RANZCO Eye Museum

Hamsa hand

The "All Powerful" Eye

Mythology draws connections between the eye and the all-seeing celestial bodies of the sun and moon. The sun lighting and observing everything.

The eye stands for both mental and spiritual vision.

Multiple eyes are shown as a mark of all seeing and knowing vision. There are many examples of idols with multiple eyes as a source of power.

The eye temple of Tel Brak in Mesopotamia dating from 3000 BC contains thousands of biscuit-like alabaster eye idols. Some idols have two pairs of eyes, others have small eyes superimposed on larger ones. A discussion of their purpose favours that of a mother goddess with all-seeing powers. The pattern of eyes divided by a beak-like nose can be traced from the Mediterranean through western Europe to Britain.

There are many variations on the power, position and multiple eyes in different cultures. The contrary depiction is evil on the French Tarot card depicting the devil covered in eyes. Some cultures fear peacock feathers with the eyes as they represent multiples of the evil eye.

An eye in an abnormal position may represent supernormal sight and clairvoyant vision. Hindu theory invokes humans having a third eye represented by a caste mark on the central forehead. Shiva, the Indian god of destruction, could wither the entire universe with his third eye.

However, a single cyclopian eye embodies subnormal vision, lack of wisdom and stupidity. The expression of being one-eyed as sub-standard as in the term of being a "one-eyed supporter".

The Eye of Horus in the RANZCO College crest derives from the Egyptian sky god Horus who lost his left eye in a fight with Set, with the eye magically restored by Hathor. The Eye of Horus represents protection, health and restoration.

The evil eye and its protection

"If looks could kill" echoes a primitive and ancient fear of being watched by harmful gods. The evil eye could represent a voluntary force inspired by malice, including animals. An involuntary force could apply to individuals with a squint or being one-eyed and could be shunned in parts of India today. Eyebrows meeting in the middle of the forehead or bodily deformities in hunchbacks or dwarfs were a sign of the evil eye. English literature quotes those aware of possessing the evil eye to avoid contact in the early morning. A man is quoted as avoiding looking at people in the morning, his eyes fixing on a pear tree which finally withered and died.

An involuntary possessor of the evil eye was at particular risk at times of natural disasters or in the time of witch trials. The *Malleus Maleficarum* handbook of the continental inquisition required suspect witches to be led into the court backwards so that the judge and court officials would be less likely to be struck by the malicious glance of the witch.

To protect against the watch of the evil eye, many cultures use talismans. The most famous being the Nazar eye and the Hamsa hand. These protective talismans date from 5000 BC and are still widely used in popular culture.

Recommended reading: Man, Myth and Magic: Encyclopaedia of the Supernatural. Edited by Richard Cavendish.

The Museum website is being continually upgraded, including additions of new historic posters and prize winners displayed from the 2023 Congress in Perth.

David Kaufman
Curator, RANZCO Eye Museum

Tel Brak Idols

Eye of Horus

Nazar for protection