



**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF
ADVANCED STUDY
SIMLA**

PRELIMINARY EXCAVATIONS AT PREHISTORIC
SITES NEAR JANAMPET

BY

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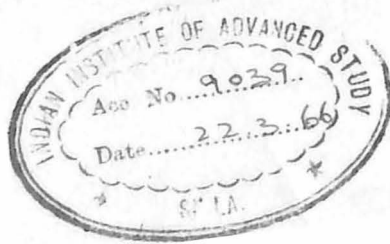


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Janampet : The place is situated in the thick forest of Warangal District and is at a distance of six miles from the right bank of the Godavari. Mr. Wakefield had visited Janampet in 1918 and opened a cromlech at Polechetti Cherugudda, a site about a mile to the east of Janampet. The results of his work have been published in the Report of this Department for that year. Another prehistoric site has been noticed in the vicinity of Janampet. It is called Dongatogu and is situated at a distance of seven miles due west. Somehow this site seems to have escaped Mr. Wakefield's notice. Hon'ble Sir Theodore Tasker who is keenly interested in prehistory visited this area in connection with some development scheme and due to his visit immense facilities were afforded to me in the investigation of the sites which are otherwise not easily accessible. Polechetti Cherugudda consists of a hill about 100 ft. higher than the surrounding level, the top and slopes of which are honeycombed with cromlechs roughly numbering about a thousand. At this place I selected three for excavation. For the sake of easy reference I shall call them A, B and C respectively.

The cromlech A is situated on the highest point of the hill, a place from which the tank locally called Polechetti Cheru is visible, and has got a ring of stones around it measuring 35 feet in diameter. The cromlech is situated nearly in the centre of the ring, the upper slab measured 10 feet north to south and 6 feet east-west with a thickness of about 18 inches. The slab rests upon 12 smaller slabs, four each on the western and eastern sides and 2 each on the northern and southern sides. The northern slabs were not completely intact. There were tall trees and other rank vegetation growing within and without the ring. The upper slab of the cromlech was carefully removed and the chamber contained practically nothing up to a depth of 1 foot, below which there was soft sand up to a further depth of one foot, which was carefully examined and removed. It did not yield any antiquities. Below the sand there was natural rock. There were no cists in this cromlech and no antiquities were discovered in it.

Chromlech B : Another tomb was selected on the northern slope of the hill and was called B. The outer circle of stones has either disappeared or has been covered up by the sand that has been brought down by the rains from the higher levels of the hill. The upper slab was supported by 10 smaller slabs. The inside of the cromlech was filled with soft sand and it contained no sarcophagus. The sand was carefully examined and removed until the bottom slab was exposed which measured 8 feet 3 inches north-south and 6 feet 8 inches east-west and 1 foot 5 inches thick. The slab was roughly rectangular excepting on the north-eastern side, where it was rounded. The finds in this grave are considerably interesting. They consist of potsherds, iron articles and a small gold ring.

Cromlech C : This is situated at a distance of about 40 feet to the north-east of the cromlech B. The outer circle had a diameter of about 24 feet. The upper

slab measured 10 feet 3 inches north-south and 5 feet 3 inches east-west. The thickness being about 2 feet. It contained two cists placed side by side and measuring 6 feet 9 inches and 7 feet in length and 1 foot 8 inches and 1 foot 11 inches in width. This grave also contained potsherds and iron implements.

The other site Dongatogu is not easily accessible and a cart track leads to it. There are roughly 1500 cromlechs situated nearly at all points of the hill. Lady Tasker had been pleased to select a cromlech at this place for excavations. The top slab of the cromlech measured 10 feet 9 inches north-south and 8 feet 6 inches east-west, the thickness of the slab being 1 foot 10 inches which was supported by eleven smaller slabs, three each on the western and eastern sides, two on the northern side, and three on the southern side. The outer circle measured 35 feet in diameter. There was a gradual slope from the chamber towards the ring of the stones around it, and this area was paved up with rubble. When the top slab was removed it was discovered that the chamber contained nothing up to a depth of 6 inches. Beyond that there was soft sand up to a further depth of 11 inches. Sir Theodore, Lady Tasker and Miss Helen Tasker actually participated in the excavations. The cromlech contained no cist, but few iron objects and potsherds were discovered in it.

