2019

Nunatta Katersugaasivia Allagaateqarfialu Grønlands Nationalmuseum & Arkiv

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[QASIGIARSUIT KANGERLUAT ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF BURIALS 2018]

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Introduction

In 2017 the Greenland National Museum surveyed the coastal land strip between Spraglenæs and Ilulissat airport where a new runway has been projected. The survey revealed a number of hitherto uncharted caches, tent rings and burials (Myrup and Lange 2017). This report describe the subsequent rescue excavation carried out in September 2018 in order to document and retrieve the skeletons from two burials (feature no 37 and 38 in Myrup and Lange 2017) discovered during the 2017 survey. In addition to these two burials a third nearby burial was excavated as well. this feature has been numbered feature C in the present report.



Fig 1. The area set aside for a new runway seen from Northeast towards Southwest. The graves presented in this report were situated in the northeastern part of the cove Qasigiarsuit Kangerluat, just below the red arrow. Note the existing Ilulissat airport appear as a bright plane area in the left side of the picture Photo Jens Fog Jensen.

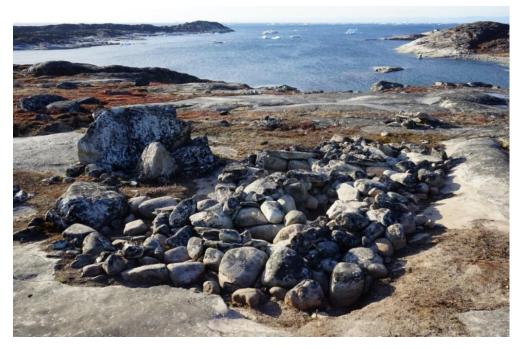
Participants in excavations

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Situation

The bay Qasigiarsuit Kangerluat is situated 4.5 km northeast of Ilulissat town center, and one km northeast of the northeastern end of the existing runway of Ilulissat airport. A new airport and runway is projected to extend approximately from the northeastern terminus of the existing runway and 2.5 km towards northeast to the cove Ujuk Killeq. The new runway and airport terminals requires massive blasting of surrounding hills and landfilling of the cove Qasigiarsuit Kangerluat as well adjacent low lying land. The area is a well-known spring and summer camping ground where many near shore rock faces have marks from the drying of ammassat (capelin). Several cabins are situated on the points and smoking ovens are scattered along the ice scoured coastal cliffs. Old winter settlements are on the other side quite distant

since the nearest known sites with turf houses are the island of Saverneq 3.5 km to the north (NKAH 1815), and towards south the nearest winter settlement in the database of the Greenland National Museum is the site Nuugaarsuk NKAH 1712 situated near Ilulissat. A foot survey of Spraglenæs carried out in 2019 did though reveal remnants of a winter house on the southern shore of Spraglenæs. However, the burials presented here are unlikely to be related to this settlement since several burials along the southern shore of Spraglenæs are more likely to represent the burials related to this settlement.



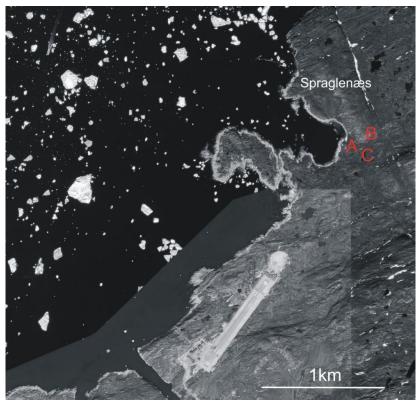


Fig 2. View of grave complex A after the removal pf capstones. Seen from northeast towards southwest. Photo: Jens Fog Jensen

Fig 3. Area with graves to the northeast of Ilulissat. The location of the three graves A, B, and C reported on here are marked with red dots. Existing runway is seen in lower part of picture. Image: reworked from Google Earth

