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WHY IS THERE STUDY OF RELIGIONS IN IBN KHALDUN'S *MUQADDIMAH*? EXPLORING SOME POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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ABSTRACT

The study of religion is an attempt to understand various aspects of religion, especially through the use of other intellectual disciplines. The *Muqaddimah* is principally meant to be an introduction to the voluminous text of history, namely *Kitab al-ʿIbar*. Yet, the creation of *Muqaddimah* includes information on the study of human, which simultaneously includes information and views on religions. There are many views on religion highlighted by Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah*. These views on religion mostly describe the roles of religion in human life as found through his sociohistorical approach of *ʿUmrān* science. Through the use of qualitative content analysis on *Muqaddimah* text, this paper found that there are a few themes highlighted by Ibn Khaldun in the study of religions. Ibn Khaldun's study of religions here includes his expositions and clarifications of the religions of Judaism, Christianity, Magianism, Sabeanism and polytheism. This also includes Ibn Khaldun's theorization of religion, such as his theories on the interrelationship between *ʿasabiyyah* and religion, *al-nas ʿala dīn mulūkihim* (the common people follow the religion of their rulers) and *al-insan ibn ma'lūfihi wa ʿawāʿidihi la tabʿatihi wa mizājīhi* (human is a child of his customs and not of his natural disposition). This paper purports to provide possible answers to why there is the study of religions in the *Muqaddimah*. In looking for the answers to this question, this paper found that there are three main features which are related to this discussion, namely: the ubiquitous nature of study of religions, Ibn Khaldun's intellectual background and his unique *Muqaddimah*.

KEYWORDS: Study of religions, Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, ubiquitous, *Isrāʿīliyyāt*

INTRODUCTION

Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn is a prolegomenon to the voluminous text of history, namely *Tārīkh* or *Kitab al-ʿIbar* by Ibn Khaldun. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun's purpose for writing the *Muqaddimah* is closely related to the purpose of writing his *Tārīkh*. In his own words, Ibn Khaldun confesses that the initiative to produce a historical book of his own, is due to four reasons as follows: first, to discuss some problematic and wrong facts in the books by previous historians such as al-Masʿūdī, al-Ṭabarī and al-Wāqidī. Second, to provide new arrangements of historical facts and reflections. Third, to give new focuses on the history of the Arabs and Berbers of Maghrib, including their early origin to Ibn Khaldun's time. And lastly, to describe new remarks on civilization, urbanization, human social organization and dynasty building (Ibn Khaldun, 2014).

To think of Ibn Khaldun and *Muqaddimah* as legitimate subjects of research in a study of religion is fairly, if not as a whole, trying to move against the current of the conventional thought in the academia. For Ibn Khaldun and *Muqaddimah* are popularly taken as subjects of study in the disciplines of history, politics, philosophy and education. Only a few scholarly works, such as Walter J. Fischel's (1902-1973) *Ibn Khaldun in Egypt: His Public Functions and Historical Research* (1967), Solomon Pines' (1908-1990) *Ibn Khaldun and Maimonides: a Comparison between Two Texts* (1970), Kalman Bland's (b. 1942) *An Islamic Theory of Jewish History: The Case of Ibn Khaldun* (1983), Steven M. Wasserstrom's (b. 1953) *Heresiography of the Jews in Mamluk Times* (1999), Muhammad Azizan Sabjan's *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft: A Study of Ibn Khaldun and Religious Institutions of Christianity* (2010)

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and Martin Whittingham's *the Value of Tahrif Ma'nawi (corrupt interpretation) as a Category for Analysing Muslim Views of the Bible: Evidence from Al-Radd Al-Jamil and Ibn Khaldun* (2011) that recognize the viability of study of religions by Ibn Khaldun through his *Muqaddimah* and *Tārīkh*.

As remarked by Kalman Bland, a Professor of Religious Study at Duke University, the study of other religions by Ibn Khaldun is 'new, extraordinary and highly useful,' but 'unduly neglected' in the academic circle (Bland, 1983, 196). Therefore, this paper is presented against the conventional writings, which focuses on providing some possible answers why is there study of religions in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*. This paper explores this unconventional question by firstly describes the brief biography of Ibn Khaldun and introducing the main contents of the *Muqaddimah*. Next, this paper continues by highlighting some probable features that are related to Ibn Khaldun's study of religions in the *Muqaddimah*, which make the possible answers to why there is the study of religions in the *Muqaddimah*.

IBN KHALDUN: A LIFE OF LEARNING

In praising Ibn Khaldun and his achievements, George Sarton (1884-1956), a renowned Belgian-American historian of science, remarks: "the greatest theoretician of history, the greatest philosopher of man's experience, not only of the Middle Ages, but the whole period extending from the time of the great classical historians down to that of Machiavelli, Bodin and Vico" (1975, vol. 3, 1775-1776).

Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis on 1 Ramaḍān 732AH / 27 May 1332AD (Schmidt, 1978, 34). He was a "medieval scholar famed for his philosophy of history and insights into the rise and fall of civilizations" (Campo, 2009, 334). One of the important factors that influenced the creation of his *Umrān* science and his writings was his travels to many regions of African, Arabic and European countries such as Morocco, Spain, Egypt, Palestine and Saudi Arabia of today (Fuad Baali, n.d.).

Ibn Khaldun's full name is al-ʿAllāmah Walī al-Dīn Abū Zayd ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn (Mohammad Abdullah Enan, 1997, 3). Therefore, his real name is actually ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, whereas Walī al-Dīn is his *laqab* (title) given to him in conjunction of his appointment as the *muftī* (religious authoritative scholar) of *Mālikī madhhab* (school of Islamic law) in Egypt. Whilst, Abū Zayd is his *kunya* (fatherly title), which means the father of Zayd; who is his eldest son; as in the traditional culture of Arab (ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Waḥīd Wāfī, 1962, 12-13). The name 'Khaldūn,' which is popularly ascribed to him and widely known in the academia is actually originated from a honorary title conferred to his ninth grandfather, whose name is Khālid ibn ʿUthmān. This grandfather of Ibn Khaldun was his first and earliest family member who entered Spain or *al-Andalus* during the opening of Islamic countries (*al-Fath al-Islāmī*). According to the culture of Arab and Moroccan, though his grandfather name is Khālid, it is changed to 'Khaldūn' with the additional Arabic letters of *waw* (و) and *nūn* (ن) to signify one's great position by using a collective noun (اسم جمع). With this change, the whole Khālid ibn ʿUthmān's family line is popularly known as the *Banī Khaldūn* or the generation of Khaldun (ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Waḥīd Wāfī, 1962, 13).

Ibn Khaldun was born in a noble and respected family in the Tunis community. According to his own confession, his family originated from the region of Hadhramaut, which at present located in the Republic of Yemen in the Arab Peninsular. This region is located very far from Tunisia, which is around 4,000 to 5,000 kilometres. Due to a war between the Muslims and Christian Crusade in Seville, his whole family members had moved to Tunisia to save their lives from becoming the casualties of the battle (Ibn Khaldun, 1979, 6-10; ʿUmar Fārūq al-Ṭabbāʿ, 1992,

27). His nearest grandparent, namely Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn (d. 737AH) was a trusted officer for Amīr Abū Yaḥyā al-Liḥyānī, a district leader during his time. Whilst his father, namely Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad ibn Khaldūn (d. 749AH) disliked any involvement with politics. According to Ibn Khaldun, his father spent most of his time on learning varieties of knowledge and mastering Arabic poetry (ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Waḥīd Wāfī, 1962, 22-23).

MAIN CONTENTS OF MUQADDIMAH

Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn refers to a lengthy introduction to the voluminous text of history, namely *Tārīkh* or *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* by Ibn Khaldun. It was prepared between the years 1375 to 1379 and has been taken as both: a respected and reviled work by many later scholars (Jaques, 2004, 335–336). While describing the *Muqaddimah*, Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975), a late eminent emeritus professor of world history and civilization, says: “in the *Prolegomena* to his *Universal History*, he has conceived and formulated a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest book of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time and place.” (Toynbee, 1951, Vol. 3, 321-322). Here, it could be said: *law la al-ʿIbar wa al-Muqaddimah, mā ʿurifa Ibn Khaldūn wa al-ʿaṣabiyyah*, which means: if it is not for (his) *History* and *Prolegomena*, (the world) would have never known Ibn Khaldun and his solidarity theory.

In fulfilling his main purpose in writing a book on the history of Maghrib; he proposed the contents of *Muqaddimah* with an opening (*khuṭbah* or *dībājah iftitāḥiyyah*), introduction of the book on the virtues of Science of History (*Muqaddimah fī faḍl ʿilm al-Tārīkh*) and six *fuṣūl* or chapters. This book on the history of Maghrib is also included with his own original ideas on civilization, urbanization, human social organization and dynasty building (Al-Ḥuṣṣī 1968:110-117; Al-Azmeh 1981:3-40; Ḍiyāʾ Al-Dīn 1995:32-39; Ibn Khaldūn 2014 1:176-178). In brief, the contents of the *Muqaddimah* are as follows (Ibn Khaldun 1967 1: xvii; Ibn Khaldūn 2005 1: vii-xviii):

