

**SHIELD OF DAVID (Magen David;** in Ashkenazic pronunciation, Mogen Dovid), a symbol made up of two equilateral triangles that are interlaced so as to form a hexagonal star, every point of which touches a circle of the same radius as each one of their six sides. This symbol is of ancient origin; according to the teachings of the Rosicrucians, it was known to the ancient Egyptians, Hindus, Chinese and Peruvians. It is found on a Hebrew seal discovered in Sidon and dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.E.; upon the tombstone of a certain Leon Ben David, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. C.E.; on the synagogue at Tell Hum (Capernaum) in Galilee, from the same century; in the Jewish catacombs at the Villa Torlonia, near Rome; on the city wall at Jerusalem; in an Arabic amulet of the 9<sup>th</sup> cent.; in Byzantine magic texts; in medieval books of magic (but as a pentagraph); in German folklore; in the relics of the Templars; as the “stone of the wise” in alchemy; as the stone-mason's sign (but in a somewhat different form) in the coat of arms of the Freemasons; as the “Order of the Seal of Solomon” in Abyssinia (from 1874 on); in the old town hall of Vienna; on or in churches at Aquileia, Brandenburg, Stendal, Hannover, Lüneburg and Bad Gastein (the latter is the most recent date). It was placed on the sign-board of taverns, particularly in South Germany, reputedly because it was used by the Pythagoreans on their begging tours to notify their comrades that at that place they had found a hospitable reception.

It can not be definitely stated just when the Shield of David became a generally acknowledged symbol of Judaism. When it first appears on Jewish buildings and objects, it often occurs in connection with other symbols, so that it may be no more than a conventional decoration. On the other hand, so few Jewish synagogues have survived from the earlier period that it is impossible to draw conclusions from the absence of the symbol in earlier accounts and to hold that it may not have a much longer history than that which is actually known. It begins to appear frequently on synagogues from the 16<sup>th</sup> cent. on, when the influence of the Cabalist Isaac Luria was spreading. It appears side by side with the Menorah, which until then had been regarded as the “shield of David,” and which it gradually displaced in synagogues and on religious objects. A Hebrew manuscript of 1564, in the Hamburg Stadtbibliothek, has the symbol accompanied by the words, *magen david*; it is further met with in the arrangement of the Seder, as a Zionist emblem, and in the name of the Red Magen David Society (equivalent to the Red Cross).

It is only in Jewish sources that the interlaced triangles are called “shield of David,” as non-Jewish sources call the symbol the “seal of Solomon.” The Jewish title appears first in the *Eshkol Hakofer* (about 1148) of the Karaite Judah ben Elijah Hadasi. Here, in connection with the Mezuzah (the doorpost amulet), the names of seven angels are given, each one of which is accompanied by this hexagram. This connection would indicate one meaning of the symbol. According to an ancient view, angels, as well as spirits and demons, were created out of fire and air. The zodiac

was considered as consisting of twelve signs, of which three each belonged to the four elements of fire, water, air and earth; the hexagram was formed by drawing lines that connected the zodiacal symbols (arranged in a circle) devoted to fire on the one hand and air on the other. Again, according to the Cabalistic view which speaks of two worlds, an upper and a lower one which corresponds to it, the two triangles, one upright and one inverted, would be the symbol of evolution and involution, the inner link of the visible and invisible world, the representation of the Ten Sefiroth as the mathematical figure of the Tree of Life. Mythologically, it designates the emergence of the microcosm (man) from the macrocosm (the universe), of the Zeir Anpin (immediate aspect of God) from the Aba Veumma (hidden aspect of God); according to this analogy, the Messiah David will arise from the “bosom of Abraham,” the foundation stone of the world.

A further confirmation of this mythological explanation is the fact that in medieval times the symbol was designated “shield of David and Abraham”; God as the “shield” or protection of both David and Abraham appears in the Bible (*Gen. 15:1; Ps. 18:36*). The use of the term “shield” points to an astrological and mythical connection, and is reminiscent of the shield of Melkart (Hercules), with which the latter slew the giant Antaeus. Just as this was preserved in the temple at Gadeira, so the shield of David, according to David Reubeni, was preserved in the synagogue at Bologna.

Not to be confused with the Shield of David is the pentagram with the names of God in ancient papyri. This five pointed symbol is a rival of the hexagram for the title of “seal of Solomon.”

The Shield of David was further interpreted to denote the seven days of the week, with the planets as their overlords. The hexagon in the center, the most complete figure, was the Sabbath; the six outer triangles, the six week-days. It was divided into four rhomboids, corresponding to the four cardinal directions: north, south, east and west. As a Messianic symbol, it represented the zodiacal sign of Pisces (February 21 to March 20), the time of the year in which the Messiah was supposed to appear.

In modern times the Shield of David has become the most universally recognized Jewish symbol. It appears in synagogues and ritual objects, on the seals of Jewish organizations and on bookplates, on the Zionist emblem (see illustration, vol. 2, p. 66) and on amulets. It was so closely connected with Jewish life as to be called the “Jewish star” by anti-Semites and to be chosen by the Nazis as the shape of their reintroduced Jew badge. ~ Max Grunwald.