

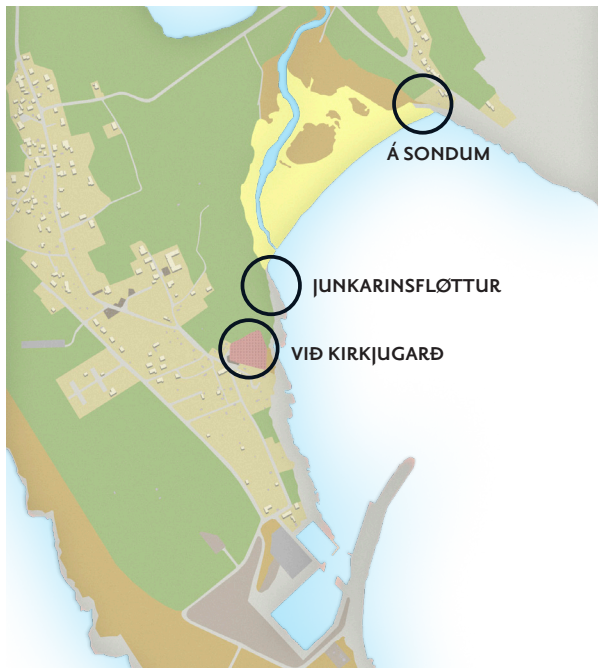


Obverse and reverse of a coin from the period of King Harald Harderåde (1047—1066 AD)

THE SANDUR COIN HOARD

In 1863 a coin hoard – the only one so far in the islands – consisting of 98 silver coins and dating back to the late Viking Period was found within the old churchyard. The origin of the coins can be traced to Continental Europe, Ireland, Britain and Scandinavia. Investigations in 1972 showed that the coin hoard had been hidden below the floor of a possible Viking building. Coins from the hoard are on display in the Faroese National Museum, Tórshavn.

SANDUR



View of the bay of Sandsvágur with Skúvoy, Stóra Dímun and Lítla Dímun in the distance

Investigations of place-names and landownership as well as archaeology in the village of Sandur, Sandoy, suggest that the Sandur area was a rich and busy agricultural area already in early times, with at least three large farms during the Viking Period.

Since 1969 Tjóðsavnið, The Faroese Islands National Museum, has carried out archaeological investigations in the village periodically, and excavations initiated as part of the “Heart of the Atlantic Project” have revealed evidence of early settlement at *við Kirkjugarð*, i.e. the area by the parish church, as well as at the site of *Junkarinsfløttur* and at *á Sondum* on the far side of the bay of Sandsvágur.



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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF SANDUR



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JUNKARINS-FLØTTUR

During 2000, coastal erosion exposed up to 2 m of archaeological deposits on the cliff face. This mixture of midden and sand layers was associated with various stone-built features and artefact assemblage of local ceramics, ironware and imported steatite and hone stones. It also produced a decorated bronze brooch dating back to the 10th century.

The excavations carried out between 2004-07 exposed structural evidence of at least two buildings with associated layers contained cereal grains, fish and animal bone and charred cereal grains – the remains of meals from the Viking and later periods.

Analyses of well-preserved animal bones excavated at the site provide us with new knowledge of the diet and domestic economy of these early settlers. The settlement remains investigated cover the period from late 8th century to ca 1200AD when people moved further uphill. Like Viking Age settlements elsewhere in the Norse North Atlantic, the Faroese farmsteads included cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. Interestingly, the animal bone assemblage from the exposed layers contained more remains from wild than domesticated animals. It is not surprising, however, that the settlers of Sandur and probably of the Faroe Islands in general, made use of the abundance of wild fish and bird species (cod and puffin) found in the islands.

Á SONDUM

The heavily eroding cliffs at á Sondum have exposed settlement remains from early periods up until the present day. Excavations in 2006-07 recorded and sampled archaeological features which had been assessed and partly investigated in 1994.



The soft eroding cliff face at á Sondum is composed of layers of ash and midden deposits – the result of many generations of settlement here, in fact a so-called farm-mound known elsewhere in the North Atlantic. At the base of these deposits are the remains of the walls and different interior features of a Viking longhouse from early Viking Period, 8th-9th/10th centuries, stretching out of the cliff face and towards the beach. Interestingly, based on carbon dating of charred barley grains found in patches of burnt peat ash of anthropogenic origin below the Viking phase, this investigation documented that the site had been settled in periods from as early as the 4th-6th and again in 7th-8th centuries – the earliest documented settlement in the Faroes!

10th century cast bronze brooch from Junkarinsfløttur



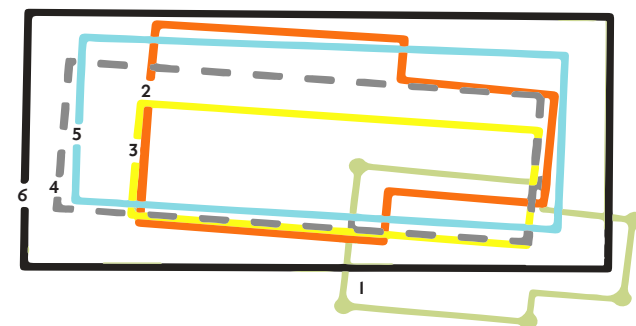
VIÐ KIRKJUGARÐ

Excavations were undertaken during the period 1970-2009 to assess the archaeological significance within the southward extension of the churchyard, which was needed for modern burials. Beneath a meter of sand cultural material was located. Investigations uncovered settlement remains evidencing a large activity area with building remains, a substantial stone built drain and different stone foundations, layers of ash and midden. Heaps with large amount of burnt and fire-cracked stones with another gully feature suggests industrial or craft activity rather than domestic settlement in this area.



In 1989 11 graves dating from the Viking period were uncovered. The graves were lying parallel, aligned east-west. The dead, all young men and women, had been buried with objects in their graves, including bronze and silver rings, knives with thin silver threads entwined around the handle, a leather purse with lead weights, a strap end ornamented with a bronze animal head, a bronze Irish style ornament, strings of pearls made of bone, glass and amber. In one grave was a bone comb, and in another grave a late 9th century Kufic (Arab) coin – the only one of its kind in the Faroe Islands.

Plan showing relative placement of church structures



THE CHURCH AND THE OLD CHURCHYARD

Investigations in 1969-70 inside the present church, built in 1839, show that it stands upon the remains of five earlier churches, the earliest being a small wooden stave-church of Norwegian type, dating back to the 11th century with corner posts dug into the soil. The second church-building had been adapted to the tree-less islands as it was constructed with a surrounding stone wall around the wooden construction (except for the western gable) and the corner posts placed on a sill of flat stones so it was kept free of the wet soil. 26 graves – both men, women and children as well as 42 mainly Norwegian coins from the 13th century – were discovered in the remains of this church. Both these oldest churches were constructed with a small choir to the east of the nave. Thus, all in all six churches have been built one on the top of the other on this very spot.

