The Cult of Flavia Iulia Helena in Byzantium

An analysis of authority and perception
through the study of textual and visual sources
from the fourth to the fifteenth century

by

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For my beloved parents,

Kornelia A. Mavridou and (†) Dr Efthymios G. Efthymiou

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Plate 64 Cyprus, Kalopanagiotes, Church of Saint Herakleidios

Saints Helena and Constantine with the cross (photo after Papageorgiou 2012)

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Saints Constantine and Helena with the cross (photo after Stylianou and Stylianou 1985)

Plate 66 Cyprus, Platanistasa, Church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati

a. Cycle of the Discovery of the Cross (photo after Argyrou 2006)
b. Scenes from the Cycle of the Discovery of the Cross (photos after Argyrou 2006)
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Plate 67 Cyprus, Galata, Church of Saint Sozomenos

a. General view to the south (photo credit Centre of Cultural Heritage, affiliated with the University of Nicosia)
b. Saints Constantine and Helena with the cross (photo after Connor 1999)
c. Exaltation of the Cross (photo after Walter 2006)

Plate 68 Cyprus, Galata, Church of Archangel Michael (originally Panagia)

a. Northwest view (photo after Constantoudaki-Kitromilides 2007)
b. Saints Constantine and Helena with the cross (photo after Constantoudaki-Kitromilides 2007)

Plate 69 Cyprus, Kyperounda, Church of the Holy Cross (photos credit Centre of Cultural Heritage, affiliated with the University of Nicosia)

a. Cycle of the Discovery of the Cross
b. Scenes from the Cycle of the Discovery of the Cross
c. Scenes from the Cycle of the Discovery of the Cross
d. Exaltation of the Cross

Plate 70 Crete, Chania, Alikampos, Apokoronas, Church of Panagia

South wall: Saints Constantine and Helena with the cross (photo courtesy of Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Prof. Dr Vasiliki Tsamakda)

Plate 71 Crete, Chania, Maza, Apokoronas, Church of Saint Nikolaos

North wall: Archangel Michael, Saints Constantine and Helena with the cross, and an unidentifiable female saint (photo courtesy of Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Prof. Dr Vasiliki Tsamakda)

Plate 72 Crete, Chania, Kavalariana, Selino, Church of Archangel Michael

Saint Constantine (photo after Lymberopoulou 2006)

Plate 73 Crete, Chania, Trachiniakos, Selino, Church of Saint John Evangelist

South wall: western niche, Saint Prokopios, Saints Constantine and Helena with the cross (photo courtesy of Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Prof. Dr Vasiliki Tsamakda)

Plate 74 Crete, Chania, Prodromi, Selino, Church of Panagia

West wall: Saints Helena and Constantine with the cross (photo courtesy of Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Prof. Dr Vasiliki Tsamakda)

Plate 75 Crete, Chania, Platanes, Selino, Church of Saint Demetrios

South wall: Saints Constantine and Helena with the cross, and Saint Anthony (photo courtesy of Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Prof. Dr Vasiliki Tsamakda)

Plate 76 Crete, Chania, Kato Floria, Selino, Church of Saint George

Saint Helena, detail (photo after Spatharakes 2001)

Plate 77 Crete, Rethymnon, Akoumia, Hagios Basileios, Church of Saviour

North wall: Saints Helena and Constantine with the cross (photo courtesy of Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Prof. Dr Vasiliki Tsamakda)

Plate 78 Crete, Rethymnon, Selli, Rethymnon, Church of Saint John Evangelist

North wall: Saints Constantine and Helena with the cross (photo courtesy of Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Prof. Dr Vasiliki Tsamakda)

Plate 79 Crete, Herakleion, Pyrgos, Monofatsi, Church of Saints George, Constantine and Helena

a. Birth of Constantine (photo after Spatharakes 2001)
b. Helena accompanying the child Constantine to the court of Constantius Chlorus (photo after Walter 2006)
c. Battle of Constantine on the Mulvian Bridge (photo after Walter 2006)
d. Christ Blessing Constantine and Helena (photo after Walter 2006)

Plate 80 Crete, Herakleion, Lytto (Xydas), Pedias, Church of Saint George

Saint Helena, detail (photo after Spatharakes 2001)

Plate 81 Crete, Herakleion, Ano Viannos, Viannos, Church of Saint George

Exaltation of the Cross (photo after Walter 2006)

Plate 82 Crete, Herakleion, Avdou, Pedias, Church of Saints Constantine and Helena

South wall: Saints Constantine and Helena with the cross (photo courtesy of Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Prof. Dr Vasiliki Tsamakda)

Plate 83 Crete, Lassithi, Kritsa, Merabello, Church of Saint Constantine

a. Triumph of Constantine (photo after Walter 2006)
b. Baptism of Constantine by Sylvester (photo after Walter 2006)
c. An unidentifiable scene with Constantine (photo after Walter 2006)

Plate 84 Crete, Lassithi, Kritsa, Merabello, Church of Saint John Baptist

South wall: Saint Anthony, Saints Helena and Constantine with the cross, and Archangel Michael (photo courtesy of Dr Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Prof. Dr Vasiliki Tsamakda)

Plate 85 Crete, Lassithi, Exo Lakonia, Merabello, Church of Archangel Michael

Saints Constantine and Helena (photo after Spatharakes 2001)

H Reliquaries

Plate 86 Stavelot triptych (photo in the public domain)

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Plate 90 Reliquary in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (photo in the public domain)

Plate 91 Reliquary in Cathedral Treasury, Esztergom (photo after Walter 2006)

Plate 92 Ivory triptych in Staatliche Museen, Berlin (photo after Walter 2006)

Abbreviations

AB	*Analecta Bollandiana*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
ArtB	*Art Bulletin*
B	*Byzantion*
BHG	F. Halkin (ed.), 1957. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graecae*. Brussels.
BMGS	*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CA	*Cahiers archéologiques*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
DOS	*Dumbarton Oaks Studies*
GCS	*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
ILCV	*Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*
JbAC	*Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JÖB	*Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
LCI	E. Kirschbaum (ed.), 1968-1976. *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*. 8 vols. Rome.
ODB	A. P. Kazhdan (ed.), 1991. *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*. 3 vols. New York and Oxford.
RBK	K. Wessel and M. Restle (eds.), 1966-. *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*. Stuttgart.
RIC	*Roman Imperial Coinage*
PG	J. P. Migne (ed.), 1857-1866. *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca*. 161 vols. Paris.

PL	J. P. Migne (ed.), 1844-1880. *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latinaa*. 221 vols. Paris.
PO	R. Graffin and F. Nau (eds.), 1904-. *Patrologia orientalis*. 49 vols. Paris.
REB	*Revue des Études Byzantines*

Introduction

As often happens in scholarship, the accumulation of bibliography may obscure instead of illuminating a problem. From time to time it is helpful to set aside the interpretations of the moderns and take a fresh look at the evidence.[1]

The symbolic role of Helena throughout the Byzantine period has never been considered in any detail. Many of the literary sources, particularly historiographical and hagiological texts, are not easily accessible and have not been translated. The visual sources referring to Helena, such as works of late Roman and Byzantine art, coinage, illustrated manuscripts, reliquaries, and wall paintings, have never been collected. My thesis collects and re-evaluates the textual and visual evidence from the fourth to the fifteenth century in order to explore the origins and development of Helena's cult; the emergence of a Helena-legend with symbolic and metaphorical functions; and the ways that the Byzantines reconstructed, judged, and appreciated her role. Special attention is given to the relationship between word and image, as well as the influence exerted on them by contemporary political and social developments. This thesis demonstrates that memories of Helena as an empress and as a saint were manufactured in several distinct stages over several centuries; and that her role differed in the eastern and western halves of the former Roman empire. The evidence is analysed thematically and in chronological order. The main themes and contributions of my research are briefly outlined in the rest of this chapter; footnotes will be limited, as full references are supplied in the relevant chapters. Here too I outline the main written and visual sources, and indicate the methodological problems that some of them pose.

[1] Mango 1998a: 54.

1. Flavia Iulia Helena the Roman Augusta

Compiling a complete and clear description of Helena's life and actions has not been an easy task for modern historians. The fact that Helena is scarcely met in the fourth-century Constantinian sources inevitably narrows down the pool of data from which solid conclusions can be drawn. Moreover, the tendency of scholars to read and interpret the available evidence on the basis of Helena's posthumous reputation as the principal figure in quasi-legendary material regarding the finding of the true cross often projects a deceptive profile for Helena.

The study of Helena as a historical figure, who lived in a period of radical changes in the political and ideological scenery of the late Roman empire, must treat its subject on two levels: Helena as an individual, and Helena as an official persona. The former is, of course, much harder to discern than the latter, because of the biases and preconceptions that exist in the fourth-century evidence either in support or in attack of Constantine's ideal image and new regime.

Jan Willem Drijvers' systematic study of Helena has significantly contributed to the issue, providing information on aspects of Helena's life.[2] Helena was probably born in Drepanum in Bithynia, but no definite statement about it can be made. Based on numismatic evidence and her journey to Palestine, the dates of her birth and death are placed around 248 and 328. There is a silence in contemporary sources regarding her social origins, though later texts emphasise on her humble origins. As for the nature of her relationship with Constantine's father, the sources use various expressions, but it seems likely that Helena and Constantius Chlorus were not married. Helena's conversion to Christianity is most safely

[2] Drijvers 1992, 1993 and 2011.

I thank Jan Willem Drijvers for providing me with valuable research data.

dated after 312, when Constantine granted Christians freedom of religion. However, it is unknown which pagan cult had her attention before she became a Christian.

Issues concerned with Helena's level of influence over her son both on familial or state matters, and of the type of her relations with other members of the Constantinian dynasty, remain elusive. Nonetheless, the extant sources firm up our knowledge of Helena's idealised profile, the one that was fabricated to communicate specific agendas. Panegyrics, for example, extoled Constantine's supreme power and political legitimacy, while Lactantius' *De Mortibus Persecutorum* celebrated Constantine's victorious rule under the benefaction of the God of the Christians. Additionally, the numismatic and statuary portraits of the Constantinian dynasty did not merely allow contemporaries to form an impression of the appearance and physiognomy of their rulers, but, most significantly, to experience and visualise their role within the cultural and political programmes of Constantine's new regime. A re-examination of the Constantinian sources is the focus of the first chapter of my thesis, leading to new insights into Helena's position at her son's court before and after her elevation to the rank of Augusta in 324. Tetrarchic visual and written 'publicity' ignored women, but they became important again in Constantine's court, and Helena's emergence needs to be seen in this context.

Having divided the analysis of the first chapter into three sections, the evidence is approached chronologically suggesting that: (a) whether or not Helena was in her son's court between 306 and 315, the pro-Constantine sources ignored her; (b) between 315 and 326 Helena was not living in obscurity any more, but she was still not the most prominent female member of her son's court; (c) two years before her death in 328 she participated in a pattern of Christian co-rulership with Constantine; (d) while posthumously, between 337 and 340, she was propagated as a symbol of the Constantinian new Christian order, with Eusebios' *Life of Constantine* containing the most elaborate treatment of the empress.

The evaluation of the political implications of Helena's role on the basis of a historical and interpretive context provides a new perspective of identification of a number of works of art whose connection with Helena has been an open question: for example, the painted ceiling found below the modern floor of the cathedral of Trier; the mosaic floor of the south hall of the church of Aquileia; the so-called Leiden cameo in the Koninklijk Penningkabinet in Leiden; a second cameo in the Stadtbibliothek in Trier, known as Ada cameo; and the bronze medallion in Nantes, Musée Dobrée. It is argued in the first chapter of my thesis that any association of Helena's name with works of imperial art made before 324 must be re-considered, and are unlikely to be correct.

Finally, my research would have been incomplete without a systematic and comprehensive study of Helena's numismatic portraits. The simultaneous circulation in the empire – both west and east – of coins with five different portrait types for Helena is striking, and has never been explored. The classification of Helena's coin portraits not only facilitates the attribution of a certain number of statues to her, but also makes clear Constantine's conscious attempt to distinguish and distance himself from his contemporaries by promoting a dynastic and monarchical imperial image that was simultaneously applied to his mother.

2. The discoverer of the true cross

Shortly before the end of the fourth century Helena was introduced as the discoverer of the holiest relic of the re-furbished Roman empire as a Christian entity: the cross of Christ's Crucifixion. From the moment that the story came into being Helena was no longer to be remembered as a historical figure but as the central character of a historical fiction. The development of Helena's legend is the subject of the second chapter of my thesis. The writings of fourth-century Christian authors and Church Fathers – including Cyril of

Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, Rufinus of Aquileia, Paulinus of Nola, and Sulpicius Severus – provide the grounds for a constructive analysis.

The first section of my research is concerned with the origins of the legend. Its first aim is to set the chronological and geographical framework within which the legend of Helena developed. Should it be, for example, credited to fourth-century eastern Christians, as it is widely believed, or to western Christians? How safe is it to suggest that a fully developed written version of the legend was first provided by Gelasios of Caesarea, when his *Church History* is entirely lost? What are the possibilities that Ambrose of Milan might have been the first who associated Helena with the true cross? Additionally, the section explores the circumstances under which the legend of Helena emerged with a particular emphasis on the social effects of Helena's role as the discoverer of the holy relic. It is made clear that the growing authority and influence that the early Christian Church could exercise over the secular elites promoted Helena as the ideal model of pilgrim.

The second section provides a thorough analysis of Ambrose's treatment of Helena as the discoverer of the true cross. It is well known that his oration for the deceased emperor Theodosios I delivered in 395 in Milan provides the earliest extant account of the legend. The text is of immense significance: Ambrose's personal beliefs and aspirations, and the turbulent political scenery that Theodosios' death caused, invite a political reading of Helena's description. It is stressed in my analysis that while in Constantine's case the year 312 and the Edict of Milan justified him in the eyes of subsequent generations of Christians as the model of the ideal Christian emperor, the year 395 and Ambrose's oration created the ideological context for an elevation of Helena to a status of equal importance as that of her son. From that moment onwards Constantine and Helena were to be commemorated as the exemplary imperial pair of Christian rule.

The legend of the finding of the cross by Helena became quickly popular in both parts of the late Roman empire. The earliest preserved accounts after Ambrose are attested in the theological and historiographical writings of Ambrose's contemporaries Rufinus of Aquileia, Paulinus of Nola and Sulpicius Severus, and of the eastern church historians Sokrates, Sozomen, Theodoret of Kyrrhos, and Gelasios of Kyzikos. The attitudes of these late fourth- and early fifth-century writers towards Helena are the focus of the third section of the second chapter of my thesis. The analysis demonstrates that the ways that Helena's role developed in the west and the east was not identical. Helena was seen more in her own right in the west, whereas in the east she was treated as part of her son's ideal Christian image. The distinct impact that the changing meanings of the mother and son relationship had on western and eastern evaluations of Helena is an aspect that is noted for the first time in my thesis.

3. The ideal Christian empress

The importance of Constantine as a prototype of exemplary Christian rulership, and as a symbol of legitimacy and identity within the context of imperial ideological strategies, has been in the forefront of scholarly attention.[3] Less interest, however, has been expressed in Helena. Leslie Brubaker was the first to examine thoroughly the participation of the female members of the Constantinian, Theodosian and Valentinian houses in the reconstruction of Helena's memory.[4] The ideological implications of Helena's textual and visual descriptions between the fifth and ninth centuries as an inseparable part of Constantine's ideal Christian profile are the subject of the third chapter of my thesis, which aims to underline Helena's symbolic significance in Byzantium. It is the ultimate ambition of this chapter to make a

[3] On the themes of Constantine and imperial renewal from 324 to 1261, see the essays collected in Magdalino 1994.

[4] Brubaker 1997: 52-75.

contribution to a better understanding of the legal ideal, on the one hand, and of the practical reality, on the other hand, of female imperial influence in Byzantine society.

The first section is concerned with the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*. This is the only text that gives evidence of (no longer preserved) visual representations of Helena in Constantinople during the period under consideration. The evaluation and interpretation of its content has been a challenging task for Byzantinists. Whether the *Parastaseis*' descriptions of Helena's portraits had a connection with contemporary imperial ideological policies is at the centre of my analysis.

The second section shows that the pattern of Christian symbolism in the visualisation of 'ideal' emperors and empresses employed from Theodosios I's successors onwards corresponds to Ambrose's description of Constantine and Helena. Their exemplary virtues and actions were not merely commemorated, but also appropriated by subsequent generations of rulers. The evaluation of Helena's role on the basis of a broad range of sources related to the imperial office – including coins, acts of councils, and works of art – leads to new insights into the role and the authority that an empress – as an institution and not as an individual – was expected to exercise in Byzantium.[5]

The eastern historiographical narratives, compared to the western sources, treated Helena as part of her son's ideal Christian image. The last section of my analysis takes the examination of the Byzantine texts a step further, showing that Helena's portrayal varied from author to author. It is stressed that while there was a consistency in the way Constantine was portrayed as the first Christian emperor, the way Helena's memory – especially her religiosity and the deciding impact that this factor had on her son's ultimate conversion to the Christian faith – was reconstructed fluctuates. Illustrative are the descriptions preserved in the fifth-century *Church Histories* of Sokrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret of Kyrrhos, the sixth-

[5] James 1997: 123-139.

century *Chronicle* of John Malalas, the seventh-century *Paschal Chronicle*, and the early ninth-century *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor. The texts are placed in a historical and interpretive context, arguing that their peculiarities are unlikely to be purely accidental, but that they should be interpreted as reflections of contemporary beliefs and concerns with which Byzantine society – and as a member of it, the author – was preoccupied.[6] The analysis seeks to add to our knowledge on the practical reality of female imperial influence in Byzantine society as opposed to the legal ideal.

4. The saint

The development of Helena's hagiological cult in Byzantium has not received any attention in the past. John Wortley has remarked that 'it was mainly on account of her association with Constantine, regardless of her supposed invention (on his behalf) of the holy cross, that she was admitted to the list of saints'.[7] I remain skeptical of Wortley's view as he has not taken into consideration the ideological significance of Helena's role for both court and church. The existence of an independent cult for either Constantine or Helena cannot be justified from the existing evidence. On the contrary, textual and visual sources demonstrate that the two figures were virtually always appreciated together in the Byzantine perception. On this basis, the studies concerned with the imperial and hagiological cult that Constantine and Helena received in Byzantium should address and treat the two figures as a pair. This procedure is followed throughout my thesis.

It is made apparent in the fourth chapter of my thesis that our difficulties in defining the origins and development of a liturgical veneration of Constantine and Helena are further sharpened by the complex function of the two figures as exemplary models of rulers. The

[6] Ljubarskij 1993: 131-138.

[7] Wortley 2006: 362.

questions raised in the first section of the chapter seek to explore the time and the circumstances under which Constantine and Helena were officially recognised as saints. This is a challenging task as it has been only sporadically addressed in the past, most recently by Alexander Kazhdan's publication in 1987.[8] Kazhdan's view that Constantine and Helena's sanctity emerged in the ninth century is questioned, as my re-evaluation of textual sources dated before the ninth century provides evidence of a growing hagiological tradition from the sixth century. The matter is examined in connection with contemporaneous developments in the empire – especially in Constantinople – regarding the cult and possession of relics of the true cross, the relations between the imperial and ecclesiastic authorities, and the political turbulent caused by doctrinal disputes, chiefly the image struggle ('Iconoclasm'). It is concluded that by the ninth century Constantine and Helena were not understood as 'ordinary saints'.

The symbolic and ideological prominence of Helena and her son – especially for the church – is further elaborated in the second section, where an overview of the earliest extant visual representations of the pair in post-iconoclastic Constantinople is provided: it appears in the fragmentary mosaic decoration of the Large Sekreton in the church of Hagia Sophia, and in the deluxe manuscript of the *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris gr. 510). Contemporaneous western pictorial examples of Constantine and Helena are brought into discussion in order to underline the dynamics of their reception in Byzantium.

The third section of this chapter concentrates on post-iconoclastic narratives of Helena, dating from the end of the ninth to the twelfth century. None of these accounts is incorporated in historiographies, but in hagiological compositions of the lives of Constantine and his mother. Their context thus is of considerable importance to the way that the genre of

[8] Schneider 1941: 245-249; Winkelmann 1964: 407; Linder 1975: 51; Winkelmann 1978: 181 and 200; Kazhdan 1987: 201 and 211.

hagiology presented Helena. The *vitae* are analysed within the context of the historical processes in which they functioned, and in relation to the preceding traditions on Helena, providing further insights into the engagement of authors with the changes affecting their social and political milieu. It is made clear that diversities witnessed in pre- and post-iconoclastic images of Helena – regardless of genre – were not detached from their actual historical setting. The findings are suggestive of Byzantines' response to ongoing ideological reforms, adding to our understanding of the transmission and implementation of concepts and beliefs in Byzantine society.

5. Memories of Helena

Although the Helena-legend with symbolic and metaphorical functions had been fully developed by the ninth century, the memories of Helena over the remainder of the Byzantine period continued to evolve as they became integrated into the Byzantines' devotional practices. The fifth and sixth chapters of my thesis are focused on the widespread veneration of Helena and her son beyond the imperial capital, aiming to explore the dynamics of effective communication of cultural and religious modes of expression between Constantinople and the rest of the empire.

The middle and late Byzantine periods are characterised by a large number of visual representations of Helena, which are particularly well attested in Cappadocia, Greece, Cyprus, and Crete. Helena is almost always depicted with her son Constantine. Exceptions, however, do exist. The findings recorded in the fifth chapter are based on eighty-four churches from all four regions (see Table). The statistics, however, are only preliminary, because of the damaged condition of the Byzantine monumental remains in all regions. Nonetheless, they are indicative of the geographical distribution of the cult of Constantine and Helena in Byzantium. My analysis places the pictorial material in a comparative context,

and examines how Helena's religious iconography developed throughout certain periods of time in different parts of the empire. I consider whether the introduction of new elements in Helena's iconography may indicate local trends and traditions or, in contrast, the appropriation of non-Byzantine cultural modes. In addition, the pictorial material is explored in terms of church decoration in order to address issues related to the role of patrons and painters. My aim is to evaluate the development of Helena's religious iconography not merely on symbolic, but also on pragmatic grounds.

I conclude my thesis with an investigation of Helena's textual portraits from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. The texts of this period are revealing of new usages of Helena's memory as they echo dramatic shifts from already established patterns. The attitude of the twelfth-century authors – including John Zonaras, Michael Glykas, Constantine Manasses, and George Kedrenos – is conspicuously negative towards Helena, especially if contrasted to their encomiastic and apologetic treatment of Constantine's holy identity. Helena's relation with Judaism is a distinct element of her twelfth-century profile, but this has never been explored by scholars. Unsurprisingly, a new definition was attached to Helena's role from the fourteenth century onwards with most illustrative examples the writings of Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos and John Chortasmenos. How Helena's memory was reconstructed in the aforementioned narratives is the subject of the sixth chapter, which is divided into two sections. The fluctuations in Helena's profile are interpreted in juxtaposition with the developments in the political scenery of the empire.

Overall, this thesis aims to examine the evolution and dissemination of the cult of Helena throughout the Byzantine period. It will explore social and political influences as well as local traditions. My main argument is that the way the image of Helena changes over the course of time reflects contemporaneous political and social concerns. In order to facilitate a

better understanding of the shifting attitudes towards Helena, I have provided at the end of each chapter – apart from chapter five – the original narrative descriptions of Helena either in Latin or Greek with English translations. It will be necessary to move constantly back and forth between texts and the main body of each chapter, and strongly advisable to follow up the cross-references given in the chapters. To the best of my knowledge, I have delivered a comprehensive presentation of all available material, and constructive new interpretations which build on the existing scholarship in the field. I can only hope that those who read this thesis will receive as much reward as I did from writing it.

1

Fact and fiction: in search of Helena during the obscure years of her lifetime

Fact and fiction can hardly be distinguished in the case of Helena. Despite multiple references to her in both the primary and secondary literature, the way that the official profile of Helena was fabricated in order to convey specific agendas for public consumption has not been studied in detail. The available sources referring to Helena are few in number and of limited reliability, but of semantic value nonetheless as they directly relate to the ideological programmes of Constantine. Accordingly, discussion in this chapter starts with 306 and Trier, when Constantine received formal political authority as Augustus in the west (Britain, Gaul, and Spain). The chapter studies visual representations in relation to literary descriptions within a critical and interpretive context, aiming to demonstrate that concurrent political and cultural shifts were responsible for changes in Helena's role as an imperial persona. It will be made clear throughout the three sections of analysis that specific political notions such as authority, motive, and reception significantly had an impact on Helena's public image. In the years between 306 and 312, for example, Constantine's mission was to establish his rule as an undisputed emperor in the west, fighting against the conspiracies and plots of Maximian and Maxentius. Soon after his victory over Licinius in 324, Constantine's aspirations were to ensconce his family as the ruling dynasty. Not long after the suspicious deaths of Crispus and Fausta in 326, Constantine sought to secure the prosperity of his regime on Christian foundations, a policy also employed by his successors.

1.1 The silence of the pro-Constantine sources (AD 306-315)

There has been a great deal of discussion about Helena's relation with Trier, the historical background of which has been closely associated with her son's reign. The city served as Constantine's permanent imperial residence from 306, when he succeeded his father Constantius Chlorus, to the year 316. From then onwards, due to his military campaigns, Constantine was constantly on the move. It is generally assumed that from 306 onwards Helena joined her son's court. However, such a claim is mere speculation for which no supporting evidence can be found. The existence of the alleged Helena-tradition developed in Trier and its surroundings from the mid-ninth century onwards cannot serve as a convincing confirmation, despite Drijvers' initial thoughts.[1] Odahl's view that Helena's arrival in Trier should date no earlier than 313 is no less hypothetical. Odahl proposes that Licinius' victory over the eastern emperor, Maximinus Daia, would have made it easier for Constantine to arrange safe passage for his mother and son, Crispus, through the empire. The scholar explores the relationship between Helena and Crispus, suggesting that after the death of Crispus' mother Minervina, Helena probably took charge of the rearing of her grandchild as Constantine was often occupied with military duties. The assumption that Constantine was forced to leave behind both Helena and Crispus, probably in Nicomedia, when he escaped from the court of Galerius in the east and hastened to the side of his father in the west in 305, is further employed in Odahl's analysis in support of his proposal.[2] The fifth-century *New History* by Zosimos, one of the last pagan historians of the Roman world, is the only source which implies a special bond between Helena and Crispus:

[1] Drijvers 1992a: 21; see below, page 28.

[2] Odahl 2004: 73, 123-124.

> The universal sovereignty having developed upon Constantine alone, no longer did he conceal his innate badness of disposition but he indulged himself in every licentious act […] For he put to death his son Crispus, whom he had honoured with the rank of Caesar as I have related earlier, for having come under suspicion of being intimate with his stepmother Fausta; no consideration was accorded natural law. When Constantine's mother, Helena, bore with irrepressible bad grace the pathetic destruction of one so young, as if consoling her Constantine cured the evil with a greater evil: he ordered an extraordinarily hot bath to be prepared, put Fausta in it, and removed her only after she had died. [3]

According to Zosimos, Helena exhibited extreme grief over the execution of her grandchild and, as a means of consoling her, Constantine also ordered the execution of the person he perceived as responsible for Crispus' reason of death: Fausta. However, no contemporary sources provide verification of Crispus' upbringing by Helena.

Perhaps the earliest attested evidence of Crispus' presence in Trier is the panegyric of 313 delivered by an anonymous orator in Trier during the festive celebration of Constantine's victories over Maxentius and the Franks.[4] This is the first panegyric composed for Constantine which employed the dynastic motif. The orator prayed to the divinity to make Constantine live forever and to give him and his son eternal rule over the Roman empire. By the end of the oration Constantine, along with his child, stands apart as a monarch.[5] Nazarius' panegyric, delivered in Rome in 321 to celebrate the *quinqennalia* of Crispus and

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[3] *Περιστάσης δὲ τῆς πάσης εἰς μόνον Κωνσταντῖνον ἀρχῆς, οὐκέτι λοιπὸν τὴν κατὰ φύσιν ἐνοῦσαν αὐτῷ κακοήθειαν ἔκρυπτεν, ἀλλὰ ἐνεδίδου τῷ κατ' ἐξουσίαν ἅπαντα πράττειν·* [...] *Κρίσπον γὰρ παῖδα τῆς τοῦ Καίσαρος, ὡς εἴρηταί μοι πρότερον, ἀξιωθέντα τιμῆς, εἰς ὑποψίαν ἐλθόντα τοῦ Φαύστῃ τῇ μητρυιᾷ συνεῖναι, τοῦ τῆς φύσεως θεσμοῦ μηδένα λόγον ποιησάμενος ἀνεῖλεν· τῆς δὲ Κωνσταντίνου μητρὸς Ἑλένης ἐπὶ τῷ τηλικούτῳ πάθει δυσχεραινούσης καὶ ἀσχέτως τὴν ἀναίρεσιν τοῦ νέου φερούσης, παραμυθούμενος ὥσπερ αὐτὴν ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος κακῷ τὸ κακὸν ἰάσατο μείζονι· βαλανεῖον γὰρ ὑπέρ τὸ μέτρον ἐκπυρωθῆναι κελεύσας καὶ τούτῳ τὴν Φαῦσταν ἐναποθέμενος ἐξήγαγεν νεκρὰν γενομένην.*
Zosimos, *New History*: ed. Paschoud, F. 1979, II.100:29; Eng. trans. Buchanan and Davis 1967, 71.29.

[4] *Panegyrici Latini*: Eng. trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 288-293; 'divina suboles tua' does not necessarily imply Crispus' presence in Trier, but the possibility cannot be ignored.

[5] *Panegyrici Latini*: Eng. trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 291 and 333.

Constantine's second son, Constantine II, as Caesars, tell us that from a tender age Crispus and Constantine II received a good education and observed their father in order to inherit and imitate both his qualities and good deeds as ruler.[6] Crispus, who was born perhaps in 305, was by 321 around sixteen years old, and Constantine, born in 316, was only five, but, as Nazarius said, he was 'already skillful at letters in accelerated study'.[7] The information we have about Crispus' education comes from Jerome, who wrote that 'in extreme old age' Lactantius took care of Crispus' learning in Latin letters.[8] Creed, Odahl, and Pohlsander date Lactantius' tutorship between 313 and 316, before Crispus' elevation to the rank of Caesar in 317.

Odahl suggests that Lactantius arrived in Trier in 313, the same year that he thinks Crispus and Helena arrived.[9] However, in Ogilvie's words, Lactantius 'travelled widely – from Africa to Nicomedia, to Gaul, perhaps more than once'.[10] Two years after the Great Persecution broke out in 303, Lactantius left Diocletian's court in Nicomedia, where he was working as a tutor of rhetoric, and went perhaps to Gaul.[11] Clearly, such a view is speculative, especially if we take into account that other scholars have favoured Africa instead. However, the possibilities of Lactantius being at the court of Constantine in Trier between 306 and 311, and tutoring Crispus, cannot be conclusively rejected.[12] In his *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, written in the years 314 and 315, Lactantius shows familiarity with

[6] *Panegyrici Latini*: Eng. trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 337-342, 347.

[7] *Panegyrici Latini*: Eng. trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 383; On Crispus and the different opinions on his date of birth, see Pohlsander 1984: 79-106.

[8] Creed 1984: xxvii; Odahl 2004: 123 and note 8.

[9] Odahl 2004: 123, 125-126.

[10] Ogilvie 1978: 4.

[11] Ogilvie 1978: 2; Bowen and Garnsey 2003: 3.

[12] Creed 1984: xxvi and note 71; Lactantius was back in Nicomedia from 311 to 313. Apart from a few hints thrown out in Lactantius' own works, nothing can be stated with certainty about his life. A selection of secondary literature on Lactantius is listed in Bowen and Garnsey 2003: 1-6.

events in Constantine's court before 313. Specifically, he is the first author to record the plot of Maximian against his son-in-law, Constantine.[13] This story was initiated in Constantine's court in 311, a year after Maximian's suicide, when Constantine had instituted *damnatio memoriae* on him.[14]

The statement of Jerome that Lactantius was of an advanced age when tutoring Crispus should not mislead us, because Jerome was born about twenty years after Lactantius' death in 325, so he was not an eye-witness, and the interpretation of age in late antiquity needs to be clarified. Lactantius, born around 250, would have been fifty-six years old by 306, and sixty-three by 313. Any age between in a person's fifties or sixties, according to Talbot, was commonly defined throughout the ancient and medieval periods as old.[15] Of extreme old age was anyone who lived into his or her seventies, but this would have been applicable to Lactantius if he continued tutoring Crispus after 317, which, however, cannot be proved. Moreover, the possibility of Crispus having been at the court of his father since 306 is not precluded by the fact that Crispus' first implicit presence in Trier dates to 313. If we accept that Helena had a role in the upbringing of Crispus, then she would have been in Trier from this time on.

It is striking, however, that Lactantius had nothing to say about Helena in his writings. Though *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, which covers the years between 303 and 313, gives information on female members of the families of Diocletian, Maximian, Constantine, and Maximinus Daia, it includes no reference to Helena. According to Lactantius, Diocletian built houses for his wife, Prisca, and daughter, Valeria. When the Great Persecution against Christians broke out, the two women were forced to sacrifice to the pagan gods in order to

[13] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*: ed. and Eng. trans. Creed 1984, 47.30.

[14] Lenski 2006: 68.

[15] Talbot 1984: 268.

prove their detachment from Christianity. After the death of Valeria's husband, Galerius, she was maltreated by Maximinus Daia. She was eventually arrested and, along with her mother, put to death in Thessaloniki by Licinius.[16] The two women were clearly not Christians in Lactantius' representation of them, because their execution seems to be understood as part of God's plan to 'vanquish all the persecutors of His Name, so that no stem or root of theirs remained'.[17] It is further recorded that Maximian's mother, whose name is unknown, was the reason that Maximian wanted to persecute Christians. Lactantius described her 'as a worshipper of the gods of the mountains and a highly superstitious woman. She used to hold sacrificial feasts almost daily, offering banquets to those who lived in her district. The Christians would keep away from these; while she was banqueting with the Gentiles, they would persevere with their fasts and prayers. As a result she conceived a hatred for them, and by complaining in the way that women will she egged on her son, who was as superstitious as she was, to get rid of them.'[18] Whether this passage bears any relationship to actual events is difficult to know. It is, nevertheless, an example of a mother and son relationship of considerable importance for an examination of the life of Helena, because it dates from the period of Helena's life, and can thereby be used in order somewhat to understand Helena's position in Constantine's court. It demonstrates, in other words, that close mother-son relations were thinkable in the early fourth century.

Constantine's wife, Fausta was not omitted from Lactantius' narrative. The author related that Maximian's conspiracy against his son-in-law was exposed with the help of Fausta.[19] The marriage of Constantine's sister, Constantia, to Licinius was also brought up.[20]

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[16] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*: ed. and Eng. trans. Creed 1984, 13.6, 23.15, 59.39-40, 61.41, 75.50, 77.51.

[17] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*: ed. and Eng. trans. Creed 1984, 75.50.

[18] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*: ed. and Eng. trans. Creed 1984, 19.11.

[19] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*: ed. and Eng. trans. Creed 1984, 47.30; see below, page 33.

Maximinus Daia's wife, whose name is unknown, was mentioned as well. According to Lactantius, the woman was thrown by Licinius into the river Orontes, 'where she had often herself ordered chaste women to be drowned'.[21] The silence of Lactantius on Helena strongly suggests that he did not know anything about her. If Helena had had a role to play in her son's court either because of her religious beliefs or as the surrogate mother of Crispus, Lactantius would not have neglected it. Therefore, during her stay at the court of Trier, Helena lived in obscurity, and whether she moved there in 306 or in 313 does not really alter our conclusion. In the years between 306 and 312, Constantine's mission was to secure his empire's frontiers from the threat of the Franks, and to establish his rule as an undisputed emperor in the west, fighting against the conspiracies and plots of his father-in-law Maximian and his brother-in-law Maxentius.[22] In 310, for example, Constantine was regarded in other parts of the empire as usurper.[23] Bringing his mother to the forefront would have promoted an aspect of his life – birth origins – which would have made his position in Trier vulnerable. Proper ancestry supplied status. Though there is no contemporary evidence for the exact nature of Helena's relationship with Constantine's father, the fact that the topic of Constantine's illegitimate birth reappears in later polemical writings against Constantine – pagan and heretical – is probably sufficient evidence that Constantius Chlorus and Helena were not married.[24] There was a bond between Trier and the house of Maximian – including Theodora and her children (Constantine's step-brothers), Fausta, and Maxentius – for the city had served as the family's imperial residence. Helena could, therefore, have been used as a

[20] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*: ed. and Eng. trans. Creed 1984, 63.43.

[21] Creed 1984: 77.50.

[22] Leadbetter 1998: 79-81.

[23] Leadbetter 1998: 79 and note 45.

[24] See Chapter 4, page 178.

way to vilify Constantine and undermine his status as ruler, and so, whether or not she was there, the pro-Constantine sources ignored her.

From the year 313 onwards Constantine took actions to remove his step-mother and her children from his court in Trier. There are no historical records of Theodora from this time on. Her sons, Flavius Dalmatius and Julius Constantius, were sent for education in southern Gaul, and remained there without any political roles until after Helena's demise. Theodora's daughter Constantia was married to Licinius, while her two younger daughters were sent away to be wed to Roman nobles.[25] Whether or not the above actions were undertaken by Constantine in order to shield his mother from reminders of her earlier displacement by Theodora as the wife of Constantius Chlorus is unknown. Marriage between members of the aristocracy and the royal houses was an important component of diplomacy. Constantine's step-brothers would possibly have been sent away in order to bar their hereditary claims for rulership. Therefore, there was no reason to promote Theodora who, after all, had no blood relationship with Constantine and who would have been a reminder of the existence of the second Constantinian branch. The later reference of Julius Constantius' son, Julian the Apostate, to Helena as the 'wicked stepmother' of his father, does not necessarily reflect the year 313 – as Odahl believes – but perhaps the years from 324, when Helena was elevated to the rank of Augusta.[26]

Helena's stay in Trier ended no later than 316. In 315 Constantine travelled to Rome with many members of his family and court officials in order to celebrate his *decennalia*. The emperor and his retinue were settled in the various imperial palaces around the city.[27] From this time on, Helena appeared in the *Liber Pontificalis* as the owner of a large territory of

[25] Odahl 2004: 124, 327 and note 7.

[26] Odahl 2004: 327 and note 7.

[27] Odahl 2004: 141, 333 and note 36.

imperial estates in the southeast of Rome, known as the *fundus Laurentus*.[28] Helena's stay in Rome will be discussed in the forthcoming section. From 316 on Trier was no longer the imperial residence of Constantine, but of his son Crispus, who had been appointed as the new commander of Gaul.[29] Constantine, because of his military campaigns, was always on the move.

Archaeological excavations below the modern floor of the cathedral of Trier revealed the remains of a large rectangular room, part of a domestic complex, with a painted ceiling smashed to fragments (Plate 1a-b). Numismatic evidence found on the site dates the room no earlier than 316. Ten years later, in 326, the domestic complex was destroyed and became the foundation for a Constantinian basilica, finished before 346.[30] The years between 316 and 326 correspond with Crispus' stay in Trier, and the date of the site's destruction fits perfectly with the date of Crispus' execution and *damnatio memoriae*. However, the fact that no inscriptions or contemporaneous textual evidence link the room to Crispus leaves the issue of its identity open for discussion, with scholars favouring three possible owners: Crispus and his wife Helena; Helena, Constantine's mother; or a member of the local aristocracy.[31]

The room is located in the northeast side of the city, which, based on the remains of other architectural sites there, has been described as forming a palatial enclave. While Trier already possessed baths (Barbarathermen), a second complex of baths (Kaiserthermen) was built during the beginning of the fourth century in order to serve the imperial court. Their architecture can only be paralleled with the imperial baths of Diocletian in Rome, and of

[28] *Liber Pontificalis*: Eng. trans. Davis 1989, 24.27.

[29] Barnes 1982: 83-84; Pohlsander 1984: 86-87.

[30] Alföldi 1959/60: 81; Pohlsander 1995: 38-39, notes 43-44 and 48; Zink 1978/9: 17-111; Weber 1984: 29.

[31] An extensive bibliography focused on the problem of identifying the room: Kempf 1951, De Azevedo 1956, Rumpf 1957, Alföldi 1959/60, Schumacher 1963, Lavin 1967, Dorigo 1971, Calza 1972, Deichmann 1972, Kempf 1977, Brandenburg 1978, Zink 1978/9, Brandenburg 1979, Kempf 1979, Brandenburg 1985, Simon 1986, Rose 2006. , .

Constantine in Arles.[32] Some distance to the south of the excavated room lay the Basilica dated to the reign of Constantine, which had served as a reception or audience room.[33]

Despite Rose's suggestions that the room might belong not to a member of Constantine's family but to a local aristocrat, two factors positively indicate the opposite view.[34] First, the double basilica, built over the room, reflects religious building programmes conducted by Constantine in Rome (San Giovanni in Laterano, 312), Jerusalem (Golgotha, 326) and Bethlehem (Nativity, 333).[35] The imperial status of Trier implies that church building would have been patronised by the imperial family; this perspective is enhanced by the imperial associations of the location selected for the construction of the church, and by the fact that no other church was built in the city during this period. Second, elements of the iconography of the ceiling imply an imperial patronage. The painted figures were clothed in purple clothes and garments, a colour intimately connected with the imperial office as the accepted symbol of imperial authority, a view reflected in concurrent writings.[36] The orator of the panegyric of Constantine, delivered in Trier in 310 on the occasion of the foundation of the city, characteristically stated of Constantine's proclamation as successor of Constantius Chlorus that 'the soldiers threw the purple over' him.[37] The orator of the panegyric of Constantine, delivered three years later in Trier (313), described Maxentius as the 'little slave

[32] Wightman 1970: 98-100.

[33] Wightman 1970: 102-108.

[34] Rose argues that houses on high ground were also important for aristocrats who wished to enhance their prestige. Moreover, the ornately jeweled female figures depicted on the room's painted ceiling do not necessarily brand them as empresses, because elaborate jewellery was common during this period. For both arguments, Rose uses as example the Piazza Armerina in Sicily. See Rose 2006: 98-101.

[35] King 1990: 190-191; Krautheimer 1975: 46-51, 60-63; Odahl 2004: 151-157; White 1997: 439-440; Wightman 1970: 110.

[36] The colours of the ceiling were not modified during the restoration, but they are in their original condition. See Weber 1986: 16-25.

[37] *Panegyrici Latini*: Eng. trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 212 and 230.

who dressed himself in purple for so many years'.[38] Lactantius in his *De Mortibus Persecutorum* in 314 narrated that Maximian against his will 'sent Constantine the purple'.[39] It seems likely, therefore, that the room excavated in Trier had some imperial associations.

Three of the panels depict male figures and it has been suggested that they represent poets or philosophers (Plate 3a-c).[40] Mosaics with scenes linked to the theme of literature and education were common in Trier, and it is probably because of this that scholars have interpreted the panels in this way. For instance, the Literatenmosaik in the Basilica depicts the Muses, a teacher of rhetoric and his pupil; a mosaic from a building in the centre of Trier shows the Greek philosopher, Anaximander, holding the sundial which he was supposed to have invented; the Monnus mosaic, found under the modern museum of the city, depicts Homer, the Muses, the Seasons, eight poets (including Hesiod, Ennuis and Vergil), and actors.[41] It should be added, however, that garments of the three men represent the Roman toga, worn not merely by civilians but by emperors as well. Though parts of their iconography have not survived, for example the face of one of the men, the other two are bearded and have features directly connected with the visual representation of emperors: the laurel wreath and the scroll. The toga, the laurel wreath and the scroll, are all elements found on imperial coinage from Augustus (BC 27) to Constantine (AD 337).[42] Moreover, the laurel wreath, as a symbol of imperial authority, is found in both visual and textual representations of Constantine and his family up to 325.[43] The orator of 310 praises Constantine saying, 'for you saw, I believe, O Constantine, your Apollo, accompanied by Victory, offering you laurel

[38] *Panegyrici Latini*: Eng. trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 319.

[39] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*: ed. and Eng. trans. Creed 1984, 39.25.

[40] Weber 1986: 20, 22-23.

[41] For further information on the three mosaics from Trier, see Wightman 1970: 86-91.

[42] Robertson 1962-1982.

[43] Pohlsander 1984: 91-97.

wreaths, each one of which carries a portent of thirty years'.[44] Lactantius also wrote that, a few days after the proclamation of Constantine, his image 'wreathed in laurel leaves was brought to the evil beast (Maximian), who deliberated for a long time whether he should accept it'.[45]

Four of the panels depict female figures (Plate 4a-c). They are shown nimbate and wearing costly adornments, and holding a jewel-box, a *kantharos*, and a mirror.[46] Much ingenuity has been used debating whether these figures represent the female members of Constantine's family or personifications of specific concepts. My analysis advocates an alternative approach, identifying the figures as personifications associated directly with the offices of emperor and empress.

Kempf identified the woman in panel two as Constantia, Constantine's half-sister and Licinius' wife; the woman in panel four as Crispus' wife, Helena; the woman in panel eight as Helena, Constantine's mother; and the woman in panel fourteen as Fausta, Constantine's wife.[47] Kempf saw in the figure of 'Helena', Constantine's mother, an old woman who would have been celebrating her seventieth birthday by then.[48] Nothing, however, indicates that the women depicted on the four panels were intended to be seen as aged, and, in fact, the iconography is far too uncertain to permit their identification as actual likenesses of imperial women.[49] Kempf's interpretation is problematic, because by the date of the room's

[44] *Panegyrici Latini*: Eng. trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 248.

[45] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*: ed. and Eng. trans. Creed 1984, 39.25.

[46] Weber 1986: 17-19, 21, 24; in panel four the female figure seems to hold an object that was interpreted as a lyre. However, the accuracy of the restoration was doubtful and the lyre has been removed from the reproductions of the ceiling, though it can be still seen in older ones. See Rose 2006: 95 and note 8.

[47] Kempf 1977: 155-158; Weber 1986: 26-31.

[48] Kempf 1977: 157.

[49] De Azevedo 1956: 60-63.

construction Helena was staying in her *Palatium Sessorianum* in Rome.[50] Fausta probably stayed in Rome for a year (316/7) as well until Constantine finished his campaigns, and then moved with him to Sirmium, Serdica, and perhaps Thessaloniki (317-324).[51] Constantia was married in 313 to Licinius and moved with his court. The only female member of the Constantinian house who positively stayed in Trier during this period (316-326) is Crispus' wife, Helena, for whom, however, our knowledge is limited.[52]

No one has been able to cite a precedent for imperial portraits depicted on a ceiling, and it has been argued that the gestures and attributes of the four female figures are unparalleled in portraits of imperial women.[53] The women are surrounded by eight pairs of *putti* (Plate 2a-h). Seven of them are depicted holding a cornucopia, a vessel, purple cloaks, a dish, a *thymaterion*, and a ball. Such objects are found accompanying specific personifications especially on empresses' coinage from the years of Livia, the first Roman Augusta (BC 58), and onwards, which include *Fecunditas*, the personification of fertility; *Pudicitia*, the personification of modesty and chastity; *Pietas*, the personification of devotion and duty; *Felicitas*, the personification of wealth and prosperity; *Concordia*, the personification of agreement, understanding and marital harmony; *Fortuna*, the personification of good luck and fate; and *Laetitia*, the personification of happiness.[54] Some of these personifications, such as *Concordia* and *Laetitia*, are found on emperors' coinage as well. The possibility that the female figures might represent any of the aforementioned

[50] See below, page 29.

[51] Barnes 1982: 68-69.

[52] Drijvers 1992a: 28-29.

[53] Lavin 1967: 101 and note 9; Rumpf 1957: 24.

[54] On the coinage of Livia and her successors up to the Constantinian empresses, see Robertson 1962: 65, 68, 79-80, 82, 87, 94-95, 102, 107, 109, 153-154, 167, 268, 274-276, 279, 285-286, 323-330; Robertson 1971: 70-72, 74-75, 169-176, 252-273, 295-303, 388-396, 448-453; Robertson 1977: 5-6, 40-49, 66-69, 98-102, 127-135, 163-169, 245-248, 276; Robertson 1978: 11-12, 24-29, 138-141, 216-218; Robertson 1982: 71-75, 252-258, 281-282.

personifications seems to fit better – as will be seen below – within the concept of the ceiling's iconographic programme than Simon's assumption that linked the figures with the personifications of *Sapientia* (wisdom), *Pulchritudo* (beauty), *Iuventas* (youth), and *Salus* (heath).[55]

One of the female figures, the one that Kempf identified as Helena the elder, is placed in the centre of the ceiling. She is shown holding a *kantharos* in her left hand and lifting her veil with her right hand. Though the panels were found in innumerable tiny fragments of fresco, their location on the floor of the room helped with their reconstruction, and hence, the reconstructed images on the ceiling are in their original order.[56] That the image of this woman in the centre of the ceiling is meant to evoke Venus, as Rose suggests, is not impossible considering that next to it is a panel depicting Eros and Psyche.[57] Arrows are still visible on the right of Eros, making his identification unquestionable.[58] The figure's characteristics, though, do not differ from the other three female figures. Another possibility is suggested by the number of women: the pattern of a group of four women as personifications of the Seasons is found on mosaic decoration in Trier, for example the Monnus mosaic, and in the Piazza Armerina in Sicily.[59] Such personifications share similarities with the ceiling's figures, richly dressed with nimbi and leafy wreathes.[60] The ceiling's figures, however, do not bear the attributes of the Seasons, are not inscribed, and the placement of one of the figures in the centre of the decorative programme implies a different interpretation.

[55] Simon 1986: 26-37, 39-45.

[56] For further details on the restoration of the panels, see Weber 1986: 10-16.

[57] Rose 2006: 102-105.

[58] Weber 1986: 22.

[59] Dorigo 1971: 127-168.

[60] Rose 2006: 102.

It is generally believed that the room served as a reception space for social functions and for the entertainment of guests.[61] Based on this hypothesis, Rose argues that 'the orientation of the figures on the ceiling is such that people throughout the room would have seen at least one row of figures right-side-up'.[62] However, reception rooms usually had apses, and so does the Basilica, the official reception room of Constantine, but not the room with the ceiling. Moreover, reception rooms were preceded by vestibules into which visitors entered from the street.[63] Doors on the north and south sides of the room led to other rooms, which were destroyed during the construction of the double church over the site, and we are thus not able to reconstruct a complete plan of the building to which the room belonged. The site was further damaged by the addition of an early medieval crypt at the east side of the room, and the sinking of a pier during the eleventh century.[64] The extant evidence indicate that frescoes of standing figures also occurred on the walls of the room – which, however, conservators are not able to piece together – and that the place was equipped with a heating system.[65]

On the basis of the above analysis, I would argue that the room did not function as a reception space but as one of the private spaces of Crispus and Helena's palace. The decorative programme implies the imperial identity of their family within a domestic context. The male figures should not be considered of less importance than the female ones, as Brandenburg suggested.[66] All figures are not merely depicted with imperial attributes found, as I have noted above, on contemporary coinage, but are also painted within red and blue borders, which visually distinguish them from the pairs of *putti* who are within yellow and

[61] Rose 2006: 108 and notes 88-89.

[62] Rose 2006: 108 and note 93.

[63] Rose 2006: 108.

[64] Weber 1986: 6-9.

[65] In the northeast corner and in the south part of the west wall of the room are the remains of a heating system. Weber 1986: 8-9.

[66] Brandenburg 1985: 159.

green borders. Crispus and Helena, apart from being an imperial couple, were also the heads of a household. In these terms, the function of the ceiling's figures was allegorical, promoting material and domestic prosperity, and the harmony of marital life. The fact that a female figure is depicted in the centre of the ceiling, and not a male one, emphasises the idea of the wealthy mistress. The gestures and attributes of the four female figures – the jewel-box, the mirror, and the *kantharos* – are not inappropriate for an imperial lady. The motif of a female figure with a mirror is not unfamiliar this period. It is seen on a relief from Roman Trier (Neumagen) where the mistress of the house is at her toilet, and on the Projecta Casket (380) where a woman holds a pyxis and is offered a mirror by a servant.[67] Had it been part of the decoration of the reception room, then it would have been of a more propagandistic imperial nature, like the decoration in the imperial residence in Aquileia celebrating the marriage of Crispus' father, Constantine, with Fausta:

> For this, I hear, is what that picture in the palace at Aquileia, placed in full view of the dinner guests, demonstrates. In it a young girl already adorable for her divine beauty, but as yet unequal to her burden, holds up and offers to you, then still a lad, Constantine, a helmet gleaming with gold and jewels, and conspicuous with its plumes of a beautiful bird, in order that her betrothal present might enhance your beauty, a result which scarcely any ornaments of clothing can produce.[68]

The fact that the room had remained intact, while the rest of the site was destroyed by the addition of an early medieval crypt, and of an eleventh-century pier, leads me to believe that its survival was not accidental. The room fed the legend developed by the Church of Trier from the mid-ninth century onwards, presenting Helena, Constantine's mother, as its benefactor. In the mid-ninth century Altmann of Hautvillers wrote on the authority of

[67] Rose 2006: 102 and fig. 2; Wightman 1970: 245 and pl. 14.b.

[68] The decoration is described by an anonymous orator in his panegyric of Maximian and Constantine, delivered in 307. See *Panegyrici Latini*: Eng. trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 198-199.

Hincmar, bishop of Reims, the *Vita Helenae*. Altmann placed Helena's birthplace in Trier and described her as the offspring of a distinguished aristocratic family, who had benefited the city's Christian community by giving part of her palace, including the bedroom, to be remodeled as the bishop's church.[69] Altmann's story initiated the development of more narratives associating Helena with Trier. Among them were the mid-eleventh-century double *vita* of Helena and Agricius, and a series of diplomas produced in the tenth and twelfth centuries presenting Helena as the founder of the Abbey of St. Maximin at Trier. All sources have been identified as unhistorical and the impulse for their composition was to establish the primacy of the bishop of Trier over Gallia and Germania.[70] Moreover, a twelfth-century sarcophagus of the Archbishop von Walencourt (1169-1183) was placed in close proximity to the room, about 1.46 meters away.[71] Both textual and archaeological evidence thus correspond to the time that Helena's tradition in Trier was established.

1.2 The use of the visual to represent Helena Augusta (AD 315-328)

The years of Helena's life before her elevation in 324 to the rank of Augusta are, undoubtedly, the most problematic to reconstruct. I have already argued that, whether or not Helena was in her son's court in Trier between 306 and 315, the pro-Constantine sources ignored her. Helena had no role to play in Constantine's mission to establish his rule as undisputed emperor in the west between 306 and 312. Bringing his mother to the forefront

[69] *Beata igitur Helena, oriunda Trevirensis…tantae fuit nobilitatis secundum honestatem et dignitatem praesentis vitae, ut pene tota ingentis magnitudinis civitas computaretur in agrum sui praedii. Quod usque hodie demonstrat domus ejus facta ecclesiae pars maxima in honore beati Petri Apostolorum Principis in sedem episcopalem metropolis dicata, adeo ut vocetur et sit prima sedes Galliae Belgicae, nec non et cubile regiae ambitionis factum in eadem urbe opera mirabili.* See Drijvers 1992a: 22, notes 3 and 6; Pohlsander 1995: 36 and note 33; Consolino 1994: 81-100; for full Latin text with a German translation, see Dräger 2007.

[70] Drijvers 1992a: 21-23; Drijvers 2011: 131-135; Pohlsander 1995: 31-47.

[71] Weber 1986: 6.

would have promoted an aspect of his life – his illegitimate birth – which would have made his position vulnerable. From 315 on, however, Helena ceased living in obscurity. She moved to Rome, where she settled on a large territory of imperial estates, known as the *fundus Laurentus*.[72] Inscriptions dated to this period salute her as the mother (*mater*) of Constantine and as the grandmother (*avia*) of the Caesars, but nothing more is known of her status in her son's court:

> D N HE[LENA VENERABILIS DO]MINI [N CONSTANTINI A]UG MATER E[T] AVIA BEATISSIMOR ET FLORE]NTIS[SIMOR CAESARUM NOSTR]ORU[M] THERM[AS INCENDIO DE]STRU[CTAS RESTITUIT][73]

> HELENAE MATRI DOMINI NOSTRI CONSTANTINI MAXIMI VICTORIS SEMPER AUG ORDO ET POPULUS SAEPINATIUM[74]

None of these inscriptions addressed Helena with any specific imperial title, but only as 'our lady' (*Domina Nostra*). The first inscription was found within Helena's estates in Rome, and Drijvers has rightly dated it between 317 and 324.[75] We are informed that Helena was responsible for the restoration of the public bathhouse. The second inscription was dedicated to Helena by the community of Saepinum, but we are not given further details of the occasion for this dedication.[76] Maybe the town of Saepinum (modern Altilia, near Sepino) was also part of Helena's possessions.

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[72] See above, page 21.

[73] *CIL* VI 1136; Translation: Our lady Helena, the mother of our venerable Augustus Constantine and the grandmother of the blessed and distinguished Caesars, had repaired the public baths which were damaged by fire.

[74] *CIL* IX 2446; Translation: To Helena, the mother of our lord Constantine, the most victorious Augustus ever, by the authorities and people of Saepinum.

[75] Drijvers 1992a: 47.

[76] Drijvers 1992a: 50.

Helena, however, was still not the most prominent female member of her son's court. Fausta – although this has been significantly underplayed by scholars who tend to favour Helena – was the ruling empress-consort from her marriage up to her death (307-326), giving birth to Constantine's heirs.[77] Despite Fausta's *damnatio memoriae* in 326, the extant evidence – mostly numismatic and epigraphic – confirms, as we shall see below, her prominent and authoritative position in her husband's court.[78]

Julian's reference to Fausta in his panegyric in honour of Constantius II (356/7), although dating a few decades after Fausta's death, shows the imperial status that she enjoyed by birth and marriage as the daughter of an emperor (Maximian), the wife of another (Constantine I), the sister of a third (Maxentius), and the mother of more than one emperor (Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans):

> Your mother's ancestry was so distinguished, her personal beauty and nobility of character were such that it would be hard to find her match among women. I have heard that saying of the Persians about Parysatis, that no other woman had been the sister, mother, wife, and daughter of kings. Parysatis, however, was own sister of her husband, since their law does not forbid a Persian to marry his sister. But your mother, while in accordance with our laws she kept pure and unsullied those ties of kinship, was actually the daughter of one emperor, the wife of another, the sister of a third, and the mother not of one emperor but of several.[79]

The significance of Fausta's role within dynastic politics – as a symbol of fertility, stability, and harmony – was explicitly celebrated in the panegyric delivered in 307 on the occasion of Constantine's marriage to her, a political act on his behalf in order to secure his promotion to the rank of Augustus:

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[77] The most substantial works on Fausta include Drijvers 1992b and Woods 1998.

[78] For helpful comments on an earlier draft of this section, I thank Inge Lyse Hansen. I am also thankful to Eurydice Georganteli, Curator of the Barber Institute Coin Collection, who has enabled me to enrich my catalogue with several images.

[79] Julian, *Panegyric to Constantius II*: Eng. trans. Wright 1913, 24-25.

> For your [Constantine] maturity is so great that although your father had left you imperial power, nevertheless you were content with the title of Caesar and preferred to wait for the same man to declare you Augustus who so declared him. Thus indeed you judged that this imperial power would be finer not if you had acquired it as an inheritance by right of succession, but if you had earned it from the supreme emperor [Maximian] as due reward for your merits.[80]

The account makes clear that Constantine obtained imperial power not as the result of hereditary succession, although he could have done so, but through a marriage alliance in which Fausta functioned as the legitimising component of Constantine's rule – at least during the early years of his reign. This is evident in the panegyrist's description of a picture of Constantine and Fausta in the imperial palace in Aquileia, where Fausta is depicted offering to Constantine a helmet gleaming with gold and jewels as a betrothal present.[81] The political and dynastic implications of this marital union were officially celebrated and promoted through the circulation in Trier – Constantine's imperial capital – of a series of copper coins (folles) in the name of Fausta as *nobilissima femina* (Plate 7a).[82] Fausta is depicted on the obverse with her hair tied in bun on the top of her head, while she is accompanied on the reverse by the image of Venus, seated holding an apple and palm-branch, and bearing the inscription *VENUS FELIX*. On the basis of the iconography of this particular coin, scholars have identified two sculptured portraits (Plate 28.3-4) as possible likenesses of Fausta, although in neither case is the hairstyle identical to the coin's portrait type.[83] The existence of statues of Fausta cannot be rejected, but as the potential examples lack epigraphic confirmation, their identification can only be speculative. Though contemporary textual

[80] *Panegyrici Latini*: Eng. trans. Nixon and Rodgers 1994, 197.

[81] See above, page 28.

[82] Sutherland 1967: 216, no.756.

[83] For further details, including bibliography, see Wegner 1984: 153-154

references to Fausta are very scarce, a study of the attitude of the authors towards her illuminates aspects of her role as an imperial consort. Lactantius, tutor of Crispus in Trier sometime between 306 and 316, although silent on Helena in his writings, is more informative in the case of Fausta:

> Calling his daughter Fausta to him (Maximian), he urged her with a mixture of entreaty and cajolery to betray her husband, promising her another who would be worthier of her. He asked her to allow their bedroom to be left open and only rather carelessly guarded. She promised she would do this, and then promptly reported the matter to her husband.[84]

This description of fidelity to her husband by Fausta shows her unblemished status at the side of Constantine from the time of their marriage in 307 until 314, when *De Mortibus Persecutorum* was composed. If we accept that a number of cameos are not earlier works mistakenly attributed to the fourth century, but can actually be considered as Constantinian, then Fausta is shown accompanying Constantine on the so-called Leiden cameo in the Koninklijk Penningkabinet in Leiden (Plate 6b), which has been dated between 310 and 315, roughly the same period in which Lactantius' wrote.[85] It is unanimously accepted that the two figures in the central position represent an imperial bridal couple.[86] Zadocks and Jitta convincingly note that 'the woman, by her veiled head and the fertility symbols – corn-ear and poppy – in her hand, suggests Juno Pronuba or, in any case, a bride', and that 'from ancient times, the motif of a man and a veiled woman together in a chariot signifies a bridal procession'.[87] Whether the woman behind the emperor should be identified as Claudia –

[84] Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*: ed. and Eng. trans. Creed 1984, 47.30; see above, page 18.

[85] For the problems and difficulties in assessing Constantinian art, see Elsner 2006: 255-277.

[86] For further discussion on the various interpretations, and bibliography, see Drijvers 1992a: 192-193; Pohlsander 1984: 96-97, fig. III.10.

[87] Zadocks and Jitta 1966: 91.

Constantine's paternal grandmother – or as Livia – wife of Augustus – and the boy standing in front of the imperial couple, as Crispus – Constantine's only child by then – is a matter of subjective interpretation of the sources.[88] But it seems almost certain that the woman should not be associated with Helena. Agate sculpture in relief, as Zadoks and Jitta remark, was a medium for conveying imperial messages.[89] And as we have seen so far, Helena does not appear – either in textual or visual documentation – as part of Constantine's imperial propagandistic agenda.

Helena's name has also been associated with a second cameo in the Stadtbibliothek in Trier, known as the Ada cameo, which has been variously dated between 317 and 323.[90] Kaiser, Zadocks and Jitta argue that the five portrait busts depicted on the Ada cameo (Plate 6a) represent from left to right: Helena (A), Constantine (B), Constantine II (C), Fausta (D), and Crispus (E). They believe that it was carved in 317, the year that Constantine's two sons were acclaimed Caesars, and the year before Constantine's third son was born.[91] Wegner, however, suggests a date between 318 and 323, before the birth of Constantine's fourth son – which Wegner places in 323 rather than in 320 – and identifies the portraits as Helena, Constantine, Constantius II, Fausta, and Constantine II.[92]

While it has been generally accepted that the two portraits in position A and D should be seen as female, only the figure at the far left (A) is clearly depicted – in my view – as female, shown with the same attributes as the central female figure in the Leiden cameo: a veil and a laurel wreath. If we accept that the figures A and B were intended to function as likenesses of Fausta and Constantine, then the remaining three portraits should be identified

[88] Bastet 1968: 2-22; Zadoks and Jitta 1966: 91-93.

[89] Zadoks and Jitta 1966: 91, 100.

[90] For further discussion on the various interpretations, and bibliography, see Drijvers 1992a: 191-192; Pohlsander 1984: 93-95, fig. III.9.

[91] Kaiser 1964: 24-35; Zadocks and Jitta 1966: 98-99.

[92] Wegner 1984: 127.

as Constantine's three sons: Crispus (D), Constantine II (E), and Constantius II (C). The inclusion of Constantius II suggests a possible date for the cameo to the year 324, when Constantine's youngest son was elevated to the rank of Caesar. Constantius II's elevation took place soon after his father's victory over Licinius, and, hence, the cameo should be considered as an early work of Constantine's sole rule, celebrating and reflecting his aspirations to ensconce his family as the ruling dynasty. This would seem to be corroborated by other modifications to Constantine's iconography that express his new ideological policies. From the end of the 324, Constantine was illustrated on his coins not with a laurel wreath, but a diadem.[93] The fact that in the cameo the emperor's portrait retains the laurel wreath indicates that it was carved before 325. The figure in position D is shown as equal to the emperor, and so it should be identified as Crispus, Constantine's eldest son who had significantly contributed in his father's victory over Licinius. The fact that he is depicted larger than his half-brothers is presumably intended to reflect the difference in their age and his higher status. Crispus was about twenty four years old in 324, Constantine II was eight, and Constantius II was seven. This order, of rank determined by age, is attested as well on other representations of Constantine's sons.[94]

At the same time the cameo was fabricated (324), a new series of copper coins (folles) were struck in Thessaloniki in honour of Fausta (Plate 7b).[95] The bust of Fausta is on the obverse, with her hair gathered in a knot on her neck and accompanied by the legend, *FAVSTA N(obilissima) F(emina)*. The reverse bears an eight-pointed star in a laurel wreath.

[93] Harrison 1967: 90; MacCormack 1981: 189; Wright 1987: 505; Zadocks and Jitta 166: 95.

[94] Three double *solidi* dated between 321 and 326, see Grierson 1996: 140-142; Zadocks and Jitta 1966: 96, fig.4; a column capital and a glass bowl dated between 324 and 326, see Pohlsander 1984: 91-93.

[95] Bruun 1966: 26, 493-494, no.49.

An identical coin was minted simultaneously in Thessaloniki for Helena (Plate 8a-b).[96] Since coins functioned not only as economic tokens but also as media communicating current imperial ideologies, this is the first testimony to Helena being part of her son's political strategies. By elevating his mother Constantine automatically altered the story of his birth. It was a political act in which, as Leadbetter suggests, Constantine 'asserted his legitimacy over his half-brothers who otherwise could exercise a powerful dynastic counter-claim to his tenure of imperial office'.[97]

For those who were unable to read the legends on the coins of the two women it would have been almost impossible to distinguish the coins of Fausta from those of Helena. Even their hairstyle is almost identical, varying only in the fact that Fausta's hair is wavy but Helena's straight. It could easily be suggested here that both women might in fact have worn their hair in the same way. But the fact that the same hairstyle continued to be used on Fausta's Augusta coins, but not on Helena's (Plates 9b, 11-15), makes clear that this

[96] Whether the coin referred to Helena, Constantine's mother, or Helena, Crispus' wife, was an issue unresolved for many years among the scholarly community. Though Maurice at first assigned the coin to Helena the elder and to the years between 313 and 324, he later altered his view, arguing that the coin presents Helena the younger, and that it is dated between 323 and 324 (see Maurice 1908: 91, pl. VIII, no. 1; Maurice 1911: 452-454, 456, no. XIII, pl. XIV, no. 5). The second assumption was followed by Alföldi and Kienast (see Alföldi 1959/60: 82-84; Kienast 1990: 302). Any identification of the coin with Helena the younger, however, is not convincing, and any connections between Thessaloniki and Crispus cannot be attested, for Crispus, as we have already seen, soon after his elevation to the rank of the Caesar took residence in Trier as commander of Gaul. Pohlsander has correctly pointed out that no source confirms that Helena the younger was granted the title of *nobilissima femina*, that no other coins were minted in her honour, and that comparable coins of Fausta, Constantine's wife, were issued by the same mint of Thessaloniki and at the same time (see Pohlsander 1995: 179). A date between 318 and 319, as suggested by Bruun, is not possible (see Bruun 1966: 493-494, 503-505, nos. 48 and 50, pl. 15, no. 50). The control of the eastern mints of the empire was under Licinius' authority between the yeas 308 and 324. Since coins communicated certain aspects of imperial ideology, there is no reason why Licinius would have chosen to promote portraits of the members of Constantine's family. The Helena *nobilissima femina* coins are most safely to be dated sometime in 324, soon after Constantine became sole ruler of the Roman Empire.

[97] Leadbetter 1998: 81.

particular coiffure was a characteristic of Fausta's external, recognised appearance. Being the leading lady in Constantine's court, and already a *nobilissima femina* from the time of her marriage, Fausta's portrait type would presumably been the most appropriate to be employed for the needs of Helena's coins as a visual confirmation of her elevation to an equal position to Fausta's. The marking of Helena as a prominent member of Constantine's court, and eventually an Augusta, had now begun. On this basis, associations of her name with works of imperial art made before 324 must be re-considered, and are unlikely to be correct.[98]

The simultaneous elevation of Fausta and Helena to the status of Augusta does not imply that the authority of the former was subordinated to the latter. Each of them had her own symbolic role to play in Constantine's ideological agenda for the well-being of his dynasty. Their promotion was celebrated with parallel issues of solidi and medallions struck in the empire's imperial mints (formerly tetrarchic and diarchic): Thessaloniki, Nicomedia, Sirmium, Rome, Ticinum, and Trier (Plates 9.b, 10-15). Both women had guaranteed dynastic stability: Helena for having given birth to Constantine – the founder of the dynasty – and Fausta for having provided heirs to the throne, and hence, securing the continuation of Constantine's dynastic imperial line. Therefore, their presence on coinage was associated with appropriate virtues, such as the prosperity (*felicitas*), piety (*pietas*), hope (*spes*), health (*salus*), and security (*securitas*) of the empire. The representation of empresses on coinage, though not unusual in the Roman imperial tradition, was not always employed. The absence of such examples is particularly evident during the years of the first Tetrarchs (293-306), whose political agenda had promoted a new model of imperial rulership: collaborative rule.[99] Therefore, the re-introduction of female iconography on coinage during the years of

[98] The fragmentary cameo in the Rőmisch-Germanischen Museum in Cologne cannot support any sound interpretation, see Bracker 1974: 103-108; Brandenburg 1972: 123-154.

[99] Smith 1985: 216.

Constantine placed the empress' importance for imperial ideology once more at the forefront. Having been presented as symbols of fertility, stability, and harmony, Fausta and Helena functioned as promoters of Constantine's monarchical and dynastical aspirations.

Seen within this context, Fausta's gold medallion issued in Trier in 324 is of particular interest (Plate 9b).[100] The bust of the empress and her name are shown on the obverse. This is the only evidence of Fausta's full name: *FLAVIA MAXIMA FAVSTA AVGVSTA*. On the reverse, Fausta is shown nimbate, and sits on a throne with a child in her lap; she is acclaimed by Felicitas holding a caduceus and by Pietas, and at her feet are two genii, each with a wreath. The legends read: *PIETAS AVGVSTAE*. This is a unique iconography, with no earlier or contemporary equivalents. The nimbus, a symbol of divine imperial rule, was firstly seen in a radiated form on coins of Antoninus Pius (138-161). After a break of many years from the period of the Antonine emperors, the nimbus was adopted by Constantine on the coinage of himself and his family, shown without rays this time but as a clear circlet.[101] This elaborate iconography – which was obviously carefully designed – not only hails Fausta's role as mother, but also implies the potential influence and authority she could exercise by exploiting the virtues attributed to her as an exemplary model of womanhood.[102] This can also be detected on the gold solidus of Crispus, struck in Trier at the same time as Fausta's gold medallion (Plate 9a).[103] On the reverse, Crispus is shown clasping hands with his half-brother, Constantine II. Between them stands Fausta with her hands on their shoulders. The inscription, *FELIX PROGENIES CONSTANTINI AVG*, celebrates Crispus and Constantine II's descent from Constantine. The inclusion of Fausta could be seen

[100] Bruun 1966: 203, no. 443.

[101] Stevenson 1889: 575.

[102] Varner notes that female imperial depictions 'underscore the fact that empresses and other imperial women frequently wielded enormous power and influence in their own right'. Varner 1995: 187.

[103] Bruun 1966: 203, no. 442.

as a symbol of Concordia and harmony between the two Caesars, overshadowing the fact that they were not both borne by her. Those two coins are, therefore, remarkable both in terms of iconography and of the authoritative potential that an empress – Fausta, in this particular case – could exercise in the court of Constantine. It is worth mentioning here that there are no equivalent coins for Helena from the mint of Trier. Though there is always the possibility that such coinage did exist but has not survived, this observation cannot be used in any conclusive way.

In the study of images – both numismatic and statuary – of Fausta and Helena, I do not focus on stylistic or physiognomic issues as they both tend to be subjective and often misleading. In contrast, constructive conclusions may be drawn from a close examination of the hairstyles of the two women, as they may have been the only part of their image which corresponded to their appearance in real life.[104] It is interesting that while Fausta's coiffure remains the same in all her coin types, in Helena's case there are apparent differentiations. Taking as more representative examples the solidi and medallions (324-326), four general portrait types existed for Helena. In Type A the diadem seems to separate her hair into two parts (Plates 11a, 12a, 13a, 16A). In Type B her hair is elaborately dressed (Plate 12a). This particular type has two variations, which – though they appear almost identical on coinage – are visible on statuary images. In variation B1, a single big twist of hair begins from the neck and is brought on the top of head, covering part of the diadem (Plate 16.B1), while in B2, a slight difference can be noted (Plate 16.B2). Type C is similar to Type A, but the diadem is placed differently on the head without separating Helena's hair into two parts (Plates 14a, 16.C). Type D, the so-called 'turban-like' hairdo, is very different from the previous three. Her hair is combed into two big twists wound around her head with a diadem in the middle (Plate 10a).

[104] Fejfer 2007: 352.

