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Bronze Age Greek city found underwater

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| AUG 27, 2015 | BY MARTIN BARILLAS

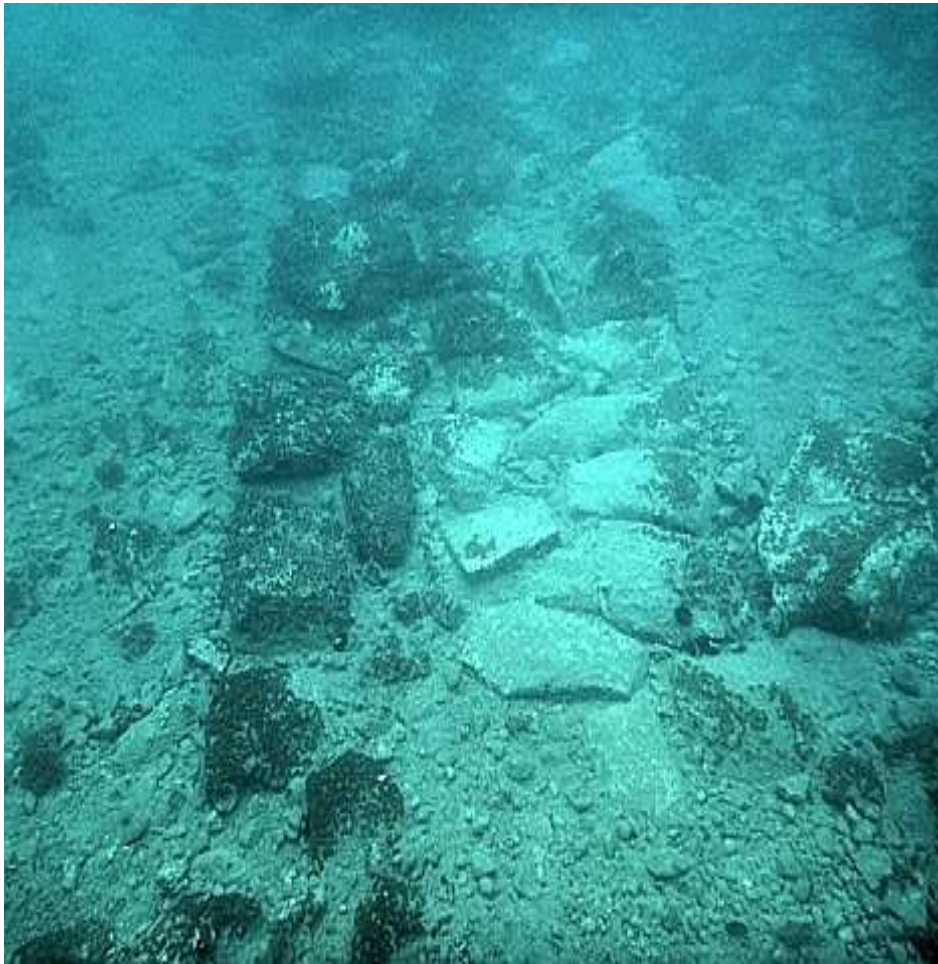
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An important archaeological discovery was announced in Greece that was found underwater in Kiladha Bay on the Peloponnese Peninsula south of Athens. Resting there for millennia, the remnants of an ancient Greek village of the 3rd millennium B.C. were found by divers just under the surface of the bay that forms part of the Argolic Gulf of southern Greece. A team of Greek and Swiss archaeologists have discovered what appears to be a significant coastal settlement now covered by the Mediterranean Sea and within sight of the nearby Lambayanna beach.



A Bronze Age pavement or fortification wall

Of the discovery, Professor Julien Beck of the University of Geneva said, "The importance of our discovery is partly due to the large size of the establishment: at least 1.2 hectares (Ed. Note: 2.9 acres) were preserved," He added that the discovery is important also because of the quantity and quality of the artifacts that were collected there. The Bronze Age sunken village dates back to before 2,000 years B.C.

The team of underwater archaeologists discovered stone defensive structures that are of a "massive nature, unknown in Greece until now," said Beck.

