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Report from Cyprus. Artificial intelligence brought a saint to life.



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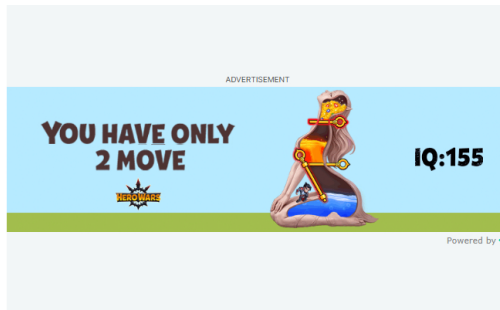
By [Apostolos Staikos](#)

Published on 02/06/2026 - 13:14 CEST

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Three-dimensional visualization and artificial intelligence have created an avatar of Saint Neophytos, who now tells the stories and history of the monastery he founded in the second half of the 12th century.

The [Monastery of Saint Neophytos](#) is located about 9 kilometers north of Paphos. It was founded by the Cypriot hermit and writer Neophytos in the second half of the 12th century.



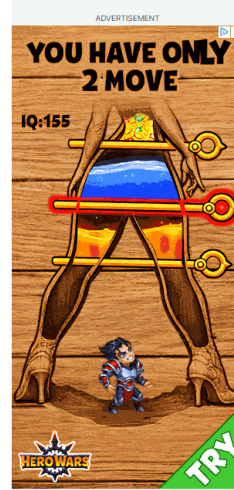
The Egleistra of St. Neophytos is one of the most important Byzantine monuments not only in Cyprus but throughout the Orthodox Byzantine world. It has always attracted numerous visitors. Recently, however, many have been coming to the monastery to see the saint who "came to life."



St. Egleistra Neophyte - Ανθολογία Στίχων

Thanks to three-dimensional digitization, artificial intelligence, and innovative virtual and augmented reality technologies, Egleistra, or the grotto of St. Neophytos, has been digitally recreated. Now the saint welcomes visitors and tells them stories from his life.

"We have a realistic representation of the saint inside Egleistra. We used this image and created an avatar. Now the saint guides visitors through the space he carved himself, where he wrote his works, and where he was ultimately buried. I wrote a tour script, and then we entrusted St. Neophytos with the role of guide. This place is alive, because the monastery he founded is still functioning today," art historian Maria Pafiti told Euronews.



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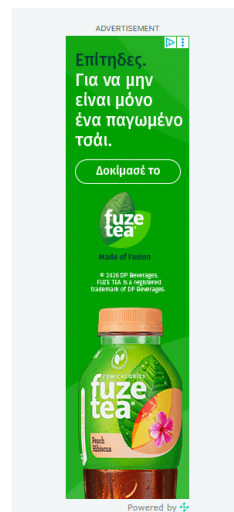
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One of the most important elements of Egleistra, besides the objectively high quality of the paintings, is the fact that we know the artist behind the frescoes. **In the first room of Egleistra, there is an inscription with the artist's name, Theodore Apsevdīs, and the date 1183.** This is extremely important and rare in Byzantine art, as iconographers almost never signed their works.



Digital Heritage Summit 2026 - Αμβρόσιος Σιδάκος

On this project, [the Digital Heritage Laboratory of the Cyprus University of Technology](#) collaborated with [MIRALab](#) of the University of Geneva.

This initiative is part of the [Eureka3D-XR](#) project, funded by the [Digital Europe program](#). The project develops innovative tools and scenarios for augmented reality applications.

These new technologies create a fascinating world, yet one that remains alien to the monks. One of the greatest challenges was gaining acceptance and establishing cooperation with the monastic community.

"First, we had to convince the hierarchy and start collaborating with them. We had to find common ground on how to record the material. **The clergy had no contact with new technologies. They were very cautious and approached them with prejudice.** They didn't want us to take away some element and then have the artificial intelligence change it and present it in a completely different form. Therefore, **we also had to train the monks. We worked together to ensure they understood what we were doing, and then they became our collaborators.**" [Marinos Ioannidis, director of the UNESCO Chair for Digital Cultural Heritage at the Cyprus University of Technology](#), told euronews.



Digital Heritage Summit 2026 - Αμβρόσιος Σιδάκος

In addition to the Egleistra of St. Neophytos, two other monuments are participating in the EurekaED-XR project: the archaeological site of Bibracte in France and the city walls of Girona in Spain.

