

THE UNEXPLAINED FILES · BOOK TWENTY-SIX

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SUNKEN CITIES LOST WORLDS BENEATH THE SEA

Ruins, Drowned Landscapes and the Mysteries Hidden
Underwater

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PUBLISHING NOTE

This is a work of general-interest nonfiction about underwater archaeology, submerged prehistoric landscapes, coastal geology, historical traditions and extraordinary claims. Documented sites are distinguished from plausible interpretations and unsupported speculation. Scientific and heritage information was checked through August 2026 where relevant.

Underwater cultural heritage is fragile and often legally protected. Nothing in this book encourages unauthorized diving, excavation, artifact removal or entry into restricted archaeological zones. UNESCO guidance generally favors preservation in situ and professional investigation rather than treasure hunting.

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PREFACE

The sea is one of history's greatest archives. It covers prehistoric hunting grounds, drowned forests, abandoned harbors, collapsed palaces, shipwrecks and entire neighborhoods. Some places vanished slowly as coastlines moved. Others disappeared in earthquakes, storm surges, subsidence or deliberate flooding. Unlike a mythical lost continent, many submerged settlements can be mapped, dated and excavated. Their reality is precisely what makes the more extraordinary claims so tempting.

For most of human history, sea level was not fixed. During the last Ice Age, enormous volumes of water were locked in continental ice sheets and shorelines lay far beyond their modern positions. As the climate warmed, the oceans rose and continental shelves were inundated. A large part of the landscape used by prehistoric people now lies underwater. Archaeologists are only beginning to investigate that missing world systematically.

This book explores both sides of the subject. It visits well-documented sites such as Pavlopetri in Greece, Thonis-Heracleion in Egypt, Roman Baiae in Italy, Port Royal in Jamaica, Dunwich in England and the drowned medieval landscape of Rungholt in the Wadden Sea. It also examines disputed locations including Dwarka, the Gulf of Khambhat, the Yonaguni formations and Bimini Road, where observation and interpretation are often mixed together.

The method throughout is strict. A dramatic underwater shape is not automatically architecture. A tradition about a drowned city is not automatically a historical record. A real archaeological discovery does not validate every legend attached to the same coast. Each case is separated into what is documented, what is plausible and what remains unproven.

That discipline does not make the underwater world less mysterious. It makes it more so. In 2025 and 2026 researchers continued to refine reconstructions of Doggerland and other submerged landscapes using seismic data, environmental DNA, magnetometry and computer simulation. The next lost settlement may not belong to legend at all. It may simply be waiting below a shipping lane, a wind farm or a layer of marine sediment.