

## The Khaldunian Vision of the World

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*In this paper, we explain the Khaldunian representation of the world and show how Ibn Khaldun understood and judged the events of his time. First, we analyze his geographical representation of the world. We then show that for him, it was the time of the genealogy, and so we evaluate the importance, the weight of the ancestors. Finally, we comment on his desire for truth and his checking principle.*

“Ibn Khaldun is one of the best witness of the state of the world... We are surprised to see how much in his Introduction, *Muqaddima* and as in his *Autobiography*, this historian has an intense consciousness of the universal destiny: about the past of the world, and the actual zones of prosperity and that of decline”<sup>1</sup>.

We agree with Abdesselam Cheddadi’s opinion of Ibn Khaldun. Throughout the pages of his books, Ibn Khaldun showed a clear view of the world in which he lived and also of the parts that he knew only from lectures. We add to the *Muqaddima*, all his writings — *the Book of Examples* (*Kitāb al-‘ibar*)<sup>2</sup> and his *Autobiography* (*al-Ta’rīf*)—, because we find in them a very strong unity.

In his construction and in his theories, he utilizes the work of authors such as al-Idrīsī with his *Geography* and historians such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Mas‘ūdī as well as many others. In the different parts of his universal history, he mentions several authors, providing proof of his extensive culture: Maghribi, Andalusian and also Near East sources are mentioned.

His lengthy stay in Egypt allowed him to change his initial project which was to write only a history of the Maghrib<sup>3</sup> and to discover and use a rich and varied bibliography, especially

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1 Cheddadi (A.), 2002, p.XIII (in French). All along this paper we shall refer to his translation because it give us good indices for the passages we shall quoted in our study.

2 All along this paper, I shall also refer to the edition of Beyrouth of the *‘Ibar*, 1968.

3 “So I write a book of history... And I base it about the history of the two nations which actually dwell in the Maghrib... These nations are Arabs and Berbers. It’s attested for a long time that these peoples lived in the Maghrib and fixed their homeland”. *Muqaddima*, ed. Beyrouth, 1956, I, pp.6-7 ; Cheddadi (A.), *op.cit*, p.8.

about Turkish peoples and tribes.

“Then, I traveled to Orient and enjoyed its lightnesses, I went to the pilgrimage... So, I could make up my ignorances (blanks) about the history of foreigners’ kings (those who were not Arabs) of these lands and about Turkish Dynasties... So my book includes the history of the human being”<sup>4</sup>. The impact of genealogical narrations also deeply marked his book as we shall see.

### 1. *The geographic representation of the Universe*

“In the beginning was the world, the seas and the continents, the Earth and its peoples”<sup>5</sup>. This beautiful and poetic sentence of Gabriel Martinez-Gros truly expresses Ibn Khaldun’s interest in the world and explains his admiration for the *Geography* of al-Idrīsī who he mentions several times in his work<sup>6</sup>.

#### *In the beginning was the Earth and the seas*

It is particularly apt that Ibn Khaldun begins with a brief summary of the *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq*<sup>7</sup> in the *Muqaddima* which he also refers to as *the Book of Roger*<sup>8</sup>. Ibn Khaldun claimed that it was not a summary of his book: “It’s too long and in my book, I shall insist especially about the Maghrib, the Berbers’ country and also about the Oriental Arabic lands”<sup>9</sup>. This view seems to focus his reflexions onto the Mediterranean world and he clearly excludes the extreme northern lands described by al-Idrīsī<sup>10</sup>. However, we must note that his concept of the territory, of the space, reappears in each part of his book, in each introduction, when he had to introduce a new area or a new country; he did this again in his *Autobiography*<sup>11</sup>.

Another example is in the sixth volume of the *Ibar*, which he devoted to the history of the Maghrib<sup>12</sup>. In this he wrote: “We follow the method observed in the *Nuzhat al-mushtāq* written

4 *Ibid*, *Muqaddima*, I, p.7 ; Cheddadi, p.9.

5 Martinez-Gros, 2006, p.48.

6 *Muqaddima*, I, pp.74, 80, 86, 89, 90, 91 ; Cheddadi (A.), *op.cit*, pp.266, 270, 274, 279. N.B. I use this translation for references because I think they are more sure than in the Arabic versions. For instance, « The authors who inform us about the inhabited Earth and its boundaries, its big cities, its mountains, its seas, its rivers, deserts, sands as Ptolemy in his *Geography* and as the author of *Roger’s Book* divide this Earth in seven parts that they named climates ».

7 The title as translate is: *The pleasure of whom like very much peregrination around the world*.

8 Roger is the Norman king of Sicily who invited al-Idrīsī to stay in his court and also to write his *Geography* that he dedicated to him.

9 *Muqaddima*, I, p.86 ; Cheddadi (A.), *op.cit*, p.270.

10 But he relates the history of the peoples who live in the northern coast of the Mediterranean : Spaniards, Romans, Franks, Byzantines.

