1975

Helena Nostra: Saint Helena in Britain

Linda Zieper

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the European History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://dx.doi.org/10.21220/s2-v4xr-t317

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
HELENA NOSTRA

SAINT HELENA IN BRITAIN

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Linda Zieper

1975
This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Approved, May 1975

A. Z. Freeman
James N. McCord, Jr.
John W. Conlee
Department of English
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................ iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ....................................... v
ABSTRACT ........................................ vi
INTRODUCTION ........................................ 2
CHAPTER I ........................................ 7
CHAPTER II ........................................ 21
CHAPTER III .......................................... 39
CONCLUSION ........................................ 77
APPENDICES ........................................ 83
BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................ 88
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank Professor A. Z. Freeman, who supervised this project, for his prodding and patience; Professor James N. McCord, Jr., in whose seminar the research and writing began, and Professor John W. Conlee for his interest and especially for his generous use of his paleographical skill and effort, without which a manuscript source would have been unavailable to her. She would also like to express her gratitude to Sharon Stauffer, then of the Earl Gregg Swem Library, for her efforts in borrowing needed texts, and to the Boston Public and Newberry Libraries for giving the author access to books Mrs. Stauffer could not borrow.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used without further explanation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EETS</th>
<th>Early English Text Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>Original Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Rolls Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCH</td>
<td>Victoria County History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

During the Middle Ages and into the seventeenth century, it was widely believed in England that St. Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine the Great and discoverer of the True Cross, was the daughter of a certain Coel, or Cole, king of Colchester. This study focuses on the persistence and popularity of the legend—which finds no corroboration in the standard ecclesiastical histories—primarily through a large number of histories of early Britain and a somewhat smaller group of hagiographical texts. The accumulated literary evidence of the saint's popularity is supported—and preceded—by a catalogue of more tangible evidence of the extent of devotion to her: church and gild dedications, devotional images, and the like.

The interdependence of the hagiographical and historical in the texts under consideration, the difficulty in distinguishing between the two genres, and the more general question of the role of the legendary in history receive some attention, but these questions are subordinate to the examination of St. Helena herself. It becomes evident that St. Helena's popularity is as dependent on her British identity as on her holy deeds and famous son, although there would, of course, be less insistence on the former without the latter.
"Quid Helenae nostrae," what of our Helena, asked John Leland, the Elizabethan antiquarian.¹ He answered his own rhetorical question with an assertion that St. Helena, discoverer of the True Cross, wife of Constantius Chlorus, mother of Constantine the Great and daughter of Coel, king of Britain, was a glory to her— their— country, a woman incomparably superior to that other Helena who brought shame to Greece.² The important nineteenth-century historians of medieval England disagreed. They felt that the shame lay in considering her "our Helena" at all. The respected ecclesiastical histories had proved that she was born, not in Britain, but in Bithynia, of low, not royal descent, and some suggested that she was not married to the father of her son; clearly, the Victorian historians considered, it was credulity and stubbornness that had made English historians and hagiographers insist for half a millennium that she was a British queen.

By the nineteenth century, the refutations were not solemn. Addressing the Historical Section of the Archaeological Institute at Colchester,

¹William Edward Mead, ed., The famous historie of Chinon of England by Christopher Middleton to which is added the Assertion of King Arthure translated by Richard Robinson from Leland's Assertio Inclytissimi Arturii together with the Latin Original (EETS, OS 165) (London, 1925), p. 79.

E. A. Freeman made genial jokes about Coel and Helena. He trusted, he said, that he did not "shock anybody in Colchester by disbelieving in Old King Cole" and confessed himself only slightly less willing to believe that the world was flat than to accept as fact that Helena, mother of Constantine, was the daughter of Coel of Colchester. J. H. Round stated that "there can be no question that Coel himself (better known as the 'Old King Cole' of nursery song), was an eponymous hero extracted from 'Colchester'," and wrote, with evident relief that, because his work dealt with St. Helen's Chapel, and not with the saint herself, he was not obliged "to treat of this strange fancy at length." In his edition of William of Malmesbury, Bishop Stubbs commended a similar disinclination on his author's part to concern himself much with the "story which was already being ventilated by his contemporary the Archdeacon of Huntingdon as well as by Geoffrey of Monmouth."

Disapproval was not limited to the St. Helena story, of course. The same disdain extended over all the legendary materials in the medieval national and local histories of England. Sir Thomas Hardy, director of the Rolls Series, authorized the publication of Robert Mannyng's rhymed chronicle, a work of "fiction," because its "useful

---


English" made its inclusion among "so much worthless repetition in Latin as the Rolls Series must of necessity contain" worthwhile.\(^6\) The "worthless repetition in Latin," of course, had no intrinsic merit, and translators and editors felt free to begin their work at the point where their authors, reaching their own times, appended original compositions to the standard accounts they so carefully copied.

Hagiographical legends elicited at least as much disapproval as secular, historical ones. Sir Thomas Hardy valued saints' lives only for the "few grains of precious ore" that, critically, carefully, could be separated from their "dross."\(^7\) But these legends were neither written nor read for the scattering of historical and social detail that later historians could extract from them, but for the stories themselves that their audience found endlessly entertaining and edifying throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. For Helena, one of the more popular, as well as one of the earliest English saints—the earliest of both the royal and women saints—the "precious ore" is almost entirely absent, and attention must focus on the ways in which the "dross" was treasured and handed on. It is no good to claim that those who shaped the traditions of the saints into legends needed no special gifts—their


hearers in the monasteries were, so to speak, a captive audience, preconditioned to acceptance. 8

The audience of the saints' lives, in England in the High and late Middle Ages at any rate, was about the same as that of the "secular legends" of King Arthur and the other "historical" heroes. The histories of England are crowded with the deeds of holy men and women, and saints' lives are set, however precariously, within historical contexts.

Repetitiously faithful accounts of St. Helena appear almost interchangeably throughout the collections of saints' lives and histories, Latin and vernacular, and much of this study necessarily concentrates on summaries and discussions of the various versions of her life and deeds, but the specific and persistent appeal of this saint and this legend, as well as the more general questions of the respected role of the legendary and saintly in history demand consideration.

Although these narrative accounts of St. Helena's activities are the most articulate—and probably the most interesting—evidence of the persistence of her cult in England, the extent of the cult is best assessed through a long catalogue of "expressions multiples" in addition to the literary narratives: the dedication of churches and altars, the celebrations of feasts, the veneration of relics, the organization

of pilgrimages, the composition of hymns, the establishment of gilds in the saint's honor, the choice of the saint's name at baptism—and Helen and its variants, Ellen, Elaine and the like have long been popular Englishwomen's names—and the depiction of the saint in images of the most various sorts.

The attempt to define the popularity of a saint, the recovery and recording of the varieties of veneration shown as saint, while not a "tache aisé," is one of the "taches principales de l'hagiographie," and a task that the next chapter undertakes. It should suggest, for other saints as well as St. Helena, what the remaining two chapters attempt to support and define, the "rôle extraordinaire que les saints" après leur mort continuent à tenir dans l'histoire."\(^{11}\)

---


\(^11\) Ibid.
CHAPTER I

Other saints were more popular than St. Helena in medieval England. The attractions of this widow and empress, mother of the first Christian emperor, could not approach those of Mary, Queen of Heaven and Mother of God. The virgin martyrs, St. Lucy, St. Barbara, and especially St. Margaret and St. Katharine exerted a more pathetic, romantic appeal. Inclusive dedications to "all saints" were common and the Evangelists and Apostles, individually and in combination, were the objects of much devotion. The popularity of St. Thomas à Becket, high from the moment of his martyrdom, manifested itself appropriately in church dedications, which prudently identified themselves with the politically unobjectionable St. Thomas, apostle of India, at the Reformation. Strikingly, while a visit to the shrine of St. Thomas is the occasion of the Canterbury Tales, St. Helena's name appears only once in Chaucer. Nevertheless, the popularity of St. Helena was considerable, if localized. Non-narrative evidence—the church and gild dedications, cult images, devotional verse and the like—is concentrated in Colchester, London and York, cities whose importance does in fact extend back to Helena's time, when they were the only settlements in fourth-century Roman Britain that enjoyed episcopal dignity.

---

York, the site of the death of Helena's husband and the acclamation of her son as emperor, honored her with seven churches, a count only the thirteen dedications to St. George, England's patron saint and St. Mary (and two of these were to Mary Magdalene) exceeded and only the apostles Andrew, Peter and Paul matched. Some of these dedications are, of course, quite modern, but four of her churches—all demolished or absorbed by other parishes in the sixteenth century—date from fairly early in the Middle Ages. St. Helen-on-the-wall, first mentioned in a charter of 1194-1214 when a Thomas of St. Lawrence gave one quarter of the advowson, the right of presentation of a candidate to a church office, to the church, claimed to house Constantius' tomb. No date is given for St. Helen, Aldwark, but St. Helen, Fisher-gate, is first mentioned in a refoundation charter of Holy Trinity Priory dating from between 1090 and 1100. St. Helen, Stonegate, near St. Helen's Square, first mentioned in 1235, was the parish church of the glass-painters whose craft flourished in York in the fifteenth century.7

The glass-painters' church is disappointingly barren of depictions of St. Helena—or of their art in general, but the cathedral church

2VCH, Yorkshire, I: York, p. 366.
3Ibid.
4Frances Arnold-Forster, Studies in Church Dedications (London, 1899), I, p. 188.
5VCH, Yorkshire, I: York, p. 366.
6Ibid.
8Ibid., pp. 141-143.
does a little better in her regard: a depiction of her in the company
of St. Margaret, St. Katharine, St. Christopher, St. Peter, St. Stephen
and the prophets Malachi and Micah among the tracery of the clerestory
of the western choir9 and another, with the cross, in the eastern choir
beneath a depiction of the Assumption of the Virgin.10 The cathedral
housed other, more material manifestations of her cult: portions of her
relics that had eluded the larger collections at Trèves, Rome, Lisbon
and Altrelle, near Reims.11 One splendid gold bejewelled reliquary in
the shape of a cross, an extremely valuable object that the Archbishop
Roger had pawned as York's contribution to King Richard's ransom money,
contained, beside a bit of the True Cross, relics of twenty-eight saints,
with Helenae reginae listed last,12 in the place rhetoric reserves for
primary emphasis. Another reliquary, in the Altar of St. James, contained
relics of ten saints, among them Helena, and a bit of the Holy Sepulchre.13
The relics are not the only remnants her cult left in York. A vernacular
hymn reflects the special devotion she drew there:

9Ibid., p. 222.

10Ibid., p. 80.

11S. Baring-Gould and John Fisher, Lives of the British Saints, IX

12James Raine, ed., The Historians of the Church of York and Its

13Ibid., p. 110.
Seint elene j þe pray
To helpe me at my last day
To sete þe crosse and his passione
Betwix my synfull saule and dome
Now and in þe houre of my dede
And bryng my saule to requied.

The attention that the position which the careers of her husband
and son brought Helena as a local saint extended beyond her church on
the city-walls throughout the diocese of York: Yorkshire, Lincolnshire,
Nottinghamshire—the North. She had, by different reckonings, thirty-
four or thirty-six dedications in Yorkshire, twenty-eight in Lincoln­
shire, and fifteen in Nottinghamshire. These account for well
over half the dedications in the country and are clearly "two and three
times as numerous as those in the South of England." The exception in the South was Colchester. The study of place
names has established the etymology of Colchester as "Roman fort on
the Coln"—the n dropped out early—and found an earlier name, Camulo-
donum, after Camulus, the British war-god, but medieval writers, who

17 Bond, p. 207.
18 Arnold-Forster, I. p. 189.
19 Ibid., p. 188
20 Kenneth Cameron, English Place Names (London, 1963), p. 36.
never allowed accuracy to spoil the sport of etymology, had their own explanation. By 1056, when the information first appeared in the chronicle of Mont-Saint-Michel, it was established that Colchester was named for a certain British prince Coel—Old King Cole, in fact, the father of Helena.

Although St. Helena appears, crowned, clasping a large cross, on the Colchester seal, the city was surprisingly slack in dedicating churches to its famous native daughter. In all of Essex there is only one church of St. Helen—and she shares that dedication with St. Giles—but there were three dedications to the Holy Cross, themselves a compliment to its Inventor. There was a St. Helen's chapel as far back as 1076, but she did not achieve her full popularity until the fifteenth century. The Hospital of the Holy Cross, belonging to the Crossed Friars, an Augustinian order, became a center for her cult in Colchester. It was never a prosperous or large foundation: in 1401 or 1402 the archbishops of Canterbury and York and a group of bishops offered indulgences to any pilgrims who might visit there and make some contribution, since the poverty of the hospital made it impossible to help the poor for whom it had been founded. To this explanation of


23Arnold-Forster, I, p. 186.

