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Pseudo-Arabic as a Christian Sign: Monks, Manuscripts, and the Iconographic Program of Hosios Loukas*

The Monastery of Hosios Loukas near the town of Steiris in the region of Boeotia in central Greece is among the great masterpieces of middle Byzantine (ca. 843-1204) architecture. The complex includes two churches, dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries (fig. 1), which together formed an important pilgrimage site for the healing cult associated with the holy monk, Luke (d. 953)[1]. No documents from the early period of the monastery – such as *typika* or inventories – are preserved. For this reason, the *vita* of the saint, which was written shortly after his death in the second-half of the tenth century, assumes unusual importance as a source for the initial history of the site[2]. The physical remains of the medieval buildings also provide key material evidence regarding the character of the foundation. Both the tenth- and eleventh-century churches exhibit sophisticated forms that represent the cutting edge of Byzantine architectural engineering of the time[3]. In addition, the remains of the decorative programs of each building show a degree of lavishness and refinement that equals that of any preserved middle Byzantine monument[4]. The south, eleventh-century church is particularly worthy of note; its fresco and mosaic programs are among the best-preserved anywhere in the former Empire and provide a clear sense of the complex's original glory (fig. 2)[5]. Especially for a provincial foundation, Hosios Loukas received generous investment, suggesting the involvement of both regional and more distant actors.

Of particular relevance to the present volume, the complex shows the extensive use of pseudo-Arabic motifs (forms that imitate Arabic letters but are not legible), indicating the monuments' participation in the complex cross-cultural networks linking Byzantium and the medieval Islamic world in the tenth and eleventh centuries[6]. Today these exoticizing elements are most prominent in the cloisonné bricks and carved marble string courses embedded in the walls at the east end of the tenth-century north church around the exterior of the apse (figs 3-6). Initially, however, pseudo-Arabic motifs were also a significant component of the internal decoration of the north church. Carved marble fragments of the original *templon* (the barrier between the naos and bema area) and *proskynētarion* (the structure supporting the major icons of the church) show that these liturgical furnishings employed pseudo-Arabic as a framing device (figs 7-8)[7]. In addition, a fresco located on the exterior wall of the narthex of the north church depicts the Old Testament general Joshua wearing a head cloth and helmet that are inscribed with bands of pseudo-Arabic along their edges (figs 9-10)[8]. Individual pseudo-Arabic motifs also appear dispersed throughout the fresco and mosaic decorations of the south church in the form of painted motifs on the column capitals to either side of the apse in the crypt (see figs 35-36) and in the mosaics of the upper church, specifically on the baldachin representing the Jewish Temple in the scene of the Presentation in the southwest squinch

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1 Regarding the importance of Hosios Loukas as a healing shrine, see Talbot, Pilgrimage 156, 163, 165, Appendix 3.

2 On this point, see Oikonomides, The First Century. For the *vita*, see Saint Luke of Steiris.

3 For a convenient summary of the major developments in middle Byzantine church architecture and the place of Hosios Loukas within this trajectory, see Vocotopoulos, Church Architecture esp. 162f.

4 Archaeological investigations carried out at Hosios Loukas in the 1960s clarified the phases of the site, establishing definitively that the north church predates the south *katholikon*. See Stikas, Oikodomikon. Scholarly consensus has not yet been reached regarding the specific chronologies of the churches. I endorse arguments that date the foundation of the north church soon after 961, the construction of the south church to the early eleventh century (ca. 1011), and the completion of the majority of the mosaics and frescoes of the south church to the 1040s. My position is further discussed in Walker, Pseudo-Arabic 101, and draws from the arguments found in Bouras, Ho glyptos 123f., 134; Chatzidakis, A propos de la date; Chatzidakis, Précisions; Oikonomides, The First Century, esp. 249-251; Mouriki, Stylistic esp. 86. For the most recent discussion of the architecture of the site, see Mylonas, Monē. Proposing that the *katholikon* was an imperial foundation, Schminck has dated its decorative program to an earlier period, positing that the mosaics date chiefly to the reign of Constantine VIII (r. 1025-1028) and the wall paintings of the crypt to the reign of his successor, Romanos III Argyros (r. 1028-1034). See Schminck, Kaiserliche Stiftung. His arguments have yet to be fully reconciled with the conventional chronologies for the construction and decoration of the complex.

5 For general discussion of the mosaics, see Diez, Byzantine. For the frescoes in the crypt see Connor, Art.

6 For a concise historiographic account of the treatment of pseudo-Arabic in Byzantine art history and related fields, see Pedone/Cantone, Ornament.

7 For documentation and reconstruction of the original *templon* and *proskynētarion* as well discussion of other sculptural fragments from Hosios Loukas displaying pseudo-Arabic, see Bouras, Ho glyptos 98-114, 130-132, drawings 3, 5a-b, figs 165-172, 182-185, 187.

8 Stikas, Oikodomikon 174-178.

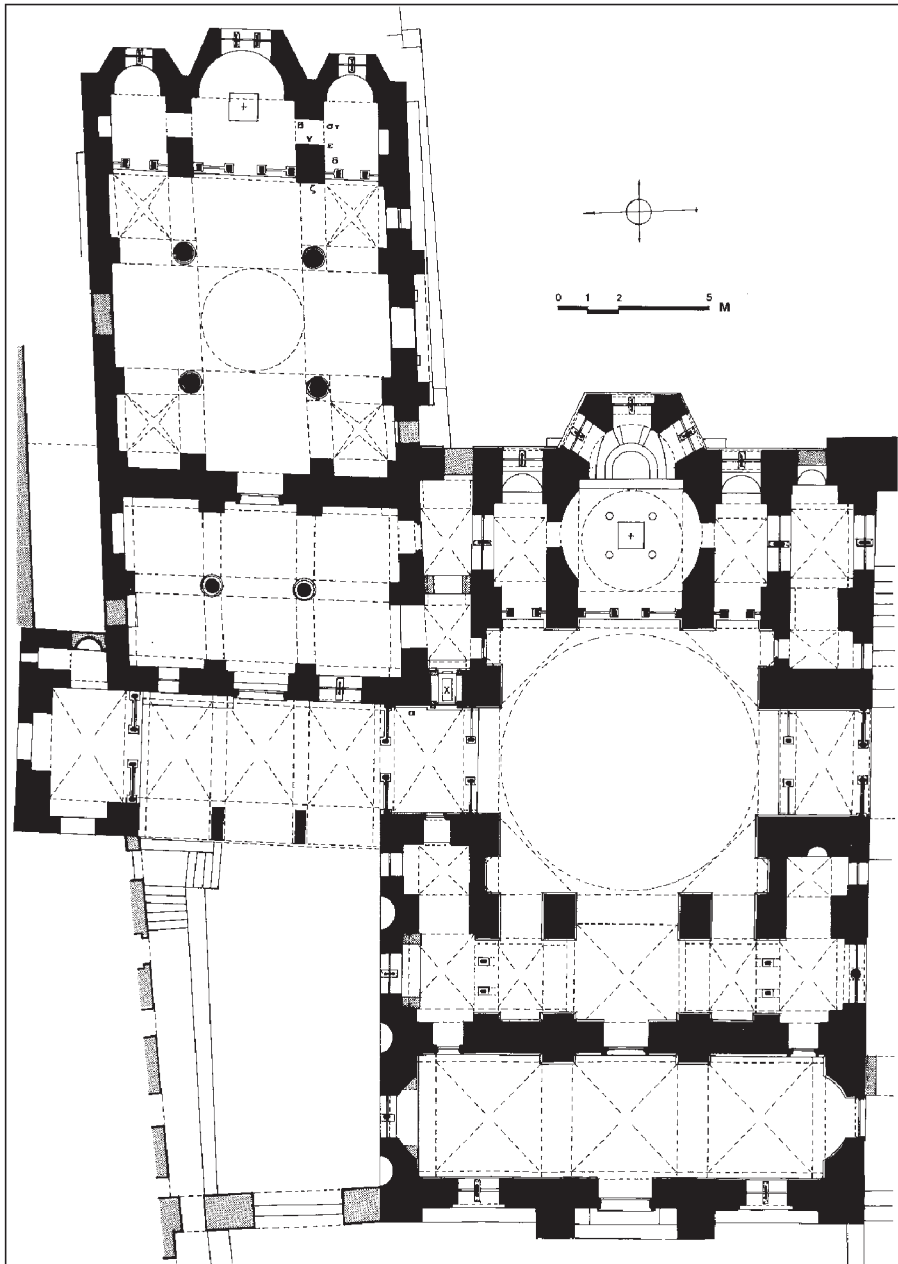

Fig. 1 Plan of Hosios Loukas, tenth to eleventh century. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 14 fig. 3).

(see figs 26-27) and in the armaments of several military saints, whose portraits are located immediately surrounding this narrative depiction (see figs 28-32)[9].

During the middle Byzantine period, Arabic was, of course, associated first and foremost with Islam. It was the language in which the Angel Gabriel communicated God's revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, and the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, was first recorded in Arabic. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, it was also the colloquial and administrative language of the majority of medieval Islamic societies, some of which were among the most prominent enemies of Byzantium, including the Emirate of Crete (ca. 824-961) and the Abbasid Caliphate (750 - ca. 1250). The presence of pseudo-Arabic in the decorative program of Hosios Loukas has vexed modern scholars because its Islamic associations put it at odds with the Byzantine identity and Christian function of the monument[10].

