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**Ibn Khaldûn: The Muqaddimah**

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE 2005 EDITION

by Bruce B. Lawrence

This is the abridged version of the only complete English translation of the *Muqaddimah* (introduction), which was published in 1958 in three volumes for the Bollingen Foundation. The *Muqaddimah* is the most significant, and challenging, Islamic history of the premodern world. Its author was the fourteenth-century Mediterranean scholar Ibn Khaldûn (1332–1406).

Ibn Khaldûn was a man of his time, but he was not like others of his time. He was marked by travel, even before he was born. In the eighth century his ancestors emigrated from Southern Arabia, or Yemen, to Andalusia, or southern Spain, then a part of the Muslim world. His full name attests to his Yemeni roots: ‘Abd-ar-Raḥmân Abû Zayd ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldûn al-Ḥaḍramî. Al-Ḥaḍramî links its bearer to Hadramut, a part of Yemen. Other privileged members of Andalusian society were also Arab immigrants, though many, including Ibn Khaldûn’s forbears, had intermarried with indigenous Berbers. What distinguished Ibn Khaldûn was neither his Arab lineage nor his linkage to Berbers via marriage but his Mediterranean location. At the intersection of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim influences, heir to Greek science and Arabic poetry, and connected by trade and history to Asia, the Mediterranean Sea had become the nexus of Muslim cosmopolitanism by the fourteenth century. Social mobility as well as physical travel animated Mediterranean Muslims, especially those, like Ibn Khaldûn, who rose to high posts in government, law, and education. Travel (*rihlah*) became the model for his autobiography, *At-Ta’rîf bi-Ibn Khaldûn wa-rihlatuhu gharban wa-sharqan*, or *Biography of Ibn Khaldûn and His Travel in the West and in the East* (hereafter referred to as *Autobiography*).<sup>1</sup> Though other Muslims

<sup>1</sup> The original Arabic version was edited by Muḥammad Tawit at-Tanjî and published in 1370 in Cairo. It was reprinted in 1951 and translated into French by Abdesselam Cheddadi as *Le Voyage d’Occident et d’Orient* (Paris: Sindbad, 1980). Regrettably, as noted by the translator of the English edition, Franz Rosenthal, Cheddadi omitted almost all of the poetry that Ibn Khaldûn quoted (Rosenthal, “Ibn Khaldûn in His Time,” in *Ibn Khaldûn and Islamic Ideology*, ed. Bruce B. Lawrence [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984], 25n.11).

wrote autobiographies prior to Ibn Khaldûn's,<sup>2</sup> his is unusual because he attempts to place his own life squarely at the intersection of East and West. Begun in the last decade of his life and continuing up through his meeting with Tamerlane (in 1401), it situates him in the midst of the political activities of his time, but even more, it stresses how crucial is the awareness of geographical/historical factors in assessing political events and their consequences.

What made Ibn Khaldûn different was not travel per se but rather his ability to travel in the imagination of his own world, to create another perspective that at once linked him to his contemporaries yet set him apart from them. Whether we call this disposition quirkiness or eccentricity, narcissism or genius,<sup>3</sup> we must recognize it as the critical element of Ibn Khaldûn that made it possible for him to conceive, then write the *Muqaddimah*, a study which the twentieth-century doyen of British historians, Arnold J. Toynbee, has called "undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time or place."<sup>4</sup>

Marking himself as different was almost reflexive for Ibn Khaldûn. He was different not just in his thought and speech but also in his dress. When he served as a judge in Cairo, he continued to wear Maghribi (or North African) robes instead of the lighter

<sup>2</sup> See Walter J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldûn and Tamerlane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 14–17. As Fischel makes clear, the *Autobiography* was initially conceived of as an addendum, integral to the larger work *Kitâb al-'Ibar (History)*. Only toward the end of his life did Ibn Khaldûn make it into an independent work, though without a proper introduction and with the title itself an afterthought.

<sup>3</sup> A study of Ibn Khaldûn's relationship to Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, begins with the observation that his character reflected "many discrepancies between his ideas and his actions, the contrast between his attempts at social reform and his own transgressions of social codes, his public sense and his pronounced egotism, his scientific impartiality and his very obvious personal preferences, his wide comprehension and his personal vanity," yet the same author concludes that "most of these contradictions can be ascribed to the dualistic character of all genius" (M. Syrier, "Ibn Khaldûn and Islamic Mysticism," *Islamic Culture* 21 [1947]: 264, as cited in Fischel, *Ibn Khaldûn and Tamerlane*, 28n.66).

