

**J.B. de Voogd, 2023.  
St. Barbara in Düsseldorf  
(North Rhine Westphalia, Germany)**



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*Figure 1: The late 15th century  
sandstone statuette of St. Barbara,  
Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf  
(Foto: Klaus Hinkler)*

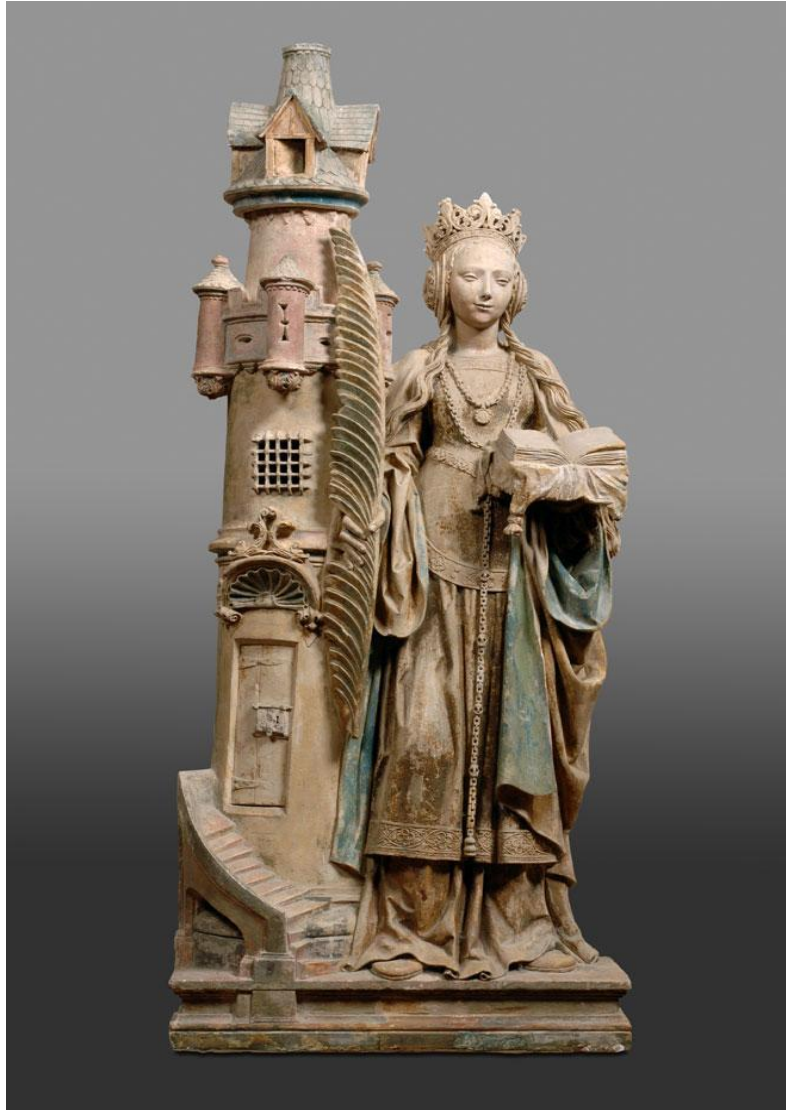
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*Figure 2 : A similar polychromed limestone figurine. [Villemoult, Aube](#), France, circa 1520–1530*

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*Figure 3: A random, more complete specimen of St. Barbara, France*

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During the excavations in anticipation of and partly simultaneously with the construction of a tunnel along the river Rhine in Düsseldorf, North Rhine Westfalia, Germany, in the second half of 1991, a small, rectangular brickwork cesspit or latrine became exposed. Despite of the narrowness of this structure, author of this article and a Polish colleague – whose name unfortunately escaped me –, together, we still managed to ‘scoop out’ this structure. During this exercise, an unknown object was lifted up. At first it seemed to be an [earthenware](#)

sewage pipe, smeared with silty clay and other iniquities, which could be expected in an environment like this. But, after cleaning up the largest, bottom piece of this artefact, this seemed to be a sandstone figurine! This led us to be even more careful excavating this part of the site, also by sieving the contents of the already grown spoil heap and the also the future spoil still to be. In the second instance the smaller piece of this statuette – i.e. the part with the tower –was discovered and cleaned. Further parts – like a smaller piece of the torso – could not be found. The incompleteness of the statuette could point to a form of iconoclasm, what happened in the neighbouring Low Countries in august and oktober 1566. The fire traces could just suggest an accident.

After restauration and art-historical studying of this figurine (Fig. 1), the iconography<sup>1</sup> led to the conclusion, that the artefact had been manufactured in the style of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and – according to its attributes<sup>2</sup> –the person depicted must have been the Holy Barbara (Αγία Βαρβάρα).<sup>3</sup> She was one of the fourteen holy helpers and patron saint of numerous (dangerous) crafts, natural phenomena etc.<sup>4</sup> There exist a legend, issued in Augsburg in the years 1471-2, where her miracles are more explained and thus she became a saint.

## **Literature**

- Carroll-Spillecke, M., 1994. Die Stadtbefestigung. In: Carroll-Spillecke (Hrsg.), M., 1994. Archäologie am Düsseldorfer Rheinufer; die Ausgrabungen 1985 bis 1992, § 4.2 p. 29-38.
- <http://www.heiligen.net/heiligen/12/04/12-04-0306-barbara.php>

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<sup>1</sup> The 'swing' with the hip towards the left (as seen from the person depicted) and the folds or kilts in the fabric

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<sup>2</sup> *In casu*: a bible, a tower (with three windows) a decapitated head, a martyrs palm. Also: a ciborium, a crown, a peacock feather, a sword

<sup>3</sup> Birth: Nicomedia (currently Izmit, Turkey), 273 AD – Death: *ibid.* 306 AD

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_Barbara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Barbara)

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_Barbara](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Barbara)