

26/05/2019

## Last Minute Rescue and Return of Stolen Relics to Cyprus (PHOTOS)



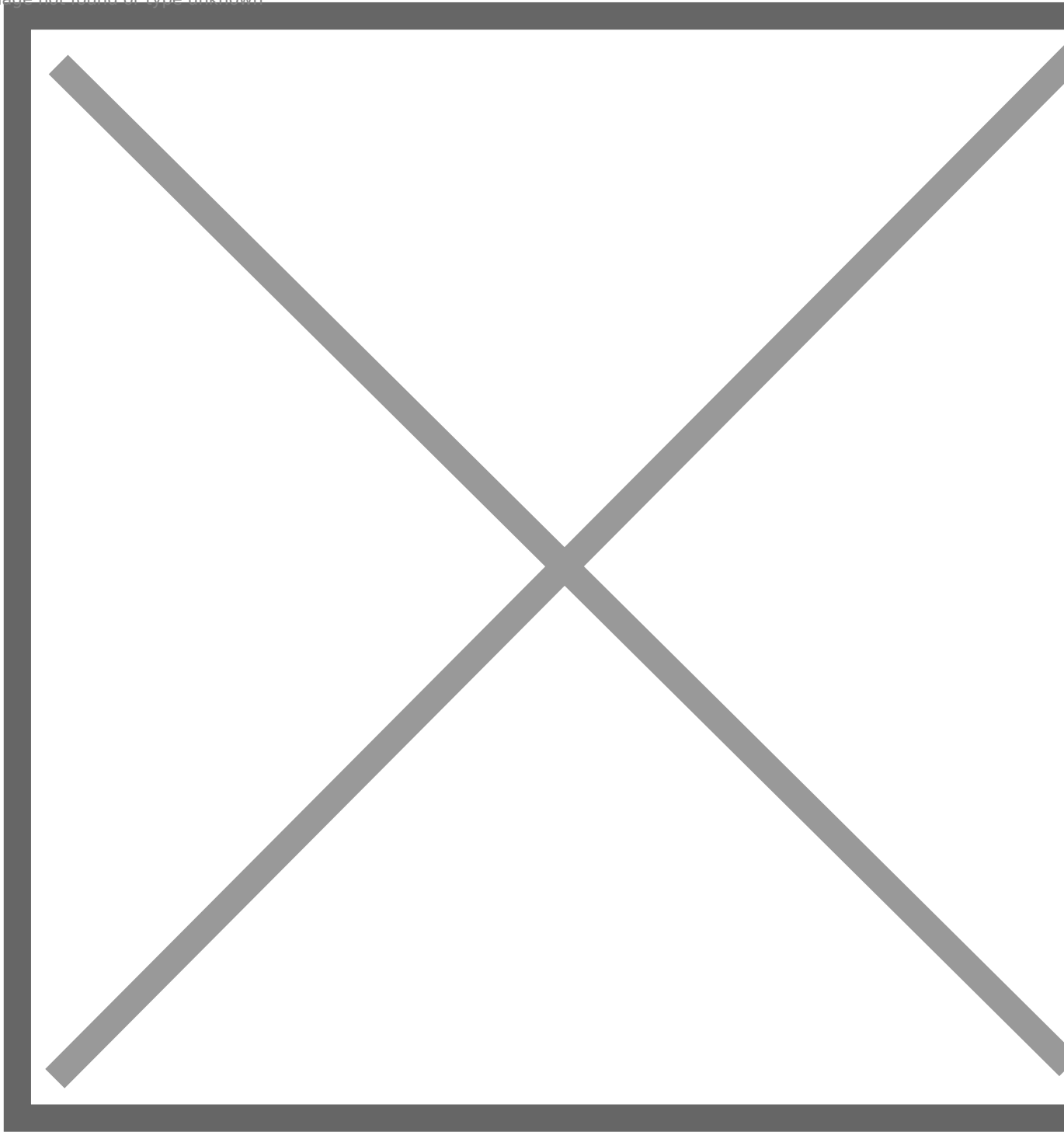
With the official return of the stolen reliquary of St. Mamas, the Cypriot patron saint of the Monastery of Morfou, Hargesheimer Kunstauktionen Düsseldorf could make a small contribution to the return of lost art treasures on May 14. Frank and Susanne Hargesheimer, Managing Director of the auction house of the same name, is keen to set an example, so that in the future culture and identity creating art objects will be returned to their rightful owners. Of course, the invited guests Archimandrite Fotios Ioakeim, representing Morfou's Metropolitan Neophytos, the Byzantine expert Maria Paphiti as well as an ambassador of the Cypriot Embassy in Berlin also shared this view.