<sup>4</sup> A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 3, *The Growths of Civilizations*, 2d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 322. Cited in Franz Rosenthal, translator's introduction to *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, by Ibn Khaldûn (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), 1:c xv. While Toynbee's praise may seem excessive, it reflects the broad reception of the *Muqaddimah* and the deep engagement with Ibn Khaldûn's thought, in both Arabic and European sources, among

robes of Egyptian judges. Though he may have been uncomfortable, he was indicating pride in his Andalusian roots, without, however, suggesting that he was less than a faithful, observant Muslim or other than an obedient, subservient officer of the Egyptian state.<sup>5</sup>

In his writing Ibn Khaldûn also expressed difference, but always within limits and often by inference. It must be remembered that he was not employed to be a historian. He was a juridical activist with a secondary interest in history. Particularly in the odd circumstances of his own life experience did he hope to find lessons (*ibar*) that would be instructive for others. While his *Autobiography* ranges over many moments, none is more poignant, or more instructive, than his meetings with Tamerlane. The year was 1401. The place was Damascus. Tamerlane had just laid siege to the Mamluk city, which had not yet surrendered. During the previous twenty years Tamerlane had become the most feared and successful warrior from the East after the Mongol chieftain Chingiz Khan. Tamerlane was heir to Chingiz Khan in a double sense. Though Turkish and Muslim, he also had Mongol lineage, with shamanic loyalties, through his mother. Even more important, Tamerlane had inherited the Mongol ideal of universal sovereignty via military conquest. He had been systematic in his plundering and massacres, from Moscow in the north to Delhi in the south to Izmir in the west. No one was spared: all those conquered, whether Muslim or not, were treated as prisoners. Some were tortured, many were slain, all were at risk.

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Muslims as well as non-Muslims. The major sources till the late 1950s have been noted in Walter J. Fischel, selected bibliography to *The Muqaddimah*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), 3:485–512. An updated bibliography, which alas includes a gratuitous critique of Fischel's bibliography, is to be found in Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldûn in Modern Scholarship: A Study in Orientalism* (London: Third World Centre for Research and Publication, 1981), 231–318. Not all readers, of course, are convinced by Ibn Khaldûn's novel and complex thesis. Even Toynbee qualified his commendation, observing that "a modern Western critic may feel that Ibn Khaldûn's empirical foundation is rather too narrow to bear the weight or to justify the range of his masterly generalization" (*A Study of History*, 3:475).

<sup>5</sup> For more extensive annotation of Ibn Khaldûn as self-consciously marked by his difference from contemporaries, see Fischel, *Ibn Khaldûn and Tamerlane*, 70–71n.54, and also Rosenthal, "Ibn Khaldûn in His Time," 16–24.

When Ibn Khaldûn was summoned by Tamerlane in January 1401, he met him outside Damascus, where the conqueror had camped while his army laid siege to the city. Ibn Khaldûn feared for his life. Yet he also knew from reports that Tamerlane could be indulgent as well as cruel, and that he had befriended scholars and mystics on previous occasions.<sup>6</sup> Ibn Khaldûn won Tamerlane's confidence, so much so that the account of their meetings justified his supplementary labor as a historian. Not only did Ibn Khaldûn claim a role in gaining pardon for Mamluk prisoners of Tamerlane, but he also saw in the Central Asian world conqueror a Turco-Mongol vindication of his own thesis, to wit, that civilization is always and everywhere marked by the fundamental difference between urban and primitive, producing a tension that is also an interplay between nomad and merchant, desert and city, orality and literacy. Ibn Khaldûn may have been projecting his own life's ambition in the subsequent portrait he provided of "Timur," or Tamerlane:

This king Timur is one of the greatest and mightiest of kings. Some attribute to him knowledge, others attribute to him heresy because they note his preference for "members of the House (of 'Ali)," still others attribute to him the employment of magic and sorcery, but in all this there is nothing; it is simply that he is highly intelligent and perspicacious, addicted to debate and argumentation about what he knows and also about what he does not know.<sup>7</sup>

The final part of this description could have served as an epitaph for Ibn Khaldûn, even without the legacy of his *Muqaddimah*: "he is highly intelligent and perspicacious, addicted to debate and argumentation about what he knows and also about what he does

<sup>6</sup> Though Ibn Khaldûn had heard of the torture of a prominent Damascene judge at the hands of Tamerlane prior to their meeting (Fischel, *Ibn Khaldûn and Tamerlane*, 78–79n.81), he also knew that the first successful approach for amnesty to Tamerlane had come from a group of Damascene notables, led by a Sufi master (ibid., 30, 64–65n.32). The subsequent plunder of Damascus, once the city fell to the Mongol siege, is recounted in sparse detail by Ibn Khaldûn. He does condemn the outcome, though not without qualification: "This was an absolutely dastardly and abominable deed, but changes in affairs are in the hands of Allah—He does with His creatures as He wishes, and decides in His kingdom as He wills" (ibid., 39).

<sup>7</sup> Fischel, *Ibn Khaldûn and Tamerlane*, 47.

not know.” It is his ability to test the limits of what is known and knowable that makes Ibn Khaldûn an explorer of the mind and not a conventional intellectual in the terms of either his own time or later times in the history of Muslim civilization.

The biggest difference between Ibn Khaldûn and the cosmopolitan elites of his generation was his orientation to *adab*.<sup>8</sup> Though trained as a *faqîh*, or jurist, and familiar with all the ancillary sciences of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), Ibn Khaldûn was also an *adîb*, or littérateur. A littérateur is attentive to words, to their expression in both speech and writing but above all, to their polyvalence. Words can mean many things in different times, places, and contexts. Though this may seem a truism today, it was far from accepted knowledge or the dominant outlook, even among the notables whom Ibn Khaldûn knew and whom he engaged in discussion or debate.

