A Piece of Greenland? Making Marketable and Artisan Gemstones

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the emergence of a Greenlandic mineral resource landscape against the background of the current establishment of an industrial ruby mine in Greenland. Anthropological fieldwork combined with a close reading of scientific reports, articles, and geological assessments about Greenlandic gemstones show a recurrent feature, namely that Greenlandic minerals get scaled and valued in ambiguous ways. This ambiguity is telling of a type of Danish (post-)colonial activity, even if such geological mapping was and is motivated by a dream of welfare, development, and economic sustainability shared by Danish experts and Greenlandic politicians alike. An overall point is to argue that the very practice of describing mineral resources also configures their perceived value and posits a yardstick by which to measure their potential.

KEYWORDS

handicraft, (post)-colonialism, rubies, small-scale mining, *tugtupite*, value, Denmark

Introduction: A Greenlandic Gemstone Landscape in the Making

In 1605, the king of Denmark-Norway sponsored three ships to explore the Greenlandic coast in response to rumours of mountains of silver and gold. The disappointment was huge among the royal investors when the ships returned with a cargo of pyrite, also called fool's gold. This early dream of an unexplored Arctic Eldorado beyond Europe has lived on in various forms. Since 2004, exploration activities leading to the establishment of a new ruby mine in Greenland have attracted the attention of geologists, administrators, policy-makers, investors, and local treasure hunters who work in different ways to develop the gem industry in the country. In this emergent situation, the Greenlandic landscape is being re-visited, re-organized and re-told. From being a country traditionally understood to live off hunting and fishing, for centuries channelled out into a global market, renewed interests in the lands as opportunities for mining have been intensely

stimulated by the public authorities since the 1990s, spurring political strategies to attract international extraction activities (e.g. Greenland Minex News 1992, 1993; see also: Nuttall 2012a; Sejersen 2014; Bjørst 2015). The current making of the industrial ruby mine is therefore not simply the default effect of a rare geology containing rubies and pink sapphires. The mine is also a carefully coordinated result of both historical Danish geological interests in Greenland, mainly through the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland, and an intensified Greenlandic official strategy to appeal to international investors and companies.

During my annual anthropological fieldwork in Greenland undertaken between 2013 and 2017, I found that the stimulated business potential has also attracted the local population in Greenland, who look for fortunes inland and explore new territories. Not least, they try to find out how to operate in juridical territories that seek to regulate and process the ancient valuables in store in the ground. The local interest is partly due to an important difference between the gemstones and other mineral resources of the country, such as for instance zinc, uranium, and iron. As anthropologist Elizabeth Ferry has also described (2013), in contrast to these industrial minerals, gemstones do not necessarily demand high-tech skills or large mining operations. Gemstones, I was continually told, can be collected without raising a huge amount of (foreign) capital. Thus, equipped with backpacks and hammers, an increasing number of small-scale miners are taking to the mountains. Stories about the abundance of rubies and other gemstones circulate, and geological maps indicating potential ruby resources are published and studied by professionals as well as lay-people. In consequence, potentially gem-rich parts of what was unmarked and commonly owned land are now being divided into legal entities and concessions granted to both small- and big-scale miners according to regulation schemes still in the making (Strandsberg 2014; Bricchet 2018).

The shared and conflicting interests in the Greenlandic underground have opened up the country's geology to an important question about what sort of natural resource Greenlandic rubies and other minerals are (cf. Ferry 2013; Vallard et al. in press). Overall, this is the question I address in this article, with a focus on how Greenlandic gemstones have appeared in reports, in jewellers' assessments, and in the work of local gemstone organizations and small-scale collectors. In particular, I explore how Greenlandic gemstones have been compared internationally by scientists and experts in written documents from

the 1960s and up until today.¹ Further, I bring this historical making of a Greenlandic mineral resource landscape to bear on present-day concerns with designing and implementing a suitable legal system for licensing, taxation, export, and marketing, and with concerns for Greenlandic economic sovereignty and welfare. Having been out of sight for billions of years, the Greenlandic rubies have now become a lively driver for activity and for thinking Northern resource landscapes.

