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A Biographical Memoir by

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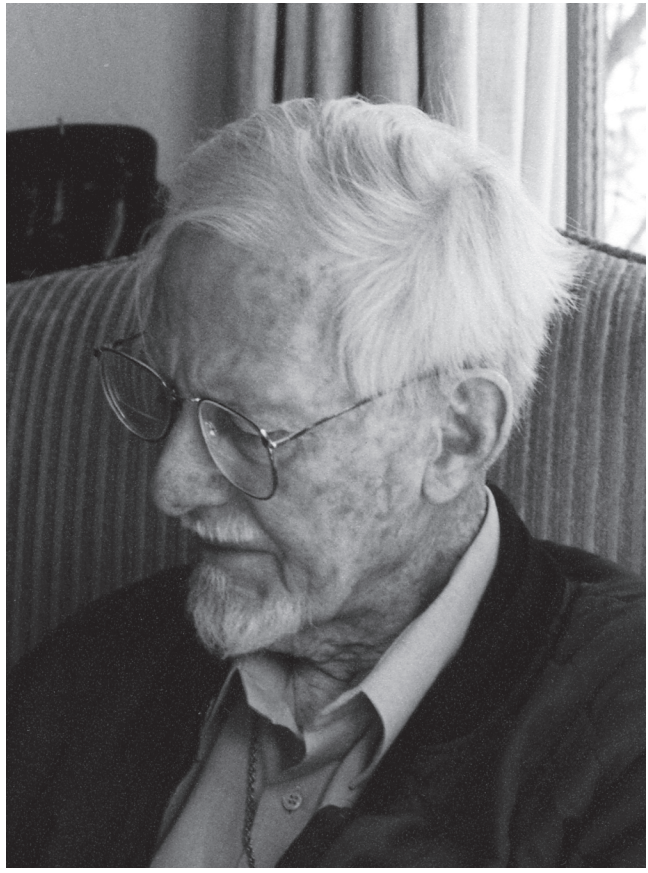

J. DESMOND CLARK

April 10, 1916–February 14, 2002

BY FRED WENDORF

By any measure J. Desmond Clark was the most influential and productive archaeologist who ever worked in Africa. More than any other individual he shaped our understanding of African prehistory, and his interests and goals have structured almost all the prehistoric research now underway on that continent.

I first met Clark in the fall of 1960, when he came to Santa Fe to give a talk on his work in Northern Rhodesia. I was then working as an American Southwestern archaeologist, but Clark's talk stimulated my interest in the archaeology of Africa. It was only two years later, in 1962, and still knowing nothing about African prehistory, that I found myself leading the Combined Prehistoric Expedition in the salvage excavations at prehistoric sites in the Aswan reservoir in Egypt and Sudan. It was my very good fortune that Clark was the first person I turned to in my frantic scramble to learn enough about African prehistory to do my job and not embarrass myself totally. Clark responded quickly with a packet of reprints and a long list of readings that began my African education. On many occasions since then I turned to him for guidance, and I found Desmond always to be generous with his advice and encouragement. I have also

learned that I was not alone in receiving help from Clark. In fact, there are very few archaeologists now working in Africa, including Africans, who have not benefited from his advice and support.

Clark was remarkably well informed about the archaeology and Pleistocene geology of almost every part of Africa, mostly because throughout his life he found opportunities to do field work in a wide variety of areas and over the whole chronological range of human experience in Africa, from the earliest human artifacts to an occasional ethnographic study of modern tribal groups. He was also an exceptionally gifted synthesizer, and he drew on his wide experience to write several summary books that remain the best available general texts on the archaeology of Africa (1954, 1959, 1970, 1982).

Desmond Clark was born in London into a fairly well-to-do merchant family. One of his grandfathers was a chemist who had developed a profitable business in cosmetics, traveled widely on the continent, and acquired a strong interest in antiquities. Clark always credited this grandfather with stimulating his own interest in prehistory. Clark's father was trained as an electrical engineer, but after he returned from service on the Western Front during World War I he took over the family cosmetic business and managed it until his death. When his father returned from service, Desmond and his family moved to the small village of Northend, in the Chiltern Hills, a beautiful wooded area about 40 miles west of London. It was here that Clark developed his interest in the natural environment. At age six he was sent away to boarding school, first to a school at Portishead, near Bristol, and then to Swanbourne House, a preparatory school in Buckinghamshire, where he studied for and passed his common entrance exams. From there he went to Monkton Combe School near Bath. Here his interests in archaeology

began to form, stimulated by his teachers, of which one was a local antiquarian.

