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MOGRA DEV

TRIBAL CROCODILE GODS

BY

EBERHARD FISCHER AND HAKU SHAH

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GUJARAT VIDYAPITH
AHMEDABAD



Mogra Dev - Tribal Crocodile Gods

Wooden crocodile images of Chodhri, Gamit and Vasava tribes,
South Gujarat (India)

BY

Eberhard Fischer and Haku Shah



PREPARED BY

*Tribal Research and Training Institute
Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad, India*

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FOREWORD

It is a pleasure for me to publish this book, not only because it documents very well indeed important aspects of the artistic and religious life of some tribal groups in Gujarat, but also because it is the first outcome of the co-operation between the Tribal Research and Training Institute of Gujarat Vidyapith and the South Asia Institute at the University of Heidelberg. This monograph can be considered a scholarly ethnographic report in which two institutes have worked together—one from abroad and one from our own country.

To my knowledge this type of work has not been undertaken in India by social anthropologists who are mainly documenting the socio-economic aspects of tribal life. But I think, it is high time that these rare and diminishing aspects, the actual wealth of tribal culture and inheritance, their arts, crafts and ceremonies, are documented in form of monographs. It would be a pity if we missed it and it will be not too much if I say, that Dr. Eberhard Fischer and Shri Haku Shah were the right persons for carrying out this documentary work. Dr. Fischer knows the method of ethnographical research through his rich experiences in the field, in West Africa as well as here in India, and Haku Shah has the right sense and the painterly eye to find the best of tribal life and folk art.

The monograph which is published now, "Mogra Dev, tribal crocodile gods", is a small output, yet it will have value for the tribal communities concerned, for the ethnologists and for all of us who are interested in studying tribal culture and tribal welfare. One will get from this monograph profound information about one aspect of tribal life which has been dealt with quite in detail and completeness. On behalf of Gujarat Vidyapith, I thank Dr. E. Fischer and the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, for collaborating with us. We hope to publish more monographs soon in the series "Art for tribal ritual". The blocks of the photographs have been prepared and printed at National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

RAMLAL PARIKH

INTRODUCTION

The following presentation is a result of the co-operation between the Tribal Research and Training Institute at the Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad, and the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg. The purpose of this joint venture is the documentation of village arts and crafts, especially in tribal areas of Gujarat.

This initial publication forms part of a series of monographs, all of which shall be presented on the same line to document the entire artistic and ritual life of the tribal people of Surat District.

Mogra Dev, the first results of our study, document the hitherto unknown wooden crocodiles of the Gamit, Vasava and Chodhri tribes, e.g. the collection of information on the details of their fabrication, significance, usage and location. This should, as far as possible follow an ethnographic method. In all our reports, only our own visual and auditory experiences will be recorded. An analysis, using the methods of a historian, functionalist, art historian etc., or establishing values or judgments, has been consciously avoided. We have also, as far as possible, tried to relate our experiences objectively, in simple language, not allowing personal feelings to influence in any way. For the avoidance of flowery words we may be excused; we have retained a sparse, economical expression of words, thus resisting the current trend of confused, prejudiced, throaty style of other folklorists, specially when dealing with problems of folkart. We hope that the reader will view the photographs not as mere illustrations but will study them to enrichen the text.

We have, furthermore, largely avoided working on already existing literature or to make comparisons with findings from other areas (like the wooden crocodiles from the Sepik-area in New Guinea), primarily, because there is no authentic material available directly concerning the art of the tribal population of Surat District and lastly because we do not desire to erase the established cultural picture. The tracing of tribal cultures of Gujarat to prehistoric findings,

seems to us out of place and in a future analysis we shall show, that elements from these tribal cultures tend more to be degenerated forms of much later traditions rather than stagnated primitive cultures.

These monographs are based on material, the two authors collected together on three excursions. These trips were organised in the following way: An initial survey tour (3rd-14th February 1969) took us to the area of Mandvi (visiting the villages and sanctuaries of Pipalvada, Sarkui, Andharvadi, Dudhmogra, Isar, Ghantoli, Umarghadi, Dadhvada, Ahindrodungar, Karoli, Bharmariodungar, Bunbho, Nanicher, Kakarpada, etc.), to Valod (with the villages of Ranveri, Kanjod, Buhari, Govaldev), to Vyara (with the villages of Grambharti, Madav, Magarkui, Andharvadi) to Songadh (with Devlimadi near Dosvada, Pipalkua, Singpur, Borisavar, Raniamba, Limbi, Khervalva, Kumbhkua, Gopalpura, Jamkhadi, Devalpura, Chimer, Nalkalandi, Borver), to Navapur and Uchhal (with Uchhalmahal, Magarbara, Vadpada, Radatia, Sakarda). Photographs of sanctuaries have been taken at many more villages.

After this short but extensive tour with a tight schedule, we wrote a report which appeared in the yearbook 1968/69 of the South Asia Institute.

The second trip (from 27th of April to 20th of July 1969) took us first to Valod (with observations in Ranveri and Valod proper, then to Buhari, Bajipura, Golan, an excursion to Unai, Nani Valjar and Moti Valjar,) to Songadh with a longer stay at Jamkhadi, a trip to Uchhal and Nizar (visiting the villages of Vadpada, Gavan, Karod, Marod, Shravani, Gorasa, Phulvadi, Taleti, Khodada, Lakshmi-kheda, Vandaveda, Mohini, Navagam, Kadavidabhi), once more visiting Devlimadi, then again Valod with a pilgrimage to Govaldev, several visits to Khanpur and Ambach, an excursion to Vyara and Grambharti, and finally Mandvi, where we were taken by surprise and tied down by an unexpected early monsoon.

In the third trip (from 14th to 22nd of November 1969), Valod was again the headquarters from where we took excursions to Ranveri, Kosambia, Golan and Grambharti.

The time at our disposal was relatively short. This was compensated by the excellent organisation of the trips as well as through our personal and friendly relations with persons of the area.

We had a jeep at our disposal on all the trips. Besides the two authors and their field assistant Mr. Bhuwanchandra Kand Pal from Bhimtal, U.P., a driver also occasionally formed part of the team. Sometimes persons from the Panchayat or local friends accompanied us. Nights were spent either in the hospitable Ashrams in the area (like in Valod at the Gandhi Vidyapith, in Grambharti, Ghantoli, Borisavar etc.), with private people in small towns, in Government guest houses or in the villages themselves. There were no regular arrangements for our—always vegetarian—meals, at times we received private hospitality, sometimes we ate at wayside cafes, at other times, especially on excursions, we made do with a bunch of bananas and a morsel of dry *khakhara*-bread washed down by tea. Occasionally we took food from our informants, especially when participating at a ceremony.

The ethnographic work was carried out in the following way. It was primarily essential to survey the area and get to know the existing monuments and sanctuaries. This involved extensive travel, seeking to discover certain remote villages, sanctuaries and informants. We also did a lot of walking, climbed mountains and photographed untiringly, measured objects and carried out local interrogation. Observations of working methods and performance of ceremonies were hastily noted down on scribbling pads, being revised and typed out as far as possible the same or following day. Two Leicaflex and one Pentax were used for photographic purposes. Due to the pressure of work, the changing of lenses was given up. Likewise photography was done only by daylight, for which films of various sensitivity were used. Some interviews, songs and stories were recorded with a Uher report tape-recorder. Here also the recordings were translated and written down if feasible on the very next day. Sometimes the information was re-checked, e.g. the playback took place in the presence of the informants.

Due to the shortage of observation time, no sample method could be applied, instead all available material was collected. It is not that the province under study was (1969) overflowing with 'art pieces', priests and ceremonies, but in a number of instances it was quite a painstaking search for the source! This time we did not attempt to settle down in a village and become accepted by a local group. We refrained from becoming "participating observers" of the ceremonies, but remained as inconspicuous as possible in the background, making copious notes and maintaining a very active camera. Not desiring to cause undue attention to ourselves, no use was made of flash bulbs or reflectors. We participated in the ceremonies at our discretion, receiving

and giving offering where necessary. Great care had to be exercised, not to hurt the sensitivity of the people nor intrude upon delicate ground, preferring to surrender something which was not voluntarily forthcoming. Every effort was made to achieve results without resorting to bribery, in the nature of cash or kind, while refraining from becoming obstacles and burdens in the paths of those we met.

It was not easy to come by valid information. Perhaps, it was our fault, perhaps we did not stay enough time in one place, anyhow, to us it seemed that only very little of the significance of rituals and customs was generally known. But even when we came across good informants, they usually answered questions reluctantly, in virtue of their limited knowledge. Sometimes the contrary also happened when, e.g. a wellversed informant spoke profusely at random but left behind only vague impressions of names and episodes. Another informant became quite theatrical in his desire to make a favourable impression upon us. Being questioned about God, he entered into a series of physical convulsions and then went into a short trance. Of course, there were also delightful informants, some of whom accepted a present of money only after much persuasion, as an offering to be made to the Gods in whose name it had been earned. This offering took the form of purchasing local liquor, a few drops of which were sprinkled to the Gods and the rest copiously consumed by themselves.

Further, one should point out how difficult it was for our informants to satisfy our interest and curiosity regarding their customs and knowledge, mainly because they lacked self-confidence. One cannot forget that these tribals were for centuries serfs of the cultural outsider—the Hindu Vania landlords, the Parsis, Muslims and the British officials. And even the friendly social-worker, with the best of intentions, looks upon their traditional way of life, specially their 'superstition' and their beliefs, as inferior and an obstacle to progress. To the social worker as well as to the Ashram teacher, vegetarianism, prohibition, regular working attitudes are the basis to social acceptance. They do not recognize the richness of the ritual, the great power of being possessed by God, the intensity of belief and even the beauty of dancing or being in a trance, as cultural values. We personally regret the change of the cultural pattern of these tribes, giving way to a shallow, monotonous lower-middle class, universal way of village life, though we are also of the opinion, that the existing illiteracy of the village folk makes possible their exploitation by the class of clever businessmen of all creeds. Even today the moneylender and the landlord exploit the villager. It is shattering to experience, how he has to go begging to them for a chicken

from his own farm, for five rupees or for a tree as firewood to burn his dead. But all this does not mean that emancipation and education should be achieved at the cost of traditional values. And what may appear in our time as uneconomical, irrelevant or superstitious could become valuable cultural material in a few years. In this connection, we mention as example only the advancement in the handling of psychosomatic illness. Who knows how to judge whether diseases like ulcer or asthma can actually be cured by powerful emotionally moving rituals? Sociologists and anthropologists besides others today appreciate that ceremonies performed by a community have a power to keep the community knit together and thereby possess great social and basic value. We shall always lend our support for the continuance of cultural traditions of a minority—an attitude which we also expressed in the villages as well as to local officials and educationists.

Lastly, it might be necessary to state explicitly that we protest energetically against any imputation that by pronouncing the aesthetical and religious aspects of the tribal culture, we were willing to help veiling the socio-economic situation of the tribal population in the visited area. Our own attitude should be clear by the above mentioned experiences. However, we do not attend to these acute problems in this book, mainly because we lack enough detailed and exact information. This treatise has been written with the impetus to document the spiritedness of the tribal culture of the Chodhri and Gamit populations, to make a positive interpretation possible, and to lay cultural values open to all interested, especially for the educated members of the tribal society who tend wrongly to break with all traditions. With such documentation we would like to assist in strengthening the cultural self-estimation and confidence of the tribal and to help him to regain the dignity he deserves.

These treatises are supposed to give the basic information we collected during our fieldwork. Special aspects like the working techniques of different potters making votive-offerings, the preparation of the loin-cloths for Chodhri-women, etc. will be published successively.

Finally we thank our Institutes—the Tribal Research and Training Institute at the Gujarat Vidyapith and the South Asia Institute of the University of Heidelberg,—who enabled us to do this work. A grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Council) has helped to meet a part of the expenditure. Our special thanks are due to Vimal Shah, then Director of the TRTI for his support of the project and his constant help from the planning of the fieldwork to the write-

up of the manuscripts, and to Dr. Shantibhai Acharya for his help and efforts in publishing this treatise.

Parts of the manuscript have been translated from German by Miss Renee Doring, others have been corrected by Mrs. Asha Cariappa. The sketches have been provided according to our instructions by Naranbhai Patel from Buhari.

EBERHARD FISCHER HAKU SHAH

Ahmedabad, December 1970

I. THE WOODEN CROCODILES

Location

Wooden crocodiles were found chiefly in the Songadh and Mandvi areas, seldom in the flat plains of Valod and Vyara, even though some of the finest examples are to be seen there, but never in the environment of Uchhal and Nizar.

The majority of the crocodiles were found in the sanctuaries of Dudhmogra (Mandvi Taluka), Devlimadi (Songadh Taluka) and the distant Devmogra (Zagbara Taluka). They were always near the fields and never on the rocks on top of the mountains. In Devlimadi, they were behind a small water-pond and in Dudhmogra at the *utaro*, secondary place of worship of some other gods, under some trees near the newly built road. In both these places only smaller specimens were found standing together in groups, in other places however, there were groups of only two or three crocodiles in the sanctuaries in the vicinity of villages. Often it is just such an individual piece or pair of crocodiles that is large and impressive. Such well decorated specimens stand under trees, or are sometimes sheltered by a thatched or tiled roof on wooden posts. Places of worship of other deities or of the ancestors often lie adjacent to them or close by. All these sanctuaries are situated off the roadside, not in the immediate vicinity of a village, but set aside at some quiet spot under a group of trees. Only seldom is there a creek or pond near by.

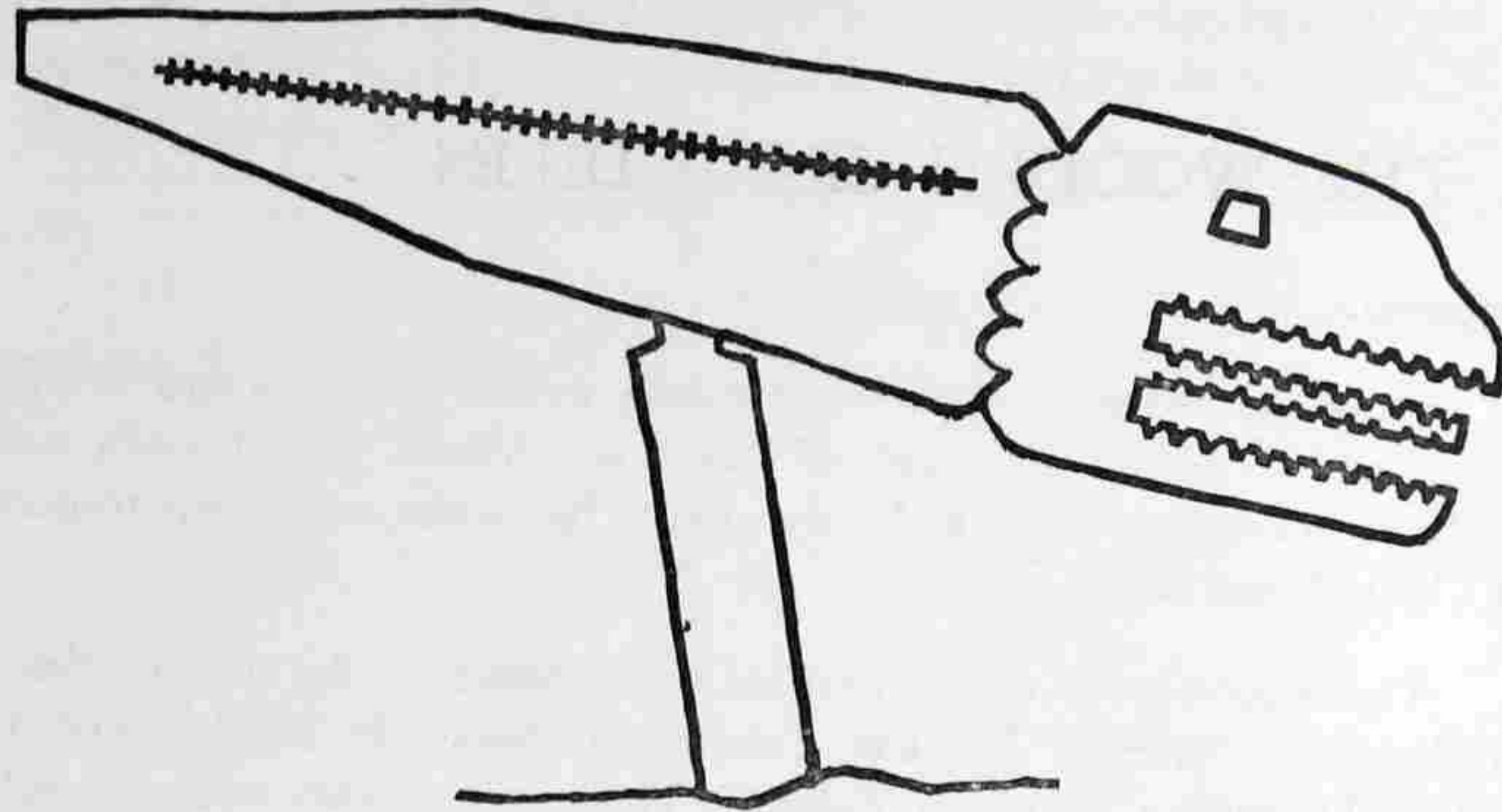
Form

One has to differentiate between two basic fundamental forms: (1) crocodiles with one head, a body and a tail, and (2) those with two heads in opposite directions with a common body (usually ornamented).

Crocodiles with a tail are rare. They are mainly found in the Mandvi area, where they have been erected mostly by the Chodhris, while the double headed crocodiles are found chiefly in Songadh, erected by the Gamit and Vasava tribes.

