Maccabee Depiction #1

Map of the Battles from the Chanukah War. 1960
National Library of Israel Ephemera Collection

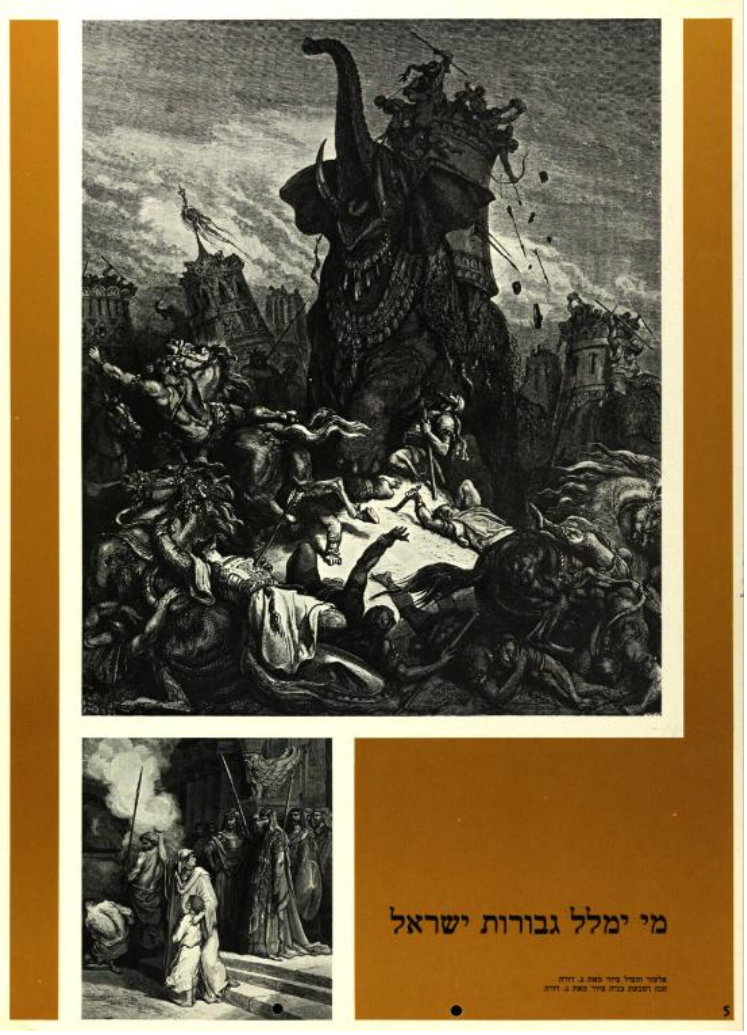


This map depicts the battles fought by the Maccabees against King Antiochus IV and the Seleucid Greeks during the second century BCE. Having experienced internal conflicts among Jewish priests, Antiochus IV viewed the unrest as a rebellion against his rule. He besieged Jerusalem, banned Jewish religious practices, and transformed the Temple into a Hellenistic sanctuary. Matityahu and his five sons led a Jewish revolt against Antiochus IV, calling on the Jewish people to resist Hellenistic influence and return to traditional Jewish practice. After Matityahu's death, his son Judah the Maccabee took leadership of the revolt and led the Jewish army in a series of successful battles against the Greek forces. Although greatly outnumbered, the Maccabees eventually recaptured Jerusalem and purified and rededicated the Temple. After the purification of the Temple, the revolt and fighting continued until around 141 BCE.

Maccabee Depiction #2

Pictures of the Chanukah War. 1960

National Library of Israel Ephemera Collection



The larger image depicts one of the final battles fought by the Maccabees against the Greeks outside Beit Shemesh. Elazar, a younger brother of Judah the Maccabee, led the Jewish army into battle. Noticing a highly adorned elephant, Elazar assumed that a high-ranking Greek official was riding it and bravely attacked. He succeeded in killing both the Greek official and the elephant but was killed himself when the elephant fell on him.

The smaller image depicts Chanah urging her youngest son to remain steadfast and accept martyrdom rather than give up his faith, despite having witnessed his six older brothers being tortured and killed by the Greek King Antiochus for refusing to abandon their Jewish faith and obey his Hellenistic decrees. After witnessing the torture and death of all seven of her sons, Chanah took her own life.

Text: "Who will praise the strength of Israel"

הספרייה הלאומית
المكتبة الوطنية الإسرائيلية
The National Library of Israel

Maccabee Depiction #3

Chanukah

William L. Gross Archive



At the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, Jews living under Tsarist Russia were largely confined to the Pale of Settlement and faced numerous restrictions. These included economic limitations, restricted access to higher education, and limited political rights. At the same time, antisemitism and violence against Jewish communities were increasingly widespread.

