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Modi'in and America: On the Power of Folklore & Place

THE SAGA OF GARIN HARMERKAZ

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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ABSTRACT

Modi'in is the site of both an ancient Jewish community and the modern nation's city of the future. This dichotomy is at the heart of a public battle between preservationists trying to raise awareness of the area's rich Hannukah-related history and developers keen on making a profit. Less well-known, is how this landscape has functioned as a mediating agent between American Jews and the State of Israel. The demilitarization of the Green Line made civilian settlement of the long-time pilgrimage site feasible. For American olim looking to connect with their spiritual heritage, the notion of restoring Modi'in offered an attractive alternative to Jerusalem's volatility. Designated by the Jewish Agency as a destination for emigration from the American Reform community, this contemporary association builds on the region's heritage as a bridge between the spiritual and physical realms of Israel. In this paper I ask how American Aliyah to Modi'in the years 1967-77 was organized, what the experience of immigration and settlement in the city was like for these olim and the impact that they had on this city's development. This work points to the significance of modern Modi'in's central planning and high quality of life. My insights also contribute to the important historiographical literature on modern Israeli urbanization of such scholars as Maoz Azaryahu and Tom Segev. I focus on a theme that appears repeatedly in archival documents: that these Americans were returning to the home of the Maccabees. This paper analyzes the use of this theme to argue that it was central to lifting these immigrants' expectations of the grandeur of their Aliya to Modi'in. This, in turn, significantly contributed to their disastrous experience of settlement and integration.

INTRODUCTION

In November of 2020, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, an Israeli real estate developer bid a record 147 million shekels (NIS) for the right to build 123 apartments and 1,000 square meters of commercial space in downtown Modi'in. News of the surprising contract capped a five-year trend in which the value of real estate in Modi'in grew by 100%.[1] Located halfway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, residents of this small central city enjoy easy access to either of Israel's metropolitan hubs. At only a 30-minute drive from either direction, the community offers a quick commute to the most sought-after Israeli locales. Nestled amidst mountainous Jerusalem's outlying foothills, centrally located Modi'in anchors a stretch of Jewish cities nestled alongside the country's former border with Jordan, or the "Green Line."[2] In 2016, *The New York Jewish Week* described Modi'in as a magnet for English speakers who were fueling the growth of a high-end real estate market across Israel. This observation helps explain why urban planners have designed a "City Center" neighborhood that is advertised as resembling Midtown Manhattan. The community's core district already features a "lake, green zones and bicycle paths" that American born residents have affectionally dubbed

[1] "Modi'in Real Estate among the Most Sought-after in Israel: Record Price Paid for Land in New City Center," *Buyitinisrael | בישראל בית,* November 15, 2020, https://www.buyitinisrael.com/news/modiin-real-estate-in-israel/.
[2] Peter Hirschberg, "Hasmonean Housing," *The Jerusalem Report,* March 14, 1991. 27, https://www.proquest.com/magazines/hasmonean-housing/docview/218741329/se-2?accountid=14546.

"Central Park."[3] Penthouses overlooking this picturesque scenery sell for over a million dollars.[4]

With open land an increasingly scarce commodity within the tiny country, housing prices in Israel are among the most expensive in the world. A recent 2020 study identifies the Jewish State as possessing the 2nd most expensive housing market in the world.[5] As this influx of American dollars accelerates the growth of luxury projects offering more living space, the price of real-estate in Modi'in continues to rise; a process that in recent years has reinforced the area's connection to Western *olim* –or Jewish immigrants.[6] Boasting excellent schools, ample green space, multiple synagogues, and a little league baseball scene to boot, the community's potential for growth is a safe bet.

But alongside its modern bourgeois appeal, Modi'in is also known as the home of the Maccabees, or the heroes of the Hannukah story. Celebrated for their role in liberating Jerusalem from a sacrilegious Greek occupation, the Maccabees are revered in the Jewish tradition. Their victory launched the Hasmonean Dynasty, nearly a century of self-rule remembered as the last bastion of Jewish sovereignty until the State of Israel's

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[3] Steve K. Walz, "Modi'in, Netanya Luring Luxury Projects," *Times of Israel*, June 7, 2016, https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/modiin-netanya-luring-luxury-projects/.
[4] Ibid. An interview with the developer responsible for the construction of these 4-5 story towers alluded to a combination of factors for their success. "Modi'in is not only considered to be a great place to live but also a very safe real estate investment, because of its quality of life and proximity to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and, of course, Ben-Gurion Airport, which is a big plus for those people who still conduct their business in the U.S. and UK."
[5] "Israel listed as being second most expensive country to buy a home," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 24, 2020, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/israel-listed-as-one-of-the-most-expensive-countries-to-buy-a-home-in-649970
[6] *Olim* is the Hebrew word for Jewish migrants to Israel

Declaration of Independence in 1948.[7] In honor of this golden era between Greek and Roman occupations of the Holy Land, an annual torch relay beginning in Modi'in at the Tomb of the Maccabees and ending at the Western Wall in Jerusalem signals the start of Hanukkah's festivities. [8] This ceremony was first begun in 1944.[9] As explained by the Israeli historians Maoz Azaryahu and Arnon Golan, it is a tradition that celebrates Modi'in's place in world history as an illustration of how a 'renewal of the old' differentiates the Jewish national revival from other contemporary movements.[10] Popular in America and Israel alike, Hanukkah connects these two Jewish communities, providing a tradition that helps bridge their many differences. And as the historic home of the mythic Jewish heroes of Hanukkah, Modi'in is assured a distinguished place in Israel, for both native-born Israelis and American olim.

The Modi'in border region's landscape occupies a uniquely outsized role within the saga of American Jews in the modern State of Israel. Out of Israel's 3.3 million olim, between 1948 to 2018 only 150,000 have come from America's population of nearly six million Jews.[11] But in recent years, this number has soared. Consequently, Modi'in has

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[7] "Who were the Maccabees?" *The American Israelite,* November 13, 2013. Newspapers.com/archive

[8] "Hanukkah Events in Israel, 2020," Tourist Israel, last modified December 16, 2020, https://www.touristisrael.com/hanukkah-in-israel/8682/.

[9] "Torch Relay", Maccabi.Org, 2022, https://www.maccabi.org/education/torch-relay.

[10] Maoz Azaryahu and Arnon Golan, "Zionist Homelandscapes (and their constitution) in Israeli Geography," *Social & Cultural Geography* 5 no. 3 (2004): 499. doi: 10.1080/1464936042000252840.

[11] Herb Keinon, "Number of Americans in Israel, Israelis in America Much Less than Thought," *The Jerusalem Post* JPost.com, December 17, 2019, https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Number-of-Americans-in-Israel-Israelis-in-America-much-less-than-thought-611218.

emerged as the epicenter of 30,000 North American olim who have arrived since the turn of the century.[12] Contemporary publications like *ModiInfo*, an independent local newsletter designed for English speakers, provide evidence of the city's warm atmosphere for Western transplants.[13] An academic theory of 'place-making' helps explain this influx. A product of collaboration between marketing and urban scholars, the concept's intellectual framework analyzes cities and notable sites as though the locales were a brand.[14] This lens provides the key to understanding Israel's use of Jewish lore in 'place-making' at Modi'in. The "culture and imagery" of Hannukah, which was already so powerful as a traditional story for American Jews, turned the place – the actual physical location of Modi'in – into a powerful 'brand.'

To contextualize this interplay between mythology and Jewish migration to Israel, this article focuses on the story of a group of American immigrants from Baltimore who in the early 1970s moved to a rural outpost near modern Modi'in. Since the contemporary city did not exist until its construction in the 1990s, the group's legacy points to the ways in which the Hanukkah story, its connection to the ancient city of Modi'in and its emphasis on religious freedom, has contributed to the region's growth as a destination for the American Jewish community in Israel. A focus on this colony from Baltimore, organized through a religious collective known as *Garin HaMerkaz*, illustrates the impact

[12] Steve K. Walz, "Israeli Little League: A 'Piece of Americana in Eretz Yisroel,'" *St. Louis Jewish Light,* April 10, 2013, https://stljewishlight.org/news/world-news/israeli-little-league-a-piece-of-americana-in-eretz-yisroel/.
[13] Rashi Kuhr, "'The Hebrew Will Come' Revisited," *ModiInfo* 2, no. 4 (March 2005), 1. (NLI Stacks 2 PB 18028).
[14] Massimo Giovanardi, "Hard and Soft Factors in Place Branding: Between Functionalism and Representationalism," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 8, no. 1 (February 2012): 31, https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2012.1.

of Modi'in's physical space. This is a place where the landscape's history and mythology have fused into a visible expression of this peoples' ancestral desire to avoid assimilation and the loss of their Indigenous culture. Intimately tied to this legacy, Modi'in has proven particularly attractive for American olim looking to connect to their Jewish roots in the historic Land of Israel, while still retaining the familiar comforts of their American lifestyles.

The experience of the Baltimore colony's Aliyah provides a foundation for my assertion that Modi'in's cultural geography serves as a bridge between Judaism's spiritual and physical realms. Underlying this analysis is an awareness of the cultural significance of a process known as 'actualization' within Jewish thought. Meaning, when "a past event is contemporized for a generation removed in time and space from the original event."[15] For example, a popular comparison of the similarities between Modern Israel's restoration of Jewish sovereignty with that of the Biblical Exodus generation's emancipated reality reveals that despite the distance between these moments, each facilitated the return of the Jews to their ancestral homeland.[16] Because this formulation eschews chronological time in favor of historical significance, reality's typical sense of separation between eras recedes. Within this conception of "sacred time," historical events are no longer confined to irreversible one-off occasions. This process is clearly visible in Modi'in, a landscape where Jewish activists have reformulated Israel's historical record into a localized example of redemptive history. By linking memory and

[15] Janet O'dea, "The Bible as a Secular Dilemma," *Forum: A Quarterly on the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel* 26, no. 1 (1977): 107.
[16] Ibid.

tradition in pursuit of community renewal, actualization grounds the relationship between the Hanukkah story, Garin Hamerkaz's project, and the Modi'in landscape itself.