Dated to the year 1835, the reliquary is in the shape of a book and, on the inside of the lid shows Saint Mamas riding a lion surrounded by four saints. Inside the box there is a hinged metal plate, which is reminiscent of a book page, in which the bones of the St. Mamas were kept. The religious traditions of the Life of St. Mamas are as numerous as contradictory. According to some earlier versions, Mamas lived

in the time of the Romans as a shepherd and avowed Christian, who preached in the mountains in front of wild animals. In the Middle Ages, the life and work of the saint was transferred to Cyprus. Thus, Mamas lived near the village Morfou as a hermit and shepherd. When he refused to pay taxes and was arrested, he stepped on a lion riding in front of the governor. Deeply impressed by this sight, the governor abated the saint's taxes for life. Due to this miraculous story, St. Mamas is revered as the patron saint of tax accountants, tax officials, and tax evaders.

The reliquary containing the bones of St. Mamas would have been sold in the auction Russian Art: Russian and Greek Icons in April 2019. The great global interest in this reliquary box attracted nearly a dozen bidders. Thanks to the Byzantine art expert Maria Paphiti, who wrote to the auction house literally during the auction, the sale could be withdrawn just minutes before the call.

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*The reliquary of St. Mamas was nearly auctioned off before it was identified as stolen and returned to Cyprus. P  
Sebastian Maass*

The story of how it came to this last-minute rescue begins in Cyprus. Independently, the Archimandrite Symeon and the archaeologist Riginos Aristotelous became aware of the reliquary described in a report from 1912. There are still contemporary witnesses who have seen the precious reliquary from the Monastery of Morfou. Thereupon, efforts were made to prevent the sale of the

object with the help of the authorities. Almost when everything seemed to be lost, the Metropolitan of Morfou notified Mrs. Paphiti, who was able to intervene before the reliquary was auctioned.

During the Turkish invasion of the northern part of Cyprus in the summer of 1974, the reliquary from the Monastery of Morfou was stolen and sold abroad. How it came decades later to be in the possession of a North German private collection and then in the art trade, is no longer retraceable since the art and icon collector passed away.