It is striking that within such a short period of only two years (324-326), there was a simultaneous circulation in the empire – both west and east – of four different portrait types for Helena. Three of these types (A, B, C) continued to be used on Helena's silver coinage until her death around 328 (Plate 16). Type D appears to be very rare, as the only extant example is her bronze medallion from Rome dated between 324 and 326. Despite the differences between them, all four types share a common feature: the use of the plain Constantinian diadem.[105] Therefore, whatever Helena's actual coiffure was, she was always shown wearing a diadem as an attribute of her rank as Augusta. The coinage of Fausta, on the contrary, clearly shows that Constantine's wife had not adopted the diadem, except in a single case. This was an equivalent issue, of bronze medallion, for Fausta from the mint in Rome between 324 and 326 (Plate 10b). The Augusta is represented not with her usual coiffure, but with a diadem and her hair combed into a single big twist and worn in an identical way to Helena's Type B1. The question naturally arises of how and why these portrait types were created and selected for Helena and Fausta. Its answer, however, remains unknown and goes beyond the ambitions of this investigation, as we know hardly anything about the administrative process involved in the production of the imperial image on coins.[106]

It is apparent that the bronze medallions from Rome should be seen as exceptions to the way that the two women were normally depicted on coins, and perhaps as special issues – probably commissioned for the celebrations of Constantine's *vicennalia* (326). With or without a diadem though, Fausta's position in Constantine's court it is unlikely to have been seen as subsidiary to Helena's. Epigraphic evidence dated from the same period addresses Fausta as the pious (*piissima*) and honoured (*venerari*) Augusta, wife (*uxori*) of Constantine;

[105] Smith 1997: 177.

[106] It is generally admitted that more die studies are needed for a better understanding of the minting activities and the transformation of images through copying. Elkins 2009: 32-35.

and Helena as the wife (*castissima coniugi*) of the divine Constantius Chlorus, progenitor (*procreatrici*) of Constantine, and grandmother (*avia*) of the Caesars.[107] Both women were, thus, receiving honours of equal status and were apparently appreciated as an integral part for the harmony of Constantine's dynasty.[108] Such inscriptions undoubtedly accompanied sculptured images of the two women. Epigraphic documentation was important not only for providing the dedicator's name and the reasons for producing the statue, but also for indicating to the viewers how they were to perceive the empresses.[109] Taking into consideration that in Late Antiquity imperial honorific portraits were not set up by the emperor, but either by private citizens or public administrative bodies, it is interesting that in two sculptured representations of Helena, the empress is shown seated (Plate 23.1-2), a type which was normally only used for the rulers as indication of their power.[110]

The identification of statuary portraits of both Fausta and Helena has long posed many difficult problems for scholars, because none of the statues attributed to them have been found with an inscription, which would provide undisputed evidence.[111] In Fausta's case, any identification is even more difficult because after she was put to death in 326, her memory was condemned. Such official damnations were always accompanied by the mutilation and destruction of any visual and epigraphic evidence that could remind viewers of the person condemned.[112] Thereafter, Helena's image was particularly enhanced. Archaeological evidence confirms that Fausta's name was eradicated in commemorative

[107] *CIL* X 517; *CIL* X 678.

[108] Varner 1995: 187.

[109] Fejfer 2007: 30; Rose 1997: 109.

[110] Fejfer 2007: 46-48, 333; eight of the ten dedicatory inscriptions found in Fausta's and Helena's name confirm their commission by municipal groups (*CIL*: IX 2446, X 678, X 1483), and members of political organisations (*CIL*: VI 1134, VI 1135, VI 36903, VI 36950, VIII 1638, X 517).

[111] For a list of the statues and the difficulties in their identification, see Wegner 1984: 143-148, 152-155.

[112] Stewart 1999: 159-167; Varner 2004: 12-23.

inscriptions and replaced with the name of Helena.[113] None of the statuary evidence which has been identified as a possible likeness of Fausta bears close similarities with the empress' portraiture on coins issued between 324 and 326 (Plate 28.1-4). Such absence of statuary suggests that images were likely destroyed and replaced with images of Helena, who had remained sole Augusta in Constantine's court. At this juncture, the analysis turns to a more detailed description of Helena's portrait statues as a means of achieving a comprehensive overview of her growing prominence as the progenitor of the imperial family. Sculptural evidence act as a supplementary source to observations already made through the examination of numismatic and epigraphic resources. The question raised here is how Helena's self-portrait stood out from the crowd (i.e. private female portraits).

Despite the difficulties and the lack of precision, a comparison of fourth-century female sculptured portraits with the coin portraiture of Helena shows that Constantine's strong concern for creating distance from his contemporaries by promoting a dynastic and monarchical imperial image is also visible in the portraiture of his mother.[114] A considerable number of sculptured portraits correspond with Helena's various portrait types on coins, providing evidence of a parallel development. Classification of the portraits based on the physiognomy is very difficult, not only because of the variations that occur – mainly due to the fact that they were the products of different workshops – but also because, in most cases, the original characteristics of the face – especially nose and chin – are damaged. On the contrary, details in the hairstyle indicate that all of these statuary images bear – or were intended to bear – a diadem and, therefore, should be considered as possible likenesses of Helena (Plates 20-23). None of the other female images that Von Heintze dated to Constantine's reign bear similar attributes to Helena. Therefore, the use of the diadem would

[113] *CIL* X 678.

[114] Fejfer 2007: 351-356; Smith 1985: 219.

immediately have distinguished Helena's portraits from portraits of private women (Plate 27).[115]

To Type A belongs an over-life-sized head of unknown provenance, now in Ny Carlsberg (Plate 20.1). It was originally placed on a statue, and its size is additional evidence of its function as a likeness of an imperial persona.[116] The bust in Berlin (Plate 20.2), though much different from the portrait in Ny Carlsberg, should also be considered a possible likeness of Helena. In terms of hairstyle, it corresponds to Type A, and in terms of style, as Wegner suggests, it is close to other statuary images of Helena of Type C and D.[117] Two portraits have been classified in Type B2. The close similarities between the two life-sized heads in Boston (Plate 21.1) and Rome (Plate 21.2) indicate two possibilities: either the one copies the other or both are replicas of a prototype. In either case, their resemblance could have been positively interpreted as proof of the imperial status of their subject. However, the lack of any evidence that a metallic diadem – now lost – might have been part of the original hairstyle, means that they cannot convincingly be related to the two portraits to Helena.[118] In the case, though, that the two heads were intended to portray private female portraits, then they presumably reflected the trends set by Helena. Wood notes that 'such highly visible works of art would have influenced the taste of the general public'.[119] This is likely the case for the two heads in Athens (Plates 21.3 and 27.6), which have been classified as Type B1.[120] Their hairstyles are not identical, but they do confirm that this particular style was in fashion. The first should be considered as a likeness of Helena, because in contrast with the second, it seems to have been decorated with a metallic diadem. Therefore, even if not all of the

[115] Von Heintze 1971: 62-72.

[116] Rose 1997: 113.

[117] Wegner 1984: 143-144.

[118] Wood 1986: 4; Wegner 1984: 144-146.

[119] Wood 1986: 1.

[120] Von Heintze 1971: 65.

portraits of Type B are actual likenesses of Helena, they should still be seen as responses to her portrait type. To Type C belongs a life-sized head in Ny Carlsberg (Plate 22).[121] The slight difference in hairstyle from Helena's coins should not encourage us to reject it as a portrait of the empress. The diadem is sufficient proof of its identification. The statuary images of Type D (Plate 23) are unchallenged likenesses of the empress, because of their striking resemblance to Helena's bronze medallion from Rome (Plate 10a).

Seven more sculptured portraits have been identified as images of Helena (Plate 26), but none of them can be considered as such because their external characteristics – especially hairstyle – do not correspond to Helena's coin portraits. Of course, a statuary portrait type was not always necessarily represented on coins.[122] The fact that there is no complete correspondence between coin and sculptured portrait types may suggest, as Fejfer remarks, that 'the creation of imperial portrait types was not restricted to official commission only'.[123] Whatever was the case for these seven female portraits, we cannot make any precise identification. Stylistic comparisons with contemporary male portraits, as Wood suggests, could have been employed here as an alternative approach.[124] Similarities in iconography and style are often typical of representations of members of the same family, especially imperial couples.[125] None of the seven portraits, however, finds comparable matches with Constantine's images. Only the portrait in Nimes (Plate 26.4) has been identified as Constantinian, and it has been suggested that it presents distant similarities to the seated statue of Helena in Rome (Plate 23.1).[126] The portraits in Vienna (Plate 26.1), Rome (Plate 26.2), Fulda (Plate 26.3), and Pisa (Plate 26.7) have been interpreted as post-Constantinian,

[121] Wegner 1984: 144.

[122] Fejfer 2007: 411.

[123] Fejfer 2007: 416-416.

[124] Wood 1986: 74.

[125] Smith 1985: 214; Varner 1995: 191; Varner 2004: 231.

[126] Wegner 1984: 145.

while the portraits in Tunis (Plate 26.5) and Paris (Plate 26.6) as second- and third-century commissions respectively.[127] Clearly, associations of Helena's name with these seven statues are unlikely to be correct.

The material evidence seen so far – numismatic, epigraphic, and sculptural – for both Fausta and Helena does not demonstrate the support for Christianity by the new regime. The portraiture of the empresses continues earlier imperial patterns, both in terms of iconography and symbolism – an aspect which has inevitably raised issues of precise identification, particularly in the case of statuary images. The first work of art which clearly disseminated the affiliations of Constantine and his family to Christianity is the bronze medallion in Nantes, dated between 326 and 328 (Plate 19). The monogram of Christ, *Chi Rho*, is depicted with the busts of Constantine and Helena. Below the imperial couple are the busts of Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans.[128] Wegner's view, that the figures represent Constantine with Fausta, and their three sons (excluding Crispus), should be rejected.[129] The hairstyle of the female figure corresponds to Helena's portrait Type A. On this basis, the medallion should be dated after Fausta and Crispus' suspicious deaths in 326, when – as Odahl suggests – the imperial house sought to reaffirm its support for Christianity, maybe as a way of demonstrating repentance.[130] This is the first time that the female members of Constantine's family – mother, mother-in-law, sister, and daughter – unanimously performed

[127] Wegner 1984: 143, 145-148.

[128] L'Orange 1984: 123.

[129] Wegner 1984: 145, 153.

[130] Odahl 2004: 209; Woods suggests that Helena had played a key role in Fausta's death: 'she was no more than Constantine's confidential agent, chosen first to persuade Fausta to have an abortion, and then to act as her assistant during the fatal procedure itself. It was in this manner, therefore, that Constantine sought to minimise public knowledge of this whole sordid affair, by entrusting his mother with the more sensitive roles. It is little wonder that she felt the need to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land shortly thereafter, probably in autumn 326.' Woods 1998: 79. By contrast, Holum argues that the reasons for and nature of Helena's journey to the Holy Land should not be interpreted as expiation for a domestic crisis. See Holum 1990: 66-81.

actions of Christian piety. Constantia and Constantina were baptised, while Helena and Eutropia undertook pilgrimages to the Holy Land.[131] Whether they acted on their own initiative or as Constantine's political instruments, of most significance here is the fact that the traditional Roman role for imperial women as ideal models of womanhood was Christianised.[132] Illustrative is Eusebios of Caesarea's *Life of Constantine* – written over some time and finished not long after Constantine's death (337) – where Helena is not merely praised for being the progenitor of Constantine's dynasty, but also for her religiosity, piety, devotion, faith and gratitude to God for favouring her son and grandchildren as his chosen representatives on earth:

> This lady, when she made it her business to pay what piety owed to the all-sovereign God, and considered that she ought to complete in prayers her thank offerings for her son, so great an emperor, and his sons the most Godbeloved Caesars her grandchildren, came, though old, with the eagerness of youth to apply her outstanding intellect to enquiring about the wondrous land and to inspect with imperial concern the eastern provinces with their communities and peoples. As she accorded suitable adoration to the footsteps of the Saviour, following the prophetic word which says, 'Let us adore in the place where his feet have stood' (Ps 132/133:7), she forthwith bequeathed to her successors also the fruit of her personal piety.[133]

In other words, Christian virtues were attached to Helena's traditional role as progenitor of Constantine's dynasty, transforming the empress' ideological role to one

[131] Odahl 2004: 209-220.

[132] Lenski suggests that Helena and Eutropia may originally have journeyed to the Holy Land despite Constantine rather than on his behalf, see Lenski 2004:114-117. Much ingenuity has been spent on the question of whether Constantine was a genuine convert to Christianity or a religious syncretist and a political pragmatist, as scholars tend to follow different lines of interpretation of the sources, both literary and visual. Undoubtedly, Constantine was concerned with securing the unity and prosperity of his empire on religious grounds other than the Roman pagan traditions. See Baynes 1929; Grégoire 1930; Piganiol 1932; Burkhardt 1949; Jones 1962; Alföldi 1969; MacMullen 1971; Dörries 1972; Cameron and Hall 1999; Odahl 2004.

[133] Eusebios of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*: ed. *PG* 20 (1857), 1101; Eng. trans. Cameron and Hall 1999, 137.42.

embedded within the context of a Christian rule by the Grace of God. Within this Christian vision for empire, the emperor and the empress (mother) participate as co-rulers.[134] This change was introduced with Helena, who is fairly characterised as the first Christian empress, and it is on this basis that the bronze medallion in question should be interpreted. The idea of a Christian co-rulership between the imperial couple, which Eusebios elaborately describes throughout his narrative on Helena, is also attested in the *Liber Pontificalis*.[135] The text records that Constantine and Helena dedicated the Shrine of Saint Peter (Petrine Shrine) at the basilica of Saint Peter (Basilica Beato Petro Apostolo) in Rome, where the bones of the apostle were deposited and the imperial commission was commemorated with a gold cross, seventy kilograms in weight, engraved with black enamel letters: 'Constantine Augustus and Helena Augusta. He surrounds this house with a royal hall gleaming with equal splendor'.[136]

Clearly, literature and material culture reveal increased interest in Christian matters on behalf of the imperial family. Architectural remains further broaden our knowledge of the extent that Helena and her descendants expressed their devotion. The basilica of Saints Peter and Marcellinus (Santi Marcellino e Pietro) dates from this time. It was erected on Helena's estate in Rome by order of Constantine, while Helena had transformed a large hall inside her palace, *Palatium Sessorianum*, into a chapel (Basilica Heleniana, Basilica in Palatio Sessoriano, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme) as a place of worship for the imperial court.[137] According to Krautheimer, the design of the chapel fits the concept and function of a court chapel. Apart from the fact that it is highly monumental, the three transverse bays divide the space into three sections in order to accommodate separately the servants, the court, and the

[134] Angelova 2004: 1-6.

[135] On Eusebios' treatment of Helena, see below, page 51.

[136] *Liber Pontificalis*: Eng. trans. Davis 1989, 19.17; *Constantinus Augustus et Helena Augusta hanc domum regalem [auro exormanus quam] simili fulgore coruscans aula circumdat*. See Odahl 2004: 209 and note 11.

[137] *Liber Pontificalis*: Eng. trans. Davis 1989, 23.26-24.27; Drijvers 1992a: 30-34; Odahl 2004: 151-152, 335 and note 45.

altar.[138] McLynn notes that Constantine and members of his family never attended a service in the cathedral of any city of the empire, at least not before 337. Instead they established a palatine devotional routine, organised around spaces such as Helena's chapel in Rome. From Constantine's death onwards, however, his sons and successors took their religious observations beyond the palace chapels and into the churches.[139]

The first attested example of imperial churchgoing corresponds with the date – sometime in the later fourth century – when the north hall of the church of Aquileia was replaced by a much grander edifice equipped with a monumental forecourt and interior colonnade. This time, Athanasius of Alexandria confirms the participation of the western emperor, Constans (337-350), Constantine's third and youngest son, in a service at the church, which was still under construction.[140] The original religious complex was erected sometime between 313 – after the Edict of Milan – and 319/20 under local patronage. An inscription found in the south hall of the church commemorates Bishop Theodore (308-319/20) and the Christian community of Aquileia as the church's donors.[141] The male and female portraits, depicted on a series of panels in the mosaic floor of the south hall of the church, have been interpreted as the representations of those local donors (Plate 5a-k).[142] Kähler's view that eight of these portraits should be seen likenesses of members of Constantine's family – Constantine (Plate 5b), Helena (Plate 5c), Fausta, Constantine II, Constantius II, Constans (Plate 5h), Crispus (Plate 5i), and Constantia – is far from

[138] Krautheimer 1975: 51.

[139] McLynn 2004: 236-243.

[140] McLynn 2004: 243; White 1997: 203.

[141] 'Theodore, Happy One, with the help of the almighty God and of the flock bequeathed to you from heaven, you have made everything happily and dedicated it gloriously'. White 1997: 207-208.

[142] Carandini 1962: 310; Dorigo 1971: 174; Krautheimer 1975: 43-45; As far as I am aware, this is the first extant example of visual representation of donors in church decoration.

convincing.[143] The portraits are not identified by any inscription, do not bear any imperial insignia, and are shown alongside allegorical figures, such as the Seasons (Plate 5e).[144] Though Aquileia had served as Constantine's residence no evidence associates the imperial family with the construction of the church.[145] Its architecture – two main halls with an atrium and a transverse hall between them – indicates a modest edifice very different from the palace basilicas erected with imperial patronage in Trier and Rome.[146]

1.3 Posthumous commemorations of Helena (AD 337-340)

Almost a decade after the death of Helena (328) a series of posthumous commemorative copper coins (folles) was minted in Trier, Rome, and Constantinople (337-340) by her grandchildren. The earlier, plain Constantinian diadem of Helena's portraiture had been replaced with a crown. The crown's variations enable three portrait types to be distinguished in Helena's posthumous coinage (Plate 17). The crown is first seen on the coinage of Constantine's sister, Constantia, who, after the death of Fausta, helped him raise his sons.[147] Coins were struck for her between 326 and 327 in the mint of Constantinople (Plate 18a), Constantine's new imperial residence from 326 onwards. Constantia was honoured with the rank of *Nobilissima Femina*, and on the reverse of the coins she was identified as the emperor's sister (*SOROR CONSTANTINI AVG*). This type of portrait was not introduced on Helena's coinage during her life-time, but only on the posthumous issues. Two sculptured portraits found in Rome (Plate 24) present a female figure wearing the crown

[143] Kähler 1962: 13 and ills. 2-6; Kähler 1972: 51-52 and pl. B.

[144] Carandini 1962: 311; Dorigo 1971: 174.

[145] Attested dates of Constantine in Aquileia: 318 (May 23-July 30, October 12) and 326 (November 22). Barnes 1982, 68-80.

[146] Krautheimer 1975: 43-51.

[147] Odahl 2004: 209-210.

type attributed to the Constantinian imperial women, but whether they should be considered as contemporary likenesses of any of those women, or as actual posthumous representations of Helena, cannot be determined with any certainty.[148] Of particular interest is the portrait in the Museo Torlonia (Plate 24.2), because it presents close similarities in style with two more sculptured portraits in the same collection (Plate 25).[149] Though in all three examples, physiognomic characteristics – nose, chin, lips – have been restored, the resemblance between them can still be seen in the shape of the eyes and eyebrows. The male portrait has been recognised variously either as Constantine I or Valentinian, or as a private portrait. If seen with the female crowned portrait (Plate 24.2), then it is likely to be Constantine. Seen though, in comparison with the second female portrait (Plate 25.2), which is represented with a much different hair style, it seems more likely to be a private portrait.[150] Therefore, no conclusive statement about the posthumous statuary images of Helena is possible.

Helena's commemorative coins should not be seen in isolation from the ones commemorating Constantine's step-mother, Theodora, issued in the same period and in the same mints by Constantine's step-brothers, as an effort to challenge the eligibility of Constantine's sons to the throne and to establish themselves as rightful heirs. The women were presented as the progenitors of each branch. Therefore, the imagery chosen for each of them aimed to disseminate different values and political aspirations. Theodora was depicted wearing a laurel wreath and accompanied with the inscription, *PIETAS ROMANA* (Plate 18b). Such attributes would immediately have made clear the intentions of Theodora's descendants to rule under earlier Roman imperial patterns, including (perhaps) the revival of pagan traditions. Helena's iconography, on the contrary, claimed continuation of Constantine's

[148] Wegner 1984: 147, 157.

[149] Wegner 1984: 125, 147.

[150] Wegner 1984: 147.

Christian rule through his sons. Her coins bear the legend *PAX ROMANA*, as a reassurance that, if rule were entrusted to the hands of Helena's descendants, the instability caused by the persecutors of Christianity would not be a threat to the prosperity of the empire and its people.[151]

Contemporary textual evidence, such as Eusebios's *Life of Constantine*, propagated the same ideals: the peaceful continuation of the new Christian order.[152] In both the preface and the conclusion of his work Eusebios emphasised that his ideal model of a Christian ruler, Constantine, continued to reign through his sons, his only legal successors (*τοὺς δ' αὐτοῦ παῖδας καὶ οὗτοι μόνους καὶ οὐδ'ἄλλους, αὐτοκράτορας καὶ Σεβαστοὺς ἀνεκάλουν*).[153] In reference to this, Cameron and Hall have noted that Eusebios' main objective, especially writing with hindsight, was to make the succession seem smooth and inevitable. He therefore tries to emphasise the uniqueness of the transition and of Constantine's continued influence, and presents the succession as a matter of natural inheritance.'[154] In the passages focused on Helena, Eusebios explicitly stressed her kin relations with Constantine and his sons. The author eulogised Helena as the ancestress of Constantine's family, who bequeathed to her descendants not only her earthly possessions, but also her religiosity and Christianity. Bearing in mind that the *Life of Constantine* should be read as a work of propaganda in the context of Eusebios' own concerns, it would not be inappropriate to suggest that Eusebios' encomiastic treatment of Helena was an individual effort by the author not just to communicate Helena's prominent position in Constantine's court, but also to enhance Helena's superiority over Theodora in the mid-fourth-century propagandist atmosphere for

[151] Drijvers 1992a: 44-53; Brubaker and Tobler 2000: 577-578.

[152] On Eusebios in general, see Wallace-Hadrill 1960; Grant 1980; Chesnut 1986: 1-174; Winkelmann 2003: 3-10; Treadgold 2007: 23-46.

[153] Eusebios of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*: ed. *PG* 20 (1857), 909-912, 1224-1229; Eng. trans. Cameron and Hall 1999, 67.1 and 180.68-182.74.

[154] Cameron and Hall 1999: 344-350.

political control.[155]

According to Eusebios, Helena was a pious and God-fearing Augusta with an outstanding intellect and absolute imperial authority as the right arm of the emperor (Text 1: D.33-35). Despite her old age, she visited the eastern provinces of the empire as a pilgrim (Text 1: B.12-13) in order to see the places that were related to Christ's death and to pray for her son and grandchildren. As a result of her pious intent, she founded and embellished religious buildings. She also travelled there, as an imperial dignitary (Text 1: F.1-3), in order to inspect with concern the communities and their citizens, on whom she bestowed donations and performed good deeds.[156] As a result of her modesty, humility and devotion to God, Helena was rewarded with an orderly and calm life in both body and soul. The capstone of Eusebios' praise of Helena is his intention to sanctify her, by presenting her as becoming an angel in the entourage of Christ after her death (Text 1: J.21-23). For Eusebios, Helena was worthy of unfading memory (Text 1: L.11-12) and she should always be recorded in all narratives of Constantine's life. A few decades after Eusebios' composition, the Eusebian model of Helena was reworked and enhanced with further elements of sanctity by subsequent generations of authors. This is the subject of the second chapter of my thesis, which examines the circumstances under which the Helena-legend emerged and was disseminated in both the western and eastern territories of the late Roman world.

[155] On the form and the meaning of Eusebios' work, see Barnes 1989: 94-123; Cameron 2000: 72-88; Cameron 1997: 145-174; Mango 1998: 58 and note 45.

[156] For an overview of recent scholarship on whether Helena's journey should be interpreted as *iter principis* or as *peregrinatio religiosa*, see Drijvers 2011: 137-143.

1.4 Textual sources

TEXT 1: Eusebios of Caesarea (c. 260 – 339/340)[157]

A

III.42 This lady, when she made it her business to pay what piety owed to the all-sovereign God, and considered that she ought to complete in prayers her thank offerings for her son, so great an emperor, and his sons the most Godbeloved Caesars her grandchildren, came, though old, with the eagerness of youth to apply her outstanding intellect to enquiring about the wondrous land and to inspect with imperial concern the eastern provinces with their communities and peoples. As she accorded suitable adoration to the footsteps of the Saviour, following the prophetic word which says, 'Let us adore in the place where his feet have stood' (Ps 132/133:7), she forthwith bequeathed to her successors also the

B

Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ αὕτη τῷ παμβασιλεῖ Θεῷ τὸ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς διαθέσεως ἀποδοῦναι χρέος ἔργον ἐποιήσατο, ὑφ' υἱῷ τε βασιλεῖ τοσούτῳ, παισί τε αὐτοῦ καίσαρσι θεοφιλεστάτοις ἑαυτῆς ἐκγόνοις, τὰ χαριστήρια δεῖν ᾠήθη δι' εὐχῶν ἀποπληρῶσαι, ἦκε δὴ σπεύδουσα νεανικῶς ἡ πρέσβυς, ὑπερβαλλούσῃ φρονήσει τὴν ἀξιάγαστον ἀνιστορήσουσα γῆν, ἔθνη τε τὰ ἑῷα και δήμους ὁμοῦ καὶ λαοὺς βασιλικῷ προμηθείᾳ ἐποψομένη. Ὡς δέ τοῖς βήμασι τοῖς σωτηρίοις τὴν πρέπουσαν ἀπεδίδου προσκύνησιν, ἀκολούθως προφητικῷ λόγῳ, φάντι, «Προσκυνήσωμεν εἰς τον τόπον οὗ ἔστησαν οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ», τῆς οἰκείας εὐσεβείας καρπὸν καὶ τοῖς μετέπειτα παραχρῆμμα κατελίμπανεν.

[157] Eusebios of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*: ed. *PG* 20 (1857), 1101-1108; Eng. trans. Cameron and Hall 1999, 137-139. A more recent edition of Eusebios' text can be found in Winkelmann 1975:95-97.

fruit of her personal piety.

III.43 She immediately consecrated to the God she adored two shrines, one by the cave of his birth, the other on the mountain of the ascension. For the God with us allowed himself to suffer even birth for our sake, and the place of his birth in the flesh was announced among the Hebrews by the name Bethlehem. Thus then the most devout empress beautified the Godbearer's pregnancy with wonderful monuments, in various ways embellishing the sacred cave there. The emperor himself shortly afterwards honoured this too with imperial dedications, supplementing his mother's works of art with treasures of silver and gold and embroidered curtains. Again the emperor's mother erected on the Mount of Olives the monument to the journey into heaven of the Saviour of the Universe in lofty

Αὐτίκα δ' οὖν τῷ προσκυνηθέντι Θεῷ δύο νεὼς ἀφιέρου, τὸν μέν πρὸς τῷ τῆς γεννήσεως ἄντρῳ,τὸν δ' ἐπὶ τῆς ἀναλήψεως ὄρους. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ γέννησιν ὑπὸ γῆν ὁ μεθ' ἡμῶν Θεὸς δι' ἡμᾶς ἠνέσχετο, καὶ τόπος αὐτοῦ τῆς ἐνσάρκου γεννήσεως, ὀνομαστὶ παρ' Ἑβραίοις Βηθλεέμ ἐκηρύττετο. Διὸ δὴ βασιλὶς ἡ θεοσεβεστάτη, τῆς θεοτόκου τὴν κύησιν μνήμασι θαυμαστοῖς κατεκόσμει, παντοίως τὸ τῇδε ἱερὸν ἄντρον φαιδρύνουσα· βασιλεὺς δέ μικρὸν ὕστερον βασιλικοῖς ἀναθήμασι καὶ ταύτην ἐτίμα, τοῖς ἐξ ἀργύρου κιὶ χρυσοῦ κειμηλίοις, παραπετάσμασί τε ποικίλοις τὰς τῆς μητρὸς ἐπαύξων φιλοκαλίας. Πάλιν δ' ἡ μέν βασιλέως μήτηρ τῆς εἰς οὐρανοὺς πορείας τοῦ τῶν ὅλων Σωτῆρος, ἐπὶ τοῦ τῶν ἐλαιῶν ὄρους τὴν μνήμην ἐπηρμέναις οἰκοδομίαις ἀνύψου, ἄνω πρὸς ταῖς ἀκρωρείαις παρὰ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ὄρους κορυφὴν, ἱερὸν οἶκον ἐκκλησίας ἀνεγείρουσα, νεών τε· κἀνταῦθα λόγος ἀληθὴς κατέχει, ἐν αὐτῷ ἄντρῳ τοὺς αὐτοῦ θιασώτας μυεῖν τὰς ἀποῤῥήτους τελετὰς τὸν τῶν ὅλων Σωτῆρα. Βασιλεὺς δέ κἀνταῦθα παντοίοις ἀναθήμασί τε καὶ

buildings; up by the ridges at the peak of the whole mountain she raised the sacred house of the church, and constructed just there a shrine for prayer to the Saviour who chose to spend his time on that spot, since just there a true report maintains that in the cave the Saviour of the Universe initiated the members of his guild in ineffable mysteries. There also the emperor bestowed all kinds of offerings and ornaments on the great King. These then were the two everlastingly memorable, noble and utterly beautiful dedications to her Saviour at two mystic caves, which Helena Augusta, the Godbeloved mother of the Godbeloved emperor, founded as tokens of her pious intent, her son providing her with the right arm of imperial authority. But the lady not long after reaped the due reward. She had traversed a whole lifespan amid everything good to the very portal of old age; by words and

κὸσμοις τὸν μέγαν ἐγέραιρε Βασιλέα. *Καὶ δὴ δύο ταῦτα μνήμης ἐπάξια αἰωνίου, σεμνὰ καὶ περικαλλῆ καθιερώματα, ἐπὶ δύο μυστικῶν ἄντρων Ἑλένη αὐγούστα Θεῷ τῷ αὐτῆς Σωτῆρι, θεοφιλοῦς βασιλέως θεοφιλὴς μήτηρ, εὐσεβοῦς τεκμήρια διαθέσεως ἵδρυτο, δεξιὰν αὐτῇ βασιλικῆς ἐξουσίς τοῦ παιδὸς παρασχομένου. Καρπὸν δ' ἐπάξιον ἡ πρέσβυς οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν ἀπελάμβανεν, ἀγαθοῖς μέν ἅπασι τὸν πάντα τῆς ζωῆς χρόνον ἐπ' αὐτῷ γήραος οὐδῷ διαπεραναμένη, λόγοις δέ καὶ ἔργοις τῶν σωτηρίων παραγγελμάτων εὐθαλεῖς παρασχομένη καρποὺς, κἄπειθ' οὕτω βίον εὐσταλῆ καὶ ἄλυπον, σώματος ὁμοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς ἐν ἐῤῥωμένῳ φρονήματι διανύσασα· ἐφ' οἷς καὶ τέλος εὐσεβείας ἐπάξιον, ἀγαθῶν τε παρὰ Θεοῦ ἀμοιβὴν κἀπὶ τοῦ παρόντος εὕρατο βίου.*

deeds she had produced luxurious growth from the Saviour's commandments; and then she had completed in full vigour of mind a life so orderly and calm in both body and soul, that as result she also met an end worthy of her religion and a good reward from God even in this present life.

E

III.44 As she visited the whole east in the magnificence of imperial authority, she showered countless gifts upon the citizen bodies of every city, and privately to each of those who approached her; and she made countless distributions also to the ranks of the soldiery with magnificent hand. She made innumerable gifts to the unclothed and unsupported poor, to some making gifts of money, to others abundantly supplying what was needed to cover the body. Others she set free from prison

F

Τὴν γάρτοι σύμπασαν ἑῴαν μεγαλοπρεπείᾳ βασιλικῆς ἐξουσίας ἐμπεριελθοῦσα, μυρία μέν ἀθρόως τοῖς κατὰ πόλιν ἐδωρεῖτο δήμοις, ἰδίᾳ τε τῶν προσιόντων ἑκάστῳ· μυρία δέ τοῖς στρατιωτικοῖς τάγμασι δεξιᾷ μεγαλοπρεπεῖ διένεμε, πλεῖστά θ' ὅσα πένησι γυμνοῖς καὶ ἀπεριστάτοις ἐδίδου, τοῖς μέν χρημάτων δόσεις ποιουμένη, τοῖς δέ τὰ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος σκέπην δαψιλῶς ἐπαρκοῦσα· ἑτέρους ἀπήλλαττε δεσμῶν, μετάλλων τε κακοπαθείᾳ ταλαιπωρουμένους· ἠλευθέρου τε πλεονεκτουμένους· καὶ πάλιν ἄλλους ἐξορίας ἀνεκαλεῖτο.

and from mines where they laboured in harsh conditions, she released the victims of fraud, and yet others she recalled from exile.

G H

III.45 Brilliantly though she shone in such things, she did not despise the other aspects of devotion to God. She allowed herself to be seen continually making personal visits to the church of God. She adorned the places of worship with shining treasures, not neglecting the shrines in even the smallest of towns. One might see the wonderful woman in dignified and modest attire joining the throng and manifesting reverence towards the divinity by every kind of practice dear to God.

Τοιούτοις δὴτα λαμπρυνομένη, οὐδὲ τῆς πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ὁσίας κατωλιγώρει, φοιτῶσαν μέν αὐτὴν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ παντὸς ὁρᾶσθαι παρέχουσα, λαμπροῖς δέ κατακοσμοῦσα κειμηλίοις τοὺς εὐκτηρίους οἴκους, μηδέ τοὺς ἐν ταῖς βραχυτάταις πόλεσι παρορῶσα ναούς. Ἦν οὖν ὁρᾷν τὴν θαυμασίαν, ἐν σεμνῇ καὶ εὐσταλεῖ περιβολῇ τῷ πλήθει συναγελαζομένην, τήν τε πρὸς τὸ Θεῖον εὐλάβειαν διὰ πάσης θεοφιλοῦς πράξεως ἐπιδεικνυμένην.

I J

III.46 When she had finally completed the course of a long enough life, and was called to the higher sphere, having

Ἐπεὶ δέ λοιπὸν τὰ τῆς αὐτάρκους διανύσασα ζωῆς, ἐπί τὴν κρείττονα λῆξιν ἐκαλεῖτο, σχεδόν που τῆς ἡλικίας ἀμφὶ τοὺς ὀγδοήκοντα ἐνιαυτοὺς διάρκέσασα,

lived to something like 80 years of age, when she was very near the end she made arrangements and dispositions, drawing up her last will in favour of her only son the emperor, the monarch and world-ruler, and his sons the Caesars, her own grandchildren, bequeathing to each of her issue part of her state, everything she possessed in the whole world. Having settled her affairs in this way, she finally came to the end of her life. So great a son was present and stood by her, ministering and holding her hands, so as to make it seem likely to right-thinking people that the thrice-blessed one was not dead, but had in reality undergone a transformation and removal from earthly life to heavenly. Her very soul was thus reconstituted into an incorruptible and angelic essence as she was taken up to her Saviour.

πρὸς αὐτῷ γενομένη τῷ τέλει, συνεταττετο καὶ διετίθετο ἐπὶ μονογενεῖ υἱῷ βασιλεῖ μονάρχῳ κοσμοκράτορι, παισί τε τούτου καίσαρσιν ἑαυτῆς ἐκγόνοις, τὴν ὑστάτην βουλὴν διοριζομένη, διανέμουσά τε τῶν ἐκγόνων ἑκάστῳ τὰ τῆς οἰκείας ὑπάρξεως, ὅση τις αὐτῇ καθ' ὅλης ὑπῆρξε τῆς οἰκουμένης. Καὶ δέ τοῦτον διαθεμένη τὸν τρόπον, λοιπὸν τὴν τοῦ βίου κατέλυε τελευτὴν, παρόντος αὐτῇ καὶ παρεστῶτος υἱοῦ τοσούτου, θεραπεύοντός τε καὶ τῶν χειρῶν ἐφαπτομένου· ὡς μὴ τεθνάναι εἰκότως τὴν τρισμακαρίαν τοῖς εὖ φρονοῦσι δοκεῖν, μεταβολὴν δέ καὶ μετάθεσιν ἀληθεῖ λόγῳ τῆς γεώδους ζωῆς ἐπὶ τὴν οὐράνιον ὑπομεῖναι.

<u>Ἀνεστοιχειοῦτο γοῦν αὐτῇ ψυχῇ ἐπὶ τὴν ἄφθαρτον καὶ ἀγγελικὴν οὐσίαν, πρὸς τὸν αὐτῆς ἀναλαμβανομένη Σωτῆρα.</u>

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III.47 Even the temporal dwelling of the blessed one deserved no ordinary care, so with a great guard of honour she was carried up to the imperial city, and there laid in the imperial tombs. Thus passed away the emperor's mother, one worthy of unfading memory both for her own Godloving deeds and for those of the extraordinary and astonishing offspring which arose from her. He deserves to be blessed, all else apart, for his piety to the one who bore him. So far had he made her Godfearing, though she had not been such before, that she seemed to him to have been a disciple of the common Saviour from the first; and so far had he honoured her with imperial rank that she was acclaimed in all nations and by the military ranks as *Augusta Imperatrix*, and her portrait was stamped on gold coinage. He even remitted to her authority over imperial

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Καὶ τὸ σκῆνος δὲ τῆς μακαρίας, οὐ τῆς τυχούσης ἠξιοῦτο σπουδῆς· πλείστῃ γοῦν δορυφορίᾳ ἐπὶ τὴν βασιλεύουσαν πόλιν ἀνεκομίζετο, ἐνταυθοῖ δέ ἠρίοις βασιλικοῖς ἀπετίθετο. Τοῦ μέν οὖν βασιλέως ἐτελειοῦτο ἡ μήτηρ, ἀξία ενομένη μνήμης ἀλήστου, τῶν τε αὐτῆς εἵνεκα θεοφιλῶν πράξεων, τοῦ τ' ἐξ αὐτῆς φύντος ὑπερφυοῦς καὶ παραδόξου φυτοῦ· ὅν πρὸς τοῖς ἅπασι, καὶ τῆς εἰς τὴν γειναμένην ὁσίας μακαρίζειν ἄξιον, οὕτω μέν αὐτὴν θεοσεβῆ καταστήσαντα, οὐκ οὖσαν πρότερον, ὡς αὐτῷ δοκεῖν ἐκ πρώτης τῷ κοινῷ Σωτῆρι μεμαθητεῦσθαι· οὕτωδέ ἀξιώματι βασιλικῷ τετιμηκότα, ὡς ἐν ἅπασιν ἔθνεσι, παρ' αὐτοῖς τε τοῖς στρατιωτικοῖς τάγμασιν αὐγούσταν βασιλίδα ἀναγορεύεσθαι, χρυσοῖς τε νομίσμασι καὶ τὴν αὐτῆς ἐκτυποῦσθαι εἰκόνα· ἤδη δέ καὶ θησαυρῶν βασιλικῶν παρεῖχε τὴν ἐξουσίαν, χρῆσθαι κατὰ προαίρεσιν καὶ διοικεῖν κατὰ γνώμην, ὅπως ἄν ἐθέλοι καὶ ὡς ἂν εὖ ἔχειν αὐτῇ νομίζοιτο ἕκαστα, τοῦ παιδὸς αὐτὴν κἀν τούτοις διαπρεπῆ καὶ ἀξιοζήλωτον πεποιημένου. Διὸ τῶν εἰς αὐτοῦ μνήμην ἀναφερομένων, καὶ ταῦτ' εἰκότως ἡμῖν ἀνείληπται, ἃ δι' εὐσεβείας ὑπερβολὴν μητέρα τιμῶν, θεσμοὺς ἀπεπλήρου θείους, ἀμφὶ γονέων τιμῆς τὰ

treasuries, to use them at her discretion, in whatever way she might wish and however she might judge best in each case, her son having accorded her distinction and eminence in these matters too. It was therefore right that while recording his memory we should also record those things wherein, by honouring his mother for her supreme piety, he satisfied the divine principles which impose the duty of honouring parents.

πρέποντα διαταττομένους.

2

Faith and authority: the invention of Helena

Why was Helena, who originally had no association with the relics of Christ's Passion, eventually held responsible for their discovery? The silence of Eusebios of Caesarea, whose portrayal of Helena's life probably comes closer to reality than any other, is perplexing. About a decade after Eusebios' composition, Cyril of Jerusalem's letter to Emperor Constantius II in 351 placed the finding of the cross in Jerusalem in the reign of Helena's son (*Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ σοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ σταυροῦ ξύλον ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ηὕρηται*).[1] Even though Eusebios emphasised the finding of Christ's tomb and the building of the Holy Sepulchre on the site – with which the cross is connected – nothing in his text suggests that the author was aware that the true cross had been discovered during these excavations.[2] According to Cameron and Hall, arguments based on the idea of deliberate omission are dangerous where Eusebios is concerned, because he never referred in his writings to the cross in material terms, but in symbolic ones. Had he been concerned with the status that the alleged discovery of the cross would have given to Caesarea's rival, Jerusalem, and its bishop, Eusebios would probably also have omitted from his narrative the excavation and restoration of any of the holy places (associated with the Birth, Passion, and

[1] 'For it is in the days of your imperial father, Constantine of blessed memory, the saving wood of the cross was found in Jerusalem'. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Letter to Constantius II*: ed. *PG* 33 (1886), 1168; Eng. trans. McCauley and Stephenson 1970, 232.

[2] For Eusebios's description of the excavation of the Holy Sepulchre, see Cameron and Hall 1999: 132.25-137.40.

Resurrection) located in the jurisdiction of Jerusalem.[3] It will be made clear in this chapter that Eusebios' records made a far from negligible contribution to Helena's legend. Had he believed Helena discovered the true cross, he would have said so. As it is, he provided not merely the historical framework for the development of the legend, but also the major source to which succeeding generations of authors turned in order to borrow information for their versions of the legend.

2.1 The origins of Helena's legend as the discoverer of the cross

A full account of the legend of the finding of the relics of Christ's crucifixion by Helena is first attested in Ambrose's oration for the deceased emperor, Theodosios I, delivered in 395 in Milan. According to Ambrose (Text 2), Helena, inspired by her maternal concern for her son, travelled to Jerusalem to search for the wood of the true cross. On Golgotha, she opened the ground, cast off the dust, and found the cross and the nails with which Christ was crucified, but they were mixed up with the crosses of the two thieves. Pilate's inscription helped her to identify the holy relics, and she had part of them made into a horse bit and a diadem as gifts for her son. Whether, however, Ambrose was the first who associated Helena with the cross is problematic.

While Drijvers correctly argues that the origins of the legend of the discovery of the true cross should be sought in the eastern provinces of the empire around the mid-fourth century, tracing the initial inclusion of Helena in the legend is more difficult.[4] Eastern textual sources omitted Helena. The *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem – a text composed around 346 – tell us that relics of the cross were circulating in the empire, while Gregory of Nyssa and

[3] On the many theories to explain Eusebios' silence, see Rubin 1982; Drake 1985; Walker 1990; for an up-to-date commentary and comprehensive bibliography, see Cameron and Hall 1999: 272-291.

[4] Drijvers 1999: 78-95; Drijvers 2011: 147-150.

John Chrysostom also expressed an interest in the use of relics of the cross as talismans and as jewellery.[5] However, no eastern narratives written before the date of Ambrose's oration attached Helena's name to the legend of the finding of the cross.

It has been suggested that a fully developed written version of the legend was first provided by Gelasios of Caesarea.[6] Gelasios' *Church History* is, unfortunately, entirely lost and a verbatim reconstruction of its content from subsequent historiographical and hagiological works is not possible.[7] The belief that his work was translated by his contemporary, the western author Rufinus, is now under question as increasing numbers of scholars support Rufinus' originality.[8] Rohrbacher notes that Gelasios may have been used sparingly by Rufinus, as one of his many sources.[9] It is difficult to say, however, for which events Rufinus relied on Gelasios' work. A familiarity with the legend of the discovery of the cross is not impossible in the case of either Gelasios or Rufinus. On the one hand, Gelasios' see was in the vicinity of Jerusalem and he was on intimate terms with Cyril of Jerusalem because of their familial ties – Gelasios was nephew to Cyril. Rufinus, on the other hand, had also lived in Palestine between 370 and 397, where he founded the first western monastery on the Mount of Olives.

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[5] Drijvers 1992a: 81-93; see below, page 79 and note 59.

[6] Drijvers 1992a: 95-102; Gelasios died the same year when Ambrose's oration was written.

[7] A short notice that Gelasios wrote a *Church History* was provided in the ninth-century *Myriobiblon* by Photios, who noted that Gelasios had translated into Greek Rufinus' continuation of Eusebios' *Church History*. See Photios, *Myriobiblon*: Eng. trans. Henry 1960, 12-15, nos. 88-89. The most substantial studies attempting to reconstruct Gelasios' work, arguing that Rufinus was the one who translated the work of Gelasios instead, include Glas 1914, Scheidweiler 1953 and 1955, Winkelmann 1966a and 1966b. On the basis of Winkelmann's studies, Borgehammar suggested that he had reconstructed Gelasios' alleged passage on the finding of the cross. See Borgehammar 1991: 11-14, 31-55.

[8] For an overview of the issue, including bibliography, see Amidon 1997: xiii-xix.

[9] Rohrbacher 2002: 100-107.

Nevertheless, there is no reason why Gelasios should be considered the first to incorporate the contribution of Helena into the legend of the discovery of the cross. None of his eastern contemporaries had done so. For instance, John Chrysostom's narrative on the finding of the cross in his 85th homily on the Gospel according to Saint John, is illustrative of concurrent perceptions:

> The wood of the cross would be lost to view, since no one undertook to preserve it, both because of the influence of fear and because the faithful were then busily engaged with other pressing matters. But at a later date it would be sought for, and it is likely that the three crosses would be lying together. Hence, provision was being made that the one belonging to the Lord might not go unrecognised: first, because of the fact that it was lying in the middle; and second, it was clearly evident to all because of the label, since the crosses of the thieves had no superscription.[10]

It is worth noting that Helena's discovery of the cross appears in Greek sources not earlier than the fifth century.[11] By contrast, Rufinus' work was written after he had returned to Italy and a few years after Ambrose's oration to Theodosius. We may accept that Rufinus' description of the discovery of the cross was translated from Gelasios' lost history. However, Rufinus' inclusion of Helena's story is likely to have been his own interpolation, reflecting the resonance of Ambrose's treatment of Helena.[12] Rufinus' story of the cross was not delivered with any obvious didactic purpose of promoting the cult of the cross. On the contrary, the main subject of his account is Helena, the finder of the cross, not the cross itself.

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[10] *Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ κατεχώσθη τοῦ σταυροῦ τὸ ξύλον, ὡς οὐδενὸς αὐτὸν ἀνελέσθαι σπουδάζοντος, τῷ καὶ φόβον ἐπικεῖσθαι, καὶ πρὸς ἕτερα κατεπείγοντα τοὺς πιστεύοντας σπεύδειν, ἔμελλε δὲ χρόνοις ὕστερον ἐπιζητεῖσθαι, εἰκὸς δὲ τοὺς τρεῖς ὁμοῦ κεῖσθαι σταυρούς· ἵνα μὴ ἀγνοῆται ὁ τοῦ Δεσπότου, πρῶτον μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ μέσον αὐτὸν κεῖσθαι, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ τίτλου δῆλος πᾶσιν ἐγένετο· οἱ γὰρ τῶν λῃστῶν, τίτλους οὐκ εἶχον*. John Chrysostomos, *85th Homily on the Gospel according to Saint John*: ed. *PG* 59 (1862), 461; Eng. trans. Goggin 1959, 430.

[11] See below, page 76.

[12] For description of Helena by Rufinus of Aquileia, see below, page 73; Rufinus's work is the earliest source which provides information on Ambrose, who seems to have been in close relations with the author's patron, Chromatius. Moorhead 1999: 9.

Had the latter been the case, Rufinus would not have introduced and concluded his story by highlighting the virtues of Helena. The western authors, Paulinus of Nola and Sulpicius Severus, both contemporaries of Ambrose and Rufinus, also show a particular interest in Helena's legend in their texts.[13] On this basis, it seems likely that the origins of Helena's inclusion in the legend of the discovery of the true cross should be ascribed to fourth-century western Christians rather than, as is widely believed, to eastern Christians.

Hunt's suggestion that during Theodosios' reign (378-395) 'the holy sites were brought once again into the ambit of the imperial court, in the way which had been presaged by the journeys of members of Constantine's family', fits nicely here, because the enthusiastic movement of Christian pilgrims – and especially of noble women – towards the Holy Land would inevitably have evoked Helena's pilgrimage, as this was first related by Eusebios in his work on the *Life of Constantine*.[14] Some of those women, such as Silvia, Egeria, Melania the Elder, and Poemenia, have been identified as of Iberian origin and have been associated with Theodosios' court.[15] The links to Helena are further enhanced by the fact that churches and nunneries were erected on behalf of Poemenia, Melania, and Paula on the Mount of Olives and in Bethlehem, which Eusebios associates with important programmes of Helena's imperial patronage. It is also significant that Melania and Paula were under the spiritual guidance of Rufinus and Jerome respectively, who both belonged to the same literary network as Ambrose, Paulinus, and Sulpicius.[16] What I am implying here is that the pilgrimage of Helena appears to have been used by western clerics as a model to encourage noble women to involve themselves with the religious dimension of the material

[13] For descriptions of Helena by Paulinus of Nola and Sulpicius Severus, see below, page 73-76.

[14] Hunt 1982: 158.

[15] On the pilgrimage of western noble women, see Hunt 1982: 155-179; Theodosios was born in Cauca or Italica in the Iberian Peninsula, see Canto 2006: 388-421.

[16] Demonstrative of the life and times of this group of upper-class women is a selection of concurrent narratives provided by Clark 1983: 156-258.

culture and landscape of the Holy Land. The same concern does not seem to have been shared by the members of the eastern clergy as no examples of analogous activity can be found. On the contrary, Gregory of Nyssa in one of his letters seems to disapprove of the pilgrimage undertaken by consecrated virgins, stressing that:

> The constraints of the journey are always disrupting the scrupulous observance of virtue. For it is impossible for a woman to undertake a journey unless she has someone to protect her and, on account of her physical weakness, to help her up onto her mount and to dismount and to support her across rough terrain. But […] whether she is supporting herself on a stranger or on a friend, she is not observing the law of chastity.[17]

It certainly becomes evident that fifty years after Helena's death, her memory had been enshrined within the story of her pilgrimage. Even if we accept that her journey to the Holy Land was originally initiated as an *iter principis*, by the end of the fourth century onwards it was reconstructed as a *peregrinatio religiosa*.[18] Holum's observation on the legacy of Helena's pilgrimage is of value: although Helena did not invent the practice, she universalised Holy Land pilgrimage and created for upper-class women new trends in projecting their wealth and social prominence.[19] Ambrose's oration indicates that the author was aware of stories, likely circulated in late Roman society, about Helena's life, some of them focusing on her origins and her relation with Constantine's father (Text 2: F.1-2). But his treatment of the empress as the discoverer of the true cross – whether original or not – laid the foundations for a new appreciation of Helena's role by the members of the imperial court, both in the west and the east: as the ideal Christian empress and promoter of orthodox Christianity. It is worth noting that all examples of documented involvement of imperial

[17] Lee 2000: 284.

[18] See Chapter 1, note 156.

[19] Holum 1990: 76-77.

women with religious material, both in the imperial capitals and in the Holy Land, post-dated Ambrose's oration.[20]

2.2 Ambrose's treatment of Helena in his *Oratio de Obitu Theodosii* (AD 395)

On the fortieth day after the death of Theodosios, the dead emperor was commemorated at a service held in the cathedral of Milan, before the body was sent to Constantinople for burial. Ambrose's oration on the death of Theodosios was delivered on this occasion in the presence of members of the imperial family (Honorios), and of high ranking civil and military officers (Stilicho). The text reflects not merely Ambrose's own concerns to place the imperial office under the influence of the Church, but also, as McLynn rightly remarks, the formal inauguration of the new regime which emerged after Stilicho (commander of the western army and husband of Theodosios' adopted niece, Serena) had claimed that he had been appointed by Theodosios as regent of the nine-year-old Honorios and of the eighteen-year-old Arcadios.[21] 'But his sons will not refuse what their father granted. They will not refuse, even though a certain person should attempt to cause a disturbance', Ambrose wrote, showing his awareness of the dangers and the political instability, which Stilicho's claim had the potential to cause.[22] 'Nevertheless, the crown of so great a favour has not been taken away from Theodosios. Not undeservedly, for if the last wishes of private citizens have perpetual stability, even though testaments are lacking, how can the will of so great a prince be disregarded?', Ambrose continued, making clear his

[20] For further discussion, see Chapter 3.

[21] McLynn 1994: 356-360; on the regency of Stilicho, see Cameron 1969: 247-280.
For helpful comments on an earlier draft of this section, I thank Neil McLynn.

[22] Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1448.4; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 66.4. The remembrance of Magnus Maximus' and Eugenius' usurpations in 383 and 393 respectively, was still fresh in Ambrose's mind. See below, page 68.

intentions to help the new regime to establish its claims despite the fact that their authenticity could not be proved.[23] At the same time, Ambrose's oration aimed to solidify the position of Theodosios' sons against any ambitions of Stilicho, by encouraging the army to 'bestow sedulous and paternal affection' on them so that their rights were not violated.[24] Arcadios and Honorios would not, Ambrose implies, be under Stilicho's guardianship for a long time, as the former 'is already a robust youth', and the latter 'knocks forthwith at the door of manhood'.[25] Hell is Ambrose's threat to Stilicho if he violates his promise to their father, bringing to his attention the tragic ends of Magnus Maximus and Eugenius.[26]

Stilicho's familial ties to Theodosios were the only means that could be employed by him to justify his ambitions to rule himself. An ivory carving representing Stilicho, Serena, and their son Eucherius was carved around 395, and at about the same time the description that the poet Claudian gave in his first book on the consulship of Stilicho is illustrative of the situation:

> Meanwhile a maiden of years full ripe for marriage troubled a father's heart, and the emperor doubted whom to select as her husband and as future ruler of the world; right anxiously did he search east and west for a son-in-law worthy of being wedded to Serena. Merit alone had to decide; through camps, through cities, through nations roamed his poised and hesitating thoughts. But thou wast chosen, thus in the opinion and judgement of him who selected thee surpassing all the candidates of the whole world and becoming a son-in-law in the imperial family where thou wast shortly to become a father-in-law. The marriage-bed was ablaze with flashing gold and regal

[23] Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1449.5; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 66.5.

[24] 'For if among the children of private citizens the rights of minors are not violated without grave crime, how much the more in the case of the children of an emperor'. Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1452.11; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 68.11.

[25] Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1453.15; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 69.15.

[26] 'But on the other hand Maximus and Eugenius in hell, as 'night to night sheweth knowledge'; teaching by a miserable example the wickedness of taking arms against their princes'. Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1461.39; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 77.39.

> purple. The maiden steps forth accompanied by her parents clad in scarlet. On one side stood her sire (Theodosios), famed for his triumphs, on the other was the queen (Flacilla), fulfilling a mother's loving office and ordering the bridal veil beneath a weight of jewels […] Happy our emperor in his choice; he judges and the world agrees; he is the first to value what we all see. Ay, for he has allied to his children and to his palace one who never preferred ease to war nor the pleasures of peace to danger, nor yet his life to his honour.[27]

What, then, is Helena doing in Ambrose's oration?[28] Baert correctly queries whether Helena's inclusion was meant to appeal to the women of Theodosios' family, but no further investigation of the matter was carried out as it was beyond the scope and ambitions of Baert's study.[29] I would argue that Ambrose's extensive digression upon Helena may plausibly have addressed Serena, who was about to act as the surrogate mother of her young cousins – and, more practically, of Honorios.[30] Or, put slightly differently, motherhood seems to have provided a fertile ground for Ambrose's implicit message to be communicated. Moorhead's systematic study of Ambrose's writings has shown that Ambrose saw gender as complementary: that it was in a man and a woman together that full perfection could be achieved.[31] Ambrose had already experienced in the recent past the negative repercussions of such a relationship, when the religious policy of Valentinian II was influenced by his mother, the empress Justina. Relating his writings to current circumstances was not an unusual

[27] Claudian, *Poem on the consulship of Stilicho*: Eng. trans. Platnauer 1922, 370-374.

[28] The view that the Helena passage should be considered as a later addition has been rejected, see Favez 1932: 423-429; Steidle 1978: 94-112.

[29] Baert 2004: 25-29.

[30] Claudian, in his Epithalamium of the marriage of Honorios with Stilicho's daughter Maria (398), presents Honorios saying about Serena: 'Daughter of mine uncle Honorios, whence I derive my name, chief glory of the land of swift-flowing Ebro, cousin by birth, by mother's love a mother, to thy care was mine infancy entrusted, in thine arms I grew to boyhood; save for my birth thou, rather than Flacilla, art my mother'. Claudian, *Epithalamium of the marriage of Honorios with Maria*: Eng. trans. Platnauer 1922, 245-247; on Claudian and his writings, see Cameron 1970.

[31] Moorhead 1999: 44-48; for further reading on Ambrose's preoccupations with gendered imagery, see Burrus 1996: 461-475.

practice for him, who had not hesitated to draw parallels between Justina and the biblical figures of Eve, Jezabel, and Herodias.[32] It seems that a particular rhetoric of gender served all too well Ambrose's need to constitute his authority and stake out the domain of his own discourse. The bishop was now acting with caution for the welfare of the empire and the Church, which, he believed, were interdependent.[33]

> Happy Constantine, because of such a mother, who at her son's command sought the aid of divine favour by which in battle he might both engage safely and not fear danger. Noble woman, who found something much greater to give to the emperor than she could receive from the emperor. The mother, solicitous for her son to whom the sovereignty of the Roman world had fallen, hastened to Jerusalem and diligently explored the place of the Lord's passion.[34]

Ambrose invites Serena to imitate Helena's maternal affection so that the rulers continue to govern with the grace of Christ, as had their ancestors, Theodosios and Constantine:

> What else therefore has the beneficence of Helena accomplished when she gave direction to the reins, than to seem to say by the Holy Spirit to all emperors: 'Do not become like the horse and mule,' and I bridle and bit to bind the jaws of those who did not realise that they were kings to rule themselves, as subjects. For power was prostrated in vice, and like cattle they defiled themselves by rampant lust. They knew not God. The cross of the Lord has restrained them and has recalled them from wickedness. It has raised their eyes that they might look toward heaven for Christ. They have stripped themselves of the bit of perfidy; they have taken up the reins of devotion and faith, following Him who said: 'Take up my yoke upon you…for my yoke is sweet and my burden light.' And so the succeeding emperors were Christians except Julian alone, who abandoned the Author of his salvation when he gave himself over the philosophic error. And so Gratian and Theodosios were Christians.[35]

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[32] Moorhead 1999: 137-139.

[33] Moorhead 1999: 118.

[34] Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1462.41; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 78.41.

[35] Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1466.51; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 81.51.

A connection between Serena and Helena was further implied through Ambrose's reference to Flacilla, Honorios' mother.[36] Galla, Theodosios' second wife, is nowhere mentioned in the text. Flacilla was the first empress after Helena to be elevated to the rank of Augusta, a promotion which, in the words of Holum, 'must have impressed contemporaries as a dramatic innovation and as reversion to prestigious Constantinian practice'.[37] Like Helena, Flacilla was celebrated for her piety, her zeal for the faith, her humility, and her offspring.[38] Direct association of Flacilla with Helena, however, is not attested in any written source, even in her funeral oration in 387 by Gregory of Nyssa.[39] This adds weight to my earlier suggestion that Helena's legend is unlikely to have originated in the east.[40]

It is very interesting in this context the inscription on the left side of the apse of the church of San Nazaro Maggiore in Milan, built by Ambrose. It bears the text of an epigram celebrating the fact that faithful Serena adorned the grave of Saint Nazarius as a votive offering for the return of her husband.[41] Suffice it to say that the event took place in 397, two years after the composition of Ambrose's oration, providing perhaps direct historical

[36] 'When his Flacilla, a soul faithful to God, clings to him'. Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1462.40; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 77.40.

[37] Holum 1982: 29-31.

[38] Holum 1982: 24-27.

[39] Gregory of Nyssa, *Funeral oration to Flacilla*: ed. *PG* 46 (1863), 877-892.

[40] See above, page 64.

[41] *ILCV* 1801:

Qua sinuata cavo consurgunt tecta regressu
sacrataeque crucis flectitur orbe caput
Nazarius vitae immaculabilis integer artus
conditur exsultat hunc tumuli esse locum
quem pius Ambrosius signavit imagine Christi
marmoribus libycis fida Serena polit
coniugis ut reditu Stiliconis laeta fruatur
germanisque suis pignoribus propriis.

testimony to the point I claim in this section: Serena's maternal role and pious devotion, as well as her partnership with Ambrose. It would seem that parallels between Serena and Helena would have made sense from the point of view inside the situation, illuminating aspects of Serena's appeal to the public.[42] The use of Serena as the vehicle for Ambrose's Helena is not, however, without its own subversions. Through Helena, the prestige of the purple was being extended to the highly controversial kingmakers of the western court.

Ambrose's treatment of Helena elevated the empress – for the very first time – to a status equal to that of her son Constantine:

> Mary was visited to liberate Eve; Helena was visited that emperors might be redeemed […] Helena has done wisely who has placed the cross on the head of sovereigns, in order that the cross of Christ may be adored among kings.[43]

Helena is paralleled with the mother of Christ, Mary, and praised for her significant role in the Christianisation of the empire, for she had secured sovereignty's holy redemption by placing the relics of Christ's crucifixion under the protection of the emperors, and she had ended the persecution of Christianity by transmitting to the emperor her devotion to Christ.

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[42] For example, rumour often preserves the genuinely immediate reaction. Two centuries later we read in Zosimos' work that a year before Theodosios' death Serena desecrated the temple of Rhea Silvia, the mythical mother of the twins Romulus and Remus, who founded the city of Rome. According to Zosimos, Serena took the ornaments around the neck of the statue of Rhea and placed them upon her own neck. The necklace was suitable to the divine worship that was paid to the goddess, and for that reason Serena's action was a severe insult in the eyes of contemporary and subsequent generations of adherents to pre-Christian Roman religion. See Zosimos, *New History*: Eng. trans. Ridley 1982, 120. Zosimos' story, whether reliable or not, bears on the reception of Serena as an active opponent of the pre-Christian Roman religion.

[43] Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1465.47-48; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 80.47.4-5, 80.48.1-3.

2.3 Western and eastern evaluations of Helena during the late fourth and early fifth centuries

The legend of the finding of the cross by Helena became quickly popular in both parts of the late Roman empire. Only a few decades after Eusebios' composition, his model of Helena was reworked in Ambrose's oration, and when Rufinus translated Eusebios' *Church History*, he incorporated the tradition of Helena's discovery of the cross, demonstrating that the memory of Helena had by then been preserved within the legend of the cross.[44] In Rufinus' narrative (Text 3), Helena is not shadowed by the predominance of her son. She is distinguished by her own uniqueness which derives from her matchless faith, piety, devotion, generosity, and humility. Her religious spirit led her to find the cross, a mission that was initiated and executed by her. She was inspired by divine visions and travelled to Jerusalem, where she was shown the place of Christ's passion by a sign from heaven. Her prayers were granted with the holy relics of the crucifixion. She erected the church of the Holy Sepulchre on the site where she had found the cross and with humility she served the servants of God.

Paulinus of Nola and Sulpicius Severus, who belonged to the same literary network as Ambrose and Rufinus, also expressed an interest in Helena's legend in their writings. Paulinus, bishop of Nola, rejected his worldly goods and the expected public career of a man of his parentage in order to follow an ascetic Christian life. His extant correspondence is remarkable for its intellectual and spiritual context.[45] In one of his letters, addressed to Sulpicius, the main topic is the relic of the cross and the story of its discovery.

[44] Rufinus added to the original work his own continuation of two books to carry Eusebios' narrative forward to 395.

[45] Conybeare 2000: 1-18.

The letter accompanied a sliver of the wood of the holy cross, sent as a gift to Sulpicius in order to enhance both the consecration of his basilica and of his collection of sacred ashes. Paulinus interpolates the story of the discovery of the cross, in order to prove to Sulpicius that this piece of wood belonged to Christ's cross. According to Paulinus (Text 4), the mission to uncover the cross took place during the reign of Constantine the Great because, in an earlier period, it would have been destroyed by the persecutors of Christianity. Constantine's mother and co-regent, Helena, travelled under divine inspiration to Jerusalem in order to restore the Holy Land. In her search for the cross, she was informed by learned Jews of the site of Christ's tomb, where she found three indistinguishable crosses. Having the crosses tested on a dead man, she managed to identify the one that belonged to Christ. Helena erected on the site a church where she enshrined the relic of the cross.

The letter is testimony to the flourishing tradition of translating and venerating relics during the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Paulinus himself had received relics of Saints Gervasius and Protasius from Ambrose, and in his turn sent relics to Sulpicius.[46] The story of the finding of the cross is supplementary in Paulinus' narration on the relic of the cross, in order to confirm the authenticity of his gift to Sulpicius. Conybeare's recent work on Paulinus' correspondence points out that the purpose of this letter was 'to serve as a basis for spiritual reflection: Sulpicius is invited to mediate on the faith of the *latro* crucified alongside Christ, who believed in Christ's resurrection even before it happened'.[47] The practice of composing and circulating letters was not merely to carry information or spiritual advice, but was itself a spiritual offering and a basis for general meditation and reflection.[48] Therefore, letters of such a sacramental function were not written only for their explicit addressees, but

[46] Conybeare 2000: 7.

[47] Conybeare 2000: 46.

[48] Conybeare 2000: 54-55.

from the perspective that they would be read to a much more extended audience, usually the recipient's immediate community.[49] Within this context, Paulinus' letter to Sulpicius takes the form of a hagiological narration on the cross. Therefore, Paulinus restricts his narration to information related to the cross, neglecting information such as the finding of the nails and their use by Helena, or the life of Helena before and after the discovery of the cross.

Nevertheless, the way that Paulinus described Helena is of value. Paulinus' Helena visited the eastern provinces with a mission and with all the rights of an imperial dignitary. The final accomplishment of her activity there had contributed to the restoration and expansion of Christianity in the empire, since up to that time the pagan wickedness of earlier ages still existed. Consequently, she enhanced her son's image as the first Christian emperor. Helena's interest in visiting the Holy Land was developed through books she had read and stories she had listened to. Therefore, upon her arrival in Jerusalem she was eager to see all the sites corresponding to the information she had received on the holy sites. According to Paulinus the search for the site of Christ's tomb was initiated by her, and the belief that the cross was hidden underground was a personal view of hers, which was confirmed by the outcome of her efforts. Though Helena is not the centre of Paulinus' narration, she is presented as the principle figure responsible for the finding of the relic of Christ's cross, and as such she was introduced by Sulpicius to his Christian community, to which he transmitted Paulinus' letter.

Sulpicius, presbyter of the Church in Primuliacum, shared a lifelong friendship with Paulinus and seems to have been influenced by his writings.[50] In his *Church History*, which takes the form of a compendious history of the world from the Creation to the year 400, Sulpicius included the story of the cross and its discovery by Helena, as he had received it

[49] Conybeare 2000: 41-59.

[50] Roberts 1894: 1-2; Stancliffe 1983: 16-19 and 30-47; Conybeare 2000: 6 and 86-88.

from Paulinus, but in an abridged form (Text 5). Helena, with imperial authority, visited Jerusalem and restored the Holy Land. There, she found Christ's tomb and the holy cross.

In Sulpicius' *Chronicle* the story of the cross is given in a different context from that of Paulinus. It is not obvious that Sulpicius' intention was to highlight and promote the veneration of the relic of the cross, as was Paulinus'. Sulpicius seems to be have been more interested in presenting the most significant events that had taken place during Constantine's reign, which are restricted to Constantine's status as the first Christian emperor of all the Roman rulers, Helena's religious activity, the heresy of Arius, and to the inaccurate report of the death of Constantine during the Council of Nicaea. Although he pointed out that during this period the Christian religion prevailed, there is no reference to Constantine's contribution towards this outcome. What is enhanced in Sulpicius' narration on Constantine's reign is Helena's prominent role in the establishment of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

Rufinus, Paulinus, and Sulpicius treated Helena in her own right, rather than giving Constantine the leading role. The modification of specific narrative elements in Eusebios' *Life of Constantine* is demonstrative of Helena's elevated role in the west. For instance, the excavation of the Holy Sepulchre and the erection of a church on the site were attributed to Constantine in Eusebios' account, whereas in the western writings – best illustrated in the narrative of Rufinus – both actions were credited to Helena.[51] When, in the fifth century, the legend of Helena's discovery of the cross was, for the first time, introduced in eastern sources, a variety of narrative traditions and innovations was interpolated into the descriptions of Helena.

The earliest Byzantine accounts were written during the reign of Theodosios II (408-450), following the historiographical tradition that Eusebios had started with his *Church*

[51] For Eusebios' description of Constantine's initiative to find the Holy Sepulchre, see Cameron and Hall 1999: 132.25-137.40.

History. Although familiar with Eusebios' *Life of Constantine*, none of these historiographical works used verbatim the Eusebian model of Helena. Sokrates, a lawyer in Constantinople, composed a continuation of Eusebios' history in seven books, each containing events from the seven emperors who ruled between the accession of Constantine and the reign of Theodosios II.[52] Sokrates appears to have used Rufinus' Latin continuation of Eusebios as a basis for his own work.[53] For example, Sokrates is the only fifth-century author who adopted the western tradition that the site of the Holy Sepulchre was excavated and restored not by Constantine, but by Helena (Text 6: B.6-10, 33-35).

Sozomen was also a lawyer at Constantinople during the reign of Theodosios II, to whom he dedicated his *Church History*. His work covered the period between 324 and 425 and aimed to present ecclesiastical affairs during the reigns of Constantine the Great and his successors, up to his times.[54] In the second book of his history two chapters are devoted to the discovery of the holy cross and nails, and to Helena. Compared to Sokrates, Sozomen's account of Helena indicates a more direct use of Eusebios' *Life of Constantine*, from which he appears hardly to have deviated at all. Nevertheless, Sozomen supplemented Eusebios' description with a new element: not only was a city in Bithynia named after Helena, but so was a second one in Palestine (Text 7: D.41-44).

Helena's religiosity was no less important for fifth-century Byzantine authors.[55] Constantine was responsible for Helena's conversion to Christianity in Eusebios, whereas a different version was related by Theodoret, bishop of Kyrrhos, in Syria. According to Theodoret's *Church History*, Helena raised Constantine, teaching him piety to God (Text 8:

[52] Chesnut 1986: 175-198; Leppin 2003: 219-254; Treadgold 2007: 134-145; Urbainczyk 1997a and 1997b; Wallraff 1997; Zenos 1891: vii-xxiv.

[53] Urbainczyk 1997a: 19, 49, 51-52, 58-59.

[54] Chesnut 1986: 200-204; Hartranft 1891: 191-232 and 238; Treadgold 2007: 145-155.

[55] Further analysis, see Chapter 3, page 147.

B.4-7).[56] Theodoret is the only one among his contemporary authors who excluded from his narrative any reference to Constantine's father. For instance, the *Church History* of Gelasios of Kyzikos – a work which has been suggested to be a copy of Theodoret's history – inflated Theodoret's version, adding that Constantine was the son of a legitimate couple, both distinguished by their Christian virtues, who together raised Constantine, teaching him piety to God.[57] Gelasios' description clearly presented Constantius Chlorus as a Christian, whereas Sokrates and Sozomen followed – more or less – the Eusebian model and portrayed Constantine's father as a pious monotheist, almost a Christian.[58]

The way in which the memory of Helena was reconstructed in the east fluctuated, indicating that by the fifth century there was not a homogeneous perception of Helena's life. The modifications did not merely concern the Eusebian model of Helena, but also expanded upon the legend of Helena's finding of the cross. Sokrates' version of the legend shares the same narrative elements as Rufinus' text: (a) Helena discovered three indistinguishable crosses and Pilate's inscription; (b) Helena was advised by Makarios to have the three crosses tested on a severely ill woman rather than a dead man, in order to identify the true cross; (c) Helena enclosed part of the holy relic in a silver case and left it in Jerusalem; (d) Helena sent

[56] On Theodoret of Kyrrhos, see Urbainczyk 2002.

[57] *ἡ τὸν μέγαν τοῦτον φωστῆρα τῇ οἰκουμένῃ τεκοῦσα καὶ τὴν τῆς εὐσεβείας αὐτῷ ἐκ παιδόθεν προσενεγκοῦσα τροφήν (οὐχ' ἧττον γὰρ καὶ αὐτὴ τοῦ τοῦ παιδὸς πατρός, ἑαυτῆς δὲ ἀνδρὸς Κωνσταντίου τοῖς θείοις αὐτὸν τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν εὐσεβείας ἀνεθρέψατο νόμοις).* Gelasios of Kyzikos, *Church History*: ed. Loeschcke and Heinemann 1918, 144.30-145.4; for studies on Gelasios of Kyzikos, see Ehrhardt 1980: 53-57; Croke 1984: 59-74; Chesnut 1986: 207-214. Gelasios' version of the legend of Helena is florid and effusive, whereas Theodoret's version is abridged and incomplete. Despite their close similarities, I do not necessarily think that Gelasios made direct use of Theodoret – at least for the passages concerning Helena – but of a text that was common to both authors. Gelasios seems to have followed this (hypothetical) original source closely, whereas the omissions observed in Theodoret indicate that the author quoted critically his source. Theodoret's work is much infused with his personal theological beliefs, see Chapter 3, page 154.

[58] For descriptions of Constantius Chlorus by Eusebios, see Cameron and Hall 1999: 74-77; by Sokrates, see Zenos 1891: 1; by Sozomen, see Hartranft 1891: 242-243.

the other part of the true cross, along with the holy nails, to Constantine; (e) Constantine made with the nails a bridle and a helmet rather than commissioned by Helena; (f) Helena assembled nuns in Jerusalem at a feast and served them herself. Although the same pattern is followed by Sozomen, in the scene of the identification of the true cross the author added that the three crosses were also tested on a dead man. This element is first attested in Paulinus' and Sulpicius' versions of the legend of the discovery of the cross. Plausible similarities with Paulinus and Sulpicius are also noted in Theodoret and Gelasios. For instance, both authors, contrary to Sokrates and Sozomen, omitted from their narratives the finding of Pilate's inscription. Theodoret and Gelasios differ from the narrative pattern used by Sokrates and Sozomen in further elements. Although they agreed with their contemporaries that Helena left part of the cross in Jerusalem, Theodoret and Gelasios seem to have used a different tradition about the remaining part of the cross: *τοῦ δέ σωτηρίου σταυροῦ μοῖραν μέν τινα τοῖς βασιλείοις ἀπένειμε* (Text 8: H.1-2). It is not explicit in Theodoret and Gelasios that Helena sent the relic to her son Constantine, but that she distributed relics of the cross to the Christian kingdoms.[59] Additionally, Theodoret and Gelasios related that the holy nails were made into a bridle and a helmet not by Constantine, but by Helena. This element was originally attested in Ambrose's oration.[60]

It is obvious that all four accounts relied on already existing traditions regarding Helena's finding of the true cross, and their differences cannot therefore be interpreted as

[59] It was known by this time that pieces of the cross were scattered around the world. Namely, it was mentioned in the *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem – a text composed around 346 – that 'the holy wood of the cross gives witness: it is here to be seen in this very day, and through those who take pieces from it in faith, it has from here already filled almost the whole world', see Borgehammar 1991: 90; for the original text, see Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*: ed. *PG* 33 (1886), 685B-688A.

