WHAT CAN A VIKING CHURCH TELL US ABOUT WHY GREENLAND'S SETTLERS DISAPPEARED?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Archaeologists working in southern Greenland have found human remains at a site believed to be a Norse church. Norse settlers from Iceland, including followers of Erik the Red, began living in Greenland around 985 CE. Their farms and trading communities survived for hundreds of years, but the settlements disappeared during the early 15th century. Researchers had suspected that the site was a church because of its stone walls. Finding a skeleton buried with its head pointing east, in the manner of a Christian burial, has provided much stronger evidence. The church probably dates from between 1100 and 1300, when Greenland's Norse settlers were becoming Christian. Researchers believe that wealthy landowners may have competed to control churches and the money and influence connected with them. The discovery may help explain how the colony was organised before it eventually vanished.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The Vikings were not only raiders. They were also farmers, traders and settlers who built communities in difficult places. Greenland's Norse colony survived for centuries before disappearing, and historians still debate why. This church gives new evidence about religion, power and everyday life inside that lost society.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

"Why might a church have been important in the Greenland colony?"

Source: Smithsonian Magazine

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/archaeologists-searching-for-evidence-of-a-norse-church-in-greenland-have-found-the-smoking-gu-near-erik-the-reds