

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
BUREAU OF AMERICAN ETHNOLOGY  
BULLETIN 143

---

**HANDBOOK  
OF  
SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS**

**JULIAN H. STEWARD, *Editor***

---

**Volume 3**

**THE TROPICAL FOREST TRIBES**

---

Prepared in Cooperation With the United States Department of State as a Project  
of the Interdepartmental Committee on Scientific and Cultural Cooperation



UNITED STATES  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON : 1948

Biblioteca Digital Curt Nimuendajú  
<http://www.etnolingustica.org/hsai>

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office,  
Washington 25, D. C.

PART I. THE COASTAL AND AMAZONIAN TUPI  
THE ARCHEOLOGY OF THE PARANÁ RIVER

---

By FRANCISCO DE APARICIO

---

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of historic times various groups of native peoples lived along the lower Paraná River, from its confluence with the Paraguay to the Delta. Some of these peoples were island dwellers and navigators; others lived along the banks of the river and were adapted to both a riverine and terrestrial life. Still others were land hunters who, perhaps, came only seasonally to the river to fish. The latter do not concern us here, but the first two groups, the island peoples and those who lived permanently along the Paraná littoral are considered here as typical inhabitants of the Paraná.

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

At its confluence with the Paraguay, the Paraná River turns south to form the lower Paraná. In this southward course its width varies from 1 to 2½ kilometers ( $\frac{5}{8}$  to 1½ miles) in the north and gradually widens toward the south. The great volume of alluvium which the river carries has resulted in the formation of numerous islands at the Delta which are dissected by small streams. Ramirez, in referring to these islands, said that: "There were so many that they could not be counted." They are a characteristic feature of the Paraná Delta landscape, and they offered, in the past, exceptionally advantageous sites for the dwellings of native peoples.

The banks of the Paraná are quite irregular in appearance. The left margin, from Corrientes to Diamante, where the formation of the Delta begins, is in some places high and falls sharply to the river, forming steep bluffs 30 meters (about 100 ft.) in height. At other places the decline from the high ground to the river is more gradual. These gradual slopes usually form the transitional terrain between the river and the typical monte country of the region. The right margin of the Paraná, on the other hand, is low. A flooded zone, of 10 to 40 kilometers (about 6 to 25 miles) in width, borders the river down to the city of Santa Fé.

From there, to the confluence of the Carcarañá, the Coronda subsidiary defines the edge of the firm land that rises only a little above the ordinary level of the waters. South of the Carcarañá, the river bank rises to high cliffs; and these highlands, in some places, continue inland for a short distance. This same topography continues down the Plata to the vicinity of Buenos Aires. The Indians occupied these highlands, and undoubtedly it was on the heights that the conquistadors had their first contact with the natives, as the flood plains were nearly always inaccessible.

The lower Paraná has numerous left tributaries, the most voluminous of which is the Iberá draining a large basin. The other tributaries flow from the western watershed of the Argentine Mesopotamia. These rivers were good locations for primitive communities, but archeological evidence indicates that they were occupied only near their mouths. On the right bank, the Paraná receives two tributaries which were of great significance in the life of the pre-Columbian populations. These are the Salado, which crosses the country from the border of the Puna de Atacama to Santa Fé, and the Carcarañá, which descends the Sierra de Comechingones. According to the geographical information which the Indians of Sancti Spíritu supplied to the explorer Cabot, it is evident that these two rivers, and especially the Salado, must have served as important routes of native commerce. Typical Paraná cultures had, however, penetrated only a few kilometers up the Salado, and no remains of the Paraná type have ever been discovered on the Carcarañá. In the northern part of the Province of Santa Fé, the rivers that run parallel to the Paraná before entering it duplicate its general environmental conditions.

The Delta embraces approximately 200 kilometers (125 miles) of the lower course of the Paraná. This extremely low region is intersected by a great number of streams, and it is subject to the tides of the Río de la Plata, which inundate it periodically. During these floods only a few small, unusually high areas remain above the waters. On such areas are found the remains of the indigenous peoples of the region.

