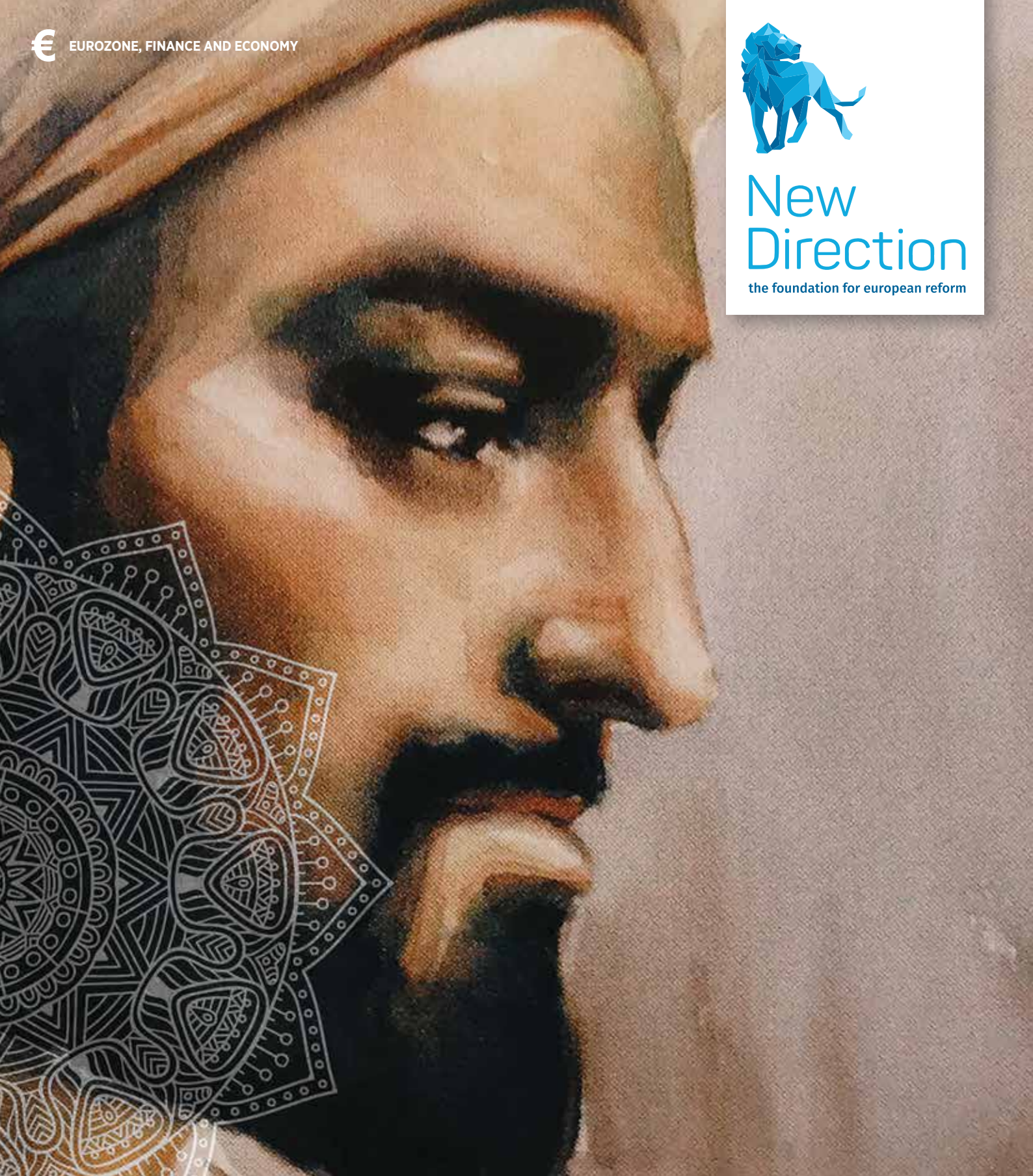




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# THE TEACHINGS OF IBN KHALDUN

# New Direction



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The articles included in this publication were originally published by the Istanbul Network for Liberty (<http://istanbulnetwork.org>), MuslimHeritage.com and the Alliance of Conservatives & Reformists in Europe (<http://acreurope.eu>). The articles have been lightly edited to match our in-house style.

New Direction is particularly grateful for the great work and contribution of these scholars in the field of Islamic studies.



## IBN KHALDUN, ISLAM'S MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

by Dr Benedikt Koehler

Tensions tearing at the basis of Islamic societies are never more acute than when stoked in the name of Islam. Idealists invoking Islam as a lever for change spark upheavals that time and again hand power to cynics. Looking for an explanation why Islamic societies wallow in paralysis, some suggest Islamic societies stagnate because Islam itself does not admit of contemplating change in society, that Islam, to put it simply, comes without a toolkit for handling social change. To think so is tempting – but wrong.

The very agenda of social sciences, why and how change occurs in society, was mapped by Ibn Khaldun, who produced a coherent body of analysis of why societies rise, peak and wane. Ibn Khaldun spread himself across so many disciplines and spheres of work, one wonders how so many activities fit into a single CV. Ibn Khaldun was born in 1332 in Tunisia to a family with a tradition of diplomatic service in Spain and the Maghrib, and he initially followed in his family's footsteps into a diplomatic career that took him to act as lead negotiator in several diplomatic missions, but he fell from favour at court and chose to move to Egypt, where he served as a senior judge until his death in 1406.

Ibn Khaldun's moves and career changes suggest his relations with his superiors were tempestuous, and it seems he did not mellow with age – in Egypt he was hired, fired and rehired several times over. In any case he put his observations of policy-making from close quarters to good use in a body of writing that ranges from history to religion. For an Islamic intellectual at the time, that breadth of interest was not uncommon, blending history and religion was in character with Islamic scholarship in its classical period.

What was different about Ibn Khaldun was that he did it in a way that was altogether new. Ibn Khaldun was an historian, but he branched out from narratives of unique occurrences to trace developments that could be generalised across time and place. In other words, Ibn Khaldun shaped history as a branch of social science. Ibn Khaldun's exploration of what dynamics trigger change in society displays the skill set of a political economist.

Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, which means as much as 'Preface', is a multi-volume tract which starts

by explaining the origins of civil society. Then it moves on to a set of dos and don'ts for government relations with civil society, specifies how to tell good taxes from bad ones and sums up the nature of entrepreneurship. That Ibn Khaldun was ahead of his time, although an estimable achievement alone to readers today, matters less than another, one that has a bearing on Islamic society today, which was that *Muqaddimah's* package of policy analysis and advice shows Islam not only tolerates but actually promotes a dynamic civil society.

Islamic scholars had a keen interest in comparative analysis of societies and how they develop at different stages. This all-embracing outlook may stem from the unique geography of the realm of Islam, a vast territory that had grown very quickly and bordered on Europe, China and India. But Arabs did not have to observe peoples across the border to pique their interest in why cultures develop in different ways.

Arabs only had to look around their own neighbourhood to see cultures follow different tracks, because even inside their empire, Arabs for many centuries were outnumbered by Jews and Christians who retained religious freedom and with it their way of life. The curiosity of Islamic scholars

also extended to cultures older than their own. The oldest description of Hinduism is by the 11th century polymath Al Biruni, and the Greek philosophy of antiquity in large parts has come down to us via Islam.

Ibn Khaldun drew on a rich repository of historical literature, indeed he conceived *Muqaddimah* as an introduction to the study of history from the very beginning. Every culture has its own creation myths, stories about how societies first come into being, and so does Islam. Ibn Khaldun, however, departed from traditional narrative by replacing it with analysis of motives. His assertion why mankind prefers to live together rather than apart is due, quite simply, to enlightened self-interest. Once people who live on their own realise they are liable to starve, they band together, and the struggle for survival induces individuals to gravitate to whatever jobs they do best. People come together through working together:

“ The power of the individual human being is not sufficient for him to obtain (the food) he needs, and does not provide him with as much food as requires to live...he cannot do without a combination of many powers among his fellow beings.

Through division of labour society is formed – not the other way round. Here is Ibn Khaldun's starting point: society is an arrangement to make everyone involved better off. Moreover, division of labour has triggered a second round effect because productivity gains do not level out, and Ibn Khaldun follows this thought to see where it leads: as division of labour proliferates, there is a continuing rise in productivity, and more and more wants and needs are catered to.

“ Through co-operation, the needs of a number of persons, many times greater than their own number, can be satisfied.

At last, the process concludes by creating demand for authorities that serve the public interest because the economy needs a dependable framework to function. Thus there emerges the need for stable government, and 'When royal authority is acquired, it is accompanied by a life of ease and increased opportunities'.

A virtuous cycle evolves a successful society, a win-win situation that has created a symbiosis of the economy and government.

“ Luxury is the consequence of wealth and prosperity; and wealth and prosperity are the consequences of royal authority.

## THE ECONOMICS OF TAXATION

When he writes about tax, Ibn Khaldun switched from policy analysis to policy prescription. Ibn Khaldun considered tax the most important bit of kit a government has in its toolbox. Entrepreneurs need to earn profit, and when taxes are low, they will come forward, but when taxes are high, they will stay at home:

“ The strongest incentive for cultural activity is to lower as much as possible the amounts of individual imposts levied upon persons capable of undertaking cultural enterprises. In this manner, such persons will be psychologically disposed to undertake them, because they can be confident of making a profit from them.

One might suspect Ibn Khaldun's argumentation to have set him on a collision course with Islamic dogma for the following reason. On the one hand, following Ibn Khaldun, the principal purpose of government is whether it has policies that promote rather than hold back economic growth. But Islam, on the other hand, tells a good government from a bad one by checking whether it complies with precepts of the Quran. Islamic fiscal guidelines, however, are perfectly aligned with the needs of an entrepreneurial society. Ibn Khaldun refers to the Quran to give his readers a



useful steer: “When the dynasty follows the ways of Islam, it imposes only such taxes as are stipulated by the religious law, such as charity taxes, the land tax, and the poll tax. These have fixed limits that cannot be exceeded.” The Quran, for Ibn Khaldun, is a block to tax creep.

Railing against taxation was commonplace in medieval Egypt. Maqrizi, a student of Ibn Khaldun, was led to sigh, ‘Just about the only thing we are allowed to do without paying tax is breathe’. Quranic guidance to keep taxes low often is ignored by governments, wrote Ibn Khaldun, an unintended consequence of rising prosperity. Members of the ruling class aspire to a better lifestyle and give in to temptation to widen the compass of taxation as a means to raise income. Such is the thin end of the wedge because with every tax that goes up, the incentive to do business goes down. At first, incremental burdens are so small they are hardly noticed, and, therefore, no one bothers complaining, but later, once the precedent is established, one new tax after another is piled on, each one on its own inconsequential and thus unobjectionable until finally there comes a tipping point when the effort of doing business no longer pays off.

“ The gradual increases in the amount of the assessments succeed each other regularly, in correspondence with the gradual increase in the luxury customs and many needs of the dynasty... Eventually, the taxes will weigh heavily upon the subjects and overburden them. Heavy taxes become an obligation and tradition, because the increases took place gradually, and no one knows specifically who increased them or levied them.

Tax increases, therefore, in the final analysis are self-defeating.

“ It should be known that at the beginning of a dynasty, taxation yields a large revenue from small assessments. At the end of the dynasty, taxation yields a small revenue from large assessments.

(This intuition is familiar to anyone acquainted with the work of the economist Arthur Laffer, who was one of the intellectual mentors of Ronald Reagan's tax reduction agenda. Arthur Laffer, in fact, acknowledged the correspondence.)

## IBN KHALDUN ON STATE-RUN ENTERPRISES

Ibn Khaldun was an early vocal opponent of state-run enterprises. Taxation, he pointed out, is not the only way a government can raise money. Another is to go into business on its own account. But he warns, to go down this road is an even greater mistake than increasing tax. There are three pitfalls on this path, and government is liable to fall into one of them.

The first is because governments often put managers in charge because they have friends in high places rather than the right qualifications.

“ The ruler is often influenced to choose such a (course) by those sorts of people – I mean, merchants and farmers – who bring him into contact with the profession in which they have been reared... The ruler, therefore, must guard against such persons, and not pay any attention to suggestions that are harmful to his revenues and his rule.

A second is that a government-owned business is liable to rig the market in its favour:

“ Men in power in a country who engage in commerce and agriculture, reach a point where they undertake to buy agricultural products and goods, at prices fixed by themselves as they see fit.

Another obstacle is that governments are exposed to conflicts of interest. There is nothing to stop government from mandating prices and thereby cutting profit margins for everyone else, but then, once capital available in the economy stops increasing, business volumes start to contract.

“ When the farmer gives up agriculture and the merchant goes out of business, the revenue from taxes vanishes altogether or becomes dangerously low.

These risks have a compounding effect. When a state-backed business imposes price controls to lock in profit margins, private sector investment returns whither and merchants are forced out of business.

## IBN KHALDUN'S THEORY OF PRICES

Political philosophers in ancient Greece and Rome did not concern themselves with teaching how business works. *Muqaddimah*, on the other hand, is one of the first works of political economy that investigates business economics at length. Separate sections investigate components of prices, why prices fluctuate; and the essence of entrepreneurship.

The first building block of price is the value of labour,

“ Gains and profits, in their entirety or for the most part, are value realized from human labour.

Taxes are another cost passed on to customers,

“ Customs duties raise the sales (prices), because small businessmen and merchants include all their expenses, even their personal requirements, in the price of their stock and merchandise. Thus, customs duties enter into the sales price.

Third, merchants need to take into account supply and demand conditions in markets where they compete,

“ When goods are few and rare, their prices go up. On the other hand, when the country is near and the road safe for travelling, they will be found in large quantities, and the prices will go down.

Prices reflect the costs a merchant can manage as well as uncertain ones beyond his control, but the final component, the one that matters most in this equation, is the entrepreneur's margin of profit.

“ An old merchant said to a person who wanted to find out the truth about commerce ‘I shall give it to you in two words: ‘buy cheap and sell dear. There is commerce for you.

Ibn Khaldun's definition of entrepreneurship, such as it is, works well, however. It is anchored in his outlook as a devout Muslim who finds guidance in all things in the Quran.

“ A merchant strives to make a profit, so that he may spend what God gives him to obtain his requirements and necessities through barter.

This sentence flows so smoothly one might skim over the reference that a merchant's profits have their source in ‘what God gives him’. However, the connotation of these words resonates deeply, as the Quran has a term for God's bounty, *rizq*, a term which may be the origin of the term we use today to describe that aspect of enterprise that is the quintessence of entrepreneurship: risk.

This whistle-stop tour of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* is but a sampler of his work, but it may have said enough to show Ibn Khaldun pushed the boundaries of historical scholarship out into social science. In Europe, Ibn Khaldun's works reached a wider audience when they were translated in the 19th century, at a time when social sciences in Europe even then were in their infancy. But even today, Ibn Khaldun's work has aged well, and his insights often are as fresh as they were when he penned them.

It may have startled some readers to see Ibn Khaldun articulated many notions centuries before they were expressed in the West. The Laffer curve is one example, but there are others, such as John Marshall's dictum, ‘the power to tax is the power to destroy (1819)’ and William Graham Sumner's ‘forgotten man’ who ends up bearing tax burdens (1883).

But Ibn Khaldun matters not only as an ideas man ahead of his time. Ibn Khaldun lived through an age of frequent regime changes that threatened corrosion of the Islamic realm from within, and foreign invasions visited devastation across the Middle East. Ibn Khaldun lived in an age of despair but did not much care for a quiet life. On the contrary, he wanted to look threats in the eye, and one of his travels took him to an encounter with the feared warlord Timurlan, a meeting that Ibn Khaldun recorded at length in his autobiography (another of his vast range of works).

If turmoil had an effect on Ibn Khaldun, it must have been as a spur to learn about different societies, and what is urgent today about the achievement of Ibn Khaldun, who did not flinch from engaging with policy-making at the highest (and most dangerous) level, is that he demonstrated how to combine firm religious orthodoxy with irrepressible curiosity in mechanisms of social change. •



1

# IBN KHALDUN: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

by Muhammad Hozien

*Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun, the well known historian and thinker from Muslim 14th-century North Africa, is considered a forerunner of original theories in social sciences and philosophy of history, as well as the author of original views in economics, prefiguring modern contributions. In the following detailed and documented article, Muhammad Hozien outlines the bio-bibliography of Ibn Khaldun and presents insights into his theories, especially by comparing his analysis with that of Thucydides, and by characterizing Ibn Khaldun's view on science and philosophy.*

## 1.1 GENERAL BIOGRAPHY OF IBN KHALDŪN

### 1.1.1 CHILDHOOD AND EARLY YEARS

He is 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Jābir b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn.

