

St. Margaret of Antioch

50.45

St. Margaret of Antioch South Netherlandish? Oak

A truthful copy of the 15th C original in the Musee Gruthuse, Bruges.



50.45

St. Margaret of Antioch / St. Margaret the Virgin

She was a Very popular saint with women and men. Women would clutch small statues and pray to the saint during labour. Men would pray for the safe delivery of an heir, as well as when they travelled far from home (not strictly exiles).

Antioch, Eastern Turkey. One of the main cities during the Crusades. It was called a cradle of Christianity. a main city on the Spice Route. She was one of the saints brought back by the Crusaders.

Her Story -

After her mother died she was raised by a woman from the countryside. When she converted to Christianity & dedicated her virginity to Christ she was shunned by her father who was a pagan priest. She was driven from her home and lived as a shepherdess (Christian slant) with her nurse, who adopted her. A Roman governor, who was infatuated with her beauty, wanted to marry her, but she would have had to give up Christianity. She refused, was denounced as a Christian, arrested and tortured. Several miracles happened during this time. The main one was that she was eaten by a devil disguised as a dragon, BUT she had a secret weapon, a crucifix.

1. Irritated the dragons' stomach with the cross and was coughed up.

2. She used the crucifix to cut herself out of the dragons' stomach.

She survived.

The Golden Legend, in an atypical passage of scepticism, describes this last incident as "apocryphal and not to be taken seriously" (trans. Ryan, 1.369). The next day, attempts were made to execute her by fire and then by drowning, but she was miraculously saved and converted thousands of spectators witnessing her ordeal - all of whom were promptly executed. Finally, she was beheaded. She was put to death in AD.304. Her historical existence has been questioned. She was declared apocryphal by Pope Gelasius I in 494, but devotion to her revived in the West with the Crusades. She was reputed to have promised very powerful indulgences to those who wrote or read her life, or invoked her intercessions; these no doubt helped the spread of her cult. It has been argued that the legends of Saint Margaret are derived from a transformation of the pagan divinity Aphrodite into a Christian saint. The problem of her identity is a purely literary question. Removed from the Roman Rite – Main Roman Catholic service. She was one of the 14 Holy Helpers, part of a prayer package (see other notes), recommended to be prayed to, but went out of fashion with the Church. Her story is still called untrustworthy. She is said to have spoken to Joan of Arc. Many churches are dedicated to her through out Europe. Over 250 in England at one time.

ONLY Scottish Church dedicated to St. Margaret of Antioch – St. Margaret's Parish Church, Dalry, Ayrshire.

Attributes - Seen with a dead dragon at her feet. Sometimes dressed as a shepherdess. Saint to - mainly pregnant women and during childbirth also dying people, kidney disease, peasants, exiles, and falsely accused people. Also escaping from the devil. 50/45 Wearing a crown. Standing on dragon, holding it by a heavy chain over her right arm - overcoming Satan.

Tail pointing up into skirt – phallic ?

Box in her right hand. Hair showing under scarf, sign of virginity.

V&A St. Margaret Altarpiece.

1. Dominating the centre is a large sculpture of the youthful St Margaret. Her fair hair falls in thick curls to her shoulders and she has a pale complexion with pink cheeks. In her right hand, she carries the remains of a palm frond, a symbol of martyrdom. At her feet is a black dog- sized dragon, its jaws gaping, its tail coiling up her right leg.
2. Margaret was believed to have burst from the belly of a dragon that had swallowed her. As a result St Margaret became associated with childbirth and was invoked by pregnant women for protection.
3. In the centre of this altarpiece, Saint Margaret stands beside a small dragon. Margaret was a fifteen year-old virgin martyred for her refusal to renounce Christianity and marry a pagan ruler. A saint is a holy man or woman who has lived an exemplary life or has been martyred for their beliefs. Roman Catholics believe that saints can intercede with God on behalf of the living and help to prevent illnesses, plagues or sudden death.
4. Although most people would have known about Margaret's life through preaching and images like the ones on this altarpiece, her life was also recorded in many written accounts. The best known comes from a 13th century book of saints' lives called The Golden Legend. It tells the dramatic tale of the virginal saint who survived numerous ordeals for her devotion to Christianity.
5. 'A monstrous dragon suddenly appeared before her and sprang to devour her, but she made the sign of the cross and it disappeared. According to another account, the dragon got its jaws over Margaret's head and its tongue around her feet and swallowed her; and it was while it was attempting to digest her that she armed herself with the sign of the cross; and this proved too much for the dragon, who burst apart, and the virgin emerging unhurt.'
6. The legend of Margaret's escape from the dragon became popular throughout Europe. Pregnant women prayed to her to help both them and their unborn infants escape the dangers of childbirth. The cult of saints and martyrs, like Margaret's, led to a proliferation of images that were used in worship.
7. During the Reformation, from the 1520s onwards, this cult came under widespread attack in Northern Europe and many images were destroyed. In 1969, the Catholic Church stopped recognising her as a saint.
8. On either side of St Margaret, carved scenes from her life read from left to right. In the top left panel Margaret's nurse gives the infant saint to her father Theodosius, a pagan priest. Immediately below is a scene of Theodosius surrounded by citizens sacrificing a sheep to a pagan idol — now lost — on a column.
9. Moving to the left-hand wing, in the lower right panel, we find Margaret brought before Olybrius, the Western Roman emperor who has been bewitched by her beauty. Margaret points to heaven as she asserts her Christian faith and refuses his offer of marriage. In the two scenes on the left of the central corpus St Margaret is first sentenced by Olybrius, then led away by soldiers. Her torments begin.
10. In the first of the lower scenes she's hung half naked by her hands and scourged with rakes, although these are now missing. In the final compartment on the left-hand side she's bound to a crossbeam and beaten by two soldiers. On the right of the central corpus she's held in a castellated tower, and in the next scene, the devil in the form of a bearded man tempts her to renounce faith. The Saint Margaret Altarpiece
11. The first of the lower pair of compartments shows St Margaret emerging serenely from the back of a black dragon who has tried to devour her. In the next scene she stands naked, hands folded in prayer, waist-deep in a vessel of boiling pitch while two men ladle more pitch onto her head. In the top of the right-hand wing St Margaret has been returned to the tower. She looks out of the window to a winged angel.
12. In the lower half of the right wing, the left-hand compartment shows Margaret's executioner Malchus on his knees in prayer before her. In final scene, on the right, Margaret is on her knees, her fair hair swept up to bare her neck, her face lifted towards heaven.

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