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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS STUDIES '17 / International Conference
on Social Movements
CULTURAL STUDIES '17 / International Conference on Cultural Studies

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CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF SAINT JEROME'S EPISTLES CONCERNING ANTIOCH, SYRIA AND CONSTANTINOPLE

MARIA CRISTINA MARTINS (Ph.D., Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil)

Abstract

Saint Jerome (c. 345-420) is best known among us for having translated the Bible into Latin from Hebrew, known as the Vulgate. This was his greatest work, his mission of life, which was carried out between 390 and 405, initiated by a request of Pope Damasus, who, like Jerome, considered the old Latin translations uncharacteristic and often inaccurate. The need for a new translation — based on *Hebraica veritas* — into Latin was justified by him in the Prefaces to the Gospels, in addition justified in several biblical commentaries (*Commentarii*), including numerous epistles, since he wrote a lot and in a much varied way, during more than 40 years. Our saint participated in crucial moments in the life of the Roman Empire, such as its dismemberment in West and East, as well as the siege of Rome and its invasion by Alaric in 410. At least in the first part of his long life Saint Jerome lived in large cities, often distant from one another, which makes him a notable traveler. We can naturally link these trips and his stays in the places of destination with various stages of his life and work.

Although we know that it is not the geographic place that projects the work of a genius, our aim is to remember, to emphasize and to analyze the connection of Antioch and Constantinople in his literary production, although this production has been consolidated in his later productions. Specifically, it is known that in these locals Saint Jerome began his Hebrew studies and deepened his Greek studies. Many subjects and experiences of Saint Jerome's life and work are related to Antioch and Constantinople: the practice of penance and protracted prayer, the ascetic life, the quiet and serious studies, as well as the access to libraries and the contact with wise people such as Evagrius, Apollinaris and Nazianzus, will lead him to his main work, the translation of the Bible (as well as its exegesis) and his work as a translator. We will consider these matters, while they are connected with his stays in these cities, based on the *Epistolae* I, II, III, IV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII (A + B), XXII and CXXV.

Keywords: Saint Jerome; Asceticism; Biblical exegesis; Late Antiquity; Latin language and culture; Translation studies.

1. Introduction

Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus was born at Stridon, a village of Dalmatia (present-day Slovenia), around 345 and 347 A.D. and died in 419 or 420 A.D. In his work *De Viris Illustribus* (c. 393), whose title was taken from Suetonius, Saint Jerome wrote brief biographies of famous Christian men and women—with the exception of the non-Christians Seneca, Flavius Josephus and Philo—and dedicated its last chapter (actually, note 135) to himself and his own bibliographical production to that moment. Here is an excerpt from his own description: *Hieronymus, patre Eusebio natus, oppido Stridonis, quod, a Gothis eversum, Dalmatiae quondam Pannoniaeque confinium fuit* "Jerome, son of Eusebius, from the city of Stridon, which had been destroyed by the Goths, and was then on the border of Dalmatia and Pannonia." (Hier. Vir. III. 135). In one of his letters, he says that his country, given the national rusticity, was located in the "womb of God" (*Ep. 7§5 In mea enim patria rusticitatis uernacula deus uenter est* (Labourt, 2002, p. 24)).

As it is recorded on the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (Cain, 2006, p.500), on September 20th, 1295, Pope Boniface VIII conferred on St. Jerome the title of Doctor of the Church, alongside St. Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose and Saint Augustine.

During the Renaissance, St. Jerome was portrayed by various artists, such as Albrecht Dürer, Leonardo da Vinci, Bernardino Luini, Domenico Ghirlandaio, and others. The paintings of that time, the saint can be seen represented in two different ways: in one of these interpretations he appears as a scholar, a learned lover of books, sometimes as a cardinal (a post he never occupied in the Church) as well, working in a harmonious environment, accompanied by a meek lion, wearing beautiful clothes and expressing serenity, balance, concentration, peace and happiness. In the other representations, St. Jerome is a tormented, unbalanced and suffering person, expressing in his face sadness and bitterness. He wears rags, beats his chest with a stone, his appearance slim and horrible, like a sinner and unworthy of happiness, like someone who needs to punish himself to be elevated to God. As a result of his self-flagellation and the prolonged fasts, St. Jerome was constantly sick (Letter 3§1).

Indeed, what can be seen represented in the pictorial art reflects St. Jerome's life trajectory and extensive legacy

to humanity. One can say that St. Jerome was a man of contradictions: his intellectual side embodied prosperity, wealth, self-esteem and a firm position on the circumstances in which he lived, which demanded from him solid opinions in the representation of his interests and ideas. His intellectual side also reveals other personality traits that are not virtuous or positive to a Christian: he was a spiteful, biting critic, violent and unfair to his enemies (including former friends, such as Rufino). However, a Saint Jerome who thinks himself as inferior, weak and undecided—a victim of a state of mind of one who thinks himself far from Christ and of perfection—also existed. In these antagonistic ways of life, the ascetic, penitent and monastic way of life emphasizes and exalts poverty, humility and chastity. On the other hand, the intellectual work must show authority and security, especially when it comes to translate the Bible and its exegesis. This conflict was very well expressed by Williams (2006, pp. 1-5) and for whom St. Jerome not only had the audacity to fuse the erudite and monk identities but also came to represent intellectual activity at its highest level, as a form of askesis—that is, of spiritual training—which appropriately matches a cenobite or ascetic's way of life. St. Jerome, as an adept or seeker of such ascetic philosophy, sought to achieve excellence and spiritual harmony through the denial of all the pleasures of the flesh or of this world in general. That is why we see him criticizing in several of his letters the *modus vivendi* of several people and spared not even the priests and monks—who should serve as examples, but who excessively ate and drank, and behave in a morally inadequate way (cf. *Ep.* 17, which will be quoted below). Be that as it may, duality is innate to the human being, and even if some would want to demean St. Jerome's figure by judging him by its exaggerations, nothing can annihilate its importance, for "he is one of the cornerstones of our civilization", as said Larbaud (1946, p. 51).

The emergence of the cult of St. Jerome originated during the Renaissance, including its iconography (Rice, 1985). Below, we show an example of each pictorial representation style that relates to our Saint's two states of mind.

We purposely chose paintings by other artists, avoiding Dürer, who is the most cited:

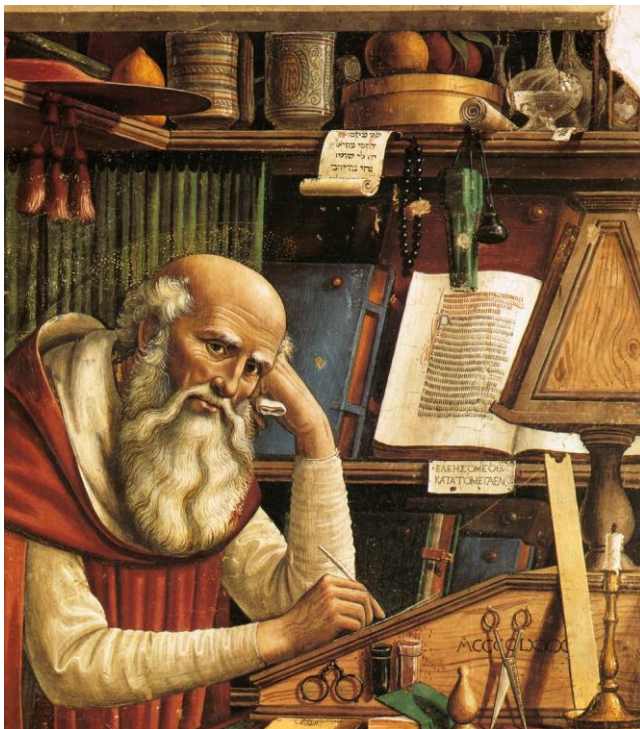


Figure 1: Saint Jerome by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1480).



