

BEWARE THE EVIL EYE

The Evil Eye in the Bible and the Ancient World

JOHN H. ELLIOTT

VOLUME 1

Introduction, Mesopotamia, and Egypt



Beware the Evil Eye

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Beware the Evil Eye
*The Evil Eye in the Bible
and the Ancient World*

Volume 1
Introduction, Mesopotamia, and Egypt

John H. Elliott



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ISBN: 978 0 227 17568 2

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A record is available from the British Library

First published by James Clarke & Co, 2016

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Published by arrangement
with Cascade Books

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For Dick Rohrbaugh
Context Group colleague, dear friend, expert himself in Evil Eye lore,
and
Madison River angler *sans pareil*.
in gratitude
for years of creative collaboration
and for generous assistance on this project in particular.
Abaskantos!

“The Eye is Evil, the most Evil thing”
(Sumerian incantation against the Evil Eye, YOS 11,71)

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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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has been a research project like no other in my professional experience. The extensive ramifications of the topic –Evil Eye belief and practice from antiquity to the present—have required research in a diversity of fields and disciplines (history, archaeology, ancient languages, the social sciences, biblical exegesis, folklore and cultural studies, among others). From colleagues, students, audience members, and readers over the course of almost three decades I have been graced with a constant flow of information consisting of bibliographical references, newspaper clippings, photographs, personal experiences and anecdotes, and even amulets acquired by my wanderlusting friends. Your names are legion and too numerous to acknowledge individually, but you are held in gratitude, each and every one. To one and all I am most grateful for your interest and your assistance in this project.

Members of the Context Group, in particular, have been especially generous with their information, photos, and feedback (Dick Rohrbaugh, Dennis Duling, K. C. Hanson, John Pilch, Bruce Malina, Jerry Neyrey, Carolyn Osiek, Dietmar Neufeld, Doug Oakman, Zeba Crook; Anselm Hagedorn, Ray Hobbs, Gary Stansell, Alicia Batten). Other colleagues have also generously provided support and information: David Balch, George Bohigian, M.D. Eugene Botha, Fred Brenk, Bob Coote, Jan Giddings, Ray Humphreys, Mark Jesenko, Petri Luomenon, Vijaya Nagarajan, Peter Oakes, Romano Penna, Chris Seeman, Brenda Schildgen, Phil Stevens, among scores of others. Special thanks to Rev. Dr. Anselm Hagedorn for his assistance in acquiring some vital Mesopotamian materials. More thanks to particular colleagues for their critical reading of drafts of one or more of the volumes: Bob Coote, Norman Gottwald, Gary Stansell, Dennis Duling, Stephen Black, and Richard Rohrbaugh, to whom this first volume is gratefully dedicated.

Thanks likewise to my generous hosts at various universities where I delivered lectures on this topic: Professor Andries van Aarde at the

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University of Pretoria, South Africa; for collaboration with Eugene Botha at UNISA, South Africa; to professors Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce at the University of Bologna; to Professor Alexander Negrov, rector of St. Petersburg Christian University, St. Petersburg, Russia; Professor Santiago Guijarro Oporto at Salamanca University, Spain; and Professor Philip Esler, St. Andrews University, Scotland.

I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities for the Summer Stipend (FT-34963-91) of \$3,750 awarded 6-8/1991 for research on the Evil Eye, eventually published as "The Evil Eye and the Sermon on the Mount: Contours of a Pervasive Belief in Social Scientific Perspective." *Biblical Interpretation* 2/1 (1994) 51-84.

Warm thanks go also to Dr. K. C. Hanson for his keen interest in the topic and his generous editorial aid and counsel over all these years. Thanks too to Ian Creeger, patient and expert typesetter. For the errors that remain. I have only myself and some nasty Evil Eye to blame.

A special thanks to my sweet Linde for your patience with your much-too- preoccupied *Ehemann*, especially in the concluding years of this project, and for your assistance with this publication in so many loving ways. Jetzt, Suesse, endlich Schluss mit dem Schreiben und ein frischer Anfang des Zusammenlebens!

May each and every one be and remain *abaskantos*—safe from the Evil Eye!

ABBREVIATIONS FOR CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. Edited by David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ET	English translation
<i>HWDA</i>	<i>Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens</i> . 10 vols. Edited by H. Bächtold-Stäubli and E. Hoffmann-Krayer. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1927–1942; Reprinted, 1987
<i>HERE</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i> . 13 vols. Edited by James Hasting, James, et al. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908–1927. 4th ed. Reprinted, 1958
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. Edited by G. W. Buttrick. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplements
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>RAC</i>	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> . Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt. 25+ vols. Edited by Theodore Klauser et al. Stuttgart: Hierse-mann, 1950–
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des études Byzantines</i> , successor of <i>Échos d'Orient</i> . Paris, 1897–1942

