SKAGAFJÖRÐUR CHURCH AND SETTLEMENT SURVEY

Vatnskot on Hegranes: TP2 Excavation Report 2018

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Picture on front page – Melissa Ritchey and Grace Bello remove the root mat from Vatnskot TP2

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We are also grateful to the field crew who participated in both years of excavation. In the summer of 2017, a team of four—Alicia Sawyer, Rita Shepherd, Tyler Perkins, and Grace Cesario—excavated the original 1x2 m test pit. In the summer of 2018, Melissa Ritchey, Grace Bello, Grace Cesario, Kathryn Catlin, Nicholas Zeitlin, and Douglas Bolender all contributed to excavation, sieving, profile drawing, and backfilling.

The project was dependent on a number of permissions.

- Minjastofnun Íslands (The Cultural Heritage Agency of Iceland) granted permission for the excavation. Project number: *201606-0051*
- And Þjóðminjasafn Íslands (The National Museum of Iceland) granted the site number used for finds: *Þjms-2018-49*

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Introduction

In 2017, a 1x1 was opened at Vatnskot (site 443-0), based on coring results (Bolender et al. 2018a) that revealed midden material and tephra layers. This was originally opened as a 1x1 m unit, according to SCASS protocol, but was expanded to a 1x2 m unit, running north-south, after the initial 1x1 produced a large, well-preserved archaeofauna.

In 2018, we returned to Vatnskot to collect more animal bones and flotation samples, based on results of the archaeofaunal analysis (Cesario 2019) and findings of potential oats as well as barley in the macrobotanical samples (Ritchey, personal communication). After coring to confirm the presence of tephra and midden deposits, we opened another 1x2 m unit. This unit runs north-south and is located directly to the west of the 2017 excavation.

Sampling Strategy

Seeds

Archaeobotanical analysis of the 2017 excavation at Vatnskot (443-0, TP1) found two oat and nineteen barley grains (see Bolender et al. (2018b) for descriptions of the 2017 excavations). The large number of barley seeds in addition to the two oats was surprising and differed from the sample removed from Grænagerði (447-1, TP 2), where two barley and twenty-two oats were recovered. The new samples from 2018 will be used as a comparison to the samples at Grænagerði and the other sites in our study area.

The initial plan was to follow the same sampling strategy as TP1, but to also target cereal-rich layers to the increase the possibility of recovering macrobotanical remains. We recovered charred cereal grains from TP1 contexts [104]/[112] and [113] in 2017, and thus their matching contexts were targeted by this year's sampling. Context [114] was also added to this targeted

sampling because, although no cereal grains were recovered from it, the nature of the dark, laminated charcoal midden had the possibility of including higher numbers of charred seed remains that could possibly include cereals. The 1x2 meter excavation unit was divided into two 1x1 meter halves for sampling–designated "NW" and "SW." This preliminary plan thus comprised of non-targeted contexts sampled with a single seven-liter bag from each half, targeted contexts sampled with two seven-liter bags from each half, and context [112] sampled from the top and bottom of the context to follow the previous year's sampling strategy.

As excavations were underway, changes in the nature of the deposits and inconsistencies between what was seen versus recorded from the previous excavations caused some adjustments in the sampling strategy and context divisions. The first changes from the previous excavation were seen when coming down upon [118], [119] and [120]. In the southwest corner of the unit, an intrusive pit feature began [118] with bone and gravel inclusions within a mottled soil matrix of subsoil, H3 tephra, and midden. It was decided that this was a later, post-1104 historic feature, and was only screened for faunal remains, with no flotation samples taken.

The 2017 excavations describe context [112] as an orange-brown ash layer with charcoal inclusions, and this context roughly corresponds with [119] and [120] in TP2. The difference, however, is that there was a tephra deposit expanding across [119] on top of a midden. The tephra was bluish-gray and wispy, but it spread across most of both halves of TP2. In the field, it was tentatively designated as the ~934 but it has not yet been chemically identified. It is possible that this tephra layer was present in the 2017 excavations but was difficult to see and thus excavated without being noted. No flotation samples were taken from [119]. Two flotation samples each were taken from the NW and SW halves of [120] from the full depth of the layer. This differed from the initial sampling strategy, where top and bottom were planned to be sampled, but during excavations the boundaries were unclear and taking samples from the full depth of the layer ensured that the samples were large enough.

