U.S.News & WORLD REPORT

THE 7 KEYS TO THE CODE

The Da Vinci Code, Dan Brown's bestselling novel, has captivated the imagination of millions of readers—and aroused heated controversies. Readers everywhere want to know what's fact and what's fiction. Inside this Special Collector's Edition, you'll find the answers to all these key questions:

BEHIND THE CODE. What explains the phenomenal success of *The Da Vinci Code*? How does it connect to the Holy Grail legend? And who is Dan Brown, the enigmatic man behind the mystery?

ALL ABOUT MARY. Was Jesus actually married to Mary Magdalene? Was she his favorite disciple—and possibly his heir apparent? Did they have a child together?

HISTORY'S GREATEST COVERUP? Are the lost Gospels real? How different was early Christianity from the Christianity practiced today? Did the early church fathers brutally suppress some of Jesus's true teachings?

LEONARDO AND HIS SECRETS. Did Leonardo da Vinci belong to a bizarre secret society? Are there hidden messages in some of his most famous paintings? And is that really a woman in *The Last Supper*?

THE NETHERWORLD OF CONSPIRACIES. Who were the sinister Knights Templar? What goes on in the hidden world of Opus Dei? What's inside the famous *Dossiers Secrets*?

THE ORIGINS OF THE HOAX. Who was Abbé Saunière? Did he really discover a great treasure in his church in southwestern France? And what is his connection to the Priory of Sion?

RESOURCES. Where is the real path of the Paris Meridian? What's buried in the church crypt beneath Saint-Sulpice? Are there 666 panes in the famous pyramid at the Louvre?

PLUS: An Advance Look at Dan Brown's Next Thriller

CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE: Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, Amy D. Bernstein, Dan Burstein, Bart D. Ehrman, Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, Susan Haskins, James Martin, S.J., Father Richard McBrien, Laura Miller, Sherwin B. Nuland, Elaine Pagels, Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, James M. Robinson, David A. Shugarts, and Margaret Starbird.

COLLECTOR'S EDITION

U.S.News & WORLD REPORT

SECRETS of the DAVINCI CODE

THE UNAUTHORIZED GUIDE TO THE BESTSELLING NOVEL

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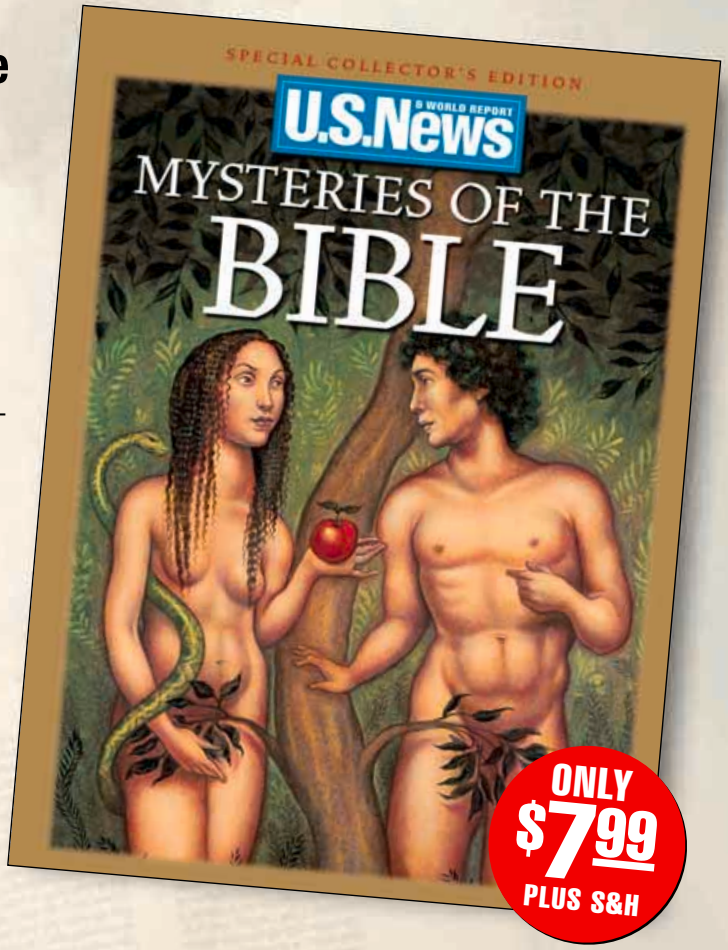

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Secrets of the Da Vinci Code

CONTENTS

6

Secrets of the Da Vinci Code

Decoding the *Da Vinci* Phenomenon | 7
Dan Brown's novel is not only a record bestseller; it has ignited a firestorm of discussion about religious history, sex, and the Catholic Church.

The Man Behind the Mystery | 16
Dan Brown himself is one big riddle. And he likes it like that.

20

All About Mary

Saint ... or Sinner? | 23
There's far more to Mary than the official penitent—and prostitute—of church history.

The "Sacred Feminine" | 28
Long overlooked, the links between Christianity and ancient goddesses and fertility cults are now being explored.

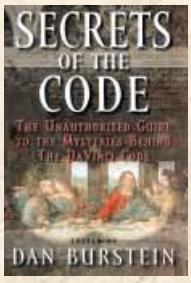
30

History's Greatest Coverup?

The Treasure of Nag Hammadi | 32
The so-called Gnostic Gospels have cast new light on the early days of Christianity.

Christianity's Untidy Start | 39

The Church Triumphant | 42
Did the early Church fathers suppress the opposition?



Secrets of the Code

Much of this special Collector's Edition of *U.S. News & World Report* is excerpted from the bestselling book SECRETS OF THE CODE: THE UNAUTHORIZED GUIDE TO THE MYSTERIES BEHIND THE DA VINCI CODE. Edited by Dan Burstein, *Secrets of The Code* explores, through the eyes and opinions of the experts—archaeologists, theologians, art historians, philosophers, and scientists—the major themes and questions raised in Dan Brown's novel, from who was Mary Magdalene to whether Leonardo encrypted secret messages in his art. Burstein also wrote several of the articles that appear here, including introductions to various chapters. The editors would like to thank him and Arne de Keijzer, the book's managing editor, for their help and cooperation in producing this project.

From *Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries Behind The Da Vinci Code*, edited by Dan Burstein and published by Client Distribution Services, Inc. Copyright © 2004 by Squibnocket Partners LLC.

COVER: LEONARDO DA VINCI, *THE LAST SUPPER.* ALINARI / ART RESOURCE. **TITLE PAGE:** LEONARDO DA VINCI, *PORTRAIT OF A BEARDED MAN,* POSSIBLY A SELF-PORTRAIT, BIBLIOTECA REALE, TURIN, ITALY / BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY. **GRAPHIC (PAGES 4-5):** LASZLO KUBINYI FOR *USN&WR*

48

Leonardo and His Secrets

A Feast for All Eyes | 51
Leonardo da Vinci hovers over *The Da Vinci Code* from the first moment in the Louvre to the last. Did he integrate a secret coded message into *The Last Supper*? And why is Mona Lisa smiling?

The Last Supper | 52
Could it really be Mary Magdalene sitting next to Jesus? A close look at the disputed painting.

Inside the Mind of a Genius | 56
From age 30 on, Leonardo produced more than 5,000 remarkable manuscript pages of notes, ideas, and drawings.

60

The Netherworld of Conspiracies

Knights of Mystery | 63
Lovers of conspiracies will delight in the murky Priory of Sion and the equally mysterious Knights Templar, a curious body of medieval soldier-monks of sinister reputation who—reputedly—were the guardians of a great secret.

The Enigma of Opus Dei | 68
The most controversial group in the Catholic Church today, it is seen by some as a cult-like organization—and by others as doing God's work.

The Riddles Have It | 70
The Da Vinci Code is an artful web of mysterious codes and secret symbols that must be solved by Robert Langdon at breakneck speed—or else.

75

The Origin of the Hoax

The Da Vinci Con | 76
The ever-rising tide of sales of the *Code* has lifted some pretty odd boats, and none odder than the dodgy yet magisterial *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* a 1980s bestseller that underlies the novel.

The French Confection | 78
Beginning in the 1950s, a small group of men with neo-chivalric and nationalist leanings was able to perpetrate what is almost certainly a marvelously intricate hoax—the Priory of Sion.

82

Resources

In the Footsteps of *The Da Vinci Code* | 82
Our armchair guide to the hot spots in the novel, from the blood-soaked Louvre and looming Saint-Suplice to Scotland's Rosslyn Chapel. Don't leave home without it.

If You Loved the Novel ... | 85
What do you read next? Our suggestions of books, movies, and websites for further exploration.

Dan Brown's Next Caper | 87
For Robert Langdon, all clues to his next adventure seem to be pointing in one direction: Washington, D.C., home of many Masonic mysteries.

FROM LEFT: AKG; DAGLI ORTI—GALLERIA SABAUDA TURIN / THE ART ARCHIVE; GIRAUDON / ART RESOURCE; ALINARI / ART RESOURCE (2); ANTONIO RIBEIRO—GAMMA; STEFANO DE LUIGI—CONTRASTO / REDUX

Cracking The Da Vinci Code with Robert Langdon & Sophie Neveu

Timetable

At 10:46 Friday night, following orders from a mysterious figure, Silas shoots curator Jacques Saunière in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Before dying, Saunière leaves a trail of coded messages in blood and black-light ink throughout the Grand Gallery of the Louvre.

SATURDAY

1. **12:32 AM** Bezu Fache, head of Paris police, summons Robert Langdon from the Ritz Hotel to the bizarre crime scene in the Louvre.
2. **1:10 AM** Sophie Neveu interrupts them.
3. **1:13 AM** Silas searches St. Sulpice for Grail keystone.
4. **1:47AM** Secret message near the *Mona Lisa,* and a hidden key, reveal Saunière belonged to the Priory of Sion.
5. **1:56 AM** Neveu and Langdon sneak out of the Louvre, foiling police.
6. **3:35 AM** Neveu and Langdon remove the precious keystone from bank vault in Rue Haxo, Paris.
7. **4:45 AM** At his chateau in Villette (near Versailles), Sir Leigh Teabing tells Neveu the Holy Grail is Mary Magdalene, Jesus's wife and successor.
8. **5:00 AM** Silas knocks out Langdon in Sir Leigh's drawing room while attempting to steal the keystone for Opus Dei.
9. **5:43 AM** Neveu, Langdon, Sir Leigh, and his servant, Rémy, tie up Silas and escape to England, unlocking keystone's cryptex en route.
10. **6:30 AM** Bezu Fache, in pursuit, misses them as they land in Kent, England.
11. **7:40 AM** Silas nearly steals the second cryptex at London's Temple Church.
12. **8:20 AM** Mysterious plotter who ordered Saunière's murder hides in London's Westminster Abbey.
13. **8:25 AM** Silas's shootout with police at Opus Dei in London.
14. **8:30 AM** Langdon and Neveu hunt for clues in the abbey to the code that will open the second cryptex.
15. **8:45 AM** In the abbey's Chapter House, Teabing admits to ordering Saunière's murder, Langdon deciphers the keystone, and Bezu Fache arrests Teabing.
16. **7:00 PM** Neveu finds her true identity at Rosslyn Chapel—and the trail leads back to Paris.

Robert Langdon
A professor of "religious symbology"—a field of study that exists only in Dan Brown's mind—Langdon arrives in Paris to give a lecture on pagan symbolism.

Langdon, who was first introduced in Brown's earlier novel, *Angels & Demons,* is his tribute to John Langdon, author of *Wordplay: Ambigrams and Reflections on the Art of Ambigrams,* one of Brown's favorite books.

Sophie Neveu
A young, pretty cryptographer, Neveu becomes Langdon's ally in the search for the truth about the murder of Saunière, her estranged grandfather.

Sofia, in Greek, means wisdom. Her last name, Neveu, is a homonym of the French word *nouveau,* or new. Combined, the full name adds up to *"New Wisdom."* At the center of the name Neveu is the word "Eve," pointing to Sophie's possibly unique position in the world as the chalice carrying Christ's blood.

Jacques Saunière
The curator of the Louvre, Saunière is also Grand Master of the Priory of Sion. As the novel begins he is found dead—naked, and spread-eagled on the floor of the Grand Gallery—with a pentacle scrawled in blood on his torso.

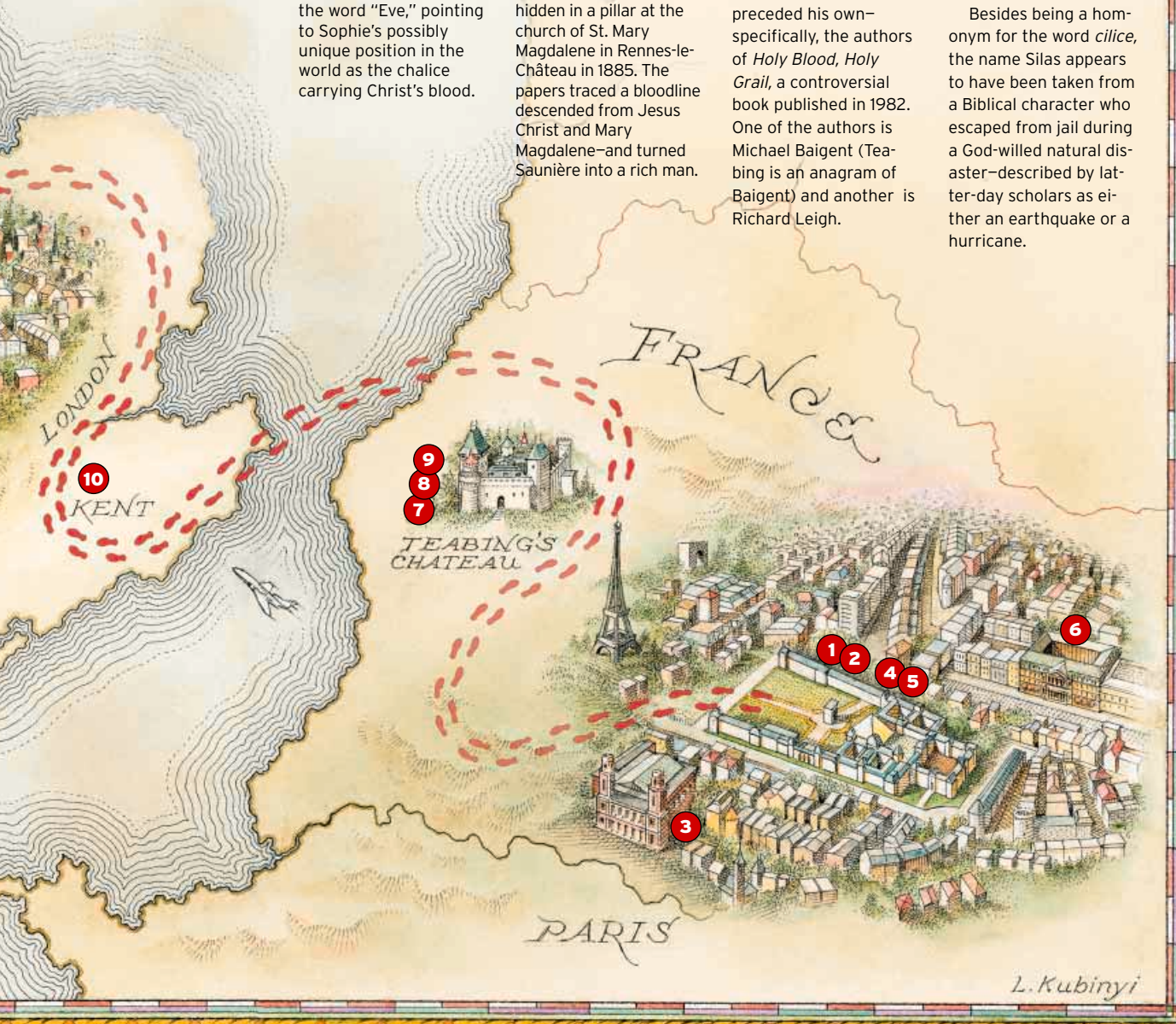
His name is derived from that of a French priest, Abbé Bérenger Saunière, who, according to legend, discovered mysterious parchments hidden in a pillar at the church of St. Mary Magdalene in Rennes-le-Château in 1885. The papers traced a bloodline descended from Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene—and turned Saunière into a rich man.