In this paper, I ask how American Aliyah to Modi'in the years 1967-77 was organized, what the experience of immigration and settlement in the region was like for these olim and the impact that they had on the modern city's development. An emphasis on the Jewish peoples' collective memory of ancient Modi'in's religious significance guides these questions. My work points to the significance of contemporary Modi'in's central planning and high quality of life. The story also contributes to the important historiographical literature on modern Israeli urbanization of such scholars as Maoz Azaryahu, Ruth Kark, and Tom Segev.

This essay focuses on a theme that appears repeatedly in archival documents: that these Americans were returning to the home of the Maccabees. I analyze the use of this theme to argue that it was central to lifting these immigrants' expectations of the grandeur of their Aliyah to Modi'in. This, in turn, significantly contributed to the disastrous experience of settlement and integration endured by members of the Baltimore colony. Their ordeal speaks to the Israeli government`s traditional struggle to attract Jewish communities from advanced Western countries

Ancient Modi'in and the Maccabees: A Hannukah Story

Contemporary Jewish society hails the Maccabees as pop-culture icons; heroes who embody Israel's strength and determination to protect the nation's identity. In the name of Jewish freedom, these revolutionaries fought their Greek occupiers for over two decades, (167-140 B.C). Each winter, countless schoolchildren enjoy animated cartoons creatively introducing the holiday's account of these guerrilla warriors. However, unlike

Passover, Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, a book which Christians refer to as the Old Testament.[17] Rather, a series of Apocryphal books, once included in the Catholic and Greek Bibles known as Maccabees I, II and IV preserve the earliest accounts of this holiday's origins.[18] Embraced by the early Christians, these texts contain one of the world's earliest examples of religious martyrdom.[19]

There is evidence that the Greek tyrant Antiochus IV (175-163 B.C.) anticipated war with an upstart Roman empire and believed that unifying his theologically divided Syrian lands provided the best chance of bolstering his kingdom's resistance.[20] Reversing his ancestors' policy of tolerance, Antiochus placed a statue of Zeus within the Temple and banned the Law of Moses. Residents of Israel were also required to offer sacrifices of pork to the new idol and no longer identify as Jews. Violators were sentenced to death by torture, a particularly nasty way of making a public example of those who refused to follow the edict.[21] But the Jews enjoyed a uniquely well-developed literary culture in which their holy books recounted "a long struggle between royal and priestly/prophetic elites for the right to interpret the will of God."[22] In turn, producing a society of individuals who celebrated those who defied sinful royal decrees and were willing to even die for their beliefs. "Elijah in 1 Kings 18; and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 20-21, 26, 28"

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[17] "History: The Hanukkah Story," Reform Judaism, May 10, 2012, https://reformjudaism.org/jewish-holidays/hanukkah/history-hanukkah-story.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

[21] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 48-49.

[22] Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 5.

as well as the story of Samson are all examples of this uncompromising ethos in the Hebrew Bible.[23]

Translated into English as "dedication," Hanukkah's narrative is rooted in the exploits of a family from ancient Modi'in remembered as the Maccabees.[2425] Their tale begins with an elderly priest named Mattathias and his five sons of the Hasmonean family name who, in the face of Greek persecution, refused to renounce their Jewishness, fleeing for the safety of Modi'in's hill country instead.[26] While Alexander and his immediate successors had been content to let the Jews practice their own faith, the Greeks' heavy-handed tactics brought their administration into an inevitable confrontation with Judaism, a religion insistent on ritualistic purity and monotheism. The decision to place a statue of Zeus within Jerusalem's Second Temple had incensed ordinary farmers and craftsmen who felt betrayed by the city's political and religious elite.[27] Jews who followed the Hasmonean family into fighting for the preservation of their faith also became known as the Maccabees, or the Hebrew word for "hammer."[28]

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Noam Zion, "The Book of First Maccabees," My Jewish Learning, last modified December 20, 2017, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-book-of-first-maccabees/.

[25] Ibid. A set of ancient texts known as Maccabees I, II and IV have preserved their tale. Of the three books, only the first is regarded as based on a contemporary source originally recorded in Hebrew. Thought to be written between 134-104 B.C., only a Greek translation survives.

[26] David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

[27] Shmuel Shepkaru, *Jewish Martyrs in the Pagan and Christian Worlds* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17.

[28] "The Maccabees/Hasmoneans: History & Overview," History & Overview of the Maccabees, accessed December 10, 2020, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/history-and-overview-of-the-maccabees.

The Maccabees' legacy of defiance reflects this tradition of Jewish intransigence. Highlighting the role of human agency, the authors' of these books explicitly link their heroes' temporal success to divine favor.[29] Comparable to the Hebrew Bible's Book of Judges, the account contained within the Book of First Maccabees is recognized as an invaluable source for reconstructing the ideology that legitimized their revolt against Greek rule.[30] For example, 1 Maccabees 5:62 asserts, "those men into whose hand the salvation of Israel was given."[31] The author's narrative transformed a commemoration of the Second Temple's rededication into not only a time of thanksgiving for deliverance, but also an occasion for petitioning God to complete the ingathering of the exiles.[32] The Jews' victory is presented to readers as merely a step in Israel's full restoration.[33]

Where First Maccabees seeks to imbue the Hasmonean dynasty with the spiritual authority to rule in this fashion, Second Maccabees understands this national renewal to carry an even greater theological purpose. Composed in Greek sometime between 78 and 63 B.C., the account is an abridged work of a lost narrative thought to be written three

[29] Michael W. Duggan, "1 Maccabees: Emotions of Life and Death in Narrative and Lament," in *Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions: Emotions Associated with Jewish Prayer in and around the Second Temple Period*, edited by Reif Stefan C. and Egger-Wenzel Renate. (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 95.

[30] Benedikt Eckhardt, "The Hasmoneans and Their Rivals in Seleucid and Post-Seleucid Judea," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 47, no. 1 (2016): 56. doi:10.2307/26551162.

[31] Noam Zion, "The Book of First Maccabees," My Jewish Learning, December 20, 2017, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-book-of-first-maccabees/.

[32] Duggan, "1 Maccabees: Emotions of Life and Death in Narrative and Lament," 250.

[33] Ibid., 252.

generations after the revolt.[34] This book expands on the nature of Antiochus's persecutions by beginning with the martyrdom of Eleazer and of the mother and her seven sons. Echoing the Book of Daniel, each of these nine Jews refuses to break the Law of Moses. Declaring, "We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our fathers" (2 Macc. 7:2).[35] Subjected to gruesome tortures along the way to their deaths, their example sets the tone for the book's focus on spiritual warfare. In the Hanukkah tradition represented by 2 Maccabees, Antiochus is labeled "the blasphemer" (9:28) for his claim of being a deity. A framework of divine judgement upon the pretender presents the revolt as only the first stage of the Jewish people's deliverance.[36] Here again, Judah's victory is presented to readers as merely a step in Israel's full restoration.[37]

Where Maccabees 1 and 2 alike extoll the liberation of the Temple, the fourth book drifts even further from focusing on this accomplishment. Focusing on the story of the nine martyrs, rather than Judah's exploits, their deaths become even more deliberate as Eleazar taunts the court and the mother and her youngest son each throw themselves into fire. Their deaths are described as "a ransom for sin" which "through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an expiation" Israel is preserved (4 Macc. 17:21-22). Scholars date the text to around forty years after the birth of Jesus Christ.[38] An era when

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[34] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors,* 50.

[35] James D. Tabor, and Arthur J. Droge, *A Noble Death: Suicide And Martyrdom Among Christians And Jews In Antiquity,* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 1991), 74.

[36] Gerry Wheaton, "The Festival of Hanukkah in 2 Maccabees: Its Meaning and Function," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2012): 261, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43727846.

[37] Ibid., 252.

[38] Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors*, 50.

Hanukkah, although a minor holiday, would have been well known among the Jews. A reference in the New Testament's Book of John attests to this reality. "And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch" (10:22-23).[39] Compiled after the fall of Hasmonean independence, Maccabees IV is thought to reflect the influence of their Roman administrators' belief in the importance of dying with honor.[40] Taken together, the three books function as a bridge between the Old and New Testament. Consequently, the Maccabees represent a critical junction in the evolution of Judeo-Christian theology.

Hanukkah's ritualized practice of lighting eight nights worth of candles is often attributed to the Maccabees' discovery that upon reaching the Temple there appeared to be only enough oil left for a single day of the inner sanctum's eternal flame. Yet miraculously, this light lasted eight days, or long enough for a runner to return with newly purified oil pressed in Modi'in.[41] Perhaps surprisingly, this cherished anecdote is not included in any of the three Apocryphal books. Falling outside the bounds of canonical Jewish scripture, an abstract narrative of how "the few defeated the many…" is shared through a series of prayers that suffice for a specific account.[42]

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[39] "Bible Gateway Passage: John 10:22-23 – New International Version," Bible Gateway, accessed December 8, 2020, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+10%3A22-23&version=KJV.

[40] Shepkaru, *Jewish Martyrs in the Pagan and Christian Worlds,* 50.

[41] "Who were the Maccabees?" *The American Israelite,* November 13, 2013. Newspapers.com/archive.

[42] Jonathan Klawans, "Hanukkah, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and the Apocrypha," Biblical Archaeology Society, December 10, 2020, https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/hanukah-maccabees-and-apocrypha/.

Interestingly, the Book of Second Maccabees does include a rationale for the eight days, but the jar of oil is nowhere to be found.[43]

> They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year (10:6-8).

Only in the fourth century AD, hundreds of years after the Maccabees' victory, does the jar of oil enter recorded memory as a part of a compilation of oral history known the Babylonian *Talmud*.[44] Composed in exile after Rome's destruction of their nation's Second Temple, Jewish leaders may not have thought it wise to propagate a narrative promising return.[45] By focusing on the miracle of the oil, they neutered the role of human agency in world events. Intentionally reformulating Hannukah into a reminder of how individuals could bring the spirituality of the Temple into their everyday lives.[46]

These early leaders of diasporic Judaism, known as Rabbis, began to view Hanukkah as an opportunity to fortify their congregations' Jewish identity. Although unmoored from its literary foundation, Talmudic era directives instilled the custom of

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Vered Noam, "The Miracle of the Cruse of Oil: The Metamorphosis of a Legend," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 73 (2002): 192-193, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23509012.

[45] Yosef Eisen, "The Babylon Talmud," Jewish History, last modified July 21, 2014, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2652565/jewish/The-Babylonian-Talmud.htm.

