MIDDLEMEN IN PEACE AND WAR: Virginia's Earliest Indian Interpreters, 1608–1632

by J. FREDERICK FAUSZ*

O my America! my new-found-land,
My Kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned,
My mine of precious stones, my empirie
How blest am I in thus discovering thee!
To enter in these bonds is to be free;
Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be.

—John Donne, Elegy XIX: "To His Mistress"

We have sent boies amongst them [the Powhatans] to learne their Language, but they returne worse than they went.

—Jonas Stockham, Virginia, 1621

ON Wednesday, 4 August 1619, the first legislative assembly in British America convened for a fifth day in the hot and humid confines of Jamestown's church to resolve an issue of vital importance for Anglo-Indian relations. The case before Governor Sir George Yeardley and the burgesses pitted two of the colony's most experienced and well-known Indian interpreters—Robert Poole and Captain Henry Spelman—against each other in a bitter, public confrontation. Already concerned that "the present peace might be disturbed and antient quarrells might be revived" with the Powhatans,[1] the assemblymen were shocked to learn from Poole that Spelman had "unreverently and maliciously" denounced Governor Yeardley to Opechancanough and told the powerful Pamunkey overlord that "within a yeare there would come a governour greatter then this."

* J. Frederick Fausz is an associate professor of history and director of the Honors Program at St. Mary's College of Maryland, St. Mary's City. He wishes to thank Professor David Beers Quinn and Professor Karen Ordahl Kupperman for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

[1] John Pory, *Proceedings of the General Assembly of Virginia, July 30–August 4, 1619* . . . , ed. William J. Van Schreeven and George H. Reese, Jamestown Foundation facsimile (Jamestown, 1969), p. 39. In all quotations from seventeenth-century sources, the use of "u" for "v" and "i" for "j" has been modernized for the sake of clarity.

Although some burgesses wanted Spelman executed for encouraging Indian disrespect for Virginia's government, the assembly took his "Childishe Ignorance" into account, stripped him of his militia rank, and, ironically, sentenced him to seven years of public service as the governor's interpreter.[2]

The trial of Henry Spelman, whom even lenient officials maintained "had in him more of the Savage then of the Christian," revealed the unique position that Indian interpreters occupied in early Virginia society.[3] Just as Spelman was considered too valuable to execute and yet too dangerous to set free, other contemporary interpreters likewise encountered a mixture of favor and fear, respect and resentment, from their colonial countrymen. The interpreters' indispensable and unrivaled knowledge of Indian languages, lifeways, and world views established their value to the colony, elevated them to positions of responsibility, and often earned them handsome rewards. And yet, ironically, the more successful they were in gaining access to strange and "savage" native cultures, the more vulnerable they became to manipulation by those who wanted to profit from their skills and to hostility from those who suspected their loyalty.

This essay analyzes the activities of Spelman, Poole, and Thomas Savage—the first Englishmen to establish careers as professional interpreters in America—in an attempt to humanize and appreciate more fully the complex connections between colonists and Indians in early Virginia. Contacts between natives and newcomers in the Chesapeake produced a vast array of interpersonal and interethnic relationships, but these three interpreters alone shared early and long-lived careers as skillful brokers between the cultures while ultimately remaining loyal to traditional English values. They differed from colonists such as Captain John Smith, an official who all too briefly sampled Indian languages and cultures as a prelude to colonial conquest, or Robert Marcum ("Moutapass"), an English renegade who totally adopted Algonquian ways.[4]

---

[2] Ibid., pp. 65, 67. See also H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of the House of Burgesses*, Vol. I: *1619–1658/59* (Richmond, 1915), pp. 4–16, for other Indian-related issues debated during this first assembly.

[3] Pory, *General Assembly*, p. 67. Pory reported that, upon sentencing, Spelman "muttered certain wordes to himselfe, neither shewing any remorse of his offenses, nor yet any thankfulnes to the Assembly for their so favourable censure" (ibid.). Perhaps the "intemporate heate" of that "Torride sommer," which contributed to the deaths of 300 colonists, had something to do with the contentiousness displayed by many participants in the Spelman case. See Susan Myra Kingsbury, ed., *Records of the Virginia Company of London* . . . (4 vols.; Washington, D.C., 1906–35), I, 310, 320; III, 220, 242, 244, 246, 275.

[4] Philip L. Barbour, ed., *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith* (3 vols.; Chapel Hill and London, 1986), I, lviii–lxviii; II, 289–90. Although the historical literature on "red Englishmen" (and "white Indians")

Spelman, Poole, and Savage could not afford to become English conquerors or Indian converts, for their important work demanded that they be transients among colonists and natives alike, habitually crossing and recrossing cultural boundaries as peripatetic emissaries. With few precedents to guide them, they founded a new profession for Englishmen in the New World, developing by trial and error the essential skills of translation and diplomacy that could provoke war or procure peace between mutually suspicious cultural aliens. As the pioneers of life-threatening livelihoods in a dangerous era of frontier violence, Spelman, Poole, and Savage tried to build bridges of understanding between vastly different peoples, but their cultivation of seemingly ambiguous and ambivalent loyalties made them the most consistently misunderstood and mistrusted people of all.

When thirteen-year-old Thomas Savage left England aboard the *John and Francis* in October 1607, he could not have known that he would soon be embarking on a fascinating, frightening career—a career in a profession that did not yet exist, conducted among people strange beyond imagining. As the lad from Cheshire stepped ashore at Jamestown in January 1608, the harsh realities of the colonists' struggle for survival in Virginia immediately became apparent. Only a few days before, Captain John Smith had "miraculously" returned from several weeks' captivity among the Powhatans only to be threatened with hanging because he had lost several colonists on his expedition. Although Smith was spared when Captain Christopher Newport arrived on the *John and Francis*, another disaster—a fire in James Fort—soon devastated the colonists in the midst of their dissension, destroying precious provisions and leaving many to perish in the winter winds "for want of lodging."[5]

By a twist of fate, young Thomas Savage was spared the suffering and

---

who converted to alien cultures is rich and growing (see especially James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* [New York and Oxford, 1981]), scholars have almost totally ignored the interpreters who translated and traveled between cultures without "converting." To date, the most perceptive comments on early Virginia interpreters are those of Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Settling With the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580–1640* (Totowa, N.J., 1980), especially pp. 118, 146–47, 156–57.

