the importance of creating and maintaining successful relationships at all levels within transegalitarian societies. However, after a considerable portion of the article has been put over to a detailed and wide-ranging ethnographic discussion, the central question still remains, why should funerals be the most appropriate venue for such feasting events and their associated displays and reciprocal obligations?

Hayden argues that the opportunity and structure for building and extending social influence is already in place in funeral situations, and it is this which makes them an ideal setting. Death and grieving tend to affect people's emotions profoundly and potentially places them at their most susceptible to persuasion and the promotion of socio-political agenda. I have concerns about this justification for three reasons. Firstly, there is a worrying circular sense to the argument. The funeral structure provides the best context for advancing, social promotion, but is itself defined by these acts of social promotion. Secondly, it seems unlikely that these features would be confined to one type of funeral gathering. Promotion, alliance formation and reciprocity are every bit as important in any hunter-gatherer society. Thirdly, the reasoning that Hayden is presenting is not exclusive to funerals, but is arguably available during any rite of intensification. The same social promotion, alliance and reciprocity (be that by exchange of goods or exchange of allegiance for fortune) objectives apply. I am not suggesting that his wider thesis is wrong, only that I have concerns about the strength of the arguments he raises to validate it.

One element that gets surprisingly little attention in this otherwise thorough discussion, and which has critical bearing on the significance of funeral proceedings, is the place and status of the deceased. Without the deceased, there is no funeral. The absence of any treatment about the place of the deceased in the context of lavish funeral feasting is a key point that weakens Hayden's argument. If the aim of the article is to help understand the importance of such funeral feasts, compared to other types of funeral within transegalitarian societies, or against those in egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies, then the social status of the body (in life and in death) must surely be considered. If transegalitarian societies are defined by characteristics of ownership — manifesting both in the spheres of access to resources and accumulation of products derived from them — and thus also evidence of prestige goods and of social inequality, how does this affect the nature of the social individual? One might argue that in a socio-economic environment where wealth is signified by material accumulation, the deceased becomes a material resource in its own right. In life, a person is a materialized means of storing wealth, different but parallel to other forms of accumulation. In death, that stored potential is now released (cashed in). It becomes the reason for organizing an extremely lavish funeral feast and by extension the opportunity for a family to promote itself and create or reinforce alliances. Within transegalitarian societies, the certainty of death (and the dead body) may, in effect, become an insurance policy against the constriction of social influence.

While the analysis and interpretation of burial evidence has formed a rich sub-field within archaeology for decades, attention to the social dynamics that underlie the funeral feasting, particularly in later prehistory, has received comparatively less consideration. One of the reasons for this, Hayden suggests in this article, lies in the fact that the social importance of extravagant funerals is poorly understood. He proposes that the extremely lavish funeral feasts that occur in many transegalitarian societies are best explained not as economically irrational cultural events, but rather as venues for social promotion and sanctioned displays of wealth. They are a crucial axis around which key social alliances are formed or maintained. This makes them not only very worthy of archaeologists’ attention, but also of considerable importance in their efforts to reverse-engineer past social mechanisms from burial evidence. While I question some of the reasoning behind the importance of lavish funeral feasts presented in this article, I feel that future refinements and the identification of associated, archaeologically visible, markers will provide an important new dimension to funereal study.

From Chris Fowler, School of Historical Studies, Newcastle University, Armstrong Building, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, UK; c.j.fowler@ncl.ac.uk.

Hayden presents a persuasive thesis outlining the socially competitive nature of extremely lavish funerary feasts. It is broad in scope and generalizing in approach, offering a valuable comparative perspective on socio-economic promotion at funeral feasts. In reading the article I found myself thinking about the phenomena of ELFFs in comparison with other events and as arenas for social relations. I offer some questions and comments on these topics here.

