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The Lost Colony of Roanoke: A Brief Introduction

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Koen De Keersmaeker

Mathijs Meert 5C

Koen Vorsters 5C

Foreword

The lost colony of Roanoke is a subject that fascinated numerous people for the last couple of decades. Countless researchers, both famous professors and amateuristic historians, have searched for clues that could unravel the mystery surrounding the lost colonists once and for all. Unfortunately they have failed. Clues have been found, theories have been thought up and occasionally a researcher declared that he solved the mystery, only to retract his statement due to lack of evidence. Our goal is not to do what many have tried to do. Our goal is not to unravel the mystery. Our goal is to inform the reader about the colony and to present some possible explanations.

We would like to thank Fred Willard for answering some of our questions. Mister Willard is the founder of The Lost Colony Center for Science and Research, a corporation conducting archaeological and historical research in order to find out what happened to the colony. We would also like to refer anyone who is interested in the colony to their website (www.lost-colony.com) for further information.

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Introduction

The colony of Roanoke was the first English colony in North-America. What makes the colony so interesting is that the colonists disappeared mysteriously. Our goal is to take a look at some of the possible explanations. Before we do this however, we need to know the history regarding the colony. We also wrote that down.

What happened to the colony is still a matter of debate. There are numerous plausible theories which have some sort of evidence supporting them. Only those theories will be discussed. It is up to the reader to pass judgement about the believability.

History of the Colony

English Colonisation of North-America

The English set their first steps towards colonial expansion at the end of the 15th century. In 1497 Henry VII sent John Cabot on an expedition across the Atlantic Ocean in order to find a trade route to China. John Cabot, born as Giovanni Caboto, was the son of an Italian merchant from Genoa and was furthermore a capable navigator and explorer. In May 1497 John Cabot left Bristol on the ship *Matthew*, a fast and manoeuvrable ship with a crew consisting of eighteen sailors. On June 24 Cabot landed on the East coast of North-America. The precise location is a subject of debate. Cape Breton Island and Nova Scotia are often said to be the landing spot, as well as Newfoundland, Labrador and even Maine. Cabot claimed the land for England and then returned.

Expeditions of Sir Walter Raleigh

It would take until 1585 before an attempt was made to colonise the new land. Sir Walter Raleigh played an important part in this. Raleigh was an explorer and writer. After his studies in Oxford he served in the Huguenot army in France and later on in the army of Elizabeth I of England in Ireland. There he distinguished himself at the siege of Smerwick. As a reward, Raleigh was granted trade privileges and a charter allowing him to colonise America in the name of England.



Sir Walter Raleigh

In 1584 Raleigh sent an expedition under command of Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlowe to North-America to explore the East coast. On July 4 they landed on Roanoke Island and made contact with the locals, the Secotans and Croatans. Barlowe returned to England with two Croatans, Manteo and Wanchese. They gave Raleigh political and geographical information about the region, after which he organised a second expedition under command of Sir Richard Grenville. The goal of this expedition was to found a colony.

The First Colony

The fleet set sail from Plymouth on April 9, 1585 and arrived in Wococon when July was coming to an end. On the nearby Roanoke Island, a colony of about one hundred men was founded. The land was named Virginia in honour of Elizabeth I, the virgin queen. In late August Grenville departed for England and left Ralph Lane behind as governor. Lane was a soldier and lacked diplomatic skill. As a result it did not take long before he came into conflict with the natives. On June 10, 1586 he killed Wingina, a local chieftain who was preparing an attack on the colony. Not long after that an expedition under command of Sir Francis Drake stopped at the colony and Lane decided to evacuate all colonists. Grenville's relief fleet arrived shortly after Drake left. Seeing that the colony was abandoned, he left a small detachment behind in order to maintain an English presence and set sail for England.

Second Colony on Roanoke Island

After the failure on Roanoke Island, Raleigh decided to make another attempt. This time the colony wouldn't be established on Roanoke Island but on the Delmarva Peninsula, near Chesapeake Bay. The natives there seemed friendlier and the waters were better suited for deep water navigation. A new fleet was put together and John White was chosen as the governor of the new colony. The fleet itself was commanded by Simon Fernandez, a Portuguese privateer in service of England. When the fleet arrived on Roanoke Island on July 22, 1587 in order to look for the detachment, Fernandez forced the 115 colonists and the Indians Manteo and Wanchese to disembark. Fernandez claimed it was too dangerous to go to the predetermined landing spot because of the weather conditions. White however was convinced Fernandez wanted to go south to prey upon Spanish ships. On the island a skeleton was found. Most likely belonging to one of the men who were detached earlier.

