

Ammassalik wood figure with traces of red pigment in the eyes, mouth, and on the body, 18th/19th century, 12.5 cm



Bruce White photos

Provenance:

Danish National Museum

Harry Beasley

John Hewett

Freddy Rolin

Christie's Amsterdam, July 2, 2002

Early East Greenland human figures with facial features (probably a residual Dorset culture trait) are uncommon. The earliest record of such a figure is the pair of male and female figures collected by Graah's expedition about 100 km south of Ammassalik (shown in a three-quarters view in Graah, 1832, and more accurately in Gulløv, 2004; see below). This Beasley Collection figure more closely resembles the male figure collected by Graah, probably dating from the 17th or 18th century, than it does the late 19th and early 20th century figures in museum collections in Denmark and Greenland. For examples of these latter figures (copies of some are included at the end of this file), see one of the 13 wood carvings (probably dating from ~1895) excavated in 1899 by C.G. Amdrup in the Nualik house ruin (Meldgaard, 1960, far left in Fig. 44); carvings collected by C. Ryder in 1892 (Møbjerg et al., 2001, Figs. 151, 153 and 157); and wood carvings from the Gustav Holm Collection (Meldgaard, 1985, pp. 96-97). These comparisons suggest that the figure

illustrated above may be in a relatively “archaic” style and predate most other similar figures by a century or more.

Based on the small and worn tag that was attached to this figure, with an inventory number that most likely reads 25-20.7-26 (although the 20 is indistinct, see copy below), this figure must correspond to object 25, described in the Beasley Collection ledger as “Wooden Doll or Amulet, small male figure” under “Angmagsalik Collection - East Greenland”. It is catalogued under the date of July 20, 1926 (i.e., 25-20.7.26), with the introductory information that this collection was “Obtained in exchange with the National Museet, Copenhagen, Denmark, Dr. Thomas Thomsen, Director. The objects are derived from the collections made on the spot by G. Holm, 1884-5, G. Amdrup, 1892-1900, and J. Petersen, Danish Merchant Agent, 1894-1900”.

There are a total of 32 entries for this first collection that Beasley obtained from the Danish National Museum (30 from East Greenland; see copies of the two relevant ledger pages below), including four wooden dolls (Beasley inventory numbers 25-28). After Beasley’s death in 1939, many items from his collection were presented by his wife to four National British Museums. Figures 26 and 28 entered the British Museum (this donation is designated the 1944 Am 2 collection) under the numbers 1944 am2.4 (male figure, 5.5 inches) and 1944 am2.5 (female figure, 3.1 inches), respectively. These are illustrated by Fagg (1972) in his Plate 21, left (female) and right (male) of the three figures shown on p. 33. (The height of the male figure, 1944 Am2.3, is listed in the British Museum ledger pages [see copy below] as 4.4 inches, which conflicts with the height of 5.5 inches given in Fagg.) Thus, only Beasley number 27 is presently unaccounted for. The British Museum ledger pages also include two other Ammassalik wood female figures, listed as numbers 2 and 3 (pp. 151-152). These were received in 1944 from Mrs. Beasley, but originated from a December 19, 1932 exchange with the Danish National Museum.



Beasley Collection tag (2.3 x 2.8 cm)



“Male and female figures carved in driftwood and found in an old grave by W.A. Graah in 1829 in an expedition to the South East coast of Greenland. The Thule culture’s arm stumps are still preserved, while the face, in contrast, has Dorset culture features.” (From Gulløv, 2004, p. 337) Probably from the 17th-18th century. Tallest figure (Danish National Museum, L. c. 372.2) is 9.4 cm. A portion of the color plate showing these two figures from Graah’s 1832 report is reproduced below.



The Ammassalik Eskimos and the Beasley Collection

Captain Gustav Holm (1849-1940) discovered the isolated group of 413 Eskimos in the Angmagsalik (current spelling: Ammassalik) district of East Greenland in his "Umiak Expedition" of 1884-85. (The umiak, an Eskimo skin boat with a steersman and rowed by about five women, was the only type of vessel able to get around the dense pack-ice usually blocking access to the East Greenland coast, by following close to the shore beginning near the southern tip of Greenland.) His interpreter, Johann Petersen, an Eskimo from Southwest Greenland (known by his Eskimo name of Ujuât), was placed in charge of the colony as the Danish agent (*kolonibestyrer*) for 30 years after Holm's return to Denmark in 1885, and made important ethnographic collections and observations (see Petersen, 1957). All of the objects collected in this initial 19th century contact period went to the Danish National Museum (originally the Royal Ethnographic Museum). Some were later exchanged with other museums, but virtually none are in private collections. The rarity of 19th century objects from East Greenland can also be inferred from the fact that the population of 413 Eskimos that Holm found in 1884 had fallen to 330 by the time he returned in 1894 to "colonize" Ammassalik, and increased to only 474 in 1905.



