



## Obituaries



Philip J. C. Dark, mid-1960s. (Courtesy of Mavis Dark)

### **Philip John Crosskey Dark (1918–2008)**

**JEROME S. HANDLER**

Virginia Foundation for the Humanities

Philip J. C. Dark, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University (Carbondale), died on April 4, 2008, in St. Mawes, Cornwall, England. He was a leading authority on tribal arts, particularly of Benin and the Pacific.

Philip Dark was born on May 15, 1918, in London, where he grew up. His father was a high-level civil servant who had won prestigious awards both for his Latin and

Greek studies at Oxford and, later, for his government service. Philip, an only child, was sent to boarding school at a young age, then received his secondary education at Bradfield College. In 1939, after a brief stint in medical school, he embarked on art studies at the St. Martins and Central School of Art in London. There he met Mavis Boam, a fellow art student, who was to become his wife and collaborator on many projects over the 66 years of their marriage. They would have two daughters, Victoria and Gail.

In the early days of World War II, Dark volunteered for the Royal Navy and soon became a junior officer. In March 1942, his vessel participated in a major raid on St. Nazaire in occupied France, which destroyed a German submarine base and battleship dock—part of the larger effort to control shipping in the Atlantic. His ship came under heavy fire and was destroyed. Dark was slightly wounded and captured along with several hundred others. Taken to Germany, he was interned in a prisoner-of-war camp near Bremen, where he spent over three years, until the end of the war. While in the camp, Dark kept a detailed journal on the books he read, ideas they generated, and his art activities. With materials sent by his wife through Red Cross packages, he produced scores of drawings and paintings of individuals and life in the camp. These were publicly exhibited in 1994 at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, the accompanying catalog also describing in detail his experiences and life in the camp (Dark 1994).

During his internment, Dark met Walter W. Taylor, who later became a major figure in U.S. archaeology; they formed a close friendship that lasted until Taylor's death in 1997. Taylor, a U.S. Marine officer detached to the Office of Strategic Services, was captured behind German lines in the south of France in January of 1945, and was brought to the POW camp that Dark was in. In the camp, to pass time prisoners would offer courses in subjects in which they had some professional competence; Dark, for example, taught a course in drawing. Taylor, a 1942 Harvard Ph.D., added one on introductory anthropology. Dark's reading on non-Western art (as well as Ralph Linton's *Study of Man* [1936]) had already led him to decide to study anthropology after the war, as an adjunct to his art, but it was in taking

Taylor's course and in his developing friendship with Taylor that his interests in anthropology became more focused and crystallized.

After the war, Dark resumed art studies at the Slade School of Fine Art (University of London), receiving a diploma in Painting and Design in 1948. At the same time, he took anthropology courses with the Africanist Daryll Forde, with whom he would retain a lifelong friendship. Forde encouraged him to continue his studies in anthropology at Yale under Linton, a major scholar of what was then called "primitive art."

Linton had a significant influence on Dark, and he introduced him to the art of the Maroons of Suriname, usually referred to in the anthropological literature of the time as "Bush Negroes." The intricate wood and calabash carvings and basketry of these descendants of fugitive slaves became the subject of Dark's 1950 Master's thesis; based on secondary ethnographic literature and a trait analysis of several museum collections, it was later published separately in a pioneering monographic study (Dark 1954a).

While at Yale, Dark's interests in tribal art and its cultural analysis led him to a two-year seminar with the art historian George Kubler, who integrated anthropological perspectives into his work on pre-Columbian art. In this seminar, Dark became interested in Mesoamerican ethnohistorical issues, particularly in working with Mixtec codices and developing a method for unraveling their meaning. This work formed the basis of his Ph.D. dissertation, *Methods in Ethnohistory: With Reference to Mixtec Materials* (1954b), which focused on two Mixtec codices, to which he applied what he called the Ideographic-Iconographical Method, utilizing a visual sorting punch-card system (further developed in his studies of Benin art formal traits). His dissertation supervisors, first New World archaeologist Wendell C. Bennett and then Ralph Linton, both died within a few months of each other in 1953, and Dark completed the dissertation in 1954 under Irving Rouse. It was later published as a separate monograph (1958).

Dark finished writing his dissertation on a ship bound for Nigeria, where he spent more than two years at the West African Institute for Social and Economic Research at University (College) Ibadan. He first held an administrative position then became a senior research fellow for the institute's Benin History Scheme, which he had helped organize. He was specifically charged with documenting all known Benin bronzes and working out a historical chronological framework for the art of this legendary West African kingdom, noted for the high quality of its traditional brass-casting and ivory-carving. He continued his studies of Benin for many years after leaving West Africa (by 1966 he had data on close to 7,000 objects from more than 200 collections and about 10,700 photos), and over the years he produced numerous scholarly articles, museum catalogs, and specialized monographs on Benin art and technology (e.g., 1962, 1973, 1975, 1982; Dark and Hill 1971; Forman et al. 1960).