Although these exoticizing motifs have long attracted scholarly attention, a conclusive interpretation of their sig-

9 Additional pseudo-Arabic motifs are painted on the column capitals in the west balcony of the *katholikon* and on the exterior wall of the *katholikon* immediately to the south of the west portal. The date of these decorations is uncertain, however, and they may be modern additions.

10 On this issue and its salience in early scholarship on pseudo-Arabic, see Pedone/Cantone, Ornament 125 f. The modern perception of pseudo-Arabic decoration in Byzantine churches as incongruous with the monuments' religious and cultural identity may derive in part from the tendency to privilege Constantinopolitan sources in the study of Byzantine attitudes towards foreign cultures and languages. Gilbert Dagron posits that the inclination at the capital was to view bi- and multilingual individuals with suspicion as potential spies or heretics. The mastery of other languages was to be expected – if not accepted – only for individuals whose professional circumstances demanded it, for example, merchants, missionaries, scholars, or soldiers posted at the frontier. Dagron, Formes.

Fig. 2 Interior view of the *katholikon*, Hosios Loukas, first half of the eleventh century. – (After Cat. New York 1997, 20).

nificance within the program of the complex has not been established. To date, studies have focused on documenting the typology and morphology of the motifs in the decorative programs of Hosios Loukas and other middle Byzantine buildings and objects[11]. In some instances scholars also identify formal models for Byzantine pseudo-Arabic motifs in medieval Islamic works of art and architecture[12]. The relative legibility of pseudo-Arabic motifs is a recurring question raised by scholars, and it has been proposed that some apparently-pseudo-Arabic elements found in Byzantine monuments can actually be read[13]. When they consider the significance of pseudo-Arabic for Byzantine viewers, scholars typically conclude that these motifs were purely decorative in nature[14]. In some instances, they acknowledge the contemporary vogue for Islamic artistic models, especially at the court of Constantinople, but this emulation is understood to operate exclusively within the realm of ornament, entailing no meaning beyond an appreciation for the aesthetic achievement and impressive luxury of medieval Islamic art[15].

A minority of these studies attempts to identify the specific mechanisms and pathways through which pseudo-Arabic motifs were transmitted to medieval Greece. These explanations differ from one another in terms of the proposed media and agents of transference, but in each instance the meaning of pseudo-Arabic at Hosios Loukas is understood to be shaped by the category of objects or people through which the motifs traveled. That is to say, the mediating objects' functions and social values – or the identities of the agents of this transmission – is argued to have informed the significance that pseudo-Arabic held for Byzantine viewers after the motifs were transferred to the walls, furnishings, frescoes, and mosaics of Hosios Loukas.

In this paper, I explore the diverse explanations for the meaning – or lack of meaning – that scholars have proposed

11 For example, see Schultz/Barnsley, Monastery; Megaw, Chronology 104-109; Miles, Material; Nikonanos, Keramoplastikes.
12 Miles, Byzantium 20-29; Grabar, La décoration 18-21; Spittle, Cufic 138-142.
13 Miles, Material 282f.; Kanellopoulos/Tome, True Kūfic; Spittle, Cufic 138f.
14 For example, see Megaw, Chronology 110.
15 For example, see Grabar, La décoration 32; Connor, Mosaics 65.

Fig. 3 Pseudo-Arabic cloisonné bricks, central apse, east façade, Hosios Loukas, ca. 961. – (Photo A. Walker).

Fig. 4 Pseudo-Arabic cloisonné bricks, east façade, Hosios Loukas, ca. 961. – (Photo A. Walker).

Fig. 5 Pseudo-Arabic cloisonné bricks, east end of south wall, Hosios Loukas, ca. 961. – (Photo A. Walker).

Fig. 6 Pseudo-Arabic carved marble string course, east façade, Hosios Loukas, ca. 961. – (Photo A. Walker).

for pseudo-Arabic at Hosios Loukas. I reconcile these divergent possibilities by recognizing pseudo-Arabic as a potently polysemous sign, which had the capacity to express different connotations to different audiences depending on the associations that viewers held for Arabic script, the things on which it traveled, and the people who transmitted these motifs and objects. I further suggest that within the physical environment of Hosios Loukas, this broad range of potential meanings was constrained and focused through the placement of pseudo-Arabic at particular locations in the iconographic schemes of the two churches. As a result, pseudo-Arabic could be read in relation to the physical and visual contexts of the north and south churches' architectural setting and iconographic programs.

I also draw attention to how, throughout the scholarly literature on pseudo-Arabic at Hosios Loukas, one category of actors has been conspicuously underrepresented in accounts of the transmission and reception of these motifs: the monks. Developing observations made by Kurt Weitzmann in the 1950s (but rarely noted in subsequent literature), I explore how the members of the monastic community of Hosios Loukas may have perceived Arabic as a Christian language that was actively cultivated at the revered monasteries of Palestine and Egypt[16]. I suggest that this association would have been informed and sustained by manuscripts and icons that were inscribed with Arabic and that originated from these hallowed sites of pilgrimage and monasticism. From this perspective, monks emerge as uniquely well-positioned to play a role in transmitting pseudo-Arabic and its Christian connotations through their travels to and from the Holy Land and their control over the decorative programs of middle Byzantine religious foundations[17]. Consideration of this and other means for the circulation of Arabic (and pseudo-Arabic) script in medieval Greece sheds light on the multiple pathways, the diverse range of objects, and the variety of actors contributing to the availability of models for pseudo-Arabic elements. In addition, this new interpretation expands the range of meanings that these motifs may have held for the Byzantine patrons and audiences at Hosios Loukas[18].

16 Weitzmann, Islamische 314 f. figs 16, 17, 19. Also see Miles, Byzantium 32 esp. 32 n. 175, who notes personal communications in which Weitzmann suggested that bilingual monks from Sinai may have served as mediators of Arabic script to medieval Greece.

17 Regarding the role of monks and manuscripts in medieval cross-cultural artistic exchange, see esp. Hunt, Cultural Transmission.

18 My argument follows the current trend in the study of middle Byzantine church decoration to see each foundation as a unique iconographic program that must be understood in relation to the specific patrons, audiences, and functions of a given building. On this point, see James, Monks.

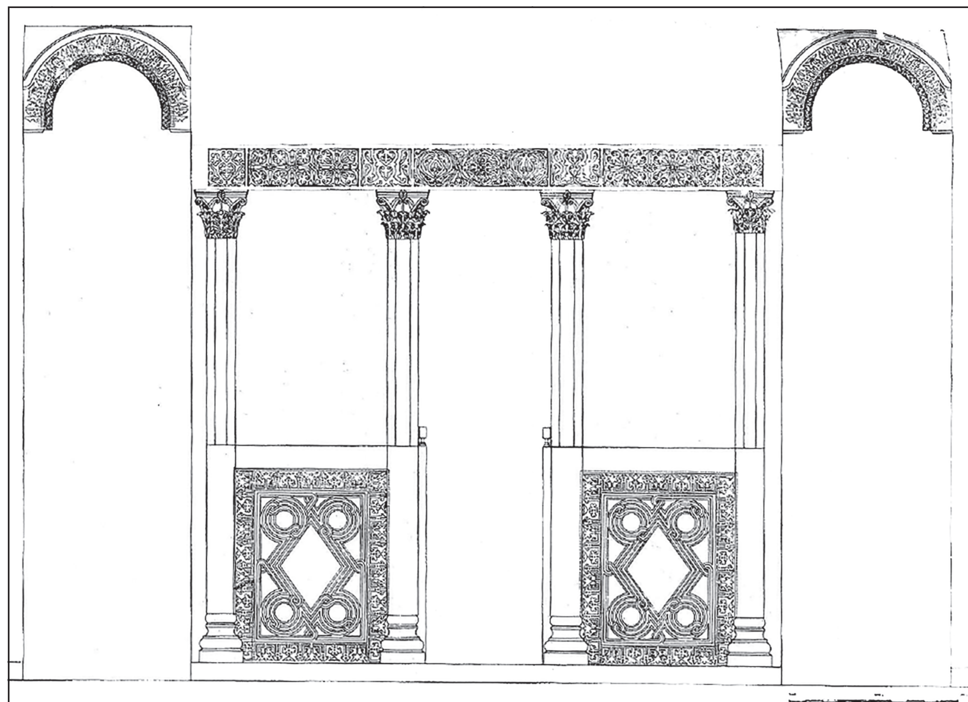

Fig. 7 Reconstruction of the *templon* for the tenth-century north church at Hosios Loukas. – (After L. Bouras, Ho glyptos 101 drawing 3).

