Göbeklitepe, located near Şanlıurfa in southeastern Turkey, is one of the most extraordinary archaeological sites in the world, often referred to as the “world’s first temple.” Dating back to around 9600 BCE, it is considered the earliest known example of monumental architecture, predating Stonehenge by over 6,000 years and the pyramids of Egypt by 7,000 years. It has reshaped our understanding of human history and the origins of civilization.

Discovered in 1963 and extensively excavated since the 1990s, Göbeklitepe consists of massive stone pillars arranged in circular enclosures. These pillars, some standing over 5 meters tall and weighing up to 20 tons, are adorned with intricate carvings of animals such as lions, snakes, vultures, and wild boars, along with abstract symbols. The carvings suggest the site held deep spiritual or ritualistic significance.

Göbeklitepe challenges the traditional narrative that agriculture and permanent settlements preceded complex religious or social structures. The site appears to have been built by hunter-gatherers before the advent of farming, indicating that communal effort and religious activity may have played a key role in the transition to settled life.

The purpose of Göbeklitepe remains a mystery, but it is believed to have been a ceremonial or spiritual site rather than a settlement. Over time, the enclosures were deliberately buried, preserving them for millennia. It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2018, and its discovery has revolutionized our understanding of prehistoric societies.