

Hosios Loukas as a Victory Church

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OVER THE PAST CENTURY the Byzantine monastery of Hosios Loukas near Delphi in central Greece has fascinated and perplexed scholars, who have recognized in it the outstanding preserved examples of middle-Byzantine architecture and monumental decoration. The great Katholikon of the monastery, sheltering the tomb of Saint Loukas in the crypt at the center of the complex, is joined at its northeast corner to another smaller church, the Theotokos. Other surviving structures include cells, towers, a warming house, and refectory, recently restored by the Greek Archaeological Service. The monastery is probably best known for the program of mosaics and frescoes in the Katholikon, unsurpassed in their quality, quantity, and fine state of preservation. Wall surfaces gleam with some 160 portraits of saints, twenty narrative and hieratic compositions, and a proliferation of polychrome marble ornament. Hosios Loukas represents the most complete and therefore, one could claim, the most important monastic ensemble of medieval Byzantium.

The works of Diehl, Schultz and Barnsley, Demus, and Sotiriou early in this century documented the existing structures and recorded their decorative themes.¹ More recently, Chatzidakis, Bouras, and Mylonas have published important studies on various aspects of the monument.² In 1970 and 1975,

¹ C. Diehl, *L'église et les mosaïques du couvent de Saint-Luc en Phocide* (Paris 1889); R. W. Schultz and S. H. Barnsley, *The Monastery of Saint Luke of Stiris, in Phocis, and the dependent Monastery of Saint Nicolas in the Fields, near Skripou in Boeotia* (London 1901); E. Diez and O. Demus, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece, Hosios Lucas and Daphni* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1931); G. Sotiriou, "Peintures murales byzantines du XI^e siècle dans la crypte de Saint-Luc," *Actes du III^e Congrès International des Études Byzantines* (Athens 1930) 390-400.

² M. Chatzidakis, "À propos de la date et du fondateur de Saint Luc," *CahArch* 19 (1969) 127-50; T. Chatzidakis-Bacharas, *Les peintures murales de Hosios Loukas; Les chapelles occidentales* (Athens 1982); L. Bouras, 'Ο γλυπτός διάκοσμος τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Παναγίας στό μοναστήρι τοῦ Ὁσίου Λουκά (=Βιβλιοθήκη τῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας 95 [Athens 1980]); P. Mylonas,

after the completion of a campaign of consolidation and restoration under Eustathios Stikas of the Greek Archaeological Service, two volumes of reports were published.³ The workmanship, even in this remote province of the Byzantine Empire, can be seen from these studies to be of the highest quality—the result, no doubt, of importing artists and materials from Constantinople. The absence of records, foundation documents, or dedicatory inscriptions, however, has left fundamental questions unanswered, including such very pragmatic ones as: who financed this ambitious undertaking? when? why? and what was the source of funds?

Scholars have disagreed whether the churches should be dated to the tenth or to the eleventh century.⁴ My work on Hosios Loukas has so far focussed on the crypt, but it has also attempted to bring about a clearer understanding of the monument as a whole through a reconstruction of its contemporary social, political, and religious setting. This approach, integrating archaeology, textual study, stylistic and iconographic analysis, and consideration of the historical context also suggests answers to the questions of when and by whom the monastery was constructed. I have proposed a mid-tenth-century date for the Theotokos, and the second half of the tenth century for the Katholikon and its interior decoration.⁵ If these are correct, in the third quarter of the tenth century, funds must suddenly have become available for the most substantial part of the undertaking, the construction and decoration of the Katholikon. As I have suggested, we may even be able to identify the probable patron for the Katholikon as Theodore Leobachus, an imperial administrator from nearby Thebes.⁶

“Gavits arméniens et Litae byzantines: Observations nouvelles sur le complexe de Saint-Luc en Phocide,” *CahArch* 38 (1990) 99–122, and “Δομική έρευνα στο εκκλησιαστικό συγκρότημα του Ὁσίου Λουκά Φωκίδος,” *Αρχαιολογία* 36 (1990) 6–30.

³ E. G. Stikas, *Ὁ Κτίτωρ τοῦ Καθολικοῦ τῆς Μονῆς Ὁσίου Λουκά* (Athens 1974–75), and *Τό οικοδομικόν χρονικόν τῆς Μονῆς Ὁσίου Λουκά Φωκίδος* (Athens 1970).

