



Special Presentation ex Ossibus Relic of the Great Martyr,  
Barbara, Virgin Martyr of Nicomedia, Patron Saint of the Artillery  
with Authentics Dated 1821 Issued by the Last Prince-Bishop of Liege



An attractive silver-plated 37 mm diameter theca housed in a 50 mm walnut case furnished with a brass bail ring, holding the first class (ex Ossibus) relics of Saint Barbara, Virgin Martyr, and accompanied by the original authentics, dated the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1821 and sealed with the threads and red sealing-wax seal of the last Prince-Bishop of Liège, François Antoine Marie Constantin de Méan et de Beurieux, Vicar Apostolic of Ravenstein–Megen and Metropolitan Archbishop of Mechelen (Belgium), who was overthrown in the rebellion. After the country was occupied by the French the Prince-Bishopric no longer existed.



## Saint Barbara

**S**aint Barbara (Greek: Αγία Βαρβάρα), known in the Eastern Orthodox Church as the Great Martyr Barbara (3<sup>rd</sup> century – December 4, 306), was a Christian saint and martyr. Although there is no reference to her in the authentic early Christian writings, nor in the original recension of Saint Jerome's martyrology, veneration of her was common from the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Because of doubts about the historicity of her legend, she was removed from the liturgical calendar of the Roman rite in 1969 in Pope Paul VI's *motu proprio Mysterii Paschalis*. However, she continues to be a popular saint in modern times, perhaps best known as the patron saint of artillerymen, military engineers, miners and others who work with explosives because of her old legend's association with lightning, and also of mathematicians. Many of the thirteen miracles in a 15<sup>th</sup>-century French version of her story turn on the security she offered that her devotees would not die without making confession and receiving extreme unction.



According to the legendary accounts of her life, Barbara was the daughter of a rich pagan named Dioscorus. She was carefully guarded by her father who kept her shut up in a tower in order to preserve her from the outside world. Having secretly become a



Christian, she rejected an offer of marriage that she received through him. Before going on a journey, he commanded that a private bath-house be erected for her use near her dwelling, and during his absence Barbara had three windows put in it, as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, instead of the two originally intended. When her father returned, she acknowledged herself to be a Christian; upon this he drew his sword to kill her, but her prayers created an opening in the tower wall and she was miraculously transported to a mountain gorge, where two shepherds watched their flocks. Dioscorus, in pursuit of his daughter, was rebuffed by the first shepherd, but the second betrayed her and was turned to stone and his flock changed to locusts. Dragged before the prefect of the province, Martinianus, who had her cruelly tortured, Barbara held true to her faith. During the night, the dark prison was bathed in light and new miracles occurred. Every morning her wounds were healed. Torches that were to be used to burn her went out as soon as they came near her. Finally she was condemned to death by beheading. The father himself carried out the death-sentence, but in punishment for this he was struck by lightning on the way home and his body consumed. Barbara was buried by a Christian, Valentinus, and her tomb became the site of miracles.

According to one version, she died on December 4, 306 in her native Nicomedia, Bithynia, Asia Minor.





Saint Barbara is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers (also known as Helpers in Need). Her association with the lightning that killed her father has caused her to be invoked against lightning and fire; by association with explosions, she is also the patron of artillery and mining. Her feast on 4 December was included in the Tridentine Calendar, having been introduced in Rome in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1729 that date was assigned to the celebration of Saint Peter Chrysologus, reducing that of Saint Barbara to a commemoration in his Mass. In 1969, because the accounts of her life and martyrdom were judged to be entirely fabulous, lacking clarity even about the place of her martyrdom, it was removed from that calendar. But she is still mentioned in the Roman Martyrology, which, in addition, lists another ten martyr saints named Barbara.

Orthodox Christians have never ceased to venerate Saint Barbara, who is very popular among them. For them too her feast day is 4 December. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the relics of Saint Barbara were brought from Constantinople to the St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kiev, where they were kept until the 1930s, when they were transferred to St. Vladimir's Cathedral in the same city.

#### Historicity of her legend

Although the legend of Saint Barbara is included in Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* (xii.64) and in later versions of the Golden Legend (and in William Caxton's version of it) and although she was one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages, some scholars doubt its veracity and even her existence. There is no mention of her in the earlier martyrologies, though her name was known in Rome in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Her cultus did not spread until the 9<sup>th</sup> century, at first in the East. Various versions, who include two surviving mystery plays, differ on the location of her martyrdom, which is variously given as Tuscany, Rome, Antioch, Heliopolis, and Nicomedia.

The name "Barbara" literally means "a barbarian woman".

#### Patronage

Saint Barbara became the patron saint of artillerymen. She is also traditionally the patron of armorers, military engineers, gunsmiths, miners and anyone else who worked with cannon and explosives. She is invoked against thunder and lightning and all accidents arising from explosions of gunpowder. She is venerated by every Catholic who faces the danger of sudden and violent death in work.

The Spanish word *santabárbara*, the corresponding Italian word *santabarbara*, and the obsolete French *sainte-barbe* signify the powder magazine of a ship or fortress. It was



customary to have a statue of Saint Barbara at the magazine to protect the ship or fortress from suddenly exploding. She is the patron of Italian Navy.

