

Venice
June 2015

History of Helen, mother of Emperor Constantine, Empress
and Saint

and

2 Frescoes ('The Mother' and 'The Saint') by Bernardo
Molinas Agnellini for the Church of St. Helen in Venice

Helen (Elena), from the greek: "torch", the resplendent.

Born in Drepamim (now Turkey), 248 A.D. - ... † 330.

From a plebeian family, worked in the stables as "stabularia", it is said in some stables of the Roman circus, where the military tribune Costanzo Cloro meets Helen, certainly a very beautiful girl. Helen was repudiated by her husband, by order of Emperor Diocletian, before his appointment as 'Caesar' or vice-emperor, and with the condition to marry the daughter of another emperor, Massimiano. This raises the tetrarchy or "the government of the four."

[Helen lived with his son Costantine in Treviri (Trier, Germany, in the present) where there was already the famous Porta Nigra (represented in the fresco of 'The Mother')].

When Costanzo died, the son of Helen, Constantine, defeated his rival Massenzio and became the absolute emperor of the empire.

Elena, whose honor was rehabilitated, had the highest title which a woman could aspire, that of "Augusta".

It was the beginning of a new era for Christianity: the Emperor Constantine, after the victory attributed to the protection of Christ, granted Christians, "and all the other", the freedom of worship:

"We, therefore, Constantine Augustus and Licinius Augustus, having met profitably in Milan and having discussed all the issues related to public interest and security, including the provisions useful to many people and to be implemented between the first, we place these related the worship of the gods in order to allow the Christians and all others the freedom to follow the religion that each believes, that the divinity that is in heaven, whatever it is, to us and to all our subjects give peace and prosperity."

(By: Lattanzio, De mortibus persecutorum Chapter XLVIII)

A key role was the mother Helen contributing to the conversion of his son. Helen showed a religious fervor, doing good works and building the famous basilicas on holy sites.

According to "The Legend of the True Cross" [painted many times, for example, as a fresco by Piero della Francesca in Arezzo, in the cycle considered as the most important cycle of Italian wall painting] Helen had found the cross of Jesus and those of the two thieves. Failing to understand what might be the one on which Christ was crucified, Helen makes expose all three over the corpse of a young man just dead, who miraculously rises when it comes into contact with the sacred relic.

The construction of many churches followed these discoveries [That of Jerusalem is represented on the right hand of Helen in the fresco 'The Saint' by B. Molinas. Over this basilica was built the present Holy Sepulchre. The left hand of Helen, in the same fresco, offers to the city of Venice the church that bears her name]



"The Legend of the True Cross" by Piero della Francesca, Arezzo (Italy)

Other representations of Helen:



Icona - Costantino ed Elena



Cima da Conegliano



Paolo Veronese, Visione di S. Elena, 1570-80, Pinacoteca Vaticana



Giovanni Battista Tiepolo – Saint Helen finds the true cross - Gallerie dell'Accademia (Venice)

2 FRESCOS by Bernardo Molinas “The Saint” and “The Mother” (‘La Santa’ and ‘La Madre’) for the Saint Helen’s Church in Venice.

With the approval of the parishioners and priest Don Carlo Serpelloni of the church of Saint Helen island.



(XII century, rebuilt in the fifteenth century)

Saint Helen's Chappel





Relic

"The Saint" and "The Mother"

2 Frescoes on building panels, painted with the technique of "Buon Fresco" (the painting technique, for example, of Michelangelo and his master Domenico Ghirlandaio).

- For walls with bricks or else building panels
- Prime plaster: "Arriccio" (with slaked lime seasoned 24 months and sand), dry
- Plaster 'of the Day': "Intonaco di Giornata" (with slaked lime seasoned 24 months and sand), moist, fresh
- "Cardboard" with the design of the sketch, scale 1: 1, with holes for the 'copy' on the plaster
- Pigments resistant to the alkalinity of lime and only water (without any binder)
- 7-10 days for each panel
- Without "remorses" or subsequent corrections with tempera on the dried work



'The Saint' (initial "plasters of the day")



'The Mother' (initial "plasters of the day")



Transport in the lagoon of the panels.

Don Carlo Serpelloni (priest of the Church St Helena) guiding the boat and the collaborator Romeo (author of the fastening system of the panels to the wall).

Transport by land from Spinea to Venice: collaboration of Renato from Spinea.











"The Saint"



"The Mother"

Bernardo Molinas Agnellini

Spinea (Venice)

Please see:

In the web site: www.amadeieuroartgarda.it

"EUROART" - Gallery of painters - B. Molinas