11 *Al-Ta’rīf*, VII, pp.1182-1186 (N.B. the *Ta’rīf* is added at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> and last volume of the *Ibar*); Cheddadi, *Autobiography*, pp.224-226.

12 *Ibar*, VI, pp.193-204.

by al-‘Alawī al-Idrīsī al-Ḥammūdī for the king of Sicily, Roger son of Roger. Al-Idrīsī was the host of this prince, in Sicily, after his family has fled from the principality of Malaga. He wrote his book in the middle of the sixth century. He used a very numerous books as those of al-Mas‘ūdī, Ibn Khurdādhbih, al-Ḥawqālī, al-‘Udhri, Ishāq b. al-Munajjim, Ptolemy, and many others”<sup>13</sup>. In his prologue, al-Idrīsī mentioned 12 Arabic geographers.

First, we explain the reasons he chose his sources and reveal why he did not use the many books of classical Arab geography that he definitely knew about, but which did not interest him, for his analysis. Although he does mention some of the texts, generally this is to dispute their assertions.

Ibn Khaldun ignores the classical Arabic geography texts because this literature was not relevant after the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In the words of André Miquel, this geography was the “daughter of the Caliphate”, so was no longer valid. The Islamic Empire has gone and Islamic lands were parceled in smaller regional entities. Thus Ibn Khaldun’s analysis was narrowly linked with his present, with the state of the world in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The geographical work closest to his background was al-Idrīsī’s, and we must remember that he was writing in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century, when many revolutions had occurred in the Muslim world.

These lands he describes in his book are surrounded by seas. He describes the Mediterranean with its different names and he gives a history of the Mediterranean that was dominated by different peoples in different times and he includes important information about the men and the sea: those who have maritime knowledge and those who learned such knowledge, who won but then failed<sup>14</sup>.

### ***The weight of the contingency, or the chronology on the geography***

The period covering the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries was a turbulent time that encompassed events that changed the face of the world. The Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba was overrun in 1031; the Turks became the protectors of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1055; and the Fatimids of Cairo declined slowly but surely until their definitive end in 1171. The idea of linguistic and cultural unity of the Islamic world also faded. These successive collapses aided and accelerated the Christian offensives in Spain, Sicily and Syria. For a lengthy period, Arabs lost their political initiative and at the same time the Persian<sup>15</sup> and Turkish languages became dominant throughout Asia. Furthermore, the Berber language slowly returned to the plains of Maghrib<sup>16</sup> but was resisted in the mountains. The Arabic language thus diminished in importance.

13 *Muqaddima*, I, p.89 ; Cheddadi (A.), p.278.

14 *Muqaddima*, I, pp.451-459 ; Cheddadi (A.), 2002, (32<sup>th</sup> chapter, pp.563-568). I have presented a paper about « Navigation in the Kingdom of the horsemen of the steppe (i.e. Mamluk Egypt) » (Tunis, December 2009) where I comment this text. It will be published in the proceedings of the colloquium.

15 We do remember the renewal of Persian language with Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāme* and the advent of Pehlevi language since the 11<sup>th</sup> century. So, we can see that this Khaldunian’s remark is right.

16 He had a very good remark about the acculturation of the Hawwāra tribe in contact with the Bedouin Arabs and the progressive loosing of the Berber language. Cf. Chapoutot-Remadi, (2004), p.99.

All these was breaking, and these changes explained how the notion of *mamlaka* which was developed by Arabic classical geography was decaying. The prominent authors of this imperial writing were from the Middle East, especially Baghdad, when their town was the navel, the center of the world. Iraq was the center point of all their descriptions, and Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Iran and Armenia, surrounded Iraq like a crown. The center was in the Orient.

After the 11<sup>th</sup> century, as André Miquel said, “the Maghrib, i.e. the Islamic Occident, made a crashing to pieces entry in the geographical literature”<sup>17</sup>. This was not only because new centers of geographical production appeared in this area but also because the description of the Maghrib became more precise. In this domain, an Andalusian push asserted its authority with authors such as al-Zuhrī, al-‘Udhri, Ibn Sa‘īd<sup>18</sup>, al-Bakrī and especially al-Idrīsī. With al-Idrīsī, the old Ptolemaic conception of the climates reappeared. He included all countries within seven climates, that is, in seven successive zones that run in latitude from the equator to the North Pole, and from the East to the West. He divided each climate into 10 sections. Inside each climate, al-Idrīsī began his description from the West, illustrating the swing of the center into the West. We must recognize that al-Idrīsī knew these areas better than he knew the Orient and we have to add that his book is the first geography text that includes Europe. This characteristic explains why this book was the first that was known, indeed, even famous, in Christian Occident.

The discussion of al-Idrīsī’s work makes easier to see Ibn Khaldun’s affinity for it. He had the same consciousness of the changes that were occurring in the world. He connects the Frankish progress in Spain, Sicily and Syria with the arrival of both the Saljuqids Turks at Baghdad and the Hilalian nomads in Ifriqiya and the Maghrib.

