Powhatan's White Dog: Tsenacommacah in the English Trading World

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Master of Arts

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The inhabitants of *Tsenacommacah* practiced a very different form of commercial exchange than what Englishmen of the seventeenth century were accustomed to. However, many of the English merchants who comprised the joint stock companies of the time had gained valuable experience encountering similar forms of exchange in the nascent transoceanic, global market. But colonists representing the Virginia Company were for the most part far less cosmopolitan or welcoming of foreign customs than the emerging merchant class, thus partially explaining why some companies such as the Levant Company and the East India Company proved far more successful. Comparing accounts from voyages to India with accounts from Virginia provides a unique lens through which we can view the Virginia Company experience.

Virginia’s cultural and natural landscapes were bewildering to unrefined English adventurers. At the same time, these adventurers lacked the “people skills” needed to successfully manage their relationship with Virginia’s native inhabitants, leading them to misunderstand and mishandle Powhatan diplomatic protocol. This combination of environment and personalities led to bloodshed and costly conflict which steered English settlers towards projects that could succeed independently of the Powhatan natives and the Virginia Company. The inability to come to a lasting, peaceful accommodation with Virginia natives was a major fact in the Virginia Company’s collapse.
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Dedicated to my nephew Chase and to my infinitely patient, loving parents.
Introduction: Tsemaosay

“You gave Powhatan a white dog, which Powhatan fed as himself. But your king gave me nothing, and I am better than your white dog.”
~ Uttatamonakkin to John Smith, 1617¹

It was late in the season of Cattapeuk. Blankets of snow, huge flocks of waterfowl, and creeks that greeted swimmers with a thousand knives were just memories, but hungry stomachs replaced the solemn quiet of Popanow. Scarcity was pervasive, and growling stomachs had to be silenced with a tight girdling of one’s apron, like muzzling an anxious dog. Across Tsenacommacah, everyone looked forward to the day soon when the first harvests would begin and fresh cakes of appoans could finally be baked again. Right now a kernel of good hominy would do more to brighten faces than a full white moon. While the women tended the fields to achieve these delights, men followed the gobble of the black ospanno into the glades, lying at the edge of the woods and searching for a red snood like a fish finding a lure. This time of year a great deal of nourishment would come from the water, too, with the long, slender cuppatoan and his grey, bony scutes being one of the choicest prizes. Failing that, shells of cauwaih could be collected and opened in great quantity, revealing the metallic-tasting flesh that was as murky as the river mud. As the ospreys built their nests overhead, something odd had revealed itself on the horizon. Here, upriver, few besides the elderly had ever seen a tsemaosay coming.

The many white tsemaosays writhed and rippled in the wind like sea grass floating ashore a marshy pocosin in the autumn floods. Everyone knew these would carry the pale tassantassas ashore. They came slowly, first up the Bay then following the Powhatan River — the Mamanatowick’s River — from utchepwoissuma, the direction the sun appears. First sighted

by the Nansemond and their neighbors, they would visit the land of the Appamattock near the falls before coming back downstream and settling on Paspahegh lands as their home. This course took half a moon’s life and by the time it concluded the news of the strangers had spread swiftly by some paddling their acomtans. Wowinchopunck, the werowance of the Paspahegh, parlayed with the tassantassas at their new encampment and gave them venison off a freshly killed uttapaantam. He and many others asked what anyone across time and space would wonder in this curious situation—Cacutterwindg kear? But they didn’t seem to respond with what they called themselves, only gestures, long speeches, and bound pieces of parchment they pointed to. At best they would give a sort of terse, flat response like “Raw burt” that didn’t hint at where the man had been or anything he had done in his life. Having a civil conversation with these pale faced strangers was difficult, as their speech was not like that of past visitors and they would not lay down their arms—loud pokosacks with a foul-smelling match. By the time Cattapeuk turned into Cohattayough, problems had begun in Tsenacommacah, land of the Powhatan.²

We can only imagine how the inhabitants of Tsenacommacah felt when the first English arrived and began calling it Virginia. Unfortunately, to reconstruct a full picture of Anglo-Powhatan relations, we must rely heavily on contemporary English accounts, often written by men who played a major role in Virginia’s foundation and therefore have an inherent bias concerning events in which they were involved. It is impossible to cross both chronological and cultural boundaries to the point that one can completely grasp the

seventeenth century Powhatan psyche with any reliability. Such an undertaking is a task best left to the literary world for the degree of conjecture and imagination it would require. However, using an ethnohistorical approach, we can recover a semblance of the Powhatan experience pertaining to what we would call trade and tribute when investigating a key element in the downfall of the Virginia Company of London.

Historians have often indicated a native contribution to the Virginia Company's termination in 1624. Usually they connect that event to the 1622 uprising led by Opechancanough, who was at the time a powerful chief (or *werowance*) and brother of the great chiefs (or *Mamanatowicks*) Powhatan and Opitchipam. While at least 347 English colonists were killed in this attack and it did have a detrimental effect on the public perception of the Company, far greater internal calamities led to its final demise in 1624 and failure to re-organize the following year. Even in terms of direct settler mortality, the effects of Opechancanough's violence were dwarfed by the consequences of the Company's own policies: between 1619 and 1621, 4,270 immigrants came to Virginia, but only about 1,240 were alive in the colony by 1622. There was a native factor in the Virginia Company's failure, but those pointing toward the 1622 uprising are investigating a proximate rather than ultimate cause.

Besides a loss of life and a lost sense of security, the 1622 uprising had very negative commercial effects and long term consequences for the English. On April 23rd, 1623 (Old Style), a court of Virginia investors convened to hear two petitions. One was by Alderman Johnson, an opponent of Sir Edwin Sandys' administration. He asked fellow investors to

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3 James Horn is one such historian: "Opechancanough's uprising had triggered a series of events that fully exposed the failure of Sir Edwin [Sandys]'s schemes..." James Horn. *A Land as God Made It: Jamestown and the Birth of America* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 278.

join him in requesting the king’s intervention to settle Company disputes and assist the colony in recovering from the uprising. He argued for Virginia’s potential evinced by...

...some of emynent sort [of Indians] were converted to Christian Religion [and] Staple Comodities began to be raysed and imported into this kingdome, as Iron, Sturgion [cuppatoan, in Powhatan], Caueary, Sope and Pott-ashes, Masts for Ships, Clapbourd Pipestaues Waynscott, Wine, Pitch, and Tarr and [that] most desyred worke of Silkwormes...

before the uprising curtailed the production of these activities.5 Obviously the commodities mentioned were less exciting than Indian gems, calico cotton, silk, or pepper, but they could put London’s poor to work, obviate the need for some of England’s imports, and support the king’s navy in case of war with the Spanish. Caviar and wine would be nothing for investors then or now to scoff at.

The other petition was a report by Captain Nathaniel Butler entitled “The Vnmasked face of [our] Colony in Virginia as it was in the Winter of [the] yeare 1622.” Here Butler turned the arguments for Virginia’s potential on their head and paints a bleak picture of the colony generally.6 Several dozen planters and mariners who could attest to Virginia’s conditions issued a reply one week later generally refuting Butler’s report, but it is telling that it did not directly contradict several of his points. First, Butler contended that many new arrivals in the colony died after the difficult transoceanic journey for lack of a “Guest house Inne, nor any [the] like place to shroud themselves in at their arriuall.” The planters replied that “itt was a late intent and had by this time been putt in practise to make a generall gatheringe for the buildinge of such a Convenient house...had itt not pleased God to suffer this Disaster to fall out by the Indians.”7 Butler also found that the “Iron workes were vutterly

vasted, & [the] men dead, The furnaces for Glass and Pots at a stay” and that, contrary to Company propaganda, “Tobacco onely was [the] business & for ought [that] I coulde here euery man madd vppon [that] and lytld thought or looked for any thinge else.” Again the planters confirmed this but blamed these setbacks, along with the destruction of all vineyards, on the “Massacre.” Opechancanough’s actions may have only killed hundreds of tassantassas directly, but it cemented the course of Virginia’s future by crushing the Company’s industrial hopes and leaving thousands without an adequate sanctuary in which they may have become “seasoned” and survived a Cohattayough surrounded by the malarial pocosins of Tsenacommacah.

Trade, to the Powhatan and many native cultures, was not the same as it was for the English. As shall be seen, the Powhatan economy was based more on gift exchange than commodity exchange, though not exclusively. Sociologist Marcel Mauss observed that anything from “banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs” could be part of the gift exchange phenomenon, and described transactions in the gift exchange economy as “somewhat voluntary . . . although in the final analysis they are strictly compulsory, on pain of private or public warfare.” Unlike a commodity exchange economy, the value of the exchange is not based on the price of the goods, but on the personal relationship affected by the transaction. Also, gifts are often seen as imbued with the soul of the giver, thus a future reciprocal gift creates a spiritual bond of obligation between two individuals.

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A gift results in the receiver being indebted to the giver spiritually and physically, and in this way those who give (and are able to give) more are those who wield power over debtors. In fact in Pacific Northwest archaic societies, those who could not reciprocate gifts were even punished with slavery.\textsuperscript{11} Giving attracts attention to one’s wealth, yet social dominance comes less from accruing wealth than it does from distributing it. Failure to immediately reciprocate a gift, however, is preferable to either not accepting a gift or giving in return something of small importance to the initial giver, for this would be a clear insult and act of aggression.\textsuperscript{12} Not only is the individual rejecting the quality of the gift, but also the spirit of the giver embodied within. He may even be mocking the courage of the giver to seek revenge for this transgression.

Englishmen around the world encountered cultures well versed in gift exchange and sometimes commodity exchange as well. If they began their careers encountering both exchange types, or at least training to empathize with a foreign commercial client’s needs, they were more likely to approach alien cultures with an open mind. Ultimately Virginia Company policy and personnel decisions hindered Anglo-Powhatan relations, leading to conflict and great difficulty obtaining provisions from Virginia’s land and people. To the chagrin of London merchants at the Company’s helm, this caused a severe restriction in the profitable economic ventures available to colonists, leading to the tobacco monoculture which directed colonial profits and labor away from the Company.\textsuperscript{13} One must not view the failure of Anglo-Powhatan relations as an “inevitable” consequence of joining incompatible peoples, and not all Englishmen were doomed to behave a certain way. As one can tell by

\textsuperscript{11} Marcel Mauss, \textit{The Gift}, 54.
\textsuperscript{13} James Horn, \textit{A Land as God Made It}, 246-247, 280.
investigating more successful foreign adventures of the time, English overseas merchants often adapted well to alien environments. Though not always fully comprehending gift exchange procedures on native terms, they often conformed to them in a way that was both commercially expedient and satisfactory to local clients. Looking at Virginia through the lens of the far more successful East India Company, or “Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies,” gives us an idea of how Englishmen perceived – and sometimes became part of – other cultures.