The Message in the Medium

As noted above, much of the scholarship on pseudo-Arabic in middle Byzantine art and architecture is concerned with documenting the numerous examples of the phenomenon in objects and monuments as well as establishing formal models for these motifs in medieval Islamic art. In some instances, these studies also venture tentative suggestions regarding the specific media through which these designs traveled and the individuals responsible for such transmissions. For example, it has been hypothesized that tenth-century Arab craftsmen – who are presumed to have settled in Greece following their successful raids in the region or to have been taken captive and indentured following the Byzantine conquests of Islamic territories – served as the mediators of pseudo-Arabic[19]. Implicit in this proposition is an understanding that these skilled workers possessed mental storehouses of architectural models and technical knowledge, which equipped them to transfer Islamic forms, including the use of Arabic (or pseudo-Arabic) inscriptions[20]. This argument fails to consider, however, that Arab craftsmen were not likely given full authority in the design of Christian places of worship, nor does it account for the role of Christian patrons, whose approval of these projects was no doubt required. The argument assumes the absence of cultural connotations for pseudo-Arabic, thereby implying that Byzantine viewers would have seen such motifs as nothing more than decorative embellishments. Yet given that Arab craftsmen probably would have been perceived as enemies of Byzantium, it seems unlikely that Byzantine patrons and audiences would have experienced pseudo-Arabic motifs in neutral terms.

Fig. 8 Fragments of the marble liturgical furnishings from the tenth-century north church at Hosios Loukas. – (Photo A. Walker).

The textile industry of Thebes has also been cited as a possible source for Islamic objects that served as models

19 Miles, Byzantium 19-21, 31; Megaw, Chronology 104; Bouras, Ho glyptos 126; Cutler, Parallel 638-642. For evidence of a Muslim settlement in medieval Athens, see Miles, Byzantium 19f.; Miles, Mosque. For doubts regarding the presence of an Arab-Islamic community in medieval Athens, see Setton, Raids.

20 Miles does acknowledge the presence of these motifs in contemporary Islamic architecture, but does not explicitly draw a connection between these monuments and Arab craftsmen who might have migrated to Greece. See Miles, Byzantium 30f. Grabar states forcefully that the models for pseudo-Arabic motifs in middle Byzantine buildings should be located in medieval Islamic architecture, but he does not fully substantiate this position. See Grabar, La décoration 18-25, esp. 21.

Fig. 9 Joshua, second half of the tenth century, fresco, south side of the exterior western wall of the north church, Hosios Loukas. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 16 fig. 5).

Fig. 10 Detail of **fig. 9** showing pseudo-Arabic adorning the edges of Joshua's head scarf and helmet. – (Detail from Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 16 fig. 5).

for pseudo-Arabic decorations at Hosios Loukas and other monuments in medieval Greece[21]. Thebes was the capital of Hellas, the Byzantine theme (administrative district) in which Hosios Loukas was located. The monastery was situated about 30 miles (45 km) to the northeast of Thebes, and the *vita* of the Saint notes his frequent contact with members of the imperial administration and local aristocracy who were based in this regional capital[22]. If Islamic silks were the medium that inspired pseudo-Arabic decorations at Hosios Loukas, their material and aesthetic value as well as their exotic origins presumably would have fueled the motivation to adapt these foreign decorative motifs to serve as architectural embellishments. The fact that textiles were used in both the Byzantine and Islamic worlds as curtains and hangings supports the possibility that patterns on silks could have been transferred easily to buildings[23]. Silks are frequently cited in Byzantine church inventories and *typika* as well as in the wills of wealthy people who donated them to religious institutions, demonstrating the active use of textiles in the decoration of ecclesiastic spaces and in liturgical rituals[24]. In rare instances, some of these silks are noted as being of Islamic origin and may have been inscribed with Arabic[25]. In the case of Hosios Loukas, luxury textiles – and exoticizing motifs derived from them – would have connoted the wealth and prestige of the Theban textile industry as well as the cosmopolitan cultural and commercial connections that were part and parcel of medieval silk production, distribution, and use[26]. In this respect, pseudo-Arabic motifs might also have recalled the commercial success of regional benefactors, who would have gained their wealth from the manufacture and sale of silks and in turn shared this bounty with the local monastery. This argument is undermined, however, by the fact that the Theban textile industry was not firmly established until the mid-eleventh century and became prominent

21 Miles, Byzantium 29 f.
22 Saint Luke of Steiris ch. 45, 58, 59, 63.
23 On the role of textiles in transferring decorative forms to medieval monumental art, see Fulghum, Under Wraps; Golombek, Draped.
24 Muthesius, Courtly esp. 97-101; Muthesius, Precious.
25 Muthesius, Courtly 100; Parani, Intercultural esp. 356 f. A possible reflection of the use of Arabic-inscribed textiles as Byzantine liturgical cloths is found in the apse of the eleventh-century Karabaş Kilise in Cappadocia, which depicts the Communion of the Apostles taking place at an altar covered by a cloth embellished at its edges with pseudo-Arabic. See Jolivet-Lévy, Les Églises 269 pl. 148 fig. 2.
26 As reflected, for example, in the regulations surrounding the production and distribution of domestic and foreign silk at Constantinople recorded in the early tenth-century *Book of the Eparch*, which makes extensive reference to the controls on the sale of silk, both that produced in Byzantium and that imported to the capital by »Syrian« (i. e., Islamic) merchants. See Leon der Weise, Eparchenbuch 94 f. (5.1-5.2). For discussion of the middle Byzantine silk industry and its cross-cultural dimensions, see Jacoby, Silk Economies; Muthesius, Silk.

only in the twelfth century[27]. This *terminus post quem* follows the construction and decoration of the two extant churches at Hosios Loukas, which likely spanned from the mid-tenth to mid-eleventh centuries[28].

Ceramic vessels are also noted as a possible means for the transference of pseudo-Arabic motifs[29]. Examples from Athens and Corinth offer geographically relevant comparanda for Hosios Loukas[30]. Nevertheless, these dishes date to the eleventh century and after, placing them at the latter end of the timeframe for construction at Hosios Loukas. Their chronology makes them ineligible as mediators of the pseudo-Arabic motifs found in the cloisonné brick and marble of the tenth-century phase of the complex.

A more promising explanation for the transmission of pseudo-Arabic to medieval Greece is found in the large amount of booty that was seized in military expeditions against the Arabs of Crete in 961, a victory achieved under the leadership of the Byzantine general Nikephoros Phokas during the reign of Romanos II (r. 959-963)[31]. In his account of the imperial triumph held in Constantinople following this victory, the tenth-century historian Leo the Deacon recounted the marvelous objects paraded in the Hippodrome, including »full sets of armor, helmets, swords, and breastplates, all gilded, and countless spears, shields, and back-bent bows«[32]. Given the prevalence of Arabic inscriptions on medieval Islamic arms, armor, textiles, coins, and luxury objects in diverse media such as ivory, rock crystal, precious metals, and enamel, the spoils claimed from Crete almost certainly included inscribed objects[33].

Carolyn Connor argues that local military contingents from Hellas likely participated in this campaign and would have returned to the region with objects taken in battle from Arab opponents[34]. These same populations of Byzantine soldiers and generals were well-positioned to serve as benefactors of local foundations like the monastery at Hosios Loukas, and it is reasonable to speculate that they paid homage to regional saints in thanks for success on the battlefield. Such recognition would have been especially appropriate in Luke's case because the *vita* of the Saint credits him with foretelling this victory[35]. If spoils seized during the Cretan campaign subsequently facilitated the transference of Arabic script to works of art and architecture in medieval Greece, their association with military triumph could have led to the perception of pseudo-Arabic in the tenth-century church at Hosios Loukas as a sign of Byzantine victory over Arab enemies as well as an affirmation of the universal superiority of Christianity over Islam.

Another line of scholarly argument perceives pseudo-Arabic as a decorative motif that derived not from Islamic sources but rather from Byzantine models in Constantinople[36]. Support for this interpretation is found in painted ceramic architectural tiles displaying pseudo-Arabic from the early tenth-century phase (ca. 907) of the church of Constantine Lips, which attest to the presence of Islamicizing architectural decorations in the capital prior to their documented appearance in Greece[37]. This argument is predicated on the assumption that the sophisticated design and decoration of the churches at Hosios Loukas required some combination of patrons, designers, or builders from the capital, a cosmopolitan environment in which cross-cultural currents ran deep[38]. According to this scenario, medieval luxury objects bearing Arabic or pseudo-Arabic inscriptions offer one means of transference, but architectural patrons, designers, and builders also served as potential conduits[39]. Implicit in this explanation is an important shift in the potential meaning of pseudo-Arabic, which no longer directly involves Islamic political or cultural groups and their material culture. Instead, pseudo-Arabic becomes a symbol of Byzantine urban sophistication and imperial or aristocratic cosmopolitanism.

Although the particular modes of transference and associated meanings for pseudo-Arabic differ in the above examples, each interpretation follows the same principle: the material and/or human agents that transmitted Arabic script to medieval Greece directly shaped the meaning of pseudo-Arabic elements. However, in judging the relevance of different objects and actors as potential mediators, it is necessary to consider them in relation to what we know of the history of a given medium and the possible means of its transmission as well as the availability of different actors both to convey pseudo-Arabic to medieval Greece and to promote its adoption at Hosios Loukas. As argued above, when such considerations are applied, certain media and agents emerge

27 Louvi-Kizin, Thebes; Jacoby, Silk 462-467, 470-488.

28 For the dating of the churches, see n. 4 above.

29 Miles, Byzantium 31 f. figs 91 and 93. On the topic of connections between Islamic and Byzantine art via ceramics, see Ballian/Drandaki, Silver esp. 57.