To anticipate my analysis, I identify a particular recurrent feature in assessments of the Greenlandic mineral landscape, namely the highly different, indeed often colliding, ways in which Greenlandic rubies and other gemstones get scaled. Ferry (2005) points to a similar distinction of said minerals being of either high or low value. But in her Mexican case, this difference accords to what the target of the mining operation is and what its side effects are. Ignited by local Malagasy miners' inquiring into the (high) value of natural sapphires, anthropologist Andrew Walsh (2010) explores the mysteries of gemstone value and how materiality can operate regardless of human intentions. In this article situated in Greenland – a country also haunted by colonialism in various ways – I argue that the ambiguous values ascribed to gemstones can be explored along different (post-)colonial lines, sometimes cast as gems of world-class quality ready for international markets and foreign investors; sometimes reduced to local handicraft, souvenirs, and mere objects of personal affection. Taken together, these features, articulated in historical records as well as during my contemporary fieldwork, speak to the nature of Greenlandic gemstones, telling stories of a Danish practice of (post)colonialism, a global coloured-gem-mining industry possibly on the rise, and a group of volatile small-scale miners and collectors struggling to get a share of the value generated from mineral deposits. My overall aim, then, is to offer a fieldwork-based reading of historical material to revitalize the history of geology in Greenland with specific view to exploring how mineral resources have been made and valued through well-intended mapping exercises of foreign experts. Accordingly, I explore the Greenlandic gemstone landscape as a particular welfare frontier (Hastrup and Lien, this volume). In doing so, I engage a notion of the post-colonial that enables thinking about difference and sameness in new ways (cf. Verran 2002), showing the unsettled nature of gemstones in Greenland. In the next section, before going more into the historical assessments of the Greenlandic mineral landscape, I introduce my fieldwork setting. This paves the way for a continuous conversation

between my present-day fieldwork and published records, implying a classical genealogical approach (e.g. Foucault 1969).

Rubies and Regulations: Bringing Gemstones Home – and to the Market

During fieldwork in 2015, 2016, and 2017, my main concern was the last decade's intensified interests in ruby deposits in the area close to Qeqertarsuaq in West Greenland. My interest was ignited by the establishment and opening of one of the first high-tech industrial mines for coloured gems in the world, eventually named Aappaluttoq, mainly financed by a Canadian firm with a subsidiary company based in Greenland that held the license to first explore and since exploit the area. At the time of my fieldwork, the establishment of a camp, road, and mining facilities was well underway, carried out by a Norwegian-owned family company through a subsidiary company. In 2016 – some months before the planned production would start – the Canadian company went bankrupt. After a few weeks of negotiation with the government the Norwegian company could announce that they were the new owners. The turbulent incident was a culmination of months of failed fundraising and a fundamental uncertainty as to whether the Greenlandic rubies could be introduced to the global market and what prices they might fetch.

Until very recently, the international market for coloured gems had only been supplied by 'mom and pop mining operations', as a geologist once framed it for me, indicating a kind of small-scale extraction of a family-like nature. But now with this Greenlandic ruby mine, and another high-tech ruby mine opening in 2011–12 in Mozambique, times are apparently changing. For the coloured-gemstone industry, a large-scale investment in a relatively big mine such as Aappaluttoq means a long-term and not least stable supply of rubies to an international market and its big ruby buying companies, as the former director of the Greenlandic company told me. Such steady supply is in stark contrast to a traditionally volatile ruby market, procuring its stones from poor countries often torn by conflict and depending on middlemen and numerous small-scale miners' success in finding the precious stones.

When the 'Act on Greenland Self-Government' entered into force in 2009 – an important liberating step away from Denmark, its former colonizer – it was of great importance that the field of mineral

resources was the first case area taken over by the government of Greenland, as the then minister claimed (Berthelsen 2009a: 3, 2009b). On 1 January 2010, the ‘Act on Mineral Resources and Related Activities’ was adopted (Mineral of Resources Act), replacing the former Danish act on the area. Needless to say, the making of the Act generated a lot of debate in the country. Negotiations and disagreements flourished (and still do) between politicians, bureaucrats, companies, non-government organizations and the public. Anthropologist Mark Nuttall (2012b) remarks that these discussions, hearings, and other signs of a lively democracy have often been imbued with an atmosphere of mistrust and frustration. During my fieldworks in Nuuk, this sense continued to emerge (see also Wilson 2015; Bjørst 2015), but since this article was written complaints from local stone enthusiasts have been heard and led to changes in the law. One example of this frustration was the closing down of the ‘Mineralogical Society of Greenland’, who found that as a result of the Act their activities were bureaucratized to such an extent that their hobby interest was made difficult to pursue (Redaktionen 2011). Their purpose, to which I return in the end of the article, was to assemble and expand local interest and knowledge of Greenlandic stones through prospecting courses, trade shows, and a bi-annual members’ magazine.

