Graham Jones

HELEN OF MESOPOTAMIA: THE VIEW FROM EDESSA

In his contribution to the 2008 symposium, the writer explored the likely resonance of the name 'Helen/a' in Empress Helena's lifetime, and whether the mother of Constantine's reputation was enhanced, then or after her death, by public awareness of the heroic and divine aspects of the Greek Helen in particular. For Eastern Christians, further comparisons were available. For example, Helena was not the first royal personage of that name to enter the annals of the devout in Jerusalem. The writer's 2009 paper revisited the impact on public memory of the Mesopotamian Queen Helena of Adiabene, east of the Tigris, whose activities, three centuries before those of her namesake, nevertheless resemble them so closely. Like Constantine's mother, she probably influenced her son's conversion (in this case to the Jewish faith), built public monuments in the Holy City, and was long remembered for her piety. Adiabene's evolution into a centre of Christianity shadowed the evolution of Christianity itself out of its Jewish roots. Moreover, and here we come to the content of the current paper (presented in summary at the 2010 symposium), Helena's name appears to have been borne by – or assigned to – a princess of Edessa, capital of neighbouring Osrhoëne between the Tigris and the Euphrates, who was mentioned in tenth- and twelfth-century texts which made Constantine the son of a noblewoman from what is now the Turkish/Syrian borderland, not an innkeeper's daughter from Bithynia, across the Hellespont from Constantinople, as the emperor's biographies insist. Osrhoëne shared with its neighbour-kingdom Adiabene the experience of an early and significant conversion to Christianity and took Constantine's mother into its historiography in another piece of literature, which re-invented her as a first-century empress named Protonike, 'First Victory'. This paper reviews recent scholarship on these and related themes, including the linking of Protonike with Berenice and Veronica, and discussion of the anti-Jewish character of the Edessan traditions, and asks how they fit into an overall pattern of using the figure of Helen/a as a bridge between the ancient and Christianised worlds of the Mediterranean and Near East.

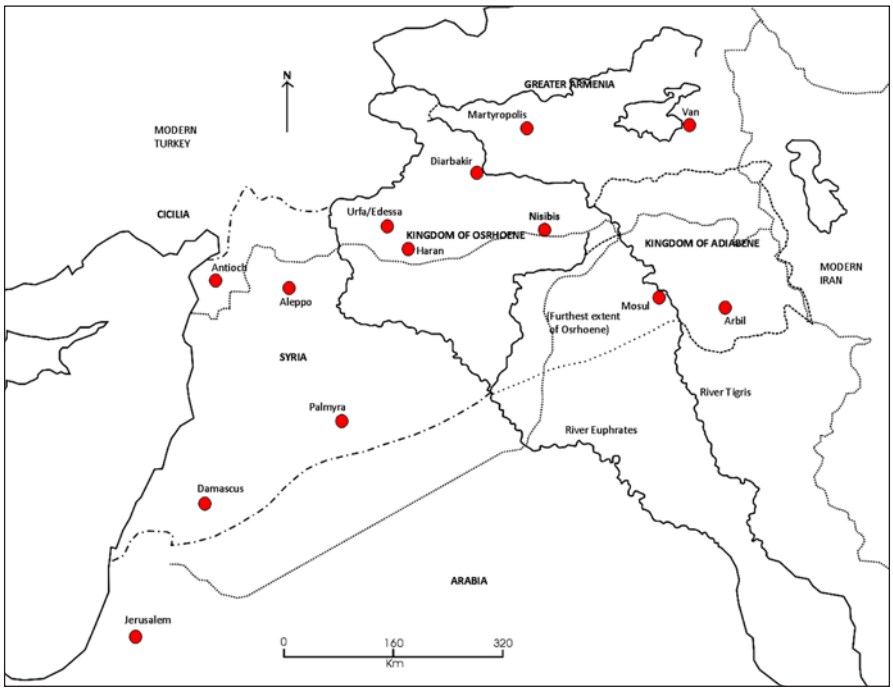

Fig. 1: The kingdoms of Edessa/Osrhoëne and Adiabene in their regional setting. Solid lines indicate rivers, coasts and lakes. Broken lines show the boundaries of the kingdoms where these do not follow rivers, while the wider-spaced dotted line shows the probable southern frontier of Edessa/Osrhoëne at its greatest extent. Closer-spaced dotted lines are the modern political boundaries of Turkey, Syria and Iran. Dot-and-dash lines indicate the approximate northern and southern boundaries of Syria in late antique times. Map by the author.

Сл. 1: краљевство Едесе / Osrhoëne и Adiabene у регионалном окружењу. Пуне линије указују на реке, обале и језера. Прекинуте линије показују границе краљевства, где оне не прате реке, док је ширим проредом тачкасте линије приказана вероватна јужна граница Едесе / Osrhoëne у највећем досегу. Ближим проредом тачкасте линије приказане су модерне политичке границе Турске, Сирије и Ирана. Тачке и линије означавају приближну северну и јужну границу Сирије у касноантичка времена. Мапа аутора.

