Modi’in: A History of Preservation through Revolution

**Modi’in Today**   
 The city of Modi’in faces tension between municipal modernizing and preservation forces. At its modern foundation Modi’in was considered a fully modern and secular metropolis situated between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and feeding into their working populations, giving families a beautiful city to live in that offered a reasonable commute to jobs in the major cities. Archaeological finds have complicated this existence. The discovery of a first-temple Israelite settlement and the Umm el-Umdan synagogue on the Titora hill have added a significant historical and religious background to the city that was entirely unforeseen by urban planners. This new discovery has led to tension between residents who wish to see the area’s history and archaeological significance preserved at all costs and municipal authorities who would prefer to divert their funds elsewhere. The two factions can be seen as representing forces of historical preservation and modern progress. Surprisingly, this isn’t the first time that the area of Modi’in is reputed to have seen a conflict of this nature:

* **The Maccabees:** Headed by Judah “the Hammer” Maccabee, the rebels fought Hellenic powers to re-establish the state of Israel for a short time before the rise of the Roman Empire. The famous rededication of the Temple in 163 BCE inspired the modern holiday of Chanukah, still celebrated all over the world. The success of the Maccabees led to the foundation of the Hasmonean dynasty. The family is associated with Modi’in due to the purported presence of the gravesite of their family members as well as the synagogues on the Titora hill which do indeed date to the Hasmonean period. The Maccabees are heroic figures, prolonging the life of the state of Israel in the face of surrounding superpowers. However their new power was controversial in their unification of the priestly and monarchical offices. Assuming both roles consolidated power to stabilize the nation but also violated laws of ritual purity. An additional infraction upon Jewish tradition lies in the battle recorded in the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees which details the Maccabean army breaking the Sabbath in order to defend themselves. The Hasmoneans worked to preserve Judaism at the cost of Jewish tradition.
* **Bar Kochba:** Less controversial than the Maccabees, Shimon Bar Kochba also worked to preserve Judaism and the state of Israel. The revolt that he led lasted between the years of 132 to 135 CE and was, like the Maccabean revolt, a guerilla warfare-style uprising that exhausted an impressive amount of Roman resources as the Empire attempted to quell it. Modi’in is reputed to house, along with its historic settlement and synagogues, a cavern that Bar Kochba may have hidden in during the revolt. While the revolt made a significant statement of Jewish power to Rome, it was controversial in the Jewish community. Rabbis in particular were crushed by the destruction of the second temple and exhorted other Jews to adapt to Roman rule and culture while continuing to adhere to their faith in any way possible. Bar Kochba made one last heroic effort to overthrow the oppressive empire despite the push from members of the Jewish community to remain passive and adapt.

Both the Maccabean and Bar Kochba revolts worked to preserve Judaism and Israel, sometimes at the cost of other traditions and through definitively revolutionary actions. Today, residents of Modi’in work to preserve the tradition of these revolutionary movements. With such a precedent of preservation of the past through exciting new ways, we can expect great things from Modi’in. By standing in front of bulldozers, Alex Weinreb (later deputy mayor of Modi’in) shows that this revolutionary spirit still continues in Jewish culture and surely Modi’in will develop cutting edge ways to preserve its history while moving forward.

**Works Cited**

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