

Off the coast of Turkey, the oldest shipwreck ever found yields relics and secrets of the Bronze Age

Thirty-three Centuries Under the Sea

By PETER THROCKMORTON

THE POWERFULLY BUILT man at the near-by table glared at us, then grunted something to his companion. He had the look of the sea about him, and gestures that come from one used to having commands obeyed. The glass that he raised to his lips was dwarfed by his huge hand.

I glanced at my friend Mustafa Kapkin, whose ear was cocked to what they were saying. We had come to that waterfront cafe to find the skipper of a sponge boat who had brought up an ancient bronze statue and a clay urn from the sea. That stretch of sea bottom, we thought, might be a likely site for some underwater archeological exploring.

Skin Diving Gear Causes Sensation

We had just arrived in Bodrum, home port of most Turkish sponge divers who work the waters of their nation's Aegean shores. Yet already the village was buzzing about the Aqua-Lung, compressed-air bottles, and underwater cameras we had brought on the bus from Izmir. And the air was filled with rumors about the undersea treasure we were after.

For us, it was the beginning of a two-year quest that was to lead, eventually, to the discovery of the oldest undersea wreck yet located—a ship that rode the waves 33 centuries ago, before the time of Homer's *Odyssey*, and ripped her ribs on a jumble of rocks off the Turkish coast.

That Bronze Age ship is at least eight hundred years more ancient than any found heretofore. And the words written here are the first personal account of this remarkable find. Through detailed notes and photographs of the wreck, outstanding archeologists at the University of Pennsylvania and at Princeton University have definitely placed the discovery in the late Bronze Age, about 1400 B.C.

But sitting uneasily in the scrubby cafe—really little more than an arbor roof supported on classic columns—we could not have guessed that such an end was in store. Now I was absorbed in the table near by.

"What are they talking about?" I asked.

Mustafa flushed. "The man with the big hands and lantern jaw is saying that our Aqua-Lungs are for tourists, and that a real

In Eerie Gloom, a Sponge Diver Slogs Through a Jungle of Broken Pottery

Shattered wine jars from ill-fated argosies litter the Aegean floor off southwest Turkey. During two years of underwater exploration in a graveyard of ancient ships, the author charted 38 wrecks, including a Bronze Age vessel some 3,300 years old. Laying aside his bulging bag of sponges, this diver examines the graceful neck of a Roman amphora.