ABBREVIATIONS FOR CHAPTER 2: MESOPOTAMIA AND EGYPT

A. ANCIENT PRIMARY SOURCES

Mesopotamian and Ugaritic Sources

ALASP(M)	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas (und Mesopotamiens)
ArOr	<i>Archiv Orientalni</i>
AO	Antiquités orientales. Tablets in the collection of the Louvre Museum, Paris
BAM	<i>Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen</i> . Edited by Franz Köcher. 6 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963–1980
BL	<i>Babylonian Liturgies</i> . Edited by Stephen H. Langdon. Paris: Geuthner, 1913
BM	Tablets, Objects of the British Museum
CAT	<i>Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets</i> . Edited by A. F. Rainey. Handbuch der Orientalistik I 25,1–4, Leiden: Brill, 1996
CT	Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum. 58 Volumes.
IM	Museum siglum of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad
KTU	<i>Die keil-alphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24.1. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1976

KTU ²	<i>Die keil-alphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartín. 2nd ed. ALASP(M) 8. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995
MDP	Mémoires de la Délégation en Perse. Paris 1900–
PT	Pyramid Text
RS	Ras Shamra. Museum siglum of the Louvre and Damascus Museums
SEL	<i>Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici sul Vicino Oriente Antico</i> . Verona: Essedue, 1984–
STT	<i>The Sultantepe Tablets</i> . Volume 1. Edited by O. R. Gurney and J. J. Finkelstein. Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara no. 3. London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1957 <i>The Sultantepe Tablets</i> . Volume 2. Edited by O. R. Gurney and P. Hulin. Occasional Publications of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara no. 7. London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1964
TCL	Textes Cunéiforms, Musées du Louvre. Paris 1910–
UDB	Ugaritic Databank (electronic) Madrid 2003–
VAT	Tablets in the Collections of the Staatliches Museum, Berlin, Vorderasiatische Abteilung, Tontafeln
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts. New Haven, 1915–
YOS 11	<i>Early Mesopotamian Incantations and Rituals</i> . Edited by J. van Dijk, M. I. Hussey, and Albrecht Götze. YOS 11. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985

Papyri, Inscriptions, Epigrapha, Ostraca

BGU	<i>Ägyptische Urkunden aus den staatlichen Museen zu Berlin</i> . Griechische Urkunden. 15 vols. Berlin: Weidmann, 1895–1983
CIG	Corpus inscriptionum graecarum. Edited by A. Boeckh. 4 vols. Berlin, 1825–1877
CIL	Corpus inscriptionum latinarum
CIL	Corpus inscriptionum latinarum. Begun by T. Mommsen. 17 vols. Berlin: Reimer, 1862–
<i>Epigr. Gr.</i>	See Kaibel, <i>Epigr. Gr.</i>

xviii *Abbreviations for Chapter 2: Mesopotamia and Egypt*

- GVI *Griechische Vers-inschriften. I: Die Grabepigramma.* Edited by W. Peek. Berlin: Akademie, 1955
- Kaibel, *Epigr. Gr. Epigrammata Graeca ex lapidibus conlecta.* Edited by G. Kaibel. Berlin: Reimer, 1878
- GMPT *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Texts.* Edited by H. D. Betz et al. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. See PGM
- IG *Inscriptiones Graecae.* Berlin, 1873- 1903
- IG² *Inscriptiones Graecae, editio minor.* Berlin, 1913-
- IGLS *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie,* edited by L. Jalabert, R. Mousterde, et al. Paris: Geuthner, 1929
- IGRRP *Inscriptiones Graecae ad res romanas pertinentes.* Vol. 1. Paris: E. Leroux, 1901
- ILS *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae.* Edited by H. Dessau. 3 vols. In 5 parts. Berlin: Weidmann, 1892-1916
- O.Amst. *Ostraka in Amsterdam Collections,* edited by R. S. Bagnall P. J., Sijpestein P. J. et al. *Studia Amstelodamensia ad epigraphicam, ius antiquum et papyrologicam pertinentia*, 9. Zutphen, 1976
- O.Flor. *The Florida Ostraka: Documents from the Roman Army in Upper Egypt,* edited by R. S. Bagnall. *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Monographs* 7. Durham, N.C. 1976. Nos. 1-31
- OGIS *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae.* Edited by W. Dittenberger, 2 vols. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903-1905
- PAES *Première Année des Etudes de Santé*
- PDM *Papyri Demoticae Magicae.* Translated in *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells.* Edited by H. D. Betz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- PGM *Papyri Graece Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri.* 2 vols. Vol. 1 (1928), Vol. 2 (1931). Edited by K. Preisendanz. Berlin: Teubner, 1928-1931. Vol. 3 (1942), edited by K. Preisendanz et al. 1941. 2d. rev. ed. by A. Heinrichs. 2 vols. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973-74. cf. ET: *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation,* ed. H. D. Betz
- Papyrus Leiden *The Demotic Magical Papyrus of London and Leiden.* Edited by F. L. Griffith and Herbert Thompson. London: Grevel, 1904
- P.Leid. *Papyri Graeci Musei Antiquarii Publici.* 2 vols. Edited by C. Leemans. Leiden: Brill. Vol. 1 (1843); vol. 2 (1885)