[5] Philip L. Barbour, ed., *The Jamestown Voyages Under the First Charter, 1606–1609*, Works issued by the Hakluyt Society, 2d ser., CXXXVI, CXXXVII (2 vols.; Cambridge, 1969), I, xxiv–xxvii; John Smith, *A True Relation of such occurrences and accidents of noate as hath hapned in Virginia* . . . (London, 1608), pp. C3*v*–C4*v*; John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* . . . (London, 1624), pp. 49–52. For brief biographies of Thomas Savage, see Barbour, ed., *Complete Works of Smith*, I, xlviii, and Annie Lash Jester and Martha Woodroof Hiden, eds., *Adventurers of Purse and Person: Virginia, 1607–1625* (Princeton, 1956), pp. 290–94.

death that claimed older, more experienced colonists, for in February 1608 he accompanied Smith and Newport on an official visit to the great *werowance* Powhatan and was quickly transported to a new life among the Indians. At Powhatan's capital of Werowocomoco, along the York River, Captain Newport made a "gift" of young Savage, whom he described as his son, to the *mamanatowick*[6] himself. This gesture, which the Indians understood and responded to in kind, defused the tensions between armed and wary warriors on both sides and provided the means for peaceful Anglo-Powhatan parleys in the future. Savage, a tangible symbol of the colonists' good intentions, remained with the Powhatans to learn the "countrey language" of the Indians that would prove valuable in subsequent encounters.[7]

After only a month in America, Savage had already become a focal point in Anglo-Indian relations. Captain Smith appreciated the value of the adolescent hostage and interpreter-in-training, and he featured the story of Savage's transfer to Powhatan in his *True Relation of such occurrences and accidents of noate*, which was dispatched to England in June and published the following August. In his *Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia* (Oxford, 1612), Smith elaborated further on the episode and appended a marginal comment: "The exchange of a Christian for a Salvage."[8] As early as February 1609, even the Spanish became aware of and concerned by Savage's influence in Anglo-Powhatan affairs. In faraway London, the Spanish ambassador to the court of James I wrote an urgent letter to his sovereign, describing how the Virginia colonists had "deceived . . . [Powhatan] with an English boy whom they gave him" and noting that the *werowance* "makes much of him."[9]

While English and Spanish policymakers speculated on the ramifications of Savage's stay with Powhatan, the boy from Cheshire was beginning to appreciate both his value and his vulnerability in a dangerous intercultural power struggle. In May 1608 Powhatan dispatched him to Jamestown to secure the release of Indian captives held by the colonists and angrily expelled him from Werowocomoco when his

---

[6] John Smith, *The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia* . . . (Oxford, 1612), pp. 18–19; Smith, *True Relation*, pp. D1*v*–D2*r*. Powhatan's title of *mamanatowick* was roughly translated as "great lord, supreme *werowance*" (William Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania* [1612], ed. Louis B. Wright and Virginia Freund, Works issued by the Hakluyt Society, 2d ser., CIII [London, 1953], p. 56).

[7] In return for Savage, Powhatan gave his trusty servant Namontack to the English delegation so that he, too, might learn the language and lifeways of a foreign culture. See Philip L. Barbour, *The Three Worlds of Captain John Smith* (Boston, 1964), pp. 184, 187, 234–39.

[8] Barbour, ed., *Complete Works of Smith*, I, 69, 116, 127, 216.

[9] Pedro de Zúñiga to Philip III, 23 Feb./15 Mar. 1608/9, in Barbour, ed., *Jamestown Voyages*, II, 257.

mission failed. No sooner, however, had Savage returned to his countrymen, "Chest and apparell" in hand, than Pocahontas appeared at the gates of James Fort and pleaded for the return of the boy whom both she and her father "loved exceedingly."[10] Such a sudden, dramatic about-face in policy symbolized the life-long fate of all interpreters, who were often weathercocks buffeted by the shifting political winds in one or both cultures.

A little more than a year after Savage rejoined Powhatan, the second of Virginia's first generation of interpreters arrived at Jamestown. In August 1609 fourteen-year-old Henry Spelman, a "young Gentlemen well descended" from a distinguished Norfolk family of scholars and politicians, came to the colony aboard the *Unity*. Banished by his kin to that distant, dangerous "reform school" across the Atlantic for some adolescent misadventure, Spelman, like Savage before him, quickly found himself at the center of an unfolding historical drama.[11]

In August 1609 Captain Smith, now president of the Virginia Council, journeyed to the falls of the James River to put an end to hostilities that had erupted between Indians and a group of hungry, demanding colonists living nearby. Perhaps because Savage had worked out so well as a hostage-emissary, Smith took Spelman along and used him to seal a truce with Parahunt, one of Powhatan's grown sons and *werowance* of several villages in the area of modern Richmond. Left with the Indians to help ensure the good behavior of the English, the naive new colonist assumed that Smith "sould me to him for a towne caled Powhatan"—a not-altogether-unattractive prospect, because Parahunt, according to Spelman, "made very much of me, givinge me such thinges as he had to winn me to live *with* him."[12]

Spelman had little time to relish Parahunt's indulgent hospitality, however, for by October 1609 full-scale warfare erupted between the colonists and the Powhatans throughout the Tidewater region. Just as Smith, the colony's leading mediator of Anglo-Indian disputes, returned to England with an incapacitating gunpowder wound, the Powhatans "revolted" and began to "murder and spoile all they could incounter" as

[10] Smith, *True Relation*, pp. E3*r*–E3*v*.

[11] Smith, *Generall Historie*, p. 108; Edward Arber and A. G. Bradley, eds., *Travels and Works of Captain John Smith* . . . (2 vols.; Edinburgh, 1910), I, ci–cii. Young Spelman (1595–1623) was the son of Erasmus Spelman and the nephew of Sir Henry Spelman, the famous antiquary of Norfolk and London (Barbour, ed., *Complete Works of Smith*, I, xlix; Francis Saunders, Will, 17 Aug. 1613, in Lothrop Withington, comp., "Virginia Gleanings in England," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XV [1907–8], 305–6).

[12] Henry Spelman, "Relation of Virginea" (ms., ca. 1613), in Arber and Bradley, eds., *Travels of Smith*, I, cii; Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 91–92.

revenge for past indignities. Instead of "corne . . . and contribution from the Salvages," wrote a colonist at Jamestown, "wee had nothing but mortall wounds."[13] As hostilities intensified, Spelman sought refuge at Jamestown. Unfortunately, his arrival coincided with the onset of the "Starving Time"—the winter of 1609–10 when diseased and severely malnourished colonists, surrounded and often besieged by the Powhatans, died in droves. Spelman, however, avoided the certain death that many faced at James Fort with the chance arrival of Savage, who had escaped a similar fate the year before. This was the first recorded meeting between the two English boys with common Indian experiences, and when Savage prepared to return to Powhatan with messages from colonial officials, "he was loith to goe . . . [unless] sum of his cuntrymen went w*ith* him, wher uppon [Spelman reported] I was apoynted to goe, w*hi*ch I the more willinglie did, by Reason *that* vitals were scarse with us."[14]

While the garrison at Jamestown endured great hardship, Savage and Spelman enjoyed the Indians' hospitality and even took their meals with Powhatan himself. But, as Spelman belatedly discovered, such favored treatment was often designed to inculcate new allegiances and to cultivate useful pawns in a treacherous struggle for power. In November Spelman went to Jamestown on Powhatan's orders and persuaded the colonists to send a trading expedition up the York River to procure desperately needed maize. Dispatched by Powhatan to a distant village, Spelman only later learned (from Savage) that "the subtell owlde foxe" Powhatan had ambushed that expedition and slaughtered some thirty colonists who had believed the promises of the young interpreter.[15] Regretting his role in this disaster and perceiving that Powhatan's "mind was much declined from us[,] w*hi*ch made us feare the worst," Spelman, along with Savage and one Samuel—a German fugitive from Jamestown who had plotted with the Indians against the colonists—planned to escape from the *mamanatowick*.[16]

Because Spelman and Samuel were fearful of being hanged as traitors

[13] Smith, *Proceedings in Virginia*, pp. 104–5. For a detailed analysis of this First Anglo-Powhatan War (1609–14), see J. Frederick Fausz, "The Powhatan Uprising of 1622: A Historical Study of Ethnocentrism and Cultural Conflict" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1977), pp. 251–71.

