

## CHURCHES FOUNDED BY THE HOLY SOVEREIGNS CONSTANTINE AND HELEN

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### ABSTRACT:

*THE FIRST CHRISTIAN EMPEROR OF THE ROMAN – AND LATER ON BYZANTINE – EMPIRE, CONSTANTINE THE GREAT – DOES THE GREATEST FAVOR TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, AS HE MAKES CHRISTIANITY LEGAL AND FREE, AFTER A LONG TIME OF PERSECUTIONS THAT LED TO REAL MASACRES. HISTORIANS UNANIMOUSLY ADMIT THAT, DURING CONSTANTINE’S REIGN, THE ROMAN WORLD BECOMES RICH IN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES, AND INSIDE THE GROWING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, AN INTENSE THEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY IS DEVELOPED, BEING ENCOURAGED AND SUPPORTED BY EMPEROR CONSTANTINE. IN THIS ACTION, HE ALSO BENEFITS OF THE INITIATIVE AND SUPPORT OF HIS MOTHER, SAINT EMPRESS HELEN, WHO SUPPORTS AND SUPERVISES THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOME SPLENDID AND MAGNIFICENT CHURCHES IN THE MOST IMPORTANT CITIES OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE. FOR THESE REASONS, THE CHRISTIAN POSTERITY HONORS BOTH OF THESE HOLY SOVEREIGNS AND CONSIDERS THEM “EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES OF JESUS CHRIST”. CONSTANTINE HIMSELF WAS BURIED IN THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY APOSTLES OF CONSTANTINOPLE, A CHURCH THAT HAD BEEN FOUNDED BY HIMSELF.*

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**KEY WORDS:** CONSTANTINE THE GREAT, HELEN, CHURCH, FOUNDATION, FREEDOM, CHRISTIANITY

### INTRODUCTION

This year we celebrate 1700 years from the official proclamation of the well-known “Edict of Milan” (*Edictum Mediolanense*) of 313 A.D., which brought to an end the persecutions against Christians stopped, and through which the Christian religion won freedom throughout the Roman Empire. Due to its great importance, both for history and for the consequences we have felt in Europe so far, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church has decided that this jubilee event and the Holy Emperor Constantine and Empress Helen should be honoured and paid homage at the same time.

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The reign of Constantine the Great (between 306 and 337 A.D.) is of extreme importance for the historical evolution of Europe and of the whole world, as it will turn the pagan Roman Empire into a Christian one<sup>2</sup>. The Holy Sovereigns Constantine and Helen have a major importance for the history of Christianity, both because they stopped all persecutions and allowed religious freedom for Christians, and due to the reforms, support and actions taken by Constantine the Great for the development of Christ's Church.

After some major events occurred in Emperor Constantine's life, he starts being aware of the fact that both the revelation he had had<sup>3</sup>, and the victory he won against emperor Maxentius in the battle of Pons Milvius (Vulture Bridge), on October 27, 312 A.D.<sup>4</sup>, were due to divine intervention. Jesus Christ Himself appeared to Constantine in his dream, holding the Cross, after Constantine had seen the Cross in the sky, at midday, and "demanded Constantine to represent a cross in the image of the sign shown to him on the sky, so as to be protected by it in his fights against his enemies."<sup>5</sup>

This is where Constantine had the well-known vision, retold by historian Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Vita Constantini (Constantine's Life)*, also retold by the Christian apologist Lactantius in *De mortibus persecutorum*<sup>6</sup> (On the Death of the Persecutors). The event retold in the two works is the argument explaining the conversion to Christianity of Constantine the Great, a conversion similar to that of Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus. From that moment on, a radical transformation takes place in Constantine's life, as the emperor understands the providential historical moment and the Holy Secret of the Cross. He had an intuition that the pagan world would not be able to survive, but would have to make room for the new one – the only world able to save humanity from darkness, superstition and ignorance. "At that time, Christianity and the Church were concentrating all energies of that world, and were becoming the only realities called to imprint the seal of their spirit on history. The most outstanding leaders of the pagan society were deserting it, increasing the Christians' number."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **A. Alföldi**, *The Conversion of Constantine and the Pagan Rome*, trans. H. Mattingly (Oxford, 1948), 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> **Eusebiu de Cezareea**, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, trans. Radu Alexandrescu, în colecția "Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești", serie nouă, volumul 8 (București: Basilica, 2012), 102-03.