Al-Idrīsī followed the Christian conquests in Andalusia - he mentions for example, the capture of Almeria in Spain, in 1147 - in Palestine, Ascalon falling in 1153 - and in Ifriqiya, the Norman occupation of the Kerkenna Islands and the sanction of Djerba on 1153<sup>19</sup>. Ibn Khaldun devoted the same attention and wrote frequently about these same events<sup>20</sup>. Both, they observed the synchronism of the Christian offensives against the Arab Coasts.

The chart of al-Idrīsī adheres to his theories: The space divided in 70 sections coincides completely with that of Ibn Khaldun who mentioned 69 regions and peoples. Elsewhere he quotes another author who systematized in tables the data of al-Idrīsī. This was the Syrian geographer Abū al-Fidā’ (d.1331), prince of Ḥamāh in the Mamluk times and the author of *Taqwīm al-buldān*<sup>21</sup>. Thus once again this is a geography mainly centered on the Mediterranean

17 Miquel (A.), 2003, p.64. After the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Maghribi Geographic books became prominent.

18 About these authors look at Mu’nis (H.), 1986.

19 Bresc (H.) et Nef (A.), 1999, p.18.

20 *Muqaddima*, I, Almeria, pp.110, 454, 1103 ; Ascalon, pp.103, 456 ; Djerba, p.457 ; Cheddadi (A.), p.566 ; *Ibar*, V, pp.428-429.

21 Abū al-Fidā’, *Taqwīm al-buldān, Géographie d’Aboulféda*, ed. Reinaud (M.) and De Slane (Le Baron Mac Guckin), Paris, 1840 ; the numerous mentions refers to *Ibar*, II, p.169.

that Ibn Khaldun conceives and retains for his universal history.

Ibn Khaldun's chart roughly follows this proposal: "The chart grants ten names for Black Africa, ten for the Maghrib, twelve for the central territories of Islam - Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Iraq - twelve to Iran and its Indian extensions, twelve to the Christianity - since Gascony until Armenia - thirteen to the Turks and their Cousins, Gog and Magog, and China"<sup>22</sup>.

The same concern of universality linked the two authors. Even if it can be said that this geography was traditional because it was still too reliant on Ptolemy's conception, it was new through its actualization in the description and in the shape of the world it presented<sup>23</sup>.

Therefore, what we must keep in mind, is that the two authors were conscious of the turning point, of the fate of the Islamic world. The Khaldunian vision of the peoples of the earth is narrowly linked with their territory. Chapters on tribes also include the geographic location and the territory in which the people live; *majāl* and men are narrowly linked like a couple that influence each other.

## 2. The time of the genealogy: the weight of the ancestors

After the definition of the space comes the human presence on the Earth, so "Books II and III of the *'Ibar*" concerned the majority of the world's nations<sup>24</sup>; they had an universal purpose. However, if this presentation is examined more closely, we see that the focus is actually on the history of the Arabs: the book is organized around the Arabs and their generations. True, all other contemporary peoples are mentioned within each generation, but this is to allow Ibn Khaldun to locate his proposed history of the Arabs: to situate it within his universal framework.

The impact of the "men's science", *'ilm al-rijāl* or the genealogical concept appears immediately. He again begins again his genealogical representation of the peoples of the Earth in his *Autobiography* as the Book II of the *'Ibar*, and particularly that of the Arabs. However, in the introduction to his second volume, he remembered a debate about the impact of genealogy<sup>25</sup>.

Ibn Khaldun therefore distinguishes four successive generations since the creation of the

22 Martinez-Gros (G.), 1998, pp.315-334. We share the same idea about the Khaldunian conception of the world.

23 For all this, look at *Muqaddima*, I, pp.87-137 ; Cheddadi (A.), 2002, *Muqaddima*, Suppl. II, pp.270-312 and especially pp.274-278 « a detailed description of the map ».

24 *'Ibar*, II, p.3. The first title is clear about his purpose « The Book II about the History (*akhbār*) of the Arabs and their generations, their dynasties from the beginning of the Creation to today ». Then he writes a second title, II, p.23 « About the Nations of the world, their different generations and something about their genealogy ». His approach is now very clear. He puts the history of the Arabs in connection with the other peoples of the world.

25 *'Ibar*, II, pp.4-11.

world<sup>26</sup>. For him, the terms *ṭabaqa* and *jīl* are similar<sup>27</sup>. These generations aren't biological but the terms signify eras and ages, as long as geological times. His concern about peoples and civilizations that marked the history of humankind in ancient went back a long way.

About this vision we must remember his sentence "The differences which are seen between the generations (*ajyāl*)<sup>28</sup> in their behaviour are only the expression of the differences which separate them in their economic way of life".

He considered consequently:

The generations of the "Disappeared Arabs", *al-'Arab al-bā'ida*, named also, the "True Arabs", *al-'Arab al-āriba*.

The second generation is the "Arabized Arabs", *al-'Arab al-musta'riba*.

The third generation encompasses "the Arabs who succeeded the Arabs", *al-'Arab al-tābi'a li-l-'Arab*<sup>29</sup>.

