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Some new Revelations and Reflexions about
the “Wessagusset-killing” in 1623

On March 27th, in the year 1623, at the settlement of Wessagusset, two local Native American leaders and their company – including many women – assembled with some English colonists in a house, which was used as accommodation for Native visitors. The other Native leaders had no suspicion; they lived in relatively peace with the English settlers, especially the inhabitants of Plymouth ever since their arrival in 1620. The Natives knew their host, Miles Standish, very well as he was the leader of the militia at Plymouth and one of the “Pilgrim Fathers”. Even if they were a little suspicious, it faded away when the English greeted them favourably and presented a table with different dishes, even pork, which was one of the Native’s most favourite dishes. Just after they started the meal, the English attacked them, and the Natives’ leader, Pecksuot, was killed by Standish with the chief’s own knife, while others killed the chief’s war leader. Later they executed – hanged – other four members of the Native entourage, and others were thrown to prison.

If we look at the previous three years, until 1620, we can see that the settlers always tried to avoid confrontation, fight and war with the Natives, and tried to solve problems with diplomatic methods. Now, however, they killed two chiefs, of high rank, and other Natives, meaning that the conflicts became deeper and worse than before. It is hard to reconstruct the events; the greatest problem is that we can only use sources written by the European settlers. However, if we will not only examine the parts of the sources about the events, but focus on the earlier times and parts which seem unimportant at first sight, so we can get closer to the solution.

We will see, that this conflict started in May, 1622, and grew slowly as the increasing number of the population, the unfertile soil, the weather and the mistakes made by the settlers together generated a massive crisis in the winter of 1622-23. It was known to be one of the coldest winters at that time, when even the Bosphorus and Golden Horn Bay had been frozen. The crisis ended with a solution, which, compared to earlier ones, was different and had long term consequences.

In my text, with the use of earlier literature and the sources, I will present the events leading to the collapse of a peaceful relationship.¹ I will speak about the complex reasons for this crisis, such as the weather, diplomatic manoeuvres, the mistakes of the settlers. I will also

¹ In short, the most important books about Plymouth, where we can find something about the events: CARPENTER 2004: 67–72, PHILBRICK 2006: 140–157, VAUGHAN 1995: 82–88. In 1905 Charles Francis Adams wrote a book about the town, which is nowadays Weymouth, MA. The sources, connecting to the events were collected and published by Jack Dempsey in 2001. Recently, Craig Chartier wrote an essay about the topic, using written sources and archeological evidences.

speaking about the consequences. I will consider the sources, and explain the decisions of the settlers and their leaders, and why they chose this solution for the crisis.

Prelude

Where should we start to build up our story? It is unnecessary to look back at the time of Adam and Eve, but we cannot miss out on earlier events.

The very first is the colony of Roanoke, founded in 1585. This was the first encounter and contact between the Natives and the English settlers, as well as the first cooperation and diplomatic manoeuvres between them. It was the first time, when the English settlers tried to handle the Natives, and give an answer to the question: how to live with them? Their answer, however, was brute force, originating from the solutions they had used in Ireland for decades. Their leader, Ralph Lane, and most of the members of the group, were veterans of the “pacification” of Ireland, and they treated the Natives the same way they treated the Irish. In Ireland, they used extortion to make short-term alliances with rival fractions, kept Irish persons of higher-standing hostage for their own security. They robbed and looted the countryside, and heavily punished even the smallest defiance. They continued this treatment in America. In response to a stolen cup, they plundered a Native village. Later, they kidnapped a high-ranking Native chief, kept him and his son as hostages, and extorted from him an oath to Queen Elisabeth. Later they killed their former ally, Wingina, because they became suspicious that he no longer wanted to be allied with them. With the death of Wingina, however, they were encircled by hostile Native tribes, and a week after Wingina’s murder, one year after the start of the colony, they left the settlement on the ships of Francis Drake. The bad luck however put some more settlers on shore at Roanoke, this time families, including John White’s daughter and her newborn daughter. They knew that the Natives were hostile, but only John White was able to sail back to England, mostly because the transport ships abandoned them just after they went ashore. When White was able to return in 1590, three years after his departure, he found the colony empty, but not destroyed. The settlers were missing, and still nobody knows, what their fate was.²

