

With more purpose,
the scratching
continues, becoming
lines above me.

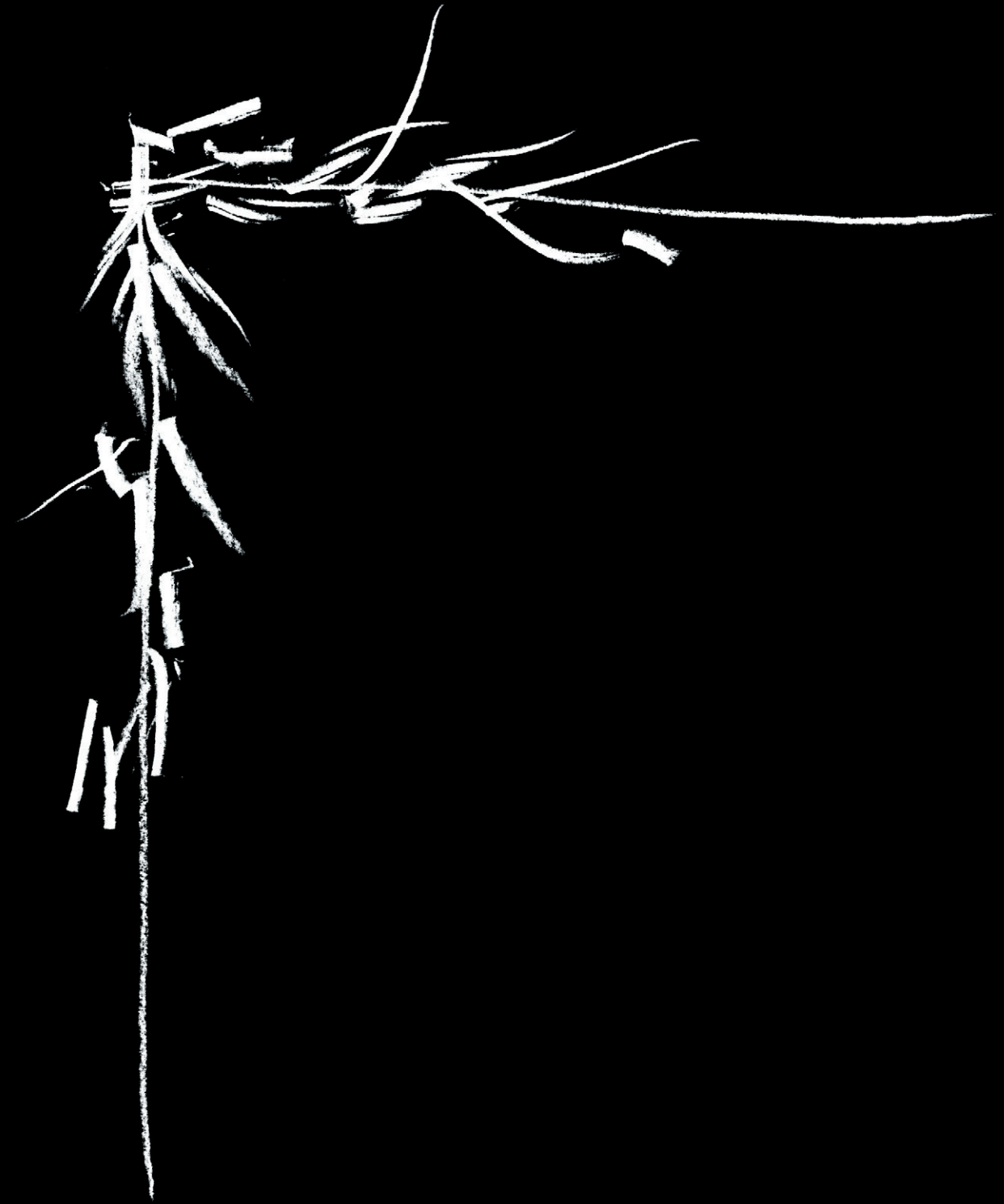


What seems like
much later,
movement returns.

More persistent
this time.

No longer a
scratching, more
of a pecking, a
chipping.

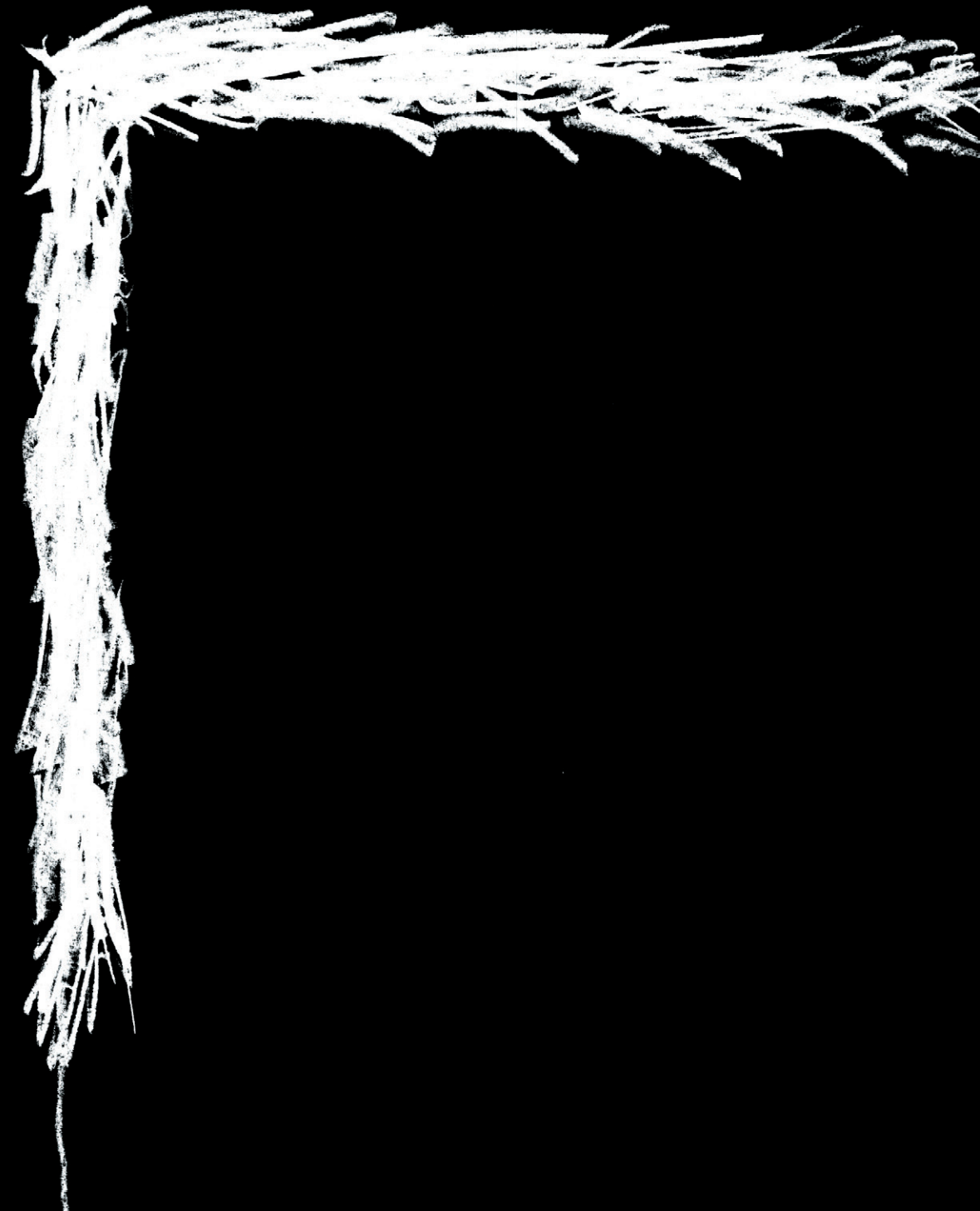
It continues.



The continuous
chipping
compounds,
burrowing down.

It stops and
starts, over and
over, endlessly.

Eventually it
continues past
me.

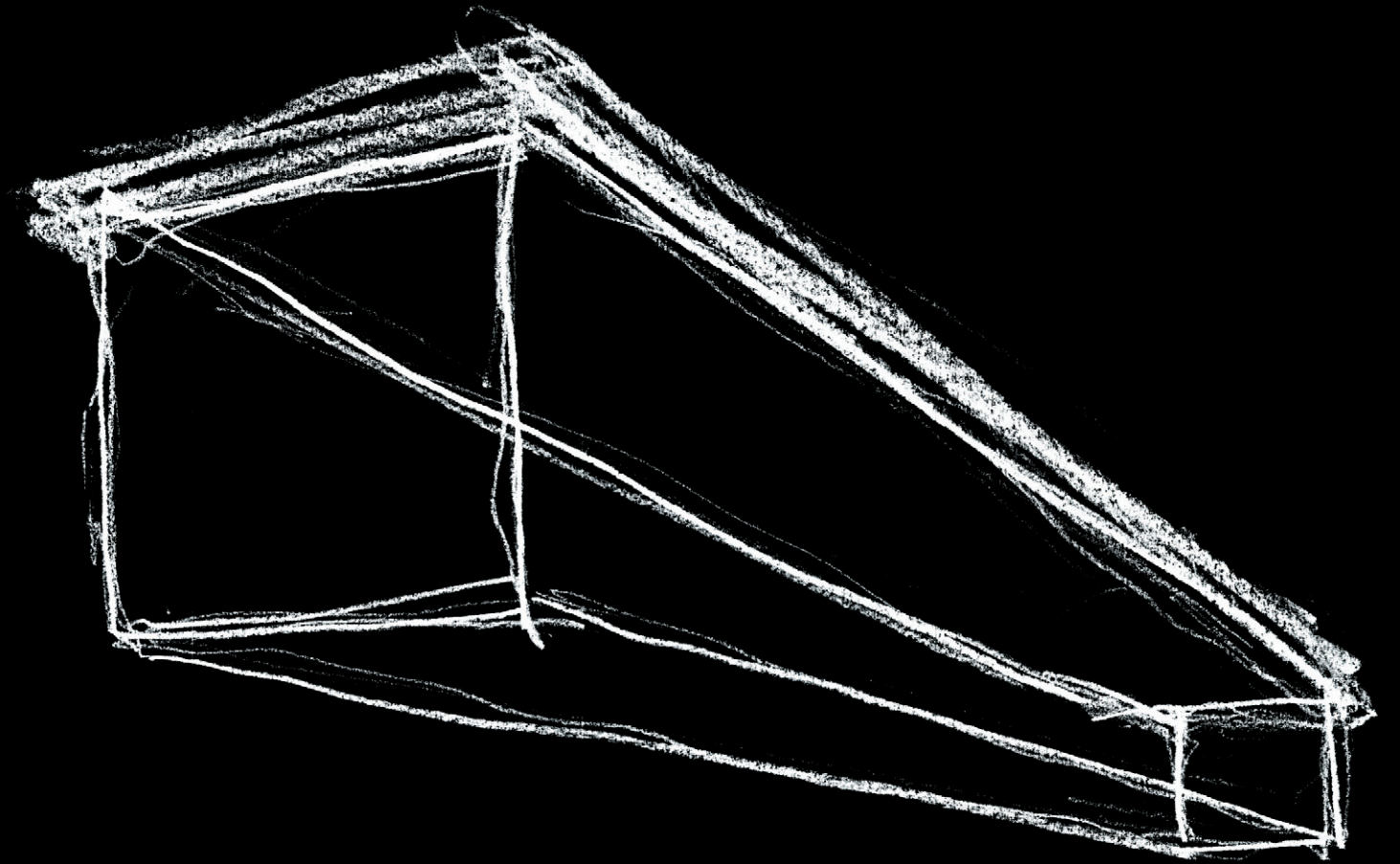


Once past me, it stops.