The portions of this work explore the cultural origins of the Virginia Company’s collapse. They are not arranged in a precise chronological manner but in a way that may give the reader more clarity in understanding how gift concepts informed the entire Powhatan society and subsequently its relationship with Virginia Company planters. The first section will discuss not only the early years of the East India Company, but also the explorers who journeyed to the Far East, before and after the Company was founded. Not all quoted material is from South Asia – it matters less where cultural exchanges occurred than where they show the form and practice of English gift exchange diplomacy. This section will demonstrate how the East India and Levant Companies were successful on a cultural frontier before any profits could even be realized. The second part will analyze the nature of Powhatan authority and consent. Understanding the dual nature of the Powhatan chiefdom as relying on both voluntarism and customary obligations explains the function of governance in an archaic society. Gift-debt relationships are the grease in the wheels of these societies, and without the trust that these long-term obligations require, conflict ensues. The final section discusses John Smith’s adoption ordeal at length and how his white lies in a stressful setting put him on a course towards war. Smith failed to pay his debt, literally disowning the father he had claimed as kin in 1608 by never fully trusting Powhatan. This
culminated in the 1622 uprising which was a repayment of Smith’s broken promises and his people’s insatiable quest for land fueled by Company promises.

Opechancanough punished the English for uncorrected gift exchange violations and other offenses made in their first few years of settlement, especially their failure to confine themselves to places where they could be easily monitored as John Smith had promised.14 Increased settlement threatened the Powhatan way of life and broke the understanding that Englishmen would restrain their thirst for land.15 The uprising directly put an end to Company industries such as glassworks, iron furnaces, and wine-making; setting the course for centuries of tobacco cultivation. Other authors have recognized the dual causes of conflict as lack of merchant tact and English uses of the land, but in addition to this I have chosen to provide the Powhatan commercial perspective through the language of the gift exchange phenomenon.16 The bewildering lands the English encountered, coupled with their refusal to use lessons learned in the English trading world, promoted a colonial system which featured misunderstanding, tobacco economics, and little place for native Virginians.

Buying Culture: Carving a Niche from an Old Statue

To trace the history of the English merchant class which directed the East India Company and revolutionized world trade, it is instructive to refer to their origins as vulnerable traders in the Mediterranean. The East India Company was forged out of concerns for the well-being of a previous trading firm, the Levant Company, which was

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14 One of these other reasons was most likely an unavenged personal threat made by John Smith. While a guest in Pamunkey territory, Smith seized Opechancanough by the hair “among seven hundred of his stoutest men” to prevent a possible ambush. Edward Hale, ed., Jamestown Narratives, 346-349.

15 The English even recognized this. The *casus belli*, according to one commenter, was the fear “that in time we by our growing continually upon them, would disposess them of this country.” Frederic Gleach, *Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures* (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 156-157.

primarily involved in Middle East trade. In 1599, reports emerged of the success of the United East India Company (VOC) in restricting European trade in the Moluccas to only Dutch interests. It was thought that faster movement of goods from the Moluccas through the Cape of Good Hope route to Europe would seriously threaten trade through the Ottoman Empire in the Levant. This proved to be an exaggeration and the Levant Company survived as one of the most successful companies of the era. Nonetheless, this threat led to a perceived need to compete with the Dutch and Portuguese through a separate route. Thus the East India Company was formed in 1600, with a third of the members also owning stock in the Levant Company and Thomas Smith serving as governor of both companies.17

The Company's foundations demonstrate just how late the English often arrived as colonial players among competing European powers, making it difficult for them to carve a niche. Jealous of the wealth of Spain, England looked toward the Mediterranean as a source of wealth long before the Levant Company was founded. In the Levant, Europeans could find such precious commodities as spices, silks, gold, ivory, salt, pepper, and even slaves. This coveted region of the early modern world seemed unobtainable for a distant island nation that would have to contend with Catholic rivals, Ottoman hegemony, and pirates to reach it, but after the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, a power vacuum existed, allowing northern European nations to try their hand at trade in the Mediterranean.18 The Levant Company was chartered in 1592 primarily to trade with the Ottoman Empire. Merchants secured trading privileges, gained commercial expertise, and most importantly, learned the arts of

18 Alison Games, The Web of Empire, 47-49.
cultural exchange and dissimulation. More directly, Levant Company revenues and experienced personnel sowed the seeds of the East India Company in its infancy.19

English travelers to alien lands had to behave far differently from how they wished; they had to learn to control their impulses. Whether making their excursions for business purposes or for their liberal education, they often read or were given travel advice well before their departure. Dangerous lands were a bad place to feel superior or to take offense. One father told his son “Study persons as weal as things...accomadat yourself to [strangers] without giving offens or receaving any for escheweing of snairs and Affronts.” One writer recommended that travelers begin in the German states, where they might learn the tradition of sharing one cup at a table, which would serve as an introduction to further rituals.20 The same travel writer reported traveling on a ship filled with Italians, Turks, Persians, and even South Asians. They all observed their religion privately as a practical matter. The sea served as a highway of many nations and the Ottoman Empire’s policy of tolerance created a melting pot of cultures; in this environment the Mediterranean model was forged, allowing the English to trade where they were a minority by establishing local alliances.21 Avoiding an abusive Ottoman soldier or a zealous Spanish inquisitor required one to swallow pride or lie for profit’s sake. One traveler on a Venetian galley said he “became all things to all men, which let me into the breasts of many.” Ministers, mariners, and traders had to forget their pride, their national affiliations, and their faith.22 Thus hiding one’s identity behind a false veneer and adopting local customs created entrées into other societies.

19 Allison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 50-52.
22 Allison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 77-79.
Lessons learned in the Mediterranean carried over to the East India Company in large part due to the many connections between the two companies. It wasn't enough that a trading company obtained expensive goods; it also had to find customers willing to buy those goods. The Levant Company merchants started the East India Company with the spice trade in mind, and they found sufficient buyers not only in England but in the Mediterranean as well. Top-level Levant merchants had this natural connection to the East India Company and were also enticed to join because its charter gave all 24 directors effective control of the firm, whereas Levant Company policy was mostly made by its general court of all investors, diluting individual power. To give an idea of the overlap between the two companies, in the 1630's the East India Company went through 47 directors: 28 were Levant Company members.23

This cohort of London merchants also dominated the finances of the Virginia Company. In re-evaluating the tabulations of Theodore Rabb, Robert Brenner estimates that the Virginia Company joint stock raised only about £37,000 for the colony, not the entire £200,000 contribution to the colony Rabb assumed for the period before 1624. Despite there being 560 gentry stockholders, Brenner contends they contributed less than £35 each for a total of about £20,000, while private investments, merchant-held stock shares (~£17,000), and lotteries made up most of the remaining £180,000. The £200,000 invested in the colony by 1624 was less than 10% of the East India Company investments during the roughly same period (over £2,000,000 from 1609-1621), mostly due to concerns over risk. In a microcosm of the situation, Thomas Smith established a private plantation in Virginia in

1617, yet canceled the project when it failed to yield quick profits. The same group of merchants left their mark in two hemispheres, but to them the East was more familiar and offered more secure profits despite its distance. Most importantly, the Virginia Company appealed to gentry investors, evidently with disappointing results.

The stock companies oriented towards commerce attracted mostly merchants and few gentlemen, becoming more exclusive and less popular efforts. By 1609 the East India Company had only nine gentry stockholders, compared to hundreds in the Virginia Company for a total of about 45% of membership. Aside from the aims of the companies being different, the relatively high stock price of many merchant companies may have discouraged all but the wealthiest noblemen. The East India Company demanded a whopping £200 and sometimes more as “virtually a minimum investment,” while £12 10s. entitled a Virginia Company investor to potential dividends and 100 acres of land. For these joint stock companies, the form of the membership fit the function, even if the total pounds invested did not. Perhaps the Virginia Company deal was too good to be true: not asking for more pounds per share and giving away land that would have to be wrested from the Powhatan was a recipe for instability.

The early success of the East India Company lay in its flexibility. South Asia had little demand for anything England could produce; so, unlike many other mercantilist joint stock operations of the time, the East India Company relied on transporting silver specie from England to purchase Indian wares that were then traded among different ports, in addition to England and the Mediterranean. This port-to-port “country trade” created greater profit margins but required a great deal of independence on the part of Company factors who

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might go unsupervised for a year or more.\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, potential factors and other prospective personnel were scrutinized, and special committees were often appointed to investigate the candidate’s past behavior. Factors had to be trusted not to indulge heavily in private trade, not to hold debts against Company money, and to handle other cultures well. Nathaniel Eile, for instance, was employed in Turkey for a London merchant and knew Turkish, Italian, Greek, double bookkeeping, and “all kinds of Turkish commodities” – a typical range of qualities possessed by a man selected to become a \textit{junior} factor!\textsuperscript{27} Knowledge of language signaled tolerance of another culture, making a factor less likely to jeopardize the Company.

Early reports from India excited Englishmen eager for profit and also signaled the sort of diplomacy they could expect to encounter. The inspiration for the East India Company may be traced to several Elizabethan-era voyages to South Asia. Reports from men such as John Newberry and Ralph Fitch fascinated Englishmen and captured their imaginations despite the commercial shortcomings of their voyage. A diplomatic and commercial reconnaissance not expected to turn an immediate profit, their 1583 to 1591 voyage was constantly endangered by Portuguese officials who were protective of their established trading posts in the region. Newberry and Fitch’s small party was detained at the Portuguese outpost of Hormuz and sent to the main trading colony at Goa for imprisonment on suspicion of espionage. To the travelers’ relief, they met an English Jesuit priest in Goa who convinced Estado da India officials of the adventurers’ (feigned) Catholic piety and achieved their release after more than three weeks in prison.\textsuperscript{28} Here we see

\textsuperscript{27} K. N. Chaudhuri, \textit{The English East India Company}, 79-83.
Englishmen who are quite comfortable with religious charades for the sake of safety and profit, putting common travel advice to good use.

For the intrepid entrepreneur, there were countless riches to be had in the East Indian trade. Soon after his release, Fitch reported that near Bijapur was the town of “Bellergan, where there is a great market kept of Diamants, Rubies, Saphires, and many other soft stones.”

Gold was also to be found at Patanaw, along with rubies and sapphires at Caplan. Diamonds appeared to be quite common in India, along with innumerable spices traded from present-day Indonesia. In Pegu one could find a red dye from a root called Saia, as well as “woolen cloth, Scarlets, Velvets, Opium, and such like.” Quite clearly these items and the opulence of some residents made an impression on Fitch and his company, so much that when he reached the heart of Mughal territory he declared Agra and Fatepore, “two very great cities, either of them much greater than London and very populous.” He received a grand reception from Akbar, who was perhaps eager to prop up a competing European power against Portugal, “I left William Leades the jeweler in service with the king Zelabdim Echebar [Akbar] in Fatepore, who did entertaine him very well, and gave him an house and five slaves, an horse, and every day sixe S. S. in money.” Aside from a desire to appease trading partners, the English could recognize a semblance of civilization here; Akbar’s effusive gift giving demonstrated his power to outsiders in a way that created bonds rather than war.

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30 Ralph Fitch, “A Letter written from Goa,” 480, 496.
Echoing Fitch’s exclamations of Fatepore and Agra’s greatness, the English in this period were generally impressed with many of the cities they came across in their merchant journeys, whether in the Middle or Far East. Cairo was described as “populous beyond all proportion” by one traveler, another commented on the diversity of “Moors, Turks, Negroes, Jewes, Coptics, Greeks, and Armenians” living in that city. Aleppo was also noted for its fascinating diversity by the Levant Company chaplain Biddulph, and Constantinople’s population of 700,000 was awe-inspiring. By comparison London in 1600 had about 200,000 residents, but this was an order of magnitude greater than other English cities of the time.\(^3\)\(^4\) Not only was an Englishman out of place and unlikely to act entitled in far-flung, gigantic cities, he also may internalize the tolerance he witnessed and decide if he were to expect polite treatment, he had better show genuine respect to the various religions and races he encountered. Any European in a city greater than London was also likely to consider such a place more or less “civilized” despite religious differences with its residents. This assessment was a major factor in prompting a company to send either merchants or planters and soldiers, creating divergence in East India Company and Virginia Company practices.