1. Opening of the book (خطبة الكتاب أو ديباجته أو افتتاحيته)
2. Introduction of the book on the excellence of historiography, appreciation of the various approaches to history, a glimpse at the different kinds of errors to which historians are liable and something about why these errors occur, which is organized in three parts (المقدمة في فضل علم التاريخ وتحقيق مذاهبه والاماع لما يعرض للمؤرخين من المغالط وذكر شيء من أسبابها)
3. Chapter One: Human civilization in general, its various kinds, and the portion of earth that is civilized in six prefaces (الفصل الأول: في العمران البشري على الجملة)
4. Chapter Two: Bedouin civilization, savage nations and tribes and their conditions of life in twenty-nine subchapters (الفصل الثاني: في العمران البدوي والأمم الوحشية والقبائل)
5. Chapter Three: On dynasties, royal authority, the caliphate, government ranks, and all that goes with these things in fifty-two subchapters (الفصل الثالث: في الدول العامة والملك والخلافة والمراتب السلطانية)
6. Chapter Four: On countries, cities, and all other forms of sedentary civilization in twenty-two subchapters (الفصل الرابع: في البلدان والأمصار وسائر العمران)
7. Chapter Five: On the various aspects of making a living, such as profit and the crafts in thirty-two subchapters (الفصل الخامس: في المعاش ووجوهه من الكسب والصنائع)
8. Chapter Six: On various kinds of sciences, methods of instruction and conditions to obtain these sciences in fifty-nine subchapters (الفصل السادس: في العلوم وأصنافها والتعليم وطرقه وسائر وجوهه)

THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS IN THE *MUQADDIMAH*

This paper purports to provide possible answers to why there is the study of religions in the *Muqaddimah*. In looking for the answers to this question, this paper found that there are three main features which are related to this discussion, namely: the ubiquitous nature of study of religions, Ibn Khaldun's intellectual background and his unique *Muqaddimah*. Therefore, the description of this relationship is formulated in a triangular form as in Figure 1 below.

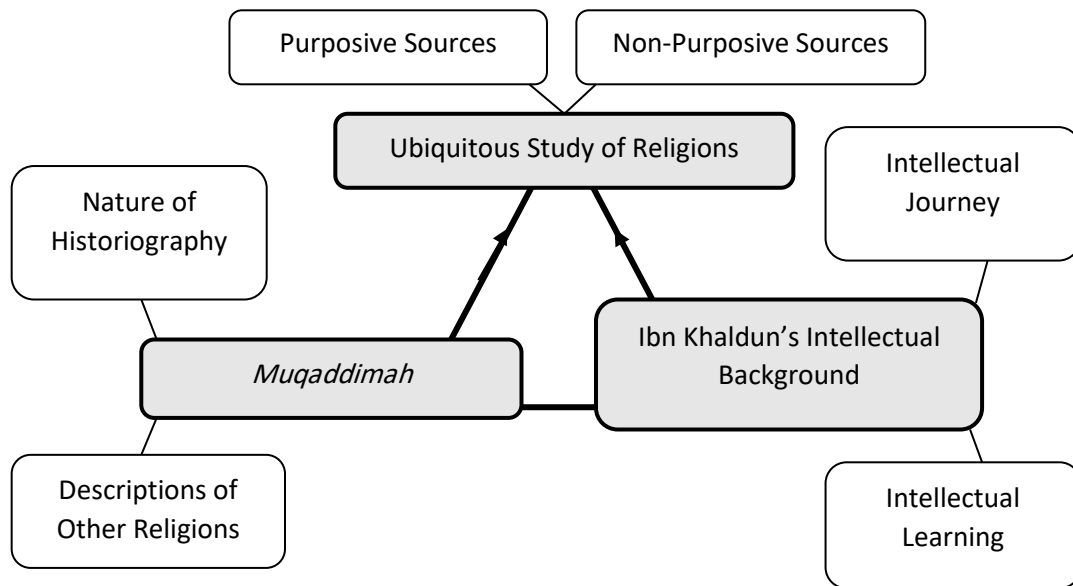


Figure 1: Relationship of the Study of Other Religions to the *Muqaddimah* and Ibn Khaldun's Personal Background (Source: Fischel 1967; Smart 2006; Syed Farid alAtas 2014; Ibn Khaldun 2014)

Ibn Khaldun's Intellectual Background

Evidently, both aspects namely the intellectual background of Ibn Khaldun and his *Muqaddimah*, are important drives of Ibn Khaldun's study of religions. By intellectual background, this means the lifelong pursuit of knowledge by Ibn Khaldun, which includes his early education in Maghrib with the leading scholars of his time. This is then followed by his participation in the official scientific discussions, travels to many places such as Jerusalem, the Holy place for four religions; and meetings with many great figures such as Pedro in Spain; Abraham Ibn Zarzar, a Spanish Jew scholar of his time; and Tamerlane in Damascus.