Hayden’s explanation that lavishness of funeral feasts depends on the current relations that the lineage enjoys with others is a refreshing change from explanations based on the rank of the deceased individual, and provides important emphasis on collective agency.
Hayden’s insight that not every person or every generation among societies practising ELFFs receives notable funerals among their own: throughout British prehistory most of the dead have left little trace, but even among those interred in cists, cairns or barrows not all are marked as being of a high status and the same monument is often shared by several bodies (including cases where round barrows are constructed after several graves are filled). While funerary sites are relatively common in Neolithic and early Bronze Age Britain, evidence for feasting is rarer. To an extent this is due to issues of deposition and preservation. But it would be interesting, in light of Hayden’s article, to review the evidence for how often feasts in the British Neolithic, say, accompanied funerals compared with those which did not. As well as lavish feasts there were massive building projects for which we can reasonably expect a workforce was fed and which formed arenas for large-scale socio-political interaction including feasts. Some of these monuments do not contain any burial chambers, graves or human remains. To what extent are ELFFs absolutely different than other means of ‘socioeconomic promotion’ including smaller-scale funerals, other extremely lavish feasts, or the construction of monuments which are not funerary in nature? While prehistoric acts of feasting and monument construction might be examples of ‘...alternative means [that] could have been employed to achieve the same (inferred) goals...’, and while in some cases the funerary evidence has not survived or its relationship to the feasting is ambiguous, the boundaries between less extravagant mortuary rites, ELFFs and other extremely lavish feasts or large ceremonial gatherings where prestige was negotiated are worth further consideration. Rather than seeing ELFFs as always a discrete phenomenon, perhaps it would be fruitful for archaeologists to explore how, where and when funerals, ancestral veneration, monument construction, calendar rites and so on became separate from one another or merged, became intimately associated with lavish feasts, and when the relative emphasis on each of these spheres of activity shifted.

To a certain extent it seems that the difference between ELFFs and ordinary funeral feasts is a matter of scale rather than of a fundamentally different set of rites. If the premise is that the larger and more lavish the event the greater the social scale involved, then much the same kind of outcome might be achieved by something like a moka ceremony as by a funeral. Should we not see funeral feasts as integrated within a system of exchanges and transformations, alongside marriages and celebrations of puberty rites, for instance (cf. Barraud et al. 1994)? As Hayden recognizes, ELFFs may well develop in order to promote relationships which can support extremely lavish marriage feasts. When in the most lavish event of a person’s existence occurs (including after their death) would also seem important as an indicator of the social and cultural milieu and the opportunities for individual aggrandizement during life. Are different kinds of mortuary practices, different treatments of human remains, as well as the details of what food, what gifts are given to whom, not significant to understanding how social relations are transformed in these contexts? It would be interesting to explore the role of durable gifts at ELFFs compared to other exchange arenas, for instance. As for the significance of the funeral at the feast, Hayden posits the emotional force of grief as key to the special and politically-malleable potency of the funerary sphere. This may be correct, but if so we could ask why that is so different from the emotive force of joy, for instance. Is Hayden also suggesting here that ELFFs ‘win out’ against other arenas of prestige negotiation? Further comparative reflection on the emotive force (and range of emotions) at various large gatherings, rites of passage, and events where the ancestral dead are collectively venerated, and comparison of the ways that people try to channel these emotions, would help resolve whether there is variation in how prestige is negotiated through different evocative events.

I would question whether there is necessarily a conflict between interpretations that couch ELFFs in terms of ‘culture values or traditions’ and those which view them as ‘socio-economic promotion’. The presence of generalizing arguments does not necessarily invalidate other, particular and contextual, interpretations — both have value. Those vying for position may attempt to demonstrate their probity with respect to traditional values and practices (indeed, Hayden illustrates how devotion to the dead through a lavish funeral may ‘shield’ the host from accusations of self-aggrandizement). The extent to which Hayden stresses competitiveness and ‘socio-economic promotion’ overshadows other aspects of human behaviour with which these co-exist in tension, such as conviviality and sociality. Many anthropologists examine the active constitution of persons and communities through prestigious gift exchanges, feasts and rites of passage. Rather than seeing these as simply arenas for signalling existing identity, such arenas are interpreted as vital to the constitution of personal identity in relation to others and in relation to social values (see, for instance, Battaglia 1990; Munn 1986; Strathern 1988). Acts of donation can be seen as acknowledgements of debt or gratitude to the wider community who played a key part in
constituting the identity of the deceased (in the case of
funerary rites) and are instrumental in the construction
of the host community itself (e.g. through economic
interactions, through marriages, through past political
support). Hayden acknowledges the force of debt, but
focuses on indebtedness to the feast hosts rather than
their senses of gratitude, their senses of sociality, social
duty and pre-existing indebtedness to others who had
played a part in the constitution of the lineage, or their
indebtedness to creditors as they raise resources for the
event. Indeed, I wondered whether it was significant
to whom families indebted themselves when they bor-
rowed extensively in preparing for ELFFs. Does taking
out a debt open up new social relations with the credi-
tors, and could this redirect the interactions of a lineage
in a new way, even tying them in to new (unwanted)
obligations? How often are ELFFs successful in lineage
promotion, and do all members of society perceive the
results of ELFFs in the same way?