Descriptions of structures

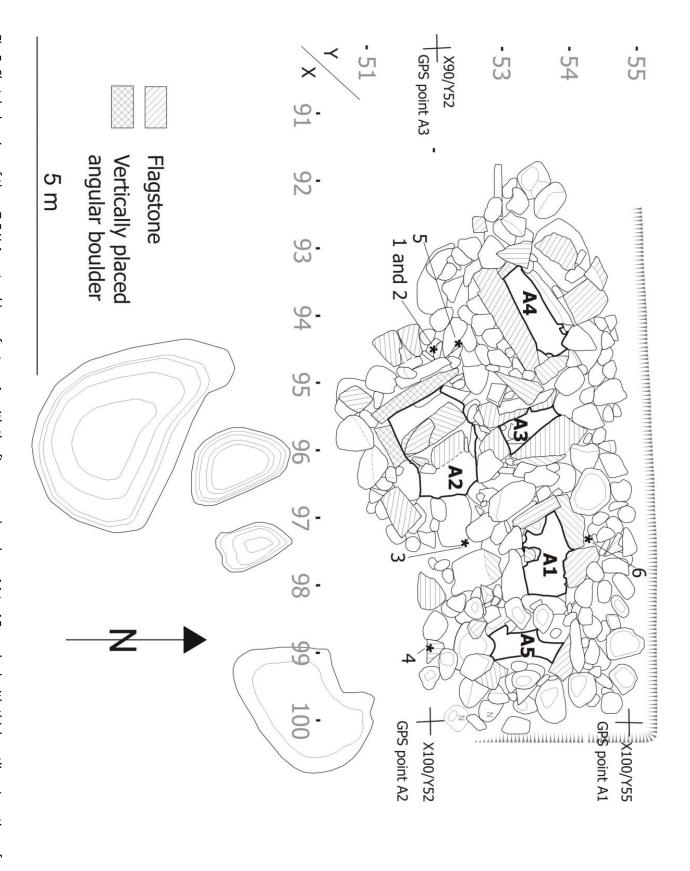
Feature A

Feature A is an east - west oriented 7.5 by 4 meter and approximately 70 cm high boulder structure, a burial complex, that have been built on a flat plane in the bedrock. The burials are built of large rounded and angular boulders, and several of the five burial chambers have a second course of more flat and angular slabs delineating the outline of the burial chamber. (CF: A1 A3 and A4). On top of the stones framing the burial chambers are the cap stones consisting of selected up to approximately one m long slabs that most often are placed perpendicular to the long axis of the burial chamber. On top of the cap stones some smaller rounded boulders are placed, giving the whole structure an appearance of a burial cairn.

Initially four burial chambers were identified in the large structure, but upon removal of the capstones a fifth chamber was discovered in the easternmost extent of the structure. The four burial chambers are numbered A1, A2, A3 and A4 from east to west and with the last discovered A5 situated in the easternmost end of the structure according to the sketch plan (fig 5 and fig 8).



Fig 4. Grave A prior to excavation. Most of the capstones appeared to be in original position. The central part of the structure did though show signs of stone lifting and minor disturbance. A few of the topping stones thus had the appearance of having been added recently, and patterns in the lichen growth on other stones indicated that they had been lifted and placed back in shifted position. Seen from Northeast towards Southwest. Photo Jens Fog Jensen.



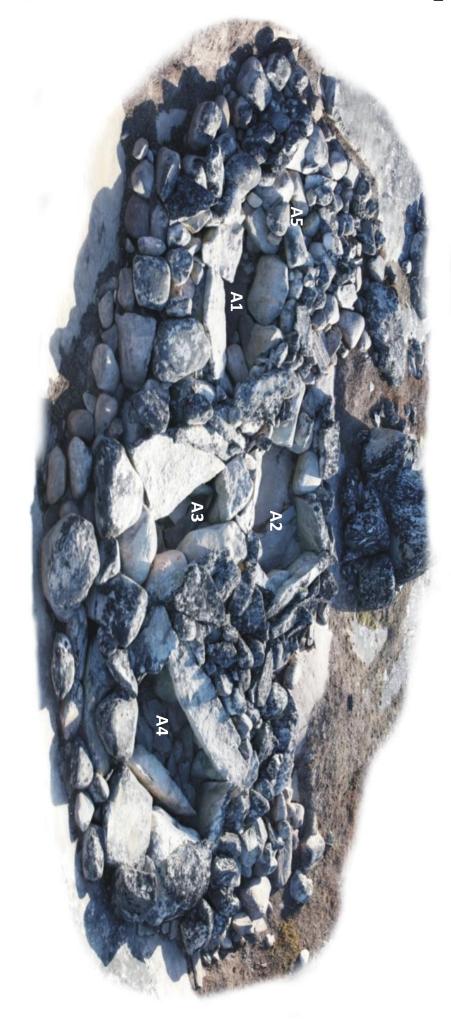
finds recovered between the construction stones are marked with numbers 1-5. Fig 5. Sketch drawing of the c 7.5 X 4 meters' large feature A, with the five grave chambers A1 to A5 marked with thick outline. Location of



Fig 6. Feature A prior to the clearing of vegetation, willow and dwarf birch scrub cover the periphery of the stone set graves. Seen from southwest towards northeast. Photo Jens Fog Jensen.



Fig 7. Grave A after removal of willow and dwarf birch scrub. The colored marks on the surveyor stick are 40 cm marks. Seen from southwest towards northeast. Photo Jens Fog Jensen.



complex from opposite point of view than the one shown on sketch drawing shown as fig $5\dots$ from North. The image is composed from several stitched images resulting in some skewing. This image illustrate the grave Fig. 8. Grave complex A after removal of vegetation and capstones. The 5 grave chambers is marked with numbers A1 to A5. Seen

Burial A1

A1 is the most conspicuous of the burials in feature A. The approximately two square meter oval area made up by Burial A1 stand out by being raised 15 to 20 cm above the other chambers, leaving an impression of being the 'founder burial' although there are no observations to suggest whether years or hours elapsed between the construction of the first and the last burial in this complex.

The well preserved chamber measures 1.3×0.75 m. It is built of approximately $60 \times 40-50$ cm large rounded boulders which are topped by a second course of flat stones and slabs placed in a slightly corbelled arch and forming an even terminus of the chamber walls for the support of the up to 1.1×0.6 m large flat capstones. One of these capstones (no 2 from east) has a nice red color. Rounded boulders have been placed on the flat stones as well as in gaps to the burial chamber. The chamber measures 1.3×0.75 cm and it is 50 cm deep.

