Space in Saint Jerome's *Vita Hilarionis*

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Dedicated to my parents: my mother, an Afrikaans teacher, who taught me the spiritual language of literature, and my father, a land surveyor, who pointed me to the place on the map.

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Abstract:

This dissertation explores Jerome's use of space in the *Vita Hilarionis*, through the use of the theory of critical spatiality. Three different spaces, all interrelated, are explored: desert space, monastic space and city space.

The *vita* falls within the genre of Hagiography, a short biography that attempts to capture the life of a saint or holy man or woman. The V*ita Hilarionis* centres around the saint Hilarion, and follows his journey into the desert of Palestine in his goal to become an ascetic. One of Jerome's goals with the writing of the *vita* is to show that Hilarion was the originator of monasticism in Palestine.

Upon closer inspection of the spaces that Jerome describes to us, his greater ideological goal can also be exposed. Jerome, a Christian with a classical Roman education, makes use of older classical models in order to write his social geography of the late ancient Mediterranean world, such as traditional notions of centre and periphery. However, as theologian, he also reconstructs or re-imagines Roman spaces, such as the circus, to propagate Christianity, the new religion for the old world.

Critical space has not yet fully been applied to text in late antiquity (100 – 600 CE) or early Christianity. This approach is steered by insights from social scientific criticism that not only views a text such as the *vita* as a literary piece of fiction, but also as a social product of its time. Through this view, largely spiritual themes in the *vita* can be viewed as also ideologically motivated, the social position and role of the ascetic in late Roman/ early Christian society understood, the spaces he/she moves in analysed and applied to shed light on early Christian identities.

List of key terms:

asceticism

monasticism

desert space

monastery

Jerome

Holy man

Hagiography

Late Antiquity

Early Christianity

Critical space

Social Scientific Criticism

Narratology

representational space

Oikoumenē

List of abbreviations

ANE – Ancient Near East

AM – Ancient Mediterranean

AMW – Ancient Mediterranean World

LA - Late Antiquity

LAC - Late Ancient Christianity

SSC - Social Scientific Criticism

CS – Critical Space

JECS – Journal of Early Christian Studies

JRS – Journal of Roman Studies

VH – Vita Hilarionis

VP – Vita Pauli

VM – Vita Malchi

OT - Old Testament

NT – New Testament

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the study

In the prologue of the *Vita Hilarionis*, Jerome sets out the polemic of an ascetic life of obscurity in the desert by comparing it to a life of communion with others by referring to his earlier hermit Paul, and comparing Paul with Hilarion[1], the main character in the *VH*. In lines 20-21 the comparison is not only strengthened by likening the lives of these two saints to that of biblical figures Jesus and John[2] (a trend in early Christian literature), but the reference is also embedded in a spatial distinction between central and peripheral space. Peripheral space is associated with asceticism, a lifestyle which gained prominence amongst practicing ascetics in late antiquity. This practice entailed living in solitude in the desert in order to achieve what early Christians understood to be *holiness*. In the *VH* this is contrasted with a more socially interactive lifestyle or life in central spaces such as urban areas or space that is traditionally seen as lived in or inhabited.

This distinction is partially informed by a larger traditional view that city space, which operates from a more dominant Roman point of view, is seen as civilised. To be part of or living in this space (partaking in its activities), makes one civilised, whilst to be not of this space, is to be uncivilised, unclean or barbaric (not partaking in civil activities). Ascetics were also placed within this category because of their "otherworldliness". In the text the same binary opposition between city and desert life is also present, but subverted. Ironically, it is in the peripheral space of the desert that the ascetic finds his "paradise regained." The text also introduces a new third space in Palestine, namely that of the monastery and Jerome claims his saint Hilarion to be the founder of this monasticism in Palestine.

In the *Vita Hilarionis*, conflict arises when virtues of asceticism, often associated with isolation, clashes with the spiritual obligation to help others. But this requires of the saint to

[1] All references to the *Vita Hilarionis* throughout this Masters are done from the English translation "*Vita Hilarionis*" by M. A. Freemantle, in P. Schaff (ed). 1983. *Jerome: The Principle Works of Saint Jerome*. Available online at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.html. *VH*, prologue.
[2] Jerome is addressing his critics. He claims in his prologue that John was criticised for his solitary life, whilst Jesus was ostracised for spending too much time in the "throng". *VH*, prologue.

enter spaces he would, by nature of his virtues, rather avoid: the city, the town, the crowds and spaces that are deemed polluted, noisy and largely Pagan from this new Christian ascetic perspective. Thus there is an inversion of the more traditional Roman view of space by early Christian writers.

1.2 Problem statement:

John Barrel argues for the "hidden ideological agenda that informs the portrayal of (a) landscape (in a text), which in turn promotes the ideology of that text".[3] Within the genre of ascetic literature or hagiography as it is now known, early Christian writers used desert space, where ascetic literature typically take place, in order to create a sphere wherein the practice of asceticism and its entailing virtues could be promoted, propagated and protected.

Writers of ascetic texts imply that practicing ascetics had experiences of desert space that differed from that of urban Romans, because of the theological significance that the desert held for them. The desert was an ideal space where asceticism could be practiced in solitude. There are many examples of ascetic texts, especially in the genre of hagiography, which thrived between the third and seventh centuries, an era when Christianity was taking shape socially, religiously and politically. This era is known as Late Antiquity and also Early Christianity. The era and use of the different terms will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three of this study, section 3.1.2.

Jerome wrote his three *vitae* with these goals in mind as well, starting with the *Vita Pauli* (377)[4] and writing the *Vita Malchi* (390-391)[5] soon after. However, it is the last more complicated and longer *Vita Hilarionis* that, even if described as one of the best examples in the genre, is spatially more problematic as a "typical" hagiographical text. Jerome's goal with the *Vita Hilarionis* was purportedly to emphasize the *propriae virtutes* (the characteristic virtues) of saint Hilarion, the main character in the *VH*. Seen from this perspective, the *Vita Hilarionis* follows a similar model to that of the Gospels in the Bible, the similarity being that

[3] Barrell, cited Ghoering, 2005, p. 136.
[4] See the *Vita Pauli* (Life of Paul) by Saint Jerome. Translation available online at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.html
[5] See the *Vita Malchi* (Life of Malchus) by Saint Jerome. Translation available online at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf206.html

the life of a holy person is described with the purpose of setting such a life as an example to others. Where he deviates from the model, is in his focus of the new movement of monasticism.

It is also what appears to be Jerome's often discrepant descriptions of space in the *Vita Hilarionis* that draws attention. In the *Vita Hilarionis*, the main character, Hilarion's relationship with asceticism and his quest to live a life of virtue is complicated by his changing role as ascetic, healer and monk. This dynamic is illustrated through the saint's travels throughout the Mediterranean world as well as his entrance into desert space, monastic space and later confrontation with city space, the latter being generally viewed with ambivalence or negativity in ascetic literature. In the *Vita Hilarionis*, the desert space represents physical suffering, but also more positively, spiritual awakening to a higher consciousness. Monastic and city space represent tension through social interaction, clashes with Roman authorities and the loss of solitude as ascetic desire when Hilarion's virtuous lifestyle is tested. The traditional views of city space as civilised and the outlaying surrounding desert or "wilderness" as uncivilised are also complicated in the *Vita Hilarionis*.

1.3 Goal of the study:

With the above in mind, this thesis proposes an exploration of how classical views of space are reinterpreted in an early Christian context, as it appears in the *Vita Hilarionis*. This idea will be strengthened by the suggestion that there also exists an intimate relationship between Jerome's ascetic theology, identity, a sense of belonging and space. Gert Prinsloo makes the following statement in this regard: "Human beings attach special feelings, whether positive or negative, with a sense of identification or alienation, to places, spaces and environments".[6] This is achieved through ideological spatial strategies in the text. Thus much of the study will draw on theory from critical spatial theory in an attempt aimed at filling the gap or, at least, aiming to apply the theory to an ascetic text.

I will argue that Jerome uses space as an ideological construct to promote asceticism and some of its virtues in his *Vita Hilarionis* by subverting or re-imagining traditional held views

[6] Prinsloo, 2013, p. 3.

of city and desert space, or central and peripheral spaces in the Late Ancient world. Being also the last *vita* to be written by him, I will show how the *Vita Hilarionis*, in a more realistic and mature way, illustrates the complicated relationship that the ascetic has with himself, God and larger society within this spatial reinterpretation. His larger goal is argued to be the Christian appropriation of pagan or Roman city spaces. However, I would also like to illustrate how the *VH* is an apt illustration of the struggle experienced (based on some of Jerome's own experiences) to find a space where the perusal of holiness and solitude, closeness to God on one hand, and on the other hand setting good examples to others and being of service to others can be balanced.

This will be done by illustrating the relationship of the character to three different spaces, namely desert, monastic and city space. Jerome's *VH* is seen as one of his "lesser" works and is easily overlooked because of its lack of theological authority. The *VH* is, despite being a text with religious themes, largely fiction. Saint Jerome is, despite being seen as a good rhetorician, largely a partial or unreliable witness, as can be evidenced by especially his *vitae*.[7] It is however, especially because of the *vitae* as mostly fictional, that Jerome gets the chance to write about the world as he saw it in this genre.[8] It is of interest to study Jerome's attempt to carve out an identity for his ascetic hero, against the backdrop of a culturally and religious dynamic and evolving era known as "Late Antiquity". In short, I will illustrate how differing Christian obligations and spiritual needs clash and are represented spatially in the text.

1.4 Research method

A *vita* is an appropriate text to approach spatially, since the practice of asceticism relies on physical and social isolation to attain its goals. The movement is also historically associated with themes such as marginalisation, othering, gender and religious martyrdom, all of which become connected to the study of critical space. The *Vita Hilarionis* also contains perceptions about space which is informed by larger classical and novel spatial frameworks that are worth exploring through social scientific criticism.

[7] Grigg, 2012, p. 126.
[8] Weingarten, 2005, p. 1.

From a literary stand-point, the study of a *vita* is not so much historically important as *how* that "history" is presented in the text. The *vita* is a relatively short and heavily truncated biography, consisting of literary devices that turn space and action into symbols or icons in the text that represent larger ideas or convictions. In continuing the current social scientific trend of a focus on representation, "constructed realities" or "imagined worlds", a study of how space is represented in the *Vita Hilarionis* will borrow from studies done in critical space elsewhere in the ancient world.

For this study, a context for the background of the text will be created by examining categories of space in the ancient and late ancient world that played an influential role in how space was organised. These categories are *sacred* and *profane* space, *central* and *peripheral* space and *city* and *desert* space. Space in the *VH* will then be examined in order to determine to what extent spatial depictions in the text agree with the above categories and to what extent they differ. The reasons for their similarities and differences will be explored and described.

Since this study also largely concerns a study of Jerome's use of space in the *Vita Hilarionis* and this text contains many layers of different spaces, I will limit my focus to desert, monastic and city space. A focus on space in ancient or late ancient texts give us access to the writer's ideas concerning space and the underlying values attached to them. We are given glimpses into Jerome's world, or rather, in Susan Weingarten's words, the world as he saw it.[9] Jerome uses space symbolically to communicate his convictions about the practice of asceticism, monasticism, and what he presumed the role and place of the ascetic to early Christian society was.

1.5 Structure of thesis

In Chapter Two of this study, the focus will be on the background of the writer Jerome, the history, development and function of the hagiographical genre and the place the *Vita Hilarionis* has within this genre. I provide an overview of the origins and context of the ascetic and monastic movements in antiquity. The point of this is to underscore the

[9] Weingarten, 2005, p. 1

importance of an awareness of the context of any literary text, as a piece of literature is shaped by social and historical process as much as it is shaped by the writer's imagination. Since this is also a religious text, social scientific awareness of ancient and early Christian values, social isolation and perspectives on the status of holy figures through social scientific criticism, form part of my method. It also aids in understanding what type of audience Jerome was writing to, and how his audience interpreted or was meant to interpret his message. Because these factors play a role in the interpretation of the text, I will also pay attention to the text as being ideological.

In Chapter Three I explore my theoretical frameworks of choice, as well as my motivations for using them. I explain Social Scientific Criticism and the place of Critical Spatial Theory within this framework. I follow with an exploration of spatial theory, focusing on the works of Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre and suggest how their tripartite conceptualization of space can be applied to a literary text. Together with an explanation of the theory of narratology and ideology in religious texts, I explore the meaning of the latter term and how it applies to space in the *Vita Hilarionis.*

Chapter Four posits the social scientific spatial focus of my research method. Each of my chosen spaces will be put into their own respective contexts, both literary and historical. This will be done in order to indicate their histories and influences. I will also pay attention to how these respective spaces were represented in literary tradition up to the introduction of the hagiographical genre.

In Chapter Five, I give a qualitative/ descriptive analysis and description of the appearance of each of my chosen spaces in the progression of the narrative of the *Vita Hilarionis*, by making use of my proposed theories and highlighting the usefulness of the application of a holistic model to a text with religious themes. In Chapter Six, I will draw my conclusions and explain what spatial relationship Jerome's Hilarion has with the desert, monasticism and the Palestinian society of late antiquity.

1.6 Predicted outcomes and conclusions:

The predicted outcomes and conclusions for the study are as follow:

1. To give an overview of ancient models of thought on the cultural category of space, through the use of Social Scientific Criticism and Critical Space;
2. To apply these categories to spatial perspectives in LA in order to understand how space is used in the *Vita Hilarionis*;
3. To determine to what extent spatial descriptions differ or agree with the determined categories, in order to understand the ideological meaning of the text;
4. The predicted ideological goals of the text may be the following:
    - The binary spatial opposition between desert and city in classical literature is present in the text to emphasise Christian ascetics as marginalised figures;
    - This opposition is subverted in the same text in order to critique spatial centres, such as the city and peripheral centres are used in positive ways to assist in the spiritual growth of the ascetic;
    - The new space of monasticism is introduced to show how monasticism in Palestine originated;
    - Jerome is using his own idea of asceticism and enhancing it in the *Vita Hilarionis* by offering the ascetic body as a geographical centre in place of celestial buildings or sacred spaces as central, by focusing on Hilarion's virtues and how they come to the fore in each space.

Chapter 2: History and Background to the text

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide some background about the writer of the text, Jerome, an overview of the movement of asceticism, the genre of the *vitae*, or hagiography and how Jerome's *vitae* fit within this genre.

2.1 Jerome

Jerome was a church father, theologian, ascetic and writer. Kelly describes Jerome[1] as "... one of the most fascinating figures of his epoch"[2]. It is speculated that he was born in Stridon, Dalmatia around 331-347.[3] He received a traditional Roman education and also studied under the great Roman *grammaticus*, Donatus (360-366)[4]. His training in rhetoric "becomes clear in his writing, as he masterfully employed its ploys such as style, emotional appeal and exaggeration."[5] During his schooling years, he also became familiar with the works of the great classical writers, like Virgil and Cicero, which he greatly admired. Despite his training in and love of the classical world, his Christian appropriation of the world around him is stated to have been one of his main goals in the *Vita Hilarionis*.[6]

Two spaces had already become prominent in Jerome's own life. The first is that of the city of Rome, where he received his classical education and also, conversely, was baptised. It was therefore a space that Jerome could never be neutral about and it is illustrated in many of his

[1] Hieronymus means "of Sacred Name", Kelly, 1975, p. 6.
[2] Kelly 1975, preface.
[3] There is some uncertainty as to when exactly Jerome was born. Kelly suggests the above, 1975, p. 1. Stefan Rebenich suggests 347, although he also notes that there are differing views on his birth date. Rebenich,. 2002, p. 4.
[4] Kelly, 1975, p. 1. For a general chronology of Jerome's life and career, see also Weingarten, 2005, pp. 7-16.
[5] Kelly, 1975, p. 15.
[6] Weingarten, 2005, p. 7.

writings of the city[7]. The second is that of the desert of Chalcis, where he had begun his ascetic life and interacted with other ascetics.[8]

It was during his stay in Trier (366 – 370) that he was finally convinced to practice asceticism, as this was where the ideals of renunciation and monastic withdrawal were being put into practice by earnest Christians in the city at the time. However, his bad health and love for his library of books prohibited him from staying in the desert for too long. His love of food and sex is also said to have played a role in deterring him to lead a holy life, lived in discipline.[9] According to Kelly, Jerome reflects semi-autobiographically on his own life-long battle with the desires of the flesh in the *Vita Pauli* and in personal letters to friends, many of them written during his stay in the desert of Chalcis as a practising ascetic.[10] It is his turn to asceticism that makes parallels between his own life and his three *vitae* discernible. He lived a monk's life for almost three years in the Syrian Desert, and left as a result of the enmity that developed between him and the other monks, because of disagreements on the nature of the holy trinity, which was heavily debated at the time.[11]

It was after his stay in the desert of Chalcis that he wrote his first *vita*, the *Vita Pauli* (*The Life of Paul the First Hermit).* Despite achieving renown for other larger and more important works, it was his experiences in the desert, as well as observations made on other Syrian monks in the nearby wilderness, from which Jerome drew inspiration for the desert saints in his two other *vitae,* following the *Vita Pauli*:

> The Syrian Desert (close to Antioch) was ... "(vast) and ... dotted with occasional oases and criss-crossed by military roads, stretched to Palmyra and beyond. It was a menacing desert, varied in aspect but everywhere exposed to the scorching sun, and cut across by sterile valleys between rocky cliffs in which generations of cave-dwellers must have lived".[12]

[7] Grigg, 2012, p.130.
[8] Patricia Cox Miller argues that Jerome's perspectives on the desert were largely influenced by his states of mind at different times and during different crises in his life. Before his own sojourn into the desert, his expectations of ascetic achievement were highly idealised. However, after his experiences with other monks, as well as the controversy over the Nicene Creed's understanding of the Holy Trinity (C. E. 376), Jerome started viewing himself as an exile in the desert, as his views clashed with other ascetics there. Thus his perceptions of them changed to "barbaric monks". 1996, p. 213.
[9] Kelly, 1975, p. 21.
[10] Kelly, 1975, pp. 30, 48.
[11] Kelly, 1975, pp. 2, 38.
[12] Kelly, 1975, pp. 46-47.

As for the cave-dwellers themselves: "... the hermits, for the most part simple, unlettered people speaking only Syrian, were renowned for their austerities and eccentric devotions. Squalid and clad in garments made of hair, they sometimes lived like beasts on raw herbs or loaded their bodies with heavy chains".[13] Jerome does not overtly use these exaggerations for his three desert saints. He himself becomes critical of this stereotyping in the *Vita Pauli* in defence of asceticism, and that it is a way of life to be taken seriously. Still, he goes on to describe what he had seen with his own eyes: "... one who had lived enclosed for thirty years, feeding on barley bread and muddy water and another who kept himself alive in an abandoned cistern on a diet of five dates a day".[14] Rather, Jerome uses exaggeration to bring across the monks' devotion to the lifestyle.

Despite the fact that Jerome was an avid promoter of and fiercely defended the orthodox faith, he himself was not always in favour with the church. Jerome favoured ascetic ideals because of its twofold role: the desires of the flesh were distracting and a disruptive force. Thus the body had to be subdued or disciplined and this could be achieved through the practice of asceticism. Secondly, through ascetic withdrawal he was also to achieve what he deemed as closeness, or spiritual connection with God Himself, without interruption or distraction. In a personal letter to his friend Heliodorus, he wrote of his stay in the desert: "Believe me, here I see a strangely brighter light; here I rejoice to throw off the burden of flesh and soar to the pure radiance of heaven".[15]

Because Jerome idealistically promoted these ascetic ideals, he was quick to criticise behaviour of other Christians in Rome and was frequently a target of attack in his high position under Damasus. He was never a bishop but a "non-practicing priest" or monk-scholar. "He was pronounced a heathen twice in one decade, quite possibly because of, but not limited to his extremist views on what was deemed then as radical forms of Christianity in his writings".[16] As a historical figure he was marginalised even in his own time, a social and religious cast-out and a far cry from the Saint Jerome presented to us in later medieval hagiography and iconography.[17]

[13] Kelly, 1975, p. 47.
[14] Kelly, 1975, p. 47.
[15] Letter 14, 10. Kelly, 1975, pp. 47-48.
[16] Cain, 2009, p. 3.
[17] Cain, 2009, pp. 2-3.

Many of these polemics also directly affected him during his stay in the desert and caused many of the neighbouring monks to drive him out, which made Jerome disillusioned with what it supposedly meant to be a monk. This conflict is also later personified in his *Vita Hilarionis*.[18] His experiences in the desert are also responsible for what Williams calls what came to be Jerome's fusion of the scholar and monk in the fourth century. Williams suggests that Jerome, like many of his contemporaries, presented textual scholarship itself as a form of *askesis* and, besides writing about asceticism in his biographies, saw the act of writing as "spiritual training appropriate for a coenobite."[19]

After the death of pope Damasus he moved to Bethlehem in 386 where he established a monastery. He died in 419 – 420 and was buried in the Church of Birth in Jerusalem.[20] His other works include translations, commentaries on the Bible, dogmatic and polemic works, biographies, historical texts and letters. Possibly his most famous or important work is that of the Latin translation of the Vulgate from the original languages, after instruction from pope Damasus (under whom he served as private secretary in Rome).[21]

2.2 Jerome's *lives of the desert fathers*

Jerome's *vitae* were the first hagiographies written in Latin, which were prompted by the success of the Greek *Life of Antony*, written by Athanasius in the third century. As can be evidenced by a large surviving number of manuscripts and copies, they were very popular.[22] The genre is even said to have further inspired the movement of asceticism, as much as the movement and its hermetic individuals have inspired the literary genre.[23] In the *vitae* there is evidence of the many sources Jerome drew from, which include Greco-Roman literature, reference to biblical material and parallels drawn with the gospels.[24] The *Vita Hilarionis* is the third of three *vitae* written by Jerome. A short description of the first two *vitae* follows.

[18] Kelly, 1975, pp. 55-56.
[19] Williams, 2006, p. 5.
[20] Kelly, 1975, p. 331.
[21] Kritzinger, 1990, p. 5.
[22] Weingarten, 2005, p. 4.
[23] Goehring 1993, p.181.
[24] There are two works worth noting here that specifically concern Jerome's use and interpretation of other sources, including Nienke Vos's *Biblical Biography: Scripture and Ascetic change in Early Christian Vitae*. PhD, University of Utrecht. 2003, and Susan Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints – Hagiography and Geography in Rome*. Brill: Leiden. 2005, already discussed.

2.2.1 The *Vita Pauli*

The *Vita Pauli* is believed to have been written between 377 and 382.[25] It describes the opening and closing phases of the hero's life and is described as "romantic idealisation of monastic withdrawal".[26] Its purpose was purportedly to prove that Antony of Egypt, the supposed originator of monasticism, had in fact been inspired by an earlier monk, Paul, and this *vita* had thus been written as competition to Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*.[27] The story unfolds as Antony visits a then aged hermit in a cave in the desert in order to be in spiritual community with him. The message given in the narrative is that of the preference for a life of poverty and loneliness to a life of vanity and riches.[28] More importantly, because the character of Paul in the story is familiar with and acknowledges his Roman classical education, it can be assumed that its purpose was also to propagate the concept of "an educated Christian holy man".[29]

2.2.2 The *Vita Malchi*

Jerome is said to have met Malchus on Evagrius's estate at Maronia, of whom he later wrote.[30] The *Vita Malchi* (*The Life of Malchus the Captive Monk*, 390/91) is a story of monk who resisted his parents' attempts to marry him off (thereby betraying his chastity) and instead fled to settle in a monastery in the desert of Chalcis. After deciding to go back home to enjoy part of his inheritance, he was seized by robbers together with another woman travelling in the same party. They are made to tend sheep as slaves and Malchus is thankful for this life in the barren desert, almost idyllically so, until his master gives him his fellow-slave's hand in marriage as a reward for good service. Not wanting to sacrifice his celibacy, he initially refuses to marry the woman, but being threatened with the sword they marry and live together pretending to be man and wife. After deciding to escape, they hide in a cave while the master and a fellow slave, who pursued them, is killed by a lion. They spent the rest of their lives first living in separate monasteries and then together in sexual abstinence in

[25] Rebenich, 2009, p. 17.
[26] Kelly, 1975, p. 60.
[27] Rebenich, 2009, pp. 3, 22.
[28] Kelly, 1975, p. 61.
[29] Rebenich, 2009, p. 23.
[30] Kelly, 1975, p. 44.

Maronia. In it we find Jerome's plea for sexual abstinence.[31] The *vita* was intended as a history of chastity and in the prologue Jerome claims that it is a preparation for a comprehensive history of the church. [32]

2.2.3 The *Vita Hilarionis*

Jerome's *Vita Hilarionis* (*Life of Hilarion,* 391) is the longest of the three texts and also described as being most similar to a Christian biography. It tells the story of a Christian youth who starts out by going to live with the revered monk Antony and ends up spending twenty-two years in solitude in the desert, where he performs miracles, attracts other monks to him and also starts monastic movements in Palestine partially due to his own growing fame. However, having so many people flock to him because of his ability to perform miracles and being constantly surrounded by other monks toward the end of his life, Hilarion becomes disillusioned with monasticism and he yearns again for the solitude which he had lost. He dies in an inaccessible mountain, in the relative peace and quiet which he so craved.[33]

According to White, Jerome was motivated by a desire to record the great deeds of this monk, who he claimed actually existed. An encomium of the Palistinian monk had already been written by Epiphanius of Salamis, who had apparently known Hilarion personally. Jerome may also have found Hilarion an attractive figure to write about as he saw much of himself in Hilarion. They held the same ideas and faced similar problems.[34]

Weingarten gives a good summary of the ideological themes of the *VH*:

> The action of the *Vita Hilarionis* takes place against the backdrop of the whole Roman world; the *vita* thus includes a cast with large numbers of people, from all social classes and from many different walks of life. In describing Hilarion's social context, Jerome sketches in microcosm the whole Roman world, with particular stress laid on the process of Christianization.[35]

[31] Kelly, 1975, pp. 171-172.
[32]Kritzinger gives an illuminating view on the role of space in the narrative structure of the *Vita Malchi*, in '"Preaching Chastity": A "Spatial Reading" of Jerome's *Vita Malchi*"' *Patrologica Pacifica Tertia*, 2013 (IX), pp. 91-106.
[33] Kelly, 1975, p. 173.
[34] White, 1998, p. 87.
[35] Weingarten, 2005, p. 110.

Whereas Jerome's earlier hermit Paul can be seen as an idealised holy man that had retired from the world to the desert, Hilarion is shown as doing the same, but is unsuccessful. The world breaks in.[36] In the *VH*, the saint is confronted with and tries to deal with late antique Roman society and the fame he gets as a result of his miracles.

