History of Science and Medicine

Ibn Khaldun

Founder of Science of History & Contemporary Sociology

(1332 AD / 732 AH - 1406 AD / 808 AH Born in Tunis died in Cairo)

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With Islam of Muhammad (PBUH) came an era of glittering Muslim civilization which not only benefitted Muslims but entire humanity. The Europe was in dark ages while Muslim world had developed great enlightened institutions of research, education and sciences. Scientists were provided the best possible support, patronage and environment by the Muslim rulers. Not only Muslim scientists but non Muslim scientists were given optimum opportunities, status and rewards. Unbiased Christians and Jews have recognized the magnanimity of the Muslims who appointed able non Muslims at high faculty positions. It is not mere an accident that burst of sharp rise of Muslims with speed of light occurred as soon as they firmly held Quran in their hands. In just 23 year Prophetic life of Muhammad (PBUH) Arabs rose from the bottom pit of disgrace to the highest place in civilization. In the golden and glittering civilization which lasted from the time of the Prophethood (610) till 1257 CE. In no time they became the sole super power. They had a country where sun would not set. But remarkable thing is that the power did not corrupt them absolutely for centuries. They did not become totally drunk and senseless. Of course when this occurred they went down the drain in Baghdad and Spain. For centuries in their glittering and golden civilization without which there was no question of emergence of modern sciences and Europe having pulled out from dark ages. It is unfortunate that the world has again come under the shadows of ignorance and folly of intelligence.

Center to this open heartedness of Muslims were their utmost honesty, respect for human beings, high morals and ethics and their firm belief in accountability. They did not have much greed and they were not slaves of materialism. Of course this was produced in them by Allah’s last and the final divine book Quran and the way Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) practiced and explained the Quran. Muslims did not buy anything unless they made thorough investigation and research no matter who said it. They put all great Greek philosopher and Indian writers works and accepted only what they thought was right and dumped what they thought was based on conjunctures, false beliefs and baseless assumptions. As they did not believe in false gods, statues they also rejected all so called gods in Sciences of all sorts. This of course did not exempt even the history; which was a mere art of compilation of various narrations and accounts without questioning. Today’s media with lot more powerful tools is unfortunately has not only adopted the same attitude but also excelled in fabrications and distortions. One of the most glaring examples of distortions and fabrications is 9/11 and killing and dumping of the body of Osama in sea! Well if you have killed a lion after years of hard work why not publicly display his body? Why were you afraid of someone picking few of his hair and through DNA test proving that he was not Osama? Such questions come to mind of many but media is sealed water tight and no such questions can be raised in the main stream of so called modern media which brags its ability to seal their eyes, ears and minds of common Americans!

Muslim kings like Haroon Rashid, Ma’moon Rashid, Salahuddin Ayyubi and Mehmoed Ghaznawi spent most of their wealth, time and energy on spread of education, research and sciences. Historians are amazed that how in the background of so many wars these kings were able to devote so much time to Science and Education. That again reflects the enormous peace and tranquility inserted in their minds by the Quran and their frequent remembering of the All Mighty Allah! No doubt there as Muslims gradually drifted from Quran their downfall began; but even in this downfall era they produced some giants such as Ibn Khaldun who is regarded by the West as the founder of Science of History and Sociology. His full name was
Abū Zayd ‘Abdu r-Raḥmān bin Muḥammad bin Khaldūn Al-Ḥaḍramī. Wiki pedia describes him as a “Muslim historiographer and historian who is often viewed as one of the forerunners of modern historiography, sociology and economics”

History writing had been vogue from time immemorial. It is of profound interest to the people and the nations. As every nation try to brag about its achievements and as people enjoy dramatization, a lot of mythology is incorporated. There is always room for errors of judgment, misunderstanding and lapses of memory. On the other hand there is a place of fabrications, distortions, yellow journalism. For people the history was just narration and compilation of events or “facts”. Again please let me bring another glittering example . Rita Katz, a member of Israeli army and now stationed in USA creates the videos and statements of so called al-qaed under her organization named SITE. She has an Iraqi Arab background and profusely uses Hollywood technology and actors. Our credible modern electronic media uses these fabricated CDs as facts and “News”. The rest of the world also follows the same. Today we can see huge manipulation of facts and events by the media. In many cases the media is playing the role of theologians and clergies which supported and protected the interest of exploiter class; then kings and now special interest groups which do not believe in humanity, ethics, and morality except when it serves their vested interest. Media which claims to be transparent and unbiased is absolutely opposite. Of course they believe in selective morality.

