

VICO AND IBN KHALDÛN: *POLIS* AND *LOGOS*

It is a classical gesture of the research literature on Ibn Khaldûn (1332-1406) to refer to Giambattista Vico as a «philosopher of history» who, three hundred and fifty years later and in a different historical context, in his *Scienza nuova*, had a similar conception of history as the great Arab historian, whose *Muqaddima* was also categorized by European scholars since the 19th century as a «philosophy of history»¹. The common feature of both ‘philosophers’ was that both founded a new science of culture and both presented history as a cyclical process². These – mostly short – comparative remarks are normally made without a direct knowledge of the *Scienza nuova* (or of the Italian language)³. From the side of Vico scholarship, the presence of Ibn Khaldûn is not as classical and frequent, but the comparisons seem to be more substantial: Gabrieli presented Ibn Khaldûn as the «Vico of Islam»⁴. Recently Messling integrated comparative reflections on the cyclical conception of history of Vico and Ibn Khaldûn in a study on the Italian historian Amari

¹ A. AL-AZMEH, *Ibn Khaldûn. An Essay in Reinterpretation*, London, 1982, p. 169.

² Cfr. M. MĪRAJ, *Ibn Khaldûn and Vico: A comparative study*, in «Islamic Studies» XIX (1980) 3, pp. 195-211; M. ÖNDER, F. ULASAN, *Ibn Khaldun's Cyclical Theory on the Rise and Fall of Sovereign Powers: The Case of the Ottoman Empire*, in «Adam Akademi» VIII (2018), p. 245; R. IRWIN, *Ibn Khaldun. An Intellectual Biography*, Princeton & Oxford, 2018, p. 73, A. MANOCHEHRI, *Die Dialektik der Asabiyya und die Sozialphilosophie des ‘umran*, in «Philosophie des Islam. Polylog. Zeitschrift für interkulturelles Philosophieren» XVII (2007), p. 78.

³ Sometimes even elementary informations on Vico are wrong, as in IRWIN, *op. cit.*, p. 73, who thinks that Vico was a «Neapolitan priest». Vico himself protested furiously against a German scholar who, in 1727, thought that he was a priest. He was very proud of being a real father with many children and not an «abbas neapolitanus»: cfr. J. TRABANT, *Giambattista Vico: Poetische Charaktere*, Berlin, 2019, p. 79.

⁴ Cfr. F. GABRIELI, *Ibn Khaldun, il Vico dell'Islam*, in this «Bollettino» V (1975), pp. 122-126.

who, in the 19th century, read Ibn Khaldûn from a Vichian perspective⁵. The best comparative study on Ibn Khaldûn and Vico is certainly the long essay of the Spanish Vico specialist José Sevilla⁶. Sevilla's study shows that, if these comparisons shall have any justification⁷, they must be based on a thorough knowledge of both authors⁸.

What follows here is, however, not another elaborated comparative study of the Arab and the Italian author. I would be completely unable to produce such a study since I do not read Arabic and have to approach the great Muslim thinker by translations. I normally do not allow myself to write on texts whose language I do not know. Hence, what I am doing here is a real philological crime. But, as far as I can see, none of those who wrote about Vico and Ibn Khaldûn (with the exception of the Italian Amari who read the *Muqaddima* in Arabic) knew both languages, and even Sevilla's profound comparison is based on the Spanish translation of the *Muqaddima*. Thus, having read the *Muqaddima* in (partial) German translations and in Franz Rosenthal's English version and being quite conversant with Vico's *Scienza nuova* in Italian, I also dare to write this short article. My intention is to add something to Sevilla's great study by introducing a new perspective into the comparison. As far as the language problem is concerned I rely on the English translation that is praised by most scholars⁹ and seems so good that one of the Ibn Khaldûn specialists even said that it can be used in lieu of the non-existing critical edition of the Arabic text¹⁰. And as to important

⁵ Cfr. M. MESSLING, *Gebeugter Geist. Rassismus und Erkenntnis in der modernen europäischen Philologie*, Göttingen, 2016.

⁶ Cfr. J. M. SEVILLA, *Ibn Jaldûn y Vico: afinidades y contrastes*, in «Cuadernos sobre Vico» IX-X (1998), pp. 191-214. Cfr. also the second part of that essay, *Ibn Jaldûn, Vico e Ortega*, in *Il mondo di Vico/Vico nel mondo*, a cura di F. Ratto, Perugia, 2000, pp. 243-270), where the comparison is confronted with Ortega's reading of Ibn Khaldun.

⁷ AL-AZMEH (*op. cit.*, p. 38) thinks «that the frequent comparisons made between Ibn Khaldun and Polybius or Vico are totally unjustified», his only reason: «because the *Muqaddima* portrays the moments of the state as moments of power and not as changes in political form and in relation to 'civil society'». But there are other reasons in favour of the comparison.

⁸ As is the comparative study by the American social psychologist R. E. LANA, *Ibn Khaldun and Vico: The Universality of Social History*, in «The Journal of Mind and Behavior» VIII (1987) 1, pp. 153-165.

⁹ With the exception of Al-Azmeh (*op. cit.*, p. 167) who criticizes its «systematic distortions».

¹⁰ Cfr. IRWIN, *op. cit.*, p. 227, also p. 179: «Rosenthal's translation is the best substitute to the Arabic edition we do not have».

Arabic terms, like *'umrān*, *'aṣabiya* and *mantiq/natiq*, I studied their meaning as thoroughly as is possible for a non-speaker of Arabic and hope that I got them right.

