

## THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN AND NORTHERN AFRICA



Interview at the UNIFESP studio in August 28, 2018: Professor Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira (USP) to the left; Prof. Maria Cristina Nicolau Kormikiari Passos (USP) to the center; and Prof. Gilberto da Silva Francisco (UNIFESP) to the right.

hyperlink to interview: <https://youtu.be/z4sEmbnjC1M>

**Heródoto (Gilberto da Silva Francisco):** Good afternoon. My name is Gilberto da Silva Francisco. I teach Ancient History at the History Department of the School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Human Sciences at the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP). I am also an editor of the *Herodotus* journal, which has the thematic scope of the Classical world and its African and Asian connections.

Today we will discuss the interface between Ancient History and the region of Northern Africa with two colleagues: Professor Maria Cristina Nicolau Kormikiari Passos, from the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of São Paulo (MAE-USP) and is a researcher at the Laboratory of Studies on the Ancient City (LABECA); and Professor Júlio César Magalhães de Oliveira, from the History Department of the School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Human Sciences, University of São Paulo (FFLCH-USP), who coordinates the research group on Subaltern Groups and Popular Practices in

Antiquity, linked to the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

To begin this discussion on the importance of Africa in Ancient History, I'd like to ask you please to say some introductory words about your researches and groups, and how your studies are inserted in this dialogue about Africa<sup>1</sup>.

**Maria Cristina Nicolau Kormikiari:** My researches in connection with Northern Africa are a result of two interests. There is a first interest at MAE-USP, where I am currently a faculty member, and where I was also a student. My postgraduate studies were carried out at MAE-USP, where I worked with North African coins and numismatics during my MSc and PhD trajectories. That was my arrival at the research world and at the North African field: first, through the study of the circulation of Carthaginian coins, and later, by studying the coins of the Numidian and Moorish kingdoms in Northern Africa – the autochthonous Indigenous kingdoms of that region.

This was the first interest. And it was precisely the study of coins and their circulation and minting throughout the Mediterranean Basin that made me strongly interested in the study of human spaces, that is, in the occupation of space by human societies. This interest was concomitant with the emergence of the Laboratory of Studies on the Ancient City (LABECA), which is aimed at the study of spaces and human occupations in Antiquity. The aim of LABECA is to understand the social, political and religious organization of ancient societies, among other aspects, based on their arrangement in space.

It is obviously an Archaeology-laboratory; so it studies not only the formats of cities, but also urbanization and the manifold aspects related to the occupation of the environment. LABECA is strongly concentrated on the study of Greek society, but my contribution has been in the field in which I began: Northern Africa and the Western Mediterranean, in connection with the Phoenicians and the Indigenous populations of the region.

So these are the two drivers of my researches: my interest in the minting of coins, followed by the study of the spatial arrangement of certain human populations in Northern Africa, as an attempt to learn more about the organization of human societies.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview transcribed by Alícia Vieira Lima, Beatriz Luedemann Campos, Bianca Jacqueline de Moraes Vicente, Daniela Fernandes Cruz, Fabio Henrique Oliveira Rodrigues da Silva, Frederico de Oliveira Foini, Danilo Gonçalves, Erik de Lima Correia, Jemima Novaes, Kelly Delmondes e Monique Monteiro, and proofread by Gilberto da Silva Francisco, Assistant Professor at UNIFESP.

**Heródoto:** Professor Oliveira.

**Júlio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira:** My interest in Northern Africa dates back to the days of my scientific initiation project at the University of Campinas. I studied then the theme of poverty in the works of Saint Augustine, an African figure who lived most of his life in Northern Africa. I was interested in studying the North African society in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. This scientific initiation project led me then to an MSc dissertation, in which I became interested – in addition to the question of poverty – in collective action and popular mobilization forms. For my master's degree, I was primarily focused on the context of the struggles between Catholics or Caecilian, and Donatists – two Christian groups who opposed each other in Northern Africa. And for my PhD studies, which were carried out at the University of Paris X in Nanterre, France, I approached popular participation and collective action in the city of Northern Africa in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In this context, I reached beyond Saint Augustine – even though he continued to be my primary source – by integrating an Archaeological approach on Northern Africa, as I was interested in forms of collective action and mobilization. I sought to find out whether these forms led to sociability practices and relations among individuals in their daily routines. To attain this aim, it would be important to grasp the context of peoples' lives, especially in artisan neighborhoods and sociability locations of North African cities. Thus, this work involved text sources (sermons, Augustine's letters, documents and other known processes from Northern Africa in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries), especially in connection with the ongoing conflict among Christians, but not only that. The archaeological documentation, based on the reports of excavations of artisan neighborhoods and sociability places allowed me to understand a bit more about the broader context of plebeian life.

As a result of my PhD studies and also of my book, one of the aspects that called my attention in recent years – as I studied the way people mobilized and how their mobilization forms were linked to their daily lives – was how people communicate. This where my interest in understanding informal communication forms comes from, in particular, rumors, gossip and their relation with politics. I sought to understand two historical moments in comparative perspective: the Late Republic and Late Antiquity, which were popular mobilization moments in which political leaders gave a particular attention to what people said and how they conversed. In this sense, it is a work that goes beyond Northern Africa, but I continue to be strongly interested in this African documentation, which is incredibly rich, particularly the works of Augustine of Hippo.

