

3,000-year-old shipwreck shows European trade was thriving in Bronze Age

The discovery of one of the world's oldest shipwrecks shows that European trade was thriving even in the Bronze Age, according to experts.



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Archaeologists believe the copper, and possibly the tin, was being imported into Britain

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The vessel, carrying copper and tin ingots used to make weapons and jewellery, sank off the coast near Salcombe in Devon and is thought to date from 900BC.

But it was only last year that the South West Maritime Archaeological Group, a team of amateur archaeologists, brought its cargo to the surface.

The discovery was not announced until this month's International Shipwreck Conference, in Plymouth, Devon.

It is thought that the goods - 259 copper ingots and 27 of tin - were destined for Britain but collected from several different sources in Europe.

The discovery reveals the high level of sophistication maritime trade in Europe had reached, even in

ancient times.

Tin ingots from this period have not been found in Britain before.

A bronze sword and three gold wrist bracelets, known as torcs, were also found at the spot, not far from the famous "Salcombe Cannon" wreck, which was discovered in the 1990s.

The team have not found any of the new ship's actual body which is thought to have perished. However, it is likely to have been powered with paddles and had a crew of around 15.

The team first got their first hint about the ancient haul down below when just small pieces of copper were found.

Engineer Jim Tyson, who took part in the dives, said: "You have something in your hands that had not seen the light of day in 3000 years. The last person to do so must have died in the shipwreck."

He added: "It shows definite communications and trade - these people were trading as we would these days."

The nearby 17th century Salcombe Cannon wreck, which is protected, has yielded Europe's largest collection of 17th century Moroccan gold coins.

Another vessel dating back to the Bronze Age had earlier been discovered in Salcombe but yielded up only 53 artefacts.

English Heritage and the Receiver of Wreck have been notified of the latest discoveries.

The British Museum are due to take charge of the artefacts and have them valued before giving the team a sum.

Experts at the University of Oxford are analysing the cargo to establish its exact origins.

Ben Roberts, A British Museum Bronze Age expert, told the Sunday Telegraph: "It is an incredibly exciting find. What we have here is really, really good evidence of trade. We don't get many shipwreck sites.

"It is very rare to get a snapshot of this level of activity. It is very possible there were also animals and people going across the Channel too.

"We hardly ever get to see evidence of this cross Channel trade in action. It is a huge amount of cargo."

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