Reading the *Muqaddima* after my life-long Vico studies I was, like all my colleagues, seduced by the fascinating parallelisms in the two great texts from different times and different cultures. But writing about Ibn Khaldûn and Vico necessarily leads to the profound differences between the two authors. As Sevilla writes, there are more differences than affinities: «Muchas son, pues, las afinidades teoréticas entre ambos autores; mas [...] muchos más son aún los contrastes»¹¹. Why then compare if there are so many differences? Comparing, since the very beginning of comparative studies, e.g. in linguistics in the 19th century, elucidates the specific nature of the items under scrutiny, here the very specific approaches of Vico and Ibn Khaldûn to History, Culture or *mondo civile*. Comparison thus yields what was called, a century ago in the humanities, *wechselseitige Erhellung*, «mutual elucidation» (Oskar Walzel).

I would like to extend the comparison to a view which transcends the usual historical perspective and look at the linguistic or semiotic ideas of the two authors. As a Vico scholar I approach Ibn Khaldûn from the Italian side. And the new perspective I am introducing to the comparison is due to the fact that I do so as a Vico scholar who follows the 'linguistic' tradition of the Vico interpretation as established by Pagliaro and Coseriu¹². I read Vico as a philosopher of language (*logos*) or as a philosopher of signs¹³, and not only, as the traditional and stronger tradition of Vico scholarship does, as a «philosopher of history» (*polis*) or even simply as a historian. In order to clarify that 'sematological' perspective I have to outline my Vico interpretation in the first part of the paper. Thence I try to understand Ibn Khaldûn's *Muqaddima* and shed some comparative light on both authors. That Ibn Khaldûn and Giambattista Vico both explicitly intended the foundation of a New Science of Man as a *zoon politikon* is a strong resemblance that justifies the com-

¹¹ J. M. SEVILLA, *Ibn Jaldún y Vico: afinidades y contrastes*, cit., p. 210.

¹² Cfr. J. TRABANT, *La scoperta di Vico come filosofo del linguaggio: Antonino Pagliaro e Eugenio Coseriu*, in *Vico nel Novecento*, a cura di D. Luglio, M. Sanna, R. Evangelista, A. Khaghani, in «Revue des Études italiennes» LXV (2021) 1-4, pp. 97-106.

¹³ Cfr. Id., *Vico's New Science of Ancient Signs. A study of sematology*, engl. trans., London/New York, 2004; *Cenni e voci. Saggi di sematologia vichiana*, Napoli, 2007; and *Giambattista Vico: Poetische Charaktere*, cit.

parative approach to these two authors. Aristotle's second definition of Man as the *zoon logon echon* will be the angle by which I approach my comparison of the vast and complex textual worlds of the *Muqaddima* and the *Scienza nuova*.

1. *Vico's new science: meta-physics becomes meta-politics.*

When you open the *Scienza nuova* of 1744 this is what you see: a picture on the left – Vico calls it the *dipintura* – and the frontispiece on the right: words. The picture precedes the word.



The *dipintura* is an allegorical representation of the ensemble of Vico's philosophy and shows the unity of the *Scienza nuova* in its three main figures: Metaphysics, Hercules, and Homer. *Metafisica*, i.e. philosophy as the quest of true science, is the centre of the *dipintura*. As a philosopher, Vico was asking where we can find certain knowledge or *scienza*. This was also Descartes' and, later, Kant's question, and it is Vico's main question. The science Vico is looking for, is, as science should be since Aristotle, always about eternal and universal truth, *scientia debet esse de eternis et universalibus*¹⁴.

¹⁴ *Principj di una Scienza Nuova di Giambattista Vico d'intorno alla comune natura*

Where can we find *scientia*? Vico's answer to this metaphysical question: *Scienza* can only be found in the civil world, *mondo civile*, as opposed to the natural world. *Civile* is the Latin-Italian word for the Greek *politikos*. The term refers to Aristotle's definition of the human being as *zoon politikon*. Right at the beginning of the *Scienza nuova* Vico introduces the social nature as the first property of human beings: «la natura de' quali ha questa principale proprietà: d'essere socievoli»¹⁵. The *mondo civile* is the *polis*, the political world. According to Vico, true knowledge can only be found in the civil world, not in the natural or physical world, because we have made that civil world, *polis*, ourselves. This *verum factum* principle – only the maker can have true knowledge of what he has made – is Vico's famous axiom and the condition of the possibility of science. Thus, meta-*physics* becomes meta-*politics*. This is why this science is *new*. Vico bases science not on Nature but on the *mondo civile* which we might also call «Culture» and which is often called – rather problematically – «History»¹⁶.

The *mondo civile* has two major aspects: Hercules and Homer, the material and the intellectual appropriation of the world. Hercules burns the wild forest, works the world materially and thereby prepares the ground for society – *polis*, he is the *eroe politico*, the political hero, in Vico's allegory of the new science. Homer, on the other side, works the world mentally, he creates thought, *logos*, poetically. The political and the logico-poetical organisation of the world, Law and Language, go hand in hand.

