

SHEETS

St. Barbatus, the apostle of the South



St. Barbatus, born in Castelvenere, bishop of Benevento in the second half of the 7th century, is acknowledged - just like Queen Theodelinda - as the protagonist of the approach towards Roman Catholicism by the Longobards of the South. Far from the influence exercised by the first queen, they were still attached to Germanic traditions and rituals, like the cult of sacred trees (namely the walnut tree of Benevento) and the unclarified cult of the “amphisbaena viper” (a golden snake with two heads).

It was the saint bishop who rearranged the Benevento diocese on a religious, cultural and also disciplinary level. According to legend, it was he that had the walnut tree of Benevento cut down, in place of which he had the Church of Santa Maria in Voto built and from the melted simulacrum of the golden snake he made a sacred chalice. According to tradition, St. Barbatus had miraculous powers: he could drive demons away and cure the ill with ablutions after Mass.

Other legends narrate the role played by “priest” Barbatus, who, during Emperor Constans II’s attempt to reconquer Italy (683), is said to have foretold that the emperor would not have conquered Benevento while under siege if the Longobard Duke Romualdo and his people were to convert to catholicism. It is said that this is what happened and the emperor gave up his intentions.

Returning to historic facts, the great prestige and culture of St. Barbatus were recognised by Pope Vitalian, who, as a reward, decreed (668) the unification of the Benevento church with the dioceses of Bovino, Ascoli, Larino and Siponto. With Siponto the Cave-Sanctuary of Monte Sant’Angelo su Gargano, an already well-known and prestigious place of worship, fell under Barbatus’ ecclesiastic jurisdiction. St. Barbatus died on 19th February 683, under Pope St. Leo II. His remains lie partly in Montevergine and partly under the main altar of the Benevento Cathedral.