

**DR. ANDREW LIPMAN ON HIS BOOK,
*SQUANTO: A NATIVE ODYSSEY***

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KYLE ROBERTS: My name is Kyle Roberts, and I am the Executive Director of the Congregational Library & Archives. Welcome to today's virtual book talk, *Squanto: A Native Odyssey*, with Professor Andrew Lipman.

To begin, I want to acknowledge that the Congregational Library & Archives resides in what is now known as Boston, which is in the Place of the Blue Hills, the homeland of the Massachusetts people, whose relationships and connections with the land continue to this day and into the future.

For those of you joining us for the first time, the Congregational Library & Archives is an independent research library. Established in 1853, the CLA's mission is to foster a deeper understanding of the spiritual, intellectual, cultural, and civic dimensions of the Congregational story and its ongoing relevance in the 21st century.

We do this through free access to our research library of 225,000 books, pamphlets, periodicals, and manuscripts, and our digital archive with more than 130,000 images, many drawn from our New England's Hidden Histories project. Throughout the year, we offer educational programs and research fellowships for students, scholars, churches, and really anybody interested in Congregationalism's influence on the American story. I hope you'll check out our website, congregationallibrary.org, to learn more about our work and for upcoming events.

Dr. Andrew Lipman, or Drew, as we know him, is Associate Professor of history at Barnard College, Columbia University. His first book, which is truly excellent... If you haven't had a chance to read it, I encourage you to go get a copy. *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast*, was published by Yale in 2015, and it was the winner of the Bancroft Prize in American History. He's here this afternoon to talk about his second book, *Squanto: A Native Odyssey*, which was published by Yale in 2024.

Thanks so much, Drew, for being here. I'll turn it over to you.

ANDREW LIPMAN: Thank you, Kyle. And thank you, everyone, for logging in today. It's truly an honor to be here.

Kyle didn't mention this, but I went to graduate school with him, so I really appreciate his hospitality here. And everyone at the Congregational Library & Archives who has been truly terrific.

So, just to get things started, it's likely if you made it here today or if you're familiar with the Congregational Library, you probably have some ties to New England, as I do. I grew up right near the Congregational Library in Brooklyn... in Brookline.

And if so, you probably don't need a thorough introduction... You don't you don't need a basic introduction to Squanto. Of course he is, he's famed as the Patuxet Wampanoag man who spoke English, greeted the Mayflower Pilgrims soon after they arrived in North America, taught them how to plant corn with fish as fertilizer, and thus made the first Thanksgiving in Plymouth Colony in 1621 possible.

Now of course, there are deeper layers to his story that aren't quite as well known. He also went by Tisquantum, and the reason that he was able to speak English was because his time with the Pilgrims came after an ocean-spanning odyssey.

He grew up in Patuxet, the original name for Plymouth, Massachusetts. In 1614, an English explorer captured him and 20 odd other Wampanoag men to sell them into the Mediterranean slave trade.

For the next five years, his fate rested in the hands of Europeans. In Malaga, Spain, a Catholic priest briefly took custody of him. Then English imperialists brought him first to the busy streets of London, then to a tiny outpost on Newfoundland with a possible stopover in Jamestown, and then to the original Plymouth in England, before finally allowing him to return home in 1619.

His return voyage had a tragic ending. He discovered that his home in Patuxet had been abandoned. An epidemic had swept across the shore, killing tens of thousands, including most of his fellow villagers. In late 1620, a year after he came back, the most famous ship in American history sailed into Patuxet's harbor. Soon thereafter, when he... he performed his famous deeds.

Now, it's worth noting this is not the first book that's ever been written about Squanto. In fact, there are close to two dozen children's titles about him. There's also several cartoons, including a 1988 Peanuts special and a live action Hollywood film with a \$20 million budget called, *Squanto: A Warrior's Tale*, which Walt Disney Pictures released to mostly empty theaters in October of 1994.

Now, some of these books, actually most of these children's books do talk about his time overseas. Some explicitly mentioned that he was enslaved and that most of his family died upon his return. But these children's books all leave out what is one of the more interesting

chapters in his story: What happened after that three-day-long feast between Massasoit and the colonists in 1621?

The English had only finished clearing away the deer bones and shells from the meal when some Wampanoag started complaining to the Plymouth leadership that their new Native friend had ruthless ambitions. These Natives alleged that Squanto was demanding tributes from followers, bribing allies with gifts, and intimidating those who resisted him with threats that he could unleash the plague once again.

The settlers were shocked. They began to see, Governor William Bradford wrote, that Squanto sought his own ends and played his own game. "Thus by degrees, we began to discover Tisquantum," wrote Edward Winslow, disappointed that his trusted guide wanted only to make himself great in the eyes of his countrymen.

Upon learning of his schemings, Massasoit demanded the colonists execute Tisquantum. The settlers were fond of him. Despite their misgivings about his behavior, they ended up sheltering him.

In November 1622, with this controversy seemingly behind him, the translator led the English on a trading mission that brought them to Monomoy, the place on Cape Cod later named Chatham, Massachusetts. And it was there that he came down with an ominous fever.

In his final days, Tisquantum beckoned Bradford to his bedside. The dying man asked the governor to pray for him that he might go to the Englishman's God in heaven. This confession of faith likely came as a surprise to the colonists. In their writings, none mentioned him having any particular interest in Christianity before his death.