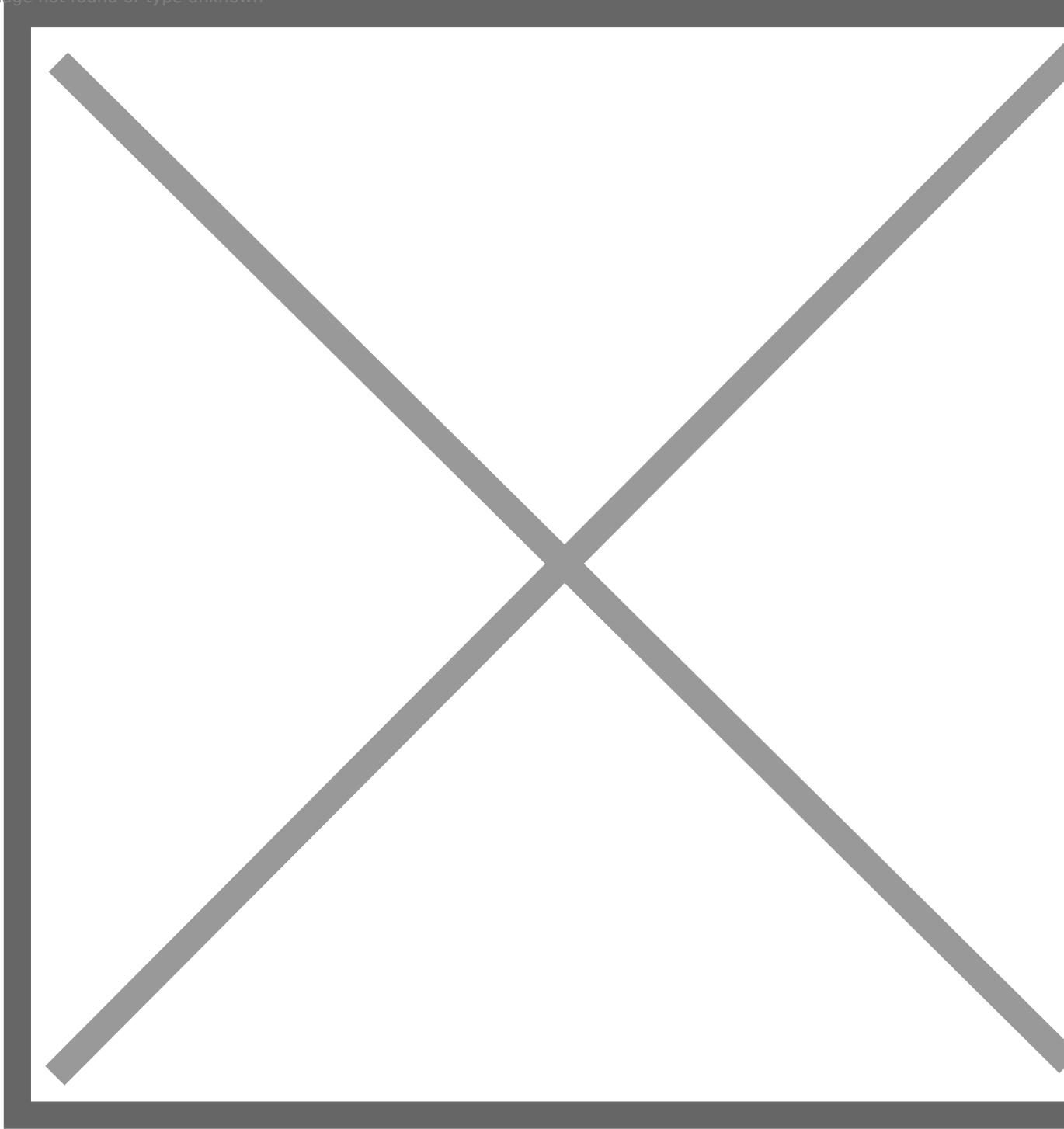
Nevertheless, the relic's journey took a happy ending, as Hargesheimer Kunstauktionen was able to compensate the heir and to donate the relics to the Metropolis of Morfou. In order to demonstrate his gratitude and appreciation for this gesture, the Archimandrite

Fotios Ioakeim gave Susanne Hargesheimer an icon designed especially for this day with St. Mamas riding a lion, although the enthusiasm and joy of the Cypriot legation about the return of the relics was rewarding enough for her.

It is almost a divine coincidence Archimandrite Ioakeim noted, pointing out that the monastery community of Morfou made several attempts to acquire relics of St. Mamas a few months earlier with no success.