At the end of his stint in Nigeria, Dark visited England for a short while and then returned to the United States, this time to Carbondale, Illinois. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale had created a separate anthropology department in 1955, but emphasis on a graduate program started in 1958 when Walter Taylor joined the university and became the department's first chair. It was, Dark wrote, Taylor's "persuasiveness and the attraction of the graduate and research programs he had initiated" that brought Dark to SIU in 1960. He became an active participant in departmental affairs, serving on numerous committees and, from 1963 to 1966, as one of the department's most effective chairs. He was widely respected in the university community for his integrity, insight, and advancement of the anthropology department.

In the early 1960s, Dark decided to focus on the art and peoples of the Pacific, an interest he had first developed in the mid-1930s through the paintings of Gauguin and his reading of early-20th-century travelers' accounts and novels, which was further stimulated by a course assignment with Daryll Forde in 1945. In the summer of 1964, he went to Papua New Guinea looking for a society on which to do an ethnoaesthetic study, and on advice from scholars knowledgeable about the area he settled on the Kilenge of West New Britain. He carried out fieldwork for a year in 1966–67 (accompanied by Mavis) and on a brief visit in 1970. His work in Kilenge—much of it in collaboration with Adrian Gerbrands, a Dutch anthropologist who was an innovator in ethnoaesthetics and visual anthropology—focused on material culture and art and, along with a rich corpus of ethnographic data, produced many hundreds of photographs. Dark's numerous publications and presentations (e.g., 1974, 1978) made Kilenge, in the words of one of his Pacific arts colleagues, "a household name for many of us interested in Pacific art and anthropology" (Welsch 1999:1). He also worked in several other Pacific areas, such as the Abelam area of Papua New Guinea, Irian Jaya, and Palau, continuing to concentrate on the Pacific, particularly its arts, for the last 35 years of his life (1983, 1993; Dark and Rose 1993).

After he retired from SIU in 1978, Dark returned to England, where he continued to be very active. Aside from weekly excursions exploring the corners of Cornwall and occasional ocean cruises, always with his wife, he headed the local Gig Club; a Cornwall institution dating from the end of the 18th century, gigs were six-oarsman rowboats designed to take pilots out to oceangoing vessels. In 1975, Dark began editing the *Pacific Arts Association Newsletter* (which became the journal *Pacific Arts* in 1990) and continued as editor for 25 years. The Pacific Arts Association recognized his contributions to the study of Oceanic arts and anthropology with the Manu Daula award in 1984, "for outstanding achievement in and dedication to the arts of the Pacific" (Pacific Arts Association n.d.). In 1999, he was honored with a special session of the Pacific Arts

Association at the Field Museum of Natural History, which was published as a festschrift (Welsch 1999).

Continuing his own research and writing, Dark completed a huge manuscript, *Craftsmanship and Art: An Anthropological Inquiry into the Conditions of Art* (with over 600 line drawings by Mavis), now awaiting a publisher. This encyclopedic volume, with data derived from the worldwide ethnographic literature, emphasizes the skills of the craftsman and the processing of materials and covers topics ranging from flint knapping, stone and wood carving, and metal casting to personal ornamentation and body modification. His final publications are a monograph on the Kilenge, coauthored with Mavis (Dark and Dark 2008), and an article on Walter Taylor, including an account of the anthropology course he taught in the German POW camp in 1945 (in press).

Over the years, Dark was consultant to a number of museums in the United States (particularly the Field Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art), Australia, and Canada. He served on the AAA's Committee on Anthropological Research in Museums (1964–76) and on the Board of Directors of the Human Relations Area Files (1974–78). He received research grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the National Geographic Society. His extensive publications on tribal arts, technology, and material culture in widely dispersed geographical areas and cultural regions, as well as in visual anthropology and museology (e.g., 1967, 1969, 1976, 1988), reflect his consuming interest in broader questions, including the relationship between art and anthropology and, in his words, "to consider the diverse arts of the world to see if art is a universal phenomenon and, if so, what is it in art that is universal?"

