

## ІСТОРИЯ

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### **THE FORMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE TRADITION IN LATE ANTIQUITY**

*In the article the author considered a trip by St. Helena to Christian relics in the Middle East and its motivation. It was analyzed the historical evidence of contemporary writers of this event, and also its historical context. It was defined the importance this mission for the formation of Christian pilgrimage tradition as the mother of the Emperor to open secret topos for all Christians Of the West and the East.*

**Keywords:** *St.Helena, Jerusalem, Holy Sepulcher, Macarius, Holy Cross, pilgrimage, pilgrimage tradition.*

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### **ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ХРИСТИАНСКОЙ ПАЛОМНИЧЕСКОЙ ТРАДИЦИИ В ПОЗДНЕАНТИЧНУЮ ЭПОХУ**

*В статье рассматривается путешествие Св. Елены к христианским святыням Ближнего Востока и ее мотивация. Проанализировано исторические свидетельства тогдашних авторов о данном событии, а также его исторический контекст. Выясняется значение миссии для формирования христианской паломнической традиции, поскольку матери императора Константина Великого удалось открыть сакральные топосы для всех верующих Запада и Востока.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Св. Елена, Иерусалим, Гроб Господень, Макарий, Честный Крест, паломничество, паломническая традиция.*

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### **ФОРМУВАННЯ ХРИСТИЯНСЬКОЇ ПАЛОМНИЦЬКОЇ ТРАДИЦІЇ В ПІЗНЬОАНТИЧНУ ДОБУ**

*У статті розглядається подорож Св. Єлени до християнських святинь Близького Сходу та її мотиваційна складова. Проаналізовано фактологічні свідчення тогочасних авторів про дану подію, а також її історичний контекст. З'ясовується значення місії для становлення християнської паломницької традиції загалом, оскільки*

*саме матері імператора Константина Великого вдалося відкрити сакральні топоси для усіх вірян Заходу та Сходу.*

*Ключові слова: Св.Єлена, Єрусалим, Гріб Господній, Макарій, Чесний Хрест, паломництво, паломницька традиція.*

Being a spiritual and religious practice, Christian Pilgrimage originates from the very beginning of the Christian doctrine, and its concept has found resonance in Christian literature. In particular, St. Cyril of Jerusalem claims that sacred journeys to Jerusalem date back to apostolic times and their aim was to worship places, sanctified by the presence of Jesus. Despite this, massive pilgrimages started later, in the IV c., and are directly connected with the names of Constantine the Great and his mother Helena.

Under the patronage of her son St. Helena opened the greatest sanctuaries of the Middle East for the whole Christian world. Among them was Jerusalem – the centre of Christian Topocosm – a place of preaching and death of the Saviour. The most important thing here is the discovery of the Christ's Coffin, i.e. the Holy Sepulchre – topos of a very special importance in view of the Christian idea of salvation (soteriology). In fact, from IV c. we can talk about the formation of Christian sacred geography that included sacred objects having mystical, supernatural significance for all the believers. The empirical experience of the Empress is interesting because of the fact that it has not only restored the objects of worship, but also started a tradition of visiting them.

Some aspects, connected with the life of St. Helena and especially with her journey to the Holy Land, found their coverage in numerous scientific researches by domestic and foreign historians and theologians. In the context of the problem, particular emphasis has been laid upon the works of such scholars as: A. Harbes, Y.Fohta D. Driver, C. Meng, J.Jhons, F.Shaff, V. Skabalanovych, J. Le Hoff, E. Hunt, J. Davis, F. Gardiner, S.Venzel, J. Leclerc, T.Yelonek, A. Vitkovska, N.Ohler and others. On thorough consideration of the source material, the above-

mentioned scientists tried to recreate certain aspects of St. Helena's life and activities. Particularly noteworthy are the works devoted to Helena's journey to the Holy Land and the discovery of the sacred Christian relics. In addition, the monograph by E. Hunt contains a detailed analysis of the medieval legends about Helena, recited by people. Apart from these, other specific issues, related to Helena's empirical experience on the formation of the Christian pilgrimage tradition, are insufficiently highlighted and analysed.

