THE NORSE LANDNAM IN THE FAROE ISLANDS IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT TOFTANES, LEIRVÍK

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INTRODUCTION

Previous work

In the 1940's the late State Antiquary of the Faroe Islands Sverri Dahl commenced upon a series of archaeological excavations in the Faroe Islands. This pioneer work was to become the initial step in establishing archaeological science in the Faroes. The investigations gradually came to deliver the archaeological evidence of the Norse landnam in the Viking Age thus supporting in general the information of written sources such as the so-called "Saga of the Faroe Islanders". Sites such as Kvívík, Tjørnuvík and Fuglafjørður today are inextricably bound up with the name of Sverri Dahl (S. Dahl 1951, 1958, 1971A, 1971B and S. Dahl & J. Rasmussen 1956).

Through the excavations parts of ancient settlements were located. In general only limited areas were excavated, and large-scale excavations were never carried out. The dating of the settlements has caused many problems, as in practice it has proved difficult to provide more than just a rough dating of the excavated structures.

In order to understand this, one has to take note of the unique conditions connected to archaeological research in the Faroe Islands. Due to the old framework of property relations in Faroese society, one can argue for a long unbroken continuity at the farmsteads of the landnam-period. Most of the so-called býling-farms with their associated settlement areas became an unbroken backbone in the development of Faroese settlement-structure up to the present day (A. Thorsteinsson 1981).

Through history these farmsteads have been located inside a legally fixed settlement area (Faroese: heimrust). Consequently older buildings have often been destroyed by later ones, and the chance of mixed archaeological material has thus been rather great. The sorting out of the

individual stages in the settlement thus usually causes the archaeologist considerable difficulties.

The extremely stationary nature of the settlement-structure causes the further problem that today often very little space for archaeological excavation on a desirable scale is available.

Sverri Dahl summarized the results of his investigations in articles in both "The Proceedings of the Sixth Viking Congress" (S. Dahl 1971A) and "Medieval Archaeology" (S. Dahl 1971B). In these articles he dealt with topics such as the relationship between the archaeological record and the evidence of written sources, linguistic studies, placenames etc.

Recent work.

During the last couple of decades fresh material has been brought into the discussion of the chronology and character of the Norse landnam in the Faroe Islands and the North Atlantic in general.

Archaeological investivations have been carried out on a number of medieval sites in Miðvágur on Vágar (D.L. Mahler 1984), Kaldbak on Streymoy (S. V. Arge 1980), Sandavágur on Vágar (S.V. Arge 1985, 1987A and 1988) and in Sandur on Sandoy (K.J. Krogh 1975 and T. Diklev 1981). An important large-scale excavation of a presumed Viking Age and Early Medieval "saeter"-settlement has just been finished at the site Argisbrekka in Eysturoy (D.L. Mahler 1987). The above-mentioned investigations have so far only been published in preliminary form. It should further be mentioned that S.V. Arge, The National Museum of the Faroe Islands, has produced a critical comment on the historical conception of the Norse landnam in the Faroe Islands (S.V. Arge 1987B).

A. Thorsteinssen, State Antiquary of the Faroe Islands, has done very important work in pointing out the property relations as a crucial determinant in the Faroese settlement-structure (A. Thorsteinssen 1978 and 1981), and has in another work dealt with the development in the structure of the Faroese house (A. Thorsteinsson 1982).

J. Jóhansen, National Museum of Natural History (Tórshavn), has in a number of works published his pollen analytical investigations in the Faroe Islands (J. Jóhansen 1971, 1979, 1982 and 1985). Among other things Jóhansen argues for a pre-Norse landnam (Irish hermits?). Critical comments on Jóhansen's historical conclusions have been delivered by K.J. Krogh (K.J. Krogh 1986). For a reply to this see J. Jóhansen 1986.

Finally should be mentioned the preliminary publication of a recent find

of a medieval runic stone in the village of Skuvoy on Skuvoy (S.V. Arge 1982).

Against this background it may seem appropriate to make some reflections on our present knowledge of the Norse landnam in the Faroe Islands. The starting-point for this evaluation will be the presentation of a large-scale excavation at the site of Toftanes in the village of Leirvík on Eysturoy during the years 1982-1987.

TOFTANES

Investigations at this site came into prominence as a new road was planned in the area. As Toftanes was one of the three ancient settlements – i.e. býling-farms – in the village, it was only to be expected that ruins of the Medieval or even the Viking period would be destroyed by the construction of the road. A trial excavation in the spring of 1982 confirmed this assumption (S. Stummann Hansen 1987 and 1989; A-C. Larsen & S. Stummann Hansen 1984).

Topography

The village of Leirvík is situated on the north-eastern shore of the peninsula of Gøtunes and in the bottom of one of two low soft coastal areas (Figure 1). These two areas are surrounded by three tall peaks – Ritufjall, Sigatindur and Gøtunestindur – the first mentioned at 640 metres high being the tallest of them. The shores around the village are rather flat, but to the northwest under Ritufjall and to the southeast near Sigatindur the shores are quite steep (Figure 2).

The village of today appears as a coherent settlement, whereas the ancient structure with concentrations around the three býling-farms – Toftanes, Við Garð and Uttan Á – is hardly now visible.

The settlement of Toftanes is placed around a small stream – Matará – flowing down the slopes of Ritufjall. The ancient settlement area of Toftanes was located on the southern side of the stream, but the settlement in the 18th century (or maybe even earlier) expanded to the northern side of the stream (Figure 3).

Structures

Inside an excavation area of approximately 900 m^2 – which comprises the north-eastern third of the settlement area – the ruins of four buildings have so far been recorded and excavated.

Figure 1 General view from the north-west over the village of Leirvík. Note the wide infield areas surrounding the village and the indicator of Toftanes. Photo: S. Stummann Hansen.

House I was 13 metres long and 4 metres wide (internal measurements). The building was placed only about five metres away from the present day shore. It had been constructed in a manner different from the other buildings at the site, as it only had a single stone-built wall and no turf-construction. This means that winds probably could quite easily blow through the building. The entrance was placed in the southern side-wall of the building (Figure 4). The north-western part of the house in earlier times had been eroded by the stream. The building has been preliminarily interpreted as an outhouse, but its function is not fully explained yet.

House II was a dwelling house. It was preserved in length for approximately 20 metres and in width for 5 metres (internal measurements). The curved walls had a thickness of 1 metre and were constructed with an outer and inner wall of dry stones with courses of turf to give a more windproof structure (Figure 4).

