

Manteo ^[1]

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fl. 1584–87

by David B. Quinn

Manteo, leading Carolina Algonquian Indian, was a member of the ruling family of the Croatoan subtribe of the coastal Algonquian group. His mother (or adopted mother) appears to have been the chieftainess of the subtribe that acknowledged some dependence on the Indians of [Roanoke Island](#) ^[2]. Manteo encountered the English visitors in 1584 and agreed to go with them to England, as did another Indian, Wanchese. It was possibly on this voyage that [Thomas Harriot](#) ^[3] began to teach him to speak English and he to teach Harriot Algonquian. By mid-October he was at Queen Elizabeth's court, wearing English brown taffeta clothing but unwilling to speak the new language. By mid-December, however, the two Indians, possibly with [Harriot](#) ^[4]'s aid, had proved capable of describing the geography and resources of their region in some detail with, we suspect, Manteo taking the lead.

He sailed with Sir Richard Grenville and [Ralph Lane](#) ^[5] to the Carolina [Outer Banks](#) ^[6] in 1585, probably taking part in the exploration of the banks in July and almost certainly playing a significant role as interpreter and negotiator during August and September, when the English settlement was established close to the village of high chief Wingina ([Pemisapan](#) ^[7]) on [Roanoke Island](#) ^[2]. From then to June 1586 he is likely to have divided his time between Croatoan (three Indian sites at or south of Buxton may represent the center of his subtribe's territory) and guiding English parties through the rivers and sounds.

In June 1586 Manteo was at [Roanoke Island](#) ^[2], possibly having brought some of his men to assist [Lane](#) ^[5], who had broken with and killed the high chief. When [Lane](#) ^[5] decided to abandon the colony, Manteo, of his own accord, accompanied him to England. We know nothing of his experiences there, except that he was exposed to [Anglican](#) ^[8] teachings and had responded to them. He probably also advised Governor [John White](#) ^[9] in his preparations for a permanent colony to be established in 1587 on [Chesapeake Bay](#) ^[10]. The expedition that reached [Roanoke Island](#) ^[2] in late July was not carried on to Chesapeake Bay by the recalcitrant sailors. Manteo accompanied Edward Stafford to Croatoan, whose men were prepared to fight until Manteo revealed himself to them. At a later stage [White](#) ^[9]'s party mistakenly attacked some Croatoan Indians who were plundering [Dasemunkepeuc](#) ^[11], where the remnant of [Pemisapan](#) ^[7]'s men were living, but the incident was glossed over with Manteo's aid.

It was intended that the colonists should make their own way to [Chesapeake Bay](#) ^[10], leaving a party at [Roanoke Island](#) ^[2] to await [John White](#) ^[9]'s return from England with further supplies in 1588. They were placed under the protection of Manteo, who, by [Sir Walter Raleigh](#) ^[12]'s appointment, was, on 13 Aug. 1587, "christened in Roanoak, and called Lord thereof, and of Dasmongueponke, in reward of his faithful service." This honor indicates how highly he was regarded in England. The majority of the colonists appear to have soon departed for their Chesapeake abode and reached there safely. A group of men was left to await [John White](#) ^[9]. But [White](#) ^[9] did not come in 1588, and sometime between 1588 and the latter part of 1589 the party moved down to live with Manteo, leaving as a sign the clear carving of CROATOAN, without any suggestion they were in distress, to show [White](#) ^[9] where he would find them. [White](#) ^[9] arrived only in August 1590 to find the remains of his own possessions strewn about, a new defensive enclosure, and indications that he would find his party with Manteo. Bad weather and the loss of a boat's crew led impatient seamen to prevent [White](#) ^[9] from making his way to Croatoan. Plans made to find a place for the winter and return in the spring of 1591 came to nothing, and [White](#) ^[9] returned to England in October 1590, leaving his colonists to their own devices.

Nothing further is known of Manteo or of the Englishmen he had sheltered. Some may have rejoined their comrades on Chesapeake Bay; some or all may have stayed with Manteo, joined his tribal group, and become assimilated. Rumors in the early seventeenth century seemed to suggest that some white men were still living in this southern area, but no trace of them was found by parties searching from [Jamestown](#) ^[13].

Manteo was evidently a man of some distinction and intellect. He favored the English intruders (and was favored by them) as against the traditional leader of his tribe. [Raleigh](#) ^[14]'s respect for him, his own loyalty to [John White](#) ^[9], his desire for assimilation rather than conflict, and his baptism and acceptance of the lordship of his tribe's territories at English hands are evidence of his role. Nevertheless, had the colonists established themselves in strength close to his domain, his inclinations might well have been put to a more severe test. As it was, he passes out of history merely as one of the first eastern American Indians to be glimpsed as an independent personality.

References:

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