2.3 Asceticism as a socio-historical practice in history

2.3.1 Definition

Asceticism can be read as a broad term that generically describes a long history of movements with unique circumstances. Caner describes the tendency to lump together, under superficial terms, "certain groups totally unrelated in time and place ..." and that they "become linked to specific heretical labels, simply because their ascetic practices appear similar, despite the lack of any demonstrable connection.[37] The name "monk", as Mayer points out, has little validity in the third century and may describe different practices in Egypt, Syria and Gaul.[38] This section is limited specifically to Christian asceticism as it is portrayed in literature, while the complex reality of asceticism is still acknowledged.

It is popularly believed that Athanasius (c.270), through his *Vita Antonii*, is seen as the originator of Christian asceticism. The *Vita Antonii* is believed by many to be the original ascetic text which inspired all other texts and also the first to portray the life of a Christian ascetic. In a story told by an official named Ponticianus to Augustine by about 385, he mentions a group of "servants of God ... of the kind to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs", who were living in a hut close to the city walls.[39] With them they had Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*, which concerned the tale of the Egyptian hermit supposed to be the founder of monasticism. The *Vita Antonii* is believed to be one of the chief inspirations and catalysts for the perusal of the ascetic/ monastic life.[40] Williams argues that it could have been the deemed heroism and perseverance of these individuals that made them famous and found them imitators, both in life and literature. In the late fourth century, it was seen as a powerful social force, as it fostered whole communities of monks and holy men individually.[41]

[36] Weingarten, 2005, p. 81.
[37] Caner, cited by T. M Shaw, 2005, p. 227.
[38] Mayer 2009, p. 10.
[39] Kelly, 1975, p. 29.
[40] Kelly, 1975, pp. 30-31.
[41] Williams, 2006, p. 10.

Historically, Christian asceticism has its roots in a long historical process of different movements that developed over a long period of time and space, in different locations that did not necessarily have any direct contact with each other. Christians practiced different forms of asceticism of which its practices and underlying beliefs were not necessarily the same. Clark however, believes that asceticism remains similar cross-culturally.[42] The basic underlying motivation remains the same. Individual men and women isolated themselves (entailing either complete withdrawal or not as extreme), in order to achieve a higher psychological or spiritual purpose. This was done by training or disciplining of the physical, of which primal needs and desires were seen as a distraction to higher spiritual or mental satisfaction.

Early Christian ascetics believed that human beings were able to transform themselves for the better and that asceticism aided in this improvement. The body and soul were not necessarily in conflict with each other, but rather intimately connected and that the "actions and movements of the one had a direct effect on the other, and not just the soul reigning in the body". It was believed that "attention to the body's discipline could improve the self".[43]

One way by which to define asceticism, is linguistic: the Greek word *askesis*, "... indicates athletic training, exercise, practice, or discipline", with emphasis on improving oneself in a performance or manner of life. Shaw argues that the "athletic terminology became a metaphor for "... rigorous dedication, hard work, and discipline, to the point of self-denial, in particular philosophical or religious mode of life".[44] Scholars however, have argued that this definition of asceticism is too narrow and began instead to refer to "ascetic behaviour":

> "Ascetic behaviour represents a range of responses to social, political and physical worlds often perceived as oppressive or unfriendly, or as stumbling blocks to the pursuit of heroic personal or communal goal, lifestyles and commitments".[45]

Abstention and avoidance are said to lie at the core of asceticism. Kaelber goes on to define it, when used in a religious context "as voluntary, sustained and at least partially systematic

[42] Clark, 1999, pp. 15, 20-21.
[43] Clark, 1999, p. 17.
[44] Shaw,m1998, p. 5.
[45] The term was decided upon by the Society of Biblical Literature Group on Ascetic Behaviour in Greco-Roman Antiquity, who, through-out the 1880's, could not decide on an appropriate definition. Clark, 1999, p. 14.

program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual or profane gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher spiritual state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred".[46]

Caner shares this view and posits that in Christian incantations of the practice, it usually involves the denial of physical pleasure, such as sex and food and the rejection of material wealth, or anything that can be seen as a distraction from achieving a spiritual or mystical goal. In Christianity, the emphasis lay especially on celibacy above marriage, for instance, and greater self-attainment would come from greater self-denial.[47]

In the ancient and late ancient worlds, isolated spheres, preferably in natural surroundings, such as mountains, caves or deserts were seen as necessary or suitable to fulfil such needs. However, they could also range from the "soft spaces" of isolated rooms inside buildings (usually built for that purpose), withdrawal to the outskirts of a town or village (usually not too far away) to extreme and total isolation into rugged, inhabitable spaces, depending on the social or religious convictions of the individual or group doing the isolation. The depth of extremity of withdrawal also depended on the need of the person(s).

In Miller's performative[48] approach of asceticism, she sees the desert as a necessary space for the "transformative implications of the Incarnation". The desert provided the harsh climate for bodily self-mortification for ascetics to embody what she calls "angelic bodies", an outward sign of the inner spiritual achievement of the ascetic. The performative actions required to achieve this include ritual behaviour such as fasting and certain repetitive acts like weaving or tilling the ground in order to induce stillness and discipline.[49]

[46] Kaelber, cited by Clarke, 1999, p. 14.
[47] Caner. 2012, p. 592.
[48] Cox Miller, "Desert asceticism and 'The Body from Nowhere'" *JECS*, (2) 2. 1994, pp. 137-153.
[49] Miller, 1994, pp. 140-41. In another article, Miller approaches the particularly visceral way within which the body can be described in hagiographic literature, which is used to induce a new sense of awareness of the body as a point of departure. She argues that that aspects of the spiritual or divine can be present in earthly bodies and the practice of asceticism illustrate this. Cox Miller, "Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity. *JECS*, 12 (4) 2004, pp. 391 – 411.

2.3.2 Development and location

Within the context of late antiquity, asceticism marks the break away from institutional (religious) authority and is an example of charismatic authority. Peter Brown has explained the effects of the power of great ascetics by looking at the shifts in locations where their power (economic, social, political and cosmological) was exercised during times of great change. Brown has suggested how the Christian ascetic or "Holy Man", as he calls him, has been able to function on various levels.[50] This includes the holy man as patron, as exemplar, and as a negotiator. In his analysis, the holy man in late antiquity fulfilled the role of an "individual locus of power", whose authority was able to extend beyond the civic world into the cosmological one, especially in times of socio-political upheaval. He was a carrier of a cultural heritage that gave him the power to introduce change whilst remaining true to that heritage, and was able to negotiate religious and political change[51].

Asceticism is older than Christianity, and has some of its Western origins in Stoicism, even if not exclusively indebted to it.[52] The movement itself had been adapted to not only fulfil individual spiritual or philosophical needs, but also to fit larger political goals.[53] In other cultural and historical manifestations of the practice, the trend repeats itself. Jewish asceticism had already been practiced in the Nazarite and Wilderness traditions, which had developed out of the forty years that the Israelites had spent in the desert. In the first century CE, Jews had gathered in what Williams describes as "ascetic conventicles", in following Jesus of Nazareth[54]. Instances of Jewish asceticism can also be found during threats made to their religion. The Essene sect practiced asceticism, which supposedly later became the Dead Sea sect (Qumran community).[55]

It is structurally easier and relevant to the study to approach Christian Asceticism as it was developing in certain key areas during late antiquity: Egypt, Syria and Palestine. Jerome's three *vitae* can even be approached when taking these three areas into consideration. The *VP*

[50] See Brown, "The Rise and function of the Holy Man in Late antiquity", JRS 61, 1971 pp. 80-101, *Society and the Holy* 1982.
[51] Ashbrook Harvey. 1988, p. 523.
[52] Clark, 1999, p. 20.
[53] Brown, 1998, p. 371.
[54] Williams, 2005, p. 10.
[55] Clark, 1999, p. 21.

is concerned with and takes place in Egypt; the *VM* takes place in Syria, whilst the *VH* is largely concerned with Palestinian asceticism and monasticism.

By the third century individuals had already started retreating into the Egyptian desert in order to seek "white martyrdom", a term that describes a form of self-imposed martyrdom with the absence of persecution[56] Evidence suggests groups of monks practicing strict forms of asceticism by 230 at prominent ascetic centres in Egypt like Nitria and Scetis.[57]

By the fourth century, it had become common for serious Christians to break with the world and renounce all possessions almost immediately after baptism or "deeper conversions". It was seen as "a dramatic gesture of renunciation." In the absence of persecution or resistance (at first) to such drastic lifestyles, they could take many forms depending on the circumstances.[58] According to writers like Rufinus of Aquileia and Palladius, the number of resident ascetics at the Egyptian monastic centre of Nitria was three thousand by 370 and five thousand by 390.[59] Egyptian asceticism should however, not be seen as the origins of Christian asceticism. Instead, Clark's view should be considered that Egyptian asceticism developed on its own while similar forms of asceticism were developing in Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia.[60]

In the second century Christians in Syria practiced *enkrasis*, meaning to restrain oneself. Virginity had appeared as a particularly explicit symbol and self-discipline and was seen as "a necessary foundation" of this life in Syrian Christianity. Thus, the type of Christianity that was being practiced in this area had some strong ascetic aspects[61]. In the *Vita Malchi*, written shortly before the *Vita Hilarionis*, chastity is the main theme and the hero of the story, Malchus, denies his inheritance in order to pursue this virtue in the desert of Chalcis.

Abstention from sex was encouraged and participation in larger society discouraged by the Syrian ascetic leader Tatian. In this way it was believed that a Christian could prepare for the

[56] Williams, 2006, p. 10.
[57] Clarke, 1999, pp. 28, 31.
[58] Williams, 2006, p. 10.
[59] Ascetic renunciation also gained popularity in the West by the mid- to late fourth century, which included the Italian Peninsula, Gaul and Spain. Clark, 1999, pp. 18-19.
[60] Clarke, 1999, p. 31.
[61] Chadwick 1958, p. 14; Clarke, 1999, pp. 31-32. There exists evidence from early Syriac texts that renunciation was a prominent feature of Christianity in that area.

reign of God by chasing away wicked thoughts, cast out demons and heal disease.[62] Within Syrian Christian society, ascetic practice happened within church structures, with more extreme forms of asceticism (isolation and wandering, living in the wild) appearing later on.[63]

Palestine is famous for not only asceticism, but also distinct forms of monasticism. The *VH* takes place in Palestine and describes both ascetic and monastic forms. The region became famous for both transitory pilgrims and permanent ascetic practitioners. Monasteries were founded at the turn of the fourth century and by the Byzantine period (600 on) more than sixty existed in the Judean desert.[64]

Williams notes that "organied monasticism had only been practised on small scale in the west, and urban asceticism featured barely in written texts". This ranged from a monastic life lived by a hermit with a spiritual father (eremitic) to the organised coenobitic (communal) life.[65] As a descendant branch of asceticism, the monastic ideal, if not more structured and socially interactive, also emphasised virtues such as poverty, chastity and humility[66], despite property and rule being held in common in historic descriptions of coenobitic monasticism.[67]

2.3.3 Motivations for the practice of asceticism

With regards to external factors playing a role in Early Christians' turn to asceticism, it was originally believed that ascetics wanted to distinguish themselves from other "ordinary" Christians. An important aspect of asceticism is also the desire to achieve mysticism. Mysticism, which entails a desire to attain deeper wisdom or knowledge of the spiritual, or essentially to be more spiritual, can be found in more than one religion. Usually aspects of the mystical can be found alongside more dogmatic aspects of the same religion at a time. Dogmatism or an over-emphasis of structure or rule-based religious practice usually leads to the desire for a more mystical interpretation of religious experience. In early Christianity, asceticism can be seen as one of the ways in which Christians tried to foster this need.

[62] Shaw, 1998, p. 1.
[63] Clark, 1999, p. 32.
[64] Clark, 1999, pp. 18-19.
[65] Williams, 2006, p. 10.
[66] See the *VM*.
[67] Williams, 2006, p. 4.

Other more explanatory suggestions are also offered by Clark and Weingarten. The absence of socio-political and religious circumstances that led to religious martyrdom may have been partial to the rise and spread of asceticism. The persecution of Christians ended when the empire was Christianised and self-imposed martyrdom, on a daily basis, became the successor of "death as a martyr". In this way, the ascetic, with his focus on spiritual growth through physical exertion, becomes this martyr for Christ.[68]

Asceticism is also argued to provide a "freer" form of Christian life, especially as a response to the strict and very formal clerical hierarchy. "With the rapid development in church office, especially in the fourth century, Christian worship became increasingly formalised and subjected to priestly authority". Yet Clark notes there are some problems that surround this interpretation, as desert hermits also congregated for worship under priests and bishops and were therefore not necessarily anti-clerical.[69]

The other motivation is suggested to stem from "the repressiveness of late Roman imperial bureaucracy that increasingly foisted the burden for the collection of taxes and the upkeep of civic structures on the curial class of towns and cities."[70] There are examples of *anachōrēsis* (retreat) of monks in narratives who are vindicated, persecuted, banished, or fleeing for political or social reasons. Two of the three of Jerome's *vitae* have persecution serving as a motivation for the journey into the desert. Paul, for instance, flees to his brother-in law's remote country estate in lower Thebaid. This may have happened under Decius's persecution of the Christians (c.250).[71] In the *Vita Malchi,* Malchus flees to a monastery to avoid a marriage proposal, only to be forcefully taken into the desert later.

It is suggested that tax evasion by a burdened class also functions as a motivation to flee into the desert. Urban decay and declining governmental structures are probable, at least as a narrative motivation. However, evidence suggests that asceticism was not only already practiced much earlier in Christianity, but that Roman towns and cities were also not necessarily declining by the mid-fourth century.[72]

[68] Clark, 1999, p. 22; Weingarten, 2005: pp. 6, 26.
[69] Clark, 1999, p. 23.
[70] Clark, 1999, p. 23.
[71] Rebenich, 2009, p. 16.
[72] Clark, 1999, p. 24.

In conclusion, asceticism is a broad and many-layered movement and the above discussion on Christian asceticism is by no means exhaustive. Asceticism across cultures and geographic locations however, seem to share similar traits and consisted of sub-groups, notably monasticism, which developed later. Motivation for renunciation as the desire to become holy or live a devote life closer to God, tax evasion, fleeing Roman authority and the desire to get away from urban decay formed part of the socially complex reasons for practicing asceticism.

2.4 The literary portrayal of asceticism

2.4.1 Hagiography

Most of the resources that we have of the movement of asceticism, come from literature. *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*[73], which record the lives and habits of desert ascetics, is probably the most well-known. Another well-known source is that of hagiography, which describes the life of a holy man/ woman or saint. Hagiographies are not always strictly ascetic. They may contain themes about holy men or women, but not necessarily always ascetics. The term, "hagiography", is a nineteenth century scholarly designation. Christian writers began to refer to their biographies as "lives of the saints" by the fourth to fifth centuries. It can be defined as a short biography written about a holy individual, usually in order to indicate their religious significance. [74]

As far as the style of the genre is concerned, Hagiography is believed to be distinctly Christian, because of its representation of lives of Christian saints, but with its origins - especially its styles and narrative structure - in Greco-Roman biography. One example is the trend of appealing to a Muse for inspiration. This was more or less continued in hagiography. In the prologue of the *VH*, Jerome appeals to the Holy Ghost for divine inspiration and guidance.

Another influence comes from the Bible. Later writers drew parallels to biblical stories. Throughout his three *vitae*, Jerome frequently compares his characters' predicaments to that of figures in both the Old and New Testaments. The Christian heroes of hagiography are

[73] Russel, (trans.) *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: the Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*. London, Mowbray. 1981.
[74] Krueger, 2004, pp. 5-6.

often represented on biblical patterns.[75] Biblical scripture is also quoted to give moral weight to instruction in a hagiography.[76]

2.4.2 The proposed functions of hagiography

Clark states that scholars have shifted their focus to the rhetoric of ascetic argumentation, because a search for the origins of asceticism proves to be slightly problematic.[77] These functions include: the ascetic as enacting a Christian ideal; Christian writing as a form of practising piety, hagiography as maintaining a form of literary authority and ascetic literature as inspiring more movements into the desert. They are discussed below:

- ***Hagiography as presenting Christian ascetic ideals***

The art of rhetoric, inherited from the Romans, was used to present ideas in such a way so that they seemed convincing to the hearer or reader. Typically, in literary portrayals, the life of an ascetic is presented as a Christian ideal or as an example of moral exceptionality. The structure of such a biography usually includes a very clearly defined prologue and epilogue (by which the author usually states his purpose), through which the writer can then address his audience in a very direct way. "The rhetorical performances framing the central narrative of saints' lives, the prologues and epilogues, shape authorial identity."[78] Jerome stipulates the reasons for writing his three Christian lives in the prologue of each *vita*.[79]

The purpose of hagiography is to engage in "representing holy people in text, offering models of the saints in narrative. They are thus stories of ascetics and monks who are supposed to set examples of how to live a virtuous life. They are studied as "samples of ethical injunction in narrative", meaning that they are written to give moral instruction. They can also be seen as

[75] Weingarten, 2005, p. 5.
[76] See Vos, 2003.
[77] Attention is also rather given to ascetic practice within certain geographic areas, material supports that underlay ascetic practices and the forms of power (political, spiritual and secular), that the ascetic was capable of wielding. Clark, 1999, p. 27.
[78] Krueger, 2004, p. 9.
[79] Kritzinger and Grimbeek have made a useful comparative study on the structure of these prologues, arguing that each prologue is closely intertwined with recurring themes and motives in the rest of the *vitae*. 2006, p. 301.

semi-auto-biographical, or at least parallels can be drawn between the characters and the writers, and Jerome is a good example.[80]

Krueger proposes that hagiographies should be seen as having the same function as images or icons, "containing the real image of their subject." The text is supposed to offer a verbal portrait of the icon or saint.[81] In this way the aim of this form of early Christian writing was the representation of virtue in narrative, just like stories in the Bible, which offer different sets of holy men and women as prototypes:

> The performance (its uses and function) of hagiographical authorship provided images of the saints to inspire imitation and moral change, inviting readers and hearers to produce further images of holiness in themselves.[82]

Hagiography and writing up the lives of desert saints can thus be argued to propagate a practical spirituality, or practical Christianity, something which writers like Jerome claimed authority for because of their experiences as desert-dwellers themselves.[83] In place of the collective or institutional practices of early Christianity in churches, these texts represented more individualised or embodied forms of spirituality through ritual behaviour such as fasting, through what became known as asceticism. The text turns their acts in the desert into examples of Christian virtue.[84]

- ***Hagiography as an attempt to integrate writing and piety:***

Another function of hagiography is that it is also an attempt to integrate writing and piety: "The classical tradition of literary scholarship had its profoundly ascetic aspects". Much like earlier incantations of Greek philosophy, it was believed that rhetorical and literary activities could be represented in terms of exercise and *askesis*, as a form of training that could bring about a profound transformation of the person."[85]

[80] Vos, 2003, p. 114.
[81] Krueger, 2004, pp. 5-6.
[82] Krueger, 2004, p. 7.
[83] Cain, 2009, p. 11.
[84] For other examples, see also Teresa M. Shaw's discussion on virginity as a fourth century ascetic ideal in "Askesis and the Appearance of Holiness" *JECS*, 6 (3) 1998, 485-500.
[85] Williams, 2006, p. 5.

The act of writing hagiography was thus employed as a form of "holy writing"[86] by early Christians. In a sense the act of writing a Christian text was a type of meditation or *askesis* on its own, and was also seen as such by various early Christian writers. "Hagiographies are not only rhetorical, but it is even argued that writers used this form of Christian writing in order to simultaneously improve themselves as well as their readers." It is for this reason that Krueger argues for caution when simply classifying hagiography as a "low-level genre", as the saint's lives represent the works of "highly literate authors for sophisticated audiences".[87]

- ***Hagiography as providing a literary medium of authority for early Christian writers***

Much has been written on the actual existence of Jerome's lonely heroes and there has been much scholarly debate on the historicity of Antony, Paul and Hilarion.[88] Kelly argues that, despite the fact that some historical evidence exists for their existence, these literary works are not, in fact, biographies, but "propagandist pamphlets presenting the monastic ideal in persuasively attractive colours".[89] These Christian heroes are also argued to be simply products of Jerome's imagination as Christian monasticism (and its predecessor asceticism) had only been established after the death of Constantine the Great, "as a reaction to the secularisation of and institutionalisation of the Church."[90]

In exploring Jerome's first *vita*, the *Vita Pauli*, Rebenich echoes Clark's words in that exploring the historicity of the *vita* is not rewarding. Rather, there are other factors in the text that had contributed to its success. Jerome, much like in his later *vitae*, combined different literary traditions, such as early Greek and Hebrew biography, together with the rhetorical devices of the former in order to edify and entertain his readers. This he used in order to show that it was Paul and not Antony, who was the originator of asceticism in Thebes and proclaimed the superiority of the Christian ascetic lifestyle.[91] In the *VH* Jerome used the same narrative devices to illustrate the benefits of a life lived in solitude in the desert and proclaim Hilarion the founder of monasticism in Palestine. Rebenich's argument for the rhetorical function of the *VP* is applicable to the *VH* as well:

[86] "Holy writing" as a term was, in fact, only associated with the genre in the nineteenth century. Krueger, 2004, p. 5.
[87] Krueger, 2004, p. 4.
[88] Kelly, 1975, pp. 61, 173.
[89] Kelly, 1975, p. 175.
[90] Rebenich, 2009, p. 14.
[91] Rebenich, 2009, pp. 18-20.

> The (*VH*) is a text fashioned so as to conform to the laws of rhetoric. The establishment of historical truth was regarded as a basic requirement, although its primary task was not to research but the artistic shaping of the material. It was intended to entertain the reader and to teach by examples.[92]

Hagiography thus provided a literary medium of authority for early Christian writers. As a rhetorician, Jerome's agenda was to present his *vitae* as historical to give his work authority. He had a strong conviction of what asceticism was and thus built a story with a realistic historic setting around this idea in order to present it in the ways he wanted the movement to be seen. In his *vitae*, much like other writers of hagiography, it was the presentation of asceticism as a serious and worthy form of Christianity. In this way he could promote his own self-image as well as his own ideas of what asceticism entailed. [93]

- ***Asceticism as medium for participation in polemics***

Asceticism provided a means for early Christian writers to partake in their own polemics. One way to understand, preach or ponder what virginity entailed, where, when or for how long to fast, *et cetera*, was to discuss these themes in religious literature. Martin *et al* note that it was thus up to writers such as Jerome, Athanasius as well as their contemporaries, who were embroiled in theological debates at the time. Many of these writers felt compelled to make distinctions in such interpretations through their writing and effect structural and institutional changes that would allow Christians to practice their *askesis* without fear of being labelled as heretics or resulting in persecution by the church and Roman authorities.[94]

Both Jerome and Evagrius of Pontus were influential thinkers in their debates over ascetic theology and practice.[95] As far as the texts go, it is possible to assume that their writings helped construct a definition of asceticism that helped give a more positive taint to its practices and implications. In this sense, texts such as the *vitae* are not only models for the promotion or perpetuation of different philosophies, but "also as polemics to be employed in furthering one tradition at the expense of others.[96]

[92] Rebenich, 2009, p. 25.
[93] Rebenich, 2009, p. 2. See also Hoffman, H. *Latin Fiction: The Latin Novel in Context*. London: Routledge and Coleiro, E. "St Jerome's Lives of the Hermits" in *Vigiliae Christianae vol* 11 (3), 1957, pp. 161-178.
[94] Shaw, 2005, p. 227.
[95] Shaw, 1998, p. 4.
[96] Weingarten, 2005, p. 6.

- Hagiography as aiding in the movement of asceticism

Because the portrayal of asceticism is seen as so rhetorically potent, some scholars argue that it is the success of the literature that has inspired further movement into the desert historically. Such an explanation, offered by James Goehring[97], focuses on asceticism as it was practiced in the Egyptian desert during the fourth century, especially within the context of tensions between Episcopal and Ascetic authority. Brown explains that, in ascetic literature, this tension is reconciled through spatial demarcation, by rhetorically confining the ascetic to the desert while the bishop dominated city space.[98]

Goehring's main focus is to understand how the act of writing literature informs original historical movements of asceticism by focusing on the development of Egyptian asceticism as an example. Rather than following the logical argument that it is history that inspires literature, he states that the lines between fact and fiction tend to become slightly blurry in certain circumstances, and that it is literary attempts at describing history that tend to further inspire more individuals to practice asceticism. In the case of Egyptian asceticism, it was the romantic descriptions thereof, according to Goehring, which inspired further individual and collective movements into the desert.[99]

By looking at an early ascetic fable by Babrius, Goehring attempts to understand to what extent the literary metaphorical dichotomy (city and desert) influenced earlier actual Egyptian monasticism. The city was described in negative terms, whilst the desert was associated with truth. Truth could be found more easily in the desert, because there were no distractions as in the city with its noise and entertainments. The confinement of the ascetic to the desert and the way in which both desert and city spaces are described, were thus rhetorically convincing in promoting further withdrawal. [100]

Whether or not asceticism or writings on asceticism functioned as what Clark refers to as a radical critique of larger society, remains open to debate.[101] However, it can be concluded that, when writing about asceticism, early Christian writers chose to use certain literary

[97] Goehring, "The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt", in *JECS*, Volume 1, Number 3, Fall 1993, pp. 281-296.
[98] Brown, cited by Ashbrook-Harvey, 1998, p. 523.
[99] Goehring, 1993, p. 294.
[100] Goehring, 1993, pp. 282, 283.
[101] Clark, 1999, p. 14.

techniques, such as rhetoric, in order to portray the movement and its actors in certain ways. These techniques include presenting ascetics as icons or literary ideals in the text (a simplified representation of what a Christian ascetic is and ought to be), writing as a form of piety, as enhancing the authority of the ascetic, as a form of polemical thinking and as an indirect means of furthering ascetic withdrawal.

Summary

In this chapter I have aimed to give a background and understanding of Jerome, the writer of the *Vita Hilarionis*, and his own relationship to the practices of asceticism and monasticism. It becomes evident that the life-world and experiences of the writer has an impact on his writings, especially in the genre of hagiography, where the structure and intentions of the genre allowed Jerome more freedom to write about the world as he saw it. Thus, the context of the text is important to take into consideration when attempting to understand the story. I have explained the meaning of the term asceticism and described its origin, as well as the motivations for the movement. I introduced the genre of hagiography, and highlighted its most important functions. Studies explaining the spatial dimension of hagiography were put forward in order to show how space can be used to further understand hagiographies. Having thus explained why it would be important to approach the literary spaces in the *VH* as functional in their own right, I now move to my theoretical chapter, and suggest frameworks that will illuminate this function.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Considerations

Aims of chapter

This chapter will be divided as follows: I will give an overview of studies done of the *VH*, followed by a discussion on how space has been approached in LA texts, especially hagiography. I will give a lay-out of Social Scientific Criticism as a framework for understanding the way in which communities can have a shared understanding of space. A discussion of Critical Space will follow. Then I move to narratology as an approach to a literary text, where I will also focus on ideology in a text. Lastly I will propose how the theories will be applied to the *VH*.