This is what I continue to do in the present, and in connection with the research group I coordinate. The group includes scholars from several universities in Brazil and internationally, who are focused on the study of subaltern groups and popular practice forms. My research is directly linked to this theme, and other researches in this group are also related to these areas in the study of popular and subaltern groups, and related topics. Further on in our talk, I can say more on this. Many colleagues and students of mine are currently working in this group with Northern Africa, and developing researches in fields linked to popular groups and practices, i.e., subaltern groups in general.

**Heródoto:** As far as I noticed, Professor Passos works more with historical periodization and notions such as the Archaic and Classical periods.

**Kormikiari:** Actually, later than the Archaic period. Carthaginian minting, for instance, began in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century b.C., thus approaching the Classical period, and then more strongly in the Hellenistic period. And from North African Indigenous populations, Numidian and Moorish minting began in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century b.C. and developed throughout the Hellenistic period. However, it is important to remark that minting is a result of contact among populations – a very strong field of studies, as I see it, which is also becoming more frequent among my students. It is the third project we are developing at LABECA, based on two large theme-projects funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP).

We started by studying the urban nuclei, i.e., the central areas of ancient cities in the Archaic period and up to the Hellenistic period. And in our second theme project, we expanded this research towards the ‘rural areas’, so to speak, because there is a notion of non-interdependence linked to these areas in Antiquity, and a very strong interweaving. This applies, in my opinion, to the entire Ancient World. So we expanded the case studies and theoretical discussions through this second theme project. And now, we have a third project that is not a theme project, but instead, a research project that looks at frontier areas as contact zones. LABECA is already more than ten years old. As a lab, it is now quite consolidated with equipment and products such as publications and audiovisual materials. Many students and researchers have already walked into our doors. And I feel quite proud to say this. So we are presently dedicating ourselves more carefully to the issue of contact.

**Heródoto:** Here is a question for both of you: considering what you have already said about your labs and your specific research interests, please tell us

more about the emergence of these labs and the advisory work you have been carrying out. Are there students interested in this theme of Northern Africa and its integration with the Mediterranean?

**Kormikiari:** Specifically in connection with Northern Africa, I am the one more involved. I have worked with these Indigenous groups during my PhD and post-PhD studies at a very important research center that works with Northern Africa, the Camille Jullian Center in Aix-en-Provence. I was also fortunate to be an intern at the Camille Jullian Center during my post-PhD studies, working on these Indigenous groups. But later on, I returned to my first root, which was laid down during my MSc studies, when I did research on the Punics, the Phoenicians, who lived in that Western Mediterranean region.

So, as Professor Oliveira mentioned in relation to his studies, our own scope of work was also expanded and started encompassing the West Mediterranean region. Many of my current students are working with the Western Mediterranean, the issue of contact and the arrangement and organization of cities. Nearly eighty students, including MSc, PhD, post-PhD and scientific initiation students, have done work at LABECA. Their case studies, as a matter of fact, are always covering the entire Mediterranean Basin.

**Oliveira:** In my case, differently from LABECA, our study group is quite new. We have been active for two years now – not yet in the form of a laboratory, strictly speaking, but as a research nucleus. Yet, in terms of academic advisory activities, we do have many students interested in Northern Africa, especially in the Late Antiquity period, which is also the field I am interested in. Some students have been working all the way from scientific initiation to their PhD with a focus both in the city of the North of Africa and in its urban transformations between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries (a long duration), in the period we now call the Late Antiquity. Those were transformations both in terms of the urban setting and of the sensorial perceptions of their populations.

One of our PhD students is now working with sensorial perceptions and how the changes in the urban landscape in the course of those centuries affected the senses. And other students, similarly. One PhD student is also working with the religious conflicts I have mentioned, focused on the ‘demonization’ of adversaries. It was a particularly acute process in the context of that North African conflict, in which the two contending churches were very well established, with dozens, nay hundreds of bishops based in all African cities, a strong presence and fairly equal weight. And as a dispute, it involved a process of ‘demonizing’ the opponent.

And even in connection with Vandal Africa. One of our PhD students is carrying out a research project on exiles in the context of the disputes between



Aryans and Catholics in Vandal Africa. In a way, this is also related to the issue of contact in the Mediterranean, since the reality of exiling implied in displacements to other areas and produced contacts that still continue to exist between distinct regions of the Mediterranean and Northern Africa. So, the impression I have is that there is indeed an interest in Northern Africa for several reasons, among them the opportunity to study the urban evolution of this region over a long period of time, in addition to its archaeological wealth and its particularly rich textual sources – at least for studying the period of Late Antiquity, in which I am interested.