"The goal of Eureka 3D-XR is to demonstrate how three-dimensional digitization can support the cultural heritage sector. This means access to data, so that monuments become more interesting for students, researchers, and, of course, citizens. The Egleistra of St. Neophytos is a special case for us. **It is very important because it connects the physical and virtual worlds.** But it is also a connection to our emotional world. To that part of us that is neither real nor digital. **It is the spiritual dimension of our lives,**" emphasizes Antonella Fresa, vice-president of [the Photoconsortium](#) association and coordinator of the Eureka 3D-XR project.

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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!

#3ddigitization #3davatar #avatar design #culturalheritage #digitalculturalheritage #stneophytos

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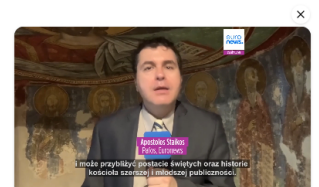
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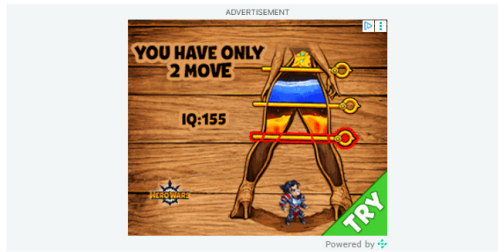
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Just a few years ago, at least in Greece and Cyprus, the combination of religion, artificial intelligence, and three-dimensional digitization would have raised eyebrows and probably even objections. **Today, however, technology can work miracles and—why not—bring the figures and stories of the Church to a wider and younger audience.**



Digital Heritage Summit 2026

Limassol hosted the Digital Heritage Summit 2026, a summit dedicated to digital cultural heritage. Some of the most important researchers in the field of digital cultural heritage and artificial intelligence participated, as well as archaeologists, museum professionals, representatives of UNESCO, **Europeana**, and major European universities.

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

"Problems can always arise, such as wars, natural disasters, or accidents. This means the destruction of cultural heritage. We know what's happening in Ukraine. It's crucial, above all, to document and preserve it, but also to make it available to the general public. It's crucial that heritage reaches the digital world, as **digital technologies break down many barriers.** Anyone with internet access can download materials and **access any information available on European platforms,**" says Anthony Cassar, Head of Technology and Experience Development at [Heritage Malta](#).



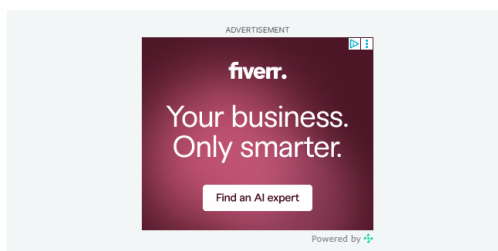
Digital Heritage Summit 2026 - Ανδρέας Σιδάκος

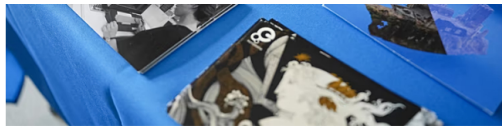
One of the topics discussed was the protection of cultural heritage and the repatriation of monuments that were illegally removed from some countries.

Nicosia is playing a leading role in this fight and is seeking the return of cultural assets belonging to [the Republic of Cyprus](#).

"**After the illegal invasion in 1974, we lost a very large part of our cultural heritage.** We monitor the internet, markets, and auction houses. If we find anything that may have been obtained illegally, we cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the police, and our legal office. I must emphasize that in recent years we have had many successes, managing to recover many objects," Vasiliki Kassianidu, Deputy Minister of Culture of the Republic of Cyprus, told euronews.

The Digital Heritage Summit 2026 was held under the auspices of [the Republic of Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#).





Digital Heritage Summit 2026 - Πάρος, Χαλκιδική

Cultural heritage is entering a new era. Virtual and augmented reality technologies are no longer just for documentation, but also for creating new experiences. **It's not just about digitizing monuments, but about "living" interaction with the past.**

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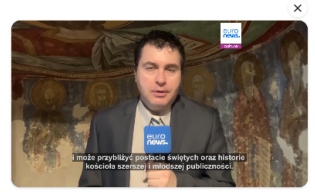
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