3.1. Literature overview

3.1.1 The *Vita Hilarionis*

There has been a substantial amount of interest in both the broader genre of *vitae*, as well as Jerome's *vitae*, especially relating to literary and textual studies[1]. Engels and Hofmann refer to the *vitae* as "tales of travel" but do not explicitly refer to space.[2] However, their contextualisation of Latin biographies is helpful. Fuhrmann and Kech describe *vitae* as instructive entertainment.[3] Kech does refer to space in the vitae but does so in passing. Other studies also focus on the rise and function of the holy man in late antiquity, such as Brown, Burton-Christie and Kelsey as well as the difficulties in approaching the holy man as a lonely

[1] Cain, The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity. New York: Oxford University Press 2009; Coleiro, "St Jerome's lives of the Hermits", in *Vigiliae Christianae*. 1957 Vol 11(3): 161-178; Leclerc, Morales & De Vogüé, *Jérôme: Trois Vies de Moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)* (Sources Chrétiennes 508) Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf 2007;
[2] Engels & Hoffmann, 1997, p. 189.
[3] Fuhrmann, 'Die Mönchsgeschicten des Hieronymus: Formexperimente in erzählender Literatur' in Reverdi, (ed.) *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'antiquité tardive en Occident* Genève: Entretiens Hardt 23. 1977; Fuhrmann, *Drei Hieronymus-Legenden, übersetzt und erläutert von Manfred Fuhrman*. Zürich: Artemis Verlag. 1983; Kech, *Hagiographie als christliche Unterhaltungsliteratur. Studien zum Phänomendes Erbaulichen anhand der Mönchviten des hl. Hieronymus*. Göppingen: Kümmerle. 1977.

religious individual standing apart from conventional religious or church structures.[4] Vos looks at biblical references in the *vitae*, with Jerome's *Vita Pauli* as one of her examples.[5]

Rebenich's reference to the rhetorical character of Jerome's *vitae* has already been discussed in the previous chapter. As far as spatial studies on Jerome's *vitae* go, space is narratologically viewed as forming part of the structural make-up of *vitae* but has thus far been left critically undervalued.[6] Where studies have been done in order to shed light on the spatial aspect of *vitae*, space, especially the desert, is sometimes approached as an emotional or psychological metaphor for the ascetic's inner world or Christian mission.[7]

Even if these texts offer insightful and creative pathways into the study of space in early Christian texts, it lacks a clear and grounded spatial theoretical framework. Weingarten looks at late Christian and classical literature by juxtaposing, for instance, their geographical and political polemics.[8] Some studies have aimed at exploring the links between the ascetic, his/her body and spirituality, for instance.[9] However, with the tentative exception of Weingarten, which will be discussed in more depth in the next section, no spatial study is available that considers Jerome's construction of space in the *VH*.

3.1.2 Late Antiquity

The term "Late Antiquity" loosely refers to the era that marks the end of the classical era, with the beginnings of early Christianity. This era is also sometimes referred to as Early Christianity or Late Ancient Christianity. Roughly, all these terms denote the same era. This era is characterised by the process of the decline of the Roman Empire and, at the same time,

[4] Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy man in Late Antiquity. *Journal of Roman Studies* 1971a, 61: 80 – 101; repr in Brown (1982: 103 – 52); Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism.* New York: Oxford University Press. 1993;
Kelsey, "The Body as Desert in the Life of St. Anthony" in *Semeia* 57 (1992): pp. 131-151.
[5] Vos, *Biblical Biography: Scripture and Ascetic change in Early Christian Vitae*. PhD, University of Utrecht, 2003.
[6] Kritzinger, & Grimbeek, 'n Vergelyking tussen die proloë van Hieronymus se Vita Sancti Pauli Primi Eremitae, Vita Malchi Monachi Captivi en Vita Sancti Hilarionis. *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*. 2006, 88 (17), 301-319; Kritzinger, '"Preaching Chastity": A "Spatial Reading" of Jerome's *Vita Malchi*"' *Patrologia Pacifica Tertia*, 2013, (IX), pp. 91 – 106.
[7] Refer to Kelsey and Burton-Christie.
[8] Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints – Hagiography and Geography in Rome.* Brill: Leiden. 2005.
[9] Brakke, Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1995; Cox Miller, "Desert asceticism and 'The Body from Nowhere'" *JECS* 1994 (2) 2 pp. 137 – 153; Cox Miller, "Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity. *JECS*, 12 (4) 2004, pp. 391 – 411.

the spread of Christianity. Late Ancient Christianity can be dated from approximately 100 to 700 CE with the onset of the dark ages.[10]

Because this era was defined by social change and upheaval, political expansion, religious innovation and the shaping and reshaping of new or different identities, the terms used are not meant to clearly put Late Antiquity into its own box. Rather, LA should be seen as building on a vast and illustrious but fading classical world, which still took much of its political and administrative shape from the old world it was beginning to replace. Much of its predecessor's literature and art were still studied and duplicated, especially to be reinterpreted and given new meaning in some cases. It is for this reason that Rousseau suggests: "The appeal to ancient models could be an instrument of transformation."[11]

Spieser also suggests that LA be seen as a historical period in its own right instead of merely being considered as a transition in history.[12] Jerome wrote in an era when urban life was not necessarily decaying, but being restructured on many levels.[13] Christianity and with it social change was taking shape. New spiritual spaces such as the desert was being discovered and "tested" through asceticism and pilgrimage. However, Jerome was also a Christian educated in the Roman school system, and his knowledge of the classical world and known geography played a role in how he saw this world.

Mayer notes that two sources of the late ancient world are available. They are material archaeological evidence and textual evidence.[14] Textual evidence includes historiographical texts or hagiography that poses as historiography, but is not limited to historical or hagiographical texts.

[10] Rousseau, 2009, p. 15.
[11] Rousseau, 2009, p. 15.
[12] Spieser, 2001, p. 1.
[13] See Loseby, "Mediterranean Cities" in Rousseau (ed.) *a Companion to Late Antiquity*, 2009, pp. 139-155.
[14] Mayer does, however, note that these two sub fields tend to be problematic for our interpretation of the LA world. Rather, the lines tend to become blurred between the two fields. Much that was "written" in LA did not begin and end with inscribed texts and was also oral in nature, such as the performative action of reading out loud. 2009, pp. 2-3.

3.1.3 Space in Early Christian literature

One aspect of cultural perception that is shaped by shared meaning is that of space. It is of relevance to study how different groups in history viewed space as it reveals much of how they thought and how they saw themselves and others. How societies choose to place themselves within the space they occupy, or to portray themselves as occupying that space, is one way of doing this. How different cultures portray themselves on maps or in literature can thus be used as a method to study shared meaning.

Scholars who have studied asceticism and its spatial portrayal in literary texts have already drawn some conclusions of note. Here I will focus more in depth Goehring's argument on what he refers to as the mythologisation of landscape in text. Short discussions will also be given of Merrills's proposed distinction between central and peripheral spaces in early Christian literature, as well as Weingarten's suggestion that the *VH*'s Christian geography is a response to "Pagan" spaces in classical literature.

The original ascetic desert in Egypt and later Palestine proved worthy of ascetic "spaces", depending on ascetic needs.[15] Both asceticism and monasticism have their respective histories rooted in spatial demarcation or isolation. This spatial aspect of the movement of asceticism in particular is also present in its literary counterpart.

Goehring argues that a rhetorical distinction exists between city and desert space in most *vitae* and that it functions to give ascetics charismatic authority in the desert. This division, which he states appears quite sharply in an ascetic tale by Babrius (100 CE), exists because the city, as "the product of human achievement and the locus of human habitation, has become symbolically the centre of evil. Truth has left the city, and presumably only falsehood remains. Truth alone now resides in the desert".[16] Thus ascetics withdraw into the desert because in the text, city space or those who dwell in city space, become associated with social evils. These social evils are then understood to have a negative effect on the

[15] Although the focus here is on male asceticism, it should be noted that female asceticism also existed, especially because the movement provided spaces for the socially marginalised. Female ascetic literature includes the *Life of Syncletica*, although literature on female ascetics, Clark notes, is considerably less than on their male counterparts. We also get to know of the doings of female ascetics through male writers such as Jerome and John Chrysostom through letters (such as Paula, who founded a women's monastery in Bethlehem). A study on space in female asceticism is thus also worth exploring. Clark, 2005, pp. 33, 39.
[16] Goehring, 1993, p. 281.

human spirit and thus, in order to be a serious Christian, a form of withdrawal is required. The physical desert functions as a place of growth and testing for the saint who wishes to become more holy.

Goehring argues that the author is making symbolic use of the visual distinction between city and desert to more adequately illustrate the ethical distinction between truth and falsehood, or good and evil. It is a literary device or metaphor used to express abstract moral or ethical convictions in spatial terms. The complexities of city life are distinguished from the simple pastoral setting, in Goehring's words. This is however, not done in order to show that only good people can live in the desert or that evil people live in the city, but rather "affirming the real difficulty of living an ethical life in an increasingly complex society".[17]

The question is thus raised about the influence of the mythologisation of landscape or space in the text and its relationship to the human state:

> The author... did not simply equate the truth of the desert with the absence of evil. Its (the desert) truth rather lay in the clarity it offered the monk on the reality and nature of evil. If ascetic life in the desert made the struggle with evil easier, it did so only in the sense that it made it more direct. In the desert there was less to distract the monk from the fight and fewer ways for the enemy to confuse him.[18]

Early Christian writers have connected the metaphorical distinction between city and desert with earlier ascetic views of withdrawal in order to write their stories. Thus the metaphor have become enmeshed with the concepts of withdrawal and renunciation in such a way that these terms have been given a distinct spatial dimension alongside of their more original legal or ethical meaning. Ascetic withdrawal, in literature, becomes the visible expression of the ethical, ascetical stance.[19]

In reality, the distinction was not as obvious. Goehring gives evidence that asceticism and monasticism existed geographically along a continuum in Egypt. Asceticism could include living within the vicinity of a village or hamlet or living behind the wall of a monastery inside or close to a city. Value was also attached to how deep individuals were able to venture into the "further" desert and the deeper or further away one withdrew, the more the ascetic

[17] Goehring, 1993, pp. 282-83.
[18] Goehring, 1993, p. 283.
[19] Goehring, 1993, p. 285.

achievement. However, Goehring's point is that the concept of withdrawal in ascetic literary space is not necessarily concerned with an accurate portrayal of occupied ascetic spaces. Rather it is concerned with the withdrawal from habitable space traditionally occupied by civilisations.[20]

This occupation of space by civilisation, therefore making space liveable or inhabitable, is explained by Merrills in his essay regarding geographical thought and the representation of monasticism in late antique Christian historiography. He argues that ascetic portrayal relied on accounts of peripheral groups provided by classical historians, who placed mythical creatures, monsters and culturally peripheral groups in the wilderness outside spheres of civilisation. To be inside the habitable world, was to be civilised and to be without, was not. Thus, monks and ascetics, who have withdrawn from the city or inhabited world, find themselves in the peripheral sphere of the wilderness, with its monsters and barbarian Ethiopians and Saracens.[21] Individuals and groups with certain characteristics are thus associated with or demarcated to certain geographical spaces.

Early Christian writers, like Jerome, Eseubius and their continuators later used this association of ascetics with the peripheral to give commentary on the societies at the centre, or those living within city spheres. The reverse is typical of classical texts, where peripheral groups are marginalised or imbued with exaggerated or negative characteristics in order to be compared with central groups. In this comparison, the latter was supposed to be viewed as superior. In *vitae* it is the opposite. The lifestyle and habits of ascetics, generally praised and viewed as ideal, are used to critique the centre or the lifestyles or morals of those who lived in the city.[22]

Susan Weingarten, who has been mentioned in the previous section, has done a detailed study on Jerome's three *vitae*, focusing on the Christianisation of Roman Pagan space as the goal of the *VH*.[23] More specifically, she argues that the function of the *VH* especially is Jerome's way of responding to an earlier classical text of Apuleius, as the narrative encompasses saint Hilarion's relationship with late antique Roman society. There are supposed parallels between the two texts, for example in an event in the narrative during a chariot race, where

[20] Goehring, 1993, p. 289.
[21] Merrills, 2004, p. 217.
[22] Merrils, 2004, pp. 223-224, 227.
[23] Weingarten, 2005, p. 81.

the Roman crowd is won over for Christ when a Christian charioteer wins. In this way, hagiography is argued to function as Christian commentaries on earlier classical literature.

More practically, Weingarten notes that Jerome's *vitae* were free-standing works of literature and not dependent on other works such as his *Commentaries*, which focused on books of the Bible, or his Letters, which were written privately for someone else. Rather in the *vitae* "Jerome was free to present his world as he saw it, and as he would like it to be seen: they combine rhetoric with *realia*". In this sense the *vitae* present us with different levels of reality and also posits as evidence of Jerome's world. With this argument, Weingarten draws our attention to what she believes forms the *vita*'s central concern of Christianisation.[24]

She argues that the *VH* especially is about the saint and his relationship with society, "and the process of the Christianisation of the Roman Empire.". She goes on to say: "... It encompasses both Palestine and the Christian Holy Land where Christianity is beginning to win significant victories, but where the process is far from complete, as well as the whole of the rest of the Empire."[25] Weingarten has been criticised for her views, more notably by Rebenich[26], although she makes some salient points with regards to the function and description of geographical spaces in the *VH*, especially in relation to the Christianisation of city space in the text and how this is achieved.

A reading of both Goehring and Merrills's arguments open up a feasible framework for understanding how Jerome uses space in the *VH*. Early Christian writers used their awareness of classical models of literary space to give commentary on groups at the centre, which included urban Romans and Christians. Jerome makes use of the same models in the *VH*, as he uses his monk Hilarion's withdrawal, subsequent confrontation with city space and renewed withdrawal as a way of discussing the ascetic life as an ideal and giving commentary on city life. How the *VH* differs from other *vitae* is that two more facets of space are also present. The new space of monasticism in Palestine is introduced in the text, purportedly established by Hilarion, and city space or inhabited Roman/Pagan space is being Christianised through performance of miracles by the saint, a view that is elaborated by Weingarten.

[24] Weingarten, 2005, p. 2.
[25] Weingarten, 2005, p. 2.
[26] Rebenich, 2009 "Inventing an Ascetic Hero: Jerome's Life of Saint Paul", in Cain. & Lossl (eds.) *Jerome of Stridon – His Life, writings and legacy*.

The concept of self-imposed martyrdom, seen from a spatial point of view, points to a new avenue (asceticism in the desert) whereby religious identity could be explored in novel or more serious ways. Writers of Christian texts made use of rhetorical devices to offer asceticism as one such serious form of spirituality. References to space in hagiography in the above studies, open up discussion for applicable theoretical frameworks on space that take into account the construction of space and its representation within literary texts. Thus critical space as a proposed framework is discussed next.

3.2 Social Scientific Criticism

Social Scientific Criticism is used to critically view and re-evaluate accepted approaches to such dimensions as culture, human behaviour and society. It makes the reader aware of the distance between his / her own culture and another culture and a text from a different time. Modern people do not have access to ancient cultures in a value-free or objective way. Thus, without an appropriate framework of thought, ancient codes or values may be misinterpreted if it is not contextualised or approached without placing it within its own historicity. SSC thus aids in contextualising the world of the text by the application of sociological and cultural anthropological ways of thinking, as well as opening up the world "behind the text": the context of the text or Jerome's world. [27]

SSC views that any social reality it studies is constructed, or that meaning is imposed onto a largely neutral world depending on the person or group's culture or worldview. SSC is used to make generalisations about given cultures and societies, in order to draw cross-cultural comparisons between them. Rohrbaugh argues that such models are thus effective because they "offer a systematic way of organizing information in order to focus on social structure and the dynamics of social process".[28]

SSC also focuses on what it frames as the core values of any given society, such as shame and honour in the biblical Mediterranean. They may also include ideas and collectively held views on the family as central, what types of food to eat or avoid, piety, religious beliefs, etiquette on communication and male and female clothing. The core values of a society can

[27] Rohrbaugh, 1996, pp. 1-3.
[28] Rohrbaugh, 1996, p. 8.

also be better understood as having collective "shared meaning". LA, for instance, can be thought of as a distinct social sphere, "where a region sharing a common set of social institutions has persisted over a long period".[29] This approach can thus be used to draw general conclusions about certain core-values in societies that remain stable, or have remained stable over long periods of time, even if change occurs on certain micro-levels.[30]

In this study shared meanings of different types of spaces by ancient and late ancient cultures are also approached as a core-value of these respective societies. One such core value or framework of thought that will be discussed and used for the remainder of the study is that of *Oikoumenē*, the Greek concept of the world that is lived in. *Oikoumenē* is understood as a way that ancient cultures have viewed the world, or over which ancient cultures have shared meaning. Another similar framework or shared meaning of space is that of sacred and profane space. In Chapter Four of this study an in-depth discussion will be given on these categories of space in order to indicate how they evolved and how they are relevant to a spatial study of the *VH*.

3.3 Critical Spatial Theory

Closely related to SSC, is the study of space. The field of spatial studies is very broad and will be narrowed down in the following section to critical spatiality as it is manifested in post-modernism. The studies of Edward Soja and Henry Lefebvre are of relevance here and will receive attention. A distinction will be made between social and literary space to create an understanding of space specifically in the *VH*. The use of ideology in literature will also be discussed.

3.3.1 The development of Critical Spatial Theory: the "spatial turn"

In his preface to *Urban and Religious Spaces in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium*, Spieser states that "the use and perception of space have to be considered as essential elements of the

[29] Rohrbaugh, 1996, p. 7.
[30] Rohrbaugh, 1996, p. 9.

mental tools which characterise any given culture."[31] This holds true for space in ancient cultures and societies as much as it holds true for the described or represented spaces to be found in the literary texts of these societies.

In its relationship to social-scientific criticism, spatial study in the social sciences has its roots in post-modern conceptualisations of the function of space in the macro- and micro-structures of culture and society, as well as its structuring impact on groups and individuals. This so-called "spatial turn" developed in the early 1990's, which Sleeman refers to as the "spatialisation of many scholarly disciplines." He names David Harvey, Henry Lefebvre and Edward Soja as the three key-thinkers in this era.[32] The study of space is also emphasised by the French philosopher Michel Foucault and the humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan.[33]

This "spatial turn" resulted in space taking up a more central place in critical social studies, as well as cultural and literary theory.[34] This reassertion of space is a reaction to the homogenous approach to space in society, which is as a result of mathematical and scientific approaches, or traditional geometries as a way of measuring space. Space was also largely defined through geographic means, with exclusive privilege given to the physicality of space or place.[35]

Instead of understanding history as one written "master-narrative" that can only be analysed or described by a positivistic (purely scientific) means with space as a taken for granted category, the conception of "heterogenous" space is offered instead. This approach acknowledges that space is instead a cultural or social category of existence. Space does not exist as *a priori* (predetermined) knowledge but is rather approached as constructed. More than one idea of space held by groups or individuals, across different cultures or class systems, are able to exist in a complex society. Such spaces can also be studied side by side and in relation to each other, without conceptual preference being given to one above the other.[36]

[31] Spieser, 2001, preface.
[32] Sleeman, 2013, p. 50.
[33] For list of publications of each as well as discussions of Foucault, Harvey, Lefebvre, Soja and Tuan, see Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine (eds.) *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*. Sage Publications Ltd: London 2004.
[34] Soja, referenced by Tally, 2013, p. 17.
[35] Berquist, 2002c, p.16.
[36] Berquist, 2002c, p. 17.

The main conclusions drawn by new theoretical developments during the spatial turn are that human beings live not only in temporal dimensions, but also in spatial dimensions. Temporality is conceptualised as a forward moving or ageing perspective on life, that life "progresses", that life has a beginning, middle and an end. Human life and also history is thus conceptualised as a narrative and historical studies were also approached in this way. Later studies in the human sciences started putting emphasis on the spatial spheres that human beings live in and that they are largely defined by the space they occupy.

Critical space as one field of post-modernism, entails becoming more critically aware of dominant discourses, or ways of thinking about the world, that are seen as normal. Alternative or different frameworks are thus conceptualised in order to more accurately approach culture and social relations, as one homogenous approach can sometimes be seen as obstructing or hiding certain realities:

> Critical spatiality especially encompasses those theories that self-consciously attempt to move beyond modernist, mechanistic, essentialist aspects of space; thus critical spatiality understands all aspects of space to be human constructions that are socially contested.[37]

This view on space has also influenced how human geography has been approached, especially in how the study is connected to the spatial location or the political construction of nation-states. Within this field, focus rests on how topographical demarcation has had a defining impact on social relations, as well as how cultures defined themselves or displayed this understanding visually.[38] Instead of seeing the world as scientifically divided into grids and lines, Tuan instead emphasises the centrality of human experience and the search for meaning as based on our relation to the world and our relationship with it (both physically and emotionally).[39] Through this view, human beings also construct a sense of space through their attachment to it. They define themselves through their spatial orientation and thus identity can be expressed through spatial terms.[40]

[37] Berquist c2002, p. 15.
[38] This is as a result of growing critical perspectives in response to the long and sometimes destructive process of colonisation. Together with modern phenomena such as globalisation and decolonization, this has lead to the development of the field of humanist geography. See Tuan, *Space and Place – The Perspective of Experience*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis. 1977.
[39] Tuan, Ch 2: "Experiential perspective", 1977, pp. 8-18.
[40] Berquist, 2002c, pp. 18, 24.

Oikoumenē can also be better understood by viewing it as a culture's attempt to understand or establish itself visually and also textually through geographic descriptions. This centripetal way of ordering space has its origins in the ancient Greek conceptualisation of space, where the city centre is associated with civilisation and everything surrounding it as uncivilised. It also has its origins in the tendency of civilisations to place themselves at the centre of maps.[41] This in turn, is based on the shame/ honour concept that has persisted in ancient and late ancient thinking. It is this structuring of space which is of relevance for a study of space in the *VH*.

3.3.2 Henry Lefebvre and the social production of space

Because Critical Space does not take space as a concept for granted, it thus transcends the study of a physical terrain or geographic location (mountain, house or desert). Both Soja and Lefebvre make use of what they referred to as a tripartite conceptualisation of space, which aids in distinguishing between different types of space.

Included in this structure and also emphasised by both theorists, is *represented space* as defined by culture, politics and beliefs. A feature of conceptual space is that it is largely seen as "invisible", as the borders and lines that define or demarcate space exist in the cultural or social imagination. Conceptual spaces are also created by certain core-held beliefs or convictions held by societies. In turn, it is these core-held values or shared meanings, as conceptualised by SCC that determine or influence how physical space is structured or used.
Henry Lefebvre describes his unitary theory of space as consisting of *physical*, *mental* and *social* space.[42] Lefebvre's concept of physical space relates to nature and the cosmos, whereas mental space "includes logical and formal abstractions". The third, social space, is that space characterised by "social practice", essentially how space is organised and used and how this, in turn, is dictated by implicit social codes.[43] Such social codes are established

[41] Post-modern thinkers especially have become critical of normalised models of space which involve a colonialist perception of space as existing from some form of "centre" that expands outwards to a border, edge or periphery. Instead, through anthropological studies especially, awareness is created that indigenous people interpreted space differently from how dominant scientific or colonial discourse tends to view space. Stewart, 2009, p. 41.
[42] Lefebvre's project is to approach space as a political practice, social system, division of labour and mode of production through a Marxist approach. Berquist, 2002c, p.19.
[43] Lefebvre, 1974 , pp. 11, 16.

within specific historic periods and the people living within these historic periods acquire the correct ways of how to act in appropriate ways within different spaces.[44]

Social space is thus produced by social practice (Lefebvre's *spatial practice*). In order to define a region or area, it first needs to be classified. Lefebvre refers to this as social production, Johnson as "the assumption of territorial awareness and shape". In other words, any space can only exist when it has collectively agreed upon boundaries (*representation of space*). Thus, there should be existing institutions in place that are capable of reproducing and maintaining them. "A region then becomes defined through a set of institutions that reproduce certain spatial conceptions and practices and maintain its understanding to the larger public. It takes shape through a set of smaller scale spaces establishing enough coherence to reproduce a certain type of space".[45]

However, Stewart claims that the definition of a space alone is not enough, as not all members or groups of a given society will accept this definition. Ideas of space and what constitutes space may also change, for various different reasons. What constitutes space and why or how notions of that space may change should also be communicated. This communication can take place in various ways. In order for a region or space to exist, it must be present in its inhabitant's regional consciousness; it has a conceptual or symbolic shape (such as "city" or "desert"). Secondly, a sphere of institutions must develop in order for it to be communicated. Thirdly, the maintenance of such a space needs to be controlled, which involves shaping or reshaping a space's meaning (*representational space*)[46].

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This process can be understood in what Sacks, Johnson and Lefebvre describe as the social production of space. This social production is also "reproduced, thus providing a territory that socialises people to understand space in the way it has been defined by their culture".[47] The importance of Lefebvre for this study is how it may aid in understanding categories of space in a historic sense. The importance of the history of space is highlighted, as well as the history of representations.[48] Because geographic space is essentially social, ideas of what a

[44] Lefebvre, 1991, p. 17.
[45] Johnson in Stewart, 2009, pp. 49-50.
[46] Stewart, 2009, pp. 50.
[47] Stewart, 2009, p. 52.
[48] Lefbvre, 1991, p. 42.

city is and means in different contexts for example, may change.[49] The historic background, or context within which Jerome wrote the *VH*, should thus be understood in order to understand the spatial categories within the text.

3.3.3 Edward Soja's *Third-Space*

Edward Soja, in his study of American Urban spaces,[50] builds on Lefebvre's work, but moves away from his Marxist approach and instead reinterprets Lefebvre's tripartite idea of space as *First-space* (geophysical realities as represented), *Second-space* (mapped realities as represented) and Third-space (lived reality as practiced). Third-space contains the implicit codes and symbolisms through which people live and construct their everyday reality. It is the conceptual space within which people are able to orientate themselves, based on their cultural beliefs regarding space.[51]

Soja especially emphasises the ability of *Third-space* to be used to study what he describes as "invisible spaces". These spaces are usually the marginal spaces that exist in between traditional spaces, such as city spaces and are thus often understudied. The reason for this is that such spaces were usually ignored by ancient people, "because their society obscured the existence of such locations through social practices of avoidance and ideologies of denial".[52]

One such space is that of the desert in ancient literature. The desert has certain connotations in the ancient world that make it a dangerous, hostile and uninhabitable space. Cultures or peoples associated with such spaces are also given connotations, such as being barbaric or uncivilised. But because such a space so often contain these characteristics, it is exactly these spaces that can be used to undermine constructed space or traditionally held views of space[53] and this is exactly what Christian writers attempt in the writing of ascetic texts through the practice of asceticism.