[14] Spelman, "Relation," pp. cii–ciii; Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 105–6.

[15] Spelman, "Relation," pp. ciii–cv; Smith, *Generall Historie*, p. 105; George Percy, "A Trewe Relacyon of the Proceedings and Ocurrentes . . . in Virginia . . ." (ca. 1612), in *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, III (1921–22), 265–66.

[16] Spelman, "Relation," p. ciii. The "Dutch man" Samuel, also referred to as one of "the Germans," conspired with other deserters to steal tools and weapons from Jamestown for the Indians' use, and he was living with Powhatan as a hostage until their promises were kept (Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 78, 88).

Virginia Historical Society

In March 1614 interpreter Thomas Savage was a key figure in negotiating a truce to end the First Anglo-Powhatan War (1609–14). In this seventeenth-century engraving from Matthew Merian's *Historiae Americanae, . . . Decima Tertia Pars* (Frankfurt am Main, 1634), Pocahontas, in the left foreground surrounded by her English guards, and Savage visit two of Pocahontas's brothers in an effort to persuade them to end hostilities.

if they returned to Jamestown, the only option open to them was to seek refuge far from both English and Powhatan settlements. In March 1610 they determined to live among the Patawomeke tribe along the southern bank of the Potomac River far to the north, for the Patawomeke "king," who was just concluding a visit with Powhatan, had treated Spelman and Savage with great kindness and perhaps encouraged their plans for escape. When the *werowance*'s party set off on its journey home, Spelman and Samuel accompanied the Patawomekes, but "Savage fayned sum excuss of stay & unknowne to us," asserted Spelman, "went backe to the Powetan and acquaynted him *with* our . . . departing." Powhatan warriors sent in fast pursuit caught up with them and killed Samuel with

a hatchet stroke to the head, but the intervention of the Patawomeke warriors allowed Spelman, allegedly with Pocahontas's assistance, to make his escape to the Potomac River without further incident. Spelman's arrival and subsequent residence there were to have a profound influence on the future of the seventeenth-century Chesapeake.[17]

At this point, only two years after Savage's arrival in America and a mere seven months after Spelman's, the young interpreters had already received their primary education in the harsh realities of Virginia frontier life. As confused and naive new arrivals, they quickly learned about the callous indifference or political cynicism of countrymen who casually "gave" them to real or potential Indian enemies. In conscientiously trying to please two masters, they soon learned about the dangerous duplicity of intercultural diplomacy: Powhatan alienated Spelman from his countrymen by arranging his complicity in the deaths of some thirty colonists, while Savage informed on his fellows in order to ingratiate himself with Powhatan. The interpreters' youthful adaptability made them accomplished students in the ways of danger and deception as well as native dialects, and their cautious skepticism about the meaning of loyalty increased their immediate chances of survival while diminishing it over time. Burning bridges with little thought of the need to recross them in the future, Savage and Spelman were well on the way to becoming marginal men of confused and uncertain cultural identification. Only time would tell whether they would become invaluable servants to colonial interests or treacherous renegades and Indian converts who were all the more dangerous because they could transmit their knowledge of English vulnerabilities to their adopted "countrymen."

Spelman's tenure among the Patawomekes soon resolved this question for the immediate future. After surviving a harrowing woodland journey to their distant lands along the Potomac, Spelman demonstrated that an appreciation of the Patawomekes' humanity and the acceptance of their hospitality would not erode his cultural identification as an Englishman. While the Powhatans and colonists waged a merciless war along the James River, Japazaws, *werowance* of the village of Pasptanzie, and his brother, the "king" who had aided Spelman's escape from Powhatan, treated the young Englishman as a special guest. Spelman served as a baby-sitter for one of Japazaws's children (maintaining that "none could quiet him so well as my selfe") and received greater respect than the

---

[17] Spelman, "Relation," p. ciii; Smith, *Generall Historie*, p. 105.

werowance's own wives. Although Spelman believed that Japazaws "made the more of me in hope I should helpe him to sum copper if at any time our english cam into thos parts," the English boy developed a sensitive, appreciative understanding of the Patawomeke language and lifeways through daily contacts in a peaceful atmosphere of mutual trust.[18] On one occasion, when the *werowance* related his version of the world's creation—how the Great Hare of the East placed men and women throughout the earth to enjoy the waters, woodlands, and wildlife he had made—Spelman did not contradict him with contrary evidence from the Christian scriptures and proved "unwilling to question him . . . lest he should offend him."[19]

The directors of the Virginia Company of London could not have known of Spelman's close relationship with the great men of the Potomac when they advised the Jamestown colonists to "make freindship with [Indians] . . . that are farthest from you and enemies unto those amonge whom you dwell," but it is clear that the interpreter's strong Patawomeke connections made such a policy possible.[20] When other colonists arrived, beginning with Captain Samuel Argall's expedition in September 1610, the presence of a trained English interpreter proved to be as fortuitous as it was unexpected. Argall gave Japazaws the English copper that Spelman "often had promised him" should colonists ever come, and the interpreter's knowledge of Algonquian dialects and tribal traditions helped transform personal friendship into a full-fledged intercultural alliance.[21]

The assistance of the Patawomekes was to play a vital role in the survival and success of the Jamestown colony, both immediately and long-term. Argall returned to the Patawomekes on several occasions between December 1612 and April 1613 and cemented through trade and fair dealing the positive relations that Spelman had initiated as a guest babysitter. Even though the interpreter was in England at this time, recording his adventures and cultural insights in his "Relation of Virginea," Argall procured valuable supplies of maize—a thousand bushels on one expedition—and encouraged the strong and productive Patawomekes to become the colonists' allies in their war with the Powhatans. In March 1613, Japazaws confirmed this relationship and acknowledged Powhatan's

---

[18] Spelman, "Relation, pp. civ, cviii–cix.

[19] Strachey, *Virginia Britania*, pp. 101–3.

[20] "Instruccions Orders and Constitucions . . . to Sr Thomas Gates Knight Governor of Virginia" (May 1609), in Samuel M. Bemiss, ed., *The Three Charters of the Virginia Company of London* . . . , Jamestown 350th Anniversary Historical Booklet, No. 4 (Williamsburg, 1957), p. 63.