From the very beginning of Vico scholarship, Hercules, the *eroe politico*, the political aspect of the *mondo civile*, was the favourite subject of Vico studies. And since the *mondo civile* is developed as a world-historical narration in the *Scienza nuova*, the historians liked Vico more than the philosophers. Due to Michelet's enormous influence and his reduction of Vico's philosophy to a universal history,¹⁷ due to the German historical school, and due to the Diltheyan inclusion of Vico into the «geschichtliche Welt» in Auerbach, Hercules – considered as universal history – is the most popular tradition in Vico scholarship.

delle nazioni, Napoli, Stamperia Muziana, 1744, p. 163. I follow the tradition in Vico scholarship of quoting the numbers of the *paragraphs* of the *Scienza nuova* 1744 [Sn44].

¹⁵ Sn44, 2.

¹⁶ Cfr. *ivi*, «Poetische Charaktere», chapter 9.

¹⁷ Cf. J. TRABANT, *Cenni e voci*, *cit.*, chapter 7, and *Giambattista Vico: Poetische Charaktere*, *cit.*, chapter 8.

However, Homer, not Hercules, is the most visible figure of the *dipintura* of the *mondo civile*. Hercules is even represented only indirectly: The Lion and the Virgin in the Zodiac stand for Hercules as Vico explains. Homer, on the other side, is Vico's answer to and his critique of Aristotle's definition of Man as *zoon logon echon*, as the animal that has *logos*. Of course, Man is the animal that has *logos*, but *logos* is not just (pure) «thought» but it is produced by the poets in *caratteri poetici*, in poetical characters, in signs. Homer represents the sematological aspect of Vico's philosophy. I use the term «sematology» (not «semiotics» or semiology) since Vico refers to Homeric *sémata* as the prototype of the signs: «[...] the mute likenesses which Homer calls *sémata* (the signs in which the heroes wrote)»¹⁸.

As the *dipintura* shows, *Metafisica*, *Ercole* and *Omero*, the metaphysical, the politico-historical and the poetico-sematological belong together. I will however approach Vico mainly from the sematological side, from *logos*¹⁹.

Homer, the sematological element, is one of the two fundamental aspects of the *mondo civile*. It is as important as the political-social one, as Hercules. The two aspects are intimately united. For this reason, Vico even transformed the structure of his book between 1725 and 1730. In the first edition of the *Scienza nuova* of 1725, the political and the sematological aspects of the science were treated in two separate books: «per l'idee» (book II) on the one side, «per la parte delle lingue» (book III) on the other. In the second edition of 1730, Vico explicitly gives up this separation, criticizing himself in his *Vita*: «... he [i.e. Vico] certainly was wrong in the order [of the book] since he treated the principles of the ideas separately from the principles of the languages»²⁰. Because the *mondo civile* is a world of signs *and* of social institutions («erano per natura tra lor uniti») ²¹, they cannot be divided. This inseparable unity of the political and the poetical is one of the major profound ideas of Vico's philosophy.

But it is also true that Vico considers the sematological approach as his very specific contribution to the new science: In § 34 of the *Scien-*

¹⁸ *Sn44*, 438. The original reads: «[...] le somiglianze mute, che da Omero si dicono *sémata*, i segni, co' quali scrivevan gli Eroi».

¹⁹ Cf. J. TRABANT, *Vico's New Science of Ancient Signs. A study of sematology*, translated by Sean Ward, London/New York, 2004.

²⁰ G. Vico, *Opere*, 2 vols., ed. A. Battistini, Milano, 1990, vol. I, p. 79.

²¹ *Ibid.*

za nuova Vico states that his philosophical discovery (*discoverta*) is the insight that humans first spoke in *caratteri poetici*. And he adds that this insight is the main key, the *chiave maestra*, of his new science.

[...] the first gentile peoples, by a demonstrated necessity of nature, were poets who spoke in poetic characters. This discovery, which is the master key of this Science, has cost us the persistent research of all our literary life²².

That the first nations were poets who spoke in poetical characters, or that humans create thought through the creation of poetical characters, is Vico's most original discovery. That humans create their thought – *logos* – in *poetical characters* is a really new and revolutionary insight. This is the second novelty of Vico's new science. Therefore, it is *la chiave maestra*, the master key to the understanding of his philosophy. Vichian metaphysics is meta-politics and meta-sematology.

Conscious of this synthetic unity of the political and the poetical or sematological character of the *mondo civile*, we can discern two main semato-genetical themes: the sequence of three languages, and the twin birth of *lettere* and *lingue*.

Vico constructs the history of human thought as a history of signs. According to the three ages of the political development (divine, heroic, human) there are three languages:

The first language was spoken in the time of the families when gentile men were newly received into humanity. This, we shall find, was a mute language of gestures and physical objects [*cenni o corpi*] having natural relations to the ideas they wished to express. The second [language] was spoken by means of heroic emblems, or similitudes, comparisons, images [*immagini*], metaphors, and natural descriptions, which make up the great body of the heroic language which was spoken at the time the heroes reigned. The third language was the human language using words [*voci*] agreed upon by the people, a language of which they are absolute lords, and which is proper to the popular commonwealths and monarchical states²³.

As one sees from the examples, 'languages' are not only or primarily verbal language but different kinds of signs: *cenni o corpi*, *immagini*, *voci*,

²² *Sn44*, 34: «[...] i primi popoli della gentilità, per una dimostrata necessità di natura, furon poeti, i quali parlarono per *caratteri poetici*; la qual *discoverta*, ch'è la *chiave maestra* di questa Scienza, ci ha costato la ricerca ostinata di quasi tutta la nostra vita letteraria».