The shores of the Paraná are covered, for the most part, with monte (shrub vegetation) of a Mesopotamian type. The abundance of the flora varies considerably according to the latitude or to which river bank is involved. A hydrophyllic vegetation thrives in the insular region of the Delta, the most common species being the willow (*Salix humboldtiana*), the ceiba (*Erythrina crista-galli*), and the yatay palm (*Cocos yatay*), the last a conspicuous tree the fruit of which was used by the Indians. In general, the insular landscape is characterized by swamp and aquatic vegetation of extraordinary exuberance.

The rich Paraná flora afforded the Indian refuge and materials for shelter, but it yielded no important food element. The fauna, however, abundantly satisfied almost all the needs of the early inhabitants.

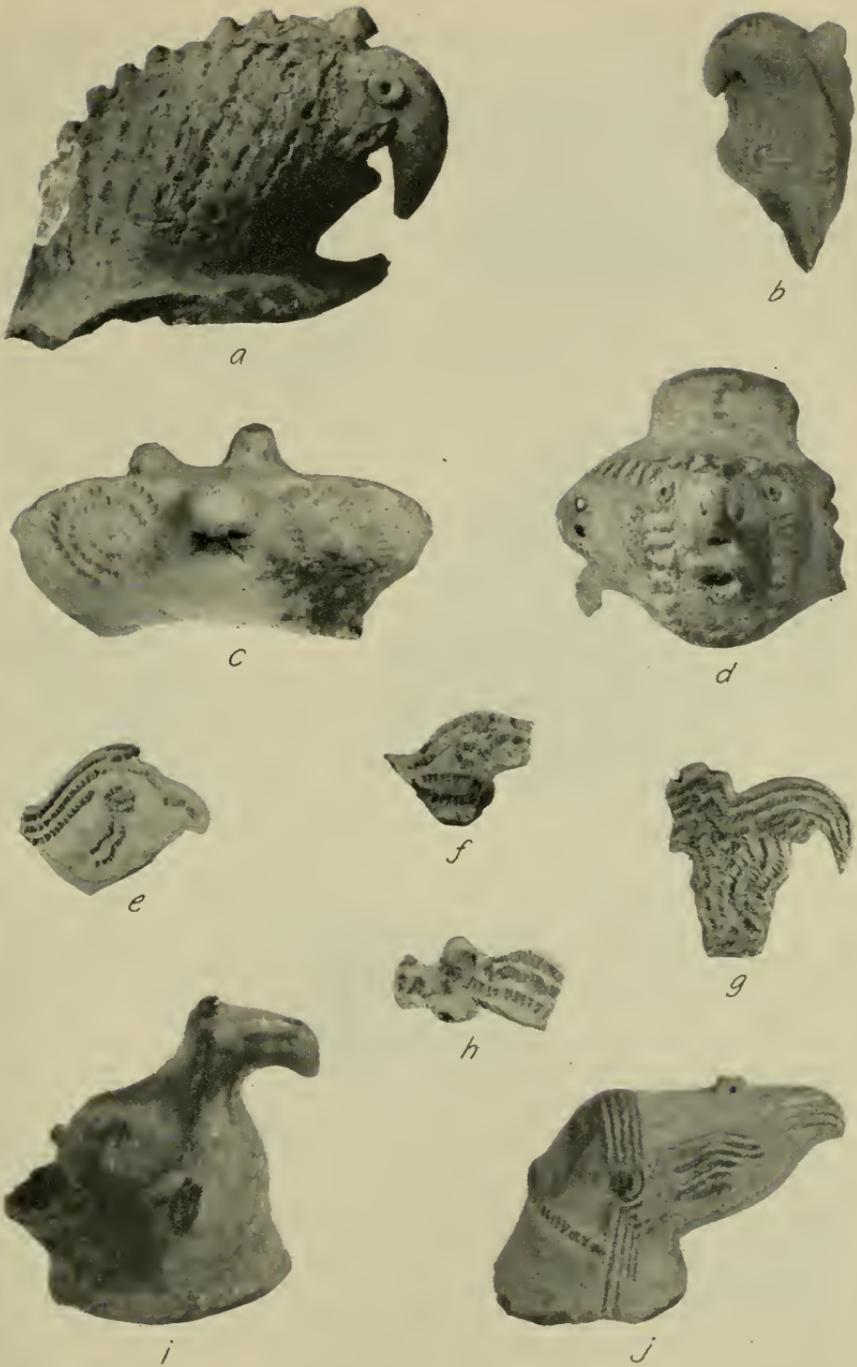


PLATE 9.—Plastic representations from the Paraná River country. *a-c*, Zoo-morphic handles, Malabrigo; *d*, human-head handle, vicinity of city of Paraná; *e-h*, silhouette rim attachments; *i, j*, free representations of birds. (*a* and *c*, Approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  actual size; *b* and *d*, approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  actual size; *e-h*, approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  actual size; *i* and *j*, approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  actual size.) (Courtesy Museo Etnográfico de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Buenos Aires.)