The beauty from the potters' quarter

Arabic sources of the ninth/tenth and twelfth/thirteenth centuries preserved accounts which identify Edessa, modern-day Urfa or Sanliurfa in south-eastern Turkey, not Drepanum, as Helena's place of birth.[1] Yaqut al-Hamawi (1179-1229), in his geographic survey of the Arab world, reported that she was a princess of the royal blood of Edessa, married anachronistically to the Eastern

[1] A phenomenon alluded to briefly by Hans A. Pohlsander, *Helena: Empress and Saint* (Chicago, 1995), p. 11. I have not been able to consult this work. A well-regarded scholarly treatment of the city and its kingdom is J. B. Segal, *Edessa, 'the Blessed City'* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970, repub. Piscataway, New Jersey, Gorgias Press, 2001), hereafter Segal, 'Edessa'.

Roman Emperor Theodosius II (408-450), who in a further jumble of chronology fathered Constantine and founded Constantinople.[2] The earlier Eutychius of Alexandria, born Sa'id ibn Batriq (877-940), followed conventional historiography by allying Helena with Constantius Chlorus. However, he went further than identifying Edessa as her birthplace. He even specified in which district she was born: Caphar or Kephar Phacar, which has been translated as 'Potters' Quarter'. He also used Edessa's Latin name, Roha, which relates to the Arabic al-Ruha, Kurdish Riha, Syriac Urhai/Orhay, and modern Turkish Urfa.[3] ('Edessa' was introduced by the Seleucids in honour of the Macedonian city of that name.) In his account he describes Constantius as

'an upright, religious man, hater of idols and friend of Christians. Advancing into the regions of Mesopotamia and Edessa, in an oppidum of Roha, Caphar Phacar (vico figuli) [oppidum = 'collection of buildings' as well as 'town'; vicus = 'place', 'suburb', 'neighbourhood'] he saw a beautiful, shapely woman called Helena (pulchram, formosam), whom the Bishop of Roha, Barsica, had converted to the Christian faith, not easily learned. When with her father's inclination he had taken her to wife, she became pregnant. Constantius returning to Byzantium, Helena gave birth to a beautiful son, mild, endowed with intellect, shunning evil, loving wisdom – namely Constantine, who at Roha was educated in the wisdom of the Greeks.'[4]

One can see the story which Eutychius picked up behind the opening of another, apparently much earlier anachronistic story about Helena which likewise makes her a native of Edessa. It is among a series of Syriac texts ascribed to Maruta, Bishop of Martyropolis (fl. 390-420),[5] and has recently been explored

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2 Yaqut al-Hamawi's account, borrowed from an earlier history by Abd Allah bin al-Azraq al-Fariqi (see Graham Jones, 'Constantine and his mother build a city: Helen of Edessa and Martyropolis', in Miša Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium. Tenth Symposium, Niš, 3-5 June 2011. The Collection of Scientific Works X* (Niš, University of Niš, 2012, forthcoming), hereafter Jones, 'Martyropolis', is in a modern Arabic edition of his *Mu'jam albuldān* (Beirut, 1957), hereafter Yaqut, 'Mu'jam', 5, pp. 236-8, and an older edition, *Jacut's Geographisches Wörterbuch: aus den Handschriften zu Berlin, St. Petersburg und Paris*, ed. Ferdinand Würstenfeld (6 vols, Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1866-73), 4, p. 703. A short extract in French translation by Jean Sauvaget is in Albert Gabriel, *Voyages archaeologiques dans la Turquie orientale, avec un recueil d'inscriptions arabes par Jean Sauvaget* (2 vols, Paris, E. de Boccard, 1940), hereafter Gabriel, 'Voyages', 1, pp. 219-20. Yaqut's source is discussed by Jean Maurice Fiey, 'Maruta de Martyropolis d'apres Ibn al Azraq', *Analecta Bollandiana* 94 (1976), pp. 35-45.

3 Segal, 'Edessa', pp. 1ff.

4 My own translation from the standard Latin edition of the Greek text: Eutychius of Alexandria (Sa'id ibn Batriq), in J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus*, *series Graeca* 111 (Paris, 1863), col. 999; Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 50 = Scriptores Arabici 6, pp. 117-18.