[46] Dianne Ashton, *Hanukkah in America: A History* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013), 29.

placing a lit lamp within a window or outside one's door to publicize the miracle.[47] The development of this practice reflects the broader strategy of rabbinical Judaism as a whole, designing a tactical relationship with the outside world that ensured the survival of the Jewish people while living among foreigners. [48] Such longstanding use of verses such as Proverbs 6:23 demonstrate this orientation; "For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light."[49] This directive provides context for the emergence of the iconic nine-branched candelabrum among the Jews of medieval Spain.[50] In this era the Christmas season brought regular outbursts of antisemitic violence upon Jews. As a result, many of the family games associated with Hanukkah today stem from this period of enforced seclusion during the overlapping holidays.[51] Although the three books containing the Maccabees' own account of the holiday eventually faded into obscurity and left the world's Christian consciousness, the work of Talmudic era Rabbis to preserve Hanukkah's essence ensured the holiday's survival into the modern era.

The first Europeans to search for the site of ancient Modi'in were late 19th century Christian monks and academics alike, drawn in by alluring descriptions of a Hellenistic era mausoleum covered in pyramids and ships of carved stone visible even from the

[47] Raphael Patai, and Hayah Bar-Yitshak, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions* (Armonk, NY: M.E.Sharpe, 2013), 228.

[48] Ashton, *Hanukkah in America: A History*, 29.

[49] Ibid., 229.

[50] Patai and Bar-Yitshak, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions,* 224.

[51] *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions,* 226.

Mediterranean Sea.[52] According to the *Mishna*, Judaism's oldest surviving text, Jerusalem's Temple lay twenty-one kilometers east of the hilltop city that would have served as a rest stop for pilgrims or traders coming from Jaffa on the coast.[53] These early archeologists focused their efforts on a centrally located region suggested by a map preserved from the 6th century.[54] And in 1866, when a Franciscan Monk named Emmanuel Forner settled on an Arab village named El-Midya as the site of the ancient city, these efforts began to bear fruit. A phonetic similarity between the names El-Midya and Modi'in complemented the community's proximity to the ancient city's supposed coordinates and provided the rationale.[55] The discovery of a nearby hilltop with a domed tomb featuring seven crypts and a Christian cross known to locals as "Sheikh el-Gherbawy," appeared to confirm the association.[56] A fellow French archeologist concurred, dating the site to the 5th century, declaring: "this structure was probably built by the Christians to commemorate the burial place of the holy Maccabees."[57] Later British explorers declared no doubt in confirming the association with the seven martyred brothers.[58]

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[52] Matti Friedman, "Is the Maccabees' ancient mystery close to solution?" *The Times of Israel,* July 09, 2012, https://www.timesofisrael.com/the-lost-tombs-of-the-maccabees-is-an-archaeological-mystery-close-to-solution/.

[53] Rimonah Traub, "Hilltop history" *The Jerusalem Post*, October 21, 2005, https://www.jpost.com/Travel/Jerusalem/Hilltop-history.

[54] Amit Re'em, "Horbat Ha-Gardi" *Hadashot Arkheologiyot* 123 (2011): 3. www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_detail_eng.aspx?print=all&id=1712.

[55] Re'em, "Horbat Ha-Gardi," 3.

[56] Ibid., 4.

[57] Re'em, "Horbat Ha-Gardi," 6.

[58] Ibid.

In 1882, two American brothers succeeded in purchasing an adjacent site, an area known to locals as the graves of the Jews. Survivors of an ill-fated Christian colony, the pair viewed the purchase as part of their expanding tourism business. Encouraged by rising Jewish settlement across the country, the outlay appeared sound. However, the remoteness of the site quickly left the brothers looking for a way out of the sour investment.[59] After the "Maccabean Club," an elite society of English Jewry, toured Palestine on their "Maccabean pilgrimage" the English Zionist Federation emerged as the leading candidate to purchase the brother's claimed site.[60] The group made acquiring the land for a Jewish colony and memorial their primary goal. [61] Although negotiations were consistent between the two sides from 1898 to 1911, progress on the deal broke down for good with the property's sale to an Arab landowner.[62] Regardless of its exact location, having been stamped with the seal of scientific knowledge, Modi'in's archeological reality provided evidence for believers and academics alike of the Maccabees' enduring historical legacy.

During the 19th century, the Bible, in addition to providing the basis for much of the modern world's earliest archeological work, began to take on increasing importance for Europe's Jewish community.[63] Jerusalem's geography, located at a major crossway of

[59] Ruth Kark, "Historical Sites- Perceptions and Land Purchase: The Case of Modi'in, 1882-1931," *Journal of Israeli History* 9, no. 1 (1988): 4. DOI: 10.1080/13531048808575924.

[60] Ibid., 6.

[61] Ibid., 7.

[62] Ibid., 5.

[63] Steven R Weisman, *The Chosen Wars: How Judaism Became an American Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 15.

the ancient world, meant that the community's recurrent insistence on sovereignty from their larger neighbors had long brought perpetual conflict.[64] But the invention of nation-state identities had blurred Christendom's traditional boundaries. A quote from one of France's revolutionary National Assembly member's outlines the stakes: "to the Jews as individuals- everything; as a nation- nothing."[65] Finding themselves increasingly caught between two worlds, the notion of "Be a man abroad and a Jew in your tent" begin to took hold.[66] Although expected to relinquish their traditional sense of self, Jewish individuals found themselves ostracized from society at large. While publicly extolling the secular values of human liberty and self-determination, each of Europe's new nation states appropriated the religious imagery of their traditional Christian culture to make their case.[67]

In *The Enlightenment Bible,* Jonathan Sheehan argues that this paradoxical development occurred as the result of a societal transition from understanding scripture as God's infallible word to that of a cultural text containing the heritage of the West. Divorced from prophecy, the study of history alone promised to "inject the Bible with the rejuvenating juice of authority."[68] The study of humanity, rather than divinity, guided this new interpretation. For example, in England, Christians transformed the story of Exodus

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[64] Lacey Baldwin Smith, *Fools, Martyrs, Traitors: The Story of Martyrdom in the Western World* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 45.

[65] Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History*, (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, 2012), 7.

[66] Ibid., 6.

[67] Shapira, *Israel: A History*, 8-9.

[68] Jonathon Sheehan*, The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 185.

into "a paradigm of revolutionary politics."[69] Due to Judaism's traditional faith in an immutable Bible, believers were written off as "depraved and corrupt" in comparison to their "noble and inventive" ancestors.[70] "If Christianity was an expression of German culture, Judaism expressed the culture of the Jews."[71] Such logic provided a platform for antisemitic critics to suggest that Jews ought to "return to their ancient homeland…to regain their national respect."[72] Although the community's leaders had traditionally forbidden their congregations from reading Christian texts, the importance of fortifying Jewish identity began to take priority.

During the 19th century, a class of liberal rabbis determined to counter this turn began to look towards non-traditional texts for answers. Trained in Europe's burgeoning university culture, these progressive reformers culled through formerly off limit sources and began encouraging Jews to study Maccabean history for more than just God's message. These young rabbis hoped that by showing how Jewish life had evolved in its fullness, they could convince Western Jews to refrain from converting to Christianity. [73] At the core of this belief was the notion that Judaism needed to be reformulated into an ethical creed for its survival into the modern world. This framing re-positioned Jews as the inheritors of a moral tradition, rather than an ethno-religious identity.[74] But among

[69] Ibid., 160.

[70] Ibid., 215.

[71] Ibid., 235.

[72] Ibid., 179.

[73] Ashton, *Hanukkah in America*, 37.

[74] Ashton, *Hanukkah in America*, 23.

supporters of the Hebrew national revival, such abandonment of the Jewish people's national character went a step too far.

In response, these early Zionists began studying Apocryphal Maccabean history as well. And in the process, they deduced markedly different lessons than their reform minded counterparts. Finding the Hasmonean's refusal to assimilate into Greek society especially useful for their own dream of creating a Jewish nation-state.[75] Motivated by Zionist ideology's rejection of a passive fate, these texts provided a convenient counterpoint to the world's failure to recognize Jews as either a religious, national, or social group. In Zionist thought, this dismissal had left their people as ghosts, confined to the ghettos and powerless against violence. To relinquish even a portion of their right to exist as Jews was inconceivable. Considering their community's historical condition, Jewish nationalists were distrustful of outsiders and believed their people must emancipate themselves solely through their own efforts.[76] Firmly rooted in this bid for self-sufficiency, Zionist culture lionized the Maccabees, holding that Jews must embrace their heritage to secure tomorrow's safety.

Zionism and indeed Israel's belief in the virtue of Jewish independence is particularly evident in contemporary Modi'in. With the Zionists' adoption of Hanukkah as a bulwark against assimilation in the modern world, they increased the holiday's prestige from its traditional place as a minor children's holiday, centered around the

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[75] The fact that Jewish nationalists relied on a story preserved by medieval Christian clergymen is one of the twists emerging from Europe's recasting of the Bible as a historical text during the era of Enlightenment. The concept of biblical archeology also stems from this re-formulation.

[76] Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2017), 35.

family unit, to one that encapsulates the promise of Jewish sovereignty.[77] Consider, for example, a 1968 advertisement inviting readers of the *American Israelite* newspaper to spend their winter holiday in Modi'in, the birthplace of the Maccabees: "Here, in 165 B.C.E. Judah Maccabee led a victorious Jewish army to dramatic victory against overwhelming Syrian force. Chanukah celebrates that victory every year. And that victory is still celebrated here every year."[78] The advertisement's use of the Maccabees as a symbol of Jewish continuity, provided potential American travelers with a familiar counterpoint to the reality of Israel's unfamiliarity. Within the country today, the official state celebration beginning the Hannukah festivities starts in Modi'in, a distance of around 30 kilometers from Jerusalem.[7980] Highlighted by an annual torch relay, the event sets out from the Tomb of the Maccabees and continues on to the nation's capital, where, since 1967, this trek has culminated in the "kindling of the lights" at the Western Wall.[81] This official, ritualized acknowledgment of the Hasmoneans' legacy for contemporary Jewish Israel marks the beginning of the holiday's commemoration of Jewish sovereignty. For the modern state, this ceremony provides an experiential narrative in which a restored Modi'in parallels the restoration of the Jewish people themselves. This formulation illustrates how the Zionists have integrated the Maccabees' legacy into a part

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[77] Raphael and Bar-Yitshak, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions,* 226.