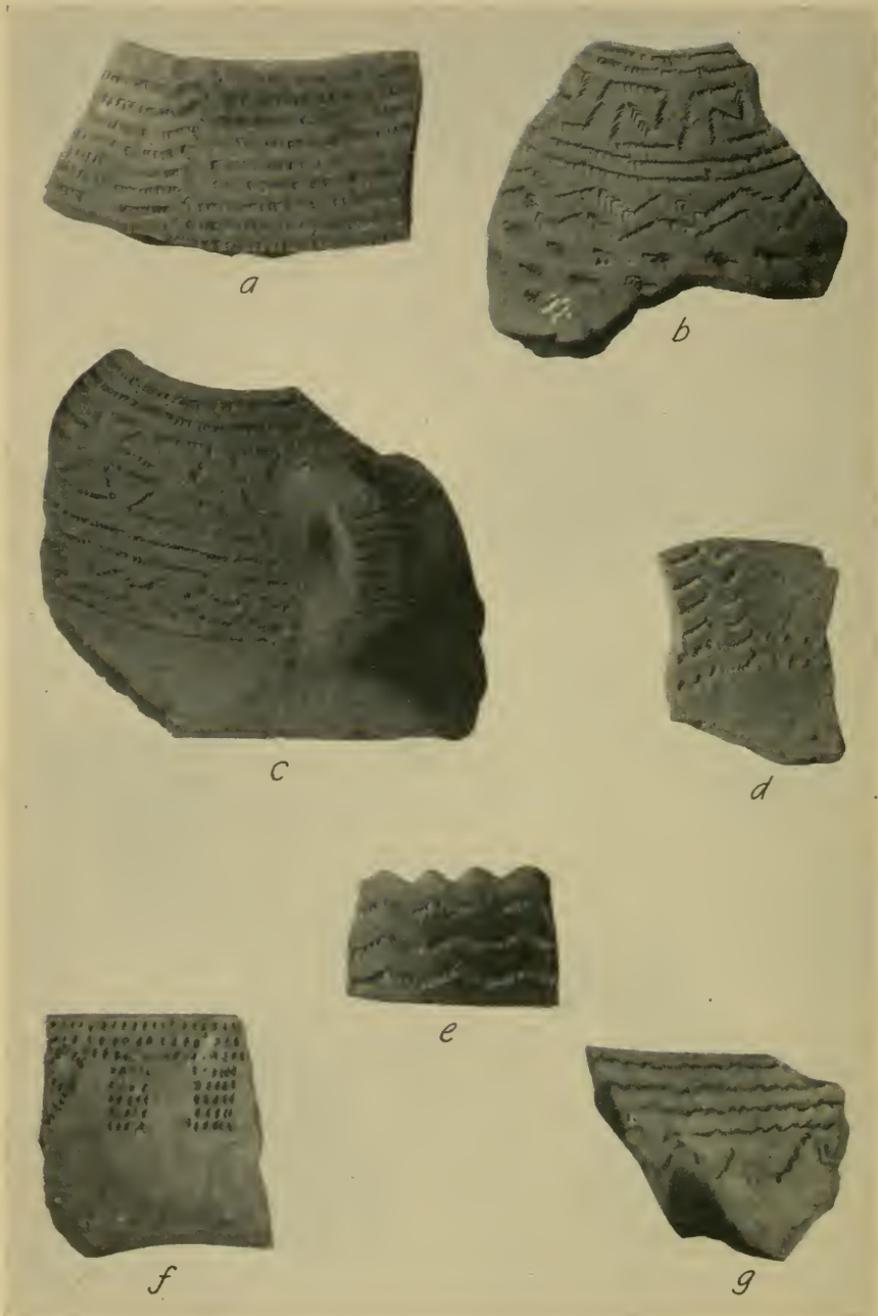


PLATE 10.—Paraná River area sherds. *a-e*, Incised lines with notched or punctated interiors ("drag-and-jab" technique); *f, g*, sherds of the insular delta complex. (Courtesy Museo Etnográfico de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Buenos Aires.)

## ETHNOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

A brief analysis of the archeology of the Paraná demonstrates three distinct archeological complexes: two in the region of the Delta, and a third which is found along both shores of the river above the Delta. The accounts of the early European discoverers of this country indicate that the Indians whom they encountered belonged to different tribes or "nations." In interpreting the written sources by comparing them with the archeological evidence, it becomes clear that there were three outstanding aboriginal groups.

The first of these were the *Querandí*, who lived in the territory of Sancti Spíritu: The "people of the country," as Ramirez called them. Oviedo y Valdés (1851-55) says that they were inland dwellers, and Sebastian Cabot (*in* Medina, 1908) affirms that their territory extended to the foot of the mountains. They occasionally reached the coast, and this explains why their name was given to the creek at whose mouth the Portuguese explorer Lópes de Sousa set up two landmarks bearing the coat of arms of his king. Later, Mendoza, according to Ulrich Schmidel (1903), encountered the *Querandí* in the region where the Port of Santa María de Buen Aire was situated. These Indians, in spite of their presence on the coast, cannot be considered as typical inhabitants of the Paraná and are not treated in this paper. Undoubtedly, they did not form a tribe, properly speaking, but were a band or a group who, a little after the second founding of Buenos Aires, are no longer mentioned but became confused with the other Indians of the plains and were included under the general name of "Pampas."

