

PEOPLES OF AZANIA

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Abstract. The name Azania, referring to North-East Africa, has long been used for a wide range of political and ideological ends. Modern interpretations given to the name are typically based more on current concerns than on the complex and long-standing relationship between the people of the region and the inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin and its environs.

Modern Uses of the Name 'Azania'

The uses to which the name Azania has been put, the interpretations which the name has been given, and the treatment of the subject in works of scholarship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries require comment and contextualisation. The nineteenth-century literature on the region reflects the interest of the colonial powers in past explorations of Africa.¹ Speculations about the etymology of the name reflect the shift from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial European perceptions of Blacks.² The connection with the

¹ The nineteenth century was the age of exploration in Africa and considerable interest was being shown in the discovery of the source of the Nile in antiquity, as can be seen in a publication by H. Schlichter, 'Ptolemy's Topography of Eastern Equatorial Africa', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* 13 (1891) 513-33, 576, who links contemporary exploration with the discoveries of the Greek explorers in his first paragraph. See C. Guillaing, *Documents sur l'Histoire, la Géographie et le Commerce de l'Afrique Orientale* 1-4 (Paris 1856-57) and G. Bunsen, *De Azania Africae Littore Orientali* (Bonn 1852). Bunsen was an Anglo-Italian who studied in Berlin in 1843-45; thanks are due to Professor B. Kytzler of the Free University, Berlin for obtaining this document for me. See also H. B. Robinson (ed.), *Narrative of Voyages to Explore the Shores of Africa (Arabia and Madagascar) Performed in H. M. Ships Leven and Barracouta, Under the Direction of Capt. W. F. W. Owen R. N. by Command of the Lords Commanders of the Admiralty* (Twickenham 1833); J. Prior, *Voyage of the Nisus Frigate* (London 1819); and William Vincent, *The Commerce and Navigation of the Ancients in the Indian Ocean* (London 1807). Vincent states that it is disappointing not to find gold among the commodities exported from Azania in antiquity, as Solomon was said to have obtained gold on this coast and, according to the Arab historians, it was later exported from southern Africa.

² For the etymology of the name see my article 'Azania—Some Suggested Derivations', *Aclass* 25 (1992) 151-59.

Persian word for 'black' is found as early as the seventeenth century.³ In 1893 the derivation of the name Azania from the custom of 'many tribes' of tying bells around their ankles (Avestan *zanga*, 'ankle') was first put forward and has since been seriously supported on the grounds that this is in agreement with the 'gay character' of Blacks.⁴ This century an equally revealing suggestion that the derivation was from the Arabic *zengel*, in turn derived from the Sanskrit *jangala* ('jungle'), has been made.⁵

The name has been used very differently in the context of nascent African nationalism. In the 1940s the cause of African nationalism was propagated in South Africa by A. M. Lembede and A. P. Mda, who belonged to the Youth League of the African National Congress (ANC). Lembede anticipated the current debate on the contribution of Africa to civilisation by claiming that Egypt was an African achievement.⁶ Lembede believed that Africa would make its own unique contribution to civilisation and quoted in support of this the proverb *ex Africa semper aliquid novi*, Pliny's Latin version of a Greek proverb (*HN* 8.41), a phrase now considerably overexploited.⁷

³ See B. Krumm, *Words of Oriental Origin in Swahili* (London 1940) 107-90, who quotes O. Dapper, *Umständliche und Eigentliche Beschreibung von Africa* (Amsterdam 1670).

⁴ See P. Horn, *Grundriss der Neupersischen Etymologie* (Strassburg 1893) 302, supported by Krumm [3] 107-09. See now L. A. Thompson, 'Roman Perceptions of Blacks', *Scholia* 2 (1993) 26.

⁵ See Krumm [3] 107-09, who cites I. G. Elliot, 'A Visit to the Bajum Islands', *Journal of the African Society* (1925-26) 13.

⁶ The argument for Afro-Asiatic influence on Greek civilisation is made by M. Bernal, *Black Athena* 1-2 (New Jersey 1987), which has caught the interest of the popular press in America. See 'African Dreams', *Newsweek* (23 September 1991) 42-48. For Lembede's claim see G. M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley 1978) 59.

