

The Druze settlement on Mount Carmel: Daliyat al-Karmil as a case study – Archaeological, historical and geographical evidence

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Daliyat al-Karmil, the largest Druze town within the borders of the State of Israel, is located on Mount Carmel, south-east of Haifa. Historical evidence and archaeological remains in Mount Carmel show many ancient ruins from various periods; among these sites is Daliyat al-Karmil. Many of the later settlements were comparatively small and associated with the Druze leader, Emir Fakhr al-Din al-Ma'ani II, a ruler under the Ottoman Empire.¹ Early studies have often debated which factors led to the destruction and abandonment of these small settlements, but most researchers agree that the destruction occurred during the nineteenth century under the rule of Ibrahim Pasha,² or soon after he left Palestine.³ The only two Druze towns that have survived on Mount Carmel are Daliyat al-Karmil and 'Isfiya, which is located north of Daliyat al-Karmil.

The aim of this study is to date the Druze arrival at Mount Carmel through dating the establishment of the modern town of Daliyat al-Karmil. The accepted insight among scholars is based only on still-repeated oral stories, and it suggests that the Druze town began during the time of Emir Fakhr al-Din II in the early seventeenth century. However, there are several other claims, discussed below, that suggest other dates. The importance of the current study is that it is pioneering in examining archaeological remains and relating them with the Druze inhabitation. In addition, our study refers to authentic historical sources, such as the biography of Fakhr al-Din II, which have never been discussed in regard to the Druze arrival at Mount Carmel. This means that the conclusions are based, for the first time, on physical remains and historical accounts, and not only on oral stories that can easily be corrupted and changed by time.

Carrying out this study allows us to answer a few important questions regarding the history of the region in general, and the history of the Druze in particular. Among the questions to ask are when the Druze settlement started in the Carmel and why. If it is later than in other places, like Galilee, why did this happen? Also, answering a question such as whether the Druze settlement in the Carmel replaced earlier inhabited villages will give us a better understanding of the use of Mount Carmel in the last millennium, especially after the Mamluk occupation of the region from the Franks in 1291.

To begin with, we reviewed the literature on the establishment and dissemination of the Druze religion. Then we examined the beginning of the Druze settlement in the modern towns and in Mount Carmel in general. We held an interview with a member of the earliest family in Daliyat al-Karmil (al-Qarra family), who provided us with the still-repeated story about the first arrivals to the settlement and also generously let us use the family's stamp ring which dates from 1451. We also carried out an archaeological survey in and around the core of the village, trying to find pottery to date the inhabitation in the location and also examining the architecture of the houses, trying to date them.⁴ Our hypothesis was that if we found pottery from the Frankish period onwards until the late Ottoman period, it would be difficult to determine when

the Druze arrived in the village, but if there was a gap between the Frankish period and the early Ottoman period, that would mean that the new arrivals should be the Druze, which fits with the historical sources and the oral stories.⁵ The survey was limited to areas declared by the Israel Antiquities Authority for three reasons: firstly, the previous surveys did not find antiquities in the majority of the other areas inside Daliyat al-Karmil; secondly, in some cases the owners of the lands did not allow us to carry out the survey; and lastly, and more importantly, the area of our survey is quite large and located in the place in which the core of the Druze settlement under study was developed. The survey took place in vacant areas that can be found at the slopes of the village's core, in which the Druze settlement was established, and are still relatively empty of modern construction.

Historical evidence of the Druze

The Druze faith separated from the Isma'iliyya in the eleventh century in Cairo, and called themselves Muwahhidun, 'unitarians'. The faith originated under the reign of al-Hakim, the Fatimid Caliph of Egypt (386–411/996–1021). Al-Hakim gave his support to Hamza ibn 'Ali who started to evangelize the new faith in 1017 CE, and later on with different missionaries that continued to do so as late as 1042–3. After the death/disappearance of al-Hakim in 1021,⁶ the authorities in Cairo, especially under the rule of the new Fatimid caliph, al-Zahir, persecuted the new believers, brutally suppressing them. However, the doctrine scattered throughout and beyond Egypt. The preachers' efforts achieved their greatest successes in Bilad al-Sham (present-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine and some other parts), reaching as far as northern Syria and spreading as far as the Hijaz currently located in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Yemen and India via Iraq and Iran.⁷

In Bilad al-Sham, several tribes followed the new faith. The first to adhere was the Tannukhs tribe, who settled in northern Syria and western Lebanon including the Beirut area. Moreover, the Sulaymans of Wadi al-Taym in Lebanon, on the western slopes of Mount Hermon and the Turabs of Galilee, north of the current state of Israel, also accepted the new religion.⁸

As for the beginning of the Druze settlement in Palestine, it is possible that it goes back to the period of the distribution of the religion (1017–1042–3). The religious sources say that there were ten Druze communities in the Upper and Lower Galilee as early as the establishment of the religion.⁹

Al-Ashrafani, a historian who is considered to be among the most important religious sources for the Druze, lived in the seventeenth century in the village of al-Ashrafiyya in al-Ghuta region near Damascus. He tells of four Druze centres from the eleventh century in Galilee and its vicinity: the coastal area of Acre, in which there were six villages, Yarka, Jathth, Mimas, Iklil, al-Hanbaliyya and Kuwaykat. These places are located very close to each other in the first hills of western Galilee. The second centre is the al-Shaghur area,¹⁰ in which there was one village called 'Ayn 'Athth in the vicinity of Sajur. The third is al-Hama area,¹¹ in which there were two villages called Dama and al-Safriyya. The fourth centre is al-Jabal,¹² in which the village of al-Jarmaq was mentioned.¹³

However, the earliest contemporary source that mentioned the Druze is al-Antaki who died in 1067. Talking about the year 1019/1020, he claimed that the Druze spread their religion among the Muslims in Wadi al-Taym between Damascus and Sidon, and he mentioned them again in Jabal al-Summaq near Aleppo in events related to the year 1032.¹⁴ In his book from 1169–1171, Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveller who, in 1165, embarked on an extensive and long journey in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, mentioned the Druze in the mountains east of Sidon, stating that they are found in the mountains ten miles from Sidon, reaching east until Mount Hermon.¹⁵ This is the exact region of Wadi al-Taym, and it is remarkable that the Druze are again mentioned there, without any reference to them in Galilee. This does not fit with al-Ashrafani's claim that the Druze had existed in Galilee since the beginning of the religion's spread. Perhaps the Druze villages in Galilee were dismantled some time before the arrival of Benjamin to the region. However, they are not mentioned in Galilee in the earlier contemporary source of al-Antaki either. It may also be the case that there were Druze in these villages but they were simply not mentioned by historians.



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