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Natalia TETERIATNIKOV

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The True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena. A
Study in the Light of the Post-Iconoclastic Re-
evaluation of the Cross

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THE TRUE CROSS FLANKED BY CONSTANTINE AND HELENA

A STUDY IN THE LIGHT OF THE POST-ICONOCLASTIC RE-EVALUATION OF THE CROSS*

In honor of Doula Mouriki

The popularity of The True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena in the Middle Byzantine art has largely been attributed to its imperial significance¹. The new functional context of this image after Iconoclasm has, however, escaped the notice of art historians, and will be the subject of the present article.

The image known in scholarly literature as Constantine and Helena with the cross was relatively standard in Middle Byzantine art. It illustrates the True Cross flanked by Sts Constantine and Helena, as seen on the tenth-century reliquary known as the Stavelot triptych from the Pierpont Morgan Library (Fig. 1). During the Middle Byzantine period, this image, despite minor alterations, did not undergo any significant changes. In the known examples the imperial saints either hold a cross or stand in attendance, but always express the notion of adoration of the True Cross, the symbol of Christianity. Because the saints have a subordinate position to the True Cross which is the compositional center, we may entitle this image "The True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena".

The history of this image is, however, unclear. From literary sources we know that portraits of the emperor Constantine and his mother Helena together with the cross were depicted from the time of Constantine himself². Eusebius and later authors mentioned sculptured and painted portraits of Constantine and Helena made for public display³, but no images of them together with the cross have been preserved from Early Christian times⁴. The situation changed radically, however, in the ninth century when this image began to appear frequently on liturgical objects, especially reliquaries of the True Cross, and in church decoration. The contrast between the rarity of these images in the early period and their frequency in the Middle Byzantine period, particularly in the ninth century, specifically in the period immediately after Iconoclasm, is so striking that it raises the question of the function of this image after Iconoclasm.

Because the cross is the focal center, the new function of the image of the True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena was probably dependent on a repositioning of the

role of the cross during and after Iconoclasm. In order to explain the functional context of this image in the Middle Byzantine period, it is first necessary to examine the cult of the cross and the cult of the Emperor Constantine and Helena during and after Iconoclasm, and then to examine the functional context of this image in church decoration and on portable objects.

The Cult of the Cross during and after Iconoclasm

A re-evaluation of the concept of the cross after Iconoclasm was imperative for the Orthodox church and the state for the "reinvention" of an image of the True Cross Flanked

* I would like to thank Henry Maguire, George Majeska, Leslie MacCoull, John Nesbitt, Nancy Ševčenko, Stephen Zwirn and Mary-Lyon Doleral for their valuable suggestions to this article.

1. V. Miasoedov, *Fragmenty freskovoi rospisi Sviatoi Sofii Novgorodskoi*, St. Petersburg 1914, especially p. 4, n. 2, 3. T. Bertelè, *Costantino il Grande e S. Elena su alcune monete bizantine*, *Numismatica XIV* (1948), p. 91-106. A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Variorum Reprints, London 1971), p. 37-39. K. Wessel, *Konstantin u. Helena*, *RbK IV*, 1989, cols 357-366.

2. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Eusebius, *Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine, I* (trans. and ed. by Ph. Schaff, H. Wace), 3rd ed., Michigan 1971, p. 544. Georgius Codinus (ed. I. Bekker), Bonn 1853, p. 35, 179.

3. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, p. 544 and chapter 15 and 16.

4. Baumstark discussed the drawing of Constantine and Helena and the cross in a Syriac manuscript dated on the basis of palaeography to the eighth or ninth century. He assumed that the image of Constantine and Helena and the cross is of Syrian origin. Anton Baumstark, *Konstantiniana aus syrischer Kunst und Liturgie*, in: *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit*, Freiburg 1913, p. 217-254. As far as the date of the manuscript is concerned, it is clear that it can be placed at the very end of the ninth or early tenth century. The illumination shows an image of Constantine and Helena and the cross very similar in style to images of the ninth and tenth century. Both imperial figures are wearing garments of a style contemporary with those of ninth- and tenth-century Byzantine emperors. The image clearly derived from Constantinopolitan models. See our discussion of the typology of the image later in this paper.

by Constantine and Helena. The cross had been a major subject in art during the Iconoclast period⁵, and therefore it became a focus for reassessment by the Iconodules. Kazhdan discusses the cautious position of Iconodules toward the cross⁶. Analyzing the polemics among the Iconodules, he points out that, for Patriarch Nikephoros, the cross was to be venerated, but not as an icon of Christ. The cross was venerated by the Iconodules because it was a symbol of Christ's suffering, Crucifixion and death.

Nikephoros insists on the deep inner connection in the cult between the cross and icons. This cautious position of the Iconodules with regard to the cross was due to the fact that despite hostility to saint's relics, the Iconoclasts nonetheless venerated relics of the True Cross. For example, the Iconoclast Patriarch Constantine took an oath, swearing on the relics of the True Cross⁷. The cult of the cross was promoted by the Iconoclasts, and had political overtones as a symbol of imperial victory⁸. Veneration of relics of the True Cross by the Iconoclasts was perhaps what necessitated re-evaluation of the attitude toward honoring this image after Iconoclasm. This situation, in connection with the attitude of the Iconophiles toward the cross, can explain the post-Iconoclastic popularity of images of the True Cross together with Constantine and Helena. A depiction of Constantine and Helena with the True Cross after Iconoclasm then acquired a new historical meaning. Constantine's vision of the cross affected his decision to Christianize the empire, while Helena's discovery of the cross made Christian veneration of the True Cross a reality. Both give a historic dimension to the relic of the Cross. After Iconoclasm, iconic images of the True Cross flanked by Constantine and Helena acquired a completely different meaning from the simple abstract concept of the cross that had been propagated by the Iconoclasts.

The Cult of Constantine and Helena

It is not a coincidence that side by side with the development of the cult of the cross there was a tremendous growth in the veneration of the imperial saints Constantine and Helena. In a recent article on the legend of Constantine the Great, A. Kazhdan has suggested that most versions of legends about Constantine were based on earlier sources but written down only in the eighth and ninth centuries⁹. He also cited some literary sources that indicated an interest in Constantine in eighth- and ninth-century literature. According to him, a new attitude toward Constantine and Helena emerged in the epistolary and liturgical sources during this period. For example, in the Council of 787, Pope Hadrian called the iconodule rulers Irene and Michael the

"New Constantine" and "New Helena". The Emperor Basil was also compared with Constantine. Patriarch Photios in his homilies also proclaims the significance of Helena, her discovery of the tomb of Christ, and her rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem¹⁰. In all of these sources Constantine and Helena appear as pious rulers, models for contemporary ones. Although the cult of Constantine and Helena had been growing gradually since the fourth century, there was a sudden upsurge of their cult in the ninth century. It is difficult to know when the vita of both saints was written. The earliest surviving manuscript of the vita is dated to the end of the eighth century¹¹. We first hear of liturgical services dedicated to both saints in Constantinople in the second part of the ninth century, at about the same time as their appearance on artifacts and in church decoration. Significantly, the chants for the liturgy of Constantine and Helena were written by Patriarch Methodius (843-847) and Leo the Wise¹². The texts of these chants include the story of the discovery of the True Cross by Helena and the acclamations to both Constantine and Helena and the True Cross. Unfortunately we do not know when the feast of Constantine and Helena was established in Constantinople; it was celebrated on the day of Constantine's death (May 21) and was included in the tenth-century "Typikon of the Great Church"¹³. This feast already existed in the Syriac church calendar in the seventh century, and perhaps from there it found its way to Constantinople¹⁴.

According to the "Typikon of the Great Church", on this day there were celebrations in Hagia Sophia, the church of the Holy Apostles, and the church of Constantine and Helena in the palace of Bonu near the cisterns, where one altar was dedicated to Constantine and the other to Helena. It was there that the Eucharistic liturgy was celebrated and the relic of the True Cross venerated¹⁵. The "De Ceremoniis" also describes processions to these churches which included the emperor, the patriarch with the clergy, and the court¹⁶.