[78] El Al: The airline of Israel, "This Winter, Spend Summer in Israel," *The American Israelite*, October 24, 1968. Newspapers.com/archive.

[79] "Hanukkah Events in Israel, 2020," Tourist Israel, last modified December 16, 2020, https://www.touristisrael.com/hanukkah-in-israel/8682/.

[80] "Modi'in Central Station to Jerusalem," Rome2rio, accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.rome2rio.com/map/Modiin-Central-Station/Jerusalem.

[81] "Hanukkah Events in Israel, 2020," Tourist Israel, last modified December 16, 2020, https://www.touristisrael.com/hanukkah-in-israel/8682/.

of Israel's sacred civil religion in which a fervent faith in the lessons of history defines Hanukkah today.

How the Maccabees Bridge the Gap Between American and Israeli Jews

Over time, America's religious protections have contributed to the fracturing of the Jewish community's sense of collective self. About one-third of American Jews identify with the liberal Reform movement, another third denies any affiliation, and the remainder is split between the Conservative and Orthodox streams of Judaism.[82] A 2019 public opinion poll conducted by the American Jewish Committee found that only 44% of the country's young/secular demographic cited Israel's existence as a significant part of their identity. And while 80% of Israeli Jews supported President Donald Trump's Middle East policies, only 37% of their American peers felt the same.[83] Zionism's belief in the legitimacy of political boundaries matching the Jewish nation's biblical kingdom has struggled to take root among progressive Jews in the United States. However, the story of Modi'in's growth challenges this narrative of ambivalence and disengagement.

Where America's founders idealized a pluralistic society, Israel's dreamed of a Jewish majority. The historian, Steven R. Weisman explains how this divergence resulted in inherently competitive strands of Jewish identity. Within *The Chosen Wars: How Judaism Became an American Religion*, he argues "that after Jews came to the United States, they evolved in the nineteenth century from believing in a messiah who would

[82] Justin Nortey, "U.S. Jews Have Widely Differing Views on Israel," Pew Research Center, May 21, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/21/u-s-jews-have-widely-differing-views-on-israel/.
[83] Judy Maltz, "Growing Number of U.S. Jews Support Evacuation of All West Bank Settlements, Survey Finds," Haaretz.com, June 2, 2019, https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-growing-number-of-u-s-jews-support-evacuation-of-west-bank-settlements-study-finds-1.7314699.

return the Jews to the Holy Land toward a belief in seeking redemption for humanity through good works."[84] Akin to a Jewish version of the Christian "social gospel," well-meaning emissaries of Europe's liberal Reform movement attempted to Americanize their Judaism. In championing progressive causes such as abolition, worker rights, and public health, adherents saw little utility in Zionism's insularity. The potential for accusations of dual loyalty were too risky to entertain for most American Jews.[85] This tension between universalism and particularism as cultural values between Judaism's progressive and orthodox wings that plays a role in the historically low of rate emigration among American Jews.

Despite the supremacy of the American Reform movement's understanding of Israel as a spiritual rather than a physical destination, Zionism grew slowly but steadily along the margins of the nation's Jewish societies. In 1901, the Federation of American Zionists were holding their fourth annual convention and boasted 151 affiliated organizations.[86] But nationally, membership still remained small, attracting mainly a motley group of non-religious immigrants who identified with Zionism as an alternative way of expressing their Jewishness.[87] America's atmosphere of religious tolerance created little incentive for jeopardizing the gentiles' welcome. But as early as 1879, a coalition of conservative synagogues were meeting in Philadelphia to discuss the revival of Hannukah as a way of countering both this turn away from Jewish "nationhood" as

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[84] Weisman, *The Chosen Wars: How Judaism Became an American Religion*, 10.
[85] Weisman, *The Chosen Wars: How Judaism Became an American Religion*, 250.
[86] "Jewish Zionists Meet: The Annual Convention of the Federation Shows Growth," *The Baltimore Sun*, June 20, 1901. Newspaper.com/archive.
[87] Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926-1948* (Tuscaloosa, Al: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 12.

well as the lure of the Christmas season in America.[88] Attempting to shield themselves, these traditionalists provided the largest base of early support for Zionism in the country. Playing off the symbols of their new home, a popular Hanukkah story conflated George Washington with Mattathias himself.[89] And as the rejuvenated holiday took root, traditionalist and reform rabbis alike latched onto the Maccabees as a way of both empowering their own role and emphasizing the importance of religious devotion during the Christmas season.[90] In the process, these rabbis infused Hanukkah with the rhetoric of religious liberty and revolution that dominated the American discourse.[91] A revitalized celebration promised a parable of how to hold onto one's identity while living amongst a modern Hellenistic culture. The Zionists' own embrace of Hanukkah had mirrored the Americans' process, elevating a similar set of values - albeit for their utility in building a country, rather than inculcating a religious identity.

But to European Zionists, having arrived in the United States to facilitate the exodus of their people before yet another tragedy occurred, seemingly supportive Americans were inexplicably content staying put.[92] In an attempt to meet their reluctant audience halfway, Zionism's emissaries began emphasizing a more holistic brand of Zionism. Now they would focus on their message's underlying notion of a "New Jew,"

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[88] Weisman, *The Chosen Wars*, 216.

[89] Esther Schely-Newman, "Local Concerns, Foreign Heroes: George Washington in Israel," *Western Folklore* 67, no. 4 (2008): 355. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25474937.

[90] Ashton, *Hanukkah in America,* 102.

[91] Ibid., 52.

[92] Daniel Gordis, *We Stand Divided: The Rift between American Jews and Israel* (New York: Ecco, 2019), 51.

while downplaying the necessity of moving.[93] In 1948, the impact of this ideological reformulation became clearer as America's Jews responded to the news of Israel's establishment with a sense of unmistakable pride. A rabbi in Philadelphia spoke of Israel's founders as "modern Maccabees."[94] Another rabbi from New Jersey went even further, declaring:

> The Maccabees really set the pattern for the leaders of the Revolutionary War in the United States…Other people had fought bravely and courageously before but the battle was the first in recorded history not for acquisition of new land or glory but for the defense of religious freedom.[95]

This appeal's familiarity made the Hasmoneans an easy bridge for Israelis looking to connect with their fellow Jews across the Atlantic. For supportive rabbis, cultivating an attachment with Israel provided another means to increase both the morale and cohesiveness of their congregations.[96] Spanning the spectrum of the Jewish experience, from orthodoxy to progressivism, this fusion with American sensibilities created a template for cooperation between the two poles and their disparate understandings of *Zion*.

As news of the Holocaust's horrors spread throughout America in the aftermath of the Second World War, this message resonated more than ever. As early as 1949, an editor from a Jewish newspaper in Denver traveled to Israel and wrote home imploring his fellow brethren to help. He identified the country's biggest problem as a lack of housing and jobs for refugees- and plugged the importance of contributing to the United

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[93] Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 625.

[94] "Hanukkah Celebration to Begin on Sunday," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* December 21, 1948.

[95] "Religious Freedom Fight Cited as Synagogue Installs," *Asbury Park Press,* December 27, 1948.

[96] Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, 625.

Jewish Appeal's drive to raise $250,000,000 for Israel's development.[97] Funds raised by local Zionist chapters in Pittsburg and Milwaukee established centers for immigrant children to attend kindergarten and day nurseries while their parents' sought employment or attended Hebrew lessons.[98] As fundraising, rather than participation in Aliyah, marked supporters, this response is reflective of Zionism's chief function in the United States.

This general lack of enthusiasm among American Jews adds to the significance of the fanfare surrounding Garin HaMerkaz's decision to immigrate to Modi'in. In 1970, the Jewish Agency had decided to try and centralize their fundraising efforts by grouping this network of supportive communities into an umbrella organization called the American Zionist Federation.[99] A supportive Baltimore Zionist Federation functioned as an affiliated chapter. Supporters of the coalition extolled the benefits of increased coordination. In addition to promoting religious education and an increased commitment to Zionism among young American Jews, proponents wanted to improve "American-Israel understanding" and assist "Jews who need or want to settle in Israel."[100] However, with little to no with little to no institutional momentum towards encouraging people to move, the list of goals reads like an overview of the difficulties facing Zionist leaders. For example, in 1975, the executive director of the American based "Israel Bond Committee" went as far as to bluntly tell a reporter that his organization was concerned

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[97] Robert S. Gamzey, "Will Immigration in Israel be Curtailed?" *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, May 20, 1949. Newspapers.com/archive.

[98] "Youngsters Haven in the Promised Land," *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, May 20, 1949. Newspapers.com/archive.

[99] "AZF: For Former Status and Stature," *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, June 12, 1970. Newspapers.com/archive.

[100] Ibid.

with raising funds and was not involved in Aliyah. And another Zionist Federation chapter president once remarked, "I think everyone's for Aliyah for somebody else. I have found that it is for very committed and observant people."[101] Such a grim outlook suggests the media attention surrounding the Baltimore colony's departure could be explained as both a function of novelty and the desire of Zionist American Jewish organizations to extract as much publicity out of the group's plans as possible.

The Saga of Garin HaMerkaz

The story of Garin HaMerkaz is particularly useful for understanding the direction of this fusion of Jewish values in today's modern world. Left to the Zionists alone, contemporary Modi'in would almost undoubtedly still exist. In a 1990s interview, Israel's director of urban planning discussed the origins of the idea, explaining that government officials had long considered the idea of the modern city of Modi'in: "It was first raised in the fifties. But the project stayed on the back burner until the mid-eighties when site studies were started." The city's architects envisioned an "alternative to Herzliyah, Ra'ananah and Kfar Savah, all of which grew rapidly and often without sufficient planning." And while set to begin as a bedroom community for the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem areas, urban planners were hoping to "attract high-tech industry to Mod'in itself." This statement points to the significance of the Israeli government's desire to prevent civilian needs from stifling the site's potential. However, without an acknowledgement of the American Jewish community's conception of Modi'in, attempts to understand the Israeli government's intentions in the region are inherently limited.

[101] Linda Sampson, "Aliyah is Supported- in Theory," *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, April 10, 1975. Newspapers.com/archive.

