
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
Bureau of American Ethnology
Bulletin 123

Anthropological Papers, No. 12
Archeology of Arauquin
By VINCENZO PETRULLO

ARCHEOLOGY OF ARAUQUIN

By VINCENZO PETRULLO

The Llanos of Apure, lying between the Apure River and the Meta River, both of which flow eastward into the Orinoco, are unknown archeologically. There are many stories of the archeological material that may be found there. The most interesting of these stories which have been verified by geologists is the "Calzado", which is represented as being an elevated highway running from the Andes eastward. In this elevated "road" it is said are found archeological materials and at various points along its route are to be found mounds.

Mounds may exist in the llanos, but no one has as yet proven it. The country during the dry season is desert except for the narrow fringes of vegetation along the river banks. However, during the rainy season practically the entire area is inundated, so that any elevated portion could serve as an ideal camping ground or an ideal place for a village. The cattle ranchers, in fact, construct their houses on these elevations.

In the spring of 1934 I traveled from San Fernando de Apure to the Capanaparo, taking a route almost due south. Along this route at several points I was told of archeological materials and saw some specimens near Cunaviche. On the Candelaria Ranch I was told of four sites where pottery figurines are found: La Mula, Platanali, La Trinchera, and Los Cavallos. The specimens I saw, two of which were given to me and are shown in plate 30 (2), *a*, *b*, *c*, seemed to be of two types, crude figures of animals and cylindrical masses of pottery with elevated geometric designs on them. They might have been used as stamps for body painting, or for decorating pottery.

Upon my return from the Capanaparo I was invited to stop at the Ranch of Arauquin, which is the area formerly occupied by the Otomocos. This area is part of the inland delta of the Apure River. Game is more plentiful there than in the upper llanos, and during the dry season especially it must have been a favorite hunting ground of the aborigines.

From the meager accounts we have of the Otomocos they did not make elaborate pottery, and if we can judge by the ware made by the Yaruros it must have been rather crude. However, in three sites close to the ranch house of Arauquin, pottery fragments show a highly developed art, surprising in its strength and rigorous simplicity.

At a depth of about a foot and a half about one hundred pieces of decorated pottery were recovered, about thirty-five of which are lugs. These are shown in plates 26-32. The potsherds can be divided into two types: those which bear in size to geometric designs and the lugs which in almost every case represent some animal or bird head. It is almost impossible to identify some of these heads, realistic though they may be. Some of them, like plate 26, *a, g, e*, obviously represent the vulture. But plate 26 and the figures shown in plate 28 may be frogs or lizards, or even horned bats.

