



NEW ZEALAND  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

**NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER**



This document is made available by The New Zealand Archaeological Association under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

MAORI PENDANTS MADE FROM DOG COCKLE SHELLS

Louise Furey  
Auckland

Shells were commonly used as personal ornamentation by Maoris. Many different species, both bivalves and univalves, were used. The tradition was also common in Easy Polynesia. The degree of modification to the shells varies from a simple perforation for stringing as a necklace unit or pendants, to shaping for use as ear and neck pendants, bracelet or anklets.

Dog cockle shell (Glycymeris laticostata) was used as a raw material for pendant manufacture. The form of the pendants varies but several are alike and could therefore be classed as a definite group. While researching this article, information was sought from the major museums and some smaller museums. In total ten pendants from museum collections are described, including six of a similar shape. Other pendants may be present in private collections or local museums. A search of the literature revealed two additional examples where dog cockle shells had been utilised as ornaments.

Dog cockles, distinct from the tuangi or common cockle, are to be found from the Far North to Stewart Island, living in shallow water below low tide (Powell, 1979). The shells have been found in archaeological sites but never in numbers to suggest they were a food source. Rather, a walk along a beach today will show the shells are washed ashore with the tide and they were probably collected specifically as a raw material for ornaments. Glycymeris shells are readily identified by the radial ribs which, even when ground down during pendant manufacture, remain as a prominent parallel grain pattern. The shell is robust which makes it suitable for working into ornaments.

Only one shaped pendant is known from an excavated context (N42/941; Furey, 1982), although several perforated but otherwise unmodified Glycymeris shells were found in excavations at Harataonga Bay, Great Barrier Island (Law, 1972). In addition two modified dog cockle shell artefacts which still retained the basic shell shape were found with an infant burial on Okahu Island in the Bay of Islands (Sutton and Gibbs, 1983). The remaining examples described here are in museum collections and can be provenanced fairly accurately (Fig. 1).

The majority of the dog cockle shell pendants described are of a shape that is narrower at the base than the upper end, and with a curved profile. Six of these are known. The four Auckland Museum specimens are from N42/941, Westfield, Auckland (AR7467), Waihi Beach (5098), South Kaipara Head (17009),

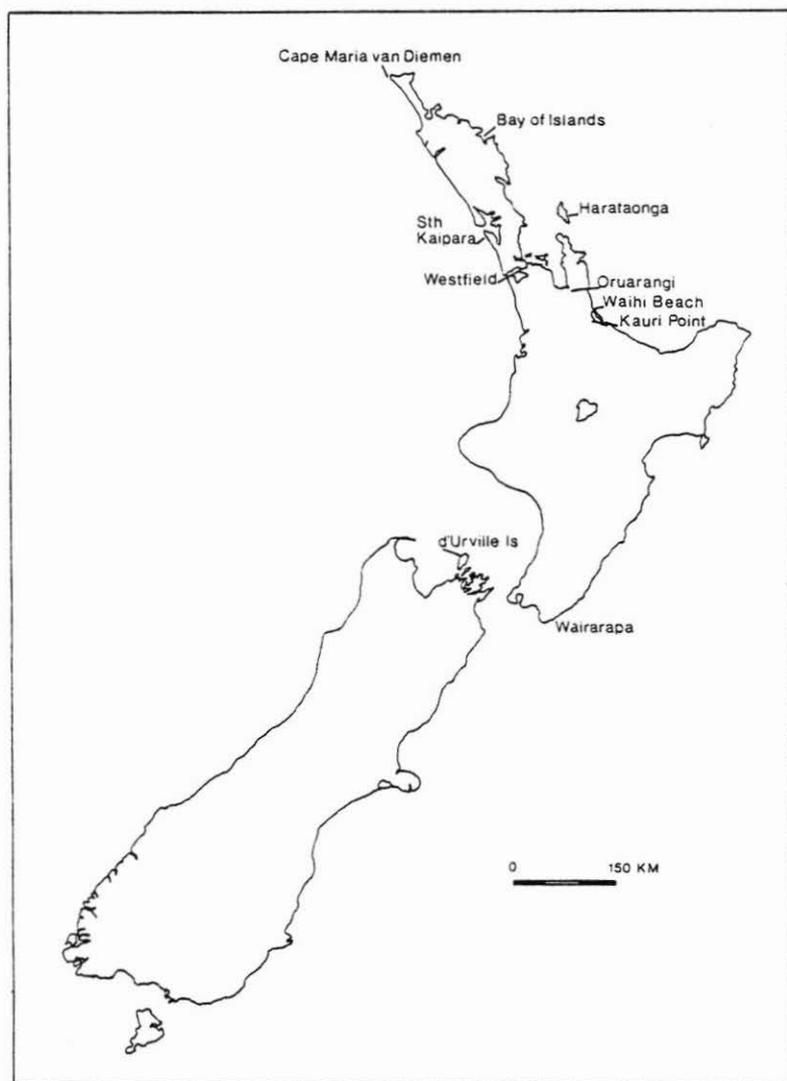


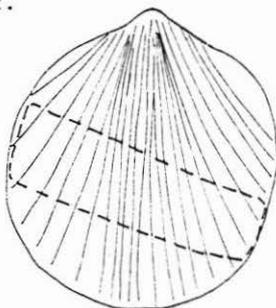
FIGURE 1. Places mentioned in the text.

