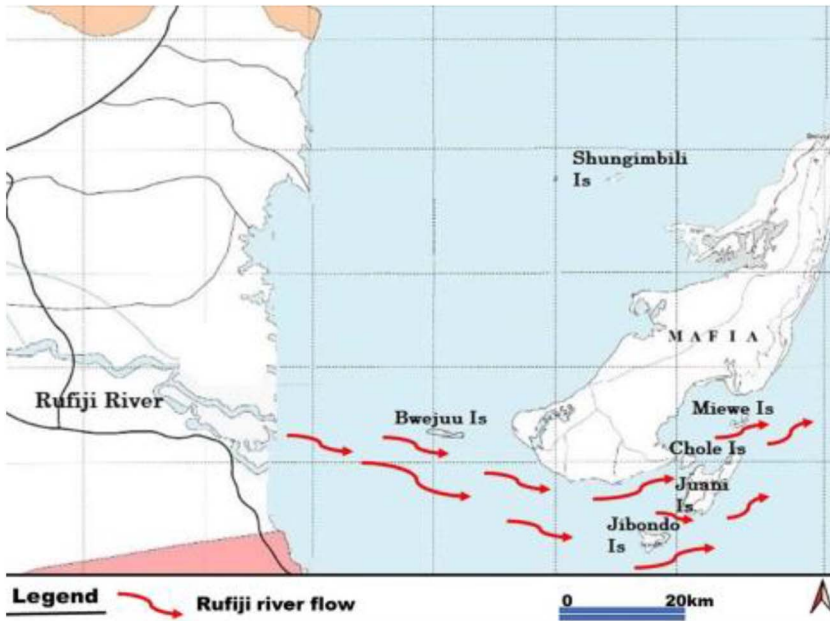


Fig. 5. Map showing the ancient Rufiji River and the delta extending east to southern Mafia Island (from Chami, Bita & Bushozi 2024).

The third theory, advanced by us, was an explanation of the description provided by Claudius Ptolemy of how one had to sail from the main ocean along the Rhapsion River to reach the metropolis of Rhapta. According to Ptolemy, one had to sail a distance of one degree westward and then turn north for another degree. It is this sailing description that Dato (1970) tried to explain by arguing that the river described by the Romans at Rhapta flows north-south parallel to the coast and turns east at a point to enter the ocean. Our theory is that from the ocean, one had to sail for about 40 miles to reach the southwest point of the main island, the place known as Kisimani Mafia (Fig. 7), and turn north along the shallow ocean water between the main Mafia Island and the modern Rufiji region. It is this shallow water that the local people identified as the female water to differentiate it from the rough main ocean on the east of the main island. Diogenes identified this shallow water as a swamp. The island of Bwejuu and the adjacent Kisimani Mafia peninsula have also been found to have many potteries of the Mediterranean world (Mandela & Chami 2021; Shikoni et al. 2019). With this theory, it was possible to understand the submerged site of Mwamba Ukuta as the metropolis of Rhapta as described by Claudius Ptolemy (Bitá, Bushozi & Chami 2023) (Fig. 7).

### Cultural and economic connections between Azania, the Mediterranean, and other parts of the ancient world, including the deep interior of Azania

In this section, we shall rely more on the available historical and archeological data and deal with the records of the Roman period, dating from the last century BCE to 500 CE. Documents examined here are Roman, Indian, and Chinese.