²³ *Ivi*, 32.

i.e. gestures (and objects), images, and then also words. Vico's history is not a linguistic story, but a semiotic one, a history of signs. The signs are embodied human thought. This sematogenetical story is explicitly constructed against the traditional conventionalist language theory. It starts from Aristotle – *zoon logon echon* – but it is explicitly anti-Aristotelian insofar as it develops a different conception of the *logos*. In the Aristotelian tradition, that depends upon *De interpretatione*, words are just sound, they are arbitrary, and their function is communication. Thought is independent from words. In Vico, thought is embodied in signs, visual and vocal; not only words, all signs are syntheses of mental and material (*conceptus + actus/vox*); all signs are non-arbitrary, but iconic; and their function is cognition, all signs are thought. Vico fights against hundreds of years of linguistic Aristotelism. Yes, the human being is *zoon logon echon*, but *logos* is embodied thought.

The signs come in two material forms, visual and vocal: «[...] letters and languages were born as twins and proceeded apace through all their three stages»²⁴. With the two terms *lingue* and *lettere* Vico does not refer so much to the opposition of script and language but rather to the two media of the semiotic appropriation of the world: the visual and the acoustic-phonetic. Vico is referring to the totality of human semiosis: to gestures (*cenni, atti*), visual signs, «images» in a very broad sense, on the one side, and to the voice (*voce*) on the other side, and to their parallel development. Sound and gesture are twins.

Now, *lettere*, *i.e.* the visual sign is the first-born twin and the stronger one: «all nations began to speak by writing»,²⁵ *i.e.* they produce *caratteri poetici*. The term «character» implies the priority of the visual: *charakteres* are incisions, they are design, graphs, drawings, *charassein* means scratch, carve, it is a synonym of *graphein*. But the poetical characters come also as sound, not only as visual forms. Sound is there from the very beginning. It does not come later, it is only the weaker twin in the beginning.

The history of the three *lingue* tells us how the sematological twins develop in a parallel way – «caminarono del pari». First, humans use the objects themselves by pointing to them, then they create mimetic signs whose imitative nature eventually becomes less and less apparent. And, as far as the materiality of the signs is concerned: the graphic twin

²⁴ Ivi, 33: «[...] nacquero esse gemelle e caminarono del pari, in tutte e tre le loro spezie, le lettere con le lingue».

²⁵ Ivi, 429: «tutte le nazioni prima parlarono scrivendo».

is bigger in the beginning, then the phonetic one becomes bigger and bigger, schematically:

1	2	3
GRAPH	graph	graph
phon	phon	PHON

1. Vico's new science is philosophy, it is a theory of true knowledge. It is based on the civil world; hence meta-physics becomes meta-politics.

2. The civil world has two aspects. It is Hercules and Homer at the same time: work and thought, political institutions (Law) and poetical institutions (Language). The human being forms the world materially and politically as well as mentally. Both works – the work of the hand and the work of the spirit – are the *factum* whence we deduce the *verum*. Both – *tro loro unite* – are the *mondo civile* where we can find true knowledge.

3. The Homeric part of the *mondo civile* is a theory and a history of thought. Vico tells the story of human thought as a story of signs which he calls *lingue*, «languages». They develop in three ages and they come in two material manifestations.

4. Verbal language – *voci* – is only one manifestation of «language» amongst others. Vico does not write about any specific language, Italian or Latin or any other. His sematology is not a linguistics.

2. *Ibn Khaldûn's new science: the science of culture.*

Ibn Khaldûn also claims a new science in the *Muqaddima*²⁶. He insists very much on the novelty of what he is writing here:

Such is the purpose of this first book of our work. (The subject) is in a way an independent science. (This science) has its own peculiar object – that is, human civilization and social organization²⁷.

²⁶ My textual basis are the two (partial) German translations of the *Muqaddima*, *Buch der Beispiele. Die Einführung al-Muqaddima*, übersetzt und eingeleitet von M. Pätzold, Leipzig, 1992; *Die Muqaddima: Betrachtungen zur Weltgeschichte*, übertragen und mit einer Einführung von A. Giese unter Mitwirkung von W. Heinrichs, München, 2011, and IBN KHALDÛN, *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*, 3 vols., trans. F. Rosenthal, Princeton, 1967. The page numbers refer to the English edition.

²⁷ *Muqaddimah*, I, p. 77. *Die Muqaddima*, p. 104. The German translator says: «die menschliche Kultur und die menschliche Gesellschaft».

This science is new because its object has not yet been treated: ‘*umrān*, human culture. It is not rhetorics, it is not politics:

It should be known that the discussion of this topic is something new, extraordinary, and highly useful. Penetrating research has shown the way to it. It does not belong to rhetoric, one of the logical disciplines (represented in Aristotle’s *Organon*), the subject of which is convincing words by means of which the mass is inclined to accept a particular opinion or not to accept it. It is also not politics, because politics is concerned with the administration of home or city in accordance with ethical and philosophical requirements, for the purpose of directing the mass toward a behaviour that will result in the preservation and permanence of the (human) species. The subject here is different from that of these two disciplines which, however, are often similar to it. In a way, it is an entirely original science²⁸.

Ibn Khaldūn elucidates the object of his new science, ‘*umrān*, by quoting Aristotle, or rather «the philosophers». They say that the human being is *zoon politikon*. And *politikos* is the adjective derived from *polis*. Hence, the Arabic term ‘*umrān* corresponds to the Greek *polis*.

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 [‘*umrān*] means²⁹.

