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## SOME REMARKS ON THE NAME AND THE ORIGIN OF HELENA AUGUSTA

Mika Kajava

The full name of the Empress-mother, Flavia Iulia Helena, is not attested before she was granted the title of *Augusta* in about 325 A.D. Actually, there is only one inscription, CIL VI 1134 = ILS 709 (after 326), and some coins, which record her name formula in full, and these are also the only instances of the gentilicium *Iulia*.<sup>1</sup> This naturally does not mean that she began to use these names only after 325. On the contrary, the relatively more frequent appearance of Helena in public documents from 325 onwards is primarily due to her promotion as *Augusta*, and it is evident that for the first two names she is indebted to her marriage with Flavius Valerius Constantius, who became *Caesar* in the year 293 A.D.<sup>2</sup> The gentilicium *Iulius* is documented for Constan-

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<sup>1</sup> For more complete epigraphical evidence, see O. Seeck, RE VII 2820–2822; PIR<sup>2</sup> F 426a (add. pp. XIV–XV); PLRE I 410–411. The inscription CIL VI 1134, now preserved in the church of S. Croce in Gerusalemme at Rome, is written on the base of a statue set up by the *comes* Iulius Maximilianus in honour of *Fl. Iulia Helena Piissima Aug.* Apart from the prosopographical catalogues numismatic evidence is provided by P. Bruun, *The Roman Imperial Coinage VII*, Oxford 1966, *passim*. He places (p. 69) the date of Helena's elevation as *Augusta* on 8 November 324. She and the empress Fausta, Constantine's second wife, were both elevated at the same time. They were named *nobilissimae feminae* about the year 318. For Helena and her life in general, cf. also E. Waugh, *Helena*, London 1950; H. Leclercq, *Dict.arch.chrét.lit.* 6, 2126–2145; A. Amore – E. Croce, *Bibl. Sanctorum IV* 988–995; H. Homeyer, *Lex.Theol.Kirche V* 208–209.

<sup>2</sup> PIR<sup>2</sup> F 390; PLRE I 227–228; J. Šašel, *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio II* (Tituli 5), Roma 1982, 575; R. Syme, *Historia Augusta Papers*, Oxford 1983, 63ff. (repr. from *Bonner HAC* 1971 [1974] 237ff.). Entering the new social rank in 293 Constantius also received the second gentilicium *Valerius* as the adopted son of Maximian.

tius in both epigraphical and literary sources.<sup>3</sup> Both at that time and before it was not an unknown practice to adopt a name or more names from the husband's family, or even vice versa, in order to make one's name correspond better to the new social circles and demands.<sup>4</sup> This is also in good accordance with the scanty facts that we know about Helena's biography.

She seems to have been of relatively humble origins. According to one tradition, preserved in Ambrosius' *De obitu Theodosii* 42, she once earned her living as *stabularia*, an inn-keeper, possibly in one of the Balkan provinces, an occupation which certainly suggests a comparatively low social origin.<sup>5</sup> Then, presumably in the late years of the seventies, Constantius, who is said to have been a native of Illyricum and who at those times served as *tribunus*, took her as his mistress.<sup>6</sup>

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According to the dynastic requirements, he was obliged to repudiate Helena, who gave place to Theodora, step-daughter of Maximian. This did not, however, mean any diminution of her influence, at least from the moment when Constantine was proclaimed *Augustus* in 306.

<sup>3</sup> Eph. Epigr. VIII, p. 460, 214: Flavius Iulius Constantius; Aur. Vict. Caes. 39,26: Iulius Constantius. One of his sons with the second wife Theodora was also called Iulius Constantius (PLRE I 226, Constantius 7), and one of his grandsons, Fl. Iul. Constantius (PLRE I 226, Constantius 8).

<sup>4</sup> Some examples in R. Syme, *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio* I (Tituli 4), Roma 1982, 397ff. Cf. also the name of Diocletian's daughter, Galeria Valeria (PLRE I 937). *Galeria* is not on attestation before her marriage to C. Galerius Valerius Maximianus (PLRE I 574-575).

<sup>5</sup> For the profession of *stabularius/a*, see T. Kleberg, *Hôtels, restaurants et cabarets dans l'antiquité romaine* (Bibl. Ekmaniana 61), Uppsala 1957, 18–19, 74ff. Cf. also Anon. Vales. 2: *Helena matre vilissima*; Eutrop. brev. 10,2: *ex obscuriore matrimonio*; Zos. 2,8,2: γυναικὸς οὐ σεμνῆς; 2,9,2: ἔξ ἀσέμνου μητροῦς.

