

THE MOSLEM WORLD: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

VLADIMIR KIRICHENKO. FROM THE HISTORY OF THE DRUZE
COMMUNITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract. The article focuses on the history and features of the Druze communities in the Middle East. The religious movement's representatives reside in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. Despite the status of a religious minority, the Druze people have played key roles in the modern history and politics of their countries. For example, in 1925, the Syrian Druze revolted against the French presence in the region.

Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, a Druze, was the leader of the anti-colonial uprising of 1925–1927. Among the Lebanese Druze, Kamal and Walid Jumblatt played a significant role in the country's political life in the 1970s and 1980s. Jordan's Druze are generally all loyal to the authorities and do not engage in conflicts with neighbouring communities. Israeli Druze are also loyal to the state where they live. Druze soldiers serve in the Israeli army, being the only Arabs to be conscripted; they have fought in all Arab-Israeli wars.

The Druze religious movement originated in Egypt in the 11th century, when the Fatimid Ismaili Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah

(996–1021) allegedly received a revelation that he was the embodiment of God. Emerging as an offshoot of Ismailism, the new movement spread rapidly after al-Hakim's death, primarily in the inaccessible regions of central and southern Lebanon, as well as in small communities in the Syrian interior. The Druze themselves call themselves Muwahhidun ("Unitarians") [1]. The name "Druze" comes from Muhammad al-Darazi, one of the preachers of the doctrine who lived in the 11th century.

The Druze believe in one God, whom they describe as transcendent and therefore incomprehensible. At the same time, God manifests Himself in successive incarnations. The sacred text of the Druze is the Kitab al-Hikma, which translates as "The Epistles of Wisdom." Their revered places of prayer are known as *khalwa*. The main Druze sanctuary is Khalwat al-Bayada, located in Lebanon. Unlike other Abrahamic religions, circumcision is not mandatory in the Druze faith. Due to years of religious persecution, the Druze often conceal their beliefs, practicing the principle of *taqiyya*, which is characteristic of some Shia branches [2].

The Druze do not observe such Muslim rites as fasting (*sawm*) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Druze marry only within their own community, and marriages between cousins are common [3, p. 70–71]. Matrilineal marriages are forbidden among the Druze, meaning marriage between individuals with a close maternal blood relation is prohibited; however, patrilineal marriages – between close paternal relatives – are permitted.

The Druze community is traditionally divided into two groups: the '*uqqal* (the initiated) and the *juhhal* (the uninitiated). The '*uqqal* are those men and women who have been initiated into the secrets of the doctrine and form the "elite" of the community. Those who are not initiated are called *juhhal* (the plural of the Arabic *jahil*, literally meaning "ignorant") and constitute at least four-fifths of the total Druze population [4, p. 116]. Among the '*uqqāl*, the most knowledgeable in matters of faith are referred to as *al-jawid* ("the perfected"). The perfected are led by the *shaykh al-'Aql* ("the shaykh of reason"). Both men and women can become initiated. The Druze do not adhere to Muslim dietary restrictions [3, p. 70–71]. In 1043 AD, the "door of conversion" for new members of the community was closed, and new converts were no longer accepted. Despite their monotheism, the Druze believe in the transmigration of souls, prohibit polygamy and temporary marriages (*mut'ah*), and are known for their strict morality [5, p. 117].

Druze clans have often found themselves on opposing sides of conflicts. For example, when the Ottoman and Mamluk armies met at