(1) Crocodiles with one head and a tail

They are carved mainly from a thinner log section, or a branch, with the head set slightly back, having a concave forehead and a hori-

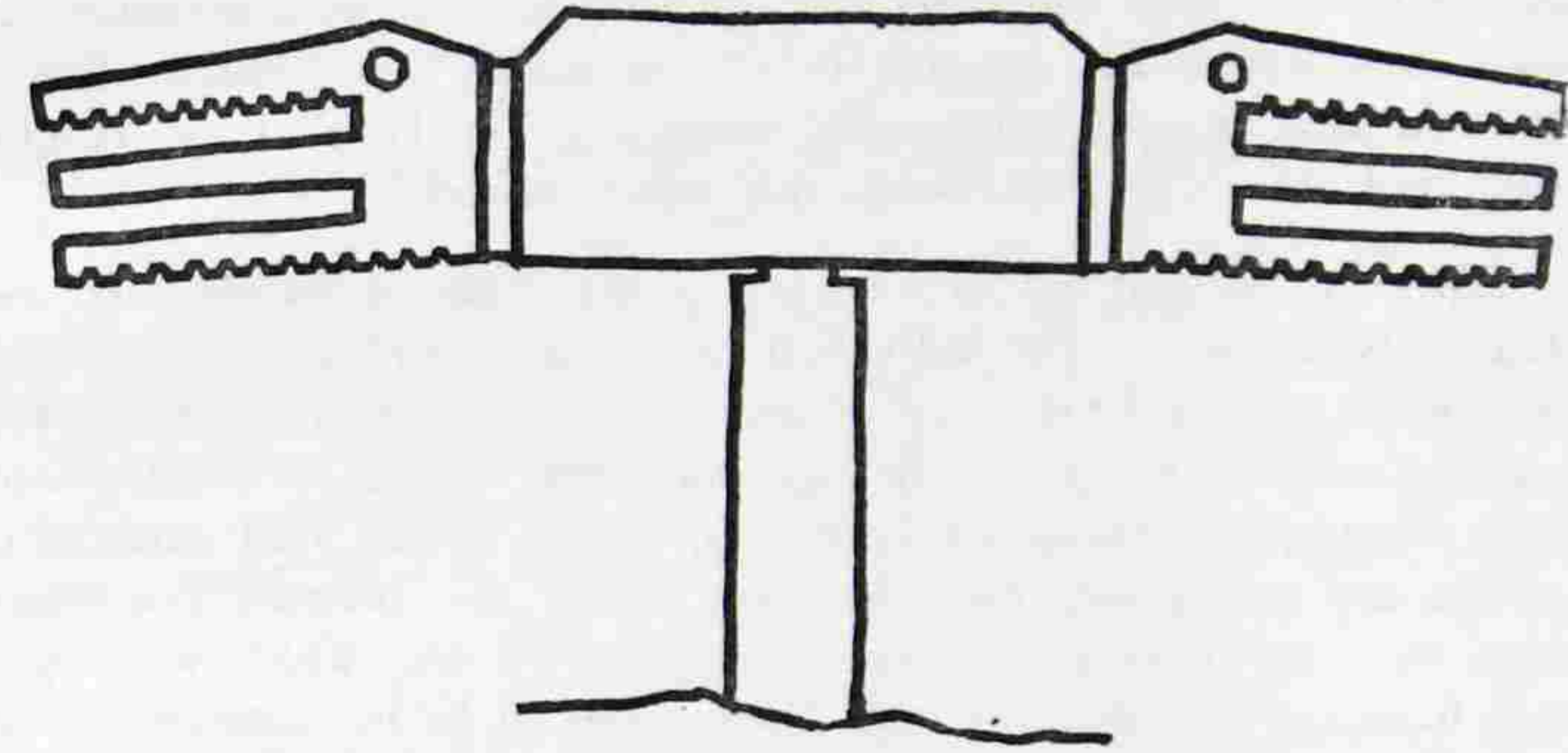


zontal mouth, two slits with a tongue stretching back almost to the base of the head. Teeth could be represented by some serration at the edges of the slits, but the tongue is also often jagged on its edges. Above the rounded jaw, lie the chiselled holes of the nose and the eyes. The body is usually angular, octagonal in section and ornamented with grooves or indented edges. The tail is set back by a step from the body, and narrows down without tapering to a real point. Most of these comparatively realistic crocodiles have no ornamental reliefs cut in their side-surfaces. The crocodiles are mounted on posts which act as supports and which are inserted with tenons in the centre of the body. Most of them can be revolved round their supporting stumps of rather thin section, the barks of which have been removed. Only very rarely they have some tori chiselled in.

(2) Crocodiles with two heads

Crocodiles of this type are mostly carved out of massive tree trunks and lie like heavy blocks horizontally on central posts. The heads at either ends are carved similarly, while the central portion has chip reliefs on both the vertical sides. The crocodiles are mostly rectangular in section; they are long and symmetrical, whereas this description does not hold good for the reliefs on the sides. The heads are stretched out horizontally and are separated from the body by a step with a chipped band which can be jagged or have semi-spheres on it as well. The upper and lower jaw are mostly of the same size, and are separated by two

broad slits with a broad tongue inbetween. Sometimes the teeth are indicated by jagged edges. The nose and eyes normally appear as holes only. The top surface of the heads would either be of irregular chip-



designs or ornamented in rows of a fish-bone-pattern, worked with a chisel or—more seldom—with a saw.

The main body, cubical in form, usually has two large rectangular surfaces on either side; the upper edge is often cut to a slant. The upper surface is usually ornamented with simple chip-designs, whereas the two side surfaces bear either chiselled relief work or chip-designs showing the out-lines of figures or ornaments.

The edges of the supporting posts are usually hacked, or are square in section and have reliefs or simple grooves chiselled in. Some are chamfered as well. They terminate in a tenon which is inserted in a hole in the body of the crocodile.

On such a wooden crocodile the animal's extremities are not shown at all, neither as chiselled designs, nor by any outward attachments. We have also never seen an open jaw, a curved tail or anything suggesting movement. All crocodiles appear to be depicted in a dormant pose.

Reliefs and ornamental motifs

Reliefs are usually chiselled in as haute reliefs, i.e. the ground-work around each motif is sunk or recessed. Such reliefs are usually found in the rectangular side surfaces of the double-headed crocodiles.

The most common motifs are the sun and crescent, followed by two riders on horseback inbetween whom generally stands another figure. Less often or not as prominently depicted are individual horses with and

without riders, hunting scenes, deer, fish, crabs, tortoises and other water animals, crocodiles, scorpions, birds — wild, water and forest birds as well as dancing peacocks — cows, bulls and calves, dogs, elephants, dancing troupes with instruments, carts with figures, women churning butter, instruments like scissors, measuring scales, gourd-ladles, dancing sticks and musical instruments, inscriptions in Gujarati or Hindi-letters and ornaments like rosettes and other flowers.

These motifs laid out in rows are mostly depicted as separate isolated units. However, the individual motifs are distributed arbitrarily over the surface, or in the case of only one or two representations, arranged centrally. Only in one specimen was the area divided into single rectangular frames by interstices, which means that each unit, i.e. sun and moon, fish, partridge, pair of tortoise, peacock and ornament, were surrounded by a complete picture-frame which was separated from the neighbouring one. There seems to be no common theme depicted on all the crocodiles, but there might be stories related to some individual carvings. There is e.g. on a two-headed crocodile the depiction of a crocodile with a swinging tail which runs after a horse, on the back of which rides a crescent moon; in another case a hunting scene is shown where a hunter with a gun is seen running after a fleeing deer. The two riders with their leader also seem to form a complete picture. Most of the other motifs depict scenes of aquatic life, showing crabs, fish and tortoise. All these motifs were rarely seen by us anywhere else, whereas the motifs of women churning butter, of elephants and peacocks, horses and riders, cattle and even trees are also commonly found as decorative forms with other ethnic-groups in Gujarat.

Most of the more elaborately carved designs were chiseled haute-reliefs; some, however, were only depicted by chipped outlines and in a very few cases the motive was drawn on the side-panel with white or red colour.

Poles

An obvious peculiarity of some of these crocodiles is that they have poles nearby which also belong to them. Such poles of similar height and thin square section are often chamfered and end on top in a spherical form. On one of the side-panels often a human being or an animal is depicted. In some of these, at about three quarters of their height, small planks are inserted horizontally which can be used as lamp holders.

By far the most interesting poles were those of the Devlimadi-crocodiles depicting riders, figures of men with animal heads (masks?),

carrying flags in their hands. It sounds probable that they depict dancers in trance.

Other poles in Songadh area were more than three meters in height and had tori cut under spherical heads.

Ornamentation and colouring of crocodiles and poles

The most common form of ornamentation is that of hacked edges and simple chip-design. Entire areas are often covered by a fish-bone pattern or by rhombi joined at corners. We also came across slanting, vertical, horizontal or zig-zag lines, parallel to each other. Within such rows of chip-carvings, ornaments like rosettes inscribed in a circle occur occasionally. Most of the chip-designs are worked with a chisel, produced by two sloping cuts and therefore may be termed 'real chip carving'. Knives were seldom used; however, in one instance there were horizontal grooves bisected by vertical ones, done with a saw, forming thus an 'imitated chip-carving'. In other instances, concentric circles were bored with a drill of several points.

All these ornaments are mostly decorative embellishment, meant to enliven blank spaces. Rarely does one come across crocodiles, the surfaces of which give the appearance of a reptile scale; impressive specimens of this type are those which have their upper surfaces worked out with hacked bands cut in at an angle or where the surfaces are covered with semi-circular chip-designs. Such specimens can be seen in Devmogra (Zagbara Taluka) and Dudhmogra near Mandvi.

Many of the crocodiles are evenly covered with a red *sindur*-layer. However, when we saw them, most of their surfaces were blank, the colouring being eaten away by ants and termites. Only a few showed signs that cocks, grain, food or money had been offered to them recently. Most of the crocodiles were old and seemed not to be cared for much now-a-days.

II. THE MAKING OF A WOODEN CROCODILE

The following is a short report on the carving of a wooden crocodile by Radatia Jethia, the *bhagat* of Jamkhadi-village (Songadh Taluka). The *bhagat* had already carved a number of double-headed crocodiles, one of which is to be seen at the sanctuary of the village Amba, near Songadh.

Working conditions, place and time

The work was executed in the farmstead of the *bhagat* who lives with some of his relatives apart from the other houses of the village. Behind the house of the *bhagat*, next to a broken water-tank is a small mound from where one can view the fields and houses of those living beyond. A group of trees offers shade. This is the open workshop of the *bhagat*, a place where already, prior to our arrival, he had placed a simple wooden bench and where he does carpentry and repair work for himself and his village clientele. Here, too, he receives visitors who come to him for advice or for seeking the oracle.

We commissioned the *bhagat* to carve a crocodile for us after we had met him for the second time and had travelled with him for a number of days—which meant, that we were already acquainted and on really good terms with him. In spite of this, he complied with our request hesitatingly, even though he seemed to accept the sum we were prepared to offer him. It was only after we agreed to procure the necessary articles for the installation ceremony like wine and a cock, and undertake the responsibility for providing the working material, did the *bhagat* accept our offer. Out of approximately 35 Rupees Radatia Jethia paid two men for the necessary time consuming labour as well.

The work started at ten o'clock on the 23rd of May 1969. On this day, the *bhagat* worked till about five o'clock. On the following day from half past eight to about eleven o'clock. After this, an interval was necessary, because a group of clients had visited him for the oracle. Work

was not resumed in the afternoon. The working block was covered overnight with a white new cloth, procured by us specifically for this purpose and which remained at the workplace. The white linen was removed the next day without any special arrangement when the *bhagat* started his work again. On the 25th of May, the *bhagat* worked from half past eight till about ten o'clock. Then he was called to a ritual by his co-villagers. After returning he resumed work at half past one and continued uninterrupted till about half past five in the evening. Also on the 26th of May, he worked from half past eight till half past twelve, after which he again took up the oracle work for waiting clients. Finally, the work on the crocodile continued till about three o'clock, by which time it was practically completed. During the days that followed, a little more work was done on the crocodile, though not in our presence. No significant changes were made. The installation of the crocodile took place in the evening of the 29th of May 1969.

Material and tools

The wood block was taken from a teak-tree which was specially felled for this purpose. From its straight trunk a section of 90 cm in length and 17 cm in diameter was used after removing the bark and fresh wood. The wood was perfect; it had no rotten spots or knots, but was straight and beautifully grained. During the working procedure, it was once watered and the completed object was doused with water once more before being erected. It was then covered with a thick layer of oil and *sindur*, vermilion, which, without doubt, helped its gradual drying and so prevented it from cracking.

For the purpose of drawing lines on the raw working block, a mixture of ash and water was used. Furthermore, water was needed for sharpening the axe, the adze-blade and the chisels.

The supporting post for the crocodile was thinner in section, cut from the same trunk, having a length of 56 cm and a diameter of 12 cm. This wood was also good, even though a knot was clearly visible in the grain. The post was also oiled and coloured with *sindur*, vermilion.

The instruments were those normally used by a carpenter: two axes for felling the tree; a flat bullock cart on which the trunk was tied with strong ropes; for transportation of the log; for removal of the bark and preparation of the block a heavy carpenter's adze, a firmer chisel and a mortise chisel along with a simple flat wooden mallet, and a saw with two handles; a pencil for drawing the outlines and the relief-

area; for marking out the block a meter-scale (with inch notation) and a string coloured in moist ash; and for carving out the relief a gauge and a number of small chisels made from iron nails with straight or slightly concave edges. Further a grinding stone, a triangular file (for sharpening the saw blade), a container for water, a rough wooden support and a white cloth for covering the working block at night were required.

Working procedure

(1) Felling a tree

In the front of his spacious house, the *bhagat* sharpens his two axes on a grindstone. The handles have been removed from the blades. With his left hand, the *bhagat* drops the water onto one of the blades, while with his right hand at an angle he moves to and fro on the grindstone. Later when no more water is needed, the left hand presses the blade against the stone. Both sides of the cutting edge are sharpened one after another and their sharpness tested with the thumb.

A small group of helpers who are related to the *bhagat*, he himself and we go into the forest which lies behind the fields, in order to fell the right tree. In the clear dry forest, the *bhagat* selects a full grown healthy teak-tree against our wishes. He rejects categorically as suitable for the working block a crooked trunk or a tall re-sprouted stump of a tree. After a lengthy discussion, we had to agree upon a straight grown, medium sized trunk which stands rather close to another trunk, which the *bhagat* suddenly decides upon, more or less against our wishes, to be the right log for his crocodile. He suddenly stands in front of the tree, thus facing the sun, takes some rice grain out of his sling bag and begins chanting. Only the louder words of "ram, ram, ram" are more often distinctly audible. While the helpers stand around him, watching, he throws the rice grain on the roots of the tree. Then he takes a coconut out of his sling bag and while still murmuring, hits it against the trunk a number of times before breaking it open on a stone near the roots of the tree. Finally, he swings one axe to the right and the other to the left of the trunk, approximately on the spot where later on the notch for felling would be. The *bhagat* then steps backwards, while two men fell the tree with hefty, alternate striking blows. Both the felling notches are at the same height and opposite each other. The tree soon collapses and falls in the desired direction. Then the lower quarter of the trunk, being the working block, is cut off on the spot, while the other people remove the branches

and the crown with the axe; the twigs remain at the spot. The large trunk piece is lifted by all the men together onto the cart, which had previously been placed parallel to the trunk. The working block is also placed next to the long trunk on the cart and both are tied together, for which purpose an axe and a strong branch are utilized for pulling and tightening the rope. The bullocks are yoked and the wood load is taken by the shortest cut through the woods. In the farmstead, the longer trunk is hidden under a haystack, while the shorter piece is taken directly to the working site.

(2) Preparation of the working block

The working block lies on the ground. Three wide, equidistant and not too deep grooves are cut with the axe on the upper surface of the block, soon followed by a fourth one. Then one of the helpers hits from the outer side with the axe, horizontally against the first groove so that the bark and the soft wood shavings splinter, while another man removes the splices from the trunk by vertical striking blows. The blows of the two men who stand opposite one another fall alternately in a fast rhythm. Sometimes both the helpers strike horizontally, one from outside, the other from the groove, sometimes they even hit the block simultaneously. When wielding the axe, the left hand holds the shaft at the back, while the right hand grasps it near the blade during the swinging action and allows it to slip back along the shaft, until it lies next to the other hand by the time the blow is struck. Each stroke is accentuated by a loudly exhaled "ha".

When the upper surface of the block has been smoothed and the bark removed, it is turned round and the bark of the reverse side is splintered, this time the helpers strike four grooves simultaneously. Later on the men work opposite each other, which means, that each man stands at the end of the working block and hits horizontally towards the groove from the outside. With each stroke the block moves a little in the direction of the blow since it is held to the ground only by its own weight.

The *bhagat*, who hitherto had been merely watching the work sitting in the shade, helping casually, now measures the size of the basic piece of wood with the scale after the two opposite sides of the block are evenly smoothed. A string is brought and then drawn through a mixture of ash and water. It is spanned along the edge of the block for the measured distance and then flicked against the wood, whereby the *bhagat* lifts the string lightly in its centre and lets it fall to the ground several times. The impression though visible well only for

a short while, shows how much of the barkwood should be removed from the sides. While his assistant stands aside, parallel to the working block, the *bhagat* himself bends over the block, axing off the sides from above.

In the meanwhile, a large saw is brought from the house. The *bhagat* sharpens the teeth with a triangular file which he draws to and fro in horizontal movements.

The saw is not used immediately. The *bhagat* axes first all the four side surfaces more or less even. Then he squats down next to the block and chips these surfaces evenly with an adze. He holds the heavy carpenter's adze quite near to the blade with the right hand, while with the left he secures the block at an angle on the edge. One of the helpers sits near the upper end and holds the block in position. Not only does the *bhagat* plane the sides with the adze, but he also slopes off the two edges at a sharp angle, so that the block becomes hexagonal in section, with varying lengths at the sides.

After some time, the block is measured once again with the scale and its external dimensions are finalised. Lines are drawn with a pencil along the scale right across the working block and finally the extra part of the block is sawed off. For this purpose the two men sit opposite each other over the block with their feet firmly embedded in the ground against it. They heave the blunted saw to and fro in powerful resounding action. Actually it is the *bhagat* who does the real sawing, as he holds the handle of the saw in his right hand, while the left lies next to the groove to be sawed, guiding the blade, while the helper who holds his saw handle-stick merely pulls it towards himself.

After the two ends have been sawed off, the *bhagat* continues planing the top-surface with the adze for a considerable time. Usually, he squats for this next to the working-block while he works along the block from the right to the left. Later on, he supports the block at an angle with a larger piece of wood, still continuing to hold it tight at the top edge with his left hand.

Now the grooves for the neck are to be sawed. From the outer edges, the same distance is marked off on both ends with the scale and then a slightly indented groove is made with the saw held horizontally on the marked line. The block is then turned over on its side, so that a similar groove may be sawn on the opposite side; and similarly turned over again — this time twice—for the third groove. The whole procedure is repeated again, when another groove is sawn only a few

fingers away from the first one and finally twice more on the other end of the working block as well.

(3) Preparing the heads and relief surfaces

The *bhagat* sharpens the blades of the adze and chisels with water on his grindstone. He then asks one of his helpers to prepare him a wedge from the scrap wood, which he pushes under the slanting working block. He takes the broad firmer chisel and spits in the palms of his hands. Using the back of the adze as a mallet while holding its handle next to the blade, he chisels an angular cut against the outermost groove. He does not work at one place all the time with this chisel, but sometimes uses the adze with his right hand in order to further plane other spots on the upper surface of the block, thus clearing small areas at a time. While doing so, he keeps measuring the block, sometimes he only puts the scale on it, doing work which has no procedure. The chisel and the adze are interchanged, and in the end the *bhagat* has sloped all the edges of the double grooves that were previously made with the saw, as well as the top edge on both fronts, after drawing the eyes with a pencil onto the heads.

