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At this time I would also like to thank Zion Tallit in New York for their help in researching the tallit, and thank them for the guided tour at their factory in New York.

I would also like to thank the Israeli Embassy for their help in gathering information.



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The history and origin of the prayer shawl, the rarest types of Tallit and Children's Tallit, that are to be found.

## **CHAPTER 2**

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the various types of decoration, including Zizit fringes, dyeing and styles of Tallit.

## **CHAPTER 3**

In Chapter 3 I will discuss collars that are found in prayer shawls, I will also discuss the Tefillin and its purpose, the Tallit bag is also important and I shall discuss, the various types of bags and the detail that can be found in them. Finally I shall discuss the dressing of the dead and customs in other countries.



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All plates thanks to the Irish Jewish Museum, *taken from photos which i took there*





# INTRODUCTION

For my Thesis I arranged a number of interviews at the Irish Jewish Museum, with Mr R. Siev who was able to give me an understanding of Jewish Tallits. In the museum I was also allowed photograph and measure the Tallit, Tallit bags, as well as the children's prayer shawls.

Because I am the first non Jewish woman to have written about Tallits, I found it hard to get information out side of Dublin. During the summer I went to New York, to a factory called Zion Tallit, where I learned about the production of the tallit and also the history about the factory. Most of the information I gathered was from Mr Siev from the Irish Jewish museum. The rest of my research was gathered from books and articles.

I also visited the Israeli Embassy in the hope of gaining more information about the Tallit.

For my Thesis I have chosen to discuss the Jewish prayer shawl. This is an item of clothing worn by Jewish males for prayer. At the age of 13 a Jewish boy receives a prayer shawl, to signify the coming of manhood.

The Tallit can be made from silk, cotton or wool, but may not be mixed with any other raw materials. The prayer shawl has four corners, at each corner there are knots in keeping with the biblical commandments. The shawl is worn during prayer in the synagogue. The shawl is first placed on the head and is then draped around the shoulders.





There are many different types of prayer shawl, some of which are worn under clothes.

In my thesis I will discuss the different types of prayer shawl and how even in death it is of great significance. I shall also discuss other items of importance such as Tallit Bags, Decoration, Tefillin and Collars that can be found on prayer shawls.



## **CHAPTER 1**

**TALLIT GODAL**

**THE TALLIT**

**TALLIT KATON**

**CHILDREN'S TALLIT**



## The Prayer Shawl and it's Beginning.

Among the Romans the "pallium" or "himation" had by the Third Century AD ceased to be used as a garment but was regarded as the attribute of learned men. It was also used for official purposes when it was worn folded two or three times reducing its width to about eighteen inches. The removal of the surplus material finally reduced it to a scarf or stole and the ecclesiastical pallium ultimately reduced to a single strip of cloth or silk, is still worn by high dignitaries of the Christian church.

By a somewhat similar sequence of events the pallium or himation worn by Jews developed into the modern tallith. It was probably made of wool or linen usually white but sometimes black or red. The arba knafoth 'four corners' or tallith 'Katon' first mentioned in the code of Jacob Ben Asher c.1350 is designed to fulfil the requirements of the Biblical Commandments to wear fringes or zizits "in Chapter 15, Verse 38".

It may be fulfilled in two ways:

- a) by wearing a small garment - a Tallit Katon - which is worn all day under one's shirt;
- b) by wearing a large garment - a Tallit Godal - which is worn during morning prayers daily.

These garments have four corners and there is a set of fringes or zizits at each corner. Originally these garments were made from wool which is still the preferred material, or linen. Nowadays they are also made from silk rayon, nylon or cotton and possibly other materials eg. chiffon. The ideal size for a Tallit Katon is 120cm in length and 60cm in







breadth, with a 15 - 18cm opening in the centre for the head. Small pockets are made in the corners in which to place the fringes so that they do not hang loose. Boys commence to wear zizits from about 3 years of age. It is a custom for Jewish brides to give a gift of a prayer shawl, Tallit Godal, to her groom for their wedding and he would wear it during the wedding ceremony.

The size of a prayer shawl can vary considerably according to an individual's taste. The requirement is that the shawl should cover the upper half of the wearer's back. The ends of the weave/cloth forming the Tallit are gathered together to form frills and are knotted. However, the frills which crop out at the corners of the garment are cut off prior to attaching the zizits. Every prayer shawl has a neck bank or collar, or "Atarah" in Hebrew meaning crown which varies in length and breadth and runs along the centre portion of the top of the Tallit Godal. The collar can be made from the same material as the Tallit but other materials can be used. They can be quite decorative and are attached to the Tallit Godal. Sometimes blessings or prayers are said when the collar is being fixed to the shawl. The Tallit Godal is worn with its sides folded back upon itself exposing its underside. When the Tallit Godal is not in use it is placed in a decorative cloth bag. The fringes or zizits on the four corners must be made from wool. They are placed in a small aperture which is not less than a thumb's breadth from the edge and not more than the width of three fringes either in length or breadth. The average Jewish man will have received 3 prayer shawls in his life time. The first at his 3rd birthday, the second at his 13th birthday when he is circumcised, and finally when his bride to be presents him with one on their wedding day.



Prayer shawls are usually left in the house or place of prayer. They are placed inside decorative cloth bags. The owners name is embroidered on the bag making it easy to identify. There is no law to prevent a woman from wearing a Tallit Godal or Katon but the custom is the women do not wear them. "Tallit prayer shawl" Originally the word meant 'gown or cloak'.

This was a rectangular mantel that looked like a blanket and was worn by men in ancient times. At the four corners of the tallit, tassels were attached in fulfilment of the Biblical commandment of zizit. The tallit usually made either of wool or of linen and probably resembled the abayah 'blanket' still worn by Bedouin for protection against the weather. The tallit made of fine quality was similar to the Roman pallium and was worn mostly by the wealthy and by distinguished rabbis and scholars.

The length of the mantel was to be a handbreadth shorter than that of the garment under it. After the exile of the Jews from Erez Israel and their dispersion they came to adopt the fashions of their gentile neighbours more readily. The tallit was discarded as a daily habit and it became a religious garment for prayer, hence its later meaning of prayer shawl. The tallit is usually white and made either of wool, cotton or silk although Maimonides and Profets objected to the use of the latter.

Strictly observant Jews prefer tallit made of coarse half bleached lamb's wool. In remembrance of the blue thread of the zizit most tallit have several blue stripes woven into the white material. Until recently however, they only had black stripes. Frequently the upper part of the tallit around the neck and on the shoulders has a special piece of





cloth sewn with silver threads to mark the upper (the collar) and the outer parts of the four-cornered prayer shawl.

Some tallitot have the benediction recited when putting on the tallit, woven into the abarah. Others, especially those made of silk, are often richly embroidered and some have the benediction woven into the entire cloth of the tallit. The minimum size of a tallit is that which would suffice to cloth a small child able to walk. The tallit is worn by males during morning prayers (except on the Night of AK) when it is worn at the afternoon service as well as during all Day of Atonement services. The hazzan, however, according to some rites, wear the tallit also during the afternoon and evening services as does the reader from the torah during the Minhah prayer on fast days. Before putting on the prayer shawl the following benediction is said:

*David (20:16) "Bless art Thou, O Lord, our God King of the universe, who hast sanctified us by Thy commandments and hast commanded us to wrap ourselves in the fringed garment."*

When the tallit is put on, the head is first covered with it and the four corners are thrown over the left shoulder (a movement called assist Yishme eglim after the manner of the Arabs). After a short pause, the four corners are allowed to fall back into their original position, two are suspended on each side. On weekdays, the tallit is donned before putting on the tefillin. Among the strictly observant Jews it was the custom to put on tallit and Tefillin at home and to walk in them to the Synagogue. They also pray with the tallit covering their head. To be enfolded by the tallit is regarded as being enveloped by the holiness of the commandments of the Torah. Denoting a symbolic subjection to the



Diving Will. Generally, however, people pray with the tallit resting on their shoulders only. the Kahanim, however, cover their heads with the tallit during their recital of the Priestly Blessing. It is customary in the morning service to press the fringes to the eyes and to kiss them three times during the recital of the last section of the Shema. The custom of wearing the tallit differs in many communities. In the Ashkenazic ritual, small children under Bar Mitzvah age dress in tallital made according to their size, usually made by their mother.

