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Wessex is a Place: Wessex is a State of Mind

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Wessex is a Place: Wessex is a State of Mind



Beguiled by ROMANCE, blinded by TREASURE ...

From an Anglo-Saxon stronghold against Viking invaders to an idyllic setting for the novels of Thomas Hardy, Wessex has been heavily romanticised in the public consciousness.

Of course, the famous expeditions by antiquarians in search of precious metals and grave goods have been paramount in establishing this as a land of riches.

BRAND-WASHED ...

Even archaeologists have fallen under Wessex's spell and we cannot help but project the more recent past into deep history. From King Alfred the Great to the Amesbury Archer... the 3000 year time-gap has not hindered the labelling of Wessex as a place of 'warrior kings' and powerful individuals.

Treasure-bias, grave-bias, and all-round Wessex-bias have (let's face it) left more boring archaeology, neglected. Regions surrounding Wessex have also been starved of the limelight. It's time to put an end to favouritism.

What is WESSEX? What is WESSEX CULTURE ...

The **Fields of Wessex**: The physical boundaries of Wessex do not comply to the modern county borders, but approximately stretch across the counties of Wiltshire, Hampshire and Dorset. (see map.)

The **Field of Wessex Culture**: Despite an ill-defined perimeter and lack of political relevance today, the term 'Wessex' has become entangled with the Archaeology of the European Bronze Age. The enormous amount of material finery, grave contexts and imposing structures all fall under the umbrella term 'Wessex Culture'.

It is a landscape filled with megaliths, barrows and gold...lots of gold.

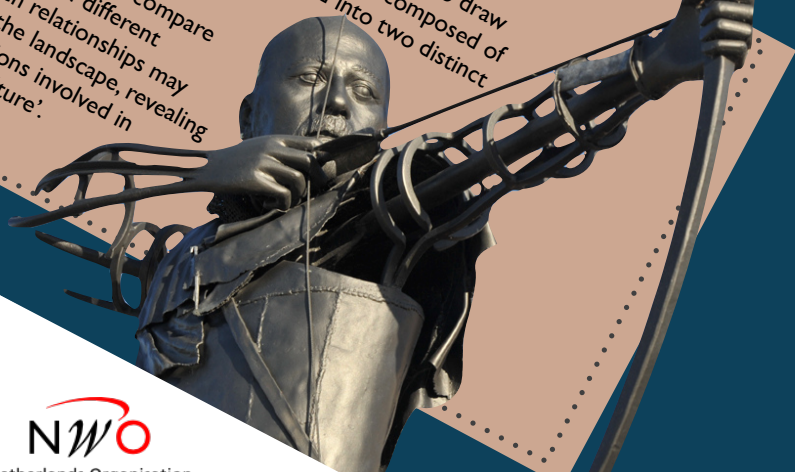
The QUESTIONS ...

- What is Wessex?
What exactly does the label mean today?
- Unpacking Prehistoric Wessex ...
What is the physical distribution of Wessex Culture?
Should we rely primarily on the funerary contexts of Wessex Culture? Is there even such a thing as a Wessex 'warrior king'?
- What do the Wessex depositional practices reveal about the shared ideas and values of the Bronze Age communities?
- Is Wessex even worth it?
Do modern understandings of 'Wessex Culture' match up to what we find in the Archaeological record? If not, where did we go wrong?
Is 'Wessex Culture' an appropriate term to use in Bronze Age Archaeology?

The PLAN ...

Briefly, we need to explore and define the **meaning and extent** of 'Wessex Culture'. Adhering to the EoD project's focus on metalwork, I intend to draw upon Needham's (2008) theory that Prehistoric Wessex was not composed of a widespread, uniform culture, but may potentially be divided into two distinct areas: 'Inland Wessex' and 'Coastal Wessex'.

Using Network Analysis we can compare assemblages on the basis of different variables. Mapping such relationships may indicate selectivity in the landscape, revealing something of the decisions involved in shaping this 'Wessex Culture'.



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