This flag was made in Russia in 1902 and depicts the Maccabee era, with Greek and Jewish soldiers engaged in battle. The Jewish soldiers are identified by the Star of David on their armor and their horses. A stern-looking leader, holding a book that is likely religious, symbolizes what the Maccabees were fighting for. Greek-influenced architecture can be seen in the background.

Top Text: A great miracle happened there
Bottom Text: "Who is like you among the gods? Who is like you in your holiness? Awesome in splendor and working wonders." (Exodus 15:11)

Maccabee Depiction #4

The conquest of Jerusalem by the British. 1917

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Estate of Roni Elenblum, accessed by the National Library of Israel



The image on the left depicts Judah Maccabee entering Jerusalem with his soldiers after defeating the Greek forces and liberating Jerusalem. King Antiochus IV had outlawed traditional Jewish religious practices and transformed the Temple into a Hellenistic sanctuary. Judah's victory allowed the Jews to reclaim Jerusalem, purify the Temple, and restore traditional Jewish worship.

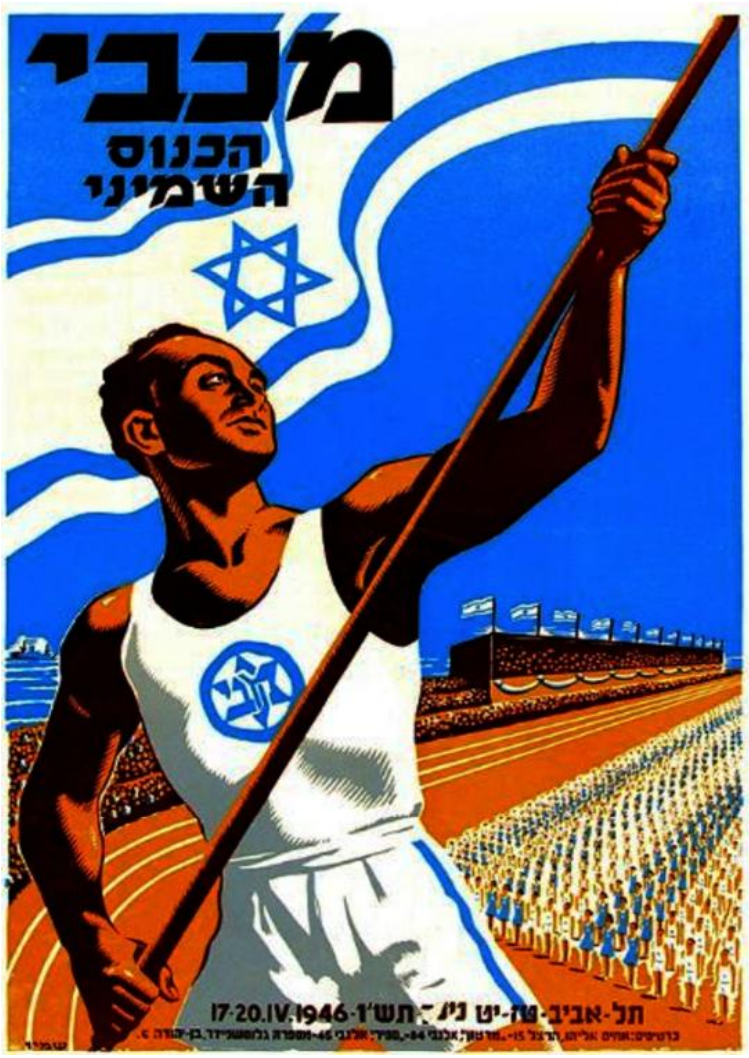
The image on the right depicts British General Sir Edmund Allenby entering Jerusalem with British troops in December 1917, marking the end of the Ottoman rule over the region and the beginning of the British Mandate over Palestine. Allenby arrived about a month after the Balfour Declaration, in which the British government expressed its support for establishing a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. Because of this timing, Allenby's conquest was viewed by many Zionists as a major step toward Jewish self-determination and the eventual establishment of a Jewish state.

At the top of the flag is a portrait of US President Woodrow Wilson flanked by two American flags. Wilson supported the Balfour Declaration and backed General Allenby's diplomacy and policies during and after World War I. The inclusion of Wilson's image on the poster suggests support for his postwar political vision, particularly his efforts to establish the League of Nations and promote international cooperation.

Maccabee Depiction #5

Maccabi – The Eighth Conference. 1946

Shamir Brothers Collection



This poster is advertising the Eighth Maccabiah Games, which were held in 1946.

