Berthold Schwarz Encyclopedia Article

Berthold Schwarz

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Contents

Berthold Schwarz Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Berthold Schwarz.....3

Berthold Schwarz

fl. 1300s

German monk and alchemist who was once credited with the discovery of gunpowder (c. 1313) in Europe, though Roger Bacon is now known to have discussed it earlier. A statue in the town of Freiberg claims that he invented gunpowder and firearms, and a copper engraving found in numerous books on explosives depicts Schwarz firing a charge of gunpowder with a flint of steel, marked with the date 1380. Schwarz has also been cited as the inventor of the cast bronze cannon in Europe. However, there is no clear evidence of his discoveries, or even of his life (no birth or baptismal record, tombstone, monastery roll, or other documents attest to his existence), and it is possible that "Black Berthold" is a myth.