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IBN KHALDÛN

# THE MUQADDIMAH

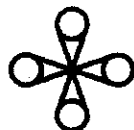
*An Introduction to History*

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3



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of) remoteness of (the tribes speaking them) from the Quraysh.

And God knows better.

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[ 46 ] *Contemporary Arabic*<sup>1335</sup> is an independent language different from the languages of the Muḍar and the Himyar.

This is as follows. We find that with regard to clear indication of what one wants to express and full expression of meaning, Arabic (as it is spoken today) follows the ways of the Muḍar language. The only loss is that of the vowels indicating the distinction between subject and object. Instead, one uses position within the sentence and syntactic combinations (*qarā'in*)<sup>1336</sup> to indicate certain special meanings one wants to express. However, the clarity and eloquence of the Muḍar language are greater and more firmly rooted (than those of present-day Arabic). The words themselves indicate the ideas. What still requires indication are the requirements of a particular situation, called "the spread of the situation."<sup>1337</sup> Of necessity, every idea is surrounded by situations peculiar to it. Therefore, it is necessary to indicate those situations in conveying the meaning one wants to convey, because they belong to it as attributes. In all (other) languages, the situations are as a rule indicated by expressions restricted, by convention, to (those situations). But in the Arabic language, they are indicated by the conditions and possibilities of combining words (in a sentence), such as earlier or later position (of words in a sentence), ellipsis, or vowel endings. They are (also) indicated by letters that are not used independently. Hence, the classes of speech in the Arabic language differ according to the different ways of indicating the possibilities, as we have stated before. Therefore, Arabic speech is more concise and uses fewer words and expressions than any other language. This is

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<sup>1335</sup> Ibn Khaldūn is thinking here of Bedouin Arabic.

<sup>1336</sup> Cf. p. 415, below.

<sup>1337</sup> *Bisāf al-ḥāl* "the circumstances."

what was meant in the following remark by Muḥammad: "I was given the most comprehensive words, and speech was made short for me."<sup>1338</sup>

One may compare the story of 'Īsā b. 'Umar.<sup>1339</sup> A grammarian said to him: "I find duplications in Arabic speech. The (three) sentences, 'Zayd is standing,' 'Behold, Zayd is standing,' and 'Behold, Zayd is indeed standing,' all mean the same." 'Īsā replied: "(No! All three) mean something different. The first (sentence) gives information to a person who has no previous knowledge as to whether Zayd is standing (or not). The second (sentence) gives information to a person who has heard about it but denies it. And the third (sentence) gives information to a person who knows it but persists in denying it. Thus, the meaning differs according to the different situations (one wants to express)."

Such eloquence and stylistic (precision) has continued to this day to be a part of Arab custom and method. No attention should be paid to the nonsensical talk of certain professional grammarians who are not capable of understanding the situation correctly and who think that eloquence no longer exists and that the Arabic language is corrupt. They draw this conclusion from the corruption of the vowel endings, the rules for which are their (particular) subject of study. But such a statement is inspired by both partisan attitude and lack of ability. Actually, we find that most Arabic words are still used today in their original meanings. Arabic speech can still today express what one wants to express with different degrees of clarity. In their speeches (the Arabs) still employ the methods and the different branches<sup>1340</sup> of the (old language of) prose and poetry. There still exist eloquent speakers at (Arab) parties and gatherings. There are poets who are gifted in all the ways of the Arabic language. (The existence of) a sound taste and healthy disposition (as far as linguistic

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<sup>1338</sup> Cf. p. 321, above.

<sup>1339</sup> He died in 149 [766/67]. Cf. *GAL*, I, 98 f.; *Suppl.*, I, 158. For the story, cf. pp. 333 f., above.

<sup>1340</sup> A and B have "methods and power."

matters are concerned) attests to the fact that (the Arabic language is still intact).<sup>1341</sup> The only part of the codified language that no longer exists is the *i'râb*, the vowel endings that were used in the language of the Muḍar in a uniform and definite manner and that form part of the laws of (the Arabic) language.

