

Timber buildings in Colonial Greenland

– Diffusion and Innovation

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In the summer of 2010, Helge Paulsen and Thomas Bartholin took dendrochronological samples from 16 ancient timber houses/buildings in Southwest Greenland with the dual aims of finding the age of the buildings and the origin of the timber (dendroprovenance).



Samples from houses in Ilulissat (Jakobshavn), Qasigiannguut (Christianshåb), Ilimanaq (Claushavn) and Sisimiut (Holsteinsborg) (red dots). Nuuk (Godthåb), the capital of Greenland (black dot).

So far seven houses have been examined (dendrochronological study) and the investigation has revealed that the timber came from trees grown in different areas of Northern Europe: Northern Poland, Southern Sweden, Southern Finland and Eastern and Southern Norway.

Additionally Helge Paulsen, an expert in traditional timber buildings and log structures in Norway, investigated closely the logs and notches in order to describe the types of buildings found.

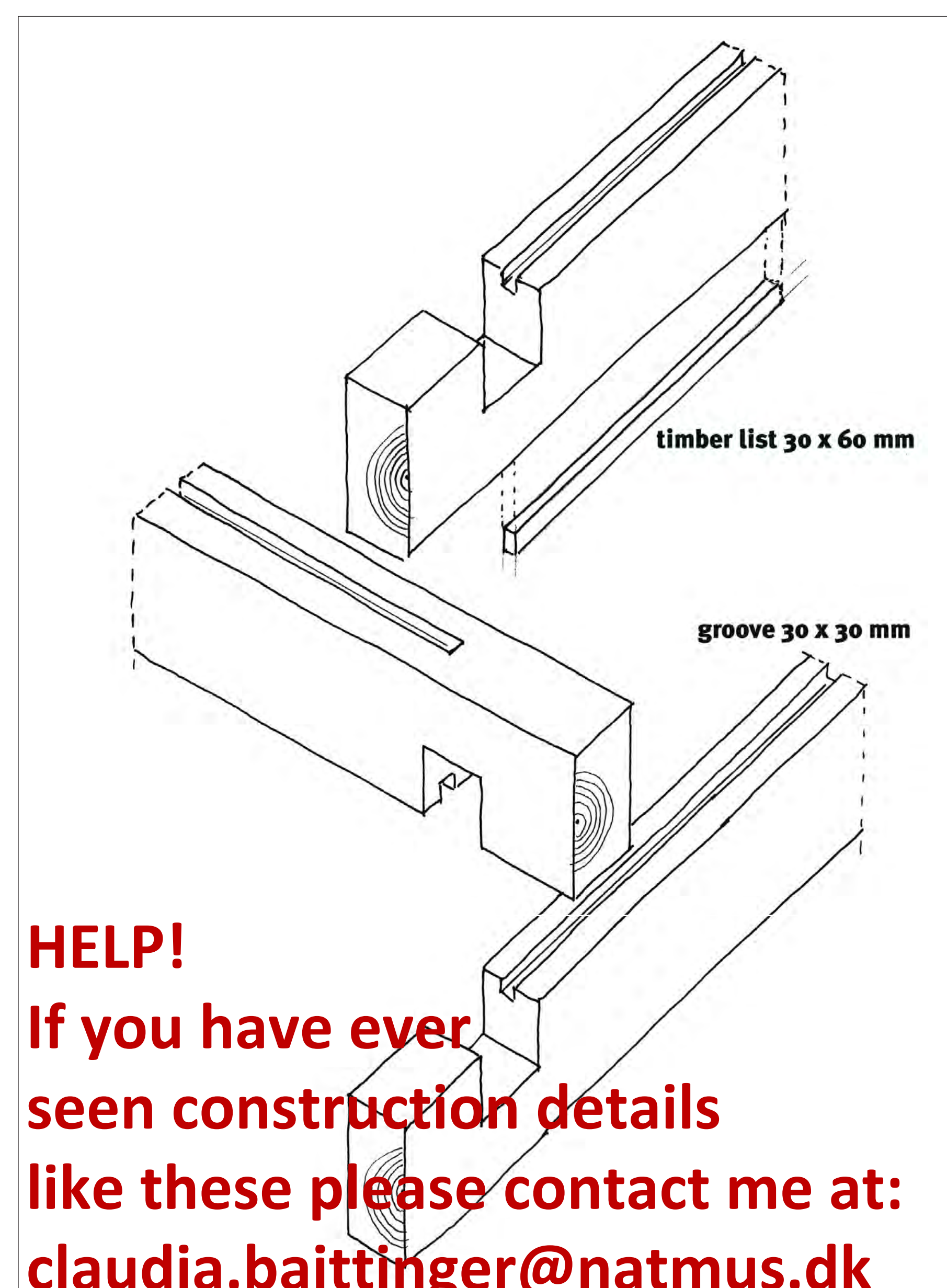


Helge Paulsen taking cores from house B-7 in Ilulissat, formerly owned by the Royal Greenland Trade Company. 'Unscandinavian' construction details: Logs are in line where they meet in the corners, and groove for timber list. Photo: Thomas Bartholin.

Although we expected to observe Norwegian building traditions from the 18th and 19th Centuries i.e. - Scandinavian and Norwegian building methods and notches - it gave a more complex picture.

In the very early houses, from the beginning of the 18th Century, we see traces of Norwegian building traditions but from the middle from the 18th Century and later, we find strong influence from other parts of Europe, especially Central and Eastern Europe.

This ongoing work is part of 'The Northern Worlds' project and a cooperation between the museums of Ilulissat and Sisimiut in Greenland, Vest-Agder County in Norway, and the National Museum of Denmark. 'The Northern Worlds' project is mainly funded by the private foundation, Augustinus Fonden, and is a scientific focus of the National Museum of Denmark. This initiative hopes to generate new insights and knowledge in culture and climatic change.



HELP!
If you have ever
seen construction details
like these please contact me at:
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Detail from timber buildings in Greenland. This technique (with groove and timber list) is not of Scandinavian origin but is seen in buildings in Eastern Europe. Mostly the pith points to the outside of the building, but we also find buildings with pith inside. The logs are in line where they meet in the corners unlike the timber buildings in Scandinavia, where the logs are out of line. Drawing: Helge Paulsen.



Modern house in Southern Norway imported as construction set from Romania. Here we find similar construction details (groove for timber list) like in most of the investigated Greenlandic buildings. Photo: Helge Paulsen.



Construction details from Norwegian timber houses such as 'Scandinavian notch' (also known as Norway's notch) and 'kamnov' (a kind of dovetail). The logs are always out of line where they meet in the corners.



House B-4 in Qasigiannguut (Christianshåb) from 1734, the oldest house in Greenland from the Colonial period. Scandinavian construction details: Logs are out of line where they meet in the corners, and Norwegian notch. Provenance of timber used: Northern Poland, felled in the winter of 1731/32. Photo: National Museum of Denmark.

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