Another opponent to the new Act was the Greenland-based protest group ‘The Association of 16. August’ that collaborates with the British-based non-institutional network Fair Jewellery Action. The association was founded by a group of locals who protested against the mining policies for their favouring of industrial mining and multinational companies at the expense of supporting an inclusive and vibrant gemstone industry in Greenland; to the association, this amounts to abuse of power (Lowe and Doyle 2013; Choyt 2008). The name of the association stems from the day that a group of small-scale miners was removed by authorities from the area where the Canadian mining company had an exploration license and worked. The cases of the removal and an earlier confiscation of the collectors’ stones have only partly been tested by different juridical authorities (Brichet 2018). The potentials and governance of Greenlandic gemstones have, indeed, become fraught issues in and beyond Greenland. However, at issue is also a discussion about what even constitutes the country’s resource landscape. This is no new question, as we shall see in the next section, where I analyse historical valuations of Greenlandic gemstones to show that these have long been debatable objects.

Fieldwork on Arctic Treasure Hunting: Minerals in the Colony

Shortly after the Geological Survey's official and documented discovery of rubies in West Greenland in the 1960s, the Danish royal court jeweller Ove Dragsted was contacted by the Survey and asked to investigate the quality of the rubies found. In a report from the Survey published in 2014 about the finding of rubies, the jeweller is cited as saying back then that the rubies were of gem quality, but that he found them too small for cutting and polishing (Appel and Ghisler 2014: 14). In 1967, a year after the ruby find, Dragsted also published an article with the title 'Precious Stones in Greenland' appearing in the popular Danish journal *Tidsskriftet Grønland*. Today, the terms 'precious' and 'semi-precious' stones have been abandoned by gemological associations around the world, realizing that all kinds of stones can potentially be extremely valuable and thus abandoning an old standard hierarchy of pre-given value.

In his text, Dragsted too expresses such a relativizing perspective by writing that only our human imagination sets the limit for assessing value. He concludes that a stone can be precious 'if someone finds it beautiful or peculiar and carries it as a piece of jewellery' (Dragsted 1967: 116). With this statement, Dragsted frames the Greenlandic stones as having a potential from the get go. Deciding what is precious is open to individual imagination and affection, but, he remarks, is often guided by social convention so that, for instance, 'stones that are transparent have always attracted the interest of human beings' (ibid.). Other humanly recognized qualities that he comments on are hardness, bright colours and not least rarity: 'a costly gem is a stone that is rarely found' (ibid.: 119). Interestingly, the valuation of Greenlandic gems is both determined by a simple market logic of supply and demand where the cost is defined by recognized qualities such as rarity, and flexible in that human imagination might treasure any stone.

My reading of Dragsted's article suggests that the Greenlandic resource landscape comes alive as crisscrossed by what I might, for want of a better phrase, call Greenland's colonial past. By this I mean a long-lived, Danish, most often well-intended interest in exploring and exploiting the natural resources of Greenland – officially a colony until 1953 when the Arctic land, with an amendment to the constitution, changed status to being a county in the Kingdom of Denmark (cf. Olesen 2019). Dragsted's text starts out by telling how industrious

dwarfs in old myths worked hard deep inside the mountains and found sparkling precious stones in all colours. These myths, he writes, are from Europe where folklore has always depicted mountains as containing enormous treasures. 'Greenlandic Mountains also contain treasures' (ibid.: 115), he mentions and continues by listing some of the minerals that have been mined: the country has produced the mineral *cryolit* much prized in industrial production of aluminium. Its host rocks too are decorative, but too fragile to use in jewellery. Copper has been mined but not yet been found in association with a particular chemical compound that can make the beautiful *malakit* known from Congo.

The text then mentions brown coal from Greenland. Here, Dragsted remarks that it might be strange to mention brown coal in relation to jewels, but that in England one can find a particular kind of brown coal that is beautiful and shiny as velvet when polished. Summing up this global excursion, Dragsted states: 'Unfortunately, the Greenlandic brown coal is not of this type. But it is not impossible that one day someone in Greenland will find some brown coal somewhere that can be polished beautifully' (ibid.: 115). Mentioned next is rock crystal (clear quartz), which is cited as something beautiful that Greenland can offer. Curiously, he then concludes that rock crystals can be used in 'cheap jewellery to imitate diamonds . . . but unfortunately, no indication has yet been made of this kind [diamond-like] of deposits' in Greenland (ibid.: 118). The article continues describing various Greenlandic stones, but every section ends by stating that this or that mineral or stone is not costly, too small, or of bad quality. At best, we learn that the good quality of the mineral has not *yet* been found in Greenland, whereby a door for future potentials is left open. But so far, Dragsted's catalogue mainly includes Greenlandic rocks that do not fulfil the standards for being used in jewellery.