In the western half of the approximately east-west orientated building a

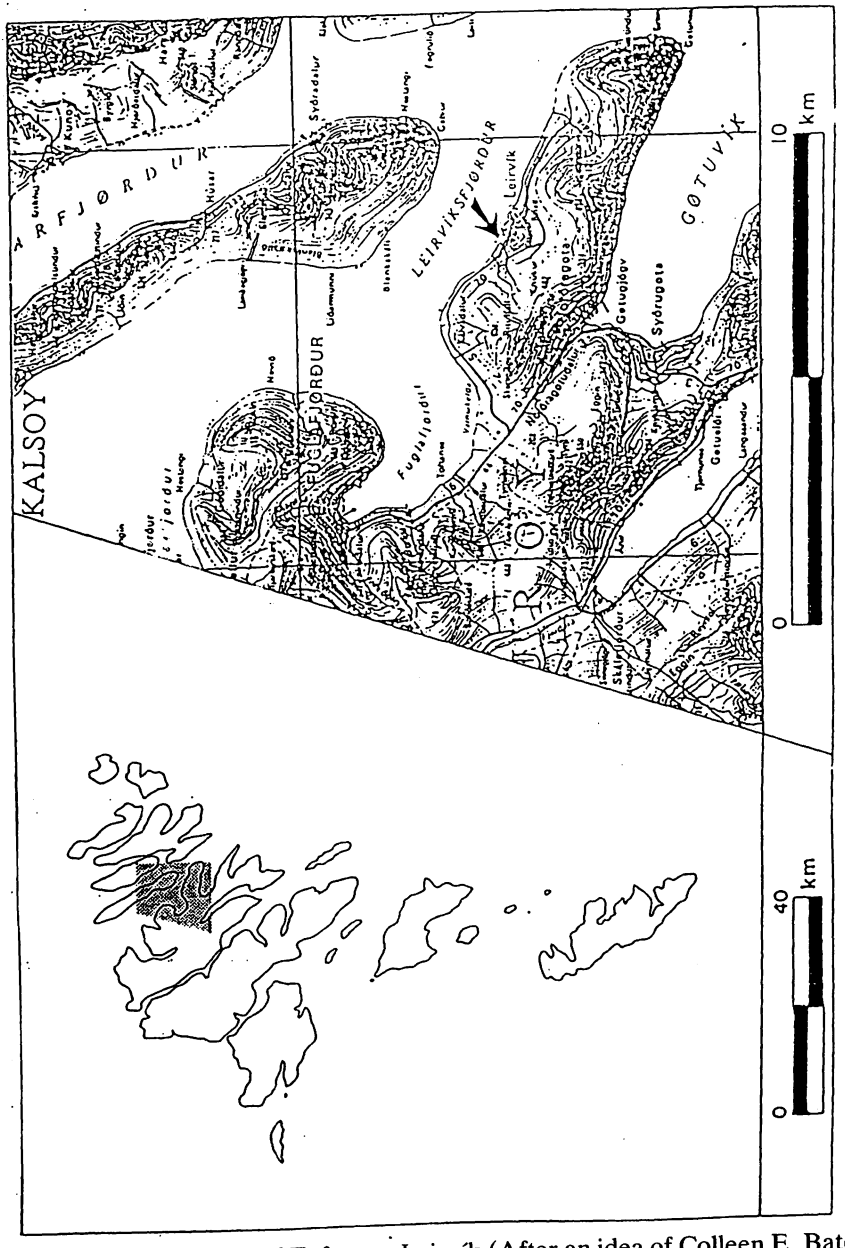

Figure 2 Location map of Toftanes, Leirvík (After an idea of Colleen E. Batey).