**Heródoto:** Still regarding the current reality of researches, and also the narratives in connection with the Classical world, can you please speak about the specific features of the study of Northern Africa in Ancient History? Is it by any means different to study Northern Africa in Ancient History? And regarding the specific historical processes of these places: were there specificities and local dynamics by any means different from the rest of the Mediterranean region?

**Oliveira:** It seems to me that Northern Africa was always present in Ancient History. And the study of the Punics and Carthaginians, and their relations with Rome; or the study of the North African conquest, was always present in the narratives about Ancient History and in the interest of its researchers. It is an issue that has always been present, and, thus, it is a part of the Mediterranean-dynamic itself. But there are also some particularities regarding Northern Africa.

One author who works with Northern Africa, Brent Shaw, goes to the point of affirming that Africa has an aspect we can define through the concept of ‘insularity’. By the way, the very definition of the Maghreb region for the Arabs – who conquered Northern Africa – was ‘the island of the West’. In a certain way, insularity is a result of these frontiers that include the desert and the sea, which make them physically distinct. We are talking about the North of Africa, except for Egypt. In this sense, the Maghreb extends itself from Egypt’s eastern desert to the Atlantic Ocean, and from the Mediterranean Sea to the Saharan fringes. What is the specific meaning of insularity for Brent Shaw in connection with this region? It is the notion that it has an initial resistance to innovations, but upon adopting them, it does so in a much more resistant and long-lasting way than other regions.

The example of Christianity is a case in point. The presence of Christianity is not as recent as in Italy: we know it has been there since the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Yet, African Christianity was rooted in such a way, and with such wide presence, that even in the countryside of Northern Africa it is found to have a relevant

presence during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries; there was a much more precocious proliferation of churches in that period than, for instance, in the Iberian Peninsula, in Gaul and other European regions. And this Christianity was so crucial for the emergence both of African and Latin Christianity. But we can think about other dynamics during the entire Maghrebi history. This, I believe, is one of the features we may consider as a particularity of Northern Africa.

**Kormikiari:** As Professor Oliveira was speaking, I was thinking: this strong issue around the Maghreb – this insularity-idea – is interesting indeed. I cite it in my articles, as I believe it does characterize a singularity. But at the same time, when we consider these two boundaries or physical barriers, which can be traced back to the Neolithic Era in 10,000 b.C. or 8,000 b.C., the composition of this region and its development are strongly linked to the East and the Iberian Peninsula, with Sicily and the Central Mediterranean, and also with the Western Mediterranean.

This means the very idea of a prehistoric population serving as a basis for the emergence of later Indigenous groups, coming as waves from the East during greatly extended historical periods with the Capsians' occupation, then moving towards the entire Maghreb region and cross-breeding with the existing population. But they are the ones who prevailed. It is similar to what Paleontology has shown for the past 15 years regarding contacts between *Homo Sapiens* and Neanderthal man. Nowadays, the big news is that little bones of a specimen were recently found and submitted to DNA studies, to attest to an alleged “marriage” between Neanderthals and Denisova hominins. So, these are the facts, and we see that it happened in Northern Africa.

This very strong connection with the East started long ago and continued after the Phoenician occupation. The Maghreb is also Phoenician. There is an overlap and a mixture of cultural, societal and exchange layers, including human exchanges, and a mixture of Phoenician populations along the entire coastal strip, extending from Libya to the islands on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. In this sense, thinking about Ancient History, I'd like to state the following problem regarding the formation of Ancient History in our Western world, and the so-called Classical Archaeology, with a prevalence of Greek and Roman studies.

There is an interest in other populations, but a marginal interest. Those peoples were seen as marginal, and so was the interest in them. Both in the periods I am more focused on in my studies, and previous ones – even up to the Hellenistic period –, Northern Africa suffered from such marginalization in a double sense, due to the fact that the peoples who occupied it and composed its social and popular mesh – its population and human fabric up to the Roman period – was, so to speak, “marginal”.

There were the Phoenicians, taken as Indigenous inhabitants, and a marginal status in the eyes of Ancient History, which was more interested in the Greeks and Romans, plus the fact it was Northern Africa. Then, starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the region was taken over by Islam and started contrasting more with the rest of Europe. Later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a European reoccupation of the region on a colonial basis, and it continued to be marginalized. Which means to say that between the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century and up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was quite on the fringes in relation to what happened in the rest of Europe. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was a violent European action in relation to those countries. Then, with the exit of European powers – with their expulsion –, four large emancipation movements took place in Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Such marginalization was always a reality, including in relation to European academia and European research centers. So I say we are facing a double marginalization.

**Heródoto:** It is precisely in this sense that I mentioned the issue of the specificities of its study. Because it seems to me that the North African region experienced a hierarchic dynamic: its action was driven by the arrival of the Greeks, then the Romans and so on, and there was never a different way of seeing its process – such way only appeared recently. But there is also a specific feature in the work undertaken by archaeologists and historians, considering the overall dynamic of imperialism, decolonization, Islamization and terrorism, and all that ends up strongly affecting the dynamic of studies on the region.

