

The *Udjat* Eye in Daily Life

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The *udjat* eye, also known as the Eye of Horus, was a powerful symbol in ancient Egyptian myth. The god Horus's eye was torn out by Set, a god of chaos and the desert; it was later magically healed by the gods. In another myth, the eye of Horus was powerful enough to revive Osiris from the dead, giving it strong healing, protective, and regenerative associations. Because of these mythic connections, the amuletic form of the *udjat* eye allowed individuals to channel its power and gain divine protection in ancient Egypt.

Though the *udjat* eye was commonly associated with the funerary realm, ancient Egyptians also called on the power of the eye for protection in their daily lives.¹ *Udjat* amulets were crafted into a form that one could wear or carry. The eye was considered a general symbol of healing, wholeness, and safety. Though likely worn by both men and women, it has been suggested that these amulets were given to women and children to wear for protection.² Regardless of gender or age, the widespread use of the eye highlights its usefulness as a powerful symbol of protection for all.

The *udjat* eye could be depicted/worn alongside other deities or amulets to amplify divine power. Bes and Tawaret, two household deities looked to for the safekeeping of women and children, were often depicted on material culture near an *udjat* eye.³ While these gods had their own protective qualities, an *udjat* eye amplified their own defensive powers to shield the household from harm.

A striking example of the *udjat* eye's power in daily life is found on the mummy of a woman discovered in the ancient Egyptian village of Deir el-Medina. The woman had three *udjat* eyes tattooed on her neck. The tattooed *udjat* eyes may have enabled the woman to channel the eye's protective power through her spoken words. The placement of the tattoos likely empowered her ritual actions and helped to shield those under her care from harm. The woman's other tattoos also linked her to Hathor, a goddess of regeneration and healing.⁴ Pairing the *udjat* eye with Hathor's imagery would intensify the divine power imbued in the woman's ritual actions.

Overall, the *udjat* eye was a powerful sign in ancient Egyptian culture. While it originated from a myth of masculine power, the symbol itself was universal and widely embraced. Whether made into an amulet or tattooed on the body, the *udjat* eye provided healing, protection, and spiritual empowerment to those who used it. Not only did it stand on its own as a powerful emblem, but it also enhanced and reinforced the power of other symbols and deities.

¹ Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 43.

² Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 88. Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 88

³ Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt*, 87.

⁴ Anne Austin and Cédric Gobeil, "Embodying the Divine: A Tattooed Female Mummy from Deir El-Medina," *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, no. 116 (September 1, 2017): 23–46, <https://doi.org/10.4000/bifao.296>.

Further Reading!

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