⁴ For a summary see C. CONNOR, *Art and Miracles in Medieval Byzantium: The Crypt at Hosios Loukas and Its Frescoes* (Princeton 1991: hereafter ‘Connor’) 82f.

⁵ Connor 66f, 82f, 122.

⁶ Connor 51, 107, 120.

A little-known hagiographical source, the *Vita* of St Loukas of Steiris, has been valuable for this study. Written by an anonymous monk in the third quarter of the tenth century, it offers insights into the life of this Byzantine holy man, the founding, construction, and early operation of his monastery, and tenth-century monasticism more generally. It also helps elucidate the meaning of the interior decoration. For example, an analysis of the frescoes of the crypt shows that the selection and arrangement of their subject matter is neither formulaic nor random, but carefully planned to provide appropriate associations with the functions of the monastery.⁷ They express layers of meaning that must have been clearly comprehensible to the contemporary observer, but which to us are far from obvious. Through the *Vita* we reach a clearer understanding of their intended connotations, for the tomb of the saint was the center of a healing cult, visited by large numbers of pilgrims, where miraculous cures took place. The *Vita* describes the founding of the first church at the monastery through the patronage of the *strategos*, or military governor, of the theme, or province, of Hellas, named Krinites (Connor 108). This church, I have argued, is the present Theotokos, founded during the saint's lifetime, in 946. The *Vita* also refers to other buildings constructed after the saint's death in 953, including a beautiful cross-shaped church over the tomb of the saint, responding to the need to accommodate the large numbers of pilgrims and visitors: this, I have argued, is the Katholikon.⁸

With this work complete, it is possible to move to new ground and to propose a more precise answer to the questions

⁷ See Connor 43–58; cf. A. Kazhdan and H. Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts as Sources on Art," *DOP* 45 (1991) 1–22, esp. 12–22.

⁸ Mylonas' articles (*supra* n.3) argue on the basis of his recent investigations of the masonry of the Theotokos and the Katholikon that both churches are replacements of earlier ones on the respective sites, citing the *Perilepsis Peistatike* (Kremos, *Phokika* I 1β–1δ), an account of unknown date, to support his conclusion. I find it difficult to see the Katholikon as a renovation and expansion project of a prior church on the site—an "église-phantôme" ("Gavits arméniens," 114ff)—of which the walls of the present crypt are the only remnant. Instead, I think it more likely that the stages of building at the monastery follow the chronology described in the *Vita*, which links the building of the great church to the saint's prophecy of the Cretan victory of 961. The sophisticated architectural solutions of the Katholikon were not arrived at by a process of enlargement or adaptation of a cross-in-square church, but through an innovative and daring conceptualizing of space and design, *de nouveau*, by a master builder.

of rationale and financial sources. The Katholikon at Hosios Loukas is not, in my opinion, only a monastery church founded to commemorate the holy man and the site of his miraculous tomb. A fresh reading of the evidence suggests an even closer relation to contemporary concerns and events, which in turn explains not only the lavishness of the construction but also some themes in the program of the mosaics. The point of departure for exploring this evidence is a prophecy.

The *Vita* of St Loukas of Steiris contains a short chapter (60) about a prophecy made by the saint. In it he predicts the recapture of Crete from the Arabs under an emperor, Romanos:

These things are indeed a source of wonder but his prophecy concerning Crete almost provokes disbelief, even though it is well attested, for nearly twenty years earlier he made a prediction that it would be conquered and under whom the conquest would take place: he said clearly, "Romanos will subdue Crete." But since Romanos the elder was ruling the empire at the time of his prediction, someone asked him if this meant the one who was currently ruling and he said, "Not this one, but another one."⁹

Such prophecies were often ascribed to holy men in Byzantium, and Crete was indeed recaptured under the emperor Romanos II (959–963) by the general Nicephorus Phocas in 961. Whether or not St Loukas really made such a prophecy is not of great importance. It is important, however, that a contemporary text makes the connection between the saint, his monastery, and the victory on Crete. The author's inclusion of the prophecy not only serves as a *terminus post quem* for the *Vita* of 961 but also provokes curiosity about the repercussions of these events. The Cretan victory was surely of great significance for the Byzantine Empire generally, for it ushered in a period of naval and military hegemony after a long period of insecurity and anxiety posed by the Arab threat.¹⁰ The victory also resulted, I believe, in the

⁹ C. L. and W. R. Connor, tr., *Life and Miracles of St. Luke of Steiris* (Brookline [Mass.], forthcoming) 99.