[60] According to Liebeschuetz, Ambrose figures significantly in Theodoret's work. The extent, however, of Ambrose's influence upon subsequent generations of ecclesiastics has not yet been studied. See Liebeschuetz 2004: 106.

Byzantine novelties. Striking, however, is the fact that, in contrast to the western narratives, the Byzantine texts inclined towards interpolating Constantine's contribution into the legend of Helena. For instance, Sokrates related that all materials for the churches erected in Jerusalem by Helena were supplied by Constantine. The author also noted that Constantine wrote to Makarios to accelerate the construction of these buildings (Text 6: B.57-60). Helena was not explicitly credited with the finding of the holy relics and the restoration of the holy sites in Sozomen's account. According to the author, when the site of Golgotha was excavated by Constantine's command, the tomb of Christ was discovered; and at no great distance, three crosses and Pilate's inscription were found (Text 7: B.28-37). In the writings of Theodoret and Gelasios, Helena's mission was closely attached to Constantine's aspiration to restore and promote Christianity. In both accounts, Helena was introduced as the bearer (*διηκόνησεν*) of a number of letters written by Constantine to the bishops of the eastern provinces concerning the preparation of copies of the Holy Scriptures and the building of churches. Nowhere are we informed that Helena was influenced by divine visions to travel to Jerusalem. Instead she was sent (*ἐστείλατο*) abroad by her son. The independence of Helena's actions was not an element of these narratives. Gelasios was more elaborate than Theodoret, stressing that Helena acted as a representative of her son: she ordered the construction of the Holy Sepulchre, and supplied Makarios with materials and craftsmen to erect magnificent churches in accordance to with commands of Constantine.[61] Sokrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Gelasios presented Constantine as the major figure behind all Christian activities. The

[61] *Οὕτως ἡ εὐσεβεστάτη βασίλισσα, ἡ τοῦ πανευφήμου καὶ θεοφιλεστάτου βασιλέως* Κωνσταντίνου *μήτήρ, εἰλικρινῶς ἐπιστήσασα τὸν νοῦν καὶ πιστωθεῖσα περί τε τοῦ σωτηρίου τάφου καὶ τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ τοῦ* Χριστοῦ, *εὐκτήριον οἶκον εὐθέως ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ τόπῳ ἐγείρει κατὰ τὰς τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου παιδὸς* Κωνσταντίνου *προστάξεις* [...] *πάντοθεν δέ παντοδαπῆς ὕλης τεχνίτας ἀγείρασα ἅμα* Μακαρίῳ *τῷ τῆς ἐκεῖσε ἐκκλησίας προέδρῳ κατὰ τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως τοῦ ταύτης υἱοῦ* Κωνσταντίνου *προσταχθέντα τοὺς μεγίστους ἐκείνους καὶ λαμπροτάτους ναοὺς θαυμασίωςᾠκοδόμησεν, ὧν τὸ κάλλος καὶ τὸ μέγεθος περιττὸν ἄγαν ὑπείληφα ἐντάξαι τῷδε τῷ γράμματι, πάντων ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν τῶν φιλοχρίστων τῶν ἐκ πάσης τῆς ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐκεῖσε συρρεόντων καὶ θεωμένων τῶν ἔργων τὴν πολυτέλειαν.* Gelasios of Kyzikos, *Church History*: ed. Loeschcke and Heinemann 1918, 146.15-21 and 146.36-147.5.

legend of Helena and the Christian legacy of Constantine were blended into one story in the east, with Helena taking on a supplementary role, whereas in the west she was treated in her own right.[62] In other words, in Byzantium Helena was treated as part of her son's ideal Christian image. I will explore the reasons for this in the third chapter of my thesis.

2.4 Textual sources

TEXT 2: Ambrose of Milan (c. 339 - 397)[63]

A		B	
1	**40** Now Theodosios of august memory […] when he greets Constantine, who, though resolved in his last hour, was freed by the grace of baptism from all	*Nunc se augustae memoriae Theodosios […] quando Constantino adhaeret cui licet baptiamatis gratia in ultimis constituto omnia peccata dimiserit,*	1
5	sin, and because he was the first of the emperors to believe and left after him a heritage of faith to princes, he had found a place of great merit. Of whose times the following prophecy is	*tamen quod primus imperatorum credidit, et post se haereditalem fidei principibus dereliquit, magni meriti locum reperit. Cujus temporibus*	5
10	accomplished: "In that day that which is upon the bridle of the horse shall be	*completum est illud propheticum: "In illo die erit, quod super frenum equi, sanctum Domino omnipotenti." Quod*	10

[62] Biographies were written about Helena in the west. The oldest preserved was composed in the mid-ninth century by the monk Altmann of Hautvillers at the request of bishop Hincmar of Reims. See Chapter 1, page 29. No such texts were composed for Helena in the east, where she was chiefly confined within the narratives of Constantine.

[63] Ambrose of Milan, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1447-1468; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 65-83; more recent English translations of Ambrose's oration can be found in Deferrari 1953 and Liebeschuetz 2005.

holy to the Lord omnipotent." And this holy object, Helena his mother, of sainted memory, when filled with the spirit of God, unveiled for herself.

illa sanctae memoriae Helena mater ejus infuso sibi Dei Spiritu revelavit.

C D

41 Happy Constantine, because of such a mother, who at her son's command sought the aid of divine favour by which in battle he might both engage safely and not fear danger. Noble woman, who found something much greater to give to the emperor than she could receive from the emperor. The mother, solicitous for her son to whom the sovereignty of the Roman world had fallen, hastened to Jerusalem and diligently explored the place of the Lord's passion.

Beatus Constantinus tali parente, quae imperanti filio divini muneris quaesivit auxilium, quo inter praelia quoque tutus assisteret, et periculum non timeret. Magna femina, quae multo amplius invenit quod imperatori conferret, quam quod ab imperatore acciperet. Anxia mater pro filio, cui regnum orbis Romani cesserat, festinavit Hierosolyman, et scrutata est locum Dominicae Passionis.

E F

42 They claim that at first she was a hostess of an inn, and known as such to the elder Constantine, who afterwards

Stabulariam hanc primo fuisse asserunt sic cognitam Constantio seniori, qui postea regnum adeptus est Bona

secured the realm. Good hostess who did not ignore that host, who cared for the wounds of the man wounded by robbers. Good hostess who preferred to be considered dung, to gain Christ. For that reason Christ raised her from dung to a kingdom, as it is written that "He raised up the needy from the earth, and lifted up the poor out of the dunghill."

stabularia, quae tam diligenter praesepe Domini requisivit. Bona stabularia, quae stabularium non ignoravit illum, qui vulnera curavit a latronibus vulnerati. Bona stabularia, quae maluit aestimari stercora, ut Christum lucrifaceret. Ideo illam Christus de stercore levavit ad regnum, secundum quod scriptum est : "Quia suscitat de terra inopem, et de stercore erigit pauperem."

G H

43 Helena, then, came and commenced to look about the sacred places. The Spirit inspired her to search for the wood of the Cross. She drew near to Golgotha and said "Behold the place of combat, where is the victory? I seek the standard of salvation and I do not find it. "I," she said, "among kings, and the cross of my Lord in the dust? I in golden ornaments, and the triumph of Christ among ruins? Thus far the cross

Venit ergo Helena, coepit revisere loca sancta, infudit ei Spiritus ut lignum crucis requireret ; accessit ad Gologotha, et ait : "Ecce locus pugnae, ubi est victoria? Quaero vexillum salutis, et non invenio. Ego, inquit, in regnis, et crux Domini in pulvere? Ego in aureis, et in ruinis Christi triumphus? Ille adhuc latet, et latet palma vitae aeternae? Quomodo me redemptam arbitror, si redemption ipsa non

lies hidden and the palm of eternal life lies hidden! How do I believe that I have been redeemed, if my redemption itself is not seen?"

cernitur?"

1 J

1 **44** "I see what you did, O Devil, in order that the sword by which you were destroyed might be walled up. But Isaac cleared from rubbish the wells blocked 5 by foreigners, and did not suffer the water to lie concealed. Let the ruins be removed that life may appear; let the sword be drawn forth with which the head of the true Goliath was cut off; let 10 the earth be opened that salvation may shine forth. Why did you labor to hide the wood, O Devil, unless that you may be vanquished a second time? You were vanquished by Mary, who gave the 15 Conqueror birth. She without detriment to her virginity, brought forth Him to conquer you by His crucifixion, and to subjugate you by His death. Today also

"Video quid egeris, diabole, ut gladius quo peremptus es, obstrueretur. Sed Isaac obstructos ab alienigenis puteos erudaverit, nec latere aquam passus est. Tollatur igitur ruina, ut vita appareat: promatur gladius, quo veri Goliae caput est amputatum: aperiatur humus, ut salus fulgeat, Quid egisti, diabole, ut absconderes lignum, nisi ut iterum vincereris? Vicit te Maria, quae genuit triumphatorem, quae sine imminutione virginitatis edidit eum, qui crucifixus vinceret te, et mortuus subjugaret. Vinceris et hodie, ut mulier tuas insidias deprehendat. Illa quasi sancta Dominum gestavit, ego crucem ejus investigabo: illa generatum docuit, ego resuscitatum: illa fecit ut Deus inter 1 5 10 15

you shall be conquered when a woman discovers your snares. As that holy one bore the Lord, I shall search for His cross. She showed Him created; I, raised from the dead. She caused God to be seen among men; I shall raise from the ruins the divine standard as a remedy for our sins."

homines videretur, ego ad nostrorum remedium peccatorum divinum de ruinis elevabo vexillum."

K L

45 And so she opens the ground; she casts off the dust. She finds three forked-shaped gibbets thrown together, which the debris had covered; which the enemy had hidden. But the triumph of Christ could not be obliterated. She hesitates uncertain. She hesitates, as a woman, but the Holy Spirit inspires a careful investigation, with the thought that two robbers had been crucified with the Lord. Therefore she seeks the middle wood, but it could have happened that the debris mixed up the crosses one with another, and chance

Aperit itaque humum, decutit pulverem: tria patibula confuse reperit, quae ruina contexerat, inimicus absconderat. Sed non potuit oblitterari Christi triumphus. Incerto haeret: haeret, ut mulier; sed certam indaginem Spiritus sanctus inspirit eo quod duo latrines cum Domino crucifixi fuerint. Quaerit ergo medium lignum. Sed poterat fieri ut patibula inter se ruina confunderet, casus inverteret. Redit ad Evangelii lectionem, invenit quia in medio patibulo praelatus titulus erat: "Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Judaeorum." Hinc

interchanged them. She returned to the text of the Gospel, and found that on the middle gibbet a title had been displayed "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Hence a sequence of truth was formulated; the saving cross was disclosed by its title. This is that Pilate answered to the Jews when they petitioned him: "What I have written, I have written" that is. "I have not written these things to please you, but that future ages may know. I have not written for you but for posterity"; saying as it were: "Let Helena have something to read, whereby she may recognize the cross of the Lord."

collecta est series veritatis, titulo crux patuit salutaris. Hoc est quod petentibus Judaeis Pilatus respondit: "Quod scripsi, scripsi," id est, non ea scripsi, quae vobis placerent, sed quae aetas future cognosceret: non vobis scripsi, sed posteritati; propemodum dicens: Habeat Helena quod legat, unde crucem Domini recognoscat.

M

N

46 She discovered, then, the title; she adored the King: not the wood indeed, because this is an error of the Gentiles and a vanity of the wicked; but she adored Him who hung on the wood, who was inscribed in the title; Him, I

Invenit ergo titulum, Regem adoravit, non lignum utique; quia hic gentiles est error, et vanitas imiorum; sed adoravit illum, qui pependit in lingo, scriptus in titulo; illum inquam, qui sicut scarabaeus clamavit, ut persecutoribus

say, who as a scarabaeus cried out to his Father to forgive the sins of his persecutors. The woman eagerly hastened to reach the remedy of immortality. She was afraid to trample under foot the mystery of salvation. Joyful at heart yet with anxious footstep, she knew now what she should do. She proceeded, however, to the cradle of truth. The wood shone and grace flashed forth. And as before Christ had visited a woman in Mary, so the Spirit visited a woman in Helena. He taught her those things as woman she knew not, and led her to the way which no mortal was able to know.

suis Pater peccata donaret. Avida mulier festinabat tangere remedium immortalitatis, metuebat calcare sacramentum salutis. Laeto corde, et trepidanti vestigio, quid faceret, nesciebat. Pertendit tamen ad cubile veritatis, lignum refulsit, et gratia micuit. Et quia jam feminam visitaverat Christus in Maria. Spiritus in Helena visitavit: docuit eam quod mulier ignorabat, si deduxit in viam quam mortalis scire non poterat.

O

She sought the nails with which the Lord was crucified, and found them. From one nail she ordered reins to be made, from another she wove a diadem. She turned one to an ornamental use; the other to a devotional one. Mary was

Quaesivit clavos, quibus crucifixus est Dominus, et invenit. De uno clavo frenos fieri praecepit, de altero diadema intexuit: unum ad decorum, alterum ad devotionem vertit. Visitata est Maria, ut Evam liberaret: visitata est Helena, ut

P

visited to liberate Eve; Helena was visited that emperors might be redeemed. Therefore she sent to her son Constantine a diadem remarkable for its jewels which the more precious gem of divine redemption interwove, as the jewels were inlaid in the iron of the cross. She also sent the bridle. Constantine used both, and transmitted the faith to later kings. And so, the first source of emperors' receiving the faith is the holy relic which is upon the bridle. From that came faith whereby persecution ended and devotion took its place.

imperators redimerentur. Misit itaque filio suo Constantino diadema gemmis insignitum, quas pretiosior ferro innexas cruces redemptionis divinae gemma connecteret. Misit et frenum. Utroque usus est Constantinus, et fidem transmisit ad posteros reges. Principium itaque credentium imperatorum sanctum est quod super frenum: ex illo fides, ut persecution cessaret, devotion succederet.

Q R

48 Helena has done wisely who has placed the cross on the head of sovereigns, in order that the cross of Christ may be adored among kings. That is not presumption but piety, since it was consecrated to our holy redemption.

Sapienter Helena, quae crucem in capite regnum locavit; ut crux Christi in regibus adoretur. Non insolentia ista, sed pietas est, cum defertur sacrae redemptioni.

S			T
1	**51** What else therefore has the beneficence of Helena accomplished when she gave direction to the reins, than to seem to say by the Holy Spirit to	*Quid ergo aliud egit Helenae operatio, ut frena dirigeret; nisi ut omnibus imperatoribus sancto dicere Spiritu videretur: "Nolite fieri sicut equus et*	1
5	all emperors: "Do not become like the horse and mule," and in bridle and bit to bind the jaws of those who did not realise that they were kings to rule themselves, as subjects.	*mulus;" sed in freno et chamo maxillas eorum constringeret, qui se non agnoscerent reges, ut regerent sibi subditos?*	5

TEXT 3: Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 345 - 410)[64]

A			B
1	**10.7** It was at this time that Helena, Constantine's mother, a woman matchless in faith, devotion, and singular generosity, the sort of person	*Per idem tempus Helena Constantini mater, femina incomparabilis fide et religione animi, ac magnificentia singulari, cujus jure Constantinus et*	1
5	whose son Constantine would be, and be considered to be, was alerted by divine visions and travelled to Jerusalem, where she asked the inhabitants where the place was where	*esset filius et crederetur, divinisadmonita visionibus, Jerosolyman petit, atque ibi locum in quo sacrosanctum corpus Christi patibulo affixum pependerat, ab incolis*	5

[64] Rufinus of Aquileia, *Church History*: ed. *PL* 21 (1878), 475-478; Eng. trans. Amidon 1997, 16-18.

the sacred body of Christ had hung fastened to the gibbet. It was hard to find, because an image of Venus had been fixed there by the persecutors of old, so that if any Christian wished to worship Christ in that place, he would seem to worshiping Venus. For this reason the place was unvisited and almost forgotten. But when, as we said, the pious woman had hastened to the place indicated to her by a sign from heaven, and had pulled away everything profane and defiled, she found deep down when the rubble had been cleared away three crosses jumbled together. But her joy at the discovery was darkened by the fact that the crosses were indistinguishable from each other. There was also found the inscription which Pilate had made with Greek, Latin, and Hebrew letters, but not even it showed clearly enough which was the Lord's gibbet. Here, then, human uncertainty demanded divine evidence.

perquirit. Qui idcirco ad in veniendum difficilis erat, quo dab antiques persecutoribus simulacrum in eo Veneris fuerat defixum, ut si quis Christianorum in loco illo Christum adorare voluisset. Et ob hoc infrequens et pene oblivioni datus fuerat locus. Sed cum (ut supra diximus) religiosa foemina properasset ad locum coelesti sibi indicio designatum, cuncta ex eo prophana et polluta deturbans, in altum purgatis ruderibus, tres confuso ordine reperit cruces. Sed obturbabat reperti numeris laetitiam uniuscujusque crucis indiscretaproprietas. Aderat quidem et titulus ille, qui Graecis, et Latinis atque Hebraicis litteris a Pilato fuerat conscriptus : sed nec ipse satis evidenter dominici prodebat signa patibuli. Hinc jam humanae ambiguitatis incertum, divinum flagitat testimonium. Accidit in eadem urbe primariam quandam loci illius foeminam gravi aegritudine confectam,

There happened to be in the city a woman of high station who lived there and who was lying near death of a serious illness. Makarios was bishop of the church at the time. When he saw the perplexity of the empress and of all who were also present, he said, "Bring here all the crosses which have been found, and God will now disclose to us which one it was that bore God." And going in with the empress and the people to the woman who was lying there, he knelt down and poured out the following sort of prayer to God:

seminecem jacere. Macarius per idem tempus Ecclesiae illius Episcopus erat. Is ubi cunctantem reginam atque omnes partier qui aderant, videt: Adferte (inquit) huc totas, quae repertae sunt cruces, et quae sit quae portaverit Dominum, nunc nobis adaperiet Deus. Et ingressus cum regina pariteret populis ad eam, quae decumbebat, defixis genibus hujuscemodi ad Deum precem profudit.

C D

10.8 "O Lord, who through your only-begotten Son have deigned to bestow salvation on the human race through the suffering of the cross, and now have most recently inspired the heart of your handmaid to seek the blessed wood on which our Saviour hung, show clearly which of these three was the cross

Tu, Domine, qui per unigenitum Filium tuum salutem generi humano per passionem cruces conferre dignatus es, et nunc in novissimis tmporibus adspirasti in corde ancillae tuae perquirere lignum beatum, in quo salus nostra pependit, ostende evidenter ex his tribus, quae crux fuerit ad

destined for the Lord's glory, and which of them were made for servile punishment, that this woman who lies here half dead may be called back from the gates of death to life as soon as the healing wood touches her." Having said this, he first touched her with one of the three, but it did not help. He touched her with the second and again nothing happened. But when he touched her with the third, she at once opened her eyes, got up, and with renewed strength and far more liveliness than when she had been healthy before, she began to run about the whole house and glorify the Lord's power. The empress then, having been granted her prayer with such a clear token, poured her royal ambition into the construction of a wonderful temple on the site where she had found the cross. The nails too, with which the Lord's body had been fastened, she brought to her son. He made of some of them a bridle to use in

dominicam gloriam, vel quae extiterit ad servile supplicium, ut haec mulier, quae semiviva decumbit, statimut eam lignum salutare contigerit, a mortis januisrevocetur ad vitam. Et cum haec dixisset, adhibuit primo unam ex tribus, et nihil profecit. Adhibuit secundam, et ne sic quidem aliquid actum est. Ut vero admovit tertiam, repente adapertis oculis mulier consurrexit, stabilitate virium recepta, alacrior multo, quam cum sana fuerat, tota domo discurrere et magnificare Dei potentiam coepit. Sic evidenti indicio Regina voti compos effecta, templum mirificum in eo loco in quo crucem repererat, regia ambitione construxit. Clavos quoque, quibus corpus Dominicum fuerat affixum, portat ad filium. Ex quibus ille frenos composuit, quibus uteretur ad bellum: et ex aliis galeam nihilominus belli usibus aptam fertur armasse. Ligni vero ipsius salutaris partem detulit filio, partem vero thecis argenteis conditam

battle, and with the others he is said to have equipped himself with a helmet no less useful in battle. As for the healing wood itself, part of it she presented to her son, and part she put in silver reliquaries and left in the place; it is still kept there as a memorial with unflagging devotion. The venerable empress also left the following mark of her religious spirit. She is said to have invited to lunch the virgins consecrated to God whom she found there and to have treated them with such devotion that she thought it unfitting for them to perform the duties of servants; rather, she herself, in servant's garb, set out the food with her own hands, offered the cup, and poured water over their hands, and the empress of the world and mother of the empire appointed herself servant of the servants of Christ. This took place in Jerusalem.

dereliquit in loco quae etiam nunc ad memoriam solicita veneratione servatur. Reliquit etiam hoc indicium religiosi anim Regina venerabilis: Virgines quae ibi reperit Deo sacratas, invitasse ad prandium, et tanta eas devotione curasse dicitur, ut indignum crederet, si famulorum uterentur officiis, sed ipsa manibus suis, famulae habitu succincta, cibum apponeret, poculum porrigeret, aquam manibus infunderet, et Regina orbis ac mater imperii, famularum Christi se famulam deputaret. Et haec quidem Jerosolymis gesta.

TEXT 4: Paulinus of Nola (c. 355 - 431)[65]

A		B	
1	**I** […] you (Severus) desire for our basilica […] some blessed object from the sacred relics of the saints […] I have found instead a fragment of a sliver of	*[...] nobis desiderare te ad basilicam [...] de sacris sanctorum reliquiis benedictionem [...] inuenimus quod digne et ad basilicae sanctificationem*	1
5	the wood of the holy cross to send you as a worthy gift. This will enhance both the consecration of your basilica and your holy collection of sacred ashes.	*uobis et ad sanctorum cinerum cumulandam benedictionem mitteremus, partem particulae de lingo diuinae cruces.*	5

C		D	
1	**3** I think it relevant here, because our faith seems to demand it and it is worth knowing, to recount the special history of the uncovering and finding of the	*Sed quia id ipsum fides uidetur postulare, non alienum puto, quia cognitu dignum est, enarrare specialem post tempora passionis historiam*	1
5	cross after the time of the Passion. If this history is not known, one can easily gauge how difficult it is to prove that this is the wood of the Lord's cross [...] This is why the search for its hiding	*reseratae et inuentae cruces. Quae si ignoretur, facile est perspici, qua difficultate adprobetur dominicae crucis esse lignum hoc [...] quid ergo nunc quaeritur ubi fuerit abdita, quia nisi*	5
10	place is made in our day, because if it had not lain hidden it must clearly have	*latuisset, illis praesertim persecutionum temporibus Iudaicam consecutis*	10

[65] Paulinus of Nola, *Letter to Sulpicius Severus*: ed. Hartel 1984, 267-275; Eng. trans. Walsh 1967, 125-133.

been destroyed, especially during the years of persecutions which succeeded upon the hatred of the Jews and almost exceeded their savagery […] The emperor Hadrian thought that he would destroy the Christian faith by insult to the place of Crucifixion, and so he consecrated on the site of the Passion a statue of Jupiter.

inuidiam et pene supergressis saeuitiam, manifestum est abolendam fuisse ? [...] nam Hadrianus imperator existimans se fidem Christianam loci iniuria perempturum in loco passionis simulacrum Iouis consecrauit [...]

E F

4 This wickedness of an earlier age continued to the time of Constantine, shortly before our day. He deserved to be prince of the princes of Christ as much through the faith of his mother Helena as through his own. The outcome proved that she was inspired by God's plan when she set eyes to Jerusalem. As co-regent with the title Augusta, she asked her son to give her a free hand in clearing all the sites there on which our Lord's feet had trod, and which were stamped with

Mansit hoc saeculi prioris nefas in tempora nostris proxima Constantini, qui princes esse principibus Christianis non magis sua quam matris Helenae fide meruit, quae diuino, ut exitus docuit, inspirata consilio, cum Hierosolyman agnosceret, nomine conregnans Augustae eum rogabat, ut sibi facultatem daret cuncta illic loca dominicis impressa uestigiis et diuinorum erga nos operum signata monumentis purgare destructis temples et idolis ab omni prophanae inpietatis

remembrances of God's works for us. She sought to cleanse them of all the infection of profane wickednesses by pulling down temples and statues, and to restore them to their rightful allegiance so that the Church might at last be famed in the land of its beginnings. So when the agreement of her son, the emperor, was promptly forthcoming, the Augusta, his mother, applied the money of the treasury to her holy tasks, completely draining the imperial purse. With all the expense and all the veneration which the queen could summon, and which piety urged, she covered and adorned by the construction of basilicas all the places where our Lord and Redeemer had fulfilled for us the saving secrets of His love by the mysteries of the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension.

contagio et religioni suae reddere, ut ecclesia tandem in terra originis suae celebraretur. Itaque prompto filii imperatoris adsensu mater Augusta patefactis ad opera sancta thesauris toto abusa fisco est, quantoque sumptu atque cultu regina poterat et religio suadebat, aedificatis basilicas contexit omnes et excoluit locos, in quibus salutaria nobis mysteria pietatis suae incarnationis et passionis et resurrectionis atque ascensionis sacramentis dominus redemptor inpleuerat.

G H

5 But hear of the great, truly God-sent

Sed in historia cruces accipiter magnum

miracle in the history of the Cross. When that revered queen reached Jerusalem, with care and devotion she avidly visited all the places in the city and vicinity which bore the marks of God's presence. She was eager to absorb through her eyes the faith which she had gained by devoted listening and reading; but most eagerly of all she began to seek after the cross of the Lord. But what method or plan of discovering it was at hand, when no suitable informant could be found, since both the long interval of years and the persistence of wicked superstition had removed all recollection and interest in religious awareness and observance? But the Lord Himself is awake to all that is hidden in earth and in men's minds; so this faithful woman through her devoted love deserved to experience the breath of the Holy Spirit. After carefully but vainly searching for this object which God had removed from

et uere diuinum miraculum. Regina illa uenerabilis ut uenit Hierosolyman diligenter et pie locis illic et circa omnibus diuinorum curiosa insignium et oculis haurire gestiens fidem, quam piis auribus litterisque perceperat, crucem domini studiosissime inquirere adorsa est. sed quae uia uel ratio inueniendi subesset, cum index idoneus nemo inueniri potuisset, ubi memoriam et curam religiosae conscientiae uel obseruantiae et antiquitas aeui et superstitionis inpiae diuturnitas aboleuisset? Uerum ipso omnium et terries et animis opertotum conscio et teste domino fidelis mulier sanctum spiritum per affectum pium meruit, quo adspirante, cum rem ab humana conscientia diuinitus remotam frustra diligens requisisset, de loco tantum passionis certior fieri studuit. Itaque non solum de Christianis doctrina et sanctitate plenos uiros, sed et de Iudaeis peritissimos ut propriae, qua

men's knowledge, she became eager to obtain information solely on the site of Passion. So she sought out not only Christians full of learning and holiness, but also the most learned of the Jews to inform her of their native wickedness in which, poor men, they even boast. Having summoned them she assembled them in Jerusalem. Her resolve was strengthened by the unanimous witness of all about the site. There and then (undoubtedly under the impulse of a revelation she had experienced) she ordered digging operations to be prepared on that very site. A force of civilians and soldiers was quickly mustered, and the work of digging soon completed. To the general astonishment, but precisely as the queen alone had believed, deep digging opened up cavities in the earth and revealed the secret of the hidden cross. But three crosses were found together, as they had once stood together with the Lord and

miseri et gloriantur, inpietatis iudices exquisiuit et accitos in Hierosolymam congregauit. Tum omnium una de loco testificatione confirmata est. Iussit ilico urgente sine dubio conceptae reuelationis instinctu in ipsum locum operam fossionis accingi parataque mox ciuium pariter et militari manu breui laborem istius molitionis hausit, et contra spem omnium sed secundum ipsius tantum reginae fidem alta egestione reseratis terrae sinibus abditae crucis arcana patuerunt. Sed cum tres pariter cruces, ut quondam fixae domino et latronibus steterant, repertae fuissent, gratulatio repertarum coepit anxia dubitatione confundi iusto piorum metu, ne forsitan aut pro cruce domini patibulum latronis eligerent aut salutare lignum pro stipite latronis abiciendo uiolarent. Respexit pias fideliter aestuantium curas dominus et ipsi potissimum, quae tam piae sollicitudinis princeps erat, huius

the thieves fastened to them. So the thanksgiving for their discovery began to be compounded with troubled doubts. The devoted faithful were rightly afraid that they might perhaps choose the gibbet of a thief in mistake for the Lord's cross, or outrage the cross of salvation by discarding it as the stake of a thief. The Lord looked with mercy on the pious anxieties of those whose faith put them in a ferment, and especially on her who was outstandingly agitated in the devotion of her heart. So He poured light on her counsels. So inspired, she ordered a man newly dead to be sought out and brought to her. Her command was instantly obeyed; a corpse was carried in and set down. As the body lay there, the first and the second cross was placed on it, but death spurned the wood which had supported the guilty. Finally, the Lord's cross was revealed by a resurrection, for at the touch of the wood of salvation mortality fled, death

consilii lumen infudit, ut aliquem recens mortuum inquiri et inferri iuberet. Nec mora ; uerbum factum, cadauer inlatum est ; sed reorum ligna mors spreuit. Postremo dominicam crucem prodit resurrectio et ad salutaris ligni tactum morte profuga funus excussum et corpus erectum est tremefactisque uiuentibus stetit mortuus et funebribus, ut Lazarus quondam, uinculis expeditus, ilico inter expectatores suos rediuiuus incessit.

was shaken off, and the corpse brought upright. Whilst living men trembled, the dead man stood up; like Lazarus of old he was freed from the bonds of death, and there and then joined the group of spectators watching him, a man brought to life.

I J

1 **6** […] As was fitting for Christ's cross, it was discovered and authenticated as His by the proof of resurrection. Then it was consecrated in worthy surroundings 5 by the foundation of a basilica on the site of the Passion. The basilica, gleaming with gilded ceilings and rich with golden altars, preserves the cross which is placed in a hidden sanctuary.

[…] ita, ut crucem Christi decuit, experimento resurrectionis inuenta et probata crux Christi est dignoque mox amditu consecratur condita in passionis loco basilica, quae auratis corusca laquearibus et aureis diues altaribus arcano repositam sacrario crucem seruat. 1 5

TEXT 5: Sulpicius Severus (c. 363 - 420)[66]

A B

1 **XXXIII** […] For Constantine then obtained the sovereignty, and he was

[…] namque tum Constantinus rerum potiebatur, qui primus omnium 1

[66] Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicle*: ed. *PL* 20 (1854), 147-148; Eng. trans. Roberts 1894, 112-114.

the first Christian of all the Roman rulers […] During this period of time, it is marvelous how the Christian religion has prevailed. For Jerusalem which had presented a horrible mass of ruins was then adorned with most numerous and magnificent churches. And Helena, the mother of the emperor Constantine (who reigned along with her son as Augusta), having a strong desire to behold Jerusalem, cast down the idols and the temples which were found there; and in course of time, through the exercise of her royal powers, she erected churches on the site of the Lord's passion, resurrection, and ascension.

Romanorum principum Christianus fuit […] Hoc temporum tractu mirum est quantum invaluerit religio Christiana. Tum siquidem Hierosolyma horrens ruinis, frequentissimis ac magnificentissimis Ecclesiis est adornata: namque Helena mater principis Constantini, quae Augusta cum filio conregnabat, cum Hierosolymam agnoscere concupisset, reperta ibi idola ac templa protrivit: mox usa regni viribus, basilicas in loco Dominicae passionis et resurrectionis et ascensionis constituit.

C D

XXXIV Through the kind efforts of the same queen, the cross of the Lord was then found. It could not, of course, be consecrated at the beginning, owing to the opposition of the Jews, and

Ejusdem reginae beneficio crux Domini tum reperta, quae neque in principio obsistentibus Judaeis potuerat consecrari, et postea dirutae civitatis oppressa ruderibus, non nisi tam

afterwards it had been covered over by the rubbish of the ruined city. And now, it would never have been revealed except to one seeking for it in such a believing spirit. Accordingly, Helena having first got information about the place of our Lord's passion, caused a band of soldiers to be brought up to it, while the whole multitude of the inhabitants of the locality vied with each other in seeking to gratify the desires of the queen, and ordered the earth to be dug up, and all the adjacent most extensive ruins to be cleared out. Ere long, as the reward of her faith and labor, three crosses (as of old they had been fixed for the Lord and the two robbers) were discovered. But upon this, the greater difficulty of distinguishing the gibbet on which the Lord had hung, disturbed the minds and thoughts of all, lest by a mistake, likely enough to be committed by mere mortals, they might perhaps consecrate

fideliter requirenti meruit ostendi. Igitur Helena primum de loco passionis certior facta, admota military manu, atque omnium provincialium multitudine in studia reginae certantium, effodi terram et contigua quaeque ac vastissima ruinarum purgari jubet: mox pretium fidei et laboris tres partier cruces, sicut olim Domino ac latronibus duobus fixae fuerant, reperiuntur. Hic vero major dignoscndi patibuli in quo Dominus pependerat, difficultas omnium animos mentesque turbaverat, ne errore mortalium forsitan pro cruce Domini latronis patibulum consecrarent. Capiunt deinde consilium, ut aliquem recens mortuum crucibus admoverent. Nec mora, quasi Dei nutu funeris exstincti solemnibus exsequiis deferebatur, concursuque omnium feretro corpus eripitur. Duabus prius frustra crucibus admotis, ubi Christi patibulo attactum est, dictum mirabile!

as the cross of the Lord, that which belonged to one of the robbers. They form then the plan of placing one who had recently died in contact with the crosses. Nor is there any delay in carrying out this purpose; for just as if by the appointment of God, the funeral of a dead man was then being conducted with the usual ceremonies, and all rushing up took the body from the bier. It was applied in vain to the first two crosses, but when it touched that of Christ, wonderful to tell, while all stood trembling, the dead body was shaken off, and stood up in the midst of those looking at it. The cross was thus discovered, and was consecrated with all due ceremony.

Trepidantibus cunctis funus excussum, et inter spectators suos astitit. Crux reperta, dignoque ambitu consecrata.

TEXT 6: Sokrates (c. 380 - after 439)[67]

A

1 **55.12-58.2** Helena, the emperor's mother (from whose name having made

B

1 *Ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως μήτηρ Ἑλένη, ἧς ἐπ' ὀνόματι τήν ποτε κώμην Δρεπάνον πόλιν*

[67] Sokrates, *Church History*: ed. Hansen 1995, 55-58; Eng. trans. Zenos 1891, 21-22.

Drepanum, once a village, a city, the emperor called it Helenopolis), being divinely directed by dreams went to Jerusalem. Finding that which was once Jerusalem, desolate ‘as a Preserve for autumnal fruits,’ according to the prophet, she sought carefully the sepulchre of Christ, from which he arose after his burial; and after much difficulty, by God's help she discovered it. What the cause of the difficulty was I will explain in a few words. […] Those who hated Christianity, having covered the spot with a mound of earth, erected on it a temple to Venus, and set up her image there […] This succeeded for a long time; and it became known to the emperor's mother. Accordingly she having caused the statue to be thrown down, the earth to be removed, and the ground entirely cleared, found three crosses in the sepulchre […] With these was also found the tablet of Pilate, on which he had inscribed in various

ποιήσας ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἑλενόπολιν ἐπωνόμασεν, δι᾽ ὀνείρων χρηματισθεῖσα εἰς τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα παρεγένετο, καὶ τήν ποτε Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἔρημον ὡς ὀπωροφυλάκιον κατὰ τὸν προφήτην εὑροῦσα τὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μνῆμα, ἔνθα ταφεὶς ἀνέστη, σπουδίως ἐζήτει, καὶ δυσχερῶς μέν, σὺν θεῷ δέ εὑρίσκει. τίς δέ ἡ αἰτία τῆς δυσχερείας, διὰ βραχέων ἐρῶ […] *οἱ δέ φυγαδεύσαντες τὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ⟨κατέκρυψαν⟩ χώσαντες τὸν τόπον ⟨καὶ⟩ Ἀφροδίτης κατ᾽ αυτοῦ ναὸν κατασκευάσαντες ἐπέστησαν ἄγαλμα* […] *τοῦτο μέν οὖν πάλαι προὐχώρει, τῇ δέ μητρὶ τοῦ βασιλέως φανερὸν τότε ἐγένετο.* Καθελοῦσα *οὖν τὸ ξόανον καὶ τὸν τόπον ἐκχώσασα καὶ καθαρὸν ἐργασαμένη τρεῖς εὑρίσκει σταυροὺς ἐν τῷ μνήματι* […] *σὺν αὐτοῖς εὕρητο καὶ ἡ τοῦ* Πιλάτου *σανίς, ἐν ᾗ βασιλέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων τὸν σταυρωθέντα* Χριστὸν *προγραφῇ διαφόρων γραμμάτων ἐκήρυττεν. Ἐπεὶ δέ ἀμφίβολος ἦν ὁ σταυρὸς ὁ ζητούμενος, οὐχ ἡ τυχοῦσα λύπη κατεῖχεν τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως μητέρα.* Οὐκ *εἰς μακρὰν δέ παύει τὰ τῆς λύπης ὁ τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων ἐπίσκοπος, ᾧ ὄνομα ἦν* Μακάριος,*λύει δέ πίστει τὸ ἀμφίβολον* […] *γυνή τις τῶν ἐγχωρίων νόσῳ χρονίᾳ ληφθεῖσα πρὸς αὐτῷ λοιπὸν τῷ θαμάτῳ ἐγένετο* […] *ἡ δέ τοῦ βασιλέως μήτηρ οἶκον μέν εὐκτήριον ἐν τῷ τοῦ μνήματος*

characters, that the Christ who was crucified was king of the Jews. Since, however, it was doubtful which was the cross they were in search of, the emperor's mother was not a little distressed; but from this trouble the bishop of Jerusalem, Makarios, shortly relieved her. And he solved the doubt by faith, for he sought a sign from God and obtained it […] a certain woman of the neighborhood, who had been long afflicted with disease, was now just at the point of death […] The emperor's mother erected over the place of the sepulchre a magnificent church, and named it New Jerusalem, having built it facing that old and deserted city. There she left a portion of the cross, enclosed in a silver case, as a memorial to those who might wish to see it: the other part she sent to the emperor, who being persuaded that the city would be perfectly secure where that relic should be preserved, privately enclosed it in his

τόπῳ πολυτελῆ κατασκεύασεν ᾿Ιερουσαλήμ τε νέαν ἐπωνόμασεν, ἀντιπρόσωπον τῇ παλαᾷ ἐκείνῃ καὶ καταλελειμμένῃ ποιήσασα. Τοῦ δέ σταυροῦ μέρος μέν τι θήκῃ ἀργυρᾷ περικλείσασα μνημόσυνον τοῖς ἱστορεῖν βουλομένοις αὐτόθι κατέλιπεν, τὸ δέ ἕτερον μέρος ἀποστέλλει τῷ βασιλεῖ. Ὅπερ δεξάμενος καὶ πιστεύσας τελείως σωθήσεσθαι τὴν πόλιν, ἔνθα ἂν ἐκεῖνο φυλάττηται, τῷ ἑαυτοῦ ἀνδριάντι κατέκρυψεν, ὃς ἐν τῇ Κωνσταντινουπόλει ἐν τῇ ἐπιλεγομένῃ ἀγορᾷ Κωνσταντίνου ἐπὶ τοῦ πορφυροῦ καὶ μεγάλου κίονος ἵδρυται. Τοῦτο μέν οὖν ἀκοῇ γράψας ἔχω· *πάντες δέ σχεδὸν οἱ τὴν* Κωνσταντινούπολιν οἰκοῦντες ἀληθές εἶναί *φασιν. Καὶ τοὺς ἥλους δέ, οἳ ταῖς χερσὶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ κατὰ τὸν σταυρὸν ἐνεπάγησαν, ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος λαβών (καὶ γὰρ καὶ τούτους ἡ μήτηρ ἐν τῷ μνήματι εὑροῦσα ἀπέστειλεν) χαλινούς τε καὶ περικεφαλαίαν ποιήσας ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις ἐκ ἔχρητο. ᾽Εχορήγει μέν οὖν πάσας τὰς ὕλας ὁ βασιλεὺς εἰς τὴν κατασκευὴν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, ἔγραφεν δέ καὶ Μακαρίῳ τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ ἐπισπεύδειν τὰς οἰκοδομάς.* ῾Η *δέ τοῦ βασιλέως μήτηρ ποιήσασα τὴν νέαν ῾Ιερουσαλὴμ καὶ ἐν τῷ ἄντρῳ τῆς* Βηθλεέμ, *ἔνθα ἡ κατὰ σάρκα γέννησις τοῦ* Χριστοῦ, *ἑτέραν ἐκκλησίαν οὐχ ἥττονα*

own statue, which stands on a large column of porphyry in the forum called Constantine's at Constantinople. I have written this from report indeed; but almost all the inhabitants of Constantinople affirm that it is true. Moreover the nails with which Christ's hands were fastened to the cross (for his mother having found these also in the sepulchre had sent them) Constantine took and had made into bridle−bits and a helmet, which he used in his military expeditions. The emperor supplied all materials for the construction of the churches, and wrote to Makarios the bishop to expedite these edifices. When the emperor's mother had completed the New Jerusalem, she reared another church not at all inferior, over the cave at Bethlehem where Christ was born according to the flesh: nor did she stop here, but built a third on the mount of his Ascension. So devoutly was she affected in these matters, that she would

κατασκεύαζεν, οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ ὄρει τῆς ἀναλήψεως. Οὕτω δέ εἶχεν εὐλαβῶς περὶ ταῦτα, ὡς καὶ συνεύχεσθαι ἐν τῷ τῶν γυναικῶν τάγματι, καὶ τὰς παρθενους τὰς ἀναγεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν κανόνι ἐπὶ ἑστίασιν προτρεπομένη, δι' ἑαυτῆς λειτουργοῦσα τὰ ὄψα ταῖς τραπέζαις προσέφερεν. Πολλὰ δέ καὶ ἐδωρεῖτο ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις καὶ τοῖς πένησιν, εὐσεβῶς τε διανύσασα τὴν ζωὴν ἐτελεύτησεν περὶ ὀγδοηκοστὸν ἔτος, καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς εἰς τὴν βασιλεύουσαν {νέαν} Ῥώμην διακομισθέν ἐν τοῖς βασιλικοῖς μνήμασιν ἀπετέθη. Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα δέ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπιμελέστερος ὢν περὶ τὰ Χριστιανῶν ἀπεστράφη πάσας τὰς Ἑλληνικὰς θρησκείας, καὶ παύει μέν τὰ μονομάχια, εἰκόνας δέ τὰς ἑαυτοῦ ἐν τοῖς Ἑλληνικοῖς ναοῖς ἐναποτίθεσθαι διεκώλυσεν.

pray in the company of women; and inviting the virgins enrolled in the register of the churches to a repast, serving them herself, she brought the dishes to table. She was also very munificent to the churches and to the poor; and having lived a life of piety, she died when about eighty years old. Her remains were conveyed to royal Rome, and deposited in the imperial sepulchres.[68] After this the emperor became increasingly attentive to the interests of the Christians, and abandoned the heathen superstitions. He abolished the combats of the gladiators, and his own statues in the temples.[69]

[68] Zenos translated that Helena's 'remains were conveyed to New Rome, the capital'. I thank Neil McLynn for bringing to my attention the oddity of the phrase *τὴν βασιλεύουσαν {νέαν} Ῥώμην*. The word 'new' is encountered only in some manuscripts. The original text probably said just 'royal Rome', as elsewhere in Sokrates. In other words, Sokrates' narration of Helena's burial did not shift away from the Eusebian model. On this basis, Zenos' translation should not read that Helena's tomb was placed in Constantinople.

[69] Zenos translated that Constantine 'set up his own statues in the temples'. Zenos' translation, however, cannot be justified by the text itself and the use of the verb *διεκώλυσεν* (prevented). Moreover, Eusebios recorded in his description of Constantine that 'by law Constantine forbade images of himself to be set up in idol-shrines, so that he might not be contaminated by the error of forbidden things even in replica'. Cameron and Hall 1999: 159.

TEXT 7: Sozomen (born between 370 and 380)[70]

A

II.1 […] The emperor rejoiced exceedingly at the restoration of unity of opinion in the Catholic Church, and desirous of expressing in behalf of himself, his children, and the empire, the gratitude towards God which the unanimity of the bishops inspired, he directed that a house of prayer should be erected to God at Jerusalem near the place called Calvary. At the same time his mother Helena repaired to the city for the purpose of offering up prayer, and of visiting the sacred places. Her zeal for Christianity made her anxious to find the wood which had formed the adorable cross. But it was no easy matter to discover either this relic or the Lord's sepulchre; for the Pagans, who in former times had persecuted the Church, and who, at the first promulgation of Christianity, had had

B

[...] *χαριστήριά τε ἀνατιθεὶς τῷ θεῷ ὑπέρ τῆς ὁμονοίας τῶν ἐπισκόπων, ὑπέρ τε αὐτοῦ καὶ παίδων καὶ τῆς βασιλείας, ᾠήθη δεῖν οἶκον εὐκτήριον τῷ θεῷ κατασκευάσαι ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἀμφὶ τὸν καλούμενον Κρανίου τόπον. περὶ δέ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον καὶ Ἑλένη ἡ αὐτοῦ μήτηρ ἧκ εν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα εὔξασθαί τε καὶ τοὺς ἐνθάδε ἱεροὺς ἱστορῆσαι τόπους. Εὐλαβῶς δέ περὶ τὸ δόγμα τῶν Χριστιανῶν διακειμένη περὶ πολλοῦ ἐποιεῖτο τοῦ σεβασμίου σταυροῦ τὸ ξύλον ἐξευρεῖν. Ἦν δέ οὔτε τούτου οὔτε τοῦ θεσπεσίου τάφου ἡ εὕρεσις ῥᾳδία. Οἱ γὰρ πάλαι τὴν ἐκκλησίαν διώξαντες Ἕλληνες ἔτι φύεσθαι ἀρχομένην τὴν θρησκείαν πάσῃ μηχανῇ σπουδάσαντες ἐκτεμεῖν ὑπὸ πολλῷ χώματι τὸν τῇδε τόπον κατέκρυψαν* [...] *Ἐγένετό γε μὴν δῆλος ὁ τόπος καὶ ἐφωράθη ἡ σπουδασθεῖσα περὶ αὐτὸν πλάνη, ὡς μέν τινες λέγουσιν, ἀνδρὸς Ἑβραίου τῶν ἀνὰ τὴν ἑῴαν οἰκούντων ἐκ πατρῴας γραφῆς καταμηνύσαντος, ὡς δέ ἀληθέστερον ἐννοεῖν ἔστι, τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιδείξαντος διὰ σημείων καὶ ὀνειράτων. Οὐ γὰρ οἶμαι τὰ θεῖα δεῖσθαι τῆς παρ' ἀνθρώπων μηνύσεως, ἡνίκα ἂν δῆλα*

[70] Sozomen, *Church History*: ed. Bidez and Hansen 1960, 47-51; Eng. trans. Hartranft 1891, 258-259.

recourse to every artifice to exterminate it, had concealed that spot under much heaped up earth […] At length, however, the place was discovered, and the fraud about it so zealously maintained was detected; some say that the facts were first disclosed by a Hebrew who dwelt in the east, and who derived his information from some documents which had come to him by paternal inheritance; but it seems more accordant with truth to suppose that God revealed the fact by means of signs and dreams; for I do not think that human information is requisite when God thinks it best to make manifest the same. When by command of the emperor the place was excavated deeply, the cave whence our Lord arose from the dead was discovered; and at no great distance, three crosses were found and another separate piece of wood, on which were inscribed in white letters in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin, the

αὐτὰ τῷ θεῷ δοκῇ γενέσθαι. Τηνικαῦτα γοῦν κατὰ πρόσταξιν τοῦ βασιλέως τοῦ τῇδε χώρου καθαρθέντος εἰς βάθος, ἐν μέρει τὸ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἀνεφάνη ἄντρον, ἐτέρωθι δέ περὶ τὸν αὐτὸν τόπον τρεῖς ηὑρέθησαν σταυροί, καὶ χωρὶς ἄλλο ξύλον ἐν τάξει λευκώματος ῥήμασι καὶ γράμμασιν Ἑβραϊκοῖς Ἑλληνικοῖς τε καὶ Ῥωμαϊκοῖς τάδε δηλοῦν· Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων […] ἐργώδης δέ ἔτι ἐτύγχανεν ἡ τοῦ θείου σταυροῦ διάκρισις, εἰ καὶ εὑρέθη, διερρυηκότος αὐτοῦ τοῦ γράμματος καὶ διερριμμένου, ἅμα δέ καὶ τῶν τριῶν σταυρῶν χύδην διεσπαρμένων, ὥς γε εἰκὸς ἐν τῇ καθαιρέσει τῶν σταυρωθέντων σωμάτων συγχυθείσης τῆς τάξεως […] γυνή τις ἦν τῶν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐπισήμων, χαλεπωτάτῃ καὶ ἀνιάτῳ νόσῳ κάμνουσα. Πρὸς ταύτην κειμένην ἦλθε Μακάριος ὁ τῆς αὐτόθι ἐκκλησίας ἐπίσκοπος, παραλαβὼν τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως μητέρα καὶ τοὺς ἀμφ' αὐτόν. Εὐξάμενός τε πρότερον καὶ σύμβολον τάξας τοῖς ὁρῶσιν ἐκεῖνον εἶναι τὸν θεῖον σταυρόν, ὃς ἐπιτεθεὶς ἀπαλλάξει τῆς νόσου τὴν γυναῖκα, φέρων ἕκαστον αὐτῇ τῶν ξύλων προσήγαγεν […] λέγεται δέ καὶ νεκρὸν τῷ ἴσῳ τρόπῳ ἀναβιῶναι. Τοῦ δέ εὑρεθέντος θεσπεσίου ξύλου τὸ μέν πλεῖστον ἐν

following words: “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” […] There yet, however, remained a difficulty in distinguishing the Divine cross from the others; for the inscription had been wrenched from it and thrown aside, and the cross itself had been cast aside with the others, without any distinction, when the bodies of the crucified were taken down […] There was a certain lady of rank in Jerusalem who was afflicted with a most grievous and incurable disease; Makarios, bishop of Jerusalem, accompanied by the mother of the emperor and her attendants, repaired to her bedside. After engaging in prayer, Makarios signified by signs to the spectators that the Divine cross would be the one which, on being brought in contact with the invalid, should remove the disease. He approached her in turn with each of the crosses […] It is said that a dead person was, in the same way, restored to life.

ἀργυρᾷ θήκῃ μένον ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις φυλάττεται, μέρος δέ ἡ βασιλὶς πρὸς Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν παῖδα διεκόμισεν, οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἥλους οἷς τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ διαπεπερόνητο. Ἐκ τούτων δέ ἱστοροῦσι τὸν βασιλέα περικεφαλαίαν κατασκευάσαι καὶ χαλινὸν ἵππειον κατὰ τὴν Ζαχαρίου προφητείαν

[...]

The venerated wood having been thus identified, the greater portion of it was deposited in a silver case, in which it is still preserved in Jerusalem: but the empress sent part of it to her son Constantine, together with the nails by which the body of Christ had been fastened. Of these, it is related, the emperor had a head-piece and bit made for his horse, according to the prophecy of Zechariah […]

C

II.2 About this period, the emperor, having determined upon erecting a temple in honor of God, charged the governors to see that the work was executed in the most magnificent and costly manner possible. His mother Helena also erected two temples, the one at Bethlehem near the cave where Christ was born, the other on ridges of the Mount of Olives, whence He was taken up to heaven. Many other acts

D

Ἀμφὶ δὲ τοῦτον τὸν χῶρον προθέμενος ὁ βασιλεὺς ναὸν ἐγεῖραι τῷ θεῷ προσέταξε τοῖς τῇδε ἄρχουσι προνοεῖν ὡς ἂν μάλιστα μεγαλοφυές καὶ πολυτελές ἀποδειχθείη τὸ ἔργον. Ἐν μέρει δὲ καὶ Ἑλένη ἡ αὐτοῦ μήτηρ δύο ναοὺς ᾠκοδόμησε, τὸν μέν ἐν Βηθλεέμ ἀμφὶ τὸ τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ σπήλαιον, τὸν δέ πρὸς ταῖς ἀκρωρείαις τοῦ ὄρους τῶν Ἐλαιῶν, ὅθεν ἐπὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνελήφθη. Ταύτης δέ πολλὰ μέν καὶ ἄλλα δείκνυσι τὴν εὐσέβειαν καὶ εὐλάβειαν, οὐχ ἥκιστα δέ καὶ τόδε. Λέγεται γὰρ αὐτὴν τότε ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις διατρίβουσαν συγκαλέσαι

show her piety and religiousness, among which the following is not the least remarkable: During her residence at Jerusalem, it is related that she assembled the sacred virgins at a feast, ministered to them at supper, presented them with food, poured water on their hands, and performed other similar services customary to those who wait upon guests. When she visited the cities of the east, she bestowed befitting gifts on the churches in every town, enriched those individuals who had been deprived of their possessions, supplied ungrudgingly the necessities of the poor, and restored to liberty those who had been long imprisoned, or condemned to exile or the mines. It seems to me that so many holy actions demanded a recompense; and indeed, even in this life, she was raised to the summit of magnificence and splendor; she was proclaimed Augusta; her image was stamped on golden coins, and she

πρὸς ἑστίασιν τὰς ἱερὰς παρθένους καὶ ὑπηρέτιν γενέσθαι περὶ τὸ δεῖπνον, παρατιθεῖσαν τὰ ὄψα καὶ ὕδωρ ταῖς χερσὶν ἐπιχέουσαν καὶ τἆλλα ποιοῦσαν, ἃ θέμις διακονεῖσθαι τοὺς τῶν δαιτυμόνων θεράποντας. Τηνικαῦτα δέ *τὰς πόλεις τῆς ἕω περιιοῦσα τὰς μέν κατὰ πόλιν ἐκκλησίας ἀναθήμασι τοῖς προσήκουσιν ἐτίμησε, πολλοὺς δέ οὐσιῶν ἐκπεπτωκότας πλουσίους ἐποίησε, πονεμένοις δέ τὰ ἐπιτήδεια ἀφθόνως διένειμε, τοὺς δέ χρονίων δεσμῶν καὶ ὑπερορίας φυγῆς καὶ μετάλλων ἠλευθέρωσε.* Καὶ *μοι δοκεῖ τούτων ἀξίας ἀπειληφέναι τὰς ἀμοιβάς· τὴν μέν γὰρ ἐνταῦθα βιοτήν, ὡς οὐ πλέον ἐνεδέχετο, λαμπρῶς καὶ λίαν ἐπισήμως διήνυσε·* Σεβαστή τε *ἀνεκηρύχθη, καὶ εἰκόνι ἰδίᾳ χρυσοῦν νόμισμα κατεσήμανε, καί βασιλικῶν θησαυρῶν ἐξουσίαν παρὰ τοῦ παιδὸς λαβοῦσα κατὰ γνώμην ἐχρῆτο.* ᾽Επεὶ *δέ ἔδει τὸν τῇδε καταλιπεῖν βίον, εὐκλεῶς ἐτελεύτησεν, ἔτη μέν ἀμφὶ τὰ ὀγδοήκοντα γεγονυῖα, τὸν δέ παῖδα καταλιποῦσα ἅμα* Καίσαριν *αὐτῆς ἐκγόνοις πάσης τῆς* ῾Ρωμαίων *οἰκουμένης ἡγούμενον.* Εἰ *δέ τίς ἐστι καὶ τούτων ὄνησις, οὐδέ τελευτήσασαν ἡ λήθη ἐκάλυψεν·* <u>*ἔχει δέ αὐτῆς διηνεκοῦς μνήμης ἐνέχυρον ὁ μέλλων αἰὼν τὴν ἐπὶ* Βιθυνίας *πόλιν καὶ ἑτέραν παρὰ* Παλαιστίνοις, *ἀπ᾽ αὐτῆς λαβούσας τὴν προσηγορίαν*</u>. Ταῦτα

was invested by her son with authority over the imperial treasury to give it according to her judgment. Her death, too, was glorious; for when, at the age of eighty, she quitted this life, she left her son and her descendants (like her of the race of Caesar), masters of the Roman world. And if there be any advantage in such fame – forgetfulness did not conceal her though she was dead – the coming age has the pledge of her perpetual memory; for two cities are named after her, the one in Bithynia, and the other in Palestine. Such is the history of Helena.

μέν ἡμῖν ὧδε περὶ Ἑλένης εἰρήσθω. 45

TEXT 8: Theodoret of Kyrrhos (c. 393 - c. 457)[71]

A

1 **63.20** The bearer of these letters was no less illustrious a personage than the mother of the emperor, even she who was glorious in her offspring, whose
5 piety was celebrated by all; she who

B

Τούτοις τοῖς γράμμασιν οὐκ ἄλλος τις διηκόνησεν ἀλλ᾽ αὐτὴ τοῦ βασιλέως ἡ μήτηρ, ἡ καλλίπαις ἐκείνη καὶ παρὰ πάντων ᾀδομένη τῶν εὐσεβῶν, ἡ τὸν μέγαν τοῦτον φωστῆρα τῇ οἰκουμένῃ τεκοῦσα καὶ τὴν τῆς εὐσεβείας 1 5

[71] Theodoret of Kyrrhos, *Church History*: ed. Parmentier and Sweidweiler 1954, 63-65; Eng. trans. Jackson 1892, 54-55.

brought forth that great luminary and nurtured him in piety. She did not shrink from the fatigue of the journey on account of her extreme old age, but undertook it a little before her death, which occurred in her eighty-first year.

αὐτῷ προσενεγκοῦσα τροφήν, αὖτη τῶν τῆς ὁδοιπορίας πόνων ἀνασχομένη καὶ τοῦ γήρως οὐ λογισαμένη τὰ πάθη· πρὸ γὰρ ὀλίγου τῆς τελευτῆς τὴν ἀποδημίαν ταύτην ἐστείλατο, ὀγδοηκοντοῦτις δέ τὸ τέρμα τοῦ βίου κατείληφεν.

C

64.3 When the empress beheld the place where the Saviour suffered, she immediately ordered the idolatrous temple, which had been there erected, to be destroyed, and the very earth on which it stood to be removed. When the tomb, which had been so long concealed, was discovered, three crosses were seen buried near the Lord's sepulchre. All held it as certain that one of these crosses was that of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the other two were those of the thieves who were crucified with Him. Yet they could not discern to which of the three the Body of the Lord had been brought nigh, and

D

Ἐπειδὴ δέ τὸ χωρίον εἶδεν ἐκεῖνο τὸ τῆς κοινῆς σωτηρίας τὰ πάθη δεξάμενον, εὐθὺς μέν τὸν μυσαρὸνἐκεῖνον ναὸν καταλυθῆναι εἰς ἔδαφος καὶ τὸν χοῦν ἐκφορηθῆναι προσέταξε. Δήλου δέ τοῦ κεκρυμμένου τάφου γεγενημένου, ὤφθησαν τρεῖς παρὰ τὸ μνῆμα τὸ δεσποτικὸν κατακεχωσμένοι σταυροί. Καὶ ὅτι μέν εἷς ἐκ τούτων ὁ τοῦ δεσπότου καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν ἐτύγχανεν ὤν, οἱ δέ ἕτεροι τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ προσηλωθέντων ληστῶν, ἀναμφισβητήτως ἐπίστευον ἅπαντες· ἠγνόουν δέ ὅμως τὸν τῷ δεσποτικῷ πελάσαντα σώματι καὶ τοῦ τιμίου αἵματος τὴν λιβάδα δεξάμενον. Ἀλλ' ὁ σοφώτατος ἐκεῖνος καὶ θεῖος ὄντως Μακάριος ὁ τῆς πόλεως πρόεδρος τοιῷδε πόρῳ τὴν ἀπορίαν διέλυσε. Γυναικὶ γὰρ περιφανεῖ, νόσῳ κατεχομένῃ μακρᾷ, ἕκαστον τῶν σταυρῶν ἐκείνων μετὰ προσευχῆς σπουδαίας προσενεγκὼν ἔγνω

which had received the outpouring of His precious Blood. But the wise and holy Makarios, the president of the city, resolved this question in the following manner. He caused a lady of rank, who had been long suffering from disease, to be touched by each of the crosses, with earnest prayer, and thus discerned the virtue residing in that of the Saviour. For the instant this cross was brought near the lady, it expelled the sore disease, and made her whole.

τοῦ σωτηρίου σταυροῦ τὴν δύναμιν. Παραυτίκα γὰρ οὗτος τῷ γυναίῳ πελάσας τὴν χαλεπὴν ἐκείνην ἐξήλασε νόσον καὶ τὴν ἄνθρωπον ἀπέφηνεν ὑγιᾶ.

E F

64.18 The mother of the emperor, on learning the accomplishment of her desire, gave orders that a portion of the nails should be inserted in the royal helmet, in order that the head of her son might be preserved from the darts of his enemies. The other portion of the nails she ordered to be formed into the bridle of his horse, not only to ensure the safety of the emperor, but also to fulfil

Οὕτω δὴ τοῦ βασιλέως ἡ μήτήρ, μαθοῦσα τὸ ποθούμενον, τῶν μέν ἥλων τὰ μὲν εἰς τὸ βασιλικὸν ἐνέβαλε κράνος, τῆς τοῦ παιδὸς κεφαλῆς προμηθουμένη, ἵνα τὰ τῶν πολεμίων ἀποκρούηται βέλη· τὰ δέ τῷ τοῦ ἵππου ἀνέμιξε χαλινῷ, καί ἀσφάλειαν μηχανωμένη τῷ βασιλεῖ καὶ παλαιᾷ προφητείᾳ πέρας ἐπιτιθεῖσα. πόρρωθεν γὰρ Ζαχαρίας ὁ προφήτης ἐβόα· "καὶ ἔσται τὸ ἐπὶ τοῦ χαλινοῦ ἅγιον τῷ κυρίῳ παντοκράτορι."

an ancient prophecy; for long before Zechariah, the prophet, had predicted that "*There shall be upon the bridles of the horses Holiness unto the Lord Almighty.*"

G

65.1 She had distributed part of the cross of our Saviour to the Christian kingdoms.[72] The rest was enclosed in a covering of silver, and committed to the care of the bishop of the city, whom she exhorted to preserve it carefully, in order that it might be transmitted uninjured to posterity. She then sent everywhere for workmen and for materials, and caused the most spacious and most magnificent churches to be erected. It is unnecessary to describe their beauty and grandeur; for all the pious, if I may so speak, hasten thither and behold the magnificence of the buildings.

H

τοῦ δὲ σωτηρίου σταυροῦ μοῖραν μέν τινα τοῖς βασιλείοις ἀπένειμε, τῷ δὲ λοιπῷ θήκην ἐξ ὕλης ἀργύρου ποιησαμένη τῷ τῆς πόλεως δέδωκεν ἐπισκόπῳ, φυλάττειν παρεγγυήσασα ταῖς ἔπειτα γενεαῖς τὰ τῆς σωτηρίας μνημόσυνα. Πάντοθεν δὲ δὴ παντοδαπῆς ὕλης τεχνίτας ἀγείρασα τοὺς μεγίστους ἐκείνους καὶ λαμπροτάτους νεὼς ἐδομήσατο. Τὸ δὲ τούτων κάλλος καὶ μέγεθος ἐκφράσαι περιττὸν ἄγαν ὑπείληφα, πάντων ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν τῶν φιλοθέων ἐκεῖσε θεόντων καὶ θεωμένων τῶν ἔργων τὴν πολυτέλειαν.

[72] Jackson inaccurately translated that Helena 'had part of the cross of our Saviour conveyed to the palace'.

I

65.10 This celebrated and admirable empress performed another action worthy of being remembered. She assembled all the women who had vowed perpetual virginity, and placing them on couches, she herself fulfilled the duties of a handmaid, serving them with food and handing them cups and pouring out wine, and bringing a basin and pitcher, and pouring out water to wash their hands.

After performing these and other laudable actions, the empress returned to her son, and not long after, she joyfully entered upon the other and a better life, after having given her son much pious advice and her fervent parting blessing. After her death, those honours were rendered to her memory which her stedfast and zealous service to God deserved.

J

Πεποίηκε δέ καὶ ἕτερον μνήμης ἄξιον ἡ πανεύφημος ἐκείνη καὶ ἀξιάγαστος βασιλίς. Τὰς γὰρ διὰ βίου τὴνπαρθενίαν ἀσκούσας συναγείρασα πάσας καὶ ἐπὶ στιβάδων πολλῶν κατακλίνασα, αὐτὴ θεραπαινίδος ἔργον ἐπλήρου, διακονοῦσα καὶ ὄψα παρατιθεῖσα καὶ κύλικας ὀρέγουσα καὶ οἰνοχοοῦσα καὶ πρόχοον ἐπὶ λέβητος φέρουσα καὶ ὕδωρ ταῖς ἐκείνων χερσὶν ἐπιχέουσα. Ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τούτοις ὅμοια δράσασα ἐπανῆλθε μέν πρὸς τὸν παῖδα χαίρουσα, μετ᾽ εὐθυμίας δὲ εἰς τὸν ἕτερον μετέστη βίον, πλεῖστα τῷ παιδὶ περὶ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς πολιτείας ἐντειλαμένη καὶ ταῖς ἐξιτηρίοις αὐτὸν ἐπικλύσασα εὐλογίαις. Ἐκείνη μέν οὖν καὶ μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν τιμῆς τετύχηκεν ὁποίας τυχεῖν ἐχρῆν τὴν οὕτως ἐπιμελῶς καὶ θερμῶς τὸν τῶν ὅλων τεθεραπευκυῖαν θεόν.

3

Imperial ideology and reality: representations of Helena in Byzantium between the fifth and ninth centuries

The Trier ivory panel, once the side of a box or casket, gives a picture of a procession in an architectural setting. A relic shrine is carried by two priests sitting in an ornate four-wheeled wagon drawn by mules. In front are men carrying candles and the figure of an emperor leading the procession. They move towards the figure of an empress, who holds a long-shafted cross. The empress stands in front of a church which is still in the process of construction. In the background, men look out of windows while singing hymns and swinging censers. It is widely accepted that the empress is the dominant figure on this ivory. Additionally, her representation invokes the legend of Helena. Although debate has focused on the identity of the empress and the date of the ivory itself, James is the only scholar who raises the issue of the ivory's ideological significance with regard to the authority that an empress, not only in person but also by virtue of her office, could exercise in Byzantium.[1] Scholars place its date between the fifth and tenth centuries, a period rich – as will be demonstrated in this chapter – in examples of empresses claiming affiliations with Helena. My evaluation of the symbolic significance that laity and clergy accorded to Helena broadens our understanding of the official position of empresses in the world of Byzantine politics. It will be made clear that the role of empress was defined by a different set of imperial virtues than the role of emperor. In other words, both empress and emperor mattered in terms of

[1] James 1997: 129-132. The most substantial works on the Trier ivory include Spain 1977; Holum and Vikan 1979; Wortley 1980; Wilson 1984; Brubaker 1999.

power, without meaning that the former was of equal importance to the latter. The portrayals of Helena involve their own paradoxical and subversive qualities.

3.1 Portraits of Helena in *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*

From the late fourth to the ninth century, visual representations of Helena seem to have existed in the empire's new capital, Constantinople. Though not extant today, the representations are attested in the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, the earliest collection of texts devoted to the history and monuments of Constantinople.[2] The work is full of anachronisms and bizarre errors.[3] The date and purpose of its compilation are, unfortunately, not straightforward, making its interpretation a difficult task. It has traditionally been dated between the reign of Leo III (717-741) and 829, and has been variously characterised as a kind of patriographic work, as a political pamphlet directed against the cult of Constantine the Great, and as a work of historiography written from the perspective of the laity rather than ecclesiastics.[4]

An interesting feature of the *Parastaseis* – overlooked by scholars – is its emphasis on empresses. A special section (section three, chapters 29-36) lists and describes portraits of them: Eudoxia (Arcadios, 395-408), Eudokia (Theodosios II, 408-450), Pulcheria (Marcian, 450-457), Verina (Leo I, 457-474), Arcadia and Ariadne (Zeno, 474-491), Euphemia (Justin

[2] For introduction, text, translation, and commentary, see Cameron and Herrin 1984.

[3] The language of the text is problematic and does not provide a solid ground for interpretation. Cameron and Herrin write in relation to this matter that the bad state of the eleventh-century manuscript makes it hard to know when the discrepancies in language are the mistakes of *Parastaseis* and when they are textual corruptions. See Cameron and Herrin 1984: 17.

[4] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 1-54; Dagron 1984: 29-48; Kazhdan 1987b: 400-403; Berger 1988: 40-49; Speck 1988: 3-17; Ševčenko 1992: 289-293; Kresten 1994: 21-52; James 1996: 12-20; Anderson 2011: 1-19.

I, 518-527), and Sophia (Justin II, 565-578).[5] While almost all of the imperial women are identified as spouses (*τῆς γυναικὸς* in single) of emperors, the references to Verina and Pulcheria are worthy of special attention. The *Parastaseis* parallels Verina with Helena (*Βερίνης ὀρθοδόξου Ἑλένης πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη*), and characterises Pulcheria as famous (*Πουλχερίας τῆς ἀοιδίμου*). The names of the two empresses appear in two more thematic units of the text: Pulcheria in section six, which is concerned with the activities of certain emperors, and Verina in section eight, which briefly describes a series of monuments and places. Though there is consistency in the way in which Pulcheria is described, the attitude of the *Parastaseis* to Verina changes. Namely, Pulcheria is the first imperial woman in the text called 'empress' (*τῇ βασιλίδι Πουλχερίᾳ*). Leo I (457-474) – who succeeded Marcian and Pulcheria to the throne, and who was married to Verina – is presented offering great honours to Pulcheria in commemorating her death, by setting up scenes from her life in the palace (chapter 45).[6] Verina, however, is portrayed in the last passage of the *Parastaseis* as having bewitched (*τὴν λεγομένην Κράνον νῆσον ἐστοιχειώσατο Βερίνα*) the island called Kranos (chapter 89). This is the first time in the text that the name Kranos does not identify a philosopher but an island.[7] The content of the passage is obscure, implying for the first time a malevolent function for an imperial figure, especially for an empress. It is likely that it is allegorical.

[5] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 92-97, 205-210.

[6] 'On her tomb he represented her image. And in the imperial palace when he looked on her picture he would deem her whole life blessed. Leo also transferred a statue of Marcian and Pulcheria to the Theodosian porticoes and gave it to the imperial city', see Cameron and Herrin 1984: 122-123, 235.

[7] 'As to why she bewitched it, no reason can be found. But while this island was bewitched, suddenly many deaths took place, whence it remained deserted until the reign of Justinian (II), who three times ordered the sea to wash over it and overwhelm it completely', see Cameron and Herrin 1984: 164-165, 277. Further on Verina, see James 1997: 133-134.

The way that the *Parastaseis* was structured becomes even more suspicious if the chronological inconsistency with which events are described throughout the text, and the persistent omission of the name of the ruling emperor at the time when the text was written, are taken into consideration. The information presented in the *Parastaseis* does not justify, as we will see, the argument either that the authors were concerned with providing a guidebook for Constantinople or a political pamphlet directed against the cult of Constantine I. On the contrary, the possibility of a historiographical use of the *Parastaseis*, conceived distinctly from conventional forms, seems to be more likely. Dating the text and understanding the reasons for which it was created are challenging tasks, and go beyond the scope and ambitions of my investigation. I will, therefore, tackle some aspects of it, restricting my attention only to the general attitude of the text towards the empresses. Nothing on empresses is mentioned in the first two sections (twenty-eight chapters), while the majority of the examples are listed, as we have seen, in the third section (eight chapters). The fourth section (seven chapters) refers to an ancient statue – set in the Bread Market by Constantine I – which predicted the conspiracy against Zeno by Verina (chapter 40), and no empresses appear in the fifth section (one chapter). The sixth section (fifteen chapters), as we have seen, salutes Pulcheria as empress (chapter 45), whereas the seventh section (five chapters) warns that an empress will once again cause misfortune for Constantinople (chapter 61). The section continues by relating the story of Eudokia, the Athenian who was selected in a bride-show to marry Theodosios II (chapter 64). The final section (twenty-four chapters) narrates that Julian (360-363) ejected his wife from the throne because she was a Christian, and exiled her in a monastery (chapter 70, the story is inaccurate); that Ariadne, who was earlier shameless, eventually became chaste (chapter 80); and, at the very end, that Verina was marked by wickedness, as mentioned above (chapter 89).

It is unclear whether individual sections were written at different times, but the *terminus ante quem* of the work as a whole should perhaps be placed around 802.[8] The *Parastaseis* begins with the foundation of Constantinople by its Christian benefactor, whose authority or activities – as will be seen below – are nowhere challenged in the text, but it ends with a disruption of normal order by an empress, and the re-establishment of normality by an emperor. The names do not really matter, and I suspect that they are only used to draw parallels with contemporary events in the capital. If I am correct, reading the information that the eight sections provide about the empresses allegorically, it may be hypothesised that each section of the *Parastaseis* corresponds to a distinct moment of the turbulent political scene in Constantinople between 717 and 802: the first iconoclasm (sections one and two); the join rule of Eirene and Constantine VI (section three); the reign of Constantine VI and Eirene's conspiracies to remove her son from the throne (sections four and five); the sole rule of Eirene (sections six and seven); and the fall and exile of Eirene by Nikephoros I in 802 (section eight). The *Parastaseis*' descriptions of the empresses seem to evoke events from the life of Eirene. Especially, the association of Eudokia, the wife of Theodosios II, with Athens and her alleged selection in a bride-show, as cited in the *Parastaseis* (section seven, chapter 64), correspond perfectly with Eirene's early life. If such a line of interpretation is correct, the author of the obscure story of Verina's malevolence in the closing passage of the *Parastaseis* could either describe or foresee – in a similar way that the philosophers of the text could interpret antique statues and warn rulers about the future of their reign – the return of the

[8] The earliest use of the epithets 'great' for Constantine and 'pious' for Leo III, are found in the *Chronographia* of Theophanes the Confessor, composed in the early ninth century. See below, page 134. The dating of the work's compilation to the very end of the eighth century (775-802) has been suggested by Berger, Ševčenko and Kresten.

empire to the hands of a traditional male ruler.[9] The question to be raised here is not only whether perhaps *Parastaseis*' descriptions of the empresses referred indirectly to Eirene, but if yes, why such a secrecy. I hope to develop this further in future work. Undoubtedly, an evaluation of the *Parastaseis*'s evidence points to many approaches and interpretations, making its content puzzling and problematic. Whatever the reasons for which the *Parastaseis* was written, and the hidden messages it was – or was not – intended to communicate to its readership, its value as a source of information about lost works of art remains unquestioned. It is used as such in my thesis.

