# Three-dimensional visualization of predatory gastropod feeding teeth with synchrotron scanning

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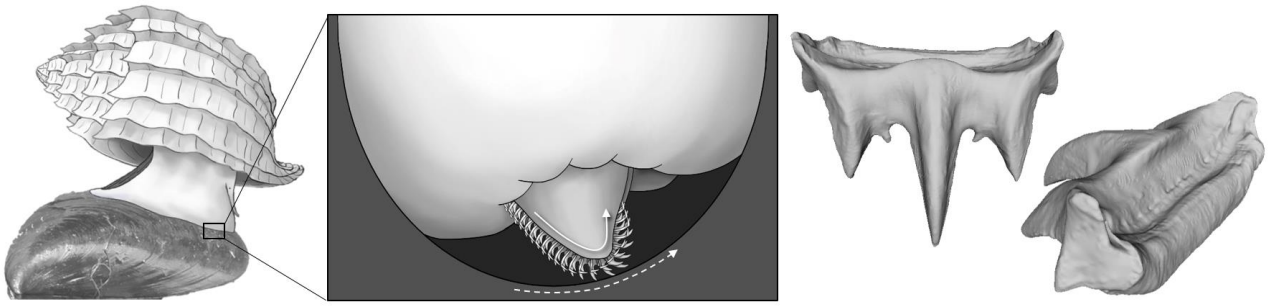
**Research Highlights:** Mineralized feeding teeth of four species of the gastropod family Muricidae are imaged using synchrotron tomographic microscopy to explore features not viewed previously and assemble 3D models to visualize tooth-tooth interactions as they would occur when drilling holes through mineralized prey shells. We describe two new types of articulating joints, one of which increases contact between teeth even as they rotate away from each other during drilling. Articulating joints have not been described in Neogastropod radula previously but are consistent with earlier hypotheses that impact forces on individual teeth during predatory drilling might be dispersed by tooth-tooth interactions.

**Graphical abstract:**



A muricid snail feeding on a mussel prey by drilling a hole through its shell. Drilling involves chemical softening agents secreted by an organ in the foot but also the radula, a ribbon of mineralized feeding teeth in the proboscis that mechanically bores into the shell. The three-dimensional tooth shapes are described for muricids for the first time using synchrotron tomographic microscopy, showing previously undescribed saddle and tongue-and-groove joints between articulating teeth. These articulation surfaces, which are mostly absent or underdeveloped in other neogastropods, support the hypothesis that muricid tooth shape has evolved to minimize injury to the snail during drilling by distributing impact forces between teeth.

## ABSTRACT

Several families of neogastropod mollusks independently evolved the ability to drill through mineralized prey skeletons using their own mineralized feeding teeth, sometimes with shell softening chemical agents produced by an organ in the foot. Teeth with more durable tooth shapes should extend their use and improve predator performance, but past studies have described only the cusped-side of teeth, mostly overlooking morphologies related to functional interactions between them. Here, we describe the three-dimensional morphology of the central drilling tooth (rachidian) from four species of the neogastropod family Muricidae using synchrotron tomographic microscopy and assemble a 3D model of a multi-tooth series in drilling position for two of them to investigate their dynamic form. We find two new types of articulating surfaces, including a saddle joint at either end of the rachidian and a large tongue-and-groove joint in the center. The latter has a shape that maximizes contact surface area between teeth as they rotate away from each other during drilling. Articulating joints have not been described in Neogastropod radula previously, but they are consistent with an earlier hypothesis that impact forces on individual teeth during predatory drilling are dispersed by tooth-tooth interactions.


## 1 INTRODUCTION

Nearly all predatory families of gastropods arose in the late Cretaceous (Taylor et al., 1998), which was a time of rapid evolutionary innovation and ecological restructuring now known as the Mesozoic marine revolution (MMR) (Vermeij, 1977). One of the feeding innovations that evolved repeatedly during the MMR was predatory drilling (Morton and Chan, 1997; Kabat, 1990; Ponder and Taylor, 1992), which refers to the ability of some gastropods to excavate feeding holes through the mineralized armor of shelled invertebrate prey. In the neogastropod family Muricidae, the most diverse clade of drillers, drilling is thought to be the plesiomorphic mode of feeding (Vermeij and Carlson, 2000) and enabled by alternating rounds of chemical dissolution by an accessory boring organ (ABO) and mechanical abrasion by the radula, which consists of hundreds of rows of mineralized teeth attached to a long, flexible ribbon (Carriker and Van Zandt, 1972; Carriker, 1981; Carriker and Gruber, 1999; Fig. 1). Each tooth row has a multi-cusped rachidian tooth in the center flanked by a sickle-shaped lateral tooth on either side. During the mechanical phase of drilling, the radular ribbon is pulled back and forth (Simone, 2011: 194) over the tip of a tongue-like cartilage (the odontophore) like the teeth of a chain saw (Huxley, 1853), with each pull causing contact of 5 to 15% of radula tooth rows with the prey shell surface (Hemingway, 1975; Fujioka, 1985; Harding et al., 2008). Most of the tooth-substrate contact is with the rachidian tooth; lateral teeth are pulled back and make only incidental contact with the surface (Carriker et al., 1974). Simultaneously, the odontophore cartilage performs its own complicated motion, performing either a

cleaning sweep across the prey shell surface or striking at it as a geologist would use a rock hammer (Carriker and Schaadt, 1973; Carriker et al., 1974).

Tooth rows damaged from drilling (Fig. 2; Carriker et al., 1974) are continuously replaced in conveyor-belt fashion, with upstream production of new teeth in the radular sac and downstream shedding of older teeth into the esophagus. However, tooth damage from drilling can outpace the rate new teeth are moved into striking position (Fujioka, 1985), leaving snails to reuse damaged teeth until nothing is left but a flat base (Fig. 2d-f; see also Carriker et al., 1974). Selection should, therefore, favor (1) teeth with stronger material properties (e.g., microstructural fibers, mineral reinforcement, degree of tanning) (Tyler and Schiffbauer, 2012; Krings et al., 2022a), (2) faster tooth replacement (Fujioka, 1985), (3) evolution of feeding modes that reduce drilling times (e.g., edge drilling, toxins, prying and wedging, scavenging, parasitism) (Herbert, 2004, 2009; Dietl and Herbert, 2005; Paul et al., 2015); and/or (4) teeth with more durable shapes that extend their use (e.g., self-sharpening wear, cusps with wider and stronger bases, articulating bases, etc.) (Herbert et al., 2007, 2016).

Complex articulating structures at the margins and bases of adjacent radular teeth are already known from scanning electron micrographs (SEM) of muricid radulae (Pio et al., 2014; Herbert et al., 2015). Possible functions of these structures include distributing impact forces between teeth to prevent early wear (Carriker et al., 1974) and counteracting lateral bending or torsional forces along the radula by keeping teeth aligned (Hickman, 1980, 1984). Interestingly, complex tooth-tooth articulation is absent or poorly developed in neogastropods that use the radula for piercing, raking, or scooping soft flesh, reinforcing the hypothesis that the complex articulations of muricid radulae are adaptations for drilling.

This study uses synchrotron tomographic microscopy (see Donoghue et al., 2006) to develop the first 3D models of muricid radulae, a first step in testing whether ~70 million years of drilling has led to more durable tooth shapes and better drillers. Synchrotron radiation produces extremely bright x-rays, allowing much higher tomographic resolutions and better contrast than conventional medical- or micro-CT scanners (Cunningham et al., 2014). Reconstructing tomographic x-ray data allows us to visualize complete quantitative surfaces of muricid radulae from any orientation for the first time, including articulation surfaces between teeth and between teeth and the supporting radular ribbon behind it. We also show how 3D models of individual teeth can be assembled to better understand the dynamic form of the radula during drilling, as opposed to relying on single-tooth morphology. From these reconstructions, we report new features of muricid radulae, describe their variation in species representing several of the muricid subfamilies, illustrate articulation surfaces and how interactions between teeth vary during

drilling, and formulate predictions about their putative functions in drilling that can be tested in the future with methods such as finite element analysis.