Concern<sup>1342</sup> for the Muḍar language was only felt when that language became corrupt through the contact of (Arabs) with non-Arabs, at the time when (the Arabs) gained control of the provinces of the 'Irâq, Syria, Egypt, and the Maghrib. (At that time) the (Arabic linguistic) habit took on a form different from the one it had had originally. The (Muḍar language) was thus transformed into another language. (Now,) the Qur'ân was revealed in (the language of the Muḍar), and the Prophetical traditions were transmitted in it, and both the Qur'ân and the traditions are the basis of Islam. It was feared that, as a result of the disappearance of the language in which they were revealed, they themselves might be forgotten and no longer be understood. Therefore, a systematic treatment of its laws, a presentation of the analogical formations used in it, and the derivation of its rules

<sup>1341</sup> Cf. pp. 397 f., below.

<sup>1342</sup> Cf. Issawi, pp. 160 f. For the traditional picture of the corruption of the Arabic language, to which Ibn Khaldûn has already alluded many times in the preceding pages, see, for instance, Majd-ad-dîn Ibn al-Athîr, *Nihâyah*, I, 4: "Among (the early Muslims,) the Arabic language was preserved in a form that was correct and unaffected by defects and errors. Then, the great cities were conquered. The Arabs mixed with peoples of other races, such as the Byzantines, the Persians, the Abyssinians, the Nabataeans [Aramaic-speaking 'Irâqîs], and other peoples whose countries were conquered by the Muslims with the help of God and whose property and persons fell to them as the prize of conquest. In consequence, the different parties intermingled, the languages became mixed, and the idioms interpenetrated. A new generation grew up. They learned as much Arabic and Arabic idiom as they needed for conversation and as was indispensable to them in discussion. They had no need for anything else. They had little interest in anything that would call for a (deeper study of Arabic). Therefore they neglected it completely. Thus (the Arabic language,) which had been one of the most important subjects of study and an obligatory necessity, was rejected and avoided and came to be considered as of no account. . . . (By the time a second generation appeared) the Arabic language had become un-Arabic, or nearly so. . . ."

were needed. (Knowledge of Arabic) thus became a science with subdivisions, chapters, premises, and problems. The scholars who cultivated that science called it grammar and Arabic philology. It became a discipline known by heart and fixed in writing, a ladder leading up to the understanding of the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Prophet.

Perhaps, if we were to concern ourselves with the present-day Arabic language and evolve its laws inductively, we would find other things and possibilities indicating what the vowel endings, which no longer exist, (used to) indicate, things that exist in the (present-day language) and that have their own peculiar rules.<sup>1343</sup> Perhaps, (certain rules) apply to the endings of (the words of the present-day Arabic language, only) in a manner different from that which existed originally in the language of the Muḍar. Languages and (linguistic) habits are not matters of chance.

The relationship of the Muḍar language to the Ḥimyarite language was of the same type. Many of the meanings and inflections of the words of the Ḥimyarite language were changed in Muḍar usage. This fact is attested by the transmitted material available to us. It is contrary to the opinions of those whose deficient (knowledge) leads them to assume that the Muḍar and Ḥimyar languages are one and the same, and who want to interpret the Ḥimyarite language according to the formations and rules of the Muḍar language. For instance, certain of these persons assume that the Ḥimyarite word *qayl* "leader" is derived from *qawl* "speaking,"<sup>1344</sup> and so on. This is not correct. The Ḥimyarite language is another language and differs from the Muḍar language in most of its (conventional) meanings, inflections, and vowels, (and has) the same relationship (to it) that the Muḍar language has to present-day Arabic. The only difference is that the interest in the Muḍar language which, we have stated, exists on account of (the connection of that language with) the religious law,

<sup>1343</sup> Bulaq does not have the relative clause.

<sup>1344</sup> Modern scholarship, in fact, assumes that South Arabic *qayl* is derived from the same root as *qawl*.

caused <sup>1345</sup> (scholars) to evolve and derive (its rules). There is nothing nowadays to move us to do the same (for present-day Arabic).

