

Henupoto Wara: Supernatural Anti-Hero of the Mythical Past

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**Presented at the Double Session in Memory of
Professor Emeritus Philip D. Young,
Anthropologist and Mentor across Cultures**

**Chair and organizer: Carla Guerrón Montero (University of Delaware)
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Philip Young, Mentor and Friend, Las Guías, Coclé, Panamá



Indigenous Comarcas and Provinces of Panama, 2002

Comarcas and Provinces of Panama, Map by EoN Systems, S.A.
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GIS database digitized from 1:250,000 scale paper map sheets provided by:
Instituto Nacional Geografica "Tommy Guardia"
Coordinates: UTM Zone 17, scale in meters. Datum: North American Datum 1927, Canal Zone



0 37.5 75 150 225 300 Kilometers

scale: 1:1,500,000 1 centimeter equals 15 kilometers

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**Emberá – lowland
tropical rain forest
subsistence
horticulturist.**

**Gathering and
preparing medicinal
plants from the rain
forest in the upper
watershed**





Hunting white-lipped peccaries that often travel in large groups over an extensive geography.

White-lipped are the larger of the two peccary species in the Darién and they can be quite aggressive and dangerous.





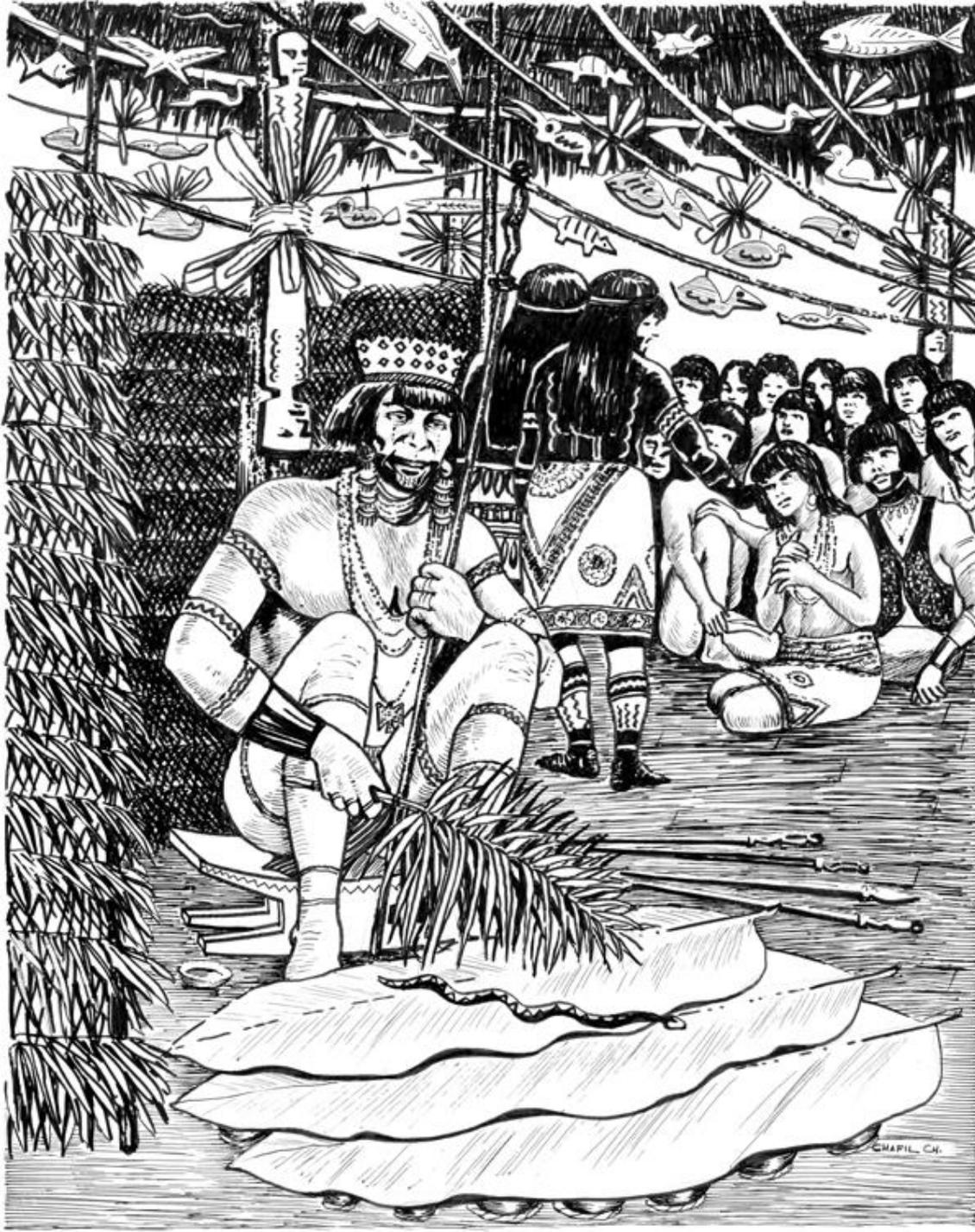
Young Emberá women ritually prepare the house with aromatic herbs that will be attractive to the spirits so they will come and interact with the Shaman to assist with a curing ceremony