The following context, [121], was sampled with two seven-liter bags taken from the top and bottom of the context in both the NW and SW halves. During excavation, it was thought that we had reached the bottom of the context, and therefore sampled as such. However, as we continued excavating, we found the context continued farther, and thus we sampled once more, collecting two seven-liter bags from the SW half for an actual bottom sample (in the NW half, the actual bottom had been excavated through before realizing it and thus could not be sampled). Contexts [122] and [123], which coincide with the 2017 [113], each received targeted samples of two bags per half. [124] and [125] both received basic sampling of a single bag taken from each half.

Table 1: Macrobotanical samples taken for flotation from Vatnskot (443-0, TP2). Samples are grouped by context and location within the excavation unit where the sample was taken. Each sample bag is seven liters.

Context and Description	NW	SW
116 Bioturbated Aeolian	*Sample 1*: 1 bag – middle of context	*Sample 2*: 1 bag – middle of context
117 Orangish-brown low density cultural	*Sample 4*: 2 bags – top of context	*Sample 5*: 2 bags – top of context

120 **Orangish-brown midden with peat ash lens**	Sample 9: 2 bags – full vertical of context	*Sample 10*: 2 bags – full vertical of context
121 **Dark, mottled midden**	*Sample 12*: 2 bags – top of context *Sample 15*: 2 bags – bottom of context	*Sample 13*: 2 bags – top of context *Sample 16*: 2 bags – bottom of context *Sample 18*: 2 bags - actual bottom
122 **Peat ash midden**	*Sample 19*: 2 bags – full vertical of context	*Sample 20*: 2 bags – full vertical of context
123 **Mottled midden with ash, charcoal, peat ash and H3**	*Sample 22*: 2 bags – full vertical of context	*Sample 23*: 2 bags – full vertical of context
124 **Dark, laminated charcoal floor**	*Sample 26*: 1 bag – full vertical of context	*Sample 27*: 1 bag – full vertical of context
125 **Greasy midden**	*Sample 29*: 1 bag – full vertical of context	*Sample 30*: 1 bag – full vertical of context

Bones

All contexts were sieved through 4 mm mesh and bones collected from the screen. Some contexts were very moist and sticky, so to save time in the field, as much of the loose dirt as possible was sieved away, and the rest collected in a large sample bag to be wet screened later, again through 4 mm mesh to keep the sampling strategy the same. A report on the bones can be found in Cesario (2019).

Excavation

Vatnskot TP2 was excavated by Melissa Ritchey and Grace Cesario, with help from Grace Bello, Kathryn Catlin, Nicholas Zeitlin, and Douglas Bolender. Excavation took place from 19-22 July 2018. In order to match contexts from the 2017 excavation and make digging easier, we first reopened the western 50 centimeters of TP1.

Contexts from the 2018 excavation were numbered sequentially, following the last number from TP1 in 2017. Most of the contexts in TP2 correlate to contexts from TP1 but see Table 2 for differences.

Table 2. Context correlation table for TP1 and TP2 at Vatnskot.