5 A. Vööbus, *The Canons Ascribed to Maruta of Maipherqat and Related Sources*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 139 [Syriac text] and 140 [English translation], Scriptores Syri 191 and 192 (Louvain, 1982), hereafter Vööbus 'Canons', 2, p. 103. A German translation is O. Braun, *De Sancta Nicaena Synodo. Syrische Texte des Maruta von Maipherkat nach einer Handschrift der Propaganda zu Rom* (Münster, 1898), hereafter Braun, 'Sancta Nicaena'. On Maruta, see Jones, 'Martyropolis'.

by Jan Willem Drijvers.[6] Helena is from the same village, here 'Kephar Phacar' in the region of Urhai. Here too she had been instructed in the Christian faith by the bishop of Edessa, in this case named Barsamya. However, the man she catches the eye of is Valantianus bar Qustus bar Arsinis bar Daquis bar Qlaudius, a man of royal lineage from the city of Rome who was visiting the region of the Orient and took her as his legal wife.[7] They had a son called Constantine. Subsequently Valantianus was promoted to royal rank as Caesar, 'the last king of Rome during the days of the apostles'.[8] Like Yaqut's source, this author ignores Constantius and marries Helena to a later emperor. The strong Valentinian I (364-75) looks likelier than the young, deposed Valentinian II (370-92).

The narrative goes on to describe that, through Helena's efforts, the Christians are granted peace from the great persecution which had arisen against the church, but at first she keeps secret about her faith, fasting and praying that Constantine would come to accept it. 'That this is so can be learned from a letter by Julianus, bishop of Rome, to Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, asking him to offer a prayer in the Holy Land for Constantine and Helena.' Readers are at this point referred to the text of the 'Finding of the True Cross' for information about Constantine's conversion. The narrative continues by declaring that, in Drijvers' translation, 'Constantine had no concern other than that concerning the pagans and the Jews'.

Helena had vowed to pray in Jerusalem and build temples on Christ's tomb, Golgotha, and the sites of his Passover meal, nativity, Ascension, and miracles. She would also build a wall around Jerusalem and renew the city of the Lord. After Constantine's conversion, therefore, she travels to Jerusalem and meets its bishop, Alexander, who had been previously bishop in Alexandria and been 'elevated by all bishops and believers' to the see of Jerusalem because of his zeal against the Arimanites (i.e. Arians) and in order to guard the city against heresies. Helena fulfils her vow to build churches at Golgotha, Christ's sepulchre, Sion, Bethlehem and the Mount of Olives. She also listens to Alexander's fears that heresies would triumph, and writes to her son asking him to put an end to heresies 'just as the pagans and Jews were not able any longer to raise their head in the empire'. Constantine summons Alexander but the bishop, warned in a dream about his impending martyrdom in an Arian ambush, writes down the things about which he wished to instruct Constantine and sends them instead by his presbyter Maqaris – a name reminiscent of that of Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem (circa 311 to circa 334) at the time of Helena's Holy Land visit in 326/7. 'Enflamed by zeal' at Alexander's death, Constantine calls the bishops of 'all the countries of the world' to a Council at Nicaea 'to establish concord'.

There are obvious parallels here to some aspects of the legend of Helena's discovery, Inventio, of Christ's Cross, which may have been around in the second half of the fourth century and from which developed a version which

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6 Jan Willem Drijvers, 'Marutha of Maipherqat on Helena Augusta, Jerusalem', in M. F. Wiles and E. J. Yarnold (eds), *Studia Patristica 34. Historica, Biblica, Theologica et Philosophica* (Louvain, E. Peeters, 2001), pp. 51-64, hereafter Drijvers, 'Marutha'.

7 The narrative outline is summarised from that of Drijvers, 'Marutha', pp. 52-54.

8 Drijvers, 'Marutha', p. 52.

named as Kyriakos the Jew who undertook the excavation under duress from Helen.[9] Likewise there are parallels to elements of a further tale from late antique Edessa, the legend of Protonike. In this another princess of Edessa is created and replaces Constantine's mother in a tale even more anachronistic – and in an opposite chronological direction – as the ones already mentioned.[10] It is a version of the story about Helena's discovery of the Cross relocated in the first century, with Helena replaced by an empress named Protonike. She is identified as 'the wife of Claudius, whom Tiberius made the second man of his empire'. Otherwise the story is very similar to the Inventio Crucis of Helena. Protonike goes to Jerusalem and forces Jews there to reveal the whereabouts of Christ's cross. The story was embedded in the early Syriac narrative concerning Abgar V, the king of Edessa who supposedly corresponded with Christ and persuaded him to send an evangelist named Addai to his kingdom. The Protonike narrative was placed alongside an elaborated version of Eusebius' account of Abgar and Addai by Ephrem the Syrian (b. 306 at Nisibis, d. 373 at Edessa), and together the two accounts constituted a tissue of miraculous happenings known as the 'Doctrine of Addai'.[11]

The Doctrina Addae provides a clue to the name of the bishop, Barsica, who in Eutychius' account instructed Helena of Edessa in the Christian faith. He is probably identical with Barsamya in the Helena-Valantianus account attributed to Maruta. Though no bishop of this name survives in the records, Barsamya was the name of a disciple of Addai mentioned in the Doctrina Addae.[12] A bish-

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9 The literature and evidence was reviewed in Graham Jones, 'Helena of the Cross, the queen of Adiabene, and royal myth-making in the Holy City', in Miša Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium. Eighth Symposium, Niš, 3-5 June 2009. The Collection of Scientific Works VIII* (Niš, University of Niš, 2010), pp. 13-27, hereafter Jones, 'Adaibene'.