The area seems to have been infested with white ants and nearly in all the graves that have been opened white ants have been discovered in great number. It is quite possible that these ants might have eaten away bones and pottery. Besides, as the cromlechs are not air-tight and as there are crevices between the slabs, rain water and atmospheric effects might have helped the disintegration of these objects. It also appears that these cromlechs were used as family vaults because some of them definitely contained more than one sarcophagi and in some cases some of the cists are so small that they appear to have been specially made for children. The absence of cists in some cromlechs has to be explained. I first thought it quite possible that some of these cists might have been removed by local people for being used as water troughs for their cattle or for some other purpose. But upon enquiries I learnt that there is a very strong superstition in the locality against doing any act of vandalism to these tombs. The superstition may be quite groundless. But we can see that because of it the tombs have suffered very little from human hands. It is quite likely that during the period to which these graves belong the cists of one cromlech, after lapse of some time, might have been utilised in the other cromlechs. As the cromlechs were used as family vaults and as they were often opened for the insertion of fresh dead bodies it cannot be expected that the remains of the bodies that were put earlier should be found intact. The stone used for the slab is locally available, but it certainly required great amount of skill to cut them according to their own requirements. An attempt has been made in the slabs used in the circle around the cromlech to make them curvilinear. In some cases very thick slabs have been used to serve as the top of the cromlech, in some cases the thickness is about 3 feet. Sandstone has been used throughout in these cromlechs, in some cases it is imbedded with pebbles.

Iron Objects: No iron objects were found in cromlech A at Polechetti Cheru-

gudda. But in B and C some stirrup like objects and hoes were discovered. In B an iron spear about 3 feet in length was found. While at Dongatogu a knife and a hoe were found. Although all of them have been discovered in extremely rusted condition, yet comparatively they are better preserved than other objects. These people appear to have been good metallurgists.

Pottery : It is very difficult to form any definite opinion about the pottery that was placed in the tombs of these ancient people, because no complete pieces have been recovered. Potsherds have been discovered in considerable number but they do not help to form any opinion about the shape or polish of the pottery. Usually they are of light red colour

Bones : In opening the tombs the prehistorian is keenly interested in taking out the bones in as complete a form as possible. But it will be in vain to search for bones in these tombs. As already pointed out no attempt was made to preserve the body. Even the sarcophagi are invariably without lids. The occasional opening of the chamber for entering fresh bodies must have been detrimental to the preservation of bones. Besides the crevices between the slabs gave free admission to destructive animals who sometimes used these chambers as dwellings. Therefore, we should not be surprised if objects inside the cromlech are found in extremely disturbed condition.

The art of stone cutting seems to have made considerable advance during those days. They have split big rectangular slabs about three feet thick from the rock. The construction of the sarcophagi and the curved slabs of the rings show their great skill in cutting and dressing stone as also their knowledge of geometry. The rings around the cromlechs are perfect circles.

The great expanse of the cemeteries suggests that a town of the people to whom these graves belong must have flourished somewhere in the vicinity. During my short stay, I must confess, I could not succeed in locating it. The search may be taken up at a more suitable time. It is quite likely that these people might have preferred to make their places of last repose more durable than their transitory dwellings and if we do not succeed in discovering the remains of pretentious buildings we must at least get some data about their mode of life and the condition of their dwellings.

