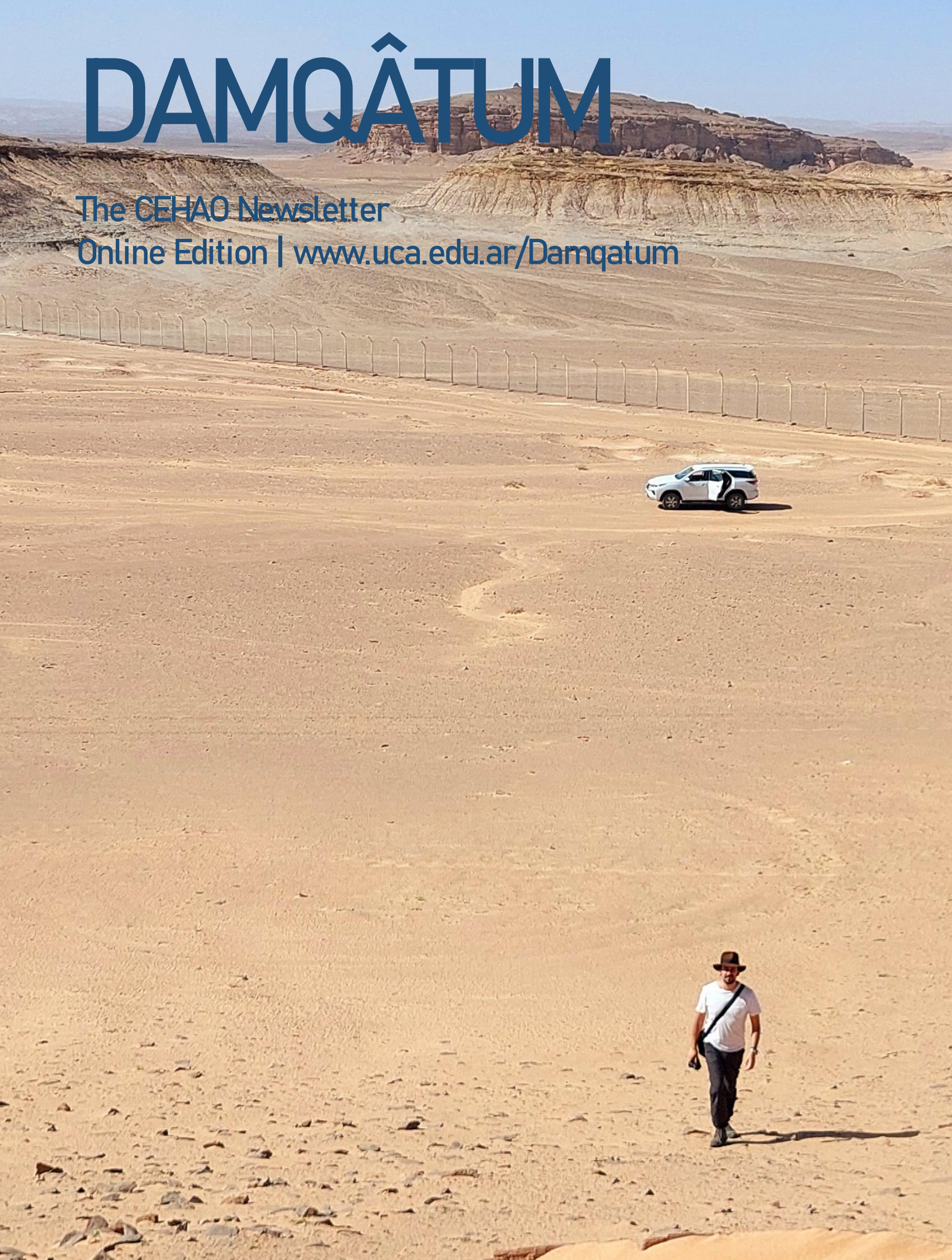


DAMQÂTUM

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CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS DE HISTORIA DEL ANTIGUO ORIENTE

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY - FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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More than 35 Years in Egyptology: An Interview with Roxana Flammini



Roxana Flammini in Egypt (2023)

She needs little introduction: Roxana Flammini has worked for more than 35 years in Egyptology in Argentina and now has just retired from all her research and teaching positions. More than anyone else, Roxana has promoted the field of ancient Near Eastern studies in Argentina and Latin America, founding the CEHAO in 2002 and

its flagship journal *Antiguo Oriente* a year later. Her retirement and recent publication of the book *La Segunda Estela de Kamose: Un estudio integral en contexto* in the Ancient Near East Monograph series is a perfect occasion for interviewing Roxana on the history of her research and the current state of the field.

Roxana, a pleasure having you with us. You have worked for more than 35 years in the field of Egyptology in Argentina and you just retired from your research positions at the National Research Council (CONICET) and your teaching duties at the National University of Lujan. How do you see the state of Egyptology, and of the ancient Near Eastern studies in general, in Argentina? What changes have you seen during this time?

Before we begin, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to share this moment with you. The first question encompasses two issues that share certain commonalities while diverging in other aspects.

I believe that over the last 40 years in Argentina, new areas of study have consolidated—such as Hittitology and studies of peripheral populations outside traditional centers (such as those of the Arabian Desert)—joining the established fields of Assyriology and Biblical Studies. As for Egyptology, it maintains the prominence that began during the era of Abraham Rosenvasser.

Archaeological perspectives have been enriched by specialists working from theoretical frameworks or through the study of ancient scripts.

However, I am concerned by a certain tendency to view linguistic mastery as secondary, prioritizing the construction of theoretical frameworks over the analysis of primary textual sources. I do not wish to be misunderstood: I have spent several years working on theoretical perspectives myself, but I consider theory to be a subsidiary tool to the evidence; that is to say, it must be changed or adjusted if new materials emerge that render a previous interpretation invalid. Unfortunately, some people cling to a pre-constructed theoretical framework and find it very difficult to remain flexible, turning a tool into a dogma to be defended at all costs. I stand very far from that approach, as I believe it stifles critical thinking.

Regarding the changes I have witnessed and experienced, I believe the most significant has been the arrival of the internet and globalization. On one hand, this has granted us access to colleagues from across the globe in record time—now reduced to mere hours. Consequently, access to bibliographical and documentary material has changed substantially. On the other, what has also changed, in my view, is the feasibility of covering vast periods of time in our analysis: the sheer volume of publications appearing today in a wide array of languages necessitates narrowing one's research focus in order to achieve true depth and mastery.

Another issue that I believe deserves close attention is the preponderance of large databases like Scopus and their metrics, which lead

researchers to be more concerned with their output volume—specifically articles in Q1 or Q2 journals—than with the actual quality of their work. The famous “publish or perish” paradigm is dominating our disciplines, and I view this with concern. Ultimately, this has become a massive business in which researchers do not truly participate—they simply gain another line on their CV.

This paradigm has many consequences. For instance, to secure a research position at CONICET, the quantity of publications often outweighs their quality (and I say this from experience); I truly hope this changes at some point. It is unacceptable that a peer-reviewed book is valued less than an article in the same condition. As a way of countering this trend, I have dedicated a significant part of my academic life to fostering free, open-access, peer-reviewed monograph series. One of them was precisely ANEM, a pioneering project initiated in 2008. Others include *Lecturas Sociales* (IICS, Social Sciences Research Institute, UCA) and *Estudios Orientales* (RIIPOA, Ibero-American Network of Ancient Near Eastern Researchers, University of Alcalá).

Today, we are experiencing another major transformation with the arrival of AI; we shall see how we adapt to its proper use. We'll see what time brings.

There is a lot of interest among people about the history of ancient Egypt, with a current exhibition in the Museo de Bellas Artes having many visitors, plus a couple of other Egyptomania-related attractions in Buenos Aires. How do you explain this attraction? How can we as scholars translate

that interest into a more proper understanding of ancient Egypt?

Ancient Egypt has fascinated generations in the West for several centuries, and Argentina is no exception. As early as the nineteenth century, we can already see the interest that ancient Egypt awakened among the educated sectors of society—an audience drawn not only by the desire for knowledge, but also by the allure of mystery. A civilization capable of building pyramids that have stood for thousands of years, and that granted death a place we find almost inconceivable today, can only inspire genuine curiosity.

Nowadays, the opening of the Grand Museum at Giza is the reason to encourage diverse activities regarding ancient Egypt, renewing the interest in this ancient society. As researchers, our role involves trying to “translate” highly specialized information for the general public, much like a medical researcher would explain the importance of DNA to non-specialists. Many of us have carried out—and continue to carry out—a wide variety of outreach activities: lectures, talks, interviews, and more. In this sense, we can consider ourselves channels that transmit reliable, evidence-based information.

You have done a lot to promote ancient Near Eastern studies in Argentina, particularly with the founding of the CEHAO in 2002 and of the journal *Antiguo Oriente* in 2003. Tell us how you came up with the idea for these two projects and how you developed them over time.

I began working at the Catholic University of Argentina (UCA) with Graciela Gestoso Singer around 1993, shortly before she moved to Israel,

where she later settled. At that time, the History program had recently been reopened, and I quickly recognized it as an open and promising space for developing a field in which the university itself had a clear interest. These ideas were present from the beginning, although it took time for the right conditions to align.

That opportunity finally emerged in the early 2000s. By then, I had gained extensive experience through my work at the Institute of Ancient Near Eastern History (IHAO) at the University of Buenos Aires—where I was trained—as well as through my involvement in CONICET’s Egyptology Program (PREDE). This background made it relatively easy to propose the creation of both a research center and an academic journal at UCA, particularly as the university leadership was very receptive to these initiatives.

As a result, the Center for Studies of Ancient Near Eastern History (CEHAO) was founded in 2002. The first issue of the journal *Antiguo Oriente* followed the next year. The most visible challenge in Argentina—largely due to economic instability, but not only for that reason—was ensuring continuity. While many initiatives faltered under these pressures, I believe a key factor in our success was my leadership philosophy: the set of principles that guided how I formed and managed teams.

From the start, I knew I did not want to remain director of CEHAO or the journal indefinitely. Therefore, I made it a priority to train teams capable of taking over whenever I chose to focus on other projects. Juan Manuel Tebes and Romina Della Casa, for example, were the ones who stepped into those roles, continuing the work I

helped set in motion.

On my side, I have dedicated significant time to building a strong relationship with the Society of Biblical Literature since 2008. In recent years, I have focused on strengthening the first [Ibero-American Network of Ancient Near Eastern Researchers \(RIIPOA\)](#), a collaborative initiative that began as a conversation with Carlos Gracia Zamacona at the University of Alcalá and formally took shape as a network in 2020. Today, the Network brings together more than thirty colleagues from universities and research institutes around the world.

Ultimately, I believe the key to maintaining continuity—beyond financial considerations—is knowing how to build strong teams, learning to navigate inevitable differences, and fostering mutual respect. My approach has always been grounded in a “win-win” philosophy: for things to go well for me, they must also go well for you. I am convinced that this perspective is what allowed these projects to remain active for such a long time, and I am confident they have a promising future ahead.

Of course, when you started these projects, you didn't do it in a vacuum, as professional Egyptology has a long history in Argentina, starting with the work of Abraham Rosenvasser, and later with important scholars like Perla Fuscaldó and Alicia Daneri Rodrigo. What can you tell us about them?

I began my training in 1985, while I was still an undergraduate student at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the University of Buenos Aires. It started mainly with the study of

languages taught at the Institute of Ancient Near Eastern History (IHAO). Over time, I began my specialized training under Perla's supervision, with whom I completed my bachelor's thesis. Later, Alicia supervised my doctoral dissertation. Both are scholars who achieved significant international recognition, working at major archaeological sites.

Although their own careers took a turn toward archaeology, they never prevented me from developing my own interests, which were more closely related to theoretical issues at that time. Both trained under Rosenvasser: Perla graduated from the University of Buenos Aires, and Alicia from the National University of La Plata. Perla took part, together with Rosenvasser, in the French-Argentine mission to Aksha, within the UNESCO-funded project to save the monuments of Lower Nubia during the construction of the Aswan Dam in the 1960s. Alicia continued her postgraduate studies in Canada, earning a master's degree from the University of Toronto.

Both worked together at the University of Buenos Aires and at PREDE, training a large number of specialists—among whom I am honored to be included. Perla later worked at one of the most important archaeological sites in Egypt, Tell el-Dab'a, the location of the Hyksos capital, Avaris, under the direction of Manfred Bietak. And Alicia worked with another leading Egyptologist, Donald B. Redford, first at El-Amarna and later at the site of Mendes, in the Nile Delta. Perla also directed the first entirely Argentine archaeological expedition to Egypt, at Tell el-Ghaba, a Late Period site located in northern Sinai during the 1990s. They were my teachers, and the most wonderful part is that we still keep in touch to this day, and they remain associated with CEHAO

as honorary researchers.

During the last years, your research has focused on Egypt's Second Intermediate Period and the role of the people known as the Hyksos. What are the main problems you encountered for this period? What conclusions did you arrive at?

In fact, referring to the “Hyksos” as a population is a mistake, given that the term actually refers to the designation Egyptians gave to foreign rulers (heqa khasut, “ruler of the foreign countries”), which some of the rulers of Avaris later adopted into their royal protocol. The Nile Delta, particularly the Eastern Delta, has been a very fluid area of interaction with Western Asian populations since Predynastic times. What happened at the end of the Middle Kingdom, during the reign of Amenemhat III, is that the crown likely decided to encourage the settlement of Western Asiatics on Egypt's eastern border. Over time, and due to other historical circumstances, these groups gradually became independent, eventually establishing a dynasty—the 15th, also known as the Hyksos Dynasty.

One of the greatest challenges in working on a period as complex as the Second Intermediate Period is precisely the scarcity of sources, especially for its earliest stages. I consider that a long-term process—beginning toward the end of the 12th Dynasty—led to an increasingly pronounced fragmentation of power. Leaders of small local towns established in Upper Egypt and the southwestern oases gained greater autonomy and probably competed among themselves for access to scarce resources, all within a landscape shaped by foreign political powers that, at various times, controlled key exchange routes: the so-

called Hyksos rulers in the north and the Nubians in the south.

Over time, and through a process that is still not fully understood, the Theban region became the setting from which the reunification of Egypt was once again initiated, following military conflict with these foreign powers. Out of this complex historical trajectory emerged the 18th Dynasty, whose rulers—figures such as Ahmose, Thutmose I, and Thutmose III—were characterized by strong militarization and expansive political ambitions. The Second Intermediate Period was, to my knowledge, a watershed moment in the way monarchy was conceived in ancient Egypt.

Your research was one of the earliest in Latin America to provide a more theoretical "world-systems" perspective of ancient Egypt's relationships with the outer world. What are the main points of your approach to this topic?

I believe that some of the most important aspects of a macro theoretical framework, such as World-Systems Analysis, lie precisely in its ability to analyze historical dynamics over the *longue durée* from an exceptionally broad perspective. In this view, Egypt is never seen as an autarkic entity, nor is it always a 'center'. Instead, these characterizations are situational; depending on the historical dynamics under analysis, it can function as either a core area or a peripheral one.

I have dedicated a large part of my research to characterizing Egypt's border regions during the Middle Kingdom, which I have termed 'linking areas' (the Eastern Delta and Lower Nubia). In these regions, the Egyptian state operated in a substantially different way than it did in more central locations near major cities like Ity-tawy or

Thebes and, precisely, it gave place to the establishment of foreign populations in the Eastern Delta, as mentioned above, and of a chain of fortresses from Elephantine to the Second Cataract in the south.

Your last book, [La Segunda Estela de Kamose: Un estudio integral en contexto](#), published with us in [ANEM \(Ancient Near East Monographs Series\)](#), is focused on the Second Stela of Kamose. How were you attracted to this source? Why is this stela so important for the history of ancient Egypt?

I was re-examining the stela while studying various terms associated with power structures during the Second Intermediate Period—chiefs, rulers, kings, and so on. In fact, this research grew out of my earlier work on Middle Kingdom political dynamics. However, when I reviewed the existing translations of the stela, I noticed that certain lines were difficult to interpret. They repeated several times the word “ruler” as if referring to two distinct concepts, yet without marking any differentiation between them.

This prompted me to seek a high-quality photograph of the monument, which was kindly provided by the Luxor Museum, where it is currently on display. It was only upon examining the image closely that I realized the word for “ruler” appeared with different determinatives. Before moving forward, I needed to verify—very carefully—whether anyone else had already identified and recorded this distinction in a translation. Given the monument’s renown and accessibility, I assumed this was highly likely. To my surprise, after reconstructing the scholarship as thoroughly as possible, I found no indication that this particular feature had ever been noted.

That discovery marked the beginning of a study that ultimately lasted almost ten years. Over time, I observed that the scribe had crafted an exceptionally sophisticated play on words, as well as intricate links between human representations and royal protocols, among other nuances. Today, I encourage Egyptologists to undertake similar work with other monumental inscriptions, treating visual information as equally meaningful as the written text and making it explicit in their translations.