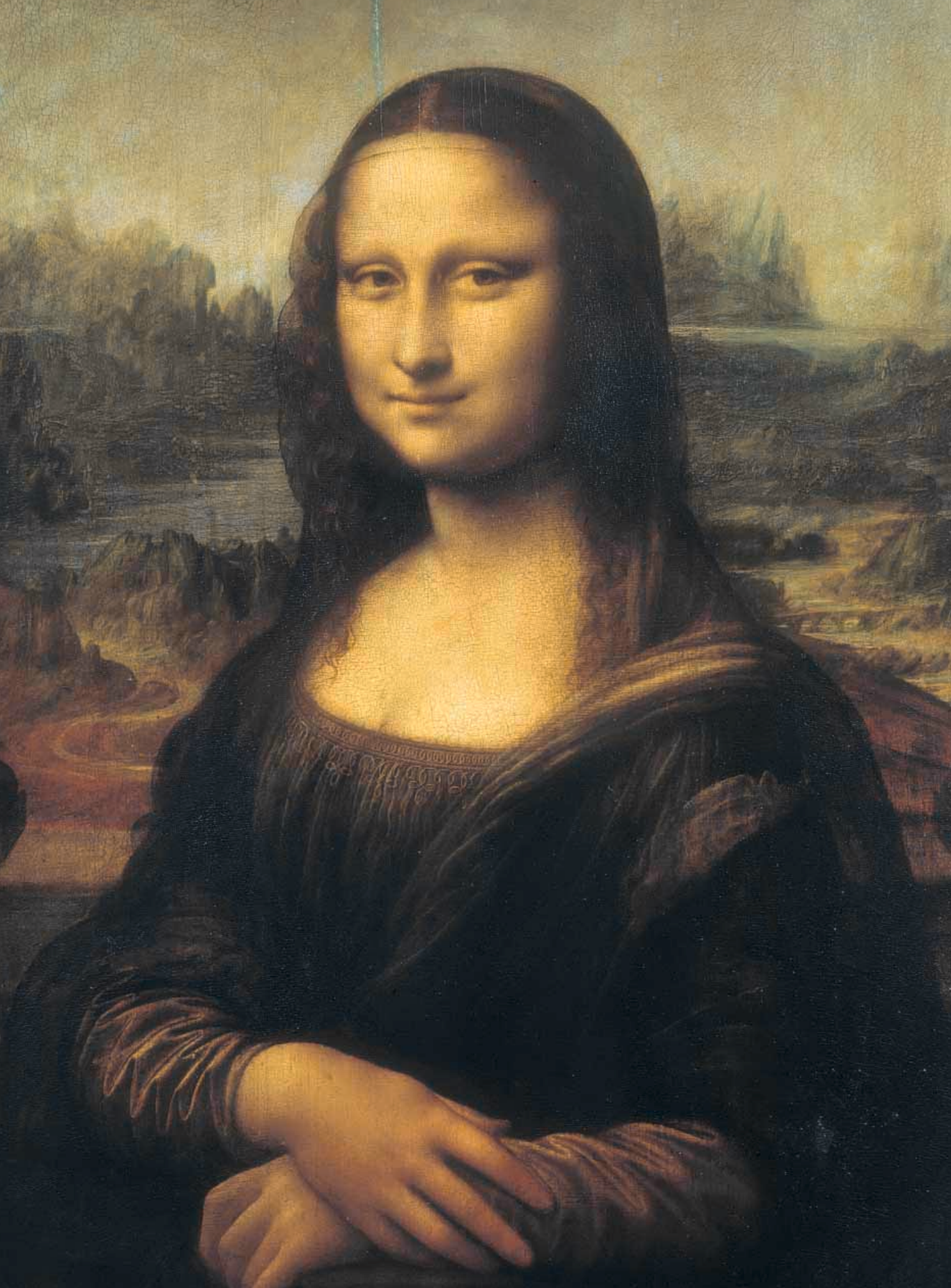
Sir Leigh Teabing
Not only is Sir Leigh a former "British Royal Historian"—a title that does not exist; he is the world's most renowned living expert on the Holy Grail. His henchman is a manservant named Rémy.

In creating the enigmatic Teabing, Dan Brown was paying tribute to the conspiracy theorists whose work preceded his own—specifically, the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* a controversial book published in 1982. One of the authors is Michael Baigent (Teabing is an anagram of Baigent) and another is Richard Leigh.

Silas
An albino monk and a member of the Catholic group Opus Dei, Silas is an orphan who is given orders from an individual known as "The Teacher" to murder Saunière. He is known for his deft practice of corporal mortification, which involves attaching a spiked chain called a cilice to his thigh.

Besides being a homonym for the word *cilice,* the name Silas appears to have been taken from a Biblical character who escaped from jail during a God-willed natural disaster—described by latter-day scholars as either an earthquake or a hurricane.





Decoding the *Da Vinci* Phenomenon

... OR HOW A 24-HOUR THRILL RIDE THROUGH PSEUDO-HISTORY BECAME A SENSATION

BY **AMY D. BERNSTEIN**

At the beginning of *The Da Vinci Code,* Robert Langdon, "Harrison Ford in Harris tweed" and distinguished professor of symbology at Harvard, is summoned to the Louvre to examine the corpse of the curator, Jacques Saunière, victim of an apparent ritual murder. The scene is film noir-esque:

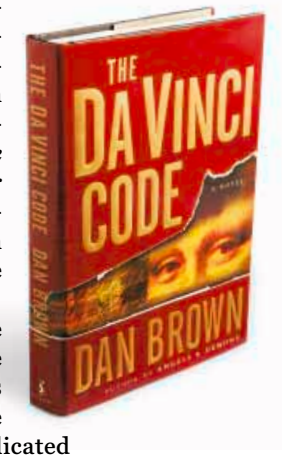
> *"The bloody star, centered on Saunière's navel, gave his corpse a distinctly ghoulish aura. ...*
>
> He did this to himself. ...
>
> *'It's a pentacle', Langdon offered, his voice feeling hollow in the huge space. 'One of the oldest symbols on earth. Used over four thousand years before Christ.'*
>
> *'And what does it mean?'*
>
> *Langdon always hesitated when he got this question. Telling someone what a symbol 'meant' was like telling them how a song should make them feel—it was different for all people."*

Eerie and mysterious, the pentacle is one of the central symbols in *The Da Vinci Code,* the phenomenally bestselling thriller that—remarkably—has an academic for its hero, makes knowing reference to Renaissance art and is filled with historical allusions to everything from the early Christian Church to the Crusades. Within minutes of seeing the corpse, Robert Langdon and Agent Sophie Neveu, a beautiful and gifted young cryptanalyst, set off on a fast-paced, 24-hour treasure hunt through France and England, aided by a series of clues and puzzles that eventually lead them to Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland. Several corpses later in this twenty-first-century retelling of the Holy Grail legend, the murders are solved. But the final resting place of the Grail comes only in the Epilogue, in an oh-yes-I-forgot-to-tell-you-finale: Dan Brown has led his readers on a classic wild goose chase.

Widespread readership of an intriguing thriller is nothing unusual, but *The Da Vinci Code* is something else again. In the almost two years since its publication, the novel has become a record bestseller, with 7.35 million copies in print. But it has also managed to ignite a firestorm of discussion about religion and sex, core doctrines of the Catholic Church, Renaissance art, symbols, codes, and even the history of the Western World as we know it. Despite its patently fictional content and glaring factual inaccuracies, *The Da Vinci Code* has been the subject of endless cocktail party chatter and water-cooler discussions. It has even been deemed worthy of an online Ivy League course: "The Da Vinci Code Demystified: A Scholarly Perspective," co-authored by Harold Attridge, dean of the Divinity School at Yale University, and two Yale colleagues—not something that normally happens after the publication of, say, a John Grisham novel. Dean Attridge says he proposed the online seminar after his talks on *The Da Vinci Code* had drawn record turnout at events all over the country. "Though you gag at the historical claims in it," he says, he spoke on every occasion to packed houses of Yale alumni "who sat with rapt attention."

Why the rapt attention from Ivy League graduates, no less? The secret lies in the novel's potent convergence of elements that entertain, enlighten, and empower the reader. A succession of seemingly complicated codes, pregnant symbols, and clues promises to lead to a hidden "truth"— which in turn promises a seismic shift in nothing less than the bedrock beliefs of Christianity itself. Mixing reality and fantasy, Brown has challenged the idea that re-

SWEET SMILE OF SUCCESS. Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* has captivated an international audience. So has the book.



AKG

CRIME SCENE. I. M. Pei's bold glass pyramid at the Louvre leads to the galleries where the deed was done.

ceived notions of the Bible and the Church are a relevant mirror for our twenty-first-century culture. At a time when the Catholic Church is in crisis, he is offering new meaning through the cryptic symbols and coded messages of ancient philosophies and pagan religions. As Catholic writer Sandra Miesel notes of Dan Brown's book in her review in *Crisis Magazine*, *"The Da Vinci Code* takes esoterica mainstream."

The main source for *The Da Vinci Code* is the "nonfiction" bestseller *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* which was first published in 1982 and is conspiracy-theory writing at its most deft. The project was originally the brainchild of Henry Lincoln, who had become intrigued with the story of Mary Magdalene's enigmatic fate after picking up an obscure book, *Le Trésor Maudit* (1968), by Gérard de Sède, one summer on the way to a rental house in France. Along with Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, Lincoln produced three very successful documentaries about the story in the 1970s that led in turn to the book. At the center of the documentaries and book was a small, hilltop town in rural southwestern France, Rennes-le-Château. It was home to an obscure village priest, Bérenger Saunière, who is said to have made an earth-shaking discovery at the end of the nineteenth century involving a trove of parchments hidden in the local Church of Saint Mary Magdalene. On the advice of his Bishop, the story goes, Saunière took the documents to the church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, and, upon his return home, became suddenly and unaccountably rich. This story was later revived in the 1950s by Pierre Plantard, a right-wing, neo-chivalric intriguer, who used it to perpetrate an elaborate hoax involving the rediscovery of Saunière's parchments in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The *"dossiers secrets"* purportedly proved that the medieval French Merovingian royal dynasty still existed, and the families St. Clair and Plantard, living descendants of the Merovingians, were Christ's direct bloodline. A secret society called the Priory of Sion had allegedly been guarding the truth for centuries.

In *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* Lincoln, Leigh, and Baigent further elaborated the story of Rennes-le-Château and used the secret of its church of Saint Mary Magdalene to bolster the conspiracy theory that Christ may not only have been married to Mary Magdalene and fathered a child with her,

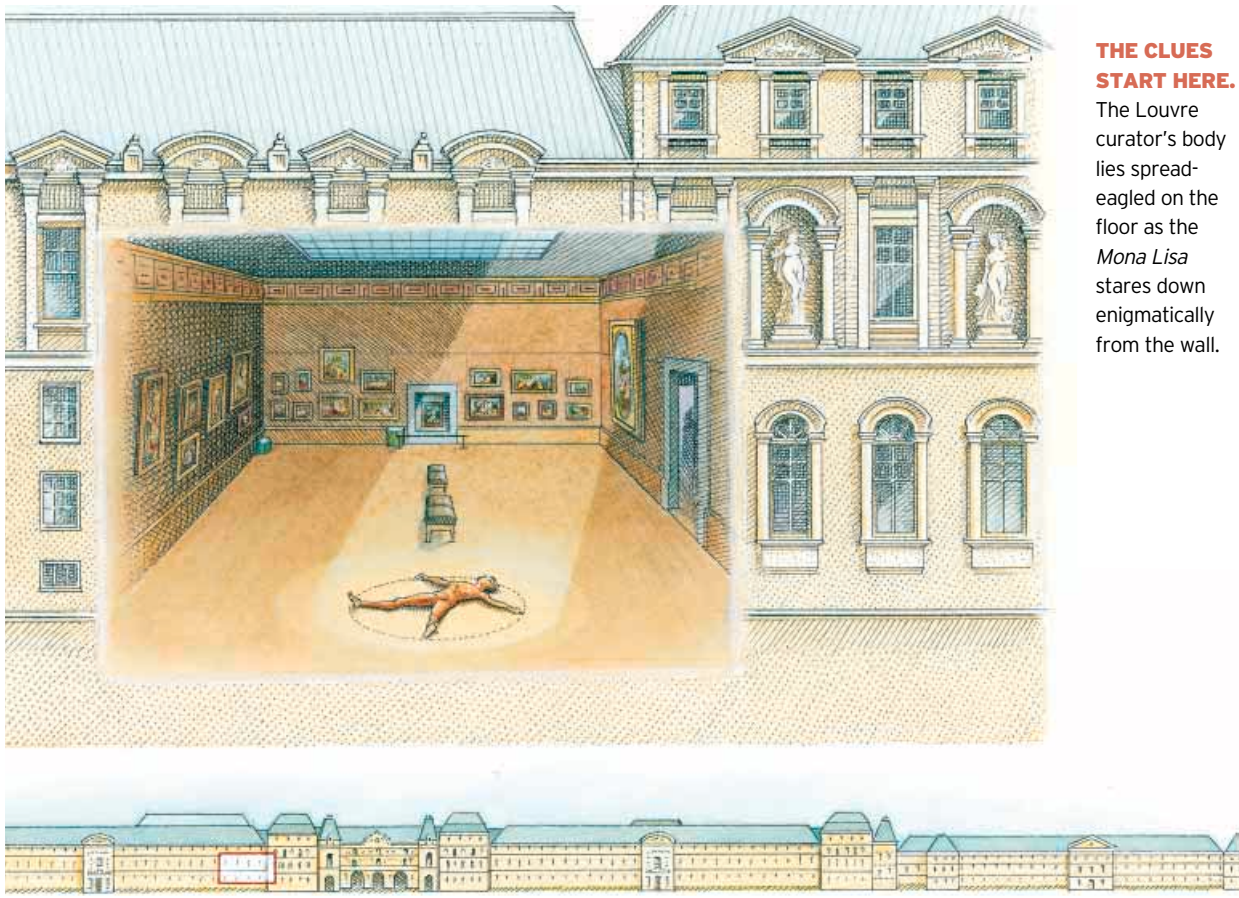
FROM TOP: BRUNO BARBEY–MAGNUM; GILLES BASSIGNAC–GAMMA

but may have even survived the Crucifixion. While the Rennes-le-Château enigma and the related Priory of Sion documents were conclusively proven in the 1990s to have been part of an elaborate hoax, and the BBC later aired a program largely disclaiming their earlier documentaries, the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* have continued to publish their unchanged version as a true story.

Enter Dan Brown, who, imitating their technique, has drawn many of his ideas, so-called "facts" and conjectures directly from *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* as well as from *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ,* a related Grail conspiracy theory account by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince that was published in 1998. Though rooted in Celtic mythologies, the Holy Grail has been a part of written literature since the Middle Ages, when it first appeared in Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal* in the late twelfth century. In the nineteenth century in particular, when there was a revival of interest in medieval and folk legends, a plethora of poetry and visual art and even an opera based on the Holy Grail legends again appeared (see Page 14). As a result, the Holy Grail became so much a part of Western cultural reference that it is now used as a figure of speech to describe any near-impossible search. It was even lampooned in a popular 1975 film, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail.* In the process, more than a few people have taken the story of the Grail seriously.

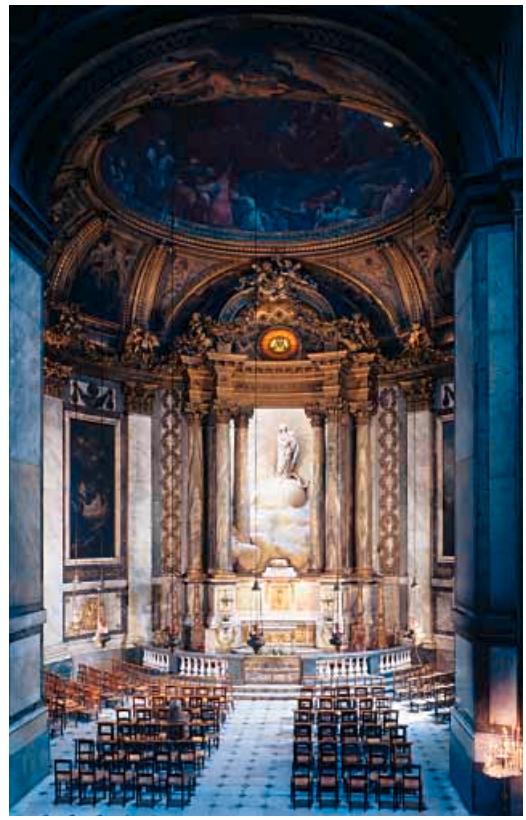
At a time when the Catholic Church is in crisis, Dan Brown is offering new meaning through the cryptic symbols of ancient philosophies and pagan religions.

