

Scientists examine a statue of an Egyptian king on the seafloor.

The Sunken City

Scientists raise the ruins of an ancient Egyptian city from the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea

Many people think of Egypt as the home of ancient pyramids rising above the desert. But some of the nation's treasures from the past are hidden underwater. A lost city that's more than 2,700 years old lies on the floor of the Mediterranean Sea. Now, archaeologists are bringing its remains to the surface to share them with the world.

Ancient texts describe a city called Heracleion (hah-rah-KLEE-en) that was located at the mouth of the Nile River. But for centuries, no one knew if the city ever really existed. Then in 2000, archaeologists found its ruins near Egypt's northern coast.

Much of the city had been untouched since it vanished beneath the waves about 1,200 years ago. The sand

had preserved many of its treasures. Archaeologists have found statues of Egyptian gods, the remains of a temple, and more than 60 sunken ships. They've also found jewelry, gold coins, and pottery. Each discovery helps paint a picture of what life was like in Heracleion.

"Different sorts of **artifacts** tell you different things about the past," says Damian Robinson. He's part of the team of archaeologists that has been exploring the sunken city.

The most important artifact may be a stone sign (*above*). It's covered with hieroglyphs—pictures and symbols that represent words. Robinson says the hieroglyphs tell us that Heracleion was an important port for ships entering Egypt.

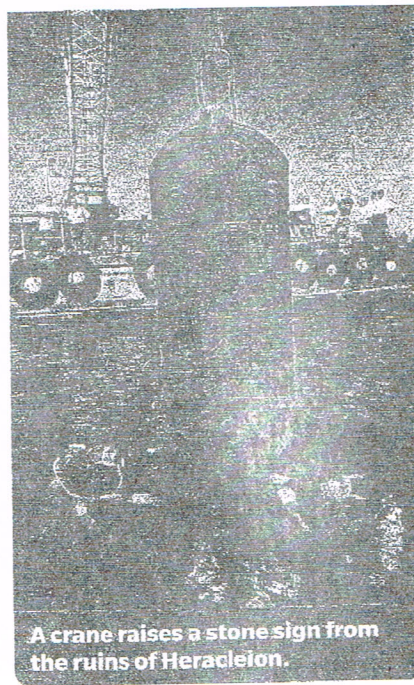
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Word to Know

artifacts (AHRT-uh-fakts) *noun, plural.* objects made or used by people long ago

Secrets of the Deep

Many mysteries about Heracleion remain—including why it sank. Robinson says rising sea levels played a role in



A crane raises a stone sign from the ruins of Heracleion.

swallowing the city. Scientists also think it may have been built on soft soil that couldn't support large buildings. Plus, tidal waves and earthquakes may have struck the area around the time the city disappeared.

Many of Heracleion's treasures are still buried under the sea, so it may be many years before all its secrets are revealed.

"We've barely scratched the surface with this city," says Robinson.

—by Joe Bubar