TP1		TP1 southern extension		TP2	
Context	**Description**	**Context**	**Description**	**Context**	**Description**
101	Disturbed	101	Disturbed	101	Disturbed
--	--	--	--	118	Post-1104 cut (SW only)
102	Cut/fill in [101]	**1300**	**Blue-grey tephra**	**1300**	**Blue-grey tephra**
		110	Disturbed brown black with bone	116	Disturbed yellow brown AD
1104	**White tephra**	**1104**	**White tephra**	**1104**	**White tephra**
103	Orange-brown low density cultural (LDC)	111	Orange brown LDC	117	Orange brown LDC w/ wood ash and FCR
104	Orange-brown ash with charcoal, bone	112	Reddish- brown ash w/ charcoal bone turf	119/120	Orange brown midden with bone, peat ash
-		-		121/122	Dark mottled midden w/ peat ash
1000	**Black tephra**	**1000**	**Black tephra**	**1000**	**Black tephra**
105	Brown-black charcoal layer	113	Pinkish brown ash/charcoal with bone, turf	123	Yellow brown midden w/ bone and shell, peat ash and turf
106	Orange brown charcoal/ash w/ bone, turf			--	--
107	Dark black, laminated with charcoal	114	Compact brown black floor w/ ash, charcoal bone turf	124	Dark thick charcoal floor with peat ash, burnt turf
108	Greasy brown-black with charcoal, bone, FCR	115	Grayish brown LDC w/ charcoal bone, FCR	125	Mid-grey black, greasy with mixed H3
109	Mixed H3 w/ charcoal	--	--	--	--

The first context, [101], is the root mat and disturbed aeolian deposit underlying it, which directly matches [101] in TP1, and is the only context that is given the same number as its corresponding TP1 context. The aeolian was disturbed by worms and possible field flattening. There was also a recent, intrusive pit [118] in the southwest corner that was not immediately obvious when [101] was removed but in profile the cut is clear (Figure 1). This pit is post-1104, since there were patches of 1104 within the fill, and it seems to be quite modern since the root

mat lies almost directly on top of the fill. The pit also contained smashed turf pieces, which confused us during excavation until the shape of the pit became clearer. Small numbers of animal bones and a single white rock (find #4) came from this pit.