The Roanoke episode was well-known in England, stories and sketches were published in great numbers, and later adventurers learned from it. We know writings from Jamestown, what says that it was a necessity to avoid the same situation, meaning the open hostilities with the Natives. Many sources suggest that they should not be treated as natural

² More about Roanoke: QUINN 1985. and KUPPERMANN 2006. For general informations about the colonial america see MIDDLETON 1994. and TINDALL 1984.

enemies, but have to be handled as a “European” country. They realized that a war with them, even with the use of gunpowder and firearms, would end the colony. They also realize a very important thing: during the first few years, the Europeans heavily depended on the food supply from the Natives.³

At the time of Jamestown, Europeans realized that at the beginning gifts and gestures were more effective than cold steel and brutality. But it is not Jamestown, however, that shows us the importance of the Natives’ help and good will, but a parallel foundation, at present-day Maine. It was the Popham (or Sagadahoc) colony, named after the main financier. It was founded at the same time as Jamestown, but launched by another company, the Plymouth Company. The settlement was built on a rocky, unfertile and cold seashore, close to a Native settlement, but not in its neighbourhood. The settlers were able to make contact with one of the Natives, but later the Natives disappeared, moving more inside the continent. Historians have developed many theories as to why the Natives moved away. The most acceptable one is that they had previous contact with other Europeans, perhaps English cod fishers. The meeting was not peaceful or a positive experiment for them, so they treated the Europeans with suspicion and tried to avoid contact with them. Without fishing ships and with lack of food, the settlers abandoned the colony after one year, and sailed back to England.⁴ We have seen how crucial the Natives’ role was in the settlement’s success, so it is time to introduce the conditions of the settlers, and the first years of Plymouth.

The average settlers: unprepared or “unprepareable”?

In the texts about Wessagusset, we learn that the settlers were ill-prepared and had no idea how to live in the new world.⁵ However, if we look over the situation and the conditions, we can say one thing: all settlers are unprepared.

The very first settlers at Roanoke, were soldiers combined with a few labourers (such as carpenters, farmers), and failed.⁶ At Jamestown, we found an equal number of soldiers and labourers, and they were successful, however at Popham the same structure was not. Plymouth was a settlement of farmer families, while Wessagusset were specialized in fur trade. So it seems that soldier settlements were less successful, but “civilians” could have problems either.

³ BITTERLI 1985: 177.

⁴ More about Popham: THAYER 2012.

⁵ CARPENTER 2004: 68. PHILBRICK 2006: 140.

⁶ See QUINN 1985. and KUPPERMANN 2006.

Our main problem is the lack of information, and, to go back to previous statements, the incapability to prepare. At that time, there was little information about the New World. And, to make matters worse, this information was mostly propaganda and a “recruitment”, but not a representation of the conditions. Writers and drawings pictured a rich, fertile land, a new Eldorado, with rich vegetation,⁷ diverse fauna, and fertile soil, and this whole heavenly land was only habituated by unintelligent, animal-like humans (savage, at this time, means forest-dwelling “monkeyman”).⁸ This was untrue, but the truth was not the thing which attracted people to be early settlers, because the reality was not as nice as the propaganda writings, sketches and speeches described. The truth, which was “come over and maybe survive,” would not be attractive, but because the too positive imagines of the New World, the newcomers were met with negative surprises.

The preparation, in the strictest meaning of the word, was impossible. In New England, the weather was different, there was a harsher winter, colder spring and autumn and a shorter agricultural positive term in a year. Their sources mention only a few things about this. The planting and growing of corn was also hard to learn, because of the lack of information about it, and they could not “practice” before arriving in the New World.⁹

