Report of Bones from Dadastaðir, Mývatn District, Northern Iceland

Dr. Thomas H. McGovern
CUNY Northern Science
and Education Center

CUNY Doctoral Program in Anthropology
Brooklyn College Zooarchaeology Laboratory
Hunter College Bioarchaeology Laboratory
August 11th 2004

NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory REPORT No. 19

July 29th, 2004
Contact: nabo@voicenet.com
A product of the North Atlantic Biocultural Organization (NABO) Research Cooperative.
**Background**

On July 27th-28th & August 10th 2004 Adolf Friðriksson of the Archaeological Institute Iceland investigated a probable pagan burial near the farm of Dadastaðir. The grave had been plundered in antiquity (prior to the 1477 tephra fall). However, bone fragments identifiable as human, dog, and horse were recovered from the grave fill and the robbers’ spoil heap. This report documents the zooarchaeological portion of this grave find.

**Report**

The bones included in this grave lot represent three species, human (*Homo sapiens* L.), domestic dog (*Canis familiaris* L.) and horse (*Equus caballus* L.). Human bone (identified by Hildur Gestsdóttir) is restricted to a fragment of pelvis, the right acetabular facet. Gender indeterminate but possibly female.

**Horse bones**

Horse fragments included were:
1. Axis vertebra, fused.
2. Cervical (neck) Vertebrae, probably cervicals 3 and 5 (thus not in articulation). From fully adult (>4-5 yrs) animal with completely fused epiphyses.
1. Thoracic vertebra, completely fused epiphyses.
1. Rib, proximal end (possibly originally in articulation with Thoracic vertebra above).
2. Sesamoids
2. Carples
2. Third phalanx (hoof) also from an adult animal of a smaller breed (such as Icelandic horse), showing some age-related pathology.
1. Radius, proximal (small fragment)
1. Fourth (accessory) metapodial complete
1. Incisor, heavily worn, from mature-old adult
1. Canine, heavily worn, also from a fully mature adult.
1. Second phalanx, fully fused mature animal. Metrics (mm, Von den Dreisch 1976) Bd 40.05, GL 81.0, SD 30.49, Bp 51.5
Total: 17 bones of horse.

**Discussion:** the partial horse skeleton is clearly disturbed, with fragments coming from many parts of the body. It would appear that a complete or nearly complete horse was interred, not just a head. The state of the teeth and fusion of the vertebrae indicate an animal that was probably a bit past its prime, though still apparently healthy adult. All the bones could have come from a single individual, and the consistent age indicators do argue in favor of a single animal, but this cannot be stated with certainty.
**Dog Bones**

Dog bones in the Dadastaðir KUML 1 deposit comprise the following elements:

- 1 Femora, left, fully fused proximally & distally. Bd 31.6, GL 186.0, SD 13.4, Bp(1) 42.9, Bp(2) 17.3
- 1 Femora, right, fully fused proximally and distally. Bd 31.9, GL 187, SD 13.2, Bp(1) 42.4, Bp(2) 18.0
- 1 Humerus, right, fully fused proximally and distally, pathological lipping on both proximal and distal ends. Bd 33.3, GL 167.3, SD 10.3, Bp(1) 46.7, Bp(2) 30.0
- 1 Humerus, left, fully fused proximally and distally, also has pathological lipping on both articular ends. BD 34.8, GL 167.1, SD 10.34, Bp(1) 45.6, Bp(2) 30.3
- 1 Innominate, left, fully fused
- 1 Innominate, right, fully fused
- 1 astragalus
- 1 metatarsus, shaft
- 2 ribs, proximal
- 1 radius, whole, fused proximally SD 10.30, Bp 17.7
- 1 cervical vertebra, fully fused
- 7 thoracic vertebrae, fully fused
- 3 lumbar vertebrae, fully fused
- 1 upper M3 carnassial tooth, exceptionally worn, old adult.
- 11 small terrestrial dog sized rib fragments.

Total 23 definite dog bones, 11 additional probable dog bones.