In the reform synagogue, the tallit is part of the synagogue service garments of the rabbi and the cantor. For male congregants the wearing of a small prayer shawl, resembling a scarf worn around the neck, is optional. Those called to the reading of the Torah, however, always don a tallit. In some communities it is customary for the Bridegroom to dress in a tallit during the huppah ceremony. It is likewise customary to bury male Jews in their tallit from which the fringes have been removed or taken. The zizit worn by men with their daily dress is known as the Tallit Katon "small tallit". The Tallit Katon is a small rectangular garment of white cotton, linen or wool, with ziziyyat (fringes) on its four corners. Whereas the ordinary tallit is worn only at the morning service, strictly observant Jews wear the Tallit Katon under their upper garment the whole day, so as constantly to fulfil the biblical commandment of zizit, a reminder to observe all the commandments of the Torah. The Tallit Katon is, therefore, often worn in a manner that it may be seen. If not that, at least the ziziyyat hang freely and are visible. The minimum size of a Tallit Katon ought to be  $\frac{3}{4}$  long and  $\frac{1}{2}$  wide (15in x 10in). According to another opinion it should be one square (20in x 20in).

The Tallit Katon is put on in the morning and the following Benediction is said:





*David (20:19) "Blessed art Thou O Lord our God King of the universe, who hast  
sanctified us by the commandments and command us to wear the zizit".*

The Tallit Katon must always be clean and in reverence for its sanctity, should not be worn on bare flesh but over an undershirt. If one of the zizits is torn, the whole tallit katon becomes ritually unfit until the torn zizit is replaced.



## Children's Prayer Shawl

Children's prayer shawls can vary in design as well as colour. In Figure 1:1 we can see a small plain linen prayer shawl measuring 27 inches long and 10 inches wide.



Fig 1:1

The inside neck is 18 inches long and  $3\frac{1}{3}$  inches wide. This child's prayer shawl was made by a mother, there is no decoration and around the neck it is simply stitched. But what makes this prayer shawl unusual is the four corners where the knots are. At the corners the reinforcements have been left open at one corner/side, so the knots can be







placed inside. This might have been fashioned this way because the parent did not want to draw attention to the prayer shawl when it was being worn by the child. Equally the maker may have decided to make little pockets to protect the knots from damage, because if damaged the prayer shawl becomes unfit to wear and so had to be replaced.



Fig 1:2

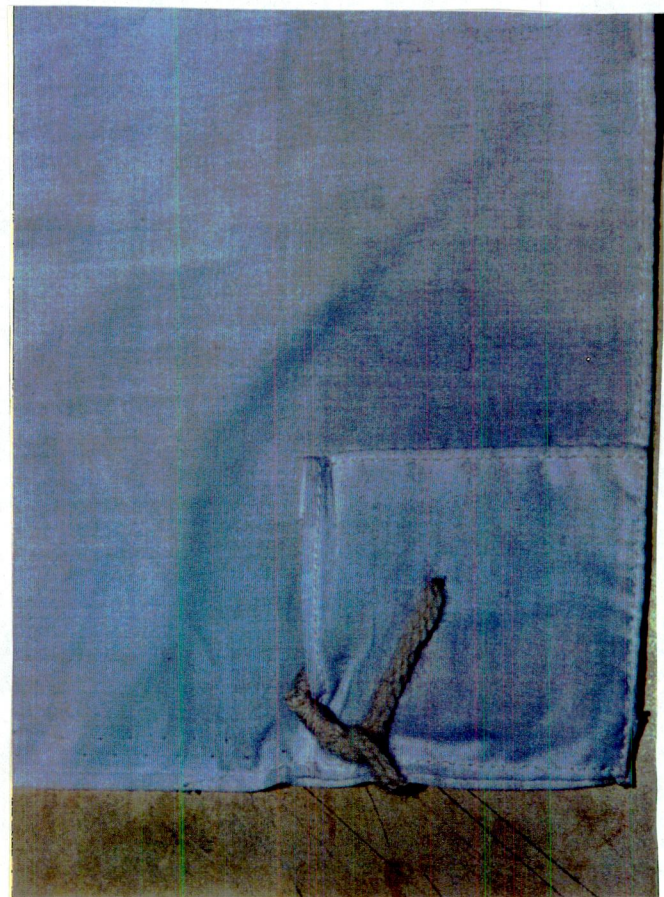


Fig 1:3

13

12



The next child's prayer shawl is made from cotton and has been crocheted. It is 26 inches long and 10 inches wide. The knots are 5 inches long. Although more decorative than the previous one, it is somewhat simplistic in style, but is in keeping with its purpose.

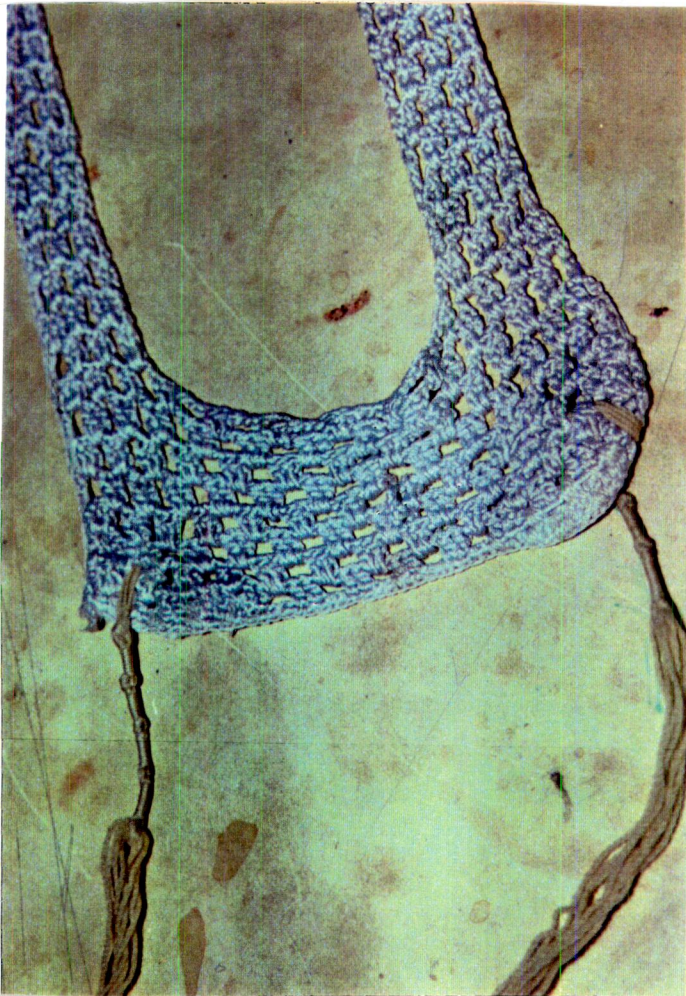


Fig 1:4

The third and final child's prayer shawl I would like to discuss is perhaps the most decorative. Measuring 14 inches long by 6 inches wide, the prayer shawl has been hand crocheted in a flower like pattern. Each section of the pattern has been carefully pinned together. They have also been mounted on a backing of cotton, thus protecting the precious work, that has been done by a mother.

1:4





Fig 1:5

In Fig 1:5 one can see the full child's prayer shawl and in Fig 1:6 one can see the detail and intricacy that has gone into the making of the garment.

