



# Ritual in Early Bronze Age Grave Goods

*John Hunter, Ann Woodward*

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The exotic and impressive grave goods from burials of the 'Wessex Culture' in Early Bronze Age Britain are well known and have inspired influential social and economic hypotheses, invoking the former existence of chiefs, warriors and merchants and high-ranking pastoralists. Alternative theories have sought to explain the how display of such objects was related to religious and ritual activity rather than to economic status, and that groups of artefacts found in certain graves may have belonged to religious specialists. This volume is the result of a major research that aimed to investigate Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age grave goods in relation to their possible use as special dress accessories or as equipment employed within ritual activities and ceremonies. Many items of adornment can be shown to have formed elements of elaborate costumes, probably worn by individuals, both male and female, who held important ritual roles within society. Furthermore, the analysis has shown that various categories of object long interpreted as mundane types of tool were in fact items of bodily adornment or implements used in ritual contexts, or in the special embellishment of the human body.

Although never intended to form a complete catalogue of all the relevant artefacts from England the volume provides an extensive, and intensively illustrated, overview of a large proportion of the grave goods from English burial sites.

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