HELENA AUGUSTA

The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross

BY

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Bronze coin with the portrait of Helena and the legend FL. HELENA AUGUSTA, minted in Trier. The reverse shows a Securitas and the legend SECURITAS REIPUBLICE (see RIC VII, Trier 508, p. 212).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Jan Willem Drijvers

ABBREVIATIONS

ANRW  Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt
ASS  Acta Sanctorum
BA  Bulletin Antike Beschauung
BHIG  Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca
BHL  Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina
BHO  Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis
BSOAS  Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
CC  Corpus Christianorum
CIG  Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum
CIL  Corpus Inscriptionum Latinae
CSCO  Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL  Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum
CSHB  Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
CTA  Codex Theodosianus
DOP  Dumbarton Oaks Papers
GCS  Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
GRBS  Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
HLCV  Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres (ed. E. Dichi, Berlin, 1925-1931)
JAC  Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
JEH  Journal of Ecclaisastical History
JTS  Journal of Theological Studies
Kl. Paulus  Der Kleine Paulus. Lexikon der Antike in 5 Bänden
Liber Pontificalis  Liber Pontificalis (ed. L. Duchesne)
MGH  Monumenta Germaniae Historica
PG  Patrologia Graeca (ed. J.-P. Migne)
PL  Patrologia Latina (ed. J.-P. Migne)
PLRE  The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (Cambridge 1971-1980)
PO  Patrologia Orientalis
RAC  Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum
RE  Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft (Pauly/Wissowa)
REL  Revue des Études Latines
RHE  Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique
RIC  Roman Imperial Coinage
ROC  Revue de l’Orient Chrétienn
SC  Sources Chrétiennes
Vig. Christ.  Vigiliae Christianae
CHAPTER ONE

THE HELENA LEGEND

Three versions of the legend of the discovery of the Cross came into being between the end of the fourth century and the mid-fifth century: the Helena legend, the Protonike legend and the Judas Cyriacus legend. The Helena legend is definitely the oldest. From the time of its origin seven texts of the Helena legend were transmitted until c.450. They can be divided into two groups: a. the texts of the legend in the Church Histories of Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret; b. the texts of the legend by Ambrose, Paulinus of Nola and Sulpicius Severus. Of these seven texts, that of Rufinus¹ comes closest to the original version of the Helena legend:

At about the same time, Helena, the mother of Constantine, a woman of outstanding faith and deep piety, and also of exceptional munificence, whose offspring indeed one would expect to be such a man as Constantine, was advised by divinely-sent visions to go to Jerusalem. There she was to make an enquiry among the inhabitants to find out the place where the sacred body of Christ had hung on the Cross. This spot was difficult to find, because the persecutors of old had set up a statue of Venus over it, so that if any Christian wanted to worship Christ in that place, he seemed to be worshipping Venus. For this reason, the place was not much frequented and had all but been forgotten. But when, as we related above, the pious lady hastened to the spot pointed out to her by a heavenly sign, she tore down all that was profane and polluted there. Deep beneath the rubble she found three crosses lying in disorder. But the joy of finding this treasure was marred by the difficulty of distinguishing to whom each cross belonged. The board was there, it is true, on which Pilate had placed an inscription written in Greek, Latin and Hebrew characters.² But not even this provided sufficient evidence to identify the Lord’s Cross. In such an ambiguous case uncertainty requires divine proof. It happened that in that same city, a certain prominent lady of that place lay mortally ill with a serious disease. Macarius was at that time bishop of the Church there. When he saw the doubts of the queen and all present, he said: “Bring all three crosses which have been found and God will now reveal to us which is the cross which bore Christ.” Then, together with the queen and the others, he approached the sick woman, went down on his knees and poured out the following prayer: “Oh! Lord, you