[21] Spelman, "Relation," p. civ; Philip L. Barbour, *Pocahontas and Her World* (Boston, 1970), pp. 87–88.

declining authority when he aided Argall in the critically important capture of Pocahontas, who was a guest in his own village.[22] The following May, the Accomac and Accohannoc tribes on the Eastern Shore also allied with the English against Powhatan, because "they had received good reports from the Indians of Pembrook [Potomac] River of our courteous usage of them."[23]

The defection of key tribes on the northern and eastern peripheries of Powhatan's domain, begun rather innocently with Spelman's individual alienation from the *mamanatowick*, helped the colonists attain victory in the brutal, devastating Anglo-Powhatan War between 1609 and 1614. The Jamestown garrison survived the "Starving Time" to launch lethal offensives with large numbers of armored and well-commanded reinforcements in 1611 and 1612. The loss of warriors, villages, tribal allies, and maize surpluses did little to lessen Powhatan's resolve; only in late 1613 did the grim realization of superior English military strength and despair over the fate of the captured Pocahontas force him to capitulate to the colonists.[24] What Spelman's friendship with Japazaws had helped set in motion now came to an end through the talents of Thomas Savage.

In March 1614 interpreter Savage was a key figure in negotiating a truce to end the fighting with the still-potent Pamunkey tribe, and in May he helped restore a degree of intercultural harmony through his personal friendship with Powhatan. Having abandoned the old *werowance* sometime in 1610, Savage had become a particular object of the Powhatans' hatred during the war. A contemporary chronicler recorded a derisive Indian war chant with which Powhatan warriors taunted their enemies before battle: "*Thom. Newport* [Savage, "his sonne"] *inoshashaw neir in hoc nantion monocock,/Whe whe* etc."—which, roughly translated, meant that they would do their best to wound or kill the interpreter despite his bright sword (*monocock*).[25] But when Savage accompanied an official colonial delegation on a goodwill visit to Powhatan following the resolution of peace and the healing marriage of John Rolfe to Pocahontas, now called Lady Rebecca, both the *werowance* and the wandering interpreter seemed quite willing to forgive and forget. Arriving at Powhatan's new capital of Matchcot along the Pamunkey River, Savage

---

[22] "A Letter of Sir Samuell Argoll touching his Voyage to Virginia . . . June 1613," in Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes* . . . (1625; modern ed., 20 vols.; Glasgow, 1905–7), XIX, 91–93; Ralph Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia* . . . (London, 1615), pp. 4–6; Barbour, *Pocahontas*, chap. VIII.

[23] "Letter of Argoll," in *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, XIX, 94.

[24] Hamor, *True Discourse*, pp. 2–3, 6–11; Fausz, "Powhatan Uprising," pp. 279–86.

[25] Strachey, *Virginia Britania*, pp. 85–86.

Virginia Historical Society

In May 1614, following the marriage of John Rolfe and Pocahontas, Powhatan, on the left, received Ralph Hamor, the secretary of the colony, and interpreter Thomas Savage at his new capital of Matchcot on the Pamunkey River. Hamor and Savage asked Powhatan for his youngest daughter, whom English governor Sir Thomas Dale desired to marry. This engraving appeared in Merian's *Historiae Americanae*.

was warmly received by his former benefactor. "My childe you are welcome," Powhatan is alleged to have said. "You have bin a straunger to me these foure yeeres, at what time I gave you leave to goe to . . . James towne . . . to see your friends, and till now you never returned. You are my child, by the donative of Captaine Newport."[26]

Both Savage and Spelman largely disappear from the surviving records for the years between 1614 and 1619, and we can only guess at their activities. But in the period of their obscurity, the third member of Virginia's first generation of interpreters—Robert Poole—was gaining experience and prominence in his profession. Poole arrived in the colony

[26] Hamor, *True Discourse*, pp. 37–38.

in May 1611 with his father and brother aboard the *Starr*, one of the ships in Sir Thomas Dale's fleet that brought supplies and reinforcements to war-torn Virginia.[27] Although details of his English background and early service are not known, Poole became the interpreter assigned to Opechancanough and the Pamunkeys when peace was concluded in 1614. Already by that date, this *werowance* of the largest and most feared of all the Tidewater Algonquian tribes was generally regarded as Powhatan's successor and often issued commands in his stead. Thus, Poole drew a difficult and dangerous assignment when he went to live with this implacable foe of the English at his nearly impregnable village complex near modern West Point.[28]

That Poole proved to be the most inscrutable and unscrupulous of the early interpreters was at least partially explained by his sensitive position at the center of intracolonial and intercultural power struggles in this period. Among the colonists, George Yeardley and Samuel Argall contended for power, prestige, and profits as they took turns in the governor's chair at Jamestown. Their bitter rivalry and mutual character assassination established contradictory Indian policies and sent ripples of dissension throughout the Virginia Company. Essentially, Yeardley wanted to secure Opechancanough's firm allegiance and relied on Poole's talents in doing so; Argall, on the other hand, mistrusted the Powhatan-Pamunkeys and preferred to strengthen the Anglo-Patawomeke and Anglo-Accomac alliances through the efforts of Spelman along the Potomac and Savage on the Eastern Shore. Complicating this competition between the interpreters and their closest Indian contacts was the political intrigue among the Powhatans. In 1617 the aged, defeated Powhatan "retired" with only a year of life left to him, and the effective leadership of the affiliated tribes descended to Opechancanough. During the compliant, indulgent governorships of Yeardley, the Pamunkey *werowance* was able to construct a new, even stronger and more dangerous Powhatan alliance, while the colonists concentrated on growing tobacco and convinced themselves that they and the Indians "lived

---

[27] Information contained in a land patent to Robert Poole, 8 Sept. 1627, in Nell Marion Nugent, comp., *Cavaliers and Pioneers: Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents and Grants, 1623–1666* (Richmond, 1934), I, 8. I am not convinced by undocumented speculation that Poole was "Robert the Polonian"—a Pole brought to Jamestown in 1608 who participated in a raid against the Chickahominies in 1616 ("The Aspinwall Papers," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 4th ser., IX [Boston, 1871], 22n.; Barbour, *Pocahontas*, p. 197; Barbour, ed., *Complete Works of Smith*, II, 257).

[28] H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia* (2d ed.; Richmond, 1979), I, 28; J. Frederick Fausz, "Opechancanough: Indian Resistance Leader," in David G. Sweet and Gary B. Nash, eds., *Struggle and Survival in Colonial America* (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 26–28.

together as if wee had beene one people."[29] Thus, in the key period between 1619 and 1622, the actions of all three interpreters must be viewed in the context of power-seeking officials in both cultures.