⁷ A. M. Lembede, 'Some Basic Principles of African Nationalism', *Inyaniso* (20 February 1945) in T. Karis and G. Carter (edd.), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964* 2: *Hope and Challenge 1935-1952* (Stanford 1972) 314-16. For the proverb see Plin. *HN* 8.41.1-8.43.5; Arist. *Hist. Anim.* 606b.17; Vitruvius. *De Arch.* 8.3.24; I. Ronca, 'Semper Aliquid Novi Africam Adferre: Philological Afterthoughts on the Plinian Reception of a Pre-Aristotelian Saying', *Akroterion* 37.3-4 (September-December 1992) 146-158; B. Baldwin, 'Some Pleasures of Later Roman Literature: The African contribution', *Acta Classica* 22 (1989) 37-57; A. V. Van Stekelenburg, 'Ex Africa Semper Aliquid Novi—A Proverb's Pedigree', *Akroterion* 33.4 (December 1988) 114-120; Tomaschek, 'Azania', *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* 2.2 (1896) 2639f.

The cause of Black nationalism was supported outside South Africa by Kwame Nkrumah, who hosted an All-African Peoples Conference in 1957 after he became the first Black President of Ghana. Nkrumah was born near Axim, a name which recalls the great ancient city of Axum in Abyssinia, said by Cosmas Indicopleustes, a geographer of the sixth century AD, to have controlled the trade with the north-east coast of Africa, known to him by the name Azania (see map, p. 8). Axim in Ghana had been the stronghold of the Pan-African Movement during the proceedings of the National Congress of British West Africa in March 1920 at Accra.⁸ Nkrumah also hosted a subsequent All-African Peoples Conference at Accra in December 1958 at which the name Azania was proposed as a replacement for the name South Africa.⁹

In 1965 Waugh's use of the name to refer to a fictitious island off the coast of Somalia in his zany, black satire on British colonial rule in Africa, *Black Mischief*, attracted the attention of ideologues of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC).¹⁰ Despite Waugh's unencouraging reply to their query about the origin of the name, it was then publicised as the name for a new South Africa.¹¹ The leadership of the PAC now uses the term to distinguish its political position from those of its rivals for power.¹² From 1979 the

⁸ For the Pan-African movement see Gerhart [6] and I. Geiss (tr. A. Keep), *The Pan African Movement* (London 1974).

⁹ B. Leeman, *Lesotho and the Struggle for Azania: Africanist Political Movements in Lesotho and Azania: The Origins and History of the Basutoland Congress Party and the Pan-Africanist Congress 1780-1966* 1-2 (London 1985) 112 n. 199. According to Leeman, this claim was made by Moses Molapo, the London representative of the Basutoland Congress Party. Leeman refers to a taped interview with Molapo in London (or Sheffield) in 1978. In a letter to me now (August 1991) Leeman says that the name was coined by the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) representative at the conference at the request of Nkrumah, who funded the PAC extensively. The representative was on Leeman's authority either Peter Raboroko or Peter 'Molotsi. See also P. Dreyer, *Martyrs and Fanatics* (London 1980) 215.

¹⁰ See T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (Johannesburg 1983) 310; C. J. Driver, *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African* (London 1980) 244. The name was advocated in the editorial of *Le Peuple Alger* (20 March 1965) on the instigation of Peter Raboroko, Patrick Duncan and Reginald Ntantala of the PAC.

¹¹ Waugh's reply was, '*As you should know it is the name of an ancient East African kingdom*' (my italics). Patrick Duncan to Randolph Vigne, 22 March 1965, *University of York Papers of Patrick Duncan* 5-97-61, quoted by Driver [10] 244. My thanks are due to Professor J. Guy for this reference.

¹² Bernard Leeman (personal communication received on 19 August 1991) suggests that the replacement of the name South Africa is in line with the general Maoist ideology of the PAC. Leeman comments further that the name Azania may have a religious meaning in

name became more popular, with the formation of the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), the Azanian Students' Organization (AZASO), and many other Black civic organizations. The ANC have rejected the name because it bears connotations of slavery and the oppression of Blacks.¹³ Despite this debate, or perhaps because of it, Connie Mulder of the Nationalist party (NP) suggested this name at a caucus meeting in March 1978 to refer to South Africa minus the Black homelands.¹⁴ In addition, the possible etymological connection with Arabic, the explorations of the Arab geographers, and the presence of Arab traders in East Africa before the first century AD has *inter alia* led a German Muslim, Tarik Knapp, to suggest that a half-Ethiopian Muslim by the name of Musa reached South Africa before the Portuguese.¹⁵ In the rest of this article the modern interpretations of the name Azania, which have been outlined above, will be compared with what is known about the Azania of antiquity, the people who lived there and their political and commercial relations with the inhabitants of the Mediterranean and its environs.