24Ibid.
the utility of a visit to Crossed Friars, Colchester, they appended a statement concerning its interest. St. Helena had herself deposited a portion of the True Cross and "other relics" in the hospital which St. Thomas à Becket kindly hallowed in 1200—thirty years after his martyrdom. Even this was not sufficient safeguard, however: just recently thieves had impiously broken in and stolen away the relics. The disappearance of the relics, though dispiriting, was not enough to destroy the devotion. On 21 November 1407, Henry IV granted a license for a gild or fraternity of St. Helena at Crossed Friars which would maintain five priests to sing mass and thirteen poor men who, too, would contribute to the gild members' souls' health. This gild, one of the "purely religious confraternities," was large, aristocratic and fashionable—although not to the same degree as the combined Coventry gilds of the Virgin, John the Baptist, St. Katharine, and the Trinity, which counted the dukes of Gloucester and Bedford and Henry IV himself among their members. The Colchester gild of St. Helena's most prominent members: the Abbot of St. Johns, Colchester, the Countess of Hertford, the Rector of Stanway, and John, Lord Berners, are, nevertheless, a fair sample of the "esquires, knights, nobles and great men" who were "glad to be admitted" to these religious gilds that had become a powerful

---

26 Ibid.
28 Arnold-Forster, I, p. 186.
political force. During the reign of Henry VI, a "certain private citizen" donated a chapel attached to the hospital for the use of the gild and dedicated to St. Helena—and Christ, the Virgin, St. Katharine and All Saints. By the end of the fifteenth century the gild had prospered beyond the Crossed Friars' control. In 1495 they petitioned that the chapel, described as a "free chapel" had once belonged to them. Their suit was successful and they won the right of having four of their native-born brothers admitted "by the masters and brethren of the Fraternity of St. Helen."

The Fraternity of St. Helen in Colchester was closely linked with the Hospital of the Holy Cross throughout its life; other religious gilds existed independently of buildings, but the dedication of gilds, like that of churches, indicates the personal devotions of their founders, the religious traditions of the district and the ties of the foundation to other foundations. The correspondence between church and gild dedications was not perfect, however. In Lincolnshire, for example, there were twenty-eight churches dedicated to St. Helena, but not one gild in her honor is recorded.

The records themselves present problems that have seemingly prevented the writing of a fully satisfactory book on the subject of

---

30 Evans, p. 219.

31 Arnold-Forster, I, p. 187.


religious gilds. \textsuperscript{34} Much of the information concerning these gilds derives from an inquest of Edward III, an inquest which the gilds, correctly interpreting the king's interest as a search for new sources of revenue, took care to subvert. They revealed as little as possible about their purposes and practices, often declining to admit that they were gilds at all. Some of the St. Helena and Invention of the Cross gilds provide no information beyond their name and location; for others, the date for their foundation or some details of their activities survive. In Cambridgeshire there were four Holy Cross gilds, one of which, at Sawston, undertook to keep the parish church in repair, \textsuperscript{35} while another, founded circa 1374, annually sponsored thirty masses for the dead and maintained a "gild-light" with fines from its membership. \textsuperscript{36} Lincolnshire had a Holy Cross Gild (circa 1377-1378) and a Gild of St. Helena which existed for the health of its founders' souls. \textsuperscript{37} A Gild of the Invention and Exaltation of the Cross at Grantham prayed in 1347 "for the good estate of the realm and English church" and for the souls of its members. \textsuperscript{38} Norfolk was amply provided with gilds of St. Helena--and good records. Two Holy Cross gilds, one of which kept candles

\textsuperscript{34}Westlake, Parish Guilds is largely a table of the gilds with a commentary on the purposes and activities of the gilds, which he sees as essentially spiritual in nature. It is a far better book than Toulmin-Smith, ed., English Gilds: The Original Ordinances of...Early English Guilds (EETS, OS 40) (London, 1870) which consistently suppresses their devotional purposes and sees them as "friendly societies."

\textsuperscript{35}Westlake, pp. 145-146.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 143.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 153.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 157.
burning before the rood and the altar of St. Helena, provided for the
singing of thirty masses for the repose of its dead brethren and
required attendance of all its members at funerals were recorded in
Lynne. Bishop's Lynne was the site of a gild dedicated to Christ,
the Virgin, "alle the holy halwin and namelike of pe holy crouche at
seinte Eleyne founde." In West Lynne, a gild of St. Helena required
its members to attend mass on St. Helena's day and offer ½d., the sum
they were required to offer at funerals, and provided twenty-four masses
for the repose of the souls of the dead. The members of the Invention
gild at Swaffham provided only twelve candles on the feast of the
Invention and the corresponding gild at Upwell, which claimed its
history went back to "time without memory" took upon itself the
responsibility of the repair of the "picture" of the Holy Cross.
The Holy Cross gilds at Walsoken, founded in 1387, and Wormegay, however,
did not reveal their activities. In Northamptonshire, a gild dedi­
cated to Helena, the Trinity, and the Holy Cross was founded in 1366,
but the corresponding gild in Stratford in Warwickshire traced its
foundation "a tempore cuius contrarium memoria non existit." 43
Yorkshire, like Essex, had only one gild of St. Helena. Founded
in 1378 in Beverly, its regulations required the annual appointment

39 Ibid., pp., 193, 197.
40 Toulmin-Smith, p. 85.
41 Westlake, p. 205.
42 Ibid., pp., 210, 212, 214, 215.
43 Toulmin-Smith, p. 213.
of an alderman and two stewards, the support of two to four bedridden poor people, the burning of three candles each Sunday and thirteen at Christmas for St. Helena, as well as unspecified masses for the dead, repairs to the church, and gifts to the poor. The requirements for the celebration of St. Helena's day were clearer and more elaborate. First there was to be a procession. A "fair youth," dressed as a queen, was to lead, accompanied by two old men, one carrying a cross, the other a shovel, in token of the events of the Invention. They were to be followed by the women, then by the men, two by two, in turn followed by the stewards and aldermen. The procession was to go, with musical accompaniment, to the Franciscan church where a mass was to be sung and each gild member was to offer a mass-penny. Later, the members were to meet in their gild hall for bread, cheese, "as much ale as is good for them," and the installation of the new officers for the next year.

Outside of London, these consolidated and powerful gilds were the focus of St. Helena's cult; in London interest centered on an old and prominent foundation, St. Helen's, Bishopsgate. A church stood there by 1010 when the relics of St. Edmund were moved there from Bury. In the reign of Henry II the church again appears in the records when one Ranulf and his son granted it to the dean and canons of St. Paul's. They in turn, in the reign of King John, granted the

---

44Ibid., p. 148.
45Evans, p. 219.
46Arnold-Forster, I, p. 188.
church to a "William son of William the Goldsmith" who was allowed to
found a convent there and to present the advowson, with the stipulation
that the candidate meet the approval of the dean and canons and swear
fealty to them.\footnote{VCH, London, I, p. 457.} The dedication to Helena, empress and saint, led the
location and well-born nuns surely had more to do with the convent's
prestige. Important people made contributions beyond their superfluous
female relations. In 1225, William Longespee, Earl of Salisbury, a
natural son of Henry II, left the nuns five cows in his will. A
year earlier, Henry III had given them two oaks and in 1248 would
license them to close St. Helen's Lane for their own use.\footnote{VCH, London, I, p. 457.} This was
a long time to go between favors and the convent repeatedly found itself
in financial distress. In 1285, however, a royal gift grander and
more impressive than cows or trees provided some relief. In that year
Edward I brought a piece of the True Cross home from Wales and walked,
accompanied by bishops and barons, to St. Helen's to present it.\footnote{Ibid.} It
may well be the possession of this holy relic, or at least its royal
donation, that in May 1290 prompted Archbishop Peckham to exempt St.
Helen's from the interdict he had placed on the city and to permit the
nuns to celebrate the feast of the Invention of the Cross, one of their
chief festivals. In October of the same year the pope proved himself
more generous. He offered penitents a relaxation of their penance for

\footnote{Ibid.}
one year and forty days for visiting the church on the feast of the Invention in May and St. Helena's day in August.\footnote{Ibid., p. 458.} This favor could not last. Like other nunneries supported by wealthy families—increasingly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, merchant families—and staffed with their daughters and widows, it suffered from mismanagement and laxity.\footnote{Baker, p. 241.} It wasted its endowment, its nuns primped and quarrelled. One ran away to be married. Attempts at reformation met hostility;\footnote{VCH, London, I, pp. 458-460.} this was a fashionable house and its religious functions receded to being little more than a suitable site for the entombments of important people like Sir John de Oteswich and Sir John Crosley and their ladies, whose burial brasses still decorate the church.\footnote{Baker, p. 241.}

Outside these centers, evidence, other than gild dedications, of devotion to St. Helena is sparse and scattered. There is a parish named for her on the Isle of Wight, and a St. Elena's at Thoroton in Nottinghamshire. Elstow in Bedfordshire recalls a convent founded there by William I's niece Judith and dedicated to St. Helena.\footnote{Arnold-Forster, I, pp. 187-188.}
Most of the 117 church dedications remain only as names, but a surprising number of artistic expressions of her cult managed to survive both Reformation and Civil War. There are, besides the York windows and the Colchester seal, a fifteenth century reredos at Mattersey in Nottinghamshire;\(^57\) a fresco showing her holding a cross, a staff and a book at Eton; a fifteenth-century Flemish window, picturing her crowned, carrying an open book, at Shrewsbury.\(^58\) The chapel of the Holy Cross gild at Stratford was decorated in the fifteenth century with a series of frescos illustrating the Invention of the Cross\(^59\) and a window on the same subject in ten panels from the refectory of Dale Abbey is at Morley in Derbyshire.\(^60\) Eighteen glass panels at Ashton-under-Lyme, Lancashire, tell the story of Helena's life from her birth, in the first scene, with the legend "Hic nascitur Elena Coyle regis filia."\(^61\)

The more limited space and circumscribed shape of the six-foot, twelfth-century carved stone cross at St. Helen's Church at Kelloe, near Durham, fits it to a less discursive or elaborate depiction of St. Helena's activities. It is a pictorial account of the Invention

\(^{57}\)Evans, p. 215.

\(^{58}\)Drake, p. 59.


\(^{60}\)Bond, p. 76.

\(^{61}\)Ibid., p. 75.
in three stories. Beneath a cross, once inscribed in a circle, and bearing the legend *In hoc vinces*, the sign that prompted Constantine's conversion, an angel appears to Helena, directing the search for the True Cross. The central panel depicts two standing figures, one carrying a cross, the other a small casket. The figure with the cross is, of course, Helena; the other perhaps Constantine or more probably, since the draperies and chevelure point to a feminine subject, the Queen of Sheba. The bottom register is a straight-forward representation of the actual finding of the cross. A large Helena with a drawn sword has convinced the Jew, Judas, to reveal the location of the cross (information that had been passed down in his family) and he holds a shovel in token of his participation in the Invention. Between them stands the cross itself and at their feet rest two corpses, one of which has been restored to life at the touch of the cross. This compressed and complex composition is clearly "somewhat unusual"—perhaps unique—but its combined interest in the commemorative and narrative is entirely typical and appropriate.

---


63 Boase, p. 233.
THE INVENTION OF THE CROSS.
(Kelloe, Co. Durham.)
Constantius Chlorus was a young Roman officer totus deditus libidini, according to an account of unknown authorship or provenance preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript;¹ Helena was a beautiful maiden of the oldest nobility of Treves, whom he met in Rome, seduced and left pregnant. Overcome with shame and remorse—although she had yielded to him only to save her travelling companions' lives—she refused to return home and lived in Rome as a paupercula with her son Constantine. Years later, when Constantine was playing with his friends down by the docks, he attracted the attention of some merchants who correctly identified him with his father, then emperor of Rome, and took him off on a long series of adventures. These can be summarized rapidly—and frequently were in the libellus, as the characters strain to keep one another and the inattentive reader aware of what had been happening. After the merchants had taken him away, they brought him up in their home, took him, still unaware of his lineage, to Greece and married him there to the Greek emperor's daughter. Then the wicked merchants stole the young couple away and left Constantine and his bride, almost dead, on an island where, by chance, other merchants rescued them and returned them to Rome. There,

¹MS Dresden J46, ed. Eduardo Heydenreich, De Constantino Magno eiusque Matre Libellus (Lipsig, 1879).
again by chance, they met Helena, who at last decided to make herself known to Constantius. Her noble bearing and her son's skill at torneamentis convinced Constantius that these unfamiliar people were indeed his family and the action closes with a joyful reunion. This is no saint's life, but a romance, exotic and extravagant. The characters invoke God at appropriate intervals, but the interest of the story is plainly with the action and not in any spiritual implications it may have. Between the revelation of identities in Rome and the closing doxology, the author notes the limits he had chosen for his narrative and directs his unsatisfied readers elsewhere:

Qualiter autem Constantinus mortuo suo patre Constantio in Romano imperio et mortuo suo socere in Graecorum imperio successerit et factus fuerit totius saeculi monarcha, qualiter a sancto Silvestro papa a lepra curatus et ad mortem suam in utroque imperio potentissime regnavit et qualiter sancta Helena, mater Constantini, Hierosolymam iverit et sanctam crucem ibidem invenerit, require in suis locis.³

He considered that the right and proper subject of his story was the ortus, the origin of Constantine and not the details of his later career or his mother's. Englishmen were quite as concerned with

²Hagiographical romances appear in England in the latter 16th C., see Helen C. White, Tudor Books of Saints and Martyrs (Madison, Wisc., 1963), pp. 279-294, but there is none about St. Helena until Evelyn Waugh, Helena (Boston, 1950).

