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## THE POWHATAN NAME FOR VIRGINIA

By WILLIAM WALLACE TOOKER

In the Powhatan name for Virginia occurs one of the few instances in which is found an Indian name applied to such an extensive territory. Virginia, according to the early charters, and as delineated by the cartographers of the seventeenth century, was a variable quantity as to its bounds in the north and south, which were also indefinable in the west, and were so considered by the colonists and the king. We cannot suppose, nor do we believe, therefore, that the subject of this essay applied to the whole of this vast domain, but rather, being a Powhatan appellative, it was applicable mainly to the country dominated by Powhatan, or at most to the lands drained by the tidewater streams flowing into Chesapeake bay on the west, as laid down on Capt. John Smith's map,<sup>1</sup> which are now included in the present commonwealth of Virginia. This view of the case is confirmed by Strachey (*Historie*, p. 29), who refers to the various tribes in the following words: "Which are in chief commaunded by their great Kinge Powhatan, and are comprehended under the denomination of *Tsenacommacoh*, of which we maye more by experience speak, yt being the place wherein our abode and habitation hath now (well neare) 11 yeares consisted." A note to this says: "In the Mss., the word 'six' was originally written, but has been crossed out and two strokes, thus, '11' inserted in darker coloured ink."

As Strachey arrived in Virginia in 1610 and remained three years, he must have written the above paragraph in 1613, when the colony had been established six years, and revised it in 1618, although his manuscript was not edited and published until 1849. In his "Dic-tionarie" he gives as Virginia, *Tsenahcommacah*. Therefore in these two notations we have the earliest form of the Powhatan name

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<sup>1</sup> These lands Smith marks on his map "Powhatan" in large Roman letters which extend from south of James river northwardly to the upper Potomac.

for Virginia, which without question can be assigned to a period not later than the year 1613.

On the well-known engraving of Pocahontas (plate vi),<sup>1</sup> by Simon De Passe, which was copied by an unknown artist from a painting made in 1616, when she was 21 years of age, and still preserved at Booton Hall, near Aylsham, Norfolk, England, appears the legend: "*Matoaks ãs Rebecka daughter to the mighty Prince Powhatan Emperour of Attanoughkomouck ãs virginia converted and baptized in the Christian faith, and wife to the wor<sup>d</sup> Joh Rolff.*" The picture is no doubt what it professes to be, namely, an authentic portrait, from life, of Pocahontas, made during the reign of James I. A description of the original painting, by Mrs Herbert Jones, appears in Arber's reprint of Smith's works. A copy is contained in Drake's *Book of the Indians*, 8th edition, 1841, which furnished the accompanying reproduction.

As Pocahontas posed for the portrait while in England, the name *Attanoughkomouck* must have been thus pronounced to the painter by Pocahontas herself, for the inscription is undoubtedly contempo-

<sup>1</sup> As to the significance and etymology of this name, Heckewelder (*Names*, etc., 1833) says: "It was corrupted from *Pockohantes*, signifying, a streamlet or river between two hills, compounded of *pochko*, a rock, or rocky hill, and *hanne*, a stream, the latter word made a diminutive by the suffix *tes*." This is incorrect, for Strachey earlier wrote: "So the great King Powhatan called a young daughter of his, whome he loved well, *Pochahuntas*, which may signify little wanton; howbeyt she was rightly called *Amonate* at more ripe yeares." (*Historie*, p. 111.) Strachey is correct in this statement, for the name, as revealed by its variations in spelling, is from the cognate of the Natick *póachau* 'he or she plays' or 'makes merry'; *-ontas*, *-untas* (= Natick, *-ántam*, diminutive *-ántas*), is the formative of verbs expressing mental state and activity, or disposition of the mind, with the diminutive termination. *Póacha-untas* thus signifies 'the little merry-minded,' 'the little frolic,' whence, also, 'the little wanton.'

"All wanton as a child, skipping and vain." — *Love's Labor Lost*. Of which trait Strachey writes: "*Pochahuntas*, a well featured, but wanton young girle, Powhatan's daughter sometymes resorted to our fort [Jamestown], of the age then of eleven or twelve yeares, get the boyes forth with her unto the markt place, and make them wheele, falling on their hands, turning up their heeles upwards, whome she would followe and wheele so herself, naked as she was, all the fort over." (*Historie*, p. 65.)

"*Amonate* at more ripe yeares," = *amonateu* 'she gives warning,' probably had reference to the warning which she gave Smith in 1609, for the Indians often changed their names at the time of some remarkable happening, viz.: "That when her father, intended to haue surprized him, shee by stealth in the darke night came through the wild woods and told him of it." (Smith, pp. 165, 455, 532.) *Matoaks*, on the portrait, = Natick *matohqs* 'a cloud.'



*Matoaks als Rebecca daughter to the mighty Prince Powhatan Emperor of Attanoughkomouck als virginia converted and baptizd in the Christian faith, and wife to the wor<sup>th</sup> M: Joh Rolff*

rary with the painting. Strachey's form, *Tsenahcommacah*, he probably obtained from some Indian frequenting Jamestown, perhaps from Kemps, the Indian who gave him the names of Powhatan's dozen wives, and whom he mentions as having died at Jamestown in 1612, after living with the colonists for nearly a year (*Historie*, p. 53).