From Dragsted's perspective, a potential gem-rich future is to be realized via other projects, since exploring for gems is usually not the primary target; for that gems are too rarely found (ibid.: 120). It is remarkable that Dragsted's article is about precious stones from Greenland, but continuously mentions beautiful stones that are unfortunately not (yet) found there. What is interesting then is the implicit yardstick by which Greenlandic gem potential is continuously measured, and according to which readers learn of a scarce country that lacks what other nations have – at least for now. What appears is a vast country that is only poorly discovered and industrialized. Maybe more than gems, Greenland lacks 'other projects' that *could* unveil

gems. As such, gems in Dragsted's article seem to be a product of either luck (you may stumble upon them) or of increased modernization (new construction projects will unearth them).

Indeed, describing Greenland as a vast unexplored country has been a driver for many Arctic explorers and is an often repeated trope (K. Hastrup 2013). A geology professor from Denmark also addressed the 'problem' of the vast unexplored country in an article published in 1954. Realizing that it would take many years for geologists to trawl through Greenland, the professor suggested that local people could help geologists find 'valuable things' if they were taught to not only look for plant and animal life in the landscape (Sørensen 1954: 223). The idea that locals' knowledge can be used to find geological formations is also one of the rationales in the present-day 'Ujarassiorit – The National Mineral Hunt' initiated in 1989 (Clausen and Stendahl 2009). Every year, residents of Greenland can send a rock sample to the Ministry of Natural Resources who in collaboration with the Geological Survey analyse the samples and award a prize for the most promising; in other words a sample with high content of desired minerals that might lead to further exploration. As stated on the ministry's homepage:

The collected samples have on several occasions caused foreign companies to initiate exploration projects in Greenland . . . Ujarassiorit can be characterised as grassroot science, the goal being to continue to take advantage of the population's local knowledge and use it in the geologists hunt for new mineral deposits, and also promote knowledge and stimulate the interest for minerals, rocks and new exploration in Greenland. (Naalakkersuisut 2008)

The mineral hunt is presented here as a well-meaning initiative to spur public interest and a sense of ownership to Greenlandic minerals. Further, as a matter of course, the fact that foreign companies might start exploring is presented as desirable. However, these implied benefits were contested by some of the small-scale miners I talked to. They feel that their knowledge is simply exploited in return for crumbs. Real treasures are better kept secret; 'why give your coordinates to a foreign company?' as one of the small-scale miners summed up. Tellingly, in this comment the self-rule and foreign companies are thought of as one, indicating a question of whom the *Ujarassiorit* serves as a public search for valuable deposits. What we see here is a discussion of whether the inhabitants of the country will prosper from the interventions of foreign companies; mistrust in such shared benefit is repeatedly voiced in public debate about various natural resources

and industries in Greenland. One answer to the question of why the local public should reveal mineral discoveries to companies and the self-rule is that foreign investment is desperately needed and believed to improve the nation's economy, especially if the often-voiced Greenlandic wish to become economically independent of Denmark is to be met (e.g. Rosing et al. 2014).

Back to Dragsted, who also addressed rubies. Laconically, he stated that Greenland has rubies, 'but until now only small ruby-crystals have been seen' (Dragsted 1967: 119). His lack of excitement is noteworthy since his article was published only a year after the initial find of rubies in 1966. As mentioned above, Dragsted was asked to investigate the found rubies, which he evaluated as being of gem quality, but too small for cutting and polishing. Even his close contact with the survey that was putting energy and resources into prospecting the area and attracting international companies – an effort that was rewarded by a Canadian company being given a license to explore for rubies, platinum, and chrome as soon as 1969 (Jûlut 1969) – apparently does not for Dragsted ignite enough hope of a future potential.

During my fieldwork, another important stone – the *Tugtupite* – has continuously featured in conversations. Termed 'Greenland's national stone' by one interlocutor, and in Dragsted's text introduced as discovered in the 1960s by a Danish geologist who also gave the stone its name (Dragsted 1967: 124), the *Tugtupite* is a rarity. Reacting to the sun's rays, its colour changes between red and white hues, and due to these fluorescent effects Dragsted emphasizes it as a curiosity. This quality, Dragsted suggests, might warrant that future poets refer to it as 'the *Dannebrog's* stone' (ibid.: 125) – *Dannebrog* being the name of the red and white Danish national flag, which at the time was also the flag of Greenland. While the *Tugtupite* might thus appear in poetry, the stone stands no chance as a real gem, according to Dragsted. It is not translucent and full of cracks, making it less valuable. In an article from 1982 about the *Tugtupite*, we learn that Dragsted presented the stone to an international audience at a gemological conference in Barcelona in 1966 (Jensen and Petersen 1982: 90), but from Dragsted's article published a year later, it seems that the stone did not spur international interest. Instead, he concludes that *Tugtupite* is not suitable for the world market, but as a Greenlandic specialty it might be able to achieve a modest position with collectors, and furthermore, in the future, it might appear in jewellery, partly in Greenland, partly in Denmark down south (ibid.: 125).

