

Elatu's Funeral: A Glimpse of Inughuit-American Relations on Robert E. Peary's 1898–1902 Expedition

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ABSTRACT. In January 1901, American explorer Robert E. Peary was an active participant in an Inughuit funeral following the death of a young woman at his base at Fort Conger, Ellesmere Island. Peary's unpublished account of the funeral is the most detailed description of an Inughuit funeral before the introduction of Christianity and agrees in most details with other accounts of funerals from the region. Additionally, along with Peary's and Dr. T.S. Dedrick's journal entries from that time, the funeral and the circumstances surrounding it provide insight into the complex relationships between Peary, his American companions, Dedrick and Matthew Henson, and the Inughuit men and women who overwintered with them at Fort Conger.

Key words: Inughuit, Robert E. Peary, funeral, Matthew Henson, Fort Conger, Quttinirpaaq National Park, Ellesmere Island, Nunavut

RÉSUMÉ. En janvier 1901, l'explorateur américain Robert E. Peary a joué un rôle dans les funérailles d'une Inughuite après le décès d'une jeune femme à sa base de Fort Conger, sur l'île d'Ellesmere. Le récit inédit de Robert Peary à propos des funérailles constitue la description la plus détaillée de funérailles inughuites avant l'avènement du christianisme, et la plupart des détails coïncident avec d'autres récits de funérailles de la région. Grâce au récit de Robert Peary et à celui du Dr T.S. Dedrick retrouvé dans son journal intime de l'époque, les funérailles et les circonstances qui les entouraient jettent un regard sur les relations complexes qui existaient entre Robert Peary, ses compagnons américains, le Dr Dedrick et Matthew Henson, ainsi que les femmes et les hommes inughuits qui passaient l'hiver au Fort Conger avec eux.

Mots clés : Inughuit, Robert E. Peary, funérailles, Matthew Henson, Fort Conger, parc national Quttinirpaaq, île d'Ellesmere, Nunavut

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INTRODUCTION

There are few descriptions of Inughuit (Polar Inuit of northwestern Greenland) funerals before their conversion to Christianity starting in 1909, so a recently discovered account of an Inughuit funeral prepared by Robert E. Peary in January 1901 deserves some attention. The account describes the events of 17–20 January 1901, during which Peary was an active participant in the funeral of a young woman who died of apparent kidney disease at Peary's base at Fort Conger on Lady Franklin Bay, Ellesmere Island (USNA, 1900–02a). The woman's name was E'-la-tu in Peary's phonetic spelling, hereafter, Elatu; all other names are given here as they appear in the original documents. Peary's account is the most detailed extant description of traditional Inughuit funeral practices, and together with information from Peary's journals from that time, it throws light both on this rite and on the interpersonal relationships of the Inughuit and Peary and with his two American companions, Dr. Thomas S. Dedrick and Matthew Henson.

BACKGROUND

By the time the funeral took place, in January 1901, Peary had been in the Smith Sound/Nares Strait region for more than two years on his longest, most difficult, and ultimately least successful expedition. Although he did not yet know it, his wife Josephine was waiting for him some 250 miles to the south at Payer Harbour (Barr, 1982). Her relief expedition, which hoped to bring him home, had arrived there in the summer of 1900 but was forced to overwinter when the ship became frozen in. The party had yet to meet up with Peary, and she would not see him until the summer of 1901.

Peary, meanwhile, was farther north on Ellesmere Island, setting the stage for an attempt on the North Pole that spring (Peary, 1907). With him was a group of Inughuit men and women, as well as Henson and Dedrick. Although Peary had established a base at Etah, Greenland, in 1898, he, Henson, and Dedrick, along with varying numbers of Inughuit, had spent most of their time since their

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arrival on Ellesmere Island. They stayed first at Pim Island, where Peary's chartered ship *Windward* had overwintered in 1898–99, and then farther north at Fort Conger, Adolphus Greely's former base on Lady Franklin Bay, during the winter of 1900–01 (Bertulli et al., 2013). There Peary and his team rebuilt Greely's station to suit his needs, with individual wooden "houses" for Henson, Dedrick, and the Inuit, and a complex insulated tent that he constructed for himself (see Dick, 2001, especially Fig. 74).