In sum, the intellectual background of a scholar is a lifelong of learning. This is true in the life of Ibn Khaldun, where he committed his whole life, especially in the Egypt phase of his life, to scholarship and teaching. This lifelong pursuit for knowledge, including his meeting with the non-Muslims enrich his study and analysis of other religions.² In one way or another, *Muqaddimah* is the proof of this achievement.

² It is interesting to note here a similar experience of lifelong learning by Clifford James Geertz (1926-2006), whereby he says: "I suppose that what I have been doing all these years is piling up learning. But, at the time, it seemed to me that I was trying to figure out what to do next, and hold off a reckoning: reviewing the situation, scouting out the possibilities, evading the consequences, thinking through the thing again" (Geertz 1999:1).

The Ubiquitous Nature of the Study of Religions

By ubiquity, this means that the discourse on religion is not just specifically concentrated in the study of religion. Whereby, discourses on religions could actually be found in many other pursuits of knowledge and sciences of all time. The study of religions is ubiquitous in the sense that the discussion on religion is very much flexible and permeating. For instance, one can read on religious origin and development in the science of history (read: not only in the study of religion). One can also know the ideals of religion from learning the philosophy. In the same way, one can also make sense on why and how religious people live in a society from reading the works on sociology or anthropology. In sum, the discussions on religions could be found in the other disciplines of study, in the same way as to find the study of religions in the *Muqaddimah*.

Again, to illustrate this ideal and discussion, one needs to comprehend that religious aspects or data are not only limited to the religious studies. As a result of that, it could be found today numerous theories and methods of understanding religion that are rooted in many modern disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology (Doniger, 2006, 1031-1033). To presume that religious aspects and data are only limited to the study of religions is actually dichotomizing. And to borrow from Maslow's wisdom, dichotomizing subsequently leads to pathologizing (Maslow, 1986, 11-18).

The study of religions then, is an independent and simultaneously, inclusive discipline of study. Independent in the sense that it can stand on its own, with its specific subject and objective of study. Whilst, it is also inclusive as it could also be found in the disciplines of many modern studies. It could be found in anthropology while discussing on religious culture; or in sociology while discoursing on religious communities; and in psychology while exploring on human religious behaviours.

Therefore, in terms of references and works in the study of religions, they could be divided into two categories, namely purposive and non-purposive. By purposiveness, this refers to the opuses and writings of the Muslim scholarship in the study of religions, which their main and primary purpose of creation is for the study of religion/s. Conversely, by non-purposiveness, this refers to the rest and remaining works of the Muslim scholarship in the study of religions, which the study of religion/s is undertaken not as the main reason of its creation (Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi, 2014).

This ideal of analysing the study of other religions in the texts of non-purposive works is not something new. For instance, Ahmad Shboul (1979) in his doctoral thesis studied al-Mas'ūdī's study of other religions in his historical *magnum opus*, namely *Murūj al-Dhahab Wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar* (2005). The same also goes to Kamar Oniah in her doctoral thesis (2003), where she analysed al-Bīrūnī's (362-440AH) study of other religions through his sociohistorical texts, namely *Fī Taḥqīq Mā Lī al-Hind Min Maqūlah Maqbūlah Fī al-ʿAql Aw Mardhūlah* (1958) and *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah ʿAn al-Qurūn al-Khāliyyah* (1897). Whilst, Mohd Sani Badron (2012) has analysed Ibn Arabī's conception of religion from his mystical masterpieces, namely: *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and *Ījāz al-Bayān Fī Tarjamah ʿAn al-Qurʾān*. Next, this paper continues with the discussions on the study of other religions in the *Muqaddimah*. With these examples, it is evident that the study of other religions in the texts of non-purposive works is not something new and supposed to be realized by the present and future researchers in the academia.

The *Muqaddimah*: Some Notes on Religions

Though the *Muqaddimah* is principally meant to be a lengthy introduction to the voluminous text of history, namely *Tārīkh* or *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* by Ibn Khaldun, nevertheless the creation of the book also includes information on the study of human, which is known today as anthropology³. In one way or another, the study of human could never escape from touching the instrumental aspects of religions from being discussed, for human history is not only made from cultural, political, commercial and educational activities, but also religious. In this sense, Ibn Khaldun says:

