Language is one of the fundamental aspects of the creation of distinct cultures. By taking a look not only at the importance of Classical Syriac, the language of liturgy and literature, for Syriac Christian communities, but also at that of the various languages that over time were used alongside it (Greek, Arabic, Modern Aramaic, and modern western languages), one may understand better the subtle ways of integration into and differentiation from host cultures. One also better appreciates why internal debates about language take such intense forms, and how such debates have become closely connected to various forms of nationalism.

As such, the case of the Syriac churches forms an excellent starting point to understand the predicament of the churches in and from the Middle East more generally, all of which face difficult questions of exclusion and belonging. Such an overview also forms the starting point of further research into the current situation of Middle Eastern churches, both in their countries of origin, and in the west, where many of them have found new homes.

The scientific lectures will be complemented by music from Syrian musicians Najat Suleiman (chant) and Hassan Taha (lute) who live and work in Switzerland.

The symposium is sponsored by the Hans Sigrist Foundation and organized by the Institute of Historical Theology (Faculty of Theology), both at the University of Bern.
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