The greatest scripts describe the land as fertile; however the new inhabitants realized that it was not the case.¹⁰ Jamestown was a swampy, unhealthy area where even drinking water was a problem,¹¹ Popham was a rocky wasteland,¹² and Plymouth also had unfertile soil. It is important to mention, that the first describer of the land, John Smith writes many pages about the importance of fishing as primary food source.¹³ It was rich of vegetation and fauna, but if we read through the sources carefully, we can see that hunting was not so common, they would mostly eat game when they bought it from the Natives. Foraging berries and oysters were not uncommon, but it was only enough to give some extra protein and vitamins, a colony could not survive with this. A strong agriculture and self-sustaining farming would be necessary. But their grain supply could not survive the cross on the Atlantic, it would rot or become infested with maggots. So they needed to get corn seeds to produce corn. But getting seeds was not simple, but if they were lucky, the Natives might give some and show them how to plant it. There were some writings even from Roanoke, written

⁷ The greatest propagandists are Richard Hakluyt and Thomas Hariot

⁸ BITTERLI 1982: 48. and 177.

⁹ More about maize: LACOMBE 2012: 12–18: and 55–63.

¹⁰ See SMITH 1616.

¹¹ See MIDDLETON 1994 and TINDALL 1984.

¹² See THAYER 2012.

¹³ SMITH 1616: 25–31

by Thomas Hariot,¹⁴ about corn and how to plant and use it, but, we can say, the settlers enjoyed limited success with it in the first two-three years.

Protein was another problem, since greater livestock animals, such as cows were unable to get transported. Pigs, however, can survive the travel. A bigger problem would be their feeding, because in the first or second year, the food was barely enough for the colonists. Despite this, we see in the sources sometimes the presence of pigs.¹⁵

So as we can see, the necessity of food turned the colonists to the Natives. A question arose: how to get the corn? It would be tempting to simply kill them and take what they wanted, but, staying in Plymouth, it would not be easy. Firstly, because they were not soldiers, and secondly, they may have realized that it would solve the problem for only a year, and thirdly, the Natives surely might become hostile, and in that case, as the history remarks, the colony would be doomed.

So they depended on the Natives, but it was not simple to cooperate with them. As remarked earlier, Natives were viewed with massive negativity. The Natives were, on the one hand, barbarians, ready to kill, but possessing little military power and easy to conquer and enslave them. This view came from the combination of a kind of superman-self-image and the despise of the Natives because of their slightly primitive life, unintelligible language and different religious and ceremonial rituals. The Spanish scripts and their translations also pictured a slightly barbarous Native, worth no more as an animal. The easy conquest of their great empires with several hundred Europeans also gave the view that they were weak and barbarous, and God sided with the Europeans if they wanted to take their gold, land, and life.

However, from the puritan view, they were potential Christians, waiting for baptism. They believed that their task was to build a new, Christian society with the Natives, and their divine task to baptize and apostolate them. They invented the term “salvage”, a wild man, who must be saved, salvaged, through Christianity. Some years later, a new company, the Massachusetts Bay Company promoted this mission with its seal, a painting of a Native American with the words “*Come over and helps us*”.¹⁶ It seemed that a new page of the Native-European relations had been opened. This new view made the contact with the Natives easier, however, we cannot say that it meant treating them like equals; they were more like “adorable stupid people”, but not “noble wild man.”

¹⁴ HARIOT 1586: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/hariot/hariot.html>

¹⁵ For example the settlers presented pork for the Natives before they killed them at Wessagusset.

¹⁶ MIDDLETON 1994: 55. and TINDALL 1984:62.

The first years of Plymouth

And now, finally, we can start our story, and show the events in their complex reality.

Our settlers were called “Pilgrims” – a Calvinist denomination, emigrated to the Netherlands, because the English authorities were less tolerant towards them.¹⁷ Their leaders were afraid that in their new home they would merge with the Dutch, so they decided to borrow ships from the Plymouth Company and England. The arrival of the colonists was pretty unfortunate – they arrived in late autumn 1620, so they spent their first, below-zero weeks onboard the *Mayflower*, and later in small wooden houses.¹⁸ Nearly half of them died in the first year, and death toll remained high during the first years. However, luck later appeared when a Native, Squanto, who spent years in England as a slave, came and introduced them to his chief Massasoit, and later worked as translator-interpreter, until his death of smallpox in November 1622. Squanto was useful, not just as translator, but he showed them how to grow corn and fertilize the soil with dead cod.¹⁹ It is time to say that the settlers earlier found abandoned corn fields there, and as they started to use them, they get most of their first seeds there.

