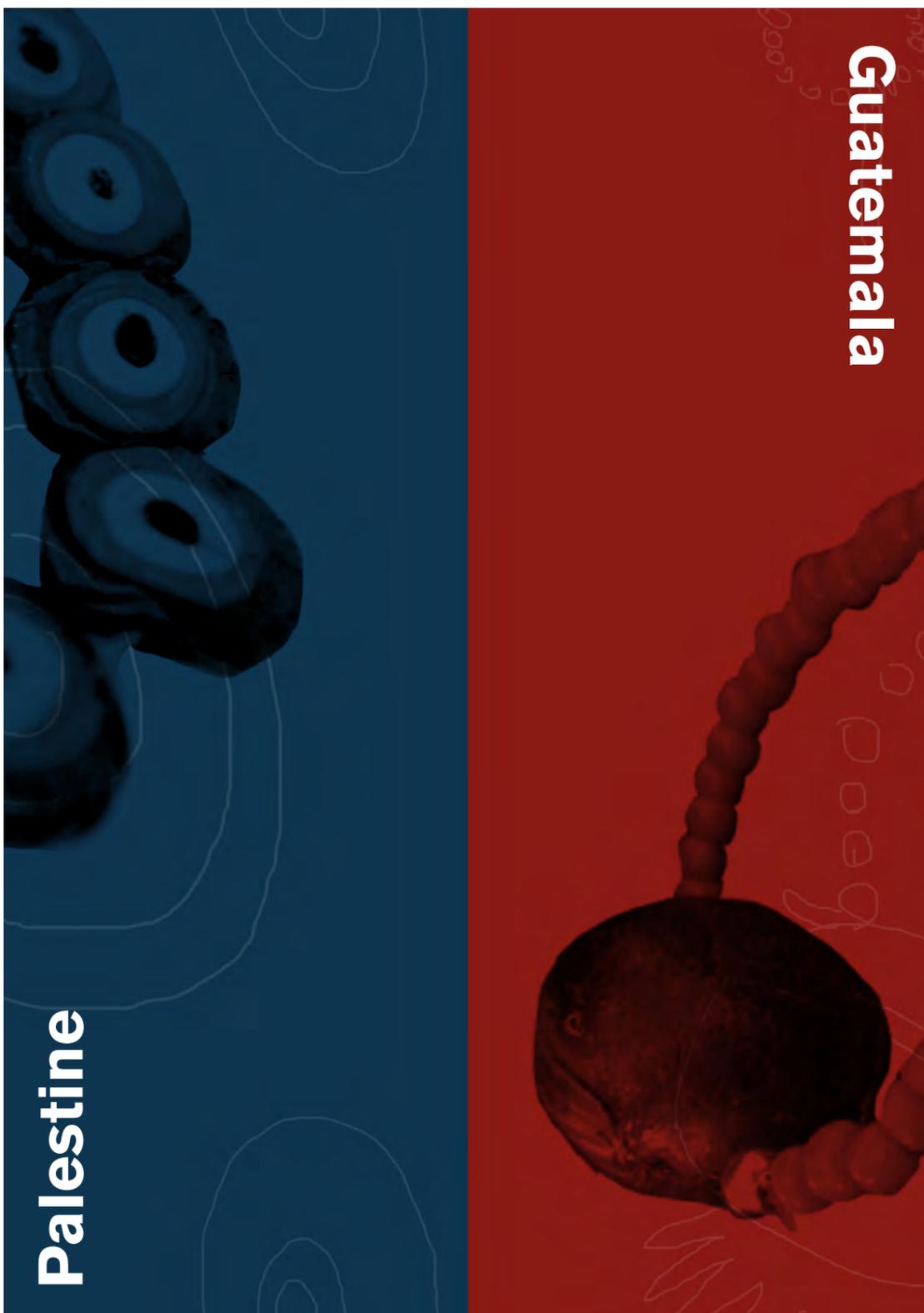


Red and Blue The Evil Eye across borders

The British
Museum

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Clare Education Centre



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عين الحسد

In Palestine, 'the evil eye' (عين الحسد in Arabic) is a magical curse that is believed to be cast by a malevolent glare, either intentionally or unintentionally. The evil eye can be cast upon anyone or anything, such as individuals, animals, plants, and even inanimate objects. A family's good reputation, wellbeing and honour are under constant threat from the evil eye, which can be triggered by the envious glare of others. People believe that upon receiving the evil eye, it will cause harm to themselves, someone or something close to them; usually in the form of bad luck, illness, injury, or even death.

Palestinians use blue amulets in the form of eyes to protect against this danger. It is believed that eye amulets can protect the holder by reflecting the malevolent glare back to the onlooker. Other measures are also taken to protect against the evil eye. It is believed that if beauty is veiled, riches not exhibited, and a child covered with a dirty or torn rag or even given an ugly name, happy events can pass unnoticed and the evil eye remains passive.

Mal de ojo

Mal de ojo or 'evil eye' is a negative energy that causes illness in small children and infants. It is said to have been brought to Guatemala by the Spanish. The superstition suggests that a negative energy can be passed onto a child by simply looking at them or by giving them special attention and praising their appearance. Giving

"mal de ojo" does not mean that a person is necessarily vicious or wishes to do harm; it simply implies that a person is a vessel for negative energy. The children who are afflicted by the evil eye become inexplicably very ill, with fevers, sweats, uncontrollable crying and pain. This is believed to be caused by the heat from the negative energy that builds in their bodies.

When evil eye is suspected, a mother brings her child to a healer. The healer then puts nine herbs and spices into a cloth. These spices include peppercorns, rosemary, rue and cinnamon. The cloth is then rubbed all over the body of the child.

The negative energy is thus and then burned to dispel its effects. As a secondary precaution, some healers rub an un-cracked raw egg over the body of the child absorbing the negative energy. The egg is inspected thereafter to see if the heat has cooked the egg.



Necklace made of beads in the form of eyes
Coloured glass
Hebron, Palestine, late 19thC-early 20thC

The belief in the power of the Evil Eye as a malevolent force is very common in the Middle East. The harm inflicted can be caused by envy and may be intentional or accidental.

This particular necklace may have been used by young women, brides or young mothers, on a daily basis both as ornament and amulet.

The colour blue, combined with the eye shape, are believed to be particularly effective against the influence of envious glares.

This necklace was made by hand in Hebron, which is famous throughout the region for its long history of glass manufacture.

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