In both the East and the West, English joint stock companies did have at least one type of adventurer in common: clergymen.\(^3\)\(^5\) According to Fitch, an Englishman could be assured of righteousness in leading the misguided “idolaters” towards the true Christian faith in India, for their ignorance was evidenced in the town of Benares by “their images standing, which be evill favoured, made of stone and wood, some like liones, leopards, and monkeis, some like men & women, and pecocks, and some like the devil with foure armes and 4.

\(^3\) Alison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 54-55.  
\(^4\) Alison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 54-55.  
\(^5\) Alison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 232-234.
hands.” In many areas one could find people who did not eat meat and were strange enough in their religious duties to “have hospitals for sheepe, goates, dogs, cats, birds, & for all other living creatures” and “give meat to Ants.” It appears veterinary medicine was a low priority in Elizabethan England; certainly a bold English priest could direct such energy towards more serious spiritual thoughts. Though Indians in silk garb were more impressive than Powhatans in furs, India was considered a state of “heathen Princes” with mysterious, frightening beliefs.

Ralph Fitch’s experience presaged that of Thomas Roe, although in different circumstances. Appointed in 1615 as the first East India Company ambassador to India, Roe had to constantly battle with local nobles who did not at first acknowledge his position and directed a stream of petty offenses toward him. The Mughal court tried to assuage his frustration with gifts of horses, an elephant, and a flag-bearing entourage. He managed to maintain the Emperor Jahangir’s trust, but he had proven a more abrasive character than Fitch, demanding to be treated as if he were King James.

Roe was unlike many ambassadors and factors the East India Company normally selected. He lacked the extensive Mediterranean trading background one might expect, but instead relied on powerful connections; his grandfather and uncle, for example, had both served as Lord Mayors of London. Educated in law, he quickly gained the trust of James I and served in the court of his daughter, Princess Elizabeth. Roe was dispatched to Spain and later to the Amazon, where he traveled 300 miles upriver from 1610-1611 but failed to

37 Ralph Fitch, “A Letter written from Goa,” 482.
38 Alison Games, The Web of Empire, 157.
39 Alison Games, The Web of Empire, 156.
discover his destination, El Dorado. He funded efforts to colonize the region afterward and also served for a time on the Royal Council for Virginia.\(^{40}\)

His diplomatic approach was rather blunt in India and later the Mediterranean in the 1620’s, where he refused to give a customary gift to an Ottoman vizier he thought would soon be replaced. Later he nearly organized an English attack on pirate cities under Ottoman protection, but soon he obtained peace and trade concessions through an exchange of slaves and prisoners.\(^{41}\) The first of the two incidents shows a blatant gift exchange violation.

Historian Alison Games has focused on how Roe’s conflicts emerged from his easily slighted honor, for he wrote that James “commanded mee to doe nothing unworthy the Honor of a Christian King, and noe reward can humble mee to any basenes,” but his background as someone skilled at taking land for England and unskilled in diplomatic giving is more significant.\(^{42}\) This episode shows directly a man who lacked commercial experience in the Levant trade who behaved far less agreeably and far more rigidly than men who started their careers there. Courtiers, explorers, and soldiers with landed interests coveted their honor far more than friendship; ritual gift giving was regard as unnecessary waste.

This attitude contrasts with men such as Ralph Fitch, who was not a Levant trader but at least understood the subtle art of commercial negotiation. He was a member of the Leathersellers’ Company of London before joining Levant merchantman John Newberry for his eight year East Indies odyssey.\(^{43}\) From Fitch’s experience he could recognize and empathize with the desires of those on the other side of the table from him, even if privately he abhorred many practices in India as evidenced in his comments. Though etiquette was

\(^{40}\) Alison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 154-155.

\(^{41}\) Allison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 159-160.

\(^{42}\) Allison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 158.

practiced at the outset for long-term financial gain, it ultimately gave him the ability to navigate and incorporate alien cultures before he knew it.

As the first Protestant nation to contact many Asian societies, the Dutch were often the first to master local customs, which they then taught to the English. In some cases, when the English arrived, the Dutch tried to shut out a potential competitor, but quite often they served as cultural trailblazers and tutors instead. In Japan, William Adams, an Englishman employed by the Dutch East India Company, managed to temporarily secure better trade terms for the English than even the Dutch enjoyed. He had gone so far as to take a Japanese wife, have two children by her, and be granted 80-90 “husbandmen” as “slaves or servauntes” by the emperor.44 This represented an ultimate cultural immersion which few achieved, but failing that, a factor could at least learn how to dine properly. At the Dutch traders’ house in 1613, Richard Cocks, the chief factor in Japan and an acquaintance of Adams, was stunned to see the Dutch head of the post serve his guests on his knees, but he was assured that it was “the fashion of the Country.”45

Cocks later needed advice on trading customs. After displaying his wares at the English post in Hirado, some customers took items yet only paid what they liked, not what Cocks asked. Not wanting to offend clients he asked if this might be “the custome of this Countrey or no.” Sort of: for those without trade concessions such as the Portuguese and Chinese it was, but since the English had trading privileges, Cocks was entitled to the price he asked for.46 This passage is of particular interest as it shows the Japanese were using both gift exchange and commodity based economics. How do we resolve this combination? In the

45 Allison Games, “Anglo-Dutch Connections and Overseas Enterprises,” 448.
46 Allison Games, The Web of Empire, 109.
gift exchange vs. commodity exchange paradigm, the two are ideals and not mutually
exclusive in practice. Usually a society is capable of both, though one dominates. The best
interpretation here is that past transgressors or outsiders, “strangers” (tassantassas to the
Powhatan), had to assure their trustworthiness by gifts, whereas familiar friends who had
been incorporated into Japanese understanding were accepted into society and trusted to not
cheat buyers.

One of the most interesting works for those investigating English gift giving is the
recently published journal of Anthony Marlowe, a goldsmith with Levantine experience who
recorded his outbound voyage on the Third Voyage of the East India Company (1607-1610).
There were two major vessels on this voyage: Hector made for Surat while Red Dragon was
bound for Java. Richmond Barbour, the editor, is primarily fascinated by the crew’s
performance of Hamlet (twice) and Richard II (once), the first known performances of
Shakespeare outside of Europe, whose canon Barbour notes as eventually becoming “an
important tool in the cultural work of colonization.” Equally fascinating are examples of
diplomatic gift giving with natives, though maybe open-air plays count as gifts as well. Even
if archaic societies would not normally consider stage performances by themselves to be
substantial gifts, Mauss pointed out examples of ritual performances and songs preceding
high-profile gift ceremonies, particularly demonstrating that hatred and warfare are alleviated
by passing gifts. Shakespearean plays displaying the folly of lust for power could have been
understood similarly.

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48 Richmond Barbour, ed. (here writing directly). “The East India Company Journal of Anthony Marlowe,
49 In one example this is compared by Melanesians to potentially furious dogs “playfully nuzzling one another.” Marcel Mauss, The Gift, 31-33.
Early encounters demonstrated how natives and Europeans alike adjusted their behavior to achieve desired results. On August 27th, 1607 (Old Style), in what was and still is called Sierra Leone, the ships had to pull in for fresh supplies. One man, “Lucas Fernandas,” spoke Portuguese well, so this was used as the medium of translation between Captain William Hawkins and King “Borreas,” or Buré. After letting the king know their intent was to use the land to simply replenish supplies, the captain gave the king a “Bottle of wyne…whch he kindly receved, ffor yt semeth they love yt well. Our Captayne sate by him aboute 2 howres, and in his talke he seemed very well affected to Christianytie, and that he himselfe had a great desyre of a long tyme to be of that professione.” The captain then invited him to receive some instruction aboard ship if he so desired. Barbour notes that Buré was already baptized a Catholic and perhaps was telling Hawkins what he wanted to hear. One may speculate that the significance of wine as Christ’s blood in communion may have prompted the king to devise this strategy. His next gift may very well fit into this theme: “kinge Borrea at his house tooke a hoope ringe of gould of ffrom his ffinger and gave yt to our Captayne. Yt was of about 6 shillings valew.” This recalls the spiritual significance of rings in holy matrimony and among Cardinals and nuns, while Marlowe’s immediate appraisal indicates the latent commodity-centered thoughts of the English traders.

Three days later, on August 30th, another remarkable cultural exchange occurred. Some of the locals, Marlowe reported, “weved us ashore as though some extreordynarye thinge had happened.” The mood must have been tense; the crew “ffound all the Negroes in armes & there women ffleed.” After an awkward standoff one man finally intimated in Portuguese that “some great Injurye had bene offered” by several crew members. The captain of the Hector tied some men to the capstan and hung weights on their necks while

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threatening to punish others in this manner, until one confessed that several men had stolen goods from the locals. "So by the wisdom of our Generall, and Captayne," Marlowe notes, "all the goodes lost was brought to light, and rendred to the poore Negroes agayne, 2 peces of theire goodes more then they coude demaunde." Most of the offenders were punished at the capstan in the manner previously described, while one was ducked at the yard arm (cast into the water from the yard). The captain made sure the locals witnessed all of this, and those "wch were abord did declare to theire fellowes of these partes of the good Justice theye had ffound, and what punishment was Infflicted uppon those that wronged them."51

With limited understanding of the local language, it seems in this incident Marlowe assumed the natives were most pleased with the punishment of the wrongdoers. However, in all likelihood the locals were happier to see their goods restored to "more then they coude demaunde" – a gift could soothe over transgressions, indicated the captain’s goodwill, and recognized the status of the parties involved in the dispute. The next day, September 1st, the captain bought and traded items with some natives who lived on islands in a nearby creek, while also giving them "beedes and knives to the cheefest of them, to theire great Content."52 This shows the English recognized that the culture of Sierra Leone, like that of Japan, utilized both commodity and gift exchange practices. What they did not fully comprehend, as evidenced by the monetary appraisal of anything made from precious metals, was the significant spiritual bond created between English sailors and African villagers by virtue of gifts given through their leaders. Though the English may have treated the personal bond of gifts more like a trustworthy business partnership, getting the English

52 Richmond Barbour, "The East India Company Journal of Anthony Marlowe, 1607-1608," 278
to at least behave appropriately must have satisfied these natives long used to transient European visitors such as the Portuguese.

One should take care not to stereotype English merchants and gentry into a strict dichotomy of two tropes. Englishmen often felt comfortable about their nation’s moral superiority, but that does not mean they always scorned novel cultures. Even though we may often assume the almost powerless English overseas factors needed to ingratiate themselves to clients to win them over for profit, many merchants sincerely enjoyed the chance to adopt new languages, customs, diets, and friends. The example of William Adams demonstrates that the English were not always bigoted xenophobes and could even complete a total cultural transformation by choice. Though violence would later emerge as a major tool for assimilation, in this period overseas English merchants demonstrated the need for a deep understanding of foreign cultures and paved the way for an “irregular” British Empire which ruled according to local conditions. Merchant adventurers of the period showed there was more than one route to success, and to achieve it one could blend into another culture rather than force others into conformity. The crew of Hector and Red Dragon did not respond to conflict with violence in Sierra Leone, but rather assumed native agency and truthfulness by meticulously redressing their grievances and punishing unruly crewmen. Their men were not inherently more honest than the Africans and were not treated that way, creating a partnership among cultural equals which fostered prosperity. As we shall see, the tassantassas in Virginia would not always act as open and magnanimous towards indigenous people as Anthony Marlowe’s mates had.

