

rhodesian history

The Journal of The Central Africa Historical Association

Volume 7

1976

D. N. BEACH

Second thoughts on the Shona economy.

J. G. STORRY

The settlement and territorial expansion of the Mutasa dynasty.

H. H. K. BHILA

Manyika's relationship with the Portuguese and the Gaza-Nguni.

P. STIGGER

The emergence of the Native Department in Matabeleland.

I. R. HANCOCK

Sane and pragmatic liberalism: the Action Group in Bulawayo.

Notes, Documents and Revisions

Reviews



The Central Africa Historical Association is affiliated to the Historical Association in London. *Residents of Rhodesia* are invited to become members of the Association on payment of an annual subscription of Rh\$4,00; members receive free the current publications of the Association. For further details of these and other activities, please write to the Hon. Secretary.

Residents outside Rhodesia are invited to place orders for back issues and Standing Orders for future issues of the following publications: *Rhodesian History* (see back cover for full details); *Mbire Historical Research South of the Zambezi* (three numbers to date); and *Local Series Pamphlets* (see inside back cover for full list).

Subscriptions, orders and enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary, Central Africa Historical Association, Department of History, University of Rhodesia, P.O. Box MP 167, Mount Pleasant, Salisbury, Rhodesia. Contributions, editorial correspondence, advertisements and books for review should be sent to the Editors at the same address.

© *The Central Africa Historical Association, 1977.*

Printed in Rhodesia by Sebri Printers (Pvt.) Ltd. Salisbury, Rhodesia.

RHODESIAN HISTORY

The Journal of the Central Africa Historical Association

Edited by R. S. Roberts and P. R. Warhurst

VOLUME 7 1976

Second thoughts on the Shona economy: Suggestions for further research. D. N. BEACH	1
The settlement and territorial expansion of the Mutasa dynasty J. G. STORRY	13
Manyika's relationship with the Portuguese and the Gaza-Nguni from 1832 to 1890. H. H. K. BHILA	31
Sane and pragmatic liberalism: the Action Group in Bulawayo, 1955-1965. I. R. HANCOCK	65
NOTES, DOCUMENTS AND REVISIONS	
Britain and amalgamation of the Rhodesias, 1937-1941. K. N. MUFUKA	85
Aspects of the history of the Rhodesian Accountants Act A. KATZ	91
REVIEWS	97
<i>RHODESIANA REPRINT LIBRARY, Volumes 7-9</i> , by W. F. Rea; VAN ONSELEN, <i>Chibaro</i> by D. G. Clarke; BOURDILLON, <i>The Shona Peoples and Myths about Africans</i> by D. N. Beach; GELFAND, <i>A Service to the Sick</i> by O. N. Ransford; Lye, <i>Andrew Smith's Journal</i> by R. S. Roberts; VAMBE, <i>From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe</i> by P. R. Warhurst; BALDOCK, <i>A Survey of Southern Africa Manuscripts</i> by R. S. Roberts; RHODESIANA SOCIETY, <i>Occasional Paper I</i> by P. R. Warhurst; LANGHAM-CARTER, <i>Knight Bruce</i> by P. R. Warhurst; O'MEARA, <i>Rhodesia: Racial Conflict or Coexistence</i> by P. R. Warhurst; BROWN, CHENNELS AND RIX, <i>Arthur Shearly Cripps</i> and DOYLE, <i>Arthur Shearly Cripps</i> by R. S. Roberts; INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS, <i>Racial Discrimination</i> , NKRUMAH, <i>Rhodesia File</i> , and DUMBUTSHENA, <i>Zimbabwe Tragedy</i> by T. D. Shopo; RANDOLPH, <i>Statistics of the Roman Catholic Church</i> by R. S. Roberts.	
NEWS	111

SECOND THOUGHTS ON THE SHONA ECONOMY: SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

D. N. BEACH

University of Rhodesia

THIS PAPER HAS its beginnings in some interviews carried out in the upper Sabi valley in 1973. The trail between these interviews and the present paper is a long and devious one, but it is worth mentioning here. In the first half of 1973 my main interest was in the digging of a kind of historical trench across the central Shona country from east to west and back again, examining and analysing the traditions of a group of peoples whose ruling dynasties were mostly of the Shava (eland) totem. The basic purpose of the work was to determine the historical-political structure of the area, which happened to coincide to a great extent with the upper Sabi valley, but a certain amount of attention was paid to economic factors. As this paper makes clear, more attention should have been paid to economic, social and religious questions, but at the time I was mainly conscious of the problem involved in collecting as much political data as possible from a very wide area in a very short time. Nevertheless, it was possible to put together the raw economic data into a preliminary paper that was read at the Umtali History Conference in December 1973.

