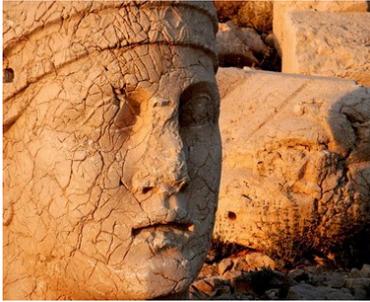


# JESUS' LANGUAGE ALIVE. OR DYING?



Cyprus is a troubled island. The fights between Turks and Greeks have divided it into two parts some 30 years ago. Not only Turks and Greeks are affected by the situation. There are also the Maronites. These people have come to Cyprus in four major waves, the first taking place in the 8th century. Nevertheless, over the years the situation has changed. As the island was separated into two parts the majority of Maronites had to leave to the Greek part. They were Catholics and spoke a unique language that was once very important, the Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ. More precisely their version of the language is called Cypriot Maronite Arabic.

Greeks are, however, Orthodox Christians and Maronites are assimilating to their culture losing their own traditions and language. Nowadays, there are only some 130 people living in the former center of Maronites', in the village of Kromakiti. The village is dilapidating as there are no people who would repair it or live here. Most of the inhabitants are in their 70s.

The local elementary school has been closed down as there were no pupils to teach. Young people left for jobs and further studies and those who left for the Greek part of the island were not allowed to return and live here. The villagers may not even bequeath property to outside heirs. Maronite Catholics outside the village provide them with needed humanitarian supplies like food, medicine, fuel and so on. Nowadays they may visit the place but may not stay permanently.

Some Maronites come here for weekends renovating their old homes. Nevertheless, without a proper program the community, its language and cultural heritage will disappear. It is easier for Maronites not to differ from the general population.

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