



UPSC &amp; STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

**DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS**

# Göbekli Tepe: The Monument That Rewrote the Origins of Civilisation

18 March 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED

**HISTORY & CULTURE****GEOGRAPHY**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator •

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

Free UPSC &amp; State PCS Resources

[ujjari.com](http://ujjari.com)

# Göbekli Tepe: The Monument That Rewrote the Origins of Civilisation

18 March 2026 · 4 min read

## ▼ On this Page

- 01 **What is Göbekli Tepe?**
- 02 The Physical Evidence
- 03 The Builders — Hunter-Gatherers
- 04 The Deliberate Burial
- 05 Why It Rewrites Civilisation Theory
- 06 Comparison with Other Ancient Monuments
- 07 India Connection — Bhimbetka and Prehistoric...

## 📌 WHY IN NEWS

Göbekli Tepe, the world’s oldest known temple complex located in Turkey, is back in academic and UPSC discourse following new interpretations of its significance: the site increasingly suggests that organised religion and collective ritual may have preceded — and even driven — the transition to farming, inverting the conventional understanding of how civilisation began.

## WHAT IS GÖBEKLI TEPE?

**Göbekli Tepe** (Turkish: “Potbelly Hill”) is an **archaeological site** in the **Urfa province (Şanlıurfa)** of **south-eastern Turkey**, near the Syrian border.

**Age:** Approximately **9600 BCE** — making it roughly **12,000 years old**

**Type:** The world’s oldest known **monumental temple complex** — a place of communal religious or ceremonial activity

**Discovered:** First noted in a 1963 survey; recognised by German archaeologist **Klaus Schmidt** in **1994**; systematic excavations began **1995** under the German Archaeological Institute (DAI)

**UNESCO Status:** Inscribed as a **World Heritage Site in 2018**

## THE PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

### THE PILLARS

Göbekli Tepe's most striking features are its **T-shaped limestone monoliths** — some weighing **several tonnes** (up to 20 tonnes), standing up to **6 metres** tall.

Arranged in **circular or oval enclosures** (at least 20 such structures have been found; only ~5% excavated)

Richly carved with **animal reliefs**: foxes, lions, vultures, scorpions, snakes, wild boar, cranes

Some pillars depict **human arms** — suggesting they may represent stylised human figures

### THE LOCATION

Built on a hilltop — visible from a great distance. The **nearest water source** is kilometres away. This was not a settlement. No **hearths, middens, or cooking debris** typical of habitation have been found.

## THE BUILDERS — HUNTER-GATHERERS

Here lies the central mystery: **Göbekli Tepe predates agriculture** in the region by ~1,000–2,000 years. The people who built it were:

**Hunter-gatherers** — nomadic or semi-nomadic

Had **no pottery, no writing, no metal tools**

Yet they coordinated to quarry, transport, and erect multi-tonne limestone pillars with precision

Required **large-scale social organisation** — hundreds or thousands of people working together

This challenges the older assumption that **complex social organisation requires agriculture** as a precondition.

## THE DELIBERATE BURIAL

Around **8000 BCE**, Göbekli Tepe was **deliberately filled in** — buried by human hands, not by natural silting.

The burial preserved the site remarkably well

The **reason remains unknown** — ritual closure? End of a religious cycle? Shift in belief system?

This intentional act demonstrates **symbolic thinking** — an abstract decision to “close” a sacred space

## WHY IT REWRITES CIVILISATION THEORY

### TRADITIONAL "NEOLITHIC REVOLUTION" MODEL (V. GORDON CHILDE, 1940S):

Agriculture → Surplus → Settlements → Specialisation → Religion → Monumental Architecture

### GÖBEKLI TEPE CHALLENGE:

Monumental Temple (9600 BCE) → possibly attracted and sustained hunter-gatherer populations → may have **incentivised sedentism and farming**

The site supports the hypothesis: "**religion first, farming second**" — that shared belief systems and the need to maintain sacred gathering sites may have been a **primary driver** of the agricultural transition.