As a littérateur Ibn Khaldûn was especially concerned with poetry and prose. It is crucial to recognize, for instance, that he was engaged by the lyrical tones of verse, that he saw poetry as a register of local identity, and that he himself had poetic aspirations.<sup>9</sup> As a littérateur, he also moved beyond the range of what is usually thought to be literature. He engaged the full spectrum of sciences that were known in Arabic translations from Greek sources by the ninth century and which were then expanded through experiment and study by Muslim scientists during subsequent centuries. By the time of Ibn Khaldûn, scientific activity had been professionalized—so much so that “most of the distinguished physicians and astronomers of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Syria and Cairo were employed as jurists, teachers in madrasa-like medical

<sup>8</sup> For the first and fullest development of Ibn Khaldûn as an *adîb*, see miriam cooke, “Ibn Khaldûn and Language: From Linguistic Habit to Philological Craft,” in Lawrence, *Ibn Khaldûn and Islamic Ideology*, 27–36. There is no single English equivalent of *adab*, and so I leave it untranslated, yet for stylistic ease I have taken the liberty of rendering *adîb*, one who practices and pursues *adab*, as “littérateur” throughout.

<sup>9</sup> It is Ibn Khaldûn’s contemporary, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, who remarks on “his promising bid for recognition as a poet,” at the same time that Ibn al-Khaṭīb praises Ibn Khaldûn for the latter’s partial commentary on a poem that he (Ibn al-Khaṭīb) had composed on the principles of jurisprudence. See citations in Rosenthal, translator’s introduction to *The Muqaddimah*, 1:xliv–xlv.

institutions, or timekeepers in the region's major mosques."<sup>10</sup> At first, it may seem odd that his treatment of the sciences would be delayed until the sixth and final chapter of the *Muqaddimah*. It is not because sciences are unimportant, or of second order importance, to Muslim elites, but rather because sciences are not integral to urban life. Like other aspects of urban society, sciences are a luxury or convenience neither natural nor necessary. Sciences are unlike crafts. Crafts are a necessity. They are linked to gainful occupations, and because they are, Ibn Khaldûn introduces, then analyzes them in chapter 5 of the *Muqaddimah*, prior to his enumeration and assessment of the sciences.

Both the placement of science and the distinction between crafts and sciences reveal the organizational vision of Ibn Khaldûn about his new science. It builds materially from manual, physical labor to refined, intellectual pursuits. It builds thematically from desert to sedentary civilization. It builds diachronically from notions of statecraft that relate to religious norms at different angles: peripheral in tribal dynasties, central in the caliphate, then asymmetric in the royal/military empires that followed the caliphate. The six chapters of the *Muqaddimah* sort out from the most general to the most specific:

- (1) On human civilization and the part of the earth that is civilized
- (2) On desert civilization, among tribes and savage nations
- (3) On dynasties, the caliphate, and royal authority
- (4) On sedentary civilization, countries, and cities
- (5) On crafts and ways of making a living
- (6) On sciences, their acquisition and study. (43)<sup>11</sup>

In assessing the *Muqaddimah* in general and its organizational structure in particular, one must remember that Ibn Khaldûn was more than a jurist and a littérateur—he was also a teacher. Teachers repeat, not to be redundant but to communicate the same thought on different occasions and often to different audiences. A practic-

<sup>10</sup> Ahmad Dallal, "Science, Medicine, and Technology: The Making of a Scientific Culture," in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 213.

<sup>11</sup> This list has been modified slightly here for rhetorical effect. Hereafter parenthetical citations of page numbers refer to the present edition of the *Muqaddimah*.

ing jurist fond of *adab*, Ibn Khaldûn wrote as he taught. He propounded novel ideas that he both documented and qualified. He repeated himself, often with different examples or sources, in order to make the same point in multiple contexts, and perhaps for multiple audiences.<sup>12</sup>

It is the principle of Ibn Khaldûn's argumentation that remains the same. To appreciate that principle in its stark originality, however, we need to consider two crucial instances relating the bases of jurisprudence to the laws of evidence in depicting historical data. As a jurist he approaches his new science within the parameters of juridical reasoning, yet precisely because jurisprudence too is a science it is not till chapter 6 that Ibn Khaldûn discusses the relationship between it and his own method. Jurisprudence is the crucial science for Ibn Khaldûn. To understand his persistent, foundational use of juridical logic, one must first grasp what he says in chapter 6 about jurisprudence as a science and then return to chapter 1, where he introduces the decisive distinction between two terms that pervades his entire book but only makes sense from the perspective of juridical logic. The two terms are *khabar*, or Event, and *hadîth*, or Tradition.<sup>13</sup>

For Ibn Khaldûn jurisprudence is both a science and a pedagogical tool. Though its provenance is religious law, its practice also informs linguistics or rather lexicography. In chapter 6 the connection of these two scientific fields, *fiqh* and *lugha*, jurisprudence and lexicography, is made in compelling argumentation, at once novel and subtle. After establishing that *ijmâ'*, or consensus, is a third kind of evidence (after the Qur'ân and the Sunnah) for jurisprudence, Ibn Khaldûn explains:

Now many of the things that happened after the Prophet are not included in the established texts [the Qur'ân and

<sup>12</sup> Muhsin Mahdi depicts this practice as an expedient strategy for Ibn Khaldûn: "It was necessary for Ibn Khaldûn to use a specific style of writing through which he could successfully impart to the intimate circle of the few the doctrines intended for it without allowing the many to suspect even the existence of such doctrines in the *'Ibar* [the larger project to which *The Muqaddimah* is an introduction]" (Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldûn's Philosophy of History* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957], 117).