Figure 2: Saint Jerome by Leonardo da Vinci (c. 1480).

St. Jerome's work can be studied in various aspects, given the variety and depth of his writings—whose subjects revolve around theological themes such as biblical exegesis, Gospel translation, commentaries on biblical characters, hagiographies, and themes of moral content and historical-cultural analysis of his time, especially in his letters. Indeed, many scholars regard St. Jerome's letters as his most important work, even standing out from other classical writers. Such is Cain's view (2009, p. 4), a specialist in St. Jerome's epistolography:

"Indeed, in the ancient Latin prose epistolographic tradition—broadly construed to include not only Christian letters-writers (e.g., Ambrose, Augustine, Paulinus, Sidonius) but also their non-Christian counterparts (e.g., Cicero, Seneca, Pliny, Symmachus)—St. Jerome is a luminary among luminaries."

We will try to show, by the very testimony of Saint Jerome, the experiences he lived during his stay in the East, including Antioch, the desert of Chalcis and Constantinople. What he lived in this early period of his career will lay the foundations for his future work, among them the most notable: the Bible translation, the *Vulgata*, and its exegesis.

Without a doubt, of all his literary production, built between 370 A.D. and 419 A.D., the most personal part is contained in his letters. St. Jerome says that the primary purpose of any correspondence is to stay present through the letter, to speak to those you love and to hear them. In the *Epistula ad Niceam (ad Nic. 8,1)*, he takes up Turpilius' statement, a comedian writer who claimed that correspondence provided the absent ones present: *Turpilius comicus tratans de uicissitudine litterarum: 'sola', inquit, 'res est, quae homines absentes praesentes faciat'*". Nevertheless, the letters' subjects surpass this fundamental purpose emphasized by Jerome, since they cover several subjects. Moreover, they do not aesthetically attach to the epistolary genre, since some letters can be considered as true treatises (ARNS, 1953, pp. 100-1). St. Jerome himself named a series of letters as *libri* ("books"), others as *libelli* ("little books"). Two of those which are considered *libri*—22 and 125—we will see in detail in this paper.

Generally speaking, the epistles address Church dogmas, biblical exegesis, spirituality, morality, funeral eulogies, and family matters. As for the recipients of the letters, there are many of them: Pope Damasus, Theophilus of Alexandria, St. Augustine (Augustine of Hippo), Senator Pammachius (the first Christian senator), some priests and monks (*Innocentius, Teodosius, Rufinus, Niceas*, among others) and ladies of the Roman aristocracy (*Eustochium*,

Paula, Marcella, among others). Most of his friends were in fact aristocratic women, who asked him for advice on how to lead a Christian life, as well as clarifications on Christianity and on the interpretation of the Bible.

Labourt (2002, p. XXXIV)—translator and commentator of the French edition by Les Belles Lettres—states that it was Roger Bacon, English Franciscan monk from the late 13th century, which made the word *Vulgata* prevail to designate the official version of the Bible. But it was only in the mid-16th century that the Council of Trent declared St. Jerome's *Vulgata* as the only authentic version of the Bible. In his time, the *Vulgata Editio* meant the Greek version of the Seventy (the *Septuaginta*), that is, the bible issue addressed to the people (*vulgus*), as opposed to the erudite version of Origen, the Hexapla.

During his stay in Antioch and Constantinople, St. Jerome dealt with the Aryan controversy, involving a theological debate on the Holy Trinity. Those who were called Aryans denied the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In two of the letters addressed in this paper—letters 15 and 16—to Pope Damasus, Jerome refers to this Eastern schism and complains about the polarization that took place in Antioch, which is found represented by four bishops: *Eusebius, Meletius, Paulinus* and *Vitalis* (*Ep.* 15§3). We will see some of these letters that were never answered by Pope Damasus.

There are also other works written by St. Jerome in his stay in the East: *Vita Sancti Pauli Monachi*, written in the desert of Chalchis in 376; *Liber contra Luciferianos*, written in Antioch in 379 A.D.; and his vast work of translation, *Chronicon* (*The Chronicle*), by Eusebius of Caesarea, held between 379 A.D. and 381 A.D. in Constantinople or Antioch. As for this last work, it is known that it was used as a history book throughout the Middle Ages (Maraval, 1998, p. 31-33). However, it will not be possible to account, in this paper, all the works written by St. Jerome in the East. This includes the letters he wrote there, therefore we selected only some of them.

2. Brief history of Jerome's trip to the East

After having finished his studies in Rome, Jerome goes to Gaul in order to broaden his knowledge and meet different people and cultures. At that time—that is, in the second half of the 4th century—*Trevorum* (Trier) and *Tolosa* (Toulouse) were the cities that offered the best cultural possibilities. There were numerous and rich libraries awaiting the arrival of readers and copyists. According to Moreno (1986, p. 25) in Toulouse there were thirty Academies of Grammar in operation. It was possible to find someone to exchange ideas everywhere, such was the number of students and teachers on site. Nevertheless, the city of Trier was the one that offered greater possibilities, that went beyond the cultural ones, because it was the usual emperor Valentinian's seat. Those who wanted to make a fortune went there. That was the city that St. Jerome chose, one of his greatest motivations being the fact that in this city the monastic life was encouraged by Anastasius, the bishop of Alexandria, who lived there while lasted the exile imposed on him by Constantine. Scholars and hagiographers (cf. bibliography) agree it was in Trier that St. Jerome decided by his monastic life. He was greatly influenced by the writings of St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers, who died in 366 A.D., whom St. Jerome had access to in Trier, even working as a copyist with some of the works of this bishop, as he himself reveals in a brief letter to his friend Florentine, written between 375 A.D. and 377 A.D. (*Epistula V, 2, Ad Florentinum*). In 370 A.D., accompanied by *Bonosius*, Jerome returned to Stridon, but remained shortly in his motherland. After living happily with his friends *Rufinus, Eusebius*, and *Chromius*, Jeronimo left Aquileia and set out to the East, in search of his obsessive idea of devoting himself to in-depth studies and to a more intense spiritual life. St. Jerome departs for the East following an inner call. According to F. Cavallera (1922), St. Jerome would have left to the East in 374 A.D. Pierre Maraval (1982) and Andrew Cain (2009), among other scholars, present evidence that his letters are written between 372 A.D. and 374 A.D.

Back to the reasons why Jerome travelled to the East, specifically to Antioch, there was the fact that the city had the conditions for creative leisure. It did not matter to Jerome that this city was the most important of the East and the seat of the governor, but rather that its population was composed of Syrians, Greeks, and Jews, which would help him improve and perfect his knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages. There was yet another important reason from the religious aspect: in Antioch, the apostles Peter, Barnabas, and Paul had preached. It was the place where the faithful to the Gospel had been called "Christians" for the first time. In fact, in his first stay at Antioch, Jerome seems to have abstained himself for a considerable time from the study of the classics and to have plunged deeply into that of the Bible, under the impulse of Apollinaris of Laodicea, then teacher in Antioch and not yet suspected of heresy, as it will occur.

