This book, based on a Ph D. thesis submitted to Harvard University, is a work focusing on 'ulamā'. The main field and period it discusses are indicated in the subtitle, 11th century Baghdad. The madrasa (Islamic institutions for higher learning) such as the famous Nizamiyya College is also important subject relating to 'ulamā'. The main feature of this work, which has to be initially concerned, is that it is a recent work concentrating on inter-disciplinary method and analysis. It should be noted that this book compares well with works like those of R. P. Mottahedeh, I. M. Lapidus, and most recently by M. Chamberlain(1). The author's ability to apply political and sociological approaches is easily recognized. However, it should be said regretfully that this advantage is not always developed in the work as a matter of central concern. After indicating the book's contents below, I will give detailed review of its analysis.

Introduction
The Framework of Inquiry; Institutionalization and Social Change; The 'Ulamā' and the Problem of Self-Presentation; A Note on the Sources

Chapter 1. The City
The Coming of the Turks; The Appearance of the Madrasa

Chapter 2. Formation
The Baghdadi 'Ulamā' and Worldwide Scholarly Networks; From Journeys to Schools

Chapter 3. Learning
Travel and Worldwide Scholarly Connections; Patterns and Frameworks of Study

Chapter 4. Forms of Social Affiliation

The Halqa; The Madhhab

Chapter 5. Mechanisms of Inclusion and Exclusion

Membership; Entry to the Ranks of the 'Ulamā'; Founding a School: Career Options; Career Patterns; Accession to Teaching Positions

Chapter 6. Place and Role in the Public Sphere

The Religious Elite and the Ruling Authorities; The Madhhab as Social Solidarity Groups; Pious and Charismatic Leaders

Conclusion

Appendix, Notes and Bibliography

The author's framework of inquiry, understanding of the period concerned and problems of existing studies are summarized in the Introduction. The first impression reading through this chapter is that it is a very different work from that of Chamberlain. Chamberlain's work, for example, does not sufficiently indicate historical sources. Also, he insists on using theory borrowed from other fields of study without careful consideration for its application in the Middle Eastern context. Also, contrary to ambiguous arguments of Mottahedeh's work, Ephrat's understanding of the period is based on long sweep of Islamic history, and refers to the problem of madrasa and 'ulamā' study in a way which is equal to the work of Lapidus.

I think it is important to consider the next points when we approach the study of 'ulamā'. That is to say, a scholar who had religious learning and sacred knowledge could not go beyond the secular level. Paying attention to the history that the scholars left of their activities, we have to interpret their distinctive cultural deeds (practices). Even if, for example, the source (which is also written by the hand of the same interest group - 'ulamā') evaluates some scholar as a highly praiseworthy figure in terms of religious value, we should take notice that such activities are conducted in this world. We must always bear in mind that the evaluators (writers of historical sources) are themselves human and are limited by their own human subjectivity.

The higher learning institutions (madrasas), which did not exist before, were developed in this period. They were founded by foreign military elites. Religious scholars began to gather round in the madrasas. Although we have this obvious information, it does not mean that the madrasas were same kind of institution as medieval institution in Europe, for example. We have to consider the reasons why newly developed institutions of higher learning could give rise to change in their own historical context.
Going back to the Ephrat's opinion, the school (*madhāhib*, sing. *madhhab*) is itself a social group. This opinion was brought due to the fact that most authors repeatedly made a connection between social change and educational institutions in their works. The previously existing studies attribute the driving force of social change to the *madrasa* without giving detailed explanations. Therefore, we have to question whether such an effect should be attributed to the contents of the education itself or the innovative manner in which instruction was provided inside the *madrasa*.

The author attempts to answer this problem in Chapters 2 and 3. Academic travel in the 11th century was nothing new but only the destinations of this kind of travel was altered by the existence of the *madrasas*. The *madrasa* did not essentially stop wandering of scholars while medieval European University brought to an end of this similar custom. The next question to be raised is whether learning activities in the *madrasa* changed over time? In fact, the traditional study circles, called *halqa*, continued. The *halqa* was sometimes held in the *madrasa*, but was not necessary confined to the *madrasa* alone.