Squanto took so many mysteries with him to his grave. What happened to him during those years of captivity overseas? How did he manage to return home when the other men taken with him had not? Why was he so willing to help the English after being captured by an Englishman? Clearly he sought his own ends, but what exactly were those ends? What compelled him to make a deathbed conversion?

Is it even possible to collect all the scraps of evidence now, 400 years later, and come up with plausible answers? Well, that's what my book is. I try to reconstruct this extraordinary life that ended when most Americans think their story begins.

Now, despite all these books on Plymouth, when I began this... on Squanto, I mean, when I began this project, it was obvious to me from the start why no one had written a serious, full-length book for adults. And the problem really lies in the sources. So many chapters of his life have thin documentation. We don't know much about him before he was taken. And there are many gaps in his story.

So I had to adopt a kind of combination of approaches. And in some ways, I have a little bit of a metaphor here on this, on this slide, which I also have in the book... is that I think the combination approaches can be a little bit like the work of paleontologists. For many species, they have never found a complete skeleton in the fossil record, just fragments. Nonetheless, they are able to, with some confidence, construct the frame, organs, flesh, diet, and behavior of a creature from the past.

And they do this by drawing on the insights of multiple disciplines: from comparative anatomy, from related creatures, from living ones, from surrounding plant and animal fossils, from climatological data, and so on. And that's what I've tried to do to recreate Tisquantum's story.

And just to be clear here, it's not Tisquantum I'm trying to put back to life. It's really the story. And in terms of this metaphor, the bones are those fragments of textual evidence about his life, much of which was written by the colonists themselves, especially accounts by Edward Winslow and William Bradford.

I've also incorporated new research from European archives, including some truly surprising brand-new discoveries that shed light on his time in Spain. I've also brought in some exciting new archeological finds from Plymouth that change our understanding of the early settlement.

And I spent time talking to and learning from museum educators, especially at Plimoth Patuxet Museums, where interpreters have long done careful work to recreate the homes and cornfields of Squanto's youth. This work, too, has put me in conversation with Wampanoag scholars, who have also devoted much of their professional lives to understanding the 17th century Wampanoag world.

Also key to my thinking was the published scholarship of Jessie Little Doe Baird, the Wampanoag citizen who helped create the Wampanoag Language Project, a groundbreaking linguistic reclamation that has brought the language that Squanto spoke back to life in the last three decades across the traditional Wampanoag lands, which include most of southeastern Massachusetts and eastern Rhode Island.

Now together, this textual, linguistic, cultural, archeological, and environmental evidence create a vibrant palette, which I think allows us to paint a new portrait of a man who I think is too often rendered as a caricature.

So my story begins in the late 16th century in Tisquantum's boyhood, his childhood and his young adult years. And it's fair to say this part of the book is more ethnographic than biographic. It's grounded in what we know about the daily life, material culture, language, religion, social structure, and government of the society that raised him. So the result is, in

some ways, a composite picture of a typical boy growing up in Patuxet and not quite a depiction of the real young man.

But here again, this is where the sources are important. Much of the descriptive evidence we have of Wampanoag life, especially from those early accounts, came from men whose primary informant was Tisquantum.

So when Edward Winslow writes about the manship rite... the manhood rites that young men went through, he's almost certainly hearing an account of Tisquantum, of his own childhood. So I do think there are ways in which we consider some of those colonial sources to have kind of a secret co-author, someone who's at least informing what might be a somewhat distorted picture of Wampanoag perspectives and life.

Another particular challenge in this section was trying to communicate the subtleties of the Wampanoag language. In fact, there's about three pages of the book on linguistics. And I will say that was easily the most labor intensive three pages I've ever written. And I'll be honest, this is probably the part of the book where I might lose a few readers who find it just a little bit too academic. But I also think it is exactly when I'm gonna win over the readers who are looking for a substantive discussion of the Wampanoag world beyond just using colonial descriptions.

Tisquantum's language has an incredible density of meaning. Jessie Baird, the linguist who brought it back to life, points out that oftentimes a single word in the Wampanoag language would really be a whole sentence in English. The language is also particularly dense with kinship terms. At one point I list the 15 different ways that a Wampanoag parent could say "my children," depending on to whom they were speaking, in what context, and even the gender of those children.

I also found a particular poignancy and significance in this Wampanoag taboo around speaking the name of the dead. And this linguistic workaround in their language called the absentative, which is a suffix added to a proper noun that indicates that it is missing or dead. In so much of Tisquantum's life, he really existed in this absentative state: when he was missing or dead to his family when he was overseas. And then he returned to find that most of his own community had forever slipped into the absentative.

And this section is also a place where I get to introduce the dynamic and sometimes dangerous political world that Squanto navigated, both as a politician in his own right, and as the colonists' translator and interpreter. And again, language is key to understanding this realm, as Native politicians spoke in poetry and metaphor. And leaders placed so much emphasis on mourning and condolence as a way of settling disputes and avoiding war.

Later in the book, we can see how the man known as Massasoit, also known as Ousamequin, was a master of this kind of rhetoric, and how it allowed him to rather thoughtfully wield

power as opposed to Tisquantum, who could be rather reckless when he tried to pose as a Native leader himself.