Upon his arrival, Jerome was received by his friend Evagrius, an important personage, an intimate friend of the emperor Valentinian—from whom, a few years ago, he could receive aid in favor of Pope Damasus, whose election in 366 had provoked bloody agitations in Rome. In this opulent character's house, Jerome was very well treated and was able to enjoy a wonderful library. In his house, Jerome wrote the first text of his career, at the request of Father Innocent, *Epistola I*. It was also during this time, when Jerome stayed at Evagrius' house, that he wrote his first biblical commentary—which never reached us—choosing the shortest book from the Old Testament, that of the prophet Abdias: "First Commentary on Obadiah" (*Commentariorum in Abdiam Prophetam Liber Unus*). We know of its existence by Jerome himself, who, later in Bethlehem, while performing the exegesis of the minor prophets, mentioned that he wrote an exegetical abortion (Moreno, 1986, p.30). St. Jerome lived ups and downs during this stay in Antioch. On the one hand, it was a very profitable period, as he was able to take advantage of Evagrius' huge library, reading eagerly and beginning his studies of the Greek language. He rejoiced at the visit of Heliodorus and the news he had brought him from Rufinus, a mutual friend who was then passing through Egypt visiting monks, on his way to Jerusalem to realize his monastic inclination. He received, from a traveler from Aquileia, the news that his friend Bonosus was already living as a monk on an island. These news are referred to in the letters 3 and 4. His concerns are, on the other hand, his lack of courage to live as an ascetic in the desert (*Ep. 2*), his sense of inferiority over his friends Bonosio and Rufino (who were already living as monks), as well as the sadness suffered by the death of their close companions, Ilas and Innocent (*Ep. 3*).

After St. Jerome had written said letter to Rufinus, he finally put into practice his purpose of living as a monk—expressed in letter 2 to his friend Theodosius and to the other anchorites of Cilicia. In letter 15, we know where Jerome will establish his residence: on the eastern border of Syria, south of Aleppo and south-west of Antioch, very close to the town of Chalcis. Before going into the desert, however, Jeronimo went to visit Maronia, a place east of Antioch, where his friend Evagrius had some properties. In that location, Jerome wrote the letters from 5 to 17, of which letters 15, 16 and 17 will be discussed here in more detail. In this tiny place, he had the opportunity to meet an old monk named Malco, whom he had heard about in his youth. Jerome did a sort of interview with this monk, asking him to describe what life in the desert was like. Later, in 390 A.D., Jerome will write a work that we may consider literary, a kind of novel about the stories he heard from this monk, under the title *Vita Malchi captivi monachi* ("Life of Malco, the Captive Monk").

After his returning to Antioch in 378 or 379, he was ordained priest by Paulinus, without ever exerting priesthood. He was consequently in better conditions to continue his studies and writings. It seems that he began the *Chronicon* translation in Antiochia, the great capital of the Eastern Diocese, and soon afterwards he went to Constantinople to pursue this writing. In this stay at Constantinople, where it seems he spent two years, he also wrote the letter 18 (A+B), to which we will address here in detail. He had also the opportunity to listen to the lessons of Gregory of Nazianzen, whose influence was very important for his works on biblical exegesis, including letter 18. When he left Constantinople, he went to Rome with the bishop Paulinus, in order to get more support for him for the synod of 382, held to end the schism of Antioch. But Jerome took a prominent place being the secretary of Pope Damasus I and the leading Roman Christians.

According to Cain (2009), the epistles of St. Jerome can be classified into two general categories: either they belong to the literary-philological type or the historical-biographical type. To the first category belong those letters that can be studied for their aesthetic properties, such as style, rhythm, tropes, as well as their epistolical traits and its intertextuality with the Bible and classical literature. In the second category are those of historical and biographical content, which reveal the religious and socio-cultural environment of Late Antiquity, as well as teaching about Western History. That is why historians use these letters as well as theologians and biographers of St. Jerome. Based on this double classification, which is quite general, the framing of letter types becomes somewhat imprecise, since their analysis possibilities fit practically into those of the general types. Cain, however, proposed a new *epistolographic* classification, with which we agree since it is very specific and sorts the letters according to the main goal sought by St. Jerome. Cain (2009, p 207-219), formulated "a new taxonomy" of Jerome's letters, with both English and Greek names, largely based on the ancient Greek theory about the epistolary genre: pseudo-Libanius (300-500 A.D.) and pseudo-Demetrius (100 B.C.-200 A.D.). Thus he proposes the following letter types: "apologetic" (ἀπολογητικός), "consulting" (ἀναθετικός), "recommending" (συστατικός), "consolatory" (παραμιθετικός), "reporting" (ἀπαγγελτικός), "congratulatory" (σιγχαρητικός), "suppliant" (αξιωματικός), "reproaching" (ὀνειδιστικός), "censuring" (ἐπιτιμητικός), "exhorting" (παραινετικός), "thankful" (εὐχαριστικός), "conciliatory" (θεραπευτικός), "mocking" (σκωπτικός), "praising" (ἐπαινετικός), "accounting" (αἰτιολογικός), "threatening" (ἀπειλητικός), "exegetical" (ἐξηγητικός).

The letters that we choose to take into account in this paper, whose motivation is expressed in the title, are *Epistolae I, II, III, IV, XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XXII and CXXV*. The only one not written in the East is letter CXXV, but in it St. Jerome describes his experiences in the desert. According to Cain's classification, these cards are classified as

follows: Letters 2 and 15 are "consulting", 3 is "reporting", 4 is "supplicatory", 16 is "reproaching", 17 is "apologetic", 18 "exegetical", 22 and 125 are "exhorting".

We will further see what are the letters' characteristics that allow them to be classified as such. All Latin quotations from Saint Jerome's letters come from the *Les Belles Lettres* editions, with the text established by Jérôme Labourt, while the translations into English were taken from Philip Schaff (except for letters 18A+B, which was made by us). Both books are listed in the bibliography.

3. Letters to be analyzed: I-IV, XV-XVII, XVIII, XXII, CXXV

In *De Viris Illustribus*, work from 393 A.D., St. Jerome dedicated the last chapter to himself and wrote more about himself than about any other personality there biographed. He listed in this personal chapter the works he had written so far. He listed seven letters by title (*Ad Heliodorum Exhortatoria* (Ep. 14), *De Seraphim* (Ep. 18A+B), *De Osanna* (Ep. 20), *De frugi et luxurioso filiis* (Ep. 21), *De tribus quaestiunculis legis veteris* (Ep. 36), *Ad Eustochium de virginitate servanda* (Ep. 22), *Consolatorium de morte filiae ad Paulam* (Ep. 39)), and still referred to two collections of letters: *Epistolarum ad diversos liber* and *Ad Marcellam epistolarum liber*. The first collection, addressed to several people, still raises controversies to this day about which letters would be part of this compilation. It is only known with certainty that the first letters of St. Jerome were written before 382, when he returned to Rome.

We have 123 letters that St. Jerome wrote between 374 and 419, although it is likely that he has written a larger amount. Some authors claim that there is a genuine letter from St. Jerome, surviving only in a Georgian translation (Cain, 2009, p. 207). Modern issues usually publish 154 letters as being from St. Jerome. However, they include the correspondence of some of his friends, such as those from Pope Damasus and St. Augustine.

As to the chronology of the letters, it is common sense that letter 1 is from the year 370 A.D. (and which, as we have seen, does not constitute the *Liber* and wasn't even quoted by Jerome in *De Viris Illustribus*), letters 2, 3 and 4 written in Antioch between 372 and 374 A.D., letters 5 to 17 written in Maronia between 375 and 377 A.D., and letters 18 (A+B), 22 and 125, respectively, in Constantinople (380 A.D.), Rome (384 A.D.) and Bethlehem (411 A.D.). Cain (2009, p. 15) delved into the research on the dating of the epistles and, having studied all the medieval manuscripts of St. Jerome's letters, he argues that *Epistula* I is not part of the first collection of letters, as well as letter 14. We cannot go into the details of his research, but the arguments he puts forward lead us to think that these two letters are not actually part of the *Liber*. According to Cain's research, *Liber* was constituted by epistles 2 to 13 and 15 to 17. Among these, epistles 2 to 4 and 15 to 17 integrate our study.