The *halqa* were formed around an authoritative scholar who presided over learning activities. When we consider a different angle, the students had to attend a lot of *halqa* to maintain their personal ties with the famous scholars presiding over the *halqa*. The existence of the *madrasa* did not affect entirely this traditional style of Islamic learning. The *madrasa* did not monopolize the education process nor transform the method of instruction fundamentally.

Because we have already reached a provisional conclusion as to the distinctive character of the social institutions in the Middle East, we should not rely directly on the educational institution for explaining social change\(^5\). We can understand more clearly by comparison with European universities that the advent of *madrasa* did not widen the curriculum nor did it profoundly change basic patterns of education and academic activities in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the fact that a lot of studies pursue the social function of *madrasa* suggests that they were not totally without effect. One suggestion in this regard is presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The author suggests that the reason for "conformity and uniformity of society" in this period is to be looked for in the activities of *'ulamā'*, in other words, in the interaction between the students and the instructors in specific contexts.

The many-layered personal ties between master and disciple constructed the academic world. These ties went back to the past and preserved the orthodoxy of the knowledge transmitted between generations. The vertical dimension of these ties appeared as schools of the scholars (*madhhab*). As the author herself mentioned, these *madhāhib* were not created first by the *madrasas*. Ephrat regards them as exclusive social groups based
on their authoritative knowledge. Contemporary scholars agree that the business of occupations or social class had little to do with ‘ulamā’ as a group. The open nature of the group is stressed, nevertheless the author insists that even such a vaguely defined group had a sense of exclusiveness toward those who wanted to enter this group. This manifested itself through the master-disciple relationship.

The author focuses on the nature of this academic network. While these network were fluid and formless, it was a driving force for “conformity and uniformity of society”. This is certainly useful point, but I would like to have seen what kind of documentation it is based upon. In my opinion, important social practice actualized this kind of exclusiveness should be sought in addition to the institutional background of the madrasa. As the author notes, the authority of famous scholars had superiority over the institution itself. However, such authorities occasionally had unanticipated dilemma when the madrasa was founded(6).

These troubles were rooted in a new financial system that appeared along with the establishment of the madrasa. Foreign military elites founded the madrasas. Because of religious ethics, scholars were not always content to receive money and other rewards for their role as religious instructor, still less satisfied when these benefits came from the secular political ruler. Nevertheless most ‘ulamā’ eventually accepted this profit-providing system. I think, it may even be useful to consider whether or not this historical fact ultimately affected the thought and scholarship of the ‘ulamā’ themselves. After all, the ‘ulamā’ have always been subjective human in limited and defined social context. This may better define the location of social change as it relates to the madrasa.

This work demonstrates the fact that not only ‘ulamā’ and the madrasa studies, but also the study of the pre-modern Middle East, should be approached from wider perspective. Influenced by the Western or modern sense of institutions, the eye of the contemporary scholar tends to look for the weight of social institutions solely. Instead, we should call attention to the role of human social activities, even if its character differs from the modern or Western type. When we try to understand the role of education in society, it should be recalled that we must specify particular actors and circumstances. Educational institutions correspond to other types of institutions like political and financial institutions. Each field should be studied differently depending on the characteristics of the institution in question.

Madrasa and ‘ulamā’ studies have serious importance. However, to fully appreciate that importance, we have now entered a period when what is most needed are comparative studies that cross both geographical and temporal boundaries. Only then will be really come to understand the true significance and social roles of the madrasa in medieval
Middle Eastern society.

Notes


(2) See Chamberlain’s “Introduction”. His painstaking task to review existing urban studies of the Middle East is very suggestive. However, after such a useful exercise, he introduces “social practice and symbolic capital” to solve a problem in the study of the Middle Eastern society that had been originally created in regard to European society. How an analytic method deduced from Western society should be applied to Middle Eastern society is not discussed concretely in his work (p. 22, n. 29). The fluid social status of Middle Eastern elites was completely different from the West. How could they manage to reproduce their household? See R. Harker, et al., *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: The Practice of Theory*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1990, “Chapter 4”.


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