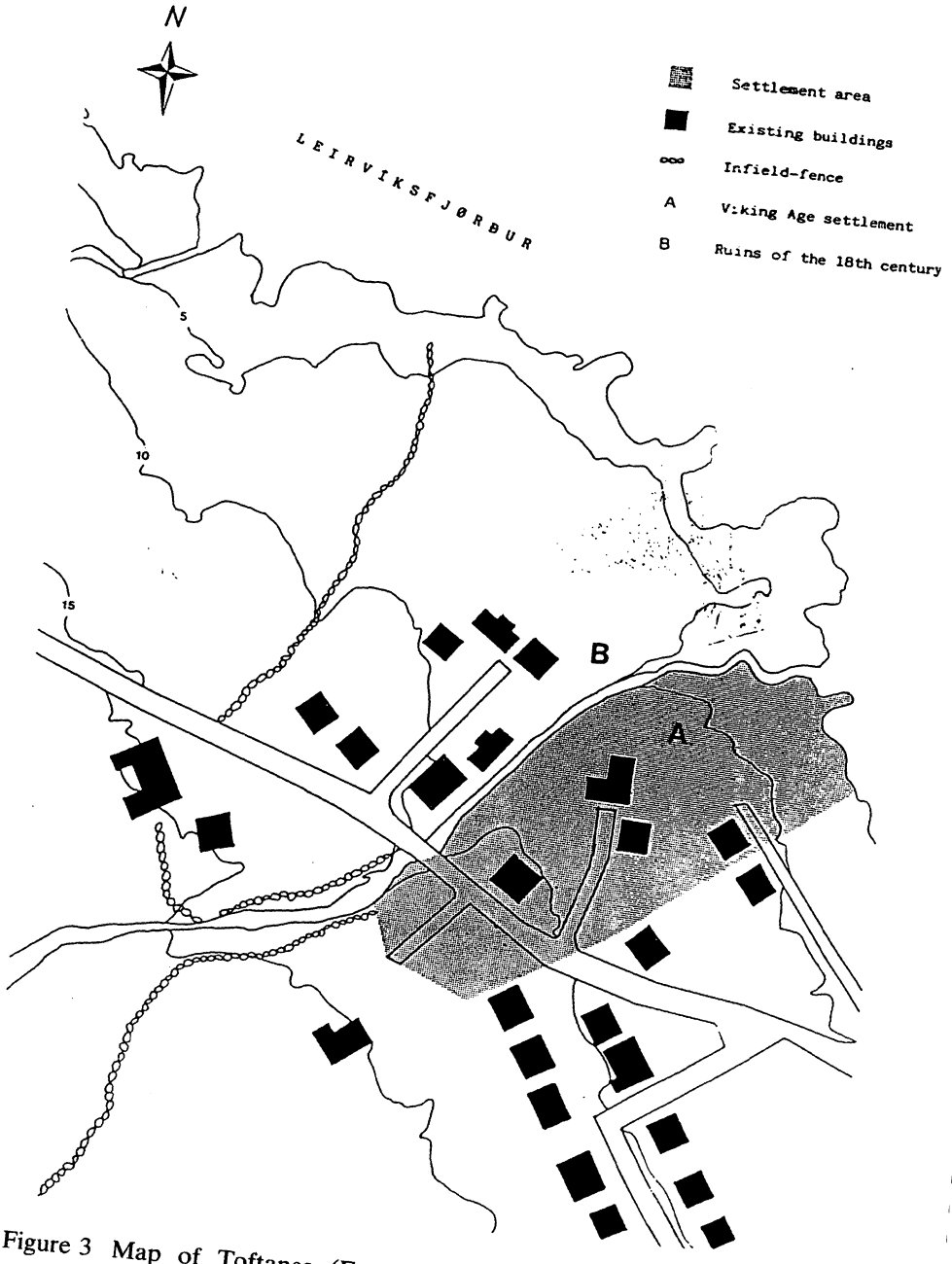

Figure 3 Map of Toftanes (Føroya Fornminnissavn, S. Stummann Hansen).

Figure 4 General view from the north-west over the excavation at Toftanes. I: outhouse; II: dwelling-house; XI: additional outhouse to building II; XII: fire-house. Photo: Føroya Fornminnissavn, S. Stummann Hansen.

fireplace nearly 5 metres in length was recorded (Figure 5). Five pairs of roof-supporting posts have been located in this section of the house (Figure 5). They had been placed in stone-packed holes. In some cases remains of the wooden posts are still preserved, offering the possibility of dendrochronological dating of the building. Further, in this part of the house the presumed evidence of benches along the walls has been

Figure 5 View from the west through building II. Note the long-fire in the axis of the house and the white indicators of the roof-supporting posts. Photo: Føroya Fornminnissavn, S. Stummann Hansen.

recorded. The western house-end unfortunately had been destroyed many years ago. The entrance to the house was near the middle of the northern side-wall. Connecting this entrance to house I, similarly orientated east-west, was a beautifully paved staircase (Figure 6). In the southern side-wall – just opposite the door in the northern wall – another entrance connected the house to the buildings XI and XII.

The function of the eastern section of the house has not been fully explained yet, but it might have contained a byre. Near the house-end slight evidence of a flow was recorded, and another entrance in the northern side-wall close to the house-end is connected to another paved staircase leading away from the buildings. No holes for roof supporting posts were recorded in this part of the building, but along the walls – regularly spaced at approximately 60 centimetres – small wooden posts were located. They might indicate another wooden construction in this eastern part of the house.

Figure 6 The entrance in building II seen from the north. Photo: Føroya Fornminnissavn, S. Stummann Hansen.

Under the floor-layers a complex system of drains – many of them being stone-built – has been recorded.

House XI is a small structure with a floorspace of approximately 12 m^2. The building has been added to the southern side-wall of house II (Figure 4). The eastern and southern walls of this building have been constructed in a way similar to that of building II. To the west there has probably been a wooden wall. The function of this building has not yet been clearly explained.

House XII was a small building placed close to and parallel with the southern side-wall of house II (Figure 4). The building has been 5 metres long and 3 metres wide. The two side-walls have been constructed like those of house II. The western house-end was destroyed in earlier times, but the eastern house-end demands some attention. A filled up ditch visible in the turf-surface and connecting the ends of the two side-walls probably indicates a sill, which has supported a wooden wall. An identical construction may have existed in the destroyed western house-end.

The floor had a pavement of flat stones covered with thick layers of ashes and charcoal. At the eastern end of the pavement a small stone-built ember-pit was located. The building has been interpreted as a fire-house.

The four buildings at Toftanes were all parts of the same farmstead. House I and II were the first to be raised, while house XI and XII were added some time later. When these buildings were abandoned a smaller building was raised on the foundations of house II. This new building may have served as a watermill-house, but it is not going to be the subject of further discussion in this context.

The finds

A large proportion of the several thousand finds were found in the floor-layers of the buildings, but also the layers outside the buildings revealed several objects. The massive deposits – in some places more than one metre thick – covering the ruins have yielded optimum conditions for the preservation of wooden items, and this group of finds is indeed very well represented. In the following section only a short survey will be given, presenting some of the more important finds.

Steatite. More than 700 objects of steatite have been recorded during the excavation. They are mainly fragments of different bowls and saucepans of well-known West-Norwegian types (A. Skjølsvold 1961, fig. 4a-b). Spindlewhorls – including unfinished examples – have been recorded to a total of more than fifty. There is a certain variation in the shape of these objects, but most common are whorls of a flat or just faintly conical shape. Line- or net-sinkers for fishing – equally of well-known Norse type – have been found in a few examples (Figure 7). In quite a few cases sherds of broken vessels have been used for secondary purposes – for instance spindle-whorls, line-sinkers or tuyéres.

Schist. Hones and querns of schist have been found especially in the floor-layers of the four buildings. Several of the hones have been provided with a perforation for suspension. The schist used is of at least two different types, as both a light, coarse-grained type as well as a more fine-