Letter 1 is considered his earliest writing, from around 370 A.D. It was addressed to Innocent (*Ad Innocentium*), a priest friend of his, very enthusiastic about asceticism. It is a work of rhetoric in which St. Jerome tells a miracle that had occurred not long ago in the city of Vercelle. A woman falsely accused of adultery by her husband is taken to trial along with her alleged accomplice. He, yielding to torture, pleads guilty, but is nevertheless executed. As for the woman, she keeps denying adultery and expresses her devotion to Jesus, saying that she refuses to lie, that she may die, but that she will not die as an adulteress, but as a Christian who believes in the afterlife. In short, the woman continued to be tortured. Having the torturers considered her dead, they abandoned her in a corner and so she got back to life. However, imperial justice still demanded her death, but Father Evagrius, a mutual friend of Innocent and Jerome, intervened and managed to spare her. Moreno (1986, p. 27) states that the letter 1 intended to compare the injustices suffered by women to the injustices that the Church was suffering. We, on the other hand, agree with Maraval's interpretation (1982, p. 17) which supposes that it is only a compliment to his friend Evagrio, who is welcoming him. Wright (1933), translator of the *Selected Letters of St. Jerome*, evaluates letter 1 as evidence that St. Jerome believed in miracles.

Jerome's first letters show his deepest anguish. Cain (2009) argues that these first letters are not naive or insignificant, as one might believe, just because they have never been given proper attention by specialists. According to him, Jerome self-promotes himself as an ascetic monk in these letters, humble, virtuous and full of wisdom, ready to be received by the patronage of high ladies of Roman society—which will happen when he returns to Rome in 382 A.D. from Constantinople. Pliny, the Young, also promoted himself, in the same way as Jerome, in the first decade of the second century. Pliny wrote several letters composing a corpus that, no doubt, he thought of leaving for posterity. After his death, Suetonius published his 247 letters in 10 books, which included the letters Pliny exchanged with the emperor Trajan and all the others that showed his various faces, from friend, husband, boss, statesman, etc. (Leach, 1990). Later, Saint Ambrose, between 395 and 397, will also follow in the footsteps of Pliny and, through his letters, will show all the influence that he received from friends, leaders of the Church and emperors to reinforce his political and religious authority and thus to promote himself.

Let us begin with the letter 3, 3rd paragraph, where Jerome describes the itinerary of his journey, stating that he found it after uncertain and errant pilgrimages (Labourt, 2002, p. 12).

Ep. 3§3: Tandem in incerto peregrinationis erranti, cum me Thracia, Pontus atque Bithynia totumque Galitiae uel Cappadociae iter et feruido Cilicum terra fregisset aestu, Syria mihi uelut fidissimus naufrago portus occurrit.

Ep. 3§3: "I wandered about, uncertain where to go. Thrace, Pontus, Bithynia, the whole of Galatia and Cappadocia, Cilicia also with its burning heat, one after another shattered my energies. At last Syria presented itself to me as a most secure harbor to a shipwrecked man".

In the letter 2 (*Ad Theodosium*), he confesses that he desires the ascetic life, but feels unable to attain it. He then asks Theodosius and his monks to obtain from God the blessing which will instill in him the certainty of renouncing the mundane things in order to live in the desert:

Ep. 2§2: Et quia paululum non tam desiui a uitii quam coepi uelle desinere, nunc me nouis diabolus retibus ligat, nunc noua impedimenta proponens maria undique circumdat et undique pontum, nunc in medio constitutus elemento nec regredi uolo nec progredi possum. Superest ut oratu uestro sancti Spiritus aura me prouerat et ad portum optati litoris prosequatur.

Ep. 2§2: "And because it is only a little while since I have begun not so much to abandon my vices as to desire to abandon them, the devil now ensnares me in new toils, he puts new stumbling-blocks in my path, he encompasses me on every side. The seas around, and all around the main. I find myself in mid-ocean, unwilling to retreat and unable to advance. It only remains that your prayers should win for me the gale of the Holy Spirit to waft me to the haven upon the desired shore".

In addition to the historical, cultural and religious study of St. Jerome's letters, we can also study them from a rhetorical point of view. St. Jerome skillfully used the resources of rhetoric to make his text beautiful, convincing, and persuasive. For this reason, he used metaphors and comparisons, merging Bible events and passages from works of classical literature with his own narrative (Virgil and Horace are often cited) in order to give more weight and depth to his statements and views (Lausberg, H., 1967). Cain (2009, p. 2) states that St. Jerome "championed an extreme form of ascetic Christianity embraced by a tiny minority, and even his partisans were put off at times by his theological and rhetorical".

As an example, see the following excerpt from letter 2, in which Jerome introduces himself as a sinner and compares himself to the good shepherd, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son, famous parables of the New Testament:

Ep.2§2: Ego ita sum quasi a cuncto grege morbida aberrans ouis. Quod nisi me bonus pastor ad sua stabula umeris inpositum reportarit, labarunt gressus et in ipso conamine uestigia concident adsurgentis. Ego sum ille prodigus filius qui omni quam mihi pater crediderat portione profusa, necdum me ad genitoris genua submisi, necdum coepi prioris a me luxuriae blandimenta depellere.

Ep.2§2: "For my part, I am like a sick sheep astray from the flock. Unless the good Shepherd shall place me on his shoulders and carry me back to the fold, my steps will totter, and in the very effort of rising I shall find my feet give way. I am the prodigal son who although I have squandered all the portion entrusted to me by my father, have not yet bowed the knee in submission to him; not yet have I commenced to put away from me the allurements of my former excesses".

The letter 2 opens with enthusiasm, as Jerome expresses his deepest desire to be part of the community of Cenobites led by Theodosius, to whom the letter is dedicated:

Ep. 2§1: Quam, quam vellem nunc uest interest conuentui et admirandum consortium, licet isti oculi non mereantur aspiceret tota cum exultatione conplecti!

Ep. 2§1: "How I am long to be a member of your company, and with uplifting of all my powers to embrace your admirable community! Though, indeed, these poor eyes are not worthy to look upon."

Jerome paints a picture of himself as a humble being who will contemplate the desert as an ascetic, as a true follower of Christ, for the desert is metaphorically a city more lovely than any other.

Ep. 2§1: Spectarem desertum, omni amoeniorem ciuitem.

Ep. 2§1: "Oh! that I could behold the desert, lovelier to me than any city!"

This environment will be able to transform him, for it is populated with saints (initially Christians were called saints), and the desert is a true paradise on earth:

Ep. 2§1: [...] uiderem desolata ab accolis loca quasi ad quoddam paradisi instar sanctorum coetibus obsideri

Ep. 2§1: "Oh! That I could see those lonely spots made into a paradise by the saints that throng them!"

In the following passage (*Ep.2§2*), Jerome uses other metaphors, reminiscences of Virgil, when he says that he is surrounded by seas, that he can neither advance nor retreat (*Aeneid*, V, 9). Thus, with the help of his friends' prayers, he has the courage to move on and achieve his goals:

Ep. 2§2: Superest ut oratu uestro sancti Spiritus aura prouehat et adumum optati litoris prosequatur.