<sup>6</sup> It was not unknown that even persons of superior prestige settled at a *hospitium* or *stabulum* during their long journeys, cf. Kleberg, *op.cit.* 91. Perhaps it was in this way, too, that Constantius made his first contact with Helena, the hostess of a *stabulum*. As to the definition 'Illyrian' and the *patria* of Constantius Caesar, see the diligent observations of R. Syme, *op.cit.* in n. 2, 63–64. The passage, where Constantius' Illyrian origin is noted, is Aur. Vict. Caes. 39,26: *Illyricum ei patria fuit*; cf. recently H.W. Bird, *Sextus Aurelius Victor. A Historical Study* (ARCA 14), Liverpool 1984, 67,148 (n. 63), and in general, G. Dagron, in *Villes et peuplement dans l'Illyricum protobyzantin* (Coll. Éc.fr.Rome 77), Rome 1984, 1–20.

Subsequently, about 280 A.D. at Naissus, their concubinage produced a child, the future emperor Constantine.<sup>7</sup>

Of Helena's birthplace the only direct testimony is given by Procopius, *De aedif.* 5,2, who argues that she was a native of Drepanum, a rather insignificant locality in Bithynia (modern Hersek).<sup>8</sup> The place was later named Helenopolis by Constantine, as the ancient authors tell us (see p. 53). Her memory was also honoured by another Helenopolis, in Palestine,<sup>9</sup> but this is certainly in part due to her renowned pilgrimage to the Holy Land.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the province of Helenopontus (formerly Pontus) was named after her.<sup>11</sup>

In the province of Bithynia Christianity progressed more rapidly than virtually anywhere else in Asia Minor, as is also testified by the epistles of Pliny the Younger, and despite persecutions, particularly those under the reign of Diocletian, many dioceses were firmly established there before the Constantinian period.<sup>12</sup> During the first decades of the fourth century Bithynia was also the scene of religious controversies, notably those arising from the favouring of Arianism in certain local circles. The followers of Arius' school, like Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia, had to meet with such adversaries as Eustathius of Antioch and Athanasius of Alexandria. Of Eustathius it is said that he was deposed by the synod of Antioch about the year 328, obviously

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<sup>7</sup> On the different opinions concerning the year of Constantine's birth, cf. the literature cited by R. Syme, *op.cit.* in n. 2, 63.

<sup>8</sup> W. Ruge, *RE* V 1697, 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Soz. hist. eccl.* 2,2,5. It is highly probable that Helena even visited the place during her journey, cf. the commentary to *Hierocl. synecd.* 720,8 (Helenopolis is here catalogued) by E. Honigmann, *Le Synekdèmos d'Hiérokès* (*Forma Imp. Byz.*, fasc. 1), Bruxelles 1939, 42–43.

<sup>10</sup> Helena was virtually the first empress – but not the first Christian – who travelled on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, cf. E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312–460*, Oxford 1984, 28–49.

<sup>11</sup> W. Ruge, *RE* V 2844. Cf. especially *Iust. nov.* 28,1 and *Hierocl.* 701,2 with the bibliography provided by E. Honigmann, *op.cit.* in n. 9, 37.

<sup>12</sup> On the development of the Christian society in various parts of Bithynia, see R. Janin, *Dict.hist.géogr.eccl.* 9, 20–28, s.v. Bithynie.

for his conduct and some unfortunate statements.<sup>13</sup> Athanasius, *Hist. Arian.* 4, asserts that it was because he had offended Helena, mother of Constantine. The motives for Eustathius' attack are not quite clear, but they might have been personal as well as political and theological. The bishop was accused of living an obscene life, and it may be that in some of his speeches he had also alluded to Helena's original profession as *stabularia*, a declaration which was evidently taken as a great offence, and perhaps not least by Constantine himself. The precise context of Eustathius' insult is unknown, as is the place where it happened, but Antioch itself should not be excluded.<sup>14</sup> There is also evidence that Helena, like other imperial women after her, promoted Arianism,<sup>15</sup> and it is perhaps not without significance that the Arian tradition – but notably only that one – tells about Helena's veneration of the martyr Lucian, the teacher of Arius and Eusebius, and of the town of Drepanum where Lucian was buried.<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to decide between history and legend, or how much the Arian apologetics counted in the story about Helena's relation to Lucian and Drepanum. In any case, the heated disputes concerning Arianism seem to reveal that Bithynia was always more or less strictly connected with Helena and her activities. In the following I shall try to find some other evidence relative to Bithynia and discuss the various possibilities of interpreting the name *Helena* and its relation to geographical and historical facts.

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<sup>13</sup> For the whole episode, cf. H. Lietzmann, *Gesch. der alten Kirche III*, Berlin 1953<sup>2</sup>, 113–114; H. Chadwick, *Journ.Theol.Stud.* 49 (1948) 34; J. Vogt, *Saeculum* 27 (1976) 220 with additional bibliography, and recently, E.D. Hunt, *op.cit.* in n. 10, 35–36.