10 For a text, see see Cureton, 'Syriac Documents'. See also S. Heid, 'Zur frühen Protonike- und Kyriakoslegendt', *Analecta Bollandiana* 109 (1991), pp. 73-108; Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden, Brill, 1992); *idem*, 'The Protonike Legend and the *Doctrina Addai*', *Studia Patristica* 33 (1996), pp. 517-23; *idem*, 'The Protonike Legend, the *Doctrina Addai* and Bishop Rabbula of Edessa', *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997), pp. 288-315; *idem*, 'Promoting Jerusalem: Cyril and the True Cross', in Jan Willem Drijvers and John W. Watt (eds), *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient* (Leiden, Brill, 1999), pp. 79-95. See also Han J. W. Drijvers and Jan Willem Drijvers, *The Finding of the True Cross; the Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac*, CSCO, vol. 565, Subs. 93 (Louvain, Peeters, 1997).

11 The text was published and translated into English by George Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle, Now First Edited in a Complete Form in the Original Syriac* (London, Trübner & Co., 1876). See also extracts in Cureton, 'Syriac Documents'. It is now also available, in Phillips' edition, but with a new English version, in George Howard (trans.), *The Teaching of Addai* (SBL Texts and Translations, 16, Early Christian Literature Series, 4; Chico, California, Scholars Press, 1981). For further information about the text and its manuscript witnesses, see A. Desreumaux, 'La Doctrine d'Addaï; essai de classement des témoins syriaques et grecs', *Augustinianum* 23 (1983), pp. 181-86. See also Alain Desreumaux, *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus* (Paris, Brepols, 1993), and Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1934; trs. in English by Robert Kraft, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1971), ch. 1, hereafter Bauer, 'Heresy'.

12 *Doctrina Addai* 68 = G. Howard, *The Teaching of Addai*, Texts and Translations

op Barsamya also appears in an early fifth-century composition, the Acts of Sharbil, Babai, and Barsamya, which draws heavily on the Doctrina Addai and tells how he converted Sharbil, a high priest, who was martyred with the latter's sister Babai.[13]

The Helena-Valantianus narrative occurs in a collection of texts attributed to Maruta in which matters relating to the Council of Nicaea are predominant.[14] The apex of Maruta's ecclesiastical career was indeed his persuasion of the bishops at the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410 to recognise the canons of the Council of Nicaea and another 73 pseudo-Nicene canons.[15] However, a detailed study of the compilation had not been carried out before Drijvers' examination, nor was a critical edition in existence of the Arabic recensions of the Syriac texts.[16] Drijvers concluded that the origins of the text lay in Edessa – a conclusion also arrived at the German scholar Braun[17] – and its purpose was to propagate monophysitism (the belief that Christ had one, divine nature, rather than two natures, divine and human, in one substance, as declared by the Council of Nicaea).[18] He has argued that the same purpose lay behind the Protonike legend, which he has also argued came into being in Edessa. He dates this to the 430s and attributes it to the initiative of the then bishop Rabbula, who, he believes, was probably also responsible for its inclusion in the official foundation legend of the Edessene church, the Doctrina Addai.[19] 'Rabbula employed the Protonike legend to propagate monophysitism in his conflect with Hiba, head of the School of Edessa, who was in favour of the christology formulated by Theodore of Mopsuestria and the latter's pupil Nestorius.'[20]

Drijvers comments on the mention of Claudius ('Qlaudius') in Constantine's genealogy in the Helena-Valantianus narrative that it 'might well be that the author of our text knew the Protonike legend and has connected it somehow with Constantine's provenance'.[21] However, he points out, the Kyriakos and Protonike legends were not so widespread and developed in the Syriac-speaking part of the Roman empire (or did not yet exist) that Maruta could have used them as a foundation for the text ascribed to him. In the legends of the Cross, Helena builds one church, that of the Holy Sepulchre, and the bishop is Macarius (Helena legend), Judas Kyriakos (Kyriakos legend), or

16, Early Christian Literature Series 4 (Chico, 1981), p. 71.

13 Segal, 'Edessa', pp. 82-83; R. Duval, 'Les Actes de Scharbil et les Actes de Barsamya', Journal Asiatique 8:14 (1889), pp. 40-58.

14 See the list given by Drijvers, p. 54, note 6.

15 Drijvers, Marutha, p. 55.

16 Vööbus, 'Canons', 1, pp. xxii-xxiii.

17 Braun, 'Sancta Nicaena', pp. 16-17.

18 Drijvers, 'Marutha', p. 56.

19 Jan Willem Drijvers, 'The Protonike legend, the *Doctrina Addai* and Bishop Rabbula of Edessa', *Vigiliæ Christianæ* 51 (1997), pp. 298-315, and 'The Protonike legend and the Doctrina Addai' in E. A. Livingstone (ed*.), Studia Patristica 33. Papers presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1995* (Louvain, 1997), pp. 517-23.