**Oliveira:** In this regard – now thinking not about what Africa meant for Antiquity, but about the study of Africa –, I believe Professor Passos is right when she mentions this historical fact. I'd say that the interest in studying this region emerged primarily among Europeans in a context of local conquests. Hence the willingness to appropriate its history as part of the European history. The French were the first ones to do it, in the case of Algeria. Later on, even the Italians did it in the case of Libya in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; there was a proposal to appropriate that past and to consider even the regional monuments under the property of the French and Italians.

Massimiliano Munzi, for instance, was a historian who sought to carry out historical researches on Libya. One of his books is called *L'epica del ritorno*<sup>2</sup> ["The epic of the return"]. It has a very significant cover illustration, depicting the landing of an Italian sailor on a beach right by the skeleton of a Roman

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<sup>2</sup> Massimiliano Munzi. *L'epica del ritorno: archeologia e politica nella Tripolitania italiana*. Roma: L'Erma Bretschneider, 2001.



soldier. The sailor takes up his sword and says: “Italy now raises the sword of Ancient Rome”. It shows the interest in Northern Africa as part of a project that assumed an attitude of passivity by African locals. The inhabitants of Northern Africa were seen either as contumacious rebels or as passive receptors of a culture that came from abroad.

Such views were resisted in the post-World War II context and with the region’s independence, when the specificities of the populations of these countries were asserted, thus leading to an opposition to ideas of people from abroad, especially in connection with Roman culture and Romanization. This new trend asserted not only the military, but also the cultural resistance of these peoples vis-à-vis the Roman conquests. However, it was an inversion of polarities. One continued to contrast two opposite sides: Romans and natives. And instead of identifying the natives’ passivity, it identified their resistance. It seems that only recently an attempt was made to reach beyond such polarities and think about the intrinsic dynamics of Northern Africa, that is, about the ways how these populations could create themselves anew in different contexts – before and after each conquest.

It is also important to stress that, differently from the common view of a separation – including by this first research on the colonization-context, which used to state that “Africa is separated both from the North and the rest of Europe as a result of Islamization” –, if it is true at all that one could identify a specific characteristic for Northern Africa in Antiquity, then in fact, it was never isolated. Instead, it was marked by constant linkages. It is impossible to think about Northern Africa without the Mediterranean. And more recently, it also seems that researches are increasingly revealing North Africa’s contacts with Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, it was far from being an isolated region. You spoke about its relations with the East, but also within this North-South circuit. There were constant relations between Northern Africa and the Mediterranean, in addition to its relations with Sub-Saharan Africa.

Such observations only became possible more recently because the interest somehow ceased to be focused only on Roman Africa. For instance, researches carried out at the Fezzan Valley in Libya, on groups such as the Garamantes – who remained outside Roman domination – enabled to expand our understanding about North African populations who interacted both with the Romans and with the Saharan south. This includes the discoveries of clay fragments and other Roman objects as far as in Mali, which attest to the reality of trade. Most of the fragments were found around the Garamantes, and later, in a less concentrated way, in the Saharan region, thus pointing at a chain that extended from the Garamantes to the Romans.

There were also, so to speak, residual exchanges with those other populations: in all likelihood, such exchanges were one of the sources that provided slaves to the Roman Empire. This also points that a description of Africa without such contacts would be something unimaginable. So I do agree in this regard with what Professor Passos said before, and I believe this is how the history of Northern Africa must be seen.

**Heródoto:** In order to elaborate more in this topic, can you please talk about study centers and the key studies related to Northern Africa, its integration to the Mediterranean and the dynamics of Ancient History? You mentioned some names, and I would like to know if there are large projects in course, and who are the most renowned experts.

**Kormikiari:** The Camille Jullian Center at the University of Marseille in Aix-en-Provence is a seminal place for the study of this previous period. It is interesting to see how the Phoenicians are similar to a sandwich filling: the more you bite, the more it comes out. You have a bread layer – Rome – and then, “ah, let’s get back to the autochthonous populations” and their relations. In so doing, one even forgets that we are talking about a thousand years of contact. A thousand years!

The histories contained in some texts mention that the Phoenicians were already sailing across the Mediterranean in 1200-1100 b.C. At a first moment, archaeological studies completely denied these accounts. But in more recent decades, Archaeology has increasingly studied the chronology of the initial Phoenician settlements or colonies in the Western and North-African Mediterranean. The current dating of Carthage is easily reaching back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century b.C., which is in line with the information provided by text sources on the city’s founding. The dating of remains reaching as far back as that is also being established at other West Mediterranean sites. So we can easily speak about nearly 800-900 years of contact, of presence, of populational and cultural intermixture involving the Eastern, Phoenician population and these Indigenous populations at the time when the Romans arrived. And despite the destruction of Carthage in 146 b.C., the Romans were initially for a very short time in Northern Africa. They went there, destroyed and extinguished it, and then went back home. Only then was there a subsequent process of Roman occupation.