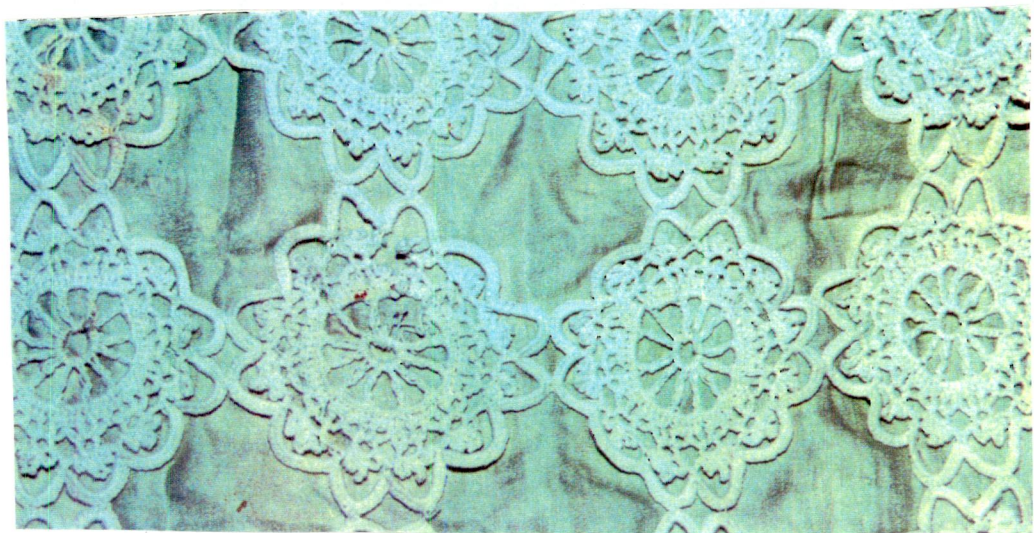


Fig 1:6

It is important to note that children commence wearing prayer shawls from the age of 3 years but the shawls are worn under the garment. I would like now to continue on and talk about tassels and Decorations and the importance of Adornment.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

- A. TASSELS AND DECORATION**
- B. ZIZIT FRINGES**
- C. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND ORIGIN OF DYEING  
TEKHELET (BLUE FOUND IN ZIZITS)**
- D. ZION STYLES OF TALLIT**



## Tassels and Decoration

There were, in fact, two kinds of tassel in common use in Western Asia. One with three threads, which may be the tsitsith, is particularly associated with the Philistines but it is also found on Syrian dress in Egypt and is perhaps a stylised form of flower with the same magic properties as the lotus blossom. The other tassel, the gedilim or twisted cord, was probably similar to that seen attached to the corners of a simlah. Among the Assyrians this type of tassel on cords suspended from the waist was a symbol of rank worn by the king and his chief officers and it probably had some significance. In Talmudic times there were two schools of thought as to the correct number and colour of threads forming the tzitzith. "Beth Shammar" maintaining that there should be four of white wool and four of blue, there should be two of each colour. The difference of opinion may be a clue to the original distinction between tzitzith and gedilim, while the lack of any absolute rule about colour can be attributed to the disappearance of the Hallazon.

Although according to the Talmud, tzitzith were a means of identifying a Jew. It seems that in early Christian times, Jews and Christians were indistinguishable and Justin, one of the fathers of the Church, in a dialogue with Trypho the Jew, written in the middle of the Second Century says:

*History of Jews*  
*Kol 19, Page 728* ***"You are not recognised among the rest of men by any other marks than your fleshly circumcision."***

Jews wore tzitzith and the Ravenn - mosaics provided evidence that some of the early Christians did so. Examples are to be found on the cupola of the Sixth Century, baptistery of the Arions, and in the groups of Christian martyr in the Sixth Century basilica. They are also worn by the Apostle Matthew on a mosaic of the same period in the church.



## Zizit Fringes

Ziziyyat "fringes" name of the tassels attached to the four corners of special (four-cornered) garments worn by men in fulfilment of the biblical commandment of Numbers 15:37 - 41 and Deuteronomy 22:12. It has been suggested that the zizit served as a talisman (amulet) or that it was instituted in order to distinguish between male and female garments which were very similar in biblical times. In the latter case it served as a protection against immoral conduct (an interpretation derived from Numbers 15:39).

Talmudic literature invests the commandment of zizit with exalted symbolism. The rabbis regarded the zizit as a reminder to the Jews to observe the religious duties giving it a function similar to that of the Mezuzah on the door posts and to the Tefillin on the head and arms. The Talmud quotes the parable how a person was saved from sensual sin because he wore fringes.

The Biblical commandment prescribing the entwining of a blue cord in the fringes is regarded as essential because blue, the colour of the sky, was also supposed to be the colour of the 'throne of glory'. Difficulties in obtaining the dyeing material for this purpose caused rabbinic authorities in the Second Century CE to waive this requirement. In modern times each zizit consists of one long and three short white threads which are passed through the holes in the four corners of the garment and folded so as to make eight threads. They are then fastened with a double knot. The long thread (called shamash) is wound around the other threads several (8, 11 and 13) times and the four points are





separated from one another by a double knot. The zizit thus consists of five double knots and eight threads (a total number of 13). This number, together with the Hebrew numerical value of zizit 600 amounting to 613, the number of biblical commandments of which the zizit are to remind the wearer. (Numbers 15:39) Ziziyyat of wool or linen are ritually fit for a tallit of whatever material. A silk or cotton tallit, however, should have ziziyyat of only the same fabric.

The minimum length of the zizit threads should be four thumb lengths. If one of the zizit threads is torn, it is customary to replace the whole fringe. A person not wearing a four cornered garment is exempt from the mitzvah of zizit since the religious duty of wearing zizit is not a personal one. In order to fulfil this biblical commandment, however, pious Jews always wear a Tallit Katon, a small four-cornered garment. Women are exempt from the duty of zizit as the fulfilment of this commandment relates to a specific time, and Women are exempt from such obligations. Ziziyyat have to be worn only during the day, based on the Bible verse:

*"ye may look upon it (Number 15:39) which excludes the night."*

It is customary to kiss the ziziyyat while reciting the last section of the shema in the morning service. It is worthy to note that dyed zizit (Tallit Katon) were discovered in the "Bar Kakhba Caves". The testing of them by modern methods proved almost certainly that they were in fact dyed with indigo - the aforementioned "Kela ilan". For all these reasons - the high cost of tekhelet, the difficulty of gathering the snails and extracting the dye, and because of the fear of counterfeiting with 'ilan' some permitted zizit made without a thread of 'tekhelet'.



## **The Significance and Origin of Dyeing**

### **Tekhelet (Blue) found in Zizits**

The Jews acquired the art of dyeing from the Rhoenicians. Serepta Neapolis (Sichern) Lydda and Jerusalem are also mentioned. The main reference to dyeing in the Talmud indicates that large numbers of Jews engaged in it. The dyer (Heb. Tsabba) whether Jew or heathen belonged to the best social class, and worked on his own premises or was self-employed. In the street he wore the sign of his trade, a piece of dyed material behind his ear, though he was also known by his coloured hands. The concept of colour (Heb. tsera) indicates a certain variety, but in former times and especially in the Orient there was a preference for white garments as the natural property of linen and wool, and thus the Jews distinguished between one main group the "aristocracy".

"White" clothes constituted the dress for happy events contrasting with black for mourning. Their attribute was purity as well as aristocracy and grandeur so that important people tended to dress in white leaving colours to people of low status and to women. However purple, the only exception, remained the privilege of the high ranks. The dyes were mainly derived from vegetable or animal substances. Among vegetable dyes there were 'wood' (Heb. isatis) for blue dyes, the saffron (Heb. Kotsa) Greek crocus for yellow, the red dye, also called Madder (Heb. pu ah) and the litanus, a red dye more beautiful but less durable than purple. Other materials included nutshells, pomegranate peel, sumach 'rhus cariaia' a kind of onion and wine. The wool dyed with the scarlet red dye is the Biblical argaman purple (Heb. purpurea).





## Tekhelet - Blue

Argaman 'purple' and talaat shani (crimson warm) are frequently mentioned together in the Bible as dye stuffs for threads and fabrics, including the curtains of the Tabernacle, the veil of the tent and the ephat. A thread of tekhelet had to be included in the fringes. Princes and nobles wore garments of tekhelet and it was used for the expensive fabrics in royal palaces. The Tyrians were also expert dyers with these materials. According to talmadic aggadah the dwellers in "Lus" a legendary locality were experts in dyeing tekhelet.

Tekhelet - Blue was extracted from the hillazan - a snail found in the sea between the promontory of Lyre and Haifa. Members of the tribe of Zebulun engaged in gathering it and according to the Modrash it is this which is referred to in that tribe blessing, that their inheritance would include hidden treasure of sand. The baraita notes that the 'tekhelet' multiplies like fish laying eggs and comes once every ten years and with its 'blood' tekhelet blue dye is made and that is why it is expensive. The above statement reflects the fact that the snail reaches the shore in shoals infrequently and the extraction of the dye is a very expensive process. For this reason a garment made wholly of 'tekhelet' was considered expensive and rare.