Explorations Down the Coast of Azania

The North-East African coast had been known to people in the Mediterranean since the sixth century BC.¹⁶ Many attempts to circumnavigate Africa, during which contact would have been made with the coast, were said to

Black fundamentalist religious circles that equate Azania with Zion. The unvocalised Hebrew ZN is taken as Zion by Biblical scholars but as Azania by the fundamentalist sects.

¹³ The ANC viewpoint is set out in an anonymous article with the title 'A Time to End the Myth', *Sechaba* 11 (1977) 64.

¹⁴ See P. Dreyer [9] 220. Dreyer's information is based on a report by F. de Villiers, 'Azania! Nat Plan to Ditch South Africa', *The Sunday Times* (5 March 1978) 1.

¹⁵ For Arabic contact with this coast see D. M. Dunlop, *Arab Civilization to AD 1500* (London 1971); M. Brelvi, *Islam in Africa* (Lahore 1964); G. Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (Princeton 1951) 79-82; C. A. Hromník, *Indo-Africa: Towards a New Understanding of the History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cape Town n.d.) 21-42. For Knapp see *Muslim Views* (August 1990) 10f.; (October 1990) 19; (November 1990) 12-14.

¹⁶ For the attitude of Greeks and Romans to Blacks in general see L. A. Thompson, *Romans and Blacks* (London 1989); 'Roman Perceptions of Blacks', *Scholia ns* 2 (1993) 17-31; F. M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, Mass. 1970). These writers do not discuss Azania specifically. L. A. Thompson, 'Eastern Africa and the Graeco-Roman World (to A.D. 641)', in L. A. Thompson and J. Ferguson (edd.), *Africa in Classical Antiquity* (Ibadan 1969) 26-61, gives information on Meroe, Axum and Nubia and briefly touches on the coastal region.

have been made in antiquity.¹⁷ Doubtless exaggerated claims were made.¹⁸ The motives for later explorations were a mixture of scientific curiosity, hunting expeditions and trade. Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246) sent out an expedition on which hunters saw rains falling in upper Ethiopia that swelled the Nile (a phenomenon discussed by Posidonius, Callisthenes, Eudorus, Ariston the Peripatetic and others; see Strab. 17.789). Elephant hunting in the interior of Africa was a regular activity in the Hellenistic period. Expeditions into the interior were launched from stations along the African coast of the Red Sea. Strabo mentions the 'hunting-grounds' of Pythangelus and Lichas (16.774) and the name Ptolemais Theron is self-explanatory.¹⁹ References to elephants are common in Hellenistic history. Polybius (5.84.5), for example, describes how African elephants stampeded before Indian elephants at the battle of Raphia.

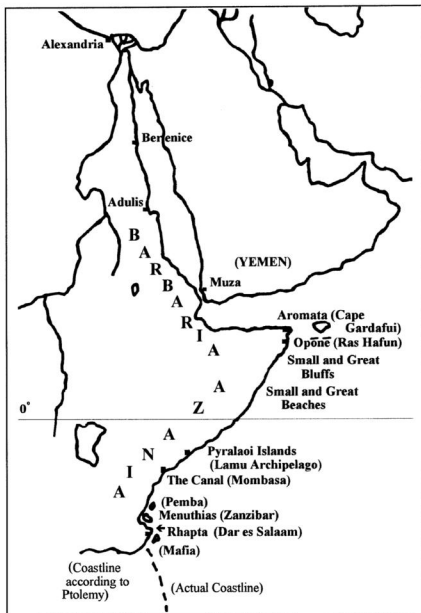
Later Strabo sceptically relates the story of Posidonius that a certain Eudoxus attempted to circumnavigate Libya at the time of Ptolemy VIII Physcon Euergetes II (146-117 BC). Posidonius noted the lack of evidence to substantiate this claim, but went on to give a lengthy account of the voyage of Eudoxus, which Strabo reported in full, in order to refute it (Strab. 2.98).²⁰ During one of his voyages Eudoxus was said to have been blown off course down the East coast of Africa. On another voyage Eudoxus is said to have loaded his ship with doctors, artisans and music-

¹⁷ See Hdt. 4.42; 4.44 (Scylax); Plin. *HN* 2.67.169 (Hanno). However, a Greek text describing this voyage indicates that the expedition ended in West Africa due to a lack of supplies; see C. Müller (ed.), *Geographici Graeci Minores* 1 (Paris 1860) 1-14. Arrian's *Indica* describes the exploration of the sea-route to India by Nearchus after the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great. See A. G. Roos and G. Wirth (edd.), *Flavii Arriani Quae Exstant Opera Omnia* 2 (Leipzig 1968) 1-73.