According to the *Parastaseis*, portraits of Helena, either in the form of statues (*στῆλαι*) or pictures (*εἰκόνες*) – it is unclear whether the text meant paintings, mosaics, or any other form of two-dimensional art – were located at prominent sites in the capital, but she was hardly ever shown alone. Helena was almost always depicted in the company of her son, Constantine. The first reference to Helena (chapter 11) mentions that when Justinian I (527-565) built Hagia Sophia, he removed from Constantine's Great Church 427 statues, which he distributed around the city. Most of the statues were pagan – including gods, emperors, philosophers, and astronomical symbols – and only eighty showed Christian themes. Out of the many that the writer of this passage found worth mentioning are statues of members of the Constantinian, Valentinian, and Theodosian imperial houses (Constantine, Constantius II, Constans, Helena, Licinius, Julian the Apostate, Valentinian (I?), Theodosios I, Arcadios, and Theodosios II); and of fourth-century imperial officials (Julian the Eparch, Galen the

[9] The prominent role of prophecy in the interest that the authors of the *Parastaseis* take in statues has been generally noted. For a recent study on this subject, see Anderson 2011: 1-19. It is interesting to note that the dynamic of prophecies was familiar in Eirene's time. We are informed by Theophanes of a forged ancient inscription prophesying the advent of a golden age under Eirene and her son. For further discussion, see Mango 1963: 201-207.

Quaestor, and Serapio the Governor) whose historical identity cannot, however, be confirmed.

> At the Great Church which is now called Hagia Sophia, 427 statues were removed, most of them pagans. Among the many were ones of Zeus, and of Carus, the ancestor of Diocletian, and the Zodiac, and the Moon and Aphrodite and the North Star, Arcturus, supported by two Persian statues and the South Pole and a priestess of Athena prophesying to Hero the philosopher, in profile. There were only a few (statues) of Christians, about eighty. Out of the many it is worth mentioning a few: Constantine, Constantius, Constans, Galen the quaestor, <Julian Caesar and another Julian, the eparch>, Licinius Augustus, Valentinian and Theodosios and Arcadios [and] his son, Serapio the governor, and three of Helena the mother of Constantine; one of porphyry and [other] marbles, another with silver inlay on a bronze column and the other of ivory, given by Cypros the rhetor. These statues Justinian distributed about the city when he built the Great Church with faith and effort. Those who know the foregoing find a good number of them if they go round the city and look for them.[10]

None of these statues postdate 450, when Theodosios II's reign ended. However, not all of them can be placed in a historical context, because of the poor awareness of the *Parastaseis* of the actual significance of some figures. Scholars have suggested that the pagan statues should be interpreted as part of the collection of antique statues that Constantine brought to decorate his new capital.[11] With reference to the imperial figures, however, though the *Parastaseis* describes them as Christians, four of them had been supporters of Arianism and paganism. The problems surrounding this passage have already been noted by Cameron and Herrin, who highlight that it is doubtful whether the writer is correct about the identification or the collective origin of the statues; whether this conglomeration was really

[10] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 70-73.

[11] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 184-186.

inside or around the old Hagia Sophia; and whether they were included among the statues that someone could see scattered round Constantinople in the *Parastaseis*' day.[12]

Whatever the case may be, it is interesting that the writer provided a description of three statues of Helena, while the rest of the imperial statues were merely mentioned briefly. Both the number of her statues, and the luxurious materials they were made of (porphyry, ivory, silver, bronze), undoubtedly denote her imperial significance, and raise issues regarding the dedication of images of her in Constantinople. Surprisingly, the earliest reference to statues of Helena documented elsewhere coincides with the chronological framework within which the *Parastaseis* placed the event. The sixth-century *Chronicle* of John Malalas, composed during the reign of Justinian I (527-565), claimed that Constantine I set up a statue of his mother Helena as Augusta, on a low porphyry column, and called the place Augusteum (Text 9). The same information appeared for a second and final time in the seventh-century *Paschal Chronicle* (Text 10). On the (unprovable) assumption that such accounts were not preceded by others, the possibility that one of the fourth- or fifth-century statues of Helena that, according to the *Parastaseis*, Justinian distributed round Constantinople, was sited in Augustaeum, seems appealing, but not provable.

The next representation of Helena described in the *Parastaseis* was found in the Forum Tauri (chapter 16). The writer related that two crosses were erected in this place by Constantine. One derives the impression that in the *Parastaseis*' days the first cross was flanked by statues of Constantine and Helena, and by two angels. At the intersection of the cross could be read the word 'holy' (ἅγιος). The second cross was inlaid with silver, and had circular orbs at the ends of its arms. It is said that it was erected by Constantine in commemoration of his divine vision. The writer narrated that in the *Parastaseis*' days the cross was accompanied by gilded statues of Constantine and his sons.

[12] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 184-186.

> Note that the cross on which can be read at the intersection 'Hagios' was set up by him who was the patron of the Forum. There too two statues are preserved on the right and left of the angels, one of Constantine himself and one of Helena. To the north as you come in and to the east as you go out, a cross inlaid with silver, with circular orbs at the ends of its arms was erected in this place by Constantine the Great, just as he saw <it in the sky>. There gilded statues of his sons and himself can be seen.[13]

As Cameron and Herrin remark, representations of Constantine and Helena with the cross 'are unlikely to have been of Constantinian date, since they clearly commemorated the post-Constantinian legend of the finding of the true cross by Helena'.[14] The text, nonetheless, is suggestive regarding the origins of the crosses only, and contains less about the accompanying elements (inscription and statues). Only two assumptions can, therefore, be made here. On the basis of Cameron and Herrin's comment, the first iconographical group may have been erected as a whole any time after 395, when the legend of Helena was first introduced. But, on the basis of the *Parastaseis*' description, it could alternatively be suggested that, if the cross in the first group had indeed been placed in the Forum by Constantine himself – which is not implausible – then it could have been supplemented at a later time, when the legend of Helena was established, with representations of Constantine and Helena.[15] In either case, by the time the *Parastaseis* was written, representations of Constantine and Helena with the cross were apparently visible in Constantinople.[16]

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[13] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 78-81.

[14] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 192-193.

[15] According to Eusebios, immediately after his vision of the cross at the Milvian Bridge, Constantine summoned goldsmiths and jewelers, and gave them instructions to construct the sign of the cross in gold and precious stones. The labarum and replicas of it were used by Constantine and his armies for protection in war. Cameron and Hall 1999: 81-82. Eusebios continued, stating that during the celebrations of his victory over Maxentius, Constantine placed a cross in the middle of Rome, inscribing it as the salvific sign of the authority of Rome and the protection of the whole empire. He also ordered a tall pole to be erected in the shape of a cross in the hand of a statue made to represent himself. Cameron and Hall 1999:85. Moreover, sometime after the

A second representation of Helena, with Constantine and the cross, was located, according to the *Parastaseis* (chapter 34), on the roof of the Milion, a significant site for imperial propaganda. The appearance of the Tyche of Constantinople in the middle of the cross places the group in an interpretive context, providing useful information about the time it might have been erected and the messages it was intended to communicate.[17] However, it is difficult to ascertain if the statues were preserved in the *Parastaseis*' days.

> Beyond the Chalke at the Milion to the east, <a statue> of Constantine and Helena above the arch. There, too, a cross <and the tyche> of the city in the middle of the cross.[18]

As Cameron and Herrin remark, the text does not mention the changes made to the Milion in the eighth century by the monothelete Philippikos (711-713) and by Anastasios (713-715), but merely describes the statues of fourth- and sixth-century rulers: Constantine and Helena, Theodosios I, and Justin II and his family. Taking into consideration that Philippikos and Constantine V are mentioned (indirectly) in other parts of the text, this particular omission seems surprising and problematic.[19]

Council of Nicaea, Constantine placed a painting of the Christogram or of the cross over the entrance to the palace in Constantinople (probably on the Chalke Gate). Cameron and Hall 1999: 121-122.

[16] The verbs used in the description are in the present tense, suggesting that both groups were visible in the *Parastaseis*' days: *ἀναγινωσκόμενος* (can be read), *σώζονται* (are preserved), *καθορῶνται* (can be seen). Cameron and Herrin note 'that present tense signifies survival', Cameron and Herrin 1984: 13.

[17] See below, page 141.

[18] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 95.

[19] Philippikos represented on Milion the first five ecumenical councils together with portraits of himself and the monothelete patriarch, Sergios I. Having reversed Philippikos' support of Monotheletism, Anastasios replaced the portraits of Philippikos and Sergios with the sixth ecumenical council. See Cameron and Herrin 1984: 208-209. The belief that the councils were substituted with scenes from the hippodrome and of charioteers by Constantine V has been questioned by Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon. See Brubaker and Haldon 2011:210.

The *Parastaseis* further relates (chapter 43) that a group of imperial statues were placed in the Senate House in the Forum of Constantine by Theodosios II (408-450), in order to replace a porphyry statue of Constantine and his sons which had been stolen and lost in the sea. The group consisted of statues of Constantine, his wife Fausta, and Helena.

> […] And the porphyry statue there of three stones with three heads, which some said was of Constantine the Great in the middle, Constantius on the left and Constans on the right, with two feet, but six hands – a strange spectacle for those who saw it, each one looking in a different direction – and one hand. But once there was a fire in this place, and while everyone was busy that extraordinary thing was stolen, in the reign of Theodosios II, the son of Arcadios, who immediately <made> threats through a herald in the suburbs and districts by the sea if the spectacle were not found. Those who dared to do this were not able to remove it to their own country, but were overtaken by the emperor's boat and did away with themselves; they cast both the spectacle and themselves into the sea and were drowned. And although many boats and rope-baskets and some divers came because of the anguish of the emperor, and though he offered a multitude of gifts and with fearful oaths promised to give five hundred centeria to anyone who could rescue it from the sea, no one succeeded in doing so. Then this Theodosios in anger gave over the house of Senatos to the fire (it was supported by four columns). He removed the statue of Helena, the mother of Constantine, and Constantine and his wife Fausta, the daughter of Diocletian, in the same Senate house. Constantine and his wife were made of cast bronze and partly of stone, but Helena was of porphyry all over. These are preserved up to the present day.[20]

It is doubtful whether this story is accurate, as no evidence confirms that the composite group of Constantine and his sons ever existed; that the Senate House destroyed by fire was indeed the one in the Forum of Constantine and not the Senate in the Augusteum; that the identification of the imperial statues is correct; or that any of the events described – if they actually happened – should necessarily be attributed to the reign of Theodosios II.[21] The inclusion of statues of Fausta, who is mistakenly described as the daughter of Diocletian

[20] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 116-121.

[21] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 230-232.

rather than of Maximian, is problematic, as their existence in Constantinople – which had become Constantine's permanent residence and official imperial capital after 326 – is unlikely given the *damnatio memoriae* that followed her mysterious death in the same year.[22] Whatever the case, it is said that Fausta and Constantine's statues were made of different materials from the statue of Helena, suggesting that perhaps they were not initially intended to be displayed as a group. The verb used to describe Theodosios' action, *μετέθηκεν* (removed or transferred), makes clear that the statues were originally standing elsewhere, but they were brought together in the same place in order to meet Theodosios's need for imperial statues in the Senate House. Moreover, this is the second occasion on which the *Parastaseis* emphasised that a statue of Helena was made of porphyry, underlining not only a recognition of her imperial status, but also a special attitude towards her.

The *Parastaseis* states (chapter 52) that a third group of portraits of Helena with Constantine and the cross was set up by Constantine in the Forum Bovis, soon after his final victory over Byzas.

> In the area of the Forum Bovis a great encampment was prepared by Constantine the Great, and Byzas made war on him, and as Sokrates says, twenty thousand pagans died. And at once in the same Forum Bovis a silver gilt cross was set up, and likenesses of Constantine and Helena, the hands of both the slaves of God holding the cross, they say.[23]

This passage is distinguished from the one previously analysed, because we are informed, for the first time, of pictures (*εἰκόνες*) of Constantine and Helena holding the cross, a type which seems to correspond to the first hagiographical representations of the pair, which are seen in

[22] According to the *Parastaseis*, a second statue of Fausta was buried along with statues of Constantine and Crispus near the church of Saint Theodore in Constantinople. Cameron and Herrin 1984: 64-67.

[23] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 126-127.

churches in Cappadocia by the tenth century.[24] In view of the lack of extant visual representations of the pair in Constantinople between the fourth and the ninth centuries, the *Parastaseis* is the only source to suggest that the standardised visual portraits of Constantine and Helena as saints were introduced and developed in the imperial city at a much earlier time than we tend to believe. At a preliminary stage, it could be said that the fact that the *Parastaseis* locates such portraits in non-religious sites, such as the Forum Bovis, enhances the possibility that they might have emerged as secular portraits, reflecting imperial ideas, and at a later period, when Constantine and Helena's hagiological cult was established in Constantinople, they were adopted by the Church and introduced into the monumental decoration of churches. The characterisation of the pair as the 'servants of God' (*θεοδούλων*), cannot be used to underscore any further interpretation, for, as Cameron and Herrin note, it is a common designation attributed to Byzantine rulers.[25] It may be noted at this juncture that the attempt to rescue historical detail allow us to approach the *Parastaseis* as a body of historical literature with strongly embedded secular elements. The secular character of the text will be explored further in this section.

The first evidence for the representation of Constantine and Helena within a church is attested in the *Parastaseis* (chapter 53). The text claimed that Constantine placed images (*ἐγχαράξας*) of his mother and himself, along with images of the Virgin and Jesus, in the church of the Theotokos that he had built on the hill of Kontaria, overlooking the harbour of Sophia.

> That the so-called Kontaria had a guard for seven years; and in the same place there was a war for two years, and a very small temple of idols which they said was of

[24] On the representations of Constantine and Helena in Cappadocia, see Chapter 5.

[25] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 239-240.

> Galen. Constantine pulled it down and built a church of the Theotokos, and portraying himself and his mother and Jesus and the Virgin he held a festival for twelve days.[26]

The text apparently associates Constantine with the dedication of Constantinople to the Virgin, a belief that was not current before the seventh century.[27] Though the story is no doubt false, the possibility of representations of the pair with holy figures cannot be excluded.[28] Accounts of the depiction of rulers in the company of holy figures are not uncommon in the *Parastaseis*. Specifically, we are told elsewhere in the text that an icon of Christ (*θεανδρικῆς εἰκόνος*) was displayed along with statues of the Emperor Maurice (582-602) and his family on the Chalke Gate of the imperial palace.[29] We are, therefore, informed that an additional iconographic type of Constantine and Helena was developed in the capital sometime after the cult of the Virgin had been established. According to the *Parastaseis*, the new – and unique – type did not show them holding the cross, but, if we believe the *Parastaseis*, dedicating Constantinople to the Virgin. Being represented in a church does not necessarily imply that they were placed there as saints, but as imperial benefactors; a pattern followed in several examples by Byzantine emperors.[30]

According to the *Parastaseis* (chapter 58), a final group representation of Helena with Constantine and his sons was erected in the Philadelphion by the emperor himself. The text narrates that in this place Constantine had one more vision of the cross, and in

[26] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 128-129.

[27] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 240-241.

[28] See below, page 134.

[29] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 62-63, 174-175.

[30] Mosaics of Justinian I and Theodora (San Vitale, Ravenna, sixth century); narthex mosaic of an emperor with Christ (Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, late ninth or early tenth century); mosaic of Constantine IX and Zoe with Christ (Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 1042-1055); south gallery mosaic of John I and Eirene with the Theotokos and child (Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 1122-1134). See Lowden 1997: 132-133, 191, 250, 352.

commemoration of this event he set a gilded cross on a four-sided column with enthroned statues of his family.

> In the region of the so-called gate of the Philadelphion, Constantine had a dream. There first of all he saw the sign of the cross, and he set it up, as he saw it, in the same length and breadth, on a four-sided porphyry column. He gilded it and fixed a sign of a sponge at the feet of the cross. He honoured himself and his mother Helena and his sons, setting up <statues> of them on thrones beside the four-sided column. In this place Constantine the Great gave many consular donations. In this place centurions were honoured, being held in honour for the carrying of the cross, seated above the …[31]

Nowhere in the passage is the impression given that the group was still visible in the *Parastaseis*' days. However, the fact that enthroned statues of Constantine's sons were visible in the late-fourteenth century in Constantinople makes possible the actual existence of this group.[32] With reference to the dating of the group, Cameron and Herrin mention that 'it is unlikely that such a group was really of Constantinian date, since it and others like it surely commemorated the invention of the true cross by Helena, a legend not current in the lifetime of Constantine.'[33] If an allusion to Helena's legend was actually intended in this representation, why then were statues of Constantine's sons also included?

If we accept that the use of the present tense in the description of monuments signifies their survival in the days of the *Parastaseis*, then from the seven representations of Helena mentioned in the text, some of them were still visible in Constantinople: three statues of her made of luxurious materials were scattered round the city after they had been removed, along with other statues of fourth- and fifth-century emperors, from Constantine's Great Church by Justinian I (527-565) (chapter 11); and a statue of Helena with Constantine flanking a cross

[31] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 134-135.

[32] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 246-247.

[33] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 246-247.

accompanied by two angels stood in the Forum Tauri, where Constantine had his second vision of the cross in Constantinople. The group is said to have been erected by Constantine himself (chapter 16). We also read of a statue of Helena with Constantine and a cross with the Tyche of the city on the roof of the Milion, but it is unclear when and who had placed them there (chapter 34), and of a porphyry statue of her in the Senate house in the Forum of Constantine, placed there by Theodosios II (408-450) along with statues of Constantine and Fausta (chapter 43). No longer preserved, but described in the *Parastaseis*, were the images of Helena and Constantine holding a cross in the Forum Bovis, placed there by Constantine (chapter 52); the portraits of both of them with Jesus and the Virgin in the church of the Theotokos in Kontaria, also placed there by Constantine (chapter 53); and the enthroned statues of Helena, Constantine, his sons with a cross in the Philadelphion, set there by Constantine after having his first vision of the cross in the city (chapter 58).

As noted earlier, group representations of Constantine and Helena with crosses and holy figures are unlikely to have been Constantinian, as they reflect beliefs current in post-Constantinian times (i.e. Helena's role in the legend of the cross, and the dedication of Constantinople to the Virgin). Commenting on the structure of the text, Cameron and Herrin highlight that 'there is no apparent structure, though certain chapters are grouped together by a similarity of topic […] These sections often seem to correspond to separate sources and in some cases to the hypothesis of separate authors'.[34] Bearing this in mind, the chapters referring to Helena belong to four different sections: chapters 11 and 16 to section one, which contains an amorphous collection of information about places; chapter 34 to section three, which lists statues of empresses; chapter 43 to section four, which describes spectacles of Constantinople; and chapters 52, 53 and 58 to section six, which describes the activities of certain emperors. Each of these sections alludes to specific emperors: Leo III (717-741),

[34] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 9-10.

Herakleios (610-641), Justinian II (685-695 and 705-711), and Leo I (457-474) respectively. The specific reigns could be used, perhaps, as *termini ante quem* for dating Helena's portraits and placing them in a historical and interpretive context. All four sections correspond to this pattern, with most characteristic section six. The section ends with the reign of Leo I, whose wife Verina is associated with one of the earliest Constantinopolitan churches surely dedicated to the Theotokos: the Holy Soros at Blachernai (c. 470).[35] Textual sources inform us that the empress was depicted in mosaic in the apse of the church with her daughter Ariadne and Ariadne's son Leo.[36] Leo and Verina's commitment to the Theotokos seems to enhance the authentication of the *Parastaseis*' portrayals of Constantine and Helena along with images of the Virgin and Jesus (chapter 53).

An evaluation of the *Parastaseis*' evidence concerning Helena would not be complete without understanding the general attitude of the text towards her son, Constantine. The opening of the *Parastaseis* (chapter 1), as has been preserved in the eleventh-century manuscript, Par. gr. 1336, alludes to the symbolic significance of Constantine for the foundation of Constantinople as a Christian city. The dedication of the city by Constantine on the festival day of Saint Mokios (May 11) is underlined in the *Parastaseis* by presenting the emperor as having built, on pagan ground, a church named after the same saint.[37] This is the first and only time in the text that Constantine is characterised as Great (Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ μεγάλου). It is an interesting detail, as this epithet is not common in the Byzantine historiographical tradition before the ninth century. The earliest recorded acclamation of Constantine as 'great' is found in the history of Theophanes the Confessor,

[35] On Verina's patronage, see Mango 1998b: 61-76; Mango 2000: 17-25; James 2005: 145-152.

[36] Mango 1998b: 70-71.

[37] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 56-59.

dated in the early ninth century.[38] Theophanes' work is also the earliest reference to Leo III the Isaurian (717-741) as 'pious', an epithet also used once in the *Parastaseis* (*Λέοντος τοῦ μεγάλου καὶ εὐσεβοῦς*).[39] This information would not have been of much importance if the *Parastaseis* had not compared the activity of Leo III to Constantine's (chapter 3).[40] According to the text, Leo III had restored the land walls of the city and the Golden Gate. The occasion was celebrated with a religious procession where the 'Kyrie eleison' (*κύριε ἐλέησον*) was chanted forty times, and the Green faction shouted: 'Leo has surpassed Constantine' (*Λέων Κωνσταντῖνον εἰς κράτος ἐνίκησεν*).[41] A very similar acclamation is employed elsewhere in the text (chapter 35a) for Arcadios (395-408), when statues of him, his father Theodosios I, and his son Theodosios II, are described: 'The son of Theodosios has surpassed Constantine' (*Ὁ γόνος Θεοδοσίου Κωνσταντῖνον ἐνίκησεν*).[42] The third and final occasion on which the text draws parallels between Byzantine rulers and Constantine occurs in the description of statues of Justin II (565-578) and Sophia, whom the text confuses with Justinian I (527-565) and Theodora. It is said (chapter 81) that when the statues of the imperial couple were erected in the baths of Zeuxippos, Justin was praised by the Green faction: 'Justinian (Justin) and Constantine the new apostles' (*Ἰουστινιανὸς καὶ Κωνσταντῖνος νέοι ἀπόστολοι*).[43] It is very interesting in this context that Verina, the wife of Leo I (457-474), is presented (chapter 29) as being acclaimed by the Green faction as New Helena, after she had crowned her brother Basiliskos: 'Long life to Verina the orthodox Helena'

[38] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*: ed. De Boor 1963, 11-34; Eng. trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 19-55.

[39] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*: ed. De Boor 1963, 396-398; Eng. trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 545-546.

[40] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 170.

[41] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 58-59, 169-171.

[42] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 94-97.

[43] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 158-159, 272.

(Βερίνης ὀρθοδόξου Ἑλένης πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη).[44] Whether the acclamations were drawn from a historical source is unknown. Even if the *Parastaseis* does not follow its sources faithfully, it does, nevertheless, reflect beliefs familiar in its own day.[45] All four cases, therefore, are indicative of the ideological and symbolic use of Constantine and Helena during the years in which the *Parastaseis* was written: they were considered to be symbols of exemplary rule and Orthodoxy.

The text's focus on the role of Constantine as the Christian founder of Constantinople is emphasised throughout, providing its own version of the emperor without, however, always including the genuine historical events of his reign.[46] The references to historical figures of the Constantinian period – especially Licinius, Maxentius, Maximian, and Fausta – are characteristic examples of the *Parastaseis*' confusion. Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, where he had the vision of the cross – the story, which in the eyes of earlier generations of Byzantine writers, associated Constantine with the Christianisation of the empire – is surprisingly omitted from the text. Similarly, the story of Helena's finding of the relic of the true cross is not mentioned.

The information provided about Constantine is always in relation to Constantinople; especially Constantinopolitan monuments of Christian, secular, and antiquarian nature either erected by him or dedicated to him. The text comments that during the pre-Christian past of Constantinople, in the days of Byzas and Antes, many pagans died in an earthquake. The transformation of the city from paganism to Christianity happened after Constantine had converted to Christianity, not in Constantinople but in Rome (chapter 41). His victories over Byzas, Antes, Severus, Herculius Maximian, and Maxentius were divine, as during his wars

[44] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 92-93.

[45] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 37.

[46] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 36-37, 265.

against them Constantine had the help of the God. He had visions of the cross: the first in the Philadelphion (chapter 58), the second in the Forum Tauri (chapters 16 and 57), and the final one – in which he actually saw the cross – outside the walls of the city (chapter 54). After his victory, he destroyed the pagan temples of his enemies (chapter 57), and beheaded many who were not willing to give up their paganism (chapters 55 and 39). Those who were spared set up a bronze statue to Constantine made out of their own weapons (chapter 54). Moreover, Constantine moved the statue of Zeus Helios, initially at the Milion, into the Senate in the Forum of Constantine, and replaced its chariot with a small statue of the Tyche of Constantinople (chapter 38). The statue was not pagan, but it was put up in the Forum of Constantine by the blessed emperor with prayers after he had consecrated it (chapter 68a). During the foundation ceremonies of the city, the statue erected by Constantine received many hymns and was revered as the Tyche of the city by government officials, the army, and the Church. The birthday celebrations lasted for forty days, and Constantine instituted them as an eternal memorial (chapters 55 and 56). The statue was used in annual ceremonies celebrating the birthday of the city until the reign of Julian (360-363), who had it consigned to a pit, because of the cross engraved on it (chapter 38). In commemoration of his visions of the cross and his victories over the pagans, Constantine erected the two crosses in the Forum Tauri, one in the Forum Bovis, and one in the Philadelphion. Both groups were visible in the *Parastaseis*' days (chapter 16). The third cross was accompanied by portraits of Constantine and Helena (chapter 52), while the fourth was set on a porphyry column with enthroned statues of his family on each side (chapter 58).

The *Parastaseis* further relates that among Constantine's Christian activities was the foundation of churches. Having destroyed pagan temples, he reused their stones to build the church of Saint Mokios and the church of the Theotokos in Kontaria, where he portrayed himself and his mother with Jesus and the Virgin (chapters 1 and 53). It is said that

Constantine was responsible for bringing holy relics in the imperial city. According to the *Parastaseis*, the relics of the twelve baskets, which had been used for the feeding of the five thousand, after of ten years of exposure in the palace of the Senate, were buried by Constantine at the base of his column in the Forum of Constantine with the relics of the true cross, the crosses of the two thieves, and a glass vessel of the myrrh with which Christ was anointed, following bishop Metrophanes' advice. The relics were made safe by Theodosios I (379-395), and were preserved at this place until the days of the *Parastaseis* (chapters 9 and 23). Moreover, the fourth-century bishops of Constantinople (Metrophanes, Alexander, Paul) were depicted under Constantine's statue. They were burned, however, by the Arians, together with images of the Virgin and Jesus, sometime either during the reign of Constantius II (337-361) or of Valens (364-378) (chapter 10).

Constantine's new capital was equipped with public spaces which the emperor decorated with antique statues. It is said that he built the first forum for the city in the Great Strategion, the place of exercise for the army, and where he deposited pagan coins (*nummi*) in a pit (chapters 69 and 24). He built the Constantinian baths and the cistern of the Basilica (chapters 73 and 74), while he set ancient statues in the Hippodrome, his Forum, the Bread Market, the harbour of Neorion, and his palace: a woman holding a running figure, an altar, a small calf, and four gold horses; the silver statue of Pallas, the scales of Asclepiodorus, and the garland of Cleopatra; a statue of Alexander the Great; and sculptured animals (chapters 5, 39, 40, 44a, 62, 69, 72). The text gives the impression that none of them caused any misfortune to Constantine or to his new city. On the contrary, anyone who had attempted to steal them was condemned to death (chapter 39); some of them were part of the birthday celebrations of the city up to the times of Theodosios I (379-395) (chapter 5); and others made prophecies relevant to the future of the city and its emperors, such as the conspiracy against Zeno (474-491) by Verina (chapter 40).

Among the portraits erected in secular sites around Constantinople, either by Constantine himself or by subsequent generations of rulers, were the statues of imperial officials (chapter 59) and of members of Constantine's family. According to the *Parastaseis*, a statue of Constantine's son Crispus, which had been erected by Constantine to atone for his sin of murdering him unjustly, was buried with statues of the emperor and Fausta near the church of Saint Theodore by Arians during the reign of Valens (364-378). According to the text, the statues were discovered in the *Parastaseis*' days (chapter 7). We are not told when, but presumably during the reign of Julian (360-363), statues of Constantine and his sons were on display in Constantine's palace with statues of Julian (360-363) and his wife (chapter 44a). Moreover, it is said that Constantine and his mother were represented with a cross on the roof of the Milion, but it is unclear when and by whom they were placed there (chapter 34). During the reign of Theodosios I (379-395) the statues of Constantine and his sons in the Augusteum were replaced by statues of the ruling emperor and his sons, Arcadios and Honorios (chapter 68). Statues of Constantine, his wife Fausta, and Helena were placed in the Senate house in the Forum of Constantine by Theodosios II (408-450), in order to replace a porphyry statue of Constantine and his sons which had been stolen and lost in the sea (chapter 43). Statues of Constantine, his sons, and Helena, along with those of later rulers were removed from Constantine's Great Church and distributed about the city by Justinian I (527-565) (chapter 11). In the Tribunal of the palace, where ceremonial dances of the factions took place until the reign of Herakleios (610-641), a statue of Constantine was on display with statues of Eudokia (wife of Theodosios II, 408-450) and Marcian (450-457) (chapter 36). Later, the wars of Constantine were represented on a relief, and a statue was erected of Constantine holding the sign of the cross in his right hand in the Forum Tauri (chapter 57).

Though the *Parastaseis* treated Constantine mostly as an emperor, on a single occasion (chapter 69) it presented him as a saint: Κ*ωνσταντῖνον τὸν ἅγιον*.[47] While the earliest preserved evidence of an established cult of Constantine in Constantinople dates to the end of the second iconoclasm (842) and onwards, when the cult was actually introduced remains unclear.[48] The *Parastaseis*' reference is therefore, as Cameron and Herrin note, 'an early witness to the growing cult' of Constantine, suggesting that its 'attitude to Constantine in general should be interpreted against the background of these developments'.[49] The text as it stands cannot be used for any independent interpretation on this matter. Besides, the text preserved in the eleventh-century manuscript is not necessarily identical to the original one, written sometime in the eight century. The *Parastaseis*' reference to a tenth-century coin, the *soterikios*, shows that the text might have gone through 'under several different versions before it was copied' in Par. gr. 1336. Therefore, I would add to Cameron and Herrin's observation not only that 'the '*soterikios*' could be because of a tenth-century copyist, or even the scribe' of the eleventh-century manuscript, but also that the epithet 'saint' could be as well.[50] If so, any further interpretation regarding the sainthood of Constantine and Helena in the original *Parastaseis* is problematic and complex.

It is almost certain that the text is not religious in origin, as 'it does not take sides openly on the issue of iconoclasm'.[51] On the contrary, it is concerned throughout with statues of rulers, and rulers who erected or destroyed statues. The accounts of their representations and activities are located in the majority of cases in secular sites, associated with imperial ceremonial and the wellbeing of both the capital and its rulers. The *Parastaseis* appears to

[47] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 150-151, 264-265.

[48] On the hagiological cult of Constantine and Helena, see Chapter 4.

[49] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 265.

[50] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 27.

[51] Cameron and Herrin 1984: 18.

have been, therefore, developed on a secular basis. The secular interpretation of its content is also enhanced by the fact that all the descriptions are topographically defined in Constantinople, the imperial capital. Constantine is, undoubtedly, considered as the exemplary Christian emperor, a role also implied for his mother Helena.

In most cases where Constantine is depicted with the cross – the symbol of Christian rule – he is accompanied by his mother Helena. We have already seen that visual representations of the imperial pair flanking the cross were located, according to the *Parastaseis*, at prominent sites (Milion, Forum Tauri, Forum Bovis) on the southwest branch of Constantinople's central avenue, the Mese, which served as the major artery for imperial processions and triumphs.[52] The iconographic details (cross, Tyche, angels) that accompanied the portraits of Constantine and Helena resemble those found on the coinage of both male and female members of the imperial houses from the late fourth to the eighth century. Specifically, the Tyche of Constantinople, holding either a Victory or – as gradually came to be established – a cross, was displayed on imperial coinage from the reign of Arcadios (395-408) to Valentinian III (425-455). Depictions of facing angels, which formed, in fact, the Christianised type of the traditional and half-pagan Victory, were first introduced on coins by Justin I (518-527), and continued until the reign of Phokas (602-610). The cross was the prominent decorative motif on coins from Tiberios II (547-582) to Theodosios III (715-717).[53] Additionally, the representation of Constantine and Helena flanking the cross recalls analogous depictions of imperial couples on coins. The type was first used by Justin II and Sophia (565-578), and remained popular during the reigns of Tiberios II and Anastasia (578-

[52] McCormick 1986: 207-217; Mango 2000: 173-188.

[53] Grierson 1982: 34-36, 48, 52; Grierson and Mays 1992: 82-84. On the coinage of individual rulers, see Grierson and Bellinger 1966: 57-376; Grierson and Bellinger 1968: 147-206, 244-690; Grierson and Mays 1992: 93-246; Robertson 1982: 436-444, 451-455, 466-495.

582), of Maurice and Constantina (582-602), and of Phokas and Leondia (602-610).[54] On this basis, I would argue that such numismatic evidence reinforces the historicity of the accounts found in the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* of the representations of Constantine and Helena with the cross in Constantinople. It may also imply that such works had a connection with contemporaneous imperial ideological policies.

3.2 Helena as the model of excellence for Byzantine empresses

The significance of Christian symbolism and particularly of the cross for imperial ideology was emphasised in Ambrose's oration for the deceased emperor Theodosios I delivered in 395 in Milan. The text is of particular interest because of the ideological context in which it placed both Constantine and Helena, as the exemplary imperial pair of Christian rule: Constantine for having elevated the cross-shaped sign of Christianity into a symbol of victory and protection of the empire, and Helena for having supplied the empire with the material remains of Christ's cross, thereby fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah (14.20) which predicted the Christian reign:

> (Constantine) was the first of the emperors to believe and left after him a heritage of faith to princes […] of whose times the following prophecy is accomplished: 'In that day that which is upon the bridle of the horse shall be holy to the Lord omnipotent.' And this holy object, Helena his mother, of sainted memory, when filled with the spirit of God, unveiled for herself.[55]

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[54] On Justin II, Tiberios II, and Maurice, see Grierson and Bellinger 1966: 195-262, plates XLIX-LIX, 264-290, plates LX-LXV, 291-375, plates LXVI-LXXX. On Phokas, see Grierson and Bellinger 1968: 147-206, plates I-VII.

[55] Ambrose of Milam, *Funeral oration to Theodosios I*: ed. *PL* 16 (1880), 1462.40; Eng. trans. Mannix 1925, 78.40.2-8.

For helpful comments on an earlier draft of this section, I thank Neil McLynn.

It has been demonstrated in the foregoing chapter that the legacy of Constantine and Helena in the form of a Christian ideology of victory was perceived by Ambrose as a validation of Theodosios' Christian reign. The idea was further embraced by Theodosios' successors, whose coinage indicates a pattern of Christian symbolism in the visualisation of 'ideal' emperors and empresses, which corresponds to Ambrose's description of Constantine and Helena. There was, in other words, an entirely new development in the early fifth century: an empress who could plausibly be presented as the recently-created Helena. While the cross on emperors' coins is in most cases depicted with the personification of Victory and the legend VICTORIA AUGGG (Augustorum), on empresses' coins the cross is normally placed within a laurel wreath – a new symbol of victory and imperial rule that was apparently created to signal a new role for the Augusta. The cross in a wreath was a new iconographic type, introduced for the first time on the coins of Aelia Eudoxia, Arcadios' wife, and continued on empresses' coins until the sixth century.[56] Though Grierson and Mays suggest that the type reflected empresses' almsgiving, I would add that it may also have implied empresses' active and pronounced involvement in the religious affairs of the empire through the patronage of churches, the translation of relics, and participation in church councils. It is striking, that from this time on the first pilgrimages of empresses in the Holy Land are documented, continuing the tradition that Helena had first introduced. It is during this period that, as Brubaker argues, affiliations between imperial women and Helena are evidenced, in

[56] It is worth stressing that an additional iconographic detail which appeared especially on the empresses' coinage of the fifth century was the hand of God (*Manus Dei*) crowning the empress represented. It is interesting that such iconographic details were attested exclusively on gold. Taking into account that coinage was a way for rulers to communicate with their subjects, it is clear that the certain types were addressed to selective groups of the higher ranks of the empire. See Grierson and Mays 1992: 12-13, 76-82, 85-86,152-156. From the sixth to the ninth century there was a break in the sequence of empresses for whom coins were struck. The few examples of empresses' coins present different iconographic themes from those of their predecessors, and therefore are not taken into consideration here. For discussion of empresses on coins, see Brubaker and Tobler 2000: 572-594.

which imperial women consciously tried to evoke Helena's memory 'by replicating her types of architectural commissions and by replicating her acts'.[57] Emperors, on the other hand, never imitated Helena's actions or her commissions. Instead they were preoccupied with the external enemies and the internal threats to orthodox Christianity, which Constantine the Great had introduced and – after four decades of religious instability – Theodosios the Great had successfully established.[58] Though the following passage, written around 450 by the African bishop Quodvultdeus, has been recognised of lacking historical foundations, it is, nevertheless, illustrative of contemporary trends:

> Indeed we know that in our own time there was a persecution among the Persians when Arcadios, a pious and Christian prince, was emperor. To avoid giving back Armenians who took refuge with him, he went to war with the Persians, assured of victory in advance by a sign – bronze crosses which appeared on the cloaks of his soldiers as they went into battle. For this reason, when he had won the victory the emperor also ordered that gold coins be struck with the same sign of the cross, coins which circulate today in the whole world, especially in Asia.[59]

The connection claimed in the *Parastaseis* between Arcadios and Constantine could, therefore, hardly be valued out of such context: 'The son of Theodosios has surpassed Constantine' (Ὁ *γόνος* Θεοδοσίου Κ*ωνσταντῖνον ἐνίκησεν*).[60]

It becomes apparent that the emperors' role, as Holum suggests, was identified with the victory of Christ on Golgotha, and hence, with the military aspect of the empire for the defence of the faith, whereas empresses represented the victory of the Christian faith, and hence, the piety of the empire. Consequently, the offices of emperor and empress, as James notes, were rather more than nominal, and had their own duties and functions connected with

[57] Brubaker 1997: 61-62.

[58] Brubaker 1997: 64. On the religious background from Constantine I to Theodosios I, see Errington 2006: 171-259.

[59] The passage is quoted from Holum 1977: 155, note 8.

[60] See above, page 135.

them. [61] A representative example is provided by the emperor Theodosios II (408-450) and his sister, the regent empress Pulcheria (408-416). While Theodosios II was preparing a campaign against Persia in around 420, Pulcheria advised him to send a rich donation for the poor to the bishop of Jerusalem, and a gold cross to be erected on Golgotha, so that the victory over the Persians would be guaranteed by divine favour.[62] More interesting, though, is the fact that this model of Christian rulership gradually entered the rhetorical vocabulary of both court and Church, which had led to the idea of emperors as New Constantines and of empresses as New Helenas. When, for example, the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon, held in 451, were confirmed, the assembled bishops identified the imperial couple of Marcian and Pulcheria (450-457) with Constantine and Helena:

> Marcian is the New Constantine, Pulcheria the New Helena! You have shown the faith of Helena! You have shown the zeal of Helena! Your life is the security of all! Your faith is the glory of the churches![63]

In about the year 567, Justin II and Sophia (565-578) sent to Saint Radegund, queen of Merovingian Gaul, founder of the convent of the Holy Cross in Poitiers, and future saint, a reliquary with fragments of the true cross for sanctification of her convent. The gift, sent with both religious and political intentions, gave rise to the composition by Venantius Fortunatus, close friend of Radegund and later bishop of Poitiers, of a celebratory poem in which Justin and Sophia were called New Constantine and New Helena.[64] The poem, as Cameron notes,

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[61] James 1997:127.

[62] Holum 1977: 162-167, 171-172. Theodosios II was still unmarried by then, and Pulcheria, even after the end of her regency, appeared to be a strong influence on him.

[63] Holum 1982: 211-216. Discussion on the role played by the emperors, from Constantine to Basil I, in the ecumenical councils, see Dvornik 1951: 2-23.

[64] On empress Sophia, see Cameron 1975: 11-14; Garland 1999: 48-49. For the poem, see Venantius Fortunatus, *Poem to Justin II and Sophia*: Eng. trans. George 1995, 111-115. Details about Venantius Fortunatus, and on whether he was acting as a Byzantine agent in Gaul as part of a cultural diplomacy, see Brennan 1995: 7-16;

treated Justin and Sophia as a pair and stressed that the relic was granted on Sophia's initiative:

> Behold, Augusti, you rival each other with like offerings; you ennoble your sex, as he does his; the man brings back Constantine, the godly woman Helena; as the honour is alike, so is the very love of the cross. She found the means, you scatter salvation everywhere, and what was first the Rising fills the Setting too.[65]

On the basis of the descriptions included in the *Parastaseis*, the fifth and sixth centuries seem to have signalised the standardisation of Constantine and Helena's symbolic association with Orthodoxy. It has already been mentioned, that Pulcheria's successor, Verina, was acclaimed as the 'orthodox Helena' (Βερίνης ὀρθοδόξου Ἑλένης πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη), whereas Justin II was believed to be with Constantine the 'new apostles' (Ἰουστινιανὸς καὶ Κωνσταντῖνος νέοι ἀπόστολοι).[66]

The next textual evidence of relevance to the Constantine and Helena legend appears towards the end of the eighth century. The long running controversy about the cult of religious images temporarily ended in 787 during the reign of Eirene, who was acting as regent for the young emperor Constantine VI (780-797).[67] The restoration of Orthodoxy and of the veneration of icons was confirmed during the final session of the Second Council of Nicaea, held in the Magnaura Palace in Constantinople under the presidency of the emperors, who the summoned bishops acclaimed as a New Constantine and a New Helena:

> Long live the emperors. Long live Constantine and his mother Eirene. Long live the orthodox emperors. Long live the victorious emperors. Long live the peace-bringing

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Šašel 1981: 359-376. For the diplomatic significance of the gift, see Cameron 1976: 56-61. For further discussion on the appeal of relics of Christ's Passion to Christian rulers, see Chapter 5, note 79.

[65] Venantius Fortunatus, *Poem to Justin II and Sophia*: Eng. trans. George 1995, 314.

[66] See above, page 135.

[67] For Constantine VI and Eirene, see Herrin 2002: 51-129; Lilie 1996.

> emperors. New Constantine and New Helena eternal may be the memory. May the God protect their empire.[68]

Similar is the example of the emperor Basil I and his wife Eudokia Ingerina (867-889), who pope Stephen addressed in 869/870 as New Constantine and New Helena for their contribution in settling the so-called Photian schism and restoring communion with Rome.[69] As Brubaker remarks, the recognition came as a reward for Basil's efforts to associate himself and his family with Constantine the Great.[70] It seems clear that by the ninth century, as Brubaker has expressed it, 'the constellation of Constantine, his vision, his *ex voto* cross, and the relics of the true cross discovered by Helena had melted into one concept, a concept crucial to imperial authority, and especially to the triumph of the Christian Byzantine state'.[71] Now that it has been demonstrated that claiming the 'Helena mantle' related to the official acknowledgment of an empress' role to exercise authority, it becomes necessary to examine how successive portraits of Helena merged into their different historical situations.

3.3 The other Helenas: the shifting practical reality of female imperial influence in Byzantine society

The first Byzantine ecclesiastical histories of Sokrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, despite variations in their descriptions of Helena's life and of her story of the discovery of the relics of Christ's crucifixion, all praised the contribution of Helena to the Christianisation of the empire, emphasising her religiosity and the deciding impact that this factor had on her son's ultimate conversion to the Christian faith. This section shifts back to Sokrates,

[68] *Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea*: ed. Mansi 1960, XIII.413-418, at 416.

[69] Pope Stephen, *Letter to Basil I and Eudokia Ingerina*: ed. Mansi 1960, XVI.185.

[70] Brubaker 1994: 139-158.

[71] Brubaker 1994: 142.

Sozomen, and Theodoret, already discussed in the second chapter, in order to reveal that the way in which the memory of Helena was reconstructed in their works was not detached from contemporary beliefs and concerns with which Byzantine society was preoccupied. John Malalas, the *Paschal Chronicle*, and Theophanes the Confessor are also brought into discussion as their attitude towards Helena is indicative of the point raised here. Overall, observations made in this section will add to our knowledge of the Byzantine construction of history.

In Sokrates' history, though we hear that Helena was divinely directed to find the cross, we are not directly informed of the depth of her piety to God. However, the author's statement that while Helena was in Jerusalem she was devoutly affected by the restoration of the Holy Land makes it clear that her religiosity increased during this stage of her life (Text 6: B.66-67). Helena's mission in the Holy Land drove Constantine to abandon all pagan traditions, such as the combats of the gladiators, and to become more attentive to the interests of the Christians (Text 6: B.78-80). It is expressed so the belief that Constantine's full commitment and conversion to Christianity was completed after his mother had discovered Christ's cross. Remarkably, nowhere in the description of Helena is her status as Augusta highlighted. Her imperial background is certainly not ignored by Sokrates. In earlier authors (Eusebios, Ambrose, Rufinus), the language used for the description of Helena emphasised her imperial authority, and not merely with adjectives like queen and empress. She was always presented, for example, as having been the principal figure who directed her whole mission. In contrast, Helena's role as Constantine's mother is the only position explicitly highlighted by Sokrates.

Although he wrote during the same period as Sokrates, Sozomen's attitude towards Helena is dissimilar. According to the author, Helena was both the mother of an emperor and an Augusta in her own right. She visited Jerusalem both as a pilgrim and as an imperial

dignitary. We are told that her zeal for Christianity made her anxious to find the wood which had formed the adored cross (Text 7; B.9-12). Sozomen projected the belief that Helena was pious before her mission to Jerusalem, where she acted with devotion because of her already established religiosity. However, this is the first text where Helena does not receive all the credit for the restoration of the Holy Land. As noted in the foregoing chapter, Sozomen strongly underlined the contribution of Constantine, and he presented Helena's actions as following those of her son. This is slightly altered in Theodoret's version of the story (Text 8). Helena's role as the principal finder of the cross was not ignored, although the independency of her actions was not stressed. Theodoret emphasised Helena's Christian virtues, communicating to his readership the belief that, as his mother, she raised Constantine, teaching him piety to God. Theodoret's version of Helena's religiosity denotes a different circumstance underlying Constantine's conversion to Christianity than those presented by his contemporaries Sokrates and Sozomen. In other words, Theodoret is the first to claim that Helena raised Constantine, and that she raised him to be a Christian.

Then in the sixth and seventh centuries, Helena almost disappears. The story of her finding of the cross is abridged in the sixth-century *Chronicle of John Malalas* (Text 9). The author gave only basic information without any encomiastic elements:

> The emperor Constantine sent his mother, lady Helena, to Jerusalem to seek for the precious cross. She found the precious cross, with the five nails, and brought it back. From that time Christianity prospered in every way.[72]

Malalas deprived Helena of the role attributed to her by the fifth-century historians in her son's conversion to the Christian faith. The significance of the finding of the cross is

[72] John Malalas, *Chronographia*: ed. *PG* 97 (1865), XIII: 473; Eng. trans. Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott 1986, 172.5

subordinated here to the grandness of holy baptism. When Constantine waged war against the barbarians, he managed to secure victory only after he had a divine vision of the cross. Returning to Rome with the standard of the cross carried before him, Constantine acknowledged the God of the Christians. On his own initiative he fasted, and afterwards he was baptised by the bishop of Rome, along with his mother, his relatives and friends. 'And so the emperor Constantine became a Christian', Malalas wrote.[73] Malalas' Helena, then, appears not to have played any role in Constantine's Christian drama.

The legend of the cross and Helena's religiosity are both omitted from the seventh-century *Paschal Chronicle*, which was probably written around 630 when Herakleios (610-641) restored the relic of the true cross in Jerusalem.[74] The author who, according to the Whitbys, belonged to the clergy of Constantinople, emphasised Constantine's piety and devotion to Christianity, but in his account for Helena he merely stressed her illegitimate relation with Constantine's father (Text 10: B.6-8). The peculiarities of the author's attitude towards Helena are also evident in his narrative about the liturgical veneration of the true cross. We are told that Constantine erected in Jerusalem a church dedicated to the cross when Makarios was bishop (Text 10: F.3-6). However, there is not any mention of the legend of the finding of the cross or of the restoration of the Holy Land, which according to tradition had taken place during the bishopric of Makarios.

There was another shift during the ninth century. The *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor praised Helena's status as the first Christian empress – and presented her as crowned by God (*ἡ θεόσεπτος* Ἑλένη) – more than any earlier source. The author highlighted

[73] John Malalas, *Chronographia*: ed. *PG* 97 (1865), XIII: 473; Eng. trans. Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott 1986, 172.2. The belief in Byzantium, that the emperor was baptised in Rome by Sylvester, was established not before the eighth century. Until then it was generally believed that Constantine was baptised at the end of his life in Nikomedia, the only exception being the sixth-century John Malalas.

[74] Whitby and Whitby 1989: x-xxix.

Helena's Christian virtues, portraying her as an all-pious (*πανευσεβὴς*), blessed (*μακαρίαν*), and God-minded (*θεόφρων*) empress. It is important to note that Theophanes shifted away from the Eusebian model of Helena's place of burial. Helena's tomb was originally placed in Rome by Eusebios (Text 1: L.2-5) and successive Byzantine authors, whereas in Theophanes it was related that Helena was buried in the imperial mausoleum in Constantinople (Text 11: D.62-68).[75] To Theophanes, Helena is an important element of the ideal Christian image of Constantine, whom he portrayed glorifying and gratifying God for revealing to him the evidence of Christ's presence on earth during the years of his own reign (Text 11: D.56-58). This is the earliest historiographical work portraying, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, Constantine as great, and attributing to him characterisations like God-like (*θεῖος*) and all-praiseworthy (*πανεύφημος*).[76] Helena's origins, which were used by the opponents of Christianity – whom Theophanes identifies as Arians and pagans – in order to vilify the exemplary Christian profile of Constantine, are now, for the first time, directly defended. Theophanes stressed Helena's legitimate relationship with Constantine's father and refuted her supposed background in prostitution. The significance of Helena's religiosity for Constantine's commitment to Christianity is further elaborated by Theophanes, who described Helena as an advisor to her son on issues concerning the Christian religion (Text 11: D.60-62). In Theophanes, as Scott notes, Constantine and Helena are a pair, and are both praised as exemplary figures of the Christian sovereignty.[77]

Sokrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, Malalas and Theophanes are valid witnesses of their times. They are, amongst other things, records of the beliefs and concerns with which

[75] Such records have caused much confusion over whether actual relics of Helena ever came anywhere near Constantinople. For discussions on Helena's remains, see Constable 1966: 1035-1041; Johnson 1992: 145-150; Wortley 2006: 362-365.

[76] For a further analysis on how Constantine's image is reconstructed in Theophanes, see Scott 1994: 62-71.

[77] Scott 1994: 66.

Byzantine society – and as a member of it, the author – was preoccupied.[78] The peculiarities met within these texts, including distortions, omissions, and elaborations, are unlikely to be purely accidental. In this case, our various authors' portrayals of Helena display a remarkable similarity to their portrayals of contemporary imperial women. During the fifth century the female members of the Theodosian and Valentinian houses cherished Helena as the ideal Christian empress, and imitated her pious life. Such are the cases of Galla Placidia (daughter of Theodosios I), Eudoxia (wife of Arcadios), Pulcheria (sister of Theodosios II), and Eudokia (wife of Theodosios II).[79] Sokrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret all covered the reign of Theodosios II, but their descriptions of Theodosios' female imperial siblings present marked differences between them.

Sokrates, who ends his narrative in 439, wrote briefly about Eudokia's pilgrimage to Jerusalem. We are informed that the decision to travel there was taken on Theodosios' initiative. While in the Holy Land, Eudokia adorned Jerusalem's churches with costly gifts, and decorated all the churches in the other cities of the east with a variety of ornaments.[80] Sokrates fail to mention Eudokia's construction of a church to Saint Stephen outside the walls of Jerusalem, and of a martyrium on the Mount of Olives; her donation of a cross to the church of the Ascension; her possession of relics of Saint Stephen, of an icon of the Mother of God, and of the mantle of Barsauma, which she brought to Constantinople; and, finally, of an image of herself that she had painted in an unknown church, shown praying at the tomb of

[78] Ljubarskij 1993: 131-138.

[79] For further details, see Brubaker 1997: 52-75.

[80] Sokrates, *Church History*: ed. Hansen 1995, 394.47; Eng. trans. Zenos 1891, 178.

Christ in Jerusalem – all of which we know about from other sources.[81] Instead we are told of her pagan past:

> The empress herself also composed a poem in heroic verse: for she had excellent literary taste; being the daughter of Leontios the Athenian sophist, she had been instructed in every kind of learning by her father; Attikos the bishop had baptised her a little while previous to her marriage with the emperor, and had then given her the Christian name of Eudokia, instead of her pagan one of Athenaïs.[82]

It has been suggested that Eudokia's pilgrimage was perhaps Theodosios' attempt to counteract accusations of pagan sympathies leveled at the empress.[83] If so, it seems that Eudokia completed her conversion to the Christian faith after her pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Unlike Sokrates, Sozomen did not mention Eudokia, perhaps because he wrote some time after the empress' disgrace and downfall in 443. At that time, Pulcheria reestablished her eminence at court. Sozomen's history ends in 421, the year before the marriage of Theodosios to Eudokia, when the emperor was still under the influence of his sister. Pulcheria is the person to whom the author dedicated a lengthy eulogy. Pulcheria was pious throughout her life:

> The Divine Power which is the guardian of the universe, foresaw that the emperor would be distinguished by his piety, and therefore determined that Pulcheria, his sister, should be the protector of him and of his government […] She caused all affairs to be transacted in the name of her brother, and devoted great attention to bringing

[81] The information are preserved in the writings of sixth-century authors – for example, Cyril of Scythopolis, Antoninus of Piacenza, Evagrius Scholasticus, Marcellinus Comes, Theodore the Lector, and John Rufus. See Clark 1982: 141-156; Holum 1982: 184-188; Hunt 1982: 221-248; Lenski 2004: 117-118; Wortley 2010: 173.

[82] Sokrates, *Church History*: ed. Hansen 1995, 379.21; Eng. trans. Zenos 1891, 164; on Eudokia's relation to paganism, see Cameron 1982: 217-289.

[83] Urbainczyk 1997a: 33-35.

> him up as a prince in the best possible way […] She strove chiefly, to lead him into piety, and to pray continuously […] She provided zealously and wisely that religion might not be endangered by the innovation of spurious dogmas […] [84]

We are further told that Pulcheria was responsible for the discovery of the relics of the forty martyrs of Sebaste around the shrine of Saint Thyrsos, and for the construction of many churches and monasteries in Constantinople.[85] But Sozomen says nothings about relics of Saint Stephen, which, according to the ninth-century history of Theophanes the Confessor, the empress deposited in the church of Saint Lawrance.[86]

Surprisingly, both Eudokia and Pulcheria are excluded from Theodoret's history, which he wrote sometime between 440 and Theodosios' death in 450. His work is much infused with his personal theological beliefs, which had caused him to be deposed from his bishopric by Theodosios in 449, accused of being Nestorian. Therefore, the author finished his history in 428 – before the conflict between the Alexandrian (anti-Nestorian) and Antiochene (Nestorian) schools of theology had started – in order to avoid mentioning his own doctrinal struggles which ended only after Theodosios' death, when the religious policy of the court had changed.[87] Theodoret's description of Theodosios' reign, apart from being very brief, is also purposely given in connection with the translation of the relics of John Chrysostom – an important Antiochene – to Constantinople.[88] Though Theodosios II is praised for his piety and faith, Theodoret's perception of the exemplary pious emperor is best fulfilled in the religious policy of Theodosios' grandfather, Theodosios I, perhaps because

[84] Sozomen, *Church History*: ed. Bidez and Hansen 1960, 390.1; Eng. trans. Hartranft 1891, 419-420.

[85] Sozomen, *Church History*: ed. Bidez and Hansen 1960, 391.2; Eng. trans. Hartranft 1891, 420.

[86] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*: ed. De Boor 1963, I.86-87; Eng. trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 135-136.

[87] Rohrbacher 2002: 129-134.

[88] Theodoret of Kyrrhos, *Church History*: ed. Parmentier and Sweidweiler 1954, 338.36; Eng. trans. Jackson 1892, 155-156.

during the reign of Theodosios I the Antiochene fathers enjoyed the favour of the court.[89] Likewise, Theodoret refrained from mentioning any specific female sibling of Theodosios II. He only wrote of the emperor's sisters, but in very general terms:

> Associated with him in this divine worship are his sisters, who have maintained virginity throughout their lives, thinking the study of the divine oracles the greatest delight, and reckoning that riches beyond robbers' reach are to be found in ministering to the poor.[90]

Unsurprisingly, Theodoret's interest is instead in Theodosios' grandmother, Flacilla. The author eulogised her for her piety and charity, highlighting her beneficial influence on her husband's religiosity:

> […] his wife used constantly to put him in mind of the divine laws in which she had first carefully educated herself. In no way exalted by her imperial rank she was rather fired by it with greater longing for divine things […] To her husband, too, she was ever wont to say, "Husband, you ought always to bethink you what you were once and what you have become now; by keeping this constantly in mind you will never grow ungrateful to your benefactor, but will guide in accordance with law the empire bestowed upon you, and thus you will worship Him who gave it." By ever using language of this kind, she with fair and wholesome care, as it were, watered the seeds of virtue planted in her husband's heart.[91]

The aforementioned examples reveal that the textual portraits of Helena in Byzantium corresponded remarkably closely with their authors' attitude towards the reigning empress. Having established, according to Sokrates, their faith in Christianity, Eudokia complemented her husband's profile of the pious Christian ruler, and similarly, Helena contributed to her

[89] Theodoret mentioned several times that Theodosios I had divine visions, similar as the vision that Constantine I had.

[90] Theodoret of Kyrrhos, *Church History*: ed. Parmentier and Sweidweiler 1954, 338.36; Eng. trans. Jackson 1892, 155-156.

[91] Theodoret of Kyrrhos, *Church History*: ed. Parmentier and Sweidweiler 1954, 313.18; Eng. trans. Jackson 1892, 145.

son's commitment to Christianity. In Sozomen, Pulcheria and Helena were pious throughout their lives. Pulcheria acted for the benefit of her brother, and similarly, Helena acted on behalf of her son, supplementing his imperial policies. Their common zeal for Christianity made both Helena and Pulcheria anxious to find the holy cross and the relics of the forty martyrs of Sebaste respectively. In Theodoret, Flacilla and Helena were eulogised for their piety and humility. Flacilla was praised for beneficial influence on her husband's religiosity, and similarly, Helena was exalted for having transmitted to her son her piety towards God. The interdependency of these descriptions and the unfixed role attributed to Helena each time, involve their own paradoxical and subversive character. Helena was not merely utilised to articulate the imperial virtues with which a Christian empress was equipped. The memory of the exemplary empress was defined in more concrete terms: Helena was manipulated in order to reflect the shifting practical reality of female imperial influence in Byzantine society.

The model of Constantine and Helena takes a different form during the reign of Justinian I.[92] The emphasis on Constantine's baptism is a significant feature in Malalas' narrative. This is unlikely to be purely arbitrary. This is the earliest Byzantine report of the claim that Constantine was baptised not on his deathbed, but earlier in his life, and, as Scott has pointed out, the inclusion of this version of Constantine's baptism should be considered as Malala's innovation.[93] The circumstances of Justinian's rule seem to have given rise to a new model of exemplary Christian emperor: the missionary emperor. This role is clearly reflected in Malala's description of the early years of Justinian's reign (527-532), where the emperor is presented several times as the sponsor of barbarians in holy baptism:

> […] the king of the Huns near Bosporos, named Grod, also came over to the emperor. He came to Constantinople and was baptised. The emperor stood sponsor for him at

[92] For studies on Justinian I, see Evans 1996; Maas 2005.

[93] Scott 1994: 59-60, note 16.

> baptism, and after bestowing many gifts upon him sent him away to his own country, to guard the Roman territory.[94]

This new form of Christianity's expansion seems to have served Justinian's ambitious plan for restoration of the Roman empire to its old glory. The way that Constantine is perceived in Malalas' history corresponds to this new model of Christian emperor. Constantine is portrayed as the first emperor, who after his own baptism, followed the same practice and himself converted more people to Christianity.[95] The empress, except from acting with the traditional piety and charity, had little role to play in this new imperial ideological pattern, and therefore, there was not a need for a detailed description of Helena in Malalas' account. In addition, Justinian's consort Theodora followed the monophysite rather than the orthodox chalcedonian line.[96] Although she was initially described in a manner which implies the ideal Helena-model, this only occurred before Justinian became sole ruler, and probably before Theodora had expressed her support for monophysitism. Malalas, who was of orthodox doctrinal views and a supporter of the emperor, wrote that when Justinian became co-emperor with Justin I in 527, Theodora 'made and sent to Jerusalem a very costly cross, set with pearls', probably in an effort to present her as having an orthodox profile. However, throughout Malalas' treatment of the years of Justinian's sole rule, his few references to Theodora are not concerned with her acts of piety, but with her imperial largesse.[97] I would

[94] John Malalas, *Chronographia*: ed. *PG* 97 (1865), 637A; Eng. trans. Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Roger 1986, 18:250.14. The chronicle was written in two editions by Malalas. The first ends in 532, while the second was composed some thirty years later covering the years up to Justinian's death. For a detailed analysis of Malalas' work, see collected studies in Jeffreys, Croke and Scott 1990.

[95] John Malalas, *Chronographia*: ed. *PG* 97 (1865), 476A; Eng. trans. Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott 1986, 13:173.3.

[96] On Theodora, see Garland 1999: 11-39.

[97] John Malalas, *Chronographia*: ed. *PG* 97 (1865), 624B-C, 649A-C, 681A; Eng. trans. Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott 1986, 17:243.19, 18:255.24, 18:272.61.

argue that, because Justinian and Theodora did not continue the New Constantine and New Helena pattern, Helena's symbolic role in Malalas' account was minimised.

The case in the *Paschal Chronicle* is similar. While Herakleios followed the New Constantine model, his second wife Martina did not, and her (in Byzantine eyes) incestuous relationship with Herakleios is mirrored in the account of Constantine and Helena which indicates that Helena and Constantius Chlorus' marital relationship was also unusual.[98] As the Whitbys note, there is a significant silence about the marriage of the emperor to his niece Martina. Although details about other members of Herakleios' family, such as his first wife Fabia Eudokia and their children, are provided, 'Martina is only mentioned once *en passant*, in connection with the celebration of Easter in 624'.[99] Examples from Martina's life indicate that she was never popular with the general populace of Constantinople and the Church, because her marriage to Herakleios was considered to go against the regulations of the Church concerning incest. The *Paschal Chronicle* is one more testimony of this disapproval.

In the ninth century, by contrast, Theophanes' history lavishly praised the first imperial woman who ruled in her own right – the pious, wised, and God-beloved Eirene (780-802), whose initiatives had restored the veneration of icons.[100] This shift of power is reflected in the author's treatment of Constantine and Helena, where Helena enjoys an elevation in status as the divinely crowned empress who was granted absolute imperial authority (Text 11: D.14-16), and as the first imperial figure to be buried at the imperial mausoleum that Constantine had erected for the Christian rulers (Text 11: D.62-68).

In all texts Helena's status mirrors that of the ruling empress. Constantine, the backbone of Byzantine imperial ideology, was nowhere vilified, but Helena certainly was,

[98] Collected studies on Herakleios, see Reinink 2002; More specific on Martina, see Garland 1999: 61-72.

[99] Whitby and Whitby 1989: xxv.

[100] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*: ed. De Boor 1963, I.444-478; Eng. trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 607-654; For further discussion on Eirene, see Brubaker and Haldon 2011: 248-365.

following the norm that the emperor's authority is divine but the empress is subjected to the law.[101] The appreciation of Helena in Byzantium, and especially the way the legend of her discovery of the cross was developed, was bound up with imperial ideology. Her supplementary role to Constantine's Christian profile signified the Byzantine ideal of the legal relationship between empress and emperor: the dependency of the former to the latter.

3.4 Textual sources

TEXT 9: John Malalas (6th century)[102]

A		B	
1	**2** After fasting and having taken instructions, he (Constantine) was baptised by Sylvester, bishop of Rome – he himself and his mother Helena and all his relatives and his friends and a whole host of other Romans. And so the emperor Constantine became a Christian.	**476B** Καὶ νηστεύσας καὶ κατηχηθεὶς ἐβαπτίσθη ὑπὸ Σιλβέστρου, ἐπισκόπου Ῥώμης, αὐτὸς καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ Ἑλένη καὶ πάντες οἱ συγγενεῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ φίλοι αὐτοῦ καὶ πλῆθος ἄλλων πολλῶν Ῥωμαίων. Καὶ ἐγένετο Χριστιανὸς ὁ αὐτὸς Κωνσταντῖνος βασιλεύς.	1 5
C		D	
1	**5** The emperor Constantine sent his mother, lady Helena, to Jerusalem to	**477C** Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντῖνος ἔπεμψε τὴ ἑαυτοῦ μητέρα τὴν κυρὰν Ἑλένην εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα εἰς ἀναζήτησιν	1

[101] On the ideological and legal relationship between an emperor and an empress in Byzantium, see Brubaker and Tobler 2000: 574-575.

[102] John Malalas, *Chronographia*: ed. *PG* 97 (1865), XIII: 473-484; Eng. trans. Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott 1986, 172-176.

seek for the precious cross. She found the precious cross, with the five nails, and brought it back. From that time Christianity prospered in every way.

τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ· ἥτις καὶ εὑροῦσα ἀνήγαγε τὸν αὐτὸν τίμιον σταυρὸν μετὰ τῶν πέντε ἥλων· καὶ ηὐξήθη ἐξ ἐκείνου τὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν πάντα.

E

F

8 Constantine […] built a basilica with great columns and statues outside: this he called the Senate. Opposite this he set up a statue of his mother Helena as Augusta, on a low porphyry column. This place he called the Augusteum.

481A *κτίσας* **[...]** *καὶ βασιλικὴν καὶ ἔξω μεγάλους κίονας καὶ ἀνδριάντας, ἥνπερ ἐκάλεσε Σενᾶτον, κατέναντι στήσας τῇ ἰδίᾳ μητρὶ Ἑλένῃ στήλην Αὐγούστας ἐν πορφυρῷ μικρῷ κίονι, καλέσας τὸν τόπον Αὐγουστιῶνα.*

G

H

12 […] He (Constantine) also did building work at the town formerly known as Souga in Bithynia, giving it the status of a city and calling it Helenopolis after his mother. He also called the province Helenopontos after his mother.

484C *Ἔκτισε δὲ καὶ εἰς τὴν Βιθυνίαν τὴν πρώην οὖσαν κώμην λεγομένην Σουγὰν, δοὺς αὐτῇ καὶ δίκαιον πόλεως καὶ καλέσας αὐτὴν εἰς ὄνομα τῆς ἰδίας αὐτοῦ μητρὸς Ἑλενούπολιν. Καὶ εἰς ὄνομα δὲ τῆς αὐτοῦ μητρὸς ἐκάλεσε καὶ ἐπαρχίαν Ἑλενούποντον.*

TEXT 10: Paschal Chronicle (630s)[103]

A

1 **6.304** […] for Constantius married Theodora the step-daughter of Maximianus Herculius, by whom his children were Delmatius, Constantius, and Hannibalianus. For Constantine, who was emperor after Diocletian and his partners, was son to this Constantius by another union, with Helena.

B

1 **692A [...]** *ὁ γὰρ* Κωνστὰντιος *ἔγημε Θεοδώραν τὴν πρόγονον* Μαξιμιανοῦ *Ἐρκουλίου, ἐξ ἧς ἔσχε τέκνα Δελμάτιον,* Κωνστάντιον, *καὶ* Ἀννιβαλιανόν. *Ὁ γὰρ* Κωνσταντῖνος *ὁ μετὰ* Διοκλητιανὸν *καὶ τοὺς μετ' αὐτοῦ βασιλεύσας ἐξ ἑτέρας τινὸς μίξεως ὑπῆρχεν αὐτῷ* Κωνσταντίῳ *παῖς ἀπὸ* Ἑλένης.

C

1 **16.328** […] and he (Constantine) named the place Augusteum because he had also set up opposite his own a monument of his mother, lady Helena Augusta, on a porphyry column.

D

1 **709B [...]** *καλέσας τὸν τόπον Αὐγουσταῖον, καθότι καὶ στήλην ἣν στήσας κατέναντι τῆς ἰδίας αὐτοῦ μητρὸς Ἑλένης Αὐγούστας δεσποίνης ἐν πορφυρῷ κίονι.*

E

1 **19.334** Indiction 7, year 29, consulship of Optatus Patricius and Anicius Paulinus. Under these consuls took place the inauguration of the church of

F

1 **713A** Ἰνδ. ζ'. *κθ'. ὑπ.* Ὀπτάτου Πατρικίου *καὶ* Ἀνικίου Παυλίνου. Τούτοις τοῖς *ὑπάτοις γέγονε τὰ ἐγκαίνια τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ* Ἁγίου Σταυροῦ *τῆς οἰκοδομηθείσης ὑπὸ* Κωνσταντίνου *ἐπὶ* Μακαρίου

[103] *Paschal Chronicle*: ed. *PG* 92 (1865), 692-713; Eng. trans. Whitby and Whitby 1989, 6-19.

the Holy Cross, which had been built by Constantine in the time of the bishop Makarios, on 17th of the month September. Thereafter began the Feast of the Invention of the Cross.

ἐπισκόπου, μηνὶ Σεπτεμβρίῳ ιζ΄. Ἐντεῦθεν ἤρξατο ἡ Σταυροφάνεια.

TEXT 11: Theophanes the Confessor (ca.760-817)[104]

A

31.26-30 Other Arians and pagans accuse Constantine the Great of being illegitimate, but they too are lying. For his imperial line goes back even earlier than Diocletian. Indeed his father Constantius was a grandson of the emperor Claudius and he fathered Constantine the Great by his first wife Helena.

B

18.8-13 *Ἄλλοι δέ Ἀρειανοὶ καὶ Ἕλληνες ὡς νόθον διαβάλλουσι τὸν μέγαν Κωνσταντῖνον· ψεύδονται δέ καὶ οὗτοι.* Ἡ *γὰρ γενεαλογία αὐτοῦ βασιλικὴ ὑπῆρχε καὶ πρὸ Διοκλητιανοῦ.* Ὁ *γὰρ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ* Κωνστάντιος *θυγατρίδης ἦν* Κλαυδίου *τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ ἐξ* Ἑλένης *τῆς πρώτης αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς ἔσχε τὸν μέγαν* Κωνσταντῖνον.

C

41.21-43.5 In the same year the God-like Constantine sent the blessed Helena to Jerusalem with money and soldiers to seek the life-giving Cross of the Lord.

D

25.28-27.18 Τῷ *δ' αὐτῷ ἔτει Ἑλένην τὴν μακαρίαν μετὰ χρημάτων καὶ στρατευμάτων ἀπέστειλεν εἰς τὰ* Ἱεροσόλυμα *ὁ θεῖος* Κωνσταντῖνος *πρὸς τὸ*

[104] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*: ed. De Boor 1963, 18-27; Eng. trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 31-43.