<sup>14</sup> If Antioch was the scene (so e.g. O. Seeck in *RE VII* 2822; cf. also E.D. Hunt, *op.cit.* 36), it is possible that the episode could be set within the framework of Helena's pilgrimage. And if the Bishop of Antioch, Antioch being one of the principal cities on her journey, refused to honour the empress and her (Arian) party, the accusation against him is easily understood. On the other hand, Helena's presence at or near Antioch is naturally no reason for Eustathius to be accused before Constantine.

<sup>15</sup> K.G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses. Women and Imperial Dominion in the Late Antiquity*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1982, 24–25. The question of Helena's Arian mood is, however, disputed, e.g. E. Zwolski, *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 5 (1962) 53–76, finds no evidence indicating that she had favoured the Arians in any special way.

<sup>16</sup> Philostorg. *hist. eccl.* 2,12 (cf. *Vita Const. cod. Angelic. A*, f. 39').

The famous Oxyrhynchus papyrus 1380 contains a long invocation of the goddess Isis. The text, which according to the editors dates from the early second century A.D.,<sup>17</sup> gives an elaborate list of the many different titles of Isis in Egypt and in other parts of the ancient world. The papyrus presents a remarkable testimony to the syncretistic aspect of the Egyptian cult: Isis is identified with numerous other deities of the Greco-Roman world, and is venerated with a great number of different epithets.<sup>18</sup> In col. V, ll. 111/112, it is stated that in Bithynia Isis brings the name *Helena*: ἐν/Βειθυναίᾳ Ἑλένην. Since Grenfell and Hunt's edition of 1915, the papyrus has been the object of a relatively great interest,<sup>19</sup> partly because of its importance to the understanding of the oriental cults, and partly because the text has raised certain – and justified – perplexity. As far as I know, the relevant line (112) has generally been accepted as referring to the personal name *Helena*. It was only in 1963 that I. Cazzaniga<sup>20</sup> proposed a divergent reading, ἑλένην, i.e. an adjective, with the significance "fulgente". With the cautious approval of the Hesychian comparison ἔλα = ἥλιος, he thinks of an "Iside solare (ἑλαάς)". In theory, this is possible, but I do not see any good reason for rejecting the much easier alternative of *Helena*, the name of the heroine.<sup>21</sup> A link between Isis and Helena is in fact well-known from other sources as well.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the major consequ-

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<sup>17</sup> It is also assigned to the first century A.D., or at least it is usually regarded as being some decades earlier than the dating of the editors, cf. the perceptive remarks of Fr. Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans* (Martin Class. Lect. 25), Cambridge (Mass.) – London 1979, 54ff., and recently J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Class.Philol.* 80 (1985) 139.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. F. Dunand, *Le culte d'Isis dans le bassin oriental de la méditerranée* (EPRO 26,1–3), Leiden 1973 passim (see the indices of the vol. 3, pp. 382–3) and *Idem*, in *Les syncrétismes dans les religions de l'antiquité* (Colloque de Besançon 1973; EPRO 46), Leiden 1975, 162.

<sup>19</sup> Some important contributions are mentioned in Fr. Solmsen, *op.cit.* in n. 17, 134–135.

<sup>20</sup> *Par.Pass.* 20 (1963) 236.

<sup>21</sup> One point contradicting Cazzaniga's theory might be the prevalence in the text of nouns and non-adjectival abstractions as characterizing epithets of Isis.

<sup>22</sup> I am thinking of their very similar characters, the lunar one and the infernal one, and how they were both closely connected, for example, in the Pythagorean apologetics,

ence of the papyrus line for our subject is that it seems to suggest a local veneration of Helena, the heroine, in Bithynia.<sup>23</sup>

Is it possible that Helena, mother of Constantine, could have derived her name from the figure of the legends? Some difficult problems immediately arise. If the papyrus is really the first attestation of the cult of Helena in Bithynia, as it in fact seems to be,<sup>24</sup> there is however no evidence that the cult should in any way be connected with the use of

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cf. M. Detienne, *Rev.Hist.Rel.* 152 (1957) 129ff. and F. Jesi, *Aegyptus* 41 (1961) 141ff. One should also note that Helena as well as Isis can often be identified as the central figure appearing in the triad "Dioscuri and a goddess", see F. Chapouthier, *Les Dioscures au service d'une déesse* (BEFAR 137), Paris 1935, 127–151, 248–262. I would also like to refer to the relation between Isis and Helena in the decorative paintings of the Aula Isiaca on the Palatin, cf. K. Schefold, 'Helena im Schutz der Isis', *Studies presented to D.M. Robinson II*, St. Louis 1953, 1096–1102. Cf. also F. Dunand, *op.cit.* in n. 18 (1973), vol. 3, pp. 95, 118, 269.