[49] Shields, 2004, p. 210.
[50] Soja. *Third-Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Spaces*. Oxford: Blackwell. 1996.
[51] Berquist, 2002c, p. 20.
[52] Berquist, 2002c, p. 23.
[53] Berquist, 2002c, p. 20.

Because *Third-space* in particular contains the implicit codes and symbols of culture, it is from this perspective that odd or marginal spaces can be studied.[54] Thus, the perception of the desert in AMW cultures and early Christian thought can be approached as a *Third-space.*

3.4 Into the Wilderness: the literary production of space

The relevance of the above discussion is to show that critical space can be used as a framework to become aware of how centripetal thinking can shape a text. However, it is desirable to distinguish between real space in the physical world and space as it is constructed in literature. In the following section I distinguish between the two concepts.

Literature can also be regarded as an institution that is effective in communicating space. Texts are literary products of their respective cultures and histories. An author is the product of his culture and space:

> In a text, space requires a fixed meaning that does not change in the same way social or cultural space changes. A text, however, does interact with the actual space of society insofar as the author is a product of that space. The author passes along those social codes that are embedded in space, but he or she may assume them and pass them on uncritically or critically engage them, challenge them, modifying them or rejecting them.[55]

The space found in literature can be seen as conceptualised space that reproduces the "social relations of spatial practice, but can also sometimes offer alternatives to them".[56] Literary space can thus interact with social space via the author's imagination and cultural understanding of space.

3.4.1 Narratology

Narratology is the study of the structure and function of a narrative. Through this view, any given text is made up of important elements that construct the world the reader is introduced

[54] Berquist, 2002c, p. 20.
[55] Stewart, 2009, p. 57.
[56] Stewart, 2009, p. 57.

to. They include plot, characters, time and space. There are also more than one method in which the story can be told. Different levels of narrative times also exist within the text, like narrative and narrated time.[57]

As noted by A. P. Brink, space as it is presented in literary texts has been understudied. On the contrary, he notes it is of importance to study the relationship between space and the story being told in a text and also the representation of space within a narrative. Desirably space in a text should also be approached as a *dimension* and not merely as an *element*. Indeed, actions that drive the plot happen in some form of space or other, whether it is implicitly referred to or explicitly described in the text.[58]

The space described or referred to within a text is also known as *narrated space*. There are various ways in which narrated space in a text can be constructed. To construct a space and also give a space meaning within a text, a specific space can be repeated often and associated with certain characters, actions and events. Spaces can also be described in such a way that they bear a certain atmosphere or connotation, or contain certain attributes. The characters may have a significant connection with a space, or associate a feeling with a space.[59]

Narrated space can thus be created through attaching value to certain spaces. If a space is observed in a certain way, why is it observed in this way and described thus? There can also be movement through space. Usually, a character stays in one space so that he / she becomes associated with it, or he / she is able to move from one space to another, interacting with each space or behaving differently within or towards each space. An action or catharsis in one space may compel a character to cross boundaries into another space. Different spaces in a text can also be contrasted with one another.[60]

A distinction can also be made between concrete and abstract space. Concrete space can be viewed in its most conventional sense, explains Brink. It can be a place or an environment, the description of a landscape, the inside of a house etc. Abstract space usually consists of conceptual spaces, such as the space of a season or a storm, or the space of circumstances of

[57] For an in-depth discussion on different aspects of literary texts, as well as important narratological studies done, see Brink's chapters, "Dagreis deur 'n Eeu" and "Die terreine van die verhaal", 1987.
[58] Brink, 1987, pp. 107-108.
[59] Brink, 1987, pp. 111-112.
[60] Brink, 1987, pp. 116-117.

poverty. Abstract space therefore takes on socio-cultural, ideological or philosophical dimensions. Such dimensions are usually connected to human experiences within a given space. Such information is usually activated within the text in a narrative way. Therefore, when a given space has a certain function, its symbols are planted, repeated and developed in the narrative in order to activate that space.[61]

Narrative space is seen as important for various different reasons. It provides not just the physical sphere within which characters move. It also provides the cultural, emotional and spiritual sphere which they travel through, where they either belong or are banished to or banished from. Through interaction with different spaces, characters can learn, grow, survive, make revelations, gain new knowledge, or become disillusioned. Thus space can play an active part in a character's development and the plot of the narrative. Space can also be argued to carry the ideological meaning of a text.[62]

In more structuralist interpretations of texts, space had been narratologically approached as an aspect of the text only, a neutral or objective setting with no subjective influence on the characters and no meaning on the levels of narrated and narrative time.[63] The reason for this is because of the persistence of theoretical frameworks that put more emphasis on narrated time than space in texts, which also strongly influenced literary studies.[64]

The world of ancient civilisations and societies in late antiquity is opened up through literary and archaeological sources. The study of the production of literary space is also important because it reveals the written perception of other cultures and the spaces associated with them. By focusing on ancient space, it unlocks the implicit codes by which ancient civilisations functioned and exposes the ways in which ancient peoples thought about their life-world. It is also argued to be an effective tool for exposing the hidden assumptions and ideologies that ancient writers had by presenting aspects of their own culture and other cultures in certain ways.

Prinsloo suggests that studies on Biblical space be conducted from both fields of narrative theory and social scientific studies as they manifest in the field of critical spatiality. Such

[61] Brink, 1987, p. 121.
[62] Van Eck, 1994 , p. 4.
[63] Prinsloo, 2013, p. 6.
[64] Van Eck, 1991, p. 3.

interpretive approaches should also be contextualised within the framework of pre-scientific or pre-modern worldviews[65]. Focus on abstract space also highlights its importance in a text, such as Ernst van Eck and Eric Stewart's study of Markan space in the NT[66].

3.4.2 Ideology

It has been suggested in Chapter Two of this study that one of the functions of hagiography is that as a literary medium, it gives authority to early Christian writers. They were able to use the genre to give weight to their own ideas of what asceticism, as a more serious form of Christianity, should entail. This was achieved through the use of rhetorical strategies and literary devices. Thus *vitae* can be seen as taking an ideological stance to asceticism.

Ernst van Eck explains this authorial style as the ideological stance of the writer. It is the ideological stance or gaze of the writer that informs his message. This is done in such a way that the audience that he writes to, because of their own life world, is able to understand his message.[67]

Van Eck suggests that the concept of ideology enforces a theoretical connection between social and literary theory, as literature becomes an expression of core-values or shared meaning. In applied narratology, ideology becomes a critical tool for connecting spatial conceptualisations as it "relates to extrinsic factors such as relations to history, social structures, institutions and cultural phenomena."[68]

In its most used form in the social sciences, Marxist interpretations of the term describe it as ideas of "false consciousness" as it relates to class structure (the political and cultural ideas of

[65] Prinsloo, 2013, pp. 2, 9.
[66] Van Eck, "Die funksie van Ruimte in die narratologie. *HTS* 42, 1986, pp. 339-349; E. Van Eck, "Galilea en Jerusalem as narratologiese ruimtes in die Markus-evangelie: 'n Kontinuering van die Lohmeyer-Lightfoot-Marxsen ketting". *HTS* 44, 1988, pp. 139-163; Van Eck, "Die ideologiese funksie van ruimte in die Markusvertelling: 'n Verkenning." *HTS* 47/4, 1991. pp. 1-24.
[67] In his study on the book of Mark for instance, Van Eck makes use of a multi-disciplinary approach by approaching Mark as a text first, consisting of spatial symbols such as the cities of Galilee and Jerusalem. Then, he makes use of social scientific criticism by which he conceptualises the book of Mark as a textual microcosm (whilst avoiding anachronism) of the larger first-century Mediterranean world, which provides the larger macro-sociological framework of the text. It is because of the link between these two approaches that he is able to interpret the ideological communication strategy of the narrator. Therefore, by using this perspective, the book of Mark can be read as what Van Eck calls a "social program" of that part of history and to understand the deeper tones of the text. 1995, introduction, p. 110.
[68] Van Eck, 1995, p. 33.

the ruling class are followed, because they have the means to power). In this sense, ideology always takes on a negative slant in social scientific approaches. It is a set of ideas or convictions used to propagate certain social ideals through which the ruling elite may be benefitted.

On the contrary, van Eck reiterates that ideology can also be approached as "a cognitive feature of all self-conscious groups and classes and their textual products."[69] On a narrative level, point of view or ideology can be seen as "... a network of themes and ideas that occur in a narrative as an "imagined" version of a specific reality ..." intended for an ideal or intended audience. [70] Thus Jerome is using an imagined idea of asceticism and communicating it to his intended audience in the *VH*.

The awareness of the ideology of a text is important for two reasons. Firstly, it plays a role in the author's relationship with his readers, or the voice or point of view from which the story is told. Secondly, it explains how ideology is used in a social scientific sense. Van Eck has argued that a narrow narratological study of texts illuminates the narrator's point of view in the story, but had not concerned itself with the values or norms that the narrator wishes to convey by telling a story. This world he is trying to convey is related to the relationship he has with the readers, for the value system or convictions and their meanings he is trying to convey, are interpreted and shared by his readers. In this sense, an ideological point of view can be understood as what the text is trying to communicate.[71]

A religious text especially, or a text containing religious themes, such as the *VH* can be approached as ideological. Hagiography describes the lives of holy men and woman and represents their lifestyle such as asceticism as an ideal: "The writer ... can persuade his readers to move cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally towards his specific understanding and as the strategy of the text."[72] Asceticism as spatial withdrawal focuses attention on the values attributed to space in the text.

[69] Elliot, cited by van Eck, 1995, p. 95.
[70] Van Eck, 1995, p. 111.
[71] Van Eck, see Chapter Three of this dissertation, section 3.3.5, "Situation and Strategy: The Concept of Ideology" 1995 p. 94-116.
[72] Peterson, cited by van Eck, 1995 p. 88.

3.5 The proposed application of SSC, Critical Spatial Theory and narratology to the *Vita Hilarionis*

Lefebvre's representational spaces are situated within their own historicity. When cultures or given societies hold shared views of space that stay more or less stable for long periods of time, they crystallise as categories of space, which act as larger frameworks that can inform the way a literary work is written. *Third-space* will be applied to approach what Soja sees as odd or "othered" spaces. In the *VH*, the desert is this marginal space and functions as a peripheral space used by Jerome to critique central spaces like the city in the text.

The method of critical space allows for the ideological undertones of a space to become visible. It is at the level of narrated space, that the ideology of the writer is exposed. Ideology can be read as a subtext, a cultural presupposition or world view that remain unexamined because it is assumed that this is the way things are. In this sense, the use of space can also be viewed as a type of subtext for a culture and can therefore not only be "read", but conclusions can also be drawn by how space is described within a given text. SSC in turn, allows for understanding why space functions or is described in this way, providing a framework of approach to core values or perceptions within a society that have remained stable over long periods of time.

By viewing space in the *vita* from a SSC and CS perspective, it can be argued that Jerome's VH have ideological underpinnings that are especially well-emphasised in his choice to represent certain spaces in the following ways:

1. In the desert, the ascetic is more capable of practicing holiness. It is the sphere he travels or flees to in order to define himself as an ascetic;
2. This is in contrast with pagan space or city space which are distracting, noisy and "mad";
3. This generalised view on both spaces is what creates a binary opposition in the text. The isolated space of the desert is in contrast with the populated space of the city;
4. This binary opposite however, is also challenged and changes in the progression of the narrative, as Hilarion becomes ambivalent towards his environments which he had very clear ideas about at first;

5. The ascetic crosses over from one space to the other, or uses other characters which can enter that space to bring moral and religious change to it. This is done through the religious appropriation of Roman space by Christian practice;
6. A new space with social and theological significance is introduced, namely that of monasticism;
7. Crossing of boundaries between two spaces are usually prompted by upheaval in the previous space.

The *Vita Hilarionis* consists of both concrete and abstract space. The text includes descriptions of geographical reality to orientate the reader, the description and inclusion of places, their names or geographical areas like the desert, mountains or seas. Then, there is abstract space which is described in certain value-giving ways in order for the reader to make a psychological association with the space in question. Thus, in the *Vita Hilarionis*, "the desert" is not only a geographical reality for Jerome or his desert saints, but also a "wilderness" or harsh environment, posing physical, mental and spiritual dangers. Awareness of this level is what best illustrates Jerome's ideological stances towards certain spaces. It is especially this second conceptualisation of space that this study is concerned with.

In order to be able to understand the above descriptions of space, key frameworks of thought that inform the way space is portrayed in the *VH* will be identified. These key frameworks are approached as the shared meaning of certain spaces that affect the portrayal of space in the text. The identification of these frameworks is based on their importance and persistence in ancient and late ancient models of thought concerning space. They include:

1. The concept of *Oikoumenē*, or the "world that is lived in";
2. The above concept's role in the demarcation of central and peripheral space in the ancient and late ancient world;
3. The conceptual framework of sacred and profane space;
4. City space as a central space;
5. Desert space as peripheral;
6. Space in Late Antiquity, which will include desert and monastic space.

Chapter Four will commence with a description of each of these conceptual spaces. They will be placed within their respective developmental cultural contexts, so that their significance can be illustrated. Chapter Five will follow with an analysis of the three spaces of choice in the *VH*, namely desert, city and monastic space. In Chapter Five the above frameworks will be used to show how space in the *VH* is described in similar ways to the above classical models of thought and how the descriptions also differ. The reasons for how they differ, or why they remain the same, will be offered.

Summary

It has been determined that there are not many adequate frameworks available for understanding space in an early Christian text. An overview has been given of available literature with attention given to the approaches of Merrills, Goehring and Weingarten. Respectively, they draw attention to how and why space can function in early Christian texts produced in the Late Ancient world.

SSC is offered as it views, together with CS, space as constructed. This is so because conceptual space informs or determines how physical space is organised. In turn, conceptual space rests on preconceived ideas about the world and can also be understood as shared meaning. It is desirable to draw a distinction between social and literary space for appropriate application of the chosen theoretical frameworks. Literary space is not always an accurate description of social space. As a condensed medium, such as hagiography, space functions as a metaphor or hyperbole. Still it plays an integral part in the telling of the story, as it creates the spheres within which characters move in and interact with.

Ideology can be used in literature by the writer to convince his audience of his point of view. This is especially true of religious literature, where the goals are to instruct and edify. One aspect of this ideological goal is the depiction of space. Desert, city and monastic space in the *VH* are described in certain ways and given certain value-laden meanings. When placed within its own context, certain proposed frameworks of thought become responsible for the ways in which space is described.

Chapter 4: Contextualising Ancient and Late Ancient Space

4.1 Introduction: The production of space in the Ancient and Late Ancient world

This chapter will explore the production of certain spaces which are found in the ancient and late ancient world. This is done in order to social scientifically explore desert, monastic and city space, by describing their context. An overview will be given of the origins and evolution of each space and how each space is "produced", to understand the spatial traditions within which Jerome wrote the text.

A discussion will be given on the perception of sacred and profane space, as it is religion, which has "grown from ancient forms of ritual designed to construct and manage a world of meaning for human life".[1] The conviction that a supernatural force gave divine order to the world plays a big role in the organisation of central and peripheral spaces. In turn, in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Near East, this conviction has also been responsible in many ways for the worldview of *Oikoumenē*, a Greek concept that means "known world", or the "world that is lived in". Henceforth use of the term Mediterranean in this study will also imply the then known world around the Mediterranean Sea, so as to avoid confusion. An explanation of these traditions will hopefully make an understanding of the differentiation between concepts such as desert and city more clear, and will also be used to explain why the distinction exists. How the distinction is maintained and if this relationship changes, and why, will also be discussed.

Conceptualisations of territory, geography as well as more abstract or symbolic conceptions of space such as sacred or profane space can be found in a vast array of ancient and late ancient literary sources.[2] Our earliest sources of what can be deemed geographic or scientific

[1] Wyatt, 2001, p. 28.
[2] In his exploration of ANE world views, Nicolas Wyatt approaches space and time as basic features of these world views. They include but are not limited to how architecture can be used to symbolise sacred space, the location of the self within these spaces, as well as the location or conceptualisation of the divine world. Wyatt, 2001, preface.

measurements or descriptions of earth can be found in Greek and ANE writings (which became the precursor for later Hebrew writings and the books of the Bible). These include descriptions of continents or the extent of *Oceanus* (the mythical ocean believed to surround all continents), as well as what can be deemed the early speculations on different peoples through human geography.

This chapter will draw from both the ANE worldview, as well as Greco-Roman worldviews, as both traditions can be seen as having influenced Christianity and Patristic writings.

4.1.1 Sacred and Profane Space

In the *Vita Hilarionis*, central spaces and peripheral spaces are described and imbued with differing characteristics. In order to understand why central and peripheral spaces held special significance in the ancient to late ancient world, their understanding must be placed within the context of what *sacred* and *profane* space meant to ancient cultures. The distinction between sacred and profane posits that they are firstly opposites. "Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane". This sacred reality is not part of the mundane or profane world.[3] This distinction permeates much of ancient thinking and rests on 1) how human beings relate to or perceive the manifestation of the divine and 2) the perceived role of the divine in spatial construction within which it manifests itself.

Mircea Eliade, when bringing out the specific characteristics of religious experience, takes religious practice in relation to space as a departure. Eliade discusses firstly how certain spaces are categorised as sacred by how they are perceived, which is as a sacred centre. A sacred centre is believed to provide the link between heaven and earth, or the link between the natural world and the divine world. It thus functions as an *axis mundi*, or universal pillar. It supports both heaven and earth and is fixed in the Underworld. This conception consists of a triad of three cosmic levels (heaven, earth and Underworld).[4]

This pillar is said to rest at the very centre of the universe, and thus the habitable world extends all around it. It is the manifestation of the sacred as central that "ontologically founds

[3] Eliade, 1957, p. 12.
[4] Eliade, 1957, pp. 37, 38.

the world", which means that all reality springs forth from this metaphorical sacred centre. This sacred centre needs a fixed point in order for it to be manifested in the world, and also for human beings to orientate themselves towards this fixed point or centre.[5] A sacred centre can then be seen as any point where the divine is said to manifest itself in the earthly realm.

The Greeks, for instance, believed themselves to be situated at the centre of the world, or inhabited the middle position of *Oikoumenē*. "Delphi was considered to be the exact middle of the earth". For this reason it was called the navel of the earth. "Greek maps also reinforced the idea of the Greek peninsula as the centre of the earth with Delphi as the centre of Hellas."[6] Romans shared similar ideas with the Greeks with regards to the relative centrality of their civilization, not only because of political reasons, but also because of the locations of its temples, an expression of the divine. Early Jews believed that Jerusalem formed this centre because of "the eschatological centrality of Israel, Jerusalem and the Jerusalem temple."[7]

This sacred centre is imitated by various natural phenomena, such as the primeval mountain or *omphalos* (navel) in Greek tradition or Mount Saphon in West-Semitic tradition. Human constructions, such as a temple, *ziggurat* or later also a church, more or less, imitates this centre and function as an *imago mundi* (representation of the cosmos)[8]. Because this centre is symbolically the centre of universal creation, it is also a space where one is close to or in the presence of the divine, for such spaces are usually the home of the gods, or where they sit enthroned. To stand in this centre, is to stand in the presence of the divine:

> The cosmic centre is reality, and is commonly represented by a mountain, either a local landmark, or even an artificial construction such as a temple platform. It is seen as the source of all benefits, and as a point of intersection of all dimensions of the world. It is the point of access to heaven, and the place at which benefit may be drawn up from the Underworld.[9]

[5] Eliade, 1957, pp. 21-22, 37.
[6] Stewart, 2009, p. 102.
[7] See Ezekiel 5:5, reference to Biblical verse in Stewart, together with examples of Greece, Rome's and Israel's ideological centrality. 2009, pp. 103-106.
[8] Wyatt, 2001, pp. 147-8.
[9] Wyatt, 2001, p. 147.

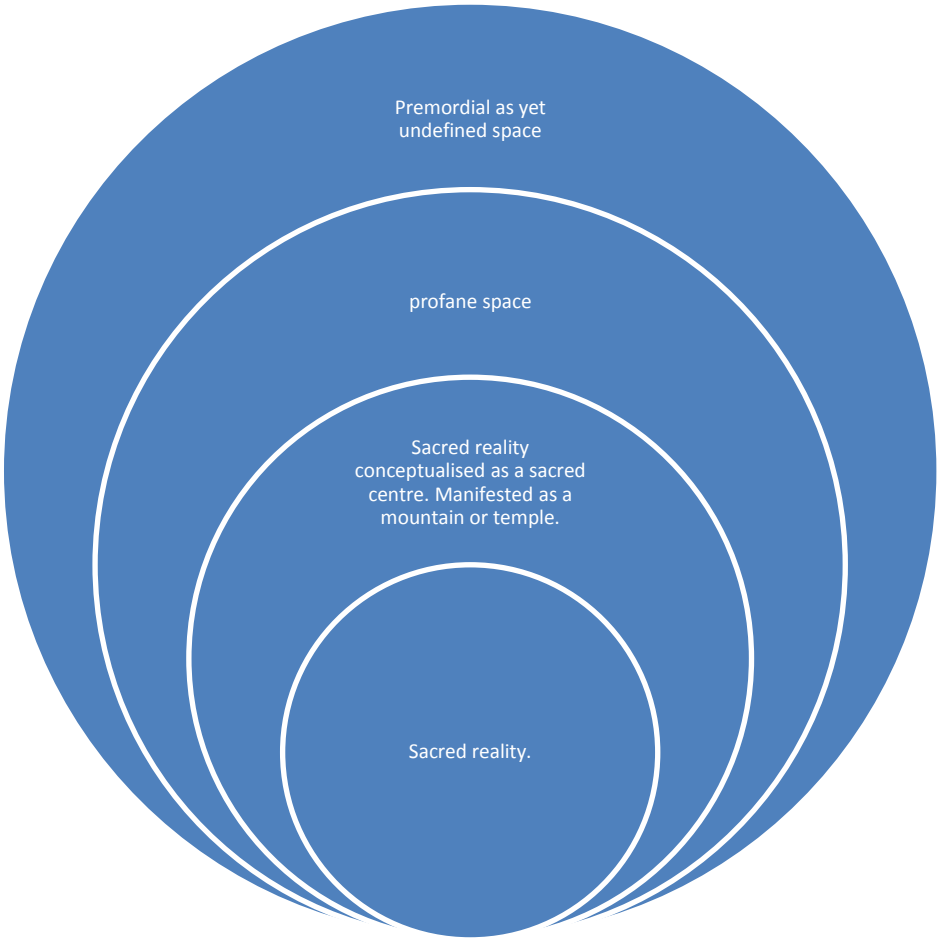

Diagram 1 – An Ancient spatial conception of the sacred, based on Mircea Eliade's description in *The Sacred and the Profane.*

Such spaces are defined by accessing it through clearly demarcated borders (prohibiting or regulating access) or ritualised behaviour. Thus we find a curtain that divides certain spaces in the temple of Jerusalem, or the Arc of the covenant being accessible only to priests. Even entering later church space requires certain modes of behaviour, such as piety or the washing of hands.[10]

Secondly, sacred space is also distinguished from all other spaces by its proposed function in the world, As a central space, it is the divine creative origin from which all profane life springs forth (as the seat of the gods). It also sustains and nourishes all aspects of profane life. All other life cannot exist without this divine presence. Through this divine presence, all life

[10] See, Eliade, ch 1, "Sacred Space and making the world Sacred" 1957, pp. 22-65.

also take their distinct shapes.[11] One example of this is the Creation myth in Genesis. Before creation, the earth is said to have consisted of a void, chaotic and with no form, but with divine intervention, the world is created:

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a vast waste, darkness covered the deep, and the spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water.[12]

In other ANE creation myths, pre-creationist descriptions refer to the cosmos as containing a fluid-like shape. Untouched by divine intervention it is a non-space. It is space as yet unorganized:

> If the end of the world is bound by the ever-flowing and fluid ocean, whose liquidity (always "becoming") symbolizes its lack of "being", its ontological opposite is the hard place, the cosmic mountain, at the centre of the world.[13]

The perception of what is sacred demarcates how space is organised. The construction or building of temples, for example, was meant to imitate not only the act of creation, but also serves as spaces between earth and heaven, where individuals could be closest to God. This means that sacred space has a fixed point or centre (the church or temple), to which all other ideas of space is oriented. The act of creation being imitated, starts at this central point and moves outward, giving all fluid or non-spaces its form.[14]

For ancient cultures, religious reality, or the sacred, is the only absolute real reality that existed. Living close to or at the centre, not only meant individuals were standing in the presence of divine, but proved that human beings were also in existence. "The sacred reveals absolute reality and at the same time makes orientation possible; hence it *founds the world* in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world.[15]

Another important aspect of sacred space is its role in what it means to be "civilised". Being of God's creation, or created by divine energy imbues humans themselves with aspects of the

[11] Eliade, 1957, pp. 28, 63-65.
[12] Gen. 1:1-2.
[13] Wyatt, 2001, p. 147.
[14] Eliade, 1957, p. 14.
[15] Eliade, 1957, p. 30.

sacred. It also justifies why humans can place themselves at the crown or centre of God's creation. Because God wields divine power and his creation is superior by virtue of being divine, it goes without saying that living beings will also be superior as part of that creation. When viewed through a cultural or political lens, ANE and AM civilizations thus viewed themselves as central to God's creation, both as central to his divine plan for the universe and also spatially central (residing in a city, oriented to a temple or sacred building at its centre). "'Our world' is holy because it is the place nearest to heaven, because from here, from our abode, it is possible to reach heaven."[16]

This self-definition plays a role in how foreign or hostile territory was perceived and how people associated with those territories were perceived. To be civilised was to stand and live in or in close proximity to the divine or sacred. This is symbolically expressed through temples as a ritualised and sacralised space. The city itself within which the temple or religious building is situated can also be sacralised.[17] The further one was to move away from this centre, the further one strayed from the sacred, or the presence of the divine, the further away one moved from the absolute reality that was creation. For outside this absolute reality, was as yet, an undefined and fluid chaotic non-space.

It is for this reason that Eliade asserts that an unknown, foreign territory - which also means "unoccupied by our people" - is still in a primordial sense, in a fluid state of chaos.[18] As much as space is then a cultural construct, it can also be viewed as a spiritual map. The temple is the middle-point or primary starting point of creation. It is the centre of creation of civilisation, but also where one can logically, when following this ancient model, be closest to God. God is the creator of order and the head of civilisation in this scheme. Holiness, as much as being civilising force, is also embodied in built structures, temples and churches, or the city. The city of Jerusalem for example, is a holy embodiment of paradise, or God's Kingdom.