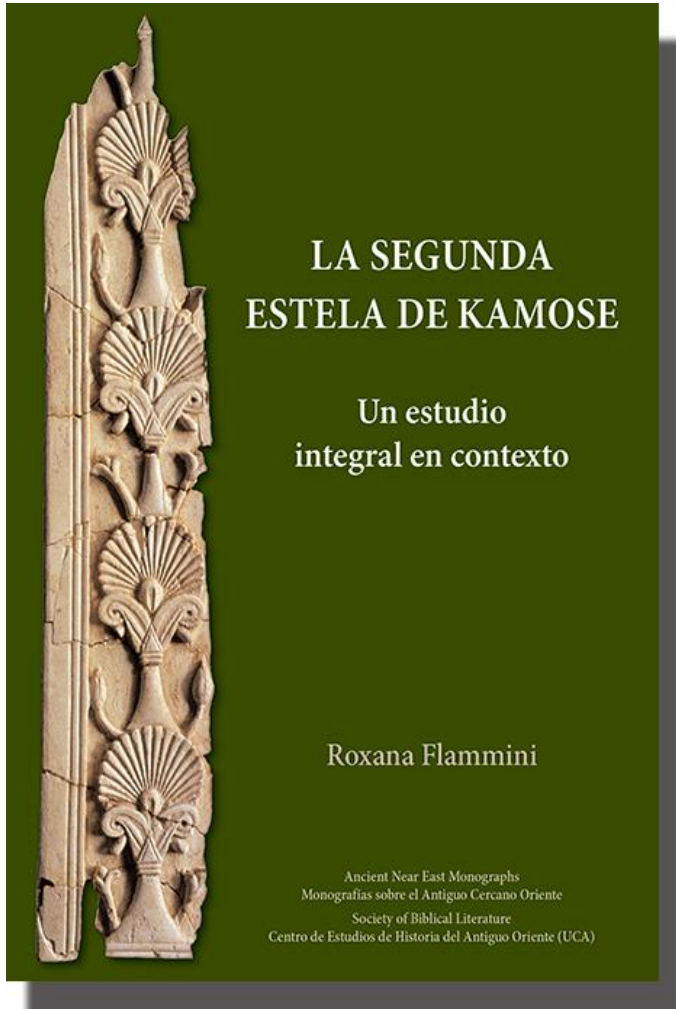
Lastly: If you have to tell young people who are interested in Egyptology or ancient Near Eastern studies a few pieces of advice to increase the chances of a successful career, what would you tell them?

I believe that one of the most important factors is choosing the right supervisor—someone who must also be a true mentor. This should be a person who can sincerely tell you what needs to be done: for example, studying both ancient and modern languages. Among the modern ones, English, French, and German are indispensable. Fortunately, we now have AI translators, but if you want to participate in international academic discussions, you must be able to speak and write fluent English, at the very least. My advice is that the earlier you start, the better.

A good mentor is someone who devotes time to their students, who reads and corrects what they write, who encourages them when their energy wanes, and who knows how to guide them because they truly “know the ropes,” as the saying goes. You should also look at the teams they have built: Are they all excellent scholars? Are they good colleagues and respectful people? Does it

look like a place where you can grow? My advice is that before choosing a supervisor, you should investigate very carefully, because unfortunately, not everything that glitters is gold.

Of course, success does not depend solely on external factors—important as those are. Personal qualities are equally essential: being disciplined, listening to those who know, and dedicating real time to study are all necessary to build a successful academic career. In the end, I simply hope that young scholars pursue this field with passion, integrity, and curiosity—and that they find in it the same joy and sense of purpose that I found throughout my career.



Cover of *La Segunda Estela de Kamose: Un estudio integral en contexto* (ANEM 34)

Problemáticas en torno a la noción del tiempo en el Antiguo Egipto

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Introducción

En el Antiguo Egipto no hubo una única noción del tiempo. Tampoco hubo una palabra para definirlo. Tanto en los mitos cosmogónicos como en las creencias acerca de la vida en el más allá o en las cuestiones de índole más profana nos encontramos con un abanico de concepciones diferentes. En esta monografía intentaremos aproximarnos a esta compleja temática desde diferentes puntos de vista, indagando algunos de sus aspectos simbólicos, religiosos, y materiales. Por un lado, nos referiremos a las problemáticas que surgen en torno a la interpretación de los conceptos abstractos de *neheh* y *djet*. Como contrapartida, nos referiremos también a las dificultades que debemos enfrentar al momento de estudiar las listas reales o de elaborar cronologías absolutas. Mencionaremos algunas de las principales hipótesis formuladas en cuanto al origen del calendario civil egipcio y señalaremos algunos aspectos interesantes en relación a las creencias religiosas. Por último haremos una breve referencia al papel que la astronomía desempeña tanto en la interpretación simbólica de documentos y monumentos como en la determinación de fechas del pasado.

Las concepciones del tiempo en el Antiguo Egipto:

En la actualidad se tiende a pensar el tiempo como

algo uniforme y unidireccional, y se tiende a medir el tiempo de una única manera. Existe incluso un tiempo universal coordinado (UTC) que toma como única referencia al meridiano de Greenwich y que permite establecer, por ejemplo, una diferencia horaria entre España y Argentina. Esta relativa uniformidad dificulta la comprensión de la noción del tiempo en el Antiguo Egipto y agrega alguna complicación adicional al cálculo de las dataciones.

En el Antiguo Egipto no hubo una única idea del tiempo. Ni siquiera existió una palabra que lo definiera. En términos del egiptólogo J. Assman: “El idioma egipcio no tenía una palabra para (...) "tiempo" (...) no nos encontramos con un concepto, sino con una constelación: no (sólo) de conceptos, sino (también) de dioses” (2001: 79). El concepto cosmológico de tiempo se expresaba de alguna manera mediante la dualidad *neheh* (*nḥḥ*) y *djet* (*djt*). El significado de estos términos ha sido largamente discutido (Assman, 2001; Hornung, 2001; Bonanno, 2013; Aly et al., 2021; Llul, 2021). Ambos suelen ser traducidos como eternidad, asociándose el primero con la eternidad cíclica, recurrente y regeneradora y el segundo con la eternidad lineal, inmutable y unidireccional. Sin embargo, no existen vocablos en nuestra lengua que puedan reflejar con exactitud el significado de estos dos principios:

“El significado de este concepto disyuntivo

del tiempo y sus dos componentes no puede traducirse con ningún par de palabras en las lenguas occidentales. Los términos egipcios no corresponden en modo alguno a nuestro "tiempo" y "eternidad"; esta distinción derivada de la ontología griega (...) no sólo era ajena al pensamiento egipcio, sino incluso contraria a él (...) No debe sorprendernos, pues, que no tengamos un equivalente de este par en nuestras propias lenguas ni en nuestro propio concepto del tiempo. Nuestra dicotomía de tiempo y eternidad se basa en la ontología griega y la dogmática cristiana, y nuestro concepto del tiempo reposa en el sistema de tiempos de las lenguas occidentales, que expresan las nociones de pasado, presente y futuro.” (Assman, 2001: 74)

Además de estos conceptos tan abstractos, los egipcios tenían ideas mucho más pragmáticas acerca del tiempo y la forma de establecerlo. Por ejemplo, elaboraron importantes listas en las que figuran sucesiones de reyes y de dinastías. Estas cronologías relativas obedecen a una concepción lineal del tiempo (Lucas, 2005) y, como veremos mas adelante, pueden llegar a ser de gran utilidad a la hora de establecer cronologías absolutas. De estas listas, una de las más antiguas y mejor preservadas es la llamada Piedra de Palermo (c. 2338 a.C.), en la que se enumeran los monarcas que reinaron entre la primera y la quinta dinastía. Otras importantes listas reales son la de Karnak (c. 1450 a.C.), la de Abidos (c. 1300 a.C.) y la de Saqqara (c. 1100 a.C.). El Canon Real de Turín (c. 1250 a.C.) es sin dudas el listado mas completo. Se cree que originalmente contenía una sucesión de alrededor de 350 faraones aunque actualmente el documento se encuentra parcialmente dañado. En

tiempos de dominación helenística el sacerdote Manetón (siglo III a.C.) escribió la historia de Egipto (*Aigyptiaka*) organizando la sucesión de reyes en dinastías. La obra original se ha perdido y solo se conoce a través de las compilaciones realizadas por escritores posteriores.

El cómputo del reinado de los faraones nos plantea una nueva divergencia en cuanto a la noción del tiempo. No conocemos datos acerca de los años de reinado de los primeros monarcas que gobernaron Egipto. A partir del rey Serpiente, cuarto faraón de la primera dinastía, se implementó el uso del jeroglífico *mnpt* para indicar el año, aunque desconocemos cuál era el calendario que se utilizaba en ese entonces, de modo que no podemos saber con certeza cuál era la duración de ese año. La forma de computar los años de reinado de los siguientes faraones del Período Dinástico Temprano y del Reino Antiguo es aun tema de discusión. A partir de la dinastía XI y hasta la dinastía XVIII los reyes consideraban que el primer año de su reinado abarcaba desde el día de su coronación hasta el final de ese año civil. Por lo tanto, ese primer año de reinado podía llegar a ser muy breve con una extensión de unos pocos meses o incluso unos pocos días. En cambio, para los reyes del Reino Nuevo el primer año de reinado se extendía desde la fecha de su coronación hasta el aniversario de su coronación del siguiente año civil, abarcando 365 días (Hornung et al., 2006). Estas diferencias en la manera de computar el primer año de reinado demuestran que no hubo una noción absoluta de tiempo en el Antiguo Egipto, y deben ser tenidas en cuenta a la hora de establecer cronologías absolutas.

Como veremos mas adelante, la cuestión del calendario civil egipcio y de su posible origen es

igualmente compleja. Los estudiosos no se han puesto de acuerdo sobre este tema. Algunos importantes historiadores han sostenido que se estableció en concordancia con los ritmos de crecida y retirada del río Nilo (Neugebauer, 1942). Sin embargo, estos ritmos no son lo suficientemente regulares como para conformar la base del calendario de 365 días. Por ese motivo se han formulado otras hipótesis que apuntan a un origen astronómico (Meyer, 1904; Parker, 1950; Clagget, 1995; Belmonte, 2003, 2009; Llul, 2016a).

La elaboración de las listas de reyes y de los calendarios que regulaban la vida cotidiana y las festividades respondía a necesidades materiales y obedecía a una concepción lineal del tiempo. Pero, además de estos métodos de cómputo temporal, los egipcios tenían otra peculiar idea del tiempo relacionada con la fiesta del jubileo del faraón o Fiesta del Heb Sed (*Hb sd*). Esta fiesta debía celebrarse cuando el rey llegaba al año 30 de su reinado. Muchos de estos reyes, como por ejemplo el rey Zoser de la tercera dinastía, no vivieron lo suficiente como para gobernar durante tres décadas. Por lo tanto, celebraban su jubileo en el más allá. En ese caso la ceremonia se consumaba en los relieves que inmortalizaban la figura del rey (figura 1), en una indudable muestra de animismo (Descola, 2014). Mas aun, en muchos templos se grabaron inscripciones otorgándole al rey no una sino millones de fiestas Sed para ser celebradas en su vida de ultratumba “(...) aprovechando el insondable suministro de tiempo allí presente (...)” (Hornung, 2001:11).

La celebración de la Fiesta del Heb Sed en el más allá nos introduce en los aspectos simbólicos del tiempo egipcio (Laguens, 2014). Desde mediados del segundo milenio a.C. el tiempo transcurrido

entre el momento de la muerte y la finalización del proceso de momificación abarcaba un lapso de 70 días (Pinch, 1994). Luego de ese lapso el cuerpo del difunto era depositado en su morada eterna, la tumba. Según algunos investigadores, este intervalo de tiempo podría haberse vinculado simbólicamente al período durante el cual la estrella Sirio permanecía en conjunción (Hays, 2010; Llul, 2016a). La conjunción es la fase en la cual los astros no son visibles en el cielo nocturno, luego de haberse ocultado por última vez en el horizonte occidental. Luego de la conjunción, los astros renacen en el horizonte oriental en su orto heliaco. Para los egipcios el fenómeno de la conjunción de los astros era entendido como una muerte cíclica que conllevaba un posterior renacimiento. La duración del proceso de momificación podría haber establecido una suerte de analogía entre el ocaso y el orto helíacos de Sirio y la muerte y el renacimiento del difunto (Descola, 2014): así como Sirio renacía luego de su muerte de 70 días, el difunto renacía a su vida eterna luego de su reposo obligado de 70 días.

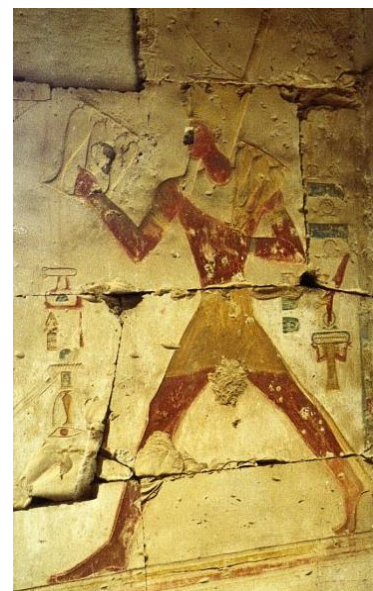


Figura 1: Relieve del rey Zoser celebrando la Fiesta del Heb Sed en el más allá. Dominio público.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Djoser_heb_sed.jp

Tiempo, ritual y religión en el Antiguo Egipto

La noción egipcia del tiempo se encuentra profundamente vinculada con la religión. Las ideas abstractas del tiempo *neheh* y *djet* se encarnaron en dos figuras divinas: respectivamente Re y Osiris. El dios sol Re, en su interminable ciclo de salidas y ocasos, representaba el eterno retorno, la muerte y el renacimiento, la renovación y “los ritmos periódicos del tiempo pulsante del día y la noche, los meses, las estaciones y los años.” (Assman, 2001: 78). Osiris, el dios de los muertos, simbolizaba la continuidad y la perdurabilidad de la vida en el más allá:

“Los egipcios concebían así el tiempo como una combinación del "tiempo solar" y el "tiempo osiriano", que tenía su origen en la eficacia activa y combinada de los dos dioses. Los egipcios imaginaban la constelación en la que Re y Osiris trabajan juntos como encarnaciones de los dos aspectos antinómicos o complementarios del tiempo (...).” (Assman, 2001: 79)

Como hemos visto en el apartado anterior, y particularmente en los párrafos referidos a la Fiesta del Heb Sed, la medición del tiempo en el Antiguo Egipto se deslizaba imperceptiblemente desde lo material hacia lo simbólico y desde la vida hacia los ámbitos de la muerte. Precisamente, es en los contextos funerarios donde encontramos las mejores muestras de los relojes que señalaban el paso del tiempo a partir del tránsito de los astros por el cielo nocturno (Neugebauer, 1945; Parker, 1950; Clagett, 1995). En los ataúdes procedentes de la necrópolis de Assiut, datados entre fines del Primer Período Intermedio y la dinastía XII, se encontraron numerosas tablas astronómicas

conocidas como relojes estelares diagonales. La iconografía que indefectiblemente acompañaba a estas tablas eran las imágenes de Nut, Osiris e Isis (figura 2), señalando claramente la indisoluble unión que existía para los egipcios entre tiempo y religión (Llul, 2016a; 2016b).



Figura 2: Detalle del interior del sarcófago del oficial Nakht. De izquierda a derecha las figuras representan a la diosa Nut, la constelación de Meskhetiu (bajo la forma de una pata de toro), Osiris y la estrella Sirio (*Spdt*) identificada con Isis.

Dominio público.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roemer-Pelizaeus-Museum_2018-09-20zl.jpg

Asimismo, en el cenotafio del rey Sethi I y en las cámaras sepulcrales de los reyes Ramses IV y Ramses VI se encontraron algunas de las mejores representaciones del Libro de Nut, con elaboradas tablas del tránsito decanal que permitían calcular las horas de la noche teniendo en cuenta la posición de los astros. Del mismo modo, en varias tumbas de la realeza de la dinastía XX se hallaron magníficas representaciones de los llamados relojes ramésidas (figura 3). Estos relojes permitían conocer la ubicación de las estrellas en el cielo nocturno utilizando un curioso y original sistema de referencia basado en una figura humana representada frontalmente. En este esquema, las coordenadas de los cuerpos celestes se señalaban en relación a las distintas partes del cuerpo humano (Llul, 2016a; 2016b).

