

First Temple-period ritual structure uncovered in Jerusalem

Comprising a series of eight rock-hewn rooms, the structure is believed to have been used for ritual purposes while the Temple still stood on the Temple Mount, just a few hundred meters away.

[Israel National News](#)

Jan 14, 2025, 9:54 AM (GMT+2)

A unique structure, uncovered by the Israel Antiquities Authority on the eastern slope of the City of David, within the Jerusalem Walls National Park, features eight rock-hewn rooms containing an altar, a standing stone (masseba), an oil press, and a winepress. In a new article published in the scientific journal *'Atiqot*, excavation director Eli Shukron suggests that the structure was used by the residents of Judah for cultic/religious practice.

This exceptional structure, dating to the First Temple period, was revealed during excavations conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority in the City of David. The newly [published article in 'Atiqot](#) proposes that the unique structure, comprising a series of eight rock-hewn rooms, was used for ritual purposes while the Temple still stood on the Temple Mount, just a few hundred meters away. It is the only known ritual structure from this period discovered in Jerusalem and one of the very few found in the land of Israel.

The uncovered structure covers an area of approximately 220 square meters and contains eight rock-hewn rooms, each with different installations: An oil press for producing oil, A winepress for making wine, a carved installation with a drainage channel, identified by researchers as an altar, and a large standing stone (masseba), next to which ritual activity

was likely practiced. One room's floor displayed mysterious V-shaped carving marks, the purpose of which remains unclear. According to Eli Shukron, the excavator of the site, these carvings may have served as a base for a tripod—an installation with three legs used for ritual activities.

In a small cave carved on the edge of the structure, a cache of objects dating to the eighth century BCE was uncovered, including cooking pots, jars bearing fragments of ancient Hebrew inscriptions, loom weights, scarabs, stamped seals with decorative motifs, and grinding stones used for crushing grains.

The authors of the article from the Center for Research on Ancient Jerusalem, led by archaeologist Eli Shukron, who directed the excavation on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, believe that the structure was in use until the 8th century BCE, the middle of the period when the Kings of Judah ruled. According to Shukron, "The structure ceased to function during the 8th century BCE, possibly as part of King Hezekiah's religious reform. According to the Bible, Hezekiah sought to centralize worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, abolishing the ritual sites scattered across the kingdom. The Bible describes how, during the First Temple period, additional ritual sites operated outside the Temple, and two kings of Judah—Hezekiah and Josiah—implemented reforms to eliminate these sites and concentrate worship at the Temple



Proposed reconstruction of the structure

“When we began excavating the City of David in 2010, we discovered that the site had been sealed with fill from the 8th century BCE, indicating it had fallen out of use during that time,” says Shukron. “The standing stone we uncovered remained upright in its original place, and the other rooms in the structure were also well-preserved.”

Although the current excavation began in 2010, the northern part of the structure was first uncovered in 1909 by Montague Parker, a British adventurer who came to Jerusalem in search of the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple treasures. Shukron’s excavation continued over several excavation seasons.



A carved installation identified as an altar

According to Amichai Eliyahu, Israel's Minister of Heritage: "This unique structure uncovered in the City of David is an exciting testimony to Jerusalem's rich past. Such discoveries make our connection and historic roots – going back thousands of years – tangible, in Jerusalem and other sites where the Jewish culture and belief system emerged."

The new article is published in *'Atiqot*, the Israel Antiquities Authority's scientific journal, part of the new IAA publications platform that consolidates all of the Authority's publications, reports, and archaeological articles for free public access.

Retrieved January 14, 2025 from [First Temple-period ritual structure uncovered in Jerusalem | Israel National News - Arutz Sheva](#)