<sup>13</sup> Because of their central role in Ibn Khaldûn's method, these two words, Event (*khabar*) and Tradition (*hadîth*), will be capitalized throughout the remainder of this essay.



the Sunnah]. Therefore, they [religious scholars] compared and combined them with the established evidence that is found in the texts, (and drew their conclusions from analogy) according to certain rules that governed their combinations. This assured the soundness of their comparison of two similar (cases), so that it could be assumed that one and the same divine law covered both cases. This became (another kind of) legal evidence, because the (early Muslims) all agreed upon it [*bi-ijmâ'ihim 'alayhi*]. This is analogy [*qiyâs*], the fourth kind of evidence. (347)<sup>14</sup>

The subtlety of this approach is its connection of analogy to consensus as part of a continuous process. Earlier, in the case for upholding the Sunnah, Ibn Khaldûn had also argued that “the Sunnah, as it has been transmitted to us, is justified by the general consensus (to the effect) that Muslims must act in accordance with traditions that are sound.”<sup>15</sup> There are four elements without which law could not be law in an Islamic key: the Qur’ân, the Sunnah, consensus, and analogy. Though the Qur’ân would seem to be prior to consensus, it is in fact the consensus of the Community of Believers in Allah and His Last Prophet who confirm that the Book is the Revealed Word to Muḥammad, just as the Sunnah becomes forceful because it too reflects this same consensus. Nor can analogy work, as the above quotation makes clear, except as a further application of the principle of consensus. Consensus, in short, is the glue, the cohesive element, that informs and fortifies every step of the judicial process that safeguards Islam as a divinely guided community.

To a person who has heard the lectures or read the book that became the *Muqaddimah*, it is evident that Ibn Khaldûn is investing *ijmâ'*, or consensus, with a special property, a collective will, an *'aṣabîyah*.

*'Aṣabîyah* is the major neologism permeating all of Ibn Khaldûn’s work. Franz Rosenthal translates it throughout as ‘group feeling.’ Some have criticized that standardized rendition of

<sup>14</sup> Words or phrases given in parentheses are the translator’s, while those in brackets are mine. For further explanation of the use of parentheses in both the 1958 edition of the *Muqaddimah* and in the abridged one, see pages xxxii and xliii, in the present edition.

<sup>15</sup> Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 3:25.

*‘aşabîyah*, considering it too static and natural an English equivalent of what remains for Ibn Khaldûn a variable pinned between the state (*dawlah*) and religion (*dîn*). Moḥammed Talbi, for instance, defines *‘aşabîyah* as “at one and the same time the cohesive force of the group, the conscience that it has of its own specificity and collective aspirations, and the tension that animates it and impels it ineluctably to seek power through conquest.”<sup>16</sup> The last element—the drive to power through conquest—seems to fall outside the juridical realm, unless one realizes that the law also is an instrument of power, whether through persuasion or domination. Jon Anderson comes closest to understanding the itinerancy of Ibn Khaldûn’s usage when he writes that “*‘aşabîyah* seems to be a concept of relation by sameness, opposed both to the state (*dawlah*) based on relations of difference or complementarity, and to religion (*dîn*), which alone supercedes it.”<sup>17</sup> Religion does supercede *‘aşabîyah*, but it does so by redefining it rather than denying it. The concept of consensus, valorized as the glue or binding element of Islamic law, functions with the force of *‘aşabîyah*, at least during the period of the early caliphate.

And so it is not ambiguous but ambivalent use of language that characterizes Ibn Khaldûn. As a jurist who is also a littérateur, he does not employ a technical term out of context; rather he applies a concept to fit the argument at hand. As miriam cooke has observed, for Ibn Khaldûn “a word used metaphorically may convey the meaning more clearly than a conventional word, because it conveys itself and also a ‘possible consequence,’ i.e., the double/multiple level of meaning prized by writers.”<sup>18</sup> The same may be said of his coining of new terms. He coins new terms like *‘aşabîyah* or *‘umrân* or *badâwah* with a specific range of meanings, one of which may be to amplify the notion of a known word, as *‘aşabîyah* deftly does with the juridical concept of consensus.

Reliance on metaphor also allows Ibn Khaldûn to demonstrate how the same word, like the same event or person, can be viewed differently over time, and also from different places in the same

<sup>16</sup> Moḥammed Talbi, *Ibn Khaldûn: Sa Vie—Son Oeuvre* (Tunis: Maison Tunisienne de l’Edition, 1973), 44.

<sup>17</sup> Jon W. Anderson, “Conjuring with Ibn Khaldûn,” in Lawrence, *Ibn Khaldûn and Islamic Ideology*, 120.