That paper, 'The precolonial economy of the upper Sabi valley', was then left as it was for a year, basically because it had raised more questions than it answered, at a time when there was a local boom in economic history, with around a dozen independent studies of southern Zambebian economic history in progress.¹ A request for an overview of nineteenth century Shona economic history led to a revival of the Umtali paper, in which a few of the previously unanswered questions were explored further, and the scope of the paper was expanded to cover, at least in theory, the entire Shona country throughout the entire Later Iron Age. This has been published and is summarized below.² However, as will also be explained below, it continued to raise a great many unanswered questions, and since there was an unfulfilled

¹ The main studies were those of H. Averill (land alienation and population movement in Matabeleland in the early twentieth century), N. M. B. Bhebe (Ndebele trade), H. H. K. Bhila (southern Zambebian trade), D. G. Clarke (peasant underdevelopment and many other topics), J. R. D. Cobbing (the Ndebele economy), P. S. Harris (industrial labour), T. Huffman (economic archaeology), B. A. Kosmin (the Shangwe tobacco trade and maize control), J. M. MacKenzie (the Njanja and the iron industry), R. M. G. Mtetwa (the Duma economy), R. H. Palmer (Rhodesian agriculture), I. R. Phimister (mining and peasantry) and M. C. Steele (Rhodesian agriculture).

² D. N. Beach, 'The Shona economy: branches of production', in R. H. Palmer and N. Parsons (eds), *The Roots of Rural Poverty: Historical Essays on the Development of Underdevelopment in Central and Southern Africa* (London, Heinemann, in press).

obligation to the supporters of the Umtali History Conference, this paper seeks to kill two birds with one stone. Rather than simply produce an updated 'Sabi Valley' paper which would merely repeat the points already made on a larger scale, I now try to show how some of the points made in the more general paper need to be questioned and to suggest a programme of local studies by which this questioning can take place. This is especially appropriate as a follow-up to the Umtali History Conference, because that conference was intended to encourage local studies, and the suggested line of research is emphatically local.

The general paper, 'The Shona economy: branches of production', dealt with four branches of production, two inter-related systems of production and trade and — very briefly — two inter-related social and economic features of the Shona past. The central argument was that, contrary to some views that depicted the precolonial Shona economy as being one of general prosperity, it was centred on a fundamental failure of Shona agriculture to provide absolute economic security. On the other hand, the picture of the efforts made by the Shona to offset this disadvantage, however limited their success may have been, ran contrary to the even older views that depicted the precolonial Shona economy as characterized by 'centuries of improvidence and land rape'.³ Hunting and gathering were described in the context of the original transition of the Shona to agriculture, and with warnings of the way in which traditions tend to give mythical pictures of the economic past of the people. It was asserted fairly categorically that the Shona population as a whole could not survive by either or both branches. Shona agriculture, its origins, its relationship to demographic pressures and soil choices, its component crops and growing processes were all described, and a great deal of attention was paid to the problems of storage. On the whole, it was concluded, Shona technology could not preserve grain from damp and borers for more than two to three years as a general rule. This, it was suggested, led to severe shortages of food during various types of environmental crisis such as droughts or locust plagues, and although both hunting and gathering were practised to offset the shortages, great stress was laid on other branches of production.

