



Good day Worthy Knights, in this part 48, the Twelve Grand Points of the Cross: 2<sup>nd</sup>.

V.III.Kt. Werner M. Schwab

Dep.Int.-Gen. Benelux Division

RCC Lecture delivered in the Schola Palatina Conclave No.509 on 19 December A.D. 2015.

## **2. The journey of St. Helena from Rome to Jerusalem**

Enter now in our story St. Helena. Who was she? St. Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, was born about the middle of the third century, in Drepanum (later known as Helenopolis) on the Nicomedian Gulf.

Little is known of her early life. The bishop and historian Eusebius of Caesarea states that she was about 80 on her return from Palestine. Since that journey has been dated to 326–28, Helena was probably born in 248 or 250. Fourth century sources record that she came from a low background. Saint Ambrose was the first to call her a stabularia, a term translated as 'stable-holder' or 'innkeeper'. He makes this fact a virtue, calling Helena a bona stabularia, a 'good inn-keeper'. Other sources, especially those written after Constantine's proclamation as emperor, gloss over or ignore her background.

The statement made by English chroniclers of the Middle Ages, according to which Helena was supposed to have been the daughter of a British prince, is, I'm afraid, entirely without historical foundation. This legend, mentioned by Henry of Huntingdon but made popular by Geoffrey of Monmouth, claimed that Helena was a daughter of the King of Britain, Cole of Camulodunum, who allied with Constantius to avoid more war between the Britons and Rome. Geoffrey further states that she was brought up in the manner of a queen, as she had no brothers, to inherit the throne of Britain.

The source for this however does not claim Helena was British but only that her son Constantine picked up his Christianity there.

At least twenty five holy wells currently exist in the United Kingdom dedicated to Saint Helena. She is also the patron saint of Abingdon and Colchester. St Helen's Chapel in Colchester was believed to have been founded by Helena herself. Since the 15th century, the town's coat of arms has shown a representation of the True Cross and three crowned nails in her honour.

Colchester Town Hall has a Victorian statue of the saint on top of its 50-metre high tower. The arms of Nottingham are almost identical, because of the city's connection with Cole (or Coel), Helena's supposed father. Whatever her background, she became the wife of Constantius Chlorus.

It is unknown where she first met Constantius. The historian Timothy Barnes has suggested that Constantius, while serving under Emperor Aurelian, could have met her while stationed in Asia Minor for the campaign against Zenobia. It is said that upon meeting they were wearing identical silver bracelets, Constantius saw her as his soul mate sent by God. The precise legal nature of the relationship between Helena and Constantius is also unknown. The sources sometimes call Helena Constantius' 'wife', and sometimes, following the dismissive propaganda of Constantine's rival Maxentius, call her his 'concubine'.

Some scholars, such as the historian Jan Drijvers, assert that Constantius and Helena were joined in a common-law marriage, a cohabitation recognized in fact but not in law. Others, like Timothy Barnes, assert that Constantius and Helena were joined in an official marriage, on the grounds that the sources claiming an official marriage are more reliable. Helena gave birth to the future emperor Constantine I on 27 February of an uncertain year soon after 270 (probably around 272). Constantine, her first and only son, was born in Naissus (Niš, Serbia) in Upper Moesia.

In the year 292 Constantius, having become co-Regent of the West, for considerations of a political nature forsook Helena in order to marry Theodora, the step-daughter of Emperor Maximianus Herculius, his Augustus. But her son remained faithful and loyal to her. Helena and her son were dispatched to the court of Diocletian at Nicomedia, where Constantine grew to be a member of the inner circle. Helena never remarried and lived for a time in obscurity, though close to her only son, who had a deep regard and affection for her.

When Constantius died in 306 at Eburacum (York), Constantine was proclaimed Augustus of the Roman Empire in 306 by Constantius' troops, and following his elevation his mother was brought back to the public life in 312, returning to the imperial court. She received the title of Augusta in 325 and Constantine ordered that all honour should be paid to her as the mother of the sovereign, and had coins struck bearing her effigy.

Her son's influence caused her to embrace Christianity after his victory over Maxentius. This is directly attested by Eusebius (*Vita Constantini*, III, xlvii):

'She became under his influence such a devout servant of God, that one might believe her to have been from her very childhood a disciple of the Redeemer of mankind'. It is also clear from the declaration of the contemporary historian of the Church that Helena, from the time of her conversion had an earnestly Christian life and by her influence and liberality favoured the wider spread of Christianity.

Tradition links her name with the building of Christian churches in the cities of the West, where the imperial court resided, notably at Rome and Trier, and we know positively through Eusebius that Helena erected churches on the hallowed spots of Palestine. Despite her advanced age she undertook a journey to Palestine when Constantine, through his victory over Licinius, had become sole master of the Roman Empire in 324. It was in Palestine, as we learn from Eusebius (*loc. cit.*, xlii), that she had resolved to bring to God, the King of kings, the homage and tribute of her devotion.

