Ruling Theory Applied at the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck

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Ruling Theory Applied at the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck

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Abstract
Ruling theory is when a hypothesis is so attractive that researches may consciously or unconsciously record data in favor of the hypothesis. “Ruling Theory can be applied in many fields, including archaeology” (Railsback, 1990). An example of an archaeological site applying the Ruling Theory is the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck. On November 21, 1996 a team of investigators from Intersal Inc. discovered an 18th century shipwreck about a mile and a half off of the coast of Beaufort Inlet. Shortly after discovering this ship the question of this ship being the Queen Anne’s Revenge, Blackbeard’s flagship, started to arise. Today many communities on the Outer Banks, like Ocracoke Island, use the Queen Anne’s Revenge to attract tourist. Is the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck really the Queen’s Revenge? Or have researches been too hasty when gathering their information about the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck?

Weight or the Date
One of the twenty-two cannons identified from the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck has a mystery inscription that has the potential to terminate the hypothesis that the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck is the Queen Anne’s Revenge. Cannon C-3 found at the site is marked with numerals between the breech and the trunnions that can either translate to ‘1730’ or ‘1737’. Cannon C-3 is identified as a French cannon, “18th-century French cannons were often inscribed with the year of manufacture near the breech” (Peterson 1969:74). However, taking all possibilities into consideration, the ‘1730’ or ‘1737’ can represent the weight of the cannon. Manufacturers would mark cannon’s with their weight to ensure balance on board ship. However, these numbers were usually written with dashes between them (Lusardi, Richards, and Rodgers, 2005: 30). If ‘1730’ or ‘1737’ is the date of manufacture then the ship found at the Beaufort Inlet cannot be Blackbeard’s flagship the Queen Anne’s Revenge since the ship sunk in 1718.

Benefits of the Queen Anne’s Revenge
The name Queen Anne’s Revenge became associated with the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck just after the first dive. Soon the name Queen Anne’s Revenge was found in grant proposals, newspapers, and other publications in the Outer Banks. To the communities of the Outer Banks the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck is the Queen Anne’s Revenge. Local newspapers are following the excavation process of the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck as well. “The Queen Anne’s Revenge Project brought the massive gun ashore Wednesday. Onlookers cheered as the eight-foot-long gun was raised above the water’s surface” (Johnson, 2011). Smaller tourist communities like Ocracoke Island use the shipwreck to attract more tourism. Ocracoke Island has a small store called Teach’s Hole where they sell Blackbeard paraphernalia. Teach’s Hole also offers a small walkthrough exhibit on Blackbeard the pirate and the Queen Anne’s Revenge.

New Findings
The Smithsonian has recently released an article about Black Beard the pirate. In this article they talk about the life of Edward Thatch, Black Beard and how he changed pirating in the Caribbean. The article also talks about the Beaufort Inlet shipwreck correlating with the Queen Anne’s Revenge. The theory of the Beaufort Inlet shipwreck actually being the Queen Anne’s Revenge is known to be true. The new debate is weather or not the Black Beard ran the ship onto the sandbar on purpose or on accident. Some historical accounts recall: Queen Anne’s Revenge ran hard aground, apparently while under full sail. One of his captives, David Herriot, later told authorities it was ‘generally believed the said Thatch ran his vessel a-ground on purpose’ to get rid of the riff-raff (Smithsonian, 2014).

Supporting Evidence
According to Moore, “Based on the hull-structure dimensions and anchor sizes the remains represent about a 250-ton ship with an estimated draught of approximately 3.7 m” (1999). The size of the vessel that Moore describes above coincides with historical accounts that match what we know as the Queen Anne’s Revenge. Corrosion patterns of certain materials at the shipwreck can also provide us with evidence about the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck being the Queen Anne’s Revenge (Sever, 2009: 1).

Reflections
The application of Ruling Theory can be found at the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck. Local communities have already come to the conclusion that the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck is the Queen Anne’s Revenge. There is a good amount of evidence that support the hypothesis that the shipwreck is the Queen Anne’s Revenge. However, there is still cannon C-3 that needs to be analyzed further. Researchers still have work to do if they want to prove that the Beaufort Inlet Shipwreck is the Queen Anne’s Revenge.

About the Queen Anne’s Revenge
In fall of 1717 Blackbeard and his crew captured La Concorde, a French ship used to transport slaves, off of the coast of Martinique. Blackbeard took this ship and renamed it the Queen Anne’s Revenge; this became his main flagship. After a winter of looting and pirating in the Caribbean, Blackbeard takes the Queen Anne’s Revenge and works his way up the Outer Banks. In spring of 1718 “Blackbeard’s fleet attempted to enter Old Topsail Inlet, not known as Beaufort Inlet. During that attempt, Queen Anne’s Revenge and the sloop Adventure grounded the ocean bar and were abandoned” (Lawrence, 2001:3).