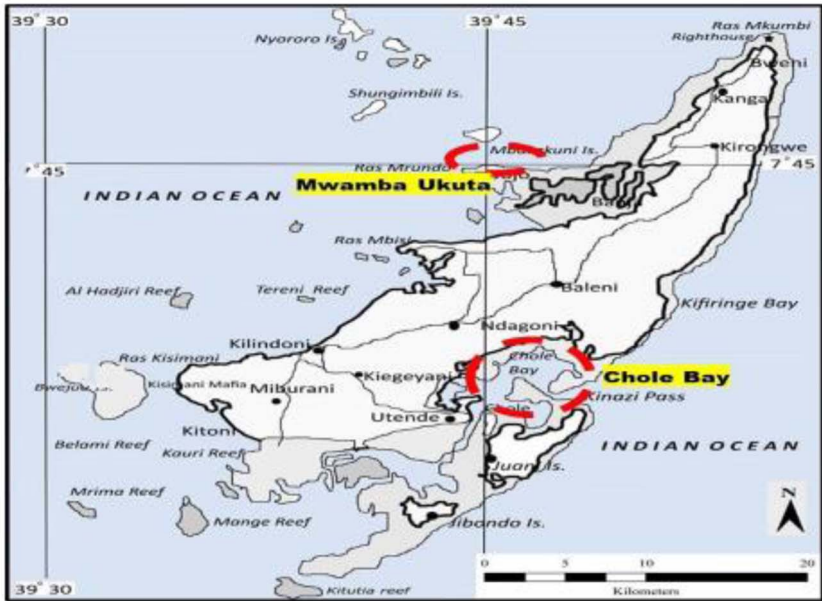


Fig. 6. Map showing the ancient location of the two ports of Rhapta, the emporium at Chole Bay, and the metropolis at Mwamba Ukuta.

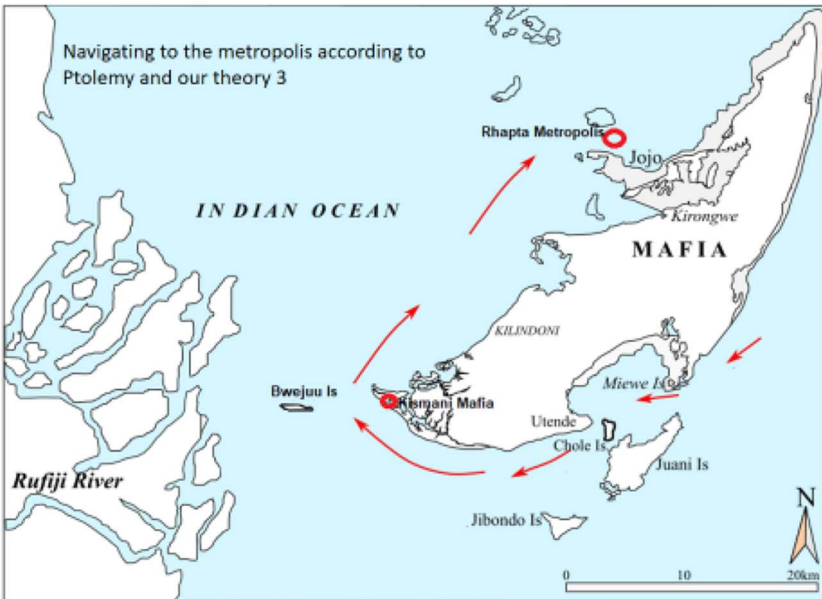


Fig. 7. Explanation of Claudius Ptolemy's sail to the metropolis of Rhapta/Mwamba Ukuta.



As noted above, the earliest record of connections between Azania and the ancient world civilizations is that of Pliny the Elder, who wanted to correct the misunderstanding that spices such as cinnamon and cassia had reached the Mediterranean world from East Africa via the Nile. Pliny argued that although the spices reached the Mediterranean world from East Africa, it was not their source. In his first mention of Azania, he argued that the spices originated from a region far in the East, and they were brought to East Africa or Azania by people who sailed for years before reaching the West Indian Ocean seaboard. There, Azania cave dwellers sailed for some distance to receive them. As discussed by Miller (1969), Pliny is clearly arguing that there were cultural connections between Azania and the people of Southeast Asia, who came with spices and returned with finished metal products of Azania. People of Azania had to have been iron smelters, and by 400 CE they are also known to have copper and lead objects, probably worked with a technology that they had even before that time (Chami 1994). The exchange between the peoples of Azania and Southeast Asia is not limited to spices and metals. Other cultural elements could have been exchanged as well, such as sailing vessels, i.e., outrigger canoes, and domesticated plants and animals from both regions. Some people from these trade missions could also have decided to settle on the lands of Azania, such as Madagascar (Boivin et al. 2013; Chami et al. 2021).

More evidence of the cultural and economic link between Southeast Asia and Azania was reported later by Claudius Ptolemy, arguing that the origin of cinnamon and cassia was in Southeast Asia. Ptolemy also recounted that the people of that region had knowledge about Azania and its capital Rhapta's location on a promontory in the southern part of Azania (McLaughlin 2018).

