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Style and Function: Conceptual Issues in Evolutionary Archaeology

Teresa D. Hurt, Gordon Rakita

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The topics of style and function within evolutionary archaeology have been the subject of great debate in the field of archaeology in general over the past two decades. Evolutionary archaeologists have a unique perspective on these concepts-one that has sometimes been misunderstood by archaeologists working within other theoretical perspectives.

The dichotomy between style and function was first formulated in the late 1970s by Robert Dunnell and remains axiomatic within the theoretical perspective of evolutionary archaeology. The original definitions of style and function were grounded in biological evolutionary concepts regarding neutral variation versus variation that is subject to natural selection. Several chapters expand upon these concepts, and explore how Darwinian evolutionary theory may be used to understand the archaeological record. Other chapters demonstrate this application through empirical case studies. Dunnell provides a foreword introducing and re-examining his original thesis.

This volume is the only text devoted to the topic of style and function within the literature of evolutionary archaeology. It provides not only theoretical discussions and augmentation, but also significant historical background regarding the development of the style/function distinction within archaeology. Moreover, it presents several case studies that provide examples of how evolutionary style and function may be applied to the prehistoric record.

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