

An Identity of the Massawomekes: Five Nations Iroquois

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The term Massawomeke seems peculiar to the literature of Captain John Smith (1612). In 1608, he came upon separate parties of Susquehannocks and Massawomekes on his trip up Chesapeake Bay (1612:53), 376). And these Susquehannocks asked him for aid in fighting the Massawomekes, "their mortall enemies," (Smith, 1612:53, 422). The identity of the Massawomekes is important to anthropology and history as part of the analysis of the culture and history of the Susquehannocks.

The Susquehannocks were defeated circa 1675 no doubt by Five Nations Iroquois (Wissler, 1940; Hunt, 1960), which led to their ultimate disorganization as a people (Talbot, 1684 and Wallace, 1961). Among the Iroquois, a tribe actually involved may have been the Seneca. On this score, a Jesuit Relation of 1675 records the elation of the Seneca over their defeat of the Susquehannocks:

In fact, since the Sonnontouous [Seneca after Thwaites, the editor of the Jesuit Relations] have utterly defeated the Andastogues [Susquehannocks after Shea, 1858:295] their ancient and most redoubtable foes, insolence knows no bounds; they talk of nothing but renewing the war against our allies, and even against the French, and of beginning by the destruction of fort Catarokoui. Not long ago, they had resolved to break Father Garnier's head, by making him pass for a sorcerer.

—Jesuit Relations, 1675:251

The Massawomekes may have been Seneca or other Iroquois (Shea, 1858:296). Comments on the Massawomekes of Captain John Smith are consistent with an Iroquois identity, namely their reputation for making war and their northerly location.

Many descriptions and discourses they [the Susquehannocks, brackets mine] made vs of Atquanahucke, Massawomecke, and other people; signifying they inhabit the river of Cannida, and from the French to haue their hatchets and such like tools by trade.

—Smith, 1612:119

Seaven boats full of these Massawomekes wee encountred at the head of the Bay; whose Targets [shields, brackets mine], Baskets, Swords, Tobaccopipes, Platters, Bowes, and Arrowes and every thing shewed, they much exceeded them of our parts;; and their dexteritie in their small boats, made of the barkes of trees sowed with barke and well luted with gumme, argueth that they are seated vpon some great water.

—Smith, 1612:367

Beyond the mountains from whence is the head of the river Patowomeke, the Savages report inhabit their most mortall enemies, the Massawomekes, vpon a great salt water, which by all likelihood is either some part of Canada, some great lake, or some inlet of some sea that falleth into the South sea. These Massawomekes are a great nation and very populous. For the heads of all those rivers, especially the Pattawomekes, the Pautuxuntes, the Sasquesahanocks, the Tockwoughes are continually tormented by them: of whose crueltie, they generally complained, and very importunate they were with me and my company to free them from these tormentors. To this purpose they offered food, conduct, assistance and continuall subjection.

—Smith, 1612:367

It is possible that the Massawomekes were not Iroquois, e.g. Erie (Hoffman, 1964:231). But in this brief communication, I cite three remarks of Captain John Smith that support Five Nations Iroquois identity. And I cite a report in the *Jesuit Relations* (1675:25) that of the Five Nations at least the Seneca participated in the 1675 defeat of the Susquehannocks. I infer that Five Nations Iroquois could have been the Massawomekes mentioned in the literature of Captain John Smith.

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