¹⁸ See Strabo (2.98) with regard to Heraclides of Pontus, who wrote a dialogue in which a *magus* told Gelo that he had circumnavigated Africa. Strabo doubted the truth of this claim. Polybius (3.37) was also sceptical about the possibility of circumnavigating Africa and denied that the Ocean around the world was continuous. Vincent [1] 189-91 did not believe that the Greeks circumnavigated Africa in view of the difficulties experienced by the Portuguese in doing this in the late fifteenth century despite their superior technology.

¹⁹ See H. H. Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World* (London 1974); P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* 1-3 (Oxford 1972).

²⁰ See Strab. 2.98; Plin. *HN* 2.97.169, who puts Eudoxus at the time of Nepos, his source c. 100-25 BC; Pomponius Mela (3.9.90).



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girls. It is possible that he may have intended to trade the girls.²¹ Whatever the truth of the claims made by Eudoxus, the story of his discovery of perfumes and jewels in India, which were confiscated on his return by Ptolemy's widow, Cleopatra, suggests that self-enrichment was part of the reason why he ventured into these regions and that the Ptolemies were aware of the profits to be made from the region. To an extent, therefore, trade along this coast was not only a matter of private enterprise but also subject to state direction.

The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (15.2), which has been dated to the end of the first century AD, gives tantalising details about Azania, which the author probably visited himself.²² Casson rightly emphasises the importance of this work for our knowledge of the economy and political geography of East Africa and India, and remarks on the author's 'lively curiosity'.²³ However, even the identification of sites along the coast, which the author names in passing, is disputed.²⁴ These names are given on the map opposite (p. 8). The *Periplus* describes the area beyond Rhapta (possibly Dar es Salaam) thus: ὁ γὰρ μετὰ τούτους τοὺς τόπους ὄκεανὸς ἀνερεύνητος ὢν εἰς τὴν δύσιν ἀνακάμπει καὶ τοῖς ἀπεστραμμένοις μέρεσιν τῆς Αἰθιοπίας καὶ Λιβύης καὶ Ἀφρικῆς κατὰ τὸν νότον παρεκτείνων εἰς τὴν ἐσπέριον συμίσγει θάλασσαν ('The ocean after these places is unexplored. It bends away to the west and, following the further reaches of Ethiopia, Libya and Africa, mingles with the western sea', *PME* 18.5).

The *Periplus* provides the most detailed information about trade with Azania. This work mentions the importation to the southern trading-port of

²¹ See A. Scobie, *Aspects of the Ancient Romance and its Heritage* (Meisenheim am Glan 1969) 105. I owe this reference and other improvements in this article to Stanley M. Burnstein.

²² L. Casson (ed.), *The Periplus Maris Erythraei: Text with Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Princeton 1989); G. W. B. Huntingford, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (London 1980); W. H. Schoff, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (New Delhi 1974); H. Frisk, *Le Périphe de la Mer Erythrée* (Göteborg 1927). The *Periplus* is thought to have been written in the reign of the Nabataean king Malchus II (44-70 AD). In general see H. F. Tozer, *A History of Ancient Geography* (New York 1964) 274-77; M. Cary and E. H. Warmington, *The Ancient Explorers* (Harmondsworth 1963) 202-21; G. Mathew, 'The East African Coast Until the Coming of the Portuguese' in R. Oliver and G. Mathew (edd.), *History of East Africa* 1 (Oxford 1963) 94; M. Wheeler, *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers* (London 1955) 112-14; Hourani [15] 79-82; J. O. Thomson, *A History of Ancient Geography* (Cambridge 1948) 256-81; Tomaschek [7] 2639f.

²³ Casson [22] 9.

²⁴ Detailed maps of the area are given in Müller [17]. For the suggested modern equivalents of the ancient toponyms and the best text see Casson [22].