The architecture of these graves is plain and simple. They consist of a small chamber looking like a table raised above the ground. The top is invariably of monolithic slab of varying dimensions, the greatest length, width and thickness of the slab being 12 ft., 8 ft., and 3 ft., respectively. The slab is supported and held above the ground by smaller slabs (each roughly measuring 2' × 2' × 1') which generally vary in number, the maximum number being twelve and the minimum being four. It is difficult for me to say whether subsequent to the construction of the chamber, supports have been removed leaving in some cases the bare number necessary to support

the top slab. The chamber has been constructed on a sheet of rock and where it was not available a slab of rock equal to the size of the interior of the chamber has been fitted in. The thickness of one bottom slab that I could examine is 1' 3".

Majority of the chambers have got a ring of stones around them which has got a diameter even of thirty-five feet in some cases. The stones of the rings have been in some cases dressed into the shape of an arc so skilfully that they form a complete circle. The area between the chamber and the ring in some cases slopes towards the ring and is paved with rubble. This was done probably for draining away rain water from the chamber.

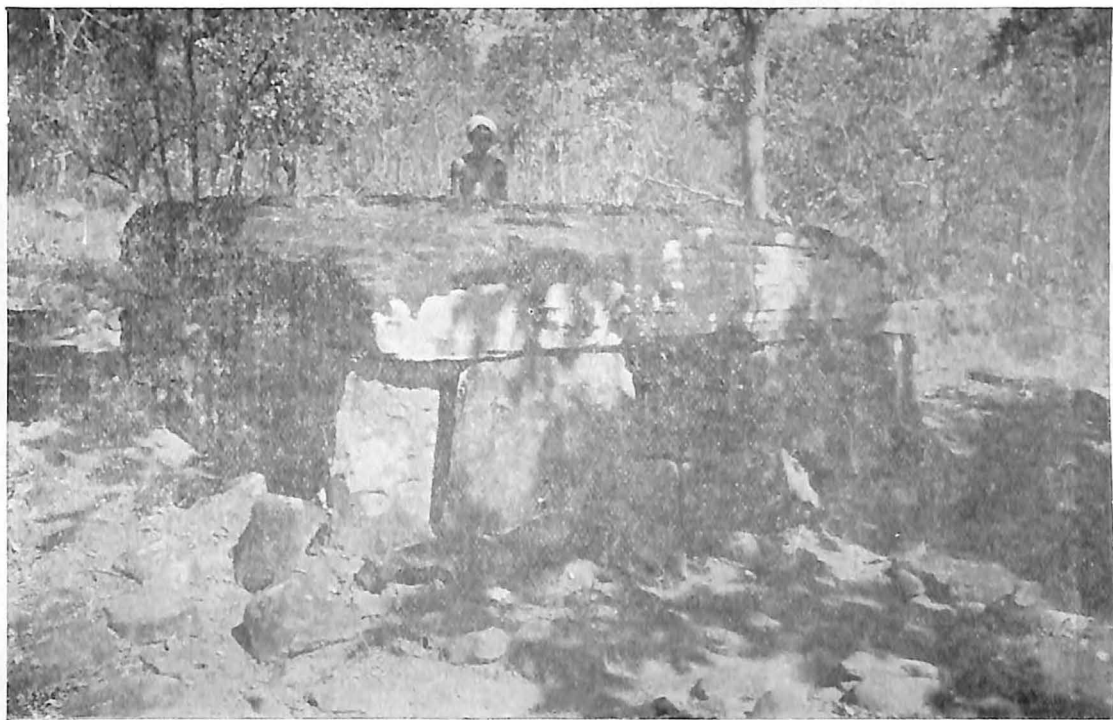
These interesting cemeteries of the old, deserve a most sympathetic and considerate treatment. They show signs of a high civilization and culture in this part of the country which is thinly populated and extremely backward in our modern civilization. Descendants of the primitive people are still to be found in great number in these parts and are locally known as Reddis. The conservation and preservation of these cemeteries will certainly require enormous amount. The trees will have to be cut down and treated with chemicals in order to check their future growth. Cemeteries by themselves have got a most pity inspiring sight but this effect at these places is highly aggravated by the devastation caused by the natural agencies. These graves have suffered not only by atmospheric effects but also by the unchecked wild growth of the trees which have in several cases upset the slabs and exposed the interior to vandalism not only by men but even by wild animals. At a time when Government is spending enormous amounts upon the propagation of learning upon higher research, it will be worthwhile to spend a decent sum upon the preservation of these historical records of the primitive people of this land. In this connection, I may mention a few measures which require immediate attention. All the trees and rank vegetation should be eradicated and treated with chemicals to check their further growth. Suitable arrangement should be made for drainage so that rain water may not accumulate in or around the graves and destroy them. Two chowkidars to be appointed, one at each place, to see that no act of vandalism is done to these monuments. Slabs which seem to have been disturbed should be set right.