The colour of tekhelet is between green and blue, and was described '*Tekhelet resembles the sea, the sea resembles grass, the grass resembles the heavens*'. Tekhelet was usually dyed on wool. The colour was fast and withstood oxidization. The best dye was obtained when extracted from live snails, and to make it fast various materials were added. In the time of Mishnah, another dye "Kela ilan" extracted from the indigo dye was introduced





into Erez Israel. The dye was very similar in colour to tekhelet but was much cheaper. Henceforth, indigo was frequently used to counterfeit, and was sold as tekhelet. Ways of distinguishing them were suggested but the experts concluded that "there was no way of testing the tekhelet of zizit (Tallit Katon) and it is recommended that it should be bought from an expert and reputable maker or establishment". It is worth noting that dyed zizit or "Tallit Kalon" were discovered in the Bar Kokhba Caves.

The testing of them by modern methods proved almost with certainty that they were in fact dyed with indigo. For all these reasons - the high costs of tekhelet, the difficulty of gathering the snails and extracting the dye, and because of the fear of counterfeiting with ilan some permitted zizit made without a thread of tekhelet.



## Zion Tallit Styles

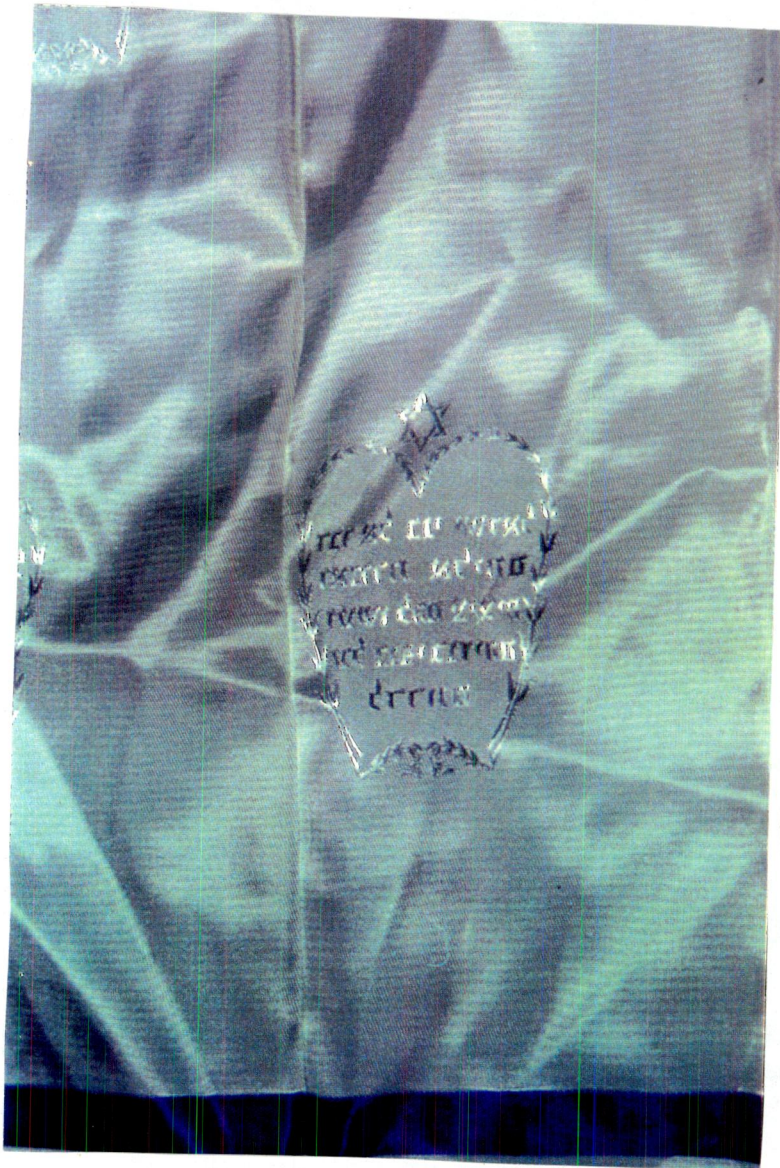
Zion - Tallit Co in Lower East Side Manhattan, New York have been manufacturing Tallis since 1920. They manufacture Tallis in the following: Rayon, Wool, Acrylic, Linen, Cotton and Silk. They are mass-produced and exported throughout the world. Although mass-production is very dominant in this factory, special commissions are given attention. For example, if a certain member of a sect requires a tallit with their crest, it can be individually hand woven to meet the requirements of that individual. Most tallit have the standardised stitches at the end, the number of which can vary from 13 to 9. Orthodox Jews prefer 9 stitches.

Most tallis are woven plain with only the lines as decoration at each end, but increasingly more and more sects are specifying or insisting, that their crest be included as a form of identification. Some crests are woven into the predominantly plain part of the shawl, in the same colour, but nowadays, the four corners of the shawl can also bear the crest and a blessing is usually woven into the corners as well. It is important to note that the knots at the four corners is not changed.





## Zion Tallis Styles



Tallis manufactured in  
Zion Tallis, New York  
made of Rayon  
  
(Irish Jewish Museum)

Fig 1:7

As you can see from the above, a crest bearing a blessing has been woven into the Tallis.



(Irish Jewish Museum)

Fig: 1:8



7.1

8.1



You can also see the corner of the same tallit bearing a crest and blessing. This tallit was manufactured in New York and is made from 100% Rayon. It has the standard stripes, 13 at each end, and was commissioned by a Jewish sect for a boys Bar Mitzvah. The 13 stripes may be a symbol of the boys coming of age. One must also note that Metallic thread is often used as a form of decoration resembling the holy Jewish crown of glory.

Most Tallis are woven on eight shaft looms. This can enable a variety of details to be added in to the stripes of the tallit, making it individual.