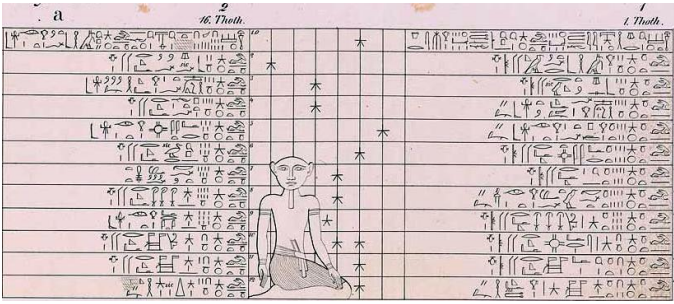


Figura 3: Representación del reloj estelar de la tumba de Ramses IX (dinastía XX). Dominio público.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grab_des_Ramses_IX._Monat_Thot.JPG

En el serdab del complejo funerario del rey Zoser encontramos otro fascinante ejemplo de la vinculación simbólica que existía en el Antiguo Egipto entre el tiempo y la vida en el mas allá. En el interior de este pequeño edificio se emplazaba la escultura del doble del faraón, ahora en el Museo del Cairo. En la pared del recinto que mira hacia el norte y a la altura de los ojos de la escultura se tallaron dos orificios (figura 4). Éstos apuntaban en dirección a ciertas estrellas muy particulares: las estrellas circumpolares cuya peculiaridad es que nunca llegan al ocaso y por lo tanto, nunca entran en conjunción (Belmonte, 2012; Llul, 2016a). Como he explicado antes, la conjunción de los astros era concebida por los egipcios como el tránsito de los cuerpos celestes por el inframundo. En ese marco conceptual, una estrella circumpolar era una estrella que nunca moría ya que nunca alcanzaba su ocaso. A través de los orificios de su serdab la escultura del rey Zoser –y por lo tanto el propio faraón– contemplaría eternamente a estos astros. Podemos imaginar que, tal como proclamarían mas tarde los Textos de las Pirámides (PT 214, 215, 268, 269, 419, 412, 422 y 441 entre otros ensalmos), Zoser anhelaba identificarse con las estrellas circumpolares *ihmiw sqiw* y gozar junto con ellas de una vida imperecedera.



Figura 4: serdab del complejo funerario del rey Zoser donde se observan los orificios practicados a la altura de los ojos de la escultura. Dominio público.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:26654-_serdab_of_Djoser.jpg

Del mismo modo que en muchas sociedades antiguas y contemporáneas, los rituales y las festividades religiosas del Antiguo Egipto obedecían a un cronograma. Este cronograma se regía por los movimientos de los astros. En particular, algunas de las festividades religiosas más importantes se organizaban siguiendo el calendario lunar. Por ejemplo, la fiesta del dios Djehuty/Toth, la fiesta de la unión de la diosa Hathor con el disco solar, la fiesta de la salida de Min, la Bella Fiesta del Valle, la Fiesta del Bello Encuentro entre la diosa Hathor y su esposo Horus y la Fiesta de Opet eran celebraciones asociadas al calendario lunar. En algún momento de la historia egipcia estas fiestas se incorporaron al calendario civil (Claget, 1995; Llul, 2016a; Depuydt, 2017). En palabras de R. Parker (1950, prefacio): “El producto final de nuestras investigaciones será (...) persuadir al lector de aceptar mi convicción actual de que el calendario lunar es una clave esencial para una adecuada comprensión de las fiestas egipcias y, por tanto, (...) de la religión egipcia”.

Hallamos otra importante manifestación de la relación entre el tiempo, el ritual y la religión en

la ceremonia fundacional de los templos y de los centros de culto. Este ritual involucraba un rito conocido como el estiramiento de la cuerda *pd-sš*. Esta ceremonia se practicaba desde tiempos tan tempranos como los reinados de la primera dinastía (Arnold, 2003; Rossi, 2003; Belmonte, Molinero y Miranda, 2009; Karkowski, 2016; Dash, 2017). Existen numerosas representaciones de este ritual datadas en distintas épocas, en las cuales el faraón reinante celebra el rito conjuntamente con la diosa Seshat (figura 5). Durante este acto fundacional, que se oficiaba en las horas de la noche, los cimientos del predio eran orientados hacia algún punto en particular. En numerosos ejemplos, el objetivo hacia el cual se alineaba el edificio era la posición de algún astro en una fecha religiosamente representativa:

“Los sacerdotes observaban determinadas estrellas (...) Así, se determinaban los ejes maestros del templo, estableciendo una alineación precisa con la estrella elegida. Una vez hecho esto, se estiraba una larga cuerda, siguiendo el eje deseado, para establecer definitivamente la orientación del templo y el lugar por donde debían pasar sus muros.” (Llul, 2016a: 333)

Los ejemplos de alineación astronómica en el Antiguo Egipto son muchos y abarcan todos los períodos de la historia, e incluso de la prehistoria egipcia. Algunas orientaciones son particularmente interesantes ya que ilustran la estrecha relación existente entre tiempo y ritual. Por ejemplo, el templo menor de Akhet-Aton (dinastía XVIII) estaría alineado hacia la salida del sol en el día en el que el templo fue inaugurado. La alineación del templo mayor de Abu Simbel es tal que dos días al año el sol ingresa hasta el final del

templo iluminando tres de las cuatro esculturas allí emplazadas. Las fechas en las que se producía este fenómeno coincidían, en tiempos de Ramses II (dinastía XIX), con el inicio de las estaciones *peret* (*prt*) y *shemu* (*šmw*). Como último ejemplo mencionaremos la alineación de los ejes del templo de Hathor en Dendera (54 a.C.). El eje menor estaría orientado hacia la posición del orto de la estrella Sirio *Spdt* el día en que se realizó el rito fundacional del templo mientras que el eje mayor señalaría hacia la salida de la estrella circumpolar Alkaid en ese mismo día (Belmonte y Shaltout, 2010; Belmonte, 2012; Llul, 2016a).



Figura 5: Ptolomeo III junto la diosa Seshat realizando la ceremonia del estiramiento de la cuerda. Dominio público. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edfu_Tempelrelief_14.JPG

Tiempo y astronomía en el Antiguo Egipto

No podemos hablar del tiempo en el Antiguo Egipto sin referirnos a la astronomía. Como hemos visto las festividades más importantes se regían por las fases de la luna; el inicio del año era señalado por el otro heliaco de la estrella Sirio *Spdt*; los templos y monumentos se alineaban en dirección a la posición que ocupaba algún astro en el día de la fundación; y la duración del proceso de momificación podría haber sido establecido en paralelo con la conjunción de la estrella Sirio. En esta sección haremos referencia a otras dos cuestiones en las cuales la relación entre la astronomía y el tiempo resultan cruciales: el origen del calendario egipcio y la datación de eventos y reinados.

El calendario civil egipcio estaba compuesto por tres estaciones (*akhet*, *peret* y *shemu*). A su vez, cada estación constaba de cuatro meses de treinta días, lo que suma un total de 360 días, a los que se agregaban 5 días más para completar los 365 días del ciclo solar o del ciclo sothíaco. Como hemos mencionado previamente, se han planteado varias hipótesis en torno a la creación del calendario civil egipcio (Clagett, 1995; Llul, 2016a). Algunos historiadores han sostenido que su origen se relaciona con el orto heliaco de la estrella Sirio *Spdt* (Meyer, 1904); otros estudiosos han preferido vincularlo a los ciclos agrarios y a las crecidas del río Nilo (Neugebauer, 1942), mientras que también se ha postulado un inicio basado en los ciclos lunares (Parker, 1950). Por su parte, J. A. Belmonte (2009) ha propuesto que el calendario civil podría haberse creado a partir de la observación del sol cenital a la latitud de Assuan en torno al 3000 a.C. La discusión sigue abierta. Sin embargo existe acuerdo en que, cualquiera que

haya sido el origen, los egipcios debieron buscar necesariamente una referencia astronómica para establecer el inicio del año y su duración.

La astronomía desempeña también un papel muy importante en la datación de eventos y de reinados. Últimamente se han desarrollado herramientas y procedimientos que permiten conocer con gran precisión, entre otras cosas, la orientación de los monumentos y la posición de los astros en el pasado (Ruggles, 2015; Magli, 2016; Walker, 2021). Estos recursos técnicos se encuentran al servicio del historiador y del arqueólogo y son de considerable ayuda a la hora de realizar determinaciones y de establecer cronologías absolutas (Llul, 2020). Si se tienen al alcance los datos necesarios, los métodos astronómicos permiten, por ejemplo, conocer con muy buena aproximación la fecha en la que fue inaugurado un edificio o en la que se celebró algún evento. En ese sentido son de mucha utilidad los documentos en los que se narra la celebración de alguna festividad asociada al calendario lunar o a algún otro fenómeno astronómico. También son de suma importancia las cronologías relativas desarrolladas por los propios egipcios. Sin embargo en este último caso debemos tomar precauciones ya que muchas de estas listas se encuentran dañadas e incompletas.

Existen numerosos casos en los que gracias a la astronomía se han podido establecer dataciones. Por ejemplo, en el Papiro Berlín 13588 se han registrado datos acerca de un eclipse solar. En base a estos datos se ha concluido que el faraón mencionado en dicho documento es Psamético I y que su muerte ocurrió en el año 610 a.C. (Llul, 2006). Asimismo, se ha relacionado el zodiaco del templo de Hathor en Dendera con la

configuración de las constelaciones y la posición de los planetas en el año 51 a.C., lo que indicaría que el zodiaco fue labrado tres años después de la inauguración del templo (Llul, 2016a).

Conclusiones

El estudio del tiempo en el Antiguo Egipto no es una cuestión sencilla. Desde el punto de vista material nos ofrece todo tipo de dificultades. Hemos visto que los faraones no seguían un criterio unificado en cuanto a la manera de computar sus años de reinado. Por otro lado, la documentación en la que nos apoyamos se encuentra, en la mayoría de los casos, dañada e incompleta. Desde la lingüística nos encontramos con que no existe un vocablo egipcio que defina al tiempo. Inversamente, no encontramos en nuestras lenguas occidentales las palabras adecuadas para definir ciertos conceptos egipcios como *nḥḥ* o *djt*. Desde la ontología, nos encontramos con una dispersión de ideas y conceptos que se extienden desde lo profano hacia lo trascendente, desde lo material hacia lo simbólico y desde lo terrenal hacia las esferas del inframundo. En este trabajo hemos intentado abordar la complejidad del tema desde diferentes perspectivas e indagar en algunas de sus más interesantes problemáticas.

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The Petra Fallacy

Early Mosques face the Sacred Kaaba in Mecca, not Petra!

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Dan Gibson's book Early Islamic Qiblas (2017) prompted my reply "From Petra back to Mecca: from pibla back to qibla" (2017). His "Comparing two qibla theories" (2018) prompted the present response. I have appended a reaction to A. J. Deus' "Monuments of Jihad" (2018) on the orientations of Turkish mosques. The abundant reliable publications on the determination of the sacred direction toward the sacred Kaaba in Mecca are here listed for the first time. To understand why this or that early mosque was pulled down and rebuilt in a different direction, read on, but rest assured, it all has nothing to do with Petra.

Since these exchanges, I have made available on my Academia webpage a 1,350-page monograph entitled "Historical Mosque Orientations" (2023) with explanations of the orientations of hundreds of mosques towards the Kaaba, using the methods described in medieval texts. In 2023, Dan Gibson published a book entitled Let the Stones Speak, demonstrating for his revisionist readers, that the foundations of early mosques face Petra, so that the origins of Islam and its early history were deliberately falsified. He devoted an entire chapter devoted to show that my ideas were false.

Introduction

For over 1,400 years, Islamic civilization has taken the orientation of sacred space more seriously than any other civilization in human history. The sacred direction towards the sacred Kaaba in Mecca is called qibla in the languages of the Muslim commonwealth. How Muslims have determined the qibla over the centuries is a complicated story, but several facts are known:

- The Arabs before Islam had an intricate system of what we now call 'folk astronomy' based on what one can see in the heavens.
- The Kaaba has a rectangular base which is astronomically aligned; its major axis points toward the rising of Canopus, the brightest star in the southern sky, and its minor axis is defined by summer sunrise and winter sunset. Its four corners point roughly in the cardinal directions.
- The Muslims developed a sacred geography in which, over the centuries, various schemes were developed in which segments of the perimeter of the Kaaba corresponded to sectors of the world which had the same *qibla*, defined in

terms of astronomical risings and settings.

- By the 9th century, the Muslims had accessed the geographical and mathematical knowledge of their predecessors, which meant that for the first time they could calculate the *qibla* using (medieval) geographical coordinates and mathematical procedures.
- From the 7th to the 9th century and also occasionally thereafter until the 19th century, Muslims used astronomical alignments to lay out the *qibla*. From the 9th century to the present Muslims have also used mathematical methods to calculate the *qibla*.

Few people know anything about this these days. Indeed, most Muslims think that all mosques face Mecca. Yet if they would investigate just a few medieval mosque orientations they would be surprised. For medieval mosques face the Kaaba rather than Mecca. There is a subtle, but highly significant difference. How can they ‘face’ a distant edifice that is not visible? How these mosques actually ‘face’ the Kaaba is something we moderns have to learn.

Over the past 50 years, I have attempted to document—for the first time—the way in which Muslims over many centuries have used astronomy in the service of their religion:

- to regulate the lunar calendar through the sighting of the crescent;
- to organize the times of the five daily prayers;
- to determine the sacred direction or *qibla*.

To do this I did not just sit down and write about these subjects, I spent many years looking at thousands of medieval Arabic manuscripts and hundreds of scientific instruments in libraries and museums around the world. Since nobody had ever looked at these manuscripts for hundreds of years, I inevitably found things that were new. Some of my results took some Muslim colleagues by surprise. Western colleagues are, I find, becoming less and less interested in anything do with classical Islamic Studies. And that field is plagued by revisionists who think no medieval Arabic texts are trustworthy and who eagerly rewrite a chapter of Islamic history relying instead on the ramblings of some early Christian bishop in Armenia (I exaggerate).

Some of my publications include studies of the following subjects:

- a) the methods with which Muslims from the earliest period could have determine the *qibla* by simple folk astronomy;
- b) the notion of a sacred geography about the Kaaba, with sectors of the world having the same *qibla* defined by astronomical horizon phenomena;
- c) the methods by which the Muslim scientists could calculate the *qibla* for a given locality;
- d) the geographical tables showing longitudes and latitudes of hundreds of localities from al-Andalus to China together with their *qiblas* in degrees and minutes;
- e) the medieval discussions of the orientations of religious architecture in various cities (notably Córdoba, Cairo and Samarqand);

- f) the extraordinarily sophisticated mathematical tables displaying the *qibla* for any locality with which the user enters its longitude and latitude in the table and reads the value of the *qibla*;
- g) the remarkable cartographical grids produced by Muslim scientists enabling the user to reading off the *qibla* on a circular scale and the distance to Mecca on a diametrical scale.

I have left it to others to write on such controversial topics as the conflict regarding the *qibla* – is it south-east or north-east? – amongst Muslims in North America. Frequently over the years folk have introduced the factor that the Earth is not a sphere into the *qibla* discussion, which is not helpful.

In 1999 I published a book dealing with the way Muslims have determined the sacred direction over for some 1,400 years. This presented an overview of the earliest procedures of using astronomical alignments to face an astronomically-aligned Kaaba, with different means of calculating the *qibla* using geographical coordinates and trigonometric or geometric methods. But the book focusses on the mathematical tables that were devised giving the *qibla* as an angle in degrees and minutes for the whole Muslim world; the geographical tables giving for the principal localities in the Muslim world the *qibla* and distance to Mecca; and the cartographical Mecca-centred grids which enable the user to read off the *qibla* and distance to Mecca for any locality in the world.

None of these materials was known 50 years ago. And inevitably none of them are mentioned in uninformed popular accounts of the *qibla* such as

one finds in Wikipedia. I never thought while preparing all my research that some day somebody would come along and announce that all early mosques are oriented toward a location other than Mecca. No Muslim would ever have thought that mosques could be deliberately oriented somewhere other than Mecca. If they had, they would rightly be considered to be deranged.

Revisionist fascination with N. W. Arabia

Some 50 years ago some over-enthusiastic London-based Arabists – John Wansbrough and his students Michael Cook & Patricia Crone – came up with the idea that Islam began not in Mecca but somewhere unspecified in N.W. Arabia. One of the principal and most convincing arguments for this bold assertion was the ‘fact’ that the earliest mosques in Egypt and Iraq did not face Mecca, but rather some locality in N. W. Arabia. Some 25 years ago I pointed out the folly of this assertion, explaining that the earliest mosque in Egypt faces winter sunrise and the earliest mosque in Iraq faces winter sunset, so, of course these mosques do not face Mecca. Nor were they deliberately aligned towards anywhere in N.W. Arabia. They face the Kaaba. The earliest Muslims in Egypt and Iraq used winter sunset and winter sunrise, respectively, for the *qibla*, not because they were stupid, but because they were smart. How else to face an edifice they could not see: all savvy ancient peoples have used astronomical alignments for one reason or another.