³Heydenreich, p. 30.
the origin of Constantine and Helena as this unknown author—although British accounts of the matter accord on no point with his version—but from the Old English homilies and Cynewulf's *Elene*, through the Middle English accounts in the *Cursor Mundi*, the *South English Legendary*, John Capgrave's *Nova legenda Angliae* and William Caxton's *Golden Legend* to the anonymous Elizabethan recusant's *Lives of Women Saints of our Contrie of England*, the hagiographer's attention has focused on what piety must perceive as the chief interest of Constantine's career, the events surrounding his conversion and the empire's to Christianity. Although Constantine and Helena play important roles in other contexts: the lives of St. Katharine and the Three Kings of Cologne, as well as the British histories, it was how Constantine became ruler of both eastern and western empires, how he was cured of leprosy by Pope Sylvester, how he was converted to Christianity and how Helena went to Jerusalem and found the Holy Cross there that made their inclusion in the other narratives attractive. The same events of the Invention commemorated in the pageant of the Beverly gild of St. Helena or on the Kelloe Cross dominate the narratives of the life of St. Helena and very often substitute for formal *vitae*. The anonymous author's directions to look for these incidents in *suis locis* are not hard to follow; their places are everywhere and almost everywhere a *locus classicus*.

---


The story of the conversion in Eusebius lacked its compliment in the story of the Invention, but the Greek historians had credited St. Helena with having found the True Cross by the fifth century and the story soon found its place in the works of the Latin fathers and hagiographers—and the vernacular hagiographers of England. Although the English writers are understandably less concerned with the details of time and place than the Greek historians, the story is generally constant.

As Constantine approached to battle, a vision of the cross appeared in the sky with the legend _In hoc signo vinces_, which the vernacular authors normally translated. Constantine understood this sign and bore a cross into battle and enjoyed the promised victory. This was enough to prompt him to enquire into the meaning of this sign and then to send his mother to find the original of the symbol that had brought him sovereignty over the world. She immediately and gladly set about this task and, arriving in Jerusalem, announced what she wanted. Frightened, the Jews told her that Judas knew. Judas' grandfather, the brother of St. Stephen Protomartyr, told his son, Symeon, about the cross but warned him that it would overturn the Old Law, information that, relayed to Judas, made him understandably reluctant to help Helena. But seven days in prison (or a dry well) without food or drink brought him around to cooperation, conversion and a name change to Quiriac or Cyriacus. His efforts turned up three crosses—the True Cross and those upon which the two thieves died—and it required a miracle to prove which cross was the True Cross. A corpse was laid on each cross in succession and the third revived the dead man. Quiriac then helped Helena find the nails that had
fastened Christ to the cross and she then divided these precious relics up, sent some home to her son, encased others in elaborate reliquaries and built a fine church on Calvary.

The version included in the *Cursor Mundi*, a very long fourteenth-century poem on sacred history, begins conventionally with a statement of the importance of the Holy Cross and its discovery "Porou a wife/ a duñti wife pat hiȝt Eline" and the author's promise that "I sal tel hit þou./ Als in stori I red & fand," which he fulfills to the point where Constantine sent "his moder eline/ for to do seche, wipouten hone/ þe cros þat crist on was done." His Helena had two messengers who found her another Jewish informant, a man who wickedly proposed, à la Shylock, to extract the debt a Christian goldsmith owed him in flesh. The empress' messengers, Benciras and Ansiers, acting as judges in the case, allowed the Jew his flesh, but forbade him any blood, lest his life and goods be forfeit to their mistress, Helena. She permitted the Jew to redeem himself by finding the cross for her:

'god wate frende,' āen saide eline,
"Þou sal be quite of all þi pine
if þou wil do as I þe bid
to shew vs quere þat cros is hid."

---


7Ibid., 11. 21495-21500
Under the threat of being blinded should he fail, the Jew led the queen to the right site on Calvary, where the Cross was dug up and tested, then divided, according to angelic instructions, and distributed among Jerusalem, Rome, which received two pieces, although one seems to have been intended for Constantinople, New Rome, the site of the "kirk of seint sophie," and Alexandria. There follows another disquisition on the subject of the virtues and early history of the Cross, from its origins in the wood of the tree in Eden to the Invention, a point that brings the author back to Helena and her finding of the nails and her having them set in Constantine's bridle. The author had not yet reached the end of his narration, however, despite the pious summation "now pe crois is brozt til ende/ pe crois mizt vs defende." He suggests that if anyone knows a better version of the story, he should tell it. He repeats that his narration follows what he had read, but acknowledges that he has himself read "mani tellis diverseli" and includes a short summary of a "diuurse story," the standard one of Judas' finding of the Cross, his conversion and name change.  

The South English Legendary accounts of the Invention unanimously uphold the Judas/Quiriac version, and follow it with an account of his life as St. Quiriac, bishop of Jerusalem, who suffered a conventionally

---

8Ibid., 11. 21801-21802; 21807; 21808.
excruciating martyrdom in the reign of Julian the Apostate.9

The details and diction of the story vary from version to version, but the contours of the narration—and the rhymes—remain constant. Two SEL manuscripts envelop the tight narration of the events between Constantine's battle and the death of St. Quiriac in a far longer and more complex account, including the only extant Middle English life of St. Helena, a passage prefatory to the Invention that the headings and margins identify as a vita sanctae elenae.10 Like most of the SEL lives, it begins with an identification of the saint's background, her social position and nationality. She was "in Bretayn borne & comen of hegh kynrede," very beautiful, erudite, and a devout observer or "Pe law God to moyses made." The noble and wealthy king Constantius heard of her wisdom and beauty and resolved to marry her. His ardor won her as his wife and "Jurch Pe wille of god a son togeder pai hadden/ Pat was seche a conqueror after his fader day." His mother's intelligence contributed to Constantine's success "as i haue herde men say," and at his father's death he succeeded to the empire, but he was suddenly and inexplicably struck with leprosy.11 At this point the narrative leaves Helena for a discussion of Constantine's "sekenes," the shameful

---

9He was forced to drink hot lead, he was roasted on a "gridil," salted and boiled in oil. When these painful and imaginative measures proved useless, the emperor stabbed him through the heart with a sharp sword. On the resistance of martyrs to any death but one inflicted with a sharp edge, see White, Tudor Books, p. 42.

10Harley 2250; Lambeth 223.

11Harley 2250, fol, 83b, 11. 15, 16, 36, 38.
remedy of babies' blood proposed by his wise men and the healing bath of baptism suggested by Saints Peter and Paul, appearing in a vision, and administered by Pope Sylvester, filling close to 130 lines. 12 This miraculous cure, replacing the victory that the sign of the cross brought to Constantine, 13 prompted him to send his mother to Jerusalem to search for the True Cross, the point at which this version of the SEL joins the other accounts, and follows them almost line for line or rhyme for rhyme through to the martyrdom of the converted St. Quiriac, before returning to the relic-collecting and church-building activities of St. Helena, her death and burial in Rome and a pious closing urging that "oure lorde for saynt elene loue send vs blis"—one folio after the author had asked the same favor through the joint intercession of "saynt elene & saynt quyriak." 14

This account is prolonged and involved, if disorganized and a bit garbled. It includes details paralleling the national histories of England—especially the chronicle of Robert of Gloucester who was once credited with the composition of the SEL 15—but curiously ignores some of the most hagiographically indispensible points, the Visio crucis, for example.

The omissions are apparently the result of independent composition, a habit not much indulged in by hagiographers, especially after

12Ibid., fol. 82a, l.49; fol. 82b, l. 10.
14Harley 2250, fol. 83B, l. 14; fol. 83a, l. 30.
the thirteenth-century compilation of Jacopus de Varagine, bishop of Genoa, the *Legenda aurea*. His enormously popular and valuable anthology faithfully reproduced the traditional stories and passed them on in Latin. Jacopus provided them with bibliographical and exegetical information for the convenience of preachers, while vernacular collections like the SEL, drawn in turn from the *Legenda aurea*, provided inspiration and entertainment for a lay audience.

The audience these collections found was a wide one. Manuscripts of the SEL are among the most numerous of those that have survived and the *Golden Legend*, translated, edited, and published by William Caxton, went through eight printings between the first edition of his "masterpiece" in 1483 and the final printing of his successor, Wynken de Worde, in 1527. Printing established a text more definitively than copying, and the various editions of the *Golden Legend* conform more with one another than do the various redactions of the SEL or the *Cursor Mundi*. One modern study, however, includes details of the Invention—drawn perhaps from the earlier English translation that Caxton had himself consulted—that the early printed versions, or their 1892 Kelmscott reprint do not. The *Golden Legend* version is an Invention of the Holy Cross, and not a life of St. Helena. It begins with Constantine's battle and a vision and proceeds along the established route to the discovery of the cross and nails, the distri-


17*White, Tudor Books*, pp. 34-35.

bution of these relics and the conversion of Quiriac. It pauses to credit Helena with the razing of the temple that the Emperor Hadrian had erected on Calvary to Venus and to cite Eusebius as the source of the information that Helena had the nails set in Constantine's helm and bridle: "This reheereth Eusebe, which was bishop of Cezayr, how be it that other say other wyse." Butler's version contains more bibliographical scruples. Concerning an account of the early history of the cross, from Eden to Calvary, his text reads, "whether these thingis be trewe or none I leve hit in the wil of the reder; ffor thei be not red in no Cronicle, ne in no storie that is autentik." The author had his doubts concerning Helena's origin as an osteler, although he duly reported it out of Ambrose, and he countered it with the account drawn from the chronicles of Britain, as published by Caxton and de Worde almost as frequently as the Golden Legend itself:

and this seith seinte Ambrose; but othir seyne, and hit is redde in a storye that is Autentik, that Eleyne was the daughter of Thoell, kynge of Bretaigne. and whan Constaunte was in Bretaigne he toke here unto his wyfe. and than the yle of Bretaigne fel unto him bi the dethe of Thoell; and this the Bretons witnesseth.

19The Golden Legend of Master William Caxton Done Anew (Kelmscott, 1892), II. p. 485.
20Butler, p. 130.
21Ibid., p. 135.
The other editions reserve this historico-genealogical information for the life of St. Katharine, and document it with a reference to "credyble cronicles." The wicked tyranny and persecutions of Diocletian's reign ("as wel to crysten men as to paynims")\textsuperscript{22} provoked a rebellion in "Armonyé" which Constantius was sent to put down. He was greatly loved by the people and married to the king's only daughter and heir, who died giving birth to their son, Costus. At his wife's death, Constantius, then king of "Armonyé," returned to Rome where he learned of a rebellion in Britain. He travelled to Britain to quell the rebellion and proved "soo acceptable to the kynge of brytaygne named Coell/ & he maryed hys daughter helyne whyche afterward fonde the holy crosse. And in a short tyme he gate on her Constantyn/ whyche after was Emperoure."\textsuperscript{23}

This pattern of marrying a king's only daughter and inheriting his crown seems to have become a family habit and Constantius' son Costus married the king's daughter of Cyprus, became king of the island and "engendred saynt Katheryne: whyche came of the lyngnyge of Constancius."\textsuperscript{24} The beautiful king's daughter of Cyprus, like the king's daughter of Britain, was carefully educated to succeed to the throne and like Helena, Katharine was expected to marry a suitably noble prince. The question of choice—or even of acquiescence—never came up in Helena's case, but Katharine refused to be married to any but

\textsuperscript{22}The Golden Legend (London, 1512), ccl.
\textsuperscript{23}The Golden Legend (London, 1503), ccxxiii
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
her mystical spouse, Christ. Her articulate and long-winded insistence on her preference for virginity over the wedded state accorded with orthodox opinion, and her defense of her maidenhood and her faith in the face of her extended martyrdom at the hands of the wicked Maxentius, the rival Constantine was to defeat at his great battle at Milvian Bridge, made Katharine "one of the hagiographic favorites." Clearly it was best for a female saint to renounce the world and her life before she lost her looks; the prolonged torment of a lovely young girl was at least as edifying as the adventures, however pious and exciting, of a widowed grandmother, and far more titillating and absorbing.