Calling the spirits with a conch shell, music, dance and spirit helpers in order to petition them to intervene in assisting Emberá with a curing ceremony



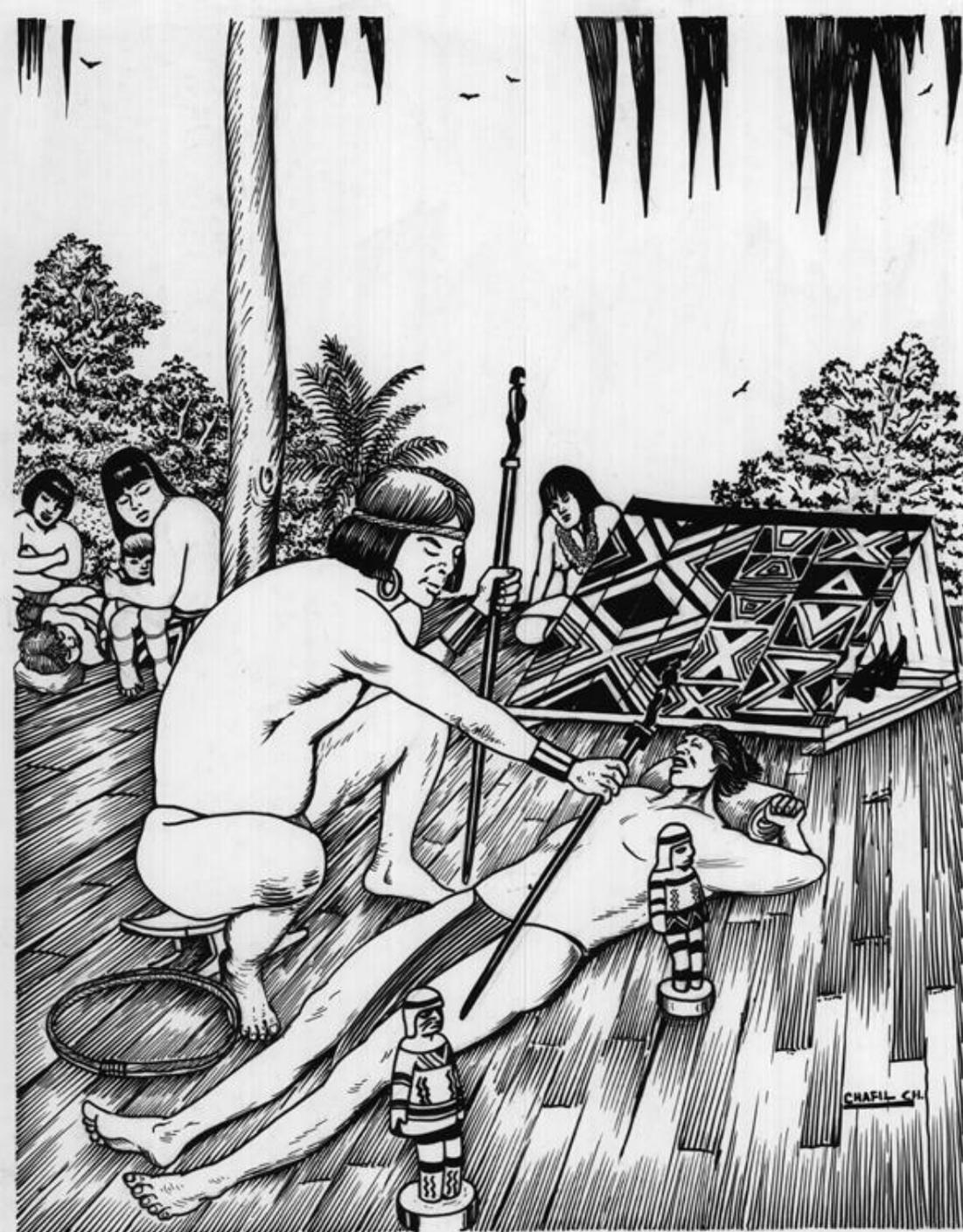


A shaman surrounded by his spirit helpers is chanting over the chicha (corn beer) that is used to summon the often reluctant spirits to assist in a curing ceremony