¹ Rufinus, Hist. Ecc. X 7-8.
² John 19:19.
saw fit through the Passion on the Cross of your Only-begotten Son to grant salvation to the human race, and now in our own time you have inspired your handmaid to search everywhere for the blessed wood on which our Saviour hung; now give us a clear sign which of these crosses was made to glorify our Lord and which were made to execute slaves. Let this woman, now lying ill unto death, be recalled to life from death’s door as soon as the wood of salvation touches her.” His prayer finished, he first brought one of the three crosses near, but nothing happened; then he brought the second near still no reaction. But when he brought the third cross near, the woman suddenly opened her eyes and got up, all her strength restored. She ran through the house more quickly than when she had been well, and began to praise the power of the Lord. When the queen saw that her wish had been answered by such a clear sign, she built a marvellous church of royal magnificence over the place where she had discovered the Cross. The nails, too, which had attached the Lord’s body to the Cross, she sent to her son. From some of these he had a horse’s bridle made, for use in battle, while he used the others to add strength to a helmet, equally with a view to using it in battle. Part of the redeeming wood she sent to her son, but she also left part of it there preserved in silver chests. This part is commemorated by regular veneration to this very day. The venerable queen also left this further proof of her deep piety: she invited to dinner the virgins whom she found there consecrated to God. She is said to have looked after them with such great devotion, that she considered it a disgrace if they used the services of maidservants. Instead, having herself donned the garb of a maidservant, she served them food and drink with her own hands and poured water over their hands. She who was both queen of all the known world and the mother of the emperor appointed herself the servant of the servants of Christ. This, then, is the true story of what happened in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CROSS IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

The legend of the discovery of the Cross probably came into being in the second half of the fourth century, but the True Cross had already been venerated for some time, especially in Jerusalem. It was also an object of veneration in other parts of the empire, and relics of the Cross had become widely distributed. In the first three centuries of the Christian era the Cross had been a symbol of minor importance. From Constantine’s reign onwards, the Cross became increasingly prominent as a symbol until it eventually became the Christian symbol par excellence. Initially an object identified with disgrace, it later became a highly revered token of salvation. From the fourth century on, the sign of the Cross appeared nearly everywhere: engraved on coins, houses, sarcophagi and weapons, sewn on clothes, and even used as a tattoo. Reverence for the Cross as a symbol was undoubtedly greatly stimulated by the ‘discovery’ of what was considered to be the True Cross.

The attribution to Helena of the discovery of the Cross is late and not based on historical evidence. The name of Helena does not occur in any of the fourth-century sources in which the True Cross is mentioned. It is useful to present a chronological inventory of these sources, since it not only demonstrates the dissemination of relics of the Cross, but also provides evidence that Helena was not initially connected with the Cross and its discovery. It also sheds light on the question of the date of discovery.

At the end of the 340s Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, mentions in his Catechetes the presence of the lignum crucis in the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre. He alludes in three places to the relics of the Cross. It appears from these passages that Christians already attached great value to the Cross and that fragments of it had

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1 See e.g. M. Sulzberger, 1925; P. Stockmeier, 1966.
2 Joh. Chrys., Contra Jud. et Gent. = PG 48, 926; Exsp. in Ps. 109, 6 = PG 55, 274.
3 P. Stockmeier, 1966, 212-217. The first known representation of Christ’s crucifixion only dates from the first half of the fifth century and was depicted on an ivory relief of Italian workmanship; see Lexicon der christlichen Ikonographie, s.v. Kreuz, 611-612.
4 P. Stockmeier, 1966, 201: “Die Auffindung des Kreuzes Christi löst eine starke kultische Bewegung aus; ...”
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PROTONIKE LEGEND

At the beginning of the fifth century two new versions of the legend of the Cross developed, both based on the Helena version and both of Syrian origin: the legend featuring Protonike (P) and that featuring Judas Cyriacus (C).

P presents an extraordinary version of the discovery of the Cross. The most authentic form known to us has come down in the Syriac Doctrina Addai (DA). This version relates how the Cross was discovered shortly after Christ's ascension, by Protonike, who was alleged to be the wife of the Emperor Claudius (41-54). In the Doctrina the legend is narrated by the apostle Addai to an audience consisting of Abgar, king of Edessa, his family and court retinue. While the legend which gives the main role to Helena is based on historical accounts (Eusebius) and on the historical circumstances of its time, P is a narrative which has no foundation in historical events. P was not known in Greek and Latin, but only in Syriac and later on in Armenian. The area of distribution of P was therefore confined to those eastern areas where Syriac (and Armenian) was spoken and understood. Before going into P in more detail, I give here G. Howard’s translation.