The majority of what is known about the earliest attempt to settle rural Modi'in by civilians is due to the existence of a lone paper booklet telling its own participants' story. This document provides evidence of not only how the Israeli government advertised the region in its pre-development years, but also how Americans themselves viewed the region's potential prior to the construction of modern Modi'in. At only nineteen pages, *The Road from Aliyah: The Story of Garin Hamerkaz* provides a brief but exhaustive record of its authors' ordeal. Furthermore, the absence of any evidence of outside editorial oversight suggests that this booklet is about as 'grass-roots' as researchers can expect to find when studying the state of American Aliyah throughout the decade following 1967's Six-Day war.

Published in 1975 and preserved in Israel's National Library, *The Story of Garin Hamerkaz* avoids attributing its contents to any single author. A testimonial dedicated to the accuracy of the text's narrative exists in lieu, suggesting that "We, the members of the Garin" were engaged in a shared effort to put their experience to pen. The communal tone makes sense considering that the Hebrew word *Garin* refers to a collective of individuals who on one level or another lived and worked together in anticipation of eventually settling in Israel.[102] Reflective of the group's commitment to making Aliyah, the booklet's cover is embellished with a series of excerpts spliced from other unspecified promotional pamphlets. Placed at haphazard angles, these lines of cheerful advice rest underneath bold headers such as "Guide For Oleh," or "The Road To Aliyah." [103] But in

[102] Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier, eds., *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1973), xxxi.
[103] *The Road from Aliyah: The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 1975. (NLI Stacks S 76 B 993), 4.

each case, the sentence's "For" or "To" features a large overriding X, giving one the impression that readers should not trust the passages' sunny tones. The fact that the Baltimore colony identified themselves as a Garin is significant. This form of social organization became a popular choice for Jews refusing to renounce their commitment to Israel despite the beginning of the American liberalism's turn against Zionism after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank following the Six-Days War.[104]

This emergence of a progressive Jewish counter-culture within American society is of particular importance because between 1967 and 1973, over 30,000 American Jews made Aliyah. This figure peaked at more than 7,000 arrivals alone in 1971.[105] Highly educated and idealistically politically liberal, these expats differed from the earlier waves of traditionally-minded orthodox Jews and their numbers dwarf the scale of prior decades. [106] For example, from 1948 to 1959 only 4,495 Americans attempted Aliyah. This averages out to a mere 375 persons per year. The six years directly preceding 1967 averaged only 699 a year.[107] In *Elvis and Jerusalem*, the historian Tom Segev explains how the nation's "conquest of the Western Wall, the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, and other holy sites gave a huge impetus to the Jewish component of Israeli identity."[108] This dynamic is important for understanding how Garin Hamerkaz, a colony of

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[104] Porter and Dreier, *Jewish Radicalism,* 117.
[105] Uzi Rebhun and Chaim Isaac Waxman, "The 'Americanization' of Israel: A Demographic, Cultural and Political Evaluation," *Israel Studies* 5, no. 1 (2000): 66-67, https://doi.org/10.1353/is.2000.0018.
[106] Judy Maltz, "When an Embattled Israel Called Them in 1967, They Came - and Never Left," *Haaretz.*com, June 23, 2017, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/they-came-in-1967-to-help-an-embattled-israel-and-never-left-1.5478360.
[107] Rebhun and Waxman, "The 'Americanization' of Israel," 67.
[108] Tom Segev, *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel* (NY: Henry Holt & Company, 2001), 90.

religiously oriented progressive American Jews, arrived in Israel at the end of this 1973 surge.

From the tract's opening passages, a sense of idealism and disillusionment pervade these emigrants' memory of their ill-fated venture. Cognizant of the fact that their accusations were inflammatory, the text's authors took pains to clarify their intent. Specifying to readers that their purpose is "not to destroy, but to build."[109] And explained that, "We feel that Aliya should be entrusted in the hands of capable and inspired people whose idealism will succeed, and whose honesty will prevail."[110] Such defensiveness reveals the participants' fear that a story describing "mismanagement, and outright dishonesty in the highest offices of officialdom" would be dismissed by readers as either unreliable or attributed to exceptional circumstances. Of particular concern are accusations of bitterness and falsifying the reality of their attempt to settle Modi'in. The inclusion of supportive third-party documents, such as newspaper accounts celebrating their departure, suggests an attempt to bolster their narrative's credibility. They are essentially imploring readers to understand that Israeli records of the Garin's experience were extremely hard, if not impossible, to come by. The Jewish Agency, or *Sochnut,* drew much of this ire. As the booklet's authors explain, "Minutes of meetings were not provided and when they were they appeared as a record of what perhaps the Sochnut should have said."[111] Unfortunately, the existence of this underlying tension between the work's authors and the Israeli government itself means that an even-handed analysis is simply unattainable. Despite the impossibility of conclusively establishing the accuracy

[109] *The Road from Aliyah: The Story of Garin HaMerkaz,* 4
[110] Ibid.
[111] *The Road from Aliyah: The Story of Garin HaMerkaz,* 4.

of the booklet's contents, attempts to analyze Garin HaMerkaz's 'side of the story' are still valuable. An analysis of the authors' memory provides scholars with a sort of 'time-capsule' detailing the inner dynamics of Aliyah-minded Americans.

In 1969, a Baltimore based Rabbi named Eliezer Perr began to organize interested families into the group. Translated into Hebrew as the "The Center," HaMerkaz's members enjoyed an educated and progressive laity.[112] A native New Yorker, the congregation's spiritual leader fostered a tight-knit atmosphere in which Aliyah to Israel functioned as the ultimate expression of Jewish identity. Rabbi Perr's *Yeshiva*, or religious study school, promulgated an innovative appreciation for classical Jewish texts amid an emphasis on socially conscious community involvement.[113] Local newspaper accounts detailing the frenzy surrounding the Garin's departure portray the Rabbi as a knowledgeable and charismatic leader of a movement fusing modern values with a commitment to Torah observance.

In one such local interview about the upcoming move, a member who expected to emigrate with his young family after finishing graduate school at Johns Hopkins justified his commitment by explaining how it would be easier "to be religious in the secular world" of Israel than in America.[114] The reporter's placement of Modi'in's location as being in an area "where the pre-1967 border nudged like an elbow into the Arab West Bank area of Jordan" complemented Rabbi Perr's idealistic description of their destination as "the last piece of undeveloped land on this [the Israeli] side of the

[112] Robert P. Wade, "Maryland Jewish Group to Begin Life Anew in Israel," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 7, 1974. Newspapers.com/archive.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Wade, "Maryland Jewish Group to Begin Life Anew in Israel."

border.[115] These exchanges reveal a curious sense of detachment from Israel's physical reality. In response to a reporter's question about the tension between secular and religious Israelis, Eliezer Perr dismissed the significance of Israel's political culture. Curtly remarking, "I'm not impressed by all the hollering…it's a free, democratic country. We'll go and work, vote and change it."[116] Befitting the Garin's own identity, which blended liberalism and traditional beliefs, a mixture of nationalism and religion provided the foundation for these Americans' identification with Modi'in's ancient Jewish inhabitants.

According to the Garin's account, for three years, their colony did not receive any outside help as its leadership sought a place capable of absorbing the entire community with minimal disruption to their quality of life. Only after sixty families were firmly committed to the move did representatives of the Jewish Agency and officers of the NYC branch of the "Israel Aliyah Center" engage with Rabbi Perr's group.[117] These officials recommended Modi'in and guaranteed that while limiting settlement to those affiliated with HaMerkaz, "all housing and necessary services would be completed prior to the Garin's Aliyah."[118] Necessary services referred to working electricity, street lights, security, telephone lines, gas, water, an accessible doctor, public transport, the use of a vehicle, and a store or some other means of purchasing food or other supplies.[119] Beds, refrigerators and other household items were also negotiated for until members' own

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[115] Carl Schoettler, "12 City Families to Found Israeli Town," *The Evening Sun* (Baltimore), June 13, 1974. Newspapers.com/archive.
[116] Schoettler, "12 City Families to Found Israeli Town."
[117] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 6.
[118] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 6.
[119] Ibid.

household belongings could arrive. These conditions precipitated the Garin's agreement to make Aliyah by the end of the 1974 summer.[120] The arrangement provided grounds for the colony's expectation of a smooth entry into Israeli society.

The Garin's impending departure captured the imagination of all the major Jewish organizations and local outlets alike. News of the families' plans circulated quickly throughout the Baltimore and Washington metro areas. A memo included within the booklet illustrates how large mainstream organizations like the Baltimore Zionist Federation supported Garin HaMerkaz's Aliyah. This document captures the importance of the moment for the American Jewish community. Inviting its recipients to a farewell ceremony for the departing members, the Garin's local Zionist Federation played on the Maccabees mythic significance to drum up support for their Aliyah.

> An event of great importance to Israel and local Jewry will take place in the next few months. More than sixty dedicated and courageous families under the leadership of Rabbi Eliezer Perr are moving to Israel where they will resettle the and rebuild Modi'in, the historical home of the Maccabees… [They will] share in rebuilding this community.[121]

Along with this celebration, the Jewish National Fund initiated a fundraiser to pay for thousands of saplings promising to reforest Modi'in. This branded effort, publicized in the Garin's name, complemented a general fundraising drive that resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars pledged to the Israeli government for rebuilding Modi'in, the home of the Maccabees.[122] These activities were in line with Israel's traditional response to the United Nation's exclusion of their country in economic aid programs for the

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[120] Ibid., 7.
[121] Sol Goldstein, "Baltimore Zionist Federation," Untitled Letter, May 24, 1974. In *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 3.
[122] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 7.

Middle East. This reality had left the young Jewish State reliant on the donations of wealthier Diaspora communities and loans from the government of the United States.[123] While American Jews regularly contributed to Zionism financially, immigration remained off the radar for most: sixty families were unprecedented. As advertised, a smattering of high-profile officials from "the Israel Aliyah Center, the Sochnut, the Israeli ambassador, and the mayor of Baltimore," attended the event.[124] With Hanukkah's centrality to the life of American Jews, Modi'in's connection to the holiday would have offered an enticing selling point for proponents of Aliyah and fundraising in general. A 1973 advertisement published by the Jewish National Fund in the popular American monthly journal *Jewish Currents* provides evidence of this element at play. Prospective tourists were invited to "Plant a Tree With Your Own Hands" in locations such as "Modi'in: near the Tombs of the Maccabees" or "Martyrs Forest: in the Judean hills, dedicated to the sacred memory of the six million Jews, victims of the holocaust."[125] Rooted in these mythic narratives, Garin HaMerkaz's expectations for their Aliyah were undoubtedly influenced by such romanticism.

