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A WANGANUI RECORD OF A COMPOSITE ADZE HAFT

Ian Keyes
N.Z. Geological Survey
Lower Hutt

Introduction

As the distinctive 'two piece' or composite wooden adze haft in New Zealand has been fully described previously (Keyes, 1971, 1973) the distinguishing characters of the artefact type need only be briefly mentioned here.

The composite adze haft (unlike conventional single piece hafts) consists of two portions - an intermediate socket into which an adze is lashed and a separate handle to which the attenuated posterior end of the socket is attached. The 'scoop like' adze socket (cf. specimen figured herein) component is a distinct, readily identifiable artefact (Keyes, 1971) and provides the best evidence for recognising the composite hafting style. The handles however are more likely to be overlooked as being part of this artefact type than are the sockets. They are however independently diagnostic and can be distinguished by the following criteria (Keyes, 1973), arranged in order of importance.

1. Unlike the conventional haft, the 'toe' (kauae) portion of the foot is minimal or absent and the toe remnant presents a squared face which abutts against the shouldered mid-portion of the socket.
2. Compared with conventional hafts the foot is virtually 'reversed', as the heel portion of the foot is considerably extended rearwards. It is reduced laterally and ventrally which provides for a firm lashing grip, and possesses an end knob which is sometimes highly ornamented (Keyes, 1973).
3. The foot is noticeably very narrow as it serves only to carry the narrow attenuated end of the socket.
4. Handles have a very low foot angle (in relation to shaft) of about 30 degrees.
5. The handles are light-weight and generally have a forward bowed shaft, and terminate in a formed knob at the distal end of the shaft.

These criteria are based on the 'type specimen', a complete haft from Mangati Swamp (Keyes, 1971:84, Fig. A-C; 1973:118, Fig. 2b) and they readily diagnose the range of ornamented handles known from Taranaki (Keyes, 1973). There are other handles available which possess some of the features of a composite haft style (e.g. Bellwood, 1978:56, Fig. 28, no. 210) but in the absence of a full range of clearly recognisable features their relationship must be left in doubt.