A characteristic feature of the language of present-day Arab (Bedouins), wherever they may live, is the pronunciation of *q*. They do not pronounce it as the urban population pronounces it and as it is indicated in works on Arabic philology, namely, where the hindmost part of the tongue meets the soft palate above it. Neither <sup>1346</sup> is it pronounced as *k* is pronounced, even though *k* is articulated in a place below that where *q* is articulated in the vicinity of the soft palate, as it is (when properly articulated). It is pronounced somewhere between *k* <sup>1347</sup> and *q*. This is the case with all Arab Bedouins, wherever they are, in the West or the East. It has eventually become their distinguishing mark among the nations and races. It is a characteristic of theirs that no one else shares with them. This goes so far that those who want to Arabicize themselves and to affiliate themselves with the Arabs imitate the Arab pronunciation of (*q*). (Arabs) think that a pure Arab can be distinguished from Arabicized and sedentary people by this pronunciation of *q*. It is thus obvious that this is the (pronunciation of *q* found in) the Muḍar language. The largest and leading group of Arab Bedouins who still live in the East and the West consists of descendants of Maṣṣūr b. 'Ikrimah b. Khaṣafah b. Qays b. 'Aylān <sup>1348</sup> through Sulaym b. Maṣṣūr and through the Banū 'Āmir b. Ṣa'ṣa'ah b. Mu'āwiyah b. Bakr b. Hawāzin b. Maṣṣūr. Now-

<sup>1345</sup> The text should probably be corrected to *ḥamala(t) 'alā dhālika*. Bulaq suggests: *ḥamala dhālika 'alā*. A has *wa-ḥamala* . . .

<sup>1346</sup> The following reference to the pronunciation of *k* is found in Bulaq, and in the margins of C and D. The clause at the end ("as it is . . .") also appears in the other text, where it belongs to the preceding sentence, and this may be its original and correct position.

<sup>1347</sup> The MSS usually do not have a dot under the *k*, which would indicate a sound like *g*. Such a dot under the *k* is, however, found in Bulaq, and below, p. 349, l. 32, which appears in C on a separately inserted sheet.

<sup>1348</sup> The Arab authorities disagree as to whether 'Aylān was the father of Qays, or whether 'Aylān was added to the name of Qays as an epithet. Cf., for instance, Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat ansāb al-'Arab* (Cairo, 1968/1948), pp. 292 ff.; *Lisān al-'Arab*, XIII, 519.

adays, they constitute the most numerous and powerful nation of the inhabited part of the earth. They are descendants of the Muḍar. <sup>1349</sup> They and all the other (Arab Bedouins) of the Banū Kahlān <sup>1350</sup> are the model for the pronunciation of *q* mentioned. It was not invented by these Arab Bedouins but inherited by them over the generations. This makes it obvious that it was the pronunciation of the ancient Muḍar. Perhaps it is the very pronunciation that was used by the Prophet. 'Alid jurists made that claim. They thought that he who reads in the first *sūrah* the words "the straight path" (*aṣ-ṣirāṭa l-mustaqîma*) <sup>1351</sup> without pronouncing the *q* (in *al-mustaqîm*) as is done by (present-day) Arab Bedouins, commits an error, and his prayer is not valid.

I do not know how this (differentiation in the pronunciation of *q*) came about. The language of the urban population was not invented by the urban population itself, either. It was transmitted to them from their ancestors, most of whom belonged to the Muḍar, when they settled in the cities at the time of the (Muslim) conquest and later. The Arab Bedouins did not invent (their pronunciation of *q*), either. However, they had less contact with the non-Arab urban population. Therefore, the linguistic features found in their (speech) can preferably be assumed to belong to the language of their ancestors. In addition, all Arab Bedouins in the East and the West agree upon that (pronunciation of *q*). It is the peculiar characteristic that distinguishes the Arabs from half-breeds and sedentary people.

