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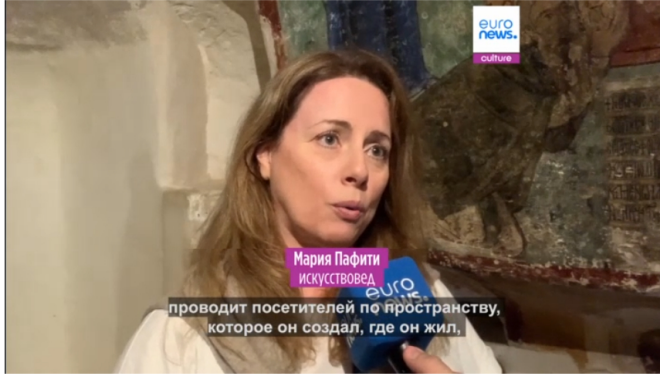
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Report from Cyprus: AI and 3D "resurrect" Saint Neophytos in Enklistra



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Published 02/06/2026 - 15:46 GMT+2

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3D digitalization and artificial intelligence have created an avatar of Saint Neophytos: he now tells stories and "speaks" about the history of the monastery he founded in the second half of the 12th century.

The Monastery of Saint Neophytos (Greek source) is located approximately 9 kilometers north of Paphos, Cyprus. It was founded by the local hermit and writer Neophytos in the second half of the 12th century.

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The Recluse of Saint Neophytos is one of the most important Byzantine monuments not only in Cyprus but in the entire Orthodox Byzantine world. It has always attracted many visitors. However, recently, many have come here to see the saint "come to life."



Shutter of Saint Neophytos - Αρθρογραφία Στάκος

Using 3D digitalization, artificial intelligence, and advanced virtual and augmented reality technologies, the hermitage—that is, the cave of Saint Neophytos—has been digitally recreated. Now, the saint "greet" visitors and shares stories from his life.

"We have a realistic image of the saint inside a hermitage. We took this portrait and created an avatar. Now the saint guides visitors through the space he himself designed, where he wrote his works, and where he was eventually buried. I wrote the tour script, and then we 'assigned' Saint Neophytos the role of guide. This is a living place, because the monastery he founded is still active today," art historian Maria Paphiti told Euronews.

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One of the most important features of the monastery, besides the objectively high quality of the paintings, is that we know the artist's name. In the first room of the monastery, an inscription has been preserved indicating the artist's name—Theodore Apevdīs—and the date: 1183. This is extremely significant and rare in Byzantine art, as icon painters almost never signed their works.



Digital Heritage Summit - 2026

To implement this project, [the Digital Heritage Laboratory of the Cyprus University of Technology \(source in Greek\)](#) collaborated with the [MIRALab laboratory \(source in Greek\)](#) of the University of Geneva.

The project is being implemented within the framework of the [Eureka3D-XR Initiative \(source in Greek\)](#), funded by the [Digital Europe program \(source in Greek\)](#). The program develops innovative tools and scenarios for augmented reality applications.

These new technologies create a fascinating world, yet one that remains little known to monks. One of the project's main challenges was gaining acceptance and establishing collaboration with the monastic community.

"First, we had to convince the hierarchs and start working with them. We had to find common ground on how to record the material. The priests had no connection with new technologies. They were very cautious and prejudiced. They didn't want us to take an image and then have artificial intelligence alter it and present it completely differently. So we had to train the monks as well. We worked together so they understood what we were doing, and ultimately, they became our assistants," [Marinos Ioannidis, Director of the UNESCO Chair \(source in Greek\)](#) in Digital Cultural Heritage at the Cyprus University of Technology, told Euronews.



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In addition to the San Neophytos Cloister, the EurekaED-XR project involves two other sites: the Bibracte archaeological complex in France and the Girona ramparts in Spain.

"The goal of Eureka 3D-XR is to demonstrate how 3D digitalization can support cultural heritage. This means providing access to data so that monuments become more engaging for students, researchers, and, of course, citizens. The Cloister of Saint 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 a part of us that is neither real nor digital. It is the spiritual dimension of our lives," emphasizes Antonella Fresa, Vice President of [Photoconsortium \(source in Greek\)](#) and coordinator of Eureka 3D-XR.

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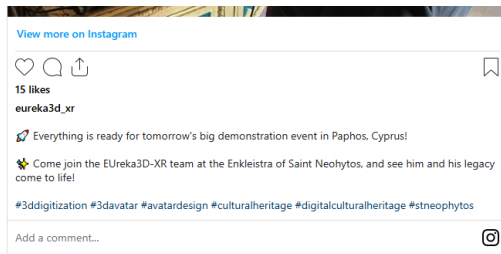
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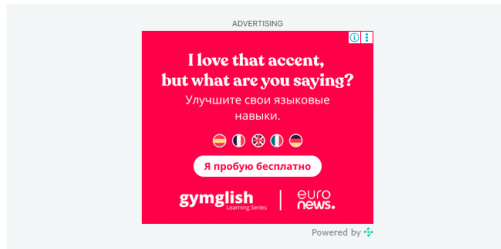
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Just a few years ago, at least in Greece and Cyprus, the combination of religion, artificial intelligence, and 3D digitalization would likely have provoked surprise, if not protest. Today, however, technology can "work miracles" and, why not, introduce church figures and stories to a wider, younger audience.



Digital Heritage Summit 2026

Limassol hosted the Digital Heritage Summit 2026. It brought together leading scholars in the fields of digital cultural heritage and artificial intelligence, as well as archaeologists, museologists, representatives of UNESCO, the [Europeana platform \(source in Greek\)](#), and major European universities.

The discussion focused on how technology is redefining our relationship with history and collective memory.

"Problems can arise—wars, natural disasters, accidents. This means the destruction of cultural heritage. We see what's happening in Ukraine. Therefore, it's crucial, first and foremost, to record it, preserve it, and make it accessible to the general public. Presenting it digitally is crucial, because digital technology removes many barriers. Anyone with internet access can download materials and access any information posted on European platforms," emphasizes Antoni Casar, Head of Technology and User Experience Development at [Heritage Malta \(source in Greek\)](#).



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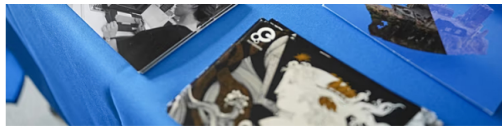
One of the topics discussed was the protection of cultural heritage, as well as the repatriation of antiquities that were illegally removed from some countries.

Nicosia is leading this fight and working to return relics belonging to [the Republic of Cyprus. \(Source in Greek\)](#)

"Following the illegal invasion of 1974, we lost a very large part of our cultural heritage. We closely monitor the internet, markets, and auctions. If we discover something that may have been acquired illegally, we cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the police, and our legal service. I must say that in recent years we have had many successes: we have managed to return numerous objects," Vasiliki Kassianidou, Deputy Minister of Culture of the Republic of Cyprus, told Euronews.

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





Digital Heritage Summit - 2026

Cultural heritage is entering a new era. Virtual and augmented reality technologies are no longer just used for documentation but also to create new experiences. Beyond digitizing monuments, the goal is a "live" interaction with the past.

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