¹⁰ See M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the West* (Cambridge 1986) 167ff for the context of this victory; also R. J. H. Jenkins, *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries, A.D. 610–1071* (London 1966) 273, who comments that "It is difficult to overrate the effect which this splendid victory had on both the spirits and the economy of the empire and on those of the Moslem world."

construction of the Katholikon at Hosios Loukas. Textual and artistic evidence that has not been drawn together before indicate that the reconquest of Crete provided the impetus behind the building and decoration of the Katholikon at Hosios Loukas.

Although in a remote location far from Constantinople, the Katholikon is larger than any surviving churches of the period in the capital.¹¹ We know from the *Vita* that the theme of Hellas, with its administrative center at Thebes, took a strong local pride in the saint, who helped consolidate Christianity in the area, rallied the rural population in times of attack, and whose relics worked healing miracles; but local pride alone cannot account for the church's size and quality. The outlay of funds for this enterprise must have been vast. The architectural sophistication of the galleried, domed structure—the first preserved example of its type—and its decoration in polychrome marbles, gold mosaics and frescoes required importing artisans and materials at enormous cost from Constantinople.

Texts describing the political and religious climate during the tenth century provide some hint as to the source of wealth for the building of the Katholikon. Among others, Kenneth Setton, George Miles, and Hélène Ahrweiler have discussed historical developments in Byzantium in the ninth and tenth centuries and examined the problems associated with the Arab occupation of Crete.¹² After the seizure of Byzantine Crete by Andalusian Arabs in 826, the island served as a base for constant raids along the shores of the Mediterranean. No town was safe from the swift Saracen corsairs; many Aegean islands were taken over or abandoned. Perhaps the worst of these disasters was the sack of

¹¹ Cf. e.g. the north church of the monastery of Constantine Lips, dated 907, whose outer dimensions measure approximately 11 × 21 m., or Bodrum Çamii (920–922), 10 × 16 m., to the Katholikon at Hosios Loukas, 17 × 28.5 m.

¹² K. Setton, "On the Raids of the Moslems in the Aegean in the 9th and 10th Centuries and their Alleged Occupation of Athens," *AJA* 58 (1954) 311–19; G. Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs," *DOP* 18 (1964) 1–32; H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer. La marine de guerre, la politique et les institutions maritimes de Byzance aux VII^e–XV^e siècles* (Paris 1966); H. Glykatzis-Ahrweiler, "Recherches sur l'administration de l'empire byzantin aux IX^e–XI^e siècles," *BCH* 84 (1960) 1–111. An excellent general history of the island under Byzantine rule is D. Tsougarakis, *Byzantine Crete, From the 5th Century to the Venetian Conquest* (= *Historical Monographs* 4, ed. E. Chrysos [Athens 1988]).

Thessaloniki in 904, when 22,000 of the youth of the city are said to have been carried off to be sold as slaves in the slave market at Chandax, the Cretan capital.¹³ Fear of the Saracen pirates was universal and repeated. According to the *Vita* of St Loukas (2), the saint's grandparents had to flee their native Aegina, and then their new home not far from Steiris:

The ancestors of this [Loukas] originated on the island of Aegina—Aegina in the Aegean gulf. Since they found the constant attacks of the Agarenes [Arabs] to be intolerable, they and all the inhabitants were compelled to leave the beloved soil of their fatherland and become emigrants; and they scattered, each one to a different city, as if they had stepmothers instead of mothers. Some arrived in the land of Kekrops, some the land of Pelops, others the land of Kadmos, and some arriving in yet other places were compelled to make their dwellings in them.... The sons of Ishmael [the Arabs] dominated the sea, and after carrying out piratical raids in all the seaside gulfs, bays and headlands finally, alas, they attacked this place as well, thus forcing them to abandon their home once more.¹⁴

Other *vitae* such as those of Peter of Argos, Athanasius of Athos, Athanasius of Methone, Arsenius of Corfu, and St Theoctista of Lesbos, relate similar stories of peril in the ninth and tenth centuries.¹⁵

The expedition led by Nicephorus Phocas in 960 was the eighth such attempt to retake the island since its capture, as we learn from Theophanes Continuatus and George Cedrenus.¹⁶ Preparations were immensely thorough, as described in an

¹³ A dramatic description of these events appears in G. Schlumberger, *Un Empererur byzantin au X^e siècle: Nicéphore Phocas* (Paris 1890) 824–38; for a detailed account of the sources and chronology for the Arab presence on Crete, see V. Christides, "The Raids of the Moslems of Crete in the Aegean Sea: Piracy and Conquest," *Byzantion* 51 (1981) 76–111, and *The Conquest of Crete by the Andalusian Moslems* (Athens 1984).

