



THE VIEW FROM BOKONI: Modelling
Development in Pre Colonial
Southern Africa

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Introduction

- The Context
- The 500 Years Project
- The implications of the Bokoni discoveries and the limits of older models
- The goals of the paper

We want to start a conversation about the elements of modelling, not offer any kind of formal model

The Bokoni Discoveries

- Landesque capital – east, west & southern Africa (some distinctive features)
- The scale of Bokoni
- The timing of Bokoni
- The role of trade and interactions with a wider world
- Relations with the Pedi state

Terracing along dependable rivers



An aerial view



Drawing on institutional theory to build better models

- Not rational choice, but choice nevertheless (David: choices are channeled rather than determined)
- Order and stability matter and are threatened by change
- Complex internal interactions and unpredictable external changes constantly threaten to disrupt any order
- The universality of suppressing inter-elite violence?

Agricultural economics and the African environment

- Uncertainty and coordination difficulties are major problems of agricultural production (Timmer)
- Africans are the 'frontiersmen' of the world (Iliffe)
- Low labour to land ratios, debilitating diseases and unpredictable climates

Compiling elements of the Model

- Movement and widespread interactions (Hall)
- Centralisation and decentralisation in response to shifting uncertainty (Sansom)
- Redistributive cultures versus individual advancement (Lonsdale)
- Cooperation versus conflict (Guy, Peires, Eldredge)
- The complex and divergent impact of trade
- Adaptation of new technologies
- Persistent versus unstable autocracies (Acemoglu & Robinson versus Herbst)

Applying these elements of a possible framework

- Relations with the wider world – functional based on a culture of inter-dependence?
- Decentralisation and entrepreneurship at Bokoni?
- Initiation and age-sets to deal with coordination problems?
- The destabilising but not devastating impact of the rise of the Pedi state?
- The disorder of competitive state formation – the economic impact of the Mfecane reconsidered?

These are questions we hope will inform the ongoing research process, which, in turn, will shape the models we build to make sense of the pre-colonial past