

HELENA OF SOFIA – A POSSIBLE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION WHY SERDICA
WAS “THE ROME OF CONSTANTINE”

(Summary)

The study analyses possible connections of St Helena with Serdica/Sofia. It is based on several sources which have so far either been neglected by researchers or have not been discussed in the context of a possible reconstruction of the events which took place in the 4th century AD. These sources include the *Map of the Danube river from Vienna to Nikopolis* by Vincenzo Maria Coronelli (1650–1718), the Poem *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga* by Andria Kačić Miošić (1801) and the local legends about the “Princess”/“Queen” Helena and the “Princess Sofia” which were first collected and commented by Bogdan Filov. The analysis is based, on the one hand, on the utterly unclear and scanty and often contradictory evidence provided by medieval authors on the question where Helena was born, where she resided in the period between the marriage of Constancius Chlorus to Theodora (293 AD) and her proclamation as Augusta by Constantine the Great (326 AD) as well as the question of where she was buried. On the other hand, quite contrary to this medieval tradition, the birth place of Helena has constantly been associated with Sofia (Serdica) since the 17th and 18th centuries. Coronelli, e.g., explicitly states that the birthplace of St Helena was Sofia (Patria di S. Helena). Miošić, in a rather unclear fashion, describes Helena as either “Bulgarian”, being born in Sofia, or “Branichavian”, being born in Nish. At the same time, the Bulgarian legends about the basilica of Saint Sofia in Serdica constantly associate the name of Helena from Tzarigrad not only with the construction of the church, eponymous with the city, but with the foundation of the city itself. This rather persistent tradition, associating St Helena with Sofia, coupled with the abundant evidence that Serdica was not only called “Mea Roma” by Constantine the Great but was actually one of his main residences, allows us to raise at least the question of whether St Helena was really born and/or died or was buried or resided for a longer period of time in Serdica or even to assume this.

Vesselina Vachkova,
National Classical Lyceum “St. Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher” in Sofia
Jordan Tabov,
Institute of Mathematics and Informatics – BAS