Veneration of the tomb of Constantine and Helena seems also to have been a part of the saints' cult. From Early Christian sources we know that the tomb of Constantine was located in his mausoleum in the Church of the Holy Apostles¹⁷. Scholars are, however, not sure whether Helena was indeed initially buried in the same tomb as Constantine¹⁸. Although it is not certain when Helena's remains were transferred, several Middle Byzantine sources seem to agree that both saints were in the same tomb by the Middle Byzantine period¹⁹. The Russian traveler Antonii of Novgorod, who was in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople at the end of the twelfth century, mentioned that both Constantine and Helena were in one tomb in this church²⁰. This is confirmed by the inscription on a twelfth-

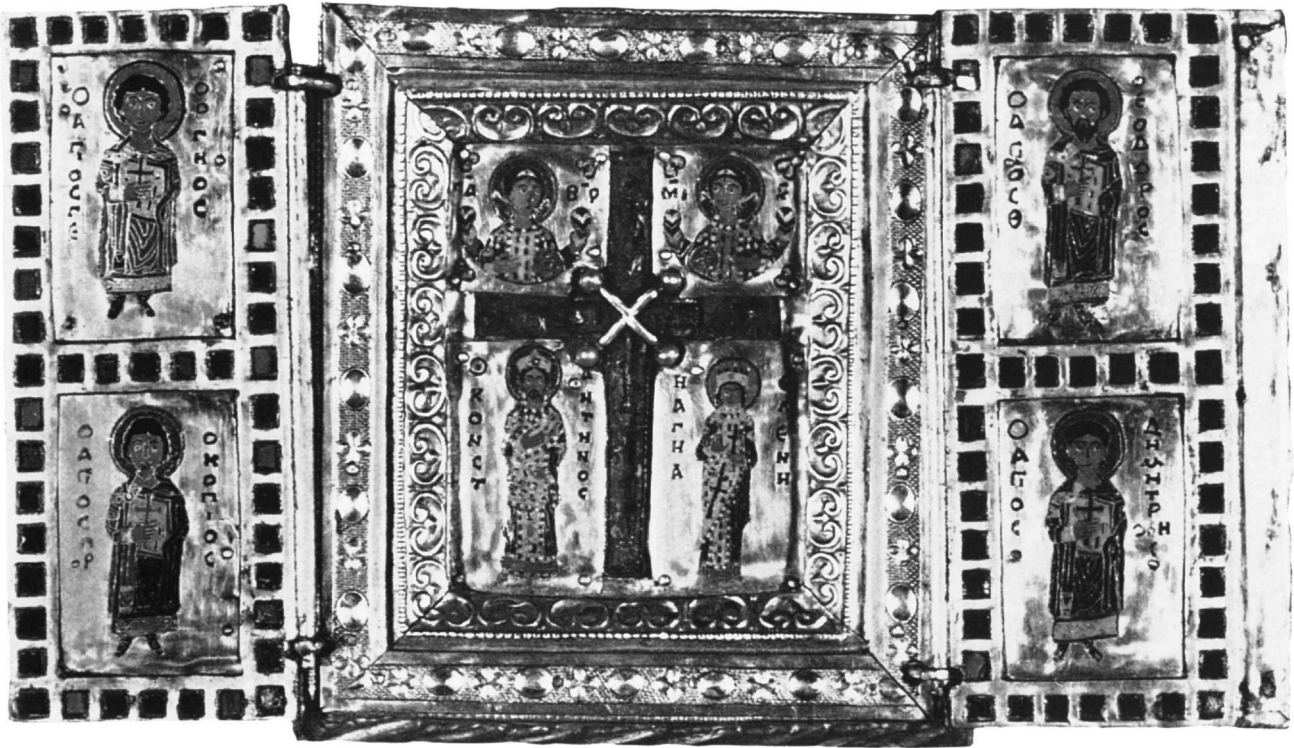


Fig. 1. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. The Stavelot triptych (after Wessel).

5. N. Thierry, Le culte de la croix dans l'empire byzantin du VII^e siècle au Xe dans ses rapports avec la guerre contre l'infidèle. Nouveaux témoignages archéologiques, RSBS 1 (1981), p. 205-228; J. Herrin, The Context of Iconoclast Reform in: (A. Bryer and J. Herrin, eds), Iconoclasm (Papers given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975), Birmingham 1977, p. 15-20. See also R. Cormack, The Arts during the Age of Iconoclasm, *ibid.*, p. 35-44; *id.*, Painting after Iconoclasm, *ibid.*, p. 147-163; M. Mundell, Monophysite Church Decoration, *ibid.*, p. 59-74; A. Cutler, The Byzantine Psalter: Before and after Iconoclasm, *ibid.*, p. 93-102; A. Wharton Epstein, The "Iconoclast" Churches of Cappadocia, *ibid.*, p. 103-111.
6. A. Kazhdan, "Constantin imaginaire": Byzantine Legends of the Ninth Century about Constantine the Great, *Byzantion* LVII (1987), p. 243.
7. S. Gero, Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V, Louvain 1977, p. 164.
8. J. Moorhead, Iconoclasm, The Cross and the Imperial Image, *Byzantion* 55 (1985), p. 165-179.
9. Kazhdan, *op.cit.*, p. 196-250.
10. L. Brubaker, Politics, Patronage, and Art: Paris, gr. 510, DOP 39 (1985), p. 10, 11.
11. F. Winkelmann, Die älteste erhaltene griechische hagiographische Vita Konstantinus und Helenas (BHG Nr. 356z, 366, 366a), in: Jürgen Dummer (hg.), Texte und Textkritik. Eine Aufsatzsammlung, Berlin 1987 (TU 133), p. 623-638. The oldest manuscript: Palimps. Cambridge Univ. Add. 4489. For further discussion on late eighth-century dating: Stephan Borgehammar, How the Holy Cross was Found, Stockholm 1991, p. 71 ff.
12. Anthologia graeca carminum christianorum (ed. W. Christ, M. Para-

nikas), Leipzig 1871, p. 99. I would like to thank Eva Topping for pointing out this reference to me.

13. Juan Mateos (ed.), Le typicon de la Grande Église, I, Rome 1962 (OCA 165), p. 296, 297. L. Mirković, Kcheortologia ili istoricheskii razvitak i bogoslužhenie prazdnika pravoslavne istočne tserkve, Belgrade 1961, p. 244, 245. The linked stories of the vision of the Cross by Constantine and the discovery of the True Cross by Helena were already included in the liturgical ceremony of the Exaltation of the Cross as celebrated in Jerusalem in the fourth century. Later, in the seventh century, it was adopted by the church of Constantinople. H. Leclercq, DACL, III.2, 1914, col. 3131/ff. Acta SS, May V, 12-27.

14. Baumstark, *op.cit.* (note 4).

15. Le typicon, I, p. 297.

16. R. Janin, Les processions religieuses à Byzance, REB 24 (1966), p. 80. Le typicon, I, p. 296. De Ceremoniis, II, 6. PG, 112, 997-1001. The patriarch, emperor, and senate, together with the faithful, proceeded from the Church of the Holy Apostles where the tombs of Constantine and Helena were located.

17. P. Grierson, The Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337-1042); with an additional note by Cyril Mango and Ihor Ševčenko, DOP 16 (1962), p. 13, 21-23, and especially p. 39-40; J. Ebersolt, Sarcophages impériaux de Rome et de Constantinople, BZ 30 (1929-30), p. 582-587.

18. Grierson, *op.cit.*; Ebersolt, *op.cit.*

19. Ebersolt, *op.cit.*

20. Kniga palomnik. Skazanie mest Sviatykh vo Zaregrade Antonia Archiepiskopa Novgorodskago v'1200 godu (ed. by Ch. M. Loparev), Pravoslavnii Palestinskii Zbornik 51 (1899), p. 24.



Fig. 2. Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, room over the vestibule, vault. St Constantine (photo: Dumbarton Oaks).

century cross from the cathedral of Hildesheim²¹. The inscription is written on the inner side of the reliquary where the image of Constantine and Helena holding a cross is depicted; relics of the True Cross and particles from the tomb of Constantine and Helena are enclosed as well²². All of the evidence seems to support Cedrenus' speaking of the tomb of both imperial figures²³.

Although we do not know exactly when the remains of both saints were placed in one tomb, it seems that it was important that the saints shared the same tomb, to promote the cult of both saints: thus pilgrims could visit one tomb and express their devotion to both saints. Moreover, the presence of the relics of the True Cross and the relics of Constantine and Helena seems to indicate that the cults of these distinct relics were intimately inter-related. The surviving number of small icons with images of Constantine and Helena, as well as representations in other media e.g. mosaics, wall painting and minor media point to the fact that there was a widespread cult of this pair of saints.

The oratory of Constantine in the Forum of Constantine also played an important role in the cult of the imperial saints. According to the "De Ceremoniis", both the forum

and the oratory of Constantine were stations on liturgical processions undertaken by the emperor, the patriarch, the clergy and the court on several feasts including those of the Annunciation (March 25), the Monday of Easter week, and the Nativity of the Virgin (September 8)²⁴. The chapel also played an important role in victory celebrations²⁵. After a victory over enemies it was the custom for Byzantine emperors to stop with their triumphal procession at the Forum of Constantine. According to the "Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai"²⁶, this forum also had statues of Constantine and Helena with the cross; it is also possible that the oratory of Constantine possessed a precious relic of the True Cross.

Along with their wide veneration by the people, these saints were also distinguished as imperial patrons of succeeding Byzantine emperors. Thus Romanus Lecapenus built a church with two altars, one dedicated to Constantine and the other to Helena, in his palace of Bonu²⁷. In Hagia Sophia in Kiev, built by Prince Iaroslav in 1037, Constantine and Helena were represented twice in the church's decoration²⁸: in the chapel of Joachim and Anne small figures of Iaroslav and his wife, Princess Irene, are depicted near the figure of St Constantine; and in the chapel of the Archangel Michael, the patron saint of Prince Iaroslav, the image of St Helena is depicted near St Anne, the patron saint of the Kiev Princess Anna²⁹. Clearly Russian princes inherited their imperial patrons from the Byzantine emperors.

From analysis of these sources it becomes apparent that there was a strong bond between the cult of the cross and

21. H. L u d a t, *Das Jerusalem Kreuz*, Köln 1956, p. 3 ff and figs 1-8.

22. *Ibid.*

23. George Cedrenus, *Synopsis Historion*, ed. I. Bekker, CSHB (Bonn 1838), p. 519-520. On Helena's burial, see J. W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: Waarheid en Legende*, Groningen 1989, p. 74-76; id., *Helena Augusta. The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the True Cross*, Leiden 1992.