Now, the Wampanoag political world was entering an increasingly turbulent period, just as the young Squanto came of age. It all began when a parade of mysterious vessels started making landfall near Patuxet in the decade before his captivity.

Now, these encounters were not first contacts. The peoples of these shores had known about Europeans for generations. And not all the unfamiliar sailors were actually European. Some were Mi'kmaq an Indigenous maritime power that was expanding its range with European-made craft at the same time that the French and English started poking around these shores.

By the year 1611, when the English returned to this part of the coast... of the downlands, Tisquantum and the rest of Patuxet would start to see these sailors for what they truly were: scouts for a future invasion. The nearest neighbors of the Patuxet started confirming that the passing strangers were not just interesting and swapping goods for furs, they were stealing men away.

And that begins the second section of my book: Away, where I look at his captivity from several angles. One sort of small goal I try to accomplish in this book is clearing up some pretty common confusion about when and where Tisquantum was taken by the English.

For those of you, and I imagine there are a few in the audience who are particularly well read on early Plymouth and Tisquantum's life, you may know that some scholars have theorized that he was taken more than once. And I sort of joke in the book, this is almost as though he was like the star of a Hollywood action franchise who kept stumbling into the same situation in each sequel. And I try to put that speculation to rest by establishing that he was only taken that one time, and that, in fact, the reason that he's often thought to have been taken more than once is because historians have undercounted the sheer number of men, and it's over 50 who were, like him, who were taken against their will to serve as interpreters for explorers.

And another sort of necessary prelude to getting to his odyssey is to talk about two of those men... who were taken before him. And not only did their experiences foreshadow his ordeals, but their kidnappings are really part of a connected process with his. They told a lie to save themselves and be returned home: That there was gold in southern New England. And the rumors of that gold were part of the reason that the man on this slide, John Smith, arrived in Patuxet when he did.

And traveling with John Smith, his second in command was Thomas Hunt, who was the man who would ultimately kidnap Squanto. And when Hunt captured him at the end of his voyage with Smith, and without Smith's knowledge or consent, that is what began Tisquantum's epic odyssey.

Now, this map is the clearest picture of where I track and place him from... across the Atlantic. And you'll notice just sort of a few details here. There's a few time windows that are not entirely clear. And I've added in his return voyage from Newfoundland, what I believe to be a likely stop that he made in the Jamestown colony with the explorer Thomas Dermer.

And if those of you interested in sort of that question, it all comes from a sentence in a well-known source, in, Edward Winslow's, "Good News from America," where he sort of mentions at the side that Tisquantum has been to Virginia. And I tried to sort of place that and put a little context with that. But I did not find any confirmation in the Virginia records to tell me where he was there, when he was there, and what exactly happened. And I do believe it was more of a passing visit than any sort of extended stay.

Now, this story though, the original leg of his voyage was when his captor Hunt brought him and over 20 other Wampanoag men to Malaga, Spain, which, as you can see on this map, rests just inside the Mediterranean, on the other side of the Strait of Gibraltar.

Now this is where I came into a particular wrinkle in this story. All that we basically knew about what happened in Malaga was from a few accounts: from a brief mention in Bradford, an account by John Smith, and one by the colonial promoter, Fernando Gorges that mentioned that he got away from this, the mechanism of which was unclear, and that the other Natives were taken in by some local friars to be converted to the Catholic faith. And that's all we knew until very recently.

And these details remained foggy until a Spanish historian named Purificacion Ruiz Garcia, who was working in the Malaga provincial archives in the 2010s, came across two curious deeds. They were signed by one Thomas Hunt, and the deeds documented the transfer of two dozen Indios to the care of a corrupt local priest named Juan Bautista Reales.

Now, the name Hunt meant nothing to Ruiz, but she knew that there was something fishy about these documents. Something that just didn't add up. So she started researching Hunt, and much to her surprise, she found out that she had come into clues about a 400 year old mystery. And again, I can get into this a little bit more in the Q&A. But, sort of the main context that she gives here is that we know that this... that Malaga, Spain was one of the busiest slave trading ports in the Mediterranean, where captives, mostly Muslim captives from the Maghreb and further south in Africa, were sold in a busy dockside market. And what she discovered was that the sale of these Wampanoag captives to this local priest was done to sort of skirt a Spanish law that forbid enslaving Indigenous people from the Americas and create a sort of plausible deniability that this was a sale, even though it rather clearly from the documents was.

Another key point in these deeds was that Hunt lied about where the men were from. He said he had taken them from Cape Breton, which is right next to Newfoundland. And to me, that's a pretty important clue because it explains why Tisquantum ended up first being taken in by

colonial supporters of the new colony in Newfoundland, that they believed he was from nearby Cape Breton. And that to me is a pretty clear clue as well that Tisquantum was taken soon after he arrived in Spain, before the, his path could be traced back and the English could figure out that he wasn't actually from near Newfoundland. So to me, this helps piece together a few different, a few different parts of this story.

I was also able to learn a little bit more in my own work in British archives about other aspects of his story. This is just a great picture that Puri shared with me of the kind of documents she was working in the Malega archives with. And you can see that she really did find the proverbial needle in a haystack in terms of finding this exciting discovery.

