Early Christian churches/cemeteries

- Establishment
- Distribution
- Abandonment
- Continuation
## The Skagafjörður Church Project

### Core questions
- Number/position of church/cemetery sites
- Geography of church/cemetery sites
- Church/Settlement development
- Church political development
- Social realities/changes/burial customs
- Where did the knowledge/organization come from?
- Who are the people? Family/communal?

### Methodology
- Extensive documentary research
- Aerial photo survey
- On site survey
- Excavation/coring at chosen sites
- Osteological research
- Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR)
- GIS database
The material

- Possible church/cemtery sites from all sources AD1000-2000 ~130

- Churches/chapels in Auðunarmáldagi 1318 = 60

- Churches mentioned in registries and other written sources 1308-1709= 46

- Churches only mentioned in earliest land registry (1709-13) = 26

- Cemeteries not found in sources = 8
Transitional phase?

Pagan/Christian?

Relocation into cemetery?
A landscape of cemeteries

- 24 standing churches today
- 29 fully/partly visible cemeteries/9 established by excavation
- The greatest concentration in Fljót and on Hegranes – least on Skagi and in highland valleys
- Total number of farms 1847: 455
Hegranes – Rípurhreppur

12 full farms 1703

Church/cemetery at 8 farms

Geographically distinct

Location of the Hegranesþing -spring assembly
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>13th</th>
<th>Post 13th</th>
<th>Hdr. 1709-13</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ás í Hjaltadalur (Neðri-Ás)</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauðá in Borgarsveit</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steinsstaðir in Tungusveit</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keldudalur in Hegranesi</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td>xO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mið-Grund in Blönduhið</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garður in Hegranesi</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyla on Langholt older</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyla, Langholt younger</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Full-church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hof in Hjaltadalur</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skíðastaðir in Laxárdalur</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Quarter-church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ysti-Mór in Fljót</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bjarnastaðir in Kolbeinsdalur</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Höfði on Höfðaströnd</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td>XO</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Parish church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ósland in Óslandshlíð</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Half-church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stóra-Seyla – lower cemetery

Aerial view of cemetery

GPR view of cemetery

Published by permission
Intrasite geography - visibility

• Position or absence of a boundary wall
• Church/no church?
• Distance/position from farm
• Grave markers/visibility?
• Other architecture, later/earlier
Internal geography/architecture

• „Fill“ layers common
• Medieval leveling
• 15-25m
• Cemetery wall/rebuilding?
• Coffins rare in outskirts of cemetery/social differentiation?
• Sex segregation
• Intercutting – evidence for changing function
Keldudalur - cemetery and longhouse

Graves:

- Emptied grave: 6%
- Female: 20%
- Male: 17%
- Juvenile 12-18 years: 4%
- Child 3-12 years: 6%
- Infant 0-3 years: 39%
- Sex indeterminable: 7%
## Burial customs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Location of cemetery</th>
<th>Location of grave</th>
<th>Arm position</th>
<th>Coffin/no coffin</th>
<th>Age/sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steinsstaðir</td>
<td>W?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>A/B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>M (OA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mið-Grund</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>A/B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>F (MA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garður/Hegranesþing</td>
<td>S?</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>A/B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>F (MA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garður</td>
<td>S?</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>A/B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>F (YA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyla (older)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>M (MA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyla (younger)</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Juvenile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skíðastaðir</td>
<td>S?</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>F (YA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ysti-Mór</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bjarnastaðir</td>
<td>SW?</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>F?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Höfði</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ósland</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Infant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preliminary conclusions

• Many seem to be established very early or around conversion – little evidence of differentiation

• Numerous small household churches/cemeteries AD1000-1300 (most independant farms?)

• Shift in late 11th/early 12th century – cemeteries come out of use/cemetery walls are built or rebuilt

• Continuation visible through building/rebuilding of walls/communal cemeteries defined by intercutting of graves
Takk fyrir!