24. *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris, De Ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* (The Book of Ceremonies), (ed. I. I. Reiske), Bonn 1829-30, I, Ch. 10, and p. 74. *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, Le livre des cérémonies* (transl. and ed. by A. de Vogt), Paris 1935, I, p. 24. *Commentaire Livre I*, p. 74. J. Ebersolt, *Sanctuaires de Byzance*, Paris 1921, p. 71-74.

25. Ebersolt, *op.cit.*, p. 71-74.

26. *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: the Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (introd., transl., and commentary by A. Cameron and J. Herrin), Leiden 1984, p. 48, 51, 78, 79, 80-81, 118, 119, 126, 127-129, 158, 159.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

28. N. N. Nikitenko, *K ikonographicheskoi programme odnofigurnich fresok Sofiiskogo sobora*, *VizVrem* 48 (1987), p. 101-107; id., *Programma odnofigurnich fresok Sofiiskogo sobora v Kieve i ee ideinye istoki*, *VizVrem* 49 (1988), p. 173-180.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 106.



Fig. 3. Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, north gallery. Emperor Alexander (photo: Dumbarton Oaks).

Constantine and Helena. Both were interwoven into the religious life of the city, ranging from private imperial celebration of both saints in the imperial palace to larger imperial processions through the city to the forum of Constantine and his mausoleum. In all these ceremonies the relic of the True Cross was present. In both private and public celebrations, Sts Constantine and Helena and the relic of the True Cross had commanded the devotion of both the church and the state with the Emperor and the patriarch present. With this knowledge of the historical circumstances that surrounded this image, let us turn to the works of art to define the Middle Byzantine characteristics of the image and its functional context.

The Middle Byzantine Images of the True Cross Flanked by Constantine and Helena and their Early Antecedents

I will first outline the pictorial characteristics of the Middle Byzantine images. Images of the True Cross flanked by Constantine and Helena impress the viewer by the contemporary appearance given to both imperial saints. This is true even of what seems to be the earliest Middle Byzantine representation, namely the mosaic in the room over the vestibule in Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, which Cormack dates to the 70's of the ninth century (Fig. 2)³⁰. Although only two fragments have survived on the vaults of this room, Constantine is identified by his inscription. He is shown wearing the imperial robe of a ninth-century Byzantine emperor, a crown, and a dark pointed beard, conventions followed in all later representations. Although the second figure on the vault of the room is difficult to identify, Cormack suggests that it is Helena represented on the opposite side of the cross from Constantine³¹. In all of the preserved Middle Byzantine monuments Constantine and Helena are depicted wearing contemporary imperial vestments. They are dressed in tunic, the ceremonial loros, gold armlets, red shoes, and crowns, characteristic of Middle Byzantine emperors³², suggesting a line of continuity from the imperial saints to the ruling monarchs, such as Emperor Alexander (912/3) on the vault of the north gallery of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (Fig. 3)³³. Constantine's beard makes him look very different from his original Early Christian portraits in the Forum of Constantine³⁴. The only beardless portrait of Constantine appeared in the tenth-century mosaic in the lunette of the south vestibule in the same church³⁵, but here he appeared as a founder of the City presenting its model to the Virgin. The later monuments, however, such as the early tenth-century church of the Holy Apostles in Sinassos and Ayvalı Kilise and others, show an image of bearded

Constantine generally similar to that which was introduced in the ninth century (Fig. 4)³⁶.

The repertory of post-iconoclastic images depicting Constantine and Helena and the cross can be narrowed down to two major types, both of which echo the statues of Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena with the cross which stood in important forums of Constantinople. These were described in the "Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai" (8th century)³⁷.

The first type shows both saints holding a cross. This type can be seen in the tenth-century ivory triptych from the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, as well as in frescoes of the eleventh-century church of Yılanlı Kilise in Cappadocia and elsewhere (Fig. 5)³⁸. It is precisely this feature that appears in the description of the imperial couple in the Forum Bovis:

...in the same Forum Bovis a silver-gilt cross was set up, and likenesses (*eikones*) of Constantine and Helena, with the hands of both the slaves of God holding the cross, they say³⁹.

This type was altered when used on church vaults. In these cases the saints are usually displayed on both sides of the vaults with their hands holding a medallion enclosing the cross. This can be seen in the above-mentioned mosaics of the room over the vestibule in Hagia Sophia, and in the tenth-century churches of the Holy Apostles in Sinassos and of Ayvalı Kilise, both in Cappadocia (Fig. 4)⁴⁰.

In the second type the two saints are shown flanking the cross with figures of angels above them as in the reliquary from Tesoro dell'Abbazia, Nonantola, Italy (Fig. 6)⁴¹. This type recalls the statue of Constantine and Helena in the Forum of Constantine, mentioned in the "Parastaseis":

30. Robin Cormack and Ernest J. W. Hawkins, The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: The Rooms above the Southwest Vestibule and Ramp, DOP 31 (1977), p. 235-247, and figs 46, 47.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 230, 231.

32. Philip Grierson, Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection, Washington, D.C. 1973, 3.1, p. 116-125.

33. C. Mango, The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul, Washington, D.C. 1962, p. 46, 47, and fig. 54. An interesting feature of the iconography of Helena is the shield-shaped cloth ornamented with the cross on the lower right side of her robes (Figs 5, 8, 17). It usually appears on monuments dated to the eleventh and twelfth century, and Ebersolt and Jerphanion identify it as a *thorakion*, a portion of her robe pulled from the back. J. Ebersolt, Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie byzantine, Paris 1917, p. 65. G. de Jerphanion, Le «Thorakion», caractéristique icono-



Fig. 4. Ayvalı Kilise, Cappadocia, entrance vault. Constantine and Helena and the Cross (photo: Epstein, courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks).

graphique du XI^e siècle, *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, II, Paris 1930, p. 71-79. 34. These probably looked similar to his famous portrait from the Basilica of Maxentius, now in the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome, or his portraits on coins. W. F. Volbach - M. Hirmer, *Frühchristliche Kunst; die Kunst der Spätantike in West- und Ostrom*, München 1958, pls 16, 17, 21.

35. Mango, *op.cit.*, 23f, figs 5, 6.

36. Other ninth-century examples are in Ms gr. 510, f. 440r; ca 880-883, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and two early ninth-century Latin manuscripts, the "Wessobrunner Gebetbuch", Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Ms Clm., 22053, f. 2r and the one in the Capitular Library, Vercelli, Italy, Cod. CLXV, f. 2r. For the illustration of the miniatures in gr. 510 see H. A. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale, du VI^e au XI^e siècle*, Paris 1902, pl. LIX. For the "Wessobrunner Gebetbuch", see *Die Handschrift des Wessobrunner Gebets*; facsimile (ed. by A. von Eckart, C. von Kraus), Munich 1922. The miniature on f. 2r from the Cod. CLXV from the Vercelli Capitular Library is published in A. and J. Stylianoú, *By This Conquer*, Nicosia, Cyprus 1971, fig. 19.

37. *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century*, p. 51, 78, 79, 118, 119, 126, 127-129, 159.

38. *Byzantine Art, an European Art, Exhibition Catalogue*, 2nd ed., Athens 1964, p. 175, 176 and no 80, fig. 80. For Yılanlı Kilise: Marcel Restle, *Byzantine Wall Painting in Asia Minor*, Recklinghausen 1967, I, plan 130, 131, and II, plan XXIII, and fig. 250.

39. *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century*, 52, p. 126, 127.

40. For Holy Apostles: G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin. Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, Plates III, Paris 1934, fig. 150; for Ayvalı Kilise: Nicole Thierry, *Haut moyen-âge en Cappadoce. Les églises de la région de Çavusin*, Paris 1983, pl. 56 a, b.

41. *Byzantine Art, an European Art*, p. 433, 434, 437, and nos 516-518, 524.

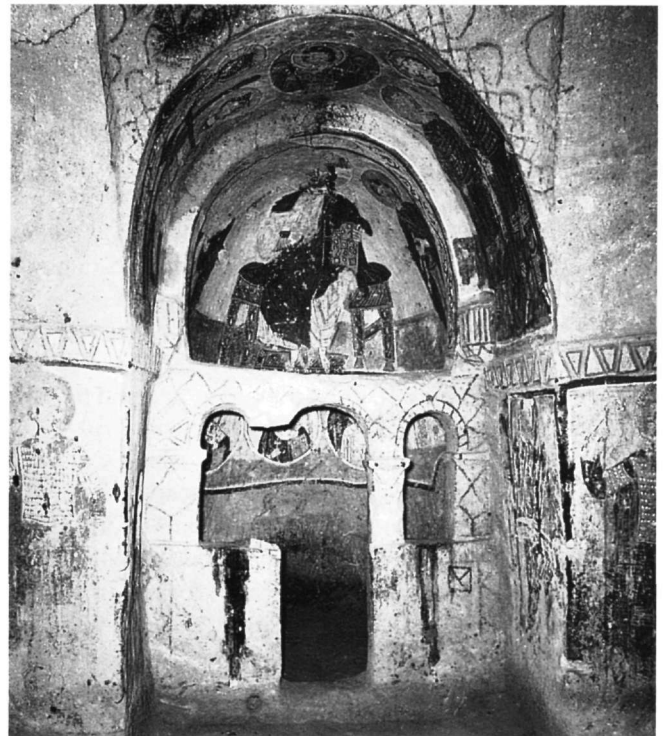


Fig. 5. Chapel 21, Göreme, Cappadocia. Interior looking east (photo: Teteriatnikov).

