

PREFACE

This four volume study traces evidence of Evil Eye belief and practice in the ancient world from Mesopotamia (c. 3000 BCE) to Late Roman Antiquity (c. 600 CE), with particular attention to the Bible and post-biblical traditions of Israel and early Christianity.

Belief in the Evil Eye is a long-standing and widespread folk concept that some persons are enabled by nature to injure others, cause illness and loss, and destroy any person, animal or thing through a powerful noxious glance emanating from the eye. Also known as “fascination” (Greek: *baskania*; Latin: *fascinatio*), this belief holds that the eye is an active organ that emits destructive emanations charged by negative dispositions (especially malevolence, envy, miserliness, and withheld generosity). These emanations arise in the heart or soul, and are projected outward against both animate and inanimate objects. The full constellation of notions comprising the Evil Eye complex includes the expectation that various prophylactic words, gestures, images, and amulets have the power to counter and avert the damaging power of the Evil Eye.

From its likely origin in ancient Sumer (3000 BCE) and its early spread to Egypt and the Circum-Mediterranean region, to its later movement eastward to India and westward and northward to Europe, the belief eventually made its way from “old worlds” to “new.” It now constitutes a cultural phenomenon with personal, social, and moral implications that has spanned the centuries and encircled the globe.

This multi-volume study concentrates on the Evil Eye phenomenon in the ancient world, with new and extensive attention to mention of it in the Bible and the biblical communities of Israel and early Christianity. It is an up-to-date, comprehensive account of the extant ancient texts, amulets, and the modern research on this perennial topic. It is the first book-length study of all the biblical and related texts mentioning the Evil Eye. The study consists of four volumes, with the material on the Evil Eye treated in roughly

historical sequence from ancient Mesopotamia to Late Roman antiquity. This is the context within which Evil Eye belief and practice mentioned in the Bible is best understood.

Volume One opens with an introductory overview of references to, and research on, the Evil Eye from the ancient past to the modern present (Chapter One). Chapter Two of Volume One examines Evil Eye belief and practice in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. Volume Two is devoted to evidence on the subject from ancient Greece and Rome. Within the geographical and cultural matrix detailed in these first two volumes, the evidence of Evil Eye belief and practice in the Bible is then examined (Volume Three). A final volume considers post-biblical evidence of Evil Eye belief and practice in Rabbinic Israel (Chapter One) and early Christianity (Chapter Two) through Late Antiquity (c. 600 CE). Concluding reflections on the import and implications of our study (Chapter Three) close this final volume.

The fulsome footnotes in these four volumes intend to register the abundance of the ancient sources relevant to our topic, the pertinent information on the physical, social, and cultural contexts of these sources, and the wide extent of modern research on the topic of Evil Eye belief and practice. It is hoped that this updated overview of research since the early years of the twentieth century will provide the basis and stimulus for future studies of this fascinating topic.