For a while longer,
there is no more
movement above or around
me.

The open air is strange
to feel around me,
different than the solid
support that I am used
to.

It warms and cools
much more quickly, and
sometimes it brings dust
and sand with it.



The movement is
back now, coming
from small beings.

They clamber around
me and begin to
chip away again,
but differently
this time, creating
small holes under
me.



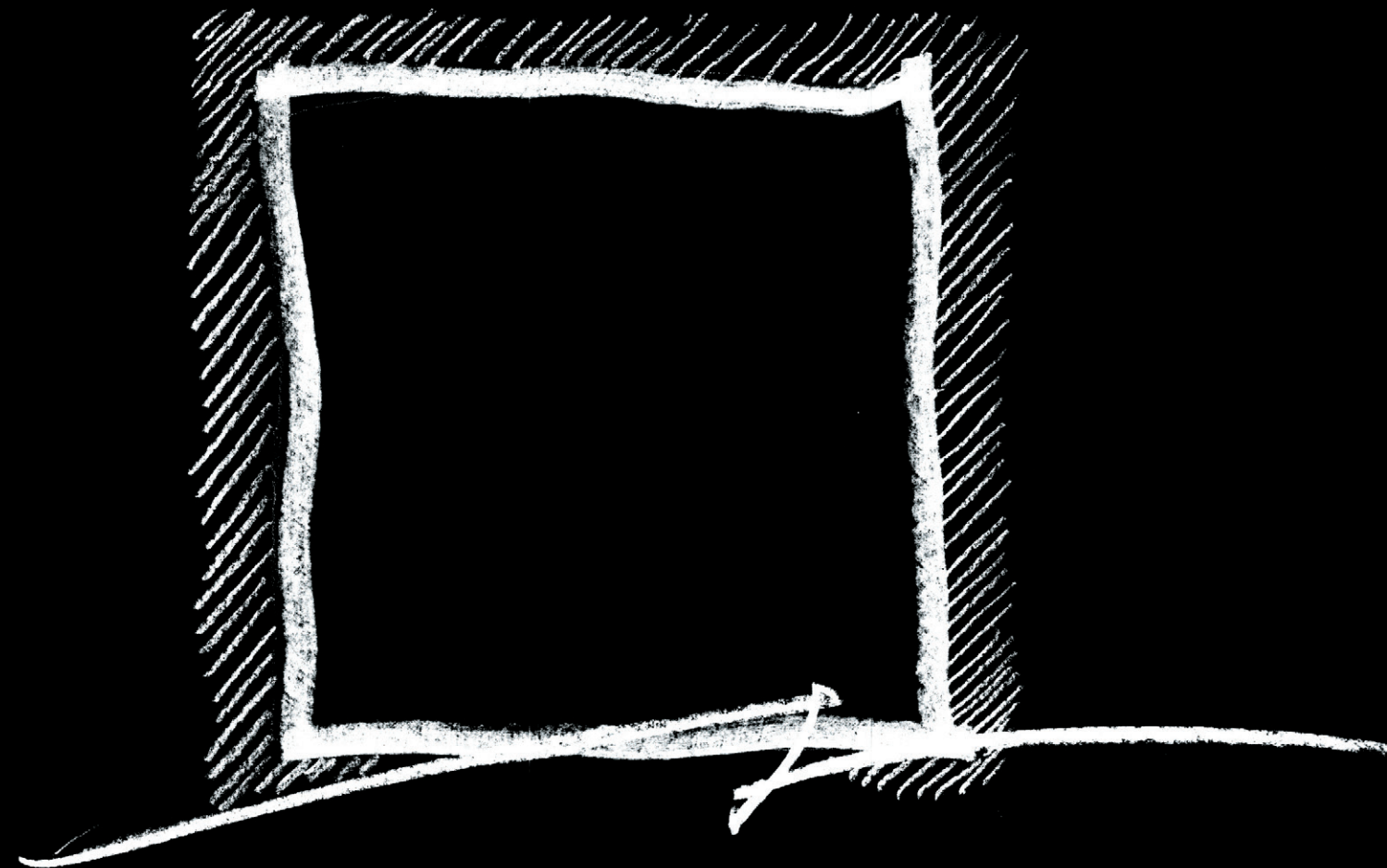
They leave, but quickly
return.

Small, warm, soft wedges
are placed into the holes
beneath me.

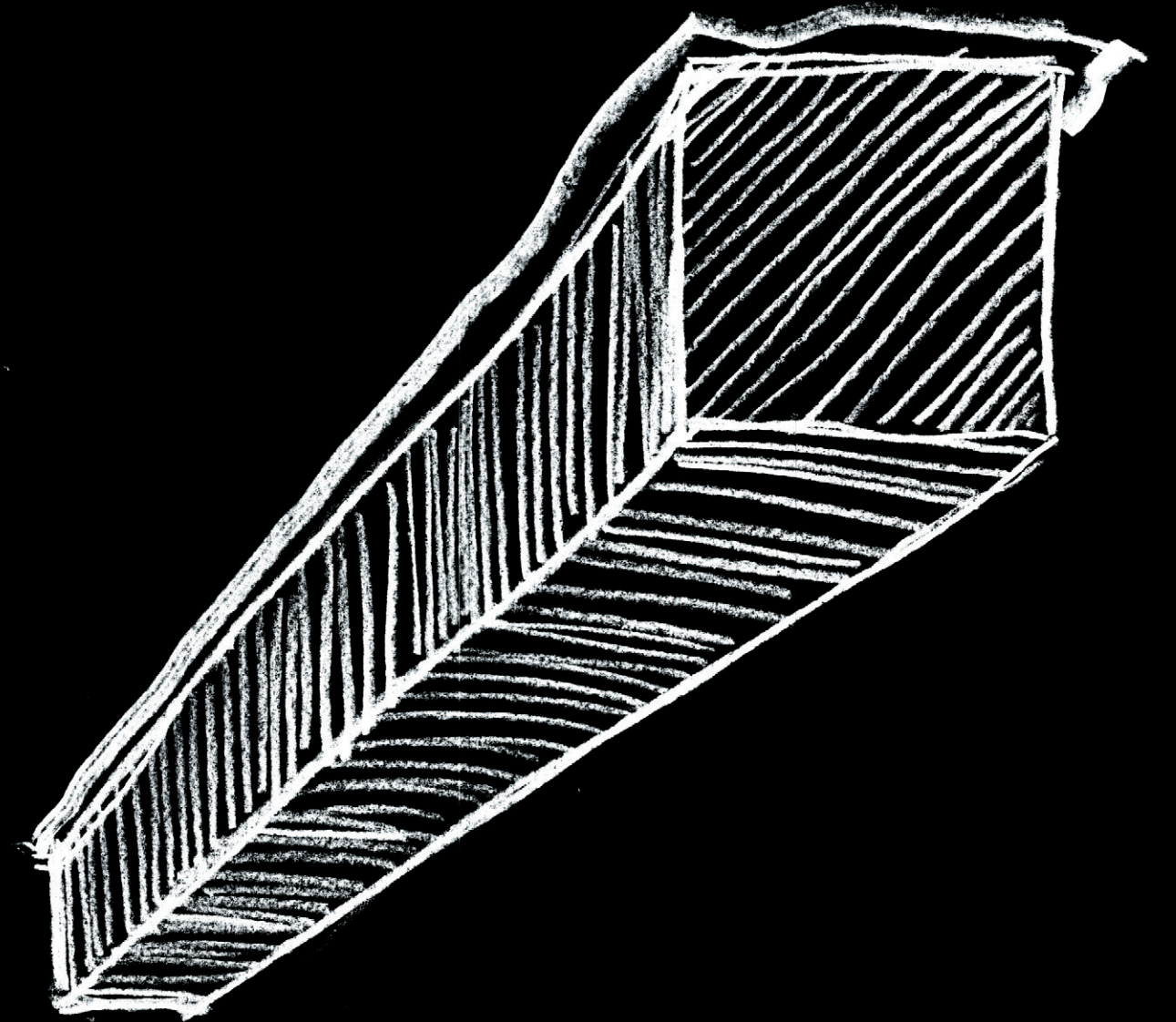
There is a cool
splashing, a dampness.

Suddenly, the wedges
aren't so soft anymore.

They push up on me, cold
and forceful, with so
much exertion that I am
sheared from my place.



Again, I am
left for some
time, resting
in my place but
no longer a
part of it.



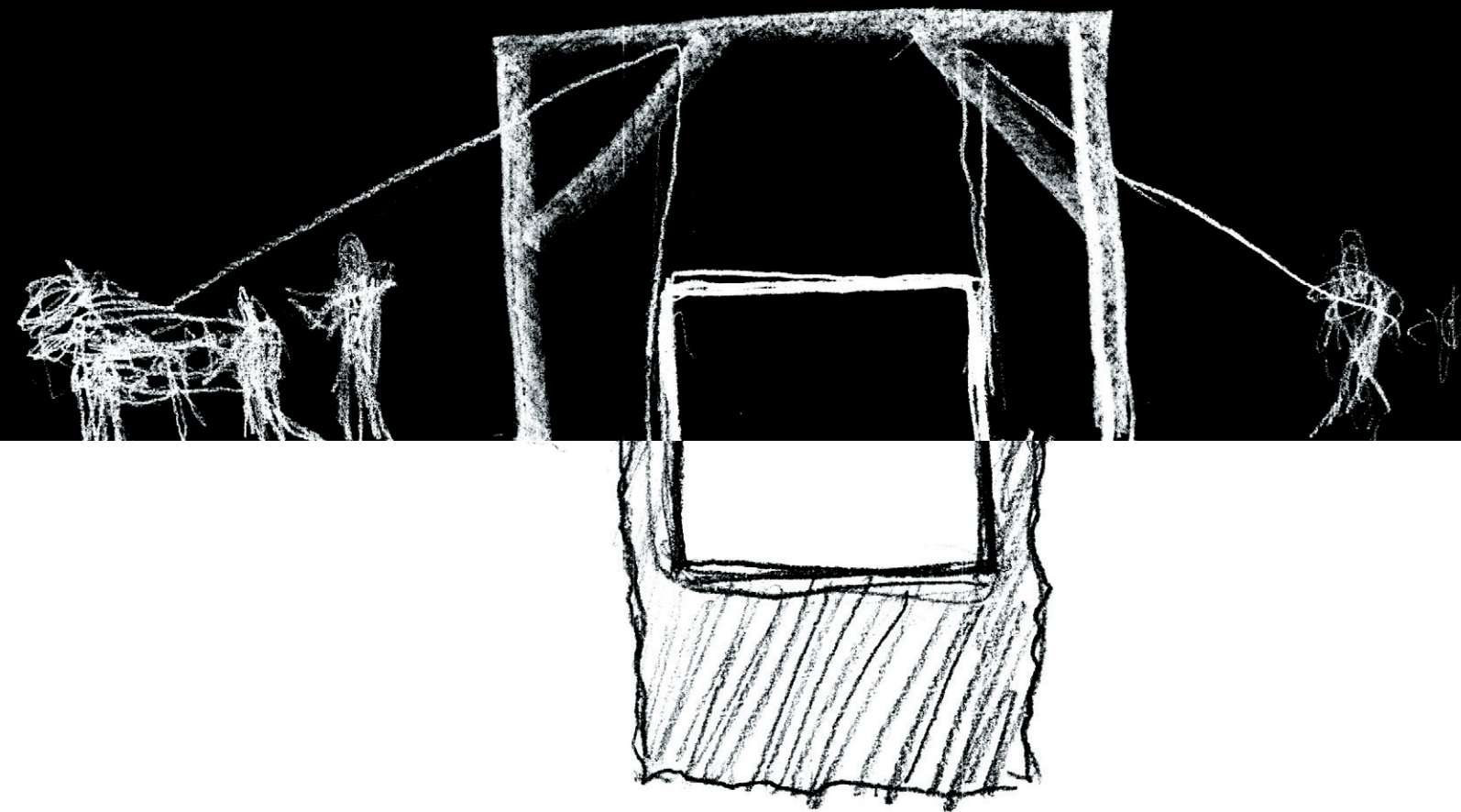
Eventually, they come back
for me.