Note that the cross at the intersection on which can be read "Hagios" was set up by him who was the patron of the Forum. There too two statues (stelai) are preserved on the right and left of the angels, one of Constantine himself and one of Helena⁴². The overall composition also recalls the description of the statue of Constantine and Helena in the Forum of the Milion given by the "Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai":

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 cross⁴³.

This passage, however, does not mention angels.

There are some images of the True Cross and Constantine and Helena of the first type which seem to overlap the second type. In these images the figures of Constantine and Helena have varied positions, either standing frontally near the cross or holding a cross; there can also be two or four angels. They are portrayed in this way on a number of reliquaries, such as the twelfth-century one in Eztergom, Hungary, the twelfth-century silver reliquaries in the monastery of Fonte Avellana and the Tesoro dell'Abbazia, both in Italy, and the thirteenth-century reliquaries in the Louvre, and Bibliothèque Nationale Paris (Figs 6, 14, and 16)⁴⁴. On a twelfth-century steatite staurotheke in the Archbishop's Palace in Syracuse, as well as in other monuments, the angels are shown as full-length figures⁴⁵. Thus standing statues or perhaps painted portraits, which were on public display were probably the models used after Iconoclasm for these iconic types of the True Cross flanked by Constantine and Helena. As the later examples show, these models were used with some freedom⁴⁶.

With regard to the representation of the cross in these two types, two comments can be made. The first thing to be noticed is the predominant importance of the cross in these images. Both types are strikingly symmetrical in composition, with the cross as visual center. Constantine and Helena either hold it, point toward it, or stand by it in attendance.

As for the depiction of the cross, we find two types of cross with Constantine and Helena: one is a simple Latin cross, while the other is a cross with two parallel arms including a suppedaneum, the so-called patriarchal cross⁴⁷. Both types of cross are found in these iconographic types of Constantine and Helena, with the latter type predominating. A chronological distinction can also be made. Images dated to the ninth and tenth centuries have both types of cross, but those from the eleventh century on, predominantly have a cross with two parallel arms, with the latter probably intended to depict the True Cross.

The Function of the Image in Art after Iconoclasm: Church Decoration

The association of Sts Constantine and Helena with the True Cross carried over into church decoration, which most directly demonstrates the powerful role of the cross and its liturgical symbolism. Liturgical ceremonies involve the symbolic use of objects and furnishings, different parts of the church buildings as well as actions such as anointing, blessing, baptizing, kissing, processions, etc. Therefore the term "liturgical" has wide meaning, and as such will be used in this paper. Concerning the image of the True Cross flanked by Constantine and Helena, this meaning, however, was based on the particular place where specific liturgical



Fig. 6. Tesoro dell'Abbazia, Nonantola, Italy. Reliquary (after "Ornamenta Ecclesiae").

ceremonies related to the cross took place or where a cross had a specific symbolic meaning. In this connection, I would suggest that a pattern can be distinguished according to the positions which Constantine and Helena with the cross occupy in the architectural settings of Byzantine churches. This image is usually found in churches where the cross had traditionally been depicted in Early Christian times, such as near the entrance door, on the vaults and ceiling, in the prothesis niche, near the water basin, as well as on the western wall near the exit. Thus the main door of a church's exterior entrance was commonly decorated with the motif of a cross, as for example in the surviving fragment of the pediment cornice from the propylaeum of the Theodosian reconstruction of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (ca 404-415), or above the doorway of the sixth-century Justinianic church at Kasr Ibn Wardan in Northern Syria⁴⁸. In Cappadocia, Syria, and other countries of the Christian East, an image of the cross above the entrance of the church building had a symbolic, apotropaic meaning as protector of the Gate of God⁴⁹. In the post-Iconoclast period, it is Constantine and Helena flanking a cross which can often be found near the church entrance, for example in the early tenth-century Ayvalı Kilise, in Cappadocia (Fig. 4)⁵⁰. Here Constantine and Helena are depicted on both sides of the barrel vault of the porch, the center of which is marked by the image of the Greek cross in a medallion. Both saints are shown supporting this medallion with their raised hands. The composition above the church entrance emphasizes the cross as protector of the church entrance. Similarly, the cross was a common feature on internal vaults in early Cappadocian churches, for example in the Early Christian churches of St John in Gülü Dere and Üsümlü Kilise in Zelve, both in Cappadocia⁵¹. The chapel of St Basil near Ortahisar in Cappadocia has a huge Latin cross occupying its entire ceiling, and the dedicatory inscription, which runs along the cornice and below the ceiling can be translated as follows: "The decoration has been made at the expense of Nicander, the walls of the glorious house which serves as a house of the honorable wood..."⁵². This is evidence that representations of crosses on the walls and ceilings of Cappadocian churches were indeed associated with the True Cross. This is evident, for example, in the eleventh-century Saklı Kilise in Cappadocia⁵³, where a relief painted cross decorates the ceiling of the narthex and is oriented toward the central arch on the vaults which bear images of Constantine and Helena⁵⁴. In the twelfth-century mosaic decoration of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, now destroyed, Constantine and Helena supporting a cross were depicted in the dome⁵⁵.

Significantly, this image was chosen, together with that of the Virgin Mary and apostles, as an addition to the cross for a dome program. The cross was one of the major images in the decoration of the ceiling and domes in churches of the Christian East, Armenia and Georgia. In the Middle Byzantine period, when Christ Pantocrator became one of the predominant images for the dome decoration of Byzantine churches in Constantinople and the provinces, churches of the Christian East including Cappadocia, Palestine, Syria, Georgia, and Armenia continued to use the image of the cross for domes, vaults, and ceilings.

The prothesis niche was often decorated with a picture of

42. Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century, 16, p. 78-79. See also Codinus, 35, 179. T. Preger (ed.), *Scriptores originum constantinopolitanarum*, I, Leipzig 1901, repr. New York 1975, p. 38, 54.

43. Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century, 34, p. 95.

44. Byzantine Art, an European Art, p. 433, 434, 437 and nos 516-518. 524. *Ornamenta Ecclesiae. Kunst und Künstler der Romanik. Katalog zur Ausstellung des Schnütgen-Museums in der Josef-Haubrich-Kunsthalle*, herausgegeben von Anton Legner, Köln 1985, vol. 3, p. 175, 176 and bibliography note 35, p. 182, fig. H68, p. 184.

45. A similar composition appears on twelfth-century silver reliquaries from the museum in Archangelsk in Russia; in the National Gallery, Urbino, Italy; in the tenth- or eleventh century *staurotheke* from San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome and others: I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, *Byzantine Icons in Steatite*, Wien 1985, p. 138, 139, nos 46-47; A. F. Chervikov, *Stavroteka XII veka iz Archangel'skogo kraevedcheskogo museia*, *VizVrem* 31 (1971), p. 188-193 and figs 1-4; A. Morassi, *Anticaoreficeria italiana*, Milano 1936, p. 28, and no 96; C. Cecchelli, *Il tesoro del Laterano - II. Oreficerie, argenti, smalti*, *Dedalo* VII (1926-27), p. 231-254, and figs on p. 234, 236.

46. Although these iconographic types can be isolated in general, there were many cases when details migrated between the groups. Artists occasionally improvised, thereby mixing the elements of the two groups.

47. A. Frolov, *Les reliquaires de la Vraie Croix*, Paris 1965, p. 124-136, and bibliography, p. 124, n. 3; P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins*, p. 131. M. Restle, *RbK* 1991, p. 28, 29.

48. For illustrations see T. F. Mathews, *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul. A Photographic Survey*, University Park and London, 1976, p. 272, figs 31-34; H. C. Butler, *Syria: Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904-5 and 1909*, Leiden 1920, p. 29, and pl. B-I.

49. N. Teteriatnikov, *Liturgical Planning of Byzantine Churches in Cappadocia* (diss. New York University, 1987), p. 109, 111.

50. Thierry, *op.cit.* (note 40), pl. 56 a, b.

51. *Arts of Cappadocia* (ed. L. Giovannini), London 1971, p. 89, and fig.

37. Only a small portion of a cross arm is visible on the ceiling in St John in Çavusin (unpublished).

52. Natalia Teteriatnikov, *The Frescoes of the Chapel of St Basil in Cappadocia: Their Date and Context Reconsidered*, *CahArch* 40 (1992), p. 99-114.

53. M. Restle, *Byzantine Wall Painting in Asia Minor*, Recklinghausen 1967, II, plan II and figs 21, 38-40.

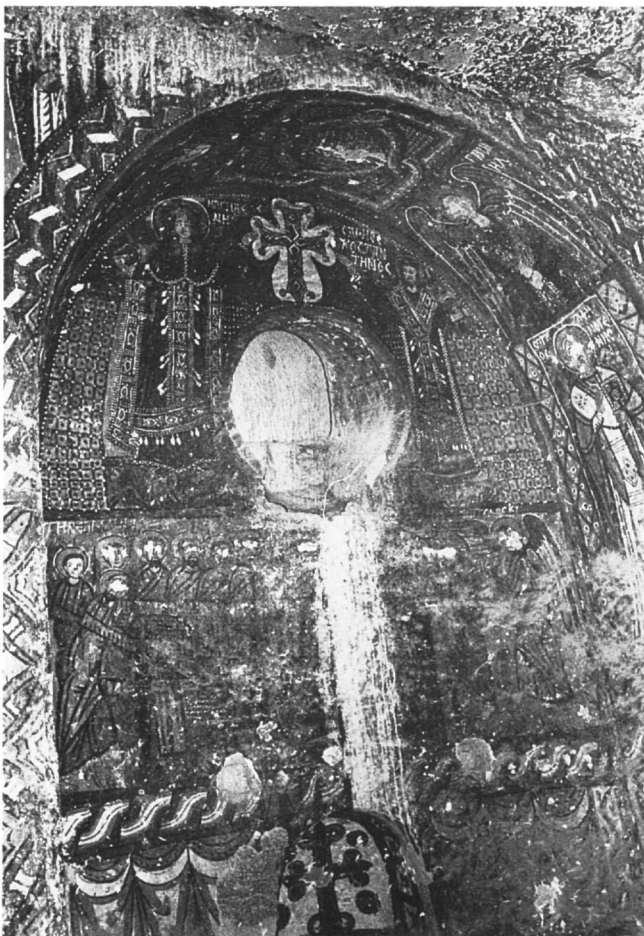
54. *Ibid.*, II, plan II and fig. 21.