Probably the most important of these was herding. Cattle, sheep and goats were independent of the crop cycle and reproduced themselves without the same human effort required for crops. Although cattle in particular had a great social significance, it seems likely that this was rooted in their special value in times of agricultural shortage; then, they were either slaughtered or traded for grain in more prosperous districts. But again, it seems that for

³ This quotation comes from a letter to me by one of the audience at a lecture given by me in 1975 in which he objected to 'the miraculous (mental) transformation from centuries of improvidence and land rape among the Shona to the enterprising and vastly productive rural communities of your imagination'.

various reasons herding was not sufficient in itself to assure economic security. Other branches of production that were followed, often with considerable labour and great ingenuity, were geared to local trade. Salt manufacture in the middle Sabi valley and on the Mafungabusi plateau, ironworking in many places — and especially on the upper Sabi at Wedza — and tobacco growing were all prominent among a host of minor industries and trades, and a degree of specialization has been claimed. Still more branches of production were linked with outside markets and market forces, especially gold mining and ivory hunting. But all of these were not, it appears, sufficient to provide solid security. Consequently, there appear to have been fairly wide differences between the rich and the poor in Shona society, and thus there were already economic imbalances in Shona society — shown in the existence of slave and bondman classes — that led towards peasant production and migrant labour even before the onset of colonial rule. The pessimistic conclusion of the paper was that, in this environment at least, the most devoted and imaginative efforts of the people could not lead to general prosperity.

This paper, of course, was a massive generalization; indeed, it could not very well be anything else in view of the fact that it sought to cover the entire Shona-speaking area for almost a thousand years with reference to all branches of the economy. It was therefore not surprising that, as soon as it was distributed, objections to its statements arose not only in the minds of its readers but also in the mind of its author. Some of these objections were directed at the relationships between branches of production in the model summarized above; others arose from a realization of the complexity of technical subjects that lie largely outside the usual field of historians. Take, for example, the question of hunting-gathering and its relationship to agriculture. For a start, the transition from hunting-gathering to agriculture in human history in both Old and New Worlds was a much more gradual and haphazard process than I had believed in 1974, but in addition it has been shown to be at least theoretically possible to base a non-mobile economy on hunting-gathering. (A mobile economy is one in which people move their living sites during each year.)⁴ Therefore, it is worth asking whether the confident assertion made earlier, that the average Shona community could not survive on hunting-gathering, is true. Dr R. Mutetwa re-

⁴ E. S. Higgs and M. R. Jarman, 'The origins of animal and plant husbandry', in E. S. Higgs (ed.), *Papers in Economic Prehistory* (London, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), 3-14; E. S. Higgs and C. Vita-Finzi, 'Prehistoric economies: a territorial approach', *ibid.*, 28-9; the most famous example of a non-mobile economy based on hunting-gathering in the Americas is that of the Northwest Pacific Coast Indians, with their stratified society based upon exceptionally rich fish-grounds, but this freak case — which at least establishes the theoretical possibility of this combination — is supported to some extent by the very gradual shift from reliance upon hunting-gathering to agriculture after the beginning of the mound-building tradition among the predecessors of the Hopewell culture — which itself shows how 'developed' a society with a proportionately small agricultural base could become, A. M. Josephy, *The Indian Heritage of America* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975), 82-8, 94-8.

ported a much greater reliance upon hunting by the Hlengwe of the south eastern lowveld — a formerly Shona area — and a consequent trade of game biltong for grain from the Duma on the plateau.⁵ Mr J. White reported a much heavier reliance upon wild vegetables in the Shabani area than the model had implied for the whole Shona economy.⁶ Finally, the location of Rimuka south of the Umfuli and west of the Rutala hills in a sodic-soil zone seems to have led historically to a proportionately greater reliance upon hunting and gold-mining than was usual: for Rimuka hunters were famous from at least the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries.⁷

It therefore seems certain that the role of hunting-gathering in the Shona past must at least be re-examined, even though the agricultural-based economy in the model was, I remain convinced, the rule. Future research will have to pay a great deal more attention to the actual amount of game cover in each area, as well as the wild vegetable and fruit resources. Obviously, neither the ravaged landscape of the modern African areas in Rhodesia nor the artificially rich game reserves can help us here.⁸ Here again, the task of determining the actual game capacity of the different parts of the country in the precolonial period involves technical knowledge outside the experience of the average historian, and it is possible that the main source book on this for the use of historians will be written by a biological scientist. The long accounts of the chase in the reminiscences of the great and not-so-great hunters of the nineteenth century that historians have previously waded through in search of something else would mean a great deal to someone thoroughly acquainted with wild-life ecology. Obviously, researchers using traditions will have to guard against the tendency of infor-

⁵ Personal communication, Dec. 1974.