Few, however, have taken it as seriously as Dan Brown and his immediate predecessors. And they, in turn, have kicked off a new frenzy of Grail hunting. After reading *The Da Vinci Code,* some people are imitating Langdon and Neveu, and embarking on their very own search for the Holy Grail—redefined in the novel as Mary Magdalene and the bloodline from her and Jesus. In a dispatch last summer, *The New York Times* noted that Rosslyn Chapel, six miles from Edinburgh, has had a 56 percent increase in visitors since the appearance of the bestseller, with tourists coming to see the chapel covered with symbols and trying



THE CLUES START HERE. The Louvre curator's body lies spread-eagled on the floor as the *Mona Lisa* stares down enigmatically from the wall.

ILLUSTRATION BY LASZLO KUBINYI FOR *USN&WR*



BEWARE THE ALBINO MONK. Saint-Sulpice Church in Paris (right and below). Silas's murder of a nun there (he uses a candle stand) has put the Baroque masterpiece on the tourist map.

their hand at a little decoding. "Many of the tourists seem not only inclined to take *The Da Vinci Code* literally, but also to have read it without proper attention to detail," noted the *Times*—since they never read the epilogue, where it is revealed that the Holy Grail is allegedly hidden in the Louvre.

The Da Vinci Code has created other pilgrimage sites, too, ones central to the action of the book. The Louvre itself and Saint-Sulpice in Paris are star attractions on *Da Vinci Code* tours. Rennes-le-Château has also attracted code enthusiasts for some time, thanks to yet another book written in 1997 by Henry Lincoln, *Key to the Sacred Pattern*, which contains many of the symbols and clues used in Brown's book, such as the hidden significance of points on the zero meridian.

Like Henry Lincoln, Brown bolsters his claims in true conspiracy-theorist style by using codes and puzzles to create a sense both of mystery and authenticity. As Michelle Delio writes in *Wired News*, "Where *The Da Vinci Code* does shine—brilliantly—is in its exploration of cryptology, particularly the encoding methods developed by Leonardo da Vinci, whose art and manuscripts are packed with mystifying symbolism and quirky codes." With a sense of mastery generated by solv-

FROM TOP; LEONARD DE SELVA–CORBIS; SUPERSTOCK

ing the puzzles and codes in *The Da Vinci Code*—which Brown makes easy enough for the average high school student to understand—readers have been breathlessly searching for meaning in geometrical patterns and number sequences, and even in the characters' names. Leigh Teabing, it happens, is a composite (in one case, an anagram) of the surnames of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* authors Richard Leigh and Michael Baigent. The *Da Vinci Code* website offers further puzzles to solve.

Being a modern-day knight-errant, Langdon must prove not his physical but his mental prowess, conquering symbols and cracking codes throughout the novel. The pentacle etched on Saunière's abdomen has a starring role in the symbology of *The Da Vinci Code.* According to Langdon,

> *"... [It] is a pre-Christian symbol that relates to Nature worship. ... This pentacle is representative of the female half of all things—a concept religious historians call the 'sacred feminine' or the 'divine goddess.' ... The pentacle was altered by the early Roman Catholic Church. As part of the Vatican's campaign to eradicate pagan religions and convert the masses to Christianity, the Church launched a smear campaign against the pagan gods and goddesses, recasting their divine symbols as evil."*

The pentacle and related symbols, Langdon tells us, from the pentagram and the Star of David to the rose and Leonardo's Vitruvian man, are part of the symbology of the "sacred feminine."

Along with his claims about the hidden meanings to be found in symbols and codes, Brown uses paintings as fertile territory for his conspiracy theories. Leonardo da Vinci, an alleged Grand Master of the mysterious Priory of Sion, and his paintings are at the heart of Brown's story, starting with an overt reference to Leonardo's Vitruvian Man in the opening murder, and in his subsequent use of *The Last Supper, The Madonna of the Rocks,* and the *Mona Lisa* to "prove" Leonardo's interest in the "Sacred Feminine." (In this respect Brown borrows, and then diverges, from Plantard's hoax, since Plantard preferred to bury his clues in a French painting by Nicolas Poussin, *Les Bergers d'Arcadie,* and another by David Teniers.)

Brown's emphasis on the hidden symbolism in Leonardo's paintings is an interesting one, given the rich tradition dating back to the Middle Ages in which nearly every detail in a church façade, mural or painting had some deeper spiritual significance. As with his symbols, Brown offers new interpretations of da Vinci's art throughout the novel. Mary Magdalene, he claims, not the beloved disciple John, is pictured at Christ's right hand in

Heresy ... or History?

In The Da Vinci Code, *Dan Brown is not shy about questioning the beliefs of conventional Christianity, or posing radically different reinterpretations of Church history, writes Dan Burstein in* Secrets of the Code. *Among the central questions raised by the novel:*

- What do we really know about Mary Magdalene? Was she a prostitute, as Christian tradition has portrayed her? If she was not, why was she portrayed as such for so long in Church history, and why did the Vatican change its mind in the 1960s?
- Is there real evidence that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married? When Gospel accounts in the New Testament speak of a woman anointing Jesus with luxurious aromatic oils from an alabaster jar and drying his feet with her hair,was this Mary Magdalene or a different Mary, who may have actually been a reformed prostitute?
- Does the *Gospel of Philip* found in an earthenware jar near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi really say that Jesus frequently kissed Mary Magdalene on the mouth—and if we have the right translation and the right words, is this a metaphor? Or is it an actual reference to a romantic relationship?
- Is it possible that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had a child and that they fostered a bloodline that continued into recent times?
- How valid are the many legends about Mary Magdalene's escape to France? Could her progeny have been the basis for the Merovingian kings?
- Was the historical Jesus essentially a Jewish rabbi, teacher, or spiritual leader and, as such, would it be likely and even probable that he would be married?
- Is it possible that Mary Magdalene was an important spiritual figure in her own right, the romantic companion or wife of Jesus, and the person whom he wished to lead his movement after his death?
- Are the Gnostic Gospels and other alternative scriptures credible, or at least as credible as the mainstream, traditional Gospels? Do they really tell a significantly different story?
- Did leaders of the Roman Church, from Constantine to Pope Gregory, carry out a concerted attack on alternative beliefs and scriptures? Did they edit what became the accepted canon for political purposes?

The Last Supper—their bodies touching in such ways as to indicate that she was part of the inner circle, and, most likely, his wife. He finds corroboration for Leonardo's ambiguous life, and supposed interest in hermaphroditism, in the androgynous looks of the Mona Lisa. Throughout the novel, Brown aims at subversion, and the ambiguous Leonardo is his perfect artistic alter ego.

As any art scholar knows, however, Brown's characterizations of Leonardo's work are free-form creativity and bear little resemblance to serious thinking in the field, revealing a stunning lack of careful knowledge concerning Leonardo's name, output, materials, and even sexual orientation (Brown calls him a "flamboyant homosexual," which has no historical foundation). As art historian Bruce Boucher points out, in reference to Brown's theories concerning *The Last Supper*, "Leonardo's composition points, in fact, in another direction, for it conforms to traditional Florentine depictions of the Last Supper, stressing the betrayal and sacrifice of Jesus rather than the institution of the Eucharist and the chalice," and that "St. John was invariably represented as a beautiful young man whose special affinity with Jesus was expressed by his being seated at Jesus's right."

By marshalling his own unique set of facts, however, Brown does give us an exhilaratingly original history of the European Christian Church, just as, in the book, Sophie (whose name could be stretched to mean Sofia, or "new wisdom") is given a crash course in Mary Magdalene poet-playwright Jean Cocteau might have been entwined with secret societies.The importance to the French of the Louvre as a historic royal residence and the country's foremost museum of fine art also can't be exaggerated.

A secular republic of about sixty million inhabitants, France is home, nonetheless, to large numbers of Catholics and Protestants and some five million Moslems, and is struggling with church-versus-state issues involving the freedom to display religious symbols in public. And then along comes Robert Langdon ...

—David Downie is an American journalist based in Paris. Copyright © 2004 by David Downie.

The Ritz Hotel in Paris, where Robert Langdon stayed

What the French Are Saying

It looks like French readers have joined American *Da Vinci Code* devotees who genuflect by the Louvre museum's inverted pyramid. Within a week of the thriller's March 2004 release, it was the country's number-three bestseller, and sales of the novel have hardly slowed since. The alluring French cover shows the *Mona Lisa* peering from behind a torn scarlet background.

Frenchmen and women expecting critics to dismiss the book outright or lambaste its fanciful interpretation of Parisian topography, French culture, and linguistics, must have been surprised by the generally positive reviews and skyrocketing sales. The highbrow *Lire,* while scolding Brown for sounding like a high-school lecturer on pre-Christian symbols, called him a "virtuoso at staging" who has produced an "intelligent entertainment and not a pure marketing ploy." The leading weekly magazine *Le Point* declared that France would be able to judge for itself now, having watched the book's phenomenal rise abroad. Anne Berthod of the influential weekly *L'Express* applauded the "Machiavellian plot and infernal pacing," calling the book an "erudite crime novel" that entices you to take another look at da Vinci's *Last Supper*.

But few French reviewers consider Dan Brown's thriller a work of literature, preferring to class it as genre fiction. Delphine Peras, writing in the daily *France Soir,* had faint praise: "I'm not saying it's a bad book, it's the perfect vacation read ... a vending-machine book." Clichés and "tricks" to keep the reader breathlessly turning pages, she noted, "risk ruining the pleasure of a well-balanced plot." Peras quotes Montpellier bookseller François Huet, saying he put down the book, finding it written "with a spatula"—meaning in a slapdash manner.

Still, the book's literary merits are a secondary consideration. Public interest in Opus Dei, the Knights Templar, the Priory of Sion, and the marital status of Jesus and Mary Magdalene has proved remarkably widespread, giving rise to earnest discussions on street corners and in so-called "philosophy cafés." What appears to fascinate French readers most is the tantalizing prospect put forward in the book that former president François Mitterrand and surrealist

ZAMBOUNIS–PICADAS–GAMMA

lene, the early Church, and even earlier religions. As his mad dash of a plot unfolds, Brown alludes to a number of important controversies that beset the Church over time, and offers his own alternative, anti-Catholic interpretation of them. "When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated and the winner writes the history books—books which glorify their own cause and disparage the conquered foe," Langdon tells Sophie, explaining why Mary Magdalene was denigrated by the early Church. This deconstructionist, postmodern view of history is spurring discussions across a very broad spectrum. In the United States, where the Pew Research Center recently published a report announcing that six in ten people (59 percent) say religion plays a very important role in their lives, it has also prompted a lively discussion of what people are choosing to believe in, something which has changed radically in the last half century.

Brown's timing in questioning the Church could not be better. In a fortieth anniversary address at Seattle University's School of Theology and Ministry in 2002, John J. Markey, O.P., Ph.D., described the impact of Vatican II as "one of the two or three most revolutionary events in the history of the Christian Church." This council of bishops overturned a system that relied on authoritarian, hierarchical figures (priests, bishops) to dispense God's grace through the sacraments, and decreed that "Grace is something that is available to all people of all cultures, faiths, and times—and even to unbelievers." By the time it ended in 1965, Vatican II had transformed an essentially Eurocentric Church into a global, ecumenical body, and opened the floodgates for a new brand of Catholicism. With the rise in numbers of college-educated and affluent people in this country, and the emergence of the Internet as well, more people have begun to question the authority of their parish priests, as well as other aspects of their faith, including women's roles in the church. From 1960-2001, the defection rate of Catholics from the Church had held steady at 15 percent, but the recent sexual abuse scandals have further discredited the institution and alienated many people from the established Church.

Several other key factors have also influenced religious attitudes in the last forty years, affecting Christians of all denominations—which, of course, is fodder for Dan Brown's skepticism. One was the discovery of fifty-two texts, now known as the Gnostic Gospels, at Nag Hammadi in December 1945. In them, previously unheard voices—those of Thomas, Philip, and Mary Magdalene—presented a very divergent view from the canonical gospels of early Christian thought. Until then, Gnostic beliefs were known mostly through the second-century writer Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon,

IF THESE WALLS COULD SPEAK ... Rosslyn Chapel, whose design is reputedly based on the ancient Temple of Solomon, is adorned with innumerable carvings (story, Page 84).

FROM TOP: SANDRO VANNINI–CORBIS; MICHAEL SCHOFIELD–WORLD PICTURE NEWS

The book is very disturbing to many because Dan Brown is not so covertly attacking the foundations of Christianity, and in particular the divinity of Christ.

who wrote a famous work, titled *Against Heresies,* decrying the alternate gospels. Broadly speaking, Gnosticism denied the divinity of Christ and stressed individual knowledge as the means of achieving salvation—a radically alternative vision of religious reality. When Elaine Pagels published *The Gnostic Gospels* in 1979 about the long-lost texts and tradition, it became an immediate bestseller.

Coinciding with the growing feminist movement in this country, the Gnostic Gospels—especially the gospel of Philip, which depicted Mary Magdalene as a favorite of Christ—showed an early Church in which women had wielded considerably more power than had been previously understood. The discovery opened new areas of research to feminist scholars such as Harvard Divinity School Professor Karen King, who has since written extensively on the subject of Mary Magdalene, most recently in *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala* (2003). The gospel, she says, "Shows us there was a tradition of Mary Magdalene as an important apostle of the Church after the resurrection."

The Da Vinci Code acknowledges this research, but draws much of its material from one particular new-age writer. On Page 253 of the novel, Brown includes a list of books in Sir Leigh Teabing's house, where Langdon and Sophie flee. It is a sly reference to his novel's sources. Two volumes are by Margaret Starbird, a lapsed Catholic and self-proclaimed heretic who combines in *The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine* and *The Woman With the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalene and the Holy Grail* neo-Gnostic ideas with Goddess worship. In a passage from *The Da Vinci Code*, Langdon parrots some of Starbird's ideas:

> *"The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the rise of the predominantly male Church, and so the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean. It was man, not God, who created the concept of 'original sin,' whereby Eve tasted of the apple and caused the downfall of the human race. Woman, once the sacred giver of life, was now the enemy."*

A proponent of the Jungian concept of "synchronicity," Starbird favors an instinctive religious response, which is open to the "coincidence between mind and matter," or what she describes as the "paranormal." It allows her to search for meaning and confirmation in everything, a practice favored by conspiracy theorists as well.

Another factor that has spurred interest in a personal religious quest for Jesus is the creation

THE ONCE AND FUTURE LEGEND

The Holy Grail story, based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's chronicle of King Arthur and Merlin, has been part of the Western imagination since the twelfth century. Along the way, it has morphed from adventure story to religious myth to pop cultural icon. An inspiration for Wagner and Tennyson in the nineteenth century, in the twentieth it became a symbol of New Age spiritualism—and a movie staple.

A knightly take on the Grail tale: an illustration from a poem by Wolfram von Eschenbach, dating back eight hundred years

A Last Supper from an earlier century: a detail from the manuscript of Sir Percival and the Holy Grail of 1286

FROM LEFT: MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY; CORBIS BETTMANN

of the Jesus Seminar in 1985. An outgrowth of the Evangelical movement, it was founded by a professor of religion, Robert W. Funk, as an ambitious collaborative attempt to study and think about the historical Jesus. Avowedly open and democratic in character (though many of its participants are eminent Biblical scholars) it was meant to dismantle the hierarchies of past teaching about Jesus, and to disseminate learning and spur discussion among a wide audience. Though enthusiasm for Evangelism has spread, the level of sophisticated inquiry has remained low—which explains both the fervent interest that has greeted *The Da Vinci Code* and its uncritical acceptance as truth. "America is a Jesus-haunted culture, but at the same time, it's a biblically illiterate culture," says Evangelical author Ben Witherington III. "When you have that combination, almost anything can pass for the historical Jesus."

Most important, however, the book is very disturbing to many because Dan Brown is not so covertly attacking the foundations of Christianity, and in particular the divinity of Christ. Darrell Bock, a professor at the Dallas Theological Seminary, says Dan Brown's book isn't so innocent: "At its very core it is an attempt to reshape our culture and Christian beliefs." As in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* there are many assertions that do not square with the broad scholarly consensus on the historical Christ. The notion that Constantine imposed the doctrine of the divinity of Christ on his bishops at the Council of Nicea in 325 is flatly disavowed by historians and scholars. "Christians were proclaiming the divinity of Christ since the first century A.D., but it was refined in the fourth century at Nicea," says Yale School of Divinity dean Harold Attridge. Sometimes Brown seems remarkably unaware of the anomalies in his fictions. His claims that Jesus was married are dismissed not only by Christians, but are also anathema to Gnostics. As Byron Barlowe of Leadership University puts it, "Gnosticism would be repulsed by the idea of physical relations between Mary Magdalene and Jesus"—something Brown asserts without hesitation.

