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MASSASOIT'S DOMAIN: IS "WAMPANOAG" THE CORRECT DESIGNATION?

by
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The Wampanoag, according to the definition of Bulletin 30, Handbook of the American Indians, was one of the principal "tribes" of New England. This understanding of the term is well established among ethnologists and archaeologists, and probably irrevocably so. Nevertheless, strange as it may seem, there is no documentary evidence whatever that Wampanoag was an early accepted name for the Indians of the Plymouth jurisdiction, as commonly supposed. It was not until the time of King Philip that it was generally used; and then, as will be suggested, it had a wider connotation than that of a "tribal" name. From the evidence available, it is not a safe assumption that Massasoit would have recognized himself as the great chief of the Wampanoag.

The fact of the matter is that the Indians of southeastern New England had no tribal designations for themselves other than territorial names of the well-defined Sachimships which they occupied, and these were usually derived from the name of their Sachim's chief residential town. "Every Sachim," wrote Edward Winslow (*Good News*, 1624), "knoweth how far the bounds and limits of his own country extendeth; and that which is his own proper inheritance. Out of that, if any of his men desire land to set their corn, he giveth them as much as they can use and sets them their bounds." The Indians of these parts were, therefore, at that period, settled agriculturists; and were so identified with their soil that they felt no need for a designation of themselves as a people apart from their land. It was quite otherwise, of course, with the nomadic and migratory Indians elsewhere, who had to carry their names with them as they sought new and more or less temporary sites for their hunting and warfare. These clan or descriptive names are generally characteristic of the American Indian tribes; but, if our local groups ever had similar names, they were not divulged to their white friends in the earlier records.

In the local dialects, the correct form of the topographical names used for the people of a Sachimship ended in -uck, a plural ending used for groups of persons. Edward Winslow mentions (*Mourts' Relation*), "the Namascheucks (they so calling the men of Namaschet)." And again (*Good News*), "He feared (that) the Massachusetts or Massachuseucks (for so they called the people of

that place) were joined with the Nanhigganeucks." Winslow's addition of an -s to these forms was for the benefit of English readers, to insure the understanding of -uck (or -og) as a plural form. Roger Williams is more explicit about this formation of territorial tribal names, (*Key*, 1643). "Secondly, particular names, peculiar to several nations, of them amongst themselves, as Nanhigganeuck, Massachuseuck, Cawasumseuck, Cowweseuck, Quintikooock, Qunniepieuck, Peguttoog, etc."

It is unfortunate that our forebears did not establish this proper form of tribal nomenclature, which would have given us "the Massachuseuck" as the name of that tribe. Instead, there has come down to us, in such forms as "the Massachusetts," a grammatical anomaly, in which the suffix -et (or -ut), indicating a geographical name, is retained in a name for persons—somewhat as though we were to speak of the Bostons, when we meant the Bostonians. Following the Indian method of grammatical construction, the tribal name of Massasoit's people would have been "the Pokonokeuck."

There can be no reasonable doubt, in view of the citations below, that the name of Massasoit's Sachimship was Pokonoket (subject to the usual variant spellings by the English). There occurs also the form Pokonokick, which by reason of the termination -ick means the residential place or town of Pokonok, and is not to be confused with Pokonoket, the name of the country of which Pokonokick was the capital. This distinction is important, as Winslow and others who knew the language use Pokonokick (never Pokonoket) as the alias of Sowams, Massasoit's home town.

The suffix -ick, as in Chappaquiddick on the Vineyard, is a softened form of -ack, as in Capawack, "the refuge place." We use this same softening in the pronunciation of such English words as "palace." In the Vineyard dialects, "ak" is used as a substantive as well as a suffix, a usage unknown to Dr. Trumbull when he compiled his Natick Dictionary. One of the documents recorded in Edgartown has the sentence, "Ak hittammuk Takemmeh ut Massachunesse,"—"the place is called Takemmeh in Massachusetts." This document was written by Indians without the benefit of English help about 1700, a decade after the Vineyard had been taken into the Province of Massachusetts. Takemmeh, usually misspelled Takemmy, is the Indian name of

the present West Tisbury. It is mentioned in this sentence as the "ak" or place where a chief had died in his "great house." There can be no doubt, therefore, that the suffix -ack, and its softened form -ick, designates the residence site, as contrasted with the Sachimship at large.

