

The Château d'Abbadia (Pays Basque, France): Antoine d'Abbadie's romantic and political utopia

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This communication attempts to show how d'Abbadie's approach consisted in recreating a dreamlike microcosm expressing both his romantic and reactionary ideals. Abbadia's Gothic Revival is not limited to architecture and decors but it also spreads into the whole property in a way of life founded on feudal and Catholic social models.

The Château d'Abbadia (fig. 1) is a most enigmatic monument in the history of art and architecture, and its originality is most decidedly due to its unusually intimate link with its owner, Antoine d'Abbadie (1810-97).¹ Set on the verdant oceanic cliffs of the Basque coast, it originally comprised bourgeois residential apartments, an astrogeophysical observatory and a large chapel. D'Abbadie commissioned the building of his house with the famous architect Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, who was the emblematic and charismatic leader of the Gothic Revival in France². In association with Edmond Duthoit, his most faithful collaborator³, the architect conceived in his characteristic rationalist approach⁴ a castle that included strictly Gothic and more eclectic features, gathering heterogeneous inspirations, from Islamic art to contemporary fashion (figs. 2-3), from science and Ethiopian ethnography to

¹ This paper partly results of my doctoral thesis *Le château d'Abbadia à Hendaye: le monument idéal d'Antoine d'Abbadie*, which was defended in December 2012 at the Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour (France) under the direction of Pr. Dominique Dussol. This study is being published in a condensed version at the Presses Universitaires de Rennes in 2014 to mark the bicentenary of the architect Viollet-le-Duc's birth. Moreover, thanks to the initiative of the Ville d'Hendaye which is responsible for the visitor management of Abbadia, the 25,000 archives concerning the Château d'Abbadia – preserved for instance in Hendaye, Bayonne, Paris or Amiens – are being prepared for the website www.archives-abbadia.fr which will offer an exhaustive inventory, many digitized documents and educative and cultural articles.

² Many publications concern Viollet-le-Duc. The most recent work on him are led by Arnaud Timbert (Université Lille 3-Charles de Gaulle), Martin Bressani (School of Architecture of McGill University, Montréal), Laurent Baridon (Université Lyon 2-Lumière) and Jean-Michel Leniaud (Ecole Nationale des Chartes, Paris). They deal with the thematics of materials, organic theories, and scientific imaginary. An international conference entitled *Viollet-le-Duc (1814-2014), villégiature et architecture domestique* organized by the Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour will take place in Hendaye (France) on the 9th and 10th October 2014 in order to celebrate the bicentenary of his birth, denominated an Official National Commemoration by the French Ministry of Culture. See an indicative bibliography on: <http://www.inha.fr/spip.php?article2564>; and the call for papers for the conference on: <http://www.eahn.org/international-conference-on-viollet-le-duc/>, or in French on: <http://blog.apahau.org/appele-a-communication-colloque-international-viollet-le-duc-1814-2014-villégiature-et-architecture-domestique-9-10-octobre-2014/>

³ Barry Bergdoll, 'Edmond-Louis-Clément-Marie Duthoit', (MA Degree diss., King's College, Cambridge, 1979); Barry Bergdoll, "'The synthesis of all I have seen": the architecture of Edmond Duthoit (1834-1889)' in Robin Middleton, ed., *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth Century French architecture*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 217-249.

⁴ See below for explanations of 'architectural rationalism', in the sections 'Abbadia's romantic fancy' and 'Abbadia's Gothic revival as a counterculture'.

traditionalist religious architecture (figs. 4-5), from medieval reverie to rational philosophy (figs. 6-7).⁵

Having dedicated his entire life to learning, d'Abbadie bequeathed his property to a public knowledge institution, the Académie des Sciences of the Institut de France, so as to continue his works after his death. He died in 1897, his wife in 1901, and they still rest in the crypt of their chapel. Since then, their castle continues to belong to this learned society and, after nearly one century of private use, it was opened to visitors in 1996.⁶ Henceforth it might be considered as a remarkable work of Viollet-le-Duc's corpus as well as an astonishing building expressing the eclectic fashion of the Second French Empire.

Antoine d'Abbadie, (also correct would be Anthony Thompson d'Abbadie) was born in Dublin in 1810 (fig. 8). His father, Arnauld Michel d'Abbadie, came from the Basque country, in the south west of France. As a cleric and royalist, the latter had emigrated to Spain and then to Britain and Ireland at the beginning of the French Revolution. Antoine d'Abbadie's mother, named Elizabeth Thompson of Park, was a Catholic Irish doctor's daughter and her family had been persecuted because of the Test and Corporation Acts. His ancestors' experiences had undoubtedly consequences for d'Abbadie's Catholic fervor and political opinions. He grew up in Ireland until the age of 8, being confronted to religious persecutions. For example, his family and he used to pray clandestinely in a house equipped with chapel, and his godfather hid his function as Catholic priest for legal reasons. In 1818, following the Bourbon Restoration under Louis XVIII, d'Abbadie's family moved to France and set up home in Toulouse, moving to Paris ten years later.⁷

In Ireland as well as in France, Antoine d'Abbadie's mind was shaped by the romantic remembrance of the *Ancien Régime*. As well as the rebirth of a 'medieval' society, he also dreamt of global exploration. He ardently admired the romantic writer François-René de Chateaubriand, and James Bruce, the discoverer of the source of the Blue Nile, to such a point that the explorer's travel journal was d'Abbadie's bedside book. While reading Law at the Sorbonne, d'Abbadie planned to organize his own expedition towards the source of the main stream of the mythical river, the White Nile. Later, he aspired to participate in that quest which constituted an essential geopolitical issue of the industrial revolution and imperial era, implying not only the control of spaces but also the technical progress to manage this spatial control, particularly with regard to Franco-British rivalry. After six years of scientific, technical and moral preparation, he joined his younger brother Arnauld in Africa in 1837. He subsequently spent eleven years in Ethiopia, devoted to his mythic quest but also to ethnographical and geographical studies, the promotion of French diplomatic interests, and the establishment of Catholic missions in this mainly Orthodox Christian country⁸. Back to France in 1850, he was awarded the *Grande médaille d'or* of the Société de Géographie of

⁵ For 3D images of these rooms, see http://www.chateau-abbadia.fr/fr/visite_chateau_abbadia/le_vestibule and http://www.chateau-abbadia.fr/fr/visite_chateau_abbadia/la_bibliotheque.

⁶ To visit the Château d'Abbadia : <http://www.chateau-abbadia.fr/>

⁷ Note autobiographique d'Antoine d'Abbadie, n°1.09, Carton Correspondance Construction Premier Observatoire, archives du château d'Abbadia, Académie des Sciences.