Regarding great scholars, there is an entire generation of French researchers, including those born in the Protectorate days and their sons, and also Frenchmen from continental Europe, who worked with this theme and were focused on Northern Africa. One could not fail to mention some names, and Gabriel Camps is the greatest of them. It is interesting how the articles that systematize

bibliographical references and researches in the field continue to mention his name. Camps already passed away. He is the founder of the Camille Jullian Center. And we must also mention Jean-Marie Lassère, who has a fantastic study on the issue of populations, that is, the dynamic and pattern of human settlements in Northern Africa. So it is interesting to see an entire generation of French scholars studying the Indigenous populations – a generation based in southern France and, later on, in Paris, where we now find some important centers of Berber studies. There are also studies about Rome, which are much broader in their scope, by authors such as Mattingly, Shaw and Whittaker.<sup>3</sup> These are important names in universities in England and the United States, such as Stanford, which is a very active center in this regard.

And then there is an entire tier of authors dealing with the Phoenicians and Carthaginians. This is actually a criticism: even the scholars who do research on the Phoenicians must carry out their studies on their own. During the entire process of my MSc research, I studied Carthaginian monetary circulation. When I got to the PhD studies, I had a new learning experience on Indigenous populations. It was a new apprenticeship-process, because my bibliographical path was strongly marked by Italian authors: the Italian school on the Phoenicians and Punics is extremely strong. Sabatino Moscati, and Bartoloni<sup>4</sup> are central references. There is the institute for the study of the Phoenician-Punic civilization, which is now part of a much larger institute of studies on the Mediterranean civilization, founded by Moscati, which is an essential place for those willing to study the theme. The University of Bologna in Italy is very active in this regard, and even Sapienza.<sup>5</sup> Well, this is something on its own right. So, I had to tread this entire path in order to find and follow these French scholars.

I remind our readers that the library of the University of São Paulo has an entire collection on Northern Africa, which contains all of these key texts that are at the basis of contemporary researches. This collection was donated by Chair Professor Eurípedes Simões de Paula, whose pre-chair thesis<sup>6</sup> was absolutely innovative in his days. He studied the relations between Morocco and the Iberian Peninsula, and Transatlantic and Mediterranean exchanges at a time when people didn't even think about these things in Brazil. And he donated his library to the Department of History. I remember to this day where his shelves were; they were the springs from which I "drank" to find out what

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Richard Whittaker.

<sup>4</sup> Piero Bartoloni.

<sup>5</sup> Sapienza Università di Roma.

<sup>6</sup> *Marrocos e suas relações com a Ibéria na Antiguidade*. Tese para o concurso à cadeira de História da Civilização Antiga e Medieval da Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras da Universidade de São Paulo. São Paulo: Industria Grafica José Magalhães, 1946.

was to be known, and so I found myself too in the process. Nowadays things are much easier; students can do everything via the Internet and find all types of things.

So, to sum it up, when we look at the lists of researches presented at congresses on Phoenician and Punic studies, we notice that the studies on Indigenous populations are becoming more and more frequent. Even so, there is still a lack of inter-connections among themes, that is, there is still the lack of a more integrated outlook. In my PhD studies, I sought to accomplish this task. But in a general way, it is interesting to include this connectivity that Professor Oliveira mentioned and seek to grasp the relations among North African Indigenous populations and the Roman Empire – neither in terms of subservience, nor of absolute resistance.

**Oliveira:** I'd like to pick up the thread Professor Passos was following regarding the importance of the Phoenicians. It is good to remember that when we speak about the inhabitants of Northern Africa, this Phoenician influence lasted up to the Late Antiquity. The peasants who lived around Saint Augustine's parish spoke Punic. They spoke neither Numidian nor Berber, but, instead, Punic! Saint Augustine had to count on a priest who spoke the language, because that population could not understand Latin. So, this influence was indeed lasting and a part of that strong mixture along history.

Regarding my own field of studies, first of all, the Camille Jullian Center is also important for the study of Late Antiquity as a result of the influence exerted by Paul-Albert Février. He was an important archaeologist who studied Northern Africa, especially during the Late Antiquity period. He passed away a long time ago, but he continues to be a key reference on Northern Africa. You will find many important scholars there, such as Michel Bonifay, who works with ceramics in Late Antiquity but has a particular interest in Northern Africa.

In France, I must mention my own advisor, the also late Claude Lepelley, who is a landmark for rethinking North African cities in Late Antiquity. His thesis published in 1979 under the title *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire*, that is, North African cities in the period then called the 'Low Empire' – nowadays, the Late Empire –, was fundamental for rethinking the cities beyond the idea of decadence. More recently, there is the also late Yves Moderán (an early loss), from the University of Caen, who had Professor Lepelley as his advisor too and wrote an extremely important work on Northern Africa about the Moors in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. The theme of the Moors in Africa is not frequently studied, and Moderán's work is important.

These scholars – Paul-Albert Février, Claude Lepelley, and Yves Moderán – did not leave followers of the same level after they died. Even in today's France,

there are no researchers of a similar caliber. Italy also has important studies, for instance by Massimiliano Munzi, who is an archaeologist too. And the University of Sassari periodically holds a colloquium named *L'Africa Romana*, which publishes extensive collections of academic news and references from many places in the world.