In addition to being Peary's longest expedition, at four years, this is also the least well known. Having had no significant successes—and indeed, a series of setbacks—he published very little about it, and few scholars have examined it in any detail (Peary, 1907; Dick, 2001). Piecing together the events of this expedition is difficult, for Peary's notes for these years are piecemeal—cobbled together in various notebooks and papers, quite unlike other journals. Some facts are well known—that he lost most of his toes to frostbite, for example, although the exact number and circumstances have been mythologized (Dick, 1995)—but the focus has largely been on his sledging expeditions (Peary, 1907). Here I am concerned not with these major activities, but with the events of a few days in mid-January 1901, following the death of an Inughuit woman, Elatu.

It is not clear when Elatu joined the expedition, or how old she was. Inconsistent spellings and multiple people with the same name make it difficult to track individuals, but a girl identified as Il-li-a-too appears in Hugh Lee's census of 1894 (USNA, 1894) and seems the most likely candidate. Subsequently someone (possibly Peary himself) indicated on that census that her parents, Kai-o-gee-too (father) and Om-mo-nel-li (mother) died before Peary's next visit in 1895. The children (Il-li-a-too, her brother In-noo-gwe-tah and sister In-no-ah-ho) were each taken into other homes. In-noo-gwe-tah and In-no-ah-ho appear in Peary's 1897 census identified as "Kai-o-gee-too's kids" (USNA, 1897). Il-li-a-too was living with Oo-mah and Al-li-ka-sing-wa at Cape York, no longer identified as a "kid" (note that this is not the Aleqasina involved with Peary, but one of a number of women named Aleqasina at the time).

The earliest mention of Elatu at Fort Conger is in Peary's diary entry for 21 June 1900, when she accompanied Matthew Henson to the coal mine near Fort Conger (USNA, 1900–02a). This casual mention at a time of year when ice conditions meant there was little back-and-forth travel between Ellesmere Island and Greenland suggests that she had been among the Inughuit working for Peary for some months at least. Unfortunately Peary was inconsistent in recording the names of people working for him, particularly women. Over the course of the summer, Peary notes two more times when Henson and Elatu go together to the coal mine and a third time when he simply notes "Matt and Angoodloo with the two women..." go off to tend to dogs (31 July). In the fall and winter of 1900, Henson and Elatu continued to travel together, and at one point Peary simply refers to "Matt, Angoodloo and their 2 wives" (10 September). Elatu is the only woman identified by name as

traveling with Henson alone, and putting these references together, it seems likely that she and Henson were living together as husband and wife. All was not well, however.

Through the fall and early winter, Elatu was frequently ill. Peary first notes her illness in early September, when she is ill with "inflamed stomach." She remains confined to bed but improving the next day, and by 10 September appears to be well enough to travel with Henson again. She is soon ill again, however. Dr. Dedrick first notes Elatu's illness on 23 September, when he reports "the woman Elatu, with liver trouble, vomits less tonight + pain decreases. Has taken nothing for 2 or 4 days" (USNA, 1900). At that time a female *angedkok* also attempted to treat her, much to Dedrick's disgust (Dick, 2001:375). But by the next day, she was feeling well enough to eat and her pain was gone. There is no further mention of her then until early December, when Peary reports that she, Henson, and two other men, Ootah and Pooblah, sledged to Divide Lake to transfer supplies. Ten days later, Ootah returned, bringing Elatu, who was ill again. She must have been quite ill, as she was kept in the doctor's house. On 25 December, Peary reports that she is doing better but that "the Dr. not caring to have her in his house longer, I have fixed a place for her in a corner of my tent where she will sleep tonight. Poor girl she is very pale + extremely thin; reminding one of the photos of Indian famine sufferers, but she eats fairly well now + is nearly free from pain" (USNA, 1900). Her recovery must have been incomplete, however, as on 10 January Dr. Dedrick included detailed instructions for her care in a note that appears to have been addressed to Peary. These included medicines and dosages for rheumatism (potassium bicarbonate, iodide potassium, and colchicine), nausea and vomiting (calomel [mercury chloride] and Epsom salts), and if necessary, for unspecified symptoms, opium. Dedrick also offered advice on whether Elatu should travel: "If she has been seriously ill, or persistently slightly off color, Henson will [illegible] good authority as to this patient's traveling conditions" (USNA, 1901c).

The comings and goings of people at Fort Conger in the first weeks of January 1901 are unclear. Peary's diary is blank for the 2nd to the 15th. It would appear, however, that Peary had left Fort Conger for one of the other encampments (on the way to one of the supply depots perhaps) at some point. On 15 January Peary reports:

Arrived [not clear from where, but presumably not Fort Conger] at harbor igloo found Matt sitting forlorn + cold. Elatu had died on the 13^o, 2 a.m. after 2 weeks illness, + Matt had started the same day for [illegible] harbor, arriving in a few hours before Ahngmaloktok and Pooblah had.