The *bhagat* then takes a rest, after which he starts work on the supporting post. At one end of it he makes a tenon, sawing in a groove first and chiseling off the wood from the end up to it. With the adze he removes splinters from the edges to get a block with an hexagonal section. The central part of the post is decorated with a broad torus. Then a hole is made with the mortise-chisel in the centre of the base of the large wooden block with great patience in which the post is fitted now for a trial. The post is then kept aside.

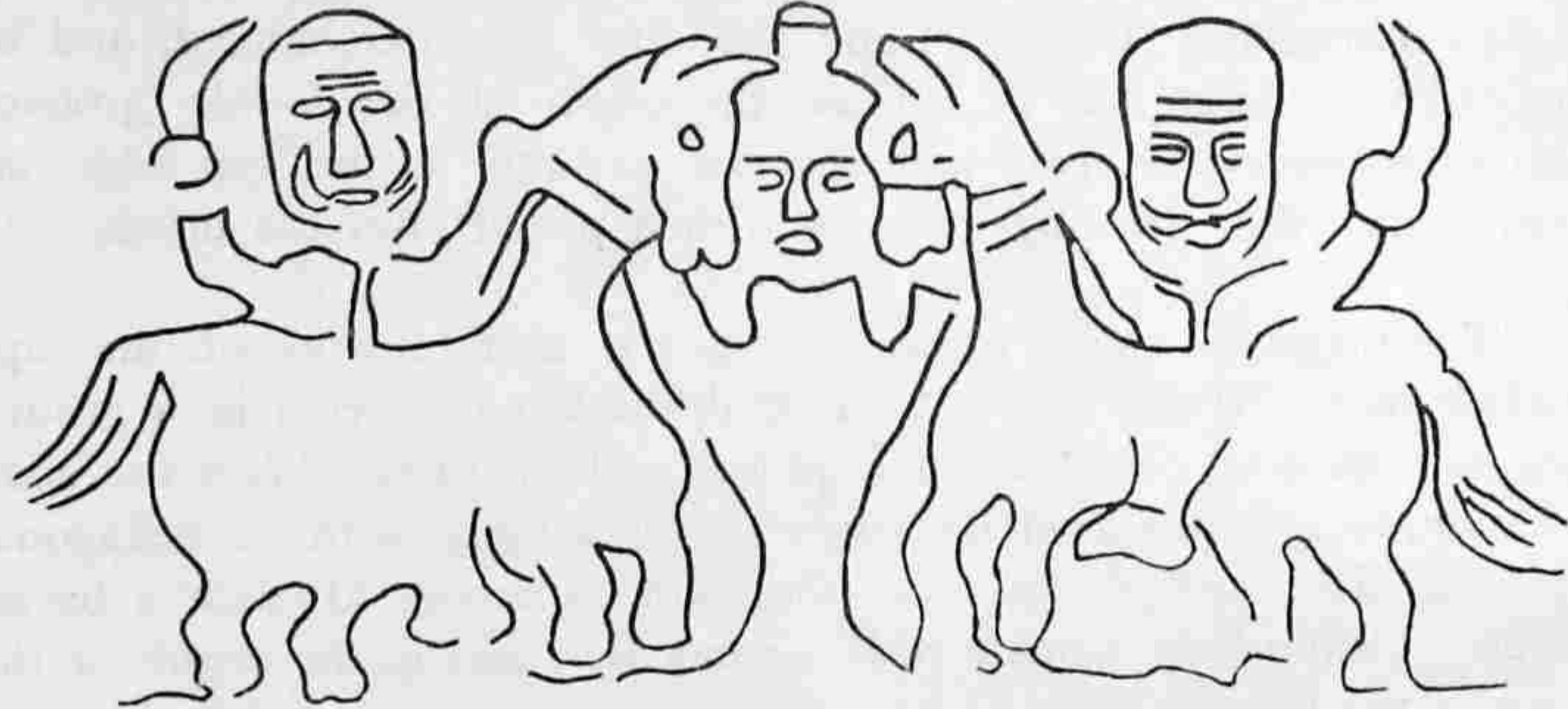
(4) Drawing and fixing relief outlines

On the morning of the second working day, the *bhagat* chisels tiny isolated marks on one of the mouths; he then washes the block with water. While doing so, he murmurs the words "*ram ram*", only. He then tells a story of Rama and Mahadev (see page 35) to the on-lookers.

He passes the broad firmer chisel smoothly over the relief areas, pressing the flat horizontal blade with his left fingertips. In doing so, he removes only the remaining small particles and grains. He finally draws the sun and a crescent moon with the pencil on the centre of the side surface while holding the scale in his left hand, ready to apply it even here. While drawing, as well as later on when doing

most of the relief work, the *bhagat* sits on the ground, his left leg bent at the knee, while the right one rests on the ground, the foot lying near to his lap.

Immediately after the two central motifs are drawn on this side, their outlines are carved, for which purpose the *bhagat* uses a simple gauge, the concave cutting edge of which fits the curvature of the motif lines. To drive in the gauge, the *bhagat* uses a simple flat rectangular wooden mallet. First the outline is only engraved slightly from top, then the *bhagat*, using the same gauge again cuts against it at an angle from the outside. After some time he removes the handle of the gauge and also exchanges his adze for the mallet. On the whole it is a characteristic of the *bhagats'* working proceduc that he likes to change his instruments fairly often, using firmer chisel and gauge for somewhat similar work, but exchanging them often.



With the pencil, he draws a banana umbel next to the sun and moon. Then he turns the block around, drawing hesitatingly on the opposite lying relief area, and bit by bit a figure emerges. He dots more short lines, rather than visualizes the total form. Once more he interrupts the drawing and measures the entire relief area to draw a vertical axis somewhat in the centre, around which he draws a torso with outstretched arms but no legs or head. Then he begins at the right side, four fingers away from the centre line, and draws here a horse's head on top of the outstretched arm of the central figure. He completes the horse's body, adds the legs, then the ears, followed by the long tail. He cuts with the gauge along some of the curved lines of the drawing. Using the firmer chisel, he planes the surface on top of the horse on the right where the outline of a human figure had been. Then he measures again the distance from the central line to the horse's head with four fingers held together and transfers this distance to the left side, where likewise a horse's head, chest, body, legs

and tail are now drawn. Using the gauge he chisels immediately around the tail of the horse. Then come the reins drawn from the mouth of the horse to the outstretched arms of the now erased rider who is then drawn again. First his torso is given with a long neck, on top of which first ears, nose, mouth and moustaches are depicted without an encircling face-line, then the arms oriented towards the reins and the sabre and finally the eyes are drawn along with the face-line. Then a second rider is drawn on the horse on the right and the *bhagat* ends up by giving a head to the figure standing between the two horses. While drawing the last figure, which exhibits a more powerfully rounded and curvilinear form, the *bhagat* seems to be far more certain about how to draw than when he started. — The outlines of the figures he then cuts in with the gauge and the chisels. Again the *bhagat* performs this task with uncertainty. He works somewhat erratically — searches for a long time for a suitable chisel, the size and concave blade of which should suit the curvature of the drawing. He places a number of small chisels with different concave blades on the drawing or tries a particular chisel at a number of places and finally manages to engrave only short lines here and there. During the work he often mutters something unintelligible accompanied by theatrical mime. — In fact, one has to confess that his tools with badly sharpened blade edges of ordinary soft iron or steel are not very suitable to cut the hard wood of the working block.

Despite all the confusion in his working method, he manages to achieve symmetry on either side of the central line, by engraving somewhat similar forms. After a few spots are finalised by shallow cuts, the *bhagat* chisels again around the chest and the tail of the horse. He interrupts this work after some time and fetches the large gauge with which he cuts circles on the neck strip which separates the relief surfaces from the crocodile's heads. He engraves these circles by placing the concave blade overlappingly. Afterwards the ground around these circles is removed and the circles themselves cut to semi-spheres by chiseling slantingly down towards their engraved outline with the gauge. After having completed two such semi-spheres, the *bhagat* concentrates on the relief work again by planing the head of one of the riders with the firmer chisel.

(5) Chiselling the mouth slits

After a short while the *bhagat* lays the chisel aside to work again on one of the two crocodile heads. Having taken some measurements, he draws along the heads parallel lines on the top and bottom of a broad horizontal tongue. He chisels them out as broad grooves with

heavy strokes, hitting the rear of the adze onto the strong mortise chisel. While doing so, the *bhagat* sits on the crocodile and initially makes a shallow groove which is the width of the chisel blade, before starting on the second one. When both grooves are approximately equal in depth, he places the chisel parallel to the edges and makes them straight and clean. Afterwards he removes the splintered wood shavings from the groove bottom with the gauge held at an angle. Finally, he digs in deeper using again the heavy mortise chisel. When these grooves have reached a depth of about a quarter of the block, he turns the block around and draws the outline for the grooves on the opposite side. He first measures them off with the scale, yet checks everything with the eye and corrects the distances accordingly. The grooves are cut through the block except at one place where a small block is kept inside both the slits, on the front part of the jaw. Such jaw slits are chiseled out similarly on the other head. The *bhagat* then finishes the chain of semi-spheres on both the neckbands.

(6) Chiselling the relief

The *bhagat* now chips along all the lines already drawn with pencil in the relief areas. He places the gauge vertically on the curves of the drawing and then hits it two or three times with the mallet and finally, using the same gauge, he places it with its concave blade at an angle from the outside and chisels off a small chip outside the outline. Only in the case of larger straight contour-lines does he use the firmer or the mortise chisels to remove the chips after having cut along the outline with the gauge or a chisel held vertically.

In this way the *bhagat* slopes off the outer areas of motif contours. After some time he again gives up this rather systematic method of working and starts carving the heads of the rider either with a flat or concave small chisel. After a long interval he works again on relief contours. Then he turns the block on its base and draws a circle with a pencil in the centre of the upper side which he hollows out with the gauge to a shallow impression. Then he turns the block still further and draws a pair of scissors in the relief side next to the sun and moon, followed by other motifs like a metric scale, a crab, a tortoise and a fish. The outlines of all these motifs are chipped unevenly with the chisel or the gauge. From the beginning the relief areas at some places are deepened, as e.g. around the scissors. This time the *bhagat* leaves all his chisels lying on the working block and chooses the suitable one each time.

Later, he redraws the crocodile's eyes and then carves out their contours. He draws a figure on the fillet between the corner of the mouth and the neck which he does not complete, erasing it later with the chisel. He also draws a big fish once in the large relief areas which he finally removes with the chisel blade and draws a scorpion instead. He chisels the contours of the scorpion only half way round and stops with the following remarks: "The scorpion is the son of a Muslim. I don't want to finish him. Here is his place." Though, later on, the contours of the scorpion are also completed; the *bhagat* gradually loses interest in his work.

Towards the end, it should also be mentioned that generally the outlines of the relief have an edge and are only rounded off nearing completion, since interior forms have to be worked on, say e.g. the nose has to be chiselled out within the face. The strong expression of the relief is lost, when, during this last working procedure, the edges are chipped off with fine chisels.

(7) Ornamentation of the heads

The *bhagat* begins to engrave some grooves on the back of the crocodile's jaw, making a row of parallel slanting lines which he joins to those in the corner at right angles. Then he makes some more grooves at right angle to the previous lot, sometimes also overlaps them, giving an appearance of a hatched design, till finally the remaining top surface is covered with a coarse fish-bone design of parallel slanting grooves. As a termination for the neck, he digs in two deeper parallel cross grooves. The *bhagat* then chips parallel and slanted grooves on the side above the jaw. Here too, he changes the direction of the grooves after a few centimeters, stopping next to the eyes, where, with the gauge he works in semi-circular, scale-like forms. When the ornamentation on the top surface of the jaw is completed, the *bhagat* takes up the heavy mortise-chisel and hammers in the teeth in the lower jaw, completing a tooth at a time. He hits deep into the centre of the groove to be made, then at an angle from the left and afterwards from the right, thus causing the chip between two teeth to break off evenly. After completing this, the *bhagat* ornaments one side of the head, turns the block around and does the same to the opposite one so that one head is complete at the end of this part of the work. The second head is ornamented similarly.

(8) Increasing the depth of the relief.

Finally, the *bhagat* concentrates on the relief areas again. He starts by deepening the outlined areas, chiselling off chips from the

lower surface. At the same time he continues to engrave the still unfinished outline contours.

The *bhagat* works unsystematically, yet one can say that as a rule he sinks the relief areas in the following way: He strikes a number of cross-like grooves on the lower surface with a large chisel and then knocks off the splintered wood particles with a chisel held slantingly. In surfaces which lie further away from the contours he hits the chisel with the wooden mallet, though nearer to the relief mostly he uses his palm as hammer. Finally he flakes off the entire lower relief surface with the gauge, thus removing the remaining slightly raised portions. At narrow junctions and also in the interior of the relief motifs, e.g. within the heads, he uses now an iron nail which has been flattened and sharpened. This rather blunt blade presses the wood in, rather than picking out chips. By this above method all the faces of the figures come out more three-dimensionally.

III. THE INSTALLATION OF A WOODEN CROCODILE

The wooden crocodile which was carved by the *bhagat* Radatia Jethia had to be formally installed—even if it was to be donated to a museum later on. This was considered essential by the *bhagat* himself and there were certainly no objections from our side. As a suitable place the tree next to the broken down well near the working place was selected.

The ceremony of installing the newly made crocodile took place during evening, after all the required articles and ingredients were purchased. A coconut, and *agarbati*, incenses, were bought in Songadh; a cock, rice and water were contributed from the *bhagat's* farmstead; *sindur*, vermilion, and oil were purchased from the small shop of the village Jamkhadi.

The wooden crocodile was placed on its supporting post, after the ground was cleared and made even. It was taken down once more and doused all over with water, which was carefully rubbed into all the grooves and holes by one of the helpers. Then it was finally fixed on the tenon of the post and properly installed. The cock was brought and placed with a *tali*, dish, full of rice beside the *bhagat* who took a handful of grain and bending towards the crocodile muttered:

“*Lodha dev, lakda dev, tamba rupa dev, chhana dev, mena dev*, God from iron, god from wood, copper or tin god, god from cow-dung, *mena dev* (?);

kal dharti, dev mogra, dharma dharti, helu pandar, dev mogi, puja padase black earth, god crocodile, sacred earth, cold queen (god), goddess crocodile, (we) offer (you) worship.”

Then he sprinkled grain on top of the surface of the crocodile, took a second handful and deposited it slowly in the central shallow depression on its body. A coconut was first offered and then broken

on a stone. The two parts were placed near the post. The small cock with firmly tied legs was handed over to the *bhagat* who laid it in front of the post where it remained released without movement for a few seconds, then to be taken up and given to some helpers who killed it with a sickle some distance away.

Sidur, vermillion, and oil were thoroughly mixed in a small bowl; the mixture was applied on the crocodile with a piece of the coconut fibres. Applying *sindur* on the crocodile as well as on the post was chiefly done by the elder helper, only on some places the *bhagat* added some layers himself.

In the meantime the women from the household of the *bhagat* and of the adjoining houses gathered around the crocodile, partly out of curiosity, partly because they wanted to sing the praise of the newly installed crocodile. Some of the songs had the following texts:

<i>Veradye ra veradye, kella deva veradye</i>	This marriage procession, of which God is it the marriage procession?
<i>Varadye ra varadye, hella mogra varadye</i>	This marriage procession, it is <i>Hela Mogra's</i> marriage procession
<i>Varadye ra varadye, kella deva varadye</i>	This marriage procession, of which God is it the marriage procession?
<i>Varadye ra varadye, ya ha mogi varadye</i>	This marriage procession, it is God <i>Mogi's</i> marriage procession.
<i>Deva ra re deva ra, kella deva deva ra</i>	O God's people, o God's people which God's people are these (worshippers)?
<i>Deva ra re deva ra, hella mogra deva ra</i>	O God's people, o God's people, these are <i>Hella Mogra's</i> people (worshippers)
<i>Deva ra re deva ra, kella deva deva ra</i>	O God's people, o God's people, which God's people are these?
<i>Deva ra re deva ra, ya ha mogi deva ra</i>	O God's people, o God's people, these are God <i>Mogi's</i> people
<i>Sugan dedhlo ya ha to, sugan dedhlo suta yahu va</i>	

. . . .

<i>Deva ra re deva ra, kella deva deva ra</i>	O God's people, o God's people, which God's people are these (worshippers)?
<i>Deva ra re deva ra, Limji deva deva ra</i>	O god's people, o God's people God <i>Limji's</i> (?) people (worshippers) are these.
(2) <i>Ghadi guthi tule Radatiye hutharye</i>	You have been carved by the Radatiya carpenter
<i>Ghadi guthi ma ya ha va</i>	You have been carved, o our mother
<i>Lai chalya tuna par dese ma</i>	They are taking you to a foreign country
<i>Lai chalya ma ya ha va</i>	They are taking you, o mother
<i>Lai gaye ma ya ha va</i>	They have already taken you, o mother
<i>Lai gaye tule pardese ma</i>	They have already taken you to a foreign country, o mother
<i>Lai gaye ma ya ha va</i>	They have already taken you, o mother
<i>Dedoni mute Ramsinh</i>	<i>Ramsinh</i> came to fetch you
<i>Dedoni mute ya ha va</i>	He has come to fetch you, o mother.

This second song was spontaneously sung by the women when the first had ended. It hints at the fact that the crocodile was carved for a museum, far away from their own village. *Ramsinh*, the well known *sarpanch*, mayor of Songadh, was our companion, himself present at this event. — When we requested the women to sing a song as if the crocodile were made in Jamkhadi for a neighbouring village, they immediately responded with this song:

(3) <i>Ghadi guthi tule Radatiye hutharye</i>	You have been carved by the Radatiya carpenter
<i>Ghadi guthi ma ya ha va</i>	You have been carved, o our mother
<i>Gadhi guthi tule Jamkhadi gavame</i>	You have been carved in Jamkhadi village
<i>Gadhi guthi ma ya ga va</i>	You have been carved, o mother
<i>Dedoni mute Chhaganvhai</i>	<i>Chhaganvhai</i> has come to fetch you

<i>Dedoni muteya ha va</i>	He has come to fetch you, o mother
<i>Lai chalye tule Yamba gavame</i>	They are taking you to Amba-village
<i>Sodi chali to Jamkhadi ganve</i>	You are leaving (now) Jamkhadi-village
<i>Sodi chali tu ya ha va</i>	You are leaving, o mother
<i>Lai lidho tu e Amba ganve</i>	You are taken by (the people of) Amba-village
<i>Lai lidho ma ya ha</i>	You are taken, o mother
<i>Sodi e tu Radatiya huthare</i>	You have left the Radatiya carpenter
<i>Sodi e tu ma ya ha va</i>	You have left, o our mother.