<sup>23</sup> This was already the conclusion of F. Chapouthier, *op. cit.* in n. 22, 148. What is important, the papyrus also presents parallel cases, and in many of these the cult of a certain deity had already been attested before, e.g. at Bambûk Isis is identified with Atargatis (ll. 100/101), whilst *Plin. nat.* 5,81 also tells about the worship there of Atargatis. Cf. *Dictynna – Isis in Crete* (l. 82); *Nanai – Isis at Susa* (ll. 105/106); *Hecate – Isis in Caria* (l. 113) etc.

<sup>24</sup> For the veneration of Helena in general, see R. Engelmann, *Roscher-Lexikon*, s.v. Helena II, 1949–1952; E. Bethe, *RE VII* 2824–2826 and L.R. Farnell, *Greek Hero-Cults and Ideas of Immortality*, Oxford 1921, 323ff. The places where something is heard about Helena or her cult are Athens, Argos (also the district between Argos and Tegea), Cenchreae, Chios, Egypt, Rhodes (Helena Dendritis), Sicyon, Sparta, Therapne (centre of her worship) and Troizen. As far as I know, the only site in Asia Minor where Helena seems to have been worshipped is Ilium Novum. According to Athenagoras, *Leg. pro Christ.* 1 (cf. Migne, PG VI 889ff.), the Ilians used to bow before Helena who bore the title of Adrasteia. This was also the epithet of Nemesis who in turn appears in some legends as the real mother of Helena; for the various versions of the myth, cf. the meticulous study of A. Ruiz de Elvira in *Cuad.Filol. Clás.* 6 (1974) 95–113. Even if Helena alone as a heroine was not attested in Asia Minor, it is not impossible at all that she was venerated in the company of other deities, say, the Dioscuri. In fact, the iconographic pattern where Helena with her brothers can often be identified, is known from the representative art of Asia Minor as well in the Roman period and before it; for details, see the author's 'Le are ritrovate nell'area del Lacus Iuturnae', No. 1 (to be published in *Lav.Stud.Arch. of the Sopr.Ant.Roma*).



the personal name *Helena* among the habitants of Bithynia.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes, it is true, a local cult has favoured the use of a certain name, as e.g. seems to be the case with *Helena* in Egypt,<sup>26</sup> but in Bithynia there are no (other) traces of this name.<sup>27</sup> The epigraphical publications, in which are collected inscriptions from Bithynia and thus also from the Helenopolis tract (westward of modern Izmit = ancient Nicomedia),

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<sup>25</sup> As such it would not be surprising that the alleged cult of Helena would have had an influence on the name-giving as late as around the middle of the third century A.D. (when the Empress was born). Even if the cult had by then expired, there may have been some relics and remembrances of it.

<sup>26</sup> *Helena* is very well attested in the Egyptian papyri, about 50 cases in Preisigke's and Foraboschi's name books, and the name index of the Prosopographia Ptolemaica VII records more than ten *Helena*e. In addition, there are four graffiti from the Memnonion of Abydos (P. Perdrizet – G. Lefebvre, *Les graffites grecs du Memnonion d'Abydos*, Nancy – Paris – Strasbourg 1919, Nos. 124, 131, 210, 511; Ptol. period) and five inscriptions from Tehnéh (E. Breccia, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée d'Alexandrie. Iscrizioni greche e latine*, Le Caire 1911, Nos. 409, 422, 452, 467, 471; Roman period), one mummy label (W. Spiegelberg, *Aegyptische und griechische Eigennamen aus Mumienetiketten der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Leipzig 1901, No. 53), and finally CIG 5234 from Ptolemais (early imperial period). Cf. also the name lists of W. Thieling, *Der Hellenismus in Kleinafrika*, Leipzig 1911, 119. From the rest of North Africa I have found 12 instances of *Helena* (CIL VIII, Inscr. Ant. Maroc, ILAlg.). Although it is true that the use of theophoric names was in general particularly common in Egypt (cf. recently H. Solin, *Arctos Suppl. II* [1985, *Studia in honorem I. Kajanto*] 233–234, when discussing the case of *Castor* and *Pollux*), I am still inclined to underline the particular position of *Helena* in Egypt. Apart from the Isis-Helena connection (see above, n. 22), the ancient authors also testify to her special relation to Egypt: the legend of *Helena*'s remaining in Egypt, while only a phantom went to Troy, is first known from the *Palinode* of Stesichorus. This version of the story was adopted by Herodotus (2, 112ff.) and Euripides in his play about *Helena*. Plutarch, *de mal. Her.* 12, also states explicitly that in Egypt πολλὰ μὲν Ἑλένης, πολλὰ δὲ Μενελάου τιμαὶ διαφυλάττονται παρ' αὐτοῖς; cf. F. Chapouthier, *op.cit.* in n. 22, 144–147 and R.I. Hicks, *TAPA* 93 (1962) 100–102.