According to Ibn Khaldūn, his ancestors originated in Ḥaḍramawt, Yemen. He also traced his ancestry (through another genealogy as supplied by Ibn Hazm in his book *Jamharat ansāb al-'arab*) back to Wā'il b. Ḥajar, one of the oldest Yemeni tribes. These genealogies point to his Arab origin, although some scholars question the authenticity

of these reports because of the political climate at the time of the reports<sup>1</sup>.

Ibn Khaldūn was born in Tunis on 27 May 1332 /1 Ramaḍān 732<sup>2</sup>. He received a traditional education that was typical for one of his family's rank and status. He learned first at the hands of his father, who was a scholarly person and not involved in politics like his ancestors. He memorized the Quran, learned grammar, jurisprudence, ḥadīth, rhetoric, philology and poetry. He reached a certain proficiency in these subjects and received certification in them. In his autobiography, he mentions the names of the scholars with whom he studied<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Mohammad A. Enan, *Ibn Khaldūn: His life and Work* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1946), 3–5. The author questions Ibn Khaldūn's Arab origin, although he does acknowledge that he came from an influential family that was politically active in Andalusian affairs. He also agrees that the Arabs held the authoritative positions while the Berbers bore the brunt of the battles, thus indirectly concurring that Ibn Khaldūn is of Arab origin. Enan raises two points to support his claim that Ibn Khaldūn is not an Arab. One point is that some Berber tribes used false Arab identities to gain political favor and positions. The second point is Ibn Khaldūn's 'attacks' on Arabs in his history. The false identity would be a valid point at the time that Ibn Khaldūn's ancestors left Andalusia and moved to Tunisia and did not change their claim to Arab ancestry. Even in the times when Berbers were ruling, during the reigns of Murābi ūn (r. 454–541/1062–1147) and Muwa'idūn (r. 524–668/1130–1269), Ibn Khaldūn's family did not reclaim their Berber heritage. The second point would be true if Ibn Khaldūn only attacked Arabs and Arabs in general. However, he criticized them for their tendency to destabilize — in his case this meant Arab tribes that were used by the Fā'imids to destabilize the Maghrib. Even if he criticized his own people, that would not make him an outsider. Throughout his life, Ibn Khaldūn sought stability and power to achieve that stability, regardless of the cost. His attacks on Arab rabble rousers are attacks on those who would cause instability.

<sup>2</sup> Enan, *Ibn Khaldūn*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. He would later write a detailed autobiography (*Ta'rīf*) while in Egypt; this is part of his book of universal history: *Kitāb al-'ibar wa-dīwān al-mubtada' wa-l-khabar fī ayyam al-'Arab wa-l-'ajam wa-l-barbar wa man 'aṣarahu min dhū al-Sultan al-Akbar*. See Walter J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

# ابن خلدون

من خلال نفاذ المكتبة الوطنية



Front cover of a descriptive list of the bibliographical materials by, and on, Ibn Khaldūn held at the Tunisian National Library: *Ibn Khaldūn min khilāl nafā'is al-Maktabah al-Wataniyah: fihris bibliyugrafi = Ibn Khaldoun dans les trésors de la Bibliothèque Nationale: catalogue bibliographique [Ibn Khaldūn within the treasures of the [Tunisian] National Library: a bibliographic catalog]. Edited by Sāmiyah Qamartī. [Tunis]: Ministry of Culture, The National Library, 2006.*

Ibn Khaldūn continued his studies until the age of 19, when the great plague swept over the lands from Samarqand to Mauritania. It was after this plague that Ibn Khaldūn received his first public assignment, marking the start of his political career and forever changing his life<sup>4</sup>.

## 1.1.2 TUNISIA AND MOROCCO

Ibn Tfrakin, the ruler of Tunis, called Ibn Khaldūn to be the seal-bearer of his captive, Sultan Abū Ishāq. It is here that Ibn Khaldūn had a firsthand look at the inner workings of court politics and the weakness of the government. Before long he had the opportunity to leave Tunis.

<sup>4</sup> Enan, Ibn Khaldūn, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 10, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 17–18. At this point, Ibn Khaldūn was promoted to the position of secretary, and, despite his youth, became a member of the sultan's private council. Even though he was well-treated, he did not stop from conspiring against the sultan.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 19–20. He wrote a poem that finally convinced the sultan to release him, however the sultan died before fulfilling the promise to do so.

In 713/1352 Abū Ziyad, the amīr of Constantine, marched on Tunis. Ibn Khaldūn accompanied Ibn Tfrakin with the forces that warded off Abū Ziyad's attack. Tunis was defeated and Ibn Khaldūn escaped to Aba, where he lived with the Muwahhidīn (r. 524–668/1130–1269). He moved back and forth through Algeria and settled in Biskra<sup>5</sup>.

At the same time, in Morocco, Sultan Abū 'Inān, who had recently settled on the throne of his father, was on his way to conquer Algeria. Ibn Khaldūn traveled to Tlemcen to meet the sultan, and he mentions that the sultan honored him and sent him with his chamberlain, Ibn Abī 'Amr, to Bougie to witness its submission to Sultan Abū 'Inān.

Ibn Khaldūn stayed in the company of the chamberlain while the sultan moved back to the capital, Fez. In 755/1354 Ibn Khaldūn accepted the invitation to join the council of *ulamā* and moved to Fez. He was eventually promoted to the post of seal-bearer and accepted it reluctantly, as it was inferior to the posts once occupied by his ancestors.

Ibn Khaldūn used his stay in Fez to further his studies. At this time, Fez was a capital of Morocco and enjoyed the company of many scholars from all over North Africa and Andalusia. Ibn Khaldūn was an ambitious young man and, at this point of his life he began to engage in court politics. He was promoted from one position to another<sup>6</sup>. He also conspired with Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad, the dethroned ruler of Bougie who was captive in Fez at that time. Abū 'Abdallāh was from the Banū Ḥafṣ, who were patrons of Ibn Khaldūn's family. Sultan Abū 'Inān found out about the conspiracy and imprisoned Ibn Khaldūn. Abū 'Abdallāh was released from prison and Ibn Khaldūn was held for another two years. Sultan Abū 'Inān fell ill and died before fulfilling his promise to release Ibn Khaldūn. The wazīr, al-Ḥassan b. 'Umar, ordered the release of Ibn Khaldūn, who was then restored to his former position<sup>7</sup>.

## 1.1.3 ESCAPE FROM MOROCCO TO SPAIN

The political climate was tense and Ibn Khaldūn again tested his fate and conspired against the wazīr

with al-Manṣūr. This loyalty was short-lived as well. He conspired with Sultan Abū Sālim, who overthrew al-Manṣūr. Ibn Khaldūn took the position of secretary (literally, 'repository of secrets', *amīn al-sirr*)<sup>8</sup>. In this, Ibn Khaldūn excelled in his position and composed many poems. He occupied the position for two more years and was then appointed Chief Justice. He showed great ability in this position, but, as a result of constant rivalry with high officials, he lost favor with the sultan<sup>9</sup>.

This, however proved unimportant, as a revolt took place and Sultan Abū Sālim was overthrown by the wazīr, 'Umar. Ibn Khaldūn sided with the victors and was reinstated to his post, with higher pay. Ibn Khaldūn was as ambitious as ever, and wanted a higher position—namely that of chamberlain. For reasons unknown (perhaps he was not trusted), he was refused the position. This upset him enough that he resigned his position, and he, in turn, upset the wazīr. Ibn Khaldūn asked to leave Fez and go back to Tunisia and was refused. It was then that he asked the wazīr's son-in-law to intercede on his behalf, that he be allowed to go to Andalusia<sup>10</sup>.

## 1.1.4 FROM SPAIN TO TUNISIA

Sultan Muḥammad al-Aḥmar, the King of Granada, was deposed by his brother Ismā'īl, who was supported by his brother-in-law. Sultan Muḥammad was a friend of Sultan Abū Salim, who had helped Ibn Khaldūn when he was deported to Andalusia by Sultan Abū 'Inān. When Sultan Abū 'Inān died and Sultan Abū Sālim became ruler, that friendship was rekindled. Furthermore, when Ismā'īl al-Aḥmar was declared King of Granada in a palace revolt, Sultan Muḥammad took refuge in Morocco with Sultan Abū Sālim. They were welcomed with great fanfare, and Ibn Khaldūn was present at the festivities. Among Sultan Muḥammad's party was his wise wazīr, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, who developed a close friendship with Ibn Khaldūn<sup>11</sup>.

Sultan Muḥammad attempted to restore his throne in Granada through an agreement with Pedro the

Cruel, King of Castile. Pedro delayed the execution of the agreement upon hearing of Sultan Abū Sālim's death. Sultan Muḥammad appealed to Ibn Khaldūn for assistance from the wazīr, 'Umar. Ibn Khaldūn used his influence to help him, and Ibn Khaldūn was even entrusted to care for Sultan Muḥammad's family in Fez. The wazīr granted Sultan Muḥammad the city of Ronda and the surrounding country. Sultan Muḥammad continued his efforts and recaptured his throne in 736/1361. He then recalled his wazīr Ibn al-Khaṭīb<sup>12</sup>.

When the relationship between Sultan Muḥammad and Ibn Khaldūn soured, he became uncertain, and turned toward Andalusia. He was welcomed and honored by Sultan Muḥammad, who admitted him to his private council. In the following year, Sultan Muḥammad sent Ibn Khaldūn on an ambassadorial mission to Pedro, the King of Castile. Ibn Khaldūn concluded the mission and peaceful terms were established between them. Pedro offered Ibn Khaldūn a position in his service and the return of his family's former estate at Castile. Ibn Khaldūn declined the offer<sup>13</sup>.

Upon his return from Castile, Ibn Khaldūn offered Pedro's gift to him to the sultan and in return, the sultan gave him the village of Elvira. Soon Ibn Khaldūn was restless once more and in the following year, 766/1364, when he received an invitation from his friend Abū 'Abdallāh, who had recaptured his throne at Bougie, Ibn Khaldūn left Granada after asking permission to leave from Sultan Muḥammad<sup>14</sup>.

## 1.1.5 ADVENTURES IN NORTH AFRICA

Ibn Khaldūn arrived in Bougie at the age of 32. His plans had finally been realised. The period of imprisonment in Fez did not go to waste. He entered the city as a favorite guest. He accepted the position of ḥājīb (chamberlain) for the amīr, Muḥammad. However, his life of power did not last long, as in the following year Abū I-'Abbās killed the amīr, Muḥammad, his cousin. Ibn Khaldūn handed

<sup>8</sup> He is Manṣūr b. Sulayman, a descendent of Ya'qūb b. 'Abd al-Ḥaqq. Enan, Ibn Khaldūn, 20–22.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 25–27. The wazīr, 'Umar b. 'Abdallāh was the son-in-law of Sultan Abū Salim, his father was the former wazīr in the court of Banū Marīn. Ibn Khaldūn was refused permission to go to Tunisia for fear that he might meet the enemies of the wazīr in Tlemcen.

<sup>11</sup> Enan, Ibn Khaldūn, 28–32. Sultan Muḥammad remained in Fez for some time and developed quite a close relationship with Ibn Khaldūn. When the sultan attempted to regain his throne, he left Ibn Khaldūn in charge of the sultan's family in Fez.

<sup>12</sup> Enan, Ibn Khaldūn, 33.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 34. He rightly declined the offer, for he could not trust Pedro.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 35. The gift was a magnificent mule with saddle and bridle adorned with gold.

the city to him and retired to the city of Biskra. He continued his political work in relaying the tribes to the service of this or that amīr or sultan. He continued his practice of shifting loyalties as times and opportunities afforded him and finally retired to a far outpost south of Constantine, Fort Salāma<sup>15</sup>. There, at the age of 45, he enjoyed a peaceful existence and began to write his famous work, the *Muqaddima*, and the first version of his universal history.

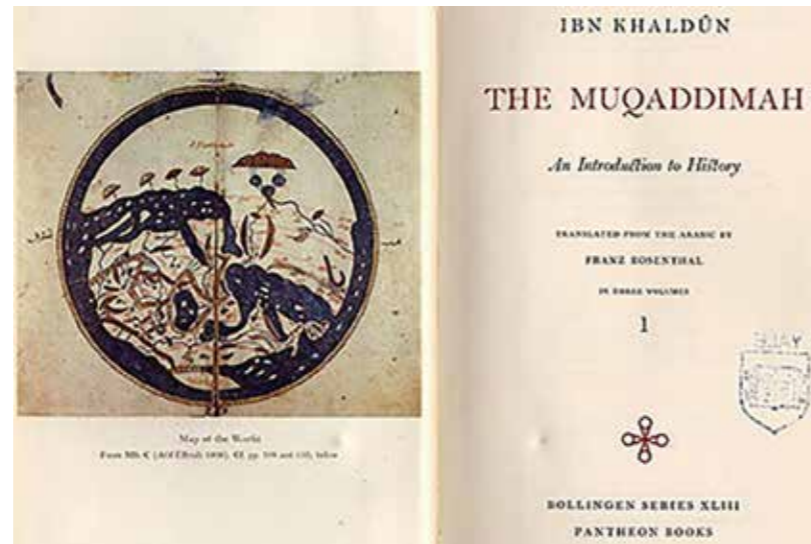
He dedicated his work to the current amīr of Constantine, Sultan Abū I-'Abbās. But tranquility did not last long for Ibn Khaldūn, as he needed reference works that were not available at his far outpost. He used the occasion of Abū I-'Abbās's conquest of Tunisia to go to Tunis. This was the first time he had returned to the town of his birth since leaving it more than 27 years earlier.

There were political forces at work against him once more, and this time, before he fell out of favor, he used a convenient occasion (in 784/1382) to leave North Africa behind, never to return<sup>16</sup>.

### 1.1.6 TO EGYPT

Ibn Khaldūn was granted permission from Sultan Abū I-'Abbās to go on ḥajj. He arrived in Alexandria in Shabān 784/ October 1382, at the ripe age of 50. He spent a month preparing to leave for ḥajj, but was unable to join the caravan bound for the Holy Lands. He turned toward Cairo instead. Here he was warmly welcomed by scholars and students, and it was in Cairo that he lived out his final days. His fame for his writings had already preceded him. He lectured at al-Azhar and other fine schools. When he met Sultan al-Ẓahir Barqūq (r. 784–801/1382–1399), he appointed him to a teaching post at the Kamāliyya school<sup>17</sup>.

He again enjoyed the favors of the sultan. He was appointed a Mālikī judge at the sultan's whim, and anger. He fared well and tried to fight corruption and favoritism, but again, conspiracies worked against him and he was relieved of duty, just in time to coincide with his family's disaster. The ship carrying his family and belongings sank in a storm<sup>18</sup>.



Frontispice of the English translation from Arabic of the *Muqaddima* of Ibn Khaldun in 3 volumes by Franz Rosenthal: *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958).

Ibn Khaldūn again took permission to go on ḥajj to the Holy Lands. He returned and was well received, and appointed to a teaching position in the newly-built school, Bayn al-Qaṣrayn. He lectured in ḥadīth, particularly Imām Mālik's *Muwaṭṭā'*. He was then appointed to the Sufi khanaqa (school) of Baybars with a generous salary. But soon the state of affairs of Egypt was disturbed, as a rival of Sultan Barqūq, Yalbughā al-Nāṣarī, organized a successful revolt in 791/1388. Sultan Barqūq staged a counter-revolt and was restored to his former throne. During this period, Ibn Khaldūn lost and then had his position restored with the return to power of the victorious Sultan Barqūq.

All the while, Ibn Khaldūn devoted his time to lecturing and studying, as well as to completing his universal history. After Yalbughā al-Nāṣarī's revolt, he wrote about 'aṣabiyya and its role in the rise and fall of states. He applied his theory to the Egyptian theater from the time of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn<sup>19</sup>.

Fourteen years after leaving the position of chief Mālikī judge, Ibn Khaldūn was reassigned to the post upon the death of the presiding judge. The state again fell into disarray upon Sultan Barqūq's death and the ascension of his son Faraj (r. 1389–1412). Ibn Khaldūn was not a party to these revolts and asked permission

to visit Jerusalem. He joined Sultan Faraj's caravan on its way back from Damascus, and he was relieved of his duties as judge for the second time, again due to political intrigue. This did not matter to him, as he was called upon to accompany the sultan on a perilous journey with fate to Damascus<sup>20</sup>.