⁸ See the introduction about this expedition in Antoine d'Abbadie, *Géodésie d'une partie de la Haute-Ethiopie*, (Paris : s.n., 1860-1873), accessed February 5, 2014, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5751392n.image.r=coll%C3%A8ge.f14.langFR>

Paris and the *Légion d'Honneur* for his 'discovery' of the source of the White Nile in 1846, which was actually erroneous⁹. Elected as a member of the Académie des Sciences in 1867, he became a well-known scholar, expert in Ethiopia and explorations¹⁰, and went on being involved in a number of scientific disciplines - geography, astronomy, geophysics, ethnography, or philology - as was typical of numerous wealthy scholars of this time. As a sponsor, he was one of the most important figures of the Basque cultural revival and of the campaign against slavery¹¹. Like many of his social background, he shared his life between Paris, where he focused on his social activities, and the provinces, where he retired to dedicate himself to scientific experiments and romantic meditations.

In 1859, he married Virginie Vincent de Saint-Bonnet, who was a native of Lyon's *grande bourgeoisie* and former nobility (fig. 9). In spite of her conservative education, she had a strong personality, was a lover of the arts, especially music and piano, and maintained a traditional nineteenth-century woman's role, that is to say, caring for her household and dedicating herself to her family's welfare. The couple never had children but together they left to posterity their amazing castle¹².

The Château d'Abbadia (1864-1884), considered as the reflection of its owners' personalities, their Gothic aesthetic choices and d'Abbadie's way of living, reveals their political and philosophical ideas. Given the sociohistorical context, Gothic revival architecture's meaning, in this specific case, may be viewed as an expression of political contestation, even as a form of counter-culture.

Abbadia's Romantic Fancy

In Abbadia, the Middle Ages were perceived as an ideal world; medieval romantic remembrance is associated with the affective nostalgia for d'Abbadie's childhood in Ireland, the latter being deeply immersed in Irish and British landscapes. Moreover, in 1835, aged twenty-five, he had travelled throughout the British Isles for

⁹ Of course, geographers debated the question of the Nile for many years. D'Abbadie's claim to have located the source, which was in fact the that of the Omo River, provoked lively discussions, and even severe attacks from some geographers, especially from Theodore Beke who went as far as accusing the French explorer of spy activities in the British newspaper *The Athenaeum* in 1850. From 1858, the subject intensified because of Richard Burton and John Hanning Speke's expeditions through Lake Victoria-Nyanza, upstream of which Speke located the source of the White Nile. Nevertheless, this discovery was not believed by specialists because he was not a geographer. In 1864, as he was going to confront his arguments to his more venerable companion, Burton, at the Royal Geographical Society, he died of a hunting accident the day before the planned discussion, which was perceived as a suicide – and so, as an admission of failure – for a long time. See, for example, see Anne Hugon, *L'Afrique des explorateurs vers les sources du Nil*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

¹⁰ His works are still considered as some of the foundations of Ethiopian ethnography. In particular, he created the first map of Ethiopia and the first French-Amharic dictionary, which comprises 15 000 words and has great ethnographical interest. He also gathered one of the most valuable collections of Ethiopian manuscripts, nowadays preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and is digitized and presented on the database Mandragore, keywords: country Ethiopie, cote Ethiopien d'Abbadie, see <http://mandragore.bnf.fr/jsp/rechercheExperte.jsp>, accessed February 5, 2014.

¹¹ For instance, see his poignant speech in 1896 : Antoine d'Abbadie, *Sur l'abolition de l'esclavage en Afrique*, (s.l.: extrait du Bulletin de la Société des Etudes coloniales et maritimes, 1896), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k106162z>, accessed February 5, 2014.

¹² See my doctoral thesis or its synthesis: Viviane Delpech, "Le château d'Abbadia, monument idéal d'Antoine d'Abbadie" *Euskonews* 667 (2013). Accessed February 5, 2014, <http://www.euskonews.com/0667zbk/gaia66703fr.html>

an initiatory journey, a sort of romantic “Grand Tour”, during which he prayed on the poet Robert Burns’s tomb and was attracted by Gothic survival and revival castles. Among the long list of the monuments he visited, we can mention the influence of Penrhyn castle in Wales and Dunluce Castle in Ireland. Later, while thinking about his house building, he visited Sir Walter Scott’s Abbotsford House, the emblematic reference of romanticism and nationalist medieval architecture whose aesthetic and spiritual model was widely diffused throughout Europe at that time. And, last but not least, Abbazia’s filiation with Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill House, famously the first whole building of the Gothic Revival, is obvious, as some elements seem to have been scrupulously copied from it.¹³

From an architectural and decorative viewpoint, all the representative components and even the clichés referring to the Middle Ages are collected in Abbazia, just as in most British or more widely European Gothic revival buildings¹⁴: coats of arms (fig. 10), Gothic stained-glass windows imitated from those of Cluny and Pierrefonds, a chapel, crenellations, a pseudo-dungeon – which in reality houses a staircase – turrets, an asymmetric and agglutinative plan, pointed arches, medieval furniture (fig.11),¹⁵ and an often fantastic sculpted bestiary - with the emblematic greyhound, the monstrous gargoyles or the more original crocodiles (fig. 12). The historical sweep continues inside the building with illusory medieval decoration, which is actually adapted to contemporary life. In fact this Gothic revival context produces an effect of coherence between d’Abbadie’s heterogeneous references as it is the castle’s main artistic thread. So, in one sense, Abbazia’s singular Eclecticism is impregnated by d’Abbadie’s particular romantic vision, and also reveals Viollet-le-Duc’s rationalist theories. Gothic revival permits effectively the bringing together of the ideal coherent ‘grand ensemble’ advocated by Viollet-le-Duc, who considered that architecture, furniture and decor must be aesthetically in harmony.¹⁶ But despite this theoretical meaning, Abbazia’s building is unsurprisingly symptomatic of the important movement of Gothic Revival and Medievalism which expanded in Europe from the end of the eighteenth century, and is often illustrated, besides the previous quoted British references, by Neuschwanstein Castle (Germany), Der Haar Castle (Utrecht, Netherlands), and the restorations to Notre-Dame de Paris and the Château de Pierrefonds (Oise, France). The Gothic aesthetic generally permitted the creation of imaginary decors as supports for the romantic reverie inspired of historicist literature and medieval myths. It is particularly pertinent in Abbazia’s case as d’Abbadie counted among his cultural references writers as Scott, Byron, Chateaubriand, Schiller or the fictional bard Ossian.