**Kormikiari:** If anyone wishes to consult these collections, they are all available at the MAE library.

**Oliveira:** It is also important to mention scholars from England and the United States, for instance, David Mattingly and Bruce Hitchner, who are leading archaeologists in these countries. More recently, there has been an interest in Vandal Africa, Byzantine Africa and up to the Arabic period. Corisande Fenwick is an author to be mentioned, who has a very interesting work on this transition between Byzantine to Arabic Africa and is little studied. There is a disrupted disciplinary approach, which is sometimes reified as a historical disruption. In fact, it is just that we don't know much about this period. But there are also works in this direction.

I could not fail to point at the relevance of African scholars themselves. The University of Tunis – the *Institut National du Patrimoine* – has many important researchers dedicated to studying Northern Africa. Mohamed Benabès is a scholar from the Institute who also studies this transition from Byzantine to Arabic Africa, with the advantage of knowing at once the Greek, Latin and Arabic sources. Meriem Sebaï and Leïla Ladjimi Sebaï are two other Tunisian scholars; Meriem Sebaï is currently teaching at Sorbonne, but she is Tunisian and has many important works from Tunisia.

As to current Algeria and also Libya, the situation is more complicated. Algeria's collaborations with European countries have been severed since its Civil War in the 1990s and have still not yet been fully resumed. And the work in Libya is also interrupted.

Another important archaeologist, Elizabeth Fentress, currently lives in Rome and is linked to the American Academy. She has led many excavations in Northern Africa, in Volubilis and, more recently, in Utica. She has many important works, and collaborations with David Mattingly and Bruce Hitchner, and has done work at many African sites from the Vandal and Byzantine periods.

**Kormikiari:** A resumption-process is in course. There are some active cross-disciplinary and multinational teams, in particular, our colleagues from Sardinia and from Tunisia's National Heritage Institute. So it is possible to make some very interesting partnerships. They are resuming excavations in Hadrumetum and Utica, and reaching deeper layers of interest. This, bearing in



mind that the greatest archaeological obstacle in Northern Africa, in a general way – and actually it is a good thing that it is an obstacle – is the excellent state of conservation of the Roman layers. One finds entire cities there, and the second best preserved colosseum of the entire Roman world in El Djem (second only to the Roman colosseum itself).

There is an archaeological park with a Roman chronology, which serves as a basis for tourism. And there is a very interesting criticism by Mounir Bouchenaki, an Algerian who is a former director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, and wrote a great deal about the issue of heritage and preservation. Bouchenaki calls attention to how terrible it is to be on the Algerian roads and see the signs for "Roman ruins" when, in fact, one is near Indigenous, Phoenician and Carthaginian ruins. An extremely important archaeologist, the late André Jodin, has worked a lot and was one of the first excavators at Volubilis in Morocco. I believe his big book about Volubilis, the big edition published in the 1970s,<sup>7</sup> continues to be accurate to this day. You simply won't find any Roman construction on fresh soil, that is, on new ground.

Now going back to the specific features of Northern Africa, I believe a crucial issue is our ability to grasp why we have looked at the ancient world from a European perspective. Both in terms of history and (even) archaeology, Western historiography is now breaking free from a certain set of ties. And one of these ties is the idea of progress or evolution in the development of what a society or civilization is. This is the city-idea. I said that our lab includes the city-concept. However, it has remained merely as a name, since we are now increasingly studying this entirety and realizing that the city is an element, i.e., a specific way of organizing certain groups, which by no means should be categorized into a progressive scale.

This is a serious problem in the case of Northern Africa; it is precisely the denial of civilization or civility, of the complexity of Indigenous groups, because they do not live in cities. But as Jodin said, one will not find a Roman site on fresh ground. He refers to these population layers related to foreigners who got to Northern Africa and reached for the established human sites, which were extremely well-settled in terms of their way of life and their adaptation to the local environment and geography.

This is an issue on its own right, which must be studied very carefully. It is interesting to see that European historiography maintained Arabic terms for the geographic features of Northern Africa, since these Arabic words account

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<sup>7</sup> André Jodin. *Volubilis Regia Iubae: contribution à l'étude des civilisations du Maroc antique préclaudien*. Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1987.

for the reason and meaning of those geographic features better than their European counterparts. Thus, a North African river is not a river according to traditional geography (in the sense of a perennial, navigable river that conveys life). Instead, it is an *oued*, since it dries out and then suddenly floods up, and if one should attempt to stand along its banks, he would drown. This is so true that, after facing many setbacks, the Romans standardized the word as a military expression: “Do not camp on the banks of an *oued*”.

In other words, one can imagine a perishing river. You have the entire climatic, geographical and environmental issue even when the populations who lived there were extremely well-adapted to it. These aspects are not considered as one looks for cities (“just let me find civilization; let me understand these societies vis-à-vis the Greek and Roman forms of organization”). This is a fallacy, which will lead scholars to reproduce stereotypes and prevent them from effectively studying those populations.