<sup>4</sup> **Prof. Ioan Bocioagă**, *Personalitatea lui Constantin cel Mare și politica lui socială* (Galați: Moldova S.A.R. pentru Industria Artelor Grafice, 1935), 12.

<sup>5</sup> **Eusebiu**, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 103.

<sup>6</sup> **Lactanțiu**, *Despre moartea persecutorilor* (Timișoara: Amarcord, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Dan Zamfirescu, *Ortodoxie și romano-catolicism în specificul existenței lor istorice* (București: Roza Vânturilor, 2013), 43.

By the Edict of Milan, promulgated in March 313 A.D., along with Licinius, Emperor Constantine not only designates Christianity a *religio licita* (permitted religion) – establishing a relation of equality between it and the pagan religions recognized by the Roman State; he also “orders actions meant to give back to the Christian communities their possessions previously confiscated by the Roman State”<sup>8</sup>; thus, he becomes the real protector of the Christians, whom he supports in all the situations. In this action, he also benefits of the initiative and support of his mother, Saint Empress Helen, who sponsors and supervises the construction of some magnificent and grand churches in the most important towns of the Roman Empire.

After 313 A.D., the Christians - now acting legally - enthusiastically continued the Apostles’ work of preaching the new religion. However, now they needed more than the occasional prayer houses, they needed large enough public worship places with a permanent destination. The public Christian religion started to organize itself increasingly better and to manifest itself by means of an increasingly pompous ceremony, meant to attract and impress the masses. The Christian rite was taking place indoors and sometimes required much larger, actually quite grand spaces - in the biggest and the most important towns. But it was very hard to quickly move from catacombs to Tabor Mountain, namely to grand churches.

In that regard, it is Constantine the Great who has the merit of founding holy buildings in almost all the centres and regions of his huge empire. Historians unanimously admit that “during the times of Constantine the Great, the Roman world gets full of churches, and an intense theological activity develops amidst the increasing Christian community”<sup>9</sup>, which activity is encouraged and supported by the emperor himself. He pays a particular attention to the former prayer houses of the Christians, which had been confiscated during their persecutions. Not only does the emperor return those buildings to the Church, but he also arranges and decorates them and he turns old pagan temples into Christian worship places. To that respect, he also issues a law by which “he orders that the walls of the prayer houses should be higher than the surroundings, and God’s churches be larger (than anything around them), both in length and width”<sup>10</sup>. In accomplishing that mission, the emperor himself gets directly involved, by allocating subventions and

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<sup>8</sup> Bocioagă, *Personalitatea lui Constantin cel Mare și politica lui socială*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Lemerle, *Istoria Bizanțului*, trans. Nicolae Șerban-Tanașoca (București: Universitas, 1998), 24.

<sup>10</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 147.

investing huge fortunes for building and decorating the holy worship places, so that anybody should be able to notice how “the emperor had plentifully endowed God’s Churches, enlarging and making the prayer houses more imposing, on his own expense.”<sup>11</sup> By official letters, he orders the bishops and province governors “to do their best to accomplish the works in sanctuaries, namely: they should either rebuild the existing walls, or make them higher; where necessary, they should build new walls”<sup>12</sup>.

In 314 A.D., bishop Paulinus had a grand church built - in Tyre town, Phoenicia - which he “decorated with beautiful thrones, in honour of the hierarchs of the Church...”<sup>13</sup>. Also, at Heliopolis, Phoenicia, Emperor Constantine “laid the foundation of a great church to be used as a prayer house, on the place of a pagan temple – which had been built to the honour of goddess Aphrodite, where pagan orgies and feasts had been organized before”<sup>14</sup>.

In most cases, the pagan temples given to the Church by Constantine’s order were not fit for the new stage of the Christian religion rite, which had started to distinguish itself by its ceremony, artistic brilliance and beauty and – for these reasons - the Christians demolished the former temples and, using the old building materials, they erected new worship places, which were larger and more comfortable than the former temples, in harmony with the spirit of the new religion revealed to Constantine. By comparison with the pagan temples, “the inner decoration of the Christian churches benefited of the greatest attention”<sup>15</sup> – mainly due to the fact that “most of the artists throughout the empire worked only for the glorification of the new faith”<sup>16</sup>. During those times of freedom, we witness a spectacular development of the Christian art, characterized by a new programme of image patterns. If, during the first three centuries, the church painting used to have a markedly symbolical and allegorical character – as different researchers concluded, by analyzing the religious scenes of the catacombs – beginning with Constantine’s age, the Christian painting starts showing images taken from the history of Christianity<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 110.