⁶ Personal communication, Dec. 1974.

⁷ Manuel Barretto, 'Information on the state and conquest of the Rivers of Cuama, 1667', in G. M. Theal (ed.) *Records of South-Eastern Africa* (Cape Town, Govt Cape Colony, 9 vols, 1898-1903). III, 484-5; in the 1860s and 1870s European hunters were able to kill a great deal of game in the area, and it was here that the first of them either chose to go or were directed by the Ndebele, E. C. Tabler, *The Far Interior: Chronicles of Pioneering in the Matabeleland and Mashona Countries, 1847-1879* (Cape Town, Balkema, 1955), 271; Public Record Office, London, [Foreign Office], 179 (Portugal, Correspondence, 1800-1912), 279, No. 168, 57, B. de Freitas, 'Memorandum on the Rights of Portugal in the Territories to the South of the Zambesi', 12 July 1890; University of Rhodesia, Dep. of History. Interviews Collection, 102 (Goromonzi), interview with Kwaramba Mudokwana, 25 May 1973; 105 (Wedza) interview with Makwarimba, 20 June 1973; N/1/1/3 (Chief Native Commissioner: In Letters: Native Commissioners: Hartley, 1 Nov. 1894 - 1 Oct. 1898), N.C. Hartley to C.N.C. Salisbury, 10 Nov. 1897. All of these references stress the presence of game in numbers or of lions and other predators.

⁸ C. Gabel, 'Terminal food-collectors and agricultural initiative in East and Southern Africa', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* (1974), 7, 61. The game reserves whose game loads are cited lie in an otherwise much hunted environment.

phants to idealize the past.⁹ Even the efficiency of the various methods of hunting needs careful checking. In the model, for example, it was assumed that the apparently sparing use of the *mambure* net for hunting was because of its deadly efficiency, so that people did not usually use it for fear of wiping out the game cover. There is another possible interpretation: in 1871, one hunt with a three-mile net yielded only one steenbok, and another with a five-mile net brought in one impala and one roan antelope.¹⁰ In the 1580s a forest near the coast with a great deal of big game was 'driven' by fifty men, and the result was three wild pigs and some piglets.¹¹ In short, these efforts might not have yielded sufficient game to justify the labour of so many people in normal times, and may have been expedients resorted to in time of shortage. In other words, in some Shona environments the *mambure* may have been rarely used for the reverse of the reason offered in the model.

Other problems arose from the discussion of agriculture. Mtetwa argues for a much longer possible period of grain storage, up to five years, while agreeing that storage certainly could not reach the ten-year figure.¹² He also points out that there is a danger in stressing the drought years at the expense of the normal or above-average year. In this case, we appear to be dealing directly with the problem of productive forces: why did any community, having experienced *Shangwa*, the disaster of drought or locust plague, not produce so much grain that there was always a surplus that had not spoiled throughout all but the most exceptional droughts? This, of course, is not a specifically Shona problem. At the present time the same problem is of vital importance in many parts of the world, but it appears to have had different causes at different times, and so far the cause in the Shona case has not been fully identified. Again, research into the actual output of given numbers of adults under the old system would be of great value. The tables produced by Scudder for the Valley Tonga village of Mazulu show how this can be done: for each household, they show the number of members, the number of consumers — with women and children graded at 80 per cent and 50 per cent of the consumption of an adult male — the number of gardeners and the acreage cultivated. Such a table, reconstructed for the past, could tell us a great deal about what actually happened in the fields, and the extent to

⁹ e.g. C. Meillassoux, *Anthropologie économique des Gouro de Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris, Mouton, 1964), 93; his source Tauxier, who collected information from the Gouro on their hunting branch of production in 1923, was doing so three years after the ivory trade was restricted, three years before net-hunting was banned, and after guns had been forcibly collected and the men forced to spend time on the *corvée*; this would have affected the Gouro attitudes towards hunting even as early as 1923, and may well have led them to exaggerate its importance in the past.

¹⁰ E. E. Burke (ed.), *The Journals of Carl Mauch . . . 1869-1872* (Salisbury, National Archives of Rhodesia, 1969), 159-63.

¹¹ Joao dos Santos, 'Ethiopia Oriental [1609]'. Theal, *Records*, VII, 227.