The letter 15, as well as letter 2, is of the consulting type. Cain (2009, p. 210), based on Malherbe (1988), both pseudo-Libanius, define a letter of the "consulting" type as "in which we communicate our own opinion to one of our friends and request his advice on the matter". In *Ep. 2*, to Theodosius, Jerome asks this ascetic monk that he intervene with God, with prayers, so that Jerome may have the courage to face the desert and thus realize his mystic-religious ideal. In letter 15, addressed to Pope Damasus, who nevertheless never answered Jerome, our saint questions the Pope about whom he should associate with at Antioch, referring to the schism of the East, a subject which is also part of letter 17. Let us take look at paragraphs 1 and 5 of the letter 15:

Ep. 15§1: Quoniam uestuto oriens inter se populorum furore conlisus indiscissam Domini tunicam et desuper textam minutatim per frustra discerpit et Christi uineam exterminant uulpes ut, inter lacus contritos qui aquam non habent, difficile ubi fons signatus et hortus ille conclusus sit possit intellegi, ideo mihi cathedram Petri et fidem apostolico ore laudatam censui consulendam, inde nunc meae animae postulans cibum unde olim Christi uestimenta suscepi.

Ep. 15§1: "Since the East, shattered as it is by the long-standing feuds, subsisting between its peoples, is bit by bit tearing into shreds the seamless vest of the Lord, "woven from the top throughout," since the foxes are destroying the vineyard of Christ, and since among the broken cisterns that hold no water it is hard to discover "the sealed fountain" and "the garden inclosed," I think it my duty to consult the chair of Peter, and to turn to a church whose faith has been praised by Paul. I appeal for spiritual food to the church whence I have received the garb of Christ".

Ep. 15§5: Quam ob rem obtestor beatitudinem tuam per crucifixum, mundi salutem, per homousiam trinitatem, ut mihi epistulis tuis siue tacendarum siue dicendarum hypostaseon detur auctoritas. Et ne forte obscuritas in quo dego loci fallat baiulos litterarum, ad Euagrium presbyterum quem optime nosti dignare scripta transmittere. Simul etiam cui apud Antiochiam debeam communicare significes, quia Campenses, cum Tarsensibus hereticis copulantur, nihil aliud ambiunt quam ut auctoritate communionis uestrae fulti tres hypostases cum antiquo sensu praedicent.

Ep. 15§5: "I implore your blessedness, therefore, by the crucified Saviour of the world, and by the consubstantial trinity, to authorize me by letter either to use or to refuse this formula of three hypostases. And lest the obscurity of my present abode may baffle the bearers of your letter, I pray you to address it to Evagrius, the presbyter, with whom you are well acquainted. I beg you also to signify with whom I am to communicate at Antioch. Not, I hope, with the Campenses; for they—with their allies the heretics of Tarsus—only desire communion with you to preach with greater authority their traditional doctrine of three hypostases".

The Christian spirituality of the desert began with Anastasis, the first hermit of Egypt, around 355 A.D., which became an example of ascetic life. One of the foundations of the monastic ideal is the abandonment of pride, because it allows the connection with the ideals of Christ, and humility is the basis of everything. Jerome expresses this ascetic ideal that is part of the value system of the fourth century Christendom, both in a rhetorical and practical way, exemplifying what it does to itself to live as a perfect ascetic monk. He considers himself a

sinner and employs corporal punishment, practices contempt to his appearance, and so on. The symbols of penance and monastic idealism are expressed in several letters from this period in which he lived in the East, among which *Ep. 17*§2 stands out:

Ep. 17§2: *Pudet dicere: de cauernis cellularum damnamus orbem, si in sacco et cinere uolutati de episcopis sententiam ferimus. Quid facit sub tunica paenitentis regius animus? Catena, sordes et comae non sunt diadematis signa, sed fletus.*

Ep. 17§2: "I blush to say it, but from the caves which serve us for cells we monks of the desert condemn the world. Rolling in sack-cloth and ashes, we pass sentence on bishops. What use is the robe of a penitent if it covers the pride of a king? Chains, squalor, and long hair are by right tokens of sorrow, and not ensigns of royalty".

In letter 3, 3rd paragraph, he humbly says that, as if all the suffering caused by the illnesses he contracted was not sufficient (including eye diseases, which will little by little jeopardize his vision and prevent him from writing, as referred to in the letters 18 and 21), he lost his friend Innocent, part of his own soul, now only Evagrius remaining alive:

Ep. 3, 3: Ubi ego quicquid morborum esse poterat expertus (...) Inocentium enim, partem animae meae, repentinus febrim ardor abstraxit. Nunc uno et toto mihi lumine Euagrio nostro fruor, cui ego semper infirmus quidam ad laborem cumulus accessi.

"Here, after undergoing every possible kind of sickness (...) for Innocent, the half of my soul, was taken away from me by a sudden attack of fever. The one eye which I now enjoy, and which is all in all to me, is our Evagrius, upon whom I with my constant infirmities have come as an additional burden".

Letter 4 is addressed to Florentine, a wealthy Christian who lived in Jerusalem and was always in touch with Rufinus. Jerome asks him to send letter 3 to Rufinus, who is traveling to Egypt and, with great humility, implores him not to consider him as having the same virtues as Rufinus.

Ep. 4§2: *In illo conspicies expressa sanctitatis insignia; ego cinis et uilissimi pars luti et iam fauilla, dum uegetor, satis habeo si splendorem morem eius inbecillitas oculorum meorum ferre sustineat.*

"You must not, however, judge of me by the virtues that you find in him. For in him you will see the clearest tokens of holiness, whilst I am but dust and vile dirt, and even now, while still living, nothing but ashes. It is enough for me if my weak eyes can bear the brightness of his excellence".

According to Malherbe (1986, p. 71) and Cain (2009, p. 209) the letters characterized as "reporting" simply seek to give news. Normally they refer themselves to friends in common to the letter's author and addressee. This is what we saw in letter 3: Jerome receives news of Rufino from a friend in common to both of them, and at the same time he gives him news about Bonósio, also friends in common. On the other hand, the 4th letter, according to Malherbe (1986, p.69) and Cain (2009, 213), is of the "supplicatory" type, which, as its name says, is a letter of appeal. In fact, it is a letter requesting a favor. Both letters share the same picture that St. Jerome makes of himself: a man full of defects, insignificant, extremely humble. These are the essential virtues required by the system of values of the ascetic communities of the eastern desert.

After this first period in Antioch, Jerome stays in Maronia, near the desert around Calcis from 375 to 377. He intends to contact in first hand the hard life of the desert came to fruition and renders his eremitic experience in several letters. In this desolate wasteland he suffers geographic displacement but also cultural and linguistic displacement as no Latin was spoken there. Desert in fact represents a frightening concept for people used to live in urban places. Paulus Orosius, the fourth century monastic historian from Braga (north of Portugal), for instance, tells as that "its sterile topsoil, its serpents, made it uninhabitable for all but the monks who were brave enough to colonize it" (Cain, 2009, p. 23). And even Jerome, years later when he was in Rome and reflects about his desert experience, said that he was the companion of scorpions and wild beasts (*scorpionum socius et ferarum*, Ep. 22,7). As Andrew Cain states, he made these calculated statements "to convey the impression that he [...] was blessed with a special grace, courtesy of his having regained paradise lost, that enabled him to live peacefully among the desert's feral menagerie" (Cain, 2009, p. 24).

