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In Cyprus: AI and 3D reconstruct a 12th-century monastery



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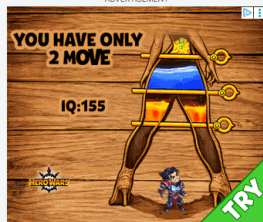
By Apostolos Stalkos

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3D scanning and artificial intelligence create the avatar of Saint Neophyte, who now tells the story of the monastery he founded almost a millennium ago.

The Monastery of Saint Neophyte is located in western Cyprus, near the city of Paphos. It was founded by the Cypriot monk, hermit, and writer Neophyte in the second half of the 12th century.



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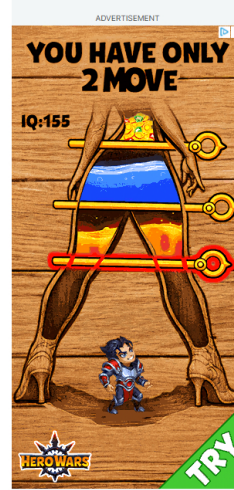
The Enkleistra of Saint Neophyte, or the Cave of Saint Neophyte, is one of the most important Byzantine monuments, not only in Cyprus, but throughout the entire Orthodox Byzantine world. It has always attracted a large number of visitors. But lately, many are coming to the monastery to see the saint who has "come back to life."



The Enkleistra of Saint Neophyte - Αμβρόσιος Στάλκος

Thanks to three-dimensional digitization, artificial intelligence, and cutting-edge virtual and augmented reality technologies, the Enkleistra has been digitally recreated. Now, an image of the saint welcomes visitors and shares stories of his life.

« Nous avons une représentation réaliste du saint à l'intérieur de l'Enkleistra. Nous sommes donc partis de ce portrait pour créer un avatar. Désormais, le saint guide le visiteur à travers l'espace qu'il a façonné, là où il a rédigé ses écrits et où il a finalement été inhumé. J'ai écrit un scénario de visite et nous avons ensuite "confié" à saint Néophyte le rôle de guide. C'est un lieu vivant, car le monastère qu'il a fondé fonctionne



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encore aujourd'hui », a déclaré à la caméra d'Euronews l'historienne de l'art Maria Pafil.

L'un des éléments les plus importants de l'Enkleistra, au-delà de la grande qualité picturale objective, est le fait que le peintre est identifié. Une inscription dans la première pièce de l'Enkleistra mentionne le nom de l'artiste, Théodoros Apevdès, et la date de 1183. C'est extrêmement important et rare pour l'art byzantin, car les iconographes ne signaient quasiment jamais leurs œuvres.



Digital Heritage Summit 2026 - Ανάστροφος Στάσιος

For this project, the Digital Heritage Laboratory of the Cyprus University of Technology collaborated with the MIRALab of the University of Geneva.

This is an action of EUREKA3D-XR, funded by Digital Europe. The program develops innovative tools and scenarios for extended reality applications.

These new technologies paint a fascinating picture, one that nevertheless remains foreign to the monks. One of the project's biggest challenges was gaining acceptance and cooperation from the monastic community.

"First, we had to convince the hierarchs and work with them. We had to find common ground on the issue of recording the material. The priests had no contact with new technologies. They were extremely cautious and distrustful. They didn't want us to take an item and then have artificial intelligence transform it to present it in a very different way. That's why we also had to train the monks. We worked together so that they understood what we were doing, and subsequently, they became our assistants," Marinos Ioannidis, director of the UNESCO Chair for Digital Cultural Heritage at the Cyprus University of Technology, explained to Euronews.



Digital Heritage Summit 2026 - Ανάστροφος Στάσιος

Besides the Enkleistra of Saint-Néophyte, two other sites participate in the EurekaED-XR project: the archaeological site of Bibracte, in France, and the ramparts of Girona, in Spain.

"The goal of Eureka 3D-XR is to demonstrate how 3D digitization can support the cultural heritage sector. This means providing access to data so that monuments become more attractive to students, researchers, and of course, the public. The Enkleistra of Saint-Néophyte is a special case for us. It is very important because it connects the physical world to the virtual world. But it also creates a link with our emotional world, with a part of us that is neither real nor digital. It is the spiritual dimension of our lives," explains Antonella Fresca, Vice President of Photoconsortium and coordinator of Eureka 3D-XR.



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Everything is ready for tomorrow's big demonstration event in Paphos, Cyprus!

Come join the Eureka3D-XR team at the Enkleistra of Saint Neophytos, and see him and his legacy come to life!

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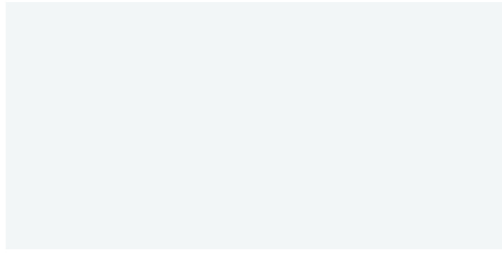
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A few years ago, at least in Greece and Cyprus, the combination of religion, artificial intelligence, and 3D scanning would have raised eyebrows, even sparked outrage. But today, technology can “work miracles” and, why not, introduce the figures and stories of the Church to a wider, younger audience.



Digital Heritage Summit 2026

Limassol hosted the Digital Heritage Summit 2026. Participants included some of the leading specialists in digital cultural heritage and artificial intelligence, as well as archaeologists, museum professionals, representatives from UNESCO, Europeana and major European universities.

At the heart of the discussions was the question of how technology is redefining our relationship to history and collective memory.

“Problems can arise, such as wars, natural disasters, or accidents. This leads to the destruction of cultural heritage. We know what is happening in Ukraine. It is very important, first and foremost, to document it, to preserve it, but also to make it accessible to the general public. It is essential to offer it in digital form, because digital technology removes many obstacles. Anyone with an internet connection can download the material and access any information available on European platforms.” emphasizes Anthony Cassar, Head of the Technology and Experience Development Unit at Heritage Malta.