While these two forms of the native name of Virginia are seemingly from different sources, their identity is apparent, the difference between them being due more perhaps to individual utterance than to any dialectal change. This appears plain when we compare the two — *Attanoughkomouck* and *Tsenahcommacah* — for then we find that the vowel sound of the initial *a* in the former was either discarded or was not heard in the latter, and that the second *t* was changed by assibilation into *s*, with resulting change in the vowels, which would make the name *Attanohcommacah* — a difference that would happen to any name spoken by a person who uses correct language, contrasted with the same spoken by a person with an impediment in speech, or with a decided lisp.

However this may be, in illustrating the etymology of the term I shall proceed as if the two forms were dialectally different and analyze them separately with the aid of the two most prominent New England dialects, for in its vocabulary the Powhatan is closer to these two than to any other of the Algonquin family. I have made this statement before in some of my essays, but it will do no harm to repeat it here. In fact it is difficult to give its equivalent from any other dialect, owing to lack of vocabulistic material; and this is especially true of the Lenape, so far as this name is concerned. It seems singular, however, that Smith does not refer to the name in any way, and the term most nearly approaching it is where he quotes Pory (page 507), who in 1621 visited a town called *Attoughcomaco*<sup>1</sup> on Pawtuxunt river, the habitation of Namenacus and of Wamanato his brother, where Pory was shown many cornfields, which might indicate, as will be observed, the same derivation for this name as the other.

We have considered that these two early forms are sufficient for

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<sup>1</sup> While this town is not named on Smith's map of Virginia, it appears to have been situated on the south side of Patuxent river, in what is now Calvert county, Maryland. Bozman, *Hist. Maryland*, book 1, p. 149.

our present purpose, and so have not searched further than the authorities given for others of the same period.

*Attanoughkomouck* finds its equivalent in the Natick *adtanohkomuk* (= *adtan-ohke-komuk*), from *adtan-*, *dtan-*, or *tan-*,<sup>1</sup> as Eliot varies it, 'growing,' 'producing,' as land does by cultivation; *ohke* 'land,' 'ground'; *komouck* or *comaco* (= Natick *komuk*, = Narragansett *kamuck*, or *commuck*), 'house,' 'inclosure,' 'an inclosed place,' hence 'land inclosed for producing or growing.' There is another constructive form, frequently used by Eliot, in several variations,<sup>2</sup> which is very similar to the foregoing in meaning but not in grammar, viz. : *adtanohketeamuk* (= *adtan-ohketea-muk*), 'a garden,' or 'where the ground is planted for growing'; *ohketeau*, 'he plants or sows,' with the termination *-muk*, which Trumbull variously calls the suppositive, passive, or present conditional-passive form of the verb.

Strachey's *Tsenahcommacah* finds its cognate form which has about the same letter change as before mentioned, i. e., *t* to *s*, in the Narraganset *sanáukamuck* (= *san-áuke-kamuck*),<sup>3</sup> 'land,' 1st pers. sing. *nissawnáwkamuck* (= *nis-sawn-áwke-kamuck*), 'my land,' literally 'land inclosed for producing or growing,' and so by free translation the name may be interpreted as 'a plantation,' and its meaning perhaps was so understood by the Virginia colonists.<sup>1</sup>

Trumbull's suggestion<sup>4</sup> that the Narraganset term was perhaps the same as *sowanohkomuk* (= *sowan-ohke-komuk*), 'south land,' 'a field with a southern exposure,' is not acceptable from any point of view; and it will not stand analysis, for the Powhatan term *chowán* = Natick *sowan* = Narraganset *sowwan*, 'south,' hence the Powhatan *chowánock* = Natick *sowanohke*, 'south land,' which indicates that there is no cognation in the prefix with the Narraganset *san* or the Natick *tan*.

<sup>1</sup> My authority for the use of this prefix is Eliot's Bible. As it occurs in various compounds, it refers to 'growing,' or 'producing,' from the beginning of cultivation, while *adtannekin*, or *tannekin* (= *adtan-nekin*) has reference to complete growth, as when a tree fruits. This is plainly seen in the Abnaki cognate: *tzanig8*, 'il cesse de croitre' — Rasle.

<sup>2</sup> *Tanohketeaonganit*, Deut. XI, 10 (= *tan-ohketea-onganit*), 'a garden'; *tanohketeaonk*, Solomon, IV, 12, 'a garden.'

<sup>3</sup> Compare Narraganset (Williams) *wuskáukamuck* (= *wuske-áuke-kamuck*), 'new ground,' from *wuske* 'new,' 'fresh,' 'young,' hence 'new ground inclosed.'

<sup>4</sup> *Natick Dictionary*, p. 145.

For a final word as to *Pocahontas*, the woman, let us remember the unbounded obligations we are under for her part in preserving this "plantation alias Virginia," of which Smith (pp. 531-532) testifies in his letter to Queen Anne: "James towne with her wild traine she as freely frequented, as her fathers habitation; and during the time of two or three yeeres [1608-09], she next vnder God, was still the instrument to preserue this Colonie from death, famine and vtter confusion; which if in those times, [it] had once beene dissolved, Virginia might haue line [lain] as it was at our arriuell to this day. She was the first Christian euer of that Nation, the first Virginian euer spake English."

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