The parallel with Vico is evident: ‘*umrān*, which the English translator renders with «civilization», is the *mondo civile*, the political world. ‘*Umrān* is the Arabic word that corresponds rather exactly to the modern European term *culture*: ‘*umrān* is connected to the Arabic verb root ‘-*m-r* meaning «live, inhabit, cultivate» just as *culture* is etymologically connected to lat. *colere* «cultivate, inhabit»³⁰. In Vico’s Italian there was not yet a word for «culture» in the modern sense, *coltura* still meant

²⁸ *Muqaddimah*, I, pp. 77-78. On the novelty of that science cfr. M. MAHDI, *Ibn Khaldūn’s Philosophy of History. A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*, London, 1957, 166 ff.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 89. H. SIMON (*Ibn Khaldūn’s Wissenschaft von der menschlichen Kultur*, Leipzig, 1959, p. 81) translates: «Der Zusammenschluß ist für die Menschen notwendig. Die Philosophen drücken das aus, indem sie sagen, der Mensch sei ein Städter von Natur, d.h. er bedarf unbedingt der Gesellschaft, die in ihrer Terminologie Stadt heißt. Das ist die Bedeutung von ‘Umrān (Kultur).»

³⁰ Cfr. MAHDI, *op. cit.*, p. 184; SIMON, *op. cit.* p. 76, fn. 62.

«agriculture». The modern meaning «culture», «Kultur», «cultura» is a recent semantic development in the European languages where normally its semantic extent is narrower than the *mondo civile* that encompasses the political organization. Al-Azmeh who thinks «civilization» is a problematic translation of ‘*umrân* and «culture» not so very fitting explains the term by «organized habitation»³¹. This, however, is also not a bad description of *mondo civile*. Considering these lexical affinities, it seems that it is, to a certain extent, correct to say that Ibn Khaldûn founds the science of the *mondo civile* or culture three hundred and fifty years before Vico.

But there are deep systematic differences:

1. The science of the ‘*umrân* has no systematic position in a philosophy of knowledge in Ibn Khaldûn. It is a science amongst others, a very encompassing one certainly. In Vico, there is only one science: *Scienza* is the realm of true knowledge and, before Vico, science was about the *mondo naturale*, and now, with Vico, the *mondo civile* becomes the substratum of true knowledge, of *scienza*. In other words: Ibn Khaldûn’s science of the ‘*umrân* is *Wissenschaft von der Kultur*, Vico’s science of the *mondo civile* is just the only *Wissenschaft* (which is based on *Kultur*).

2. Even if Vico’s *New science* starts with a chronological table of the political history of Antiquity, on the whole it clearly favours the Homeric part of the *mondo civile* to its Herculean aspect, the history of thought to the history of political organization. Ibn Khaldûn’s cultural world, ‘*umrân*, is not developed as a history of signs or a history of human thought, of *logos*.³² Ibn Khaldûn focusses clearly on the socio-political aspect of the ‘*umrân*.

3. While Vico radically transforms the *logos* of the Aristotelian definition of Man, *zoon logon echon*, into the plethora of human signs, Ibn Khaldûn on the contrary explicitly refers to that definition and stays close to Aristotle: He gives a rather Aristotelian sketch of the development of human *thought* on the one side and, on the other side – as Ibn Khaldûn’s own original contribution – reflections on *verbal* language and on a specific language, Arabic.

4. Ibn Khaldûn’s science of the ‘*umrân* is organized in the *Muqaddima*, after the discussion of general principles in the first chapter³³, as

³¹ A. AL-AZMEH, *Ibn Khaldûn. An Essay in Reinterpretation*, London, 1982, p. 135.

³² But has, however, as we will see, an important part on thought and language.

³³ Just as Vico presents his principles in the first book of the *Scienza nuova*.

a triad of Power, Hand and Thought, in the following systematic way: chapter 2 to 4: POWER: the political organization (with its characteristic fundamental bipolarity of sedentary and nomadic culture), chapter 5: HAND: the crafts or the material production, chapter 6: THOUGHT: the sciences or the intellectual production. Ibn Khaldûn is primarily interested in Power (and its historical transformations) and in a fundamental *political* trait of the Muslim world, the distinction between nomads and sedentaries. This opposition of Desert vs. City is fundamental for his historical view, with a clear preference for the Nomads: «Bedouins are the basis of, and prior to, sedentary people»³⁴ (by the way: Vico rather sides with sedentary culture, nomads are called *errones* in his Latin works, and the *errones* are not yet human but still rather animal protohumans.). The reason of this preference is ‘*aşabiya*, translated by Rosenthal as «group solidarity», the strong social cohesion of the desert tribes. ‘*Aşabiya* is the central concept of Ibn Khaldûn’s political thought, treated extensively by all commentators³⁵.

Now, even if the development of *logos* is not the main interest of Ibn Khaldûn, he dedicates however one third of his book (i.e. chapter 6) to the Aristotelian *logos* theme.

Ibn Khaldûn refers often and explicitly to Aristotle’s definition of Man as *zoon logon echon*. As we have seen, he starts with a general consideration on the *social* nature of Man in the first chapter. But as a *zoon politikon* Man is still like other animals. The specific difference to animals is thought, *logos*. And to thought Ibn Khaldûn adds the *hand*: «To man, instead, He gave the ability to think, and the hand. With the help of the ability to think, the hand is able to prepare the ground for the crafts».³⁶

This is a great anthropological insight: hand *and* thought are the basis of the human condition. Hand and thought remind us of the two fundamental Vichian figures: Hercules and Homer, the material and the intellectual elaboration of the world. But these dualities do not quite coincide: Vico’s Hercules is not only the Hand (he fights against the forces of wilderness), but – as *eroe politico* – corresponds mainly to Ibn Khaldûn’s Power. And Ibn Khaldûn’s Thought is, as we will see, not Homeric at all.