<sup>27</sup> Nor is there any correlation between the personal name *Helena* and the nomenclature of those favouring the cult of Isis, as is revealed by the name lists of T.A. Brady, *The Reception of the Egyptian Cults by the Greeks (330–30 B.C.)*, *Univ. Missouri Stud.* 10,1 (1935) 51–88. Cf. in general, L. Vidman, *Eirene* 5 (1966) 107–116.

record not even one example of *Helena*.<sup>28</sup> Keeping in mind that only a minor part of all those who ever bore the name *Helena* is now recorded, and that very little is known about the exact distribution of the cult of the heroine, we should still lay stress on the total absence of *Helena* in Bithynia, all the more because this name is relatively well attested in other parts of Asia Minor, not to talk about the rest of the ancient world. Being a kind of fashionable name at Rome,<sup>29</sup> it was also largely used in the West by free-born as well as freedwomen and slaves from the Republican and imperial time.<sup>30</sup> In the epigraphical material of Asia Minor *Helena* appears about forty times, mostly in the western and southern parts, in Lycia, Phrygia and Pisidia, but also in other places.<sup>31</sup> The instances geographically most adjacent to Bithynia come

<sup>28</sup> F.K. Dörner, *Inschriften und Denkmäler aus Bithynien* (Istanbuler Forsch. 14), Berlin 1941; A.M. Schneider, *Die römischen und byzantinischen Denkmäler von Iznik-Nicaea* (Istanbuler Forsch. 16), Berlin 1943; F.K. Dörner, *Bericht über eine Reise in Bithynien* (Denkschr.Österr.Akad. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl. 75,1), Wien 1952; TAM IV,1 (ed. 1978; *Tituli Bithyniae: Paeninsula Bithynica praeter Calchedonem*); S. Şahin, *Bithynische Studien* (Inscr. gr. Städte aus Kleinasien VII), Bonn 1978; Id., *Museum Iznik (Nikaia) I–II* (Inscr. gr. Städte aus Kleinasien IX–X,2), Bonn 1979–82. A detailed map of the whole district is enclosed in *Museum Iznik II*,1.

<sup>29</sup> H. Solin records in his *Namenbuch*, pp. 538–541, and in *Arctos Suppl. II* (1985) 245, as many as 192 examples.

<sup>30</sup> The distribution of *Helena* in the West, as it appears in epigraphical sources, is as follows: Italy (apart from Rome): 59 cases; Hispania 14; Gallia Narb. 9; Lugudunum 4. There is, as far as I know, only one instance of *Helena* in Noricum, CIL III 4852 (Virunum), likewise in Pannonia Sup., Hoffiller – Saria, No. 349 (Poetovio).

<sup>31</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the material here listed dates approximately from the second century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. *Miletus*, IG II/III<sup>2</sup> 9536–39 (four Milesian *peregrinae* at Athens). *Smyrna*, Inscr. v. Smyrna I 426 (=IGR IV 1466 = CIL III 416); cf. also CIG 6862, perhaps from Smyrna. *Ephesus*, Inscr. v. Ephesos IV 1396,6. *Halicarnassus*, SEG XVI 669,3. *Cyme*, Inscr. v. Kyme 37,52b. *Galatia*, IG II/III<sup>2</sup> 8452a (a *peregrina* at Athens), CIG 9251 (North Galatia, Christian; cf. S. Mitchell, *Reg.Epigr.Catal.Asia Minor II*, BAR Intern.Ser. 135, 1982, No. 429). *Cilicia*, MAMA III 423 (Corycus, early Byzantine period). *Anatolia*, CIG 9286a (Christian, A.D. 819). *Cyzicus*, Inscr. v. Kyzikos und Umgebung I 180,181,347, II 87 (=I 288). *Lydia*, TAM V 176 (Saittae), TAM V 52 (=IGR IV 1742; Silandus). *Lycia*, SEG XXVIII 1233,1236,1239 (Tyriaeum), CIG 4277, A. Balland, *Fouilles de Xanthos*, No. 57 (cf. SEG XXXI 1316 and AE 1981,807)[the last two are from Xanthus], IGR III 586 (Telmessus), TAM II 815 (Arycanda), TAM II 998 (Olympus), CIG add. 4300e