But I will tell you that which happened and was done for people who, like you, believed in the Messiah that he is the Son of the living God. Protonice, the wife of Claudius Caesar, whom Tiberius had made second in his kingdom when he went to war against the Spaniards who had rebelled against him, this woman, when Simon one of the disciples was in the city of Rome, saw the signs and wonders and astonishing powers which he performed in the name of the Messiah [and] recanted the paganism of her fathers in which she lived, even the pagan idols which she worshiped. She believed in our Lord the Messiah, worshiped and glorified [him] along with those who were followers of Simon, and held him in great honor.

1 Greek fragments on papyrus of the DA are known but no traces of P have been found on Greek papyri; see R. Peppermüller, 1971.
2 G. Howard, 1981, 21-35 (Leningrad N.S. 4). For the manuscript tradition of P see BHO, 50-52; R.A. Lipsius, 1880; E. Nestle, 1889; V. Ryssel, 1895; J. Straubinger, 1912, 82-84; A. Derreumaux, 1933. Of the five published manuscripts of P, the sixth-century Leningrad manuscript N.S. 4 of the DA contains the most authentic version according to J. Straubinger, 1912, 84-86. It was first published by G. Phillips, 1876. See for a description of the manuscript, M. van Esbroeck, 1988.
Later she wished also to see Jerusalem and the places where the mighty deeds of our Lord had been performed. So she arose with zeal and went down from Rome to Jerusalem, she [f. 54a] and her two sons with her and her one virgin daughter.

When she entered Jerusalem, the city came out to meet her. They received her in great honor as due to the lady queen of the great country of the Romans. [As for] James, who was made leader and prefect over the church which was built for us there, when he heard why she had come there, he arose and went to her and entered in before her where she was dwelling in the great palace of the royal house of King Herod. When she saw him she received him with great joy, even as [she had received] Simon Peter. He also showed her healings and miracles like Simon.

She said to him: "Show me Golgotha where the Messiah was crucified, the wood of his cross on which he was hung by the Jews, and the grave where he was laid." James said to her: "These three things which your majesty wishes to see are under the authority of the Jews. They control them and do not permit us to go and pray there before Golgotha and the grave. They are not even willing to give us the wood of his cross. And not only this, but they persecute us that we not preach or proclaim in the name of the Messiah. Often [f. 54b] also they confine us in prison."

When she heard these things the queen immediately ordered that they bring before her Onias, the son of Hanan the priest, Gedalia, the son of Caiaphas, and Judah, the son of Ebed Shalom, chiefs and officers of the Jews. She said to them: "Deliver Golgotha, the grave, and the wood of the cross to James and to those who follow him. Let no man hinder them from offering service there according to the custom of their worship."

When she had thus ordered the priests, she arose to go and see those places and to hand over the area to James and to those who were with him. Later when she entered the tomb she found within the tomb three crosses, one belonging to our Lord, and two to the brigands who were crucified with him on his right and left sides. In the moment that she entered the [f. 8a] tomb, she and her children with her, in that very instant, her virgin daughter fell down and died without pain, illness, or any cause of death. When the queen saw that her daughter had suddenly died, she kneeled and prayed within the tomb the following prayer: "The God who gave himself to death for all people, being crucified in this place and laid in his tomb, and who as God gives life to all, arose and brought many to life with him, whom the crucifying Jews will not hear as well as the erring pagans, whose idols, graven images, and pagan worship I have renounced. Now they will look on me with mockery and say: 'All this that has happened to her is because she renounced the gods whom she worshiped, acknowledged the Messiah whom she did not know, and availed herself of the place of his tomb and crucifixion.' So, if my Lord, I am unworthy to be heard because I worshiped creatures instead of you, have regard for your august name, that it not be reviled in this place [f. 8b] as they have reviled you in your crucifixion."

While she was saying these things in her prayer and was relating [them] in the suffering of her crying out in front of all who were there, her oldest son came near and said to her: "Listen to what I have to say, your majesty. In my mind and reasoning I think that this sudden death of my sister was not in vain; it was rather a marvelous visitation by which God could be glorified—what did not happen that his name be blasphemed—in order that those who hear might believe. Look, we entered the tomb and found three crosses in it. We do not know which one of them is the cross upon which the Messiah was hung. By the death of my sister we are able to perceive and learn which cross is the Messiah's because the Messiah will not turn away from those who believe in and seek him."