Rhapta of javelins of the type made in Muza in Yemen, axes (pangas?), knives (knives decorated with gold and jewels were still a major article of trade when Vincent wrote his account, as they still are today), awls and glass of various sorts (*PME* 17). The importing of iron implements does not necessarily imply ignorance of smelting, since these items were also imported into Adulis, which had known of iron-smelting for some centuries. Corn and wine were also carried for trade to secure the good will of the local inhabitants.²⁵ Exports from Rhapta included ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoise shell and nautilus shell.²⁶ Slaves are mentioned as an export from Opōnē (*PME* 13) and not from Azania specifically, though slaves were doubtless obtained from the interior of Azania. Mediterranean trade with Azania at this time can therefore be characterised as the exchange of luxury goods from the African region in return for tools and manufactured products. Commodities were bartered for the most part, although it is possible that money was introduced later into the region.²⁷

An account of this coast is also given by Claudius Ptolemy, the second-century AD Alexandrian geographer and astronomer, in his *Geography*, which was later edited by Byzantine encyclopaedists.²⁸ The work of Ptolemy is based on that of Marinus of Tyre.²⁹ Both Marinus and Ptolemy aimed at producing a map of the world, so that their interest lay in the precise latitude and longitude of the places on this coast. For example, Ptolemy corrects Marinus on the direction in which Azania lies (south-west, not south). Ptolemy knows much more about the coast and mentions

²⁵ Vincent [1] 172 comments, 'This is so truly consonant with the modern system of carrying out spirits to America, and the coast of Africa, that the resemblance should by no means be suppressed'.

²⁶ Inscriptions refer to ivory craftsmen in Rome (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6.7885: *P. Caesetius politor eborarius*; 37374a: *M. Perperna*; 9397: *Q. Considius*) and to a businessman dealing in ivory at the time of Hadrian (*CIL* 6.33885,3). Pliny mentions a shortage of ivory in his day (*HN* 8.7), which may have been a motive for the voyages of exploration along this coast. Rhinos would have featured chiefly as exhibits at the games (first seen at the games of Pompey in 55 BC [Plin. *HN* 8.71]; they became common later (Suet. *Aug.* 43; Mart. *Spect.* 22.1). The uses of rhino horn (Juv. 7.130) and tortoises (Nic. *Theor.* 700-714; Athen. 8.17.5) are well known in antiquity.

²⁷ See below, pp. 12f.

²⁸ K. Müller (ed.), *Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia* 1-3 (Paris 1883) 1-570; C. F. A. Nobbe (ed.), *Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia* 4-8 (Leipzig 1843).

²⁹ Marinus of Tyre lived about seventy years after Pliny in the second century AD. Marinus made use of information provided by Diogenes, Theophilus, Dioscorus, an anonymous account and Julius Maternus. The Arab historian Mas'udi knew of Marinus as distinct from Ptolemy, according to Dunlop [15].

mountains known as Zingis and Phalangis, two new harbours called Essina (south of Opōnē) and Sarapion (after the Small and Great Beaches), the emporium Niki (north of Rhapta), and Prason (Ptol. 1.17.5), which is on modern Cape Delgado (south of Rhapta). He also knows about Mt Kilimanjaro and the lakes that are the sources of the Nile.³⁰ Ptolemy places Azania in the hinterland of Africa and not on the coast as in the *Periplus*. After this Ptolemy's knowledge becomes extremely vague. He uses the term ἡ ἀντοκουμένη ('the opposite side of the inhabited world') in reference to Agisymba (1.8.1) to denote a counter-balancing continent to match the Mediterranean world and describes the area beyond Rhapta as the limits of the known world (8.16.14).³¹

Marinus (via Ptolemy) tells us that a merchant Diogenes, who was travelling to India, was blown off course by a storm from the north when he was turning away from the promontory of Aromata. He was blown south for twenty-five days, with the land of the Trogodytes on his right. Here he found the source of the Nile in the hinterland just north of Rhapta. Ptolemy also tells us that Diogenes travelled along the East coast of Africa to the vicinity of modern Zanzibar and then inland to the lakes and the Mountains of the Moon (Ptol. 1.9.3). Theophilus on the other hand, who was travelling to Azania from Rhapta, was blown off course by the south wind and reached Aromata on the twentieth day (Ptol. 1.8.5). The voyage of Theophilus is particularly interesting, since it suggests that his presence in Rhapta was unremarkable. This in turn suggests that trade along the coast was regular at this time. This passage also indicates that Azania was thought to be well north of Rhapta. The contrary direction of the winds is not a difficulty in these stories, since the monsoon winds blow along the coast in different directions in winter and summer.

In the sixth century we have information on this coast from Cosmas Indicopleustes in a work entitled *Christian Topography*.³² Mathew suggests

³⁰ Ptol. 1.17.6; 4.8.3.