The second important group were the *Guaraní*, who inhabited some of the islands and navigated the Paraná, "because they were the enemies of all the other nations," says Ramirez. The *Guaraní* left behind cemeteries with urn burials and other types of characteristic remains. Finally, the chroniclers mention a series of people who lived along the banks of the river: *Carcarai*, *Chana*, *Begua*, *Chana-Timbú*, *Timbú*, *Mocoretai*, *Camarao*, *Mepene*. All of these peoples were, evidently, small bands belonging to a larger group, the third major group of the area. The archeological evidence found along the shores of the Paraná verifies the testimony of the conquistadors who, although they gave many names to these people, left no doubt that culturally they were fundamentally uniform. To these people can be assigned the dominant archeological complex of the Paraná, characterized by the ceramic representations and accompanying other remains (Aparicio, 1928-29).

The sites, other than those of the *Guaraní*, which have been found on the "cerritos" (small elevations) of the Delta cannot yet be assigned to any of the people mentioned in the early literature. All that is known of these people is confined to the archeological materials themselves. These materials differ both from the Paraná complex of the ceramic

plastic representations and from those of the *Guarani* sites. It is very possible that when the remains from some of the sites of the right margin of the Río de la Plata are better known that these will prove to have a close relationship with those from the Delta "cerritos."

#### HISTORY OF ARCHEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The excavation of the "Túmulo Prehistórico de Campana," made around 1877 by Don Estanislão S. Zeballos and Pedro P. Pico (1878), began archeological research along the Paraná and was also the first systematic investigation of an Argentine archeological site. Several years later, in 1893-94, Ambrosetti found fragments of decorated pottery in Entre Ríos and a handsome collection of plastic representations in pottery from the site of Goya. Further field work was not attempted along the Paraná littoral until Frenguelli and the present author discovered important sites on the Malabrigo River. Other minor discoveries were also made by Frenguelli, by the author, and by Antonio Serrano.

