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DRUZE. The Druze are a monotheistic religious group of over one million adherents. They emerged in the eleventh century CE, from the Ismāʿīlī school of Shiism. Today they are located primarily in the eastern Mediterranean/Levant region.

Druze Beliefs. Several beliefs and characteristics set the Druze apart from other religions. Their faith is exclusive and secret, not universal. Their theology, while deriving from Ismā'īlī theology, accepts the Christian Old and New Testaments as divine texts, reveres several figures (including Jesus Christ and the Prophet Muḥammad) as prophets, and includes aspects drawn from other religions and from secular philosophers. The Druze separate themselves from Islam irrevocably by declaring that the revelations of al-Hākim ibn 'Amr Allāh, the sixth Fāṭimid caliph (r. 996-1021), not those of the Prophet Muhammad, contain the ultimate truth. The Druze believe that God is beyond human comprehension or definition, and that God is a universal intellect resident in every aspect of existence. They adhere to seven principles, drawn from scripture: belief in the unity of God; truthfulness in their conduct; loyalty and aid to other Druze; renunciation of all other religions; submission to God's will; contentment with God's deeds; and the rejection of any behavior that distracts from their spiritual conduct and endeavors.

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Because of their strict secrecy, a Druze is permitted outwardly to deny the faith as protection in times of mortal danger. The Druze believe in the transmigration of souls (tanāsukh), which is not a feature of the mainstream monotheistic religions. They believe that the number of souls was finalized at the closure of conversion, and that transmigration lets the soul have a breadth of experience and build a greater knowledge of God than would be possible in one lifetime and is thus seen as a generous, definitive act of divine justice. Male circumcision, universal among Muslims, is not ritually practiced among the Druze. Gender issues also set the Druze apart from some other religions: polygamy, concubinage, and temporary marriage (mut'ah) are forbidden to Druze. Divorce is not an easy process, and a Druze woman can initiate proceedings.

Although known to outsiders as Druze, the Druze refer to themselves as al-Muwaḥḥidūn (Unitarians), a sign of their emphasis on absolute monotheism. Many details about the religion have been held secret since the closing of the da'wah and are shared only by a small number within the community. In each succeeding generation, a few are initiated into the ranks of the al-'uggāl (the enlightened), which has, from the earliest days, included both men and women. Al-'uggāl live ascetic lives focused on the pursuit of enlightenment and are initiated only after years of study and observation. Other Druze, the juhhāl (the ignorant, or the uninitiated), protect the secrecy and sanctity of the religion through group loyalty and solidarity.

The Theological and Political History of the Druze. The Druze faith grew from the Ismā ilī theology that prevailed in early Fāṭimid Cairo. It promised a radical political change within Islam that failed to materialize once the Ismā ilīyah gained political power in North Africa, especially in Egypt in 969 CE. People still looked for

is not completely free of abuse of the system or political influence.

[See also Courts; and Sharī'ah.]

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DĪWĀNĪYAH. The term al-dīwānīyah derives from dīwān (pl. dawāwīn), which is a registry or a logbook containing army personnel, scribes, and poets. It was also known as a collection of papers, as well as a reference to army records, monetary establishments, and other such places. Some claim it has Assyrian origin. In modern parlance, it refers to a secluded room that is part of the house but with its own entrance to the outside. The room is used for guests or as a place for gathering. All of these meanings and connotations revolve around a common concept: to meet, discuss, and exchange views. Despite their modernization and urbanization, societies in the Arabian Gulf States still retain a private dīwānīyah for each tribe or family. These dīwānīyāh were the headquarters of leaders and notable shaykhs in the past, but later evolved and became specialized with time into fundamental foundations in the lives of ordinary individuals. They are now a distinguishing cultural and political characteristic of Arabian Gulf society as they play an important role in spreading political awareness among citizens and fill a vacuum in some of those societies where there are no political parties and, hence, no real political participation.

In the Arabian Gulf States, the dīwānīyāh are currently considered the most important social phenomenon as they function as a place where men can periodically gather to discuss social. political, cultural, or economic affairs of their society. This is true particularly in Kuwait, where the dīwānīyāh played a very important and unique role in the politics of the country. Their role was especially significant in the crisis periods (1921-1938) and during the Iraqi invasion in 1990 when they immediately became active venues for political articulation. Moreover, during periods of parliamentary dissolution, the dīwānīyāh were used to pressure the government into resumption of parliamentary rule despite restrictions imposed on their political practices. The dīwānīyāh were apparently active on Mondays when political figures, parliamentarians, and opposition activists met to exert pressure on the government to resume parliament. Until the present day, dīwānīyāh in the Gulf region, and especially in Kuwait, have been the most effective institution in managing active political and social participation across a clear and mature framework relevant only to public welfare, while conforming to the heritage and traditions of each segment of society. They have been deservedly referred to as "informal parliaments."

[See also Gulf States.]

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