Dragsted concludes his article saying that from his review of Greenlandic stones, there is nothing that encourages him to claim ‘that we have found a world item. Thus, nothing animates us to start a big treasure hunt’ (ibid.: 126). The view that Greenlandic stones remain a Greenlandic specialty with no world market potential makes treasure hunting literally an uphill task. Accordingly, Dragsted, who apparently knows what ‘world items’ are since they are not found in Greenland, suggests that the country might eventually become home to a small production. Maybe one day some Greenlandic jeweller might create a small stone-polishing facility, which ‘is not that difficult to establish, as long as one only wants to polish cabochons’ (ibid.). A bigger polishing facility, on the other hand, would demand availability of beautiful stones in large numbers, which the country in Dragsted’s view cannot supply – at least not yet.

Interestingly, discussions about cabochons also appeared during my fieldwork in Nuuk in 2015. Cabochons have been and are still a widespread way, also in Greenland, to polish especially opaque stones, and they are relatively easy to encase in jewellery. The low requirement for costly machinery and skills makes cabochons well suited for ‘handicraft’. When I introduced ‘handicraft’ as a local method of processing stones, one small-scale miner exclaimed: ‘This is precisely the problem; the devaluation of our stones. I’m sick and tired of cabochons – that round crap! Look at a faceted stone – that’s high class!’ Of course, he was aware that cabochons can be of high value, but contrary to a cabochon that can be opaque, a faceted stone requires transparency in order to sparkle and gain value. But at this moment he was furious about the low level of ambition often but not always encased in cabochons. Like several other small-scale miners, he had invested in a facet machine and learned the skills by taking a course, reading internet sources and books, and through trial-and-error experience. What we see here, again, is an intriguing discussion about the potentials of Greenlandic gems, and the expertise to find, identify, process, and market them.

My point is that an intensely complex Greenlandic gemstone geology is partly made up by a Danish jeweller who wanted to ‘do something for Greenlandic stones’, as a Danish newspaper phrased it on his 80-year birthday (Editorial 1993). Meanwhile, in the article mentioned above, his expert assessment of the country’s deposits downscaled them to collector’s objects and handicraft items. Arranging polishing courses and investing a lot in the Greenlandic gems, Dragsted did his

utmost to develop the gem industry in Greenland, and the point here is not to deny his (or others') work. Rather, I want to highlight the ambiguous nature of aspirations for world-class gemstones. In present-day Greenland, too, there are discussions about this, as we saw above. In the next section, I elaborate on this discussion through a closer look at the concept of 'handicraft' and its role in scaling the Greenlandic gemstones – strung out between standardized global investment objects and local curiosities.

Souvenirs, Sentiments and Art: A Love for Greenland through Handicraft

During the 1970s, before Greenlandic Home Rule, the Royal Greenlandic Trade (KGH), which held a state monopoly on trade in and out of Greenland from 1774 until 1950, hosted several seminars on handicraft upon request from the advisory assembly in Greenland (*Landsrådet*). In a report on handicraft by the KGH, I read that sales from handicraft were an income not to be neglected (KGH 1973: 3). The report thereby indicates a double quality of handicraft, namely that it is both an important kind of activity *and* one that is easily neglected due to its non-institutionalized and non-professional character. Over the last couple of years income from handicraft had been halved due to problems with marketing of and trade in the products (*ibid.*: 2). The report was commissioned as a result of frustrations and missed opportunities. Therefore, a committee to 'investigate possibilities for marketing of handicraft for tourists' (*ibid.*: 2) was set up in 1969, and their recommendations formed the background of the report's messages. Among other things, this 'souvenir committee', as it was named, (*Landsrådets Souvenirudvalg*) stressed that for the time being the manufacturing of handicraft 'has been very heterogeneous and ought to follow common guidelines, where especially the "Greenlandic" should be highlighted . . . It is emphasised that increased sale should not lead to a depreciation or a shallowing of the handicraft production, and that the Greenlandic look will not be weakened by influence from abroad' (*ibid.*). With the report's aim at a homogenization and institutionalization, a conservatism or perhaps rather a cultural traditionalism were explicitly introduced into the homes of the creators-cum-producers whose small production units should mimic the standardization of industrial assembly lines. In a way, the recommendations aim at a professionalization without making professionals,

but rather streamlining and optimizing the handicraft machinery to make more of the same (stressing the producing quality over a free style creative quality). In Danish, the word used for handicraft is '*husflid*', literally meaning 'house diligence'; not to be confused with arts and craft (in Danish: *kunsthåndværk*). My point here is that we see an interesting movement of industrial production techniques into the homes of the producers, who increase the value of the country's raw material by processing it – as a standardized yet uniquely Greenlandic product – 'a souvenir for visitors', as it is also called in the report.

