

THE INSTITUTE FOR ANACYCLOSIS

EXCERPT FROM
THE MUQADDIMAH
BY IBN KHALDÛN

1377 A.D.

Note: This text describes a process of intergenerational decay that inevitably results when a population develops a sufficiently powerful sense of security, affluence, and prestige. While this sociological phenomenon permits many useful inferences of cause and effect within the context of Khaldun's five-phase sequence and Anacyclosis itself, it is not a process that is exclusive to either of them, or to any concept of a cycle. Khaldun describes a five-phase sequence of dynastic evolution that can without difficulty be condensed and reconciled to the first three phases in Polybius' original version of Anacyclosis (monarchy-kingship-tyranny) which has been substantially retained in The Institute's version (chiefdom-kingdom-tyranny). Note that the first three phases of Anacyclosis pertain to variations of monarchical government, as do all five of Khaldun's phases. For this reason, from the standpoint of testing Anacyclosis against the historical record, whatever societies and civilizations fit within the rubric of Khaldun's sequence should, eo ipso, fit within the first three stages of Anacyclosis. Khaldun's unit of analysis (Bedouin tribal society) more or less represents the earliest and most primitive level of analysis of political evolution, which never really passes beyond the various stages of monarchy into aristocracy. Anacyclosis, to the contrary, follows the political evolution of (retroactively-identified) leading cultures as they develop from the maximum level of dispersion (feuding warrior tribal society) to the maximum level of integration (integrated political, legal, and economic systems dominated by the language and laws of the leading culture). It is thus not that Khaldun describes a process that contradicts Anacyclosis, but rather a process that only expresses the first part of Anacyclosis.

Book One of the Kitab Al-'Ibar. Chapter 3. On Dynasties, Royal Authority, the Caliphate, Government Ranks, and All that Goes With These Things. 12. Dynasties Have a Natural Life Span Like Individuals.

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We have stated that the duration of the life of a dynasty does not as a rule extend beyond three generations. The first generation retains the desert qualities, desert toughness, and desert savagery. (Its members are used to) privation and to sharing their glory (with each other); they are brave and rapacious. Therefore, the strength of group feeling continues to be preserved among them. They are sharp and greatly feared. People submit to them.

Under the influence of royal authority and a life of ease, the second generation changes from the desert attitude to sedentary culture, from privation to luxury and plenty, from a state in which everybody shared in the glory to one in which one man claims all the glory for himself while the others are too lazy to strive for (glory), and from proud superiority to humble subservience. Thus, the vigor of group feeling is broken to some extent. People become used to lowliness and obedience. But many of the old virtues remain in them, because they had had direct personal contact with the first generation and its conditions, and had observed with their own eyes its prowess and striving for glory and its intention to protect and defend (itself). They cannot give all of it up at once, although a good deal of it may go. They live in hope that the conditions that existed in the first generation may come back, or they live under the illusion that those conditions still exist.

The third generation, then, has (completely) forgotten the period of desert life and toughness, as if it had never existed. They have lost (the taste for) the sweetness of fame and (for) group feeling, because they

are dominated by force. Luxury reaches its peak among them, because they are so much given to a life of prosperity and ease. They become dependent on the dynasty and are like women and children who need to be defended. Group feeling disappears completely. People forget to protect and defend themselves and to press their claims. With their emblems, apparel, horseback riding, and (fighting) skill, they deceive people and give them the wrong impression. For the most part, they are more cowardly than women upon their backs. When someone comes and demands something from them, they cannot repel him. The ruler, then, has need of other, brave people for his support. He takes many clients and followers. They help the dynasty to some degree, until God permits it to be destroyed, and it goes with everything it stands for.

As one can see, we have there three generations. In the course of these three generations, the dynasty grows senile and is worn out. Therefore, it is in the fourth generation that (ancestral) prestige is destroyed. ...

Id. 15. The Stages of Dynasties. How the Desert Attitude Differs Among the People in the Different Stages.

A dynasty goes through different stages and encounters new conditions. Through the conditions that are peculiar to a particular stage, the supporters of the dynasty acquire in that stage traits of character such as do not exist in any other stage. Traits of character are the natural result of the peculiar situations in which they are found.

The conditions and stages of a dynasty are as a rule no more than five (in number).

The first stage is that of success, the overthrow of all opposition, and the appropriation of royal authority from the preceding dynasty. In this stage, the ruler serves as model to his people by the manner in which he acquires glory, collects taxes, defends property, and provides military protection. He does not claim anything exclusively for himself to the exclusion of (his people), because (such an attitude) is what is required by group feeling, (and it was group feeling) that gave superiority (to the dynasty), and (group feeling) still continues to exist as before.

The second stage is the one in which the ruler gains complete control over his people, claims royal authority all for himself, excluding them, and prevents them from trying to have a share in it. In this stage, the ruler of the dynasty is concerned with gaining adherents and acquiring clients and followers in great numbers, so as to be able to blunt the aspirations of the people who share in his group feeling and belong to his group, who are of the same descent as he himself and have the same claim to royal authority as he has. He keeps them from power and bars them from its sources. He stops them from getting to it, and, eventually, all the power is in the hands of his family. He reserves all the glory that he is building up to the members of his own house. He takes as much, or more, care to keep his people at a distance and to subdue them, as the first members of the dynasty expended in the search for power. The first members of the dynasty kept strangers away, and all the people who shared in their group feeling supported them in this. He, on the other hand, keeps his relatives away, and he is supported in this effort only by a very small number of people, who are not related to him. Thus, he undertakes a very difficult task.

The third stage is one of leisure and tranquillity in which the fruits of royal authority are enjoyed: the things that human nature desires, such as acquisition of property, creation of lasting monuments, and fame. All the ability (of the ruler) is expended on collecting taxes; regulating income and expenses, bookkeeping and planning expenditures; erecting large buildings, big constructions, spacious cities, and lofty monuments; presenting gifts to embassies of nobles from (foreign) nations and tribal dignitaries; and dispensing bounty to his own people. In addition, he supports the demands of his followers and retinue with money and positions. He inspects his soldiers, pays them well, and distributes fairly their

allowances every month. Eventually, the result of this (liberality) shows itself in their dress, their fine equipment, and their armor on parade days. The ruler thus can impress friendly dynasties and frighten hostile ones with (his soldiers). This stage is the last during which the ruler is in complete authority. Throughout this and the previous stages, the rulers are independent in their opinions. They build up their strength and show the way for those after them.

The fourth stage is one of contentment and peacefulness. The ruler is content with what his predecessors have built. He lives in peace with all his royal peers. He adopts the tradition of his predecessors and follows closely in their footsteps. He imitates their ways most carefully. He thinks that to depart from tradition would mean the destruction of his power and that they knew better (what is good for the preservation of) the glory they themselves had built.

The fifth stage is one of waste and squandering. In this stage, the ruler wastes on pleasures and amusements (the treasures) accumulated by his ancestors, through (excessive) generosity to his inner circle and at their parties. Also, he acquires bad, low-class followers to whom he entrusts the most important matters (of state), which they are not qualified to handle by themselves, not knowing which of them they should tackle and which they should leave alone. The ruler seeks to destroy the great clients of his people and followers of his predecessors. Thus they come to hate him and conspire to refuse support to him. He loses a number of soldiers by spending their allowances on his pleasures (instead of paying them) and by refusing them access to his person and not supervising them (properly). Thus, he ruins the foundations his ancestors had laid and tears down what they had built up. In this stage, the dynasty is seized by senility and the chronic disease from which it can hardly ever rid itself, for which it can find no cure, and, eventually, it is destroyed.

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