Yesterday he walked nearly up to our igloo, but not knowing where it was turned back. He is in bad shape. Gave him a good drink then made coffee and cooked some fish for him, gave him my deerskin shirt to put on and got him to sleep.



FIG. 1. Elatu's grave at Fort Conger. Peary placed the bricks around the burial site to hold down the skins in which the body was wrapped. Some human remains are scattered near by (M. Bertulli, pers. comm. 2013). Photograph by Margaret Bertulli, 20 July 2010. Used with permission.

The next day Henson and Angoodloo went off “to the other igloo” while Peary and Pooblah waited for the sledge to return. On Thursday, 17 January, Ootah, Ahngmaloktok, and Ionah (Ahngmaloktok's wife) arrived, and after a short rest, they headed back to Fort Conger with Peary and Pooblah. Peary's diary entries for 18–21 January are brief. He merely writes that the funeral rituals continue, with little or no work done.

Somewhat surprisingly, Dr. Dedrick makes few references to Elatu's death. In a note dated 16 January in which he describes Henson's poor health (he had symptoms of scurvy, if not actually scurvy itself), the doctor notes that “the girl evidently died of acute inflammation of kidneys which would have been fatal under any circumstances.” In his diary he merely notes, “E died on the 13th” (USNA, 1901d).

Peary does provide a detailed account of the funeral, however, on a series of seven loose pages, now interleaved with the handwritten loose diary pages. They are on the same type of paper as the rest of the diary, but are not part of the typewritten transcript prepared by Marie Peary (USNA, 1900–02b) and now housed, along with the notes, at the U.S. National Archives. Here I will summarize Peary's account (USNA, 1901a).

PEARY'S FUNERAL NOTES

Peary begins his account with his return to Fort Conger at 5:00 pm on 17 January. The Inughuit men (unnamed in the account, but according to the diary, Ootah, Pooblah, and Ahngmaloktok) hurried to put all their kayaks and equipment, including spare raw materials such as ivory, out on the ice.

The next day, Peary and a woman (identified only as “the woman,” perhaps Ionah) went to Henson's house, where Elatu's body was. Peary describes the body, which was



FIG. 2. Elatu's grave in relationship to the structures at Fort Conger. The grave is in the lower right corner of the image, near the dry streambed. Photograph by Margaret Bertulli, 11 July 2013. Used with permission.

now laid out. Elatu was wearing only her short trousers, but was covered with a muskox skin. The woman, with Peary's assistance, wrapped the body in another muskox skin, put the deceased woman's clothing on top, and then wrapped it all up in blankets and secured it into a bundle with twine. Following a widespread Inuit tradition, the woman stuffed her nostrils, although it seems Peary did not. Throughout the operation, she repeated “some words” that Peary does not, or cannot, translate.

Peary and the woman carried the well-wrapped body out of the house and dragged it over the snow to a location that they had selected and cleared of snow. The three other men in the party observed from a distance, but did not help. Peary, with the woman's husband, returned to the house to collect skins to place over and under the body, which had been placed on the ground with the head pointing south. The skins covering the body were weighted down with bricks, and Peary and the woman slowly returned to the house. The grave is still visible, outlined by the bricks (Figs. 1 and 2; see also Phillips and Burnip, 1981; Bertulli, 2010). On the way back, the woman stopped seven times, turned, drew a line across their path, and said something. She, Peary, and the woman's husband returned to Henson's house, where, according to custom, they were “to spend 3 days and nights without undressing or lying down, without removing our hoods or mittens, and without going out of doors except to continue the funeral rites and for nature's demands.”

All might have been well, had not fumes from the stove caused difficulties: the three of them had to evacuate the house, the woman having fainted and Peary himself being lightheaded from coal gas fumes. They re-established themselves in Dr. Dedrick's house and continued with the funeral rites, despite the lingering effects of the fumes. They visited the grave again and followed the same protocol, including walking around the grave three times in the direction of the sun, except that this time it was Peary who

led the way to the grave. On the way back he followed the woman, drawing lines across their track.