Queen Protonice, although at that moment being very bitter inside, recognized that her son had spoken these things wisely, rightly, and straightforwardly. She took with her hands [f. 9a] one of the crosses and placed it upon the corpse of her daughter who was lying before her. Then she prayed: "O God, you who have demonstrated wondrous powers in this place in order that we might hear and believe, if this cross is yours, my Lord, and on it your humanity was hung by shameless men, show the strong and mighty power of your divinity which dwells in the humanity and let my daughter live and arise that your name might be glorified by her when her soul returns to her body. May those who crucified you be ashamed and may those who worship you rejoice."

When she had waited a long while after she had said this, she took up the cross from the corpse of her daughter, put another one in place, and again prayed: "O God, by whose commands worlds and creatures exist, who takes pleasure in the lives of all people who turn to him and who does not turn away from the request of those who seek him, if this is your cross, my Lord, show the power of your victorious deeds as you are accustomed and let my daughter live and arise [f. 9b]. Let the pagans be ashamed who are worshipers of your creation rather than of you. May those who are true believers make confession that their mouth might be opened to praise you before those who deny you." After she had waited a long time she took the second cross from her daughter and taking the third cross placed it upon her daughter. When she attempted to raise her eyes to heaven and open her mouth in prayer, immediately, in that instant, in the twinkling of an eye, as the cross touched the corpse of her daughter, her daughter came back to life, suddenly arose, and glorified God who had restored her to life by his cross. Queen Protonice, when she saw how her daughter had come back to life was moved and greatly frightened. But though she was perturbed, she glorified the Messiah and believed concerning him, that he is the Son of the living God.

Her son said to her: "My lady, you have seen that if this had not occurred today, it might perhaps have happened that they would have carried the cross of the Messiah, by which my sister came back to life [f. 10a], and would have taken and honored one belonging to the murderous robbers. Now behold, we have seen and rejoiced that the Messiah has been glorified by this which he has done."
She took the cross of the Messiah and gave it to James that it might be kept in great honor. She also gave orders that an especially great edifice be built over Golgotha where he was crucified and over the tomb where he was laid in order that these places might be honored and that there might be an appointed place for prayer and an assembly for worship.

When the queen saw all the people of the city who had gathered to the spectacle of this event, she commanded that without the veil of honor suited for queens, her daughter should go with her openly to the palace of the king where she was staying in order that all the people might see her and glorify God. Then the crowd of Jews and pagans who had been happy at the beginning of this affair and cheerful became very sad at the end of it. They would have been pleased if this [f. 106b] which they had seen had not happened, for because of it many had believed in the Messiah. Increasingly, they saw that the signs which had occurred by his name after his ascension were many times more than those which had occurred before his ascension. Moreover the news of this event which had happened travelled to distant places, even to my fellow apostles who were proclaiming the Messiah. So there was peace in the churches of Jerusalem and the cities around it. Those who had not seen this event with those who had seen it glorified God.

When the queen went up from Jerusalem to the city of Rome every city which she entered thronged together to catch a glimpse of her daughter. Upon entering Rome she related the things which had happened to Claudius Caesar. When Caesar heard it, he commanded all the Jews to leave the country of Italy, since in this whole region this event was spoken of by many. She also told Simon Peter [f. 11a] that which had happened.

Everything, therefore, which our fellow apostles were doing we preach to everyone in order that those who do not know might also hear the things the Messiah was doing openly by our hands in order that our Lord might be glorified by everyone. I have told you these things so that you might know and understand how great the faith of the Messiah is to those who truly follow him.