The accounts of the life of St. Katharine are correspondingly long and detailed. The Golden Legend version of her life, for example, lingers over the details of her martyrdom and John Capgrave, the fifteenth-century hagiographer-historian, devoted a book-length study to her life.26

Another of Capgrave's hagiographical works, the Nova legenda Angliae, treats Helena's life in some detail and at some length. Based on the fourteenth-century Sanctilogium of John of Tynmouth, the Nova legenda Angliae was an anthology of saints' lives organized according to the principle, more consistent with national pride than the idea of sainthood, of national identity. Saints who were born or worked in Britain—generously expanded to include Wales, Scotland and Ireland—would, it was reasoned, have special appeal and

25 White, Tudor Books, p. 47.
exemplary value for Britons, and, as de Worde, who published a Latin edition of the collection in 1515, pointed out, it was necessary to collect the edifying stories of these native saints "for there can no thynge be loued & honoured but it be known."  

Capgrave's careful, scholarly life of St. Helena insured that a great deal about her "be known." A prefacio notes that diversi have recorded diversa concerning her origin. Capgrave quotes Ambrose, but adds "Ego vero illam nequaquam existimem fuisse stabulariam," unless, of course, it were "tropologice loquendo." He adds that the speculation that she and Constantius were not married debases Constantine, and announced that his account will follow the old histories of great authenticity--the histories of Britain, one of which he himself wrote.

He begins with a rather detailed summary of Roman-British history, from the days of the Christian king Lucius to Coel's rebellion against the wicked Asclepiodotus. But history is here subordinate to hagiography and every mention of Coel is in relation to Helena, "ipsam," he repeats, "de qua loquimur sanctam Helenam." He stresses her beauty and intellectual accomplishments, claiming that she was educated in fide catholica as well as the liberal arts (although, he thought, she had not been 

29Ibid., II, pp. 13-14. 
30Ibid., p. 15.
baptised as a young girl). She married Constantius and bore him a daughter Constancia and six sons besides Constantine, her important firstborn. The story of Constantine's conversion is too important to be rushed over, even in a life of his mother and Capgrave offers two versions, the Visio crucis and Pope Sylvester's cure of his leprosy, which had been very properly visited on him for his persecution of Christians. Helena, who had come under Jewish influence in Bizantia, heard of his conversion in Bithynia and criticized his decision. Sylvester organized a disputation between himself and 141 learned Jews and his eloquence and miracles inevitably won. Helena and omnes converted and she set about proselytizing and building churches herself. Then

\[ \text{vero beatissima imperatrix Helena, incomparabilis femina, fide, religione ac magnificentia singularis, a spiritu sancto edocata, divinis admonita visionibus, Hierosolimam petiit.} \ldots \]

There she found the True Cross, built a great many churches and collected the numerous relics credited to her in the accounts of the Three Kings of Cologne, de quibus longum esset narrare. No matter how long it would be, he cannot resist giving a precis of at least Helena's part in this legend, written in Latin in the fourteenth century by John of Hildesheim and soon translated into English and

\[ ^{31} \text{Ibid., p. 17.} \]
\[ ^{32} \text{Ibid., p. 20.} \]
widely circulated in England before going into four editions at de Worde's press between 1496 and 1526.\textsuperscript{33} She found, according to the vernacular version of the legend:

\begin{quote}
\textit{pe same heije falt was layde in yn pe manger, and pe clohes falt our lord ihesu was wounde yn, and oure lady smok. . .pe wich seynt Elene finde all feyre and hole, wounde togder in pe manger,}\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

as well as the bodies of the three kings themselves, which she found in India, after converting the Indians to the true faith by her preaching and holy example. This adventure leaves only her death and burial to be accounted for before the pious closing, expanding on her virtues and innumerable and unspecified miracles, and comparing her with other holy women, St. Anne, for example, and Deborah.\textsuperscript{35}

The Latin life goes on for rather better than seven printed pages; a translation, quite literally a reduction into English, printed by Richard Pyson in 1516, the same year that de Worde's press issued the full Latin version, accords her little more than one folio leaf. The \textit{Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande} reduces the story to the form

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{33}White, "Early Renaissance," 103.

\textsuperscript{34}C. Horstmann, ed., \textit{The Three Kings of Cologne} (EETS OS 85) (London, 1886), p. 124.

\textsuperscript{35}Horstmann, ed., \textit{Nova legenda Angliae}, II, p. 21.
\end{footnotes}
and dimensions accorded it in the printed chronicles of England, intended, like the Kalendre and the other cheaper and less comprehensive editions of saints' lives, for an audience whose literacy was not synonymous with latinity.

The Kalendre introduces Helena as "daughter of Cloell kyng of grete Brytayn" and goes on to summarize the British political circumstances that made Coel offer Constantius his daughter:

thereupon Constancyus toke pe sayd Helyn
hys daughter to wyfe & had by hyr constantyne
which after the dethe of his fader went to
rome with grete power of brytayne/ & toke
his moder with hym & put downe maxencys pe
tyraute.

The "put downe maxencyus pe tyraute" is the only allusion to the Visio crucis; here Constantine's conversion is the result of Sylvester's cure and Helena's the result of the pope's profound arguments and the miracles Christ vouchsafed him. Helena immediately resolved to "enlarge pe crysten feyth all pt she could" and went to Jerusalem where she found the cross, an accomplishment shorn of its narrative, the nails, and "our ladyes smokke," built churches on Calvary, in Bethlehem and "many other places," and then returned to her son in Constantinople, bringing with her "pe Bodyes of the Thre Kynges of Coleyne" and the Holy Cross." A "moder to all personys," she dies "amid great weppyng of all pe people," but herself comforted by a vision of Christ, his cross, and a chorus of

36Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande (London, 1516), liii.
singing angels. 37

The emphasis the Kalendre places on the origin of the saint, paralleling the accounts in the national chronicles and Capgrave's insistence in the Nova legenda Angliae on crediting his information to authentic histories, were echoed in the anonymous Lives of Women Saints of our Contrie of England. This collection, which survives in a single manuscript copy since its early seventeenth-century date clearly precluded its finding an English publisher, is based on chronological, historical principles. It puts Helena at the beginning as the first of England's female saints and cites a sampling of the appropriate national and ecclesiastical histories as sources. It states the special virtues of national English saints for English believers more articulately, more insistently, than the Nova legenda Angliae or the Kalendre. They were

so much the more forceiblie mooving, in that they haue moste beene bredd in this land, where we our selues haue been borne, walked on this earth, on which we walke, filled this ayer which we draw with their renowned fame, sanctified it with their holie acts, blessed it with their merits, magnified it with their miracles, and enriched it with their sacred bones and bodies. ... 38

37Ibid., liv "with his Crosse mervelously singing which comforted her moche."

The Rev. Alban Butler's considerably later collection of lives is organized on a conventional calendar scheme, not on national or chronological principles. Nevertheless, in dealing with St. Helena, Butler repeats the usual story supported by detailed references—footnotes—to the usual authorities. His opening stresses his reliance on the national histories: "We are assured by the unanimous tradition of our English historians that this holy empress was a native of our island." Butler permitted himself a slight exaggeration. Tradition was not unanimous. Yet, as we shall see, most British historians asserted her Britishness as persistently as the hagiographers did her sanctity.

---

39 The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and other Principal Saints compiled from Original Monuments, and other Authentic Records. The first edition was published in London in 4 volumes between 1756-1759. Citations here are from an undated 19th century edition in 12 volumes.

40 Ibid., VIII, p. 251.
CHAPTER III

Jocelyn of Furness was glad to have an English model for his Latin life of St. Helena. His source, which has disappeared, drawn, he claimed, for a British original, which probably never existed, had virtues beyond its antiquity. Translating the little book in which eius vita seriatim dictatur was not nearly as arduous as composing a fresh life out of the scant and confusing materials in the church histories and standard chronicles:

Huius gesta clarissima in diuersis historiis
ecclesiasticis et cronicis catholicis sparsim
strictiusque pocius tanguntur quam distribuntur,
et nescio a quo forma nimis informi confuse
collecta referuntur.¹

Eusebius claimed she was a Greek and never mentioned the Invention of the Cross, Ambrose considered her French and a stabularia, and Bede called her concubina and neglected the question of her nationality.²

In the late twelfth century, Jocelyn saw only the start of some five


hundred years of confusion and controversy, occasionally heated, about
the identity of St. Helena and her role in the British history, although
the mid-twelfth-century histories of Henry of Huntingdon, William of
Malmesbury and Geoffrey of Monmouth already offered divergent versions
of the story of an English Helena.

The story, one of the "extraneous oddments...that in the course
of the Middle Ages stuck themselves like burrs upon the accommodating
body of the British History," had its origin in folklore and local
legend. Inevitably, however, it survives in written records: first in
a chronicle of Mont-Saint-Michel, circa 1056 and then in a history of
the foundation of the abbey of St. John, Colchester (circa 1090), from
sometime following 1120. This local history briefly noted Helena's
local birth and upbringing, her marriage to Constantius and the birth
of their son Constantine. The author claimed that this information
had been handed down: "Traditur tamen Helenam, quondam imperii matrem,
ex hac civitatem natam et educatam." The twelfth-century historians
were anxious to preserve and disseminate the traditional stories, the
"burrs"—seeds which not only survived, but took root and flourished.

4S. Baring-Gould and John Fisher, Lives of the British Saints, IX
5Sir William Dugdale, Monasticon anglicanum: A History of the Abbies
and Other Monasteries, Hospitals, Frieries, and Cathedral and Collegiate
Churches, with their Dependencies, in England and Wales (orig. publ. in
Latin, 1655-1675/ rev. and trans. John Caley et al. (Westmoreland, England,
6Kendrick, p. 15.
Henry of Huntingdon's is, atypically, the authoritative account. He told of the marriage of Constantius and "Helenam, quam Sanctam dicimus," but made no effort to fit it into any political context and passed quickly over the career of Constantine, noting his grandeur and Britishness and the length of his reign all together: "Constantinus flos Britanniae regnavit XXX. annis et X. mensibus. Hic igitur Britannicus genere et patria: ante quem nec post similis est egressus de Britannia." Henry seems to have been more interested in detailing Helena's accomplishments, at home and in the Holy Land:


William of Malmesbury, whose reputation for responsible writing is far better than Henry's, evidently found this story fabulous and altered it to appear more plausible. This, of course, is the methodology of hagiography, a genre the Middle Ages did not carefully distinguish from the writing of history. P. Delehaye described the

8 Ibid., p. 30.
9 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
process:

He /a narrator/ invents some new detail and suppresses another until probability and logic appear to him sufficiently safe-guarded. This result is usually only obtained at the expense of truth. . . .

The version that William found sufficiently logical and probable is far briefer than Henry's and was intended to glorify, not Helena, but Britain alone. It appears on the first page of the first book. There William follows the fact of the coming of the Angles and Saxons, 449 years after the Incarnation, with a summary of what had preceded it, emphasizing—and exaggerating—Britain's importance to Rome. He stressed Caesar's efforts and pride in the conquest of Britain and mentioned that the emperors Severus and Constantius were buried there supremo honore. Severus built a trench (fossa) from sea to sea, but Constantius left an even more remarkable monument: "Constantius, ut aiunt, vir magnae civilitatis, Constantinum et Helena stabularia. . . reliquit heredem." The son of the British stabularia—William's debt to Ambrose—had a glorious career, which William summarized from an insular point of view. He was acclaimed emperor in Britain and, if he looked for and found glory in other lands, he took a great many British soldiers with him and won his triumphs"per quorum industriam."
Geoffrey of Monmouth was no less interested in stressing the importance of Britain to Rome than William, but in discussing Helena, he preferred the "local tradition" he found in Henry of Huntingdon, but embellished and expanded it. Geoffrey was not at all concerned with the grandmother who found the True Cross, but with the beautiful and accomplished British princess Constantius married:

\[\ldots \text{cui nomen erat helena. Pulcritudo eius provinciales puella superbat. nec uspiam repperiebatur altera. que in musicis instrumentis siue in liberalibus artibus doctior illa censeretur. Caruerat pater alia sobole regni potiretur. unde eam ita docere laborauerat. ut regimen patrie post obitum suum facilius quiuisset.}\]

He constructed a fuller context for this marriage, explaining it in terms of the relations between the British kingdom—and one kingdom is indicated—and the Roman Empire. The matter begins in the reign of Diocletian, when Coel, then Duke of Colchester, rose against his king, Asclepiodus, and became king in his stead. The Romans were glad of the replacement, but sent Constantius to observe the situation.