Makarios, patriarch of Jerusalem, having met the empress with due honour, made the search for the longed-for life-giving wood along with her, in tranquility, with earnest prayers and fasting. When these things had been done, the site was quickly revealed to Makarios by God in the place where the temple and statue of the impure demon Aphrodite stood. The divinely crowned Helena, using her imperial authority, immediately arranged for a large number of workmen to destroy the temple […] Straight away the Holy Sepulchre and the place of the Skull were revealed, and close by, to the east, there were three buried crosses. After searching, they even found the nails. But they were all at a loss to know which cross was the Lord's. The blessed was particularly grieved, but the well-named bishop Makarios solved the problem by his faith […] a distinguished lady who was in despair

ἀναζητῆσαι τὸν ζωοποιὸν τοῦ κυρίου σταυρόν. Μακάριος δέ, ὁ πατριάρχης Ἱεροολύμων, συναντήσας τῇ βασιλίδι μετὰ τῆς δεούσης τιμῆς τὴν ζήτησιν τοῦ ποθουμένου ζωοποιοῦ ξύλου ἐποιεῖτο σὺν αὐτῇ μεθ' ἡσυχίας καὶ προσευχῶν σπουδαίων καὶ νηστείας. Τούτων δέ γενομένων, ἐφάνη συντόμως θεόθεν ὁ τόπος τῷ αὐτῷ Μακαρίῳ δειχθείς, ἐν ᾧ ἵδρυτο τῆς ἀκαθάρτου δαίμονος Ἀφροδίτης ὁ ναὸς καὶ τὸ ἄγαλμα· ὃν τῇ βασιλικῇ αὐθεντίᾳ χρωμένη συντόμως καθεῖλεν ἡ θεόσεπτος Ἑλένη διὰ πλήθους τεχνιτῶν ἐκ βάθρων κατασκάψασα καὶ τὸν χοῦν ἀπορρίψασα […] *αὐτίκα δέ τὸ ἅγιον μνῆμα καὶ ὁ τόπος τοῦ κρανίου ἀνεδείχθησαν, καὶ πρὸς ἀνατολὴν σύνεγγυς τούτων τρεῖς σταυροὶ κεχωσμένοι· ἐρευνήσαντες δέ εὗρον καὶ τοὺς ἥλους. Ἀμηχανούντων δέ πάντων, ποῖος ἄρα εἴη ὁ δεσποτικὸς σταυρός, καὶ σφόδρα τῆς μακαρίας Ἑλένης λυπουμένης, ὁ Μακάριος φερώνυμος ἐπίσκοπος διὰ πίστεως ἔλυσε τὸ ζητούμενον. Ἀπεγνωσμένη γάρ τινι γυναικὶ τῶν ἐμφανῶν καὶ σχεδὸν τεθνηκυία* […] *ἡ δέ πανευσεβὴς Ἑλένη μετὰ φόβου καὶ πολλῆς χαρᾶς ἀνελομένη τὸ ζωοποιὸν ξύλον μέρος μέν αὐτοῦ σὺν τοῖς ἥλοις ἤγαγε πρὸς τὸν παῖδα, τὸ δέ λοιπὸν εἰς ἀργυροῦν καταθεμένη γλωσσόκομον*

and near death […] The all-pious Helena with fear and great joy took up the life-giving wood and brought part of it with the nails to her son, and having placed the rest of it in a silver casket, she handed it over to bishop Makarios as a memorial for later generations. Then she also ordered that churches be built at the Holy Sepulchre and at Calvary in the name of her son, where the live-giving wood was discovered, and also at Bethlehem and on the Mount of Olives. And so she returned to the all-praiseworthy Constantine. He, having welcomed her with joy, placed the particle of the life-giving wood in a golden chest, handing it over to the bishop for safe keeping […] The same all-praiseworthy Constantine wrote to the well-named Makarios to hurry with the building and sent out an officer of works with an abundance of money with orders to build the Holy Places so that there would be nothing so beautiful

παρέδωκε τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ Μακαρίῳ *εἰς μνημόσυνον ταῖς μετέπειτα γενεαῖς. Τότε δέ καὶ ἐκκλησίας ἐκέλευσε κτισθῆναι ἔν τε τῷ ἁγίῳ μνήματι καὶ ἐν τῷ κρανίῳ καὶ ἐπ᾽ ὀνόματι τοῦ ἑαυτῆς υἱοῦ, ἔνθα εὑρέθη τὸ ζωοποιὸν ξύλον, καὶ ἐν* Βηθλεέμ *καὶ ἐν τῷ ὄρει τῶν ἐλαιῶν· καὶ οὕτως ἐπανῆλθε πρὸς τὸν πανεύφημον* Κωνσταντῖνον. *Ὁ δέ δεξάμενος αὐτὴν μετὰ χαρᾶς τὴν μέν τοῦ ζωοποιοῦ ξύλου μοῖραν ἐν χρυσῇ θήκῃ παρέθετο, παραδοὺς τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ εἰς τήρησιν* […] *ὁ δέ αὐτὸς πανεύφημος* Κωνσταντῖνος *ἔγραψε τῷ φερωνύμῳ* Μακαρίῳ *ἐπισπεύδειν τὴν οἰκοδομήν, καὶ ἄρχοντα τοῦ ἔργου ἀπέστειλε μετὰ δαψιλείας χρημάτων, κελεύσας οὕτω κτισθῆναι τοὺς ἁγίους τόπους, ὡς μὴ εἶναι τοιαύτην καλλονὴν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ, γράψας καὶ τοῖς ἡγεμόσι τῆς ἐπαρχίας συνδραμεῖν τοῖς ἔργοις σπουδαίως ἐκ τοῦ δημοσίου λόγου. Ἦν δέ ὁ βασιλεὺς φαιδρῶς ἑορτάζων καὶ εὐχαριστῶν τῷ θεῷ τῷ ποιήσαντι τοιαῦτα ἀγαθὰ ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις αὐτοῦ* […] *Κατ᾽ αὐτὸν τὸν καιρὸν καὶ ἡ μακαρία* Ἑλένη *ἐκοιμήθη ἐν κυρίῳ ἐτῶν π΄ πολλὰ ἐντειλαμένη τῷ υἱῷ περὶ τῆς εἰς* Χριστὸν *εὐσεβείας. Ἐτάφη δέ ἐν τῷ ναῷ τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων ἐν* Κωνσταντινουπόλει, *ὃν ἔκτισεν ὁ υἱὸς αὐτῆς* Κωνσταντῖνος *εἰς τὸ θάπτεσθαι τοὺς τελευτῶντας βασιλεῖς*

in the entire inhabited world. He also wrote to the governors of the province to join in the work earnestly from the public account. The emperor in splendid celebration gave thanks to God for having made such good things happen in his time […] During the same period the blessed Helena also died in the Lord at the age of eighty, having made many exhortations to her son concerning the Christian religion. She was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, which her son Constantine built for the burial of deceased Christian emperors. The blessed Helena was the first to be buried in it, and was honoured by magnificent night-long memorial services. The sacred maidens in Jerusalem, whom the God-minded Helena had entertained and served in person at the table, like a serving maid, praised her forever with divine services.

Χριστιανούς. Πρώτη δέ ἐτάφη ἐν αὐτῷ ἡ μακαρία Ἑλένη, μνήμαις φαιδραῖς καὶ παννυχίσι τιμηθεῖσα. Αἱ δέ ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἱεραὶ παρθένοι, ἃς ἐστιῶσα δι' ἑαυτῆς, ὡς θεράπαινα, ταῖς τραπέζαις διηκόνει ἡ θεόφρων Ἑλένη, διὰ παντὸς θείαις μνήμαις αὐτὴν ἐμακάριζον.

4

Politics and sainthood: the hagiological cult of Constantine and Helena in Byzantium

The inter-dependence of Constantine and Helena in the Byzantine political thought, as it has been just demonstrated in chapter three in detail, was further expressed by the way in which their hagiological cult in Byzantium was formed. There was no distinct use of their Christian deeds in the liturgical formularies, as they were never accorded a sole commemoration. On the contrary, Constantine and Helena were almost always shown together in both hagiological and hagiographical documentation. By the tenth century the liturgical celebration in their commemoration on 21 May was regarded as a state occasion.[1] Textual records from that period – the *Book of Ceremonies*, *Typikon* of the Great Church, and *Synaxarion* of Constantinople – indicate that they were honoured with a triple synaxis (*σύναξις*) in the Great Church, the Holy Apostles, and in the chapel of the Palace of Bonos in the presence of the emperor, his court, and the patriarch.[2] The Eucharistic liturgy was consummated in the latter location, which had two sanctuaries (*βήματα*), one dedicated to Constantine and one to Helena, and housed a devotional cross – perhaps a relic of the true cross.[3] This was clearly a tenth-century cult, but when it started and under what circumstances is a question open for research. The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it aims to demonstrate that the rite was much older than is generally assumed, and second, to

[1] Wortley 2006: 358-359.

[2] Constantine Porphyrogenitos, *Book of Ceremonies*: ed. *PG* 112 (1861), 997-1002; *Typikon of the Great Church*: Fr. Trans. Mateos 1962, 296-297; *Synaxarion of Constantinople*: ed. Delehaye 1902, 697-700.

[3] Constantine Porphyrogenitos, *Book of Ceremonies*: ed. *PG* 112 (1861), 1001.

suggest that it was highly determined by the relations, perhaps competitive, between church and state. The evidence is assessed against the background of events in pre- and post-iconoclastic Constantinople.

4.1 Evidence of a cult in the making before the ninth century

The recognition of Constantine and Helena's sanctity in the ninth century did not represent a sudden upsurge, but rather the cumulative effect of a hagiological tradition that had been growing since the sixth century. The earliest evidence consists of a hymn by Severos, bishop of Antioch in Syria between 512 and 518, in which nothing is mentioned about Helena. However, this is a rare case as the omission of Helena is not encountered in any other hagiological texts explored in this chapter. The belief that complete sanctification of Constantine required Helena seems to be enhanced by such an oddity. In a sequence of five hymns, Severos praised Constantine, Honorios, Gratian, Theodosios I, and Anastasios, for having ruled victoriously in the name of Christ, and for deserving a place among the saints because of their religious deeds and pious lives.[4] Constantine's vision of the cross and conversion, his anti-heretical concerns and support for the orthodox creed, and his religious building activity, are the main components of Severos' devotional chant to the first Christian emperor:

> "Before the Lord the steps of a man are established". "I will sing to thy name, he maketh great salvation for his king". Not from men nor through man came the calling to the elect Constantine, the religious king, but through Jesus Christ, even as to the great apostle Paul. For, having clearly seen in the sky the resplendent sign consisting of the form of the cross, he believed that he who was God in the beginning, the Word of the Father, became flesh for our sake having in invariable fashion become truly

[4] Severos of Antioch, *Hymns*: Eng. trans. Brooks 1911, VII.663-711.

> man; and accordingly the king, having rejoiced in thy strength, and having greatly exulted because of thy salvation, as the great prophet David sings, called and gathered together in himself the preachers of the orthodox faith in all places of the earth, and expelled from the church the madness of Arius, who called the Word who is before the ages a creature; and further also he checked beforehand and annihilated the impiety of those who divide Emmanuel into two natures, by recognising him who became incarnate, who was crucified and suffered and died in the flesh for our salvation, to be one; and he further rebuilt and restored the holy churches; having become the beginning of all the believing kings who were after him; of whom David sings with us, "The rulers of the peoples have been gathered together with the God of Abraham". Praise to thee![5]

Constantine's Christian deeds, and especially the theme of his activities against heresies, were the subject of a brief description of Constantine in a second sixth-century hymn, *On the adoration of the cross*, written by Romanos the Melodist, also of Syrian origin:

> He who rules in eternity with goodness, the merciful God in his will very wisely called the emperor Constantine, a man of faith from the race of Abraham and David. He imitated his ancestor, and having shown his parentage he ended the war against the Church. Leading of three hundred and eighteen faithful warriors, won the war for Abraham; with the same number of men, too, the faithful and valiant emperor ended the heresies so that atheists do not go to heaven.[6]

Romanos enriched his hymn with an elaborate commemorative section of four verses dedicated to Helena's finding of the relic of the cross, a theme omitted by Severos. According to Romanos, Helena, the worthy woman (*ἀξία*) and friend of God (*φιλόθεος*), mother of the emperor, vacated the imperial palace (*λιποῦσα ταχὺ τὰς ἐν βασιλείοις αὐλάς*), shook off her laziness and weariness of the journey (*καὶ τὸν ὄκνον ἔρριψεν ἀφ' ἑαυτῆς καὶ τὸν πόνον τῆς ὁδοῦ*), and ran in haste to Jerusalem as she was anxious to discover the holy wood, the light that

[5] Severos of Antioch, *Hymns*: Eng. trans. Brooks 1911, VII.663-665.

[6] For the original Greek text and its French translation, see Romanos the Melodist, *On the adoration of the cross*: ed. and Fr. trans. Grosdidier de Matons 1969, 344.18. The English translation provided here is mine.

guides to heaven.[7] The holy relic, however, was not found by Helena but Judas the Jew, who originally bore the name of Christ's traitor, but was renamed Kyriakos the saint (*Κυριακὸς ὁ ἅγιος*) once he completed his pious mission.[8] Helena, the holy woman, as Romanos called her, seems to have been responsible only for finding the holy nails (*τοὺς ἥλους...εὑροῦσα ἡ ὁσία*), which she used to make a bridle, fulfiling in this way Zachariahs' prophecy (14.20): 'In that day there shall be upon the bridle of every horse, holiness to the lord almighty' (*ἔσται ποτέ ἅγιον τὸ τοῦ χαλινοῦ*).[9] We are not informed whether the bridle was destined for Constantine's horse or whether on the way Helena distributed the relic of the cross to others, because Romanos' emphasis is that Helena's actions had benefited Christianity. This is clearly reflected in his description of the symbolic value of the relics: victory is provided by the bridle (*εἰς νίκην ἀεὶ τῶν πεπιστευκότων*) and eternal life by the cross (*οἱ γὰρ τούτῳ πεποιθότες μετὰ δόξης εἰσέρχονται ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ*).[10]

Severos and Romanos' hymns are not identical in content and language, and do not present strong similarities with contemporary historiographical texts – for example, the narratives of Theodore Anagnostes and John Malalas (Text 9).[11] They do, however, use on two occasions phraseology similar to the fifth-century writer Theodoret of Kyrrhos (Text 8). Both Severos and Theodoret claimed that 'neither from men nor through man' (*οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδέ δι' ἀνθρώπου*) came the calling to Constantine, but from heaven

[7] Romanos the Melodist, *On the adoration of the cross*: ed. and Fr. trans. Grosdidier de Matons 1969, 346.19.

[8] Romanos the Melodist, *On the adoration of the cross*: ed. and Fr. trans. Grosdidier de Matons 1969, 348.20-21.

[9] Romanos the Melodist, *On the adoration of the cross*: ed. and Fr. trans. Grosdidier de Matons 1969, 350.22.

[10] Romanos the Melodist, *On the adoration of the cross*: ed. and Fr. trans. Grosdidier de Matons 1969, 350.22.

[11] Helena's remembrance in Anagnostes' *Church History* is within the legend of the finding of the cross. The description of the events is brief, focusing on the basic information. See Theodore Anagnostes, *Church History*: ed. Hansen 1971, 12-13.

through Jesus Christ.[12] Moreover, Romanos' treatment of Helena's anxiety to find the holy relic is presented in a manner similar to Theodoret, who tell us that Helena was tolerant of the weariness caused by the journey and of the pains of old age (*αὕτη τῶν τῆς ὁδοιπορίας πόνων ἀνασχομένη καὶ τοῦ γήρως οὐ λογισαμένη τὰ πὰθη*).[13] It has already be seen in chapter two that Theodoret incorporated in his *Church History* a different narrative tradition about Helena than the one followed by his contemporaries, Sokrates and Sozomen. The source on which Theodoret plausibly relied, and which was probably utilised by Gelasios of Kyzikos as well shifted away from the Eusebian model of Constantine's upbringing: it provided information about Helena's role in Constantine's childhood, projecting in this manner the close relationship between mother and son.[14]

Such manifestations, although small in quantity, if seen in juxtaposition with Theodoret, Severos and Romanos' common Syriac backgrounds, may suggest that the passages were constructed on the grounds of a hagiological tradition about Constantine and Helena either already popular or in its formation in the Syriac church. The Syriac development of this tradition is further supported by Romanos' choice to incorporate the Judas Kyriakos version of the legend of the finding of the cross, which appears to be of Syriac origin too.[15] This differentiates his hymn from the other fifth- and sixth-century Greek and Latin writers, who, even when they were familiar with the Judas Kyriakos legend, as in the cases of Paulinus of Nola (Text 4: H.22-28) and Sozomen (Text 7: B.19-23), nonetheless,

[12] Theodoret of Kyrrhos, *Church History*: ed. Parmentier 1954, 5.5-8.

[13] Theodoret of Kyrrhos, *Church History*: ed. Parmentier 1954, 63.23-64.1.

[14] See Chapter 2, page 78.

[15] It is noted in Drijvers' recent study, that the cross and its discovery were popular topics for writers in Syriac. During the sixth century, for example, Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) composed a (still unpublished) verse homily on the finding of the cross, and Henana of Adiabene (c. 572 - c. 610) wrote a now lost *Cause of the Invention of the Cross*. For further details, see Drijvers 2011: 159. Further discussion on the Judas Kyriakos version and the west, see below, page 195.

always used the Helena and Makarios version of the legend.[16] Whether, however, we may argue about the existence of a *vita* dedicated to Constantine and Helena, or the incorporation of their Christian deeds into hymns devoted to the cult of the holy cross – see Romanos' hymn, for example – is an issue that cannot be determined with certainty, but, as seen below, the association of Constantine and Helena with relics of the cross was common across the empire. Moreover, because of the high efficiency of a network of communication, it certainly cannot be suggested that a hagiological cult dedicated to Constantine and Helena must have originated in Syria nor that it was an isolated phenomenon limited to Syria alone.[17]

By the sixth century the cities of Apamea (Syria), Jerusalem, and Rome were important centres of a liturgical veneration of relics of the holy cross, which they had in their possession. As far as it is known, the Apamea relic was kept in the city's church and its delivery there was credited to a Syrian man.[18] In the case of the Jerusalem relic, textual references link its origins with Helena's discovery. The donation of a fragment of the holy relic to the city by Helena is first recorded in Rufinus of Aquileia, who related that the relic was placed within a silver reliquary and was the subject of unflagging devotion by the inhabitants of the city (Text 3: D.30-35). Paulinus of Nola (Text 4: J.1-8) and Sulpicius Severus (Text 5: D.31-32) further elaborated that the relic was consecrated and deposited in a hidden sanctuary of the basilica erected on the site of Golgotha. The bishop of Jerusalem brought it out for veneration on a specific day during the Great Week, which according to Egeria's description, was Good Friday.[19] The fact that Egeria's account preceded the accounts dealing with the legend of the discovery indicates that Jerusalem's significance as a

[16] Drijvers 1992a: 165-180.

[17] The exchange of ideas between east and west is evident, for example, in John Malalas. The author made use of the theme of Constantine's baptism by Sylvester, pope of Rome, which was the subject of a contemporary western *vita* of Sylvester. See John Malalas, *Chronographia*: ed. *PG* 97 (1865), XIII: 476B.

[18] Klein 2004a: 37-38.

[19] Egeria, *Itinerary*: Eng. trans. Wilkinson 1981, 154-157.

cult centre of the cross did not emerge through the legend nor was it dependent upon it, while the opposite will be observed for Constantinople. A third fragment of the holy relic was believed to be enshrined in Rome in reflection of the city's Christian and authoritative profile. During the tenures of the bishops Hilarius (461-468) and Symmachus (498-514), oratories dedicated to the holy cross were founded at the Lateran basilica and at the St. Peter basilica respectively. The relic was enclosed in a cruciform reliquary of gold and jewels.[20] The translation of a fragment of the holy relic to Rome was by that time credited to Constantine, whom the *Liber Pontificalis* presented as having placed it in the basilica of the Sessorian palace, formerly the imperial residence of his mother. The relic was enclosed within a reliquary made of gold and decorated with jewels, and the site was renamed Santa Croce in Gerusalemme.[21] A second reference in the *Liber Pontificalis* further linked the cult of the cross in Rome with Constantine and Helena, mentioning that they had donated to the Shrine of St. Peter (at the basilica of St. Peter, where the bones of the apostle were deposited) a gold cross engraved with black enamel letters: 'Constantine Augustus and Helena Augusta. He surrounds this house with a royal hall gleaming with equal splendour'.[22] Overall, the inconsistencies observed in the evidence about the origins of the relics should be understood within the context of a procedure of adjusting pre-existing local traditions to new realities once the popularity of Helena's legend had been widely established: a combination of history, politics, and legend.

Possession of relics of the cross would presumably have elevated politically the status of their owner-cities, and, therefore, the fabrication of such traditions is likely to have been of high priority to those involved. No evidence, other than the narratives of the legend of

[20] *Liber Pontificalis*: Eng. trans. Davis 1989, 40.48 (2-4), 47.53 (7).

[21] De Blaauw 1997: 55-73; *Liber Pontificalis*: Eng. trans. Davis 1989, xxxii-xxxiii, 21.20.

[22] See Chapter 1, page 47.

Helena's finding of the cross, project Constantinople's claim of having in its possession a relic of the cross. It should also be clarified at this point, that none of these narratives justify or confirm the possession of relics of the cross by Apamea and Rome. Although in the early writings of the legend (Ambrose, Paulinus, Sulpicius) it was said that the holy cross was kept in one piece in Jerusalem, Rufinus' account provided the first testimony of a division of the cross into two pieces: one was kept in Jerusalem, the second was sent to Constantine by Helena (Text 3: D.30-35).[23] By the time that Sokrates composed his work, a few decades after Rufinus, it was believed that this particular relic had been enclosed in Constantine's statue that crowned the porphyry column in the Forum of Constantine (Text 6: B.41-48).[24] A variant tradition was introduced in Theodore Anagnostes' narrative early in the sixth century, according to which the same relic was divided into two parts: the one Constantine enclosed in his statue – as the fifth-century tradition claimed – and the second, which he placed in a bejeweled reliquary and kept in the palace (*τὸ δέ ἕ διαλίθῳ σταυρῷ κατακλείσας ταῖς περιόδοις ἑαυτοῦ ἡγούμενον ἔμπροσθεν ἔταξε· τοῦτο δέ καὶ εἰσέτι νῦν ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ φρουρούμενον ἐν ταῖς ἑορταστικαῖς τῶν βασιλέων προόδοις ἐξάγεται*). By the time Anagnostes wrote, this particular reliquary was used in imperial processions.[25]

Apparently there was a strong bond between the cult of relics of the holy cross and the figures of Constantine and Helena. Any association of these relics with Constantine and Helena would inevitably have stressed their authentication, while the character of their control, ecclesiastical or imperial, would have determined the nature of the cult that Constantine and Helena received by the sixth century. The ideological significance of the cross, and of Constantine and Helena, for Byzantine rulers is an aspect that cannot be

[23] Klein 2004a: 33.

[24] Klein 2004a: 34-35.

[25] Klein 2004a: 36; Theodore Anagnostes, *Church History*: ed. Hansen 1971, 13.1-7.

ignored, and it has been explicitly analysed elsewhere in my thesis.[26] At the same time, though, the existence of an imperial cult would not have prevented the parallel development of a liturgical one. The official justification of Constantinople as a cult centre of the cross seems to have been established during the reign of Justin II (565-578) – chronologically, a few decades later than comparable reports for Apamea, Jerusalem, and Rome. It is said in the writings of twelfth-century authors, Michael the Syrian and George Kedrenos, that Justin II, having been advised by the patriarch, forcefully removed part of the relic of Apamea and brought it to the imperial capital, where he placed it for veneration in the church of Hagia Sophia.[27] If we accept what the late narratives tell us, it may be assumed that by the end of the sixth century Constantinople counted three relics of the cross in its collection: two for imperial use and one for liturgical, which would have enhanced its status not only as a secular centre of the empire (New Rome) but as a religious one (New Jerusalem) as well. An expression of the new status quo of the imperial city is reflected perhaps in Justin and Sophia's initiative to send to St. Radegund, queen of Merovingian Gaul and founder of the convent of the Holy Cross in Poitiers, a reliquary with fragments of the true cross for sanctification of her convent.[28]

A liturgical veneration of particles of the cross in Apamea, Jerusalem, Rome, and Constantinople seems to encourage the possibility of the inclusion of Constantine and Helena in local hymns dedicated to the holy wood, such as the one composed by Romanos the Melodist during the reign of Justin II. Could the incorporation of their Christian deeds in such hymns, however, signify their recognition and veneration as saints? An official ecclesiastical acknowledgment and proclamation of the sanctity of Constantine and Helena would have

[26] See Chapter 3, pages 142-147.

[27] Klein 2004a: 39.

[28] See Chapter 3, page 145.

meant commemoration of their feastday, composition of their *vitae*, dedication of churches to them, veneration of their icons and relics.[29] The extant evidence does not suffice to support such an argument, and the difficulties of providing a conclusive answer are further sharpened by the complex function of Constantine and Helena as exemplary models of rulers. Severos of Antioch and Romanos the Melodist's hymns are the only examples that portrayed them as saints. With what ease, however, could such content and attitude be generalised, especially if we consider that none of the other four Christian rulers (Honorios, Gratian, Theodosios I, and Anastasios) that Severos wished to present as saints, never were – as far as we know – officially recognised or venerated as such? Any argument suggesting the liturgical veneration of Constantine and Helena during the fifth and sixth century seems to be discouraged by analysis of the prosopographical data of the period. Of twenty-two men and one woman named after Constantine or Helena in the fifth and sixth centuries, none is identified as a member of the church. On the contrary, all of them seem to have belonged to the empire's local elites.[30] It may, therefore, be suggested that by the end of the sixth century Constantine and Helena were not the subject of a hagiological cult in Byzantium.

This was about to change in the seventh century, when Constantinople was raised to the status of the empire's primary centre of the cult of the holy cross. Shortly before the Arab sack of Jerusalem, the relic of the cross kept there was translated to Constantinople (637/638), enriching the capital's collection of holy relics of the cross.[31] The seventh-century *Paschal Chronicle* (Text 10: F.7) and Adomnanus of Iona's account of the (probably fictional) pilgrimage of Arculf, a bishop from Gaul, refer to two feasts of the holy cross

[29] Regarding post-ninth-century churches, chapels, and monasteries dedicated to Constantine and Helena, see Janin 1969: 109, 295-298.

[30] Martindale 1980: II.311-318, 530.

[31] The event is recorded by the Armenian bishop Sebeos. See Sebeos, *Armenian History*: ed. and Eng. trans. Bedrosian 1985, 125-126. For an updated English translation with a historical commentary of Sebeos' *History*, see Thomson 1999.

receiving, for the first time, public veneration in the church of Hagia Sophia: the feast of the holy cross on Good Friday which traditionally is dedicated to the finding of the cross and the Passion of Christ, a liturgical ceremony already celebrated in Jerusalem since the fourth century, and the feast of the exaltation (*ὕψωσις*) of the cross on September 14 which is associated with Herakleios' recovery of Jerusalem's relic of the true cross from the Persians in 628.[32] Alexander the Monk's account, *On the Cross*, a text that scholars have dated between the sixth and the ninth century, credits to Constantine, for the first and only time, the celebration of the feast of the finding of the cross in Hagia Sophia (*τὴν μέν τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ μερίδα ἐν χρυσῇ θήκῃ ἀποθέμενος παρέδωκε τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ εἰς τήρησιν, ἐνιαυσιαίαις μνήμαις ἑορτάζειν τὴν ἀνάδειξειν τοῦ σταυροῦ προστάξας*).[33] If we accept that the innovation in Alexander's text may reflect contemporary events taking place in the capital related to this matter, then it might indicate a changing attitude by the ecclesiastical authorities towards Constantine and his mother by claiming access to their ideological significance. As hypothetical as this may be, it seems to be supported by the changes that occurred in nomenclature during this period. Not only did the numbers of persons named after Constantine and Helena steadily increase, reaching an approximate total of 340 by the end of the ninth century, but about one third of them are identified as members of the church (bishops, clerics, and church officers).[34]

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[32] Klein 2004a: 41-45; Adomnanus of Iona, *Pilgrimage of Arculf*: Eng. trans. Wilkinson 2002, 167-206. The systematic study of Adomnanus' writings by Thomas O'Loughlin has shown that Arculf's pilgrimage was a fictional story. Nevertheless, the use of Arculf as a literary device rather than as the subject of a historical event, does not affect the point made here. For further discussion and bibliography, see O'Loughlin 2007.

[33] Alexander the Monk, *On the Cross*: ed. *PG* 87 (1865), 4064B; Eng. trans. Scott 2004, 157-184. With reference to the date and genre of Alexander's text, see Drijvers 2011: 168-173 and Nesbitt 2003: 23-39.

[34] Lilie 2000: II.120-123, 480-601. From the seventh century dates a seal depicting on the obverse a portrait of a saint holding a *globus cruciger* who is identified on the reverse as Saint Constantine, see Laurent 1972: no. 1922.

The seventh century seems to signal the beginning of this new development around the memory of Constantine and Helena, and may be the time of the first compositions of *vitae* dedicated to them. The saint-mother harlot relation that is a distinct component of the earliest extant *vitae* of Constantine and Helena in the ninth century seems to have its origins in the seventh-century hagiological tradition with the most prominent example being found in the *vita* of Saint Theodore of Sykeon. Theodore's mother, Maria – a most beautiful girl (*κόρη πάνυ εὐμορφωτάτη, ὀνόματι* Μ*αρία*) – was working as prostitute at the inn owned by her mother and aunt in the village of Sykeon in Galatia. To this inn came Kosmas – the imperial courier (*μαγιστριανός*) – to take lodging for the night. In view of Maria's beauty, he wished to spend the night with her (*θεασάμενος τὴν* Μ*αρίαν εὔοπτον καὶ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ ταύτης γενόμενος ἐκοιμήθη μετ' αὐτῆς*). Maria received a vision revealed that night, which accompanied Theodore's conception (*συλλαβοῦσα τοίνυν ἐντεῦθεν ἡ γυνὴ βλέπει κατ' ὄναρ ἀστέρα παμμεγέθη τε καὶ λαμπρὸν οὐρανόθεν ἐπὶ τὴν κοιλίαν αὐτῆς κατελθόντα*).[35] The close similarities of this story with Helena's social origins and Constantine's conception are apparent, enhancing the possibility that they were not the result of a mere coincidence. The Guidi-*vita* of Constantine and Helena (late ninth century) reads:

> Constantius, having been invested with the rank of *tribunus* by the emperors […] came to the place called Drepanum which later was also called Helenopolis, and arrived in an inn which was clearly marked as such […] Constantius suddenly longed for a bed of love (or, at any rate, union, sexual intercourse); and when he announced his desire for intemperate pleasure to the guide, he, having observed his imperial bearing, since he had his young daughter Helena with him, a girl who was uninitiated about the male sex, was glad to offer her to the gentleman to enjoy himself; and Constantius, having noticed that the young lady was good looking and was just at the height of her beauty, received her with altogether the greatest pleasure […] and while he was entwined in her embraces, and night enfolded the whole affair, a wonderful vision was revealed just for that night; for the sun that shines by day, having, contrary

[35] *Vita of Saint Theodoros of Sykeon*: ed. Festugière 1970, 3.3.

> to nature, run backwards out of its bed which is beside Oceanus in the west, was unexpectedly directing its four-fold rays on the house where Constantius was sleeping with the girl.[36]

A shortened version this motif reoccurs in the Halkin-*vita* (ninth – tenth centuries):

> During these years, Constantius, the emperor of Britannia, having the rank of *tribunus* […] stayed in an inn, where was living a beautiful young girl, pagan in religion, named Helena; having a sexual urge he slept with the girl; from the same night the woman became pregnant.[37]

Inns and their association with harlotry were a feature of sixth- and seventh-century hagiologogical compositions. Inns along with bathhouses, taverns and the stage functioned – as Magoulias has observed – as 'important arteries for the dissemination of religious and political propaganda in the empire'.[38] It is within this context that the emphasis on Helena's low social origins may perhaps be assessed, although at first glance it seems contradictory to Constantine and Helena's ideological significance as exemplary models of Christian rulership. With the perspective of these works being intended to be read to a much more extended audience, the stories of Helena and Maria appear to redeem harlots from their association with wickedness, demonstrating that impudence was not a restriction to a life of repentance and holiness.[39]

The issue of Helena's low social origins was not unfamiliar to Christian authors, but was almost never brought up or stressed in their narratives. The only example is Ambrose's fourth-century oration – when the legend of Helena was still in its development – mentioning

[36] *Vita of Saints Constantine and Helena (BHG364)*: ed. Guidi 1907, 308; Eng. trans. Beetham 1996, 108.3.

[37] *Vita of Saints Constantine and Helena (BHG365n)*: ed. Halkin 1959, 74.2; my translation.

[38] Magoulias 1971: 233.

[39] Prostitution was not restricted to the brothel, but it was also common in upper-class circles. For example, empress Theodora (Justinian I, 527-565), if we believe Prokopios' description of her in his *Secret History*. For some of the problems with this interpretation, see Brubaker 2004: 83-101.

that Helena 'was a hostess of an inn, and known as such to the elder Constantine (i.e. Constantius)', without, however, elaborating any further on this matter (Text 2: F.1-2). On the contrary, the few extant writings of Arians and pagans indicate that Helena's low origins were a popular theme to groups of heretics. According to the fifth-century Philostorgios (an adherent of Arianism) and the sixth-century Zosimos (a pagan) Helena was 'a worthless woman and no different to a common harlot', and 'an ignoble mother'.[40] The origins of this tradition were politically driven, traced back to the fourth century – during the reign of Julian the Apostate (360-363) at the latest – as a medium of vilifying the legitimacy of Constantine and his heirs. The only pre-ninth century Christian text that re-introduced the theme is the seventh-century *Paschal Chronicle* mentioning in brief that Constantine 'was son to this Constantius by another union, with Helena' (Text 10: B.6-8). The time that the *Paschal Chronicle* was composed fits perfectly with the narrative components of the saint-mother harlot relation in hagiology. Taking into consideration that the chronicle's treatment of Helena presents no strong similarities with any Christian historiographical text, it may be appropriate to suggest its possible textual relation to a contemporary *vita* – now lost – of Constantine and Helena, indicating – in this very indirect way – the parallel existence of a secular and liturgical cult of the two figures by the end of the seventh century. The existence of an early prototext, plausibly dated to the seventh century, was first suggested by F. Winkelmann, A. Linder, and A. M. Schneider, but rejected as not convincing by A. Kazhdan, whose conclusions on the issue are, however, no less hypothetical and questionable.[41]

Stories referring to Helena's social origins – no matter if they were accurate or not in content – would possibly have had some impact on the way subsequent generations of

[40] Philostorgios, *Church History*: ed. Bidez and Winkelmann 1981, 26.3-14, 27.22-29; Zosimos, *New History*: Eng. trans. Buchanan and Davis 1967, 54.8-55.9.

[41] Winkelmann 1964: 407; Winkelmann 1978: 181 and 200; Linder 1975: 51; Schneider 1941: 245-249; Kazhdan 1987b: 201 and 211.

Byzantines remembered and reconstructed Helena. The degree of penetration of such elements into the Christian perception of the two figures is reflected in the late eighth- and ninth-century accounts of Constantine and Helena. Theophanes the Confessor (Text 11: B.1-3) and George Hamartolos provide the earliest extant testimonies of a reaction and of an effort to defend Constantine's and Helena's origins, by rejecting as lies and libel any claim of Constantine's illegitimate birth and Helena's prostitution. Hamartolos' statement that such claims were examined and refuted by a number of scholars (*ὧν ἐκ πορνείας γεγενῆσθαί τινες τοῦτον εἶπον, οἱ καὶ ἐλέγχονται σαφῶς ὑπὸ διαφόρων ἐξηγητῶν ὡς ψευδολόγοι καὶ ματαιόφρονες*) constitutes a further indication of the severity of this matter in the eyes of contemporary Christians.[42] A distinct element of the seventh-century *vitae* – apart from Helena's prostitution – is her origins in the region of Bithynia (Drepanum). In other words, prostitution and Bithynia seem to have been interrelated. The significance of Helena's place of origin to our interpretation is confirmed by Theophanes and Hamartolos' accounts, which either remained silent about it or relocated it from Drepanum to Dacia (probably Naissos), indicating a late-eighth-century tendency of conscious alteration of specific elements of existing narratives.[43] The similarities in attitude towards Constantine and Helena that a second group of post-ninth-century *vitae* (Opitz-*vita*, *Synaxarion* of Constantinople, Gedeon-*vita*) shares with Theophanes' and Hamartolos' texts, suggest the possible development of a second hagiological tradition about the two figures during the late eighth century, as an answer to or as a substitute for the one established during the seventh-century. A good example is the Guidi-*vita*, which brought together the two traditions about Helena's origins: on the one hand, she was born and raised in an inn in Drepanum; on the other hand,

[42] George Hamartolos, *Chronographia*: ed. *PG* 110 (1863), 580.16.

[43] George Hamartolos, *Chronographia*: ed. *PG* 110 (1863), 576.8; Hamartolos' claim was based on an older tradition attested in the *Origo Constantini* (340-390) and the *Mathesis* of Firmicus Materns (330s). Geographically, ancient Dacia covered part of modern Serbia, where the ancient city of Naissos is situated.

she was not a prostitute, but a virgin girl who, after she had been obliged by her father to sleep with Constantius, remained pure during the up-bringing of Constantine (Text 13: B.10-16). The Guidi- and Halkin-*vitae* are the only testimonies of an earliest hagiological tradition about Constantine and Helena, as it does not reappear in any other post-ninth-century texts – either hagiological or historiographical.

Alexander Kazhdan has suggested that the legend of Constantine became very popular in the eighth and ninth centuries.[44] I would rather prefer the term 'became reshaped' to 'became popular'. Interest in Constantine and Helena was, more or less, constant throughout the Byzantine period. However, the way(s) that this interest was expressed were always adjusted to contemporary circumstances. During the eighth and ninth centuries these circumstances are represented by the dispute about the cult of religious images – Byzantine 'Iconoclasm'.

The significance of Constantine and Helena during the iconoclastic controversy has already been stressed by Robert Grigg, showing that iconodules, 'in their efforts to find unassailable precedents for a practice which they wanted to defend', portrayed Constantine and Helena as patrons of religious images.[45] Helena tends to get conflated with Constantine here because specific Helena-related items are limited. Particularly, during the second council of Nicaea in 787, the two delegates of the pope, Hadrian, alleged that Constantine had decorated the Lateran Basilica in Rome with images illustrating scenes from the Old and New Testaments (*tale quid et divae memoriae Constantinus Magnus imperator olim fecit: aedificato enim templo Salvatoris Tomae, in duobus parietibus temple historias veteres et novas designavit, hinc Adam de paradise exeuntem, et inde latronem in paradisum intrantem figurans: et reliqua*), a claim that was further elaborated by the pope himself in his letter to

[44] Kazhdan 1987: 200.

[45] Grigg 1977: 12.

Constantine VI and Eirene.[46] Hadrian referred to Constantine's vision of the apostles Paul and Peter, whom the pope Sylvester ordered to have painted so that the emperor could identify them. Soon after his baptism by Sylvester, Constantine placed images of Christ and the saints in churches for veneration (*ποιεῖν ἐκκλησίας, ἀναστηλῶν ἐν αὐταῖς τὰς αὐτὰς σεβασμίας εἰκόνας, εἰς σέβας κ᾽ ἀνάμνησιν τοῦ ἐνανθρωπήσαντος κυρίου ἡμῶν Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ, κ᾽ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων*).[47] Hadrian further wrote that by the time the cult of religious images was established as an integral part of orthodox Christian practice and tradition, Constantine's example had been followed by subsequent generations of Christian rulers, but disrupted during the years of Constantine VI's iconoclast grandfather, Constantine V. The unity and the orthodoxy of the Christian Church were restored under Constantine VI and Eirene, who Hadrian called the New Constantine and the New Helena, for having imitated the deeds of their role models.[48] As has been noted elsewhere in my thesis, it was not unusual for Byzantine rulers to be ideologically associated with Constantine and Helena. Interesting though is the way that these exemplary imperial models were manipulated by ecclesiastics in order to convey to contemporary rulers specific agendas. One example is the letter purporting to have been written by John of Damaskos to emperor Theophilos (829-842), the last iconoclast emperor, urging the emperor to imitate (*μίμησαι θεοσεβέστατε δέσποτα*) the orthodoxy of Constantine – the apostle of Christ (*ὁ ἐν βασιλεῦσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπόστολος*) – by bringing an end to the ecclesiastical disputes and extinguishing the arrogance of the ill-famed iconoclasts (*παῦσον τὰ σχίσματα τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν· σβέσον τὰ φρυάγματα τῶν κακοδόξων εἰκονοκλαστῶν*).[49]

[46] Anastasios Bibliothekarios, *Latin copy of the Acts of the Fourth Council of Constantinople*: ed. PL 129 (1879), 289C.

[47] Pope Hadrian, *Letter to Constantine VI and Eirene*: ed. Mansi 1960, XII.1059.

[48] Pope Hadrian, *Letter to Constantine VI and Eirene*: ed. Mansi 1960, XII.1055-1072; see Chapter 3, page 146.

[49] John of Damaskos, *Letter to Theophilos*: ed. *PG* 95 (1864), 345-386, esp. 348C and 381C.

The letter attempts, according to Grigg, 'to defend the admissibility of images by reporting that Constantine not only engraved as a token the saving and heaven-manifest cross, he also sponsored images of Christ', such as the old authorities had described (*τοῦ χάριν χαρακτηριζόμενος, καθὼς οἱ ἀρχαιοῖ ἱστορικοὶ διαγράφουσιν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐκτύπωσιν*).[50] The letter's content and argumentation was enriched with further examples of orthodox rulers who succeeded Constantine – among them Theodosios I, Honorios, Constantine VI and Eirene – whose policies were contrasted to the bad practices of heretic rulers, such as the iconoclasts. A second letter sent to Theophilos by a council that was held in Jerusalem in 836, not only urged once again that the emperor imitate Constantine's piety and humility (*μίμησαι τὸν εὐσεβῆ καὶ φιλόχριστον βασιλέα* Κωνσταντῖνον, *υἱὸν τῆς μακαρίας* Ἑλένης), but also attributed to Helena the mosaic decoration of the church of Nativity in Bethlehem – which Helena had dedicated to the Mother of God – with representations of the scene of Nativity, of the Virgin holding in her arms the child Christ, and of the scene of the Adoration of the Magi. In addition, it is claimed according to the text that soon after the discovery of the cross, Helena adorned the consecrated sites with holy images (Καὶ *γὰρ καὶ ἡ μακαρία* Ἑλένη *ἡ θεόφρον βασίλισσα, ἐν τῇ τοῦ ζωοποιοῦ σταυροῦ ἀνευρέσει, τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ σεβασμίους τόπους καλλιεργοῦσα καὶ κατακοσμοῦσα διὰ σεπτῶν εἰκόνων, ἐν οἷς καὶ τὴν ἁγίαν ἔνδοξον* Βηθλεέμ, *μέγιστον ναὸν τῆς* Θεομήτορος *ἀνεγείρασα, καὶ τῷ πρὸς δύσιν ἔξωθεν μέρει μουσουργικοῖς ψηφώμασιν ἐξεικονίσασα τὴν ἁγίαν* Χριστοῦ *γέννησιν, καὶ τὴν* Θεομήτορα, *ἐγκόλπιον φέρουσαν τὸ ζωηφόρον βρέφος, καὶ τὴν μάγων μετὰ δώρων προσκύνησιν*).[51]

Whether Constantine and Helena were employed in iconoclastic arguments as well is not provable because of the lack of solid evidence.[52] Bearing in mind, however, that the

[50] Grigg 1977: 12, note 70; John of Damaskos, *Letter to Theophilos*: ed. *PG* 95 (1864), 348-353.

[51] *Letter of the three patriarchs to emperor Theophilos*: ed. Duchesne 1912, 283 and 356; for an English translation of the letter, see Munitiz, Chrysostomides, Harvalia-Crook and Dendrinos 1997.

iconoclasts did not support the pictorial representation of saints, but did support the biographies of saints, it may be suggested that this might have had some impact on the compositional elements of *vitae* dedicated to Constantine and Helena.[53] One such element is the issue of Constantine's baptism. While until the eighth century it was generally believed that Constantine was baptised at the end of his life in Nikomedia – the only exception is the sixth-century *Chronicle* of John Malalas (Text 9: B.1-7) – by the time Theophanes the Confessor (an iconophile) wrote his history, the belief that the emperor was baptised in Rome by Sylvester was established.[54] Though the date that the story reached Constantinople remains unknown, during the years of the iconoclastic controversy it appears to have been explicitly used in iconophile writings – such as the letters of Pope Hadrian and John of Damaskos – which elaborated on Constantine's vision of Paul and Peter and of their pictorial representations. The characterisations employed in John's letter expand this trope: not only were Constantine VI and Eirene praised as the New Constantine and the New Helena, but so was the patriarch Tarasios as the New Sylvester (*μεθ' ὧν καὶ ὁ νέος Σίλβεστρος, ὁ μέγας καὶ ἀοίδιμος Ταράσιος*), indicating the importance of this story in the construction of an iconophile profile for Constantine and Helena.[55] With the final victory of the iconophile fraction until the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the theme of Constantine's baptism in Nikomedia never reappeared in the hagiological and historiographical sources, as it had been permanently replaced by the story of Sylvester.

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[52] Kazhdan, for example, suggested that the emphasis on Helena's immoral past was an iconoclastic element, 'as if the Iconoclasts wanted to say to their adversaries: you identified your heroine Eirene with Helena – do not forget that she was a whore'. See Kazhdan 1987: 248.

[53] Anastos 1954: 153-160.

[54] Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*: Eng. trans. Mango and Scott 1997, 31.

[55] John of Damaskos, *Letter to Theophilos*: ed. *PG* 95 (1864), 364D. Parallels between Byzantine ecclesiastics and Sylvester did not fade out in subsequent centuries. Extant evidence – such as the eleventh-century Vatican Psalter gr.752 – demonstrates Sylvester's ideological significance in the claims of the Church for authority. For further discussion, see Angelov 2009: 91-157; Kalavrezou, Trahoulia, Sabar 1993: 195-219.

It becomes apparent that by the time the recognition of Constantine and Helena as saints reached its peak, the pair were not understood as 'ordinary saints'. The descriptions of their virtues, calling for their imitation, did not address a wide range of the population but mainly the imperial elite. In other words, manipulation of Constantine and Helena's saintly profiles was an alternative way for the hierarchy of the church to attempt to influence effectively the religious policies of secular rulers, a perspective that, not surprisingly, conveniently encouraged the official sanctification of Byzantium's exemplary model of rulers. This is a case where verbal descriptions corresponded harmoniously with visual communications.

4.2 The earliest extant post-iconoclastic visual representations of Constantine and Helena in Constantinople

Fragmentary mosaics have been found at the post-Justinianic gallery-level rooms at the southwest corner of the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The first room over the vestibule and the second over the ramp were part of the patriarchal palace, erected during the reign of Justin II (565-578), and were known as the Large Sekreton and Small Sekreton respectively.[56] The mosaic decoration of both rooms bears clear evidence of intense iconoclastic and iconophile activity. Namely, the representations of saints in medallions in the Small Sekreton had been replaced during the iconoclastic era by crosses, while in the Large Sekreton the victory of the iconophile faction is stressed by the depictions of famous opponents of Iconoclasm, of Christ and the Virgin, and of saints, including Constantine and Helena.[57] This is the earliest preserved hagiographical representation of Constantine and Helena in the Byzantine Empire.

[56] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 190-202.

[57] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 202-235.

The mosaics of Constantine and Helena (Plate 32) are located in the upper zone of the east and west sides of the south bay respectively. Constantine is bearded and wearing a crown, while his halo and the inscription Ο ΑΓΙΟC // [K]ωNCTAN[TINOC] (Saint Constantine) are attributes of his sainthood.[58] Though only the right hand and cuff of the figure pendant to Constantine is preserved, according to Cormack and Hawkins, it suggests an identification of Helena, which is also enhanced by the fact that the two figures are beside the representation of a cross at the summit of the south window.[59] Four iconophile patriarchs are depicted in the same decorative cycle in the south bay. They are shown in pairs facing each other in the east and west lunettes: Germanos (715-730) and Tarasios (784-804), during whose offices the first Iconoclasm began and ended respectively; Nikephoros (806-815) and Methodios (843-847), under whom the second intersection of Iconoclasm started and officially ended respectively.[60] Looking to the north bay, the tympanum over the central door of the room is decorated with mosaics of Christ, the Virgin and plausibly, of John the Baptist.[61] Christ sits enthroned, holding in his left hand a closed Gospel Book and blessing with his right, while the Virgin is in three-quarter view towards Christ with her hands extended.[62]

It has been argued by Cormack and Hawkins that the iconography of the Large Sekreton 'is not strictly a church decoration […] but the portrayal of the orthodox theology of its sponsor', who seems to have been either Ignatios (847-858, 867-877) or Photios (858-867, 877-886) because of their strong concern with Iconoclasm.[63] On this basis, the decorative

[58] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 230, figs. C, 46, 47.

[59] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 231, figs. 47, 49.

[60] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 223-228, figs. 26, 40-41, 44-45.

[61] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: fig. 27.

[62] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 213-220, figs. 28-37.

[63] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 235-237.

programme has been dated not earlier than 847 and not later than the 870s.[64] The incorporation of portraits of Constantine and Helena provides a further manifestation of their ideological significance during the years of the iconoclastic controversy. With reference to this, Brubaker writes that 'like the cross, Constantine had been returned to the fold: he now served the iconophile orthodox'.[65] Immediately after the end of Iconoclasm, Constantine is represented in both textual and visual sources dispatching the enemies of orthodoxy with the triumphal sign of the cross. [66] A relic of the true cross seems to have been kept or displayed in the Small Sekreton, providing a reason for the preservation of the iconoclastic decoration of crosses in the room.[67] The representation, therefore, of Constantine and Helena on the vault near the door into the Small Sekreton symbolised the inseparable association of their Christian deeds with the cult of the cross.

At the same time, the appearance of the pair with the imperial attributes of ninth-century rulers and in the company of exemplary ecclesiastical leaders, may be considered a visual statement of the ideal relation between rulers and their religious advisors: to work in

[64] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 235-247.

[65] Brubaker 1999b: 167.

[66] For example, Constantine is depicted holding a cross-headed lance in the Khludov Psalter, see Corrigan 1992; Mango 1975; Ščepkina 1977; Walter 1987. The earliest extant iconophile hymn dedicated to Constantine and Helena was composed by patriarch Methodios (843-847):

Ὁ τῶν ἀνάκτων ἄναξ καὶ Θεὸς,
ὁ πλουσίαις δωρεαῖς κατακοσμῶν τοὺς ἀξίους,
αὐτὸς οὐρανόθεν, ὥσπερ Παῦλον τὸν ἀοίδιμον,
διὰ σημείου τοῦ σταυροῦ σέ, Κωνσταντῖνε, ἐζώγρησεν,
ἐν τούτῳ, φήσας, νίκα τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου·
ὃν ἀναζητήσας σὺν μητρὶ θεόφρονι
καὶ εὑρὼν, ὡς ἐπόθεις,
τούτους κατὰ κράτος ἐτροπώσω·
σὺν αὐτῇ οὖν ἱκέτευε ὑπέρ ὀρθοδόξων βασιλέων
καὶ τοῦ φιλοχρίστου στρατοῦ
καὶ πάντων τῶν τὴν μνήμην σου τελούντων πιστῶς,
τὸν μόνον φιλάνθρωπον λυτρωθῆναι πάσης ὀργῆς.

See Methodios, *Hymn to Saints Constantine and Helena*: ed. Christ and Papanikas 1871, 99.

[67] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 250.

collaboration.[68] The selection of space for the transmission of such ideas was not unintentional. Both the Large and Small Sekreta were used as reception rooms, where ceremonial processions into the church of Hagia Sophia were formed.[69] They were the meeting points of the patriarch and the emperor on the occasions of important religious feasts, such as the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September) and the Sunday of Orthodoxy.[70] The idea of a balance of power between church and state was also stressed in the ninth-century *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris gr.510).

The manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale was the product of a Constantinopolitan workshop probably produced under the direct intervention and supervision of patriarch Photios (858-867 and 877-886) in order to be offered as a deluxe gift to the Byzantine emperor Basil I (867-886) and his family.[71] Forty-six full-page and full-coloured miniatures are interspersed throughout the text in order to provide a visual interpretation of their

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[68] Cormack and Hawkins have observed that 'in the room over the vestibule Constantine takes on the appearance of a contemporary Byzantine emperor and, moreover, bears a striking resemblance to a member of the family of Basil I, as portrayed in Hagia Sophia in the Alexander panel and probably that of the narthex. This type of Constantine may therefore be deliberately intended to demonstrate the ideal prototype of the reigning emperor', see Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 240-241. The idea of a cooperative relationship between church and state was exemplified in the letter sent on behalf of the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem to emperor Theophilos in 836:

> Τοίνυν, *θεογέραστε δέσποτα, καὶ ἡμεῖς οἱ μέτριοι, κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν, «συνεργοῦντες παρακαλοῦμεν» μὴ εἰς κενὸν τὸν λόγον ἡμῶν δέξασθαι, ἀλλ' εὐμενῶς καὶ μακροθύμως θεοενηχήτους ἀκοὰς ὑμῶν ἀνοῖξαι καὶ κλῖναι τοῦ ὑπακοῦσαι ἡμῖν* [...] *Καὶ τοὺς μὲν ἱερεῖς, ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους πρὸς τὸν τῆς* Ἐκκλησίας *κατήρτισε* [Κύριος] *καταρτισμόν· τοὺς δὲ βασιλεῖς πρὸς τὴν τοῦ κόσμου εὐσεβῆ διοίκησιν καὶ ἀτάραχον ταῖς γενεαῖς ἕνωσιν* [...] *Ἀλλ' ὅσων μὲν ἱερεῖς ψυχῶν ἄρχοντές εἰσιν, ἀσωμάτων τε κυριεύοντε, ἀγγέλους κρίνειν δυνάμενοι, κατὰ τὸν θεῖον ἀπόστολον, βασιλείας εἶναι ἀνωτέρους.*

See *Letter of the three patriarchs to emperor Theophilos*: ed. Duchesne 1912, 233-234. A few years earlier pope Hadrian wrote in his letter to Constantine V and Eirene, that it is better for rulers not to be involved in ecclesiastic matters (*κρεῖττον* [...] *μὴ ἐμβαλεῖν χεῖρας* [...] *εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*), see Pope Hadrian, *Letter to Constantine VI and Eirene*: ed. Mansi 1960, XII.1055.

[69] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 247-248.

[70] Cormack and Hawkins 1977: 248-250.

[71] Brubaker 1999b: 5-7, 204.

accompanying texts.[72] The alterations and adjustment which occur in most of the scenes highlight the personalised and idiosyncratic character of the manuscript, which was fine-tuned to suit the tastes of its ecclesiastical patron and its imperial viewer.[73] As Brubaker convincingly remarks, the structure of the visual arguments parallels the structure of Photios' written arguments in a way that allowed the patriarch to communicate his ideas to Basil I.[74] The miniatures, on the one hand, incorporated and manipulated imperial ideology as a means of flattering Basil I and his family, and, on the other hand, they stressed the idea of a balance of power between Church and State, with Photios underlining a pattern of proper behaviour by rulers towards their religious advisors.[75] The scenes with Constantine and Helena seem to have been adjusted or to have been *ad hoc* creations in order to communicate the ideological importance of the exemplary pair in the Byzantine imperial system.[76] Brubaker's systematic research on Basil I has shown that assimilating himself and his family with Constantine and Helena was important to his ideological agenda.[77] Their images on Paris gr.510, therefore, were consciously promoted as prototypes of Basil I and his wife Eudokia.[78]

Constantine and Helena are shown on folio 440r wearing imperial garments and attributes similar to those of Basil I and Eudokia, while the selected scenes of Constantine's vision and victory over his enemies with the help of the cross (EN TOYTΩ NIKA), and Helena's discovery of the cross, provide a narrative version of the message conveyed by the two crosses (Plate 31.3-4) accompanying the imperial portraits on the frontispiece sequence

[72] Brubaker 1999b: 1, 43.

[73] Brubaker 1999b: 42.

[74] Brubaker 1999b: 204.

[75] Brubaker 1999b: 412.

[76] Brubaker 1999b: 165.

[77] For a complete analysis of the topic, see Brubaker 1985: 1-13; Brubaker 1994: 139-158; Brubaker 1999b: 147-172.

[78] Brubaker 1999b: 164, 169.

of miniatures: the relationship between Constantine's cross of triumph and the true cross.[79] The growing tradition of Constantine and Helena as symbols of exemplary Christian rule was clearly the stimulus that automatically brought forth their unconditioned inclusion in the manuscript. The associations between Constantine and his family and Basil I and his family are also expressed in the text following folio 440r. Although at first glance, the *Metaphrase of Ecclesiastes* seems extraneous to the content of the miniature, it actually underlines the ideal Christian example of a ruler in the textual picture of Solomon, and in the visual picture of Constantine.[80] Folio 440r, therefore, supplemented rather than illuminated the text it accompanied, functioning, in other words, as *exegesis*.[81] There is no doubt that Photios' intentions were amplified by both visual and literary means. Further parallels are implicitly expressed throughout the manuscript. The content of the introductory miniature of the *Homilies*, presenting Christ holding an unusual text (Plate 31.1), demonstrates that Basil and his heirs rule through God, and acclaims them as worthy successors to Constantine.[82] The imperial portrait of Basil flanked by Elijah and Gabriel (Plate 31.5), presents Elijah handing the labarum of Constantine to Basil, promoting, in this way, the idea of divine approval for Basil as a direct successor to Constantine.[83]

Hence, even though images of Constantine are not depicted elsewhere in the manuscript, the ideological motifs referring to him are unquestionably clear. Helena, however, seems to be portrayed a second time, along with Saint Paraskeve on folio 285r (Plate 31.6).[84] Though questions about her identification have been raised, especially because

[79] Brubaker 1999b: 167; the iconographical resemblance of Constantine and Helena to current rulers on later wall paintings appears to have had its origins in imperial ideology.

[80] Brubaker 1999b: 169.

[81] Discussion on images as *exegesis*, see Brubaker 1999b: 71.

[82] Brubaker 1999b: 150, 169.

[83] Brubaker 1999b: 158-161.

[84] Brubaker 1999b: 205.

of the problematic reading of the explanatory inscription and of the discrepancies in appearance when compared with the image of Helena on folio 440r, it is best understood if related to Photios' idiosyncratic writings.[85] The miniature introduces the text *On Easter*, and although Helena has no explicit connection with the homily, she is implicitly associated, as Brubaker explains, with the crucifixion because of her role as the discoverer of the cross of Christ's passion.[86] Therefore, Helena is represented on the miniature holding a model of Christ's tomb, which iconographically, although it ignores the standard formula, corresponds to Photios' prescriptions of the tomb in the *Aphilochia* (Question 316), where Helena is mentioned.[87] An additional interesting feature of the miniature is that Helena continues to be dressed in imperial costume as in folio 440r, but in this case her attire recalls more clearly the appearance of empress Eudokia on folio Br (Plate 31.2).[88] As Brubaker suggests, 'the affiliation of Helena's formal portrait on 285r with that of Eudokia was presumably intentional, and meant to solidify the links between Basil and his family, and Constantine and his'.[89]

The miniatures of Constantine and Helena in Paris gr.510 are comparable to the early ninth-century Vercelli cod. CLXV and Munich clm. 22053, which were produced in the Carolingian west. Though the three manuscripts were created independently, both geographically and iconographically, they allow us to explore and evaluate how the memory of Constantine and Helena was developed within different ideological contexts.

The manuscript in the cathedral library of Vercelli, the *Canones conciliarum*, is a collection of canon laws, including among others apostolic canons, papal letters, and canons

[85] Gavrilovic 2007: 67-72.

[86] Brubaker 1999b: 205.

[87] Brubaker 1999b: 207. Photios' text is also provided.

[88] Brubaker 1999b: 5, 164.

[89] Brubaker 1999b: 164.

from Gallo-Roman and Merovingian church councils.[90] The collection was compiled in northern Italy, probably in the see of Milan (church of S. Felice in Pavia), and from the script used throughout the texts it has been dated no later than the second quarter of the ninth century (800-825).[91] It includes a series of full-page miniatures, all bunched together at the beginning of the collection. The introductory illustration on folio 2r shows the excavation for the discovery of the cross, and Judas presenting the cross to Helena (Plate 29.1). It is followed by the burning of the Arian books at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 presided over by Constantine (Plate 29.2), by Saints Peter and Paul discussing the Council of Nicaea (Plate 29.3), the burning of the books of the Macedonian heretics at the First Council of Constantinople in 381 presided over by Theodosios I (Plate 29.4-5), Theodosios II presiding over the Council of Ephesos in 431 (Plate 29.6), and the scenes end with Constantine and Helena adoring Christ in Majesty on 5r (Plate 29.7). Each miniature is composed of uncoloured pen-and-ink drawings, showing their subject in a summary and schematic way, and each is accompanied by Latin legends in uncial and cursive scripts.[92] The location of the scenes in the manuscript indicates, as Walter suggests, that they were 'intended to call attention to the authenticity of the following texts and the apostolic tradition which inspired them'.[93]

Helena is depicted twice in the manuscript. At the bottom of folio 2r, Judas is shown excavating and finding the three crosses. The scene is accompanied by an inscription explaining that Judas had found among the crosses the cross of Christ (UBI IUDA / S CRUCE [m] INVE / NIT). Above, Judas is presented offering the true cross to Helena, who extends her hands to receive it. Though Judas is identified by an inscription (IUDAS),

[90] McKitterick 2004: 256; Walter 1968: 99, note 2; Walter 2006: 58.

[91] Baert 2004: 76; McKitterick 2004: 65-66; Walter 2006: 58.

[92] McKitterick 2004: 258; Walter 2006: 59.

[93] Walter 2006: 59.

Helena's identity is established through her iconography: she is shown nimbate, wearing a diadem, standing in front of a throne, and accompanied by a member of her retinue. Consequently, she would immediately have been identified by contemporary viewers, familiar with her traditional association with the story of the finding of the true cross. On folio 5r Helena is shown with Constantine raising their hands in adoration of Christ, who is depicted above them, enthroned and accompanied by two angels. The figures are identified by inscriptions: Helena is presented as Regina; the legend for Constantine is not legible; while Christ's name is written in Greek letters (*ιhs χρs*), implying, as Walter has suggested, that the miniaturist might have used a Byzantine model.[94] While there was no need for Helena to be identified in folio 2r, the miniaturist may have had her name added in the latter illustration, probably because the scene did not follow traditional iconographical patterns recognizable to the viewers, and maybe because it had been adjusted in order to accommodate precise and time-specific points relevant to the content of the manuscript.[95] No iconographical parallels of this scene can be found either in the west or in the east.

McKitterick notes that the illustrations in the Vercelli manuscript, as a unit, complemented the written part, and even enhanced its meaning by visual references to texts not included in the collection at all, such as the acts of the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesos, and the legend of the finding of the true cross.[96] As McKitterick further remarks, the illustrations 'mirror the themes of the crucified and triumphant Christ, faith and devotion, the role of the emperors in supporting the Christian church, the definition of orthodoxy, the historical place of the church in relation to the New Testament and the apostles, and the importance of books and writing as embodiments of the

[94] Walter 2006: 59.

[95] Discussion on iconography and the issue of tradition, see Brubaker 1999b: 37-43.

[96] McKitterick 2004: 258.

faith'.[97] The scenes are conceived and developed in order to address the issue of the twofold nature of Christ, a theme of current debates in the Carolingian west.[98] Because the nature and person of Christ in relation to God the Father is essentially connected to the dogma of the Incarnation, the issue had also emerged and been expressed in the liturgy of the finding of the true cross in the Carolingian Church.[99] The invention of the cross signifies the material proof of Christ's incarnation and salvation.[100] The human and divine nature of Christ is expressed in the Vercelli manuscript through the representation of the instrument of his passion on earth in the introductory miniature with scenes from the finding of the cross, and through the image of Christ in majesty in heaven at the closing miniature. The link between these scenes is reinforced by placing, as McKitterick suggests, 'Helena and Constantine beneath Christ in attitudes of supplication'.[101] The inclusion of imperial figures in the miniatures (Helena, Constantine, Theodosios I, Theodosios II), should be seen, therefore, as a manifestation of the submission of the rulers to the service of the orthodox faith.[102] There is a chronological sequence between the miniatures which inevitably stresses Helena's primary role in the political establishment of the Christian Church and the pre-eminence of the mainstream Christian faith.[103]

The manuscript in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, the *Wessobrunner Gebetbuch*, was produced in the diocese of Augsburg in Bavaria around 814, during the reign of

[97] McKitterick 2004: 258.

[98] Baert 2004: 78.

[99] Baert 2004: 78; McKitterick 2004: 260.

[100] Baert 1999: 124.

[101] McKitterick 2004: 259.

[102] Acceptance of the orthodox doctrine, of the first four ecumenical councils, of the church canons, and rejection of heresy, were part of the election procedure of prelates in the Carolingian times. All these elements are not irrelevant from the scenes represented in the Vercelli, as they could all be considered visual translations of the importance the Carolingians attached to orthodox belief. See Chazelle 1997: 1063-1067.

[103] Baert 2004: 76.

Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious.[104] It includes texts of a broad range of themes, such as theology, weights and measures, botany, geography, and chronology. The collection is introduced with the text of the story of the finding of the cross, covering the first twenty-one folios, and it is followed by the Wessobrunner prayer book. All texts are written in Caroline minuscule script by five different hands.[105] Only the text of the finding of the true cross is accompanied by illustrations, following the beginning of each paragraph and in direct response to the details of the narrative. The scenes are drawn in simple outline pictures, as in the Vercelli manuscript.[106] The story, both in written and pictorial form, begins with the dream of Constantine on folio 2r (Plate 30.1). It is followed by Helena's mission to Jerusalem in order to find the holy relic of the cross, and the legend of Judas Kyriakos (Plate 30.2-18). Though only the scene of the actual discovery of the cross was chosen for illustration in the Vercelli manuscript, the whole iconographical cycle of the legend was employed in the Wessobrunner manuscript.

The Judas Kyriakos version of the legend of the finding of the true cross had been favoured by the Christian Church in the west since the sixth century.[107] Its distinguishing feature is that the Jew, Judas Kyriakos, is presented as the main character of the legend, responsible for the finding and identification of the holy relics, while the role of Helena's contribution, as Drijvers rightly remarks, significantly alters from the eastern tradition.[108] The polemical character of the Judas Kyriakos legend against Judaism was particularly popular when the Wessobrunner manuscript was written, and was considered an integral part of the

[104] Baert 2004: 72-73; McKitterick 2004: 262.

[105] Baert 2004: 73; McKitterick 2004: 265.

[106] McKitterick 2004: 263.

[107] Drijvers 1992: 174-175.

[108] Drijvers 1992: 177.

campaigns of the western Church to convert the Jewish communities.[109] The cycle of Judas' belief from doubt to conviction, from confession to baptism, as Baert describes it, enhanced the idea of a peaceful conversion of the Jews, which would be the result of conviction to the true faith and not of compulsion.[110] Helena is considered here as the exemplary representative of authoritative rule, which places its power in the service of the Church for the defense and promotion of the Christian faith against unbelievers and heretics.[111] The accomplishment of Helena's mission and Judas Kyriakos' conversion manifests, in this case, the triumph of Christianity over Judaism.

The illustrations found in the Vercelli and Wessobrunner manuscripts are among the earliest examples of an iconographical development of the legend of the finding of the true cross in the west.[112] Their literary backgrounds are found, as we have seen, in the Judas Kyriakos legend. Bearing in mind that the Carolingians never esteemed images above words, the employment and manipulation of such iconographical cycles in books is a particularly interesting feature.[113] Undoubtedly, the depictions of Helena within the aforementioned pictorial programmes were not simply decorative in function, but enhanced and reflected the ideological meanings of the texts, which are apparently best understood if seen against the background of events in the ninth century. As such, Helena's image was also employed in the book iconography of the Byzantine east, with the earliest and only example – as we have seen – being the ninth-century *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus. Helena is depicted (Plate 31.7) as the main character of the visual narration of the finding of the true cross. In contrast to the

[109] Collins 1998; Delort 1986

[110] Baert 2004: 74-76; Drijvers 1992: 177.

[111] Drijvers 1992: 177-179.

[112] The first recorded example is the Gellone Sacramentary manuscript (750-790) with an initial decoration of the finding of the cross. See Baert 2004: 54-72.

[113] Discussion of the attitude of the Carolingians towards texts and images, see McKitterick 1990: 297-318; McKitterick 2005: 210.

Carolingian manuscripts, there is, here, a clear differentiation and a separate development in the literary tradition regarding the story of the finding of the cross. The Judas Kyriakos version is not the most prominent form of the legend in the east, where Helena is helped in her mission by Makarios, bishop of Jerusalem. Therefore, though one of the figures depicted on the scenes of folio 440r may be identified as Makarios – he wears clerical garb – only Helena is identified by an inscription: Η ΑΓΙΑ ΕΛΕΝΗ (Saint Helena).[114]

4.3 Descriptions of Helena in post-iconoclastic hagiological writings

The earliest extant post-iconoclastic hagiological descriptions of Helena in Byzantium have been dated to the period between the end of the ninth century and the twelfth century. However, the precise date and chronological order in which these texts were compiled is far from certain. The Halkin- or Patmos-*vita* (Text 12) is included in the codex Patmos gr.179 (fol. 4v-25v). The Guidi-*vita* (Text 13) has been traced in more than forty extant manuscripts, but the text published by Guidi is based on codex Paris gr.1453 (fol. 68v-91v). The main body of the Opitz-*vita* (Text 14) comes from the codex Angelicus gr.22 in Vatican (fol. 1v-54v), while the Gedeon-*vita* (Text 16) was supplied from the codex Kultumusius gr.23 in Athos (fol. 286v-299v).[115] Additionally, a brief *vita* is included in the *Synaxarion* of Constantinople (Text 15) and was read on the day of the feast of Constantine and Helena.[116] By the late ninth century there was a broad pool of earlier sources from which hagiographers could derive their information on Helena, without having to follow directly or consistently a unique source. The anonymous authors utilised already standardised themes in their descriptions, some of which they either presented in a more rudimentary and abridged form

[114] Brubaker 1999b: 164.

[115] Halkin 1957: 121-125.

[116] Delehaye 1902: 697-700.

or enriched with new elements. Unsurprisingly, none of the *vitae* presented homogeneity in content.

With reference to Helena's social origins, we are informed in the Halkin-*vita* that Helena was a young, beautiful and pagan girl who was working in an inn (Text 12: B.7-8). The same story was employed by the author of the Guidi-*vita*, but without emphasising her supposed background in prostitution. Instead Helena was transformed into a virgin girl (Text 13: B.15-16) who after she had been forced by her father to sleep with Constantius Chlorus, remained pure during the up-bringing of her son (Text 13: B.32-34). Helena's low origins were nowhere mentioned in the *Synaxarion* of Constantinople and the Gedeon-*vita*. On the contrary, Helena was praised for her pious and modest life (Text 15: B.6; Text 16: B.1-3). She was the legitimate wife of Constantius Chlorus who had to leave her after his elevation to Caesar (Text 16: B.9-12). In the long run, the theme of Helena's social origins faded out.

Helena's imperial rank was a common theme in all narratives. Besides the use of standardised features, such as the coronation of Helena as Roman empress (Text 14: H.27-28) and the circulation of coins in her name (Text 13: D.15-16), we are also told – for a first and only time – by the author of the Halkin-*vita* that the empress was brought from Rome to rule with her son the new capital of the empire (Text 12: D.1-6). Moreover, the display of visual representations of her in secular sites, and the alleged possession of her mortal remains in the imperial mausoleum attached to the church of the Holy Apostles seem to have been understood as public manifestations of Helena's ideological significance. In continuation of sixth- and seventh-century traditions – best reflected in John Malalas and the *Paschal Chronicle* – the author of the Opitz-*vita* referred to a statue of Helena in the Augusteum (Text 14: E.3-5). By the ninth century, Helena's entombment in Constantinople became a standard feature in the writings of Alexander the Monk, Theophanes the Confessor, and George Hamartolos, and it was widely held until the fall of the Byzantine Empire (see *Synopsis*

Chronike, George Kedrenos, and Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos in chapter six). Whether actual relics of Helena ever came anywhere near Constantinople, is difficult to say. In any case, the elevated symbolic role of Helena from 395 onwards does not preclude such a possibility, and the celebrations of the Venetians marking the translation of Helena's relics from Constantinople to Venice in 1211, might have their basis in truth.[117] The regenerated interest in the mausoleum of Constantine between the late ninth and early eleventh centuries raises an interesting possibility about the date by which the tradition of Helena's funeral in Constantinople may have been established.[118] It is worth noting that the discrepancies between the two versions of Helena's place of burial were first addressed in the contemporaneous Guidi-*vita*. According to the text, Helena's mortal remains were laid in a porphyry coffin in a circular chapel with a vault outside the city of Rome, but two years later she was brought back with her porphyry coffin to Constantinople and she was laid to rest in the church of the Holy Apostles (Text 13: F.9-18). The tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies* went even further, claiming that Helena shared the same tomb in Constantinople with Constantine (*ὁ λάρναξ τοῦ ἁγίου Κωνσταντίνου πορφυροῦς* [...] *ἐν ᾧ ἀπόκειται αὐτὸς μετὰ Ἑλένης*).[119]

New elements were infused in the story of Helena's pilgrimage to Jerusalem and her finding of the holy relics, with no attested counterparts in preceding narratives. The Guidi- and Opitz-*vitae* shared the belief that two relics of the holy cross were distributed by Helena to Jerusalem and Constantinople: one part of the cross was enclosed in a silver case and left

[117] Wortley 2006: 366-367.

[118] During the reign of Basil I (867-886) the mausoleum was brought back into use after a long period of abandonment since the death of Anastasios in 518. It remained in use until the reign of Constantine VIII (960-1028). Grierson, Mango, and Ševčenko 1962: 19-22.

[119] Constantine Porphyrogenitos, *Book of Ceremonies*: ed. *PG* 112 (1861), 1189B; Natalia Teteriatnikov notes 'that it was important that the saints shared the same tomb, to promote the cult of both saints', see Teteriatnikov 1995: 170-172.

in the patriarchate of Jerusalem, while the other part was sent to Constantine (Text 13: D.57-70; Text 14: H.64-70). The Guidi-*vita* further elaborated that the relic received by Constantine was placed in a gold reliquary and was given to the patriarch of Constantinople (Text 13: D.87-91). There was no element of originality in either *vita* because both accounts relied on already existing traditions (Sokrates, Sozomen, Alexander the Monk). Nevertheless, a different version was introduced in the Halkin-*vita*. We are told that the relic of the cross venerated for so many centuries in the Christian world was made from the base of Christ's cross, because the actual cross – found by Helena – had been elevated to heaven (Text 12: F.9-11). The cross was made at the command of Helena in order to replace the original one, and it was the same cross Herakleios recovered from the Persians in 628 (Text 12: F.22-27). The Halkin-*vita* omitted to make a special mention to the relic possessed in Constantinople, but more striking is its claim that relics of the cross were distributed by Helena to all Christian churches (Text 12: F.28). A slightly modified treatment of the relics occurs in the fifth-century writings of Theodoret of Kyrrhos and Gelasios of Kyzikos, who claimed that the recipients of the holy relics were the Christian Kingdoms instead.[120] The growing authority of the Church from the fifth to the ninth century might explain the diversities witnessed in pre- and post-iconoclastic accounts.

The hagiological texts are of further significance as they provide testimony of a new development in Byzantium regarding Helena's material involvement in the Holy Land. Helena was not only responsible for the erection of churches on Calvary (Holy Sepulchre), in Bethlehem, and on the Mount of Olives – which was the commonly held belief throughout the Byzantine period – but, according to the Guidi-*vita*, her activity was extended to more holy sites, including Gethsemane, Bethany, the River Jordan, Tiberias, Capernaum, Nazareth,

[120] See Chapter 2, page 79.

and Galilee (Text 13: D.69-75).[121] Although most of the buildings and topographical information described in the text originated in the late-seventh century account of the Holy Land by Epiphanios the Monk, *The Holy City and the Holy Place*, none of them was initially associated with Helena.[122] Clearly the new development cannot be dated before the eighth century, but the circumstances under which it emerged are an issue for further research. The brief reference made in the Halkin-*vita* that Helena's religious building programme in the Holy Land also included the construction of houses for the poor, monasteries, and hostels (Text 12: H.1-10) may suggest a possible association of the new tradition with the pilgrim activity taking place there under the Muslims. It is worth mentioning that pilgrimage in the Holy Land was not interrupted by the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in 638.[123]

It becomes apparent that literary production – either historiographical or hagiological – was not detached from its actual historical setting. We are told in the Opitz-*vita* that Constantine ordered visual representations of himself and his mother with the image of the cross (Text 14: D.7-9). Such representations were not unknown in earlier times. Suggestive is the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, which located such portraits in non-religious sites, for example, the Milion, and the Forums Bovis and Tauri. Nonetheless, earlier accounts of Constantine and Helena only referred either to images of Constantine that the emperor forbade to be set up in idol-shrines (Sokrates), or to a statue of Helena that Constantine set up in the Augusteum (John Malalas, *Paschal Chronicle*). By the time the *vitae* were compiled, the frequent appearance of Constantine and Helena in the decorative programmes of a large number of churches across the empire did not only signal their political significance as

[121] For a detailed description of the churches allegedly erected by Helena, see *Vita of Saints Constantine and Helena (BHG364)*: ed. Guidi 1907, 643.24-648.6.