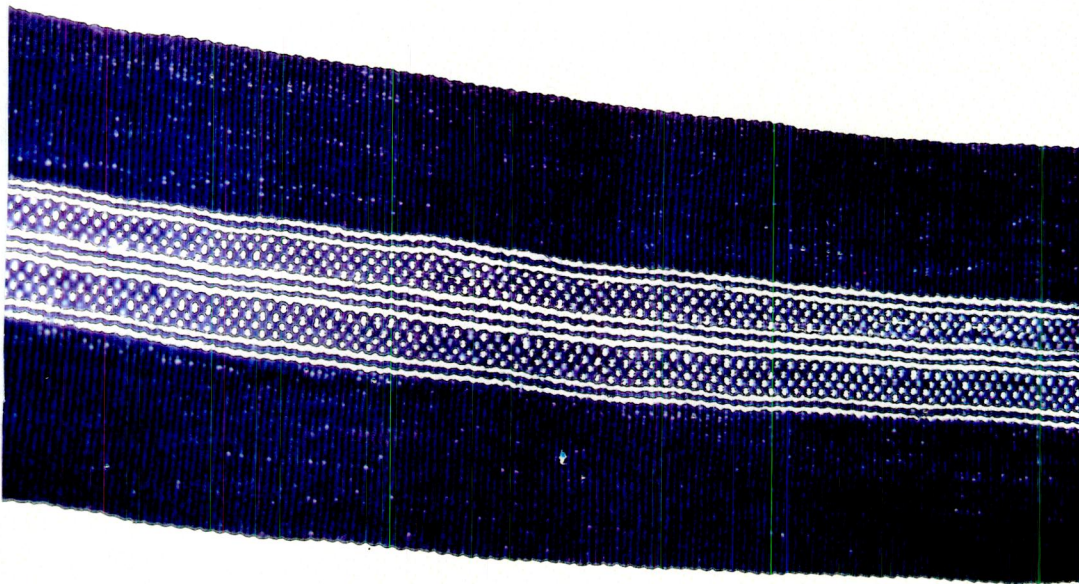


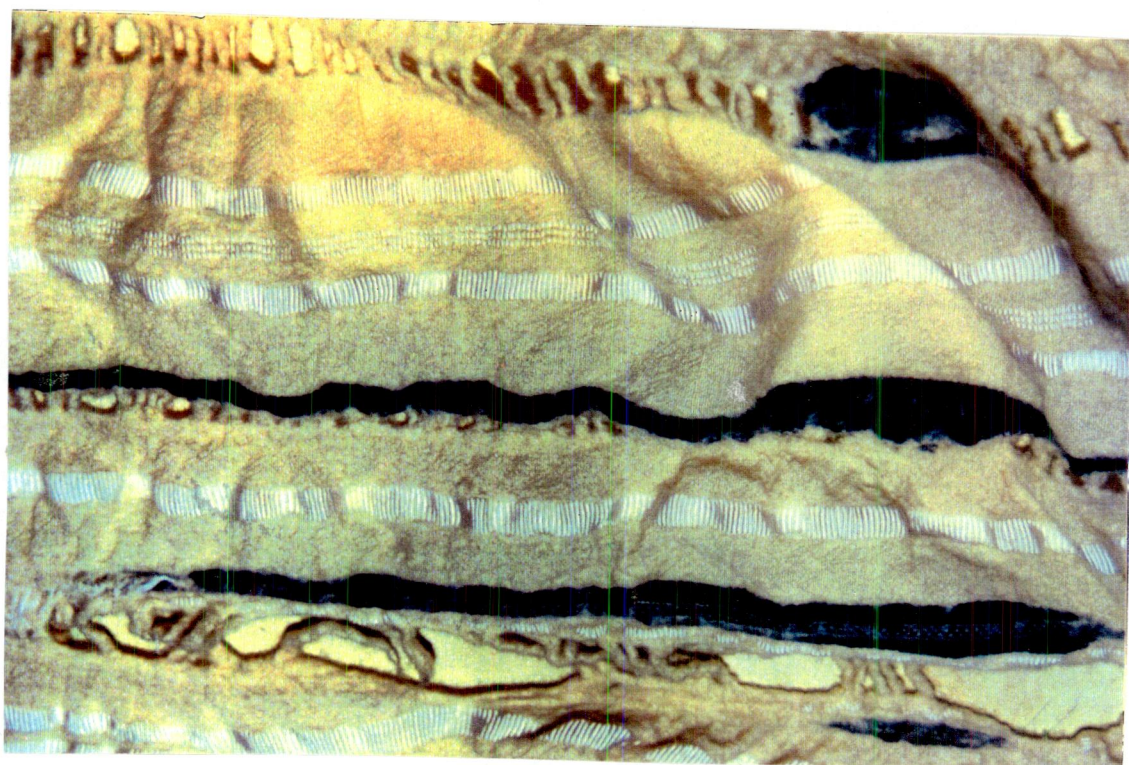
Fig 1:9

The above is made from 100% cotton (Jewish Museum Ireland)





But for more detailed tallis, more shafts have to be used, and up to 36 shafts are often used for finer detail eg. writing 'blessings'. Because of the number of shafts and the complication of the lifting plan, computer looms are becoming more widely used, thus speeding up production. Most looms are set at 38 ends per inch, on a straight draft, but threading is often changed to meet requirements. In Zion Tallis Factory sometimes, the tallis is woven plain first with only the stripes at the end, and then the crest or blessings are embroidered in by industrial sewing machine. This is time-saving and speeds up production. All the employees in the factory are men, and all are Jewish. They are trained on the premises and are usually given a two-year apprenticeship with the firm. The finishing and packaging is done on the premises. Styles, and approaches to the making of the tallis have changed over the years. If one looks closely at Fig 1:10 you will note that as well as having four block stripes, eight white stripes have also been added. Although it has felted because of time and use it is still possible to make out these distinctive features.

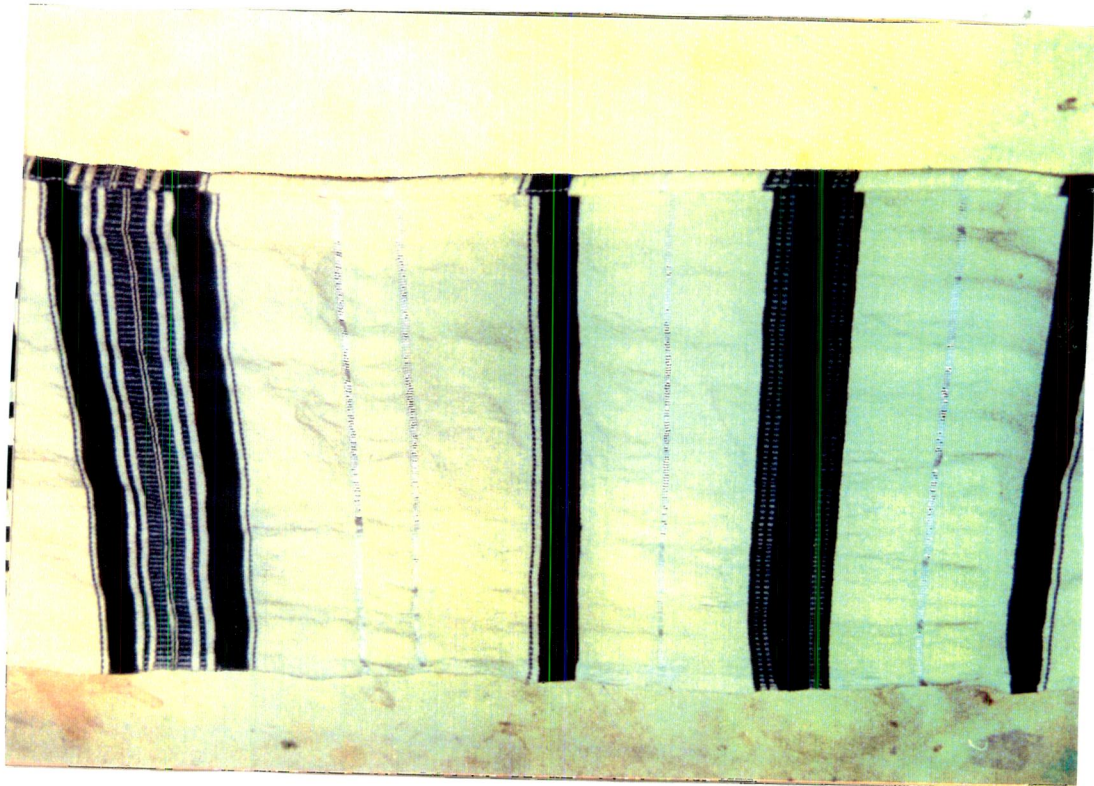








This tallis may be found in the Irish Jewish Museum. The above tallis is about eighty years old and is made from wool. This is not the only prayer shawl that has had white stripes added. In Fig 1:11 we can see fourteen black stripes and four white stripes.