They climb down around me
again and slide sinuous
strands underneath me.

At the same time, others
build structures over me,
to which the strands are
connected.

All at once, there is an
upward tug from these
ropes and I am lifted.

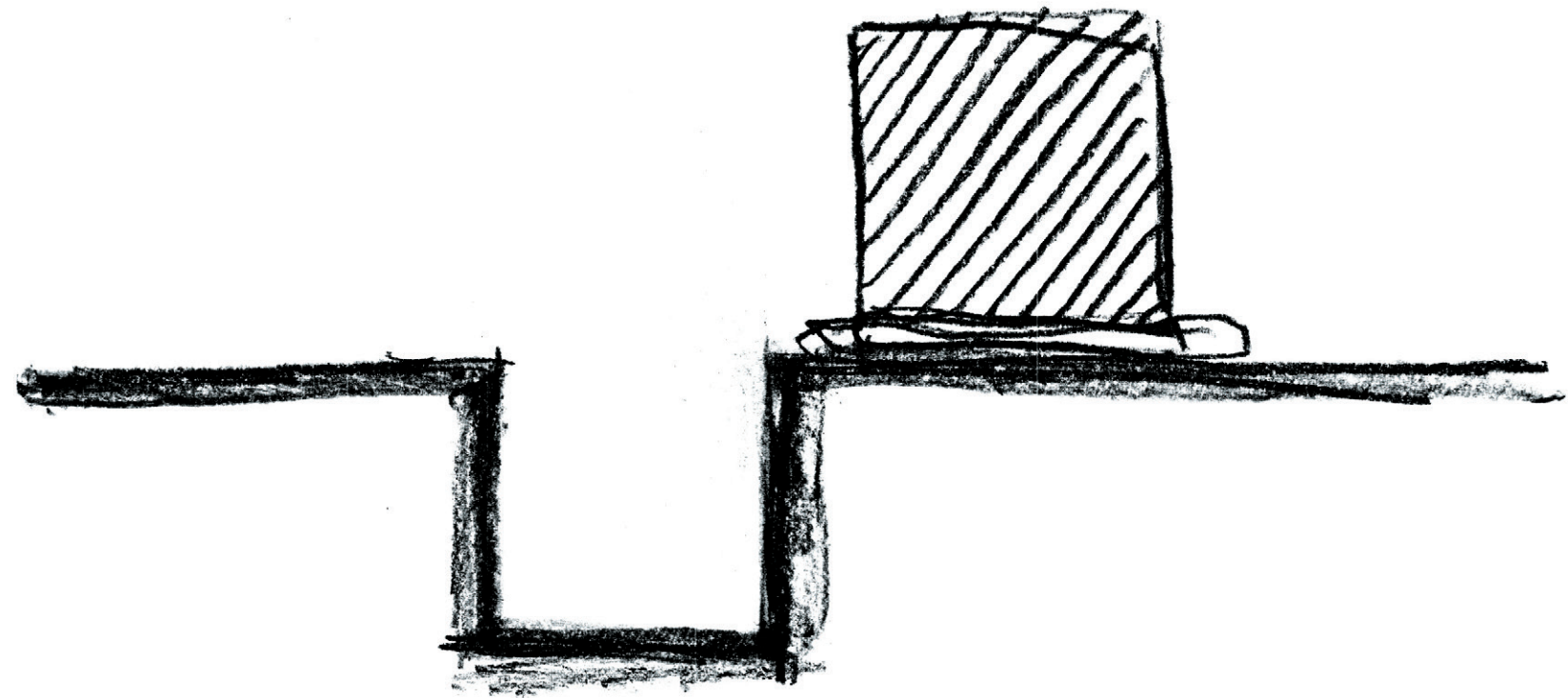
I slowly rise from the
ground, and see that the
people are not alone, but
have larger creatures with
them, which are harnessed
to the strands supporting
me.



I am tugged to the side by more ropes and am placed in the bright sun next to the hole that I was removed from.

I rest atop more of the soft wood that forced me from my home, and it leaves me feeling unanchored.

The sun sets.



They return the next day with their tools again and begin chipping away at me.

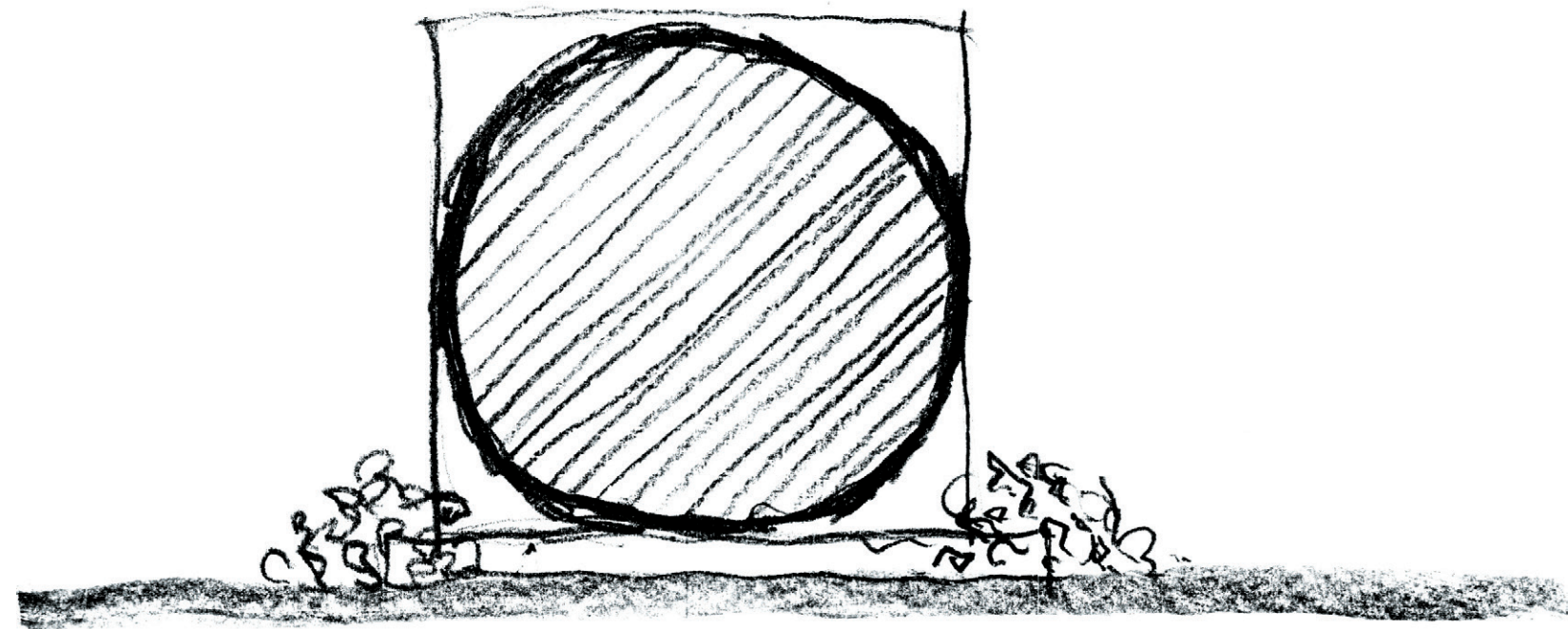
Bit by bit, my sharp edges are broken away and rounded off.

I am rolled over on my unstable wooden foundation and they work on all sides of me.

They continue over many days, stopping when the sun sets and resuming when it comes back up.

When they are done, I have been changed completely, lightened and smoothed, the rough shell that I have shed crumbled into pieces around me.

The soft wooden base below me also bears remnants of my old form, grooves and scratches from when I was rolled atop it.

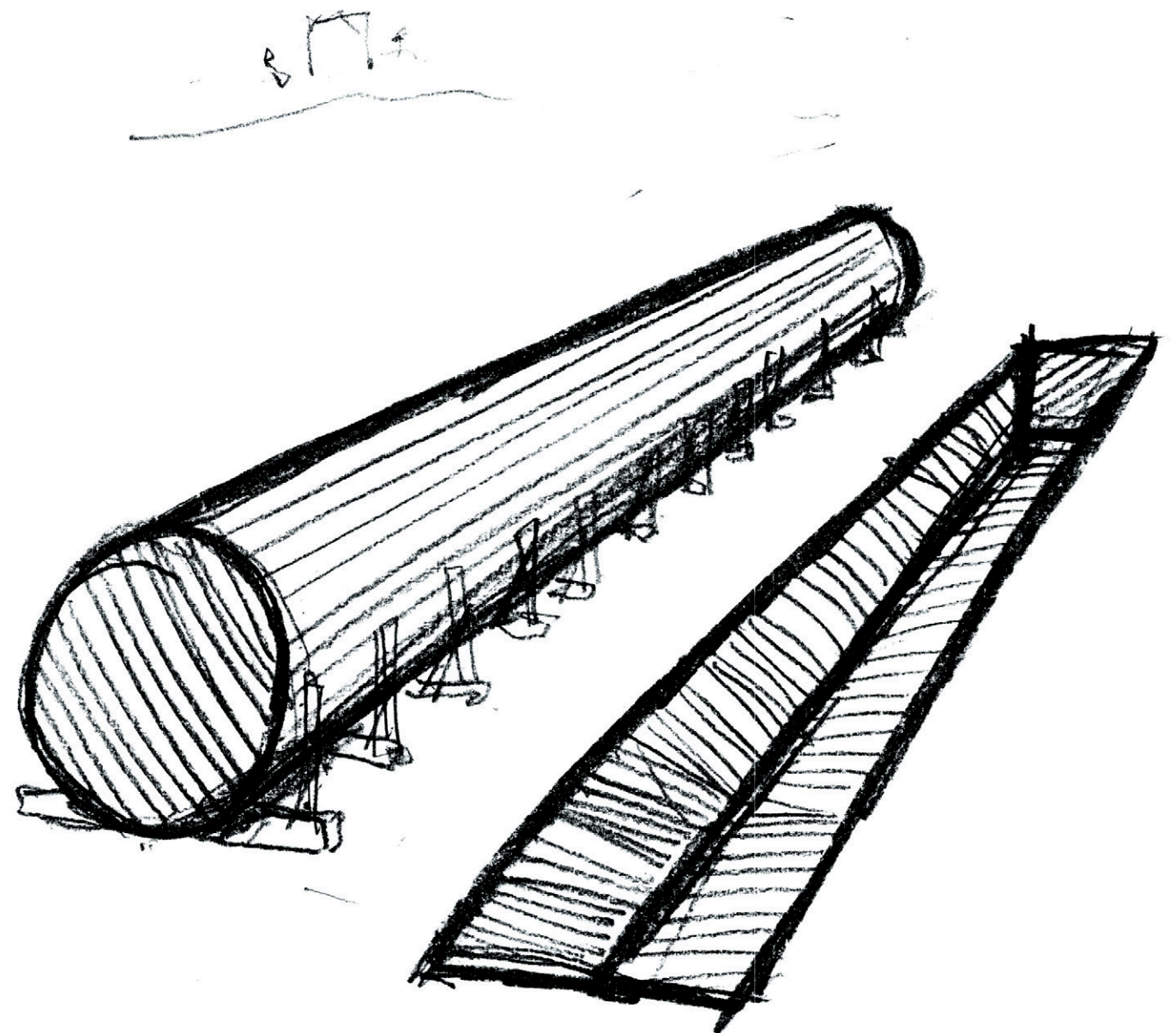


Another period of inactivity passes.