During the Roman period, the Chinese also had their own record of sailing to Azania, the region that they identified as Zezan. From Zezan they may have obtained information on how to circumnavigate Africa to the Atlantic via South Africa, and traveled as far as Rome (Hill 2004; Chami 2017). According to Pliny the Elder, the Chinese also reported of the long distance it took to travel from Southeast Asia to Azania, and were aware of the existing connection between the Persian Gulf and Azania. They recorded, for the first time in history, that Rhapta was a Roman colony.

The Indians have their own report from the 7<sup>th</sup> century of the cultural/economic relations with Azania, of traders traveling to East Africa, to an island settled by black people they called Yavanas (Basham 1954). Sunil Gupta believes that the report refers to Azania during the Roman period, as Indian potteries of different types have been recovered from sites of the Mafia archipelago<sup>2</sup>.

Another cultural link is the exchange between cave dwellers along the coast of Azania and the people living in the interior of Africa, as reported by Pliny the Elder. As mentioned above, these cave dwellers transported the spices brought from Asia via a caravan route to Lake Victoria, where they were ferried via the Nile River to the Mediterranean world. In these trade connections, cultural exchanges between the two regions were also formed (Chami & Ntandu 2018). The existence of these trade and cultural connections was well recognized by the Romans, as the Roman emperor Nero sent an army to verify it (Welsby 1996; Synge 1937).

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<sup>2</sup>Personal communication.

This historical examination of the cultural and economic connections between Azania and other parts of the ancient world will not be complete without mentioning the Roman geographers and skippers who provided data to Claudius Ptolemy about different African regions, of which Ptolemy reported without having gone there. Marinus of Tyre traveled to several parts of Africa, particularly in the deep regions, and provided information that appears in Ptolemy's map of Africa (Lacroix 2017). The people of the whole sub-Saharan Africa are identified as Ethiopians, meaning black people. Few groups have their names mentioned, such as the Agisymba of central and southern Africa (ibid.). Agysimba people are still recognized in Madagascar and Mozambique today (Vérin 1986; Freeman-Grenville 1962; Chami 2021).

Another such source was Diogenes who is reported to have been to Azania several times. His main contribution, already noted above, was that he traveled along a caravan route from the coast of Azania to as far as the Great Lakes region where he observed Lake Victoria and the Ruwenzori Mountain, which he termed the Mountain of the Moon. The Mountain of the Moon provided water to Lakes Victoria and Albert, which in turn provided water to the Nile. Ptolemy's map of Africa shows the range of the mountain that provides water to two great lakes linked by rivers to the Nile (Chami 2006: 181; Berggren & Jones 2000, pl. 2). Diogenes recognized these lakes as the origin of the Nile. It is possible that during his travel on this caravan route, Diogenes observed Mount Kilimanjaro that he reported to have three peaks.

Counterparts of Diogenes were the skippers Theophilus and Dioscurus, who traveled beyond Rhapta to the Mozambican channel. While on trade routes to southern Africa, these skippers most likely introduced Azanian socio-political and economic affairs to the region, including the islands of Madagascar and the Comoro archipelago (Chami 2021). Dioscurus is reported to have bypassed Theophilus (Cary & Warmington 1929), which could probably have meant that he traveled to Azania or to regions beyond Rhapta, such as to southern Africa, many more times. Information on the islands of Madagascar and the Comoro archipelago, which appear on Ptolemy's map of Africa, could have been received from Theophilus or Dioscurus (Lacroix 1998, m. 8).

### Archeological evidence of cultural and economic connections of Azania with other ancient civilizations

Artifacts that suggest cultural and economic links between Azania and ancient civilizations in other parts of the world were found in archeological sites along the coast of East Africa or the ancient Azania coast. I provide a brief summary here.

Probably the earliest archeological evidence is presented by Horton (1996) from data available by the 1980s. The outstanding evidence is coins from different regions of the ancient world found in the Azania region extending to southern Africa. Most of these had been found in non-archeological contexts, although some were collected from sites related to the Roman records, like the Roman coins found in Tanga, north of Tanzania (Fig. 4). This was the area that Ptolemy located the metropolis of Toniki, at the fourth parallel south. The discovery of the coins published in Horton's paper is indisputable evidence of trade and cultural connections between Azania and other regions, including the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In the same region of Tanga, Indian Elephanta pottery was collected in 2016 by my research team (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. One of several Elephanta potteries from India recovered from the shores of the port of Tanga.

