

Ibn Khaldun

The First Social Scientist (1332-1406)

BIG HISTORY PROJECT

TEXT: EMAN M. ELSHAIKH
ART: ARGHA MANNA

ABU ZAID ABD AL-RAHMAN IBN MUHAMMAD IBN KHALDUN WAS BORN INTO A WEALTHY, EDUCATED FAMILY IN THE CITY OF TUNIS.

HE STUDIED
ISLAM, MATHEMATICS,
AND PHILOSOPHY.

IBN KHALDUN'S
PARENTS DIED OF
THE BLACK DEATH,
AND HE WAS ON
HIS OWN FROM
A YOUNG AGE.

AS A YOUNG MAN, IBN KHALDUN SERVED SULTANS AND RULERS ACROSS ANDALUSIA AND NORTH AFRICA, LEARNING ABOUT DIFFERENT SOCIETIES.

HE PLOTTED FOR AND AGAINST DIFFERENT RULERS, AND IT OFTEN GOT HIM IN TROUBLE—EVEN LANDING HIM IN JAIL. BUT HE USED HIS GREAT POLITICAL ABILITY TO SECURE POWERFUL POSITIONS ...

... AS A DIPLOMAT, MINISTER, SENIOR ADVISOR, AND PRIME MINISTER—BUT HE NEVER STOPPED SCHEMING.

AFTER HIS SCHEMING WENT TOO FAR, IBN KHALDUN WAS EXILED AND FLED TO A REMOTE FORTRESS. THERE, HE WROTE AL MUQADDIMAH, A BOOK OF HISTORY DESCRIBING SOCIETIES IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD.

HE DESCRIBED THE DEVELOPMENT OF "CIVILIZATION." FOR IBN KHALDUN, THIS MEANT LITERATE CITY-DWELLING SOCIETIES, WHICH HE THOUGHT WERE SUPERIOR TO NOMADIC SOCIETIES.

"Human social organization is something necessary. The philosophers expressed this fact by saying: 'Man is "political" by nature.' That is, he cannot do without the social organization for which the philosophers use the technical term 'town' (polis). This is what civilization means. . ."

HE DREW INSPIRATION FROM HIS INTRIGUING POLITICAL CAREER, AND HE IS CONSIDERED AN INVENTOR OF THE "SOCIAL SCIENCES," WHICH INCLUDES THE STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY, CULTURE, POLITICS, AND ECONOMICS.

ONE OF HIS KEY IDEAS WAS 'ASABIYAH, OR GROUP FEELING, WHICH HE BELIEVED WAS NECESSARY FOR SOVEREIGNTY.

IBN KHALDUN MET MANY WORLD-HISTORICAL FIGURES.

BUT DESPITE BEING ON OPPOSITE SIDES, IBN KHALDUN APPROACHED THE ENCOUNTER AS A HISTORIAN, LEARNING ABOUT TIMUR AND CHRONICLING HIS EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS.

AS AN OLD MAN, HE MET EMPEROR TIMUR WHEN THE TIMURID EMPIRE INVADDED MAMLUK LANDS, WHICH IBN KHALDUN CALLED HOME AT THE TIME.

IBN KHALDUN LIVED A WORLD-HISTORICAL LIFE FILLED WITH POLITICAL INTRIGUE AND SCHOLARSHIP. HIS WRITINGS WERE THE FIRST OF THEIR KIND, COMBINING DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES TO PRODUCE THEORIES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPLEX SOCIETIES IN WORLD HISTORY.