<sup>12</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 148.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebiu de Cezareea, *Istoria bisericească*, trans. Pr. Prof. T. Bodogae, în colecția “Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești”, volumul 13 (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1987), 373.

<sup>14</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 164, 199-200.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. P. Constantinescu – Iași, *Arta și creștinismul* (Chișinău, 1926), 16.

<sup>16</sup> Egon Sendler, *Icoana, imaginea nevăzutului, elemente de teologie, estetică și tehnică*, trans. Ioana Caragiu, Florin Caragiu și monahia Ilie Doinița (București: Sofia, 2005), 19.

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Badea Cireșeanu, *Tezaurul liturgic al Sfintei Biserici Creștine Ortodoxe de Răsărit*, tomul II (București, 1910), 200.

The first basilica-type Christian worship place, founded by Constantine, is the basilica of Lateran (today, Saint John Lateran) begun in 313 A.D.<sup>18</sup>, – one year after 312 A.D., when Constantine had given the local imperial palace to the bishop of Rome, to be used as an Episcopal residence. Unfortunately, there are scarcely any architectonic remains of the former Constantine basilica, on whose bases we could imaginary reconstitute the original plan of the building. Historians assert that the basilica used to have a transept and a grand baptistery, and was adorned with mosaics of “beautiful compositions covering the free areas of the walls in general, and particularly the apse curves.”<sup>19</sup>

The other Christian basilicas and constructions are some *Martyria*, built over the tombs of the Saints Peter and Paul - the Apostles, and of other Christian martyrs, or *mausoleums*, which belonged to different members of the imperial family<sup>20</sup>.

Saint Peter’s Basilica of Rome, whose construction started about ten years later than the basilica of Lateran, took up to the middle of the fourth century to complete, and it is chronologically considered the first *martyrium*-basilica, in the true meaning of the word. It used to be a large basilica, having a transept, five naves, an apse to the west and an atrium with four porticoes to the east, where the entrance used to be<sup>21</sup>.

The *martyrium*-basilicas built over the tombs of Saints Laurentius and Agnes, during Constantine’s reign, were smaller in size, having three naves.<sup>22</sup> Also, by emperor Constantine’s support and initiative, in Rome the following worship places were built: Basilica of St. Paul, the Apostle (over his tomb), today called San Paolo fuori demura, located in via Ostiense - which burnt during the fire of 1823 and was rebuilt later, according to the old plans; Basilica Apostolorum of the San Sebastiano catacomb, in via Appia, which hosted temporarily – during the third century – the holy relics of Saints Peter and Paul, the Apostles; and Basilica of Marcellinus and Peter, the martyrs, on via Labicana<sup>23</sup>.

On May 11, 330 A.D., on the banks of the Bosphorus strait, Emperor Constantine inaugurates his new capital city – that is Constantinopolis<sup>24</sup> or ΝέαΡομη (which means the

<sup>18</sup> Ion Barnea, Octavian Iliescu, *Constantin cel Mare* (București: Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982), 79.

<sup>19</sup> Constantinescu – Iași, *Arta și creștinismul*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Cireșeanu, *Tezaurul liturgic al Sfintei Biserici Creștine Ortodoxe de Răsărit*, 102.

<sup>21</sup> André Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l’art chrétien antique*, I-er volume, “Architecture” (Paris, 1946), 293-305.

<sup>22</sup> Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l’art chrétien antique*, 305-08.

<sup>23</sup> P. Testini, *Archeologia cristiana* (Roma, 1958), 216-18.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Diehl, *Istoria Imperiului bizantin*, trans. Carmen Roșulescu (Craiova: Scorilo, 1999), 21.

New Rome) – which he endowed with gorgeous palaces and numerous public buildings. The urban scenery was also completed by a few famous churches, by whose construction Emperor Constantine meant to put his city under the protection of his God. Being dominated by the divine spirit of wisdom, Constantine decided to clean the city bearing his name of all the idolatry forms, so that inside its temples there should be no more statues of the so-called idols to be worshipped, and no other form of superstition. Three of the churches built in his imperial residence are more representative: the basilica built in honour of the Divine Wisdom (Saint Sophia), which later became an Episcopal palace church; the basilica built in honour of the Divine Peace (Saint Irene), on the old acropolis of the city, and the basilica built in honour of the Holy Apostles. The Saint Sophia Church had - on the outside - the shape of an elongated rectangle and, on the inside – the cross shape given by the rows of columns dividing its inner area. Being built of beams and rafters, the church was divided into five naves and had a library and a very large baptistery, so that it provided the possibility of hosting the synod meetings. This Church will become a model for the worship places of the next period. On the location of this church – which burnt during the uprising of Nika, 532 A.D., Justinian later built the monumental cathedral - Saint Sophia, unique in grandeur and artistic beauty, a real masterpiece of the byzantine architectonic style<sup>25</sup>.