<sup>18</sup> cooke, “Ibn Khaldûn and Language,” 36n.27.

time frame. Perhaps the most crucial argument that Ibn Khaldûn makes on behalf of history as an Islamic science is that historians alone among Muslim scientists can explain how Islam arose out of a context of orality and nomadism/primitivism (*badâwah*) to become a proponent of both writing and civilization (*hadârah*). What had been speech and a habit became writing and a craft.<sup>19</sup> Yet the very lifeline of Islam depended on maintaining the connection between literacy and orality, between writing and speech, as also between civilized and nomad. In short, analogy, while it had its most immediate application in law, could, and should, also be applied to the understanding of the laws of history—above all, the history of Muslim civilization.

Now, when speech was a habit of those who used it [the pagan Arabs and early Muslims], these (linguistic matters) were neither sciences nor norms. At that time, jurists did not need them, because linguistic matters were familiar to them by natural habit. But when the habit of the Arabic language was lost, the experts who made it their speciality determined it once and for all with the help of a sound tradition and of sound rules of *analogy* they evolved. (Linguistic matters) thus became sciences the jurists had to master, in order to know the divine laws. (347–48; emphasis added)

Analogy applied to history is not the same as analogy applied to law, however. The strategy of one science is imported to the practice of another. It is crucial to understand how the connection emerged and developed in Ibn Khaldûn's imagination, for the same term when used in divergent contexts also embraces new connotations.

Put differently, new connotations require new facts which analogy itself cannot provide. On this point Ibn Khaldûn is clear,

<sup>19</sup> It may be confusing to speak of writing as a craft when the sciences include the sciences linked to the Arabic language—grammar, lexicography, syntax, style, and criticism as well as literature. But Ibn Khaldûn's unwavering criterion is manual labor, so that both the art of writing and book production are listed as crafts (chap. 5, pp. 327–28), while not only medieval Arabic language but also Qur'anic Arabic (Muḍar), South Arabian Arabic (Himyarite), and Spanish Arabic are treated, along with poetry and the distinction between poetry and prose, in chapter 6 as instances of scientific production.

though his clarity as a historian has always to be qualified by his status as a jurist. As he writes in chapter 6,

the meanings of words cannot be established by analogy, if their usage is not known, although, for jurists, their usage may be known by virtue of (the existence of) an inclusive (concept) that attests to the applicability of (a wider meaning) to the first (word). . . . (This is so) only because the use of analogy (in this case) is attested by the religious law, which deduces the soundness of (the application of) analogy (in this case) from the (general norms) on which it is based. *We do not have anything like it in lexicography.* There, only the intellect can be used, which means (relying on) judgment. . . . It should not be thought that the establishment of word meanings falls under the category of word definitions. A definition indicates (the meaning of) a given idea by showing that the meaning of an unknown and obscure word is identical with the meaning of a clear and well-known word. Lexicography, on the other hand, affirms that such-and-such a word is used to express such-and-such an idea. The difference here is very clear.<sup>20</sup>

What Ibn Khaldûn is explaining comes closest to what modern linguists call the distinction between stipulative and conventional definitions. Elsewhere, Ibn Khaldûn notes that “knowledge of the conventional meanings in general is not sufficient for [jurisprudence].”<sup>21</sup> Lexical or conventional definitions link a specific word to a known idea, creating synonyms within a familiar realm of limited association, while stipulative or juridical definitions take an unknown and obscure word and link it to the meaning of a clear and well-known word, enlarging the connotative range of the latter while adding heuristic value to the former because of its novelty. While the difference is far from clear to most people, it is both clear and compelling to Ibn Khaldûn: stipulative definitions become the hallmark of his new science.

<sup>20</sup> Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 3:331–32 (emphasis added). The connection between *‘aşabîyah* (group feeling) and *ijmâ‘* (consensus) discussed earlier relies on just this distinction: *ijmâ‘* is not identical with *‘aşabîyah*, yet *‘aşabîyah* in Ibn Khaldûn’s use of the word does convey the force of *ijmâ‘*.

<sup>21</sup> Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 3:26.

The key strategy for students of Ibn Khaldûn is always and everywhere to recall that he is at once a jurist and a littérateur. His move to the latter, as in the above excerpt, does not falsify his standing in the former. He is not trying to undercut the Islamic juridical tradition or to disparage the history of Muslim civilization. He is trying to forge a new science that at once makes Islamic law more expansive and Muslim civilization more resilient, at the same time that it foregrounds him as the interpreter who facilitates and protects both!

Having followed the linguistic turn in juridical logic outlined in chapter 6, we can now return to the beginning of the *Muqaddimah*. The major lexical term is *khavar*, or Event. Ibn Khaldûn already highlights it in the full title for the larger book to which the *Muqaddimah* was intended as an introduction (though chapter 1 was later incorporated along with the introduction into what now appears as the *Muqaddimah*).<sup>22</sup> The crucial comparison is Event to Tradition. Trained as a jurist, Ibn Khaldûn understood both the importance of Tradition and the danger of generalizing its usage. While it was impossible for him to write the history of Islam without attention to the religious sciences, he also deemed it impossible to do justice to the scope and depth of Muslim civilization if restricted to the religious sciences.