### 1.1.7 MEETING TAMERLANE

During Ibn Khaldūn's stay in Egypt Sultan Faraj asked him to accompany his expedition to Damascus. News reports had confirmed the movement of Tamerlane's war party toward Damascus. Sultan Faraj and his army were on their way there, and it seems that Ibn Khaldūn was asked, firmly, to accompany the sultan to Damascus<sup>21</sup>.

The sultan stayed in Damascus just two weeks; he had to leave because of rumours that a revolt was in the works in Cairo. Ibn Khaldūn and several notables were left behind in Damascus. It was up to the leaders of Damascus to deal with Tamerlane. Ibn Khaldūn had suggested that they consider Tamerlane's terms. It was the task of another judge, Ibn Mufliḥ, to discuss the terms with Tamerlane. When Ibn Mufliḥ returned from Tamerlane's camp, the terms were not agreeable to the residents of Damascus.

Since it was Ibn Khaldūn's suggestion to come to terms with Tamerlane, he felt obliged to meet with Tamerlane personally, and so he left Damascus and went to Tamerlane's camp. It is not clear whether he went on his own or in an official capacity. Ibn Khaldūn took gifts with him for Tamerlane and they were well received; he stayed in Tamerlane's camp for 35 days.

During this period, Ibn Khaldūn had many meetings with Tamerlane, conversing through an interpreter, 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Khwārizmī (d. 805/1403). Ibn Khaldūn's account is the only detailed one available; the subjects they discussed were varied and some were unrecorded. Walter Fischel lists six specific topics about which they talked:



Autograph of Ibn Khaldun (upper left corner) on a manuscript of the *Muqaddima*.

- The Maghrib and Ibn Khaldūn's land of origin;
- Heroes in history;
- Predictions of things to come;
- The 'Abbāsīd caliphate;
- Amnesty and security 'for Ibn Khaldūn and his companion';
- Ibn Khaldūn's intention to stay with Tamerlane<sup>22</sup>.

Ibn Khaldūn impressed the conqueror enough that he was asked to join Tamerlane's court. Some biographers have suggested that he did plan to join Tamerlane's court and that he wrote an eloquent appeal to return to Egypt to settle his affairs, get his books and family, and then join Tamerlane. However, it is more likely that Ibn Khaldūn left on good terms with Tamerlane, and accomplished his mission of extracting favorable terms for the people of Damascus<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 36–49.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 51–57.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 63–67.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 69–72.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 72–75.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 78–79.

<sup>21</sup> Fischel, *Ibn Khaldūn in Egypt*, 42.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 44. Ibn Mufliḥ was a Ḥanbalī judge in Damascus. Ibn Khaldūn mentions that Tamerlane had asked about him personally; at the time, Ibn Khaldūn was advanced in age and was quite famous. It was also Tamerlane's style to seek out scholars, so Ibn Khaldūn's name might have been mentioned as one of those scholars who are in Damascus. Fischel mentions that Tamerlane made use of spies and agents working for him throughout the lands that he conquered, and that Ibn Khaldūn was in a personal capacity to meet with Tamerlane. This could be the case; it could also be that the leaders of Damascus wanted Tamerlane to know that Ibn Khaldūn acted on his own, in case his diplomatic efforts failed. The gates of Damascus were not opened and he had to be lowered by rope (46–49).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 62–65. Ḥajjī Khalīfa, the author of *Kashf al-zunūn*, and Ibn 'Arabshah suggest that Ibn Khaldūn promised to serve in Tamerlane's court, contingent on his return to Cairo to get his books (which he had spent his lifetime compiling). Ḥajjī Khalīfa went so far as to suggest that Ibn Khaldūn died in Samarqand.

Ibn Khaldūn's parting words lend credence to the fact that he would not be returning to Tamerlane's service:

'Is there any generosity left beyond that which you have already shown me? You have heaped favors upon me, accorded me a place in your council among your intimate followers, and shown me kindness and generosity which I hope Allah will repay to you in like measures'<sup>24</sup>.

### 1.1.8 FINAL DAYS IN EGYPT

Upon Ibn Khaldūn's return to Egypt, he was restored to his position as Mālikī judge. Due to the political situation within the community of Mālikī judges, Ibn Khaldūn was dismissed and reinstated three times during the five-year period. He died while in office on 26 Ramaḍān 808/17 March 1406. He was buried in the Sufi cemetery outside Bāb al-Naṣr, Cairo at the age of 74<sup>25</sup>.

## 1.2 AL-MUQADDIMA: IBN KHALDŪN'S MAGNUM OPUS

Ibn Khaldūn's works can be classified in the categories of history and religion. Of his works on history, only his universal history has survived to our day. The history that was written specifically for Tamerlane, as Ibn Khaldūn mentioned in his autobiography, has been lost. His religious books are: *Lubab al-maḥṣūl* [Summary of the result]; a commentary on an uṣūl al-fiqh poem, and a few works of questionable attribution to him, namely a Sufi tract, *Shifā' al-sā'il* [Healing of the Inquirer]<sup>26</sup>.

Ibn Khaldūn's magnum opus *al-Muqaddima* can be divided into three parts. The first part is the introduction, the second part is the universal history, and the third part is the history of the Maghrib. In this section, I concentrate on the first part. The second part is similar to the standard histories of Muslim historians, and there does not seem to be much divergence. The third part, which is concerned with the history of the Maghrib, is considered a primary



Tarikh ibn Khaldun, edited by Khalil Shahada, 8 vols. Beirut: Dar al-fikr, 2001.

source work<sup>27</sup>. Much of the information in this section is from Ibn Khaldūn's personal travels and contacts in the area, and it is replete with firsthand accounts. An additional work that is not usually considered a part of this book is an appendix, which is an autobiography of the author.

The first part, the "Introduction," is popularly known as al-Muqaddima; Ibn Khaldūn wrote this in a span of five months<sup>28</sup>. It can be divided into six parts as follows:

- Human society — ethnology and anthropology
- Rural civilisations
- Forms of government and forms of institutions
- Society of urban civilisation
- Economic facts
- Science and humanity

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 65. Ibn Khaldūn mentioned this statement in asking for the return of his mule. Note Ibn Khaldūn's mastery of courtly manners. This is the result of years of experience with a variety of courts, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 67–68. There were some who were interested in having the position of the chief Mālikī judge, and they conspired with their contacts close to Sultan Faraj to have Ibn Khaldūn dismissed. It would seem that Ibn Khaldūn also had some influence, and this led to his reinstatement.

<sup>26</sup> See Abderrahmane Lakhassi, "Ibn Khaldūn" in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 353.

<sup>27</sup> See Franz Rosenthal, trans., *The Muqaddimah, An Introduction to History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 11–12.

<sup>28</sup> The author says at the end of his introduction: "I completed the composition and draft of this first part, before revision and correction, in a period of five months ending in the middle of the year 779 [November 1377]." Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. 3, 481. Also see Darwish al-Jawaydī, ed., *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn*, by 'Abd al-Rahmān M. Ibn Khaldūn (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriya, 1995), 416.

This impressive document is the essence of Ibn Khaldūn's wisdom and hard-earned experience. He used his political and firsthand knowledge of the people of Maghrib to formulate many of his ideas and summarized almost every field of knowledge of the time. He discusses a variety of topics, including history and historiography. He rebukes some historical claims with a calculated logic and discusses the contemporary sciences. He wrote about astronomy, astrology, and numerology and dealt with chemistry, alchemy, and magic in a scientific way. He freely offered his opinions and well documented the 'facts' of other points of view. His discussion of tribal societies and social forces is the most interesting part of his thesis. He illuminated the world with deep insight into the makings and workings of kingdoms and civilisations.

The following quotation describes his philosophy of the historical process of civilizations, including, for example, the role of economics:

“ In the field of economics, Ibn Khaldūn understands very clearly the supply and demand factors which affect price, the interdependence of prices and the ripple effects on successive stages of production of a fall in prices, and the nature and function of money and its tendency to circulate from country to country according to demand and the level of activity.<sup>29</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn is well known for his explanation of the nature of state and society and for being 'the founder of the new discipline of sociology':

“ Ibn Khaldūn fully realised that he had created a new discipline, 'ilm al-'umran, the science of culture, and regarded it as surprising that no one had done so before and demarcated it from other disciplines. This science can be of great help to the historian by creating a standard by which to judge accounts of past events. Through the study of human society, one can distinguish between the possible and the impossible, and so distinguish between

those of its phenomena which are essential and those which are merely accidental, and also those which cannot occur at all.<sup>30</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn's contributions to the field of history must also be noted.

“ He analysed in detail the sources of error in historical writings, in particular partisanship, overconfidence in sources, failure to understand what is intended, a mistaken belief in the truth, the inability to place an event in its real context, the desire to gain the favour of those in high rank, exaggeration, and what he regarded as the most important of all, ignorance of the laws governing the transformation of human society.<sup>31</sup>

On the development of the state, and the relationship between the state and society, Ibn Khaldūn believed that:

“ Human society is necessary since the individual acting alone could acquire neither the necessary food nor security. Only the division of labour, in and through society, makes this possible. The state arises through the need of a restraining force to curb the natural aggression of humanity. A state is inconceivable without a society, while a society is well-nigh impossible without a state. Social phenomena seem to obey laws which, while not as absolute as those governing natural phenomena, are sufficiently constant to cause social events to follow regular and well-defined patterns and sequences. Hence a grasp of these laws enables the sociologist to understand the trend of events. These laws operate on masses and cannot be significantly influenced by isolated individuals.<sup>32</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn proposed that:

“ Society is an organism that obeys its own inner laws. These laws can be discovered by applying human reason to data either culled from historical records or obtained by direct

<sup>29</sup> Charles Issawi and Oliver Leaman, "Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abd al-Rahman (1332-1406)," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), vol. 4, 623–627.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

observation. These data are fitted into an implicit framework derived from his views on human and social nature, his religious beliefs and the legal precepts and philosophical principles to which he adheres. He argues that more or less the same set of laws operates across societies with the same kind of structure, so that his remarks about nomads apply equally well to Arab Bedouins, both contemporary and pre-Islamic, and to Berbers, Turkomen and Kurds. These laws are explicable sociologically, and are not a mere reflection of biological impulses or physical factors. To be sure, facts such as climate and food are important, but he attributes greater influence to such purely social factors as cohesion, occupation and wealth.<sup>33</sup>

For Ibn Khaldūn, history is a constantly changing cycle, with essentially two groups of people, nomads and townspeople, with peasants in between. He characterizes each group:

“Nomads are rough, savage and uncultured, and their presence is always inimical to civilization; however, they are hardy, frugal, uncorrupt in morals, freedom-loving and self-reliant, and so make excellent fighters. In addition, they have a strong sense of ‘asabiya, which can be translated as ‘group cohesion’ or ‘social solidarity’. This greatly enhances their military potential. Towns, by contrast, are the seats of the crafts, the sciences, the arts and culture. Yet luxury corrupts them, and as a result they become a liability to the state, like women and children who need to be protected. Solidarity is completely relaxed and the arts of defending oneself and of attacking the enemy are forgotten, so they are no match for conquering nomads.<sup>34</sup>

With regard to the political and social cycle, Ibn Khaldūn suggests the following sequence of events:

“Nomads conquer territories and their leaders establish a new dynasty. At first the new rulers retain their tribal virtues and solidarity, but soon they seek to concentrate all authority in their own hands. Increasingly they rule through a bureaucracy of clients — often foreigners.



Front page of Manuscript of the World History of Ibn Khaldūn: Kitāb al-‘Ibar wa-dīwān al-mubtada’ wa-al-khabar fī ayyām al-‘Arab wa-al-‘Ajam wa-al-Barbar. MS >Arabic suppl. 359Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven. 261 leaves, 26.5 x 17.5 cm; written in various hands and copied in 1140 H / 1728. Part of Ibn Khaldūn: An Exhibition at Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University Library, March to May 2008.

As their former supporters lose their military virtues there is an increasing use of mercenaries, and soldiers come to be more important than civilians. Luxury corrupts ethical life, and the population decreases. Rising expenditure demands higher taxes, which discourage production and eventually result in lower revenues. The ruler and his clients become isolated from the groups that originally brought them to power. Such a process of decline is taken to last three generations, or about one hundred and twenty years. Religion can influence the nature of such a model; when ‘asabiya is reinforced by religion its strength is multiplied, and great empires can be founded. Religion can also reinforce the cohesion of an established state. Yet the endless cycle of flowering and decay shows no evolution or progress except for that from the primitive to civilized society.<sup>35</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn acknowledges that there are turning points in history. He wrote that in his time, he believed the Black Death and Mongol invasions were turning

points, as was the development of Europe. His observations and research focused on the etiology of civilisational decline, ‘the symptoms and the nature of the ills from which civilizations die’<sup>36</sup>. Ibn Khaldūn’s thesis, that the conquered race will always emulate the conqueror in every way<sup>37</sup>, and his theory about ‘aṣabiyya (group feeling/party spirit) and the role it plays in Bedouin societies is insightful. The genius of this work is his study of the science of human culture, the rise and fall of empires; Ibn Khaldūn termed this the science of ‘umrān (civilization), and it contains many pearls of wisdom. His ‘Introduction’ is his greatest legacy, left for all of humanity and generations to come.

### 1.3 SELECTED VIEWS OF IBN KHALDŪN THEORIES

#### 1.3.1 IBN KHALDŪN AND THUCYDIDES

A comparative study of Ibn Khaldūn’s *Muqaddima* and Thucydides, who is considered the ‘father of history’ was prepared by L. E. Goodman. In it, Goodman reveals the similarities in methods, assumptions and conclusions and notes that:

“Both men are naturalists, both empiricists, both exponents of a critical approach to historiography. Yet neither is a reductionist. Both seek a lesson in history, and both believe that the message of history is to be discovered in the careful study of historical laws revealed in the play of forces which are the expression of man’s political and social nature. But beyond similarities of approach, there is a deep congruity of thought between the two authors, for both believe themselves to have glimpsed the pattern, learned the lesson of history. Both Ibn Khaldūn and Thucydides have been led by their study of history to a cyclical, rather than linear view of historical process; both have been led, in developing their concepts of human and political reality, to a qualified relativism, which affords them... a cautious but by no means pessimistic historical theodicy.<sup>38</sup>

Although Goodman finds similarities between some of the historical theories of the two historians, there is little proof that the ideas of Thucydides ever appeared in Arabic. Further, as is the case with Ibn Khaldūn, not many of their ideas have borne fruit, except perhaps in the modern period. Ibn Khaldūn remains a vibrant and original thinker, not only in the field of history, but in sociology as well.

#### 1.3.2 IBN KHALDŪN’S VIEW ON SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

Ibn Khaldūn’s view on science followed the traditional division of sciences, which involves a division into religious sciences and non-religious sciences. The non-religious sciences are further divided into useful and non-useful sciences (mainly the occult sciences such as magic, alchemy and astrology). In the *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldūn reports on all the sciences up to his time, with examples and quotations. He makes it a point to refute magic, alchemy, astrology, and philosophy in his book. His work became a record of the development of sciences in his day.

Ibn Khaldūn’s view on philosophy is similar to that of al-Ghazālī, in the sense that he attempted to reconcile mysticism and theology. In fact, Ibn Khaldūn, according to Issawi,

“goes further than the latter [al-Ghazālī] in bringing mysticism completely within the purview of the jurist (faqīh) and in developing a model of the Sufi shaykh, or master, as rather similar to the theologian. Philosophy was regarded as going beyond its appropriate level of discourse, in that “the intellect should not be used to weigh such matters as the oneness of God, the other world, the truth of prophecy, the real character of the divine attributes, or anything else that lies beyond the level of the intellect.<sup>39</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn criticized Neoplatonic philosophy, and asserted that the hierarchy of being and its progression toward the Necessary Being, or God, is not possible without revelation<sup>40</sup>.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 M. Talbi, “Ibn Khaldūn,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill).

37 This is due to the fact that they believe that the conqueror is superior to them in every way. Thus, in order for them to succeed where they had failed, they must emulate the conqueror in every detail, down to the dress and mode of behavior. See Rosenthal, *The Muqaddima*, vol. 1, 299–300.

38 L. E. Goodman, “Ibn Khaldūn and Thucydides,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 92, no. 2 (April–June 1972): 250–270.