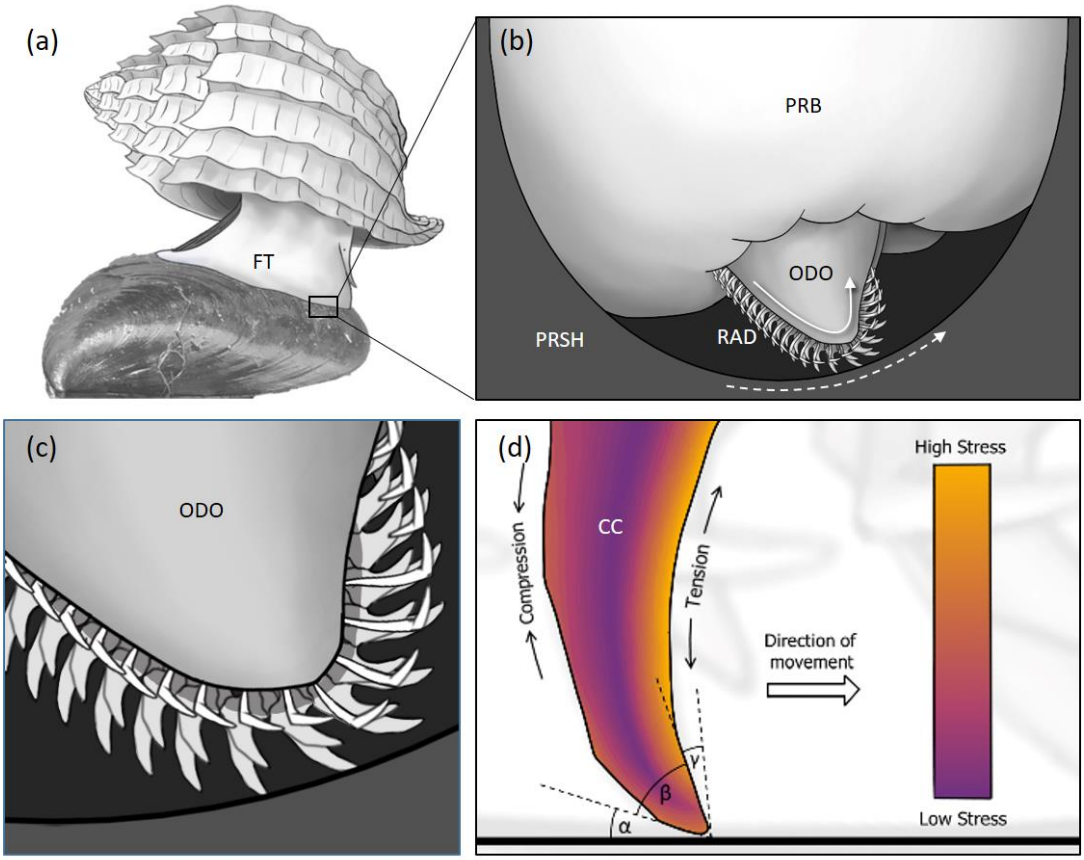



Fig. 1. Drawing showing the anatomical position of the feeding apparatus of the Muricidae during predatory drilling of a prey bivalve mollusk (a), excavation of shell inside an active borehole with a sweeping motion of the tooth-covered, odontophore-like tongue (dotted line) and simultaneous rotation of radular teeth over the tip of the odontophore (solid line) modeled after Carriker and Van Zandt (1972, figs. 12, 17) (b), closeup of individual central teeth (rachidia) of the radula striking the shell (c), and a schematic representation of how mechanical stresses on the rachidian tooth central cusp are likely to be accommodated as bending within striking cusps (d). CC = central cusp, FT = foot, ODO = odontophore, PRB = proboscis, PRSH = prey shell, RT = rachidian tooth, RAD = radula, α = clearance angle, β = wedge angle, ϒ = rake angle.

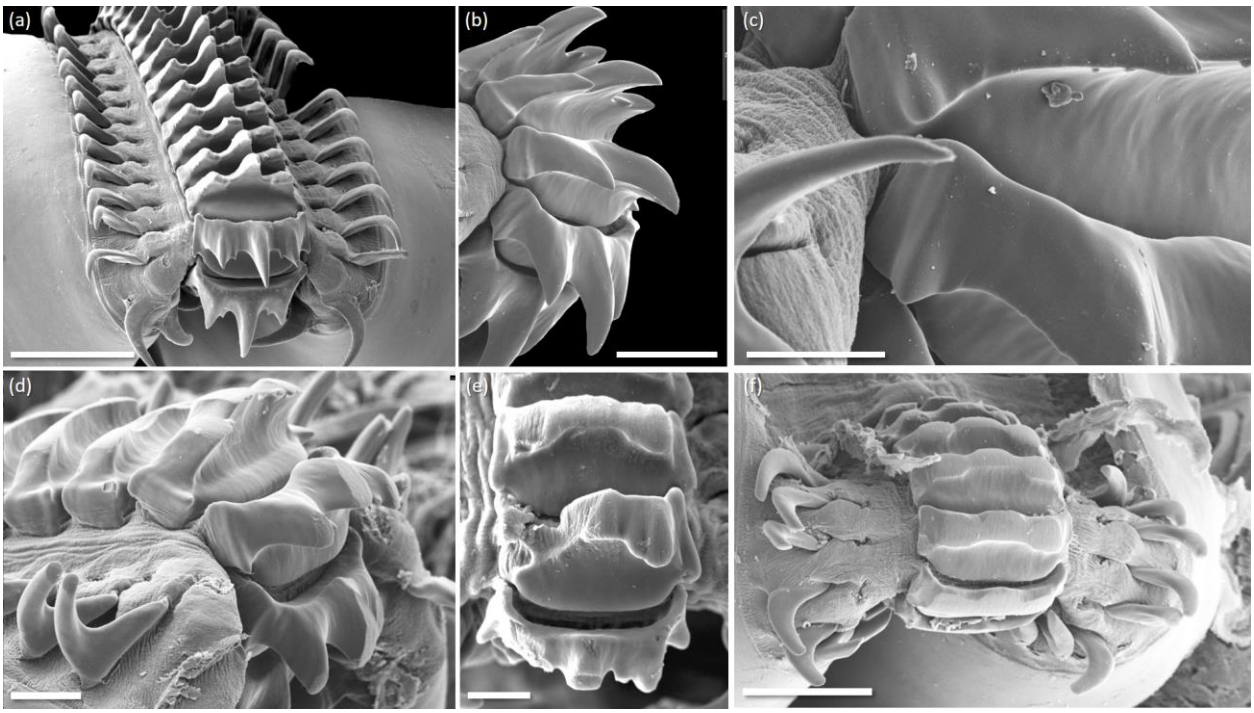



Fig. 2. Scanning electron micrographs (SEM) showing radular tooth-tooth contact and teeth before and after predatory shell drilling in the muricid *Trophon geversianus*. View of intact tooth rows, including the central rachidian tooth and sickle-shaped outer lateral teeth, as the radula rotates over the odontophore tip (a). Lateral view of unworn articulating rachidian teeth (b). Closeup of unworn marginal cusps of a rachidian tooth (c). Central and lateral cusps maintain sharp edges after wear, extending tooth lifespan (d). Heavy wear and structural failure of rachidian tooth central and lateral cusps (e). Complete wear of rachidian tooth cusps and latero-marginal ridge (f). Rachidian tooth terminology explained in Fig 3. Scale bars = 200 µm (a), 100 µm (b), 20 µm (c), 50 µm (d), 20 µm (e), 100 µm (f).