[122] Epiphanios the Monk, *The Holy City and the Holy Place*: Eng. trans. Wilkinson 2002: 19-20, 207-215.

[123] Alice-Mary Talbot's investigation of middle and late Byzantine hagiological texts has shown that Byzantine pilgrims continued to travel to the Holy Land throughout the Byzantine centuries. See Talbot 2001: 97-110.

symbols of ideal Christian rule. In the aftermath of their acknowledgment as saints, Constantine and Helena's imperial and hagiological cult was interchangeable. The appeal and popularity of their cult is the subject of the next chapter of my thesis.

4.4 Textual sources

TEXT 12: Halkin-*Vita* of Saints Constantine and Helena (9th-10th centuries)[124]

A		B	
1	**74-75(2)** During these years, Constantius, the emperor of Britannia, having the rank of *tribunus*, set out against the Sarmatians; after his great	*Ἐν τούτοις τοῖς καιροῖς Κώνστας ὁ βασιλεὺς Βρεττανίας τριβοῦνος ἔτι ὢν ἐξῆλθεν εἰς πόλεμον κατὰ τῶν Σαρματῶν· καὶ τούτους κατὰ κράτος ἑλὼν ὑπέστρεφε μετὰ νίκης μεγάλης. ΄΄Εν τινι δὲ τόπῳ διαναπαῦσαι τὸν στρατὸν βουλόμενος εὑρίσκει πανδοχεῖον, ἐν ᾧ ἦν <u>κόρη εὐειδὴς ἕλλην τῇ θρησκείᾳ</u> Ἑλένη τοὔνομα· ἧς ἐρασθεὶς συνεισῆλθεν αὐτῇ· καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ νυκτὶ συλλαμβάνει ἡ γυνή. Πρωίας δὲ ἀναστὰς δωρεῖται ταύτῃ τῆς κοίτης ἕνεκα αὐτῆς χιτῶνα πορφυροῦν καὶ μανιάκην χρυσοῦν* […] *Ἦν δέ ὁ Κώνστας ἔχων ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδίας αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς υἱὸν μωρόν* […] *καὶ πέμπει πρωτίκτορας ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνατολὴν εἰς τὸ ζητῆσαι παιδίον εὐειδές τε καὶ συνετὸν πρὸς τὸ οἰκειώσασθαι αὐτὸ εἰς υἱόν· τοῦτο δὲ τῆς ἄνωθεν πάντως προθημείας ἔργον ἦν. ΄΄Ερχονται οὖν οἱ*	1
5	victory against them he was on his way back to his province, when he stopped at a city there to rest his army; he stayed in an inn, where there was living a beautiful young girl, pagan in religion,		5
10	named Helena; having a sexual urge he slept with the girl; the same night the woman became pregnant. The next day, when he woke up in the morning, he gave her a purple dress and a gold		10
15	necklace as reward for her service […]		15

[124] *Vita of Saints Constantine and Helena (BHG365n)*: ed. Halkin 1959, 63-107 and 370-372; my translation.

Constantius had a retarded son from his legitimate wife […] he sent an embassy to the east to find a handsome and clever boy to adopt as son. The envoys took the same route that Constantius used during his return from the war against the Sarmatians; and they stayed at the same inn where Helena was […] The son of Helena, Constantine, whom she bore from her pregnancy by the emperor Constantius while he was still *tribunus*, as has already been said, being of the age of ten he took away the horses and boasted that due to a divine blessing his ancestors were emperors. When one of the envoys went out and saw the boy ride one of the horses, being angry he slapped him and said: 'Do not misbehave, otherwise you will be enlisted.' Being in pain, the boy ran to his mother crying; she first took care of the boy and then she said to the envoy: 'My good friend, do not hit the child, because he is the son of the

ἀπεσταλμένοι δι ἐκείνης τῆς λεωφόρου ἔνθα καὶ ὁ Κώνστας ἀπὸ τοῦ πολέμου τῶν Σαρματῶν ὑποστρέψας ἦν· καὶ καταλύουσιν ἐν τῷ πανδοχείῳ ἐν ᾧ ἡ Ἑλένη *ἦν* […] Ὁ *δὲ τῆς* Ἑλένης *υἱὸς* Κωνσταντῖνος, *ὃν συνέλαβεν ἀπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως* Κώνσταντος *τριβούνου ὄντος καθὼς προείρηται, ὑπάρχων ὡσεὶ ἐτῶν δέκα, τερπόμενος οἷα παῖς, μᾶλλον δέ τῇ θεικῇ προνοίᾳ ἐπὶ τοῖς πατρῴοις βασιλείοις καλούμενος, ἤλετο τοῖς ἵπποις· τῶν δέ πρωτικτόρων εἷς ἐξελθών, ὡς εἶδεν αὐτὸν τῷ ἵππῳ ἐπικαθήμενον, ὀργισθεὶς δίδωσιν αὐτῷ κόσσον εἰπών·* «Μὴ *ἀτάκτει· οὔπω γὰρ ἐστρατεύθης.*»' Αλγήσας *οὖν ὁ παῖς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὴν μητέρα κλαίων· ἡ δέ τὸν παῖδα πρῶτον θεραπεύσασα λέγει τῷ τύψαντι αὐτόν·* «Ἑταῖρε, *μὴ δέρε τὸ παιδίον, ὅτι βασιέως ἐστὶν υἱός.* »

[…] Ἡ *δέ* Ἑλένη *διεβεβαιοῦτο ὀμνύουσα κατὰ τῶν θεῶν αὐτῆς καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ καίσαρος ὅτι βασιλέως ἐστίν.* 'Απιστούντων *δέ αὐτῶν ἔτι,* Ἑλένη *τὰ κατὰ τῆς νίκης τῶν Σαρματῶν μετὰ τὴν ὑποστροφὴν τοῦ* Κώνσταντος *τριβούνου τηνικαῦτα ὄντος διηγήσατο· καὶ τὰ δοθέντα αὐτῇ παρ' αὐτοῦ εὐθέως ὑπέδειξεν. Οἱ δέ ἰδόντες τόν τε πορφυροῦν χιτῶνα καὶ τὸ χρυσοῦν μανιάκιον καὶ βεβαιωθέντες ἐχάρησαν ὑπερβαλόντως.*

emperor.' […] Helena assured him, swearing by her gods and on the Caesar's life, that he was the emperor's son. In order to persuade them, Helena narrated the story of Constantius' victory against the Sarmatians and the events that took place during the return of the *tribunus*; she also showed them the gifts that were given to her by him. The envoys, seeing the purple dress and the gold necklace, were persuaded, and they were very delighted.

C

92-93(14) The finding of the true cross. Fulfiling the wish of the pious emperor Constantine, Roman citizens inhabited Constantinople; but the emperor found it inappropriate to rule the new city without having with him his mother, thus he brought her from Rome. She had a vision from heaven, as she explained it, to travel to Jerusalem in order to find the true cross of Christ, our

D

Περὶ τῆς εὑρέσως τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ. Τῆς ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει οἰκήσεως τῶν Ῥωμαίων μετὰ καὶ τοῦ εὐσεβοῦς βασιλέως Κωνσταντίνου λαχόντων, οὐ θεμιτὸν ἡγησάμενος ὁ βασιλεὺς μὴ συνεῖναι αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν μητέρα, εἰσάγει καὶ αὐτὴν ἀπὸ Ῥώμης. Ἡ δὲ ἐξηγεῖται ὡς θεία ὀπτασία ταύτῃ ἐνσκήψασα τὴν ἐπὶ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα πορεύεσθαι διεκελεύετο πρὸς τὸ τὴν τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν εὕρεσιν ποιήσασθαι καὶ τὴν τῶν ἁγίων τόπων φανέρωσιν. Πέμπεται οὖν μετὰ πλούτου ἀναριθμήτου καὶ πάσης

God, and to reveal the Holy Land. Therefore, she was sent there with great wealth and with every kind of authority. While she found the Holy Land and she was in search of the holy cross, she found it hidden very deep in the ground […] Well, with the contribution of the holy Helena, the holy sepulchre and the life-giving cross was found on the twenty-second day of April by Judas Kyriakos.

ἄλλης ἐξουσίας. Ἥτις τοὺς ἁγίους καταλαβοῦσα τόπους καὶ τὴν ζήτησιν τοῦ σεβασμίου σταυροῦ ποιουμένη εὑρίκει τοῦτον εἰς βάθος γῆς πολὺ κατορωρυγμένον […] *Εὑρίσκεται οὖν ὁ ἅγιος τάφος καὶ ὁ ζωοποιὸς σταυρὸς τῇ συνεργείᾳ καὶ σπουδῇ τῆς μακαριωτάτης Ἑλένης τῇ εἰκοστῇ δευτέρᾳ τοῦ ἀπριλίου μηνὸς ὑπὸ Ἰούδα τοῦ ἐπικληθέντος διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος Κυριακοῦ.*

E

1 **93-95(15)** The elevation of the true cross. The holy Helena erected a magnificent church on the holy Golgotha, where she placed the cross. However, during the fourteenth day of September, at dawn, and while a crowd of people was in the church, all of a sudden, everybody saw the roof of the church open, and the cross separated from its base and elevated to heaven through the open roof; all together

F

Περὶ *τῆς ὑψώσεως τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ.* 1
Δειμαμένη τοίνυν ἡ μακαριωτάτη Ἑλένη ναὸν περικαλλῆ ἐν τῷ ἁγίῳ Γολγοθᾷ ἐκεῖσε ἵστησι τὸν σταυρόν· τῇ δὲ τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτῃ τοῦ σεπτεμβρίου 5
μηνός, διαφαινούσης τῆς ἡμέρας, τοῦ πλήθους τῷ ναῷ προσεδρεύοντος, ἄφνω πάντων ὁρώντων ἀνεῴγνυται μέν ἡ στέγη τοῦ ναοῦ, ἀνίπταται δέ ὁ σταυρός, τὸ ὑποπόδιον μόνον ἐν ᾧ ἵστατο καταλιπών 10
ἐπὶ τοῦ τόπου, καὶ διελθὼν τὴν ἀνοιγεῖσαν τοῦ ναοῦ στέγην ἐπήρθη ἕως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, πάντων μιᾷ φωνῇ κραζόντων τὸ «Κύριε, ἐλέησον» […] *Ἡ οὖν μακαρία Ἑλένη,*

voiced: ‘Lord, mercy!’ […] Then, the holy Helena afraid that the base of the cross might be elevated as well – the base had been sprinkled by the blood from Christ’s holy rip and feet – she followed the advice of the holy bishop Makarios, and used the base to form a cross similar to the elevated one, but smaller in size. The cross was placed in the church, and it is the same cross taken years later by the Persians and restored by Herakleios. However, pieces of the cross she also sent to all the Churches. The nails by which the holy hands and feet of our Lord Christ were fastened [to the cross], she put one in the bit of her son the emperor Constantine’s horse, in order to fulfil an old prophecy which said: ‘That which shall be upon the bit of the horse, shall be holy to the Lord Almighty.’ The second nail she put in his helmet, in a cruciform shape; the other two nails she put in the column of Constantine,

φοβηθεῖσα μὴ καὶ [*εἰς*] *τὸ ὑποπόδιον τοῦ σταυροῦ τοιοῦτόν τι πάθῃ - καὶ γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸ ταῖς ἐκ τῆς θείας πλευρᾶς ῥανίσι καὶ ἐκ τοῦ τῶν ἁγίων ποδῶν αἵματος ἐκεκόσμητο - αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ τῇ μετ᾽ εὐχῆς προτροπῇ τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις ἐπισκόπου* Μακαρίου *κόψασα ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὅμοιον τῷ ἀναληφθέντι σταυρῷ, εἰ καὶ κατὰ τὸ μέγεθος ἐλάττω, κατασκευάσασα ἔστησεν, τὸν καὶ μετὰ χρόνους τινὰς ὑπὸ Περσῶν αἰχμαλωτισθέντα καὶ αὖθις ὑπὸ Ἡρακλείου βασιλέως ἀναρρυσθέντα· ἀλλὰ καὶ πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἔπεμψε.* Τοὺς δέ γε ἥλους τῶν ἀχράντων χειρῶν *καὶ ποδῶν τοῦ δεσπότου* Χριστοῦ, *ἕνα μέν ἐν τῷ χαλινῷ τοῦ βασιλέως* Κωνσταντίνου *καὶ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς ἔβαλεν, ὥστε πληρωθῆναι τὸ προφητικὸν λόγιον* […] Τὸν δέ *ἕτερον ἧλον τῇ περικεφαλαίᾳ αὐτοῦ σταυροειδῶς ἐπέθηκεν, τοὺς δέ ἑτέρους δύο ἐν τῇ στήλῃ ἔθετο ἣν οἱ* Ῥωμαῖοι *ὑπέρ τῆς ἀπὸ* Μαξιμίνου *τοῦ τυράννου ἐλευθερίας τῷ* Κωνσταντίνῳ *ἐποίησαν.*

which the Romans had made to honour Constantine for giving them freedom from the tyrant Maximianus.

G		H	
1	**95(16)** She built houses for the poor, monasteries, churches in all these places that are related to Christ's passing, restored the holy Sion, constructed	*Δομησαμένη οὖν παντοῖα πτωχοτροφεῖα καὶ μοναστήρια, πρὸς δέ καὶ ναοὺς ἐφ' οἷς τόποις ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ Θεὸς ἡμῶν θαυμάσια πεποιηκὼς φαίνεται, ἔτι μὴν καὶ τὴν ἁγίαν Σιών, καθ' ὃν τρόπον μετ' ὀλίγον*	1
5	hostels, and the expenses of every feast she legalised to be paid from the official treasury. Afterwards, she returned to her son […] The holy Helena passed away	*ῥηθήσεται, καὶ ξενοδοχεῖα κατασκευάσασα καὶ τὰς χρείας τῶν εἰρημένων πάντων ἑκάστῳ ἐπετείως ἀπὸ τοῦ δημοσίου παρέχεσθαι ἐπικυρώσασα πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν ὑποστρέφει* **[…]** Τελευτᾷ	5
10	in Constantinople, close to her son, at the age of eighty, having lived a pious Christian life; she was laid in the church of the Holy Apostles.	*δέ ἡ μακαριωτάτη Ἑλένη παρὰ τῷ υἱῷ αὐτῆς ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει ἐτῶν οὖσα ὀγδοήκοντα, πολλὰ τούτῳ ἐντειλαμένη περὶ τῆς τῶν χριστιανῶν εὐσεβείας καὶ πίστεως· κατατίθεται δέ ἐν τῷ ναῷ τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων.*	10 15

TEXT 13: Guidi-*Vita* of Saints Constantine and Helena (end 9th century)[125]

A		B	
1	**2.108-5.111** […] It happened that in completing their journey the soldiers	**308.9-312.19** **[…]** *ἔτυχε τοὺς στρατιώτας ἐκείνους καὶ αὐτὸν*	1

[125] *Vita of Saints Constantine and Helena (BHG364)*: ed. Guidi 1907, 306-340 and 637-655; Eng. trans. Beetham 1996, 106-142.

and Constantius himself came to the place called Drepanum which later was also called Helenopolis, and arrived in an inn which was clearly marked as such […] and while these men were making their camp in that place, it happened that Constantius suddenly longed for a bed of love (or, at any rate, union, sexual intercourse); and when he announced his desire for intemperate pleasure to the guide, he, having observed his imperial bearing, since he had his young daughter Helena with him, a girl who was uninitiated about the male sex, was glad to offer her to the gentleman to enjoy himself; and Constantius, having noticed that the young lady was good looking and was just at the height of her beauty, received her with altogether the greatest pleasure. So Constantius took the girl and, having made love with her, he gave her an embroidered mantle dyed in purple as

Κώνσταντα καταλύοντας τὴν πορείαν φθάσαι εἰς τὸ λεγόμενον Δρέπανον, ὃ καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐκλήθη Ἑλενόπολις, καταντῆσαί τε ἐκεῖσε ἐν ἐπισήμῳ πανδοχείῳ […] τούτων δέ ἐκεῖσε αὐλιζομένων ⟨συνέβη⟩ ὀρεχθῆναι τὸν Κώνσταντα ἐρωτικοῦ λέχους, [ἤγουν μίξεως, συνουσιασμοῦ·] ὡς δὲ ἤγγειλε τὴν τῆς ἀκράτου ἡδονῆς ἐπιθυμίαν τῷ ξεναγωγῷ, θεωρήσας οὗτος τὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς δυναστείαν ἀσμένως εἵλετο τὸ παρὸν αὐτῷ θυγάτριον Ἑλένην, οὖσαν ἀμύητον ἀνδρός, ἐπιδοῦναι τούτῳ πρὸς τὴν ἡδυπάθειαν· ὁ δέ προσχὼν τῇ νεάνιδι, εὔοπτον οὖσαν καὶ ὡραιοτάτην τῷ κάλλει πάνυ ἥδιστα ταύτην κατεδέξατο. Λαβὼν οὖν ὁ Κώνστας την κόρην, ἐρωτικῶς συνῆλθε ταύτῃ, χαρισάμενος αὐτῇ πορφυρόβαφον ἔμπλουμον ἐπενδύτην, ἕνεκεν τῆς κοίτης αὐτῆς· ἐν δὲ ταῖς περιπλοκαῖς συγκατεχομένῳ καὶ νυκτὸς τὰ πάντα συνεχούσης, παράδοξόν τι θέαμα κατὰ τὴν νύκτα ἐκείνην δείκνυται […] ἀνατείλαντος δὲ τοῦ ἡλίου, προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν πατέρα τῆς κόρης, πολλῷ δέει συνεχόμενος καὶ δώροις αὐτὸν ἐκμειλιξάμενος παρέθετο τούτῳ τὴν παῖδα, παρεγγυσάμενος φυλάττειν αὐτῷ τοῦ λοιποῦ ταύτην ἀμίαντον ἅτε δὴ κειμήλιον καθαρόν τε καὶ μέγιστον […]

an expression of his gratitude, in return for her admitting him to her bed; and while he was entwined in her embraces, and night enfolded the whole affair, a wonderful vision was revealed just for that night […] As soon as the sun was up, being under the constraint of great terror, he sent for the girl's father and after sweetening him with many presents he gave him his daughter back, with a solemn recommendation to keep her undefiled and unblemished for him as a very great treasure […] And as time went on, again it became necessary to send a delegation to the Persians and Constantius, having picked the distinguished members of his court, sent them away into Persia; and it happened that those ambassadors went through those places where the holy Helena was living bringing up the child, that is the wonderful Constantine, that she had had by

προιόντος δὲ τοῦ καιροῦ ἐδέησε πάλιν πρεσβείαν ἀποστεῖλαι πρὸς Πάρθους, *καὶ ἐπιλεξάμενος τοὺς ἐπισήμους τοῦ παλατίου ὁ* Κώνστας *ἐξαπέστειλεν ἐν* Περσίδι· *ἔτυχε δὲ τοὺς πρέσβεις ἐκείνους δι' ἐκείνων διελθεῖν τῶν τόπων, ἔνθα ἡ ἁγία* Ἑλένη *διῆγεν ἀνατρέφουσα ὃν ἔτεκε παῖδα ἐκ τοῦ* Κώνσταντος, *τὸν θαυμάσιον λέγω* Κωνσταντῖνον. *Ξενισθέντων δὲ τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκεῖσε, συνέβη τὸ μειράκιον παρὰ τῶν τηνικαῦτα ξενοδοχηθέντων ἀνδρῶν παροξυνθέν ἀνιᾶσθαι· ὡς δὲ τοῦτο ἐπέπληττον οἱ ἄνδρες καὶ ἐπεχόλαινον, ἀντιποιουμένη ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ παιδίου κατάδηλον ἐποίησεν αὐτὸ τίνος παῖς ὑπάρχει, καὶ ὅτι υἱὸς βασιλέως ἐστί, φησί· πρὸς ἣν οἱ βασιλικοὶ γελάσαντες ὡς ἤκουσαν ἔφησαν· «γύναι, παίζεις ἢ τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγεις;» ἡ δὲ ἔφη· «οὐκ ἀπατῶ ὑμᾶς, ὦ ἄνδρες, μὰ τοὺς θεούς, ἀλλ' ἀλήθειαν εἶπον ὑμῖν».* Ὡς δὲ ἤκουσαν οἱ ἄνδρες τὸ παράδοξον τοῦ λόγου περιεργότερον ἐξετάζοντες […] *πιστεύσαντες ἀληθές εἶναι τὸ πρᾶγμα συγγνώμην ᾔτουν περὶ τῆς προλαβούσης ἀγνοίας, φιλήμασί τε καὶ κολακείαις τὸν παῖδα περιπτυξάμενοι καὶ ἀργύρια δόντες αὐτῷ εἰς τὰς χεῖρας ἐξεμειλίσσοντο* […] *ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ* Κώνστας *τοὺς ἄλλους*

Constantius. And while the men were being accommodated there, it happened that the lad was teased by the gentlemen who were staying at that time, and was upset; and when the men were taken aback at this and were beginning to act in an ill-tembered way, the boy's mother retorted and made it clear to them whose child he was, sayimg that he was the emperor's son; when they heard that, the imperial officers laughed at her and said, 'Madam, are you making fun or telling the truth?' But she said, 'By the Gods, gentlemen, I am not cheating you; what I told you was true.' When they heard what she said they could not believe it, and began to question her rather officiously […] been convinced that the matter was true, they began to beg her pardon for their presumption and ignorance, and after they had smothered the child with embraces and flattery, they soothed him by putting

ἀποπεμψάμενος τοῦτον ἀκριβῶς ἠρώτα, πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὴν Ἑλένην μαθεῖν βουλόμενος καὶ τὸν παῖδα […] ἰδὼν καὶ τὴν ἔκβασιν τῆς ὀπτασίας περαιωθεῖσαν, ἀξίως τὸν ἀγγέλοντα δεξιωσάμενος καὶ δώροις πολλοῖς ἐπιδοὺς αὐτόν, προτρέπεται μετὰ συνθημάτων πολλῶν καὶ πολλῆς καὶ βασιλικῆς δορυφορίας ἀπελθόντας ἐν τῷ Δρεπάνῳ ὅτι τάχος ἀγαγεῖν τὴν Ἑλένην καὶ τὸ παιδίον. Ὁ κατὰ τὸ κελευσθέν πεποιήκασι· αὐτὴν σὺν τῷ παιδὶ καθίσαντες ἐπ' ὀχήματος βασιλικοῦ ἤγαγον πὸς τὸν Κώσταντα. Θεασάμενος δέ τούτους ὁ Κώνστας ἠγαλλιάσατο σφόδρα καὶ περιπτυξάμενος εἰσήγαγεν ἔνδον εἰς τὰ βασίλεια […] Θρυλλουμένου δέ τοῦ παραδόξου τούτου πράγματος τοῦ κατὰ τὴν Ἑλένην καὶ τὸν παῖδα, ἦλθεν εἰς τὰς ἀκοὰς Θεοδώρας, τῆς γνησίας θυγατρὸς Ἑρκουλίου, γυναικὸς δέ Κώνσταντος, ἐξ ἧς καὶ παῖδας ἔσχε τρεῖς ἄρρενας, θυγατέρα δέ μίαν […] δεδιὼς ⟨δέ⟩ ὁ Κώνστας μή τι ἄρα ζηλοτυπίας ἕνεκεν δολοφονηθῇ ἡ νεᾶνις σὺν τῷ παιδίῳ, σκεψάμενος ἐξαπέστειλε τὸν παῖδα μετὰ γραμμάτων πρὸς Διοκλητιανὸν […] οἰκονομήσαντος τοῦ Κώνσταντος καὶ τὰ κατὰ τὴν Ἑλένην μή τι ἄρα ἐπιβουληθῇ παρὰ τῆς προγενεστέρας αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς Θεοδώρας, ὡς προειρήκαμεν.

silver coins into his hand […] When he heard this, Constantius sent the others away; then he began to question this man closely, because he wanted to learn all about Helena and the boy […] He also saw that the result of his vision had been fulfiled, and so after rewarding his informant appropriately with honours and also giving him many presents, he instructed him to go to Drepanum with many warrants and a large imperial bodyguard and fetch Helena and the child as quickly as possible. They did as he commanded; having seated her with her son in an imperial carriage, they brought her to Constantius. And when he saw them, Constantius rejoiced exceedingly; he embraced them and led them inside his palace […] Moreover, as this incredible affair concerning Helena and her son was becoming common talk, it came to the ears of Theodora, the legitimate daughter of Herculius,

who was Constantius' wife, by whom he had also three male children and one daughter […] However, Constantius, fearing that the young lady and her child might be murdered for jealousy, after some consideration sent the boy with a letter to the emperor Diocletian […] Constantius having made arrangements also to thwart any plot by his older wife Theodora against Helena, as we have already explained.

C

29.133-32.138 […] The emperor, during the Council, had commanded Makarios, the current archbishop of the holy Church in Jerusalem on his return to search out the place of the holy resurrection of Christ our God and Golgotha, the place of the skull, and the life-bestowing piece of wood, that is to say, the glorious and holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, which

D

642.2-649.9 […] *τότε δέ καὶ τῷ ἀρχιεπισκόπῳ Μακαρίῳ τῆς ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἁγίας ἐκκλησίας παρόντι ἐν τῇ συνόδῳ προσέταξεν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐπανιόντι ἐρευνῆσαι τὸν τόπον τῆς ἁγίας Χριστοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἀναστάσεως καὶ τὸν τοῦ κρανίου Γολγοθὰν καὶ τὸ ζωοποιὸν ξύλον, ἤγουν τὸν τίμιον καὶ ἅγιον σταυρὸν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃν διὰ τὴν σωτηρίαν τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου γένους ὑπέμεινε καὶ ἀπελυτρώσατο τῆς πλάνης. Ἐν τούτοις ὄντων τῶν πραγμάτων καλῶς, τὴν*

he endured for the sake of the salvation of the human race when he redeemed it from error. Meanwhile, as his affairs were prospering, he crowned his devout and most holy mother Helena and assigned coinage to her as an empress; she had seen a vision bidding her to journey to Jerusalem and bring to light the holy places and the sacred crosses that had been buried by the impious Jews. Moreover, she begged her son Constantine to fulfil the command that had been sent to her from God, which he did by dispatching her with much money to Jerusalem for the purpose of discovering the life-giving and salvific and glorious Cross of Christ, our Lord and God and saviour. And the blessed and holy Helena departed for Jerusalem, and the holy Makarios, the archbishop of Jerusalem, met her with the deference due to an empress, and conducted with her the search for that

μητέρα αὐτοῦ τὴν θεόφρονα καὶ ἁγιωτάτην Ἑλένην ἔστεψε καὶ μονήτας ὡς βασιλίδι ἀπένειμεν· αὕτη ὀπτασίαν ἑώρακε κελεύουσαν αὐτὴν καταλαβεῖν τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ τοὺς ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνόμων Ἰουδαίων καταχωσθέντας ἁγίους σταυροὺς καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους τόπους εἰς φῶς ἀγαγεῖν. Ἡ δὲ τὸν παῖδα Κωνσταντῖνον ᾐτήσατο πληρῶσαι τὸ θεόθεν κελευσθέν αὐτῇ, ὁ δὲ τὴν ὑπακοὴν ἐπλήρωσεν ἀποστείλας αὐτὴν μετὰ χρημάτων πολλῶν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς ἀναζήτησιν τοῦ ζωοποιοῦ καὶ σωτηρίου καὶ τιμίου σταυροῦ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ. καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἡ μακαρία καὶ ἁγία Ἑλένη εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, συνήντησε δὲ αὐτῇ ὁ ἅγιος Μακάριος ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἱεροσολύμων μετὰ τῆς πρεπούσης βασιλίδι τιμῆς, καὶ ἅμα αὐτῇ ἐποιεῖτο τὴν ζήτησιν τοῦ ζωηφόρου ξύλου, νηστεύοντες καὶ προσευχόμενοι ἀδιαλείπτως· ὁ δὲ φιλάνθρωπος κύριος συντόμως ἐφανέρωσε τὸν τόπον τοῦ ἁγίου μνήματος αὐτοῦ, ἐν ὀπτασίᾳ ὑποδείξας τὸν ἅγιον Μακάριον, ἐν ᾧ τόπῳ ἵδρυτο τῆς ἀκαθάρτου δαίμονος Ἀφροδίτης ὁ ναὸς καὶ τὸ ἄγαλμα. Ἡ δὲ ἁγία Ἑλένη τῇ βασιλικῇ αὐθεντίᾳ χρωμένη συντόμως καθεῖλεν αὐτὸν [...] αὐτίκα δὲ τὸ ἅγιον μνῆμα καὶ ὁ κρανίου τόπος

life-bearing wood; and they fasted and prayed without ceasing. But the Lord, who loves mankind, swiftly revealed the place of his holy tomb by informing Makarios in a vision. It was where also the shrine and statue of the unclean spirit Aphrodite were erected. And the holy Helena used her imperial authority and swiftly demolished it […] The holy tomb and the place of the skull were revealed at once, and nearby, to the east of them, three crosses covered with a heap of soil. After continuing their search, they found also the holy nails with which Christ, our God, had been nailed. But while they were all at a loss to discover which was the Lord's Cross, the holy and kingly one, and the blessed Helena was greatly distressed, Makarios, the well-named bishop, solved the riddle through his faith; there was a certain lady of an illustrious and famous family whose

ἀνεδείχθησαν, καὶ πρὸς ἀνατολὴν σύνεγγυς τούτων τρεῖς σταυροὶ κεχωσμένοι. Ἐρευνήσαντες δὲ εὗρον καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους ἥλους ἐν οἷς ἐπάγη Χριστὸς ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν· ἀμηχανούντων δὲ πάντων ὁποῖος ἂν εἴη ὁ τοῦ κυρίου σταυρός, ὁ θεῖος καῖ δεσποτικός, καὶ σφόδρα τῆς μακαρίας Ἑλένης λυπουμένης, ὁ Μακάριος φερωνύμως ἐπίσκοπος διὰ πίστεως ἔλυσε τὸ ζητούμενον· ἀπεγνωσμένῃ γάρ τινι γυναικὶ τῶν ἀειφανῶν καὶ ἐνδόξων καὶ σχεδὸν τεθνηκυίᾳ […] ἡ δὲ πανευσεβὴς καὶ πανολβία Ἑλένη μετὰ φόβου καὶ πολλῆς χαρᾶς ἀνελομένη τὸ ζωοποιὸν ξύλον τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ, μέρος μέν αὐτοῦ λαβοῦσα σὺν τοῖς σεβασμίοις καὶ τιμίοις ἥλοις παρ' ἑαυτῇ ἐφύλαξε, σπουδάζουσα ταῦτα ἀγαγεῖν τῷ υἱῷ αὐτῆς, τῷ φιλοχρίστῳ Κωνσταντίνῳ ἐν τῷ Βυζαντίῳ, ὃ καὶ πεποίηκε· τὸ δέ λοιπὸν ἐν θήκῃ ἀργυρᾷ καταθεμένη παρέδωκε τῷ θείῳ Μακαρίῳ, τῷ ἀρχιεπισκόπῳ τῆς ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἁγίας τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκλησίας, εἰς σωτηρίαν τῶν μετέπειτα γενεῶν. Τότε καὶ ἐκκλησίας κατὰ τοὺς τόπους ἐν οἷς ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν περιεπάτησε καὶ τὰ παράδοξα εἰργάσατο θαύματα ἡ μακαρία αὕτη καὶ ἁγία τῷ ὄντι βασίλισσα

life had been despaired of, and who was almost dead […] The all-reverent and all-blessed Helena picked the life-giving wood of the glorious Cross up with fear and great joy; part of it with, with the sacred and precious nails, she took and kept by her, being anxious to take them to her son, the Christ-loving Constantine, in Byzantium, which in fact she did; she had the rest placed in a silver casket and gave it to the godly Makarios, the archbishop of the holy Church of God in Jerusalem, for the salvation of future generations. Then this blessed and truly holy lady, the empress Helena, ordered churches to be founded in places where our Lord had walked on account of our salvation and performed his wonderful miracles […] After she had commanded that these precious and holy churches, dedicated to our God, should be built, the generous and truly Christ-loving Helena, the blessed

ἙΕλένη ἐκέλευσε κτισθῆναι […] ταύτας τὰς τιμίας καὶ ἁγίας τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐκκλησίας οὔσας κή ἡ μεγαλόφρων καὶ φιλόχριστος ὡς ἀληθῶς Ἑλένη ἡ μακαρία μήτηρ τοῦ μακαρίου καὶ ἁγίου μεγάλου βασιλέως Κωνσταντίνου προστάξασα κτισθῆναι […] λαβοῦσα μεθ' ἑαυτῆς τὴν μερίδα ἣν ἐφύλαξε τοῦ πανσέπτου σταυροῦ καὶ τοὺς τιμίους καὶ ἁγίους ἥλους, ἐπανῆλθε πρὸς τὸν πανεύφημον βασιλέα Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον. Ὁ δέ δεξάμενος αὐτὴν μετὰ χαρᾶς τὴν μέν τοῦ ζωοποιοῦ ξύλου μερίδα ἐν χρυσῇ θήκῃ θέμενος παρέδωκε τῷ ἁγιωτάτῳ ἐπισκόπῳ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ εἰς τήρησιν, ὁ γὰρ μακάριος Μητροφάνης ἐτεθνήκει, τῶν δέ ἥλων τὸν ἀριθμόν, τοὺς μέν εἰς τὴν περικεφαλαίαν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐχάλκευσε, τοὺς δέ ἀνέμιξε τῷ σαλλιβαρίῳ τοῦ ἵππου αὐτοῦ […] ὁ δέ πανεύφημος Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ μέγας βασιλεὺς ἀπέστελλε συνεχῶς πρὸς τὸν ἐν ἁγίοις Μακάριον τὸν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις πρόεδρον ἐπισπεύδειν τάχει πολλῷ τὴν οἰκοδομὴν τῶν ἁγίων ἐκκλησιῶν ὧν κατέλιπεν ἡ μακαρία καὶ ἁγία Ἑλένη μήπω τετελειωμένων, ἀπέστειλε δέ καὶ ἄρχοντας τοῦ ἔργου μετὰ πολλῶν χρημάτων, κελεύσας αὐτοὺς τοιοῦτον ἔργον ἐπιδείξασθαι εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους

mother of the blessed and holy emperor Contantine the Great […] taking with her the portion than she had kept of the Cross that is worshipped by all and the precious and holy nails, returned to Byzantium, to her son the emperor Constantine who is praised by all. He welcomed her with joy and both placed the portion of the life-giving Cross in a golden casket and handed it over to the most holy bishop Alexander to keep, for the blessed Metrophanes had died, and as far as the quantity of nails was concerned, some he had welded into his crown, and others melted down and used in the bit of his horse […] Moreover, the emperor Constantine the Great, whom all praise, used continually to send senior officials to Makarios in holy Jerusalem to urge on with much haste the construction of those churches of the blessed and holy Helena which had not yet been

ναοὺς οὓς ἡ ἁγία Ἑλένη ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ διετάξατο, ὡς μὴ εἶναι ἐφ' ὅλης τῆς οἰκουμένης τοιαύτην ὡραιότητα. Ἔγραψε δέ καὶ τοῖς ἡγεμόσι τῆς ἐπαρχίας συνδραμεῖν τοῖς ἔργοις 110 *σπουδαίως, καὶ εἴ τι γένηται πρὸς χρείαν ἐκ τῶν τοῦ δημοσίου ἀναλῶσαι.*

completed; he also sent supervisors of the work with much money with orders to bestow on all the holy churches which the holy Helena, his mother, had ordered, such trouble that there should not be comparable beauty in the whole of the inhabited world. He also wrote to the governors of the provinces to support the work zealously, and to meet whatever expenditure was necessary from the public purse.

E

34.140 […] The blessed and holy Helena who had come piously to the end of her life, had acquired a precise belief in the holy Trinity which is consubstantial and indivisible, and had extended the faith of the Christians, moved to Rome and there welcomed her blessed departure from this life, radiant in beauty and wisdom and every other virtue; she had lived to the

F

652.25-653.14 **[…]** *ἡ δὲ μακαρία καὶ ἁγία Ἑλένη εὐσεβῶς τὴν ἑαυτῆς βίον τελέσασα καὶ πιστεύσασα ἀκριβῶς τῇ ἁγίᾳ καὶ ὁμοουσίῳ καὶ ἀδιαιρέτῳ τριάδι καὶ τὴν τῶν χριστιανῶν πίστιν πλατύνασα, μετῆλθεν ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ κἀκεῖ τὸ μακάριον τέλος ἐδέξατο κάλλει καὶ σωφροσύνῃ καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ πάσῃ ἀρετῇ διαλάμψασα· ἐτάφη δὲ ἔξω τῆς πόλεως Ῥώμης ἐν στρογγυλοειδεῖ εἰλημματικῷ ναῷ ἐν λάρνακι πορφυρῷ, ἐτῶν ὑπάρχουσα ὀγδοήκοντα· μετὰ δὲ διετῆ χρόνον τῆς*

age of eighty, and was buried outside the city of Rome in a circular chapel with a vault, in a porphyry coffin; but two years after she had fallen asleep she was brought back with her porphyry coffin to Constantinople and laid to rest in the church of the holy Apostles which the most Christian emperor Constantine, her son, had founded in honour of the holy Apostles who are praised by all, and for the purpose of the burial of Christian emperors there at such time as they should die. The blessed and holy Helena was the first to be buried there, honoured with memorial services and joyous vigils. The holy virgins in Jerusalem also, whom the holy Helena had established and served personally like a handmaid, used to hold an unbroken and continuous series of services to her blessed memory.

κοιμήσεως αὐτῆς ἀνεκομίσθη μετὰ τοῦ πορφυροῦ λάρνακος ἐκείνου ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει καὶ κατετέθη ἐν τῷ ναῷ τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων, ὃν ἔκτισεν ὁ χριστιανικώτατος καὶ μέγας βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ υἱὸς αὐτῆς εἰς τιμὴν τῶν ἁγίων καὶ πανεφήμων ἀποστόλων καὶ πρὸς τὸ θάπτεσθαι ἐκεῖσε τοὺς τελευτῶντας χριστιανοὺς βασιλεῖς. Πρώτη δέ ἐν αὐτῷ κατετέθη ἡ μακαρία καὶ ἁγία Ἑλένη, μνήμαις καὶ παννυχίσι φαιδραῖς τιμηθεῖσα· αἱ δέ ἅγιαι παρθένοι αἱ ἐν Ἰεροσολύμοις, ἃς παρίστατο καὶ διηκόνει δι' ἑαυτῆς ἡ ἁγία Ἑλένη ὡσπερ θεράπαινα, συνεχῶς καὶ διηνεκῶς μνήμαις ⟨αὐτὴν⟩ ἐμακάριζον.

TEXT 14: Opitz-*Vita* of Saints Constantine and Helena (end 9th-11th centuries)[126]

A

1 **547** […] When the emperor was persuaded by the holy Sylvester of the benefits that he could receive through baptism, he requested to be baptised
5 […] Then, it is said, there was also baptised the full of grace Helena, and the son of Constantine, Crispus.

B

[...] Λόγοις οὖν παρὰ τοῦ ὁσίου Σιλβέστρου τὴν τοῦ θείου βαπτίσματος ἰσχὺν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀναδιδαχθεὶς ἐζήτει καὶ δι' ἔργου πεῖραν λαβεῖν [...] Τότε φασὶ βαπτισθῆναι τὴν θαυμασίαν Ἑλένην, ναὶ μὴν καὶ Κρίσπον τὸν υἱὸν Κωνσταντίνου.

C

1 **551** Afterwards, the pious Constantine supported the Christian religion with legislation and actions […] He prohibited by law the use of the cross as
5 a medium of punishment, but of respect for the saviour cross. He ordered visual representations of him and his mother Helena with the image of cross.

D

Ἐντεῦθεν Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ εὐσεβὴς πάμπολλα ὑπέρ τῆς Χριστιανικῆς θρησκείας ἐνομοθέτησεν τε καὶ ἔπραξεν [...] Ἐθέσπισε δέ καὶ σταυρῷ μηκέτι καταδικάζεσθαι ἄνθρωπον διὰ τὸ σέβας τὸ πρὸς τὸν τοῦ σωτῆρος σταυρόν. Ταῖς δέ ζωγραφουμέναις εἰκόσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς μητρὸς Ἑλένης συνεκτυποῦσθαι σταυρὸν διαπαντὸς παρηγγύησεν.

E

1 **574** Acquiring the Roman status of its founder Constantine, it was named

F

Κωνσταντίνου δέ τὸ Ῥωμαικὸν κῦρος παρειληφότος καὶ αὐτὴ Κωνσταντινούπολις ἐπεκλήθη [...]

[126] *Vita of Saints Constantine and Helena (BHG365)*: ed. Opitz 1934, 535-593; my translation.

Constantinople […] And he erected a statue of his mother Helena on a column and called the place Augusteum.

Καὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ μητρός Ἑλένης ἐπὶ κίονος ἀνέστησεν ἄγαλμα καὶ τὸν τόπον ὠνόμασεν Αὐγουσταῖον.

G

576-579 Constantine's eagerly wish was to find and ornament the holy sepulchre of our Saviour Jesus Christ in Palestine; he was impelled to this not by chance, but by a divine vision, which he and his mother, the pious Helena, had. For impious and possessed men had concealed with a heap of earth the holy site, hoping that its significance was going to be forgotten. However, the holy site was carelessly hidden, because it was inhabited by angels and undimmed light was coming from there. Immediately, the emperor sent very skilled assistants to clean the place, ornamented the divine sepulchre with magnificent columns in a semicircle shape, erected around the sepulchre a luxurious church, and named the place

H

Τούτων οὕτως ἐχόντων ἄλλο τι κράτιστον δρᾶσαι καὶ μνήμης ἄξιον ὁ εὐσεβὴς βασιλεὺς ἐβουλεύσατο, οὐκ ἐξ ἀλογίστου τύχης τινός, ἀλλ' ἐκ θεικῆς ὁρμηθεὶς ἐπινοίας καὶ οἷον εἰπεῖν ὀπτασίας, ἣν αὐτὸς καὶ ἡ θεοφιλὴς Ἑλένη μήτηρ αὐτοῦ ἐθεάσατο, τὸ ἐν Παλαιστίνῃ θεσπέσιον καὶ ζωηφόρον μνῆμα τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πρεπόντως κατακοσμῆσαι καὶ τοῖς πᾶσι δεῖξαι κατάδηλον. Ἄνδρες γάρ τινες δυσσεβεῖς καὶ ἀλάστορες πολὺν τὸν μόχθον εἰσενεγκάμενοι καὶ γῆν ἐπιφορήσαντες ἔξωθεν τὸν ἱερὸν ἐκεῖνον χῶρον κατα καλύψαντες παραδοῦναι λήθῃ διενοήθησαν. Ἀλλ' οὐ παρεῖδεν ὁ θειότατος βασιλεὺς χῶρον ἐκεῖνον, ὃν διέπουσιν ἄγγελοι καὶ φῶς ἄσβεστον διηνεκῶς καταυγάζει, οὕτως ἠμελημένον θεᾶσθαι. Ἀλλ' εὐθὺς πολυταλάντῳ χειρὶ δύναμιν ἀποστείλας καὶ τὸν τόπον ἀνακαθάρας καὶ κίοσι λαμπροτάταις σὺν ἡμισφαιρίῳ κύβῳ τὸν θεῖον τάφον κατακοσμήσας πέριξ αὐτοῦ περιφανῆ ναὸν ἐδομήσατο καὶ νέαν Ἱερουσαλὴμ

New Sion. When all these had been completed, the pious Helena was crowned Roman empress by her son. Crowned in the name of the Almighty God and impelled by her deep piety, she thought it a duty to visit as pilgrim without considering her old age, the land where Christ lived and suffered for our salvation; when she arrived in the Holy Lands and completed her pilgrimage, with great zeal and wealth, she erected luxurious churches in Bethlehem and on the Mount of Olives, which she decorated with imperial donations; she was also intensively looking to find the holy cross, granting benefits and luxurious gifts in order to achieve this. In a short time, the holy Helena found in the centre of Calvary three crosses, which were hidden underneath Golgotha, and took them. She also found the inscription which Pilate made in different languages presenting the crucified Christ as king

ἐπωνόμασεν. Τούτων δὴ τελεσθέντων ⟨ἡ⟩ θεοσεβὴς Ἑλένη παρὰ τοῦ παιδὸς στεφθεῖσα καὶ βασιλὶς Ῥωμαίων ἀναδειχθεῖσα τῷ παμβασιλεῖ θεῷ τὸ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς διαθέσεως ἀποδοῦναι χρέος ἐπειγομένη ἦκεν δὴ σπεύδουσα νεανικῶς ἡ πρεσβῦτις τόπον ἐκεῖνον καταλαβεῖν τε καὶ προσκυνῆσαι οὗ ἔστησαν οἱ θεῖοι καὶ ἄχραντοι πόδες καὶ τὸ σωτήριον πάθος ὑπέρ ἡμῶν ἐτελέσθη, φθάσασα δέ καὶ τὸ τοῦ ποθουμένου πέρας καταλαβοῦσα, ὑπερβαλλούσῃ φρονήσει καὶ χρημάτων περιουσίᾳ περικαλλεῖς ναοὺς τὸν ἐν Βηθλεέμ καὶ τὸν ἐν ὄρει τῶν ἐλαιῶν περιφανῶς ἐκ βάθρων οἰκοδομήσασα καὶ βασιλικοῖς ἀναθήμασι τούτους καταγλαίσασα, τὸ τίμιον τοῦ ζωοποιοῦ σταυροῦ ξύλον εὑρεῖν περὶ πολλοῦ ποιουμένη, δαψιλεῖς τὰς χορηγίας ἐδίδου καὶ δῶρα πολυτελῆ, τὰ μέν παρεῖχε, τὰ δέ καὶ παρασχεῖν ὑπισχνεῖτο, εἰ τὸ τοῦ ποθουμένου πέρας καταλαβεῖν ἐπιτύχοι. Οὐ πολὺ δέ τὸ ἐν μέσῳ καὶ τὸν τοῦ κρανίου τόπον ἀνερευνήσασα τοὺς τρεῖς ὁμοῦ τοὺς ἐν τῷ Γολγοθᾷ πηχθέντας σταυροὺς εὑρεῖν ἡ μακαρία κατίσχυσεν. Σὺν αὐτοῖς δ' ηὕρετο καὶ ἡ Πιλάτου σανίς, ἐν ᾗ βασιλέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων τὸν σταυρωθέντα Χριστὸν προγραφῇ διαφόρων γραμμάτων ἐκήρυσσεν. Ἐπεὶ δ' ἀμφίβολος ἦν ὁ σταυρὸς ὁ ζητούμενος, οὐχ ἡ τυχοῦσα λύπη

of the Jews. However, the emperor's mother was in deep sadness because she could not distinguish which of the crosses belonged to Christ. In a short time the bishop of Jerusalem, named Makarios, relieved her of her sadness; with his belief in God he solved the perplexity, for he received a divine sign from God. The sign was the following. There happened to be in the city a woman with status, who had suffered for many years with an incurable disease and she was lying near to death […] Surprised by the miracle, Helena took with veneration the holy cross, and gave part of it to the bishop Makarios, and the rest of it with the holy nails she brought to her son, the pious Constantine. He received them with piety and devotion, and he put one of the nails in his helmet and the other in the bit of his horse, in order to fulfil the prophesy […] In Jerusalem, the pious Helena ornamented the holy churches in

κατεῖχε ⟨τὴν⟩ τοῦ βασιλέως μητέρα· οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν δέ παύει τὰ τῆς λύπης ὅ γε τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων ἐπίσκοπος, ᾧ ὄνομα ἦν Μακάριος· *λύει δέ πίστει τὸ ἀμφίβολον· σημεῖον γὰρ ᾔτει παρὰ θεοῦ καὶ ἐλάμβανεν.* Τὸ δέ *σημεῖον ἦν τοιοῦτον· γυνή τις τῶν ἐγχωρίων νόσῳ χρονίᾳ ληφθεῖσα πρὸς αὐτῷ λοιπὸν τῷ θανάτῳ ἐγίνετο* […] *Καὶ ἐκπλαγεῖσα τῷ θαύματι καὶ σεβασμίως περιπτυξαμένη ξύλον τὸ τίμιον, μέρος μέν αὐτοῦ τῷ τηνικαῦτα προέδρῳ τῷ* Μακαρίῳ *κατέλιπεν, τὸ δέ λοιπὸν καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἥλων τῷ εὐσεβεῖ* Κωνσταντίνῳ *τῷ υἱῷ προσεκόμισεν.* Ὁ δέ *εὐσεβῶς τε καὶ φιλοθέως ὑποδεξάμενος καὶ τῶν τιμίων ἥλων τι μέν τῇ ἰδίᾳ περικεφαλαίᾳ ἐγκαταμίξας, τί δέ τῷ τοῦ ἵππου χαλινῷ περιθείς, τὸ παρὰ τοῦ προφήτου πάλαι ῥηθέν ἀνεπλήρου* […] Ἐν *Ἱεροσολύμοις εὐσεβῶς Ἑλένη διαπραξαμένη τόν τε ἐν* Βηθλεέμ *πανίερον οἶκον καὶ τὸν ἐν τῷ* Θαβωρίῳ *ὄρει κατακοσμήσασα τὰς ἐν τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις παρθένους ἱερὰς πρὸς ἑστίασιν συγκαλοῦσα δι' ἑαυτῆς ὡς θεράπαινα ταῖς τραπέζαις διηκόνει ὕδωρ ταῖς χερσὶν ἐπιχέουσα καὶ τρύβλια πλύνουσα καὶ ποτήρια καὶ πάντα, ὅσα δοῦλοι ποιεῖν ἐπιτρέπονται.* Πλείστης δέ *τὴν μητέρα ὁ* Κωνσταντῖνος *ἠξίου τιμῆς ὡς καὶ*

Bethlehem and the Mount of Olives. There, she also invited to a meal the virgins consecrated to God, and as a humble servant, she set out the food with her own hands, offered the cup, and poured water over their hands, every service that servants are obliged to provide. Among the honours that Constantine offered to his mother was a city, which he named after her.

πόλιν αὐτῇ κτίσαι ἐπώνυμον.

TEXT 15: *Synaxarion* of Constantinople (10th century)[127]

A

1 **697-700** To the memory of the first pious emperors, Constantine and Helena. The holy and famous emperor Constantine was the son of Constantius
5 Chlorus and Helena, a decent woman. Constantius was born by the daughter of Claudius who ruled in Rome before the reigns of Diocletian and Crinus. Constantius reigned with Diocletian,
10 Maximinian and Galerius. While the

B

Μνήμη τῶν ἐν εὐσεβεῖ τῇ λήξει γενομένων πρώτων βασιλέων ἡμῶν Κωνσταντίνου καὶ Ἑλένης. Οὗτος ὁ μακάριος καὶ ἀοίδοιμος ἐν βασιλεῦσι Κωνσταντῖνος υἱὸς γέγονε Κώνσταντος τοῦ Χλωροῦ καὶ Ἑλένης τῆς τιμίας. Ὁ γὰρ Κώνστας θυγατριδοῦς γέγονε Κλαυδίου τοῦ προβεβασιλευκότος ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ πρὸ τῆς τοῦ Διοκλητιανοῦ καὶ Καρίνου βασιλείας. Οὗτος ὁ Κώνστας παρὰ Διοκλητιανοῦ καὶ Μαξιμιανοῦ τοῦ Ἑρκουλίου προσληφθεὶς αὐτῶν κοινωνὸς εἶναι τῆς βασιλείας μετὰ Μαξιμιανοῦ τοῦ

1 5 10

[127] *Synaxarion of Constantinople*: ed. Delehaye 1902, 697-700; my translation.

other three persecuted the Christians, Constantius was the only one who protected them and used them as his advisers. He taught piety to his beloved son Constantine, the first Christian emperor, and appointed him successor of his rule in the British islands […] He also sent his mother Helena to Jerusalem in search of the holy wood, to which the body of our Lord Christ was nailed; during her journey in the Holy Lands she found and collected the holy wood, and afterwards, she returned to the imperial city; arriving in Constantinople, she passed away.

Γαλερίου, τῶν ἄλλων ἁπάντων τὸν κατὰ τῶν χριστιανῶν διωγμὸν σφοδρῶς ἀναρριπιζόντων, μόνος οὗτος πραότητι καὶ συμπαθείᾳ χρώμενος, μᾶλλον τοῖς ὑπέρ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ πίστες ἀγωνιζομένοις ἐχρῆτο καὶ συμβούλοις καὶ κοινωνοῖς τῶν βασιλικῶν πραγμάτων. Οὗτος καὶ Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν ἀγαπητὸν υἱόν, τὸν μετὰ ταῦτα πρῶτον τοῖς χριστιανοῖς χρηματίσαντα βασιλέα, τὴν εὐσέβειαν διδάξας διάδοχον τῆς ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείας κατέλιπεν ἐν ταῖς Βρεττανικαῖς νήσοις […] Οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ Ἑλένην κατὰ ζήτησιν τῶν τιμίων ξύλων, ἐν οἷς Χριστὸς ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν ἐπάγη σαρκί, ἀποστείλας εἰς τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, δι᾽ αὐτῆς ταῦτα ἀνεκομίσατο, τὰ μέν ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις καταθεμένης, τὰ δέ πρὸς τὴν βασιλίδα πόλιν ἀναγαγούσης· ἥτις τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν καταλαβοῦσα τὸν βίον κατέλυσεν.

TEXT 16: Gedeon-*Vita* of Saints Constantine and Helena (11th-12th centuries)[128]

A

1 **253(γ)** [...] Mother of Constantine was the most admirable among women, the

B

[…] *μήτηρ δέ ἡ θαυμασιωτάτη πασῶν γυναικῶν Ἑλένη, σεμνή τις οὖσα καὶ κοσμία.* Τίκτεται δέ αὐτοῖς οὗτος περί τινα

[128] *Vita of Saints Constantine and Helena (BHG363)*: ed. Gedeon 1900, 252-254, 262-263, 279-280, 303-304; my translation.

modest and decent Helena. He was born by her (and Constantius Chlorus) in the city of Dacia […] When Diocletian received the rule of the Roman empire, he wished to promote Constantius to the rank of Caesar, because he had faith in his abilities; despite the fact that Constantius already had a spouse, the holy Helena, he was forced to leave her and married Theodora, the daughter of Maximianus Herculius.

τῆς Δακίας πόλιν […] *Διοκλητιανοῦ δέ τότε τὰ σκῆπτρα τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς διέποντος καὶ πρὸς πλείονα πίστιν τῆς εἰς αὐτὸν εὐνοίας τὸν Κωνστάντιον ἀγαγεῖν βουλομένου, ἄρτι τότε τὸ τοῦ καίσαρος περιθέντος αὐτῷ ἀξίωμα, ἣν μέν εἶχε γαμετὴν, Ἑλένην δέ τὴν μακαριωτάτην ὁ λόγος ἐδήλωσεν, ἀποβαλεῖν ἠναγκάσθη, Θεοδώραν δέ τὴν τοῦ Ἐρκουλίου Μαξιμιανοῦ θυγατέρα καὶ ἄκων ἀγαγέσθαι γυναῖκα.*

C

D

1 **280(ι)** […] Since we have praised the building activities and spruceness of Constantine, we will not neglect to commemorate the erection of churches in Palestine by his mother, and her most important activity, the finding of the holy crosses.

Ἐπεὶ δέ καὶ τῆς περὶ τὰς οἰκοδομὰς αὐτοῦ φιλοκαλίας ἐμνήσθημεν, μηδέ τῶν ἐν Παλαιστίνῃ ναῶν, οὓς διὰ τῆς μητρὸς ᾠκοδόμησε, καὶ τὴν σπουδὴν, ἥν περὶ τῆς εὑρέσεως τῶν τιμίων ξύλων ἐποιήσατο, ἀμνημόνευτον καταλείψομεν.

E

F

1 **303(ια)** Helena, the most decent and revered among women, having an affinity for the divine, was urged to visit

Ἑλένη γὰρ ἡ τιμιωτάτη καὶ σεβασμιωτάτη πασῶν γυναικῶν, πόθῳ τῷ πρὸς τὸ θεῖον θελγομένη, τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα δεῖν ᾠήθη καταλαβεῖν καὶ

Jerusalem to look for the Holy Lands and honour them; faithful to her cause and supported by her son the emperor, revealed the holy sepulchre of Christ which was covered by a heap of earth and a pagan temple erected by the Greeks; when she had pulled away everything profane and defiled, she found when the rubble had been cleared away the holy sepulchre; and she erected a magnificent church on the holy site dedicated to our Saviour, Jesus Christ, resurrection, and ornamented it with luxurious donations. The holy and life-giving cross, where the body of our Saviour was fastened, was also found; and the holy nails, of which she used some to make a helmet, and the rest of them for a bit, and as she wished she sent them as a gift to her son the emperor. She also erected churches in Bethlehem and on the Mount of Olives, which she visited with piety to pray to God. At the age of eighty and a short

τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ σεβασμίους τόπους κατιδεῖν τε καὶ προσπτύξασθαι· καὶ δὴ παραγενομένη καὶ τὸν πόθον ἀφοσιωσαμένη, συνεγοῦντ᾽ αὐτῇ καὶ τὰ βασιλέως καὶ υἱοῦ γράμματα ἔχουσα, τὸ θεῖον καὶ σεβάσμιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ μνῆμα, χώμασι πλείστοις καὶ εἰδωλικοῦ ναοῦ ἀνεγέρσει παρὰ τῶν ἑλλήνων ἀποκρυβέν, ἀνεκάθηρε· τὸν ναὸν δέ καὶ τὰ χώματα καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ὕλας μακράν που ῥιφῆναι προσταξασα, φανεροῖ τοῦ ἁγίου τῶν ἁγίων τὸ μνῆμα· καὶ ναὸν εὐκτήριον ἐπὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ τόπῳ τῆς τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀναστάσεως τερπνότατον οἰκοδομεῖ, καῖ πλεῖστα ἀναθήματα φιλοτίμως δωρεῖται· φανεροῖ δέ καὶ τὸν τίμιον καὶ ζωοποιὸν τοῦ Κυρίου σταυρὸν, εἰς ὃν σαρκὶ διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἑκὼν προσηλώθη, καὶ τοὺς σεβασμίους ἥλους, ὧν τοὺς μέν περικεφαλαίαν ποιησαμένη, τοὺς δέ χαλινὸν, τῷ υἱῷ καὶ βασιλεῖ δῶρον ποθούμενον ἔστειλεν. Ἔτι τε κατὰ τὴν Βηθλεέμ καὶ ἐν τῷ ὄρει τῶν ἐλαιῶν ἐκκλησίας οἰκοδομησαμένη, καὶ ἐν αὐταῖς εὐλαβῶς συναγομένη καὶ τὸ θεῖον ἐκλιπαροῦσα, ὀγδοηκοντοῦτις ἤδη γεγενημένη, και αὖθις ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει ἐπαναζεύξασα, Θεῷ τὴν μακαρίαν ψυχὴν παρατίθεται λελαμπρυσμένην τοῖς κατορθώμασι. Λέγεται δέ αὐτὴν πάσῃ χριστομιμήτῳ

time after she had returned to Constantinople, she handed her wonderful soul to God. It is said that she was distinguished by her humility, in the pattern of Christ's instructions, and that she always treated the monastic orders with modesty and affinity; for she invited to a meal the virgins consecrated to God, and as a humble servant, she set out the food with her own hands, offered the cup, and poured water over their hands, every service that servants are obliged to provide. Being of such character, her famous son honoured her greatly; even when she died, he buried her with honours, leading the procession, and rewarded her as an old wise woman and as a mother.

ταπεινοφροσύνῃ κοσμεῖσθαι, καὶ πρὸς πάντας μέν, διαφερόντως δέ πρὸς τὸ τῶν μοναζόντων ἱερώτατον τάγμα πλείω τὴν αἰδὼ καὶ τὴν συμπάθειαν ἐπιδείκνυσθαι· τὰς γὰρ διὰ βίου τὴν παρθενίαν ἀσκούσας συναγείρουσα καὶ ἐπὶ στιβάδων κατακλίνουσα αὐτὴ δι' ἑαυτῆς καθυπούργει, ὄψα παρατιθεῖσα, καὶ κύλικας ὀρέγουσα, καὶ ὕδωρ ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν ἐπιχέουσα, θεραπαινίδος ἐκτελοῦσα ἔργον. Τοιαύτην δέ οὖσαν πάσαις τιμαῖς ὁ ἀοίδιμος αὐτῆς ὑπερετίμαυίὸς καὶ ἐγέραινεν· ὅθεν καὶ θανοῦσαν μεγαλοπρεπῶς ἐνταφιάσας, τῆς κλίνας προπορευόμενος, ἄξια γέρα καὶ τροφεῖα ταύτῃ ἀπέδωκεν.

5

Piety and devotion beyond the capital: regional groupings and perspectives

The function of Constantine and Helena as imperial saints preserved its charm until the fall of the Byzantine empire. Their ideological connotations were particularly well expressed on imperial coinage, especially during the reigns of John V Palaiologos (1341-1391) and Manuel II Palaiologos (1391-1425).[1] The standing figures of Constantine and Helena, holding between them a cross, were shown on the obverse of the coins, while the portraits of the ruling emperors were on the reverse. Constantinople was the centre of such activities. A miniature from the late-eleventh-century liturgical scroll Stavrou gr.109 in Jerusalem, Patriarchal Library, displays Constantine and Helena holding a cross between them in the left margin, with an image of Constantinople in the right margin (Plate 32). The image accompanies the line 'Remember Lord the city in which we dwell' (*Μνήσθητι Κύριε τῆς πόλεως ἐν ᾗ παροικοῦμεν*).[2] It would be wrong though to be claimed that the cult of Constantine and Helena was a prerogative strictly restricted to the secular and ecclesiastical elites of the capital. Pictorial sources from the tenth century onwards allow us to evaluate the appeal of Constantine and Helena's cult to a wide range of the population beyond Constantinople. Of such a large number of images of the two saints in Byzantium, it needs to be said that no examples survive from Constantinople itself. It is this absence of evidence in the capital which adds significance to the iconography of Constantine and Helena in Cappadocia, Greece, Cyprus, and Crete.

[1] Grierson and Bellinger 1999: 172-223.

[2] Grabar 1954: 176; I thank Barbara Crostini for the information.

This chapter produces an annotated catalogue with commentary of representations of the two saints from eighty-four securely dated Byzantine churches. This is the most comprehensive source of corpus data designed to accommodate material from the tenth to the early sixteenth century. Organisation by date is in the appendix (see Table and Appendices 1-4). In order to facilitate analysis, other churches (mainly from Crete), of which the date and iconographic programmes are not securely known, have not been brought into discussion. This being said, it needs to be added that the findings recorded here are organised by region than by date, because the primary objective is to present the differences observed in representations of the sainted pair in regional and interregional level. Variation and change in the iconography of Constantine and Helena will emphasise the role of Byzantine viewers in art's creation.

5.1 Cappadocia

Yüksekli Kilise 1 in Gülşehir (Appendix 1: church 1), dating from after 850, preserves the earliest iconographical example of Constantine and Helena in Cappadocia.[3] The two saints are portrayed with their arms raised, holding up a medallion containing a cross. Similar representations have also survived in two tenth-century churches in the region of Sinasos (Mustafapaşa): the Holy Apostles – otherwise known as Pentekoste (Appendix 1: church 2, Plate 34a-c) – and Elevra 3 (Appendix 1: church 7).[4] A fourth example dating also in the tenth century is seen in the Yilanli Kilise in Yeşlköy at Ihlara valley (Appendix 1:

[3] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 235-237; Jolivet-Lévy 1987: 113-132.

I thank Tolga Uyar and Deniz Sever for providing me with unpublished photographs from their private collections to add to my catalogue.

[4] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 179-182, 188; Schiemenz 1977: 230-262.

church 3, Plate 35a-c).[5] The type remained in use well into the thirteenth century. Such examples are found in the monastery of the Archangel Michael in Cemil (Appendix 1: church 20, Plate 49a-b) and the church of Saint George in Ortaköy (Appendix 1: church 22, Plate 51a-b).[6] In almost all examples, Constantine and Helena are portrayed in the arch at the entrance of the apse. The apse, as Robert Ousterhout has explained, replaced in symbolic function the dome – mainly because of the architectural particularities of the rock-cut churches – and received the highest iconographical emphasis with frescoes of Christ Pantocrator, of the Virgin, or of the Deesis dominating, in most cases, its interior.[7] Providing a preliminary interpretation of the iconographical type, Catherine Jolivet-Lévy has suggested that it had an apotropaic function, while Christopher Walter has proposed – without, however, elaborating or establishing solid argumentation – that it might had been invented for Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos (913-957) and his wife Helena.[8] Whatever the case, the frequent appearance of Constantine and Helena in Cappadocian churches is justified through their association with the true cross, which seems to have enjoyed great popularity in the region.[9] The cult of the true cross was not certainly underplayed in the other three regions, but other trends and traditions influenced, as it will be demonstrated below, the local development of Constantine and Helena's iconography.

The representations of Constantine and Helena in Cappadocia are rich and sophisticated, reflecting the great artistic productivity in the region. In the Old Church of Tokali Kilise in Göreme, dating between 913 and 920, Helena and Constantine are portrayed

[5] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 307-310.

[6] Uyar 2008: 119-130; Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2001: 167-189; Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 157-160, 251-253.

[7] Ousterhout 1997: 93-112; Ousterhout 2005: 4.

[8] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 235-237; Walter 2006: 47, note 81.

[9] For further discussion on the cult of the true cross in Cappadocia, see Teteriatnikov 1995: 177.

holding a large cross between them and turning towards each other (Appendix 1: church 6, Plate 36a-b).[10] The Old Church was originally a single-naved barrel-vaulted church, but its apse was destroyed when the New Church was added before 969. In a series of standing saints on the walls, Helena and Constantine were selected to be portrayed on the north wall close to the sanctuary apse. In the New Church – a building of an extensive and complex architecture – the two saints are portrayed at the entrance of the central arch before the sanctuary apse, but their iconography differs considerably from the one seen in the Old Church: Constantine holds a standard and a globe, each surmounted by a cross, while Helena is represented orans (Appendix 1: church 11, Plate 37a-b).[11] The large cross hold by the sainted pair in the Old Church alluded to Christ's holy cross, whereas the imperial attributes seen in the New Church seem to have primarily emphasised the standing of Constantine and Helena as imperial models. The cross and the globe symbolised the Christian dominion over the world. This interpretation makes even more sense if seen in conjunction with the elite origins of the patrons of the church: Constantine and his sons Leon and Nikephoros have been identified as members of the Phokas family.[12] Undoubtedly, either type reflected the twofold effect of Constantine and Helena's cult in Byzantium. Iconographically similar to the New Church are the portraits of Constantine and Helena in the eleventh-century Sakli Kilise, also located in Göreme valley: Constantine holds a small cross and globe, while Helena holds only a small cross (Appendix 1: church 17, Plate 42).[13] Variations of the same iconography are found as well in churches outside the Göreme valley. Such examples are preserved in two

[10] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 95-96; Wharton-Epstein 1986.

[11] Wiemer-Enis 1998; Wharton-Epstein 1986.

[12] Thierry 1989: 229.

[13] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 85-87.

tenth-century churches: the Ayvali Kilise in Güllü Dere (Appendix 1: church 4, Plate 47a-b) and the Erdemli Kilise in Yeşilhişar (Appendix 1: church 8).[14]

Representations of Constantine and Helena seem to have been popular in Göreme valley as they were included in the fresco decoration of five more churches, dating between the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the tenth-century El Nazar (Appendix 1: church 12, Plate 38a-b), Helena and Constantine are portrayed in the west arm on the north side of the vault, holding a small cross between them.[15] With reference to their appearance, the two saints are not depicted wearing diadems or crowns, as in other representations of that period, but merely imperial garments. More paintings of Constantine and Helena holding a cross between them are seen in Çarikli Kilise (Appendix 1: church 15, Plate 40), in Chapel 21 (Appendix 1: church 16, Plate 41a-b), in Yilanli Kilise (Appendix 1: church 18, Plate 43a-b), and in Karanlik Kilise (Appendix 1: church 13, Plate 45).[16] All churches date in the eleventh century, and a feature almost common in all four of them is the ecclesiastical background of their patrons: monks, deacons, and presbyters. The location of Constantine and Helena's portraits varies from church to church indicating the high degree of flexibility patrons and painters had, not only in stylistic matters, but also in the design and execution of religious decorative programmes. On the one hand, in both Chapel 21 and Yilanli Kilise the two saints are placed as close to the apse: in the former they are seen in the arch at the entrance of the apse, while in the latter – the architecture of which is different – they are seen on the east side of the north half vault, close to the apse. A location close to the sanctuary apse for Constantine and Helena seems to have been a popular feature in the Cappadocian churches.

[14] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 37-44, 275.

[15] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 83-85.

[16] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 126-127, 128-131, 132-135, 136-137; Jolivet-Lévy 1998: 301-311; Wharton-Epstein 1975: 116; Wharton-Epstein 1981: 36.

In twenty-four churches, more than half follow this pattern. On the other hand, there was a second trend followed in Cappadocia – also encountered, as it will be observed later in this chapter, in other regions of the Byzantine empire: the portraits of Constantine and Helena are placed as close to the west end of the church as possible. Such examples are preserved in Çarikli Kilise and Karanlik Kilise. In both churches, the position of Helena to the subservient right raises issues of a hierarchical arrangement between the two saints, which may echo social and gender restrictions of the period. This is an interesting aspect in the iconography of Constantine and Helena, especially if taking into account that portraits of Helena are usually followed by the paintings of more female saints – for example, in Karanlik Kilise. This stereotype, although not rare in Cappadocia, it is best understood in other regions of the empire (see below). Portraying Helena on the right side of the cross, however, was not always the norm. In Chapel 21 and Yilanli Kilise, for example, Helena is seen on the left so that Constantine is portrayed closer to Christ or the Virgin.

Portraits of Constantine and Helena holding a cross between them are seen in a considerable number of churches not only in Göreme, but in Soğanli valley as well, for example, in the tenth-century Belli (Kubbeli) Kilise (Appendix 1: church 5) and the eleventh-century Tahtali Kilise (Appendix 1: church 14, Plate 48a-b).[17] The type was in use until the thirteenth century. Although Cappadocia came under the control of Seljuk Turks after the battle of Manzikert in 1071, art and architecture continued to be produced by the Christian communities with the tolerance of the Moslem authorities.[18] Karşi Kilise (Appendix 1: church 19, Plate 44a-b) and Tatlarin Kilise (Appendix 1: church 21, Plate 46a-b) in Gülşehir

[17] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 254 and 266.

[18] Ousterhout 2005: 3.

preserve some of the latest hagiographical examples of Constantine and Helena in Cappadocia.[19]

Three iconographical types of Constantine and Helena have been seen so far. In twenty-four churches, eleven depict the two saints holding a cross between them (Appendix 1: churches 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21); six portray them with their arms raised, holding up a medallion containing a cross or a framed cross (Appendix 1: churches 1, 2, 3, 7, 20, 22); and four show them holding imperial attributes or standing orant (Appendix 1: churches 4, 8, 11, 17). All three types seem to have been in frequent use in Cappadocia. At first glance, it seems that none of the last two types is encountered anywhere else in the Byzantine empire, suggesting the possible identification of local artistic traits. But, if we accept that the fragmentary mosaic of Constantine and Helena in the Large Sekreton of the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople was originally depicted in a way similar to the Cappadocian examples, then it becomes even more possible to suggest that such representations might reflect Constantinopolitan prototypes.[20] As for the selection of one of the three iconographical types, it is likely that it was not merely determined by the artistic taste of different painters and the preferences of individual patrons, but also by the architectural plan of each church and the architectural particularities of the location chosen for the depiction of the two saints. On the basis of the available evidence, type one was preferred on large surfaces, whereas types two and three were chiefly accommodated inside and outside the arch. These two latter types are usually seen in the arch at the entrance of the arch, indicating that they were perhaps designed and painted according to fixed rules. On the

[19] Jolivet-Lévy 2001a: 163-181; Jolivet-Lévy 2001b: 133-145; Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 229-230, 233-234; Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 1996: 53-54.

[20] See Chapter 4, page 186; a comparison of the Cappadocian forms with the mosaic of Hagia Sophia has been highlighted by Natalia Teteriatnikov, see Teteriatnikov 1995: 174.

contrary, type one is seen on different parts of the church, indicating perhaps the intervention of patrons and painters.

Such interference is clearly evident in the tenth-century Kuşluk (Pigeon House) in Çavuşin (Appendix 1: church 10), which was executed under imperial patronage: the reigning rulers, Nikephoros Phokas (963-969) and Theophano, are depicted with members of their family on the north apse of the church (Plate 39c).[21] In Çavuşin – as in Tokali Kilise New Church – there is an effort to communicate visually Constantine and Helena's significance as imperial saints. They were depicted, for the first time, into the sanctuary. Specifically, Constantine and Helena stand on the south side of the central apse in order to counter-balance the reigning rulers (Plate 39a-b). In a group of five figures, Nikephoros is portrayed at the centre, in front of a throne, and holding a cross as a visual manifestation of his primacy. Theophano, however, does not receive the same emphasis. Nikephoros is shown turning towards Theophano in order to stress her status and to facilitate her identification by the viewers. Through this effect, Theophano is immediately elevated from supplementary figure to an empress. The assimilation of the reigning couple to the sanctified rulers Constantine and Helena is not surprising, but it is rare in terms of iconography. There are plenty of textual examples of New Constantines and New Helenas, but very few visual ones (for example, see Paris gr.510).[22] As a consequence of the strong link between the two pairs, Constantine and Helena are portrayed in a similar posture as the reigning rulers. By placing a globe in the hands of Helena, there is an indirect emphasis to the significance of the role of Theophano as an empress, which is not clearly evident in her own portrait.

[21] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 15-22; Restle 1967: 135-138.

[22] See Chapter 3, pages 134-141; Chapter 4, page 188.

The intervention of patrons and painters is further evident in Bahattin Samanliği Kilikesi in Belisirma (Appendix 1: church 9, Plate 50a-c).[23] None of the aforementioned three iconographical types is followed in the depiction of Constantine and Helena. They are portrayed separately instead, in order to stress perhaps the dedication of the church to Saint Constantine, or because the placement of the portrait of a female saint within the sanctuary was considered inappropriate. Constantine is placed in the southern niche of the sanctuary apse, holding a globe and a cross in his hands. Helena is represented alone at the north of the east wall, counter-balancing Constantine. Despite the alteration of already established iconographical elements, the selection of space clearly helped communicating the connection between Constantine and Helena – which was not possible to overlook.