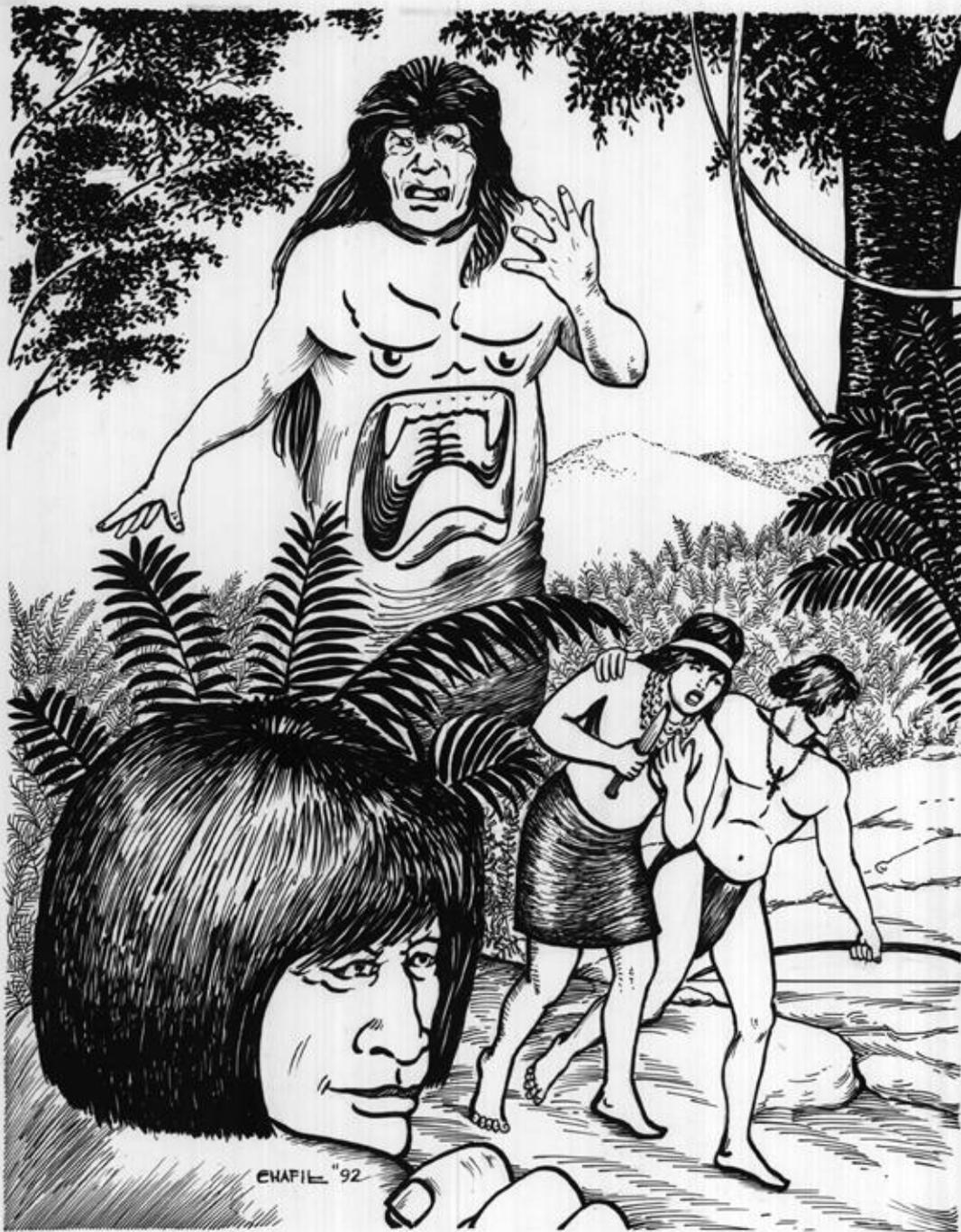
After the ceremony the special chicha that is used to seduce the spirits through its intoxicating smell is drunk by participants

Sometimes a shaman must transport the sick person to the spirit underworld in a special container that is conceived as an upside down canoe in order to engage the spirits to assist in a cure.





Many demons inhabit
the Emberá
supernatural world
... one of the most
malevolent, Antomiá,
eats the souls of
Emberá



Another evil forest demon, Pakore, appears to a hunter from the distance as a beautiful woman and as the unsuspecting hunter approaches she grows to a giant's statue, becomes ugly and a large mouth opens up in her abdomen in which she uses to devour the hunter.