(a) A CROMLECH AT DONGATOGU



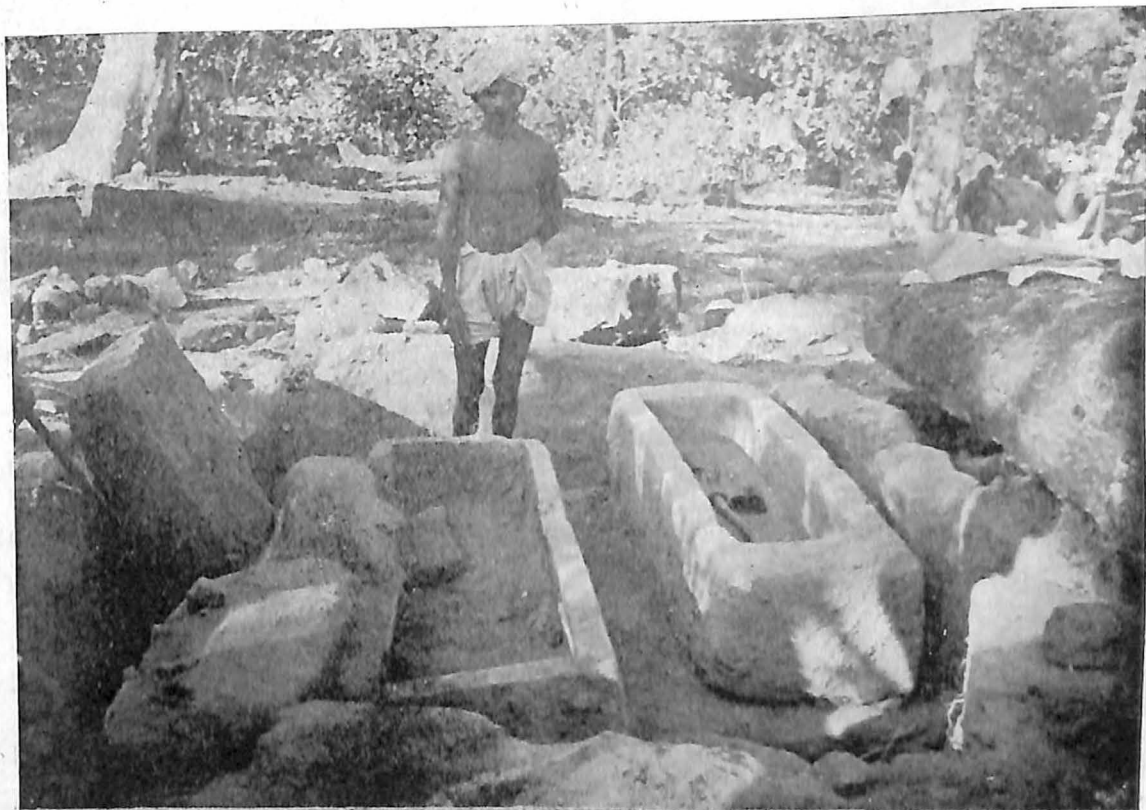
(b) A CROMLECH AT DONGATOGU SHOWING THE RAVAGES OF RANK VEGETATION



