

The belief in the existence of the “evil eye” in the Romanian environment – a historical-theological analysis¹

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Abstract:

The present paper deals with the origins of the belief in the „evil eye” and the connected practices. The ”evil eye” belief is a world-wide phenomenon with personal, social, and moral implications that has spanned the centuries and encircled the globe. We`ll find it today still operating in Romanian villages where the eldmothers defend the newborns, the children and the stock with red rope, garlic and incantations. So, why such an ancient superstition is alive today and what is the official position of the Christian Church? In order to respond, we have divided our research in three main parts, with emphasis on the terminological and theological analysis. The results show the following: ancient Sumer is likely the origin of the belief; for Greeks and Romans, „evil eye” is the destructive power of an angry glance, connected with the emotion of envy. The possessors could be: „evil-eyeing demons”, the gods and the humans. Christian figures like John Chrysostomos, Basil, Jerome or Tertullian suggest that the devil and his demons use men`s envious eyes in order to accomplish their evil purposes.

Keywords:

evil eye, fascinatio, invidia, greek mythology, romanian popular belief, theological perspective

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1. The “evil eye” – a historical and terminological analysis

The belief in the “evil eye” consists of the conviction that the human eye possesses a supernatural force that can hurt or kill a man, an animal or any other thing³. The oldest mentions of the belief in the “evil eye” come from Mesopotamia⁴ and Egypt, but there is the possibility of its import by the Greeks along with other traditions, as Herodotus states. The belief in the “evil eye” and the accompanying practices occurs in various sources: literary texts (tragedy, comedy, poetry, philosophical writings, geographical accounts), ceramics, shields, plastron, papyri, inscriptions, mosaics, tablets fixed at the entrance of a home, statues, figures, art and thousands of amulets used with a personal or public purpose⁵.

In ancient Greece, the terms “φθόνος” and “βασκανία” describe what is generally referred to as “the evil eye” or “hex”. It incorporates a complex of conditions that don’t have a definite identity, while fear is the common factor. Most of the times we speak about a fear of envy, which generated the names of the evil eye in Latin: “invidia”, “fascination”, “fascinus”⁶. The most used terms for the “evil eye” in Ancient Greece were those constituted from the root “βασκ”: “βασκανος” (noun and adjective), βασκαινειν (verb), βασκανια (noun). This terminological family does not occur in the works of Homer or Hesiod, neither in the literature previous to the 5th century BC. It is considered, however, that references to the “evil eye” were contained in the mentions regarding the destructive power of the look. It occurs in the late Greek texts, in Demosthenes, Plato, Aristotle and in the Hellenistic period. The old association between the “evil eye” and envy (φθόνος) made some of the researchers

³ John H. ELLIOTT, “Social-scientific criticism: Perspective, process and payoff. Evil eye accusation at Galatia as illustration of the method”, in: *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 67, 1 (2011), p. 5.

⁴ The belief in the evil eye is first mentioned in the Sumerian incantations (3000 BC). In Mesopotamia it was thought that the eyes of the gods, of the supernatural beings, of animals and people could cause illness, death, destruction of the harvest, pestilence and natural disasters. For example, the expression “the eye of death” is mentioned twice in the legend of the descent into inferno of goddess Inanna. The eye is used as a metonymy for the action of seeing, while the verb “to die” refers to the effect that it has on the person it looks at. At first, Inanna herself becomes a victim of the evil eye of god Anunna, and then she kills her husband, Dumuzi. The monster Humbaba, from the legend of Gilgamesh also has “the eye of death”. But here the monster’s eye does not kill Gilgamesh, but only causes fear. Cf. Zacharias KOTZE, „The Evil Eye of Sumerian Deities”, in: *Asian and African Studies*, 26, 1 (2017), pp. 108–109.

⁵ John H ELLIOTT, *Beware the evil eye: the evil eye in the Bible and the ancient world. Greece and Rome*, vol. II, Cascade Books, Eugene, Oregon, 2016, pp. 4–5.