Ibn Khaldun becomes relevant as he was the first historian who traced the presence of these biases, fabrication and warned against accepting the “news” and information thirsted upon them. As he lived in an era where Muslim states were decay due to enormous wealth and infighting and as they were drifting away from Islam (in the real sense). He spent a good deal of his life in company of various rulers and had good opportunity to observe the behaviors of Kings and rulers. He observed the gradual decay and made powerful analysis of the societies and the reasons for their rise and downfall. He thus laid down the Sciences of Sociology and History. His many terminologies such group dynamics, time management etc are re-invented people of this age without giving due credit to him. Quran produced astonishing clear vision and scrupulous, thoroughness methodology in Ibn Khaldun's life. It is reflected from the fact that he maintained his diary well and produced his own autobiography in which numerous documents regarding his life are quoted word-for-word. The Muqaddimah (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction), also known as the Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun or the Prolegomena a book written by the North African Muslim historian in 1377 which records an early view of universal history. Some modern thinkers view it as the first work dealing with the philosophy of history or the social sciences of sociology, demography, historiography or cultural history and economics The Muqaddimah also deals with Islamic theology, political theory and the natural sciences of biology and chemistry. Ibn Khaldun wrote the work as the preface or first book of his planned world history, the Kitab al-Ibar, but already in his lifetime it became regarded as an independent work. He developed one of the earliest scientific philosophies of history in his masterwork, the Muqaddimah.

Ibn Khaldun in the line of Quranic injunctions and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) condemned “superstition (A big sin in Islam and referred as “jibt” in Quran) and gullible reception and acceptance of chronological historical information.” As a consequence, he pioneered a scientific method to the study of history, which was considered incredibly “novel to his age”, and he often referred to it as his "new science", now associated with historiography. His historical method also laid the foundation for the observation of the role of state, communication, propaganda and systematic bias in history and he is thus considered to be the "father of historiography or the "father of the philosophy of history".

In the Muqaddimah, Ibn Khaldun warned of seven mistakes that he thought that historians regularly committed:
1. Partisanship towards a creed or opinion...
2. Over-confidence in one's sources...
3. The failure to understand what is intended...
4. A mistaken belief in the truth...
5. The inability to place an event in its real context
6. The common desire to gain favor of those of high ranks, by praising them, by spreading their
7. The most important is the ignorance of the laws governing the transformation of human society.

Against the seventh point (the ignorance of social laws) Ibn Khaldun lays out his theory of human society in The Muqaddimah. In this criticism, he approached the past as strange and in need of interpretation. The originality of Ibn Khaldun was to claim that the cultural difference of another age must govern the evaluation of relevant historical material, to distinguish the principles according to which it might be possible to attempt the evaluation, and lastly, to feel the need for experience, in addition to rational principles, in order to assess a culture of the past.

Here are some pearls of wisdom from his scientific historical method in his Muqaddimah:

- "History is a science"
"History has a content and the historian should account for it"

"The historian should account for the elements that gather to make the human history"

"He should also work according to the laws of history"

"History is a philosophical science"

"History is composed of news about the days, states and the previous centuries. It is a theory, an analysis and justification about the creatures and their principles, and a science of how the incidents happen and their reasons"

"Myths have nothing to do with history and should be refuted"

"To build strong historical records, the historian should rely on necessary evidence.

His writings based on his painstaking practical experiments in various courts and associations noticed, determined and ascertained a pattern in the changes that occur in man's political and social organization. Lucid, balanced and rational in its approach, analytical in its method, encyclopedic in detail, his famous Muqaddimah characterizes an almost complete exodus from conventional historiography, discarding conventional concepts and clichés and seeking, beyond the mere chronicle of events, an explanation—and hence a philosophy of history.

The Muqaddimah emphasized the role of systemic bias in affecting the standard of evidence. Khaldun was quite concerned with the effect of raising the standard of evidence when confronted with uncomfortable claims, and relaxing it when given claims that seemed reasonable or comfortable. He was a jurist, and sometimes participated unenthusiastically in rulings that he felt were coerced, based on arguments he didn't respect. He took upon himself the challenge to systematically study and account biases in the creation of history until Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche in 19th century Germany, and Arnold J. Toynbee, a 20th century British historian.

Ibn Khaldun also examines why, throughout history, it has been common for historians to sensationalize historical events and, in particular, exaggerate numerical figures: Whenever contemporaries speak about the dynastic armies of their own or recent times, and whenever they engage in discussions about Muslim or Christian soldiers, or when they get to figuring the tax revenues and the money spent by the government, the outlays of extravagant spenders, and the goods that rich and prosperous men have in stock, they are quite generally found to exaggerate, to go beyond the bounds of the ordinary, and to succumb to the temptation of sensationalism. When the officials in charge are questioned about their armies, when the goods and assets of wealthy people are assessed, and when the outlays of extravagant spenders are looked at in ordinary light, the figures will be found to amount to a tenth of what those people have said. The reason is simple. It is the common desire for sensationalism, the ease with which one may just mention a higher figure, and the disregard of reviewers and critics. This leads to failure to exercise self-criticism about one's errors and intentions, to demand from oneself moderation and fairness in reporting, to reapply oneself to study and research. Such historians let themselves go and made a feast of untrue statements. "They procure for themselves enter-taining stories in order to lead (others) astray from the path of God."[27] (Qur'an 31.6)

The Muqaddimah is the earliest known work to critically examine military history. It criticizes certain accounts of historical battles that appear to be exaggerated, and takes military logistics into account when questioning the sizes of historical armies reported in earlier sources. In the Introduction to the Muqaddimah, Ibn Khaldun directs this criticism towards to famous historians such as Al-Masudi, who is today regarded as the "Herodotus of the Arabs" and who Ibn Khaldun himself regarded as one of the most famous historians up until his time.