¹⁴ Connor and Connor (*supra* n.9) 4f.

¹⁵ See e.g. summaries of the lives of St Athanasius of Methone, St Peter of Argos, and St Arsenius of Corfu in G. da Costa-Louillet, "Saints de Grèce aux VIII^e et X^e siècles," *Byzantion* 31 (1961) 314, 322, 328, 367; A. Vasiliev, "The 'Life' of St. Peter of Argos and its Historical Significance," *Traditio* 5 (1947) 163–91.

¹⁶ Theophanes Continuatus 6.472–81 Bonn; Cedrenus 2.340–47 Bonn; see also A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World* (London 1973) 343 on the earlier attempts to recapture Crete.

appendix to Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De ceremoniis* (2.44–45 [651–78 Bonn]). Here (653) we learn specifically that the theme of Hellas, administered from Thebes, contributed substantially both soldiers and boats to the campaign of 935, supplying ten of the latter, while the theme of the Aegean Sea supplied only seven. In the campaign of 949 a commander of Hellas, Chripos, is mentioned by name along with exact sums advanced to the theme from the imperial purse to help muster the requisite supplies (668). Although the campaign of 960 is only superficially treated in the *De ceremoniis*, Hellas no doubt made its contribution to this campaign as well. So great was the effort to muster supplies throughout the Empire for the armies of this Cretan campaign that Constantinople is said to have experienced a famine.¹⁷

In preparation for such expeditions, monks and monasteries also played a significant rôle, offering prayers for their success; a letter from the emperor to monks of the holy mountains of Olympos, Kymena, and Athos requests their prayers and vigils.¹⁸ No doubt monks at Hosios Loukas and all the monasteries scattered round the shores of Hellas and Peloponnese offered prayers as well.

In the summer of 960, the imperial fleet consisting of 3,300 ships coming down the Aegean by way of Fygela, near Ephesus, made the run to the coast of Crete and landed without resistance near Chandax, modern Herakleion.¹⁹ Nicephorus, using a new type of warfare resembling modern guerrilla tactics, first secured his position by building a fortress, then proceeded to blockade the Moslem stronghold through the winter of 960 and early spring of 961. In March his troops were able to storm the walls; terrible slaughter ensued, and then a sack.²⁰ Leo

¹⁷ See Toynbee (*supra* n.15) 27ff for a discussion of the policies of mobilization of soldiers and supplies, and the high costs of the war, including the famine in Constantinople as a cause of Nicephorus Phocas' unpopularity.

¹⁸ See J. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins du X^e siècle* (Paris 1960) 147 no. 83.

¹⁹ See *De cerim.* 658 and the description of the invasion in Ahrweiler (1966: *supra* n.11) 114ff, who stresses the high capability of the Byzantine fleet that attacked Crete in 960, perhaps the best equipped in Byzantine history, for at the end of the tenth century the fleet went into decline (119). See also the poetry of Theodosius the Deacon commemorating the event: *Acroasis de expugnatione Cretae*, Migne, PG CXIII 1001f.

²⁰ In Jenkins (*supra* n.9) the events surrounding the victory are discussed, including the sentiment that now reprisal could be taken for the Arab scourge: "Chandax, stuffed with the spoils of a century's pillage of so many Aegean

Diaconus describes the event, the siege, the capture, the rejoicing in Constantinople, and the immense accumulated wealth of the Cretan Arabs after being entrenched for 135 years (1.27ff Bonn):

After a magnificent reception by the emperor Romanos, he celebrated a triumph at the Hippodrome, before all the assembled people who marveled at the magnitude and splendor of the booty. For a vast amount of gold and silver was to be seen, as well as barbarian coins of refined gold, garments shot with gold, purple carpets, and all sorts of treasures, crafted with the greatest skill, sparkling with gold and precious stones. There were also full sets of armor, helmets, swords and breastplates, all gilded, and countless weapons, shields and back-bent bows. If someone happened by there, he would think that the entire wealth of the barbarian land had been collected at that time in the Hippodrome.²¹

The value and extent of the Cretan spoils cannot be ascertained, but the soldiers and their generals no doubt amassed great wealth in the sack. Although the system of payment of soldiers, rowers, *et al.* was carefully regulated, the *strategoi* of participating themes reaped disproportionately high rewards.²² The only evidence of this victory consists of descriptions by historians and in hagiographic texts, although the eleventh-century chronicle of Ioannes Skylitzes in a later illustrated version in Madrid—our unique example of an illustrated chronicle—shows the Byzantine army camped on Crete before

towns, churches and monasteries was abandoned in its turn to a general sack” (272).

