

The history of the banner (Latin: labarum, initially a type of Roman flag), in the form in which it is known today, goes back to the 4th post-Christian century and is linked to Constantine the Great (272-337). Both the orator and adviser to the emperor, Lactanius, in his work titled *De mortibus persecutorum* (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors*) , and the ecclesiastical historian Eusebius of Caesarea (265-340) in his work titled *Εἰς τὸν βίον τοῦ μακαρίου Κωνσταντίνου βασιλέως* (*Life of Constantine*) , make detailed reference to the vision of the first Christian Roman emperor who would also be the first in the history of war to introduce – through banners (*labara*) – the Christogram and the Christian cross, as a sign of invocation and at the same time gratitude to Christ, the Virgin Mary and the Saints.

The Battle of the Milvian Bridge (over the Tiber River, next to Rome on 28 October 312) led to the demise of Maxentius (278-312) and the rise of Constantine the Great as the sole emperor. The Christogram and the phrase *Ἐν τούτῳ νίκα* (In this sign thou shalt conquer) would become symbols that would lead the army into battle every time.

In the long history of Hellenism, banners (*labara*) were always present at the nation's struggles for Freedom. They would come out of churches to accompany priests and believers in every church procession, on every great celebration, during every litany. They were guarded with reverence, reflecting the dreams, hopes, as well as the tears and pain of the people. They were always embroidered with expectation, but often painted with blood. However, they never ceased to serve their purpose, which was to give strength to the men and women who sought the help of God, and to encourage those who fought with self-sacrifice.

Self-sacrifice like that of the fighters of 1821 who solemnly swore to fight the enemy, sacrificing their very own lives and the lives of their children on the altar of the nation. The banner of Agia Lavra reflects the flag of the uprising; it symbolizes the gradual liberation of Greece. Just like Constantine the Great, those brave men, too, prayed and threw themselves into the flames of battle.

On the occasion of the 200-year anniversary since the Greek Revolution of 1821, artist Maria Kompatsiari is raising her very own banners at the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki. She intertwines gold thread with precious stones, and honours the Cross in a play with colours that is rife with symbolism.

She goes on a journey through time and interacts with the gold-thread-embroidered banners of the Byzantine emperors and fighters of 1821. Her passion brings to life those glorious times that have left an indelible mark on history.

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