The skeleton

Immediately after the removal of capstones a well preserved skull and some limp bones were seen in the chamber (fig 10), where smaller stones had fallen in as well. The skull was situated in the eastern end of the chamber facing west, indicating that the body had been placed in supine position, head towards east and facing west. Upon clearing of dust and dirt the vertebrate and ribs and arm bones confirmed the position of the body in supine position with hands on chest and bend knees. The leg bones (both femora and tibia) was post depositional disturbed by in caving stones and possibly by human opening of the chamber as well. One femora were thus seen lying on top of dirt and stones that had fallen in already when the burial was opened (se fig 10). The body was thus placed with the head in the eastern end of the chamber facing north. The legs were bent, knees facing south. The body appear to have lain on the base of the chamber and not against the side. A single upper phalange and metacarpal were found in the area of the chest - at least one hand have thus been resting on the chest. The post cranial skeleton was poorly preserved only small fragments of the limbs (humerus /clavicle) and tibia and femora were present.

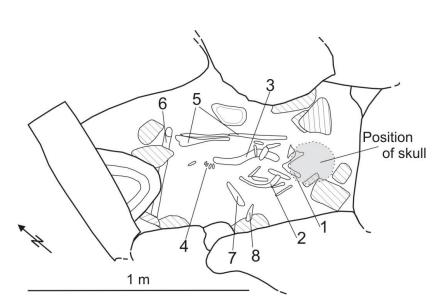


Fig 9. Plan drawing of grave A1, after removal of minor collapsed stones and dirt. 1 mandible, 2 ribs, 3 vertebrae, 4 fingers, 5 right arm, 6 femur, 7 radius, 8 humerus.

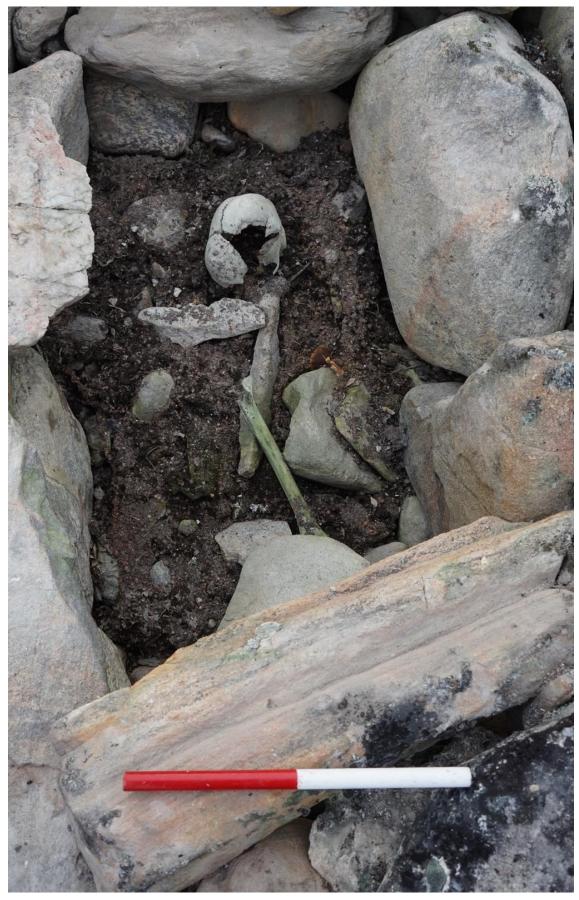


Fig. 10. Grave A1 as the chamber appeared immediately after the capstones had been removed. Photo: Jens Fog Jensen.



Fig- 11. Grave chamber A1 after the skull had been lifted out and stones and dirt removed. Photo: Jens Fog Jensen.

Burial A2

A2 is a large collapsed chamber or possibly two smaller chambers situated in the southwestern part of burial structure A. In contrast to the other chambers, two of the walls outlining A2 is built of angular blocks placed in a near 90 degrees angle or corner towards south and west whereas the chamber towards north and east is delineated by the more rounded stones used in the construction of burial A1 and A3, A4 and A5. The 140 x110 cm large chamber was partially filled by slabs and stones from the collapsed roofing. Two oblong stones considered to be part of the collapsed cover may though have been kind of wall dividing the relatively large chamber into two smaller burial chambers. However, very sparse skeletal remains were found in the form of a few skull fragments from a child in the northwestern corner, and no (additional) skeletal remains was found in the eastern part of the chamber. Therefore, no skeletal evidence support that there should have been two chambers or more than one burial in this part of the burial complex.

The skeleton

Only three fragments of a cranium from a small child (Villa 2019) was found in the northwestern corner of this chamber. The skull fragments were all lying on the surface partially covered by a little moss, so it is not certain that they were in situ. We did search for teeth but did not recover any.



Fig 12. Grave chamber A2 seen from the west after clearing of a shallow accumulation of dirt. The eastern part of the chamber had no paving but plane bedrock as flooring, whereas the western part of the chamber (front part of image) had a paving of large thin flagstones. This part of the chamber was delineated by angular rocks set on edge, whereas the eastern part of the chamber (upper part of image) was built of naturally rounded rocks as was most of the other burial chambers in feature A.

Burial A3

A3 is situated immediately to the west of A1, and similar to A1, A4 and A5 it is built of large rounded boulders, some of which may be natural erratic's incorporated into the burial structure. A second course of construction stones are placed on top of the rounded boulders that outline the base of the burial chamber. This course of large flat stones frames the burial chamber and they are underpinned by smaller stones ensuring that they form a level edge on the chamber. Finally, there are large flat slabs placed perpendicular to the long axis of the burial chamber. The skull is seen in the northern end of the 85 x 15 to 40 cm wide north - south oriented chamber.