**Discussion:** These elements very probably come from the same individual dog, as long bones and pelvis are paired halves, fusion states are uniform, and the measurements are very similar. This dog was evidently not only an adult but also a fairly aged animal. Tooth wear is extreme and the apparent osteoarthritis around the humerus (both joints) strongly suggest an animal at the end of a long life. The Dadastaðir dog is of medium size and build, not unlike the general range of modern traditional Icelandic breed. Humerus is very similar in size to the Hrísheimar dog find.

![Figure 1) Probable arthritic lipping around the edge of the proximal articular facet of the dog humerus.](image)
Perdikaris S, Colin Amundsen & T.H. McGovern

Clayton M. Tinsley, Thomas H. McGovern

Clayton M. Tinsley, Thomas H. McGovern
2002 Zooarchaeology of Aðalstræti 14-16, 2001 Assessment Report of the Post-Medieval Contexts NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports No.3

McGovern, T.H, Sophia Perdikaris, Árni Einarsson , Jane Sidell
2002 Inland Sites and Coastal Connections - Patterns of Wild Animal Exploitation in Settlement Age Mývatn District, Northern Iceland, NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports No.4 DRAFT

McGovern Thomas H
2002 Report of Cattle and Sheep Skulls Recovered from Hofstaðir, Mývatnssveit N Iceland , NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports No.5 DRAFT

McGovern, T.H. & Sophia Perdikaris
2002 Preliminary report of animal bones from Hrísheimar N Iceland, NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports No.6

McGovern, T.H & Sophia Perdikaris
2003 Report of Animal Bones from Selhagi, Mývatn District, Northern Iceland, NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports No. 7.

McGovern, T.H
2003 Animal Bones from Vigishellir Cave, W Iceland NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports, No. 8

McGovern, T.H
2003 Herding Strategies at Sveigakot, N Iceland: an Interim Report, NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports No.9 DRAFT

Woollett, Jim & T.H. McGovern
2003 Interim Report of Animal Bones from the 2002 Excavations at Skálholt, S Iceland, NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports No.10

Woollett, Jim & T.H. McGovern
2003 Interim Report of Animal Bones from the 2002 Excavations at Gásir, N Iceland, NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports No 11

Edvardsson, Ragnar, Perdikaris S., T.H. McGovern, Colin Amundsen, Noah Zagor, Matt Waxman
2003 Hard times in NW Iceland : an 18th c archaeofauna from Finnbogastaðir NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 12

Brewington, Seth, Ramona Harrison, Colin Amundsen, Tom McGovern
2004 An early 13th c Archaeofauna from Steinbogi, Mývatnssveit, N Iceland, *NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 13*

Thomas H. McGovern
2004 An Archaeofauna from Háls, Southwestern Iceland, *NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 14 DRAFT*

Colin Amundsen, Sophia Perdikaris, Matthew Brown, Yekaterina Krivogorskaya, Salena Modugno, Konrad Smiarowski, Shaye Storm, Malgorzata Frik, Monica Koczela, Thomas H. McGovern
2004 The 15th c Archaeofauna from Akurvik, an early Fishing Station in NW Iceland, *NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 15*

Ramona Harrison, Seth Brewington, Jim Woollett, Thomas H. McGovern
2004 Interim Report of Animal Bones from the 2003 Excavations at Gásir, Eyjafjörður, N Iceland, *NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 16*

Thomas H. McGovern, Colin Amundsen, Sophia Perdikaris, Ramona Harrison, Yekaterina Krivogorskaya
2004 An Interim report of a Viking-Age & Medieval Archaeofauna from Undir Junkarinsflöt, Sandoy, Faroe Islands, *NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 17*

Thomas H. McGovern, Orri Vésteinsson, Sophia Perdikaris, Colin Amundsen
2004 Zooarchaeology of Landnám: 9th - 11th c Midden Deposits at Sveigakot, N Iceland, *NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 18 DRAFT*

Thomas H. McGovern
2004 Report of animal bones from a pagan grave at Dadastaðir, N Iceland. *NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 19*

Thomas H. McGovern
2004 Report of bones from a pagan grave at Saltvík N Iceland. *NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 20.*

Thomas H. McGovern
2004 Report of bones from a pagan grave from Litla-Nupar, N Iceland. *NORSEC Zooarchaeology Laboratory Reports no 21.*