30 Frantz, Agora fig. 19; Morgan, Pottery 31 f. fig. 21 pls XIV (fig. e), XVII (figs e-g), XXV, XXVI (figs a-c), XXXII (figs i, k, l), XXXIX (figs A.e , A.f, A.h; B.e, B.g), XL, XLIV (fig. e).

31 This argument is further developed in Walker, Pseudo-Arabic 108 f. My interpretation resonates with that of Connor, who also sees Hosios Loukas as a »victory church,« but does not explicitly identify pseudo-Arabic as a symbol of Byzantine military triumph. Furthermore, Connor proposes that the *katholikon* was the monument that commemorated the Byzantine reconquest of Crete, and dates that building to the tenth century. Connor, Victory 305 f.; Connor, Art 82 f., 122. In contrast, I follow current scholarly consensus on the matter of chronology, placing the south church in the eleventh century and proposing that the tenth-century north church was associated with the victory over the Emirate of Crete. Regarding the chronology of the churches, see n. 4 above.

32 Leo the Deacon, History 81; cited by Connor, Victory 300. Regarding the likelihood that the Arabs of Crete had amassed substantial material wealth in advance of the Byzantine reconquest of the island, see Christides, Crete 116-122.

33 For medieval Islamic arms and armor inscribed with Arabic, see Mohamed, Arts nos 7, 68-70, 87, 90-91, 104, 232.

34 Connor, Victory 298 f.

35 Connor, Victory 299-303; Saint Luke of Steiris ch. 60.

36 Grabar, La décoration 33-36; Connor, Mosaics 65.

37 Gerstel/Lauffenburger, Lost Art no. VI.16, 194 f. Ceramic vessel fragments with pseudo-Arabic motifs were also recovered during excavations of the Hippodrome in Constantinople. See Rice, Pottery 210 figs 14 and 15.

38 For instance, see Connor, Mosaic 64-67. Regarding the cosmopolitan tastes of the middle Byzantine court, see Grabar, Le success; Walker, Emperor.

39 For discussion of middle Byzantine luxury objects inscribed with pseudo-Arabic, see for example Cutler, Christian; Parani, Intercultural 362 f.; Walker, Mingling.

as less viable. In particular, the establishment of the Theban textile industry in the period immediately following the date by which construction and decoration at Hosios Loukas is thought to have been completed casts doubt on the role of Islamic or Islamicizing textiles and their Theban owners/producers as conduits through which pseudo-Arabic reached the region. Also questionable is the argument that posits a prominent role for Arab craftsmen. Even if skilled workers from Islamic lands contributed in some way to the transmission of pseudo-Arabic to Greece, it is unlikely that Muslims would have controlled decisions regarding the design and decoration of Christian churches. Instead, the motivation for including these motifs in Byzantine monuments needs to be located among Byzantine actors. For these reasons, Arab craftsman cannot serve as a primary explanation for the use of pseudo-Arabic at Hosios Loukas.

Yet other media and agents of transmission do find support in the historical evidence of the period. As noted above, soldiers returning to Hellas following the military expeditions against Crete in 961 would have carried with them booty that likely included objects inscribed with Arabic. These men would have been motivated to make contributions to religious foundations in thanks for their success. Indeed, it is known that in the middle Byzantine era, monks throughout the Empire were called upon to support imperial military endeavors with their prayers[40]. The recently established community at Hosios Loukas would have had a vested interest in contributing to Byzantine success against the Arabs of Crete, one of several foreign groups who had harassed the region of Hellas throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, a problem to which the Saint's *vita* alludes repeatedly[41]. Luke's prophecy of the Cretan victory provides yet another reason for Hosios Loukas to be a privileged recipient of votive offerings. For these reasons, it is also worth considering that the reconquest of Crete may have spurred imperial support for Hosios Loukas in recognition of Luke's forecasting of Romanos II's victory over the Arabs[42].

Easily reconciled with this argument is the proposition that pseudo-Arabic was a desirable decorative form because of its association with the cosmopolitan tastes of the Byzantine capital. The sophisticated design and high-quality execution of the structure and the ornamentation of the tenth- and eleventh-century churches at Hosios Loukas support the possibility of involvement from Constantinople itself[43]. Alternately, the regional elite of Hellas were well-positioned to transmit the most current architectural and artistic trends and tastes to this provincial location[44]. As indicated in the Saint's *vita*, the Theban aristocracy and imperial administrators maintained close contacts with the capital[45]. Especially in the eleventh century, during the period when the south church was built and decorated, the growing economic and administrative status of Hellas would have enhanced the ability of local patrons to finance the expansion and improvement of the monastery[46].

Before exploring further the implications that these interpretations of pseudo-Arabic have for our reading of the iconographic program of Hosios Loukas, it is necessary first to discuss an additional group of individuals who were intimately involved in the development of the monastery, but have not been fully integrated into previous analyses of the role of pseudo-Arabic in the decorative program of the churches: the monks.

Monks as Mediators

As already noted, monks are conspicuously absent from most accounts of the transmission of (pseudo-)Arabic to medieval Greece or interpretations of the significance of these motifs in the iconographic program of the churches at Hosios Loukas[47]. This is surprising for several reasons. First, the Saint's *vita* indicates the monastic community's active part in the architectural development of the site, with the earliest foundations of the monastery being established by monks. Construction of a church dedicated to Saint Barbara, which preceded the churches now standing at the site, was initiated by Luke himself with financial support from the governor of Hellas based at Thebes[48]. In addition, the first elaborations to Luke's tomb are said to have been undertaken by a monk, Kosmas, from Paphlagonia (a Byzantine theme located along the southern coast of the Black Sea), who was en route to Italy when he received a divine order to serve the Saint. Arriving at the monastery about six months after Luke's death, Kosmas found the condition of the Saint's shrine to be unsatisfactory. He created a platform to mark the site and a barrier to protect it[49]. The *vita* further recounts that two years after the Luke's death, his followers completed the Church of Saint Barbara, embellishing it as much as they were able. In addition they erected buildings to serve both pilgrims and the monastic community as well as improved upon the Saint's tomb, which was now described as a cruciform *euktērion* (memorial shrine)[50].

40 Connor, Victory 299, 301.
41 Saint Luke of Steiris ch. 2, 24, 32, 50, 62.
42 As suggested by Bouras, Ho glyptos 134. Connor posits that general Nikephoros Phokas could have served as the major donor to Hosios Loukas, with a similar motivation of offering thanks for the victory achieved under his leadership. Connor, Victory 301. Elsewhere Connor has acknowledged other possible imperial patrons, including Romanos II (r. 959-963) and Basil II (r. 976-1025). For discussion of these issues, also see Walker, Pseudo-Arabic 101f, 109.
43 Bouras, Ho glyptos 134; Schminck, Kaiserliche Stiftung esp. 351-354; Connor, Victory 301; Connor, Mosaics 64-67.
44 As suggested by Cantone, Problem 35. Also see Connor, Mosaics 11.
45 Saint Luke of Steiris ch. 58-59, 63.
46 Regarding the expansion of wealth and resources in Hellas beginning in the eleventh century, see n. 27, above.
47 The major exception being Weitzmann, as noted by Miles. See n. 16 above.
48 Saint Luke of Steiris ch. 59.
49 Saint Luke of Steiris ch. 66.
50 Saint Luke of Steiris ch. 67.

Fig. 11 Abbot Philotheos offering a model of the *katholikon* to Saint Luke, fresco, northeast area of south church, Hosios Loukas, ca. 1011. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 55 fig. 50).

Fig. 12 Line drawing showing fresco of Philotheos offering a model of the *katholikon* to Saint Luke. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 16 fig. 51).

Debate surrounds the identification of the buildings mentioned in the *vita*, but most scholars contend that the churches currently standing at the site are not those described in the Saint's life. Although we lack a thorough textual account of the founding of the present buildings, fragments of evidence from historical sources and from the monuments themselves indicate the continued involvement of the monastic community in the architectural development of the site. A canticle written in honor of the translation of Luke's relics to a new church (most likely in 1011) identifies the founder of this building to be the *hēgoumenos* Philotheos[51]. His role in the construction of the south church is further supported by a fresco near the present tomb of the Saint in the northeast corner of the *katholikon*, which shows Philotheos offering a model of the building to Luke (**figs. 11-12**). Inscriptions and additional portraits in the south church name several abbots of the monastery. A fragment from a funerary inscription honors the monk Theodore/Theodosios, whom Nicholas Oikonomides has identified as another *hēgoumenos* of Hosios Loukas, Theodosios Leobachos, who was active from the 1020s to the late 1040s[52]. Oikonomides also proposes that the mosaics of the *katholikon* could have been carried out under Theodosios' direction[53]. In the southeast vault of the crypt are rendered portraits of four abbots of the monastery, including Philotheos and Theodosios (see **fig. 33**)[54]. These two leaders of the monastery are also depicted in a group portrait of monks next to the entrance to the crypt (**fig. 13**)[55]. Finally an inscription in the *katholikon* credits the abbot Gregory with the addition of marble revetments to the interior of the upper church[56]. Oikonomides raises the possibility that Gregory was also responsible for carrying out the fresco program in the crypt[57].