Fig 13. Grave A3 after the capstones was removed. A few smaller stones have dropped into the chamber where dust and leaves also have accumulated. Note for example the hand sized flat stones covering the skull fragments in the uppermost / northern end of the chamber.

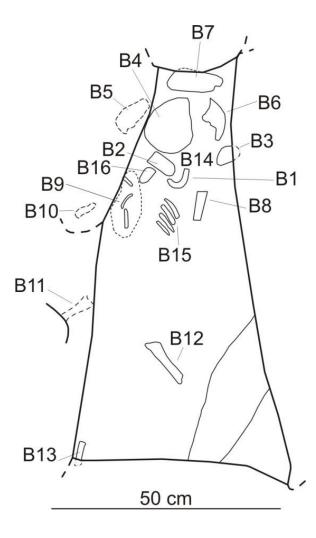


Fig 14. Sketch drawing of bones in grave A3 after clearing of dirt. B1 teeth, B2 petrous + temporal, B3 temporal +mandible, B4 parietal + petrous, B5 occipital, B6 frontal?, B7 cranial vault, B8 long bone B9 unidentified (ribs?), B10 long bone, B11 femur, B12 femur, B13 tibia, B14 mandible, B15 ribs ?, B16 humerus / scapula: Bones hidden under stone are shown with dashed line.

The badly preserved skeleton was placed with the cranium in the narrow northern end of the chamber. Apart from teeth and remains of the skull only little of the postcranial skeleton had survived. To the south of the cranial fragments there were elements of vertebrae, femora and tibia (see fig 14).

Burial A4

A4 is a well-defined east-west oriented rectangular chamber in the northwestern corner of feature A. Similar to chambers 1, 3 and 5 it is defined by a base of rounded boulders. On top of the rounded stones of more than head size that form the base of the chamber there are more than one-meter-long flat stones placed along the sides of the chamber.



Fig 15. Grave A4 after removal of capstones. Part of skull is visible in easternmost part of the chamber (barely visible under large chamber construction stone in far right end of chamber). Photo Jens Fog Jensen.

Both the northern and southern side of the chamber is delineated by long slabs extending almost the whole length of the 130 x 70 cm large and 50 cm deep chamber. Skull and bones were visible in two well defined heaps: 1) the one in the southeastern corner of the chamber where most of the bones associated with the torso and arms were placed in a heap just under the cranium and 2) another heap of bones in the southwestern corner, where limp bones were compacted near the feet. The central part of the chamber was void, leaving an impression of secondary clearing. A4 thus appear to have been cleared for the accommodation of a secondary burial in the same chamber, but for some reason the corpse made space for was never placed here or have been secondarily removed.

The skeletal parts found in pile 1 in the southeastern corner of the burial were in addition to the cranium and mandible: many ribs, 2 scapulae, 4 vertebrae, 2 humerus, calvicle and os coxa. the skeletal parts found in heap 2 (the southwestern heap) are: 2 femora, 2 tibia, 1 fibula, 3 vertebrae, sacrum and as coxa, nearby but a little further towards west were tarsals and metatarsals recovered in the westernmost part of the chamber, where they might be in their original position. All together the recovered bones form a relatively complete skeleton of a female ca, 30 years old.

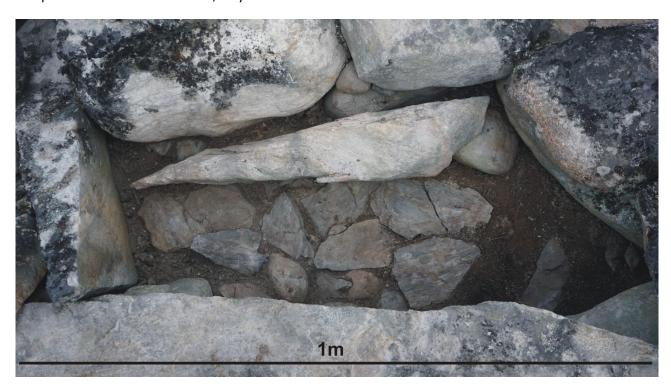


Fig 16. Grave A4 excavated to bottom where pavement is seen. Photo Jens Fog Jensen.

Burial A5

A5 is a child's burial situated in direct prolongation of Burial A1 towards east. The north-south oriented burial chamber measured approximately 120 x 15-30 cm and it was 27 to 40 cm deep. A5 was the only chamber that was not recognized prior to the removal of capstones. Several of the rounded boulders defining the long sides of the chamber had collapsed into the chamber as had some of the capstones. However, after removal of the cap stones skull fragments were readily visible in the northern end leaving no doubt that this was indeed a fifth burial. Details in the construction left no clues to the question about whether A5 is an 'add-on' burial or whether it is built simultaneously with A1 with which it shared the boulder wall towards west. When the collapsed stones had been lifted from the narrow chamber some of the limb bones became visible. The deceased have been placed with the head towards north, but more detailed information on the position of the body could not be detected.