From his eremitic experience, Jerome left us thirteen letters (Ep. 5-17). According to Cain (2006, p. 502), chronological analysis of St. Jerome's work shows that his first sixteen letters (Epp. 2-17) have been studied to this day by literati and specialists as primary sources for the understanding of the first stage of the monastic and literary career of our saint. Their study was also carried out for they revealed Jerome's state of mind as a young man. However, Cain notes that eight of these letters (Epp. 6-9, 11-13, 16) share Jerome's sense of abandonment and frustration with his friends who did not respond to his letters or did not respond quite briefly. Therefore, these letters gave rise to books that analyzed psychologically St. Jerome's behavior, as in the work of Kelly (1975). According to Cain, however, these eight letters to which we refer have in common the purpose of censoring and disapproving the behavior of their friends—leaving aside the particularities of each one, all being able to be classified, according to pseudo-Libanian (c. IV-VI centuries A.D.), as belonging to the "reproaching" genre (Cain, 2006, p.504). We quote the essential feature of this genre of letters, based on pseudo-Libanian, from Cain (2009, p. 213):

"You have received many favors from us, and I am exceedingly amazed that you remember none of them . . . This is characteristic of a person with an ungrateful disposition. For the ungrateful forget noble men, and in addition ill-treat their benefactors as though they were enemies."

In Antiquity, it was essential that the correspondents, in any relationship maintained through exchanges of letters, should follow the protocol of responding to the letters so that the relationship balance was maintained. Otherwise, if there was no response to a letter, the pact of friendship was threatened and, from this, a series of negative assumptions passed through the mind of those who felt wronged, renegade, abandoned.

Among the letters characterized by Cain as "reproaching", the present paper includes letter 16, addressed to Damasus. Letter 15, also sent to Damasus, but classified as "consulting", was similarly written in Antioch, and refers to the troubled period in which Jerome lived the so-called "schism of the East". Jerome asked in these two letters the Pope's position on this schism and asked whom he should join. It refers, moreover, in letter 16, to the savagery of the people of Syria (*barbaro Syriae limite teneor*). Neither of these two letters was answered by Damasus.

We agree with Cain's (2006, 2009) proposition that letter 16 should be considered as "reproaching", since this letter is small, composed of two paragraphs, in which only two lines are dedicated to a request addressed to the Pope (*ut mihi litteris tuis apud quem in Syria debeam communicare significies*). Everything that comes before is indeed a reprimand to the pope, in which, through rhetorical resources, Jerome recalls portions of the Bible, whose purpose is to show that God, Christ, and the apostles did not disdain those who apparently bothered them, and yet it is necessary to be careful, for the position you occupy in the world can be reversed: those below can be on top and vice versa. In Jerome's own words:

Ep. 16§1: Quorsum ista tam longo repetita prooemio? Uidelicet ut paruum magnus aspicias, ut diues pastor morbidam non contemnas ouem. Christus paradisum de cruce latronem tulit et ne quis aliquando sera, conuersionem putaret fecit homicidii poena martyrium. [...] Paulus ex persecutore fit praedicator. [...]

“To what end, you ask, these far-fetched references? To this end, I make answer; that you in your greatness should look upon me in my littleness; that you, the rich shepherd, should not despise me, the ailing sheep. Christ Himself brought the robber from the cross to paradise, and, to show that repentance is never too late, He turned a murderer’s death into a martyrdom.[...] From a persecutor Paul becomes a preacher”.

The last letter written in the desert was *Epistula 17*, when there was still tension between the two branches that divided the Church. It was addressed to Marcus, priest leader of the cenobite community affiliated with Jerome’s Christians ideals. The letter reflects the Oriental monastic ideal of live as Jerome sustained that he earns his daily bread honestly. According to Cain (2009, p.209), the letter 17 fits in the apologetic type as defined by pseudo-Demetrius, the "apologetic type is that which adduces, with proof, arguments which contradict charges that are being made".

Apologetic letters usually begin with a list of charges brought against the writer followed by his rebuttal. In his fourteen extant letters of this kind, Jerome defends his moral, theological, and scholarly integrity against challenges from critics. Jerome argues:

Ep. 17§2: Nihil alicui praeripui, nihil otiosus accipio. Manu cotidie et proprio sudore quaerimus cibum, scientes ab apostolo scriptum esse: "qui autem non operatur, nec manducet.

Ep. 17§2: "I have robbed no man of anything; neither have I taken what I have not earned. With my own hand daily and in the sweat of my brow I labor for my food, knowing that it is written by the apostle: "If any will not work, neither shall he eat."

The letter also reaffirms Jerome’s steady allegiance to Nicene orthodoxy. He complains quite sharp of the hard treatment meted out to him by a group of monks because his refusal to take part in the great theological dispute then raging in Syria and begs permission to remain where he is until the return of spring, when he will retire from the inhospitable desert:

Ep. 17§3: Cotidie exposcor fidem, quase sine fidem renatus sim. Confiteor ut uolunt: non placet. Suscribo: non credunt. Unum tantum placet ut hinc recedam. Iam iam cedo. Abruperunt a me partem animae meae, carissimos fratres. Ecce discedere cupiunt, immo discedunt melius esse dicentes inter feras habitare quam cum talibus Christianis; ego ipse, nisi me et corporis inbecillitas et hiemis retineret asperitas, modo fugerem. Verumtamen, dum uernum tempus adueniat, obsecro ut paucis mihi mensibus heremi concedatur hospitium; aut si et hoc tardum uidetur, abscedo.

Ep. 17§3: "Every day I am asked for my confession of faith; as though when I was regenerated in baptism I had made none. I accept their formulas, but they are still dissatisfied. I sign my name to them, but they still refuse to believe me. One thing only will content them, that I should leave the country. I am on the point of departure. They have already torn away from me my dear brothers, who are a part of my very life. They are, as you see, anxious to depart—nay, they are actually departing; it is preferable, they say, to live among wild beasts rather than with Christians such as these. I myself, too, would be at this moment a fugitive were I not ithheld by physical infirmity and by the severity of the winter. I ask to be allowed the shelter of the desert for a few months till spring returns; or if this seems too long a delay, I am ready to depart now".

According to Cain (2009, p.33) *Epp. 15-16*, in conjunction with *Ep. 17*, reaffirm Jerome’s unwavering loyalty to Nicene orthodoxy. This allegiance conduct to the principles of Nicaea would have earned him the sympathy of the more conservative theological circles at Rome. In addition, by including the two Damasian letters, many years latter (393) in the *Liber* maybe he has hoped to impress Roman readers with his ties with the reigning pope. In fact

we agree with Cain (2009, p. 38) when he says that Jerome probably suspected that his monastic desert training "would certify him in the eyes of ascetic Christians in Rome as a veteran of spiritual warfare" and that the Syrian experience will enhance his ascetical capacities and highlight his spiritual authority in front of his disciples, especially the circle to which women like Marcela Paula and others belonged.

We know that Jerome wants to be in accordance with coeval monastic stereotypes. This is the reason why his testimonies of his day to day life in the desert are like this. In fact we know that he do not stay in a cave and he did not live in complete solitude either, according to Cain (2009, pp. 40-41).

After his stay in the desert, when already in Rome, in the spring of 384, Jerome reminds in a letter (*Ep. 22*), really a treatise, to Eustochium (Paula's daughter) his past experiences. The most quoted passage of the letter that describes this experience is at (*Ep. 22.7*):

Ep. 22§7: "How often, when I was living in the desert, in the vast solitude which gives to hermits a savage dwelling-place, parched by a burning sun, how often did I fancy myself among the pleasures of Rome! I used to sit alone because I was filled with bitterness. Sackcloth disfigured my unshapely limbs and my skin from long neglect had become as black as an Ethiopian's. (...) Now, although in my fear of hell I had consigned myself to this prison, where I had no companions but scorpions and wild beasts (...)"

