



ČAŠM-ZAḲM

ČAŠM-ZAḲM (lit. “a blow by the eye”), the evil eye (*čašm* also occurs alone with the same meaning; cf. *čašm-e bad*, *čašm-e šūr*, *čašm-e ḥasūd* “envious eye”; *nazar zadan* or *čašmzadan* “to inflict with the evil eye”; MPers. *duščašmīh* or *sūr-čašmīh*), the supposed power of an individual to cause harm, even illness or death, to another person (or animals and other possessions) merely by looking at him or complimenting him. In classical Arabic and Persian literature the evil eye is sometimes called *‘ayn al-kamāl* “the eye of perfection” (Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* I, p. 452; IV, p. 117 n. 2; Ta‘ālebī, p. 327; and Rūmī, V, p. 555 v. 4575). Possession of the evil eye is known as *šūr-čašmī* (lit. “having bad eyes”) and those who possess it as *šūr-čašm*.

Good looks, good fortune, and good health particularly attract the evil eye (Elworthy, pp. 3, 8-9; Dundes, 1980, p. 93; Donaldson, pp. 15-16), and the beholder who causes it may do so unintentionally. In Persia and other countries where belief in the evil eye is found, most diseases and injuries are attributed to it (Edwards, p. 33; Alberts, p. 923; Donaldson, p. 13; De Cunha; Mūsawī, pp. 11-12; cf. Foster; Saunders, pp. 33, 142-49, 250 n. 11; Sachs, passim; Gifford; McKenzie, pp. 225-62).

Early beliefs. Belief in the evil eye is attested in Vedic (Caland, pp. 79f.; Gonda, pp. 4-5, 61; Keith, p. 387; cf. Rigveda 1.148.5), Avestan, and early Greek writings (Onians, pp. 78, 223 n. 5, 243 n. 6), as well as among Germanic and other Indo-European peoples (Krappe, 1927, pp. 1-44; Grimm, III, pp. 1099-1100; IV, pp. 1632, 1807-08, 1814), which suggests that it was part of the common Indo-European heritage, though it is also found in a number of other cultures



(Roberts; Maloney, *passim*; Dundes, 1980, p. 94). In the Avesta the evil eye is represented by the demon *aṃāši-* (< *aṃā* “evil” and *aši* “eye” [of demons]; *AirWb.*, col. 48; *Grundriss* II, p. 660; Spiegel, p. 462; *Avesta*, tr. Darmesteter, II, p. 278; Gray, *Foundations*, p. 224; Frachtenberg, pp. 419-24), but other pre-Islamic Persian literature attests that the power to inflict harm by means of the gaze is not limited to her. Some divine beings are also said to possess this power, which is then called the “good gaze” (Seligmann, I, p. 224). For example, according to a late Avestan tradition, a rogue (*mairiia-*) was once destroyed by the gaze of Spənta Ārmaiti (*Yt.* 1.29; Gonda, p. 61).

The evil eye (*šūr-čašmīh*) is also well attested in the Middle Persian literature (Christensen, p. 50; Tafazzolī, 1354 Š./1975, p. 54). Several demons endowed with its power are mentioned in the *Bundahišn*: *Aṃāš* (from Avestan), the demon who can slay men (TD₂ p. 186.10, 15; tr. Anklesaria, chap. 27.41; TD₂, p. 186.10); the demon of jealousy (TD₂, p. 183.11; tr. Anklesaria, chap. 27.16); and the demon who harms anything that men see [and praise?] without saying “in the name of God” (TD₂, pp. 186.15-187.1; tr. Anklesaria, chap. 27.45). Among human beings the Arab Zēngāw is said to be capable of slaying his enemies merely by looking at them with the evil eye (*pad duščašmīh*; TD₂, p. 212.11-14; tr. Anklesaria, chap. 33.9). In the *Mēnōg ī xrad* 58.9, *čašm-arešk(en)īh* “having an envious eye” is mentioned (ed. Anklesaria, p. 159; tr. Tafazzolī, p. 36.29). According to early text sources several measures could be adopted to avert the effects of the evil eye. Foremost among them was mention of the name of God (*Bd.*, tr. Anklesaria, 27.45; *Šad dar-e naṭr* chap. 15, ed. Dhabhar, p. 14; cf. *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, I, p. 244 v. 1587; Dehḡodā, s.v. *be-nām īzad*).