39 Charles Issawi, *An Arab Philosophy of History* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1987), 3.

40 Issawi and Leaman, “Ibn Khaldūn,” 623–627.



2

## IBN KHALDUN AND THE RISE AND FALL OF EMPIRES

by Caroline Stone

### 2.1 INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY THE EDITORS OF SAUDI ARAMCO WORLD

**A**bu Zayd ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun al-Hadhrami, 14th-century Arab historiographer and historian, was a brilliant scholar and thinker now viewed as a founder of modern historiography, sociology and economics. Living in one of human kind’s most turbulent centuries, he observed at first hand—or even participated in—such decisive events as the birth of new states, the death throes of al-Andalus and the advance of the Christian reconquest, the Hundred Years’ War, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, the decline of Byzantium and the great epidemic of the Black Death. Albert Hourani described Ibn Khaldun’s world as “full of reminders of the fragility of human effort”; out of his experiences, Arnold Toynbee wrote, “he conceived and created

a philosophy of history that was undoubtedly the greatest work ever created by a man of intelligence.” So groundbreaking were his ideas, and so far ahead of his time, that a major exhibition<sup>1</sup> now takes his writings as a lens through which to view not only his own time but the relations between Europe and the Arab world in our own time as well.

### 2.2 HIS LIFE

Ibn Khaldun’s ancestors were from the Hadhramawt, now southeastern Yemen, and he relates that, in the eighth century, one Khaldun ibn ‘Uthman was with the Yemeni divisions that helped the Muslims colonize the Iberian Peninsula. Khaldun ibn ‘Uthman settled first at Carmona and then in Seville, where several of the family had distinguished careers as scholars and officials.

<sup>1</sup> [The exhibition was held in the Real Alcázar de Sevilla in May-September 2006: Ibn Khaldun: el Mediterráneo en el siglo XIV. Auge y declive de los imperios [Ibn Khaldun: The Mediterranean Region in the XIV century; the rise and fall of empires] organised in (Sevilla) by the Fundación ‘El Legado Andalusi’ and Fundación José Manuel Lara [note added by MuslimHeritage.com editorial board].

During the Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, the family emigrated to North Africa, probably about 1248, eventually settling in Tunis. There Ibn Khaldun was born on 7 May 1332. He received an excellent classical education, but when he was 17, the plague, or Black Death, reached the city. His parents and several of his teachers died. The terrible epidemic that struck the Middle East, North Africa and Europe in 1347–1348, killing at least one-third of the population, had a traumatic effect on the survivors. Its impact showed in every aspect of life: art, literature, social structures and intellectual life. It was clearly one of the experiences that shaped Ibn Khaldun's perception of the world.

Tunis was not only ravaged by the Black Death, but had also been reduced to political chaos by its occupation between 1340 and 1350 by the Marinids, the Berber dynasty that ruled Morocco. At 20, Ibn Khaldun set out for Fez, the Marinid capital, the liveliest court in North Africa. On the strength of his education, he was offered a secretarial position, but left before long. Although some historians regard his departure as disloyal, it is more likely he was fleeing the general political disintegration.

This was to be a pattern in Ibn Khaldun's life. He was constantly tempted to become involved in murky political intrigues which, combined with the extreme instability of most of the ruling dynasties, meant that he had little choice but frequent changes of master. These experiences, like those of the Black Death, were instrumental in shaping his outlook.

After a number of moves, he found himself back in Fez, where the previous Marinid ruler had been supplanted by his son, Abu 'Inan, to whom Ibn Khaldun offered his services. Soon, however, he was once again caught up in political turmoil, and after many changes of fortune, including two years in prison, he decided to withdraw to Granada in 1362. The roots of this decision went back several years.

In 1359, the ruler of Granada, Muhammad ibn al-Ahmar, had been forced to flee to Fez together with his vizier, Ibn al-Khatib, one of the most famous scholars of the age. There they had met Ibn Khaldun. A warm friendship had developed, so that when, in turn, Ibn Khaldun had to escape from similarly dangerous politics, he was received in Granada with honours. Two years later, in 1364, Ibn Khaldun was sent by Ibn al-Ahmar to Seville on a peace mission to



Miniature 'Victimes de la peste de 1349' (victims of 1349-plague) in the *Annales* of Gilles le Muisit (1272-1353). The Great Plague, or Black Death, swept from Central Asia to Europe, killing an estimated one-third of the population wherever it spread. It reached Tunis in 1348 when Ibn Khaldun was 17; its victims included his parents and several of his teachers. These losses, together with the ensuing social and economic chaos, deeply affected him. © Royal Library of Belgium.

King Pedro I of Castile, known as 'Pedro the Cruel.' In his autobiography (*Ta'rif*), Ibn Khaldun describes how Pedro offered to return his family estates and properties to him, and how he refused the offer. This contact with a Christian power was another watershed experience. He reflected not only on his own family's past, but also on the changing fate of kingdoms—and above all on the historical and theological implications of the reassertion of Christian power in Iberia after more than five centuries of Muslim hegemony.

Later, personal clashes with Ibn al-Khatib, probably fuelled by a mixture of jealousy and court intrigue, drove Ibn Khaldun back to the turmoils of North Africa. He had repeatedly expressed the wish to devote his life to scholarship, but the political world clearly fascinated him. Over and over he succumbed to its temptations; in any case, so well-known a figure was unlikely to be left in peace to study.

In spite of their differences, Ibn Khaldun continued to correspond with Ibn al-Khatib, and several of these letters are cited in his autobiography. He also tried to save his friend when, largely as a result of court intrigue, Ibn al-Khatib was brought to trial, accused of heresy for contradicting the 'ulama, the religious authorities, by insisting that the plague was a communicable disease. His situation can be compared with that of Galileo nearly three centuries later, but with a less happy outcome: Ibn al-Khatib was strangled in prison at Fez in the late spring of 1375.

Ibn Khaldun was much affected by his friend's death, not only personally, but also because of the political and religious implications of such an execution. Not long afterward, he withdrew to the Castle of Ibn Salamah, not far from Oran in Algeria. There, for the first time, he could really dedicate himself to study and reflect on what he had learned from books, as well as on his often bitter experience of the violent and turbulent world of his day.

The fruit of this period of calm was the *Muqaddimah* or Introduction to his *Kitab al-'Ibar* (The Book of Admonitions or Book of Precepts, also often referred to as the Universal History). Although these are really one work, they are often considered separately, for the *Muqaddimah* contains Ibn Khaldun's most original and controversial perceptions, while the *Kitab al-'Ibar* is a conventional narrative history. Ibn Khaldun continued to rewrite and revise his great work in the light of new information or experience for the rest of his life.

He spent the years from 1375 to 1379 at the Castle of Ibn Salamah, but at last felt the need for intellectual companionship — and for proper libraries in which to continue his research. At the age of 47, Ibn Khaldun

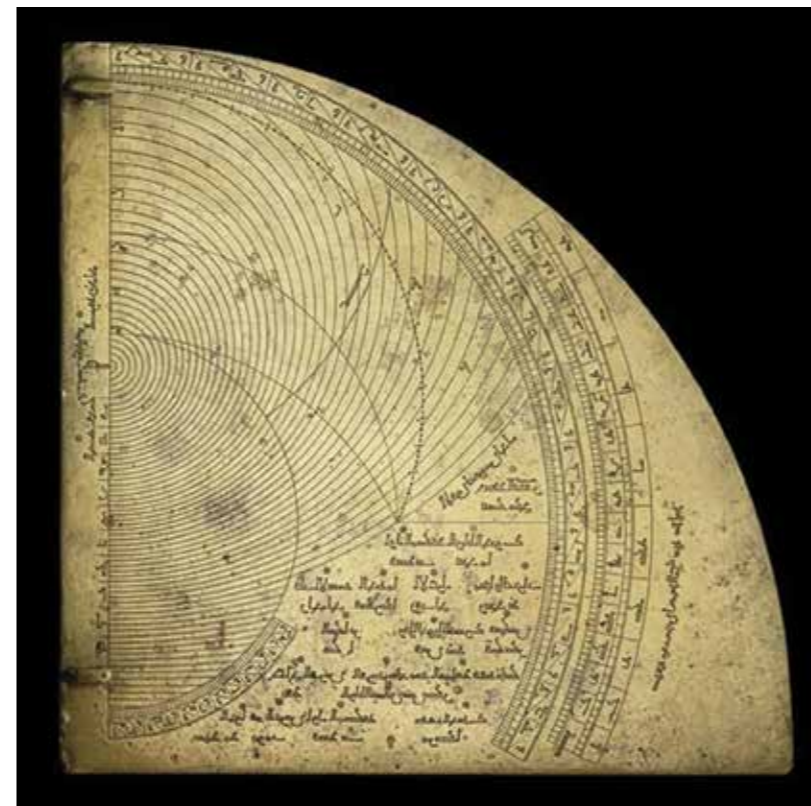
returned again to Tunis, where 'my ancestors lived and where there still exist their houses, their remains and their tombs.' He planned to travel no more and to settle down as a teacher and scholar, eschewing all political involvement.

That was not so easy. Some considered his rationalist teachings subversive, and the imam of al-Zaytunah Mosque in Tunis, with whom he had been on terms of rivalry since his student days, became jealous. To make matters yet more difficult, the sultan insisted that Ibn Khaldun remain in Tunis and complete his book there, since a ruler's status was greatly enhanced by attracting learned men to his court.

The situation finally became so tense and so difficult that in 1382 Ibn Khaldun asked permission to leave to perform the hajj, the pilgrimage to Makkah — the one reason for withdrawal that could never be denied in the Islamic world. In October he set out for Egypt. He was immensely impressed by Cairo, which exceeded all his expectations. There, the Mamluk sultan Barquq received him with enthusiasm and gave him the important position of qadi, or justice, of the Maliki school of Islamic law.

This, however, proved to be no sinecure. In his autobiography, Ibn Khaldun describes how his efforts to combat corruption and ignorance, together with the jealousy aroused by the appointment of a foreigner to a top job, meant that once again he found himself in a hornets' nest. It was something of a relief when the sultan dismissed him in favour of the former qadi. In fact, before the end of his life, Ibn Khaldun was to be appointed and dismissed no fewer than six times.

Ibn Khaldun was married and had children; he had a sister who died young — her tombstone survives — and his brother Yahya ibn Khaldun was also a very distinguished historian. However, we know very little about his personal life. It was not the Muslim, and in particular not the Arab, custom to include personal details in one's writings. We do know, however, that at about this time, Ibn Khaldun's family and household, which was essentially being held hostage at Tunis for his return, were given permission to join him in Cairo. This was at the personal request of Barquq, whose letter is quoted in the Autobiography. But the boat carrying his family went down in a tempest off Alexandria, and no one survived.



Astrolabic quadrant made by Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Mizzi the *muwaqqit* (time-keeper) of the Great Mosque of Damascus in 1333-34 CE. There are four other astrolabic quadrants signed by the same craftsman, and they are the earliest known examples of this type of quadrant.

Three years passed. Ibn Khaldun dedicated himself to teaching and then at last set out to perform the hajj in 1387 with the Egyptian caravan. Ibn Khaldun says little of his pilgrimage, but he mentions that at Yanbu' he received a letter from his old friend Ibn Zamrak, many of whose poems are inscribed on interior walls of the Alhambra. Ibn Zamrak, then the confidential secretary of the ruler of Granada, asked among other things for books from Egypt. It is one more example of how Ibn Khaldun maintained his intellectual contacts all across the Arabic-speaking world.

On his return to Cairo, Ibn Khaldun held various teaching posts, but from 1399 the cycle of political appointments and dismissals began again. The scholar had already witnessed at first hand the political upheavals caused by the various Berber dynasties in North Africa, as well as the success of the Christian powers in reducing the Muslim kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula. Now he was about to witness another example of the rise and fall of empires, this time with an epicentre farther to the east than he had ever traveled.

In 1400, Ibn Khaldun was compelled by Barquq's successor, Sultan al-Nasir, to travel to Damascus, where he took part in the negotiations with the Central Asian conqueror Timur, the Turco-Mongol ruler known in the West as Tamerlane. The aim was to persuade Timur to spare Damascus. Ibn Khaldun describes his conversations with Timur in some of the most interesting pages of his autobiography.

In the end, however, the Egyptian diplomatic delegation was unsuccessful. Timur did sack Damascus and from there went on to take Baghdad, with great loss of life. The following year, Timur defeated the Ottomans at Ankara, taking their Sultan Beyazit prisoner. These events are described by the Spanish traveler Ruy Gonzáles de Clavijo, who went out to Samarkand in 1403 as ambassador to Timur.

Ibn Khaldun's autobiography continues for no more than a page or two after his return from Damascus, and he mentions only his appointments and dismissals. Although he never returned to Tunis, he continued to think of himself as a westerner, wearing until the last the dark burnous that is still the national dress of North Africa. He continued to revise and correct his great work until his death in Cairo on March 16, 1406 — 600 years ago this past spring.

## 2.3 HIS WORK

Ibn Khaldun's most important work was *Kitab al-'Ibar*, and of that the most significant section was the *Muqaddimah*. Such 'introductions' were a recognized literary form at the time, and it is thus not surprising that the *Muqaddimah* is both long — three volumes in the standard translation — and the repository of its author's most original thoughts. *Kitab al-'Ibar*, which follows, is much more conventional in both content and organisation, although it is one of the most important surviving sources for the history of medieval North Africa, the Berbers and, to a lesser extent, Muslim Spain.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western scholars, already admirers of such Muslim thinkers as the philosopher Ibn Rushd, whom they knew as Averroes, became aware of the *Muqaddimah*, probably through the Ottoman Turks. They were struck by its originality — all the more so because it was written at a time when political and religious authority were exerting increasing pressure against independent thought, resulting in a decline of original scholarship. In this context, Ibn Khaldun's interest in a whole range of subjects that today would be classified as sociology and economic theory, and his wish to create a new discipline to accommodate them, came as a particular surprise to scholars in both the Arab world and the West.

Many of the subjects that Ibn Khaldun discusses are not, however, new preoccupations. They had also concerned both Greek thinkers and earlier Arab



One of the many beautiful patios of the Alcazar palace in Seville showing the delicately carved arches of the Patio del Yeso (Patio of the Stuccoes). In 1364, Ibn Khaldun journeyed to Seville, seat of the Castilian monarch Pedro I, whose magnificent Real Alcázar ("Royal Palace"), inspired from Mudejar art, was then close to completion.



Two coins issued in 1382 during Antonio Venier reign as Doge of the Venetian Republic from 1382 to 1400. Antonio Venier was responsible for reviving Venice's economy after the Black Death and negotiating with the Mamluks to make the city Egypt's most important trading partner. At this period, Ibn Khaldun was resident in Cairo. The statue is displayed in the Real Alcázar's Hall of the Ambassadors, where Ibn Khaldun may have been received by Pedro I.

writers, such as al-Farabi and Mas'udi, to whom Ibn Khaldun refers frequently. The question of how much access Ibn Khaldun had to Greek sources in translation is still being debated, and in particular whether he had read Plato's *Republic*. But Ibn Khaldun's originality lies not in the fact that he was conscious of these problems, but in his awareness of the complexity of their interrelationships and the need to study social cause and effect in a rigorous way.

It is in this way that Ibn Khaldun took his place in a chain of intellectual development. Although his work was not followed up by succeeding generations, and indeed met with some disapproval and even censure, the great Egyptian historian al-Maqrizi perhaps chose his career as a result of his acquaintance with Ibn Khaldun, and he developed some of Ibn Khaldun's ideas. It was, however, the Ottoman Turks who took the most interest in his theories concerning the rise and fall of empires, since many of the points he discusses appeared to apply to their own political situation.

In the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun's central theme is why nations rise to power and what causes their decline. He divides his argument into six sections or fields. At the beginning, he considers both source material and methodology; he analyzes the problems of writing history and notes the fallacies which most frequently lead historians astray. His comments are still relevant today.

Another aspect of Ibn Khaldun's originality is his stress on studying the realities of human society and attempting to draw conclusions based on observation, rather than trying to reconcile observation with preconceived ideas. It is interesting that at the time

Ibn Khaldun was writing, the humanist movement was well under way in Europe, and it shared many of the same preoccupations as Ibn Khaldun, in particular the great importance of the interaction between people and their physical and social environment.

One of Ibn Khaldun's basic subjects is still being debated, and it is of the greatest relevance in the increasingly multicultural societies of today: What is social solidarity, and how does a society achieve it and maintain it? He argues that no society can achieve anything—conquer an empire or even survive—unless there is internal consensus about its aims. He does not argue in favour of democracy in any recognizable form (which suggests he may not have had intimate knowledge of the Greek political theorists), and he assumes the need for strong leadership, but it is clear that, to him, a successful society as a whole must be in agreement as to its ultimate goals.

