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Edited by Margaret W. Conkey and Christine A. Hastorf
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**THE USES OF STYLE
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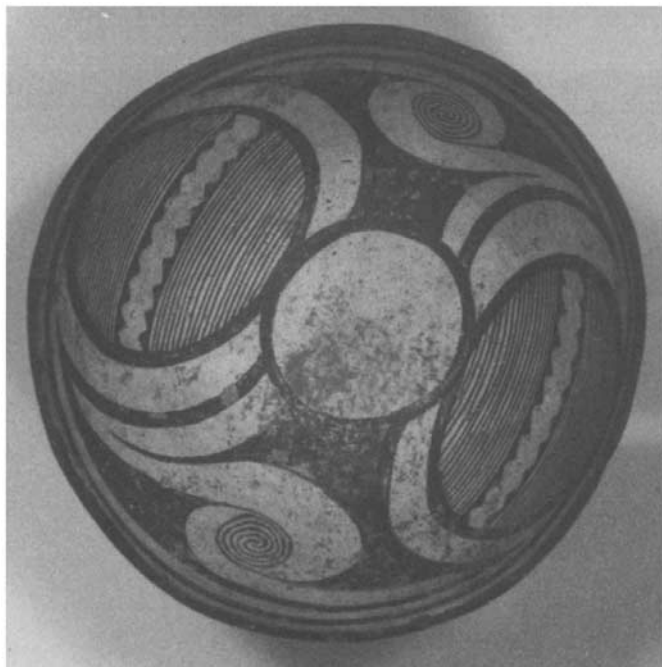
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For Elden Johnson

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PREFACE

This volume on the uses of style in archaeology grew out of a conference of the same title sponsored by the Department of Anthropology and the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis the weekend of January 25–26, 1985. There six archaeologists, who have long been concerned with this issue, along with two commentators and a guest speaker, discussed the problem of style. As this volume will demonstrate, the subject is rich and multidimensional, with many varying points of view, from the functional use of style by archaeologists, to the interpretation by art historians, to the use of style by those in past cultures themselves.

The inception of the conference was a bit like the subject, diverse and eclectic. One year before the visit of a traveling exhibit of ceramic pieces from the prehistoric Mimbres culture of the southwestern United States to the University Art Museum, I was approached by the chairman of the Anthropology Department, Elden Johnson, to consult on several archaeological exhibits that would accompany the pottery, which were being organized by Lyndel King and Susan Brown of the museum, and to coordinate an associated conference with Dr. Christy Caine. The Anthropology Department had periodically held a small conference in honor of the late archaeologist Dennis Puleston, and Johnson suggested we think about organizing a departmental conference linked to the Mimbres pottery, because the department houses the largest collection of this ceramic tradition in the world.

Upon thinking about the pottery and its complex style, I had to move beyond seriations, art history, and the southwestern U.S. space-time traditions: the designs on the pottery were expressing relationships and communicating social messages that archaeology should be pursuing, I felt.

I realized that in order to talk about the Mimbres designs and styles with a cultural connection to the humans who conceived of them, produced them, and perceived them, we would have to begin with a wider debate on style in general. And so we abandoned the idea of a conference on Mimbres culture and ceramics, and turned to the underlying issue of style itself, though it is a very broad intellectual vista.

The number of scholars interested in the subject was increasing each year, yet there were only a few archaeologists who had expressed the major views on this subject in the archaeological literature. We invited seven archaeologists to come to Minnesota, present a paper, and join a round-table discussion on the uses of style in archaeology. Six agreed to attend, despite the fact that the proposed date was in the heart of winter in Minnesota! The six speakers were Margaret Conkey, Timothy Earle, Ian Hodder, Stephen Plog, James Sackett, and Martin Wobst. In addition, University of Minnesota colleagues Sheila McNally, an art historian, and Guy Gibbon, an archaeologist, each commented on three of the papers. To tie the conference on style to the exhibit we invited a keynote speaker on the pottery itself. James Brody of the

Preface

Maxwell Museum at the University of New Mexico came to speak on the pottery. The auxiliary exhibits were completed by Barbara Lass Withrow, and were on display in conjunction with the nationally traveling Mimbres pottery exhibit.

The conference was funded by the University of Minnesota including monies from the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, the College of Liberal Arts Committee for Conferences, the Center for Ancient Studies, and the University Arts Museum in addition to special departmental funds in honor of Dennis Puleston. In addition to thanking them for their support, I would also like to thank all who helped, especially Elden Johnson, Joan Carothers, Christy Caine, Lyndel King, Susan Brown, and Barb Withrow.

As the conference commenced, the enthusiasm of the participants, the amount of heated debate and critical issues raised, as well as the opportunity to have so many interested parties together in one place convinced me to take the time to bring these papers together in a volume on the uses of style in archaeology. Having moved quite far afield from my own current research, I asked Margaret Conkey to join me in editing the volume to help gain a more complete and sophisticated range of contemporary viewpoints on style. All but one of the invited speakers have contributed revised papers

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to this volume. We solicited several other chapters, from Whitney Davis, Warren R. DeBoer, and William K. Macdonald, that fill out the volume by providing additional views and approaches to the uses of style in archaeology. In addition, we have written an introduction to the volume that is a brief overview on the subject of style in archaeology. The final chapter in the volume is a commentary by Polly Wiessner, who discusses her own views on the uses of style based on her work and in light of the volume's contributions.

This volume is not a compendium of all perspectives, approaches, or debates on the uses of style in archaeology; it is merely a first attempt to face directly such an amorphous but fundamental aspect of archaeology: style is in all things, yet it is almost undefinable. The fact that the discipline is willing to address this very complex and multifaceted thorn in interpretation makes the subject and these papers timely and important. As we become more conscious of the issues debated in this volume, and can incorporate, criticize, and build on them, we should be moving closer to more full cultural interpretations of all cultural artifacts, including Mimbres pottery.

Christine A. Hastorf
 1989

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