⁶ Matthew DICKIE, „The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye”, in: *Byzantine Magic*, Henry MAGUIRE (ed.), Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington D.C., 1995, p. 14.

suspect that the references to φθόνος involved, or even replaced, the terms derived from “βασκ” because of a Sprachtabu that exists regarding the dangerous words. Starting with the 5th century BC these terms appear most frequently in comedies and invectives, but never in tragedies or poetry because they were considered vulgar and improper. Instead of those φθόνος will be used.

The etymology of the terms “βασκανος”, “βασκανειν”, “βασκανια” is uncertain. Thomas Racoczy considers that it might have derived from “βασκειν” (to speak, to speak ill of somebody) and “βαζις” (expression), which led to “βασκαινειν” (“to mesmerize with the help of the words”, “to hurt with the look”, “to give an evil eye on”)⁷. The adjective “βασκανος” has the meaning “to look at something with evilness”, “to have an evil eye”, “to look enviously” or “to speak denigratory”. As a noun it may have the sense of calumniator, referring to “persons or beings with an evil eye”, “somebody who speaks ill, denigratory”. The use of “βασκανος” shows the association of the “evil eye” with actions that include look and speech⁸.

People feared that the luck they enjoyed could attract envy from his fellows, from the demons, gods, Fortuna⁹, of the Destiny represented by fairies (ursitoare - Μοϊραι)¹⁰, or of the supernatural power they called “φθόνος”. Libanius says that when three people are praised, βασκανία takes a look at them, for φθόνερὸς δαίμων could not stand the things said about them. In the case presented by Libanius, βασκανία possesses a dangerous look, but not that of a human being, instead that of an envious

⁷ J.H. ELLIOTT, *Beware the evil eye: the evil eye in the Bible and the ancient world. Greece and Rome*, vol. II, p. 17.

⁸ Thomas RAKOCZY, *Böser Blick, Macht des Auges und Neid der Götter: eine Untersuchung zur Kraft des Blickes in der griechischen Literatur*, coll. *Classica Monacensia* 13, Narr, Tübingen, 1996, p. 256.

⁹ She is the equivalent of the Greek goddess Tyche, considered a goddess of wealth and personification of luck. She is often represented holding the cornucopia, with a ball or the fortunae wheel (wheel of fortune). She could bring good or bad luck, in the latter of the hypostases being represented with her face covered and blind, similar to the modern images of Justice, but without holding balance scales. She represents the arbitrary changes that appear in life, and is sometimes considered to be a goddess of the destiny (Atrox Fortuna). Cf. Marguerite KRETSCHMER, „Atrox Fortuna”, in: *The Classical Journal*, 22, 4 (1927), pp. 267–275.

¹⁰ There were three sisters: Clotho, the one who created the vital thread from the wool distaff and turned it on the wheel. At first she was a goddess called to help in the 9th month of pregnancy; Lachesis was the one who decided the length of a man’s life by pulling a thread from the tow. Atropos, also called “the relentless”, she is represented having a pair of scissors in her hand with which she cut the vital thread of a man, and she also decided the manner in which each man’s life ended. Walter BURKERT, *Greek religion*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 32–47.

Fortuna¹¹. The envy that the gods could manifest towards the mortals occurs especially in the texts of the archaic period, considered a cause of the bad luck that the mortals experimented many times. The divine envy attacks especially those who enjoy prosperity, and Herodotus said that envy, such a natural characteristic of the human kind, occurs especially in those who enjoy a greater power, especially kings, who can envy the most virtuous of their subjects and wish them dead¹². Envy of the gods strikes those who excel and stand out; I saw Zeus with his lightnings that he always strikes the biggest animals, preventing them from growing too much, while the small ones don't bother him. For he does not allow anyone to have higher thoughts than he has¹³.

From a technical point of view, “φθόνος” and “βασκανία” can be differentiated, with “φθόνος”/envy referring to a disposition, and “βασκανία”/the evil eye, refers to the physical conduct and the exterior protection of this emotion. Thus, envy is a disposition or an emotion transformed into a weapon directed against the others by the Evil Eye¹⁴. “The evil eye” is associated with envy, greed, avarice, and the one who possesses it does not want to help the one in need. These features reveal a social reality of the Antiquity, the “evil eye” being present where there was an abyss between the rich and the poor. In this system dominated by two social classes, those from the first category were the fearful ones; persons that have suddenly been touched by Fortuna's benefactions could become a direct object of envy and thus vulnerable to the “evil eye”. Other sensitive categories to this maleficent influence were: children, relatives, those with ophthalmologic problems (the blind), those who possessed strange ocular features (unibrow etc.), those with a physical deformity, those without a social status (widows), social deviants (those who lacked moral and generosity), strangers and enemies.