O quotiens in heremo constitutus et in illa vasta solitudine, quae exusta solis ardoribus, horridum monachis praestat habitaculum, putavi me Romanis interesse deliciis! Sedebam solus, quia amaritudine repletus eram. Horrebant sacco membra deformis, squalida cutis sicut Aethiopiae carnis adduxerat. [...] Ille igitur ego, qui ob gehennae metum tali me carcere ipse damnaveram, scorpionum tantum socius et ferarum [...].

The following 7th paragraph aims to alert Eustochium to the fact that, even chastising the body, he would suffer temptations.

Letter 22 is one of St. Jerome's best known letters because it is in it that the famous dream is narrated (22§30), in which God appears to him and accuses him of being a Ciceronian and not a Christian. In this dream, he refers to the whipping and torture suffered by him in a court and claims that when he awoke he still felt the sores. The letter tackles, however, many issues. It is in fact a treatise on virginity addressed to Paula's daughter, Eustochium. There, he advises her to be vigilant, careful with her instincts, sobriety, reading, prayer and contemplation. All these orientations are long developed and supported in Biblical quotations, in the beautiful and inimitable style of St. Jerome's. But the letter is more than a treatise on virginity, which is expressed in its own title (this was one of the seven letters whose title Jerome quoted in *De Viris Illustribus*). Letter 22 is a pictorial description of the desert, which largely inspired Renaissance artists. It is a portrait of the desert through his ascetic experience, with all its torments: loneliness, burning sun, dirt, poverty, food and drink (which he says he should not talk about), rags, constant diseases, the whipping in his own body, and his own torturous thoughts. In this letter we can see the two faces of St. Jerome: that of a man who felt guilty for reading pagan literature and for considering himself a sinner and a little Christian, and the intellectual Jerome who still asked to send him more books. We know that all the intellectual activity of St. Jerome began at that time, when he was in the East, in the region which now includes Turkey and Syria. The ascetic practices, fastings, meditations and waking nights used for reading and writing were fundamental to the later conquests of St. Jerome.

Unlike the hard ascetic life experienced by our saint in the desert, described in letter 22, in letter 125, paragraph 12, he recalls many years later, in Bethlehem, in 411 A.D., his efforts to learn Hebrew, whose lessons began during this period in which he lived in Antioch. He says he often gave up learning this difficult language, but then resumed his study. In the same paragraph, he once again recalls the solitude of the desert and the rigorous fasts. Concerning the Hebrew language, we know that its knowledge was essential for his later works, because otherwise there could have been no translation of the Bible and its exegesis. Let's look at the paragraph in question:

Ep. 125§12: *Dum essem iuuenis, et solitudinis me deserta uallarent, incentiuu uitiorum ardoremque naturae ferre non poteram; quae cum crebris ieiuniis frangerem, mens tamen cogitationibus aestuabat. Ad quam edomandam, cuidam fratri, qui ex Hebraeis crediderat, me in disciplinam dedi, ut post Quintiliani acumina, Ciceronisque fluuios, grauitatemque Frontonis, et lenitatem Plinii, alphabetum discerem, stridentia anhelantiaque uerba meditarer. Quid ibi laboris insumpserim, quid sustinuerim difficultatis, quotiens desperauerim, quotiensque cessauerim, et contentione discendi rursus inceperim, testis est conscientia, tam mea qui passus sum, quam eorum qui mecum duxere uitam. Et gratias ago Domino, quod de amaro semine litterarum, dulces fructus capio.*

Ep. 125§12: "In my youth when the desert walled me in with its solitude I was still unable to endure the promptings of sin and the natural heat of my blood; and, although I tried by frequent fasts to break the force of both, my mind still surged with [evil] thoughts. To subdue its turbulence I betook myself to a brother who before his conversion had been a Jew and asked him to teach me Hebrew. Thus, after having familiarized myself with the pointedness of Quintilian, the fluency of Cicero, the seriousness of Fronto and the gentleness of Pliny, I began to learn my letters anew and to study to pronounce words both harsh and guttural. What labor I spent upon this task, what difficulties I went through, how often I despaired, how often I gave over and then in my eagerness to learn commenced again, can be attested both by myself the subject of this misery and by

those who then lived with me. But I thank the Lord that from this seed of learning sown in bitterness I now cull sweet fruits".

These last two letters (*Ep.* 22 and *Ep.* 125) as well as the one we will see below (*Ep.* 18) are classified as "exhorting".

According to Malherbe (1988, p. 69) and Cain (2009, p. 214), exhorting letters are those, as the name says, that exhort, that is, encourage someone to adopt a lifestyle or, on the contrary, encourage someone to avoid certain behaviors. Jerome wrote 21 letters that fall into this theme which encourages the recipient to adopt or avoid specific behavior or lifestyle. In many of these letters, he urges correspondents to engage in a life of self-renunciation. In some cases, the exhortation takes the form of invitations to friends and acquaintances to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and specifically to Bethlehem.

We selected excerpts from *Ep.* 22 in which Jerome narrates to Eustoquium his experiences in the desert with all his torments and provocations. However, the letter is an exhortation for Eustoquium to keep his virginity, and, more extensively, as Cain (2009, p. 101) asserts, it is an open letter of instruction to all virgin Christians of the aristocracy. He also takes advantage of the letter to criticize clerics, false pious women and unhappy marriages. As it turns out, at the same time Jerome encourages Estoquium to follow one path and avoid another.

Letter 125, from 411 A.D., is addressed to the monk Rustic and is a manifesto as well, a small work (*Ep.* 125§17 in praesenti opusculo) to encourage the monastic life. The paragraph quoted above was intended to show Jerome's recollections of the ascetic life he experienced in Antioch. But this memory is intertwined in the context of Jerome's counsel to the young monk. In 125§9, for example, he encourages him to live in a holy community and to avoid asceticism. In 125§15, he suggests that he should not instruct himself, but follow a master: *nulla ars absque magistro discitur*. It is undoubtedly a kind of letter of encouragement, of exhorting.

During the years 383 and 384, St. Jerome and Pope Damasus established a dialogue on the Scriptures through six letters: two from Damasus to Jerome, *Ep.* 19 and *Ep.* 5, and four from Jerome to Damasus: *Ep.* 20, *Ep.* 36, *Ep.* 21 and *Ep.* 18 A+B. Letters 20 and 36 respond specifically to Damasus's 19 and 35. On the first letter, the Pope asks for explanations on the meaning of the Hebrew word *hosanna* and, on the second, on the content of five passages of Genesis. Letters 18A and B, 20 and 36 are considered the foundations of the *Hebraica Veritas*, hermeneutical methodology employed by St. Jerome that privileges the Hebrew text as a source to be considered for interpretation of the Old Testament. As a whole, these six letters are part of the exegetic type.

The term "exegesis" comes from the Greek *exégēsis* (ἐξήγησις), from the verb *exēgēomai* (ἐξηγέομαι) "to lead", "to guide". "Exegesis" therefore means "exposition of historical facts", "interpretation", "commentary", "interpretation of a dream" and also "translation".

In our opinion, perhaps the most important letter of all that has been presented here is the one we are going to address now: 18 (A+B). It represents the beginning of the work of a Bible translator and exegete. It also highlights the advances made in the study of Hebrew and in biblical knowledge, which are fundamental to the translation of the Bible, which he will develop between 390 and 405. This translation, which was his greatest work, his life's mission, began with a request from the Pope Damasus himself, who, like Jerome, regarded the old Latin translations as not literary and often inaccurate. The invitation came from Damasus's observation about St. Jerome's wisdom and erudition, through a series of exegetical letters in which the saint answers the Pope's questions about various passages or topics in the Bible, dated 383 and 384 A.D.

