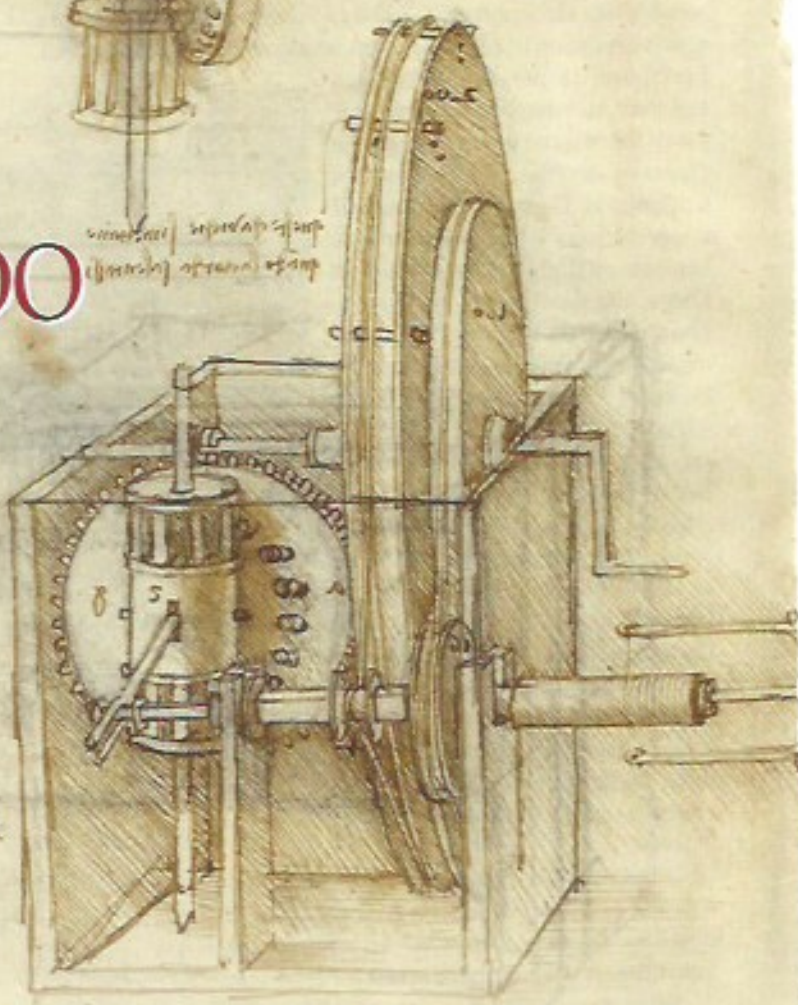
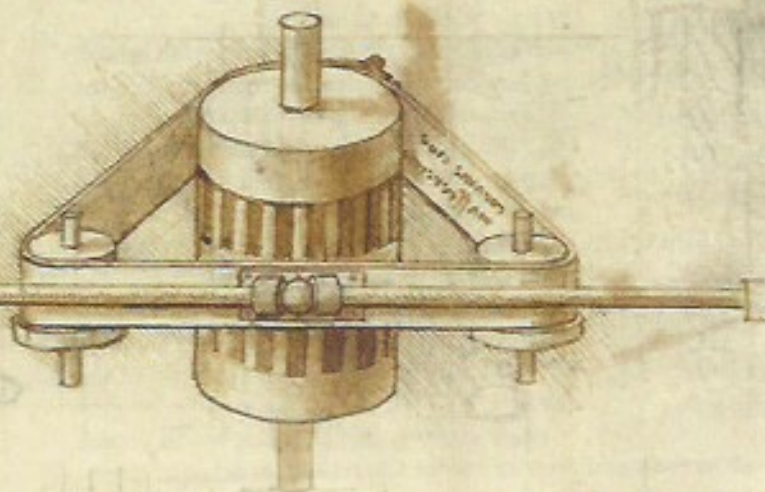




Leonardo's drawing of a spinning wheel and spindle in *Codex Atlanticus*. In the photo, a model of Leonardo's catapult and, in the circle, a self-portrait of the artist

MORE LEONARDO CELEBRATIONS

■ BY LUCY GORDAN



On March 22, Laura Aldoriso, my colleague at www.lavocedineewyork.com in her article "Leonardo, 500 anni dopo: le iniziative, tra cui una mostra digitale realizzata nei Paesi dell'America del Nord e del Sud. E in Italia..." ("Leonardo, 500 Years Later, the Initiatives, Among Them a Digital Exhibition in North and South America, and in Italy...") published an extensive and seemingly complete list of 2019 Leonardo celebrations. I visited the one she mentioned as being in Rome "Leonardo da Vinci: Scienza Prima della Scienza" ("Leonardo da Vinci: Science Before Science") at the Scuderie, on until June 30 (entrance fee: 15 euros) and one she didn't mention, "Leonardo: Il San Girolamo dei Musei Vaticani" (Leonardo: The Vatican Museums' St. Jerome) on in the Braccio di Carlostano in the left side of Bernini's colonnade in Vatican City's St. Peter's Square until June 22 (entrance free).