The fourth and the final generation is the "Desarabized Arabs"<sup>30</sup>, *al-'Arab al-musta'jama*; Ibn Khaldun named them "the hybrids ones".

Before we explain his project and note the differences that he saw between these generations, we have to show how they succeeded one another. In a preliminary chapter to his presentation about the first three generations, he explains that the advent of each age was always provoked by the disappearance of the preceding one<sup>31</sup>.

### *Nasab and linguistic*

It is interesting to note that the four ages as defined in this classification are viewed primarily according to their relationship with the Arabic language. The linguistic criteria is the first one and most important in the thought of Ibn Khaldun; so his chapter about the state and the nature of the Arabic language in the *Muqaddima*<sup>32</sup> is fundamental. In addition, his

26 We must note the unity of the Khaldunian's theory, he saw also in his cyclic view of the evolution always four generations, see for example *Muqaddima*, I, p.307 ; Cheddadi (A.), (2002), III, p.439. We find this explanation about the birth, the growth, the apogee and the decline of each dynasty, in his history.

27 Look at his own definitions of the two terms in many passages. *Muqaddima*, I, pp.253, 304-307, 392-394, 399-400 ; Cheddadi (A.), pp.439-441.

28 Martinez-Gros (G.), 2004, he divides the time of Islam from 640 to 1380 in seven lives. If we remember that Ibn Khaldun evaluates, the life of any state at 120 years (3 times of 40 years each=120 years) : four lives for Islam and three after the disappearance of the Empire.

29 *Ibar*, II, pp.33-83, 84-91, 494-503.

30 It's a barbarism but I don't find a term to tell Arabs who lost their language.

31 *Ibar*, II, p.28 « When these times finished and when these peoples by the fact of the divine Power... »

32 « The language is a technical habit »; The contemporary Arab language is an independent one, with no relations with those of Mudhar and Himyar, (i.e. Northern Arabic and Southern one of the Peninsula) ; the language of sedentary and urban peoples is an independent language which differs with that of Mudhar ; look at *Muqaddima*, I, pp.1040-1042, 1042-1048, 1049-1053 ; Cheddadi (A.), (2002), pp.1105, 1106-1111, 1111-1114... He had a very interesting analysis about this aspect ; look for these passages in the translation of Franz Rosenthal, *Ibn Khaldūn, An Introduction to History*, vol.III, chapter VI,

classification, mentioned above, shows the deep unity of his thinking about the historical evolution of the language. In conclusion, we must note that as the Arabs progressively lost their power, the Arabic language lost its purity. Ibn Khaldun emphasized this aspect in many passages of his book<sup>33</sup>.

Ibn Khaldun's observations on the hybridism of the Arabic language as it came into contact with the languages of the peoples subjected by them are remarkably accurate<sup>34</sup>.

"More contacts with non-Arabs mean greater remoteness from the original language. For as we have started a (linguistic) habit results only from instruction... In Ifriqiya and in the Maghrib, the Arabs had contacts with the non-Arab Berbers who constitute the bulk of the population ('*umrān*) of (those countries)... Thus there originated another mixed language in which the non-Arab (element) was preponderant for the reason mentioned"<sup>35</sup>.

In fact, Ibn Khaldun designates as the fourth *ṭabaqa*, the Hilal and Sulaym Arabs who were the subjects of his sixth volume of the '*Ibar*. They played an important role in the Arabization of the Maghrib<sup>36</sup> but in his time he had another image of them.

He writes further "On the coasts of the Maghrib, the Berbers are the inhabitants of the country, their language is those of the land, except in the cities. The Arabic language is drowned (flooded) in the Ocean of the Berber language"<sup>37</sup>. So, we can thus see that they played a major role in the big changes in the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>38</sup>.

The same process occurred in the Middle East when the Arabs came into contacts with Persians and Turks and in Andalusia when Spaniards mixed with non-Arabs, Galicians and European Christians.

We return to the genealogical examination to analyze another Khaldunian approach: he wrote about the history of the origins of each people and drew schemas to illustrate these: "I represent them as trees whose I draw the roots and the principal trunk, noting the most important ancestor - the eponymous one as we say - of all these peoples, *shu'ūb*, then I draw the different branches which emanate from them. The concrete images are closer in imagination than the explanations that would be given"<sup>39</sup>. As Martinez-Gros explains: "History

pp.315-363.

33 *Muqaddima*, I, pp.1024-1061 ; Rosenthal, III, p.352 ; Cheddadi, (A.), 2002, pp.1086-1113.

34 This problem is still now very actual, especially in the Maghrib. Cf. Dakhliia (J.), 2004, in the foreword, Jocelyne Dakhliia wrote « The linguistic question is crucial in the Maghrib: antagonistic couples pull about the post-colonial Maghrib between two opposites: French against Arabic, Arabic against Berber or Tamazight... tearing, painful binarity of the report/ratio to the languages, the Maghrib of the languages that would express itself in duel : diglossy, bilingualism », p.11.