²¹ I would like to thank Alice-Mary Talbot for this translation. See also McCormack (*supra* n.9: 167) on the celebrations to Nicephorus Phocas’ victories.

²² The system of distribution of rewards is described in *De velitatione*: see G. Dagron, ed., *Le traité sur la Guérilla (De velitatione) de l’Empereur Nicéphore Phocas (963–969)* (Paris 1986) 233f, with one-sixth going to the emperor and most of the rest being distributed by the participating *strategoi*, taking into account the most courageous service of particular soldiers: “Le butin tende à devenir entre les mains du stratège une sorte de trésor de guerre, librement redistribuée....” He also stresses that the spirit and language of the *De velitatione* resemble the Islamic *jihad*, in which soldiers are seen as liberators and saviors and the dead are seen as martyrs for the faith. He refers (284) to this language as “langage mobilisateur” reflecting the spirit of this military society.

the siege and, in another miniature, Nicephorus Phocas presenting his booty to the emperor Romanos II in the Hippodrome of Constantinople.²³ Although the event figures large in the history of Byzantium, there is almost nothing to attest its impact on outlying parts of the Empire.

The "white death of the Saracens," as Nicephorus Phocas was known, went on to become emperor in 963 after further successes against the Arabs in the eastern part of the Empire. Although this meant that he did not take up the monastic habit as he had once planned, he remained very responsive to monks and monasticism throughout the rest of his life. For example, he is remembered for providing the funds to found the Great Lavra on Mount Athos.²⁴ He requested his great friend and spiritual father, the monk Athanasius (later known, like his namesake, as St Athanasius) not only to pray for the success of the Cretan expedition but also to sail from Mt Athos to Crete, which Athanasius did, arriving immediately after the victory (Petit [*supra* n.23] 31ff). The source of Nicephorus' recorded gifts to Athos, Kymenas, and perhaps other monasteries, a form of thanks for their prayers as well an expression of personal religiosity, was surely the wealth of Crete. Athanasius, we know, immediately went about the building of the Katholikon of his monastery (Lemerle [*supra* n.23] 78f).

On Crete, after the victory, the process of Christianization was initiated by the forced baptism of the population, described in *De ceremoniis* 2.49 (694).²⁵ Two hagiographical accounts, the *Vita* of St Nikon of Sparta and the *Diatheke* of John Xenos, provide further descriptions of the efforts of the proselytizers and the many churches they founded. At 20–21 of St Nikon's *Vita* his mission on Crete preaching his message of repentance (hence his epithet Μετανοεῖτε, the "Repent Ye") is vividly

²³ See S. C. Estopañan, *Skyllitzes Matritensis* (Barcelona 1965) 343 (fol. 140), 346 (fol. 142vb).

²⁴ See P. Lemerle, "La vie ancienne de saint Athanase l'Athonite composée au début du XI^e siècle par Athanase de Lavra," *Le millénaire du Mont Athos 963–1963* (Chevotogne 1963) 75–79, for an account of the donation of the funds by Nicephorus Phocas to Athanasius for the construction of the Lavra; see also L. Petit, ed., "Vie de Saint Athanase l'Athonite," *AnalBoll* 25 (1906) 5–89.

²⁵ On the re-Christianization of Crete and the aftermath of the Byzantine conquest see Tsougarakis (*supra* n.11) 74ff.

described.²⁶ Nikon, as we shall see later, also has a connection with Hosios Loukas.

[Nikon] recognized that it was necessary for him to sail to the island of Crete. For the Divine Will called him to this. Now he reached the island just when it had been snatched from the hands of the Agarenes [Arabs] and preserved for the Roman empire in the time of Nikephoros, emperor of blessed memory.... The island still bore traces of the vile superstition of the Agarenes, since its inhabitants, by time and long fellowship with the Saracens, alas! were led astray to their customs and foul and unhallowed rites. Therefore, when the great one began to cry "Repent" according to his custom, they cried out against this strange and foreign preaching, and inflamed with passion they violently opposed the just man, wishing to destroy him (Sullivan 83ff).

