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ON A LARGE EXAMPLE OF *MEGALATRACTUS*  
*ARUANUS*, L.

BY CHARLES HEDLEY, Conchologist.

(Plates xxi.-xxii., and fig. 24).

Since the appearance of Mr. H. L. Kesteven's article<sup>1</sup> on the structure of *Megalatractus aruanus*, further notes and information have been accumulated on the subject by the writer. The size attained by this gigantic shell does not seem to be generally appreciated. It is quoted by Deshayes<sup>2</sup> as "longueur 3 pouces, 11 lignes." The latest monographer, Tryon,<sup>3</sup> gives the length as from 8-12 inches. It appears to be the largest recent Gasteropod. So far as I am aware, no illustration of the adult shell has appeared.

The Trustees have lately received from Mr. P. G. Black a magnificent specimen which that gentleman procured in Torres Strait, and which is figured on the accompanying plate (Pl. xxi.). The subject of this note weighs ten pounds twelve ounces, the breadth is ten and a half inches, and the length one foot ten and three-quarter inches. As usual in the adult state, the apex is decollated; by comparison with younger examples it is estimated that in the individual figured the styliform embryo and two and a half succeeding whorls have been removed, curtailing the total length by three-quarters of an inch. Seven whorls now remain. In the young shells the keel bears projecting nodules, but in the adult it is smooth.

The original figure of this species by Rumphius,<sup>4</sup> upon which Linne founded the species,<sup>5</sup> and from which he derived the name and locality, is reversed. That this was done by error of the engraver and not intentionally is shown by the fact that the remaining figures of *Septa tritonis*, Linn., &c., upon the same plate are also reversed. This unfortunate mistake evidently caused Linne to confound this shell with the American *Fulgur carica*, Gmelin, which is really a sinistral shell.

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<sup>1</sup> Kesteven—Austr. Mus. Mem., iv., 1904, pp. 419-449.

<sup>2</sup> Deshayes—Anim. s. Vert., 2nd. ed., ix., 1843, p. 450.

<sup>3</sup> Tryon—Man. Conch., iii., 1881, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Rumphius—D'Amboinsche Rariteikamer, 1741, p. 93, pl. xxviii., fig. a.

<sup>5</sup> Linnæus—Syst. Nat., 10th. ed., 1758, p. 753.

According to Brauer,<sup>6</sup> the *Murex gigas* of Born is a synonym of this species.

*Buccinum incisum* of Martyn is usually considered to belong here also. The locality he gave has been noted as erroneous by E. A. Smith.<sup>7</sup>

The islanders of Torres Strait employed this shell in their ceremonies. Prof. A. C. Haddon<sup>8</sup> has described and figured its use in the "zogo," or sacred ground of Murray Island. In a drawing by Prof. T. H. Huxley,<sup>9</sup> the species is shown mounted on a funeral screen at Mt. Ernest, Torres Strait.

When visiting Bentinck Island, Gulf of Carpentaria, in June, 1903, as the guest of Dr. W. E. Roth, I gathered a specimen (Pl. xxii.) eighteen inches in length which the aborigines had employed for carrying water. To facilitate transport, a hole had been knocked in the ventral surface at the margin of the inner lip, in which the thumb was inserted while the fingers grasped the columella.

Dr. Roth notes<sup>10</sup> that at Mapoon, Cape York Peninsula, where it is called "pandari," the natives eat the mollusc and manufacture the shell into nose-pins and water-vessels.

I am indebted to Mr. A. Morton for permission to notice here an interesting specimen preserved in the Tasmanian Museum. A shell (fig. 24) about nine inches in length was perforated in the back of the penultimate whorl, and had been used as a trumpet by the Papuans. It was collected on the Fly River, British New Guinea, by the late Rev. James Chalmers.

The furthest point to which I have traced the species to the south-west is Rest Bay, Exmouth Gulf, W.A., where Admiral P. P. King observed<sup>11</sup> "a buccinum of immense size" upon the beach.

On Darnley Island it appears, from an observation by Jukes, to be known as "mabaer."<sup>12</sup>

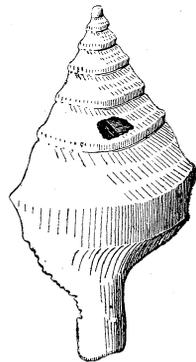


Fig. 24.

*Megalatractus aruanus*.

<sup>6</sup> Brauer—Sitzb. K. K. Akad. Wiss. Wien, lxxvii, 1, 1878, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> Smith—Proc. Zool. Soc., 1890, p. 317.