He points out that solidarity — he uses the word 'asabiyah — is strongest in tribal societies because they are based on blood kinship and because, without solidarity, survival in a harsh environment is impossible. If this solidarity is joined to the other most powerful social bond, religion, then the combination tends to be irresistible.

Ibn Khaldun perceives history as a cycle in which rough, nomadic peoples, with high degrees of internal bonding and little material culture to lose, invade and take resources from sedentary and essentially urban civilizations. These urban civilizations have high levels of wealth and culture but are self-indulgent and lack both 'martial spirit' and the concomitant social solidarity. This is because those qualities have become unnecessary for survival in an urban environment and also because it is almost impossible for the large number of different groups that compose a multicultural city to attain the same level of solidarity as a tribe linked by blood, shared custom and survival experiences. Thus the nomads conquer the cities and go on to be seduced by the pleasures of civilization and in their turn lose their solidarity and come under attack by the next group of rough and vigorous outsiders — and the cycle begins again.

Ibn Khaldun's reflections derive, of course, from his experiences in a radically unstable time. He had seen Arab civilization overrun in some parts of the world and seriously undermined in others: in North Africa by the Berbers, in Spain by the Franks and in the heartlands of the caliphate by Timur and his Turco-Mongol hordes.

He was well aware that the Arab empire had been founded by Bedouin who were, in terms of material culture, much less sophisticated than the peoples of the lands they conquered, but whose 'asabiyah was far more powerful and who were inspired by the new faith of Islam. He was deeply saddened to watch what he saw as a cycle of conquest, decay and reconquest repeated at the expense of his own civilization.

As Ibn Khaldun developed his themes through the *Muqaddimah*, he presented many other innovative theories relating to education, economics, taxation, the role of the city versus the country, the bureaucracy versus the military and what influences affect the development of both individuals and cultures. It is in these themes that we find echoes of al-Mas'udi's *Kitab al-Tanbih wa al-Ishraf*, where he considers the factors that shape a nation's laws, the nature of authority and the relationship between spiritual and temporal powers, to name only two.

It is worth remembering that, besides having witnessed a particularly turbulent period of history, Ibn Khaldun also had much practical experience of politics on both national and international levels. Furthermore, his various terms of duty as a qadi in Cairo gave him, as he claimed, insight into the problems of battling corruption and ignorance in a cosmopolitan environment, mindful of the 'moral decadence' he believed to be one of the great threats to civilisation. His conclusions were, as he tells us in his *Autobiography*, based on practical knowledge and direct observation, as well as academic theory.

It would be hard for any book to live up to the standard set by the *Muqaddimah*, and indeed *Kitab al-'Ibar* does not. Although it is an invaluable source for the history of the Muslim West, it is less remarkable in other fields, and Ibn Khaldun did not share al-Mas'udi's lively and unbiased interest in the non-Muslim world. Other blank spots are all the more surprising in that Ibn Khaldun was living in Cairo with access to excellent libraries and bookshops.

On the other hand, there were occasions when he made great efforts to establish facts accurately. It must have required courage to ask Timur himself to correct the passages in the 'Ibar that referred to him! Timur was of great interest to Ibn Khaldun, who hoped the conqueror might be the one to provide the social solidarity needed for a renaissance of the Muslim and, especially, the Arab worlds — but it was a short-lived hope.

Ibn Khaldun wrote a number of other books on purely academic subjects, as well as early works which have vanished. His autobiography, although lacking personal details, contains extremely interesting information about the world in which he lived and, of course, about his meetings with Pedro and Timur.

Ibn Khaldun's strength was thus not as a historian in the traditional sense of a compiler of chronicles. He was the creator of a new discipline, 'umran, or social science, which treated human civilization and social facts as an interconnected whole and would help to change the way history was perceived, as well as written.

## 2.4 THE EXHIBITION IBN KHALDUN: THE MEDITERRANEAN IN THE 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: THE RISE AND FALL OF EMPIRES

The exhibition marking the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Ibn Khaldun could not be held in a more evocative place than Seville's Real Alcázar (Royal Palace). Not only is it a most beautiful backdrop, but it is a building that Ibn Khaldun himself knew. He walked through the same rooms where the exhibition is being held today, and he stood in the great audience chamber when he met Pedro I 'The Cruel' on his peace mission from the sultan of Granada in 1364.

That is, of course, if the rooms were complete, for in 1364 the palace was partly under construction by the Christian king 'in the Moorish manner,' decorated with Arabic calligraphy by Muslim craftsmen in the style called mudejar. For Ibn Khaldun it must have been a strange experience to revisit the city where his ancestors had held high office and to walk through older areas of the palace, such as the Patio del Yeso (Patio of the Stuccoes), which they would have known.

Opened by King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofía of Spain and attended by royalty and dignitaries from many countries, the commemorative exhibition is dedicated to the world of Ibn Khaldun, placing him in the context of his age and doing much to explain his particular preoccupation with the rise and fall of empires.

Apart from manuscripts, some in his own hand, and his sister's tombstone, little survives that is directly connected with Ibn Khaldun, although the writings of his friend Ibn al-Khatib are represented. Nevertheless, from around all the Mediterranean, a dozen or more countries have contributed items to build up the picture



Map of the Muslim World around 1400, few years before Ibn Khaldun's death. In the 15th and 16th centuries, three major Muslim powers emerged: the Ottoman Empire in much of the Middle East, the Balkans and Northern Africa, the Safavid Empire in Greater Iran, and the Mughul Empire in South Asia. These new imperial powers were made possible by the discovery and exploitation of gunpowder and a more efficient administration.

of the material world he would have known: plates such as those he might have used, mosque lamps, a traveler's writing box, a set of nesting glasses, some beautiful examples of Granada silk and more.

In one section of his autobiography, Ibn Khaldun wrote at length about the gifts he arranged to be sent to certain rulers on various occasions. These were an essential part of the diplomatic exchanges of the day, and fine silks played an important role. He also described his hunt for suitable presents to give Timur: He chose a one-volume copy of the Quran with an iron clasp, a pretty prayer rug, a copy of a famous poem (al-Burdah) and four boxes of his favourite Egyptian sweets — which he tells us were immediately opened and handed round. Similar items are on display.

The world of Ibn Khaldun is also brought alive by photographs or architectural details of buildings he would have known, from the street on which he is believed to have lived in Tunis to the Castle of Ibn Salamah, now in ruins, where he retired for four years of relative peace to write his great work. The madrasahs, where he taught all across North Africa and in Cairo, are represented too—including, of course, al-Azhar, the great centre of Islamic learning still functioning today.

The Christian world is also present to remind the visitor of what was going on in Europe in terms of art and intellectual achievement during the period Ibn Khaldun was writing. There are objects from China and Central Asia too, for besides the struggles for power among the Berber dynasties in North Africa and the Christian attempt to drive the Muslim

colonizers from Spain, the great threat to civilization as Ibn Khaldun saw it was in fact posed by Timur. Hence the Central Asian steppe was an important part of the world picture from which his theories of the rise and fall of empires was formed. Taking advantage of Seville's warm summer nights, the exhibition stays open until midnight. This enables visitors to wander through the courtyards of the palace, watch the moon reflect in the ornamental pools and inhale the scent of jasmine—a plant introduced by the Arabs and which Ibn Khaldun would have known.

In the evenings, a play about Ibn Khaldun is performed in the gardens, and across the façade of the palace there is a striking play of projected images: knights in armour, Mamluk horsemen, depictions of Dante and Timur, calligraphy in both Arabic and Latin, maps and landscapes taken from illuminated manuscripts.

One of the most remarkable achievements of this exhibition is its fine catalogue, coordinated under the auspices of the Granada-based El Legado Andalusi and the José Manuel Lara Foundations. It is in two volumes, with one dedicated specifically to the exhibition and the other a compilation of articles on aspects of Ibn Khaldun and his world written by scholars from a wide range of universities. (Fittingly, Ibn Khaldun's home city of Tunis is particularly well represented.) It is, in fact, an anthology of the most up-to-date scholarship on Ibn Khaldun and his world.

Particularly interesting is the analysis of his manuscripts by Jumaâ Cheikha of the University of Tunis, who shows that the oft-repeated statement that Ibn Khaldun was not valued in the Muslim world is untrue: 195 surviving copies of his various books may not seem like much in the light of modern print runs, but by medieval standards it indicated success. Many works by more recent authors have come down to us in not more than a single copy.

As an homage to Ibn Khaldun, and one that would surely have given him pleasure, the organizers and especially Jerónimo Páez López, founder of El Legado Andalusi, have gone to immense trouble to ensure that places associated with Ibn Khaldun are all represented and different aspects of his world covered. It is very much to be hoped that the plans for the exhibition to travel to a number of different locations will come to fruition.

## 2.5 APPENDIXES<sup>2</sup>

### 2.5.1 THE BLACK DEATH

“ Civilization both in the East and the West was visited by a destructive plague which devastated nations and caused populations to vanish. It swallowed up many of the good things of civilization and wiped them out. It overtook the dynasties at the time of their senility, when they had reached the limit of their duration. It lessened their power and curtailed their influence. It weakened their authority. Their situation approached the point of annihilation and dissolution. Civilization decreased with the decrease of mankind. Cities and buildings were laid waste, roads and way-signs were obliterated, settlements and mansions became empty, dynasties and tribes grew weak. The entire inhabited world changed. The East, it seems, was similarly visited, though in accordance with and in proportion to [the East's more affluent] civilization. It was as if the voice of existence in the world had called out for oblivion and restriction, and the world responded to its call (tr. Rosenthal).

### 2.5.2 THE CONTENTS OF THE MUQADDIMAH

- Human society, its kinds and geographical distribution
- Nomadic societies, tribes and 'savage peoples'
- States, the spiritual and temporal powers and political ranks
- Sedentary societies, cities and provinces
- Crafts, means of livelihood and economic activity
- Learning and the ways in which it is acquired

### 2.5.3 THE NEW SCIENCE

“ This science then, like all other sciences, whether based on authority or on reasoning, appears to be independent and has its own subject, viz. human society, and its own problems, viz. the social phenomena and the transformations that succeed each other in

the nature of society... It seems to be a new science which has sprung up spontaneously, for I do not recollect having read anything about it by any previous writers. This may be because they did not grasp its importance, which I doubt, or it may be that they studied the subject exhaustively, but that their works were not transmitted to us. For the sciences are numerous, and the thinkers belonging to the different nations are many, and what has perished of the ancient sciences exceeds by far what has reached us (tr. Issawi).

### 2.5.4 OVERCROWDING AND URBAN PLANNING

“ The commonest cause of epidemics is the pollution of the air resulting from a denser population which fills it with corruption and dense moisture... That is why we mentioned, elsewhere, the wisdom of leaving open empty spaces in built-up areas, in order that the winds may circulate, carrying away all the corruption produced in the air by animals and bringing in its place fresh, clean air. And this is why the death rate is highest in populous cities, such as Cairo in the East and Fez in the West (tr. Issawi).

### 2.5.5 THE PERNICIOUS EFFECTS OF DOMINATION

“ A harsh and violent upbringing, whether of pupils, slaves or servants, has as its consequence that violence dominates the soul and prevents the development of the personality. Energy gives way to indolence, and wickedness, deceit, cunning and trickery are developed by fear of physical violence. These tendencies soon become ingrained habits, corrupting the human quality which men acquire through social intercourse and which consists of manliness and the ability to defend oneself and one's household. Such men become dependent on others for protection; their souls even become too lazy to acquire virtue or moral beauty. They become ingrown... This is what has happened to every nation which has been dominated by others and harshly treated (tr. Issawi).

### 2.5.6 TAXES

“ In the early stages of the state, taxes are light in their incidence, but fetch in a large revenue; in the later stages the incidence of taxation increases while the aggregate revenue falls off... Now where taxes and imposts are light, private individuals are encouraged to actively engage in business; enterprise develops, because businessmen feel it worth their while, in view of the small share of their profits which they have to give up in the form of taxation. And as business prospers the number of taxes increases and the total yield of taxation grows. However, governments become progressively more extravagant and start to raise taxes. These increases [in taxes and sales taxes] grow with the spread of luxurious habits in the state, and the consequent growth in needs and public expenditure, until taxation burdens the subjects and deprives them of their gains. People get accustomed to this high level of taxation, because the increases have come about gradually, without anyone's being aware of exactly who it was who raised the rates of the old taxes or imposed the new ones. But the effects on business of this rise in taxation make themselves felt. For businessmen are soon discouraged by the comparison of their profits with the burden of their taxes, and between their output and their net profits. Consequently production falls off, and with it the yield of taxation. The rulers may, mistakenly, try to remedy this decrease in the yield of taxation by raising the rate of taxes; hence taxes and imposts reach a level which leaves no profit to businessmen, owing to high

costs of production, heavy burden of taxation and inadequate net profits. This process of higher tax rates and lower yields (caused by the government's belief that higher rates result in higher returns) may go on until production begins to decline owing to the despair of businessmen, and to affect the population. The main injury of this process is felt by the state, just as the main benefit of better business conditions is enjoyed by it. From this you must understand that the most important factor making for business prosperity is to lighten as much as possible the burden of taxation on businessmen, in order to encourage enterprise by giving assurance of greater profits (tr. Issawi).

### 2.5.7 AT QAL'AT IBN SALAMAH

“ I had taken refuge at Qal'at ibn Salamah...and was staying in the castle belonging to Abu Bakr ibn 'Arif, a well-built and most welcoming place. I had been there for a long time...working on the composition of the Kitab al-'Ibar to the exclusion of all else. I had already finished drafting it, from the Introduction to the history of the Arabs, Berbers and the Zanatah, when I felt the need to consult books and archives such as are only to be found in large towns, in order to check and correct the numerous citations that I had set down from memory. Then I fell ill... Because of all this, I felt a great wish to be reconciled with the Sultan Abu al-'Abbas and to go back to Tunis, the land of my forefathers, whose houses and tombs are still standing and where traces of them are still to be found (tr. Caroline Stone). •

<sup>2</sup> These extracts from Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddima are part of the article published in Saudi Aramco World. A note in the article specifies: "Where not otherwise credited, translations from the Muqaddimah are from Charles Issawi's An Arab Philosophy of History: Selections from the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun of Tunis (1332-1406) (revised edition 1987, Darwin Press) or from Franz Rosenthal's three-volume translation The Muqaddimah (second edition 1967, Princeton University) [note added by MuslimHeritage.com editorial board]."



3

# IBN KHALDUN AND ADAM SMITH: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY OF DIVISION OF LABOR AND MODERN ECONOMIC THOUGHT

by James R. Bartkus & M. Kabir Hassan

*The contributions of Ibn Khaldun to the development of economic thought have gone largely unnoticed in the academic realm of Western nations, this despite recent research focusing on Khaldun's magnum opus, Al-Muqaddimah. In this paper, we examine the similarities between Al-Muqaddimah and Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations, particularly as they discuss the benefits of a system of specialization and trade and the role of markets and price systems.*

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Ibn Khaldun, while widely regarded in the Arab/ Islamic world as a great 14th century social scientist, remains relatively unknown in the West for his scholarly contributions, particularly in the development of economic thought. This relative obscurity lingers despite the fact that Western scholars have been analysing the economics of Ibn Khaldun for over 50 years. Ameer Ali and Herb Thompson (1999) recently addressed this issue in the context of the tendency of the academy in the West to ignore the work of Muslim scholars in mapping the history of economic thought<sup>1</sup>.

Whereas prior research has examined the contributions of Ibn Khaldun in the broad framework of the history of economic thought (Ali and Thompson, 1999; Essid, 1987) or strictly elaborating on those contributions (Soofi, 1995; Boulakia, 1971), in this essay, we seek to narrowly examine the contributions of Ibn Khaldun to economic thought as they compare to those of Adam Smith, particularly in regards to the benefits of division of labor. Dieter Weiss touched on this topic in a 1995 paper entitled 'Ibn Khaldun on Economic Transformation', looking at the similarities between Khaldun's and Smith's thoughts on the benefits to society of specialisation and cooperation in production.

<sup>1</sup> Beginning with Schumpeter's *History of Economics Analysis* (1954), the authors argue that a trend was established in the sub-field of the history of economic thought of ignoring the work of Arab/Islamic scholars and that 'at the very least, the history of economic thought should incorporate the work of Arab/Islamic thinkers.'



A page from a manuscript of Ibn Khaldun's autobiography *Al-ta'rif bi-Ibn Khaldun wa-rihlatuhu sharqan wa gharban*.