³⁴ *Muqaddimah*, I, p. 252.

³⁵ Cfr. however MANOOCHEI, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-92.

³⁶ *Muqaddimah*, I, p. 90.

Anyhow, the duality of hand and thought is an important structural trait for the composition of Ibn Khaldûn's book³⁷: The fifth chapter, on the Hand, treats commerce and other professions and crafts, material production. The sixth chapter, on the sciences, is the chapter where the theme of *logos* is developed in a very characteristic way that differs deeply from Vico's Homeric approach since thought and language are treated separately.

Chapter 6 starts with a paragraph on thought (chapter 6. 1) that is then developed into a detailed history of the mind. The mind creates first images in the brain through perceptions³⁸. This first step in thought is discernment³⁹. Thought then abstracts 'representations' from those mental images (discerning intellect). In the commerce with others and in practical life it creates 'apperceptions' (experimental intellect). Finally, beyond practical necessities, thought creates 'knowledge' (speculative intellect)⁴⁰. This creation of thought and knowledge seems to be a completely mental activity. Even if the 'apperceptions' depend upon conversations, nothing is said about their linguistic qualities and their connection with words.

Ibn Khaldûn takes up again, in chapter 6. 3, Aristotle's definition of man as *zoon politikon*⁴¹ and repeats Aristotle's second formula for the human species, *zoon logon echon*, «their ability to think»⁴², as the essentially human feature of that political nature. As in the beginning of the *Muqaddima*, thought is the specific difference to other animals, the other animals do not have *logos*. He states again «that man belongs to the genus of animals and that God distinguished him from them by the ability to think»⁴³.

The Arabic word for «thought» used here - *natiq*, from the three-letter root *n-t-q* – seems to be completely parallel to the Greek *logos*, which means speech and thought at the same time: The normal Arabic

³⁷ A. AL-AZMEH (*op. cit.*), in his great epitome of the *Muqaddima* in the second chapter of his book does not see this anthropological foundation of the *Muqaddima*.

³⁸ *Muqaddimah*, II, pp. 411-412. They very much correspond to the «affections of the soul» (*pathemata tes psyches*) in Aristotle's *De interpretatione* which are also «images», *homoiomata*.

³⁹ *Muqaddimah*, II, p. 424.

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 425.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 417.

⁴² Ivi, p. 418.

⁴³ Ivi, p. 424.

word used for the Greek word *logos* (and «logic») is *mantiq*,⁴⁴ but Ibn Khaldûn uses *natiq*. Meyer shows that *natiq*, which is used by Arab philosophers to translate *logos* in the Aristotelian formula *zoon logon echon* - *hayawan natiq* – is a word from the Koran, e.g. 51,23 (and more often)⁴⁵. Ibn Khaldûn reduces the Arabic word clearly to «thought» as did the Romans when they translated *logos* by *ratio* (and the *zoon logon echon* became *animal rationale*). This rationalistic interpretation of *logos* differs profoundly from Vico's who, on the contrary, develops a *synthesis* of speech and thought: *Logos* is *embodied* thought, thought is always also a physical sign. *Logos*, Vico says so explicitly, is word *and* idea at the same time: «*logos significa e idea e parola*»⁴⁶. On the contrary, Ibn Khaldûn, throughout his book, maintains the separation of thought and language. There is, as he says, a veil between the words and thought: «Words and expressions are media and veils between the ideas».⁴⁷ This separation of words and ideas is affirmed in other contexts, e.g. when he states that «poetry and prose work with words, and not with ideas» or that «the ideas are secondary to the words»⁴⁸.

Words are treated separately from the ideas, but they have, nevertheless, a very important role in Ibn Khaldûn's new science. He writes about language for the first time at the end of the fourth chapter (chapter 4. 22), in the Power section of the book: Language is an essential element of the social organisation, of Power. In the cities the dialects come from the founders or conquerors, hence they are Arabic. Since religion is in Arabic, Arabic must govern, and other languages are to be avoided. The second Khalif even prohibited other languages. In the cities, amongst the sedentaries, we have a corrupted Arabic contrasting with the true Arabic of the desert tribes. Language, in the *Muqaddima*, first occurs as

⁴⁴ Cfr IRWIN, *op. cit.*, p. 76; MAHDI, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁴⁵ Meyer finds this usage astonishing: «In Anbetracht dieser Sanktionierung durch den Koran ist es schon sehr verwunderlich, wenn in der Philosophie der Mensch ein *hayawan natiq*, ein sprechendes Tier genannt wird. Dies ist natürlich die Übersetzung des griechischen *zoon logon echon*» (E. MEYER, *Sprache und Weisheit*, in *Aristotelisches Erbe im arabisch lateinischen Mittelalter*, ed. A. Zimmermann, Berlin/New York, 1986, p. 127).

⁴⁶ *Sn44*, 401.

⁴⁷ *Muqaddimab*, III, p. 316.

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 391, quoted by M. COOKE, *Ibn Khaldun and Language: From Linguistic Habit to Philological Craft*, in *Ibn Khaldun and Islamic Ideology*, ed. by B. B. Lawrence, Leiden, 1984, p. 28.

a part of the historical development of the dynamic opposition between the sedentary and the nomadic, of course with a strong preference for the nomadic language, because this means Arabic, pure Arabic. It is certainly not wrong to say that Arabic is the *'aṣabiyah* language. From the very beginning, it is clear that 'language' in the *Muqaddima* means verbal language, mostly even a specific historical language, Arabic, and not an ensemble of different visual and phonetic semioses (gestures, images, words) as in Vico.