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53 Alison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 83-84.
54 Alison Games, *The Web of Empire*, 297-299.
Sovereignty: Translating Chiefly Power

The power of chiefs in *Tsenacommacah* was recognized by tribute paid to them by their subjects, which helped support their enhanced lifestyles.\(^{55}\) Though this has been viewed as only a limited redistribution system by some authors, I contend that this tribute was expected to be fully reciprocated in a type of gift exchange involving more than just inanimate objects.\(^{56}\) Chiefly influence depended on the control of trade of prestigious goods, and within *Tsenacommacah* trade was initiated by gifts or tribute, similar to what we have seen in Anthony Marlowe’s journal. To understand why relations between the English and Powhatan failed, one must understand the nature of Indian-European diplomacy, and to understand native diplomacy one must understand native sovereignty.

Archaeological evidence indicates societies tend to centralize more power in response to nearby competitors’ increased organization, but just as the residents of a chiefdom resist domination by an outside presence, so too will they resist overly authoritarian rulers from within. Accumulating too much tribute without redistribution creates resentment, while accumulating too little tribute can make a chief appear weak in the face of competitors. Consequently, a chief must carefully balance the desires of the people for both security and liberty, and with no standing army must rely upon community support of his or her decisions. Additionally, to link disparate communities, chiefly authority is identified with spiritual abilities. As archaeologist Stephen Potter puts it, “the role of chief

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\(^{56}\) For limited redistribution see Helen Rountree. *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 111.
[is] cast as a ritually sanctioned intermediary between the secular and the sacred, thereby transcending purely local concerns.\textsuperscript{57}

William Strachey, at one time the Secretary of Virginia, noted that in addition to conventional political chiefs, the Powhatan also had councilors (called \textit{cronoccoes}) and “war captains,” the term for which may have been \textit{cockarouse} or \textit{Caucorouse}, according to John Smith.\textsuperscript{58} War captains became known for their bravery and leadership skills and were recognized by \textit{werowances} with gifts of precious items, such as beads or copper, as well as influence over commoners that may extend well beyond wartime. Anthropologist Frederic Gleach compares these war captains to a northern Algonquian concept of the \textit{ginap} war chiefs, who were recognized for supernatural powers. Unlike a shaman, a \textit{ginap} could not heal or cast spells, but could perform feats of superhuman strength or endurance. Though of a different quality, the \textit{amount} of power a \textit{ginap} was reckoned to possess may have been comparable to that of a shaman, as a whole army could be rendered impotent with the death of a \textit{ginap}, regardless of its strength.\textsuperscript{59}

Anthropologist Margaret Holmes Williamson offers some modified support for Gleach’s comparison by interpreting the role of \textit{werowance} as one of passive judge and priestly king, while \textit{cockarouses} were active agents executing a \textit{werowance}’s will, whether serving guests, raiding enemies, or punishing offenders. Importantly, it appears \textit{cockarouses} could achieve or inherit their position. Powhatan’s \textit{cockarouses} on his council included such district chiefs as Opechancanough; in turn his \textit{cockarouses} included village \textit{werowances}, so one was a \textit{cockarouse} or

\textsuperscript{58}Cronoccoes is from Edward Haile, ed., \textit{Jamestown Narratives}, 615. Cockarouse variants are from Margaret Holmes Williamson. \textit{Powhatan Lords of Life and Death: Command and Consent in Seventeenth-Century Virginia} (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 134, 165-166.
\textsuperscript{59}Frederic Gleach. \textit{Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia}, 34.
werowance depending on the situation, and “like his sliding secular status, the werowance’s sacerdotal status varied also according to context.”

Williamson fails to distinguish between cockarouses and Strachey’s cronoccoes, however, and unfortunately the latter term rarely appears. Strachey at one point simply defines them as “chief men” separately from cawcawwasaughes (cockarouses). Perhaps cronoco was a collective term for all men who advised a chief in council — whether cockarouses, influential priests, or werowances too old to fulfill the role of cockarouse. Smith seems to use cockarouse synonymously with war captain, but it appears the role of cockarouse included several peaceful duties.

Whether all cockarouses were also war captains, or all war captains became cockarouses, is unclear — just because one is given the task of leading men into battle (as a cockarouse) does not mean one is very good at it. It is hypothesized here that being successful in war earned a cunning warrior, cockarouse or otherwise, recognition as a war captain and commemorative given names — Strachey mentions “the king” rewarding valorous deeds with “a name answerable to the attempt” and high status goods.

The concept of the ginap illuminates some of the descriptions of the Powhatan power structure the English give us, as it shows that leaders besides priests and conjurers were recognized for their spiritual power. Also, the degree of authority a werowance held depended on his qualities as a ruler, and to make matters more complicated, Strachey records that a war captain could be “some lusty fellow” or a werowance as well. Chief Powhatan’s brother and immediate successor Opitchapam apparently wielded little power, with younger brother Opechancanough being the de facto Mamanatowick for much of his tenure. The

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60 Margaret Williamson, *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death*, 135-136, 170-172.
English observed that, compared to Opechancanough, Opitchapam was "decrepit and lame," implying that he was even unfit as a cockarouse before he became Mamanatowick.\(^{64}\)

Opechancanough was already recognized as a great war-chief and councilor, and with these sort of merit badges, coupled with his esteemed lineage, he was able to muster incredible power in 1622 while Opitchipam was still living.\(^{65}\) Being able to challenge and punish the English settlers was as much an unspoken message to native residents of Tsenacommacah as it was to the English: by my cleverness, skill, and supernatural power I can defeat any opponent, what can Opitchapam do for you? In Opechancanough's mind, the 1622 uprising would accomplish two goals at once, correcting improper English behavior and cementing his authority to the detriment of his brother. Since power was more earned and demonstrated than inherited, a coup was unnecessary. After 1622, perhaps in an effort to win back confidence from his subjects, Opitchapam foolishly boasted that the Pamunkey (whom he directly ruled) could feed any allies and kill any Englishmen that might raid their fields. The English came as expected, and Opitchapam's men engaged in a rare two day, open-field skirmish.\(^{66}\) After Opitchapam lost this battle and hundreds of bowmen, Opechancanough's superior skill as a ruler and warrior was self-evident. It was so evident that the English often seem to forget about Opitchapam, demonstrating how confused they could be in this strange land about as simple a question as "who leads these people?"

Not only did the colonists grasp Powhatan etiquette poorly and having a hard time locating who exactly was in charge, they also were challenged by the task of understanding the nature of Powhatan authority. As aforementioned, directing men into battle required supernatural talent no matter one's birthright. But besides this, werowances not only secured

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\(^{64}\) James Horn, *A Land as God Made It*, 249-250.


\(^{66}\) Helen Rountree, *Pocahontas, Powhatan, Opechancanough*, 220-222.
the public defense, but also occasionally distributed copper and beads, which Williamson has interpreted to signify the essence of Powhatan life. In her view, white jewelry represented water (the source of pearls and Roanoke beads) while red ore represented earth (the color of most Tidewater Virginia soil), and together white and red represented life itself. The exchange of auspicious jewelry may have been normally restricted to high-status individuals and their vassals—a gift practice which Mauss and Bronislaw Malinowski noticed in the kula ring in Melanesia.

Chiefs also gave gifts of corn and venison, most likely supported priests, and provided sacrifices for their people's sake. Also, only priests and chiefs were allowed access to the most sacred temples at Uttamussack, and only these spiritually significant positions were assured of a comfortable afterlife. Thus the Powhatan chiefdom cannot be viewed as a "limited redistributive" one in a Western sense of commoditized accounting, but one in which commoners agreed to give tribute to generous leaders who showed supernatural ability in battle or an ability to intercede with spiritual beings for the people.

Hidden in Powhatan's title, Mamanatowick, is the word manitou, an almost universal Algonquian term for spirit beings, albeit with many spelling variations. Gleach compares Powhatan to the great Micmac Sagamore Membertou, "having been since his youth a great [war] Captain, and also having exercised the offices of soothsayer and medicine man." One cannot accurately gauge the degree to which Powhatan or Opechancanough fully assumed these various roles, but suffice to say, the people of over two dozen tribes in Tsenacommacah

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67 "But to sume he favors...whome he giveth beads into ther hande and this is the greatest curtesey he doth his people." Daniel Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624. Peter C. Mancall, ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 59.
68 Margaret Williamson, Powhatan Lords of Life and Death, 251-254.
69 Marcel Mauss, The Gift, 28.
70 Margaret Williamson, Powhatan Lords of Life and Death, 164-165, 171-172, also see Edward Haile, ed. Jamestown Narratives, 652.
71 Frederic Gleach, Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia, 32-33.
would only collectively embrace men who fulfilled economic, religious, and military roles in exemplary fashion. They could not be compelled by force alone and in this sense they formed their own social and spiritual contract through their tribute. In fact it appears some tribes did indeed vacillate between more than one power center, as archaeological evidence and mid-seventeenth century accounts indicate the Patawomecks on the Northern Neck were part of the once-powerful Conoy chiefdom until nominally switching their allegiance to Powhatan shortly before the English arrived. Powhatan had to market himself as one leadership choice among many; therefore, maximizing his appearance of generosity and spiritual power was paramount.

To reinforce the reality of werowances as spiritual leaders, it is worth noting that Gleach has found special meaning in the word Powhatan itself. Comparing notes with Ojibwa, Cree, and Micmac experts, he deduces that the root Algonquian word powwdw in this case means “dreamer” or “dreams.” It is known that Chief Powhatan’s true name was Wahunsenacah and that he was only later called Powhatan. The traditional assumption has been that he was renamed after his birthplace. Gleach argues, however, that the chief’s birthplace was renamed after him, with an approximate meaning of “one who dreams” for the person and “dreamer-hill” for the place. This is significant as dreams were reckoned as a source of power by Virginia Algonquians as late as the 1920’s. Also of note is that Strachey gives the native name for the falls of the James as Paquacowng, distinct from the word Powhatan, therefore Powhatan carries more meaning than simply “fall of water” and has yet to be deciphered. Of course, with the Powhatan language being long extinct it is unlikely

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72 Stephen Potter, Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs, 149-150.
74 Frederic Gleach, Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia, 33.
75 Edward Haile, ed., Jamestown Narratives, 595.
anyone will ever prove Gleach’s hypothesis, but it is worth noting that the Powhatan had at least one location renamed for a ruler. Strachey records “a country called Opechanckeno upon the head of Pamunkey River” presumably replacing the name of the Pamunkey or Youghtanund district. Gleach’s assertion is challenged by Williamson, who considers “a country called Opechanckeno” an aberration and takes what Strachey, John Smith, and Captain Gabriel Archer say at essentially face value, assuming werowances usually took the name of their birthplace.

If Wahunsenacah was associated with dreams that could guide his actions, then it adds an interesting insight into a story the English heard that was recorded by William Strachey:

Not long since it was that [Powhatan’s] priests told him how that from the Chesapeack Bay a nation should arise which should dissolve and give end to his empire, for which not many years since, perplex’d with this devilish oracle and divers understanding thereof, according to the ancient and gentile [pagan] custom he destroyed and put to sword all such who might lie under any doubtful construction of the said prophecy...And so remain all the Chessiopeians at this day and for this cause extinct.

Strachey wrote these words sometime between 1609 and 1612, so he wasn’t giving some clever anecdotal fable about how Powhatan’s foolish misguidance allowed the English to conquer his lands. Powhatan’s chiefdom was still very much a nation to be reckoned with in those years, even if the English hoped to “give end to his empire” in the future, so the basis of this story is most likely true. Here and elsewhere in the records we see priestly divination used to determine the intentions of outsiders. For example, John Smith was subjected to a divination ceremony at Werowocomoco reportedly lasting three or four days, and at its

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76 Edward Haile, ed., *Jamestown Narratives*, 627. Also see 613, “this tract or portion of land...is govern’d in chief by a great king, by them called by sundry names according to his divers places, qualities, or honors by himself obtained amongst them either for his valor, his government, or some suchlike goodness”

77 Margaret Williamson, *Powhatan Lords of Life and Death*, 55-59.

conclusion he must have been relieved to discover that he was freed in the end. Whether Powhatan priests or conjurers would be the principal figures in these ceremonies is unclear; many eyewitnesses interchange the two terms. Robert Beverley was the only one who distinguished them unequivocally, but he made his observations in the 1690's and may have been influenced heavily by Thomas Hariot’s notes on the Roanoke natives in *A Briefe and True Report.* Parsing the records, priest and conjurer seem to possibly be two different roles – the former one appeasing deities, the latter more active, magical, and shamanistic – but they may have overlapped in much the same manner as *cronocoes* and *cockerouses.*

Rather than simply consulting top priests for guidance as the English believed, Powhatan would have to participate in divination ceremonies regularly to maximize his authority, perhaps by interpreting dreams or sharing his own for interpretation. In fact, at the end of Smith’s divination ceremony, according to one of his accounts Chief Powhatan “more like a devil than a man, with some two hundred more [painted] as black as himself, came unto him and told him they were now friends.” In connection with these recorded instances, Powhatan’s name and title suggest he was recognized by his subjects for some prognostication ability used to protect his people from foreigners, whether directly or indirectly. This sort of power could genuinely frighten Englishmen rather than cause derision: when Rev. Samuel Purchas interviewed the priest Uttatomakkin, he was convinced the chief Powhatan god *Oke* was the devil incarnate and could give priests real power, and he wasn’t alone in this opinion. English planters and gentry who had only

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82 Edward Haile, ed., *Jamestown Narratives,* 880-884. Also see xix (writing directly) and 139-140.
visited other countries in a military context had less of a basis to understand Powhatan magical rituals and were more likely to assimilate rather than accommodate these practices.

Beyond what has been said earlier about the spiritual importance of gifts exchanged between individuals and the ritual significance of copper, it should be mentioned that the English record the Powhatan people directly rewarding supernatural power, making it a further possibility that Chief Powhatan exchanged tribute for his protection by supernatural means. John Smith described in one of his later writings capturing two Chickahominy brothers after a pistol went missing from Jamestown. One brother was released to retrieve the pistol; if he failed to return in twelve hours, the other brother would be killed. The captured brother was given charcoal to start himself a fire in the fort's dungeon; when the released one returned with the pistol, he found his comrade had accidentally suffocated himself and feinted. Smith promised "if hereafter they would not steal, I would bring him to life again." Upon his successful revival and recovery, rumor spread among the natives of "a miracle, that Captain Smith could make a man alive that was dead." Afterwards Smith was showered with gifts: "from all parts, with presents, they desired peace; returning many stolen things which we never demanded."83

Although some Algonquian leaders like Membertou served the role of medicine man, there’s no direct mention by the English of a Mamanatowick healing the sick. Still, we know that priests and conjurers were associated with healing, as theologian Alexander Whitaker described the importance of village shamans to the Powhatans: "they have their recourse to him, who conjureth for them, and many times prevaleth. If they be sick, he is their physician; if they be wounded, he sucketh them; at his command they make war and peace;

neither do they anything of moment without him." Strachey also appears to describe healing rituals of the priestly class, "They have many professed physicians who with their charms and rattles with an infernal rout of words and actions will seem to suck their inward grief from their navels." John Clayton observed in the 1680's that specimens of important medicinal plants used by priestly healers were kept safe in temples, which only werowances and priests had open access to. Given that Powhatan had this access and was purportedly esteemed "not only as a king, but a half a god," and given the understanding of healing as connected to the supernatural, it is not out of the question that the Mamanatowick offered his people health in return for tribute, either through controlling access to vital medicines or the patronage of skilled priests or conjurers. For tribute and allegiance, Powhatan returned not only goods but also his other-worldly services as a debt payment. Both subject and sovereign were expected to continually reciprocate each other's gifts to create a bond of kinship.

Divine medical power was not altogether unfamiliar to the English, for their own king was believed to channel the power of the Great Physician above to cure "the King's evil" by the laying-on of hands and coin pendants (today this "evil" is known as scrofula, a form of tuberculosis). Two copper alloy King’s Touch tokens have been found in the context of a high-status early seventeenth century burial of a child at Werowocomoco, along with red, white, and black prestige items representing "a complex suite of ideas associated with life, death, and liminality." Likely intended for trade, at least 23 King’s Touch tokens

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87 The quotation can be found in Helen Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia*, 115.
dating from circa 1610 have also been found at Jamestown. Though not every one of these coins came from a person treated for the King’s evil, the spiritual significance of these items was noticed by the colonists, and apparently the Powhatan as well. These tokens were an opening through which the English may have understood the importance the Powhatan attached to a variety of prestige items. By this view, flooding the Powhatan with touch tokens as visible signs of King James’ divine power was a form of spiritual imperialism.

Although some Englishmen such as Rev. Whitaker recognized the Powhatan chiefdom not as monarchical but “a rude kind of commonwealth and rough government,” most did not acknowledge the personal nature of Powhatan authority. Just as they recognized the divine right of monarchs in Europe, so too did Englishmen sometimes gaze in amazement at Powhatan’s power, acknowledging a Mamanatowick’s divine sovereignty:

And sure it is to be wond’red at how such a barbarous and uncivil price should take into him…a form and ostentation of such majesty… I am persuaded there is an infused kind of divineness, and extraordinary – appointed that it shall be so by the King of Kings – to such who are his immediate instruments on earth, how wretched soever otherwise under the course of misbelief and infidelity.

As an “immediate instrument,” Powhatan was the legitimate intermediary between his subjects and God in English eyes. Endowed with blood royal, this placed him in the same terms that James I, God’s vicar as head of the Church of England, even described himself.

It is often assumed that the English accepted the divine right of kings for quite some time, but although the Stuarts promoted this philosophy, it was not always the prevailing theory before James. With the constant upheaval on the English throne in the period, from

91 Edward Haile, ed., Jamestown Narratives, 618.
92 Margaret Williamson, Powhatan Lords of Life and Death, 107.
the Wars of the Roses to the aftermath of Henry VIII's Reformation, the position of the monarch was considered by many to be a right no matter how it was achieved. By this philosophy, a monarch was justified by the people's indirect election of him or her through the Lords and Commons in Parliament, whose choice was inspired by God.\textsuperscript{93}

Smith and Strachey recognized the Powhatan chiefdom as a monarchy and discussed how the Powhatan reckoned descent not as a matter-of-fact, but to put it in agreement with James' rule by inheritance rather than election. This reinforced Stuart revisionist notions of power in reference to both English and Powhatan rulers. Although the Powhatan chiefdom was not an absolute monarchy, recognizing it as such gave the English a simple, direct leader to deal with, one who could forcefully command werowances like Wowinchopunck near Jamestown. But in reality, these were also Powhatan's councilors who would greatly influence his decisions, restraining his power by custom and tradition much like peers in the English Parliament. In a time when royal absolutism was on the rise, it was avant-garde for Smith and Strachey to cast the Powhatan in terms that limited the power credited to his subordinates.

This false analogy also meant that the Mamanatowick's divine right included a heathen interpretation of the divine, one colored by "misbelief and infidelity" to the English. Giving tribute was a form of submission to Powhatan, and submitting to Powhatan not only meant treason, but also sinful heresy. In Smith's \textit{Proceedings of the English Colony}, there is a discussion in which Powhatan complains of Captain Christopher Newport treating him properly, but that both Newport and Powhatan must give Smith whatever he desires with no reciprocation in spite of Smith calling both "father." Smith rebuked in religious terms any

\textsuperscript{93}Margaret Williamson, \textit{Powhatan Lords of Life and Death}, 108-109.
notion that he should act subservient, "I have but one God, I honour but one king; and I live not here as your subject, but as your friend."94

The spiritual essence of Powhatan tribute and gift introductions prevented many Englishmen from dealing peacefully with the Powhatan chiefdom. With wide-ranging experience, a cosmopolitan English merchant-traveler such as Ralph Fitch or Richard Cocks would not be so essentialist as to reduce Powhatan sovereignty to the same terms as an English monarchy and would see the importance of local rulers' role as cronocoes — the eyes and ears of the Mamanatowick who could sway his opinion. In all likelihood merchants also would have fewer qualms about swallowing the pill of non-Christian spiritual concepts, passively tolerating what they internally may have viewed as heresy. The experience of being one Christian among thousands of non-Christians tends to render one a bit slower to judge. The actions of most of the English tassantassas would betray their true intentions; however, the deeds of a few men such as Christopher Newport demonstrated the efficacy of the merchant mindset in uniting disparate cultures.

Dangerous Presents: Adopting a White Lie

The inability of the English to accommodate the Powhatan chiefdom is evinced in the story of John Smith's capture and his subsequent dealings with the Mamanatowick. Given that John Smith wrote several overlapping accounts of his time in Virginia, one has to decide which is more reliable. There are even direct contradictions, such as Smith mentioning being conducted to Jamestown after his capture with "4 men — one that usually carried my gown...two other loaded with bread, and one to accompany me" in A True Relation, to simply "12 guides" in The General History.95 Smith wrote A True Relation as a private letter only

95 Edward Haile, ed., Jamestown Narratives, 162, 240.
a year after arriving in the colony (1608) and Proceedings of the English Colony in 1612, but The General History was set down far later in 1624, when he had time to settle political scores and exaggerate in his narrative. Pocahontas famously saves Smith’s life at Werowocomoco in The General History and plays a much larger role overall, perhaps because she had died and became well-known by the time of its writing. One would imagine that nearly having one’s cranium pulverized would warrant mention in the earlier work. Many authors have glossed over this and other discrepancies between A True Relation and The General History, treating the latter with little scrutiny and using it as their main reference point, perhaps because it contains more detail. As Smith had little time to exaggerate, romanticize, and politicize his letter sent in 1608, and as it was a more immediate recollection, I believe it is best to favor A True Relation where events are coterminous. The fact that the Virginia Company was in its death throes in 1624 would have also colored Smith’s work with a selective hindsight.

Smith set out on a trip to trade for corn and explore the Chickahominy River in December, 1607. He was ambushed on the upper Chickahominy by a group of Powhatans led by Opechancanough, possibly for intruding on a communal hunt, receiving a thigh wound and witnessing two of his countrymen killed. After being brought to the hunting town of Rassaweeck between the Chickahominy and Pamunkey Rivers, Opechancanough watched as Smith showed him

a compass dial, describing by my best means the use thereof, whereat he so amazedly admired as he suffered me to proceed in a discourse of the roundness of the earth, the course of the sun, moon, stars, and planets…

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97 John Smith’s most famous rescue can be found in Edward Haile, ed., Jamestown Narratives, 239. On Pocahontas’ popularity see Helen Rountree, Pocahontas, Powhatan, Opechancanough, 176, 183.
98 For example, Seth Mallios. The Deadly Politics of Giving, 88; James Horn, A Land as God Made It, 68-73; Margaret Williamson, Powhatan Lords of Life and Death, 215.
[He] took great delight in understanding the manner of our ships and sailing the seas, the earth and skies, and of our God.  

Perhaps due to this seemingly magical wisdom and knowledge of other realms, Opechancanough spared Smith by preventing the father of a man Smith killed from exacting his revenge. Then he conducted Smith on a long, circuitous journey to show off the captured English leader. He was eventually led to Tappahannock where the locals examined Smith to see if he was the captain of a ship’s crew that had killed their werowance and “took off his people” the previous year. Seeing he was too short to fill the description, Smith was once again spared and finally brought to Werowocomoco, Powhatan’s capital. Here, Smith lied and said that Christopher Newport, his “father” and “mewroames” (werowance), would return and carry the colonists away after repairing their pinnace, Discovery. Their only other goal, Smith said, was to avenge the death of another “child” of Newport killed by the Monacan, a rival nation of the Powhatan. At some point the aforementioned divination ceremony occurred involving circles of corn kernels and sticks, notably including sacrifices of “Great cakes of deer suet, deer, and tobacco... casteth in the fire.” Finally, the Mamanatowick did not ask Smith’s people to leave upon Newport’s arrival, but rather to move the colony “and to live with him upon his river, a country called Capa Howasicke; he promised to give me corn, venison, or what I wanted to feed us; hatchets and copper we should make him, and none should disturb us.” Smith agreed. If Smith had somehow kept his agreement, then the English might have cultivated an inhabited area far more fit for settlement, rather than one surrounded by a pocosin. He misunderstood Powhatan culture enough to suspect treachery, when in reality the Mamanatowick would demonstrate poor host behavior and send a message of bad faith to his people if he betrayed Smith with a false gift.


100 Edward Haile, ed., *Jamestown Narratives*, 159-163.
Smith mentions specifically in his *General History* that the divination ceremony “was to know if he intended them well or no” and that Powhatan was to “forever esteem him as his son Nantaquoud” in return for two artillery pieces and a grindstone for sharpening weapons. However, the day after Smith returned to Jamestown, Powhatan’s servant Rawhunt arrived with his companions and found the two demi-culverins and grindstone Smith offered “somewhat too heavy.”\(^{101}\) This promise also appears in *A True Relation*, though simply as four demi-culverins (no grindstone), Smith “being sure that none could carry them.”\(^{102}\) Perhaps Smith also presented these items thinking he would be freed from Powhatan’s contractual terms, allowing the colonists to justifiably remain at Jamestown since the Mamanatowick could not collect his gift. In any case, it certainly sounds as if Smith was adopted and thus converted from a captive to a son, creating a relationship of mutual obligation that would repair English-Powhatan relations in the wake of unannounced English settlement.

This adoption placed Smith in a position of great importance as a cultural intermediary, drawing the envy of other colony leaders and drawing much needed provisions from the Powhatan. Soon, however, colonists and mariners arriving on the First Supply traded freely with Powhatan commoners, devaluing metal objects formerly held in high regard. The English valued goods exchanged over the relationship between the exchangers, and therefore it was hard for them to see the insult created by allowing commoners to acquire goods formerly distributed by chiefs. It tarnished the spiritual value formerly placed on copper and disregarded the essential role of chiefs in Powhatan society. Besides this, Smith of course refused to relocate the colony to Capa Howasicke near Werowocomoco,  

where Powhatan could more efficiently control the movement of goods between cultures. No obedient werowance would dare spurn Powhatan’s gifts. Further destabilizing native society, in a court held in November, 1624, translator Robert Poole enumerated cases of Powhatans being given firearms and taught how to shoot them. Two of the teachers he mentions are Sir Thomas Dale and Captain John Smith. It is strange to think why these ruling men of Virginia would arm natives, but it requires little imagination to picture the consternation werowances felt upon suddenly seeing their subjects carry muskets before they had them.

By refusing Powhatan’s gift and undermining his authority, the English soured relations with the Mamanatowick, and soon tensions with the native Virginians escalated. Once Christopher Newport returned to Virginia, he and Smith went with a party of men to Werowocomoco several times in the winter of 1608 to try to cement their friendship. While Smith gave Powhatan “a suit of red cloth, a white greyhound, and a hat” and obtained “public confirmation of a perpetual league and friendship,” he drew suspicion by repeatedly refusing to disarm his men, telling Powhatan “that was a ceremony our enemies desired, but never our friends.” They also exchanged boys, Namontack and Thomas Savage, who were adopted into the other culture to become translators, but trade was still difficult:

And not being agreed to trade for corn, he desired to see all our hatchets and copper together, for which he would give us corn. With that ancient trick the Chickahamaniens had oft acquainted me. His offer I refused, offering first to see what he would give for one piece. He, seeming to despise the nature of a merchant, did scorn to sell, but we freely should give him, and he liberally would requite us.

Captain Nuport would not with less than twelve great coppers try his kindness, which he liberally requited with as much corn as at Chickahamania I had for one of less proportion.

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104 Edward Haile, ed., Jamestown Narratives, 917.
Once they left, Powhatan also provided “venison sufficient for fifty or sixty persons.”

Here Smith insulted the Mamanotowick by equating his wishes with those of Smith’s enemies, implying treachery. More importantly, Captain Newport was willing to trade with other nations through gift giving, understanding that entire relationships between givers mattered more than the values in any one particular exchange of commodities. Newport had previously obtained the respect of native Virginians by frequently giving gifts unusual to the Powhatan world. Being an experienced merchant captain and privateer, Newport was probably used to trading with indigenous coastal cultures and would go on to practice this as a captain for the East India Company in the last years of his life. His attitude is seen in other English cosmopolitan merchants who laid the foundation for East Indies success, whereas Smith’s attitude typifies one which undermined the Virginia Company mission.

The “Chickahamaniens” John Smith mentions here were some of the only people in Tsenacommacah who regularly carried on exchange outside of gift-giving and tribute. Not coincidentally, they were one of the few Tidewater Algonquian groups that were not part of the Mamanatowick’s chiefdom politically, instead being ruled by eight elders. Without a werowance to collect tribute, economic regulation was far more laissez-faire, and the Chickahominy were quite comfortable conducting a commodity trade with Smith, sometimes standing ready with baskets of corn before Smith even landed on the shore. Smith simply “showed them what copper and hatchets they should have for corn, each family seeking [read: competing] to give me most content... What I liked I bought, and lest

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106 Edward Haile, ed., *Jamestown Narratives*, 145-146 features an example occurring before even the landing at Jamestown.
107 Edward Haile, ed., *Jamestown Narratives* (writing directly), 50.
they should perceive my too great want, I went higher up the river." Anthropologist Seth Mallios has tallied the documented exchanges between the Chickahominy and English, concluding that they traded twice as often as they exchanged gifts, compared to three fourths of overall English-Powhatan transactions consisting of gift exchange. As the Chickahominy were perfectly capable of commodity trade, they offer us insight into the important link between authority and exchange in the Powhatan chiefdom. Gift giving carried more cultural, political, and sacred significance than the trading in which Smith wished to engage. Gift exchange required the recognition of an indigenous ruler’s power and spiritual authority over receivers of gifts, recognition which Smith was not willing to give.

John Smith acted as if Powhatan authority was not only treacherous, but also not worth recognizing. How the Powhatan landscape compared to places he had seen in his military career may explain this air of superiority. Powhatan towns, with their reed and bark covered yehakin houses, may have seemed far less impressive than large bazaars. In a catalogue of Powhatan towns and chiefs compiled around 1612, estimates for towns were given by the number of adult males a chief could muster as bowmen, ranging from ten to 400. The greater towns were mainly noted for their variety of agricultural products and potential for farmland or vineyards, rather than precious gems or spices. Reports vary, but a substantial town probably had between twenty and thirty houses, while smaller ones had only a handful. The largest towns had perhaps 1,000 denizens, but this was rare and generally Powhatan towns were small but often not far apart from each other. With their stone tools, houses made from natural materials, and a society which appeared outwardly far more

111 For a description of yehakins and other shelters see Helen Rountree, The Powhatan Indians of Virginia, 60-62.
113 Helen Rountree, The Powhatan Indians of Virginia, 58-61.
homogenous, the Powhatan natives clearly left a weaker impression on all English minds, whether merchant or gentry. However, the appearance of the country and descriptions of bountiful land reinforced notions of who should be sent there. No one would gaze upon Aleppo and imagine it as a place for mineral prospectors or gentleman planters. Personnel sent to English colonial ventures cannot be understood outside an environmental context.

To help familiarize their environment, a strategy was devised to place Powhatan within an understood English hierarchy. In a visit to Werowocomoco recorded in The General History (after the events of A True Relation), Smith and Newport crowned Powhatan as a vassal of James I. First the Mamanatowick refused to go to Jamestown for this ceremony, for guests in his land should visit him instead. When Newport and Smith traveled to perform it, they practically had to force him to accept the crown even with Namontack’s help. After receiving it with other gifts, Powhatan “gave his old shoes and his mantle to Captain Newport.”114 As Games has summarized the event, “a man who was not a king was crowned by an authority he did not recognize.”115 This event is echoed by the Virginia Company advising Sir Thomas Gates in May 1609 to “make him [Powhatan] your tributary, and all other his weroances about him first to acknowledge no other Lord but Kinge James.” Not settling for mere allegiance, Gates was to collect corn, dye, skins, and weekly labor according to the size of each weroance’s domain; imprison priests in order to convert children to Christianity; avoid trading in debased copper with local rulers; and seek out allies among the tribes farther from English habitation.116 The Company clearly viewed the closest natives with suspicion; seeking help from more distant tribes belied its true intention of expansion.

The coronation was a trap.

115 Allison Games. The Web of Empire, 136.
Smith was upset at the pricey gifts given at the ceremony and thought that the Mamanatowick might think too highly of himself. On the contrary, the relationship was already poisoned, as Powhatan committed an obvious gift exchange violation by refusing to travel for the ceremony, not initially accepting the crown, and giving what he knew were insufficient return items. He was already acknowledging a broken bond that had resulted in a state of hostility.\textsuperscript{117} Clearly, Powhatan was also not ignorant of the subservient status created by the coronation, for Namontack had been to England and was returning as the Mamanatowick's translator to explain the ceremony.

Powhatan leaders must have been exceedingly exasperated with European behavior by this point. Tsenacommacah had dealt with uncouth European interlopers before. It is commonly thought the first European vessel in the Chesapeake Bay was a French pirate ship that stopped by in 1546. The local Indians traded "as many as a thousand marten skins in exchange for knives, fishhooks and shirts."\textsuperscript{118} The Spanish visited the area in 1561 and returned to Tsenacommacah to found a mission in 1570. But they were dismayed to find the land had been visited by "six years of famine and death."\textsuperscript{119} In the Powhatan view, perhaps this was caused by malevolent Spanish medicine or magic, leaving the natives immediately ill-disposed to newcomers. Coping with this new threat must have also caused confusion and upheaval.

Relations never truly soured until after a bad exchange: "By a bit of blundering... someone made some sort of a poor trade in food...now they are reluctant when they see they receive no trinkets for their ears of corn." The Spanish response was to forbid preliminary gift giving before a "bargain" was made so as to dampen native expectations, but

\textsuperscript{117} Seth Mallios, \textit{The Deadly Politics of Giving}, 93-96.
\textsuperscript{118} Stephen Potter, \textit{Commoners, Tribute, and Chiefs}, 161.
\textsuperscript{119} Daniel Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," 41.
this resulted in the missionaries' guide, Paquiqueño, fleeing and eventually killing all the Spanish priests when they requested food one last time. Nearly two years later the Spanish returned, learned of what happened, and hanged eight or nine natives from the yard of a ship in retaliation (being sure to baptize their victims first, of course). This taught the people of Tsenacommacah not to trust tassantassas, for they broke their agreements, bargained rudely, double crossed professed friends to get more items in their exchanges, begged insolently to those they had insulted, and murdered when they did not get what they wanted. They clearly followed a different code; people so different and dangerous had to be tamed by adoption and incorporation. Wahunsenacah's people must have tired of holding European hands through the process of learning how to act “when in Rome,” as we might say.

Gift violations were not confined to tassantassas. It should be noted that there is some evidence the Powhatan fought among themselves for gift exchange offenses. Strachey recorded that the Powhatan “seldom make wars for land or goods, but for women and children, and principally for revenge, so vindicative and jealous they be to be made a derision of and to be insulted.” While this passage does not give any examples of what such an insult might be, we get a clue from the 1608 example of the Piankatank tribe, Chief Powhatan’s “neighbors and subjects.” Powhatan “sent divers of his men to lodge amongst them one night, pretending a general hunt, who were to give an alarum unto an ambuscado of a greater company within the woods.” Twenty four Piankatank scalps were brought to Werowocomoco and later shown to pesky Englishmen who came to trade for corn.
“thinking to have terrified them with this spectacle.” The Powhatan were delivering a message to the English: these are the prices exacted against those who fail to pay their debts. The Powhatan quickly tired of the English practice of giving prestigious goods to commoners for something as mundane as corn, so showing scalps likely demonstrated to the English what happened to those who didn’t respect economic customs. Piankatank slights probably included either some lack of hospitality or abuse of hospitality, constituting a gift exchange violation. The Powhatan stratagem involved trusting their prey’s hospitality in lodging and hunting, then striking when their guard was down. Ironically, lying vulnerable in the Piankatank yehakins made the Piankatank too trusting and exposed, for failing to properly care for a guest would raise suspicions and show poor etiquette. This may have been some symbol for past transgressions, fitting well into what we know of the wit and playful irony often seen in Indian warfare and tortures across the continent. The similar transgressions Smith committed were certainly enough to put him in the same category as the Piankatank, but there was one which was unique: he left without telling anyone.

Pocahontas would later refer to the broken bond between Smith and Powhatan when she saw him in England in 1616, over seven years after Smith’s departure from Virginia. Smith left an account of this candid encounter:

“You did promise Powhatan what was yours should be his, and he the like to you. You called him father, being in his land a stranger, and by the same reason so must I do you;” which, though I would have excused, I durst not allow of that title because she was a king’s daughter. With a well set countenance she said, “Were you not afraid to come into my father’s country, and caused fear in him and all his people (but me)? And fear you here I should call you father? I tell you then I will, and you shall call me child,

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124 Examples of this sort violation can be found in Anglo-Paspahegh relations. Seth Mallios, The Deadly Politics of Giving, 81-82.
125 Frederic Gleach, Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia, 49-53.
and so I will be forever and ever your countryman...your countrymen will lie much.”

In spite of over two years’ direct experience, Smith still did not fully understand the differences between his own culture and that of indigenous Virginians, especially differences in the nature of power. Even to such a man as himself who had risen above the station in which he was born, status was not reckoned on the “sliding scale” Williamson describes, and his position was more rigidly fixed in English society, both in fact and in mind. So engrained was the psychology of hierarchy, he considered Pocahontas “a king’s daughter” not only because that created a familiar analog to English royalty, but because he believed it as well. Pocahontas was genuinely angry that Smith had forgotten his fictive kinship ties to Powhatan and failed to send any message upon departing Virginia, expressing her anger blatantly by saying his people “would lie much.”

Perhaps she was equally frustrated with his gift alliance with Powhatan’s western enemies, which betrayed her people politically and her family personally. Smith proved untrustworthy by acting deceptively; he violated Powhatan etiquette by not just breaking kinship ties, but by not signaling it with any clear message to Powhatan such as a lesser gift, or giving notice of his departure in 1609. After soliciting enemy groups, he continued giving gifts to Powhatan such as the hat, cloak, and white dog, which insulted both Powhatan’s intelligence – he knew of Smith’s attempts to ally with his rivals – and his power – these were signs of subservience to a king he never met. Pocahontas’ companion, the priest Uttamatomakkin, referenced this in his complaint made to Smith soon after the reunion with Pocahontas, quoted at the beginning of this work. Powhatan continued to care for the dog

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126 Edward Haile, ed., *Jamestown Narratives*, 864. (quotation marks original to text)
in defiance of Smith’s actions – he would show Smith who was a more honorable partner in their relationship.

Gleach interprets Pocahontas’ scorn as the recollection of “the terms of [an] arrangement that Smith never understood” – the English had become Powhatan’s countrymen but ignored their responsibilities as a new nation of his. Gleach reckons Smith’s capture as the separation point from English culture, his procession through Powhatan’s domains a liminal phase, and the ritual rescue at Werowocomoco his final “incorporation” into Powhatan culture as a third and final stage. He takes The General History’s account of Pocahontas’ rescue for granted, however, and assumes Smith’s capture was pre-arranged as a way to familiarize the strange and fearful tassantassas. Gleach’s overall assessment of the significance of Smith’s ordeal may have merit, but assuming threats by the father of the slain warrior and the people of Tappahannock were predetermined seems a bit inductive. As mentioned earlier, Strachey observed violence was “principally for revenge,” and even Opechancanough had to recognize the grieving father’s customary right, avoiding him to preserve Smith’s life rather than restricting his actions. For those two incidents one could follow Occam’s razor in assuming they occurred basically as Smith first recorded them. They also show that chiefly power was delineated by custom and personal relations.

It seems William Strachey grasped to a limited degree the political roots that customary gift giving sprouted. Reflecting the instructions to Gates, he sounds sympathetic at first until one reads more deeply. Seemingly unprovoked transgressions against tassantassas were blamed on the priests and conjurers, or quyoughquisocks, the only ones who would feel English vengeance. The rest were to be saved from Powhatan, who “doth at his pleasure

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126 Frederic Gleach, Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia, 120-121.
129 Helen Rountree, Pocahontas, Powhatan, Opechancanough, 70-73.
despoil them both of their lives and goods without yielding them any reason... they shall for hereafter be delivered from his tyranny and shall enjoy freely the fruits of their own territories.” This sounds more like a snare when one reads on:

But after such time as they shall submit themselves to the king's majesty and consent to pay him a tribute to be agreed upon... they shall freely enjoy all they can gather and have a peaceable and frank trade with the English for the commodities they can make of their own, exchanging them for ours.

Finally, Strachey makes a wishful comparison, hoping exploitation can be achieved:

In Guiana, thirty of the people with their canoa will be hired for one hatchet to row... if our copper had been well ordered in Virginia, as may be hereafter, I am assured that less than one crown will serve to entertain the labor of a whole household for 10 days.  

In English eyes, economic efficiency would benefit King James' kingdom but would also save Powhatan souls on consensual terms - they would “freely enjoy all they can gather” for the price of tribute. The goals were to replace the economic system, civil government, and religion of native Virginians. Commodities were to replace gifts, a king was to replace the Mamanatowick, and the true religion would replace devil worship. These goals were not mutually exclusive and in fact complementary. If some white lies such as Smith's had to be told to overhaul the savage culture, they were excused by the result. As James was head of the English church, homage to one's sovereign had critical spiritual importance to the English, albeit in a different way than the Powhatan view their chief. For its spiritual significance, Powhatan's tribute was more akin to tithes than taxes, so the colonists often recognized the incorrect mechanism of his power: force rather than spiritual protection. But it is doubtful this would soften their hearts to a non-Christian foe. Common Englishmen of this period admittedly did not possess a strict racial ideology, but they did view non-Christian cultures in an ethnocentric manner with what can be called "kindly

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condescension." As described in the first chapter, however, a merchant well-versed in many cultures would not necessarily be prone to such haughtiness. If Englishmen could bite their tongue on a ship filled with believers of various creeds in the Mediterranean, they could bite it in Virginia for a profit incentive.

The tolerance and flattery exhibited by the East India merchants is difficult to imagine in men like John Smith, Thomas Gates, Thomas Dale, or Samuel Argall in Virginia. Smith, Dale, and Gates all spent considerable time as mercenaries for foreign nations, with Dale serving the Dutch on and off from 1588 to 1609. Under the titles of marshal, governor, and deputy governor, Dale was known for his severe, harsh administration, a reputation shared by Thomas Gates. Famous for issuing the very Spartan Laws Divine, Moral and Martial, Gates became the first official Governor of Virginia under its new charter and ruled with Dale as his deputy. They both had been officers in the Dutch army and, not surprisingly, participated in brutal reprisals against the Powhatan. Lifelong mariner Samuel Argall was a double cousin of Thomas Smith by marriage. He succeeded Newport as pilot of Virginia, though he certainly didn’t act like his predecessor, capturing Pocahontas by deception in a 1613 trading expedition. Later that year he destroyed the French mission of Saint Sauveur in modern Maine, taking Jesuit prisoners to Virginia. His brief term as governor ended when he fled over fear of being arrested for piracy.

Unlike the merchants trained in the art of accommodation, many of the leading men in Virginia were military officers trained in the art of force at the “university of warre” more commonly known as the Low Countries. Men such as Thomas Dale might normally be a protective accoutrement to the merchant’s fortified trading post in Asia, but in the New

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133 Edward Haile (writing directly), *Jamestown Narratives*, 42-43.
World, he was a Deputy Governor. Dale, Gates, John Smith, Lord De La Warr, and Edward Maria Wingfield all gained combat experience fighting to protect the Netherlands, a crucial proving ground for many English leaders.¹³⁴ This was a major connection Englishmen made with their fellow Protestants the Dutch; the counterweight to the more subtle arts of persuasion and negotiation they learned from them on the other side of the globe.

The Protestant warriors who came to Jamestown were used to being paid in hard currency directly for their service in a timely fashion, and even some non-military men such as Argall extracted wealth and subjugated enemies through any means necessary. These were the types of risk-taking leaders Jamestown attracted because any extended stay at Jamestown was risky. They did not fight for revenge or family ties, but for religious affinity and cash. They eased tensions not by bargaining with gifts and speeches of affection, but with hostages. Though not eye-catching, Virginia did have proven commodities merchants wanted, such as cedar, the cure-all tonic sassafras, and many of the commodities previously quoted in Alderman Johnson’s petition.¹³⁵ The leadership in Virginia was from the same culture as men who might have extracted these items peacefully and without the deadly costs of conflict, men who were, in fact, largely holding the purse strings of the colony. But the leaders on the ground tried to buy supplies rather than give something for them, proving incompatible with an archaic culture.

Seeing constant turmoil and death from poor supply, the London merchant class contributed tepidly to the Virginia Company, preferring firms that hired those with a tried and true cross cultural approach traveling to a land with more outward signs of wealth. Adventures are exciting but ultimately dangerous; better the devil you know “with foure

¹³⁵ Edward Haile (writing directly), Jamestown Narratives, 10.
armes and 4. Hands” than the one with animals on his head covered in black paint “with some two hundred more” like him. Frustrated with the inability of settlers to make a quiet peace with the Powhatan, Company leaders who did invest large sums in the colony resorted to more desperate colonial plans of action like the one expressed by Strachey. Ironically “the nature of a merchant” was abandoned by merchant investors instructing the Company because they thought this strategy failed, when in reality it was never fully practiced.

Conclusion: Apooke

The people of Tsenacommacah watched. English men and women arrived like drops of rain on a field. But as surely as a raindrop falls, it is consumed by the soil it strikes and disappears under Cohattayough’s heat. It seemed the tassantassas often disappeared just as quickly, falling victim to the sun under their stuffy outfits toiling away for the care of the plants that consumed their lives. But like a strong storm with flashes of kecuttannowas, eventually the rain can prevail and drown those caught in its current. So it seemed with this flood of tassantassas — many expired, but gradually their houses replaced yehakins in some places. Lands formerly intended for a few years’ cultivation at a time were replaced by permanent rows of sticky apooke — and even when these lands weren’t filled with apooke, the English fenced it in for themselves. This was all very strange and curious. This apooke was not like that which the quyoughquisocks grew — the leaves were larger but the kekepemgwah was weaker in flavor and effect when one lit a pipe. What could one make of all this? Apooke was a gift from Oke, but was this even the same plant, or some corruption?

Why the palefaces had arrived had been a great mystery. Perhaps this apooke was it. At first it was thought they wanted to fell mehtucs, for their ships and houses must have required many of them. But now that seemed less important than apooke. Sometimes a man would give leaves of it to someone and get trifling items he or his wife could have made
themselves — such as loaves of *apooans* or a knife — with an odd immediacy. More mysteriously, at the shore sometimes a well-dressed fellow would look at it carefully, try it himself, and exchange it for some parchment he signed with letters that had great importance. How could this white slip be worth a barrel of *apooke*? It was not quite like receiving the red metallic *matassun* or white *matacawiak* beads from a *werowance*, but it was of equal importance. No, for what the English wanted, its origin and giver were quickly forgotten; it did not seem to matter who the *apooke* or the parchment came from. It seemed to have no life. They referred to this idea as “chilleengs” or “pounds” sometimes, and it was impertinent to question it. The English seemed hungry enough to die for it; they thought it was good but their avarice for the thing was *riapoke* — the devil — to the land and its people.

Native gift exchange practices are and were not completely altruistic. Givers know that their objects can cement an alliance and reward services. With an expectation of eventual reciprocation, it may be said that someone in a gift economy “proceeds like a capitalist who knows how to dispose of his ready cash at the right time, in order to reconstitute at a later date this mobile form of capital,” in the words of Mauss.\textsuperscript{136} There is no true gift in this context, so the exchange only *appears* to be something-for-nothing. The disinterestedness the wealthy giver displays towards his possessions and the painful reminder of status that charity creates both permeate our society today.\textsuperscript{137} But in archaic societies, gift giving requires continual reciprocity, so in some sense there are no alms within them. These exchanges reinforce the status of the individuals involved, and failure to reciprocate can

\textsuperscript{136} Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, 94.
\textsuperscript{137} Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, 83-84.
mean losing rank, prestige, and effectively one's soul. To Powhatan, John Smith became less than human for rejecting his adoptive ties. As we have seen already in Sierra Leone and Japan, gift and commodity exchange economies are not incompatible and in fact a continuum exists between the two. Where a culture is placed on that scale depends on the bonds that exchange is expected to create. A merchant in a new land must gain trust from natives, whereas a soldier of fortune among natives must gain new land he can defend. The former seeks a lasting relationship for long terms profits, whereas a transfer of land requires merely a single transaction.

Native American warfare practices mirror and complement gift exchange concepts. Just as a gift must be met with an equal or greater gift in due time, whether directly or in 'some circular fashion as in the great kula referenced earlier, so too do offenses have to be avenged with equal or greater offenses that send a clear message. Often these contain a bitter irony that toys with its victims, such as when in 1609 several Englishmen occupying a Nansemond island were found “slain, with their mouths stopped full of bread, being done as it seemeth in contempt and scorn that others might expect the like when they should come to seek for bread and relief amongst them.” All the tassantassas seemed to do was nag for corn, so their hunger was satisfied by their obliging “hosts” the Nansemonds. If English windpipes could not handle this generosity, such ungratefulness was not the fault of the hosts, in the native mind. Cunning, artfulness, and well-planned surprise were highly prized qualities in indigenous warfare, not just for tactical purposes but for enforcing “poetic justice.” When Opechancanough launched his 1622 uprising, natives accustomed to working among the English used the tassantassas' own tools to kill them whenever possible to drive

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139 Edward Haile, ed. Jamestown Narratives, 503.
home their bitter point. Killing with knives, axes, shovels, or hoes could not send a clearer message about what the Powhatan thought of the English settlement policy that had transformed the landscape of Tsenacommacah: these have killed us slowly, now they will kill you quickly.

Poor leadership decisions by the Virginia Company led to a colonial council composed of men more skilled in the art of war than diplomacy. These decisions led to John Smith’s broken promises he made to Powhatan, which eventually contributed to the Company’s downfall. Perhaps he was frightened in an unfamiliar land, but that did not condone his conduct in the eyes of Tsenacommacah’s people. The land and its customs, combined with English misbehavior, entangled the tassantassas in a web of distrust and broken promises. These suspicions culminated in Opechancanough’s surprise attack in March of 1622, largely avenging past insults and correcting English behavior. Some historians such as Daniel Richter have noticed the link between the uprising and previous English misbehavior, but they usually see the control of exotic goods as the focal point of power and conflict, rather than the bonds of obligation these goods create.

The men sent to Tsenacommacah in the ships with fluttering tsemaosays were not entirely unfamiliar with Powhatan’s world. They had encountered it among other cultures, at least on Dominica on the journey over. But their profession and their instinct were to subdue, not to accommodate, even if that meant initial friendship to achieve their goal. For the most part they came to the table too quickly, not knowing the art of patient cultural negotiation as transient mariners like Newport did. Eventually the savages would have to become

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140 Frederic Gleach, *Powhatan’s World and Colonial Virginia*, 47.
142 Edward Haile, ed., *Jamestown Narratives*, 86.

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Englishmen one way or another, or so the militant adventurers believed. What was the point of acclimating to Virginia if the Virginians will acclimate to you?

Ironically, John Smith did not act in “the nature of a merchant” as Powhatan complained. He understood it too poorly to fill that role – whereas he became the President of the Council in Virginia, he probably would have never been hired by the East India Company. Could Jamestown have become something else under merchant governance, a fur trading post perhaps? Historians such as Karen Kupperman seem to think so, but it would require a different character of settler and a different initial goal than mineral exploitation. Others such as Susan Kingsbury have disagreed, arguing that for any material gain, Virginia “incidentally, because of the character of the country… was forced to become a colony.” I contend that only a company appealing to merchants, not gentry, with shares that did not entitle investors to land, would have taken the colony down a more peaceful, less assimilationist, low-tobacco path – albeit one far more gradual with less military protection.

For Wahunsenacah, he had united so many tribes so quickly, his power depended heavily on enforcing cultural norms to make his people respect his abilities. For a commoner to traffic in the goods of werowances without permission was treasonous and base; some subjects sacrificed their life for their desire for wealth. While Wahunsenacah could not punish and regulate his people on a daily basis, he did have the power to give on a daily basis, and eventually those gifts would make their way to all his people according to their status and deeds. This economic system was really a chain of individual relationships, creating a very “visible” hand which could serve to regulate Powhatan citizens. Could this large nation be governed more by reward than punishment indefinitely? Perhaps the chiefdom

Wahunsenacah worked a lifetime to build needed a constant outside threat to sustain itself and justify his power, and Opechancanough greeted the mortal challenge of the English as a hidden opportunity to cement his power.

With English settlement expanding, more than likely Opechancanough punished the English for Smith’s unfulfilled promise to confine the *tassantassas* to Capa Howasicke, as well as other gift exchange violations. Evidently he waited a long while for an opportune time to strike or to give the English time to address their mistakes. Merchants would have parlayed with the *Mamanatowicks* and made a concession for a breach of contract. Smith and company recognized agreements on native terms as informal agreements, not contractual, so they often ignored accepted Powhatan norms of behavior. Vassal status was the main relationship he and other colony leaders hoped to create for Virginia’s natives, and in turn they interpreted indigenous adoption as a vassal’s subservience. The landscape of Virginia did not conjure images of Marco Polo’s Silk Road or Mansa Musa’s golden hajj, so it prompted a Company approach which placed violent veterans amongst proud native warriors – veterans uninterested in comporting to local mores and perplexed by them besides.

Virginia’s early settlers can indeed been seen as bold, enterprising adventurers seeking the American dream, but they were also ham-handed negotiators, spendthrift entrepreneurs, and poor neighbors who did not comprehend business etiquette. Understanding that helps us deconstruct romantic origin stories and the trope of American Exceptionalism. Instead it places American origins in the broader context of a vast interconnected, interpersonal English trading world. The gift exchange model may have echoed into later periods of American history and may have deep implications for later systems of credit, such as the relationship between eighteenth century Virginia crop masters and their merchant agents in England.
Glossary of Powhatan
(other words are defined in the text)

**Acomtan** Boat

**Apooke** Tobacco

**Appoans** Bread

**Cacutterewindg kear?** What is your name?

**Cattapeuk** Spring [the Powhatan had five seasons per year and this fell after Popanow]

**Cauwaih** Oysters

**Cohattayough** Summer [this was the third of five seasons and fell after Cattapeuk]

**Cuppatoan** Sturgeon

**Kecuttannowas** Lightning

**Kekepemgwah** Smoke

**Matassun** Copper

**Matacawiak** Pearl

** Meihtucs** Tree

**Ospanno.** Turkey Cock

**Pocosin** Wetland

**Pokosack** Gun

**Popanow** Winter [this was the first of five seasons; the last was *taguitock*]

**Quiyoughquisocks** “Pettie gods and their affinities” [particularly priests, as it is used here]

**Tassantassas** Strangers

**Tsemaosay** Sail

**Utchepwoissuma** East

**Uttapaantam** Deer
Bibliography


