

Call for Papers
AisMoc – AIRS Joint Conference 2025
“Isolated Sanctuaries: Geographies of Withdrawal, Liminal
Landscapes and Dynamics of Sacred Isolation”
Málaga, 18-20th November, 2026

The research project AisMoc – Spatial and Metaphorical Isolation in the Christian West (4th–7th c.), funded under the Spanish National Programme for the Generation of Knowledge, invites paper proposals for the conference Isolated Sanctuaries, organised in collaboration with the *Associazione Internazionale Ricerche sui Santuari* (AIRS). The conference will take place between 18-20th November 2026.

The conference aims to examine how isolation—whether physical, topographical, social or metaphorical—has shaped sacred spaces from Antiquity to the Early Modern period. We seek to foster a cross-disciplinary dialogue that reassesses the interplay between sacred space, withdrawal, individual agency, institutional norms and landscape, integrating historical, archaeological, literary, anthropological and theoretical approaches.

Suggested thematic subjects

1. Topographies of sacred isolation

- Sanctuaries, hermitages, monastic foundations and rural churches in remote or marginal landscapes.
- Island monasteries, mountainous shrines, frontier sanctuaries and culturally “wild” spaces.
- The construction of cultural landscapes where remoteness becomes a vector of sacrality.

2. Physical isolation, mobility and networks

- Accessibility, connectivity and circulation (GIS mapping, spatial analysis, network theory).
- Relative, intermittent or constructed isolation vs. literary ideals of complete withdrawal.
- Interactions between isolated cult sites, nearby settlements and structures of authority.

3. Isolation as metaphor and discursive model

- “Western deserts,” reworkings of the Egyptian ascetic ideal and hagiographic stereotypes.
- The rhetorical use of solitude, retreat and segregation in epistolary, conciliar and monastic texts.
- Literary topoi of wilderness, silence and remoteness in shaping religious identities.

4. Agency, individual choices and institutional tensions

- Voluntary withdrawal and its negotiation within or against religious norms.
- Conflicts between ascetics, communities, bishops or lay patrons.
- Micro-historical approaches to individuals navigating sacred landscapes of isolation.

5. Gender and sacred isolation

- Female forms of retreat in urban, rural or ascetic contexts.
- Female penance, enclosure and other modalities of enforced religious isolation.

- Transgender cases and gender reconfiguration within monastic and eremitic settings.

6. Long-term perspectives and comparative approaches

- Continuities and transformations from Late Antiquity to the Medieval and Early Modern periods.
- Cross-cultural comparisons within the Mediterranean and Western Europe.
- Reoccupation, reinterpretation or secularisation of isolated sacred sites.

Submission guidelines

Abstract: 250–300 words

Languages: English, Spanish, French or Italian

Deadline: April 30 2026 (**extended to May 31 2026**)

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