Second Viking Age ship burial found at archaeological site in N. Iceland

BY STAFF | JUN 15 2017

Yesterday archeologists discovered a second boat burial at an archeological site at Dysnesness in Eyjafjörður fjord in North Iceland. On Tuesday a burial site where a Viking age chief was buried in his boat, along with his sword and dog had been discovered. Two other graves dating to the Viking age have been found at the site. Archeologists working at the site are optimistic to find more, as the dig has only just started.

UPDATED June 15, 16:30: Archaeologists think they might have found a third boat burial at site in N. Iceland

Undisturbed graves
Neither boat burial has been disturbed by grave robbers, as many Viking age burial sites have been. Most Viking Age burial sites seem to have been opened up relatively early, only decades after the burial, and valuables, especially swords, removed. The reasons for such grave robbing are not known.
Read more: Archaeologists in N. Iceland discover Viking age chief buried in ship with his sword and dog

Archeologists working at Dysnes have now found four different Viking age graves at the site. Two were boat burials. An archeologist working at the dig told the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service RÚV that they expected to find more. "Everywhere we stick a shovel into the ground we seem to find something".

The dig is only just starting
The boat burial found yesterday was in significantly better condition than the one found on Tuesday. Although neither grave has been disturbed by grave robbers, the boat burial found on Tuesday has been badly damaged by erosion from the ocean. The sea had already destroyed part of the grave, taking half of the boat and most likely some of its contents. Human bones, a Viking sword and canine teeth, from a dog which was buried in the grave with the boat's owner, were found. Time and the sea had washed the rest away.

The archeologists are only just starting to explore this second burial, but Hildur Gestsdóttir, who is in charge at the site, told RÚV that they were hoping it would contain more clues as to the life and death in Eyjafjörður fjord during the Viking Age.

"Part of the boat is completely untouched and we see no signs of it ever having been robbed by people, so we are hoping to find more artifacts untouched in the grave."

An unusual and important find
Both boat burials are believed to date to the 9th or 10th centuries. The two sites seem to have been arranged in a line, bot to stern. Hildur told the local newspaper Morgunblaðið that she was optimistic the dig would unearth even more boat burials.
The discoveries at Dysnes are extremely important as only ten boat burials have been found in Iceland. Out of these five have been found in Eyjafjörður: Two at Dysnes, a third which was found 11 years ago a short distance, 500 m (1600 ft), at Kumlholt south of Dysnes and two which were found near the village Dalvík, just north of Dysnes.

The Dysnes find is also unique as it is only the second site in Iceland where two boat burials are found at the same site. The only other site with two boat burials is at Dalvík.

**Burial-hill and Robbers-ditch**

Archaeologists in Iceland frequently use place names to guide them in the search for sites to explore. Kumlholt, where the boat burial found south of Dysnes 11 years ago, translates as Burial-hill, as the word kuml is an old word for Viking age grave. The area where the ship burial was found is known as Dysnes, a name which points to Viking age graves, as dys is an old word for burial mound. The word Dysnes translates to "Burial ness". The precise location of the boat grave is then known as Kumlateigur, which could be translated as "Burial stretch".

The two additional graves which have been found at Dysnes were found in a second place called "Ræningjagryfja", a depression which is six meters (9 ft) long. This name translates as "Robbers pit". The origins of this name is difficult to determine, and we can only speculate whether it refers to some local legends, the people buried in the two graves already excavated or some, undiscoverd mysteries.
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