and one from the Halcombe Collection (36515), unprovenanced but possibly Taranaki. In the National Museum, NM 4930 from the Bollons Collection is from Cape Maria van Dieman, and D34.735 in the Otago Museum, ex Bollons Collection, is localised to the same area (Skinner, 1974:83). Skinner described the Otago Museum pendant as a simplified form of rei puta.

The rei puta, made of whale ivory, is considered to be a late form of ornament as it was popular in the 18th century at the time of Cook's first voyage. The rei puta generally has eyes at the lower end which is thicker than the upper portion of the pendant. None have been found from an excavated context, although one from Oruarangi must post-date 1500 A.D., the initial occupation of the site (Best, 1980:78). However, Davidson (1984:83,87) relates the shape to the older whale tooth pendant form, which also occurs in East Polynesia. This general shape, with an outward curve at the lower end must have been common in East Polynesia, and culminated in the rei puta in 18th century New Zealand and in the lei niho palaoa in Hawaii.

The rei puta-like dog cockle form is a breast ornament rather than decoration for the ear. This distinction is not so clear on some of the other forms of dog cockle pendant described later. The curve of the shell was utilised (Fig.2), to form a pendant which followed the same lines in profile as the bone imitation whale tooth pendant.

Figure 2. Glycymeris laticostata shell, showing the position from where pendant shapes were removed.



All the pendants are of a similar size, the upper range of which would be determined by the size of the shell (Table 1). The thickness is fairly consistent. However small differences are apparent in the overall shape, and the number and positioning of the suspension holes.

The pendant from Waihi Beach (Fig.3d) and the two from Cape Maria van Dieman (Fig.3e) are very curved in profile with the distal end projecting out. By contrast, the example from Westfield is flat in profile (Fig.3a). All examples have

	Length	Width		Thickness
		a	b	
AR 7467	54	22	18	5
5098	63	28	21	6
36515	60	23	20	5
17009	59	24	20	5
NM 4930	77	25	20	4
D 34.735	70	24	20	3

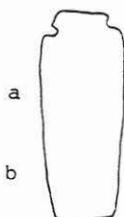


TABLE 1: Dimensions of rei puta-like dog cockle.

squared-off ends with the exception of 17009, which has a rounded distal end (Fig.3c). In each case the raised ridges of the *Glycymeris* shell have been ground down but the pattern still remains. However this was not an important part of the visible decoration as the patterned side was against the wearer. The plain side, with the outward curve at the lower end, was displayed. This is demonstrated clearly in the Westfield pendant where wear polish and rubbing is evident on the patterned side.

The number of attachment holes varies but two is most common. Skinner (1974:83) illustrates a pendant identified as D34.735 which is in fact NM 4930 from the National Museum. This has three intact suspension holes, the central one of which is larger than the outer two. Specimen D34.735 has two perforations, both broken. The pendant from Waihi Beach has only one central hole, while 17009 (South Kaipara) has two intact holes and AR 7467 (Westfield), and 36515 (unprov.), each have two broken holes. However, 36515 is sand blasted and may be notched rather than drilled. On AR7467, a central hole was started from the back but was not completed.

The age of these pendants is not established but the form was probably in use for several hundred years. The pendant from Waihi Beach is almost certainly from an Archaic site but the associated artefacts suggest it is from the later end of the Archaic period. The Westfield pendant was recovered by excavation from an ocean settlement site. It was found in a shell midden radiocarbon dated to  $421 \pm 59$  BP (NZ 6164; Furey, 1983). The site also had a number of other artefacts of bone and stone (Furey, 1982). Few excavated sites in Auckland have produced such a number of artefacts.

Dog cockle shells were also used as a raw material for other types of pendant. In several the form is similar to ornaments made from bone or stone.