In order not to be suspected of having an “evil eye”, people struggled to be generous to the other and not to remember evil. They also avoided praising someone for the wealth he possessed and in the case when such a compliment was made God was mentioned as a protector and origin of blessing¹⁵. There were many tactics which aimed to keep away from the “evil eye”, such as avoiding the look into the eyes of a person, covering/hiding women, children, food and the most valuable possessions.

¹¹ M. DICKIE, „The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye”, p. 13.

¹² HERODOTUS, *Cele mai frumoase istorii*, trans. by Adelina Piatkowski and Felicia Vanț-Ștef, Humanitas, București, 2018, p. 155.

¹³ HERODOTUS, *Cele mai frumoase istorii*, p. 338.

¹⁴ J.H. ELLIOTT, *Beware the evil eye: the evil eye in the Bible and the ancient world. Greece and Rome*, vol. II, p. 54.

¹⁵ Anastasia APOSTOLIDES, Yolanda DREYER, „The Greek evil eye, African witchcraft, and Western ethnocentrism”, in: *HTS*, 64, 3 (2008), p. 1029.

Gestures such as making a fist and showing the middle finger (*digitus infamus*), spitting into the face of those suspected to have an “evil eye”, were often used. Personal protection was provided by a variety of amulets, jewels, red or blue clothes, sachets with garlic and rue, sometimes one could find incantations of the “evil eye” even on the walls. In this case, the principle “*similia similibus*” was used.

However, there is also a series of researches that observe the matter of the “evil eye” from a social, cultural and ecological perspective. The environment in which this belief about this maleficent action occurred was characterized by cultural complexity, rural-urban economy, technological advancements that involved manufacturing metal, agriculture (especially cultivation of wheat), raising animals and processing milk. Ancient societies were based on a system of two social classes, populated by the landowners, bureaucrat, farmers, villagers and artisans. People lived in a constant social pressure because many times the improvement of a person’s economic status was achieved by depletion of another family¹⁶. This reality led to feelings of vulnerability and suspicions, those targeted were the very members of the family, friends and neighbors. This type of environment nurtured envy which later on led to the apparition of the notion of “evil eye”. Since nobody wanted to be struck by it, people tried to be generous with each other, avoiding admiration of the others’ possessions and trying to hide their own. That is why one may say that the “evil eye” had the function to adjust behaviors and social interaction in ancient society¹⁷.

2. The “evil eye” in the ambiance of the Romanian village.

The belief in the existence of an evil action of the look, with physical repercussions can still be met in the rural communities. Those who have this power are considered to possess features that are less common: blue eyes, evil look, eyes of different shapes or colours, squint look, unibrow etc. Those that can feel the effects of an evil eye are both people and animals, especially the good and the beautiful ones. The action of looking with an evil eye was most often involuntary, that is why it was customary that when you “see something beautiful – animal or human being – to spit and say: God bless you”¹⁸. The symptoms of the evil eye are: weakness, aches all over the body, nausea, insomnia, torment, heart aches. They also occur in animals as well: birds peck each other, bees leave their hives etc. To cure them from the evil eye it is

¹⁶ Boris GERSHMAN, „The economic origins of the evil eye belief”, in: *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 110 (2015), p. 121.

¹⁷ A. APOSTOLIDES, Y. DREYER, „The Greek evil eye, African witchcraft, and Western ethnocentrism”, p. 1030.

¹⁸ Artur GOROVEI, Iordan DATCU, *Credinți și superstiții ale poporului român*, Grai și Suflet - Cultura Națională, București, 2003, p. 74.

recommended to tie them a red thread¹⁹. The evil eye does not result simply from a look of those with an evil eye, but also from the praises they give to certain persons or animals. In some areas it was thought that those with green eyes and a unibrow “have a very evil eye” if they look insistently at something. That is why they had to say “God bless you” and to spit three times²⁰. In Vâlcea there is the belief that those who were born with a caul have an evil eye²¹. Those with an evil eye could also be the ghoul and poltergeists²².