- P.Lond. *Greek Papyri in the British Museum*. 7 vols. Edited by F. G. Kenyon et al. Vols. 1 and 2 edited by F. G. Kenyon; Vol. 3 edited by F. G. Kenyon and H. I. Bell; Vols. 4 and 5 edited by H. I. Bell. London: British Museum, 1893–1974. =P.Mag.Lond.
- P.Mag. Leid.W. Leiden Magical Papyrus W. Edited by A. Dieterich
- P.Mag.Par. C. Wessley, “Griechische Zauberpapyrus von Paris und London.” *Denkschrift der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaft, Philosoph.-Historische Klasse* 36/2 (1888) 27–108; “Die Pariser Papyri des Fundes von El-Faijûm.” *Denkschrift der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaft, Philosoph.-Historische Klasse* 37/2 Vienna (1889) 97–256.
- P.Mich University of Michigan Papyri, various editors. 1931—
- P.Oxy. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. Edited by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt et al. 72 vols. London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1898–1972
- P.Petr. *The Flinders Petrie Papyri*. 3 vols. Edited by J. Mahaffy and J. Smyly. Dublin: Acamemy House, 1891–1905
- P.Rein. *Papyrus grecs et démotiques recueillies en Égypte*. Edited by T. Rienach, W. Spiegelberg, and S. de Ricci. Paris: Leroux, 1905 [Milan 1972]
- PSI *Papiri greci e latini*. Pubblicazioni della Società italiana per la ricerca dei papyri greci e latini in Egitto., Florence: Arini, 1912—
- P.Thead. *Papyrus de Théadelphie*. Edited by P. Jourget. Paris: Fontemoing, 1911
- P.Turner *Papyri Greek and Egyptian Edited by Various Hands in Honour of E.G. Turner on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*. London 1981
- Rev.Ég. *Revue égyptologique*
- SB *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten*. Edited by Friedrich Preisigke et al. 13 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1915–1979
- SEG *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*. Leiden, 1923–1971. Edited by H. W. Pleket and R. S. Stroud et al. Amsterdam: Gieben, 1972—
- van Haelst, *Catalogue* J. van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens*. Université de Paris IV. Série Papyrologie 1. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1976

2. MODERN ENCYCLOPEDIAS, JOURNALS, SERIES

ALASP(M)	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palastinas (und Mesopotamiens)
AO	<i>Archiv Orientalni</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOS	American Oriental Series (New Haven 1925–)
ASJ	Acta Sumerologica (Hiroshima 1979–)
BIFAO	Bulletin de l'Institut Francais d'Archéologie Orientale au Caire, Le Caire
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CRAIBL	Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. Paris: Picard, 1857–
Daremberg-Saglio	Daremberg, Charles and Edmond Saglio, eds. <i>Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines</i> . 10 vols. Paris: Hachette, 1877–1919
HERE	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</i> . 13 vols. Edited by James Hastings et al. 13 vols. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908–1926
IDB	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. Edited by George Arthur Buttrick. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962
IDBSup	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume</i> . Edited by K. Crim. Nashville: Abingdon, 1976
ISBE	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia</i> . 4 vols. Edited by James Orr, et al. Revised ed. by M. G. Kyle. Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1929; revised and reedited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979–1988
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NABU	Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires
NISABA	Studi Assiriologici Messinesi
ÖAW	Die Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
PSBA	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology</i>
TWAT	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> .
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i> 1969–

ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie</i>
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS AND SIGLA

adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
a.k.a.	also known as, alias
act.	active
AMB	Aramaic Magic Bowl
anon.	anonymous
aor.	aorist
BCE, CE	Before the Common Era; Common Era (replacing B.C. / A.D.)
c.	<i>circa</i> (about)
cent.	century
cf.	confer, see
ch(s).	chapter(s)
col.	column
cp.	compare, contrast
<i>fl.</i>	<i>floruit</i> (flourished, was active at a certain time)
fig.	figure
FS	Festschrift
gen.	genitive
HT	Hebrew Text, a.k.a. MT (Massoretic Text)
ill.	illustration
JHE	John H. Elliott (as translator)
l(l)	line(s)
lit.	literally
MT	Hebrew Massoretic Text a.k.a HT (Hebrew Text)
no(s)	number(s)
P.	Papyrus
part.	participle
pass.	passive
per.	person

xxii *Abbreviations for Chapter 2: Mesopotamia and Egypt*

Pl.	Plate
pl.	plural
p(p)	page(s)
Prol.	<i>Prologus</i> (prologue)
Ps.-	pseudo- (inaccurately ascribed to)
Q	Qumran
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>s.v.</i>	<i>sub voce</i> (under the [listed] word)
<i>v.l.</i>	<i>varia lectio</i> (variant reading)
[]	Square brackets identify textual material supplied by the translator of the original source or by the present author (JHE)