Another evidence of cultural and economic connections between Azania and other ancient civilizations is the discovery of Roman beads, including the segmented gold in silver beads that were produced on the Mediterranean island of Rhodes (Fig. 11). I recovered these from an excavation at Mkukutu-Kibiti in the Rufiji Delta, the region now suggested by scholars to have been in proximity of the elusive metropolis of Rhapta (Chami 1999a; Chami, Bita & Bushozi 2024). A Roman segmented gold in silver bead was also recovered from an excavation site on the southern slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro (Chami & Silayo 2023) (Fig. 12). Many more beads of the Greek and Phoenician culture were recovered from the Ukunju Cave on the Mafia archipelago (Chami 2006) close to Rhapta (Chami, Bita & Bushozi 2024). Beads of Indian origin, including carnelian beads, were recovered from the Misasa site, also in the Rufiji region (Chami 1994; Gupta 2021). The recovery of these and other beads in the Rufiji region, along with various glass materials found on the coast of East Africa/Azania, was published by Sunil Gupta as evidence that Azania had trade connections with other ancient civilization as far as Southeast Asia.

Furthermore, excavations in the Kuumbi Cave and Unguja Ukuu of Zanzibar recovered more materials of Roman trade, such as pottery (Juma 1996) and glass bead (Chami 2009). It should be noted here that not only artifacts of transoceanic cultural and trade materials have been recovered from the Azania region, but also remains of domesticates that could either have been brought from Asia or transported there from Azania in the Roman period or even before. The ones reported here, however, are those found in the contexts of the Roman period. Rice, coconut, millet, and cow peas were recovered from the Kuumbi Cave. Millet and cow peas are of African origin but are also found in Asia. Excavation in the Ukunju Cave also recovered remains of domesticates, including chicken and cattle bones (Chami et al. 2021). Other scholars who have discussed these kinds of cultural connections include Beaujard (2005) and Boivin et al. (2013). On Mlongo, Mafia Island, Walz and Kwekason (2022) also discovered coconut fronds used by the people of Azania for roofing. It seems that this roofing tradition existed on the coast of East Africa to the modern time. Could this tradition have had been brought along with others from Southeast Asia in the ancient time?



Fig. 9. Roman terra sigillata pottery.



Fig. 10. Underwater remains of the perimeter wall of the metropolis of Rhapta (from Chami, Bitá & Bushozi 2024).

The terrestrial archeology of the 1990s and later were supplemented with underwater archeology since 2019 – a result of the discovery of a submerged site at Makutani in the Mafia archipelago and the discovery of several Roman potteries (Shikoni et al. 2019) (Fig. 2, 3, and 9). The need for underwater archeology in the Mafia archipelago area was obvious. In that undertaking, both Claudius Ptolemy's metropolis of Rhapta and the emporium of Rhapta depicted in the *Periplus* were discovered. The metropolis of Rhapta was found to be at the underwater site of Makutani (Fig. 6 and 7). Also found were architectural structures using Roman technology (Chami, Bitá & Bushozi 2024; Chami 2021) (Fig. 10).

Chole Bay was identified as the location of the Emporium of Rhapta (Fig. 7). Underwater work at this site recovered several caches of ceramics, most of them being entire pots. Some were of Roman origin (Fig. 13) and others Indian (Fig. 14). In some places a collection of dressed stones was found. A type of Roman pottery with perforations was also recovered from the site (Fig. 15), the same kind that was reportedly also found in other sites in the Indian Ocean, such as the Ukunju Cave in the Mafia archipelago (Shikoni 2023: 218), as well as in Arabia (Pavan 2017)<sup>3</sup>.

Cultural elements of the deep interior of Africa are also found to have spread to the coast of Azania. From the excavation at Maramba on a Tanga site, Roman coins and some dimple-based potteries of the Lake Victoria region known as Urewe were

<sup>3</sup>Also see Tomber (2008) on the Indo-Roman trade.



Fig. 11. Roman beads from the Rufiji Delta (from Chami 1999a).