I can see the people moving around, working farther away, but I cannot see what they are doing.

The sun rises and sets, and the wind moves around me, blowing sand over my new form.

I sit for many weeks.



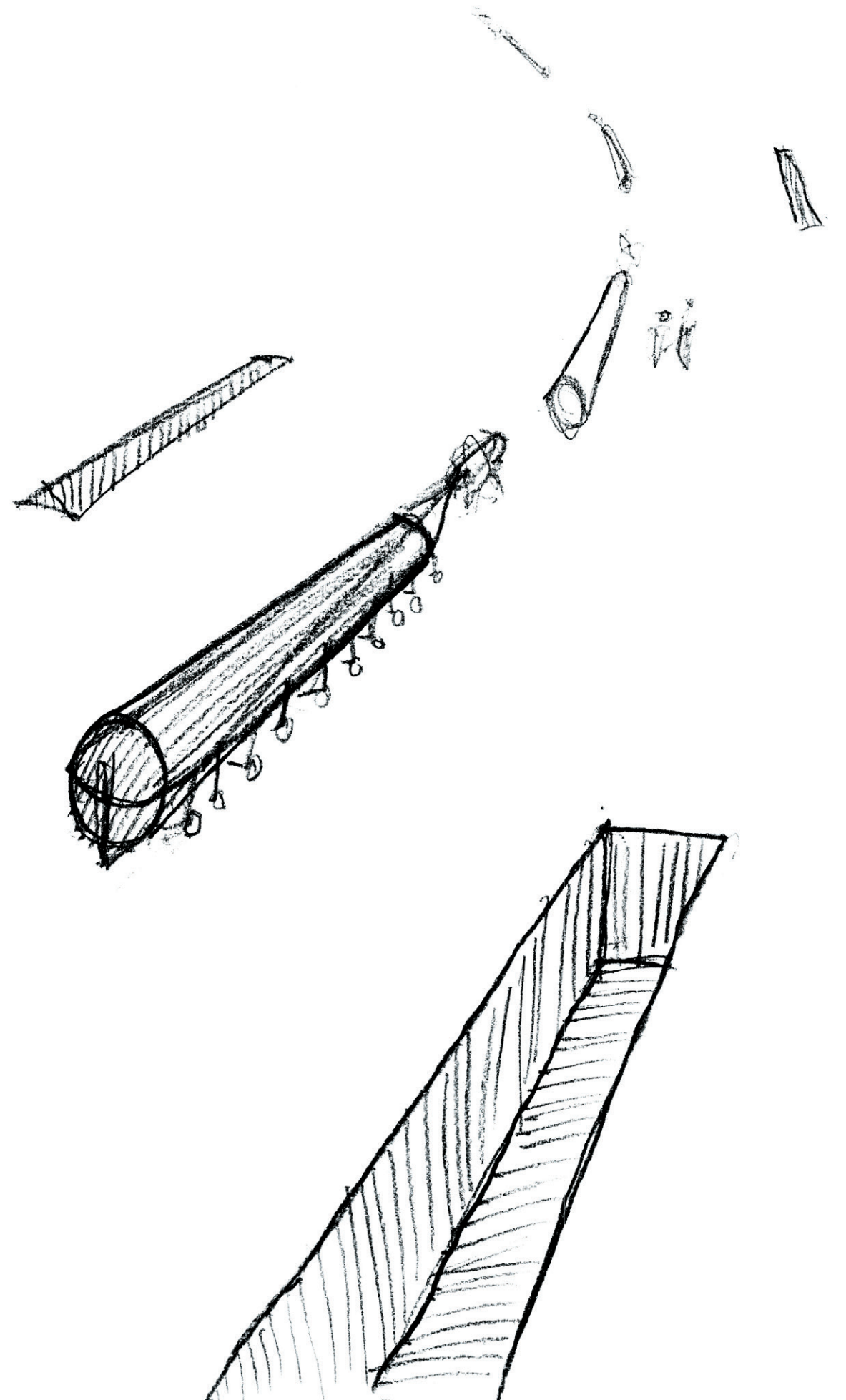
The people and their animals
return one day, and again I am
prepped and rigged.

They pull me, and the unstable
wood underneath me gives way,
rolling.

As uneasy as I am, I gradually
become accustomed to it, and
begin to see that there are
many more holes around me.

Others like me, apparently what
I have seen the people working
on in the distance.

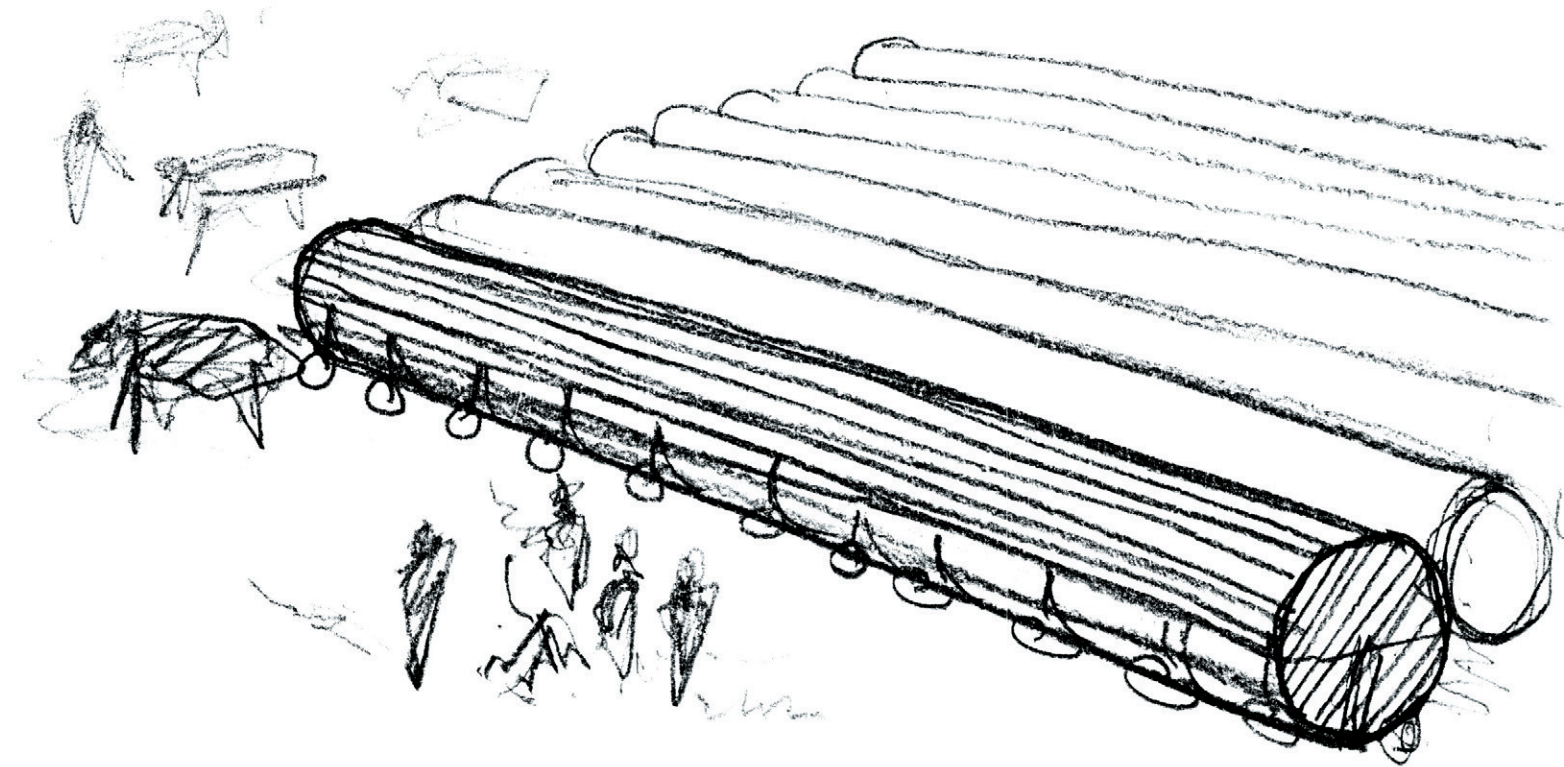
I join a train of other round,
grey columns, and we are carted
into the expanse together.



Our journey is long.

We travel through the desert, only stopping when the dust picks up too much or when the sun sets.

At night, the people burn wood, warding off the cold that comes with the dark.

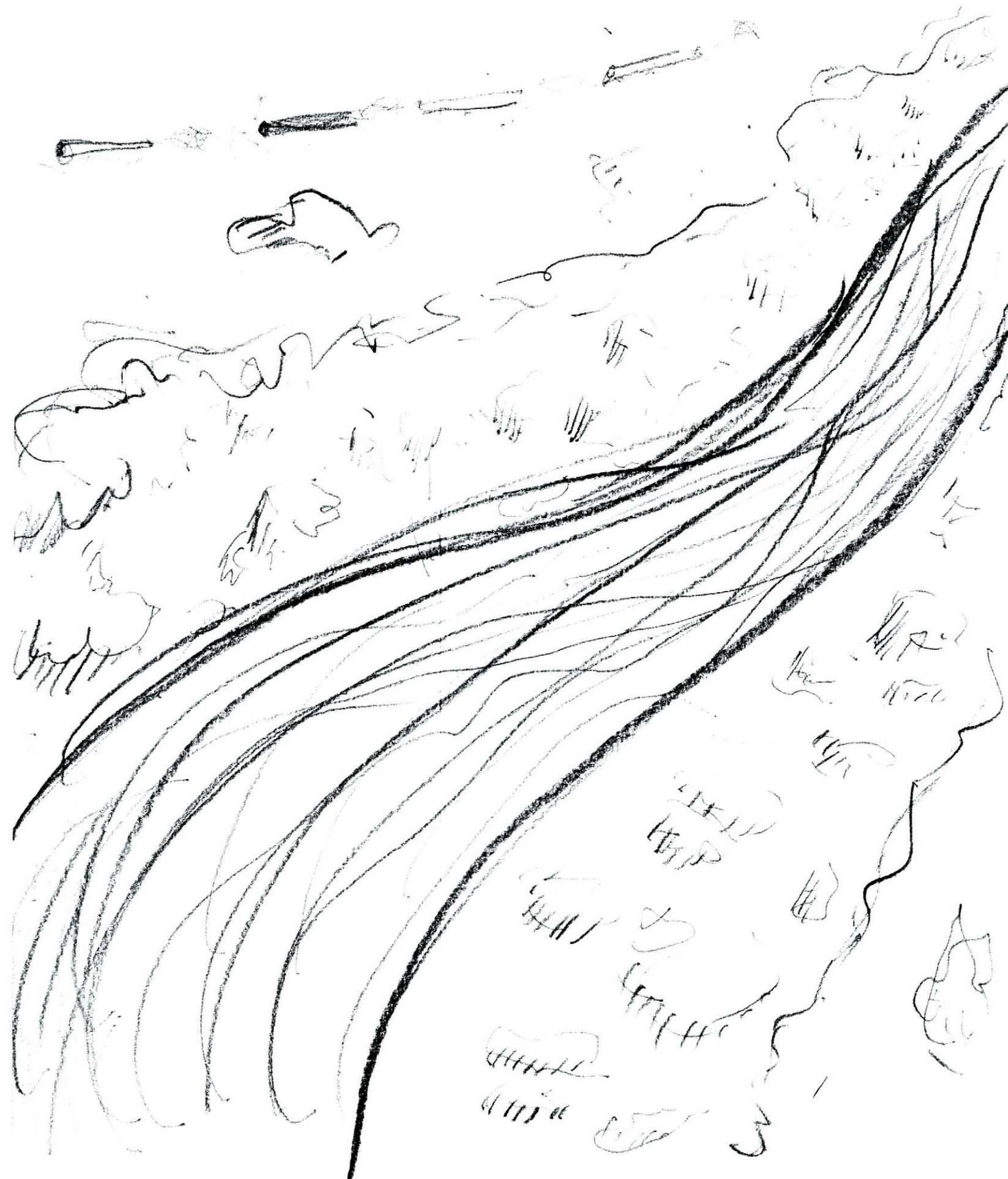


The scenery begins to change. We leave the sand behind and travel along more solid ground, and there is more greenery.