Operating within a religious framework, humans build out from this centre and create their world enacting God or the gods' divine creation of the universe. Those spaces, which he has not yet built on or claimed for himself through spatial demarcation or organisation, which

[16] Eliade, 1957, pp. 39, 42.
[17] Eliade, 1957, pp. 39-40.
[18] Eliade, 1957, p. 31.

have essentially not been made habitable yet, are still in their primordial and fluid state. It would thus follow that such spaces are viewed negatively or at least with ambivalence, as they are essentially in a chaotic and primordial state of existence.

> "The religious need to... express a thirst for being is exemplified by the sanctification of the world (hence the building of churches, temples etc.). (Man's) terror of the chaos that surrounds his inhabited world, corresponds to his terror of nothingness. The unknown space that extends beyond his world – an uncosmosized because unsanctified space, a mere amorphous extent into which no orientation has yet been projected, and hence in which no structure has yet arisen – for religious man this represents absolute non-being. If, by some evil chance, he strays into it, he feels emptied of his ontic substance, as if he were dissolving into chaos, and finally dies."[19]

4.2 *Oikoumenē*: Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World

4.2.1 Centre

Oikoumenē, a Greek word, literally means "house", or the inhabited world. This concept is of interest because its definition relies on that which surrounds it, which is the uninhabited world.[20] In early Greek thought, this concept functioned on a physical geographical level and included any liveable land, where people were thought to dwell, or land that could nurture the development of human economies and where civilisations could thrive. Areas outside of this sphere, took on more primordial characteristics, such as the assumption that this inhabited world was surrounded by a primordial ocean called *Oceanus*. Early Greek interpretations of this included the idea of a tripartite set of continents (Europe, Africa and Asia). This spatial perspective became altered and systematically broader as Greek knowledge widened and travel expanded. The most notable expedition to have an influence on Greek conceptualisations of the world, were the conquests of Alexander the Great.[21]

In its turn, the Greek conceptualisation of *Oikoumenē* has influenced later Roman thought on the idea of a habitable world. More importantly, it has largely influenced how both Greeks and Romans perceived their world and their place within it. It has also had an influence on how they chose to represent this world and represent themselves as part of it:

[19] Eliade, 1957, p. 64.
[20] Stewart, 2009, pp. 62-63; Humphries, 2012, p. 89.
[21] Dilke, 1985, p. 29.

> ... (A)ncient peoples believed that the territorial region in which one lived defined their essence – their personality, their appearance, their constitution and their modes of community living. All of these elements of a peoples' make-up were determined by their geographical locale.[22]

Space can thus be seen as an extension of an individual's identity or a given culture's collective identity. Identity can thus be mapped or expressed in spatial terms.[23] One way of formulating a cultural or political identity, is to view one's culture or civilisation as spatially "central". Firstly, to be at this centre is to symbolically be in the cosmos or part of creation, God's creation and to be outside of it, is to be in chaos, or symbolically dead. Secondly, to be represented at the symbolic centre as cultured or civilised is also to be superior.

Oikoumenē has also undergone reinterpretations, even if its main idea has remained stable, namely that men can inhabit a space that is seen as central, relative to other or surrounding spaces. The "centre" of this world, the inhabited one, included firstly the largely Greek world surrounding the Aegean, and later, with the rise of Roman political and administrative power, shifted to Rome and Italy as the centre. With the rise of Christianity, this centre gradually shifted to the Holy Land and Jerusalem as a new theological centre. This conceptualisation of the East gained new significance again during the Middle Ages as well:

> It was during the Age of Discovery, a period during which the orientation of European thought changed entirely, both literally and figuratively. The very word "orientation" means "facing east", and the supplementary meaning that this term retains today, that is, "to get one's bearings", or to "understand one's place", made sense for medieval Europeans who derived their sense of place in the world relative to the Holy Land in the East and, in particular, Jerusalem.[24]

It is largely because of the location of the Mediterranean world, as well as the socio-political development of its key civilisations, that space has had geographical and cultural significance. *Oikoumenē* held significance to both Greeks and Romans specifically where it was related to "the extent of land in which it was possible (according to their knowledge and understanding), due to climactic conditions, for people to live.[25]

The survival and maintenance of the concept of *Oikoumenē* is thus largely dependent on ancient traditions of geography, as well as ancient geographers, mathematicians and

[22] Stewart, 2009, p. 62.
[23] Berquist, 2002, p. 24.
[24] Tally, 2013, p. 20.
[25] Stewart, 2009, p. 62.

philosophers' enquiries into the shape, composition and extent of the then known world.[26] In literary sources, for instance, we find descriptions of geographical space, areas, borders, and strips of land, speculative and ancient scientific descriptions of land and sea and the extent of the known world (based on travel)[27].

Other occupied spaces also had social significance for Greeks and Romans, because there are commentaries on the types of people or cultures found in or associated with these geographical locations, the nature of their civilisation, or lack of civilisation, in the mind of the writer.[28] In Jewish literature, for instance, there is not as much geographic concern with the nature or size of *Oikoumenē*, as there is with those who occupy it. Stewart suggests that the book of Genesis can be seen as the earliest Israelite "geography" of the world, as it concerns the occupation of land as well as why the Israelites were entitled to occupy certain areas of the then known world.[29]

Nonetheless, there are parallels in both AM and ANE cultures' ideas of the known world, which includes an interest in what it means for one's identity to occupy land. The survival of such spatial strategies is dependent on ideological and political concerns. Thus *Oikoumenē* also has a rhetorical and ideological function, apart from its pure geographical significance.

[26] Writers then did not make a distinction between purely scientific methods of writing about the world and, for instance, literature deemed traveller's tales. Stewart gives a helpful chronology of Greek thought and its evolution regarding writings of Ptolemy (also the most scientifically oriented), but also includes Josephus, Philo and Pliny. These writings include stances on size, stance and topography in the known ancient world, like the presumed distances between continents, the shape of the earth and the reach of *Oceanus* (the ocean). In his overview of Greek (and Roman) thought in ancient geography, Stewart raises an important question, namely that of the scientific purity of Greek geography. He notes that even if they were concerned with accurate measurement and distance, their geography was also social in nature. Their information was largely based on travellers' accounts of the world at large, which in turn, rested on those travellers' social significance they attached to certain peoples and certain regions. Such geographies were also limited largely to areas inhabited by humans. Stewart, 2009, p. 67.
[27] For examples, see Stewart, "Space in Ancient Texts", 2009, pp. 62 – 127.
[28] See Merrills, "Monks, Monsters, and Barbarians: Re-Defining the African Periphery in Late Antiquity", in *JECS*, (12) 2 pp. 217-244.
[29] Stewart, 2009, pp. 70 – 72.

4.2.2 Periphery

I have stated that part of *Oikoumenē*'s definition depends on its opposite. The inhabited world is seen as having borders and on these borders lie the periphery. Peripheral spaces can function in two ways. It indicates the borders of the whole known world, or peripheral spaces may be found within the *Oikoumenē*, as deserts, wildernesses or borders.[30] An important feature of *Oikoumenē* is the distinction that is made between spaces that are inhabited and thus also those that are not inhabited or sometimes, not habitable. "Outside of this known world, any activity leading to the generation and maintenance of human life was not possible, primarily due to excessive cold or heat.[31]

In literature, various strategies are used to express how the periphery is uninhabitable. Apart from descriptive texts, inhabitable spaces are sometimes symbolically linked to spheres of danger or death, because these areas were seen as being dangerous. An example is the Mediterranean Sea. In Greco-Roman tradition, this sea was a physical feature (a water mass) and held economic and cultural importance for trade and discovery for ancient cultures on the surrounding landmass. However, The Mediterranean also had ideological connotations, which are well illustrated in many early classical Greek narratives, such as Homer's *The Odyssey*.[32] Because of the uncertain and dangerous weather conditions on sea and the threat of piracy and its effect on ships, cargo and trade, the Mediterranean has an ongoing association with danger and is portrayed as a symbolic sphere of death in many literary traditions.[33]

In the Israelite tradition, desert-like spaces can be seen as fulfilling similar functions in literary works, such as the Israelites' journey through the desert in the Old Testament. The desert re-occurs in many later ascetic hagiographies. The desert, or similar spaces that are deemed inhospitable, is described as a wilderness, or as the opposite of what is seen as civilised. Usually it is also a space that is associated with death, because it is seen as unfit for human settlement. Travel into such spaces is dangerous not only because of weather conditions, but also because of the danger of brigands. Travel was also wearisome and roads

[30] Stewart, 2009, p. 149.
[31] Stewart, 2009, p. 62.
[32] Murray (transl.) *The Odyssey, English and Greek*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge Mass. 1995.
[33] Stewart, 2009, pp. 155, 159.

were built for armies. Policing also fell within city walls.[34] In literary tradition, desert space is thus associated with or personified as spheres of death, or seen as a space that is inhabited by demons both in Israelite tradition and in later Christian literature, such as can be found in the *VH*.[35]

These spheres, as the uninhabitable spaces of the known world, form the periphery of *Oikoumenē* and are always conceptualised as lying on the edge of the known world, or are seen as to surround or enclose it. Because they are seen as far away or unexplored, they are associated with that which is unknown. In many narratives, these spaces contain supernatural elements or beings. If early cartographers did not know what lay beyond the invisible unexplored part of the map, they would conceptualise it with the presence of dangerous forces, or forces unknown, usually mythical or supernatural.[36] In the gospels, there are references to demons inhabiting the desert.

Both ideas of centre and periphery as two underlying features of the concept of *Oikoumenē* are important to understand an early Christian text in more than one way. The Greeks and Romans defined themselves at the centre of spatial conceptualisations of the world. Because of this strategy, they also privileged their own spatial practices and "... judged all other civilisations by how their practices mimicked or differed from Greek and Roman practices."[37] Other races or civilisations were also judged based on the spaces they were associated with. To live in a city, or form part of a culture that sees itself at the "centre", which was the epitome of civilised life, was the exact opposite of a life in the "wilderness".

Ascetics, because of their choice of physical and social isolation, found themselves allocated to the same place as their barbaric counterparts in the wilderness by classical writers and historians. What groups of people did in the chaotic peripheral spaces they inhabited, which bordered the central spheres of civilisation, were comparatively used to show the honour and civility of people who lived at the centre.[38]

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[34] Stewart, 2009, p. 159.
[35] Stewart, 2009, p. 150.
[36] See, section, 'Homeric Influence on the discussion on the *Oikoumenē*', in Ch 3, "Space in Ancient Texts.", Stewart, 2009, p. 73. Another example of this perception is the symbol of the Sea Dragon that appears on later colonial maps. This can be seen as the later variant of the original Biblical Leviathan monster.
[37] Stewart, 2009, p. 61.
[38] Even Romans who lived in the countryside and not in the city, were sometimes demarcated to this stereotype by Roman writers. Stewart, 2009, p. 130.

The classical conception of both peripheral and central space creates an important backdrop against which writers like Jerome wrote about asceticism. Jerome was not only trained in the Classical world, but possibly, like many other Roman urbanites, afraid of the desert.[39] Older models of space are used by Jerome to employ the same kind of strategies, spatially, but also to subvert those same strategies. In this sense, the desert that surrounded inhabited areas in the *VH* can be seen as homologous to peripheral spaces such as the Underworld. A cursory reading of the *VH* at least, gives the impression of a wild untamed wilderness and Jerome goes to great lengths to describe it as such.[40] In the *VH*, one role that desert space thus fulfils is the role of a symbolic space of chaos or death, a space that the ascetic enters and also becomes associated with.

However, there are also examples of *Oikoumenē* and its opposite as functioning as a slightly more complex spatial category. Peripheral desert space can take on more nuanced meanings. The desert is, for instance, described by Roman commentators as "hard spaces", where civilisations could be challenged in order to grow and develop when they were forced to survive in harsh physical climates and environments. This was seen as beneficial for creating military training and discipline for armies, as well as fostering courageous cultures because they lived far from civilisation.[41] Such examples can also be found in OT literature, such as the book of Jonah, where the sea signifies the sphere of death, but also features as the instigator of Jonah's symbolic spiritual rebirth.[42] Thus the Mediterranean Sea is not only a space of danger, but a space where the danger can be overcome, or "conquered". I will elaborate on these alternative interpretations in the following section and use examples from the *VH* in Chapter Five of this study to illustrate this.

Oikoumenē is one useful category by which space can be approached. It aids in understanding how ancient people viewed their world and thus, also wrote about their world. This concept of how the world is ordered remained more or less stable since ancient people started conceptualising their world, whether verbally or visually, and influenced early Christian writers in LA.

[39] Cain, 2009, p. 23.
[40] Eliade, 1957, p. 43.
[41] Stewart, 2009, p. 106.
[42]See Prinsloo, "Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Theoretical Considerations and Practical Application with Reference to the Book of Jonah" in Prinsloo & Maier (eds.) *Constructions of Space V*. Bloomsbury: New York, 2013.

4.2.3 Being at the centre: City space

Because ANE and AM cultures conceived their world as the middle or centre, it follows that their territory, as far as it expands, will be an attempt to re-enact the cosmos, or centre of creation. This representation might be in the form of a whole country (Palestine), a city, (like Gaza), a village or hamlet, a house, or a sanctuary (such as a temple or church). An attempt to create order and civility, or a reflection of the divine order, is a representation of *imago mundi* (a reflection of the universe).[43] City space can be seen as one such attempt at creating this image.[44]

There are many ways to define what city meant to ancient cultures and this definition largely depended on the social and cultural context of the people who lived in them. Greek authors, for instance, used the words "village" and "city" interchangeably. *Polis* may also have referred to a whole Greek city-state or just an urban unit and its definition remained ambivalent to its descriptors. Strabo based the definition of a city on its "honour status". He defines a city as consisting of people who live together in a social arrangement that gains importance the more similar it is to that which is defined as civilised.[45] Thus there are differing conceptual ideas of what "city" could mean or entail.

The Neolithic revolution, which started its progression from the tenth millennium BCE, marks the slow transition from hunter-gatherer communities to agricultural sedentary societies. From these villages grew cities and from the territories that surrounded these villages grew kingdoms.[46] The temple, as the sphere to communicate with the gods, was located in the city.

Cities usually played an extractive economic role in its relationship to its surrounding region. Villages surrounding cities provided the food and goods to cities that was used by them. The elite would usually reside in the city and those who served them, also resided there. Only ten percent of the population, however, lived in ancient cities while the rest of the population lived in the surrounding villages. Despite the important role that these villages and their

[43] Eliade, 1957, p. 42.
[44] Jerome himself plays on the verbal similarity between *urbs* and *orbs*, noting on the metonymic similarity between city and empire in his commentary on Ezechiel. The city of Rome is sometimes likened to or symbolically represented as the whole of the Roman Empire. Nasrallah, 2010, p. 55.
[45] Stewart, 2009, p. 131.
[46] Wyatt, 2001, p. 26.

economic activities had in the flourishing of city life, they are underrepresented in Greek source material.[47] If any mention is made of them, they are usually described as ignorant or caricatured:

> Since almost every preserved description of ancient cities originates within a city, they tend to be overwhelmingly positive in their evaluation and estimation of cities and entirely lacking in their description of actual living conditions in the countryside.[48]

As a point of departure, *Oikoumenē*'s one aspect of "centrality" may be applied to understand city space in the ancient world. It has already been stated that this ancient world view promulgates how city space has been understood or defined, namely the placing of the city at the centre of conceptual maps of what can be seen as "civilisation". An ancient city was built following a lay-out or plan. It was also the seat of the leader or ruling class, as well as the seat of a pantheon or temple. It is a hub of cultural and economic trade. Thus the city is a physical and symbolic manifestation of everything that is ordered, civilised and refined.[49]

To return to Strabo, regarding his idea of honour status, the social arrangement of people that determine whether or not they live in a city, was evaluated by its cultural similarity to Rome. "Cultivation of the soil and adherence to Roman social customs mark "big villages" as "cities." In his discussion of Celtiberian territory, its inhabitants were seen as city dwellers because they lived on the shore of the Roman Sea ("our sea"). Their proximity to Roman social configurations "exercised a civilising influence on them". Those that then don't live up to this standard, are seen as "wild" and live in villages. Those who lived in a city, by contrast, had honour and were also known by their city of origin.[50]

When understood from Eliade's point of view, this credence of honour to city space is connected to the presence of a sacred building, manifested as a temple, or later church as a symbol of divine presence on earth. The larger image of the city becomes the symbol for a civilised space as it is spatially and ideologically closely connected to the divine. The conception of the role of the divine in the creation of space and how space is thus organised according to this idea has influenced how city space has been organised up until late

[47] Stewart, 2009, p. 130.
[48] Stewart, 2009, p. 130.
[49] Spieser, 2001, p. 14.
[50] Stewart, 2009 pp. 131-32.

antiquity. It is also connected to the presence of elites within certain city spaces and their visibility within and control of public spheres.[51]

The city, depending on the cultural context of both Roman and Greek understandings, is also one of the symbols of what could entail *Oikoumenē*, but at the same time, the inhabited world also stretched beyond city borders. The Romans were city lovers, or *philopolides*. The centrality of the Roman city had a close relationship with their conceptualisation of culture and civilisation. However, "the Romans took the city-state model, projected it across their empire, and used it to sustain a world-system".[52]

The *civitas* or *polis* was the standard organizational unit by which Rome defined its urban centres and included the surrounding area for which it was administratively responsible. To belong to such a centre incurred civic status onto a Roman citizen. The creation, maintenance and embellishment of its public buildings, arenas and the celebration of the urban aesthetic of the city meant that the Roman city could become a manifestation of Roman civilisation. Local elites, who paid for and was in charge of urban centres, thus ensured the shared maintenance of a shared set of Roman political and cultural values.[53]

In Jewish literature the city of Jerusalem, for instance, forms the middle-point in cosmic viewpoints. "To be in Jerusalem is to be in the centre, to experience peace and life; to be far from Jerusalem is to be on the periphery, in the realm of chaos and death".[54] The reason for Jerusalem's later symbolic importance in especially medieval Christianity and also its conceptual significance to Christians writing and practicing Christianity in LA, should be seen in the context of Rome's declining role as the centre of the empire. The empire was being Christianised, and with this Christianisation came an increasing focus on Jerusalem as a conceptual centre[55].

[51] Stewart 2009, p. 135.
[52] Loseby, 2012, p. 139.
[53] Loseby, 2012, pp. 139-155.
[54] Prinsloo, 2013, p. 10.
[55] "Constantine himself expended much patronage in endowing Jerusalem with church buildings that reflected its importance in the Christian worldview as the site of Christ's passion and resurrection, and this activity was to foster an upsurge in Holy Land pilgrimage." Humphries, 2009, p. 98.

Thus, the city had symbolic and ideological significance until into Late Antiquity, when it not necessarily declined, but changed socially in part due to Christianity and political and administrative changes[56].

4.2.4 At the edge of the world: Desert space

Oikoumenē was especially used by Greeks and Romans to refer to the extent to which it was possible for people to live in certain conditions, because of climate: "Outside of the *Oikoumenē*, activity leading to the generation and maintenance of human life was not possible, primarily due to excessive cold or heat."[57] It is also because of this reason, that these spheres are heightened to spheres of death and danger in literature. "The inhabited world was their whole world, while the surrounding unknown was understood as yet undefined, indeterminate space." This "other" world, as described by Eliade, is "a foreign, chaotic place, peopled by "ghosts", "demons", "foreigners" (who are assimilated to demons and the souls of the dead)." This is true for both Greco-Roman and Ancient Near Eastern conceptions of centripetal space.[58]

In Jewish tradition, as is evident in the Old Testament, the desert becomes the paradigm wherein the Israelites rebelled against God, thus a place of sterility and sin. This idea is strengthened by Egyptian religion, which saw the desert around the Nile as largely inhabited by Set, God of the Underworld in Egyptian religion and cosmology. However, the Hebrew or Jewish desert offers more examples of the desert as a place where the divine can also be experienced in different ways.

Peripheral spaces can also be seen as the sphere of wanderers. As early as the Old Testament, depending on the circumstances, wandering cultures rebelled against central spaces. They usually involve a rejection of social configurations or norms of centres of civilisation, such as Jerusalem temple leadership in early Jewish culture during the Second Temple Period.[59] Another example is that of Greek writers such as Tatian, Justin and Lucian. They were Greek philosophers or Sophists who came from the fringes of the Roman Empire. In their writings,

[56] Spieser, 2001, p. 14.
[57] Stewart, 2009, p. 62.
[58] Eliade, 1957, pp. 29, 41-42.
[59] Stewart, 2009, p. 129.

they were responding to the prestige of Greekness during the second-century Roman Empire and trying to come to terms with what it meant to be a philosopher or rhetor in the Roman Empire. Any person associated with barbarians or lacking clear ties to an empire or central civilisation, was interpreted as existing outside of central space.[60]

The Greek and Roman presentation of the world was with each of their respective civilisations in the centre, marginalising those who came from outside. Even physical territory, such as mountains, deserts and the wilderness was seen as the opposite of cities, as these were the honourable places to live. Therefore, "other" spaces that fall outside city or populated categories are defined in reference to or in opposition to the ancient notion of city space. [61]

This perspective of the desert as a place of death is not only symbolically potent, but realistic. At least, the inspiration for writing about these spaces in such a way stems from geographic fact. Proper and dense societies would not be able to flourish in conditions with scarce water and extreme temperatures, as well as the presence of wild animals and territorial conflict with foreign tribes. It is then no surprise that the Hebrew Bible depicts man as either "off-centre" in chaos and disorientation, or as man properly oriented in his world.[62]

4.3 Space in Late Antiquity

4.3.1 Shifting centres: City space

It has already been established that a city is context dependent, as far as understanding how its space is organised and that cities in the ancient world has evolved and taken on different forms. Late Ancient literature also gives examples of how city space is represented. In late antique Roman society, the city as a symbol of Roman civilisation was losing its ideological power, for various reasons.

As has already been discussed previously in the chapter, one of the reasons why the symbol of Greco-Roman cultural progression and civilisation was able to be used as such an effective

[60] Nasralla, 2010, p. 57.
[61] Stewart, 2009, p. 128.
[62] Prinsloo, 2013, p. 11.

ideological tool, is because Roman and Greek writers were able to, for a long time, subjectively write about their own culture in an unquestioned way. With the dawn of the new religion, Christianity, Christian writers used the Roman city's symbolic association with civilisation, centrality and Paganism to criticize this centre and in order to enhance ascetic practice.

Gradual change in perspective was not only due to the virtues and principles of Christianity that was causing its worshippers to practice religion and finding God in wholly different ways to that of old Pagan worship. The rise and spread of new forms of Christian power structures and new architectural designs caused the reinterpretation of how older spaces were to be used:

> Moreover, in the process of Christianisation, the new places invert the characteristics of the older ones: cemeteries became places to assemble; gold and the lavishly decorated internal space of the church, where man faces his God represented in the vault of the apse, took the place of the open space, *sub divo*, of antiquity.[63]

Alongside the reinterpretation of buildings within city space, there was also the development of a "Christian topography", or travel for the spiritual purposes. New Christian movements such as pilgrimage to holy sites and of course asceticism meant that the expression of holiness was not only limited to the city sphere or sacred buildings.[64]

In late antiquity, the transformation of the Roman city was also due to administrative reshaping of the Roman Empire. An important development that influenced this process was the centralisation of Roman imperial control. Rome was expanding its imperial power. For this to be effective, the whole Roman Empire had to reinvent itself spatially as a centre. Thus on local municipal level, the Roman city lost its appeal as an ideological centre. [65] Another reason had to do with wealth distribution within late antique Roman cities. Roman elites, who used to have local control over urban districts, did not see investment in upkeep of cities as rewarding anymore, due to administrative reshaping and shifts in imperial control over

[63] The architectural design of the inside of the church, for instance was supposed to form a structural parallel: "the man who is preoccupied with his soul, who scrutinizes his self, takes the place of the man whose body was inscribed in the world". Spieser, 2001, pp. 11-12.
[64] Stewart, 2009, p. 161.
[65] For an extensive explanation for the loss of appeal of the Roman city, see Loseby's exploration of the state of the Late Antique Roman city in the chapter "Mediterranean Cities", in *A Companion to Late Antiquity* Rousseau, (ed.) 2009, p.139 – 155. See also Spieser's explanation, "The city in Late Antiquity: a re-evaluation." 2001, p. 1-14.

different regions. At the same time, bishops became more and more involved in the upkeep and maintenance of especially Episcopal buildings.[66]

After the gradual decline of the Roman conceptualisation of slavery and the introduction of a new morality as inspired by the teachings of Christ, more emphasis was also put on the prevention of social decay and the upliftment of the poor. Emphasis on social renewal in the city also became a way for the new church to justify taxing. Money previously spent on the upkeep of Roman monuments for status enhancement as a proper Roman city, was now invested by bishops who were starting to wield a considerable amount of power within city spheres.[67]

The shaping of the antique Roman city because of larger imperial forces also determined how Christianity responded to this. Most Christian men in the Mediterranean world still received a classical Roman education. Areas on the periphery of the Roman frontier as well as the people associated with these spaces were still being used by writers in late antiquity to define Roman culture. A classical education, as well as a classical geographical worldview played an important part in how Jerome could continue the classical notion, even if he (and others) also breaks with it.[68]

Despite the social and structural changes that Roman cities were experiencing, Christian literature still used the concept of the city as a Roman centre in order to give commentary on it and further its own views. Stewart argues that when city space is described as negative, such as in the Gospel of Mark, it spatially underscores the ideology of the text. A spatial practice (Roman rule) is thus operative that is opposed to the new practice that Jesus introduces in the gospel.[69] When city space is presented negatively in the *Vita Hilarionis,* it is largely also because of its associations with places where Roman practices take place. Hilarion's hate of the circus and arena is explicitly mentioned in the prologue, as they are symbolic of Roman rule and certain structures of old Roman religion still functioning within the city spheres.

[66] Spieser, 2001, p. 13.
[67] Spieser, 2001 pp. 10, 13.
[68] Merrills, 2004, p. 226.
[69] Stewart, 2009, p. 185.