Other things that I did learn, though, was about the people who took him in in London. He, for about two years, lived in the household of one John Slaney, who was a Merchant Taylor and a member, really the chief executive of the Newfoundland Company, which was sponsoring a new, small trading and fishing village on the island.

I also found out that his brother, named Humphrey Slaney, is probably one of the likely people who learned about the captives in Malaga and was probably the one who recruited Tisquantum to be his interpreter. And this Humphrey Slaney, unlike his brother John, was very well traveled, had lived in the Azores for time and regularly visited the ports of southern Spain. So that's why he's the person I think of as the kind of most likely person to transfer Tisquantum from one place to another.

Now once Tisquantum had arrived in the English capital, he lived with John and his wife Elizabeth in their house in Cornhill, a prosperous district of trading companies near the city's core.

Now, there's no indication that anyone in London took pains to instruct Squanto formally in English, and he seems to have picked up the language mostly through immersion, which experts believe is the fastest way for anyone to pick up a new language. It's also worth noting that the language that the Slaneys spoke is not the same language spoken in London today. They spoke a distinct, archaic dialect of English that has since been reconstructed by literary scholars, and because of that it's often referred to as Shakespearean original pronunciation.

Knowing this language that they spoke actually gives us a little bit more detail into understanding the challenges that Tisquantum faced learning to speak the English language. For example, unlike a modern English dialect, which the "r" is often dropped, like think father or rather, the English people in the 17th century emphasized the "r." And they had a kind of a hard, almost growling dogish sound to their "r," which is particularly difficult for someone like Squanto because the Wampanoag language has no "r" sound.

And in fact, it adds a little bit of context to the colonial descriptions saying that their Native neighbors used an "n" sound for "l," which they also didn't have, and "n" for "r." In one

example, calling a lobster a “nobsten.” The Plymouth settler Winslow reported that the Massasoit called him “Wisnow.”

So when Squanto was first learning this language, he would have faced this kind of challenge. Likely pronounced his host’s names as “Snaney” and called his temporary home “Engnand.” In their everyday exchanges with them, the Slaneys would have surely made an effort to improve his pronunciation and grammar, while explaining the words and phrases that puzzled him. And once he was proficient, he was ready to serve his master's company in the place that they also called Terra Nova, or the Newfoundland. And this is part of why his return home was not a straight path.

He first came across the icy waters of the North Atlantic in 1617 or 1618, to the harbor of Cupers Cove in Newfoundland, where the international codfish market had created a bizarrely amphibious and seasonal colony. The visiting fishermen and the small population of colonists had tensions with the local Beothuk people. Tensions that the English hoped a translator like Tisquantum could ease, and potentially through speaking to Natives, learn more about the potential riches of Newfoundland and the secrets that it held in its interior.

And again, they were like a lot of early English explorers, hoping that there might be precious metals, or at the very least iron, which there actually is in Newfoundland, which would add another source of profits to this colony beyond just fishing.

But again, the Beothuk side of the story is pretty complicated. And here's where I had to turn mostly to archeology. The Beothuk were very small in population. The estimates of their pre-contact history has their population at roughly 1,000 people, which is an interesting number because the estimate of the pre-colonial population of Patuxet that Tisquantum gave was 2,000 people, which meant that he had gone from his village to an island where the Indigenous population was half of his entire village. And Newfoundland is not a small place. It's actually bigger than Ireland.

Moreover, these islanders had only rare contact with other Native people on the mainland. So they lacked the robust traditions of diplomacy and alliance making that was so important in Tisquantum's much more crowded Indigenous world.

So we also know from the vague references in the only surviving account of that period that colonists attempted to contact the Newfoundland Natives and were unsuccessful. So that means that Tisquantum probably never got the chance to meet the actual Native population. And even if he had, the differences inbetween their language and the Wampanoag language were too great for him to be much use as an interpreter.

But it was in Terra Nova where he made a pretty fateful new friend, the trader and explorer Thomas Dermer, who he once... who later was referred to as his honored friend, who realized that because he was not from nearby Cape Breton, that he could potentially be a guide in his

actual homelands. And that would be southern New England. So Dermer decided to convince the backers of Newfoundland colonization to hire him and Tisquantum to go on another reconnaissance mission, which is what brought Tisquantum home in 1619.

Before that he had confirmed, last winter in the original Plymouth, near, in Devon. And then he arrived home to encounter the shocking aftermath of recent epidemics. An unknown pathogen, probably transmitted by French sailors, had killed as many as 90% of the local Wampanoag and Massachusett people, hitting heaviest throughout the shore of eastern Massachusetts in what is now coastal New Hampshire and Maine. Tisquantum, upon returning, would have to grapple with a world that must have seemed post-apocalyptic.

Now contrary to previous scholarship, I argue that he was not the sole survivor of Patuxet, which is a common thing that many previous writers have said about him. Though the town itself was abandoned when he arrived, the sources are clear that he did have extended family among surviving Wampanoags. In fact, there's even some contextual evidence to support the theory that he might have remarried and that his new wife lived in Nemasket, now Middleborough, Massachusetts, where the colonists later mentioned having breakfast at "the house of Squanto."