Fig. 12. Beads from the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, Roman segmented bead at the bottom (from Chami & Silayo 2023).

collected. Also recovered were crucibles with schematic, geometric, and amorphous [SGA] inscriptions, theorized to be ancient scripts of the Lake Victoria region (Chami 2006, 2008). SGA inscriptions have also been found in the Ukunju Cave in Mafia and in a site in Comoros (Chami & Ntandu 2018; Chami 2013).

Roman trade and cultural connections are reported to have influenced the African people, particularly the Bantu speakers, in several ways. For example, the spread of Roman decorative materials and embroidery such as beads and kohl, reported by the Romans to be trade goods, may have caused women to change their cultural tradition to instead adorn themselves with such materials. In the 1800s, women in the Mount Kilimanjaro area were reported to have been well adorned with such items (Stahl 1965).

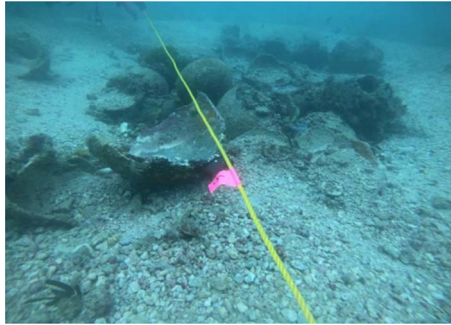


Fig. 13. One of the pottery caches at Chole.



Fig. 14. Indian pottery recovered from one of the pottery caches.

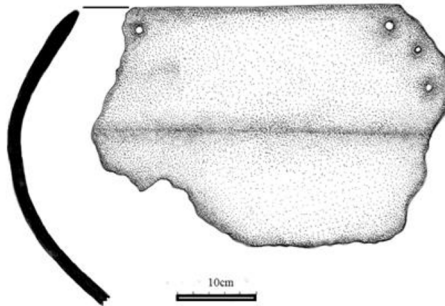


Fig. 15. Perforated pottery recovered from Chole Bay, Mafia archipelago.

Archeological evidence on the coast of East Africa recovered imported materials like beads in cultural sequence lasting from the Early Iron Age to the modern time. Roman segmented gold in glass beads that were recovered from several sites of ancient Azania also indicate that the ancient tradition continued to the modern time (Chami & Silayo 2023).

Another major effect of the transoceanic trade on Azania was theorized to be the establishment of caravan routes that extended to the deep interior of Africa. This phenomenon is believed to have changed the life of the Bantu-speaking people of the region, for it facilitated the spread of technologies such as iron smelting, ceramics, and domestication that led to trade-based permanent settlements. The observation has



led archeologists of the 1960s and 1970s to view the ancient variants of pottery of the Bantu-speaking people as a result of their migration throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Such pottery tradition was found in east, central, and southern Africa. I questioned this explanation by arguing that the existence of variants of Bantu-speaking peoples' culture in these three parts of the Sub-Saharan Africa was the effect of the Roman trade that extended to the deep region of Africa from the coast of Azania (Chami 1999c), for the same effect is also observed on the Comoros and Madagascar (Chami 2010, 2021).

### Concluding remarks

Roman reports of relations between Azania and other ancient civilizations via the Indian Ocean are well accepted and discussed by many scholars. McLaughlin's *The Roman Empire and the Indian Ocean* (2018) is probably one of the leading works on this issue in recent times. Souza and Arnaud have collated papers on this issue in *The Sea in History - The Ancient World* (2017), including that of Chami on the Indian Ocean.

However, some scholars (Sinclair 2007; Crowther et al. 2014) have challenged the evidence of this ancient world system, particularly the one provided by my own research team. My colleagues and I have done our best to respond to this challenge (Chami 2009b, 2021; Chami et al. 2021; Shikoni et al. 2019). All our recent publications cited in this paper provide new archeological evidence of Rhapta, related architectural structures, and artifacts of transoceanic connections.

Research on Rhapta is expected to take many more years to gain a better understanding of this complex phenomenon. I hope the filming of the discovered sites of Rhapta by Discovery Channel and the issues discussed in this paper will generate more research interest. Research on the territory of Azania and its metropolis will provide data to understand not only the ancient western Indian seaboard, but also the earlier periods of Azania that was known by the Greeks as Panchaea and by the Egyptians as the land of Punt or Pwane (Chami 2004; Chami & Ntandu 2018; Perry 2005; Kitchen 2004).

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