Many weak-minded and uncritical persons learned these things from them, and even (the competent historians) themselves accepted them without critical investigation, and thus (strange stories) crept into their material. In consequence, historiography became nonsensical and confused, and its students fumbled around. Historiography came to be considered a domain of the common people. Therefore, today, the scholar in this field needs to know the principles of politics, the (true) nature of existent things, and the differences among nations, places, and periods with regard to ways of life, character qualities, customs, sects, schools, and everything else. He further needs a comprehensive knowledge of present conditions in all these respects. He must compare similarities or differences between the present and the past (or distantly located) conditions. He must know the causes of the similarities in certain cases and of the differences in others. He must be aware of the differing origins and beginnings of (different) dynasties and religious groups, as well as of the reasons and incentives that brought them into being and the circumstances and history of the persons who supported them. His goal must be to have complete knowledge of the reasons for every happening, and to be acquainted with the origin of every event. Then, he must check transmitted information with the basic principles he knows. If it fulfills their requirements, it is sound. Otherwise, the historian must consider it as spurious and dispense with it (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, vol. 1, 55-56).

As underlined above in previous quotation, Ibn Khaldun stresses that historiography is a special discipline, which is suited only for the knowledgeable and skilful scholars to master. In other words, historiography is not just about history, it is also about politics, philosophy, cultures, geography, chronologies and also religions. This is evident when Ibn Khaldun uses these terms to represent religions, namely “ways of life, character qualities, customs, sects and schools” (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, vol. 1, 55).

The same path was also shown by the previous famous Muslim historiographers and historians, such as Abū ʿAbdillāh Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar Ibn Wāqid al-Wāqidī (130-207AH), Aḥmad Ibn Yahyā al-Balādhūrī (d. 278/279AH), Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310AH) and Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī Ibn Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī (282/283-345AH), which their works were read by Ibn Khaldun. In other words, all masterpieces by these previously listed Muslim historiographers and historians, also included their study of other religions altogether with their historical descriptions. For instance, though al-Wāqidī’s *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (1984) focuses on the history of

³ Anthropology literally means the study of human, where *anthropos* means human and *logos* means study. According to Barbara D. Miller, “Anthropology is the study, analysis, and description of humanity’s past and present. Questions about the past include prehistoric origins and human evolution. Study of contemporary humanity focuses on biological and cultural diversity, including language. Compared to other disciplines that address humanity such as history, sociology, or psychology, anthropology is broader in two ways. In terms of humanity’s past, anthropology considers a greater depth of time. In terms of contemporary humans, anthropology covers a wider diversity of topics than other disciplines, from molecular DNA to cognitive development and religious beliefs” (Miller, 2008, vol. 1, 116).

war during the days of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, however he also includes details of other religions, especially of the *Mushrikūn* (polytheists) of Mecca (al-Wāqidī, 1984). The same also goes to al-Masūdī, where his study of religions has caught the attention of some modern researchers such as Ahmad Shboul (1979) and Sulaymān ʿAbdullāh al-Shuwaykat (1986), through their published doctor of philosophy theses and Majdan Alias' (2011) critical journal article.

Due to that, it is also found in the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldun, a number of analyses and descriptions on the study of other religions. This paper found that Ibn Khaldun uses the word *Dīn* in seventeen times and *al-Dīn* eighty-four times in his *Muqaddimah* (Ibn Khaldun, 2005 and Ibn Khaldun, 2014). Ibn Khaldun's study of religions here includes his expositions and clarifications of the religions of Judaism, Christianity, Magianism, Sabeanism and polytheism. This also includes Ibn Khaldun's theorization of religion, such as his theories on the interrelationship between *ʿasabiyyah* and religion, *al-nas ʿala dīn mulūkihim* (the common people follow the religion of their rulers) and *al-insan ibn ma'lūfihi wa ʿawā'idihī la tabīʿatihi wa mizājihī* (human is a child of his customs and not of his natural disposition).

Furthermore, there are also previous researches and papers by modern scholars of religious study and historiography that also highlight the same discussions on the study of religions in the *Muqaddimah*. These scholars, including non-Muslim and Muslim, discuss on multiple aspects related to the study of Ibn Khaldun's study of religions such as his study of Judaism, Christianity, Jesus, Bible and theories of religion.

For instance, Walter J. Fischel (1902-1973), Solomon Pines, Kalman Bland, Steven M. Wasserstrom, Muhammad Azizan Sabjan and Martin Whittingham focus on the specific issues, such as Ibn Khaldun's usage of Jewish sources and his knowledge of the Bible (Fischel, 1958, 147-171; Pines, 1970, 265-274; Bland, 1983, 189-197; Wasserstrom, 1999, 164; Muhammad Azizan Sabjan, 2010; and Whittingham, 2011, 209-222). Then, in terms of Ibn Khaldun's theories of religion, scholars such as Bryan S. Turner, Charles Issawi (1916-2000) and Syed Omar Syed Agil highlight his view on secularism and *asabiyyah* (group feeling) in the sociological study. They discuss on the role that religion plays in society, politics, culture and the elements of human nature and economics in relation to religion (Turner, 1971, 32-48; Issawi, 1963, 131 – 139 and Syed Omar Syed Agil, 2008, 301 – 307).

