Ibn khaldun

Ibn khaldun is a historian of logic and evidences, ibn khaldun was born in Tunis and died in Egypt, his education includes history, physics, Arabic poetry, hadis, jurisprudence, mathematics, and Islamic studies…he was also acquainted in Islamic and Greek philosophy. He worked as secretary and ambassador and adviser to various sultan and princes in Andalusia and Maghreb. His min intervention in history is his meeting and negotiation with timur leen: the great world conquers. The Islamic world during the 14th century was in general in the phase of decline and disintegration except few areas. the western North Africa -were ibn khaldun grew and lived for 15 years- was a spectacle of chaos and desolation, there ibn khaldun drew lessons from the events of history and was motivated to reflect on the meaning of these events. Ibn khaldun discovered the nature of history and was indeed the first one who looked to the history as a science having for its subject all the social phenomena in man’s life. Kitab al ibar consist of three books. The first deals with history. The muqaddimah deals with the science of culture and civilization. The book is not an ordinary work of history but go beyond ordinary history, it is an analysis of history and its events where we he could draw laws from it. Ibra means the bridge to cross from the events to go back to them.

Ibn khaldun main stated that the laws of history are eminent in the history itself and they are present in it. Ibn khaldun regarded himself as the discoverer of the science of history because he consider it as the science that study all the phenomena of man’s life. He Introduced a philosophical approach to historical writing based on Greek and Islamic philosophy. History is information about human social organization, it deals with different aspects of civilizations such as savagy and socialization, royal authority and dynasty, ways of making leavings. History is comprehensive before one attempts to understand history he should study all sciences. By developing a philosophical methodology for historical research and in his emphasis on society and civilization, Ibn Khaldun distinguished himself within the Greco Islamic tradition. History is analyzing rationally the events of history not only reporting the events. For ibn khaldun, History as a search for truth conducted as a logical enquiry based on axiomatic truths (self evident or universally recognized truths), logic and an understanding of regional and chronological peculiarities. Greek historians may have seen patterns in human history, but they usually shied away from metaphysical explanations. Aristotle said that Greek philosophy is not a science because it deals with particulars. He spoke about inductive and deductive reasoning informed by personal experience and encyclopedic knowledge of the differences in time and place in world history. For him history is an inductive science, we make conclusions from particulars, and we make universal and general laws from particulars. The particular event is understood against its social context- the individual is subordinate to the universal. The general comes before the particular. . In history the focus is on human association, on the collective, on nations, tribes, on human culture or 'Umran.

Then, he spoke about the three axioms or principals or fondemental truths (dialectical model of ibn khaldun):

1. Man is the child of his environment. Influence of local environment and food provided there. He argues that desert inhabitants who lack grain and seasoning but live on meat and milk are healthier, and eat less are better looking, and superior in character and more intelligent than people who eat seasoning and agricultural food. The reason he hypnotized is that excess of food is transformed into moisture that will affect the brain and causes stupidity, and carelessness. Hence, each environment and its diet determine the physical, mental, and spiritual qualities of each civilization.
2. The rise of two natural groups: The Bedouins and the sedentary people. He compared the qualities of the two groups. Bedouins-Badawa- prior in nature (Aqdam)-they had nomadic society- tribal- no political institutions- their way of life render them tough and disciplined held together by a social bond(asabiyyah) in the harsh environment of the desert. Whereas Sedentary people- Hadara- dwellers of towns and cities- they lived in sophistication- luxury corruption-they were less conservative- the social bond (asabiyyah) confined to fellow citizens, to family members, then it becomes weaker little by little. Bedouins are prior to sedentary people. The toughness of Bedouin life is followed by the softness of sedentary life. He analysis the characteristics of civilizations. The most important is assabiya and group feeling it is a central concept in ibn khaldun’s study of history. Asabiyya (Group Feeling) esprit de corps-solidarity. Derived from ‘asab “to bind”…the key to understand the social and cultural development from Badawa to Hadara. Assabiya is an important factor in social cohesion. The concept of assabiya brings ibn khaldun to the third axiom.
3. Man is political by nature. Kingship is a necessity of existence, natural for human being, natural end for Bedouin civilization. The royal authority cannot exist without matter, so when civilization disintegrates its form the dynasty inevitably decays as well. He alludes to the praiseworthy qualities that are associated to royal authority: group feeling, respect for religious laws, when these laws are lost it is the decline of civilization.

Ibn Khaldun’s Philosophy of History:

 He viewed history as an evolution that unfolds logically and orderly. It is a science; it contains within itself cyclical movements. Laws of history are immanent in history and belong to its nature. For him, history does not have a definite end or a place in a universal plan or a move towards perfection. The facts are observed, correlated and explained without any effort to fit them into a theistic interpretation. Things, however, are what they are by the will of Allah- by their constitution.

Religion functions as a form of 'asabiyyh and is part of the growth cycle. The activity of God coincides with the natural process. God "permits" (ya'dhan) certain states to decline and others to arise.

Despite of his religious orthodoxy, ibn khaldun applied scientific principle to his study of events. He gathered facts rationally. He applies there is a separation in his work between the purpose of science and religion. The facts that he draw are in accordance with religion. He seems that he is separating the natural from the supernatural. He leaves to religion what is supernatural while natural is accessible to what is rational. Humanity is the subject of history; god is the cause of the immutable regularity of these causes.

 Ibn Khaldun’s conception of power:

Divinely religious laws and rational politics (Letter of Tahir Ibnal Hussein (d.822) to his son Abdallah). An epistle of political - administrative nature= “Mirror for Princes”genre. Power and virtue. “Virtues of judiciousness and moderation; warning against the vices of the arbitrary exercise of power; & of stinginess; how to choose governors; consult with jurists and ‘ulama; wealth is sterile if it is merely stored up; less taxation; care for the kadi’s-office, impartial administration of justice; regular payment of salaries; attendance to the military.

Power is neither good nor bad; it is used in the maintenance of the state whether it is good or bad. But it is a commodity; it helps in furthering the society interest and the labor of human hands and success of the state. Power is **not** the most important factor in the civilization’s success. Ibn khaldun focused on how power is acquired, maintained, and lost.

He seems to separate politics from religion and to move from the particulars to generals or universals. In his letter stated that human social organization is necessary. He differentiates between the revealed religious law and the political law. The religious law is useful for this world and for the other world. The rational law is useful only for this world.

Each civilization or state takes 3 or 4 generations. A state does not dye necessary after these 4 generations but it is ready for the decline. Human society is an eternal up and down movement, it develop not to something higher but to something different that comprises both the new and the old together. Victory is to the stronger assabiyya. Religion functions as a kind of assabiya. History is a “fan” art, it is a new kind of philosophical knowledge.

Other sources:

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. This is why he says that history is a science whose laws can be inferred from the history itself.

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 civilization. His conclusions were, as he tells us in his Autobiography, based on practical knowledge and direct observation, as well as academic theory.

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.