55. H. Duckworth, *The Church of the Holy Sepulchre*, London 1922, p. 243, 245 ff.



Fig. 7. Chapel, Zelve, Cappadocia. Interior looking northeast (photo: Teteriatnikov).

Fig. 8. Yılanlı Kilise, Ihlara, Cappadocia. Interior looking south (photo: Teteriatnikov).



a cross in early times. In the sixth-century chapel in Zelve, in Cappadocia, there is a cross inside and above a prothesis niche (Fig. 7). In the eleventh-century chapel 21 in Göreme, Constantine and Helena holding a cross were painted above the prothesis niche (Fig. 5)⁵⁶, while in another Cappadocian church, St Barbara (ca 1006) in Soğanlı, both saints appear on the north wall and just to the west of the prothesis niche⁵⁷. Because the prothesis niche was the place where bread and wine were prepared for the Eucharist, the cross was to be understood within an Eucharistic context, since it was always stamped on the *prosphora* bread.

The water basin is an important piece of liturgical furniture often decorated with a cross in Early Christian churches. The fifth-century chapel of St George in Umtabyh, Syria, still has preserved a water basin with a carved cross⁵⁸. Middle Byzantine water basins were sometimes decorated with an image of Constantine and Helena standing on both sides of the cross. The eleventh-century Yılanlı Kilise in the Ihlara valley of Cappadocia is interesting in this regard. The water basin, located on the south wall of the south arm of the church, is decorated with a small cross (Fig. 8)⁵⁹. The painted program above the water basin develops in two registers, the lower illustrating the Koimesis and the upper showing Constantine and Helena holding a cross. The image of this cross is on the same axis as the cross on the water basin. A similar juxtaposition of water basin and cross is found in the cave chapel of St Saba in Trebizond, in Asia Minor (ca 1213)⁶⁰.

This pictorial link between the water basin and the image of Constantine and Helena with the Cross can be understood through the liturgical association of the True Cross with an actual cross. The Cross played an important symbolic role in the liturgical ceremony during the feast of the Epiphany. According to the ritual of this feast, the blessing of the water is performed in the church naos or narthex where the water basin is located⁶¹. After vespers, the clergy, with the faithful, walk in solemn procession to the holy water basin. After the lessons and recitation of psalms and prayers, the priest performs the main element of the rite by dipping a cross into the water three times, symbolically re-enacting the Baptism of Christ. Thus the significance of the cross in the baptismal ceremony, for which the great blessing of the water on Epiphany was the model, may explain the presence of the True Cross near the scene of the Baptism of Christ.

For instance, this connection may also explain the location of Constantine and Helena with a cross near a Baptism of Christ scene in the tenth-century El Nazar Kilise in Göreme⁶². The two scenes occupy the barrel vault of the



Fig. 9. Panagia Mavriotissa, Kastoria. Narthex, west wall (photo: Teteriatnikov).

south arm of the church. While the Baptism is painted on the western part of the barrel vault, Constantine and Helena are shown on the eastern part, the two scenes facing one another. In a further development of this theme, in the late eleventh- or early twelfth-century church of Panagia Mavriotissa in Kastoria, Greece (Fig. 9)⁶³, Constantine and Helena with the cross are represented on the northern part

basin and on the western wall. There are also other examples where Constantine and Helena and the cross occupy an interesting position in relationship to the holy water basin. In the fourteenth-century frescoes of Panagia Koubelidiki in Kastoria in Greece, both saints holding a cross are shown on the western wall in the narthex. They are slightly to the north of center and above the lunette over the doorway. What is striking is that Constantine and Helena are depicted just above the part of the Nativity scene where the Christ Child is shown using a water basin: A. Paschales, *Kastoria*, Athens 1979, fig. on p. 59.

61. On the function of the water basin see Teteriatnikov, *op.cit.* (note 49), p. 98-109. The ceremony is described in *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris, De Ceremoniis aulae byzantinae* (transl. and ed. J. Reiske), I, Bonn 1829, ch. 34; *Constantin VII Porphyrogénète, Le livre des cérémonies* (transl. and ed. A. Vogt), Paris 1935, I, ch. 34, 131, 132.

62. Restle, *op.cit.* (note 53), II, plan I and figs 13-15.

63. L. Hadermann-Misguich, *Kurbinovo. Les fresques de Saint-Georges et la peinture byzantine du XIIe siècle*. Bibliothèque de Byzantion, Bruxelles 1975, diagram fol. p. 16 and fig. 129.

56. Jerphanion, *op.cit.* (note 40), Plates II, pls 133γ, no. 3.

57. *Ibid.*, Plates III, pl. 186, no. 3.

58. H. C. Butler, *Early Churches in Syria*, Princeton 1929, p. 216, fig. 219.

59. Restle, *op.cit.*, III, plan LVII and fig. 498.

60. G. Millet - D. Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Painting at Trebizond*, London 1936, pl. XXV-III. It is a small rock-cut chapel where the round water basin is carved within a pavement in the southwest corner of the nave. Constantine and Helena with a cross are depicted above the water

of the eastern wall of the narthex while the Baptism appears juxtaposed on the southern part⁶⁴. A somewhat similar idea is also embodied in the fresco program of the eleventh-century Elmalı Kilise in Cappadocia, as well as in tenth-century frescoed churches such as St Stephanos in Kastoria, Greece; it is also found in the thirteenth-century frescoes at the Boiana church in Bulgaria and the early thirteenth-century frescoes of the Geyikli Kilisesi in Matzouka in Asia Minor⁶⁵.

Because the cross is the focus of Christological scenes related to Christ's death, it would not be surprising to find Constantine and Helena near such scenes as the Crucifixion, the Deposition from the Cross, Christ before the Cross, the Women at the Tomb, and the Anastasis. Indeed, in the New Tokalı Kilise in Göreme, Cappadocia, the image of Constantine and Helena is juxtaposed with the scene of the Crucifixion. Both saints are placed on the soffits of the triumphal arch⁶⁶. This arch faces toward the central apse conch which bears an image of the Crucifixion. A similar arrangement is found in the small chapel of Zoodochos Pigi in Yeraki (Pera Kastro), Greece, and in the thirteenth-century frescoes of the bell-tower chapel in the monastery church at Ziča, Yugoslavia (Fig. 10)⁶⁷. In the twelfth-century chapel of St Neophytos in Cyprus, there is a connection between the imperial saints and the scene of the Deposition from the Cross. Constantine and Helena are depicted on the lower register to the north of the doorway; the Deposition from the Cross is painted above (Fig. 11)⁶⁸. Moreover, in the early tenth-century Old Tokalı Kilise in Göreme, Cappadocia, Constantine and Helena are juxtaposed with two scenes, the Deposition from the Cross and the Entombment, on the north wall⁶⁹. These scenes are depicted just above the two saints.

Several instances illustrate a juxtaposition of the image of Constantine and Helena and the cross with the scenes of the Women at the Tomb and the Anastasis. In her recent book, A. Kartsonis showed that debates on Christ's death and resurrection stimulated the development of passion cycles in Byzantine art⁷⁰. It is precisely at that time that images of Constantine and Helena with the cross were blended with passion scenes in church decoration programs.

In the eleventh-century Karanlık Kilise in Cappadocia, this image is connected with the scene of the Women at the Tomb⁷¹. The juxtaposition of the same image with the Anastasis can be found in the early eleventh-century mosaics in the narthex of Hosios Lucas in Phokis, Greece⁷². Here Constantine and Helena are represented in a tympanum over the south window of the western wall, while the Anastasis is depicted in the opposite

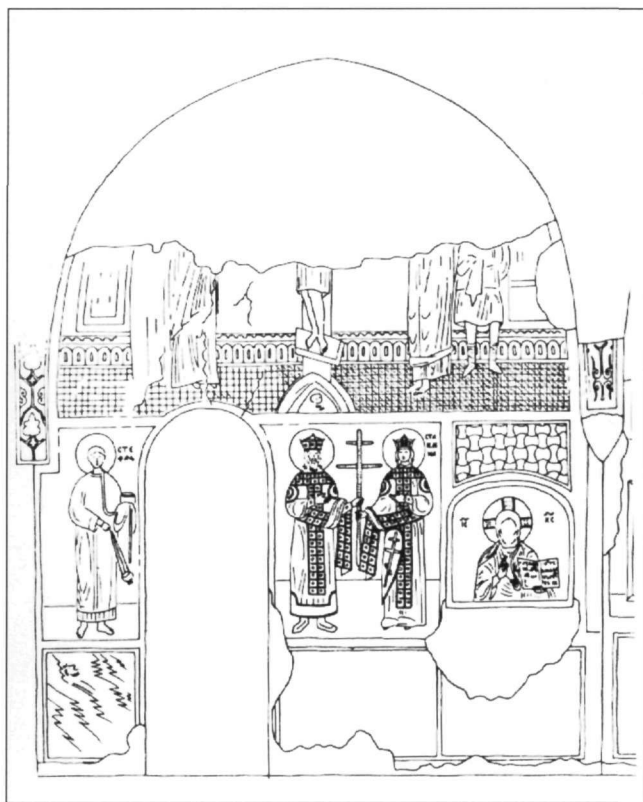


Fig. 10. Bell tower chapel, Ziča monastery, Yugoslavia. East wall (after Subotić).