Particularly worth noting is the high level of informativeness of different works of church historians and writers of the Western and Eastern traditions: Ambrose (c. 340-397 years.) [1], Tyrannius Rufinus (345-410) [8], Eusebius Pamphili (263-340) [3,4] Socrates Scholasticus (380-440) [12] Theodoret of Cyrus (386-457) [14], Sulpicius Severus (363-410) [9] Hermias Sozomen (400-450) [18]. Events, connected with the pilgrimage mission of the Empress, have been most completely revealed in the „Life of the Blessed Basileus Constantine” by Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea in Palestine [3]. Equally significant information has been provided in „Ecclesiastical History in 9 Books” by a Constantinople lawyer Socrates Scholasticus [12] and in „Ecclesiastical History in 5 Books” by Theodoret of Cyrus [14]. Quite important information for the reconstruction of the events, related to the formation of the „geometry” of the Christian sacred space of Syria and Palestine, is contained in general books, as well as in the „Chronographia of Theophanes” [17].

Considering Helena's activity during her journey to the East, we should determine the exact time of this pilgrimage. Relying on the factual sources, we realise that Constantine's mother has performed her mission in the Holy Land in a rather advanced age. According to Eusebius of Caesarea, she was about 80 years old [3, B. 3, Ch. 46]. However, this did not affect the activity of the Empress: „... the bayou of an extraordinary mind and the speed of the boy hurried to the east and with the royal caring examined a strange land, eastern

anarchies, towns and villages to carry out the proper worship to the feet of the Saviour ...” [3, B. 3, Ch. 42]. Today there is no consensus on the exact date of the pilgrimage in contemporary historiography. In particular, a famous orientalist of the XVIII c. and the director of the Vatican Library, J. Assemani believed that Helena received Holy Cross on May 3, 326 (Julian calendar). Russian theologian M. Skabalanovich strongly rejected that date, assuming that Helen died in 325 AD., during the Council of Nicaea. The researcher based his conclusions on the evidence of the Alexandria Chronicles of the VI century, which he considered a reliable source. As a result, M. Skabalanovich concluded that Helen had made her pilgrimage before the Council, namely in 320 [11, p. 47]. The ambiguity in the research visions is caused by inaccurate source evidence. In particular, Eusebius of Caesarea in the „Life of Blessed basileus Constantine” does not indicate the exact date of the trip, but its description follows the report of the Ecumenical Council held in 325 as it is known. Eusebius’ successor Socrates Scholasticus in his „Ecclesiastical History” writes the entry about getting to the Holy Cross right after the story about the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the reign of Constantine, i.e. July, 25, 326. Most likely, this is the true date. At least, the eyewitnesses and authors of the contemporary sources confirm it.

According to the testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea, the purpose of this trip was Helena’s desire „to pray in the places that are blessed with the presence of Jesus Christ (to worship the feet of the Saviour), as well as to „pay God a debt” for her pious position. She wanted to thank Him for her son Basileus and for her descendants – God-loving emperors, the children of His...” [3. B. 3, Ch. 42].

In his turn, Socrates Scholasticus in his „Ecclesiastical History”, indicates the prophetic dream that prompted Helen to the journey: „the mother of the king Helena ... having received the guidance in her sleep, went to Jerusalem” [13. B. 3. Ch. 17]. Tyrannius Rufinus also mentions the divine vision that has inspired the journey of