When considered in total, this evidence points to the agency of the monks of Hosios Loukas in the architectural expansion and elaboration of the monastery in the tenth and eleventh centuries. It is likely that just as Luke turned to affluent local patrons for support of his building initiatives, later leaders of the monastery similarly sought outside assistance for the funding of their construction and decoration projects. But in no instance does any evidence suggest that external benefactors played an active role in shaping the form or embellishment of the churches. The latter observation serves as

51 Chatzidakis, A propos de la date; Chatzidakis, Précisions 87 f.; Oikonomides, The First Century 249 f.
52 Oikonomides, The First Century 245-249.
53 Oikonomides, The First Century 251.
54 Connor, Art 48-53 fig. 10, although see revisions to Connor's identification of the vault portraits in Oikonomides, The First Century 250 f.
55 Oikonomides, The First Century 249.
56 Chatzidakis, A propos de la date 141.
57 Oikonomides, The First Century 251.

Fig. 13 Monks praying to Saint Luke, crypt of the *katholikon*, Hosios Loukas, mid-eleventh century. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 91 fig. 97).

a caveat against the tendency to underestimate the agency of monks in determining the decorative and iconographic programs of the churches at Hosios Loukas, including the use of pseudo-Arabic motifs.

It stands to reason that in developing the churches, the monks would have sought to promote the reputation of their foundation. The question remains on what grounds they would have attempted to stake their claims, and how pseudo-Arabic might have served these ambitions. From the above-cited possibilities, the association of (pseudo-)Arabic inscriptions with spoils of war claimed by Byzantine soldiers is among the most promising explanations for the tenth-century phase of the monastery because of Luke's foretelling of this military success and the renown that fulfillment of his prophecy must have brought to his cult. The resonance of pseudo-Arabic with spoils of war and military triumph as well as the promotion of Hosios Loukas as a victory church would have served the interests and needs of both regional donors to the church (including soldiers recently returned from the battlefield) and resident monks (who would have sought to celebrate their founder's role in this major triumph over Muslim enemies).

Yet in tandem with the connotation of Arabic as a sign of Christian triumph, the monks at Hosios Loukas may have perceived other associations for this exotic script that would have made it meaningful to them in a different way. During the ninth to mid-eleventh centuries, Arabic had grown in stature as a language of Christian theology among Melkite Christians living in the ancient monastic centers of Palestine and Egypt[58]. This tradition of manuscript production consisted of not only translating well-established Christian literature from Greek to Arabic, but also composing original theological works in Arabic[59]. Important centers for this activity included the famed monasteries of Mar Saba, situated about 9 miles (14 km) east

58 For a general introduction to this phenomenon, see Griffith, The Church 187-189; and the essays collected in Griffith, Arabic Christianity. On the ninth- to eleventh-century phase of this process, see Griffith, From Aramaic. On the doctrinal position and other characteristic features of the Melkite church, see Griffith, »Melkites«.

59 Nasrallah, Histoire 2,2 and Nasrallah, Histoire 3,1; Griffith, Monks; Griffith, Byzantium 247-250. Also see Monferrer-Sala, Hellenism.

Fig. 14 Bilingual Greek-Arabic book of the Psalms and Odes, produced at the Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt, eighth or ninth century, inks on parchment, ca. 21 × 16 cm, Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine, cod. 36, fol. 39r. – (After Cat. Washington, D.C. 2006, 193 no. 46).

of Bethlehem, and Saint Catherine's, located in the middle of the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. But other sites were also active in Christian-Arabic intellectual development and manuscript production, including Mar Chariton in the Judean desert southeast of Bethlehem.

While these communities were positioned in remote locales, they were not entirely isolated from the larger medieval world. Monastic and political leaders from around Byzantium maintained sporadic correspondences with the heads of these houses, and the great foundations of the East were among the *loca sancta* visited by pilgrims to the Holy Land. This was particularly true of monks, who sought out the tombs of the great founders of Orthodox Christianity and sometimes expanded their own spiritual training through sojourns and even extended residences in these communities[60]. Indeed, Luke's *vita* tells how the Saint yearned to visit the Holy Land as a young man, imploring a pair of monks whom he encountered to allow him to accompany them on their journey to Jerusalem[61]. Fortunately for Hosios Loukas, Luke's request went unfulfilled, and the monks instead deposited him at a monastery in Athens. But this example recalls an important characteristic of middle Byzantine monasticism: Orthodox monks were not obligated to remain with the community in which they took their vows, and many moved repeatedly and over vast distances during their lives, including to the ancient monasteries of the East[62].

Although very meager textual evidence documents tenth-century pilgrimage to the Holy Land from Byzantine territories, Luke's encounter with traveling monks is recounted in the *vita* as unexceptional, suggesting that such peregrinations were not uncommon at the time. Other pilgrims known to have visited Jerusalem in the tenth century include Dounale-Stephen, who was of Western origin. In the 940s he traveled from Constantinople to Palestine and is said later to have offered a report of his travels to the emperor[63]. As Alice-Mary Talbot observes in her survey of the *vitae* of middle Byzantine saints who made journeys to the Holy Land: »It is surely significant that these texts do not single out these pious journeys as extraordinary events, and thus they suggest that pilgrimage to Palestine was not so unusual in the middle and

60 Talbot, Byzantine Pilgrimage 101-103; Kaplan, Les saints 119; Shepherd, Holy Land 524-526.

61 Saint Luke of Steiris ch. 9.

62 Charanis, Monk 68.

63 Talbot, Byzantine Pilgrimage 98.

late Byzantine centuries«[64]. Also of note, in the 1020s, Holy Land pilgrimage by Western Europeans saw a sharp upswing, and travel circuits formed to facilitate passage by land through the Balkans as well as by sea from southern Italy[65]. In addition to pilgrimage traffic, commercial and diplomatic networks that tied the region of Boeotia to Islamic territories are mentioned in Luke's *vita*[66]. For example, an imperial delegate traveling from Constantinople to Egypt is reported to have been waylaid at Corinth, where Luke assisted him in recouping a substantial purse of imperial funds that had been stolen by a servant[67]. In all these ways, we can appreciate how monks and monasteries maintained fluid networks of east-west (and north-south) communication, which facilitated the circulation of people, objects, and ideas.

Fig. 15 Icon depicting the Prophet Elijah (with detail showing inscriptions in Greek and Arabic), ca. 1050-1100, tempera and gold over textile on panel, 129.2 × 69.2 × 3.5 cm, Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. – (After Cat. Los Angeles 2006, 190f. no. 28).

As has been discussed already, the tenth-century church at Hosios Loukas can be understood as a commemorative monument, which celebrates Byzantine victory over the Arabs of Crete and uses pseudo-Arabic as a sign of triumph. Similarly, the eleventh-century church was constructed and decorated during a period of tense Byzantine-Islamic relations, but ones that transpired in cooler terms. The date for construction of the *katholikon* ca. 1011 places the foundation of this building in the wake of the notorious destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher at the order of the Fatimid caliph, al-Ḥākim (r. 996-1021) in 1009. This vandalism occurred during a period of violent persecution of Christians in the Holy Land, including those residing in monasteries of the region. In response to this aggression, the Byzantine emperor Basil II (r. 976-1025) established an embargo on trade with the Fatimids in 1016, which lasted until 1027. Permission for the Byzantines to rebuild the Holy Sepulcher was granted by al-Ḥākim's son and successor, ʿAlī aẓ-Ẓāhir (r. 1021-1036), to Romanos III Argyros (r. 1028-1034) in the 1030s, but these renovations were not launched until 1042, during the reign of Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042-1055)[68]. Although the exact dates for the fresco and mosaic campaigns at the *katholikon* of Hosios Loukas are uncertain, evidence suggests that they were carried out over several decades and were completed in the late 1040s[69]. According to this chronology, the construction and decoration of the *katholikon* was undertaken against the backdrop of Fatimid aggressions in the Holy Land and a protracted Byzantine effort aimed at quelling these violent actions through diplomatic measures and remediating the physical damage inflicted upon Christian *loca sancta*.

From the time of the Islamic conquest of the Christian Holy Land in the seventh century, the prominence of Arabic as a colloquial and administrative language had grown consistently. As such, Arabic was dominant not only in the textual culture of these regions but in the visual culture as well, appearing in inscriptions on buildings, coins, and other »public

64 Talbot, Byzantine Pilgrimage 98.
65 Shepherd, Holy Land 523; Micheau, Les itinéraires 89-91.
66 For broader discussion of these trade connections, see Jacoby, Byzantine Trade esp. 30-47; Shepherd, Holy Land 520-522.
67 Saint Luke of Steiris ch. 44.
68 Jacoby, Bishop Gunther 271-74; Shepherd, Holy Land 519f., 530-535.
69 Regarding the date of the frescoes and mosaics, see n. 4, above.

Fig. 16 Detail of **fig. 15** showing inscription at lower edge of the icon. – (After Cat. Los Angeles 2006, 190f. no. 28).

texts«[70]. Christians who traveled to the East would have seen Arabic in these contexts and associated it with Islamic hegemony. A key example of these circumstances is found in a possibly tenth-century Fatimid inscription in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which recorded the dedication of a Muslim place of prayer in the atrium of this most important *locus sanctus*[71]. Needless to say, the presence of an Islamic-Arabic inscription in the holiest of Christian shrines would have been a powerful reminder of Fatimid dominance in the region. Given the persecution of Christians that transpired under Fatimid rule in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, such public inscriptional assertions of Muslim authority carried with them very real threats to Christian freedom of worship and even personal safety[72].