---


Coel, fearing Constantius, promised him peace and the customary tribute, a bargain the Roman found fully satisfactory. Coel died eight days later and Constantius took his daughter and kingdom.\(^{15}\)

This contact between the British royal family and the affairs of the Empire did not stop with Constantius' death or Constantine's acclamation. Maxentius' tyranny and persecutions sent Roman refugees to Britain. They persuaded Constantine to take Rome with their help and accordingly, "adiuit roman. subiuguitque illam ibi. & postmodum monarchiam totius mundi obtinuit."\(^{16}\) He did not forget his British relatives, but brought Helena's three uncles to Rome with him and found them suitable positions. He sent one, Trahern, back to Britain to put down a rebellion very like the one that had first brought Constantius there, but Trahern was treacherously slain. Geoffrey was a firm believer in cyclical history,\(^{17}\) and this usurper, Octavius, had a marriageable heiress too. His advisors suggested that Maximian, the son of Leolin, another of Helena's uncles, be solicited as the heiress' bridegroom. His mixed Roman-British blood made him an ideal choice, and an emissary persuaded him of the advantages of the offer:

\[
\text{Si igitur mecum veniencs inceptum istud ab incepto perpertraueris cum copia auri & argenti britanniae. multitudine etiam}
\]

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 338.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 340.

bellicosorum militum ibidem manentium romam
ualebis redire. expulsisque imperatoribus
eam subiugare. Si enim egit cognatus tuus
constantinus pluresque reges nostri qui
imperium ascenderunt. 18

Tatlock suggested that Geoffrey's insistence on Helena's accomplishments and competence, her fitness to rule after her father, like his inclusion of other princesses whose fathers left no other heirs: Lear's Cordelia, for example, or Octavian's daughter, was a sign of his support of Matilda's right to the throne. 19 Geoffrey's Historia was, after all, dedicated to Robert, earl of Gloucester, Matilda's most prominent supporter, and Henry's dedication of his book to the same lord may similarly explain his interest, not only in the royal Helena, but in Boadicea and Ethelfleda, Lady of the Mercians.

Neither this shared dedication, nor the friend Geoffrey and Henry shared in a certain Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford who, so Geoffrey claimed, provided him with the ancient book in the British tongue brought over from Brittany which he used as a source for his Historia, is a sufficient reason for Henry's enchantment with Geoffrey's book. 20 Clearly it was

18 Griscom, ed., Geoffrey, pp. 343-344.

19 Tatlock, pp., 286-288.

the Arthurian chapters that most interested him (and most outraged William) but the entire account, from the founding of Britain by Brutus, Aeneas' nephew, through scores of eventful reigns to Vortigern, Hengist and Horsa and the advent of the Saxons quickly became the authoritative version of early British history. Some twelfth-century writers: Gerald of Wales, William of Newburgh and William of Malmesbury, were vehemently skeptical of Geoffrey's venerable authority that no one ever saw, but few shared their scruples. Most considered that Geoffrey had filled an important gap in pre-Saxon history and, not at all incidentally, in an agreeably glorious manner. Brutus gave Britain an origin as ancient and enviable as Aeneas gave Rome and King Arthur was as grand a hero as France or Germany's Charlemagne.

The story of Helena, according to Geoffrey's version, but usually with the reinsertion of the Invention story and the topographical information from Henry's account, was just as flattering to national pride. It linked the royal house of Britain, the island on the outer edge of the Roman world, with Constantine, the world conqueror and the first Christian emperor, and his mother who had found the most venerable relic in all Christendom. Not all the subsequent writers who included this episode in their British histories laid much—or any—stress on its sententia, but it inevitably found its place in the accounts, no matter how pressed their authors were for space. It became part of the established story in the twelfth century and historians of the following centuries were less willing to engage in independent

21Stubbs, ed., William, p. 11: "Hic est Artur de quo Britonum nugae hodieque delirant: dignus plane quem non fallaces somniarent fabulæ, sed veraces praedicarent historiae, quippe qui labantem patriam diu sustinuerit."
research and writing about any period but their own, when they had no other, safer, choice. It was much easier and more responsible to accept the work of the twelfth-century authorities—generally Geoffrey—"ready made,"22 than arrogantly to attempt original work. While the modern tendency is to assume that the most authoritative scholarship is the most recent, the medieval reaction was opposite. The received account was to be handed on in a "conveniently potted version,"23 one "tinkered a little here and there"24 but essentially the same, essentially the standard.

The *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris, the most ambitious and most respected historian of the thirteenth century, covers world history from the Creation until contemporary times in great detail and at great length. Understandably, the emphasis in any time period is on England. The later third and early fourth-century materials are largely a year by year account of the deeds of Asclepiodotus, Coel, Constantius, Helena and Constantine, largely out of Geoffrey, but with long interpolations from a life of St. Alban, the patron of Matthew's own house. There is more effort to set the material within an imperial context, drawn from Roman histories, and some details about Helena and the rest, new to the


23Kendrick, p. 18.

histories appear: Silvester's cure of Constantine's leprosy, a catalogue of Helena and Constantine's church-building projects, and Helena's finding not one cross, but three and an experiment to prove which cross was the True Cross:

\[
\text{Denique ex tribus inventis crucibus illarum ad}
\]
\[
\text{Dominicam gloriam quae ibi fuerat, per feminam}
\]
\[
\text{quandam gravi infirmitate confectam et perfecte}
\]
\[
\text{curatam evidenti indicio demonstratur.}^{25}
\]

The *Flores historiarum* attributed to Matthew of Westminster includes a transcription of the account from the *Chronica Majora*; almost the only lapses of fidelity are variations in spelling or phrasing.\(^{26}\) But all the historical accounts were not in the careful and faithful Latin. Vernacular histories dealt with the same materials in poetic—or at any rate versified—fashions.

Still within the twelfth century, Lawman produced his *Brut*, citing Bede for his prestige but composing largely from Wace's French version of Geoffrey's *Historia* for its convenience and congeniality.\(^{27}\) Lawman's Middle English account of the history, with the half-lines and formulae of Old English verse, follows Geoffrey's narration, but with the reintroduction of the hagiographical materials:

---


\(^{27}\) Tatlock, p. 489.
The dimensions of this version are quite modest; Robert of Gloucester, whose chronicle covers the same period as the Flores—the beginnings through the reign of Edward I—was more expansive. He had, with his 12,000 lines of plodding English verse, all the space he needed and more. He padded out his rhyming lines with "iwis"'s and "as ich understonde"'s and required whole lines to remind his readers in what year events happened. His account of Helena and her relations runs long. It is full of comments, 'connections and judgments. He wrote approvingly of Coel, his daughter and his rebellion. He said nothing new, but he said it all together and as explicitly as anyone could wish:

Cole was a noble mon. & gret poer adde an honde
Erл he was of colchestre here in this londe
& Colchestre after is name is iculped is ich understonde

Ure louerd among oþer þinges·him sende a uair sonde
hat he adde an holi doþter· at colchestre in ðis lond
hat Seint eleyne is iculped· ðat ðe holi rode vond.²⁹

When Coel overthrew his predecessor and became king, Constantius, a "gode kniȝt"³⁰ set out from Rome to "ðis lond· winne æen to rome."³¹ Coel met him in Rome and negotiated a settlement, but died a month afterward.

& oþer eir nadd he non·bote seint eleyne þe gode
His doþter þat suþe·fond·þe swete holi rode
Constance uor ðr eritage· ðis maide to wiue nom:
& nom wiþ ire so ðis lond· & ðis kinedom
& let him crouni to king· & god king was afin
Bi hire he adde an gode son· iculped Constantin.³²

Constantine became a righteous and wise king, like his father, especially in contrast to Maxentius, who took after his father too:

He was as lujþer as is fader·gret ssrewe inou
Vor in strong martirdom· seinte Katerine he slou

³⁰Ibid., p. 131.
³¹Ibid., p. 133.
³²Ibid.
These "deserites"—the word evokes the Barons' Wars of Robert's youth—travelled to Britain to ask Constantine to become their emperor, since Rome was his rightful land and his inheritance. Constantine found their argument persuasive: "Constantin him vnder stod · of is kunde londe/ & god it were to abbe boe · his & pet an honde."\(^{35}\) He set off to win the Empire and met with the Visio crucis and the victory it promised. He understood this too and had himself baptized and cured of a previously unmentioned leprosy by Pope Silvester, who became the first pope to die a natural death. Robert emphasized the significance with repetition, the only device he knew:

Sein seluester was pope bo· & he verstelat per com of all popes pat deyde · wiout martirdom Vor per nas non biuore himpat ymartyred nas of pe luiper emperours· uor ech hejene was.\(^{36}\)

Constantine then sent Helena, as is "wide ikud"\(^{37}\) to Jerusalem to find the Cross. She accomplished this, in no detail, "Je biginningge of may/ As je abe ofte yhurd· Je holi rode day," which had, in fact,

\(^{33}\)Ibid., p. 134.
\(^{34}\)Ibid.
\(^{35}\)Ibid., p. 135.
\(^{36}\)Ibid., p. 136.
\(^{37}\)Ibid., p. 137.
been established on 3 May since the eighth century.  

At this point he returned to Geoffrey's version. Constantine took Helena's uncles to Rome and made them "grete loueredes." Octavius rebelled and Constantine sent an uncle to put thh revolt down, but he was defeated. Again there was the problem of a suitable husband for Octavius' daughter and again Maximian is the ideal choice, "vor he was leolines sone. bat eleyne uncle was pe gode Constantines modir. vor no betere nas." Maximian accepted the offer for the same persuasive reason: that from the British throne he could win Rome as did his "gode cosin constantin" and "mani opere" British kings.

Many other British histories included the account in its proper place, in its proper form. Later in the fourteenth century the chronicle of Robert Mannyng, better known for his Handlyng Synne, refined the story, reducing it to the form drawn from Geoffrey, through the French of Pierre de Langtoft. His account ignores Helena's sanctity, the conversion of Constantine and the Invention of the Cross. His Helena, intelligent and beautiful: ". . .scheo was ferly wys/ And of beute bar the prys," is "A ful god woman, & a certayne," and a well-schooled heir to her father's throne. The "knave child" her marriage to Constantius produced is remarkable for his lineage, an


39Wright, Robert, p. 138.

40Ibid., p. 140.

41Ibid., p. 143.


43Ibid., p. 216.
observation the national pride of a vernacular historian\textsuperscript{44} leads him to emphasize:

\begin{quote}
for his moder, he loued \textit{je} Bretons;
for his fader, of Rome al \textit{je} barons,
of \textit{je}yse two kynde he was born,
And of \textit{je} noblest men biforn.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

The fifteenth century saw no slackening of interest in the legendary history in general and the St. Helena episode in particular. The prolific John Capgrave was not especially interested in King Arthur, squeezing his exploits and conquests into five lines.\textsuperscript{46} Plainly, Helena and her family concerned him more. He marked the early ninth-century translation of her relics from Rome to France\textsuperscript{46} and the late fourteenth-century discovery of her treasure in Rome ("for in the serkil was writin hir name"\textsuperscript{47}). His \textit{Nova legenda Angliae} contains her \textit{vita} and his life of St. Katharine is set in the court of Helena's son's wicked rival Maxentius. The \textit{Chronicle of England} shifts the emphasis from the saint's martyrdom to its historical context:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44}J. Taylor, \textit{Medieval Historical Writing in Yorkshire} (St. Anthony's Hall Publications, 19) (York, 1961), p. 74.
\item \textsuperscript{45}Furnivall, p. 218.
\item \textsuperscript{47}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 268.
\end{itemize}
The persecucion of Dioclecian in the Est, and Maximiane in the West, was of swich cruelte, that withinne XXX. dayes XX. thousand men and women were slayn for Crist; bokes brent, Cherches distroyed, prelatis killid. In that persecucion were slayn Sebastian, Gervase, Damiane, Anastase, Agnes, Agas, Lucy, Katerine. And in Britayne the more part of Cristen men were distroyed. 48

This "persecucion" prompted Constantine's war against Maxentius (Capgrave had understandable difficulty in keeping his wicked emperors straight), the Visio crucis, his conversion and his mother's Invention of the Cross, events that Capgrave prefaced with enough background material to show Englishmen why they should be interested:

This Constantine (i.e. Constantius) conquered al Spayn; and aftir that cam into Britayn, and compelled the lond to pay her old tribute to Rome, wedded here a mayden thei cleped Heleyn, the Kyng douter of Colchester; and of this woman and of him cam Grete Constantine, that ded mech for the Cherch. Than deid this Constantyn in Britayn, and was byried at York, and left his son, Grete Constantin, the empire of Frauns and of Spayn, with othir cuntries. 49

48Ibid., p. 25.
Far less elaborate and far more popular—most of the fifteenth-century chronicles were appended to some version of it—was the Brut, an unrhymed, free translation of Geoffrey's Historia. It is concise and familiar, with an emphasis on the religious aspects that Geoffrey had suppressed:

The Kyng Coel set his daughter Eleyne to Constance, for to haue here for his spouse, pat was bope faire, wise, and gode, and wel lettrede: and his Constance spousede here pere with michel honour. and it bifelle sone afterwarde, pat his Kyng Coel deide in the pere of his reyne xij, & lith at Colchestre enterede.

