The Powhatan Indian Way of Life in 1607

BEFORE WE EMBARK upon a comprehensive history of the Algonquian-speaking Indians in Virginia (hereinafter collectively called "Powhatan Indians"[1]), we need to describe their way of life so that their actions through history will make better sense. The English colonists at Jamestown left a few moderately comprehensive descriptions of this way of life, though not nearly so comprehensive as an anthropologist would wish.[2] The English writers lived in an era before the advent of any of the social sciences. Full and objective descriptions of alien cultures were not even conceived of back then. The colonists were also male, with all that that meant in early Jacobean England, and they came to Virginia not to observe Indians but to explore the territory and to make their fortunes. Their descriptions of Indian lifeways are therefore spotty and essentially incidental to the records they left about their colonizing enterprise. Nonetheless, we can reconstruct the skeleton of Powhatan culture, and I have done so at length in another book.[3] For our purposes here, I will summarize the culture briefly, laying emphasis upon the parts of it that are most relevant to Powhatan-English relations. As we shall see, the Powhatans were closely involved with and limited by their territory; they had a sophisticated government (though it was *not* a confederacy, as the older history books call it); and they viewed ownership of land and the relations between men and women very differently from the way the English did.

The Powhatans occupied a region that corresponds handily to the coastal plain of modern Virginia, extending about one hundred miles from east to west (including both shores of the Chesapeake Bay) and one hundred miles from north to south. The six thousand square miles of land available were occupied by at least fourteen thousand Algonquian speakers in 1607–1608.[4] There had probably been many more people than that a century earlier, before European contact brought new diseases to North America.[5]

The Powhatans' eastern boundary was the Atlantic Ocean. Their western boundary, which they contested with the Siouan-speaking Monacans and Mannahoacs, was approximately at the "fall line," where the rivers cease to be navigable. Their southern boundary, which they usually shared peacefully with the Algonquian-speaking Pamlicos and Chowanocs, was roughly

where the Virginia–North Carolina border is,[6] though the Iroquoian-speaking Nottoways and Meherrins peacefully inhabited the inner coastal plain south of the James River.[7] And their northern boundary was approximately the Virginia-Maryland line on the Eastern Shore and, on the western shore, the Potomac River,[8] down which marauding Iroquoians called Massawomecks came from time to time. The man Powhatan, father of Pocahontas, claimed to dominate all of this region,[9] though the claim was exaggerated.

The territory that was—and still is—home to the Powhatans is a coastal plain that tilts gently eastward into the Atlantic.[10] It is a well-watered plain (average annual rainfall: forty-six inches) crossed by more water in the form of rivers and partially covered by still more water from the Atlantic. The Chesapeake Bay, which is in fact the drowned lower valley of the Susquehanna River, has the Potomac, the Rappahannock, and the York as major tributaries from the northwest; the James, parallel to them, now flows into the bay but in Ice Age times had its own separate path between the Virginia Capes.[11] All four of these southeastward-flowing rivers are genuine rivers, carrying massive amounts of fresh water annually to the Chesapeake from the piedmont (Rappahannock and York) and the Appalachian Mountains (Potomac and James). But because the coastline is drowned by the ocean, the rivers gradually become estuaries to the eastward, first brackish and then salty.[12]

Eastern Virginia is riddled with navigable waters, a fact that was lost on neither the Indians nor the English. Large boats can (and still do) penetrate more than one hundred miles inland. The Chesapeake varies between twelve and twenty-two miles wide in its Virginia reaches, and its parent stream, the Susquehanna, is navigable far up into Pennsylvania. All of the four major rivers of the Powhatan region are wide: at least half a mile wide in their middle reaches as they cross the coastal plain, and anywhere from two miles (the York) to seven miles (the Potomac) wide at their junction with the bay. All of them have sizable tributaries, some of the tributaries have sizable tributaries of their own, and most of these again have branches or swamps at their heads. (The same is true of the western edge of the Delmarva Peninsula, whose "creeks" are tributaries to the bay.) It is therefore possible, in a canoe, to get almost anywhere in the region by water. And it is not surprising that the Powhatans—and the English, until the advent of paved roads for motorcars[13]—chose most often to travel by water. (There were also footpaths on land, allowing rapid communication with some neighbors.[14]) The variety in size, salinity, and tidal impulse in all these watercourses is phenomenal, with a corresponding variety in the plants and animals that live in or near them.

The climate of eastern Virginia is a mild one. Real winter lasts only three months at most, and berries and fruits and nuts are available fresh for some seven months of the year.[15] Most of the land supports a cover of deciduous

trees mixed with pines and cedars.[16] Many of the deciduous trees are nut bearers (hickory, walnut, chestnut, chinquapin, beech), while a wide variety of berry bushes grows in the forest's understory along with native fruit trees such as the persimmon. All of these, in addition to the marine foods available year-round, support raccoons, opossums, muskrats, beavers, wild turkeys, and (now making a comeback) brown bears. In the freshwater marshes there are plants such as arrow arum, with a root (tuckahoe) that human ingenuity can make edible, as well as reeds for mat making. Meadows, manmade or natural, provide a number of wild greens. And the grasses there and the tender leaves of the understory feed the Indians' favorite prey, the Virginia white-tailed deer, which was hunted by individual men year-round and by whole tribes in communal hunts in the late fall.[17] The only domesticated—or domesticable—animal the Powhatans had was the dog.[18]

Given these conditions, Indians in Virginia after the end of the last Ice Age lived very well by hunting, gathering, and fishing, in spite of the extinctions that carried off the mammoths and mastodons. The Powhatans of the early seventeenth century kept up all these ancient skills. The English colonists called it "living from hand to mouth," but it was precisely these skills that were needed in the spring and early summer, when the previous year's supplies ran out and the crops were not yet ripe,[19] or when a summer drought—no uncommon occurrence in Virginia—blighted the (nonnative) crops.

The Powhatans kept up their foraging skills, but they were by no means nomadic. They were a farming people, accustomed to a settled life with an orderly government. Unfortunately, their farming was done in a manner that the English observers were hardly able to appreciate. All of the farming work except the clearing of fields was done by the women, assisted by children.[20] That was a standard Woodland Indian practice, and being food producers as well as food preparers seems to have given Powhatan women a higher status in their society than English women had in theirs. For their part, Powhatan men had their hands full being hunters and fishers; yet the English persisted for centuries in viewing them as lazy because they did not do the farming.

Powhatan fields also looked less smooth and, because of their smallness, produced less food than expected by the English, with their intensive plow agriculture. Indian fields were cleared by the slash-and-burn method, which left tree stumps behind.[21] Lacking draft animals as well as plows, the Powhatans had no need for meticulously smoothed fields, and their digging-stick horticulture was time consuming enough that most women did not plant really big fields.[22] The crops planted—maize, beans and squash—grew handsomely and were nourishing. But the women planted them amongst one another (a practice called intercropping), so that by midsummer Indian fields looked overgrown with vegetation.[23] In years with normal

rainfall, fresh garden vegetables were available from July (early August for corn) through October.[24]

The Powhatans, like other coastal Algonquians, used no fertilizer on their fields,[25] and after a few years they would leave some fallow and move on to others. Land was "owned" strictly by usufruct; deserted fields could be cleared again later by anyone who wanted to use them. Ultimate ownership remained with the tribe or, once he had established supremacy, with the *mamanatowick*, or paramount chief.[26] Most Powhatan towns had a dispersed settlement pattern in which the houses were scattered randomly among the gardens.[27] Since dwellings were made of perishable materials (see below), women found it expedient to build new houses near their new fields. Thus a whole town would gradually move, amoeba-like, to another location after a couple of decades.[28] The new town would be called by the name of its new location, although the residents remained the same.[29] The English eventually used this Indian practice of "abandonment" to their own advantage, while the Powhatans remained woefully uncomprehending of fallowings and land sales that became "for ever." Even after the Powhatans had learned the English system of land tenure, white neighbors sometimes forced them to leave (see chapter 5).

