



ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
INSTITUTE  
OF AMERICA

# UNCOVERING ULUBURUN

The True Tale  
of the Bronze  
Age's Greatest  
Shipwreck

# Introduction

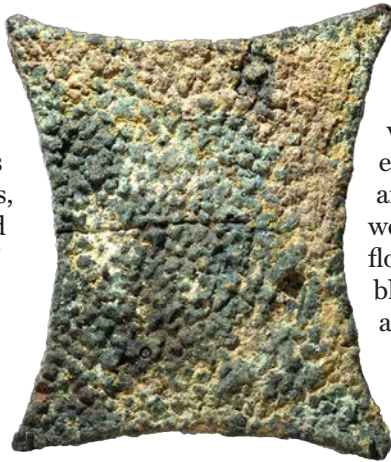
**A**ROUND THE YEAR 1320 B.C., a 50-foot-long single-mast ship was sailing along the coast of southwest Anatolia when it approached the steep cliffs of a promontory that jutted a mile and half into the sea. The vessel had been at sail for weeks, having set out from a port in the eastern Mediterranean where it had taken on the bulk of its cargo. In the ship's hold was almost 20 tons of freight that included exotic items such as ostrich eggshells and hippopotamus tusks, foodstuffs like olives and pomegranates, stacks of pristine ceramic bowls, and dozens of multicolored glass ingots.

The primary cargo, though, was metal—copper and tin, to be precise. For this was the Bronze Age, and copper and tin, which are the main components of bronze, were the most sought-after commodities of the day. The ship was carrying more than 11 tons of these metals, which could potentially be converted into thousands of bronze weapons. Bronze could make armies. It could create kings.

As the ship neared the promontory, something went wrong. The heavily laden craft drew dangerously close to the unforgiving shore. Then, in an instant, it was dashed violently against the rocks. The vessel and its valuable cargo sank to the bottom of the sea, where it remained hidden for millennia.

More than 3,000 years later, in 1982, a Turkish sponge diver combing the seabed off Uluburun, or the Grand

Cape, reported that he had encountered a cluster of curious objects, which he described as “metal biscuits with ears.” This immediately piqued the attention of archaeologists, as they suspected these distinctively shaped items could be only one thing—a type of copper ingot known as an oxhide ingot. These were telltale signs of a Bronze Age shipwreck. When Turkish



Copper oxhide ingot

authorities and the Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA) investigated the spot where the diver reported seeing the unusual artifacts, their suspicions were confirmed. The sea-floor near Uluburun was blanketed in hundreds of ancient ingots.

There was also much more. Underwater archaeologists were staring at not only the world's oldest known

shipwreck, but one of its richest and most extraordinary. The assemblage of Bronze Age goods from the Uluburun wreck, as it is now known, was unlike any that had ever been found, and its discovery completely changed what researchers knew about Bronze Age maritime trade. The ship's diverse cargo attested to a globalized and interconnected world, where people from different cultures, sometimes thousands of miles apart, communicated and exchanged goods with each other. It would take more than a decade for archaeologists to completely document and recover all the objects the vessel was transporting. There was so much material—approximately 18,000 objects—that even today, 40 years after the ship's discovery, archaeologists are still *Uncovering Uluburun*.

Uluburun III: A sunken replica  
of the original 14th-century B.C.  
Bronze Age ship