In fact, a veritable phalanx of scholarly and religious writers has risen up to refute *The Da Vinci Code,* point by point, on television and on the Internet, and has created a minor book industry as well. *USA Today* notes that there are now over ninety titles in print that are related in subject matter to *The Da Vinci Code,* spawning even more reviews and commentary. Through it all, Dan Brown remains unrepentant. As he says on his own website, "... the dialogue itself is a deeply empowering and positive force for everyone involved. Suddenly, enormous numbers of people are passionately debating important philosophical topics, and regardless of the personal conclusions that each of us draws, the debate can only help to strengthen our understanding of our own faith."

For while all the plot inventions in *The Da Vinci Code* add up to a reckless joy ride through pseudo-history, those in possession of the actual facts will continue to present him with some hefty speeding tickets. But Dan Brown already knows that the revenue derived from his book sales will certainly pay for them. ●

One of Julia Margaret Cameron's 1874 photos illustrating Idylls of the King and other poems by her friend Alfred, Lord Tennyson

A 1914 postcard advertising a production of Wagner's opera Parsifal, which includes a commemoration of the Last Supper

Richard Harris plays King Arthur in Camelot (1967), a film adaptation of T. H. White's The Once and Future King (1958)

FROM LEFT: JULIA MARGARET CAMERON–HULTON–DEUTSCH COLLECTION / CORBIS; AKG; KOBAL COLLECTION

The Man Behind the Mystery

DAN BROWN LOVES CREATING RIDDLES AND CODES—INCLUDING THE RIDDLE OF HIMSELF

BY **STEPHEN MEREDITH**

"Secrets interest us all, I think," Dan Brown opines on his website, pointedly sidestepping the obvious fact that *The Da Vinci Code* yarn spinner himself has become one of the curiosities of our time. For unlike most commercially minded craftsmen of modern fiction, the 39-year-old former New England high school teacher remains an elusive creature, less Tom Clancy or Stephen King—who at least have looked Larry King in the eye—than a true recluse-in-training, a J. D. Salinger or, well, Howard Hughes or Greta Garbo.

Not that Brown is a total TV ghost. He was there, wisely, last November to help plug an ABC special titled *Jesus, Mary and Da Vinci,* and to show up on that day's *Good Morning America.* But that was to promote the program, not himself. Oprah, can you help us here?

In fact, so little is known about this preppy-looking sphinx with a dimpled chin (paging Michael Douglas for the eventual biopic) that the BBC failed miserably at *Decoding The Da Vinci Code Author,* as it called its 2004 profile. The only nugget: that it was while on vacation that Brown read a Sidney Sheldon novel and felt so strongly that he could do better that he finally turned his back on his day job.

Facts: Brown was born in New Hampshire. Father, a celebrated math teacher at Phillips Exeter Academy (also attended by Dan). Mother, a professional musician, specializing in sacred music. Graduated from Amherst College, also studying art history at Spain's University of Seville, which offered insights into "the mysteries of Da Vinci's paintings." By his own admission, he grew up "surrounded by the paradoxical philosophies of science and religion" in the ivory-tower atmosphere of East Coast prep schools and the Ivy League, "with all of their little fraternities and eating clubs and secret societies." These helped spark Brown's unquenchable interest in the clandestine, as did his "associations early on with people from the National Security Agency," as he told online book re-

PUZZLE MAN. Among Brown's inspirations were the eating clubs and secret societies of the Ivy League.

viewer C. M. McDonald (although what, specifically, those associations might have been he has not cared to elucidate). A visit to the Vatican, thanks to "a connection, very high," further exerted its influence.

Not one to know exactly what he wanted to do in life, Brown pursued several different careers after college. First he tried following in his mother's footsteps, though in a more popular vein. He headed to California to sing, play the piano, write songs, and produce four CDs, by now largely forgotten. "It was his own brand of pop," Los Angeles music producer Barry Fasman told the *Boston Globe*. "Real accessible mainstream."

So mainstream was his music that one Brown ditty, "Peace in Our Time," made its way to the Summer Olympics in 1996—by which time the composer was already three years into his stint teaching English at the same school where his father had been. The younger Brown taught Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey, Of Mice and Men* by Steinbeck (whose descriptions Brown says he tries to emulate) and "anything by Shakespeare" (whose wordplay Brown attempts to fol-

PAULA LERNER–AURORA

Dan Brown's first three books sold roughly 20,000 copies combined. Any way you decode it, at no point did a megaselling author appear to be in the making.

low). Though he no doubt never conducted a course on Robert Ludlum, Brown does tip his hat to that mystery writer's plotting as well.

While he was teaching, Brown also published his first book—one far from his eventual mysteries. *187 Men to Avoid: A Survival Guide for the Romantically Frustrated Woman,* which was published amid zero fanfare in 1995, was billed as a resource "for women of all ages and stages ... in the never-ending search for Mr. Right." It was written in collaboration with Brown's wife, Blythe, a painter and art historian described by her husband—especially in regard to *The Da Vinci Code*—as "an enormous influence [whose] knowledge and passion for the subject matter certainly buoys the [writing] process when it bogs down." (One mystery about *187 Men:* Its authorship was ascribed to Dan and Danielle Brown, not to Dan and Blythe. Curiouser and curiouser, unless it was not deemed worthy of carrying her real name.)

More significantly, 1996 was the year Brown quit teaching at Exeter for good and began writing novels full time. His first, *Digital Fortress,* which was published by Simon & Schuster's Pocket Books in 1998, was set in the National Security Agency. Pocket Books also published Brown's next two novels. *Angels & Demons,* which appeared in 2000, was the first Robert Langdon adventure. It not only introduced the dashing symbologist from Harvard but presaged, with its tale of intrigue in the Vatican, *The Da Vinci Code*'s quasi-academic mix of art, religion, codes, and secret societies. *Deception Point,* a thriller involving the White House, NASA, and possible life on other planets, came a year later. The three sold roughly 20,000 copies combined, with the middle book being the most successful (though any way you decode it, at no point did a megaselling author appear to be in the making.)

The Billion-Dollar Publishing Bonanza

Dan Brown may not feel as possessive of the *Mona Lisa* as Walt Disney was about Mickey Mouse. But that's not to stop the New Hampshire-based recluse from being well on his way to creating his own empire—one whose worth is likely to soar to ten figures within the next twenty-four months.

So far, the controversial but unstoppable *Da Vinci Code* has seen hardcover sales of $210 million in America and a dozen foreign countries with an additional $75 million anticipated from an eagerly awaited soft-cover version. Only don't hold your breath for that: Publisher Doubleday has that edition on hold, pending any signs that interest in the hardcover is starting to wane (to date, zilch). Its ascendancy to the top of the bestseller list was more or less assured when *The New York Times* reviewer Janet Maslin wrote, "Mr. Brown takes the formula he has been developing ... and fine-tunes it to blockbuster perfection." Brown's own stunned reaction: "People called and said, 'Is Janet Maslin your mother, because she never says stuff like that'? She invoked the holy name of *Harry Potter*."

While even Robert Langdon cannot match the fabled *Harry Potter*—to date, *Da Vinci* has more than seven million copies in print, compared with eighty million in circulation for the five titles in J. K. Rowling's boy-wizard series—the brisk sales just keep going. Thanks to the sudden potency of his name, Brown's pre-*Da Vinci* oeuvre—the novels *Deception Point, Digital Fortress* and, the most commercial of the lot, *Angels & Demons*—are producing an additional $60 million at the cash register. Industry observers predict $10 million more will pour in from the audio versions of *Da Vinci* and an upcoming, illustrated collectors' edition.

The biggest bonanza, however, is likely to come from next year's Sony Pictures version, which will be produced by Brian Grazer and directed by Ron Howard, the Oscar-winning team behind *A Beautiful Mind.* Details regarding it remain as well-guarded as Opus Dei, despite Brown's description in his book of hero Robert Langdon, Harvard professor of symbology, as resembling Indiana Jones in tweed—which nakedly points to a casting request for Harrison Ford.

"One of the beauties of the reading experience is that everybody pictures Langdon in his or her perfect way," Brown told interviewer C. M. McDonald in a rare Q&A. "The second you slap a character [into a movie], no matter how you describe Langdon or any other character, they picture Ben Affleck or Hugh Jackman or whoever it happens to be."

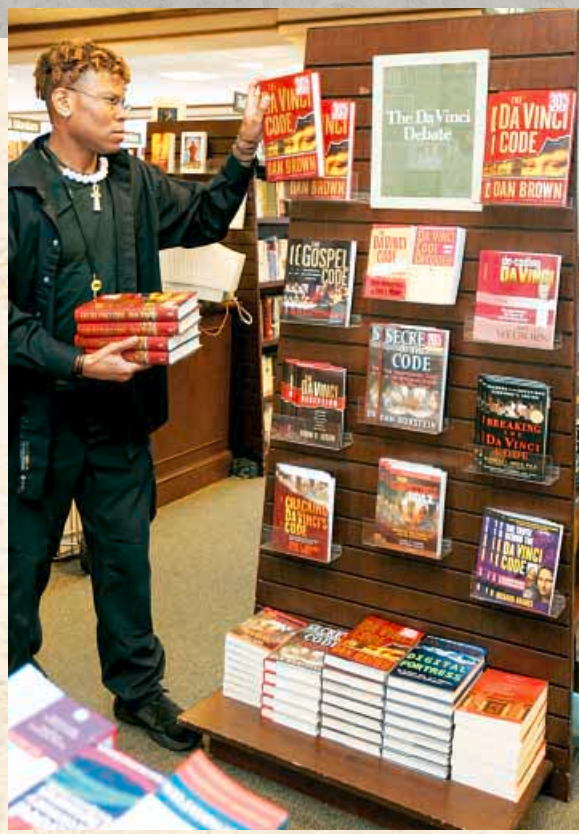
Whatever name does end up on the marquee, about $450 million in revenue can be counted upon once *Da Vinci, The*

Where Brown lucked out was that his editor for all three books, Jason Kaufman, liked them and him—so much so that when Kaufman jumped ship to Doubleday, he told president and publisher Stephen Rubin there was an author he should meet. "We said, 'Who's Dan Brown?' " Rubin recalled to the *Globe*. Doubleday initially anticipated respectable sales of between 20,000 and 50,000 copies for *The Da Vinci Code,* billed as "a thriller for people who don't like thrillers." Then the manuscript made the rounds of the publishing house. "Everyone went bat shit," Rubin told *Fortune* magazine, explaining the company's heady gamble to get advance reader copies into the hands of 5,000 critics and book buyers such as Barnes & Noble, which responded by boosting its first order from 15,000 copies to 30,000 and eventually to 80,000. Brown was on his way; *Da Vinci*'s first printing, originally set for 60,000, was increased to 230,000. "I was terrified," said Rubin.

What nobody has come out and said directly—not Kaufman, not Rubin, not even Brown—is how closely the "fairly shy" (so say colleagues), "very smart, preppy ... extremely charming" (so says Rubin) academic-turned-author might resemble his hero, Robert Langdon. In his website portrait, Brown looks as tweedy as he describes Langdon as being, about the same age (in *The Da Vinci Code* Langdon is forty), and as caught up in his own little eccentricities as one might expect from a world-traveling educator. Rubin likens Brown to "the college professor you never had. He's impossible not to like."

Brown insists upon being at his desk every morning at four to begin writing, using an antique hourglass to signal when it's time for him to break to do sit-ups, stretches, and push-ups. "I find this keeps the blood (and ideas) flowing," he says, instructively. Gravity boots also help him "solve plot challenges by shifting my entire perspective."

As for how Brown's own worldview has changed now that his world's been turned upside down by success, he remains, according to Kaufman, the same person he always was: "It's harder for him to walk down the street, but he is remarkably levelheaded about his life." ●



A Barnes & Noble employee keeps the shelves full of the *Code* and stacks of related books at a store in Washington, D.C.

Movie hits—though that also takes into account monies from potential screen adaptations of *Deception Point, Digital Fortress,* and *Angels & Demons.* (It also supposes that, once *Da Vinci* goes Hollywood, it doesn't devolve into a catastrophe like *The Bonfire of the Vanities.*)

But wait, there's more: Brown has promised he will write more novels about Langdon; the next one, reportedly set in Washington, D.C., is due next year. That franchise will bring home another $220 million or so. Any way you fry it, that's a heck of a lot of pork rinds.

And that doesn't even count the spinoffs, such as royalties from a $130 *Da Vinci*-related tour of the Louvre, where the novel's key murder takes place, or the $35 DVD of four Brigham Young University lectures on the theological principles set forth by Brown. In the department of imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, there are now available some ninety related books, ranging from critiques like *The Da Vinci Hoax: Exposing the Errors in the Da Vinci Code* to backlisted titles (including *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* the conspiracy book mentioned in the Brown novel). Together, they constitute an entire *Code* (or decode) information industry, good for another $20 million in somebody else's pocket.

Characteristically for a recluse, Brown has no comment. *–S.M.*

JEFFREY MACMILLAN FOR *USN&WR*

All About Mary

Mary Magdalene is, in many ways, the star of *The Da Vinci Code.* But who was this woman who plays such a key role at critical moments in the traditional Gospels? She is clearly one of the closest companions of the itinerant Jesus. She is mentioned twelve times by name in the New Testament. She is among the only followers of Jesus to be present at his crucifixion and she attends to him after his death. She is the person who returns to his tomb three days later and the person to whom the resurrected Jesus first appears. When he appears, he instructs—indeed, he empowers—her to spread the news of his resurrection.

All of that is according to statements made in the officially accepted New Testament accounts. If you study the alternative accounts—various lost scriptures and the Gnostic Gospels—you find hints that Mary Magdalene and Jesus may have had an extremely close relationship, an intimate relationship of man and wife. She may have been caught up in a jealous rivalry among the other apostles, some of whom, notably Peter, may have disdained her role on the basis of her gender and found her relationship with Jesus problematic. She may have represented a more humanistic, individualized philosophy, perhaps closer to that which Jesus actually preached than to what became accepted in the time of Constantine as official Christian thinking.

She is perhaps best known in history as a prostitute. But was she ever a prostitute? Did Jesus simply forgive her to illustrate traditional Christian principles about sin, forgiveness, penance, and redemption? Or was she not a prostitute at all but a wealthy financial patron and supporter of the Jesus movement who was later declared by Pope Gregory in the sixth century to be identical to a different Mary in the Gospels who was, indeed, a prostitute? And when Pope Gregory conflated three different Marys in the Gospels into one, did he do this deliberately to brand Mary Magdalene with the stigma of prostitution? Was it a stratagem to ruin Mary Magdalene's reputation and, by doing so, destroy the last influences of pagan goddess cults on early Christianity?

Did it go even further? When Pope Gregory placed the scarlet letter of prostitution on Mary Magdalene—who would remain officially a reformed prostitute for the next fourteen centuries—was it the beginning of a cover-up to deny the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene and, ultimately, the sacred bloodline of their offspring? Their offspring? Well, yes. If Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married or at least had an intimate relationship, there might well have been a child or children.

Every issue that could be debated has come into the modern debate about Mary Magdalene, and Dan Brown has done quite a job in *The Da Vinci Code* of alluding to many of them. One can see why *The Da Vinci Code* has people talking, however improbable some aspects of the plot may be and however rewoven or spun out of whole cloth the religious history may be. —*Dan Burstein*

FALLEN WOMAN? Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Holy Grail* (opposite); above, the unguent jar, symbol of the Magdalene

FROM LEFT: FRESCO DEPICTING SAINT MARY MAGDALENE BY GIANFRANCESCO DA TOLMEZZO: ELIO CIOL—CORBIS; SOTHEBY'S / AKG

Saint…or Sinner?