Abbazia’s Gothic spirit is expanded by its fabulous landscape which draws its stylistic roots in the British idealization of nature. Abbazia’s environment was imagined and restructured by the landscape architect Eugène Bühler, who realized more than one

¹³ As for d’Abbadie’s gothic castles references, see in particular: Carnet de 1835, ms 2081, Papiers d’Antoine d’Abbadie, Bibliothèque de l’Institut de France.

¹⁴ Marc Bascou et al., *Gothic revival : Architecture et arts décoratifs de l’Angleterre victorienne*, (Paris : Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1999).

¹⁵ For a 3D image of this room, see http://www.chateau-abbazia.fr/fr/visite_chateau_abbazia/la_chambre_empereur

¹⁶ Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens*.

hundred private or public gardens throughout France¹⁷. He conceived in Abbadia the illusion of a wild and to some extent hostile nature. Abbadia's landscape still testifies to his creative process, which was based on tree-massifs, curves and natural reliefs and proposed views inspired by Claude Lorrain's landscape paintings (fig. 13). This reveals the heritage of British landscape architects such as Lancelot Capability Brown or William Shenstone.

As was his general practice, Bühler magnified the pregnant natural or picturesque elements of d'Abbadie's property in order to make emerge the *genius loci* – the place's 'spirit' – by creating viewpoints and invitations to contemplation designed to showcase the castle's Gothic form. On account of its oceanic and mountainous environment, Abbadia's estate is similar to British picturesque landscapes, all the more as it involves a Gothic revival building and vernacular houses; these last correspond to Basque traditional agropastoral architecture (fig. 14),¹⁸ and recreate a past and unreachable society and all the social and ideological symbols it implies. The extent of the architectural imaginary and whimsy, and the irrationality with which designs were ordered, even led d'Abbadie to dismiss his master builder Delarocque. In fact, the craftsman was opposed to concealing the wings' ridgepoles for the crenellation to be distinguished at a distance of one hundred metres.¹⁹

These artificial decors, inside or outside, invite the contemplation of nature's power and elements – the ocean's waves, rocky cliffs, verdant grazing, the Rhune mountain top, the Cap du Figuier, but it also corresponds to a departure point of reverie and travel on the spiritual, spatial and temporal scales. Everything is contrived to let d'Abbadie, as a global *flâneur*, escape to a universe that suited him more than the present he rejected. In one way, from an aesthetic viewpoint, he reconstituted the environment that an educated person of the nineteenth century imagined to be a feudal lord's property. So the estate's Gothic inspiration has a complex relationship with its architectural realisation; it proceeds from a comprehensive and universalist project as well as of a nostalgic and fantasy vision of the world.

This spiritual tendency is materialized and consolidated by the chapel and also the omnipresent use of the Word, that is to say, the use of ornamental scripts. This decorative process was fashionable in the nineteenth-century's elite's residences but is particularly excessive in Abbadia. For that, the d'Abbadies chose a great deal of romantic and mystical quotations, extracted from sacred texts or anthologies of poems. For instance, in Virginie's room, a poem by the 'founder' of German romanticism, Friedrich Schiller, dealing with the flight of Time, is inscribed on the joists: 'Dreifach ist der Schritt der Zeit: / Zögernd kommt die Zukunft hergezogen, / Pfeilschnell ist das Jetzt entflohen, / Ewig still steht die Vergangenheit' [Triple is the transit of time; hesitant and mysterious the future comes to us; rapid as a dart the present flees; eternal and immutable the past rests]²⁰. The last verses of the British writer Buchanan's poem, 'The Syren', decorate the lounge's joists: 'O melancholy waters, softly flow! / O stars, shine

¹⁷ See in particular Louis-Michel Nourry, *Les jardins publics en province, espace et politique au XIXe siècle*, (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1997).

¹⁸ Monique Mosser and Georges Teyssot, eds., *Histoire des jardins de la Renaissance à nos jours*, (Paris : Flammarion, 1991).

¹⁹ Correspondance d'Abbadie-Viollet-le-Duc, Carton Construction du Château, Archives du château d'Abbadia, Académie des Sciences.

²⁰ Friedrich Schiller, *Gedichte*, (Leipzig: S.L. Crusius, 1804-1805) 66. Accessed February 5, 2014, <http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/N11187956.pdf>

softly, dropping dewy balm! / O moon walk on in sandals white as snow! / O winds, be calm, be calm! / For he is tired with wandering to and fro, / Yea, weary with unrest to see and know. / O charmed sound / That hoverest around! / O voices of the night! Sing low! Sing low! Sing low!’²¹. We can also quote the Latin sentence that is set on the observatory west wall: ‘Coeli enarrant gloriam dei’ [The skies tell God’s glory] extracted from David’s psalms (fig. 15).²² Or d’Abbadie’s room proposes the spiritual proverb ‘Nihil vita sine gestis, nihil gesta sine intentione, nihil intentio nisi adpetat Deum’ [Life is only worth by action, action is only worth by intention, intention is only worth if it comes from God]. So the use of the ornamental inscriptions creates a fanciful and timeless atmosphere; and the dominance of mysticism reinforces the propensity for introspection and metaphysical questionings that characterize romantic concerns in reaction to, in Abbadia’s case, the French Revolution’s Anticlericalism ²³.

More than the utilitarian function of architecture, Abbadia’s Gothic aims to stimulate the visitor’s imagination. Further, it invites him to a mystic introspection, to a trip in a dreamlike medieval world in harmony with nature.

The political refugee of History

The importance of the imaginary highlights a deep moral discomfort and testifies to a will to escape from contemporary society. As suggested above, d’Abbadie was influenced crucially by his ancestors’ stories. He considered that the nineteenth century was a period of immorality, of ‘lâcheté morale’ [moral cowardice], according to his words.²⁴ He strongly denied the French Revolution’s social and political heritage, especially the abolition of the privileges of the nobility, and the sidelining of the clergy. He therefore claimed his legitimist commitment by denigrating Napoleon III’s politics in spite of his youthful connections with the emperor. The two men had met in 1836 during a crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, on a ship conveying d’Abbadie to his first scientific mission to Brazil and the future emperor’s place of exile following his failed coup d’état in Strasbourg²⁵. In spite of the friendship born during this crossing, d’Abbadie was against the new Bonapartism and adhered to the Ultramontanist factions of religious conservatism. He blindly trusted the Pope’s authority, an ideological position which was marginal even in his own social background²⁶.

The deep reasons for these engagements are to be located in the decline and historical trauma that his family had undergone. Under the *Ancien Régime*, his paternal ascendance transmitted from generation to generation a social function named ‘abbé laïc’ - which can be translated as ‘secular abbot’ – which appeared between the tenth

²¹ Robert W. Buchanan, *Undertones*, (London: Strahan, 1865) 149-164. Accessed February 5, 2014, <http://dbooks.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/books/PDFs/600074487.pdf> . For a 3D image, see http://www.chateau-abbadia.fr/fr/visite_chateau_abbadia/le_salon_d_honneur

²² *Psalms*, 19 (18), 1-5.

