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Stylistic affinities of the Waitore Site (N136/16) assemblage

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the styles of decoration associated with the Waitore (N136/16) artefact assemblage, which has been dated to the 15th century A.D. Two notching styles of decoration are defined. The first is an incised form of notching which is frequently (though not exclusively) found on artefacts placed in the Archaic phase of New Zealand prehistory; a variant of this form is a raised, pyramid-like notching. The second type is a punched notching form which is also placed within this period. The spatial and chronological distribution of these decorative styles is discussed. This is followed by a description of the stylistic features of the Waitore assemblage. The Waitore artefacts with their associated notching forms of decoration can be accommodated within Mead's (1975) evolutionary sequence of Maori art.

Keywords NEW ZEALAND, TARANAKI, WOODEN ARTEFACTS, DECORATION, NOTCHING, PUNCHING.

NOTCHING AS A FORM OF DECORATION IN NEW ZEALAND CARVING

Incised notching, as an external decoration and sometimes functional motif, has a wide distribution within New Zealand. This form of notching is made by adzing, nicking or filing the external boundaries (or raised interior edges) to decorate an artefact (for examples see Duff 1956:123, 126; Skinner 1974:67-71).

Mead's (1975) developmental sequence of Maori art does not include punched notching as a decorative form. However, the Waitore finds show that punching is contemporary with incised notching, being found together on the same pieces. (In addition, the double spiral also occurs on the same piece.)

The use of notching as a decoration on artefacts is said to be commonly associated with: the simplistic portrayal of human facial features, the use of chevron designs, the use of the single spiral instead of a double spiral, and the portrayal of "raised or shaped eyes" which tend to characterise early carving styles (Duff 1956:123, 126; Mead 1975:203-204; Phillipps 1972). Mead (1975:204) states that:

The evidence suggests that modification of the external edges by incised notching, shaped notches or by more complex forms such as the hand and feet decoration on chevron amulets was an aesthetic concern among artists of the Settlement and Development periods [A.D.900-1000 and A.D.1100-1350 respectively].

Mead builds a developmental sequence of Maori art forms based on (1) a theory proposed by Kubler about art objects and time (Mead 1975:191), (2) Green's 1963 evolutionary scheme which was proposed for the prehistoric sequence in the Auckland province (Green 1970), and (3) the present archaeological record. Within this sequence notching, as an external decorative form found on chevron pendants, whale-tooth ornaments, bird-spears and tattooing chisels, is placed in the settlement and developmental phases. In the Experimental phase, (A.D.1350-1450), incised notching continues to be important as a decorative form. In the Proto-Maori phase (A.D.1450-1650) in Northland "... the Moa-hunter preference for modifying the outline edges by notching still prevailed ..." and this external decorative form continued into the Classic Maori phase (A.D.1650-1800) (Mead 1975:204). Notching, *per se*, is therefore of little chronological significance, although it is notable on artefacts associated with the Archaic period and inconspicuous but present among Classic decoration styles.

Mead's developmental sequence incorporating incised notching is based on a hypothesised evolutionary sequence of the *manaia* motif (Mead 1975:Fig. 4) which includes decorative elements. No concrete, archaeologically-based dates for notched wooden artefacts are given, as most of the artefacts used in the sequence tend to be swamp finds unassociated with controlled archaeological excavation (Green 1974:1). The notched artefacts excavated under controlled conditions at the Waitore Site (N136/16) begin to provide this needed concrete information.

A second type of decoration is punching or indentation made by impressing a chisel on a flat surface, thus covering the artefact with decoration. The object is not pierced, though superficially one might see parallels between the Waitore punch decoration and the pierced or incised decoration found on Raivavaean material, Austral Islands (Barrow 1972b:114-115, Figs 188, 189; Force and Force 1971:139-145). When examined closely, however, the technique, style and motif of these carvings are totally different. Punching, as a form of decoration, is much rarer than notching. An example is provided by two small bone chests (*waka tupapaku*) which are thought to have come from a cave in the Hokianga district of Northland (Archey 1977:Fig. 167; Barrow 1972a:Plate 78; Phillipps 1972:Plate 54). Phillipps (1972:36) observes that "... the head is emphasised ... All [three bone chests] have raised eyes ... the teeth are large and toes are the normal number and on the ill-formed thighs a single spiral appears ...", but he fails to mention the punched notching which covers the surface of one of the bone chests (Auckland Museum 5651) in a dotted lateral-patterned design. Phillipps points out that Elsdon Best believed that these unusual carvings from Northland were associated with "pre-Fleet inhabitation" (Phillipps 1972:36). Barrow (1972a:68) also associated this "Whangaroa notching style" with early Maori tattoo styles, placing it in the Archaic period of New Zealand prehistory.