Now let us take a look at the settlement’s geographic position. It was actually on the sandy seashore, quite far from any Native settlement. According to a few of the sources, the settlement was surrounded by mixed forest, not so dense, and some fields. These fields had previously been corn fields of the Natives. Natives used a forest-burning method with which they created a field using it for some years, then abandoning it and creating new fields.²⁰ Now the settlers used these abandoned and more or less exhausted fields. Even with the cod-fertilization, it is hard to imagine that these fields had good crop.

It became a necessity to trade with the Natives. However, in the first years, the goods that the settlers could give was nothing but promises; they promised that in case of survival and development, they would honour the Natives’ good intentions. The Natives, especially Massasoit, seemed to accept this deal. But it was not so easy with other tribes; hazardous manoeuvres were needed to establish a peace with some of the Natives.

The first conflict happened when a boy, John Billington, got lost in the forest and was captured by Natives from the Nausset people. An expedition, led by the organizer of the militia Miles Standish and governor Bradford – were set out to recover him. When they arrived at the Native settlement, the leaders of the tribe agreed to give back the boy, but in

¹⁷ CHADWICK 2003: 194–199.

¹⁸ PHILBRICK 2006: 83-84.

¹⁹ BRADFORD 1622: <http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/mourt2.html>

²⁰ LACOMBE 2012: 60.

exchange the settlers needed to give back earlier stolen goods. To make their offer more irrefutable, the tribe summoned – according to the English sources – nearly a thousand warriors. There was no fight, and the settlers returned home, but realized that a possible Native attack would be more severe and irrefutable than it had seemed earlier.²¹

Some months later a new threat appeared; the Narraganset tribe started a war against the tribe of Massasoit, and the enemies captured Squanto, their translator. The council made the following decision; they would try to free Squanto, or, if he was already dead, they would avenge him. Some fifteen men, led by Miles Standish, marched to the village of the Narragansets, and tried to find Squanto. During this, they shot into the air with their rifles, and beat those who resisted. They soon realized that Squanto had already fled, so they approached the tribe's chief. They apologized for the trouble, and asked the chief to stop the attacks against Massasoit's tribe. They even offered medical treatment for the wounded Native warriors.²² This act is definitely different from what we have seen for example in Roanoke or Jamestown in similar situations. There were no killings, and – if we believe the English sources – the “misunderstandings” were handled not only with power demonstrations, but also with humanitarian acts. The settlers tried to avoid same situations later. And, to prevent siding with one Native group over another thus resulting in war, they signed a treaty with the nine surrounding tribes – including the Massachusetts.²³ They hoped that this would prevent one of the Native tribes using them as allies in local conflicts.

The way to the crisis

A half year passed in peace, and the colony slowly started to grow. New settlers came in every spring, constantly keeping the population around two hundred people, with a small growth every year.²⁴ However, in spite of the relative success of the colony, in England the investors were less happy. The colony constantly had a deficit, mostly because the trade with the Natives was not as good as they would have hoped. The settlers still bought mostly extra food from the Natives, instead of starting the fur-trade. They still owed debt for the transportation, so the company decided to get back its money. The leaders of the company,

²¹BRADFORD 1622: <http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/mourt3.html>, and PHILBRICK 2006: 111.

²²BRADFORD 1622: <http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/mourt4.html>

²³PHILBRICK 2006: 116.

²⁴About population see: <http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/townpop.html>

especially Thomas Weston, decided to send some fifty-sixty men to Plymouth. They would have the task to collect furs and sassafras, and cooperate with the settlers of Plymouth.²⁵

However, the settlers of Plymouth did not know the plan, and they did not expect the newcomers. It was a serious problem, because the settlers did not count these people when they planted their corn. And, for an unexpected growth, these sixty men were huge in number, compared with the other two hundred inhabitants. At first, it seemed that there would be no problem. The work of these sixty men made agricultural works and harvesting easier and quicker. After the harvest, the newcomers moved north on the shore and founded Wessagusset colony, some 25 miles away from Plymouth.²⁶

Soon, however, it became clear that there would not be enough food in Plymouth for these unexpected newcomers. Settlers of Plymouth accused the new colonists many times with the theft of food.²⁷ When the new settlers left for Wessagusset, they took a certain amount of products from the harvest. We do not know how great the amount of food was, but at the end of the autumn, they ran out. At first, they tried to get some from Plymouth, but the settlers, constantly being on the edge of their supplies, turned them away. Thefts from Plymouth by the Wessagusset settlers reappeared.