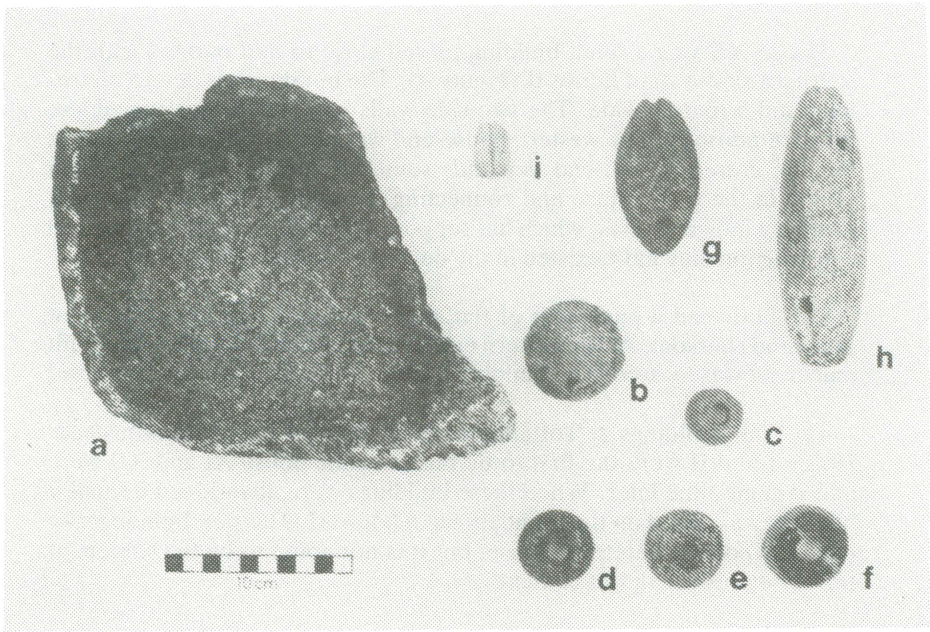

Figure 7 Steatite items from Toftanes. a: sherd of broken bowl; b-f: finished and unfinished spindle-whorls; g-h: line- or net-sinkers; i: bismar weight(?). Photo: Føroya Fornminnissavn, S. Stummann Hansen.

grained, dark schist is represented. The first one is of the Norwegian Eidsborg-type (S. Myrvoll 1985 and J.G. Mitchell et alii 1984). Special attention may be paid to a 25 centimetre long mullion of the dark fine-grained schist, as this object must be regarded as an imported semi-manufactured piece – probably also from Norway.

Two upper parts of querns made of schist have been recorded in the floor-layers in two different buildings (House II and XI). One of them has a diameter of 50 centimetres and was furnished with two holes for insertion of a wooden handle. The other one – having a diameter of 40 centimetres – only has a single hole for a handle, while in the underface a groove for insertion of iron bars occurs (Figure 8). This feature is common in the western part of the Viking world, while it is not seen in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Other stone artifacts. While all the stone-implements of steatite and schist have been imported, as these types of stone do not originate from the Faroe Islands, only very few artifacts produced of local material were found at Toftanes. Local materials, such as tuff and basalt, were used for

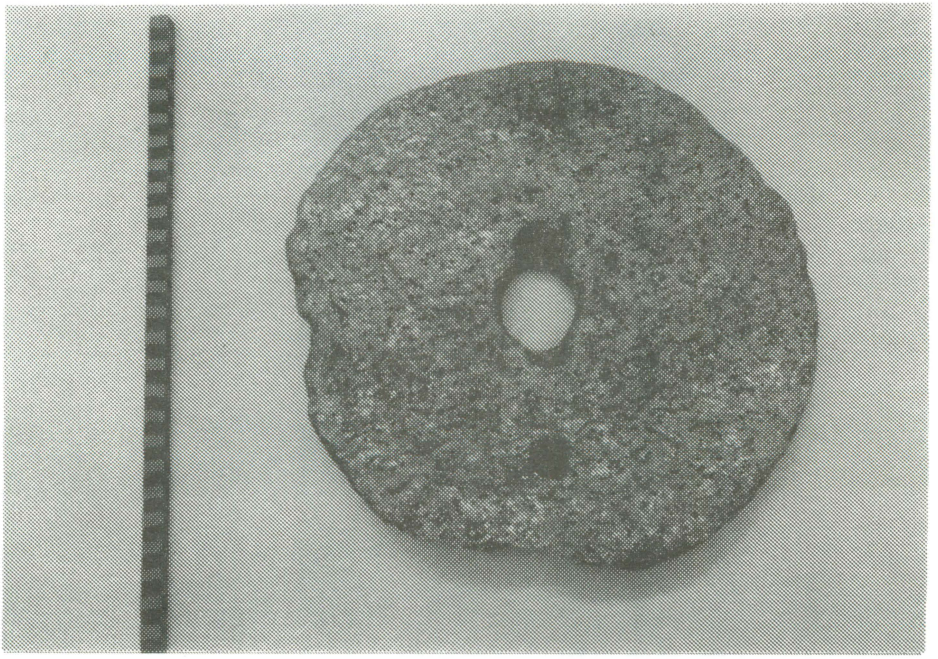

Figure 8 Upper part of quern with a groove for insertion of iron bars in the underface. Photo: Føroya Fornminnissavn, Súsanna Joensen.

such objects as spindle-whorls, loom-weights and line- or net-sinkers. The origin of an armring of jet or lignite is probably England or Scotland.

Metalwork. Very few objects of metal have been unearthed at Toftanes. Three bronze objects however deserve some consideration.

One of them is a small circular brooch with a diameter of 2.6 cm. On the surface, the brooch has been furnished with an ornament of three animal-heads in Borre-style (Figure 9a). Comparative finds have been made at Birka in Sweden (H. Arbman 1940, Tf. 71:11 and 1943, p. 211), Trelleborg in Denmark (P. Nørlund 1948, p. 128, Tl. XXV, 7) and Haithabu in Northern Germany (T. Capelle 1968, Tf. 11:9). The brooch can be dated by these parallels to the 10th century.

Two ring-headed pins, one of them intact, have been found in layers outside the buildings (Figure 9b-c). The pins belong to a type whose

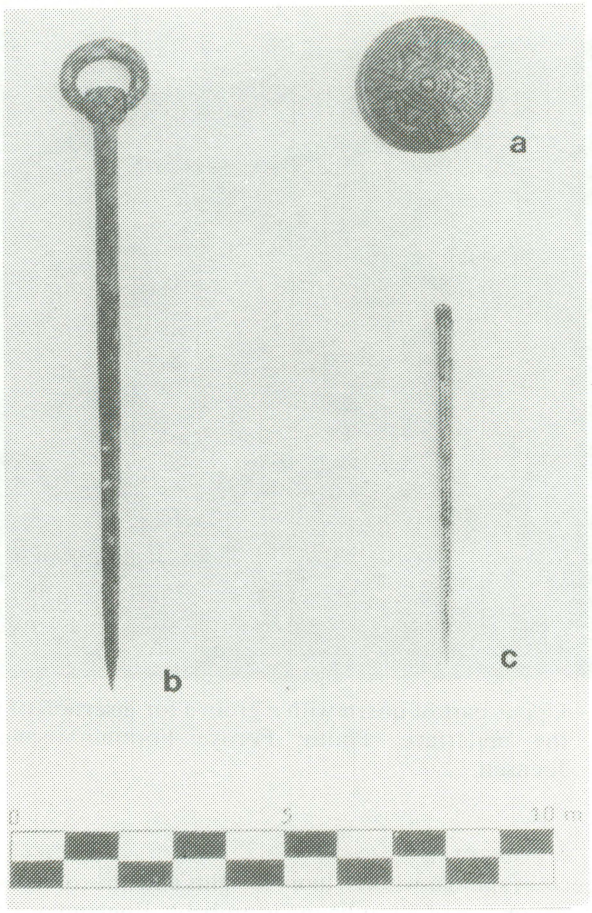

Figure 9 Metalwork from Toftanes. a: circular brooch in Borre-style; b: ringheaded pin; c: fragment of ringheaded pin with step-pattern. Photo: Føroya Fornminnissavn, S. Stummann Hansen.

