

# In Search of the Lost Metropolis of Azania -Rhapta: Continued Research in Misimbo, Rufiji

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to report on archaeological fieldwork conducted in the Rufiji Delta area, particularly at Misimbo. Rufiji and Misimbo areas were described in previous publications (see Chami 2001). The work was a continuation of surveys and excavations in the northern parts of the Rufiji Delta, an area believed by Chami (2006) and other few previous scholars (Chittick 1982) to be the location of the lost ancient metropolis of Azania. Various finds of previous researches, including Roman beads, indicated a culture of the Roman period in the region, were found and discussed in detail by Chami (2006).

The work reported here was done in two phases. The first phase was supervised by Chami, as principal researcher, assisted by Valence Valerian and Christowaja Ntandu. It was run from August-September 2009, and was part of the University of Dar-es-Salaam Field School. The second phase was supervised by Valence Valerian from 15<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March 2010 as part of Master students training. Different from previous researches in the same region, the aim of this research was to explore the area of Misimbo which was formerly, in the colonial time, a sisal plantation. One reason for focusing on this area is that this is part of the northern Rufiji Delta region which slopes to the valleys and which must, in the ancient time, have formed one of the rivers of the Delta. The relics of the ancient river, including oxbows and mounds which would have been small islands or parts left over by meandering river, can be observed here. The would be river sand beaches with water rising and falling during the tides, can also clearly be observed. The inland small lake near this river, which is part of the Misimbo farm, was before found to have pottery and microliths of the Roman time period (Chami 2001). It took another ten years to discover that the area of the lake was part of a large Early Iron Working period site extending to the river Valley together with the whole forest area of the old Misimbo farm, identified hereafter as Misimbo hill (Bufure and Vakolavene 2010). This reported work, and indeed another in this issue by Bufure, were therefore attempts to explore the lake and the forest areas of this farm down to the ancient valley.