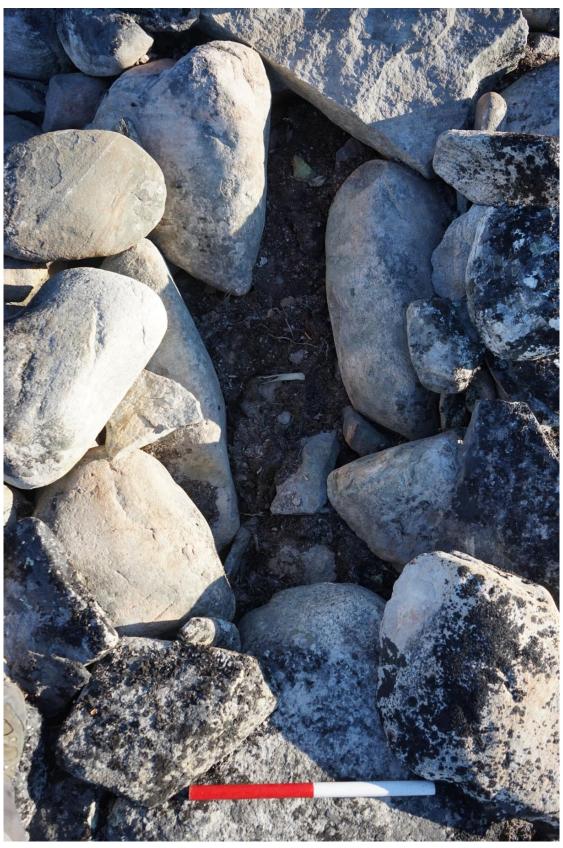


Fig 17. Grave A5 after removal of capstones and minor collapsed stones. Note: skull fragment is visible in the northernmost part of the chamber, and a limb bone I visible in the central part of the chamber. Photo: Jens Fog Jensen

Skeletal remains in A5 are badly preserved, however enough has been documented to conclude, that a child of ca 3,5 years have been placed in the chamber. In addition to the skull fragments and long bones seen already upon opening of the burial the excavation revealed several teeth, a fragment of mandible and ribs and vertebrae (Villa 2019). One of the teeth has sign of enamel hypoplasia indicating stress and or period of malnutrition.

Finds from Burial A

Three artifacts and two bones were recovered between the large construction stones of Burial A. All were situated at the exterior side of the burial complex, and the finds are therefore difficult to associate with individual burials,

1) In the western part of the structure, there was a miniature (toy) soap stone lamp measuring 41 X 28 X 8 mm. The lamp has a full wig rim along the broad side, and the lamp is approximately xx mm thick.





Fig 18 a and b: Miniature lamp found in the western end of Grave A at point 1-2 on fig. 5.

2) Near the find spot of the miniature lamp were a glass ball 15 mm in diameter. The ball is made of white glass with red bands winded in. One side of the ball has a rather uneven melted appearance (fig 19).





Fig 19.
Glass bead found in the western end of Grave A at point 1-2 on fig. 5.

Both the miniature Lamp and the glass ball were recovered from the organic dust that had accumulated deep between the rounded boulders. Both are likely to have rolled down between the boulders and are thus not believed to have been in their original position.



Fig 20. Whalebone bow brace found under large stone to the east of A3 and to the south of A1.

3) A 10.3 cm whale bone bow brace. The bow brace was recovered on the east side of Burial A2 where it had been tucked in below a very large stone which constitutes the eastern side of burial chamber A2. The ventral side is characterized by a flat but curved plane with grooves cut across. The rounded dorsal side has some visible cut marks /whittling scars in the otherwise weathered surface (fig 19).



Fig 21: Soap stone shards with a hole from mending in the left side. Marked as find no 4 on fig 5.

4) A 13 X 4,5 cm large soap stone rim shard with a hole from mending in one side, which also has been secondarily smoothened. The rim is 13 mm thick. The broken end adjacent to the hole left by the mending is polished flat. The shard is therefore believed to have been left in a fragmented state along the southern rim of the structure at the outer side of Burial A1 and A5.

In addition to these finds a seal scapula was recovered close to where the miniature lamp and glass ball was found and an ulna was found in a little oblong gap between the wall stones of the chamber and the outer support stones om the northern side of Chamber A1.

5) Bone, seal scapula (phoca groenlandica) found deep between construction stones in between accumulated leaves and dust at the bottom of the structure. Similar to the miniature lamp and glass ball the scapula was recovered deep between the rounded boulders from which the burial complex was built, but in contrary to the two former objects the size and shape of the scapula makes it very unlikely that it

could have fallen down between the stones to the position where it was found close to the bottom of the structure.

6) Ulna from Cervid or Bovid!! The gap where the ulna was situated could relatively easily have been accessed after the construction of the burial by lifting the capstones. However, the bone appeared well concealed by the capstones and it was only discovered after the removal of the capstones, so presumably it has been left in the position where it was found during the period of active use of the burial complex. Identification of the superficially heavily weathered bone was attempted at Zoological Museum in Copenhagen. The proximal extreme end is fractured and broken off as is the most distal point. However, oddly enough the ulna has been difficult to identify positively as caribou, during a comparison to ulnas from caribou, dog, wolf, human, polar bear, musk-ox and calf, it had the closest resemblance to an ulna from a sub adult calf!

