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EBN ḴALDŪN, ABŪ ZAYD ʿABD-AL-RAḤMĀN

EBN ḴALDŪN, ABŪ ZAYD ʿABD-AL-RAḤMĀN b. Moḥammad (b. 1 Ramażān 732/27 May 1332; d. 26 Ramażān 808/17 March 1406), the historian famous for the general theory of history and civilization brilliantly expounded in his *Moqaddema*.

His life. He was born in Tunis into a family that claimed South Arabian roots and residence in Spain since soon after the Muslim conquest. It belonged for centuries to the aristocratic leadership of Seville. His great-great-grandfather left the city, which was soon to fall to the Christians, in the second quarter of the 7th/13th century to join the rising Hafsid dynasty in Northwest Africa. There, his descendents continued to hold positions at court and to cultivate their intense devotion to scholarship. As was customary, the future historian received the best education available. He might have spent his entire life in his native Tunis if the Black Death had not claimed both his parents, simultaneously with a temporary decline of Hafsid power. Not long thereafter, he left the city and soon joined the Merinids in Fes, where he was able to widen and conclude his higher education among the scholars assembled there. The two most decisive special influences on his development would seem to have been his family's pride in, and sense of belonging to, Spain (reinforced by teachers of a similar background) and the ravages of the Black Death, which put an end to the adolescent's security and disrupted his familiar environment.

After less than three years in Fes during the rule of Abū ʿEnān, he apparently fell under suspicion of pro-Hafsid leanings and was imprisoned for twenty-one months, to be released only after Abū ʿEnān's death in early 760/late 1358. Having supported Abū Sālem, who soon became Abū ʿEnān's successor, he was rewarded with official appointments, including his first semi-judicial duties, the *maẓālem* jurisdiction, but after another change in government, he decided to move to Granada, where he arrived in Rabīʿ I 764/December 1362. His Spanish sojourn, which lasted slightly over two years, included a diplomatic mission to the court of Pedro the Cruel, giving him the opportunity to visit his family's native Seville. Back in the turbulent Northwest African power struggle of Hafsids, Merinids, and ʿAbd-al-Wādeds, he sought to find his niche in Bougie, Biskra, and, again, Fes. After a decade of uncertainty, he gave up and attempted to settle in Spain, but an extradition request by the ruler of Fes forced him to return. He took refuge with the ʿAbd-al-Wāded Abū Ḥammū of Tlemcen and lived for a while in nearby ʿObbād. He became convinced, however, that his best course for the time being was to withdraw from active politics. He had long had good relations with influential tribal groups and, therefore, now sought out the Awlād ʿArīf in Qalʿat Ebn Salāma. During the two years he stayed there, he began work on his world history. Within a period of five months, he completed its *Moqaddema* in Rajab 779/November 1377. Growing restless and feeling the need to continue his large project where he could count on access to the necessary library resources, he returned to Tunis in the following year. At first, he received a warm reception at court and had the opportunity to teach and lecture. Yet, things began to sour, and under the pretext of going on the pilgrimage, he escaped to Egypt, where he arrived in 784/December 1382. He stayed in Egypt for the last third of his life and left the country only for brief periods to perform the pilgrimage, to visit Syria and Palestine, and to participate in a diplomatic mission that was to bring him in contact with Tīmūr in Damascus in 803/1401. In a remarkably short time after his arrival in Egypt, he succeeded in establishing himself at the court of the country's new ruler Sayf-al-Dīn Barqūq (792-801/1390-99). He was appointed to a succession of important academic positions and to the Malikite judgeship. As was the ordinary situation in academic and judicial affairs, this involved politics almost as fierce as what he had been used to before and resulted in frequent changes and dismissals. He died a few days after his re-appointment as judge.

While in Egypt, he kept up his personal and diplomatic ties with Northwest Africa. He clearly retained a deep attachment to the land of his birth. He was

much devoted to his family, first to his two siblings, of whom the younger, Abū Zakarīyāʾ Yaḥyā (733-80/1333-79), also was active in regional politics and as an historian wrote on the ʿAbd-al-Wādeds of Tlemcen; his death at a comparatively early age cut short a promising career. Ebn Ḵaldūn's own family suffered much from his many peregrinations. They were often held hostage when he moved, and it was always difficult to obtain permission for them to join him. Diplomatic intervention at the highest level was required for them to be allowed to follow him to Egypt. Their voyage ended disastrously with their ship sinking near Alexandria with the loss of the passengers and their possessions. His wife and, we are told, five daughters drowned. What happened to his two or three sons who apparently were not involved in the disaster, we do not know for certain, nor do we have trustworthy information on his later family life.