We come to a large moving current of water, all flowing the same direction, and travel along it for a few more days.

Structures begin to appear in the distance, and once we are close a small group of people breaks off and heads toward them.

A little while later, they return, several large floating structures of wood accompanying them on the river.

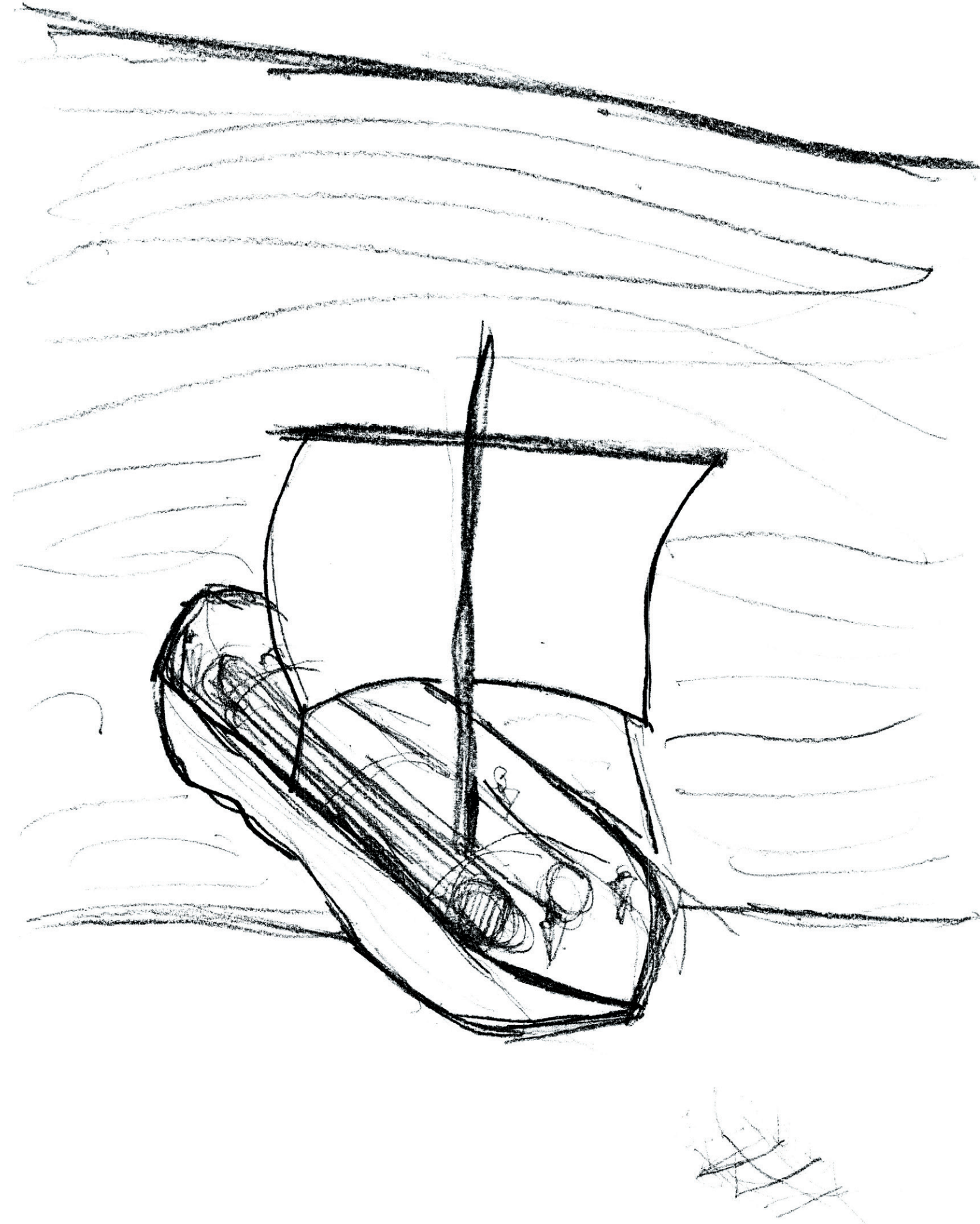


All of us are detached from the animals pulling us, and we are loaded onto the wooden boats on the water.

They feel even less stable than the carts that I have grown accustomed to.

The boat that I am placed on bobs up and down, and gently rocks side to side, subject to the whims of the water.

My previous experience with wood and water makes me very wary of my situation, but we set off anyway.

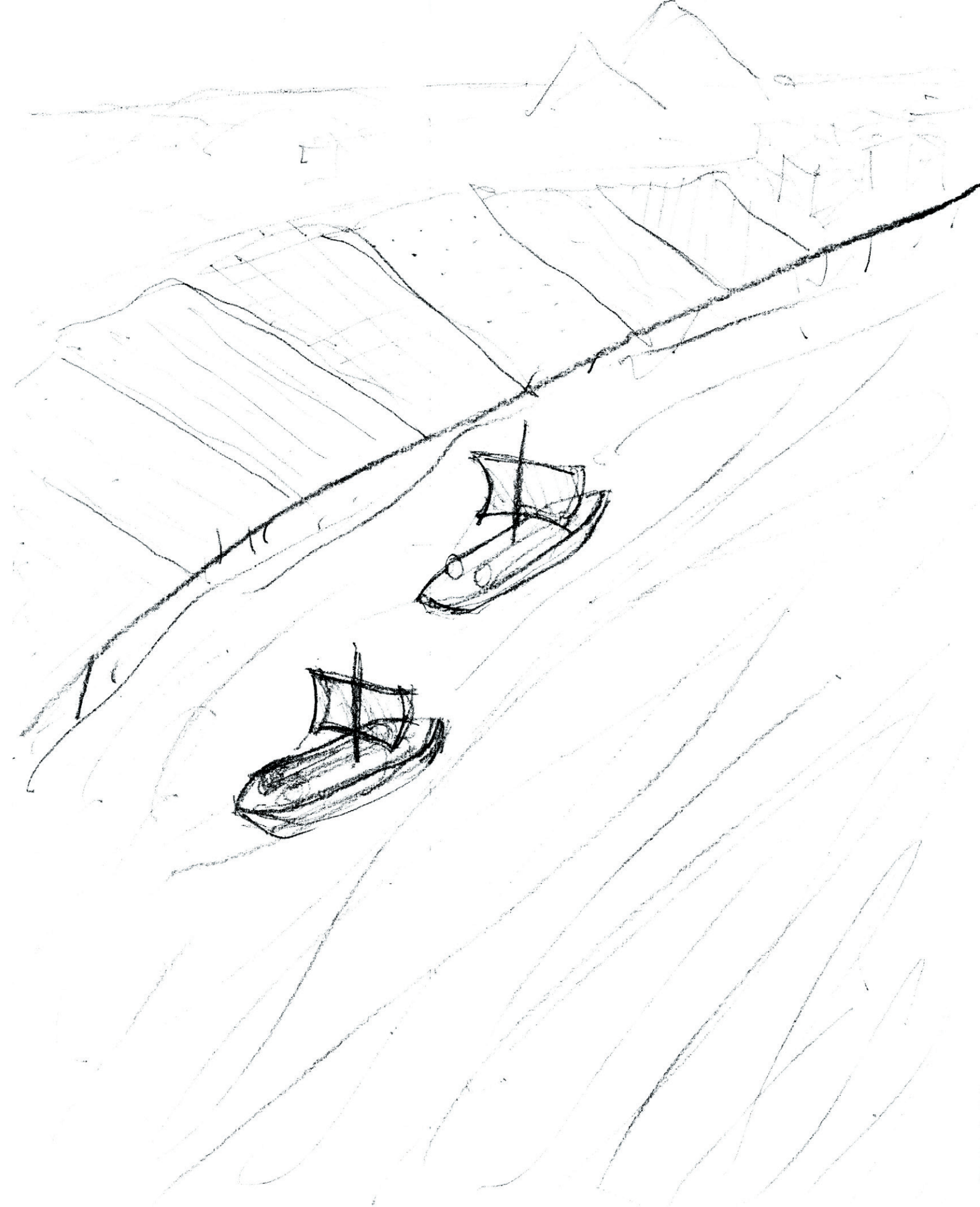


For all my worry, things go smoothly.

We move slowly down the river, passing many lush green fields.

Travelling even by night, we spend many days on the move.

Eventually we can see immense structures in the distance, and smaller structures begin to fill the river banks beside us.



As the boats pass this area built up with human dwellings, the land falls away altogether entirely.

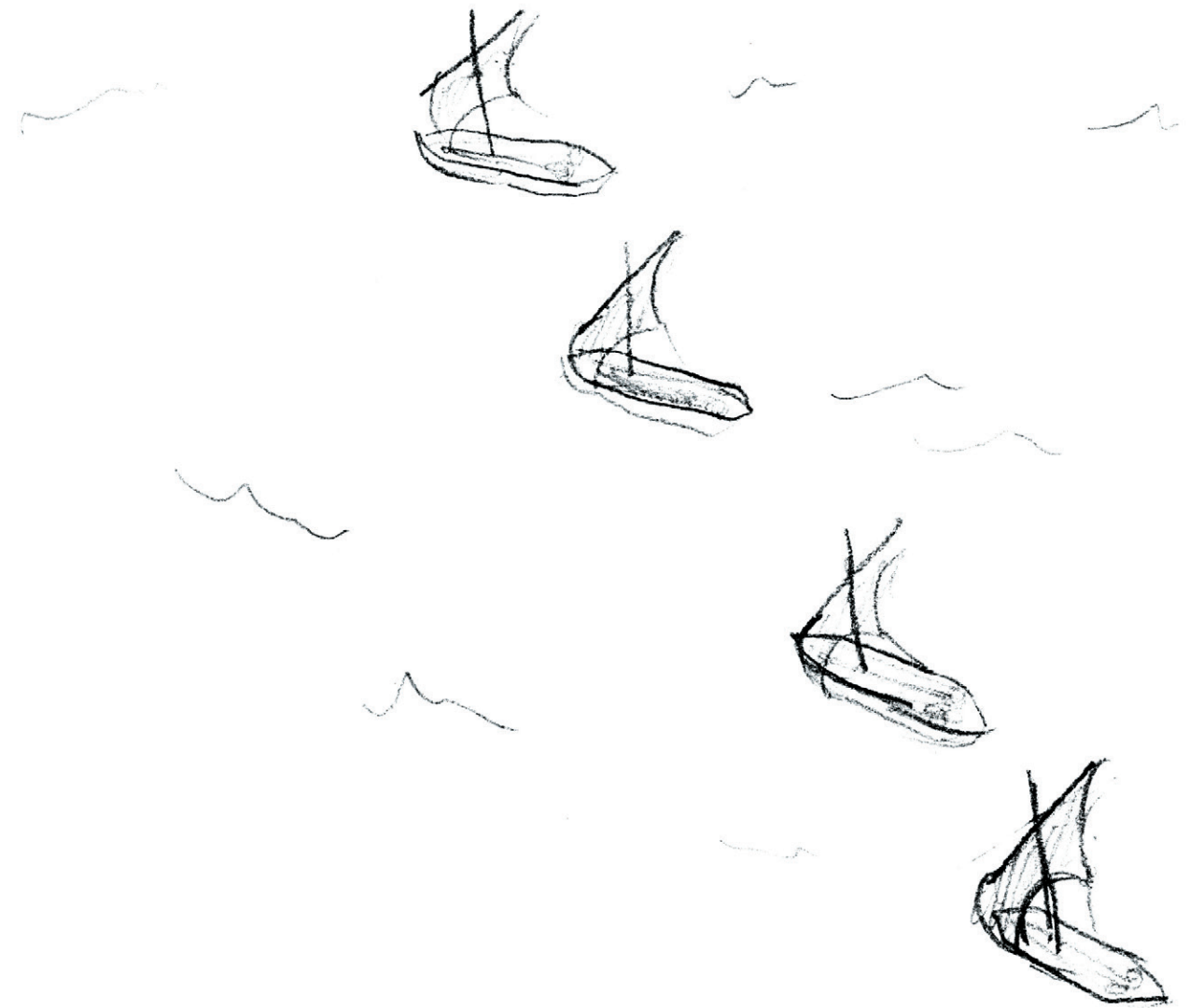
We are in another body of water, but it is open and moves in waves rather than with a current.