Still, evidence demonstrates that during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, the sectarian status of Arabic as the exclusive language of Islam diminished in some respects, as Melkite monastic communities adopted Arabic for their own purposes. This transformation is manifest in the material record through Christian manuscripts that employ Arabic, both in marginal annotations and in the main texts. Particularly striking are a number of bilingual Arabic-Greek manuscripts, including an eighth- or ninth-century text of the Psalms and Odes (Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine, cod. 36, fol. 39^{r}) (**fig. 14**)[73]. Such books convey in compelling visual terms the coexistence of Arabic and Greek as »written signs« of Melkite Christianity[74].

In addition to manuscripts produced in the scriptoria and kept in the libraries of Holy Land monasteries, icons also displayed Arabic inscriptions. A key example of this category of Eastern monastic material culture is found in two icons now in the treasury of Saint Catherine's at Sinai that date to the second half of the eleventh century and depict Elijah and Moses. The lower edges of the frames are inscribed in Greek and Arabic with prayers of dedication and invocations for the salvation of the donor (**figs 15-18**)[75]. These icons and

Fig. 17 Icon depicting Moses (with detail showing inscriptions in Greek and Arabic), ca. 1050-1100, tempera and gold on panel, 134 × 69.9 × 4.1 cm, Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai, Egypt. – (After Cat. Los Angeles 2006, 192f. no. 29).

Fig. 18 Detail of **fig. 17** showing inscription at lower edge of the icon. – (After Cat. Los Angeles 2006, 192f. no. 29).

70 Coined by Irene Bierman, the term »public text« refers to writing employed by a hegemonic cultural-political authority in the built environment to communicate identity and difference. Public texts can serve both to affirm the superior status of the ruling group as well as to demarcate the limits of subservient groups' participation in social, religious, or political power. See Bierman, Public Text; Bierman, Writing Signs 1-27 esp. xi-xii, 1, 4.

71 This inscription was removed in the nineteenth century. See Busse, Die 'Umar-Moschee 75f., 79f. I thank Ute Verstegen for bringing this inscription to my attention.

72 Regarding this argument, also see Walker, Pseudo-Arabic 114f.

73 Cat. Washington, D.C. 2006, 192f., 272 no. 46. For an illustrated mid-ninth-century Arabic Gospelbook with a portrait of the Evangelist Luke labeled in both Greek and Arabic, see Cat. Washington, D.C. 2006, 166f., 274f. no. 35; Cat. Los Angeles 2006, 200-203 no. 32.

74 As defined by Bierman, »written signs« are visual manifestations of language (usually alphabets and script) that appear in public spaces and index group identities through their display of difference, with its implications of social inclusion and exclusion. Bierman, Writing Signs xii.

75 The inscriptions on the icon of Elijah read in Greek: »For Stephen, who fashioned your image, O Tishbite, obtain by your mercy pardon of transgression«; in Arabic: »Forgiveness for Stephen who painted you, O Prophet Elijah, May God forgive him the sins he has committed«. The inscriptions on the icon of Moses reads in Greek: »The person who painted your likeness, named Stephen, requests, O God-Seer, release from his errors«; in Arabic: »O you, who have seen God, grant forgiveness to Stephen who painted your virtues«. Cat. Los Angeles 2006, 190-193 no. 28, 29. Regarding the medieval tradition of Melkite icons, see Garidis, Hoi melchitikes 370-374.

manuscripts illustrate how eleventh-century pilgrims could have encountered Arabic in conjunction with Christian sacred images, thereby encouraging them to perceive these foreign written signs as emblematic of Christian devotional culture at these distant holy places.

Most material traces of the tenth- and eleventh-century phases of Eastern monasteries were lost following the abandonment and subsequent deterioration of the sites in the post-medieval era. The erasure of their physical environments makes it impossible to know if Arabic was employed as a prominent written sign in these spaces. But a few Christian foundations that operated under medieval Islamic hegemony during the medieval period are preserved today and employ Arabic in their decorative programs. For instance, wall paintings dating to 1232/1233 at the Monastery of Saint Anthony near the western coast of the Red Sea show a row of saints framed by an arcade in which the impost blocks are inscribed with pseudo-Arabic bands (figs 19a-b)[76]. Although significantly post-dating the mid-eleventh-century fresco program of the crypt at Hosios Loukas, the motifs found in the wall paintings at Saint Anthony's directly recall the pseudo-Arabic embellishments on the column capitals to either side of the apse in the crypt (see figs 31-32). Arabic and pseudo-Arabic inscriptions are found throughout the wall paintings of the church of Saint Anthony, embellishing textiles, armaments, and other attributes of Christian holy people[77].

Evidence in the form of manuscripts, icons, and frescoes from medieval monasteries in Palestine and Egypt supports the possibility that monks and other pilgrims traveling to these sites in the middle Byzantine era would have been exposed to Arabic as a pervasive written sign of Eastern Christianity. As a result, Arabic could have come to connote not only the hegemonic and sometimes oppressive power of medieval Muslim political groups like the Fatimids, but also the most revered, authoritative, and enduring ancient Christian monastic communities of Palestine and Egypt. It is reasonable to speculate that these same pious travelers would have acquired sacred objects, such as icons and manuscripts[78], thereby equipping them to serve as conduits for the spread of (pseudo-)Arabic from ancient monastic centers of the East[79].

Dissemination of Arabic as a Christian language, conveyance of actual Christian objects inscribed with Arabic, and transmission of memories of Christian monuments that employed Arabic as a sacred language was not limited to Byzantine monks who went on pilgrimage to the East. Monks resident in these distant communities also traveled throughout the medieval Mediterranean and beyond. An intriguing example of such an individual is the monk Symeon, who in 1026 was sent as a representative of the monastery of Saint Catherine to France in order to collect a promised donation from Richard, Duke of Normandy. Symeon had been born in Syracuse, but eventually moved to the Holy Land, where he first worked as a guide for pilgrims. After realizing his own vocation, he became a monk, eventually joining the monastery at Sinai. According to his *vita*, Symeon knew Latin, Greek, Syrian, »Egyptian« (probably Coptic), and Arabic[80]. As such he embodied the complex, polyglot identity of the Eastern Orthodox monasteries.

Symeon's journey to France met with many obstacles, particularly at its initial stages, during which he was falsely arrested by Muslim authorities in Egypt and then barely escaped a violent raid by pirates[81]. He eventually found refuge in Antioch, where – after meeting another Greek monk, Kosmas – Symeon joined a party of Western pilgrims that included the famous historian and monk Adémar of Chabannes (988-1034). They later developed a friendship during Symeon's residence at Angoulême, which lasted until July of 1027[82]. Adémar and Simeon's connection demonstrates the role that traveling monks – both Western and Eastern – could play in creating networks of information exchange and personal bonds across vast cultural and geographic landscapes. Adémar also exemplifies how monks transmitted foreign artistic traditions. In a miscellany text produced with his own hand, Adémar added a diverse range of sketches and ornamental borders, including a band of (pseudo-)Arabic (Leiden, Voss Latin VLO 15, fols 210^{v}, and 211^{v}) (fig. 20)[83]. Returning to Europe with its creator, the manuscript serves as an unusually concrete example of cross-cultural artistic transmission in the medieval era.

The further impact of Arabic literary production in the Melkite monasteries of the Holy Land might be traceable through pseudo-Arabic border and carpet page illuminations in some middle Byzantine Christian manuscripts written in Greek. Conventionally these ornaments have been viewed as part of a larger tenth- to eleventh-century aesthetic predilection for the decorative forms of Islamic art[84]. But Arabic-Christian manuscript production in Syria-Palestine and Egypt raises the possibility that these borders instead represent an acknowledgement of Arabic as a sign of ancient Christian identity and authority. For example, a manuscript containing the Homilies on Genesis by John Chrysostom dates to the second-half of the tenth century and shows pseudo-Arabic decorative bands (Venice, National Library, Marcianus Graecus II, 4 [832], fol. 207^{v}) (fig. 21)[85]. A tenth- or early eleventh-century lectionary also shows pseudo-Arabic

76 Bolman, Monastic figs 4.19, 4.22, and 7.6.
77 Bolman, Monastic 109-111, 125.
78 As suggested by Talbot, Byzantine Pilgrimage 107 f.
79 On this point, also see Hunt, Cultural Transmission esp. 8-13.
80 Wolff, How the News 183 f.
81 Wolff, How the News 184.
82 Landes, Relics 157 f., 161-167, 172.
83 Wolff, How the News 154; Spittle, Cufic 143 f.
84 This phenomenon has received surprisingly limited attention and is usually noted only in passing. For a brief but focused discussion of these manuscripts, see Cantone, Problem 33-38. For suggestion that pseudo-Arabic motifs in Byzantine sacred manuscripts are a »symptom« of Arab-Muslim converts to Christianity at the middle Byzantine court, see Pedone / Cantone, Ornament 129.
85 Cantone, Problem 33 f.; Pedone / Cantone, Ornament 129 f.