35 *Muqaddima*, I, p.1047 ; Rosenthal (F.), *Ibn Khaldūn, An Introduction, op.cit*, III, p.352.

36 Camps (G.), (1983), p.7-24 ; Brett (M.), (1979), pp.9-16.

37 *Muqaddima*, I, pp.1058-1061 ; Cheddadi (A.), (2002), p.1123.

38 '*Ibar*, VI, this part is titled « the fourth *ṭabaqa* of the 'Arab al-musta'jama » p.8 ; Cheddadi, (A.), 2004, p.57.

39 '*Ibar*, II : all this volume is full of these drawings, look for example p.16, 19, 23, 40... In front of each chapter about genealogical matter, we find them in all the volumes, VI, pp.178, 182, 252, 272, 281, 285... and so on about the Berber tribes.



is a genealogical tree with its nodes, branches and buds, its sterilities, one is born to with apart one another history”<sup>40</sup>.

For this history of the ancient and distant past, Ibn Khaldun frequently mentioned many authors such as al-Mas‘ūdī, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Athīr and also the most famous genealogy specialist of Ibn al-Kalbī<sup>41</sup>. He also referred to the Bible - the *Isrā’ ilīyāt* - and the universal history of Orosius<sup>42</sup>.

Paul Orosius was a Roman priest and an apologist who was born at Tarragona or at Braga in Galicia about 390 and he died around 417 or 418. Following Saint Augustine’s request, Orosius wrote a universal history in seven books entitled *Historia adversus Paganos*<sup>43</sup>.

The Andalusian authors in general held an important place in the heart of Ibn Khaldun. This perhaps explains the choice of this book which he said was translated into Arabic on the 10<sup>th</sup> century and to which he frequently referred<sup>44</sup>.

### ***Nasab : the Pyramid of the Humanity***

“We created you from a male and female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you might come to know each other...” (Koran 49:13, *sūrat al-ḥujurāt*).

It is possible that this verse of the Koran influenced the approach of Ibn Khaldun and led him to construct such images of the Arabs and all their neighbours.

We return now to the genealogical classification and speak first about the three ages that Ibn Khaldun distinguished and ask who were these “curious Arabs”.

*Al-‘Arab al-bā’ida*, the disappeared Arabs: these are the mythic peoples mentioned in the Koran as ‘Ād, Thamūd, Jurhum who generally lived before the advent of Islam.

The most popular of them are ‘Ād and Thamūd. The two were mentioned 24 times in the Holy Book<sup>45</sup> and they represent the peoples of the pre-Islamic times and depicted as rebels. They refused to listen to the prophets Hūd and Šāliḥ who were sent by God and so were destroyed<sup>46</sup>.

Jurhum was the tribe who met Agar, the servant of Abraham, and her son Ishmael, when

40 Martinez-Gros (G.), 2007, p.109.

41 Fischel (W.J.), (1961), pp.109-120.

42 The travel relation of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī tells the circumstances in which the *Book of Histories* of Orosius was offered by the Byzantine Emperor Roman II (948-963) to the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (912-961) with also the treaty of Dioscoridos. Then, this chronicle was translated under the reign of his successor al-Ḥakam al-Mustanṣir. Nevertheless, Ayman Fu’ād al-Sayyid corrects this information found in Ibn Juljul, *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’*, and said that the Byzantine emperor was Constantin VII. Cf. al-Maqrīzī, 2002, I, pp.78-80 and the footnotes.

43 Ed. and translated by Arnaud-Lindet (M.-P.), Paris, 1991-92.

44 *Ibar*, II, pp.169, 402.

45 For all these mythic peoples I refer to Déroche (F.), “‘Ād”, p.21 and “Thamūd”, p.869, *Dictionnaire du Koran*, edited under the direction of Amir-Moezzi (M.A.), Paris, 2007 (in French).

46 In numerous verses in the Koran : The destruction of ‘Ād : 29:40 ; 41:16 ; 46:24-25;51:41-42 ; 59:19-20 ; the sanction of Thamūd : 7:78 ; 51:44 ; 54:31 are mentioned.



she discovered the miraculous source of Zamzam after seven journeys between al-Şafā and al-Marwa, the two hills near the site of the Ka‘ba<sup>47</sup>. The tribe negotiated with her for the access to the water in return of their protection. The Jurhum were thus the first inhabitants of Mekka<sup>48</sup>. She appeared as the primordial tribe. Jurhum was issued from the ‘*Arab al-‘āriba*’; he is the brother of Ya‘rub son of Qaḥṭān who is the first to speak in Arabic. The Jurhum inhabited the Sacred land, *al-Balad al-ḥarām* where Ishmael grew up, and he married a woman from this tribe<sup>49</sup>.