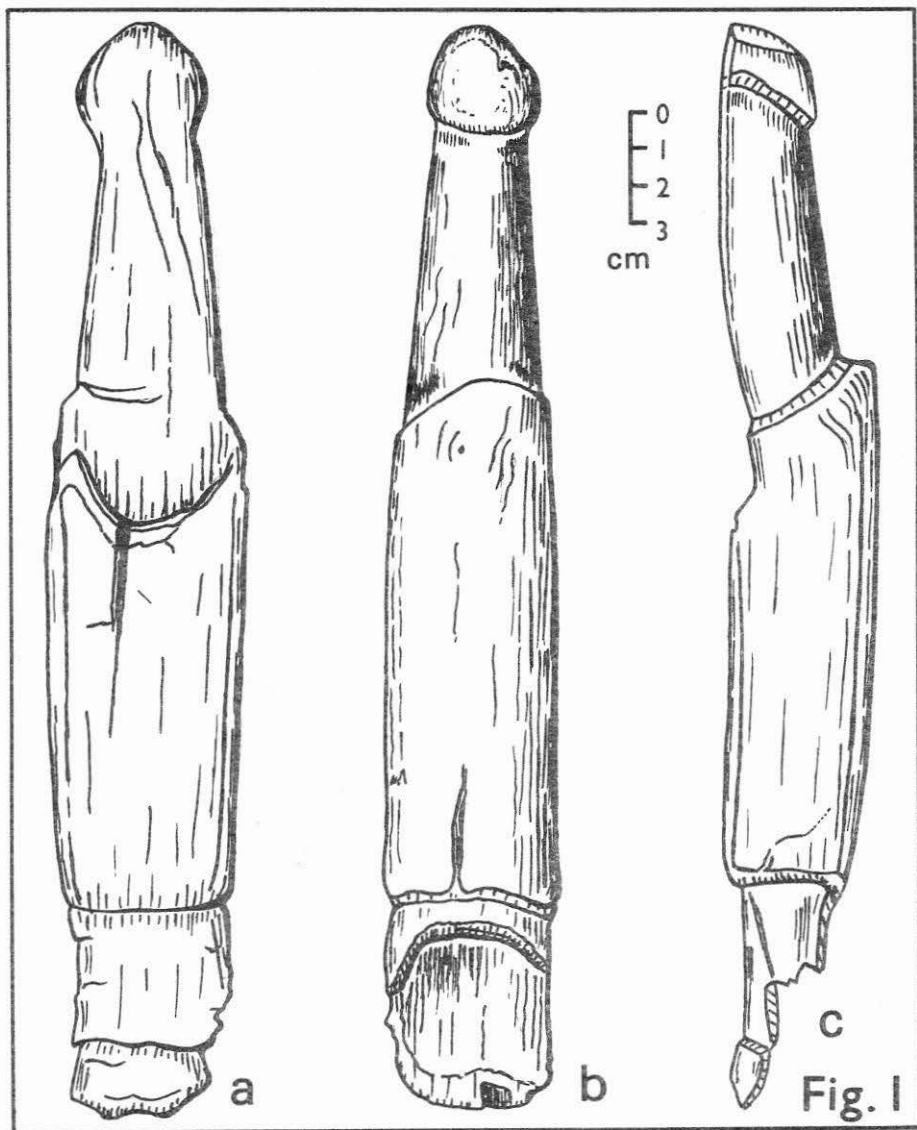


FIGURE 1. The Nukumar socket: a. posterior; b. anterior; c. side view.

This two-piece hafting style, where the adze is fitted into a separate socket, is somewhat similar to the rotatory adze sleeves of various parts of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia (Keyes, 1973). However the New Zealand type is not a rotatory style (where the axis of the adze can be rotated through 90° from a horizontal plane to a vertical position for side cutting) but a fixed position hafting in the conventional manner. It is a hafting style that is apparently of Classic Maori origin and a method ideally suited to hafting small rounded-sectioned adzes of the '2B' type. The extended socket with projecting adze would give even a short stone adze a considerable extension and the characteristically short, bowed, light-weight shaft with low foot angle suggests it was an artefact for close carefully working, particularly for canoe hollowing, where it could be used for both longitudinal and transverse cutting. It was a single 'compromise' artefact of Classic Maori culture that probably replaced the earlier traditional specialised early East Polynesian adze types that were present in New Zealand's Archaic culture, especially the side-hafted adze (Duff type '5A') which was a basic canoe building tool (Keyes, 1971, 1972; Moore, Keyes & Orchiston, 1979:56,58).

The Nukumarū specimen

This specimen of a socket from a composite adze haft was donated to the Wanganui Museum in 1979 (Fig.1). From the limited available information associated with the specimen (Mr D.W. Cimino, pers. comm.) it was apparently one of two specimens originally recovered from a small lake at Nukumarū many years ago. The other specimen was destroyed. The small lake referred to would be one of the swampy lakes that occur in the depressions between the fixed sand dunes immediately to the east and west of Nukumarū Station Road - like Lakes Waikato, Marahau or a smaller unnamed body of water which is possibly now drained.

In overall length the specimen measures 270mm. Only two other specimens of the nine sockets previously measured exceed this length. Mid section width is 45mm; thickness 36mm; adze socket cavity length c. 50mm and width c. 35mm. The upper sides of the socket are broken off. This specimen is notable for its considerable mid-section length and short socket cavity for receiving the butt end of the adze. These two features in combination suggest that the original fitted adze was only a short specimen and greater 'reach' and forward extension of the adze blade was obtained by producing a socket with an elongated mid-section. Another feature of note is that on the underside of the socket, the shoulder against which the toe of the haft abutts is not squarely cut at right angles to the axis of the specimen. It is cut as a hollow 'V' to take an obviously V-shaped toe on the foot of the handle (Fig.1a).