**Oliveira:** Let me add a remark. This observation of how the Roman city marked the studies on Northern Africa is really important. A change in relation to this pattern only started taking place in the 1970s. The turning point in terms of Urban Archaeology, from a long duration perspective, was the initiative to excavate Carthage: “Save Carthage”. That international campaign led by UNESCO was a living laboratory with many Tunisian, French, British, US, Canadian, Polish and Danish teams: the whole world was represented at several sites. And those excavations started from the Punic layer and went up to the Late Antiquity layer. So they uncovered not only the classic days of the *Colonia Iulia Carthago* founded during Augustus’ period and henceforth, but also the period from the Punic city and up to Late Antiquity.

That was already a change, since the focus of study was shifted from the city – as had been the case in previous excavations, which sought the city of the period that scholars imagined to be the height of the empire. But there has been a more recent change, which seems to point to what Professor Passos said, and this is an interest beyond the city. This second shift only started in the 1980s, for instance, with the initial prospections at the Libyan valleys which allowed moving away from the city in order to study the occupation of the countryside. And more recently, I believe these studies in the region of the Garamantes at the Fezzan Valley indicate an interest that expands itself not only beyond the city, but also beyond the countryside occupied by the Romans, that is, beyond the frontiers of the Empire.

Even though the interest persists to produce monuments for tourist visitation in Tunisian and Algerian archaeology (even the current governments of these countries are interested in maintaining these monuments as tourist attrac-

tions), there are collaborative research projects involving scholars from many countries, who are reaching beyond the Roman city with a long duration perspective – most of these recent projects seek to identify a long duration trend – towards the countryside and beyond the frontiers of the Empire.

**Kormikiari:** The *Libyan Valleys Survey* is quite interesting, since in the pursuit of academic interests, people sometimes close their eyes to political questions. The Survey was a request by Muammar al-Gaddafi to the UN.<sup>8</sup> What was his intention? He looked at Libya's desert strip and saw many architectural remains in an uninhabited area, which showed him that "in ancient days, things were different". So his intention was to understand what had taken place in Antiquity. Were there other practices that could enable them to use that location? Did the climate change? Has desertification taken over? The climate-issue is also very interesting.

In a general way, the issue of geography is still poorly explored in the studies. There are a number of isolated studies showing that the climate has not changed. So there are ancient occupation areas that no longer exist because people gave up their attempt to maintain their lifestyles, or because they found better techniques in relation to the environment – and not because the climate changed and they were forced to move away. So this was his intention with the Libyan Valleys survey. And then, precisely the British, with a strong team, accepted the task amidst that context of the Pan Am crash in Great Britain – the 1988 episode in Lockerbie, attributed to the Libyan government –, but that situation was not an obstacle. I find this very interesting.

Despite all the political embargos exerted by the British government on the Libyan government, this team accepted the task and went to Libya to carry out their research. They showed that there was, indeed, an entire technology to harness ground water (ground water in this region in Libya is not located so deeply; in some areas, it is located deep below the surface, but there are other areas in which the water table is close to the surface). There were extensive works of hydraulics and channeling. That team did a wonderful survey there, with an extremely well-built project, and showed that what happened was that people gave up maintaining their practices, instead a climatic change.

**Heródoto:** I have a final question about how strong this theme is in the present. I am not an African history expert, but I must deal with the history of Africa in my teaching activities. For instance, I have frequently worked in

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<sup>8</sup> This project was started in 1989 under the auspices of UNESCO.

class with the importance of Egypt. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Egypt was seen to be fully integrated to the Ancient Near East for a long period of time, including environmentally, since it was a part of the Fertile Crescent region. Later on, there was a re-discussion of whether Egypt is in the East, and activists started to affirm that “Egypt is Africa”. And there is also the issue of the black Pharaohs. So, these issues are quite current.

Considering Brazil today and the obligatoriness of topics linked to African history as part of the guidelines for school programs, how can these reflections on Northern Africa, in connection with the dynamics of Ancient History, contribute to our thinking about Africa? In a general way, the Africa that appears before our eyes is another one, as we attempt to understand other issues. I am asking this so we may have a brief discussion about how this content can contribute to our thinking about Africa here in Brazil, as a final reflection.

**Kormikiari:** Professor Regina Bustamante from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro is actively involved in this theme. She has been working to develop and elaborate it: the incorporation of Northern Africa to African studies under the legislation of the national guidelines for teaching. Because we were left with the Sub-Saharan issue much later in the course of time, that is, during Brazil’s colonial days. And then Northern Africa was left behind in a sort of limbo. Luckily or not, it has not yet been covered by Classical Studies, which are primarily focused on Greece and Rome. We still suffer from this marginalization. And Northern Africa is covered by African Studies, but not in a particularly concentrated way.

There is a set of populations who are not necessarily black only: actually, we are talking about a multi-ethnic society. But there have been some attempts at broad works. I particularly refer to Professor Regina Bustamante because she has been so active in trying to incorporate this topic to Brazilian programs. I have been with her at events of the National History Association (ANPUH) to present our researches and show that they can reach higher. But this issue of Egypt, which you mentioned, is interesting, since Archaeology has a historiography of its own as well, right? It is a field on its own right.