My present intention is simple: it is to warn the unsuspecting reader that the only other person ever to have written generally on the subject of mosque orientations

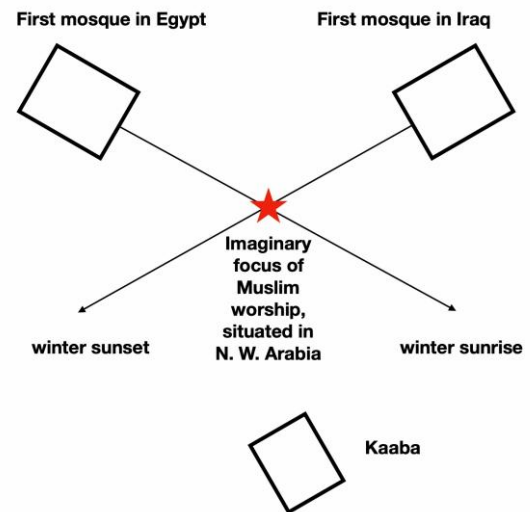
- a) has no qualifications to correctly interpret the available data;
- b) has no understanding of the fact that **MODERN** directions from one place to another cannot be used to investigate the reasons underlying the orientation of **PRE-MODERN** architecture;
- c) seems oblivious to the fact that there is well-established discipline called archaeoastronomy and has no understanding of astronomical alignments;
- d) has erred monumentally in his interpretation of mosques that were built on pre-existing religious architecture or to fit with pre-Islamic city plans;
- e) has no understanding of how mosques were laid out over the centuries; and
- f) has no control over any of the numerous medieval Arabic sources—legal, astronomical, folk astronomical, and mathematical—relating to the determination of the qibla.

Worse still, he

- g) has settled on a locality as the focus of early Islam where there were no Arabs, no Muslims, no Jews, and there was no life.

And worse than that,

- h) behind Gibson's apparently innocent adventures in a field he does not master there lies a pernicious ulterior motive that I personally find odious.



The fallacy propounded by Cook & Crone. They observed that the earliest mosques in Egypt and Iraq appeared to be aligned with a place in N.W. Arabia rather than with Mecca. This, they thought, confirmed their (incorrect) theory that the origins of Islam were somewhere in N.W. Arabia. In fact, the mosques are aligned with the Kaaba in Mecca by means of astronomical horizon phenomena, namely, winter sunrise and sunset. The first generation of Muslims knew what they were doing with regard to mosque orientations and later generations over many centuries developed remarkable and more sophisticated means for finding the sacred direction. We moderns just have to learn how they dealt with the need to align mosques in the sacred direction toward the sacred Kaaba in Mecca. It is not something one can imitate or investigate with an iPhone

Enter Dan Gibson with his Early Islamic Qiblas (2017)

I refer to Dan Gibson, an amateur Canadian Near East archaeologist with no formal academic training but with strong Christian missionary connections who has convinced himself that Islam started in Petra rather than Mecca and Medina.

He is certainly very creative: for example, he is able to find numerous references to Petra in the *Qur'ān* that nobody before him had ever noticed. The prominent Arabist Arthur Jeffrey in his book *The foreign vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (1938) documented numerous Aramaic words but no specifically Nabataean words. Also, although the Nabataeans may have been Arabs, it should be

remembered that classical Arabic developed in Mecca, not in Petra.

With the arrogance of the uninformed Gibson claims to be able to interpret the orientations of any early mosque. He presents as ‘proof’ of his Petra theory the ‘fact’ that the earliest 50-odd mosques are oriented to within a degree or two with Petra in sight, not Mecca. And, Gibson claims, the real Kaaba was originally in Petra anyway. All this happily confirms his theory that Islam started in Petra, not Mecca. But this is all poppycock (كلام فارغ , *kalām fārigh*), not least because it contradicts everything we know about early Islam and contemporaneous Petra, let alone the sacred direction or *qibla*, but mainly because it is based on the most obvious false premises. Since Gibson has no idea how the first generations of Muslims might have determined the direction of anywhere – Petra or Mecca – he compares the orientation of mosques laid out well over 1,200-1,400 years ago with **MODERN** directions of Petra and Mecca.

Let me say at the outset that I believe that Gibson is sincere even though he is misguided; he really believes what he has discovered is new and exciting, substantiated by the evidence, which he is the first person to present. (Certainly nobody before Gibson has presented this dazzling array of mosque orientations.) But he cannot believe there is another explanation to all of his orientations which does not involve Petra at all. As they say in new-speak, he just doesn’t get it.

Nabataean orientations before Gibson

If Gibson is ill-informed about Muslim practice, he appears to be quite clueless about earlier Nabataean practice in Petra and elsewhere. He

apparently does not know that even his favourite Nabataeans used astronomical alignments—the cardinal and solstitial directions—for orienting their religious architecture and their tombs.

Accurate mosque orientations towards Petra

To give credence to his Petra theory Gibson needs to rewrite the history of science, a subject about which he is singularly uninformed. He wants us to accept that when the first generation of Muslims expanded out of Petra (!) they knew all about astrolabes (!) and spherical trigonometry (!) and the like. When they wanted to build mosques around the world from al-Andalus to China facing the Kaaba in Petra they used these advanced mathematical techniques to calculate the pibla toward Petra and they were able to do this to within a degree or two. More poppycock (كلام فارغ)! In fact, they used simple astronomical alignments, and there was no need for any mathematical system. (However, as part of the Graeco-Roman world, the Nabataeans long before the advent of Islam did have such devices as sundials.)

Mosque orientation before Gibson

Gibson’s claim about Petra deliberately ignores everything that modern scholarship has uncovered about the notion of sacred direction in Islam. His first book *Qur’anic Geography* (2011) had not a single reference to any serious book or article on the *qibla*. His later works have been padded with a few references to my works but they deliberately omit any reference to four articles which presented an overview of what was known before Gibson appeared on the scene:

- “On the astronomical orientation of the Kaaba” (with Gerald S. Hawkins) (1982);

- “Astronomical alignments in medieval Islamic religious architecture” (1982);
- “The orientation of medieval Islamic religious architecture and cities” (1995);
- “The earliest Islamic mathematical methods and tables for find-ing the direc-tion of Mecca” (1996); and
- “The sacred geography of Islam” (2005).

For myself, I am fairly confident that Islam started in Mecca and Medina, and that all early mosques were deliberately aligned to face the astronomically-aligned Kaaba in Mecca. These orientations were achieved by the early Muslims with a considerable amount of success within the limits of their capabilities, mainly using astronomical alignments or building on earlier foundations that were inevitably also astronomically aligned. Later mosques were aligned either in *qiblas* calculated from geographical data using mathematical procedures, although the old procedures continued to be used.

In each major centre in the medieval Islamic world there was a palette of several *qibla*-directions accepted by one interest group or another. There might be a *qiblat al-ṣaḥāba*, a direction chosen by the first generation of Muslims who settled in that locality, usually an astronomically-defined direction, and favoured thereafter; there might be different directions favoured by the individual legal schools; there might be a different astronomically-defined direction that was favoured by some; and there could be two mathematically-determined *qibla*-directions, one based on an approximate methods and the other based on an exact procedure. In addition, there is the modern *qibla*, which is

irrelevant to the investigation of any historical mosque.

I consider it necessary to respond to Dan Gibson’s latest pronouncements for two main reasons:

- People seem to forget that the sacred direction in Islam is not toward Mecca but toward the Kaaba in Mecca. There is a significant difference between facing an edifice that one cannot see but which one knows is astronomically aligned and facing a distant city. People need to be reminded of this, because what was obvious to a medieval mind is not obvious to us moderns. All of Gibson’s mosques are aligned toward the Kaaba in one way or another. Since the 9th century, when mathematical geography and mathematical methods became available, mosques have generally been aligned toward Mecca, usually, but not always, using mathematical methods. In major centres there was sometimes a quadrant of *qibla*-directions used different interest groups. Without knowing this, it is somewhat precarious to try to explain an early mosque orientation.
- There are very few people – Muslims, non-Muslims and independents – who know anything about medieval *qibla* determinations and even fewer who would be able to counter Gibson’s ‘new’, basically absurd theories which appear to rely on ‘scientific evidence’.
- I am well aware of the potential damage Gibson has done / can do to our field. But more seriously, Gibson’s writings

are guaranteed to contribute to Islamophobia amongst those who have no idea about the one and only civilization which really took orientations seriously for over 1400 years.

Some basics

Before we begin to lose the reader through technicalities we mention a few basic notions that were self-evident to medievals but are not to some moderns.

The heavens above the observer appear to rotate about a celestial axis defined (more or less) by the Pole Star. The altitude of that star above the northern horizon is a measure of the latitude of the locality.

The cardinal directions north and south are defined as the intersections on the horizon with the meridian, the vertical circle passing through the Pole Star, intersects. The cardinal directions east and west are defined on the horizon by the vertical circle perpendicular to the first one. Or we may consider them as the points at which the sun rises and sets at the equinoxes, the days when the length of daylight equals the length of night.

The daily path of the sun is a circle perpendicular to the polar axis. At the equinoxes the day-circle passes through the east and west points. At the summer solstice, when the length of daylight is maximum, sunrise and sunset are substantially (for convenience say about 30°) to the north of east and west. At the winter solstice, when the length of daylight is minimum, sunrise and sunset are substantially to the south of east and west.

The expression ‘astronomical alignments’ relates here to buildings whose bases, mainly rectangular,

are in the cardinal directions, or in directions defined by the rising or setting sun at the solstices. The risings and settings of various bright “qibla stars” might also be involved. These solar directions conveniently divide each quadrant of the horizon into three roughly equal parts.

To calculate the direction from any general locality toward another, specific locality, one needs to know the longitudes and latitudes of both localities and be familiar with an appropriate geometric procedure or trigonometric formula. These are adequately dealt with elsewhere. The latitudes used by medieval astronomers could be fairly accurate but the longitudes less so.

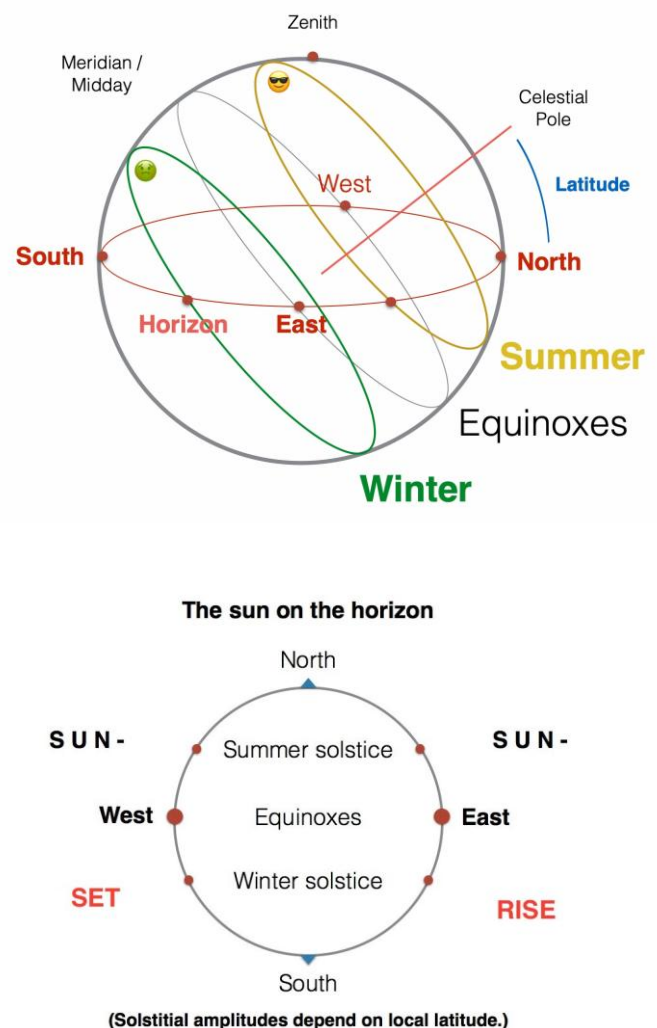


Fig. The sun’s paths above and below the horizon at the equinoxes and the solstices

Gibson's "Comparing two qibla theories" (2018)

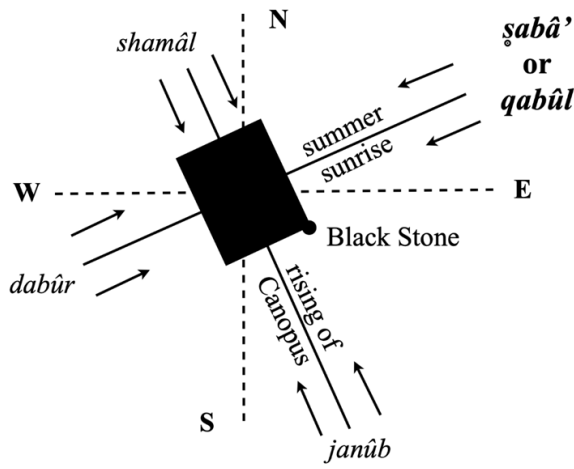
In this silly and desperate new article Dan Gibson attempts to compare what he and I have written on the *qibla* or sacred direction in Islam and the orientation of the earliest mosques (to ca. 800). He still seems to have no understanding of anything I have ever written on the subject of the *qibla* so he is hardly equipped to summarize my findings. He claims that I do not understand what he has discovered, which is very far from the truth, because I like numbers and can handle them (up to a point) and I can sometimes tell when people have been misled by numbers, as is the case with Gibson. And statistics are on my side this time.

Gibson has the audacity to present our respective credentials for conducting such an investigation, and I admit to being somewhat tickled by this. He modestly fails to mention the universities and subjects of his own "several undergraduate degrees". He states that he is assisted by "a small team of fellow researchers with degrees in history, astronomy, engineering, mathematics, and physics", but it is a pity that none of these have saved him from making a complete fool of himself in such areas, now well-documented, as ethnoastronomy and archaeoastronomy, for this is where our investigations belong, as well as in Islamic Studies and Nabataean Studies.

In discussing my credentials Gibson omits mention of the fact that my first degree was in mathematics (Cambridge, 1963), with a distinct penchant with respect to statistics. My graduate studies in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures and the History of Science came later (Yale, 1972). In discussing my professional experience Gibson simply omits the two decades (1985-2006) I spent as Professor of the History of Science at the

Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt and Director of one of the two leading centres in Europe of research on the history of Islamic astronomy and mathematics (the other being the University of Barcelona). معلّش .

Gibson states that my "location of data" is my article "Qibla" in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the prestigious reference work on historical Islamic Studies with articles each written by leading international authorities, kindly adding "many books and articles on the subject" and referring to an old website of mine. However, in that overview article "Qibla", published in 1979, after presenting some of the methods and tables used by Muslim astronomers over the centuries, I briefly discussed mosque orientation in a few lines. Gibson is correct in stating that I have not personally measured mosque orientations (except in Samarqand). However, in the 1970s I did consult hundreds of published mosque plans in the library of the Institute of Fine Arts in New York. Only a small minority of studies of individual mosques or architectural complexes contained reliable statements concerning orientations and few plans had reliable indications of true north. I concluded that to publish a survey of orientations based on such plans would not be worthwhile ("Astronomical alignments", p. 310).



Orientation of the Kaaba mentioned in medieval texts and confirmed by satellite images, with consideration of the surrounding horizon.

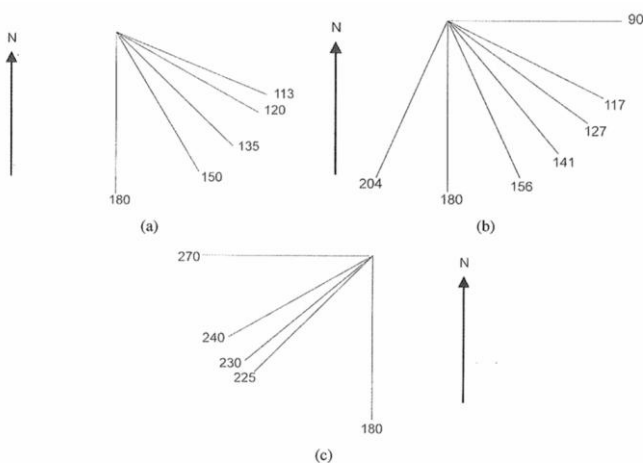
Canopus (سهييل, *Suhayl*) is the brightest star in the southern sky. The direction of the rising of Canopus is perpendicular to the axis between summer sunrise and winter sunset for the latitude of Mecca.

In pre-Islamic folklore the walls of the Kaaba were associated with the four 'cardinal' winds. Note that if one standing in front of the SW wall one is facing (استقبل, *istaqbal*) the قبول *qabûl* wind, also called صبا *ṣabâ*; in this position one is facing summer sunrise with (formerly) fortunate Yemen (اليمن, *al-Yaman*) on the right and ominous Syria (الشام, *al-sha'm*) on the left.

Some revisionists have claimed that the orientation of the Kaaba may have been altered on one of the several occasions when the edifice was rebuilt after destructive floods.

Revisionists have to be very innovative when confronted with an edifice that is as ancient as the Kaaba.