The Delta of the Paraná is known from the works of L. M. Torres (1913) and from the recent excavations of the North American, Samuel K. Lothrop.

The bibliography relative to Paraná archeology includes important works of other authors—Ameghino, Lafone Quevedo, Outes, and Torres. These are, however, monographic treatments of selected themes and are based upon rapid exploratory trips, occasional discoveries, or library research. The present brief synthesis is based, for the most part, upon the personal investigations carried out in the lower Paraná region by the author. These investigations are only partly published.

#### ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES

##### SITES ALONG THE PARANÁ

Campana and Goya are the classic sites of the Paraná littoral. The first was studied with surprising care for the period in which the excavations were made (1877). The investigators stated, with regard to the nature of the mound:

We established *a priori* that this monument was a tumulus similar to those found in the different territories of Europe and the Americas. Its material consists of decayed vegetal substances and Quaternary deposits. Taking the form of an ellipse, its major diameter measures 79 varas [approximately 220 feet, or 70 m.]; the lesser diameter was 32 varas [approximately 90 ft., or 30 m.]; and its greatest height was 2½ varas [approximately 7 ft., or 2.2 m.] above the surrounding ground. [Zeballos and Pico, 1878.]

Zeballos defined the mound, on the basis of its general appearance, as a tumulus comparable to the earth monuments of other continents. At about the same time, some similar sites had been discovered by re-

liable amateurs in the lowlands of southern Entre Ríos. The coincidence of these discoveries was commented upon by Ameghino, shortly after this, leading to the supposition of the existence of a culture or "a people of the tumuli."

At Goya, Ambrosetti made very rapid and superficial observations, and his descriptions do not give a clear idea of the conditions under which he discovered the material which he describes. However, judging from investigations in many other sites along the Paraná, it is evident that Ambrosetti was investigating a site quite typical of the region. These sites are always found on the banks of the river or of its tributaries, and are situated on high ground above the zone of inundations. The cultural remains are always found at a very slight depth, immediately below the humus. They consist of potsherds, apparently scattered intentionally, hearths, remains of food, and human bones coming from secondary inhumations. The writer has noted sites of this type in Corrientes, in the vicinity of the city of Paraná, near Diamante and Victoria, in Gaboto and other places along the right bank of the Coronda, and in various localities north of the city of Santa Fé. A site of the same type, but located on low ground in the insular region, is Las Tejas, explored by Antonio Serrano, in the vicinity of the Lake of Coronda.

The better-known sites of the Paraná are, however, those of the right bank of the Malabrigo River. They are located upon a series of hills that extend a short distance from the edge of the river. Frenguelli remarks that, taking into account the "characteristic alignment [of these hills] upon the edge of a fluvial valley, and the nature and homogeneity of the materials that compose them," they must be interpreted "as ancient aeolian accumulations [sand dunes] more or less affected by later weather action, that shaped them in the form of hills, which are likely places, in these regions, for the refuge of indigenous populations" (Frenguelli and Aparicio, 1923). In all of the mounds explored, artifacts and human skeletal remains have been found at only a very slight depth in the sand.

#### SITES OF THE DELTA

In the insular region and the bordering lowlands of the Delta, a country subjected to periodic flooding or tidal action of the estuary of the Rio de la Plata, locations of aboriginal dwellings were limited to only a few elevated places, which are referred to today as "cerritos," or little hills. In them are found cultural refuse and human burials. Because of their appearance, as small mounds rising above the surrounding lowlands, these "cerritos" have been considered by some authorities, especially Torres, as true tumuli that were deliberately constructed by man. However, Lothrop, who has explored one of these "mounds," believes that their artificial elevation is the inadvertent accumulation of detritus left by

human occupation. Outes, who explored a site of this type in Mazaruca, also tends to this latter view:

Mazaruca, as with the great majority of the other burial places in more or less isolated elevations, is a relatively consolidated sand dune. Some of these dunes are covered by a cap of humus, deep enough to be considered the product of the slow transformation of the coarse quartz sand which forms the underlying material of the dune, and to which has been added continuously detritus carried by floods and the decomposed organic matter from the rank vegetation that covers the surface of the marsh. [Outes, 1912.]

The author has had occasion to investigate a similar site in "La Argentina," in the region of Mazaruca, and concurs with Outes (Aparicio, 1928). It is unfortunate that a comprehensive study of the geological nature of the "cerritos" has not yet been made.

## CULTURAL REMAINS

### THE PARANÁ LITTORAL

**Plastic representations.**—The sites along the shores of the Paraná are characterized by modeled pottery figures or plastic representations, with which are associated quantities of potsherds, plain, incised, and, in a few cases, painted. By and large, however, the materials, which are almost exclusively ceramics, are of rather poor quality and of monotonous uniformity.

All of the plastic representations are hand-made, and knowledge of molds was lacking. All of the figures conform to a definite art style which distinguishes them from comparable pottery representations found in other American areas.<sup>1</sup> The native artists of the Paraná interpreted the regional fauna with surprising talent and sensibility. They were sometimes able to reproduce nature with a masterly realism; in other instances, they modified the form until they achieved stylizations of a disconcerting audacity. Both types of depiction are usually complemented by incised decoration which is purely geometric and in no sense zoomorphic characterizations.

The plastic representations, in some cases, were adornos on pottery vessels, serving either as handles or simply as added ornaments. The figure handles are bulky and are attached to the vessel walls; the purely decorative adornos are silhouette forms which appear to have been added to the rims as an extension of the vessel wall. In both cases, the figures have the same paste, firing, finish, etc., as the vessels of which they form a part.

<sup>1</sup> Attention has often been called to the analogies existing between the plastic representations of the Paraná and of the Amazon and other regions of the continent. Nordenskiöld in studying this problem contrasted a series of schematic drawings. As in such schemes, the sculptures have lost all stylistic quality, and the resemblances of one with the other are therefore surprising. However, anyone who has seen an appreciable quantity of plastic representations of the Paraná and of the Amazon, and who has some artistic sensibility, would not hesitate to declare the analogy to be of theme and not of style.

The function of the separate or free figures can only be conjectured. They differ from the attached figures in being larger and usually solid rather than hollow, as is the case with the latter.

At the sites of Malabrigo, Resistencia, Campana, and Goya, the figures are almost exclusively of the attached type. In sites of the river country of Santa Fé, between San José del Rincón and Gaboto, and in those along the banks of the Paraná between the city of Paraná and the Delta (such as Las Tejas), the free figures have been found in greater abundance. As there is a fairly adequate bibliography upon this subject, only a few typical examples of the plastic representations will be illustrated and discussed here. Plate 9, *a*, a handle figure from Malabrigo, is a magnificent example of interpretative realism. Although executed in a slovenly manner and free of all technical preoccupation, it unites surprising elements of expression and life. The beak is exaggerated in its dimensions but faithfully portrayed; the fierce expression of the eye and the tufted crest give the head a singular dynamism and exceptional vitality. The decorations of the piece have been executed with a marked lack of prolixity. They consist simply of a series of parallel rows of punctations that run perpendicular to the tufted crest and cover both sides of the face. Below, and at the sides of the beak, this simple ornamental feature is repeated in smaller size. Another handle representation from Malabrigo (pl. 9, *b*) is a good example of extreme stylization. Although this head has the same general characteristics as the last, the artist's intent was obviously different. His interest was not in achieving sincere realism, but in producing a graceful and elegant formalism, which he accomplished with admirable simplicity by portraying a beak of disproportionate size and a long undulant crest which extends down the back of the head. The crest plays an important decorative role, complementing two grooved projections at the sides of the head. Ornamentation is limited to some parallel zigzag lines. This particular specimen is almost completely covered with red ocher.

The great parrots were the preferred subjects of the native sculptors of the Paraná littoral, and representations of them constitute an overwhelming majority of known specimens. Other birds and animals were also portrayed. Plate 9, *c*, another handle specimen from Malabrigo, is a beautiful example of an owl. The artist has retained only features necessary to the characterization: Eyes, "horns," and beak. He has represented them with great ease and assurance.

The artists made human representations much less often than animals, and with less success. An example of accentuated human realism is the little head (pl. 9, *d*) from the vicinity of the city of Paraná.

No intact vessel has yet been discovered with two figure handles attached, but the great number of rim sherds with such attachments leaves little

doubt that such handles were used on vessels, e. g., figure 4, a nearly complete specimen from Las Tejas, Santa Fé. The handles on this piece are of an exceptional type, as the zoomorphic figure has been depicted as an entire body rather than by the usual practice of simply showing it as a head (Aparicio, 1925).

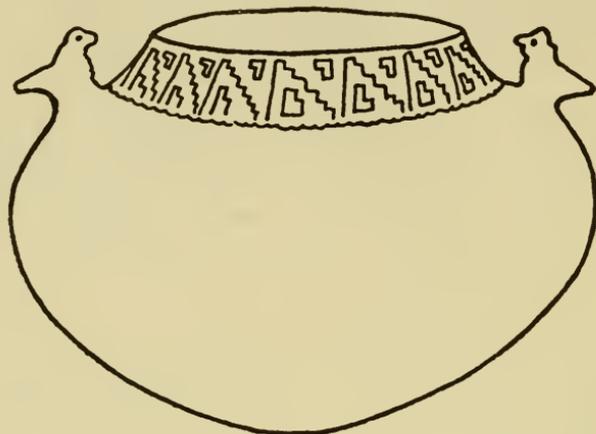


FIGURE 4.—Paraná River vessel with zoomorphic handles. (Courtesy Museo Etnográfico de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Buenos Aires.)

The silhouette rim attachments which the author first discovered and published some years ago, are definitely in the artistic style of the Paraná plastic representations (pl. 9, *e-h*). The silhouettes have been made by cutting out the outline of the animal which is being represented from a flat piece of clay. The surfaces of the figures are then treated somewhat in the manner of relief sculpture, in some cases to augment the characterization intended, and in others simply to decorate the figures. [Aparicio, 1923.]

Various examples of separate or free representations, either complete or fragmentary, have been examined by the author. Plate 9, *i*, can be considered typical. Artistically, it is contemptible. The heavy modeled parrot is scarcely recognizable. The head reproduced in plate 9, *j*, though of unusual beauty, is no doubt a similar piece. Although the subject has been drastically conventionalized, the essential characteristics—beak, crest, and throat—enable one to recognize it immediately as a royal condor. The head is covered with incised decoration, which, as usual, is disconnected and seems to lack design plan.

**Pottery.**—Plastic representations are always found in association with plain, incised, and painted potsherds. Some instances of combined painting and incision have also been noted. Various ornamental combinations have been made with incised lines, but these have not yet been systematically analyzed. These decorative combinations show some similarity to comparable pottery decorations from other primitive cultures. However, the exact nature of these incised decorations, and the manner in

which they have been executed, is characteristic of the Paraná littoral. Incision was made in the soft paste by a small pointed instrument which effected a series of successive impressions, or a groove with a notched interior. These notched grooved lines ("drag-and-jab") vary considerably, depending upon the size and shape of the instrument used. Plate 10, *a-e*, shows a random selection of such sherds. At a glance one can see the identity of the pottery decorations with those found on the plastic representations.

In addition, pottery decorated with incised lines and separate punctations is not lacking. Pottery may also have the most elementary sort of decorative treatment: fingernail impressions and finger-and-fingernail impressions in various combinations. These latter types are, nevertheless, in the minority, and they cannot be considered as typical manifestations of the culture. (See concluding section of *Guaraní* influences.)

