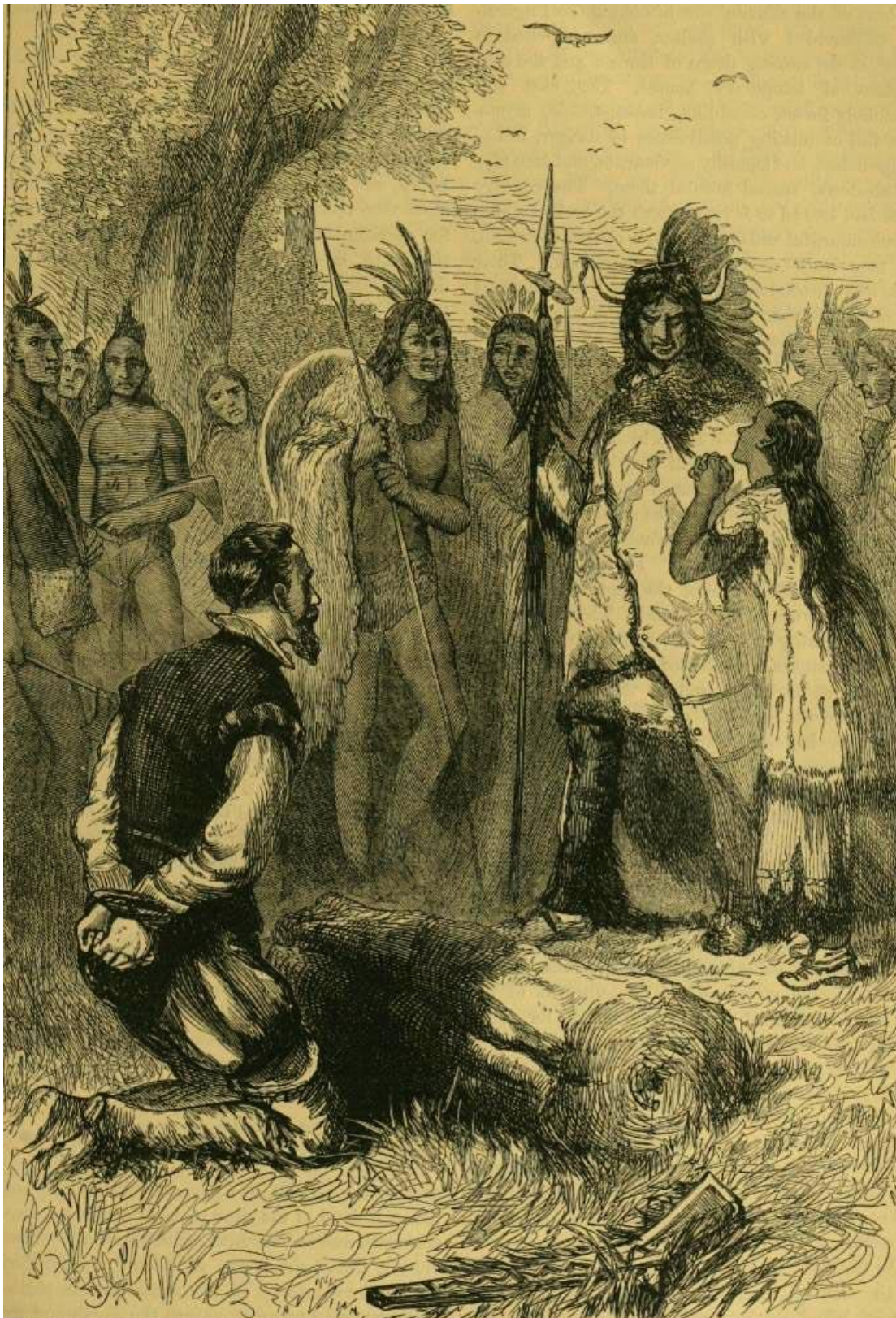


Pocahontas saves Captain Smith's life

Pocahontas saves Captain Smith's life

This illustration from the late nineteenth century shows Pocahontas, the young daughter of Powhatan, the chief of the Algonquian Indians of the Chesapeake, pleading for the life of John Smith, a leader of the Jamestown colony. According to Smith, he was captured by Indian hunters and taken to a chief village of the Powhatan Empire. He was then laid across a stone and was about to be executed, when Pocahontas threw herself across his body. Smith wrote in a 1616 letter to Queen Anne that "at the minute of my execution, she hazarded the beating out of her own brains to save mine; and not only that, but so prevailed with her father, that I was safely conducted to Jamestown."

Smith's story may or may not have been true; no other account of the event exists. Pocahontas later was married to colonist John Rolfe to make an alliance between Powhatan and the Jamestown colony. She traveled to England with Rolfe, and Smith may have invented the story to gain respect for Pocahontas among the English. If it occurred, it may have been a ritual in which Smith was symbolically killed and "reborn" as a member of the Powhatan people. Although no one really knows what happened in 1607, the event has become a part of the mythology of American history.



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