The Doctrina Addai, of which this translation is a part, originated and developed in the North Mesopotamian city of Edessa where Syriac was the native language. It is the official foundation legend of the Edessene church, and it gives an account of the introduction of Christianity to Edessa and the subsequent conversion of the Edessene King Abgar (4 B.C.-7 A.D.; 13 A.D.-50 A.D.), surnamed Ukkama, and his city. Abgar, who suffered from an unspecified disease, heard of Jesus' miraculous healings and invited him to Edessa by means of a letter, which was delivered by Abgar's archivist Hanan. Once in Edessa he could not only cure Abgar but he would also be safe from the hostilities of the Jews. Jesus rejected Abgar's proposition, answering that his task on earth had nearly been fulfilled. Instead of coming himself, he promised to send one of his disciples to Edessa after he had ascended to heaven. This reply of Jesus to Abgar, contained in a letter, was presented by Hanan to his king together with a portrait which he (Hanan) had painted of the Messiah. After Christ's ascension the Apostle Addai was sent to Edessa by Jesus' alleged twin brother Judas Thomas. He cured Abgar and during his presence at the court related the story about Protonike's discovery of the Cross. When Addai had finished his story, Abgar, his family and the others present, glorified God's name. Addai was permitted to preach his faith in Edessa. As a consequence Christianity spread rapidly among the inhabitants of Edessa and the surrounding countryside. Addai was made bishop and by the time of his death, the whole city had been converted.

The DA is obviously historical fiction. A correspondence between Jesus and Abgar cannot really have taken place, nor can there be any question, as early as the first century, of the conversion of an entire city. The first impetus for the composition of the DA is definitely to be dated later than the first century, but not later than c.300. Already at the beginning of the fourth century Eusebius refers in his Church History (I 13) to the correspondence between Jesus and Abgar and Addai's missionary activities in Edessa. Eusebius even included a Greek translation of the letters of Jesus and Abgar. He asserts that he had found the letters in the archives of Edessa and had translated them himself from the Syriac into Greek. Whereas the DA speaks about the apostle Addai, Eusebius, to whom this name was unfamiliar, identifies him as Thaddaeus, whom he reckons to be one of the seventy apostles.

The DA's place of origin was Edessa and its development should probably be considered as a reaction to the spread of Manichaeism in the Mesopotamian area. In the second half of the third century Mani (216-c.276) preached his gnostic doctrine in this region. A certain Addai became one of his followers and was a most enthusiastic proclaimer of Manichaeism. Addai preached his creed in the desert of Syria-Mesopotamia. So apparently, there existed two apostles with the same name who tried in the same area to make converts for their respective religions: a Christian who,

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1 Tacitus, Annales XII 12, mentions him as rex Arabum Acharus.

4 Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. I 13, does not mention Hanan's portrait of Jesus. Perhaps this element was added to the DA only later; or perhaps Eusebius is deliberately reticent for dogmatic reasons: he disliked portraits of Jesus.
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE JUDAS CYRIACUS LEGEND

The existence in Syria of a legend about the first discovery of the Cross also demanded the invention of a story about a second discovery. The Helena legend, which was known outside Syria as the one and only account of the discovery, was simply inadequate for this. And so it was that a third version, the Judas Cyriacus version (C), came into being.

Of all three versions of the legend, the Judas Cyriacus version became the most popular and the one with the greatest area of distribution. Its popularity may be due to its anti-Jewish character. In the Middle Ages in particular it was a story much loved throughout Europe and was translated into many vernacular languages. But the earliest versions are in Syriac, Greek and Latin. Some of these are published, others are only known in manuscripts. The text below is translated from the Syriac manuscript BL Add. 14644, which dates from the fifth or sixth century, and may be considered the most authentic text available.

The story of how the wood of the Cross which was found in Jerusalem, was found for the second time in the days of the blessed queen Helena, mother of the victorious and godloving Constantine, the Christian emperor.

In the year 351 in the reign of the godloving Constantine the holy and lifegiving grace of the Holy Spirit deemed the believing Helena, mother of this Constantine, worthy of a great and excellent gift. For she was a woman who was instructed in all Holy Scriptures and love for Our Lord Jesus Christ was found with her. And in accordance with this diligence she took great trouble to trace and