Example of Section 23 - Emberá version

(1) Mābe b'abadyimana, kewa'ra wid'ibadyimana:

(2) "Bueno, barã drõarãma mū papara karēba beasima?, asimana. "Mū papara".

(3) "Papada karēba beasida?; damaba ka' beasiada", asimana. "papara damaba".

(4) "Bia b'ūad'a", asimana.

(5) Aramaũda wãsimana nurēma dia'ped'ed'a jĩdrũ' dogosimana lonche katũ' dogosimana.

(6) Aramaũda damara beakuasida, damara kena beasida chaba, drũ' beab'esimanada chaba.

(7) Bueno, mābe kewa'ra zesida.

Example of Section 23 - English version

(1) Then he was there; in the afternoon he always asked them:

(2) "Well, for you the elders what killed my mother?" he said.

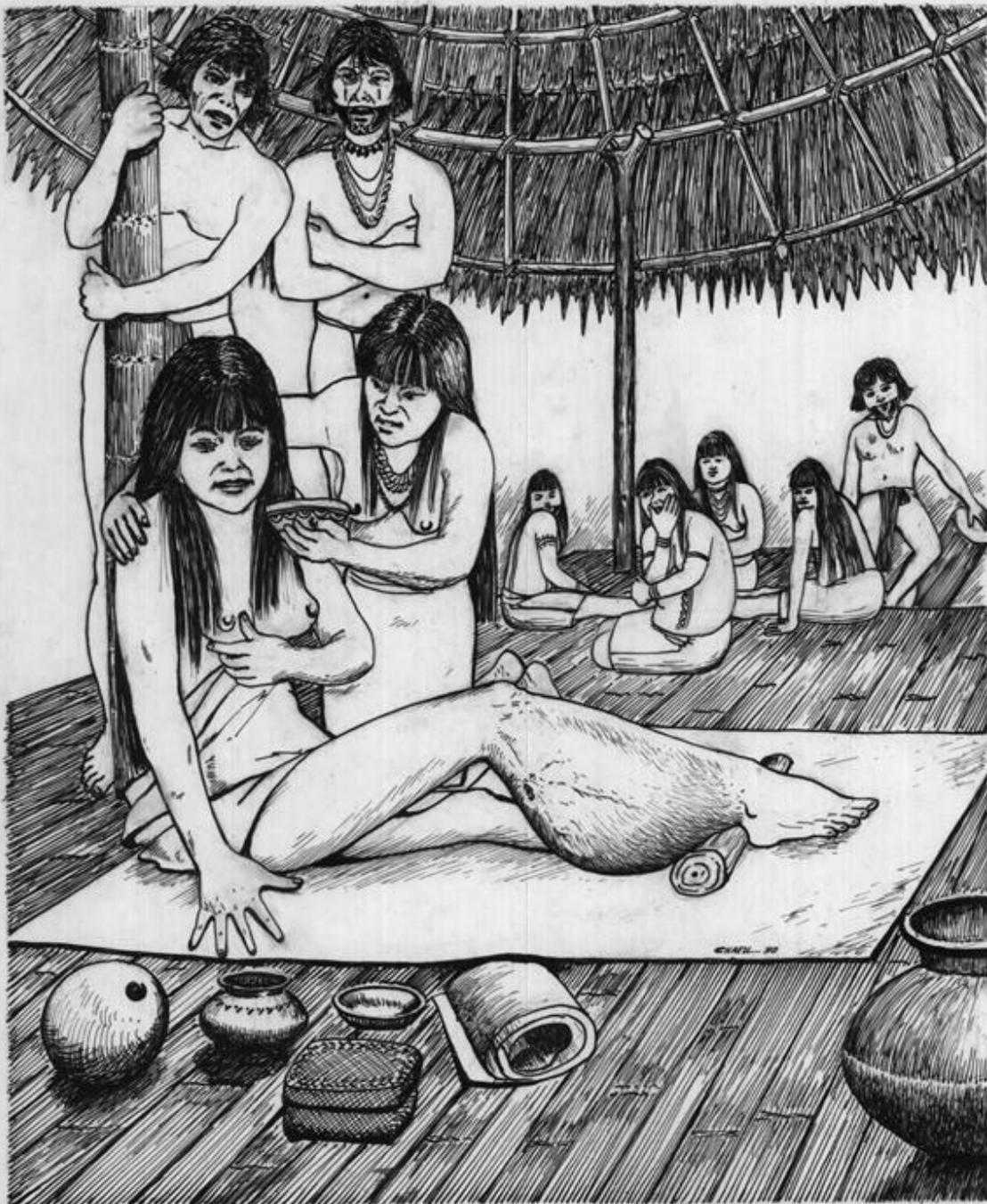
(3) "What killed your mother? "A snake bit her and killed your mother," they said.