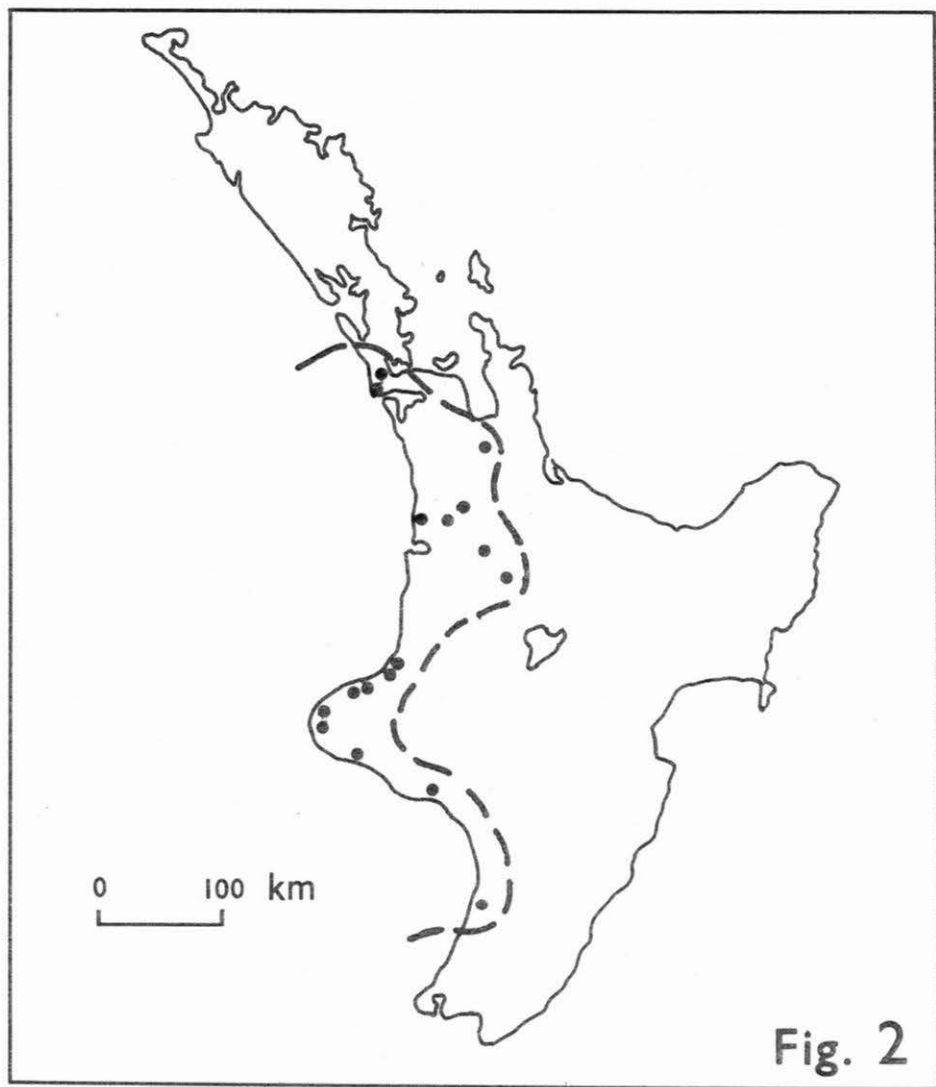


FIGURE 2. Distribution of recorded localities (17) from which examples of composite size hafts have been recovered.

Distribution

Recovered examples of sockets and handles with locality details recorded (Keyes, 1971, 1973; Adkin, 1948) provides the present distribution pattern for this artefact type (Fig. 2). An absence of any record from the Wanganui region previously created an important gap (Keyes, 1973: 127) in distribution between the southern Taranaki specimens and the three handles from Lake Horowhenua (Adkin, 1948, Figs, 121, 122, 133) which possess enough characters to suggest they are of (or relate to) the composite haft type (especially Adkin, 1948, Fig. 122 - see discussion, Keyes, 1973: 127). As with all archaeological studies the presence of 'gaps' in artefact distributions are difficult to interpret as to whether they are only apparent or real, and whether future finds will confirm or alter earlier conclusions.

The existence of the Nukumarū specimen consolidates a distribution pattern for the composite haft that now covers most of the western North Island. Future recovery of wooden artefacts from swamps in other areas may in time confirm whether the composite haft style had a restricted western occurrence or a wider distribution. At present its distribution pattern is interpreted to be related to the distribution of the 2B adze style.

Acknowledgements

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