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3 For the date, see W. Wright, 1872, 1083; A. Desrumaux, 1983, 183. The manuscript was first published and translated into German by E. Nestle, 1889, 25-36, 35-64. The Leningrad manuscript N.S. 4 also contains a Syriac version of C. According to M. van Esbroeck, 1988, 215, this text may be of slightly earlier date than that of BL Add. 14644. Unfortunately, however, the Leningrad text of C has not yet been published. The translation of the text presented here keeps closely to the Syriac.
find the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ. For after she had learnt
about the Incarnation of Our Lord and how He was hung on the
wood and had risen from the dead on the third day,1 she did not
desist from this until she had found it. Thus the believing one went
to and arrived at Jerusalem in glory and with a large army on the
28th of the month Iyar. And she made a large assembly from the
inhabitants of the city and from the Jews who were there. Not only
those that were in the city she ordered to assemble, but also those
that were outside it in the towns and villages. For Jerusalem was
almost laid waste in that time and not more than 3,000 Jewish
people were found there. And when they had assembled, the queen
said to them: "I have learnt from the Holy Scriptures that you were
of old the beloved of God. Because you rejected all knowledge of
the Scriptures and reviled Him who wanted to save you from the
curses of the Law and showed with saliva contempt for Him who
through His saliva opened the eyes of the blind,2 and because you
regarded the light of truth darkness and falsehood, these curses that
are written in your Law came over you. Assemble therefore for me
people from your midst who have detailed knowledge of the Law,
so that they shall teach me about everything I ask them." Then
they went away from her with great fear and searched out from
their midst people who knew the Law, about 1,000, and they
brought them before the queen. And the queen spoke and said to
them: "Listen to my words and give ear to my sayings for you did
not understand the words of the prophets as they prophesied before
about the coming of Our Lord. Because of this I am going to
interrogate you. For the blessed David said: 'I put the Lord always
in front of me and He was at my right hand so that I should not
quail.'3 And the holy Isaiah said: 'I raised and exalted children
who sinned against me and an ox knows his owner and an ass
the manger of his master, but my people did not know me and
Israel did not recognize me.' And all Scriptures spoke about the
Messiah too. Because you were instructed in the Law, search out
now for me again today people that truly are well acquainted with
the Law so that I can interrogate them and they will answer me."4
The blessed Helena now gave orders that the Romans should guard
them in order that they should not flee anywhere before they had
given an answer. They consulted with each other and chose again
out of their midst about 500 people and they came and stood in
front of her. And she asked: "Who are these?" And they said:
"People who have detailed knowledge of the Law." And she began
to teach them, saying: "You are really fools, sons of Israel, as
Scripture says, who follow the blindness of your ancestors, those
murderers, who said that Christ is not God. You, who read in the
Law and in the Prophets, and you do not understand." Then they
said: "We read and we understand. What are these words that you

3 Ps. 16:8; Acts 2:23.
4 Isaiah 1:2-3.

Luke 24; John 20-21; Mark 16; Matthew 28.

For the genealogy of Judas' family, which varies in the various manuscripts,
see J. Straubinger, 1912, 54-55.

Acts 6-7.