The most sensitive categories to attacks are the newly born and the parturient. As preventive methods, the child wore a red thread on his wrist or round his neck, or the lap of his shirt was notched, or the midwife took some mud and made a patch on his forehead saying: “God bless you!” and she spitted three times²³. When a child suffered from insomnia, troubled sleep or he was ghoulish, had a head ache or didn’t have appetite was considered to be under the influence of an evil eye. The parents immediately called for a woman that was specialized in incantations. The most common method of healing required the use of coal. It was introduced into water and after it went out the water was used to wash the child’s face. The people thought that the coal preserved a part of the soul of the tree from which it was cut and which cured the child. The amulets used against the evil eye there was coal²⁴, put into sachets and

¹⁹ From a historical point of view, red has several symbolic meanings. In prehistory ochre red was used to paint the walls of the caves, connected with the power to spring life. For the Egyptians, red symbolized life and victory; that is why during the religious ceremonies, the Egyptians painted their skin in red. But it may also symbolize violence, evilness because of the act that Seth is described as being a red-head, and in the Greek mythology it is associated with the gods of war, Ares, Deimos and Phobos. Still, it is also a symbol of the love that Aphrodite had for Adonis. Cf. May MCKINLEY, „Continuity in Color: The Persistence of Symbolic Meaning in Myths, Tales, and Tropes”, pp. 29–32.

²⁰ Gheorghe F. CIAUȘANU, *Superstițiile poporului român în asemănare cu ale altor popoare vechi și nouă*, coll. *Academia Română. Din viața poporului român*, Librăriile Socec & Comp. and C. Sfetea, București, 1914, p. 190.

²¹ Gheorghe F. CIAUȘANU, *Superstițiile poporului român în asemănare cu ale altor popoare vechi și nouă*, coll. *Academia Română. Din viața poporului român*, Librăriile Socec & Comp. and C. Sfetea, București, 1914, p. 189.

²² Tudor PAMFILE, *Mitologie românească*, coll. *Din viața poporului român*, Academia Română, București, 1924, p. 129.

²³ Marcel OLINESCU, *Mitologie românească: cu desene și xilografuri de autor*, Saeculum I.O., București, 2001, p. 218.

²⁴ Partially burnt, the coal was the symbol of occult energies, of the solar force tethered into the ground; a lit coal symbolizes the spiritual force: the dark coal unlit represents the virtuality capable to transform into life when a sparkle kindles it. There are many restrictions regarding the offering of the colas to those that are not part of the family, and their disobedience could have severe consequences, such as: “When someone asks you for coal, don’t hold it for

worn by the children round their neck; and garlic used in the same way²⁵. The people from Transylvania used talismans made of three blades of garlic, three of pepper and three of spring wheat²⁶, three of autumn wheat, three beans of incense, three of salt²⁷, three gobbets of bread and three small pieces of the child’s placenta. To protect the animals from the evil eye the owners tied garlic to their tails²⁸.

Mihail Canianu enumerates four main procedures used by the Romanians to cure the evil eye: three or nine coals are put out in untasted water²⁹, and the water is given to the sick to drink it; an incantation is said; eggs are placed under the stars; pour wax or plumb³⁰. “To put an egg under a star” happened like this: take a fresh egg, break it

him or your teeth will fall off”, or “the pregnant mother shall not offer lit coal to anybody or her child will have blains on his body when he is born”. Cf. A. GOROVEI, I. DATCU, *Credinți și superstiții ale poporului român*, pp. 229, 43.

²⁵ Garlic is one of the main ingredients to cast away the devil, the iele, poltergeists, ghouls and to defend from the spells of the witches, the mythical-symbolical valences being originated by the form of the bulb and the popular terminology. The Romanians say that “the garlic is a man; it has a head, a cross and it is clothed”, its sacrality being reinforced also by the fact that it is closely connected with the mythical snake that guards each house and its presence can be felt by the smell of garlic. Cf. A. GOROVEI, I. DATCU, *Credinți și superstiții ale poporului român*, p. 245; Valer BUTURĂ, Iordan DATCU, *Cultura spirituală românească*, Minerva, Bucuresti, 1992, p. 222.

