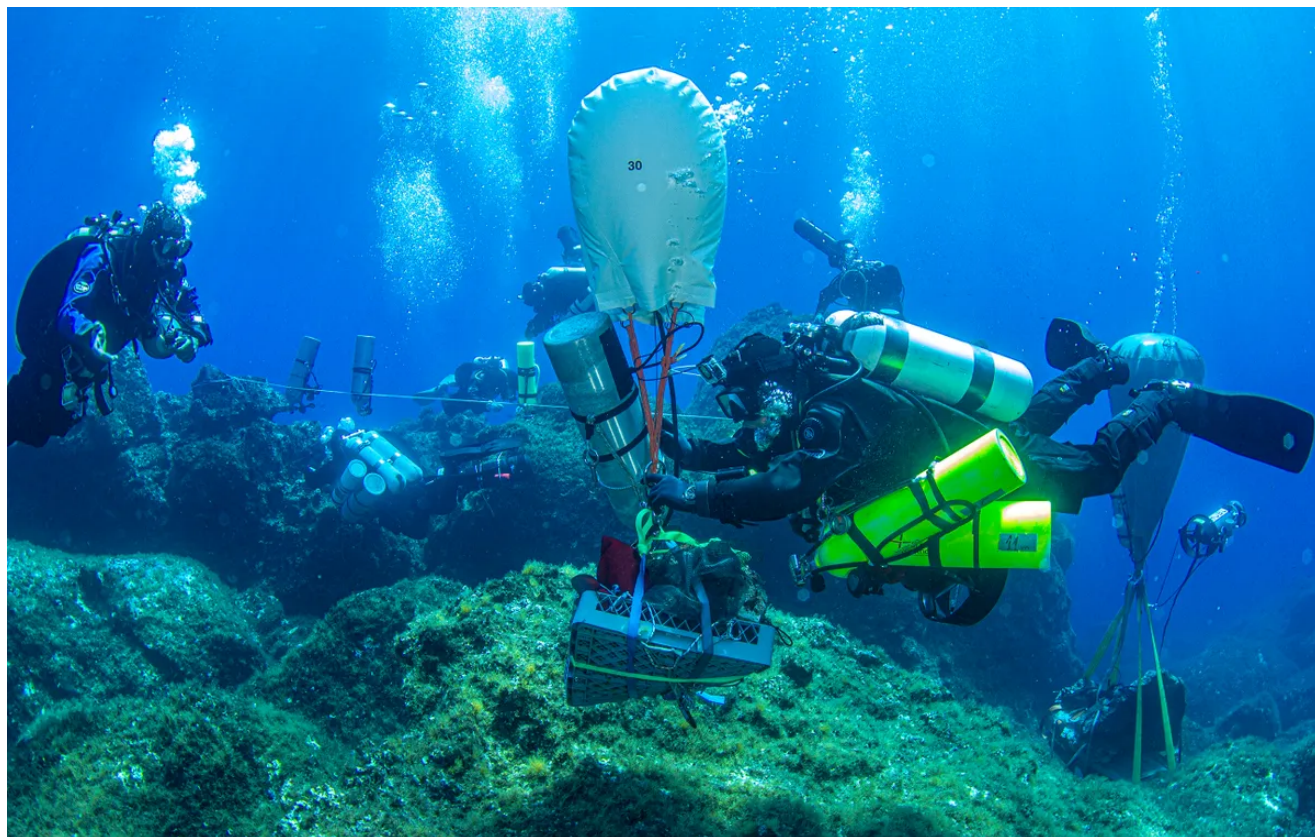


# Divers Pull Marble Head of Hercules From a 2,000-Year-Old Shipwreck in Greece

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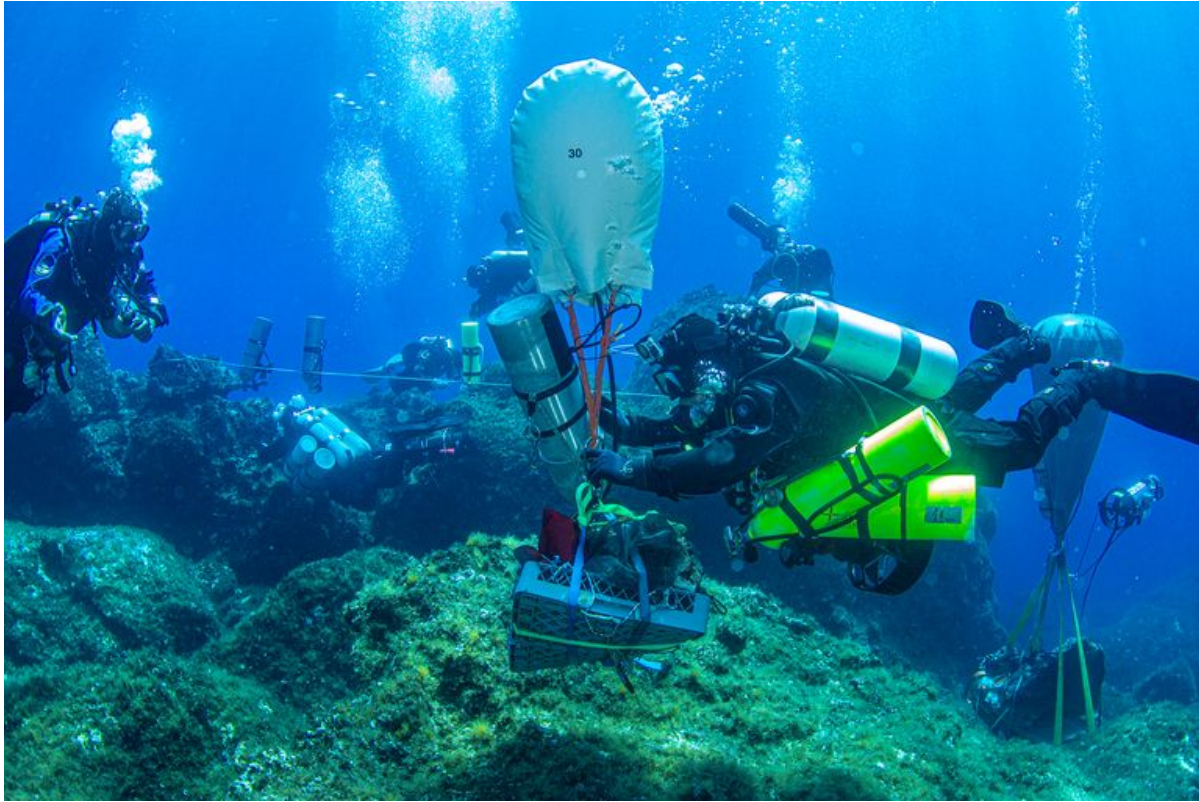
## Cool Finds

**The Antikythera shipwreck, discovered in 1900, continues to yield new artifacts**



Elizabeth Djinis - History Correspondent

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First discovered in 1900, the Antikythera shipwreck has yielded some of the greatest archaeological finds of the 20th century. Photo by Nikos Giannoulakis © Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece / Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports

A marble statue of Hercules in Athens' National Archaeological Museum is missing one notable component: its head. Now, divers exploring the 2,000-year-old Antikythera shipwreck may have recovered it.

"In 1900, [sponge divers] pulled out the statue of Hercules and now in all probability we've found its head," Lorenz Baumer, a University of Geneva archaeologist who is directing the excavations, tells the Guardian's Helena Smith. "It's a most impressive marble piece. It is twice lifesize, has a big beard, a very particular face and short hair. There is no doubt it is Hercules."

Divers uncovered the head this summer, according to a statement from "Return to Antikythera," a project dedicated to researching the site. The wreck dates to around 60 B.C.E., and it was first discovered off the coast of the Greek island Antikythera by a group of sponge divers in 1900. The site has revealed multiple bronze and marble statues, human remains and—perhaps most famously—the Antikythera Mechanism, which some call the first computer.





A researcher examines the marble head of Hercules. © Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece / Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports

But since then, only a handful of researchers have investigated the wreck. Until the “Return to Antikythera” project began studying it in 2012, the last expedition was in the mid-1970s under the watch of explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau.

These latest excavations involved relocating natural boulders—each weighing up to 8.5 tons—that had covered parts of the shipwreck, per the statement. In addition to the marble head, divers also discovered parts of the base of a marble statue, pieces of the ship’s equipment (including components of the anchor) and two human teeth.