from the regions of Cyzicus, *Inscr. v. Kyzikos und Umgebung I*, No. 180 (Bandirma), 181 (*ibid.*), 347 (Edincik); II, No. 87 (Karacabey, north of Miletopolis). From northern Phrygia could be mentioned SEG VI 115 (Cotiaeum) and CIL III 6999 (= Eph. Epigr. V 1371, from Nacolia) and from northeastern Lydia TAM V 52 (Silandus) and TAM V 176 (Saittae), but even these examples are not very near to Helenopolis either. And in order to find a Helena in the regions north of Propontis, we have to go as far as to Odessus in Moesia (SEG XXIV 980 = IGBulg. 142 bis) and to the territory of Philippopolis in Thracia (IGBulg. 1432). On the basis of these considerations it seems obvious that the cult of Helena in Bithynia, supposing that it really existed there, did not have any special influence on the local nomenclature.<sup>32</sup> On the whole, because *Helena* was a popular and geographically very wide-spread name, there seem to be usually no grounds or possibilities to delineate the motives of using this name in singular cases. As to our theme, it is to be concluded that the papyrus and the onomastics do not prove anything for or against the Bithynian origin of Helena Augusta.

*Helena* was also the name of one of the four children of Constantine the Great (the name was of course inherited from the grandmother).<sup>33</sup>

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(Antiphellus), CIG add. 4300t (Aperlae), PIR<sup>2</sup> C 1097 (Claudia Helena *c.f.*). *Phrygia*, MAMA VI 126 (Heraclia), SEG VI 115 (Cotiaeum), CIL III 6999 (= Eph. Epigr. V 1371; Nacolia). *Pisidia*, TAM III 266,421,426–429,576 (Termessus). *Caria*, CIG 2827,3,8 (Aphrodisias). *Cappadocia*, SEG XX 108 (Melitene). In the East, but outside of Asia Minor, *Helena* appears four times at *Sarmatia-Bosporus* (II cent. B.C. – III cent. A.D.), CIRB 396,397 (= Inscr. Pont. Eux. II 227), 666 (= Inscr. Pont. Eux. II 290 = IGR I 894), 1031 and at least six times in the Near East: *Armenia*, IG II/III<sup>2</sup> 8383 (an Armenian *peregrina* at Athens). *Syria*, SEG XX 359 (Cfeir), IG II/III<sup>2</sup> 8167–68 (two Antiochian *peregrinae* at Athens), IGLS III 841 (Antiochia ad Oront.), 1042 (Daphne; uncertain), IGLS V 2476 (Emesa; a cross representing Helena, the Empress, as a saint), IGLS XIII 9344 (Bostra).

<sup>32</sup> The same is true with Greece where the cult of Helena was attested in many parts of Peloponnesus (see n. 24). There is only one inscription, IG IV 732, I,5: Ἑλένα θεοδώρου, that might suggest Helena's influence on the local nomenclature. The text was found at Hermione, the town perhaps being named after the daughter of Helena, though the hypothesis is naturally highly questionable.

<sup>33</sup> PLRE I 409–410. We are also told of still another Helena in the imperial family. Cod. Theod. 9,38,1 records the wife (PLRE I 409) of Crispus, son of Constantine from his first marriage to Minervina (PLRE I 602–603).

Born of Constantine's marriage with Flavia Maxima Fausta, she was the youngest sister of Constantius II and was married to Julian in 355. The fact that she was often shown as Isis in coins and lamps, naturally has nothing to do with the old alliance between the two deities (cf. n. 22). Julian, who tried to renew and revive the worship of the traditional gods, particularly that of Helios-Sol and the Egyptian deities, used to style himself as Helios-Sarapis and his wife, Helena, as Isis. A relatively large number of these representations is known, naturally with slight variations in regard to the external appearance and the epithets portrayed.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, the fact that Julian's wife was often wrapped in the shape of Isis, is not the result of her name, but derives from the fact that she and her husband liked to present themselves as the Egyptian pair of gods, Isis and Sarapis. Nor did she only appear as Isis: after her death Julian erected two gold-covered statues at Nicomedia, one for himself as Apollo, the other for Helena figured as Artemis.<sup>35</sup>

A totally different hypothesis of Helena Augusta's origin has also been proposed. J. Vogt has put forward the interesting possibility that Helena was of Jewish birth.<sup>36</sup> This is, however, pure speculation based primarily on his interpretation of some passages of Eusebius, e.g. *Vita Const.* 3,47, from which is deduced that Helena would already in her childhood belong to the children of Israel.<sup>37</sup> The Greek text, οὕτω μὲν αὐτὴν θεοσεβῆ καταστήσαντα οὐκ οὔσαν πρότερον, ὡς αὐτῷ δοκεῖν ἐκ πρώτης τῷ κοινῷ σωτῆρι μεμαθητεῦσθαι, is rather to be seen as an example of Eusebius' figurative language. In this way strength is added to his declaration of Helena's true θεοσέβεια. Vogt also associates – naturally as a hypothesis – the traditional discovery of the Cross by Helena with her alleged Jewish origin.<sup>38</sup> Searching for the fragments of the Cross she would make amends for the terrible crime of the crucifi-

<sup>34</sup> Representative material is provided by L. Budde, 'Julian-Helios Sarapis und Helena-Isis', *Arch.Anz.* 1972, 630–642.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. P. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism. An Intellectual Biography*, Oxford 1981, 190.