## 2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Specimen preparation

Species selected for synchrotron imaging included one individual each of *Muricanthus ambiguus* (Reeve, 1845) (subfamily Muricinae) (78 mm shell length), *Thaisella kiosquiformis* (Duclos, 1832) (34 m shell length), and *Acanthais triangularis* (Blainville, 1832) (21 mm shell length) (both subfamily Rapaninae) from near Venado Island, Panama, and *Trophon geversianus* (Pallas, 1774) (subfamily Trophoninae) (35 mm shell length) from Puerto Madryn, Argentina. Radulae were isolated from full-sized, adult specimens preserved in 70% ethanol by dissecting the proboscis and dissolving the buccal mass tissues in concentrated sodium hypochlorite. Radulae were collected with forceps, washed in distilled water, snipped with forceps into three or four shorter segments, and one or two individual segments fastened

cusps-side-up while still wet in open position (lateral teeth pulled away from the rachidian as with a typical SEM mount) on the end of a 2 mm wide carbon fibre rod with polyvinyl acetate (washable Elmer's PVA glue) and allowed to air dry.

To visualize tooth wear and the radula in its functional feeding position (Fig. 2), odontophores were dissected from the proboscises of several individuals of *T. geversianus*, dehydrated in a graded ethanol series, critical point dried, and attached to SEM tabs with double-sided conductive tape for SEM imaging. The smoothness of the radular membrane and the positions of interlocking teeth (e.g., Fig. 2a) show that deformation of the radulae during drying was minimal.

**2.2 Scanning procedures and 3D-modeling**

Specimens were scanned using single propagation distance phase contrast tomography at the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF) in Grenoble, France using the ID19 microtomography beamline. Every specimen used the following scan parameters: 2999 angular projections collected for a 360° rotation; 0.1 ms exposure time; 360 $nm^3$ voxel size; 20 mm sample-to-detector distance; x-ray energy of 26.5 keV. Preparation of critical point dried specimens for SEM was the same as for synchrotron preparation except that radulae were coated with Au-Pd and mounted on stubs with double-sided conductive tape for imaging with a Philips XL 30 scanning electron microscope at the Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales.

Sixteen-bit Synchrotron *.tif stacks were reconstructed using"Paganin" single-distance phase retrieval algorithms (developed in-house at ID19), imported into *Avizo Lite* 9.4 (Thermo Fisher Scientific), and visually explored for mature rachidian teeth that showed no evidence of *in vivo* wear or post-mortem breaking during sample preparation. The scan volume was then cropped to these sections to facilitate data management. Segmentation of one tooth per species was performed semi-automatically: the "Magic Wand" tool was used initially to select the tooth volume based on greyscale intensity and then to manually remove any traces of the supporting radular membrane, mount, or mounting glue that remained attached to the teeth. Once segmented, each tooth was exported as an *.stl and brought into *Geomagic Wrap* 2017 (3D Systems) for smoothing and cleaning of artefacts. In one specimen (*Acanthais*), damage to the tooth was only apparent after segmentation.

Although not all muricid radulae are symmetrical (e.g., muricid subfamily Typhinae), most are, and we assumed bilateral symmetry and used palaeontological protocols (Lautenschlager, 2016) to reposition and retro-deform damaged cusps of the *Acanthais* tooth in *Geomagic* and *Avizo.* Damage to the *Acanthais*

specimen was addressed by creating an individual segmentation of the detached marginal cusp, which was then aligned to the body of the main tooth in Avizo and the surfaces combined in *Geomagic* using the "merge" function. The merged file was then reimported into *Avizo* where minor cracks were filled and the model was smoothed. The central cusp was repaired by selecting a "donor cusp" from an undeformed tooth from the same radula and segmenting it. The deformed central cusp from the original specimen was removed and the donor cusp aligned and merged into its place using the same methods previously applied to the marginal cusp. Segmenting artefacts in the form of ridges on the central cusp were removed by smoothing.

Rachidian base widths were measured at the widest point and are reported for individual teeth selected for segmentation. Measurements of the cusp angle from the rachidian base were taken digitally using Adobe Photoshop (version 22.4) in lateral profile. A line parallel to the radular ribbon was drawn from the apex of the tongue and projected to the equivalent position on the trailing side. An angle was then taken from this line to the tip of the cusps on the feeding side (Fig. 3). Cross sections of the central cusp were taken in MeshLab v.2020.02 (Cignoni et al., 2008). A plane was defined at halfway along the trailing length of the central cusp and material distal to this plane was removed. The sectional view was oriented in the plane of the screen and traced in Photoshop. Anatomical terminology for rachidian features described previously follows Kool (1993) and Pio et al. (2014), with some new features described herein for the first time.

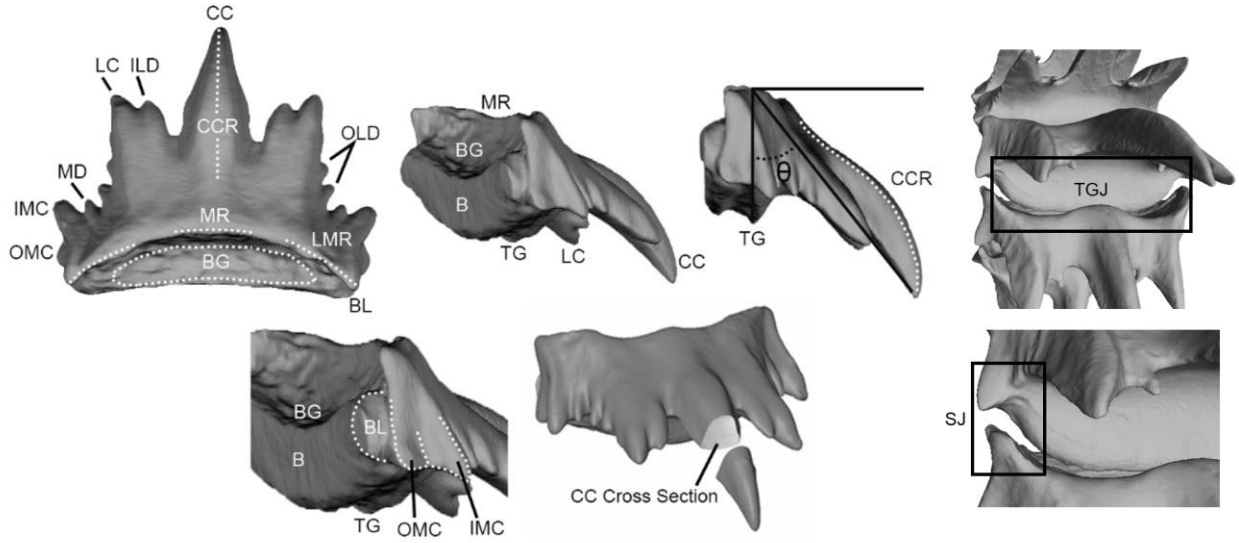



Fig. 3. Rachidian tooth terminology. B = Base; BG = basal groove; BL = basal lobe; CC = central cusp; CCR = central cusp ridge; ILD = inner lateral denticle; IMC = interior marginal cusp; LC = lateral cusp;

LMR = latero-marginal ridge; MD = marginal denticle; MR = medial ridge; OLD = outer lateral denticle; OMC = outer marginal cusp; SJ = saddle joint; TG = tongue; TGJ = tongue and groove joint; $\theta$ = cusp projection angle.

