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TWO TROLLING LURE SHANKS FROM THE EAST COAST

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In October of 1991, while involved in cataloguing some East Coast fish hooks, I was shown two bone trolling lure shanks which had been found by Neil McGregor at Karaka Bay just north of Tolaga Bay. My thanks to Neil for making these artefacts available for description.

TROLLING LURE 1

The larger of the two (Fig. 1), measures 88.0 mm in length, has a maximum width of 14.5 mm and a maximum depth of 12.0 mm.

The head of the lure shank has been perforated dorso-ventrally with the ventral part of the perforation showing the clear conical form associated with pre-contact period manufacture. The dorsal part of the perforation has less evident taper and initially the possibility of metal tool drilling was considered. However, this has been discounted. It now seems more likely that different drill points were used on either side.

The head tapers to a blunt point with two protruding eyes carved on either side, slightly forward of the attachment line perforation. At the distal end of the lure shank a flat platform 12.0 mm long has been carved on the upper surface. Three shallow vertical notches have been cut into one side of the lure at right angles to the platform and two similar notches on the other side. These notches would have increased the grip of the lashings holding the point limb in place.

The ventral surface of the lure is flatter than the remaining surfaces with the cross section approximating a flattened circle.

The bone, which is probably whale, has an uneven density, being solid and compact on the forward under surface and more cellular and open on the upper part of the shank.

TROLLING LURE 2

The second bone lure shank (Fig. 2) is more notable as the point limb was found in association with the shank.

The shank is 74.5 mm long, has a maximum width of 12.0 mm and a maximum depth of 11.0 mm.

The perforation at the head of the lure is also dorso-ventrally drilled and more clearly bi-conical. Protruding eyes have been carved on the sides of the lure with three concentric incomplete circles forming the eye on one side and two concentric circles forming the eye on the other. The eyes are separated

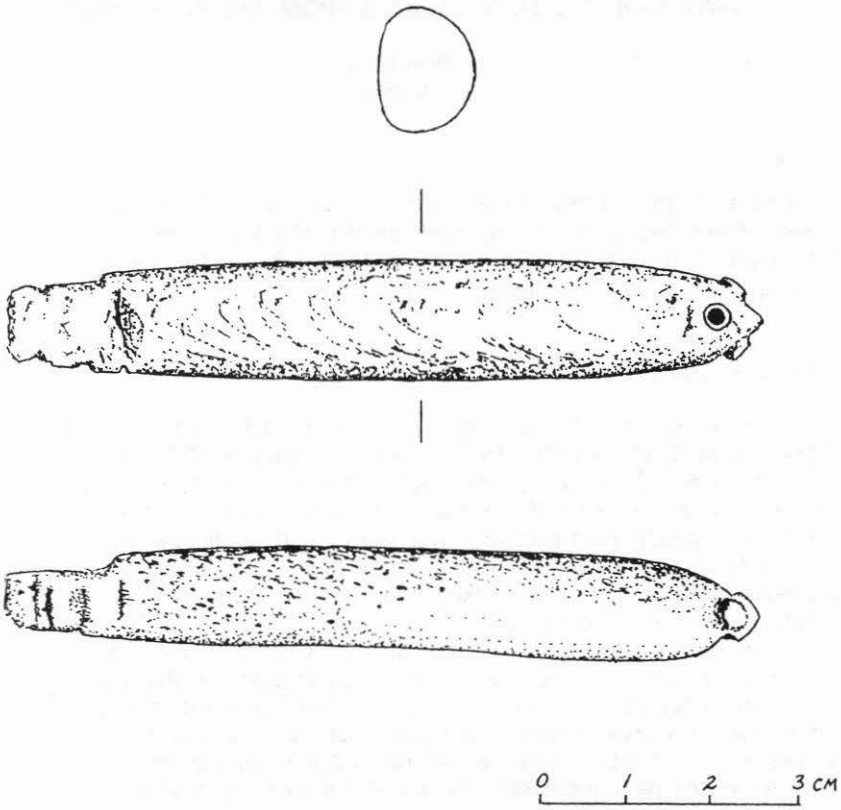


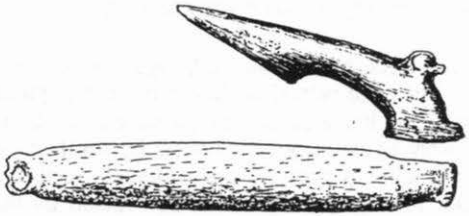
Fig. 1. Trolling Lure 1

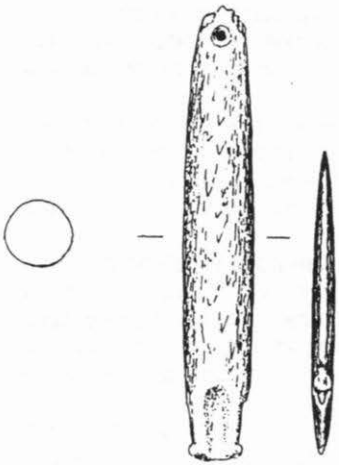
by a narrow vertical ridge which forms the most forward part of the lure. Three very shallow notches bisect this ridge. The cross-section of this lure is near circular. At the distal end, the point attachment platform is indented into the dorsal surface of the lure to a depth of 0.8 mm and has a length of 11.0 mm.