³¹ Pomponius Mela in 43 AD describes Africa as a vast continent in the southern hemisphere, resembling another world, entirely cut off from the Mediterranean, even though he places the sources of the Nile in this southern continent (1.20.1). C. Frick (ed.), *Pomponius Mela: Chorographia* (Stuttgart 1968). See also Man. *Astron.* 1.363-67. For the theory of zones see Verg. *Aen.* 7.222-27.

³² E. O. Winstedt (ed.), *The Christian Topography of Cosmas Indicopleustes* (Cambridge 1909); W. Wolska-Conus (ed.), *Cosmas Indicopleustes: Topographie Chrétienne* 1-3 (Paris 1968-73). Full translation can be found in J. W. McCrindle (ed. and tr.), *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk* (London 1807); excerpts translated in G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The East African Coast* (London 1975).

that the author's name is an indication that the Indian Ocean was unfamiliar to his contemporaries and that this means that trade with the East coast of Africa had fallen off considerably in his day.³³ Cosmas describes Adulis in detail but of Azania he has only the vague knowledge of a place named Zingion. Although Cosmas travelled in the region himself and gathered information from others who had sailed along the coast, his information is unreliable (he cites Moses as the source of his knowledge). Mathew attributes the decline in trade with this area to the increased influence of Persia and Axum. The inscription copied by Cosmas Indicopleustes at Adulis during the reign of Justinian I in about 545 AD records the conquest of Asia by Ptolemy III Euergetes using elephants from the country of the Trogodytes. After this Ptolemy invaded Abyssinia and reduced a number of towns including Zingabene, which is identified by Vincent as 'the country of the Zangues, Zinguis or Caffres'.³⁴ The similarity of the name to the Zingis of Ptolemy suggests that the tribe lived in Azania.

There is certainly evidence of commercial activity in the Red Sea.³⁵ Under Augustus, 120 ships per year set out from Myos Hormos and Berenice to North East Africa and India (Strab. 2.118; 15.686); previously fewer than twenty had sailed per year (17.798, 815). That expeditions to Azania were undertaken for commercial motives is suggested by a number of coin finds that date from the Ptolemaic period to the Ottoman occupation of Egypt (sixteenth century). The coins were allegedly found at Bur Gao (Port Durnford in Somalia) and were described by Harold Mattingly in 1932.³⁶ The coins had been found in 1913 by C. W. Haywood in what he described as a Greek amphora that broke in his boat during a storm. This find included forty-six fourth-century AD Roman coins struck at the mints of Alexandria, Rome, Thessalonica, Antioch, Cyzicus, Nicomedia, and

³³ Oliver and Mathew [22] 99.

³⁴ Vincent [1] 531-49 (dissertation on the Adulitic inscription).

³⁵ For the commercial activity in the Red Sea see P. Green, *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (Berkeley 1990) 326-29; S. Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa 30 BC-AD 217* (Leiden 1986); J. Desanges, *Recherches sur l'Activité des Méditerranéens aux Confins de l'Afrique* (Palais Farnèse 1978). None of these authors deal with trade contact with Azania.

³⁶ N. Chittick, 'An Archaeological Reconnaissance of the Southern Somali Coast', *Azania* 4 (1969) 129f., is sceptical. G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, 'The Times of Ignorance: A Review of Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Settlement on the East African Coast', *Discovering Africa's Past* (Kampala 1959) 5 (repr. G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, *The Swahili Coast, 2nd to 19th Centuries* [London 1988] ch. 2, p. 5), does not discount the value of the coins as evidence for Ptolemaic trade in the area.

Constantinople; six coins of emperors from Nero to Antoninus Pius, struck at Alexandria; and sixteen Ptolemaic coins from Egypt, six of which date from Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221). Knowledge of this find was only made public nineteen years after the event and Captain Haywood was unable later to confirm the exact location of the site at which the coins were found. The presence of Ottoman coins in the hoard need not necessarily mean that the Ptolemaic coins were only deposited in the sixteenth century AD.³⁷ There is also a coin of Ptolemy X (116-80 BC), which was found with a dagger not far from Dar es Salaam and is described by M. P. Charlesworth.³⁸ A third find in Zanzibar is described by Freeman-Grenville and includes coins of the emperors Diocletian, Licinius, Justin and Justinian, two Hellenistic coins of the second century BC, and Parthian and Sassanian pieces.³⁹ Glass beads of Roman manufacture have also been reported in Zanzibar.⁴⁰ It is noticeable that the *Periplus* also mentions trade in Roman money, although the author here refers to India rather than Africa (*PME* 49).