**2.3 Analysis of tooth-tooth contact during rotation over the odontophore**

To visualize how tooth articulation surfaces interact during rotation of the radula over the odontophore, the 3D models of a segmented tooth from *T. geversianus* and *T. kiosquiformis* were duplicated and used to reconstruct two articulated radular series of five teeth, from which cross sections and deviation maps were generated for teeth away from and at the bending plane of the odontophore. The *Remesh* function of *Geomagic Wrap* 2017 was used to decimate the *T. kiosquiformis* model to 500K polygons (originally 4.4M; *T. geversianus* model was 493K). For *T. geversianus*, and using *Maya* 2023 (Autodesk), a polygonal cube was created, flattened, and positioned to represent the radular ribbon attachment and thickness, based on a reference image from the scans (SI 1). This ribbon object delineated the borders of the ventral surface of the radula that articulates with the odontophore. Within this ventral surface, a rectangular strip of polygons was selected in Geomagic Wrap 2017. A cylinder was algorithmically fit to these polygons using the *Best Fit* function and imported into *Maya* using custom MEL scripts to define the center of rotation and rotational axis Z of an XYZ locator object (Carney in revision). In *Maya*, the Y axis of this object was aligned to the ribbon object plane, yielding an X axis that bisected the ventral articular surface. The tooth was then parented under the XYZ locator object, which in turn was translated and oriented to the world origin (0,0,0). Both the cylinder-based axes and inertial axes (via custom MATLAB script; Ibid.) revealed ~2° of bilateral asymmetry in the tooth, which was compensated for in order to align the central cusp axis to the world axis. Inertial axes were also created for the *T. kiosquiformis* tooth and used to translate and orient this model to the world origin, as well as for subsequent rotations of the other teeth in the radular series (0, 22.5, 45, and 45 degrees between each pair from left to right). ~1° of bilateral asymmetry was apparent in this tooth. However, a compensatory rotation resulted in poorer alignment between teeth in the radular series and so was not used for the final reconstruction. For *T. geversianus*, SEM images (e.g., Fig. 2b) were projected onto the *Image Plane* of virtual cameras, the middle tooth of which was aligned to the 3D model and used as a reference for manually positioning four instanced duplicates of the tooth into an articulated series (two in front, two in back). Contiguity of the ribbon objects was maintained for the *T. geversianus* series, and interpenetration of the tooth models was avoided. A sagittal section was created to visualize the articulations along the axis of the central cusp for both species. Deviation maps between adjacent teeth were generated by importing the articulated series from Maya into *Geomagic Wrap* 2017, post-processing the model meshes (*Mesh Doctor*), flipping the normals of the anterior tooth (*Flip Normals*), and then selecting the posterior

tooth for analysis (*Deviation*; with a critical angle of 45° and a maximum deviation of 20 and 10 µm for *T. geversianus* and *T. kiosquiformis*, respectively).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 3D Model Descriptions

*Trophon geversianus* (Pallas, 1774) (Trophoninae) (Fig. 4a). Rachidian tooth width 203 µm. Central cusp long, narrow, gently curved along sagittal axis, with 60° degree angle of projection from rachidian base. Central cusp cross-section triangular with rounded angles (Fig. 5a), resulting in a narrow, rounded central cusp ridge. Lateral cusps short, roughly half the length of central cusp, triangular shape with wide base, bent downward (ventrally) mid-way along sagittal axis, and with 41° angle of projection from rachidian base. Inner edge of lateral cusps smooth, outer edge with 3 low serrations. One inner lateral denticle between central and each lateral cusp. Inner lateral denticles short, thin, sharing a common base with lateral cusp, oriented at 45° angle towards central cusp. Marginal area narrow with one low marginal denticle. Two marginal cusps at each end of rachidian base. Inner marginal cusp short, narrow, and sharply pointed, with distal end gently curved laterally and forward (dorsally). Outer marginal cusp weakly developed as a faint ridge mid-way between inner marginal cusp and short, semi-circle-shaped basal lobe. Latero-marginal ridge narrow, restricted to marginal cusp zone. Rachidian base thick with broad, straight basal groove overlapped by prominent M-shaped medial ridge; large, rounded tongue. Medial ridge broad, rounded.

*Muricanthus ambiguus* (Reeve, 1845) (Muricinae) (Fig. 4b). Rachidian tooth width 229 µm. Central cusp long, narrow, gently curved along sagittal axis, with 43° degree angle of projection from rachidian base. Central cusp parabolic in cross section (Fig. 5b), resulting in prominent, rounded central cusp ridge. Lateral cusps long, narrow, more than half the length of central cusp, gently curved along axis, with 42° angle of projection from rachidian base. Inner edge of lateral cusps with single, low serration at midlength; outer edge smooth. One inner lateral denticle between central and each lateral cusp. Inner lateral denticles thin, free from lateral cusp, slightly recurved laterally. Marginal area narrow, smooth, arched. Marginal cusps absent. End of rachidian base rounded. Basal lobe small, semi-circular. Latero-marginal ridge high, rounded, and broad, extending from marginal area to lateral cusp zone. Rachidian base thin, U-shaped with broad, shallow, U-shaped basal groove and tongue. Medial ridge narrow, low.

*Acanthais triangularis* (Blainville, 1832) (Rapaninae) (Fig. 4c). Rachidian tooth width 92 µm. Central cusp is long, narrow, gently curved along sagittal axis, with 36° degree angle of projection from rachidian base. Central cusp cross-section is an oblate circle (Fig. 5c), resulting in broad, rounded central cusp

ridge. Lateral cusps long, more than half the length of central cusp, triangular shape with wide base, slight lateral deflection, and 35° angle of projection from rachidian base. Inner edge of lateral cusps smooth, outer edge with 2 large, denticle-like serrations. One inner lateral denticle between central and each lateral cusp. Inner lateral denticles long, bullet-shaped, sharing a common base with lateral cusp, and slightly laterally deflected. Marginal area narrow with one large marginal denticle. Two marginal cusps at each end of rachidian base. Inner marginal cusp long, bullet shaped, with distal end gently curved laterally. Outer marginal cusp smaller, weakly developed, in front of prominent, pointed basal lobe. Latero-marginal ridge flat-topped, broad, extending from marginal area to lateral cusp zone. Rachidian base thick with deep, U-shaped basal groove and narrow, weakly developed medial ridge; shallow, rounded tongue.

*Thaisella kiosquiformis* (Duclos, 1832) (Rapaninae) (Fig. 4d). Rachidian tooth width 71 µm. Central cusp is long, narrow, with gentle curve along sagittal axis and 48° degree angle of projection from rachidian base. Central cusp cross-section resembles a trapezoid (Fig. 5d), resulting in sharp, high central cusp ridge. Lateral cusps half the length of central cusp, with triangular shape, prominent ridge, wide base, slight lateral deflection, and 34° angle of projection from rachidian base. Inner edge of lateral cusps smooth, outer edge lacking serrations. One inner lateral denticle between central and each lateral cusp. Inner lateral denticles short, narrow, sharing a common base with lateral cusp. Marginal area wide with 2 large marginal denticles. Two marginal cusps at each end of rachidian base. Inner marginal cusp long, narrow, with distal end gently curved laterally. Outer marginal cusp small, weakly developed, in front of heavy, knob-like basal lobe. Latero-marginal ridge low, broad, extending from marginal area to lateral cusp zone. Rachidian base thick with a broad medial ridge and deep, bowl-shaped basal groove; narrow, rounded tongue.