¹² Personal communication, Dec. 1974.

which the sudden boom in Shona agricultural production that followed on the arrival of the Europeans distorted the pattern of Shona society.¹³

Both agriculture and herding involve questions of land use that have not been answered satisfactorily. Writers have argued for and against the various soil types as being those preferred by the Shona for crops. These arguments have so far tended to treat Shona soil preferences as being directly linked to agriculture,¹⁴ but although it has been argued above that agriculture was the most important single branch of the Shona economy it was not the only branch, and even the most recent argument in the 'soils' debate has only taken the level of discussion down to dynastic territorial level. It will be suggested below that the final answer — or, more likely, answers — will be found in the micro-study of the single village community. For the same reason, generalized accounts of Shona herding with relation to such topics as the tsetse fly will really demand local studies that take into account the local environment. Only in this way will it be possible to suggest why, in nearly a thousand years of large-scale herding, the herding branch of production did not, in the Shona case, act as a complete guarantee against agricultural failure.

The over-riding impression that Shona industries and trades, such as salt making, ivory hunting or gold mining, create with this writer is one of amazing effort for very little return. People laboriously refined salty mud, risked their lives to kill elephants or burrowed into unsafe mines. One of their main targets, at least in the trade of gold and ivory, was to gain trade goods such as beads and cloth. The position of such trades as precursors of underdevelopment even before colonial rule is becoming clear from general research in Africa.¹⁵ But one question has apparently not yet been satisfactorily answered in the Shona case: we know that beads and cloth were wealth, but exactly why was this so? We know that the Shona could and did make bark-cloth and cotton cloth of their own, and it has been suggested in the model cited above that these local cloths could not compete with imported Indian cloths because they cost more in valuable man-hours out of the Shona working year than could be spared, so that it was in the end cheaper to dig for gold, and so on. But why was cloth valued at all? Much of the imported cloth in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was obviously thin, showy stuff of silk or fine cotton, much decorated and therefore prestige material for the upper classes in Shona society.¹⁶ On the other hand, the eighteenth-century Rozvi rulers seem actually to have preferred finely processed skins

¹³ T. Scudder, *The Economy of the Gwembe Tonga*, (Manchester, Manchester Univ. Press, 1974), 103.

¹⁴ J. M. MacKenzie, 'Red soils in Mashonaland: A re-assessment', *Rhodesian History* (1974), 5, 81-8.

¹⁵ E. Alpers, 'Re-thinking African economic history', *Ufahamu* (1973), 3, 97-129.

¹⁶ E. A. Axelson (ed.), 'Viagem que fez o Padre Antonio Gomes . . . 1648', *Studia* (1959), 3, 209.

to cloth, while the nineteenth-century Ndebele and other Nguni peoples combined power and wealth with a reputation, at least for a while, of going almost naked.¹⁷ In short, what made cloth wealth? Similarly, though beads have been imported into southern Zambezia since the Early Iron Age, apparently on the basis of being brighter and rarer than the local equivalents made of ostrich-shell, porcupine-quill, natural seeds and gold or copper, the way in which they were distributed and the social role they played does not seem to be clearly known, though endless speculation is possible. The whole body of work on Shona industry and trade seems to have dwelt upon production and exchange of the local products rather than the distribution of the imported goods inside the local unit of production, the village.

A final major deficiency of the 'Shona economy' paper was that it did not deal with relations of production, the ways in which people co-operated to produce what they required and then distribute it among themselves. This omission was deliberate, since I did not believe that I possessed the necessary information to give a satisfactory analysis. The few precolonial documents that deal with the Shona economy appear to have been rather vague about the allocation of labour time between the sexes and other such matters, and the greatest temptation is for the researcher to use twentieth-century ethnographic material and project it back into the past. Often enough, this may give a more or less accurate picture, but it is now becoming clear that by the beginning of the twentieth century, with its demands for male labour and tax for governments and others, Shona society was already becoming distorted. Although the 'Shona economy' paper has stressed that the Shona economy as a whole has not been entirely removed from the kind of outside pressures that could distort the structure of society, it seems unlikely that twentieth-century material will be as useful as it ought to be. A further problem in dealing with the traditions concerning relations of production is that they are especially liable to distortion as a result of the way in which the Shona see their society. Like many peoples, the Shona are prone to idealize their past, making it an exaggeratedly peaceful and plentiful scene. Like many peoples, the Shona have their own ideas on the proper roles and positions of men, women and children. Consequently, there is a possibility that the traditions will exaggerate the roles of men in hunting, women in agriculture and children in herding, when in fact there was rather less allocation of work according to sex and age than these traditions imply.