Peary feared that all the Inughuit were still nervous (presumably because of the tragic death of Elatu, as well as the difficulty with the stove) and sought to allay their fears by proposing that he conduct “white man’s rites” as well. Peary was not a religious man, and this is made clear by the “rites” he performed: he declaimed as much of Mark Antony’s funeral oration for Caesar by William Shakespeare as he could remember and placed a wooden grave marker that he had made. In a curious example of syncretism, as he returned from the grave he drew lines across his tracks. This he did at midnight, concluding the first day of the ceremonies.

That night, according to custom, Peary, the woman, and her husband slept sitting up, with all their clothes on. Twice, on the second and third days, Peary and the woman returned to the grave, repeating the same ritual. On the third day, some of Elatu’s possessions were placed on the grave. During the second day, they changed houses once again, moving from the doctor’s to Peary’s, and they continued to observe prohibitions: the woman removed one of her kamiks whenever she ate or drank, and both she and Peary refrained from cutting things with a knife (although he notes that they could use scissors).

THE AFTERMATH

After the funeral, life at Fort Conger seemed to return to some semblance of normal, but concerns remained. In an unusually long diary entry on 23 January, Peary writes about his worries for himself, the expedition, and the men and women with him. He writes that, “Matt is in bad shape mentally and physically,” and he notes, regarding his own worries, that “the continuation of the darkness, and the something of a mental tension I have been under for a week ever since I heard the news of Elatu’s death, saw its effect upon Matt[,] and appreciated its certain results upon the Eskimos[,] may perhaps exaggerate these forebodings.” Elsewhere, in an undated letter to Dr. Dedrick, he writes that “it was evident to me the moment I saw poor Matt sitting forlorn in the Bivouac Igloo...” (USNA, 1901b).

DISCUSSION

Peary’s account of Elatu’s funeral is revealing in a number of ways, giving us insight into a rarely described ritual, as well as into Peary and his relationship to the Inughuit men and women he worked with.

Other Accounts of Funerals

As the most detailed description of such a ritual from this region around the turn of the 20th century, Peary’s account of Elatu’s funeral shows both similarities to and

differences from other records. His own published description of funeral rites (Peary, 1898) predates this experience and is brief and general. It agrees in broad strokes with other published descriptions and demonstrates that he had some understanding of Inughuit practices. However, it is not clear how he came by this information—whether he witnessed one or more funerals during his earlier expeditions, or directly questioned members of the community, or relied to an unknown extent on earlier published descriptions. Elisha Kent Kane (1856:569) briefly describes a woman’s funeral; he included wrapping of the body, covering it with stones, and speaking over the body. Isaac Israel Hayes’ (1867:265) description of Kablunet’s funeral is similarly sketchy, although he does note that the body was wrapped in sealskin, that some belongings were placed on the grave, and that another woman walked around the grave reciting words.

More detailed published descriptions of funeral rituals among the Inughuit from this period are found in Knud Rasmussen’s *People of the Polar North* (1908), based on his stay in the Smith Sound region as part of the Danish Literary Expedition of 1904–05, and in Alfred Kroeber’s *The Eskimos of Smith Sound* (1899). Kroeber’s report was based on a survey of the literature and on research conducted with Franz Boas at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, which included conversations with the six Inughuit brought to the museum by Peary in 1895. In this case, Boas and his colleagues had the unfortunate experience of witnessing such rituals firsthand, as respiratory illness led to the death of Atangana, wife of Nuktaq (who also eventually died, along with most of the others). Kroeber quotes extensively from an assistant, apparently fluent in Inuktun, who witnessed Nuktaq’s behavior following his wife’s death. While the details differ somewhat from those described by Peary, there are many similarities. Nuktaq spoke at length to his dead wife, telling her spirit, among other things, to stay where it belonged and to come to him only in his dreams. Perhaps these are also the sorts of things that the woman said over Elatu, which Peary did not translate.

The rituals and prohibitions that Nuktaq followed are similar to those described by Peary—he stuffed one nostril with paper, and he confined himself to his house and did not remove his clothes, sitting up for the first two nights. He did not actively participate in the burial, and he observed dietary restrictions, which included not cutting his food himself. For his first walks outside the house, he walked counter to the direction of the sun and scratched a line where the walk began (Kroeber, 1899).

Nuktaq’s actions, then, have broad similarities to those described by Peary. The rituals appear to go on longer (most for five days rather than three), and some aspects are clearly influenced by the exotic location (use of paper in the nostrils, his inability to see the grave), but overall the pattern of events is much the same.