THERE'S FAR MORE TO MARY MAGDALENE THAN THE OFFICIAL PENITENT OF HISTORY

The Magdalene Myth

BY **SUSAN HASKINS**

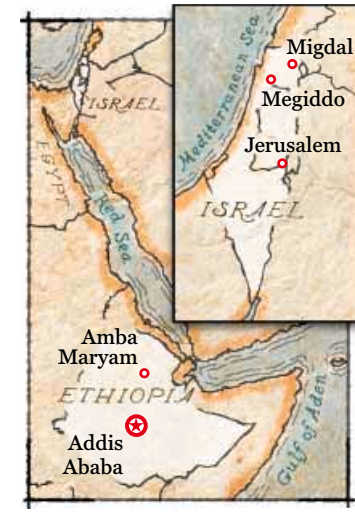
Susan Haskins is an author, editor, researcher, and translator. This excerpt is taken from her Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor *(the name is the author's preferred spelling). Copyright © 1993 by Susan Haskins. Used by permission.*

We know very little about Mary Magdalen. The predominant image we have of her is of a beautiful woman with long golden hair, weeping for her sins, the very incarnation of the age-old equation between feminine beauty, sexuality, and sin. For nearly two thousand years, the traditional conception of Mary Magdalen has been that of the prostitute who, hearing the words of Jesus Christ, repented of her sinful past and henceforth devoted her life and love to him. She appears in countless devotional images, scarlet-cloaked and with loose hair, kneeling below the cross, or seated at Christ's feet in the house of Mary and Martha of Bethany, or as the beauteous prostitute herself, sprawled at his feet, unguent jar by her side, in the house of the Pharisee. Her very name evokes images of beauty and sensuality, yet when we look for this creature in the New Testament, we look for her in vain. All we truly know of her comes from the four Gospels, a few brief references which yield an inconsistent, even contradictory vision. These shifting reflections converge, however, on four salient aspects: that Mary Magdalen was one of Christ's female followers, was present at his crucifixion, was a witness—indeed, according to the Gospel of St. John, the witness—of his resurrection, and was the first to be charged with the supreme ministry, that of proclaiming the Christian message. She brought the knowledge that through Christ's victory over death, life everlasting was offered to all who believe. …

One of the most striking aspects about the Gospel accounts is the role given to Christ's female followers as supporters and witnesses during the events of that first Easter. Their faith and tenacity were acknowledged by early Christian commentators, but later cast into the background as new emphases and interpretations increasingly reduced their importance. The true significance of their witness was for the most part ignored, while Mary Magdalen herself was in the late sixth century recreated as an entirely different character to serve the purposes of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This refashioning by the early Church Fathers has distorted our view of Mary Magdalen and the other women; we need therefore to turn again to the Gospels in order to see them more clearly.

Mark tells us that Mary Magdalen was among the women who when Christ was in Galilee "followed him and *ministered* unto him" (my italics; 15:41; see also Matt. 27:55). "To minister" is translated from the Greek verb *diakonein,* to serve or to minister. It is also the root of the word "deacon," which establishes the important function given to the women within the group of both female and male disciples. Luke, from whom we also hear that the group has been part of Christ's entourage for some considerable time before the crucifixion (8:1-4), corroborates their ministering role, and amplifies it with the words "of their own substance" (v. 3). This role has often been assumed to have been domestic, as women's lives in Jewish society of the first century A.D. were circumscribed within their traditional household environment. They carried out such tasks as grinding flour, baking and laundering, feeding children, bed-making and wool-

HANDMAIDEN TO HISTORY? Mary Magdalene in Paolo Veronese's *Meal at the House of Simon* (Left). Below, some of her possible places of origin.



FROM LEFT: DAGLI ORTI–GALLERIA SABAUDA TURIN / THE ART ARCHIVE; ROB CADY–*USN&WR*

working. Until modern times the role of the women amongst Christ's followers has also been taken to have been merely domestic, and therefore less important, an assumption which has only recently been questioned by scholars. But "of their own substance" indicates that the women contributed the means to enable the travelling preachers to carry out their work. Whilst women are known to have supported rabbis with money, possessions, and food, their participation in the practice of Judaism was negligible. Although they were allowed to read the Torah at congregational services, they were forbidden to recite lessons in public in order to "safeguard the honor of the congregation."

It is in this context that Luke's phrase has a special significance, as it suggests that Christ's women followers were central to the group as a whole, in that they donated their own property and income to provide Christ and the male disciples with the means to live as they travelled around the countryside preaching and healing. This, in turn, sheds further light on the women, since their ability to dispose of their money presupposes their financial independence, and possibly their maturity, which is corroborated by the statement that one of the Marys is the "mother of James," presumably referring to the apostle (Mark 15:40 and 16:1). Even more important is the recent suggestion that, contrary to a general assumption that the women disciples did not preach, and in this way differed from their male counterparts, they may well have done so, since the term "to follow" as used by Mark to describe those at the crucifixion—"who also when he was in Galilee followed him,

The French Connection

There are several legends about Mary Magdalene travelling to France (or Gaul as it was then) after the crucifixion," writes Lynn Picknett in *Mary Magdalene,* "together with a varied assortment of people, including a black servant girl called Sarah, and Mary Salome and Mary Jacobi—allegedly Jesus's aunts—besides Joseph of Arimathea, the rich man who owned the tomb in which Christ was laid prior to the resurrection, and St. Maximin (Maximus), one of the seventy-two closest disciples of Jesus and the first bishop of Provence."

By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, according to Susan Haskins, "huge pilgrimages grew around the more famous shrines" in the south of France, with "vast crowds in the hope of cures, deliverance from demons, and other such manifestations of divine intervention. ... Pilgrims flocked from all over France to touch the tomb of Mary Magdalen at Vézelay." Although Papal bulls were issued by Lucius III, Urban III, and Clement III, confirming that Mary Magdalene's body was, indeed, in Vézelay, no one could explain how it had gotten there.

No matter: The veneration continued, and Mary Magdalene became a powerful figure in the pantheon of saints. "And the movement founded in her name in Germany in 1225 for the moral relief of prostitutes and fallen women," writes Haskins, "which grew to enormous proportions throughout the Middle Ages, and lasted in various forms until early in the twentieth century, might never have existed had it not been for Vézelay's claims to have in its possession the relics of Christianity's most loved and illustrious penitent."

A Black Madonna (above) from Aurillac, France; left, the Basilica of the Holy Magdalene at Vézelay in Burgundy

FROM LEFT: ALAIN LE BOT–GAMMA; ERICH LESSING–ART RESOURCE

and ministered unto him" (15:41)—was used technically to imply their full participation, both in belief and in the activities of the travelling preachers, as is borne out by the accounts in Acts and in Paul's letters of the women's involvement. Nowhere in the texts is there any indication that Christ regarded the women's contribution as inferior or subsidiary to that of his male disciples. ...

Companion of the Savior

Mary Magdalen's close relationship to Christ is emphasized in the *Gospel of Philip* where she is depicted as one of the "three who always walked with the Lord: Mary his mother, her sister, and Magdalene [sic], the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary. And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene." The Greek word *koinonos* used to describe Mary Magdalen, whilst often rendered as "companion," is more correctly translated as "partner" or "consort," a woman with whom a man has had sexual intercourse. Two pages on is another passage, which amplifies in sexual imagery the relationship already described:

> *But Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on the mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?" The Saviour answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you like [I love] her?"*

Erotic love has often been the vehicle used to express mystical experiences, perhaps most notably in that great spiritual epithalamium, the *Canticle of Canticles,* or *Song of Songs,* which describes in the most sensual and voluptuous imagery what the rabbis were to read as an allegory of Yahweh's love for Israel, and early Christian commentators to interpret as Christ's love for the Church, for the Christian soul—sometimes in the person of Mary Magdalen—and for the Virgin Mary. In the *Gospel of Philip,* the spiritual union between Christ and Mary Magdalen is couched in terms of human sexuality; it is also a metaphor for the reunion of Christ and the Church which takes place in the bridal chamber, the place of fullness or *pleroma.* ...

The sequence in the *Gospel of Philip* can be seen at two different levels, one symbolic of the love of Christ for the Church—in the person of Mary Magdalen—and the other as representing an historical situation in which she symbolizes the feminine element in the Church. As we have seen, the preferential treatment that Mary Magdalen receives from Christ in both the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Gospel of Philip* gives rise to jealousy among the other disciples, notably Peter. ... It has been suggested that Peter's antagonism towards Mary Magdalen may reflect the historical ambivalence of the leaders of the orthodox community towards the participation of women in the Church. But by the end of the second century, the egalitarian principles defined in the New Testament, and adhered to in this context by St. Paul, had been discarded in favor of a return to the patriarchal system of Judaism which had preceded them. Thus at the level of historical interpretation, the Gnostic texts may have referred to a political tension in the early church. It is a situation inferred in the synoptics ... namely the suppression of the feminine element within the Church which had gradually been taking place from the second century. ●

But Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on the mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it. –The Gospel of Philip

Sacred Sex and Divine Love

BY **LYNN PICKNETT**

Lynn Picknett is a writer and lecturer on the occult and historical and religious mysteries. This excerpt is taken from her book Mary Magdalene. *Copyright © Lynn Picknett 2003. Appears by permission of Carroll & Graf Publishers, an imprint of Avalon Publishing Group.*

Who was the mysterious Mary Magdalene, so carefully squeezed to the very outside edge of the New Testament by the Gospel writers? Where did she come from, and what made her so threatening to the men of the emergent Roman Church?

In *The Templar Revelation* I write about the enduring controversy surrounding this pivotal biblical character:

> *The identification of Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany (Lazarus's sister) and the "unnamed sinner" who anoints Jesus in Luke's Gospel has always been hotly debated. The Catholic Church decided at an early date that these three characters were one and the same, although it reversed this position as recently as 1969. Mary's identification as a prostitute stems from Pope Gregory I's* Homily 33, *delivered in 591 C.E. in which he declared:*
>
> *"She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. And what did*

Was Jesus Married? A Theologian Speaks Out

Father Richard McBrien, a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame, appeared on the ABC program "Jesus, Mary and Da Vinci" in 2003, triggering some controversy over his logical explanation of why Jesus could well have been married:

What do you think of the possibility that Mary Magdalene is depicted in *The Last Supper?*

I'm open to it. There is no evidence in the New Testament that she was present. The question is whether Da Vinci put her there. That's at least arguable, given the highly feminine features of the one resting her/his head against Jesus.

Why did the church depict Mary Magdalene as a prostitute for so many years?

Perhaps it's because some church leaders couldn't face up to the fact that she was one of Jesus's main disciples, a close friend, and a primary witness of the resurrection.

In "Jesus, Mary and Da Vinci," you mention that it would not have compromised the divinity of Jesus for him to have been married. Can you explain why?

I don't mean to be flippant, but why not? The Epistle to the Hebrews (4:15) says that Jesus was like us in all things except sin. Is it sinful to engage in sexual relations within marriage?

You also said that if Jesus was married, it's just "a short putt" to Mary Magdalene. Why to her?

Because she was the female disciple closest to him during his life. Unlike the cowardly males, she and other women stuck by him to the end. She is the one who, according to at least three traditions in the New Testament, was the first to see him after his resurrection.

Would all the leading religious figures of the time have been married?

Perhaps not all, but certainly most. It is clear that some of the apostles were married, including Peter.

Why do so many people find Mary Magdalene such a compelling character today?

Perhaps because they have been so alienated from the church for its negative, rigid, and censorious views on human sexuality. If Jesus had been married, that would undermine centuries of bias against sexual intimacy.

To what do you attribute the renewed interest in Mary Magdalene?

Recent writings by reputable scholars and the women's movement have been influential. But obviously nothing has done more to draw attention to her than *The Da Vinci Code.*

these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? . . . It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has always treated Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany as separate characters.

The Catholic Church has always been canny in its presentation of the Magdalene, recognizing her value as role model for the hopeless women under their control, such as the Magdalene laundresses. As David Tresemer and Laura-Lea Cannon write in their preface to Jean-Yves Leloup's 1997 translation of the Gnostic *Gospel of Mary Magdalene:*

> *Only in 1969 did the Catholic Church officially repeal Gregory's labeling of Mary as a whore, thereby admitting their error—though the image of Mary Magdalene as the penitent whore has remained in the public teachings of all Christian denominations. Like a small erratum buried in the back pages of a newspaper, the Church's correction goes unnoticed, while the initial and incorrect article continues to influence readers.*

Yet perhaps it would be unduly hasty to dissociate her from all suspicion of "prostitution" in an excess of modern zeal to rehabilitate her. Several researchers have pointed out that the "seven devils" that were allegedly cast out of her may be a garbled reference to the seven underworld gatekeepers of the pagan mysteries, and may provide a valuable clue about her real background. Indeed, in the pagan world there were the so-called "temple prostitutes," women who literally embodied and passed on the sacred "whore wisdom" through transcendental sex: Clearly, outside their own culture they would be viewed as little more than streetwalkers, especially among the male disciples, imbued with the moral and sexual strictures of the Judaic Law, in the Holy Land. ...

Luke's choice of words in describing her moral status is very interesting: It is *harmartolos,* meaning one who has committed a crime against the Jewish law, although this does not necessarily imply prostitution. It is a term taken from the sport of archery, meaning missing the target, and may refer to someone who for whatever reason does not keep the religious observances—or does not pay the taxes, possibly because she was not actually Jewish.

Mary of Bethany is also described as having unbound or uncovered hair, which no self-respecting Judaean Jewish woman would do, for it represented sexual license, as it does to Orthodox Jews and Muslims in today's Middle East. ...

A woman could even be divorced on the grounds of appearing in public with unbound hair—so heinous was the sin—and here Mary of

MARY, MARY. Three different takes: From left, *The King of Kings*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and *The Last Temptation of Christ*

Bethany, a *harmartolos* woman, one who somehow misses the Jewish mark or is outside the religious law, seems utterly oblivious to the outcry her actions would cause. More significantly, not only does Jesus not rebuke her for flouting the Judaic law, but he tacitly encourages her by turning on those who criticize her behavior.

Both of them are behaving like foreigners in a strange land: No wonder they are not understood, particularly by the Twelve who, time after time, we are told, fail to understand Jesus's teaching or the whole point of his mission. Mary of Bethany may be an outsider, but she appears to share some kind of private secret with Jesus—and they are both outsiders.

If the anointing were not a Jewish custom, then to what tradition did it belong? In their time there was a sublimely sacred pagan rite that involved a woman anointing a chosen man both on the head and feet—and also on the genitals—for a very special destiny. This was the anointing of the sacred king, in which the priestess singled out the chosen man and anointed him, before bestowing his destiny upon him in a sexual rite known as the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage). The anointing was part of the ritual preparation for penetration during the rite—which did not have the same emotional or legal ramifications as the more usual form of marriage—in which the priest-king was flooded with the power of the god, while the priestess-queen became possessed by the great goddess.

The concept of the sacred marriage is essential to the understanding of Jesus and his mission, and his relationship with the most important woman in his life—not to mention two highly significant men. ... The persistent image of Mary of Bethany/Mary Magdalene as a whore begins to make sense when it is realized that this ritual is the ultimate expression of what the Victorian historians called "temple prostitution"—of course with their arrogant and hypocritical puritanism and sexual repression, this should not surprise us—although the original term for the priestess involved was *hierodule,* or "sacred servant." It was only through her that a man could achieve knowledge of himself and of the gods. In the epitome of the sacred servant's work, the *hieros gamos,* the king is sanctified and set apart—and of course immediately after the biblical anointing, Judas betrays Jesus and the machinery for his ultimate destiny through the crucifixion is set in motion. ...

The sacred marriage was a familiar concept to pagans of Jesus's day: Versions of it were commonly performed by the devotees of various other dying-and-rising god cults, such as that of Tammuz (to whom there was a temple in Jerusalem at that time), and the Egyptian god Osiris, whose consort Isis breathed life into his dead body long enough for her to conceive the magical child, the hawk-headed god of courage, Horus. Indeed, Tresemer and Cannon state unequivocally that: "Her appearances with special oils to use in anointing Jesus Christ place her in the tradition of priests and priestesses of Isis, whose unguents were used to achieve the transition over the threshold of death while retaining consciousness." Indeed, this places her in the specific context of the shamanic tradition of Egypt, which is only now being acknowledged. ...

The concept of the sacred marriage is essential to the understanding of Jesus and his mission and his relationship with the most important woman in his life.

Clearly, this woman who anointed Jesus was very special, a great priestess of some ancient pagan tradition. ●

FROM LEFT: EDWARD STEICHEN–CONDE NAST ARCHIVE / CORBIS; FOTO FANTASIES (2)

The 'Sacred Feminine'

TRACING THE LINKS BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ANCIENT FERTILITY CULTS

BY **MARGARET STARBIRD**

Margaret Starbird has studied at Vanderbilt Divinity School and has written extensively on the concept of the sacred feminine. This is excerpted from The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine. *Copyright © 1998 by Margaret Starbird. Reprinted by permission of Bear & Company, a division of Inner Traditions International,* www.InnerTraditions.com.

Early Christian renderings of the Virgin and her child were modeled on the far more ancient images of the Egyptian goddess Isis, the Sister-Bride of Osiris, holding the sacred child Horus, god of light, on her lap. Ritual poetry from the cult of Isis and Osiris parallels the Song of Songs, in some places word for word. Both lunar and Earth goddesses of the ancient world were often rendered dark to represent feminine principle in juxtaposition to the solar/masculine, a dualism common in the early civilizations of the Mediterranean. Numerous goddesses were rendered black: Inanna, Isis, Cybele, and Artemis, to name only a few.

