



## **Cereal production, high status and climate in Medieval Iceland**

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At Hrísbú (formerly the medieval Mosfell estate) in the Mosfell Valley, southwest Iceland, archaeologists have excavated a medieval skáli (hall) proposed to be the high status residence of a chieftain. This is indicated by the size of the skáli, artefacts (foreign goods), archaeofaunal (cattle/sheep bone) ratios and macrobotanical remains (cereal grain). The analysis of pollen from nearby natural contexts suggests that cereals were grown locally. Using multiple profile palynological approach, this paper examines if the apparent cereal production is representative of high status in the Icelandic context. First as a correlate by confirming that cereals were grown in association with the archaeological features characteristic of high status; secondly, as an indicator in its own right through comparison with other palynological datasets from inferred lower status farms. The presence or absence of cereal-type pollen (cf. barley) and other arable correlates was examined for each site. The results suggest that medieval cereal cultivation in the Mosfell Valley was confined to the landholding of the medieval Mosfell estate. This feature is seen as an attribute of the locale's greater status in relation to the other farms in Mosfell Valley. The abandonment of cereal cultivation at the Mosfell estate around AD 1200 is probably associated with interactions between changes in the nation's social power structure and how marginal cereal production in Iceland was (and is) in terms of climate.