Gustav Holm



Harry Beasley

Harry Geoffrey Beasley (1881-1939) was a wealthy man, having inherited the North Kent Brewery. He made his first acquisition of a lime spatula at the age of 11, and built up a private collection of ethnographic (principally from Oceania and the North West Coast of America) and Tibetan art that was probably the finest in Britain. His collecting continued throughout his lifetime, and after his marriage in 1914 this interest was shared with his wife Irene. He never collected in the field but traveled widely in Britain and Europe, visiting museums and establishing contacts with museum curators, collectors and dealers. His collection was thus built up by exchanges with institutions and other collectors throughout the world, and by purchase mainly from Missionary Societies, soldiers, and auction houses. He obtained a number of important objects from East Greenland by exchange with the Danish National Museum in 1926 and in the 1930s. (Based on the British Museum accession ledger for 1944 Am2, Beasley exchanges with the Danish National Museum that are now in the British Museum were dated 20.7.26, 12.2.31, 19.12.32, 14.10.33, 27.2.35, 3.10.36, and 29.9.38.)

His collection became so vast that when he moved to Chislehurst in Kent in 1928 he founded there the Cranmore Ethnographical Museum, with an extensive library and its own publication, *Ethnologia Cranmorensis*. Beasley died unexpectedly from diabetes in February, 1939. His museum was bombed during the Second World War but the collection survived and was housed for safekeeping at the British Museum. After the war his widow kept some of the collection but the majority was offered to museums in Britain, with the British Museum having the first choice (2,123 objects) and the remainder going to museums in Liverpool (3,000), Edinburgh (620), Cambridge (180) and Oxford (98). Up until Mrs. Beasley's death in 1974 some objects that she had kept were acquired by various dealers, especially John Hewett (1919-1994) and American dealers including Merton Simpson, J.J. Klejman, John Wise and Allan Frumkin. A small residue of the collection (216 lots, of which 73 were Tibetan and South East Asian art) was then sold at auction by his daughters in Hove (Palmeira Auction Room, Graves, Son & Pilcher, March 3, 1975). In that same year Beasley's daughters presented to the Department of Ethnography of the British Museum the four volumes of Beasley's original catalogue, and his letters and notes on the museums and collections he visited. The catalogue contains important information about Beasley's collecting in general as well as about specific objects. (For biographical information on Beasley, see Palmiera, 1975, Waterfield and King, 2006, and Starzecka et al., 2010.)

Literature:

Fagg, W. (1972): *Eskimo Art in the British Museum*, London

Graah, W.A. (1832): *Undersøgelses-Reise til Østkysten af Grønland. Efter Kongelig Befaling udført i Aarene 1828-31*. Copenhagen

Gulløv, H.C. (2004): *Grønlands Forhistorie*, Gyldendal, Copenhagen.

Meldgaard, J. (1960): *Eskimo Sculpture*. Methuen, London.

Meldgaard, J., Ed. (1972): *Gustav Holm: Konebådsekspektionen. Etnologisk skitse af Angmagsalikerne*. (Gustav Holm: The Umiak Expedition. Ethnologic Sketch of the Anmassalik Eskimos), Rhodos, Copenhagen.

Meldgaard, J., Ed. (1985): *The Gustav Holm Collection. Objects collected by the Umiak-Expedition to Ammassalik 1883-85*. The Greenland Secretariat, National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen.

Møbjerg, T., Rosing, J., and Franceschi, G. (2001): *Folk Art in Greenland throughout a Thousand Years*, Walther König, Köln.

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Petersen, J. (1957): *Ujuâts Dagbøger fra Østgrønland 1894-1935*, Det Grønlandske Selskabs Skrifter 19, Charlottenlund.

Starzecka, D.C., Neich, R., and Pendergast, M. (2010): *The Maori Collections of the British Museum*, British Museum Press, London.

Thalbitzer, W.: The Ammassalik Eskimo. *Meddelelser om Grønland*, Vol. 39, 1914, and Vol. 40, 1923.

Waterfield, H., and King, J.C.H. (2006): *Provenance*, Somogy, Paris.

ANGMAGSUK Collection: East Greenland -

20726 Obtained in Eschbunde with the National -
-Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark by Thomas
Thomason, Director. - The objects are derived
from the collection made on the spot by.