This representation is found in the book of another Andalusian Ibn Sa‘īd (d.685/184) titled *Nushwat al-ṭarab fī tāriḫ Jāhiliyyat al-‘Arab*<sup>50</sup>. There followed dissension between genealogists about the classification of the Arabs inside this tripartite tableau. Who were the first Arabs, the true Arabs, ‘*Āriba*’, who spoke the Arabic language for the first time and then taught it to the ‘*Arab musta‘riba*’? The dominant opinion was that they were the southern Arabs. This is the thesis of Ibn Sa‘īd, as we know that he claimed that the majority of Andalusians, his compatriots, who were of Himyarite origins like Ibn Khaldun’s family. Perhaps, he adopted it for this reason?

Another point of his method must be shown. Ibn Khaldun is always careful to situate the Arabs among a universal chronology, so he mentioned at each generation, at each step, the other peoples who lived in the same period. So we can see that he never forgot the others and that his representation of the successive peoples is constant<sup>51</sup>. We can say that Ibn Khaldun, as the first Arabic historians, inserted the history of the Arabs in a continuum.

As Abdessalam Cheddadi wrote: “The Arabic past is situated in a universal frame of Biblical Nations thanks to a genealogical construction where the Arabs find the best place beside the Hebrews, Persians, Rum and so on”.

Indeed, all the Arabic authors situated their own history within an historical continuum. This approach became a necessity when the conquests suddenly enlarged their space and they met the others.

“So the genealogy plays also as the framework of the history of the Arab peoples, giving a base, a materialisation of their continuity in time and in space”<sup>52</sup>.

To explain the approach, we must speak about the Bedouin factor and all the aspects of Khaldunian thought, about this way of life and Ibn Khaldun’s impact on the writing of history;

47 She wandered about the desert without water nor food when the Archangel Gabriel make a miraculous act in finding water.

48 *Muqaddima*, I, pp.631-632 ; Cheddadi (A.), 2002, *op.cit*, pp.714-715 ; Amir-Moezzi (M.A.), 2007, p.540.

49 Cheddadi (A.), 2004, p.39.

50 Ibn Sa‘īd, *Nushwat al-ṭarab fī tāriḫ Jāhiliyyat al-‘Arab*, 1982, 2 volumes ; Ibn Khaldun cited him frequently in the Book II of *Ibar* but without mentioning this title; see for example II, pp.14, 17, 21, 35, 48, 55...

51 See for instance the tableau drawn by Martinez-Gros, 2007, p.130.

52 Cheddadi (A.), 2004, *op.cit*, p.66.

however, we deliberately omit his anthropological approach, which deserves a separate study<sup>53</sup>.

### 3. *The desire of Truth—and the checking principle*

The two preceding points that we developed could be studied without any criticism, but if we think in this way we forget the predominant quality of Ibn Khaldun, who always refuted the traditions transmitted by the ancient and preferred the way of rationality and criticism in all matters. He wrote, for instance:

“The effort of verification is scarce, the care of correction generally weak. The error and the illusion are together conforms to this sort of account, the imitation is anchored in the human nature and transmitted from generation to another one... It’s dangerous to graze the field of ignorance. But the power of truth is irresistible, the demons of the fallacy can be pushed away by the light of the reason”<sup>54</sup>.

#### *An image of world real, moving but without fairy-tales*

If we begin with the geography, we find that Ibn Khaldun is still close to al-Idrīsī because he rejected the fables and enumerated the errors in his foreword. We will mention at least some stories that he invalidated in the books of al-Mas‘ūdī<sup>55</sup>, al-Wāqidi, al-Bakrī and many others.

The first accepted idea he rejects concerned the army of the Jews who were with Moses in the desert. For him Moses’ army could not number six hundred thousand men, because at that time even Egypt and Syria did not have this amount of population. As well, they could not survive in the desert. The Persians and Romans who were more powerful than the Israelites did not have such armies.

He is also skeptical of the fables related by al-Mas‘ūdī about the tale on Alexander and the maritime monsters that tried to prevent him from building Alexandria.

He also rejected the existence of three mythic towns that were mentioned in almost geography texts: the City of Brass, *Madīnat al-nuḥās*<sup>56</sup>, the City of the Doors, *Madīnat al-abwāb*<sup>57</sup> and the City of Columns, *Iram dhāt al-‘imād*<sup>58</sup>. He mentions these tales about these

53 Look at Chapoutot-Remadi (M.) et Bouhdiba (A.), 2006.

54 *Muqaddima*, I, p.3 ; Cheddadi (A.), 2002, *op.cit.*, p.6.

55 *Muqaddima*, I, pp.3-4, 13, 15, 17, 19, 28, 50, 56, 58, 62, 89, 148, 189, 308, 313, 318, 366, 367, 370, 515, 643 ; Cheddadi, (2002), pp.6-7, 12, 15, 14-15, 24-25, 45-46, 226, 252, 254, 257, 278, 320, 351, 442, 445, 450, 492-493, 496, 612, 725 : He said about him that he is « open to criticism and suspicious » even if he is notorious! ; he committed other errors because he related that the army of Moses was strong of six hundred thousand men. This number is impossible in this time. All the numbers of the Israeli people are false. *Muqaddima*, I, pp.13, 14.