Ibn Khaldûn strove to be different, to be a man of his times and more: to grasp a point of balance or measurement (*mi'yâr*) between the norms of belief, religion, and law (*da'wah*) and the demands of state, science, and practical reason (*dawlah*). In schematizing his view of history, he relied on observation and argumentation to offset a blind acceptance of stories, even those that could be confirmed by a 'sound' chain of transmitters. He used the methodology of Tradition scholars but did not accept its claim to be universal in scope. To the claims of Tradition he counterposed Event, the sort of evidence that can be proven or disproven by independent inquiry.

The term Event, however, is itself open to qualification. In Arabic, the full title of *Kitâb al-Ibar* reads: *Kitâb al-'ibar wa-dîwân al-mubtada' wa-l-khavar fî ayyâm al-'Arab wal-'Ajam wal-Barbar wa-man*

<sup>22</sup> See Rosenthal, translator's introduction to *The Muqaddimah*, 1:lxviii, for an explanation of how the original introduction and chapter 1 of the *Kitâb al-Ibar* (*History*) became one book, known collectively as *The Muqaddimah*.

*‘asarahum min dhawî as-sultân al-akbar*. In translation the title becomes: *The Book of Lessons and Archive of Early and Subsequent History, Dealing with Political Events Concerning Arabs, non-Arabs, and Berbers, and with Their Contemporary Supreme Rulers*. If Ibn Khaldûn hopes to offer *‘ibar* (instructions or lessons), their content revolves around understanding Event. What is *dîwân al-mubtada’ wa-l-khabar*? They are the bookends of history, the beginning and the end, with *khabar* having a multilayered meaning. It is both Event and outcome or sequel. Given Ibn Khaldûn’s disposition to use linguistics in the service of his new science, *al-mubtada’ wa-l-khabar* are framed as grammatical terms, specifically, the subject and the predicate, that is the beginning and the sequel or end, of a nominal sentence. The subject becomes the early conditions, or first instances, of social organization, namely, *badâwah* or desert civilization, which sets the stage for what follows it, namely, the emergence of world civilization (*‘umrân*) through sedentary or urban civilization. From the very title of *Kitâb al-‘Ibar*, *khabar* becomes the key word, or signifier, the cipher, for what will be the showcase of his new science, namely, the interplay of oral and written, primitive and cosmopolitan, Arab and non-Arab, in the making of oecumenical or world civilization. *Khabar* is at once Event, sequel, outcome, civilization.

At the same time, however, Event retains another, more juridically weighted meaning. Event is integral to Tradition scholarship but as a subsidiary link: Events were the accounts of the persons whose integrity was being reviewed in order to verify or disqualify what they reported as Tradition. For Ibn Khaldûn, the grammatical and juridical meanings of Event expand into something more vital and visionary: the surplus of labor, but also of thought, that produces a model of civilization across time and space. The linchpin to transforming Event into this new conceptual domain was *muṭâbaqa*, or conformity. Even while eschewing the idea that all forms are external, Ibn Khaldûn did believe in conformity, namely, the correspondence between what one remembered as Event and historical reports of what others witnessed as Event.

Methodologically, the passage linking Tradition to Event while also distinguishing between them is the most crucial one in the *Muqaddimah*. It occurs at the outset of chapter 1, where Ibn Khaldûn sets forth the criteria of assessment for his own historical

project. Here he pits knowledge of the nature of civilization against criticism of the personalities of transmitters. It is a double move: he is not saying that the appraisal or criticism of the personalities of transmitters is invalid or useless, but he is saying that its use should be limited to norms and values. While crucial to laying out a religious system, it cannot, and should not, guide historical inquiry.

Though Rosenthal's translation is apt, it is best comprehended within the larger argument about the rules of scholarly inquiry that separate law from history, Tradition from Event:

Personality criticism is taken into consideration *only* in connection with the soundness (or lack of soundness) of Muslim religious information. . . . [For Events, by contrast,] a requirement to consider is the conformity (or lack of conformity) of the reported information with general conditions). . . . [And so] the correct notion about something that *ought to be* [*inshâ'*] can [only] be derived from (personality criticism), while the correct notion about something that *was* [*khabar*] can [and should] be derived from (personality criticism) and external (evidence) by (checking) the conformity (of the historical report with general conditions).<sup>23</sup>

The difficulty of this passage is precisely its pithy understatement. At first glance, it seems to be just a matter of tenses, the shift between subjunctive (normative) and indicative (past/present/future). The Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui has provided a straightforward translation that reflects this level of reading: "The normative draws its sense solely from itself, while the account, which is indicative, draws its sense both from itself and from an ex-

<sup>23</sup> Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 1:76–77 (emphasis added). "Personality criticism" is Rosenthal's choice to define the subdiscipline of *ḥadīth* scholarship known as *'ilm al-jarḥ wal-ta'dīl*. Ibn Khaldūn provides perhaps his best explanation of this term in examining the appeal of the Mahdī among the Fāṭimids by surveying all the *ḥadīth* relating to the Mahdī. In introducing this long and often convoluted section (51) of chapter 3, he notes that "*ḥadīth* scholars acknowledge negative criticism [of the personalities of *ḥadīth* transmitters] to have precedence over positive criticism" [*'inda ahl al-ḥadīth anna al-jarḥ muqaddamun 'alā al-ta'dīl*] (Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah*, 2:158). The one exception, of course, is the *Saḥīḥayn*, the two *Ṣaḥīḥs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, which, though still open to criticism, are considered to be at a different, higher order of soundness than other Sunni collections.