The colonists had no choice but to establish a second colony on Roanoke Island. White tried to improve relations with the natives but was not very successful. On July 28, George Howe, one of the colonists, was found dead two miles from the encampment. His body was impaled with sixteen arrows and there were signs of severe beating. When the colonists consulted with the Croatans, they were told the murder was the work of the Roanokans. The Croatans promised to support the colonists should it come to conflict on condition that the Croatans were given a badge or other token of friendship that could be used for identification.

After attempts to find a peaceful solution, White and Manteo led some men to the village of the Roanoke tribe in a surprise attack, only to discover too late that the village was occupied by the Croatans. The Roanokans had fled earlier and the badges the Croatans were given were not visible in the dark.

Not long after that, a supply fleet under command of Simon Fernandez arrived. On August 18, after all supplies had been unloaded, the fleet returned to England. John White was travelling with them to report back to Raleigh.

Disappearance of the Colony

The war with Spain made it somewhat difficult to send supply ships to the colony. Because of the threat of the Spanish Armada, all English ships were forbidden to set sail. In April, Raleigh managed to send two ships to the colony. A small fight with the Spanish however, made them turn back. It wasn't until 1590 that Raleigh managed to organise a new expedition. Four privateer ships agreed to sail to the colony and drop off John White. There were no colonists or supplies on board.

On August 15, 1590 the fleet arrived at Roanoke. John White disembarked but was unable to find any colonists. He and his men could not find a trace of the 90 men, 17 women and 11 children. There were no traces of a fight and all houses and fortifications had been dismantled, meaning that if they left, they did not leave in a hurry. White and his men found the word "Croatoan" carved into the palisade and in a tree nearby, someone carved the word "Cro".



The discovery of the word "Croatoan"

Before White left three years earlier, it was agreed upon that the colonists would carve a Maltese Cross into a tree if they had to leave the colony because of danger. No such cross was found, which indicated their leave was not forced. White thought the clues he had found indicated that the colonists moved to Croatoan Island (now called Hatteras Island). It was however unlikely that all colonists would be there. The sandy ground and the contact with the salt seawater meant that the island was not fertile enough to maintain a large colony. The next day White left with the fleet without searching Croatoan Island. He was convinced that the colonists had moved to a new location where the natives were friendly and that there was nothing to worry about.

Theories

The Powhattan Tribe

A new colony, Jamestown (after James I of England), was founded in 1607. The colonists established contacts with the native tribes and tried to discover what happened to the colony of Roanoke. The first information came from captain John Smith, who led the colony from 1608 to 1609. Wahunsunacock, chieftain of the Powhattan tribe, claimed his tribe murdered the colonists of Roanoke and that he personally led the slaughter.

The colonists apparently integrated into the tribe of the Chesepian and lived amongst them for some twenty years after the departure of John White. After the Chesepian refused to join a tribal confederacy led by Wahunsunacock.

Integration

The colonists of Jamestown had the habit of questioning everyone the colony came into contact with regarding the fate of the colonists of Roanoke. Some questioned natives told stories about settlements with two storied buildings and thatched roofs. Others told about tribes who were able to read English and who dressed similarly to the Europeans. Near Jamestown itself, a young boy was spotted. He was dressed as a native but had blond hair and a pale skin.

This evidence led them to believe that the colonists of Roanoke had split up and integrated into numerous tribes. After some generations this would create natives with European blood.

There is, for example, the Lumbee tribe. The tribe originates from the region of North Carolina and their oral traditions links them with the lost colony of Roanoke. Family names used by the colonists, such as Dial, Hyatt and Taylor, were common in the Lumbee tribe in 1719. The English colonists who established relations with them for the first time were surprised to discover that they had grey eyes and spoke English, which indicates English ancestors.

According to Fred Willard, the colonists integrated into the Croatan tribe. They became the Hatteras and later on the Mattamuskeet, who eventually joined various other tribes after a black-tongue plague hit in the 19th century.