Together with the Ministry for Greenland in Copenhagen, the KGH had 'succeeded in hiring the former reindeer breeder, painter, and author, Jens Rosing, who knows all the Greenlandic possibilities – both with regard to the raw material infrastructure and the populations' craftsmanlike and artistic skills' (ibid.: 6) to explore both the Canadian Inuit's handicraft business and look into the Greenlandic activities in order to come up with suggestions. He was also asked to assess various raw materials in the country, since initiatives to prevent bigger sea mammals from extinction had prompted a shortage of supply of bones and teeth especially from narwhale and walrus – traditional materials for handicraft (ibid.: 7). As a classic middleman: bilingual, educated in Denmark and knowing the Greenlandic natural resources, the Greenlandic population, and 'their' skills, he was seen as the right man for the job. In the appendix to the report, Rosing writes on possibilities of promoting handicraft in Greenland and interestingly he directly comments on this cultural traditionalism in relation to jewellery: 'Jewellery production in silver with enclosed stones can be a new way out that must carefully be considered, but some might probably accentuate that the Greenlandic tradition thereby will be disrupted. To this it must be noted that new challenges in many cases can give rise to unexpected gratifying results' (Rosing 1973: 4). Rosing further makes an analogy of Aron to Kangeq, a celebrated Greenlandic artist, who learned to draw on paper even though he was used to carving out objects.

This new engagement with pen and paper did not make Aron less of a Greenlander, and the result became of such a high standard, 'that one must say that it was world class. Maybe with silver smithing and stone polishing one could create something new. Polishing of stones has in fact been introduced, but unfortunately the results are largely insignificant for the time being' (ibid.). Rosing concludes his report by warning against using a tone of "This is how you should do!" . . . but one must give information in a way that gives rise to ideas' (ibid.:

5) – a view potentially colliding with the cultural traditionalism that the committee behind the report wished for. As such, this also reads as a note of caution from Rosing, reminding us of the (post-)colonial atmosphere in which this report on Greenlandic handicraft was produced. Rosing's analogy to Aron is striking in this regard, as it elegantly transforms the notion of local handicraft, mainly understood as souvenirs for tourists in search for mementos of travels, to art of world-class quality that can move spectators who may not necessarily have visited the country. In terms of my overall focus on the tension between perceptions of Greenlandic gemstones as either world-market items or local objects, this leap from local souvenir and handicraft to world-class art is important. It reminds us that Dragsted's evaluation of Greenlandic minerals is a particular perspective on the resources of the land, rather than an objective mapping. As such, Dragsted's views can be challenged, for example by way of a slight shift in focus that connects crafted objects from Greenland to world-class artwork.

In 1981, two geologists from the Geological Survey also thought that it was time to revisit Greenlandic gemstones (Secher et al. 1981: 106). From their shelves, they assembled more than 25 potential gemstones on the table. They decided to show the Greenlandic gem potential via some examples with raw stones and polished mounted pieces. A Danish jeweller was engaged and tasked with using a broad selection of Greenlandic stones to show the span of possibilities and create both professional and more simple jewellery that could inspire people of interest. The collection was explicitly to be used in strengthening the interest for Greenlandic gems. In the project, Greenlandic gems were once again directly addressed as stretched out between attracting international or merely local interest. The team asserted that: 'For most gem materials the interest is limited only to the Greenlandic population and to people who have visited the country. A few materials, however, might be of international concern. The idea with this report is to show that gemstones from the former group are the most important and thus in focus here' (ibid.: 105). This matter-of-fact typology of levels of interest in what Greenlandic geology has to offer, based on life-long experiences with the Greenlandic rocky landscape, is another expression of the span between international potential and local significance, that we also saw in Dragsted's and Rosing's writings.