²⁶ The wheatear symbolizes abundance and fertility; it is in the same time food and seed, a guarantee of rebirth. The people attributed miraculous powers to the first wheatears gathered from the field and they were kept in “sacred” places of the house (usually by the icons). Cf. Ion GHINOIU, *Vârstele timpului.*, Meridiane, Bucuresti, 1988, p. 268.

²⁷ Salt has a broad symbolics. It is a symbol of incorruptibility, it has purifying properties and it is a symbol of indestructible relations. In Caraș-Severin it was used within the rituals of the receiving the bride and groom, the mother of the groom offering them “rotgut” and bread with salt. Cf. Emil Petrovici, *Folklor din valea Almăjului (Banat)*, Cartea Românească, București, 1935, p. 54.

²⁸ G.F. CIAȘANU, *Superstițiile poporului român in asemănare cu ale altor popoare vechi și nouă*, p. 194.

²⁹ In the Romanian popular mythology, water is a symbol of the prime material, of cleanliness, chastity and elements of regeneration and purification of life. Some of the fountains, springs, water flows were venerated, and various religious ceremonies and passing rites were celebrated at the site. From here clean water was collected before sunrise, also known as “untasted water”, used for all the purification rituals, for curing the ill, and to chase away evil spirits. Cf. Elena ȘIȘCANU, „Ioan Godea. Apa și arhitectura de odinioară.”, in: *Buletin Științific. Revistă de Etnografie, Științele Naturii și Muzeologie*, 19, 32 (2013), p. 214.

³⁰ In the popular tradition it is used to cast a spell or for disenchantment. See more in Constantin RĂDULESCU-CODIN, Dumitru MIHALACHE, *Sărbătorile poporului cu obiceiurile*,

and pour water carefully over it so that the egg white does not mix with the egg yellow and the water. Then iron sulphate was added and after the sun went down it was placed under the light of the stars. At midnight, the woman that knew the incantation took something from the child touched by the evil eye, for example his bonnet, and she went outside, took the glass from the gutter and stared at a star. While she recited an incantation three times, she touched the glass and the bonnet with sticks from a derelict broom³¹. If the incantation with “the eggs under the stars” didn’t work, a piece of plumb was melted and poured in a large glass of water. If there was no plumb, it could be replaced with wax. Plumb or melted wax was left in the water for a little while to become solid again, in order to obtain a figure with a human aspect. During all this time incantations were recited. If the figure was with its head up it meant he will escape from the evil eye; if it was with its head down it was thought he will die. The wax or the plumb was kept and the water was thrown at a crossroads³².

3. Christian perception over the “evil eye”

The only mention in the New Testament of a word derived from the noun βασκανία occurs in the Epistle to Galatians. Saint Paul introduces the argument that he will develop within the epistle with a surprising question: “You foolish galatians! Who has bewitched (ἐβάσκανεν) you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrsyed as crucified” (Galatians 3:1)³³. As we have already seen, the general meaning of the word “βασκαίνω” is to look with an evil or envious eye or to have an infamous behavior, and it could indicate an accusation of witchcraft or a rhetorical topos used to discredit an oponent. Ben Witherington accepts the latter of the senses, arguing that as a good rhetor, Paaul already knew of the existence of a real fear for the “evil eye” among the Galatians converted from pagans, and the best method to weaken the influence of the agitators was to suggest the fact that they possess this distructive which they use against the converts³⁴. With this rhetorical question, Saint Paul suggests that the Galatians have deserted the land of faith for that of superstition³⁵.

crediințele și unele tradiții legate de ele: culegere din părțile muscelului, coll. *Din viața poporului român* 7, Tipografia Cooperativa, București, 1909, p. 10.

³¹ Mihail CANIANU, „Din psihologia poporana (Deochiul si faptul)”, în: *Revista pentru Istorie, Arheologie si Filologie*, VII (1893), pp. 125–129.

³² V. BUTURA, I. DATCU, *Cultura spirituală românească*, p. 66.

