

FILM 3- A LIVING HERITAGE

Anne Embs, Vice-Regional Curator of Historical Monuments at the Regional Department of Cultural Affairs for Poitou-Charentes, and **Brice Moulinier**, restorer of mural paintings, explain the restoration work on the mural paintings of the templar chapel of Cressac-Saint-Genis.

Anne Embs and Brice Moulinier at Cressac-Saint-Genis

Here we are at the chapel of Cressac. It is the last standing remnant of a Commandership that belonged to the Order of the Templars, which was founded in the 12th century. On its outside facade, the building is rather simple and sober. But inside, you can see a collection of mural paintings that also date back to the 12th century. This is relatively unique in the region of Poitou-Charentes, even in all of France.

These paintings tell us the story of the Crusades to the Holy Land that took place during the 12th century. These paintings went through a surprising number of developments since their creation in the 12th century. First of all, they were often repainted, that is to say new layers of paint were often added, which has led to some confusion in deciphering the different strata of their history. Then, as is often the case with paintings, microorganisms developed, creating micro-fissures in the paintings, and these had to be remedied. Many restorations took place in the 20th century. During one restoration in particular, in the 50s and 60s, the applied fixatives actually created more damages. That is why, forty years later, we had to restore these paintings once again, to control the pathologies and also to render them more legible to the general public. So in 2013, we asked Brice Moulinier, the restorer of mural paintings, to intervene here to restore these paintings.

These paintings were transported and stocked elsewhere, and that is when they became damaged. Ten years or so passed before the paintings were put back into the chapel by another team.

So the paintings became damaged by peelings, by the development of micro-organisms and gloss caused by excess fixatives, excess glazes that had been added during the restoration works. The second team made the decor of fake rock that underlined the lower register overly visible.

To treat the paintings and the micro-organisms, we worked through compresses so as to avoid all mechanical action on the paintings. We repeated this process many times over, in order to treat all of the bacteria.

We did the same thing to treat the glossiness, working with compresses, with absorbent sheets of paper and solvent to alleviate and diminish the glossiness.

The most delicate procedure was the fixing, the consolidation of the pictorial layers. We used hypodermic needles to inject drops of resin on the back of the flakes, then the flakes were reapplied using pressure. We had to seal all the minor cracks in the wall using a fine coat and mini trowels. The final phase consisted in touching up the paintings. This was done using small brushes and watercolors.

And we attenuated the overly visible fake-stone decor which disrupted the view of the lower level murals.

Romanesque treasures of Poitou-Charentes, Poitou-Charentes region, 2014.

www.romanesquetreasures.com

www.tresorsromans.poitou-charentes.fr