Summary of Burial A

Burial A is a collective burial monument for at least 5 persons, two adult women and 3 children. Establishing the chronological order and total time frame for the 5 burials is paramount for the correct understanding of the structure and history of events that might have led to its construction. The relative position of the 5 burials and the fact, that the capstones covering A1 were raise approximately 15 to 20 cm above the top of the other burials ads 'prominence' to A1 and leaves the impression that A1 is the 'founder burial' or first burial in the complex to be build. The order of the construction of the remainder burials is difficult if not impossible to discern. The burials may have been completed within hours, days months or even years. However, the basic principles applied in the construction of A1, A3 and A4 are so similar, that one is left with the impression that they were built by the same person or persons. A1, A3 and A4 are characterized by having the burial chambers built of large rounded stones, some of which may be in their original natural position. On top of this first layer of stones delineating the chambers are flat, in some cases more than one meter elongated slabs positioned to form even edges on the chambers, and finally are the capstones which in most cases are flat slaps placed transversely to the long axis of the chamber. Burial A2 and to some degree also A5 are different from this pattern, since A2 towards south and vest is built by edged blocks put on edge, and A5 although in a collapsed state during excavation appeared to have been built entirely by rounded boulders and closed by the partially collapsed capstones. If the architectural details of these two children's burials have any significance in relation to their sequence of construction, then they must be considered to have been built or added on to the Burials A1, A3 and A4 after they had been completed. The grave goods consist in one reworked soap stone rim, one miniature (toy) soap stone lamp, one glass ball found very close to one and another in the western end of the burial structure, and one bow brace found partially hidden under one of the large construction stones on the eastern side of A2. The glass ball must be of European origin pointing towards a post-colonial or at least early colonial dating, since bows and arrow was supplanted by firearms during the second half of the 19th century.

All together one may imagine an early colonial scenario where all of the buried in feature A have settled in Qasigiarsu Kangerluat during the summertime to catch ammassat and expecting to trade with European whalers. During such contacts the family may have been infected by European diseases causing their death within a short period of time. This single episode narrative does though not account for the clearing of

bones in A4, that must have occurred long after the burial to allow the legs to separate from the rest of the body. Another interpretation of the burials in structure A would thus be to suggest that the burials were built during several consecutive episodes, but still beginning with A1. In such a scenario one can envision that the five burials were built one by one during a course of several years or they could have been built in a variety of combinations of episodes involving the addition of more burials to A1. In such a scenario It would be natural to consider A1, A3 and A4 as being temporarily related due to the earlier described architectural similarities, and A2 and A5 as being the two lastly added burials. One last thing in relation to the burials incorporated in structure A is the fact, that the two adult persons (A1 and A4) are east west oriented, with the the head in the eastern end, whereas the three children's graves are placed perpendicular to the long axis of the adult graves. A2, A3 and A 5 are thus more or less north-south oriented, and the buried are placed with the head in the northern end of the chamber.



Fig 22. Grave B on the hill above grave A, prior to removal of capstones. Large natural boulders adjacent to grave A can be discerned in the upper left side of image. Seen from NNE towards SSW. Photo: Jens Fog Jensen.

Burial B

B is a single chamber burial situated 60 m uphill to the north of burial A. B is well built approximately 3 m long and 1.75 m wide. The chamber is defined by a large rock split from the bedrock whereby a crack has opened between the loose rock and the hillside. The burial chamber is situated in this east west oriented crack. Towards east and west the crack has been blocked by angular rocks fitted to either end of the crack whereby a 106 cm long and 66 to 54 cm wide burial chamber have been created. The chamber is 50 cm deep. In both the east and west end of the burial, there were smaller chambers capped by flagstones although they were filled with irregular stones. No artifacts were found. Upon removal of the capstones, a skull was seen in the eastern end of the chamber. The remainder parts of the skeleton appeared to be imbedded in a cushion of moss and organic matter. (see fig 26). The organic deposit was largely made up of very degraded branches especially near the head in the eastern end of the burial, and it is believed that the body was covered by vegetation at burial. Under the organic matter and body almost the entire floor in the chamber had been paved with small flagstones. (see Fig 27).

Fig 23. Sketch drawing of section of grave B. The grave chamber is situated in crack between loose rock and bedrock,

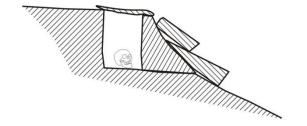




Fig 24. Grave B prior to removal of capstones. Seen from southwest. Photo: Jens Fog Jensen.

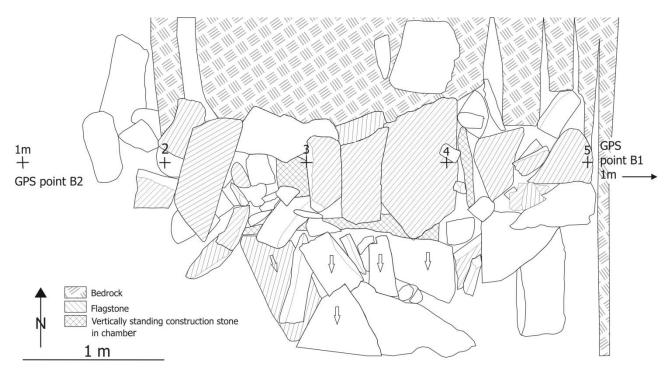


Fig 25. Plan drawing of grave B prior to the removal of capstones. Note: the bedrock / hill side where the grave was built rise steeply towards north. The top of the plan drawing is thus situated approximately one meter higher than the bottom part towards south. heavily slanting stones are marked with an arrow.