Eventually, sight of land is lost altogether.

I catch several glimpses of it again, as the sun rose and set several times, and eventually the boats rounded a peninsula and we follow a new coastline.

Here, everything is green, completely contrasting the dry, dusty land that we had been pulled from.

There are mountains and huge cliffs bursting forth from the water, but even they had foliage springing from them.



The boats pulled into shore, we were offloaded and placed on smaller ones.

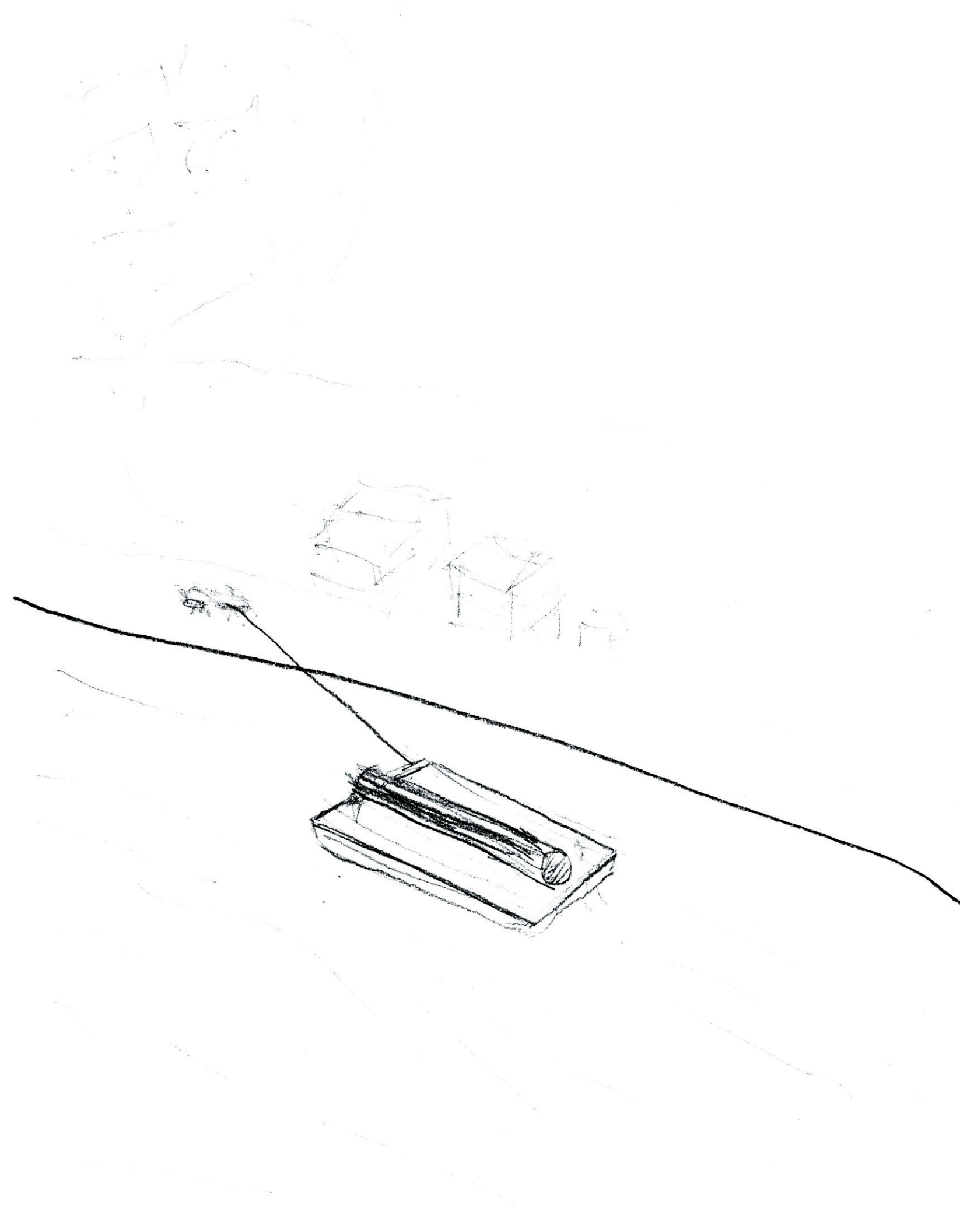
These small boats were shallower, and I soon saw why.

After we are loaded the boats set off and quickly turn up another river, much smaller than the first one.

Just as with to our previous river journey we are moving past fields and eventually we enter another built up area.

Here walls encompass the river, and the buildings are even bigger and shaped differently than the others that we have passed.

Even travelling upstream, we quickly reach our destination and are pulled to shore.



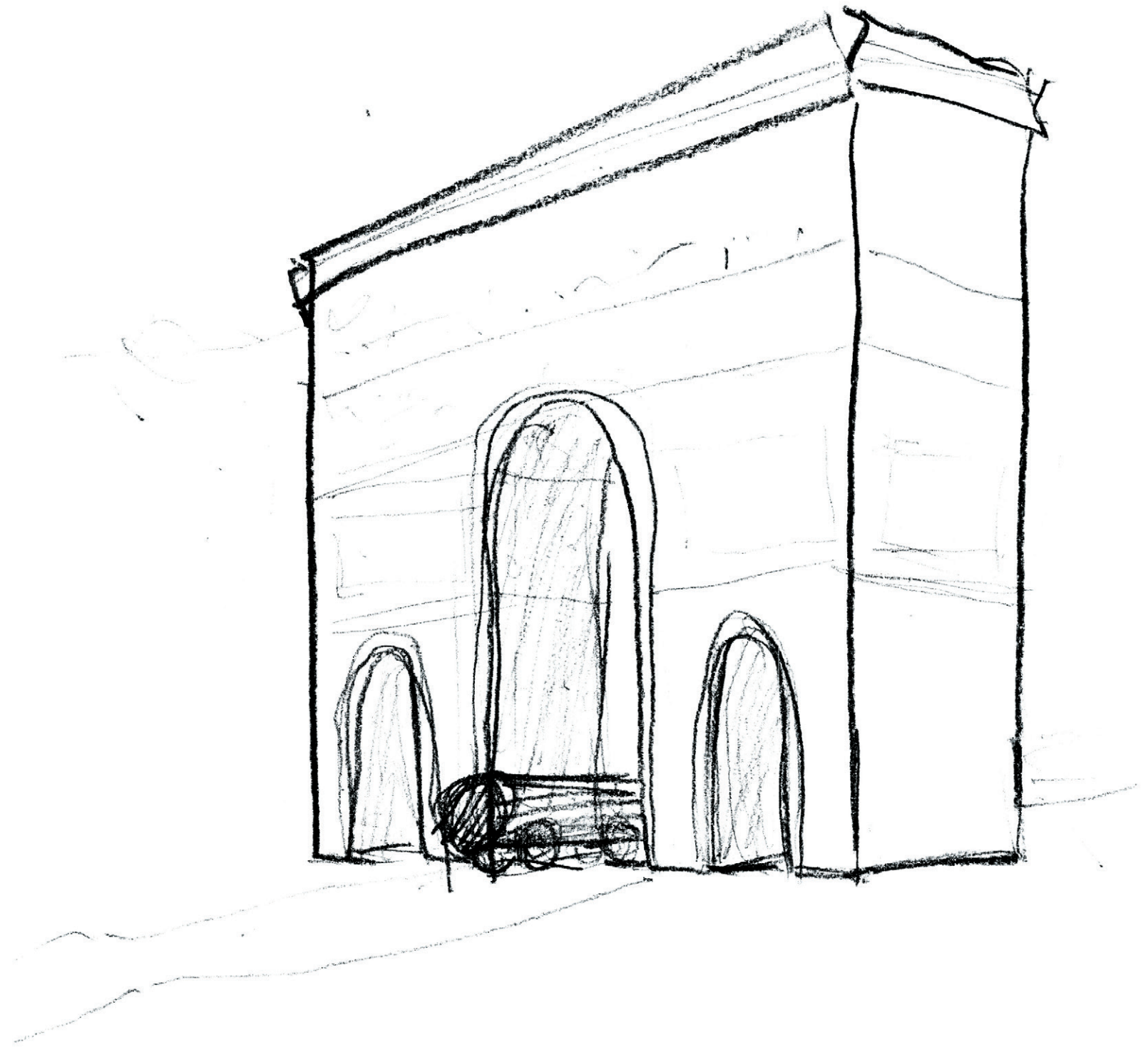
I am left on the shore with the rest of the columns like me, but not for very long.

Soon, more people with teams of animals rig us with ropes, and we are pulled into the city.

They pull us through narrow streets that I am nearly too wide for, let alone the corners that we are maneuvered through.

I worry that I will accidentally be let to tumble and will end up knocking over some of the smaller buildings next to me.

But the teams are skilled, and I am kept stable on my journey through the city.



My journey through the city comes to a halt in a large open space.