The following occurrences of Pokonoket and Pokonokick in early documents have been noted. In none of these documents, covering the first half century of the white man's contact with Massasoit and his people, is there any mention of the name Wampanoag. Thomas Dermer (1619), accompanied only by Squanto, reached Nummastaquyt, from whence he "dispatched a messenger a dayes journey further west to Poconaokit which bordereth on the sea; whence came to see me two Kings, attended with a guard of fiftie armed men." In a later letter about his trip (1620), he refers to the "Pocanawkits, which live to the west of Plimoth."

Edward Winslow, (in *Mourt's Relation*, 1621), writes: "Tisquantum told us we should hardly in one day reach Packonokick." . . . From thence we went to Packanokick; but Massasoit was not at home." Again, (*Good News*, 1623), "I hired one to go with all expedition to Puckanokick." . . . "remained at Sawaams, or Puckanokick." . . . "our return from Sawaams, or Puckanokick."*

In the printed *Plymouth Records*, Vol. II, p. 23, (1641), Pockanacutt is mentioned as a country. In Vol. 4 (1662), there are several references to "Philip, Sachem of Pockanockett." In Vol. 11, p. 21, both Pokanacutt and Puckenakick, alias Sowaamset, occur. There is no "Wampanoag" in the indices of these records. The minutes of the Commissioners of the United Colonies for September, 1644, mention Pockanokick alias Sowamsett.

John Josselyn (*Two Voyages*, describing the voyage of 1663) writes, "The Pocanokets live to the westward of Plimouth." He further writes: "Massasoit, the great Sachem of the Plimouth Indians, his dwelling was at a place called Sowams, about (forty) miles distant from New-Plimouth . . . The Roytelet (petty king) now of the Pokanaketts, that is the Plimouth-Indians, is Prince Philip alias Metacon, the son of Massasoit."

A little known but impressive source of information is "A Mapp of New England, by John Seller, Hydrographer to the King." It is not dated,

but from the names shown was probably drawn about 1665. It may have been made by or for the Commissioners sent over by King Charles II to straighten out affairs in New England. East of the upper part of Narragansett Bay is the legend in large letters, "Pokanaket Country," and below this, also in large letters extending across the Taunton River is another legend reading "King Philips Country."

Daniel Gookin (*Indian Collections*, written in 1674) was Commissioner of the Praying Indians in the Bay Colony and an intimate of John Eliot. His comprehensive account of the New England Indians is one of the better observations of the period. The opening sentence of his chapter on them reads: "The principal nations of the Indians, that did, or do, inhabit within the confines of New-England are five: 1: Pequots; 2. Narragansitts; 3. Pawkunnawkuts; 4. Massachusetts; and 5. Pawtucketts." The unusual spelling, Pawkunnawkuts for Pokonokets, represents his own broad pronunciation of the name. There is no mention of the Wampanoag in his work.

For the purposes of this study it is important to remember that Massasoit was not only the great chief of his Sachimship, Pokonoket, but was also the head of an extensive confederacy. These confederates are included in the Treaty of Peace, signed with the Pilgrims on March 22, 1621. The clause stated that "He (Massasoit) should send to his neighbour confederates to certify them of this, that they might not wrong us, but might likewise be comprised in the conditions of peace." These confederates are undoubtedly named in part in the report of the conspiracy of certain sub-tribes, contrary to the will of Massasoit, who wished to join with the Massachusetts in wiping out the Weston Colony. Winslow (*Good News*, 1623) reports this as follows: "He (Massasoit) called Hobbamock unto him, and privately revealed the plot of the Massachuseucks against Master Weston's colony and so against us; saying that the people of Nauset, Paomet, Succonet, Mattachiest, Manomet, Agowaywam, and the isle of Capawack, were joined with them."

Daniel Gookin, fifty years later, gives a similar list of these minor Sachemships in league with the Pokonokets. Included are the petty sagamores on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, of Nawsett, Mannamoyk, Sawkattukett, Nobsquasitt, Mattakees and several others, together with some of the Nipmucks. But to my knowledge no name appears in

*Ed. Note—from *Hubbard's History of New England*, "Massasoit they brought down to the English at Plymouth, though his place was at forty miles distant, called Sowams, his country called Pokanoket."

the records of this half century from Winslow to Gookin to serve as a descriptive title of this aggregate of island, cape and mainland tribes over which the great Sachim of Pokonoket "held dominion." The situation is not unique, however, as Gookin likewise states that the Sachim of the Narragansetts "held dominion" over such diverse tribes as those of Block Island, some on Long Island, and some of the Nipmucks "that lived remote from the sea." These tribes were certainly not "Narragansetts", either by location or descent, yet one is at a loss to know what name otherwise might be used for the confederacy.

