

**William Strachey,  
*The History of Travel into Virginia Britannia*  
 (1612)**

**Caput [Chapter] 5**

*A true Description of the People; of their Color, Constitution and Disposition; their Apparel.*

They are generally of a Color brown, or rather tawny which the Mothers cast them into with a kind of Arsenic-stone... or rather with red tempered ointments of earth, and the juice of certain scrused roots, so soon as they are borne, and this they do (keeping themselves still so smudged and besmeared) either for the Custom of the Country, or the better to defend them (since they go most what naked) from the stinging of Mosquitoes . . . which here breed abundantly, amongst the marsh whorls, and fenberries; and of the same hue are their women, howbeit it is supposed neither of them [is] naturally borne so discolored, for Captain Smith (living sometime amongst them) affirmeth, how they are [born] from the womb indifferent white, but as the men so do the women, dye and disguise themselves, into this tawny color, esteeming it the best beauty, to be nearest such a kind of Murray, as a sodden Quince is of (to liken it to the nearest color I can) for which they daily anoint both face and bodies all over, with such a kind of fucus or unguent, as can cast them into that stain. . . .

Their hair is black, gross, long and thick, the men have no beards, their noses are broad flat and full at the end, great big Lips, and wide mouths (yet nothing so unsightly as the Moors [Africans],) they are generally tall of stature, and strength, of comely proportion, and the women have handsome limbs, slender arms, and pretty hands, and when they sing they have a delightful and pleasant tang in their voices.

For their apparel, they are sometimes covered with the skins of wild beasts, which in winter are dressed with the hair, but in the Summer without, the better sort use large mantels of divers skins, not much differing from the Irish falinges [cloaks]; some embroidered with white Beads, some with copper, other painted after their manner, but the Common sort have scarce wherewithal to cover their nakedness, but stick long blades [of] grass, the leaves of Trees or such like under broad Baldrics of Leather which covers them behind and before.

The better sort of women cover them (for the most parte) all over with skin mantels, finely dressed, shagged and fringed at the skirt, carved and colored, with some pretty work or the proportion of beasts, fowl, tortoises, or other such like Imagery as shall best please or express the fancy of the wearer, their younger women go not shadowed [covered] amongst their own company until they be nigh eleven or twelve returns of the Leaf old (for so they account and bring about the year) calling the fall of the leaf *Taquitock*) nor are they much ashamed thereof, and therefore would the before remembered *Pocahontas*, a well featured but wanton young girl *Powhatan*'s daughter, sometimes resorting to our Fort, of the age then of 11 or 12 years, get the boys forth with her into the market place and make them wheel, falling on their hands turning their heels upwards, whom she would follow, and wheel so her self naked as she was all the Fort over, but being past once 12 years they put on a kind of semicinctum leathern apron (as do our artificers or handicrafts men) before their bellies and are very shamefaced to be seen bare: we

have scene some use mantels, made both of Turkey feathers and other fowl so prettily wrought and woven with threads that nothing could be discerned but the feathers, which were exceeding warm and very handsome . . .

The women have their arms, breasts, thighs, shoulders and faces, cunningly embroidered [tattooed] with divers works, for pouncing and searing their skins with a kind of Instrument (heated in the fire), they figure therein flowers and fruits of sundry lively kinds, as also Snakes, Serpents, Efts, etc., and this they do by dropping upon the seared flesh, sundry Colors, which rubbed into the stamp will never be taken away again because it will not only be dried into the flesh, but grow therein. . . .

Their ears they bore with wide holes commonly two or three, and in the same they do hang chains of stained pearl, bracelets of white bone, or shreds of Copper, beaten thin and bright, and wound up hollow, and with a great pride certain Fowls' legs, Eagles, Hawks, Turkeys, etc., with Beasts' Claws, Bears, Arrahacounes [Raccoons], Squirrels, etc. the claws thrust through, they let hang upon the Cheek to the full view; and some of their men there be, who will wear in these holes, a small green and yellow colored live Snake near half a yard in length, which Crawling and lapping himself about his neck oftentimes familiarly he suffers to kiss his lips, others wear a dead rat tied by the Tail, and such like Conundrums. . . .

Some of them are of disposition fearful (as I said) and not easily wrought therefore to trust us, or Come into our Forts, others again of them are so bold and audacious as they dare come unto our forts, truck and trade with us and look us in the face, crying all friends, when they have but new done us a mischief, and when they intend presently again, if it lie in their power to do the like, they are generally Covetous of our Commodities, as Copper, white beads for their women, Hatchets, of which we make them poor ones of Iron, Hoes to pare their Corn ground, knives and such like.

They are soon moved to anger, and so malicious that they seldom forget an Injury; they are very thievish, and will as closely as they can convey any thing away from us, howbeit they seldom steal one from another, lest their Conjurers should reveal it, and so they be pursued and punished: that they are thus feared it is certain; nor let any man doubt but that the devil can reveal an offence actually committed.