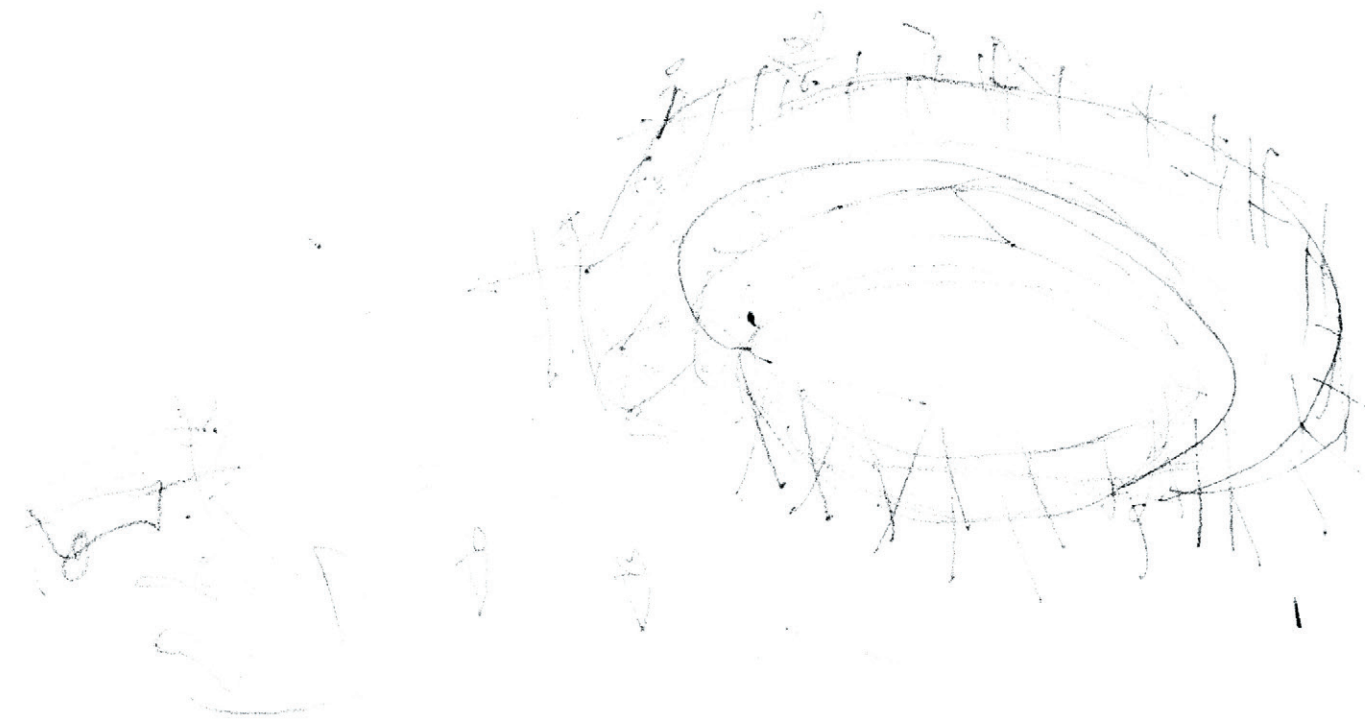
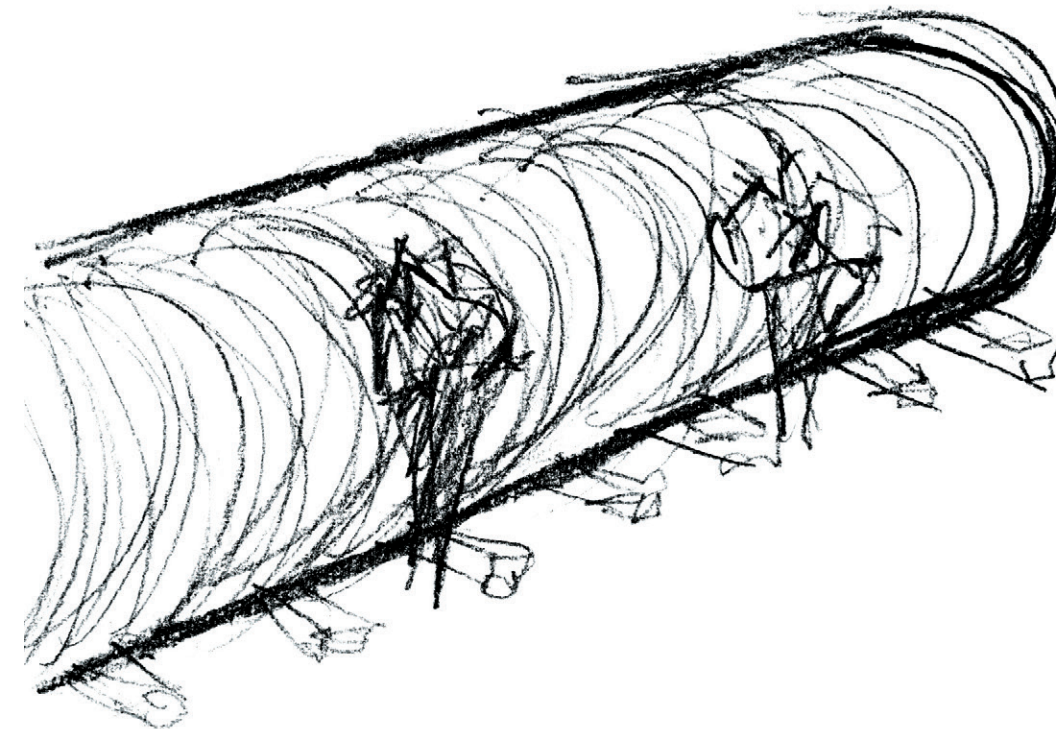
Here the people are in a flurry of movement, organized teams moving large carts of fired earth blocks and others stacking them in precise layers and adhering them with damp earth.

I am laid aside from this commotion, but soon another team descends on me.

Again, they cut away at me, but their actions are more precise this time, more surgical.

My form, which I thought was perfectly round in comparison to the block I had been released from, is even more exactly shaped.

After many, many days of this I feel lighter, and dust from myself and others like me blows around the worksite, quickly trampled back into the ground by the flurries of people and animals at work.



Now this shaping work is done,
and I am again saddled with
ropes.

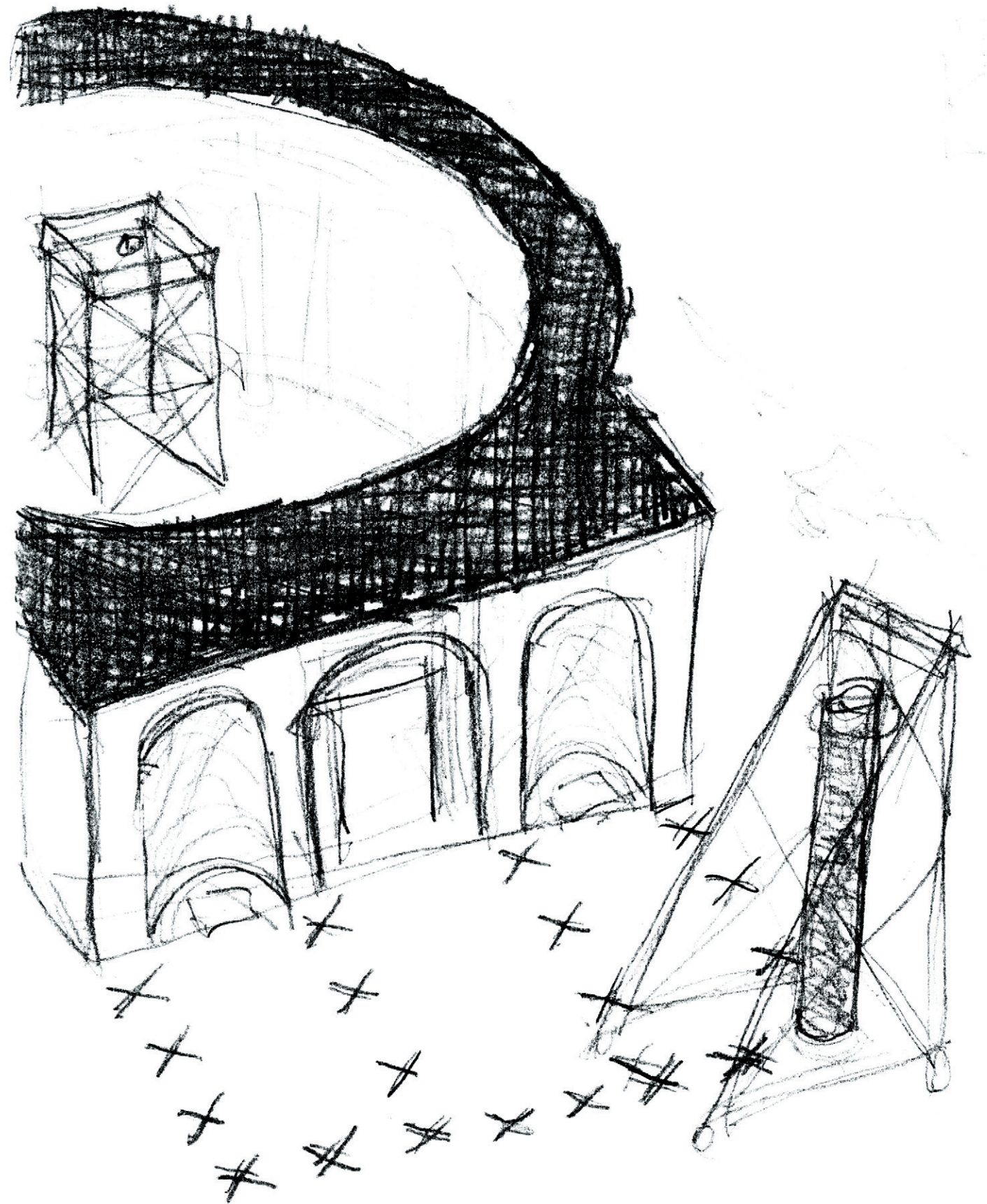
I am moved closer to the
commotion of building that has
been going on at the other end
of the site and am harnessed to
a tall wooden frame.

The ropes tighten, straining
greatly as large teams of
people and animals pull on
other ends.

Suddenly the world shifts.
Everything is sideways.

I have been turned onto my
side, perched precariously
pointing up to the sky.

The ropes are tied in place,
and I am left to spend the
night hanging, with only my
narrow point resting on the
small round stone below me.



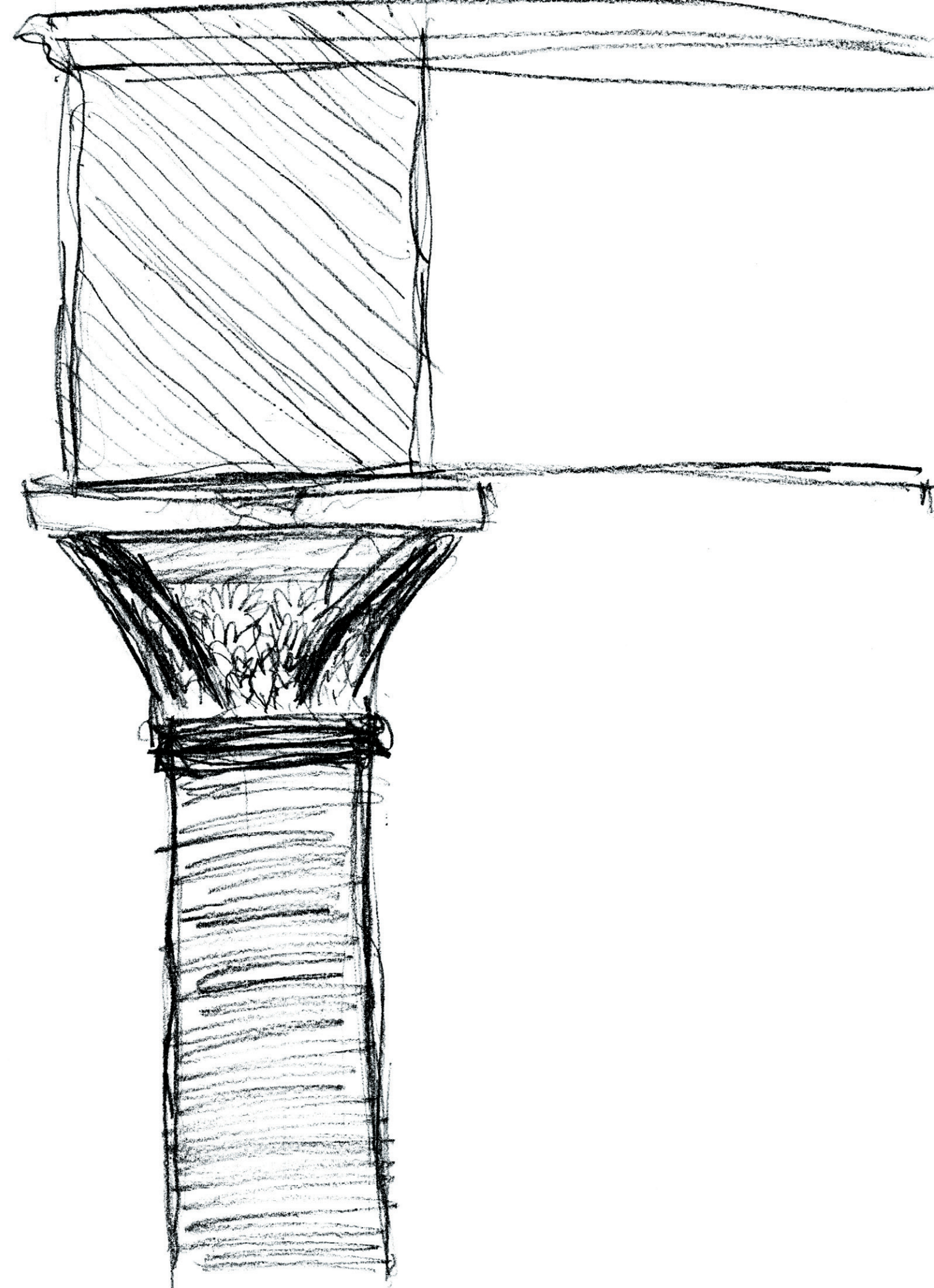
The next day, more wooden frames are erected next to me, and one of my siblings is stood up there.