4.3.2 The new sacred centre: Church space

Similar to the cosmic mountain or temple, religious buildings in both Judaism and early Christianity became representations of celestial works of architecture. The temple, synagogue and church can be viewed as *imago mundi*, or the earthly reproduction of a transcendental model. The temple of Jerusalem (as well as the city itself) is one good example of this imitation. The Christian Basilica and cathedral is supposed to "take over and continue all such symbolisms." The church, much like its architectural predecessors, was conceived as imitating the Heavenly Jerusalem and "also reproduces Paradise or the celestial world".[70]

However, Christian conceptualisations of holy or sacred spaces differ somewhat from more ancient conceptualisations. R. A. Markus argues that Christian spaces only became holy quite late in antiquity and that early Christians had a problem with viewing places as inherently holy. Rather, it is reiterated that it is the body that becomes God's temple. Holy sites, such as the burial sites of martyrs or saints were usually sanctified in order to glorify a Christian past. The focus on the body in asceticism extends the idea of the individual's capability of becoming more holy, rather than being present in a holy space.[71]

The development of early church spaces in the expansion of Christianity can, in its primary stages, be seen as operating within the framework of a city. The building itself was a monumental building, adding to older traditional types, but not necessarily replacing them. People in power, such as bishops, wielded enough influence to be able to do their own building, both in the religious and secular spheres. *Ius civitatis* (right of citizenship) could now be obtained through the cult of the saints in the city. [72]

Church space in hagiography is still largely confined to those spaces deemed "central". The development of asceticism and the later more organised forms of monasticism paved the way for more fluid forms of Christian authority. In literature of Egyptian asceticism, the space of the church is seen as opposite to monastic or ascetic space, because they are seen to represent two distinct forms of Christian power. The bishop held bureaucratic power over the city,

[70] Eliade, 1957, pp. 58, 61.
[71] Markus, 1994, pp. 257-271.
[72] Spieser, 2001, pp. 7, 8.

whereas the monk held charismatic power over the desert. Because of the goals of the writer, the two spheres are rhetorically kept apart.[73]

Where church space is referred to in the *VH*, it is referred to as a symbolic space in order to illustrate where Hilarion's spiritual allegiance lies in the text's prologue. A second reference to the church where it is referred to in a symbolic way is when Hilarion draws the outlines of a church in the sand, after he converts Saracens in the desert.[74] In this sense, the church is used as a signifier of the expansion of Christianity into distant territories.

In the *VH*, the church is thus given new symbolic meaning. As representative of Christian practice, the church is viewed as occupying the wilderness. Asceticism can thus be seen as either breaking away from the church as a physical building and what it represents Episcopally, or continuing Christian forms of spirituality in new unconquered spaces in two new forms. Jerome continues the tradition of propagating Christianity as universal. God is not only at the centre of the universe or in sacred places. God is everywhere.

4.3.3 Paradise regained: Desert space

With the birth of Christianity, coupled with changing social and political circumstances that define much of late antiquity, increasingly more emphasis was placed on the desert as a new space for practicing holiness. Holiness became disassociated with a sacred space such as a temple or church. Secondly, with the reinterpretation of holiness within its ascetic understanding, it was now entirely possible for people themselves to become geographic or spiritual centres, instead of sacred spaces or buildings.[75]

It has been stated that there are examples in the Old Testament of people able to find God in the wilderness. Moses is ordered to take off his shoes, when he is called by God, because the ground he stands on is holy. (Exodus 3:5).[76] However, in this case it is not desert space itself that becomes sacred in this localised spot, but rather that Moses is in the presence of the

[73] See Goehring. "The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt." *JECS* 1993 (1) 3 pp. 281-296.
[74] *VH*, 25.
[75] Stewart, 2009, pp. 171-173.
[76] Eliade, 1957, p. 20.

divine. God speaks to his people in this space, where He recalls the wandering Israel to renew his love (Hosea). Elija is said to hear "the voice of God speak to him in the quiet breeze (1 Kings 19:12)[77] In the New Testament, when Jesus withdraws into the desert, it is in order to fast and to spiritually reconnect to the divine after dealing with the many crowds that gathered around him and also confront the Devil, by whom He is also tempted, like Israel was.

In Late Antiquity, with the new church gaining administrative and bureaucratic power, desert ascetics were the first to traverse the desert to experience new and perhaps more simpler, but serious forms of holiness[78]. This brought new experiences of the desert and caused a shift of emphasis in awareness of a space and many deemed their journeys worthy to write about. The wilderness also provided a way of avoiding Roman authorities, tax evasion and fleeing persecution.[79] Thus a new paradigm of thought is introduced and examples can be found in ascetic literature, such as the *vitae*.

J. A. McGuckin notes that it was largely with the dawn of the ascetic tradition in the later fourth century, when the movement flourished in Egypt, Syria and Palestine, that the desert "... became a symbol for paradise regained."[80] Athanasius saw the monastic life as a *mimesis* of the gospel and the desert became the ascetic space where the struggle for the Lord could be imitated (and articulated). Ascetic practice in real life also found its own expression in literature. In Jerome's *Vita Pauli*, for example, the desert is an ideal place of quiet romance (*otium*), "where the affairs of the heart and soul could flourish... and where empty wilderness had become new the civilisation of ascetics." It is this image specifically, McGuckin also argues, that becomes an especially potent and popular symbol in later Christian rhetoric and art.[81]

More importantly also, is the shift from the obsession with the terrestrial habitation of the Holy Land in earlier Old Testament Jewish literature, to early Christian conceptions with a

[77] McGuckin, 2005, p. 99.
[78] Jerome claims he wrote the *Vita Malchi* so that he could prepare to write a larger history of the church. In the prologue of the *Vita Malchi*, Jerome mentions the spiritual decline of the church which came with the increase of power and riches.
[79] Clarke, 1999, pp. 23-24.
[80] McGuckin, 2005, p. 99.
[81] McGuckin, 2005, p. 99.

more spiritual or celestial concept of the holy land.[82] After the shift in the fourth century following Constantine, salvation was not found in the conceptualisation of the holy city of Jerusalem or the religious structures of the church, according to hagiographic literature. Rather the ascetic in desert literature shifts his attention to his body and his own soul. Holiness becomes an integral part of the subject, where its meaning can be understood, meditated upon, but most importantly, *experienced* through ritualised practice in an extreme environment. Emaciation of the physical body for the survival of the soul is achieved through strict discipline and trusting God completely, the angst of existential meaning worked out in a desert-like wilderness that becomes a space of growth for ascetics.

Wastelands such as marshlands and deserts are portrayed in the *vitae* as peripheral spaces, the traditionally untraveled and largely dangerous spaces where not only vagabonds such as robbers roam, but also monsters such as demons and fabled creatures.[83] The distinction between city/ town as populated by humans and therefore civilised and the country/desert as uninhabitable and uncivilised (where only barbaric races roam,)[84] is present in the *vitae*. It is the colonising power of the ascetic that is seen as having a civilising influence on the savage desert that becomes prevalent in early Christian ascetic literature.[85]

In early Christian texts, it is also demons[86] that come to inhabit deserts, together with more fabled creatures such as the hippocentaur in the *Vita Pauli*[87]. There is also a strong presence of the same symbolism in the VH, as Hilarion is tormented by visions of the Roman circus, interspersed by visions of demons.[88]

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[82] Weingarten, 2009, p. 7.
[83] See *VP*.
[84] See *VM*.
[85] Leyerle, 2005, p. 161.
[86] Demons come to inhabit not only the desert, but also fringe places such as borders, cities, and people. To understand why demons are placed within certain literary spaces, their political significance and not just their religious significance should be taken into consideration. David E. Aune argues that, for instance, in the gospel of Mark, demons may present the Roman legion and are literally "driven into the sea by Jesus". In turn this is argued to be reflecting a larger desire of the Jews to drive away the Romans from the land they occupied. Emphasis here is on Jesus who is in control of the space he occupies, to such an extent that he even occupies space ruled by Romans and Roman Law. Aune, cited by Stewart, 2009, p. 183.
[87] Jerome's mythological creatures are viewed with more ambivalence than demons. In fact, sometimes they are even viewed positively and act as guides to the saints on their journeys. This may have been influenced by Jerome's great love that he bore for the classical works and illustrates the extent to which he was influenced by them. Patricia Cox Miller's study is of worth here, She focuses on Jerome's centaur in the *Vita Pauli* as what she calls a "hyper-icon" of the desert. The presence of a Pagan symbol of the centaur in an early Christian text serves to further illustrate Jerome's ambivalent view of the desert. Cox Miller, "Jerome's Centaur: A Hyper-Icon of the Desert", *JECS* 1996 (4.2), pp. 209-233.
[88] *VH* chapters 6 – 8.

The Early Christian notion of the desert is imbued with geographical fact (real space) and also spiritual meaning (abstract space). Thus it can be argued that the desert represents a new type of reality for Christians, in terms of the socio-political context of the fourth century. The classical notions of the desert as a peripheral space are reinterpreted as a new liminal space. This new "liminal" reality (from the Latin word *limen*, which literally means threshold) presented by the desert, describes the new state of mind that ascetics themselves came to occupy in the desert, as they were represented in early Christian texts.

In Christian ascetic texts, we find the expansion of God's creation or divine power into the chaotic realms of the primordial, or rather, the realm of Satan, as it is now vividly described in Christian terms.[89] Christian identity not only rested on practicing faith in the Episcopal spaces of the church, but rather a radical new embodiment of faith strengthened and disciplined in the extreme desert. This is expressed through the movements of asceticism and monasticism as different spatial expressions of the same religion. "Travel involved leaving the safety of civilised regions to pass through dangerous peoples and places such as frontiers, wilderness areas and mountains." By such means, people themselves could serve as what Stewart calls geographical centres. Ascetics and monks, through travel, could bring healing and teaching to others who in return, like pilgrims, could flock to them. More importantly, as geographic centres, people could also present challenges to other types of fixed centres.[90]

Jerome specifically, both in his letters and his three *vitae*, "constructed the desert as a landscape intended to provide a compelling statement of his own view of asceticism as the highest form of Christian life."[91] Thus, desert space can be employed in rhetorical or ideological ways to help reiterate the theological messages of early Christian writers.

4.3.4 The "ideal human being": Monastic space

Monasticism can be better understood by approaching it in terms of the rise of the "holy "man", or monastic history as the institutionalisation of charisma.[92] The movement rests on

[89] Ghoering, 1993, p. 283.
[90] Stewart, 2009, p. 129.
[91] Cox Miller, 1996, p. 214.
[92] Caner is referring to Peter Brown's essay entitled "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", which explores the holy man within a larger social matrix. 2012, p. 591.

the same principles as that of asceticism, and can be described as a more organised and socially interactive form of asceticism[93]. John Cassian, in his study of Egyptian monasticism made a distinction between *coenobites* and *anchorites*. Coenobites lived together in a community under the rule of an elder, which took the apostolic community in Jerusalem as its inspiration. They still lived in seclusion, or outside towns and villages. Anchorites or ascetics usually retreated into the deeper desert alone after having received training with an elder at a *coenobium*.[94]

Spatially, Roman commentaries designate monastic (and ascetic practice) with strange behaviour and "otherworldliness", as their practitioners exist on the peripheries of Roman society and even outside the traditional or Episcopal church structure. But it is this very difference, enhanced and propagated later by early Christian writers Caner argues, that is supposed to set monks apart from other men.[95]

Caner argues that the motivation for the development of Christian monasteries follows from the earlier Greek idea that gave birth to the polis, philosophical schools or communities: the ideal circumstances (or *politeia*) in order to foster the "ideal human being". What makes this specific movement different within its Christian context is that its goal is to define this transformed human being against the "norms of the world". Spatially, monasteries were supposed to produce perfect citizens of heaven, but living on earth.[96] Emphasis is also put on material and sexual renunciation and that attainment would rather come from self-denial.[97]

In the Christian literary tradition, monasteries had first been founded in the fourth century, purportedly by Antony in Egypt, who had also been the supposed originator of asceticism. Despite this evidence, it is suggested by Caner that monasticism be seen as a wide-spread phenomenon that had no clear organization or direction and that monks became more

[93] For the spatial lay-out and rules of a fourth century monastery, see Leyton revelatory study of Shernoute's monastery. Layton analyses the manuscript of a monk called Shernoute, which gives an intimate depiction of the lay-out, social organisation and rules of an Egyptian monastery in the fourth century. He argues that the movement of monasticism has become normalised at this point and thus the manuscript, part of his *Canons*, represents a typical monastery in fourth century Egypt. Layton, "Rules, Patterns and the Exercise of Power in Shernoute's Monastery: The Problem of World Replacement and Identity Maintenance", *JECS*, 15 (1), 2007, pp. 45 – 73.
[94] Caner, 2012, p. 590.
[95] Caner 2012, p. 588.
[96] The term "perfect citizens of heaven", is referred to in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*. Russel, N. (transl.) 1981.
[97] Caner, 2012, pp. 589, 592.

prominent and visible after Constantine's conversion when the thread of persecution had passed.[98]

Spatially, Gleason argues that monastic social relationships were maintained through four social relations in monasteries: visitation by monks and *abbas* (fathers) from one monastery to another, the spread of news (which promoted shared meaning amongst monks) and the regulation of both erring aspirants (new monks) and regulation of one father of another through visitation of different monasteries. The focus of this exploration is that of gossip amongst monks. Even if the act of gossip is warned against in Christian practice, it is conversely its practice amongst monks that allows for shared meaning and social cohesion.[99] During Hilarion's travels as a monk, he visits different monasteries, commenting on the behaviour of different monks. Yet again monastic space is used to promote the ideal virtues of behaviour of a monk or holy man. This will be further explored in Chapter Five of this study.

The motivation, similar to asceticism, is that of a "spirit of repentance" and/ or "self-sanctification" with emphasis on not being of the world. It had only in the fourth to fifth centuries gained promoters and defenders, such as Jerome, who wrote about it in an attempt to give their own interpretation of the movement. These writings included the various descriptions and instructions on the monastic life, the different types of monks to be found in monasteries, the lay-out and design of monastic buildings, their organisation and higher spiritual goals.[100]

> It was out of this diverse and experimental background that monasticism evolved into a distinct professional order (*taxis*), gradually becoming recognizable as such in the late fourth and early fifth centuries through the propagation of certain common assumptions, expectations and goals. This happened unevenly from region to region, mostly by word of mouth, as disciples sought out experienced teachers or made up their own rules to follow, adapting Old and New Testament precedents.[101]

As ascetics, monks were "othered" and were seen as to be distinctly different: "They wore different clothing, ate different foods, they *acted* differently." Thus, monks and the spaces

[98] Caner, 2012, pp. 590, 593.
[99] Gleason, pp. 501-521.
[100] Caner, 2012, pp. 589-590.
[101] Caner, 2012, p. 593.

they occupied were also seen as peripheral. But it is also, conversely, this difference that give communities of monks prestige and power in late antiquity. “It is not so much their physical withdrawal and austerity that sets them apart, but rather also a life of commitment to the acquisition and demonstration of an “other-worldly” humility”.[102]

Caner notes that the context for this development must also be taken into consideration. In a society where hierarchy was extreme and positions of power were tightly controlled, it was more difficult to expect to receive service from societal institutions in the Roman world of slave-master relationships and highly social stratification. Thus monasticism, with its basis of servitude towards fellow-man and absolute humility in the act of doing so proved more accessible to people who desired help and comfort.[103]

In the *VH*, Hilarion is said to be the originator of monasticism in Palestine, which has Hilarion’s own asceticism as a precursor. Hilarion attracts people and other monks to him as his fame spreads as a result of his miracles, which he is able to start performing during his stay in the desert. Hilarion first lived with Antony with whom he also received his training before setting off to the desert himself.

Summary

Social scientific criticism in combination with critical space was used to create better understanding categories of ancient space. This plays a role in the construction and representation of space within the text. The first of these was sacred and profane space, the second, that of *Oikoumenē*. *Oikoumenē* can be said to form a relatively stable core value or perception that stems from ancient Greek thought up to Late Antiquity and beyond. It has had a very lasting effect on how cultures have viewed themselves and also viewed other surrounding cultures.

The main idea that underlies the concept of *Oikoumenē*, is that in imagining the world visually through conceptual maps or written texts, civilizations tend to put themselves at the centre. The conceptual idea of “the centre” has resulted in the attachment of positive

[102] Caner, 2012, p. 589.
[103] Caner, 2012, pp. 599-600.

connotations to groups or cultures that are denoted a place of honour when they are located in this sphere. This was done by classical writers, historians and geographers. All other cultures are placed within a peripheral sphere that is described as forming the borders of these central spaces. This concept also creates understanding of how civilisations used the existence of other cultures to define themselves. This perception can be seen as a core value that has persisted in the AMW and ANE.

Included within and also influenced by this dominating frame of thought, are frames of thought revolving around the city and the area surrounding a city, usually uninhabited. Generalisations of occupation of city space and what types of people are said to occupy city space, have resulted, sometimes inaccurately but persistently, in a binary opposition between city and non-city spaces. Examples of this opposition can be found in many classical texts as well as *vitae*, where the city is juxtaposed with the desert or wilderness. Thus shared meanings regarding the city and the desert influence how they are represented in literature and art.

The construction of church space also shares similarities with the idea of sacred space as central. Thus, churches were found in the cities in early Christianity, where bishops could wield their Episcopal power. With the development of asceticism, its unique virtues created the need for isolated sphere where holiness and a stricter life could be practiced. Thus asceticism became to be practised in the surrounding desert. Monasticism developed from asceticism and was more organised and socially interactive. The otherworldliness of its practitioners made them recognisable to the outside world and became the reason for the status that monks enjoyed in the later fourth to fifth centuries.

The next and last chapter of this dissertation will contain a qualitative analysis of instances of how desert, city and monastic space are described within the *Vita Hilarionis*. This will be done against the backdrop of the ancient frameworks of thought on space that was identified above. How they correlate or differ will be pointed out.

Chapter 5 – Analysis: Representations of space in Jerome's *Vita Hilarionis*

Introduction

This chapter will be divided according to the three chosen categories of space as they appear in the *Vita Hilarionis*. They will include desert space, city space and monastic space. An exposition will be given of the structure and layout of the text. Then I will approach each space in the following way: I will give examples and briefly discuss the themes to be found in Jerome's spatial descriptions. I will make reference to certain events, rituals and actions within these spaces. I will aim to explain their descriptions and function using the proposed models in chapters three and four in order to understand them.

Despite dividing the text into these categories, I wish to emphasise that they are not the only ones present in the text and it is not the purpose of this study to explore space in the *Vita Hilarionis* in its entirety. Instead, through focusing on what I deem to be the "main" spaces in the text, I hope to show how theories of spatiality, awareness of history and knowledge of asceticism help us understand the spatial dimensions and movements within the text and how this underlies or alters ideas of spiritual identity in fourth century Christianity. Jerome's identity construction of Hilarion can be explained or illuminated by mapping of his movement in this early Christian text. In the linear narrative of the text, the focal point that brings all of these different spaces in dynamic interplay is Hilarion as traveller and ascetic.

5.1 The structure of the *Vita Hilarionis*

The *Vita Hilarionis* consists of 47 chapters. It is argued to have been the last one written by him and also the most complex. It consists of a prologue that sets out the themes and purpose of the *vita*. Chapter 2 gives a short description of Hilarion's upbringing and hometown, as well as his later education. Some of his character traits are described as a young man growing

up. Chapters 3-13 describe his sojourn in the desert, chapters 14 to 23 his miracles.[1], chapters 24 to 29 his time spent with monks and his growing fame (which is a result of his ability to do miracles), chapters 30 to 46 an amalgamation of his journey back into the desert, nature wonders and exorcisms as well as a stricter return to asceticism. Chapter 47 ends with the epilogue.

Table 1 Structural and Spatial lay-out of the *Vita Hilarionis*:

Prologue: Purpose and themes		
Chapter number:	**Space being occupied:**	**Actions within Space:**
2	Thabata, 5 miles south of Gaza, Palestine; Alexandria	Upbringing Education
3 - 13	Egyptian Desert;	Visits Antony
	Conversion to Asceticism, entrance into desert	
	"wilderness" that stretches seven miles to the left of Majoma, a port of Gaza;	Takes up asceticism and lives there for twenty two years. Is known in many Palestinian cities;
	First miracle, results in growing fame	
14 - 23	Unclear. Although, it is mentioned that there are now monks living with him. The home towns or cities of the afflicted that he helps are all mentioned;	Performs numerous miracles, which results in Hilarion's fame growing far and wide;
24 - 29	Other monks follow his example. A vast number of monasteries are established throughout Palestine and many monks flock to Hilarion	
	Desert of Cades: Elusa ("Semi-barbarous" Saracen	Visits monasteries to lead by example; Converts Saracens to Christ;

[1] White suggests that the *VH* might be the first example of a Saint's life in which the miracles performed by the monk provide the narrative material. Many other hagiographies, such as the *Life of Martin* and *Life of Benedict* would later follow the same structure. White, 1998, p. 88.

	town);	
29	Unclear, but somewhere in Palestine;	Head of a grand monastery with a multitude of brethren;
	Grows disillusioned with monastic life and starts to feel like a prisoner	
30	Monks and other devotees refuse to let him go. He fasts until he is released.	
	Sets off to Betilium	Accompanied by a multitude; chooses 40 monks who are capable of travel during fasting time after sunset;
	Lychnos	Visits monks who are living here;
	Castle of Theubatus	Visits Dracontius, bishop and confessor, living in exile here.
	Babylon	Visits Philo the Bishop, also a confessor;
	Town of Aphroditon	Meets with deacon Baisanes and takes dromedary to Antony's resting place alone.
31	Antony's abode and tomb: a high rocky mountain oasis	Hilarion stays here to practice asceticism in his mentor's abode, visits tomb. Stay here implies his motivation for a stricter return to asceticism
32 - 46	Stays in neighbouring desert;	Practices strictest asceticism yet; performs first nature miracle by making it rain;
	Goes to monks in Bruchium, close to Alexandria. Wishes to avoid city itself. Intends to go to the farther oasis of the desert from there;	The destruction of Hilarion's monastery by Roman authorities in Palestine is mentioned. A petition is put out for his death. (under Julian's reign)
	Travels East;	Does not go into desert to flee, but

		rather to hide from followers and devotees. Despises his fame. Julian is slain and a Christian emperor commences his reign. Hilarion refuses to return to his monastery;
	Travels to Pachomium, city on the coast of Libya Takes ship to Sicily Flees to interior of Sicily, fearing he might become known;	Casts demon out on ship; Does miracle which results in his whereabouts becoming known; Multitudes flock to him;
38	Desires to go to barbarous races where his name might not be known	
39 - 40	Epidaurus, Dalmatia	Rids area of massive snake and prohibits a flood from washing over town. Once again he becomes known and grieves for this;
41	Escapes secretly to Cyprus, lives in obscurity about two miles from Paphos; Retires to the higher interior of the island, similar to Antony's abode;	Location is revealed by demons; Stays for two years however and performs more miracles; Retires here for eighteen years;
45	Prepares himself for death and dies. Body is buried there.	
46	Body is stolen by a fellow monk and displayed in Majuma;	
47	Dispute between people of Palestine and Cyprus over Hilarion's body and the symbolism of his presence in both spaces.	

5.2 Desert space in the *Vita Hilarionis*: Chapters 3-13

I will focus on three themes in the desert section of the *Vita Hilarionis*: the desert as a negative peripheral space, the desert as a space of spiritual transformation and the desert as preparation for other spaces.

5.2.1 Into the wilderness: The desert as periphery

In Chapter Three of the study it was established that civilised space is associated with safety and order, and uncivilised space with danger and also uncivilised races in ancient literary traditions. It was indicated that this is so because what is defined as civilised or barbaric, is a cultural construct that featured prominently in ancient Greco-Roman thinking. Such thinking was also applied to geographical mapping and the construction of space in the ancient world, in the form of *Oikoumenē*. It was also established that literature gives evidence of these constructions or imagined worlds. Jerome too makes use of a stereotypical model in order to introduce his desert space, sometimes with hyperboles:

> (H)e found pleasure in the vast and terrible wilderness, with the sea on the one side and the marshland on the other.[2]

The wilderness or solitude [*solitudinem*] (which is described as lying seven miles left of Majoma, the port of Gaza, on the coast of Egypt) is described as a geographical or physical wilderness and also as a place of physical danger. This is emphasised by references to its extreme climate, such as the heat during the day and the cold during the night.[3] More importantly there are also descriptions of the effect this extreme climate has on the saint's body, as well as his mental state.

The saint is also warned of robbery and blood in that part of Gaza. It is said to have an unsavoury reputation because of these practises in that region. Cast-outs or trouble makers are also to be found in this space, especially those associated with being responsible for creating chaos or disorder through such practises:

[2] *VH* 4, *inter mare et paludem, vasta et terribili solitudine fruebatur*.
[3] *VH* 4.

> And although the locality had a record of robbery and of blood, and his relatives and friends warned him of the danger he was incurring, he despised death that he might escape death.[4]
>
> And because the district was notorious for brigandage, it was his practice never to abide long in the same place.[5]

In chapter 12, Hilarion is discovered by robbers, who want to steal from him.

The physical dangers of the desert are similar to descriptions in classical texts of peripheral spaces. When Jerome describes the small hut he builds to protect himself against the elements, its size and state is likened to that of a tomb, which strengthens the idea of an Underworld-like space. The desert is equated to the sphere of death:

> Afterwards he built himself a small cell which remains to the present day, five feet in height, that is less than his own height, and only a little more in length. One might suppose it a tomb rather than a house.[6]

The desert is also posited as a place of mental danger, since the Devil now tries to attack Hilarion by "instilling lustful thoughts in his mind", which he overcomes by starving himself, so that "he will think more of food than wantonness". The development of the saint's character moves here to the testing of his mental strength. Hilarion responds to this by the emaciation of his body:

> "Ass!" he exclaimed, "I'll stop your kicking, I will not feed you with barley, but with chaff. I will weaken you with hunger and thirst, I will laden you with heavy burdens, I will drive you through heat and cold, that you may think more of food than wantonness.[7]

Patricia Cox Miller argues that Jerome transforms the physical desert into a "torrid landscape of the suffering ascetic's psyche":

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[4] *VH*, 3, *Cumque essent cruenta latrociniis loca, et propinqui amicique eius imminens periculum denuntiarent, contempsit mortem, ut mortem evaderet.*
[5] *VH* 4, *Et quia regio latrociniis infamis erat, nunquam in eodem loco habitare consueverat.*
[6] *VH* 9, *Exstructa deinceps brevi cellula, quae usque hodie permanet, altitudine pedum quinque, hoc est statura sua humiliore, porro longitudine paulo ampliore, quam eius corpusculum patiebatur,* ***ut sepulcrum potius quam domum crederes.***
[7] *VH* 5, *'Ergo,' inquit, 'aselle, faciam, ut non calcitres: nec te hordeo alam, sed paleis. Fame te conficiam et siti: gravi onerabo pondere; per aestus indagabo et frigora, ut cibum potius quam lasciviam cogites.*

> Clearly this landscape offered Jerome no consolation for his mortality but rather searing judgment; the "raw matter" of the desert has become a negative embodiment of psychic torment, a landscape eerily conscious of human desire.[8]

Because of the extreme circumstances he is experiencing, his spirit dwindles and a description is then given of Hilarion's various ascetic practices, which he makes use of to keep his spirit strong. This includes permitting himself to eat certain foods, such as herbs and figs (after sunset), fasting and hoeing the ground.[9]

In chapter 6, a description is used of night-time in the desert, and this is also related to Hilarion's mental temptation in the desert.

