



ŞANLIURFA · TÜRKİYE · TAŞ TEPELER

Sayburç

The Field Guide

The oldest story in stone — and the village around it

sayburc.net · Powered by The Community Garden

Welcome

One of the oldest villages on Earth

Eleven thousand years ago, in the hills near Şanlıurfa, a community carved the earliest known scene in human history — and lived their daily life right beside it. Not a remote temple on a hilltop like Göbekli Tepe, but ritual woven into homes, hearths and workshops.

This short guide introduces Sayburç: its famous relief, the village around it, the discoveries still coming out of the ground, and how to see it in person. Every claim traces back to the record; where something comes from the trench rather than a publication, we say so.

Here, ritual and daily life share the same floor.

The Relief

The first story in stone

In a round building carved into the bedrock, five figures were cut along the front of an interior bench: a man flanked by two leopards, and a second man beside a bull. Most scholars regard it as the earliest known narrative scene — figures placed in relation to one another, telling something.

It was published by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eylem Özdoğan of Istanbul University in the journal *Antiquity* in 2022.

- A central male figure in high relief, holding his phallus in his right hand
- Two leopards in profile, mouths open, teeth marked
- A second male figure holding an object, turned toward a bull
- A bull with exaggerated horns

We keep the meaning open. Sayburç gives us a composed, deliberate scene whose specific meaning stays a mystery — and that honesty is part of the wonder.

The Village

Homes, halls, pillars and the dead

Sayburç is a whole community preserved together. Excavation has exposed more than fifty structures — five communal or special-purpose buildings and the rest homes — with hearths, storage, grinding stones, benches, niches, and the region's signature T-shaped pillars, some standing inside ordinary houses.

The people of Sayburç kept their dead close, buried within the homes. In one communal building a single skull was set into a wall niche, held apart from the rest — one of many signs of a deep concern with death and memory across the Taş Tepeler world.

Discoveries

Stories from the dig

Beer before bread?

Giant stone basins and grinding gear hint at large feasts. At neighbouring Göbekli Tepe, chemical traces in huge basins point to the fermentation of grain — some of the earliest evidence for brewing, from before farming was established.

The triangle necklace

A V-shaped collar carved on Urfa Man — the world's oldest life-size human statue, around 9000 BC — recurs across the sites for nearly two thousand years, alongside the bull, the leopard and the human form.

Sky burial & the scavengers

The animals carved most often are scavengers and predators — vultures, leopards, boar. It fuels a powerful idea: that the dead were first exposed, given to the birds, before their bones and skulls were gathered and kept.

Visit

See it as part of the whole

Sayburç is an active excavation, not a ticketed attraction — a village and open-air museum is planned but not yet open. The rewarding way to see it is a guided route through the wider landscape, based in Şanlıurfa:

- Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum — context first
- Göbekli Tepe — the monumental enclosures
- Karahan Tepe — carved heads and rock-cut rooms
- Sayburç — the village with the story on its wall, access permitting

The comfortable seasons are spring (April–May) and autumn (September–October). To arrange a visit, write to info@thecommunitygarden.org.

Sayburç.net is the English-language home for the Neolithic site of Sayburç, published by The Community Garden — a foundation in cultural preservation — as part of the Taş Tepeler network. Visuals are interpretive renderings, not photographs of the protected surfaces.