ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF MACHINING DURING DEVELOPMENT WORK AT AÐALSTRÆTI 2, REYKJAVÍK

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Front-cover photo shows large part of excavation area during machine-excavation. Facing south-east. Photo: Nikola Trbojević

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Introduction

On April 6 2016, following an agreement and correspondence with Verkís[1], Reitir I ehf[2,3] and Minjastofnun Íslands[4,5], a monitoring of development-related machine-excavation in front of the N-side of the building at Aðalstræti 2 (on the corner of Aðalstræti and Vesturgata, Reykjavík, see Figure 1 below), was undertaken in order to identify, record and if necessary excavate eventually uncovered archaeological features. The excavation area (oriented NW-SE) was c. 80 m^2 (c 5 x 16 m). According to plans of the development company it was necessary to excavate the area down to the depth of c. 2 m, which would imply, in total, a removal of c. 160 m^3 of soil.

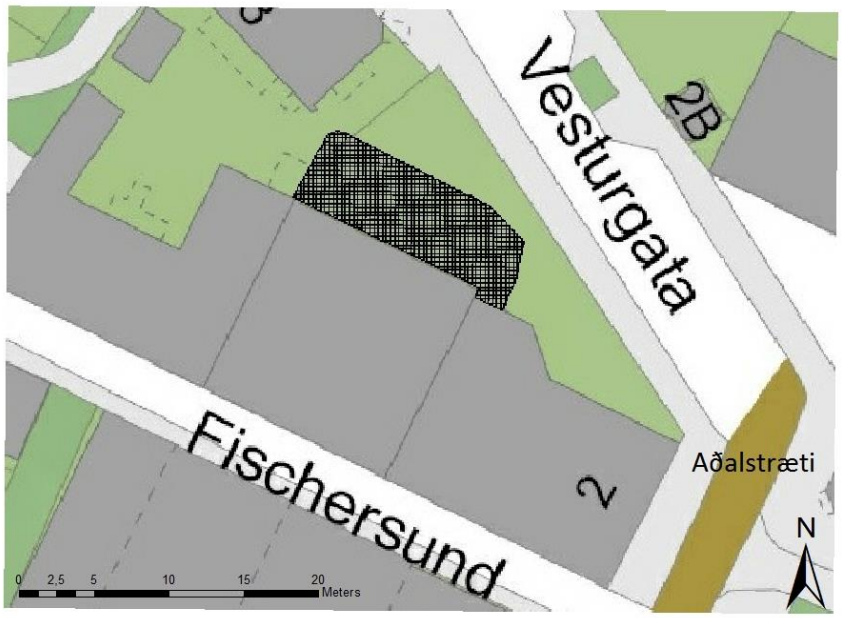

Figure 1. Location and extent of the excavation area

Having in mind location of other, previously identified features in the close vicinity of this site (i.e. downtown Reykjavík), there was an expectation that archaeological features and structures may be identified in the area, which would eventually imply temporary termination of the development work and preservation or excavation of the identified archaeological remains. Nikola Trbojević and Lísabet Guðmundsdóttir

[1] http://www.verkis.com/
[2] Reitir I ehf., Kringlunni 4 – 12.
[3] Letter from Reitir I ehf.
[4] http://www.minjastofnun.is/
[5] Letter from Minjastofnun Íslands, received on 11.12.2015.

monitored the machine-excavation and recorded the site under the supervision of Hildur Gestsdóttir.

Results

The excavation revealed that the area was already heavily disturbed by a fairly recent development work – machine-excavation uncovered plastic-made pipes of different sizes, most likely used for water supply and/or sewer drain. Pipes (oriented differently) were positioned throughout the area, at the approximate depth of 0.3 (0.5), 1 and 1.8 m. In addition the southeastern part of the area was also heavily disturbed by tree-roots.

Figure 2. Peat-ash layer in the N-NW corner of the excavated area

In brief, no substantial, structural archaeological features were identified or noticed in the excavated area. The excavation revealed only few deteriorated unstructural layers and deposits of different kinds. Most noteworthy of those was (at some places up to 25 cm thick) peat-ash layer, positioned in the N-NW corner of the area, c. 70 cm beneath the surface. The layer extended further towards north, outside of the boundaries of the area and its remains were clearly visible at the end of excavation in the N-NW profile of the area. The location of these deposits, as well as the outline of the area affected by the development were recoded with a total station.

A single find – fragment of a clay-pipe was recovered from the layer during the machine-excavation. As an addition to this, it is noted that the peat-ash layer was partially covering remains of a deteriorated non-structural turf deposit.

Figure 3. Close-up of the peat-ash layer in the N-NW corner of the excavated area

Scattered remains of crushed shells and, at some places decayed fish- and animal-bones, were also identified throughout the excavated area and it appears clear that their position was a result of the mentioned frequent disturbances of the site in the near past. Unidentified calcinised material (mostly crumbled and occasionaly mixed with sand) was also identified in the eastern part of the area. Finally, a number of randomly positioned stone- and (fragmented) concrete blocks were identified in the eastern and southeastern part of the area.

The machine-excavaton was ended upon reaching the natural, gravel layers at the approximate depth of c. 2,00 m.

Concluding remarks

The development-related machine-excavation in front of the building at Aðalstræti 2, conducted by Verkís revealed no substantial/structural archaeological feature.

Appendix: Finds register

Find number	Unit/layer	Material	Type	Quantity	Weight (g)
2016-02-1	Peat-ash layer	Clay	Clay-pipe	1	1.84