The letter 18, traditionally divided into A and B, was dedicated to Pope Damasus in 383, although it was written at Constantinople in 380 or 381.

In part 18A§3, Jerome explains at length the vision described in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, and builds upon its vision a mystical meaning. He says that some of his predecessors interpreted the vision being the Lord sitting upon a throne: God the Father and suppose the *seraphim* to represent the Son and the Holy Spirit. He said that he does not agree with them, for John expressly had tell us that it was Christ and not the Father whom the prophet saw.

18A§3: *Quorum ego auctoritati, quamvis sint eruditissimi, non adsentio, multo si quidem melius est uera rustice quam diserte falsa proferre, maxime cum Iohannes euangelista in hac eadem uisione non Deum Patrem, sed Christum scribat esse conspectum.*

"Translators (or interpreters) undoubtedly most erudite, but to whose authority I do not hold myself, for it is better to tell rustically the truth, than to speak eloquently falsehoods. And the main reason is that John the Evangelist in this same vision writes not to have been seen the Father, but Christ".

Scholars interpret that our saint refers to Origen when he says that his predecessors write wrong things with a beautiful style. It is known that Jerome was inspired greatly by Origen, from whom he followed at least three

teachings, according to Vessey (2004, p. 321): the strongly ascetic conception of Bible study as part of the Christian life regime, a biblical philology centered in the text according to the demanding tradition of the Hellenistic grammarian critics and a hermeneutic ethics that establishes an emphasis in the spiritual meanings obtained by allegorical exegesis. While the exegesis of the Greek text, especially spiritual, was inspired by Origen. We can not fail to mention the influence of Apollinaris of Laodicea, exegete and theologian, from whom he followed the method to interpret the Bible in a sober manner, respecting the literal and historical meaning of the text before seeking a spiritual meaning. Donatus, his old grammarian teacher, in turn, influenced him to comment the works verse by verse.

In 18A§6 Jerome continues the interpretation of the word *seraphim* from its basis in the Hebrew language where the word *seraphim* means either "glow" or "beginning of speech", and the two *seraphim* thus stand for the Old and New Testament's mystical meaning. Jerome then speaks of the unity of the sacred books. He affirms that whatever we read in the Old Testament we find also in the Gospel; and what we read in the Gospel is deduced from the Old Testament. So, there is no discord between them, no disagreement because in both Testaments the Trinity is preached.

The letter is remarkable in so many ways. Not only because he shows all his knowledge about the Bible and three languages in question – Hebrew, Greek and Latin –, but also because with his letter he has begun his long journey through *Hebraica Veritas* who will lead him to his most important book, namely the *Vulgata*.

There would be many topics to develop concerning this letter because it is rich in its exegesis, because of its allegorical interpretations and also, inversely, by the rigorous translation of Isaiah's chapter, comparing it to the previous Latin translations and to the translation of the Seventy (*Septuaginta*). However, Jerome always defends his personal translation, unrelated to those that preceded him. This is one of the most admirable characteristics of our saint, that is, intellectual independence, as well as the particularly daring character to express his opinions, no matter who it was, even if it was the Pope he was addressing to.

Finally, letter 18 (A+B) would deserve a detailed exposition of his translation technique. With responsibility and prudence, in these exegetical letters, among which 18 (A+B) is the first, one can see his work as a translator and reviewer, comparing the biblical texts in Latin, Greek and Hebrew to, later, defend the *Hebraica Veritas*, which will be done expressly after he composed the *Questiones hebraicae in Genesim*, between 391 and 392 A.D. In the next section, we will summarize everything we seek to develop in this article and draw some conclusions.

4. Final Thoughts

Valéry Larbaud (1946, p. 26) in his book of essays on translation—*Sous l'invocation de Saint Jérôme*—devotes the first forty pages to the exhibition of St. Jerome's role not only as a translator but also as a brilliant writer. The genius of St. Jerome is not simply an *avant-garde* translator, but a forerunner of the literary and medieval writers. In fact, in recent decades we have witnessed more and more scholars developing works on the spiritual and intellectual wealth of St. Jerome. The amount of research that examines the various aspects of St. Jerome's life and intellectual production—which is presented, for example, only in the bibliography of the authors quoted in our references—is impressive.

St. Jerome was a pioneer in his time. He has left us an enormous legacy, his intellectual production being of almost half a century. Among his inheritance, as we have already mentioned, the translation of the Bible is undoubtedly the most remarkable. However, the bases for this translation and for its exegesis were launched in that initial period when St. Jerome departed for the so-called East or Orient. These letters were not only the basis for his biblical formation and the legacy he left us—making him the patron of translators, librarians and encyclopedists—but also his pioneering issues of interpretation and translation, from long before modern translation theories, that is, almost two thousand years ago.

We addressed the letters that show for themselves the experiences of St. Jerome in the first decade of his long career as a religious and intellectual: the difficulties to get to Antioch, the sadness for the loss of friends, the hardness of his life as an ascetic, problems that affected him, the division of the Church in the East, among other aspects. In these letters were interwoven the two faces of Jerome: that of the ascetic monk, humble and suffering, who sought consolation and perfection in Christ and the monastic ideal; and another, that of a learned and sophisticated intellectual. As for Jerome's personality, we personally believe that he has always been particularly genuine, for even in moments of weakness he was profound and sincere. This is one of the most striking features of his conduct. When he met someone or joined some principle he incorporated them into his personality, defending his views with vehemence, without fear, without restrictions. No doubt this behavior brought him some enmity and made him abandon old friends, such as Rufino, his lifelong companion. On the other hand, it also provided the friendship and favoring of influential people, such as Pope Damasus and the high ladies of Roman society. Evidently, the fruits he reaped from his engagement with influential people were due to his own intellectual qualities as a great Bible connoisseur and scholar. His life experience and the deepening of his studies

in Antioch, the desert of Syria and Constantinople, although briefly reported in the letters we have selected, will provide him the facilitation of his life projects. From his arrival in Rome, starting from Constantinople, many other achievements flow to St. Jerome, not only intellectuals, but also culminating in the construction of the monastery in Bethlehem, sponsored by Paula, where he will live the last thirty-four years of his life. St. Jerome was a tireless traveler and these experiences can be followed in his other letters.

We may now address some words and draw some conclusions on the framework of letters proposed by Cain's taxonomy (2009). We agree with Cain's taxonomy and try to justify it by reading the letters. However, Jerome's writing pattern is of a high aesthetic quality, in which there is much intertextuality with the Bible and classical Greek-Roman literature. And it is in the middle of this well-written composition, interspersed with extratextual references, metaphors and other figures of language that one must extract the main purpose of the letter, which is not always so obvious or at least can not be regarded as so pure. The fact that St. Jerome's letters can be classified into several types, according to the ancient theorists of the epistolographic genre, shows that Jerome himself had this knowledge. In fact, we know that he mentions Cicero and Horacio as his masters—also great connoisseurs of the genre—and consciously employs the steps of classical rhetoric, which should instruct (*docere*), delight (*delectare*) and persuade (*persuadere*) its readers. St. Jerome was a master of persuasion, earning him the task of spiritual counselor and life counselor from the high ladies of Roman society. However, in our view, the letters we are dealing with here can not be regarded as having been expressly produced so that he could construct an image of a saint, a perfect Christian, or an unequaled scholar and intellectual among the society of that time. St. Jerome was, in fact, all these people in one. To this day, it is difficult to find someone who can be compared as equivalent to him.

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