²³ Alain Vaillant, ed., *Dictionnaire du romantisme*, (Paris : CNRS Editions, 2012).

²⁴ Dossier Montalembert 2, fol.324, ms 2077, Bibliothèque de l’Institut de France.

²⁵ The president of the Académie des Sciences, Gaston Darboux, eloquently narrated this meeting in a speech to pay tribute to d’Abbadie on the tenth anniversary of his death. See Gaston Darboux, *Notice historique sur Antoine d’Abbadie*, (Paris : Comptes-rendus hebdomadaires de l’Académie des Sciences, 1907); http://www.academie-sciences.fr/activite/archive/dossiers/eloges/Abbadie_Darboux.pdf , accessed February 5, 2014.

²⁶ For further information about this political point, see Delpech, *Le château d’Abbadia à Hendaye* and Pascal Ory, ed., *Nouvelle histoire des idées politiques*, (Paris : Hachette, 1987).

and the twelfth centuries. The 'abbé laïc' was generally an influential and rich individual who was attached to a parish. His status derived from his position as main sponsor of his parish, which thus allowed him the privileges to build his house near the church, to participate in the election of the priest, and to be buried in the church's sanctuary²⁷. Despite this important local function, the d'Abbadies, who were native to the village of Arrast in the inland and mountainous Basque country, came from the circle of modest landlords. But throughout his life, and like some other counterrevolutionaries, d'Abbadie vainly looked for clues of a potential – or dreamt – ascent to the great nobility. On account of this failure, he finally exhibited in his castle his wife's lineage which undoubtedly was much nobler than his own. That is why most of Abbadia's coats of arms are those of Virginie d'Abbadie's ancestors (fig.16), dating back over seven generations²⁸. To find them, in a quite scientific approach, d'Abbadie had done a good deal of genealogical researches because he needed to anchor these decorative elements - figuring his model of the universal ideal – in an authentic reality. Thus he made recompense for the affronts the French Revolution had made to his family and that of his wife by building his personal ideal world, even choosing his burial place in the crypt of his chapel, imitating the tradition of his ancestors.

Furthermore, d'Abbadie's society model was founded on the archaic notions of the code of honour and Christian devotion, which he considered as his family heritage and custom. This led him to break off his relations with his two brothers – Arnaud and Charles – for what he perceived as their disrespect for this strict traditional ethics. By choosing the Gothic revival style, he particularly erected two aesthetic elements that literarily inhabited the immediate landscape and had a deep symbolic meaning: the dungeon and the bell-tower (fig. 17). In this manner he materially claimed his political and philosophical vision of society which was dominated by feudal lords and ecclesiastical power.

However, not satisfied with creating a historical illusion, he instituted a way of life based on his ideal values. So he invented a utopian world, a dreamlike microcosm, in which he controlled everything. On his 415-hectare property, he instituted a system of sharecropping, which was current in contemporary landowners' properties but could be here assimilated to feudal organization with its lord and vassals. The difference from the sharecropping practices of his contemporaries lay in the paternalist and moralist way with the one d'Abbadie administrated his lands. In particular he stipulated that his thirty-five farmers should attend the dominical mass in his chapel, signalled by the sound of the bell.²⁹ And the property was governed by an austere moral code, breaking of which could lead to the dismissal of an employee.³⁰

D'Abbadie's moral precepts are also conveyed by the castle's decoration which contains stern phrases expressed in fourteen languages and often inscribed in Gothic script. These aphorisms dictate and normalise behavior, producing an austere, even oppressive atmosphere³¹.

²⁷ Jean-Baptiste Orpustan, 'Les noms de maison issus du latin abbatia dans le Pays basque médiéval' (Labourd, Basse-Navarre, Soule), in ed. Patri Urkizu, *Antoine d'Abbadie (1897-1997), Congrès international*, (Donostia-San Sebastian : Editions Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1998), 481-492.

²⁸ Delpech, *Le château d'Abbadia à Hendaye*, 439-440.

²⁹ For a 3D image, see http://www.chateau-abbadia.fr/fr/visite_chateau_abbadia/la_chapelle.

³⁰ Delpech, *Le château d'Abbadia à Hendaye*, 213-220.

³¹ See Viviane Delpech, 'L'Ethiopie au château d'Abbadia, de la création à l'expression d'un programme orientaliste', *Annales d'Ethiopie* 26, Centre Français d'Etudes Ethiopiennes-CNRS (2011) 129-165.

For example, the biblical Latin 'Memento morieris' ('Remember you will die') on the triumphal arch in the chapel is around the evangelists' animal symbols, reminding the faithful of the eschatology of Scripture and their inexorable death. The Arabic metaphor 'Do not throw a stone into the well in which you drink water' (fig.18), in the Room of Honour, and the provocative Ethiopian 'Pray there is no traitor around this table' in the dining room, interpellate the notion of betrayal and its spiritual Christian meaning. Or the English phrase of the Room of the Tower 'Far from the busy toils of life,/ Far from the world its cares strife,/ In solitude more pleased to dwell, /The Hermit calls you to his cell' is inscribed under Saint Anthony Abbot's statue, and invites the guest to asceticism as the exclusive way to move closer to God (fig. 19).

The essential contrast should be noted, between Abbadia's iconography and reactionary life and the evolution of French society, which was inevitably leaving paternalism and was heading to a more popular and egalitarian power and to secularism. Indeed, during Abbadia's building and existence, from the 1850s to the 1900s, France underwent numerous deep structural upheavals as the continuation of 1789: a new revolution in 1870, with Napoléon III's humiliating fall at Sedan and the establishment of the Third Republic, the legal establishment of the right of strike, the adoption of the Jules Ferry Laws concerning compulsory secular education, and finally the separation of Church and State, which can be considered as one of the foundations of the modern French nation³².

To sum up, the social and aesthetic symbols and the mental representations of the ancient world were associated in Abbadia to create a social illusion, a sort of "human comedy" as Balzac would have said³³, in which the human community constituted by d'Abbadie and his employees would live in quasi-feudal conditions, in a Medieval ideal which in reality did not exist. In one way the d'Abbadies lived in Abbadia as the feudal lords they would never be.

Abbadia's Gothic revival as a counterculture

Considering counterculture as a protest reaction against a recognized and official norm, two forms of "parallel" cultures, an aesthetic one and a political other, are observable in the use of Gothic revival in Abbadia.

