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A Century of Miracles

At the beginning of the 4th century, Christians comprised a small minority of the Roman empire, enduring what came to be known as “The Great Persecution.” When it ended, they were the dominant religion in what soon became a Christian Roman Empire.

The story of this dramatic transformation is usually told through its councils and creeds, and the interference of emperors in Church decision making. In his new book, “A Century of Miracles: Christians, Pagans, Jews, and the Supernatural, 312-410” (Oxford University Press), Harold Drake, a UC Santa Barbara professor emeritus of history, offers a new perspective, looking instead at famous miracles, such as Constantine the Great’s famous “Vision of the Cross.”

In a lecture hosted by the UCSB History Associates, Drake will use a series of 16th-century woodcuts to illustrate what he describes as the most important and popular story to come out of this time. His talk, “A Century of Miracles: The Legend of the Cross,” will take place Saturday, April 14, at 2 p.m. at the Santa Barbara Mission Archive Library, 2201 Laguna St. Admission is $5 for members and guests and $7 for all others. Admission is free for students.

The Legend of the Cross tells how Christianity’s most sacred relic — the Cross — was discovered by Constantine’s mother, Helena. Such storytelling, says Drake, explains how Christianity was able to survive the disastrous sack of Rome in 410.

A specialist in Ancient Rome, Drake focuses his research on the 4th century, with particular emphasis on questions of historiography and the realignment of interests and identities that followed from Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity. He is the author of "Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance" (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) and, with Joe Leedom of Hollins University, "Laws, Gods and Heroes: Thematic Readings in Early Western History" (Kendall Hunt, 1994).

A reception will follow Drake's talk. Questions may be directed to Sears McGee, professor of history at UCSB and a member of the History Associates board of directors, at jsmcgee@history.ucsb.edu.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.