

First Project for the MIRU:

Cleaning and Reintegration of the 13th Century Icon with Saint John the Baptist, Monastery of the Syrians, Wadi Natrun in Egypt



+ Painted by a Byzantine-trained artist on a locally-crafted sycamore panel, later partly devoured by insects, the endangered icon (91×67×2cm) was revitalised using the MIRU.

+ The appalling state of the support made it possible to look through the sacred object and scrutinise in detail the otherwise hidden techniques peculiar to the Nile Valley.

+ The rediscovered masterpiece was provided with a protective glassed maqsurat fashioned by Egyptian carpenters.

CREDITS:

Phase One 2001–2002: Stabilisation of the panel, preparation and paint layers are credited to Warden (Roy) Hesterman (†)

Scientific analysis: Prof. Dr. Jaap J. Boon, Dr. Pieter Hallebeek, Dr. Olga Katsibiri; Monastic Liaison: Father (now Bishop) Martyros El-Suriani

Phase Two 2005–2007: Complicated re-restoration using MIRU is credited to the Prince Claus Fund Project

PCF Officials: Els van der Plas, Cora Taal, Geerte Wachter

Project Field Director and Chief Conservator: Zuzana Skalova (cleaning under microscope and retouchings)

Assistant Conservator: Dr. Magdy Mansour, Supreme Council of Antiquities

Monastic Liaison: Father Bigoul El-Suriani, Father Andraus El-Suriani, Father Pachomius

Project Assistant: Arch. Sameh Adly Habashi; *Icon Display Case:* Arch. Magdy Yacoub

Many people have generously contributed towards the success of this project: Dr. Niek Biegman, Dr. Kim Duistermaat, Joost Hagen, Dr. Karel Innemée, Tilly Mulder.

His Holiness Pope Shenuda III and His Grace Bishop Mettaus El-Suriani gave their blessings and hospitality.

Aims of the MIRU

Due to the refurbishments and modernisations of old churches, the majority of portable icons were removed from their traditional setting. They can be studied and restored – but, regrettably, also over-restored by non specialists, making the subsequent professional re-restoration very difficult.

Guardians of the remarkable Egyptian icon collection housed in hundreds of churches in Cairo, the Delta and along the Nile, have no direct access to conservation expertise or, more pragmatically, to resources for creating a restoration workshop equipped with tools and materials that can provide modern basic maintenance, assistance and know-how. The MIRU can therefore be seen as a first practical step towards sustained improvement.



Monks in the Monastery of St. Antony the Great at the Red Sea show a group of icons from various periods and painted using different techniques on wood and canvas, which were conserved / restored with modern methods in 1988.