



The finely-detailed Viking whalebone plaque found in Orkney

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**Picture: DUNCAN DINGSDALE**

ONE of the most exciting archaeological finds of Viking times has gone under the microscope in Edinburgh — the rich collection from the recent boat burial excavation on the Orkney island of Sanday.

In the impression of the boat were the skeletons of a man, a woman, and a young person, along with their grave goods, which included a whalebone plaque with carved horses' heads, a gilded brooch, bone combs, iron utensils, a sword, and even 25 bone pieces used in a board game identified as a forerunner of chess.

The finds are being studied at Historic Scotland's conservation laboratory at Newcraighall, near Edinburgh.

They were excavated by free-

## Viking finds excite experts

lance archaeologist Magnar Dalland for Historic Scotland and Orkney Islands Council, and discussing the project yesterday were Olwen Owen, its project manager, and conservation manager Richard Welander.

Further investigations and carbon dating of the bones may show that the Vikings were first-

generation Nordic settlers in the ninth century.

Artefacts may go back even further, said Ms Owen, pointing out that archaeological colleagues in Norway are equally excited about the find.

The remains were found in traditional burial style in a six-metre "Faering", or four-oar inshore rowing boat, inside a stone-lined pit.

The find has already been declared Treasure Trove and, after detailed examination of up to two years, the Finds Disposal Panel will decide where the burial finds will go on display.

Ms Owen said that early indications show the remains are of Vikings of high rank.

She described it as probably the most exciting example of a Viking find in Britain.

The Orcadian sand has helped preserve the collection.