Across Europe, Jewish sports clubs were established in response to antisemitism and the exclusion of Jews from many local sports organizations. The Maccabiah Games, often referred to as the Jewish Olympics, were first held in 1932. The games brought Jewish athletes from around the world together, strengthening their connection to the wider Jewish people and to the Land of Israel. They also promoted physical fitness and challenged stereotypes about Jewish physical strength and athleticism. More broadly, the Maccabiah movement emphasizes Jewish athletes' identification with both the countries they lived in and the larger Jewish community with its shared culture and heritage.

Maccabee Depiction #6

Reflective Maccabee Poster. 1960

National Library of Israel Ephemera Collection



This is a 1960 cartoon drawing of a contemporary Israeli pioneer looking at his reflection and seeing a Maccabee. Underneath him is a photograph of IDF soldiers lighting a chanukiah and the Hanukka-related phrase "in those days." The image draws a direct connection between the Maccabees' defense of the Jewish people in the past and the role of modern Israeli forces in the present day.

In 1960, Israel was not involved in an active war, but military service was still compulsory, and reservists were regularly called up for duty. Tensions with Egypt remained high, particularly along Israel's southern border and in the Sinai Peninsula. This situation reflects the image's depiction of the IDF as a modern continuation of the Maccabees, emphasizing the importance of military strength in protecting the Jewish state.

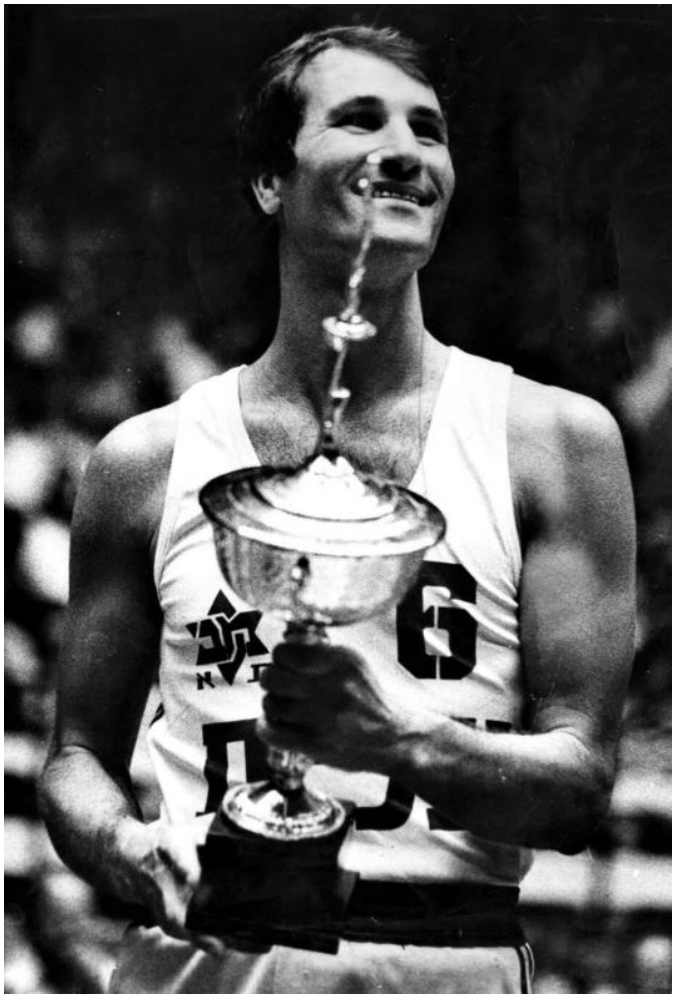
In the same year, the Mossad captured Adolf Eichmann, a former Nazi official, in Argentina. Eichmann was secretly brought to Israel to stand trial for his role in organizing the deportation and murder of European Jews during the Holocaust. He was convicted for his crimes. Although Eichmann and his capture are not depicted in the image, the event further demonstrated the strength of Israel and the Mossad in protecting the Jewish people, similar to the Maccabees' role as defenders of the Jewish community in the past.