Another problem was, that the settlers of Wessagusset quickly found a new food source; a settlement of the Massachusetts tribe, which was close - only a mile away - to the settlement. It was one of the indicators; as others point on it, the temptation is greater, as the accessible food was just in the neighborhood.²⁸ And there was another problem; – which is not mentioned in the earlier writings – the settlers had a very different food-acquiring method than the settlers of Plymouth. While the Pilgrims visited nearly a dozen of Native settlements to acquire food²⁹ – through stealing, and later, through trade – the settlers of Wessagusset visited only this Massachusetts village. We do not know the exact amount of the stolen goods, but it is obvious that constantly stealing from one village rather than from nine has greater impact. The Natives quickly realized that their food amount was running out and the nightmare of starvation came into their mind. The primitive agric methods, described earlier, only sustained their needs. The settlers of Plymouth realized at the “Billington-affair” that food-stealing could be dangerous; and, perhaps because of this, tried to get food from more Native settlements, to avoid major impact on the Native’s food-storage.

²⁵ MIDDLETON 1994: 48–49. and WINSLOW 1624:
<http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/goodnews3.html>

²⁶ PHILBRICK 2006: 140.

²⁷ WINSLOW 1624: <http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/goodnews5.html>

²⁸ PHILBRICK 2006: 141.

²⁹ Based on Winslow’s and Bradford’s account.

The conflict and the solution

At December of 1622, the situation of Wessagusset became seriously dangerous. The Natives tried to prevent the settlers to get food from their stores – but starving English settlers continuously tried to steal. The leaders of the Massachusetts said to the settlers that it was highly intolerable, and to try and stop the stealing, or they would. To calm down the Natives and terrify the stealers, the leaders of the colony made a public punishment in the presence of Native chiefs. One man was hanged and others were whipped in public.³⁰ But hunger proved to be a greater power; sometimes it overwrites moral codes and laws so badly that people are eating dead humans, or they kill each other and eat the victim. Whipping or threatening therefore is not a power which can hold back someone to fight of his hunger through stealing food from someone.

The consequences of the ongoing stealing were two-fold; the first was that some English settlers moved to the Native village, where they started to work for food.³¹ The second was a kind of blockade; according to the English sources, the Natives encircled Wessagusset and constantly kept watch to prevent the settlers from leaving the village.³² Soon the settlers were forced to forage for oysters, but some of these oysters were handed to the Natives. Even so, the leader of the village, Phineas Pratt managed to escape, avoiding the Native patrols, and arrived at Plymouth where he presented the unbearable situation.³³ He said that the settlers were very weak, on the edge of starvation, and the Natives were planning an attack against them. He asked for immediate support and active intervention from Plymouth; some food and militiamen, in order to avoid starvation and resist a Native attack. However, this was denied by the leaders of Plymouth. They thought that the situation was still solvable through diplomacy, and perhaps on the other hand they did not want to take a risk for a settlement which had been a source of problems ever since its foundation. The decision of the aggressive actions happened later.

The way to the decision

Here, we must speak about three reasons. At first, the Pilgrims were not so merciful and peaceful as they seemed. Until that time, the Pilgrims avoided violence, because, as some

85. ³⁰ WINSLOW 1624: <http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/goodnews5.html>, and VAUGHAN 1995:

³¹ PHILBRICK 2006: 153.

³² PRATT 1662: 3. CARPENTER 2004: 69.