The research was conducted in 2014 with archaeologists from the University of Geneva, under the auspices of the Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece and in collaboration with the Greek Ministry of Culture. The team is seeking to find evidence for the oldest village in Europe yet known to science, dating back at least 8,000 years ago.



Divers conducted a meticulous search of the underwater Lambayanna site

In 2014, Beck and other team members trained at the Lambayanna beach nearby while awaiting official authorization to conduct underwater searches. Diving is severely limited by the Greek government in order to prevent the looting of archaeological sites beneath the sea. The team

found pre-historic fragments of pottery of the sort that abounds in the area during their training. Intrigued by these artifacts, team members also found what appeared to be architectural elements beneath the surface of the sea. They returned to the site in 2015 and utilized the solar-powered ‘Terra Submersa’ ship that served as a tender for the expedition.



A view of the Argolic Gulf from onboard the Terra Submersa

The buildings found by Beck and colleagues are characteristic of the Greek Bronze Age, which tend to be built on a rectilinear plane and circular or elliptical in shape. Paved surfaces, which could be streets or the remains of structures, were also found by the divers. Connected to the exterior fortifications were three significant stone

structures that were probably towers. Structures of this sort are unknown elsewhere in Greece. The team also found tools associated with the site, including obsidian blades dating to the Helladic period (3200 to 2050 BC), which can be divided into three phases.



Close-up of an ancient Greek pavement

The experts contend that while the ancient economy at the time was primarily agrarian, there is evidence of technological innovation including metallurgical arts and mining, as well as the emergence of a market economy along the hundreds of miles of the Peloponnese coastline. Organized collective work, as well as craft

specialization becomes evident during the second phase of the Helladic period.



A view from the shore at Lampayannas

Greek author Christos Doumas wrote in *L'Histoire de la Humanité* that architecture of the period in question was characterized elsewhere by small dwellings of two rooms each that had a small patio. They were built of unfired clay bricks and were very close together along narrow streets or pathways. Frequently, they are surrounded by fortified walls. This is the sort of configuration found by the Greco-Swiss team. According to Beck, "A similar set in this region

and for this same period is the nearby town of Lerna," which is located in the nearby Gulf of Nafplion. Lerna is mentioned in the Greek mythological tale of Hercules, who had to battle the Hydra of many heads there as one of his twelve labors. "That city is considered a reference point in architectural terms and ceramics which have been found there," said Beck. "Now, if we compare our discovery to that important city," Lerna's status will now have to be re-examined, said Beck. A map and drawings of the newly discovered village have yet to be drafted because of the sheer size of the find.

Along the shore near the site, archaeologists have found more than 6,000 objects, including fragments of the red ceramics that are characteristic of the area. Beck called the area an "archaeologist's paradise."

Beck points out that other civilizations were extant at the time, such as Egypt and the nascent civilizations at the islands of Crete and Santorini. The researchers expect that future research at Lambayanna will shed new light on a dense network of coastal settlements stretched throughout the Aegean Sea. Of the structures found by the researchers, Beck said "There must have been a brick superstructure above a stone foundation," who added that "the chances of finding such walls under water are extremely low." Furthermore, he said, "the full size of the

facility is not yet known. We do not know why it is surrounded by fortifications."



**Weathered pottery sherds found at
Lambayanna beach in the Pelopponese
Peninsula of Greece**

The walls that were found by the team are contemporaneous with the pyramids at Giza that were built around 2600-2500 B.C., as well as the Cycladic civilization (3200 to 2000 BC), at the first Minoans on the island of Crete (2700-1200 BC). However, they precede the first great Greek civilization, the Mycenaean (1650-1100 BC), by one thousand years. Obsidian blades that the researchers found at Lambayanna may have come from volcanic rock sourced at Milos: an island in the Cyclades archipelago that was inhabited as of the third millennium. The island

is known for the famous statue of Aphrodite which was found there and now displayed at the Louvre.

Based on a study of the style of the pottery discovered at Lambayanna, researchers believe that the site dates to the Early Helladic II phase, said Beck, and contemporaneous with the building of the famous Egyptian pyramids.



A 3-D view of the Lambayanna underwater site

Divers began archaeological operations in July of this year, which ended on August 14.