While amongst some Muslim scholars, though a few of them acknowledge the information on other religions provided by Ibn Khaldun in his *Muqaddimah*, there are a few others who disregard his efforts on this particular. Ibn Khaldun is condemned for collecting the *Isrāʾīliyyāt* (news or stories from the Jews) in the *Muqaddimah*. This also includes his writings on magic (*al-Siḥr*) and sorcery (*al-Ṭalismāt*), where Ibn Khaldun describes them in his Chapter Six of *Muqaddimah*, where both are listed together with the other popular sciences of his age (al-Ḥuṣrī, 1968, 12-41; Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn, 1995, 40-47 and Mushegh Asatryan, 2003). However, it is very clear in the text of *Muqaddimah* that Ibn Khaldun also highlights on the prohibition from magic (*al-Siḥr*) and sorcery (*al-Ṭalismāt*) in the Islamic law.

Before any condemnation is made, people are supposed to differentiate and distinguish between both contexts in the Muslim scholarship, namely first, the prevention of dissemination of heretical or non-Islamic views and secondly, the academic or intellectual study of other religions. Prevention or prohibition of widespread of heretical or non-Islamic views by the scholars of Islam are best understood as *sadd al-dharaʾiʿ* or blocking the means, especially among the public and ordinary Muslims. This is beautifully described by Imam al-Ghazali in his *Ihyaʾ* as follows: كما يَصَانُ الصَّبِيُّ عَنْ شَاطِئِ النَّهْرِ خِيفَةً عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الْوُقُوعِ فِي النَّهْرِ (al-Ghazali, 1982, Vol. 1, 22), which means: the same as a child is protected from the riverside, fear from him or her drown in the river.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the study of other religions are prohibited. Imam al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 471 AH) exemplifies this in a poetical manner as follows: عرفت الشر لا للشر ولكن لتوقية، ومن لم يعرف الشر يقع فيه (Al-Isfarāyīnī, 2010, 14), which means: I know (or learn) the wrong teachings not for the sake of it (or to apply it) but for protection, one who does not know (or learn) the wrong teachings might just involve with it. In addition, to study other religions is also to get to know others faith and religious practices, which also culminated as cultures and traditions. In Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49: verse 13, Allah the Most High says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ
(١٣)

O you men! surely We have created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is Knowing, Aware.

Whilst on the use of *Isrāʿīliyyāt*, in reality, its polemics had begun since the age of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, where diverse stands were taken, shown and taught by the Prophet PBUH to his companions RA. Furthermore, this issue is not only restricted to the Muslim circle, but it also prompts questions from the Jews and the Christians as to why Muslims would source the Torah and the Bible to understand Islam, whether as borrowing (Geiger, 1898; Zwemer, 1900, 178; Zwemer, 1907, 186; Goldziher, 1971, Vol. 2, 346-362; Noldeke et. al. 2013, 312-313), intertextual exercise (Firestone, 2003, 1-22; Robins & Newby 2003, 23-42), side by side reading (Lodahl, 2010) or as subtext (Reynolds, 2010, 39-199).

In Muslim scholarship, *Isrāʿīliyyāt* literally derives from the Arabic word *Isrāʿīliyyah*. *Isrāʿīliyyāt* is the plural form for *Isrāʿīliyyah*, whereby *Isrāʿīliyyah* is an infinitive (*maṣḍar*), which functions as a relative or relational adjective (*al-Nisbah*) and genitive construction (*al-Iḍāfah*) to the word *Isrāʿīl*. In the Muslim scholarship, *Isrāʿīliyyāt* refers to the stories and narratives from the Jewish sources (Al-Dhahabī, 1990, 13). Nevertheless, *Isrāʿīliyyāt* here are not only restricted to the sources from the Jews, but they also include sources from the Christians. This is best illustrated by referring to Muhammad Muhammad Abu Shahbah's words (1408H, 12):

وإسرائيل هو: يعقوب —عليه السلام—، وبنو إسرائيل هم: أبناء يعقوب، ومن تناسلوا منهم فيما بعد، إلى عهد موسى ومن جاء بعده من الأنبياء، حتى عهد عيسى —عليه السلام— وحتى عهد نبينا محمد —صلى الله عليه وسلم—.