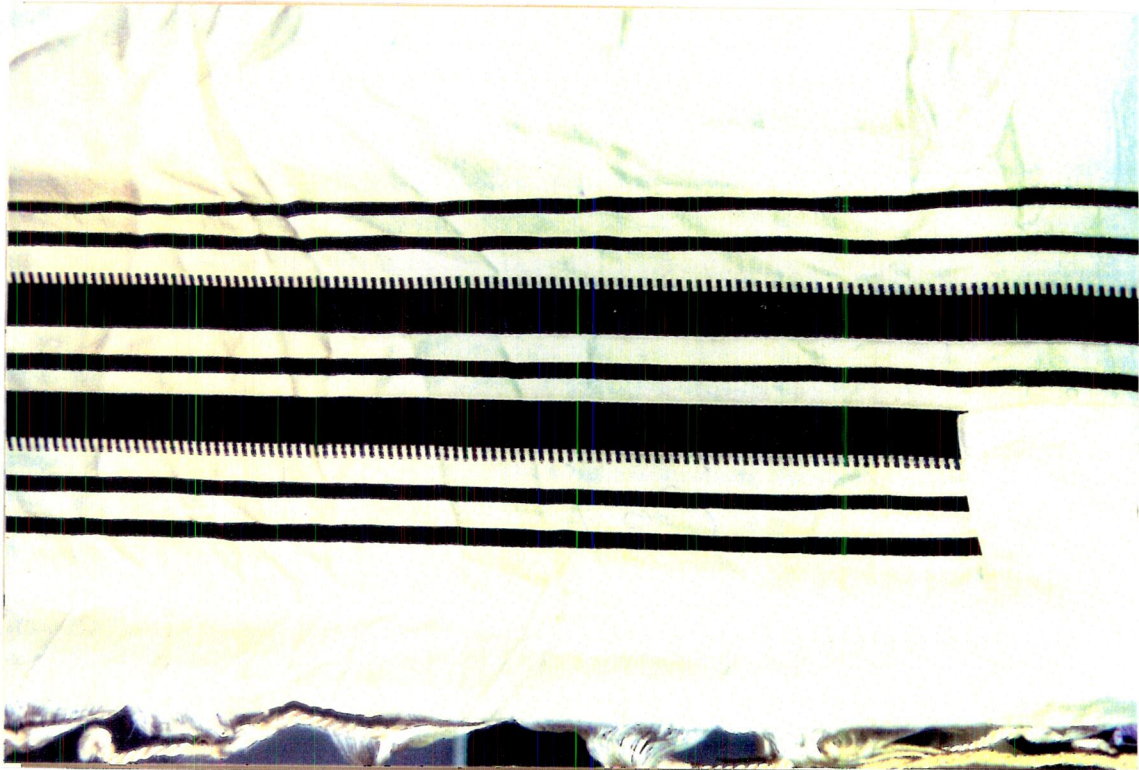
### Zion Tallis Styles

This tallis is of a much later date around 1960 - 1970, but still some of the distinctive features carry through both tallis are made from 100% wool. They once belonged to orthodox Jews. It is not known whether orthodox Jews preferred white lines inserted into a tallis, but black lines seemed to be the preferred : Orthodox Jews prefer wool or linen prayer shawl. Silk prayer shawls are also very popular, but are less fussy and more simple in design. This is probably because silk is a precious cloth and not much decoration is needed. As you can see in Fig 1:12, there are but seven stripes, two of which resemble





a fagged comb edge. This is the only form of decoration that is to be found. In the next Chapter I would like to talk about Collars, Tefillin, Tallit Bags and finally the use of the Prayer Shawl in Burial.







## **CHAPTER 3**

**A COLLARS**

**B TEFILLIN**

**C TALLIT BAGS**

**D THE USE OF PRAYER SHAWLS IN THE DRESSING  
OF THE DEAD**

**BURIAL CUSTOMS IN OTHER COUNTRIES**



## Collars

Collars are also an important part of the prayer shawl, many of which are highly decorative and personalised. I would like now to discuss three different types of collars. As I have mentioned previously, metallic thread is very often used in the decoration of various parts of prayer shawls and has been used repeatedly in the making of collars. As one can see in Fig 2:1/2 metallic thread has been used in the decoration of the collar and various patterns have been sewn in metallic thread to give the appearance of something very precious. To the left of the collar we can see a crown shaped design. This design is repeated at the opposite end, surrounded by a chain-like effect the crowns and flower-like designs are held in place.

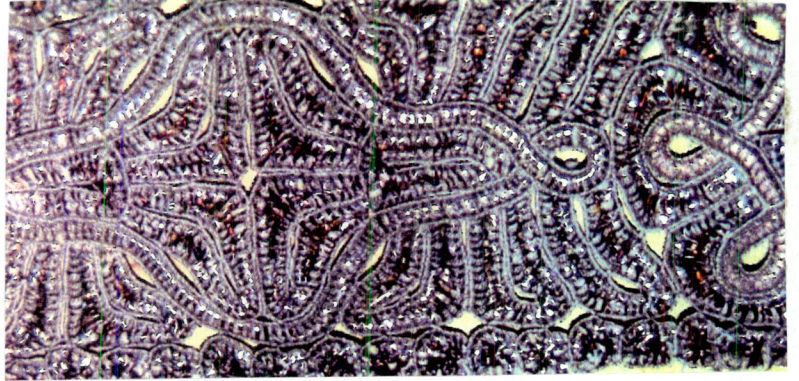


Fig 2:2

The second collar has been industrially produced in blue velvet. A crest representing the sect has been added as well as a blessing. The crest and blessing have been added by industrial sewing machine.



221

222





Fig 2:3

(produced by Zion Tallis). Fig 2:3/4

The crest shows four flower-like symbols and five leaves with an inscription above.



Fig 2:4

The third collar shows a walled-in city with a temple as its centre feature. Behind the temple to the left can be seen the wailing wall. This collar was bought in New York and brought back to Ireland by Mr Sive.

Fig 2:5





It was then hand-embroidered tastefully, by a local seamstress in shades of blue and green.

The scene is that of the old city of Israel, with its buildings and temple as I have mentioned before and is extremely rare ( See Fig 2:5/6).



Fig 2:6







## **Tefillin, the history behind it, when it is worn and received.**

Tefillin usually translated into Hebrew means "phylacteries" two black leather boxes containing scriptural passages which are bound by black leather stripes on the left hand and on the head, and are worn for the morning services on all days of the year, except Sabbaths and scriptural holy days. In four passages on the bible there occurs the almost identical passage requiring the Jew to put these words of the law for a sign on the hand and a frontlet between their eyes (on their forehead). Both the passages of Deuteronomy state explicitly *"and thou shall find them"* where the two passages in Exodus merely say *"and they shall be"*.

Of all the commentators on the Bible only the 12th Century commentator Samuel takes this command as a figurative one. In his commentary on Exodus 13:9 he says

*"according to the essence of its lateral meaning it means it shall ever be as a memorial as though it were written upon thy hands as in the verse."*

*"Set me as seal upon thy heart as a seal upon thine arm."*

Apart from this it was accepted that the verse had to be bound on the hand and placed (on the forehead) between the eyes. The portions selected for the fulfilment of this commandment were the four above I have already mentioned the passages which constitute the tefillin. The rabbis were aware of the fact that apart from these verses there is no explicit reference to this ceremony or the manner in which it was to be fulfilled in the bible, and they regarded it as the classic example of a biblical law whose details are wholly of the "scribes".



The Tefillin are first mentioned in the letter of Aristoeas, but only the Tefillin on a 'hand' and upon our head too god expressly orders the symbols to be fastened. Josephus mentioned both that of the head before the hand. The rabbis regarded them as having been instituted at the earliest times in the bible. The Tefillin were worn by day but not at night. It is even stated that 'he who wears Tefillin at night transgresses a positive commandment' but it is doubtful whether they were generally worn all day.

Tefillin were worn only by men but according to a baracita "Michael" the Prophet of the Cushite wore Tefillin and Rabbis did not protest. As I have stated before both the Tefillin of the hand and of the head contain the four paragraphs. In the Tefillin of the hand they are written on one piece of parchment, and in the order of their occurrence in the Bible. The Tefillin of the head is divided into four compartments. The four paragraphs are each written on a separate piece of parchment and tied, they are then inserted into the leather box. It is important to note that the paragraphs are hand written by a holy man or member of the Tefillin firm who specialises in miniature writings.

Both the Tefillin are cubical boxes of leather painted or dyed black. The parchment must be made from the skin of ritually clean animals preferably of a calf and the scripture passage from the bible written on them. The small box into which the parchment is inserted is closed with a square piece of thick leather, it is then stretched with twelve stitches of gut made from a clean animal.

Protruding from the back of the Tefillin case is a hollow extension through which the straps are passed. These straps must also be made from the hide of clean animals and be





black on the outside. The arrangement of the straps is conditioned by the purpose to which they are put. The hand Tefillin is in the form of a noose to enable it to be tightened on the arm. The Tefillin of the head has a circlet tied with a knot, its size adjusts to the circumference of the head, the two ends hanging loosely. Tefillin are worn on all weekdays, but not on Sabbaths and festivals. The reason given in the Talmud is that they are called 'a sign' but the Sabbath itself is so called and the same rule was applied to festivals so there was no need to wear the Tefillin.