asks us, what answer will we give her concerning the wood of the Cross?” And they answered and said to him: “We never heard these things from her before, we heard from you today. And now, give it to you, if the wood of the Cross is searched for do not show it if you know it. For indeed from your words you also know where it is.” And when they secretly discussed these things among themselves, other Romans came after them and said: “The queen seeks for you.” And they brought them. And when she had discussed many things with them and she had asked them and they could not answer her, she ordered them to be delivered to the fire. They, however, since they were afraid, handed one of them over to her, whose name was Judas, saying: “This man is the son of a just man and a prophet and he is more than anyone else versed in the Law and he will teach you everything you ask him.” And when the Jews had given this testimony of him, she sent them away from her and she retained only Judas and called him and said to him: “Which of these two things do you choose [I.20] for yourself; either someone will place a good and gracious life in front of you or death with severe tortures.” Judas said: “Who in the desert would desire to eat stones when he can get bread?” The queen said: “If you want to have life in heaven and on earth, tell me where the wood of the Cross is to be found and where it was hidden by you.” Judas said: “As it is written in the official acts.” She then said: “Show it to me.” Judas said: “Many years have passed since that time, about 200 or 300, and we are young men nowadays and how can we know these things?” The queen said: “And what about the Trojan war that happened many generations ago and what about Ili on whom everybody recalls so that they even can show his tomb to the people that dwelled there?” Judas said: “It is clear that there are many things from records; we, however, do not have these.” The queen said: “How many times does it occur that even ignorant people are acquainted with great things; you, however, even shortly before asserted me that there are official acts.” Judas said: “I said it, mistress, by way of supposition.” The queen said: “I learned from the Holy Gospel that He was crucified at a place called Golgotha. You show me where this place is and I shall search it; I have come here so that I shall find it [the Cross] and my desire will be fulfilled.” Judas said: “I do not know the place, mistress, because I also was not born [here].” The queen said: “I swear by Christ, who was crucified, that I shall torture you with hunger and thirst if you do not tell the truth.” And when she had said these things, she ordered Judas to be thrown into a dry well for seven days [I.21] and that he should stay there without food. And when seven days had passed Judas screamed from the well and said: “I beg you, bring me up from this well and I will show you the place where the Cross of Christ is hidden.” And when he had ascended from the well, he went to that place and he called with a loud voice in Hebrew, saying as follows: “Oh God, who made the earth and measured the heaven with His span and who meted with the hollow of His hand the dust of the earth,” God, who sits on the chariot of the Cherubs who fly in the air and dwells in the glorious, immeasurable light whither one of the children of men cannot ascend; God, who made the countless Seraphs for His service and who continuously praise Him with their voices, saying ‘holy, holy, holy, mighty Lord whose glory fills the earth’ [I] you are the Lord of the Universe because everything is the work of your hands. And now, Lord, if this is your will that the son of Mary will reign, He whose being is derived from you because if His being were not derived from you, He would not have performed these mighty deeds and He would not have risen from the dead after three days. Now, Lord, I beg you, too, perform this miracle for me and just as you showed the bones of Joseph to Moses, show thus also to us the excellent treasure, the wood of your Cross. And if it is buried in this place, may the sweet smell of incense ascend from it, and I too shall believe in Christ who was crucified, He who will reign for ever and ever.” After Judas had prayed, there was immediately a loud voice at that place and a strong smell of excellent incense exhaled from this place so that Judas was enlightened while he clapped his hands, praised, rejoiced, and said [I.21]: “Truly, you are Christ, the Saviour of the Universe. I thank you, Lord, because although I do not deserve it, you have not deprived me of your grace. I beg you, Lord, do not remember my sins against me but lead me to the blessed Stephen, my brother, he, who is triumphant today together with the twelve blessed apostles, your servants.” And when he had said this, he girded his loins manfully and took an axe in his hand. When he had dug about twenty ells he found three crosses that were hidden and he brought them into the city to the queen. And the queen asked him: “Which of these is the one on which Christ was crucified. For I know that two of them are those of the robbers who were crucified together with him.” And he put them in the middle of the city and they waited in order to see the glory of Christ. And at the time of the ninth hour a dead person passed by (while they carried him) on a bier, and this dead person was a youth. Judas then said: “Now, mistress, we can learn which is truly the Cross on which Our Lord was crucified and you can perceive his power.” And Judas seized the bier and placed two crosses upon it and this dead person did not rise. And when he had placed the third one, on which Our Lord was crucified, this dead person immediately rose. And all people that stood there were amazed and glorified God for what they had seen. Then a demon screamed in a man who belonged to Satan, who used to be jealous of beautiful things, and he cried out and said: “Who is this Jesus who did not allow me to receive the souls. Oh, you, Jesus, who drew the whole

12 Cf. Matthew 15:33; Matthew 7:9.
14 Cf. Isaiah 14:12.
15 Cf. Ezekiel 1:1ff.
16 Isaiah 6:2-3.
17 Exodus 13:19.
world towards you, why did you reveal again your Cross to Judas that he should be my opponent? Oh Judas, what have you done! Through the first Judas I effected betrayal [L29] and caused the world to sin. Now, however, I am being persecuted by the second Judas. I have found out a device which I will use against you. Now I shall go to another king who will rule in the name of Him who was crucified and he will follow me and submit you to many tortures and then you will renounce Him, who was crucified, in whom you have believed up to the present. Judas became angry and resisted this demon and said: “May Christ, who raised the dead, rebuke you.” And immediately this man found rest from his demon. And when the blessed Helena had seen what Our Lord had done through Judas, she was amazed by his faith. And Helena kept the venerable Cross with great care and mounted it in pure gold and precious stones and she made a silver shrine for it and placed it in it. And she built a church at that place which is called Golgotha. And Judas immediately received the incorruptible baptism in Christ and he became a believer by the signs that Christ had performed through him. Then she, the believing woman, entrusted Judas to the bishop who was there at that time in Jerusalem because he also had baptized him. And when the local bishop had died, the queen spoke to the blessed Eusebius, Bishop of Rome, who was with her and he laid hands upon Judas and made him bishop there in Jerusalem. And she also changed his name and called him Cyriacus.