Weiss notes that Adam Smith devotes the first chapter of *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* to the subject of the division of labour and its associated benefits, while Ibn Khaldun likewise discusses these same benefits 400 years earlier in the first chapter of *Al-Muqaddimah*. Certainly, the subject is expounded upon in far more detail by Adam Smith, but that should not preclude the interested scholar from further examination of the similarities between the economics of Ibn Khaldun as they relate to those of the 'Father of Economics' himself<sup>2</sup>. We will expand this comparative analysis between these two great thinkers in the hopes of furthering the discussion of the history of economic thought outside of the typical Western civilisation boundaries.

### 3.2 THE ECONOMIC THOUGHT OF IBN KHALDUN

Boulakia (1971) provides a succinct biography and introduces the economic ideas of Ibn Khaldun, as well as interpreting how Khaldun reached economic conclusions and 'organized them into an extremely coherent model'<sup>3</sup>. Boulakia lays out Khaldun's ideas

found in *Al-Muqaddimah* relating to a theory of production, theories of value, money and prices, a theory of distribution, as well as theories of cycles in population and public finance. We note here that these theories are essentially a collection of lines from *Al-Muqaddimah* that Boulakia has organized into categories of modern economic theory. Ibn Khaldun set out to write a history of the world, and his consideration of economic concepts was subordinate to those of history and sociology. As organized by Boulakia, the economic theories of Ibn Khaldun are considerably coherent and there is little doubt that these ideas remain relevant to both modern economic theory and the development of a history of economic thought.

#### 3.2.1 DIVISION OF LABOR

Chapter one of *Al-Muqaddimah* parallels the first chapter of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in introducing the benefits of the division of labour. Ibn Khaldun actually presents the advantages of specialisation in the form of a necessary condition for survival, illustrating this concept with a detailed accounting of the various skills (or crafts) and tools needed to produce bare subsistence levels of food:

However, the power of the individual human being is not sufficient for him to obtain (the food) he needs and does not provide him with as much food as he requires to live. Even if we assume an absolute minimum of food - that is, food enough for one day, (a little) wheat, for instance - that amount of food could be obtained only after much preparation such as grinding, kneading and baking. Each of these three operations requires utensils and tools that can be provided only with the help of several crafts, such as the crafts of the blacksmith, the carpenter and the potter. Assuming that a man could eat unprepared grain, an even greater number of operations would be necessary in order to obtain the grain: sowing and reaping and threshing to separate it from the husks of the ear. Each of these operations requires a number of tools and many more crafts than those just mentioned. It is beyond the power of one man alone to do all that, or (even) part of it, by himself. Thus, he cannot do without a



The travels of Ibn Khaldun and their geopolitic background: (a) Map of the Mediterranean basin in the 14th century; (b) map of Ibn Khaldun's travels from Spain to the Islamic East.

combination of many powers from among his fellow beings, if he is to obtain food for himself and for them. Through cooperation, the needs of a number of persons, many times greater than their own (number), can be satisfied (1:89)<sup>4</sup>.

This contrasts with the manner in which Adam Smith famously illustrates the benefits of the division of labour by providing an accounting of the detailed steps required in the trade of a pin-maker:

“ A workman not educated to this business (which the division of labour has rendered a distinct trade), nor acquainted with the use of the machinery employed in it (to the invention of which the same division of labour has probably given occasion), could scarce, perhaps, with his utmost industry, make one pin in a day, and certainly could not make twenty. But in the way in which this business is now carried on, not only the whole work is a peculiar trade, but it is divided into a number of branches, of which the greater part are likewise peculiar trades. One man draws out the wire; another straightens it; a third cuts it; a fourth points it; a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; to make the head requires two or three distinct operations; to put it on is a peculiar business; to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put them into the paper; and the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations (1:1:3).<sup>5</sup>

Smith continues with a comparison between the output of a single hypothetical pin-maker (without division of labour) and a pin factory that he had witnessed with 10 employees specializing in one or several of the distinct operations mentioned. He opines that an individual could make no more than 20 pins per day in the absence of division of labour, while the 10 employees could collectively produce 12 pounds, or roughly 48,000 pins in a day.

Smith continues with three particular circumstances that allow for improvements in productivity through the use of division of labour. The improved dexterity of a worker who specialises and the greater ability to improve productivity through the use of machines resemble the underlying premise for gains in Khaldun's domain. Although Ibn Khaldun seems to hint that returns to investment in human capital may be the true source of gains when he says, 'each of these operations requires a number of tools and many more crafts than those just mentioned', when he reasons that one person does not have the power to even obtain the food he needs<sup>6</sup>.

#### 3.2.2 SURPLUS AND TRADE

Both Ibn Khaldun and Smith extend the discussion of the gains from specialization to include the idea of trading the resulting surplus production. Ibn Khaldun first puts forward the idea that individuals cannot survive without the cooperation of others and subsequently expands that to suggest that such cooperation will result in more than enough

<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith allocates an entire chapter to the introduction of the subject of division of labor before expounding on the underlying principles and limits of the theory, while Ibn Khaldun includes a single paragraph on this topic. This is not unexpected as Ibn Khaldun was principally writing as a historian, incorporating elements of the other social sciences as a means of providing historical context to his writing. The extent of Ibn Khaldun's writing directly related to economics should not detract from the value of his contributions to the development of economic thought.

<sup>3</sup> Boulakia 1971, p. 1105.

<sup>4</sup> References to *The Muqaddimah* throughout this essay will be listed as the chapter and page number from Franz Rosenthal's 1958 translation. Rosenthal's comments appear throughout the translation in parentheses.

<sup>5</sup> References to *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* throughout this essay will be listed as the book, chapter and page number from an 1852 edition published in London and Edinburgh by T. Nelson and Sons and Paternoster Row.

<sup>6</sup> Crafts refer to skilled labour or skilled occupations.

production to satisfy the needs of the cooperating group:

“ But what is obtained through the co-operation of a group of human beings satisfies the need of a number many times greater (than themselves). For instance, no one, by himself, can obtain the share of the wheat he needs for food. But when six or ten persons, including a smith and a carpenter to make the tools, and others who are in charge of the oxen, the plowing of the soil, the harvesting of the ripe grain, and all the other agricultural activities, undertake to obtain their food and work toward that purpose either separately or collectively and thus obtain through their labor a certain amount of food, (that amount) will be food for a number of people many times their own. The combined labor produces more than the needs and necessities of the workers (4:270).<sup>7</sup>

Ibn Khaldun continues to explain how surplus can be used to trade with inhabitants of other cities:

“ If the labor of the inhabitants of a town or city is distributed in accordance with the necessities and needs of those inhabitants, a minimum of that labor will suffice. The labor (available) is more than is needed. Consequently, it is spent to provide the conditions and customs of luxury and to satisfy the needs of the inhabitants of other cities. They import (the things they need) from (people who have a surplus) through exchange or purchase. Thus, the (people who have a surplus) get a good deal of wealth (4:271).<sup>8</sup>

While Ibn Khaldun focuses on the benefits of trade from a macroeconomic perspective, Adam Smith first mentions the idea of trade in his second chapter on the division of labour as a distinct rationale for man to engage in specialisation:

And thus the certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he may have occasion for, encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to



The façade of The Alcázar of Seville in Spain, originally built by the Almohads who called it first Al-Muwarak, on the site of the modern day Alcázar. The Real Alcázar Palace hosted between 19 May and 30 September 2006 the exhibition Ibn Khaldun, the Mediterranean in the 14th century: The Rise and Fall of Empires. The exhibition looked at the political, economic and social relationships between Europe and the Arab-north African world in the 14th century. A special focus was laid on the broad exchanges and conflicts that traversed this geographical framework, which produced a rich cultural and artistic legacy that marked the period.

cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent of genius he may possess for that particular species of business (1:2:7).

Smith then draws the controversial (for the time period) distinction between monetary wealth (stockpiles of gold and silver) and the true wealth of a country, the value of the exchange of goods amongst countries. Thus, Smith advocates a system of specialisation and individual trade that ultimately supports the wealth of entire nations.

The idea that the wealth of a country did not lie in its stock of precious metals was somewhat novel for the 18th century, but it was not unprecedented. As Ibn Khaldun put it 400 years prior:

“ The common people who hear them think that the prosperity of these peoples is the result of the greater amount of property owned by them, or of the existence of gold and silver mines in their country in larger number (than elsewhere), or of the fact that they, to the exclusion of others; appropriated the gold of

the ancient nations. This is not so... A large civilization yields large profits because of the large amount of (available) labor, which is the cause of (profit) (4:280-281).

This closely resembles the words of Adam Smith:

“ It was not by gold or by silver, but by labour, that all the wealth of the world was originally purchased; and its value, to those who possess it, and who want to exchange it for some new productions, is precisely equal to the quantity of labour which it can enable them to purchase or command (1:5:13).

### 3.2.3 THE IMPACT OF POPULATION DIFFERENCES

The benefits of specialisation and trade lead both authors to similar thoughts on the impact of population growth on the economy. Ibn Khaldun in general writes of the rise and fall of empires, and in doing so frequently makes comparisons between rural and urban settings. Specifically, he discusses the impact of population growth during the rise of a city:

“ When civilization (population) increases, the (available) labor again increases. In turn, luxury again increases in correspondence with the increasing profit, and the customs and needs of luxury increase. Crafts are created to obtain (luxury products). The value realized from them increases, and, as a result, profits are again multiplied in the town. Production there is thriving even more than before. And so it goes with the second and third increase. All the additional labor serves luxury and wealth, in contrast to the original labor that served (the necessities of) life. The city that is superior to another in one (aspect of) civilization (that is, in population), becomes superior to it also by its increased profit and prosperity and by its customs of luxury which are not found in the other city. The more numerous and the more abundant the civilization (population) in a city, the more luxurious is the life of its inhabitants in comparison with that (of the inhabitants) of a lesser city. This applies equally to all levels of the population, to the judges (of the one city) compared with the judges (of the other city), to

the merchants (of the one city) compared with the merchants (of the other city), and, as with the judges and merchants, so with the artisans, the small businessmen, amirs, and policemen (4:272).

Thus, as population (and the supply of labor) increases, there is a concurrent increase in demand for luxury goods and services. Moreover, these increasingly unnecessary goods and services are produced by workers that specialise in the development of narrower and more idiosyncratic crafts. Ibn Khaldun likewise suggests that inhabitants of the desert will have only the necessities of life as long as they remain nomadic and are unable to take advantage of specialisation and trade like those that are able to adopt a sedentary lifestyle<sup>9</sup>. This idea is similar to that expressed in the opening paragraph of chapter three of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*:

“ When the market is very small, no person can have any encouragement to dedicate himself entirely to one employment, for want of the power to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he has occasion for. There are some sorts of industry, even of the lowest kind, which can be carried on nowhere but in a great town (3:8).

Smith suggests a porter as an example of the type of worker that could only 'find employment and subsistence' in such a place. He then offers the counter-example of the relative need for a variety of skills in less populated areas:

“ In the lone houses and very small villages which are scattered about in so desert a country as the highlands of Scotland, every farmer must be butcher, baker, and brewer, for his own family. In such situations we can scarce expect to find even a smith, a carpenter, or a mason, within less than twenty miles of another of the same trade (3:8).

Smith provides these examples in the context of establishing limitations to the benefits of division of labour, specifically defining the limits placed by the extent of the market. He continues by demonstrating

<sup>7</sup> Our emphasis in italics.

<sup>8</sup> Here and throughout much of *The Muqaddimah*, labor is used to mean the product of labor.

<sup>9</sup> Chapter 1, p. 249.

the benefits of founding cities on waterways in order to extend the market as widely as possible, providing both contemporary and historical examples. Adam Smith's thoughts once again parallel those of Ibn Khaldun, though in this case Smith provides the further insight that more populous areas provide more ability for workers to specialize as an aside to his specific detailing of the impact of the extent of the market.

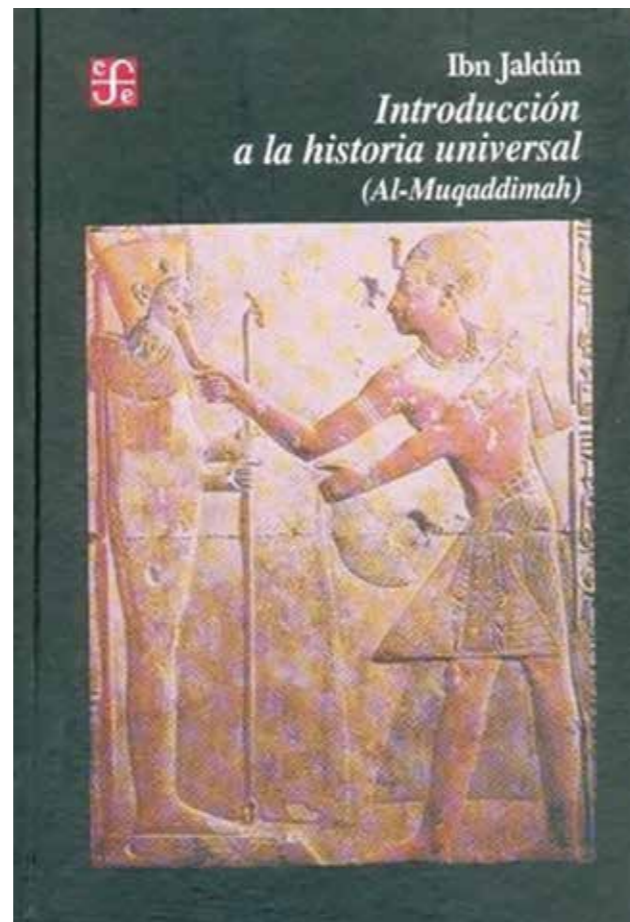
### 3.2.4 MARKETS, PRICE SYSTEMS AND THEORY OF VALUE

Adam Smith echoes Ibn Khaldun's thoughts on the underlying value of a good as a product of the labour necessary to acquire it. As Adam Smith put it, 'Labour, therefore, is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities' (1:5:12). Ibn Khaldun, likewise attributes the prosperity of individuals to the 'value realized from their labour' (5:308). Khaldun further credits the wealth of large nations to the 'large amount of (available) labour, which is the cause of (profit)' (4:281).

These ideas are further developed by both Khaldun and Smith into an understanding of how markets function to determine prices. Khaldun discusses the differences in prices for labour in different locations and attributes the differences in wages to the differences in the stages of development of the localities. That is, when demand for luxury goods increases due to increasing population (and therefore increased prosperity), the wages of those that provide these goods will rise.

Then, when a city has a highly developed, abundant civilization and is full of luxuries, there is a very large demand for those conveniences and for having as many of them as a person can expect in view of his situation. This results in a very great shortage of such things. Many will bid for them, but they will be in short supply. They will be needed for many purposes, and prosperous people used to luxuries will pay exorbitant prices for them, because they need them more than others. Thus, as one can see, prices come to be high. (4:277)

This eventually provides incentives for others to join the profession and the increase in the supply of labor will bring wages down. Khaldun also applies the concepts of supply and demand to goods markets:



Front cover of the Spanish edition of the *Muqaddima: Introduccion a la historia universal: Al-Muqaddimah* (San Diego, CA: Fondo de Cultura Economica USA, 2006, Hardcover).

Likewise, it is more advantageous and more profitable for the merchant's enterprise, and a better guarantee (that he will be able to take advantage of) market fluctuations, if he brings goods from a country that is far away and where there is danger on the road. In such a case, the goods transported will be few and rare, because the place where they come from is far away or because the road over which they come is beset with perils, so that there are few who would bring them, and they are very rare. When goods are few and rare, their prices go up. On the other hand, when the country is near and the road safe for traveling, there will be many to transport the goods. Thus, they will be found in large quantities, and the prices will go down. (5:336)

Adam Smith discusses the concepts of price and markets by introducing the idea of natural price, or equilibrium price, and the role of changes in demand and supply in explaining deviations from the natural price. Smith repeats the idea that profits in an industry will lead to greater competition and thus falling profits:

When by an increase in the effectual demand, the market price of some particular commodity happens to rise a good deal above the natural price, those who employ their stocks in supplying that market are generally careful to conceal this change. If it was commonly known, their great profit would tempt so many new rivals to employ their stocks in the same way, that, the effectual demand being fully supplied, the market price would soon be reduced to the natural price, and perhaps for some time even below it. If the market is at a great distance from the residence of those who supply it, they may sometimes be able to keep the secret for several years together, and may so long enjoy their extraordinary profits without any new rivals. Secrets of this kind, however, it must be acknowledged, can seldom be long kept: and the extraordinary profit can last very little longer than they are kept. (1:7:25)

Yet again, the parallels between Smith's and Ibn Khaldun's thoughts are easily drawn. Both authors discuss the roles of supply and demand on prices, both utilize the concept of labour as the underlying source of value of goods and they both discuss the role that the labor of a population plays in the wealth of that nation.