Various *qibla*-directions accepted in medieval cities of (a) Córdoba, (b) Cairo, and (c) Samarqand.



These include astronomical directions, cardinal and solstitial, and qiblas determined by approximate and/or accurate formulae.

In Córdoba there is no accurately-computed qibla attested, only one derived by an approximate formula (113°), which competed with winter sunrise (120°). The striking orientation of the Grand Mosque (150°) results from the street-plan of the Roman suburb where it was built, and it is happily 'parallel' to the main axis of the Kaaba. In the case of Cairo, the qibla of the Companions of the Prophet was winter sunrise (117°) and in the 10th century the *qibla* of the astronomers (127°) started to become popular. In Samarqand the *qibla* of the Companions was toward winter sunset (240°) but the *qibla* of the Shāfi'is was due south (since the Prophet had prayed due south in Medina) and that of the Ḥanafis was due west (since the road to Mecca left Samarqand in a westerly direction).

Imagine trying to unravel this from mosque orientations alone. Fortunately, we have medieval texts which explain it all.

The orientation of the Kaaba

It was the discovery of the astronomical alignment of the Kaaba – based on satellite images interpreted by Gerard Hawkins and a medieval Yemeni text extracted by myself – which in 1982 provided the key to the astronomical alignments of numerous early mosques. Such astronomical alignments were then confirmed not only by the mosques themselves but also by medieval texts mentioning the different mosque orientations in individual cities, notably, Córdoba, Cairo and Samarqand. These cities, with their mutually independent astronomical traditions, reveal remarkably similar arrangements of qibla-directions within a quadrant.

By 1987, when I published the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* article "Makka as centre of the world", as well as various articles on mosque orientations, I was able to present the first explanation of the reasons certain mosques face in directions that take us by surprise. Inevitably Gibson has never mentioned these articles. Some of them are reprinted in the 1993 volume *Astronomy in the Service of Islam*, which he now cites by title but does not mention its contents. These texts show

that a palette of different qibla directions was used in each major centre, that is, a set of directions within a quadrant. For some legal scholars the direction of the Kaaba was optimal (عين الكعبة , *ayn al-Ka'ba*) was optimal but any direction within the appropriate quadrant (جهة الكعبة , *jihat al-Ka'ba*) was acceptable. Gibson for the first time now mentions the orientation of the major axis of the Kaaba but he describes it as solstitial, whereas in fact it is aligned toward the rising of Canopus, the brightest star in the southern sky: it is the minor axis which faces winter sunset on one side and summer sunrise on the other. The astronomical orientation of the Kaaba is a topic that has not yet attracted any serious attention, either in the Muslim world or in the West.

Anybody who wants to understand mosque orientations should first consider the Kaaba and the astronomical orientations of its rectangular base, and then pose the question: how would one face an astronomically-aligned sacred edifice in a distant location, without much geographical knowledge and with little or no mathematics? The answer for the early Muslims was quite simple: one should face the same direction as one would when standing in front of the Kaaba at that wall or corner which corresponds to the location in question. No serious geography. No mathematics. It's called tradition.

The corners of the Kaaba were named since time immemorial after the directions they faced: Syria, Iraq, the Yemen and "the West". A rich tradition of sacred geography was developed over the centuries based on the notion of the alignments of the sacred edifice. Some 20 different schemes are now known from Arabic and Persian manuscript sources – treatises on geography, legal and practical texts on the *qibla* (كتب دلائل القبلة *qibla*), treatises

on folk astronomy, encyclopaedias – in which the world is divided into sectors about the Kaaba, with the qibla for each sector defined in terms of astronomical risings and settings. This newly-discovered material was surveyed in the article "Makka as centre of the world" mentioned above, and was announced mainly to receptive audiences of ethno- and archaeo-astronomers. The Islamic tradition of orientation and sacred geography is the only aspect of ethnoastronomy and archaeoastronomy in human history for which we have documentation. Gibson would not like these manuscript sources of Islamic sacred geography because they are "late"; in fact, they date from the period between the 9th and the 16th century, which for me is still early.

Gibson's conclusions regarding orientations

Gibson's investigations of the orientations of some 50-odd early mosques and comparison of their orientations with the **MODERN** directions of Petra, Jerusalem and Mecca, have revealed to him that there were four *qiblas* in early Islam. In his words:

"Gibson believes that early mosques faced one of four different qiblas. Originally they faced Masjid al-Haram in Petra (Jordan). Then during a century of disagreement they faced Mecca, as well as a place between Mecca and Petra, and some were aligned to be parallel to a line drawn between Mecca and Petra."

So his first "*qibla*", attested for the majority of early mosques, is towards the Masjid al-Ḥarām in Petra (!), which, according to him, is the original Kaaba (!). I label this direction *pibla* because it should not be confused with the real *qibla*.

Other early mosques “during a(n imaginary) century of disagreement”, faced Mecca, or a place between Mecca and Petra. If the mosques found by Gibson to be facing Mecca do indeed face Mecca, then it is by coincidence. To assert that mosques were deliberately built in between two directions is extremely naïve but saves Gibson from admitting that he does not know what is going on.

The fourth orientation is parallel to a line drawn between Mecca and Petra, which I label *fribla*, for ‘frankly ridiculous’. There is no historical cultural tradition known to Man in which people aligned sacred buildings in a direction between two directions to two different places. Here Gibson trips over deliberate solstitial alignments, which for certain localities do indeed lie cunningly between the local directions of Petra and Mecca.

Some individual mosques

I have no intention of commenting here on the orientations of numerous mosques. I have done that already in “From Petra back to Mecca – From *pibla* back to *qibla*” (2017), and I have seen how some of my pronouncements there have been misunderstood and misrepresented and distorted. I may have written somewhere that this or that mosque faces Petra and this has been taken as a confirmation of Gibson’s pronouncements, but I went on to say that in fact the mosque is actually aligned toward summer sunrise or whatever. Further, I now doubt that one can trust Gibson’s values for mosque orientations derived from satellite maps. So I shall here restrict comments to six (rather important) mosques, although later I shall make some suggestions for serious research in the future.

Gibson claims that the **Umayyad Mosque in Damascus** faces Petra not Mecca. He further claims that it was deliberately laid out towards Petra, and accurately at that. He overlooks the important fact that it was built on a Byzantine basilica which had replaced a Roman temple that was cardinally aligned. This is why it appears to face Petra, since within the limits of the exercise, Petra is roughly due south of Damascus. The Muslims built their Mosque and were surely happy that it ‘faced’ the northern Syrian corner of the Kaaba, as indeed it does. (Later, Muslim astronomers calculated the qibla in Damascus as about 30° E of S according to medieval data.)

Similarly, the **Mosque of ‘Umar in Jerusalem** was built so that it is aligned with the Temple complex, which is roughly cardinally aligned. Gibson claims the Mosque faces Petra, but in fact it is happily facing roughly due south toward the Kaaba. (It was some time before the astronomers announced that the qibla in Jerusalem was about 45 E of S according to medieval data.)

The **Mosque of Guangzhou** in China, dated (by some) to 627 (but this is legendary), is oriented at 292°. Gibson maintains that it was deliberately aligned towards Petra at 295° rather than Mecca at 285°. Since it faces Petra to within 3°, Gibson thinks that those who built it must have used a correct mathematical procedure. More likely, it was oriented towards summer sunset at about 295°. One should keep in mind that the Mosque has been rebuilt several times, although tradition would probably have dictated that the basic layout by Companions of the Prophet not be changed. Also one can ask how Muslims from Petra might have reached China before the death of the Prophet and built a mosque toward Petra. Gibson believes they had ships; I have suggested flying

carpets. I repeat that the origins of this mosque are legendary.

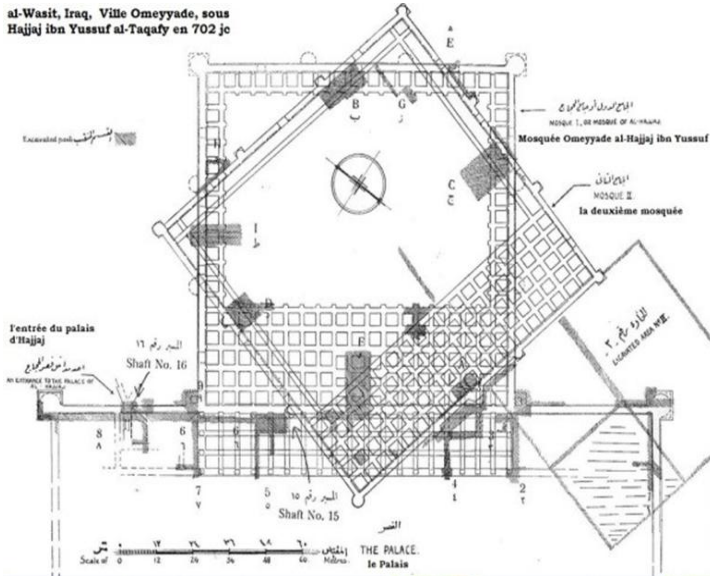
The **Grand Mosque in Sanaa**, built in 705, is oriented at 334°. Now it happens that from Sanaa Petra is at 334°, Jerusalem is at 335°, and Mecca is 326°. Does this mean someone calculated the direction of Petra and got it right to the nearest degree? No it doesn't, because the major axis of the Mosque is 'parallel' to that of the Kaaba in Makka (and it even has a miniature Kaaba inside). Those who built the Mosque were thinking about facing the south-eastern wall of the Kaaba, not about "The rose-red city", of which they had probably never heard.

The **Great Mosque in Córdoba** faces the deserts of Algeria rather than the deserts of Arabia. Why? The suburb of Roman Corduba that was called Colonia Patricia and which slopes down to the River Guadalquivir has only in the past 20 years been excavated. The orthogonal street pattern is now seen to be standard Roman, with the minor axis solstitially aligned between summer sunrise and winter sunset. We now see that the Mosque was built exactly in accordance with that street-plan. And that is why it faces a direction perpendicular to the solstices. And that is very nice, not least because its major axis is 'parallel' to the major axis of the Kaaba. Some medieval schemes of sacred geography appropriately associate al-Andalus with the middle of the NW wall of the Kaaba. (Later, Andalusī astronomers proposed different *qiblas*, including winter sunrise and a direction derived by an approximate geometric procedure.)

Several early mosques in the Maghrib from Morocco to Tunisia face the same direction as the Mosque of Córdoba, thanks to the Romans, and

thanks to the alignments of the Kaaba, and thanks to the late American Islamicist and historical geographer Michael Bonine, who discovered this. So much for Gibson's *fribla*, according to which the Mosque was built so as to be parallel to an imaginary line between Petra and Mecca. It is the *fribla* that is also imaginary.

The first **Mosque at al-Wāsiṭ** in the province of al-'Irāq was built in 706 and then demolished; a second Mosque was erected between 1009 and 1155 in a completely different direction, at about 50° further south. The first Mosque faces about 245° and the second Mosque faces about 195°. K. A. C. Creswell, the father of the history of Islamic architecture, wrote in the 1930s that the first Mosque faced Jerusalem; Crone & Cook inevitably said it faced an unidentified site in N.W. Arabia; Gibson now says it was first built deliberately facing "between Petra and Mecca". In fact, it faces winter sunset, which was taken as the *qibla* by the first generations of Muslims in al-'Irāq. The second mosque was oriented in a *qibla* for Wāsiṭ that had been derived by someone familiar with (medieval) geographical coordinates and mathematics. The orientation of the two mosques has never been previously explained in modern times.



This plan of the first two mosques at Wāsiṭ was published by the Iraqi archaeologist F. Safar in 1934.

It tells us all that we need to know in order to understand about the general notions regarding early mosque orientations.

The first mosque there was erected in 706 towards winter sunset because that was the *qibla* (or one of the *qiblas*) of the early Muslims. Clearly this seemed like a good idea at the time and it was eminently sensible: the Kaaba was more or less in that direction, and its NE Wall also faced winter sunset.

Thus the *qibla*-wall of the mosque was ‘parallel’ to the NE wall of the Kaaba.

A few centuries later a replacement mosque was built on the same site in the direction that was computed for the local *qibla* using a mathematical formula and the available geographical data.

The modern *qibla* for Wāsiṭ is irrelevant to any discussion of this situation, because all this is not about ‘us’, it is about ‘them’.

The orientations of both the first and second mosques in Wāsiṭ, like those of every mosque from the 7th to the 21st century, have nothing to do with Petra

Criticism of Gibson’s methodology

My main complaint again Gibson’s methodology is that he believes with all his heart that **MODERN** directions towards Petra and/or Mecca are somehow relevant to our understanding of the orientations of early mosques. There cannot be anybody on his team who knows about geography or mathematics (or better, the history of those disciplines) and who could have explained to him

why this is problematic. The ancients and the medievals did not have access to **MODERN** geographical coordinates. Nor did they have access to exact procedures for finding the direction on one locality to another.

To use pre-modern coordinates in such an investigation is no task for an amateur like Gibson. Whatever he might have used in the way of ancient Greek (Ptolemaic) coordinates would be inaccurate—especially given that the Greek value for the length of the Mediterranean was in error—and the first coordinates in Muslim sources appeared in Baghdad ca. 825.

Another problem with his methodology is the following. He finds that many early mosques are oriented toward Petra accurately to within a degree or two. He then assumes that the early Muslims/Arabs/Petrans deliberately wanted their mosques to face Petra and that they achieved this with impressive accuracy.

Another problem I have with Gibson’s interpretations of this data is that he desperately needs to rewrite the history of mathematical geography:

“... the early Muslims had methods of accurately calculating *qiblas*. Just because we do not know for certain what method they used, does not make it impossible or even improbable that they managed to do this.”

Elsewhere he has discussed all of the scientific means that must have been available to the first generations of Muslims. Did his Arab Muslims from Petra really know about Ptolemy’s geographical coordinates (with its incorrect value of the length of the Mediterranean) as well as Greek and/or Indian trigonometry? Did they have astrolabes? I doubt that they did, and certainly the

first Muslim scientists known to have proposed exact methods, geometrical and trigonometric, for determining the *qibla*, date from ca. 825 (inevitably in Baghdad). Also, the earliest Islamic astrolabes, from the 8th and 9th centuries, have no means for finding the *qibla* anyway.

Why do we do this?

At my advanced age I have no time to waste writing about crackpot theories like that of Dan Gibson. Nevertheless, I feel I must write these few pages trying to show how crazy and potentially dangerous they are. There is quite a lot of repetition in these pages but I cannot stress enough the fallacious procedures Gibson has used and the fallacious conclusions he has reached.

In the late 1980s I had a strong motive to try to understand medieval Islamic orientations; it was purely academic, for I was constantly confronted with historians of Islamic architecture writing such nonsense as this or that mosque “does not face Mecca properly” or “is not correctly aligned towards Mecca” or marking a mosque-plan with a directional indicator toward Mecca on a *qibla*-wall when the mosque doesn’t face Mecca at all (by modern standards). These colleagues had no idea about medieval *qibla* determinations and would not want to hear about these from an outsider anyway. In fact, I can count on the fingers of one hand those colleagues in the history of Islamic architecture over the past 50 years who have even mentioned what scientific and legal texts tell us about the *qibla*. So my colleagues in the history of Islamic art and architecture generally still tend to write *n’importe quoi* (اي كلام) when confronted with a curious orientation and continue to publish whole books about medieval cities or about

architectural complexes without mentioning orientations at all.

Gibson has an even stronger motive to push his Petra thesis. He concludes his book *Early Islamic Qiblas* (2017) with the smug advice to Muslims to decide for themselves whether they should carry on praying in (what he calls) the false *qibla* toward Mecca or switch to the correct *qibla* toward Petra (which I call *pibla*). There is another revisionist enthusiast in London, an English historian not well-versed in the development of the prayer ritual in Islam, who has recently claimed that Muslims have been praying at the wrong times for 1400 years. This kind of ammunition is very useful for those who campaign against Islam and Muslims.

An example of the way in which the Christian lunatic fringe has been able to use Gibson’s theory is the video entitled “The earliest mosques don’t face Mecca! Gibson’s new research”. This features a conversation between a total innocent Al Fadi and one Jay Smith. The latter is an assertive Christian evangelist, apologist and polemicist; since 1983, he has been a full-time missionary with the Brethren in Christ Mission with a focus on apologetics and polemics among the Muslims of London. In the video Smith makes a complete fool of himself by talking about the way some early mosques, for example, in India and China face Petra to within a degree or two. But I myself showed in the 1980s that many mosques, not just early ones, faced the Kaaba – not the city of Mecca – using astronomical alignments. This is because, as Gibson seldom mentions, and as Smith would not want to know, the Kaaba itself is astronomically aligned.