At the end of the ceremony, rice was once more offered to the crocodile and some drops of wine were sprinkled on the ground in front of the image. During this ritual the *bhagat* uttered:

“*Bal mage, bal apo; paisa mage, paisa apo; dhan mage, dhan apo; nokri mage, nokri apo; badhu mage e de he*, if children are asked, give children; if money is asked, give money; if grain is asked, give grain; if service is asked, give service; give everything asked for.

Puja padi jay, marghe bhet, nariyel bhet, chokha bhet, chhakh padi jaje, we offer you worship, gift of chicken, gift of coconut, gift of rice, offering of wine is given.”

In the meantime the cock was plucked and cut into pieces with the sickle. In a small straw-fire it was roasted. The liver and heart were fished out of the ashes soon and were offered by the eldest helper to the wooden crocodile together with some drops of wine, poured on the ground out of a cup of leaves. Some more men came to offer wine and liver-particles. Then the ritual was over, all the participants went to the fireplace to enjoy the small feast with the chicken and the left over wine.

IV. DENOTATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Wooden crocodiles are generally called *mogra*, *magru*, *magar* or in their (feminine) diminutive forms, *mogri* or *mogi*. The word *dev*, god, is often affixed, as in *magar dev* or *dev mogro* to denote the object is sacred and not an ordinary, natural crocodile. However, it is not certain, whether all wooden crocodiles are meant to be the manifestation of one and the same crocodile god or each represents an independent local form. One of the crocodile-gods is well known by the name of *hela mogra*, cool crocodile, and there are two sanctuaries bearing the names of the crocodile-god(s), *dev mogra* (near Zagbara) and *dudh mogra*, milky crocodile (near Mandvi). Some of the wooden crocodiles found near the villages were simply referred to as *magar dev*, the crocodile god, whereas the crocodile of Pipalkua (near Songadh) was said to represent *hela mogra*.

The *bhagat* Radatia Jethia from Jamkhadi (near Songadh) gave the following information which has yet to be ascertained:

“*Mogra* is *koldabyo* according to Vasava, *dudh mogra* for Gamit, *helo mogro* for Kotvalio, *dev mogra* for Kukna and *mogri* for Bhil.”

Koldabyo has been equated with *helo mogra* several times during the talks of this *bhagat*. However, no informant has confirmed this information.

The wooden crocodiles are called the same name irrespective of whether they have only one head or two. The different parts of a (one-headed) crocodile were termed by the Vasava informant Chhania Holia in Bhatvada (near Songadh) as follows:

“The crocodile has a *mathu*, head, which consists of *ankh*, eyes, *jibh*, tongue, *dant* teeth, *nokharu*, nose and *chundiu*, forehead; the neck is decorated with *ganthi*, knots, and the body with *diba*, (rhombic) shapes. On top of the body is (always) a small depression which is called *paiha mukela*, to put money, i.e. the place where coins are deposited as offer-

ings to the crocodile. The body ends in a *puchhadu*, tail. It rests on a *thambhalu*, pillar or post."

Next to this crocodile stands a large wooden *khambh*, pole, which is decorated with designs and motifs often to be found on crocodiles as well. The Vasava informant gave the following terms:

"The moon is called *chand*, moon, or simply *ghato*, decreasing, while the sun is *akho*, full and *nathi ghato* never decreasing. The sun was (formerly) called *dahado*, day."

The depicted human figure is described as being *dev ne man*, honour of god, or a worshiper.

The *bhagat* Radatia Jethia from Jamkhadi used for the parts of a crocodile the following expressions:

"The *chhir*, head, has *dola*, eyes, and *jibh*, tongue. The post (on which the crocodile rests) is called *khunto*, pole, or *pag*, leg. — The engraved sun is *Ram* and the moon is *Lakshmana* or *chandra*, moon. The bananas are *Ram ne kela*, bananas of Rama."

The same *bhagat* calls the ornamental lines on the head and upper surface of the crocodile *dhar*. He used the following terms for the different motifs depicted as relief-work on the front and backside of the crocodile's body and explained them as such:

"On (my) crocodile I depict: *chhash*, buttermilk (—churning) *havario*, singers, (the god) *gimi (rao)*, (the goddess) *kunta (rani)*, *kunta rani ni dhani*, goddess Kunta's husband, *bhai*, (her) brother, *katar*, scissors, *gaj*, ell-ruller, *mach*, fish, *kachelo*, crabb, *khatedar*, landlord, (the god) *koldabea*, and *dhupi*, incense-holding men."

"The turtle is called *kanvar kachho*. The *kachelo*, crabb, is (representing) *Mahadev (Shiva)*. At the same level and belonging (directly) to *mogra*, crocodile, are *Amarvani's* father, son, *guru*, teacher and *ghodo*, horse (are these the depicted two riders and the man in between?)."

"*Rama* and *Lakshmana* went to fight *Ravana*. They were sitting on a turtle, while the crabb held the tail of the turtle. *Rama* is the sun, *Lakshmana* the moon.—*Gaj katar vadhu hoy to kape, ochhu hoy to ape*, (after measuring with the) ell (Rama) cuts with the scissors if there is more, if there is less, he will add (i.e. when going to *Lanka*, to fight *Ravana*, *Rama* cut the distance with the scissors and by measuring with the ell-rule he covered the distances. Accordingly, the god gives to his followers what is missing, but might take the surplus if he wants)."

Myths and stories

Some abbreviated myths—more bits of knowledge which once might have been more elaborately known to everybody—were told by the *bhagat* Radatia Jethia while carving a crocodile. The first of them is narrated as such:

"*Hela mogra* and *kunta rani* came to Gujarat, sitting on a buffalo. They said (to the people): 'Offer us buffaloes', and the Gujarati-people said: 'No, we cannot do that.' Then they (*hela mogra* and *kunta rani*) went to the Vasava-people. They agreed to offer buffaloes. That is why *hela mogra* and *kunta rani* went to stay on the mountains near the Vasava-people: Vasavas offer them *pado*, buffaloes."

In a second myth, it is *Goval dev*, the cowherd god, who gives to his colleague *Hela Mogra* and his wife *Kunta rani* a wooden crocodile as their emblem or as their image for worship. Most probably, the entire story is misinterpreted by the *bhagat* Radatia Jethia. It might be mentioned that at *Goval dev's* sanctuary there are no wooden crocodiles to be seen nowadays. The story is narrated as such:

"*Hela Mogra* and *kunta rani* were grazing their cattle; once *goval dev* told them: 'Give me cows and take this crocodile with you. Worship it and get it established everywhere and you will get many cows.' They took it and made people understand: 'Offer worship to this *dev*, god, and you will get lots of cows, bulls, and your harvest will be very good.' From this day we started farming and we got cows, bulls and fertile land."

The third myth, most probably mis-stated as well, is an example of the importance *Helo Mogro* has (especially) for milch cows.—This short myth is followed by another bit which was related by the *bhagat* at another occasion, but both stories show how the *bhagat* uses parts of his stories without restraint and combines them as he likes: People around him listen more to the words and names he uses than to the message they convey. Radatia Jethia narrated:

"Once *helo mogro* and *kunta rani* came from *Lankar* (i.e. Ceylon)! They brought *kansari*- seeds and (their relative) *gimi rayo* brought the cow. They (finally) came to *Delhi* and asked *Shankarji (Shiva)*: 'Where shall we live?'—*Shankarji* and *Ram* answered: 'Go to the (hills and sanctuary of) *kalakakad*.' And there they went and there they stayed."

"At *hela mogra's* place, there is a cow. *Hela mogra's* small brother is *gimi rayo*.—*Pandar rani's* *dir*, small brother, did not allow the cow to

give milk. They said: 'Let us make a crocodile'. (It was made) and on the same day it was installed and worshipped. From that day on, cows and calves became happy."

The wooden representations of the crocodile are considered to be not just a wooden image, but a live being. It can see with its eyes and it needs a shelter to keep cool. It can bite as well and turn around on its post. A story about an unbeliever who put his arm into the mouth of a crocodile to prove that it is only wood and not alive, was suddenly caught by the crocodile, is often narrated. A short version is told by Kuvaria Chhonga Gamit near Songadh:

"The Vanjara-gipsies said once: 'What is the use of *mogro*, crocodile?' In this way they abused the god. Then one man placed his hand in the mouth of the (wooden) crocodile and his fingers were crushed."

The same story is told by Radatia Jethia the following way:

"The Vanjara-gipsies told their wives: 'How can there be wooden gods in this world? What can wooden gods do? They offer goats, they dance, they install *mogra*, crocodiles—for what is all this?' Their women said: 'Whatever they do, according to their wish, it is right for them.' But the Vanjara-men still continued their speeches and one of them said, touching the head of the crocodile: 'This is all pretention.' But at once, the hand of the Vanjara was clamped in the mouth of the crocodile. All the women ran away. The Vanjara took a vow: 'O *mogra dev*, crocodile god, if I can be freed, I will offer you a goat.' Thus he was set free."

Another story was told about a large and massive crocodile, installed near Andharvadi (in the Vyara area) which on an occasion only a year ago proved to its believers that it could change its material qualities. The following account is given by the *sarpanch*, headman of Andharvadi:

"When the great flood came (1968), our (wooden) crocodile went to Bardoli. There it lay and many people tried to lift it up, but nobody succeeded. At last, three men from Andharvadi came. One was our old *bhagat* and there were his two companions. They went to Bardoli to bring the crocodile back to its original place. After making some offering to it, they lifted the crocodile like a piece of reed.—Now again, we worship the crocodile here every year at *maha vad amas*

(i.e. in february). On that day all people from our village gather here, next to the crocodile."

Formal aspects

The places where the crocodiles are installed have no special generic name. Such a spot is called in Pipalkua (near Songadh) *Jambuda dakhla*, jambuda branches. Very often, however, the crocodile is placed under a shelter, a fact which is explained in Pipalkua with the following remarks:

"There should always be a *mandavo*, shelter, over *hela mogra*, lit. cool crocodile; the shade will keep it cool."

The head of the crocodile should be directed to the east. Chhanio Holio from Bhatvada (near Songadh) says:

"The mouth (of the crocodile) should always point to the sun-rise. If it does this, it is good for the village. If it has turned and points to the north or to the sunset-side, then we know that something bad is to happen. *Kai (devlok) avine ferve jato ohe*, some (gods-folk) may have come and turned it. That is why the crocodile should be installed with the head looking towards sun-rise."

An explanation for the fact that many crocodiles have two heads and can look at both sides has been stressed by the *bhagat* Radatia Jethia:

"*Char dola re*, there stay four eyes. *Be ankhe bar je, be ankhe andar je*, with two eyes it sees outside, with two eyes it looks inside.—*Be modha, dev jat ganay etle*, (it has) two heads, because it is considered to be of gods' kinship."

Other informants always tried to explain that many wooden crocodiles have two heads due to a mistake of the carpenter, or with the remark that "someone must have made a vow to offer a crocodile with two heads instead of only one" (Radatia Bhakra, Gamit in Karoli, near Mandvi). None of the carpenters questioned had ever seen a living crocodile, but some said, that "others" might have seen one "in the circus or somewhere".

The fact, that quite often two crocodiles are standing together, was explained in Karoli:

"There must be two. As we are men and women, we have to install two."

In some places, however, the crocodile can be accompanied with a pole instead of a second crocodile. Such poles are to be found e.g. with the crocodiles at Devlimadi or with the large and massive crocodile of Bhatvada. Here Chhania Holia explains it as such:

“This *khambh*, pole, was installed together with *mogra*, crocodile. It is called *mogra nu jodu*, crocodile’s partner (pair). *Khambh* is husband, *mogra* is wife. // It was like this in the old sanctuary as well. So we have to do it as such. If we keep only half the gods, it may stay half (i.e. half the success), but if we make it full, it becomes full. It is the same with human beings in the house: it needs a couple.”

The necessity of placing a *khambh*, pole, together with a *mogra*, crocodile — a custom prevalent most probably in Vasava areas—was denied the same day by some Gamit informants at the village of Ghoda (near Songadh) with this argument:

“*Magar* or *mogro* is a male (crocodile). The word is male. *Khambh*, pole, is something completely different. It is separated. *Mogra* is a couple by itself: one side is male, one side is female.”

From this information no final conclusion can be drawn. However, it is very feasible, that in fact the crocodile with the two heads represents the unified sexes, i.e. it is a bi-sexual god.

Function

A very general statement about the small crocodiles to be found in the villages near Mandvi, was given by Vania Rala, *sarpanch*, headman of Umakhadi:

“We offer each year a crocodile. // We decide this about two weeks ahead. // All (our) crocodiles are made by Sura Chhagan from our (own) village. // He is here the carpenter. // He takes no money for the work. // There is no worship (of the wood) before the crocodile is installed, only then (we worship). There, where the crocodile is erected, one goat is killed and five pounds of wine are used. // Wine is offered. // The *bhagats* and the others drink as well. // All Chodhris install (such) crocodiles. // The time is usually *maha amas* (i.e. in february).”

From this statement, one gets the impression, that the small crocodiles are installed the same way as clay horses or wooden bulls are deposited, being a kind of votive-offerings. That might be in fact the case for the Mandvi-area, where we found many of such small, un-

decorated, one-headed crocodiles. However, the large, double-headed crocodiles from the Songadh-area which are installed mainly by Gamit and Vasava, seem to be erected for other reasons.

In Singhpur, a village near Songadh, the Chodhri Khalpa Vadheria said:

“This is the form of *khotra mogra*, decorated (?) crocodile. About 60 to 70 years ago, the wooden crocodile had been installed here by Ghuria Chotia Gamit. This man had no sons. When he was old, in his dream the (crocodile-) god said: ‘Put me’, and the man got the crocodile made and installed.”

A similar story was related in the village Sakerda (near Songadh):

“One woman was not getting a son. She took a vow that she would install a crocodile and worship it after having born a son. That was before 45 years. She got a son and installed this crocodile. Her son is still alive and lives in this village.”

For the second crocodile in the same village we got the following information:

“Manyo Bhondo had no sons. When he had got (his first son) he installed the crocodile. That son is still alive.”

Other reasons for the installation of a crocodile were given in Devalpada (near Songadh):

“The cows (from this village) were not giving milk and they were not having calves. After installing this crocodile, we got milk and calves.”

The same assertion was cloaked in various versions, like the following about the crocodile in Amba-village (near Songadh) by its maker, the *bhagat* Radatia Jethia from Jamkhadi:

“This crocodile has been installed because the cattle were dying, there was no milk in the houses and all their sons and daughters could not live. They started to worship all gods, and I brought all the gods (together) in this wood (i.e. I made a powerful wooden crocodile). That was ten years ago. The people of this village (Amba) installed the crocodile. The cows were dying and the people did not get sons. The tiger was eating their cattle and the crops were spoiled. The god (i.e.

the crocodile) proved good and true. All twelve months they worship (the crocodile).”

or

“Four buffaloes have come (to my house). They have been sent by *hela mogra* (i.e. have been given through the god to the *bhagat's* household). *Helo mogro chalto chalto apide*, (the god) cool crocodile comes walking and gives.”

Near the village of Bhatvada, in the jungle between Songadh and Mandvi, is a sanctuary with a large wooden crocodile. The following account of the installation and renovation of this crocodile is given by the old Vasava-informant Chhania Holia, the brother of the late Thagia Holia, who had himself installed the crocodile and whose name is inscribed on its body:

“At this sanctuary there are four things: *mogra*, crocodile, *khambh*, pole, *pandar dev* and *kondol dev*. *Mogra* and *khambh* were formerly installed at *him*, field-edge, at the border to Khervada-village. They had rusted and were rotten. The village and my brother brought them here. They made a new crocodile. It was installed about eight to nine years ago. The old one was *dohana*, *dohana*, *dohana*, very, very old. It had become very small with rust and mud. Even my father did not know, when they had installed that crocodile. // The carving on that (old) crocodile was like *gumda*, pimples. // Figures were not there. // The man who carved the (new) crocodile was a Chodhri. His name is either Tahyo or Bijlo. It was carved here only (i.e. near the sanctuary itself). It took the carpenter three days to accomplish it. Holia (my father) was already dead at that time. We (the next generation) installed it. Altogether, it took about seven to eight days. The people of our village laboured and gave two rupees as *falo*, share (to participate in the feast). The other people, like the villagers from Dunagari-falia came to sit (i.e. to watch and participate in the feast, but perhaps not active in the actual offering-ceremony). They did not give *falo*, (their) share. // For installing the wooden crocodiles, only people of the village give their share.—The goat was offered. *Pavri*, clarinet, was played and all men were dancing here. Lots of wine was there. *Bhatthi*, kiln for making alcohol, was always burning.”

The crocodile is often not found alone, but in the vicinity of other sanctuaries. It is generally stated, that *e dev loko*, these god-folk like to stay together. In the above mentioned Bhatvada, as for example

next to the crocodile and the pole, there are the sites for worshipping *pandar devi* and *kandol dev*, as well as the small-pox god. If one of these gods is to be worshipped, the others get some minor offerings as well. Such offerings to the sanctuary is described by Chhanio Holio:

“Each year, the crocodile has to be worshipped by the village. The same is done for *pandar dev*. The villagers have to offer flags, coconuts, *bhat*, rice, *sopari*, betel-nut and cocks. The gods are worshipped at the days of *gin* and *harad*, when all ancestors have to be worshipped. *Devni badha le*, *pichhi nan kha ve*, they take the vow of the god, and the *pichhi*-ceremony has to be performed. And at the end, all the women come here, bring pots on their heads, with a burning lamp over the pot. This, they offer here at the *pandar*.—This year however, we cannot worship, because *bapji*, respected father (i.e. small pox) is here present (i.e. there is an epidemic in the village). That is why we cannot apply *sindur*, vermillion, to the crocodile. The *bhagat* performs the *pichhi* ritual at each house in the morning and evening daily for *bapji*, small pox.”

Besides this general worship from the entire village, individual worship is possible as well. The same informant explains:

“If there is *jhadjhad*, i.e. if a ghost or a witch has entered someone's body, then they worship.—If a man has *adtar nadtar*, i.e. is harrassed by a witch, he will worship.—When such a person has become alright again, *dhani pote chhutva ave*, the husband (i.e. the patient) himself comes to relieve himself (i.e. to fulfil the vow taken when ill).”