distribution is linked to the western part of the Viking world (Figure 10), as they have only been found in Ireland, Isle of Man, Scotland, The Hebrides, Orkney, Shetland, Faroe Islands, Iceland and Newfoundland (Th. Fanning 1969, 1975, 1983A and 1983B). This type is mainly dated to the 10th century. Previously only one pin of this type has been found in the Faroe Islands – in one of the graves at the Viking Age cemetery in Tjørnuvík, Streymoy (S. Dahl & J. Rasmussen 1956). The combination of the ornaments on the two sides of the head of the intact pin from Toftanes is found on other pins of this type – for example that from a 10th century grave at Buckquoy, Orkney (Th. Fanning in A. Ritchie 1977).

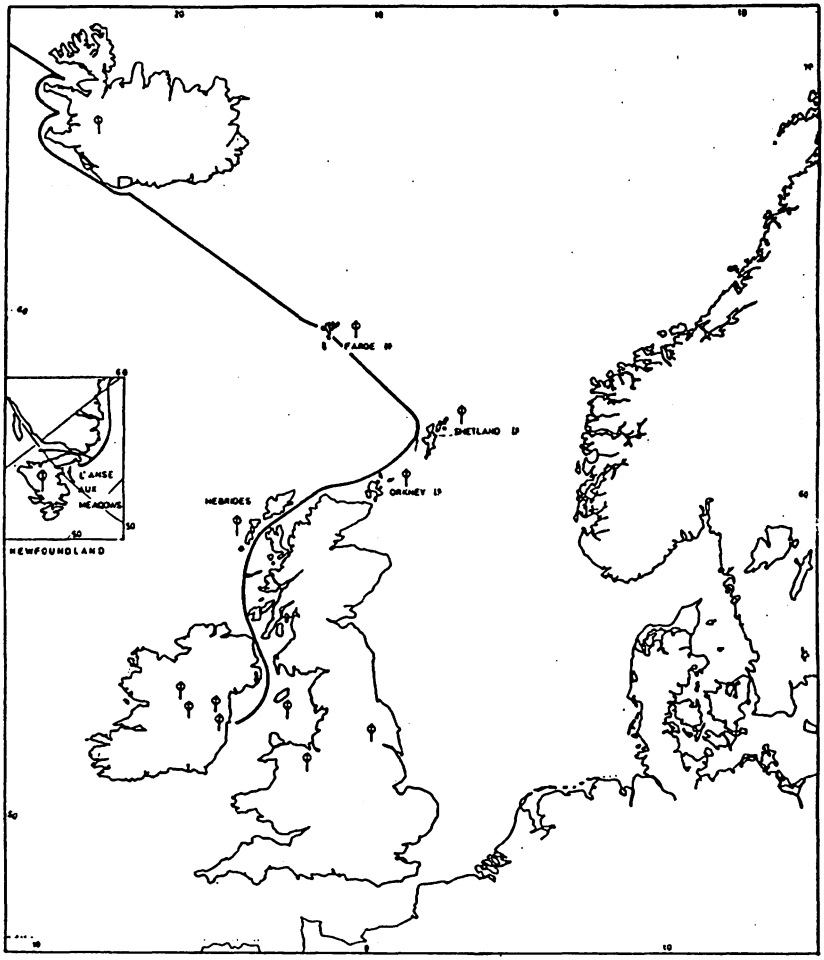

Figure 10 The western sea-route of the Vikings (after Gwyn Jones), with the distribution of plain-ringed polyhedral-headed pins (after Th. Fanning 1983A).

Beads. About 30 beads, mainly of glass but also of amber, were found at Toftanes. Most of these belong to the segmented type of bead. The colours are mainly blue and yellow. Other types of beads are also represented at Toftanes.

Wooden objects were, as mentioned, preserved in huge numbers. Many of them of course being waste from the construction of the buildings, but even several artifacts were found. Among these one can mention a

doorplank with a carved wooden handle, spindle-whorls, a small box, counting sticks, tallies and small carved model-boats. Parallels to the last mentioned – which must be interpreted as toys – have been found at other Viking settlements in the Faroes (S. Dalh 1979, fig. 1:c).

Of domestic utensils, bowls, spoons and barrel staves with carved grooves for the bottom should be mentioned.

Special attention may be paid to one half of a gaming-board. The board is a 70 centimetre long piece of oak, on the underside of which a square grid consisting of 14 by 14 squares was carved. Most probably we are here dealing with the old Norse game of "Hneftafl", which is mentioned in the sagas (Figure 11a). "Hneftafl"-gaming-boards have previously been found at other Viking-settlements in the North Atlantic – for instance in Orkney and Shetland, where typically they seem to have been carved in flagstone (A. Ritchie 1977, p. 199, fig. 9-10, pl. 13:c; C.L. Curle 1982, p. 110, fig. 50:274; J.R.C. Hamilton 1956, p. 145, pl. XXXI:I and A. Small 1967, p. 244, fig. 16).

On the upper side of the board was carved a game of "Nine Mens Morris", which is identical with the game of "Mill", which is played even today in Scandinavia (Figure 11b). Other finds of gaming-boards for "Nine Mens Morris" are known from Norse sites, e.g. in the Isle of Man (A.M. Cubbon 1960). The nearest parallel to the gaming-boards from Toftanes however derives from a rich 10th century boatgrave at Gokstad in Norway, where a fragment of a wooden gaming-board contained evidence of the same two games on the upper- and underside (N. Nicolaysen 1882, p. 46, pl. VIII).