Now we know that Wampanoag people lived in a mater-local culture, in which women sort of stayed put and men moved into their households. If Tisquantum had a wife in Nemasket, it's likely that's where she would make her home. And they were not, in fact, at the house of Squanto. They were the house of his female kin, whether he was married to them or they were through previous blood relation is unclear.

Now, upon reestablishing himself among the Wampanoag people, he was a fateful interpreter soon after the Mayflower made landfall in December of 1620. Now this is, of course, the best-known part of the story. And I kind of doubt this audience needs a total rehashing. But the main thing, the main point was that within a few months of its founding, Plymouth looked more like a graveyard than a colony since half of the original colonists died from exposure and malnutrition over that first winter.

And the nearby Wampanoags at Pokanoket who had met Dermer and Tisquantum were also still reeling from their own losses in the epidemics. And it was their leader, Ousamequin or Massasoit, who had the foresight to attempt to form an alliance using Tisquantum and a Wabanaki man named Samoset as his initial translators. Together, translating between Ousamequin, his brother, and the governor, John Carver, the two translators helped broker an initial pact of... an initial pact of mutual defense between the newcomers and the Wampanoags.

Now Massasoit left the village once the pact was made, but Tisquantum stayed on. For the first time since Hunt's crew shoved him below decks almost seven years earlier, he made

Patuxet his home again. And it was then that he performed the kind of bread and loaves, fabled deed of teaching the settlers how to raise corn using fish as fertilizer.

And one sort of small point I do make here. There's an old sort of scholarly dispute about whether he learned that practice in Europe or not that has also been rather conclusively put to rest by more recent archeology that has discovered evidence of Native people using fish as fertilizer in the archeological record dating to before the colonial arrival. It's another sort of one of these small points I make sure to kind of set straight in this narrative.

Now, this is also the point in the book where I think I make the biggest single revision to the scholarship on Tisquantum in early Plymouth. And I contend, and here I have, I think, documentary and archeological evidence, that that first summer when he was helping out the Mayflower colonists, he was not alone. In fact, I think we should think of him and his surviving kin and friends as kind of establishing a seasonal village across the narrow town brook in Plymouth, crossing the English settlement in that same summer, just as Squanto was performing his famed acts of generosity towards the settlers. And I think it was this small, mobile Indigenous community that was somewhat attached to the town of Nemasket that was his supporting constituency when he began his ill-fated political machinations.

Now this theory that Patuxet was reborn alongside Plymouth changes the standard picture of the settlement's first year, where their village is typically imagined as kind of an isolated, lonely group of colonists aided by a single Native consultant. But instead, and this is from, this is right in some of those original sources who talk about visiting parties of Natives. If we understand that Native people in the summer months often went and broke into bands to do hunting and fishing and shell fishing, as they were described doing here, they were in many ways making kind of a seasonal visit to Patuxet, a place that many of those visitors probably were originally from. And that put the English in constant contact with this mirroring Wampanoag community.

And this is not supposed to be exactly, sort of, what the village itself would have looked like, the wetus across the brook. But we do know that the English are constant. There were very many Native people visiting over that entire summer. And my hope is to kind of correct a common misconception that the returning captive was the sole survivor, and thus was, and this is in the words of a recent source, recent pop history, "an outsider, an alien, one without a people."

And in framing him as a lonely actor who single handedly assists the colonists, many previous writers have argued he did so really out of his own self-interest. And I think in my rereading, his actions appear in a different light. He's best understood as a figure who I think was motivated by the communal concerns of this circle of friends, and allies, and family, and by his own personal ambition.

When he was later found out to be plotting against other Native leaders and opportunistically using the colonists as his allies, it's my belief that this shows how he sought his own ends for a larger constituency. And that he saw the English as help mates to his people, returning the favors that he had offered them. He never intended to create an exclusively English place, but rather, I believe, was hoping to bring his old community back to life with the help and alliance of a band of useful new neighbors.

His vision was grounded in some age-old Wampanoag ideas about kinship, condolence, reciprocity, and spirituality. But when putting his plan into motion, he defied some of the core rules of Indigenous politics. And his deceitful attempts to challenge the traditional structures of power would lead to his undoing. And that's in many ways the most dramatic part of the book. The events that led to his almost execution, that were then followed by his enigmatic death when he supposedly asked to go to the Englishman's God in heaven.

Now, in this book, I try to go a lot deeper into some of those sort of lingering mysteries. And I'm not going to get fully into all of them today because we only have so much time, and I can't spoil everything because I do want you to still have a reason to read the book.

Now while I don't settle all the outstanding questions conclusively, and indeed probably never could, I think I came closest to understanding Tisquantum when I came to see him as a teller of tales, which is not coincidentally a common epithet attached to the figure of Odysseus. The man from Patuxet, like the man from Ithaca, was also famously wily, a man of twists and turns, and a man of many sorrows.

Ultimately, it was the Patuxet man's way with words, both in Wampanoag and English, that defined his character. He possessed a true gift for talking people into things and talking his way out of things. When tested again and again overseas, he proved to be a quick study, picking up a new language and convincing his captors of his usefulness to secure his way home.

Once returned, he brazenly brought a heated Englishman with him and vouched for this foreigner, that was Dermer. Months later, he leveraged his linguistic abilities to become an indispensable envoy to that small village of the English, while at the same time he used his facilities with fiction to amass a following of old and new Native allies.