5.2 Greece

Southwest of Constantinople, the pictorial examples found in the Greek territories add further insights into the dynamics of effective communication of cultural and religious modes of expression between centre and periphery. The surviving examples date from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, and they are distributed all over Greece. The current analysis focuses on sixteen churches located in Evros in East Macedonia; Mount Athos in Central Macedonia; Kastoria in West Macedonia; Phokida in Central Greece; Laconia in Peloponnese; and on the islands of Kythera and Naxos.[24] Crete will be examined in a separate section because of its historical particularities (see below).

[23] Jolivet-Lévy 1991: 320-323.

[24] I thank George Makris for sharing his knowledge in Greek monuments and helping me to solve many practical issues.

The earliest extant religious representation of Helena in Greece is preserved in the monastery of Hosios Loukas in Phokida. The monastery was dedicated to Holy Luke of Stiris, a local saint who lived in the tenth century. The monastic complex had been built by the early eleventh century around Luke's original hermitage and tomb. The saint's wonder-working body was enshrined in the *Katholikon*, and was the centre of a healing cult at the monastery. Philotheos, the abbot of the monastery, is considered as responsible for the foundation of the *Katholikon*, while the possibility that the place might have enjoyed imperial benefaction during the reign of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1054) is not impossible – but it is not provable in any way. The *Katholikon* is known for its complicate architectural type – a domed-octagon church – and its sophisticated decoration.[25]

The *Katholikon* employed the standard system of decoration: from heaven above to earth below. In other words, the architectural space was viewed as having three zones, with the most sacred at the top.[26] Constantine and Helena were not chosen to be depicted in the naos, but in the narthex (Appendix 2: church 1). The narthex – located at the end of the naos, at the far end from the church's sanctuary – provided a transition from the exterior. This was the room where catechumens – those not eligible for admittance into the general congregation – were allowed to hear and partake in the service; and where baptisms and burials were performed. Therefore, the space was commonly embellished with a special decorative programme, often emphasising its funerary function.[27] The tympana on the north, east, and south walls of the narthex of the *Katholikon* of Hosios Loukas present scenes of Christ's Passion, while those on the west wall are decorated with the portraits of saints – either in

[25] For studies on Hosios Loukas, see Chatzidakes-Bacharas 1982, Connor 1991, Diez and Demus 1931, Oikonomides 1992, Στίκας 1970 and 1974.

[26] Maguire 1998: 127-136; for further reading on the classical system of Middle Byzantine church decoration, see Demus 1948; for some of the problems with this system, see James 1994: 162-175.

[27] *ODB* II: 1438-1439; for further reading on burial in the church narthex, see Gerstel 1998: 99-102.

medallions or as full-length figures. Constantine and Helena, dressed in imperial garments and holding a long cross between them, are shown on the south tympanon on the west wall, counter-balancing the scene of Christ's Resurrection (Plate 52a-b). An identical large cross is depicted in either scene, reflecting the theological value of Helena's discovery of the true cross for the Christian doctrine: the relics of Christ's Crucifixion provided an unconditional documentation of his Incarnation.[28] Constantine and Helena are surrounded by medallions of female saints: Thekla and Agatha by their sides; Anastasia, Pheuronia, and Eugenia below them (Plate 52c). On the north tympanon on the west wall, counter-balancing Constantine and Helena are the portraits of more female saints: Eirene, Catherine, Barbara, Euphemia, Marina, and Juliane. On the tympanon over the entrance door, and between the aforementioned tympana is the representation of a group of five saints, known as the Saints Akindynoi: Anempodistos, Pigasios, Akindynos, Apthonios, and Elpidiphoros.[29] All these male and female saints had a martyr's death in the name of Christ.

The organisation of Constantine and Helena's imagery seen in Hosios Loukas was a recurrent pattern in the art of the Greek territories. The extant portraits of the sainted pair in Kastoria are suggestive of a geographic, iconographic, and contextual consistency. Chronologically contemporary to Hosios Loukas is the three-aisled church of the Saints Anargyroi, one of the largest in Kastoria. It preserves in its first layer of wall paintings – dated between the second half of the tenth century and the first half of the eleventh century – portraits of Constantine and Helena (Appendix 2: church 2).[30] The full-length figures of the

[28] The reverberation of this symbolism is well reflected in a plausibly tenth-century Byzantine ivory triptych in the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris. The figures of Constantine and Helena are incorporated in the scene of the Crucifixion (Plate 87). Walter 2006: 74.

[29] Ground plan of the *Katholikon* and list of saints, see Demus 1948: fig. 42; Χατζηδάκη 1996: 22-23.

[30] With reference to the chronology of the first layer, see Μουτσόπουλος 1992: 390-392; Christopher Walter mistakenly dates them to the twelfth-century redecoration of the church, see Walter 2006: 103.

two saints are dressed in royal attire and hold between them a long cross (Plate 53).[31] They are located on the north wall of the narthex, and nearby, in the northeast corner, next to the figure of Helena, is the portrait of a deceased man.[32] The man is identified by an inscription as Constantine, the servant of God.[33] He turns in the direction of the saints with raised arms (orant). Understanding the three portraits within the iconographic programme of the first layer is difficult, as it is covered by the second layer of wall paintings executed under the patronage of Theodoros Lemniotes and his wife Anna Radene – perhaps members of the local aristocracy – in the twelfth century, when the church had begun to suffer damage with the passing of time.[34] The portraits of Constantine, Helena, and of the deceased Constantine were revealed after the fall of a part of the second layer. They were accompanied by two angels, leading to the hypothesis that the narthex might have been originally used as a burial place for Constantine.[35] The possibility that the paintings of Constantine and Helena were repeated in the twelfth-century layer, as it is evident for other paintings of the narthex – for example, Saints Basil and Nikolaos – is enhanced by the fact that the second layer of the west wall is occupied by female saints: Jerusalim, Euphemia, Thekla, Anastasia, Kyriake, Juliane, Marina, and Theodora.[36] The appearance of portraits of Constantine and Helena in the same iconographical context both in the *Katholikon* of Hosios Loukas and in other churches of Kastoria – see below, for example, the church of Saint Nikolaos – increases the possibility of a similar programme here. Whether, however, the portrait of the deceased Constantine –

[31] Μουτσόπουλος 1992: 379-388.

[32] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 22-25, 38.

[33] «'Εκοιμήθη ὁ δοῦλος / τοῦ Θεοῦ Κωνσταντῖ / νος μηνὶ Νοεμβρίῳ…». The reading of the inscription is disputed, specifically on whether the letter M should be read as month or monk, and whether the letters – not included here – following November define the date or the place. For further analysis, see Μουτσόπουλος 1992: 368-379.

[34] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 38-43; Δρακοπούλου 1997: 32-34, 44-53.

[35] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 38.

[36] Malmquist 1979: 17-23; Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 38; Μουτσόπουλος 1992: 368.

perhaps a member of the local ecclesiastical community, of whom we know nothing – was also repeated cannot be satisfactorily answered, not only because of the particularities of the original iconographical composition, but also because his inclusion would have been determined by the extent of his contribution to the construction of the church and his relationship to the family of Theodoros Lemniotes and Anna Radene, the twelfth-century patrons.

A second representation of Constantine and Helena is seen in the small single-nave church of Saint Nikolaos (Appendix 2: church 6). On the basis of studies concerned with the style of the iconography of the church and of its architecture, it is believed that its foundation was completed sometime in the twelfth century under the patronage of the magister Nikephoros Kasnitzes – perhaps an exiled courtier from Constantinople – and his wife Anna.[37] The portraits of Constantine and Helena are shown on the lower zone of the south wall of the narthex (Plate 54). Saint Photeine stands to the left side of Helena, while on the east wall, in proximity to Constantine, is the scene of the Baptism. The lower zone on the north wall contains full-length female saints – Juliane, Barbara, Marina, and an unidentified figure – while the upper zones present scenes from the life of Saint Nikolaos, the titular saint of the church.[38] The reappearance of Constantine and Helena in the narthex along with female saints raises issues about their hierarchy in church decoration.

The depiction of Constantine and Helena in the narthex is a pattern popular in Kastoria, as it is also attested in the Panagia Mavriotissa, a single-nave church dated between

[37] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 50-65; Δρακοπούλου 1997: 41-44, 54-56; Μουτσόπουλος 1992: 406-411; According to Ann Wharton-Epstein, the title, magister, "had been devalued since the later eleventh century and had all but disappeared by the second half of the twelfth. Consequently, Nikephoros may be identified as a *ktetor* [founder] of not necessarily more than local standing", Wharton-Epstein 1988:120.

[38] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 52; Malmquist 1979, 24-26.

the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries (Appendix 2: church 7).[39] Full-length portraits of Helena and Constantine (Plate 55) are painted to the left of the Royal Door, and the Baptism, to the right. The lower zone of the south wall continues with the paintings of five male saints: Mardarios, Auxentios, Eustratios, Eugenios, Orestes.[40] No paintings have survived on the north wall. However, the positioning of Helena to the left of the cross encourages the possibility that the north wall might have accommodated the portraits of female saints. On the upper zones are scenes from the Last Judgement.

Constantine and Helena are depicted wearing royal garments and holding the relic of the cross between them in Saint Stephanos, a three-aisled church (Appendix 2: church 11). The two saints are painted on the lower zone of the central arched door leading from the narthex into the nave (Plate 56).[41] Helena – as in the Panagia Mavriotissa – is placed to the left of the cross in order to be as far to the east in the church as possible. The paintings of two male saints on the soffit of the arch belong to the first layer of wall paintings dated in the ninth century.[42] The decoration of the church is not homogeneous in style or technique because of the addition of paintings at different times.[43] Therefore, it is difficult to provide a solid date for the portraits of Constantine and Helena. It can be generally said, on the basis of epigraphic evidence, that they were painted sometime between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but their patronage is unknown.[44]

The lower zone of the walls of the small one-aisled church of Saint Athanasios is covered with full-length figures of female and male saints (Appendix 2: church 14).

[39] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 78-81; Μουτσόπουλος 1992: 422-430; Δρακοπούλου 1997: 80-85.

[40] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 68.

[41] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 8-9; Μουτσόπουλος 1992: 229, figs. 203-210.

[42] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 14-18.

[43] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 6-19.

[44] Δρακοπούλου 1997: 87-90.

Constantine and Helena are painted on the west wall, with Helena closer to the entrance (Plate 57). On the other side of the entrance are the figures of the Archangel Michael and Saint Barbara, while the north wall continues with the paintings of Saints Nikolaos the Younger, Alexander of Pydna, Paraskeve, Kyriake, and two more male saints.[45] Next to Constantine on the south wall are the paintings of male saints, among them Merkourios, Prokopios, Theodoros Stratelates, Theodoros Tiro, Demetrios, and Nikolaos. More male and female saints are seen in medallions between the lower and upper zones on the north and south walls. Above the entrance of the church is the founder's inscription, which records that the construction and decoration of Saint Athanasios was completed in 1384/5 under the benefaction of the brothers Stoias and Theodoros Mouzakes, and the monk Dionysios.[46]

The location selected for Constantine and Helena in all six churches seen so far was on the narthex or – in the absence of a narthex – as close to the west wall as possible. This form is also encountered in other regions in Greece. Such examples have been preserved in the eleventh-century church of Saint George Diasorites on the island of Naxos (Appendix 2: church 3) and in two thirteenth-century churches in Laconia: the church of the Zoodochos Pege (originally dedicated to Panagia and Saint Niketas) near the village of Vrondamas (Appendix 2: church 8, Plate 59), and the church of Panagia Chrysaphitissa in the village of Chrysapha (Appendix 2: church 10, Plate 60).[47] However, in six more churches located in Laconia, Evros, Mount Athos, and the islands of Naxos and Kythera (Appendix 2, churches 4, 5, 9, 13, 15, 16, Plate 58a-b) the portraits of Constantine and Helena are seen in different

[45] Pelekanides and Chatzidakes 1985: 106-119.

[46] Δρακοπούλου 1997: 95-95.

[47] Chatzidakes 1989: 66-79; Δρανδάκη 1995: 159-194; Albani 1988: 363-388.

locations, indicating – once again – that church decoration was not just a set of rules (if we could describe it as such), but also a matter of patrons' personal taste and devotion.[48]

The iconographic diversity seen earlier in Cappadocia is certainly not obvious in Greece: paintings of Constantine and Helena holding a cross between them seem to have been a popular choice for the Greeks. Of no less interest is also the appearance of the sainted pair in the company of female saints. This combination prevailed over any other pattern, probably because of the gender of Helena. For example, in the early fourteenth-century church of Saint John Chrysostom in the village of Geraki in Laconia (Appendix 2: church 12), Helena appears without Constantine in a series of ten female saints in medallions.[49] Their selection and depiction on specific locations in the church may provide – as Sharon Gerstel has proposed – insights on the influence exerted by female patrons on the decorative programmes of Byzantine churches.[50] This view is further enhanced – as will be demonstrated below – by the extant images of Helena on Cyprus and Crete. Namely, in ten churches on Cyprus, only three shift away from the pattern (Appendix 3: churches 2, 7, and 10), while the percentage is also small on Crete: in only six of thirty-six churches are no female saints included in the iconographic programmes incorporating Constantine and Helena (Appendix 4: churches 11, 12, 13 14, 18, and 34).

[48] Chatzidakes 1989: 80-89; Chatzidakes and Bitha 2003: 242; Δρανδάκη 1995: 259-306; Δρανδάκη, Καλοπίση, Παναγιωτίδη 1979: 201-202; Ousterhout and Bakirtzis 2007: 32-34; Toutos and Fousteris 2010: 414-416.

[49] Gerstel 1998: 107.

[50] Gerstel 1998: 89-111.

5.3 Cyprus

The main corpus of churches with relatively intact frescoes of Helena is situated in and near villages in the Troodos range of mountains in south central Cyprus.[51] The imagery adopted for Helena on the island presents homogeneous features with the majority of the examples already seen in Cappadocia and Greece. Namely, Helena is in most cases depicted with her son Constantine, holding a long cross between them. The earliest extant example is preserved in the church of Panagia Phorbiotissa (Appendix 3: church 1), better known as Panagia of Asinou, situated to the south of the village of Nikitari. On the basis of the dedicatory inscriptions the vaulted single-aisled church was built and decorated in 1105-1106, when Alexios I Komnenos was emperor, at the expense of *Magistros* Nikephoros Ischyrios (the Strong) – the later monk Nikolaos – possibly a judge or a taxation officer, and his daughter Gephyra.[52] The original decoration has been partly preserved, and its execution is attributed to a painter from Constantinople.[53] Examples of the twelfth-century painting are seen on the north-west and south-west arched recesses. The first is painted with the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, while the lunette of the second is filled with the portraits of Constantine and Helena (Plate 61). They are imperially dressed and hold a long cross between them. Below Constantine and Helena are the paintings of three monastic saints and of Saint Thekla, while on the soffit of the arch round the recess are the busts of four male martyrs. One of the two dedicatory inscriptions concerning the painting of the church appears on the border

[51] I thank Sophocles Sophocleous, Director of the Centre of Cultural Heritage, who has enabled me to enrich my catalogue of Cyprus with images from the centre's photographic archive.

[52] Hadjichristodoulou 2002; Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 114-117.

[53] It has been suggested that the style of the painings resemble Komnenian manuscripts, such as the cod.208 from the monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai. See Weitzmann and Galavaris 1990: 166-170; Megaw 1974: 59-88.

below Constantine and Helena.[54] The church of Panagia Phorbiotissa preserves not merely the earliest iconographic representation of Constantine and Helena on Cyprus, but also the only extant example from the time that the island was still under the political control of the Byzantines.

In the years of political upheaval that followed the island's Latin conquest in the wake of the Third Crusade – first as a Frankish kingdom (1192-1473), and finally as a Venetian colony (1489-1571) – the two saints continued to be portrayed in their standard iconographic type. The earliest example after Asinou is preserved in the *Katholikon* of the monastery of Saint Neophytos – commonly known as the *Enkleistra* – in the province of Paphos (Appendix 3: church 2). The church was dedicated to the Holy Cross, for Neophytos had placed a particle of the true cross there.[55] Although the excavation of the church was completed by 1170, its decoration dates not earlier than 1197.[56] The naos is accessed by a barrel-vaulted loggia which serves as a kind of narthex, while a carved iconostasis separates the naos from the bema. The bema in turn communicates with the *Enkleistra* which contains Neophytos' tomb. Despite the irregular shape of the construction, the disposition of the paintings that have been preserved follows the classical system of middle Byzantine church decoration. The ceiling is occupied by the Ascension, while a Passion cycle appears in the middle zone. A row of twelve monastic saints is represented on the lower zone on the west wall, while on the south wall only the Hospitality of the Abraham has survived. Two thirds of the north wall is occupied by the iconostasis, with the portraits of the Enthroned Christ and of an unidentifiable bishop been depicted to its right (Plate 62a). In the northeast corner the outer

[54] Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 117-126; Sacopoulo 1966: 88-93; the other dedicatory inscription is located over the south entrance of the naos accompanying the portrait of the donor.

[55] Whether Neophytos obtained the particle of the cross in Cyprus, as Cyril Mango and Ernest Hawkins suggest, or from Palestine, where he travelled in 1158, as Anatole Frolow proposes, cannot be discerned. See Mango and Hawkins 1966: 123-124 note 12.

[56] Mango and Hawkins 1966: 200-201, 204.

wall forms a recess where there is a cruciform sinking to which a reliquary with the particle of the true cross would have originally fitted (Plate 62b). The portraits of two bishops are depicted left and right of the cross, while the Archangels Michael and Gabriel are shown above the crossarms.[57] Directly above the relic is the scene of the Crucifixion, which implies, in Robin Cormack's words, 'a carefully planned focus of the whole narrative cycle'.[58] The possibility of a special function for the recess, as a kind of sanctuary, is also noted by Mango and Hawkins. Constantine and Helena, whose alleged role in the finding the relic of the cross was of immense theological significance as proof of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection, are symbolically depicted on the wall next to the particle of the cross (Plate 62c). They are imperially dressed with the ceremonial robes and crowns of the Komnenian emperors, communicating in this way Neophytos' religious and political attitudes, and reminding to the spectator 'of his place in the Byzantine empire'.[59] Despite the fact that after 1191 Cyprus had passed under the political control of the Crusaders, Neophytos continued in the *typikon* to commend his community to the Byzantine emperor.[60] Next to Helena stands an unidentifiable bishop. Neophytos together with two Stylites saints are represented to the south side of the entrance door.[61]

Four more depictions of Constantine and Helena survived from the period that the island was under the rule of the Franks. They are preserved in the church of Saints Joachim and Anna in Kaliana, in the church of the Holy Cross in Pelendri, in the *Katholikon* of the monastery of Saint John Lampadistes in Kalopanagiotes, and in the church of the Archangel Michael in Pedoulas. All four villages are situated in Troodos. Remnants in the architecture

[57] Mango and Hawkins 1966: 140-158.

[58] Cormack 1985: 245.

[59] Cormack 1985: 245.

[60] On Neophytos and his hermitage, see Χατζηϊωάννου 1914; Τσικνόπουλλος 1955; Tsiknopoullos 1965; Mango and Hawkins 1966: 121-135; Cormack 1985: 215-251; Galatariotou 1991.

[61] Mango and Hawkins 1966: 159-160.

and iconography of the first church indicate that the original building was a vaulted single-aisled church dating at the beginning of the twelfth century (Appendix 3: church 3).[62] When the church was reconstructed and repainted during the fourteenth century, Constantine and Helena were frescoed on the north wall, imperially dressed and holding a long cross (Plate 63).[63] The single-aisled domed church of the Holy Cross was sponsored by a group of people – whose identity is unknown – at the end of the century (Appendix 3: church 4). Constantine and Helena were selected to be painted to the left of the entrance on the west wall of the naos, accompanied by Saints Paraskeve and possibly Barbara.[64] The original cross-in-square church of the monastery of Saint John Lampadistes is dedicated to Saint Herakleidios and dates to the eleventh century (Appendix 3: church 5).[65] About the middle of the fifteenth century, plausibly after 1453, a narthex was attached along the church's west wall under the patronage of Michael, his wife and children. On the basis of the fragmentary dedicatory inscription over the south entrance, the paintings of the narthex are attributed to a painter from Constantinople. Constantine and Helena are depicted in their standard iconographical type on the lower zone of the east wall of the narthex (Plate 64). Constantine is preceded by Saints Christophoros and Niketas, while Helena is followed by Saints Merkourios, Artemios, Alexios and John Salos. Portraits of female saints are included in the paintings on the remaining walls of the narthex.[66] With reference to the church of the Archangel Michael, dating to 1447, the dedicatory inscription and the donor portraits seen over the north door of the naos suggest that the decoration was executed by a local painter from the valley of Marathasa at the expense of the priest Basil Chamades, his wife and their two daughters

[62] Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 107-109.

[63] Connor 1999: 219.

[64] Connor 1999: 219; Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 223-232.

[65] Papageorgiou 2012; Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 292-294.

[66] Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 306-312; Connor 1999: 219.

(Appendix 3: church 6). Constantine and Helena are depicted on the right of the west door, while on the left are the portraits of Saints Andronikos and Anastasia (Plate 65). Helena is followed by the paintings of three female saints (Barbara, Kyriake and Marina) on the westernmost part of the north wall.[67]

The same iconography of Constantine and Helena is encountered in Cypriot churches in the years that followed the island's conquest by the Venetians. One such example is preserved in the church of Saint Sozomenos in the village of Galata, dating to 1513 (Appendix 3: church 8). It was built with the contribution of a group of villagers, while the expenses for the decoration were covered by a lawyer named Ioannes. The dedicatory inscription names Symeon Axenti as the painter of the iconographic programme. The paintings of Constantine and Helena are placed on the south wall in a series of standing male and female saints (Plate 67a-b).[68] The two imperial figures inscribed *Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ* and *Η ΒΑΣΙΛΙΣΣΑ* in the scene of the Exaltation of the Cross (Plate 67c) may represent Constantine and Helena, as comparable illustrations are preserved in two fifteenth-century churches on Crete (Appendix 4: churches 29 and 32).[69] A second representation of the holy pair holding the cross is preserved in the village of Galata, in the church of the Archangel Michael, originally dedicated to Panagia (Appendix 3: church 9).[70] The dedicatory inscription accompanying the paintings of the Deesis and of the donors over the north door, records that the church was erected with the expenses of Monsieur Stephanos Zacharia and his wife Loiza, while the paintings were sponsored by Monsieur Polos Zacharia, his wife Madelena and their children. The decoration was completed in 1514, a year later than the church of Saint Sozomenos, by the hand of the same painter, Symeon Afxenti. It is clear that the church

[67] Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 331-341.

[68] Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 84-88.

[69] Walter 2006: 118-119.

[70] Constantoudaki-Kitromilides 2007: 49-84.

was a family chapel, belonging to the Hellenised Venetian family of Zacharia.[71] Constantine and Helena are depicted on the north wall, near the door which is under the donor portraits (Plate 68a-b). The painting of Constantine and Helena shares the same iconographic features with their portrait in the church of Saint Sozomenos. Stylistically, though, the two paintings are very different, and it is apparent that they were not executed by the same hand. It may, therefore, be suggested that Symeon Afxenti was not working alone, but as the head of a local workshop.[72]

Gradually, though, new elements were introduced in Constantine and Helena's iconography with no attested counterparts in Byzantine artistic tradition: the standard imagery of Constantine and Helena was replaced by the narrative cycle of the Discovery of the Cross by Helena and Judas Kyriakos. One such example is shown in the decoration of the church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati situated near the village of Platanistasa (Appendix 3: church 7).[73] The single-aisled building might have been erected earlier, but its decoration was executed in 1494 at the expense of the priest Petros Peratis and his wife Pepani, who are portrayed on the outside of the south wall. The wall paintings were executed by the hand of Philippos Goul, who was of Syrian origin. The theme of the Discovery of the Cross is narrated in ten small paintings on the arched recess on the north wall arranged between the angles of a painted cross (Plate 66a-b). In the soffit of the arch round the recess, are arranged two scenes from the Life of Constantine as an introduction to the legend: the Vision of Constantine; and the Triumphal Entry of Constantine into Rome after the defeat of Maxentius (Plate 66c-d). The scene of the Exaltation of the Cross with emperor Herakleios as one of the

[71] The Venetian family of Zacharia established on the island since the fourteenth century, see Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 90-96.

[72] Symeon Afxenti and his pupils were also responsible for the paintings of a third contemporary church in the village of Galata dedicated to Saint Paraskeve, see Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 106; Παλιούρας 1982: 591-600.

[73] Argyrou 2006; Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 186-218.

protagonists is placed at the end of the visual narrative concerning the cross, as the epilogue (Plate 66e). The appearance of Herakleios founds no comparison in Byzantine art. The scene of the Exaltation of the Cross in Platanistasa consists one of the three compositional variations of the theme on Cyprus, as in other contemporaneous examples either the Byzantine liturgical conception of the theme (see below, church of the Holy Cross in Kyperounda) or the incorporation in the scene of Constantine and Helena (see above, church of Saint Sozomenos in Galata) is preferred. The portraits of Saint Theodoros Tyron, an unidentifiable soldier saint, and Saints Sergios and Bacchos are painted below the scenes of the cycle of the Discovery of the Cross.

A second cycle of the Discovery of the Cross is preserved in the church of the Holy Cross in the village of Kyperounda. The church dates to 1521 and was sponsored by a monk called Akakios (Appendix 3: church 10). Part of its original decoration remains intact in and around the north and south arched recesses. The wall of the north arched recess is filled with the cycle of the Discovery of the Cross by Helena and Judas Kyriakos (Plate 69a-c). The iconographic composition of the ten small images and their arrangement between the angles of a painted cross resembles to the cycle of the Discovery of the Cross in the church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati. However, the scenes from the Life of Constantine observed in the soffit of the arch round the recess in Agiasmati, were replaced in Kyperounda with a series of busts of martyrs in medallions. Deviations also occur in the depiction of the Exaltation of the Cross. It seems that the Kyperounda's painter adopted the Byzantine liturgical conception of the theme, the *Hypsosis* of the Holy Cross (Plate 69d).[74] The portraits of Saint John Lampadistes, of the donor, and of Saints Kosmas and Damian are painted below the scenes of the cycle of the Discovery of the Cross.

[74] Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 219-222.

As has already been made clear in the foregoing chapter, the Judas Kyriakos version of the legend of the finding of the true cross was particularly favoured by the Christian Church in the west. The earliest examples of an iconographical development of the legend in the west are found in two early ninth-century manuscripts – the *Canones conciliarum* and the *Wessobrunner Gebetbuch*.[75] Narrative scenes of the theme were also employed in the western monumental art throughout the Middle Ages. Reflective of such trends is the fresco decoration of the mid-fifteenth-century Cappella Farfense in the municipality of Montegiorgio in Italy.[76] The Judas Kyriakos variant, however, was not the most prominent version of the legend in the Byzantine world, where as we have seen Helena is helped in her mission by Makarios, bishop of Jerusalem. The only exceptions are the sixth-century hymn, *On the adoration of the cross*, by Romanos the Melodist (*ὥσπερ Παῦλον πρώην ἐζήτησε καὶ εὗρε καὶ ἐκάλεσε καὶ ἔδειξε κήρυκα ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἀπόστολον, οὕτως ἐκλεκτὸν ἔκρινεν Ἰούδαν ποτέ ὃς εὗρε σταυρὸν καὶ μετωνομάσθη καλῶς*); the ninth- or tenth-century *vita* of Saints Constantine and Helena, known as the Halkin-*vita* (Text 12: D.18-23); and the *Church History* compiled by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos sometime in the fourteenth century (Text 20: F.11-16).[77] Also rare in the east seems to have been the use of iconographical programmes of the discovery of the cross by Helena and Makarios. The only surviving example is found in the ninth-century manuscript of the *Homilies* of Gregory of Nazianzus. The distinction between eastern and western traditions is well shown in the Stavelot triptych (Plate 86), which was created in the mid-twelfth-century at the abbey of Stavelot in Belgium under Abbot Wibald, in order to accommodate two triptychs of

[75] See Chapter 4, page 191.

[76] Baert 2001: 219-233.

[77] Romanos the Melodist, *On the adoration of the cross*: ed. and Fr. trans. Grosdidier de Matons 1969, 348.

Byzantine origin.[78] It is believed that Abbot Wibald received the two reliquaries as diplomatic gifts from the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos.[79] The Byzantine triptychs are placed in the central panel. The lower larger one has two slivers of wood of the true cross forming a cross, which is flanked by figures of Constantine and Helena.[80] The middle section is protected by two outer wings, which contain enamel medallions with narrative scenes from Constantine's conversion to Christianity and the legend of the Discovery of the true cross by Helena and Judas Kyriakos.

It becomes apparent that the new elements gradually manifested in Constantine and Helena's religious iconography on Cyprus were the product of several generations of the island's exposure to western cultural modes.[81] None of the patrons of the new decorative programmes seen on Cyprus was necessarily of western origin; most, in fact, seem to have been members of the Orthodox clergy. Beyond, however, the interesting implications that the cultural contact between Orthodox and Latin populations on the island may have had, it is also significant to highlight the willingness of members of the Orthodox community to adopt alien forms of cultural and religious expression, especially taking into consideration the close

[78] Voelke 1980.

[79] According to Holger Klein, before the fall of Constantinople in 1204, the Byzantine emperors was the sole possessor and distributor of relics of the holy cross, indicating the close ties of the imperial office with the divine powers. Therefore, the grant of such priceless gifts to western rulers reflected on the superiority of the giver over the recipient. See Klein 2004b: 283-314. For further discussion on the political advantages which relics offered to Byzantine emperors within and beyond the Byzantine borders, see Mergiali-Sahas 2001: 41-60.

[80] The same Byzantine iconographic forms are also encountered in the representations of Constantine and Helena in the Khakhuli triptych (Plate 88), the Jaucourt reliquary (Plate 89), the Hermitage reliquary (Plate 90), the Esztergom reliquary (Plate 91), and in the ivory triptych in Staatliche Museen in Berlin (Plate 92). All five of them have been identified as Byzantine products, dating no earlier than the eleventh century. For an overview on representations of Constantine and Helena on luxury objects, see Walter 2006: 64-76. Teteriatnikov's interpretation of images of Constantine and Helena on such objects, underlines their twofold function. On the one hand, Constantine and Helena guaranteed the authenticity of the relics, and on the other hand, they associated the relics with the imperial office. See Teteriatnikov 1995: 182-187.

[81] For further reading on the cross-cultural complexity of Cyprus' medieval art, see Weyl Carr 2005: 285-328.

relation between religious iconography and strictly defined theological ideas and doctrines. Making easy generalisations about shifts from Byzantine artistic modes into western ones can be controversial and for this reason the introduction of isolated cases of western iconographic features in orthodox ecclesiastical decoration, like the cycle of the Discovery of the True Cross by Helena and Judas Kyriakos, can be seen as exceptions rather than the rule.[82]

During the Crusades the cross was exalted not only as the flagship of the campaigns, but also as the stake of pilgrimage with Helena figuring as the model pilgrim. The existence of relics of the cross on Cyprus was known to the Latins almost a century before the island's Frankish conquest. In particular, a letter sent to the Frankish ecclesiastical authorities in Paris in 1108 referred to the existence of two crosses on Cyprus.[83] Over the five centuries of Frankish and Venetian rule, legends associating Helena with particles of the true cross on the island were circulated by Orthodox and Latins alike, reflecting the significance of possession of such relics for either side. The authentication of these relics seems to have been assured through the alleged visit of Helena to the island. The cross of the good thief was kept, according to Wilbrand, count of Oldenburg, on Stavrovouni. On his way to the Holy Land, Wilbrand visited Stavrovouni in 1211. He mentioned in the records of his pilgrimage that the cross was kept with much honour in a small Orthodox convent at the top of the mountain. His text is the earliest testimony associating Helena with Cyprus. According to Wilbrand the cross was set on Stavrovouni by Helena to help the natives to overcome their misfortunes. Wilbrand wrote that:

> The devil […] used to tear up by night the bodies of the dead who had been interred during the day, and brought them back to the homes of their friends. So that the

[82] The discontinuity of the theme from the medieval to modern times, may be a further proof of its awkward perhaps compatibility to Orthodox theological forms.

[83] *Letter to the Frankish ecclesiastical authorities in Paris*: ed. *PL* 162 (1854), 732A.

> natives could not bury their dead. Helena […] pitied their trouble, and set that cross which she had brought whole from Jerusalem, as it stands today, on that mountain; and thus she drove with power those malicious foes not only from the land, but from the lower air which is thought to be the prison of devils, as though she used that word of the Lord "let the dead bury their dead". And thus that ancient enemy, who conquered on the cross, was by that cross conquered.[84]

At the time of Wilbrand's visit, Stavrovouni was still under the control of the Orthodox church. By the fourteenth century, however, the site was managed by Benedictine monks (Black Monks).[85] Stavrovouni's reputation and popularity among western pilgrims was further enhanced by the belief that more relics of the Passion were held there. Wilhelm von Boldensele reported in 1333 that the convent had under its care not only the cross of the good thief, but also part of a nail of the Passion, and other wonderful relics.[86] In 1394, Martoni, a notary of Carinola, near Calvi in Campania, was eager to visit the cross of the good thief, which was known as the Cross of Cyprus. Martoni wrote that in this cross is a piece of the wood of the cross of Christ covered with silver. After he had devoutly seen, examined and adored that holy cross, the monks showed him more relics: a large piece of Saint Anna, an arm of Saint Blaise, a nail fixed in the hands of Christ, a rib of Saint George, and a stone with which Saint Stephanos was stoned.[87] The possession of a nail of the Crucifixion is also confirmed by Orient d'Ogier VIII, Seigneur d'Anglure, who visited Stavrovouni in 1395.[88] It is briefly acknowledged in their writings that Helena set the relic on Stavrovouni, without, however, making explicit reference to the content of the legend as Wilbrand did.

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[84] *Excerpta Cypria*: Eng. trans. Cobham 1908, 14.

[85] Reports by Sir John Maundeville (1322), Jacobus de Verona (1335), and Ludolf von Suchen (1336-1341). See *Excerpta Cypria*: Eng. trans. Cobham 1908, 18-19, 21.

[86] *Excerpta Cypria*: Eng. trans. Cobham 1908, 16.

[87] *Excerpta Cypria*: Eng. trans. Cobham 1908, 27.

[88] *Excerpta Cypria*: Eng. trans. Cobham 1908, 29.

Fifteenth-century narratives are reflective not only of the popularity of Helena's cult on the island, but also of the different ways her memory was reconstructed by the Orthodox and Latin communities. In 1458 Leontios Machairas wrote that when Helena arrived on the island she found it deserted, without any inhabitants for thirty-six years, because there was a great famine from lack of rain. She had with her the two crosses of the thieves, the four crosses she formed from the footpiece to which the feet of Christ had been nailed, the sixteen corners she cut away from these four crosses, the nails and the crown of thorns. After divine visions, Helena erected one church on Stavrovouni, where she set a fragment of the cross of the good thief, and a second church in Tochni, where she placed one of the four small crosses. As soon as she finished the building of the churches, according to Machairas, God sent rain and the inhabitants returned back to the island.[89] Machairas gave as his source a book written by Saint Kyriakos on the Finding of the Cross. Nothing more is known about the existence of Kyriakos' book. The content of the legend provided by Machairas differs considerably from Wilbrand's story in the thirteenth century.

Unsurprisingly, more versions of the legend circulated on the island when Machairas' chronicle was written. They are attested in the writings of Felix Faber, a Dominican monk of Ulm, who visited Cyprus twice in 1480 and 1483. By the time Felix visited Stavrovouni, the monastery was utterly destroyed by the Turks and Saracens, and the monks of Saint Benedict were scattered. The care of the site was under 'a clerk who knew no Latin, because he was a pure Greek, to whom Latin was barbaric', in Felix's words. According to Felix's description, the cross of the good thief was covered in front with silver-gilt plates, where a small piece of Christ's cross was enclosed. Two of the relics that earlier Latin pilgrims venerated on Stavrovouni – the arm of Saint Anna and one of the nails with which Christ was nailed on the cross – were moved in the Latin church at the village of the Holy Cross at the bottom of

[89] Leontios Machairas, *Chronicle*: Eng. trans. Dawkins 1932, 2.3-9.8.

Stavrovouni. Felix notes that the monastery was built by Helena. When she found under mount Calvary three crosses, she exposed the cross of Christ to the veneration of the whole world, she threw away the one of the bad thief, while the second of the good thief she kept for herself and with her visit to Cyprus set it on Stavrovouni. Felix was either unaware of the local version of Helena's legend – expressed in Machairas' chronicle – or he deliberately ignored it because of its non-Latin origins. Four different explanations of Helena's act are provided in Felix's text. Namely, the cross was set on Stavrovouni: a) for the destruction of gentile rites, because a temple dedicated to Venus stood there; b) for the well-being of the Cypriots, because a gate leading to Hell was on the mountain; c) for stirring the devotion of pilgrims who travelled towards the Holy Land, because their final destination was visible from there in fine weather; d) for instruction, because before one reaches to the cross of Christ 'must first take on himself the thief's cross of penitence'. [90]

Machairas' chronicle gives the impression of a competitive relation between Orthodox and Latins on relics of the cross. He explicitly wrote that:

> And because the Latins envy the Greeks, they hide the miracles that are worked by the icons and by the pieces of the holy wood in the churches of the Greeks: not because they disbelieve, but because they are envious. For this reason the Latin churchmen used to say that the cross is not of the holy wood, but the miracles are worked by craft.[91]

Churches dedicated to the Holy Cross were erected and decorated by the members of two rites alike. Sometime between 1324 and 1359, according to Machairas, the lady Mary d'Ibelin, aunt of king Hugh IV's wife, erected outside Nicosia – where the Venetian walls

[90] *Excerpta Cypria*: Eng. trans. Cobham 1908, 37-40.

[91] Leontios Machairas, *Chronicle*: Eng. trans. Dawkins 1932, 67.72.

now stand – a church called the Cross made Manifest.[92] The church attracted the interest of the Orthodox as well. It was not only built with the blessing of the Orthodox bishop of Nicosia, but the patriarch of Antioch – who happened to be on the island that time – donated to the church a cruciform reliquary with relics of saints. The cross was carried in processions when there was a plague or locusts or a drought.[93]

It seems that changes in the ideological presentation of Helena may have created a demand for corresponding changes in the pictorial documentation. Western iconographic features were introduced in Orthodox ecclesiastical decoration because perhaps no Byzantine iconographic patterns existed to reflect the popularity of the cult of Helena and the cross on the island. The cycle of the Discovery of the Cross seems to have been preferred in churches dedicated to the Holy Cross, but the evidence does not suffice to support its extensive use. Three more churches dedicated to the Holy Cross have survived from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the villages of Kouka, Palaeomylos, and Hagia Eirene. However, none of them includes in their decoration either the cycle of the Discovery of the Cross or Constantine and Helena holding the cross.[94] It is clear, once again, that iconographic peculiarities should be assessed as reflections of individual devotion. Certainly, the stimulation of innovation through the intervention of painters cannot be undervalued, but limited evidence confines a deeper understanding of the issue. The case of Crete will show that the role of donors in the selection and disposition of an iconographic programme was more decisive than the contribution of painters.

[92] Leontios Machairas, *Chronicle*: Eng. trans. Dawkins 1932, 71.76.

[93] Leontios Machairas, *Chronicle*: Eng. trans. Dawkins 1932, 71.77.

[94] Stylianou and Stylianou 1985: 151-156, 235, 344.

5.4 Crete

In seventy-three painted churches that have been securely dated on the basis of dedicatory inscriptions, thirty-six are embellished with paintings of Constantine and Helena.[95] The churches are distributed across the island's four prefectures: fifteen are situated in Chania (Appendix 4: churches 1-15), eight in Rethymnon (Appendix 4: churches 16-23), nine in Herakleion (Appendix 4: churches 24-32), and four in Lassithi (Appendix 4: churches 33-36). Almost all of them – with the exemption of two (Appendix 4: churches 25 and 27) – have a single nave and a barrel vault in the interior, presenting, in other words, a quite homogeneous architectural type. The majority of them date to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Moreover, the epigraphic evidence provides the names of the patrons for thirty-two churches, and for a smaller number – nine churches – the names of their painters. Finally, the churches were erected in honour of fourteen different holy and sainted figures: Panagia, Saviour (Soter or Christos), Archangel Michael, Holy Fathers, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Demetrios, George, Nikolaos, Stephanos, Prokopios, Mamas, Constantine and Helena, and Pelagia. Such a range of information allows the current analysis to evaluate the available iconographical material on Constantine and Helena thoroughly and extensively. The two saints are often depicted in their standard iconographical type, already common – as we have seen – in other regions (Cappadocia, Greece and Cyprus) of the Byzantine world.

[95] This analysis is largely based on Ioannes Spatharakes' corpus of dated Byzantine wall paintings of Crete, see Spatharakes 2001; Constantine and Helena certainly figure in more churches besides those which are listed here, as a large number of about eight hundred painted churches have survived in Crete. For example, fifteen churches are additionally given in Giuseppe Gerola's catalogue of the Cretan monuments. However, they lack of a secure chronology and of a detailed description of their iconographic programme. See Gerola 1961: nos. 89, 127, 135, 138, 150, 173, 214, 226 (Chania), 303, 312, 314, 327, 329, 393 (Rethymnon), 559 (Herakleion). Over the last few years, Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Vasiliki Tsamakda have been surveying the Byzantine and post-Byzantine Cretan monuments, revealing more wall paintings of Constantine and Helena. I thank both scholars for providing me with a significant amount of unpublished photographs from their private collections.

Exceptions, however, do exist. It is this last category of paintings which adds significance to the iconography of Constantine and Helena on Crete.

- **Chania**

Ten of the churches in the prefecture of Chania are situated in the province of Selino. Selino is located in the southwestern corner of the island. None of its churches is located in the same village. Chronologically, the earliest extant Cretan representation of Constantine and Helena is preserved in the church of Saint Demetrios in the village of Livadas, dating around 1292-1296 (Appendix 4: church 1). The two saints are depicted to the west of the niche on the north wall of the naos. The niche is decorated with Saint Demetrios, the titular saint of the church. The niche on the south wall is embellished with the figure of Christ Pantokrator. To the west of the niche, counter-balancing Constantine and Helena, are the portraits of the military Saints George and Theodore. Helena is followed by two unidentifiable female saints flanking the entrance on the west wall. The dedicatory inscription, naming Manolis, Ioannes, and Stephanos as the patrons of the church, is written above the portraits of Constantine and Helena.[96] A second church situated in the village of Platanes, dating to 1372-1373, is also dedicated to Saint Demetrios (Appendix 4: church 9). However, its iconographic programme is not identical to the one in Livadas. For instance, the choice of saints to be depicted on the lower zone of the church's lateral walls alters significantly. Constantine and Helena are painted here on the south wall (Plate 75). Constantine is followed by the Archangel Michael to the east, and Helena by Saints Anthony and Onouphrios to the west. The north wall is decorated from the east to the west with the paintings of Saints Demetrios, Theodore, Nestor, Prokopios and Menas. Only the representation of female saints on the west wall presents some resemblances to the church in

[96] Spatharakes 2001: 16-18.

Livadas: Saint Marina and a second unidentifiable female saint are depicted to the south, with Saint Zosimas and Mary of Egypt to the north. The dedicatory inscription above these figures names [Kar]vounis, his wife and their children, and the monk Ko[st]as Kar[vounis] as the patrons of the church.[97] This is the first out of five examples in which one of the donors is named after Saint Constantine. We will shortly examine whether such parallels between saint and donor affected the way Constantine and Helena were depicted in a church. For now, suffice is to note that in the church in Platanes the two saints are painted in a central location in the naos: neither too far east nor too far west.

The west niche in the south wall of the church of Saint John Evangelist in the village of Trachiniakos, dating to 1328-1329 (Appendix 4: church 6, Plate 73), is painted with Saints Prokopios, Constantine and Helena. Before them, closer to the sanctuary, are the figures of the Archangel Michael, Saint Mamas, and Saint Nikolaos. Near Helena, to the west of the niche, are paintings of female saints, which continue on the west wall: Saints Kyriake, Paraskeve, Barbara, Marina, Eirene and Catherine. Patrons of the church were the members of three families, but the dedicatory inscription does not include specific details of their identity.[98] Constantine and Helena are also seen on the south wall of the church of Saint Prokopios (now Saints Apostoles) in the village of Drys, dating to 1382-1391 (Appendix 4: church 10). Constantine is preceded to the east by the Archangel Michael, while Helena is followed by Saints Bartholomew and Kyriake. The paintings of female saints continue on the west wall, with Saint Paraskeve portrayed to the left of the entrance, and Saint Marina to the right. Nikolaos Verin[os], a priest, was the church's donor.[99] The representation of Helena in a sequence of female saints is a repeated theme in her religious iconography. Gerstel has

[97] Spatharakes 2001: 119-120.

[98] Spatharakes 2001: 76-78.

[99] Spatharakes 2001: 121-123.

observed that the clustering of portraits of female saints in specific areas of the church corresponds to the devotional needs of female congregations.[100]

Although, in the churches discussed, Constantine and Helena were depicted either on the north or the south wall of the naos, in the churches of the Panagia at Prodromi and of the Saviour at Vlithias, the holy pair figures on the west wall instead. In the first church, dating to 1347, Constantine and Helena (Plate 74) are seen to the left of the entrance, while Saints Paraskeve and Marina are painted to the right (Appendix 4: church 7).[101] In the second church, dating to 1358-1359, the holy pair is portrayed to the right of the entrance (Appendix 4: church 8). Paintings to the left of the entrance are too fragmentary to allow us to identify the saints. The painter Ioakim was responsible for the execution of the iconographic programme.[102] Both churches were sponsored by a large number of villagers; five of the fourteen were named after Constantine (Kostas Pothitopoulos, Kostas Raptis, Kostas Partzalis, Kostas Kasimatis and Kostas Verinos).[103]

None of the above portrayals differs significantly from the way Constantine and Helena were generally portrayed in the Byzantine world. However, Helena was not always included with Constantine on Crete. The earliest extant example of this theme is preserved in the church of the Archangel Michael in the village of Kavalarina in Selino (Appendix 4: church 5). Constantine is depicted to the left of the eastern niche on the south wall (Plate 72). He is followed by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, the donors, the Saints John the Eremite and Demetrios, and an unidentifiable female saint on the westernmost part of the wall. Constantine holds a small cross in his right hand, while his left hand is held in front of his chest with its opened palm facing the viewer. He is counter-balanced on the north wall by

[100] Gerstel 1998: 89-111.

[101] Spatharakes 2001: 92-93.

[102] Spatharakes 2001: 106-107.

[103] The names Kostas and Kostantis are short forms of Constantine.

Saint Nikolaos. The dedicatory inscription states that the church was built at the expenses of Theotokis Kotzis, Manoïl Melissourgos, Nikitas Sideris, Demetrios, and their children in 1327-1328. The painter Ioannes was responsible for its decoration.[104] Representations of Constantine without Helena are also seen in Cappadocia.[105] However, the main difference between Cappadocia and Crete is that in Cappadocia Helena was not entirely excluded from the iconographic programme of the church as she is at Kavalarina.

The iconography of Helena and Constantine from three fifteenth-century churches in the province of Selino does not shift from already standardised patterns. In the church of the Archangel Michael in Prines, dating to 1410, the saintly pair is painted to the left of the entrance (Appendix 4: church 11). To the right of the entrance stands an Archangel. No female saints have been identified among the paintings. Constantine is followed by two unidentifiable male saints on the north wall. Sponsors of the church were a large number of Christians, all males. None of them, however, is named after Constantine.[106] Finally, two churches in the Apano Floria and Kato Floria, dating to 1470 and 1497 respectively, accommodate Constantine and Helena's portraits on the south wall. Xenos Digenis, the painter of the church of the Saints Fathers, depicted the two saints on the westernmost part of the wall (Appendix 4: church 14). They are preceded by Saint Nikolaos and the Deesis to the east. No other female saints were included in the iconographic programme, despite the fact that among the sponsors are the names of female members of the family of Manouel Erimoïoannis.[107] Georgios Provatopoulos, the painter of the church of Saint George in the second village (Appendix 4: church 15), represented Constantine and Helena closer to the sanctuary (Plate 76). Constantine is preceded by Saint Mamas, while Helena is followed by

[104] Lymberopoulou 2006: 115; Spatharakes 2001: 73-75.

[105] For example, in Bahattin Samanliği Kilikesi in Belisirma. See above, page 236.

[106] Spatharakes 2001: 161-162.

[107] Spatharakes 2001: 214-216.

three female saints. Two more female saints continue on the west wall. The family of Floriotis sponsored the church. It is unspecified whether any of them was named after Constantine and Helena.[108]

Two more churches in the prefecture of Chania are situated in the province of Apokoronas. Apokoronas is located northeast, in proximity to the prefecture of Rethymnon. Both churches are dated to the early fourteenth century and their paintings were executed by the same painter, Ioannes Pagomenos. The church of the Panagia in the village of Alikampos, dating to 1315-1316 (Appendix 4: church 2), preserves paintings of Constantine and Helena at the westernmost part on the south wall (Plate 71). Constantine is preceded by the Archangel Michael and Christ Pantokrator to the east, while Helena follows Saint Mamas on the west wall. Saint Kyriake counter-balances Helena on the north wall. The church in the village of Maza dates to 1325-1326 and is dedicated to Saint Nikolaos (Appendix 4: church 4). The location of Constantine and Helena in the iconographic programme of the church changes: they are painted on the north wall (Plate 70). Constantine is preceded by the Archangel Michael, an unidentifiable female saint, and the Virgin with the Child to the east. Helena heads a series of paintings of female saints, which continues on the west wall (Saints Barbara, Anastasia, Photeine and Paraskeve).[109] Undoubtedly, one would have expected that no differentiations would have occurred in the iconography of Constantine and Helena between the two churches, especially since they had been painted by the same person. The displacement, however, of their portraits from the south to the north wall, makes clear that, at least in these cases, the patrons and not the painters decided where the holy pair was going to

[108] Spatharakes 2001: 217-218.

[109] Spatharakes 2001: 70-72.

be depicted in a church.[110] The church of the Panagia, on the one hand, might have been a family chapel as it was sponsored by just one family: Michael, his wife and children. The church of Saint Nikolaos, on the other hand, might have served a larger group of villagers, as it had been built and painted with the contribution of all the inhabitants of the village of Maza. Only two of them were named after Constantine: Kostantis Raptis, Konstantinos Sarakinopoulos. In general, it may be suggested that the role of donors in the selection and disposition of an iconographic programme was more decisive than the contribution of painters. For instance, Ioannes Pagomenos, although apparently aware that female saints were normally depicted as close to the west end of the church as possible – a stereotype that he clearly adapts in both churches – chose (presumably was told) to portray two female saints (unidentifiable) not far from the sanctuary in the church of Saint Nikolaos.

The last three churches in the prefecture of Chania are situated in the province of Kissamos, in the northwestern corner of the island. The church of the Saviour in the village of Kephali, dates to 1319-1320 (Appendix 4: church 3). Constantine and Helena are depicted on the south wall, close to the sanctuary. Helena is followed by three male saints and one female saint, while five medallions with female saints are arranged above them. Saints Photeine, Theodosia and Anastasia are among them, while Saint Kyriake follows on the west wall, to the right of the entrance. Constantine and Helena are counter-balanced by three military saints on the north wall (Theodore, Demetrios and George). One of the church's six sponsors was named after Constantine: Kostas Raptopoulos.[111] The other two churches date to the fifteenth century. The church in the village of Voukolies, dating to 1452-1461, is dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helena, the *isapostles* as the dedicatory inscription states (Appendix

[110] Parallels between saint and donor also apply in the case of saints Michael (Appendix 4: churches 2, 4, 7, 11, 12, and 21), Manuel (Appendix 4: church 11), Theodore (Appendix 4: church 3), Demetrios (Appendix 4: churches 4 and 5), George (Appendix 4: churches 4, 8, 13 and 19), and Eirene (Appendix 4: church 27).

[111] Spatharakes 2001: 56-58.

4: church 12). This is the first out of three churches built in honour of the holy pair. The two saints are depicted on the north wall, close to the sanctuary. They are followed to the west by a Stylite saint and three military ones. No female saints can be identified among the fragmented paintings, only Archangel Michael and Saint Anthony on the south wall, and Saints Sabas and Kosmas on the west wall. Hell is seen to the right of the entrance.[112] None of the numerous sponsors of the church is named after Constantine or Helena. Finally, the church of Christ in the village of Palia Roumata, dating to 1466, was built and painted with the contribution of Leos Vavoulaias, his wife Sophia and their children (Appendix 4: church 13). Constantine is depicted without Helena to the right of the entrance on the west wall. He is counter-balanced to the left of the entrance by the Archangel Michael, while he is followed by Saints George, Demetrios and Theodore on the north wall. An earlier example of Constantine without Helena has already seen in the church of the Archangel Michael in the village of Kavalarina in Selino. This deliberate omission of Helena is particularly interesting, and underlines the existence perhaps of a local tendency favouring the cult of Constantine.[113]

- **Rethymnon**

Eight representations of Constantine and Helena are located in the prefecture of Rethymnon, and are equally distributed among the provinces of Mylopotamos, Amari, Hagios Basileios and Rethymnon. Only the names of the donors for some of them are known, but none of these names corresponds to Constantine and Helena. The identity of their painters cannot be recognised. The earliest extant example is preserved in the church of Panagia – originally dedicated to Saint Mamas – in the village of Hagios Mamas in Mylopotamos (Appendix 4: church 16). Constantine and Helena are painted on the south wall. They are

[112] Spatharakes 2001: 200-201.

[113] Spatharakes 2001: 213-214; see below, page 270.

preceded by Saint Mamas, the titular saint of the church, while to their right are the portraits of Saints Marina, Eirene and Paraskeve. The north wall is occupied by male saints (Anthony, Artemios, Prokopios and Onouphrios) and the portrait of a donor. The fragmentary dedicatory inscription found on the north wall dates the church between 1312 and 1320.[114] The church of Saint Stephanos in the village of Kastri in Mylopotamos, dating to 1391, preserves portraits of Constantine and Helena on the westernmost part of the south wall (Appendix 4: church 20). Near Constantine, to the east, are the portraits of two unidentified male saints and of Saint Stephanos, the titular saint of the church. Female saints, including Eirene, Catherine and Paraskeve, are seen, on the north wall. To the left of Helena, on the west wall, are paintings of the Damned.[115]

Constantine and Helena are depicted on the west wall of the church of the Saviour in the village of Voliones in Amari, dating to 1346-1347 (Appendix 4: church 17). They stand to the left of the entrance. Near Helena, on the westernmost part of the south wall, are the figures of female saints: Marina, Catherine or Eirene, and Paraskeve.[116] A second church in the province of Amari dates to 1516. It is located in the village of Hagia Paraskeve and is dedicated to Panagia (Appendix 4: church 23). The busts of a large number of female saints are depicted in the middle zone of the iconographic programme of the naos. The donors (the priest Georgios Varouchas and his wife) and the unknown painter, obviously shift away from earlier standardised iconographic patterns. Male saints are represented on the lower zone on the south and north walls of the church, while Constantine and Helena were portrayed to the right of the donors' paintings on the west wall.[117]

[114] Spatharakes 2001: 31-32.

[115] Spatharakes 2001: 142-144.

[116] Spatharakes 2001: 90-91.

[117] Spatharakes 2001: 219-221.

The church of the Saviour in the village of Akoumia in the province of Hagios Basileios, dating to 1389, was equipped with a narthex (Appendix 4: church 18). The portraits of Constantine and Helena are represented on the westernmost part on the north wall of this space (Plate 77). They are counter-balanced by the portrait of the donor's son, named Kostas, on the south wall. The portrait of his mother, Anitza, continues on the west wall. Representations of female saints are not found in the narthex, but on the south and north walls of the naos.[118] A second church in the province of Hagios Basileios, dating to 1417, preserves the saintly pair to the right of Christ on the south wall of the naos (Appendix 4: church 22). They are followed to the west by the paintings of male saints, while they are counter-balanced by the Archangel Michael on the north wall. The sponsors of this church, which was dedicated to Panagia, were Leontakis Troulinos, his wife Ana (likely Anna) and their children, and his brothers Nikolaos and Ioannes.[119] It is clear that a different patronage immediately introduced a new attitude towards the way Constantine and Helena were chosen to be represented, regardless whether they were painted by the same painter or not – see for example, Ioannes Pagomenos and Symeon Afxenti's work.[120]

More examples of Constantine and Helena are seen in the province of Rethymnon. In the church of Panagia in the village of Roustika, dating to 1390-1391, Constantine and Helena are depicted to the right of the entrance on the west wall (Appendix 4: church 19).[121] In the church of Saint John Evangelist in the village of Selli, dating to 1411, the sainted pair is displaced on the westernmost part of the north wall (Appendix 4: church 21, Plate 78).[122] In

[118] Spatharakes 2001: 127-132.

[119] Spatharakes 2001: 170-173.

[120] See above, pages 248 and 263.

[121] Spatharakes 2001: 137-141.

[122] Spatharakes 2001: 163-166.

both churches they are depicted in proximity to the figures of Damned, a pattern popular on Crete, but seen nowhere else in the Byzantine world.

- **Herakleion**

The representations of Constantine and Helena preserved in churches in the prefecture of Herakleion are of particular interest because of their inventive character. Two of the nine churches are painted with scenes from the Life of Constantine, one incorporates Constantine and Helena in the scene of the Exaltation of the Cross, while another one represents Constantine without Helena. Such examples do not reflect specific trends towards the two saints isolated in Herakleion only. Two more portraits of Constantine without Helena have already been recorded in Chania (Appendix 4: churches 5 and 13), while a third iconographic cycle of Constantine's life also appears – as it will be observed below – in the prefecture of Lassithi. Nonetheless, the Cretan paintings are exceptional.

One such example, distinct from traditional standards, dates to 1314-1315 and is situated in the village of Pyrgos in the province of Monofatsi. The three-nave church is dedicated to Saints George, Constantine and Helena, and it was completed under the patronage of Georgios Pachnoutis, his wife Xeni and their son Paulos (Appendix 4: church 25). It may be generally observed at this point that, based on all the examples seen so far, the inclusion of Constantine and Helena in the iconographic programme of a church was not necessarily dependent on whether any of the donors was named after either of the two saints. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the existence of such a connection between donors and saints increased the possibilities. On the basis of the surviving material, cycles of Constantine on Crete appear only in churches dedicated to Constantine and Helena. The church in Pyrgos preserves four scenes from the Life of Constantine at the sanctuary of the southern bay (Plate 79a-d). The scenes of the Battle of Constantine on the Milvian Bridge (which is mistakenly

described as against Diocletian by the accompanying inscription) and of Christ Blessing Constantine and Helena are seen on the lower zone of the south wall, while on the north wall the scene of the Birth of Constantine and the scene of Helena accompanying the child Constantine to the court of Constantius Chlorus are identifiable.[123] It will be seen in chapter six that the new elements introduced in Constantine and Helena's iconography in Pyrgos reflect on contemporaneous ideological developments taking place in Constantinople. The last three scenes of the cycle in Pyrgos are not encountered anywhere else in the Byzantine world, but they do correspond to late Byzantine textual descriptions of Constantine and Helena.[124]

A cycle of Constantine is also painted in a second church dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helena in the village of Avdou in the province of Pedias. The church dates to 1445, and according to the dedicatory inscription it was sponsored by a priest named Manuel, and painted by Manuel and Ioannes Phokas (Appendix 4: church 32). The poor condition of the paintings in this church cannot support a certain identification of the four scenes, which are seen on the middle zone of paintings on the north and south walls of the naos. It has been suggested that the first scene on the north wall presents an emperor, presumably Constantine, on a throne, while the fragmentary remains of the second scene may show the Finding of the Cross. On the south wall, the first scene may show the Baptism of Constantine, while the second may show Constantine and Helena participating in the Exaltation of the Cross. An additional portrait of the two saints holding the cross can with certainty be recognised on the south wall of the sanctuary of the church (Plate 82).[125] No paintings of female saints can be identified in either of the two churches in Pyrgos and

[123] Gallas, Wessel and Borboudakis 1983: 375-377; Spatharakes 2001: 36-39; Βασιλάκη 1987: 60-84; Walter 2006: 111-113.

[124] See Chapter 6, page 286.

[125] Gouma-Peterson 1983: 159-170; Spatharakes 2001: 197-199; Walter 2006: 122.

Avdou. The inclusion of Constantine and Helena in the scene of the Exaltation of the Cross is uncommon in Byzantine art, and only two examples are preserved on Crete. The earliest surviving example, dating to 1401, is depicted in the church of Saint George (Appendix 4: church 29) in the village of Ano Viannos in the province of Viannos (Plate 81). Georgios Damoro and the priest Ioannes Mousouros were the patron and the painter of the church respectively, about whom, however, no more details are known.[126]

In a second church in the province of Viannos, Constantine is portrayed without Helena. The church, dating to 1360, was dedicated to Saint Pelagia and was sponsored by Nikole[tos] Maris, his wife Sophia and their children, Kostas Maris, his wife and children, and their mother Eudokia (Appendix 4: church 28).[127] While in the churches of the Archangel Michael and of the Saviour (Appendix 4: churches 5 and 13), Constantine was selected to be depicted on the south and west walls of the naos respectively, in Saint Pelagia he is represented on the south wall of the sanctuary. This prominent location of the saint in the church would have been very likely determined by the fact that one of the sponsors bore his name. Most importantly, though, the repetition of such examples within a considerable span of time (1327-1466) and within a broad geographical framework, stress the popularity of Constantine on Crete. The fact that no parallels have been found in other parts of the Byzantine world, may suggest that the popularity of Constantine on Crete was the effect of internal turbulence caused by the change of political control on the island in 1204. It is reflected in the legend of the twelve *archontopoula* which was constructed during the Venetian conquest of the island, in order to serve, in the words of Chrysa Maltezou, 'as a tool of ideological propaganda to keep alive in memory of the Cretans the direct link with the

[126] Παπαμαστοράκης 1987-1988: 328; Spatharakes 2001: 148-152; Walter 2006: 116-121.

[127] Spatharakes 2001: 111-114.

empire'.[128] One of the versions of the legend placed the settlement of the twelve *archontopoula* on Crete during the reign of Constantine.[129] Years after the Venetians had been established on the island, the communion of the Cretans to the Byzantine authority was still spirited. The dedicatory inscriptions of two fifteenth-century churches state that the churches were built and decorated during the reign of the king and emperor of the Romans John VIII Palaiologos (Appendix 4: churches 31 and 32).

Portraits of Helena with Constantine holding a cross between them have been preserved in five churches in the prefecture of Herakleion. Three are dedicated to Saint George, and the remaining two to the Panagia. The church of Saint George in the village of Hagia Trias in the province of Pyrgiotissa dates to 1302, and was sponsored by Konstantinos Skynoplokos, his sons, and the nuns E[u]praxia and Kataphygi (Appendix 4: church 24). Constantine and Helena are depicted to the left of the entrance, and Saint Onouphrios to the right. The paintings of other saints on the south wall of the naos are in a bad state of preservation, and therefore, it is unclear by which saints – female or male – Constantine and Helena were followed.[130] The second church of Saint George dates to 1321 and is situated in the village of Lytto (Xydas) in the province of Pedias (Appendix 4: church 26). In this church, which was sponsored by Iakomos, his wife Sofia and their children, Constantine and Helena were represented on the westernmost part of the south wall (Plate 80). Helena is followed by the portraits of female saints (Paraskeve, Marina Photeine and Eirene) on the west wall, while Constantine is preceded by the Archangel Michael and an unidentifiable female saint. The north wall accommodates the portraits of Saints George, Demetrios and

[128] The legend was related to Cristoforo Buondelmonti, a Florentine cleric, by a Cretan priest in 1415, see Maltezou 1998: 232-235.

[129] The other two version placed the settlement either immediately after the reconquest of Crete by Phokas, or during the years of Theodosios, see Maltezou 232-235.

[130] Spatharakes 2001: 22-23.

Mamas.[131] Also in the province of Pedias, specifically in the village of Emparos, is the fifteenth-century church (1436-1437) of Saint George, which was built with the contribution of the priest Manuel, his wife and children, and other Christians (Appendix 4: church 31). Constantine and Helena are depicted on the south wall between the portraits of male saints. They are counter-balanced by the paintings of female saints (Marina, Catherine (?), and Paraskeve) on the north wall.[132] The church was painted by the hand of Manuel Phokas, who was also responsible for the paintings and the scenes from the Life of Constantine in the church of Saints Constantine and Helena in the village of Avdou (Appendix 4: church 32). Although a priest with the name Manuel is among the sponsors of both churches, it is a common name on Crete, so it is not possible to suggest that the two Manuels are the same person.

Variations in the location of the paintings of Constantine and Helena are also observed in the two churches of Panagia. The first is a cross-in-square domed church dated to 1323. It is situated in the village of Fodele in the province of Malevisi and was sponsored by Michael Melissourgos, his wife Eirene and their children (Appendix 4: church 27). Constantine and Helena are depicted to the east on the north wall of the northwestern bay. They are followed to the west by the paintings of two unidentifiable male saints, and by Saints Catherine (?), and Paraskeve on the west wall. No definite chronology can be provided for the portraits of Constantine and Helena, as the church is painted in various layers, dating between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.[133] The south and north walls of the church of the Panagia in the village of Kapetaniana in the province of Monofatsi, dating to 1401-1402, are decorated with male saints. Constantine and Helena are painted on the westernmost part

[131] Spatharakes 2001: 60-62.

[132] Spatharakes 2001: 185-189.

[133] Spatharakes 2001: 67-69.

of the north wall (Appendix 4: church 30). The priest Gregorios Kalamaras is named as the church's sponsor.[134]

- **Lassithi**

A smaller number of portraits of Constantine and Helena are preserved in the prefecture of Lassithi. The earliest representation dates to 1354-1355 and is situated in the village of Kritsa in the province of Merabello. The church is dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helena, and it was sponsored by Basileios and Anna (Appendix 4: church 33). The standard iconographic type of Constantine and Helena, holding a cross between them and imperially dressed, is depicted on the lower zone of paintings on the south wall of the naos. They are preceded by Saint Onouphrios to the east, and followed by Saints Marina, Paraskeve and Mamas to the west. Additionaly, three scenes from Constantine's Life are painted on the lower zone of the northern and southern halves of the barrel vault: the Triumph of Constantine and his Baptism by Saint Sylvester (Plate 83a-b). The third scene is not identifiable, and scholars are reluctant to accept that it might be related to the Finding of the Cross because of the difficulty in identifying the fragments of the imperial figure as Helena (Plate 83c).[135] Constantine's conversion by Sylvester was a popular theme in middle and late Byzantine narratives referring to Constantine; however, no equivalent artistic manifestations are found in Byzantium. Therefore, the scene in Kritsa is unique and only comparable to western wall paintings, for example, the thirteenth-century frescoes in the chapel of Saint Sylvester in the Basilica of Santi Quattro Coronati in Rome, and the church of Saint Sylvester in Tivoli.[136]

[134] Spatharakes 2001: 157-160.

[135] Spatharakes 2001: 97-98; Tsamakda 2004: 153-166.

[136] Hermanin 1913: 181-203; Muñoz 1913: 203-211.

In the church of Saint John Baptist, also situated in the village of Kritsa, Constantine and Helena are depicted in the normal way (Appendix 4: church 34). They are seen on the south wall of the naos (Plate 84). They are preceded to the east by Saint Anthony, Saint Anne holding the Virgin as infant, and Saint Panteleimon, while they are followed by the Archangel Michael to the west. More male saints are painted on the north and west walls. The church dates to 1389-1390 and it was sponsored by Ioannes Skordilis and Basileios.[137] A second portrait of them is preserved on the south wall of Panagia in the village of Malles in the province of Herapetra (Appendix 4: church 35). They are depicted between male saints, while they are counter-balanced by female saints on the north wall. The church was built and decorated in 1431-1432 at the expense of Georgios Markatantos.[138] The last example, dating to 1431-1432, is depicted to the right of the entrance of the church of the Archangel Michael in the village of Exo Lakonia in the village of Merabello (Appendix 4: church 36). To the left of the entrance are the portraits of its sponsors, Nikolas, Michael, Ioannes and his wife, and members of the family Mochiotis. Helena is followed on the south wall by the paintings of the female saints Marina and Paraskeve (Plate 85).[139]

The continuous series of painted churches preserved on Crete and the other three regions provide a comprehensive documentation of the evolution of Helena's iconography in Byzantium, reflecting not only on progress in provincial level, but probably also on developments in Constantinople itself. The images do not merely 'illustrate' the known about Helena, but also underline the popularity of her cult among the broad population of the empire (and former empire). The private devotion towards Helena and her son was also expressed through the use of small scale icons of them, worn perhaps as *enkolpia*. One such

[137] Spatharakes 2001: 133-136.

[138] Spatharakes 2001: 178-180.

[139] Spatharakes 2001: 181-184.

object was found in Çanli Kilise in Cappadocia dating, according to Ousterhout, to the late Byzantine period.[140] The reception of Helena in the empire between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries will be further assessed in the next chapter of this thesis, where it will be revealed – once more – that the way her memory was reconstructed in literature or in art was not done mechanically.

[140] The icon – found in a burial – measures approximately 13 x 9 cm, and is 0.4 cm thick. On the obverse, it represents a metropolitan saint in liturgical garb, while on the reverse, Constantine and Helena appear with the cross. Ousterhout 2005: 206-208. This is the earliest extant icon of Constantine and Helena, dating before 1453. I thank Robert Ousterhaout for bringing this icon to my attention.

6

Veneration of the sacred as part of political transitions: changing perceptions of Helena in Byzantium between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries

The fascination that the cult of Constantine and Helena exercised upon rulers, as well as upon sophisticated or simple people alike, is unquestionable. Constantine and Helena were carriers of sanctity and authority, and so their symbolism in Byzantium has a complex meaning. The analysis presented so far has shown that Constantine and Helena's juxtaposition to the relic of the true cross, on the one hand, and their imperial identity, on the other hand, have allowed their use by both members of the secular and ecclesiastical elites, whose objectives were chiefly politically driven. It has been further revealed in the foregoing chapter that the meanings accorded to Constantine and Helena were effectively transmitted beyond the borders of Constantinople, where they merged into regional congregations' devotional needs. Such needs are best defined through the worshippers' social identities – including class, status, and gender – and the local traditions about Constantine and Helena. One might speak, then, of a centrally-produced cult with idiosyncrasies in its regional implementation. The geographical distinction inevitably leads to the idea of several versions of Constantine and Helena coexisting in Byzantium: the Constantinopolitan, the Cappadocian, the Greek, the Cypriot, and the Cretan saints. In continuation of these observations, the final chapter of my thesis provides further insights into the way Helena was remembered in Byzantium under the Komnenian and Palaiologan rulers. Literary accounts referring to Helena are of particular interest in establishing a more precise understanding how

her role and image was subsequently reshaped between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries in response to sociopolitical realities.

6.1 Helena and Judaism

It was demonstrated in chapter four that, by the end of the iconoclastic controversy, selected elements of the sixth-century western *vita* of Sylvester were smoothly incorporated into Byzantine narratives of Constantine and Helena, replacing once and for all earlier traditions. One such feature was Constantine's baptism by Sylvester.[1] Byzantine authors, however, seem to have used Sylvester's *vita* critically as they avoided mentioning specific events in the conversion process of Helena. According to the twelfth-century Greek translation of the *vita* of Sylvester by John Zonaras, Helena was in Bithynia (*ἐν τῇ* Β*ιθυνίᾳ* [...] *διατριβούσῃ*) when the baptism of her son took place.[2] While there, she was approached by Jews (*'*Ι*ουδαίων προσεληλύθασι*) who were opposed to Constantine's conversion. Having reported (*ἐδήλωσεν*) to her son the protests of the Jews, Constantine ordered the assembly of a debate (*διάλεξιν*) in Rome between the Jews – whom Helena knew (*ἐγνώρισε*) – and the bishops of the Christians. Present at the debate was the emperor with his mother, and the Senate.[3] The debate of course ended with the victory of the Christian faction. The Jews (*ἐκεῖ παρόντας* *'*Ι*ουδαίους*) and a considerable number of Romans (*πλῆθος* *῾*Ρ*ωμαίων*)

[1] See Chapter 4, page 184.

[2] For a survey of the various Greek *vitae* of Sylvester, see Halkin 1957: 1628-1634. It is believed that the Greek *vitae* are translations of the original sixth-century Latin *vita* of Sylvester. Zonaras' text has a similar content as the earlier Greek versions of the *vita*. I thank Dimiter Angelov for providing me with a copy of the published text in *Roma e l' Oriente*. The most recent study on John Zonaras and his writings is the PhD thesis of Helena Kaltsogianne, «Τα αγιολογικά έργα του Ιωάννη Ζωναρά», submitted in 2008 at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. See Καλτσογιάννη 2008: 48-73, 388-412.

[3] John Zonaras, *Vita of Pope Sylvester*: ed. Anonymous 1913, 350.16.

confessed Christ (*πιστεύσαντας*) and asked to be baptised (*τοῦ θείου καταξιοῦσθαι βαπτίσματος*). Of no less interest was Helena's confession. She fell at Sylvester's feet (*τοῖς ποσὶ τοῦ ἁγίου προσέπεσε*) and asked to be initiated and baptised («*Πιστεύω, λέγουσα, τῷ Χριστῷ*», *καὶ ἀξιωθῆναι ζητοῦσατοῦ θείου βαπτίσματος*). Wishing to disseminate the Christian faith (*πλατύνας τὴν πίστιν*), Sylvester accompanied Helena to the Holy Land (*τῇ βασιλίσσῃ συναποδημήσας εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ*), and helped her (*συμπονήσας αὐτῇ*) in her search of the holy cross. More Jews were baptised after the finding of the cross.[4]

The earlier Greek versions of the *vita* of Sylvester shared the same material with Zonaras' text, but the story became popular in the historiographical accounts of Helena not until the twelfth century. The new usage of Helena's memory in the twelfth century is primarily expressed by Zonaras. His description of Helena in his world chronicle, the *Epitome Historion* (Text 17) – containing history from the creation down to the end of Alexios I Komnenos' reign in 1118 – relied significantly on his translation of the *vita* of Sylvester.