A very comprehensive group of wooden objects consists of cords of twined juniper branches. They are preserved in lengths up to 2 metres, and altogether more than a hundred metres of these have been found. Among other things they might very well have served the purpose of ropes for the roof-stones. This interpretation is supported by the fact that nearly all of them are found in layers outside the buildings. In one case – just outside building II – a stone bound with a juniper cord was recorded (Figure 12). A sheaf of branches were found at the entrance of house II. These cords may of course have served a number of different purposes, just as they do even today in Western Norway – e.g. keeping the barrel staves together.

Bone. No bone-industry appeared at Toftanes – or for that matter on any Faroese Viking Age settlement. This is in contradistinction to Orkney and Shetland for instance. Perhaps in the Faroe Islands the bone-industry might have been partially replaced by an industry of wooden implements. However, it must be noted, that nearly all bones found at Toftanes were

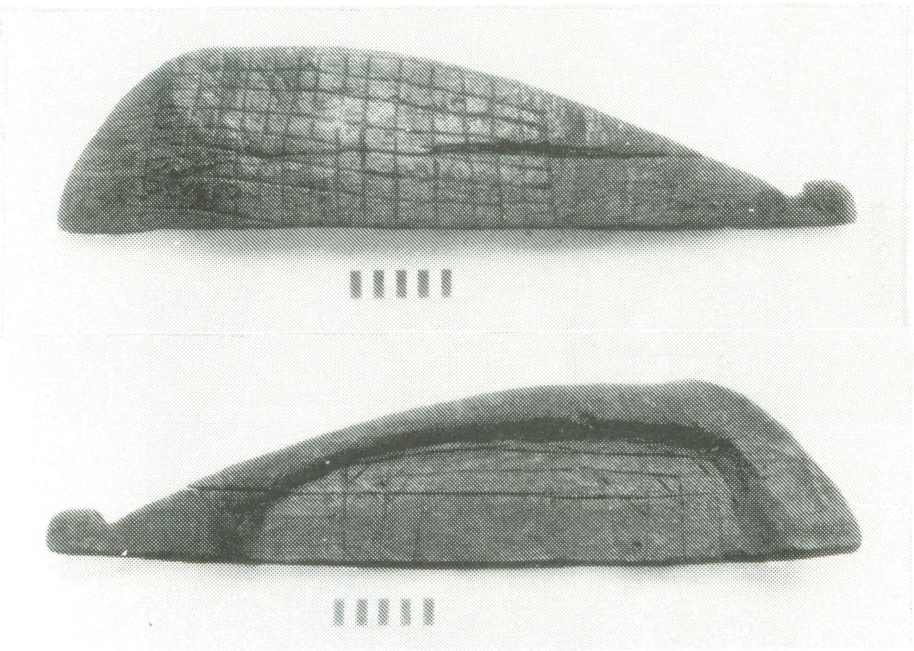

Figure 11 Wooden gaming-board from Toftanes containing the games of "Hneftafl" (a) and "Nine Men's Morris" (b). Photo: Føroya Fornminnissavn, John Lee.

burnt, so that the missing bone-industry could be the result of preservational conditions.

Tove Hatting of the Zoological Museum of Copenhagen has provided some preliminary identifications of the bone-material from Toftanes, showing that sheep was dominant, while only a few bones from cow and pig have been found. It must be added that so far only a minor part of the material has been identified.

Dating

As previously mentioned dating Faroese settlements has generally caused great problems. This was partly due to rather sparse archaeological research in the Faroe Islands and the North Atlantic in general, and partly to the fact that Faroese settlement-structure is of a very stationary character from the Viking Age up to the present day. As a result of the complexity of archaeological remains, it can be very difficult to establish a

Figure 12 Roof-stone bound with a cord of twined juniper branches. Photo: Føroya Fornminnissavn, S. Stummann Hansen.

definitive archaeological chronology based upon the stratigraphy.

However, excavations during the last decades in Orkney and Shetland especially have demonstrated a clearer picture of the composition of the archaeological record at the Norse settlements in these areas. Hamilton's investigations at Jarlshof in Shetland showed that the Viking Age phases at this settlement were characterized by an aceramic assemblage, as pottery seems to have been replaced by a domination of steatite objects (J.R.C. Hamilton 1956).

Since the publication of Jarlshof in 1956, other excavations in these groups of islands have confirmed the observations made at Jarlshof. Settlements such as Buckquoy, Orkney (A. Ritchie 1977), Brough of Birsay, Orkney (C.L. Curle 1982), Skaill, Orkney (P.S. Gelling 1984) and Underhoull, Shetland (A. Small 1967) – which all have been dated to the 9-10th century – have all yielded an aceramic assemblage. Locally-produced pottery seems to be a feature that can be linked to the Late Norse period in the North Atlantic. The difference between aceramic and ceramic sites thus must therefore be interpreted as a chronological one rather than – as suggested by Sverri Dahl (S. Dahl 1971B, p. 71) – one dictated by different social conditions or differing possibilities of contact.

The archaeological evidence from Toftanes may without problem be fitted into this aceramic horizon. A substantiation of the archaeological dating is available for so far three C-14 datings from floor-layers in building I providing the following dates in conventional C-14 years: 840±65 AD, 830±65 AD and 800±50 AD (calibrated years – according to M. Stuiver 1982 – 900-975 AD, 895-940 AD and 890 AD). The C-14 datings have been provided by The Copenhagen C-14 Dating Laboratory in Radiocardon (K-4441, K-4442 and K-4443).

Conclusion

The archaeological excavations at Toftanes have unearthed a Viking Age settlement from the period of the landnam, containing a dwelling-house with associated outhouses and extensions. This is the first time that such a comprehensive farmstead has been excavated in the Faroe Islands.

The investigations have brought to light fresh evidence for the discussion of the construction and development of ancient Faroese farmsteads, and have further created a solid foundation for establishing a chronological sequence for the archaeological material of the Faroes.

More detailed conclusions about the construction of the buildings and their functions will have to await further studies of the observations made during the excavation. Certainly the buildings are of well-known Norse type, with parallels at other Viking Age settlements in the Faroe Islands and elsewhere in the North Atlantic.

The archaeological material provides the evidence of a settlement based upon agriculture characterized by domestic animals, such as sheep, cow, pig and by grain-growing. This economy seems to a certain degree to have been supplemented by fishing activities. Further, a number of daily life activities are represented in the material – for instance wool-spinning,

weaving, iron-production or -extraction, grain-grinding, honing tools and playing board games. The archaeological record is dominated by imported raw materials (steatite and schist) – probably from Western Norway – and by an extensive wooden industry (the wood probably being imported too).