Constantine's mother [8, p. 124]. Moreover, in the „Chronicles of Theophanes” it is said that with the support of her son, Helena went on a pilgrimage: „... divine Constantine sent blessed Helena with treasures to search for the Holy Cross” [17, p. 231]. The contents of the source make it clear that the very emperor has initiated this journey. The message of Eusebius of Caesarea proves this. Describing Constantine's reign, regarding the construction of the temples in the sacred places, which are interwoven with biblical history, the eyewitness relegates the mother of the emperor to the background. The opuses, devoted to Constantine's activity in the Middle East, are written in the „Life” after the Ecumenical Council and begin with the command of the Emperor to build the prayer temple in Jerusalem, in the place of the Resurrection of the Saviour [3, B. 3, ch. 25]. Then Eusebius tells the legendary story of the gentiles, trying to hide a location of the place from the eyes of the first Christians „... with the meaningless intention to hide the truth because of this” [3 B.3, Ch. 26]. The hagiographic work is followed, further on, by the fifteen chapters, dedicated to active work of Constantine the Great on arranging the holy places in the Holy Land. The central idea of the story lies within the Emperor's cares about the construction of the Temple of the Saviour that was to become the best and the greatest place. For this purpose, Basileus constantly communicates with Macarius, the bishop of Jerusalem, with whose help he was trying to implement the plans on architectural design of the future temple. Eusebius says little about Helena, marking her pilgrimage to Palestine. He only describes the generosity, charity and god-fearing of the Empress. She is almost unnoticeable in Eusebius's work. This tendency looks quite logical, since the author has dedicated his hagiographic work to his very patron. Therefore, he tried to glorify him, to present him in the eyes of the future readers as the best Christian king and the patron of the new religion.

Considering the motivation, that led the Empress to go on a dangerous and quite difficult pilgrimage to the Holy Land area, it

is expedient to mention that some researchers point out a number of political issues, but the source material does not confirm this version. A.Kure indicates that in Jerusalem Helena sought for consolation after the recent grief - the death of her eldest grandson Crispus (305-326 years.) [6, p. 29]. It is known that the grandson of the Empress, a talented army commander Constantine Flavius Julius Crisp, was executed on his father charges of treason. In any case, the „official” purpose of the trip was to find the Lord’s Sepulchre and the Holy Cross, on which Jesus Christ was crucified.

According to the eyewitnesses, having arrived at Jerusalem, the Empress „began to earnestly seek for the tomb, where Christ was buried and rose again” [12. B. I. Ch.17]. It was a challenge to find the place, where Jesus Christ had been buried, as pagan rulers had taken all the necessary steps to hide and desecrate the holy places of Christians. They even changed the appearance of Calvary. The cave, where the Lord’s Sepulchre was located, was filled with waste and paved with stones in the 13’0s. Afterwards, according to Eusebius of Caesarea, they made there „... the tomb of spirits, gloomy abode for idols, shelter for the lustful demon of love, where wicked sacrifices were offered on the wicked altars” [3, B. III, Ch. 26]. Other sources report that the Roman emperor Hadrian (117-138) has tried particularly hard to desecrate the holy places of the pagan gods. On the site of Jerusalem, ruined by Titus, he built a city and ordered to fill the Tomb of the Lord with earth and stones, and to erect the temple of pagan goddess of debauchery Venus on the hill, where the Saviour had been crucified (the so called „Rock of Cross”). These events took place in the midst of persecution of the early Christians to erase the memory of the sacred relics, and those who come here to pray, paid homage to the goddess Venus [8, p. 232]. According to V.Grant, these measures have caused the resistance of the local Christian population. Another church historian Socrates Scholasticus claims that people, who withdrew from Christ, concealed the place (destroyed memory), where He had

been buried, having erected a temple of Aphrodite [13. B.1. Ch. 17].

The archaeological excavations were conducted here by Helena's order. The cave, where Jesus had been buried, was finally discovered. In addition, many contemporary historians claim that the Empress also had to find the cross, on which the Saviour had been crucified. Constantine himself wanted to get this great sacred Christian world relic. In the „Chronicles of Theophanes” it is stated: „... the divine Constantine sent blessed Helena to find the Holy Cross ...” [17, p. 125]. Since it was difficult to detect the relic, the Empress's frustration is easy to understand. „The Lord's Cross has not yet been revealed, grief swept over the mother of the King” [13. B. VI, Ch. 17].