Two other punch-decorated objects should be mentioned: (1) a late gourd with punch decoration around the rim (Leahy 1976:60), (2) an unprovenanced canoe prow in the Waikato Art Museum with sets of punched notches (Waikato Art Museum A14.497). Our current knowledge of punching suggests that there are no definite chronological or distributional patterns associated with this form of decoration.

THE NOTCHED ARTEFACTS FROM WAITORE

The pieces in question are:

Piece N136/16/1, 20, 106, 107 (Fig. 1; also Cassels, this volume, Figs 4, 10, 11) Fragments of a plank-like artefact. The surface is decorated with punched marks in a series of spirals and line groupings and the central spine is decorated with incised pyramid-like notches.

Piece N136/16/24 (Cassels, this volume, Fig. 7, lower) A small, broken, curved knob or "horn" decorated with both incised notching and punching.

Piece N136/16/9 (Cassels, this volume, Fig. 4) A *whakapapa*-like notched stick, flat on one surface and concave on the other. The pyramid-like notching (a regular pattern of 123 notches on the edge of the concave surface) suggests a decorative form rather than the irregular notching of a *whakapapa* (Skinner 1974:99). "Whakapapa" means genealogical tree (Skinner 1974:99 and Fig. 11. 5), and is commonly a small artefact made of bone, with a series of notches to enable the owner to remember his relationship to any member of his *whanau* or *hapu*.

Piece N136/16/15 (Cassels, this volume, Fig. 9) Decorated canoe strake, incised notching along three ridges of the upper surface. The four groupings of notches spaced along the edges could have been functional (as securing grooves for lashings) and also decorative. Lashing marks are found on the one end with the complete hole, as well as in the middle sections.

Piece N136/16/103 (Cassels, this volume, Fig. 9) Curved handle or thwart, with 12 deep pyramid-like notches on convex surface; both ends damaged (24.5 cm long).