It <sup>1352</sup> is obvious that the pronunciation of *q* as practiced by (present-day) Arab Bedouins is the same as that of the ancient speakers (of Arabic). The place (where the sound) of *q* may be produced is wide, ranging from the soft palate to the place next to where *k* is articulated. The velar pronuncia-

<sup>1349</sup> Cf. Bombaci, p. 468.

<sup>1350</sup> The express reference to the Banū Kahlān is not found in Bulaq.

<sup>1351</sup> Qur'ān 1.6 (5).

<sup>1352</sup> The remainder of the section is not found in Bulaq. C has it on an inserted sheet.

tion is the urban one. The pronunciation close to *k* is that of (present-day) Arab Bedouins.

This fact refutes the statement of the 'Alids that failure to pronounce the *q* in the first *sūrah* (as it is pronounced by present-day Bedouins) invalidates one's prayer. All the jurists of the (great) cities hold the contrary opinion. It is improbable that all of them would have overlooked this (point). The matter is to be explained as we have stated it.

We do say (however) that the Arab Bedouins' pronunciation (of *q*) is preferable and more proper, because, as we have mentioned before, its continuity among them shows that it was the pronunciation of their early Arab-Bedouin ancestors and the pronunciation of the Prophet. The fact that they assimilate *q* to *k* (in pronunciation) because of the proximity of the places where the two sounds are articulated, also makes this (assumption) appear preferable. If it were pronounced far back, as a velar, as is done by the urban population, it would not be close to *k* in its place of articulation and would not be assimilated (to it).

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Arab philologists have mentioned this *q* which is close to *k*, as pronounced by present-day Arab Bedouins. They consider it a sound intermediary between *q* and *k*, and an independent sound (phoneme). This is improbable. It is obvious that it is a *q* pronounced at the end of the wide range of articulation available for *q*, as we have stated. The (philologists) then openly denounced (that *q*) as an ugly, un-Arabic sound, as if they did not recognize that (the way in which it was pronounced) was the pronunciation of the early Arabs. As we have mentioned, it belonged to (Arab) linguistic tradition, because (the Arabs) inherited it from their ancestors, generation after generation, and it was their particular symbol. That is proof that (the way in which it is pronounced) was the pronunciation of the early Arabs and the pronunciation of the Prophet, as has all been mentioned before.

There is a theory that *q* as pronounced by the urban population does not belong to the (original) *q*-sound, but is the result of their contact with non-Arabs. They pronounce

it as they do, but it is not an Arabic sound. However, our afore-mentioned statement that it is (all) one sound with a wide (range of) articulation is more appropriate.

This should be understood. God is the clear guide.

[ 47 ] *The language of the sedentary and urban population is an independent language different from the language of the Muḍar.*

It should be known that the usual form of address used among the urban and sedentary population is not the old Muḍar language nor the language of the (present-day) Arab Bedouins. It is another independent language, remote from the language of the Muḍar and from the language of present-day Arab Bedouins. It is more remote from the former (than from the latter).

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It is obvious that it is an independent language by itself. The fact is attested by the changes it shows, which grammatical scholarship<sup>1353</sup> considers solecisms. Moreover, it is different in the various cities depending on the differences in terminologies used by their (inhabitants).<sup>1354</sup> The language of the inhabitants of the East differs somewhat from that of the inhabitants of the West. The same applies to the relationship of the language of the Spaniards to either of them. All these people are able to express in their own language whatever they want to express, and to explain their ideas. That is what languages and dialects are for. Loss of the vowel endings does not disturb them, as we have stated in connection with the language of present-day Arab (Bedouins).<sup>1355</sup>

The fact that (the language spoken in present-day cities) is more remote from the ancient (Arabic) language than the language of present-day Arab Bedouins is conditioned by the fact that remoteness from the (ancient Arabic) language is due to contact with non-Arabs. More contact with non-Arabs

<sup>1353</sup> Bulaq, C, and D correct 'inda *ṣinā'at ahl an-naḥw* to the simpler 'inda *ahl ṣinā'at an-naḥw* "grammatical scholars."

<sup>1354</sup> Cf. p. 413, below.

<sup>1355</sup> Cf. pp. 344 and 347, above.