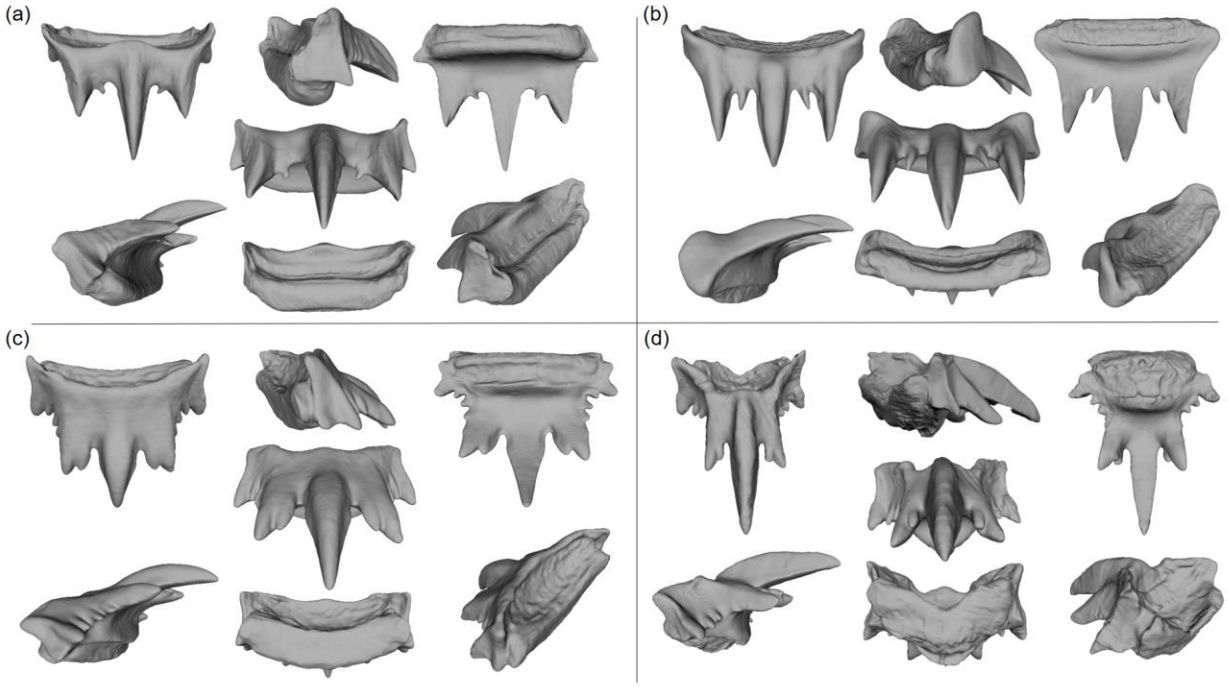



Fig. 4. 3D renderings of rachidian teeth of *Trophon geversianus* (a), *Muricanthus ambiguus* (b), *Acanthais triangularis* (c), *Thaisella kiosquiformis* (d). See Results text for tooth widths.

### 3.2 Central Cusp Cross-Sectional and Medial Ridge Shapes

The central cusp shafts of *Trophon*, *Muricanthus*, and *Acanthais* are bell-shaped and more or less oblate in cross-section, while the cross section of the central cusp of *Thaisella* is more trapezoidal (Fig. 5). The medial ridge ranges from a narrow and prominent ridge in *Thaisella* and *Trophon* to only a weakly developed hump in *Muricanthus* and *Acanthais* (Fig. 5).

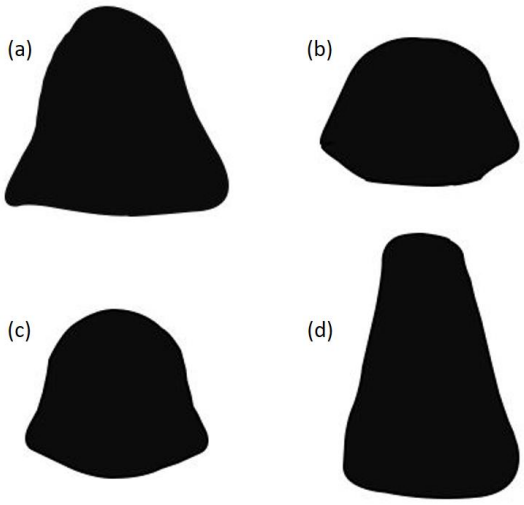


Fig. 5. Central cusp cross sections for *Trophon geversianus* (a), *Muricanthus ambiguus* (b), *Acanthais triangularis* (c), and *Thaisella kiosquiformis* (d).

### 3.3 Observations on Material Composition

No differences in radiodensity, which might indicate variation in internal structure, chemical composition, or mineralisation, were detected within teeth or between the teeth, radular ribbon, and PVA adhesive used to mount the specimens (Fig. SI).

### 3.4 Articulation Surfaces in 3D

SEMs and our 3D reconstructions of the radula of *T. geversianus* show that the tongue-and-groove joint tightens posteriorly as the teeth rotate over the tip of the bending plane of the odontophore, even as the angle between central cusps of adjacent teeth increases (Figs. 2a-f, 6). Conversely, the saddle joint at the marginal cusps becomes more open for *T. geversianus*. For *T. kiosquiformis*, the tongue-and-groove joint also tightens posteriorly for teeth near the bending plane of the odontophore, but the extent of tightening across the tongue is much less due to the much greater depth of the basal groove in *T. kiosquiformis* (Fig. 7). Distances between articulation surfaces of the saddle joints in *T. kiosquiformis* show little change in teeth further from and closer to the bending plane of the odontophore.

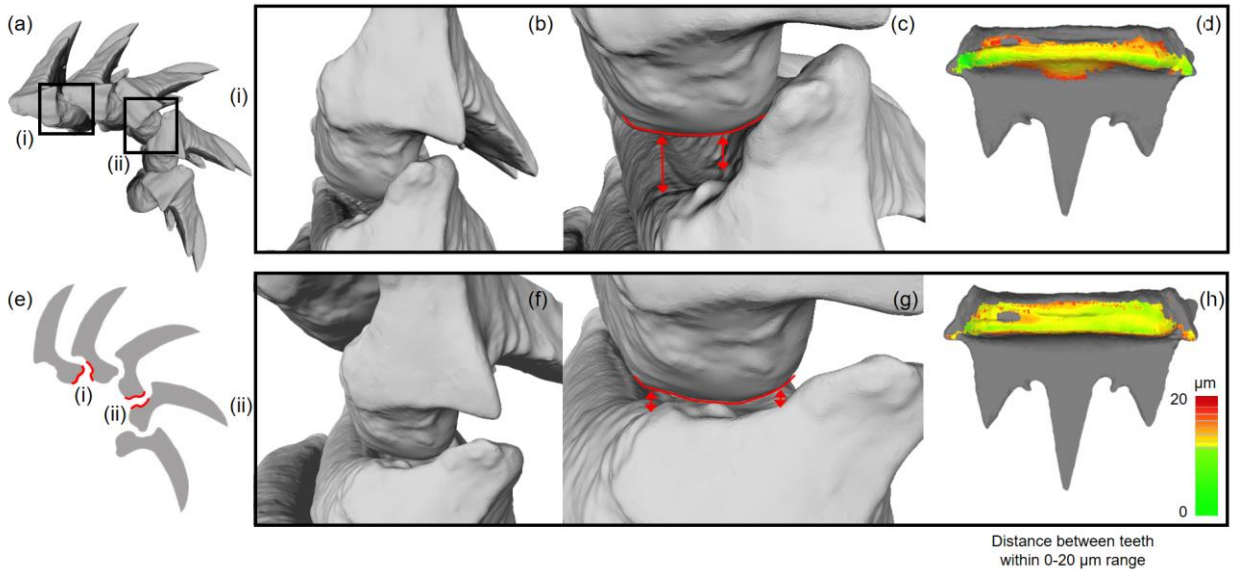



Fig. 6. Articulated series of five duplicated tooth models of *Trophon geversianus* (a), showing tooth-tooth articulation (b, c, f, g). Sagittal section through the central cusp of the five articulated teeth, with the sigmoidal outlines of the tongue-and-groove articulation surface highlighted in red for teeth further away (i) and closer to the bending plane of the odontophore tip (ii) (e). Deviation maps illustrating distances between articulating surfaces of adjacent teeth in minimum (i) and maximum (ii) relative rotation; heat map with a linear scale of ± 20 µm (d, h). Note the expansion of the tongue-and-groove articular surface and slight reduction of the saddle joint articular surfaces in (f) compared to (d).