Fig. 19a Portraits of monks framed by architectural structures inscribed with pseudo-Arabic, fresco, 1232/33, Monastery of Saint Anthony, near western coast of the Red Sea, Egypt. – (After Bolman, Monastic fig. 4.22).

Fig. 19b Detail of **fig. 19**. – (After Bolman, Monastic fig. 7.6).

Fig. 20 Sketchbook of Adémar de Chabannes showing pseudo-Arabic motifs, first half of the eleventh century, Leiden, Voss Latin VLO 15, fol. 210v. – (After Spittle, Cufic pl. XV, fig. B).

Fig. 21 Line drawing of pseudo-Arabic bands from a manuscript of the Homilies on Genesis by John Chrysostom, second-half of the tenth century, Venice, National Library, Marcian. gr. II, 4 [832], fol. 207v. – (After Cantone, Problem 33 fig. 2).

Fig. 22 Line drawing of a pseudo-Arabic band from a lectionary, tenth- or early eleventh-century, Athens, National Library of Greece, 59, fol. 229r. – (After Cantone, Problem 35 fig. 3).

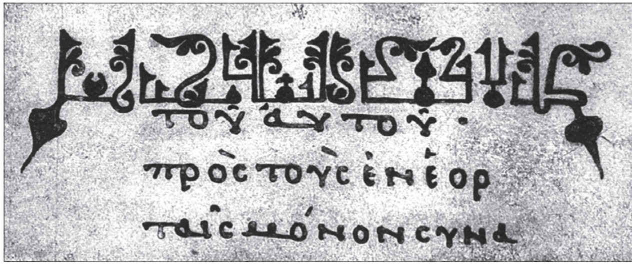

Fig. 23 Pseudo-Arabic band from a manuscript of the Homilies of John Chrysostom, twelfth century, pigment on vellum, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, cod. Gr. 660, fol. 350r. – (After Miles, Byzantium 32 fig. 94).

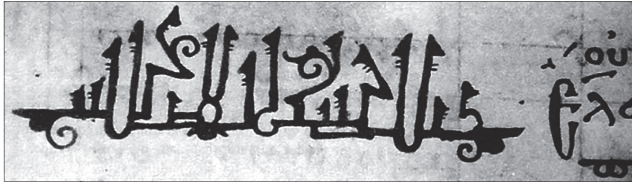

Fig. 24 Pseudo-Arabic band from a lectionary, early twelfth century, pigment on vellum, Sinai, Monastery of Saint Catherine, Gr. 207, fol. 210r. – (After Cutler, Parallel 642 fig. 2).

borders (Athens, National Library of Greece, 59, fol. 229r) (fig. 22)[86]. A decorative band in a twelfth-century copy of the Homilies of John Chrysostom (Bibliothèque Nationale, cod. Gr. 660, fol. 350) prominently displays a pseudo-Arabic motif that is quite proximate to actual Arabic (fig. 23)[87]. A final example from an early twelfth-century lectionary (Sinai, Gr. 207, fol. 210r) follows an Arabic model so closely that it has been read as the *šahāda* (the Islamic testament of faith: »There is no God but God and Muhammad is his Prophet«), although the legibility of this »inscription« has also been questioned (fig. 24)[88]. If these books were intended to recall Melkite texts that were written in actual Arabic, then their pseudo-Arabic motifs can be understood as respectful acknowledgments of an exotic, but still Christian tradition, which carried connotations of ancient religious authority and continuing monastic tenacity in the Holy Land. By decorating the walls of their monastery with the written signs of Eastern monasticism, the monks of Hosios Loukas might have similarly aspired to share in the tradition of ancient Christianity as well as to garner for their own community and pilgrimage cult some of the aura of the revered *loca sancta* in the East.

Hosios Loukas as a *locus sanctus*

Elsewhere I have argued that the meaning of pseudo-Arabic at Hosios Loukas shifts over time, from a symbol of military victory over Arab adversaries in the tenth century, to a sign of Muslim political and religious hegemony in the Holy Land in the eleventh century[89]. The possible role of monks in the design of the decorative and iconographic program at Hosios Loukas requires revision of this earlier interpretation. While I still propose that pseudo-Arabic can be understood as a mark of alterity, the degree of this cultural difference was not absolute, and the reaction that it spurred from Byzantine patrons and viewers was not entirely antagonistic. The Melkite monasteries of the Holy Land were without question exotic and other, but they were also part of a common history. Indeed, these Eastern monastic communities formed the deep and ancient roots of the Orthodox monastic tradition to which Hosios Loukas itself belonged. The legacy of this heritage was perpetuated, for instance, by the continuing role of the Sabaite order as a model for monastic *typika* in the middle Byzantine era[90]. Although it is impossible to know if regulations at Hosios Loukas were influenced by the Sabaite form, it is reasonable to speculate that the leaders of the community may have been aware of its status and currency in the medieval Orthodox world.

The perception of (pseudo-)Arabic as a written sign of Melkite authority may have circulated in the Byzantine world by the tenth century, but there are no aspects of the placement of pseudo-Arabic in the decorative program of the north church that evoke a distinctly monastic association for these motifs. In contrast, the relation of pseudo-Arabic motifs to the broader iconographic program of the south church can be understood to create to a larger statement about Byzantine attitudes towards contemporary Islamic dominance over the Christian Holy Land. This is particularly evident in the mosaic depicting the Presentation of Christ (Luke 2:22-38), which appears in the southwest squinch of the upper church (see figs 25-26). Here a pseudo-Arabic motif marks the baldachin that represents the Jewish Temple. I have argued that this instance of pseudo-Arabic reveals an ambivalent attitude toward this *locus sanctus* in Jerusalem, on the one hand recognizing its subservient position under the political dominion of contemporary Muslims, while on the other hand marking the monument as a site in need of liberation from Islamic control[91]. The icons of holy people positioned in the soffits immediately surrounding this squinch depict soldier saints, and their presence may be read as an additional appeal for military action. Although such figures appear throughout the mosaic program of the *katholikon*, these three portraits of Saints Demetrios (figs 26a-b), Prokopios (figs 27a-b), and Merkourios (fig. 28) are the only ones to have pseudo-Arabic emblazoned on their armaments. This detail suggests that their armaments should be understood as spoils of war and a testament to these holy warriors' efficacy on the battlefield. Pseudo-Arabic functions here as both a rallying cry for intervention in the Holy Land

86 Cantone, Problem 34 f.
87 Ebersolt, La miniature 48 plate LIII, 2; Miles, Byzantium 32 fig. 94.
88 Weitzmann/Galavaris, Monastery 118 plate CXXVIII fig. 395; Cutler, Parallel 642 fig. 2.
89 Walker, Pseudo-Arabic.
90 For an overview of the impact of the Sabaite form on middle Byzantine monasticism, see Thomas, Imprint esp. 77 f., 82 f.
91 Walker, Pseudo-Arabic 114-117.

Fig. 26 The Presentation of Christ, 1040s, mosaic, southwest squinch of the *katholikon*, Hosios Loukas, with a pseudo-Arabic motif decorating the baldachin that represents the Jewish Temple. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 30 fig. 17).

as well as an assurance of Christian superiority over Muslim adversaries, both past and present.

Yet in the crypt of the *katholikon*, a very different relationship with the *loca sancta* of the East and pseudo-Arabic is articulated. The fresco program of the crypt visually evokes the sites of great events from the life of Christ, which are painted at eye-level along the walls. This connection is also evident in the *vita* of the Saint, which lauds his healing cult as the »New Siloam,« thereby comparing it to another location of miraculous cures, the spring of Siloam in Jerusalem (John 9:1-12)[92]. Other features of the lay out and decorative program of the crypt evoke the Holy Land as well. The organization of a complex around the tombs of its founders and subsequent leaders was a common feature of the great monasteries of the East[93]. Similarly, the crypt at Hosios Loukas was likely dedicated to the burials of the most honored members of its monastic community[94]. Their pride of place is conveyed by the four portraits of »Holy Fathers« in the southeast vault, who likely represent prominent *hēgoumenoi* from the early centuries of the monastery: a later Luke (d. ca. 1005); Philotheos (fl. ca. 1011); an otherwise unidentified monk by the name of Athanasios; and Theodosios (fl. 1048) (**fig. 29**)[95]. The placement of scenes of Christ's Deposition and Burial on the walls immediately below this vault might allude to the entombment of the four abbots in this space. In addition, the frescoes on the ceiling of the crypt explicitly parallel these four leaders of Hosios Loukas with monastic forerunners of local and universal Christian history. The northeast vault portrays four homonymous monastic saints: Saint Luke himself; the famous Athanasios of Alexandria (fourth century); Theodosios the *koinobiarchēs* (fourth century), who founded a preeminent monastery in Palestine near the River Jordan; and the otherwise little-known Philotheos the Confessor (probably tenth century), who originated from Asia Minor and was noted for his miracles, especially miraculous healings (a characteristic which may have rec-

92 Saint Luke of Steiris 115, ch. 69, l. 18.
93 Binns, Sacred Space 30; Connor, Art 49.
94 Oikonomides, The First Century 251.
95 Oikonomides, The First Century 248-252.