Philip Dark was a meticulous scholar, a brilliant photographer, and an avid book collector, with a constantly inquisitive mind and many interests outside of anthropology, ranging from art to politics to travel. He was gentlemanly in demeanor, with a quiet wit, unfailingly considerate of others and sensitive to their needs. Former students and younger scholars remember him as a kindly, conscientious, and supportive mentor who had high academic standards and communicated an ethic of hard work and dedication to anthropological scholarship as well as someone with a warm sense of humor.

Dark's extensive collection of research notes and photographs on Benin art and technology have been deposited with the Department of Ethnography, British Museum. His Pacific research notes and photographs have been given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

## NOTE

*Acknowledgments.* For assistance with this obituary, I am grateful to Mavis Dark, George Gumerman, and Virginia Lee Webb; thanks also to Kelly Yamashita and Mary Smith of the Yale Anthropology Department.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Dark, Philip J. C.  
 1950 Bush Negro Art. M.A. thesis, Department of Anthropology, Yale University.  
 1954a Bush Negro Art: An African Art in the Americas. London: A. Tiranti. [Reprinted, London: Tiranti, 1970; London: Academy Editions, 1973; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973]  
 1954b Methods in Ethnohistory: With Reference to Mixtec Materials. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Yale University.  
 1958 Mixtec Ethnohistory: A Method of Analysis of the Codical Art. London: Oxford University Press.  
 1962 The Art of Benin: A Catalogue of an Exhibition of the A. W. F. Fuller and Chicago Natural History Museum Collections of Antiquities from Benin, Nigeria. Chicago: Chicago Natural History Museum.  
 1967 The Study of Ethno-Aesthetics: The Visual Arts. In *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*. June Helm, ed. Pp. 131–148. Seattle: University of Washington Press.  
 1969 Anthropology and Museums: Only Art? *American Anthropologist* 71(6):1130–1133.  
 1973 An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology. Oxford: Clarendon Press.  
 1974 Kilenge Life and Art: A Look at a New Guinea People. London: Academy Editions.  
 1975 Benin Bronze Heads: Styles and Chronology. In *African Images: Essays in African Iconology*. Daniel F. McCall and Edna G. Bay, eds. Pp. 25–103. New York: Africana.  
 1976 Supplying the Demand. *African Arts* 9:55–57.  
 1978 Among the Kilenge "Art Is Something Which Is Well Done." Wellington, New Zealand: Second International Symposium of Oceanic Art.  
 1982 An Illustrated Catalogue of Benin Art. Boston: G. K. Hall.  
 1988 Museums in Micronesia. *Pacific Arts Newsletter* 26:12–20.  
 1994 In Captivity: Images from World War II. Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts.  
 1999 Persistence, Change, and Meaning in Pacific Art: A Retrospective View with an Eye toward the Future. In *Proceedings of a Special Session of the Pacific Arts Association: Festschrift to Honor Dr. Philip J. C. Dark—Working Papers*. R. Welsch, ed. Pp. 5–29. Hanover, NH: Pacific Arts Association.  
 In press Walter Taylor: POW, Professor, and Colleague. In *Walter W. Taylor: Prophet, Pariah, and Pioneer*. Allan L. Maca, Jonathan E. Reyman, and William J. Folan, eds. Boulder: University Press of Colorado.  
 N.d. *Craftsmanship and Art: An Anthropological Inquiry into the Conditions of Art*. Unpublished MS, independent researcher.
- Dark, Philip J. C., ed.  
 1983 *Development of the Arts in the Pacific*. Wellington, New Zealand: National Museum.
- Dark, Philip, and Mavis Dark  
 2008 *Bukumo: Life and Art of the Kilenge*, Papua New Guinea. New South Wales, Australia: Crawford House Publishing; Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press.
- Dark, Philip, and Matthew Hill  
 1971 Musical Instruments on Benin Plaques. In *Essays on Music and History in Africa*. Klaus Wachsmann, ed. Pp. 65–78. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Dark, Philip J. C., and Roger Rose, eds.  
 1993 *Artistic Heritage in a Changing Pacific*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Forman, W., B. Forman, and Philip Dark  
 1960 *Benin Art*. [Photos by W. Forman and B. Forman; Introduction and Notes by Dark]. London: P. Hamlyn.
- Linton, Ralph  
 1936 *The Study of Man*. New York: Appleton-Century.
- Pacific Arts Organization  
 N.d. Pacific Arts Organization website. Electronic document, <http://www.pacificarts.org/node/7>, accessed August 13, 2008.
- Welsch, Robert L., ed.  
 1999 *Proceedings of a Special Session of the Pacific Arts Association: Festschrift to Honor Dr. Philip J. C. Dark—Working Papers*. Hanover, NH: Pacific Arts Association.