(4) "Very well," Jīrū'poto said.

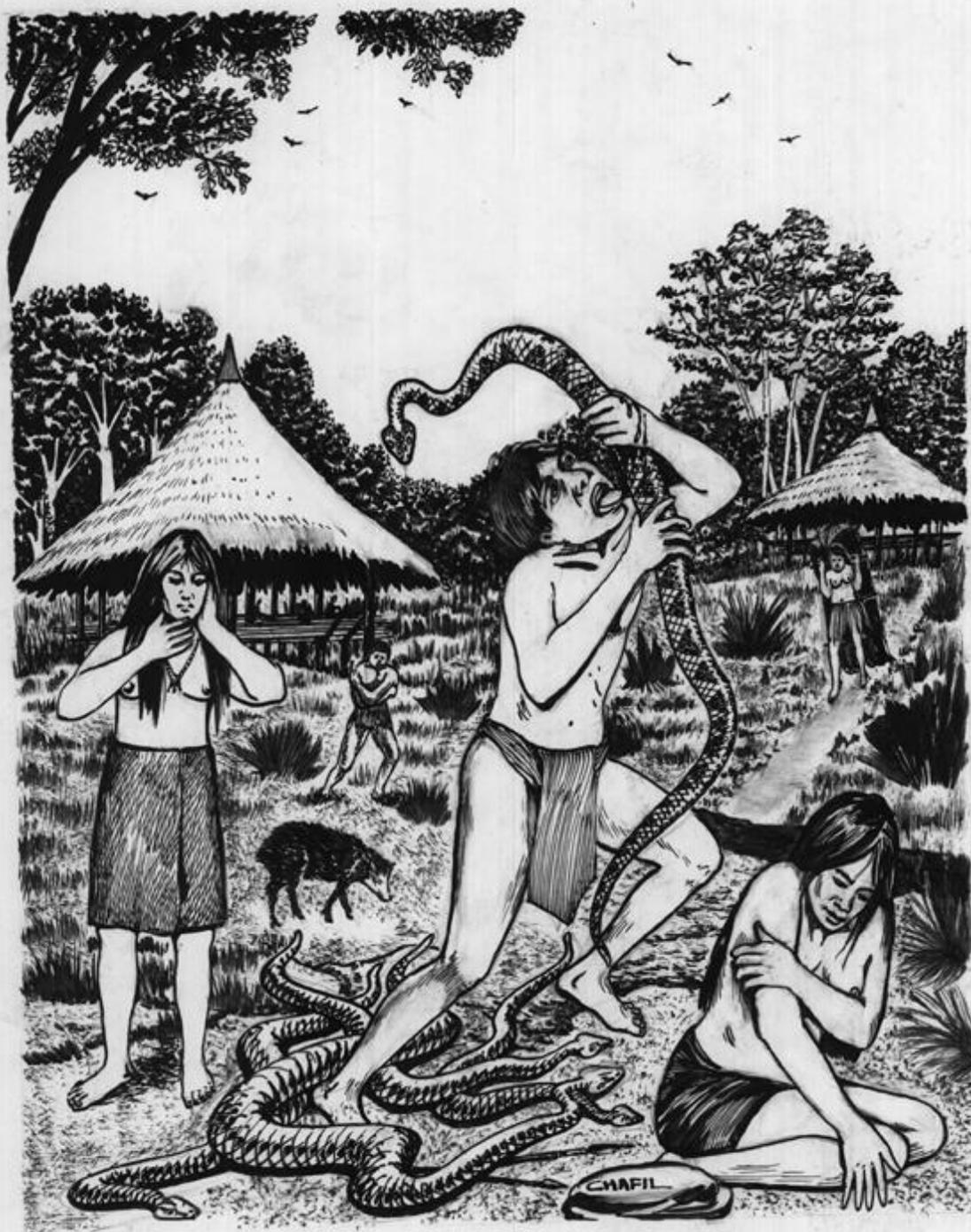
(5) The next day very early in the morning he set out with all of his snack.

(6) At once he began to kill the snakes with his arrow, he continued killing all the snakes with his arrow.

(7) Then he returned in the afternoon.