Arab Traders in Azania

The Arabs who traded along the north-east coast of Africa constituted an interface between the Mediterranean and the interior of Africa. In the first century AD Azania was under the control of the Sabaeans and Homerites, who were ruled by Charibael, who significantly had close diplomatic contact with more than one Roman emperor (*PME* 23, 31). Despite this, a town in his kingdom was reputedly sacked by a Caesar (*PME* 26).⁴¹ Charibael was based at Saphar in Arabia but the main trading port was Muza (modern Mocha), controlled by Charibael's governor in Mapharitis (Yemen), Cholaebus (*PME* 22). The Homerites, or Himyarites, were said by Aelius Gallus to be the most populous of the Arab nations (Plin. *HN* 6.161). They were united with the Sabaeans temporarily under Charibael. The Arab traders knew the African coast well, speaking the language and intermarrying

³⁷ H. Mattingly, 'Coins from a Site Find in British East Africa', *Numismatic Chronicle* 5.12 (1932) 175.

³⁸ M. P. Charlesworth, 'A Roman Imperial Coin from Nairobi', *Numismatic Chronicle* 6.9 (1949) 107-10. G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville [36] ch. 2, p. 4 attributes the find to F. Stuhlmann, *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte von Ostafrika* (Berlin 1909) 843.

³⁹ G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville [36] ch. 2, p. 5.

⁴⁰ G. W. B. Huntingford, 'The Peopling of the Interior of East Africa by its Modern Inhabitants', in Oliver and Mathew [22] 97.

⁴¹ See Casson [22] 160.

with the inhabitants of the interior, thus producing the Swahili language.⁴² At the same time they collected taxes from the region on behalf of Cholaebus (*PME* 16). Zoskales, the grasping and acquisitive ruler of Avalites, the country south of Adulis, also knew how to read and write Greek (*PME* 5.6). He traded spears, axes, swords, awls, glassware, corn and wine for ivory, rhino horn, tortoise shell and coconut. On the island of Dioscurides the *Periplus* says that rice, grain, cotton cloth, and female slaves could be exchanged for loads of tortoise shell (*PME* 31.5). The island had a mixed population of Arabs, Indians and Greeks (*PME* 30).

The Sabaeans were known to be wealthy as a result of their trade in perfumes from the horn of Africa (Artemidorus in Strab. 16.778). Augustus, who was impressed by the wealth of Arabia, sent Aelius Gallus to explore Arabia and Ethiopia (Strab. 16.780). Pliny says that the Sabaeans and other Arab tribes often took to brigandage (*HN* 6.161f.). He adds that the tribes of Arabia were extremely wealthy: *in universum gentes ditissimae ut apud quas maximae opes Romanorum Parthorumque subsidant, videntibus quae e mari aut silvis capiunt, nihil in vicem redimentibus* ('They are the richest nations in the world, as the considerable wealth of the Romans and Parthians falls into their hands. They sell what they capture in forests or from the sea and buy nothing in exchange', 6.162). This appears to echo the sentiment of the emperor Tiberius, who deplored the drain of wealth to foreigners in exchange for precious stones: *illa feminarum propria, quis lapidum causa pecuniae nostrae ad externas aut hostilis gentes transferuntur* ('Our money is exported to foreign or enemy countries for the sake of these stones, which women love so much', Tac. *Ann.* 3.53). Pliny elsewhere estimates that HS100 million left the Roman Empire for India and China annually in exchange for feminine luxuries, although his objections to this are religious rather than economic: *Verum Arabiae etiamnum felicius mare est; ex illo namque margaritas mittit. minimaque computatione miliens centena milia sestertium annis omnibus India et Seres et paeninsula illa imperio nostro adimunt: tanti nobis deliciae et feminae constant. quota enim portio ex illis ad deos, quaeso, iam vel ad inferos pertinet?* ('But surely the Arabian sea is even more 'happy', for from it Arabia procures pearls for export. India, China and the Arabian peninsula take one hundred million sesterces from our empire per annum at a conservative estimate: that is what our luxuries and women cost us. For what percentage of these imports is intended for sacrifices to the gods or the spirits of the dead?', *HN* 12.84) A lot of this

⁴² See Brelvi [15] 197 n. 1.

trade must have gone to the Arab middlemen.⁴³ It is unlikely that trade with Azania played a very considerable part in Arab trade with the Mediterranean, but it should not be excluded from consideration entirely.