(a) CROMLECH (C) AT POLECHETTI CHERUGUDDA



(b) A CROMLECH AT POLECHETTI CHERUGUDDA



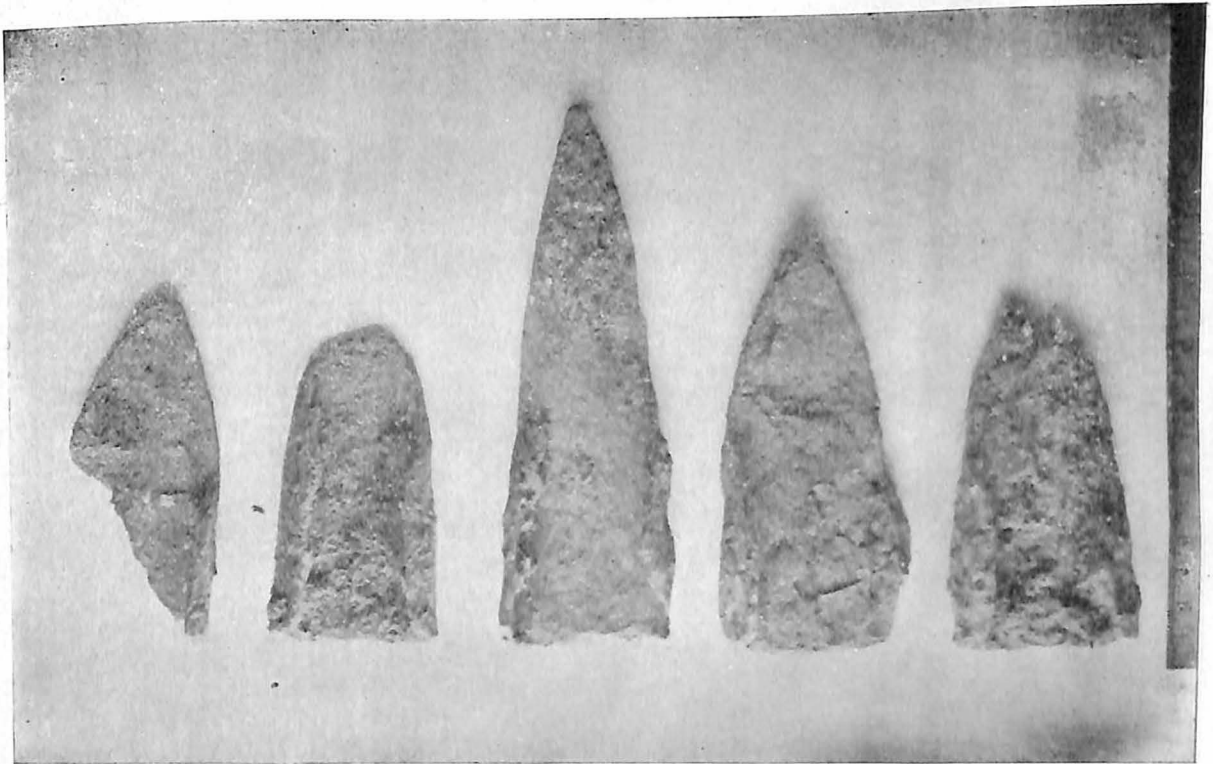
(a) A CROMLECH: AFTER THE TOP SLAB IS REMOVED



