
Bibliography. Paperback.

*Merchants, gods and Beduins (the system of authority in pre-Islamic Arabia)* is 77th in the Jornadas series of publications by El Colegio de México, but perhaps it is the first in the series to be published on Islam and also seems to be the first to be sponsored by Centre for Asian and North African Studies.

Professor Manuel Ruiz, a young Mexican scholar presents in this volume a thorough and penetrating study on one of the fundamental issues of the sociology of Islam. Having studied at the Pontific Institute of Biblical Studies and at McGill University, Professor Ruiz commands a good knowledge of Arabic as well as European classical languages to ably use the sources of his study. The study is a diligent piece of research.

The book explains the concept of authority in pre-Islamic Arabia. The analysis has been undertaken within the Weberian frame of reference. According to Max Weber, social life consists of three overlapping dimensions: authority, material interest and value orientation, the interaction of these three shapes the growth of a society and its concept of political authority. Weberian method of sociological analysis seeks to “decompose” these aspects into separate parts.

Professor Ruiz has skillfully applied Weberian method of analysis to the pre-Islamic Arabian society. In this analysis he has fully utilized the researches of eminent orientalists such as I. Goldziher who had studied the value system of pre-Islamic Arabia in detail. The Arabian society at the advent of Islam provides a particularly interesting subject for sociological study. This society, basically a beduin society, had developed into a commercial urban social system in cities such as Mecca situated on international trade routes. With the emergence of Islam the social structure was undergoing changes of wide range under the genius of the Prophet of Islam. Authority, material interests and value orientation, the three dimensions of social life in the Weberian system, were also being affected. What could be a more appropriate subject of study for a Weberian sociologist?

The study is divided into three parts. First part is devoted to a descriptive analysis, of Beduin Society, in which four chapters describe the social structure, material interests ideals and values of the society, and authority holding persons.

The second part studies the urban society of Mecca. Emphasis is on the development of social system as a consequence of commercial activity. Therefore the first two chapters in this part analyse the sedentary life and commercial development in the city, and the impact of material interests on the social system. The last two chapters analyse the fusion and interaction of traditional social system and its institutions with these commercial developments and the resulting concept of authority.
The third part discusses the religious organization of pre-Islamic Arabia. It describes in detail how religion was a fundamental component of this society and how the concept of tradition or Sunna has religious as well as social significance. It also reveals the way how in Islamic society the tradition or Sunna became the cause of not only charismatic domination but also how it provided the basis of legal domination of Islamic law.

The book contains a comprehensive Bibliography. However it would have been more useful if a glossary and an index had been added. Regrettedly the book contains a number of mistakes, largely of transliteration. Errors such as the following could have been avoided: Margoliought (p-16), Mu’callaqat (p. 16) Ibn Jhaldun (p. 3), Bräumlich (p. 27) etc.

The book is a welcome addition to the studies on the sociology of Islam. If translated into English the study may be accessible to a larger number of readers.

Islamabad. —M. Khalid Mas’ud