Milk, it might be mentioned, seems to be one of the major items next to wine offered to the crocodiles—it is stated by Radatia Jethia from Jamkhadi:

“Human beings drink milk. Man's life is (like) *mogra's* life. That is why we offer milk to the crocodile as well.”

Production and installation

The *bhagat* Radatia Jethia in Jamkhadi did not mention much about the carving of a wooden crocodile while he was at work. Most of the following sentences he uttered more for himself when he was working.

While searching a suitable tree for the wood-block, the *bhagat* said:

"Hara jhad ami tapah karta, we search for a good tree. Jivta jhad, marela nea, a living tree, not a dead one'.

When cutting off the bark from the log, the *bhagat* said:

"Bahu chivat chhe, it is (a) very hard (job)."

That all the outermost parts of the log have to be cut off, he explains the following way:

"Kacho kadhi nakhe, tender (wood) is to be taken out.—If this *dingo*, log, is kept fully, the ants and termites would eat it away.—*Kape to gar kali dekhay, pachhal thi lal dekhay*, when the inside-wood (from the log) is cut, it looks black; but later on it appears red.—*Lalbham thai jahe*, it will become bright red."

When the *bhagat* carves the sun and the moon as simple geometrical figures, he says:

"Ram ni murti pan kadhta chhe, pan eni shobha nathi, Rama's image is also being taken out (i.e. carved), but that doesn't look good."

When he pours water over the wooden block—in fact some time afterwards—he remarks at this event:

"Magru kadhi e etle pani joie. Melu dur rakhe, if we draw (i.e. carve the relief) on the crocodile, water is needed. That keeps the dirt (or evil) away."

When carving the relief-panels, the *bhagat* says that he has to be cautious not to destroy anything, because it is the representation of a deity:

"Chitra tuti nahi java joiye, the carvings should not be broken. Mane tene dev, ni to pathar, mitti, lakadu, if one believes, then it is god, otherwise it is stone, clay or wood."

When installing the crocodile, the *bhagat* uttered the following expression, to give an example of the greatness of the work he had accomplished by carving a crocodile which becomes an idol:

"Dongo huthar ghadte ghodo, murti thambhe, the carpenter Dongo had carved a stand (lit. horse), (but) installed an idol (of the crocodile)."