Two modified dog cockle shells were found in association with an infant burial on Okahu Island. At the time of burial a transversely broken dog cockle shell, with a square hole

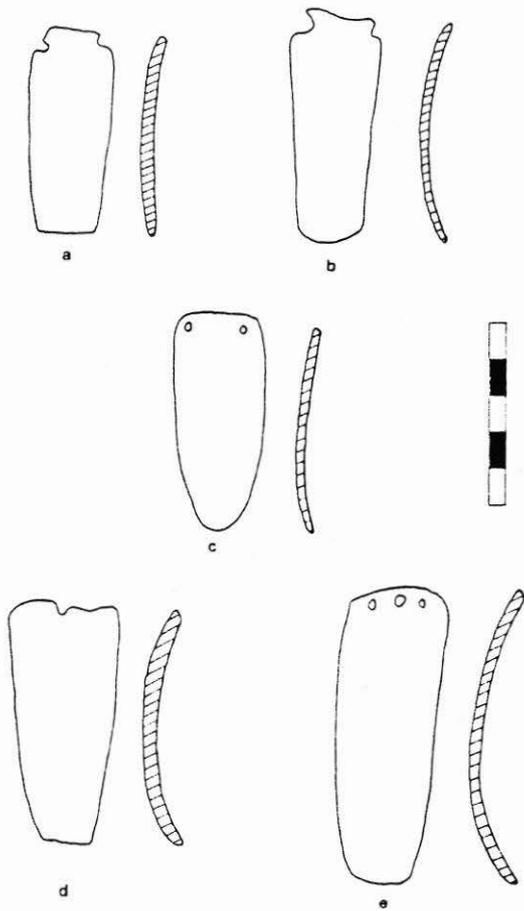
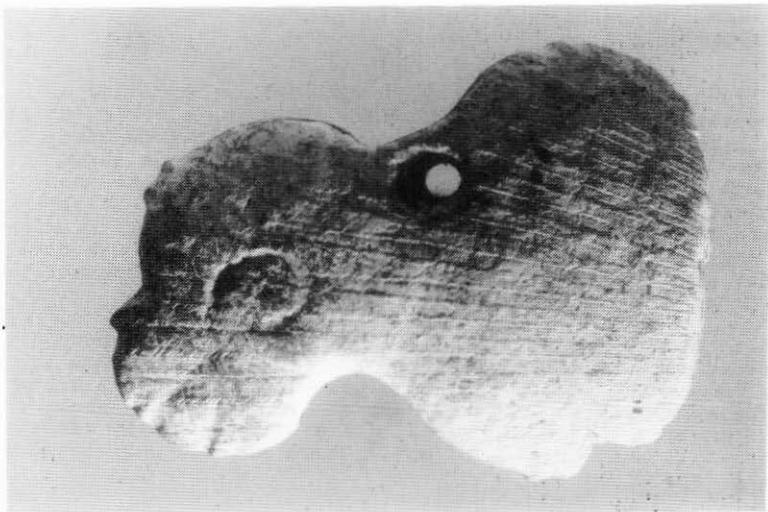


FIGURE 3. Rei puta-like pendants: a. AR7467; b. 36515; c. 17009; d. 5098; e. NM4930.

in the apex, had been placed against the child's abdomen. A second shell with a cut notch on each side of the valve was placed over the buttock. Sutton and Gibbs (1983:102) suggested these ornaments may have been attached to a fibrous waistband, of which no evidence remained.

Another pendant of dog cockle in the Auckland Museum (34813.2), also from Waihi Beach, is shown in Fig.4. Cut from the hinge end of the shell this pendant does not have highly pronounced radial rib scars. The shell has been shaped on one side to form a face, or head, in profile with features depicted by incised lines. Notching appears in six different places around the edge. The length, taken horizontally from the suspended position, is 44 mm, with the width being 33 mm, taken at the widest point and at right angles to the length. There is a single suspension hole with a diameter of 3 mm. The 'face' is reminiscent of the decoration on some of the combs from Kauri Point Swamp (see Davidson, 1984:212), which is not far from Waihi Beach. The pendant cannot with certainty be localised to the same site as that from which the rei puta-like pendant was collected. However it is quite likely that



*Figure 4. Dog Cockle shell pendant (Auckland Museum 34813-2)  
from Waihi Beach*

the pendants, along with other material from Waihi Beach placed in the Auckland Museum at the same time, were from the same site. The site was a large one, exposed in a dune blowout over a number of years, and surface collected by several people (Hammond, 1964).

A very unusual pendant made from Glycymeris shell was reported and illustrated in the N.Z.A.A. Newsletter by Barrow (1959:6-7). Found on the Wairarapa coast in a sand dune and possibly associated with a burial, this figure has been referred to as a hei tiki. The patterning of the dog cockle shell is clearly visible. Because of the absence of a suspension hole it has been inferred the tiki was worn upside down with the suspension cord either wound around the feet, or possibly threaded through between the legs (there is a piece missing between the feet). Barrow (1959:7) suggested the tiki, 55 mm in length and 25 mm wide, may have been Archaic in style based on the upright position of the head. The artefact, from a private collection, is on deposit in the National Museum.