Constantius, here a Christian himself, died and "Constantyne, his sone of seynt Elyn, pat founde pat croice in pe holy londe" came to the throne. He left England to rid the Empire of Maxentius, identified as having martyred St. Katharine, and then went on to Rome, taking his mother "for pe michel wisedome pat she coupe," and her three uncles, listed by name but not by relationship.

Adam of Usk's roughly contemporaneous Latin Chronicon makes the point about the three uncles and dwells on it. His book is largely an account of his, Adam's, own experiences in England and Italy, and

---


52 Ibid.
his mention of the uncles appears in a report of a conversation he had with Byzantine ambassadors to the papal court in 1404:

\[ A \text{ quibus Grecis et habui quod Grecie proceres} \]
\[ a \text{ dicto Constantino ejusque tribus avunculis,} \]
\[ Treharn, Leolyn, et Mewrye, aliisque triginta} \]
\[ milibus Britonibus cum eo de Britania illuc} \]
\[ advectis, omnino descenderunt; ac quodhujus-modi Britonum genus, sue nobilitatis ac domina-} \]
\[ cionis in signum, secures portant in terra, et} \]
\[ non alii.\]  

That the princes of Greece were descended from the British uncles and that the present day descendants of the fourth-century British immigrants—more plausibly the descendants of those Saxon noblemen who had left England after the Conquest to serve in Alexius Comnenus' Varangian Guard—had the special privilege of bearing axes must have been the new information he had of the Greeks. Like Geoffrey, a Monmouthshireman whose expectations of ecclesiastical preferment were forever being disappointed, Adam knew his British history, was proud of it and sensitive to it. This sensitivity made him sympathetic to the Greeks, who were about to be conquered by the Turks and Tartars, just as Britain, their common homeland, had fallen to the Angles and

---

Similarly, Rome's afflictions grieved Adam sharply because the people of Rome and Britain had their common origin in Aeneas:

O Deus!, in quantum Roma est dolenda, quia olim principibus et eorum palaciis plena, jam tigurriis, furibus, lupis et verminibus, desertisque locis, eciam per ipsosmet Romanos se mutuo confringentes quam dolenter noscitur desolata! Ab Enea post Trojanum bellum, prout et nacio mea ejus pronepote, originem, Roma, traxisti; unde et mutuo est locus dolendi.

Adam's ruminations in his Chronicon were highly personal and probably peripheral; Ranulph Higden's Polychronicon was the most authoritative work of its time as well as the longest. It too is concerned with Helena and her family, both in the fourth-century context and throughout later world history. The year the Northmen arrive in France is notable for the translation of St. Helena's relics from Rome to Treves and the year 1127 for the discovery in Treves of the body of the Apostle Matthew which a saintly archbishop had brought there tempore Constantini senioris, ex dono Helenae reginae.

The chief interest, however, is in the story itself. Higden's

---

54 Ibid., p. 97.
55 Ibid., p. 91.
57 Ibid., p. 468.
account of Constantius' arrival in Britain, his marriage to Helena and the birth of Constantine is concise, but complete. He supplies additional details concerning the conversion and Invention. His Helena, for example, is a Jew, and Pope Silvester is forced to produce a remarkable miracle—the restoration of a roasted bull to life—to achieve her conversion. 58

The wide reading that gave Higden's work its bulk and authority provided him with a bit of inconvenient information: that St. Ambrose had said that Helena was a stabularia in Treves whose beauty had attracted Constantius, but he continued, "historii Britonum dicit eam fuisse filiam Coeli regis Britonum prout supra dictum est." 59

What Ambrose—a foreigner, if a Church father—said could not be permitted to interfere with the traditional facts, what the historians of the British say. Less ambitious works, like the Brut and the chronicles of William Caxton and Wynken de Worde, the works that were first published, did not address themselves to such problems. A new royal house, a new invention, served only to make the old stories more popular, and the early printed chronicles published them succinctly, simply and without apology. Their tables print the sequence Coel-Constantius-Constantine in the list of the kings of England and, in edition after edition, the standard account appeared in its proper place. If there is any new tendency, it is toward simplification.

59Ibid., p. 136.
Coel and Asclepiodus quarrel over the former's founding and naming of Colchester "after his name," a reduction of motivation to simple jealousy, Coel's accession makes the Romans "wonder glad," and Constantius is very pleased with his bride "that was Both fayr. Wyse/ and good/ & wel lettred," a final quality that served her well when she accompanied her son "fro this land to rome." 60

Robert Fabyan's longer, fuller New Chronicles of England and France, first published in 1516, three years after his death, was a rather more learned project. 61 It attempted to straighten out chronology from discordant chronicles, which he did not recognize as drawn from one another. He wondered whether Helena's marriage took place before or after her father's death and chose the date of Constantius' accession ("the yere of our Lord. CC. lxxx. and ix") "as saythe Polycronica," 63 his source, too, for Helena's initial unhappiness at her son's conversion. 64 The testimony of "myne Auctour Gaufride" 65 supports other statements, but Fabyan was plainly dissatisfied with the information he found concerning Helena, Constantius and Constantine—in volume, not kind:

62 Ibid., p. 44.
63 Ibid., p. 45.
64 Ibid., p. 47.
65 Ibid., p. 49.
Of this Constancius lytell memorie is lafte in the Brettysshe or Englysshe Cronicles, except that he received of the aforesayde Eleyne a Sone named Constantinus, the which after, for his knyghtly and Merciall dedys, was called Constantyne the great.

The kniightly, martial and pious deeds of Constantine were interesting, and likely to encourage both piety and patriotism but, unfortunately, his imperial career was not entirely pertinent to Fabyan's subject, the history of Britain, and the account had to be cut short:

Thus haue I shewed to you a parte of the dedys of Constantyne, which if I shulde contynue the hole processe of his reygne, that endured as Emperoure by space of. xxx. yeres, I shulde thereof make a large volume. But for it concerneth no thyng of thentent of this werke, as touchyng the Lande of Brytayne, therfore I woll retoure my style to Octavis, from whom I haue make a longe degression.

The stricture did not apply to John Rastell, Fabyan's successor.

---

66Ibid., p. 45.
67Ibid., p. 49.
His *Pastyme of People*, first published in 1529, was a world history, broken up into papal and political histories, the latter further divided into national histories, the largest England's, for the convenience of the large and not intellectual audience that had come to see history as the "perfect literature": exciting and edifying, safe and useful. The protagonists appear in various contexts. The Papal History notes the Invention of the Cross in the sixth year of the papacy of "Eusebe, a Greke," and the Flemish History explains that Constantius, who enters the history as an ally of the duke Artsard, because he "wold be the more stronger agaynst the Almayns. . . marryed Helene, daughter to Coyll, king of Bryttayn." The same information appears in the Roman History with the direction to "Looke more of hym among the kingis of Bryttayne." Rastell explained Constantius' marital history according to the accounts of St. Katharine's geneology, and invariably identified Helena with her sanctity and Invention. The entry concerning Constantine, too, is more ample among the kings of Britain than the emperors of Rome. He was:

next kyng of Great Brytteyn. . . and there wel belouyd, because he was born in Brytton and there dyd good justyce. He came from Britteyn to Rome

---


71 Ibid., p. 63.

72 Ibid., p. 25.

73 Ibid., p. 99.
at ye istace of diuers of ye Romayns, and there
droue one Maxêce out, which had vsurpyd the empyre
... and Constantine was made eperour.

The authority for all this is Geoffrey: "as Galfridus affermeth"; "as Galfridus writyth," but Rastell was not at all certain about the authenticity of the material he found in Geoffrey because it found no corroboration in Caesar, nor Gildas, nor Bede, nor the chronicles of Rome and Italy, but, he confided in his prologue "... that not with stôdîg I will not deny that story of Galfridus, nor I will not precisely affirme it." He would, however, "reherse hit somewhat after Galfridus" because of the exemplary value the stories, true or false, had.

The specific applicability of the story of the British origin of Helena and Constantine to Tudor needs is probably what exempted it from Polydore Vergil's condemnation of Geoffrey's Historia. An early translation of Vergil's Anglica Historia—the very title puts a distance between it and the British histories—includes pages of the traditional materials, with an apology for having "touched them sleyghtlie;"

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., p. 101.
76 Ibid., p. 7.
77 Ibid.
the noble and godlie woorckes of the great prince Constantine and his mother Helen (whome the renomed parent Britane brought foorthe), worthie of all memorie, and easlie surmountinge all the actes of the former emperoures.80

The most explicit and useful facts first appeared in the Henrician editions of the book—not in Vergil's manuscript.81 The text first suggested that Constantine, "being begott of Britishe mother borne and made emperour in Brittaine, noe doubte made his native countrie pare-taker of the greatnes of his glorie,"82 and then closed its discussion with an assertion of the imperial character of the British crown, a legacy from Constantine:

Albeit the imperie remained not long after in the stocke of Constantine, (so sodaine is the fall of humaine treasures), nevertheless the maiestie of the imperie coulde not perishe, sithe that even at this presente the kingis of Englande, according to the usage of their aunciters, doe weare the imperiall diadem as a gifte exhibited of Constan-tantine to his successors.83

80 Ibid., p. 95.
82 Ellis, Vergil, p. 91.
83 Ibid., p. 95.
The historical lesson to be drawn from this information was evident and welcome to Henry VIII's supporters in his struggle with the pope and emperor. It meant not only that England was not subject to the papacy nor empire, but also that the king had a constantinian authority over his country's church. The Donation of Constantine, a document in any case falling into disrepute, was not binding on England if Constantine had already made his native country a gift of his imperial crown. Outsiders, not familiar with the facts of the legendary history, however, could easily miss the point. In 1530, the Emperor's ambassador, Chapuys, reported a peculiar interview he had had with the Duke of Norfolk. He wrote that in the middle of a discussion of the important current issues, the Englishman suddenly began to talk about Constantine who had ruled Rome and whose mother, Helena, had been British. Chapuys, supposing he was being told some story with a *translatio imperii* moral (so *sodaine is the fall of humaine treasures*), interrupted, saying he did not understand, he was not interested, and commenting on the vanished empires of Babylon and Persia. Chapuys missed the whole point, of course, but he learned the lesson Norfolk was trying to get across soon enough: by 1534, in an effort to improve the position of the Princess Mary, he cited "a law of Constantine, from whom the kings of England boast to have their imperial crown."

---

84 Koebner, 36.
85 Ibid., 40.
86 Ibid., 46.
The *Anglica Historia* was useful and pleasing on this point, but its dismissal of most of the established facts of the early history as fictions infuriated some who rushed to defend the story found in Geoffrey. The Latin of Humphrey Llhuysd's *Historiae Britannicae Defensio* and John Leland's *Assertio Inclytissimi Arturii* quickly found translators in Thomas Twynne (*The Breviary of Britayne*) and Richard Robinson (*The Assertion of King Arthure*). What could one expect of a foreigner and a Roman at that? Polydore Vergil was, Twynne wrote, "no Historiographer, but a Preist and a Preacher," and an "idle, and ill disposed sclaunderer." Love of his, Twynne's, country "which is euil spoken of undeservedly" provoked him to defend its history.\(^\text{87}\) Robinson wrote that it was important to accept "those thinges which are consonant by Authorytie. . . that which nowe a long time is embraced of Learned men with greate consent," he continued, "otherwise, the History had not hitherto remained in so greate reputation."\(^\text{88}\) He did not find the *argumentum ex silentio* at all persuasive. If Arthur, especially Arthur among the heroes of the British history, were so important, ran the argument, why was there no mention of him in Paul the Deacon, in Gildas, whose *De excidio* Vergil had edited as his first project in British history, or in Bede. Paul "had other matters to busie himselfe with";\(^\text{89}\) Bede,
"otherwise a good man and a learned," was an Englishman—a Saxon, not a Briton—and therefore unlikely to care much for British glory, a servant of the "Romishe Bishoppe," and therefore unsympathetic to the native Church of England that preceded the mission to the Saxons by papal initiative, and, in any case, he had no access to the appropriate documents, which had already crossed to Brittany. The silence of Gildas was still less convincing:

Gildas remembreth not Aruiragus, Lucius, or Constantine the greate, and therefore they were not living  
0 straunge force of Logicke! And yet being hartened with this so weake argument (as it seement to him in deede) he thinkes he hath easily gotten the best game. Is this an Italian reason?