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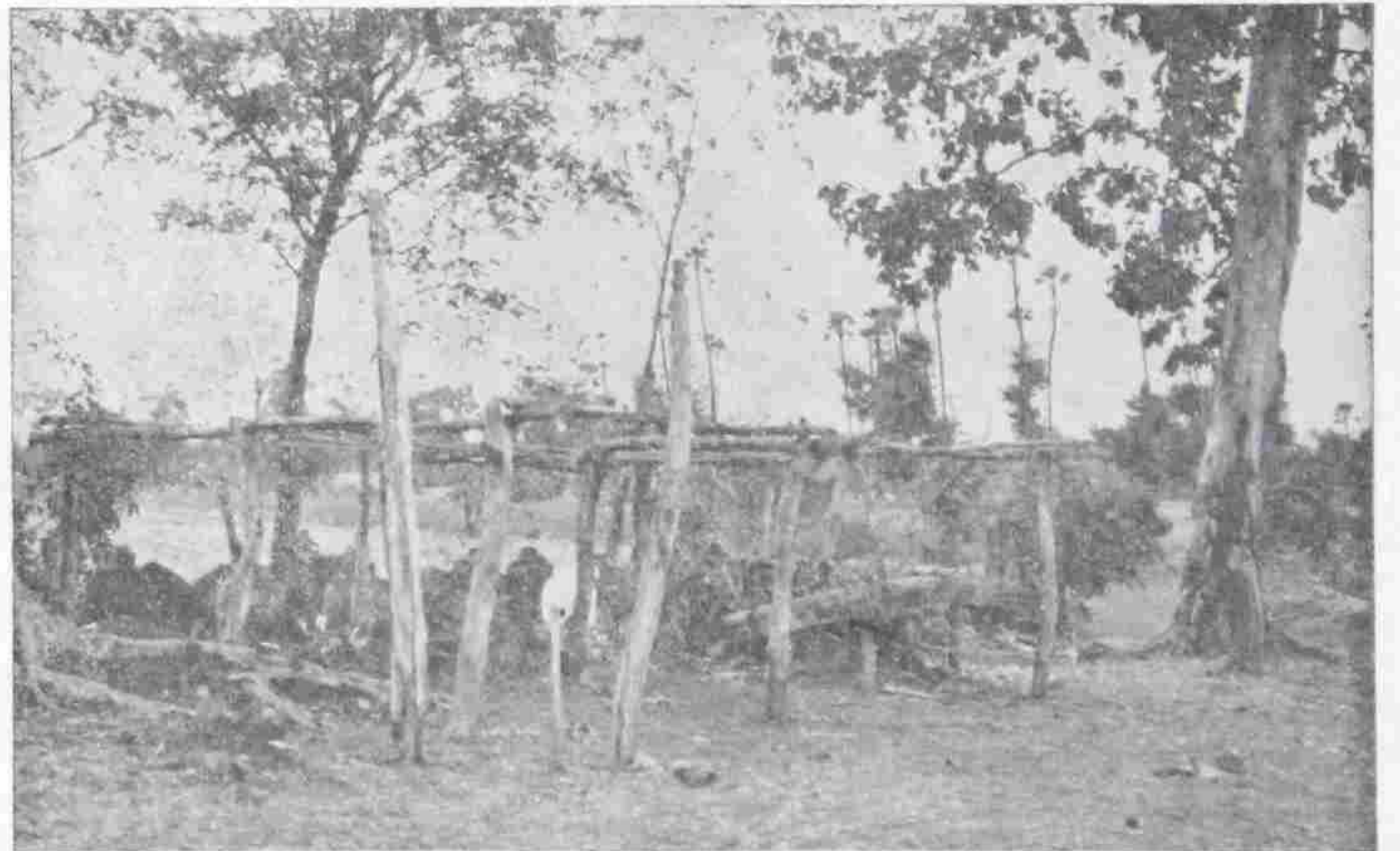
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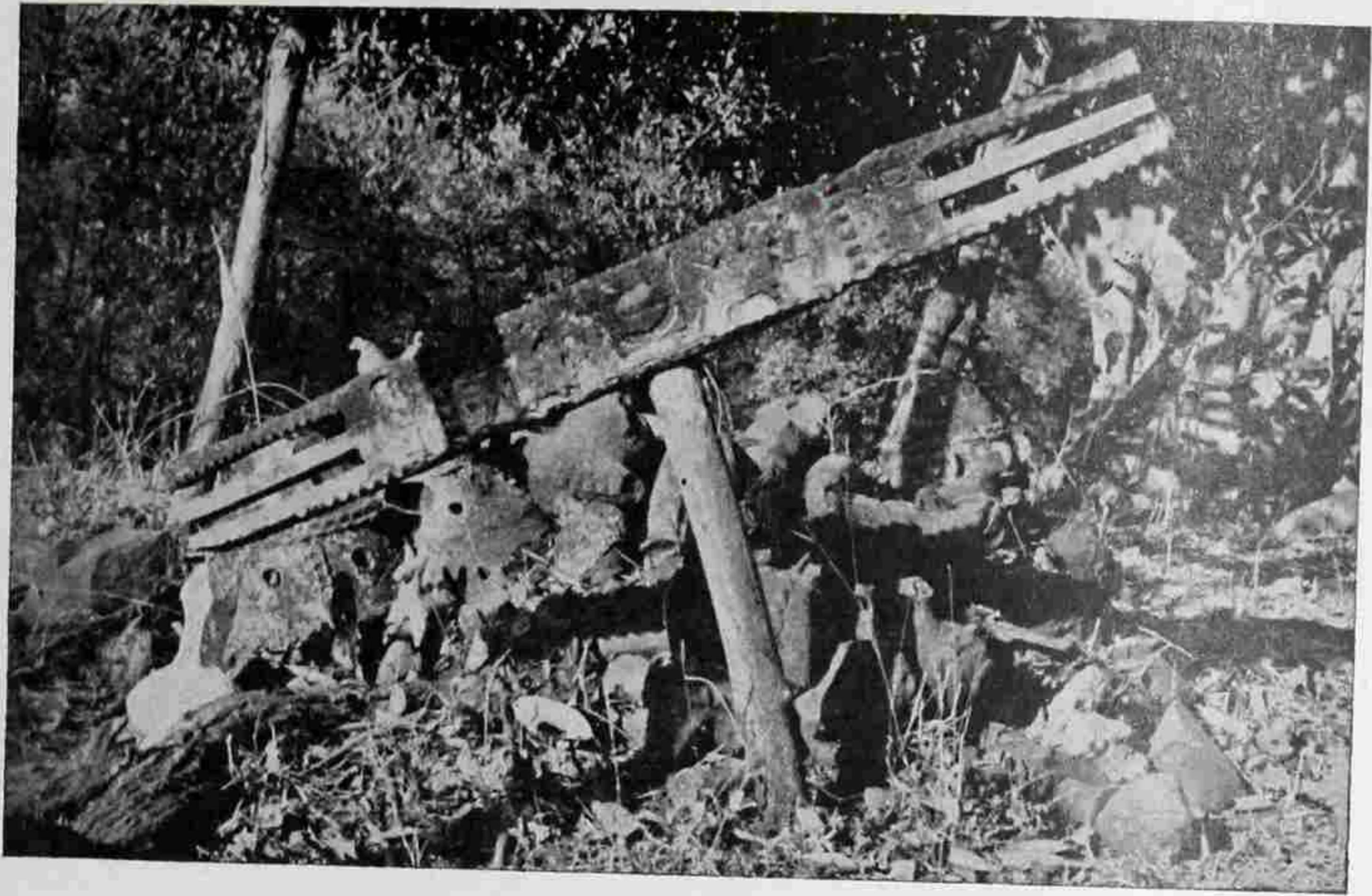
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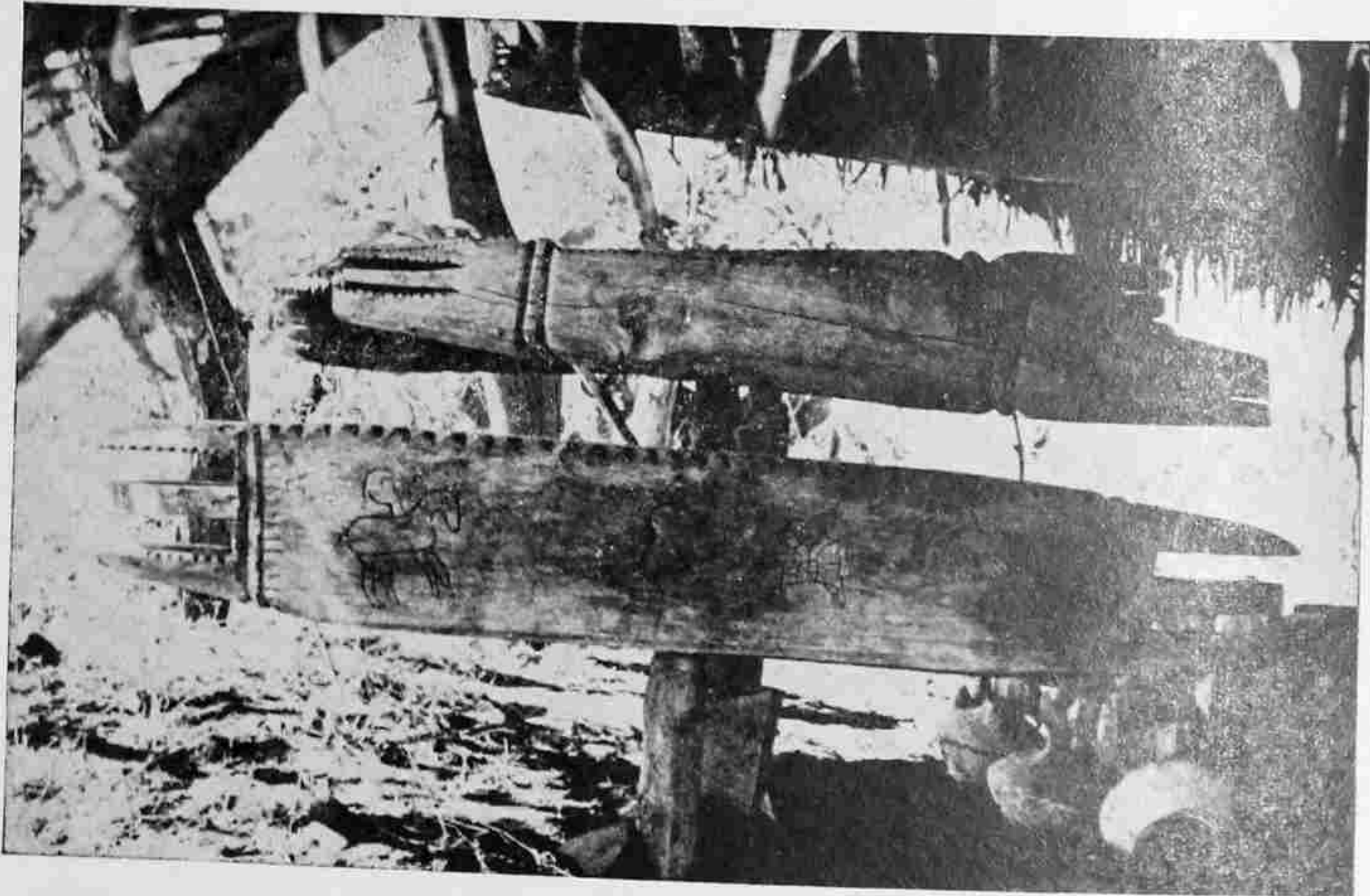
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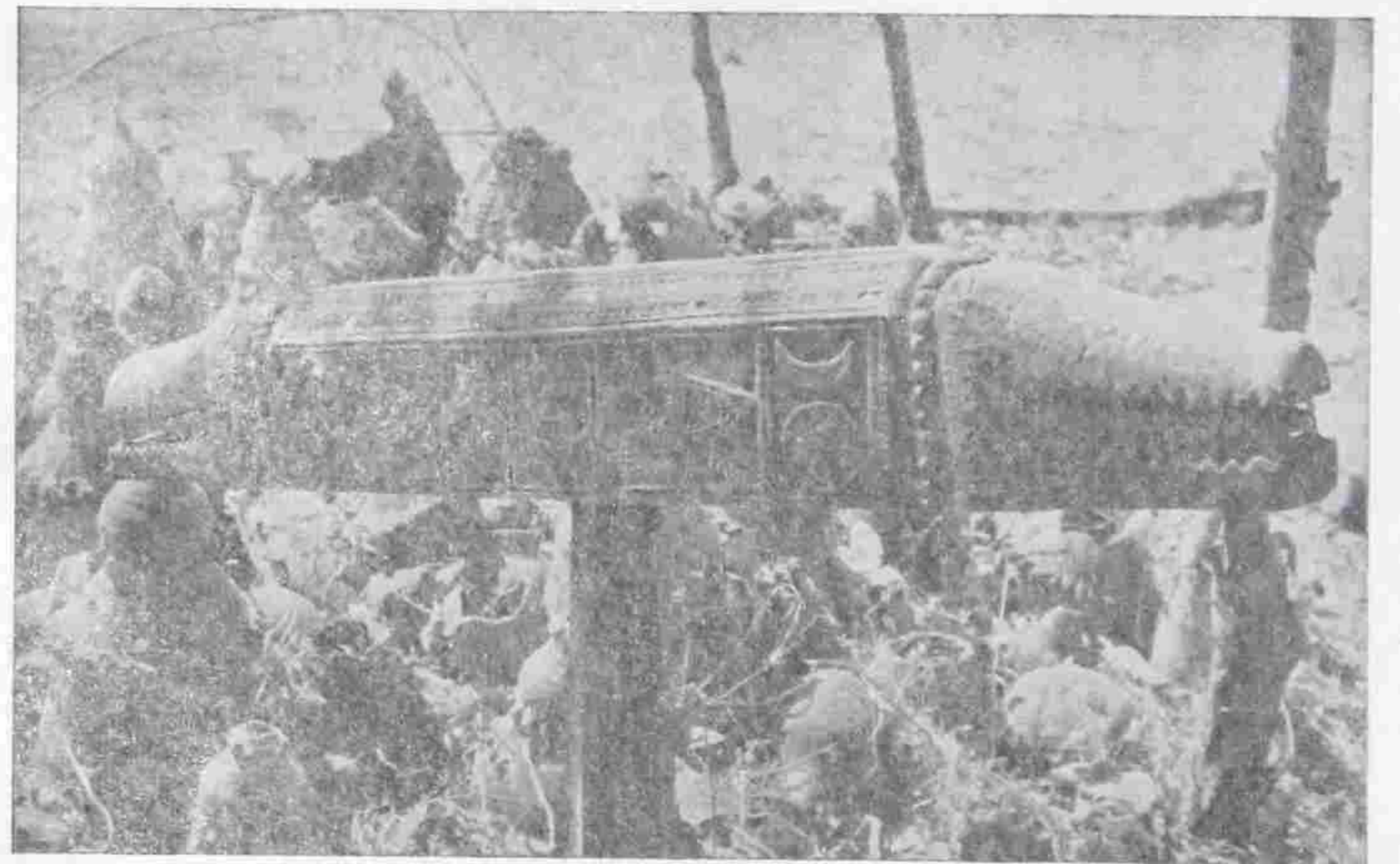
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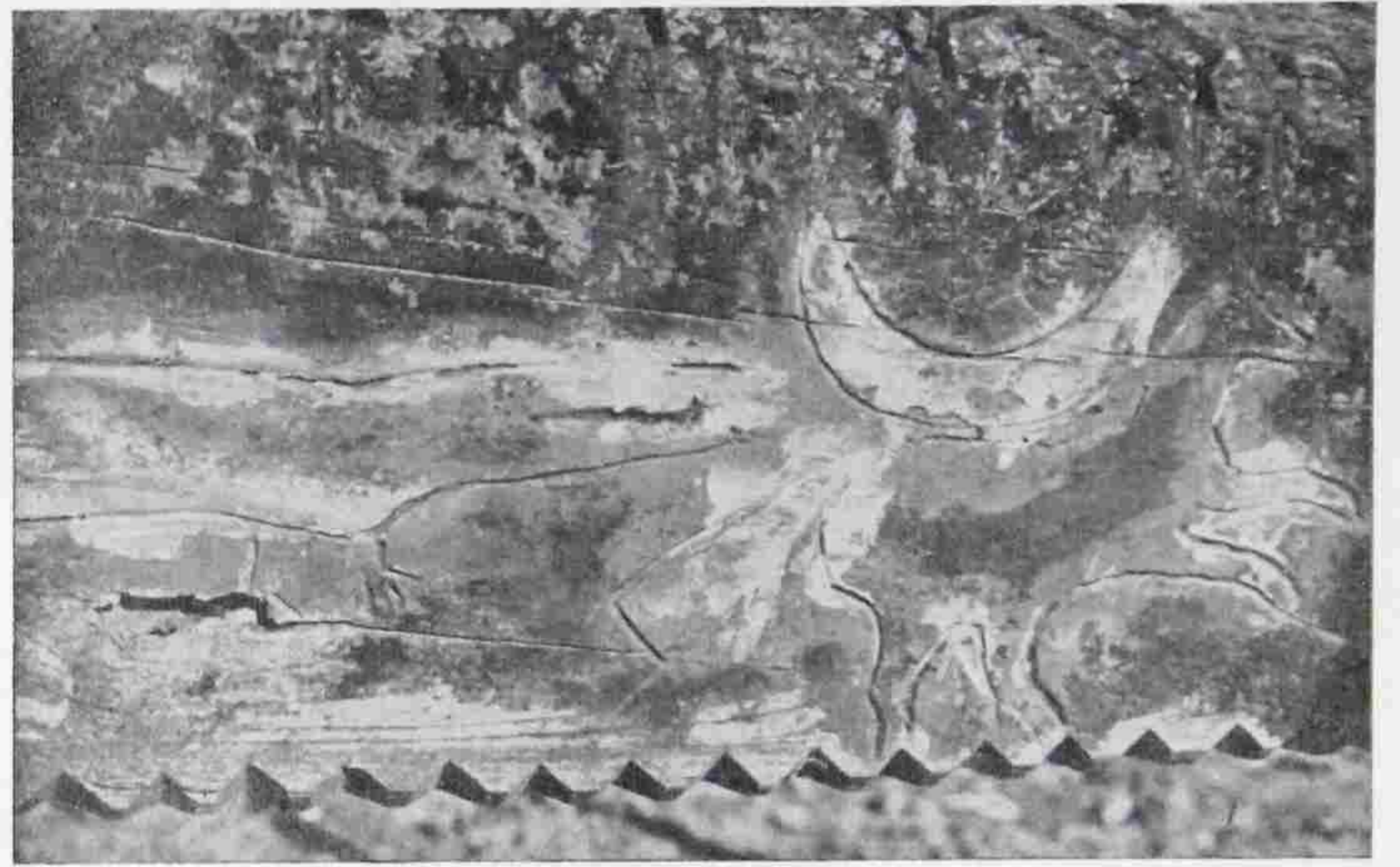
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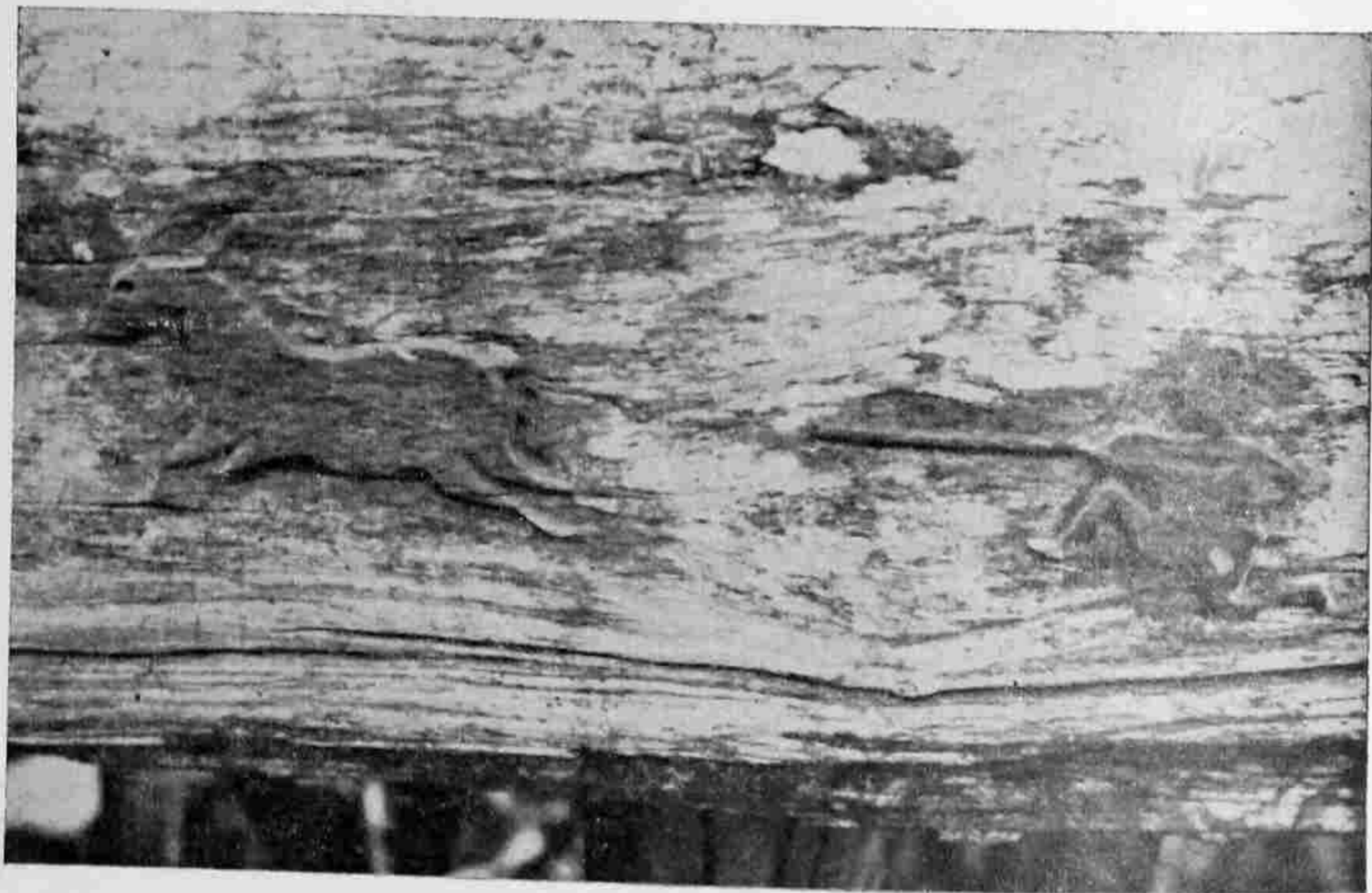
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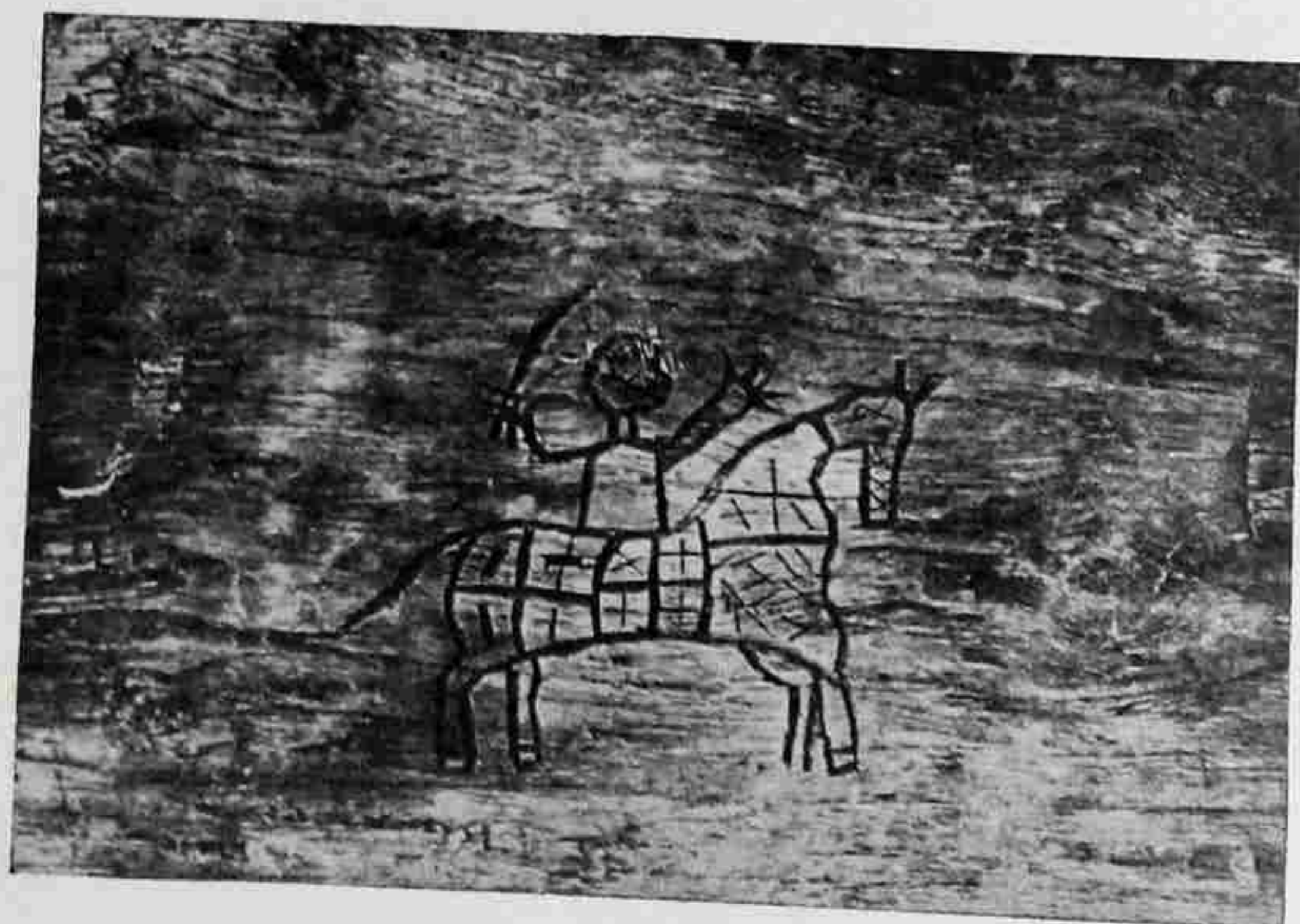
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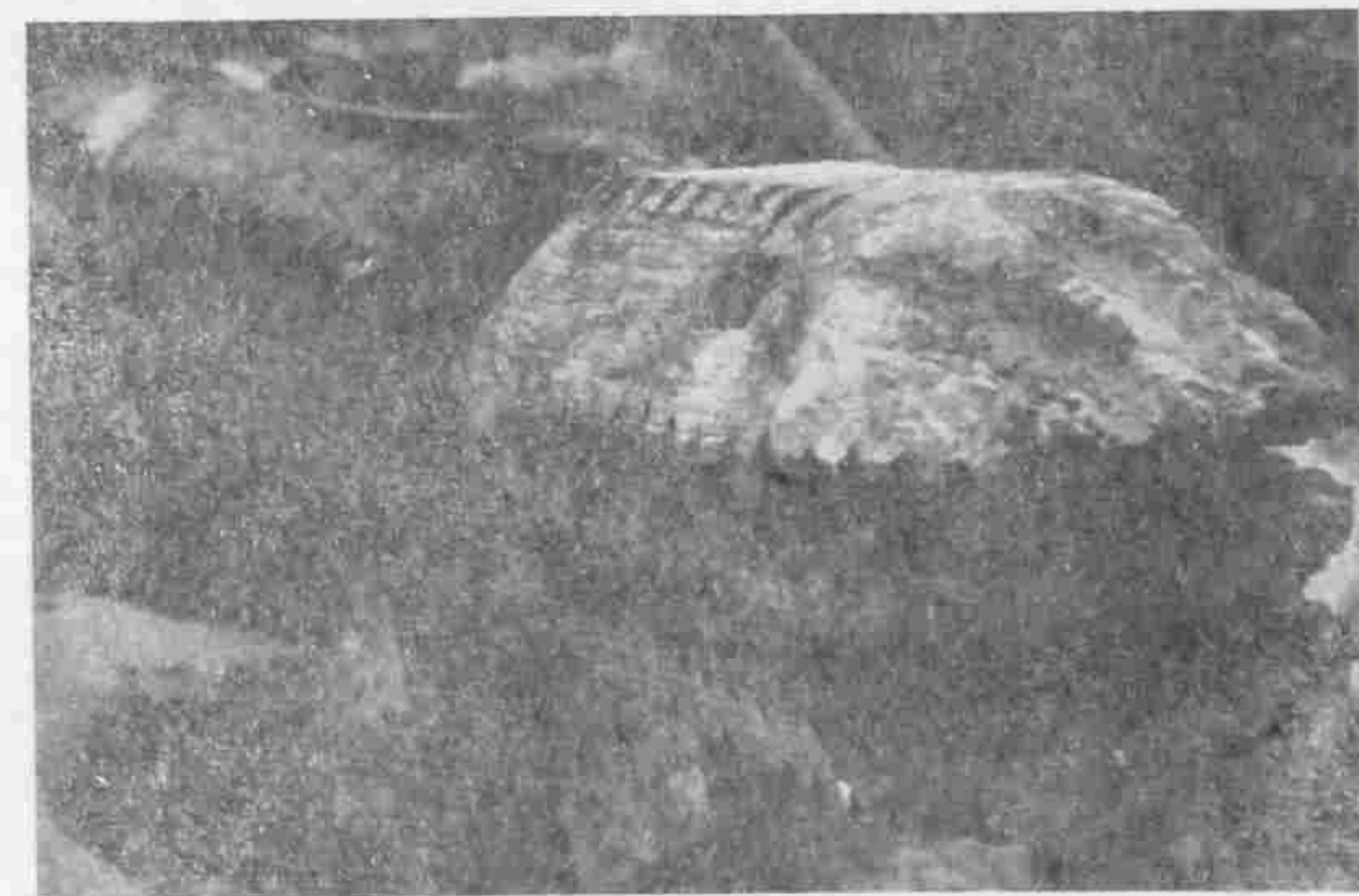
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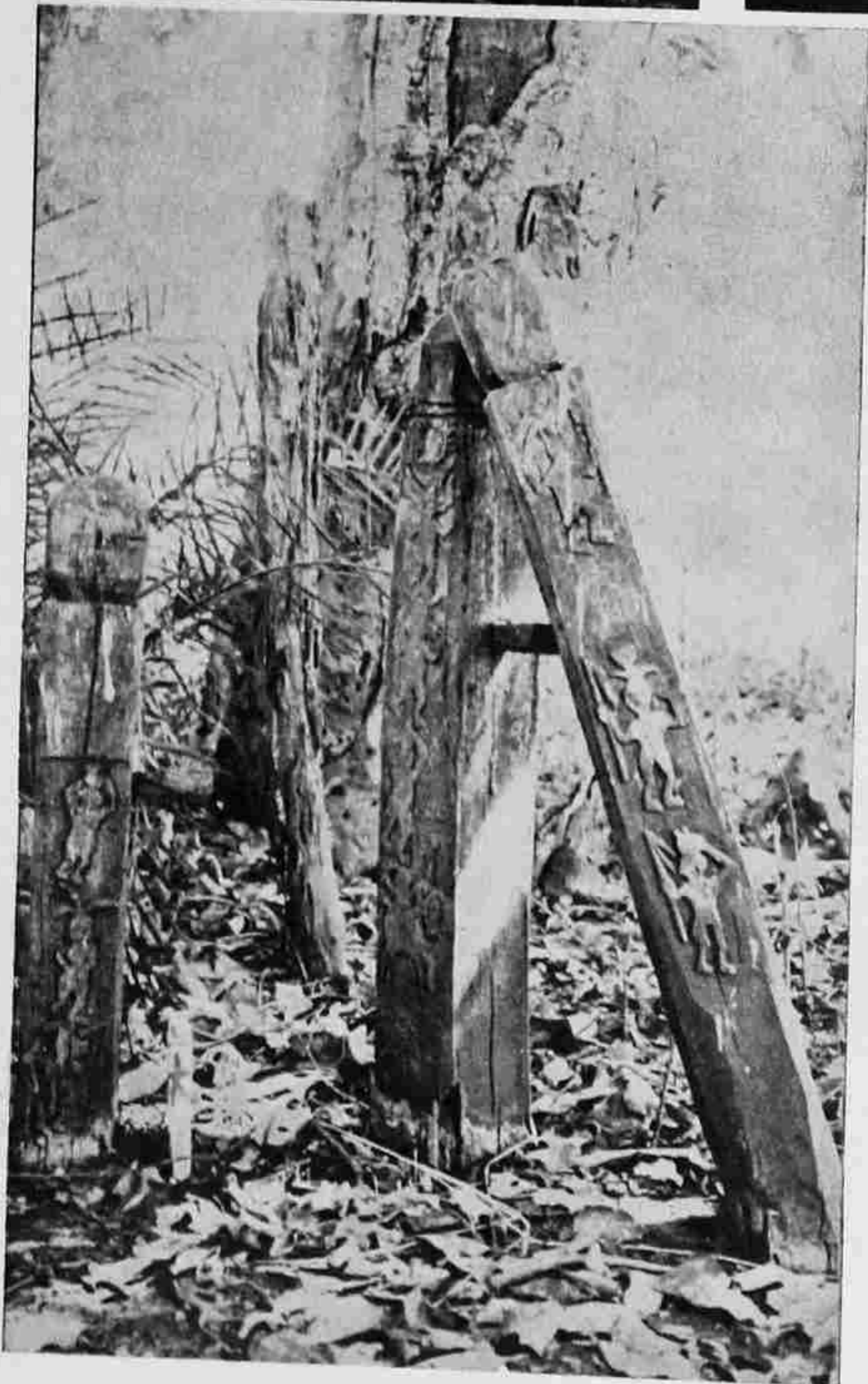
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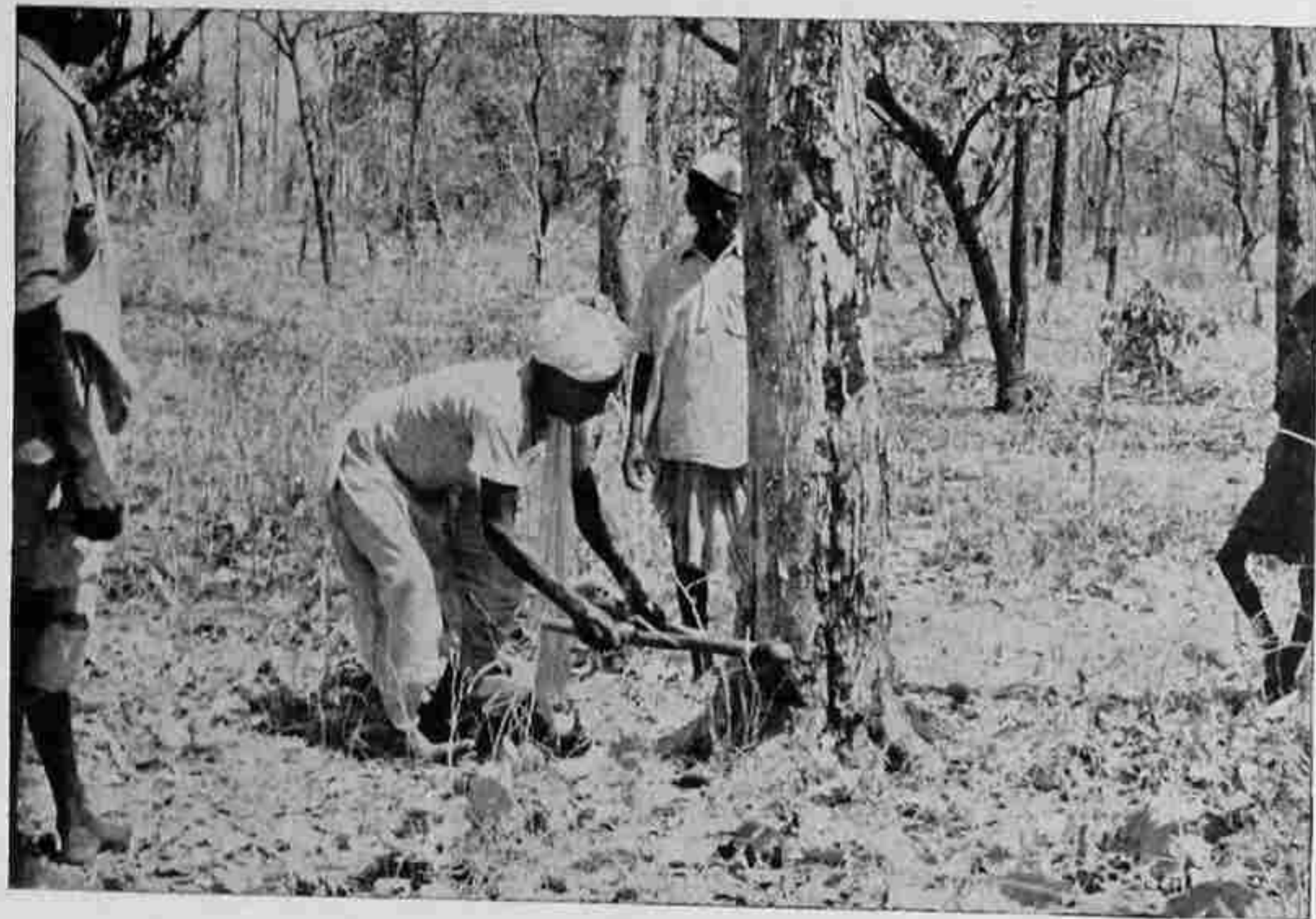
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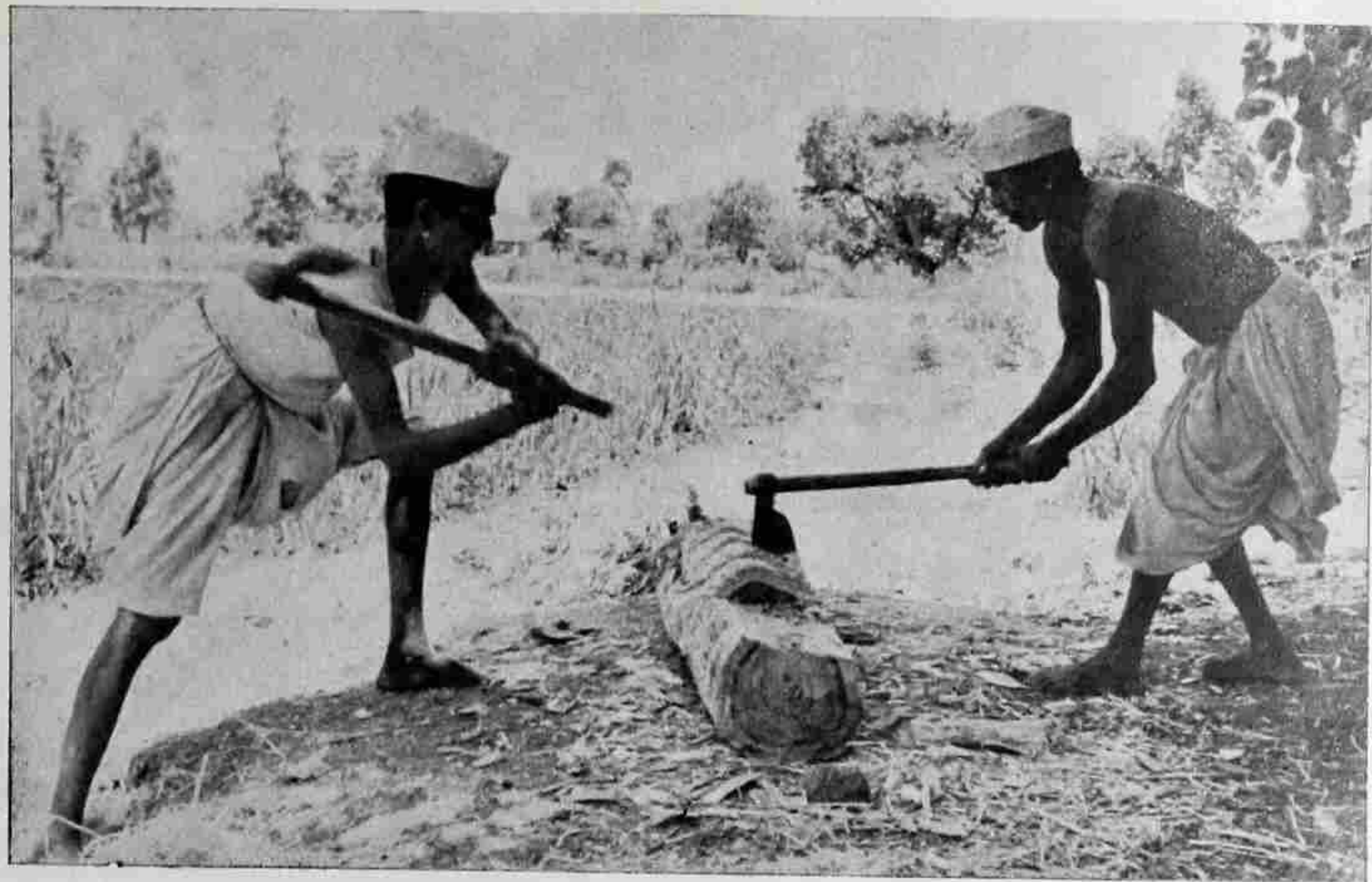
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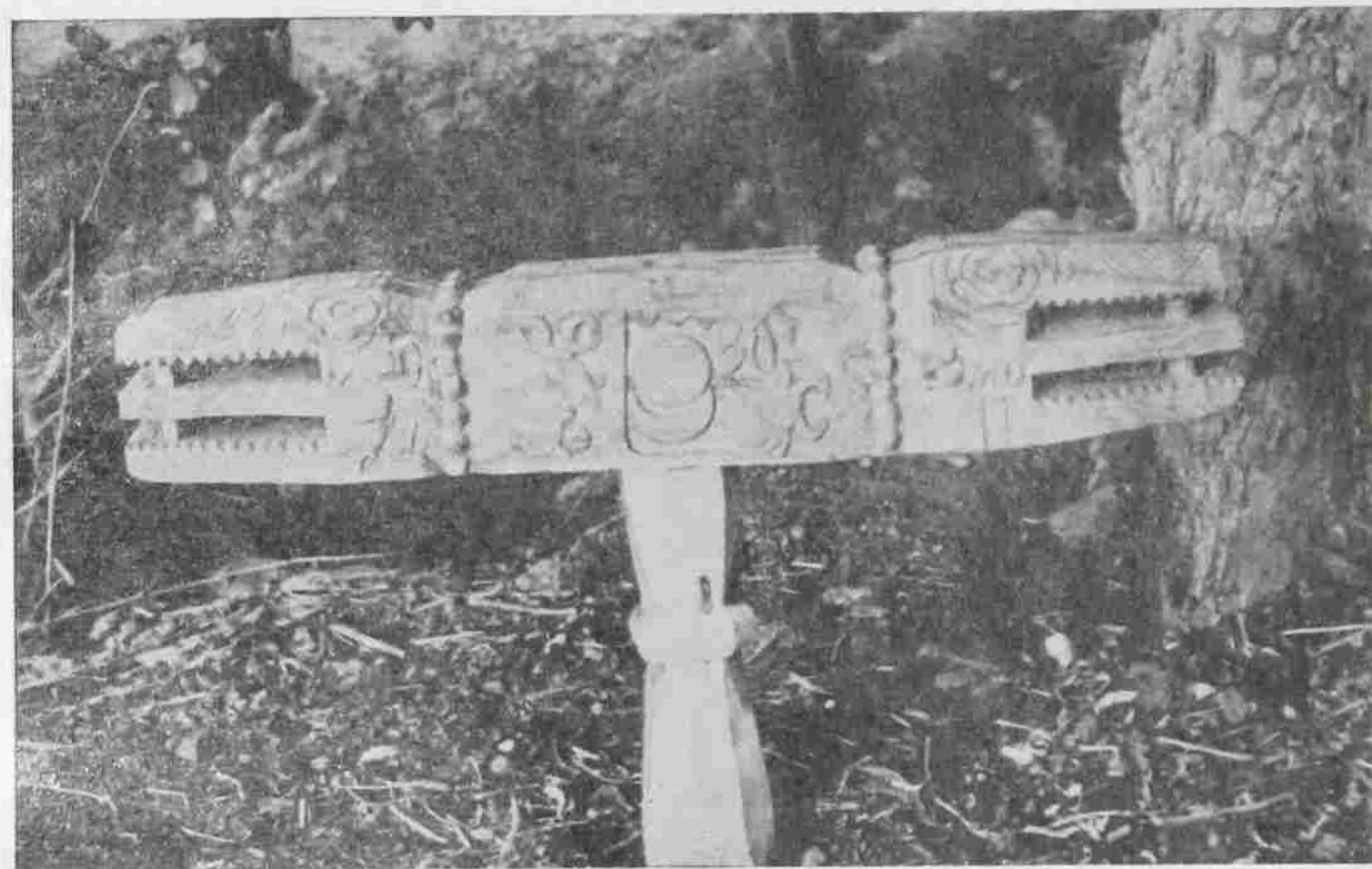
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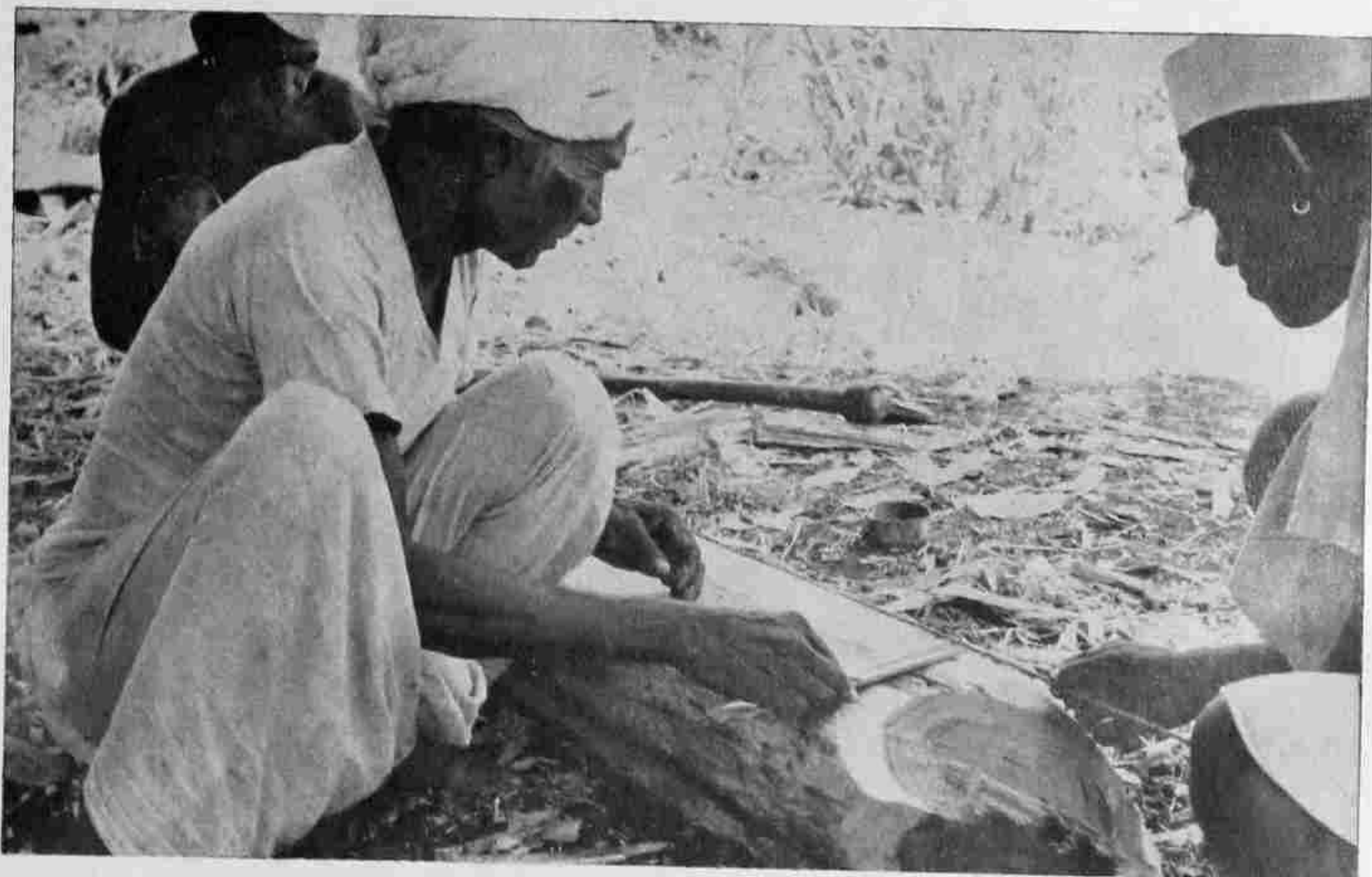
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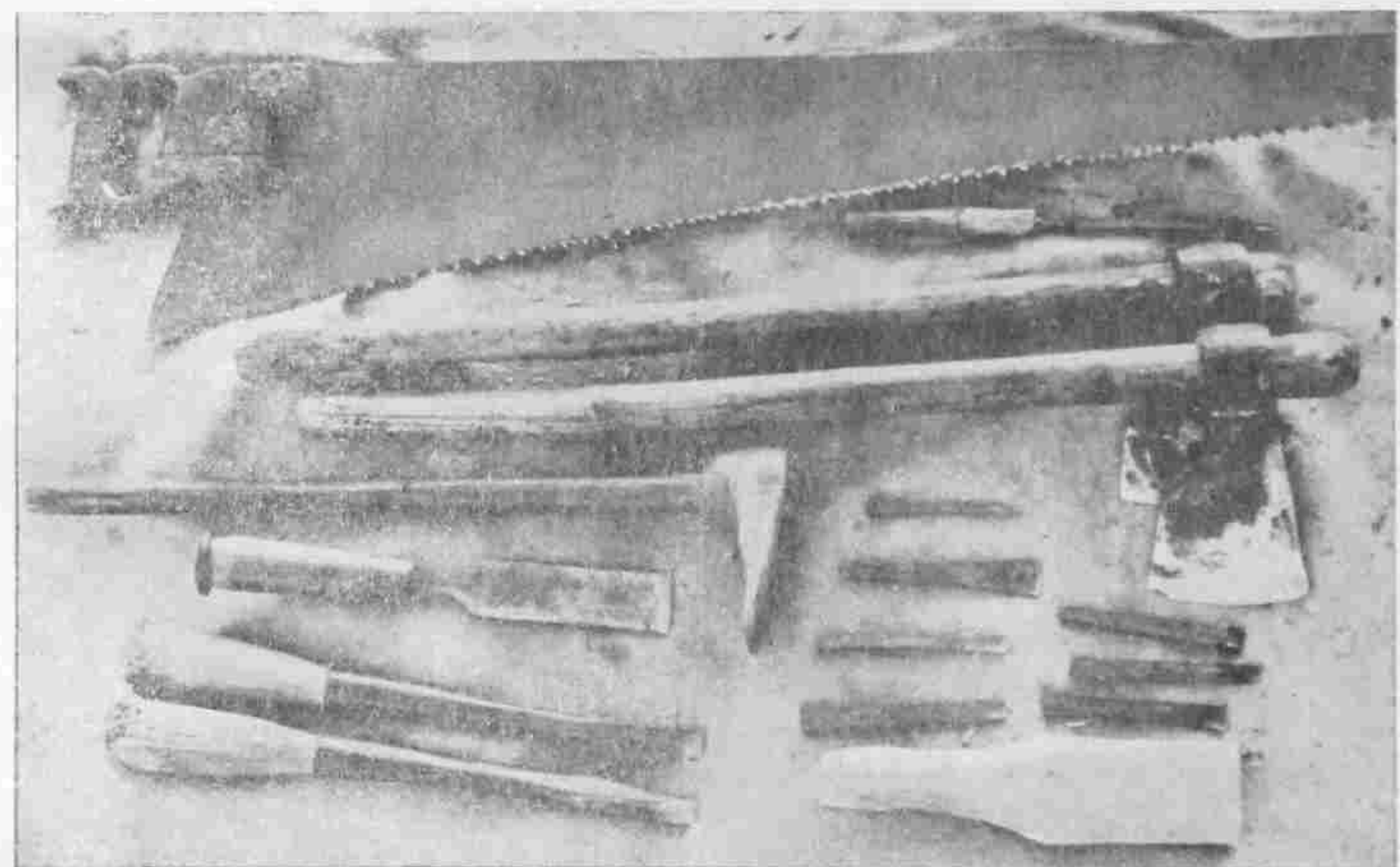
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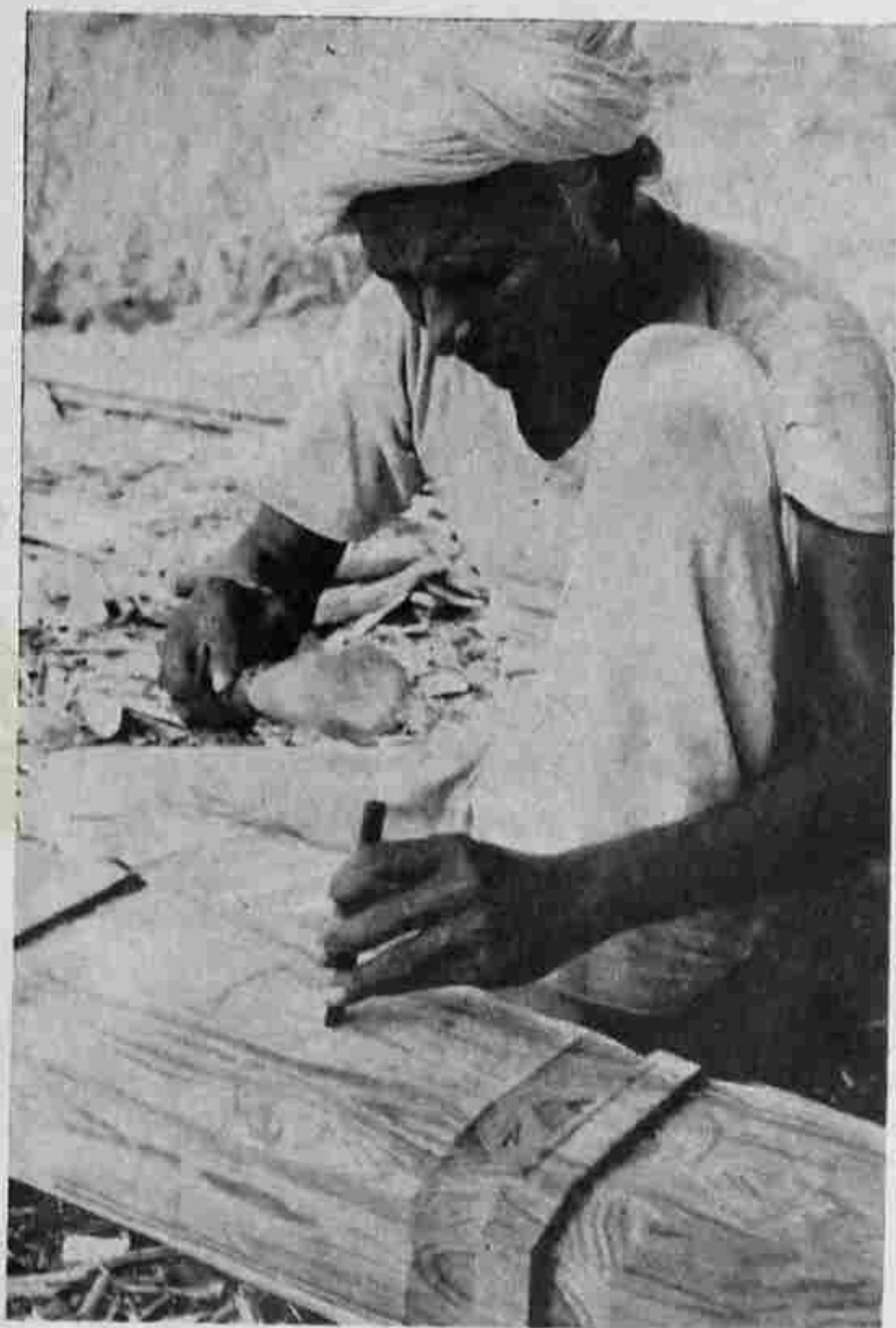
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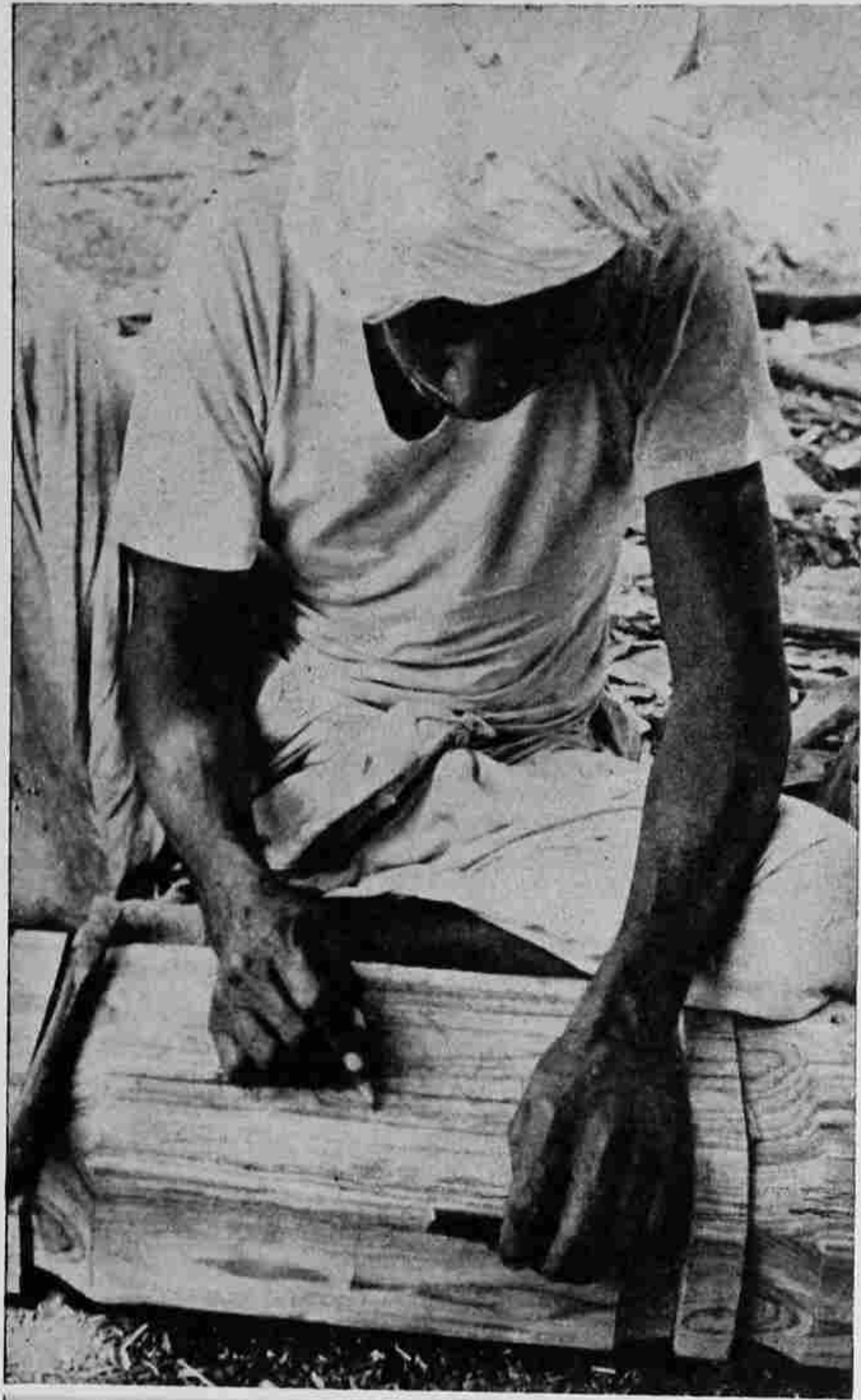