G. Holm, 1824-5. G. Arndrup, 1892-1900. and
J. P. Jensen, Danish Resident Agent, 1894-1900.

1. Wornam knife: CARMIN wooden handle, two legs
blade mended with sinew. see Holm Coll. 1824/5 MO -
2. Wooden Plate: - ILLIARINNAQ having strips of ivory
pegged to the edge. MO -
3. Snow goggles: - 4 leather thong "ITTAAR" M -
4. Eye shade of wood. 4 leather thong. "IMLEKITTAN" M -
5. Bone combs: - ITTAARUTIN H -
6. Seal skins sheath for a hunting knife. "POORAN" M -
7. Man's knife: - iron blade in two pieces, wood handle
with serrated grip. "PILAA'TAT" M -
8. Man's knife: - small iron blade set in a bone
handle. "PILAA'TAT" E
9. Bow drill set: - Uplete. The bow of wood inlaid with ivory
& having ivory ends, drill stick of ivory ends & iron
point, mouth piece made from a seals knuckle
bone. original leather thong. "PUTOORUTIN" MA -
10. Finger protector: - double worn when using a knife
an ornamental band connects the two.
called "TIKKILI POORAN" made of seal skin. E
11. Needle skin, "BERTCEEUWIK" oblong piece of dressed skin
decorated with white skin. below hangs a three
pronged fork of Bone "TIKKIWEE" on which the thin ole
guards, "TIKIN" are hung. one accompanies the
specimen. H -
12. Bag of seal intestine "An ornamental top" "IPARANWIN" M -
13. . . . skin. Flat, ornamented with a design in

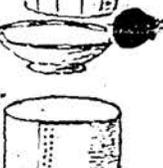
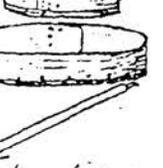
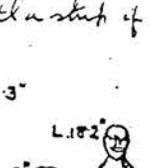
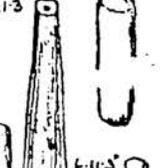
1726.

— ANCMAGSALIK Coll contd.

- 20. 7. 26 Fire making set: "INNERII" the block of wood.
 14^{A/B} "NEEUTAA" the drill stick; "NAQUII-AA" the iron bar.
 "YIMAAWIAA" the hide cord. "ARCAARA" the two handles MO -
- 15 Spoon for soup + blubber. made from a bears scapula.
 called "QATIWAARISARTER" M -
- 16 Wooden scoop for household use. The edge has
 been neatly repaired. E
- 17 Large spear thrower. "AJATCIN": the sides edged w/ M - -
 strips of wavy. an old piece.
- 18 Wooden plug for a wounded seal. "NAATERSEET" E
- 19 Wooden oval vessel for meat + blubber. "PERTAQ." H -
- 20 Wooden model of a Bear. M -
- 21 . . . Bird. M -
- 22 . . . Bucket. 4 iron handle inlaid M -
 with Ivory.
- 23 Ivory: crude model of a seal. part of the ornamental E
 work on a pail or other object.
- 24 Ivory: small snuff tube, ornamented with dots.
 called "TUPAARISIWIK" G -
- 25 Wooden Doll or Amulet, small male figure M -
- 26 M -
- 27 M -
- 28 Female M -
- 29 Drum: "QILAA'N". The skin part repaired. otherwise a A -
 good specimen. additional for repair. N R -
- 30 Toy: Two birds facing each other. loosely fixed to N -
 two rods. called "PUKUTARTAN".

- 31 Central Esquimaux. W. woman's knife. Ivory handle MO -
 upper legs. collected by the Thule Expedition.
- 32 West Greenland. woman's knife. W. European trade H -
 blade, mounted in an ivory handle.

COLD
551K

	How Acquired	Bill Date	Observations
	Given by Mrs. H. G. Beasley, Dudley Hotel, Havn, Sumner	3.10.36	1-17 ESKIMO, ANGMAGSSALIK, E. GREENLAND
	index in Lab 5 checked 1950	19.12.1932	2.
		19.12.1932	3.
		28-20.7.26 (sic)	4.
		26-20.7.26	5.
		19.12.1932	6. "PITORNATERUT" "TUPILAK - the embodiment of an evil spirit half raven and half dead child."
		14.10.1933	7. "enna tub - QOOLORPIK"
		2-20.7.26	8. "ILULIARINNAQ" (?)
		9-20.7.26	9. "PERTAQ"
		19.12.1932	10. Lumber tray
		3.10.36	11.
			

with a strip of

L.173
L.182

L.213

L.115

12. } Probably belong together - old numbers agree.
13. }

14. "AJATCIN"

15.

16.

17. Blade marked "J.E. Möller & Co. København"



From the 1899 C.G. Amdrup excavation of the Nualik house ruin (Meldgaard, 1960, Fig. 44)



From the Holm collection (Meldgaard, 1985) From the 1892 Ryder collection (Møjberg et al., 2001, Fig. 157)