For the earliest Christians, the goddess in the Gospels was Mary Magdalene, whose epithet meant "elevated" or "watch-tower/stronghold." ...

After peaking in the twelfth century, the unique importance of the Magdalene in Western Europe was gradually downgraded from around the mid-thirteenth century—a date that corresponds rather dramatically with the Albigensian crusade against the Cathars [a heretical sect that believed that the world was created by an evil god] and the adherents of the "Church of Love." The rise of the Inquisition in the thirteenth century was especially virulent in southern France in response to several Gospel-oriented versions of Christianity, popular heretical sects that severely threatened the hegemony of the Church of Rome. With collaboration from the French king, the pope mounted a crusade against the Albigensian heretics, a bloody war that lasted for a generation, wiping out whole towns and destroying the cultural flowering of the region known as the Languedoc.

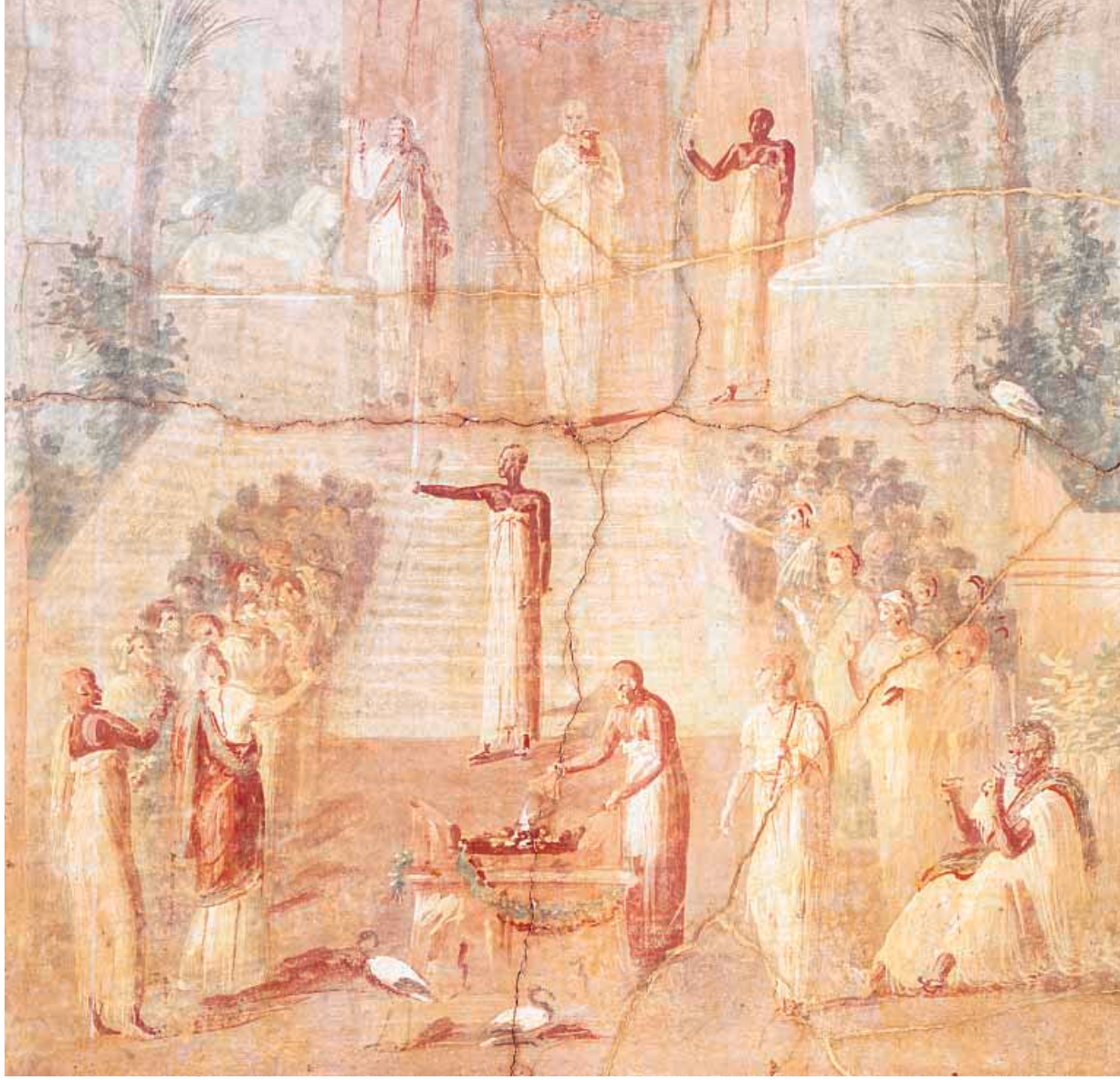
During this same era, beautiful and important epithets that once belonged to the Magdalene were shifted to the Blessed Virgin Mary and churches built to "Our Lady" ostensibly honored the mother of Jesus as the preeminent bearer of the archetypal feminine—"alone of all her sex." Statues and effigies of the Virgin proliferated, most often with her child on her lap, reminiscent of the Egyptian statues of Isis and Horus. After the mid-thirteenth century, the "voice of the Bride" was effectively silenced, although it is whispered that the masons of Europe kept the true faith and built its symbols into the very stones of their Gothic cathedrals ...

The anointing of Jesus in the Gospels is an enactment of rites from the prevailing fertility cult of the ancient Middle East. In pouring her precious unguent of nard over the head of Jesus, the woman whom tradition has identified with "the Magdalene" ("the Great"!) performed an act identical to the marriage rite of the *hieros gamos*—the rite of the anointing of the chosen Bridegroom/King by the royal representative of the Great Goddess!

Jesus recognized and acknowledged this rite himself, in the context of his role as the sacrificed king: "She has anointed me in preparation for burial" (Mark 14:8b). Those who heard the Gospel story of the anointing at the feast in Bethany would certainly have recognized the rite as the ceremonial anointing of the Sacred King, just as they would have recognized the woman, "the woman with the alabaster jar," who came to the garden sepulcher on the third day to finish the anointing for burial and to lament her tortured Bridegroom. She found an empty tomb.... ●

FEMALE ARCHETYPES. Demeter stands in a long line of ancient symbols of fertility.

DAGLI ARTI / THE ART ARCHIVE; SCALIA / ART RESOURCE



FERTILE BEGINNINGS. A fresco from Herculaneum portrays a ritual from an Isis cult that was prevalent during the Roman empire.

The God and the Goddess

In the much-read books Jesus and the Lost Goddess: The Secret Teaching of the Original Christians, *as well as* The Jesus Mysteries, *Timothy Freke—who co-wrote both books with Peter Gandy—argues that the early Christian movement's beliefs in the Gnostic experience of mystical enlightenment and the mystical union of the Godman (Jesus) and the Goddess (Mary Magdalene) were so threatening to the Roman church's vision that they had to be brutally suppressed.*

Timothy Freke has a degree in philosophy.

How important was Goddess worship in pagan cultures?

Along with the myth of the dying and resurrecting Godman, the pagan mysteries told a myth of the lost and redeemed Goddess. This was an allegory about the fall and redemption of the soul. The most famous pagan version of this myth is Demeter and Persephone. The original Christians adapted this into their myth of Sophia, the Christian Goddess whose name means "wisdom."

What is so "feminine" about Sophia?

The Goddess represents the All, the universe, all that we sense, all that we imagine. God, the male archetype, represents the One, the mysterious source of all, consciousness which conceives and witnesses the flow of life.

But the Goddess is not always portrayed in only one light.

Pagans and Christians describe the Goddess as having two aspects, symbolized by a virgin mother and redeemed prostitute. In the gospel story these two aspects of the Goddess are represented by Mary, Jesus's mother, and Mary Magdalene, his consort.

History's Greatest Coverup?

The religious girders that frame the edifice of Dan Brown's plot are built upon the foundations of early Christian history and, in particular, the set of Gnostic Gospels found in 1945 near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi. These documents, which have led to remarkable discoveries about an alternate tradition later suppressed, form the backdrop of another artful blending of fact and fiction in *The Da Vinci Code*. In Chapter 58, which takes place in Leigh Teabing's sumptuous study, Sophie Neveu and Robert Langdon are handed a copy of these lost Gospels in a "leather-bound ... poster-sized" edition to demonstrate irrevocably that "the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record."

"What I find interesting about Dan Brown's book is that it raises a very important question: If they—meaning the leaders of the church—suppressed so much of early Christian history, what else don't we know about? What else is there to be known? And as a historian, I think it's a really important question because the answer means a great deal."

—Professor Elaine Pagels

As the following excerpts and interviews with some of the world's leading experts elaborate, there is no doubt the Nag Hammadi texts have yielded a treasure trove of documents permitting a richer, more nuanced, and, perhaps, even more radical interpretation of the words of Jesus, the role of his followers, and the interpretation of early Christianity. They shed light on a time when the many contending schools of Christian worship were interwoven and the definitive canon had not yet been created. Specifically, they give our era a glimpse into a different tradition—the Gnostic Tradition—that conflicted with the interpretation of Jesus's preaching found today in the orthodoxy of the New Testament. More explosively, they suggest a much more important role for Mary Magdalene as a disciple and close companion of Jesus. They also suggest more interest in seeking inner knowledge and self-development than what we traditionally understand as New Testament philosophy. And the Gnostics of Nag Hammadi seemed to feel less need for churches and priests. They seemed perfectly comfortable interpreting their own Gospels and sacred books without intermediation—an idea institutionalized Christianity would find threatening.

The search for the meaning and implications of these lost Gospels continues to this day. Certainly they seem to emphasize a balance between the masculine and the feminine, the good and the evil in mankind, and the importance of Mary Magdalene as an apostle. Beyond that, did the word *companion* imply marriage or simply indicate a fellow traveler? What of the seemingly explicit reference in the Gospel of Philip to Jesus's kissing Mary Magdalene frequently on the mouth? Factual description or metaphor? And if metaphor, metaphor for what? Are the Gnostic Gospels really telling us that an emphasis on the "spirit within" and a strongly anti-authoritarian, pro-feminine tradition existed that was purposely marginalized and shoved aside as heresy by history's Christian "winners"? *—Dan Burstein*

IN THE BEGINNING. A fragment from the *Gospel of Philip,* part of the find at Nag Hammadi a half century ago

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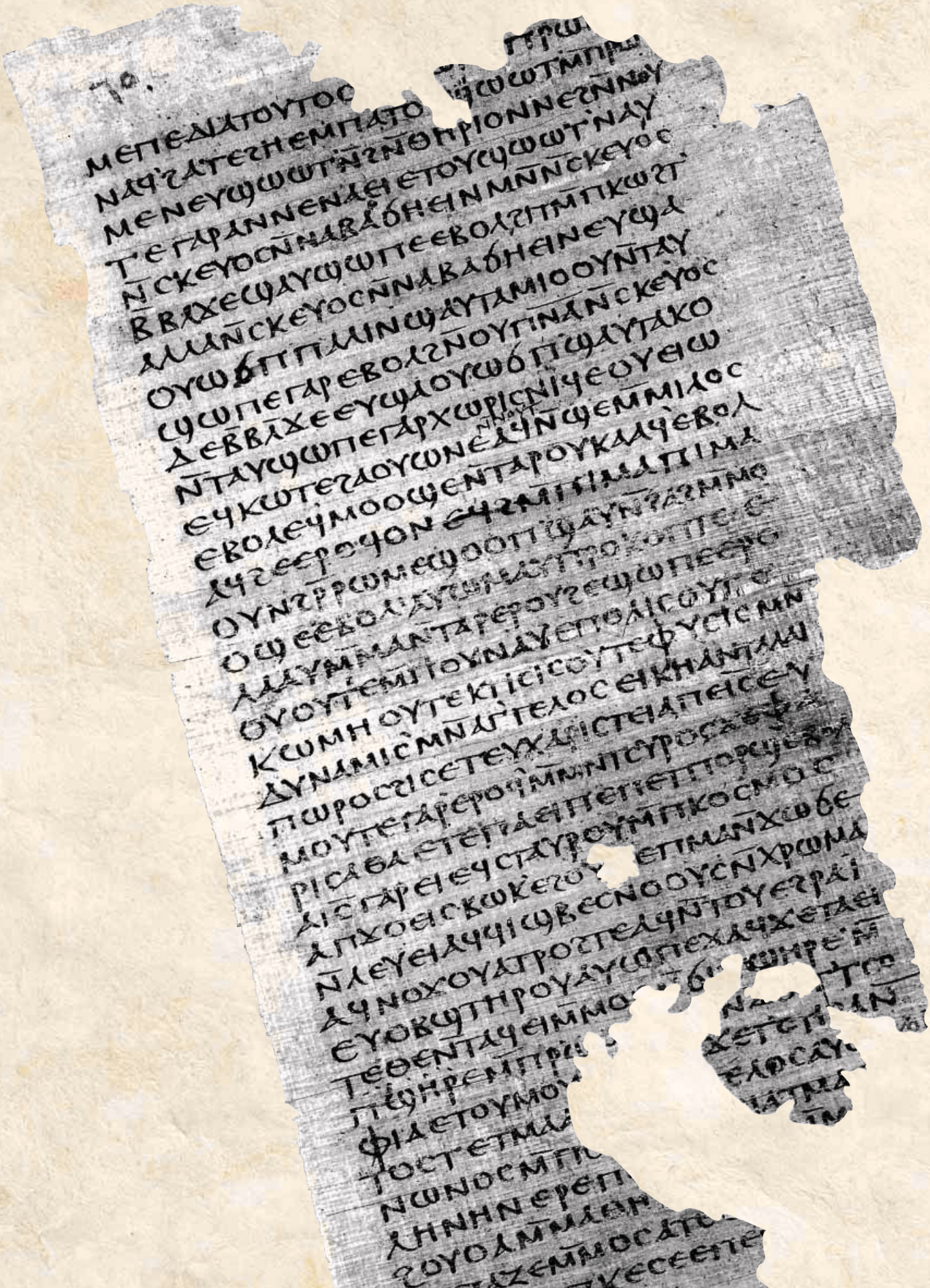

The Treasure of Nag Hammadi

MANUSCRIPTS HIDDEN FOR OVER 1,500 YEARS ARE REDEFINING EARLY CHRISTIANITY

BY **ELAINE PAGELS**

Elaine Pagels is Harrington Spear Paine Professor of Religion at Princeton University and author of the bestselling Beyond Belief *as well as* The Gnostic Gospels, *which won the National Book Critics Circle Award and the National Book Award. Excerpted from* The Gnostic Gospels *by Elaine Pagels. Copyright © 1979 by Elaine Pagels. Used by permission of Random House, Inc. Information about other Random House books and authors is available online at* http://www.randomhouse.com.

In December 1945 an Arab peasant made an astonishing archaeological discovery in Upper Egypt. Rumors obscured the circumstances of this find, perhaps because the discovery was accidental and its sale on the black market illegal. For years even the identity of the discoverer remained unknown. One rumor held that he was a blood avenger; another, that he had made the find near the town of Naj 'Hammadi at the Jabal al-Tarif, a mountain honeycombed with more than 150 caves. Originally natural, some of these caves were cut and painted and used as grave sites as early as the sixth dynasty, some 4,300 years ago.

Thirty years later the discoverer himself, Muhammad 'Ali al-Samman, told what happened. Shortly before he and his brothers avenged their father's murder in a blood feud, they had saddled their camels and gone out to the Jabal to dig for *sabakh,* a soft soil they used to fertilize their crops. Digging around a massive boulder, they hit a red earthenware jar, almost a meter high. Muhammad 'Ali hesitated to break the jar, considering that a *jinn,* or spirit, might live inside. But realizing that it might also contain gold, he raised his mattock, smashed the jar, and discovered inside thirteen papyrus books, bound in leather. Returning to his home in al-Qasr, Muhammad 'Ali dumped the books and loose papyrus leaves on the straw piled on the ground next to the oven. Muhammad's mother, 'Umm-Ahmad, admits that she burned much of the papyrus in the oven along with the straw she used to kindle the fire.

A few weeks later, as Muhammad 'Ali tells it, he

FROM TOP: INSTITUTE FOR ANTIQUITY AND CHRISTIANITY, CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA; ROB CADY–*USN&WR*

and his brothers avenged their father's death by murdering Ahmed Isma'il. Their mother had warned her sons to keep their mattocks sharp: When they learned that their father's enemy was nearby, the brothers seized the opportunity, "hacked off his limbs ... ripped out his heart, and devoured it among them, as the ultimate act of blood revenge."