Except for "Leonardo da Vinci Parade," a selection of models made in the 1950s based on Leonardo's drawings, at Milan's Museo della Scienza e della Tecnologia from July 19 to October 13, "Science Before Science" seems to be the only exhibit which concentrates on Leonardo's engineering and scientific talents and not on his artworks. Its some 200 artifacts and books are divided into 10 sections, each concerning a different scientific subject of interest to Leonardo, and each with an appropriate drawing from Leonardo's *Codex Atlanticus* on loan from the Ambrosiana Library in Milan. One of the treasures of the Ambrosiana, the *Codex*, the most complete collection of Leonardo's manuscripts, gets its name not from the ocean but from the large atlas-size of its paper. Also on display are models on loan from Milan's Museum of Science and Technology and books on loan from Milan's Ambrosiana Library.

A word about the lenders: The Museum of Science and Technology was founded by Guido Ucelli, an industrialist from Milan. "The Museum first opened to the public," a wall panel explains, "on February 15, 1953 with the exhibition 'The Science and Technology of Leonardo,' timed to coincide with the celebration of the 500th anniversary of Leonardo da Vinci's birth." The Museum's collection of "Leonardo" models is the largest in the world; more than 130 models document Leonardo's diverse areas of study, from flying devices to military engineering, architecture, and industrial machines.

"Inaugurated by Cardinal Federico Borromeo on 8 December 1609," recounts another wall panel, "the Ambrosiana Library was among the first to grant access to anyone able to read and write. It was conceived as a center for humanist study and culture, comprising a *Collegio di Dottori* (Board of Fellows), a *Pinacoteca* (Art Gallery, founded 1618), and an *Accademia del Disegno* (Academy of Drawing, founded 1620)."

"With more than a million printed books," continues the wall panel, "including thousands of incunabula and 16th-century works, almost 40,000 manuscripts in many languages, and 12,000 drawings by Raphael, Leonardo, and many others, the Ambrosiana is one of the world's most important libraries."

As for *Codex Atlanticus*, it was "compiled by the sculptor and collector Pompeo Leoni," continues the wall panel, "at the end of the 16th century. Leoni brought together countless loose folios and large fragments, affixed them to 401 large format pages, and bound them together in a volume. Upon Leoni's death the *Codex Atlanticus* was inherited by Polidori Calchi, and later by Count Galeazzo Arconati, who donated it to the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in 1637."

Chronologically speaking, the content of the *Codex* covers a substantial period of time, from 1478 to 1518, dealing with hugely diverse areas of study, from hydraulics and the flight of birds to fortifications and military engineering, not to mention the copious theoretical annotations on mathematics, astronomy, geography, botany, and other topics. After recent restorations, the *Codex* drawings are now distributed on 1,119 loose pages."

To return to "Science Before Science," Section 1 "Tuscan Engineers": Leonardo's first encounter with engineering took place between 1469-71. As an apprentice in Verrocchio's workshop, he collaborated with creating and placing the gold-plated copper ball at the summit of Brunelleschi dome's lantern. He was also able to observe first-hand the cranes that Brunelleschi had created and used to build this dome of Florence's Cathedral, one of the most revolutionary building sites of the Renaissance.

On display in Section 2, "The Study of the Ancient World," is Leonardo's personal copy of Francesco di Giorgio Martini's *Trattato di Architettura*, an analysis of the relationship between the proportions of buildings and those of the human body. On loan from the Laurentian Library in Florence, complete with Leonardo's handwritten annotations, it's the only book we know with certainty belonged to Leonardo.

Two leaves from the *Codex Atlanticus* in Section 3: "Drawing and Perspective" feature perspective studies by Leonardo. One is of

a gear, another a small sketch of an artist drawing an armillary sphere or celestial globe with a perspectograph.

Leonardo lived in Milan from 1482 to 1502. It's difficult to determine if his drawings on display in Section Four: "Ideal Cities and Waterways," are of already-existing waterways or represent original proposals for improving Milan's waterways.

Between 1495 and 1497, while painting his *Last Supper*, Leonardo studied textiles and metallurgy. One of his most beautiful drawings on display in Section 5: "Ingenuity at Work" is of a spinning wheel with spindle.