Nikon, who is said to have benefited from a combination of personal persuasiveness and divine grace, eventually succeeded in his mission: "And thereafter the Cretans, believing he was an apostle sent from God, made known his deeds throughout all the island; and they all flocked to him, and considered his doings God-like, and all that was ordered by him was to them law" (Sullivan 87). In contemporary terms, this man was a hero, and he was remembered particularly for his successful mission on Crete. His *Vita* goes on to describe how he assisted in the rebuilding of churches; three days' journey from Gortyn he founded the church of St Photeine after experiencing a miraculous vision in a dream. After seven years on Crete, Nikon traveled to mainland Greece, to Thebes, then through the Peloponnese and down to Sparta where he founded a

²⁶ See D. SULLIVAN, *The Life of Saint Nikon, Text, Translation and Commentary* (Brookline 1987: hereafter 'Sullivan') 83-89. See H. Delehaye, *Synaxaires byzantins, ménologes, typica* (repr. London 1977) vi, "Deux Typika Byzantins," Appendice: "Le Testament de Jean l'Étranger," a copy of the Greek text and discussion of this document attesting the missionary activity of a hermit, John Xenos on Crete, in the early eleventh century. See also K. Gallas, K. Wessel, and M. Borboudakis, *Byzantinische Kreta* (Munich 1983) 34-82, for the patterns of re-Christianization and a general picture of the island in the period after the Byzantine reconquest; E. Voulgarakis, "Nikon Metanoete und die Rechristianisierung der Kreter vom Islam," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 417 (1963) 192-269.

monastery and remained.²⁷ When passing through Thebes it is likely he founded another church dedicated to St Photeine, for the Greek archaeologist Orlandos some years ago excavated the ruins of a church just outside the city dedicated to St Photeine, which he dated on internal evidence to the second half of the tenth century.²⁸ It is the only church with this dedication whose site is known.

Thebes, as capital of the military theme of Hellas, naturally had a significant stake, as mentioned earlier, both in Nicephorus' campaign and in the victory. A Theodore Leobachus from Thebes appears in two contemporary sources, a land charter, the Cadaster of Thebes, where the family name appears forty-five times.²⁹ Its members clearly belonged to a wealthy administrative elite. Theodore Leobachus also appears in the charter of a burial society of the area, the so-called Naupactos Typikon, where he is remembered as "the all-holy late monk and abbot of Steiris, lord Theodoros Leobachos."³⁰ The pattern indicated here is a common one: in Byzantium members of the governing elite often retired to monasteries late in their lives, frequently endowing them handsomely. Someone with Theodore's status would have been expected to play a part in the Cretan campaign, and would have profited greatly from the booty. Following the example of his commander-in-chief (and other administrators of Hellas before him), he might well have turned to the building of churches. Recognizing that the tomb of the local holy man Loukas was a fast-growing pilgrimage site, I suggest that he decided to claim the distinction of building a burial church to accommodate both the saint's tomb and his own, in a convergence of aims. The story of St Loukas' prophecy of the Cretan victory, whether made before or after the fact, enhanced the prestige of Theodore's foundation. Once we recognize the likelihood of a Cretan connection for this church, several interpretive problems can be resolved.

²⁷ Sullivan 87–95. Similar patterns of founders and monastic careers are discussed in R. Morris, "Monasteries and their Patrons in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *ByzForsch* 10 (1986) 185–231, with special activity noted in Greece and Crete (207).

²⁸ A. Orlandos, "Ἡ ἀγία Φωτεινὴ τῶν Θεβῶν," *Ἀρχεῖον τῶν Βυζαντινῶν Μνημεῖων τῆς Ἑλλάδος* 5 (1939–40) 144–47.

²⁹ See N. Svoronos, "Le cadastre de Thèbes," *BCH* 83 (1959) 11–19, 41ff, 73f.

³⁰ J. Nesbitt and J. Wiita, "A Confraternity of the Comnenian Era," *BZ* 68 (1975) 360–84, esp. 365, 369.