Published works. The world history, *Ketāb al-ʿebar wa dīwān al-mobtadaʾ wa'l-ḵabar fī ayyām al-ʿArab wa'l-ʿAjam wa'l-Barbar*, has a first chapter and an added appendix, both of which were already treated by Ebn Ḵaldūn himself as independent works, the first known as *Moqaddema* (Introduction) and the second as *Taʿrīf*... (Autobiography). There is no satisfactory modern edition of either the *ʿEbar* or even the *Moqaddema*. The former is to be quoted according to the seven-volume Būlāq printing of 1284/1867 (tr. of the Berber history by de Slane, P. Casanova, and H. Perès, Paris, 1925-34, 1956, recent tr. of large excerpts by A. Cheddadi, Paris, 1986), and the *Moqaddema* according to the edition of E. M. Quatremère (Paris, 1858). The *Moqaddema*, in its entirety or partially, has been printed innumerable times, and there are translations in many languages. The long autobiography, which is particularly remarkable for its author placing himself in the history of his larger environment, has been well edited by Moḥammad b. Tāwīt Ṭanjī (*al-Taʿrīf be-Ebn Ḵaldūn wa reḥlatoh ḡarban wa šarqan*, Cairo, 1379/1951) and has recently been translated, unfortunately with omissions, by A. Cheddadi as *Le voyage d'Occident et d'Orient* (Paris, 1980).

Ebn Ḵaldūn does not mention other works by himself anywhere in the *ʿEbar* (there is a reference in the *Taʿrīf* to a geography of the Māḡreb supposedly written for Tīmūr on his request). An abridgement of the *Moḥaṣṣalafkār al-motaqaddemīn wa'l-motaʾaḵḵerīn* on religious philosophy by Faḵr-al-Dīn (Ebn al-Ḵaṭīb) Rāzī as commented on by Naṣīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī, entitled *Lobāb al-Moḥaṣṣal fī oṣūl al-dīn*, was written by Ebn Ḵaldūn in Ṣafar 752/April 1351 as a remarkable exercise by someone not yet twenty years old (ed. L. Rubio,

Tetuan, 1952). His treatise on Sufism has so far been edited twice; the careful edition by Moḥammad b. Tāwīt Ṭanjī (*Šefāʾ al-sāʾel le-tahḏīb al-masāʾel*, Istanbul, 1957) includes a discussion of the authenticity of its attribution to Ebn Ḵaldūn (tr. R. Perez as *La voie et la loi*, Paris, 1991). Some of his occasional poetry, of which he himself did not think very highly (*Taʿrīf*, p. 70, tr. Cheddadi, p. 68), is included in the autobiography, as are specimens of his correspondence and the full text of two lectures. Other published fragments from his scholarly activities are autograph *ejāza*s and endorsements of the works of others (*taqrīzá*). (For the former, see H. Ritter, in *Oriens* 6, 1953, p. 83 and pl. XVII, with the unusual feature of giving the date of his birth, and Azmeh, bibliography, nos. 127 and 269; for the latter, see F. Rosenthal, in *Oriens* 27-28,1981, pp. 190f.)

The general ideas on history of the *Moqaddema* no doubt came to Ebn Ḵaldūn in the course of his work on the world history project. In turn, they governed his elaboration of it, as is most clearly indicated by his choice of the dynastic/genealogical arrangement. It suggests the rise and fall of ruling groups according to the strength and weakness of their internal coherence, their “group feeling” (*ʿaṣabīya*); their progress from simplicity through power and wealth as necessary for civilization (*ʿomrān*) to wasteful luxury under the preeminent force of economic factors; and their inevitable replacement in endless cycles—a combination of psychological and material determinants of human society. Intellectual history takes a backseat in the historical presentation, but much space is rightly assigned to it in the *Moqaddema,* which thus gives a condensed overview of the historical developments of all facets of Muslim civilization that appears convincing and remains instructive to this day. In the *ʿEbar*, the role of religion is by and large restricted to showing awareness of earlier religions and later sectarian developments and occasionally stressing the uniqueness of Islam. In the *Moqaddema*, the real problem confronting the conservative Muslim thinker was how to integrate the powerful phenomenon of religion into the historical process understood as motivated by human needs. This is done by assigning revealed religion an exceptional position that is of exceedingly rare occurrence but undeniably real.

Persia in Ebn Ḵaldūn’s view of history. Brought up within an ethnic mix very remote and different from that of the eastern part of the Muslim world, Ebn Ḵaldūn probably had no personal connection whatever with Persians or persons claiming some sort of Persian heritage all the while he lived in

Northwest Africa. This appears to have also been the case even in Egypt. There he became keenly aware of the Turkic antecedents of its recent rulers, but only his meeting with Tīmūr brought him briefly face to face with the Asian reality.