Vergil had dared to doubt that Britain could have produced a hero of Arthur's standing; Leland and Robinson were outraged and cited other great men of British lineage out of the legendary history who had conquered Rome itself: what of Bellinus and Brennus, of "Constantine the Emperor, & sonne of Helen, sometime heere Queene?" Constantine, Helenae nostrae filii Imperatoris tempore Constantini?

---

90 Ibid., p. 85.
91 Ibid., p. 79.
92 Ibid., p. 80.
93 Ibid., p. 141.
accepted and admired by Vergil, was a congenial subject, and the
author continued a little further. Constantine, a king of England,
"possest The Empyre; Rome he surely kept, and Bizance eke encreast."
Constantine's share in England's glory was not in question; the Assertio
hoped to use it to clear through the doubt and obscurity into which
the rest of the history had been cast:

And at lengthe (those same most thicke mistie
cloudes indeed of ignorance being shaken off, &
utterly dashed aside), the light of Britiss
Antiquitie with desplayed beames farre and wide
shall shine forth.

The same metaphor of obscurantism and light governs The Light
of Britayne by Henry Lyte, a short book flattering Queen Elizabeth
and criticizing the work of William Camden, "the author of the new
Britannia, which lacketh Brutes light the glorye of Britayne." He listed Helena, Coel and Constantine in his catalogue of "auncient
Princes, noble men and Gentlemen of Britayne" and insisted that the
British history "bee no fable, as the Critici of our time do esteeme it, who will not beleve our auncient written Records, although confirmed by Emperors, Kings, Popes and parliaments, neither the testimonie of

94Ibid., p. 80.
95Ibid., p. 90.
96Henry Lyte, The Light of Britayne: A Recorde of the honorable
Originall & Antiquitie of Britaine (London 1814 /orig. publ. 1583/),
unpaged.
97Ibid.
of strangers." 98

The more modest chroniclers of the sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries, intending their work for the uncritical audience of the Brut, the chronicles of Caxton and de Worde and the Pastyme of People made no mention of the "Critici." The Breviat cronicle treats the years to the Norman Conquest as a bare listing of kings in sequence with the length of their reigns: "Coile Duke of Colchestre xxvii yere; Constantius a Duke of Rome as some wryte xxx yere; Constantius his sonne xv yere," 99 and the Cronycle Begynnyng at the VII. Ages of the Worlde is little fuller; it notes that Coel made Colchester (xx yere) and that Constantius was the "Romayne/that wedded saynt Eleyn Coyles doughter (xv yere)." 100 A picture book on the genealogy of the kings of England from Noah to Elizabeth 101 summarizes the standard information as captions, in prose to the Conquest, then in verse. Coell, the seventy-eighth king of England according to the author's computation, has Constantius' promise of peace "on condition /that/ Coell should give him his daughter Helene to wife," Constantius rules by reason of that marriage and Constantine was "welbeloued of his subiects" 102 for the same cause. The 1569 Epitome of Chronicles 103

98 Ibid.

99 A breviat cronicle contayning all the kynges from brute to this daye. . . .(London, 1552), unpaged.

100 (London, before 1535?), unpaged.

101 To the Reader. Beholde here a brief abstract of the geneologie of all the Kynges of England (London, 1562), unpaged.

102 Ibid.

103 Thomas Lanquet, An Epitome of Chronicles (London, 1569).
and 1640 Historia Britannica contain the same information concerning Helena's piety and learning and Constantine's bequest of his imperial crown to his native country.

Works more freely poetical than strictly historical follow the same formula, elaborating rather than questioning it. William Slayter's Historie of Great Britanvie to this Present Rayne, for example, is a verse account, with Latin and arch, classicizing English on facing pages. The pertinent passage in the text reads in part:

So Coyll raign'd till Chlorus sent
From Great Rome, took the gouernement:
To whom his daughter Coyll gives
Hellen, fair noblest Nymph that liues.

Chlorus gain'd
To th'Empires feate; then marrying more,
faire Nymph, Maximians Theodora;

The marginal notes explain, in serviceable prose, that this is the same Helena who found the Cross and nails, built churches in Jerusalem and the walls around Colchester and London. Still more peculiar is William Warner's Albions England. As its full title claims, it is "Not


105 (London, 1621), unpaged.
Barren in Varietie of Inventive and Historical Inter-mixtures.\textsuperscript{106}

Its couplets deal with the antiquity of the British Church, the parentage and achievement of Helena ("...of her do praises go/ for finding of the holy Crosse, and for devotion rare") and Constantine's rule over Rome and "...his Parents Reame./ He turned the Empires ebbing pompe into her flowing streame." It continues, criticizing Constantine for his Donation to a "pompous priest," that led to trouble for England and ruin for Rome\textsuperscript{107} and indulging in a page and a half of description of a suitable hell for popes: "So dreamed one: but ouer-long on fantazies I dwell."\textsuperscript{108}

More scrupulous historians did not wish to dwell on "fantazies," although they could not avoid "Inventive and Historical Inter-mixtures."

In 1543 Richard Grafton published the fifteenth-century rhymed chronicle of John Hardyng with its complete account of Coel, Helena, and the rest. Hardyng made no excuses and Grafton did not intrude into the text, but his prologue makes his ambivalent attitude clear. On the one hand, "It were an unquod thyng yf we should go about/To alter and chaunge what olde men haue wryte,"\textsuperscript{109} but on the other, Hardyng may have been too uncritical:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{106}William Warner, \textit{Albions England: A Continued Historie of the Same Kingdome, from the Originale...Not Barren in Varietie of Inventive and Historical Inter-mixtures} (London, 1612), title page.
  \item \textsuperscript{107}Ibid., p. 85.
  \item \textsuperscript{108}Ibid., p. 87.
  \item \textsuperscript{109}Henry Ellis, ed., \textit{The Chronicle of John Hardyng together with the continuation of Richard Grafton} (London, 1812), p. 12.
\end{itemize}
But in thinges dooen before his owne dayes,
He followeth his authours at aventure,
Without choice or difference of the true wayes,
Nor well assured who were corruppte or pure,
Nor whether they were certaine or elles vsnsure;
Whether fabulores, or menne of veroitee
Whether vaine, or of good authoritee.

Writers, rather than editors or publishers, had to concern themselves with the vexatious problem of the accuracy of their sources more directly, and Helena's position was becoming almost as insecure as Arthur's. John Clapham's doubts were far more pronounced than Higden's, and he made no attempt to resolve them:

Helena. . .the mother of Constantine the Great, was
(as some have written) the daughter of Coil a British king, though by others it be otherwise reported.
But of what Country or Kindred soever she was, it appeareth by consent of all Writers, that she was a wife and vertuous Lady, worthy to be the Wife of such a Husband, and the Mother of such a Sonne.

Raphael Holinshed's prodigiously long chronicle was the standard

110Ibid., p. 10.

of his age, as Higden's had been of his. Like Higden's too, it was composed on the principle of accumulation and, inevitably, it had to deal with discordant data. Holinshed included anything he had read anywhere, but disassociated himself (parenthetically) from responsibility for its accuracy. For example, he raised the problem of Ambrose's opinion without judging it.\footnote{Raphael Holinshed, Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland, ed. (London, 1807), I, p. 528.} Coel reigned either twenty-seven years "as some write" or thirteen "as othir have."\footnote{Ibid., p. 527.} Constantius' marriage to Helena is described "as our histories doo witness"\footnote{Ibid., p. 534.} and Constantine's birth of that marriage "as some affirme," "as oure writers doo affirme,"\footnote{Ibid., p. 530.} the Invention and the attendant miracles were as "some writers alledge," and "as it is reported, but how trulie I can not tell."\footnote{Ibid., p. 531.} Still, these disassociations did not satisfy Holinshed and he interrupted his discussion with a long and curious statement:

> But by the way touching this Coelus, I will not denie, but assuredly such a prince there was: howbeit that he had a daughter named Helen, whom he maried vnto Constantius the Romane lieutenant that was after emperor, I leave that to be decided of the learned. For if the whole course of the liues,
as well of the father and the sonne Constantius
and Constantine, as likewise of the mother Helen,
be consideratelie marked from time to time, and
yeere to yeere, as out of authors both Greeke and
Latine the same may be gathered, I feare least such
doubt maie rise in this matter, that it will be
harder to prooue Helen a Britaine, than Constantine
to be born in Bithynia (as Nicephorus auocheth.)
But for so much as I meane not to step from the
course of our countrie writers in such points,
where the received opinion may seem to warrant
the credit of the historie, I will with other
admit both the mother and sonne to be Britains
in the whole discourse of the historie following,
as though I had forgot what in this place I have
said. 117

Holinshed, and others, left the question "to be decided of the
learned." It was not his place to "step from the course of our
countrie writers," but it was not possible to ignore the contradictory
evidence from the Greek and Latin authors. The statement of the
intention to "admit both the mother and sonne to be Britains in the
whole discourse of the historie following, as though I had forgot what

117 Ibid., p. 528.
in this place I have said" defines an uncomfortable and precarious position. History writers would not be able to disregard their doubts much longer and the "Critici" would not be silenced. Helena lost her position in the History, not to new evidence and new arguments, but to the old objections: the silence of Bede, the authority of Ambrose, the accounts of Eusebius, Eutropius and Nicephorus. Camden's declaration that Coel took his name from Colchester (which in turn took its name from the River Colne) and not the other way around was one new and almost irrefutable point.

Almost irrefutable. One John Lewis, barrister and amateur antiquary, was unconvincing. He was not persuaded that:

where ther is any Affinity betwixt the name of a Ryver and a Towne or City built thereupon, of Necessity the Ryver must give the Name to the Towne as Colne heare to Colchester. . .as though it were impossible for him that named the Towne or City to have the Ryver also. 118

Lewis' own readings in the Latin, Greek and British writers "in search of the Antiquities of the noble island of Great Britain," had convinced him only that Nemo potest certa scribere de veteribus factis, 119 but he himself supported the traditional story about Helena. Not to do so was "to disgrace that holy, vertuous and lerned Lady, St. Helen."120 In support of this he had in hand, he said, Geoffrey's own

118 Lewis, History, p. 130.
119 Ibid., p. 1.
120 Ibid., p. 130.
source, "the Original itself in the British Tongue. . .written upon Vellum before the Days of Geoffrey" and a number of ingenious arguments. The slurs that she was a concubina (from Bede) and a stabularia (from Ambrose and Nicephorus) met the explanation that "the Worde concubina is sometyme taken in bonam partem, for a Wif as well as for a Concubine" and that stabularia referred to "that great office in Fraunce and England, cauld the high or great Constable." He cited "Al the Laten Writers affirming, that Helen was a King's Daughter of Britain (except very few)" and collected a catalogue of church dedications to prove his point.

But his choice of Latin writers, the medieval English chroniclers, was itself suspect. The same information, drawn from the same sources in Michael Alford's 1641 Britannia Illustrata, sive Lucii, Helenae, Constantini, Patria et Fides met the almost immediate derision of the Bollandists, his brother Jesuits. Ita vult Alfordus, the authors of the Acta Sanctorum mocked, ut putat Alfordus. Their account of her life and deeds drew on the same church historians whom the English

121 Ibid., p. 38.
122 Ibid., pp. 127-128.
123 Ibid., p. 126.
124 Ibid., p. 127.
historians had invested so much effort in refuting. This scientific taste in sources was now the prevailing one for Puritans as well as Papists. Milton's 1670 *History of Britain* dismissed the story "seconded by most of our own Historians, though not those the ancientest"\textsuperscript{126} with a refutation drawn from Eutropius, Eusebius and "others neerest to those times."\textsuperscript{127} The oldest historians had settled the question to the newest historians' satisfaction.


\textsuperscript{127}Ibid., p. 93.
CONCLUSION

...it widely influenced her regal, ecclesiastical, and civil life; it so permeated her military and commercial activity that without it her history would require to be rewritten. ^1

This declaration of the importance that the relics of the Passion—the True Cross, the nails—had in England is clearly exaggerated, but it is equally clear that the relics and their Inventor were objects of considerable attention and devotion. The Count of Flanders could think of no greater or richer gifts for his brother-in-law Athelstan than the sword of Constantine ("in quo litteris aureis nomen antiqui possessoris legebatur") with one of the nails imbedded in the hilt and a fragment of the True Cross set in crystal. 2 Edward I took another fragment as a trophy of his Welsh campaign and other particulars found honored places in elaborate reliquaries. 3 St. Helena and her deeds were marked and celebrated in literature and monuments, and the catalogue of dedications and toponymic references to her is considerable. These do not prove the

1 J. Charles Wall, Relics of the Passion (London, 1910), vi.


3 Chapter I, p. 9.
fact of her British birth, as the eighteenth-century John Lewis, the last of the chroniclers to accept—to insist on—the literal truth of the legendary history, maintained:

Al the Laten writers affirming, that Helen was a King's Daughter of Britain, (excepting very few) when Constantius ruled; and at Wetherby in Yorkshire, is St. Helen's foord; and in South Wales, Sarn Elen, ie Elen's Cawsey; and a Church in Monmouthshire, and another in Cornwall are dedicated to St. Helen, and the Abbey of Elstow in Bedfordshire. Though the Graecians, by Color of the fable aforementioned or of her Greatnes, challeng her for theirs.4

But it does reflect the insistence on the elaborate and glorious accounts in the saints' lives and histories, as well as the extent of her cult which touched so many aspects of "regal, ecclesiastical, and civil life."