³³ PRATT 1662: 4.

people think, they looked to the Natives as potential Christians, and they were also refugees, who only wanted peace. However, there are a sources that state that Pilgrims were not exactly what they seemed. The writings of Thomas Morton give us a view of the other side of the Pilgrims. Morton was a really interesting figure of the early New England history; his and his settlers' "extravagant" lifestyle at the neighbour Merry-mouth settlement caused many quarrels with the residents of Plymouth. He was banished by the Pilgrims later, and published about his experiences under the title "New English Canaan." In this work we are met with a different way of thinking about the settler-Native relations. He wrote that the whole situation was a kind of struggle for power, and one group must become the overlord and the other group the subject; and, obviously, the Natives must be the subjects and the English settlers the rulers. He wrote that the English had to avoid a situation where the Natives could feel that the "upper hand" was theirs, and where the English settlers depended on them; a situation like this must be avoided, even through hostilities. And according to Morton, the settlers of Plymouth felt the same.³⁴ So if we accept Morton's view, the settlers, who moved to the Native settlements to work for them for food, became slaves; and the dependency of the English on the Native food supply became clear to the Natives. If they had the same ideas as what Morton described, then this was maybe the point when they thought that the events must be turned. We also have to take into account that maybe news reached the settlements about the events at Jamestown; in 1622, the Natives attacked the settlers, and killed 300 inhabitants. John Smith wrote that one of the reasons for the attack was that the settlement lost its self-sustaining ability because of the tobacco monoculture, and depended more and more on Natives' food supply.³⁵

The previous part explains why the Pilgrims were at this time more aggressive towards the Natives than earlier, but as I mentioned before, when Pratt arrived with the news, they refused to help him. It seems that later the Pilgrims got the information from a more trustworthy source. This source, as others state as well, was Massasoit. Massasoit was very ill in the early spring of 1623. He probably got some kind of typhoid, and Edward Winslow gave him treatment. When Massasoit recovered, he told Winslow about the "conspiracy" of the Massachusetts tribe. Massasoit told him that the tribe was planning to attack not only Wessagusset, but Plymouth as well, and they wanted to exterminate all of the English. Did Massasoit tell the truth? It is doubtful because of an earlier episode. In 1621, with the guidance of Squanto, the settlers visited a Massachusetts settlement. There, Squanto tried to

³⁴ MORTON 2011: 77.

³⁵ KUPPERMAN 1988:193–195

convince them to attack the village and take away what they could. The settlers refused, but it shows us that the tribe of Massasoit earlier tried to use the English against the Massachusetts. The situation of Wessagusset gave him an opportunity to depict the Massachusetts as a hostile tribe, and convince the settlers to take actions against them, breaking the power of his old enemies.³⁶ It seems that the English believed what their oldest and most important ally said, and decided to take the actions against the Massachusetts. Now we only have to clarify why they chose to kill those people; Pecksuot, the chief, seems to be a clear decision; the leader of the tribe would surely be the leader of the conspiracy. But the more symbolic death was given to his war leader, Wittuwamat, who was not only killed, but his head was cut off and taken back to Plymouth, where it was set on a pike before the gate.

A quiet popular answer is a mostly “romantic” episode about vengeance and personal duels. According to this, the “war leader” of the Massachusetts, Wituwamat, had a quarrel with Miles Standish, the leader of the Plymouth militia.³⁷ When Standish was on a visit at another tribe (months before the events), Wittuwamat arrived and presented to him and the other chief a knife, which was taken from a killed French sailor of a ship, wrecked some years earlier on the shore. According to this, the Native told the other chief – but not Standish – that he killed many “whites” and was able to do it if necessary.³⁸ However, it is hardly acceptable as the only and main reason of the killings. And we have to mention, that according to Pratt, the Massachusetts’s chief, Pecksuot, was a friend of the English settlers, and even could speak a little bit of English.³⁹ He hated the French, because they took many of his tribe members as slaves, but he felt no hostility toward the English settlers – at least not until the beginning of the stealing.⁴⁰ And we simply cannot find any evidence that proves that Wittuwamat hated the English and wanted to kill them. But then why he was killed, and – which makes his death more important – why was his head cut off and put into a pike at the gate of Plymouth? The order, to cut off his head and bring it back, was given to Standish and to the militia before they departed. It can be argued that it was the common treatment of traitors at that time. But then, why his head was cut off and not his chief’s? The answer can be found above; Wittuwamat, in the eyes of both the English and the Natives was a man who was a fearsome warrior, who could kill white men with a certain ease, and maybe even invulnerability.⁴¹ So I

³⁶ PHILBRICK 2006: 149.