“It’s so deep they can only be down there for 30 minutes,” Baumer tells the *Guardian*. “But now we have an idea of what has been hiding under those rocks ... [E]ach find helps us piece together more context in our understanding of the ship, its cargo, the crew and where they were from.”

The tale of the Antikythera wreck’s discovery is almost as storied as the find itself. A group of Greek sponge divers en route to Tunisia were deterred by a passing storm; they decided to stop near Antikythera, not far from Crete. Thinking they would use the time to dive for sponges, they were stunned to discover the wreck roughly 130 to 160 feet below the surface, according to the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, a former partner on the recent excavation project. Initially, the divers thought they were looking at corpses, while they were actually seeing marble and bronze sculptures, reports *Hyperallergic*’s Sarah E. Bond.

Ensuing excavations, including those conducted by Cousteau’s team in the mid-1970s, revealed many more objects, including a bronze statue named the “Antikythera Youth,” the head of a Stoic philosopher, coins from cities in Asia Minor, and bones from at least four people, per *Hyperallergic*.

But in recent years, attention has focused on the Antikythera Mechanism, the piece of technology used to track the sun, moon and planets. What now resembles “three flat, misshapen pieces of bronze” actually contains “gears with neat triangular teeth (just like the inside of a clock) and a ring divided into degrees (like the protractor you used in school),” wrote *Smithsonian magazine*’s Jo Marchant in 2015.

Aside from showing the Ancient Greeks’ technological prowess, the find is also “a window into how the Greeks saw their universe,” wrote Marchant. “They came to believe that nature worked according to predefined rules, like a machine—an approach that forms the basis of our modern scientific views.”

While the Antikythera shipwreck is particularly compelling, new wrecks are discovered frequently. Roughly 600 have been found since 1992, according to *Hyperallergic*. The Oxford Roman Economy Project even has a database of ancient shipwrecks in the Mediterranean up until 1500 C.E., which lists nearly 1,800 entries.

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