The duty of buying a Tefillin begins when a boy reaches his religious maturity (at the age of 13 years and a day) but he usually begins to do so a few weeks earlier for practice, like the prayer shawl which he will also receive on his thirteenth birthday from his parents. Both have to be purchased outside of Ireland eg New York and Erez Israel. The wearing of the Tefillin is not permitted in any cemetery or in any unclean place or while asleep. In years past Tefillin were passed from generation to generation, especially in poor countries, but today new Tefillin are made. This is because parents and boys alike, prefer everything new, thus indicating the transgression from child into manhood. It is important to note that if, like the prayer shawl, it becomes damaged, it is rendered unfit and usually discarded.





## Tallit Bags

Tallit bags are used for both decorating and protection of the prayer shawl. Many of the bags have been personalised or hand embroidered, often with the owner's initials on the front. This acts as a form of identification. The preferred cloth for the bags seems to be velvet but silk is often used for the bags.

Royal blue and red are the most popular colours used for the making of the tallit bags. They are often richly decorated in metallic silver or gold threads. A wreath often encloses a crown or initials signifying the unity or creation of life. Another popular decoration is that of the Star of David with its six corners. In Fig 2:7 we can see an example of the above, a wreath encloses the star and the star encloses the crown above which there is lettering.

The most decorative feature of the motif is the star that has all six sides embroidered in tiny open square boxes, letting the backing show through. As I have mentioned before, embroidery plays an important part in the decoration of the tallit bag, and in Fig 2:8 we can see the front of the tallit bag has the wreath which surrounds the owner's initials, above which can be found the crown.



Fig 2:7



Fig 2:8







At the back of this tallit bag Fig 2:9 again we can see the owner's initials. This time the owner's initials are embroidered in silver thread, but the rest of the design is done in gold thread. One can see the Star of David and at the right and left side two doves are also embroidered, in the middle of which the crown sits on top of one of the points of the Star of David.



Fig 2:9

Another unusual bag is that of Fig 2:11. It shows the wreath, inside of which can be seen the owner's initials but above the initials one can see two animals that look as though they are protecting the crown.



Fig 2:11



608

608



The animals are facing outwards, heads turned and tongues lengthened. Everything on the bag has been hand embroidered and great care has been taken in the individual features. At the back of the bag it is plain red velvet. As I have mentioned before, many of the bags are highly decorative and can often depict certain scenes that may have a special meaning to the owner. In Fig 2:12 we can see an embroidery of the wailing wall in Israel, around which a blessing is embroidered.



Fig 2:12

Both the scene and lettering are hand embroidered to meet special requirements of the owner. The bag is eight inches long by eight inches wide. This particular bag is pre-1939. Prayer bags are used in many different nations, amongst which in Africa a wide variety may be found. In Fig 3:1 we can see a good example of a 1900 bag. It is very highly decorated in gold threads, but has none of the usual features.

2.12





Fig 3:1

Its long spiral lines interlock to give a trellis effect, as well as incorporating various shapes. There is no writing or picture to be found, just the date in which it was probably made. At the back of Fig 3:2 the same design is to be found in its place on top lettering can be seen.



Fig 3:2



100

100

Fig 3:2

The bag is oval in shape and red velvet is used as a backing for the embroidery. It is 12.5 inches long and 9.5 inches wide. There are three tassels, one at the bottom, and two at the top where the draw strings are. The backing of the bag is probably hard card and the lining is made from silk.

The following bag is also from Africa. It is also oval in shape. Silver thread is used instead of gold which is embroidered on top of purple velvet. It is not known when the bag was exactly made, but 1919 seems to be of some significance. Figs 3:3/3:4



Fig 3:3

The above bag does not have any tassels but has a hard-backing to keep its shape. It also has pink silk lining.



3-3





Fig 3:4

The reason that both bags have remained in such good condition is probably due to the fact that the card has helped to keep the shape. The embroidery stitches used in both bags is a simple straight stitch, but in the first bag gold card is pinned down, then sewing is placed, on top of the card - thus being able to give the shapes that are appealing. The next bag is plain royal blue velvet - Fig 3:5. It has a zip opening on top to allow the owner access to the inside. Again a wreath can be seen with a centre flower and nine leaves on either side.



Fig 3:5

3.4

3.5



A blessing, followed by the crown can also be seen above which initials belonging to the owner have been placed. The embroidery is done in silver thread. The bag measures eight inches long by 7.5 inches wide. This bag could be more recent than the others and the zip might have replaced fasteners. In Fig 3:6 we can see a rich red velvet tallit bag.



Fig 3:6

This time the wreath almost surrounds the initials and blessing in the middle. The wreath is centred by a bow in the middle. To the left and right flowers can be seen interspersed by leaves. The back of this tallit bag is plain. It is closed by fasteners and has no lining. It is approximately 7 inches long and 7 inches wide.



3.6

The following bag is also very plain. It is made of royal blue velvet - Fig 3:7.



Fig 3:7

It has a simple wreath and blessing as its feature. The centre of the wreath has a bow and either side just has one flower and a few leaves. The bag is very modestly decorated, and measures 10 inches long and 9 inches wide. It is also closed by fasteners, the back of the bag is plain velvet.

Crushed velvet has been used to make the next tallit bag. It is a deep burgundy colour and has also been modestly decorated with a wreath that once again is centred by a bow. There are no flowers to be seen. The Star of David is in the centre of the wreath above which the owner's initials are to be found. The bag is closed by fasteners and measures 8.5 inches long and 8.5 inches wide.







Fig 3:8

The bag is closed by fasteners and measures 8.5 inches long by 8.5 inches wide. The back of the bag is plain velvet. The next tallit bag Fig 3:9 is also plain velvet. It just has the Star of David on the front of it, and Hebrew writing going through it. It also closes by fasteners and measures 6 inches long by 5 inches wide.

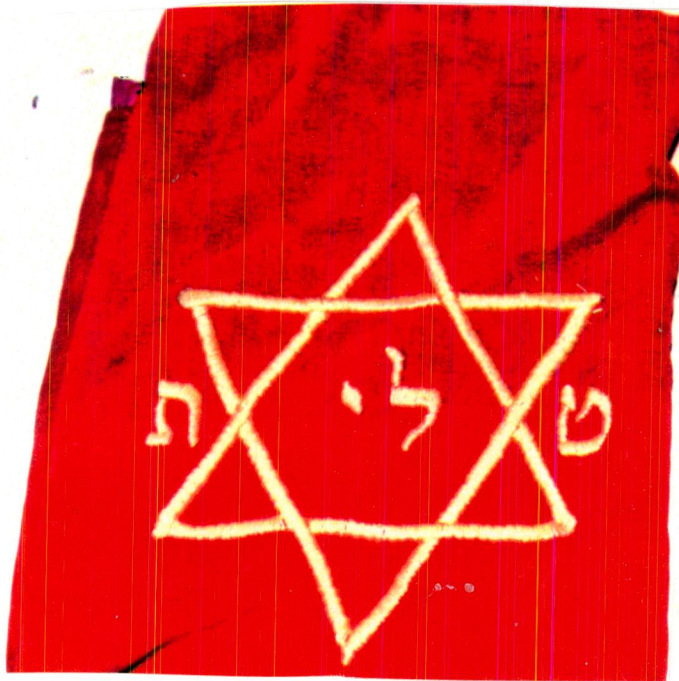


Fig 3:9

3.8

3.8



In Fig 3:10 we can see an example of a silk thread tallit bag. The bag has all the main features that may be found on other bags. It is made up of two pieces of silk that have been sewn together at the seams, a gold piping cord has been added for decoration. The bag has the Star of David in which a picture of the wailing wall can be seen; a wreath and blessing can also be found.



Fig 3:10

At the back of this particular bag a candelabra can be seen with a wreath almost surrounding it.



Fig 3:11





The designs and features on this bag have been printed onto the silk, the bag was then constructed. Fasteners are used to keep the bag closed. The final bag - Fig 3:12 - is an older bag. It is embroidered in gold thread. It has the Star of David as its main feature, through which Hebrew words can be found. On the right and left points of the Star two doves can be seen, probably signifying peace. Above the centre point of the Star a crown has been added



Fig 3:12

The bag is 8 inches long by 8 inches wide. It is also closed by fasteners and has a silk lining.