Right up to his very last days on Earth he remained a bold persuader, assuring his English companions that he would find his way through difficult waters before he was struck down with that deadly fever.

I think in his struggles, we can find echoes of an old question from Homeric literature. After years at sea, can a homesick wanderer ever truly go home again?

And there's a part, and this is where I kind of have to turn to the book itself.... There's a part of his story that I had to sort of get to and accept some of the mysteries and the absences in his story. And that is the question of what actually became of his body. There... for those of you who might be familiar with the town of Chatham, there's actually two sites in Chatham that claim to be the site where he died and where his remains have been found. And in the conclusion, I talk a little bit about why that's actually a very hard point to sustain. And in fact very... it's very likely he was not in that place.

And I believe that this is somehow fitting that we actually cannot locate Tisquantum in the Earth since he himself actually believed that sometimes the most powerful kind of monument is one that isn't there. And we know this from the colonist Edward Winslow, who talked about a practice that he learned from Tisquantum of how the local Wampanoag people often marked the place of important events and deeds, not by building something and putting a something there, but by digging a hole. And that every time someone passed by that hole, they were duty bound to clear out any dirt that had come into it or anything that was starting to grow into it to keep that hole, that spot of absence there. And when doing so, to tell the story of what happened in this sort of pit of memory.

Writing about this practice, Winslow marveled at how it kept many things of great antiquity fresh in memory. And he wrote, "if one can understand his guide," in this case, he's definitely talking about Tisquantum, "his journey will be the less tedious by reason of the many historical discourses which will be related to him."

Now, it's tempting to lament that Winslow never transcribed any of the Patuxet man's histories, but that would be missing the point. These narratives were meant to be given a voice again and again, kept alive over the generations by speakers, not writers. Tisquantum, that teller of tales, avoided the false certainty of a marker like Plymouth Rock. He preferred a verbally preserved poetic nothingness over a heavy-handed granite, somethingness. He knew that in time, a forgotten hole would fill in on its own. So the absence of dirt reflected the presence of historians. It was reminiscent of that absentative suffix in his own language, the grammatical convention that let speakers recall a lost person without ever speaking their name. The missing name in a Wampanoag sentence, like the missing piece of Earth alongside a Wampanoag path, demonstrated reverence for those who came before.

Now, I think the point of this book is to do justice to the real person. But it's not just mythbusting. There are better reasons to learn about this past than seeking a cheap feeling of superiority over your grade school teachers. And debunking the narrative that he was a happily welcoming Indigene is about as easy as tipping over a cardboard cutout. I think it takes a little more work to explore his culture, to retrace his travels, and then use this information to reconsider a misunderstood man.

Thank you. So that's my talk. And I'd be delighted to take questions from the audience.

KYLE: Thanks so much, Drew, that was fantastic.

And I'm about to jump in. I've got a thousand questions. I'm not gonna ask them all, but... So I think one of the things that you touch on in the, in the introduction that I want to probe a little, which I think is of potentially of interest to Congregational audiences, is that kind of deathbed moment, you know.

And I mean, the source that we have for that, right is, you know, the English recipient of that request. What do you, what do you do with Squanto's relationship to Christianity? Did you find anything that led you to kind of formulate a theory of where he fell?

ANDREW: Yeah. So it is, you know, it's this fantastic mystery.

And it's something that a number of previous writers have connected that somewhat mistaken information in Spain to and thought, well, he was introduced, believing that maybe he then, you know, because the sources were unclear, many people had sort of assumed that he stayed in Spain for a while. That he might have been there for years under the care of friars. There's a literary scholar who just asserts with confidence that he spoke Spanish. And some have claimed that he was Catholic as well. That's also something. Again, these are based on a few sentences.

I think the new deeds really, really make that unlikely, that he even spent much time at all and probably was not converted. So that somewhat falls away as being a likely source of any exposure he had to Christianity.

However, we do know that the Slaneys were, you know, devout Anglicans, that they gave a lot and were involved in their local parish. And so he's likely brought to that, to local services there and also to services at the old St. Paul's Cathedral in London. That seems almost certain since he was with them for a while.

And of course, he also would have observed, you know, regular prayers and heard psalms in every shipboard passage that he made and also in Newfoundland, as well. So he certainly had exposure to Christianity.

And again, we know a bit about, you know, other Native converts and some of the things that they would respond to: the iconography of Christ on the cross, the Virgin Mary, that we have some sort of contextual evidence from other converts. So, you know, there's a story, there's something that could have interested him.

But in terms of thinking about, you know, his conversion, I think it is, it is telling that it's only sort of mentioned as an end of his life moment. And I think this is where my sort of theory and read on this was from pulling on a lot of the excellent work done by scholars including Jean O'Brien, Linford Fisher, and David Silverman, and Neale Salisbury on Native converts in which

they noticed there's a few distinct factors that made some Native people more likely to convert, and, in fact, are the reasons that Native people gave when they gave their own spiritual narratives of conversion.

They... a common theme was losing a number of your own family and community to epidemics. And that, in fact, the early Native people to come to the praying towns led by John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew were the survivors of areas that had been hit hard by those epidemics. So that's certainly a factor that was in Tisquantum's life.