Three aspects of the decorative program merit consideration. First, more than fifty saints representative of Greek Orthodox monasticism appear in the vaults, soffits of arches, and lunettes of the Katholikon. Their presence is pervasive as they stare down, clothed in black habits, holding crosses or books, in an attitude of prayer. More surprising, however, is the large number of warrior saints in the high soffits of the arches of the naos where they appear full-length and colorfully armed; warrior saints also appear in bust-length and medallion portraits, among both mosaics and frescoes. Included among the warriors are five portraits of saints named Theodore, in some cases Theodore Stratelates, and in others Theodore Tiron. These could be a reference to the name of the patron, Theodore Leobachus. Military and monastic themes in the decoration indicate the importance of the rôles of monks and soldiers in the contemporary world, including their heroic rôles in the struggle against Arab domination. This is not surprising when we consider the concern at this time with securing Byzantine territories from attacks of the infidel.³¹

The second aspect of the decorative program I would like to consider came to light only in 1964. A fresco on the façade of the Theotokos church depicts Joshua as a full-length figure armed for battle, standing before the archangel Michael, of whom only the curve of a wing and tip of a sword survive (Connor 64, 117, fig. 94). The inscription proclaims the angel's presence as ἀρχιστράτηγος, or commander, of the armies of the Lord who has come "to strengthen" Joshua. In his account of the victory of 961, Cedrenus says that before the final assault Nicephorus Phocas invoked the Virgin (as Theotokos), along with the holy warriors and the *archistrategos* Michael, supplicating all these glorious saints and Christ with them to make the towers and walls of Chandax fall down as formerly those of

³¹ R. Morris, "The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas," *ByzModGkSt* 12 (1988) 83–115, presents a convincing portrait of the ruler as both "the white death of the Saracens" and the pious devotee of monasticism under his spiritual father, Athanasius. The dual nature of the emperor is consistent with military and monastic rôles fulfilling critical needs at this time. In this climate "The monks and hermits who could bring salvation and victory by the purity of their lives and the concentration of their prayers were just as vital in the fight against the infidel as the soldiers whose sacred duty it was to wage temporal war" (110). Nicephorus also rebuilt or restored churches on Crete in which, in at least one case, he was depicted as donor.

Jericho crumbled before Joshua.³² The passage underlines the close contemporary associations between military victory and the figures of St Michael and Joshua. The Joshua fresco may be regarded as a prayer of thanks for victory. The defeat of the Arab infidel had become a 'holy war' for Byzantium, with those who died viewed as martyrs for the faith. The fresco must have been painted after the Cretan victory, asserting the Biblical parallel of Joshua's divinely-aided conquest of the Holy Land. Today it appears to be freshly painted, for it was covered shortly after completion with marble panels of the newly-constructed, interlocking, and adjoining Katholikon.

The best known representation of Joshua from this period is the tenth-century Joshua Roll (Vat. Pal. gr. 431), a long parchment scroll depicting narrative events of Joshua's conquest of the Holy Land with excerpts from the Septuagint appearing below the miniatures. On sheet IV the episode of Joshua's meeting with the archangel appears with the Septuagint text inscribed in the space between the figures, the only instance in the Joshua Roll where the text enters the pictorial space.³³ Judging from the preserved portion of the archangel in the fresco, the attitudes of the two figures and the position of the text between them correspond so closely in fresco and Roll as to suggest a connection between them, at least of contemporaneity, if not a common model. Nearly forty-five years ago Meyer Schapiro suggested that the Joshua Roll was commissioned to stress the parallels between the Biblical hero and the conquests of Nicephorus Phocas.³⁴ It is likewise tempting to see in the portrait quality of Joshua's face in the fresco at Hosios Loukas an allusion to a specific individual cast as Joshua, perhaps a contemporary general or an emperor.

An interesting problem presented by the Joshua fresco is the use of Arabic-looking script to decorate his helmet. The pseudo-Kufic letters around the rim of Joshua's helmet raise questions about why a form of writing associated with the Arabs would be

³² See Schlumberger (*supra* n.12) 90f; N. Thierry, "Le culte de la croix dans l'empire byzantin du VII^e siècle au X^e dans ses rapports avec la guerre contre l'infidèle: Nouveaux témoignages archéologiques," *RivStBizSl* 1 (= *Miscellanea Agostino Pertusi* I [1981]) 205-28 at 222 n.47.

³³ See K. Weitzmann, *The Joshua Roll: A Work of the Macedonian Renaissance* (Princeton 1948) 14 and fig. 13.

³⁴ M. Schapiro, "The Place of the Joshua Roll in Byzantine History," *GBA SER.* 6 35 (1949) 168, 172 with n.31, 176.

used in tenth-century decoration, how such motifs entered the artistic vocabulary, and how their appearance would have been interpreted. Further examples of this script appear in the designs in the brick fabric of walls and in the mosaic and fresco decoration of both churches at Hosios Loukas.³⁵ The motifs also occur in later churches of Attica, Boeotia, and the Aegean islands.³⁶ The inclusion of this pseudo-Kufic indicates a contemporary preoccupation with Islam, perhaps stimulated by the Arab presence on Crete.