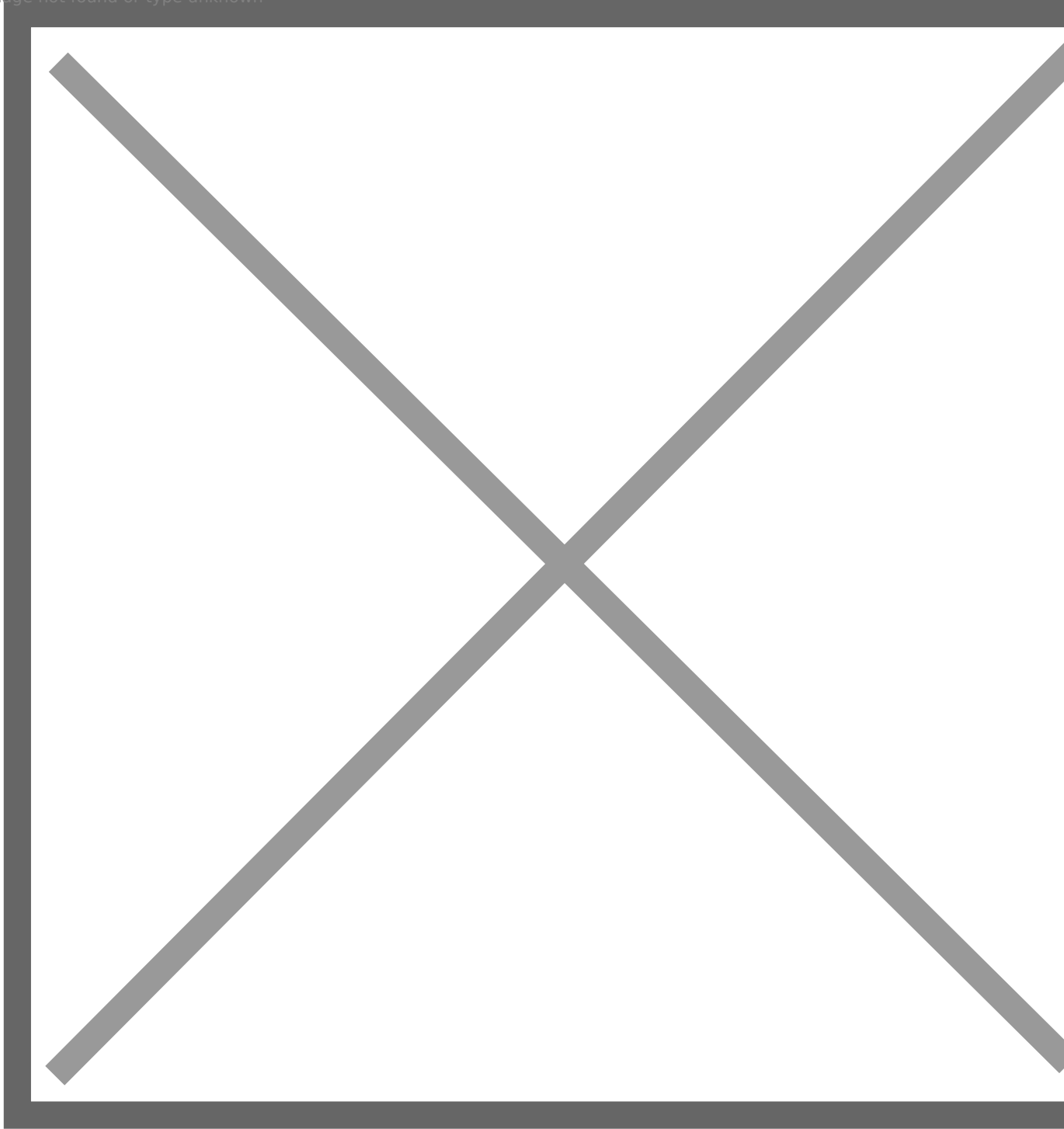
Although the reliquary cannot be returned to its original location in the Monastery of Morfou, which was built in the 18th century over the tomb of the saint and is located in the Turkish occupied north of Cyprus, at least the monastery community of Morfou has had the bones of their patron St. Mamas returned to them.

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*The reliquary of St. Mamas from the Morfou Monastery in Cyprus. Photo: (Courtesy of Hargesheimer Kunstauktion  
Düsseldorf)*

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*The reliquary of St. Mamas from the Morfou Monastery in Cyprus. Photo: (Courtesy of Hargesheimer Kunstauktion  
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*Frank and Susanne Hargesheimer, Managing Director of the Hargesheimer Kunstauktionen Düsseldorf, with the reliquary of St. Mamas which was returned to Cyprus. Photo: Sebastian Maass*

— Source: [The National Herald](#)