Fig. 11. St. Neophytos, Paphos. West wall (photo: Dumbarton Oaks).

Fig. 12. Peribleptos, Mistra. Interior looking west (photo: Teteriatnikov).

tympanum on the eastern wall. This visual link between the Anastasis and the image of Constantine and Helena is also provided in the fourteenth-century church of the Peribleptos in Mistra (Fig. 12)⁷³. In some cases Constantine and Helena are found on the western wall below scenes of the Last Judgment. Examples can be seen in the eleventh- and fourteenth-century frescoes of the Georgian church at Bedia, and the east wall of the narthex of the above-mentioned church of Panagia Mavriotissa in Kastoria and elsewhere (Fig. 9)⁷⁴. But more often, we find Constantine and Helena and the cross near scenes of death. The Koimesis is a common scene on the western wall of Byzantine churches, and so is the image of Constantine and Helena with the cross. The combination of both scenes on the western wall is found in the chapel of Hagios Athanasios tou Mouzaki (ca 1384/5), in Kastoria, Greece as well as many others⁷⁵.

This association of the image of the imperial saints and



64. S. Pelekanidis - M. Chatzidakis, *Kastoria*, Athens 1985, p. 76-81, fig. 14.

65. For the decoration in the Geyikli Kilisesi: A Bryer - D. Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*, Washington, D.C. 1985, p. 276-277 and fig. 88. For Elmalı Kilise: Restle, *op.cit.*, II, plan XVIII; A. Grabar, *L'église de Boiana*, Sofia 1924, p. 65, no 50 and pl. XVIII.

66. Ann Wharton Epstein, *Tokalı Kilise, Tenth Century Metropolitan Art in Byzantine Cappadocia*, Washington, D.C. 1986, fig. 116.

67. The fresco program of the chapel of Zoodochos Pigi is unpublished. Photographs of it, however, are in the Dumbarton Oaks Photograph Collection. For Ziča monastery, see G. Subotić, *Ziča*, Belgrade 1988, p. 18.

68. C. Mango - E. Hawkins, *The Hermitage of St. Neophytos and its Wall Painting*, DOP 20 (1966), pl. 16.

69. Restle, *op.cit.* (note 53), II, Plan X.

70. A. Kartsonis, *Anastasis. The Making of an Image*, Princeton 1986, especially p. 228-236.

71. Restle, *op.cit.*, II, plan XXII and fig. 239.

72. R. Schultz-S. Barnsley, *The Monastery of Hosios Lucas*, London 1901, p. 49, 50 and pl. 36.

73. S. Dufrenne, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra*, Paris 1970, pl. 29.111; 30.158.

74. L. A. Shervashidze, *Srednevekoviaia monumental'naia zhivopis' v Abkhazii*, Tbilisi 1980, p. 50, 51 and fig. 14. Pelekanidis-Chatzidakis, *op.cit.* (note 64), fig. 14.

75. Pelekanidis-Chatzidakis, *op.cit.*, fig. on p. 114. For Kars Kilise (ca 1212) in Cappadocia: Restle, *op.cit.* (note 53), III, plan LI; for church of Christos in Veroia (ca 1315): this scene is unpublished, but a photograph of it is in the Dumbarton Oaks Photograph Collection; for the fresco in the fourteenth-century monastery church at Kalenić,



Fig. 13. *San Francesco in Cortona, Italy. Reliquary (after Weitzmann).*

death scenes could derive from the story of the discovery of the cross by Helena⁷⁶. In this legend, Helena found three crosses and tested them on a dead man to see which had the power to restore life. The cross which raised him back to life was recognized as the True Cross of Christ. Thus, it is possible that an image of Constantine and Helena with the cross was thought to anticipate the power of the Resurrection, making it suitable to be depicted above burial sites⁷⁷. It is notable that in the majority of cases Constantine and Helena with a cross appear on the western wall or on the walls of the narthex of Byzantine churches. This may well be explained by the fact that these places were often reserved for tombs or arcosolia⁷⁸, where commemorative services took place. Since the cross is a symbol of resurrection and salvation, Constantine and Helena carried and reinforced its message. The image reinforced the message that not simply any cross was meant but the True Cross, attested by the presence of Constantine and Helena. This can also be supported by the liturgical texts on the feast of Exaltation of the Cross (September 14) found in the Typikon of the Great

Church⁷⁹. These texts state that the True Cross is a symbol of Christ's Passion and his Anastasis. Therefore the image of the True Cross flanked by Constantine and Helena had the power of the resurrection, and in this context it was used for the decoration of burial sites.

Reliquaries and Devotional Images

Let us turn to reliquaries of the True Cross bearing images of Constantine and Helena. They were the ones that were venerated during the feasts associated with the True Cross. We know that the relic of the True Cross in the imperial palace in Constantinople was carried in procession during Monday of Easter week and was venerated in the Oratory of Constantine by the patriarch, the Emperor, and his court.

Reliquaries, made in ivory, silver, and steatite, represent the largest group. One of the earliest reliquaries is a tenth-century ivory plaque from the church of San Francesco in Cortona, Italy (Fig. 13)⁸⁰, with a precious relic of the True Cross occupying the center of its front side. What is impressive is that among the saints depicted near the cross-relic, Constantine and Helena are given a prominent position in medallions in the lower register below the relic of the cross. Helena points toward Constantine, holding the imperial scepter located just below the central arm of the cross-relic; above the upper arm, Christ is depicted in a medallion. Thus a juxtaposition of Constantine to the relic of the True Cross and Christ is suggested by their axial arrangement. Two aspects are accentuated in the image of Constantine and Helena: first, their imperial identity, and second, their relation to the relic. The relic of the True Cross remains the focal center of the reliquary, and the presence of Constantine and Helena recalls the story of the discovery of the cross and establishes its veneration on the highest imperial level. The imperial figures' closeness to the cross functions as a certificate of authenticity, guaranteeing that the relic being displayed in this object is a genuine piece of the cross found by Helena. This imperial association with the relic can be further observed in the eleventh-century silver reliquary in the Louvre, where Constantine and Helena stand on either side of the cross and point toward the relic (Fig. 14)⁸¹. This reliquary has a sliding lid: When it is opened, Constantine and Helena appear inside together with the relic as a testimony that the relic is the True Cross. A similar idea is expressed in three other reliquaries in the Louvre, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and the twelfth-century reliquary from the Archangelsk Museum, in Russia⁸². Triptych reliquaries of the True Cross offer a similar message, namely the simultaneous appearance of the

