
The book opens with a chapter on the Druze faith by Professor Sami Makarem whose contribution to the study of Druze religion over more than thirty-five years is immense. Although the chapter is brief, it is full of important concepts and themes which distinguish the different layers of Druze doctrine and allow an appreciation of the subject matter and the philosophical issues woven into it. Continuing on from this, Tony Naufal’s excellent summary of the achievements of the great French Orientalist Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838) is valuable for current research on the subject. Sacy was rigorous in his approach to the study of the original manuscripts provided at the time, and was a prolific scholar in many classical and contemporary fields of activity.

David Bryer writes in detail about the dating and authorship of the Druze canon of scriptures, commonly known by the Druzes as the “six books of wisdom.” They were written in Cairo during the reign of al-Hakim following the declaration of the Da’wa al-Tawhid in 408 and continued by the fifth Cosmic Had up to A.H. 434. It is established in the study that the fifth rank of the five Hudud, namely Maulana Baha‘al-Din was the one who gathered the 111 epistles before the break-up of the community of believers in Egypt and before his journey to the East.

Naila Kaidbey devotes her chapter of the book to the life and writings of the most venerated Druze saint, Emir Jamal al-Din Abdullah al-Tanukhi (a.d. 1417–79), who was a theologian, reformer, and ethical philosopher. His strict adherence to the path of Tawhid and his asceticism and strict moral code made him a pre-eminent Shaykh (not only members of his own faith, but Christians and Jews also came to him for advice and arbitration in disputes). His revolutionary teachings for the time were backed by extensive writings on marriage, divorce, and commentaries on the Druze epistles. Leila Fawaz’s chapter on the Druze-British connection (1840–60) explores some aspects of this link as the European influence intensified with the growth of trade and steamship navigation at the time. This relationship was represented through the eyes of Lord Dufferin who championed the cause of the Druzes. This was a humiliating period of Druze history when the semi-autonomous Mount Lebanon was brought under the harsh direct control of the Ottomans through the Mutasarrifiyya system of government in the period (1861–1920).

Michael Provence examines the Druze revolt in 1925. He mentions that during this time Syrian nationalism was the language of revolt in Jabal Hawran. The Druze leadership was divided in its strategy and allegiance, with Sultan al-Atrash aligning himself and his followers with Emir Faysal Ibn Husayn and with Great Britain, whereas Salim al Atrash remained with the status quo for fear of reprisals and retaliation from the Ottomans. The popular Revolt of 1889 saw the power of the Druze chieftains decline, and the peasant tillers secure their titles over some of the lands of the Jabal.

Leslie McLoughlin tells the story of Fuad Hamza, a Druze who joined the service of Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia in 1926 as a translator and who later became a close adviser in the delicate period of the history of the Kingdom. Hamza played an important role in negotiating with internal and external dissidents, and helped in the process of reforming the administrative institutions. A further chapter about the Druze and Arabism highlights briefly the role of the Druzes in the national struggles of the region in which they lived. The Druzes inhabited the Levant before the Tawhid Da’wa and were great contributors to the struggles of the Middle East and the development of Arab Identity.

Amir Taheri paints a cultural picture of communities with Druze-like affinities. These numerous “minorities” are scattered across Turkey, Iran, newly independent
states of the ex-Soviet Union, the whole Indian sub-continent, and China. Given their secrecy, it is impossible to form but a fragmented sketch of these cultures hidden in these parts of the world which were ruled by empires representing oppressive majorities. Even with such a wide diversity of themes, there is some continuity and affinity among the religious, social, and cultural ideas explored in this book which would make it very useful for scholars and students alike. It is highly recommended since it fills a gap in the study of Druze doctrine.

Adnan Kasamanie
Independent Scholar


Since the publication of D’Alexandre à Zénobie: Histoire du Levant antique, I ve siècle av. J.-C. — IIIe siècle ap. J.-C. (2001), Maurice Sartre has firmly established himself as one of the most important scholars working in the Ancient Near East. Now an abridged version of that 1,200-page study has appeared in English, although Sartre notes that it is more properly a “condensed” translation in that he and his two translators, Catherine Porter and Elizabeth Rawlings, have excerpted certain chapters without cutting passages or larger sections (xi). It has also been slightly updated by bringing into account the scholarship that has been published in the intervening years between the original publication and its English version. For the most part, it is a more focused and, to this reviewer, a more successful piece of scholarship than the original monograph.

Although generally chronological in its organisation, at the heart of this work lies not the tale of Roman administration over a non-Roman region, but the complex cultural interaction of Greek, Roman, and Semitic civilisations. Sartre takes Syria as his main geographical region of interest, but does not neglect other areas and peoples, writing extensively on Jews, Palmyrenes, Phoenicians, and Arameans. Indeed the importance of what the author calls process of “acculturations,” particularly the influence of Hellenistic and Roman civilisations, is the primary theme of this work. While the author notes the multiple directions of cultural diffusion, he takes as a key issue the importance placed on urbanism and, in particular, its influence through the form and function of Greek poleis.

Sartre notes the significance of eastern Mediterranean urban centres, but also notes that they supplemented rather supplanted earlier forms of social organisation and cultural traditions. As with other scholars looking at Roman interaction with the East (including Kurht, Young, and others), the author recognises the limited impact of Romanisation, and moreover the almost studied disinterest with which imperial government treated its subjects. There were, of course, exceptions (particularly in the matter of the financial benefits of empire), but there is a cognisance of what administration could (and should) accomplish. Cities as socio-cultural loci represented an exception to Roman involvement. But overall, the degree and quality of interaction between the ruler and ruled was a sporadic one.

A considerable amount of Sartre’s discussion also falls upon religion, and the way in which complex interactions affected the movement and development of diverse practices and movements. Of especial interest are the conflicts, elisions, and divisions between polytheist and monotheist traditions. The connection between Jewish