From an artistic viewpoint, this stylistic choice is opposed to the academic doctrines and their neoclassical norm³⁴. In this sense, French artistic context during the nineteenth century was quite restrictive as far as civil buildings were concerned. Indeed Gothic was then admitted as the national style for sacred art but it was not widespread in the field of domestic and civil architecture. The majority of French bourgeois houses of this period do not look like Abbadia; they were built almost exclusively in accordance with neoclassical style and norm.³⁵

The Gothic revival commitment reflects d'Abbadie's tastes, of course. But its aesthetic particularities also give space for Viollet-le-Duc's archeological approach and

³² Dominique Barjot et al., eds., *La France au XIXe (1814-1914)*, (Paris : PUF/Quadrige, 2005).

³³ Honoré de Balzac, *La comédie humaine*, (Paris : La Pléiade, 1976).

³⁴ Robin Middleton and David Watkin, *Architecture du XIXe siècle*, (Paris/Milan : Gallimard/Electa, 1993).

³⁵ Claude Mignot, *L'architecture du XIXe siècle*, (Fribourg : Edition du Moniteur, 1983) ; François Loyer, *Histoire de l'architecture française. De la Révolution à nos jours*, (Paris : Mengès/Editions du Patrimoine, 1999).

nationalist preoccupations. The famous architect made precise study of Gothic monuments in France throughout his life, and strived tirelessly to rehabilitate the Medieval past – in particular Gothic architecture – which had been denigrated since the Renaissance. This engagement can be seen in his artistic and theoretical realizations in which he tried to reproduce Medieval architectural process, adapted to modernity. Moreover, at the time of Abbadia's building, the famous architect rebelled against the Académie des Beaux-arts' theories, as seen in his highly polemic *Entretiens sur l'Architecture*³⁶, published following his quarrel with the Ecole des Beaux-arts in early 1864³⁷. In this, he denounced the erroneous way with which the Académie appropriated Greco-Roman architecture by forgetting its rationalist principles and concentrating on aesthetic, and hence non-essential, concerns. Further, according to Viollet-le-Duc's theories, the neoclassical 'dictatorship' had given up expressing national identity; for him, architecture should be the product of history and embedded in the land.³⁸ And above all, the spirit of Gothic building combined the rationalist logic and the local – national – identity style, as Abbadia's architectural and aesthetic conception demonstrates. For these reasons he recommended to his 'civilization' – the Western European one – the use of Gothic revival as the basis of a renewed architecture of identity, diametrically opposed to the universal model which was acclaimed by the Académie des Beaux-arts. In this way, Abbadia contributes to this fundamental debate that animated the French – and more widely western – world of art and architecture throughout the nineteenth century.

Another subject which provoked intense debates between academist and anti-academist artists turned on painting technique, which particularly characterizes Abbadia's decors (fig. 20). The architect's polychrome scheme is similar to the processes of the colourist theorists such as Félix Duban, Jacques-Ignace Hittorff or Owen Jones, who however acted in a more conventional art, inspired by classical antiquity³⁹. This process is inscribed in the continuity of rationalist theories that Viollet-le-Duc explained for example in his *Entretiens*: the building had to result from an overall project in which architecture, decoration and furniture are interdependent⁴⁰. As in architecture, the inspiration of the Middle Ages aimed to create a modern and nationalist decorative art by referring to using the Ancients' know-how in an archeological approach gleaned from archeological study, an architectural process which had to correspond to Gothic precepts. This intellectual conception radically differs from d'Abbadie's spiritual and imaginative motivation. But decorative rationalism explains why the ornamental motifs are adapted to the spatial characteristics of the rooms, why colours are bright and distinct, why the figures of the paintings are demarcated by a compartmentalized black line (fig. 21). This visual technique comes not only from Gothic art of the thirteenth

³⁶ Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens*. These volumes were translated and published in English by Henry Van Brunt in 1875, and by the architect Benjamin Bucknall (who was a disciple of Viollet-le-Duc) in 1881. These translations made Viollet-le-Duc's teachings reachable to the American and British architects. See Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Discourses on architecture*, trans. Henry Van Brunt, (s.l.: Osgood, 1875) and Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Lectures on architecture*, trans. Benjamin Bucknall, (s.l.: Osgood, 1881).

³⁷ Mignot, *L'architecture du XIXe siècle* ; Loyer, *Histoire de l'architecture française* ; Middleton and Watkin, *Architecture du XIXe siècle*.

³⁸ Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens*.

³⁹ John Gage, *Couleur & Culture. Usages et significations de la couleur de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, (London : Thames & Hudson, 2008).

⁴⁰ Viollet-le-Duc, *Entretiens*.

and fourteenth centuries but also from Pompeian decorative art. The latter was indeed promoted by colourists who had discovered and highlighted Roman polychrome, and who were initially in opposition with the Academists who defended the more sober colours of the Renaissance⁴¹.

This polychromatic movement would progressively succeed in French decorative arts and architecture. But from a technical viewpoint, Viollet-le-Duc's medievalist decoration would be much appreciated on the other side of the Channel, with William Burges' works for instance⁴², where the notion of Gothic was closely bonded to ideas of nationalism and morality, as expressed by Pugin or Ruskin, for example. These claims run parallel to d'Abbadie's ideology, according to which French national identity found its roots in ancient nobility and in an exemplary Christianity that he believed to be present in Medieval history and artistic production.

Abbadia's Gothic revival integrates in the meantime some of the tastes of high romanticism and a political trend which asserts old values and an ancient, even reactionary, mode of governance. For being born at the beginning of the century, only a few years after the French Revolution, d'Abbadie bore the heritage of the counterrevolutionary elites that emigrated to Britain and encouraged the restoration of the monarchy. Furthermore his Gothic building is concomitant to the Gothic-revival castle's apogee of the 1850s, corresponding to the beginning of Napoleon III's reign. This historical and aesthetic trend was mainly to be found in France in central and western regions, which traditionally adhered to monarchism. And it participated to the fashion of holiday resort cities such as Biarritz and Trouville in France or Bath and Brighton in Great Britain, as an oniric outlet from urban daily life⁴³.

Although Abbadia was built during this modern period, its sprawling building soon made its style an obsolete and outmoded one. Finished in 1884, under the Third Republic, it results from an ideal of the first part of the nineteenth century, of a henceforth marginal and residual ideology. In all cases d'Abbadie's utopian thought had become completely powerless in front of institutions and the progress of modern society. Abbadia's Gothic revival architecture and way of life are the indicators of d'Abbadie's opposition to the established order and of the social, religious and political contemporary model. But this opinion does not mean that d'Abbadie was only an immobilist; as a scholar, he dedicated his lifetime, particularly in Abbadia, to sciences under the aegis of Catholicism's doctrines. He wanted society to evolve, but with what he thought to be good foundations, that is to say, relying on its Catholic roots and chivalrous values. As a matter of fact the fundamentals of his philosophy lay in a surprising mixture of Thomism and Augustinism, in which society's and sciences' progress constituted the best way to reach God's perfection. This original ideology

⁴¹ Gage, *Couleur & Culture*.