There are several pendants in the Otago Museum which are probably made from Glycymeris shells. All are from D'Urville Island. Specimen D57.428 localised to Greville Harbour, is described on the catalogue card as an imitation shark tooth, 43.9 mm long and 31.1 mm wide, with two suspension holes and a third unfinished central hole. Tapering to a point at the distal end, the pendant is curved in profile. The thickness is measured at 5.1 mm.

Illustrated in Skinner (1933), D57.398 is described as intermediate between a one-piece hook and a snake. The 'point' of the hook is incurved and joins the shank below the bird-like head. Two suspension holes are present; one is above the mouth and the second, a smaller hole, is below the head. The object is 71 mm long and 44 mm wide. The thickness is 9 mm and the artefact must have been made from a particularly large and robust shell. The smaller suspension hole may have been for attaching additional decoration such as feathers, rather than a neckcord.

Also from D'Urville Island, D72.54 was reputed to have been found in a burial cave. Skinner (1934:25) describes it as "... a pendant in the form of a point of a composite fishhook cut from a massive shell ...". Curved in profile the pendant is 79.8 mm long and 34.6 mm wide. Like the previously described pendant it is very thick (9.2 mm). There are two perforations near the 'shank' of the hook.

There are two clusterings apparent in the distribution of the pendants. The first comprising all those with the rei puta-like shape, occurs in the northern half of the North Island.

The second is around the Cook Strait area comprising the Wairarapa coast and D'Urville Island. The ornaments from here are more elaborately sculpted and have a variety of shapes. Interaction of people on the Wairarapa coast with people in the upper part of the South Island is indicated both from the stone material found in an archaeological context (Leach, 1978) and from ethnographic accounts (Simmons, 1981).

There appears to be an absence of artefacts made from dog cockle in the South Island, excluding those from D'Urville Island, even though the area is within the natural distribution of dog cockles. This may be due to inadequate sampling on my part but a perusal of the literature indicates neither artefacts nor shells have been found in the context of an excavation. However in the Canterbury Museum there are pendants made from other shell species such as Mactra and Spisula (L.Williams, pers.comm.).

The rei puta-like shape is also copied in other types of shell. In the Auckland Museum a breast ornament of similar size to those described above has been fashioned from a shell of a Mactra sp.

Imitation whale tooth pendants or necklace units had a wide distribution throughout New Zealand in the early period of settlement. The rei puta has also been recorded from most areas (Skinner, 1934:114). The rei puta-like shell pendant form was in use from the early period until at least the 16th century, and the rei puta proper was seen in the 18th century. This suggests the style of a single pendant with an outward turned end was present throughout the sequence of occupation in New Zealand but the rarity of this type of pendant in collections suggests it was not common.

#### Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the curators of various museums for information: Betty McFadgen (National Museum); Wendy Harsant (Otago); Lyn Williams (Canterbury); David Butts (Hawkes Bay); Richard Cassels (Manawatu); and Anton van der Wouden (Whakatane). Nigel Prickett and Caroline Phillips were also of assistance. Lyn Williams commented critically on an early draft of the paper.

#### References

- |            |      |  |
|------------|------|--|
| Barrow, T. | 1959 | An Archaic type of Maori hei-tiki from the Wairarapa east coast. <u>N.Z.A.A. Newsletter</u> , 2:6-7. |
| Best, S.   | 1980 | Oruarangi Pā: past and present investigations. <u>N.Z. Jnl Archaeology</u> , 2:65-91.                |

- Davidson, J. 1984 The Prehistory of New Zealand. Longman Paul, Auckland.
- Furey, L. 1982 Interim report on excavations at N42/941, Westfield, South Auckland. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter, 25:138-143.
- 1983 Radiocarbon dates from N42/941, Westfield, South Auckland. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter, 26:106.
- Hammond, W.T. 1964 Sites of ancient Maori workshops. The Ohinemuri Regional History Journal, 1:31-32.
- Law, R.G. 1972 Archaeology at Harataonga Bay, Great Barrier Island. Rec. Auckland Inst. Mus., 9:81-123.
- Leach, B.F. 1978 Four centuries of community interaction and trade in Cook Strait, New Zealand. Mankind, 11:391-405.
- Powell, A.W.B. 1979 New Zealand Mollusca. Collins, Auckland.
- Skinner, H.D. 1933 Maori amulets in stone, bone and shell. Jnl. Polyn. Soc., 42:310-320.
- 1934 Maori amulets in stone, bone and shell. Jnl. Polyn. Soc., 43:25-29; 106-117.
- 1974 Comparatively Speaking. University of Otago Press, Dunedin.
- Simmons, D.R. 1981 Stability and change in the material culture of Queen Charlotte Sound in the 18th century. Rec. Auckland Inst. Mus., 18:1-61.
- Sutton, D. and 1983 An infant burial from Okahu (or Redhead) W. Gibbs Island, Bay of Islands. N.Z.A.A. Newsletter, 26:102-105.