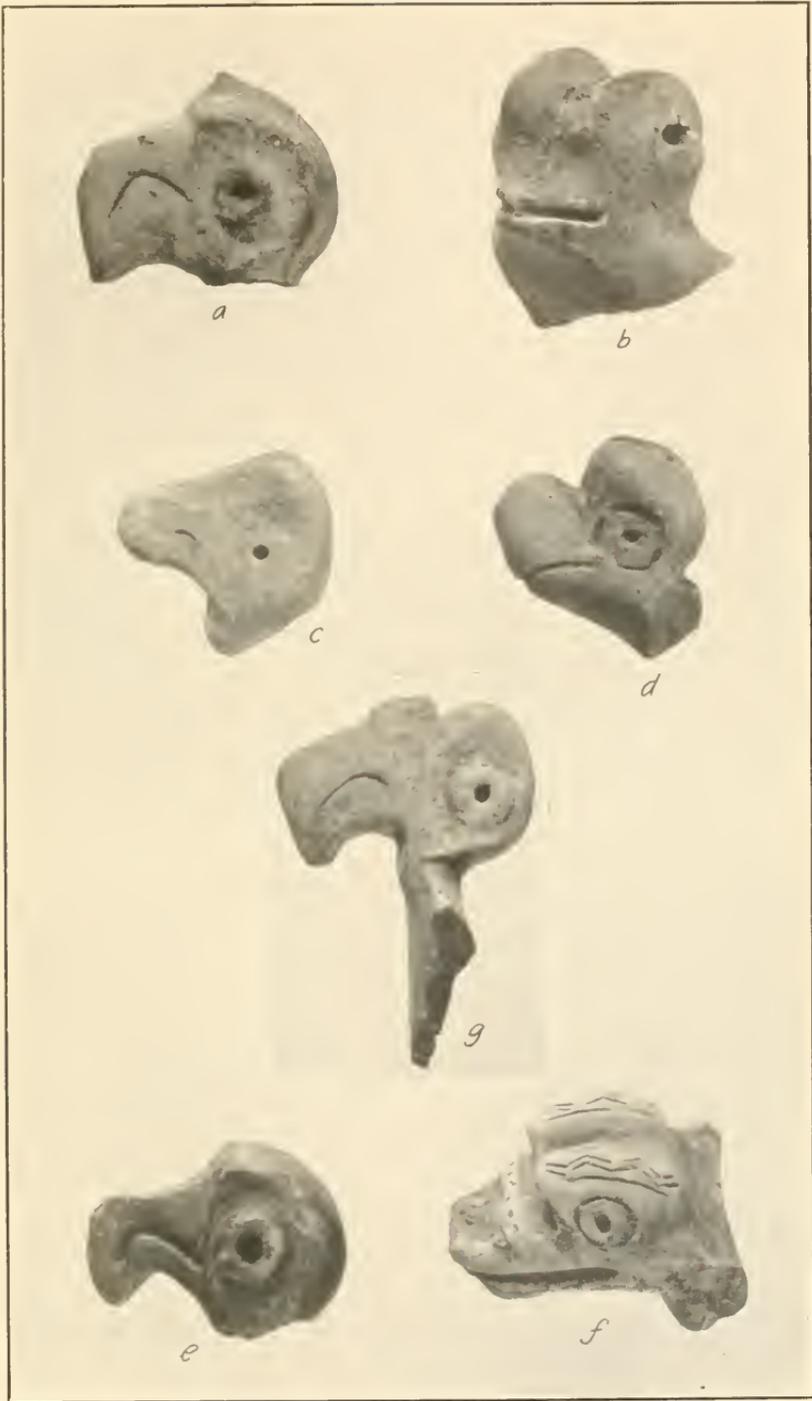
As mentioned above, the striking things about these pottery fragments is the simplicity of the art and its strength. On the whole, it is much more advanced than anything found at Tacarigua, for instance, which has attracted so much attention recently.

The pieces recovered are too few to allow for any broad comparison to the potteries of Venezuela, the Antilles, or any of the surrounding region. The only thing that can be said at this time is that some of the pieces remotely resemble some of the material recovered in Trinidad. It does not seem to have any affinity to Antillean material nor to Amazonian material, nor to Andean material. How widely spread this type of pottery is was not determined. Since it was found on elevations, it may very well be that they are broken pieces from refuse heaps, or even mounds. Unless extensive excavations are undertaken, which was not possible in the three days I spent in the vicinity, there is no way of determining whether these elevations are mounds. They are located in a country which is very sandy and in which shifting sand dunes are common.