Fred Willard is the founder and director of The Lost Colony Center for Science and Research. Their goal is to carry on with the archaeological and historical that the Croatan Group began. In excavations in Buxton, on Hatteras Island, a ring with a coat of arms of a prancing lion. Lions were often used in English heraldry. This is an indication that at least a part of the colonists integrated into the Croatan tribe.



The Kendall ring

A different explanation states that the colonists fell victim to the Spaniards, who had a settlement on the coast of Florida. It cannot be denied that the Spaniards in the West Indies knew the location of the colony. When in 1587 the fleet of Simon Fernandez was sailing towards North America to found the second English settlement, they halted in Puerto Rice to buy supplies. A number of colonists, such as Darby Glante, disembarked. In later statements, Glante declared he had told Spanish officials about the location of Roanoke. It would not be so strange that Spain did not tolerate any colonial competition and decided to destroy the English settlement.

The Dare stones

In 1937, Louis Hammond found a stone with white writings on it in Edenton, North Carolina.

The text ended with "EWD", the initials of Eleanor White Dare, daughter of John White and inhabitant of the Roanoke Colony. Hence the name "Dare Stone".

New stones continued to be found until 1941, 48 in total. The stones described a tale that was so unbelievable that journalist Boyden Sparkes decided to investigate it. On April 26 he published an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* in which he claimed the stones were forged. The spelling on the language usage were historically incorrect.

47 of the 48 stones were proven to be forged. The first stone is however different in .writing style, language usage and even type of rock. If the stone is fake, it is most definitely a much better forgery than the other stones.

The geologist Scott Wolter has examined the first Dare stone. His findings, coupled with the research already done by The Lost Colony Center for Science and Research, led him to the conclusion that the stone is authentic.



The First Dare stone

Front side Dare stone:

Anaias Dare & Virginia Went Hence Unto Heaven 1591.

Anye Englishman Shew John Whit Govr Via.

Back side Dare stone:

Father Soone After You Goe for England Wee Cam Hither.

Onlie Misarie & Warre Tow Yeere.

Above Halfe Deade ere Tow Yeere More From SickenesBeine Foure & Twentie.

Salvage with Message of Shipp Unto Us.

Smal Space of Time they Affrite of Revenge Rann Al Awaye.

Wee Bleeve it Nott You.

Soone After Ye Salvages Faine Spirits Angrie.

Suddaine Muther Al Save Seaven.

Mine Childe.

Ananais to Slaine wth Much Misarie.

Burie Al Neere Foure Myles Easte This River Uppon Small Hil.

Names Writ Al Ther On Rocke.

Putt This Thes Alsoe.

Salvage Shew This Unto You & Hither Wee Promise You to Give Greate Plentie Presents.

EWD

The story above described how the colonists ventured further inland after John White returned to England. Due to illness and conflicts with natives, only 24 colonists remain. Not long after a ship is spotted, the natives with whom they stayed became aggressive and killed seventeen colonists, including Anania and Virginia, the husband and daughter of the writer Eleanor White Dare respectively. The seven survivors buried the dead and made gravestones for them. Whoever finds the stone is also asked to give the stone to John White and a reward is promised.

Other Theories

Hundreds of theories regarding the fate of the lost colony of Roanoke exist. Unfortunately, most of them have little to no evidence or are just not realistic. According to some, the colony was flooded. Others claim the colonists did not have enough food and resorted to cannibalism. A disease outbreak, hurricanes and even aliens would explain everything according to some, but those theories are contrary to the evidence that has been gathered over the years.

Multiple theories can be true however. The best way for an abandoned colony to survive, is to divide itself into smaller groups. That way the groups can spread, meaning that there is less pressure on the land to produce food. It is possible that different groups met different fates. There is however little to no evidence that the group split up.

Conclusion

To us it seems that integration is the most likely explanation. The little evidence that exists, seems to be supporting that theory. Until an inarguable artefact is found which proves the theory, we cannot be sure. In the meantime it is, as we said in the introduction, up to the reader to make up his mind about the matter. Researchers are still looking for an explanation and it is possible that in a couple of years the fate of the colonists will be generally known. Until then, we can only speculate.

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