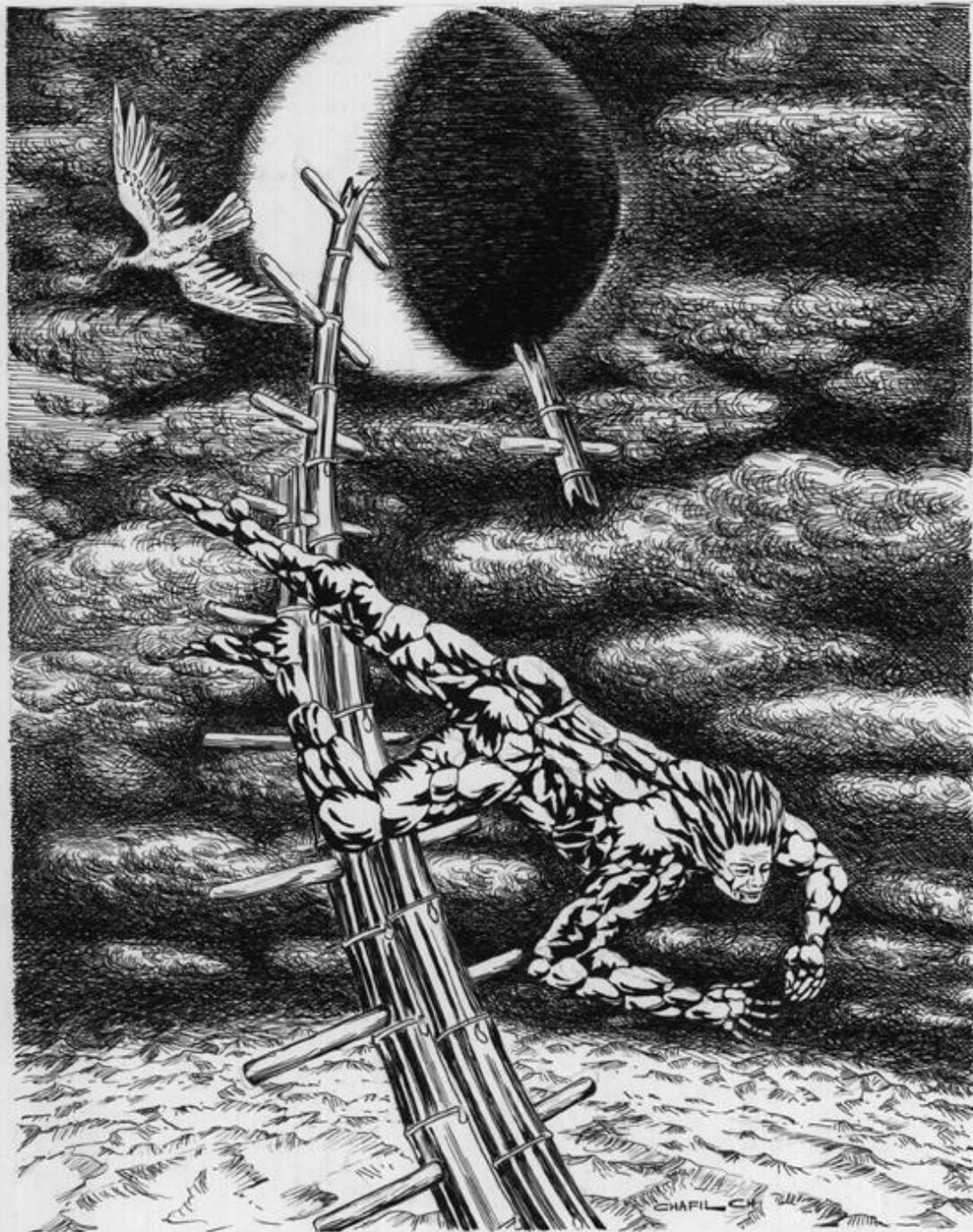
The Emberá woman becomes pregnant in her leg as the result of the union between her and the creator spirit. Her friends and family are rightly concerned for her welfare.



The mother dies as Henupoto is born and he grows strong by drinking menstrual blood and afterbirth as his chicha. If no “chicha” is available he kills and drinks the blood of snakes. The women consider him a nuisance. They are always trying to find ways to get rid of him.



