

Is there a palynological expression of shieling use/transhumance within the Norse North Atlantic?

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The practice of exploiting summer pastures for livestock grazing was widespread in the Norse North Atlantic and it is inferred to have had its beginnings in prehistoric Europe. This system of transhumance, whereby farmers moved animals to relatively remote pastures, reduced the pressure on grazing land close to main farms. This survival strategy preserved more productive infields for winter fodder production. Such transhumance was characterized by small isolated buildings (the shieling, *sæter*, *sel*, *ærgi*) often at altitude, sometimes relatively close to a main farm, but also at distance.

Depending on resource availability, shieling activity included the production of dairy products, haymaking, charcoal manufacture, peat cutting, and the collection of other fuel and winter fodder. Apart from the spatial separation of principal and subsidiary centres, the landscape activities of North Atlantic transhumance involved both small-scale and rangeland-type resource exploitation. There is also the recent categorization (Madsen 2019) of “marine-shielings” – seasonally occupied satellite coastal sites, with “nonfarming functionality” related to marine-resource use.

The detection of such activities in pollen, charcoal and fungal spore records is explored using sites and data from the Eastern Settlement of Greenland, western Iceland and Suðuroy in the Faroe Islands. A consideration of model patterns of palynological expectation and observation informs the process of inference and there are convincing, interpretable palynological signatures at times when shielings are known to have been in use. Palynology can also suggest what type of shieling activity is *not* represented. Given the uncertainties in archaeological knowledge relating to shieling existence and function in the Norse North Atlantic, the pollen and related evidence can be shown to mitigate such deficiencies as well as to contribute to wider aspects of environmental history.