56 *Muqaddima*, I, p.58 ; It’s the most famous and we find it in the geographical literature as in the *1001 Nights* tales.

57 Al-Bakrī relates that this mythic town had ten thousand doors! *Muqaddima*, I, p.58 ; Cheddadi (A.), 2002, pp.253-4.

58 *Muqaddima*, I, p.20 ; Cheddadi (A.), 2002, pp.18-20 ; *Ibar*, II, p.35.

mythic towns, in many passages of his book, as I refers in the footnotes.

For two of these tales, two sacred books seem to be contested - the Bible for the story of Moses [Exode,12:37-38] and the Koran for Iram [al-Fajr, 89:7-8]<sup>59</sup>. He can interprets this huge number of Hebrews as the expression of the All-Mighty Divine, as a miracle<sup>60</sup>. Therefore, he did not contest the sacred text, but the interpretations made by the transmitters, the traditionalists. About Iram, for example, he wrote “this is tales of story-tellers, *wa-innamā hādhā min khurāfāt al-quṣṣāṣ* and Iram is not a city but a tribe. It’s related by the most doubtful commentators, *wa-innamā yanqulu-hu ḍu‘afā’ al-mufasssīrīn*. And the supposed columns, *‘imād*, are in fact the tent-pegs”. In addition he provided a grammar lesson.

Nevertheless, may we propose that this mythic city built in the sands of Aden by Shaddād b. ‘Ād, with gold rocks ruby-columns and other jewels, tried to compete with Paradise. Shaddād who heard about Eden, was in fact guilty of an offense against God, guilty of “hubris”<sup>61</sup> and so he was one of the rebels who was mentioned in the Koran and was destroyed.

He included many other critical remarks in his encyclopedic book but I will now, provide some comments on genealogy.

Ibn Khaldun insisted on a genealogical representation but in the same time seemed doubtful. When he wrote that all men descended from the three sons of Noah and that they had an eponymous ancestor, he added: “I don’t know whereupon the genealogists leaned to assert that all the human lineage descent exclusively from three men. Is it only according to the Tradition? It’s impossible, as we have seen”<sup>62</sup>.

About this tale of the origin of humans he commented on the theory that all black peoples descended from Cham (Ham): “The genealogists who know nothing about the nature had imagined that the Blacks are the sons of Cham son of Noah, and that their specific color is issued from the curse of Noah. The effect of this one is reflected in the color of Cham and in the slavery that God imposed as a penalty to all his descent. The curse of Cham is mentioned in the Torah, but not the blackness”<sup>63</sup>.

This episode is in fact related in Book IX:20-27 of the Genesis. No mention is made of the darkening of the skin but it links slavery to the descendants of Cham. We can easily imagine the “slippage” that occurred in history and how the connection between slavery and color came about<sup>64</sup>.

We are never sure whether Ibn Khaldun accepted the principle and the reality of the

59 Ben Cheikh (J.), (1990), pp.71-81.

60 *Muqaddima* (Cheddadi ed.), (2005), p.17 ; Cheddadi, (2002), p.15 ; We do not find this passage in the Lebanese edition of the *Muqaddima*.

61 It’s a Greek notion developed by them when heroes tried to compete with divinity and then he was punished.

62 *Ta’rīf*, VII, p.1186 ; *Autobiography*, p.225.

63 *Muqaddima*, I, p.141 ; Cheddadi (A.), (2002), p.315.

64 Goldenberg (D.M.), 2003, « The Biblical history was the unique legitimation of slavery during more than thousand years! »

mythic individuals who lived for many centuries and had a large number of offspring, such as 'Ād who lived 1200 years, married 1000 wives and had 4000 sons!<sup>65</sup>

He refuted another topos<sup>66</sup> that the ancient remains found by Arabs in many countries were built by *Amalecits*, 'Amāliqa, giants. He wrote "we must not believe as the common people that the Ancients were taller than us... And that the enormous buildings were made by one man!"<sup>67</sup>.

He pursued his refutations about another subject - the origins of the Berbers. He queried that their name came from their strange language "barbara"<sup>68</sup>; that some Berber tribes as Kutāma and Ṣanhāja would be of Yemenite origin and that the Zanāta's claim to descent from the Amalecits<sup>69</sup>.

He also contested the fables relating the authenticity of Fatimid genealogy, in particular the Idrissid story that showed how their enemies, The Abbassids Caliphs and their agents, played an important role in constructing these theories<sup>70</sup>.

All these examples reveal that Ibn Khaldun attempted to clear history of all the *mirabilia*, miracles, the fairy-tales transmitted by the authors across the centuries from one to another without any rationality. In the way he consciously create a new science, a new history.

### ***The Major actors in the world in the 14<sup>th</sup> century***

The world where he lives knows "a swinging of the civilization from the South to the North" and he thinks that "the emptiness created in the South and his regions couldn't stay without future"<sup>71</sup>.

We can answer, without betraying his thought, that the Franks about whom he wrote many pages, inhabited the Northern coasts of the Mediterranean. He considered them an unique people composed of many nations. In the same period, people of the Southern coasts, the Arabs, were eliminated by the Berbers in the West and by the Turks in the East.