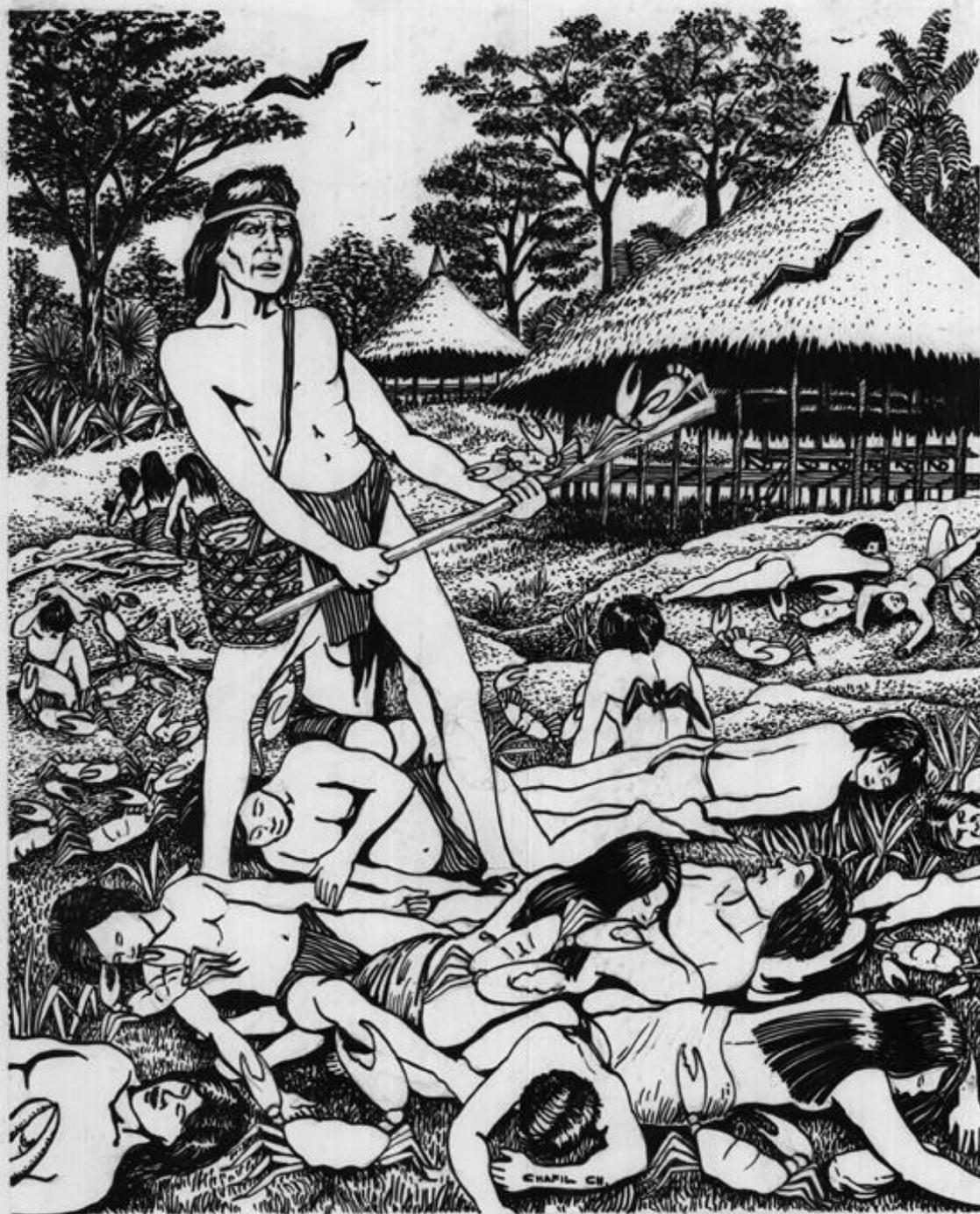
Henupoto is told by the elders that the moon killed his mother and he plants a bamboo ladder that grow up to the moon. As he reaches to grab off the face of the moon the Emberá elders, fearful of upsetting the natural order, send the woodpecker to cause the bamboo ladder to fall.



As Henupoto falls he declares "mohopono, mohopono, mohopono" (balsa flower) and he converts into a balsa flower and floats on the air currents. Eventually he tires of floating and cries "mongora, mongara, mongara" (rock) and he converts to stone and falls back to earth and into the underworld beneath the earth.



Henupoto falls into the underworld where he encounters the Amurukos, a spirit being that derive sustenance from the smell of food. They defecate out their ears. They are amazed that Henupoto can eat and they all demand to have Henupoto carve them an anus with a sharp stick so they can eat and defecate too.



An number of game animals such as the blue land crabs attack the Amurukos but Henupoto kills the crabs and the other game animals and teaches the Amurukos to eat them.