³⁷ PHILBRICK 2006: 141. STRATTON 1986: 355–358

³⁸ Only mentioned at Winslow’s writing, nobody else have a word about it. see WINSLOW 1624: <http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/goodnews3.html>

³⁹ PRATT 1662: 2

⁴⁰ PRATT 1662: 2

⁴¹ Pratt says that in the eyes of Natives, Wittuwamat is invulnerable, see: PRATT 1662: 5

think his head was not cut off because it was the punishment of traitors, as some suggest, or because of the quarrel with Standish, but to terrify the other Natives with the message: even your best warrior can be killed easily, so do not try to attack us.

Conclusions and consequences

The aftermath has already been described shortly; Standish and his militia set out to Wessagusset, where they met with the Native leaders. The Natives were not suspicious – maybe they did not know that their conspiracy was known by the settlers, or they were simply innocent, which seems more plausible. The killing was quick; the Natives were surprised, and according to Morton, they got drunk before getting killed.⁴² The Natives took revenge; they killed the three English men who lived with them in the village – the earlier mentioned “slaves”. But after that they quickly fled from the area; the tribe abandoned its early habitats, and moved to swampy, hidden areas, and tried to avoid contact with the settlers in the future.⁴³ Future impact was that the fur-trading deceased.⁴⁴ It happened because after the killing – in spite of Standish promising the men at Wessagusset that there would be safety – the settlers of Wessagusset boarded a ship and returned to England, with empty hands and in bad condition.⁴⁵ At first they tried to move to Plymouth, but the leaders did not allow them – so we can derive from that that Plymouth already had enough “hungry mouths to feed.” After their return, the settlers of Plymouth still remained farming people with moderate trade. The events also had a small impact on Plymouth; the food amount, what they got from the Natives became fewer, and they were forced to fishing more than before.⁴⁶

Massasoit was also not the winner. Even if he finally got rid of the Massachusetts, his warriors and allies were also terrified by the settlers’ actions. Natives were terrified by the brutality of the settlers, so some of them moved from the area, or became more closely allied. This situation was perfect for the English settlers; with most of the Natives as their allies, they were undisturbed and could establish more and more new villages.

In the end, let us quickly summarize what is our conclusion. At first, there was a relative small population of English settlers, among tribes whose population was around two thousand. The number of inhabitants grew slowly at the first years. The land was able to

⁴² MORTON 2011: 75–76.

⁴³ WINSLOW 1624: <http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/goodnews5.html>

⁴⁴ PHILBRICK 2006: 154–155

⁴⁵ PHILBRICK 2006: 153. and CARPENTER 2004: 71.

⁴⁶ CARPENTER 2004: 72–75

sustain this population; however, the English settlers depended on the Native food gifts. Later, however, there was a quick increase in the English population with the arriving of the settlers of Wessagusset. The main problems were that the settlers were unprepared for the conditions, they had not enough food for so many people, and they had wrong methods about acquiring it from the Natives. At Wessagusset, the settlers used only one village as an extra food source, while earlier the settlers of Plymouth used ten villages. This made an impact on the Natives' food amount, threatening them with starvation for the winter. When they became more and more hostile because of the continuous stealing, the English felt that the Natives were ready to attack them. However, the final blow was the information of Massasoit about an upcoming attack. When the English were informed by Massasoit, – an enemy of the Massachusetts – they decided to strike. To send a message to the other Natives, they beheaded their best warrior – after killing him and his chief, and many others – and set his head on a pike before the gate of Plymouth. The effects were mixed; on the one hand, the Natives were not hostile for decades, which allowed the settlements to grow. On the other side, the fur trade became less effective, and for a short time, the settlement was barely self-sustaining. But the greatest impact was, that the Natives did not take actions against the English for the next decades, until it was late.

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