<sup>8</sup> Haddon—Head-Hunters, Black, White, and Brown, 1901, p. 54, pl. vii.

<sup>9</sup> Macgillivray—Voy. "Rattlesnake," ii., 1852, p. 37, pl. ii.

<sup>10</sup> Roth—North Queensland Ethnography, Bull. iii., 1901, p. 18; vii., 1904, p. 3, fig. 203.

<sup>11</sup> King—Survey Coasts Australia, i., 1827, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Jukes—Voy. "Fly," i., 1847, p. 189; ii., p. 286.

When alive the shell is entirely covered by a dense buff epidermis, which peels off dry specimens. An example of the animal which I purchased at Mapoon, from an aboriginal who proposed to eat it, served my friend Mr. H. L. Kesteven as a subject for anatomical study.<sup>13</sup>

In previous articles I have discussed the synonymy and egg capsules of the species.<sup>14</sup>

*Add.*—Since the above has been in print the South-western range has been extended by the receipt from Mr. J. M. Sheridan of an egg-case of *M. aruanus*, collected on Carnac Island, seven miles South-west of Fremantle, W.A. The eastern-most record is a dead shell I observed on the beach at Masthead Island, Capricorn Group, Queensland.

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<sup>13</sup> Kesteven—Austr. Mus. Mem., iv., 8, 1904.

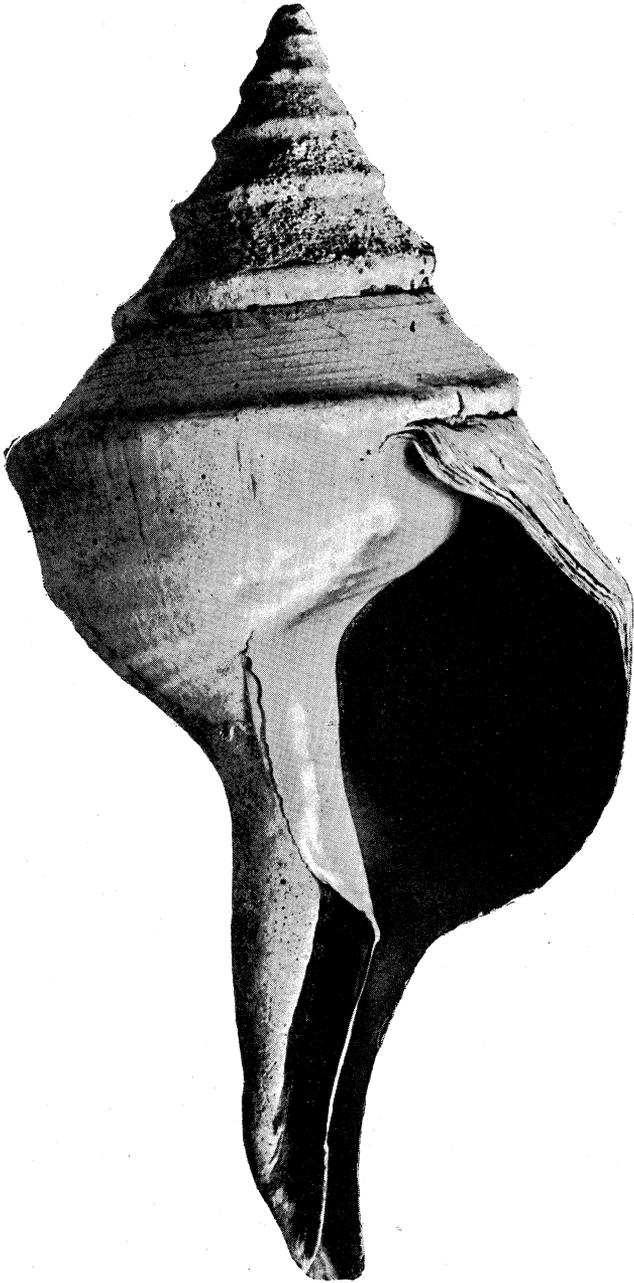
<sup>14</sup> Hedley—Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S. Wales, xxv., 1900, pp. 98 and 508, pl. xxv., f. 18.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXI.

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MEGALATRACTUS ARUANUS, L.

Torres Strait, about a quarter the natural size.



T. WHITELEGGE, Photo  
Austr. Mus.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE XXII

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MEGALTRACTUS ARUANUS.

Wellesly Islands, Gulf of Carpentaria, fashioned by natives to carry  
water, about a quarter the natural size.



T. WHITELEGGE, Photo.  
Austr. Mus.