In the time of Cosmas Indicopleustes the inhabitants of Axum, which controlled trade with Azania, bartered with the inhabitants of Sasu (probably located near Axum, though Cosmas is extremely vague on this point). Cosmas describes how the Axumites would bring meat, salt and iron to the natives and then retire. The natives would then lay gold nuggets on the goods. If the gold were to the satisfaction of the traders they would take it and leave the goods behind; otherwise, they would retire again. The natives would then either add more nuggets or withdraw.⁴⁴

The Inhabitants of Azania

The *Periplus* describes the coast of Azania as precipitous and lacking in harbours. The island of Menuthias (possibly Zanzibar) is said to be low and wooded, with rivers, birds, mountain-tortoise and harmless crocodiles. Azanian society was based on small groups under the authority of local chieftains (*PME* 16.5). The word used to describe the inhabitants is corrupt (the text at *PME* 16.6.7 reads ὄρατοι; Müller suggests *πειραταῖ*, 'pirates', Giangrande *ἀπόροι*, 'tillers of the soil').⁴⁵ The islanders certainly lived off the sea. They fished and caught turtles in baskets from canoes hollowed from single logs. The technique of sewing material to make boats gives Rhapta its name (from *ῥάπτω*, 'sew together'). The use of sewn boats has persisted down to modern times in Somalia.⁴⁶ Ptolemy describes the last of his five regions of East Africa, that from Rhapta to Prason being the territory of barbarian cannibals (*anthropophagoi*).

Rhapta is described as a place inhabited by big-bodied men. Many authorities remark that there is no specific mention of negroid people in the *Periplus* or of any distinction between the fair-skinned people of the Somali

⁴³ Pliny (*HN* 9.117) tells us that he saw Lollia Paulina covered with pearls that were the spoil of the provinces of the East. The quotation in the text, though, indicates that the pearls derived from the Red Sea and not the east coast of Africa.

⁴⁴ G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville [32] 5-7; J. Gray, 'Trading Expeditions from the Coast to Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika Before 1857', *Tanganyika Notes and Records* 49 (1957).

⁴⁵ G. Giangrande, *Corolla Londiniensis* (Amsterdam 1981) 49-53. Casson [22] 253 comments on the readiness of translators and historians to accept Müller's reading.

⁴⁶ See N. Chittick, 'Sewn Boats in the Western Indian Ocean, and a Survival in Somalia', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration* 9 (1980) 297-309.

coast and the dark-skinned people south of the Juba. The implication is that Bantu-speaking people had not at this stage moved north of Rhapta. The phrase 'big-bodied' has also been taken to refer to Cushitic-speaking people (there are survivals of Cushitic languages in East Africa). The 'man-eating savages' of Ptolemy, if not simply a confession of ignorance (such as 'here be monsters'), could indicate a people living around Cape Delgado distinct from the people north of them. This could be the first reference to Bantu-speaking people, who were beginning to move into the area.⁴⁷ Roland Oliver has suggested that the East coast of Africa was colonised by Indonesians in the first five centuries AD and that they introduced bananas, coconuts and outrigger boats, which resulted in an increase in the population of the region and the consequent expansion of Bantu-speaking peoples as far as the Juba River.⁴⁸

There is, therefore, evidence of trading contacts and close cultural links among the Greeks and Romans, Arabs and Azanians on the north-east coast of Africa. Initially, contact between Ptolemaic Egypt and Azania was sporadic and accidental, but it must have served to awaken the curiosity of Greeks and Romans about the region. Voyagers from Ptolemaic Egypt found Arab traders engaged in commerce with the inhabitants to the extent that they knew the language of the people and had intermarried with them. The Greeks and later the Romans appear to have begun to deal in a commercially significant way with Azania. In comparison with Arabic trade, however, which preceded it and was subsequently greatly increased, this trade was adventitious and of secondary importance.

⁴⁷ On the problem of Bantu expansion see D. Nurse, 'Bantu Expansion into East Africa: Linguistic Evidence'; R. Soper, 'Bantu Expansion into Eastern Africa: Archaeological Evidence', in C. Ehret and M. Posnansky, *The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History* (Berkeley 1982); R. Oliver, 'The Problem of Bantu Expansion', *Journal of African History* 7.3 (1966) 361-76. G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, 'Tanzania: Problems of a Toponym', *Geographical Notes and Queries* 94 (1968) 7 (repr. Freeman-Grenville [36] ch. 3, p. 7), speculates that Ptolemy's 'man-eating savages' were the Bantu-speaking people. See also G. W. B. Huntingford, 'The Azanian Civilization of Kenya', *Antiquity* 7 (1933) 153-65.

⁴⁸ See Oliver [47] 368.

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