Sections 6, 8, and 9 concern his "machines" for theatrical scenery and ephemeral celebrations, for war, and for flying. Among his illustrations here are canons, a catapult, crossbows and a glider. His "entertainment" drawings are all lost. These would have concerned temporary structures for the wedding between Giangaleazzo Sforza and Isabella of Aragon in 1489, scenery for the *festa* on January 13, 1490, known as *Paradise* with a libretto by Bernardo Bellincioni, and Scythian and Tartar costumes for the wedding of Ludovico il Moro and Beatrice d'Este in 1492.

My favorite two sections are 7: "Leonardo's Library," and 10: "His Myth." Due to his exclusively practical training, Leonardo de-

fined himself as a "omo senza lettere" ("an illiterate man"), yet, at his death he owned an exceptional library of 150 titles, which sadly have been dispersed. Nonetheless, we know many of the titles he owned from lists he made in his Codices. Until he moved to Milan in 1482, where he was eventually obliged to learn Latin and mathematics, he could not read Latin, so he read in the vernacular: Dante's *Divine Comedy* or translations of Ovid and Pliny, for examples. On display in Section 7 are a number of titles that might have been in his library and a number of illuminated manuscripts that he could not have afforded, but were associated with courts like those of his patrons, the Sforza, so he probably studied some.

The myth of Leonardo as an engineer and scientist began in 1796 after centuries of oblivion. In that year, Napoleon requisitioned Leonardo's manuscripts from the Ambrosiana Library and brought them to Paris. Finally, beginning in 1881, Leonardo's manuscripts were gradually made available in print, transforming their author into "a universal genius." Hence the 1939 exhibition "Leonardo da Vinci e delle Invenzioni italiane" served as a primacy of Italian genius and "proudly displayed the scientific and technological successes of an Italy that no longer needed the help of foreign nations."

As I wrote in my article "Experiencing Leonardo in Rome," *ITV*, April 2017, Leonardo came to Rome in 1513 at the behest of Giuliano de' Medici, Pope Leo X's younger brother and commander of the papal troops, and stayed three years, living in the Vatican's Belvedere. The article illustrates how Leonardo spent his time in Rome, although he was unhappy there because Pope Leo X preferred Michelangelo's work. This may help to explain why Rome is possibly home to only one of his works, *The Adoration of the Christ Child*, only recently attributed to him (due to a similar fingerprint



Details of a wing of a glider, from a drawing contained in the *Codex Atlanticus*

found on *The Lady with an Ermine* in Krakow) and not yet confirmed, in the Villa Borghese Museum. Another, *St. Jerome in the Wilderness*, in the Vatican Museums, is the subject of "Leonardo: il San Girolamo del Museo Vaticano" ("Leonardo: St. Jerome in the Vatican Museums").

In my earlier article I wrote: "Dating to c. 1480, so not painted in Rome and left unfinished, Leonardo's *St. Jerome in the Wilderness*... probably remained in the artist's possession until his death. According to the Vatican Museums' website, it was first mentioned and attributed to Leonardo in the painter Angelica Kauffmann's will (1741-1807). On Kauffmann's death, all traces of it disappeared, until it was found by chance and purchased by Napoleon's uncle, the Cardinal Joseph Fesch. According to tradition, the cardinal discovered the painting divided into two parts: the lower part in the shop of a Roman second-hand dealer where it formed the cover of a box [or cupboard], and that with the head of the saint at the shop of his shoemaker who had used it to make the cover of a stool. Over and above the story, the painting can really be seen to be cut into five parts. On the death of the cardinal, the picture was auctioned and sold a number of times until it was identified and purchased for Pius IX (pontiff from 1846 to 1878) for the Vatican *Pinoteca* (1856)."



Leonardo's unfinished
St. Jerome in the Wilderness

Although there are no documents about who commissioned the painting or where it was destined, the painting has elements that are typical of Leonardo's techniques: the landscape here and in both *Virgin of the Rocks*; the color scheme: greens and ochre here and in the *Adoration of the Magi*; the details of the neck and shoulder muscles here and in his anatomical drawings; and lastly, his painting of St. Jerome as the hermit not Father of the Church, as in Verrocchio's very similar *St. Jerome on display* in Florence.

The exhibition almost entirely consists of bilingual (Italian and English) wall panels explaining the reason for the exhibition, and illustrating the life of Leonardo with a time-chart, details of his life in Rome, the history of the

painting, the construction of its frame, and the discoveries made during its restoration. Aside from the painting in its custom-built frame, the only other artifact on display is a document on loan from the Historical Archives of the *Fabbrica di San Pietro* attesting to Leonardo's sojourn and apartment in the Belvedere.

In its hermetically sealed, temperature- and humidity-controlled, "travelling frame" (its construction illustrated with text and images in a wall panel), *St. Jerome* will travel first to the Metropolitan in New York from July 8 to October 6 and then to the Louvre's blockbuster exhibition from October 24-February 24, 2020. ◯

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