The evaluation of quality that we see in the 1981 article is not restricted to stones, but with regard to stones and minerals it has been difficult to get hold of raw materials of the right quality, simply

because laymen do not have the knowledge needed, nor access to books on the subject. Part of the problem, apparently, is a knowledge deficit among the general Greenlandic public, who may have a love for the country and thus an interest in its gems, but no proper guidance. In consequence, the team cast their evaluation as an introduction to the field, hoping to expand knowledge. Interestingly, they are inspired by Rosing, mentioned above for having invented the concept ‘*Nunarput-jewellery*’, which literally means: ‘our land’s jewellery’. In the authors’ interpretation that is ‘jewellery that by choice and origin of material are characteristic for Greenland’ (ibid: 107). This concept seems to fit nicely with the authors’ idea of local interest and love of the country. But how do the authors further address the span between international interest and local significance? They write:

... the Greenlandic gems are of both good quality and have a high degree of rarity, which is why a high local demand is to be expected if the product gets known and possibly marketed either as raw material or in jewellery. Several of the gems mentioned here could certainly provide a basis for a local trade at decent prices – as it is already the case for *Tugtupite*. But in most cases, it still applies that stones do not need to be precious, i.e. priced, in order to create an extraordinarily beautiful and “valuable” piece of jewellery ... we are interested in emphasising the emotional value tied to personally collecting stones and creating one’s own jewellery. The fact that the value of a faceted ruby or diamond can be ten thousands of kroner, by contrast, is of no importance in this context. (ibid.: 110)

In this rich paragraph we see how the authors assess importance along affective lines, which might make a stone ‘valuable’. This affective value is interestingly contrasted with economic value, which the authors see as of little importance in this context. The quotation marks around valuable are telling, and again it seems as if the only obstacle to a (strictly) local demand is the lack of knowledge about the (strictly) personal satisfaction that may come from wearing a piece of your country as jewellery. The authors, well knowing that many of the Greenlandic gemstones are rare, see a local market potential, but one that is cut off from the potential of the highly priced valuable faceted stones. Even though no highly priced gems had been found in Greenland when they wrote the article, one wonders if the individual collectors mentioned in the quote would operate with the same clear-cut distinction between affective and economic value. This raises the paradox that Greenlandic gemstones are seen both as a potential to boost via raising awareness, and as limited to instilling an affective love of collecting a place – a piece of Greenland. With

slightly different emphasis, we have seen that historical articulations of just this tension make them a valuable tool for understanding what Greenlandic rubies are also today. In the next section, which serves as a conclusion to this article, I return to present-day concerns with valuing Greenlandic rubies. Here, the tensions implied in how Greenlandic gemstones get scaled make it into the very legal frameworks that regulate the mineral practices in Greenland.

A Piece of Greenland?

In 2000 a Danish enthusiast and geologist Bjarne Ljungdahl, living in Greenland for decades, was one of the initiators of the Mineralogical Society of Greenland – an amateurs’ association wanting to enlighten people. For 11 years, the Society, driven and financed by its members, published articles and arranged trade fairs, fieldtrips, and courses where people traded, discussed, and learned about stones. A few times, two or three members were sent to international gem shows where they sold Greenlandic stones – these travels were subsidized by the Greenlandic Home Rule and seen as a way to promote Greenlandic stones, apparently an issue of national concern. In a book published in 2005 by the Society about gems of Greenland, a year after the Canadian company initiated their exploration for rubies and sapphires, Ljungdahl states that the tradition of looking for gems in Greenland is recent, which might be due to few findings of valuable stones. Further, the surface in Greenland is dominated by ancient rocks that leave fractures in the worn down stones which decrease the potential gem quality (Ljungdahl 2005: 8; 14). Yet, quite a few stones distinguish themselves by rarity – 30 minerals are found only in Greenland (Ljungdahl 2003: 4) – making Ljungdahl see a market potential for collectors’ minerals. Few are the attempts at internationalizing the Greenlandic gems, and as of yet no formal education to equip professionals exists in Greenland. In light of rarity, collectors’ potential, and the possible improvement of local skills, Ljungdahl enthusiastically stresses that these are exciting times where much work is ahead. Like Secher et al.’s article (1981), the book is therefore meant as a help and inspiration for the gemstone enthusiasts of Greenland (Ljungdahl 2005: 6). During fieldwork in the homes of small-scale miners, I have often seen the book and an associated poster displaying minerals of Greenland also published by the Society. Indeed, the Society has made it into the homes of people where it enlightens, as was Ljungdahl’s aim.

However, as an effect of the new Mineral Act in 2009 the Society was closed down, because, as Ljungdahl termed it in a public newspaper: ‘We cannot have association activities that go against the letter of the law!’ (Ljungdahl in Redaktionen 2011). And in another article, he elaborated:

The authorities make it impossible for us – local small-scale enthusiasts – to continue our work in stone collecting and jewellery production, since very complicated permission procedures and licenses, where all applicants are checked up on in all kinds of ways, are now required. There simply ought to be a triviality limit as to when locals need special permission. For a while, about three years, we have had a dialogue, or perhaps more accurately, the authorities have dictated our possibilities. This lack of will to engage in actual negotiations means that we will no longer spend our time on this, when there is no concern with locals’ needs, and only multinational companies are given priority. (Ljungdahl in Høegh-Dam 2011)