There is no easy explanation of the orientation of medieval mosques. But we have laid the foundations for understanding this complicated subject. Then along comes Dan Gibson, completely untrained in Islamic studies, mathematical geography, and the history of science, and measures the orientation of some 50-odd early mosques using satellite images. His conclusion is that their orientations all have some connection to Petra, not Mecca. But he does not realize that these early mosques were not intended to face Mecca: they were intended to face the sacred Kaaba in Mecca, a building whose rectangular base is astronomically aligned. Since they had limited geographical knowledge and no mathematical knowledge the earliest Muslims adopted a very sensible expedient to enable them to face the Kaaba: they used astronomical risings and settings.

Of course these early mosques do not face Mecca. They face the Kaaba, according to the limitations of the time. They do not face Petra or any other specific locality. No civilization before *ca.* 825 (when the Muslims controlled both the geography and the mathematics) could orient edifices toward a specific locality because no civilization had the means – geographical and mathematical – to do that. To assert as Gibson does, that the Muslims in the 7th and 8th centuries could find the direction of Petra **EXACTLY** from al-Andalus to China is ridiculous. The reader should keep in mind that Gibson's conclusions are most welcome to certain partisan religious interest groups. See below and also the Appendix!

Critiques of critiques

Most people are either numerate, which means that they like numbers and know how to handle

them, or innumerate, in the sense that they don't like numbers and shy away from them. Such people shudder when confronted with a direction such as 292°, because they have no idea that modern usage measures directions from 0° clockwise to 360° = 0°; these people might prefer to read 22° N of E. Gibson's book is all about numbers, some real (measurements of mosques) and some irrelevant (modern directions of Petra and Mecca). Alas, most reviews of Gibson's *qibla* extravaganza have been made by people not well versed in numbers.

In the acknowledgements to his *Early Islamic qiblas* Gibson thanks two scholars Rick Oakes and Ahmed Amine whom we shall mention below. (He also thanks one of the leading archaeoastronomers of the Near East, and of Petra, my friend Juan Antonio Belmonte, who was even more surprised than I was to find his name in Gibson's acknowledgements, for Gibson knows nothing about ethno- or archaeoastronomy.)

It is important to consider Gibson's approach to mosque orientations in light of his methodology. For he uses **MODERN** geographical coordinates to calculate directions of buildings to Petra or Mecca or Jerusalem when those who erected these buildings did not have access to such coordinates. Nor did they have **EXACT** mathematical procedures for calculating directions of one place to another. So when Gibson writes that a given mosque faces Petra, not Mecca, this is not to be taken seriously. If I were to say this or that mosque faces Mecca not Petra, that might be equally absurd. If either of us says that a given mosque faces exactly Petra or Mecca so that those who built it must have had the geographical and mathematical knowledge to determine the *pibla/qibla* accurately, this would be nonsense. For

mosques in the earliest period were laid out in directions that were not calculated at all.

In my first critique of Gibson's Petra thesis I deliberately stated that I would not demonstrate his error for all of the mosques he had misinterpreted but would present enough examples to demonstrate that not only are his interpretations erroneous, but also that the whole idea of assessing the "errors" of medieval orientations by comparing them with **MODERN** directions is flawed. Some later commentators didn't get this.

Rick Oakes, an independent American scholar, has posted his evaluation of my critique of *Early Islamic Qiblas* on the blog of the International Qur'anic Studies Association (IQSA), an outfit based in Atlanta claiming to be "devoted to the study of the Qur'an from a variety of academic disciplines". Oakes' focus here is not on the science, mathematics, or astronomy that was (or, rather, was not) available to early Muslims, nor is it with how they could have pointed any of their earliest mosques in any particular direction. But rather, he focusses on the 17 mosques that Gibson says face Petra. He does not argue whether or not they were pointed toward Petra intentionally. He does not argue that Gibson's mosque orientation measurements are accurate, but that these Gibson's conclusions based on these orientations deserve confirmation or refutation. He repeats from his non-critical review of Gibson's first book:

"Gibson's evidence is just begging for a response. ... Certainly, Gibson deserves a thoughtfully-considered book that responds to his analysis of the evidence with a different explanation."

I can only feel ashamed that my response was not "thoughtfully considered"; maybe the present essay will help. Oakes begins by naming five mosques whose orientations I did not even mention. He seems so convinced (and happy?) about Gibson's finding that 17 early mosques point toward Petra that he challenges other scholars to offer better explanations. Oakes correctly observes that my explanations of why the mosques in Amman, Fustat, Jericho, and Khirbat al-Minya (only these!) are preferable to Gibson's explanation that they point to Petra. While he is correct in mentioning that I wrote that the Sanaa Mosque points at Petra, he missed the fact that this does not mean that it was deliberately laid out to face Petra. For I also said that it was 'parallel' to the main axis of the Kaaba, so that the *qibla*-wall is 'parallel' to the SE wall of the Kaaba. His best quote is priceless:

"Jericho – Khirbat al-Mafjar – King says that "All of these mosques are trying to tell us that they face south." Nonetheless [!], (this mosque) faces 180°, only 1° away from Petra's 181° [!!].

"Khirbat al-Minya – King says that "This complex was obviously intended to face due south." Nonetheless, it faces 183°, only 1° away from Petra's 182°".

In brief, Oakes has unfortunately overlooked what I wrote about the absurdity of using modern directions to investigate orientations of buildings that were built well over 1,200 years ago and the folly of ignoring cardinal and solstitial directions in interpreting orientations that were laid out toward astronomical horizon phenomena or on pre-Islamic foundations that were cardinally aligned.

Another revisionist historian of early Islam, the French fundamentalist priest Édouard-Marie Gallez, has fallen for Gibson's thesis, as they say, 'hook, line and sinker'. He also fell for the nonsense that the first generations of Muslims must have been scientifically advanced. He further believes implicitly in Cook & Crone's 1977 *Hagarism* thesis. His own pet people are the so-called Judéo-Nazaréens, of whom most people, including the Hagarenes, have never heard. When he read my critique of Cook & Crone and Gibson on mosque orientations he went bananas and wrote an outrageous and venomous rejoinder quite unworthy of a man of the cloth, which in turn merited an appropriate response from an independent.

A rather curious book appeared in 2018. It was authored by Ahmed Amine, an independent researcher trained in medicine and studying the history of religions in late Antiquity. It is entitled *L'islam de Petra ...* and was intended as a response to the thesis of Dan Gibson. The author had no prior knowledge of the *qibla* or its determination in Islamic history but simply launched into Gibson and his 'findings'. He then discussed my criticism of Gibson's theories. It is clear that he had little understanding either of what Gibson had been trying to do, or why I saw this as problematic. Sadly, Amine's book will probably be read with enthusiasm by unsuspecting French-speaking Muslims, although it is incomprehensible without access to the original writings of Gibson and myself, both in English and not properly explained by Amine. Sadly also, such readers will not find any serious writings in French (or any other language) on the determination of the *qibla* in past centuries because these have been omitted from Amine's bibliography. Some seven pages of

references contain an important article by Saifallah *et al.* and a few lesser articles of mine, otherwise nothing whatsoever of consequence on the *qibla*. Amine's conclusion after 226 pages is that

“la thèse de Pétra demeure en l'état, comme une simple hypothèse de travail qui nécessite des preuves supplémentaires plus décisives.”

Here a valuable opportunity has been lost, but one may well ask what was the goal. Gibson's Petra thesis, Amine says, “remains at project stage like a simple working hypothesis which requires additional and more decisive proofs”. It was a mistake in the first place for the author (AA) to approach a book based on totally false assumptions (DG) together with a harsh criticism thereof (DAK) without any understanding of the subject at hand. And it was a mistake for this author (DAK) to innocently try to help that author (AA) try to understand anything.

But all is not lost. I can recommend the article by Mark Anderson of the Zwemer Center for Muslim Studies: it is entitled “Is Mecca really the birthplace of Islam?”. This should be required reading for anyone interested in the Petra fallacy. (Unfortunately I am reported to have said that the earliest Muslims “calculated” the *qibla* but this is what Gibson falsely claims for directions to Petra, whereas in fact I had stated that they “determined” the direction of the Kaaba using astronomical alignments: they calculated nothing.) Anderson's study considers seven of Gibson's arguments for Petra and the match ends with a score **Mecca 7, Petra 0**. I doubt that any serious scholar in the History of the Near East, Nabataean Studies or Islamic Studies, or the History of Science would contest this.

Dan Gibson's "qibla tool"

Gibson's publisher (CanBooks) has in the past few days (early November, 2018) released a new "Qibla Tool" (available at <http://thesacredcity.ca/data/index.html>). This is most useful and will put an end to some of the often silly controversy that has been raging about early mosque orientations. A Google Maps image of the whole medieval Muslim world shows the location and orientation of all of the earliest mosques. Click-on, rather confused insets then give further details, which happily do not conceal the 'map'. Gibson explains that this tool uses the latest Google Maps, which sometimes is "not the best" and that it is not intended to be a highly accurate investigative tool. Rather, it is an illustrative tool, so users can quickly view and compare various mosques, and make their own conclusions about the patterns that Gibson sees in early mosque construction.

What is obvious from the map is the following:

- The overwhelming majority of mosques in Jordan and Palestine are astronomically aligned to face south.
- The majority of mosques in Syria are astronomically aligned to face south.
- Virtually all mosques in al-Andalus and the Maghrib face a curious direction around south south east.
- The Mosque in Sanaa is aligned roughly north-north-west, 'parallel' to the mosques in al-Andalus and the Maghreb. How can that be?
- There are not many mosques in Egypt on the one hand and in Iraq, Iran & Central

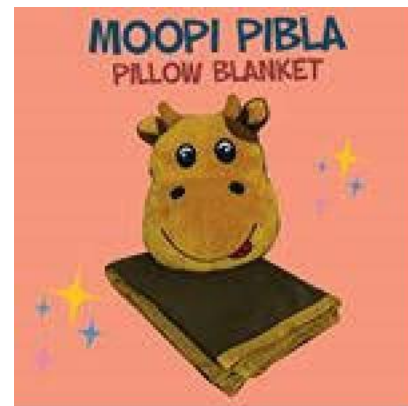
Asia on the other with a clearly defined general orientation.

- The conclusions that can be drawn from these observations are the following:
- In Palestine the early Muslims favoured south for the qibla. (This makes the mosques all seem as though they are facing Petra, which is not far to the south.)
- In Greater Syria the early Muslims favoured south for the qibla. South means south or (for latitudes less than 36°) the rising or setting of Canopus. (Their mosques appear to point between Petra and Mecca because Syria is more to the east than Palestine and further from Petra than Palestine.)
- As already established by Michael Bonine in the 1990 & 2008 (Maghrib) and myself in 2016 (Córdoba), the mosques in the Islamic West were built in accordance with Roman city-plans that had their minor axis solstitially aligned (summer sunrise and winter sunset). This was considered acceptable by the Muslims because, as luck would have it, the mosques are 'parallel' to the main axis of the Kaaba. (They are indeed 'parallel' to a line between Petra and Mecca, but this is of no historical consequence.)
- The solitary Mosque in Sanaa is aligned 'parallel' to the axis for the Kaaba because people wanted that, not because there was any Roman city. (From Sanaa, Petra is sort of behind Mecca so the mosque appears to be aligned towards both.)

- We have to look more carefully at orientations in places like Egypt, Iraq and Central Asia. I can recommend my studies on Cairo (1983/2004) & and Samarqand (1984/2012) for a start. In each location, the cardinal directions and winter sunrise and sunset played a significant role, and for each locality there were more than one calculated qibla direction.

Only general observations are appropriate here because Gibson is using a **MODERN** map. The directions it shows for mosques are supposedly **MODERN** *qiblas*. (I do not know how directions left, right and centre are supposed to be preserved on such a map as this.) As far as I know, nobody ever calculated the direction of Petra before Dan Gibson; what are shown on his new “*qibla* tool” are, he thinks, the **MODERN** *piblas*. The problem with Gibson’s new map is that his directional indicators show the orientations of the mosques but do not point correctly at the places he would like them to point because of the nature of the map projection and, inevitably, because of the curvature of the earth. I love the way some of his straight lines indicating mosque orientations swish across the world and end up in or around Petra or Mecca. Flat maps always have limitations of one sort or another. On a rectangular Mercator map of the whole world the *qibla* in North America appears to be toward south-east. However, when you fly out of New York’s JFK Airport on Saudia towards Jeddah you fly north-east over Greenland (or what’s left of it), not towards the south-east as some folk might think. And you probably fly over Petra too. In the case of Gibson’s map, parallels of latitudes and meridians (longitudes) are not shown; instead there is an unlabelled square (orthogonal) grid which curiously does not expand

when one enlarges the map. Since the grid is orthogonal it does not correspond to that of a map that would preserve direction (necessarily toward a central point). It is just as well for Gibson that he has not included distant places (such as New York or Guangzhou) on his map; he might be in for quite a surprise. In any case, pictures speak louder than words, and Gibson’s map speaks louder than mere numbers. Just be very careful how you use it.



Suggestions for future research

Fortunately, nowadays one would not have to travel the length and breadth of the Muslim world to have a new look at mosque orientations. What concerned investigators might want to do in the future with the major mosques of the medieval period (7th-15th centuries) is the following:

- 1) determine which mosques were built on the authority of the Prophet or his Companions;
- 2) determine which mosques were built on the foundations of, or in line with pre-Islamic religious architecture which happened to be cardinally aligned (such as in Jerusalem and Damascus);
- 3) determine which mosques were built according to the street-plans of pre-Islamic

cities which happened to be solstitially aligned (such as Córdoba, Tlemcen, Tunis, Kairouan);

- 4) determine which mosques were built toward winter sunrise (taken as one *qibla*-direction from Egypt to al-Andalus), and toward winter sunset (taken as one *qibla*-direction from Iraq to Central Asia), or toward some other astronomical horizon phenomenon;
- 5) determine which mosques face due west in India and due east in N. Africa;
- 6) determine which mosques face more or less due south in Jordan and Syria and more or less due north in Yemen and E. Africa.

Mosques which do not conform to these norms can possibly be explained by means of information on the local *qibla* in treatises on folk astronomy and sacred geography (**astronomically-defined directions**) or treatises on mathematical astronomy (*qiblas* calculated from available medieval geographical data using **exact or approximate mathematical methods**). Local topography or hydrography may also have played a role. In all such investigations, no conclusions should be drawn based on *qibla*-directions calculated from **MODERN** geographical data using some kind of **EXACT** mathematical procedures.

To any interested parties, I would recommend looking at the five articles mentioned above, not least my article on the earliest mathematical methods and tables for finding the *qibla*. I am confident that such simple approximate methods had far more influence in mosque alignment than any complicated exact methods and tables. But one cannot use any of these without knowing what geographical coordinates were available over

the centuries. The complexity of Islamic geographical tables giving longitudes and latitudes, and the basic reference work by E.S.&M.H. Kennedy, *Geographical coordinates of localities from Islamic sources* (Frankfurt, 1987), presents 14,000 sets of longitudes and latitudes from some 80 Arabic and Persian astronomical and geographical sources.

In investigating the orientation of a historical mosque it is important to take into consideration the original surrounding street-plan and the various *qibla*-directions that were favoured in that region at the time. Without such information it is not a little arrogant to suppose that one can make any sensible pronouncement regarding the reason behind the orientation of an edifice that was built over a millennium ago. Woe betide anyone who claims to explain any medieval mosque orientation without realizing how complicated is the subject of orientations.

New light on orientations in Turkey

In 2018 two studies appeared on the orientation of mosques in Turkey. The first was an eminently sensible analysis of selected mosques of major importance (ulu camis) based on sound historical criteria and the kind of modern investigative methods now standard in archaeoastronomy, and it was published in an academic journal. The authors were Profs. Mustafa Yilmaz and Ibrahim Tiryakioglu from the Department of Geomatics, Faculty of Engineering, Afyon Kocatepe University in Afyonkarahisar, Turkey, and the title was “The astronomical orientation of the historical Grand mosques in Anatolia”.

The second ‘study’, by A. J. Deus, an economist by training, was a completely off-the-wall attack on Turkish history based on a nutty idea that the

diverse mosque orientations resulted from deliberate attempts to align the mosques not toward the *qibla* but (exactly, of course) toward the sites of contemporaneous military campaigns in Ukraine, Iran, Somalia, to Tunisia. Instead of places of worship the mosques, for Deus, become – اعوذ بالله – “monuments of jihad”. Oy weh!

Deus is inevitably innocent of any idea about Ottoman astronomy, mathematics, geography, and instruments for finding the *qibla*, and has no idea how the Ottoman astronomers actually determined the *qibla*. Proof of this is his premise that they could compute the MODERN *qibla* (and MODERN directions to Ottoman military hot-spots hundreds of miles away) whenever and wherever they wanted to, which they most certainly could not. To be sure, their favourite method was approximate anyway (this is well documented) and their geographical data was not accurate, so if they came up with a direction similar to the MODERN *qibla* it would be by chance.