At this critical juncture in Anglo-Indian relations, Poole emerged as the most manipulative and most feared of the colonial middlemen. In October 1619, only two months after his accusations had ruined Spelman's reputation, Poole apparently made a bold attempt to become the dominant power-broker in English relations with the Pamunkeys. Knowing that Yeardley was anxious to impress Indian leaders and London officials in the light of Spelman's deprecating remarks, Poole convinced the governor that Opechancanough desired to improve relations with the colony. Yeardley immediately made overtures to the Pamunkey capital, but when his messengers returned, reporting that Opechancanough "never hadd any intent to come unto him," the governor suspected treachery. Fearing that Poole had been "very dishonest" from the beginning, Yeardley sent John Rolfe and Spelman to investigate. Arriving among the Pamunkeys, they received a "harshe" and hostile welcome from the Indians and reported that Poole had "turned heathen." Following what was almost certainly an angry confrontation between the two rival interpreters, Opechancanough intervened, expressing "greate love and amyty" toward the English, and the Rolfe delegation departed in peace.[30]

Having returned to the safety of Jamestown, Rolfe "accused and Condemned" Poole "as an instrum[en]t that sought all the meanes he could to breake o[u]r league" with the Powhatans, and he contended that the colonists "lived in dayly hazard" because "all messages . . . [were] untruly delyv[er]ed by Poole on both sides." Although Rolfe's inclination was to "bring Poole away" from his lodge among the Pamunkeys, he knew that English officials dared not "make any shew of discontent to him, for feare he should perswade them to some myscheif in o[u]r corne feildes."[31] John Pory, speaker of the House of Burgesses during Spelman's trial, agreed that Governor Yeardley should punish Poole and prevent him from "telling any more false tales to Opochancano, if once he gott him into his power."[32] In a letter from Jamestown, dated 13 January 1620, however,

[29] Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 119–28, 138–40; Fausz, "Powhatan Uprising," pp. 313–29; Barbour, *Pocahontas*, pp. 197–99; Wesley Frank Craven, *Dissolution of the Virginia Company: The Failure of a Colonial Experiment* (New York, 1932), chap. V.
[30] John Rolfe to Edwin Sandys, Jan. 1619/20, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, III, 244–45.
[31] Ibid., p. 245.
[32] John Pory to Edwin Sandys, 13 Jan. 1619/20, in ibid., p. 253.

Pory revealed a recent change in official attitudes: "For bringing the Kinges picture as a messenger from Opochancanough, we counted him [Poole] a publique, and as it were a neutral person, and so for not discontenting Opoechancanough, w[i]th whom nowe we stand in termes of reconciliation, we thought it no wayes convenient to call Poole to accounte."[33]

Poole's status as a "neutral person" essentially meant that he was equally distrusted and mutually disliked by both colonists and Indians. Whether he was a skillful middleman disguising his cultural loyalty or a marginal man actually confused about it, the volatile, variable Poole was useful if appeased and dangerous if aroused. Accused by reputable Englishmen of having "turned heathen," Poole nonetheless destroyed or stole the firing mechanisms from Pamunkey muskets, an action that forced the Indians to send them to Jamestown, where they were confiscated by colony officials.[34] As perhaps the original and subsequent supplier of guns, Poole probably acted out of profit-minded self-interest, rather than from patriotic or humanitarian motives. In any case, the effect was the same: Poole seemed to be working for both sides and neither side. Condemned as a traitor to the colonists' cause and then respected as a "publique" who could help the English by manipulating the Indians, Poole remained the fulcrum in a seesawing, interethnic balance of power until Opechancanough's advisers grew "very weary of him," concerned that Pamunkey policies, as well as their muskets, had fallen into the wrong hands.[35]

By 1620 neither the cajolery nor the duplicity of English interpreters could deter the Powhatans from their pursuit of a glorious, final victory over the hated colonial conquerors. Opechancanough, through the efforts of Nemattanew, or "Jack of the Feathers," a charismatic warrior-prophet considered invulnerable to English bullets, effectively revitalized the cultural pride and the military might of his people.[36] The actions of the colonists since 1614 had alienated formerly independent tribes such as the Chickahominies and Nansemonds, and they swelled the ranks of

[33] Ibid.

[34] When the General Court in 1624 investigated how the Powhatans first obtained muskets, Poole testified that in 1619, perhaps under direct orders from Governor Yeardley, he had stolen the "feathers of the locks" from some six Pamunkey muskets while living with Opechancanough. Although some colonists believed that Yeardley had supplied muskets to the Indians in the first place, Poole stated "he never remembreth that ever Sir George Yeardley gave A peece to any Indyan" (McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of Council*, I, 28).

[35] John Rolfe to Edwin Sandys, Jan. 1619/20, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, III, 245.

[36] J. Frederick Fausz and Jon Kukla, eds., "A Letter of Advice to the Governor of Virginia, 1624," *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter cited as *WMQ*), 3d ser., XXXIV (1977), 108–9nn., 117.

Opechancanough's new intertribal alliance, awaiting the fateful day when they would rise against the English and return the Chesapeake to its rightful Indian owners.[37]

The colonists remained largely oblivious to the growing power and increasing militancy of the Powhatans until it was too late, because their Indian policies were as ambivalent and ambiguous as the perceived loyalties of the interpreters. In addition to the internecine disputes between Yeardley and Argall, company officials in London and colony officials at Jamestown had fundamentally different perspectives on the "Indian problem." The company wanted the colonists to convert Powhatans to Christianity by bringing them into their settlements, while the colonists wanted only to drive the Indians away from their expanding tobacco farms. Although these contradictory policies divided the English population, they both served to unite Opechancanough's people, for the destruction of native ways and the dispossession of native lands were equally ominous and provocative to the Powhatans. Only after it was too late to dissuade the Indians from plans to annihilate them did the colonists realize that the Powhatans never "at any time . . . voluntarilie yealded themselves subjects or servants, . . . nor . . . [were they] mutuallie helpful or profittable, . . . but to the contrary, . . . [any assistance] proceeded from fear without love . . . [and was] procured by sworde or trade."[38]

As the human barometers of changing conditions, the English interpreters were the first to detect the gathering storm clouds over the Chesapeake. In October 1621, about the time that Opechancanough was deceiving the gullible colonists with pledges of peace and promises to convert to Christianity, Savage discovered the terrifying truth of the *werowance*'s implacable hatred of the English. His friendship with the "Laughing King" of Accomac and his brother, Kiptopeke, *werowance* of the Accohannocs, provided Savage with vital information known only to Indians. These Eastern Shore leaders, who had consistently supported the English since the Anglo-Powhatan War, told Savage that Opechancanough had recently tried to obtain a poison found only on their side of the bay to use against the colonists. They also revealed that the Pamunkeys were planning to assemble all of their allies at a huge ceremony for "the takinge upp of Powhatans bones" and to dispatch those

---

[37] Fausz, "Opechancanough," pp. 28–31.

[38] McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of Burgesses*, I, 35; Fausz, "Powhatan Uprising," pp. 290–366.

Virginia Historical Society

At parleys similar to this one between Captain Samuel Argall and the Chickahominy, Thomas Savage and Henry Spelman were placed in service as interpreters to Indian *werowances.*

Virginia Historical Society

On 22 March 1622, Opechancanough's warriors slaughtered one-fourth of the colonial population as the result of the English failure to understand the Indians as the interpreters had or to heed the warnings of Thomas Savage. Both engravings are from Merian's *Historiae Americanae.*

warriors against "every Plantatione in the Colonie."[39] After the two Indians informed Savage that he and they were specifically marked for death because of their close ties, Savage visited the Patuxents (of "Maryland"), the Pamunkeys' newest and northernmost allies, and verified, by the hostility he encountered, the truthfulness of the "Laughing King"'s story.[40]

Despite Savage's best efforts to convince his countrymen of imminent danger, the new governor at Jamestown, Sir Francis Wyatt, continued to take Opechancanough at his word and believed in the "very great amytie and confidence w[i]th the natiives."[41] But the accuracy of Savage's predictions became horrifyingly apparent on Friday, 22 March 1622, when Opechancanough's forces fell upon English settlements throughout the length and breadth of the James River. Some 330 men, women, and children—one-fourth of the colonial population—died in the great Powhatan Uprising on that day, and the devastated, despairing survivors turned to the expert interpreters as their last, best hope.[42]