The Holy Apostles Church remains, par excellence, the most magnificent of all churches, built in the centre of the capital city.

“After Constantine had this church built ineffably, he covered it from basement to roof by all coloured-stones, catching your sight; he divided its upper part into narrow strips and entirely gilded it”<sup>26</sup>. Inside this famous church Constantine sheltered the holy relics of the Twelve Apostles, laid in twelve sarcophagi, and he ordered his body to be laid in the middle of those, in a sarcophagus got ready for him, and placed in the central part of the mausoleum, for him to be guarded by six Apostles on one side, and the other six Apostles on the other side, as he considered himself to be the thirteenth apostle of Jesus Christ. It was for the first time that an intra-muros mausoleum (within the walls of the citadel) was built, against the prescriptions of the Roman laws of that time, which stipulated that tombs should be placed outside the city. This time, the mausoleum of Constantine and of other emperors who were to be buried inside this worship place, beside the Holy Apostles, were

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<sup>25</sup> Brezeanu Stelian, *O istorie a Imperiului bizantin* (București: Albatros, 1981), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 240-41.

going to be an example to follow for the whole Christian world and, last but not least, for the Romanian rulers, who would later on imitate the example of the great Emperor Constantine.

The Saint Irene Church was originally a dome-basilica, incipiently prefiguring the later byzantine style. Emperor Justinian reconstructs it in 532 A.D., and gives it a more imposing shape, by adding two extra domes<sup>27</sup>.

Historian Eusebius also tells us that in the new capital city of his empire, Emperor Constantine founded “great churches built in honour of the Christian martyrs”<sup>28</sup>, which can only be those mentioned by a great Romanian historian, namely: the St. Martyrs Serge and Bacchus Church, St. George Church, St. Archangel Michael Church, St. Agatonicus, St. Procopius, St. Acatius, St. Philemon and St. Eudoxius Churches, as well as those founded by his mother – Empress Helen, who founded the churches built in honour of St. Theodor, Ss. Carpus and Papyrus.<sup>29</sup>

After Rome and Constantinople, Constantine’s attention switched to the Holy Places of Palestine, and in its provinces he founded new Christian churches, much more slender and brighter than the old ones. “During the early fourth century, when the victory of Christianity allowed that the places - which had been sanctified by its origins - should be freely researched, as a French historian retells, Jerusalem and its surroundings abounded in churches. They built basilicas all over the place: on the location of the Holy Sepulchre, discovered by Saint Helen; on Olivet Mountain, sanctified by the Ascension of the Lord; on the place mentioned by the holy tradition as the Cenacle place; in the house of Saint Anne or over the tomb of Virgin Mary; and the Christian emperors of the centuries to come – that is empress Eudoxia, who lived in the fifth century, and emperor Justinian, who lived in the sixth century – continued that holy work in Jerusalem”<sup>30</sup>.

The emperor’s special concern naturally focuses on the place of the Passion, burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and Constantine decides to enrich the place with grand worship places, meant to impress the Christian posterity by size, grace and value, and to immortalize over the centuries the memory and honour of the major events in the history of mankind’s salvation. To make this ideal come true, the emperor asks for the support of the high officials and province governors and, mainly the support of the bishop of Jerusalem –

<sup>27</sup> Pr. Prof. Petre Vintilescu, “Arhitectura religioasă bizantină”, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 5-6 (1966): 592.

<sup>28</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 192.

<sup>29</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria vieții bizantine* (București: Enciclopedică, 1974), 76.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Diehl, *Călătorii istorice și de artă*, trans. Ion Herdan (București: Sport - Turism, 1984), 215.

Macarius – to whom, in 326 A.D., he sends a letter through his mother, asking him to support empress Helen in her great action of restoring the churches destroyed by pagans and of cleaning the holy places - which had been desecrated by idol altars and pagan sacrifice rituals<sup>31</sup>. The main goal of the emperor was to build a grand church over the glorified sepulchre of the Lord, and that was a mission which he entrusted to his faithful mother, who was 80 years old at the time.

