

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 implication, and moral implications that has spanned the centuries and encircled the globe.

Beware the Evil Eye 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. 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

in ancient Greece and Rome. The analysis of Evil Eye belief and practice in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome summarizes a century of research since the milestone two-volume study of Siegfried Seligmann, *Der böse Blick und Verwandtes* (1910), and describes the ecological, historical, social, and cultural contexts within which the biblical texts are best understood. 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 in 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. Throughout this study we are treating the Evil Eye in antiquity not as an instance of vulgar superstition or deluded magic, but as a physiological, psychological and moral phenomenon whose operation was deemed explicable on rational grounds; for discussion see Vol. 1, pp. 26-27.

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