Finally, the excavations at Toftanes have stressed the theory, that a continuity at the býling-farmsteads ranges from the Viking Age up till today.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NORSE LANDNAM IN THE FAROE ISLANDS

The material from Toftanes provides a basis for a review of the question of when the Norse landnam in the Faroe Islands took place and of its character.

As mentioned above the material can be fitted into an aceramic horizon of the 9-10th century in the North Atlantic. If we accept that the farmstead at Toftanes – as indicated by the C-14 datings – was established in the decades around the year 900 AD, it would certainly be in agreement with the statements of the sagas that the Norse landnam took place during the reign of King Harald Hairfair in Norway (ca. 872-930). Although an earlier date is indicated by C-14 datings in relation to pollen analytical schemes from sites such as Tjørnuvík and Hovi (J. Jóhansen 1971, 1982 and 1985), there is still no archaeological support for such an early date. Neither is there any archaeological support for the statement in the Irish clergyman Dicuil's "De mensura orbis terrae" saying that the islands were inhabited by Irish hermits before the arrival of the Norsemen. An acceptance of the above-mentioned rather late date of 900 AD for the Norse landnam does not however exclude the possibility of an earlier sporadic raiding activity in the region, but this would probably not have left much for the archaeologists, thus making it quite difficult to prove it archaeologically.

How then do we interpret the evidence of the finds from Toftanes in relation to the situation, that met the Norse settlers in the Faroe Islands? Let us first turn to a description of the environmental conditions for the landnam.

Today the Faroe Islands are characterized by heavy grazing of sheep, and remnants of the original vegetation are only found in more or less remote and inaccessible places – e.g. islands in lakes, and on rocks, cliffs and crevices. Another effect was increased erosion, as sheep break up the closed vegetation swards on the hill sides and in the valleys, partly by biting

down to the roots and partly by trampling holes in the surface (J. Jóhansen 1985, p. 90). This creates openings for wind and water, and provides the perfect background for an acceleration in erosion.

With the Norsemen's arrival in the Faroe Islands the cultivation of barley (hordeum) was introduced, while the original vegetation of tall-herbs became extinct (J. Jóhansen 1985, p. 58). In his pollen analytical investigations Jóhansen has demonstrated that juniper (Juniperus) was quite common at the time of the settlement, but from that time onwards was decreasing rapidly. The explanation that Jóhansen gives for this is that juniper was used for fuel (J. Jóhansen 1971, p. 151) and for smoking meat (J. Jóhansen 1985, p. 55). As sheep can not cause the extinction of juniper, it must be human impact on the environment, that is the real reason. The explanations given by Jóhansen may, however, be insufficient. It does not seem probable, for instance, that virtually the only tree-vegetation in the Faroe Islands was exploited for firewood, when there were many turves to cut along the hillsides and near the coasts. Cut and burnt turves have been found in the floor-layers in the buildings of Viking Age Toftanes.

Further, the extensive use of juniper branches for rope found at Toftanes indicates that the wood from this plant played a rather important role in daily life. It thus seems that the plant was far too important to be used as mere firewood.

As the Faroe Islands were thus not capable of providing new inhabitants with wood suitable for timber, this had to be imported or collected as driftwood on the beaches.

Nancy Eskildsen from the Waterlogged Wood Conservation Department of the Danish National Museum has done some preliminary work on identification of some of the wooden objects. In this material, species such as oak (Quercus), common spruce (Picea abies), pine (Pinus silvestris), hazel (Corylus), larch (Larix), elder (Sambucus), birch (Betula) and alder (Alnus) are represented. Nothing definitely may be said about these things at the present moment, as only a rather small proportion of the material has so far been determined. The vast bulk of samples of waste-wood is still to be identified.

One rather notable observation may however be the subject of some consideration. Of four wooden bowls totally or partially preserved, three were made of alder, while the last one – a cheese-bowl – was made of common spruce. As none of the wooden objects identified so far were made of alder, there is here certainly an indication that either these bowls were imported, or that the Norsemen were very selective in their use of wood-species for different purposes. It can hardly be argued that a very

high degree of specialized selectivity could rely on chance supplies of driftwood. Alan Small is thus probably right when he states that "some supplies of driftwood, much of which has been shown to be of American origin, were available, but most of this would be unsuitable for boat building or for roof supports for houses and would be used for fuel, supplementing the main source, locally cut peat" (A. Small 1969, p. 147).

In his article from 1969, Alan Small attempts to give a description of the "primary farmstead" in both Shetland and the Faroe Islands. Alan Small creates a model for the settlement based upon a division of the land into settlement area, infield area and outfield area. This model is still valid in the Faroe Islands today and can hardly be open for discussion. We can instead look at the specific requirements upon which the model settlement is based. As the most important, Alan Small lists: 1. access to the sea, with a reasonable place to pull up the boat; 2. a patch of fairly flat, reasonable well drained land suitable for the construction of a farmstead and with the potential for some grain cultivation; 3. extensive grazing areas, since the number of animals which the poor vegetation of the islands could support would be rather low (A. Small 1969, p. 149). Also one might add the access to fresh water.

Toftanes does fit very well into this model. Placed on a small headland and by a stream, its topographical location is almost classical, the Viking Age sites in Kvívík and Fuglefjøður being situated in identical topographical conditions.

The farmstead at Toftanes is located on a rather shelving terrain, but during excavation an amazing engineer-work prior to the construction of the buildings has been documented. A levelling of the terrain seems to have taken place, while the digging of a splendid network of ditches has ensured that the area was well drained.

Looking to the infield and outfield facilities, the village of Leirvík is very well off. The village has a very extensive and rather flat infield area. Coming in by boat from the North through Leirvíksfjørður, this place would probably have been the most attractive place to Norse settlers in this region (Figure 13).