Another point, mentioned in conversion narratives was the idea of a transgression against community, of some sort of a point of ostracizing, or shame, or putting one's own will up above God's. That would certainly be part of Tisquantum's story as well, if he was familiar with the beliefs of his, of his puritan neighbors.

One more factor that also influenced people's conversion was an encounter with death, of which we know Tisquantum had several.

So the three main factors given for why people converted were all things that Tisquantum went through. So in many ways, I think if we think of him as someone who was at least curious about Christianity, he definitely fits the profile. He has... his path is actually a very common one.

So I think, while it's tempting to place his European experience as being the reason for his conversion, I think that in many ways it's that changed world that he returned to, and indeed his personal story of kind of attempting, to, to remake the world as he would like and then failing, that sort of humility and mourning were probably the main things driving him to have some interest in the Christian faith.

KYLE: Great.

And I love in your answer, you're really showing us the methodology that undergirds how you've done this entire book, right? That you have a lovely line in your intro where you say that if we were to stick only to a dreary list of the uncontested things we know, we wouldn't have much of a history to read.

But that thinking about other examples and thinking about those contexts really help us kind of understand the potential of what we wouldn't be able to know otherwise.

ANDREW: Yeah.

No, and I think it's... one thing is, and we do know, actually know quite a bit about the Native people of southern New England in some ways. And this is... those conversion narratives are things written in the hand of Native people, sometimes in the Wampanoag language. That's

actually... that preservation in the number of literate converts is actually how the language is able to be brought back to life.

And that it isn't just colonial sources and Native sources. That in fact, there's actually a spectrum. And that does, I think, give us some real insight into how these Wampanoag people thought and prayed in the 17th century. And it's not an unknowable thing.

KYLE: Thank you.

So I've got a question here from Doug Gray, who asks, what is the Wampanoag tradition around the epidemic that decimated the area before Tisquantum returned?

ANDREW: Well, that's a very complicated question.

One, you know, sort of in, among modern Wampanoag people, I believe was Paula Peters who's coined this term that I think is commonly used, the Great Dying, to refer to that.

In terms of how was understood at the time, you know, I went, I talked a bit about some of the sources often taken from later, from the 1630s and 1640s, of colonists talking to Native people about that. That they had an understanding, at least in the sources, that this might have been the action of a vengeful European god.

Of course, they had a polytheistic religion. The idea that Europeans had a spirit acting on their behalf was consistent with polytheism. And that, in fact, they believed that this had been foretold by French sailors who'd been taken as captives a couple years before Tisquantum returned. Actually, Tisquantum redeemed two of those French sailors with Thomas Dermer when he returned. That one had apparently said that God would curse the Native people for taking him captive. That was sort of retroactively seen as a, as an omen.

They also saw the Great Comet of 1618 as an omen, which is a pretty important event that was remarked upon by... James I wrote a poem about it. It's something... and I want to you know, just sort of show my sources and homage... the writer Nick Bunker, in his history of "The Mayflower Pilgrims," sort of pointed to this as kind of a signal event, in a feeling that war was imminent. As it was, the Thirty Years War was about to break out on the Atlantic side. And then on the Native side as well, the idea that this omen foretold new, momentous things to come. So the idea that there was some omens to this as part of that.

And then there are quotations from colonists saying as well that Native people were, saw this as, was part of their fear of the, of the English people not just being with the material things that the English had, like firearms. But that this was a, something that they themselves had control of, which Tisquantum would claim that he actually could unleash this epidemic again. And that he actually somewhat claimed that the epidemic itself was contained in the gunpowder that the colonists had buried in their blockhouse.

And that in itself, you know, I spent a little time thinking through that. I don't think necessarily that we should say that Tisquantum was lying when he said that. The idea that a potent substance could, you know, something that could make, you know, thunder come out of a gun, also to be able to strike people down. I don't think that's necessarily, from his worldview, a leap that we could... that that's something that I think is an interesting connection.

So there's a lot to it. There's many layers here. This was an absolutely transformative event. And again, there's even more, sort of, work on Native people and epidemics throughout the American story that is fascinating. And again, I can... some of these things are rabbit holes where you can kind of keep going. I sort of give a summation in the book and then kind of have to keep moving on, because I... while I love doing this delving, I also want to have a story to tell with a little bit of momentum to it.

KYLE: Of course.

So Katherine Rhoda asked, did Squanto spend any time on Monhegan Island, Maine?

ANDREW: Yes.

So when he returns to North America with Dermer in 1619, that is their first stop because Dermer has this voyage funded, but he has to have returns. So he's there with trade goods. He trades with the local Abenaki peoples. Almost certainly, this is where Tisquantum met Samoset, the other interpreter at that first treaty, who was there at Monhegan Island and making contact with the visiting English and French traders there. That's how he was able to speak English.

And they were there for several weeks before they then ended up sailing further south down the coast. And, so he was definitely there. Definitely been there.

It's also, I think, you know, we do know that Native people traveled fairly widely throughout the coast, that making voyages of several hundred miles was common enough. He'd likely been to at least parts of what's now the Maine coast earlier in his life. And, so yeah, that was definitely a place that he went to. And one location among many that's significant in his story.

KYLE: Thank you.