Fig. 26 Hagios Demetrios (with pseudo-Arabic motif decorating his shield), mosaic, 1040s, Hosios Loukas. – **b** detail of **a** showing pseudo-Arabic motif on the saint's shield. – (Photos A. Walker).

Fig. 27 Hagios Prokopios (with pseudo-Arabic motif decorating his shield), mosaic, 1040s, Hosios Loukas. – **b** detail of **a** showing pseudo-Arabic motif on the saint's shield. – (Photos A. Walker).

Fig. 28 Hagios Merkourios (with pseudo-Arabic motif decorating his greaves), mosaic, 1040s, Hosios Loukas. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 30 fig. 17).

Fig. 29 The Entombment and the Three Women at the Tomb and (above) the portraits of the Holy Fathers (likely former *hēgoumenoi* of the monastery): Athanasios, Philotheos, Luke, and Theodosios, fresco, mid-eleventh century, southeastern groin vault, crypt of the *katholikon*, Hosios Loukas. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 83 fig. 84).

ommended him for comparison with Saint Luke) (**fig. 30**)[96]. The remaining vaults of the crypt ceiling feature eight other hermits and abbots, who represent additional revered monastic foundations of the fourth to ninth centuries in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Bithynia[97].

With parallelisms to *loca sancta* and ancient monastic foundations in mind, we can appreciate how the two column capitals inscribed with pseudo-Arabic prominently positioned to either side of the apse in the crypt evoke the distant location of holy sites in the East, a region in which Arabic was

Fig. 30 Portraits of Saints Athanasios, Philotheos, Luke, and Theodosios, fresco, mid-eleventh century, northeastern groin vault, crypt of the *katholikon*, Hosios Loukas. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 85 fig. 85).

96 Connor, Art 48-53 fig. 10, with corrections in Oikonomides, The First Century 250f.
97 Connor, Art 47f. fig. 10. For discussion of Holy Land parallels in the crypt of Hosios Loukas, also see Walker, Pseudo-Arabic 110-115.

Fig. 31 Painted pseudo-Arabic motifs decorating the column capitals to either side of the apse in the crypt of the *katholikon*, fresco, mid-eleventh century, Hosios Loukas. – (After Chatzidakis, Hosios Loukas 72 fig. 72).

Fig. 32 Detail of **fig. 31**. – (Photo A. Walker).

the dominant public text (see **figs 31-32**)[98]. Yet these pseudo-Arabic motifs can be understood to recall not (or not only) Islamic hegemony in this region, but also the Arabophone communities of Eastern monasticism. As such pseudo-Arabic becomes another iconographic sign linking the community of Hosios Loukas with their ancestors in Palestine and Egypt, and stakes a claim for this provincial site in medieval Greece as ranking on par – or at least in conjunction – with the famed centers of Eastern Christian sanctity. As a father of monasticism in Greece, Luke is modeled after the great founders of early Orthodox communities in the Holy Land[99].

Conclusions

Given the paucity of textual evidence relating to the foundation and early development of Hosios Loukas or the intentions behind the decorative programs installed in the tenth- and eleventh-century churches at this site, it is impossible to know for certain the motivations for introducing pseudo-Arabic at Hosios Loukas or to ascertain with absolute confidence the significance these motifs accrued over subsequent periods. Nonetheless, a productive approach to this question is to ask by what means pseudo-Arabic may have been conveyed to Hosios Loukas, and how these media and mediators may have inflected the meanings that these exoticizing motifs held for the individuals involved in designing the monument's decorative and iconographic programs. As I have discussed above, essential agents for the transmission and deployment of pseudo-Arabic heretofore neglected in scholarly discussions of Hosios Loukas are the monks who founded, developed, and promoted the monastery and its healing cult. I do not mean to suggest that monks held exclusive control over the design of these buildings, nor that other groups had no role to

98 My argument here resonates with Thomas Dale's reading of the prominent positioning and repetition of Islamicizing ogee arches in San Marco, Venice, as an evocation of the Eastern origins of its patron, Saint Mark, as well as of the *loca sancta* of the Holy Land. Dale proposes that the patrons of San Marco promoted the church as a pilgrimage destination by cultivating the aesthetic hybridity that characterized the holy sites of the East. Dale, Cultural Hybridity.

99 For the meaning of the monasteries in the Holy Land for Byzantine monasticism in that period, cf. Pahlitzsch, Byzantine Monasticism.

play in conceiving the decorative and iconographic programs of the churches. But surely the monks were authorities in this process, and the experiences and concerns they may have brought to the project are worthy of consideration.

Both the tenth- and eleventh-century phases of the decorative program at Hosios Loukas can be correlated with contemporary anxieties for the liberation of Byzantine territories from Islamic control, and pseudo-Arabic offered a means for articulating those aims. While the use of pseudo-Arabic in the tenth-century north church is best explained as a mark of Byzantine triumph over their Arab Cretan enemies, similar motifs in the eleventh-century decorative program of the *katholikon* are inflected differently through their relationship to the iconographic contexts in which they are situated. Pseudo-Arabic in the crypt and upper church of the *katholikon* indicates a new perception of Arabic as the language of the Holy Land, both of the hegemonic and at times oppressive Muslim powers who dominated that region in the tenth and eleventh centuries as well as of the authoritative, revered communities of monks who had resided in Palestine and Egypt since the earliest centuries of Christianity. As such pseudo-Arabic can be understood to articulate the possibility of Christian endurance under – and eventual triumph over – Islam. Yet this victory is one that will be achieved not by erasing Arabic written signs but instead by co-opting this script to serve Christian aims, thereby subverting Islamic identity and authority.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

Pseudo-Arabic as a Christian Sign:
Monks, Manuscripts, and the Iconographic Program of Hosios Loukas

The monastery complex of Hosios Loukas in Phokis, Greece, has long fascinated scholars because it incorporates pseudo-Arabic motifs in the decorative program of its tenth- and eleventh-century churches. This paper considers the possible modalities through which these motifs were transmitted to Hosios Loukas, and how different means of transference would have inflected the significance that pseudo-Arabic held for the various groups potentially involved in the construction, decoration, and use of the complex. It is argued that pseudo-Arabic motifs at Hosios Loukas and on other medieval buildings and objects materialized social identities and spiritual authority among monastic communities across the eastern Mediterranean, thereby attesting to an interconnectedness that is only thinly documented in the written record. When contextualized within networks of religious, cultural, and political traffic, pseudo-Arabic »inscriptions« reify social affiliations and distinctions, although not always in a manner consistent with modern assumptions about linguistic identity in the medieval Mediterranean world. In some instances, (pseudo-)Arabic operated as a sign of Islamic political and cultural groups and could be asserted or subverted to articulate shifting power dynamics between Christians and Muslims. Yet in other instances, (pseudo-)Arabic was generated and sustained within exclusively Christian networks and could stand instead for the authority of ancient monastic communities in the Holy Land, a region where Arabic was not only the dominant colloquial language but also a language of Orthodox Christian theological discourse.

Pseudo-Arabisch als ein christliches Zeichen:
Mönche, Manuskripte und das ikonographische Programm von Hosios Loukas

Der Klosterkomplex Hosios Loukas in Phokis (Griechenland) hat die Gelehrten schon lange fasziniert, weil er pseudoarabische Motive in das dekorative Programm seiner Kirchen aus dem 10. und 11. Jahrhundert einbezieht. In diesem Beitrag werden die Umstände betrachtet, die dazu beigetragen haben können, dass diese Motive nach Hosios Loukas übertragen wurden, und wie unterschiedliche Mittel und Wege des Transfers die Bedeutung beeinflusst haben könnten, die das Pseudo-Arabisch für die verschiedenen Gruppen hatte, die möglicherweise am Bau, an der Dekoration und an der Nutzung des Komplexes beteiligt waren. Es wird argumentiert, dass pseudo-arabische Motive in Hosios Loukas und auf anderen mittelalterlichen Gebäuden und Objekten soziale Identitäten und spirituelle Autorität unter den Klostergemeinschaften im östlichen Mittelmeerraum sichtbar gemacht haben, was auf eine Verbindung hinweist, die in den schriftlichen Quellen nur schwach dokumentiert ist. Pseudoarabische »Inschriften« verdeutlichen soziale Zugehörigkeiten und Unterschiede, wenn sie in Netzwerken religiöser, kultureller und politischer Verkehre kontextualisiert werden, wenn auch nicht immer im Einklang mit modernen Annahmen über die sprachliche Identität in der mittelalterlichen Welt des Mittelmeerraumes. In einigen Fällen fungierte (Pseudo-) Arabisch als Zeichen islamischer politischer und kultureller Gruppen, dessen Bestätigung oder Unterwanderung eine sich verändernde Machtdynamik zwischen Christen und Muslimen zum Ausdruck bringen konnte. In anderen Fällen wurde (Pseudo-)Arabisch in ausschließlich christlichen Netzwerken kreiert und beibehalten und stand so für die Autorität der alten Klostergemeinschaften im Heiligen Land, einer Region, in der Arabisch nicht nur die Umgangssprache, sondern auch eine Sprache des orthodox-christlichen theologischen Diskurses war.