In 1934 Clark was accepted by Christ's College, Cambridge, where he studied history for two years, then archaeology and anthropology under Miles Burkitt, who awakened in him an interest in artifacts and the history of the discipline, and Grahame Clark, who taught him the importance of the paleoenvironment to archaeology, primarily how changes in the environment might influence human behavior. Another significant influence on Desmond at this time was Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who instructed him in rigorous field techniques. Clark worked for Wheeler at Maiden Castle during the 1936 field season and part of the summer of 1937. Desmond was an excellent student, and in 1937 he received his bachelor of arts degree with first-class honors, as well as an honorary bachelor scholarship from Christ's College.

Despite his distinguished undergraduate academic record there were almost no positions in archaeology when Clark received his B.A. degree. In fact, there were only three permanent non-museum positions in archaeology in the entire country, and none of these were open. Clark applied unsuccessfully for several museum positions in England. Then in the late fall of 1937 he was offered a three-year appointment, with an option for a long-term contract, in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) as secretary of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and curator of the David Livingstone Memorial Museum. The position included a salary of £400, plus a house with basic furniture. Although not previously interested in African archaeology, Clark eagerly accepted the offer and in mid-December went by boat to Cape Town, arriving there the first week of January 1938. A few days later he traveled by train to Livingstone, a three-day journey. Although initially intending to stay only 3 years in North-

ern Rhodesia, he remained there and held the same two positions for 23 years, until 1961, when he accepted an appointment as professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. He stayed at Berkeley as professor, and from 1986 as professor emeritus, until his death.

While at Cambridge, Clark met a fellow student who was reading modern languages. Her name was Betty Baume, and she was from Yorkshire. Their friendship soon blossomed, and they became engaged during his final year. Shortly after his arrival in Livingstone, Clark sought and received permission to marry Betty from the governor (permission to marry was required of all first-tour staff). In late spring of 1938 Betty came to Livingstone, and a month later they were married. This began one of the great partnerships in archaeology. Betty went with Desmond on all his expeditions, she ran the field laboratory while he supervised the excavations, and she translated his notoriously terrible handwriting and typed many of his manuscripts. She even served as acting curator of the museum while he was away in service during World War II. They had two children, a son, John Wynne Desmond Clark, now living in England, and a daughter, Elizabeth Anne Cable Clark, who resides in Australia. Betty died two months after Desmond.

During the 1930s Clark was one of the three or four professional archaeologists in southern Africa, but when he arrived in Livingstone his first efforts were to do something about the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum. Clark found the museum to be a disorganized shambles, with collections, mostly ethnographic and historical materials, displayed on open tables, and housed in an old Palladian-style building that had previously served as the United Services Club. There was only one small display of archaeological artifacts, and these were from Gatti's 1929 excavations at Mumbwa caves. Most of the collections were still in boxes. There was no

technical staff and the collections were little more than assemblages of artifacts and mineral specimens with few or no records. He set about reorganizing the museum: creating thematic exhibits of both archaeological and ethnological materials and writing an accompanying handbook. Clark also directed an annual two-week winter field school in archaeology that was based at the museum. All these activities and improvements at the museum were popular with the local people and schoolchildren, and after World War II this popularity made possible the construction of a new museum with funding from several private companies and the Northern Rhodesia government.

With the museum in reasonable shape Clark turned his attention to research on the local archaeology. He began his fieldwork with geologist Basil Cooke from Johannesburg, and their study of the stone tools and fossils of the Old Terrace gravels of the Zambezi River resulted is his first publication, in 1939, with H. B. S. Cooke. He published two other papers that same year, one a summary of the known Stone Age sites in Northern Rhodesia (issued as the first occasional paper of the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum), and the other a discussion of the origin and aims of the David Livingstone Memorial Museum, which appeared in the *Museums* Journal (London). Clark also obtained a research grant to excavate the Mumbwa caves in Northern Rhodesia, and his report on that work (1942) recorded a sequence of Stillbay, Rhodesian Wilton, and Iron Age seasonal occupations in those caves.

From 1941 to 1946 Clark was in the British army, serving initially as a sergeant in the Seventh East African Field Ambulance Corps in Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Somalia. His unit took part in the retaking of Berbera in British Somaliland, and several engagements on the plateau at Hargeisa and Boroma, and finally, in late 1941, at Gondar,

the last battle in the Ethiopian campaign. After officer training he became a civil affairs officer in the British Military Administration in Somalia, where he was stationed in the southern part of the country. During this period he also traveled to Kenya and became close friends with Louis and Mary Leakey, visiting them frequently. While in Ethiopia and Somalia, in addition to his work as a soldier and later as a civil affairs officer, Clark also managed to do some archaeology, recording sites and even performing limited excavations. In 1944 and 1945 he published three short articles, all on Stone Age sites he found in Ethiopia. By 1946, when he took his discharge from the army, Clark had accumulated 22 petrol boxes of artifacts and quantities of field notes from his studies in Somalia and Ethiopia. With the help of the army he managed to get them all safely to Livingstone, and eventually to Cambridge. Later the sites he surveyed and the data he collected provided an important part of his Ph.D. dissertation and the basis of his highly respected book *The Prehistoric Cultures of the Horn of Africa* (1954).