Language is then treated exhaustively in chapter 6. 43 to 6. 59 (one third of the long chapter, 170 pages in Rosenthal's translation), in long elaborations of various linguistic themes: language as a craft, language acquisition (of Arabic) through dialogical habitualisation, a classification of Arab dialects, language of the nomads and of the sedentaries, style, poetry. The reflection on the two Arab languages, that of the nomads and that of the cities, is the heart of Ibn Khaldûn's linguistic elaboration. Thus, the fundamental opposition of his history – sedentaries vs nomads – recurs in his linguistic considerations.⁴⁹

To sum up: Ibn Khaldûn clearly separates thought and language. The Aristotelian *logos* theme is therefore developed in two ways: the *thought* aspect of *logos* in a discussion of thought and logical problems, the *speech* aspect of *logos* in a long treatment of the Arabic language. This corresponds very well to the Aristotelian separation in *De interpretatione*: thought, *pathemata tes psyches*, is something non-linguistic, and language, *ta en te phone*, is something non-cognitive, it is communicative sound⁵⁰. Ibn Khaldûn stays close to Aristotelian positions in these linguistic matters.

3. *Two new sciences of polis and logos.*

Now, looking back, the comparison of the two authors can be summarized in the following way: The striking parallel is the fact that both authors create a new science and that this new science is a science of the *polis*: *'umrân* in Ibn Khaldûn, *mondo civile* in Vico: Culture. The human

⁴⁹ COOKE, *op. cit.*, seems to be the only study of the language theme in Ibn Khaldun, since Dayeh's paper is not yet published.

⁵⁰ ARISTOTLE, *De interpretatione*, 16a, cfr. J. TRABANT, *Mithridates im Paradies. Kleine Geschichte des Sprachdenkens*, München, 2003, pp. 29-34.

being is a *political* being whose specificity is *logos*, the ability to think. But there are five rather profound differences.

1. The *Muqaddima* is not a philosophical book in the sense of a theory of cognition⁵¹. It does not look for an answer to the metaphysical question of philosophy, i.e. how true knowledge is possible. Ibn Khaldûn's book is a book on culture. Vico's *Scienza nuova* is explicitly philosophy, philosophy *based on* culture, *mondo civile*; it is metaphysics becomes metapolitics.

2. Culture, the *mondo civile*, hence, has a completely different systematic position in both authors. In Vico the *mondo civile* is the material and proof for philosophical truth. This turn of the substratum of philosophy from the natural to the political world is the first novelty of Vico's science. In Ibn Khaldûn the science of the human world is not the new metaphysics, i.e. meta-politics. It is just the science of culture. It is new, because the object is a new one: culture, the '*umrân*'.

3. Since in Vico those cultural proofs for philosophical truth (*scienza*) have to be universal and eternal⁵², culture in Vico is in a certain way not culture or history as we understand it today, i.e. as the particular and chaotic sequence and ensemble of concrete man-made events and forms. It is primarily a manifestation of the *Universal*. Humans are everywhere the same, they have a *senso comune*, a common intellectual disposition, and therefore the three steps in political institutions – divine, heroic, human – are the same everywhere. Diachronically the *mondo civile* as history is *storia ideale eterna*.

Also, Ibn Khaldûn looks for general principles in the functioning and the history of the '*umrân*'. The opposition of the Desert and the City, the '*aşabiyah*', the rise and fall of states – to name just the most important of these historical laws – are, however, not extended beyond the Muslim world to other cultures, they are *general*, not universal laws. Vico's science looks for universal laws. It is science because it finds «universal and eternal» truths: *universalia et aeterna*. Ibn Khaldûn's cultural and

⁵¹ The question whether Ibn Khaldûn is a philosopher or not is discussed throughout the literature. Al-Azmeh is particularly explicit: «Ibn Khaldûn uses much of the conceptual armour used by philosophers, and Ibn Khaldûn is not a philosopher and is paradigmatically alien to philosophy» (AL-AZMEH, *op. cit.*, p. 116). IRWIN (*op. cit.*, pp. 67-70) points out that Ibn Khaldûn was rather critical of philosophy and did not consider himself a philosopher. But his work is generally categorized as «philosophy of history», cfr. e.g. the title of Mahdi's great book.

⁵² *Sn44*, 163: «*scientia debet esse de universalibus et eternis*».

historical descriptions do not aspire to universal validity but belong to the general historical level of the Muslim World. Ibn Khaldûn's history remains closer to particular social structures and historical developments⁵³.

4. And, most importantly: Ibn Khaldûn's new science is not an integrated history of human social institutions *and* of human signs and cognition, manifested as *caratteri poetici*. In Vico human knowledge is poetical: *Metafisica poetica, logica poetica, morale poetica, iconomia poetica, politica poetica, storia poetica, fisica poetica, cosmografia poetica, astronomia poetica, cronologia poetica, geografia poetica* are the chapters in the second book of the *Scienza nuova* on *sapienza poetica*. The third book on the Poet, on the «vero Omero», on the true Homer, is the heart of the *Scienza nuova*. This poetical *logos* is the second novelty of Vico's science⁵⁴. Ibn Khaldûn's science of culture is mainly political history, to which he adds a description of the material techniques of production and of the production of knowledge. Thought and language, are important aspects of Ibn Khaldûn's new science, but they are not its «master key».