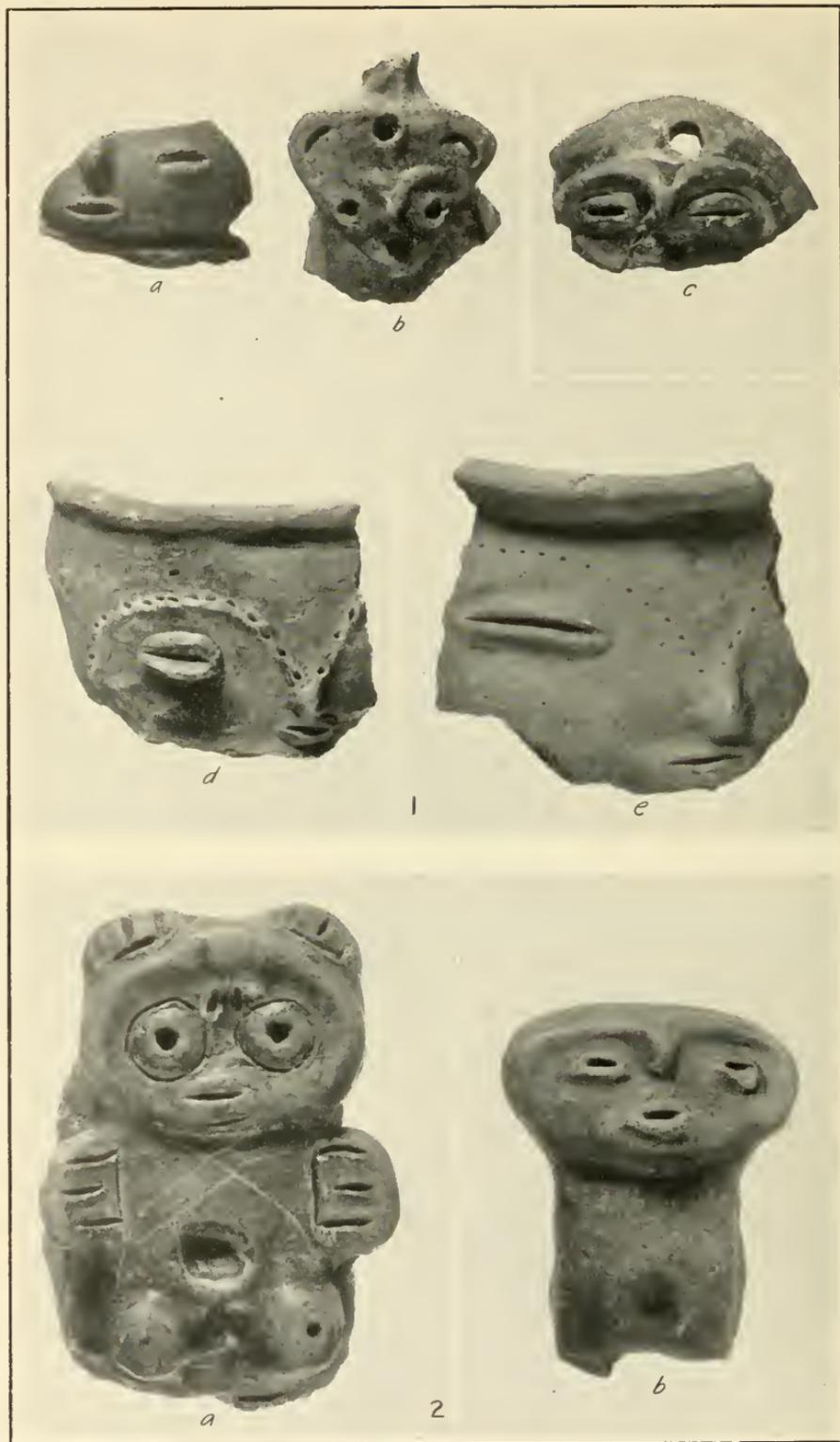
Several of the potsherds show affinity to some of the material uncovered at Tacarigua and in other places in Venezuela. These are shown in plates 27, *a, b, c, d, e*; 29, *a, b, f, g*. Their resemblance is stylistic. These differ so strikingly from the lugs shown in plate 28 that one wonders if the same people produced these contemporaneously with the others.

Most of the ware uncovered consisted of a yellowish clay with a red paint on the surface or a red slip. At this time it is not possible to say more about the quality of the ware. We hope that it will be studied sometime in the near future and the results published. The two figures shown in plate 27, *2*, were given to me by local enthusiasts. They reported that the pieces were picked up at Las Trin-