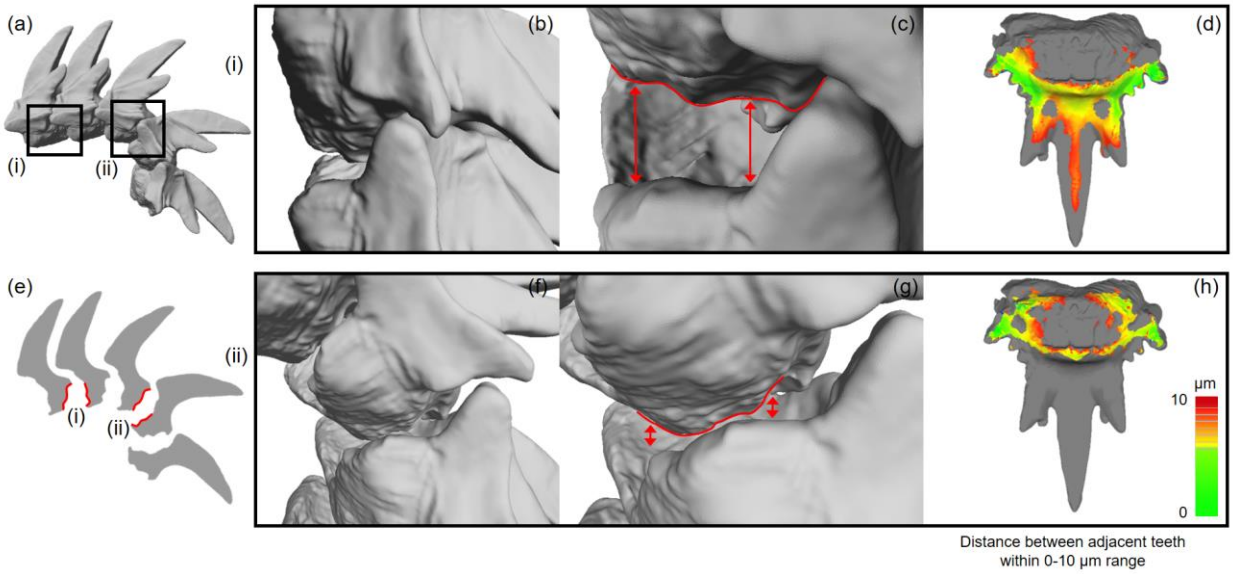



Fig. 7. Articulated series of five duplicated tooth models of *Thaisella kiosquiformis* (a), showing tooth-

tooth articulation (b, c, f, g). Sagittal section through the central cusp of the five articulated teeth, with the sigmoidal outlines of the tongue-and-groove articulation surface highlighted in red for teeth further away (i) and closer to the bending plane of the odontophore tip (ii) (e). Deviation maps illustrating distances between articulating surfaces of adjacent teeth in minimum (i) and maximum (ii) relative rotation; heat map with a linear scale of ± 20 µm (d, h). Note the posterior expansion of the tongue-and-groove articular surface in (f) compared to (d), as in *T. geversianus*, except for a large central region of the articulation surface.

## 4 DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Major results

Our synchrotron scans reveal the complete 3D morphology of the muricid rachidian for the first time, including two previously undescribed types of articulation surfaces: (1) a tongue-and-groove system that articulates adjacent tooth bases as a hinge joint, and (2) two saddle joints, one at each end of the rachidian tooth formed by an arched shoulder (latero-marginal ridge) on the posterior tooth that fits within a notch in the adjacent, anterior tooth. Our study also reveals substantial variation between species in the shapes of these articulation surfaces and how they are formed (Fig.4).

The tongues of these tongue-and-groove joints vary most obviously in length but also degree of curvature, the presence of ridges, and width of the attachment zone between the rachidian tooth and the backing radular membrane. The corresponding groove varies from a rectanglar depression that is open on one side to a deep bowl-shaped depression. Variation in the saddle joint notch is determined primarily by which features that create the notch. It is formed by the angle between two marginal cusps in some species, while in others it forms between the lateral cusp and basal lobe, the marginal cusp and basal lobe, or the outer marginal cusp and the basal lobe (Fig. 4; also Pio et al., 2014: figs. 1,3). There is also variation in the position of the latero-marginal ridge (part of the adjacent tooth that fits within the saddle joint) between species, which can form above each marginal cusp or each lateral cusp or span both (Fig. 4; Herbert et al., 2007, 2015; Pio et al., 2014).

Although Carriker et al. (1974) did not describe specific articulation types, they hypothesized that “basal support” in the muricid radula might be an adaptation for dispersing forces from violent impacts during predatory shell drilling across multiple rachidian teeth, thereby preventing stress buildup within any individual tooth. Experimental evidence for force dispersion by tooth-tooth contact has since been demonstrated in other mollusks, including chitons and paludomid gastropods (Krings et al., 2021a; 2021b; 2022b). Our 3D reconstructions of 5-tooth rachidian series for *T. geversianus* and *T. kiosquiformis*

reveal that the articulation surfaces of the tongue-and-groove joint (Fig. 6e, 7e) become increasingly parallel (i.e., improved fit) as teeth approach the striking tip of the odontophore. This may represent a unique type of joint that has not yet been described. We hypothesize that if improved fit of the tongue-and-groove surfaces of teeth at the striking tip of the odontophore exists *in vivo*, it would allow for tooth-tooth contact to increase during drilling, along with increased potential for force dispersion between the striking tooth and adjacent teeth. Thus, Carriker et al.'s (1974) hypothesis that tooth-tooth contact is capable of dispersing impact forces during drilling is supported by our observations, but our study goes further in showing how tooth fit and potential for force dispersion improve at the striking tip of the odontophore. Future should explore how tooth-tooth fit over the odontophore varies across the Muricidae and whether there is evidence for adaptive improvement, i.e., directional trends from more basal to more recently evolved lineages.

Well-developed articulating bases are common but not ubiquitous across the Muricidae. The muricine *M. ambiguus*, for example, has a relatively shallow tongue-and-groove hinge joint (Fig. 4b), and the anterior end of the saddle hinge is formed by a shallow depression between the lateral cusp and base endpoint. In contrast, the rapanine *T. kiosquiformis* has a deep tongue-and groove hinge and a saddle hinge developed as a sharp notch between two marginal cusps (Fig. 4d). In general, simpler and more weakly-developed articulating bases are found in the subfamilies Muricinae and Haustrinae; variable complexity and development are found in the Rapaninae, Ergalataxinae, Muricopsinae, and Trophoninae; and complex and strongly developed articulating bases are found in the Ocenebrinae (Herbert et al., 2007, 2015; Pio et al., 2014). Since the Muricinae predates all other subfamilies in the fossil record by at least 20 million years (Vermeij and Carlson, 2000; Merle, 2012), we propose that more complex tooth articulation was absent in earliest muricids and evolved later as drilling increased in frequency as a mode of attack, as prey shells thickened and drilling times increased, and/or as interactions between drillers and their own predators intensified selection for more efficient drilling. Conversely, relaxation in selection for traits that reduce stress and strain on teeth is expected in lineages where the use of drilling has given way to faster, non-drilling feeding modes, such as use of toxins, shell chipping, and parasitism (Herbert, 2004; Dietl and Herbert, 2005; Herbert et al., 2007, 2009, 2016, Pio et al., 2014; Paul et al., 2015). This hypothesis would be most productively explored in subfamilies with the greatest diversity of articulation surfaces, well-resolve phylogenies, and abundant feeding and dietary observations (e.g., Rapaninae).