# Burial

## The Dressing of the Dead

### Burial Customs in Other Countries

Burial, the history behind ritual burial and the sequence of events and tradition that is necessary for the Spirit to become free. In the Bible decent burial was regarded to be of great importance in ancient Israel, as in the rest of the ancient Near East. Not only the Egyptians whose extravagant provision for the dead is well known, but also the people of Mesopotamia dreaded above all else the thought of lying unburied. One of the most frequently employed curses found in Mesopotamian texts is:

*"May the earth not receive your corpses"*

In the same way one can measure the importance that Israelites attached to burial by the frequency with which the Bible refers to the fear of being left unburied. One of the curses for breach of the covenant is (Deuteronomy 28:26)

*"Thy carcasses shall be food unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth."*

Again and again the prophets use this threat, especially Jeremiah (Jerusalem 22:19)

*"In judgement on King Jeremiah he shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."*

There is also abundant positive evidence for the importance of burial (Gen 23). Abraham's purchase of the cave at Machpelah as a family tomb and the subsequent



measures taken by later patriarchs to ensure that they would be buried there, occupy a prominent place in the patriarchal nature.

Biblical biographies ordinarily end with the statement that a man died, and an account of his burial, especially if this was in some way unusual. This is not only a literary convention, but reflects the value assigned to proper interment. To give a decent burial to a stranger ranks with giving bread to the hungry and garments to the naked. Tombs of the Israelite period in Palestine show that considerable, though not lavish, care was given by those who could afford it to the hewing out of tombs and the provision of grave goods.

It is necessary to emphasise the importance of decent burial. Archaeology reveals no distinctively Israelite burial practices during almost the whole of the biblical period. There is evidence to show that the Israelites continued to use modes of burial employed in Palestine long before the conquest. Because of this one must be careful in drawing firm conclusions about Israelite religious beliefs on the basis of specific burial practices. For example, the provision of grave goods or lack of them, communal or individual burial, and so since any or all of these may have been dictated by immemorial custom rather than by consciously held conviction. The law says relatively little about burial and where it treats the subject, the concern is to avoid defilement of the dead. The dead do not praise God - they are forgotten and cut off from his hand and, in consequence, mourning and the burial of the dead are, at most, peripheral matters in Israelite religion.





The one thing expressed most clearly by Israelite burial practices is the common human desire to maintain some contact with the community even after death, through burial in one's native land at least, and, if possible, with one's ancestors.

*"Bury me with my Fathers" (Gen 49:29)*

Jacob's request was the wish of every ancient Israelite.

*"That I may die in mine own city and be buried by the grave of my father  
and of my mother."*

Jewish custom insists on prompt burial as a matter of respect for the dead, a consideration of particular relevance in hot climates. According to one Kabbalistic source, burial refreshes the soul of the deceased, and only after burial will it be admitted to God's presence. However, certain delays are unavoidable. Funerals may not take place on the Sabbath or on the Day of Atonement. Although the Rabbis at one time permitted funerals on the first day of a festival, provided that certain functions were performed by gentiles, and regarded the second day of "gom tor" as a weekday, as far as the dead are concerned. Some modern communities prefer postponement. Where there are two internments at the same time, respect demands that the burial of a scholar precedes that of an "amha-ares" (average citizen) and that of a woman always precedes that of a man.

Escorting the dead (especially a deceased scholar) to his last resting place is considered a great 'mitzvah' the fruit of which a man enjoys in this world, while the stock remains for him in the world to come and is called the true kindness since one can expect no reciprocation of any sort. A custom instituted by Kabbalists and still largely observed in Jerusalem, forbids children to follow the burial of their father and attend his funeral.





The most elaborate rituals have either disappeared or been modernised. The recital of psalms in the home still precedes the burial act. However, the custom of having musicians, torch bearers and barefooted professional mourners in the funeral procession has been discontinued. In Great Britain the custom of reciting the 'mehillah' (asking pardon of the corpse on the arrival at the cemetery) was discontinued in 1887.

The dressing of the dead in costly garments of gold or silver is forbidden. Since talmadic times it has been customary to bury a male in the "Tallit" which he had used during his lifetime, after its fringes have been deliberately rendered ritually unfit. The victim of an unnatural death is buried in his blood-soaked garments, over which the white shrouds are placed, in order that all parts of the body should be interred.

Coffins were unknown to the early Israelites. The corpse was laid horizontally and face upward on a bier. The custom of burying important personages in coffins evolved only later. In Judah 22:18, however, ordered that holes be drilled in the base of his coffin so that his body might touch the soil. In Erez Israel coffins are not usually used. In the Diashora, it is still customary to spread earth from Erez Israel on the head and face of the corpse, but the custom of placing ink and pen beside the deceased bridegroom, and a key and book of accounts beside a childless man have been discontinued. The older practice of food offerings to the dead and of burning the personal effects with the corpse have completely disappeared. Even today the custom of placing flowers on the grave is discouraged by Orthodox Rabbis because of "Hukkat ha-gai". Before the funeral, the mourners tear their garment as a symbol of mourning.



The funeral service now often varies according to the age of the deceased. A male who died before he was seven days old is circumcised and given a Hebrew name at the cemetery. Only two men and one woman participate at the funeral of children who die before they reach the age of thirty days, although children who have learned to walk and thus are known to many people are escorted as adults. In such normal cases the coffin is carried on the shoulders of the pallbearers into the cemetery prayer hall where the Zeddaik ha-Den (acknowledgement of the Divine Judgement) beginning with the affirmation:

*"The rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgement."*

In some communities this prayer is recited after the coffin has been lowered into the grave, and on those days on which the Tahoman is not said.

When the coffin is lowered into the grave, those present say *"May s/he come to their place in peace"*, the grave is then filled in. As they leave, they throw grass and earth behind them in the direction of the grave while saying *"Remember God that we are dust"*. Before leaving the cemetery the people who have thrown the dust wash their hands. In Jerusalem it is customary not to dry your hands after washing the dust away. I would like now to talk briefly about Jews in Libya and Yemen. In Libya if a man died and left a wife in the early stages of pregnancy, those carrying the bier would lift it high when they left the home of the dead man and the widow would pass under it in order to demonstrate that the deceased is the father and in doing so prevents malicious gossip later. Sons did not go near the bier (deceased man) and did not enter the cemetery, but stayed at the entrance where they recited the Kaddish at the end of the burial service. The burial society supplied the mourners' meal and buried the remains of it in the ground so that mourning should not return to the family. If the deceased was an old scholar, a small meal was eaten before the bier was removed from the house.





In Yemen the mourners follow the bier in black tallitat (prayer shawls). The sons of the deceased uncover their right arm and shoulder. The participants walk around the bier seven times and a formal declaration releasing the deceased from all penalties that may have been put on him is made.





## Glossary

<i>Pallium</i>	-	"himation" = cloak
<i>Atorah</i>	-	collar
<i>Tallit Prayer Shawl</i>	-	gown or cloak
<i>Abbayah</i>	-	blanket
<i>Maimonides</i>	-	holy men
<i>Hazzan</i>	-	sect of Jewish people
<i>Torah</i>	-	Holy Book
<i>Synagogue</i>	-	House of Prayer
<i>Kahaman</i>	-	sect of Jewish people
<i>Cantor</i>	-	person who sings from Holy Book
<i>Huppah</i>	-	wedding
<i>Gedilim</i>	-	twisted cord
<i>Simlah</i>	-	different type of shawl
<i>Talmudic</i>	-	old times
<i>Mezuzah</i>	-	little box on doors to be found in Jewish houses
<i>Tefillin</i>	-	leather boxes that are placed on head and arms for prayer
<i>Tekhelet</i>	-	blue dye collected from snails
<i>Rhoenicians</i>	-	sect of people found in Asia
<i>Isatis</i>	-	wood
<i>Katsa</i>	-	saffron
<i>Pu ah</i>	-	modder
<i>Purhurea</i>	-	purple
<i>Shani</i>	-	crimson warm
<i>Tabernacle</i>	-	place where Holy Book is kept
<i>Tyrians</i>	-	sect of people
<i>Hillazan</i>	-	snail
<i>Modrash</i>	-	history keeper
<i>Mishnah</i>	-	religious period
<i>Kabbalistic</i>	-	history keeper
<i>Mehillah</i>	-	asking pardon of the corpse on the arrival at the cemetery
<i>Zeddaik ha-Den</i>	-	acknowledgement of the Divine Judgement

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