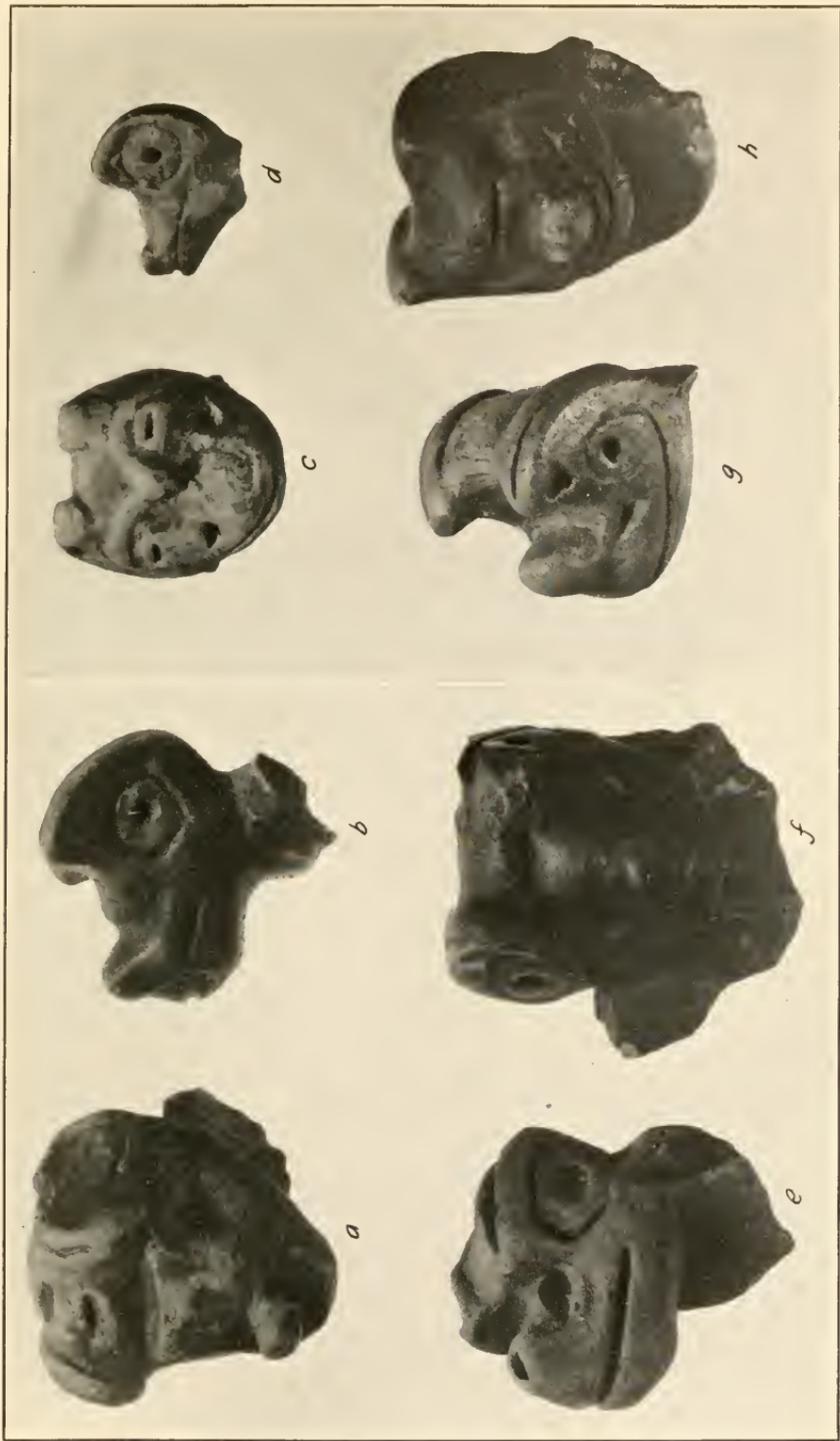
cheras which, according to them, consists of low earthworks resembling trenches. These figurines are, of course, strikingly different from those picked up at Arauquin. The country where they were found is almost completely desert during the dry season—barren even of grasses. Of course this may not have been the condition of the plain in the low tides. It may be that some of the desert aspect of the llanos has been brought about by overgrazing.