ternal fact which corresponds to it.” Laroui is condensing the earlier, more complex analysis of another North African historian, the Tunisian Moḥammed Talbi. Talbi, like Laroui, agrees that this passage is the decisive methodological statement in the entire *Muqaddimah*. Yet Talbi explains the intricacy of this phrase as turning on a linguistic usage, in this case not grammatical but rhetorical. “Arab rhetoricians,” observes Talbi, “divide language into two categories: *inshâ’* and *khabar*. What is prescribed as a norm or Tradition (*inshâ’*) cannot be qualified with any other datum: it functions as a command or a query, while Event (*khabar*) is open to either confirmation, qualification, or refutation by other sources both internal and external to itself.”<sup>24</sup>

For Talbi, the introduction of *inshâ’* as Tradition is yet another application of analogy by Ibn Khaldûn. In other words, its rhetorical use is extended to a new field of inquiry, the demarcation of historical inquiry from juridical investigation. Since no scholar before Ibn Khaldûn had summarized the process of *ḥadîth* verification as *inshâ’*, its use here stamps Ibn Khaldûn as radically different; it demarcates his new science from the efforts of all his predecessors. But precisely because neither the dyad of Tradition/Event nor its importance will be transparent to nonspecialists reading the *Muqaddimah*, it seems necessary to frame the context in which this crucial use of analogy takes place.

The practice of law depends on the soundness of characters in the chain of transmitters. The core methodology for juridical scholars is the integrity or soundness of those who claim to have received the report of an esteemed person, in this case, the Prophet Muḥammad, whose words and deeds become the Sunnah, or model for Islamic law, during all the successive generations of devout Muslims. To understand the centrality of Tradition studies, one need only consider the commendation of Tradition offered by Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi, one of its most renowned and cosmopolitan advocates:

There is no way for us to obtain knowledge of the divine laws . . . except through the report of the Prophet. . . . There

<sup>24</sup> For Abdallah Laroui, see *Islam et l’Histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999), 144n.11. Moḥammed Talbi’s *Ibn Khaldûn: Sa Vie—Son Oeuvre* (see note 16) remains one of the outstanding introductory books on the distinctive terminology and the even more distinctive historical vision of Ibn Khaldûn. The quotation here is taken from page 33, note 1.



is also no way for us to have knowledge of the sayings of the Prophet . . . , except by receiving reports which go back to him by successive links and transmission, whether they are in his words; or they are interrupted Traditions whose transmission was verified by a group of the Companions and the Successors . . . and in our time there is no way to receive these reports except to follow the literature written in the science of Tradition.<sup>25</sup>

Even though the author of this passage lived in the eighteenth century, 300 years after Ibn Khaldûn, he was reflecting a comparable worldview. Observance of the law was the backbone of collective Muslim life. Jurists had to make decisions based on Islamic principles, and those revolved around a double axis: the Messenger and the Message, the Prophet and the Qur'ân, each reinforcing the other, but with different textual domains. While the Qur'ân exceeds 6,600 verses, most Muslim jurists and scholars agree that only some 500 verses have a legal content. Though these verses, often quite long, do provide elements for a coherent legal system, they need to be supplemented in a society based on divine law. And so the locus of attention became the vast legacy of attributions to the Prophet. Collecting, verifying, and systematizing Traditions occupied enormous scholarly labor in the aftermath of the rapid expansion, then consolidation of an Islamic polity.

Among the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence that evolved, the eponymous founder of one, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, was renowned for both his knowledge of Tradition and his skill in applying Tradition to the demands of jurisprudence. Once, we are told, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was asked how many Traditions a scholar needed to know in order to give a *fatwa*, or authoritative legal opinion. His response was 300,000–500,000!<sup>26</sup> Even if we were to accept the middle figure of 400,000 Traditions as the baseline of knowledge requisite for juridical scholars issuing *fatwas*, the dedication to Tradition dwarfs the attention to Qur'ânic data, despite the towering importance of the latter.

<sup>25</sup> Marcia K. Hermansen, trans., *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shah Wali Allah of Delhi's "Hujjat Allah al-Baligha"* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 387.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

Perhaps even more daunting than the task of mastering Tradition was the subsidiary task of winnowing out the true from the false. By the third century after the *hijrah* (exodus),<sup>27</sup> the tracing of *isnâd*, or chains of transmission, had become a fixed part of Islamic legal training. One book catalogs all the various categories of malfeasants who make up Traditions. They range from atheists and heretics to outright falsifiers of Traditions, including those who would invent Traditions in order to embellish religious stories they told in mosques and hence collect larger donations from gullible believers!<sup>28</sup>

In order to establish his new science, Ibn Khaldûn the jurist had to both affirm his own practice of Tradition criticism<sup>29</sup> while also allowing for another way to approach human social organization, which for him is the basis of global or world civilization (*‘umrân al-‘âlam*). Hence it is crucial to understand how his forensic skill as a littérateur allowed him to cite Event, itself an ancillary part of Tradition scholarship, as an independent term conveying the surplus of meaning that he wanted to impart to the study of human social organization or the history of world civilization. Demarcating Tradition from Event, while affirming both, became the pathway to his new science.