As an example, Ibn Khaldun notes that Al-Masudi and other historians reported that Moses counted the Israelite army as 600,000 or more soldiers. Ibn Khaldun criticizes Al-Masudi for failing to take into account certain logistics, questioning whether Egypt and Syria could have possibly held such a large number of soldiers, or whether an army of that size would be able to march or fight as a unit. He notes that the whole available territory would have been too small for such a large army, and argues that if "it were in battle formation, it would extend" several times "beyond the field of vision." He questions how two such parties could "fight with each other, or one battle formation gain the upper hand when one flank does not know what the other flank is doing,"[32] and that a coordinated battle movement in such a large group "would hardly be possible."[33] He argues that the "situation in the present day testifies to the correctness of this statement" since the "past resembles the future more than one drop of water another." He then compares it to the Persian Sassanid Empire, noting that it was far more vast than the Israelite Kingdom and yet the size of the Sassanid army at the Battle of al-Qadisiyyah amounted to 120,000 troops at most (citing the 8th-century historian Sayf ibn Umar). The Muqaddimah states that if the Israelites really did have such a large army, the extent of their empire would
have been far larger, as "the size of administrative units and provinces under a particular dynasty is in direct proportion to the size of its militia and the groups that support the dynasty."
The Muqaddimah further notes that Moses lived only a few generations after Ya’qoob, the founder of the Israelite tribes, according to the Levite tribe genealogy, as described by Al-Masudi. Ibn Khaldun argues that it "is improbable that the descendants of one man could branch out into such a number within four generations." The Muqaddimah also states that there was a general assumption that Sulaiman’s army was similarly large, but Ibn Khaldun refutes this, noting that Sulaiman came only eleven generations after Ya’qoob, and argues that the "descendants of one man in eleven generations would not branch out into such a number, as has been assumed." He then agrees with another statement from the "Israelite Stories" suggesting that Sulaiman’s army had 12,000 soldiers and 1,400 horses. He notes that this was when the Israelite state was at its strongest, making other claims giving larger numbers for the Israelite army unlikely. Ibn Khaldun notes that Jews have claimed the unrealistically large increase in the Israelite population within several generations was possible because it was a miracle of God, a claim that Ibn Khaldun did not dismiss completely. He considers such a miracle highly unlikely, but appears to be open to the possibility.

If one uses Ibn Khaldun principles one can question not only the numbers of Jews killed in Holocaust but also the role of Zionist organizations in collaboration with Hitler in it. It is amazing that who dare to simply raise simple honest questions are labeled as anti-Semite and then with the help of media and state power the person is even punished; a clear reflection of their lack of confidence in their own theories and data.

Khalidun’s achievement was the first critical outlook on human society. His work was a definite break from the past as history was no longer merely an account of a king’s glorious conquest, an empire’s leaps in every facet of material civilization or the magnanimity of individuals.

If it weren’t for a western academic by the name of Franz Rosenthal, most of the world today would have forgotten the genius of Khaldun. Rosenthal translated Khalidun’s work from Arabic into English, bringing the world’s attention to one of the most original thinkers of humanity.

History writing and informatics is not mere drawing room chit chat or discussions, it has serious impact on the society and individuals. It can create serious hatred toward classes of people, the vast majority of whom may have nothing to do with the incidence. Sometime incidences are created and blame is ascribe on the victim classes in order to victimize them further. Glaring example from very recent past is an attack on Sikh temple in Wisconsin where several Sikhs were gunned down in mistaken identity of them being Muslims. Muslims are held hostage by Global Terrorist for crimes which they did not commit and which Islam strongly forbids. Quran clearly prohibits killing of any innocent saying killing of one man is like killing of entire humanity! (“On that account We ordained for the Children of Isra’îl that if any one slew a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he slew the whole humanity: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the whole humanity. Then although there came to them Our messengers with clear (guidance), yet, even after that, many of them continued to commit excesses in the land. Quran-e-Majeed Surah al-maeedah ayat: 5:32 ) Unfortunately the World has forgotten the honesty, objectivity, just analysis and instead is following the doctrine of end justify mean thus allowing all heinous crimes. No wonder world has become full of violence, greed and inhumanity.

Sources