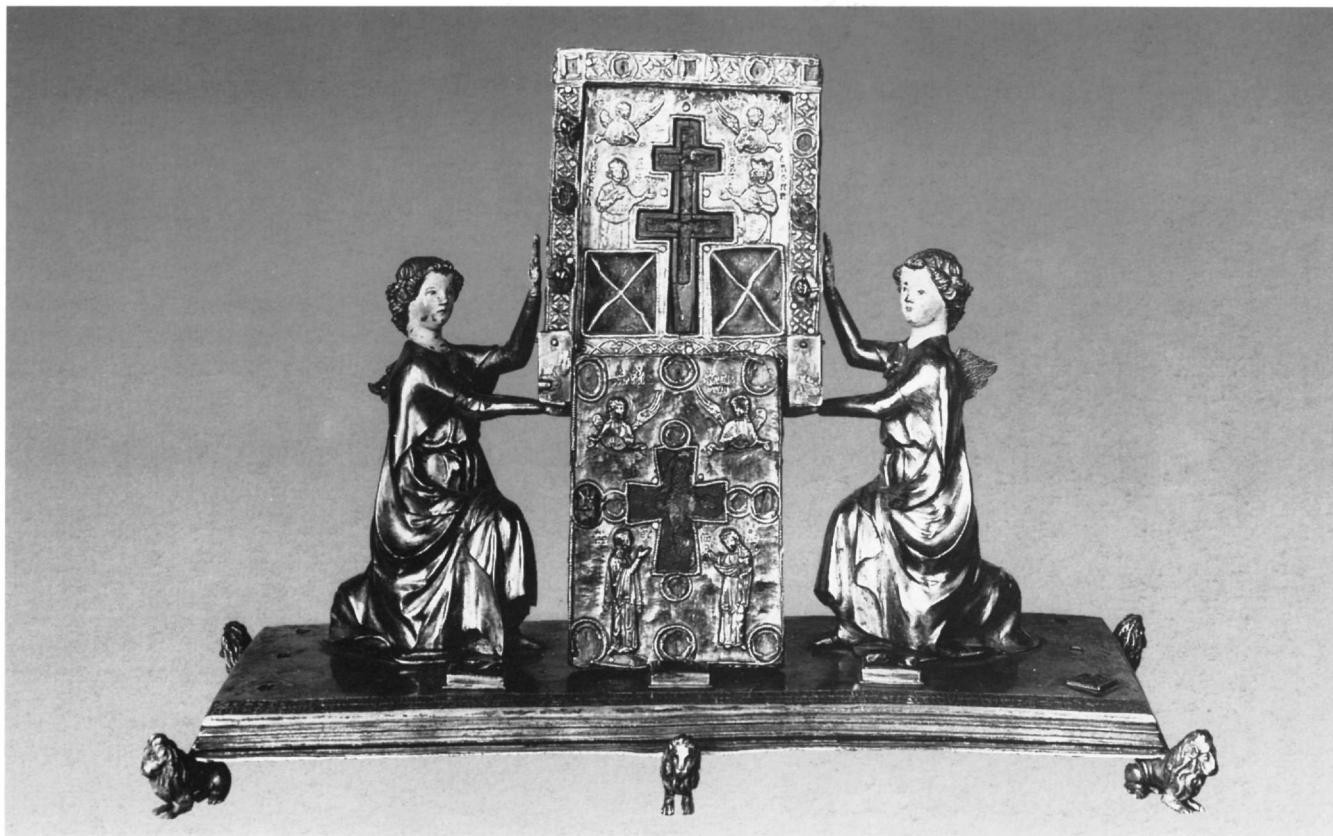
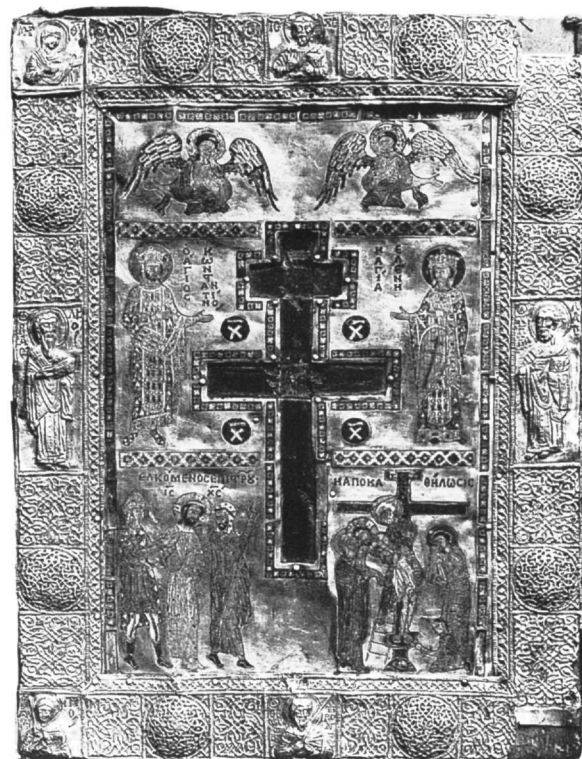


Fig. 14. Louvre, Paris. Reliquary (after "Ornamenta Ecclesiae").

Fig. 15. Christian Museum, Esztergom, Hungary. Reliquary (after Wessel).



Yugoslavia: V. Petković - A. Z h. Tatić, Monastir Kalenić, Belgrade 1926, p. 58 and fig. 49, p. 87 and fig. 73.

76. M. Wenzel, Some Notes on the Iconography of St. Helen, Actes du XIIe Congrès international d'Etudes Byzantines (Ochride, 10-16 septembre 1961), III, Belgrade 1964, p. 415-421, and fig. 3. Kenneth G. Holum, Hadrian and St. Helena: Imperial Travel and the Origins of Christian Holy Land Pilgrimage, The Blessings of Pilgrimage (ed. by Robert Ousterhout), Urbana and Chicago 1990, p. 66-81.

77. Wenzel found images of Helena on medieval tomb stones in the area of Dalmatia near Split. Wenzel, *op.cit.*, p. 416-418 and figs 1-6.

78. N. Teteriatnikov, Burial Places in Cappadocian Churches, *GOTHR* 29/2 (1984), p. 141-174.

79. Le typicon, I, 29-33.

80. Frolov, *op.cit.* (note 47), p. 239-241. A. Goldschmidt - K. Weitzmann, Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.-XIII. Jahrhunderts, Berlin 1934, p. 48, 49 and pl. XXX, no. 77. A. Cutler, The Cortona Cross-Reliquary in History and Art, Abstracts of Papers, 15th Byzantine Studies Conference, Amherst, Mass. 1989, p. 35, 36.

81. Ornamenta Ecclesiae, p. 168 and bibliography n. 35, fig. H68, p. 184.

82. Chervakov, *op.cit.* (note 45), figs 1-4.



Fig. 16. Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Triptych (after Weitzmann).

saints together with relics. When the doors of the triptych were opened, the central panel revealed the imperial saints together with the relic. This can be observed, for instance, on the golden staurotheke known as the Stavelot Triptych in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, dated to the twelfth century (Fig. 1)⁸³. In the twelfth-century reliquary triptych from the cathedral in Köln⁸⁴, the relic of the True Cross flanked by four flying angels occupies the entire space of the central panel. Constantine

the Great and his mother Helena are depicted frontally on each wing of the triptych, with just their hands pointing toward the True Cross in the central panel. Crosses in medallions are added to the spaces above and below each figure. This effect of opening the reliquary side wings or a lid to reveal the miraculous appearance of saints near the True Cross can also be observed in the tenth-century reliquary in the cathedral treasury in Köln; the tenth-century ivory in the Louvre, Paris; a reliquary from St



Fig. 17. Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Triptych (after Weitzmann).

Peter's in the Vatican; one in San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome; and the Gelaty triptych in Georgia⁸⁵.

A further link between the image of Constantine and Helena and the cross and the relic of the True Cross can be detected in a twelfth-century silver reliquary from the Christian Museum in Esztergom, Hungary (Fig. 15)⁸⁶. This reliquary is richly decorated with enamels and repoussé work, the relic of the True Cross occupies the center of the panel, while the silver background is divided

83. The Stavelot Triptych. Mosan Art and the Legend of the True Cross. Exhibition catalogue with introduction by W. Voelkle, New York 1980, figs 1, 7, 38.

84. Ornamenta Ecclesiae, p. 118-120 with bibliography on p. 120, and fig. H37, p. 123. Ebersolt, *op.cit.* (note 24), p. 125, 126 and fig. 17.

85. A. de Waal, Die antiken Reliquiare der Peterskirche, RQ 7 (1893), p. 245-262 and pl. XVIII. Cecchelli, *op.cit.* (note 45), fig. on p. 235. Ebersolt, *op.cit.*, p. 125, 126 and fig. 17.

86. K. Wessel, Byzantine Enamels from the 5th to the 13th Century, Recklinghausen 1967, p. 158-163 and fig. 49; Ornamenta Ecclesiae, p. 116 with bibliography p. 116 and fig. H33, p. 116.

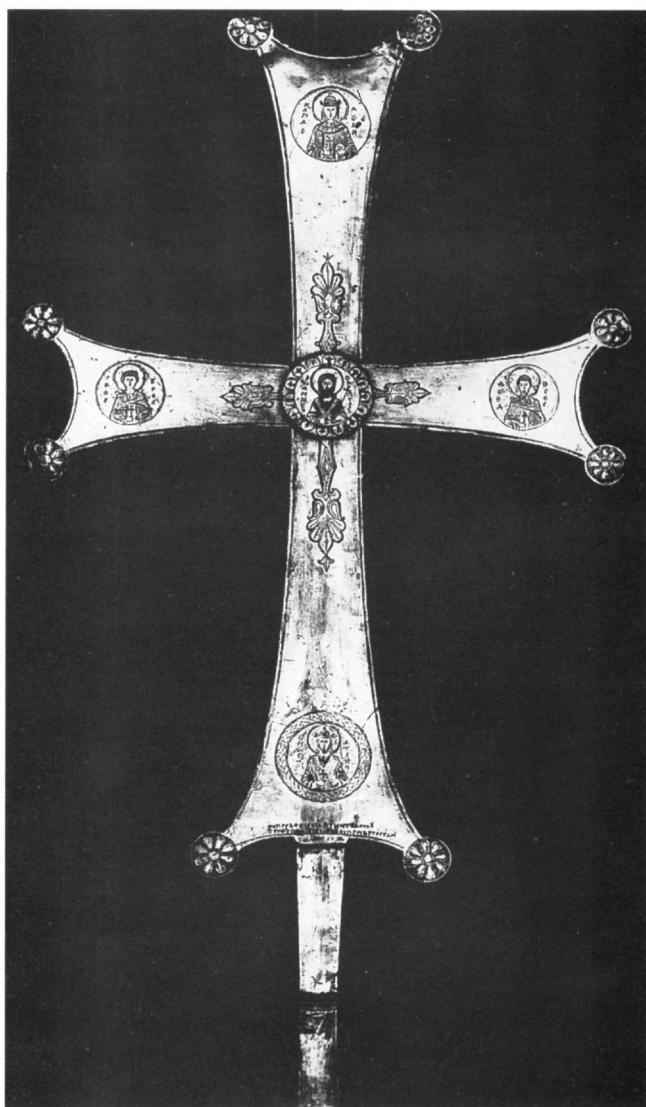


Fig. 18. Benaki Museum, Athens. Silver cross (after L. Buras).