In order to unfold this rich paragraph, I need to go a few years back. Up until 2009, all residents of Greenland could collect, mine, and sell stones from the commonly owned land without further permission, given that collectors did not violate any licensed exploitation sites, and that collecting was of non-industrial character (Mineral Resource Act from 1991).² But when self-rule was about to be established and the new mineral law was being written during 2009,³ the Canadian company with exploration license for rubies and pink sapphires had proven that gems of Greenland were potentially extremely valuable – indeed, so precious as to trigger the construction of one of the world’s first high-tech ruby mines on a tiny licensed area the size of a football field. Many small-scale miners confirmed this idea of high value in a small area, by saying things like: ‘A backpack is *more* than enough for me if it contains quality rubies’, while they searched the internet to give me updated ruby prices. The fact that one *could* find very valuable stones without big investments, business planning, or formal geological education, changed the regulatory landscape. The new law, accordingly, made any quarrying and collection of fixed stones without having a license illegal, causing Ljungdahl to give up his enlightenment project.

Dealing with such condensed values it is no wonder that what an interlocutor termed ‘ruby psychosis’ thrives among both big- and small-scale miners. But it was also this extremely condensed value that the new law intended to control by extending the license system to the local population who were then to become registered as ‘small-scale

miners', rather than just 'local small-scale enthusiasts', as Ljungdahl termed members of the Society.

With the 2009 law any economical transaction of Greenlandic stones of any kind must be accompanied by a license covering the area where the minerals were found – also retrospectively.⁴ Filling a backpack might not demand investments of an industrial character, but the potentially high price of the resources of the land needed to be taxed and thereby redistributed to the benefit of all Greenlanders. A license system was seen as the way to secure and control this re-distribution, as argued by the then minister (Berthelsen 2009b; pers.com 4 October 2016). It was this bureaucratic licensing-control system that Ljungdahl criticized in the quote above – because it professionalized (and complicated) an activity that until then had only been a hobby. Even if the formal reason was that the country's riches should be taxed so that Greenland as a whole could benefit, according to Ljungdahl this amounted to an unjust favouring of multinational companies.

For my article as a whole, the Mineralogical Society's wish for 'a triviality limit' is therefore central. It substantiates the understanding that finding, collecting, processing, and possibly selling stones were considered like any other handicraft activity in Greenland, that is, as a means of supplementing the income, a matter of private collection, and indeed a way of inhabiting the country.

Other small-scale miners contested this triviality limit. What if, they asked, a small-scale collector had found an exceptional stone or worked up the skills of cutting and polishing stones, thereby multiplying their value? Why should such golden strikes be illegal? And why, they asked, did this possibility all of a sudden pose a problem for the law-makers, when it was not an issue before the Canadian company started their exploration programme? To these small-scale collectors – some of whom had been employed by the Canadian company to assist in the field, learning the tricks of the trade beyond those of local handicraft – a triviality limit would also be a surrender to the multinationals at the expense of local possibilities.

This story of the Mineralogical Society of Greenland colliding with the new law and the ensuing discussion of a triviality limit sums up my overall discussion of Greenlandic gems as being seen both as limited to local handicraft with emotional value and as potential 'world items', as Dragsted put it. On the one hand, the law is meant to regulate gemstone production to the benefit of the country and the locals; on the other hand even the small local enthusiasts must comply with

the rules that also apply to big-scale companies, making it laborious to accommodate the bureaucracy – and prohibiting a random golden strike without having made an application for a license.

What I have shown is a striking kind of ambivalence in the different valuations, degrees of professionalization, and potentials for internationalization and marketization of Greenlandic gems. The notion of a ‘triviality limit’ and the fact that this compromise was rejected, eventually closing down the Society, resulted in amendments to the law in 2016 that accommodated some of the critique. But taken together, the stories engaged with here materialize still unsettled questions such as: are Greenlandic gems trivial or not? Who are to benefit from the country’s mineral values? What are the appropriate yardsticks to measure and regulate this emergent mineral landscape? And what even counts as a piece of Greenland?

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Notes

1. All texts written in Danish are translated by the author.
2. Commentaries to §30, Act 1978. In the Act from 1991 (and the consolidation Act from 1998) the residents’ rights remains unchanged.
3. Already in March 2009 the administration in the Ministry of Mineral Resources made some standard terms for small-scale mining anticipating many of the things written into the 2009 Act (Råstofdirektoratet 2009).

4. In the ministry they called such stones ‘historical stones’ – i.e. stones collected before the 2009 law that suddenly could not be sold without seeking permission through the authorities (cf. Brichet 2018).

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