The Powhatans divided up their territory in a way different from the English or modern American one. Like their fellow Algonquians up and down the Atlantic Coast, they saw watercourses as centers of districts, not boundaries. Waterways were major sources of food and avenues of transportation, and if a waterway was narrow enough (a mile or less), the people in a tribe would build their towns on both sides of it in much the same way that we build on both sides of our major highways. Werowocomoco, the capital of the paramount chiefdom, comprised houses built on two points between three small intersecting creeks.[30] Many subject tribes (e.g., Nansemond and Pamunkey) lived on both sides of the rivers that were named after them,[31] and the Rappahannocks and the Weyanocks claimed territory on both sides of the big rivers they lived on (the Rappahannock and the James, respectively).[32] The English would choose to ignore this custom in a law of 1705, to gain more Indian land (see chapter 5).

Waterways, which provided fish, shellfish, migratory birds, and marshes, where reeds and edible plants grew and muskrats lived, made up the center of tribal territories and even, at times, of major Indian towns. The houses of towns and satellite villages alike were always located fairly close to the shore, usually on or near a point[33] commanding a view of the water and the people (including enemies) traveling upon it.[34] With the dispersed pattern that was used, a small village might stretch along a mile of waterfront.[35] "Town center" was wherever the *weroance*'s (chief's) house stood. All houses were barrel-vaulted frameworks of saplings, with coverings of mats (doubled in winter) or, for those of higher status, bark slabs.[36] *Weroances*' houses and the temples, which were usually built outside the towns, differed from other buildings only in their greater length and in their multiple rooms.[37]

Beyond the villages lay a zone of forest cleared of underbrush, used both for sanitation and for firewood gathering.[38] Beyond that lay the forest proper, where men went hunting and warring, and women and children went foraging for nuts, berries, greens, and fiber for cordage. Landward boundaries among the Powhatans appear to have been inexact, one tribe's hunting territory shading gradually into the next tribe's.[39] A man who merely wounded a deer expected to be able to chase it down, no matter where the chase took him—a fact lost upon the boundary-conscious English settlers of a later date.

The English found much to deprecate in the simplicity of Indian field clearing and house building, but in fact the Powhatans' ability to elaborate their material culture was severely limited by the nature of their cutting tools. Before European iron became available in the late sixteenth century,[40] the Powhatans were a Stone Age people faced, in many areas, with a shortage of stone. On the coastal plain, where the bedrock is covered with up to 2,300 feet of sediment,[41] stones are available only in occasional exposures along shorelines and river cliffs, unless the plow brings them up. These cobbles are rarely the kind of fine-grained stone needed for elaborate knapping into razor-sharp edges. Smooth stone axes with reasonable cutting edges were made by chipping and then laborious grinding.[42] Well-crafted stone knives and arrowheads were made, but sometimes hunters had to substitute mussel shells or sharpened reeds for the knives and shaped oyster shells or wild-turkey spurs for the arrowheads. Scraping of wooden surfaces was usually done with beaver incisors for small jobs and with clamshells (after burning the surface) for big jobs such as canoe making.[43] It is no wonder, then, that the Indians were reluctant, in the early days of the Virginia colony, to see their canoes burned by threatening Englishmen. It is even less wonder that in 1607 the Powhatans were already fiercely eager to obtain English iron tools: the men wanted hatchets[44] and the women wanted knives and "paring irons" (digging sticks).[45] The men's desire for firearms came soon afterward.[46] However, Indian house-building methods remained the same for more than 150 years after iron tools came into use. Flimsy as Powhatan houses may have seemed to the English, they were better adapted than English ones to the hot Virginia summers, when a smoky but partially ventilated house meant sleeping cooly and mosquito free, and to the cold winters, when the extra mats or bark and the roaring central fires made them as "warme as stooves."[47]

Wealth among the Powhatans consisted mainly in things, many of them perishable, that were available to all people if they made the effort. People could work extra hard to get large quantities of foodstuffs, especially high-status venison for generous feasts, and maize for making cornbread at all seasons of the year. They could also aspire to wear many deer hides, nicely

tanned and made into long, fringed, and decorated mantles[48]; or strings of pearls from freshwater mussels[49]; or strings of smooth-edged tubular beads called *peak*, the white variety made from the inner column of the whelk's shell, the more rare purple ("blue") kind made from the small purple area on the quahog clam's shell.[50] (*Roanoke*, made from disk-shaped pieces of various shells[51] strung on thread, was mentioned only later in the century.) There was also a glittering antimony ore, used mixed with body paint, which was excavated in Patawomeck territory and traded widely.[52] A highly prized face and body paint was made from puccoon.[53] The *mamanatowick* Powhatan exacted tribute comprised of all these things,[54] but some were retained by ordinary folk.

The only item of high value found outside the Powhatan area was nearly pure copper ore, which was cold-hammered into "long linckes" or other forms.[55] Powhatan held a monopoly on it and used it as gifts and as payment to *weroances* of his subject tribes for military services.[56] The English rapidly discovered that copper rings, bracelets, and bells were excellent trade goods to bring; glass beads, especially blue ones (analogous to the more valuable "blue" *peak*), were also in high demand.

On most days, the Powhatans did not appear to pay attention to social status, as the English did. All men, even ruling ones,[57] could and did go hunting, fishing, and warring,[58] often taking their sons along in the first two activities. For these they wore the basic men's garb: buckskin breechclout, leggings, moccasins.[59] They also wore a hairstyle they believed had been given them by one of their gods:[60] long hair in a knot on the left, a roach along the crown, with head shaved on the right to avoid the tangling of hair in bowstrings.[61] All women and girls spent most of their time producing food, preparing food, making pottery, making and repairing houses and mats and baskets, and caring for the younger children.[62] (The English practice of "fostering out" their own children and rearing other people's seems to have appalled the Indians.) For this work they wore the basic women's garb: buckskin apron and, in the forest, leggings and moccasins.[63] Their hair was worn loose, or in a single long braid with bangs in front, or cut short all around the head. Prepubescent girls went naked[64] and wore their heads shaved except for a long braid at the back.[65] Both sexes wore buckskin mantles ("matchcoats"[66]) for warmth in winter.[67] Because the men's world and the women's world did not meet often; and because the women did a great deal of outdoor work, the patriarchal English assumed that women had a very inferior status.[68]

But appearances were deceiving. Women did, in fact, control their family's food supply and their own bodies, both before and after marriage.[69] They were choosy about husbands and insisted that the men provide economic and military security.[70] A man who was a good provider could therefore have more than one wife, and the women appear to have been willing to join such polygynous households. Romance could be found, usually with a husband's permission, in the arms of a lover.[71] Inheritance among the ruling families was matrilineal (see below); it may have been matrilineal or bilateral among the common folk.

Social differences between families became apparent on dress-up occasions, such as feasts for visiting dignitaries. Chiefs and the "better sort" in general[72] had long, fringed buckskin mantles[73] to wear for such events, along with multiple necklaces of pearls and copper and shell beads. They also had immense quantities of high-status food such as venison and cornmeal to dispense at all seasons of the year. The Powhatan status system was even more evident in the people's behavior toward one another. Ruling families, men and women alike, were paid great deference. They expected to give orders at home,[74] for they had servitors to cook and serve their food[75] and help them dress.[76] High-ranking women, such as Pocahontas, were expected to travel with an escort, although not necessarily with a relative.