In the decade-long Second Anglo-Powhatan War (1622–32) that was now initiated, the English depended upon the services of Spelman to renew the military alliance with the Patawomekes and upon Savage to assure the assistance of the Accomacs and Accohannocs. While Savage procured much-needed maize and lands for secure settlement from Kiptopeke and his brother, Spelman fashioned an indispensable alliance with his former benefactors to the north, which vastly improved the colonists' chances of success in their retaliatory war. The Potomac River quickly became a strategic and much-contested region in the struggle with the Powhatans, and in order to protect their important Patawomeke allies, the English constructed a fort next to the tribe's capital and accompanied them on a joint raid of their nearby Nacotchtank (Anacostan) enemies in the summer of 1622.[43]

The mutually beneficial Anglo-Patawomeke alliance, which in 1623 accounted for the deaths of several Powhatan *werowances* in an elaborate-

[39] Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 141–43; [Edward Waterhouse], *A Declaration of the State of the Colony and . . . a Relation of the Barbarous Massacre* (London, 1622), p. 21; Francis Wyatt and Council to Virginia Company, 20 Jan. 1622/3, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, IV, 10.

[40] Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 141–43.

[41] Francis Wyatt and Council to Virginia Company, Jan. 1621/2, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, III, 583–84.

[42] Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 144–50; [Waterhouse], *Relation of the Barbarous Massacre*; Fausz, "Powhatan Uprising," pp. 350–403.

[43] Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 151–56; John Martin, "The Manner Howe to Bringe the Indians into Subiection" (15 Dec. 1622), in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, III, 704–5; John Martin, "How Virginia May be Made a Royal Plantation" (15 Dec. 1622), in ibid., pp. 707–8; Fausz, "Powhatan Uprising," pp. 444–61.

ly planned ambush at one of the Patawomeke villages, was earlier nearly destroyed by the treachery or misjudgment of Poole. In September 1622, Poole warned Captain Isaac Maddison, commander of the English garrison along the Potomac, that his hosts were plotting to murder his men and, in a fit of paranoia, encouraged the captain to slaughter some thirty to forty tribesmen. The mutual animosity between Poole and Spelman's trusted allies also resulted in the capture of the Patawomeke "king," an act that caused John Smith to observe that this "murder and indiscretion" and the "abuse [of] their friends" would "bring them all to ruine."[44]

Although the Anglo-Patawomeke alliance rebounded from Poole's tragic machinations, the interpreter who first trekked the path to peace in the Potomac became a victim of the escalating violence in the region. In March 1623, only a few months after Maddison's mad assault, Spelman and nineteen other colonists were attacked and slain by some sixty canoes full of Indians while on a trading expedition along the Potomac. Contemporary accounts disagree as to whether revenge-minded Patawomekes or Nacotchtanks and Piscataways, avowed enemies of the English, conducted the ambush, but most colonists concluded that Spelman died because "hee presumed too much upon his acquaintance amongst" the tribes of the region.[45] At age twenty-eight, after performing "much good service" in a career that spanned half his life, "one of the best Interpreters in the Land" died as he had lived—"amongst the Salvages."[46] A victim of interethnic hostilities, Spelman left behind a lasting legacy of compassion and understanding in the "Relation of Virginea," his manuscript account of life among the Patawomekes. Although it was not published until 1872, Spelman's "Relation" is one of the most sensitive, intimate views of Chesapeake Indians in the annals of English colonization.[47]

---

[44] Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 156–57; [Anonymous], "Good Newes from Virginia" (a broadside ballad, ca. 1622–23), in *WMQ*, 3d ser., V (1948), 355. In May 1623 Capt. William Tucker, presumably with the Patawomekes' cooperation, drew together more than 200 leading enemy *werowances* for a fake peace parley on neutral ground along the Potomac River. Dr. John Pott of Jamestown had allegedly prepared a quantity of poisoned sack for the occasion, and upon the urging of an English interpreter (Savage? Poole, whom Opechancanough seemed to trust?), many Indians drank of it and fell sick or died. Tucker's musketeers then fired on the Powhatans, killing at least fifty, and "brought hom[e] parte of ther heades"—either the skulls of some or the scalps of many (Robert Bennett to Edward Bennett, 9 June 1623, "Lord Sackville's Papers respecting Virginia, 1613–1631," *American Historical Review*, XXVII [1921-22], 507; Fausz, "Powhatan Uprising," pp. 496–99).

[45] Smith, *Generall Historie*, p. 161; Peter Arundell to William Caninge, Apr. 1623, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, IV, 89; McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of Burgesses*, I, 37; James Merrell, "Cultural Continuity among the Piscataway Indians of Colonial Maryland," *WMQ*, 3d ser., XXXVI (1969), 554.

[46] Smith, *Generall Historie*, pp. 120, 161.

[47] See Arber and Bradley, eds., *Travels of Smith*, I, ci–cxiv.

Poole left no such written legacy and displayed cruelty more consistently than compassion, but his influence upon events following Spelman's death was no less important. In April 1623, when colony officials were negotiating with the Powhatans for the release of twenty female captives taken in the 1622 uprising, Poole's "threatening Speeches" to the Indians delayed the release of the English hostages and nearly cost them their lives.[48] By increasing misunderstanding between the cultures, Poole extended his monopoly over Anglo-Indian negotiations and perpetuated the colonists' dominant belief in native treachery. In the autumn of 1624 he daringly sailed north of the Potomac River to trade with the Patuxents, the tribe that had earlier tried to kill Savage and only weeks before had assisted Opechancanough in the biggest battle of the Second Anglo-Powhatan War. Counting on his reputation among Indians who approved of slaughtering Patawomekes, Poole enjoyed a month of peaceful, profitable trading as the agent for none other than George Sandys, treasurer of the colony, uncle to Governor Wyatt, brother to the influential director of the Virginia Company, and son of the former archbishop of York. Attaining greater respectability by his association with such an eminent gentleman-scholar, Poole procured with European glass beads a large and varied quantity of "countrey commodities"—maize, woven reed mats, and, most significantly, furs from otters, muskrats, deer, bears, wildcats, and "1 Lyone."[49]

Although Poole's inventory of furs did not include the more valuable beaver pelts or the exotic, legendary "black fox skins," his pioneering voyage opened up fresh regions for new enterprises in the years ahead. Even earlier, in 1621, Savage had submitted to the Virginia Company an influential, expert assessment of the prospects for a "great Trade of Furrs," but the onset of the Powhatan War eliminated the participation of the company while providing colonists with the opportunity to explore and exploit the northern bay on their own initiative.[50] Savage also had much to do with making Accomac the primary base of operations for the Virginia fur traders, for his long-standing friendship with the leading

---

[48] Francis Wyatt and Council to Virginia Company, 4 Apr. 1623, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, IV, 98–99; J. Frederick Fausz, "The Missing Women of Martin's Hundred," *American History Illustrated* (forthcoming).