<sup>36</sup> *Saeculum* 27 (1976) 211–222 (an English translation is printed in *Classical Folia* 31 [1977] 135–151).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 217–218.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 219.

xion. Yet there is nothing to persuade one that Helena was the discoverer of the *lignum crucis*. Actually, at that time there was obviously no sign left of the Cross on Golgotha Hill, nor is there any evidence of her participating in the original excavations around the area of Golgotha.<sup>39</sup> That relics of the "true Cross" soon appeared here and there, is a different matter.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Helena was not linked with the finding of the Cross by contemporary authors, and notably not by Eusebius in the encomium of Helena inserted in his *Vita Constantini*. The legend about Helena and the Cross makes its first appearance in Ambrosius' sermon *De obitu Theodosii* 45, and, it is important to note, from the first beginning of its development the legend usually strives for a different kind of resolution than a purely factual and historical one.<sup>41</sup> Supplied with additional anecdotes and episodes the story is nearly always set together with the Constantinian building-scheme at Jerusalem. And in this context, what would be a more suitable way to glorify the Constantinian and Theodosian empire than to create a story about the Empress-mother searching for and discovering the Cross? As a historical fact her pilgrimage to the Holy Land was the necessary link to make the story reliable and trustworthy.

Nor are there any grounds to suppose with Vogt<sup>42</sup> that Helena's name, if she was of Jewish birth, would come from the daughter (PIR<sup>2</sup> H 47) of Izates, King of Adiabene. Converted to Judaism she moved to Jerusalem with her son in the Claudian period and settled there. This Helena must have been a woman of renown who had remarkably extensive property (at Jerusalem she had a palace and a mausoleum built for herself),<sup>43</sup> but despite all this it is highly improbable that she served

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. especially the perceptive remarks of E.D. Hunt, *op.cit.* in n. 10, 37ff.

<sup>40</sup> For this, see the pieces of testimony (1150 items up until 1961) collected by A. Frolov, *La relique de la vraie croix* (*Arch.Orient.Chrét.* 7), Paris 1961, 155ff.

<sup>41</sup> An illuminating and critical description of the various types of the Helena legend is given by E.D. Hunt, *op.cit.* in n. 10, 40ff. For Helena and the Cross, cf. also H.A. Drake, *GRBS* 20 (1979) 381–392 and M. Pardyová-Vodová, *Sborník Prací Fak. Brn.Univ.*, *Rada arch.-klas.* 25 (1980) 235–240.

<sup>42</sup> *Art.cit.* in n. 36, 220.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. E. Schürer, *Gesch. des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi III*, Leipzig 1909<sup>4</sup>, 169–171.

as a name model for Helena, the *stabularia*. We only need to refer to the great popularity of this name in all parts of the ancient world (see p. 48).

The above discussion may also serve as an instructive model and a reminder when certain onomastic phenomena are interpreted. The more favoured and extensive the use of a name is, the more problematic becomes the attribution of a geographically precise origin to one who bears that name. When lower classes are concerned, the place of the discovery of a sepulchral stone is usually enough to determine where someone's homeland was situated, and thus we are reliably informed about most of the Helenae. Epigraphical evidence also suggests that the only woman of nobility to have used the name before the Constantinian time, Claudia Helena (PIR<sup>2</sup> C 1097), was of Lycian origin (she lived around the middle of the second century A.D.). The problem with Helena Augusta is that her origin is never recorded in public documents. There is, however, no reason to doubt her having been a *stabularia*.<sup>44</sup> But Drepanum, her presumed birthplace, still calls for an explanation. A closer look at the literary *fontes* seems to appear as particularly interesting.