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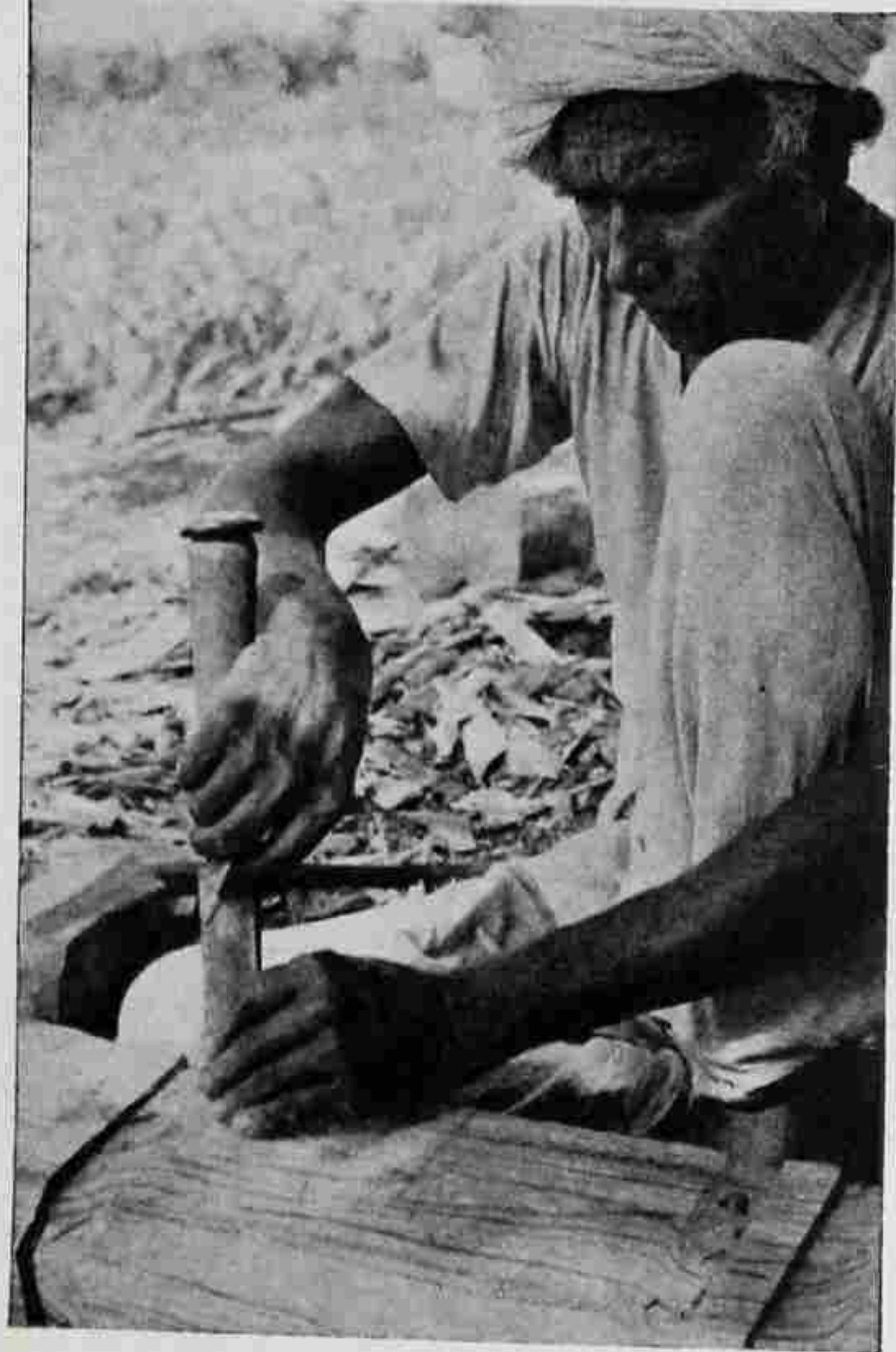