[49] McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of Council*, I, 29–30; Francis Wyatt and Council to Virginia Company, 2 Dec. 1624, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, IV, 507–8; Richard Beale Davis, *George Sandys, Poet-Adventurer: A Study in Anglo-American Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (London and New York, 1955), pp. 166, 166n.

[50] Virginia Company minutes, 10 July 1621, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, I, 504; see also ibid., III, 641, 705 on Savage's explorations.

werowances on the Eastern Shore assured Indian cooperation in the large-scale colonization of that region.

On the eve of the fur-trade bonanza, however, powerful and greedy Englishmen sought to monopolize the essential services of this skilled interpreter and trusted intermediary. Because Savage possessed the unrivaled ability to obtain grants of land and large quantities of maize (Virginia's most desired and profitable crop after tobacco) from his Indian contacts, entrepreneurs such as former Governor Yeardley and Captain John Martin of Martin's Brandon vied for his services, both in and out of the courts.[51] In 1624 Yeardley succeeded in making the third of the three interpreters do his bidding by having Savage convicted of slander and insubordination against Captain William Eppes, commander of the Eastern Shore plantations and Yeardley's close associate. Sitting on the council that sentenced Savage to serve Eppes and himself, Yeardley engineered the dubious conviction, despite the fact that the violent-tempered Eppes, who had already killed one colonist in a brawl, had beaten Savage and tied his ankles to his throat.[52] Thus, Savage, like Spelman before him, was victimized because of his value to ruthless profiteers.

Savage obtained his freedom in 1627, when Yeardley died and Eppes emigrated to the West Indies, and his rare and valued talents quickly earned him rich rewards in the booming Chesapeake fur trade. Compensated in cattle, cash, and corn for a variety of services requiring expertise in Indian relations, Savage dealt with most of the rising fur entrepreneurs on the Eastern Shore: Captain Henry Fleet, formerly of Chatham, Kent, who had survived the attack on Spelman's fatal expedition and four years' captivity with the Nacotchtanks to become an able interpreter and trader along the Potomac; Charles Harmar, one of Fleet's main rivals for Potomac furs and Eppes's sole witness against Savage in 1624; and

---

[51] Martin, "Howe to Bringe Indians into Subiection," in ibid., III, 705; *Martin* v. *Yeardley*, Feb. 1625, in ibid., IV, 510–14; John Penreis, petition to Council, Sept. 1623, in ibid., IV, 276; McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of Council*, I, 11; Jester and Hiden, eds., *Adventurers of Purse and Person*, pp. 290–91.

[52] McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of Council*, I, 15, 48; Jester and Hiden, eds., *Adventurers of Purse and Person*, pp. 160–61 (Eppes), 375–77 (Yeardley). Eppes, when commander of Smythes Hundred Plantation (one of Yeardley's business interests), was found guilty of "Manslaughter by Chaunce meddley" in the brutal slaying of Capt. Edward Roecroft, alias Stallenge, but "the Governor [Yeardley] fynding him . . . a proper civill gent, and of good hopes, not long after restored him to his Command" (John Rolfe to Edwin Sandys, Jan. 1619/20, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, III, 242). Apparently Eppes had an uncle of the same name who committed a similar crime of violence sixteen years before in Eppes's hometown of Ashford, Kent (Quarter Sessions, Canterbury, 11 Jan. 1603, "Calendar of Early Quarter Sessions Rolls, 1596–1605," pp. 132, 144, Kent County Archives Office, Maidstone; Eva Turner Clark, *Francis Eppes: His Ancestors and Descendants* [New York, 1942], pp. 24, 29).

Captain William Claiborne, formerly of Crayford Parish, Kent, councilor, surveyor-general, secretary of state, justice of the peace for Accomac, and Virginia's most influential beaver trader. When Claiborne established his elaborate Kent Island trading settlement in August 1631, he paid Savage almost £2 "to be our interpreter at our first goeing up to the Island."[53]

In the decade after 1624, both Savage and Poole prospered as never before as a result of the shift in the colonists' focus from the militant raiding of Indian fields to the lucrative trading for Indian furs. In this new era of intercultural cooperation, interpreters faced fewer dangers, because English traders brought desirable European goods to Indian trappers and guarded against alienating them over land rights and religious issues. With the prospect of living to enjoy the lucrative rewards from his services, Savage married and settled down to a secure, middle-class existence on his beloved Eastern Shore. In 1625 this "Ancient Planter" possessed a house, barn, boat, and two servants. His prosperity increased rapidly, for two years later, he owned a 150-acre plantation ("Savages Choice") and held title to 9,000 acres of undeveloped land given him by "the King of the Easterne shoare." After Savage's death in 1633, this patrimony enabled his son John to enjoy even greater prominence as a planter and burgess.[54] Although Poole evidently never married and perhaps lived a decade longer than Savage, his increasing prosperity occurred simultaneously. In 1625 he was living on Jamestown Island as a tenant of merchant Edward Blaney; his "distressed estate" consisted of only a single bushel of corn and a pair of muskets, and he was daily "threatned by his Creditors to be arested & trobled." Given the increased demands for his services in the fur-trading era, however, within two years Poole owned a 300-acre plantation at Newport News and was being addressed as a "Gentleman."[55]

---

[53] William Claiborne's accounts of disbursements, in "*Claiborne* vs. *Clobery et als.* in the High Court of Admiralty," *Maryland Historical Magazine* (hereafter cited as *Md. Hist. Mag.*), XXVIII (1933), 32; McIlwaine, ed., *Minutes of Council*, I, 11; Susie M. Ames, ed., *County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia, 1632–1640*, American Legal Records, VII (Washington, D.C., 1954), especially pp. 16–17, 154–59; Raphael Semmes, *Captains and Mariners of Early Maryland* (Baltimore, 1937); Nathaniel C. Hale, *Virginia Venturer: A Historical Biography of William Claiborne, 1600–1677* (Richmond, 1951); J. Frederick Fausz, "Profits, Pelts, and Power: English Culture in the Early Chesapeake, 1620–1652," *The Maryland Historian*, XIV (1983), 14–30.

[54] Jester and Hiden, eds., *Adventurers of Purse and Person*, pp. 67, 291–94; Nugent, comp., *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, I, 23, 30, 75.

[55] Jester and Hiden, eds., *Adventurers of Purse and Person*, p. 29; Nugent, comp., *Cavaliers and Pioneers*, I, 8–9, 159; Robert Poole, petition to Francis Wyatt, Feb. 1623/4, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, IV, 457–58.