Gradually, all of us are upturned, to look down on the ground that we came from at such a strange angle.

When we are all standing, the people lift more blocks, much bigger than the fired earth and made of stone, but different than me and cut in intricate patterns, and place them atop us.

I feel much more stable having the familiar weight pushing down on me, but I can't imagine that they appreciate being forced to float so far above the ground with nothing but my spindly trunk supporting them.

On top of these, teams place smaller blocks, and gradually the weight over me increases until I feel almost as secure as I had in that desert so far away.



As the enormous construction continues behind me, the people that shaped me return.

This time they don't bear sharp implements of iron, but rather scaled the wooden frameworks carrying wooden blocks and pots filled with water and stone dust.

They wet their blocks and placed powder on them, then set to work rubbing my surface.

Many of them working at the same time, day in, day out, slowly abrading away at my roughness.

Every so often they switch powders, and the abrading becomes less and less.

This goes on for an even longer period than the final shaping that they gave me, but finally one day I gleam as bright as the sun shining upon me.



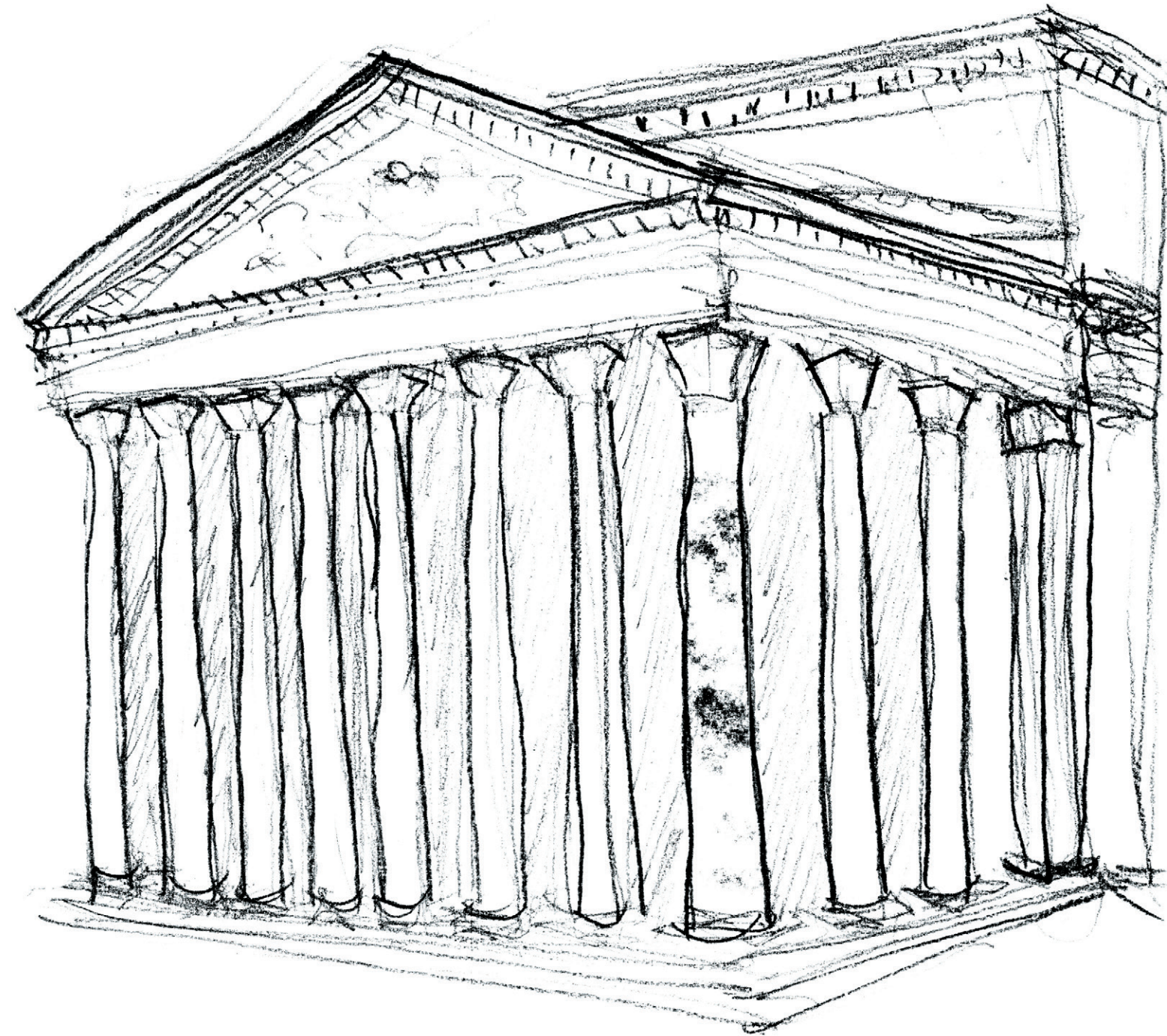
Once they have finished me,
they pull away the wooden
scaffolding around me.

We are now left to stand
together, watching silently
as the construction continues
behind us.

They raise other columns that
are similar to us but are
coloured warm pink rather than
our stark grey.

They also build square stacks
out of smaller blocks, which
have not only been polished
but have also had long grooves
scraped into them that blend
them all together.

The largest teams of people
seem involved in moving huge
amounts of wetted earth and
minerals somewhere behind me,
but it is kept out of sight by
a large block wall and the roof
that is now resting over all of
us.



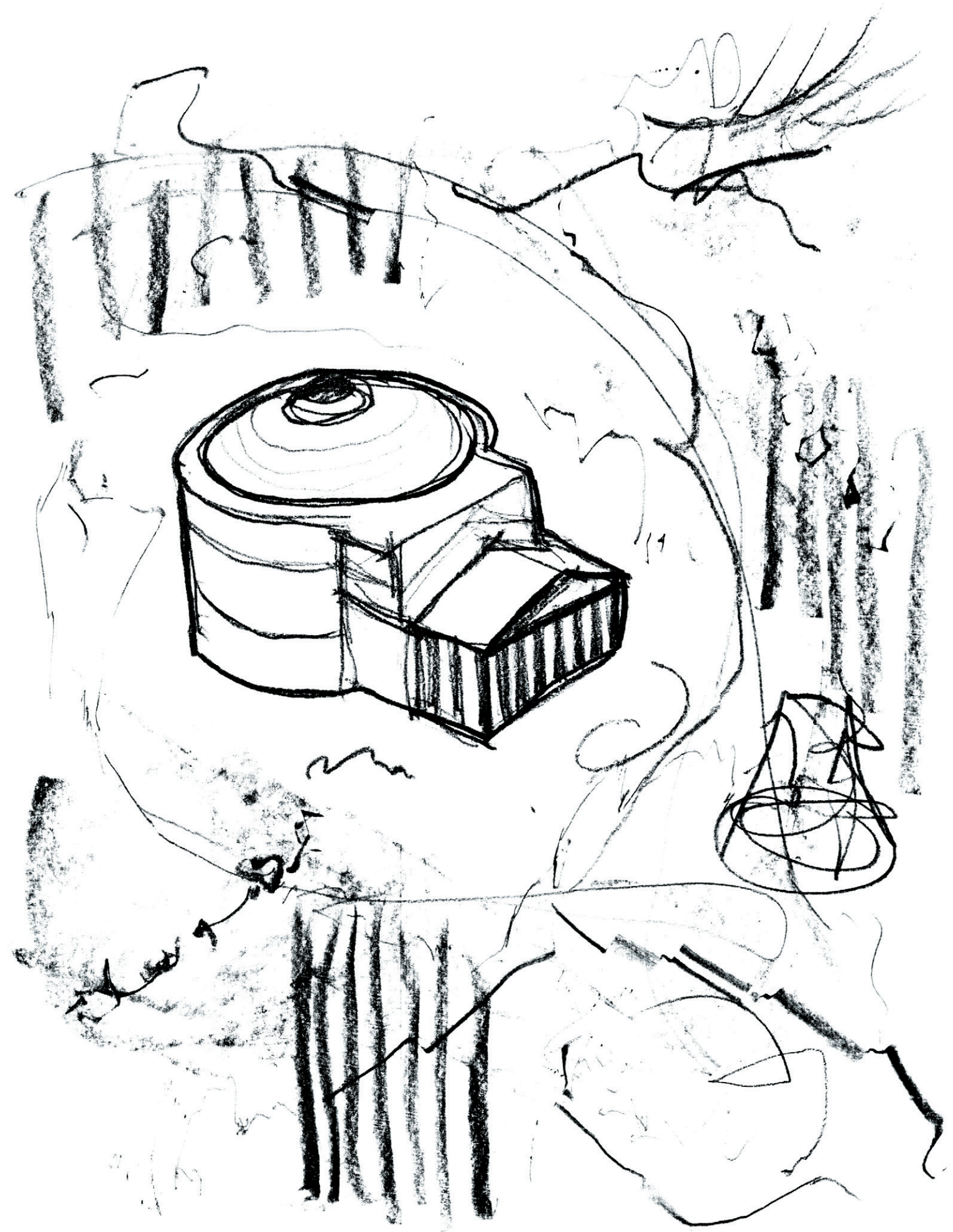
The movement behind us slows,
until one day it stops.

No matter though, because in
front of me the city continues
to shift and grow.

Other buildings around us burn
down and are rebuilt, and some
are torn down by other groups
of people, but we are for the
most part left alone.

Water occasionally rises, and
brings the ground up with it,
but if it ends up surrounding
us groups of people tend to
come and dig us back out.

At some point, the city grows
so much that it even adheres
to consumes some of us off
to the right, but eventually
it recedes and those who
disappeared are replaced with
more of our pink doppelgangers.



Throughout all of this,
people have walked between us
and into the vast structure
behind us, more than I could
possibly count over the passing
millennia.

Visitors of all sorts, some
seeming to come from even
further than I did on my
original journey so long ago.

Although they sometimes stand
beside me, almost all of
them seem to walk through us
and into whatever space lies
through the opening behind.

Their feet polish the marble
floors, while the dust carried
from my home on the wind
abrades away at me slowly
through the centuries.

Although I may have lost my
initial lustre, I continue to
stand guard and to support,
with the others like me,
whatever structure lies above
and behind us.

For now, I am simply happy to
watch the sun rise and set on
the scenery in front of me.

I hope to do so until I am
myself turned to dust and am
swept back to the desert from
where I came.

