

himself with an ecological approach, Chakrabarti is consciously trying to achieve the same goal for Indian archaeology.

No archaeological practice is free from social and political bias; furthermore, ethnicity, being a purely cultural concept, is far more difficult to study than archaeologists once believed. Yet I doubt that people anywhere will ever stop insisting that archaeologists try to answer their questions about ethnic prehistory. Movements of people and changing concepts of identity are in any case legitimate problems for historical investigation. Finally, it is erroneous to conclude that a particular approach in archaeology inevitably is linked to a specific ideology. Evolutionism has at various times been tied to racist as well as universalist viewpoints; while romantic approaches have both celebrated cultural diversity and encouraged bigotry and ethnocentrism.

I agree, however, with Chakrabarti that a sound understanding of the ecological and social development of India, which is more accessible to archaeological investigation than are issues of ethnicity, would provide a solid background against which questions of ethnicity might be studied. I hope that a processual approach, such as is being advocated by Chakrabarti, K. Paddayya, and others can help to promote among Indians the sense of communal solidarity that Chakrabarti values so highly.

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***Digging through Darkness* by Carmel Schrire, 1995, University Press of Virginia. 286pp. ISBN 0-8139-1558-9, Cloth. \$29.95**

by

**Tim Murray
Department of Archaeology
LaTrobe University
Bundoora, Victoria, Australia**

It is a great pity that archaeologists tend not to write like this. Over the last decade with the rise (and the eagerly awaited fall) of post modernist perspectives in the discipline we have become accustomed to archaeologists proselytising about the aridity of much archaeological writing, supposedly brought about by a lack of critical self-reflection, or by an outmoded adherence to the subject-object distinction. But answering the call for a more "humane" archaeology has instead simply led to the replacement of a "positivist" aridity with even more vapid, abstracted, and disconnected discourse about archaeology, with interpretation stalled in abstractions of poorly understood and even more poorly applied perspectives from the human sciences or from "cultural studies". Instead of the passion and high principle which is evident in best of Gordon Childe's writing or even, surprisingly, the closing chapter of more conventional works such as Lubbock's *Prehistoric Times*, we have regular rehearsals of the elite sensibilities of archaeologists from centres of academic over-production in England and the United States. These have proved not to be very interesting, either as archaeology or as fiction.

Perhaps the problem stems from the fact that if archaeologists want to dispense with a meaningful grappling with the empirical and to substitute this with discourse about archaeology or a pastiche of abstractions about the meaning of the past, then they have to share this market with a great many others who have much experience at telling interesting stories, or who produce the perspectives that archaeologists so assiduously borrow. Thus far the bulk of archaeologists have not been equal to the contest.

Carmel Schrire's *Digging through Darkness* is an exception to this not so wild overgeneralisation. Part (or whole?) antobiography, part discussion of some of the consequences of colonialism in South Africa and

northern Australia, and part reflection about the business of making historical archaeology, this book breaks new ground in some important directions. Among its many attractive aspects (not least of which are some sly observations and some excellent writing) the most appealing is that it is a book about self and about archaeology which does not diminish either. Schrire's personal journey, unlike the vapid posturing we have been getting used to, is interesting and consequential. Part of the reason for this is that Schrire can write, but the most important reason is that she clearly understands that by exploring her own history in South Africa and in Australia, she develops a richer understanding of the process and meaning of colonialism which we all can share.

This great theme is developed at a number of levels and through the articulation of the traditional databases of the historical archaeologist: place, artefacts, written documents, oral histories, and ethnohistories. Schrire knows this material well and her history of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) is full of sharp asides and amusing anecdotes. She also appreciates the human face of the late 17th century world economy with the poor of northern Europe leaving their bones in Africa and places as far East as the Arafura Sea. Schrire also writes powerfully about the Khoikhoi and of the consequences of contact for women such as Eva. Part fiction and fact, Eva's story humanises the reality of contact in a way which does much more than give empowering voice to the indigenes, it also allows us to reflect more deeply about the business of interpretation in historical archaeology.

This is exemplified in her straightforward reporting of the site of Oudepost 1, which she excavated as a centrepiece of her investigations into the archaeology of colonialism in the Cape. We have an extended discussion of how the site was located, excavated, and analysed. There is the usual drama of dating the site and trying to get the clay pipes to do as they are supposed to, but then Schrire shifts gear and seeks (through fiction) to get to the essence of what Oudepost 1 might have meant to the people who lived there and those who traded with them. This story is not some post modernist fantasy, nor some mechanical application of vogue social theory to an "intractable" archaeological record, but a genuine act of the imagination. Love it or hate it, be pro or anti Collingwood's notion of empathetic reconstruction, but you can't ignore it.

Of course there is much to disagree with and many points to debate about Schrire's account of the archaeology of contact and of colonialism, but this is to be expected in a book which challenges and moves the reader. In my view Schrire has produced a valuable contribution to historical archaeology, but an even more valuable contribution to our collective understanding of the recent history of South Africa.

VI. Activities of Various Academic Gatherings Related to the History of Archaeology

Saturday, 22 November 1997 at the British Academy, a session entitled "Grahame Clark and World Prehistory" will be held. Readers of the BHA might be interested in a paper by Professor Desmond Clark for the session "Introduction to Grahame Clark and World Prehistory." Professor Clark's paper will survey the impact of Grahame Clark and the study of world prehistory. The session at the British Academy will be jointly sponsored by the Prehistoric Society and the British Academy.

David Browman sends word of the upcoming Gordon R. Willey History of Archaeology Symposium to be held during the 63rd Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, 25-29 March 1997: