

THE DISTRIBUTION OF IM THURN'S ELABORATE TYPE  
PETROGLYPHS IN SOUTH AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

Several authors writing on the archaeology of the Antilles have pointed out the similarities between Antillean petroglyphs and the 'elaborate type' or 'shallow type' petroglyphs in Guyana and Suriname. Surprisingly, however, the only Guianese<sup>1</sup> material used for this comparison consists of some incomplete drawings in Brown 1873 or Im Thurn 1883<sup>2</sup>, while sometimes the terms 'shallow type' and 'swaddled' are used interchangeably. The aim of this paper is to provide a basis for an adequate comparison of Antillean and Guianese rock inscriptions by determining the importance of these concepts and presenting a survey of elaborate type petroglyphs in the Guianas with their distribution. The facts have partly been taken from our ms 'An inventory of the petroglyphs in the Guianas and adjacent parts of Brazil and Venezuela', in this paper referred to as 'Inventory', which study will be published by the Institute of Archaeology, California University. Some petroglyphs depicted here are published for the first time.

THE SHALLOW TYPE

Im Thurn (1883:394-397) introduces this concept of "shallow type" referring to drawings along the Corentyne and its tributaries (our nos. 1,7,9,11), and along the Berbice river (our nos 17,18,19). He characterizes the type as drawings "of quite inconsiderable depths and as "rectangular figures, of greater height than width, crowned by a semicircle marked with distinct radii. This outline is filled in by a pattern of straight lines; which, unlike the outline, is not always the same as at Temehri (our fig.7), and is indeed often considerably varied... Figures of this sort vary very considerably in dimensions, though they are always much larger than are the figures of the deep sculptures." They are "as is indeed usual, very indistinct, and, except in certain lights, ... almost invisible until water has been poured over the surface of the rock."

It is evident that Im Thurn sees the type as a combination of formal elements (*the shape of the drawing*), and the way of producing the inscription ("*formed by long continuous friction with stones and moist sand*"). As is shown in our table 2, however, petroglyphs of the shape described by Im Thurn may either be 'deep' or 'shallow. Most probably, the deep engravings were made by grinding or pecking the lines into the rock surface, and polishing them afterwards by rubbing with a rounded pebble, while the shallow drawings were made by a procedure of scraping or rubbing the rock surface with a blunt stone, aided by an abrasive agent, such as moist sand. This procedure removed the tops of the innumerable little 'hills' that constitute the surface (*at the same time removing small irregularities on that*

surface). This technique produced rather broad lines (*mostly some 2 or 3 cm*) without any real depth. The lines are sometimes poorly visible; their visibility depends partly on the observer's viewpoint and on the direction of the light that strikes them. The slanting sunlight just after sunrise or just before sunset, or the light of a clear moon, throws them into relief onto the rock surface on which they are made. This effect may have been intentional, but we do not have tangible arguments for this supposition.

Here and there the incorrect coupling of depth and shape by Im Thurn has caused some misunderstanding in the literature on South American petroglyphs. For that reason we avoid the term 'shallow type': instead we prefer to speak of *elaborate type* petroglyphs (*which may be either deep or shallow*). The descriptions of Antillean rock engravings which often mention their depth, do not show whether the shallow ones have been made in the way we have described above, or whether their shallowness is caused by erosion and/or the fact that they were only superficially pecked or ground in.

#### THE SWADDLED TYPE

Without attaching an interpretative meaning to such notions, we may divide an elaborate type drawing into a 'head' and a 'body'. These bodies, the outlines of which converge, diverge or run parallel, show figurative or ornamental elements which evoke associations with swaddled infants (*Frassetto 1960:386*), or likewise, swaddled dead bodies (*Vega 1975:201*). These elements consist of lines connecting the outlines of the body and crossing each other (*e.g. our no.1*). As 9 of the 11 petroglyphs in Brown and Im Thurn that were used for the comparison of Antillean and Guianese engravings are swaddled in this way, the notion 'swaddled' and 'shallow type' are sometimes used interchangeably. However, out of the 35 Guianese elaborate type drawings presented in this paper (*fig. 1-35*), only 10 are swaddled in the strict sense of this word. Another 6 have other swaddle-like body decoration inside; 5 have a swaddled head, and 14 do not show any swaddling at all (*see Table 1*). The same goes for comparable Antillean petroglyphs: some are swaddled in the strict sense, others have other swaddle-like lines inside the outlines of the body, some are not swaddled at all. On the other hand, we noted down 6 properly swaddled petroglyphs in the Guianas (*fig. 76-80, 85*) and 3 in North Venezuela (*fig. 81-83*) which do not belong to the elaborate type. Outside the Guianese and Antillean areas, 24 elaborate type-like inscriptions are mentioned in the relevant literature (*figs. 52-75*); only one of them, a petroglyph from Salta, Argentina, being swaddled in the strict sense (*fig. 52*). We therefore suggest to use the term 'swaddled' for all petroglyphs with symmetrical decorations inside the body which are connected, or near-connected, with the outlines of this body; at the same time disconnecting the notions 'swaddled type' and 'elaborate type' (or, in Im Thurn's terminology: 'shallow type').

*SURVEY OF ELABORATE TYPE PETROGLYPHS*

The Survey opens with a list naming our sources per petroglyph. Then we present the elaborate type petroglyphs in the Guiana area in a broad sense: the territory bounded by the lower and middle Orinoco, the Cassiquiare Canal, the Rio Negro, the lower Amazon, and the Atlantic Ocean (figs. 1-36). This domain is larger than the area of our 'Inventory', which lies between 0° and 8° N, 51° and 62° W; this enlargement enables us to include the nos 32, 34, 35 and 36. The criteria for bringing these petroglyphs under the heading 'elaborate type' are those of Im Thurn's 'shallow type' minus the element shallow; they are only based on the shape of the drawing. These criteria are listed in Table 2; No 36, the engraving from Vigirima in the coastal mountain range of Venezuela, has been added to this group because of its body, which is exactly that of a Guianese elaborate type petroglyph, and of its headdress, although this does not contain any radii. However, the drawing does not possess any arcs (semicircles) and it lies outside the Guiana area, so it does not really belong to this group. Furthermore, a map is provided that shows the distribution of these drawings, with the exception of no. 36. The petroglyph sites along the Corentyne are on Surinam territory, the frontier between this country and Guyana being constituted by the line that marks the highest tide on the left bank of this river.

Then follows a table (Table 2) which shows the distribution of the elements constituting the notion 'elaborate type' over the drawings within the Guianese area that may be considered as 'elaborate type' petroglyphs without a body (figs. 37-51). The lack of a body keeps them outside elaborate category, and consequently out of Table 2, but the drawings for the greater part conform with the heads of the nos 1-35. Some of them might be unfinished elaborate type petroglyphs, or elaborate type petroglyphs from which the body has been erased by erosion or has been overlooked by the person who found and registered them. After that we reproduce pictures of elaborate type-like inscriptions outside the Guiana area (figs. 52-75) the criteria for this category being the radiated headdress and some kind of a body. By this presentation we do not want to suggest any direct relation to our elaborate type petroglyphs, but the evident correspondences between the two categories made us include these pictures in the Survey. There are striking similarities between the engravings from Caquimba, Chile (figs. 60-62) and some engravings from Santa Marta, Colombia (figs. 65-67). The survey ends with swaddled figures which do not belong to the elaborate type (figs. 76-85); the nos 76-80 and 85 are in the Guianese area; nos 81-83 are in the northern part of Venezuela. No 84 is in Middle America, and as such, outside the scope of this paper; it is shown here because of its resemblance with no 76.

*THE ANTILLEAN SIDE OF THE PICTURE*

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the subject of the relation between Antillean and Guianese petroglyphs. Several competent authors have done so. We may be allowed, however, to venture some remarks.

1. The historical and cultural relations between the Antilles and the mainland of northeastern South America have been established without doubt. Various ceramic traditions in the islands originate from Saladoid-Barrancoid series which were carried to the Antilles by Arawak migrants about 2000 years ago. It is an attractive idea to ascribe part of the Antillean petroglyphs to this Saladoid-Barrancoid tradition, and indeed some authors have tentatively suggested the idea. In our opinion there are as yet no substantial arguments to conclude to such a connection.

2. As far as we know, there exists only one Antillean petroglyph which answers to our notion 'elaborate type': the Yambou no. 2 drawing in St. Vincent, described by Kirby (1969) and others (fig. 86). A striking detail in this *deep type* inscription is the lengthened mid ray, which is also present in our nos 9 and 24. The magnificent Barrouallie drawing, also in St. Vincent, cannot be considered as 'elaborate type' because of its body; the headdress does not fully conform to this type either, as appears from the clear photograph by Kirby (fig. 87).

3. Several drawings among the Antillean petroglyphs suggest a relation with the mainland engravings, without belonging to the elaborate type. They have bodies that show the ornamentation which we called swaddled in the broad sense, but do not show the elaborate headdress; instead their 'heads' suggest human heads, often with indications of eyes, a mouth, sometimes a nose as well. These heads are often radiating or plumed. The swaddling shows a remarkable correspondence with that of the Cubeo drawings in Koch-Grünberg sketchbook (1907:57), especially with the figs. a and c. In our opinion, this correspondence allows us to interpret swaddling in Guianese and Antillean petroglyphs as a representation of ritual or ceremonial clothing. However, it is not clear how the swaddled heads (nos 13-16, 19) fit into this interpretation.

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#### NOTES

1. By 'Guiana', we indicate the area of the three Guiana's and the adjacent areas of Brazil and Venezuela; the former colony British Guiana, now independent, is indicated by its proper name: Guyana.
2. Mason 1885: 832-834; Hamy 1903: 97; Koch-Grünberg 1907: 59-61; Bullen 1971: 67, 1973: 100; Vega 1975: 207.

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## A. ELABORATE TYPE PETROGLYPHS IN THE GUIANA AREA

## I. SURINAME

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Aritapu falls,    | Sp 93, after B. Brown 1873 Plate XVI.                              |
| 2. Wonotobo falls,   | Sp 98, after a photograph by the author.                           |
| 3. idem,             | Sp 100, idem.  |
| 4. idem,             | Sp 196, after a photograph by Ir. F.C. Bubberman, Paramaribo.      |
| 5. idem,             | Sp 194, idem.  |
| 6. Bigi Bere falls,  | Sp 127, idem.  |
| 7. Bigi Timehri,     | Sp 131, after a photograph by the author.                          |
| 8. idem,             | Sp 132, after a photograph by Bubberman.                           |
| 9. Pikin Timehri,    | Sp 135, after a photograph by the author.                          |
| 10. idem,            | Sp 139, after a photograph by Bubberman.                           |
| 11. Avanavero falls, | Sp 152, after a photograph by Dr. J.P. Schulz, then at Paramaribo. |
| 12. idem,            | Sp 153, after a photograph by the author                           |
| 13. idem,            | Sp 154, after a photograph by Bubberman.                           |
| 14. idem,            | Sp 155, idem.  |
| 15. idem,            | Sp 156, idem.  |
| 16. idem,            | Sp 157, idem.  |

Sp means: Suriname petroglyph, and refers to the consecutive numbering in the 'Inventory'.

## II. GUYANA

17. Marlissa falls, Berbice river, after Williams 1978:27.
18. idem.
19. idem.
20. idem.
21. idem.
22. idem, after Goodland 1976 fig. 5.
23. idem, fig. 7.
24. Aishalton, Rupununi savanna, after Williams 1979:32.



## III. BRAZIL

25. Cachoeira Zoadá, Cumina river, after Rondon 1953 fig. 1022.
26. Cachoeira do Resplendor, Cumina river, after O. Coudreau 1901:68, 85.
27. idem.
28. Igarapé Cuxaré (Campo Grande), Cumina river, idem: 176.
29. idem.
30. Lower Anamau (Honawau), after Farabee 1916:91.
31. idem.
32. Rio Negro near Manaus, after Netto 1885 Est.13.

## IV. VENEZUELA

33. Yuruari, after Tavera-Acosta 1956 fig. 57.
34. Caroni, Isla Los Arrendajos (Guri), after Villalobos 1980:16.
35. Salto de Mura, Rio Chiguao, after a photograph by D. Branch, Caracas.
36. Vigirima, Distr. Guacara, Est. Carabobo, after Oramas 1959:210.

## B. 'HEADS' OF ELABORATE TYPE

## I. SURINAME

37. Most westerly point of Aramatau river, Sp 10, after Ahlbrinck 1929:78.
38. Coeroeni river, opposite creek without a name, Sp 20, after a photograph by Prof. Dr. W.P. de Roever, Amsterdam. (Personal communication 22-12-1974).
39. Wonotobo falls, Sp 113, after a photograph by the author.
40. Bigi Bere falls, Sp 125, after a photograph by Ir. F.C. Bubberman, Paramaribo.
41. Bigi Timehri, Sp 134, after a photograph by Bubberman.
42. Pikin Timehri, Sp 124, after a photograph by Bubberman.
- 43-44. Avanavero falls, Sp 158-159, after a photograph by Bubberman.

## II. GUYANA

45. Kwitaro River, after Dubelaar and Berrangé, 1979: 64.

## III. BRAZIL

- 46. Murapi, after O. Coudreau 1901:176.
- 47. Paru d'Este, idem:177.
- 48. Cumina, after Rondon 1953 fig. 1028.
- 49. idem, after O. Coudreau 1901:177.

## IV. VENEZUELA

- 50. Caroni, Lago di Guri, Isla Los Arrendajos, after Villalobos 1980:19,20.
- 51. idem, after Villalobos 1980:16.

C. PETROGLYPHS IN OTHER AREAS OF SOUTH AMERICA  
RESEMBLING THE GUIANESE ELABORATE TYPE GLYPHS

## I. ARGENTINA

- 52-55. Salta, after Oliver, Bes, Pastor and Gonzalez 1969, figs. 44-52.
- 56. Cordoba, after Gardner 1931 Plate 44. (rock painting).
- 57. Salta, after Krapovickas .
- 58. San Juan, after Schobinger 1972 fig. 212.
- 59. Catamarca, after Ameghino 1879 Plate II fig. 7

## II. CHILE

- 60-62. Coquimba, after Klein 1973:109.

## III. COLOMBIA

- 63. Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, after Hildeberto Maria 1954:84-85.
- 64. idem:96.
- 65-66. idem:98,101.
- 67. idem:135.
- 68. idem:136.
- 69. idem:147.
- 70. idem:148.
- 71. idem:186.
- 72. Caqueta, after Von Hildebrand 1975:346,347.
- 73. idem:353.
- 74. Apaporis, after Schindler 1978:52.
- 75. idem.

D. OTHER SWADDLED FIGURES

I. SURINAME

76. Wonotobo, Sp 144, after a photograph by the author.  
77. idem, Sp 116, after a photograph by Ir. R.C. Bubberman, Paramaribo.

II. BRAZIL

78. Cumina, after O. Coudreau 1901:177.  
79. idem, after Rondon 1953 fig. 1015.  
80. idem, fig. 1020.

III. VENEZUELA

- 81-83. Carmen de Uria, Dep. Vargas, after Cruxent 1955:178.

IV. HONDURAS

84. Valle de Jesus de Otero, after Lunardi, cited in Nuñez Jiménez  
1959:72.

V. GUYANA

85. Kassikaityu river, after Williams 1979:132.

## Note

The data presented in this diagram are sometimes open to interpretation. They depend on the degree of accuracy in which the investigator who recorded the petroglyphs was able to operate. When a certain inscription was described and pictured by two or more observers independently, the representations they supply often show differences, sometimes of an essential character. One could compare, for instance, the pictures of a petroglyph at Marlissa, Guyana, made by Brown (1873, Pl.18), Goodland (1976, fig. 11), and Williams (1978, fig. B2A1). Interpreting a figure as, say, anthropomorphic, may involuntarily induce the recorder to see a 'face', i.e. two eyes and a mouth; in the same way the generally symmetric aspect of a drawing may lead to deviations in the representation in those details where the (expected) symmetry fails. In our case these factors may interfere, for instance if we try to attach an anthropomorphic character to the elaborate type drawings by counting the cases where we see 'eyes', a 'mouth', a 'nose', 'ears' on the head, or 'arms', 'legs', 'aprons', 'navels' on the body. Another difficulty is caused by the notions 'deep' and 'shallow' in the literature on S. American and Antillean petroglyphs. The typical technique of the shallow Corentyne drawings which we described (see: Shallow type) bears on the nos 1-8, 10, 12-16; for the nos. 25-27 we concluded to this type from the photographs. So we did for the head of no. 34; the body seems to belong to the deep type; however, its engraving technique and its shape are so different from those of the head, that we suspect the body to be a later addition. Thus, in our Table 2, we listed this inscription as shallow. The nos. 9 and 11 are a combination of deep and shallow lines; so are the nos. 22-23, according to Williams' description. Nos 17-20 are described by William as shallow, but we do not know whether their technique is the same as that of the Corentyne shallow engravings. The photograph of no 35 identifies this petroglyph undoubtedly as belonging to the deep type. Neither the description nor the line drawings of 28-32 supply indications of their depth.

Elaborate type drawings are much larger than the average Guianese petroglyphs. The length of our nos 1-24 lists as follows:

1. 135 cm	9. 72 cm	17. 47 cm	
2. 108	10. 69	18. 64	
3. 157	11. 86	19. 48	
4. 90	12. 50	20. 54	The length of the
5. 80	13. 40	21. 36	nos 25-35 is un-
6. 80	14. 35	22. 82	known.
7. 390	15. 58	23. 80	
8. 330	16. 40	24. 120	

This makes an average of 98 cm. In comparison, the average length of the Surinam engravings, elaborate type included, is 47 cm ('Inventory'). Yet the Surinam items in this list (1-16) are larger than the Guyanese ones (17-24). We have listed no. 24, Aishalton, as elaborate on the ground of its shape; however, it is the only one that does not belong to the tropical forest petroglyphs, which are frequently inundated. It is engraved upon a huge boulder in the Rupununi savanna; moreover,

the other drawings on this rock do not resemble the petroglyphs in the Guiana forest. It is possible that this no 24 does not belong to our elaborate type. The table enables us to construct a picture of the average elaborate type petroglyph, by looking at the 'total' column. This picture will show a shallow drawing with two arcs, rayed in the space between them. The space inside the innermost arc has some decoration (which might represent a 'face' in some cases). The body consists of two parallel lines, it is swaddled somehow and has some decoration besides. The nos 3 and 7, which answer this description, are, in our opinion, the most impressive and spectacular of all Guianese petroglyphs we have seen.

It is evident from our drawings with radiated heads, that the number of radii is arbitrary, not significant. Therefore it does not seem likely that the 13 radii of the Barrouallie drawing on St. Vincent have something to do with the number of lunar months in a year (Olsen 1971:36).

At Tipiaka- (Tapioca-) Cachoeira, Rio Caiary-Uaupés, Koch-Grünberg (1907:53-61, Tafel 22 figs, a,b) found two drawings which represent dance-masks, that compare with drawings of such masks in his sketchbook, made by Kobéua (Cubeo) Indians and others. However, he extends this interpretation to the elaborate type petroglyphs in the Guianas; he considers our nos. 1, 8, 17-19, 22, 23, 26-29 also as representations of dance-masks. This claim is, in our opinion, insufficiently supported by facts. Neither the two petroglyphs, or the five sketches of dance-costumes, show a headdress that resembles the elaborate type headdress. The apron (our nos 1,7,11,15,26) might indeed represent strings of bark covering the lower part of the body and the legs, but from our 35 elaborate inscriptions only 5 have aprons, which might easily, like the swaddled body-decoration, be an indication of (ritual) clothing without having anything to do with dancing. Schobinger (1972:497) interprets the radiated heads in west-central Argentina as visual expressions of man's inner powers, the schematic expressions of actual psychic experiences, the radii forming a kind of halo.

Table 1. Kinds of 'swaddled' elaborate  
type petroglyphs (1-35)

'swaddled body' in the broad sense		'swaddled head' (in the strict sense)	no swaddling
in the strict sense	other swaddle-like like decorations		
1	5	13	2
3	11	14	6
4	25	15	8
7	28	16	10
9	33	19	12
18	35		17
22			20
23			21
26			24
32			27
			29
			30
			31
			34
Total 10	6	5	14



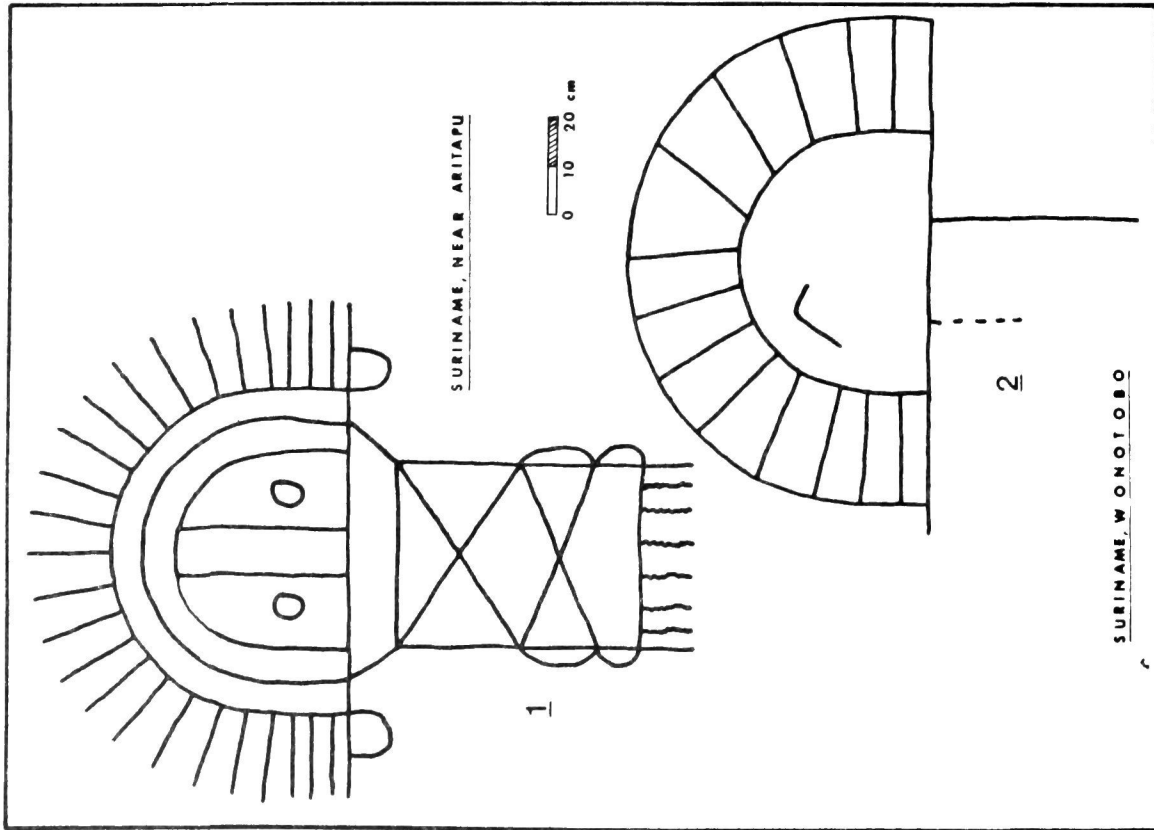


Figure 1.

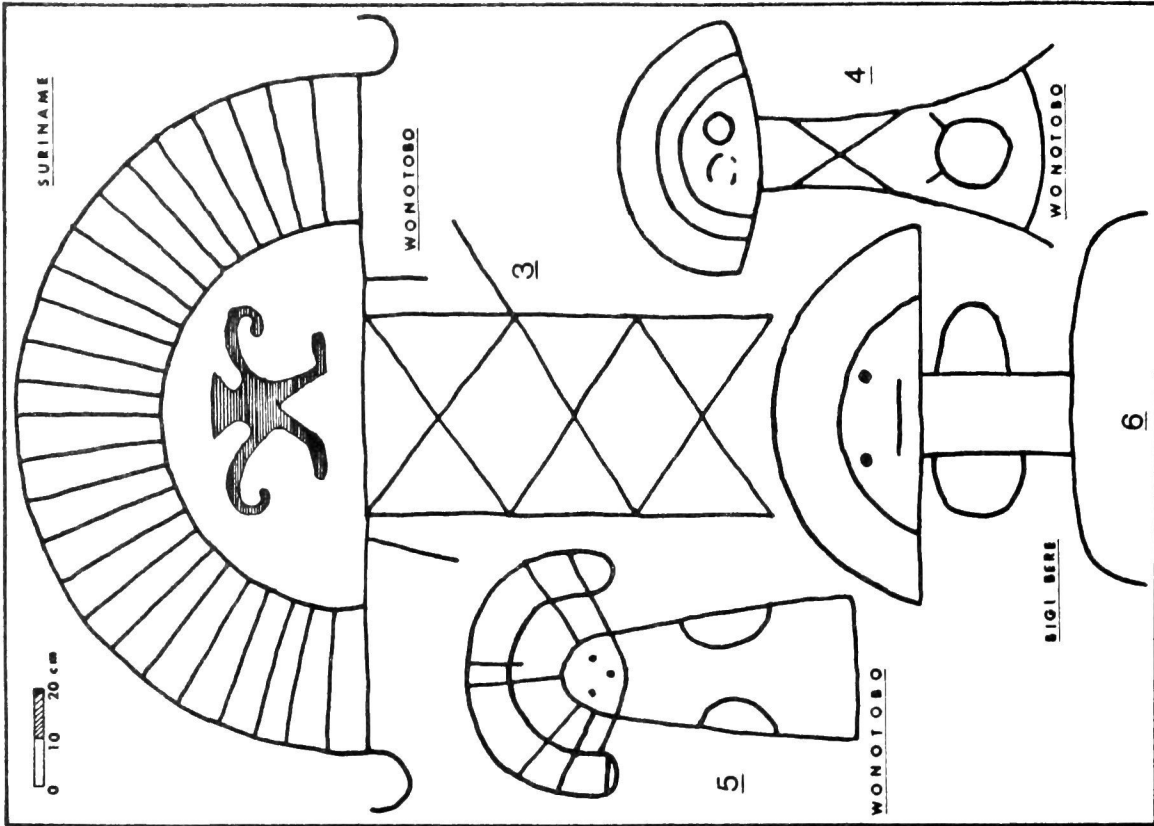
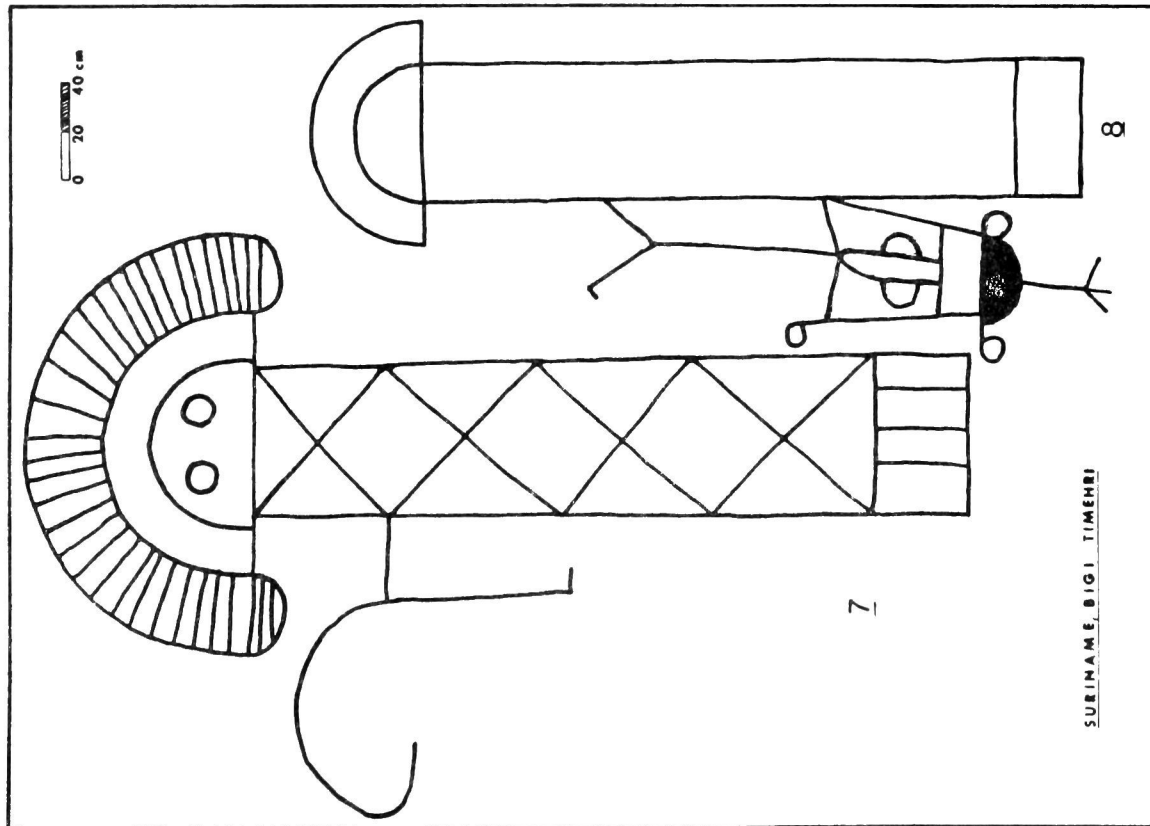


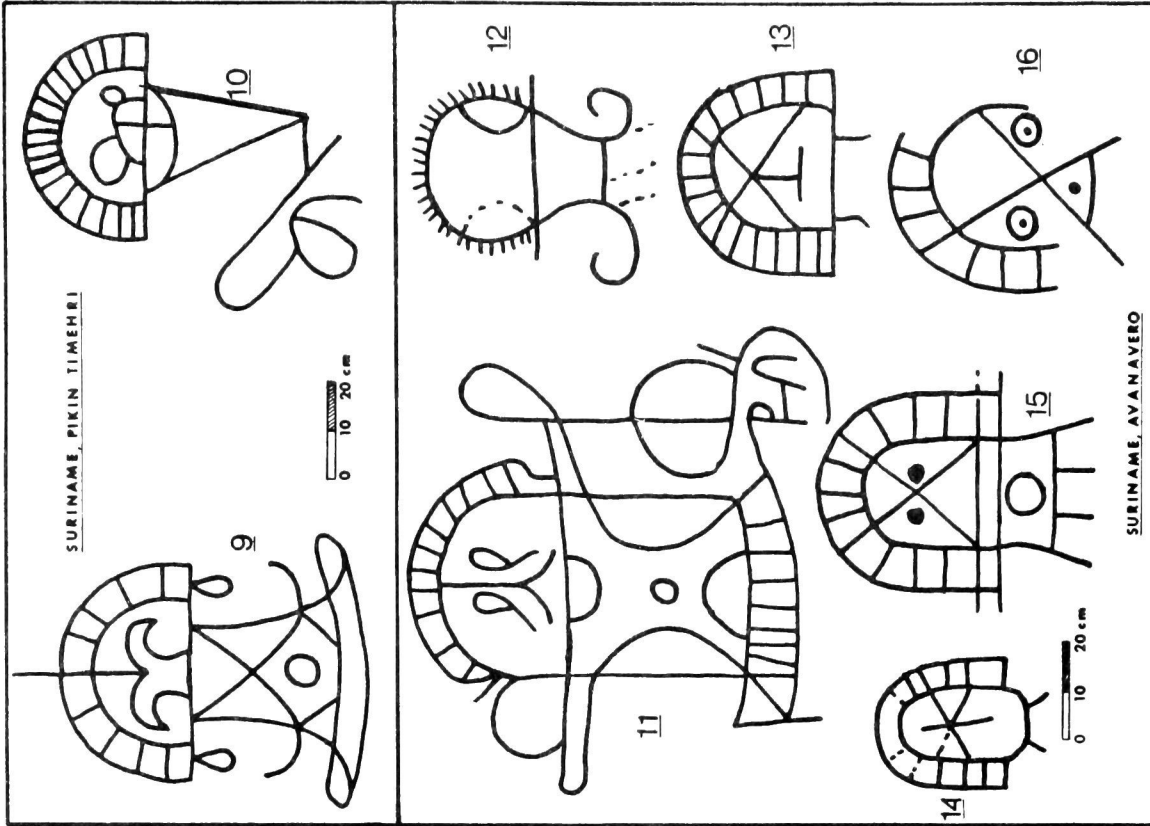
Figure 2.





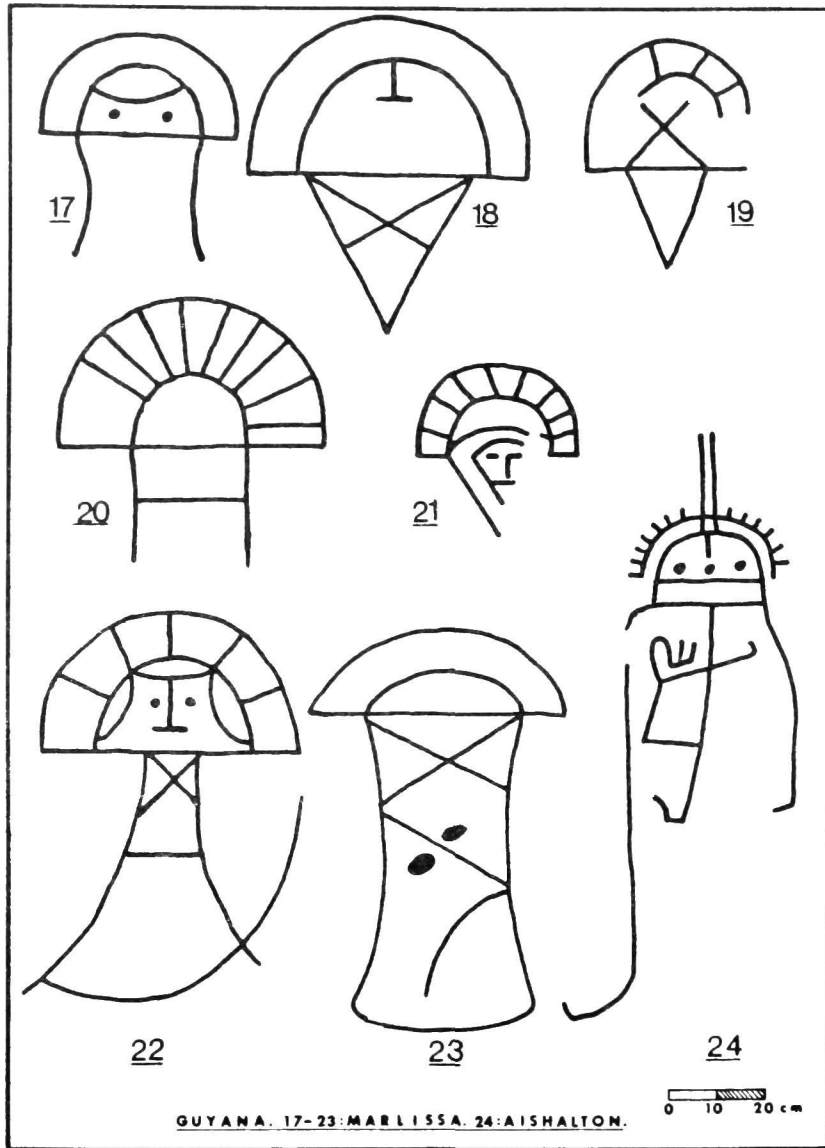
ELABORATE TYPE

Figure 3.



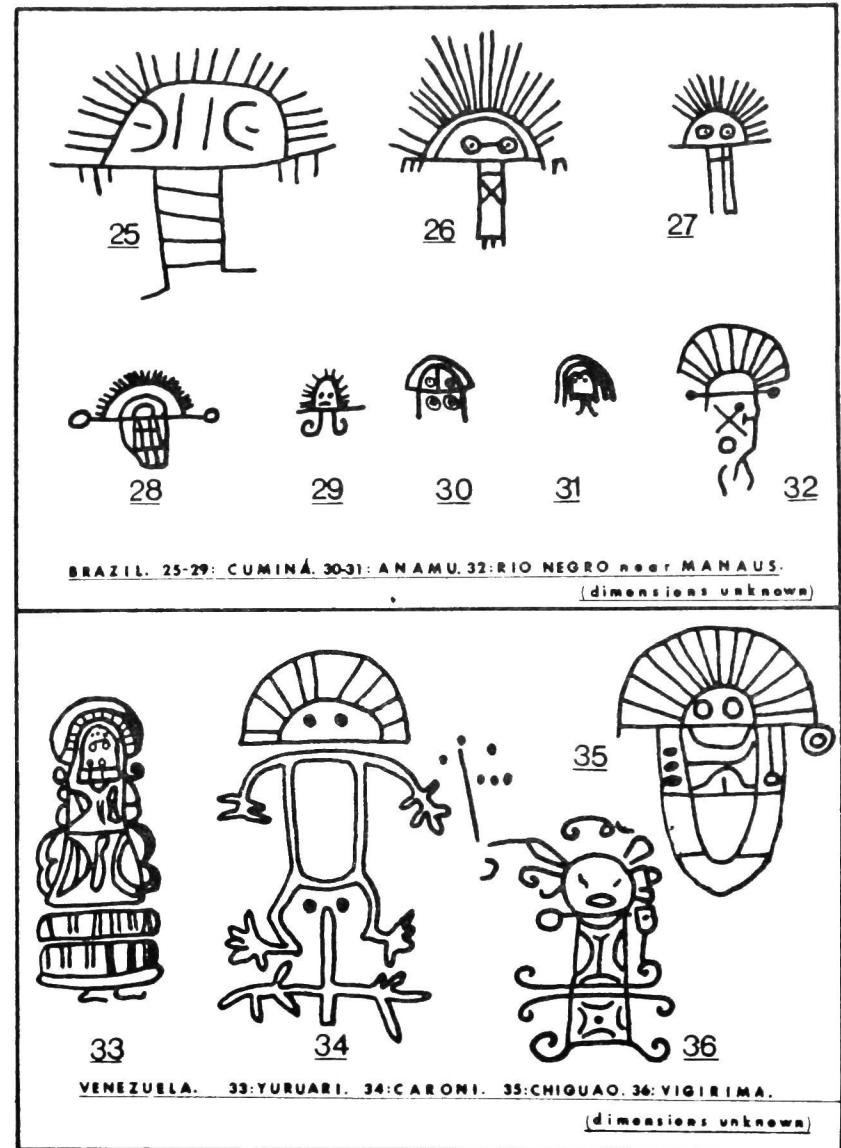
ELABORATE TYPE

Figure 4.



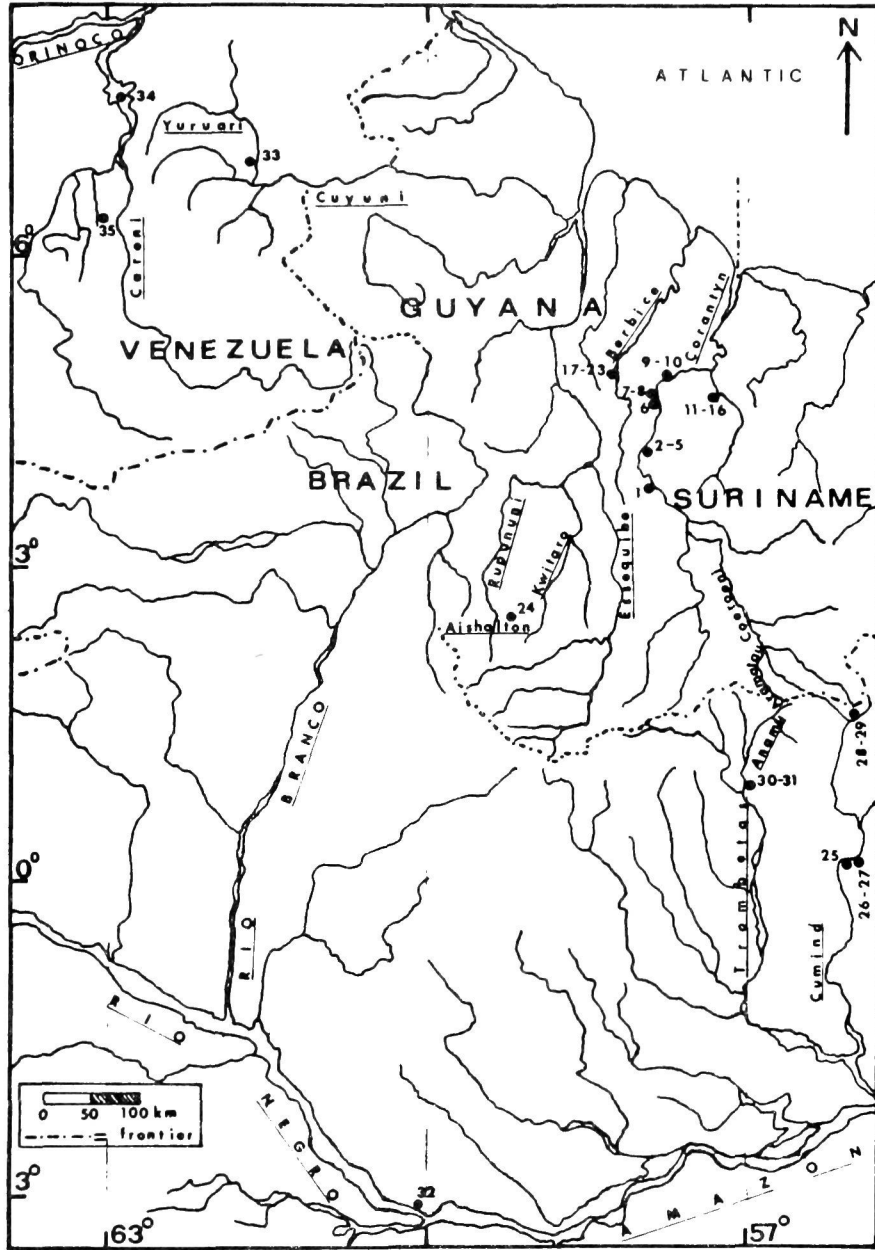
ELABORATE TYPE

Figure 5.



ELABORATE TYPE

Figure 6.



DISTRIBUTION OF ELABORATE TYPE PETROGLYPHS

Figure 7.

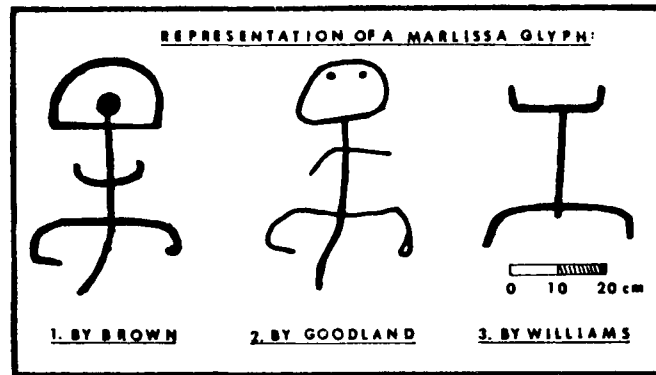
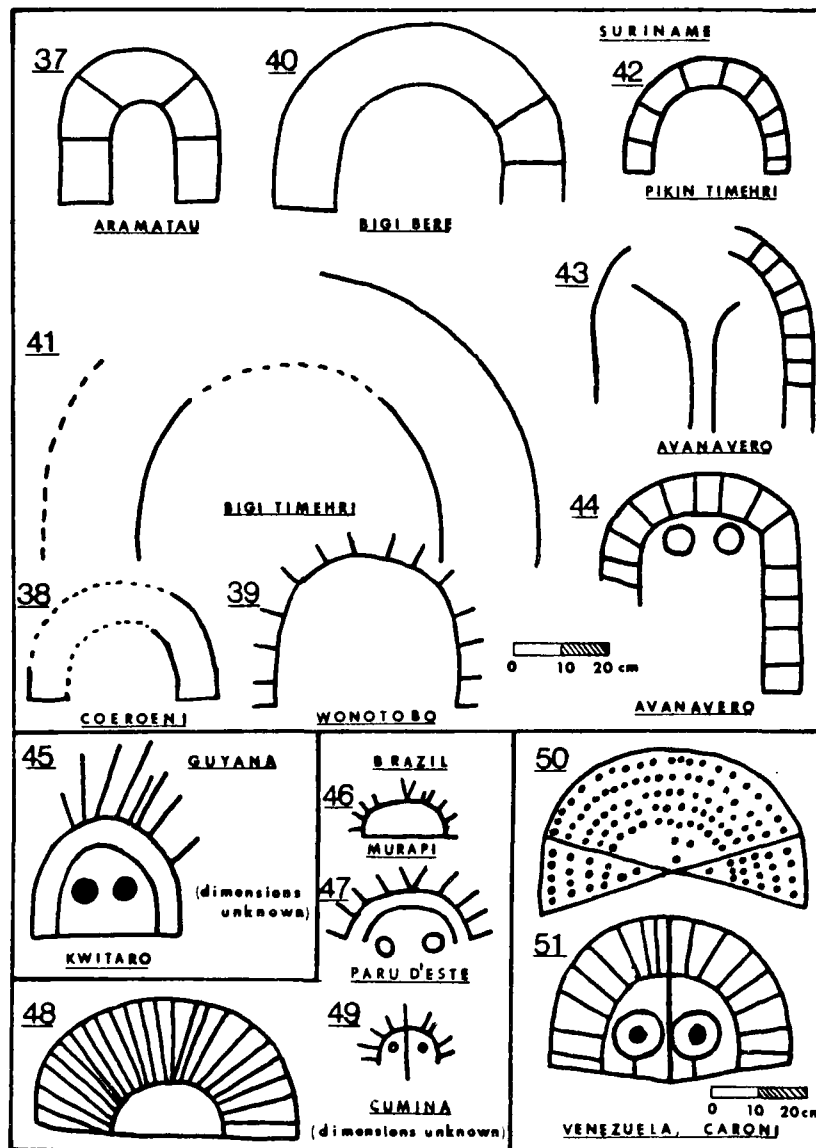


Figure 8.



**ELABORATE TYPE HEADS**

Figure 9.

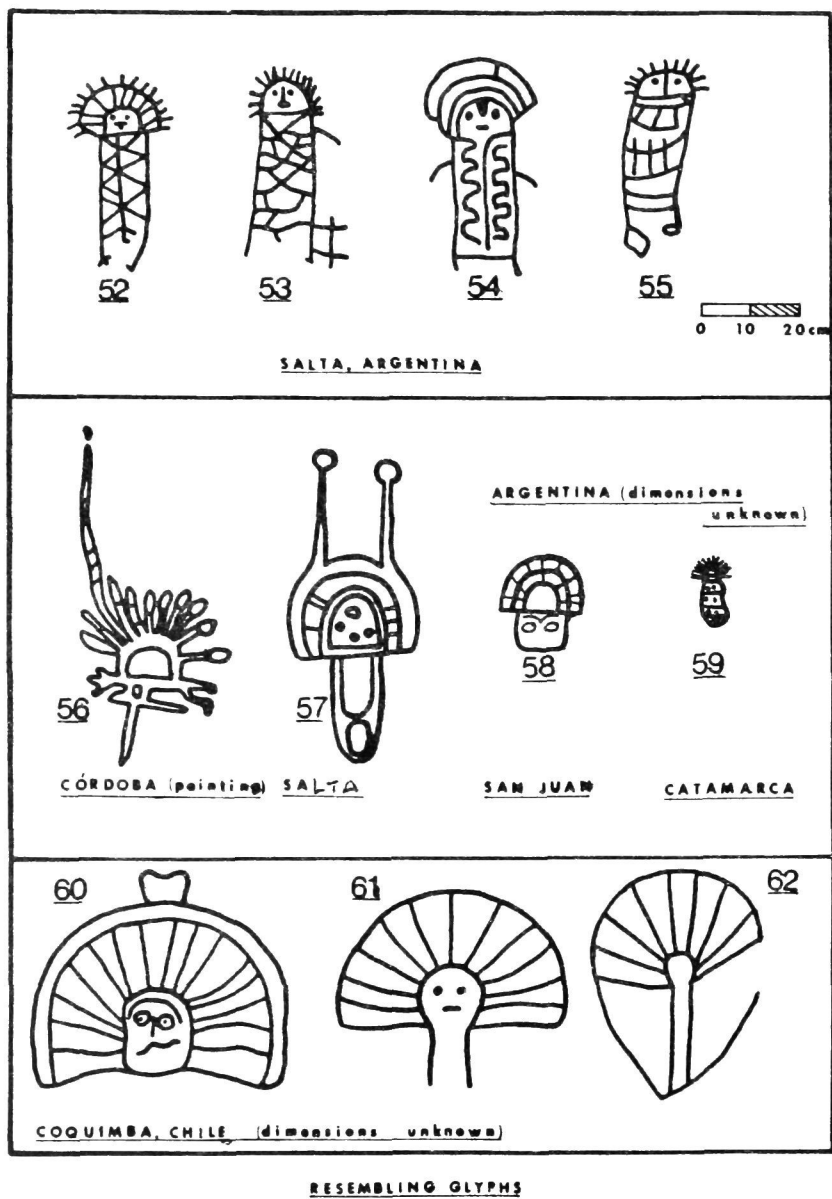


Figure 10.

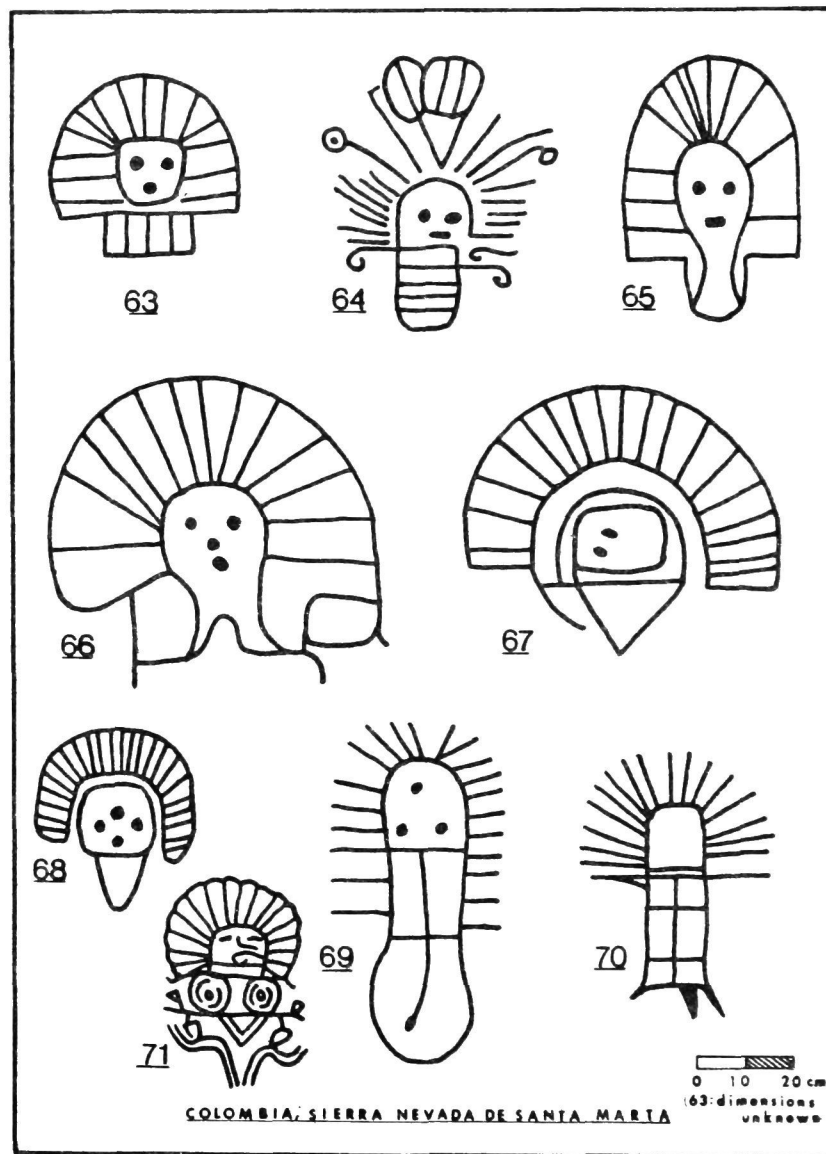
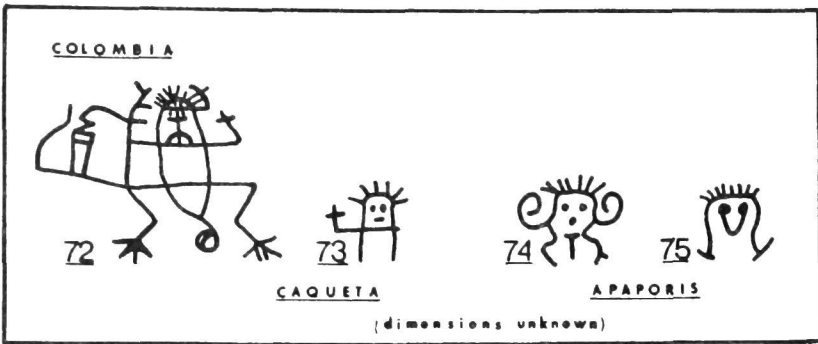
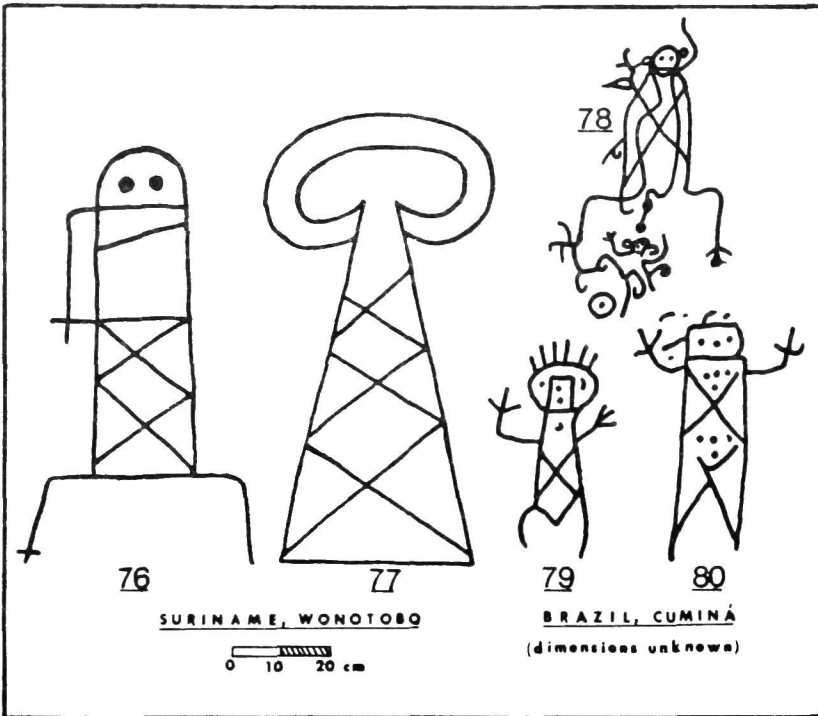


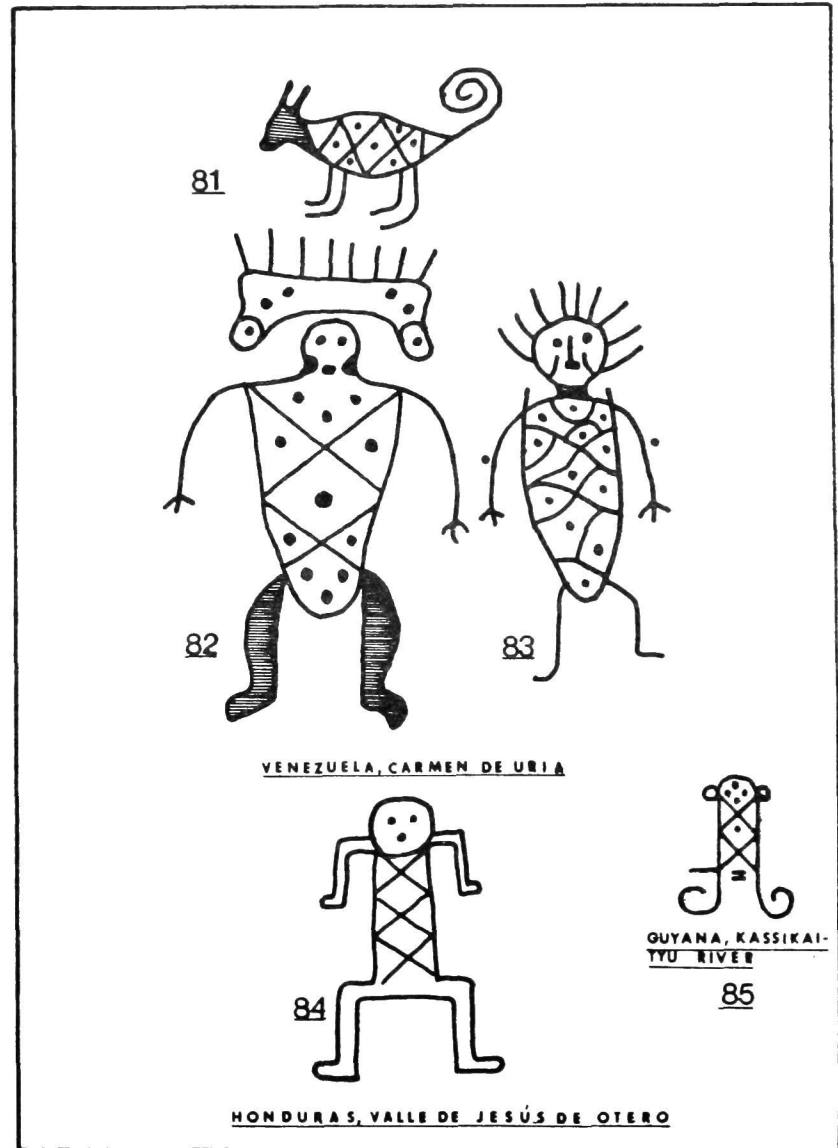
Figure 11.



RESEMBLING GLYPHS

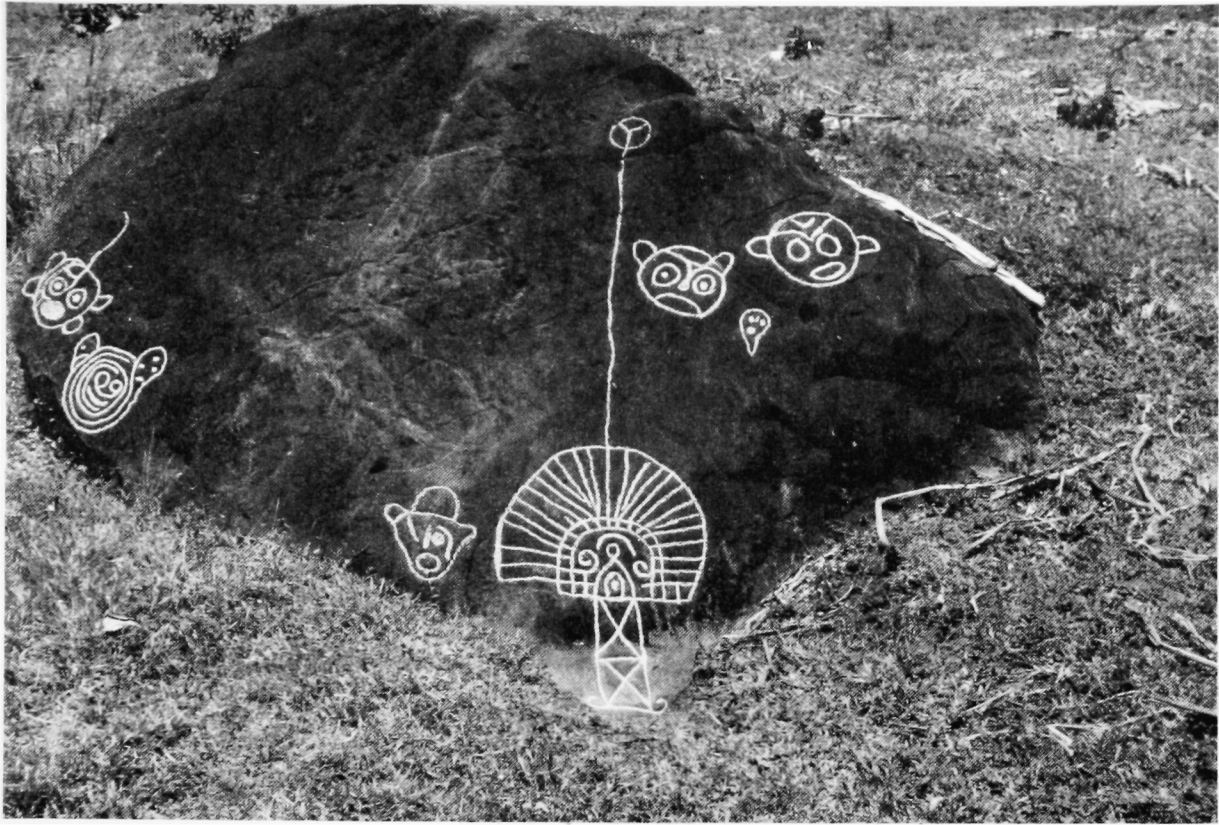


OTHER SWADDLED GLYPHS



OTHER SWADDLED GLYPHS

Figures 12, 13 and 14.



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YAMBOU, ST. VINCENT (KIRBY)

Figure 15.



87

BARROUALLIE, ST. VINCENT (KIRBY)

Figure 16.