As a whole I agree with Hayden's argument
that engaging in ELFFs makes good sense to the
protagonists, and it is clear that social competition
occurs in these arenas. Events at which prestations
occur, including feasts, may be seen as key to building
and acknowledging a variety of social relationships
just as they can support socio-economic promotion
for the hosts. I think that it is vital to consider how
ELFFs co-exist with other arenas for social interaction
within their cultural contexts. There are other rela-
tions of give and take and other large-scale events to
be considered alongside ELFFs (e.g. acts of charity,
feasts in honour of guests, communal festivals). How
ELFFs relate to differing economic regimes, differing
beliefs about death and the cosmos, other important
socio-cultural events such as rites of passage and other
feasts, and different ideologies of self and society,
seems significant. Different forms of socio-political
interaction, including different kinds of competition,
involved in certain types of feasting are also important
(e.g. ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘patron-role’ and ‘diacritical’
feasting: Dietler 1996). Such considerations may help
in differentiating common ways in which ELFFs are
effective in socioeconomic promotion compared with
other social arenas, and further situate specific ELFFs
within their cultural contexts. This, to my mind, is the
intriguing challenge Hayden's article presents to us.

Reply from Hayden

I thank the commentators for their additional insights
into funeral feasts, and I am grateful for their general
recognition of the importance of this topic. I concur
with Jones's sentiment that it would be wonderful to
use hard field data to document a linkage between this
kind of feasting and survival/reproductive success,
as well as Fowler’s notion that such feasting should
be situated in broader contexts of varying economic
regimes, beliefs about death, other types of feasts, and
other arenas of social interaction. However, this article
was simply meant as an initial step in proposing a
broader program of investigation. As such, I felt that
it was first necessary to recognize and to define a key
phenomenon (excessively lavish funeral feasting)
that appears critical for understanding the social,
economic and political dynamics that underlie some
important aspects of past and present transegalitarian
cultures. Once this foundation has been established,
it should be possible to examine other linkages and
variations in more detail. Whether taking these suc-
cessive steps may be possible among living traditional
societies (due to globalization and other disruptions
of traditional cultures) is an empirical issue, as well
as a function of research-funding priorities. So we get
what information we can with the funding available
and try to understand what is actually transpiring in
traditional cultures as best we can.

The major difference between my perspective
and those of some commentators (Hastorf and Jones
in particular) revolves around the importance of non-
economic or practical motivations for holding funeral
feasts. I would like to make it very clear that I fully
recognize the importance of grief, sorrow, closure,
and various cultural beliefs in understanding human
behaviour, including many aspects of funeral feasts.
It is true, as Hastorf rightly emphasizes, that sorrow
and grieving form a part of funeral rituals in general,
and can account for many specific and general aspects
of funerals. Where we differ, I think, is in recognizing
types of behaviour that go well beyond the ability of
these factors to account for such behaviour. There
are multiple facets to funeral feasts, but if we want to
understand specific components, we need to ask very
specific questions. The point I tried to make in this
article is that the extreme expense, effort and plan-
ning involved in ELFFs does, in fact, go well beyond
what grief, sorrow, or simple cultural beliefs (lacking
major practical entailments) are capable of explaining
by themselves. Moreover, the widespread occurrence,
the social pressures to engage in ELFF displays, their
manifestly competitive nature, and their persistence
over the millennia all indicate that something much
more fundamental than grief is at play on a cross-
cultural level.

Undoubtedly, within the range of human var-
iation of any large population, there could be a few
wealthy people that might be so aggrieved that they

47