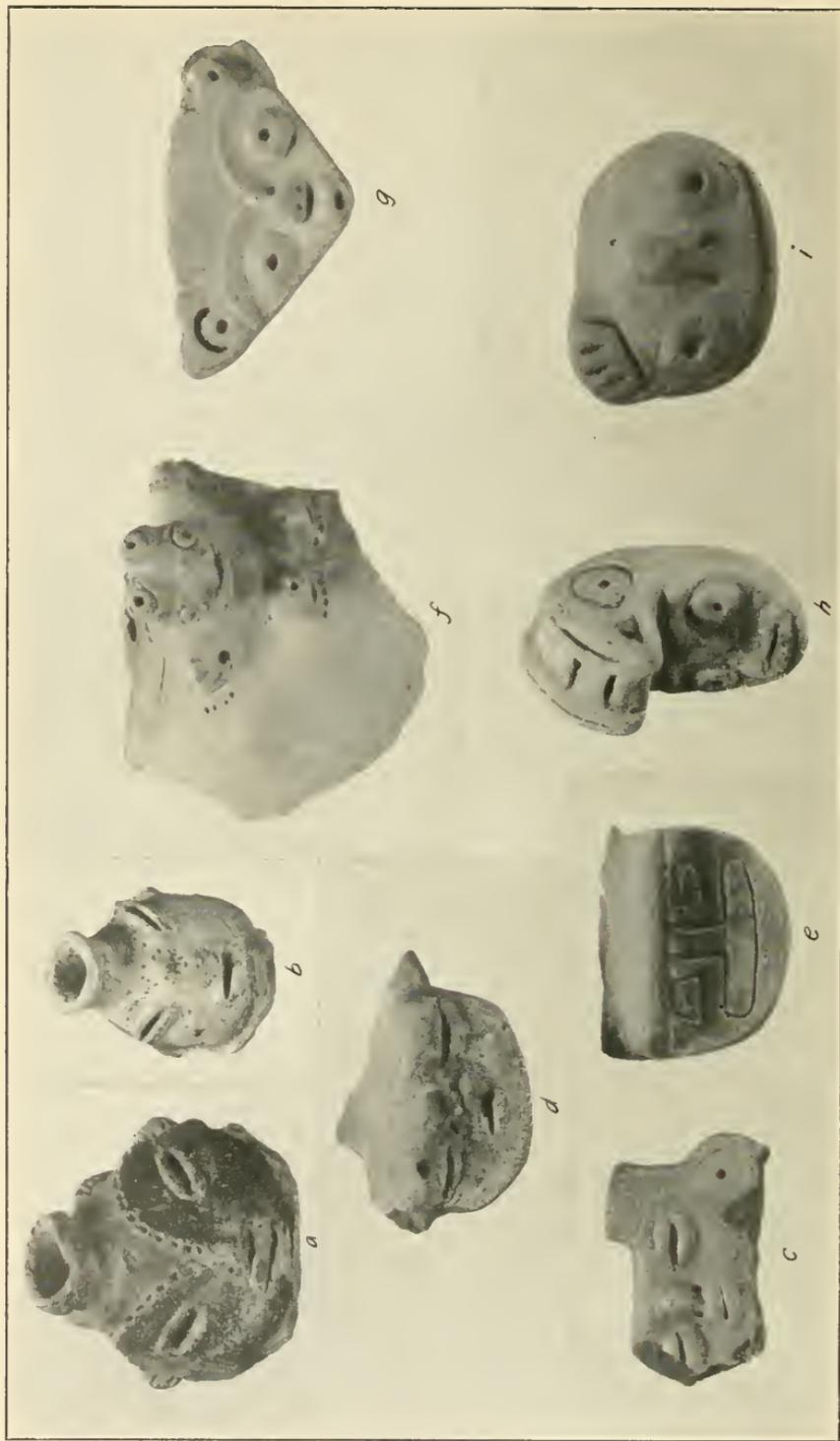
Pottery lugs from Arauquin, Venezuela. *a, g, e*, identifiable as vulture or hawk heads. *f* shows signs of white paint. These pieces are remarkable for their simplicity and strength of style.