20 Drijvers, 'Marutha', p. 57.

21 Drijvers, 'Marutha', pp. 57-58.

James (Protonike legend). Drijvers thinks it more probable that the author of the Helena-Valantianus narrative was Rabbula (died 436) or one of his party, writing 'in the doctrinal controversies which divided the Christian community of Edessa in the 430s and 440s'.[22]

The bishop Alexander of the story may be a conflation, in Drijvers' opinion, of Alexander, bishop of Alexandria (circa 312-328), a strong opponent of Arianism, and an Alexander described by Eusebius, who was bishop first of Cappadocia and then, by unanimous approval of the bishops of sees around Jerusalem, bishop of that city in the third century. Drijvers suggests that Julianus, bishop of Rome, can be identified with Julius, who held the see between 337 and 352 and was a strong supporter of Orthodoxy in the dispute with the Arians.[23] Drijvers notes that the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, teacher of Nestorius, were taught at the School of Edessa. Rabbula held to these views and then changed his mind after the Council of Ephesus – perhaps, according to Drijvers, because Theodosius II had abandoned Nestorius at the same time, in 431.

Before recapitulating the Edessene legends and related narratives, it is instructive to observe that even reports of Helena's encounter with her future husband which name Constantius and conventionally place it at Drepanum in Nicomedia could be laced with anecdotes which appear fanciful while perhaps preserving echoes of actuality. Thus the Church History of Nikephorus Kallistos Xanthopoulos (fl. circa 1320):[24]

Constantius was assailed with the desire for a bedfellow. [The host] recognising his guest, by the magnificence and splendour of whose retinue the region was excited, he brought him his daughter, a beautifully formed girl already of marriable age. [Constantius] had an affair with her, and for the cohabitation rewarded her with a purple-woven peplum. In a dream Constantius [who was turned away from Drepanum by duty] was shown a miraculous vision of her which alarmed him. Why would the girl, encouraged by her father, wear the gift as a mark of honour, carefully stay undefiled, and have her off-spring well educated? He understood what was said in the dream... The boy born [to] Helena played boyish games [but] was angry with the odious speech of friends, and rebuked their indignity. Then the mother indicated to Constantius that he was his child. Her issue, the peplum, and the child's appearance and generous character, were sufficient witness.

Her circumstances being known to Constans from the report of envoys, he undertook with the company of the region to bring the child with his mother to Rome. Truly also, it was not absurd what befell his legitimate wife Theodora through jealousy and marital rivalry. He sent his son to Diocletian at Nicomedia... where in the imperial palace Constantine joined the household scholars [assistants to judges and ministers), learning the Greek disciplines.

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22 Drijvers, 'Marutha', p. 63.

23 Drijvers, 'Marutha', pp. 59-61.

24 Nicephori Callisti, 'Ecclesiasticæ Historiæ Bk 7, Ch. 18, in J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiæ Cursus Completus*, *series Graeca* 145 (Paris, 1865), cols 1241-44. Latin translation, from which the English is mine.

It is worth reminding ourselves that Drepanum was renamed Helenopolis by Constantine when he restored it in honour of the local martyr Lucian, according to Jerome (circa 347-420).[25] It was not the only city so-called. Local tradition, recorded by Procopius in the sixth century, furnished the belief that it was Helena's birthplace, perhaps because of its name, perhaps because Lucian was venerated by Helena – but we can not be sure that the tradition was bet-

Fig. 2: Inner core of Urfa/Edessa, mapped by the author from aerial photography (Google Earth), with locations after Segal, Plan 1 (Maps and Plans following p. 257). Dark lines indicate the course of the fortifications. Lighter lines mark morphological sub-divisions within the city. Former church sites as follows (after Segal): 1. Mother of God (Melkite)? Converted to Huseyin Pasa Mosque; 2. St Barlaha? Hayrullah Mosque 3. St Michael? Arabi Mosque; 4. Saviour, cathedral built beside the Old Church, later site of Melkite cathedral or Hagia Sophia?; 5. St Thomas, succeeded ultimately by Ridwaniye Mosque; 6. Mother of God (Monophysite) with baptistery, formerly School of Persians? Halil Rahman Mosque; 7. Ss John the Baptist and Addai? Now site of power station; 8. Twelve Apostles (Armenian)? Firfili Mosque; 9. Mother of God (Melkite)? Imam Sekkaki Mosque; 10. Cross (Melkite)? Seyhnebi Mosque; 11. St Stephen, formerly synagogue? Ulu Mosque; 12. Confessors? Kadioglu Mosque; 13. St Cyriacus? Yusuf Pasa Mosque; 14. Twelve Apostles? Haciyadigar Mescidi; 15. St Sergius? Ak Mosque; 16. Ss Sergius and Simeon? (Circis Peyamber); 17. St Theodore? Ruins in the citadel;

