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**DECODING
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Thanks to new technology and fresh discoveries, a band of modern code breakers is racing to crack the last undeciphered writing systems—and solve mysteries that have puzzled historians for ages.

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ON THE COVER

SUBSCRIBER EDITION A meerkat stands upright, a sentry gazing over the grasslands of South Africa's Tswalu Kalahari Reserve.
Photograph by THOMAS PESCHAK

NEWSSTAND EDITION The mysterious Bronze Age writing on this silver vessel—a script called Linear Elamite—is one of about a dozen extinct writing systems that researchers are trying to decode.
Photograph courtesy MAHBOUBIAN FAMILY ELAMITE COLLECTION