All of the questions raised here call for more research, either to fill in the gaps in our knowledge, or to discover whether the assumptions that have been made already are justified in fact. And here, it seems, the methodology of conventional history is simply not good enough. So far, those historians

¹⁷ Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, Moçambique, Caixa 17, 'Discripção Corográfica do Reino de Manica, seus Custumes e Leis', c.1780.

in southern Zambezia who have taken an interest in economic history have adopted a wide-ranging approach, whether they have had general or special interests. They have put together some fairly coherent models, but they have raised questions that seem to call for a different approach, that of the historical anthropologist. This approach, once it has had most of its more obvious pitfalls removed by discussion and criticism, could be used by a great number of local researchers at once, thus gaining both cross-checks of data from comparable areas and comparisons of communities in different environments. What is being suggested is the recreation, on paper, of an actual village of the late nineteenth century, with an accurate and complete description and analysis of its personalities, social relationships, politics, economy and environment. By comparing this with its fellows and with the data on the villages that preceded and followed it, it might then be possible to put some content into the outline of Shona economic history that we have at present.

This, it must be stressed at once is certainly not a new idea. Such a procedure is standard practice for modern anthropologists and has been ever since Malinowski, and it has had some notable historical applications outside Rhodesia. Vansina, for example, took the Tio people of the Congo and 'froze' their entire society in the 1880s, combining fieldwork with documentary studies.¹⁸ Lancaster's work on the Goba people of Zambia has not only combined anthropological with historical techniques, but has done so with an outlying section of the Shona people themselves.¹⁹ But, as far as is known, nothing on these lines has been attempted for the main body of the Shona people on the southern Zambebian plateau, and certainly not for a single village. The nearest approach to it seems to have been made by Bullock in the 1920s, though his intention was simply to outline the Shona kinship system. He described what was obviously a real village under the Chivero dynasty in the Hartley area, naming the occupants of each hut and their origins, relationships and life histories. An especially important virtue of this account was that it included people who were not related to the village-head's family in any way; thus, it was not simply a chunk out of a family tree 'frozen' at one point in time, but relied upon genuine memories of a real community.²⁰

To take this idea of Bullock's and use it as the nucleus of a much more ambitious research project would depend upon the availability of reliable traditions or even memories of late nineteenth-century conditions of ordinary life. This paper has been written in the belief that, even at this late date, such traditions survive. In 1973 it was still possible to find many men who could give accurate and consistent figures for the prices of Njanja hoes against goats, chickens and other items in their areas. These figures were not

¹⁸ J. Vansina, *The Tio Kingdom of the Middle Congo, 1880-1892* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1973).

¹⁹ See, for example, 'Ingombe Ilede and the Zimbabwe Culture', *African Historical Studies* (forthcoming).

²⁰ C. Bullock, *The Mashona* (Cape Town, Juta, 1927), 52-6.

only consistent locally, but they fitted into an overall pattern of hoe prices, based largely on the distance from Wedza, of which the informants could not have been aware. These hoe prices were obviously Njanja hoe prices, since the prices of twentieth-century hoes were far less, yet these men were apparently only in their fifties or sixties. That would mean that they would have been too young to see and understand the late nineteenth-century society's workings, and must have been repeating the general substance of conversations overheard in their youth. In other words, it seems probable that some reliable pre-colonial economic data still survive, although it cannot be long before the element of legend will obscure the details.

The most obvious requirements for such a project combine the availability of a number of old people from the same original village with easy access to that village site itself. There would be no point in trying to get information on a site and community some fifty miles from the informants, since the idea would be to relate actual hut sites to identified people. Ideally, the informants should be able to see and point out the territory involved, even though, where several informants from the same original community lived together, a sand model of the territory and village could be used as a visual aid. Again ideally, if a whole modern community could be interested in this project, perhaps as part of a programme of education, group interviews would be as valuable in recalling economic and social history as they can be suspect in political enquiries.