Although set to begin humbly, the official government plans for Modi'in were far greater than a simple hamlet in the hills. An advertisement published by the Israel Aliyah Center, and included in the Garin's booklet, introduced readers to the opportunity. "Nestled in the rolling foothills of the blue-green Judean hills is the historic town of

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[123] "UN Survey Recommends Aid to Arab Nations," *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle,* January 13, 1950. Newspapers.com/archive.

[124] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 7.

[125] Itzhak Ben and Moshe Grinberg, eds. *Who's Who In Israel: 1973-74 Special Jubilee Issue* (Tel Aviv: Bronfman & Cohen Publishers, 1976), 477.

Modi'in, the birthplace of the Maccabees." [126] Having oriented its audience to the site's mythic significance, the advertisement's author continued into a summary of the village's trajectory. There were promises to prospective residents of the construction of an additional hundred three-to-four-bedroom homes on single family plots. And for those wanting a smaller unit, "Efficiency apartments will be available" as the community's phased construction progresses.[127] Intended to preserve the natural beauty of the Modi'in site's undeveloped environment, the advertisement included the requirement that "all members will maintain the landscape bordering their home to preserve the natural beauty and residential quality."[128] This appeal's emphasis on the individual's responsibility for maintaining the character of the community's pastoral character is reminiscent of an American homeowner association. As the community grew, the government office also promised a local school system and shopping centers. Public transportation was also promised, with the plan that the community would eventually possess its own mini-bus and incorporation into the countrywide "Egged Bus Company" network. Interested individuals could submit a written application to the NYC office followed by a personal interview. Pending approval by Garin HaMerkaz's leadership, all were welcome to join.[129] The cooperation between Rabbi Perr's vision and Zionist institutions cemented the Garin's credentials and contributed to the romanticism underpinning the region's Maccabean heritage.

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[126] Israel Aliyah Center, "Village of Modi'in," An advertisement in *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz,* 2.
[127] Village of Modiin," *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz,* 2.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

Throughout the summer of 1974, local journalists covered the Garin's first group of impending departures with a mix of curiosity and incredulity. In one story, readers learned that "A group of deeply religious Baltimore families will begin emigration to Israel this month to found a new town based on the ancient law of the Torah." A description of the occupational adjustment awaiting the families followed suit. "Although the Modi'in settlement will be oriented toward an agricultural and light industrial base, Rabbi Perr concedes his group has no farmers."[130] The collective's leader attempted to minimize this reality by stressing his flock's commitment to perseverance. "It is easy to sacrifice as long as you don't feel what you are doing is a sacrifice; if you are doing what you feel is important. Going on Aliyah [emigrating to Israel] is like marriage. It's not getting married that's tough. It's staying married."[131] Although a confident response, the Rabbi's tacit acknowledgement of the enormity underlying the decision to uproot one's life hints at the sense of purpose shared by the group's membership.

In a nod to the reality of the Modi'in site's location along the border with the West Bank, Israeli officials had told the group to bring two-way radios for coordinating security with the country's border patrol. "Unlike some extremist religious groups in Israel," the Garin's spiritual leader made clear that his community would not "shirk its duty" and while "it's not a particularly secure spot, no one has canceled on that basis." [132] In response to why a "group of comfortable, middle-class American professionals would move to a tiny village in Israel," Rabbi Perr flipped the journalist's question, asking,

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[130] Schoettler, "12 City Families to Found Israeli Town."

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid.

"How did we end up here"?[133] This allusion to his nation's 2,000 years of exile is representative of the Zionist movement's central tenet: the physical return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.

The Garin's initial settlers expected to be flexible in navigating the early trials of the move as they worked to build their base for the others. [134] Mindful that they could not achieve self-sufficiency overnight, the Americans were planning to take work assignments from the Israeli "absorption" ministry. In Modi'in, the expected roles ranged from teaching English to factory work and raising flowers for export. [135] And at the request of the Jewish Agency, HaMerkaz had sent two members in advance "to train for turkey raising," which would be the primary enterprise of the first families.[136] Twelve two-bedroom homes were to await the Garin's vanguard. Built for private purchase, these starter houses represented the foundation for further construction. The first group of families expected to also have access to a community center for Torah education, a nursery and a recreation hall.[137] On the advice of the Israel Aliyah Center, Rabbi Perr's group set their membership fees at $1,000 prior to departure and another $4,000 upon arrival to secure housing. Of the twelve homes, eleven were promised to be ready on time. Ten would be for families with the remaining two houses set aside for the group's single members.[138]

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[133] Wade, "Maryland Jewish Group to Begin Life Anew in Israel."
[134] Schoettler, "12 City Families to Found Israeli Town."
[135] Ibid.
[136] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 8.
[137] Schoettler, "12 City Families to Found Israeli Town."
[138] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 5.

Despite the publicity surrounding the Garin's group Aliyah, there were a series of warning signs that preceded the group's summer departure. As early as March 1974, a message from the leader of a nearby Israeli yeshiva had warned of the Modi'in site's condition, expressing skepticism of its validity. This tip prompted the Garin's leadership to seek reassurance. But the Jewish Agency dismissed HaMerkaz's concerns. A letter from the agency's director of Aliyah to Israel explained to the Garin that "they were the only reliable source of information."[139] In April, still worried about the conditions, HaMerkaz's president, Dr. Zisk, traveled to Israel himself to meet with the Sochnut's director of Aliyah, a man named Moshe Yakir. Surprisingly, Moshe declined to meet with Dr. Zisk, redirecting the Garin's emissary to meetings with lesser agencies.[140] Such evasiveness should have been a warning for Rabbi Perr's community, but swept up in the momentum of the moment, and lacking the resources of the digital age, the group's members proceeded ahead towards their summer exodus.

Tragically, the cautionary letter proved all-too accurate. Upon arrival, Rabbi Perr's group discovered that not even one of the eleven houses were livable.[141] To make matters worse, the border police claimed zero awareness of their authorization to live in Modi'in and ordered the confused Americans off-site. In any event the Garin could not live in that area since they lacked the security detail promised to them by the Jewish Agency. In a similar fashion, news "that the turkey industry was no longer a viable enterprise" meant that despite an agreement that the Americans would only work in Modi'in, the Jewish agency officials that they were in contact with in Israel made it clear

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[139] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 7.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., 8.

that the Baltimore Garin would work in the nearby village of Kfar Daniel picking roses. Unable to live in a restored Modi'in, but refusing to renege on their promised experience, these members of HaMerkaz's vanguard attempted to re-negotiate their living conditions. Living in another place called Kfar Chabad and working in Kfar Daniel left little room for developing a connection to the Modi'in site. Aside from periodic guard duty, or *Shmira*, on unfinished homes they did not even own, members were cut off from the site. As a result, members asked the Jewish Agency if they could either temporarily find work in a city or help finish Modi'in's grounds. However, the Israeli officials rejected both alternatives outright.[142]

Exasperated at the dissonance between their promised reality and current experience, the booklet's authors recall how Israeli officials threatened the Garin's members with destitution should they reject the new assignment. However, the authors' text also reveals how the Israelis encouraged the Americans to get outside of their immediate problems. The booklet's authors explained this memory as "the usual lecture of what it was like in the thirties, and how thankful we should be."[143] For these idealistic immigrants, such platitudes were a rude awakening to the gap that existed between their dream of Aliyah and reality of Modi'in's physical condition. Members recorded how for five months they sought to make the best of their situation, despite working longer hours for less money than unaffiliated hired hands. It also appears that at some point, members began working night guard duty in Modi'in, a demand that meant "none of the people slept more than four hours a night, for close to three months."[144] Compounding this stress

[142] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 9.
[143] Ibid., 8.
[144] Ibid.

was the fact that HaMerkaz's members felt especially neglected by the Jewish Agency's lack of attentiveness. In addition to the homes not being ready, "no arrangements had been made for food or meals. We had no utensils, gas or electric, for preparing food, and no ready-made food could be supplied. We foresaw problems, but the Sochnut said they would handle it." Clearly flustered, the document's authors ask its readers to consider "the effect this would have on the entire project."145 Deprived of basic provisions and met with indifference by Israeli officials, these Americans found themselves trapped in an inexplicable plight.

The entire premise of HaMerkaz rested on the settlers remaining in the United States until both homes and jobs abroad were ready for community members.[146] But in reality, they had neither. While Modi'in remained inaccessible, life in Kfar Chabad offered next to no services either. The nearest grocery store, only open during working hours, was a half hour walk away. Nor were there any public phones. And any instruction the Garin received, was in Russian. The author of HaMerkaz's experience described the psychological toll of such disorienting conditions.

> The more intelligent members of the Garin took one look at the reality of the situation, and left to go to the Merkaz Klita at Mevasseret Zion, even though the Sochnut concluded that this was proof they were not serious people and cut off means of their support.[147]

Those who left sought places geared toward absorption, rather than labor. In comparison to life in Kfar Chabad, these "deserters" no longer had to pay rent and the new communities provided the Americans with both Hebrew classes and childcare free of

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[145] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 8.
[146] Ibid., 9.
[147] Ibid.

charge. This decision to cut their losses and give up on the dream of living in Modi'in must have been heartbreaking for the Garin's members who decided they were better off without the Jewish Agency's broken promises.

In December of 1974, after an excruciating five and a half months with little progress, the American colony's remaining participants reached out to the Israeli media. This effort resulted in a television program and the "following day after the showing Modi'in was filled with officialdom."[148] But shortly afterwards – according to the account written in the Garin's pamphlet - Israeli officials, rather than evicting a collective of squatters in the unfinished homes, gave them equal rights to the site with HaMerkaz. This was a flagrant violation of the settlement policy negotiated before the group's arrival. Furthermore, this expanded group no longer recognized Rabbi Perr as the site's administrator. Israeli officials accused the Garin's spiritual leader of financial mismanagement and even went as far as to bar the Rabbi from entering Modi'in until he agreed to the new power structure. While the Americans' memory of their loss of control over the site portrays this reversal as a malicious power grab by Israeli bureaucrats, the overwhelming sense of righteous indignation that colors the account's narrative illustrates the emotional attachment that these Americans felt toward the 'idea' of Modi'in: a place they never lived in, never paid for, and had never actually held any real sort of authority over.