Deus published this ‘study’ online “in collaboration with” a dubious revisionist outfit called “Inarah – Institute for Research on Early Islamic History and the Koran” based in Saarbrücken, Germany, and known for some very strange and misguided pronouncements about early Islam. If this is the best that Inarah (انارة , *ināra*, ‘enlightenment’, from نور , *nūr*, ‘light’) can do with mosque orientations, it is rather sad but hardly surprising. Deus’ ‘study’ will doubtless be swallowed whole by clueless *revisionistas* and other uninformed, innumerate souls. I have addressed this outrageous and pernicious nonsense elsewhere. The principal monuments amongst Deus’ 200-odd mosques can be interpreted with reference to the *qibla* that was accepted at the

time they were built (which is of course not the MODERN *qibla*), and they all face the Kaaba in one way or another, in ways that Deus shows himself incapable of understanding. There is no need for any overzealous, uninformed revisionism.

Concluding remarks

For the time being, practicing Muslims can happily ignore Gibson’s outrageous suggestion that they start praying towards Petra again, as he thinks they did in the earliest days. He thinks they should have been praying towards Petra for over a millennium. اعوذ بالله .

My humble opinion is that Muslims should simply carry on praying towards the Kaaba as they have been doing for over 1,400 years.

As for the Kaaba itself, nobody in its vicinity could guess or test its astronomical alignments now because of all of the skyscrapers surrounding the Mosque complex. And by 2019, according to numerous news reports in 2017, the whole area around the Kaaba will supposedly be covered by a retractable roof. These reports were inevitably neither confirmed nor denied by the Saudi authorities. If they are true, then the focal point of Islam, the Kaaba, symbol of the divine presence, will no longer be visible even from space.

The author

David A. King is a British orientalist and historian of science who has spent 50 years researching the history of astronomy and mathematics in Islamic civilization from the original sources. In particular, he has documented the ways in which astronomy was used in medieval Islamic society for the purposes of religious obligations: the calendar regulated by the visibility of the lunar

crescent, the sacred direction (*qibla*) toward the Kaaba in Mecca, and the astronomically-defined times of prayer. These writings, which include a dozen books and 250 articles, notably *In Synchrony with the Heavens* (ca. 2,000 pages, 2004/05), are based mainly on his researches on several thousand Arabic scientific manuscripts and hundreds of astronomical instruments which he has studied in libraries and museums around the world. King has also published on an ingenious medieval Cistercian number-notation and on the cult of the most misunderstood saint in Christian history, as well as on the Latin acrostic which provided the inspiration for Piero della Francesca's enigmatic "Flagellation of Christ" (2007). His first book was *Mathematical Astronomy in Medieval Yemen* (1983) and his most recent works are "Astronomy in medieval Jerusalem" (2017) and "Two medieval spherical astrolabes from Tunis and Istanbul" (2018).

Bibliography of books, articles and websites on *qibla* determination

Notes: No general bibliography on *qibla* determinations has ever been prepared before. References to specific medieval Islamic legal works on the *qibla* are to be found in the writings of Neumann, Dallal, King, Rius and Schmidl. See also the article "Qibla (legal aspects)" by A. J. Wensinck in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn. ••••For the latest, see Gibson 2023 and King 2023.

Early Western works

The first modern scholar to turn his attention to mathematical *qibla* determinations was the German historian of Islamic mathematics and astronomy **Karl Schoy** (1877-1925), on whom see the obituary by J. Ruska in *Isis* 9 (1927), pp. 83-95. His collected papers are available as *Beiträge zur arabisch-islamischen Mathematik und*

Astronomie, 2 vols., Frankfurt, 1988. The next was **Edward S. Kennedy** (1912-2009), the leading scholar of the history of Islamic astronomy in the 2nd half of the 20th century, on whom see the obituary and bibliography in *Suhayl* 9 (2009-2010), pp. 185-214. His collected papers are published in *Studies in the Islamic Exact Sciences*, Beirut, 1983.

For numerous writings by **the two next generations of specialists in the history of Islamic astronomy and mathematics** on mathematical methods for finding the *qibla* – especially Richard P. Lorch, Julio Samsó, Jan P. Hogendijk, J. Lennart Berggren, Ahmad Dallal and DAK – see www.staff.science.uu.nl/~gent0113/islam/qibla.htm.

Reprints by Variorum of various studies by DAK are the following: *Islamic Mathematical Astronomy* (1986/1993); *Islamic Astronomical Instruments* (1987/1995); *Astronomy in the Service of Islam* (1993); and *Islamic Astronomy and Geography* (2012). All publications of DAK are available at davidaking.academia.edu.

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Robert G. Morrison, "Islamic astronomy and astrology", in Robert Irwin, ed., *New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 4, Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 589-613.

Kennedy *et al.*, *Studies*: E. S. Kennedy, Colleagues and Former Students, *Studies in the Islamic Exact Sciences*, David A. King and Mary Helen

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- DAK, "Science in the service of religion: The case of Islam", *impact of science on society* (UNESCO), no. 159 (1991), pp. 245-262 (available in several languages, but not Arabic), repr. in *Astronomy in the Service of Islam*, I, available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0008/000885/088535eo.pdf>.
- , *In Synchrony with the Heavens – Studies in Astronomical Timekeeping and Instrumentation in Islamic Civilization*, vol. 1: *The Call of the Muezzin*, & vol. 2: *Instruments of Mass Calculation*, Leiden, etc.: Brill, 2004-05.
- Clive N. Ruggles, ed., *Handbook of archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy*, 3 vols., New York, etc.: Springer, 2015, contains the following articles: King, "Astronomy in the service of Islam", pp. 181-196; Clemency Montelle, "Islamic mathematical astronomy", pp. 1909-1916; Tofiq Heidarzadeh, "Islamic astronomical instruments and observatories", pp. 1917-1926 (more references below).
- Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn., 13 vols., Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960-1980, especially articles "Anwā' (pre-Islamic calendrical system)"; "Ašturlāb (astrolabe)"; "Hay'a (astronomy)"; "Kibla (sacred direction)", "Layl wa-nahār" (simple timekeeping); "Makka as centre of the world" (sacred geography), "Miḳāt" (astronomical timekeeping and times of prayer)", "Mizwala (sundials)", "Rub' (quadrant)", "Nudjūm" (starlore); "Ru'yat al-hilāl (lunar crescent visibility)", "Shakkāziyya (universal projections)", and "Ṭāsa (magnetic compass)"; and "Zidj (astronomical handbooks and tables)".
- BEA*: Thomas Hockey *et al.*, eds., *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, New York: Springer, 2007, available at <http://islamsci.mcgill.ca/RASI/BEA/>. (Standard reference on significant Muslim astronomers.)
- DSB: Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, 14 vols. and 2 supp. vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970-80. (Biographical articles are sometimes preferable to the corresponding ones in *BEA*.)
- Lennart Berggren, *Episodes in the Mathematics of Medieval Islam*, New York, etc.: Springer, 1986.
- E. S. Kennedy & Mary Helen Kennedy, *Geographical coordinates of localities from Islamic sources*, Frankfurt: IGAIW, 1987.

Islamic folk astronomy (selected)

There is no general survey. Various aspects are treated in the following works:

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- , article "Ibn Qutayba", in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, XI, pp. 246-247 (no article in *BEA*!).
- Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, VII: *Astrologie – Meteorologie und Verwandtes*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979, pp. 336-370.
- Charles Pellat, articles "Anwā'" and Layl wa-nahār", in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn.
- Anton H. Heinen, *Islamic cosmology: A study of as-Suyūṭī's al-Hay'a al-saniya fi-l-hay'a al-sunnīya*, Beirut, 1982 (a work of prime importance for understanding an independent, truly Islamic Arab cosmology, reviewed in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109 (1989), pp. 124-127).
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- , "Astrology and Folk Astronomy: The *Mukhtasar min al-Anwā'* of Aḥmad b. Fāris", *Suhayl – International Journal for the History*

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- , "A survey of arithmetical shadow-schemes for time-reckoning", in *idem*, *In Synchrony with the Heavens*, III: pp. 457-528, previously published in *Oriens* 32 (1990), pp. 191-249.
- Petra G. Schmidl, *Volkstümliche Astronomie im islamischen Mittelalter. Zur Bestimmung der Gebetszeiten und der Qibla bei al-Aṣḥabī, Ibn Raḥīq und al-Fārisī*, 2 vols., Leiden, etc.: Brill, 2007. (The first study of its kind, based on medieval Yemeni treatises on folk astronomy compiled by legal scholars and astronomers.)
- Daniel M. Varisco, "Islamic folk astronomy", in Helaine Selin, ed., *Astronomy across cultures – The [!] history of non-western astronomy*, Dordrecht, etc.: Kluwer, 2000, pp. 615-650.
- Clive N. Ruggles, ed., *Handbook of archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy*, 3 vols., New York, etc.: Springer, 2015, contains the following articles (see also above): Petra G. Schmidl, "Islamic folk astronomy", pp. 1927-1934; Daniel Martin Varisco, "Folk astronomy and calendars in Yemen", pp. 1935-1940.
- Danielle Adams, "Two Deserts – One Sky – Arab star calendars", at onesky.arizona.edu (accessed 2018) (a new website featuring aspects of Arab star-lore in a visual and reader-friendly fashion, at the same time respecting the original Arabic star-names).
- Gerald R. Tibbetts, *Arab Navigation in the Indian Ocean before the coming of the Portuguese ...*, (Oriental Translation Fund, N.S. XLII), London: The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1971, repr. 1981. (It is often overlooked that Arab navigation is an aspect of Islamic folk astronomy, not of Islamic

astronomy, which is based on observations and calculations.)

On archaeoastronomy and ethnoastronomy

Clive L. N. Ruggles, ed., *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy*, 3 vols., New York, etc.: Springer, 2015. (A work of monumental importance covering many relevant topics, with various chapters in Part II: Methods and Practices, and overviews by experts of the situation in all parts of the world, although, alas for our present purposes, Central and South Arabia are not covered.) (This book is on a much more scholarly level than the 2005 publication by D. H. Kelley & E. F. Milone entitled *Exploring ancient skies: An encyclopedic survey of archaeoastronomy*, which does not even mention the Islamic phenomenon of orientations.)

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General

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- , "The sacred geography of Islam", in *Mathematics and the Divine – A Historical Study*, T. Koetsier and L. Bergmans, eds., Dordrecht: Elsevier, 2005, pp. 161-178, repr. in *Islamic Astronomy and Geography*, VIII.

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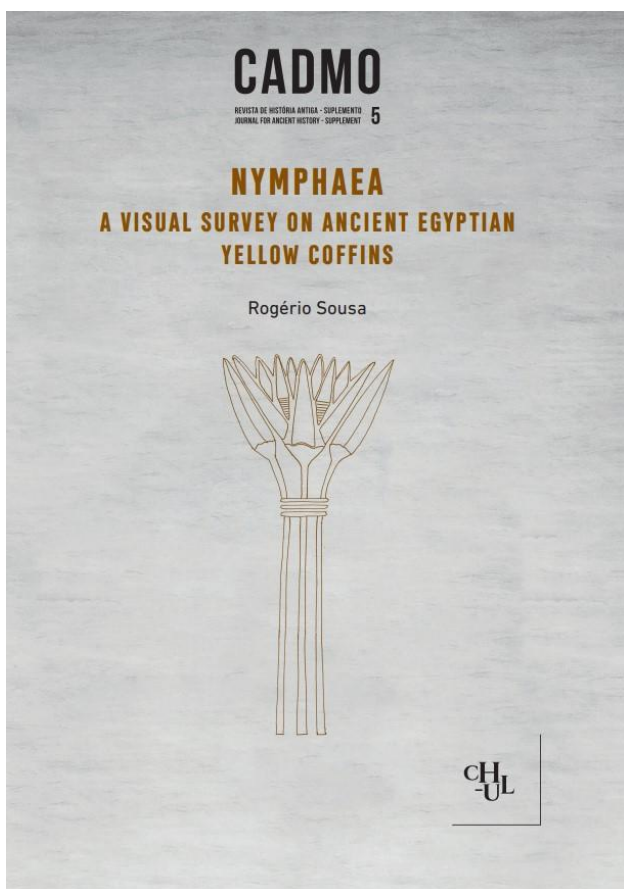
10.5281/zenodo.33835 (on 32 tombs in Petra and Madā'in Šāliḥ).

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Reseña Bibliográfica:

Un estudio abarcador y novedoso de los ataúdes amarillos de la Dinastía egipcia XXI en Tebas

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Portada de: [NYMPHAEA A visual survey on ancient egyptian yellow coffins](#) (Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa)

Los ataúdes amarillos fueron un fenómeno singular en la historia de la cultura y del arte del Antiguo Egipto¹ (Sousa, 2024, p. 574) que el libro en acceso libre *NYMPHAEA A visual survey on ancient egyptian yellow coffins* (2024) estudia el

eminente historiador portugués Rogério Sousa, profesor de la Universidad de Lisboa. Se conservan miles de piezas alrededor del mundo que evidencian el desarrollo de la historia del arte egipcio en un periodo de tiempo de tan solo doscientos años en la región de Tebas desde mediados de la dinastía XX y hasta la dinastía XXI cuando se estableció una teocracia en Tebas que tenía el poder político en tiempos en que se carecía de una monarquía centralizada en las tierras de Egipto² donde adquirió sus características definitivas según el estudioso.

La novedad del libro es que presenta un análisis e interpretación de una parte del corpus de ataúdes amarillos de los que hace una minuciosa tipología para entender, primeramente, las iconografías en las distintas partes de las que se componían: las tapas, las tablas de las momias y las cajas; el repertorio de motivos y símbolos tanto en el exterior como en el interior de las piezas, etc. Entre los grandes méritos de la obra es que el exhaustivo análisis de la tipología, “que no es un fin en sí mismo”³ (Sousa, 2024, p. 24) es simultáneo con el estudio de las iconologías que permiten no solo conocer la historia de las obras de arte, las continuidades con los ataúdes negros que

comenzaron la época de Tutmosis III y Hatshepsut sino la historia de la religión, las tradiciones religiosas y los cambios profundos que se operan en Tebas desde la época ramésida en la cuales aparecieron los proto ataúdes amarillos. Los mismos deben su particular color a que los ataúdes de las capas socioeconómicas más altas tuvieron finas capas de oro en los rostros que tiene una connotación religiosa específica pues los representaba como “dioses iluminados, la luz del solo irradiando de sus propios cuerpos”⁴.

El investigador estableció un dialogo entre el arte y su devenir al dar a conocer por medio de los estudios de casos y generales, con una profusa mención de fuentes y bibliografía cómo se transformó la realidad política, la cultura y la identidad en la dinastía XXI. Al mismo tiempo que aparecen motivos florales en las representaciones visuales de los difuntos y el típico color amarillo que innovan la sociedad que los creó estaba cambiando.

Los sacerdotes de Amón avanzaron hacia formas colectivas de acción que incluso se manifestaron en tumbas que no eran individuales, se apropiaron de símbolos, textos y representaciones visuales de la realeza, elevándose así a niveles que nunca antes habían tenido. Los talleres de los artesanos tebanos asociados a la fabricación de los ataúdes dividieron aún más sus roles: los carpinteros y pintores se separaron para producir piezas más elaboradas y proteger el acabado de las obras (Capítulo VIII). Todo lo cual revela que ellos florecieron bajo las órdenes de los sacerdotes que comisionaban las piezas más logradas para las altas élites y, sin embargo, no olvidaron incluir a otros sectores de la sociedad que adquirieron derechos divinos.

Rogerio Sousa logra hacer un exhaustivo y

abarcador estudio de los valores culturales, teológicos y sociales de los ataúdes amarillos con un balance entre las innovaciones artísticas y estilísticas que lograron los artesanos en las piezas por encargo y el contexto histórico de los hombres que crearon ese riquísimo repertorio de temas, símbolos y significados teológicos. Reveló las profundas imbricaciones que tuvo la sensibilidad artística de la época en los cambios de las relaciones sociales entre los miembros del clero tebano y la sociedad en general, de modos inesperados y que rompen con los clichés de la una cultura e identidad religiosa, cultural o étnica egipcia inamovible y primordialita. En las casi de 600 páginas de un volumen que es ya de necesaria referencia para conocer el corpus de los ataúdes amarillos y consideramos que de los ataúdes en general, y la historia del arte del Antiguo Egipto hay un valiosísimo material para entender las costumbres funerarias y sus variaciones, y para comprender la religión egipcia.