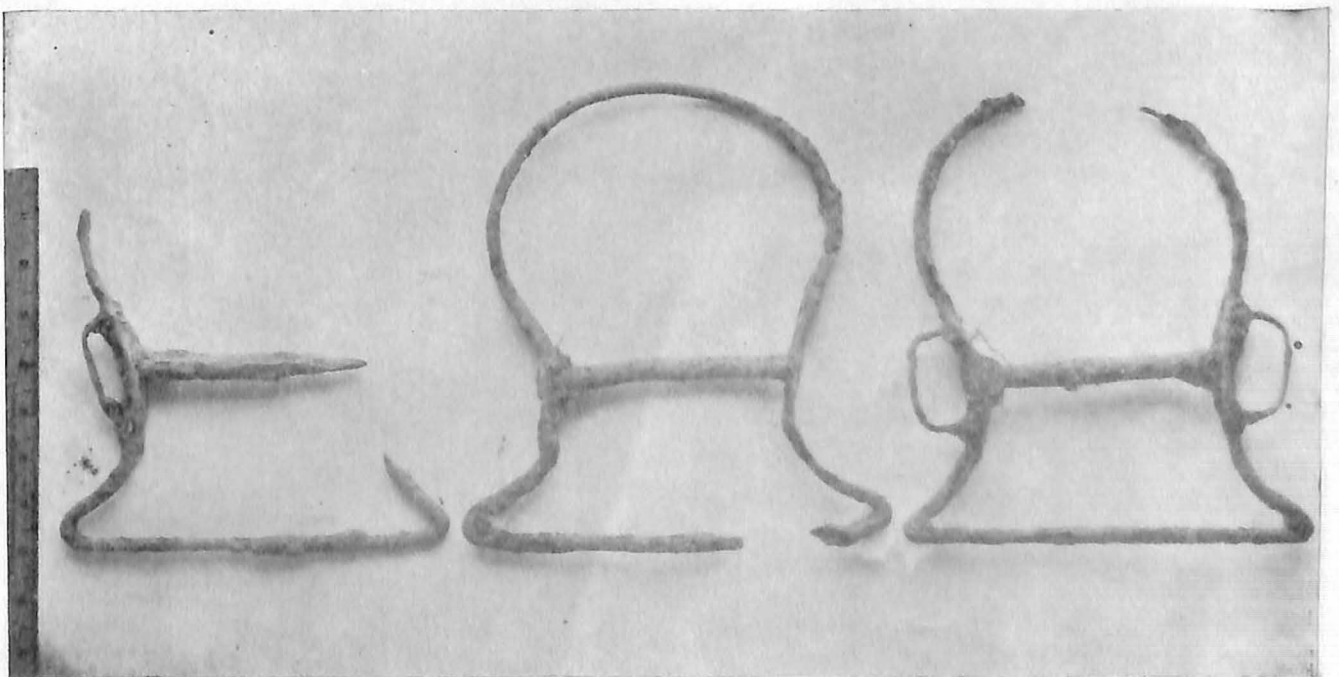
(b) THE SAME: ANOTHER VIEW



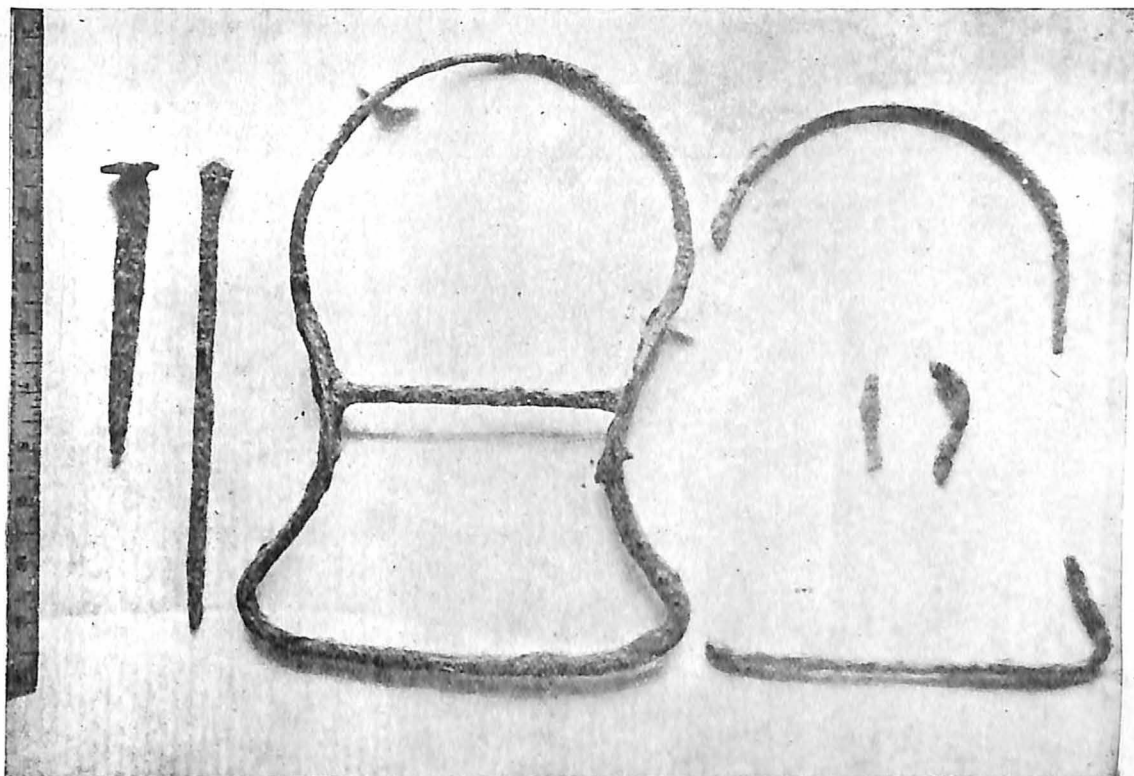
(c) A CROMLECH: SHOWING A HOE BENEATH A CIST



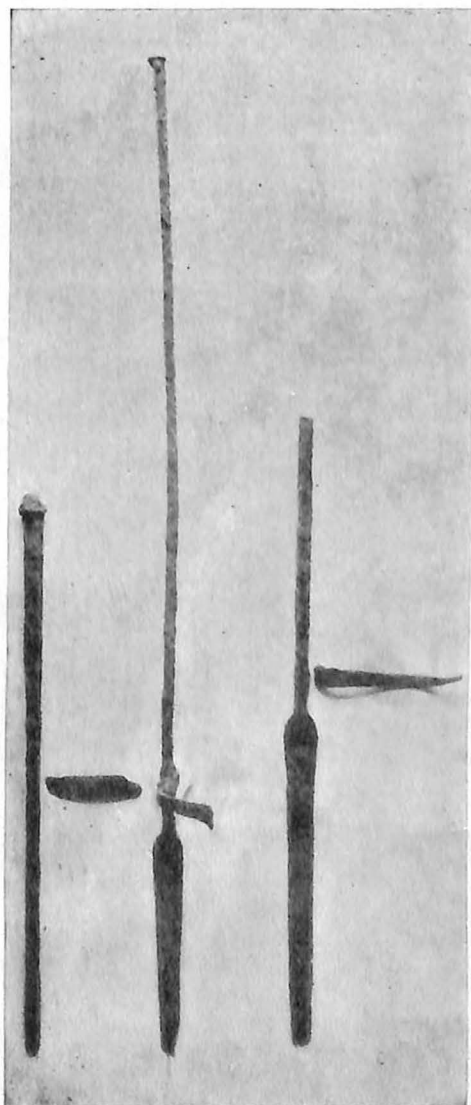
(a) IRON HOES DISCOVERED IN THE CROMLECHS AT POLECHETTI CHERUGUDDA



(b) IRON OBJECTS DISCOVERED IN THE CROMLECH AT POLECHETTI CHERUGUDDA



(a) IRON OBJECTS DISCOVERED IN THE CROMLECH AT POLECHETTI CHERUGUDDA



(b) IRON OBJECTS DISCOVERED IN THE CROMLECH AT POLECHETTI CHERUGUDDA