"The Nations of the Ancient Persians, Syrians, Nabateans, Tubba', Israelites, Egyptians disappeared... After them came, the Persians of the Second age, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Franks... Then came the Islam with the power of Muḍar... The State of the Arabs disappeared in it's turn... Nothing which was edified by their ancestors survive... The power passed to other non-Arabs peoples: Turks in the Middle East, Berbers in the West, Franks in the North"<sup>72</sup>.

Ibn Khaldun's cyclic theories reappeared in all of his pages. The Arabs had in the past

65 'Ibar, II, p.35.

66 It's a Greek term which signify common sense.

67 *Muqaddima*, I, pp.317, 622 ; Cheddadi, (2002), pp.449, 707.

68 *Muqaddima*, I, p.16 ; Cheddadi, (2002), p.15 ; 'Ibar, VI, p.176.

69 *Muqaddima*, I, pp.234-238 ; Cheddadi (A.), (2002), pp.384-388 ; 'Ibar, II, p.51 ; 'Ibar, VI, p.170.

70 I developed these ideas in another papers about Ibn Khaldun (look at the bibliography).

71 Cheddadi (A), 2002, pp.1207-1208 (This text is found only in this translation, because it comes from a group manuscripts read by Cheddadi).

72 *Ibid*, p.40.

an exceptional fate, as conquerors and as messengers of Islam, but they lost in fine and were eliminated. In many passages of his book, he adds two others factors creating the crisis in his world: the effects of the nomadism (Bedouinism) and of the Black Death. With all these elements he can affirm that his world declined.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the ancient Arab and Islamic empire was now replaced by four Berber kingdoms in the West and many Turkish kingdoms in the East. Much territory was lost and passed into the hands of the Christians states. The civilization that narrowly linked with urban society decayed, allowing the rural society to dominate.

I will now discuss some limitations to the theories of this incredible thinker. He refuted the biblical theories about the Black peoples but unfortunately accepted the climate schema: black peoples inhabited countries so near the equator that the extreme heat colored their skin. He accepted the racial explanations about the inferiority of black peoples.

In adopting the "airist" theory, which is a Greek legacy, he applied it to the other peoples of the human race. In this schema the Arabs appeared as *Ummat al-wasat*, inhabitants of the median climates who had a moderate character with regard to their physical constitution (their body) as their manners<sup>73</sup>. We can add also that they were a moderate color, neither white – as were peoples of the Northern countries – nor black; they resided in the middle one.

Then we find again this theory of the navel that is common to the Greek and many others nations<sup>74</sup>. Ibn Khaldun learned this from a verse of the Koran "We have made of you a Community (*Umma*) of the Golden mean (or the happy medium)" (2:43)<sup>75</sup>.

We can tell that Ibn Khaldun sometimes fell into his own trap because he is not always in alignment with his rationality. For instance, he had a critical attitude toward the genealogical constructions, but he presented always every nation that he wrote about in his book with their supposed mythic eponymous ancestor. If he displayed some irony and if he is often conscious of the false character of the genealogical claims of the Berbers dynasties, even when he refuted them, he made some exceptions<sup>76</sup>.

The constraints of the courtier, of the politic, living in the courts of these kings in the Maghrib and in Egypt, living thanks to the generosity of these powerful and sometimes dangerous protectors, limited the freedom of his speech. Indeed during his long life Ibn Khaldun experienced many episodes of disfavor which obliged him to flee.

Ibn Khaldun had a consciousness and an exceptional lucidity about the changes that occurred in his time. He expressed it as:

73 *Muqaddima*, I, p.142 ; Cheddadi (A.), 2002, p.317.

74 Miquel (A.), 1975, II, p.69 ; N.B. China for instance named itself « the Empire of the Middle ».

75 Contemporary intellectuals used this verse to study the Muslim society and to describe it as a balanced Nation. As Talbi (M.), Tunis, 1993.

76 « All these pretensions are due to the flatteries of those who want to please to the kings in creating these kinds of stories », *Muqaddima*, I, pp.235-237 ; Cheddadi (A.), p.386 seq.

“In the work of the historian, there is another source of error which could be unperceived. That’s the nonobservance of change which affect the situations of the Nations, the generations and which are relied with the changes of the periods and the running of the days... In fact, the conditions of the world, the Nations with their manners, their creeds, do not stayed in the same form nor had a constant character. This is observed at different levels, of the persons, the eras, the big cities as well as the regions, the lands, the States... Contrary to our days, in this end of the eight century, the conditions of the Maghrib change ahead of us and change completely... It was in the world, as if the voice of the life invited to the sleeping, the torpor, to retire within oneself and that the world answered to this call !<sup>77</sup>

The final word of the end is that Ibn Khaldun writings are so imbued with rationality, realism and clarity that they are poignant and moving.

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<sup>77</sup> *Muqaddima*, I, pp.50-51 ; Cheddadi (A.), (2002), p.40.

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