Las representaciones iconográficas de los dioses abren nuevas puertas para indagar en la teología tebana y en las tradiciones previas de creencias y formas de ver y crear imágenes divinas, de manifestar la naturaleza de los seres sagrados para los egipcios, de modos muy dicientes y complementarios con los textos sagrados como el Libro de los Muertos o el Libro del Amduat. Ese último está en el “corazón”, la esencia de los ataúdes amarillos porque ellos “representan la apropiación del imaginario real del Amduat”. (Sousa, p. 576), explican la apropiación de los símbolos e imágenes de la realeza que lo acerca a capas más amplias del tejido social, que al mismo tiempo ponen en tensión los ideales de la monarquía y la religión oficial precedentes justo cuando se vuelven a enterrar las momias reales,

reúsan los ataúdes de época ramésida e indican fenómenos que subyacen en el orden político al garantizar una legitimidad de los sacerdotes tebanos en el poder. Es decir, sirven para comunicar nuevas ideologías y relaciones con el espacio sagrado al “sacralizando el paisaje tebano como extensión del inframundo”. Así el texto logra ordenar y presentar piezas de arte antiguo egipcio que revelan los entresijos del poder y el patronazgo a los artistas con claros antecedentes en Deir-el-Medina durante el Reino Nuevo en los que las maderas las nuevas técnicas de composición, el uso del color, los soportes, etc. sostienen costosos rituales y creencias que no solo comunican con el más allá, sino que informan de las redes de comercio y las tecnologías disponibles en la época al servicio del poder. Arte funerario, arqueología y sociedad egipcia de la dinastía XIX son los grandes temas del libro del Dr. Rogério Sousa *NYMPHAEA A visual survey on ancient egyptian yellow coffins*, publicado por la Universidad de Lisboa.

Notas

- ¹ Rogério Sousa *NYMPHAEA A visual survey on ancient egyptian yellow coffins* Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa, 574
- ² Rogério Sousa, *NYMPHAEA*, 574
- ³ Rogério Sousa, *NYMPHAEA*, 24
- ⁴ Rogério Sousa, *NYMPHAEA*, 74
- ⁵ Rogério Sousa, *NYMPHAEA*, 576
- ⁶ Rogério Sousa, *NYMPHAEA*, 576

Bibliografía

- Hornung, Erik, (1999), *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.
- Ikram, Salima y Aidan Dodson, (1998), *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt: Equipping the dead for eternity*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.
- Niwiński, Andrzej, (1988) *21st Dynasty coffins from Thebes: Chronological and typological studies*. Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern.
- Warburton, David, (2007) *The Egyptain Amduat. The Book of the Hidden Chamber*. (Erik Homung and Theodor Abt revisores y editores). Zurich Living Human Heritage Publications.

The CEHAO in the 2025 Annual Meetings of ASOR and SBL in Boston

Four members of the CEHAO, Roxana Flammini, Juan Manuel Tebes, Pablo Andiñach, and Emanuel Pfoh, were present in the *American Society of Overseas Research 2025 Annual Meeting* (10-22 November) and in the *Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting* (22-25 November), both held in Boston, USA.

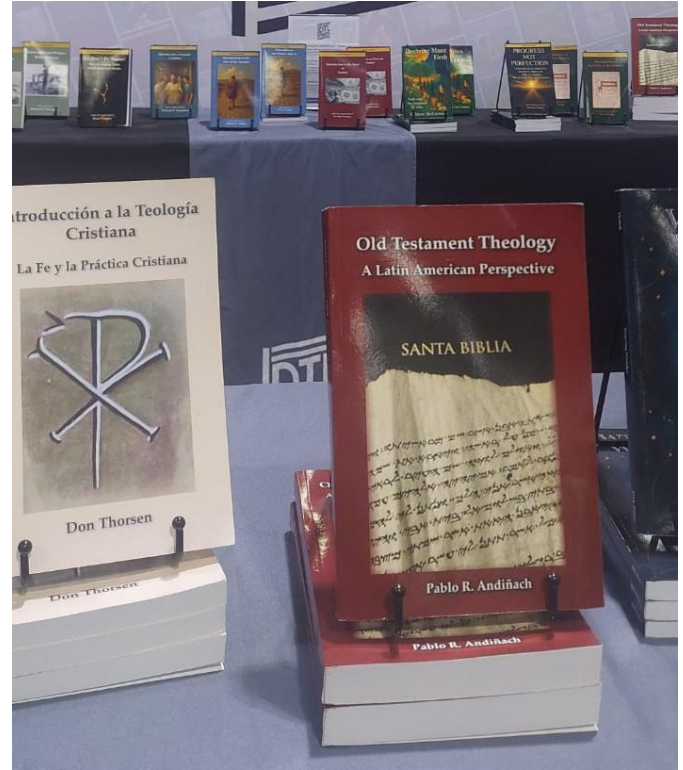
Roxana Flammini presented in the SBL Meeting her book *La Segunda Estela de Kamose: Un estudio integral en contexto* and presented a paper on “Depicting the Enemies: The Theban and the Hyksos Rulers in the Second Stela of Kamose.”



Juan Manuel Tebes presented in the ASOR Meeting his paper on “Introducing the Desert Cults Mapping Project: A Digital Humanities Tool for Studying the Ancient Sacred Landscapes of the Arid Southern Levant.” He also participated in the SBL Council meeting and Nominating Committee meeting, and visited with colleagues the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East.



Pablo Andiñach presented in the SBL Meeting his book *Old Testament Theology: A Latin American Perspective* and presented his paper on “Poverty in the Biblical World Section and Latino/a/e and Latin American Biblical Interpretation Section.”



Emanuel Pfoh co-organized in the ASOR Meeting a workshop and presented his paper on “The Impact of the Victorian Orientalism on Biblical Studies and the Historiography of Ancient Israel.” He also presented in SBL his paper on “Kinship and Kingship in the Iron Age Southern Levant: Historiographical, Methodological, and Anthropological Notes.”



CEHAO Scholarly Participation

[PABLO R. ANDIÑACH](#)

[EVENTOS ACADÉMICOS](#)

“Nicaea and Latin American Methodism. Words on the unity of the Church” in the Nicean Webinar, The United Methodist Church. March 4, 2025.

“La profetisa Julda. Hermenéutica de la primera mujer biblista” en el Encuentro de CBE (Christians for Biblical Equality) sobre el lugar de la mujer en la Iglesia, Seminario Bautista Internacional, Buenos Aires, octubre 2025.

“Leer de Josué al Libro de los Doce como libros proféticos”, en el Encuentro Judío-Cristiano, organizado por el I. Isaac Abarbanel, UCA, Buenos Aires, Octubre 2025.

“Respuesta a las presentaciones sobre la teología de Gustavo Gutierrez” en el Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Boston, EEUU, 20 al 24 de noviembre de 2025.

[PUBLICACIONES](#)

“Old Testament Theology. A Latin American Perspective”, North Haven, DTS Press, 2025. ISBN 979-8-89731-000-5 (Print); ISBN 979-8-89731-001-2 (E-book); ISBN 979-8-89731-002-9 (Kindle).

[GRACIELA GESTOSO SINGER](#)

[CAPÍTULOS Y ARTÍCULOS EN LIBROS](#)

“Hostages in the Amarna Period”. In Renata G. Tatomir and Susanna Moser (eds.). *The faces of life, death, and the afterlife*. Trieste: Kemet Edizioni, 2024, 9-37 (*Bucharest Egyptological Studies*, 1).

“Pride and Prejudice in the Amarna Letters from Assyria.” In Grégory Chambon and Juan Pablo Vita (Hrsg.). *People, Places and Technology in the Ancient Near East. Festschrift für Ariel M. Bagg*. Münster: Zaphon, 2025, 155-171 (*dubsar*, 38).

[AMIR GORZALCZANY](#)

[LIBROS EDITADOS](#)

Tepper Y., Koch, I., Ecker, A., Gorzalczany A. Dan-Goor, S., Shadman, A, and Stiebel, G.D. (eds.). 2025. In Centro 5: Fire. Collected Papers Vol. 5: Proceedings of the Fifth Annual “In Centro” Conference held by the Central District of Israel Antiquities Authority, the Jacob M. Alkow Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures and the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University and the Institute of Archeology of Bar-Ilan University on June 20, 2024 at MUZA, Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv.

[ARTÍCULOS EN PUBLICACIONES CIENTÍFICAS](#)

Gorzalczany, A. Rosen, B. (forthcoming). *Stones on the Move: Architectural Trade Networks and Logistical Practice in Late Antique Palestine*. *Atiqot*.

Gorzalczany, A., Toueg, R., Kool, R., Stern, E.J. and Perry-Gal, L. (forthcoming 2026). The Mamluk–Early Ottoman Marketplace of Qāqūn, in the Northern Sharon, Israel. *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*.

Gorzalczany, A. Rosen, B. 2025. Measuring Time, Distance, and Mass in the Arad Fortress, Early 6th Century BCE. *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology* 8:106–119.

<https://doi.org/10.52486/01.00008.50>;
<https://jjar.huji.ac.il>

Gorzalczany, A., Rosen, B. and Tepper, Y. 2025. The Disappearance of the Cultivated Caper (*Capparis spinosa*) from the Southern Levant. *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany*. DOI: 10.1007/s00334-025-01059-2

Elisha, Y., Gorzalczany, A. and Torgë, H. 2025. Vessel-Covered Mamluk-Period Tombs on the Israeli Coastal Plain, in Light of the Excavation on Danny Mass Street, Ramla. *'Atiqot* 117:499–519. (The Archaeology of Death).
<https://doi.org/10.70967/2948-040X.2272>

REPORTES FINALES EN EXCAVACIONES

Gorzalczany, A. (forthcoming). The Chalcolithic Cemetery at Palmaḥim (North) – The New 2011 Excavations. *'Atiqot*.

ARTÍCULOS SOBRE PONENCIAS EN CONGRESOS

Gorzalczany, A. 2025. Early Islamic Industry and Urbanism: The Site of Matzliaḥ (Ramla South) as a Case Study of Reciprocal Influence between Production and Urban Planning. In K. Cytryn-Silverman, K. Damgaard and D. Whitcomb (eds.) *Insights into Islamic Archaeology and Material Culture. A Conference in Jerusalem*. (Jerusalem, February 7th– 8th 2013). Chicago. Pp. 27–52.

ORGANIZACIÓN DE CONGRESOS

Congress “Bamerkaz VI, Banquet”. *Joint Congress of the IAA Central District and the Institute of Archaeology of the Tel Aviv University, Bar Ilan University and The Eretz-Israel Museum*. (12th June, 2025). MUZA, Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv.

PONENCIAS EN CONGRESOS

“The Mamluk–Early Ottoman Marketplace of

Qāqūn, in the Northern Sharon, Israel” (with R. Toueg, R. Kool, E. Stren and L. Perry-Gal). *Workshop Eretz-Israel under the Ayyubid and Mamluk Rule, Yad Ben Zvi, the Hebrew University and the Israel Antiquities Authority* (7 April, 2025). Jerusalem.

JUSTEL VICENTE DANIEL

EVENTOS ACADÉMICOS

“La contribución de la Asiriología al conocimiento del antiguo Israel”. Conferencia en el Seminario Redemptoris Mater (Universidad Gregoriana), Roma, 26 de febrero de 2025.

Organizador de las II Jornadas de la Red Iberoamericana de Investigadores en Próximo Oriente Antiguo, *Proyectos y perspectivas de investigación sobre Próximo Oriente Antiguo*. Formato online, 12 de mayo de 2025.

“Las rúbricas de evaluación: qué, cómo, cuándo y para qué”. Comunicación en la *Jornada de Profesorado del Máster Interuniversitario de Mediterráneo Antiguo*. Universidad de Alcalá, 13 de junio de 2025.

“Prácticas de reasentamiento en la Mesopotamia del Primer Milenio a. C.: el caso de las ciudades gemelas”. Comunicación en el X Congreso del Centro de Estudios de Próximo Oriente. Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, Albacete, 23 de octubre de 2025.

“Estudios sobre religiones en la Antigüedad: el caso de la Mesopotamia antigua”. Comunicación en el Grupo de Investigación *Ancient Religions and Cult Networks*. Universidad de Cantabria, Santander, 13 de noviembre de 2025.

PUBLICACIONES

“Documentos cuneiformes sobre comunidades exiliadas en época neobabilónica (s. VI a. C.)”, en Eduardo Ferrer Albelda (ed.), *De las arenas*

de Babilonia a las aguas del Tarteso. Estudios ibéricos sobre Orientalística y Egiptología II, Colección Shadum n.º 4, Editorial Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla, 2025, pp. 457-466. ISBN 978-84-472-2676-4.

“Gula, diosa de la curación, en el contexto mágico-religioso de la antigua Mesopotamia”, en Eduardo Ferrer Albelda y Pablo Andrés Guija Rodríguez (coords.), *Afecciones del cuerpo, dolencias del alma. Medicina y religión en la Antigüedad*, Spal Monografías Arqueología LIX, Editorial Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla, 2025, pp. 13-28. ISBN 978-84-472-2677-1.

“The Concept of Childhood in Ancient Near Eastern Cultures”, *A Theology of the Child, Sacrum Testamentum* vol. 4 (2025) (<https://sacrustestamentum.wixsite.com/sacrum-testamentum/volume-4>).

DOCENCIA

“Historia y Cultura del Antiguo Israel”. Asignatura optativa de 4.º del Grado de Historia. Universidad de Alcalá.

“Historia de la España antigua”. Asignatura obligatoria de 3.º del Grado de Historia. Universidad de Alcalá.

“Enseñanza de las Ciencias Sociales en ESO”. Asignatura obligatoria del Máster de Profesorado de Secundaria y Bachillerato. Universidad de Alcalá.

“Introducción al Sumerio”. Dentro del Curso *El III milenio a. C. en Oriente Próximo antiguo: periferias mesopotámicas*. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 30 de octubre-11 de noviembre de 2025.

PROYECTOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Proyecto *El discipulado en la Biblia*. Investigadores principales: Napoleón Ferrández Zaragoza y Luis Sánchez Navarro. Duración: 2022-2026. Entidad Financiadora: Universidad San Dámaso. Participación: miembro del equipo investigador.

LORENTE VIDAL JOSUÉ NATANAEL

DOCENCIA

Docente en el Diplomado de Historia Cultural y del Pensamiento en la Antigüedad Clásica. Módulo III: Egipto, el don del Nilo. Universidad de Querétaro, México (2025).

FORMACIÓN

Finalización del programa Formación Permanente Egiptología II, Universidad Alcalá de Henares, Madrid (2025).

Máster Formación del Profesorado de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y Bachillerato, Formación Profesional y Enseñanzas de Idiomas. Especialidad Geografía e Historia, Universidad de Murcia (2026).

CURSOS

Microcredencial universitaria para la competencia digital docente: hacia un uso pedagógico, ético y consciente de la tecnología educativa. Universidad de Murcia (5-6/02/2026).

FELLOWSHIP

Contrato predoctoral, programa estatal FPI - Agencia Estatal de Investigación 2025, ayudas a proyectos de generación de conocimiento y a actuaciones para la formación de personal investigador predoctoral, en el marco del Plan Estatal de Investigación Científica, Técnica y de

Innovación 2024-2027. Universitat Jaume I, Castellón (2026).

PREMIOS

Primer premio en el concurso CAJAMAR AL MEJOR PITCH de UMUEMPLOYER FEST@ 2026 de la Universidad de Murcia (03/2026).

PACHECO IZURIETA CONSUELO

PARTICIPACIÓN EN CONGRESOS Y

JORNADAS

III Congreso / Congresso Iberoamericano de Jóvenes Investigadores en Egiptología, 18 de septiembre del 2025

PUBLICACIONES

Pacheco Izurieta y Sea, C. (2022). *Marc van de Mieroop, Historia del Próximo Oriente antiguo (ca. 3000-323 a.n.e.). Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2020* [Reseña]. *Damqatum. The CEHAO Newsletter*, (18).

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TEBES JUAN MANUEL

EVENTOS ACADÉMICOS

The Archaeology of Iron Age Transjordan

Ponencia presentada.

“Archaeological correlates of a southern Levantine chiefdom: The case of Iron Age Edom.” International Conference of the Cluster of Excellence ‘Religion and Politics’, Universität Münster. 6-7 Octubre 2025.

American Society of Overseas Research 2025 Annual Meeting

Ponencia presentada.

“Introducing the Desert Cults Mapping Project: A Digital Humanities Tool for Studying the Ancient Sacred Landscapes of the Arid Southern Levant.” American Society of

Overseas Research, Boston. 19-22 Noviembre, Boston.

Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting
SBL Council Meeting, SBL Nominating Committee Meeting. Society of Biblical Literature, Boston. 22-25 Noviembre 2025.

PUBLICACIONES

Assyria and The West: A Fresh Look at the Unshakeable Pillars of the Late Bronze and Iron Age Chronology of the Eastern Mediterranean World. P. van der Veen, R. Wallenfels & P. James (eds.) Bicester: Archaeopress, “The Chronology of Edom in the Iron Age: A Critical Review of the Evidence.” Juan Manuel Tebes, pp. 323-346.

ESTANCIAS DE INVESTIGACIÓN

DUKE LIBRARY RESEARCHER.

Duke University, Duke Center for Jewish Studies and Duke Libraries. November-December 2025.

OTROS

The Jordan Times

Entrevista.

“Unveiling 10th Century BC copper boom: Breakthroughs in technology at Khirbat an-Nahas.” Por Saeb Rawashdeh, 8 Marzo 2025.

<https://jordantimes.com/news/local/unveiling-10th-century-bc-copper-boom-breakthroughs-technology-khirbat-nahas>



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