

The earliest rotary quernstones in Iceland: The gradual merging of original local manufacture with later Norwegian import.

Sólveig Guðmundsdóttir Beck

Iceland was settled permanently and quickly in the Viking Age between the late 9th and early 10th centuries AD. The nature of local cereal cultivation and consumption on this isolated island in the North Atlantic has long been an important research subject, but the manner of grinding the grain and origins of early Icelandic quernstones has remained somewhat vague. This poster details the history, typology, manufacture and import of the earliest Icelandic rotary quernstones, taking advantage of previous research into cereal cultivation and by tracing the quernstone through Icelandic historical sources and analysing in detail just under 500 fragments and whole quernstones that have been excavated or conserved in museums and private hands in Iceland. The research demonstrates that shortly after settlement, Icelanders commonly took advantage of local phytic and vesicular igneous rock formations to make functional rotary quernstones for grinding e.g. barley and malt, and between the 9th and 12th centuries Icelandic querns were the norm. Only in the High Middle Ages do Norwegian, crystal studded mica schist quernstones from Hyllestad, and later Saltdal, appear in the assemblage along side Icelandic manufacture, as testimony of Medieval trade connections between Norway and the South of Iceland.