Fearing that the police would search his house and discover the books, Muhammad 'Ali asked the priest, al-Qummus Basiliyus Abd al-Masïh, to keep one or more for him. During the time that Muhammad 'Ali and his brothers were being in-

LUCKY FIND. Muhammad 'Ali al-Samman was looking for fertilizer, not lost gospels, when he found the earthenware jar near Nag Hammadi.

He hurried back to his hotel with the text. Tracing out the first line, he was startled, then incredulous, to read: "These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke."

terrogated for murder, Raghib, a local history teacher, had seen one of the books, and suspected that it had value. Having received one from al-Qummus Basiliyus, Raghib sent it to a friend in Cairo to find out its worth.

Sold on the black market through antiquities dealers in Cairo, the manuscripts soon attracted the attention of officials of the Egyptian government. Through circumstances of high drama, as we shall see, they bought one and confiscated ten and a half of the thirteen leather-bound books, called codices, and deposited them in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. But a large part of the thirteenth codex, containing five extraordinary texts, was smuggled out of Egypt and offered for sale in America. Word of this codex soon reached Professor Gilles Quispel, distinguished historian of religion at Utrecht, in the Netherlands. Excited by the discovery, Quispel urged the Jung Foundation in Zürich to buy the codex. But discovering, when he succeeded, that some pages were missing, he flew to Egypt in the spring of 1955 to try to find them in the Coptic Museum. Arriving in Cairo, he went at once to the museum, borrowed photographs of some of the texts, and hurried back to his hotel to decipher them. Tracing out the first line, Quispel was startled, then incredulous, to read: "These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and which the twin, Judas Thomas, wrote down." Quispel knew that his colleague H.-C. Puech, using notes from another French scholar, Jean Doresse, had identified the opening lines with fragments of a Greek *Gospel of Thomas* discovered in the 1890s. But the discovery of the whole text raised new questions: Did Jesus have a twin brother, as this text implies? Could the text be an authentic record of Jesus's sayings? According to its title, it contained the *Gospel According to Thomas;* yet, unlike the Gospels of the New Testament, this text identified itself as a *secret* gospel. Quispel also discovered that it contained many sayings known from the New Testament; but these sayings, placed in unfamiliar contexts, suggested other dimensions of meaning. Other passages, Quispel found, differed entirely from any known Christian tradition: The "living Jesus," for example, speaks in sayings as cryptic and compelling as Zen koans:

> *"Jesus said, 'If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.' "*

What Quispel held in his hand, the *Gospel of Thomas*, was only one of the fifty-two texts discovered at Nag Hammadi. Bound into the same volume with it is the *Gospel of Philip,* which attributes to Jesus acts and sayings quite different from those in the New Testament:

> *" ... the companion of the [Savior is] Mary Magdalene. [But Christ loved] her more than [all] the disciples, and used to kiss her [often] on her [mouth]. The rest of [the disciples were offended.] ... They said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' The Savior answered and said to them, 'Why do I not love you as [I love] her?' "*

Other sayings in this collection criticize com-

COLLECTED WORKS. Some of the leather-bound manuscripts found at Nag Hammadi

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mon Christian beliefs, such as the virgin birth or the bodily resurrection, as naïve misunderstandings. Bound together with these gospels is the *Apocryphon* (literally, "secret book") *of John,* which opens with an offer to reveal "the mysteries [and the] things hidden in silence" which Jesus taught to his disciple John.

Muhammad 'Ali later admitted that some of the texts were lost—burned up or thrown away. But what remains is astonishing: some fifty-two texts from the early centuries of the Christian era, including a collection of early Christian gospels, previously unknown. ...

What Muhammad 'Ali discovered at Nag Hammadi, it soon became clear, were Coptic translations, made about 1,500 years ago, of still more ancient manuscripts. The originals themselves had been written in Greek, the language of the New Testament: As Doresse, Puech, and Quispel had recognized, part of one of them had been discovered by archaeologists about fifty years earlier, when they found a few fragments of the original Greek version of the *Gospel of Thomas.*

About the dating of the manuscripts themselves there is little debate. Examination of the datable papyrus used to thicken the leather bindings, and of the Coptic script, place them about A.D. 350-400. But scholars sharply disagree about the dating of the original texts. Some of them can hardly be later than about A.D. 120-150, since Irenaeus, the orthodox Bishop of Lyon, writing about 180, declares that heretics "boast that they possess more gospels than there really are" and complains that in his time such writings already have won wide circulation, from Gaul through Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor.

Quispel and his collaborators, who first published the *Gospel of Thomas,* suggested the date of about 140 for the original. ... But recently Professor Helmut Koester of Harvard University has suggested that the collection of sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas,* although compiled about 140, may include some traditions even older than the Gospels of the New Testament, "possibly as early as the second half of the first century" (50-100)—as early as, or earlier, than Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. ...

Why were these texts buried—and why have they remained virtually unknown for nearly 2,000 years? Their suppression as banned documents, and their burial on the cliff at Nag Hammadi, it turns out, were both part of a struggle critical for the formation of early Christianity. The Nag Hammadi texts, and others like them, which circulated at the beginning of the Christian era, were denounced as heresy by orthodox Christians in the middle of the second century. We have long known that many early followers of Christ were condemned by other Christians as heretics, but nearly all we knew about them came from what their opponents wrote at-

A Reading from Philip

The Gospel of Philip is a compilation of statements pertaining primarily to the meaning and value of sacraments. To be sure, it does provide the occasional word or deed of Jesus. But these few sayings and stories about Jesus are not set in any kind of narrative framework like one of the New Testament Gospels. In fact, the gospel is not organized in a way that can be conveniently outlined. Although some continuity is achieved through an association of ideas, a series of contrasts, or by catchwords, the line of thought is rambling and disjointed. Complete changes of subject are common.

Saint Philip, deep in prayer

... Christ came to ransom some, to save others, to redeem others. He ransomed those who were strangers and made them his own. And he set his own apart, those whom he gave as a pledge according to his plan. It was not only when he appeared that he voluntarily laid down his life, but he voluntarily laid down his life from the very day the world came into being. Then he came first in order to take it, since it had been given as a pledge. It fell into the hands of robbers and was taken captive, but he saved it. He redeemed the good people in the world as well as the evil.

Light and darkness, life and death, right and left, are brothers of one another. They are inseparable. Because of this neither are the good good, nor evil evil, nor is life life, nor death death. For this reason each one will dissolve into its earliest origin. But those who are exalted above the world are indissoluble, eternal.

As for the Wisdom who is called "the barren," she is the mother [of the] angels. And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [... loved] her more than [all] the disciples, [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [...]. The rest of [the disciples ...]. They said to him "Why do you love her more than all of us?" The Savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you like her? When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in darkness."

Translated by Wesley W. Isenberg. From the book The Nag Hammadi Library *edited by James M. Robinson.* *Copyright © 1977, 1988 by E. J. Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands. Published by arrangement with HarperSanFrancisco.*

GEORGES DE LA TOUR, *SAINT PHILIP,* ERICH LESSING–ART RESOURCE

tacking them. Bishop Irenaeus, who supervised the church in Lyon about 180, wrote five volumes, entitled *The Destruction and Overthrow of Falsely So-called Knowledge,* which begin with his promise to "set forth the views of those who are now teaching heresy ... to show how absurd and inconsistent with the truth are their statements. ... I do this so that ... you may urge all those with whom you are connected to avoid such an abyss of madness and of blasphemy against Christ."

He denounces as especially "full of blasphemy" a famous gospel called the *Gospel of Truth.* Is Irenaeus referring to the same *Gospel of Truth* discovered at Nag Hammadi? Quispel and his collaborators, who first published the *Gospel of Truth,* argued that he is; one of their critics maintains that the opening line (which begins "The gospel of truth") is not a title. But Irenaeus does use the same source as at least one of the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi—the *Apocryphon of John*—as ammunition for his own attack on such "heresy." Fifty years later Hippolytus, a teacher in Rome, wrote another massive *Refutation of All Heresies* to "expose and refute the wicked blasphemy of the heretics."

This campaign against heresy involved an involuntary admission of its persuasive power; yet the bishops prevailed. By the time of the Emperor Constantine's conversion, when Christianity became an officially approved religion in the fourth century, Christian bishops, previously victimized by the police, now commanded them. Possession of books denounced as heretical was made a criminal offense. Copies of such books were burned and destroyed. But in Upper Egypt, someone, possibly a monk from a nearby monastery of St. Pachomius, took the banned books and hid them from destruction—in the jar where they remained buried for almost 1,600 years.

But those who wrote and circulated these texts did not regard themselves as "heretics." Most of the writings use Christian terminology, unmistakably related to a Jewish heritage. Many claim to offer traditions about Jesus that are secret, hidden from "the many" who constitute what, in the second century, came to be called the "catholic church." These Christians are now called Gnostics, from the Greek word *gnosis,* usually translated as "knowledge." ... As the Gnostics use the term, we could translate it as "insight," for gnosis involves an intuitive process of knowing oneself. And to know oneself, they claimed, is to know human nature and human destiny. ...

What Muhammad 'Ali discovered at Nag Hammadi is, apparently, a library of writings, almost all of them Gnostic. Although they claim to offer secret teaching, many of these texts refer to the

"The Gnostics were more liberated"

INTERVIEW WITH
JAMES M. ROBINSON

James Robinson is general editor of The Nag Hammadi Library.

How would you characterize the Nag Hammadi texts?
The canonical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are a sort of theological biography of Jesus. By contrast, only one of the four Nag Hammadi "Gospels" should be called a gospel at all, if by that term one means information about Jesus. For only the *Gospel of Thomas* tells about Jesus. And, rather than telling the stories about him, it only quotes 114 sayings ascribed to Jesus.

Dan Brown refers to the Nag Hammadi find as "scrolls," but they are not. They are codices—books with individual pages. They are actually the oldest example we have of leather-bound books.

What do we know about how these texts were written?
They were most likely written by different people at different times. If they were written in the second and third centuries, the authors would likely have been Gnostics, part of a movement that was almost competing with emerging orthodox Christianity. They thought the dominant church of the day was too earthbound, too worldly, too materialistic, and too physical and had missed the spiritual, allegorical, higher, heavenly secret meaning of Christianity.

Does the word *companion* in the Gospel of Philip imply that Jesus and Mary were married? And even that they kissed?
No, it doesn't automatically mean married or unmarried. *Companion* is not necessarily a sex-related term. The writer of the *Gospel of Philip* clearly disdains physical sex as beastly. And too much has been made out of this kiss. There is another Nag Hammadi text in which Jesus kisses James on the mouth. Does that make him homosexual? And given both kisses, does that make him bisexual?

Still, would you agree that whoever wrote the Gnostic Gospels was more sympathetic to women than was the case with the orthodox tradition?
Yes, certainly. I think the Gnostics were more liberated, to use a modern term. Their view of women in the church was based more on the perceived quality of their religious experience than on the relationship between bishop and supplicant.

Scriptures of the Old Testament, and others to the letters of Paul and the New Testament Gospels. Many of them include the same dramatis personae as the New Testament—Jesus and his disciples. Yet the differences are striking.

Orthodox Jews and Christians insist that a chasm separates humanity from its creator: God is wholly other. But some of the Gnostics who wrote these gospels contradict this: Self-knowledge is knowledge of God; the self and the divine are identical.

Second, the "living Jesus" of these texts speaks of illusion and enlightenment, not of sin and repentance, like the Jesus of the New Testament. Instead of coming to save us from sin, he comes as a guide who opens access to spiritual understanding. But when the disciple attains enlightenment, Jesus no longer serves as his spiritual master: The two have become equal, even identical.

Third, orthodox Christians believe that Jesus is Lord and Son of God in a unique way: He remains forever distinct from the rest of humanity whom he came to save. Yet the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* relates that as soon as Thomas recognizes him, Jesus says to Thomas that they have both received their being from the same source:

> *"Jesus said, 'I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become drunk from the bubbling stream which I have measured out. ... He who will drink from my mouth will become as I am: I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him.' " ...*

Ideas that we associate with Eastern religions emerged in the first century through the Gnostic movement in the West, but they were suppressed and condemned by polemicists like Irenaeus. Yet those who called Gnosticism heresy were adopting—consciously or not—the viewpoint of that group of Christians who called themselves orthodox Christians. A heretic may be anyone whose outlook someone else dislikes or denounces. According to tradition, a heretic is one who deviates from the true faith. But what defines that "true faith"? Who calls it that, and for what reasons?

We find this problem familiar in our own experience. The term "Christianity," especially since the Reformation, has covered an astonishing range of groups. Those claiming to represent "true Christianity" in the twentieth century can range from a Catholic cardinal in the Vatican to an African Methodist Episcopal preacher initiating revival in Detroit, a Mormon missionary in Thailand, or the member of a village church on the coast of Greece. Yet Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox agree that such diversity is a recent and deplorable development. According to Christian legend, the early church was different. Christians of every persuasion look back to the primitive church to find a simpler, purer form of Christian faith. In the apostles' time, all members of the Christian community shared their money and property; all believed the same teaching, and worshiped together; all revered the authority of the apostles. It was only after that golden age that conflict, then heresy emerged: so says the author of the Acts of the Apostles, who identifies himself as the first historian of Christianity.

But the discoveries at Nag Hammadi have upset this picture. If we admit that some of these fifty-two texts represent early forms of Christian teaching, we may have to recognize that early Christianity is far more diverse than nearly anyone expected before the Nag Hammadi discoveries. ●

We may have to recognize that early Christianity is far more diverse than nearly anyone expected before the Nag Hammadi discoveries.

HERETIC HUNTER. Irenaeus led the church's early campaign against heresy.

DAGLI ORTI / THE ART ARCHIVE

Christianity's Untidy Start

THE DA VINCI CODE IS SHINING A NEW LIGHT ON WHAT REALLY HAPPENED LONG AGO

BY **DAN BURSTEIN**

One form of Christianity ... emerged as victorious from the conflicts of the second and third centuries. This one form of Christianity decided what was the "correct" Christian perspective; it decided who could exercise authority over Christian belief and practice; and it determined what forms of Christianity would be marginalized, set aside, destroyed. It also decided which books to canonize into Scripture and which books to set aside as "heretical," teaching false ideas. ...

—Bart D. Ehrman,
Professor of Religious Studies,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

In the beginning, there was not one Christianity, but many. And among them was a well-established tradition of Gnosticism, one of the key "heresies" upon which Dan Brown builds the plot of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Sacred roots and twenty centuries of primacy in the Western world have led to the generally dominant view that modern Christianity evolved more or less linearly and directly from the teachings of Jesus. The snapshot Western civilization has tended to see is a natural progression: starting with Jesus and followed by the preaching of the apostles as depicted in the New Testament, on through the establishment of the church by Peter, brought under the wing of Constantine and the Council of Nicea, and from thence throughout the Roman Empire, Europe, and on into the modern world. If we think about debate, conflict, and heresy in Christian thought, our history and humanities classes tend to emphasize the comparatively recent experience of the Reformation.

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* wants to acquaint the reader with the lesser known, even "hidden" side of the story, the unanswered questions about the early history of Christianity.

Early Christian history proceeds to an untidy story punctuated by loose ends, unknowns, intrigues both political and personal, ironies, and considerable doses of what in today's political vernacular might be called "spin." As it turns out, the history of Christianity is primarily one of widely and sometimes wildly differing understandings of what correct Christian belief is, and considerable zeal in the identification and persecution of those thought not to believe correctly. These divergences, diversities, and differences may even go back to the very first moments of the Jesus movement. The differences between Peter and others, the question of Mary Magdalene's role, and the inner questions and doubts of Jesus himself are all becoming far more apparent given today's scholarship, textual analysis, and archaeology, than they were at any time in the last sixteen hundred years or so.

Scholars have long known that there is roughly a forty-year gap (maybe less, but maybe much more) between the death of Jesus and the writing of the first Gospel. During that period the followers of Jesus were consolidating their beliefs through oral tradition, and deciding who Jesus was and what his life and death meant. Each Gospel was an evangelist's telling of the story from a somewhat different point of view, based on the teller's own circumstances and audience. Eventually, four Gospels and twenty-three other texts were canonized into a Bible. This did not occur, however, until the sixth century.