### 3.3 CONCLUSION

It is well known that many of the ideas put forth in *Wealth of Nations*, including the benefits of division of labour, did not originate entirely with Adam Smith. Although some debate remains regarding the extent of the originality of Smith's ideas, this debate has largely ignored the contributions of Ibn Khaldun to the development of key economic principles attributed to Smith<sup>10</sup>. We have examined some of the similarities between the major works of Ibn Khaldun and Adam Smith in order to encourage the inclusion of Ibn Khaldun's writing in the study of the development of economic thought. Further research is necessary to more closely examine how Ibn Khaldun's thoughts on the role of prices and markets, money, taxes and the economic role of government fit into the context of modern economic theory. To be sure, this is not the first paper acknowledging the role of Ibn Khaldun, but one that attempts to more firmly establish the role of Khaldun as progenitor of much of the foundation of modern economic thought, particularly as put forth in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.



Beginning of Ibn Khaldun's text *Shifā' al-sā'il fi tahdhib al-masā'il*, a work on Sufism composed around 1373 in Fes, Morocco. MS in Princeton University Library, folio 62.

<sup>10</sup> Much of the debate centers on the extent of Smith's dependence upon the works of the French philosophers in general and Diderot's *Encyclopedie* in particular, though others argue that there are other influences found in Smith's writing.



# IBN KHALDUN'S THOUGHT IN MICROECONOMICS: DYNAMICS OF LABOR, DEMAND-SUPPLY AND PRICES

by Cecep Maskanul Hakim

*In this article on Ibn Khaldun's thought in microeconomics, Cecep Maskanul Hakim analyses several central concepts and theories, from the dynamics of labor to the complex question of demand-supply and prices. Another aspect of the analysis regards the role of government in the economy, is the macroeconomy and monetary theory. Finally, the article addresses some of the recent critiques to Ibn Khaldun's theory and answers them.*

## 4.1 BRIEF HISTORY

**A**bu Zaid Abdurrahman b. Muhammad Ibn Khaldun Al-Hadhrami, known as Ibn Khaldun, was born in Tunis on Ramadhan 1st, 732 H/ 1332 CE from an influential family who emigrated from Seville, Spain. His ancestors came from Yemen to Muslim Spain in the beginning of the Muslim administration in the 8th century, but after the fall of Seville they moved to Tunisia<sup>1</sup>.

Ibn Khaldun received a good education in Islamic law 'sharia', logics, philosophy, Arabic grammar and poetry, all contributing to his capability as a statesman. No doubt his role was vital in politics in North Africa and Spain, where he had the opportunity

to analyse and evaluate the events that happened there in the different Muslim states. He worked for the ruler of Tunis, Fez, Granada and Bijaia. Finally he worked in Egypt for twenty four years at a high level position, namely as chief judge (Ra'is al-Qudhat) of the Maliki school and as a lecturer in Al-Azhar University. Political intrigue and jealousy for his position caused him to be expelled from the high court position five times<sup>2</sup>.

Ibn Khaldun is known as the Father of Social Sciences<sup>3</sup>. In his famous book, Al-Muqaddima he writes on the dynamics of civilization or umran, which is considered as the foundation of sociology. However, one can find in the book the foundation of other sciences as well, such as economics<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Abul-Hasan M. Sadeq & Aidit Ghazali, *Readings in Islamic Economic Thought*, Longman Malaysia, 1992, p. 222; Hamed A. Ead, *Alchemy in Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddima*.

<sup>2</sup> Hamed A. Ead, *Alchemy in Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddima*.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Marie Fritz (editor), *The Clinical Sociology Resource Book*, Washington, DC: The American Sociological Association, 2006, 6th Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim M. Oweiss, 'Ibn Khaldun, Father of Economics', from *Arab Civilization*, (joint editorship with George N. Atiyeh), State University of New York Press, 1988. About Ibn Khaldun's contribution in education, see Fahri Kayadibi, *Ibn Khaldun and Education*.

His book *Kitab al-'Ibar* is a unique source of historical analysis in his time. *The Muqaddima* is the theoretical prolegomena to this monumental book of universal history which provides a basic introduction to understanding the dynamics of politics and the history of Arabic, Islamic and Berber states in North Africa, Muslim Spain and the world of Islam at large until Ibn Khaldun's time.

Ibn Khaldun died in Cairo on the 25th Ramadhan 808 H/ 19th March 1406 CE.

## 4.2 CONTRIBUTION IN ECONOMICS

Like other scientists in the 14th century, who were usually generalist (in the sense that their expertise covered many disciplines), Ibn Khaldun wrote his work by explaining various foundations of science. His book *Al-Muqaddima* is written to describe how a civilisation (umran) begins, strengthens and finally falls. For that purpose he elaborates various constructing elements that finally become its foundation.

However, Ibn Khaldun represents a generation of scholars who wrote their books using positive-rational approach. This approach diverts from scholars tradition in the previous century, and even centuries afterwards, which is usually embedded with a legal-normative method in their writing. This uniqueness in approach seemed unpopular in his time since only a few scholars who wrote books used this style, even after some centuries later. Positive-rational approach might have been extensively used in science books such as astronomy, medicine and alike but to apply such new approach in history and sociology was really a new invention.

In economics, Ibn Khaldun's work covers almost every foundation of modern economic thought, ranging from microeconomics to international trade. It is no surprise when one finds almost one third of his *Muqaddima* consists of socio-economic concepts. He wrote the concepts in such a way that they are interconnected to one another, that one would not understand a concept without knowing basic ideas about others. Due to scope limitation, this paper will only discuss elements of microeconomics (supply, demand and prices) in Ibn Khaldun's works.

### 4.2.1 LABOUR THEORY OF VALUE

According to Ibn Khaldun, labour is a source of value. He explains in details about his theory of labour value and presents it for the first time in history<sup>5</sup>. According to him,

“...everything in the world is purchased with labor<sup>6</sup>. What is purchased with money or other good is purchased by labor, inasmuch as gained by labor from our body. Money or commodities indeed save us. They contain certain quantity value of labor that we exchange for what it should be, when it contains the same quantity. The value of a commodity for those who own it, and those who do not use it for himself, but exchange it with other commodity, therefore, equal to labor quantity that enable him purchasing or, directing it. Labor, therefore is a real measure of exchangeable value of all commodities<sup>7</sup>.”

Whether ribh or kasb, revenue is the value realised from man's labor, i.e. all that is obtained through human effort. According to Ibn Khaldun, although commodity value comprises of cost from raw material and natural resources, it is through labour that value increases and hence, wealth grows. Without one's effort, the opposite will occur. Ibn Khaldun underlines the role of extra effort that was later known as marginal productivity in the welfare of a society. His theory on labour gives the reason for the increase of cities, such as one indicated by his historical analysis, that becomes major element of civilisation.

Profit theory in economics is known by equation:

$$\Pi = TR - TC$$

If  $\Pi > 0$  then there will be a positive return (profit)

If  $\Pi < 0$  then there will be a negative return (loss)

Where

$\Pi$  = Total Profit

TR = Total Revenue, namely QP= total quantity sold multiplied by price

TC = Total Cost, namely  $f(C) = \alpha + \beta C$  where  $\alpha$  is fixed cost and  $\beta C$  is variable cost

It appears that Ibn Khaldun already differentiated *kasb* (Total Cost) from *rihb* (positive return = profit =  $\Pi$ )

Theory of Profit

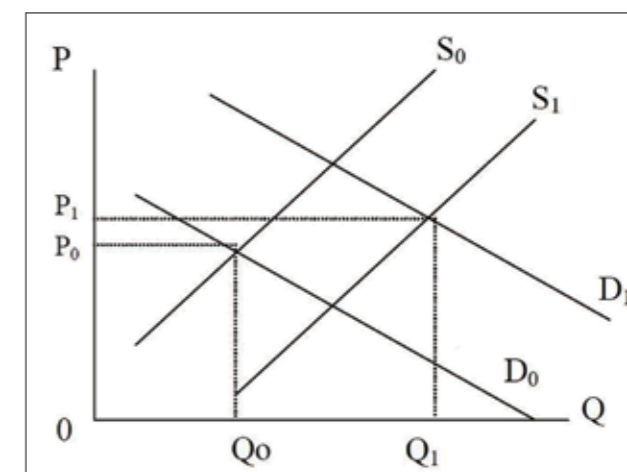
“ Labor is necessary for revenues and capital accumulation. This is obvious in the case of manufacture (craft). Even if revenue generated from something other than manufacture, the value of generated profit (and capital) should cover labor value by which the commodity is obtained. Without labor, all other things will not be acquired.

Ibn Khaldun divides all revenues into two categories: ribh (gross revenue) and kasb (life revenue). Ribh is secured when man works for himself and sells his products to others. In this context the value should contain the cost of raw material and natural resources. Kasb is achieved when one works for himself. Therefore ribh means profit or gross revenue, depending on the context. In this instance, ribh means gross revenue because raw material cost and natural resources are included in the selling price of an object.

If we can interpret Ibn Khaldun's idea on work, it is clear that labour is necessary and a sufficient condition for revenue and natural resources is only a necessary condition. Labour and effort tend to produce which in turn will be used against an exchange through barter, or through the use of money, namely gold and silver. The process hence generates revenue and profit that is acquired by man from a manufacture/commodity as value of his labour, after deducting cost of raw material. Ibn Khaldun also explains causes of different labour revenue<sup>8</sup>. They might be caused by differences in skill, market size, location, expertise (craftsmanship) or work, and in how far the authority and governors purchase final products. When a certain kind of labor becomes more expensive, namely if the demand exceeds available supply, the revenue must increase.

High return in a manufacture will attract other players. This is a dynamic phenomenon that finally increases available supply and lowers profit. This principle explains how original Ibn Khaldun's idea was in adjusting long-term of the labour and between certain professions and others<sup>9</sup>.

Ibn Khaldun precisely observes how income may differ in one place to another, even for similar



Basic Market Theory. A large market means consisting of high demand (D1) compared to small market (D0) even at a different price level. This also causes large investment, in turn causing high supply (S1). Through the cost and return function, a large market generates large income as well. Source: Koutsoyiannis 1979.

profession. Income for judges, crafters even burglars, for instance, is directly related with welfare levels and living standards in every city, achieved through labour results and crystallization of a productive society. Adam Smith explains the difference in labour income by comparing between England and Bangladesh, similar to what Ibn Khaldun did four centuries before, when he compares income in Fez and Tlemcen<sup>10</sup>. It is Ibn Khaldun, not Adam Smith, who presents, for the first time, labour contribution as wealth creation for a nation by stating that labour increases productivity and that product exchange in a large market is the prime reason of wealth (and prosperity) of a nation. On the contrary, decrease in productivity may lead to decrease in economy and income of its society. In his words, 'a civilization generates large profit (income) due to large number of labor force that is the cause of profit'<sup>11</sup>.

It is Ibn Khaldun who asserts on the need of free economy and free choice. He said in this respect in the *Muqaddima*:

“ Among suppressive action, and very perilous measure to the people is to compel someone to do forced work injustice. Because labor is a commodity, like the one we will show later, in income and profit, representing work value

<sup>5</sup> He never mentions it as a theory, but presents it in his analysis of work and workers.

<sup>6</sup> This proposition is quoted by David Hume in His *Political Discourse* published in 1752.

<sup>7</sup> This quotation is even used by Adam Smith as a footnote: see Ibrahim M. Oweiss, "Ibn Khaldun, Father of Economics".

<sup>8</sup> It means long time before Ricardo published his *The Principle of Political Economy and Taxation* in 1817.

<sup>9</sup> This concept is challenged by Keynes by his famous expression 'in the long term we are dead'. However, Ibn Khaldun's analysis is not only proved historically correct, but also creates the core thought of classical economy.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima*, edited by Darwish Al-Juwaidy, Saydah, Al-Maktaba Al-'Asriyyah, Part IV, Chapter 11, p. 334.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Part 4, Chapter 14, p. 339

of its recipient... unfortunately most people do not have income source other than his own labor. Therefore, if they are forced to work for what they achieved through training, or compelled to do work in their own field, they will lose the result of their work, and pulled out of the greatest part of, even all, their income.<sup>12</sup>

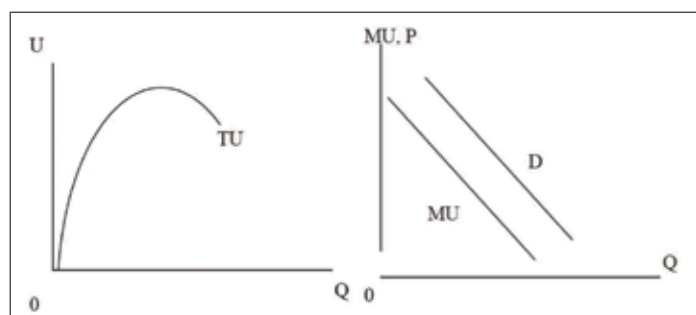
To maximize revenue and utility level, one should be free to do what is led by their talent and ability. Through natural talent and learnt ability one can freely produce high quality objects and often more work-units per hour.

#### 4.2.2 DEMAND, SUPPLY, PRICE AND PROFIT

Other original contributions to economics of labour by Ibn Khaldun concern the introduction and analysis of the relationship of some economic instrument analysis such as demand, supply, price and profit.

#### DEMAND

Demand for a commodity is based on utility to gain it and not always based on the need for it. Hence satisfaction is the motive behind the demand. It creates incentive for a customer to purchase in market. Ibn Khaldun, therefore, planted the first seed of demand theory that was later developed by Thomas Robert Malthus, Alfred Marshall, John Hicks and others. If a commodity demanded to attract more customer purchase, either price or the quantity sold would increase. On the other hand, if the demand for manufacture (craft) decreases, the sale goes down and, therefore, the price decreases.



Derivation of demand. Graphical presentation of Utility function by Thomas Malthus and Alfred Marshall. Derived from Total Utility (TU) curve, Marginal Utility is congruent with Demand curve (D) against price and quantity. Source: Koutsoyiannis 1979.

Demand for certain commodities depends also on how far they will be purchased by the state. Sultan (king) and ruling elite buy more quantity than the people can buy individually. A manufacture develops when the state purchases its products. By his analytical and genius thinking, Ibn Khaldun found a concept that is known in modern economic literature as 'derived demand'. He said: 'Manufacture increases and goes up when demand for its products increases.' Demand for a manufacture worker is also derived from the demand for this product in the market.

#### SUPPLY THEORY

As generally accepted, modern price theory states that cost is the backbone of supply theory. It is Ibn Khaldun who for the first time explored analytically the role of production cost in supply and price. In searching differences between food price produced in fertile land and the less fertile one, he found the difference among others merely in production cost.

In coast and hill areas, where the land is not suitable for agriculture, the inhabitants are forced to uplift the area condition and its plantation. They undertook it by giving additional work and things that need cost. All of them increases cost in agriculture product, which they include them in determining its sale price. And since then Andalusia is known for the high price...its position is in opposite with land of Berber. Their land is very rich and fertile so that they do not need to add any cost in agriculture; therefore in that country the food price become low<sup>13</sup>.

Besides personal and state demand and production cost, Ibn Khaldun introduces other factors that influence the cost of commodity or service, namely (a) welfare and prosperity level of a region and (b) wealth concentration rate and tax level imposed to intermediaries and traders. A direct functional relationship between income and consumption provided by Ibn Khaldun opens the way for consumption function theory as the cornerstone of Keynesian economics.

#### PROFIT

Ibn Khaldun also gives original contribution to the concept of 'profit'. In economic literature, a theory stating profit as a reward for uncertainty risk in the future generally refers to Frank Knight, who published his idea in 1921. Undoubtedly it is Frank Knight who substantially forwards a profit theory in a well established form. However, it is Ibn Khaldun, not Knight, who put the cornerstone of this theory.

