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***'Elite' funerals, monuments and landscapes in the 2nd millennium
BC: Wessex graves in long-term perspective***

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Wessex burials are often treated as expressions of an exclusive social (ie, elite), ethnic and/or aesthetic 'phenomenon' that can be understood in its own terms, largely disengaged from other contemporary or earlier modes of mortuary practice.

This paper advocates a different interpretative approach based on long-term comparative perspectives on 'rich grave' funerary deposition, individual burial and monumentality, and on the spatial contextualisation of the significant dead in prehistoric landscapes. In this view, Wessex graves and earlier kinds of 'complex' burials do not represent a coherent 'tradition' of practice, but rather a series of fashions of funerary display and memorialisation that changed rapidly in their performative qualities, symbolic referents and significance over time. Although lavish funerals and prominent monument construction drew upon wider cultural repertoires, and involved emulation and 'historical' referencing that reproduced *styles* of funerary representation, each burial should also be seen as a strategic act that sought to realise a particular vision of the cultural present, past and future in a specific social and political situation.