Fig 26. Grave B after removal of capstones. Most parts of the postcranial skeleton is imbedded in an organic cushion topped by moss in dry condition when photo was taken. Along the edge of the chamber some of the small flagstones used for paving are seen along the southern side. Cranium in eastern end of chamber. Photo: Jens Fog Jensen.



Fig 27. The floor in grave B had a nicely built pavement of flagstones. Photo Jens Fog Jensen.

In the eastern end of the chamber a skull was situated with the face turned towards north (Fig 26). The body was thus placed in a supine position with the head in the eastern end of the chamber facing north. The legs were bent, knees leaning towards south. The body appear to have lain on the base of the chamber and not against the side. A single upper phalange and metacarpal were found in the area of the chest - at least one hand has thus been resting on the chest. The post cranial skeleton was poorly preserved, only small fragments of the limbs (humerus /clavicle), tibia and femora were present. Analysis of the skull indicates that the human remains from burial B belonged to a female 15 to 16 years old (Villa 2018:).

Summary of Burial B

The human remains in Burial B belonged to a single female approximately 15 to 16 years old buried in supine position with bend knees much similar to the burials of the adult humans in Burial A1, and C. No burial presents were recovered from the extra chambers in the eastern and western end of the burial. Degraded brushes and plant materials was registered in particular in the eastern end of the chamber near the skull. However, the recovered person did not appear to have been laid on top of a cushion of such materials, but more likely to have been covered by branches.

Burial C

GPS: GRAVC1: X 498759.4100, Y 7682908.7750, Z 22.5777 GRAVC 2: X 498756.7771, Y 7682912.9245, Z 21.9376,

Burial C is a SE-NV oriented 3 by 1.6 m large boulder structure built against the flat vertical side of a large natural boulder. The north-east-facing vertical side of the natural boulder form the south-western delineation of the burial chamber (down or lower part of plan drawings and photos below). The three other sides of the burial are built by rounded stones and capped by flag stones. The chamber is approximately 90 cm long and 38 cm wide at the top, but widening out to a length of 120 cm at the bottom, due to the leaning-in of the stones in both ends of the burial chamber. A large slab (approximately 50 by 15 cm) forming the capping stone of the chamber had fallen into the burial but its north-western end was still resting on the top of the chamber wall. As soon as the collapsed capstone was removed two long bones (femora B2 +B3) were revealed lying bleached on top of the sediments. A cranium and some infant teeth and a tibia were seen as well, although these latter mentioned bones were covered by moss and small flat stones that had fallen in. Below the organic material on which the skeleton lay, the floor of the burial chamber was paved with small flat stones. Under the paving there was a large in situ boulder on the northern edge and natural gray clay sediment under the southern end. Where the two met, the depression had been filled with small pebbles to create a level base. Under the pebbles were natural sediment and stones.

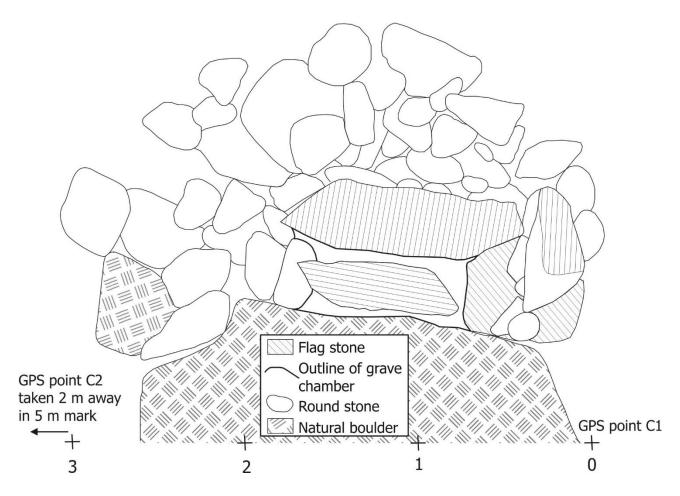


Fig 28. Grave C. Sketch drawing of grave prior to the lifting of capstones.

Burial C contained human remains from two persons, one adult female approximately 50 years at time of death, and a child around 3.5 years old at time of death (Villa 2019)

When the capstones had been lifted, the position of visible skeletal elements indicated the adult as having been laid in supine position with bend knees. A bleached skull was seen in the eastern end of the burial chamber, and long bones was seen in the southwestern part of the chamber. The bleached femora were deposited in a 180 degrees rotated position (proximal ends down and distal ends towards the skull) as a result of secondary handling by persons that have had access to the partly open chamber. The postcranial skeleton was well preserved with an almost complete skeleton preserved. Vertebrae, ribs and arms were documented in anatomical order, whereas the skeletal remains of the child are badly preserved. However, it could be deciphered that the child had been placed across the adult with the child's head resting on the right arm of the adult female (see Fig. 29 and 30).



Fig 29. Grave C, after the skeleton had been excavated from covering dirt. Note part of child's skull is visible against stone in upper part of picture. Photo: Jens Fog Jensen.

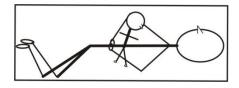




Fig 30. Principle sketches of the position of adult female and child buried in Grace C.

