De Smet Daniel,
Les Épîtres sacrées des Druzes : Rasā'il al-Ḥikma, vols. 1 et 2, *Introduction, édition critique et traduction annotée des traités attribués à Ḥamza b. ʿAlī et Ismāʿīl at-Tamīmī.*

Leuven, Peeters, 2007. xiii + 772 p. (including translation, p. 125-459, Arabic text, 461-724, glossary, bibliography and indexes)
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The history of the Druze is full of both mystery and fascinating obscurity. As a unique and isolated group, they faced obvious hostility all around them; their Christian and Muslim neighbors each were, at times, implacable enemies of theirs. Yet they have survived the millennium since the foundation of their creed in the final years of the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim (r. 996-1021) and that is truly remarkable. The situation has always been delicate, requiring constant and careful vigilance, a firm defense and protective secrecy against the revelation and polemical exploitation of the oldest records and texts of their tradition. This new publication by the well respected Belgian scholar, Daniel De Smet, in which he provides for the first time a critical edition of volumes one and two of the Druze sacred Canon, along with an extensively annotated translation, might seem to violate a long-standing policy against making such material openly available. The world of scholarship should, however, rejoice in his achievement. And, in truth, manuscript copies of these foundational Druze writings-the one hundred and eleven epistles and documents that make up the Canon, the *Rasā'il al-ḥikma,* as they are commonly known-have been widely consultable in libraries outside of the Levantine Druze heartland. Examples reached Europe as long ago as the end of the 17th century. At present they exist in relatively great numbers-De Smet offers a list of some 200-scattered over many countries and institutions (in thirty-two different collections).

European interest in the Druze and their origin began early but proceeded only in fits and spurts. Except for the work of the towering French orientalist, Antoine Silvestre de Sacy (the family name was Silvestre), that condition persisted through the following centuries and would, were it not for the studies conducted by De Smet, remain true today. Silvestre de Sacy was, however, a formidable exception. In his long career, he devoted a substantial effort to the investigation of Druze origins and the religious doctrines propounded in their texts. A work he called *Exposé de la religion des Druzes*-two thick volumes, issued in Paris in 1838-was but one result. He had already published others and had he lived longer-he died the same year, 1838-he intended to complement that publication with an edition of the Arabic text and a translation of it as well.

For some professed experts, the origins of the Druze has been a matter for wild speculation. However, our best sources, which include among them many of the individual documents in the Canon, provide a reasonably clear picture, albeit not without some residual confusion and uncertainty, of the agitation in the Fatimid capital that engendered the movement eventually labeled as Druze. Three men are named as those primarily responsible: al-Ḥasan b. Ḥaydar al-Farġānī al-Akhram, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl Naštakīn al-Darazī, and Ḥamza b. ʿAlī. The first we know principally from a treatise that survives written against him by the establishment Fatimid *dāʿī* Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī in the year 408/1017. The second shows up in the Druze texts as a renegade and apostate, an enemy of the true faith, but a man whose name nevertheless stuck and gave rise to the word Druze *(Daraziyya, Durūz).* The third was the actual founder of the sect. He was, moreover, its imam and prophet and, from our perspective, its creator.

The *Rasā'il al-ḥikma* as a whole consists of a variety of separate pieces, which, other than the first four, are ascribed to three members of the supreme hierarchy of five ranks set up by Ḥamza in the period 408/1017 to 411/1020, the years of his mission in so far as we understand it. Ḥamza stood at the top, with Ismāʿī1 al-Tamīmī in second place; the former was the universal intellect and the latter the universal soul, to cite one set of terms for them. Of the three remaining, the fifth, Bahā' al-Dīn al-Muqtanā, was the only other to contribute writings to the *Rasā'il.* Of the forty items that form volumes one and two, nos. 5 to 35 are explicitly or by implication compositions of Ḥamza; 36 to 40 are works by al-Tamīmī. All those in later volumes, which number three or four more depending on how the remaining 71 epistles are divided, are thought to belong to al-Muqtanā and come from a second period of intense Druze activity begun by him in 418/1027 and lasting until 434/1043, when he closed his own mission and ended the *daʿwa.* Four items, nos. 1 to 4, precede the collection. They are unlike any of the rest and display almost no characteristics that mark them definitely as being Druze. Two appear to be Fatimid decrees as if issued from the chancery; one is an account of al-Ḥākim's encounter with the Jews and Christians; the last a letter from him to the Qarmatians.