Chiefs, called *weroances*, "commanders," could be male or female (*weroansqua*) and were creatures set apart. They kept and traveled with large retinues.[77] They received elaborate welcomes when they reached their destinations, the welcomes including feasting,[78] dancing, oratory, and, for the men, young female bedmates for the night.[79] Chiefs had the power to punish disobedience with a quick death by knocking out the brains.[80] They presided at the execution of thieves and murderers, who were bound and thrown into a fire to burn to death.[81] ("Theft" referred only to stealing from one's own people; Europeans were fair game.[82]) *Weroances* knew how to procure their own food, but they normally had huntsmen to bring in game[83] and whole towns to plant fields of crops specially for them.[84] They also collected "tribute," which consisted of tanned deerskins, pearls and *peak*, and maize.[85] (Apparently, wild plant foods were not "taxable," which may have been another incentive for people to keep up their foraging skills.) Only *weroances*, along with the priests, were allowed inside the holiest temples on a regular basis.[86] When they died, they received special burials,[87] and they and the priests were believed to be the only people who had an afterlife.[88] Male *weroances*, with their greater incomes, were able to pay the bridewealth to acquire more wives than ordinary men; more wives working in the fields meant still more income, which could be used to acquire yet more wives. The *mamanatowick* Powhatan had more than one hundred wives in his lifetime and kept more than a dozen at any one time.[89] He had only one child by each wife,[90] so that his children were all half-siblings to one another.

Weroances acquired their positions most often by matrilineal inheritance.[91] Thus it was rare that any of the children by all those wives became *weroances* themselves, though Powhatan did appoint several of his sons to govern subject tribes.[92] A ruling position passed from a female ancestor to her sons in order of age, thence to the daughters in order of age, and thence

to the sons and then daughters of the eldest daughter. Powhatan's successor was therefore his next brother, Opitchapam, a lame and unimpressive man[93] who was overshadowed in his lifetime by his more able and charismatic brother and successor, Opechancanough. There were also two sisters who would have become paramount chiefs had they lived long enough.

It was the sensible practice of Virginia *weroance*s to make their successors viceroys while they lived. Thus, Opitchapam, Opechancanough, and a third brother, Kekataugh, jointly ruled the powerful Pamunkey tribe for their brother.[94] The doughty Opussunoquonuske acted as *weroansqua* of a satellite town for her brother, the *weroance* of the Appamattuck tribe and a subject in turn of Powhatan,[95] while Iopassus (Japazaws), the Indian collaborator in the capture of Pocahontas in 1613, ruled the satellite town of Passapatanzy for his brother, the *weroance* of Patawomeck.[96]

Most of the Indians of eastern Virginia were organized into chiefdoms[97] in the late protohistoric period,[98] judging by what William Strachey heard about the Kecoughtan "chief" who was conquered by Powhatan in the 1590s.[99] The only exception was the Chickahominies, who deliberately remained on a tribal level.[100] It was not until very late in the protohistoric period that a paramount chief (Powhatan) emerged (see chapter 1). The reason for the development of chiefdoms and, later, a paramount chiefdom may have been a "natural" movement toward more complex political organizations in an ecologically rich area,[101] although nearly all of the riches of the Virginia coastal plain are so widely available that the economic specialization which Elman Service sees as a major factor in the rise of many chiefdoms[102] was not in operation there.[103] I feel, instead, that though the chiefdoms may have been a "natural" development, a major factor in the rise of a paramount chiefdom in eastern Virginia was the increased military threat the people of the region felt from Europeans and other Indians alike, possibly coupled with social disruption caused by epidemics. Internal pressures with external causes have been known to open the door to political takeovers elsewhere.

Powhatan claimed to rule nearly all of eastern Virginia.[104] He had inherited six chiefdoms (Powhatan, Arrohateck, Appamattuck, Pamunkey, Mattaponi, and Chiskiack) and had then gathered more tribes into his fold, either by warfare or by intimidation.[105] He had added the Kecoughtans to his collection in 1597 or 1598; he had exterminated the Chesapeakes, who would not join him, by the summer of 1608 (see chapter 1). By 1608, then, Powhatan had received at least a nominal submission, if not full subjection, from all the surviving Algonquian-speaking chiefdoms of the coastal plain. The Chickahominies were an exception. This populous tribe persisted in governing itself by a council of elders, while holding Powhatan at bay with a large population of warriors and by making judicious payments to him.[106]

The Algonquian-speaking ethnic groups of the James, the York, and probably the Rappahannock river basins were chiefdoms fully integrated into Powhatan's "empire"—which was *not* a "confederacy."[107] The chiefdoms of the southern shore of the Potomac and of the Eastern Shore were, according to Powhatan's accounts and occasionally to their own, officially part of the "empire,"[108] but in fact they were a "fringe" on the new ethnic group that the paramount chief was trying to create (see below). That fringe was the first part of Powhatan's empire to be detached through English influence.

Powhatan's organization was in three levels, with his viceroys being the tribes' *weroance*s, and their viceroys in turn being the petty *weroance*s of satellite towns.[109] The proper term to apply to Powhatan's organization is "paramount chiefdom" rather than "empire," since Powhatan himself did not exert enough coercive force for his organization to be called a monarchical "state."[110] He either could not or did not control his subject tribes rigidly. Tribes occasionally fought among themselves, as did the Weyanocks and Paspaheghs on the James and the Rappahannocks and Moraughtacunds on the Rappahannock in 1607–1608 (see chapter 2). They also negotiated on their own with the English, until Powhatan decided that the newcomers were important enough to deal with himself, and even then the tribes were allowed great latitude in their behavior. But Powhatan expected obedience to his wishes and he was prepared to punish disobedience with annihilation, which he inflicted upon the Piankatanks in an ambush in 1608.[111] Peripheral peoples, such as the Accomacs and Occohannocks on the Eastern Shore and the Patawomecks and Onawmanients on the Potomac, paid him lip service as often as real obedience.

There was no "state" religion among the Powhatans. Varying beliefs about the creation of the world and life after death were recorded by the English colonists.[112] All accounts agree, however, that the Powhatans believed in multiple gods, with an anthropomorphic male tutelary deity ("okeus," or *kwiokos*) in each town to whom the temples were dedicated.[113] The latter god was served by full-time (or nearly so) priests, who wore special garb[114] but were allowed to marry; one priest, Uttamatomakkin, married a daughter of Powhatan.[115]

Priests had functions other than sacerdotal ones. They communicated with gods, so they could make rain and cure disease.[116] They could foretell the future, so they became extremely influential in councils of war. They were able to determine secret things and were therefore called upon to identify criminals[117] and intuit the motives of foreigners, as they tried to do with John Smith.[118] The priests' powers made them highly sought after both by *weroance*s and by the *mamanatowick*. Although these rulers were free to make final decisions for themselves, the priests were said to have "the final voice" in council meetings,[119] where everyone's opinion was consulted.[120] Given their connection with the source of temporal power, it is not surprising that Powhatan priests became as unalterably opposed to English settlement, once that intention was revealed to them, as were the hereditary chiefs.

Warfare was endemic to eastern Virginia when the English arrived. There

were genuinely lethal Indian enemies to the west and northwest[121] and—before long—in the English colony in the Indians' midst. War against such outsiders probably helped Powhatan to impose his "empire" upon Woodland Indian people, who had not previously had such a polity, by directing their resentment outward. And war still gave an ambitious man not born into a ruling family a chance to earn prestige. The Powhatans knew how to fight in massed formations,[122] but most of their warfare took the form of small-scale raids and ambushes,[123] in which feats of individual bravery were easy to observe.

All men, except possibly the priests, were trained from infancy to be hunters of animals or of people. Babies were washed daily in cold water to make them hardy, a practice that both sexes followed throughout life.[124] Boys were not fed their breakfast by their mothers until they had hit targets their mothers tossed for them.[125] Boys were expected to increase their hunting exploits over time, receiving new personal names denoting their achievements; grown men, even brothers of Powhatan, did the same thing in war and politics throughout their lives (see chapter 4).[126] Boys heard about and occasionally saw the fate of male war captives (women, children, and "royals" were adopted[127]), who were slowly tortured to death by townspeople of both sexes.[128] Some time before puberty, boys were expected to go through a harrowing ordeal of several months' duration called the *huskanaw*, in which they were ceremonially "killed," isolated, and fed a "decoction" that sent them mad and gave them amnesia, and then were "reborn" and retrained by men, away from women's influence. Some boys did not survive. The effects on those who did were incalculably deep.[129]

Powhatan men were "real he-men," ever ready for war and councils of war, ever ready to gain honor in going against foreigners and in taking revenge for perceived slights, ever prepared to meet stoically a death by torture, and in the meantime ever ready to prove themselves as great deer hunters in order to acquire wives. Men and women alike expected this role of men; the women's role (which included farming) was complementary and separate. Indian men literally hated to be shamed, to be "made a derision of,"[130] and public shame could come easily in a culture in which a man's very name told what he had or had not done lately. The women would not marry any man who did not measure up. The men had no respect for other men who did not measure up—including most of the Englishmen they met, except for John Smith.