There are several versions of the legends about the discovery of the artefact in contemporary historiography. Narration says that Helena appealed for help to the local Jewish population, the latter, referring to ignorance, refused her. A local Jew Judas Kiriak told about the location of the Holy Cross under the pressure of threats of death. He pointed to the spot where Helena managed to find sanctuary: „having removed the idol, having dug out and cleared the place, she found three crosses in the tomb – one blessed, on which Jesus Christ had been crucified, and others, on which two thieves had been crucified and died – says Socrates Scholasticus [13 B.I, Ch. 17]. They also found the plate with tittle in three languages (Greek, Latin, Hebrew) „INRI” „Jesus Christ – the King of the Jews”. There was a new problem of identification of the cross, on which Jesus had been crucified, because the plate had separated from the Holy Cross with time. Then the sources represent a series of tales, which refer to measures, aimed at identifying the relics.

According to one of them, the Jerusalem bishop Makarios suggested a test. They brought a terminally ill (bleeding) woman to the found crosses; her instant healing indicated the true Cross of the Saviour. Then the patriarch raised it so that people could gather to worship the shrine. According to the legend, the above-described

miracle has produced a great impression on Christians and Jews. In particular, Judas Kiriak, who did not want to show the location of the artefact, then baptized [13, B. I, Ch. 17]. There is also a version that the cross raised a dead man who was carried by.

The result of Helena's trip was not only the discovery of the Holy Cross, but also the foundation of a range of holy sites, closely associated with biblical events since the first centuries of Christianity. All the newly discovered sacred objects have found proper respect. In particular, churches were built. Total quantity of topos found by Helena is still uncertain. Contemporary authors, in our opinion, are prone to exaggerate. Among them historians mention the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Temple on the Illinois Hill, St. Semeona Church in Gethsemane, the Oak of Mamre Church in Hebron Basilica of Christmas in Bethlehem, the Church over the tomb of Lazarus at Bethany, the Church of the Holy Apostles at Tiberias Lake, the Temple in the name of the prophet in place of Elijah rapture, the Temple in honour of Jesus Christ and the apostles Peter, James and John, and others. However, the above list is of a fairly recent origin. It is mentioned in the Life of Helena, and dates back to the VII. Influenced by the tradition, the author of this hagiographic work was prone to exaggeration. Most likely, Helena has erected the three churches on Calvary, Illinois Hill and in Bethlehem. At least, only her contemporaries, Socrates Scholasticus and Eusebius Pamphili, have mentioned these objects. In our view, the evidence of the above-mentioned church historians is the most reliable in terms of historical factology. The rest of the stories are of legendary nature, but demonstrate all of the global resonance, which the mission of St. Helena made on the territory of the Holy Land.

As a result, in the middle of the IV c. the toposes that have subsequently outlined a „sacred space”, filled by the categories that made up religious nature and applied reality of pilgrimage phenomenon were determined. The sacral significance of these toposes is determined under the influence of the Holy Scripture and



narrations, which recorded divine involvement in these objects. But since their discovery by the Empress, they were transformed into the concept of geographical location, which in the Middle Ages, was associated with the term „holy place”, the latter, according to the phenomenological approach, is a space (sacred or secular), with its inherent sacred traits, linked by supernatural (often mystical) power. So the mission of Constantine’s mother is actually the establishment of religious pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which semantics is gradually transformed and acquires more spiritual colours. In year 333 a so-called „Bordeaux Guide” appears. It describes the pilgrimage journey from Bordeaux and Jerusalem. Like Greek intenerars, an anonymous author describes the religious sites of Syria and Palestine. The journeys to the Holy Land became more common in the IV-V c., as evidenced by the large number of written records of the pilgrimage genre: „Silva’s Pilgrimage”, „Anonymous pilgrim” and others.

So objectively, we can say that Helena’s mission to the Holy Land had a fundamental meaning to the Christian world, because the main sacred toposes, which are associated with biblical history, were discovered. This has initiated the whole tradition of worship and the Christian pilgrimage practice.

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