A wide notch approximately 7.0 mm in width has been ground into the sides and ventral surface of the lure adjacent to the point attachment platform.

The bone is more dense than Trolling Lure 1 and apart from a bleached area at the distal end where the lure was projecting from the sand, the bone density and condition are very good. Whale bone seems the likely material.

The point limb is made of greenstone, possibly from the Arahura source and in addition to being well designed as a functional item, has an interesting decorative feature in the form of a head (manaia) projecting from the dorsal





OBLIQUE VIEW
VENTRAL SURFACE OF "HEAD"
(NOT TO SCALE)

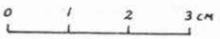


Fig. 2. Trolling Lure 2

edge of the hook close to where the point limb would have been bound to the bone shank.

A short 'beak' and slightly raised (but clearly defined) eyes have been carved on this projecting head. As is the case with East Coast bone one-piece hooks which feature a similar 'manaia' on the snood end (Waikawa report in preparation), this projecting head is likely to have been covered by the lashing and would certainly have prevented the lashing from slipping forward along the point. Lashing movement in the other direction would have been halted by the extended base.

The horizontal length (hook base to tip when lashed to shank) is 47.0 mm, with the overall length being 51.5 mm. The maximum thickness is 3.8 mm. The length of the base which abuts the shank is 13.0 mm. The point limb has an internal barb 23.0 mm from the tip. This barb does not curve out from the general line of the point but rather is formed by a crescent-shaped reduction of the inner edge of the point.

DISCUSSION

Both these lure shanks have characteristics recognisable as typical of North Island East Coast trolling lures. The dorso-ventral line perforation, the near circular cross-section and the protruding 'eyes' on either side of the line perforation are typical features of this type of lure.

Duff (1956: 200) features a similarly provenanced lure shank from East Cape and Davidson (1984: 64-65) figures an archaeological specimen from Oruarangi – both similar to these Karaka Bay specimens. Davidson notes that this form of lure 'may well have lasted in parts of the eastern North Island almost until European contact.'

There is, however, a feature of the greenstone lure point which adds further to the distinctive East Coast characteristics of the lure. On the dorsal edge of the greenstone point limb, the clearly recognisable head with well-formed eyes and beak is remarkably similar to the decorative snood ends and 'bait knobs' which occur on several bone one-piece hooks from Waikawa and a further example from Ocean Beach, Hawkes Bay.

The small size of this particular decorative feature on the lure point and similar ones on the bone bait hooks has naturally limited the amount of detailed carving possible. However, I believe that the shape is recognisable as a manaia form and was intended as something more significant than a mere line support knob.

The prolific sea-bird life on the East Coast and the effective fishing methods of those birds would have been frequently observed by the tribes in the area, whose strong traditional beliefs supported by day to day observations of bird life would have made the inclusion of the manaia form on their hooks a natural development intended to enhance the effectiveness of the fishing gear.

Buck (1950: 223-224) infers that the lateral knobs on the proximal end of the lure shanks were functionally associated with the snood lashing. However, the concentric circles which form the 'knobs' on Trolling Lure 2 are too shallow

for lashing grips and are almost certainly intended as 'eyes' to enhance the life-like appearance of the lure. Buck's view is not supported by the three examples of trolling hooks which he illustrates, which show the snood lines clear of the 'knobs'. Though lacking the concentric ring design of Trolling Lure 2, the more prominent and protruding knobs on Trolling Lure 1 are more likely to be eyes to visually deceive the attacking fish.

Though perhaps not exclusive to the East Coast, the presence of a manaia-like form on lure points and one-piece bait hooks is characteristic of the Ngatiporou and Ngati Kahungunu area, while the protruding eyes carved on bone trolling lures is, to date, strongly representative of that region.

The solid density and weight in both lures, the care taken in carving the eyes on the shanks and the considerable skill required to produce a narrow nephrite barbed point with decorative features, enhances the view that this type of lure is a late development representative of fishing gear used just prior to European contact.

REFERENCES

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Davidson, J. 1984. *The Prehistory of New Zealand*. Longman Paul, Auckland.

Duff, R. 1956. *The Moa-Hunter Period of Maori Culture*. Government Printer, Wellington.