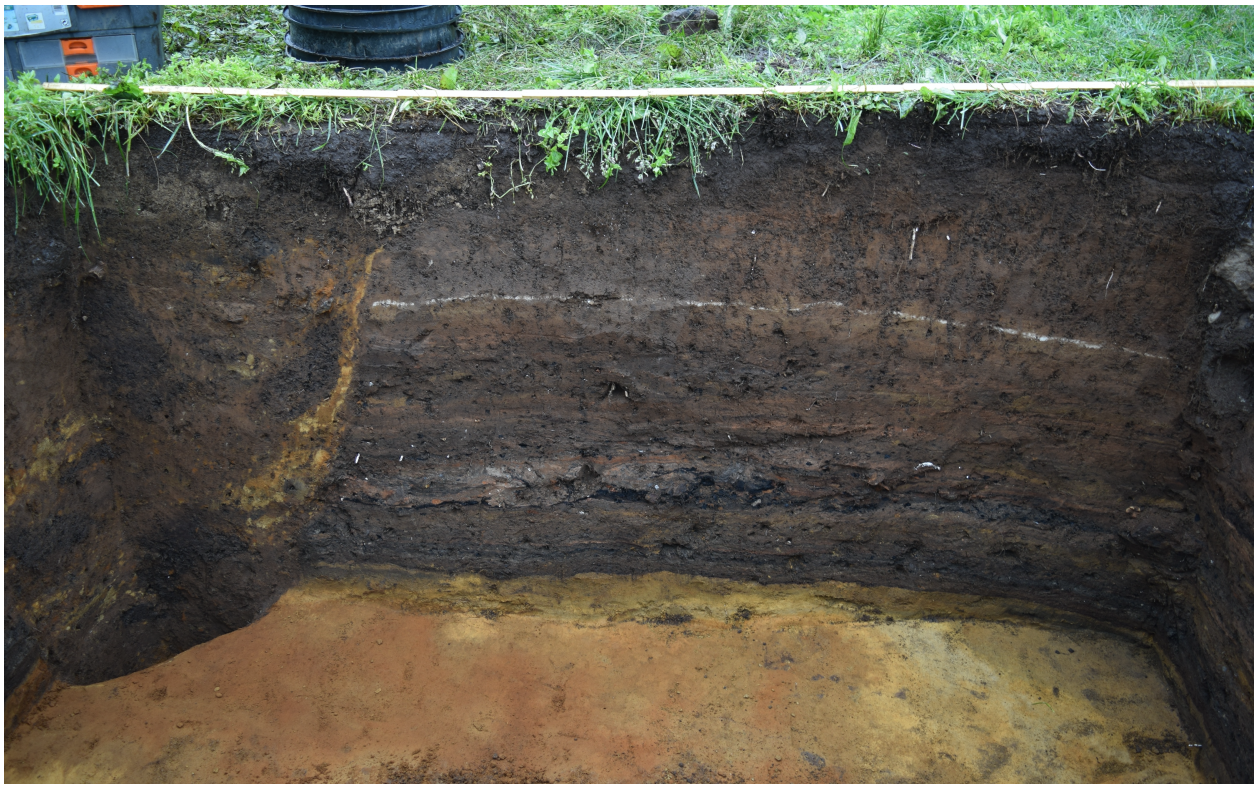

Figure 1: West wall profile. Intrusive pit [118] is on the left of the photo. The white line about 1/3 of the way down is the AD 1104 tephra.

Underneath [101] was the 1300 tephra layer. This layer was patchy and bioturbated and did not cover the whole unit evenly. Context [116], a mid-yellowish brown deposit, was below the 1300 tephra; however the boundary was unclear because this layer was also heavily bioturbated. A spindle whorl came from this layer (find #1) along with an iron object (find #3).

Context [116] was followed by the white 1104 tephra layer. This tephra layer was also patchy but more obvious than the blue-grey 1300 layer. It also covered most of the unit, though there were some spots in the northwest that were very thin and which we troweled through while trying to trace out the layer. There appeared to be turf in the southwest corner of the unit that we thought might have been part of a structural collapse, but we realized later that it was from the intrusive pit [118].

Below the 1104 tephra was a mid-orange brown context with a low density of cultural material [117]. There was wood ash and fire-cracked rock present in the context, and a small amount of animal bone was also recovered. This layer also contained a green glass bead, recovered in the screen (Figure 2). The presence of fire-cracked rock as well as animal bone indicates that this is was a fairly typical deposition of household debris.

Figure 2: Green bead (find #5) from context [117]. Photo by Josiah Wagener.

Context [119] was a thin orangey midden with patches of blue-grey tephra and wood ash. While excavating, this tephra looked a lot like the 934/950 tephra, but being so close to the 1104 tephra layer this did not make sense. The tephra was mostly present on the eastern half of the unit but was not present in any of the side walls. It was quite patchy and might have been in small bits of turf. Ultimately, we decided that it was not *in situ*. This context was also bioturbated and the boundary between [119] and the context below, [120], was unclear. Context [120] was similar in color to [119], a mottled mid orange-brown, but it was more compact and had peat ash lenses as well as charcoal flecks. In the southwest corner near the pit [118] was a more distinct peat ash lens. The two contexts [119] and [120] seemed to have different characters while excavating but were difficult to tell apart while drawing the profile, so they were ultimately lumped together, as can be seen in Error! Reference source not found. above. It must be noted that the profile was drawn on a cloudy day in the rain, and a clearer day may have made the difference between contexts more noticeable.

The next context, [121], was a darker orange-brown mottled midden, though the boundary between [120] and [121] was unclear due to bioturbation. This was a more high-density midden with a lot of peat ash and charcoal, as well as some H3 tephra mixed in. Both burned and unburned bones indicate household cooking refuse. A small charcoal lens was noted in the northwest corner, and a lump of turfy material in the northeast had some tephra in it that appeared to be the 1000 or possibly 934/950 tephra. The entire midden was very mixed up with peat ash lensing and an unclear boundary with both the above and below contexts. Underneath [121] was context [122], a mid-pinkish brown midden layer with more peat ash than the previous

context. This midden was more compact and homogenous than the very mottled layer above, though lenses of H3 tephra were also present. Similar to the above contexts, [121] and [122] looked different while excavating but during profile drawing, it was difficult to distinguish between the two and so they were also combined as one larger layer.