- A. PLAN VIEW
- B. VIEW OF CROSS SECTION

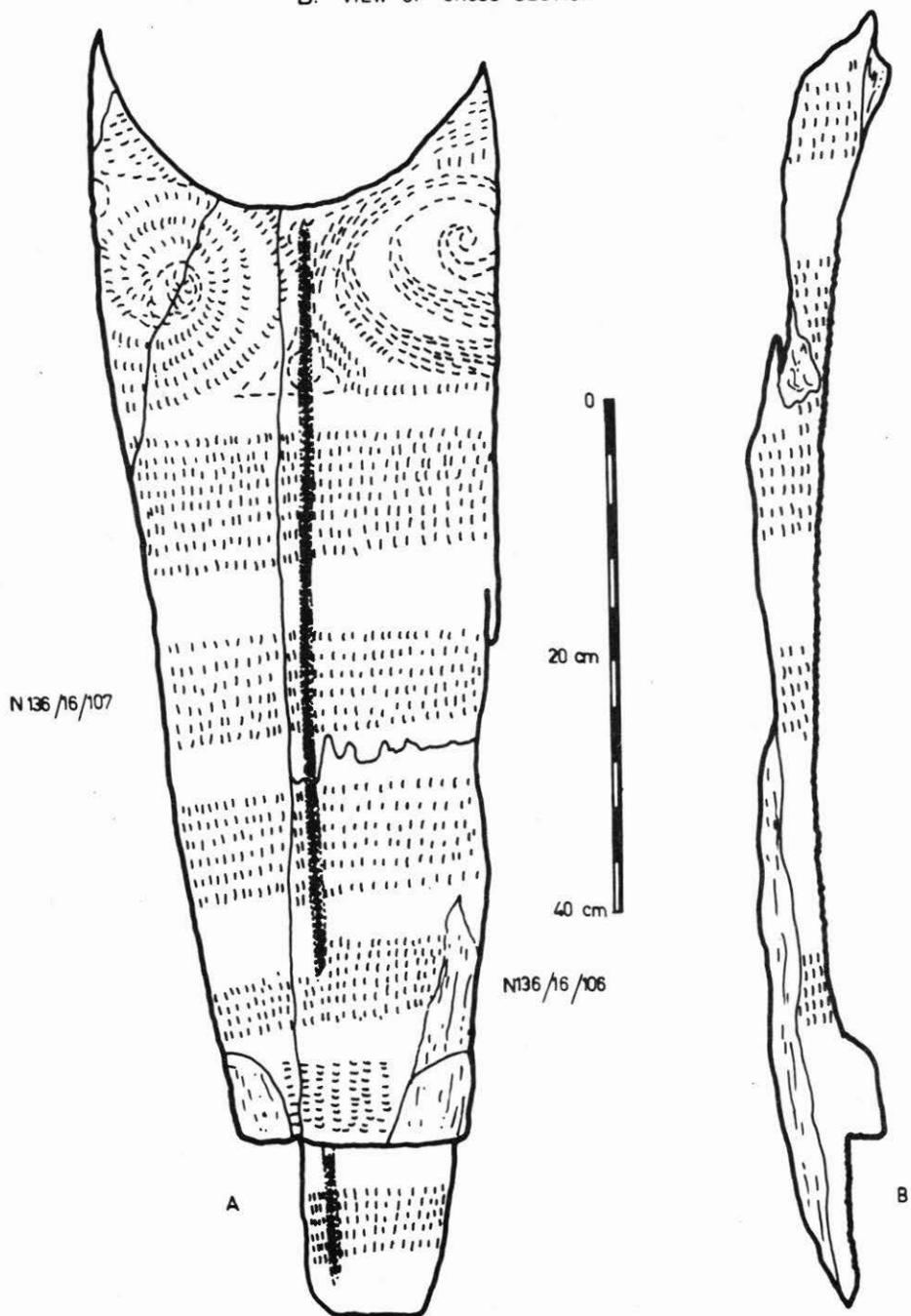


Figure 1 Decorated board (N136/16/1, 20, 106, 107) from Waitore Site.

Piece N136/16/501 (Cassels, this volume, Fig. 9) Short handle with notches. (See previous paper by Cassels for discussion of provenance, stratigraphy and function of these artefacts.)

DISCUSSION

Incised notching is found on several of the Waitore artefacts. The notching on the canoe strake (piece 15) is very similar to that found on other wooden carvings (Simmons 1973a: Figs 1 and 2; Simmons 1973b: Figs 10 and 11. This sketch of the Kerepehi bowl (4689 Auckland Museum) over-emphasises the incised notches which are actually not very pronounced, as is the case with the Waitore canoe strake, piece 15). Simmons' study of the Katikati and Te Puke "godsticks" points out that this use of decorative notching is not restricted to New Zealand Maori carving, but also appears on Cook Island and Tahitian artefacts which are depicted in the Oldman Collection (Simmons 1973a: 65). Simmons concludes from his study that "... the early New Zealand examples may then represent more closely the original art style of East Polynesia before marked variation had occurred, even though the New Zealand examples themselves have undergone some development in New Zealand" (Simmons 1973a: 67).

The "horn" (piece 24) has an external boundary notching which has been quoted as being characteristic of the Archaic period and a punched pattern on one surface. This association again shows that both styles are contemporary.

The second type of notching represented in these Waitore examples is an incised, raised, pyramid-like form on pieces 9 (*whakapapa*) and 103 (thwart) and the central spine of piece 1 (decorated board). This type of notching is very similar to that found on the Kaitaia lintel carving (Skinner 1974: Fig. 3.9C) which Mead places within the Experimental phase (A.D. 1350-1450) of his developmental sequence (Mead 1975: 201, Fig. 4). On piece 9 the notches are large, being formed with single impressions of an adze down the length of the stick along one edge of the concave surface, whereas notches on piece 1 and 103 have been formed by incising. A similar notched spine can be seen on the Chatham Island house post figured by Skinner (1923, Plate VI).