Business (commerce) means to buy commodities, store them and wait for a market fluctuation to bring about an increase in price (of these commodities). This is called "rihb" (profit).<sup>14</sup>

In another context, Ibn Khaldun states again the same thought:

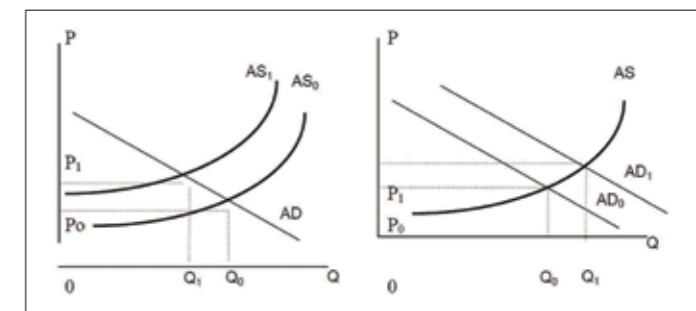
The clever and experienced people in the city know that to hoard and wait for high price is not good, and its profit can reduce or lose through this hoarding.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of profit hence becomes a reward for facing a risk. In undertaking uncertainty in the future, one who bears the risk may lose instead profit. Similarly, profit or loss may occur as a result of speculation by profit-seekers in the market.

To maximize profit, Ibn Khaldun introduces the magical word of traders: 'Buy low and sell high'<sup>16</sup>.

#### PRICE

If Ibn Khaldun's magical word is applied in cost analysis, it will be clear that profit may increase, even for the price of a final product, when someone reduces raw material and other input used in production. It can be done by the means of purchasing them with discount - or in general - at a low price even from a distant market, as indicated in his explanation about the benefit of foreign trade. However, Ibn Khaldun concludes that both an excessive low price and an excessive high price will potentially destroy the market.



Cost Push and Demand Pull Inflation. Economists agree that increase in cost -as illustrated by shifting Aggregate Supply upward (AS0-AS1) causes increase in general price level. From P0 to P1. Similar effect occurs when there is an increase in Aggregate Demand -illustrated by shifting upward of AD curve (AD0-AD1). Source: Branson, 1989.

Therefore, it is advised that a country not bring prices artificially low through subsidy or other methods of intervention. Such a policy is economically perilous because low price commodities will disappear from the market and increase disincentive for suppliers to produce whenever their profit is directly affected.

Ibn Khaldun also concludes that an excessively high price will not be appropriate with market expansion. When high-price commodities are few in the market, high price policy becomes counterproductive and damaged goods flow in the market. Ibn Khaldun hence put the basis of thought that afterward lead to formulation of disequilibrium analysis. He also mentions some factors that influence the increase in general price level, such as increase in demand, supply limitation and increase in production cost that includes sale tax as one component of total cost.

After his analysis about what creates overall demand in a growing economy, Ibn Khaldun states the following:

Because demand for luxury goods finally becomes habits and then becomes necessity. In addition, all labor becomes expensive in the city, convenience becomes expensive because there exists many purposes that also become demand of luxury, and also because the government imposes tax in the market and business transaction. This is reflected in sale price. Convenience tools, food and labor hence

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, Part 5, Chapter 14, p. 366.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Part 5, Chapter 13, p. 368.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, Part 5, Chapter 9, p. 366. In his translation, Franz Rosenthal states in a footnote: "in 1952 a book written by Frank V. Fischer appears, titled *Buy Low, Sell High: Guidance for Readers in Good Investment Method and Wise Trade Technique*".

become expensive. As a result, expenditure increase drastically, proportionate to the culture (city). A big sum of money is spent. In this situation, people need big amount of money to acquire necessities for themselves and their family, and other need as well.<sup>17</sup>

And he, therefore, concludes: When goods are less, their price increases.

By reading carefully both quotations above, it is clear that Ibn Khaldun finds what is known now as cost-push inflation and demand pull inflation (see Box 4 for comparison). In fact, he is the first philosopher in history who systematically identifies factors that influence both commodity price and general price level.

### ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN STATE'S ECONOMY

What makes Ibn Khaldun differ from his Western successors, especially Classicalist writers is that Ibn Khaldun believes that government plays a critical role in the economy.

The government plays an important role in growth and in the country's economy in general through the purchase of goods and services through fiscal policy, namely tax and expenditure. The government may also provide an incentive environment for work and prosperity, or the opposite, an oppressive system that finally becomes self-defeating. Although Ibn Khaldun considers government as inefficient (too much calculation is done by those known today as cost and benefit), it still plays an important role in the country's economy through purchases on a big scale. Government expenditure stimulates the economy using income that increases through a multiplier effect. However, if the Sultan (king, government) accumulates income from tax, business becomes slow and the country's economic activities will be affected significantly through a multiplier effect<sup>18</sup>. In addition, welfare programs to reduce poverty, help widows, orphans and blind people should be launched (if not they become a heavy burden to the state treasury). The government should spend its tax income wisely

to raise their condition in order to maintain their rights and save them from danger<sup>19</sup>.

### MACROECONOMY AND THEORY ON MONEY

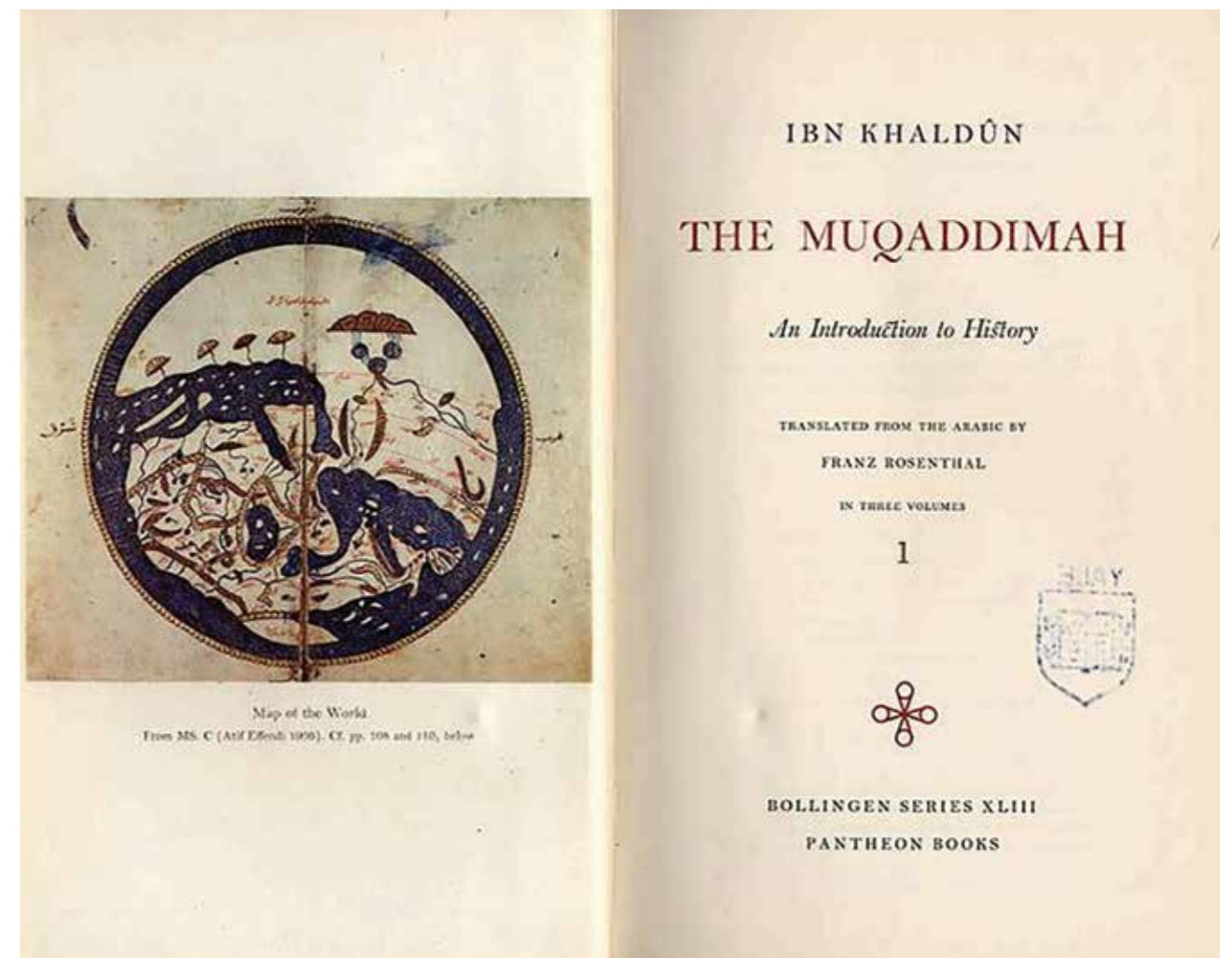
In macroeconomics, Ibn Khaldun also gives contribution in theory of money. According to him, money is not the real form of wealth, but an instrument where the wealth may be obtained. He is the first writer who presented the prime function of money as a measure of value, store of value and numeraire.

“ Mines, gold and silver as (measure of) value for capital formation...considered as wealth and property. Even in a certain situation, everything is obtained, the final purpose only to acquire them. Everything depends on the fluctuation from which (gold and silver) are exempted. They are basis for profit, property and wealth<sup>20</sup>.

The real form of wealth is not money. The wealth is created or transformed through labour in the form of capital formation in the real measure. Hence it is Ibn Khaldun who for the first time differentiates between money and real wealth, although he realizes that the later is obtained by the former. However, money plays a more efficient role than bartering in business transactions in a society, where one exchanges to each other the result of their labour, both in the form of goods and services, to fulfill the need that cannot be fulfilled individually. Money can also facilitate goods flowing from one market to the other, even across the country's border.

### 4.3 CRITICISM TO IBN KHALDUN'S THEORY

Criticism to Ibn Khaldun comes from modern Islamic economic thinkers, amongst those Masudul Alam Choudhry<sup>21</sup>. In analysing political economic thought from a Islamic perspective in classical Islamic literature, Choudhry compares Ibn Khaldun, Al Ghazali, Ibn Taimiyya and Shah Waliullah Dahlawi. According to him, Ibn Khaldun



“ had equally failed to present a Quranic philosophy of history to show the rise and decline of civilizations owes to the primal condition of the believers' commitment or otherwise to the observance of Shari'a and Sunna Allah in the midst of society and self. These were the undertakings of Al-Ghazzali and Ibn Taimiyya. Hence, no philosophy of history could be afforded by Ibn Khaldun. He thus remained to be merely an empiricist without the greater depth of epistemological-analytical vision that sways permanence of historical explanation. In the Western world, we find this attempt being made for Occidentalism by Hegel. In the Islamic world, a better and deeper study of the philosophy of history was given by Shah Waliullah.

According to Choudhry, only empirical theory of political economy, not Islamic political economic theory, can be derived from Ibn Khaldun's

*Muqaddima*. Hence, 'for those who believe in the reductionist philosophy of rationalism as the controller of destinies, and for those who treat the Divine Reality as outside the determining life of history, as an endogenous force, will continue to take stock of Ibn Khaldun's work. Thus has Ibn Khaldun become popular in the West today, but not so Shah Waliullah, Imam Ghazzali and Ibn Taimiyya. That is because Ibn Khaldun championed his Greek lineage along with the Hellenic philosophers, like Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Razi and others. That was the fashion of intellectuals of the time when Ibn Khaldun wrote, and it was the very kind of inquiry that gained the privileges with the elites and rulers of the time<sup>22</sup>.

Choudhry himself concedes that,

“ It is true that Ibn Khaldun thought of the pure economic functions of urban life – division of labour, economic development and public finance – long before Adam Smith and Keynes.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, Part IV, Chapter 13, p. 338.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, Part III, Chapter 40, p. 257.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, Part III, Chapter 51, p. 285.

<sup>20</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddima*, Part V, Chapter 1, p. 354.

<sup>21</sup> M.A.Choudhry, M.A.Choudhry, *A History of the Islamic Political Economy Thought Among Early Writers*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

He also argues that the transition from the state of dynasty to the state of towns and cities is a costly one, but he also promotes the importance of government functions. From Ibn Taimiyya to Ibn Khaldun, the importance of government in the economy has increased, albeit not without cost.

However, Choudhry does not agree with the development transformation of society with the excessive role of government. Consequently, the capitalistic and elitist trend will arise in the society who lost their freedom to the state.

Ibn Khaldun's taxes for the state have become increasingly onerous. In the above paragraphs, he is in a way defending the taxing powers of the state in spite of the costs that he recognizes in this state function. Thus, what can be concluded from these is the seemingly costly processes involved in the recommended transitions from basic needs regimes of development to industrial states of development with a great degree of government presence in this transformation<sup>23</sup>.

It has taken off the human freedom to participate in development and has individuals have lost it to the overweening states. If Ibn Khaldun's ideas are taken first, as a prescription of development, it is a socially and economically costly way to develop in the face of capitalistic and elitist claims over the resources of development, ownership and empowerment of elitism,

kings and rulers. This sorrowfully has happened in the Arab world contrary to the Islamic precepts of governance<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, Choudhry sees that the idea of the development model by Ibn Khaldun leads to disequilibrium, and contrary to Islamic methodology on development of socio-economy, political economy and history:

“ If Ibn Khaldun's ideas are taken as dynamics of the historical process of change, there is no relevance in all of these of the Islamic view to development, wealth and progress, growth and industrial advance while keeping the moral precepts intact as was delineated by Ibn Taimiyya and Imam Ghazzali. Likewise, while the great Shari'a scholars described their politico-economic universe in the midst of equilibrium, Ibn Khaldun described it in terms of a disequilibrium dynamics. Economic development as an evolutionary process leading to the destruction of dynasties and the rise of cities and nation states as costly entities, means that this inevitable development must be increasingly costly in Ibn Khaldun's framework of political economy. Taken in this perspective, Ibn Khaldun's prescription and message of history are both contrary to the essentially Islamic methodology of socioeconomic development, political economy and historicism.<sup>25</sup>

From this criticism, it appears that Choudhry tries to understand Ibn Khaldun as an intellectual who is separated from the spirit of Islamic epistemology, something that actually may become perilous. This can be understood if the ideas in Ibn Khaldun's work are not viewed in a unified concept. It is not denied that a large part of Ibn Khaldun's writing in the *Muqaddima* contains empirical explanations on contemporary phenomena that go on around him in his age. It is because Ibn Khaldun's career path walked in the midst of political situations, which contained dynamic intrigues and the interests of different rulers. However, to place Ibn Khaldun as an intellectual who does not have any methodology that leads to Islamic epistemology is clearly a misconception. Furthermore, it should be noted that Choudhry's criticism is merely based on the *Muqaddima* (translated by Franz Rosenthal), a book written by Ibn Khaldun as an introduction to a larger book of history, the *Kitab al-Ibar*, of which a part only has been written and was never completed because of his death.

Choudhry seems to ignore some details that makes his criticism unnecessary. When discussing political decision-making, for instance, Ibn Khaldun clearly refers to the Wilaya al-'Ahd that was practiced during the Prophet Muhammad's companions era (*Muqaddima*, Part III, Chapter 30); and the role of the government head in religious matters (Chapter 31), also his dislike towards the replacement caliph institution to kingdom (Chapter 28) or his appreciation of the letter of Tahir bin Husein (Chapter 51) – a senior minister in the Abbasid era who was also a literalist, philosopher and brave man – to his son on the best method of government, so as to be the way

towards pleasing God. Ibn Khaldun's fondness of this letter made him quote it fully in his *Muqaddima*.

A similar misconception is found in Ibn Khaldun's socio-economic analysis. Choudhry is trapped with a Western intellectual analysis that confines Ibn Khaldun to empiricism without examining details given to him to lead them to an Islamic perspective. In discussing monopoly (“Ihtikar”, *Muqaddima*, Part IV, Chapter 13) for instance, it can be seen how Ibn Khaldun explains it according to sharia and from a psychological perspective, or his criticism against the ruler who applies pricing regulation policy, quoting the Quranic verse 58 of Surat Azzariyat (Part IV, chapter 15). With this verse, Ibn Khaldun seems to suggest to the ruler that price regulation will have a negative effect for the development of their society and that the policy is against Islamic principles and doctrine (aqida). Besides, like other Islamic scholars and intellectuals in terms of ethics (akhlaq), Ibn Khaldun always ends his writing by reminding the reader that there is He (the Lord), who knows more than everyone in this world.

It can be concluded that Choudhry has a fractional view on Ibn Khaldun, namely from a merely empirical approach. He may not realize that what Ibn Khaldun has done is to explain scientifically what is already laid by the Divine Will in the dynamics of human civilisation from the perspective of power, socio-economy and knowledge. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun wants to teach his Muslim fellows an important lesson to achieve a success in the world (and the Hereafter). His credo seems to be that a nation cannot ignore the commands of Allah Sunnatullah through empirical description. If a nation deviates from it, then the disaster will be the logical consequence. •

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.







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