Rasmussen’s (1908) description is rather more general, but shares many details with other accounts. The length of

the rituals is again described as five days, with specific prohibitions including closing nostrils, not removing clothing, not cutting meat, and remaining inside as much as possible. He also describes walking around the grave following the direction of the sun and a prohibition against crossing the tracks of the burial party, but not the drawing of lines across the path. Rasmussen also notes the practice of putting objects (sledges, kayaks, unfinished tools) on the sea ice, something that Peary reports but does not elaborate on.

Farther afield, Boas ([1888] 1974) reports many of the same elements for funerals in the Canadian Arctic, gleaned from his own studies as well as from published reports. Common elements include carrying the body to the place of burial without using a sledge, three days of ritual mourning, stuffing the nostrils, prohibitions regarding eating, placing the deceased's possessions on the grave, walking three times around the grave in the direction of the sun, and talking to the deceased.

Peary's description, then, tallies well with contemporaneous descriptions of burial customs in the region, with the singular exception of his own participation. His role in the rites and rituals seems to be that of a family member. Although he had probably witnessed Inughuit burials during previous expeditions, it is unlikely that he had been an active participant.

Peary and the Inughuit

Delving into the motives and attitudes of individuals on the basis of scattered journal entries is fraught with difficulties, and this is not the place for an extended discussion of Peary's complex and even contradictory attitudes toward and relationships with the people he worked with. Nevertheless, this brief episode throws some light on these issues and may help explain how Peary and the Inughuit continued to work together for so long under difficult circumstances.

Peary was single-minded in pursuit of his goals, and his treatment of the people who worked for him was often self-serving (see Harper, 2000; Lukens, 2008 among others). In this context, the work of historian Lyle Dick (1995, 2001, 2002) is most pertinent. Dick has written extensively about Peary's interactions with the Inughuit, revealing them to be problematic in many ways; Peary was racist, sexist, authoritarian, and paternalistic. Dick has shown that Peary's attitudes toward Inughuit women, rooted in 19th-century beliefs about race and gender, resulted in often callous behavior that ranged from turning a blind eye to overt sexual harassment (2002:81) to sending men on long dangerous journeys, leaving their sometimes grief-stricken wives behind. In the latter case, it appears that Peary was at least on some level aware of the problem he was causing, offering to comfort the women "as best I could" (cited in Dick, 2002:82), although he clearly never considered not employing these men for difficult and dangerous work merely because it distressed their wives. The former case is more complex.

Peary strongly believed that female companionship was important to a man's well-being in the North (Peary, 1900–02a, b; Dick, 2001:382, 2002:84). Thus he condoned and even encouraged relationships between Inughuit women and American men. At Fort Conger, each of the three American men was somehow involved with an Inughuit woman, although in different ways.

Peary himself seems to have been living as a bachelor there, but was involved in a long-term relationship with a young Inughuit woman, Aleqasina, with whom he had two sons, and this relationship is an exemplar of Peary's complexities and contradictions. Kenn Harper describes Aleqasina's relationship with Peary as a traditional wife-exchange with Piugaattoq (Harper, 2000:29) and indicates that Peary called her "Aleqasinnguaq," using a suffix indicating endearment (p. 253). It appears that he was very attached to her, but in no way did he consider her his equal, nor did he place her in the same category as his wife, Josephine. The difference in the ways he viewed them is perhaps best understood through the photographs he published of them. In Volume II of *Northward over the Great Ice*, Josephine appears, in a formal portrait, as the frontispiece, while Aleqasina is presented unnamed, with her relationship to Peary unacknowledged, in a full-frontal nude image (Peary, 1898:394).

As an aside, Aleqasina was not at Fort Conger in the winter of 1900–01. Rather, she was living at Payer Harbour, near the *Windward*, which had sailed north in search of Peary with Josephine aboard (Barr, 1982). Aleqasina was pregnant with Peary's child, a fact of which she was apparently proud. She made no secret of her relationship with Peary, much to Josephine's shock and dismay. Peary and Josephine worked things out, however, and apparently remained devoted to each other.