Сл. 2: унутрашње језгро Урфа / Едесае, мапиране од стране аутора на основу фотографија из ваздуха (Google Earth), са локацијама по Сегалу у, план 1 (мапе и планови од стр. 257). Тамне линије показују рапоред утврђења. Светлије линије означавају морфолошких под-поделе унутар града. Бивши локације цркава су следеће (по Сегалу): 1. Богородица (Melkite)? Преобраћена у џамију Хусеин Паше; 2. Св. Барлаха? Хаирулах џамија ; 3. Св. Михајло? Араби џамија ; 4. Спаситељ, храм изграђен поред Старе цркве, а каснија локације Мелките катедрале или Свете Софија?; 5. Св. Тома, на крају преобраћен у Ридвание џамију ; 6. Богородица (Монопхисите) са крстионицом, раније Персијска школа? Халил Рахман џамија; 7. Св. Јован Крститељ и Адаи? Сада локација термоелектрана; 8. Дванаест апостола (јерменских)? Фирфили џамија; 9. Богородица (Мелките)? Имам Секаки џамија; 10. Крст (Мелките)? Сеихнеби џамија; 11. Св. Стефан, негдашња синагога? Улу џамија; 12. Исповедници? Кадиоглу џамија; 13. Ст Кириак? Јусуф Паша џамија; 14. Дванаест апостола? Хациадигар Месциди; 15. Св. Сергеј? Ак џамија; 16. Св. Сергеј и Симеон? (Цирцис Пеиамбер); 17. Св Теодора? Рушевине у цитадели

account of Paul's trial in 60 CE at Caesaria Maritima before her brother and the governor, Felix (who had married her sister Drusilla, previously wife of the king of Emesa).[50] Josephus recorded a series of short-lived marriages between 41 and 48 CE, the last with her uncle Herod of Chalcis – like some other dynasties, the Herodians practised uncle-niece marriages as a means of retaining power.[51] After this, much of the remainder of Berenice's life was spent at the court of her brother Agrippa II, 'where their relationship became matter for gossip' that they were in an incestuous relationship.[52] Juvenal's Sixth Satire declared them lovers. To deal with the gossip (according to Josephus), she married king Polemon II of Cilicia (the territory around Tarsus), but deserted him and returned to Agrippa's court. She appears to have acted almost as co-ruler, and was allowed by the Romans to rule over parts of Syria. During the prelude to the First Jewish-Roman War, she travelled to Jerusalem in 66 to intercede for the Jews who were being discriminated against under Nero, and nearly met her death in the tumult. Subsequently she became the mistress of the Roman

50 Acts of the Apostles, 25:13-14, 23 and 26:30.

51 Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, and *The War of the Jews*. Both texts are available in Internet translations.

52 Alexander Jones (gen. ed.), *The Jerusalem Bible* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966), Acts 25:13, note e.

general Titus, with whom she lived in Rome from 75 after a four-year separation. Agrippa II accompanied her to Rome and was made Praetor. However, Berenice's unpopularity among the Romans led Titus to dismiss her when he became emperor in 79. After his death two years later, Berenice disappears from the record. Agrippa died in 92.

Berenice's career is relevant to this discussion because Huller believes that Edessa was closely involved in the process by which he asserts that Christianity came into being. 'Once you hear Edessa you should always think Marqion [Marcus Agrippa]. "Protonike" means "first victory" just as "Berenice" means "victory bringer." I suspect that what [the Protonike legend] really contains is a reworking of material related to [Berenice's] mother's efforts to secure Christianity for Marcus by means of a miracle related to her resurrection. "Protonike" is a way of distinguishing the "first" Mary from the second – i.e. Berenice.'[53] (To be precise, Berenice is a Macedonian name, corresponding to Greek phere nike, 'the bringer of victory'.) J. B. Segal, on the other hand, has suggested that Protonike's name may have been inspired by that of Stratonike ('army victory'), wife of Seleucus, king of Syria, and subsequently of her stepson Antiochus I, king of Assyria. She was one of the reputed founders of the temple of Atargatis at Hierapolis, north-east of Aleppo, in 300 BCE.[54]

The Protonike story begins with what Huller describes as a deliberate effort to connect Protonike to the ruling Julio-Claudian line. 'Just as Berenice is connected with "Titus the son of Tiberius" in the Vengeance of the Saviour tradition [discussed below], we see "Protonike" identified as "the wife of Claudius the Emperor, whom Tiberius made the second man of his empire" in the Syriac tradition. Just as the original narrative of Vengeance is set during the Jewish War, the material in the Protonike narrative tells of that "at that time" Claudius "set out to make war on the Spaniards who had rebelled against him."'[55]

Protonike encounters a disciple of Simon and is converted. In the Edessan material, Protonike is said to have seen 'the signs and wonders and mighty acts he did in the name of Christ, and she foreswore the heathenism of her forefathers …[gave up her idols] … and believed in our master, Christ'. Protonike goes to Jerusalem with her two sons and one daughter in search of the tomb of Jesus. 'When she came to Jerusalem the whole town came out to meet her and they received her with great honour, as was due a queen… [There] she dwelt in the royal palace of king Herod.' Huller comments: 'There is thus still something of a remembrance of her being connected to the Herodians beneath the veil of her Romanness.'