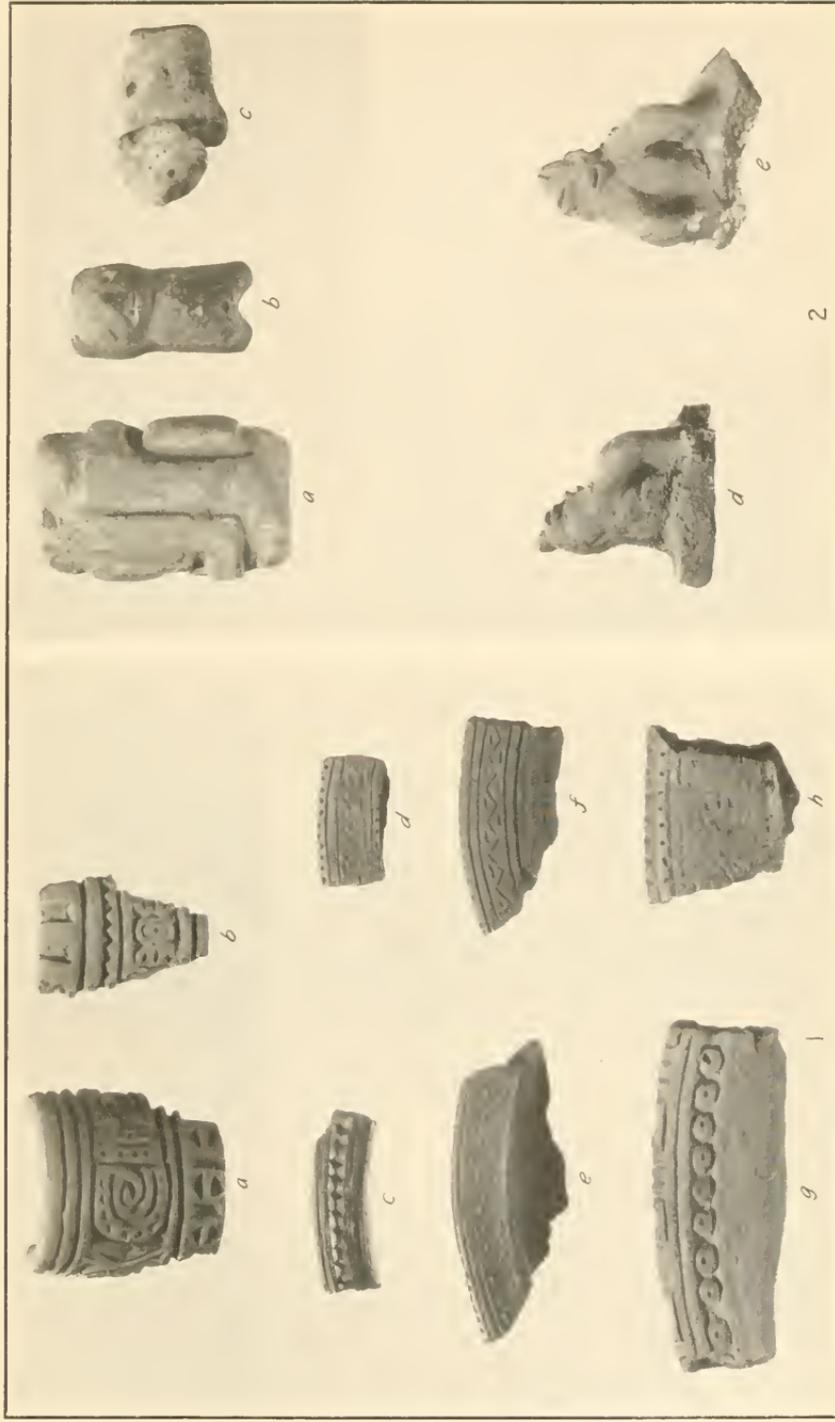
Pottery from Apure, Venezuela. 1. From Arauquin. *a*, *c*, Fragments. *b*, Lug. *d*, *e*, Rim fragments. 2. Figurines from Las Trincheras.



