

IN MEMORIAM

Julio Samsó (1942-2026)

Julio Samsó Moya¹ was a leading scholar in the history of Islamic science, in particular, astronomy, and especially in the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages and early modern era. Hence his work was focused on the centre of the cauldron of learning that boiled over into the Latin (and, later, vernacular) translations that stimulated the growth of European science from the mid-twelfth century onwards. He was born in Barcelona 1942 and, whilst his academic contacts and his scholarly reputation spread throughout the world, his career remained rooted in Catalonia, where he took up a post in the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (1976-1982) before settling at the Universitat de Barcelona, where he was professor (1982) and professor emeritus (from 2012) in the Departamento de Árabe for the rest of his life. He had worthy predecessors here – above all in the person Josep Maria Millàs Vallicrosa (1897-1970) who, with his deep knowledge of Arabic, Hebrew and Latin, was able to put on the map, as it were, the rich activity in the science of the stars in Spain, and especially that concerned with Catalonia (e.g., his *Assaig d'història de les idees físiques i matemàtiques a la Catalunya medieval*). Samsó freely admitted that he did not know Hebrew (and he did not publish in Catalan), but his expertise in Arabic, in all its aspects, and his ability to collaborate with Hebrew scholars, such as David Romano and Shlomo Sela, amply compensated for this. He was generous in his praise of those from whom he had learnt his craft. In one dedication (*al-Qanṭara* 33 [2009], p. 321) he writes “in memory of my two masters and friends, who taught me to analyse a horoscope, Edward S. Kennedy and John D. North”. As a teaching member of staff of the Arabic faculty, he had to embrace a wide range of subjects, and it is not surprising that he produced an anthology of translations from the *1001 Nights*, just as his teacher in the history of Arabic science, Joan Vernet (1923-2011), had produced a translation of both the Qurʾān and the *1001 Nights*. He also wrote on the Christian polemic of Anselm Turmeda (1352-1423), a Majorcan convert to Islam. His heart, however, lay in the astral sciences. And what a rich field that is! He embraced the whole period of astral sciences in the Iberian peninsula and the Maghreb, in many articles, ranging from the earliest Arabic astronomer in Spain, ‘Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Ishāq al-ḡabbī (fl. ca. 788-ca. 852), through the Toledan community of astronomers in the eleventh century – Abū Marwān al-Istijī, al-Zarqālluh, Ibn al-Kammād and Ibn al-Hāʾim; through the Córdoba and Sevillian astronomers Maslama al-Majrīṭī (d. 1007), Jābir ibn Aflaḥ (ca. 1100-1150) and al-Bīṭrījī (d. ca. 1204); through the twelfth-century scholars working in the valley of the Ebro, Barcelona and Béziers – Abraham Bar ḥiyya (ca. 1065-ca. 1145), Plato of Tivoli (fl. 1134-1138) and Abraham Ibn Ezra (ca. 1089-1167); through the Alfonsine scholars in the entourage of Alfonso X el Sabio (1252-1284); until the Catalan scholars Ramon Llull (ca. 1232-1316), Bartomeu de Tresbens (fl. 1359-1374) and Abraham Zacut (1452-1515). He also dealt with the lesser-known Maghrebi tradition of learning, which was bound closely to that of al-Andalus (through travels of scholars, or of their writings): ‘Alī ibn Abī l-Rijāl (d. after 1037), Ibn Ishāq

¹ Julio Samsó never used the second part of his family name (Moya) in his publications.

al-Tūnisī (fl. 1193-1222), Ibn al-Raqqām of Murcia and Tunis (d. 1315), and Ibn Bannā al-Marrākushī (1256-1321). While the Islamic West developed a distinctive intellectual culture of its own, it was not entirely detached from central Islam (al-Mashriq), and Samsó also devoted articles to the astronomical tables of al-Khwārizmī (ca. 780-850) and al-Battānī (ca. 868-892), the *Letters* of the tenth-century Baṣran Ikhwān al-Safā', thirteenth-century contacts between al-Andalus and the Maragheh observatory of the Mongols, the astronomical tables of Ibn Ishāq al-Tūnisī which survived in a manuscript in Hyderabad, and the seventeenth-century recension of the Persian tables of Ulugh Begh made by Sanjaq Dār al-Tūnisī. Topics formed the subject matter of other articles, on the doctrine of *tasyīr*, the projection of rays of the planets, mediation, the *animodar*, the *dawr*, lunar mansions, astronomical instruments such as the Carolingian astrolabe of Destombes, the *saphea/azafea* of Azarquiel, the *azafea shakkāziyya* of Ibn ṭibugā (1359-1447)), astrometeorology and spherical trigonometry. For a substantial list of Samsó's articles one can consult <https://barcelona.academia.edu/JulioSams%C3%B3Moya>, where several of his works are available digitally. Many of his articles were collected in the volumes *Islamic Astronomy and Medieval Spain* (1994), *Astronomy and Astrology in al-Andalus and the Maghrib* (2007), *Las ciencias de los antiguos en al-Andalus* (2011), and *Astrometeorología y astrología medievales* (no date). But the culmination of his life's work appeared in his final book: *On Both Sides of the Strait of Gibraltar: Studies in the History of Medieval Astronomy in the Iberian Peninsula and the Maghreb* (2020). This book, in over one thousand pages, covers the whole history of pre-modern Arabic astral sciences in the West, together with its European reception. After the historical first chapter it is divided by subject, into *mikāt* (timekeeping and the qibla); astrology, as the aim of the study of astronomy; astronomical instruments (astrolabes, quadrants, armillary spheres etc.), *hay'a* (cosmology), astronomical theory, and astronomical tables (*zīj*es). Along with the journal *Suḥayl*, an international journal for the history of the exact and natural sciences in Islamic Civilization, which he founded in 2000, this book will remain his most lasting contribution to scholarship.

Samsó passed on his learning to some distinguished students, including Emilia Calvo, the late Mercè Comes, Miquel Forcada, Roser Puig, Mònica Rius, Hamid Berrani and Àngel Mestres. He welcomed scholars to his office in the Departamento de Árabe, including Edward Kennedy, Bernard Goldstein, Keiji Yamamoto, John North, David King and myself. He valued his collaboration with other scholars, while freely admitting friendly disagreements. For example, in *On Both Sides of the Strait of Gibraltar*, p. 19, he states that "my friend David King disagrees with me on my interpretation of the Caroline astrolabe as an instrument "translated" from an Arabic original. He may be right, but I still stick to this hypothesis". His kindness and generosity were legendary, and he delighted in accompanying visitors to the most iconic monuments in Barcelona – the La Catedral de la Sagrada Família and other buildings of Gaudí, Mount Tibidabo (where he enjoyed the amusement park with my family). Perhaps his favourite companion, however, was his cat, who poses with him on most of his published portraits.

Charles Burnett
The Warburg Institute, London