The Prophet Moḡammad is reported to have said *al-‘ayn ḡaqq* “the evil eye is truth” (Boḡārī, IV, pp. 61-62; Ebn Māja, II, p. 1159 trads. 3506-08, ascribing this tradition to Abū Horayra, ‘Āmer b. Rabī‘a, and ‘Āyeša) and “If there is anything which could vie with fate it is the evil eye” (Ebn Māja, II, p. 1160 trad. 3510; cf. Mīrgānī, p. 221 nn. 1, 2; Ebn ‘Abd Rabbeh, IV, p. 227; Ebn Manzūr, IV, p. 3196, s.v. *‘ayn*; Termedī, p. 157). These Traditions, which probably reflect popular beliefs, entered both Arabic and Persian commentaries (*tafsīr*) on the Qur’ān (e.g., Meybodī, X, p. 670; Hoḡūqī, III, p. 138; Ṭabarī, VII, p. 1918), especially on Sūras 113 (al-Falaḡ) and 68:51 (“Lo, those who have disbelieved almost cause thee to stumble with their looks, when they hear the Reminder, and they say: “Surely, he is mad”,” from al-Qalam; cf. Meybodī, X, p. 199; Rāzī, XI, pp. 342-43; Qazvīnī, p. 310). References to the evil eye also permeate the secular writings of both Arabs and Persians (Qatremère, pp. 233-44; Jāḡeḡ, II, pp. 397-400;



Dehḡodā, s.v. *čašm* and *čašm-zaḡm*). One of the earliest references to the evil eye in Persian is in a couplet attributed to the 3rd/9th-century poet Ḥanzala of Bādḡīs (ʿAwfī, *Lobāb* II, p. 2; tr. Browne, *Lit. Hist. Persia* I, p. 452). Throughout the Middle Ages it was believed that the evil eye could harm human beings in various ways (Nezāmī, *Laylī o Majnūn*, pp. 67, 86; idem, *Šaraf-nāma*, p. 83) and also animals, gardens, fruits, trees (Nezāmī, *Laylī o Majnūn*, pp. 32, 67, 249; Saʿdī, *Kollīyāt*, p. 483; cf. Graf, p. 570); the poet Farīd-al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār declared that anything could be subject to its dangerous effects (*Mošibat-nāma*, p. 232; cf. Ritter, p. 223). Muslims could counter the effects of the evil eye by reciting either *mā šāʿ Allāh; lā ḡawl wa lā qowwa ellā beʿllāh al-ʿalī al-ʿaẓīm* “[It is] what God wills; there is no power and no strength except through the great God on high” or Suras 113 and 114 (al-Nās), which are thought to be especially effective in averting all harm from magic, especially from the evil eye. Reciting Sura 68:51 was also effective against the evil eye. Certain stones were thought to be useful as charms against the evil eye (Qazvīnī, pp. 196, 206-207). The *čašmārū*, an earthen vessel with a human face (*rū*) painted on it and wrapped in colorful fabrics (*pārčahā-ye rangīn*), was filled with small coins and hurled from the roof of the house on the last Wednesday of the year (*čahāršanba sūrī*; Gorgānī, I, p. 138 v. 72; ʿAṭṭār, *Manṡeq al-ṡayr*, p. 9; Saʿdī, *Būstān*, v. 1544). Passersby picked up the coins from the shattered bowl, thus averting the evil eye from the house, its inhabitants, and their belongings for the coming year (Rajāʿī). A donkey’s head could be placed in the middle of a field to protect the crop (Saʿdī, *Būstān*, p. 130; cf. Ritter, pp. 36-37; ʿAṭṭār, *Asrār-nāma*, pp. 134-35 vv. 2282-88; Saʿdī, *Būstān*, p. 139 vv. 2589-93, which has a version of the same story; for a contemporary example of the practice see Tawakkolī, p. 69). The most common means of countering the effects of the evil eye, however, was to burn the seeds of wild rue (*esfand*, *Peganum harmala*; Nezāmī, *Šaraf-nāma*, p. 238; idem, *Laylī o Majnūn*, pp. 43-44; ʿAṭṭār, *Mošibat-nāma*, p. 231; Saʿdī, *Golestān*, p. 106; cf. Šakūrẓāda, pp. 366-67; Lindquist; Dehḡodā, s.v. *esfand*).