Saint Barbara's Day, December 4, is celebrated by the British (Royal Artillery, RAF Armourers), Australian (RAAF Armourers), Canadian (Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technicians (EOD), Canadian Air Force Armourers, Royal Canadian Artillery, Canadian Military Field Engineers), New Zealand (RNZAF Armourers, RNZA), Irish Defence Forces Artillery Regiments, United States Army and Marine Corps Field and Air Defense Artillery and other Artillery formations. The units and sub-units celebrate the day with church parades, sports days, guest nights, cocktail parties, dinners and other activities.

Santa Barbara is also recognised as the patron saint of U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Aviation Ordnancemen.

The day is also celebrated by the Artillery Corps of the Greek Army and the Cypriot National Guard. The Artillery camps throughout the two countries host celebrations in honor of the saint, where the traditional sweet of loukoumades is offered to soldiers and visitors, allegedly because it resembles cannonballs.

The city of Santa Barbara, California, located approximately 100 miles northwest of Los Angeles, is so called because of the Franciscan mission there that was dedicated to her; it received that name in 1602, as a result of explorer Sebastian Vizcaino's gratitude for surviving a violent storm just offshore on December 3, the eve of her feast day. Other Spanish and Portuguese settlements named Santa Barbara were established in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, Philippines and Venezuela. There were many churches dedicated in her name in Russia, including one in Moscow, next to Saint Basil's Cathedral, and in Yaroslavl.

Because of her identification with lightning, royalty, towers, and cannons, in Santería she is identified with Chango, god of lightning, fire, dance and war.

In Georgia, Saint Barbara's Day is celebrated as Barbaroba on December 17 (which is December 4 in the old style calendar). The traditional festive food is lobiani, bread baked with a bean stuffing.

In Macedonia Saint Barbara's day is celebrated as Барбара (Varvara) on 17 December. Most Macedonians make a celebration with their closest family and friends at home, while others stay at home and don't go anywhere due to believing that people who step into their house on Saint Barbara's day will give them either good or bad luck for the rest



of the year.

## The Order of Saint Barbara

The United States Field Artillery Association maintains the Order of Saint Barbara as an honorary military society of the United States Field Artillery. Members of both United States Marines and United States Army field artillery and Air Defense Artillery units, along with their military and civilian supporters are eligible for membership. There are two levels of membership in the order, The Ancient Order and the Honorable Order.; The most distinguished level is the Ancient Order of Saint Barbara and those who are selected for this honor have achieved long-term, exceptional service to the field artillery surpassing even their brethren in the Honorable Order of Saint Barbara. The Honorable Order may be approved by the first Lieutenant Colonel in the Chain of Command, The Ancient Order must be approved of by the Commanding General, United States Army Field Artillery Center and Fort Sill.

In modern popular culture

Saint Barbara is mentioned in Federico García Lorca's play, *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* (1936). According to this drama, a popular Spanish phrase regarding this saint in the early 20th century was:

Blessed Santa Barbara,  
Your story is writ in the sky,  
With paper and holy water.

The first Spanish-language Telenovela filmed in color for tv in the US, was the 1973 production of *Santa Bárbara, Virgen y Mártir*, filmed entirely on location in Hialeah, Florida.

Saint Barbara is referenced in the song "Don't Let Me Explode" by the rock band The Hold Steady. Before performing the song at a 2006 Lollapalooza music festival, lead singer Craig Finn told the story of Saint Barbara to the crowd of several thousand fans. He compared being a Christian in her time to having facial tattoos.

GK Chesterton wrote the *Ballad of Saint Barbara*, interweaving the Legend of the Saint with the contemporary account of the huge artillery barrages that turned the First Battle of the Marne.

Saint Barbara is written into a central role in the Jimmy Buffett bestseller, *A Salty Piece*



of Land, as well referenced in the song "Trouble on the Horizon."

In Robert A. Heinlein's *Space Cadet* (1948), Saint Barbara was referenced as the patron saint of Rocketmen due to the high likelihood of their deaths being sudden and caused by explosions. This may be seen as a

natural progression from her use by Artillery units. In *Space Cadet*, a mass is dedicated to her after the deaths of several trainee patrolmen in a rocket crash.

In Shaenon K. Garrity's webcomic *Narbonic*, mad scientist Lupin Madblood exclaims, "What in the name of Saint Barbara was that?" in response to a massive explosion in his secret lair.

Saint Barbara's day or Eid il-Burbara is celebrated in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine among Arab Christians annually on December 4, in a feast day similar to that of North American Halloween. The traditional food for the occasion is Burbara, a bowl of boiled barley, pomegranate seeds, raisins, anise and sugar offered to masquerading children. The general belief among Lebanese Christians is that Saint Barbara disguised herself in numerous characters to elude the Romans who were persecuting her.

In art

Saint Barbara is depicted in art as standing by a tower with three windows, carrying a palm branch and a chalice, sometimes with cannons depicted by her side.

An important first-class relic of an important Saint.