For pre-Islamic history, he naturally followed the sources available to him that celebrated the greatness of the political and intellectual power of the Persians (*Fors*). Here as throughout his history, he dispensed with strict literal accuracy in quoting his sources, as the coherent and effective picture he aimed at and, indeed, succeeded in presenting required much condensation. His procedure is illustrated by the twenty-three lines of printed text (*ʿEbar* II, pp. 263 f.) devoted to Bahrām Gōr and abridged from Ṭabarī (I, pp. 854-69; Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, pp. 85-109): The legendary material is omitted, while references to Bahrām Gōr's difficulty to become ruler owing to his "Arab" education, to astrologers, and to material wealth are preserved, as are, somewhat surprisingly, those to the large numbers of soldiers in the armies of that time. Ebn Ḵaldūn's Berber environment made him aware of the need for indicating the proper pronunciation of names: He thus explained the last consonant of Ōšahanj as pronounced somewhere between *q*, *k*, and *j* (*ʿEbar* II, p. 155), ostensibly on the basis of the work of the Spanish scholar Sohaylī (with whose famous commentary on the *Sīra*—which, however, does not seem to contain the information—he must have been familiar since childhood). The Arabic translation of the Latin history of Orosius is used for data on Persian history, which mostly cannot be traced to the original text or the preserved Arabic translation (see the discussion by ʿA. Badawī in his edition of Orosius, *Taʾrīḵ al-ʿālam*, Beirut, 1982, pp. 467-97).

With the Muslem conquest, the pre-Islamic Persians lost not only their political power but also their ethnic identity; their numbers were dramatically reduced (*Moqaddema* I, p. 269), and they seemingly continued an almost invisible existence in geographical terms. Other groups, of ultimately the same Japhetite descent, in the first place the Turks with their great ethnic variety, the Deylamites, the Kurds, etc., appear to dominate the Eastern Muslim history with a sprinkling of Arabs; when diplomacy required it, "the Turks and the Arabs" were said to be the most notable peoples in world history (*Taʿrīf*, p. 351; tr. p. 216). Linguistic criteria for Persian affinity were not available to Ebn Ḵaldūn, even if he recognized some words as being of Persian origin. He had to be satisfied with declaring the Deylamites to be of Median origin through descent from Japhet's son Madai (Genesis 10:2) and expressing doubt as to Ebn

Saʿīd Maḡrebī's genealogy connecting them with Shem's son Ashur (*ʿEbar* III, pp. 381ff., IV, p. 417). He sensibly preferred Persian descent from an official of Ḵosrow Anōšīrvān for the Samanids to a fanciful Arabic connection with Sāma b. Loayy (*ʿEbar* III, pp. 311f., IV, p. 333). He accepted an alleged Persian origin for the Barmakids but had an easy time disproving a royal Sasanian pedigree for the Buyids as resulting from abject flattery by people unaware of the principles laid down in the *Moqaddema*, which would have made it impossible for them as descendents of the Sasanian dynasty to achieve leadership among the Deylamites in as short a span as seven or eight generations since the end of the Persian empire (*ʿEbar* III, p. 395, IV, p. 426). In view of the South Arabian origin claimed for Ebn Ḵaldūn's family, it is perhaps understandable that he expands upon Persian dominance in Southern Arabia in earliest Islam (*ʿEbar* IV, p. 212). For Northwest Africa, he accepted without question Persian origin for the Rostamids who ruled Tāhart around the 3rd/9th century (*ʿEbar* VI, p. 121), even if in general he was more skeptical of dubious genealogical claims than, for instance, Ebn Ḥazm, one of his greatly admired sources (Ebn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿArab*, ed. E. Lévi-Provençal, Cairo, 1948, p. 475).

Within the set limits of his personal situation, Ebn Ḵaldūn treated the history of the Persians intelligently and fairly, although having lost political power, they were unable to interest him as a lasting historical phenomenon. Their cultural importance was another story. The traditional high regard for their ancient culture and its effect upon early Islam were obvious to him. Their literary and scientific accomplishments were alive enough for him to compare the Tatars' alleged throwing of the books of the libraries of Baghdad into the Tigris to the fabled destruction of the Persian books in Ctesiphon during the Muslim conquest as doing irreparable damage to human civilization (*ʿEbar* V, p. 543). He was fully conscious of their later enormous contribution to Muslim scholarship. His first work was based on two obviously Persian thinkers, Rāzī and Ṭūsī (*ʿEbar* V, p. 543; *Moqaddema* III, p. 274), but it appears to have been only in Egypt that he learned about the flourishing intellectual life in the East exemplified by his older contemporary Taftāzānī (*Moqaddema* III, pp. 92f., 274). It was probably there that he became acquainted with (the Arabic translation of) the great historical work of Rašīd-al-Dīn Faẓl-Allāh, whose system of genealogical presentation he compared to his own (*ʿEbar* V, p. 549). He had, of course, earlier been familiar with the "non-Arab" contribution to Arabic linguistics, which made him wonder how this had been possible for non-native speakers; his explanation was that those scholars were non-Arab only by descent but not in linguistic habit (*Moqaddema* III, pp. 217, 316). Their

art and architecture were impressive (ibid., I, pp. 317f.). They gave a strong impulse to music in Islam (II, p. 360). They promoted literary criticism through the Qurʾān commentator Zamaḵšarī (III, p. 293). Ebn Ḵaldūn would not speculate about the ethnic origins of Eastern scholars, but he realized their Persian background. The civilizations of the Spanish/Maḡrebī and Asiatic parts of Islam lived in a way harmoniously together in him, as we would expect it to be the case in one of the world's foremost historical thinkers.

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