Such men and women did not suffer gladly the English attitude of cultural superiority—not when those Englishmen proved repeatedly that they could not even feed themselves. And as we shall see, such men and women did not change their roles willingly, even after a century of defeat and decline.[131]

As Powhatan built up his paramount chiefdom, he was, in fact, attempting to build a new ethnic group out of chiefdoms that spoke closely related languages and possessed closely similar cultures.[132] Many ethnic groups are known to have formed originally because of a commonality of interest—especially a political interest[133]—in opposition to some other people's interest. A forceful personality may or may not be present to hurry the process. The United States is a case in point, the opposition having been to the mother country. The interest that bound Powhatan's organization together was defense against enemies—Siouan, Iroquoian, and European (see chapter 1). By 1607 the territory occupied by the coalescing ethnic group had a name: Tsenacomacoh.[134] If its inhabitants had a collective name for themselves, the English did not record it. (Modern scholars' use of the term "Powhatan" for these Virginia Algonquians is primarily for our own convenience.) If the paramount chiefdom had remained untampered with by Europeans, it would have become a full-fledged ethnic group in a few more decades.

Powhatan's new polity was not a monolithic affair. Tribal identities such as "Pamunkey" and "Appamattuck" remained very strong, even in the loyal core of the organization.[135] That is nothing unusual. The same was true for at least a century in counties like Burgundy and Gascony after their incorporation into the French state, and many developing countries today are forging "national" identities in the attempt to dominate all the tribal identities within their (European-drawn) boundaries.[136] Powhatan's organization did not complete the process. When it came to a premature end in 1646, the older tribal identities remained, but by that time the people had long since come to see themselves as "Indians" (a supratribal ethnicity that did not presuppose a single polity) as a collective way of distinguishing themselves from the English.[137]

Even if Powhatan's new ethnic group had lasted, it still would not have been monolithic, with neatly defined boundaries. Even modern nation-state ethnic groups (e.g., Portugal), with their lists of citizens to be taxed, do not have conveniently demarcated boundaries except on paper. All ethnic groups actually have an easily recognized core surrounded by a fringe that contains people who are less recognizable and less intensely involved.[138] Fringe status embraces a great variety of relationships to the core. In modern nation-states, with their carefully recorded censuses, it can include expatriate, formerly core people; in-married foreigners; tax-paying expatriates from other countries, nationalized or not; persons with dual citizenship; members of separatist movements; and some of the more disaffected and non-tax-paying poor. This list shows another characteristic of many fringe people: they belong to two or more ethnic groups and feel some loyalty to both.

Fringes change as cultures change over time. This book describes not only the history and the changing culture of the Powhatan core people but also what the Powhatan fringe people were like. In Powhatan's paramount chiefdom in 1607, the fringe consisted of the more distant and less loyal groups such as the Patawomecks, as well as the autonomous but peaceful

Chickahominies in the chiefdom's midst. In the same chiefdom of Opechancanough's time, some of the geographical fringe groups had been wooed away by the English and a new fringe of partially Anglicized Indians was forming. That fringe remained a major source of culture change on Virginia Indian reservations until the core Indian people were almost entirely Anglicized. After that, the tribes' fringes consisted of people who were simply not as actively involved or as fully accepted (e.g., white spouses) as core people were.

Ethnic groups are always complicated entities, and the Powhatans have always been no exception. People are capable of a wide variety of responses to the world around them. All but the most repressively conformist ethnic group (e.g., Old Order Amish) will show a considerable spectrum of such responses at any one time. As the centuries pass, the groups that survive use the parts of the spectrum that work for them in dealing with outsiders, and thus they retain or change the customs they consider to be "normal" and uniquely "theirs." After making many adaptive changes, they may scarcely resemble their ancestors, but their group identity will still exist.[139] The following chapters document and explain the ethnic survival process for the Powhatan Indians of eastern Virginia.

Before the English Came

HUMAN OCCUPATION in Virginia goes back at least ten thousand years.[1] However, the Algonquian-speaking Indians collectively called "Powhatans" in this book had a tradition of arriving in the Tidewater only "300. years" earlier,[2] a tradition that has yet to be borne out by archaeology.[3] As far as the excavations tell us, the Powhatans were the *in situ* result of at least fifteen hundred years of Woodland Indian adaptation to life in the Chesapeake Bay region. As such, they were the end-product of a long process of development, not the pitiable practitioners of a static and unproductive society that the English and Spanish thought them to be.

Europeans made sporadic visits to the eastern coast of North America for six centuries before they began serious attempts at settlement. However, it appears that the earliest visitor to the Chesapeake was Giovanni da Verrazzano, who in 1524 probably sailed past the Virginia Capes.[4] In 1546 a storm forced an English ship into a "very good bay" in "the land of La Florida in 37°," according to the cabin boy's account made to the Spanish in 1559.[5] While that ship rode at anchor, "over thirty canoes in each of which were fifteen to twenty persons" came alongside to trade. The bay may well have been the Chesapeake; the thirty-seventh parallel runs through its entrance.

The first documented contact of Europeans with a Powhatan Indian occurred between 1559 and 1561, when a Spanish exploratory party picked up an Indian who was visiting to the south of his homeland. This man, who was later baptized with the name of his sponsor, Don Luis de Velasco, was probably a youth at the time.[6] European explorers made a practice of kidnapping adolescents, who could learn a new language quickly while retaining their own and thus become useful as interpreters. The Indian youth was taken to Mexico, where he was baptized and educated by Dominicans. He was then taken to Spain, where the Jesuits who met him described him as the "son of a petty chief" and a "self-styled 'big chief' and a 'big talker.'"[7] He remained in Spain for two years, during which time he met King Philip II and "received many favors" from him.[8] Lastly, he went to Havana with some Dominicans, whom he eventually persuaded to found a mission to the "heathen" in his homeland, which he called *Ajacán*.

In 1566 the governor in Havana sent Don Luis with two friars and thirty soldiers to carry out that mission, but the expedition aborted when Don Luis failed to find the Virginia Capes.[9] Meanwhile, the Jesuits in Cuba had become discouraged with their conversion rate and were ready to try a mission farther north. Thus, in August 1570 a second expedition, consisting of Don Luis, eight Jesuits, and one young novice named Alonso de Lara, set out for Chesapeake Bay.[10] One historian has suggested that Don Luis may have pretended to fail to find the Chesapeake in 1566 because of the expedition's preponderance of soldiers over priests; the 1570 roster was entirely religious and Don Luis had no trouble finding his homeland.[11]

The Jesuit mission arrived in Tidewater Virginia on September 10, 1570, and sailed up the river later called the James. Judging from the testimony of the ship's captain, they landed at College Creek, five miles east of Jamestown Island. Then, for reasons unknown, they crossed the Peninsula by way of creeks until they reached the mouth of either Kings or Queens Creek on the York River.[12] There they settled, in a spot that was on another river entirely from their intended debarkation place.

The timing of the mission was poor: the region was enduring a famine,[13] so that the Indians they wanted to convert had already dispersed to go foraging for the winter. The location of the mission was also unfortunate. The people at the debarkation place, possibly those later known to the English as Paspaheghs (or perhaps Chickahominies; see below), had welcomed Don Luis back as a relative. But the missionaries settled, perhaps inadvertently, among people of another group, later known as the Chiskiacks. No Spanish writer mentions the nature of relations, peaceful or hostile, between the two groups. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that Don Luis "lived with the Fathers but two nights and not over five nights in the village"[14] before going off to live among his own people. It is also understandable that at a distance from the mission his eagerness to help the Jesuits faded, especially when his younger brother, now the ruler of his people, offered his own position to Don Luis. Don Luis declined the offer[15] and decided to live with an uncle who ruled another (unidentified) group, also some distance away from the mission. As a privileged member of a ranking family, Don Luis soon succumbed to the temptation to live well in the Indian fashion, which, to the Jesuits' horror, included taking several wives.

The Jesuits, left behind at their camp, were soon in dire straits. They had brought few supplies from Cuba because they counted on the services of an interpreter and expected to be supported by new converts, a standard practice in Jesuit missionary work at the time. When their supplies ran out, they had to sell many of their tools to Indian neighbors and eke out an existence by foraging. Their messages to Don Luis, imploring him to return, went unanswered. Finally, in early February 1571, three missionaries sought out the "apostate" in his uncle's household and put direct pressure on him. That was their final mistake. Don Luis seems already to have felt caught between loyalty to his own people and loyalty to the missionaries who had brought him home; whatever he did, he would be publicly criticized and shamed by somebody, a terrible fate for one brought up in the Powhatan world. But the Jesuits were more ready than his own people to blame him for disloyalty just then, and the missionaries were few in number. Therefore, the solution Don Luis chose was to eliminate the Jesuits.[16]

The three men from the mission were killed in the woods as soon as they started back.[17] Later, on the morning of February 9, Don Luis and a party of warriors arrived at the mission, offering to work with the mission's axes. As soon as they had the axes, however, the Indian party used them to kill the remaining five missionaries, after which they looted the camp. Only young Alonso was spared, in keeping with Powhatan warfare practices. Don Luis, knowing his Europeans, advised his people to kill the boy before he could talk to the Spanish punitive force that was sure to come later, but two tribal rulers in succession insisted on keeping him alive.

A Spanish relief ship did indeed come looking for the missionaries later that year. The ship's master became suspicious when he saw none of the prearranged signals for guiding him to the Jesuits' camp. Instead he saw Indians walking on the beach wearing Jesuit cassocks and beckoning him ashore, and when he approached the shore, his men were ready for the canoes of attacking warriors. In the fray that followed, three Indians were captured, one of whom was successfully carried to Cuba. There the man told his captors what had happened and that Alonso was still alive.

Thus, in August 1572, after several delays, the punitive force that Don Luis feared arrived in the Chesapeake and anchored in Hampton Roads. Its commander was the governor of Cuba himself. A boat bearing the Indian captive was sent up College Creek to the Jesuits' debarkation place, where, after some deliberately friendly trading, the Spanish suddenly took more captives. That at least some of the captured Indians had played a part in murdering the Jesuits was apparent because one of them had met the Spanish wearing a silver paten from the mission.[18] Carrying the captives, the boat then returned to the creek's mouth. There the people agreed to fetch Alonso from the place where he was being kept, two day's journey away, in what was later known as Kecoughtan territory. However, when no Alonso was forthcoming, the frustrated Indians tried to ambush the boat's occupants before the Spanish reacted violently to the delay. The boatmen beat off the attempt and waited one more day for Alonso. When the boy was not delivered, they approached the shore and fired arquebuses into the midst of the warriors gathered there, killing many of them. Ironically, Alonso's host had sent him directly to the Spanish ship in Hampton Roads, where the boat's occupants found him on their return from the shore.

The Spanish commander, Menendez, now sent one of the Indian captives upriver with orders to bring back Don Luis within five days or he would

punish the other captives in Don Luis' place. Meanwhile, he held an inquest, with Alonso serving as interpreter.[19] Five Indian captives were declared innocent and released, but when Don Luis was not brought in the time allotted, the others were hanged from the ship's rigging. The Spanish then went home. Alonso lived to be interviewed by Jesuit writers.[20] In later decades, Indians and English colonists alike still dreaded a return of the vengeful Spanish.

The Powhatans learned from the Spanish Jesuit mission and its aftermath that Europeans expected to have their own way and were willing to wreak vengeance on people who thwarted them.[21] It is unlikely that the Powhatans recognized either the same qualities in themselves or that their own violence was a contributing cause to Spanish violence. Instead, the people who had lost warriors merely hated the Spanish. One group, the Chickahominy, was particularly outspoken about it to the English in later years,[22] which may indicate that the occupants of the debarkation place in 1570 were not the Paspaheghs but the Chickahominies. However, the Indians' understanding of Europeans' true intentions for New World people, as well as for their land, depended upon how much they heard from Don Luis (who probably told them plenty) and how much of his talk they believed. Judging from Indian behavior in the first years of the English colony (see chapter 2), they believed little.

No European ever seems to have learned what Don Luis' eventual fate was among his own people. However, rumors about alleged non-Virginian origins of Powhatan rulers circulated for more than a century in the English colony (their Indian sources were not recorded), making some scholars wonder whether one of these rulers was the returned Don Luis living under an Algonquian name. One rumor from the early seventeenth century stated that the Chickahominies hated the Spanish because the Indian emperor "*Powhatans* father was driuen by them from the *West-Indies* into" Virginia;[23] but Powhatan and Don Luis were probably contemporaries, not father and son.[24] The other rumor, from the early eighteenth century, based itself on a foreign origin to account for the undying hostility of Opechancanough, Powhatan's brother, to Europeans: Robert Beverley claimed that the Powhatan Indians of his time denied the brotherhood of Opechancanough and the more pacific Powhatan ("They say he was a Prince of a Foreign nation, and came to them a great way from the South-West; And by their Accounts, we suppose him to have come from the Spanish Indians, somewhere near Mexico.").[25] Yet Thomas Rolfe, Pocahontas's son and a grandson of Powhatan, specifically claimed Opechancanough as a relative whom he wanted to visit in 1641.[26] And all the early English accounts agree that Opechancanough was indeed a brother of Powhatan. The late-seventeenth-century Powhatans may only have been trying to disassociate themselves from a leader the English still detested.

Some modern historians, notably Carl Bridenbaugh, have speculated that Opechancanough and Don Luis were the same person. Indeed, Bridenbaugh has written a composite life history of them as though they were one, saying only parenthetically that the idea cannot actually be proved.[27] I think there is little likelihood of their being the same, as do some of the authorities on the Spanish Jesuit mission.[28] My reasons are both historical and cultural. Don Luis and Opechancanough were approximately contemporaries, since Don Luis and Powhatan were contemporaries. But Don Luis had only a younger full brother, as far as the Spanish accounts show, while Opechancanough had two older full brothers who became *mamanatowick* ahead of him. That means there were different sets of people in their immediate families. Additionally, Don Luis came from a territory somewhere around the mouth of the Chickahominy River in 1559–1561. Powhatan and, by extension, Opechancanough came from a territory that included tribes up near the fall line of the James and York rivers (see below). In 1559–1561, when Powhatan was at best only newly installed as a ruler, it is possible, yet unlikely, that his dominion already extended down to the Chickahominy's mouth; his immediate family and Don Luis's would therefore have been different, though perhaps related.

Bridenbaugh notes that in 1621 Opechancanough disclosed some knowledge of astronomy (i.e., that the Big Dipper revolved around the North Star and was called the "Great Bear"[29]); this he takes as persuasive evidence of a European-bred sophistication.[30] Yet astronomical knowledge of that basic sort (revolving heavens, naming of constellations) is easily arrived at after only a few years of casual observation, and anthropologists have found that most peoples in the world have at least that much knowledge. The Great Bear's Powhatan name, *Manguahaian*,[31] is Algonquian (though it is possibly Opechancanough's impromptu translation of the European name), and the correspondence of Powhatan and European names for the constellation is probably coincidental, since bears are among the animals native to both continents. On the other hand, there is Opechancanough's recorded deep fascination with English gadgets, such as the lock on the door of his English house in 1621 (which he is said to have spent hours playing with).[32] That fact seems to argue a lack of experience with European technology, though it could have been a show for the English missionary who had the house built for him. Had he been Don Luis, he would not really have felt such a fascination, because the gadgets would have been familiar to him already.

But most convincingly, Opechancanough showed himself to be non-Europeanized in a truly essential matter and at a time when Don Luis would not have pretended for *anyone's* benefit: when Opechancanough tried to drive the English out of Virginia in 1622 and again in 1644, he did not follow up on his initial victory, a failure that gave the English time to regroup.[33] In Indian-style warfare, vicious "hints" such as that were enough to make the survivors withdraw, at least for a time, until they could bear (or adopt) and rear more warriors. Opechancanough was confident that

one strike was enough, as he told the Potomac River tribes.[34] But Europeans in colonies the size of Jamestown did not take "hints" of that sort: they usually stayed in their well-established forts and sent home to their densely populated mother countries for reinforcements. A follow-up was definitely needed in 1622 to make the English even think about abandoning their colony; Don Luis would have known that, after spending a decade among the Spanish. He had been Europeanized enough to want to kill the boy Alonso and complete the job in 1571. Had he led the attack of 1622, he would almost certainly have come back to finish that job, too. Opechancanough was deadly serious in his aim of routing the English from Virginia, but his methods show him to be woefully unacquainted with the nature of Europeans. We must therefore conclude that Opechancanough was not Don Luis. No one knows what became of the Jesuits' erstwhile convert.

The 1570s and 1580s saw several European expeditions visit the mid-Atlantic Coast; the Powhatans met some of their members firsthand. One of the Roanoke Colony's ships may have entered Chesapeake Bay and encountered a hostile reception in 1584, though the Englishman who described that trip was vague about it.[35] The Spanish sailed along the coast a number of times, and in 1588 they sailed up the bay as far as the mouth of the Potomac River. There they seized an Indian youth and carried him away, along with another boy from the Eastern Shore. The former soon died of grief, while the latter lived to reach Santo Domingo, where he converted to Christianity and subsequently died of smallpox.[36]

One pre-Jamestown English expedition is known beyond question to have spent time with the Chesapeake Indians, who occupied what are now the cities of Norfolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, and Virginia Beach. It is a pity that the Chesapeakes did not survive to tell the Jamestown colonists about their visitors and that the English records of the trip were subsequently made classified information and then lost.[37] That expedition, which included the scientist Thomas Hariot and the artist John White, came from the first "Virginia" colony on Roanoke Island and spent some months, probably the early and middle winter of 1585–1586,[38] with the "Chesepians."[39] The location of that group's capital town, where Lane's party presumably stayed, is uncertain. John White's map[40] shows it as "Skicoak," rumored to be Virginia's "greatest citie,"[41] on what is now the south branch of the Elizabeth River; two other villages, one named Apasus, are shown between two branches of Lynnhaven Bay. John Smith's map[42] shows a "king's house" called "Chesapeake" at approximately the location of White's "Skicoake." Given the difference in time of compilation, both maps may give the name of the capital correctly. The Chesapeakes may have concentrated all their population on the more protected Elizabeth River after Europeans began visiting the region frequently.

That winter Hariot and White collected information about the lower Chesapeake Bay. Their superior, Ralph Lane, also heard later from the

Chowanocs[43] about a rich ruler to their north whose main stronghold, an island, answered to the description of Old Point Comfort,[44] in Kecoughtan territory. While based with the Chesapeakes, the English party was visited by members of several other tribal groups, most of which cannot be identified (one, the Mangoags, may have been the Nottoways or Meherrins). Significantly, no visitors from the James River tribes came; in 1607 they told the Jamestown colonists that they were enemies of the Chesapeakes.[45] The richness of the bay region and the cordiality with which the Roanoke party was received caused the English to decide to move their colonial enterprise northward.[46] It was only the stubbornness of a ship's pilot bent on privateering that placed the third (and later "lost") colony back on Roanoke Island.

It is likely that some of the "lost colonists" went northward as refugees in 1587 and stayed among the Chesapeakes, while others moved (or were abducted) westward to the Carolina mainland. David B. Quinn believes strongly in the idea[47] and has constructed a scenario of the northern refugees' gradual assimilation with the Indians.[48] I agree that this is likely. As Quinn notes, the Chesapeakes had been friendly two years earlier and the colonists knew that any later English attempts at settlement would be directed north of the Carolina Sounds. In addition, I would point out that the Indians who assaulted the English at Cape Henry in April 1607 showed a suspicious lack of panic when faced with English firearms (see chapter 2), as though they were familiar with those firearms' limitations. However, the fate of any English people among the Chesapeakes can only be guessed at, for as we shall see, the Chesapeakes were exterminated by Powhatan before the Jamestown colonists could interview them. Archaeological excavations have yet to turn up solid evidence of an English presence in Chesapeake territory before the 1630s.

Quinn further suggests that some Roanoke refugees survived until sometime just before the Jamestown colonists' arrival, at which time Powhatan's forces exterminated the Chesapeake Indians as well as the English and half-English people living among them. After that, Quinn says that Powhatan and his people systematically kept their "crime" a secret by attacking the English at the first landing at Cape Henry and then by deflecting the English explorations away from that area.[49] Quinn's evidence is William Strachey's statement that King James had been told by 1609 that although the Roanoke colonists had lived for "20. and od yeares" outside his dominions, Powhatan had killed them.[50] In fact, "the slaughter at [of] *Roanoak*" had happened "at what tyme this our Colony, (vnder the conduct of Capt. *Newport*) landed within the *Chesapeack* Bay."[51] King James may have heard this news from John Smith, for according to Samuel Purchas, who talked with Smith, Powhatan admitted to Smith during his captivity that he had killed "those at [from] Roanoke."[52]

I find the evidence for this part of the story circumstantial, not to say

dubious. The refugees may have been killed at the time Quinn suggests, just before the English arrived at Chesapeake Bay in April 1607, but I think that if any such attack occurred, it was on the Carolina mainland. John Smith himself never wrote that Powhatan had killed any Roanoke colonists; only Purchas did, and he wrote it in 1625 as part of an anti-Indian polemic titled "Virginia's Verger." William Strachey accused Powhatan directly, but he did so in a passage exhorting Englishmen to settle in Virginia and convert the "heathen." The context of both charges is biased, so the charges themselves are flimsy.[53] The Virginia Company's instructions to Sir Thomas Gates in 1609[54] speak of "the slaughter of [by] Powhaton of Roanocke [colonists], vppon the first arrivall of our colonie" (i.e., in 1607; the partial copying here by Strachey is plain), but there is no mention of where it was thought to have happened. In addition, Strachey wrote of the "Roanoke" murder (*Historie of Travell*, pp. 34, 91) and of the extermination of the Chesapeakes by Powhatan (*Historie of Travell*, pp. 104–105) in entirely different places; at no point in his book does he indicate any connection between the Roanoke colonists and the obliterated Chesapeakes. It seems that Strachey expected most, if not all, Roanoke survivors to have taken refuge among the Carolina tribes, and that is where the leaders at Jamestown did, in fact, send emissaries to look for them (see below).

As for the Jamestown colonists' being systematically kept away from the Chesapeakes' old territory, that is questionable. The attack they experienced at Cape Henry did not deter them from an initial exploration of the Lynhaven area, which they found apparently deserted. (A reason for that desertion has already been advanced.) Instead, the colonists do not seem to have been interested in the Chesapeakes' territory—for any reason—until the summer of 1608, and then merely as a matter of curiosity. Before John Smith's captivity of December 1607–January 1608, they were far too eager to find a "Northwest Passage" up the major rivers of the region, and at other times their hunger drove them to concentrate on trading for corn with tribes nearer to Jamestown. If Smith learned of any "guilt" of Powhatan's during his captivity, a subsequent confirmatory expedition of some sort would have been logical, considering that the English already distrusted Powhatan and were unaware that word of their other explorations had reached him. But the Jamestown colonists made no such move. They did not sail up the Elizabeth River until several months later, and then only at the end of an expedition that had traveled freely (though not unmolested) over the entire Chesapeake Bay region. It seems doubtful that Smith heard anything about any English being among the Chesapeake Indians or about the Jamestown colonists being discouraged by anyone from going there.

I suspect that the extermination of the Chesapeakes took place shortly after Jamestown was founded (see below) but that few, if any, of the English refugees among them survived long enough to be killed by Powhatan's men. Adult male English refugees probably did not live very long among the

Chesapeakes. Englishmen had already demonstrated their ability to antagonize most of their Indian neighbors in the Roanoke region: the English and the Indians of that time were both apt to be arrogant and touchy. Even Englishmen from a peaceful, non-military colony were ethnocentric enough to be perceived by Indians as abrasive, given long enough contact; sixteenth-century Europeans were quick to give advice to "barbarians," by whose standards such advice was probably insufferably rude and aggressive.[55] If they offended the Chesapeakes, the men would have been eliminated by their Indian hosts, who might later have attacked the newly arriving English at Cape Henry before the English, as the Indians expected, attacked them in reprisal. The female and young male Roanoke refugees would have been spared, adopted, and resocialized.[56] But mortality was high, by modern standards, for both sexes and all ages among both the Indians and the English of that era. It is entirely possible that only half-blood children would have remained by 1607; those children would have been considered Indians, not English, by Powhatan's raiders, and therefore not worthy of notice.[57]

One person, possibly half-English, was actually observed by the Jamestown colonists. He was "a Saluage Boy about the age of ten yeeres [in 1607], which had a head of haire of a perfect yellow and a reasonable white skinne . . ."[58] This boy, who would have been born around 1597, was observed living in Arrohateck territory, near the falls of the James, in the core of Powhatan's territory; there is no mention in the account of his being a captive from another tribe, Chesapeake or Carolina Algonquian. No English account mentions any questions being asked about him, either, although the Indians there were exceedingly friendly. But he may well have been the child of a "lost colonist."

Neither the Jamestown settlers nor any other English ever went searching to Croatoan (now Hatteras Island), where the "lost colonists'" message found by John White in 1590 had indicated they were going.[59] Instead, the Jamestown English made inquiries among the Powhatan groups, who invariably suggested the North Carolina mainland. In December 1607, Opechancanough told the captive John Smith about Europeans in "Ocanahonan,"[60] which may have been the town of Ohanoak on the lower Chowan River that was visited by a party from the first Roanoke colony.[61] In the spring of 1608 the ruler of Paspahegh offered to take an English party to "Panawicke beyond Roonok," but the offer proved to be fraudulent.[62] Both towns were described to William Strachey in 1610–1611 as having two-story houses of stone and people who bred tame turkeys and hunted "apes" in the mountains. Strachey also heard about a place called Ritanoe, where the king of "Eyanoco" (possibly Eno, a Siouan-speaking group) kept four English men, two boys, and a young girl as servants.[63] However, the only expeditions to search so far afield for "lost colonists" were the ones sent to the Chowanocs and to the Nottoways; both took place in the spring

of 1609 and both failed to hear news.[64] Thus, the ultimate fate of the "lost colonists" remains a mystery only archaeology may solve.

On July 26, 1603, an English ship captained by Bartholomew Gilbert was driven into what may have been Chesapeake Bay (Quinn believes the bay was Delaware Bay) by foul weather.[65] Already low on food, water, and firewood, the ship was in desperate straits by July 29, so a landing party was sent ashore.[66] Without warning the party was attacked and five men were killed, including Captain Gilbert. The ship thereupon weighed anchor and sailed to England, still short of supplies. The reason for the Indians' hostility was never discovered, but it may have had something to do with earlier Spanish movements in the area.

Another European ship visited the Chesapeake either "the yeare before"[67] or "some twoe or three yeeres before"[68] the settling of the Jamestown colony in 1607. The nationality of the crew was unknown to the Indians who told the story of its visit, but Quinn has suggested[69] that it may have been an English ship captained by Samuel Mace, a companion ship to Gilbert's which had become separated. It may, in turn, have been Mace's ship that brought to England the Indians who are documented in 1603 as giving a canoe-handling demonstration on the Thames River.[70] All these connections are tenuous, given the scanty surviving records. Whatever its nationality, the ship visited Powhatan himself first and got a cordial reception, after which it went exploring in the Rappahannock River area. There the Rappahannock ruler made the crew welcome, but suddenly the Europeans turned on the Indians, killed their ruler, kidnapped some of the people, and sailed away. That, of course, is the Indian view, which acknowledged no culpability in creating a misunderstanding. The Powhatans appear not to have held that stealing from Europeans was "theft," since unpleasant incidents arising from thefts were common in the early days of the Jamestown colony; so it is likely that Rappahannock behavior played some part in causing the Europeans' violence. Nevertheless, the Rappahannocks still felt deeply offended in 1607, and for that reason John Smith was taken to them during his captivity in the winter of 1607–1608. He was exonerated because he was too short to have been the "great man" who captained the European ship.[71]

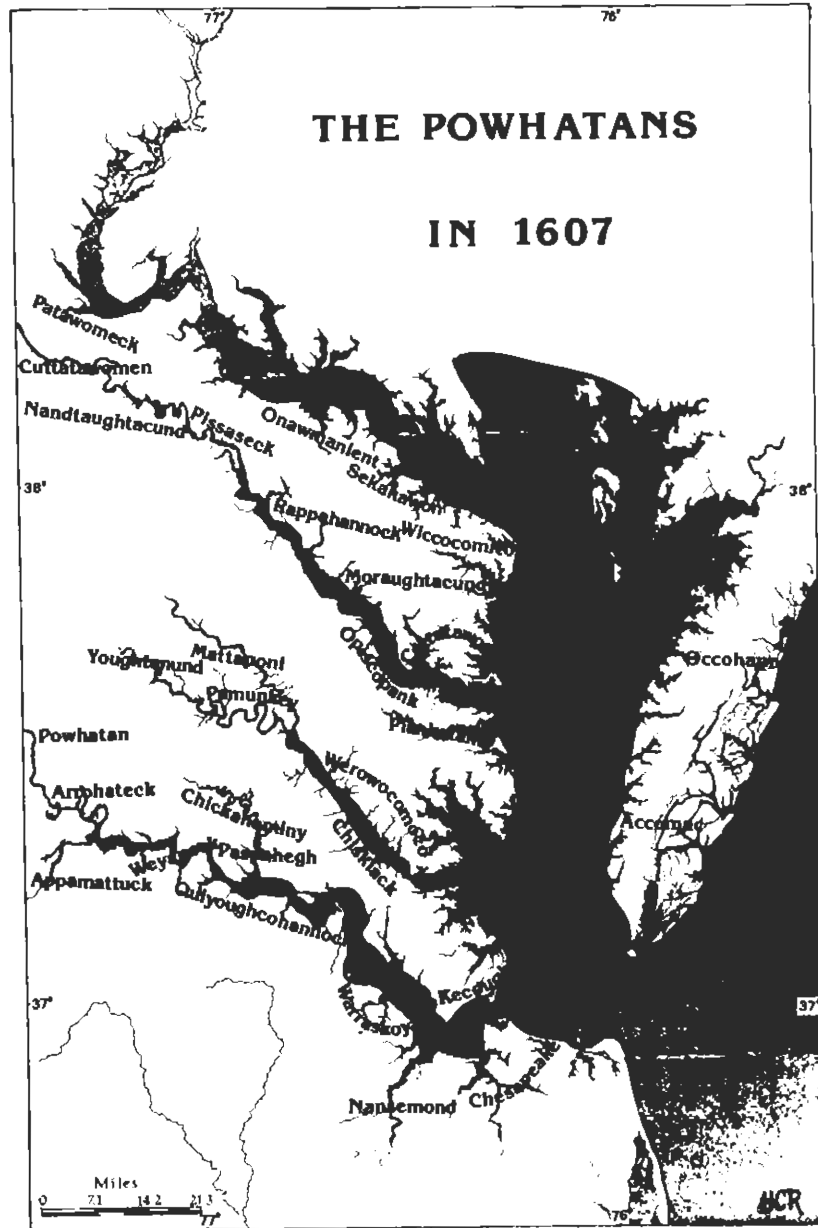
In the decades before 1607, then, the Algonquian-speaking Indians of Virginia met a number of Europeans and heard about more. They must have had mixed impressions, for both their firsthand experiences and those related by neighbors were with Europeans who could be either friendly or violently angry. Spanish and English visits to the Chesapeake Bay area must have caused unease. Stories of the repeated attempts to settle Roanoke Island may have been downright alarming, though the Powhatans would naturally not confess such a thing to the Jamestown settlers whose records we must use. There is also evidence that Iroquoian-speakers expanded their territory in the protohistoric period, and that their ritual torture of male captives was a means of further terrorizing other Woodland groups.[72] The Massawomecks who so frightened some Powhatan groups[73] may have been the Eries, moving down the Potomac valley in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[74] The probability is high, therefore, that the Indians of eastern Virginia felt more threatened militarily at the end of the sixteenth century than they had ever felt before.

There may also have been serious epidemics of European diseases in eastern Virginia. Epidemics devastated other regions where the native people had no immunity,[75] and in the Pamlico region the Roanoke colonists noted that dreadful diseases causing high mortality afflicted any Indian groups who offended the English (i.e., most Indian groups) a few days after the English left.[76] That the Indians in Virginia experienced epidemics is indicated by Powhatan's statement to John Smith that he had "seene the death of all [his] people thrice"[77] and by John Smith's hearing of mass deaths after the exhumation of two children's bodies at Accomac.[78] Archaeological proof has yet to surface in the form of mass graves for the victims,[79] but the likelihood of epidemics having occurred is still high. Severe epidemics can cause great social disruption, as Europeans had found out in their experiences with the Black Death.[80] If such had been the case in late-sixteenth-century Virginia, an ambitious chief who wanted to become a paramount chief would have found circumstances aiding him.[81]

Powhatan began his career as a paramount chief on a small scale sometime between the 1550s and the 1580s. From one or both of his parents, about whom nothing else is known,[82] he inherited the chiefdoms of Powhatan, Arrohateck, and Appamattuck near the falls of the James River and the chiefdoms of Pamunkey, Mattaponi, and Youghtanund in the upper York River drainage.[83] He then expanded his holdings, either by intimidation or by outright military conquest,[84] until by 1607 he claimed all the peoples of the coastal plain except the Chickahominies as his.[85] (See map 1.)

Powhatan added Kecoughtan to his collection in 1596 or 1597, conquering it after its chief died.[86] Until that time the Kecoughtans had been strong enough to refuse to join the growing paramount chiefdom, and enmity had existed between the two peoples; only when a new and weaker chief reigned could Powhatan move in. His warriors killed the new chief and "most of" the people, according to Strachey, and the survivors were borne away in captivity, their territory being occupied by loyalists under one of Powhatan's sons.

The Chesapeake chiefdom also held out against Powhatan's expansionist aims. Apparently, a massive effort was required to conquer the Chesapeakes, and Powhatan made that effort after hearing a prophecy from his priests to the effect that his empire would be eclipsed by a nation coming "from the *Chesapeack* Bay."[87] Powhatan took this to mean his enemies the Chesapeakes, and accordingly he completely obliterated that people with a



Map 1. The Powhatans in 1607. Base map adapted from *Bathymetry of Chesapeake Bay* (Virginia Institute of Marine Science, 1977).

thoroughness unusual in Virginia Algonquian warfare. Their territory was then resettled, probably by the neighboring Nansemonds.

The date at which the Chesapeakes were bludgeoned into extinction is unknown and therefore open to speculation. Quinn, as mentioned above, believes it to have been just before the English arrived. There is evidence for his view in Smith's statement, written in the spring of 1608, that the Indians who attacked the English at Cape Henry, in Chesapeake territory, in April 1607 were Nansemonds: "the riuer of Nausamd, [Nansemond], a proud warlike Nation, as well as may testifie, [by what happened] at our first arriuall at Chesiapiack . . . ," an "iniury" which the English avenged in the spring of 1608.[88]

However, the timing may have been different. Smith's later accounts[89] do not repeat his assertion of 1608. William Strachey, the sole source for our knowledge of the Chesapeakes' demise, interviewed Indian informants far more carefully than Smith did, and his statements leave the timing uncertain. Strachey never mentions an attack on the English at Cape Henry, and he is deliberately vague about the identity of the people who occupied the area after the Chesapeakes, calling them "such new Inhabitants that now people *Chessapeak*."[90] Strachey said the extermination occurred "not long synce," i.e., not long before 1612. The extermination was carried out also as part of a general assault on "all such who" might be meant in the prophecy, a movement that could include the otherwise unexplained attack on the small, apparently inoffensive Piankatank group in the fall of 1608.[91] (That would mean that repercussions from the prophecy continued for a year and a half beyond the time of the English arrival.) Strachey's use of a prophecy to explain the massacre of the Chesapeakes does not prove that the event happened before Jamestown was founded. True, when the prophecy was made, with its seemingly obvious reference to people in the east, the English may not yet have been on the scene. Yet after the English did sail in from the east, Powhatan did not immediately apply the prophecy to them; instead he waited a long time, hoping to make them into allies, before he decided they were enemies. What is obvious to us (and was to William Strachey) was not obvious to him. On the other hand, if the English came before the prophecy was made, then Powhatan, upon hearing it, may have feared that the unpredictable strangers would make common cause with the Chesapeakes, who were definitely his enemies, thus creating a powerful bloc to the east. Elimination of those he knew to be enemies would now be a necessity, regardless of whether any Roanoke colonists survived among them.[92] Thus, the Chesapeakes could have been obliterated after the English arrived.

And there is still that nagging point about the English firearms, which the attackers at Cape Henry "little respected,"[93] unlike Indian people upriver (see chapter 2). The Chesapeakes were much more likely, given their geographical location, to know the limitations of European firearms than

were the Nansemonds, with or without refugee colonists from Roanoke Island. Therefore, Smith may have been wrong about Nansemonds having assaulted the English at Cape Henry in 1607. I suspect, instead, that the attackers were men from a Chesapeake chiefdom that was not exterminated until after Jamestown was founded. However, neither Quinn's belief nor mine can be proved from the scanty evidence presently available.

CHAPTER 2

Watching a Struggling Colony

IN THE EARLY ill-organized and even worse-supplied years of the Jamestown colony,[1] the Powhatans played a waiting game, watching for signs that the English would make useful allies against Indian enemies. Sometimes they offered the colonists the foodstuffs they needed, and sometimes they attempted to put the English "in their place" as interlopers. But always the paramount chief tried to retain the foreigners as allies.

Unlike the English, the Powhatans did not see the situation as "Indians versus Europeans" in those first years. They realized immediately that they were dealing with a second, non-Spanish kind of European. So they thought in terms of "some Indians versus other Indians" (i.e., Powhatan's paramount chiefdom versus the Monacans) and "English versus Spanish," with coalitions possible where interests ran parallel (i.e., Powhatans and English versus Monacans and Spanish). In other words, the English might prove useful in local military maneuvers. At the very beginning, Powhatan even allowed his chiefdoms to act as they pleased toward the English, as a means of testing the newcomers.

It took the Indians several years even to begin to realize that the English saw the land and its people in terms of European politics (competition with the Spanish for colonies), religion (spreading their own version of Christianity, and by extension, their own way of life), and an ideology of "savagism" with its unrealistic stereotypes of native people, who were either innocents in paradise or demonic near-animals.[2] When they did realize these things, the Powhatans appear to have been incredulous, for they were slow to take action against the arrogant intruders and then that action was on a small scale (see below and chapter 3). They had good reason to be incredulous. It was difficult for the Indians, who knew their world thoroughly, to believe that these blustering foreigners who could not even feed themselves actually intended to make Virginia into an outpost of English culture. In the early years, when the English periodically starved in their fort, it probably seemed to the Powhatans that adopting English culture would mean they would *all* starve. Ridiculous, they thought. In fact, in the first year of the colony, it was all too apparent that the English were novices in the region, both in their selection of a place to settle permanently in May 1607 and, in