Once arrived at the holy places, Saint Helen enthusiastically looked for the Holy Cross - which our Saviour had been crucified on – by digging on the Golgotha (Skull) Hill, where the tomb of the Lord had been, and where Emperor Hadrian (117-138 A.D.) had had a pagan temple built, in honour of goddess Aphrodite, in 119 A.D.<sup>32</sup>. “After seeing the place where Jesus Christ had suffered the Passions for the salvation of the whole mankind, she demanded that they should immediately demolish that unholy pagan temple and carry away all the debris. After discovering the Tomb - which had been hidden from sight before, three crosses came out, covered in soil, somewhere near the Tomb - everybody was perfectly sure that one of the crosses was the one on which Jesus Christ, our Lord had suffered the Passions and died, and the other two were those on which the two convicts had been crucified, at the same time. But they were not sure which was the cross that had been touched by the body of the Lord, and on which of the crosses drops of His Holy Blood had fallen. Then, the very wise and truly divine bishop of Jerusalem - Macarius, made a smart decision: After much and intense prayer to God, they had each of the three crosses touched by a honoured wealthy woman, who had been ill for a long time, and so they found out the power of the saving Cross, since as this cross touched the woman’s body, it cured the severe disease that the woman had suffered from, and made her healthy again”. Saint Helen shared the saving cross in two parts. She sent a part of it to Constantinople, for her son Constantine to keep in his imperial residence, “and made a silver case for the other part and she gave it to the bishop of Jerusalem, ordering him to keep it for the future generations, so that it should remind them of mankind’s salvation”<sup>33</sup>.

On the place of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, Emperor Constantine builds a grand complex of holy buildings - called the New Jerusalem by Eusebius - namely that

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<sup>31</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 184-86.

<sup>32</sup> Ierom. Ieraclie, *Mărgăritare sau evangheliile sărbătorilor și explicarea lor populară* (Chișinău, 1935), 140.

<sup>33</sup> Teodoret, Episcopul Cirului, *Istoria bisericească*, trans. Pr. Prof. Vasile Sibiescu, în colecția “Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești”, volumul 44 (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1995), 62-63.



which had been prophesied by the prophets<sup>34</sup>. The grandest edifice of that complex is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, called *Martyrium* – since it had been founded on the place of the crucifixion and burial of our Saviour<sup>35</sup>, for which reason it was also called the Great Martyrium. Its inauguration - in 335 A.D. - was witnessed by Emperor Constantine, and its sanctification occurred on September 13; on September 14, bishop Macarius showed the Holy Cross Wood to the crowd - who had come for the celebration - by lifting it up so that anybody could see it; that event is reminded by the Church by celebrating the Feast of the Glorious Cross.<sup>36</sup>

This basilica was also named the “Resurrection Church”, as Emperor Constantine had had it built “as great evidence of the Resurrection for our salvation”, and “he took care that the church should be extremely beautiful in all aspects, of an expense and glory worthy of an emperor.”<sup>37</sup> The basilica had five naves and was made of polished stone, covered by a lead roof and the inner walls were colour marble-plated, and to the east – where the entrance used to be – it had an atrium with four porticoes. To the west, the basilica also had an atrium, making the connection with the apse which closed the vault with the tomb of our Saviour. The apse constituted the most important part of the architectural complex, as it was fit with a circular belt inside, formed of twelve columns (according to the number of the Holy Apostles), having their heads embellished by big silver vessels<sup>38</sup>. Of that architectural Constantine-type complex - which existed up to the eleventh century, almost in its original form - only few columns and a fragment of the apse wall remain to this day.<sup>39</sup>

By the enthusiasm and efforts of Empress Helen, at the same time they also had two holy and great worship places built, namely the Church of Nativity of Bethlehem, lying on the place where the cave of our Saviour’s birth used to be, and the Ascension Church on Mount Olivet, from where our Saviour ascended to the skies and where – according to the holy tradition – there was a grotto where the Divine Master initiated his disciples, by revealing His teachings to them. Three other Oriental basilicas are attributed to Emperor Constantine: basilica of Abraham’s oak in the valley of Mamre, where the

<sup>34</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 186.

<sup>35</sup> Sfântul Chiril al Ierusalimului, *Cateheza a XIV-a*, în volumul “Cateheze”, trans. Pr. Prof. Dumitru Fecioru (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2003), 225.