The boundary between [122] and [123] was gradual, but [123] was a mid-yellowish brown with less peat ash and more easily distinguished in profile. In addition, a very patchy and discontinuous 1000 tephra layer separated the two contexts. This tephra layer was not present across the entire unit and did not show up in the profiles. Context [123] had lensing of the H3 tephra as well as peat ash and turf pieces throughout the context. Bone and shell were also present, indicating domestic activities.

Below [123] was a very firm context [124]. We interpreted this as a floor (matching with [107] and [114] from TP1). It was a very dark grey brown with lenses of peat ash and burned turf. One bag of bone was recovered from this layer. In the northwest of the unit the floor was truncated and consisted only of ashy patches, which lines up with TP1 where the floor [107] was thinner and less obvious in the north/northwest.

Context [125] is a mid-greyish black greasy layer that was directly below the floor layer. This context contained charcoal and bone inclusions, as well as large amounts of fire-cracked rock. There was also H3 tephra mixed throughout the context, which was on top of the sterile subsoil. No landnám tephra was present between the last cultural deposit and the subsoil. As noted by Bolender et al. (2018), the presence of a compacted floor layer directly on top of a domestic midden raises questions about the interpretation of the “floor” and it being part of a structure or simply a very trampled midden deposit.

Profiles

Vatnskot 443-0
TP 2- North, South, West Walls

Context	Description
101	Rootmat
116	Bioturbated Aeolian Deposit
117	Low Density Cultural Layer
118	Pit Cut
119	Midden
120	Midden w/ Peat Ash Lens
121	Dark Midden
122	Peat Ash Midden
123	Midden w/ Peat and Charcoal
124	Charcoal Floor
125	Greasy Midden

Tephra
1300
1104
1000
H3
H3 mixed with subsoil

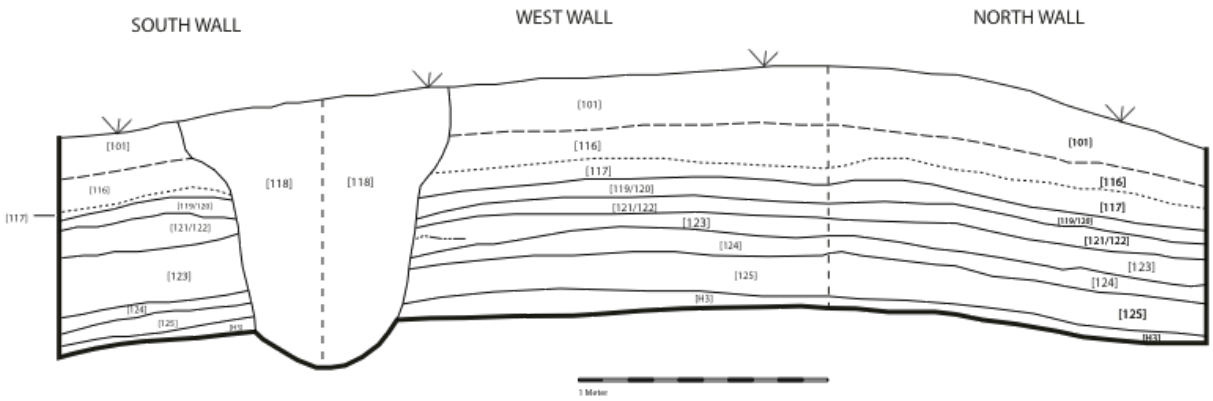

Figure 3: Profile drawing showing the entire exposed profile of TP2.

References

Bolender, Douglas J., John M. Steinberg, Brian N. Damiata, and Guðný Zoëga
2018a *Hegranes Settlement Survey: Interim Report on Fieldwork at Vatnskot, Beingarður, Hamar and Rein in the summer 2017*. University of Massachusetts, Boston, Fiske Center.

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