

Imaginary Places

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IMAGINARY PLACES IV

Abbe at Urban

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Abbe at Urban

The abbey was established in the fog of time between the fourth and seventh centuries A.D., and, in form and purpose, it was clearly an anticipation of the machine age that would not be seen in full flower for another thousand years or so. They had either discovered or perfected complex applications of the *lever*, the *wheel*, the *axle*, the *pulley*, the *inclined wedge*, and the *screw*.

The founder, a hermit monk identified in the incunabula of the abbey as Martin the Assayer (whose true name may have been Robert Clef), is credited with the invention of

the mechanical bread oven and the oscillating toothbrush. And his famous proof linking clean, mechanical efficiency with absolute virtue remains a model for students of logic and metaphysics.

The architectural features of the abbey betray an unmistakable preoccupation with the wheel, cog, and gear, but most especially pulleys and levers. Much of the statuary of the late period, in fact, was animated by means of clockwork mechanisms of such ingenious design that today it is a veritable shrine for theme-park planners the world over.

ABBE AT URBAN

It has also been claimed that it was Martin the Assayer, not Leonardo, who first conceived the notion of the **rotor-propelled flying machine**.

The documents of the abbey number in the hundreds. They inform us that the order shunned religious matters, preferring to occupy its members with issues of

architectural engineering, mathematics, mechanics, and alchemy. The symbol of the order, which decorates the frontispieces of its chief manuals, shows a measuring rod suspended over a chaldron, the contents of which are being stirred by rays of sunlight fashioned in the form of an Archimedean screw.



Plan View, Abbe at Urban

The plan view is dated A.D. 538 and is a reasonable depiction of the abbe and its surrounding parts. The area shown in the lower third of the sketch is presumed to be the famous *Garden* area, modeled more or less after the school of Epicurus that became the *pressio* of intellectual effort in Athens circa 300 B.C. In the upper right quarter is the portion of the abbe thought to have housed racquetball courts and sauna. The chapel, right of center, includes an odd-shaped transept and choir, and then an adjoining compartment where mid-level managers could meet, show slides, or hold court for important guests.

By 1272 the abbey grounds had quadrupled in size and included several fancy guest houses, a comfort station for dogs and cats, and a rather amazing wind-powered tram system.

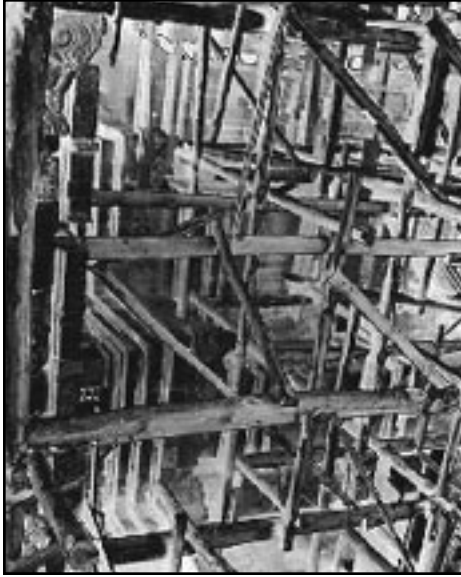


Helicopter Sketch

From the Diary of Martin the Assayer.

It is difficult to trust the date attributed to this sketch (A.D. 417) since Martin the Assayer was so fond of fudging dates, sometimes by as much as 200 years. Lying about dates, authorship, etc., was common practice throughout Europe until the end of the fifteenth century, not counting later fabrications by the scoundrel Rudolf Raspe or the bogus works of the infamous Paco Wang.

Whatever the date, though, it almost certainly predates the work of Leonardo. And, as to the comparative merits of the designs, it seems a fair assumption that the design by Martin the Assayer stood a far better chance of actually flying, had either of these fanciful ideas ever been brought to full fruit.



Preserved Scaffolding at Urban

Diaries found at the abbe in the late fifteenth century record that sometime after A.D. 621 work to renovate the abbe buildings was begun and included the construction of scaffolding to support major portions of the main complex. It is recorded that the membership of the abbe was so impressed with the scaffolding that it was decided it should be left in place *for eternity*, or for at least as long as *the brothers are content to look upon it*. Recent efforts to restore the scaffolding have met with mixed success, owing to annual invasions by termites and wood-eating ants.