Having set out to recreate a late nineteenth-century Shona village, the researcher's enquiries would in theory be unlimited, and only limited in practice by his personal interests arising out of his reading of the literature on economies and societies. Nevertheless, a few guidelines can be suggested. Firstly, since traditions for periods of economic history earlier than the late nineteenth century are unlikely to be reliable and since the documents available do not give the kind of detail required, a great deal of reliance will have to be placed on archaeology for a more definite overall economic history of the Shona. Therefore, research of the kind suggested ought to try to relate as much as possible to those aspects of economic history that can be studied by the archaeologist. One topic that is only subsidiary to the economy as a whole but of considerable importance to archaeologists is the sociology of pottery: who makes it for whom, and why they make it in the style chosen. This forms part of a much wider study, that of the site catchment: the total area from which the contents of the site have come. This would include such places as salt or iron deposits that were outside the territory of the village in question and which were either visited occasionally or whose products are brought in by traders. The entire mechanism of production and exchange of these products would form part of the study. A second field of major importance to archaeologists, but which is of equal importance to historians, is that of the site territory. This is the whole area around a village that is regularly used by the people of that village. It would include the site of the village

itself, its croplands *and* the areas used by that same village for that purpose in the past and expected by its people to be used in the future, its grazing grounds, its area of hunting, gathering, firewood collection and its water resources. Archaeologists have recently been using an assumed standard territory of one hour's walk from the site for agriculturalists and two hours for hunter-gatherers, but in the kind of research proposed it should be possible to get a much more accurate figure for each environment. This would give a more or less definitive answer to the questions of soil preference.²¹

Since this paper is intended to encourage part-time researchers who have neither the access to the enormous literature on African economic and social history nor the leisure to read it, those who wish to follow up this kind of research might well fall back on a much more primitive methodology. This would involve taking two main fields — branches of production and relations of production, that is, the different things that people did in the Shona economy and the ways in which they worked together to do this, dividing each of these into three categories — production, distribution and consumption, and then applying some basic questions: what, how, where, when, whom, how many and why? Thus a researcher enquiring about the collection of wild vegetables might ask what vegetables were collected, how they were dug up and carried, where they were found, at what time and on what days they were collected, who carried out this task, how many vegetables were collected and why they were chosen, how, where, when and how many were given to whom by whom and why, and even who ate what, where and with whom, before going on to the relation of production and the discovery of the way in which the collection of wild vegetables related — if it did — to the social system, marital ties or even the traditional political system. This line of research would then have to be applied to the other three major branches of production, hunting, agriculture and herding, where the whole process was carried out more or less within the community, and to processes in which the community's product, such as ivory, was ultimately to be used by someone else and was exchanged for a product, such as cloth, which was initially produced by someone else but which was distributed and used within the community.

The part-time researcher might well find this list of questions formidable, but, given time, most of them would follow on logically from each other, and in time the informants would probably supply their own. But the operative word is 'time'. Neither the travelling researcher nor his informants can spare the time for this kind of research, and thus the answers to these important historical questions — which, after all, underlie the whole course of Shona history up to the present — can only be answered by a researcher and

²¹ Higgs and Vita-Finzi, 'Prehistoric economies: a territorial approach', in *Papers in Economic Prehistory*, 27-36.

his informants in an anthropological situation, with plenty of time to let this barrage of questions be posed and answered gradually and naturally. Not all of the data might be usable at once, but in another fifty years they would constitute a priceless body of information about the Shona past. Correspondence between researchers should aid progress, either through newsletters such as the Central Africa Historical Association's occasional newsletter *Mbire: Research South of the Zambezi*, or directly between themselves. One of the advantages of this type of micro-study is that, at a time when wide-ranging travel in southern Africa is made difficult by the spread of the war, the researcher would be able to concentrate on one spot, with only occasional reference to the archives to check early twentieth-century maps and documents. Finally, and this brings us back to the start of this paper, local conferences on the lines of the 1973 Umtali History Conference could bring researchers together, with little cost and no fuss, for useful discussions.



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons
Attribution – NonCommercial - NoDerivs 3.0 License.

To view a copy of the license please see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

This is a download from the BLDS Digital Library on OpenDocs
<http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/>