The people of the Paraná littoral apparently had the custom of intentionally destroying their pottery and other ceramic artifacts. Because of this, very few complete specimens are now extant. The sherds, however, reveal that there were various vessel forms, some small and carefully made, others large, coarse, and without decoration. There is only one good example of a vessel of the finer ware; but there are, perhaps, a dozen of the large coarse vessels. These latter are usually subglobular in shape. All complete vessels have been brought together in a special monograph (Iribarne, 1937).

**Miscellaneous ceramic objects.**—Exceptionally, in some sites, pipes, pendants, and spindle whorls have been found.

**Nonceramic objects.**—Artifacts of stone or bone are extremely scarce. In Malabrigo, the stone industry can be considered nonexistent; in Goya, four worked stone artifacts and several bolas were found; in Campana, Zeballos and Pico mention the finding of 150 pieces of worked and polished stone. Unfortunately, this last material was lost and there is no description available. However, the exceptional lithic representation at Campana can be satisfactorily explained if it is realized that the site lies on the periphery of the Paraná littoral culture. This stone artifact complex was probably the result of contact with neighboring peoples.

Bone artifacts are similar to stone artifacts in their occurrence. Their presence at Campana, again, must be explained by the geographical location of the site.

#### THE PARANÁ DELTA

**The Delta culture of the "cerritos."**—Although the general aspect of the Delta sites is more or less uniform, the contents of these sites is variable. Some sites contain urn burials accompanied by a very characteristic artifact complex. Other sites have direct inhumations accompanied by unspecialized ceramics and bone artifacts. The latter correspond to

sites already mentioned, with the exception of Arroyo Malo explored by Lothrop (1932).

The sites with the direct inhumations and the nondistinctive archeological content, represent the insular culture of the "cerritos," presumably the remains of the ancient occupants of the Delta. In addition to being little specialized, and lacking in definitive characteristics, the pottery and artifacts from the "cerritos" are very scarce. Skeletal remains, on the other hand, are quite abundant. The potsherds that have been found show very simple line and punctate combinations. They differ, significantly, from those attributed to the peoples of the *Guaycurú* family, and, even more strikingly, from the well-known *Guaraní* ceramics. In plate 10, *f, g*, are shown sherds from the sites of the insular Delta complex. (Cf. with pl. 10, *a-e*.)

A stone industry is very poorly represented in these Delta sites. Those artifacts found probably were trade pieces received from neighboring peoples. Artifacts of bone and horn, such as awls, punches, and points, although not highly specialized or differentiated, are the most typical.

**Guaraní influences.**—Various sites of the Delta are characterized by great funerary urns. Despite the fact that investigations at only one such site have been fully published (Lothrop, 1932, Arroyo Malo), the artifact complex associated with this culture of the urn burials is well known and is attributed to the *Guaraní* peoples. The distribution of *Guaraní* finds is very extensive, allowing comparisons with similar discoveries made in relatively remote regions, such as the upper Paraná and the upper Paraguay Rivers. In addition, they are also found throughout the entire geographical area to which we have been referring in this paper. Sometimes these *Guaraní*-type finds are found by themselves; in other instances they are found as intrusions into archeological strata of other cultures.

The *Guaraní* funerary urns have peculiar forms. The surfaces are plain or fingernail marked, or, more rarely, they are completely or partially painted with polychrome decorations (fig. 5; pls. 11, 12). Fragments of pottery are also found in association with the burial urns. These suggest vessels of different forms and uses which have been decorated in a similar manner to the funerary vessels.

There are also typical stone artifacts in association with the above pottery. These are polished axes and lip plugs of various forms.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ambrosetti, 1893, 1894; Ameghino, 1880-81; Aparicio, 1923, 1925, 1928, 1928-1929; Cabot (*in* Medina, 1908); Frenguelli and Aparicio, 1923; Iribarne, 1937; Lafone-Quevedo, 1909; Lothrop, 1932; Outes, 1912; Oviedo y Valdés, 1851-55; Schmidel, 1903; Torres, L. M., 1913; Zeballos and Pico, 1878.