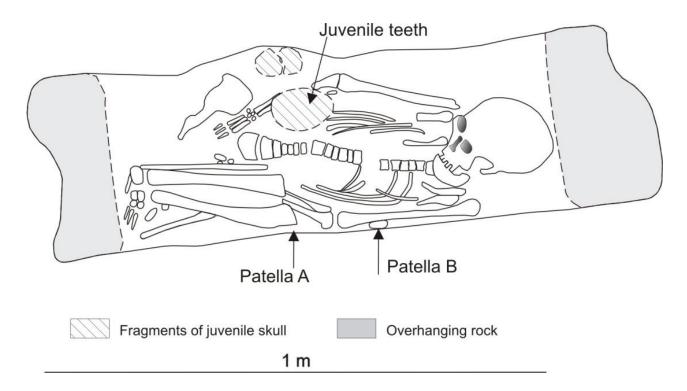


Fig 31. Grave C, sketch drawing of the skeleton after the burial had been excavated from covering dirt.

Summary of Burial C

Burial C was the only one of the seven burials reported on here, where more than one had been buried in the same burial chamber. The female approximately 50 years old, and the 3.5 years old child could have been buried at the same time, but they could just as well represent two consecutive burials in the same chamber. The adult female was buried first and the child placed on top of the adult. The position of the child with its head on the adult female's right arm does though indicate, that it was placed as if it was lying in the arms of the adult, which may indicate that the two was buried simultaneously or that there is a close relationship between the two such as mother / grandmother and child.

Summary

The burials A, B and C reported on here form a distinct cluster of burials in the bay of Qasigiarsuit Kangerluat. With five persons in structure A, one in B and two individuals in Burial C, a total of eight persons have been buried in the three burial structures. The individuals have been identified as four females and four children. Apart from the close proximity there is no evidence to elaborate on the possible relations between the tree burial sites. Several more burials have been documented to the south of A, B and C, indicating, that formerly the area have attracted many settlers at least periodically, and that some have succumbed while living here. Since no large winter settlements are known from this particular area it seems most likely, that the numerous burials relate to warm occupations. During spring and summer the area is rich in ammassat and many people from Ilulissat camp on the terraces, fish ammasat and dry them

on the ice scoured rocks along the shore. In 2019 the heavily eroded remains of a turf house were located in the cove where there are cabins on the southern side of Spraglenæs and approximately 450 m to the northwest of the three burials A, B and C. In this cove there are also several burials, and the Burials A, B and C does therefore not seem be directly associated with former settlements on Spraglenæs.

Feature A stand out with its 5 burials built into one large complex. Feature A may well be understood as a family burial complex. Future DNA analysis may reveal more specific relations between some of the persons buried here. As discussed in the summary of Burial A, it is difficult to establish the chronological order of the five chambers that have been joined in burial structure A, and one can envision several different scenarios involving short timespans ranging from days to somewhat longer sequences of construction over several years. However, the architecture and situation of the different chambers indicate, that chamber A1 was the first of the five burial A chambers to be built.

The disarticulation of the skeleton in A4 show that even if one imagines a short 'one burial episode' for the construction of all of the burials in feature A, people have returned and carried out activities at the burial some time probably in the order of years or decades after the initial burial of the individual in burial A4. The purpose of the clearing of chamber A4 without the addition of a second individual is enigmatic.

The aforementioned clustering of the three burials may be coincidental or topographically induced, however, it is tempting to suggest, that all three burials were built by the same group of people, whom may have settled in the cove on a regular basis. Along this line of thought, the authors preliminarily suggest that all of the burials were left by early historical Inuit settlers whom arrived to this particular place to trade and barter with Dutch whalers and/or Danish settlers arriving during the early 18'th century. This dating of the burials corresponds well to the grave goods including the glass ball and possibly a calf's bone? (finds no. 2 and 6), as well as the miniature soap stone lamp with the rim list (find no. 1). Furthermore, the east-west orientation of the adult burials (A1, A4, B and C) with the head in east may indicate that the buried actually are Christianized. The contact to Europeans is well known to have resulted in the spread of catastrophic epidemics in Greenland, where thousands of Inuit succumbed to smallpox, measles and other diseases introduced by Europeans. Today we know most about the larger epidemics of the 19th century, but numerous more isolated episodes of infection must have occurred along the Greenland shores as a result of unrecorded encounters between Inuit and Europeans. The burials in Qasigiarsuit Kangerluat could well result from such an episode of deadly but local epidemic disease.

References:

Lange and Myrup 2017: Ilulissat Lufthavn, Udbygning – Arkæologisk Forundersøgelse 2017 RAPPORT: NKA2017/01.

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List of GPS coordinates

GRAVA1, 498735.1174,7682953.3938,19.1473,GRAV,
GRAVA2,498732.8554,7682951.4251,18.8407,GRAV,
GRAVA3,498724.8325,7682957.5481,18.0751,GRAV,
GRAVB1,498800.1627,7683006.9944,36.1140,GRAV,
GRAVB2,498795.5212,7683008.7313,35.8750,GRAV,
GRAVC1,498759.4100,7682908.7750,22.5777,GRAV,
GRAVC2,498756.7771,7682912.9245,21.9376,GRAV,