And after these things had happened, because she was truly full of belief and instructed in the two testaments of the Holy Scriptures, the queen furthermore took care to search also for the nails that had been hammered in the Cross. And she again called the blessed Cyriacus by whose name was Judas before, and said to him: “Now that my wish has been fulfilled concerning the wood of the Cross, I also want very much to get possession of the nails that were driven into His hands and feet. And I shall not cease and my heart will have no rest until Christ also will fulfill this desire. But pray again and I believe that our Lord will also show you this.” Immediately the blessed one stood up and together with many brethren and believers went to that place where the Cross had been found and where they had seen that miracle which occurred when said to him: “Christ was found, namely how it brought a dead man back to life. And when he had arrived there, he smote his breast and lifted his eyes towards heaven and called upon God, saying: “I give thanks to you, my Lord, that you have delivered me from the ignorance of the Jews and I praise those who already believe in you and all those who believe in you.” And he prayed for a long time and waited to see a sign such as he had seen when the wood of the Cross was found. And at the end of his prayer when he said “even”, a sign again appeared like the first one which we all saw when we were assembled. For a powerful and strong flash of lightning suddenly shone forth from heaven at that very place of the Cross so that it overcame the light of the [L23] sun. And those nails manifested themselves from the earth like shining pure gold, so that everybody who saw this believed and said: “Now we know that Jesus, who was crucified, is God.” And this blessed bishop Cyriacus in a worthy manner took the nails and brought them to the believing Helena. And when she saw them, she kneeled before them and worshipped. And since she was full of belief, she praised Christ Our Lord and considered what she would do with these nails. And, as before, the grace of the Holy Spirit again enlightened her mind and suggested to her the idea of making something out of them that would provide good testimony for future generations. And she planned to make what the prophet had prophesied before and she sent for a believing man, a skilled craftsman, of whom many had testified. And she said to him: “Keep the king’s order and carry out the mystery of the king and take these nails and make from them bridles for the horse of the king so that it will be an invincible weapon for him against all his enemies because now the victory belongs to the king and he will have peace instead of war. In this way the saying of the prophet Zechariah will be fulfilled, who said: It will happen on that day that the bridle of the horse will be called holiness unto the Lord.”

Thus the blessed one enlarged belief in Our Lord in Jerusalem. And when she had accomplished all these things, she immediately stirred up a large persecution against the nation of the Jews and gave orders that they should be expelled from Judaea. And great grace was [L23] given by God to bishop Cyriacus so that he also chased away the host of demons through his prayer and cured every pain and illness. Then the queen presented many gifts in Jerusalem and left them to the bishop for the support of the poor. And she left with great honour and in peace and ordered all the believers in Christ, men and women, to celebrate the commemoration of the finding of the Cross every year as long as they lived. And all who know the Cross and commemorate it will be a part of the blessed Mary, the mother of God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Finished is the official record of how the wood of the Cross of Our Lord was found for the second time in Jerusalem by the exhortation of the faithful Helena in the days of the Christian Constantine, the victorious king.

Like the Protonike legend, this version of the legend was also the object of scholarly study at the end of the last century. The final result of these studies was presented by J. Straussinger in his book Die Kreuzaufzündungslegende. With regard to C, Straussinger’s study is still authoritative and his “Gesamtergebnis” cannot be challenged

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18 A reference to the reign of Julian the Apostle (361-368).
19 A reference to Judas' martyrdom in the time of Julian’s reign.
20 Cf. John 11:35-44.
Constantine II, Constantius II and Constans. Wegner rejects the identification of the woman as Helena. For him the portraits represent Constantine and Fausta and their three sons. Wegner is probably right.

The Codex Barberini contains a drawing of a marble head, found on the Esquiline, with the caption 'S. Helena'. The portrait shows a woman far too young to represent Helena.

Many statues and portraits have been thought to represent Helena, but taking the hair style as a test for identification, only the statue in the Museo Capitolino, the one in the Palazzo Governorato, the gemstone mentioned by Delbrück and possibly the left-hand female figure on the Ada-cameo are likely to be representations of Helena.

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