Alan Small further discusses the strategy of survival implied by the settlers, stating that the subsistence strategy was built on pastoralism as the main basis of agriculture, with sheep and cattle as the most important animals. Grain-growing played a secondary role compared to that of pastoralism. The identification of bones from Toftanes are still preliminary and concerns only a limited part of the material, but so far the results do not contradict the words of Small. In this context, it should

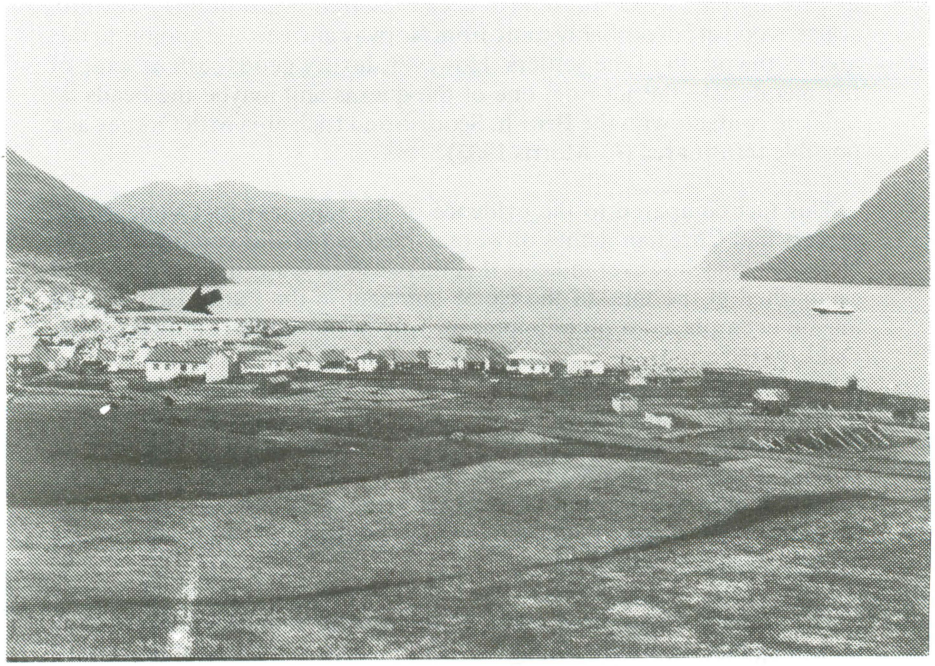

Figure 13 General view from the south over the village of Leirvík and through Leirvíksfjørður. Note the indicator of Toftanes. Photo: S. Stummann Hansen.

further be mentioned that in a preliminary report about pollen-samples from the layers at Toftanes Jóhannes Jóhansen has shown the presence of barley.

As a supplement to agriculture, Alan Small points out among other things fishing, which he postulates became still more important after the very first stages of settlement. No fish-bones have so far been recorded at Toftanes, but this might be due to the local conditions of preservation. However, sieving of the many samples collected during the excavation may bring new evidence that relevant. But even so, it must be added that very few fishing-implements have been found, and the impression of the material from Toftanes does not leave much room for the proposition, that fishing played any significant role in Viking Age Toftanes.

Even if the sea did not play a dominant role in supplying the daily diet, it must have been of great importance for the supply of most goods necessary for daily life. As stated above, nearly all material necessary in establishing

a "primary farmstead" must have been imported. Most of this – steatite, schist, wood etc. – probably came from Norway and certainly points to this area as the origin of the settlers. However, luxury goods such as some of the metalwork, the jet-ring, one of the querns and maybe the beads do indicate contacts with the British, Scottish and Irish area with Orkney as a possible transit area (C. Morris 1985).

This fact compared to the evidence of the saga-text that some of the settlers had Christian names or were named as persons coming from the Hebrides, may however indicate that this western sea-route was quite well established at the time of the Norse landnam in the Faroe Islands, and maybe even played a quite important role in the settlement process (S. Dahl 1971B, p. 60).

What really happened after the first stages of settlement is still subject to many questions. Did the Faroe Islands become an integrated link in trading systems in the North Atlantic and did the established systems remain in existence or even develop throughout the Viking Age and the Medieval period? The material from Toftanes provides some support for arguments in this discussion.

The name Toftanes itself could be interpreted as a primary one, thus indicating that deserted buildings – "toftir" – were at the ness at the time of the Norse arrival. In that case, these could derive from either the so-called Irish hermits or even very early Norse settlers or raiders. This however does not seem probable, and the name rather has to be interpreted as a secondary one.

In this case the farmstead – whose original name may have been "a nesi" – must have become deserted after the Viking Age but before the sixteenth century, when the name Toftanes occurs in written sources. This interpretation may be supported by the fact that no objects of Late Norse date were found during the excavation.

This interpretation of the name Toftanes implies that Viking Age Toftanes died out. Supporting this theory is the fact that quite a few completely intact implements were found at the site – e.g. wooden bowls, metalwork, line- or net-sinkers, querns etc. Why were these things not collected for further use, and comsequently why did the farmstead become deserted?

The aceramic horizon in the North Atlantic has been described as "one of the most mysterious features of Norse archaeology" (B. Crawford 1979, p. 40). The question is, however, whether this aceramic horizon can not be linked to the expansive phase of the Viking Age – i.e. the phase of the

landnam, where bilateral relations to the homelands still were frequent? The decline of activity following the end of the expansion made contacts with the homelands of the settlers much more unilateral, and this process must even have been enforced by the lack of sufficient supplies of wood for building of ocean-going ships to replace the ones that originally brought the emigrants to their new homes in the West. In this situation a new strategy for survival must have developed, as local resources must have become increasingly important to the settlers. Supporting the theory that the settlers became short of the necessary imported goods is the fact that the hones found at Toftanes are extremely heavily worn, which indicates that fresh supplies did not turn up on a satisfactory scale. Further, the steatite-material seems to have been the object of an extensive degree of re-use – more than 20 percent of the items showed evidence of having been re-used.

An increasing isolation of the emigrant settlements and a decline in the efficiency of the established networks of contacts must have put a heavy pressure on many farmsteads, and some of them might have been deserted at the end of the Viking Age due to that fact. This might have been the fate of Viking Age Toftanes and would give an explanation of the general picture that the archaeological material from Toftanes produces.

CONCLUSION

In this article, some of the topics concerning the history of the Norse landnam in the Faroe Islands in the Viking Age have been discussed, while others – such as e.g. the evidence of place-names and of the "saeter"-problem – have been avoided. There has not been an attempt to go through all the aspects of Norse Atlantic history, but instead to concentrate on the background of a preliminary presentation of fresh archaeological material from the site Toftanes in order to focus on some major aspects.

The material raises many questions, some of them being dealt with in the reflections above. For many of these questions there might not be a sufficient or satisfactory answer in the near future, but certainly much information may come to light, when the material from Toftanes has been fully examined.

In particular, information on environmental conditions for the Norse landnam is needed in the Faroe Islands in general, and hopefully the examination of the collected samples from Toftanes can help to fill out this gap.

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