

ħamsa

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Maltese

Etymology

From Arabic خَمْسَة (*xamsa(t)*).

Numeral

Maltese cardinal numbers

4	5	6
<i>Cardinal</i> : ħamsa		
<i>Ordinal</i> : il-ħames		
		

ħamsa *m, f*

- five

Coordinate terms

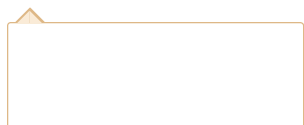
- ħames (*construct form*)
- ħamest (*long construct form*)

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Categories: Maltese terms derived from Arabic | Maltese lemmas | Maltese numerals | Maltese cardinal numbers

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Hamsa

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **hamsa** (Arabic: *خمسة* *khamsah*, Hebrew: *חַמְסָה*, also romanized **khamsa**, meaning lit. "five") is a palm-shaped amulet popular throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and commonly used in jewellery and wall hangings.^{[1][2]} Depicting the open right hand, an image recognized and used as a sign of protection in many societies throughout history, the hamsa is believed to provide defense against the evil eye.

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Hamsa

Etymology

Khamsa is an Arabic word that literally means "five", but also "the five fingers of the hand".^{[3][4][5]} It may also be taken as a reference to the primary number itself.

History

Early use of the hamsa has been traced to ancient Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). A universal sign of protection, the image of the open right hand is seen in Mesopotamian artifacts in the amulets of the Qāt Ištar/Inana.^[2] Other symbols of divine protection based around the hand include the Hand-of-Venus (or Aphrodite), the Hand-of-Mary, that was used to protect women from the evil eye, boost fertility and lactation, promote healthy pregnancies and strengthen the weak, and in the Buddha's gesture (*mudrā*) of teaching and protection.^[2] In that time, women were under immense pressure and expectation to become mothers.^[6] The women's upbringing was centered on becoming a mother as an exclusive role, and it indicated child bearing as necessary.^[7] In addition, it was also thought marriage was a sense of protection for both the man and woman.^[8]



Examples in Israel

One theory postulates a connection between the khamsa and the Mano Pantea (or Hand-of-the-All-Goddess), an amulet known to ancient Egyptians as the Two Fingers. In this amulet, the Two Fingers represent Isis and Osiris

and the thumb, their child Horus and it was used to invoke the protective spirits of parents over their child.^[2] Another theory traces the origins of the hamsa to Carthage (Phoenicia) where the hand (or in some cases vulva) of the supreme deity Tanit was used to ward off the evil eye.^[9]

This relates to the belief that God exists in everything. Another meaning of this symbol relates to the sky god, Horus. It refers to the eye of Horus, which means man cannot escape from the eye of conscience. It says that the sun and moon are the eyes of Horus. The Hand of Fatima also represents femininity, and is referred as the woman's holy hand. It is believed to have extraordinary characteristics that can protect people from evil and other dangers.^[10]

The hamsa's path into Jewish culture, and its popularity particularly in Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish communities, can be traced through its use in Islam.^{[2][9]} Many Jews believe that the five fingers of the hamsa hand remind its wearer to use their five senses to praise God.^[11] This "favorite Muslim talisman" became a part of Jewish tradition in North African and Middle Eastern Muslim countries.^[12] The symbol of the hand appears in Kabbalistic manuscripts and amulets, doubling as the Hebrew letter "Shin", the first letter of "Shaddai", one of the names referring to God.^[13]

The khamsa holds recognition as a bearer of good fortune among Christians in the region as well. Levantine Christians call it the *hand of Mary* (Arabic: *Kef Miryam*, or the "Virgin Mary's Hand").^{[14][15]} Well after the end of Islamic rule in Spain, its use was significant enough to prompt an episcopal committee convened by Emperor Charles V to decree a ban on the Hand of Fatima and all open right hand amulets in 1526.^[2]

Symbolism and usage

The Hand (Khamsa), particularly the open right hand, is a sign of protection that also represents blessings, power and strength, and is seen as potent in deflecting the evil eye.^{[2][16]} One of the most common components of gold and silver jewellery in the region,^[17] historically and traditionally, it was most commonly carved in jet or formed from silver, a metal believed to represent purity and hold magical properties.^{[2][18]} It is also painted in red (sometimes using the blood of a sacrificed animal) on the walls of houses for protection,^{[19][20]} or painted or hung on the doorways of rooms, such as those of an expectant mother or new baby.^[2] The hand can be depicted with the fingers spread apart to ward off evil, or as closed together to bring good luck.^[21] Highly stylized versions may be difficult to recognize as hands, and can consist of five circles representing the fingers, situated around a central circle representing the palm.^[21]



Door knocker in Morocco

Used to protect against evil eye, a malicious stare believed to be able to cause illness, death or just general unluckiness, hamsas often contain an eye symbol.^{[18][22]} Depictions of the hand, the eye or the number five in Arabic (and Berber) tradition are related to warding off the evil eye, as exemplified in the saying *khamsa fi ainek* ("five [fingers] in your eye").^[22] Raising one's right hand with the palm showing and the fingers slightly apart is part of this curse meant "to blind the aggressor".^[19] Another formula uttered against the evil eye in Arabic, but without hand gestures, is *khamsa wa-khamis* ("five and Thursday").^{[23][24]} As the fifth day of the week, Thursday is considered a good day for magic rites and pilgrimages to the tombs of revered saints to counteract the effects of the evil eye.^[25]

Due to its significance in both Arabic and Berber culture, the hamsa is one of the national symbols of Algeria

and appears in its emblem. It is also the most popular among the different amulets (such as the Eye and the *Hirz* — a silver box containing verses of the Quran) for warding off the evil eye in Egypt.^[17] Egyptian women who live in *baladi* ("traditional") urban quarters often make *khamaysa*, which are amulets made up of five (*khamisa*) objects to attach to their children's hair or black aprons. The five objects can be made of peppers, hands, circles or stars hanging from hooks.^[20]

After the establishment of the State of Israel, the widespread use of the talisman by Jews from Islamic countries was considered a sign of "Easternness", looked down upon in the Eurocentric Ashkenazi cultural milieu that dominated.^[26]

In the wake of the renewed interest in Mizrahi folklore and customs in Israel, use of the hamsa has become trendy. It has been described as "an icon of Israeliness and secularity", although its symbolism is by no means all pervading or universal.^[26] As a "good luck" charm, it appears on necklaces, keychains, postcards, telephone and lottery cards, and in advertisements.^[26] It is also incorporated into high-end jewellery, decorative tilework and wall decorations.^[27]

Similar to the Western use of the phrase "knock on wood" or "touch wood", a common expression in Israel is "Hamsa, Hamsa, Hamsa, tfu, tfu, tfu", the sound for spitting, supposedly to spit out bad luck.^[28]

At the Mimouna, a North African Jewish celebration held after Passover, tables are laid with various symbols of luck and fertility, with an emphasis on the number "5", such as five pieces of gold jewelry or five beans arranged on a leaf of pastry. The repetition of the number five is associated with the hamsa amulet.^[29]

Gallery



Amulet with two hands of Fatimah, bearing the inscriptions "God is the guardian", "God brings consolation in all trials".



Hamsa in the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam.



Icon for WikiProject Visual arts.

See also

- Abhaya Mudra
- Nazar

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Malé'ake

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Mal'ak (also spelled **Malak**, Melek) is the Semitic word for "angel" (Arabic: ملك, **malak**; Hebrew מַלְאָךְ; Ge'ez መልሐክ, mal'āk; Aramaic מלאך). The plural of ...

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