At Fort Conger, Peary's "instrumentalist" (Dick 2002:81) attitude toward women in general, and sexual relationships in particular, sometimes led to disturbing if short-lived relationships such as that between Detrick and Saune in the late summer of 1900 (USNA, 1900–02a; Dick, 2002:81). But it would be a mistake to assume that all of the relationships between American men and Inughuit women were necessarily coercive or one-sided. In the case of Detrick and Saune, for example, Detrick asked Peary in late July 1900 if Saune could come and live with him permanently. Peary gladly gave his permission. Less than two months later, however, Peary writes, "Dr. has let his Eskimo girl go back with the others. She was dissatisfied at living with him" (8 September 1900). Saune apparently did not feel the need to ask Peary's permission to return to living with the other Inughuit, nor did Peary feel the need to convince her to stay with the doctor, although he later attributed Detrick's irritability to her leaving.

Henson's relationship with Elatu at Fort Conger may represent a third type of relationship, in this case a traditional marriage, recognized by Inughuit and the other Americans alike. There is no way of knowing what role, if any, Peary played in this relationship, but he does seem to have

accepted it and acknowledged that, on Henson's part at least, there was a significant emotional connection. Henson's reaction to Elatu's death, whether she was living with him as his wife or not, shows this clearly. There is no way to know if this attachment was reciprocated, but it seems possible. Henson's second marriage to an Inughuit woman, Aqattanguaq, mother to his son Anauqaq, is reported to have been characterized by a mutual regard and affection, and he is remembered fondly by the community (LeMoine, 1999). In this context, it is interesting to note that Henson does not seem to have been present at Elatu's funeral. Peary writes that Henson went to "the other igloo" on the 16th, probably to stay for some time near a cache of meat to feed dogs. His absence may account for Peary's participation in the funeral, as a sort of stand-in for the absent American husband.

Peary's account of Elatu's funeral, along with his journal references to the impact of her death on Henson, adds to the complex picture of interpersonal relations on his expeditions. Certainly his actions were still in part self-serving; he could not afford to lose the support and confidence of either Henson or the Inughuit and so had much to gain by keeping them happy. But his participation in the funeral and the concerns he expresses in his diary are at odds with the image of him as egotistical and authoritarian. It is evidence of a willingness to acknowledge the importance not just of the Inughuit technologies and practical knowledge he depended upon so heavily, but also of the social structures and rituals that went along with them. In sitting up for three days, abstaining from cutting his food with a knife, and carefully drawing a line across his path as he returned from the grave, he was publicly (if unconsciously) acknowledging the importance of traditional rituals and the dignity of the deceased woman. He repeated this effort in a minor way the following winter, when the Inughuit living with him were struck by an epidemic, but this time he adapted the ritual to his own sense of dignity, carrying the body of a woman to her grave rather than dragging it in the traditional way (Peary, 1911). His actions at times like these were important in building the relationship of trust that developed between him and the Inughuit men who worked for him, despite the many physical, social, and emotional hardships this work entailed.

Even more difficult to reconstruct than Peary's attitude is that of the Inughuit. Any real understanding of the reaction of the Inughuit men and women to Elatu's death and to Peary's participation in the funeral rites must remain elusive, since all we have to go on is Peary's own account. All we can know for certain is that for the small group at Fort Conger in early 1901, the death of Elatu far from her home was a tragedy, which they dealt with according to custom. Some of the actions Peary describes, such as the men rushing to put things out on the ice when they returned to Conger, suggest a heightened level of anxiety, but this could be Peary's interpretation of a standard practice (one also described by Rasmussen, 1908), colored by his own anxiety. Even the crisis with the stove, which could have ended disastrously, does not seem to have resulted in any

additional problems such as episodes of *piblockto* (Arctic hysteria), which Dick (1995, 2002) associates with anxiety, resistance, or both. Whether the Inughuit were pleased, grateful, or offended at Peary's participation in the funeral rites is impossible to know. Nevertheless, Peary remained concerned about their mental and emotional well-being, and considering the length of time they had all lived and worked together, it seems likely that his concern was well placed, although his attempts to improve things may not have been.

SUMMARY

Elatu's grave, a simple oval of bricks with a few scattered bone fragments, remains visible at Fort Conger, although until now it has been unrecognized, its wooden marker having disappeared. Peary's account of the funeral, and his and Dedrick's journal entries and notes from the weeks and months leading up to it, provide a small glimpse of the lives of the men and women living at Fort Conger in the winter of 1900–01 and the tragic death of one of them. It is a very different view from the stories of hunting and sledging, hardship, and endurance that have dominated accounts of this expedition until now. As an anthropological document, it provides the most detailed account of Inughuit funeral practices, while as a historical document, it adds to our understanding of the complexities of the relationships between Peary and the Inughuit.

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