As stated above, Procopius, historian of the early sixth century, is the only one to assert that Helena was a native of Drepanum.<sup>45</sup> But it is worth noting that he does not refer (in *De aedif.* 5,2) to Helena's origin as an absolute fact: it was rather public opinion that thought her origin was in Drepanum: ἐκ ταύτης (scil. πόλεως) γὰρ τὴν Ἑλένην

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<sup>44</sup> This may be reflected also in the Constantinian legislation, cf. J. Vogt, *Festschr. L. Wenger* (Münch.Beitr.Papyr.Ant.Rechtsgesch. 35,II), 1945, 135 and *Saeculum* 27 (1976) 220. If so, the relevant decree, *cod. Theod.* 9,7,1, which gave the penalty for adultery (*dominae tabernae* were punished while *ministrae* were not affected), would indicate that Helena was a *ministra*, a bar-maid, rather than a *domina*. Vogt's hypothesis presupposes that the decree in question was an act of respect in regard to his mother's origins. There are, however, some evident difficulties, not so much with the variants *taberna/stabulum*, but with the fact that *stabularius/a* usually suggests the person who is in charge of a *stabulum*. And in addition, would not Constantine, the emperor, prefer to remain silent about Helena's lowly origins (cf. n. 5)?

<sup>45</sup> Niceph. *Call.* 8,31, something of a secondary source, seems also in part to depend on the Procopian tradition.

ὠρμησθαι φασί I would suggest that Procopius created or, perhaps, reproduced the story about Helena's provenance so as to give an etymological explanation for the place-name Helenopolis. He was not the only one and certainly not the first who mentioned the change of the name Drepanum to that of Helenopolis, but before him nothing is heard of her birthplace. The sources cited by W. Ruge in RE V 1697 do not say anything about her origin, they only tell that Constantine, when refounding and enlarging Drepanum, gave it a new name in honour of his mother.<sup>46</sup> There is also another line of tradition related to Helena and Drepanum, the Arian one (cf. p. 44). Philostorgius, who lived at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries, asserts in his Hist. eccl. 2,12 that Constantine named the place Helenopolis because his mother revered it as the depository of the relics of the Arian martyr Lucian. He suffered martyrdom in Nicomedia, from where his corpse was later transferred to Drepanum. The first to tell about the site of his tomb is Jerome,<sup>47</sup> who also states<sup>48</sup> that it was in honour of the martyr that Constantine restored Drepanum and named it after his mother. Exactly the same declaration is found in the Chronicon Paschale under the year 327, as in the Acta Sanctorum Jan., t. I, pp. 357,363.<sup>49</sup> As was supposed above (p. 44), Philostorgius' version strongly suggests that it was written in an Arian apologetical spirit, as was his whole Ecclesiastical History. So Helena's veneration of Drepanum would be an Arian invention. Of all the versions, that of Jerome and Chron. Pasch. a. 327 seems the most plausible: Drepanum was refounded, the *civitas* was given to it, and it was declared free from taxes *quousque patet ante urbem prospectus*, in part also honouring the martyr, and it was named Helenopolis after Helena Augusta, but without any regard to her possible relation to it. This is only one link in the long series of towns called

<sup>46</sup> Amm. Marc. 26,8,1 (who mentions only the two names); Socr. hist. eccl. 1,17 and 1,18 (cf. Migne, PG LXVII 124); Hierocl. 691,1.

<sup>47</sup> De viris illustr. 77: *sepultusque Helenopoli Bithyniae*.

<sup>48</sup> Hier. chron. Euseb. a. 331 (cf. Migne, PL XXVII 497–498), cf. H. Delehaye, Les origines du culte des martyrs (Subs. Hagiogr. 20), Bruxelles 1933<sup>2</sup>, 151.

<sup>49</sup> Strange to say, on p. 362 the Acta state that it was Helena herself who, returning from Jerusalem, founded the town at the place where the relics of Lucian had been brought.

after rulers and their wives (cf. Alexandria, Antiochia, Constantinople, Seleucia etc.).

In conclusion, Helena was probably not born at Drepanum (as is currently stated in various lexica and studies), but still perhaps in Bithynia or rather in one of the Balkan provinces (later, at or before the time of her "marriage", Constantius served as *tribunus* and then as *praeses* in Dalmatia, cf. nn. 2,6).<sup>50</sup> There is no way one can give a more precise location. In this paper I have discussed all the sources that might suggest her origin is in Bithynia, but by themselves they do not prove anything decisively. It is, however, easily understood that Bithynia and Helenopolis (!) were considered as her home. Many of the great events of the Constantinian empire happened either in Bithynia or its environs, and this is certainly also due to its vicinity to Constantinople.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Speculation about Constantius' origins and the fact that Constantine's birthplace is known (Naissus) will of course be of little value when Helena's ancestry is studied, see the important remarks of R. Syme, *op.cit.* in n. 2, 63ff., on the essential distinction between birthplace and *patria*.

<sup>51</sup> For the central position of the city of Nicomedia in Bithynia (now Izmit) in Diocletian's administration, see S. Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, London 1985, 54–55.