When she discovers where the tomb of Jesus was located, she finds that 'it is under the stewardship of the Jews'. Her object, in Huller's words, is to 'grab control of Christianity away from the Jews for, as one believer explains to her "[t]hey have taken possession of them and they do not permit us to go thither and worship before the Calvary and the tomb, [n]either will they give us the tree

53 Huller, 'Messiah'.

54 Segal, 'Edessa', p. 51. See Lucian's Apocryphal work, *De Dea Syria*.

55 Huller, 'Messiah'.

of the cross".' When she hears that Christians are being persecuted by the Jews she demands that they hand over these things to the Church 'in order that they may perform their service there, according to the customs of the service'.

She enters the tomb and almost immediately 'her daughter, a virgin, fell and died without pain and without sickness and without cause of death'. Her son comes forward and announces that the death of his sister might be a good thing because he recommends that they put her body on each one of the crosses to discover which one belongs to Jesus and thus resurrect her to prove the greatness of their Lord. Once the members of the toyal family discover the true cross of Jesus and heal their sister by laying her on the wood a now unnamed boy of the Protonike story exclaims 'Thou seest, my mistress, that if not this had happened today, then they would have left this cross of Christ, by which my sister was revived… [B]ehold, we see and are glad, and Christ, who as done this, is glorified in her.'

Huller declares that 'The story of Protonike, like many of these narratives is ultimately of course, a stupid story. Nevertheless it illustrates the manner in which something of the original history of Christianity never died or went away – it just became deliberately obscured. In due course the whole "Protonike" tradition was developed by Constantine for the sake of the new state religion of Rome. Now Constantine stood in the place of Marcus and Constantine's mother Helen replaced the original mother in the narrative, Salome.'

CONCLUSION: DIVINE VENGEANCE, DIVINE TRIUMPH?

Berenike/Veronica and Jerusalem, Helen and Troy

To Protonike and Berenice (Berenike) should be added a second Berenice, namely the woman known by its Latin form Veronica and the tale of her Vernicle, a cloth (usually a veil) that bore an image of the face of Jesus and had the ability to cure the sick. (Medieval etymology combined Latin vera, 'true', with Greek eikon, 'image'.) The legend of Veronica and the cloth which she gave to Jesus to press to his face in momentary relief as he dragged his cross to Golgotha, was closely connected with Edessa through the story of Abgar V's conversion. The Doctrina Addai asserted that the king's archivist Hannan visited Jesus as Abgar's emissary and painted Christ's face on cloth – an image, the Mandylion, which subsequently was found miraculous. The story was further elaborated by the church historian Evagrius, Bishop of Edessa (circa 536-600), who declared that the image was 'divinely wrought', and 'not made by human hands'.

As with the Protonike legend of Edessa and the historical associations of Queen Berenice with Syria, the account of Veronica came to be associated with the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and Vespasian, a popular subject for medieval writers, particularly those who used the destruction of Jerusalem as what Stephen Wright has called 'a new interpretation of the Church's own histo-

ry, nature and mission'.[56] An early tradition included around 325 by Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History was that at Caesaria Philippi lived the woman whose issue of blood was cured by Christ.[57] In the West she was identified with Martha of Bethany, but in the East was named Berenike or Beronike, initially in the widely popular, fourth-century life of Pontius Pilate, Acta Pilati: 'And a certain woman named Bernice crying out from afar off said: I had an issue of blood and touched the hem of his garment, and the flowing of my blood was stayed which I had twelve years. The Jews say: We have a law that a woman shall not come to give testimony.'[58] As in a later appendix, circa 600, 'The Healing of Tiberius', Cura sanitatis Tiberii, this combines Matthew's miracle with Luke's account of the woman healed when she touched the hem of Jesus' garment.[59] The appendix attached Veronica's story to Josephus' story of the fall of Jerusalem by telling that her Vernicle was the instrument of Tiberius' healing, and his subequent conversion. About a century later, the healing of Titus was incorporated into Vindicta salvatoris, the 'Vengeance of the Saviour', along with the explicit portrayal of the siege as vengeance for the Crucifixion.