> One night he began to hear the wailing of infants, the bleating of flocks, the lowing of oxen, the lament of what seemed to be women, the roaring of lions, the noise of an army, and moreover various portentous cries which made him in alarm shrink from the sound ere he had the sight. He understood that the demons were disporting themselves, and falling on his knees he made the sign of the cross on his forehead.[10]

The saint is plagued by disturbing visions, including demons, animals, naked women and fiery chariots. The saint's mental exhaustion, his physical exertion and dehydration is used theologically by Jerome through the introduction of demons. Hilarion equates and perceives this mental imagery with the presence of demons. Then he sees a fiery chariot (a reference to the circus arena mentioned earlier) with steeds and calls on Jesus.[11] The chariot is swallowed up and he quotes from the Bible, using imagery that is also related to the Roman arena: "The horse and rider he hath thrown in the sea ... some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will triumph in the name of the Lord our God".[12] The choice of this imagery is worth noting, since later in the narrative, Hilarion's mastery over evil reaches a climax in a chariot race where the saint is asked to partake in and thereby winning over a Roman crowd for Christ at the race.

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[8] Cox, Miller, 1996, p. 211.
[9] *VH*, 5.
[10] *VH* 6 *Quadam nocte, infantum coepit audire vagitus, balatus pecorum, mugitus boum, planctum quasi muliercularum, leonum rugitus, murmur exercitus, et rursus variarum portenta vocum, ut ante sonitu quam aspectu territus cederet. Intellexit daemonum ludibria.*
[11] Jerome makes use of the saint's senses to emphasise his experiences in the desert, such as hearing and seeing. Tuan argues that senses help in structuring the character of this space. In this sense the desert is lent an ominous feeling. Tuan, 1977, p. 15.
[12] *VH*, 6.

The presence of demons underlies the struggle of the saint's inner self amidst the danger of outside forces. "Its truth (desert space) lay rather in the clarity it offered the monk on the reality and nature of evil. The battle against evil was a battle against the demonic, and in the desert the demons had fewer places to hide. If ascetic life in the desert made struggle with evil easier, it did so only in the sense that it made it more direct. In the desert, there was less to distract the monk from the fight and fewer ways for the enemy to confuse him".[13]

A final example of Jerome's desert functioning as a peripheral space is the presence of foreign "pagan" peoples as stereotypically inhabiting these spaces, such as the Saracens. They are described as worshipping the Roman goddess Venus, which is said to be as a result of the workings of the Devil. However they are also portrayed as a people capable of being redeemed. They ask Hilarion for assistance. Hilarion is said to convert the entire town and before leaving draws the outlines of a church in the sand.[14]

Demons and foreigners become signifiers that Jerome appealed to more classical models of peripheral spaces when describing the journey of his saint. In each encounter, Hilarion overcomes the spiritual or physical challenge because of his faith and conquers the desert as a dangerous peripheral space.

5.2.2 The desert as a space of physical and spiritual transformation

The second prominent feature of the *VH* is that of desert space as spiritually beneficial to the saint. After his various experiences, Hilarion starts attributing positive spiritual experiences to his harsh new environment. The harshness of the physical environment and the physical and emotional effects that it has on the saint is juxtaposed to his spiritual response to it.

Even before Hilarion ventures into the desert, one of the deeper motivations for going into the desert can be found. It is stated in chapter 3 that he still desires to go, "despising death in order to escape it". And later, despite his difficult physical transformation, the harsh physical conditions and real geographic dangers of the desert is interpreted by Hilarion as spiritually

[13] Goehring, 1993, p. 283.
[14] *VH*. 25.

beneficial, a theme not only present in the *VH*, but also a trend in hagiographic literature that becomes the norm for the desert saints.

Jerome achieves this through his description of how the desert slowly transforms Hilarion physically, as has already been noticed in the previous section. His skin becomes "dry and scabby", because of the dry desert air, sun and heat. His bodily health breaks down to such an extent that he fears that "death is near", so that he abstains from bread "until he is eighty".

> But finding his eyes growing dim and his whole body shrivelled with a scabby eruption and dry mange, he added oil to his former food and up to the sixty-third year of his life followed this temperate course, tasting neither fruit nor pulse, nor anything whatsoever besides.[15]

The other physical indicator that is used in order to describe his transformation to an ascetic is that of his clothing. His sackcloth, or material impoverishment is the embodiment of the ascetic trope in hagiography and is an important marker of the social status of the ascetic (a self-imposed status) and is also revelatory of the ascetic's relationship to his/ her body.

The saint is described as showing no laxity and has "wonderful spirit, acting like a novice in the service of the Lord".[16] The saint's strength of character is emphasised and it is his faith that is said to be the reason. A story is recounted of how robbers discovered the eighteen year old Hilarion (after failing to find him first) and when they threaten him (albeit mockingly, noting that he is still a youth), Hilarion tells them that he is prepared to die. With this they marvel at him, acknowledging the error of their ways and leave him alone.[17]

The mental preparation for and later acceptance of physical death is illustrative of the spiritual awakening of the saint. The incident also indicates how Hilarion is conquering the peripheral space of the desert through the conversion of its inhabitants, which also happen with the Saracens. The saint, and thus also others whom he comes in contact with, spiritually benefits from a desert life. The robbers, whose activities stereotypically placed them within

[15] *VH* 11, *Sentiens autem caligare oculos suos, et totum corpus impetigine et pumicea quadam scabredine contrahi, ad superiorem victum adiecit oleum, et usque ad sexagesimum tertium vitae suae annum hunc continentiae cucurrit gradum, nihil extrinsecus aut pomorum, aut leguminis, aut cuiuslibet rei gustans.*
[16] *VH*, 11.
[17] *VH*, 12.

the wilderness, undergo a transformation themselves. Not only is the desert space reinterpreted by Jerome, but also elements or people traditionally associated with it.

Jerome uses another example to emphasise his saint's growing spiritual link with the desert. As the desert functions as a space of fulfilment, and despite the saint's struggle to survive physically and spiritually, Hilarion also starts creating his environment instead of reacting to it. When sixteen, he builds a hut from reeds and sedge in order to protect himself from heat and rain, which is so small that it is described as a tomb rather than a house.[18] He also survives through routine, such as shaving his head once a year on Easter and sleeps on "bare ground on a bed of rushes".[19]

Despite initially making use of older models to describe the desert with, Jerome's goal is to underscore desert space as an environmental tool that aids in the spiritual awakening of the saint. This idea is also strengthened by the use of ritual transformation or ritual enactment of certain practices to indicate Hilarion's change of social status. The repetitive weaving of baskets, tilling the earth[20], recital of prayer, the rigid abstinence and a very strict diet are all ascetic practices.[21] In the *VH* these rituals are used to show Hilarion's transformation into an ascetic, as a form of protection against the elements, and protection against spiritual or mental attack by supernatural forces.

The ritual performance which illustrates Hilarion's ascetic transformation is a proclamation of space. The descriptions of ritual enactment are used to illustrate how Hilarion "takes command over his space". It thus becomes an important and encompassing source of power in his life.[22] Through these rituals, the ascetic also proclaims God's presence in the desert.

His first miracle is performed when his solitude is broken when he is visited by a sterile woman who wants to bear children. Hilarion is at first hesitant to help her and turns her away,

[18] *VH*, 9.
[19] *VH*, 10.
[20] Mircea Eliade argues that labour is an essentially primordial act, "the transformation of chaos into cosmos by the divine act of creation." When Hilarion is tilling the desert soil, he is repeating the act of God, Who had organised chaos into structure, form and norm. Eliade, 1958, p. 31.
[21] *VH* 10 and 11.
[22] Harvey, 1990, p. 226

but the woman begs for his compassion and starts crying. He then tells her to have faith and a year later he sees her with a son. This resulting miracle brings a cathartic turn in the narrative, as the fame of Hilarion as a healer starts to spread.[23]

Because of Jerome's focus on the promotion of asceticism as an important theme in the *VH*, the desert is not only dangerous but essential in the saint's spiritual development, because of the dangers this space is portrayed to pose. It is only under these extremities that the character of the saint can get tested. The solitude of the desert is also beneficial to the ascetic desire to be alone, but this desire is complicated when Hilarion starts getting visitors in the desert, because of his growing repute.

The desert as an ascetic space reiterates Goehring's argument that desert space becomes rhetorically linked with ascetic practice. "Truth is more easily found in the simplicity of the desert than in the city with its complex variables and constant pressures" and that an urban life had its snares and pitfalls.[24]

5.2.3 The desert as preparation for other spaces

The desert poses an imagined space of ascetic withdrawal, but through the spiritual purging of the saint in the desert, Hilarion is prepared for other spaces he will encounter later in the narrative and also the encounters he will have within them. This preparation has three phases: Firstly, the desert strengthens the saint through physical and mental testing, then the nature of these tests acts as a type of cleansing power that enables the saint to become holy. Thirdly, with this holiness comes the ability to do miracles.

The desert as strengthening the saint: It can be argued that the mental strength and discipline that Hilarion learns in the desert, is applied during his time as a monk. He is willing to cross the desert of Cades in order to visit a monastery, because he doesn't want to exclude visiting any one of them.[25]

[23] *VH*, 13.
[24] Ghoering, 1993, p. 283.
[25] *VH* 25, lines 7-10.

The desert as "cleansing" Hilarion to become more holy: This cleansing is achieved through fasting, meditation and other ritualised practices that Hilarion practice in the desert. He wears a sackcloth and cloak of skins[26] and he eats only fifteen dried figs after sunset,[27] sustains his spirit with singing and prayer and hoes the ground for the pain of toil.[28] He also weaves baskets and shaves his hair.[29] This is all in accordance with biblical precepts for prayer, singing of psalms, fasting, etc. It is a process of sanctification, which includes a disregard for the body to focus on the soul.

The desert as enabling Hilarion to perform miracles: Hilarion's resultant ability to perform miracles is one of the facets in the text that illustrates his elevation of status to sainthood. Jerome refers to Hilarion as the "blessed Hilarion" [*beatum Hilarionem*].[30] Jerome implies that Hilarion's social role that he can possibly play in society is elevated. He is given power and status, something that both works to his advantage, but also causes him to come into conflict with other groups.[31]

I will elaborate more on miracles in Section 5.3.2.

5.3 City space in the *Vita Hilarionis*: Chapters 14- 23

It has been established that city space forms part of inhabited space, where people live in socially or politically established units or urban units. In the *VH*, city space, or any inhabited space is that which is more or less opposite that of the ideal desert space desired by the monk. This is because his desired state requires a complete break from society or most forms of social relations or interactions. It is for this ideological reason that hamlets and small towns are also included as part of central or urban spaces which ascetics either avoid or live on the fringes of in close proximity. Apart from Gaza, which frequently features in the narrative,

[26] *VH*, 3.
[27] *VH*, 4.
[28] *VH*, 5.
[29] *VH*, 10.
[30] *VH*, 15, line 2.
[31] For instance, see Brown, "The Rise and Function of the holy man in late Antiquity. *JECS* 6. 1998. 353-375.

towns around the Mediterranean and Egypt, which include villages and hamlets, are included.[32]

Moxnes argues that the criticism of a space or existing structure is commonly represented by making use of the same structures.[33] The same paradox exists in Jerome's view of city space in the *VH*. The same existing structures, such as the Roman arena, become places of Christian conversion.

I focus on two themes of city space that can be found in the *VH*: 1) how the city space in the text functions as a space of conversion or is being appropriated[34], especially since much of this conversion takes place in Roman spaces such as the arena and 2), how city space in an ascetic text is presented as "off-centre", or not as the centre of civilisation, from the saint's perspective.[35]

5.3.1 Jerome's city space as a place of conversion

In chapter 14 a woman, who had heard of the aged saint as "a certain monk in the neighbouring wilderness", comes to Hilarion while he is still in the desert. She asks the saint to heal her sons, who were dying of a fever. There are two themes surrounding this miracle that are of interest spatially. Firstly, the theme of Hilarion's conflict is introduced. This conflict pertains to the ascetic desire to live in solitude and the responsibility or social role of the saint or holy man toward other people. The healing will require of Hilarion to travel to Gaza. Generally, because such areas are populated and tend to be avoided by ascetics,

[32] Weingarten, 2005, p. 108.
[33] Moxnes, cited by Stewart, 2009, p. 28.
[34] Illustrated by the upcoming example, it can be argued that Roman space is being appropriated. I draw from David Harvey's interpretation of the word "appropriation" as meaning the way in which space is occupied by objects, activities or individuals or even classes and social groupings, and how this occupation is re-occupied in a literary sense to give a specific or deeper underlying message. Harvey, 1990, p. 222.
[35] It is in the description of Hilarion's miracles that we find references to city or town space, as well as descriptions of the celebration of Roman-pagan festivals and cults. Each miracle, described in chapters 14 to 22, starts with information given where the afflicted is from. All of them include districts or urban areas that form part of larger cities in the area where Hilarion becomes famous. Chapter 22 suggests that the character, an officer, is from farther away, indicating how far Hilarion's fame has spread. The later miracles happen when Hilarion returns to the desert and mostly revolve around nature miracles.

Hilarion refuses, telling her that he never leaves his cell, thus highlighting the tension between the "wilderness" that the monk calls home and the "city of the Gentiles".[36]

The second theme is that of the city space that acts as a space of conversion, because 1), any miracle done here can be seen by witnesses and thus 2), converts non-Christians in the area to Christianity. It is the woman herself, who, trying to convince Hilarion out of desperation, urges him to heal her sons because Christ's name will then be glorified in that gentile city:

> "I pray you by Jesus our most merciful God, I beseech you by his cross and blood, to restore to me my three sons, so that the name of our Lord and Saviour may be glorified in the city of the Gentiles. Then shall his servants enter Gaza and the idol Marnas shall fall to the ground."[37]

Hilarion is presented with a dilemma. As an ascetic, he does not wish to enter public spaces, not so much because he fears that his purity as a saint will be endangered, but more so because he does not wish to associate with the crowds and there are too many distractions in such a space for ascetics. However the woman's anguish over her loss is distressing to him and thus the saint agrees to enter Gaza after sunset, presumably when the town is quieter and also because the saint, in his resultant fame does not wish to draw more attention to himself. In this example, Gaza, with its negative connotation with idolatry (the association is made in chapter one) in the *VH*, becomes a possible space of conversion. The widow prays that "the name of Christ will be known in the city of the gentiles".

Another example where both these themes can be found is in chapter twenty. Jerome describes an event surrounding a Christian Roman who kept horses for the races in the town of Gaza. The Roman asked the saint to bless his horses before a race one day, as his adversary, who worshipped the idol god Marnas, was using a magician in order to incite his horses and bring harm to the opposite teams. The saint, deeming the matter unimportant to waste prayer on, urged the man to rather sell the horses and give the money to the poor for the salvation of his own soul. The man responded that his office was public duty [*functionem publicam*] and that he acted out of compulsion more than out of choice. He deemed himself

[36] *VH*, 14.
[37] *VH*, 14, *Precor te, ait, per Iesum clementissimum Deum nostrum: obtestor per crucem eius et sanguinem, ut reddas mihi tres filios;* ***et glorificetur in urbe gentilium nomen Domini Salvatoris, et ingrediatur servus eius Gazam, et idolum Marnas corruat.***

Christian and would rather seek the aid of the saint than do magic himself, as Hilarion was "a servant of Christ, especially against the people of Gaza who were enemies of God, and who would exult over the Church of Christ more than over him."[38]

Hilarion gives the man water that has been blessed and he sprinkles it over the horses, the track, as well as the barriers of the course. Through this action, Hilarion can avoid being physically present at the arena. This story quickly spreads and the spectators at the race assume an implicit rivalry between Italicus and his adversary, having foreknowledge of Hilarion's involvement. What ensues is a vivid description of an adventurous race, which reaches its climax when Italicus's chariot wins the race, converting the excited crowd for Christ in their moment of elation in Italicus's victory.

Hilarion is not physically present in this "miracle". It is rather the arena's association with Roman rule and Roman custom (the race was done to commemorate the successful "rape of the Sabine women") that is of symbolic importance in this passage. The pagan space of the arena is being subverted by the introduction of the new God, Christ through the victory of the Christian Roman's chariot. "The placement of the Romans at the centre of the *Oikoumenē*" is also being questioned. It is the power of God that is now operative in this space, and not the *pax romana*.[39]

Again emphasis is also on public and largely Roman spaces that are deemed as spaces of "blood" by Hilarion in chapter 2. It is a space that also changes from having negative connotations to non-Christian practices, to being a space that is used to bring non-believers to faith. Even actions and behaviour associated with these spaces, are used to do this, such as the chariot racing. It is in the high emotional point of the crowds' infatuation with a pagan sport, the racing, that they are also won over for Christ. In this sense, a completely non-ascetic space is used to publically sway non-believers in the absence of the saint, through a Christian man's chariot race.

Weingarten argues, by comparing the event to an earlier Roman classical work, that the text is meant to illustrate the Christianisation of the Roman world. Jerome is argued to be showing

[38] *VH*, 20.
[39] Eric C. Stewart applies this argument to a spatial strategy operating during miracle of Jesus in the gospel of Mark, although I believe it is also applicable to this chapter in the *VH*. Stewart, 2009, p. 184.

his readers "how the Christian must conquer pagan Roman society from within, and come to terms with all aspects of power and popular culture".[40] "The circus," Weingarten notes, "was often conceived as a microcosm of the pagan world, and Jerome's Christian hero is thus defeating his opponents at the symbolic centre of pagan urban life, site of the imperial cult".[41]

Jerome uses city space in the *VH* as a representational space that can be re-imagined or re-appropriated. The events in the arena are used by Jerome to imagine a new Christian utopia for the Roman arena, one where a miracle (maybe the most visible and powerful symbol of Christian power), is used to influence a large Roman crowd. When the crowd is won over for Christ, the space is claimed. This is achieved though the ritual use of blessed oil. "Spaces of representation, therefore, have the potential not only to affect representation of space but also to act as a material productive force with respect to spatial practices. [42]

Besides the above described miracles, a substantial part of the text goes toward describing other miracles of Hilarion, including healing, exorcisms (animals and humans) as well as nature wonders, during his later return to the desert. The miracles happen in different settings, which include desert, city and monastic space. A substantial part of the *vita* is dedicated to the description of the various miracles the saint performs. Chapters 14-23 describe them as well as the resulting fame and repute that grow around the saint, whilst later, nature wonders are described as the saint journeys into the desert again (this time, further into the desert) and crosses the Mediterranean to Sicily.[43]

Apart from the above suggested role of miracles in pagan or city space, they function as evidence of the spiritual power of the ascetic and are effectively used to convert others who witness them. They are also used to illustrate how this spiritual ascetic power, forged in the desert, comes into conflict with other sets of power in contested spaces. When the above charioteer's horses that had supposedly been sprinkled with water blessed by the saint, win the race, the losing opponents immediately demand his execution.

Within the context of city space, miracles become an important symbol for the re-occupation or re-appropriation of this space. In different types of Christian texts, miracles act as proof of

[40] Weingarten, 2005, pp. 81-82.
[41] Weingarten, 2005, p. 107.
[42] Moxnes. 2001, p. 179.
[43] *VH*, 25, 32, 33, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41.

the existence of God. In the *VH* they become a visible truth for the power of this God.[44] This is not only illustrated through Jerome's conversion of pagan space, but also, ironically becomes the means through which Hilarion's whereabouts is betrayed in his later search for solitude.[45]

5.3.2 Jerome's city as "off-centre"

In Chapter Three of this study the assertion was made that ascetic literature offers descriptions of city or town spaces that differ from more classical descriptions of city space. A distinction was made between older Greek and Roman descriptions of city spaces, or the city and early Christian descriptions of the same spaces. The suggestion was made that early Christian writers bring a different view to city space through literature. One prominent difference is the description of city space in the *VH* and how city space is used.

In chapter 1 an indirect comparison is made between desert and city space when Hilarion is introduced. He loves solitude and despises anything that has to do with the turmoil of the circus and the arena. He refuses to go into an urban area because he is not accustomed to the crowds, thus agreeing to only enter the city after nightfall in chapter 14.

> More important than all of this, he was a believer in the Lord Jesus, and took no delight in the madness of the circus, the blood of the arena, the excesses of the theatre: his whole pleasure was in the assemblies of the Church.[46]

In chapter 42 it is people with possessed spirits who cry out that Hilarion, the servant of Christ has come. The first of the two significant parts of this unit is that of the number of city names that are mentioned. All are described as having people with unclean spirits who cry out for Hilarion:

> But not quite twenty days passed before throughout the whole island whoever had unclean spirits began to cry out that Hilarion Christ's servant had come, and that they must go to him with all speed. Salamis, Curium, Lapetha, and the other cities joined

[44] Stewart, 2009, p. 184.
[45] When Hilarion finds his final resting place in Cypress, he finds a paralysed man who had crawled to his abode to ask for healing. When he is healed, news of the miracle spreads. *VH*, 43.
[46] *VH*, 2: *Quodque his maius est omnibus, credens in Dominum Jesum,* ***non circi furoribus, non arenae sanguine, non theatri luxuria delectabatur****: sed tota illi voluntas in Ecclesiae erat congregatione.*

> the cry, while many declared that they knew Hilarion and that he was indeed the servant of Christ, but where he was they could not tell.[47]

It is people who occupy city space that are said to have unclean spirits. Jerome's city is the space of the circus and the arena, of crowds and Paganism, thus making it difficult for the ascetic to find solitude. As with desert space, demons are used again to indicate the presence of chaos, or social evil. In this instance, city names are equated with the presence of demons.[48]

In chapter 18, a man is cured by Hilarion when he is possessed by a demon. When he comes bearing gifts with his wife and children, Hilarion send them to go and redistribute these gifts amongst the poor, since they live in a city and are confronted with the poor every day. Jerome also mentions the existence of poverty in the city but suggests, through Hilarion's reaction, how this problem can be overcome.

The above examples show how the centripetal power attributed to the city as a symbol of Roman power has begun to break down as Hilarion's intentions are fulfilled.[49] The *VH* is used by Jerome to question the Graeco-Roman preoccupation with the view of themselves as situated at the centre, by representing urban areas as off-centre.

This is done by using ascetic practice and the virtues it is supposed to embody, which are associated with peripheral space like the desert, to become critical of life at the centre, or in cities. Jerome's city, at least in the *VH*, is socially impoverished and symbolic of Roman power. At the same time, city space becomes revitalised with Christian power through miracles.

Grigg observes, when looking at Jerome's perspectives of the city of Rome by studying his letters, that Jerome's relationship with the cities that he was familiar with, was indeed complicated. He had a great love for the classical heritage of Rome, but was critical of what it

[47] *VH*, 42: *Verum non ad plenum viginti transiere dies, cum per omnem illam insulam quicumque immundos habebant spiritus, clamare coeperunt, venisse Hilarionem servum Christi, et ad eum se debere properare. Hoc Salamina, hoc Curium, hoc Lapetha et urbes reliquae conclamabant, plurisque asserentibus scire se quidem Hilarionem, et vere illum esse famulum Dei, sed ubi esset ignorare*.
[48] "These three cities were in the east, south and north of Cyprus; together with Paphos in the west, they represent the whole island." White, Cited in footnote, 1998, p. 214.
[49] Talley, 2013, p. 110.

stood for at the same time.[50] In his *VH*, written in the late fourth century, he expands Christian power into the city, making use of ascetic charismatic power, instead of the bureaucratic power of bishops.

5.4. Monastic space in the *Vita Hilarionis*: Chapters 24 - 29

This section revolves around monastic space. Jerome uses Hilarion's resultant fame as the origin of monasticism in Palestine. In chapter 14, it is because of Hilarion's miracle in the desert that people from Syria and Egypt start flocking to him, resulting in the conversion of many, but it is rather the lifestyle of asceticism specifically that they convert to. Here a new space is also introduced, namely the monastery. It is mentioned that there were no monks in Syria before the saintly Hilarion and also no monasteries. The origins of this "saintly life" are attributed to him and it is also mentioned that he himself started to train men to devote themselves to this life:

> … the people flocked to him from Syria and Egypt, so that many believed in Christ and professed themselves monks. For as yet there were no monasteries in Palestine, nor had anyone known a monk in Syria before the saintly Hilarion. It was he who originated this mode of life and devotion, and who first trained men to it in that province. The Lord Jesus had in Egypt the aged Antony: in Palestine He had the youthful Hilarion.[51]

The text presents Hilarion as the inspiration for monasticism in Palestine, another branch of early Christianity. Susan Weingarten argues that the *VH* describes and propagates the Christianisation of the Roman Empire,[52] for Hilarion establishes one monastery in Palestine in chapter 14 and it is related in chapter 29 that he is the head of a grand monastery with "a multitude of resident brothers."

In chapter 21, after chapters 1 to 20 roughly describe the saint's sojourn in the desert, as well as some of his miracles, the saint is now described as aged and living with monks at the monastery. Although the exact location of this monastery is not known, it is most likely

[50] Grigg. 2012, pp. 125-143.
[51] *VH*, 14: *certatim ad eum de Syria et Aegypto confluebant: ita ut multi crederent in Christum, et se monachos profiterentur. Necdum enim tunc monasteria erant in Palaestina, nec quisquam monachum ante sanctum Hilarionem in Syria noverat. Ille fundator et eruditor huius conversationis et studii in hac provincia fuit. Habebat Dominus Iesus in Aegypto senem Antonium: habebat in Palaestina Hilarionem iuniorem.*
[52] Weingarten, 2005, pp. 2, 81.

situated in the desert not that far from the town. At that point in the narrative, many people deem the journey into the desert to seek the saint not too arduous and even bring animals to be healed of afflictions.[53] The saint could also be living with other fellow monks because of age, and that location would be fitting to do miracles in order to propagate the ideal virtues of the monk, as well as Christianity.

During the relay of miracles performed by the saint, passing comments are made about people with afflictions being brought to Hilarion by "the brethren", from which it can also be assumed that there are now other monks living with him.[54] Hilarion's simple ascetic life is now slightly complicated by the presence of others, however, his thoughts on the matter are never given. Mention is made that he was pleased to see others following his example and he even praises each monk individually "to the profit of their souls".[55] Only much later, during his retreat into the deeper desert, does the saint express his disillusionment with his fame and his life with other monks. In chapters 17, 18, 21 and 22 various persons come or are being brought to a monastery [*monasterium*], although, as mentioned, the origins, locality and building process of this monastery are not mentioned.

From chapters 20 to 30 the monastery is described not as a clearly defined space, but rather in relation to the presence of other monks, or "the brethren" [*fratribus*] as they are referred to.[56] This spatial relationship, as consisting of social relations, was introduced in Chapter Four of this study. Hilarion is referred to as Father [*abba*]. From chapter 24 more than one monastery is also now in existence and "all the monks flocked to him". Chapters 25-28 describe some aspects of monastic life in the form of vignettes, and are used to exemplify how a virtuous monk ought to live, or how a virtuous monastery ought to be run and organised, sometimes through the use of satire, something Jerome is famous for.[57] More importantly, chapters 29-30 describe Hilarion's growing disillusionment with his fame and monasticism, not so much the movement itself, but rather the desire to withdraw into the desert once more. By the end of chapter 30, he journeys into the deep desert for a second and more prolonged time.

