

SANDUR ARCHAEOLOGY - the Faroe Islands

The Church Site and the Buried Archaeological Viking Environment

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In 1969, an archaeological excavation commenced within the parish church in the village of Sandur, Sandoy. Thus 2019 marked the 50th anniversary of archaeological settlement and burial research at this site named *Við Kirkjugarð* and in its vicinity.

Right up to modern times, the parish church and its isolated position in the landscape of pastoral fields lying apart from the village have characterized the locality. The archaeological research in the surrounding area of the church verified that the church site was part of an extensive Viking settlement, apparently abandoned ca. 1200 AD. Hereafter, deep and protective aeolian sand deposits sealed the remains of the settlement.

Archaeological investigations carried out by *Tjóðsavnið*, the National Museum of the Faroe Islands, from the 1970's to 1990's focused on the modern extension of the churchyard towards the south, revealing remains deriving from earlier settlement and industrial activities, as well as quite sensational Viking burials. A recent PhD project reassess these Viking Age burials and together with an ongoing isotope research, these will add new perspectives and understandings about the burials.

In recent years, *Tjóðsavnið* collaborated with international universities and institutes on the project *Heart of the Atlantic* 2003-2009. This contributed to conclusive knowledge and understandings of a variety of aspects regarding the oldest history of the Faroese society. The zoo-archaeological investigations of mixed sandy midden deposits at the early Viking site *Undir Junkarinsfløtti* ca. 100 m to the north of the church site provided new insight in to the Faroese palaeoeconomy and the exploitation of natural resources.

Test trenches in 2018 and 2019 followed up by aerial and geophysical surveys, revealed widespread archaeological structures beneath the deep sandy soil layers, in the area between the sites *Undir Junkarinsfløtti* and *Við Kirkjugarð*.

In fact, the landscape and the quite calcareous sandy soils have been the condition of a wealthy agricultural society, reflected in the archaeological record. Therefore, the church site *Við Kirkjugarð* and its vicinity is highly significant in our understandings of the societies, networks and cultural contacts in the North Atlantic and Scandinavia.

The archaeological data collected over the past 50 years combined with the latest archaeological discoveries makes the church site and the buried archaeological Viking environment in the village of Sandur the most promising potential for future Faroese archaeology.