As Michael Livingston has observed, 'In a sense, the bitter separation of Church and Synagogue can be traced to the destruction of Jerusalem, since for the latter it resulted in renewed obedience to the Torah, while for the former it became a sign of the rejection of the old Israel and the birth of a new Christian empire in Rome. In the Christian imagination, the destruction of Jerusalem was finally removed from its secular context altogether and came to stand for nothing less than the ultimate triumph of Ecclesia over Synagoga, a symbol of the Western Church's repudiation of its own Jewish heritage.'[60]

Thus Constantine's mother Helena was caught up, either in her lifetime or more likely very soon after it, in a polemic in which Christians and Jews were increasingly placed in antagonistic opposition. The weaving and interweaving of meaningful narrative even brought memory of Helena's greatest namesake, the Greek Helen, into play, for the fall of Jerusalem was easily compared and contrasted with the fall of Troy. Malcolm Hebron has written: 'As an image of history, the siege of Jerusalem contrasts with that of Troy. Where the fall of Troy illustrates a Boethian model of history as a cycle of rise and fall of power and fortune, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman emperors Titus and Vespasian illustrates the separate, Augustinian conception of history as a succession of great events which reveal part of the divine scheme of things. The siege of Troy is a warning against human vanity and folly, while that of

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56 Stephen K. Wright, *The Vengeance of Our Lord: Medieval Dramatizations of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, Studies and Texts 89 (Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1989), p. 6.

57 Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 7:18; Matthew 9:20.

58 'The Testimony of Nicodemus or Acts of Pilate', trs. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924), ch. VII.

59 Luke 8:43-48.

60 Michael Livingston (ed.), *Siege of Jerusalem* (Kalamazoo, Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), Introduction.

Jerusalem reveals the will and power of God. Where Troy is a tragic fall of power and pride, Jerusalem even in its tribulations is seen as a sign of the triumphal march of destiny.'[61]

A notable feature of the Helena legends is how often she is described as fair of face and form. In the narrative context it is unnecessary, yet it is persistent. Helena's physical attractions to the various potentates who take her to their beds, whether as wife or concubine – Constantius, Valentinian, Theodosius in Mesopotamia, Magnus Maximus in Britain – almost jar as a motif in these moral histories. Indeed it is tempting to wonder whether the introduction of a course in Christian teaching by Barsica/Barsamya might not be a deliberate attempt to downplay, or least counter-balance, her physical charms. It is almost as if the words carry a strongly signalled allusion to the lovely Greek Helen whose beauty, in Marlowe's phrase, 'launched a thousand ships and burned the topless towers of Illium'. Much recent scholarship has been devoted, rightly, to pointing up the Greek element in the late antique and early medieval culture of the Fertile Crescent generally and Edessa in particular.[62] Here too one catches an echo in the wind. Another persistent motif in the legends is the precocious learning of Constantine, who takes to schooling in the 'Greek disciplines' (Nikephorus) and 'Greek wisdom' (Euchytius).

Education in Edessa was available to both boys and girls.[63] These learning establishments were the feeders to Edessa's three great Schools, of the Armenians, Persians and Syrians, which together amounted to one of the ancient world's great universities. They flourished in a cultural humus which had developed over the centuries of Greek influence and was fed also by the academies of Persia and Egypt. The fruits of this civilisation nourished the peoples of the region and were diffused along the routes of trade and commerce, particularly, it may be guessed, those of the Jews and Arabs, and by the great religions, whether Zoroastrianism, Jewish monotheism, Christianity, Islam, or the various devotions around the great pantheons that included Artemis, Baal, and Isis. In an educated Edessan's ears, Homer's name would have been as familiar as Shakespeare's is in ours. If ideas about the Greek Helen percolated into those about Helena, mother of Constantine, no surprise there. The motifs in the Edessan Helena legends are a hint of how that might have happened.

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61 Malcolm Hebron, *The Medieval Siege: Theme and Image in Middle English Romance* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 113-17.

62 Segal, 'Edessa', pp. 30-35.

63 On Edessan education, Segal, 'Edessa', pp. 149-152.

Грем Џонс

ЈЕЛЕНА ОД МЕСОПОТАМИЈЕ: ПОГЛЕД ИЗ ЕДЕСА

На симпозијуму 2009.године, аутор је предочио могућност да су Јеленина посета Јерусалиму и њене активности у вези са изградњом Константинове цркве, као и инкорпорације Светог града у његов нови хришћански светски поредак, побожни Јевреји озбиљно схватили због њене имењакиње, краљице Адиабене из првог века. Ово Северно месопотамијско краљевство делило је са суседном Едесом рани и значајни прелазак у хришћанство, а Едеса је чак унела Константинову мајку у своју традицију, успостављајући је као првовековну Царицу Протонике, 'Прву победу „. Овај рад разматра недавни конкурс на ову тему, укључујући и дискусију о анти-јеврејском карактеру Едесанске традиције, истражује како се уклапају у општи образац употрбе Јелениног лика, као моста између древних и хришћанских светова Медитерана и Блиског истока.