5. In Ibn Khaldûn language appears as verbal language. In Vico's construction of the sematological history of mankind, «real languages» – French, Italian, Greek, Latin etc. – actually are not treated. Ibn Khaldûn writes about concrete historical languages, about Arabic and the languages of the cities, and about real sociolinguistic change: e.g. about the fact that the language of the tribe will be contaminated and completely transformed in the cities, that the nomadic purity is destroyed. Ibn Khaldûn writes about the concrete social and historical circumstances of linguistic change.

6. Thus, Ibn Khaldûn's more descriptive approach is closer to the empirical facts of the civil world and, hence, appears more modern. Vico's *philosophical* approach seems old fashioned compared to the

⁵³ On the differences in the 'science' of history cfr. SEVILLA (*Ibn Jaldún y Vico: afinidades y contrastes*, cit., p. 199): Ibn Khaldun conceives of history as «event and succession», «acontecimiento y sucesión»; Vico's ideal and eternal history is the «true science of man», «verdadera ciencia del hombre». Cfr. also LANA (*op. cit.*, p. 162): «Where Ibn Khaldun provides us with descriptions of societal development, Vico provides us with a method and a universal perspective of societal advance and change».

⁵⁴ Lana alludes to the integration of the poetical and the societal when he adds to his comparative remark that Vico's «method encompasses philological examination of the poetry and terms of understanding of older cultures» (*ibid.*).

Arab historian. His research of universal laws of culture and history squeezes the *mondo civile* into the Procrustean bed of the old European conception of ‘science’ (*universalia et aeterna*). Ibn Khaldûn as a genuine *historical* author observes, without these universalistic or ‘scientific’ constraints, the functioning and the transformation of a specific society, his Muslim world, and thereby discovers, as a sociologist *avant la lettre*, its fundamental social structures and historical laws in a new science of the ‘*umrân*’.

4. Conclusion.

That Ibn Khaldûn and Giambattista Vico, in distant centuries and in radically different places, both explicitly intended the foundation of a new science of the *polis* was the strong resemblance that justified the comparative approach to these two authors. In the classical comparisons Ibn Khaldûn is the «forerunner» of Vico as the founder of the «philosophy of history»⁵⁵. José Sevilla’s thorough study of the two authors, however, shows the deep differences but also why the comparison is justified and brings new insights. The present comparative sketch is a proposal for further research on the basis of the approach to Vico as a philosopher, not as a universal historian. He turns metaphysics from Nature to Culture, the *mondo civile*, where we find true knowledge because we can have true knowledge only of those things we have made ourselves. This turn towards the *mondo civile* is new. The other novelty – and the master key to his science – is the ‘linguistic’ or ‘sematological’ turn, i.e. the fact that poets create thought in *poetic characters*. I hope that my comparative intuitions lead also to reading Ibn Khaldûn not only as a political historian. The semiotic perspective on Vico might induce to acknowledging that also Ibn Khaldûn integrates language and thought, *logos*, into his historical construction. That the *logos* part of his work is generally not considered important is shown, e.g., by the fact that the book on language is completely absent from some translations. The German translators and interpreters think that this part can be skipped⁵⁶. In reality, language is not just a *quantité négligeable*, but an integral and

⁵⁵ Sevilla’s study: *Ibn Jaldún y Vico*, cit., is a convincing rebuttal of the problematic concept of «forerunner» in the light of the fundamental divergences.

⁵⁶ Even SEVILLA (ivi, and *Ibn Jaldún, Vico e Ortega*, cit.), reads the *Muqaddima* only up to chapter 4.

systematic part of the *'umrān*, and hence of the science of the *'umrān*. Therefore it is not acceptable to ignore the *logos* part of the *Muqaddima* and of the *'umrān* (nor the chapter on the HAND, the material production)⁵⁷. It has to be read together with the political part as in Vico who for a long time had the same destiny and was read exclusively as a political historian or «philosopher of (political) history». But it has become evident that his history is at the same time a history of human thought, i.e. of language and human signs, and that his philosophy of the *mondo civile* is hence at the same time a philosophy of political developments and of signs.

JÜRGEN TRABANT

VICO AND IBN KHALDÛN: *POLIS* AND *LOGOS*. *That Ibn Khaldûn created a 'new science' of culture of the civil world three hundred and fifty years before Vico's revolutionary invention of such a science is a classical statement and a challenge to comparative reflection. The parallelism between these two authors is as striking as their profound differences are. Comparative studies traditionally focused on their different conceptions of history and culture, i.e. on polis. My linguistic or semiotic approach to Vico adds a new perspective to this comparison taking also into consideration logos, the other term of the Aristotelian duality between logos and polis. The differences between the two authors' conceptions of logos are as deep as those in their respective conceptions of polis. Including Ibn Khaldûn's linguistic reflections (logos) in a study of his work can open a new chapter in its understanding and highlight its 'modernity'.*

⁵⁷ AL-AZMEH (*op. cit.*, pp. 38; 120-121) does not give great weight to language in his epitome of the *Muqaddima*. Unfortunately, I do not know whether this is already done in the scholarship on Ibn Khaldun in the Muslim world. Cfr. I. DAYEH, *Ibn Khaldun on Linguistic Purity, Decay and Universal Rules*, in «Philological Encounters», forthcoming.