into three registers. The busts of two adoring angels are depicted on the upper register; the second register depicts Constantine and Helena, clad in richly adorned imperial garments, flanking the cross-relic, with their hands raised toward the relic. On the lower register are two scenes flanking the bottom arm of the cross: "Christ before the Cross" and the "Deposition from the Cross", providing a visual link between the Passion of Christ, the cross, and Constantine and Helena who were responsible for its discovery and widespread veneration. The theme of Christ's Passion invokes previously mentioned liturgical texts which were cited for the liturgy of the Exaltation of the Cross in the "Typikon of the Great Church"⁸⁷. As in church decoration, images of Constantine and

Helena and the cross were widely used on devotional images in various media. Thus the imperial saints are, in some instances, found on triptychs where the center is often occupied by a representation of the Crucifixion, the focus being the cross. In the tenth-century ivory triptych from the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, there is a dramatic depiction of the Crucifixion on the central panel (Fig. 16)⁸⁸. On the inner sides of its wings, four saints are depicted on each side. Constantine and Helena holding a cross are shown on the left wing in the lower compartment. In the tenth-century ivory triptych from the Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Constantine and Helena also appear on the triptych, but here the saints are shown on the central panel and near the Crucifixion (Fig. 17)⁸⁹. In this case their figures are half the size of the figures of Christ, John and the Virgin. They stand near Christ's feet in three-quarter posture and point toward the central cross with Christ. Both figures are identified by inscriptions above their heads. But there were also triptychs where Constantine and Helena were depicted full size on side wings attached to the central panel⁹⁰. Thus, these triptychs and the reliquaries were the models for devotional artifacts used for private devotions.

In this context it will be useful to examine processional and devotional crosses where the image of Constantine and Helena and the cross also appears. The presence of these saints is noted on a tenth- or eleventh-century silver processional cross from the Benaki Museum in Athens (Fig. 18)⁹¹. In this case, half-length figures of Constantine and Helena are shown on the reverse side of the cross, at the extremities of the upper and lower arms of the cross. In another early twelfth-century processional cross in Matskahavarishi, Georgia, both saints are enclosed in a medallion placed on the extremity of the lower arm; the center of the cross is occupied by the image of Christ⁹². These crosses, however, were made for a specific use: they are crosses of large size intended to be carried in processions and seen by the public, possibly on the feast of Constantine and Helena, since they display these saints' representations as well as that of the Exaltation of the Cross. A cross of similar type is shown in the illustration of a liturgical procession in the Menologion of St Basil⁹³. Even small private objects such as the twelfth-century silver encolpion from the Cathedral Treasury of Hildesheim, Germany, carry the same message, i.e. the unity of Constantine and Helena with relics of the True Cross (Figs 19-20)⁹⁴. Because of the presence of Slavonic inscriptions, the type of the cross, and the niello decoration, this cross was probably made in twelfth-century Novgorod⁹⁵. The front side of the encolpion depicts an image of the Crucifixion; the reverse shows



Fig. 19. Hildesheim, Cathedral Treasury. Cross, obverse (after Ludat).

eight saints. The encolpion still contains relics of the True Cross as well as relics of Constantine and Helena; one of its inner sides has a picture of Constantine and Helena and the cross. When this encolpion is opened, relics can be seen along the inside of the obverse; the inner side of the reverse encloses engraved images of Constantine and Helena with the cross. There is an inscription in Slavonic naming the owner of this cross: "Lord, help your servant of God, Ilias, who has this Cross in this life and the life to come". Because this encolpion was to be worn around a person's neck, it displays the prayer for salvation of a private person through the help of the True Cross and the saints⁹⁶.

In conclusion, the examination of the cult of the cross and



Fig. 20. Hildesheim, Cathedral Treasury. Cross, inner side (after Ludat).

87. Le typicon, I, 29-33.

88. Goldschmidt-Weitzmann, *op.cit.*, 2, p. 46 and pl. XXVIII, no 72 (a). Byzantine Art, an European Art, p. 175, 176, no 80 and fig. 80. Ornamenta Ecclesiae, 15, 16 with bibliography p. 16, and fig. G9, p. 15.

89. Goldschmidt-Weitzmann, *op.cit.*, 2, p. 37, no 39, pl. XVI.

90. One such wing of a triptych, dating to the middle of the tenth century, has been preserved, and is in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection. It represents Constantine holding a cross scepter. The emperor stands in frontal position but is turned slightly to his left. The central panel more than likely depicted the Crucifixion as in the triptychs discussed above. The right wing probably had a representation of Helena: K. Weitzmann, *Ivories and Steatites*, Washington, D.C. 1972, p. 58-60 and pl. 5, no 25; A. Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory*, Washington, D.C. 1985, p. 32, figs 30, 41 and 46.

91. Byzantine Art, an European Art, p. 430, 431, no 513.

92. L. Khushkiadze, *Vizantiiskii Krest is Mazkhvarishi*, Zograf 15 (1984), p. 24-40 and figs 2, 13.

93. *Il Menologio de Basilio II* (Cod. Vaticano greco 1613) (ed. P. Franchi de Cavalieri), Turin 1907, II, p. 142.

94. Ludat, *op.cit.* (note 21), p. 3ff. and figs 1-8.

95. For the bibliography see *ibid.*, especially notes 2-9. Ludat dates it to the twelfth or thirteenth century. The iconography of St Helena's garments seems to allow a dating to the twelfth century. Helena has a cloth on her garment; the former is in a shape of a shield with inscribed cross. As Ebersolt and Jerphanion pointed out, this detail appears on imperial garments on monuments dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 13, 14. Further testimony to the importance of Constantine and Helena comes from the inscription located just next to the image of the two saints. Among several inscriptions referring to particles from the famous relic, there are two that mention particles from the tomb of Constantine and Helena. The relics were probably brought to Russia from Jerusalem by the pilgrim Ilias, who then ordered the silver reliquary cross in his home town of Novgorod.

the cult of the imperial saints Constantine and Helena helps us to understand the new functional context of the image of the True Cross flanked by Constantine and Helena in religious art after Iconoclasm. The image became increasingly popular in Byzantine art after Iconoclasm, in the period when the cult of the True Cross and the cult of Sts Constantine and Helena reached its peak. The new function of this historical image can be associated with the polemic surrounding the meaning of the cross during the Iconoclast period. Iconoclasts and Iconodules both venerated the cross; after Iconoclasm it was important for the Iconodule church to neutralize the Iconoclast concept of the cross. It was necessary to rehabilitate the cross that had been appropriated by the Iconoclasts for their own ends. Thus the Byzantines introduced the imperial saintly pair of Constantine and Helena visually in order to guarantee and to authenticate the cross which they emblematically present. The Early Christian statues or painted portraits of the Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena with the cross were most likely used as iconographic models for the Middle Byzantine images. Examination of the image in Middle Byzantine church decoration suggests that the image was used in various parts of the church where the cross was usually located in Early Christian churches. In Middle Byzantine churches, the True Cross flanked by Constantine and Helena was used as a substitute for a picture of the cross alone, and invoked the liturgical and symbolic meaning of the cross pertaining to a particular location in the church. The frequent appearance of Constantine and Helena on reliquaries reinforces the saints' association with relics of the True Cross. During the feast of Constantine and Helena and especially the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, the reliquaries of the True Cross were venerated in the church by the public. Since reliquaries decorated with the images of Constantine and Helena are known beginning from the tenth century, and they were displayed in the church for public veneration during the feast days, it is possible that

representations of Constantine and Helena appeared first on reliquaries to authenticate the Cross and to replace the cross by an icon of the True Cross flanked by Imperial saints. This image then was reproduced in devotional triptychs, crosses, and icons. Since reliquaries of the True Cross, as well as processional crosses, were venerated during the church feasts⁹⁷, the images of the True Cross flanked by Constantine and Helena acquired liturgical significance. As the text for the liturgy of the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14), cited in the "Typikon of the Great Church", states⁹⁸, the True Cross protected the emperors and the Empire and its people; it also symbolized Christ's passion and his Anastasis. Joining the True Cross, Sts Constantine and Helena also acquired the power of the cross, which at the same time guaranteed their popularity.

97. Egeria described the procedure in the Holy Sepulchre when the True Cross was venerated by the faithful: "As long as the Holy Wood is on the table, the bishop sits with his hands resting on either end of it and holds it down, and the deacons round him keep watch over it. They guard it like this because what happens now is that people, catechumens as well as faithful, come up one by one to the table. They stoop down over it, kiss the Wood, and move on" in: Egeria's Travels (transl. John Wilkinson), London 1971, p. 137. In the year 700 Bishop Arculf described the veneration of the relics of the True Cross in Constantinople: "It (Hagia Sophia)... has, in its inmost part, on the north side, a large and beautiful closet, wherein is a wooden chest with a wooden lid, containing three pieces of our Lord's cross; that is to say, the long timber cut in two, and the transverse part of the same holy cross. These pieces are exhibited for the adoration of the people three times a year; namely, on the day of our Lord's Supper, the day of the Preparation, and on Holy Saturday. On the first of these, the chest, which is two cubits long and one broad, is set out on a golden altar, with the holy cross exposed to view: the Emperor first approaches, and after him, all the different ranks of laymen in order to kiss and worship it; on the following day, the Empress and all the married women and virgins do the same; on the third day, the bishops and different orders of the clergy observe the same ceremonies; and then the chest is shut, and carried back to the closet before mentioned". *Early Travels in Palestine* (transl. Thomas Wright), New York 1968, p. 12. For other references see also: Frolow, *op.cit.* (note 47), p. 71-78.

98. *Le typicon*, p. 29-33.