Zonaras' first reference to Helena concerns the nature of her relationship with Constantine's father. The author introduced the various versions of the story evident in earlier written sources, presenting them side by side. Zonaras related that there was a disagreement among authors and inevitably nothing could be argued with certainty (Text 17: B.2-3). Obviously, not only modern historiography but Byzantine history writers as well could not reach to any fruitful conclusion regarding Helena's relation with Constantius Chlorus. Zonaras mentioned that some of the authors argued that Constantius and Helena were legally married (Text 17: B.5), and he had to leave her in order to become Caesar and marry Theodora, while others narrated that she was not a legal spouse of Constantius, but that the

[4] John Zonaras, *Vita of Pope Sylvester*: ed. Anonymous 1913, 367.37.

two had had a love affair (Text 17: B.12) which had resulted to Constantine's birth. Helena reappears in Zonaras' narration in the passage following Constantine's baptism by Sylvester. The story relates that Jews approached the emperor's mother (Text 17: D.1-2) saying to her that Constantine was deceived to become Christian for Christ is not divine but just a human. Helena transmitted (Text 17: D.6-7) the information to her son, who called a debate among the Christian and Jewish clergy. During the debate the Jews were convinced of the divinity of Christ and converted to Christianity. At this point, Constantine's mother's conversion to Christianity is introduced. Helena, the famous mother of the emperor, was not Christian yet, but now she agreed to be baptised (Text 17: F.6-7). With respect to language, Zonaras does not really give a verbatim copy of Helena's description in his version of Sylvester's *vita*. Unlike the *vita*, the chronicle presents Helena's conversion not in relation to the Christianisation of a large part of the Roman society, but in connection to a series of conversions to Christianity among Jewish populations. Seen in this context, we wonder about Helena's relation with Judaism. Her initiation was followed by her wish to visit the Holy Land. Travelling there, she took with her Sylvester (Text 17: F.11-13). In Jerusalem, Helena worshipped at Christ's tomb, found the holy cross, and erected luxurious churches. Completing her journey she returned to her son. Reaching to a very old age, Helena died (Text 17: H.4) and was buried by Constantine in the church of the Holy Apostles.

A contemporary author of Zonaras, Michael Glykas, provides more explicit information on Helena's relation with the Jewish creed. Glykas' chronicle, the *Biblos Chronike*, covers the same time period as Zonaras, but his account of Helena is very brief, highlighting the fact that up to the day of Constantine's baptism and the debate between Sylvester and the Jews on the truthfulness of the Christian creed, the holy Helena was still

supporter of Judaism: *τῆς ἁγίας* Ἑλένης, *ἔτι τῷ* Ἰουδαίων *μέρει προσκειμένης*.[5] It becomes apparent that in Zonaras and Glykas' days it was believed – for unknown reasons – that Helena was a follower of the Jewish religion. Undoubtedly, the twelfth-century profile of Helena neglected earlier traditions about her. Moreover, Glykas did not incorporate the legend of the finding of the cross, though he seemed familiar with the work of Alexander the Monk, *On the Cross*.[6] The source appears in the section of Constantine's death along with the Arians' point of view that the emperor was baptised by Eusebios of Nikomedia. Here, Glykas argued that it is impossible that Constantine was baptised at the end of his life, because he would not have been able to participate in the Council of Nicaea if he had not been baptised already. And so the author maintained that Constantine was baptised in Rome by Sylvester.[7]

Zonaras and Glykas add an interesting twist to the material they have drawn from earlier descriptions of Helena, both historiographical and hagiological. Both authors inclined towards Constantine's saintly identity, expressing an apologetic tone in the presentation of his non-Christian past. Constantine's 'Christian idea' is stressed throughout Zonaras' narrative, especially by the use of religious language: divine (*ὁ θειότατος αὐτοκράτωρ*), very Christian (*ὁ Χριστιανικώτατος βασιλεὺς*), and emperor equal to the Apostles (*ὁ ἰσαπόστολος αὐτοκράτωρ*).[8] Zonaras related that Constantine was the first-born son of Constantius Chlorus by his first wife. On this occasion the author did not mention the name of Helena, while in the same lines he did identity Constantius' second wife Theodora. Constantine was proclaimed successor to his father's throne, because Constantius had found it impossible to rule with his other sons, and had had a vision of an angel pointing to

[5] Michael Glykas, *Biblos Chronike*: ed. *PG* 158 (1866), 468.

[6] See Chapter 4, page 176.

[7] Michael Glykas, *Biblos Chronike*: ed. *PG* 158 (1866), 472-473.

[8] John Zonaras, *Epitome Historion*: ed. *PG* 134 (1864), 49C, 1112A, 1113B, 1116C.

Constantine as his successor.[9] Constantine was the most famous of all emperors and the most notable of all Orthodox (*ὁ ἐν βασιλεῦσιν ἀοίδιμος καὶ ἐν ὀρθοδόξοις ἐπισημότατος*). However, Constantine was not pious from the beginning of his rule. When he succeeded his father, he was still a follower of the Greek religion and opponent of the Christians (*τοῖς Χριστιανοῖς ἀντικείμενος*). Influenced by his wife Fausta, he was deeply devoted to the pagan idols.[10] During his battle against Maxentius he had the vision of the cross, which helped him to win. From that moment Constantine ordered that the sign of the cross be placed on the labarum, stopped the persecution of the Christians and declared Christ as God.[11] After his victory against Licinius, Constantine was announced sole ruler and received the name Flavius. Despite the fact that he had accepted and followed Christianity, he had still not denounced the cult of the idols. However, when he was severely ill with leprosy, he had a vision of saints Peter and Paul pointing to pope Sylvester as the person that could secure to him physical and spiritual health. Eventually, Constantine was baptised by Sylvester and was immediately healed. At once, he opened the Christian churches, ordered the construction of new ones, forbade the operation of the pagan temples, and granted freedom of speech to the Christians.[12]

Following the same pattern and narrative themes as were introduced in Zonaras' account, Glykas also focused on praising Constantine. The author related that during the battle against Maxentius the sign of the cross helped Constantine to win. However, influenced by his wife Fausta, the emperor was still a follower of paganism. Nevertheless, this changed when Constantine fell severely ill and God then gave him a second call. His

[9] John Zonaras, *Epitome Historion*: ed. *PG* 134 (1864), 1092B-C.

[10] John Zonaras, *Epitome Historion*: ed. *PG* 134 (1864), 1097A-B.

[11] John Zonaras, *Epitome Historion*: ed. *PG* 134 (1864), 1097C, 1100A-B.

[12] John Zonaras, *Epitome Historion*: ed. *PG* 134 (1864), 1101B, C, D - 1104A, B.

vision of the Apostles was followed by his baptism by Sylvester and his immediate recovery. From his baptism onwards Constantine converted to Christianity and followed the Christian traditions.[13] Unsurprisingly, both Zonaras and Glykas attributed Constantine's paganism to his wife Fausta, an element not evident in earlier narratives of Constantine.

A similar description of Constantine is provided in George Kedrenos' world chronicle, the *Synopsis Historion*. A contemporary of Zonaras and Glykas, Kedrenos portrayed Constantine as great and saintly (Κ*ωνσταντῖνον τὸν μέγαν καὶ ἅγιον*); divine and Christian (*ὁ θειότατος καὶ χριστιανικώτατος βασιλεὺς*); pious (*εὐσεβεστάτου*); Christ-beloved (*φιλόχριστος βασιλεὺς*); and promoter of Christianity (*ἐπὶ τούτου τοῦ βασιλέως πολλὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν τὸν* Χ*ριστιανισμὸν προσεδέξαντο*).[14] Praise of Helena is not evident, despite the inclusion of a short passage relating her virtues (Text 18: H.6-21). The author, though not clear on the relation of Helena's with Judaism, nonetheless placed her baptism immediately after the conversion of the Jews (Text 18: D.5-9). Strikingly, Helena almost disappears in Constantine Manasses' twelfth-century verse world chronicle, the *Chronike Synopsis*. Manasses portrayed Constantine as the promoter of Christianity (*περίτρανος σάλπιξ*), whereas his only reference to Helena emphasised on the fact that she was the first wife of Constantine's father, who had to leave her in order to marry Theodora (*εἶχε δ' ὁ* Κ*ώνστας γαμετὴν* Ἑ*λένην τὴν ὀλβίαν, ἐξ ἧς ὁ μέγας νικητὴς προῆλθε* Κ*ωνσταντῖνος·* Ἀ*λλὰ γὰρ δυσωπούμενος τὸ κῆδος τοῦ τυράννου αὐτὴν ἀποβαλλόμενος μίγνυται* Θ*εοδώρᾳ*).[15] The author's detailed descriptions of the female members of other imperial houses – for example, of empresses of the Theodosian house, including Placidia, Eudoxia, Pulcheria, Eudokia – raise questions about his disinterest in Helena.[16] The

[13] Michael Glykas, *Biblos Chronike*: ed. *PG* 158 (1866), 465.

[14] George Kedrenos, *Synopsis Historion*: ed. *PG* 121 (1894), 516B, 517A, 521C, 540A, 544A.

[15] Constantine Manasses, *Chronike Synopsis*: ed. *PG* 127 (1864), 306-308.

[16] For Manasses' description of the female members of the Theodosian house, see Constantine Manasses, *Chronike Synopsis*: ed. *PG* 127 (1864), 311-322.

discussion below suggests, in broad outline, that a world of ideas and beliefs, possibly beyond Manasses' preferences, ruled out his narrative choices.

It has been argued earlier in this thesis that the textual portraits of Helena not merely echoed beliefs and concerns with which Byzantine society was preoccupied, but that the implications of such descriptions were usually politically defined. It is unclear whether the twelfth-century portraits of Helena should be interpreted in a similar way. Various suppositions rise from such an approach, but all are of weak feasibility and validity. It is impossible, for example, to discern whether Helena's Jewish profile reflected the relationship of a twelfth-century Byzantine empress with Judaism. Moreover, our knowledge of the Jewish population of Constantinople for the period under consideration is very poor. According to Benjamin of Tudela – a twelfth-century Jewish traveler who visited Constantinople – although Jews were not allowed to live in the city and were much hated by the Christians, they enjoyed considerable alleviation of their oppression through Rabbi Solomon Hamitsri, who, during the reign of Manuel I Komnenos, worked as the emperor's physician.[17] Whatever the answer, the twelfth-century intrusions in Helena's story are unlikely to be purely accidental: the trend is defined both chronologically and geographically. In other words, it is an idiosyncrasy of twelfth-century Constantinople, and it is possible that it reflected beliefs of the Komnenian court. Two of our authors can be said to have had close connections with the palace: Zonaras was a high ranking official at the court of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118), and Manasses was a court writer during the reign of Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180). The latter's writings were produced on behalf of members of the imperial family and high ranking officials. His chronicle, for example, was an imperial commission, probably by *sebastokratorissa* Eirene Komnene, wife of Andronikos I and sister-in-law of Manuel I. Such authors, then, are hardly likely to have committed to writing

[17] Benjamin of Tudela, *Itinerary*: Eng. trans. Adler 1907, 11-14.

opinions offensive to their benefactors. Their writings not only spoke for themselves, but represented information pleasing to their aristocratic audiences. Therefore, while the majority of Eirene Komnene's female imperial predecessors are described, it is suspicious that the most important of all, Helena, is almost neglected.

The same attitude towards Helena continued through into the thirteenth century. A brief description of Helena is found in the chronicle known as *Synopsis Sathas*, after its editor Constantine Sathas. The work covers the period from the creation of the world to the recapture of Constantinople in 1261.[18] Theodore Skoutariotes, ecclesiastical official and metropolitan of Kyzikos, was initially suggested as the chronicle's author, but this identification has proven problematic. Hence, the issue of the authorship of the text remains open for further research.[19] The *Synopsis Chronike* not only presented Helena as follower of Judaism, but also claimed that, having been convinced of the authority of the Jewish creed, she pushed Constantine to convert to Judaism rather than to Christianity (Text 19: D.1-5). Of course, Helena was eventually persuaded and baptised along with the rest of the Jews by Sylvester. However, while in earlier accounts, especially in Kedrenos, the converted mass – among them Constantine and Helena – is presented as praising God (Text 18: D.9-15), in the *Synopsis Chronike*, the one who is praised is Constantine, for having expanded the orthodox creed.[20] Within the same framework as the previous authors, the chronicler does not seem to emphasise on Helena's holy image, despite the inclusion of a short – and dry of any encomiastic comments – reference on her activity in Jerusalem, her role in the finding of the

[18] The most recent work on *Synopsis Chronike* is the PhD thesis of Konstantinos Zafeiris, 'The *Synopsis Chronike* and its place in the Byzantine chronicle tradition: its sources (Creation – 1081 CE)', submitted in 2007 at the University of St. Andrews. See Zafeiris 2007.

[19] For a more detailed discussion of the subject, see Tocci 2005: 551-569; Zafeiris 2011: 253-263.

[20] *Synopsis Chronike*: ed. Sathas 1894, 46.12-20; how the legend of Constantine is treated by the author of *Synopsis Chronike*, see Zafeiris 2010: 237-252. I thank Konstantinos Zafeiris for letting me read a complete draft of his work before publishing.

holy cross and relics, and her modest life. This is also stressed by the difference between the description of Constantine and Helena's deaths. Helena died (*θνήσκει*) and was buried as a common human (Text 19: F.15-18), but Constantine will continue – according to the *Synopsis Chronike* – to live in the deathless kingdom of heaven (*πρὸς τὴν ἀθάνατον μεθίσταται βασιλεί*).[21] Clearly, something was going on – especially since the Komnenians were supposed to be so pro-women.[22] It is my hope that future scholarship will explore the perspectives of this analysis in greater depth.

6.2 Helena and the salvation of the empire

Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century narratives of Helena significantly alter from the trends emerged in the Komnenian period. The early fourteenth-century *Ecclesiastical History* (Text 20) compiled by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos – an educated ecclesiastical writer, hagiographer and poet in the court of Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328) – provided a comprehensive description of Helena, incorporating all the available traditions about her memory from Eusebios of Caesarea up to his times: Helena's relationship with Constantius Chlorus, and Constantine's story of birth; Helena's approach by Jews, and her conversion by Sylvester; Helena's journey to Palestine, her pious activities, and the legend of the finding of the cross; Helena's death and burial; and the renaming of two cities in remembrance of Helena. The organisation of information in Xanthopoulos' *History* was not done unconsciously. Taking into consideration that the work was dedicated to emperor Andronikos II, it is hardly likely that Helena's treatment was not adjusted to the standards of the imperial court.

[21] *Synopsis Chronike*: ed. Sathas 1894, 53.22.

[22] Angold 1995: 426-440; Hill 1999.

The positive reception of Helena is further enhanced in subsequent generations of Palaiologan rulers. For example, during the reigns of John V Palaiologos (1341-1391) and Manuel II Palaiologos (1391-1425) coins were struck with representations of Helena and her son on the obverse.[23] The hagiographical descriptions of Constantine and Helena by John Chortasmenos, a literate clergyman, who had addressed some of his works to emperor Manuel II, are indicative of the significance that late Byzantine society accorded to them: in the face of strong external enemies (Text 21: H.1), Helena and her son, the God-crowned and equal to the Apostles emperors (Text 21: H.25-27), were praised as symbols of salvation of the empire and of the Christian faith (Text 21: H.2-6).

While comparisons of Constantine with religious Christian models, such as David, Moses, Solomon, and Apostle Paul, are not uncommon in earlier sources, similar attributes for Helena are exceptional in Chortasmenos' text. No other Byzantine source seen so far has compared Helena with Anna, mother of Prophet Samuel, or with Elisabeth, mother of John the Baptist. It appears that in late Byzantine perception, Christianity triumphed through Helena's motherhood. Helena's new role seems to have encouraged the development of new elements in her religious iconography. Such examples are only extant on Venetian Crete, whose spirited communion with Byzantine authority continued. Helena is the dominant figure in two of the four scenes from the early fourteenth-century cycle of Constantine in the village of Pyrgos, already mentioned in the foregoing chapter. In the first scene Helena is presented giving birth to Constantine – who is inscribed as the King of the Christians (*Κ[ωνσταντίνος] Β[ασιλεύς] Χ[ριστιανών]*). The hand of God at the centre of the scene eulogises Constantine's birth. In the second scene the child Constantine is shown

[23] See Chapter 5, page 228.

accompanied by his mother to the court of Constantius Chlorus.[24] The date of the scenes in 1314-1315 confirms the observation made in the introduction of this section: the reign of Andronikos II seems to have been a turning point in the veneration of Helena in late Byzantium. Chortasmenos' text was, then, reproducing already established beliefs about Helena and her son, rather than inventing new ones. The supreme function of Constantine and Helena as symbols of salvation expressed in Chortasmenos' narrative, is also encapsulated in the Pyrgos paintings. Constantine and Helena's divinely appointed mission and intermediary role is communicated in the fourth scene of the cycle, where Christ is depicted blessing Constantine and Helena, who stand at his left and right (subservient) side respectively. The saints hold their hands in front of their chest as a gesture of piety. At the feet of Constantine stand the figures of three small men who represent the defeated enemies of Christianity.[25] Thus, events of the late Byzantine period created a situation in which Byzantines looked to Helena and her son as protectors.

6.3 Textual Sources

TEXT 17: John Zonaras (first half of 12th century)[26]

A		B	
1	**1097A** He (Constantine) was born to his father from the blessed Helena, about whom the writers disagree and are	*῾Ὃς ἐκ τῆς μακαρίας ῾Ελένης γεγένητο τῷ παρὶ, περὶ ἧς διαφωνοῦσιν οἱ συγγραφεῖς, καὶ παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς τὰ περὶ ταύτης οὐχ ὡμολόγηται. Οἱ μέν γὰρ τῷ*	ι

[24] See Chapter 5, page 268; a description of the scenes is provided in Greek by Maria Vasilaki, see Βασιλάκη 1987: 65-67.

[25] Βασιλάκη 1987: 72.

[26] John Zonaras, *Epitome Historion*: ed. *PG* 134 (1864), 1097-1117; Eng. trans. Banchich and Lane 2009, 148-157.

discordant and among them there is no consensus as regards her. For some say that she dwelt with Constantius by ordinance of marriage, but was sent away when Maximianus Herculius, as has previously been said, betrothed to him his daughter Theodora and appointed him Caesar. Others have recorded that she was not Constantus' legitimate spouse, but a diversion of his erotic desires, and that it was actually from that that Constantine was conceived.

Κωνσταντίῳ <u>νόμῳ γάμου</u> φασὶν αὐτὴν συνοικεῖν, ἀποπεμφθῆναι δέ, τοῦ Μαξιμιανοῦ Ἑρκουλίου, ὡς ἔμπροσθεν εἴρηται, τὴν οἰκείαν παῖδα τὴν Θεοδώραν τούτῳ κατεγγυήσαντος, καὶ ἀναδείξαντος Καίσαρα. Οἱ δὲ οὐ γαμετὴν νόμιμον αὐτὴν γενέσθαι τοῦ Κωνσταντίου ἱστόρησαν, ἀλλὰ <u>πάρεργον ἐρωτικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν</u>, καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνου τοῦτον δὴ συλλαβέσθαι τὸν μέγαν Κωνσταντῖνον.

C

1 **1104B-C** Then Jews approached the sovereign's mother, saying that the sovereign had been deceived and had confused a deed hateful to God with a deed dear to God […] The abominable ones disparaged Jesus as a human criminal and a wizard. His mother reported these things to her sovereign and son.

D

<u>Προσίασιν οὖν τῇ τοῦ βασιλέως μητρὶ Ἰουδαῖοι</u>, ἠπατῆσθαι λέγοντες τὸν βασιλέα, καὶ ἔργῳ θεοφιλεῖ ἔργον ἀναμίξαι θεομισές […] τὸν Ἰησοῦν δέ ἄνθρωπον οἱ ἀλιτήριοι κακοῦργον ἀπεκάλουν καὶ γόητα. <u>Ἀναφέρει ταῦτα ἡ μήτηρ τῷ βασιλεῖ καὶ υἱῷ.</u>

E

1105B And the Jews, dumbstruck by the marvel, fell at the holy man's feet and implored that God be gracious to them and judge them worthy of divine baptism. The sovereign's mother, too, being uninitiated, asked to be initiated and baptised. So then, when she had gained her request and recognised the true God, she desired to look upon the places which Christ's beautiful feet had travelled as he preached the gospel of peace. She took with her the marvelous Sylvester and arrived in Jerusalem, and she venerated the Lord's tomb, discovered the divine cross to which our God was bodily affixed, and, after she had built many lavish places of worship, returned to her son and sovereign.

F

Οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι δὲ καταπλαγέντες τῷ θαύματι τοῖς ποσὶ τοῦ ἁγίου προσέπιπτον καὶ ἱκέτευον ἱλεώσασθαι αὐτοῖς τὸν Θεὸν, καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ σφᾶς ἀξιῶσαι βαπτίσματος· καὶ ἡ ἀοίδιμος δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως μήτηρ ἀμύητος οὖσα ἠξίου μυηθῆναι καὶ βαπτισθῆναι· τυχοῦσα τοίνυντοῦ ἐφετοῦ, καὶ τὸν ἀληθῆ ἐπιγνοῦσα Θεὸν, τοὺς τόπους οὓς οἱ ὡραῖοι πόδες Χριστοῦ, ὡς εἰρήνην εὐαγγελισαμένου, διώδευσαν, θεάσασθαι ἐπεθύμησε. Καὶ συμπαραλαβοῦσα τὸν θεσπέσιον Σίλβεστρον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα παραγέγονε· καὶ τὸ τοῦ Κυρίου προσκυνήσασα μνῆμα καὶ τὸν θεῖον ὑρηκυῖα σταυρὸν ἐν ᾧ προσεπάγη σωματικῶς ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, ναούς τε δομησαμένη πολυτελεῖς, πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν καὶ βασιλέα ἐπανελήλυθεν.

G

1116D When the sovereign's mother, the blessed Helena, had reached a very

H

Ἡ δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως μήτηρ ἡ μακαρία Ἑλένη εἰς γῆρας βαθὺ καταντήσασα (ὀγδοήκοντα γὰρ λέγεται ζῆσαι ἐνιαυτοὺς)

old age (for it is said that she lived eighty years), she, whom her son regally interred at the church of the Holy Apostles, departed for the celestial abodes.[27]

πρὸς τὰς οὐρανίους ἀπῆρε μονὰς, ἣν ὁ υἱὸς ἐν τῷ τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων ναῷ βασιλικῶς ἐθησαύρισεν.

TEXT 18: George Kedrenos (12th century)[28]

A

1 **516B** Helena, Constantius first wife bore his son, saint Constantine the great, in Dacia.

Ὃς ἐγέννησεν ἐξ Ἑλένης τῆς πρώτης αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν μέγαν καὶ ἅγιον, περὶ τὴν τῆς Δακίας πόλιν.

B

1

C

1 **540A** The Jews, struck with surprise by the great miracle, at once embraced saint Sylvester's feet requesting to receive the holy baptism. The blessed empress Helena embraced saint Sylvester's feet as well, begging him to give her forgiveness. And this was done. The Christ-beloved emperor and the blessed Augusta along with the rest of the people were all in such a great

Ὅπερ μέγα θαῦμα Ἰουδαῖοι θεασάμενοι καὶ σφόδρα καταπλαγέντες αὐτικα προσέπεσον εἰς τοὺς πόδας τοῦ ἁγίου Σιλβέστρου πάντες, αἰτούμενοι τὸ ἅγιον βάπτισμα. Ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ μακαριωτάτη βασίλισσα Ἑλένη προσπεσοῦσα τοῖς ποσὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Σιλβέστρου παρεκαλεῖτο τόπον αὐτῇ μετανοίας παρασχεθῆναι. Καὶ τούτου γενομένου ἐχάρη μεγάλως ὅ τε φιλόχριστος βασιλεὺς καὶ ἡ μακαριωτάτη Αὐγοῦστα καὶ πᾶν τὸ

D

1

[27] Banchich and Lane omitted to translate that Helena was entombed 'at the church of the Holy Apostles'.

[28] George Kedrenos, *Synopsis Historion*: ed. *PG* 121 (1894), 516-565; my translation.

joy that for two hours they praised the God, ‘Great is the God of the Christians’.

πλῆθος τοῦ λαοῦ, ὥστε ἐπὶ, ὥρας δύο κράζειν ἅπαντας· Μέγας ὁ Θεὸς τῶν Χριστιανῶν.

E F

1 **541C** The mother of the emperor, Helena, motivated by a vision, travelled to Jerusalem, where she revealed the Holy Lands, found the holy cross, and
5 erected luxurious churches.

Καὶ Ἑλένη ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ βασιλέως στεφθεῖσα δι᾽ ὀπτασίας εἰς τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα ἀπέρχεται, καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους τόπους φανερώσασα καὶ τὸν τίμιον σταυρὸν εὑροῦσα πάντα ἀνέστησε, καὶ ναοὺς οἰκοδομήσασα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιφανῶς τούτους ἐκαλλώπισεν.

G H

1 **544D** Returning from Jerusalem, the blessed Helena gave instructions to her son and emperor on the Christian faith. Then she died in the age of eighty. She
5 was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles. She was distinguished by her virtues and her humility, in the pattern of Christ’s instructions, especially towards the monastic orders which she
10 treated with modesty and affinity; for she invited to lunch the virgins consecrated to God, and, as a humble

Ἡ δέ μακαρία Ἑλένη ἐξ Ἱεροσολύμων ἐπανελθοῦσα, καὶ πολλὰ τῷ υἱῷ αὐτῆς καὶ βασιλεῖ περὶ τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως ἐντειλαμένη, ἐτελεύτησενέτων π΄ καὶ ἐτά φη ἐν τῷ ναῷ τῶν ᾽Αγίων ᾽Αποστόλων. Πάσαις τοίνυν ἡ μακαρία ἀρεταῖς κεκοσμημένη εἶχε καὶ τὴν χριστομίμητον ταπεινοφροσύνην πρὸς πάντας μέν, ἐξαιρέτως δέ πρὸς τοὺς μονάζοντας. Συνάγουσα γὰρ παρθένους καὶ ἐπὶ στιβάδων κατακλίνουσα αὐτὴ δι᾽ ἑαυτῆς καθυπούργει, ὄψα παρατιθεῖσα καὶ κύλικας ὀρέγουσα καὶ ὕδωρ ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν ἐπιχέουσα, θεραπαίνης ἔργον ἐπλήρου. Οὕτω δέ καὶ τὸν ἀείμνηστον υἱὸν αὐτῆς ἐξεπαίδευσεν ἄτυφον ἔχειν φρόνημα,

servant, she set out the food with her own hands, offered the cup, and poured water over their hands, every service that servants are obligated to provide. She taught her most venerable son to be modest, to govern his citizens with virtue, and to serve the Lord with fear and awe. Following her instructions, he much prospered.

ἀρετῆς καὶ πολιτείας ἀκριβοῦς ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, δουλεύειν δέ τῷ Κυρίῳ μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου· ὅς φυλάττων ἀκριβῶς τὰς αὐτῆς ἐντολὰς ἐκαρποφόρει ἑκατονταπλασίως.

TEXT 19: *Synopsis Chronike* (second half of 13th century)[29]

A

1 **41.22** The successor of Constantius' reign was Constantine, who was borne by his first wife Helena.

B

1 Κώνστας [...] *θνήσκει, τὸν ἐξ Ἑλένης τῆς προτέρας αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς* Κωνσαντῖνον *βασιλέα καταστησάμενος.*

C

1 **46.12** The holy Helena and mother of the emperor, being with her son, was pushing him to convert to the Jewish creed; she was convinced by the 5 teaching of Judaism by some Jews. Sorcerers were using their craft to refute

D

1 *Ἡ δὲ ἁγία Ἑλένη καὶ μήτηρ τοῦ βασιλέως, συνοῦσα τῷ υἱῷ, κατηνάγκαζε τοῦτον τῇ Ἰουδαϊκῇ μᾶλλον προσελθεῖν πίστει, ὑπό τινων Ἑβραίων τὸν νόμον αὐτὴν ἀκριβῶς διδασκόντων πεισθεῖσα·* 5 *ἀλλὰ καὶ μάγοι τινὲς ἐξαίσια τέραταποιοῦντες ἀντέκειντο τῷ Σιλβέστρῳ, οὓς πάντας μετὰ τῆς*

[29] *Synopsis Chronike*: ed. Sathas 1894, 40.27-53.23; my translation.

saint Sylvester's arguments. However, Sylvester, having by his side the Holy Spirit, persuaded them and the blessed Helena to convert to Christianity; and so they were baptised. The Christian faith was expanded and the crowd was praising the emperor, because he was the reason behind all these events.

μακαρίας Ἑλένης θαύμασιν αὐτὸς καὶ δυνάμει Πνεύματος πείσας πρὸς τὴν εἰς Χριστὸν πίστιν μετήνεγκε, καὶ οὕτως ἐβαπτίσθησαν· καὶ ἡ ὀρθόδοξος ηὐξάνετο πίστις καὶ πάντες τὸν βασιλέα εὐφήμουν, τοιούτων καλῶν αἴτιον αὐτοῖς γεγονότα.

E F

1 **52.17** His blessed mother Helena was sent to Jerusalem with imperial authority in order to search for the Lord's holy cross. Helped by God she found the cross and the holy nails as well. While she was there, she gave money to the poor, and erected churches magnificent in beauty and size. Part of the holy cross and the nails she brought to her son and emperor, and the rest of it she enclosed in silver case and gave it to the bishop of Jerusalem Makarios. Having lived a pious, merciful and decent life, she died at the age of eighty.

Ἑλένην δὲ τὴν μακαρίαν ἑαυτοῦ μητέρα βασιλικῷ κοσμήσας διαδήματι, πρὸς τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα πέμπει εἰς ἀναζήτησιν τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ τοῦ Κυρίου, ὃν καὶ εὗρε, χάριτι τοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ προσπαγέντος Χριστοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ τοὺς ἥλους οἷς προσηλώθη· ἥτις πολλὰ τοῖς ἐκεῖσε πένησι διένειμε χρήματα, καὶ ναοὺς κάλλει καὶ μεγέθει περιφανεῖς ἀνήγειρε· καὶ μέρος λαβοῦσα τοῦ ζωοποιοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τοὺς ἥλους, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν ἅπαν ἀσφαλισαμένη ἐν ὁλοαργύρῳ θήκῃ καὶ παραθεῖσα Μακαρίῳ τῷ ἐκεῖσε πατριάρχῃ, χαίρουσα πρὸς τὸν υἱὸν καὶ βασιλέα ὑπέστρεψεν· ἥτις καὶ εὐσεβῶς ζήσασα, καὶ ἐλεημοσύναις καὶ εὐποιΐαις τὸν βίον ἑαυτῆς λαμπρύνασα, θνήσκει, ἐτῶν οὖσα ὀγδοήκοντα· καὶ ἐν τῷ ναῷ τῶν

15 She was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles by her son the emperor.

ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων θάπτεται παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς. 20

TEXT 20: Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (c.1256 - c.1335)[30]

A B

1 **1241C** The already mentioned Constantius Chlorus had also another child, Constantine, borne by the blessed Helena. Constantius, neglecting his 5 legitimate sons from Theodora, appointed Constantine as his successor for the prosperity of Christianity. The events of the great Constantine's birth are as follow […] During the night, 10 Constantius arrived in a town called Drepanum, where he decided to camp […] Here, Constantius had an erotic urge. The owner of the inn, in which Conastantius happened to stay, 15 informed of Constantius' need, sent his daughter to his bodyguards with the hope to take her. After sleeping with her, he rewarded her with a purple

Ὁ δὲ εἰρημένος Κώνστας ὁ Χλωρὸς καὶ 1
ἕτερον παῖδα ἐκ τῆς μακαρίας Ἑλένης τὸν Κωνσταντῖνον γεννᾷ· ᾧ καὶ τὸ κράτος τῆς ἀρχῆς παρῆκεν, ὡς τὰ Χριστιανῶν καλῶς ἐλομένῳ, παρωσάμενος τοὺς ἐκ τῶν 5
γνησίων σπερμάτων τῆς Θεοδώρας γεγενημένουςαὐτῷ. Ὅ γε μὴν τρόπος τῆς τοῦ μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου γεννήσεως οὗτος ἦν […] Ἐπεὶ δὲ τὴν ἑσπέραν διελθὼν 10
πρὸς τὴν ἕω ἐχώρει, καὶ περὶ τὸν, ὃς καλεῖται Δρέπανον τόπος, ἐπήγνυτο τὴν σκηνήν […] ἐνταῦθ' ὁ Κώνστας γενόμενος εἰς ἔρωτα συνουσίας ἦκεν.'Επεὶ οὖν τὸν λόγον ὁ ξεναγὸς διέγνω, ἐφ' οὗ καταλύων ὁ 15
Κώνστας ἐτύγχανεν, ὑποβάλλει αὐτῷ τὸ θυγάτριον, τὴν περὶ αὐτὸν βασιλικὴν δορυφορίαν ἰδὼν, ὥραν ἤδη γάμου ἔχον, καὶ ἀκμαῖον μάλα τὸ εἶδος προβεβλημένον. Ὡς δ' ἐκείνῳ τὰ τοῦ γάμου τετέλεστο, 20
μισθὸν τῆς συνουσίας, ἔπιπλόν τι ποικίλον πορφύρᾳ διειλημμένον τῇ γυναικὶ ἐχαρίζετο. Παράδοξον δέ τι κατὰ τὴν

[30] Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, *Church History*: ed. *PG* 145 (1865), 1241-1324 and *PG* 147 (1865), 109-222; my translation.

cloak. During that night Constantius witnessed something strange, which made him feel awe. He requested her father to keep her undefiled and unblemished as a very great treasure; her offspring as well […] And as time went on, again it became necessary to send a delegation to the Persians and it happened that those ambassadors camped in Drepanum, where the daughter of the commander of the group of mercenaries, Helena, had borne the son of Constantius, Constantine […] The boy's mother made it clear to them that the child was Constantius' son, showing to them the purple cloak […] When the ambassadors related the events to Constantius, after a year, he sent an imperial delegation to fetch the child and his mother in Rome. Constantius, fearing that Helena and her child might be murdered out of jealousy by his legitimate wife Theodora, sent Constantine to spend some time in the

νύκτα ἐκείνην τῷ Κώνστᾳ συνέβη ὁρᾶν, ὅ καὶ εἰς δέος εἰσῆγε· καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα παραφυλάττειν ἄχραντον, ὡς κειμήλιόν τι φέρουσαν, τῷ ταύτης παρηγγύα πατρὶ, καὶ τὸ ἐκ ταύτης τεχθὲν ἀσφαλῶς φυλάττειν […] *Ὡς δὲ χρόνῳ προήκοντι πρεσβεία πάλιν ἐπὶ Πάρθους ἐστέλλετο, ἐπὶ τὸ Δρέπανον οἱ πρέσβεις αὖθις διανεπαύοντο. Ὁ δὲ τῷ Κώνσταντι γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τῆς τοῦ ξεναγοῦ θυγατρὸς Ἑλένης παῖς Κωνσταντῖνος* […] *ἡ δὲ μήτηρ ὡς εἴη παῖς Κώνσταντος διεσάφει, παρεδείκνυ τε τὸ πέπλον, πορφύρᾳ διεσκευασμένον, ἐξάγουσα* […] *Ὡς δ' ἔγνω Κώνστας ἕκαστα διηγουμένων τῶν πρέσβεων, χρόνῳ ὕστερον βασιλικῇ δορυφορίᾳ τόν τε παῖδα σὺν τῇ μητρὶ ἐς Ῥώμην ἀνῆγε. Δεδοικώς γε μὴν μή τι ἐκ ζηλοτυπίας τῆς ἐκ νόμων γυναικὸς Θεοδώρας ἄτοπόν τι τῇ Ἑλένῃ καὶ τῷ παιδὶ ἐπιγένηται, τὸν μὲν Κωνσταντῖνον ἐς Διοκλητιανὸν κατὰ τὴν Νικομήδειαν διατρίβοντα σύναμα τῷ γαμβρῷ τῷ Γαλλερίῳ Μαξιμίνῳ ἀνέπεμπεν.*

court of Diocletian in Nikomedia with his son-in-law Gallerius Maximianus.

C

1289B While Helena, the emperor's mother, was in the region of Bithynia, she was approached by Jews who were aware of the emperor's conversion. They convinced her to write and explain to her son that it was good that he abandoned the pagan cult, but not good at all that he accepted the belief of the Nazorine. Helena did so. Constantine, receiving his mother's letter, made a fair proposition: he requested Jews to participate in a dialogue with Christian priests […] Present were the emperor and the empress Helena, who were listening with caution […] When the miracle was completed, the blessed Helena was convinced and adopted her son's belief; with piety she embraced Sylvester's feet and her baptism was completed. The mother of Constantine,

D

Τῆς δὲ τοῦ βασιλέως μητρὸς Ἑλένης κατὰ τὴν Βιθυνῶν ἐπαρχίαν διατριβούσης, Ἑβραῖοι τὸ τῆς μεταβολῆς ἀθρόον τοῦ βασιλέως ὑπολογισάμενοι, ἀναπείθουσι τὴν μητέρα γράφειν καὶ παρεγγυᾶν τῷ υἱῷ, καλὸν μὲν πρᾶξαι τῆς εἰδωλικῆς ἀποσπάντι θρησκείας· οὐ καλὸν μέντοι ποιῆται τῇ νεοπαγεῖ τοῦ Ναζωραίου θρησκείᾳ περιελθεῖν. Καὶ ἡ μὲν ἐποίει τὰ εἰσηγούμενα· Κωνσταντῖνος δὲ τὰ τῆς μητρὸς δεχόμενος γράμματα, τὸ εἰκὸς ὑπετίθει· καὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων τινὰς μετεστέλλετο, ὥστε τοῖς Χριστιανῶν πρεσβυτέροις εἰς λόγους ἐλθεῖν […] Παρῆν δὲ καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἡ βασιλὶς Ἑλένη, ἑκατέρων μετὰ συνέσεως ἀκροώμενοι […] Τοῦτο γενόμενον, καὶ τὴν μακαρίαν Ἑλένην ἔπειθε, κρείττονά τινα περὶ τῷ υἱῷ οἴεσθαι. Ὅθεν καὶ τὸ πάτριον καὶ αὐτὴ σέβας ἀποθεμένη, Σιλβέστρῳ προσέπιπτε· καὶ ἐτελεῖτο τὰ μυστικά· καὶ μήτηρ εἶναι τοῦ τοσούτου τὴν ἀρετὴν ἄριστα ἔφαινεν, ἐπίσης ἐκείνῳ καὶ τὸν ζῆλον καὶ τὴν πρὸς Χριστὸν πίστιν διακειμένη.

who was so much distinguished by her virtues, also shared her son's zeal and devotion to Christ.

E F

1 **109A** The letters of the emperor (to the bishops of Caesarea, Jerusalem and Palestine) delivered the mother of the emperor, the blessed Helena. The year
5 of the council she had a vision. She visited Jerusalem without considering the journey's sufferings and the pains of the old age – for this was only slightly before her death. She was piously
10 devoted to Christianity. She wanted more than anything to find the holy cross and the life-giving sepulchre of Christ. Despite difficulties she did find them. Some others have claimed [she
15 found the cross] with the help of a Jew who pointed out the place according to the instructions in a Jewish text. But the truth is, as I personally know it, that the place was revealed by divine signs and

Διάκονος δὲ τῶν τοῦ βασιλέως 1
γραμμάτων ἡ τὸν τοσοῦτον τεκοῦσα τοῦ βασιλέως μήτηρ, ἡ μακαρία Ἑλένη, ἐγένετο. Τῷ γὰρ αὐτῷ τῆς συνόδου ἔτει κατ' ὄναρ χρηματισθεῖσα, εὐχῆς χάριν καὶ 5
ἱστορίας κατέλαβε τά Ἱεροσόλυμα, οὔτε τὸν τῆς ὁδοῦ κόπον, οὔτε μὴν τὰ τοῦ γήρως ὑπολογισαμένη. Περὶ γὰρ τὸ τέρμα τῆς αὐτῆς ἀφίκετο βιοτῆς. Λίαν δὲ καὶ αὕτη περὶ τὸ Χριστιανῶν εὐλαβῶς διέκειτο 10
σέβας. Περὶ πλείστου δ' ἦν αὐτῇ τὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ ξύλον εὑρεῖν, καὶ τὸ ζωηφόρον μνῆμα Χριστοῦ. Καὶ δυσχερῶς μὲν, εὑρίσκει δ' οὖν ὅμως, ὡς μέν τινες ἔφασαν, ἀνδρὸς Ἑβραίου καταμηνύσαντος τὸν 15
χῶρον ἔκ τινος πατρώας γραφῆς· τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς, ὡς ἐγῷμαι, Θεοῦ σημείοις δή τισι καὶ ὀνείρασιν ὑποδείξαντος [...] *Κατὰ γὰρ τὴν τοῦ κρατοῦντος πρόσπαξιν, τοῦ ἐναγοῦς ἐκείνου καθαιρεμένου ναοῦ, καὶ τοῦ* 20
χώματος ἐκφορουμένου, ἔνθεν μὲν τὸ ἱερὸν τῆς Ἀναστάσεως ἐκεῖνο ἄντρον ἐφαίνετο, τρεῖς δ' ἐν μέρει σταυροὶ χύδην διερριμμένοι, καὶ σανὶς ἑτέρα λευκὴ, ἧ

visions […] Following His guidance, after the demolition of the temple, and the excavation of the place, there were found in the cave of Resurrection the pieces of three crosses, and a white plate bearing 'King of Jews' written in various languages, which Pilate had placed on Christ's head so to present him as king of the Jews. The disposition of the plate and crosses made it clear that the identification of the holy cross was going to be hard […] The mother of the emperor, full of heart, prayed to God, who pointed out the holy cross in the following way […] There was a woman, severely ill and very close to death, whom Makarios visited along with Helena. God gave his sign to them: the one of the three crosses that will heal the nearly dead woman, this will be Christ's cross. Hoping for this, Makarios began to place on her the crosses […] It is said that after this miracle, more dead people were

βασιλέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων γράφων διαφόροις γράμμασιν ὁ Πιλᾶτος ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς ἐτίθει, ἐν εἴδει στήλης βασιλέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων τὸν σταυρωθέντα κηρύττων. Καὶ γε διερρυηκότος τοῦ γράμματος, καὶ τῆς σανίδος ὡς ἔτυχεν ἐῤῥιμμένης, ἐργώδης ἔτι ἡ τοῦ θείου ξύλου εὕρεσις κατεφαίνετο, καὶ τῶν σταυρῶν διεσπαρμένων συγχυθείσης τῆς τάξεως […] Ἀμφηρίστου δὲ τῆς ζητήσεως οὔσης, ἐν ἀθυμίαις ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως ἦν μήτηρ, καὶ καταμηνύειν ἐδεῖτο Θεοῦ· καὶ ἔλυέ γε τρόπῳ τοιῷδε […] Γυνὴ γάρ τις τῶν εὖ γεγονότων, χαλεπῷ πάθει κατισχομένη, τὰ ἔσχατα κάμνουσα ἦν, ἐφ' ᾗ Μακάριος σύναμα Ἑλένῃ καὶ τοῖς ἀμφ' αὐτὸν ἦκε· σύμβολόν τε ἐδίδου, ὅς ἂν ἐπιτεθεὶς τῶν σταυρῶν τὴν κάμνουσαν ἀπαλλάττειν ἀθρόον ἔχοι, τοῦτον εἶναι τὸν τοῦ Κυρίου σταυρόν. Καὶ δὴ εὐχόμενος, κατὰ ἕνα τῶν σταυρῶν προσῆγεν ἀρξάμενος […] Λέγεται δ' ἔπειτα καὶ νεκρῷ παντάπασιν ἐπιτεθέντα τὸν θεῖον σταυρὸν ἀναβιῶναι ἐκ τοῦ αὐτίκα. Καὶ τοῦτον μὲν τὸν τρόπον τὸ θεσπέσιον ἐμφανὲς γεγενῆσθαι ξύλον ἱστόρηται. Οὗ μέρος τὸ πλεῖστον ἡ θεία Ἑλένη ἀργυρᾷ περικλείσασα θήκῃ, τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ εἰς μνήμην ταῖς εἰσέπειτα κατελίμπανε γενεαῖς· οὗ κατ' ἔτος καὶ τὴν θείαν Ὕψωσιν ἐθέσπιζεν ἐκτελεῖν· μέρος δὲ τῷ παιδὶ καὶ βασιλεῖ διεκόμιζεν.

immediately resurrected when the holy wood was placed on them. By this way it is related that the divine cross was found. Part of it the holy Helena placed it in a silver case and gave to the bishop for commemoration of the event by forthcoming generations, and ordered the celebration of its holy Elevation once per year. Part of the cross she sent to her son and emperor. As it is told, when he received he treasured it as holy relic for the protection of the city […] She also sent to him the holy nails, which had been found by the tomb […] He used some of them to make a helmet for himself, and the rest he enclosed in his horse's bridle, so that he would be undefeated in battles […]

Ὃ πῶς ἂν τις εἴποι ἐκεῖνος δεξάμενος, συνελογίζετο πίστει τὴν πόλιν ἐκείνην σώζεσθαι, ᾗ ἂν τὸ τοσοῦτον διατηροῖτο κειμήλιον […] *Ἐπεμπέ γε μὴν καὶ τῶν θείων ἥλων τινὰς οὓς εὗρον τηνικαῦτα περὶ τὸ μνῆμα* […] *Ἐξ ὧν λόγος περικεφαλαίαν τε ἑαυτῷ κατασκευάσαι, καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ χαλινῷ δὲ τοῦ ἵππου θάτερον ἐμβαλεῖν, ὡς ἂν ἐν μάχαις ἄτρωτος διαμένοιεν* […]

G

1 **112D-117B** The empress Helena erected in the place of Resurrection and Golgotha a luxurious church, not lucking in beauty and size, and named it

H

Ἡ δὲ βασιλὶς Ἑλένη, πολυτελῆ τὸν οἶκο ἐν τῷ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως μνήματι καὶ τοῦ Κρανίου δειμαμένη, ὡς μηδενὸς λείπεσθαι τῶν, ὅσα εἰς κάλλος ἥκει καὶ μέγεθος, νέαν Ἱερουσαλὴμ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν 1 5

New Jerusalem […] She also founded two other magnificent churches; the one in Bethlehem, by the cave where Christ was born; the other one on the Mount of Olives where Christ saw his disciples before his elevation […] In the town of Gesthimanen she erected a church to the Mother of God […] In Bithynia she founded a church by the side of Lazaros' tomb […] Approaching the Jordan river, she erected a church by the cave where John the Baptist lived […] Moving to the east she arrived in Nazareth. Finding the house where the Mother of God was visited by the Archangel, she erected a church dedicated to her […] The God-beloved empress Helena erected many other churches, around thirty in number, and then she returned to her beloved son […]

ὠνόμασεν [...] *Οἴκοθεν δὲ αὕτη καὶ ἄλλας δύο ἐκκλησίας μεγαλοπρεπῶς ἀνιστᾷ· τὴν μὲν ἐπὶ Βηθλεὲμ ἀμφὶ τὸ τῆς Χριστοῦ γεννήσεως σπήλαιον* [...] *Ὑπερφυῆ δέ τινα ἕτερον ἐν τῷ χωρίῳ Γεθσιμανῆ νεὼν τῇ Θεοτόκῳ ἐγείρει* [...] *Ἐκεῖθεν εἰς Βηθάνιαν ἰοῦσα, Λαζάρῳ τῷ φίλῳ Χριστοῦ νεὼν περὶ τὸν τάφον περιφανῶς ἀνιστᾷ* [...] *Ἐπειτα τῷ θείῳ Ἰορδάνῃ προσβάλλει· καὶ ἀμφὶ τῷ σπηλαίῳ ᾧ πάλαι τὴν κατοίκησιν εἶχεν ὁ Βαπτιστὴς, οἶκον αὐτῷ περικαλλῆ ἀνεγείρει* [...] *Ἐκεῖθεν δὲ πρὸς ἀνατολὰς κατιοῦσα, εἰς Ναζαρὲτ γίνεται. Καὶ τὸν τοῦ χαιρετισμοῦ οἶκον εὑροῦσα, ναὸν χαρίεντα τῇ Θεοτόκῳ ἀνίστα* [...] *Πολλὰς δὲ καὶ ἄλλας ἐκκλησίας τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐκείνοις τόποις κατασκευάσασα, οὔσας ὑπὲρ τριάκοντα, ἡ θεοφιλὴς βασιλὶς Ἑλένη, πρὸς τὸν φίλον ταύτης υἱὸν ἐπανέστρεψε* [...]

I

1 **117C-120C** Her pious and God-beloved

J

1 *Ταύτης πολλὰ μὲν καὶ ἄλλα μαρτυρεῖ τὸ εὐλαβὲς καὶ φιλόθεον· οὐχ ἧττον δὲ*

life is evidenced by many other deeds, which I wish to present. It is said that in Jerusalem she assembled all the virgins consecrated to God, and she herself fulfilled the duties of a servant; she set out the food, handed the cups and poured out wine, and poured out water to wash their hands. She bestowed to the churches of the east many gifts and donations. She supported the poor, and those who had suffered during the persecutions. She granted freedom to the prisoners. With virtues and devotion to God she reached an old age. She received many honours during her life: she was crowned Augusta, gold coins with her image were circulated, and she was granted with imperial power to have access to the state's financial revenues. Since death is inevitable, she died in Rome in the age of eighty, leaving as a legacy to her son the virtues of a pious life. She received honours after her death as well, equivalent of her

παραστήσει καὶ ὅ μέλλω ἐρεῖν. Λέγεται γὰρ τὰς ἐν Ἰεροσολύμοις ἱερὰς παρθένους πρὸς ἑστίασιν μεταστειλαμένην, θεραπαινίδος ἐκπληρῶσαι τάξιν αὐταῖς. Αὐτὴ γὰρ τὰ ὄψα ταῖς οἰκείαις παρετίθει χερσίν· ὕδωρ τε προσῆγε καὶ χέρνιβα καὶ ἄλλ' ἄττα διακονουμένη, οἷς τοὺς διαιτυμόνας εἰωθὸς θεραπεύειν. Δῶρα δὲ πλεῖστα καὶ πολυτελῆ ἀναθήματα ταῖς ἀνὰ τὴν ἕω ἐκκλησίαις ἐδίδου. Ἐνδεέσι τε τὰ ἐπιτήδεια ἐχορήγει ἀφθόνως. Πολλούς τε εἰς τὴν προτέραν ἐπανῆγεν ὄξιν καιρῶν δυσκολίαις ἀνατραπέντας· δεσμῶν τε χρονίων λύσιν ἐπῆγε, μετάλλων τε ἠλευθέρου· καὶ τὴν ὑπερόριον ἀνεκαλεῖτο φυγήν. Ὧν χάριν καὶ ἄξιά γε πρὸς Θεοῦ εἰληφέναι τὰ γέρα· καὶ γὰρ τὸ μὲν παρὸν, ὡς οὐκ ἄν τίς ᾠήθη, κάλλιον διαγέγονε· σεβαστή τε ἀνακηρυχθεῖσα, καὶ χρυσοῦν νόμισμα εἰς μόρφωμα ἴδιον κόψασα, θησαυρῶν τε βασιλικῶν ἐξουσίαν λαβοῦσα, κατὰ γνώμην ἐκέχρητο. Ἐπεὶ δὲ τελευτᾷν ἔδει, μετ' εὐφήμου ἐτελεύτα τῆς μνήμης ἐν Ῥώμῃ ὀγδοηκοστὸν ἔτος γεγενημένη ἑνὸς λείποντος, πολλὰ τῷ παιδὶ ἐντειλαμένη τοῖς ἐξιτηρίοις περὶ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς πολιτείας. Πάνυ δὲ μεγάλης καὶ μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν ἠὐμοίρει τιμῆς, ὁποίαν ἐχρῆν τὴν οὕτω θεοφιλῶς ζήσασαν. Ἔξω δὲ τῆς πόλεως Ῥώμης ἀξιωθεῖσα ταφῆς, ἐν ναῷ στρογγύλῳ λάρνακι

God-beloved life. Her burial took place outside Rome, and her body was placed in a circular church inside a purple sarcophagus. In two years' time her sarcophagus was transferred by Constantine and placed in the church of the Holy Apostles with many honours. She was the first one to be buried there. The sacred maidens in Jerusalem, whom the God-minded Helena had entertained and served in person at the table, like a serving maid, praised her forever with divine services. And if there be any advantage in being remembered after death, it is certain that her name will be transmitted to future generations, for her son and emperor named two cities after her, the one in Bithynia, and the other in Palestine […] Such is the history of Helena.

πορφυρᾷ κατετέθη. Μετὰ δὲ διετῆ χρόνον, *σὺν τῇ λάρνακι ἐν τῇ* Κωνσταντίνου *ἀνασωθεῖσα, πρώτη ἐν τοῖς βασιλικοῖς μνημείοις τῶν ἱερῶν ἀποστόλων ταφῆς ἠξιώθη, φαιδραῖς τὸ ἐξ ἐκείνου μνείαις καὶ παννυχίσιν ὡς εἰκὸς τιμωμένη.* Αἱ δ' ἐν *Ἱεροσολύμοις σεμναὶ παρθένοι ἐκεῖναι, αἷς οἷά τις διηκονεῖτο θεραπαινὶς, ἐξαισίαις μνήμαις ταύτην ἐσέμνυνον.* Εἰ δέ τι καὶ τὸ *κατὰ κόσμον εἰς ὄνησίν τις λογίζεσθαι ἔλοιτο, καὶ λήθης κάν τούτῳ ὑπερτερεῖ· ἐνέχυρον γὰρ ὥσπερ ὁ μέλλων ἔχει αἰὼν τῆς ἐς ἀεὶ μνήμης τὴν ἐπὶ* Βιθυνίας πόλιν, *καὶ ἑτέραν ἐν* Παλαιστίνῃ· *ἃς ὁ παῖς αὐτῇ καὶ βασιλεὺς δειμάμενος, τὴν ἀθάνατον ἐκείνην μνήμην χαρίζεται* […] Περὶ *μὲν οὖν τῆς μακαρίας Ἑλένης τοσαῦτα.*

TEXT 21: John Chortasmenos (c.1370 - 1439)[31]

A

165.2 […] Mother of the great emperor Constantine is Helena, who was seemly, decent, and had an equivalent social background and prudence to Constantius; she was from a noble and senatorial family. Legally she became Constantius' wife, before he received the reign, while he was in Bithynia under the orders of the emperors Diocletian and Maximinianus.

B

[…] *μήτηρ δὲ Ἑλένη, εὐπρεπὴς αὐτη καὶ σφόδρα κοσμία καὶ ἀναλόγως ἔχουσα τῷ τε γένει καὶ τῇ σωφροσύνη* Κωνσταντίου, *ἣν ἐξ εὐπατριδῶν οὖσαν καὶ τῶν τὰ πρῶτα φερόντων ἐν τῇ συγκλήτῳ φανερῶς ἠγάγετο* Κωνστάντιος *εἰς γυναῖκα, μήπω βασιλείας ἐπειλημμένος, ἀλλὰ κατὰ* Βιθυνίαν *ποιούμενος ἔτι τὰς διατριβὰς μετὰ* Διοκλητιανοῦ *τε καὶ* Μαξιμιανοῦ *τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων.*

C

190.26-27 While the very pious and holy Helena was spending some time in Asia - at the time when the emperor Constantine was undertaking such great actions and was getting ready to refute the very mischievous Jews - she was approached with malice pretense by them […] The holy Helena, having listened to them, wrote to her son and

D

Καὶ *δὴ τῆς τρισμακαρίας αὐτοῦ μητρὸς Ἑλένης περὶ τῆς Ἀσίαν διατριβούσης, ἡνίκα βασιλεὺς* Κωνσταντῖνος *τὰ ὑπερφυῆ καὶ μεγάλα ἐκεῖνα ἔπραττε, παρασκευάζει τοὺς πονηροτάτους τῶν κατ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν καιρὸν ὁ Ἰουδαίους, προσελθεῖν αὐτῇ μετὰ δόλου* […] Τούτων *ἡ μακαρία Ἑλένη ἀκούσασα, γράφει τῷ υἱῷ τε καὶ βασιλεῖ.* Καὶ *ὅς εὐθὺς ἀναγνοὺς καὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων τὸν δόλον συνεὶς, ἀντιγράφει τῇ μητρὶ διὰ τάχους ἐπιλεξαμένης τοὺς λογιωτάτους τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐλθεῖν εἰς Ῥώμην μετ'*

[31] John Chortasmenos, *Vita of Saints Constantine and Helena*: ed. Ioannou 1884, 164-229; my translation.

emperor. The emperor, having immediately read her letter and sensing the Jews' deceit, wrote back to his mother to choose as soon as possible the most literate of the Jews and come to Rome with them, so that they can say to his face what they want. So it was done. First of all the holy Helena arrived in Rome with her imperial delegation and a group of famous and wise Jews […] The day was arranged, and next to the emperor was seated his mother the empress.

αὐτῶν, ὡς ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ λέξοντες ὅ,τι δὴ καὶ βούλοιντο. Γέγονε τοῦτο. Καὶ τῆς μακαρίας Ἑλένης ἄρτι πρῶτον ἀφιγμένης ἐν Ῥώμῃ μετὰ βασιλικῆς τῆς δορυφορίας, παρῆσαν σὺν αὐτῇ καὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἄλλοι τε πλεῖστοι πολλῶν ὑπερέχοντες δόξῃ τε καὶ σοφίᾳ [...] *Ἡμέρας οὖν τακτῆς ὁρισθείσης, καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως προκαθίσαντος ἅμα τῇ μητρί τε καὶ βασιλίδι.*

E

218.49-51 […] He sent his very pious, holy and famous mother Helena to Jerusalem along with imperial delegates and with honours appropriated to her status as empress, so that she efficiently search for the Christ's cross […] As it is said, as soon as she found the place of the sepulchre, and the temple of Aphrodite was pulled down and the

F

[...] *τὴν ἑαυτοῦ μητέρα τὴν τρισμακαρίαν ὄντως καὶ ἀοιδίμον Ἑλένην ἀπέστειλεν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα μετὰ δορυφορίας βασιλικῆς καὶ τῆς ἄλλης προσηκούσης βασιλίδι τιμῆς, ὥστε πᾶσαν σπουδὴν εἰσενέγκασθαι, ἐφ' ᾧ τὸν σωτήριον τοῦ Κυρίου σταυρὸν ἐξευρεῖν* [...] *μόλις οὖν, ὡς εἴρηται, τῶν σημείων καταφώρων γενομένων, καὶ τοῦ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ναοῦ καθῃρημένου, καὶ τῶν θεμελίων ἀνορυττομένων τοῦ εἰδωλικοῦ τεμένους, εὑρέθησαν ὑποκάτω κρυπτόμενοι*

ground was excavated, three crosses were found underneath. The holy and famous Helena collected them and was wondering which of the three was the Christ's cross […] During that day a dead woman was carried for burial […] She placed the holy cross into a silver case. She took part of it so that she could give it to her son and emperor, and she left the rest in Jerusalem for remembrance of the event by the following generations. She also found the nails of Christ's crucifixion, still intact. Some of the nails she enclosed in her son the emperor's helmet to protect him in battles; the others she enclosed them in the bridle of his horse, so that she fulfilled the prophecy of Zacharias […] Moreover, she visited all the places where our Lord Jesus Christ had been and had undertaken his miracles; she embellished all these places with the erection of divine churches and luxurious dedications, houses for the

σταυροὶ τρεῖς. Καὶ τούτους ἀνελομένη ἡ μακαρία καὶ ἀοίδιμος Ἑλένη, διαποροῦσα ἦν, τίς ἄρα ἐκ τῶν τριῶν εἴη ὁ τοῦ Κυρίου σταυρὸς […] Κατ' ἐκεῖνο γὰρ τῆς ἡμέρας νεκρὸς ἐκομίζετο γυναικὸς εἰς ταφήν […] ὅ καὶ ἀργυρέᾳ θήκῃ ἐνθεμένη ἡ βασιλίς, μέρος μὲν ἐκεῖθεν ἀνείλετο, ὥστε τῷ υἱῷ καὶ βασιλεῖ κομίσαι, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἀφῆκεν, ὥστε εἶναι ταῖς ἐφεξῆς γενεαῖς εἰς μαρτύριον. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς τιμίους ἥλους, οἷς ὁ Σωτὴρ ἡμῶν τὰς ἀχράντους χεῖράς τε καὶ πόδας ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ προσηλώθη, μηδὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ καιροῦ λελυμασμένους εὑροῦσα καὶ ἀνελοῦσα, τοὺς μὲν αὐτῶν ἐνέθηκε τῷ κράνει τοῦ υἱοῦ τε καὶ βασιλέως, ὅπλον αὐτῷ καὶ φυλακτήριον ἄμαχον ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις ἐσόμενα, τοὺς δὲ τῷ χαλινῷ τοῦ ἵππου αὐτοῦ ἐγκατέπηξε, κἀν τούτῳ πληροῦσα προφητείαν τινὰ Ζαχαρίου τοῦ προφήτου […] Οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους περιοδεύσασα τόπους, ἐν οἷς ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εὐδόκησεν ἐμπεριπατῆσαι ἤ ἄλλο τι μυστήριον ἐνεργῆσαι τῆς θεανδρικῆς οἰκονομίας αὐτοῦ, καὶ πάντας κατακοσμήσασα θείων ναῶν ἀνεγέρσει καὶ ἀναθήμασι φιλοτίμοις, ἔτι τε πτωχοτροφεῖα, καὶ ξενοδοχεῖα καὶ γηροκομεῖα πλεῖστα κατασκευάσασα, καὶ ἀποχρῶντα τούτοις ἐπιμετρήσασα σιτηρέσια καὶ προσόδους,

poor, hostels and houses for the old people; she also assigned to them sufficient funds and resources, and granted the indigents with vast amounts of money. She almost implied that she undertook these actions on her own initiative without the involvement her son the emperor's piety and dutifulness. She then returned to Byzantium bringing with her many displays of her virtue acts; most of them were holy water from Jerusalem, which she placed in the city of her son and emperor. Being at her son's side, and having so much pleased his God-inspired soul, she blessed him for a pious and fruitful reign, and then she departed to the other worldly and deathless kingdom at the age of eighty. The blessed and holy one, she is very worthy of the immortal kingdom and of praise, because, as Anna the prophet bore Samuel the saint, as the famous Elisabeth bore the Baptist and Forerunner, she bore the great

καὶ πάμπολλα χρήματα διαδοῦσα τοῖς πενομένοις, καὶ σχεδὸν εἰπεῖν, ἐν μηδενὶ ληφθεῖσα τῆς τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ βασιλέως εὐσεβείας τε καὶ φιλοτιμίας, ἐπανῆλθεν εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον μετὰ πολλῶν τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς φορτίων, πλεῖστα ἐξ Ἱεροσολύμων ἁγιάσματα τῇ ἐπωνύμῳ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ βασιλέως πόλει ἐγκαταθεῖσα. Ἃ καὶ τῷ υἱῷ παραθεμένη, καὶ ἀμυθήτου πληρώσασα ἡδονῆς τὴν ἔνθεον ἐκείνου ψυχήν, μετ' οὐ πολὺ τοῦ τῇδε ἀπάρασα κόσμου, πρὸς τὴν ὑπερκόσμιον καὶ ἀθάνατον βασιλείαν μεταχωρεῖ, ὀγδοήκοντα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς διαζήσασα ἔτη, καὶ πλήρης ἡμερῶν γενομένη τῶν τε ἡμετέρων καὶ τῶν τοῦ πνεύματος, πλεῖστα τῷ υἱῷ περὶ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς πολιτείας ἐντειλαμένη, καὶ ταῖς ἐξιτηρίοις αὐτὸν εὐλογίαις ὥσπερ ἄνθεσι καταστέψασα· μακαρία τῳόντι καὶ τρισμακαρία γενομένη, καὶ αἰωνίου βασιλείας ἅμα καὶ εὐφημίας ἀξία, ὡς Ἄννα ἡ προφῆτις, ἡ τὸ Σαμουὴλ ἀποτεκοῦσα τὸν ἅγιον, ὡς ἡ πανεύφημος Ἐλισάβετ, ἡ τὸν Βαπτιστὴν τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἀποτεκοῦσα καὶ Πρόδρομον, οὕτω καὶ αὕτη τὸν μέγαν βασιλέα καὶ ἰσαπόστολον Κωνσταντῖνον γεννήσασα, καὶ ἀμιλλησαμένη πρὸς αὐτὸν, διὰ πάντων ἑξῆς τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς εἰδῶν, καὶ τὸν Χριστὸν ἐν ἑαυτῇ δοξάσασά τε καὶ

emperor and equal to the Apostles Constantine; in a spirit of cooperation with her son, she revealed her virtues, praised and served Christ, and became a model for the imitation for the subsequent women. Having in such way lived her life, she received death as part of the natural course of life. She was buried with honours by her son and emperor and in the presence of the Christian flock. The great Constantine, being very willing to bestow benefactions and in a spirit of emulation of his mother's virtues, acted with much dutifulness.

θεραπεύσασα, καὶ τύπος γενομένη καὶ ὑπογραμμὸς πάσαις ταῖς μετ᾽ αὐτὴν καὶ παράδειγμα. Ἐκείνη μὲν οὖν οὕτως ἐπὶ γῆς βιώσασα, καὶ θανοῦσα τῷ κοινῷ νόμῳ τῆς φύσεως, τῆς προσηκούσης τιμῆς ἔτυχε καὶ κηδείας παρὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τε καὶ βασιλέως, καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐν τέλει, καὶ παντὸς ὡς εἰπεῖν χριστιανικοῦ πληρώματος. Ὁ μέν τοι μέγας Κωνσταντῖνος, τὸ ἀπ᾽ ἐκείνου μείζονος ἐπειλημμένος τῆς προθυμίας, ἅτε δὴ καὶ πρὸς τὰς μητρικὰς ἁμιλλώμενος ἀρετάς, οὐ διέλιπεν ἀφθόνους ῥέων ἅπασι τὰς πρὸς φιλοτιμίαν τε καὶ τὴν ἀναγκαίαν χρείαν ἀφορμάς.

G

1 **228.58-59** We are fearful of the extreme perils we are facing. We beg you, the sainted lord and emperor, and your sainted mother, to pray to our Lord, on 5 our behalf, the ignoble and sinners, so that he will be merciful. Not because of the present peril or for the Roman cities

H

1 *Ὡς οὖν, ἐν ἐσχάτοις ὄντες κινδύνοις, δυσωποῦμεν, καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν σὲ, τὸν ἅγιον δεσπότην καὶ βασιλέα, καὶ τὴν σὴν ἁγίαν μητέρα, δεηθῆναι τοῦ κοινοῦ πάντων Δεσπότου ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῶν* 5 *ταπεινῶν καὶ ἁμαρτωλῶν, ὥστε ἐλεῆσαι ἡμᾶς.* Οὐ δὲ γὰρ περὶ τοῦ τυχόντος ἐστὶ νῦν ὁ κίνδυνος, οὐδὲ περὶ πόλεων καὶ χωρῶν ῥωμαϊκῶν, ἃς πρότερον ἔχοντες, ὕστερον

and regions – which we possessed in the past, but then, as incapable, we were deprived of – but for the well-being of Christianity and godliness. You, the most famous and sainted emperors Constantine and Helena, along with the blessed Virgin, Mother of God's Logos, the Theotokos Maria – the most elevated in heavens, the most glorified in earth, and the most celebrated in creation – pray to God for our salvation, to show mercy so that the nations do not say, where is their God; so that the nations do not blaspheme against His holy name […] Prayers and pleas to you the sainted and God-crowned great emperors and equal to the Apostles, Constantine and Helena, and to all the holy Saints. Amen!

ἀφῃρεθημεν ὡς ἀνάξιοι, ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ, ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐσεβείας αὐτῆς. Διὸ συμπαραλαβόντες [ὑμεῖς] *οἱ πανεύφημοι, καὶ ἅγιοι βασιλεῖς* Κωνσταντῖνος *καὶ* Ἑλένη, *καὶ τὴν ἀειπάρθενον* Μητέρα *τοῦ* Θεοῦ Λόγου, *τὴν* Θεοτόκον Μαρίαν, *τὴν τῶν οὐρανῶν ὑψηλοτέραν καὶ τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς ἐνδοξοτέραν, καὶ πάσης κτίσεως τιμιωτέραν, δεήθητε τοῦ* Θεοῦ, *ὑπὲρ τῆς σωτηρίας ἡμῶν, ὅπως ποιήσῃ εἰς ἡμᾶς ἔλεος διὰ τὸ πανάγιον αὐτοῦ ὄνομα, ἵνα μὴ εἴπωσι τὰ ἔθνη· ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ Θεὸς αὐτῶν· ἵνα μὴ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ἅγιον αὐτοῦ βλασφημῆται ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν* […] *εὐχαῖς καὶ ἱκεσίαις ὑμῶν τῶν ἁγίων θεοστέπτων μεγάλων βασιλέων καὶ ἰσαποστόλων,* Κωνσταντίνου *καὶ* Ἑλένης, *καὶ πάντων τῶν ἀπ᾽ αἰῶνος ἁγίων.* Ἀμήν!

Conclusions

Just as words unpack the pictures, the pictures unpack the words, and provide them with a resonant context.[1]

Exploring the ways in which the social memory of the mother of Constantine the Great was reconstructed, judged, and appreciated during late antiquity and throughout the Byzantine period has been a stimulating task. Returning to the queries posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that successive portraits of Helena, when analysed in their different historical settings, become bearers of messages. One of the more significant findings to emerge from my analysis is that leadership qualities were important in the formation of Helena's cult.

Almost a decade after Helena's death in 328, the sons of Constantine claimed legitimacy of their right to rule through their grandmother who, beyond her function as the progenitor of the Constantinian house, was extolled as a guarantee of the peaceful continuation of a Christ-centred system of governance. In subsequent years, Helena's ideological significance was regenerated through the story of her pilgrimage. Members of the clergy sought to stake out the domain of their discourse by encouraging upper-class women to appropriate Helena's actions. Within the same context Helena's reputation as the discoverer of the true cross was developed around 395 by Ambrose of Milan, for whom Helena represented the piety of the imperial house. Ambrose's patrons, the Theodosian emperors, promoted strong links with orthodox Christianity and Helena's discovery of the

[1] Brubaker 1989: 82.

true cross exemplified this connection. It is during this period that the perception of Helena as the ideal Christian empress entered the rhetorical vocabulary of both state and church.

My evaluation of the symbolic significance that clergy and laity accorded to Helena has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the church-state relations in late antiquity and Byzantium. On the one hand, Helena was utilised to articulate the imperial virtues with which a Christian empress was equipped. On the other hand, Helena's imperial links constituted a platform for the hierarchy of the church to endorse authority over politico-theological matters. The evidence from this study suggests that the claims of the church to bring Helena and her son under religious supervision resulted to the acknowledgment and proclamation of the pair's sanctity, probably in the seventh century. The employment of Helena and her son to diplomatic ends is best exemplified during the long-running debate over images in the eighth and ninth centuries, when their profiles were exploited by the iconophile faction. By that time, the pair's hagiological and imperial cult was interchangeable. Ideological transformation, then, of Byzantium's exemplary model of rulers, allowed to the hierarchy of the church to influence the religious policies of secular rulers and to entrench its ecclesiastical supremacy. Overall, it seems safe to argue that in the aftermath of the iconoclastic controversy, the relation between the sphere of government and that of religion was redefined. The ideal of a concord between state and church – so emphatically promoted in the textual and visual documents of the eighth- and ninth-centuries – was not a novelty, but dates back to the sixth-century *Novella* of Justinian I, which insisted on the common divine origin of both the emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople.[2]

[2] Meyendorff 1982: 14-15; for further discussion on the separation between secular and spiritual power, see Dagron 2003: 282-312.

From the perspective of the diachronic development of her cult, the results of this investigation show that the perception of Helena as a symbol of authority was at all times in tune with the political realities – which were inextricably connected with theology – within and beyond the borders of the capital. The sharing of ideas provided the people of the periphery (Cappadocia, Greece, Cyprus, and Crete) with a strong sense of communion to the Byzantine realm – exemplifying the notion of a Byzantine commonwealth – and with the intellectual means to shield their political and religious identity from external threats. It is not surprising, then, that in times of crisis Byzantines turned to Helena and her son for political legitimation and divine protection. The appeal and symbolism of Helena was not confined to Byzantium alone, but also extended to the western kingdoms, leading to the notion of a universalised cult. More broadly, research is also needed to determine the influence of Helena's veneration in Slavonic and Caucasian territories, answering, amongst other things, whether Helena's images experienced the same widespread popularity as in Byzantium.[3] From the Byzantine and the western perspective, Helena was a bearer of unyielding ideological agendas, which seem to have facilitated the communication and appropriation of information within the Mediterranean of the late antiquity and of the Middle Ages. The primary-source discussion points to multiple domains of conscious or unconscious interactions: literacy, orality, ritual, symbolism, and visual imagery. This study can thus provide further insights into the exchange of ideas and culture in interregional and international level.

Deconstructing and reconstructing Helena clearly shows that her image was made with an audience in mind. Undoubtedly, events after Helena's death kept her memory alive,

[3] The ongoing investigations on the cross-cultural exchange between Byzantium and its Orthodox neighbours by Monica White and Lynn Jones throw up many questions in need of further investigation. I thank both scholars for giving me the privilege of having an insight into their views.

but the various descriptions and the unfixed role attributed to her each time underlines the changeability in the way she was received by the different audiences. Of course, Helena meant more or less at different times. For example, her ideological importance is not immediately apparent from the sources of the Komnenian period. Nevertheless, the popularity of her cult remained strong over the remainder of the Byzantine period inspiring all Byzantines regardless of social class and status.

The interpretation process followed here of interconnected cultural phenomena opens up new areas of knowledge of Byzantine society and Byzantine perception (how the Byzantines saw). Having demonstrated, for example, that authors and artists not only spoke for themselves, it is possible to yield further insights on how Byzantines defined appropriate masculine and feminine roles. Despite the massive amount of scholarly literature on gender in Byzantium, only Liz James' pioneering publications addressed the concept of 'queenship' in Byzantium – the insightful essay "Goddess, whore, wife or slave: Will the real Byzantine empress please stand up?", and the monograph on *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium (Women, Power & Politics)* – providing a thought-provoking research background.[4] The textual and visual portraits of Helena not only ascribe more weight to imperial women, but also allow us to go beyond the official point of view and to assess how the role and position of a Byzantine empress was valued by a wide range of the population, providing information that covers all strands of Byzantine society.

To conclude, this analysis has given an account of and the reasons for the widespread veneration of Helena in Byzantium, identifying the political and ideological aspects of her cult that have been significantly understudied by modern scholars. Art and text had a meaning in Byzantine culture, and Helena's example enhances our understanding of this

[4] James 1997: 123-139; James 2001.

dynamic.[5] This study has determined that images of Helena mattered in Byzantium, and that the consistent representations – narrative and pictorial – of her with Constantine had a *raison d'être*. Helena, the first overtly Christian empress, now has content.

[5] On the close link of image and word in Byzantium, see collected essays in James 2007.

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