The third type of decoration is punching, which is seen in Figure 1. The punched decoration is very elaborate, incorporating two spirals and six notched bands which also appear on the sides. The spirals, the triangular pattern between them, the central raised incised line and the broken-off protrusions at the lower end of the plank are reminiscent of a human figure, representing facial features, spinal column, and limbs. The use of notching to represent the spinal column is not uncommon in Eastern Polynesian wood carving (Barrow 1972b: Fig. 3.13-3.15; Skinner 1974: Fig. 4.153). This example of punched decoration is far more complex than the previously cited bone chest from Northland, where the notching forms a linear surface pattern with no definite design. Cassels' reconstruction of piece 1 suggests that the plank served as a canoe prow cover (see previous paper by Cassels). Alternatively, the possible connection of this punching decoration with burials (Phillipps 1972: Plate 54) could indicate a mortuary function.

The most interesting carved artefact associated with this notched material is the small carved wooden face, piece 5, which was found in the stream bed at the site, and therefore not directly associated with the other finds. The facial features are naturalistic, with raised eyes, natural nose and the mouth being represented by three incised lines. Numerous other naturalistic Eastern Polynesian-looking heads carved in wood can be found in the literature (Coutts 1969: 121; Downes 1932a: Figs 9B, 12B, 13B and 1932b: Plate 7 showing examples from Waverley approximately 15 km from Waitore Site; also Simmons 1973a: 65 and 1973b: Figs 6 and 7; Sinclair 1940: 140), the majority of which have been described as being characteristically "early" in appearance and "representative of an archaic style". The association of notching with naturalistic facial features appears on the Te Puke and Katikati batons or "godsticks" described by Simmons (1973a: 65). This same association also appears on pendants (Phillipps

1972:Fig. 55; Duff 1956:Plate 19A; Archey 1977:Fig. 213) and amulets (Skinner 1974:Figs 4.92, 4.94, 4.95, 4.96) showing that these carving styles were not restricted to wood carving alone. These examples of Archaic art suggest that, on the basis of the style association alone, one would infer that the Waitore artefacts, particularly the head and the board, were contemporary and belong to this same period. Using Mead's developmental sequence, the Waitore artefacts would be placed in the Development-Experimental periods (A.D.1100-1350 and A.D.1350-1450 respectively). The Waitore radiocarbon dates are compatible with the later period (Cassels: this volume).

Notched artefacts have a wide distribution within New Zealand, although incised notching on wooden artefacts has a biased distribution weighted toward the North Island where swamp finds are most numerous. Since there is, however, only one other well-provenanced example of punched decoration on wooden artefacts this may turn out to be a very localised decoration style, so far only known from Northland and Waitore, South Taranaki.

CONCLUSION: THE DECORATIVE STYLES

Mead states that many gaps exist in the sequence of art between the Archaic and Classic periods of Maori cultural development, and that "... future archaeological investigations will undoubtedly fill in some of the gaps" (Mead 1975:192). I propose that the Waitore punched and notched board with spirals is one such piece in this jigsaw. The designs on the plank could possibly represent an intermediary or transitional stage in the progression from the early rectilinear style to the curvilinear style which characterises Classic Maori carving. The dating of the swamp sediments associated with these artefacts gives a time depth which enables them to be placed more firmly in an evolutionary sequence of carving styles.

The Waitore Site suggests that notching, punching, simple spirals and naturalistic carved heads featured in the decorative techniques of the early 15th century A.D.

The little carved head is very similar to other heads found carved on "godsticks" in the Waverley/Wanganui region, and seems to be a distinctive regional phenomenon and style.

The simple decorative form (?partly functional) of notching is found on several artefacts, and this has been previously thought to be mainly an Archaic style. The Waitore finds confirm its antiquity. The distinctive decorative style of punching has been shown to be, so far, very rare in New Zealand. One of the designs formed by punching is a crude double spiral, a design form common in late prehistoric and recent Maori carving but here shown to be an ancient form in New Zealand.

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