## COMPARISON WITH OTHER ANCIENT MONUMENTS

Monument	Location	Age	Builders
<b>Göbekli Tepe</b>	Turkey	~9600 BCE	Hunter-gatherers
<b>Stonehenge</b>	England	~3000 BCE	Early farmers
<b>Pyramids of Giza</b>	Egypt	~2500 BCE	State civilisation
<b>Mohenjo-Daro</b>	Pakistan	~2500 BCE	Urban Harappans

Göbekli Tepe is **older than all of them by thousands of years.**

## INDIA CONNECTION — BHIMBETKA AND PREHISTORIC EVIDENCE

India has its own prehistoric context:

**Bhimbetka Rock Shelters** (Madhya Pradesh): rock paintings dating to ~30,000 BCE; UNESCO World Heritage Site; evidence of hunter-gatherer culture

**Mehrgarh** (Balochistan, Pakistan): earliest South Asian farming settlement (~7000 BCE) — roughly contemporary with the late phase of Göbekli Tepe's use

**Mesolithic and Neolithic transitions** in India are studied through sites like **Koldihwa** (UP), **Mahagara** (UP), and **Chirand** (Bihar)

**UPSC RELEVANCE**

Göbekli Tepe location, age, discoverer, UNESCO status.

**MAINS GS-1:**

Prehistoric human societies; Neolithic Revolution; origin of religion; archaeological evidence for cognitive evolution.

**INTERVIEW:**

“What does Göbekli Tepe tell us about the relationship between religion and civilisation?”

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

### GÖBEKLI TEPE — CORE DATA:

Location: **Urfa province (Şanlıurfa), south-eastern Turkey**

Age: **~9600 BCE** (~12,000 years old)

Type: World's oldest known **monumental temple complex**

First noted: **1963** archaeological survey

Recognised by: **Klaus Schmidt** (German archaeologist), **1994**; excavations from **1995**

UNESCO: World Heritage Site since **2018**

Deliberately buried: **~8000 BCE** (reason unknown)

### PHYSICAL FEATURES:

Structures: **Circular/oval enclosures** (20+ identified; ~5% excavated)

Pillars: **T-shaped limestone monoliths**, up to **6 metres tall**, up to **20 tonnes**

Carvings: Foxes, lions, vultures, scorpions, snakes, cranes, wild boar

No evidence of permanent habitation — purely ceremonial/ritual site

### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Builders: **Hunter-gatherers** (pre-agricultural people)

Predates: **Stonehenge** (~3000 BCE), **Egyptian pyramids** (~2500 BCE), **Indus Valley** (~2500 BCE)

Central argument: Organised ritual may have preceded and enabled the shift to farming

Inverts conventional Neolithic Revolution model (farming → religion → monuments)

### INDIAN PREHISTORIC PARALLELS:

**Bhimbetka** (MP): Rock paintings ~30,000 BCE; UNESCO World Heritage

**Mehrgarh** (Balochistan): Earliest South Asian farming ~7000 BCE

**Koldihwa, Mahagara** (UP): Neolithic transition sites

**Mesolithic** → **Neolithic** in India: ~8000–3000 BCE transition period

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

“Potbelly Hill” = Turkish meaning of Göbekli Tepe

Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) period: ~10,000–8700 BCE (Göbekli Tepe belongs here)

Klaus Schmidt died 2014; excavations continued under German Archaeological Institute

Şanlıurfa Museum houses many artefacts from the site

Related concept: **Çatalhöyük** (another early Neolithic site in Turkey, ~7500 BCE) — had both farming and communal structures

Sources: [UNESCO](#), [The Hindu](#), [Nature](#)

## RELATED EDITORIALS

[DOWN TO EARTH](#)

[INDIAN EXPRESS](#)

**Spring That Never Came — El Niño 2026 and the Monsoon Threat India Must Prepare For**

20 Mar

**The Aravalli Question — Science, Law and the Desert at the Gate**

19 Mar

**HINDUSTAN TIMES****Tribal Tourism — Bridging Livelihood and Cultural Preservation**

18 Mar

**INDIAN EXPRESS****Preah Vihear Temple — ICJ, Sovereignty, and the Limits of Colonial Cartography**

14 Mar

---

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

# Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

 [Read Full Article on Ujyari](#) →

<https://ujyari.com/daily/2026/03/18/gobekli-tepe-civilisation/>

---

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · [ujyari.com](https://ujyari.com)