⁴² William Burges (1827-1881) was an English Victorian architect and designer. He is well-known for his numerous prestigious restorations, in particular the one of Cardiff Castle. Like Viollet-le-Duc, he encouraged the renewal of Medieval art and tradition. See for example the following publications : J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Strange Genius of William Burges*, (London/Cardiff: Victoria and Albert Museum/National Museum of Wales, 1981) ; J. Mordaunt Crook, *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream*, (s.l.: Frances Lincoln, 2013).

⁴³ Bernard Toulhier, « Les réseaux de la villégiature en France » *In Situ, revue des patrimoines* 4 (2005). Accessed February 5, 2014, <http://insitu.revues.org/1348> ; Bernard Toulhier, *Villégiature de bord de mer XVIIIe-XXe siècle*, (Paris : Centre des Monuments Nationaux/Editions du Patrimoine, 2011) ; Yves Perret-Gentil et al., eds., *Les villes balnéaires de l'Europe occidentale du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*, (Paris : PUPS, 2008).

therefore explains the surprising iconographic association of Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine of Hippo on the stained-glass windows in the choir of the chapel (fig.22). Thus the utopist scholar d'Abbadie mainly caught philosophical tendencies 'off-balance' and demonstrated his deep belief – or illusion – that his personal model could become a perennial solution to social troubles.

In one sense, we can say that he continued the work of his father, who died suddenly in 1832 from tuberculosis and rests in the Cimetière du Père-Lachaise, and that he led his own counterrevolution, although in vain. D'Abbadie, as clericist and royalist, inscribed his life in his father's footsteps, and this cleric and royalist who never accepted the French Revolution. In this sense, d'Abbadie's personal sepulchre in Abbadia was once more against the contemporary current which, privileging modern hygienist practices and a new conception of death, preferred to develop the use of cemeteries⁴⁴. His burial place inspired by those of feudal lords confirms in the end the marginality of his life, even though he had a recognized and prestigious social status. But what can astonish the onlooker is the sober aesthetic of his tomb, which could have logically been a Gothic monument but is entirely bare. At last, in his act of legacy to the Académie des Sciences, his will to control his castle's use after his death again reveals his backward-looking, utopian and unachievable vision of the universe. For instance, at this time of progress to democracy and secularism, he recommended to the Académie des Sciences to constitute a catalogue of 500 000 stars which would be updated each fifty years, to keep at the castle's service exclusively Basque people, or to employ a priest as Abbadia's observatory's director who could carry out scientific research and celebrate mass regularly⁴⁵. Though this latter point could not be officially inscribed in the act of legacy for legislative and political reasons, Abbadia's legatees respected this original will by employing an astronomer who was also a clergyman until the observatory's closure in 1975 (fig.23)⁴⁶. Thus the Académie des Sciences prolonged in one way its generous donor's utopia as far as it could.

Conclusion: the last of the Crusaders

Abbadia's Gothic Revival has a complex meaning, for the castle and its estate constitute a place of escape for the romantic gentleman, who aspired to contemplation and introspection, and a historical refuge, an idyllic hermitage, a utopian island, for the

⁴⁴ Michel Ragon, *L'espace de la mort. Essai sur l'architecture, la décoration et l'urbanisme funéraires*, (Paris : Albin Michel, 1981).

⁴⁵ Acte de donation, 1896, Carton Donation, Archives du château d'Abbadia, Académie des Sciences.

⁴⁶ The observatory worked during the twentieth century. It was a branch of CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) from 1958 to 1975, when it closed because of the obsolescence of its equipment. Nevertheless its scientific instruments hold an important historical interest by reason of their antiquity and their unique character. Most of them are graduated with the decimal system, which testifies to the debates about the unities of measure throughout the nineteenth century. For these two reasons, all Abbadia's instruments are protected as historical monuments. During the inventory of French astronomical heritage ordered by the ministry of Culture, Françoise Leguet-Tully and Jean Davoigneau studied Abbadia's equipment in 2001; see http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/memoire/VISITES/abbadia/lieu_frameset.htm

counterrevolutionary idealist Antoine d'Abbadie, where he could openly reveal his unorthodox political opinions. Without doubt, the recourse to Gothic forms in the oceanic Basque landscape of Abbadia the fantasy form of one of the last witnesses of an archaic world confronting its own disappearance (fig.24).

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Figure 1: The château d'Abbadia by E.-E. Viollet-le-Duc and E. Duthoit (C. Rebière-Balloïde Photo)



Figure 2: The Arabic smoking room (Viviane Delpech)



Figure 3: The lounge (Photoclub Hendayais/Ben)

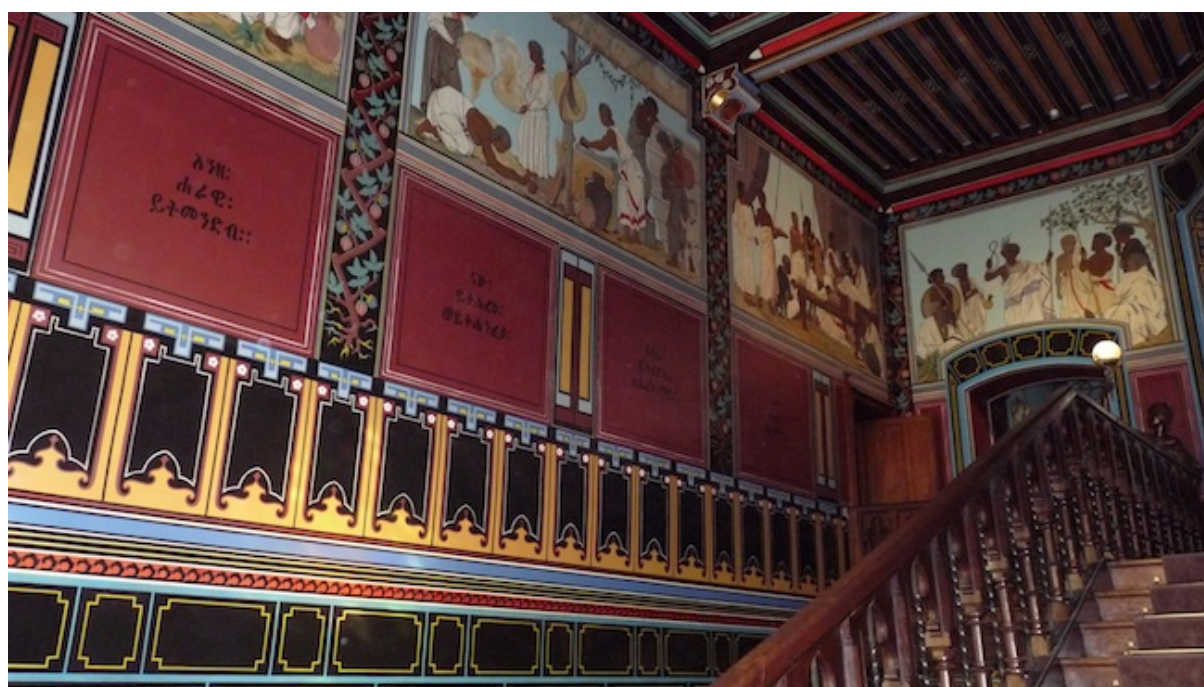


Figure 4: The Ethiopian paintings in the hallway (Viviane Delpech)