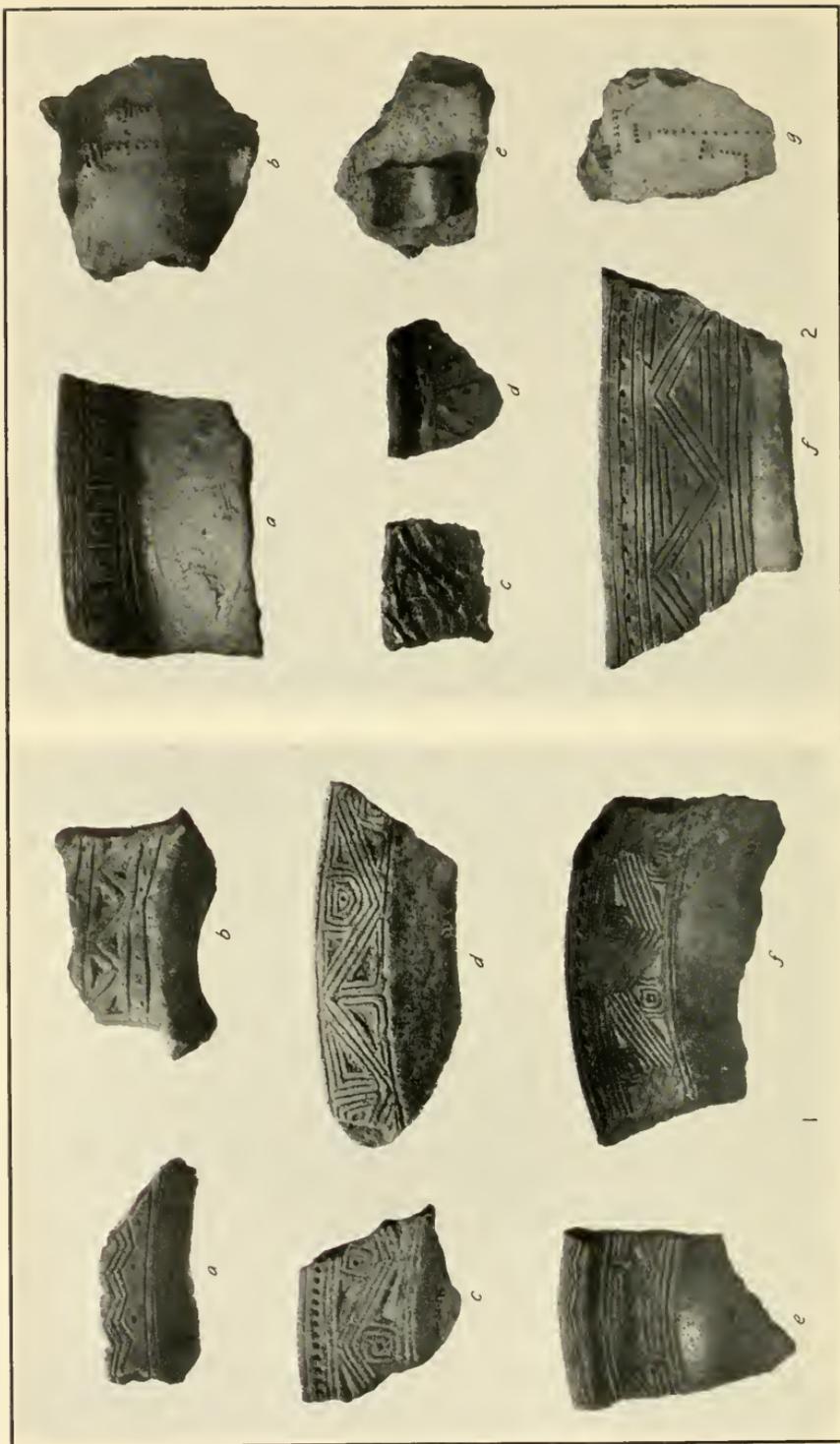
Pottery lugs from Arauquin, Apure, Venezuela. It is impossible to identify these representations of animalistic forms with any certitude.



