

Obituary: Susan Kent 1952-2003

Dr Susan ('Sue') Kent died on April 13, 2003, while attending the Annual Meeting of the American Archaeological Association in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Her death was consistent with her life, of unceasing scholarly activity, on a variety of research fronts, ranging from archaeology - in both the New World and the Old - to medical anthropology. Much of her work was in the field of ethnoarchaeology, seeking to synthesise her two principal fields of research. The eclecticism of this exceptionally productive scholar is evident in the seven volumes she edited over the past two decades: *Method and Theory for Activity Area Research An Ethnoarchaeological Approach* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987; she also published a book on that subject matter in 1984, titled *Analyzing Activity Areas: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of the Use of Space*, published by University of New Mexico Press); *Farmers as Hunters The Implications of Sedentism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *Diet, Demography, and Disease: Changing Views of Anemia* (co-edited with Patricia Stuart-Macadam; New York: Aldine de Gruyters Publishers, 1992); *Cultural Diversity among Twentieth Century Foragers: An African Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Gender in African Archaeology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1998) and *Ethnicity, Hunter-Gatherers and the "Other" Association or Assimilation in Africa* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002). In addition to this prodigious output of books, Susan Kent published over sixty book chapters and refereed articles, some of the latter in such journals as *American Anthropologist*, *Man*, *Current Anthropology*, *American Antiquity* and *Ethnology*. She was a regular presenter at conferences, in both of her major fields, and guest lecturer nationally and abroad.

Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, where she held a faculty position until the time of her death, recognised the achievements of its distinguished faculty member in 2002 by promoting her to the position of Eminent Professor.

After a period of archaeological and ethnoarchae-



Sue Kent, a prolific scholar at work

ological research in the American Southwest in the 1970s and early 1980s (on Navajo irrigation and the Pueblo II Mesa Verde Anasazi in southwestern Colorado), Susan Kent shifted her research site to southern Africa. She was engaged in two research enterprises: the Kutse project in Botswana, from 1987-1997, and the Caledon River Valley project in South Africa, from 1998. The former was a highly productive project of ethnoarchaeology, consisting of detailed, carefully quantified ethnographic field work on diachronic changes among the recently sedentarised Kutse Basarwa (San or Bushmen). It focused on such features of Basarwa culture as hunting and gathering practices, gender, diet, violence, health, material culture, use of space, social organisation and egalitarianism, all in the dynamic context of the society's shift from nomadism to sedentism. The more recent project was an archaeological reconnaissance study on the changes, from the Late Stone Age to the Middle Stone Age, of patterns of social behaviour, gender and spatial distribution.

What makes Susan Kent's scholarly work so distinctive is that it has always combined her own research interests with those of fellow-researchers, whom she engaged in lively discussion at conferences and recruited as contributors to her volume projects. Through this scholarly *modus operandi* – an instance of generosity and sharing of the kind she studied amongst African hunter-gatherers – Sue's own ideas and projects were expanded and exposed to the critical scrutiny of a wide range of scholars. Her

work became established within the current scholarly discourse, on such issues as the foraging-farming transition, activity area analysis, architecture and spatial studies, hunter-gatherer sociality (especially gender relations and egalitarianism), hunter-gatherer diversity and the Kalahari (and hunter-gatherer) revisionism debate.

One of her most notable theoretical contributions has been to the last, the revisionism debate. When the debate was at its peak, in the early 1990s, with positions most polarised and intractable and hunter-gatherer theory at an impasse, she published a significant article (in *Man*) that evaluated the issues of the debate and suggested a compromise between the two positions. The revisionism issue is at the core also of her last two edited volumes on African hunter-gatherers, their cultural diversity and the spectrum of

interaction patterns between them and their agro-pastoral neighbours. These volumes demonstrate that, for all of their involvement with the economies and polities of their stronger agro-pastoral neighbours, more than a few of the many and varied African hunter-gatherers have also managed to retain their cultural integrity and political autonomy.

Because of her productivity and eclecticism as a scholar and her energetic activities as volume editor that provided a forum for researchers in the fields of her own interest, Sue Kent had an impact on the professional lives and careers of a large number and wide range of scholars. She is missed and mourned, and remembered, by many.

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