Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and "Ibn Khaldûnism" in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Letters

CORNELL FLEISCHER
Washington University, St. Louis, U.S.A.

Introduction*

It has long been taken as axiomatic that Ottoman men of letters, seemingly almost alone among pre-modern Muslims, were well acquainted with the celebrated Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldûn. Indeed, the fact that Ottoman historians adopted Ibn Khaldûn's ideas on the rise and fall of civilizations well before European orientalists "discovered" the North African historian in the early nineteenth century, would sometimes appear, from the historiographical literature, to constitute their primary, if not sole, contribution to Islamic intellectual culture. Such treatment reflects the larger-than-life stature accorded Ibn Khaldûn by European and, latterly, Middle Eastern scholars, and also the polemical content implicit in discussions of a Muslim thinker "discovered" and prized by Westerners.

Few attempts have been made to guage the intellectual impact of the Ottoman discovery of the Muqaddimah. Received scholarly opinion suggests either that Ibn Khaldûn had a definite but undefined influence on Ottoman historiography or that his ideas nearly revolutionized Ottoman historical thinking. Such judgments mislead by their very generality, and they imply assumptions about the character of Islamic historical thought which do disservice to both Ibn Khaldûn and his Ottoman successors. A closer study of how Ibn

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Arabic and Persian terms and proper names, in appropriate contexts, have been transliterated according to the Library of Congress system, while transliteration of Ottoman Turkish follows the usage of the İslâm Ansiklopedisi.
Khaldun's ideas were absorbed into the Ottoman intellectual tradition clearly in order; but this is a task beyond the scope of this essay. My goal is rather to broach a problem—not only how did historically-minded Ottomans utilize the Muqaddimah, but also why—and to approach that problem at its chronological starting point. The first section of this essay is given to the visible history of the penetration of the Muqaddimah into Ottoman letters. In the second section significant facets of the historiographical tradition into which Ibn Khaldun was received are delineated through an examination of the ideas of Mustafa Âli, a major Ottoman intellectual of the sixteenth century whose historical vision is in many ways similar to that of Ibn Khaldun. My purpose is to demonstrate that the Muqaddimah, while influential, hardly revolutionized Ottoman historical writing. Rather, it was accorded a warm reception by thinkers who found its ideas at once relevant and familiar, because conceptions of sovereignty and of the growth and decay of dynastic states very similar to those of Ibn Khaldun had already been articulated in Ottoman historical literature. The reasons for this confluence, rooted in the special history and historical consciousness of the Ottoman state, are suggested in the conclusion.

Ibn Khaldun in Ottoman Letters

Although it has been said that Muslim scholars writing in the Ottoman domains were familiar with Ibn Khaldun's work as early as the fifteenth century, the textual evidence does not support this contention. The first firm date in the story of the Ottoman adoption of Ibn Khaldun is 1598, when the scholar and poet Veyes (d. 1628) acquired a manuscript of the Muqaddimah in Cairo. Not until the middle of the seventeenth century did Ottoman authors begin to make explicit reference to Ibn Khaldun. The polymath Katib Çelebi (d. 1657) listed the Muqaddimah in his massive bibliographical compendium, the Kashf al-zunun. He also acknowledged that his Destir维尔camel lui islah il-halet (The Mode of Procedure for Rectifying the Damage), one of the best-known treatises on administrative reform, owed much to the Muqaddimah. Katib Çelebi appropriated Ibn Khaldun's analogy between the human body and the body politic, which undergo analogous stages of growth, maturity, and decline, and expanded that analogy to liken the four component classes of society (Men of Religion, Men of the Sword, Men of Commerce, and Men of Husbandry) to the four humors of medieval medicine. He described the chief executive, in this case the grand vezir, as the physician who must treat the society's ills by restoring the proper balance between the constituent elements, since it is only their equilibrium which ensures the health of society.

Katib Çelebi's Destir, in turn, was an important source for Muṣṭafā Naţımâ (d. 1716), who prefaced his history of the Ottoman state after the year 1000 AH/1591-2 with an extended discussion of the problems which seemed to indicate that the Ottoman Empire had entered, in Ibn Khaldun's terms, the penultimate phase of its life cycle, the period of "surfeit and decline." Naţımâ's enthusiasm for Ibn Khaldun was tremendous; in addition to praising