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Between *Bāṭin* and *Sharīʿa*: The Druze as *Ghulāt* in Formative Shiism

This paper examines Druze doctrine through the prism of the enduring tension between esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*) and legal normativity (*sharīʿa*), situating it within the broader continuum of early Shiism and its associated *Ghulāt* movements. Rather than approaching the Druze as a radical rupture or marginal offshoot, it argues that they emerge from—and intensify—key dynamics already present in early Shiʿi religious configurations, including hierarchical conceptions of knowledge, the centrality of a divinized guiding figure, and ambivalent attitudes toward positive law. Drawing on the *Rasāʾil al-Ḥikma* in dialogue with early Ismaili and Imami materials, the paper highlights both structural continuities—such as the prominence of *taʾwīl* (esoteric hermeneutics), restricted access to salvific truth, and cyclical understandings of revelation—and decisive doctrinal shifts, most notably the suspension of exoteric legal obligations in favor of an exclusive form of knowledge articulated in Fatimid Cairo during the cycle of unveiling (*dawr al-kashf*). It further argues that the incorporation of *Ghulāt* doctrines, like metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*, *intiqāl*), functioned to defer eschatological closure while simultaneously enabling the elaboration of a distinct communal legal doctrine, retrospectively framed as a *madhhab* (school of law). In this light, the Druze case appears not as an anomaly but as a radical crystallization of latent tensions within formative Shiism, thereby inviting a reconsideration of the boundaries between orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and esoteric speculation in the intellectual history of medieval Islam.



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