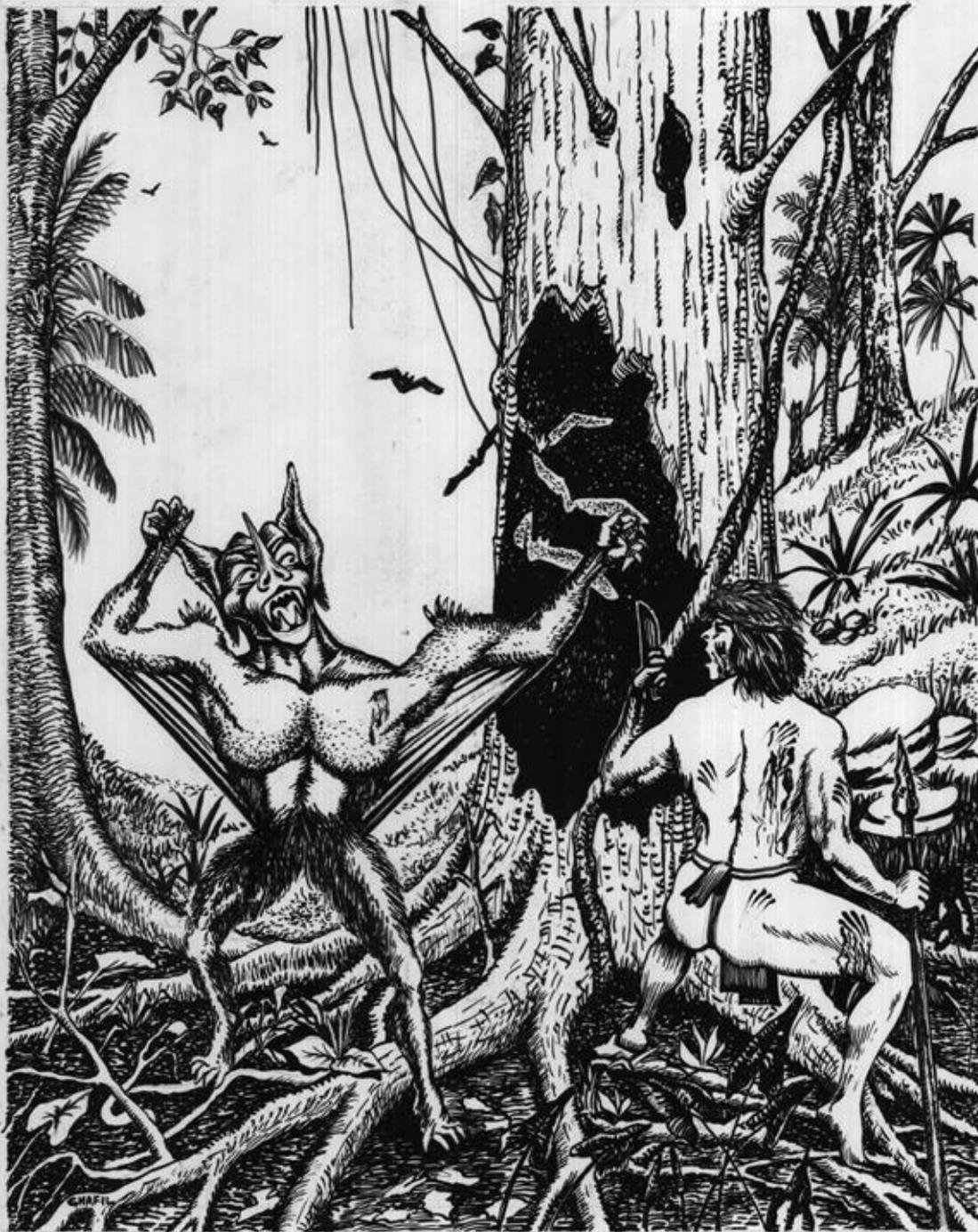
Eventually Henupoto returns to his world of the Emberá.



The people tell Henupoto that the Ge killed his mother. Henupoto and his balsa raft is swallowed by the Ge, a giant aquatic demon that looks like a giant constrictor with deer antlers. Inside he finds all kinds of food and Emberá dying of hunger. He cuts off the heart of the Ge and drinks the blood and roasts the heart and feeds the people.



Henupoto builds a fire in the Ge and props open the Ge's anus with logs. The Ge expels the contents of his stomach and the people are freed along with all the different food plants and animals.



The people tell Henupoto that Geambuima killed his mother so Henupoto goes to kill the demon. He is beaten by the demon and as he lies dying he says:

"Well, even if I die; tell everyone that I am going to die, but I am not going to die."



“I will turn into different types, in an instant I will turn into blood suckers.”
As Henupoto lay dying from the mortal wounds of the Geambuima all the blood sucking creatures of the forest came forth from the blood leaking from his body. Ticks, vampire bats, leaches, flies, chiggers, mosquitos, sand fleas, and assassin bugs.

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