Modern folk practice. Persian folk practices related to the evil eye are generally of three kinds: preventive, anticipatory, and counteractive. Preventive measures are taken against potential damage when there is no reason to think that an individual possessed of the evil eye is actually present. They involve a variety of precautions. For instance, activities in which one might be particularly vulnerable to accident or danger are performed when no one is looking (Wilson, p. 287; Massé, *Croyances*, p. 322). Talismans of agate, onyx (Budge, p. 27), or turquoise (Hedāyat, p. 111; Massé, *Croyances*, p. 326; cf. *Nowrūz-nāma*, p. 28) are carried. Amulets worn against the evil eye are called



čašmāvīz, *ta'wīd*, or *herz*; they include *nazarqorbānī* (the dried eye of a sheep slaughtered for *īd-e qorbān* “feast of sacrifice”), blue beads, shells, tiger teeth (possibly a reinterpretation of “beaver teeth”), gazelle hooves, wolf’s nails, pieces of blue cloth, and the like (Hedāyat, p. 111; Massé, *Croyances*, pp. 325-26, 142; Katīrāī, pp. 19-20). Small Korans or pieces of cloth or metal sheets on which Sūra 68:51 is inscribed are called *vanyakād* (from Ar. *wa en yakādu*, the beginning of this verse). Pieces of cloth with the *besme'llāh* written on them forty times are also considered effective. Garlic is sometimes carried as a charm against the evil eye (Adams, p. 445; cf. Leach, s.v. garlic); and lanterns containing wild rue (*qandīla-ye esfand*) are hung on house and garden walls. Certain formulas are also recited as preventive measures: *čašm-am kaf-e pā-t* “my eye under your foot,” *mā šā' Allāh* “whatever God wills,” *Allāho akbar* “God is great,” *bār-e namak mībarand* “they are carrying a load of salt,” *čašm-e bad dūr* “may the evil eye be far away,” *bar čašm-e bad* (or *casm-e šūr*) *la'nat* “cursed be the evil eye,” and the like (Massé, *Croyances*, pp. 322-23; Hedāyat, pp. 104, 109). It is also believed that, if a pregnant woman should happen to look upon a corpse, her child will be born with the evil eye (Hedāyat, p. 192); she can prevent this outcome by putting salt on the corpse or in its hand and then washing her child’s eyes (Faḡīrī, p. 16) or rubbing his body with it after he is born (Katīrāī, p. 9).

Anticipatory measures are taken when the presence of the evil eye is suspected. For instance, when a stranger or a person known or considered to possess the evil eye utters praise, especially of a child, a piece of string or cloth from the suspect’s clothes must be cut off secretly and burned with rue seeds (Faḡīrī, p. 136; cf. Vahman, p. 60). Drawing a line on the suspect’s footsteps with a knife or rubbing dust from the sole of his shoe on the navel of the potential victim or having him ingest it are other methods (Hedāyat, p. 99; Mūsawī, p. 12). If a person suspects that he himself may have inflicted the object of his praise with the evil eye, he should look at the end of his nose and touch it with his fingertip (Hedāyat, p. 103; Massé, *Croyances*, p. 318; for illustrations of such magical gestures, cf. Elworthy, pp. 233-77).

Curative measures are similar to anticipatory measures and often involve magical practices requiring personal belongings of the suspect. A piece of cloth or string from the clothes of the possessor of the evil eye may be burned with wild rue seeds while certain formulas are recited (Hedāyat, pp. 43-44; Flattery, pp. 27-28 n. 22; Massé, *Croyances*, pp. 322-23; Vahman, pp. 60-61). Alum and wild rue seeds may be burned and seven spots (*kāl*) of the soot placed on



seven parts of the victim's body (Hedāyat, p. 57). Tattooing is both a preventive and a cure (Katīrā'ī, pp. 404-07). Sometimes curative measures are related to signs that appear on the person of the victim. For instance, if two or three eyelashes are attached to one another on a child's eyelid, it is a sign that he is the object of the evil eye; the ends of the eyelashes are then cut as the child sleeps, and he is made to drink them in water when he awakens (Massé, *Croyances*, p. 56; cf. Vahman, p. 59). A child who becomes cross is thought to have been stricken by the evil eye. A little dough is put in the oven, and, when it swells up and bursts, the evil eye has been eliminated (Adams, p. 445).

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