By 1630 the sun was setting on the careers of both Savage and Poole, as they became respectable, home-bound planters finally able to enjoy the hard-won profits of their dangerous profession. Savage's growing family responsibilities and Poole's physical disability from an arrow wound in the leg meant that a new generation of interpreters would now carry their work forward. As Virginians expanded their contacts with new and different Indian groups in the Chesapeake, many men were recruited to serve as translators, traders, and culture-brokers. Fur entrepreneurs such as Fleet and Claiborne did much of their own interpreting, and their incomparable knowledge of far-flung native peoples gave them key roles in determining official colonial Indian policy for many decades. Fleet, who in 1627 asserted that he was "better proficient in the Indian language than mine own," obtained a 4,000-acre tract for his valuable service to the early Maryland settlers and, as late as the mid-1640s, was the interpreter chosen by both Chesapeake colonies to negotiate with separate groups of hostile Indians.[56] In the mid-1630s Claiborne made Kent Island a training ground for interpreters by recruiting Englishmen from Accomac, Indians such as "Constantine" and "Sparrowbill," and at least one African to be his translators and traders with the fur-rich Susquehannocks at the head of the Chesapeake Bay.[57]

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the pioneering careers of Virginia's first generation of interpreters were honored indeed by the mushrooming growth of the profession as the English Chesapeake matured and expanded. In 1638 the Marylander George Evelyn, descended from a distinguished family of Surrey and London, placed his son Mountjoy with the Patawomekes "to learn that country's language" before becoming a fur trader.[58] About the same time, several Jesuit priests established residency among the various Algonquian tribes of

---

[56] Henry Fleet, "A Breife Journall of A voyage made in the Barque Warwick to Virginia and other partes of the Continent of America Anno 1631," 22 Feb. 1633, Ms. 688/19, f. 12, Lambeth Palace Library, London; Edward D. Neill, *The Founders of Maryland*. . . (Albany, 1876), pp. 2–18; Jester and Hiden, eds., *Adventurers of Purse and Person*, pp. 172–73; William Waller Hening, comp., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia* . . . , I (2d ed.; New York, 1823), pp. 317–19; William Hand Browne et al., eds., *Archives of Maryland* (72 vols. to date; Baltimore, 1883–), III, 148–51; J. Frederick Fausz, "Present At the 'Creation': The Chesapeake World that Greeted the Maryland Colonists," *Md. Hist. Mag.*, LXXIX (1984), 7–20.

[57] William Claiborne's accounts of disbursements, in "*Claiborne* vs. *Clobery et als.*," pp. 39, 177, 180–87; Cyprian Thorowgood, "A relation of a voyage . . . to the head of the baye" (ca. Apr. 1634), Ms. 7, ff. 1–2, Young Collection, Maryland Department, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore; Hale, *Virginia Venturer*, pp. 129, 164, 215, 227, 242, 245.

[58] Hale, *Virginia Venturer*, p. 220; Semmes, *Mariners of Early Maryland*, p. 543; Jester and Hiden, eds., *Adventurers of Purse and Person*, pp. 166–67; Edward C. Papenfuse et al., eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature, 1635–1789*, I (Baltimore, 1979), p. 314.

southern Maryland, learned their dialects, and extended the range of the interpreter's art by translating Christian teachings into the Piscataway language.[59] In the early 1650s, Maryland Councilor Robert Brooke, belonging to a prominent London family of lawyers and jurists, nominated one of his sons to "be imployed as an Intelligencer amongst the Indians Living upon Putuxent River."[60]

Less affluent and influential colonists also sought to cross cultural bridges after the early interpreters had eliminated much of the fear, mystery, and misunderstanding from Anglo-Indian relationships. In 1638 an indentured servant from Accomac attempted to obtain "a booke to learne to speake the Indyan tongue" so that he could escape to the Delaware River. "Wherefore should wee stay here and bee slaves," he is alleged to have said, "[when we] may goe to another place and live like gentlemen?"[61] Five years later another resident of Savage's county made plans to evade Virginia justice by "goe[ing] to the Susquesehanocks and see[ing] what I can doe there."[62]

The success and fame enjoyed by the original interpreters in their own lifetimes invested this new profession of the New World with the respectability that encouraged its perpetuation. But too often later generations of colonists appreciated only the economic rewards of such an occupation without realizing its dangers and its drawbacks. To indentured immigrants forced to endure the drudgery of stoop labor, the interpreters must have appeared as free spirits who lived outside the reach of English laws and the boundaries of English settlements. But the mystical, mythical allure of a profession that allowed even low-born colonists to "live like gentlemen" obscured the tragedies and trials that accompanied the interpreters' triumphs. In his twenty-five-year career, Savage served Virginia "with much honestie and good successe . . . without any publike recompense, . . . [even though he] had an arrow shot through his body."[63] The martyred Spelman was similarly commend-

---

[59] "Extracts from the Annual Letters of the English Province of the Society of Jesus . . . ," 1639–42, in Clayton Colman Hall, ed., *Narratives of Early Maryland, 1633–1684*, Original Narratives of Early American History (New York, 1910), pp. 124–40, especially p. 137; Semmes, *Mariners of Early Maryland*, p. 543, and chap. XXI.

[60] Brown, ed., *Archives of Maryland*, III, 293–94; Papenfuse et al., eds., *Biographical Dictionary*, I, 170.

[61] Ames, ed., *Court Records, 1632–1640*, p. 120.

[62] Susie M. Ames, ed., *County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, 1640–1645*, Virginia Historical Society Documents, X (Charlottesville, 1973), p. 313.

[63] Smith, *Generall Historie*, p. 142.

ed for his "good service" but "badly rewarded" in equal measure.[64] In his later years, Poole so suffered from injuries received in the colony's service that the Virginia assembly granted him an official pension.[65]

The early interpreters who bore such a disproportionate, personal burden in advancing English interests in the Chesapeake began their careers as youthful pawns when Indians held the balance of power in the region and ended their days as respected contributors to the dominant conquest culture. These men who "returne[d] worse than they went" from their frequent sojourns among the Indians quickly discovered that both their value and their vulnerability increased the "worse" they became.[66] The most "Indian-like" interpreters usually survived the longest and enjoyed the greatest success in relations with native populations, but their colonial countrymen reacted to their acculturation with a confusing mixture of admiration, appreciation, apprehension, and abhorrence. Manipulated by a few Englishmen who were jealous of their frontier skills and condemned by many more who were suspicious of them, most interpreters persevered to become free, loyal, and respectable colonial citizens in later years.

In a cynical sense, the ultimate success of the earliest interpreters in dealing with Indians could be measured by the lack of Indians that later generations of colonists had to deal with. But Savage, Spelman, and Poole, however much they may have wanted to put their endless, dangerous missions behind them and settle down to "live like gentlemen," were not so cynical. Their relations with Indians often centered around real friendships rather than duty alone, and one has the impression that they would have mourned the passing of the great tribes and native nations more than any other Englishmen. In the final analysis, the interpreters' legacy as indispensable middlemen was completely dependent upon the existence of Indians, and it lasted only as long as Anglo-Americans felt the compulsion to explore unknown regions of this continent and heeded the impulse to reach out to native peoples through rational discourse and mutual respect.

---

[64] Ibid., p. 120; Peter Arundell to William Caninge, Apr. 1623, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, IV, 89.

[65] Robert Poole, petition to Francis Wyatt, Feb. 1623/4, in Kingsbury, ed., *Va. Co. Records*, IV, 457–58; McIlwaine, ed., *Journals of Burgesses*, I, 53.

[66] The Rev. Mr. Jonas Stockham, a colonist not very optimistic about the chances for English success in converting Powhatans, in May 1621 wrote that "we have sent boies amongst them to learne their Language, but they returne worse than they went" (Smith, *Generall Historie*, p. 140).