There is a third problem to which we can suggest a solution, now that we recognize the Cretan connection. It concerns two mosaic portraits in the Katholikon whose meanings have never been convincingly explained. Located on the west wall of the naos these portraits are labeled as Νίκων ὁ Μετανοεῖτε to the south, and Λουκᾶς ὁ Γουρνικιώτης to the north. They appear juxtaposed with the imposing orant portrait of St Loukas of Steiris on the west wall of the north arm of the Katholikon.³⁷ All three appear similarly wearing monks' garb and standing half-length with their arms raised in prayer, and are distinguished by their large size as well as their prominent locations. One of them, Nikon the "Repent Ye," we at once recognize as the Apostle of Crete who undertook a campaign of converting Moslems to Christianity after Nicephorus Phocas' victory. The other, Loukas Gournikiotes, is otherwise unknown; no St Loukas with this epithet is recorded in the Byzantine calendar of saints, nor is it easy to explain the epithet Gournikiotes. But once we recognize the Cretan connection in the source of patronage for the church an interesting possibility emerges. The epithet probably indicates a place name, a place with a stem

³⁵ Pseudo-Kufic motifs appear in the Katholikon as a shield device on the shield of St Demetrius, as an ornament on the baldachin of the altar in the scene of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, among others. They also appear more ubiquitously as patterns in cut brick in the masonry of the Theotokos church.

³⁶ See A. Grabar, "La décoration architecturale de l'église de la Vierge à S. Luc en Phocide et les débuts des influences islamiques sur l'art Byzantin de Grèce," *CRAI* (1971) 15-37; see also Miles (*supra* n.11) 20-32 for a full treatment of this subject.

³⁷ See Stikas (1970: *supra* n.3) figs. 27, 32, 72. All three would be visible simultaneously when facing west from the eastern part of the naos or just in front of the sanctuary.

Gourn-.³⁸ The only recorded place or town with a similar root is Gournia, a Bronze Age site on the northern shore of Crete. Gournia is a toponym referring to the presence of trough-shaped receptacles called *gournes* scattered over the site, and so it has been called from an unknown date.³⁹ This other Loukas, from Gournia, may be significantly juxtaposed with Nikon and with the prophesying founder of Hosios Loukas, Loukas of Steiris, as a third holy man with a Cretan connection.

The incentives for constructing such a large and imposing church over the tomb of St Loukas at Steiris can be traced not only to local interest in the saint but to a great influx of wealth into Hellas at this time as a result of the victory. A patron such as Theodore Leobachus would wish to associate himself with the victory on a scale commensurate with its rewards. The church can best be seen as reflecting a belief in the divine nature of the forces at work in achieving that victory. It thus takes its place among a series of churches that validated military power, including those at Mt Athos, on Crete and, as recently shown, in the monastic outpost of Cappadocia. In a recent article Nicole Thierry interprets the frescoes of the "Great Pigeon House" at Çavuçın as commemorating Nicephorus Phocas' victorious Syrian campaign of 963.⁴⁰ Among the similarities with the monumental decoration at Hosios Loukas are not only the depictions of monastic saints and warriors, but also of Joshua before the archangel Michael, in a rare instance of the scene in Byzantine monumental decoration. The scene appears in the frescoes of the east wall directly above a niche in which are represented portraits of Nicephorus Phocas, the donors of the church, and Nicephorus' generals in that campaign. The parallel with Çavuçın and the textual and artistic evidence we have examined point to the likelihood that the Katholikon at Hosios

³⁸ I should like to thank John Bennett of the Department of Classics, University of Wisconsin, Madison, for these suggestions.

³⁹ See H. B. Hawes, *Gournia, Vasiliki and Other Prehistoric Sites on the Isthmus of Hierapetra, Crete* (Philadelphia 1908) 20 for a discussion of the name of the site.

⁴⁰ N. Thierry, "Un portrait de Jean Tzimiskès en Cappadoce," *TravMém* 9 (1985) 477-84.

Loukas is a victory church commemorating a clear sign of God's favor, the Byzantine reconquest of Crete.⁴¹

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⁴¹ This article was first presented as a paper at the 18th International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Moscow, 1991, and later revised as a lecture for the Department of Classics, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.