The authenticity of these works has been questioned but, particularly with those by Hamza, which contain such specific details of time and place-Fustat-Cairo in the later years of al-Ḥākim-it is hard to doubt them. Certainly, the collection had to

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have been assembled and possibly edited by some later authority. The obvious choice for these initial volumes would be al-Muqtanā. In the course of his later efforts, he may have attempted to rescue and preserve as much of the writings of his master as he could. Apparently, even so, he did not find copies of everything; the surviving treatises mention others now lost. (Modern Druze claims to the contrary appear dubious.) It is also not above possibility that an even later redactor added or subtracted bits and pieces. Nevertheless, surely a substantial portion of the material said to be Ḥamza's actually does go back to him and, accordingly, the value of the treatises in these two volumes is especially significant for several reasons. For one it constitutes the prime documentation for the thought of Ḥamza; and it also reveals his debt to an Ismaili background he brought with him when he embarked on his own radically new path. There is also a plethora of evidence in his writings that bears on the history of the time, both as to exactly what happened during the final years of al-Ḥākim and to the institution of the Ismaili *daʿwa* in that same era.

This material is of such obvious importance it is odd that it remained so long unpublished. Yet that has been its curious fate. Despite the announced intension of several scholars to do it, the first to complete an edition of these two volumes was David Bryer, who presented the text as part of a dissertation done at Oxford in 1971 under the direction of Samuel Stern. Bryer, who thereafter left the field, published only his introduction (in *Der Islam* 1975 & 1976); the Arabic text he prepared was keep by Oxford under restricted access. In 1986 Father Joseph Azzi printed in Lebanon a basic transcription of the whole *Rasā'il al-ḥikma* (all 111 epistles). Despite the drawbacks of this print version, it remains the only relatively easily accessible source for the epistles of volumes 3 through 5(6). Previously we needed it also for volumes 1 & 2. Fortunately, that is no longer the case; for the first two volumes, we now have before us the edition, translation, notes and related material brought together by De Smet.

The effort required, however, cannot have been easy, despite the contributions of previous scholars. The Arabic text rests, naturally, on the long manuscript tradition and its numerous known exemplars, too many in fact for easy consultation. Fortunately, the Druze have copied these treatises with extreme devotion and care; over the last several centuries variations in the wording are quite rare. Once the tradition fixed on the text, it preserved it with great precision. In printing the volume before us, some typos have entered and the formatting of the Arabic is less than ideal. Nonetheless, we are quite grateful to have it; and it serves well enough. De Smet's careful translation is accompanied by extensive annotation and each individual document has its own introduction. In many ways this aspect of his work is the most useful. The world of Hamza was peculiar and it will seem strange and outlandish to almost anyone, even to a scholar well versed in Ismaili esoterica. Concepts in these treatises derive as well from the Islamic *ġulāt.* In addition much of it is surely unique to Ḥamza. Understanding what he wrote requires therefore a thorough a familiarity with all aspects of his thought, not merely in one epistle or another, but in all of them together. Here De Smet certainly appears to have mastered the Druze master; the cross references he supplies from one item to another are thus essential, as is his constant reminder about the special meaning of Druze technical terms and language that appear throughout these epistles all too frequently. His long introduction is especially important for it contains not only the essential information about the manuscripts and the edition but also a learned critique of previous scholarship concerning the *Rasā'il* and problems associated with them. It constitutes in many ways a history of Druze studies in addition. Certainly, future attempts to understand Druze origins, early history, and the doctrines advocated by the movement's founding authorities must now begin with this publication. We must also hope that De Smet himself will continue his efforts with the later volumes of the Canon.

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