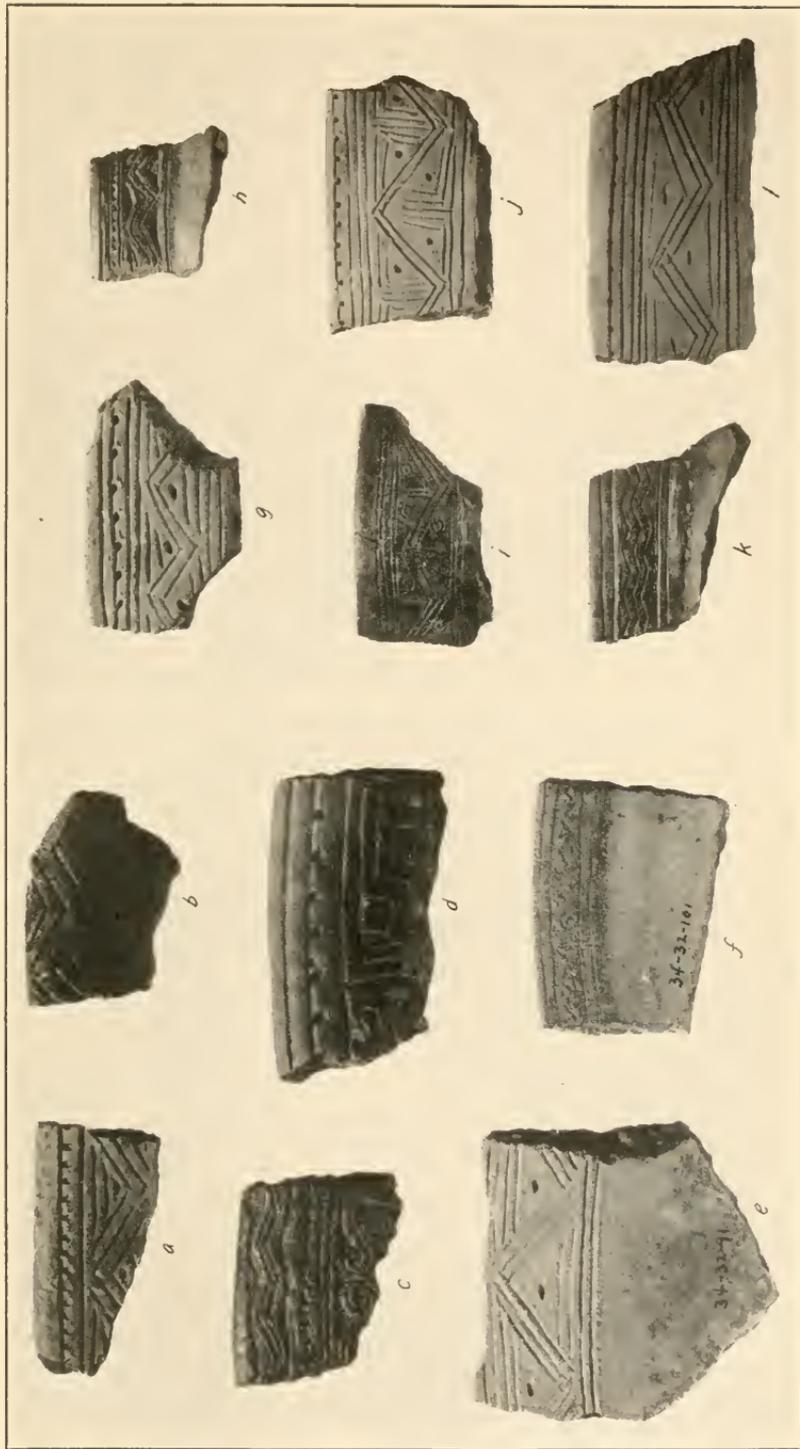
Potsheerds from Arauquin, Venezuela. *a, b*, Upper portions of vessels. *c, f*, Rim fragments. *d, e, g, h, i*, Lugs. *b* and *h* show signs of white paint.



Potsherds from Arauquin, A pure, Venezuela. 1. *a, b*, Fragments of two pottery rings. *c, d, e, f, g, h*, Rim fragments. 2. *a*, Solid pottery. *b*, Pottery figurine. *c*, Animal figurine with white paint or slip. *d, e*, Crude seated figure.



Pottery fragments from Ararquin, Apure, Venezuela.



Pottery fragments from Arauquin, Apure, Venezuela. Most of the designs appearing on the potsherds are incised in rectilinear; e, however, shows curvilinear designs.