The Garin's account of their disengagement from the site during this time is particularly traumatic. Its authors described how looters combed through Rabbi Perr's family possessions that had been left at the site, stealing clothing and children's toys. As

[148] *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz*, 15.

members engaged in negotiations about their new role, Sochnut officials seized Rabbi Perr's personal vehicle, terminated his salary and expense account, and refused to reimburse him for "previously authorized expenditures."[149] As if these measures were not enough, "His children were cut off from transportation to school, forcing the Rabbi to move to the city."[150] As to which city, the account never says. But in the eyes of Israeli officials, the appearance of unaffiliated outsiders appears to have eliminated the necessity of HaMerkaz's residence in Modi'in altogether. For the survivors of this experience, advocating for reform by penning their ordeal served as much of a therapeutic as practical purpose- but such an emotionally charged document must be kept in perspective and the Jewish Agency's side of the story would be worth finding.

As reports like Garin HaMerkaz's booklet trickled home, supportive North Americans sought solutions of their own by creating resources that others could learn from. This trend of using personal experience as a teaching aid helps explain the Baltimore colony's desire to record their side of the story without any outside editorial oversight. The colony's tract also provides context for the 1968 establishment of "The Association of Americans and Canadians for Aliyah." The organization's opening meeting featured a speech by Israel's Ambassador to the United States. Held at the Jewish Agency's New York City building, the diplomat spoke candidly, but optimistically, about the challenges facing Westerners. He encouraged prospective olim to be flexible when thinking about where they would like to live or what they could do for work. Saying that a more "homey" social life in Israel meant "one can either take it as

[149] Ibid., 16.
[150] Ibid.

a decrease in the standard of living, or you can take it as a change in the style of living. If you take it in the latter manner, you will be able to adjust to it very rapidly." Trips in advance of a move were encouraged, but olim needed to remember "people are busy in offices in Israel…the scouting trip has to be planned in advance and has to have somebody follow it up."[151] One can imagine Rabbi Perr's pre-departure visits to Israel and how limitless the possibilities must have felt as he sought the perfect locale for his Garin's future home. Unfortunately, these visits obviously failed to accomplish their purpose.

The newly formed Association of Americans and Canadians for Aliyah, or A.A.C.A., intended to address as many gaps in this process as their members could identify. In addition to generally "representing the interests of olim," the organization promised to provide "information and services related to job opportunities and housing for members seriously planning Aliyah within 3 years." And most importantly, the organization guaranteed ongoing assistance to those making the "transition from planning to actual settlement in Israel."[152] This recognition of the ongoing difficulties after one's arrival illustrates the era's growing sense of awareness that more Western Olim needed more support. While designed to "work closely with the Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency which deals with individual olim," groups were still encouraged to contact the

[151] "Large Group Forms Association to Facilitate Aliyah," *Newsletter of the Association of Americans and Canadians for Aliyah* 1, no. 1 (March 1968), 1. (NLI Stacks S 76 B 993).
[152] "Large Group Forms Association to Facilitate Aliyah," *Newsletter of the Association of Americans and Canadians for Aliyah* 1.

central office.[153] But this emphasis on individual Aliyah could explain why the organization goes unmentioned within the Baltimore colony's own account.

In a bid to better understand Israel's social climate, the A.A.C.A. conducted a pilot study sending three representatives to gather information about job leads and employers. Their scouting report emphasized that opportunities existed but were not always publicly shared. Close-knit communities dominated the country's social fabric. Fear of an American "take-over;" and a "questioning of our role and contribution since we come from a society of abundance, skills and know-how" was also pervasive.[154] These sentiments provide a clue as to why Israeli officials ignored Garin HaMerkaz's concerns about their situation after arriving. The Americans' expectations may have been easy to dismiss as soft or naïve. Having made their Aliyah, the special treatment ended abruptly.

Equally significant for understanding the vanguard's ordeal, the organization's scouting report describes a weak rental home market and how there were "problems of transporting personal possessions, household and other effects since transportation and storage costs are high."[155] This created "a question of availability of immediate housing with or without furnishings" and culminated in an appeal for the importance of a satisfactory "standard of living."[156] The authors also described the consequences of Israel being "a European-Mediterranean country with different standards, training and experience," declaring it a rather provincial "small-townish, bureaucratic and politically

[153] Ibid., 2.
[154] Ibid., 1.
[155] "Large Group Forms Association to Facilitate Aliyah," *Newsletter of the Association of Americans and Canadians for Aliyah*, 2.
[156] Ibid.

minded" place that "responds to group pressures."[157] This portrayal hints at the magnitude of Rabbi Perr's quest for a site capable of absorbing HaMerkaz's sixty families with minimal disruption. A lack of suitable alternatives may have contributed to the Garin's decision to trust their plans in Modi'in despite the warning signs.

The Road from Aliyah: The Story of Garin Hamerkaz provides researchers a route towards understanding how romanticized notions of the archeological work underpinning the Maccabees' contemporary renaissance have contributed to the emergence of modern Modi'in's high quality of life. Marketed to the Americans as an opportunity to help restore Jewish life in their people's indigenous homeland, the dissonance between the dream and reality left these people heartbroken. And despite the Baltimore colony's memories of broken promises, the Jewish Agency's actions suggest that the fall-out may have been inevitable. As is typical of bureaucracies, such disconnection speaks to the individual agendas that often plague large organizations. Where the Americans might have wanted to believe they were being catered to, it is just as likely that these bureaucrats were merely saying whatever had to be said, at whatever cost, to accomplish their larger goal of encouraging Aliyah from the United States. The existence of the Garin's account also points to the era's growing realization among Westerners that the quality of their life in Israel could not be left in the hands of government authority alone.

Americans in Modern Modi'in: A Conclusion

While Rabbi Perr's ill-fated Baltimore colony eventually dissolved and faded from public consciousness, there are traces of their presence in other histories of the modern Modi'in region. For example, a self-published book by members of Rabbi

[157] Ibid.

Shlomo Carlebach's well-known Moshav alludes to this history. Unlike the more well-known entirely collectivist Kibbutz, residents of a Moshav own their private residences and the nuclear family remains central.[158] Having settled near the Tombs of the Maccabees, Carlebach's San-Francisco based community claims to be the first inhabitants of Modi'in. A description of their site's existing infrastructure upon their arrival matches the record left behind by Garin Hamerkaz's members. Although they named their community Modi'im, rather than Modi'in, the following passage provides evidence of the identification:

> It began as a religious Nachal settlement under the auspices of the *Poalei Agudat Yisrael* in 1965, at which time work was begun on the construction of twelve houses, a Beit Knesset (synagogue), and a *cheder ochel* (dining room) about 6 km from the intersection of the Lod-Ben Shemen Road. This road continued a few hundred meters beyond the Moshav and reached a dead end at the *Kevrot haMaccabim* (the site of an ancient cemetery labeled the "Graves of the Maccabees") ...Several civilian groups attempted to settle Mevo Modi'im in the following years, but all disbanded a short time after their arrival.[159]

Garin Harmerkaz is one of one of these "disbanded" groups who had failed to stick at the site. The Moshav's account also notes that when their original members arrived from San Francisco there were "a number of French-speaking immigrants and four Israeli families" already living at the site. But by the end of the first year, these residents had all gone.[160]

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[158] Ovadia Shapiro, *Rural Settlements of New Immigrants in Israel: Development Problems of New Rural Communities* (Rehovot, Israel: Settlement Study Center for the Jewish Agency, 1971), viii.
[159] Ben Zion Solomon, "A History of Me'or Modi'im," in *The Moshav: Me'or Modi'im 25th Anniversary Journal 1976- 2001* (Mevo Modi'im: Me'or Modi'im Productions, 2001), 2. (NLI Stacks 2 2013 B 2337)
[160] Ben Zion Solomon, "A History of Me'or Modi'im," in *The Moshav: Me'or Modi'im 25th Anniversary Journal 1976- 2001* (Mevo Modi'im: Me'or Modi'im Productions, 2001), 3.

This dispersal left Rabbi Carlebach's American followers free to construct their own vision of Modi'in.

Unfortunately, a 2019 fire destroyed most of the community's legacy at the site of Moshav Modi'm, displacing its sixty families and revealing the ad-hoc nature of its origins. A government agent summed up the insurance fracas, remarking, "Technically, all the homes were illegal."[161] The residents did not own their land except by default, because they had been living there for so long. An ousted local recalled how, from 1976 to 1986, they had lived

> like true pioneers. We really struggled financially to make it. We did not have phone lines for more than a decade. There was one car for everyone…We had a vision of creating a spiritual community that would bring light and Torah and tradition to the people of Israel, we were young and idealistic, and we worked the land…We put the best years of our lives into it.[162]

The Moshav's residents are famously responsible for introducing granola to Israel, but they were also known for leading a Hassidic lifestyle in which t-shirts and jeans replaced the white shirts and black coats of their more traditionally orthodox peers. These "neo-Hassidic" hippies embodied the region's heritage, their outfits reflecting the area's mediating influence between Judaism's competing interpretations. In an interview about the community's unique atmosphere, the Moshav's secretary once told a reporter: "Our physical location half-way between the Holy City of Jerusalem and beaches of Tel-Aviv symbolizes what we represent."[163] Mirroring Modi'in's physical location, these residents'

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[161] Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, "Rising from the ashes: Moshav Mevo Modi'im marks one year since fire," *The Jerusalem Post,* May 8, 2020. https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/moshav-mevo-modiim-marks-one-year-since-devastating-fire-627308
[162] Ibid.
[163] Simon Griver, "Modern Maccabees of Me'or Modi'in," *The Jewish Star* (Calgary, CN), December 6, 1985. Newspaper.com/archive.

quest for a spiritual middle ground softened the polarized nature of Israel's secular-religious divide for those who visited, particularly Americans.