³³ *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură*, trad. Bartolomeu Anania, Jubilee edition of the Holy Synod, EIBMBOR, București, 2001, pp. 1980–1981.

³⁴ Ben WITHERINGTON, *Grace in Galatia : a commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids Mich., 1998, p. 203.

³⁵ J MARTYN, *Galatians : a new translation with introduction and commentary*, 1st ed., Doubleday, New York, 1997, p. 283.

The belief in the existence of the “evil eye” in the Romanian environment

Saint Jerome considers that Saint Paul uses the language of the people in Galatians 3:1 and not because he thought there was something like “fascinus” in the way others accepted it. He brings proof two fragments from the Septuagint in which the terms βασκανια and βασκανος were used to “teach us that a man can be tortured by the envy he feels on another person’s luck, or that someone gifted with something good can be hurt by the look of someone who envies him”. Regarding this final aspect, Jerome says that “fascinus” affects especially children, young people and those that are not mature yet. The validity of this popular belief is left in God’s hands. He only raises the possibility that the demons are behind the actions of the “evil eye”, and they are trying to cast away any good deed of those who made progresses on the “way of God”. Saint Paul uses the interpretation of “fascinus” as follows: just as those who are newly born are hurt by the fascinus, so are the Galatians, who have been newly born in the Christian faith and were nurtured with milk, and they have been harmed like the little ones, for they felt sick of faith and threw out the food of the Holy Spirit. Hence “fascinus” represents for Jerome, at least in the fulgar sense of the term, someone’s capacity to hurt another person, without specifying clearly the means by which this happens³⁶.

Two other Latin commentaries to Galatians, those by Marius Victorinus³⁷ and Ambrosiaster³⁸ explain what ἐβάσκανεν means, or if it is something real in this belief. Tertullian, in his work “De virginibus velandis” states that, among the benefits a virgin has from covering her head, one can enumerate the fact that she is protected from suspicions, calumnies, emulations and envy. He stops to the last aspect and says that it is something even the pagan fear and which they call “fascinus”, being the consequence of too much praise and glory. This is considered by the Christian to be coming from the devil, and sometimes from God. In the first case it refers to the hatred against the good, and in the second case as a judgement of anger, which praises the humble and humiliates the arrogant. Hence, a humble virgin will fear both the envy of the enemy and the critic eye of God³⁹.

³⁶ Andrew JEROME, *Commentary on Galatians*, coll. *The Fathers of the Church* 121, Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2011, pp. 118–119.

³⁷ Stephen COOPER, *Marius Victorinus’ Commentary on Galatians: introduction, translation, and notes*, coll. *Oxford Early Christian Studies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 2005.

³⁸ AMBROSIASTER, *Commentaries on Galatians-Philemon*, coll. *Ancient Christian Texts*, trans. by Gerald Lewis Bray, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 2009, p. 14.

³⁹ TERTULLIAN, „On the Veiling of Virgins”, in: *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to 325 A.D.*, Alexander ROBERTS, James DONALDSON (eds.), vol. IV, coll. *Early Church Fathers*, trans. by Sydney Thelwall, Christian Literature Company, Buffalo, 1885, pp. 27–39.

Saint Basil the Great in his “Homily concerning Envy” mentions the faith of some Christians, who thought that the envious could harm only by looking, because “healthy and strong bodies in the heyday of youth, enchanted by them, suddenly fade and all of the sudden the whole body collapses, as if from the eyes of the envious a destructive force came out which ruins and damages”. Saint Basil considers this belief as a superstition “spread among tagsters and women”, but he believes that the “demons who hate good, when they find a disposition that fits their purpose, they use it in every manner according to their own will; in this way they also use the eyes of the envious, to serve their will”⁴⁰.

Saint John Chrysostom mentions the Christian women who, when they bathe the little children, they make a sign on their forehead with dirt to protect them from ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρός, βασκανία and φθόνος. Do they imagine, asks Saint John, that it has the power to chase away legions of demons; if dirt is so powerful even on the forehead, why don't we all stuck our heads into dirt, since we are all grown-ups who are envied by a lot more people than a child? Also, he urges the mothers not to protect their children by hanging amulets on their necks or bells on their wrists, but to use only the holy Cross, as the only sign that can protect them. Those women who tie an amulet inscribed with the name of a river do not perform a simple act of witchcraft, but they also fall under the influence of evil⁴¹.

