

**LANDSCAPES OF LIFE AND DEATH: SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF A
PERCEIVED LANDSCAPE IN VIKING AGE ICELAND**

by

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ABSTRACT

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by

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The pre-Christian period in Iceland dates from the settlement in the latter half of the 9th century to about the year 1000 C.E. The burials from that time are found across Iceland, singly or in group cemeteries. Prior research on the burials has ranged from surveying, excavating and cataloging them, to comparative analyses of the grave designs and grave inclusions with respect to other contemporary areas of the Viking World. Separately, various types of skeletal analyses have been conducted to assess the sex, age and pathology of the individuals; and also a focus on the origins of the individuals is in progress through the use of strontium isotope analysis. However, little attention has been paid to accumulating the various data sets on the subject and interpreting them in an anthropological context in order to provide an image of the society who created the data in the first place. Such a study yields information regarding differences based on gender and age. Even less has been done with respect to understanding the role that the landscape and seascape played in burial placement and its relationship to cosmology. By reevaluating the grave inclusions, skeletal remains, artifact and animal inclusions, and considering the landscape in which they were originally placed, this study was able to

recognize social positions based on gender and age within and between the burials, and also revealed the significance in the placement of the graves. The gender and age differences led to understanding the social dimensions in Iceland during this time; while placement shed light on the cosmology of the society. All of this underscored the fact that Iceland was indeed a 'new land.'

This work is dedicated to:

My dad, Charlie Maher,
you waited so long for this, I wish you
were here to celebrate with me.

And, to my son, Kjartan,
who gave me the *oomph* to move forward.

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