[53] See Hilarion's exorcism of a camel, *VH*, 23.
[54] *VH*, 15.
[55] *VH*, 24.
[56] *VH*, 15, 17, 18, 28, 29.
[57] Grigg, 2012, p. 132.

With regards to monastic space, there are three themes that will be explored. They are 1) monastic space as propagating the spread of Christianity in novel ways that fall outside church structures; 2) monasticism as opening a window to travel, visiting and fellowship between monasteries and 3) the monk's life as a prison.

5.4.1 Monastic space as used to propagate the spread of monasticism and the Christianisation of Syria/ Palestine and the Roman Empire.

As has been mentioned above, Hilarion is seen as the originator of monasticism in Palestine and the first to train monks in that province. Jerome states in chapter 14 that no-one had known any monk in Syria before the saintly Hilarion and neither were there any monasteries. His resultant fame attracts monks to him, who want to follow his ways.[58]

After this statement, a description ensues which emphasises the growth of Hilarion's fame. Chapters 15 to 21 describe miracles done within the context of a monastic environment, as they are described as people with some affliction being brought to a monastery. Importantly, the place or town from where the afflicted person is from is mentioned. This includes Syria itself, Egypt and places as far as the frontiers of the Roman Empire, like Germany. Jerome wants to emphasise the fame of Hilarion through his claim that people came from all over to visit him.[59]

Chapter 24 relays that "innumerable monasteries sprang up throughout the whole of Palestine, and all the monks flocked to him." Hilarion reacts positively to this, and is convinced that this happening has a larger spiritual goal. Another example of this symbolic Christianisation can be found in chapter 25, which describes the salvation of the souls of the entire Saracen town in Elusa, already discussed.

[58] *VH*, 24.
[59] *VH*, 22. For Jerome's knowledge on geography, and what he understood to be the "known world", see Weingarten, Ch 4 "Jerome's World Concept – Mental Maps and Real Maps", 2005, pp. 197-219.

5.4.2 Travel, visiting and fellowship

Jerome describes the monks that come to live with Hilarion as the "brethren" on more than one occasion. When not using this term, there are descriptions that create the impression that Hilarion is living amongst other groups of people. Examples of this feeling of fellowship are when they seem to act protectively of Hilarion and that they also see Hilarion as their leader. As the head of monastery his role changes from ascetic to a head monk. Hilarion is also described as an old man and thus his fellow monks act protectively of him. They also deem the wisdom he is able to give as important and therefore, try to keep Hilarion with them by prohibiting him to leave.

In order to emphasise this spreading fame, a description is also given of his life amongst his fellow-monks at the monasteries. Hilarion is described as visiting monasteries both great and small: those with over a thousand monks living in them, as well as those that are farther away, smaller and more secluded.[60] Hilarion, who is initially presented as the ideal of an ascetic, is now painted as the epitome of a monk.

Jerome makes use of vignettes to not only illustrate the number of monasteries that are now in existence, but also to propagate Christian examples of humility in his interaction with other monks. This is done in satirical and often humorous ways. In his travels, the saint has to draw up a list to decide which ones he will visit and which ones he will see in passing. Wishing to set examples of humility and zeal and not wanting to pass over even the poorest of monasteries, he even takes a long journey into the desert of Cades at one point.[61]

Examples of thrifty monks are used to propagate Christian ideas of giving, rather than receiving.[62] In chapter 27, the souring of grapes in a monastery's vineyard is used by Hilarion as a familiar Christian warning to other monks to not be anxious of the future, to not be "too careful about expense, or raiment, or some of the other things which pass away with the world." Life in a monastery, with more food and earthly possessions, carries with it more temptations than a simpler life of asceticism.

[60] *VH*, 25.
[61] *VH*, 25, 26.
[62] *VH*, 26.

The saint's view on property ownership in monasteries is also emphasised by his encounter with a monk who jealously guarded all that he owned and did not wish to share what he had with others. Any object with which the brother interacted was in a sense cursed and so was he himself, or even described as being inhabited by a demon. What the brothers owned in the monastery should ideally be shared. These brief descriptions of property ownership illustrate how to manage the communal ownership of material goods or wealth and how to avoid having this ownership of goods clash with ascetic virtues and values. The monastic life is either described as ideal, or as affected by improper conduct, and it is up to Hilarion to set things right.

A new space is created through the introduction of the monastery, not so much the physical building, but rather the social relations it entails or symbolises. Through these interactions, Hilarion is able to achieve certain goals that would not have been possible had he stayed isolated in the desert as an ascetic. One of them is leading by example to show what it is to be the "perfect citizen of heaven". As many of his contemporaries, Jerome, through his depiction of monasticism, could promote his own definition of the practice.[63]

5.4.3 The monk's life as a prison

Hilarion's devotion to a holy life has given him the means to conquer evil, heal the afflicted and bring others to faith. This life has resulted in his fame but this fame has also become the saint's prison. As multitudes gather around him, the saint desires nothing but solitude. He flees into the desert, but not before the crowds that had gathered around him try for a long time to stop him. His disparate desires of wanting to travel with his brothers and seeking solitude cannot be reconciled. In the end, the saint desires solitude more and steals away into the deep desert, where he practices a stricter form of asceticism anew, as the material and social whiles of the monastic life have become too much for him.

The inference that can be made is that a type of implicit tension exists between *coenobitic* and *anchoritic* lifestyles. Even if both are still practiced within the rubric of Christian doctrine, they are seen as two distinct modes of life in Jerome's view. Hilarion cannot seem

[63] Caner, 2012, p. 598.

to reconcile a life in the spotlight (which monasticism confronts him with) with his true desire for solitude. He is capable of setting an example for other monks and helping to maintain monasteries, but rather desires solitude, something only complete ascetic withdrawal can give. The tension between Hilarion's desire to lead an ascetic lifestyle and his willingness to help others is not resolved - something which resembles the portrait of Jesus in the Gospel. Rather Hilarion, as can be seen during his deeper conversion into the further desert, is left to wander all over the Mediterranean in his last years of asceticism.

One of Jerome's goals in the *VH* is to show, through the experiences of the character of Hilarion, how monasticism was founded and spread in Palestine. There is one reference to Hilarion's newly found monasteries being under threat. By the time the *VH* was written, Palestine was still a colony of the then late Roman Empire. Jerome describes one of Hilarion's monasteries being put to the torch after he fled back to the desert.[64]

The *VH* then, as much as it is a hagiography, is also a piece of regional literature that strives to give ideological significance to Christian events in Palestine. The space of monasticism, through Hilarion's interaction with his brothers and the people who seek his help is used to illustrate this and also helps Jerome to show how his Hilarion becomes the epitome of a "citizen of heaven", in Caner's words.[65]

5.5. The journey back: chapters 30 – 46

5.5.1 The wilderness as signifying the spread of the Christian faith

Early Christian historians and writers like Jerome's interest in the geography of the desert helps reiterate the idea of the dispersal of Christianity across the Mediterranean.[66] Hilarion firstly goes into the desert and then ends up fleeing across the Mediterranean to avoid his fame. His ascetic desire to be alone results in a journey that stretches from the desert along the Egyptian coast to Libya, across the Mediterranean Sea to Sicily and finally to Cyprus.

[64] *VH*, 33.
[65] Caner, 2012, p. 589.
[66] Merrills, 2004, p. 231.

The motivation for Hilarion's return stems from his disillusionment with his fame and the desire to practice a more serious form of asceticism. He crosses the Libyan desert after visiting Antony's abode and never stays long in one place. Through his journey across the Mediterranean he encounters people that he is able to assist by doing miracles. This is done through numerous acts in these spaces and I will focus here on a key few. Most of these miracles are nature miracles.

In chapter 32, in the neighbouring desert, close to Aphroditon, Hilarion is stated to practise such strict abstinence, that "he felt that then for the first time he had begun to serve Christ." The land is said to have suffered from a drought for three years. People in the area attribute this drought to the death of Antony:

> Three years had now elapsed since the heavens had been closed and the land had suffered from drought, and it was commonly said that even the elements were lamenting the death of Antony. [67]

The people of that area, famished by hunger and heat and seeing Hilarion as Antony's successor, beg him to make it rain. Hilarion, filled with compassion, performs the miracle. The miracle leads to circumstances that entreat yet a second miracle. The rain attracts poisonous scorpions and snakes to the area and thus Hilarion is obliged to bless healing oil for use by husbandmen and shepherds. The oil heals their bites and wounds.

In chapters 35 and 41 two miracles happen on the sea. In the first, on a ship taking Hilarion to Sicily, the captain's son is possessed by a demon, who comically calls out to Hilarion that they cannot even be hid from Hilarion on the sea:

> "Hilarion, servant of God, why is it that through you we cannot be safe even on the sea? Spare me a little until I reach land. Let me not be cast out here and thrown into the deep."[68]

The second involves pirates preparing to attack the merchant ship Hilarion travels with on his way to Cyprus. They are however, unable to make it to the ship in their small rowing- boats and are washed ashore.

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[67] *VH*, 32, *Porro iam triennium erat, quod clausum coelum illas terras arefecerat; ut vulgo dicerent, Antonii mortem etiam elementa lugere*.
[68] *VH*, 35, *"Hilarion serve Dei, cur nobis per te et in pelago tutos esse non licet? Ita mihi spatium donec ad terram veniam, ne hic ejectus, praecipiter in abyssum."*

In the country near the town of Epidaurus in Dalmatia,[69] Hilarion is confronted with a large python who has consumed whole oxen and humans. Hilarion calls the serpent forth through prayer and orders it to sail up a pyre which he lights to burn the snake to ashes. In the next chapter, the same town is threatened by a tsunami after an earthquake. Hilarion is placed on the seashore, where he draws the sign of the cross in the sand three times. Raising his hands, he is able to create a barrier to the wall of water, until the sea levels.

Jerome uses Hilarion's motivation to practice a stricter form of asceticism to also let Hilarion travel throughout the Mediterranean, where he is brought into situations where he can perform miracles. In these chapters, these miracles include miracles connected to nature, performed both on sea and land by Hilarion. Hilarion constantly flees from one place to another, since each miracle draws attention and fame to him. His virtue of humility makes it difficult to deal with the consequences of his miracles.

Hilarion conquers both sea and land. Travel in the ancient and late ancient world was notoriously difficult, where the elements, piracy and bigandry were a constant threat. With policing limited to cities, travellers had little protection.[70] Hilarion is shown as being able to overcome these dangers. He also claims both wildernesses as a Christian space. God is not only in church, but everywhere. After his establishment of monasticism and the conversion of certain key city spaces, Hilarion is now claiming desert space.

5.5.2 The desert as "paradise regained"

At two key points in the narrative, there are descriptions of a type of "final abode" for the saint. One is the final resting place of Hilarion's mentor, Antony,[71] and the other is Hilarion's own final abode as an old man on the Greek island of Cyprus.[72]

After hearing of Antony's death, Hilarion feels compelled to visit his mentor's abode and burial place. Jerome takes great pains in describing his abode:

[69] *VH*, 39.
[70] Stewart, 2009, pp. 155-161.
[71] *VH*, 31.
[72] *VH*, 42-47.

> "There is a high and rocky mountain extending for about a mile, with gushing springs amongst its spurs, the waters of which are partly absorbed by the sand, partly flow toward the plain and gradually forms a stream shaded on either side by countless palms which lend much pleasantness and charm to the place."[73]

Jerome goes on to describe Antony's abode as also consisting of a garden, vine and shrubs planted by Antony himself. He also dug a pool for watering his garden, which he took care to hoe.

Hilarion takes over the abode, including Antony's cell in which he slept, described as "square, its sides measuring no more than the length of a sleeping man", which brings to mind the cell which Hilarion himself built in the desert during his youth. Structurally the space also gains ascetic significance for Hilarion in old age. The highest top of the mountain is said to have two cells to which Hilarion could escape from "the crowds of visitors or the company of his disciples". They were cut out of "live rock and were only furnished with doors."[74]

Antony's garden is significant. It marks the new change in lifestyle for Hilarion and is highlighted by the idealistic way in which the abode is described. Isolation becomes the desired state at this point in the narrative and, as if it spurs Hilarion back into seclusion, he retreats into the desert and practises strict abstinence.[75]

After travelling across the Mediterranean, Jerome is unsuccessful in avoiding the fame that his miracles cause. Hilarion reaches the end of his travels in Cyprus where he stays for two years and again the saint's final abode is emphasised:

> "(He was urged)... to rather go to a spot in Cyprus itself which was higher up and more retired. After long and diligent search he found such a place twelve miles from the sea far off among the recesses of rugged mountains, the ascent to which could hardly be accomplished by creeping on hands and knees... The old man entered and looked around. It was indeed a lonely and terrible place; for though surrounded by trees on every side, with water streaming from the brow of the hill, a delightful bit of garden, and fruit trees in abundance (of which however, he never ate), yet it had close by the ruins of an ancient temple from which, as he himself was wont to relate and his

[73] *VH, 31. Saxeus et sublimis mons per mille circiter passus, ad radices suas aquas exprimit, quarum alias arenae ebibunt, aliae ad inferiora delapsae, paulatim rivum efficiunt; super quem ex utraque ripa palmae innumerabiles multum loco et amoenitatis et commodi tribuunt.*
[74] *VH*, 31.
[75] *VH*, 32.

> disciples testify, the voices of such countless demons re-echoed night and day, that you might have thought there was an army of them. He was highly pleased at the idea of having his opponents in the neighbourhood ..."[76]

The second is the description of the saint's (final) abode. Towards the end of his life, Jerome would have us believe that the saint finally seems to have found the ascetic paradise he so craves. Far up in the mountains, with nothing but trees, water and a garden to satisfy his basic needs (he refuses to eat the fruit, however) and, ideally, a hard place to get to for other people. Hilarion, at the end of his life, is alone and only has demons to conquer. There is an ancient temple and two stone cells to keep him warm. An old man, his final resting place is slightly more sophisticated than the simple desert life he lived as a youth, however, this is intentional.

The loneliness of the garden is described as both "terrible", idealistic and romantic. This description of his resting place should be seen in the context of Hilarion's desire to be alone. First the desert is introduced as a place of trial, growth, preparation for other spaces, and ultimately, towards the end of the narrative, as fulfilment. However, this loneliness is seen as positive and beneficial. The desert as an isolated but idyllic garden stands opposite to civic city culture, "in the forms of ties to family and to the ecclesiastical institutions of the city."[77] These elements stand in the way of achieving holiness, thus complete isolation becomes the ideal. This isolation is personified as a garden of fulfilment, the return to the desert as an attempt "to regain a lost Paradise still latently present within him."[78]

Toward the end of the *VH* and end of Hilarion's travels when he finally retires to the island of Cyprus, Hilarion's last wish is to be buried in the isolated garden which he loved and where he lived out his last days. However, after his death, his body is stolen and, perhaps even ironically intended by Jerome, is embalmed and put on display for all to see. Maybe Jerome

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[76] *Quem cum diu lustrans omnia, reperisset, perduxit eum duodecim millibus a mari procul inter secretos asperosquq montes, et quo vix reptando manibus genubusque posset ascendi. Qui introgressus, contemplatus, quidem est terribilem valde et remotum locum arboribus hinc inde circumdatum, habentem etiam aquas supercilio collis irriguas, et hortulum peramoenum, et pomaria plurima, quorum fructum nunquam in cibo sumpsit: sed et antiquissimi iuxta templi ruinam ex quo ut ipse referebat st eius discipuli testantur tam innumerabilium per noctes et dies daemonum voces resonabant, ut exercitum crederes.*
Goehring notes that the connection between the distance of the saint's withdrawal and the degree of his sanctity is a hagiographic motive by which the author can heighten the hero's sanctity, almost to the point of literary exaggeration. 1993 pp. 288, 289, 291.
[77] Cox Miller, 1996, p. 212.
[78] Cox Miller, 1996, p. 228.

implies that, despite the search for spiritual wholeness and emaciation away from the world, the world has finally broken in.[79]

The elaborate paradisical descriptions of Hilarion's final resting places are functional as an emphasis of the ascetic paradise that ascetics crave and go in search of in the desert. Towards the end of the *VH*, Hilarion seems to have found his ascetic paradise. It is the perfect desert. It offers seclusion, because of the impossibility of getting there and the presence of spiritual challenge in the form of demons which now inhabit the ruins of the temple there.[80]

5.6 Summaries of desert, city and monastic space

5.6.1 Jerome's desert space

Five themes were identified in Jerome's descriptions of desert space:

1. The desert as a peripheral space;
2. The desert as aiding in the physical and spiritual transformation of Hilarion;
3. The desert as preparing Hilarion for other spaces;
4. The desert as signifying the spread of Christianity through Hilarion's nature miracles;
5. Jerome's desert as paradise regained.

The desert is represented with classical traditional aspects which deem it a largely negative space. It is a place of physical dangers, as well as of spiritual and mental dangers. Drawing on older classical models, and creating Biblical parallels, the hero-ascetic enters darkness in order to achieve his spiritual goal: closeness to God and holiness through subduing the body. Thus, the desert is also viewed as positive: it is a romanticised space of stillness and quiet, where the ascetic can find God, outside of an authoritative church structure. It serves as a "hard" space of preparation for Hilarion's entrance into other spaces. He receives the gift to heal in the desert and uses it later in other spaces and receives the growth necessary to be able to deal with the crowds, demons and later travel into the deep desert.

[79] Chitty, cited by Weingarten, 2005, p. 81.
[80] The city Paphos is situated on the island of Cyprus. The city was associated with the Greek goddess Venus and it is now only a ruin of its greater former self. Venus's abode has been symbolically vanquished. The demons in the ruins of her temple are left to be conquered by Hilarion. Weingarten, 2005, p. 94.

The desert as a powerful symbol in ascetic literature is connected to Hilarion's overpowering sense of "nothingness", or the human body becoming subdued, so it can be filled up with the divine spirit, a Christian idea that permeates much of late classical thinking. The body is reduced to be dry and withered through fasting, so that the soul or spirit might be made more prominent, emphasised or made stronger. In such a reading it is not so much the wilderness itself that holds power, but rather Hilarion's experience in that wilderness, how he interprets it, how it changes him (physically and spiritually), in short, how he makes use of an extreme climate to be made more humble, to be more holy.[81]

It is during this important transformation that the social role or status of the ascetic is changed or rather, elevated. Hilarion's process of becoming holy encapsulates the preparation for the later fulfilment of an important social role in other spaces, especially those dominated by different or conflicting power structures. He becomes able to perform miracles, exorcisms and appropriate Pagan spaces and through this sets an example to other monks.

The final return to the desert, after all the steps have been fulfilled, leads to the discovery of a final resting place or abode, symbolised as the arrival in paradise. This rediscovery of paradise happens, yet again, in the desert, after the journey has been made not only through different spaces, but also throughout his changing role as ascetic, monk and healer, and Jerome's descriptive passages of these final resting places emphasises that Hilarion has found his paradise regained.

5.6.2 Jerome's city space

Two themes were identified in Jerome's descriptions of city space:

1. City space as a space of conversion to Christianity;
2. Jerome's city space as represented as "off-centre" in comparison to classical descriptions of city space.

[81] Eliade, 1975, pp. 10-12.

The examples given indicate a desire to portray the ascetic as having power even in urban areas. Yet again rituals are used to occupy these spaces or Christianise them. Miracles are used as evidence of this ritual power. The stories of his miracles also spread and it makes Hilarion even more famous. The placement of conversions is also strategic. To reiterate Weingarten's words, the circus was often perceived of as a microcosm of the Pagan world.

Jerome breaks away from the classic notion of city space as an important central symbol from which all civilisation springs. Viewed from the perspective of the ascetic's eyes, city space becomes a space of noise and pollution. It is said to be a space distracting ascetics from their true calling. Jerome breaks away from this obsession with "the centre", and instead uses the terror of the wilderness as positive spiritual growth for Hilarion. In Jerome's view, the saint turns his focus inward and to be close to God in the undefined wilderness to achieve holiness. The Greek idea of discipline is fulfilled within a Christian morality away from a symbolic centre associated with civilisation and discipline.

5.6.3 Jerome's Monastic space

Three themes were identified in Jerome's introduction of monastic space:

1. Jerome's monastic space introduces the spread of monasticism in Palestine;
2. He illustrates the monastic virtues of fellowship and teaching through travel between monasteries;
3. The introduction of monastic space creates tension between asceticism and monasticism.

Jerome's literary descriptions of the monastery in the *VH* range from Hilarion as the proposed originator of monasticism in Palestine to his travels to monasteries in order to maintain them in his role as father or *abba*. Hilarion starts to experience disillusionment with the new order he established. His miracles attract attention and fame to him. Hilarion craves the solitary life that asceticism provides. Thus a spatial tension between asceticism and monasticism is introduced.

In Jerome's descriptions of monastic space we are confronted with Hilarion becoming enmeshed in social relations through his interaction with his fellow monks and other people, whilst doing miracles and travelling. There is mention of monasteries "springing up" all over Palestine. Indeed, it is the space of Palestine that is being occupied. As Jerome reminds us in chapter 15, "The Lord Jesus had in Egypt the aged Antony: in Palestine He had the youthful Hilarion."

6. Concluding remarks and unanswered questions

In this dissertation I have approached the study of a popular Patristic text of Jerome from a spatial perspective. I have done so by focusing on Hilarion, the main character in the *Vita Hilarionis* as an ascetic, traveller, healer and monk.

Firstly, Jerome's life was briefly discussed, as well as the movement of asceticism. Jerome's three *vitae* were introduced and the genre of hagiography was placed within its own historical and theological context. The conclusion was drawn that Jerome used the *vitae*, but especially the *VH* in order to represent his own unique ideas of asceticism and the virtues the practice is supposed to embody. Within the context of the early Christian world, the goal of the ascetic in literature is to be cleansed in order to be more holy, to be able to practice ascetic virtues in a space that allows this. The focus on early Christianity as a domain-centred religion (like the church), shifts to a deeper connection with God, once the body is subdued.

Social scientific criticism and critical space were introduced as possible frameworks for approaching space as it is represented in the *VH*. Social scientific criticism makes it possible to understand a culture's shared meanings. Shared meanings of certain core values or ideas in a society may remain stable over long periods of time.

Cultures may also have shared meanings of how the spaces they occupy are organised and how such spaces can be represented in literature. Critical space creates awareness over spatial categories, why such categories exist and how they are maintained or subverted. The concept of ideology was discussed to understand the use of rhetorical strategies of a text with religious or rhetorical themes. In the case of the *VH*, these rhetorical strategies also function at the spatial level of the text.

A larger framework for the understanding of spatial thought in ancient Mediterranean societies was created by identifying core spatial categories that remained more or less stable up to LA. Through this method, desert space could be placed within its own larger spatial and literary history. This can be understood when one also takes into consideration that the text is linked to its own history, thus creating the need for the text to be put into its own context. People thought about the desert in the Ancient Near Eastern, Greco-Roman and finally late

classical / early Christian world in specific ways, depending on their culture, orientation and cosmology. The Mediterranean world and the geographical realities of the desert and what sort of challenges desert travel posed, were experienced by writers themselves and written into the text semi-autobiographically, besides being used as a literary device to present reality the way they wanted to.

6.1 Jerome's desert

However in Jerome's *VH*, the desert is not simply geographical marshland between land and sea. We are introduced to the spiritual progression of the saint. The desert, which typically functions as a peripheral space in classical texts, gains theological significance to function as the important background to Hilarion's awakening. It becomes the hard place for his growth, discovering his purpose and serves as the paradise regained for his final abode. The desert is a geographic reality as a wide open wilderness and a transcendental valley of shadow, one through which Hilarion travels so that Jerome can show what it means to become holy in the fourth century. With this growth he is prepared for other spaces, and also the trials he will experience while moving within these spaces.

In Jerome's desert, a mystical connection with God is possible, through emaciation of the body in order to strengthen the spirit. The monk enters the wilderness to come out a better person. The desert is a physical reality in the story, but more importantly, it is also employed in symbolically rich ways to enhance the effect of the story told and to rhetorically aid in Jerome's purpose of giving positive views on asceticism, the practice of certain Christian virtues he saw as important, and to display his polemical views on life in the church or the public eye.

Hilarion also "conquers" the desert. This is achieved through various nature miracles, as well as the conversion of so-called semi-barbarous tribes. The first of his miracles happens in the desert. Hilarion's ascetic virtues are also expressed through his involvement with people who flock to him for healing and with his involvement with other monks who flock to him. The saint is said to be responsible for the rise of monasteries in the desert of Palestine, the new church of the wilderness. It is expressed in his ability to heal the sick and drive out demons in

people. It is expressed in the saint's appropriation of Roman space, by the spatial habitation of Christian beliefs and values, which can be seen as replacing a Roman ritual.

6.2 Jerome's city and monastery

The desert ultimately prepares Hilarion to be a healer and monk, and prepares him for other spaces such as the city. The theological goal of Jerome's saint is also socio-political: to win people over for Christ, but also to appropriate Roman spaces in an early Christian nation-state where older pagan virtues were making way for new ones. And Jerome, at least in his idealized ascetic phase, seemed to believe that asceticism was more effective in achieving this goal than official church structures.

The other spaces are city space and monastic space. Both have their own ideological function within the text. Both are used to propagate monastic and ascetic virtues via different rhetorical strategies. The city, generally represented as a positive or central space in classical literature, is viewed here with more ambivalence. More importantly, it is used as a space of re-appropriation of Roman values into Christian ones.

In the first century, the distant concept of the "city" as a metaphor for the new paradise can still be found. Its origins and inspiration lies in both the Roman version of the idealised city, a space of civilization and the Hebrew concept of the new Jerusalem as representative of paradise. However, there is also a slow but gradual shift away from this conceptualisation of the city as Kingdom of Heaven. Instead we have the beginnings of a new desert religion, or spirituality, first in Christ and his disciples and later in ascetics. The Kingdom of Heaven is now located in the individual subject, where the body is subjugated for the spirit to develop.

Despite the illumination I have hoped to have provided with the above frameworks, there are still some unanswered questions that have come forth in this study. I have chosen, for various different reasons to focus on a male ascetic text, one which has already proved to be quite dense in its undertaking. A comparative study of female ascetic spaces as well as their representation is suggested as worth exploring. Secondly, the later development of the "cult of the saints" in the city in the fifth century, which celebrated martyrs and ascetic saints, seem to be in conflict with earlier ascetic virtues of humility. A study into this apparent conflict

might prove worthwhile. Thirdly, comparative studies involving cross-cultural texts or even ascetic texts from different eras may also prove insightful, since the practices of asceticism and monasticism have remained popular over the centuries and still captures the imagination of modern/postmodern man.

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