On his release from the army and his return to Northern Rhodesia in 1946, the improvement of his museum was again Clark's first concern. One of his initial tasks was to begin planning a new Rhodes-Livingstone Museum, the drawings for which were published in 1947. This was followed in the same year by an article issued by the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute on the public service role of museums. Other publications during this period were limited to a few brief articles on a variety of topics, including the Bushmen, copper production in Central Africa, and the formation and chronology of the Victoria Falls. Clearly, there was a lack of focus, but this was to change shortly.

In 1947, less than a year after Clark returned to Northern Rhodesia, Louis Leakey organized and hosted the First Pan-African Congress on Prehistory. This congress brought

together for the first time almost everyone interested in African prehistory—archaeologists, Quaternary geologists, and paleontologists—who came from 26 countries and from all parts of Africa and abroad. It gave those who attended the opportunity to meet and learn what others were doing and to discuss mutual problems. It was a landmark event for African prehistory and for Clark. He gave a well-received paper on his research in the Somalilands, but his engaging personality, together with his scholarly competence and experience with the prehistory of southern and eastern Africa gave him considerable prominence beyond his presentation. Most important, however, the discussions at the congress stimulated Clark's commitment to archaeological research, and over the next decade following 1947 Clark conducted excavations in the upper Zambezi Valley, dug the Late Stone Age cave of Nachikufu, and reexamined the Broken Hill site (1959) where "Rhodesian man" had been discovered in 1921.

In 1948 Clark took a year's leave and returned to Cambridge to complete his residency requirement for a doctorate. He received his degree in 1951, writing his thesis on his work in the Zambezi Valley and the Horn of Africa. The previous year he published his first regional synthesis, issued as a monograph by the South African Archaeological Society (1950). In that year he also published several articles on a variety of archaeological topics, and served as president of the South African Archaeological Society. Clark was rapidly becoming a leader among African archaeologists, a position that was reinforced by a remarkable publication record that included 57 papers and six books published in the 10 years between 1950 and 1959. He also continued to be active in the museum field, and in 1955 he served as president of the South African Museums Associa-

tion, giving a presidential address on the role of museums in public education.

Clark was also interested in cultural preservation, and he realized that something needed to be done to protect the archaeological and historical sites in Northern Rhodesia. To provide this protection, in 1950 he founded and was secretary of the Northern Rhodesia National Monuments Commission, with authority to protect all monuments built before 1897. Clark served as secretary of the Commission until 1961, when he left to go to Berkeley. He was then elected an honorary member of the commission, a position he held until his death.

The Second Pan-African Congress was held in 1952 in Algeria, and Clark served as chairman of the prehistory section. Stimulated by the papers and the collections he saw while at the congress, Clark proposed a correlation of prehistoric cultures north and south of the Sahara that was published in the *South African Archaeological Bulletin* (1954). Although the model he proposed is now known to be incorrect, it was Clark's first attempt to view African prehistory as a whole.

The Third Pan-African Congress was held in Livingstone in 1955 with Clark as the organizing secretary and coeditor of the proceedings. Shortly after the congress in Livingstone, Clark was invited to do field work in Angola, where mining activities had exposed many archaeological horizons buried in fossil dunes. He spent four field seasons there (1959, 1960, 1963, and 1968) and he wrote four volumes on the results of his excavations. These were published by the Museu do Dundo in Lisbon (1963, 1966).

Although Clark moved to Berkeley in 1961, he continued his archaeological research in Northern Rhodesia (each year from 1962 through 1968 and again in 1972), as well as smaller projects in South Africa (in 1962, 1966, 1979, and

1985). He also found time to spend two field seasons in Syria (1964, 1965) and two more along the Nile in central Sudan (1972, 1973).

In 1953 Clark discovered the most important site of his career at Kalambo Falls in Northern Rhodesia. This was a deeply stratified, waterlogged Lower Paleolithic locality with superb preservation of wood, seeds, leaves, and pollen. Because of the acidity of the soil, however, almost no bone was preserved. It was here that Clark introduced the technique of "point plotting" each individual artifact. This resulted in the first record of African Acheulian activity areas. Because of his earlier training at Cambridge and his initial experience with Cooke and other geologists, the research at Kalambo Falls was organized as a multidisciplinary project with a focus on the reconstruction of the paleoenvironments of the site. A number of students and young scholars, including many who are now major figures in prehistoric studies in Africa and elsewhere, participated in the excavation and writing of the reports. The first two books on his work at Kalambo Falls (1969, 1974) established him as one of the two leading African prehistorians, the other being Louis Leakey. The third volume on Kalambo Falls (2001), an even more massive report than the first two, was delayed in part because of the enormous size of the effort and because Clark began to lose his eyesight while he was working on the manuscript. Fortunately he was able to finish the report and see it through the press. He was nearly blind when he died a few months later.