Eusebius of Alexandria, in his work “De Neomeniis et Sabbatis” denounces the Christians who offer as an argument to give to the poor the fact that it is Sabbath or the first day of a new moon, or a birthday or those who follow the flight of the birds at Easter. Such a behavior is characteristic to the Jews not to the Christian, says Eusebius. In this context he mentions other practices as well: not offering fire to the neighbor after sunset, analyzing the song of birds and considering the vocal intonation of certain people as prophetic. Christians should not waste their time in such a manner, or to protect themselves from their brothers. For some of them instead of blaming the devil for what goes wrong in their life, for the destruction of one of their works, they blame the evil eye of someone who passed by. When he wants to harm someone, the devil takes control over those who let their guard down, and so when someone returns home without having fulfilled the purpose of his departure, he says that he has met someone and because of that person he did not succeed. Eusebius is

⁴⁰ VASILE CEL MARE, „Omilia XI, Despre invidie”, in: *Scrieri. Partea întâia*, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești* 17, EIBMBOR, București, 1986, p. 463.

⁴¹ Ioan HRISOSTOM, „Omilia XII”, in: *Comentariile sau explicarea Epistolei I către Corinteni a celui între sfinți părintelui nostru Ioan Chrisostom, arhiepiscopul Constantinopolului*, trans. by Theodosie Athanasie, Atelierele Grafice Socec&Co., Anonymous society, București, 1908, pp. 163–164.

insulted by those who attribute βασκανία to their neighbors, forgetting the fact that from the very beginning the devil was envious and at war with the human kind⁴².

Conclusions

From the historical analysis operated on the belief in the “evil eye” we observe the following aspects: the evil eye is a global phenomenon that refers to “casting spells” with the help of the eyes, the Greek terms ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρός, βασκανία and φθόνος referring to looking with an evil eye, envious, or to speak calumniously; it always has a negative connotation; the persons that had an “evil eye” were demons, gods, Fortuna, Destiny or people. Social and economic research on this phenomenon advanced the hypothesis according to which this belief occurred on the background of the abyss existing between the rich and the poor. Becoming rich was most often achieved by rendering another family poor, and from here come all the feelings of vulnerability and suspicion.

The belief in the “evil eye” still exists in some of the Romanian villages and it respects the scenario that existed in the ancient people we analyzed. In the case of the Romanians the evil eye is produced through the look, as well as through praises. However, we have not discovered sources that mention God as a possible source of the evil eye, as is the case of the Greek sources and Tertullian’s works, but we do not exclude the possibility of the existence of such a perspective.

The Christian sources analyzed indicate that the Fathers of the Church do not believe that some people have the capacity to “charm” the others through their look or praises, nevertheless they do not reject it categorically. Regarding the reality of the existence of a power that acts physically through looks, Saint Jerome leaves it up to God. Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Basil the Great consider it a superstition spread among women, with the difference that the latter does not exclude from the equation the possibility that the devils use the look of the envious people to harm others, an opinion which is also shared by Eusebius of Alexandria. Tertullian speaks of two sources of the “evil eye”. Demons and God. In the case of God, βασκανία manifests as a judgment of people’s pride, and in this case we may speak about the “critic eye” of God who humbles the arrogant and praises the humble.

However, there is also a positive aspect of this popular belief, for the fear of the power of envy led to a strengthening of the social solidarity and the cultivation of moderation regarding the ostentatious exhibition of material or intellectual wealth, features which lack to the world today.

⁴² EUSEBIUS et al, *Eusebiou tou Alexandreōs, Eusebiou Emisēnou, Leontiou tou Buzantiou, Ta heuriskomena panta*] = *Eusebii Alexandrini Episcopi, Eusebii Emeseni, Leontii Byzantini Opera quae reperiri potuerunt omnia*, vol. 1, coll. *Patrologiae cursus completus., Series Graeca* 86, J.P. Migne, Paris, 1865, pp. 352–357.