Testing these hypotheses rigorously would require advances over previous work, which have tended to focus on how radular teeth deform and distribute stresses and strain in isolation during feeding (Van der Wal et al., 2000; Krings et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2023). While studying tooth performance in isolation can

give valuable insight into the structural performance of tooth morphology, interactions between adjacent tooth bases must be factored in in studies of the muricid radula. Krings et al. (2021c) modelled a section of a gastropod radula comprising multiple teeth embedded within the radula ribbon. This approach permits some understanding of how different teeth respond to the same loading scenario. However, the close tooth arrangement and highly dynamic motion of the radula as it passes over the odontophore tip in muricids may require use of more computationally-complex, non-linear, large-displacement models with well-defined, non-penetrating contact surfaces to fully resolve between-tooth strains (see Marcé-Nogué, 2022 for an in-depth discussion of these issues).

### 4.2 Alternative explanations for saddle and tongue-and-groove joints

An alternative explanation for tooth-tooth articulation features of gastropod radulae is that they counteract bending and torsional forces along the radula during feeding by holding teeth in place (Hickman, 1980, 1984). This explanation could apply to saddle joints in some muricid species because of the way marginal cusps wrap laterally around the adjacent tooth (e.g., *T. kiosquiformis*: Fig. 7f,g). This is supported by (1) the fact that the saddle joints of *T. geversianus* are maximally open (least contact) when teeth are at the striking tip of the odontophore, unlike its tongue-and-groove joint; and (2) observations of wear of the latero-marginal ridge on teeth in several specimens of *T. geversianus* (Fig. 2d-f). The latter type of wear can only be explained by tooth-tooth interactions since the latero-marginal ridge does not face the prey shell surface.

An unexpected finding of our research was the large, circular area of no contact (a large open space) in the center of the tongue-and-groove joint articulation surface of *T. kiosquiformis*, even when teeth are rotated into feeding position and the tongue and groove fit is tightest (Fig. 7h). This open space is created by a deep, basin-like groove and short tongue in *T. kiosquiformis*. The function of this deep basin is unknown, but another rapanine, *Plicopurpura patula*, has a similar deep, basin-like groove that opens into an open slit down the center of a long, hypodermic-needle-like central cusp (Fig. 8; also Kool, 1993: fig. 17e). Since hypodermic-needle-like teeth are associated with toxin delivery in other predatory gastropods (Puillandre et al., 2017), basin-like depressions that open into the needle plausibly store toxins. Basin-like grooves with poor tongue-and-groove surface articulation in other species could serve a similar function. This hypothesis is speculative but mentioned as there are alternatives to purely biomechanical explanations for tooth shape in the Muricidae.

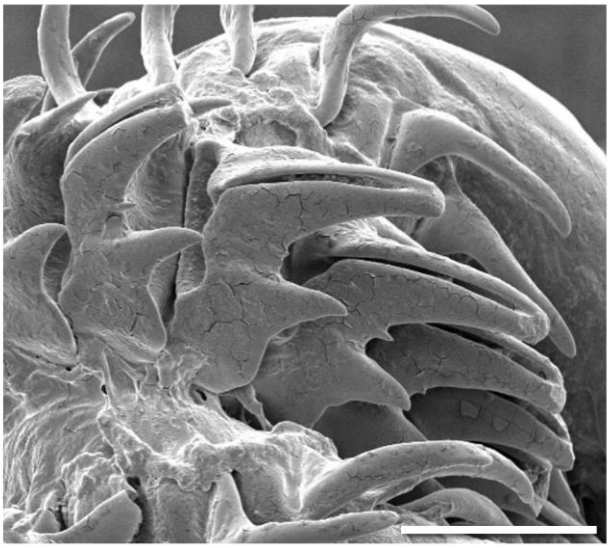


Fig. 8. Radula of the rapanine muricid *Plicopurpura patula* showing deep, basin-like groove of the rachidian base that connects to an open slit down the center of the central cusp. Scale bar = 100 μm.

**4.3 Distribution of articulating rachidian bases in the Neogastropoda**

Rachidian bases with articulating tongue-and-groove or saddle joints are either completely absent or poorly developed in almost all other Neogastropoda outside of the Muricidae, including Buccinoidea (Fedosov and Kantor, 2012; Harasewych, 2018), Olivoidea (Kantor and Bouchet, 2007; Kantor et al., 2017), Conoidea (Kantor et al., 2018), Mitroidea (Fedosov et al., 2015, 2017) and Turbinelloidea (Kantor et al., 2001). Most of these neogastropods use the radula for piercing, raking, and scooping soft prey tissues rather than drilling through hard shell (Taylor, 1998). Exceptions include a small number of species of Volutoidea (e.g., *Cysticus sp.*: Fedosov et al., 2019: fig. 4C,D) and Turbinelloidea (*Ceratoxancus* spp: Kantor and Bouchet, 1997; *Cyomesus chaunax* Harasewych, 1987: fig. 20) that have tooth-tooth contact, shallow- to moderately-deep tongue-and-groove articulation, and a present but weakly-developed saddle joint (i.e., latero-marginal ridge bounded by one cusp). Kantor and Bouchet (1997:119-20) speculated that at least one of these, *Ceratoxancus basileus*, drills shelled prey based on SEMs of the radula showing rachidia worn flat to the base (Kantor and Bouchet, 1997: fig. 3B). Other species of *Ceratoxancus* have been found to use a labral spine on the shell's aperture to wedge open large bivalve prey (Kantor and Bouchet, 1997), a mode of attack also used by some muricids in combination with drilling (Vermeij, 2001). Predation behaviors of *Cyomesus* and *Cysticus* are unknown, but their rachidian morphology suggests they might also drill or chip shelled prey using the radula (Y. Kantor, personal communication to GSH June 8, 2020). Given current knowledge of family-level phylogenetic relationships among neogastropods (e.g., Fedosov et al., 2015), these sporadic occurrences of articulating tooth bases outside the Muricidae probably represent independent origins.