Figure 5: The chapel (Viviane Delpech)

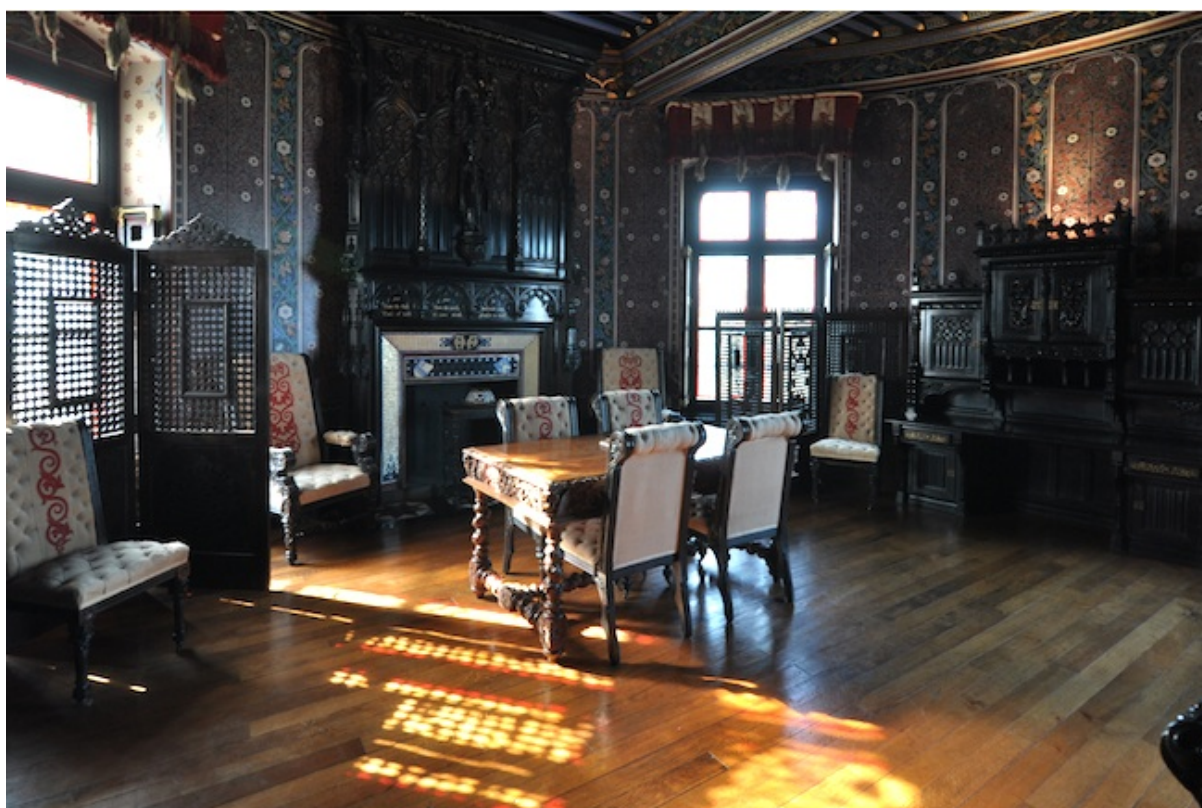
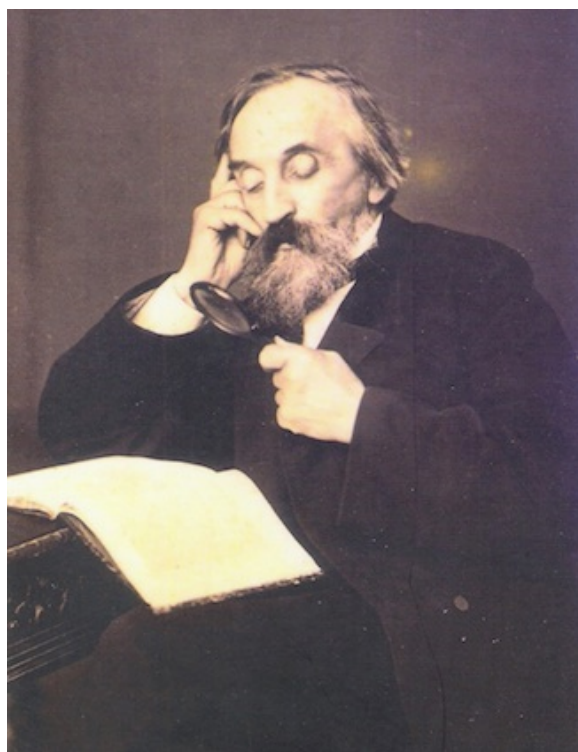


Figure 6: The Room of the Tower (Viviane Delpech)



Figure 7: The Observatory



Figures 8 and 9: Antoine d'Abbadie (Abbadie-Académie des Sciences) and Virginie d'Abbadie (Abbadia- Académie des Sciences).