I have been teaching an undergraduate subject at USP for some time, entitled “Northern Africa in Antiquity”, and I always meet students who want Egypt to be included. I usually tell them: “you see, it won’t be possible for us to cover Egypt, since Egypt...”, and so on. But the Egyptians were doubtlessly linked to Northern Africa, including the Punics, the Carthaginians and the Indigenous populations geographically close to its region. And even later on, Hannibal had an entire set of linkages to Ptolemy. So you do have a strong connection, but these fields of study are still separated from each other.

**Heródoto:** Once, while working with my students, I took the introduction of a textbook on the Ancient Near East, and one of the topics it discussed was: is Egypt part of it? The students were discussing and reasoning about the absence of Egypt in the reflections presented by contributions on the Ancient Near East. But this is really being discussed. That's when you see that the notions of space do change.

**Kormikiari:** And if one studies Phoenician history, Egypt is totally included in the account. Byblos has been there since 3,000 b.C., when we cannot specifically mention Phoenicia and the Phoenicians, since those inhabitants were Canaanites and Semites. Their relations with Egypt were extremely strong, and would remain thus. Egypt is this link. Where have they passed by? In their comings and goings, and later on via navigation, since Egypt has one of the most terrible deserts of the world, which is the Libyan desert. It is impossible, in my opinion, for Egypt not to be a part of it. It may not be part of the historiography on the theme; but in this case, Egypt must be incorporated to it.

**Oliveira:** I think it depends also, and a lot more, on the academic dynamics than on the context. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the distinct fields of specialization have derived partly from philology. It is important to remember that history as a discipline, in particular, but also archaeology and other disciplines, derive to a certain extent from philology. Philology was the very first discipline to be institutionalized as such in modern universities, starting in Germany with a conception of knowledge in the form of branches. And then, from philology, Ancient history emerges as Classical Philology, for instance. This has an impact, since you can define your field of studies based on a body of texts and a linguistic specialization.

Then you have a predominance of Greek and Latin, and in relation to the study of Egypt and the Ancient Near East's world, you would also have a linguistic specialization. One would need to know hieroglyphics or cuneiform writing, with the Akkadian and Sumerian languages. This leads to academic separations. And the resulting problem in this regard is excessive specialization. There are also political issues involved in these separations, but I believe the academic dynamic has divided things. More recently, we have seen attempts to break through these barriers and consider much higher levels of integration and contact than these academic frontiers had demarcated.

**Kormikiari:** In this regard, I remember a very interesting figure, which is also a specialty of Northern Africa: it is the field of epigraphists, with over 60 thousand inscriptions – the vast majority of them dating back to the Roman period. So this also led to a detour, so to speak. There is a concentration of studies, and the training of epigraphists takes place in this field. But then it ends up narrowing the scope of attention, which could otherwise encompass a broader perspective.



**Oliveira:** This is an excellent remark on the importance of Epigraphy for the study of Northern Africa, by all means. I would need to bring back your question about the relevance of Northern Africa for the study of African History. It is really odd to see the exclusion of Northern Africa from the studies of those who are interested in Africa. This very word, "Africa", comes from Northern Africa. The Romans named Africa after the *Afri* tribe, which was based near Carthage, to separate the Punics after the conquest. When the Romans conquered Carthage's territory, they named this conquered province as "Africa". By extension, the name started being used in reference to all North African provinces. In the period I have been studying, the name referred to a "diocese", i.e., a set of provinces initially called "Africa", and later on started referring to the entire continent.

So this is already a reason why one should not exclude the history of this region from the study of African History. But there is also the importance of all that secular history with its wealth, which makes me think of an intrinsically African wealth – not only influenced by what came from abroad, but also containing its own native elements in terms of what was done and produced in Northern Africa. I mentioned, for instance, the importance of African Christianity. What was produced in Northern Africa influenced Latin Christianity and was not developed in Italy. It is the result of an autochthonous development. Some features in Christianity were developed in Northern Africa and influenced the history of the Mediterranean as a whole. So, the very wealth of this history also deserves to be considered in the context of the history of the continent.

Finally, I mentioned how much the recent studies have raised the perception of contacts also with Sub-Saharan Africa, at least since the first century of our era. Until recently, people supposed that this would be a feature of the Medieval period, and not of the Ancient period, with the development of trade routes. But nowadays we see that it already existed in the ancient days, and it helps us understand the very nature of this Mediterranean world. This helps us understand, for instance, why 24% of the skeletons found at a Roman cemetery in London were likely to have Sub-Saharan origin. How did they get there, if not via Northern Africa? And this also helps us think about the Roman world itself in a much different way from what we used to think, that is, it helps us think about it as a multi-ethnic world with extremely frequent contacts. Northern Africa is essential for this inquiry, since it is intimately linked to the history of this continent. I believe it is important not only to rethink the place of Africa for the study of Ancient History and its connections, but also for expanding the study of the African continent itself.

**Heródoto:** With that, we end today's conversation. Thank you wholeheartedly, Professor Oliveira and Professor Passos, for your participation.