462

463 **4.4 Biomechanics of the rachidian cusps**

464 **4.4.1 Cusp shape**. Our 3D scans illustrate morphological variation of rachidian cusps, ridges, and
465 denticles across the family. Muricid rachidia usually have three major cusps, including a long central cusp
466 flanked on each side by one lateral cusp (Herbert et al., 2007). Cusps come to a sharp point distally,
467 which helps generate fracture-inducing stresses in the prey shell. The cusp shaft functions as a
468 cantilevered beam that is loaded in bending when it contacts the prey shell. Stresses developed in a beam
469 under bending are dependent on both the cross-sectional shape of the beam (the second moment of area)
470 and the bending moments it experiences, which are themselves dependent on the length and curvature of
471 the beam, and the magnitude and direction of the loading force. Length and curvature of the cusps vary
472 widely between species and within species during ontogeny (Herbert et al., 2007, 2015; Pio et al., 2014).
473

474 Cusp cross-sectional shapes vary between species in the Muricidae, potentially affecting performance.
475 Although a trapezoidal cross section results in a blunter cusp tip and, thus, potentially lower fracture-
476 inducing stresses on the prey shell, Euler-Bernoulli beam theory predicts that under bending loads, such a
477 cross-section will be comparatively stronger in bending in the antero-posterior direction. As this is the
478 dominant loading direction during feeding, we predict that the trapezoidalcross-sectional cusp shape of *T.*
479 *kiosquiformis* should better resist bending stresses in the shaft relative to bell-shaped cross-sectional
480 shapes.
481

482 Curvature of the cusp along its main axis is also important, because forces from drilling produce higher
483 moment arms (and therefore stresses) in a straight cusp than in a curved one. Using 2D finite element
484 analysis, Van der Wal et al. (2000) showed that a curvedcusp shifts stresses away from the tooth tip and
485 towards the leading (flatter) edge of the base compared to a straight cusp. The curvature and cross-
486 sectional shapes of the cusp shafts may therefore covary to minimise bending stresses experienced during
487 feeding. In all species, the leading edge of the cross-section is wider than the trailing edge, which may act
488 to compensate for the effects of shaft curvature.
489

490 The medial ridge at the base of the central cusp is another interesting source of variation in the species
491 studied. Manual manipulation of 3D prints of the teeth suggests that even the most prominent medial
492 ridge is unlikely to come in to contact with the tongue of the trailing tooth to prevent over-rotation.
493 Instead, we suggest that the presence of the ridge acts to increase the antero-posterior height of the cusp at
494 the base of the shaft, increasing the second moment of area (and thus the resistance to bending) in this
495 direction. We also note from published SEM studies that the relative size and shape of this ridge changes

496 throughout ontogeny, with younger snails tending to have a sharper and more prominent ridge (Herbert et
497 al., 2007, 2015; Pio et al., 2014). Juvenile snails also tend to drill more than their adult counterparts
498 (Herbert et al., 2007; 2016), and therefore might be expected to have tooth shapes that reflect this mode of
499 feeding, or that their teeth need to be more efficient to compensate for their comparatively small size. If
500 the medial ridge is an adaptation for resistance to bending, then this ontogenetic difference is interesting,
501 as paedomorphosis has been observed in muricid radulae before, and implies that heterochronic shifts
502 could be the mechanism by which drilling evolved in this group (Herbert et al., 2007, 2015).
503
504 **4.4.2 Changes in cusp shape and length with wear.** Tooth wear during drilling alters cross-sectional
505 shapes, lengths, and curvature of the central and lateral cusps (Fig. 2), although the effect of wear on
506 drilling performance is unknown. Hickman (1980) points out that the unworn state of a tooth may not
507 represent its most efficient functional shape. The most efficient shape for drilling may instead only arise
508 after some wear has taken place. Recognition of this context may offer further insight on the curvature of
509 radular cusp shafts. During feeding, the radula can be thought of as a cutting tool with rake and clearance
510 angles (Van der Wal et al., 2000). An efficient tool requires these angles to be positive, and, in particular,
511 that the clearance angle stay above zero to allow the tool purchase on the worked surface. Assuming that
512 the animal maintains a consistent feeding stroke, the curvature of the shaft allows a positive clearance
513 angle to remain as the cusp wears. Wear patterns in *T. geversianus* (Fig. 2) suggest that cusps may have
514 distinct mechanical properties between the leading and trailing edges that would cause them to be self-
515 sharpening, although this has not yet been studied. Extreme cusp wear eventually eliminates the cusps
516 altogether but brings the smaller denticles between the cusps and denticles into contact with the prey
517 shell, potentially extending the life of the tooth as a drilling tool (Fig. 2).
518
519 **4.5 Material properties of muricid radulae**
520 Muricid snails build their radulae from chitin, with various degrees of tanning or mineralisation by
521 calcium, silica, strontium, and other trace metals (Carriker and Van Zandt, 1972; Hickman, 1980; Tyler
522 and Schiffbauer, 2012). Tomographic data from the four specimens studied here suggest that the muricid
523 rachidian tooth is homogeneous in composition, with no distinct layers of different elemental composition
524 (e.g., metal), as previously observed in studies of chitons (Wealthall et al., 2005; Weaver et al., 2010). We
525 infer that the muricid rachidian is mostly organic with low mineralisation due to its similarity under X-
526 rays to both the radular ribbon and the PVA mounting glue (SI 1). A caveat in this finding is that
527 synchrotron images cannot easily detect ultrastructural heterogeneities when there is no change in
528 material (Wealthall et al., 2005) or when they are below the 360 nm resolution of the synchrotron (e.g.
529 Weaver et al., 2010; Lu and Barber, 2012; Tyler and Schiffbauer, 2012; Wang et al., 2014).

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Padilla (2003) outlines three main areas in which to focus future studies of radular form and function, specifically: the quantification of morphology, explicit tests of function, and efforts towards a synthesis of the two. While the small size of the radula has historically presented several challenges in the imaging and functional study of this organ, many of these challenges can now be overcome in light of technological advances in imaging and the field of functional morphology. In any study of functional morphology, a reasonable geometric model of the morphology concerned must first be obtained. Although SEMs offer excellent spatial resolution, they are still two-dimensional images. Synchrotron imaging allows us to capture detailed three-dimensional representations of radular morphology (see also Kruta et al., 2015 for an ammonoid example), offering the chance to observe several new features. Once obtained, these models may then be used in advanced downstream analyses that address each of Padilla's (2003) focal concerns.

The field of geometric morphometrics has advanced significantly since 2003 (Adams et al., 2013), allowing for the detailed quantification and analysis of organismal form in three dimensions. A potential limitation of landmark-based geometric morphometrics when applied to the radula is a lack of homologous landmark points across taxa, however, advances in the use of 'homology-free' landmarks (e.g., Boyer et al., 2015) mean that geometric morphometrics is a viable tool for the study of this system. In addition to capturing detailed 3D data, synchrotron scanning also has a dramatically higher rate of throughput than other tomographic methods, meaning that the large sample sizes necessary for geometric morphometrics studies may be obtained. The main rate-limiting steps are gaining access to a synchrotron facility and the time taken to segment the tomographic data.

*In vivo* and *ex vivo* experiments on radula function are difficult to conduct, owing to the radula's small size (although see Padilla, 1985; 1989; Carriker et al., 1974; Krings et al., 2019). Our synchrotron approach can overcome these limitations in two creative ways. The first is that, once segmented, radular teeth are represented as computer surface files suitable for up-scaled 3D printing. This allows for physical models to be produced for *in vitro* experimental work (e.g. Krings et al., 2021d). The second, and more versatile, implication of this is the potential for *in silico* functional testing using finite element analysis (FEA; reviewed in Bright, 2014) and multibody dynamics analysis (MDA; reviewed in Curtis, 2008). The use of deductive and inductive FEA within and between taxa allows specific hypotheses about the stress performance of traits to be tested (Rayfield, 2007). MDA can test hypotheses on likely ranges of motion, and thanks to its collision-detection capabilities, investigate tooth-tooth interactions and the potential for

disarticulation. Critically, FEA and MDA can be combined with one another (e.g. Lautenschlager et al., 2018) or with geometric morphometrics (Polly et al., 2016) to build a comprehensive analytical framework in which to interrogate the links between function and form in an evolutionary context. This combination of methodologies therefore allows us to untangle a key problem identified in studies of snail radulae by Hickman (1980): that not all features are necessarily adaptive (indeed, such thinking is problematic across all taxa; see Lauder, 1995).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