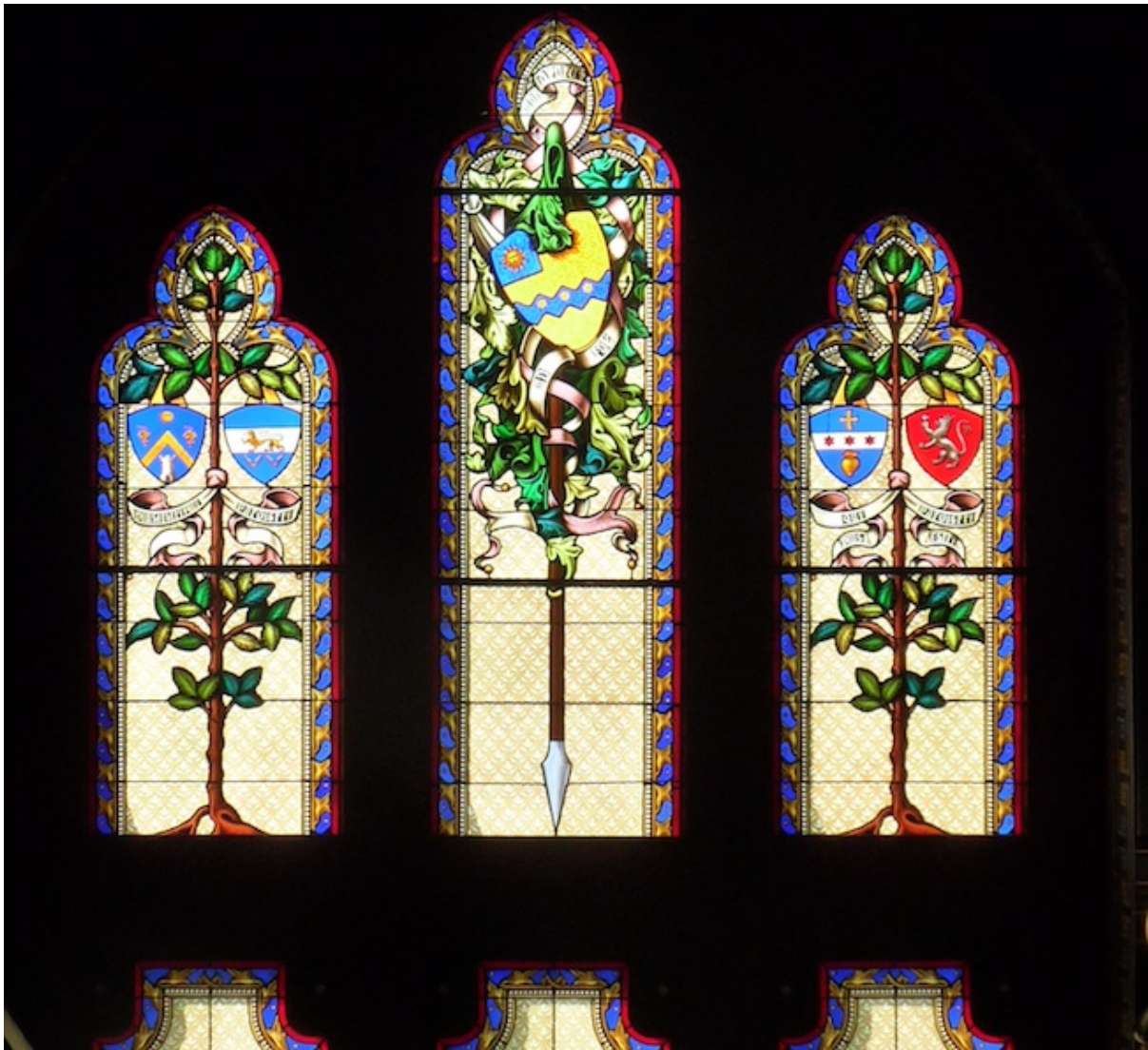


Figure 10: Stained glass windows in the Hallway (Viviane Delpech)



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Figure 13: The Estate of Abbadia, from the air looking southward (C. Rebière-Balloïde Photo)



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Figure 18: Sentence in the chimney in the room of Honor: *Do not throw a stone into the well from which you drink water* (Viviane Delpech)

Figure 19: The chimney of the room of the Tower (Viviane Delpech)





Figure 20: Painted decor of the Room of the Tower (Viviane Delpech).

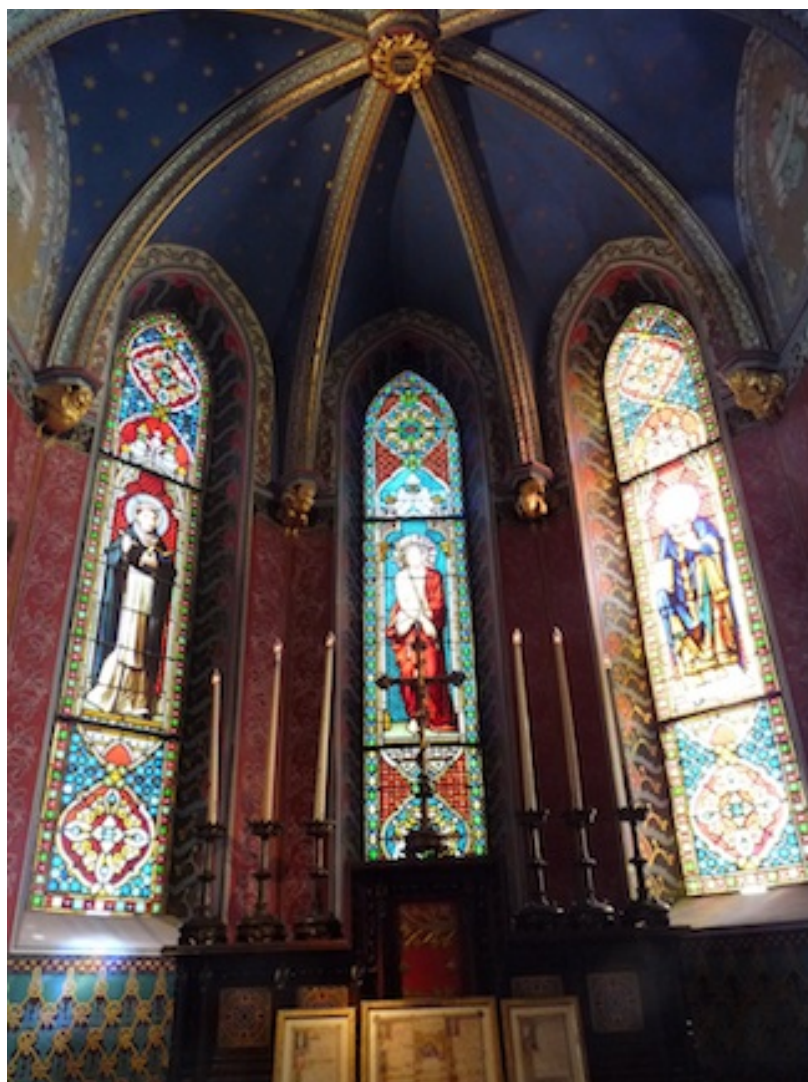


Figure 21: Stained-glass windows in the Chapel (Viviane Delpech)



Figure 22: Detail of the Ethiopian Paintings (Viviane Delpech).



Figure 23: Abbazia's Observatory, early 20th century (Private Collection)



Figure 24: The Château d'Abbadia from a wood in its estate, early 20th century (Private Collection).