

Pemisapan (Wingina) ^[1]

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by F. Roy Johnson; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, February 2023

d. 1 June 1586

See also: [Dasemunkepeuc](#) ^[2]



John White's watercolor drawing of a man presumed to be Permisiapan (Wingina).
ca. 1585-93. Image courtesy of The British Museum.

^[3]Pemisapan (Wingina) was the king or chieftain of the Algonquian ^[4] (or Algonkin)-speaking American Indian tribe on Roanoke Island ^[5] and the opposite mainland when Sir Walter Raleigh ^[6] was initially colonizing the North Carolina coast for England. Wingina was first mentioned by Arthur Barlowe ^[7] in 1584 in his report to Raleigh ^[8] concerning his and Philip Amadas's exploration or fact-finding mission ^[9]. The explorers conversed and traded with Granganimeo, brother of King Wingina, who was said to be some distance away at "the main village" recuperating from wounds he had received in a fight with the chief of a neighboring country.

Soon after Raleigh ^[8]'s first settlers, with Ralph Lane ^[10] as governor, colonized Roanoke Island ^[5] in 1585, King Wingina took the name of Pemisapan. At first relations between him and the English were friendly, but friendship turned to enmity when the English exploited and subjugated the tribes and their people with the threat of their superior weaponry and the natives' superstitions. Pemisapan and his great men plotted to overthrow English oppression, and Lane ^[10] came to regard him as a serious threat to the well-being of his colony. Rather than confronting the English alone with his small band of

warriors from Roanoke ^[11] and Dasemunkepeuc on the mainland near present Manns Harbor ^[12], Pemisapan sought the assistance of stronger tribes.

When Lane ^[10] visited King Menatonon ^[13], the king of the Chowanocs on the Chowan River ^[14], in the spring of 1586, he learned that Pemisapan's emissaries had preceded him. However, he also learned that Menatonon ^[13] had not been moved by his intrigues. But the Moratocs, a weaker tribe, were frightened when warned that the English planned to kill them. When Lane ^[10] sought to explore the Roanoke River ^[15] upon which they lived, they abandoned their villages and retired with their food into the interior.

When Lane ^[10] and his men returned safely from Chowanoc and Moratoc, a disappointed Pemisapan gathered up his people at Roanoke ^[11] and retired with them to the village of Dasemunkepeuc on the mainland, leaving the English to plant and tend their own crops and catch their own fish.

About this time Pemisapan's father, Ensenore, an influential "advisor and prophet," died, leaving his son unrestrained. Pemisapan then began formulating plans to unite the coastal tribes in one great effort to destroy the English. Largely because of Menatonon ^[13]'s advice, King Okisko ^[16] of the Weapemeocs declined to be enticed by the promise of much copper to join him. Skiko, Menatonon's son who was held hostage by the English at Roanoke ^[11], told Lane ^[10] of Pemisapan's plot, and Lane ^[10] decided that the king should be destroyed.

On the morning of June 1, 1586, Lane ^[10] and twenty-five of his men crossed over Croatan Sound ^[17] in his largest boat and a canoe about three miles to Dasemunkepeuc. They hailed one of Pemisapan's men who was standing watch at the shore, and the man carried a message from Lane ^[10] to his chief. The Englishmen were on their way to Croatoan and had stopped to complain about one of Pemisapan's men who had sought to free a prisoner.

Pemisapan and seven or eight of his men and their followers came down to the shore. Whereupon Lane ^[10] gave the watchword "Christ our victory" and his men shot into the members of the tribe. Pemisapan was hit by a pistol ball and fell to the ground as if mortally wounded. But shortly he "started up and ran away as though he had not been touched." As he ran he was shot through the buttocks by one Kelly or Gavin ("mine Irish boy") with a petronel, a large cavalry pistol. The debilitated chief then was chased into a woods and killed by Thomas Hariot and Edward Nugent, another Irishman. Soon they returned to the company with the king's head.

Although Lane ^[10] may have prevented a tribal assault on the English colony at Roanoke ^[11], Pemisapan's followers became enemies unto death, perhaps costing the lives of some later arrivals at Roanoke Island ^[5].

References:

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Additional resources:

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Portrait of an Indian Chief (possibly Wingina). Asset Number 25884001. The Trustees of the British Museum. The British Museum: London. Available at <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/25884001> ^[21]

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