**Vatnahverfi: a green and pleasant land? Palaeoecological reconstructions of environmental and land-use change**

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**Abstract**

Accounts describing the Vatnahverfi region of Greenland are almost always effusive in their praise for the rich and bountiful nature of the landscape. Whether it was the dense scrub and woodlands, or the freshwater lakes and fertile green pastures, this landscape – contrary to elsewhere in the Eastern Settlement – is frequently assumed to have been an excellent location for Norse pastoral farming. Nevertheless, these observations are merely anecdotal in nature and based on the perceptions of archaeologists, or others who have visited the region. This paper asks whether Vatnahverfi was really the green and pleasant land that the literature would suggest, whilst exploring the rationale behind settlement in this region. Pollen-analytical data and associated proxies are deployed here in an attempt to assess whether the pre-*landnám* landscape was an attractive location for settlement, and to investigate vegetation and land-use changes consequent upon settlement. Pollen analysis allows an assessment of the natural capital of the pre-*landnám* (initial settlement) environment, which suggests that the central valley of north-west Vatnahverfi supported substantial *Betula*-*Salix* scrub or low woodland prior to *landnám*. The presence of woodland at *landnám* indicates the availability of a key resource (for fuel, building materials, or as fodder for livestock), and a cluster of early *landnám* era dates have been returned on pollen sequences from farms in the centre of Vatnahverfi. Data from pollen influx and coprophilous fungal spores associated with grazing animals also point towards this landscape having been particularly suitable for pastoralism. Poaceae (grass) pollen influx values, for instance, are often double those of farms in the Qassiarsuk region, suggesting higher hay yields with the potential to support larger numbers of domesticates. Radiocarbon age-depth modelling of pollen sequences suggests that abandonment of farms in the region may have begun from the mid-13th century AD, culminating in 14th century.

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