Over the past few years, I have become quite interested in historical Druze religious poetry (from about the 17th–18th century CE onwards). Stumbling across it from time to time in Druze sources during the course of other work, I decided to search for this poetry and related prose material more systematically and, over time, have put together a corpus of relevant machine-actionable texts.

I have spoken about this undertaking on several occasions, most recently, at the online symposium organised by Rami Zeedan from the University of Kansas in the context of the launch of the *Druze Studies Journal* in November 2023.

An ongoing side project, this corpus to date encompasses approximately 157,000 tokens (including multiple witnesses of the same texts), some 56,000 of which are poetical material, corresponding to about 10,000 lines of poetry. All of the material in this corpus was transcribed by me manually from manuscript sources found in libraries in Europe, the United States, and the Middle East. Momentarily, this corpus is kept both in a private repository on GitHub as \*.txt files and separately on eScriptorium.

In its current state, this corpus reflects personal research interests of mine. Thus, apart from prayer literature, I am particularly interested in two larger categories of poems and interlocking prose material. On the one hand, poems that praise the five *ḥudūd* of the Druze religious system, most notably, Ḥamza b. ʿAlī, express love for them, and turn to them for help; on the other hand, the so-called *ʿaskariyyāt* poems which, by means of a relatively stable skeleton of events, imagine how large Druze armies led by the five *ḥudūd* will come marching in from the Far East and often China, paving the way for the second appearance of al-Ḥākim, overthrowing an order which is perceived to be unjust, taking revenge, and so forth.

As has been suggested by Werner Schmucker[[1]](#footnote-1) many years ago, there is a relation between these two categories of poems. Indeed, imagining that delivering armies led by the five *ḥudūd* will arrive *from* the Far East is the counterpart to yearning for those who are *in* the Far East, praising them, imagining how one is close to them, and dreaming oneself into their presence, expressing pain about their absence. If deliverance comes *from* the Far East, love goes *to* those in the Far East. These two categories of poems are almost like swings of a pendulum.

In the corpus of poems transcribed by me, approximately 40 poems contain references to armies and in more or less folded form allude to the events imagined in the *ʿaskariyyāt* and related material.

Over the following months, I will address several aspects of this poetic material and its interrelations in a series of blogs and journal articles. The first blog is about expressing loyalty in Druze religious poetry.

1. See Werner Schmucker, “Eine drusische ʿAskarīya,” Wolfhart Heinrichs and Gregor Schoeler, *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag* (Beirut: In Kommission bei Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1994), 507–544. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)