Great question here from Charles Hambrick-Stowe, who says it's been a few years since he has visited Plimoth Patuxet, and he's wondering how your work is being received there. Is your telling of the story being integrated in the narrative presented there, both on the Pilgrim side and the Wampanoag side?

ANDREW: Yeah.

The answer is yes. I've had a particularly good relationship with the deputy director there, Richard Pickering, and several past and current members of the Indigenous staff.

But, and one just thing I just will note, and this is, you know, relevant and may even be mentioned by Linda Coombs when she speaks later this week. There is... there has recently been some falling out of some former Wampanoag interpreters with the museum, some of which has been patched over. There is now a growing new Wampanoag staff. And it had to do particularly with some of the treatment of the Wampanoag historic site collection practices.

Then there was a break in of, involving the Wampanoag tribal chief on the, in the museum. It's kind of a big, messy story that I allude to in a paragraph of the book. And it's complicated. It shows sort of the complicated nature of, you know, non-Indigenous institutions trying to work with Indigenous partners. And that is a very complicated part that I've tried not to put myself in the middle of. But I've learned from people on sort of all sides.

So some of the... in answer of how this actually changes Plimoth Patuxet, you know, Plimoth, the staff there has been aware of some of these archeological discoveries that have been influential to me. And they've, they've actually taken and built a new Native home, a wetu, just outside the Plimoth village. And that's reflecting both archeological finds that there were both, often nearby Native houses and sort of people in the neighborhood.

And then the presence of one particular person who died in 1628, Hobbamock, who's another Indigenous man who would eventually become an interpreter, who lived alongside the Plymouth Colony. And in an early record is given a set plot of land where he and his family lived. So that kind of, you know, close proximity of Native and Indigenous... of Indigenous and colonial houses is something that is now reflected more directly in the museum.

And I was able to do a kind of book launch there in September in which I was talking to many museum staff. So yes, I've been really lucky to work with those interpreters. And they've taken some inspiration from my work. But in many ways, I wouldn't have begun this project, or would have given up on this project long ago if I hadn't already been visiting and working with people there and getting some real enthusiasm and encouragement that writing this book was possible. As I mentioned, there were a lot of challenges to doing it. So, I can... they might credit me to some things, but really, I think I have to credit them. I think museums and public historians have always been central to how I think and imagine the past. And, I really admire the work they do.

KYLE: Thanks.

This question from David Perez makes me think about your opening when you're thinking about the different disciplines that you're interested in and kind of open to pulling on. And

David writes, I'm thinking of how traumatic Tisquantum's arrival back to Patuxet must have been and his arrival to Europe. I'm curious if there's a way to read his relationship with his captors as a sort of Stockholm syndrome.

His travels, if we call him that, we're not by his choice. It's something we know a lot more about being captive now than back in the 1600s. Thinking here, you know, PTSD, is there room for this take in writing a history of him?

ANDREW: Yeah.

You know that is... I would largely avoid... and I don't, sort of, adopt the idea, the idea of pure Stockholm syndrome. In fact, I think actually Stockholm syndrome itself has been somewhat debunked as a concept, or at least complicated by psychologists. I don't think that quite fits his story.

But certainly I think trauma, dislocation, a term that scholars of slavery will call natal alienation or social death is part of his story. And as well a kind of failed social rebirth, that he tries to attempt. So being pulled out of his context where he had power and standing in his home community to be treated essentially as a servant in the homes of others, I think, would be quite traumatic. Being separated from the other Wampanoag men in Spain, I think, would be another sort of, particular point of pain.

You know, I think, almost certainly if you had sort of, you know, again, this is not, the new deeds don't quite shed a light on this, and this is still sort of unknown of why Tisquantum himself was taken.

My sort of general theory that I put forth in the book is one thing that's consistent about Squanto, what I was saying about him being a teller of tales, is he clearly has a bold and risk-taking personality.

And a scholar of bilingualism in New England, Julie Fisher, has pointed out from reading the language and the literature on bilingualism, is that what makes people quick to pick up a language isn't any particular verbal skill. It's the personality type of a high tolerance for risk. That's actually what defines fast language learners. I think that sort of says everything.

And so my sort of working theory is that among the captives, when whether it was Humphrey Slaney or another agent of the Newfoundland Company heard about these captives and wanted an interpreter, he was simply the one who could speak English the best, the one who picked it up quickest from the English sailors on his voyage over.

And that in being willing, if he did have a choice to go with the English, it probably would have been with the hope of redeeming the other Wampanoag man left in Spain. And that just

would be consistent with the values of Wampanoag men. The idea of a kind of fictive kinship given to all, the idea of solidarity and protecting the honor of others.

So that's sort of the failure to bring them back, I think, is something that would have concerned him, and that he would want to answer for, and would be part of his story, and part of the pain of his travels overseas.

And in terms of the, you know, return home, it's sort of unimaginable, right, that he's in a world that is post-apocalyptic. And of course, that I think, you know, has some bearing on his later conversion or at least openness to Christianity. You know, I think that is, that pain is at the center of his story. And that sort of painful absence, as you can see, the theme of absence throughout the book, I think is really at the heart of everything.

KYLE: Well, I can't think of a more moving note to end this program on.

Our hour has gone right by. Thanks so much, Drew. Take care everyone.

ANDREW: Thank you so much, Kyle. And thank you, everyone for coming.