When, therefore, does the name "Wampanoag" come into fairly general use? The earliest mention of "the Wampanoag" that I have been able to find (with many works yet to be examined), is in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia*, published in London in 1702.* Mather writes of the colonists' fear that the Narragansetts would make "junction with Philip and his Wampanoogs (for so were Philip's Nation called) . . ." From this, and from the meaning of the name, "The Easterners," it seems likely that "Wampanoag" could have been chosen by Philip as the name of the new pan-Indian nation which he hoped to form. The name seems too inclusive to have been the tribal name of Philip's inherited Sachimship. To tribes to the west, the Narragansetts, the Massachusetts, the Nipmucks were all "Easterners, and the name could not have served in that sense to distinguish Massasoit's people from these other eastern nations. On the other hand, it was a name under which all these diverse New England tribes could be united—and that was precisely King Philip's plan—that their lands might be recovered from the white invaders.

For an illuminating comment on the significance of the name Wampanoag I am indebted to the late Frank G. Speck. He wrote me: "I cannot refer you to where Wampanoag was first used in print, but it is a form of Wobanaki (-ag), "Easterners," as you point out, and indicates the localization of the people in the ancient east, along with the rest of the Wobanakkia (Wabanaki, Wapanachki etc.) . . . I would rate it as a kind of generic term for them and am so doing in an article on the Del-Munsee who use it too." It will doubtless surprise many, as it did me, to learn that Wampanoag and

Abnaki are dialect variants of one and the same name. Laurent (*Abnakis and English, Quebec*, 1884) defines Wobanaki as "the land or country of the east," from "woban," daybreak, and "-aki", land, ground or region. Wobanaki means also in Indian "from where the daylight comes." For comparison, note that the Natick word for "full daylight" is "wompan," (Trumbull, p. 242). The omission or addition of 'm' before 'p' or 'b' is a common phenomenon in dialect differences—hence wompan—woban, and Wampanoag—Wobanakiak, shortened to Abnaki.

From this it would appear that our seaboard Indians, like those of Maine and Delaware, were aware from ancient times that they were the easternmost of their racial stock: but there seems to be no reason why the name Wampanoag should be limited in meaning to the Pokonokets and their dependencies. On Block's Figurative Map of 1614 the name "Wapanoos" is placed at the northwest corner of a bay with islands recognizable as Narragansett Bay, not far east of the name "Pequats," as though the Dutch explorer understood that all of the tribes east of the Pequots were Wapanoo, or Easterners. On a map from *Blaeu's Atlas*, drawn probably about 1625 and largely the same as Block's, the name Wapanoos is replaced by "Nahicans." On this latter map, the Pokonoket region bears the name "Horicans," but what manner of reference this may be baffles me.

On both of these maps, Block's and Blaeu's, the seaboard Indians from New Plymouth north to the Kennebec River are designated as "Almouchicoisen," a name picked up by Champlain in 1605, and spelled Almouchiquois in 1613. Lescarbot, in a prior publication translated into English in 1609, gives the same name in a slightly different spelling, saying ". . . and from Kinibeki as farre as Malebarre, and further, they are called Armouchiquois." These people were described as speaking a dialect which the Frenchmen could not understand, and were notable for the cultivation of corn. This name is presumably the Abnaki designation for their neighbors to the south, and is apparently a French corruption of Alemousiski, "Land of the little dog."

If King Philip's "Wampanoag" were, as I believe Cotton Mather meant, the aggregate of Pokonokets, Massachusetts, Narragansetts, Nipmucks and others whom Philip hoped to rally under his leadership as the new King of the Easterners, then it is one of the ironies of history that the most easterly of them, the Christian Indians of the Cape and the Islands, are now also known by the name used for the tribes whom they refused to aid in 1675.

*Ed. Note—Hubbard's considerably earlier "Indian Wars" mentions Wampanoogs. William Hubbard, the Ipswich minister, was one of the better early historians. Cotton Mather is chiefly indebted to him for what is correct in the "*Magnalia Christi Americana*."