Which means: And *Isrāʿīl* is Yaʿqūb *Alayh al-Salam*, which means the Servant of Allah. And *Banu Isrāʿīl* are those Children of Yaʿqūb and those begotten from them afterwards, until the day of Musa and also those Prophets after him. Until the day of Isa *ʿAlayh al-Salām* and until the day of our Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

Due to that, the concept of *Isrāʿīliyyāt* includes Jewish and Christian sources, and also news from the *Tawrah*, *Zabūr* and *Injīl*. Interestingly, some scholars have taken the term *Isrāʿīliyyāt* to be understood as inclusive of other non-Muslim elements, which cover Zoroastrian, Near Eastern and other foreign elements in the Quranic exegesis (Albayrak, 2000, 114). While some other scholars would restrict *Isrāʿīliyyāt* to only sources from the people of the book or *Ahl al-Kitāb*. These sources include both news from the Jews (*Isrāʿīliyyāt*) and the Christians (*Naṣrāniyyāt*) sources, whereby some of them are citations from the *Tawrah*, *Zabūr* and also the *Injīl*. Some of the earliest writings on the use of *Isrāʿīliyyāt* in Muslim scholarship could be referred to ʿUbayd ibn Shariyah's (d. 67AH / 686CE) *al-Mulūk Wa Akhbār al-Maḍīn* as identified by Ibn Qutaybah's (213AH / 828CE – 276AH / 885CE) *Taʾwīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* (Vajda, 2012; Ibn Qutaybah, 1999, 403-410).

There are many general reasons why Muslims use *Isrāʿīliyyāt*. In the days of the Prophet Muhammad, these reasons could be linked to the close geographical and political relations

between the Arabs and the People of the Book, namely the Jews and the Christians. According to Ibn Khaldun (732-808 CE):

وقد جمع المتقدمون في ذلك وأوعوا، إلا أن كتبهم ومنقولاتهم تشتمل على الغث والسمين والمقبول والمردود. والسبب في ذلك أن العرب لم يكونوا أهل كتاب ولا علم، وإنما غلبت عليهم البداوة والامية. فإذا تشوقوا إلى معرفة شيء مما تشوق إليه النفوس البشرية في أسباب المكنونات، وبدء الخليقة، وأسرار الوجود، فإنما يسألون عنه أهل الكتاب قبلهم ويستفيدونه منهم، وهم أهل التوراة من اليهود ومن تبع دينهم من النصارى. وأهل التوراة الذين بين العرب يومئذ بادية مثلهم، ولا يعرفون من ذلك إلا ما تعرفه العامة من أهل الكتاب، ومعظمهم من حمير الذين أخذوا بدين اليهودية. فلما أسلموا بقوا على ما كان عندهم، مما لا تعلق له بالأحكام الشرعية التي يحتاطون لها، مثل أخبار بدء الخليقة وما يرجع إلى الحدثن والملاحم وأمثال ذلك. وهؤلاء مثل كعب الأحبار ووهب بن منبه وعبد الله بن سلام وأمثالهم.

Which means: The early scholars had already made complete compilations on the subject (namely *tafsīr naqli*). However, their works and the information they transmit contain side by side important and unimportant matters, accepted and rejected statements. The reason is that the Arabs had no books or scholarship. The desert attitude and illiteracy prevailed among them. When they wanted to know certain things that human beings are usually curious to know, such as the reasons for the existing things, the beginning of creation, and the secrets of existence, they consulted the earlier People of the Book about it and got their information from them. The People of the Book were the Jews who had the Torah, and the Christians who followed the religion of the Jews. Now, the people of the Torah who lived among the Arabs at that time were themselves Bedouins. They knew only as much about these matters as is known to ordinary People of the Book. The majority of those Jews were Himyarites who had adopted Judaism. When they became Muslims, they clung to the information they possessed, which had no connection with the religious laws as they were very wary of it. These information include the beginning of creation and information of the type of forecasts, predictions and their equivalence. Such men were Ka'b al-Aḥbār, Wahb ibn Munabbih, °Abd Allāh ibn Salām, and similar people (Ibn Khaldun, 2014, Vol. 3, 935 and Ibn Khaldun, 1967, Vol. 2, 445).

In short, according to Islamic rulings, there are three categories of *Isrā'īliyyāt* namely: first, *Maqbūl* (accepted), secondly, *Mardūd* (refuted) and lastly, *Maskūt* °*Anhu* (unknown status of neither accepted nor refuted) (al-Shāfi'ī, n.d., 397-400; al-Dhahabī, 1990, 41-52; Albayrak, 2000, 116-121; Ibn Taimiyyah, 1994, 90-91; Ibn Kathīr, 2000, vol. 1, 9-10; al-°Asqalānī, 2001, vol.6, 575 and al-Khālidī, 2007, 43-55). Descriptions on the definitions and examples of these three main categories of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Muslim scholarship are as follows:

1. The accepted narrations of the People of the Book or the *Maqbūl* are defined as those narrations that are proven to be in line and confirmed by the revelations of Islam, namely al-Quran and al-Sunnah. For instance, these include the names of the prophets, brief stories of prophets such as Adam, Nuh, Musa and Isa, which synchronize to the reports of the Quran and Hadith.
2. The *Mardūd* or the refuted narrations of the People of the Book are defined as those narrations that are proven to be not in line and in conflict with the revelations of Islam, namely al-Quran and al-Sunnah. For example, the concept of Original Sin, the Concept of Jesus as Son of God, the death of Jesus by crucifixion and other reports that conflict with the principal teachings of Islam.
3. The unknown status of narrations of the People of the Book or the *Maskūt* °*Anhu* are defined as those narrations that are neither authenticated nor refuted by the revelations of Islam, namely al-Quran and al-Sunnah. For instance, these include the majority descriptions in the *Isrā'īliyyāt* such as the name of the forbidden tree, the names of the people of the cave (*Aṣḥāb al-Kahf*), the colour of their dog, types of birds in the story of Prophet Ibrahim, and many others which are not able to be authenticated nor refuted by the revelations of Islam.

From this categorization of the use of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Muslim scholarship, it is clear that neither all narrations from the People of the Book are to be rejected, nor they are to be taken as authentic from the viewpoint of Islamic ruling. If all traditions from the People of the Book, as well as traditions from other religions, to be accepted as *Maqbūl*, then there will be no different at all between Islam and the other religions, whereby religious syncretism emerged. On the other hand, if they are all to be refuted or taken as *Mardūd*, then Islam has neglected the principle of *Wiḥdah al-Dīn* or the unity of religion of the Muslim prophets as taught and preached in Islam.

Objectively, Islam provides the third category of *Isrā'īliyyāt*, namely the *Maskūt* °*Anhu* or the traditions with unknown status, due to the unavailability of some narrations from the People of the Book in the sources of Islam. Furthermore, these traditions are neither authenticated nor refuted, in principle or in details, by the revelations of Islam, namely al-Quran and al-Sunnah. This objective and impartial attitude, which is highly stressed in the Muslim scholarship is learned from the wisdom of the verse 36 in the Sūrah al-Isrā', which says: *And pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge; for every act of hearing, or of seeing or of (feeling in) the heart will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning).*

Some of the issues discussed in the *Muqaddimah*, which source from the *Isrā'īliyyāt* are as follows:

1. The Islamic and Christian View of Prophet Isa AS
2. Nicene Creed
3. Contents of the New Testament
4. Alteration of the Old and the New Testament
5. The Origin of Pope (*al-Bābā*) and Patriarch (*al-Baṭṭrik*) in Christianity
6. The Origin of Cohen (*al-Kūhan*) in Judaism
7. Brief Chronological Development of Christianity
8. Jerusalem, a Holy Place for the Sabeans, Jews, Christians and Muslims (Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Ibn Khaldun, 2005; Ibn Khaldun, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn is a prolegomenon to the voluminous text of history, namely *Tārīkh* or *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* by Ibn Khaldun. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun's purpose for writing the *Muqaddimah* is closely related to the purpose of writing his *Tārīkh*. To think of Ibn Khaldun and *Muqaddimah* as legitimate subjects of research in a study of religion is fairly, if not as a whole, trying to move against the current of the conventional thought in the academia. For Ibn Khaldun and *Muqaddimah* are popularly taken as subjects of study in the disciplines of history, politics, philosophy and education. Only a few scholarly works that recognize the viability of study of religions by Ibn Khaldun through his *Muqaddimah* and *Tārīkh*.

Through the use of qualitative content analysis on *Muqaddimah* text, this paper found that there are a few themes highlighted by Ibn Khaldun in the study of religions. Ibn Khaldun's study of religions here includes his expositions and clarifications of the religions of Judaism, Christianity, Magianism, Sabeanism and polytheism. This also includes Ibn Khaldun's theorization of religion, such as his theories on the interrelationship between °*asabiyyah* and religion, *al-nas* °*ala dīn mulūkihi* (the common people follow the religion of their rulers) and *al-insan ibn ma'lūfihi wa* °*awā'idhi la tab'atihi wa mizājīhi* (human is a child of his customs and not of his natural disposition).

As a conclusion, this paper found that there are three main aspects, which are important impetuses for the study of religions in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*. These three main aspects

are namely the ubiquity of the study of religions, the intellectual background of Ibn Khaldun and his *Muqaddimah*. Though the *Muqaddimah* is principally meant to be a lengthy introduction to the voluminous text of *Kitab al-ʿIbar*, nevertheless the creation of the book also includes information on the study of religions.

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