The literary expressions that devotion to St. Helena found point, too, to the artificiality of the distinction between the genres of hagiography and history. Definitions can draw clear distinctions among medieval approaches to biography: the hagiographical "which attempts a complete account of /the saint's/ life" and the historical, "which simply offers within a larger historical context a few relevant facts or

selected incidents,"5 but other definitions—and the literature itself—defeat them. Delehaye's definition of hagiography as "those conventional and fictitious productions composed at a distance from the events recorded and without any tangible relation to the facts"6 fits equally the lives of Helena, Katharine, the accounts of the Invention and the Three Kings of Cologne and the British histories. The process of embellishment and suppression of detail for plausibility and effect is the same in all cases, and in any case: "The confusion between history and legend was never ending. History in the Middle Ages meant everything that was told, everything that was written in books."7 History and hagiography were so alike because they were traditionally written by the same man, "performing a double duty."8 Bede, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, Matthew Paris, John Capgrave, William Caxton, and Wynken de Worde all composed saints' lives as well as chronicles and the same details concerning St. Helena, her family, her deeds, and her times appear in the histories and lives of Capgrave and Caxton and de Worde.

The writers themselves did not fail to note these connections. Henry of Huntingdon reminded his readers that his princess Helena was


7Ibid., p. 66.

"Helenam, quam Sanctam dicimus," and Robert of Gloucester inserted a full account of the conversion of Constantine and the invention of the Cross into his chronicle with the assertion that the information was "wide ikud" and "as ye abbe ofte yhurd." Later chronicles identify the daughter of Coel, wife of Constantius and mother of Constantine, as "saynt Elyne that fonde the holy crosse in the holy land," and by the persistence with which they identify Constantine with Helena, suggest that one of the emperor's most remarkable accomplishments was being born her son, and through her, an Englishman. The identification of Helena and the narration of the events surrounding her marriage according to the historical accounts appear in the hagiographical accounts with just less regularity.

The stories about St. Helena and Constantine took their places in the histories as parts of the regular sequence of the legendary history. The whole history of early Britain, as Geoffrey defined it, had compelling attractions for chroniclers: it was ready made; it was very old--and Geoffrey himself based the authority of his account on the antiquity of his British source--and it was glorious. The vitality of each legend

---


13 Chapter II, pp. 27-38.
depended on its own appeal, however, and Helena's appeal was evident. She and her son gave England a share in, even credit for, the glories of Christian Rome. Her adventures and accomplishments in the Holy Land and India were both edifying and exciting. The brief descriptions of her person and character in the histories: her beauty and learning, piety and dutifulness, are as complete a catalogue of feminine virtues possible without the virginity and martyrdom that would have made her accomplishments impossible.

These attractions were constant; this legendary material, unlike the Arthurian, found little specific, practical application before the Reformation. There were certain allusions, however: St. Helena's right to her father's throne lent historical precedent for Matilda's claim to her father's; arguments for Constantine's overthrow of the wicked Maxentius echoed, in the chronicle of Robert of Gloucester at least, the concerns of the Barons' Wars; and the character of the tyrannical Maxentius who would not take counsel: "No man spak to hym whateuere he wil doo" was a constant counter example to kings who would be good.

Nevertheless, clear and avowed connections between the events of the legendary history and contemporary concerns first appeared in Tudor times. Henrician writers, with their seemingly boundless ingenuity in coaxing new corn from old fields, found political and polemical lessons in the St. Helena stories. The facts of Constantine's British birth,  

his succeeding to the Empire from a British base and with British help, and especially his bequest of his imperial crown to the successors to his British throne, made England, as Henry VIII claimed, an empire, and exempted it from control of the Empire and pope. The Christianity of St. Helena and her contemporaries had polemical use too. It showed a native British church whose antiquity antedated the conversion of the English by papal initiative.

That she was a Catholic saint eliminated from the very much reduced Anglican calendar did not appear to matter much and her story survived the sixteenth-century suppression of the cults of the saints safely lodged in the histories, but it could not withstand persistent doubts and objections indefinitely. The story of Helena—and of the other kings and queens and saints and heroes of the legendary history—was eliminated from the standard histories when historians decided that they had an obligation to distinguish carefully between the narrow history of what actually happened and the ampler legends, which they abandoned to the writers who dealt openly with fictions. The British historians left the Trojan Brutus, the legendary founder of their nation, to the poets, and returned their Helena to the Greeks. This restoration, like the return of that other Helena to Greece, was legitimate, final, and probably necessary, but, in a broader sense, inconsequential. The Homeric Helena still draws her identity from Troy; St. Helena, by her long and various associations with Britain, became and remains herself British.

15Evelyn Waugh, Helena (Boston, 1950), ix-xiii.
### APPENDIX A

**A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE MAJOR SOURCES, THEIR LANGUAGE AND FORM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Prose</th>
<th>Verse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cynewulf, Elene</td>
<td>eighth c.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bede, <em>Ecclesiastical History</em></td>
<td>ca. 731</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of St. John's Abbey, Colchester</td>
<td>ca. 1120</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry of Huntingdon, <em>Historia Anglorum</em></td>
<td>ca. 1135</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoffrey of Monmouth, <em>Historia regum</em></td>
<td>ca. 1135-1140</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoffrey of Monmouth, <em>Historia regum</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Britanniae</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William of Malmesbury, <em>De Gestis regum</em></td>
<td>ca. 1140</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Anglorum</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawman, <em>Brut</em></td>
<td>1189-1199</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Paris, <em>Chronica majora</em></td>
<td>ca. 1265</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert of Gloucester, <em>Metrical Chronicle</em></td>
<td>ca. 1300</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Matthew of Westminster,&quot; <em>Flores Historiarum</em></td>
<td>ca. 1307</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Mannyng, <em>Story of England</em></td>
<td>ca. 1338</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Brut</em></td>
<td>ca. 1340</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranulph Higden, <em>Polychronicon</em></td>
<td>ca. 1342</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South English Legendary</td>
<td>fourteenth c.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cursor Mundi</td>
<td>fifteenth c.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam of Usk, <em>Chronicon</em></td>
<td>ca. 1421</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>Verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Story of St. Katharine</em></td>
<td>before 1464</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nova legenda Angliae</em></td>
<td>before 1464</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Golden Legend</em></td>
<td>1483</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cronyce of the londe of Englode</em></td>
<td>1493</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Three Kings of Cologne</em></td>
<td>1496</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wynke de Worde, <em>Chronicles of England</em></td>
<td>1502</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Kalendre of the New Legende of England</em></td>
<td>1516</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Rastell, <em>Pastyme of People</em></td>
<td>1529</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polydore Vergil, <em>Anglica Historia</em> and translation*</td>
<td>1534</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cronycle Begynnynge at the VII. Ages of the Worlde</em></td>
<td>before 1535</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cronycles of Englande. . .newly augmented</em></td>
<td>1542</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Grafton, <em>Chronicle</em></td>
<td>1543</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Leland, <em>Assertio Inclytissimi Arturii</em></td>
<td>1544</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Breviat cronicle. . .to this daye</em></td>
<td>1552</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>Verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To the Reader</strong></td>
<td>1562</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper's Cronicle</td>
<td>1565</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epitome of Chronicles</td>
<td>1569</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humphrey Lluyd, <em>Breviary of Britain</em></td>
<td>1572</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Twynne, <em>Breviary of Britain</em></td>
<td>1573</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Robinson, <em>Assertion of King Arthur</em></td>
<td>1582</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphael Holinshed, <em>Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland</em></td>
<td>1587</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Lyte, <em>Lyte of Britayne</em></td>
<td>1588</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Clapham, <em>Historie of Great Britannie</em></td>
<td>1606</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives of Women Saints</td>
<td>ca. 1610</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Stow, <em>Abridgement of the English Chronicle</em></td>
<td>1611</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Slayter, <em>Historie of Great Britannie to this present Rayne</em></td>
<td>1621</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historia Britannica Hoc Est</td>
<td>1640</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Milton, <em>History of Britain</em></td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Lewis, <em>History of Great Britain</em></td>
<td>1729</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

St. Helena; The Whole Story

Coel, founder and duke of Colchester, rebelled against his lord Asclepiodotus and made himself king in his stead. The Romans heard of this usurpation and sent Constantius Chlorus, a young lieutenant to investigate. Coel, fearing Constantius, promised him the customary tribute and the hand of Helena, his only child and heir, a most beautiful, learned, virtuous and musical young woman. Constantius, who had married the king's daughter of Cyprus in an exactly similar situation (she died, leaving a son Costus, the future father of St. Katharine), accepted the offer. The couple was married and Coel promptly died. Helena bore Constantine, a daughter, and six other sons to Constantius, who was himself occupied with ruling Britain and conquering France and Spain. Constantius repudiated Helena to make a politically advantageous—perhaps necessary—marriage with Theodora, the Emperor Maximian's daughter or niece, but when Constantius died and was buried at York, Constantine succeeded to his authority as emperor of the West. At the urging of refugees to Britain from the East, Constantine rose against the wicked Maxentius. It was during this war that Constantine was converted to Christianity. Before the battle of Milvian Bridge, he saw in the sky the sign of the cross, the Visio crucis, with the legend "In hoc signo vinces." He bore the sign into battle, won, and converted. Alternatively or additionally, Constantine was stricken with leprosy. His wise men
suggested that a bath in babies' blood would be a good cure, but St. Peter and St. Paul appeared to him in a vision, saying that Pope Sylvester had a more healing bath, baptism. Constantine was converted and baptised. Helena, a Christian, rejoiced at her son's conversion, or Helena, a pagan or Jew, regretted it and sent forty wise men to change Constantine's mind. Pope Sylvester's arguments and miracles converted all the wise men and Helena. Although she and her three uncles had just recently joined Constantine in Rome, she was delighted to be sent off to the Holy Land to find the True Cross. She did this with the help of the Jew Judas and a miracle. Judas himself converted, took the name Cyriacus and became bishop of Jerusalem and a martyr during the persecutions of Julian the Apostate. She also found the nails that fastened Christ to the Cross, the manger of the Nativity with the original hay still in it, the Virgin's smock and other relics. She divided the relics up and packed them off to the important cities of the Empire and to her son. She set one of the nails into a bridle for Constantine and dropped another into the stormy Adriatic, which has been calm since. She built many churches in the Holy Land before going on to India to find the bodies of the Three Kings (which went to Cologne), convert the Indians and build more churches. She died at a great age, mourned by all, and was buried in Rome with much honor. Her relics traveled to Trèves in the ninth century.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


A breviat cronicle contayning all the kynges from brute to this daye. . . . London, 1552.


The Cronycle Begynnynge at the VII. Ages of the Worlde. . . . London, before 1535?


_____. *Polydore Vergil's English History, from an Early Translation Preserved among the MSS. of the Old Royal Library in the British Museum, I* (Camden Society, OS 31). London, 1846.


B.M. Harley 2250, "Vita sanctae Helenae," transcribed John Conlee.


Lewis, John. The History of Great Britain from the first Inhabitants thereof;...to which is added the Breviary of Britayne, in Latin by Humfrey Lhuyd...and Lately Englished by Thomas Twine. London, 1729.


Mead, William Edward, ed. The famous historie of Chinon of England by Christopher Middleton to which is added The Assertion of King Arthure translated by Richard Robinson from Leland's Assertio Inclytissimi Arturii together with the Latin original. (EETS, OS 165). London, 1925.


Slayter, William. The historie of Great Brittanie to this present Rayne. London, 1621.


Secondary Sources


______. XXXVII (3 Augusti). Paris, 1867.


VCH, Essex, II.
   London, I.
   York, I.


______. *Shrines of British Saints.* London, 1905.


VITA

Linda Zieper

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, 27 July 1949. Graduated from Leo T. Doherty Memorial High School in that city, June 1967; B.A. Skidmore College, 1971. After graduation, the author worked at the Mediaeval Academy of America until July 1973, when she began an editorial apprenticeship at the Institute of Early American History and Culture. She began graduate work in the Department of History, College of William and Mary in September of that year. After finishing her course work there, she accepted a position at the Center for the History of the American Indian, the Newberry Library.