During the 1980s, this Moshav near the Maccabees' Tomb emerged as a popular cause for American Jews looking to make financial contributions to Israel's success.[164] A 1985 article entitled *Modern Maccabees of Me'or Modi'im* described the community as one in which "most of the 25 families living in the settlement are of American origin."[165] It also mentions the 1974 departure of a prior group who failed at making the site economically viable. With Rabbi Carlebach's community also struggling, declaring bankruptcy themselves two years prior to the story's publication, the opening of a new highway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem promised brighter days ahead. Running right by the Moshav, the journalist wrote to highlight the community's upcoming Hanukkah education initiatives. Quoting a resident from Philadelphia who explained, "The story of Chanukkah teaches us that the Maccabees rebelled against assimilation despite the attractions of Greek culture- a story which is relevant today."[166] This message is eerily similar to how HaMerkaz's members felt about the area's significance. When compared to Jerusalem`s political toxicity as a contested city among Progressive American Jews, the idea of restoring Modi'in must have offered an attractive alternative for American Jews to rally around.

In recent years, the city's metropolitan region has expanded across the Green Line where a network of interconnected communities fortifies the Israeli claim to the West

[164] "Miami Beach Eternal Light Chapter of the Moshav Me'or Modi'im," *The Miami Herald*, May 7, 1981. Newspaper.com/archive.
[165] Griver, "Modern Maccabees of Me'or Modi'im."
[166] Ibid.

Bank. The largest of these is Modii'n Illit, an ultra-orthodox community dominated by English speakers. With 80,000 residents, the city is the most populous Israeli settlement across the Green Line.[167] As young Haredi families with English speaking backgrounds seek more space, but still wish to remain near Jerusalem, they are drawn across the Green Line by financial incentives.[168] A 2006 article in *The Boston Globe* described the arrival of an American technology company named "City Book" as triggering a "small social revolution" by providing an income stream for women. The company's founder, an ultra-orthodox Jew who lives in New Jersey, is illustrative of the transnational economy that Israel is cultivating through the area's unique cultural geography.[169] The construction of this Modi'in metropolitan region reveals how the longtime pilgrimage site's cultural geography has contributed to the development of a rapidly maturing anchor city whose real-estate market is showing no signs of slowing down.

As the recent lockdowns and quarantines have facilitated an expansion of telecommunication technology, applications for Aliyah from North America have soared.[170] According to *Nefesh B'Nefesh*, an organization whose purpose is to facilitate Aliyah among Westerners, of the 3,570 North American olim in 2019, 20-25% of these

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[167] "The 'Consensus' Settlements," www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org, accessed June 2, 2021, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-ldquo-consensus-rdquo-settlements.
[168] Sharmila Devi, "Israeli High-Tech Outsourcer Taps into Ultra-Orthodox Talent Pool," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 2005. Newspapers.com/archive.
[169] Matthew Kalman, "US Companies Look to Israel for Outsourcing," *The Boston Globe*, November 24, 2006. http://archive.boston.com/business/globe/articles/2006/11/24/us_firms_turn_to_israel_as_outsourcing_alternative/.
[170] Yori Yalon, "North American Immigration to Israel Spikes after 'Year of COVID,'" *JNS*.org, June 16, 2021, https://www.jns.org/north-american-immigration-to-israel-spikes-after-year-of-covid/.

immigrants work remotely for American institutions.[171] Government officials only expect this rate to grow as the world becomes increasingly digitized. There are concerns about whether the nation is prepared to capitalize, but Nefesh B'Nefesh's Executive Vice President has hailed the moment as "an opportunity unlike any other, possibly since the establishment of the state, to absorb a mass Aliyah from North America."[172] For Zionists, the invention of the nation-state provided a revolutionary opportunity to redeem the Jewish people from exile, but of the 200 delegates present at the First Zionist Congress in 1897, only four were Americans.[173] Such an early distance between these camps provides a fitting glimpse into Modi'in's significance for 21st century Israel. Here, American immigrants have found a community that allows them to express their faith without giving up their individuality. And it is this reconciliation of the individual within the collective that epitomizes Hanukkah's ability to mediate the legacy of Jewish nationalism and the faith's heritage of liberal reform.

Today, Modi'in is known for its sizeable population of English speakers and affinity for American culture. Newsletters like *ModiInfo* reveal a community that prides itself on its blend of olim and Israeli residents. [174] Residents appreciate the prominent level of inter-mixing between recent olim and native Israelis. As one interviewee explained:

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[171] Larry Luxner, "Living the American Aliyah Dream: Residing in Israel, but Keeping a US Job," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 7, 2020, https://www.jta.org/2020/01/07/israel/living-the-american-aliyah-dream-residing-in-israel-but-keeping-a-us-job.
[172] "Sharp Increase in North Americans Registering to Immigrate to Israel," Knesset.gov.il, August 10, 2020, https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/press10820v.aspx.
[173] Gordis, *We Stand Divided: The Rift between American Jews and Israel*, 48.
[174] Kuhr, "The Hebrew Will Come' Revisited," *ModiInfo*, 2.

> I saw less of the problem of extremely dominant English language and weak Hebrew language skills among Modi'in children as I did among predominantly Anglo-Saxon communities that I worked with.[175]

The results of a recent ranking published by the nonprofit, Be Free Israel, reinforce this notion of a welcoming atmosphere for Western residents. The organization's study declared Modi'in as the Israeli city with the most religious freedom. Citing the absence of a government-sanctioned Orthodox religious council and the fact that intercity buses and cultural institutions remain open on Shabbat.[176] Considering the fact that the community has a rich religious tradition among American Jews, the award provides evidence of the city's commitment to religious pluralism. A local Reform Rabbi explained the city's foundation as a natural enmeshment of the Israeli political spectrum itself.

> In terms of bottom-up, when Modi'in was founded, it drew people mainly from two places — Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Those who came from Jerusalem were fleeing religious indoctrination, while those who came from Tel Aviv brought with them liberal values. The meeting between these two populations created this bottom-up force pushing for more open-mindedness.[177]

Naturally, the recent influx of American immigrants into Modi'in has reinforced the city's tendency to protect civil liberties while also driving up the price of new real-estate. Luxury developers are increasingly keen on building projects that match the lifestyle their clients are used to back home.[178]

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[175] Ibid., 3.
[176] Judy Maltz, "Which City Is the Model for Religious Freedom in Israel? Hint: It's Not Tel Aviv," *Haaretz*.com, October 11, 2018, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-which-city-is-the-model-for-religious-freedom-in-israel-hint-it-s-not-tel-aviv-1.6548189.
[177] "How This City Became Israel's Model of Jewish Religious Tolerance - Israel News," Fair Press, March 21, 2019, https://fairpress.net/how-this-city-became-israels-model-of-jewish-religious-tolerance-israel-news/.
[178] Steve K. Walz, "Modi'in, Netanya Luring Luxury Projects," *The New York Jewish Week*, June 07, 2016, https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/modiin-netanya-luring-luxury-projects/.

Israel is no longer the developing country that existed in the early 1970s, open land is increasingly scarce. The growing presence of American olim has accelerated the real estate market's embrace of luxury penthouses offering more living space than the traditional Israeli apartment. The romanticism of the area's Maccabean heritage is no longer a key draw for potential residents, but Modi'in's unassuming reputation exemplifies Zionism's goal of returning the Jewish people to the land, a quest in which the attainment of normalcy, even the banal, is the one of the greatest markers of progress. The appealing atmosphere of a quiet bedroom American suburb carries an instinctive attraction for Zionism's dream of a Second Hasmonean Dynasty. An attractive locale, this West Bank border community rests alongside one the world's most contentious frontier zones. Modern Modi'in's presence anchors a growing stretch of Jewish communities meant to ensure Israel's command of the Green Line.

The Zionist's use of suburban style urban planning rooted in a rich cultural narrative history has made the modern city's restoration appear seamless. However, like the traditional Hanukkah celebration missing the actual texts of the Maccabees stories, Modi'in's historical narrative is missing a link. Devoid of an explicit connection to the Hasmoneans, the Israelis use of the Maccabee's gravesites obstruct their truly amorphous nature in a bid to show continuity and normalcy within the Jewish experience at all costs. Modi'in's restoration is indicative of the trauma encoded within centuries of violent antisemitic attacks that propels Zionism's uniquely utopian brand of American suburbia in the Middle East.

There is a growing awareness that globalization is not a monolithic process, but rather an ongoing dialogue between groups of people from across the world. Rob Kroes,

a former chair of the American Studies program at the University of Amsterdam, weighs in on this discussion from the perspective of a sociologist.[179] His 1999 article, *American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: A View from the Receiving End*, laments how globalization studies often tend to focus on what the "exporters" of a message intended, rather than what the audience does with said message. His depiction of this dissonance makes a convincing case for taking a deeper look into the ways in which American culture is rearranged into local contexts abroad.

While the Baltimore colony's experience proved disastrous, their booklet exists as evidence of the collective effort within American Jewish communities to participate in Israel's re-establishment and the future of Jewish life. By providing a template for other Americans of what not to do, these members of a progressive Jewish counter-culture movement were attempting to protect the integrity of their belief in Israel's right to existence by making Aliyah themselves. Their booklet is a testament to the seriousness in which they held their beliefs. It could have been easy for the group to disband and only let the newspaper accounts tell their story, but in penning their collective voice, this failed colony took ownership of their Aliyah, and their own participation within Israel's actual reality, rather than its mythic one. Thus, *The Story of Garin HaMerkaz* provides a rare example of a document in which ordinary people are forced to grapple with the outcome of one of their life's biggest decisions. The booklet's anonymity its perhaps its greatest strength. Devoid of anyone attributing author, the text has about as much evidence of an assured connection between its contents and truth as does linking the 19th century tombs

[179] Rob Kroes, "American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: A View from the Receiving End," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 3 (1999): 463, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24913675.

to the Hasmoneans. But just as inscriptions of second temple period Jewish life abound throughout Modi'in's landscape, so too does the vulnerability and sincerity of the Garin's collective voice strike a reader. The tale of Garin HaMerkaz's ill-fated Aliyah shines a light on how Modi'n's cultural landscape functions as a mediating agent between east and west, old and new. Over the last half century, however, nationalistic proponents of the site have merely shifted the emphasis of their appeal from Modi'in's spiritually minded Maccabean heritage to its more material advantages. This unassuming landscape's mythic romanticism provides a striking background for Israel's vision of a neo-liberal suburbia built upon the fabled ruins of Hasmonean glory.

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