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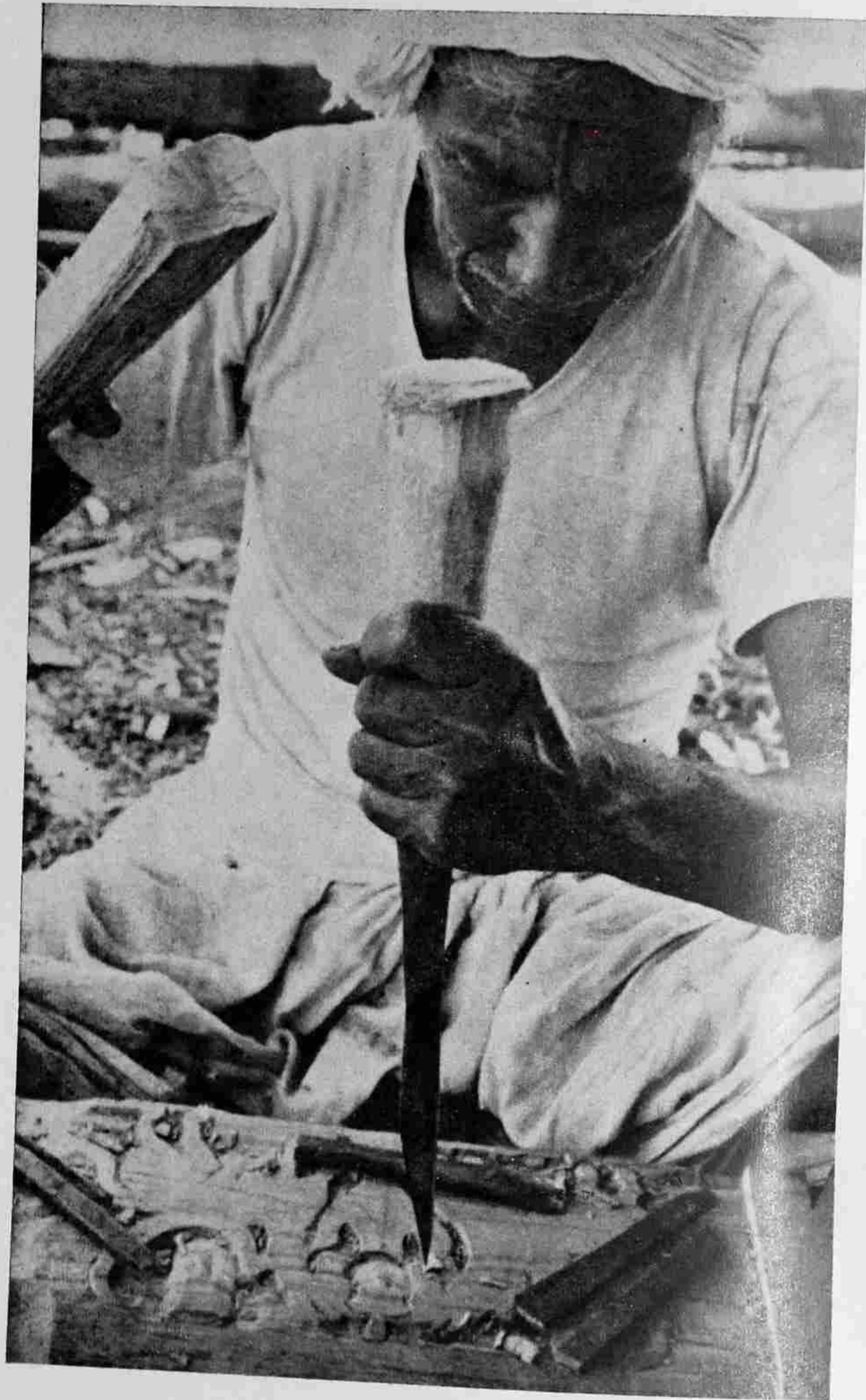
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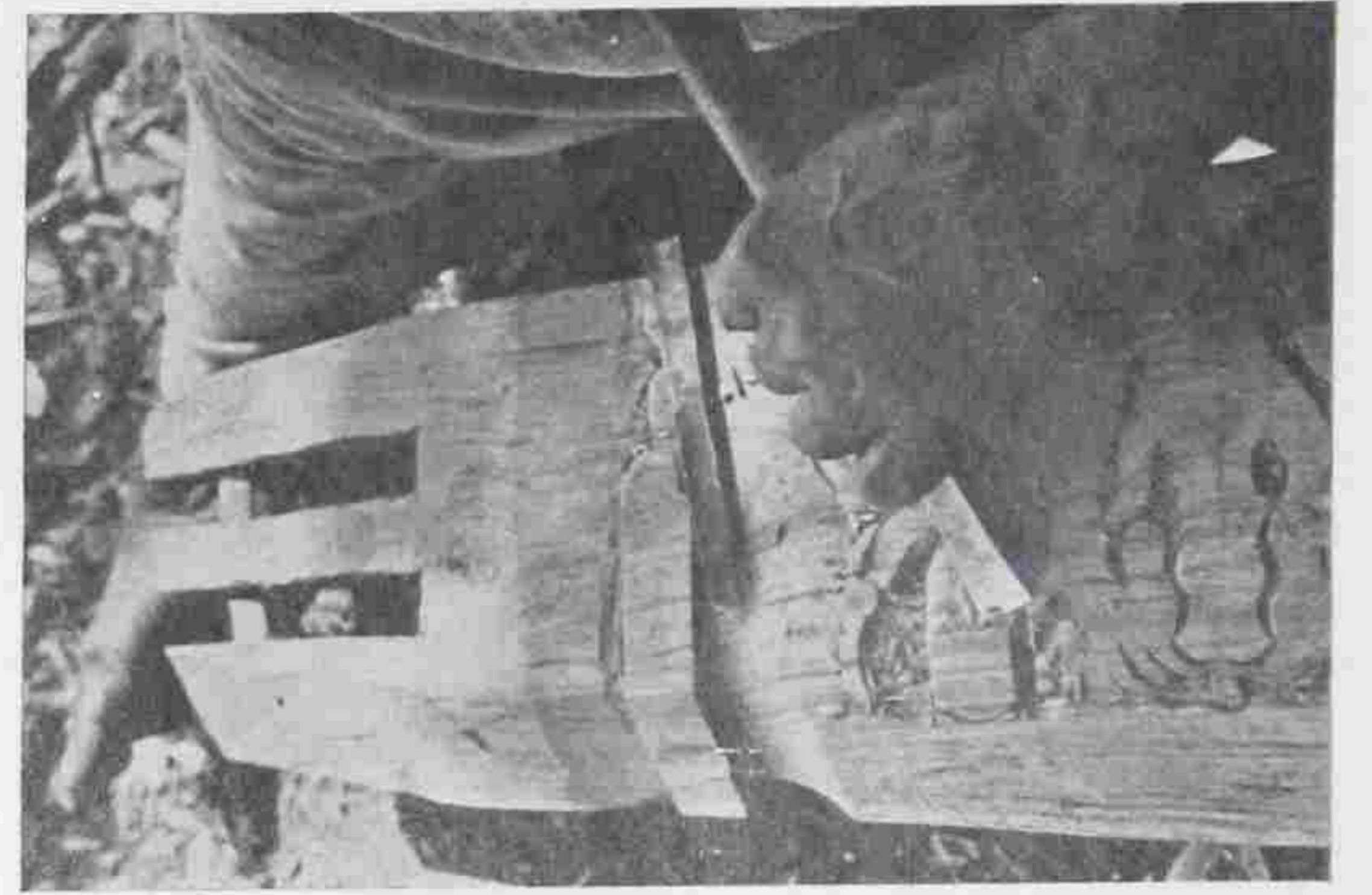
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