<sup>36</sup> Petru Lebedew, *Liturgica sau explicarea serviciului divin*, trans. Nicolae Filip (București, 1899), 311.

<sup>37</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 188.

<sup>38</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 188.

<sup>39</sup> Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l’art chrétien antique*, 256-58, 264, 282.

Holy Trinity had appeared to patriarch Abraham as three travellers (Genesis 18:1-16); the basilica of Nicomedia, built on the place where an old basilica had lain but it had been destroyed during the persecution of Emperor Diocletian (285 - 305); and the basilica of Antioch, unique for its beauty, “of an unusual size and guarded by heavy walls from all sides, amidst which the church itself arose – octagonal in shape – absolutely grand, surrounded all around by rooms – on two floors, of which some were on the ground floor, and others on top of the first.”<sup>40</sup> Due to the wealth of the architectural scenery, this last basilica of the Orient metropolis was named Domus Aurea (Golden House – *lat.*) and they say that it was the model for the building of the famous San Vitale of Ravenna, as well as of other churches of the same style<sup>41</sup>. Being an Episcopal church, it also had a baptistery, the same as the Resurrection Church of Jerusalem.

The Christian hagiographers assert that Empress Helen also had some other eighteen churches built, embellishing them with all ornaments and giving them other material assets. Those churches were built on places where the most important acts and miracles recorded in the Bible History and in the Holy Christian Tradition had taken place, such as: the tomb in the garden of Gethsemane - where the immaculate body of Virgin Mary had been buried; the tomb of Lazarus in Bethany - on the bank of the Jordan river, close to the place where Jesus Christ, our Saviour had been baptized; on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias), where Jesus had made the miracle of the multiplication of the bread, and the miraculous fishing; the place where the house of Mary Magdalene had been, and the place of the house in which Peter's mother-in-law had lived; the top of Mount Tabor, where the Transfiguration of Jesus took place; in Nazareth town, where archangel Gabriel had given the wonderful news to Virgin Mary - that she was to give birth to our Lord Jesus (the Lady Day); in Cana of Galilee, on the place where our Saviour had turned water into wine; on the peak of Mount Zion; in the grassland where the angel of the Lord had announced the shepherds of the birth of Messiah – who had been prophesied by the prophets; in the former courts of bishop Caiapha; near the Siloam bath, where the man born blind had been healed; in the valley of prophet Jeremiah<sup>42</sup> etc. All those worship places were endowed with precious gifts and valuable religious objects.

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<sup>40</sup> Eusebiu, *Viața lui Constantin și alte scrieri*, 142, 145, 214.

<sup>41</sup> Grabar, *Martyrium. Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, 214-27.

<sup>42</sup> *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Teodosie*, trans. Academician Gheorghe Mihăilă (București: Roza Vânturilor, 2010), 76-77.

According to the architectural model of the basilicas from Palestine, emperor Constantine built a double Christian basilica at Trier (Augusta Treverorum), the former capital city of the western regions of the Roman Empire.<sup>43</sup> Also “in Dobrogea, Romania, the Christian fortresses and churches built by Constantine the Great are very many and beautiful, in all boroughs and towns, even in very many Roman villages of Dobrogea.”<sup>44</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Emperor Constantine fully deserves the name of *Great*, since his decisions changed the future of civilization, which led to a deeply Christian world. His first great decision was to declare Christianity a legal religion in the Roman Empire, and the second was to move the imperial capital city from (the pagan) Rome to Constantinople, which he further turned into the greatest Christian city, by enriching it with numerous churches. Anyway, he had Christian worship places built not just in Constantinople but also in Rome, the Holy Land and many other towns and villages throughout the Roman Empire.

As he felt he was God’s representative on the Earth, emperor Constantine acted as an instrument of the Divine Providence and entirely obeyed God’s will, by impressing the spirit of the Christian faith and morals on all the organizational structures of the empire’s social and political life. For his merits and services to Christianity, the Church has honoured him exceptionally, and has considered him a saint, along with his mother, Empress Helen, calling them “equal to Jesus Christ’s Apostles”, and considering Constantine as wise as king Solomon and as good as king David.

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<sup>43</sup> Ion Barnea, Octavian Iliescu, *Constantin cel Mare*, 82.

<sup>44</sup> Vasile Pârvan, *Începuturile vieții române la gurile Dunării* (București: Cartea românească, 2000), 162.

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