Shortly after Clark arrived in Berkeley in 1961 he and his colleagues in the Department of Anthropology began the development of a research and graduate training program in African prehistory and related disciplines that soon became the most distinguished center in the world for such studies. In addition to the outstanding faculty involved in

the program, a key feature was the active recruitment of students from Africa. By the time Clark retired from teaching in 1986, 10 Africans from 6 different countries had received their doctorates under his direction. These African graduates are now university teachers, museum directors, and heads of antiquities organizations in their own countries. Beginning in 1974 Clark began a long-term project in Ethiopia. Initially it was focused on the Arussi-Harar Plateau and the Gadeb Plain, on the eastern side of the Rift Valley in the southeastern section of Ethiopia. He worked there for four seasons, until 1978, and he published several interesting papers on the results of these investigations, which were mostly at Lower Paleolithic (Oldowan) and Acheulian sites. Then in 1981 and 1982 he shifted to the Afar Middle Awash Valley where he worked in the rich Lower and Middle Paleolithic localities in that area. Unfortunately only one paper based on this work was published, in part because the research was unfinished. The project was placed on hold when the Ethiopian government declared an eight-year moratorium on all paleoanthropological research in Ethiopia by foreign scholars while the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture established new rules and regulations. It was not until 1990 that Clark was able to return to the Middle Awash and the Afar Basin.

Unable to work in Ethiopia, Clark turned his attention to other areas, and for the first time he began to develop long-term projects outside Africa. It had long been known that Lower Paleolithic sites with lithic assemblages at least superficially similar to those in Africa occurred in central and western India. Clark was interested in these because they indicated possible contacts with Africa and might relate to the spread of early humans into Southeast Asia. In 1980 Clark, with several Indian colleagues, began a study of several Lower Paleolithic sites in the Madhya Pradesh of

north-central India. He spent four seasons there between 1980 and 1983; In 1983 Clark published a book with G. R. Sharma on the results of this research. In many respects, however, the results were disappointing. Preservation was poor, associated fauna was limited to nonexistent, and dating was insecure. In early 1987 Clark was invited to visit north China and see the Paleolithic sites there and study the collections from these sites. Later that year and continuing into 1988 he returned to visit the Paleolithic sites in south China. His interest in China continued in late 1989 and early 1990, when he did archaeological research at several very early Paleolithic sites in the Nihewan Basin in western China. Unfortunately the results of this research had not been published when he died.

Clark received many honors for his research and scholarship. His first was in 1960 when he became a commander of the Order of the British Empire. This was followed in 1967 by the Commandeur de l'Ordre National de Senegal; the Huxley Medal from the Royal Anthropological Institute, London, in 1974; and in 1985 the Gold Medal of the Society of Antiquaries in London. In 1985 he also received two honorary doctorates, one from the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and the other from the University of Cape Town. He was elected a foreign associate member of the National Academy of Science in 1986 and a full member in 1993. Clark also received the Gold Medal of the Archaeological Institute of America in 1989.

The quality of Clark's research and his established record for publishing his results were widely admired by his colleagues, and for this reason his requests for funds were usually favorably received by the award panels at the National Science Foundation (10 grants between 1962 and 1984 for paleoanthropological research in Africa), the Smithsonian Institution (five grants between 1980 and 1985

for research in central India), and the Wenner Gren Foundation (with several grants to assist his research in Africa, to publish two books [*Atlas of African Prehistory* and *Background to Evolution in Africa]*, to fund a movie on flaking stone artifacts, and to assist with data analysis for volume III of *The Kalambo Falls Prehistoric Site*).

Possibly one of Desmond's most treasured public honors, and certainly the most emotional, was the great party held at Berkeley for him when he retired in 1986. Nearly 200 of his old students, friends, and colleagues came from all over the world to celebrate his enormous professional achievements and to express their thanks for all that he had done for them. It was a measure of his contributions to archaeology as both teacher and scholar that they came from several countries in Africa, from Europe, from China, and from many universities and museums in the United States.

IN THE PREPARATION of this biographical memoir I have drawn extensively on two publications: a brief autobiography by J. Desmond Clark, "Archaeological Retrospect 10" in *Antiquity* 60(1986):179-88 and a second by H. B. S. Cooke, J. W. K. Harris, and K. Harris, "J. Desmond Clark: His Career and Contribution to Prehistory" in the *Journal of Human Evolution* 16(1987):549-81. I also wish to thank his son, John Clark, for the photograph of Desmond included with this memoir and for help with his family's history.

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