Text: "In those days and today"

Maccabee Depiction #7

Tal Brody played for Maccabi Tel Aviv. 1977

Ynet News. Photo: Yossi Roth

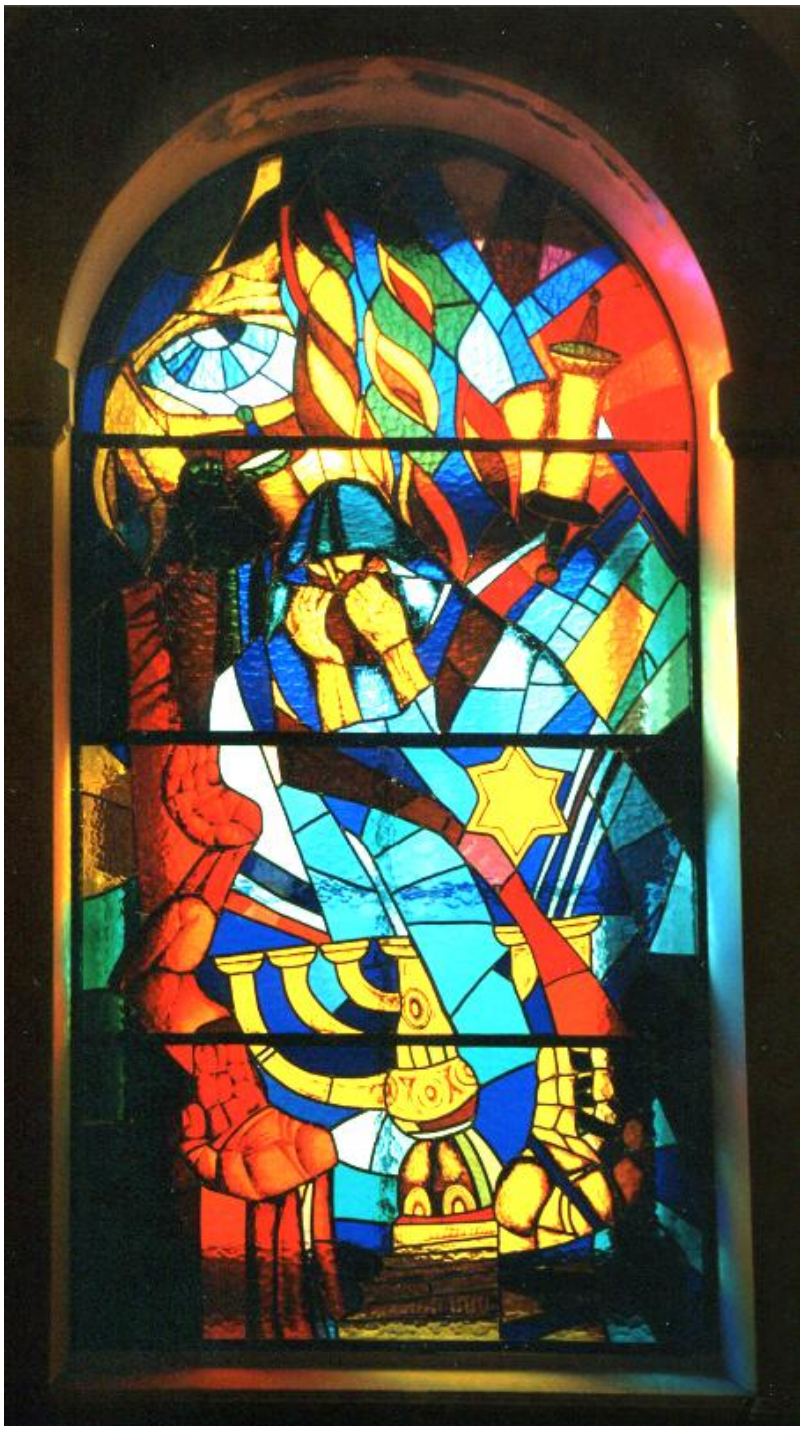


Tal Brody was a first-round NBA draft pick when he visited Israel in 1965 to compete in the Seventh Maccabiah Games. During his visit, he fell in love with the country and made the decision to turn down a career in the NBA, move to Israel, and play for Maccabi Tel Aviv. In 1977, Israel was still recovering from the trauma of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and experiencing significant political and social tensions. That same year, Brody and Maccabi Tel Aviv faced the Soviet basketball powerhouse CSKA Moscow in the European Cup semifinals. The game carried significance far beyond basketball because it took place during the height of the Cold War, when tensions between Israel and the Soviet Union were already high. Against all odds, Maccabi defeated the heavily favored Soviet team and went on to win the European Cup, creating a powerful moment of pride and celebration for Israelis across the country. After the victory, Brody was interviewed live on Israeli television where, in his heavily accented Hebrew, he said: "We are on the map! And we are staying on the map, not only in sports, but in everything." This statement captured the significance of the victory far beyond basketball, symbolizing Israel's resilience, confidence, and determination to be recognized on the world stage.

Maccabee Depiction #8

Tailors' Synagogue Stained Glass Window. 2003

Jewish Architecture (Center for Jewish Art) - Center for Jewish Art Collection



This is an artistic stained-glass window in Tailors' Synagogue, located at 29 Shchekavitskaia St. in Kyiv, depicting Chanukah and featuring various symbols associated with the holiday.