As crucial as is the distinction between Tradition and Event, it is important not to overanalyze Ibn Khaldûn’s motives for invoking, then pursuing this distinction. Was he smuggling philosophical reason into the domain of law and history? Was he a secularist undermining transcendental absolutes with pragmatic alternatives? Was he a crypto-Sufi jurist offsetting external formalism with internal dynamism? Even while all these speculations have circulated about Ibn Khaldûn, their confirmation, or disavowal, depends on

<sup>27</sup> That is, the exodus of the Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Medina, due to the threats on his life, and those of his followers, from hostile Quraysh. It occurred in 622 C.E. and became the baseline for measuring years and centuries in the lunar, or Islamic, calendar.

<sup>28</sup> Farhat J. Ziadeh, “Integrity (*‘Adalah*) in Classical Islamic Law,” quoting al-Bustî, *Kitâb al-majrûhîn*, in *Islamic Law and Jurisprudence: Studies in Honor of Farhat J. Ziadeh*, ed. Nicholas Heer (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 89.

<sup>29</sup> *Hadîth* criticism is in effect the science of personality criticism (*‘ilm al-jarḥ wal-ta’dîl*), as explained *supra* in note 23. Though introduced at the outset of Book One of *Kitâb al-Ibar* (see p. 35n.1), it is not fully explained till much later, requiring the reader to make explicit the connection that is left implicit by Ibn Khaldûn.

a prior question: what difference did Ibn Khaldûn project between himself and most of his predecessors as well as his contemporaries? Above all, he was a *littérateur* cast as a jurist. His novelty was linguistic: (a) to use old terms in new ways and (b) to introduce new terms that might reflect the deeper layers of actual experience. He remained engaged by dyads or binary expressions of major phenomena, even as he often invoked dyads in order to qualify or even invert them. The intricate relationship of crafts to sciences, earlier discussed, is but one major instance of dyadic logic pushed to new limits. Crafts are a crucial category, related to custom yet different from it. Crafts, like custom, may be practiced everyday, but the former are also marked as intrinsically useful. They are indispensable to science and the sciences, even when the latter seem to distance themselves from their material origins. In the same way, Ibn Khaldûn seems to privilege writing over orality when, toward the end of chapter 5, he asserts that “writing is the most useful craft” (331). Writing allows for calculation and scientific inquiry. It permits one to move over the range of symbols. It makes possible “the habit of intellection” (332). Because writing emerges at the core of urban cosmopolitan life, it, rather than poetry or oral communication, would seem to be the centerpiece of world civilization. Yet poetry remains a desideratum at the heart of sedentary culture, and the final sections of the final chapter (6.51–59) of the *Muqaddimah* are devoted to extolling the benefits, and clarifying the challenge, of poetry for city dwellers, whether they be Arabs or non-Arabs.

No one will ever know the full set of conversations between Ibn Khaldûn and Tamerlane.<sup>30</sup> Addicted, as both were, to debate and argumentation, they must have discussed the nature of dynastic power, the collective urge to control (*‘aşabîyah*), and also the relationship between primitive/nomadic life (*badâwah*) and the demands of urban civilization (*ḥaḍârah*). Samarqand and the splen-

<sup>30</sup> Fischel, *Ibn Khaldûn and Tamerlane*, 29–48, provides an English translation of Ibn Khaldûn’s summary accounts of his meetings with Timur, but they are clearly just that, summaries, at the same time that the larger report to which they allude was cast in the form of a letter to the Marinid ruler, Abu Sa’id, of Fez, and so are designed to please, or at least not alarm, the ruler of the region where Ibn Khaldûn’s closest personal and professional ties remained till the end of his life (Fischel, *Ibn Khaldûn and Tamerlane*, 110–12n.199–201).

dors of its courtly life remain the legacy of Timur's cultural sophistication and organizational prowess; the *Muqaddimah* and, in its shadow, *Kitâb al-'Ibar* remain the legacy of Ibn Khaldûn's juridically inspired and linguistically channeled genius.<sup>31</sup> If you cannot travel to Samarqand, you can read the *Muqaddimah*. In it you will discover the marvel of a civilizational vision that exceeds both time and space, precisely because it is so attentive to each.

<sup>31</sup> The modern Syrian playwright Sa'dallah Wannus imagines a parallel declaration from Ibn Khaldûn, though his is penned as a retort by Ibn Khaldûn to one of his students (Sharaf ad-dîn) who is critical of his collaboration with Tamerlane: "History will not remember except the science which I have created and the book which I have written" (Sa'dallah Wannus, "Munamnamât tâ'rîkhîyah," [Historical Miniatures] in *Al-a'mâl al-kâmilah* [Damascus: Ahâli, 1996], 418).