There was so much ferment in Judaism in those days—different cults, sects, clans, tribes, prophets, false prophets, rabbis, teachers, the Greek-influenced, the Roman-influenced—that the Jesus movement may not have appeared as anything shockingly new or different when it first emerged. The Jewish communities scattered across Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere all had their own traditions of modified beliefs and influences drawn from their surrounding cultures. Judaism in those days was a big tent even if under it, things were often unruly, fractious, and bitterly—even fatally—divided.

What became Christianity was initially Jews

POINT MAN. St. Paul had his own views on Christianity, but there were plenty of other versions.

GIRAUDON / ART RESOURCE

For a long time after the death of Jesus, his followers were not necessarily perceived as believers in a religion that was fundamentally different from Judaism.

preaching an increasingly different form of Judaism to other Jews. Sometimes called Nazareans by Jews and Christians by gentiles (non-Jews), some of the circles of Jesus's followers required that males be circumcised and that the Jewish ritual and dietary laws be followed, yet they professed belief that Jesus was the Son of God and the sole path to salvation—beliefs inconsistent with Jewish orthodoxy. Saul, a Greek Jew, was strongly opposed to the Nazareans, but on the road to Damascus he had a vision in which Jesus told him to spend the remainder of his life spreading the gospel to the gentiles. Saul changed his name to Paul. His beliefs differed in significant ways from those of the others of the groups then emerging from the Jewish tradition: Paul felt that male converts should not have to be circumcised, and that following Jewish law was not necessary, thereby setting up one of the earliest Christian conflicts. Paul concentrated his efforts on converting gentiles, while others attempted to convert from within the Jewish community.

The spread of Christianity was a protracted, complicated, and decidedly messy process that must be viewed within the context of the political world in the early centuries of this era. As the Roman Empire spread geographically, it incorporated populations whose religious beliefs were primarily pagan and naturalistic, tied to Greek and Egyptian mythology. These existed side by side, with the state taking no side.

Against the dominant polytheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism were monotheistic, teaching an entirely different relationship of man to God (as opposed to man to gods), and a decidedly different path to salvation. Along the way, many diverse interpretations of the Christian belief system arose, some borrowing elements from the surrounding pagan traditions (see below) and others simply having alternate interpretations of key doctrinal beliefs.

Yet another trend to emerge—one especially

The Pagan Mysteries Behind Early Christianity

BY **TIMOTHY FREKE** AND **PETER GANDY**

We had shared an obsession with world mysticism all our lives which recently had led us to explore spirituality in the ancient world. Popular understanding inevitably lags a long way behind the cutting edge of scholarly research and, like most people, we initially had an inaccurate and outdated view of Paganism. We had been taught to imagine a primitive superstition, which indulged in idol worship and bloody sacrifice, and dry philosophers wearing togas stumbling blindly toward what we today call science. We were familiar with various Greek myths, which showed the partisan and capricious nature of the Olympian gods and goddesses. All in all, Paganism seemed primitive and fundamentally alien. After many years of study, however, our understanding has been transformed.

Pagan spirituality was actually the sophisticated product of a highly developed culture. The state religions, such as the Greek worship of the Olympian gods, were little more than outer pomp and ceremony. The real spirituality of the people expressed itself through the vibrant and mystical "Mystery religions." At first underground and heretical movements, these Mysteries spread and flourished throughout the ancient Mediterranean, inspiring the greatest minds of the Pagan world, who regarded them as the very source of civilization.

At the heart of the Mysteries were myths concerning a dying and resurrecting godman, who was known by many different names. In Egypt he was Osiris, in Greece Dionysus, in Asia Minor Attis, in Syria Adonis, in Italy Bacchus, in Persia Mithras. Fundamentally all these godmen are the same mythical being.We will use the combined name Osiris-Dionysus to denote his universal and composite nature.

The various myths of the different godmen of the Mysteries share what the great mythologist Joseph Campbell called "the same anatomy."

The more we studied the various versions of the myth of Osiris-Dionysus, the more it became obvious that the story of Jesus had all the characteristics of this perennial tale. Event by event, we found we were able to construct Jesus's supposed biography from mythic motifs previously relating to Osiris-Dionysus:

Osiris-Dionysus is God made flesh, the savior and "Son of God."

His father is God and his mother is a mortal virgin.

He is born in a cave or humble cowshed on December 25 before three shepherds.

He offers his followers the chance to be born again through the rites

relevant to those interested in the real background of *The Da Vinci Code*'s version of history—was Gnosticism. Gnostics sought knowledge in a mystical, cosmological, and secret sense. They tended to fuse Christianity as a philosophy with more Greek, Egyptian, mythic, and even Eastern elements. Gnostics seem to have been highly literate and to have inherited a mix of the Greek and rabbinic traditions of forming schools to share knowledge and discussion. Representing a variant of Christianity at sharp odds with the increasingly dominant Pauline Christians, the Gnostics were declared to be heretics to be opposed and suppressed.

Over the first two centuries, Christianity morphed from belief taught by itinerant evangelists to small communities of believers organized in local churches—each with its own leaders, writings, and beliefs—with no overarching authority or hierarchy. Slowly at first, then with increasing rapidity, a formal hierarchy came about, and with it a need for doctrinal uniformity. Bishops met in synods to declare what was doctrinally correct. Other views were heresies to be eradicated.

A major thorn in Constantine's side was the ongoing controversy with the followers of Arius (Arians) who disputed the notion that Jesus was of the same substance as the Father. Only the Father was God, said Arius and his followers; Christ was not a deity. Constantine wanted the matter settled, and so in 325 convened the Council of Nicea, which declared Arianism a heresy. What did and didn't happen at the Council of Nicea is a subject of debate between Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code* and what many religious practitioners and scholars believe. But Brown's version is highly compelling in this key sense: This was a power struggle over the intellectual infrastructure that would rule much of European politics and thought for the following thousand years. Nicea was not about truth or veracity of religious or moral vision. Ruling some ideas in and others out was fundamentally about politics and power. From Constantine at Nicea to Pope Gregory nearly three hundred years later (and much in between) turns out, at least in retrospect, to have been all about developing the intellectual and political infrastructure of Europe for the next thousand years. You might say it was about codification of the code. ●

Osiris: Death and resurrection are a common religious motif.

ERICH LESSING–ART RESOURCE

of baptism.

He miraculously turns water into wine at a marriage ceremony.

He rides triumphantly into town on a donkey while people wave palm leaves to honor him.

He dies at Eastertime as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

After his death he descends to hell, then on the third day he rises from the dead and ascends to heaven in glory.

His followers await his return as the judge during the Last Days.

His death and resurrection are celebrated by a ritual meal of bread and wine, which symbolize his body and blood.

These are just some of the motifs shared between the tales of Osiris-Dionysus and the biography of Jesus. Why are these remarkable similarities not common knowledge? Because, as we were to discover later, the early Roman Church did everything in its power to prevent us perceiving them. It systematically destroyed Pagan sacred literature in a brutal program of eradicating the Mysteries, a task it performed so completely that today Paganism is regarded as a "dead" religion.

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The Church Triumphant

WAS THERE A COVERUP, OR JUST A GREAT THEOLOGICAL DEBATE?

BY **DAN BURSTEIN**

That modern philosopher-theologian Yogi Berra once said, "When you come to the fork in the road, take it." The metaphorical junction of Christian theology and the struggle for control of the church presented itself as a series of forks in the road during the first six hundred years after the death of Christ. Where these roads led, how they clashed, and what the overt and covert meaning of the outcome was, is discussed in the following pages.

To achieve primacy, the early church fathers from the time of Constantine onward believed they needed to turn Christianity into a force to unite and strengthen the Roman Empire, consistent with the empire's values, politics, and social and military infrastructure. Those who led the empire in this pursuit believed that a key task was to distill a core ideology and cosmology out of all the various ideas that made up the Christian and other competing messages of the era. In doing so, they chose to glorify certain Gospel accounts that reinforced their version of Christendom's message—even to select those to be included in the Bible and in what order—at the same time as they vigorously rejected as heretical anything seen as politically or textually deviating from the mainstream.

The Gnostics, far from the centers in Rome and Constantinople, ended up on the defensive in this battle. The church systematically eliminated Gnostic and other "heretical" influences, even those that may have been closer to the beliefs and practices of the original revolution Jesus had started, in favor of those that served the cause of consolidating a standardized, hierarchical, powerful church. Down one path lay mystics having ecstatic experiences in the desert; down the other lay strong popes, central cathedrals, peasants arranging their lives against the backdrop of heaven and hell, and motivated Christian soldiers prepared to march forward.

As Bart Ehrman, professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, notes, "Once Constantine converts to Christianity, he converts to an orthodox form of Christianity, and once the state has power, and the state is Christian, then the state starts asserting its influence over Christianity. So by the end of the fourth century, there's actually legislation against heretics. So the empire that used to be completely anti-Christian becomes Christian, and not just becomes Christian, but tries to dictate what shape Christianity ought to be."

The struggle against the alleged heretics can be found in the writings of some of the most influential writers of the second and third centuries: Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Eusebius.

These individuals were real, historically well-documented figures of the early church. They played a critical, if sometimes inadvertent, role in selecting which Gospels and which texts would become the New Testament and the modern Christian canon, as well as in destroying—intellectually, ideologically, and physically—the "heretical" Christian movements. Although their names are scarcely known today to the average person of Christian faith, they wielded extraordinary power over determining the ultimate content of modern Christianity. They were the editors, so to speak, of the Bible. Reacting as they were to the severe repression of Christians they had witnessed, these church leaders developed their own biases and have to be understood in their own context. If you read some of their original pronouncements, you will understand just how dark and fearful the age was in which they lived and worked.

With the benefit of more than sixteen hundred years of hindsight, some experts now see those Gnostic "heretics" denounced by early church officialdom as having been on a more humanist, more philosophical, more feminist, and more "Christian" spiritual path than those who ultimately triumphed. If ever there were a case of the winners getting to write history the way they saw it, this is it. Out of

this epoch-defining process came a small number of Gospel truths on one side and a great many heretical documents on the other.

The extreme extension of the church's arguments against the heresies of sixteen hundred years ago would be recycled a thousand years later in the Inquisition. *Malleus Maleficarum,* published in 1486 as the political platform of the Inquisition, has its roots in the earlier battles against alleged heresies.

The theological and passionate cry of "foul" put forward by those who took the second road—expressed primarily in Gnosticism—can be found in the writings of Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy (excerpted on next page), among many other postmodern commentators. Freke and Gandy see the deeply spiritual, mythical, poetic, romantic, Goddess-cult, sacred feminine roots of Christianity being stamped out by these virulent antiheresy campaigns. They go so far as to argue that "there was no evidence that Jesus ever lived" (see interview, Page 45.) For them, it is the meaning of the myth that matters, not the man. They argue Jesus was another in a long line of mythic god-man figures, who was supposed to exist in harmony with the goddess. They see the efforts to select the Gospel truths and edit the rich history of Christian origins into an industrial-strength pablum as the destruction of the feminine side of the continuum, a deracinating break with the collective unconscious and the collective past. "Some of the things that we put in Jesus's Word were actually words that were originally in the goddess's mouth," they say.

Other scholars of religion, such as Elaine Pagels and Bart Ehrman, provide a very different perspective on this struggle of interpretation. Most serious scholars are likely to see Jesus as a real historical character, of and in his times. For example, in her bestselling book *Beyond Belief,* Elaine Pagels looks at how the Word of God became the Word of man through the selection of the Gospels to be included in the Bible. Professor Ehrman, in his book *Lost Christianities*, surveys the "other Christianities" and probes the religious, political, and cultural implications of the church's victory and the Gnostics' loss. (An excerpt from an interview with Professor Ehrman appears on Page 46.) Enter Dan Brown of *The Da Vinci Code,* who is determined to provoke new questions about this great historical debate. As Brown's character Leigh Teabing tells Sophie Neveu, what, in fact, unfolded several centuries after Christ's death was "the greatest coverup in human history." ●

TURNING POINT. The Council of Nicea met in 325 A.D. under Constantine's watchful eye.

DAGLI ORTI–ROGER CABAL COLLECTION / THE ART ARCHIVE

IMPERIAL POLITICS: The baptism of the Emperor Constantine just before he died.

The Origins of the Coverup

BY **TIMOTHY FREKE** AND **PETER GANDY**

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The traditional version of history bequeathed to us by the authorities of the Roman Church is that Christianity developed from the teachings of a Jewish Messiah and that Gnosticism was a later deviation. What would happen, we wondered, if the picture were reversed and Gnosticism viewed as the authentic Christianity, just as the Gnostics themselves claimed? Could it be that orthodox Christianity was a later deviation from Gnosticism and that Gnosticism was a synthesis of Judaism and the Pagan Mystery religion? This was the beginning of the Jesus Mysteries Thesis.

Boldly stated, the picture that emerged for us was as follows. We knew that most ancient Mediterranean cultures had adopted the ancient Mysteries, adapting them to their own national tastes and creating their own version of the myth of the dying and resurrecting godman. Perhaps some of the Jews had, likewise, adopted the Pagan Mysteries and created their own version of the Mysteries, which we now know as Gnosticism. Perhaps initiates of the Jewish Mysteries had adapted the potent symbolism of the Osiris-Dionysus myths into a myth of their own, the hero of which was the Jewish dying and resurrecting godman Jesus.

If this was so, then the Jesus story was not a biography at all but a consciously crafted vehicle for encoded spiritual teachings created by Jewish Gnostics. As in the Pagan Mysteries, initiation into the Inner Mysteries would reveal the myth's allegorical meaning. Perhaps those uninitiated into the Inner Mysteries had mistakenly come to regard the Jesus myth as historical fact and in this way Literalist Christianity had been created. Perhaps the Inner Mysteries of Christianity, which the Gnostics taught but which the Literalists denied existed, revealed that the Jesus story was not a factual account of God's one and only visit to planet Earth, but a mystical teaching story designed to help each one of us become a Christ.

The Jesus story does have all the hallmarks of a myth (see *The Pagan Mysteries Behind Early Christianity,* Page 40), so could it be that that is exactly what it is? After all, no one has read the newly discovered Gnostic Gospels and taken their fantastic stories as literally true; they are readily seen as myths. It is only familiarity and cultural prejudice that prevent us from seeing the New Testament Gospels in the same light. If those Gospels had also been lost to us and only recently discovered, who would read these tales for the first time and believe they were historical accounts of a man born of a virgin, who had walked on water and returned from the dead? Why should we consider the stories of Osiris, Dionysus, Adonis, Attis, Mithras, and the other Pagan Mystery saviors as fables, yet come across essentially the same story told in a Jewish context and believe it to be the biography of a carpenter from Bethlehem?

We had both been raised as Christians and were surprised to find that, despite years of open-minded spiritual exploration, it still felt somehow dangerous to even dare think such thoughts. Early indoctrination reaches very deep. We were in effect saying that Jesus was a Pagan god and that Christianity was a heretical product of Paganism! It seemed outrageous. Yet this theory explained the similarities between the stories of Osiris, Dionysus, and Jesus Christ in a simple and elegant way. They are parts of one developing mythos.

The Jesus Mysteries Thesis answered many puzzling questions, yet it also opened up new dilemmas. Isn't there indisputable historical evidence for the existence of Jesus the man? And how could Gnosticism be the original Christianity when St. Paul, the earliest Christian we know about, is so vociferously anti-Gnostic? And is it really credible that such an insular and anti-Pagan people as the Jews could have adopted the Pagan Mysteries? And how could it have happened that a consciously created myth came to be believed as history? And if Gnosticism represents genuine Christianity, why was it Literalist Christianity that

JACOPO VIGNALI, *THE BAPTISM OF CONSTANTINE,* SCALA / ART RESOURCE

came to dominate the world as the most influential religion of all time? All of these difficult questions would have to be satisfactorily answered before we could wholeheartedly accept such a radical theory as the Jesus Mysteries Thesis.

The Great Coverup

Our new account of the origins of Christianity only seemed improbable because it contradicted the received view. As we pushed farther with our research, the traditional picture began to unravel completely all around us. We found ourselves embroiled in a world of schism and power struggles, of forged documents and false identities, of letters that had been edited and added to, and of the wholesale destruction of historical evidence. We focused forensically on the few facts we could be confident of, as if we were detectives on the verge of cracking a sensational whodunit, or perhaps more accurately as if we were uncovering an ancient and unacknowledged miscarriage of justice. For, time and again, when we critically examined what genuine evidence remained, we found that the history of Christianity bequeathed to us by the Roman Church was a gross distortion of the truth. Actually the evidence completely endorsed the Jesus Mysteries Thesis. It was becoming increasingly obvious that we had been deliberately deceived, that the Gnostics were indeed the original Christians, and that their anarchic mysticism had been hijacked by an authoritarian institution which had created from it a dogmatic religion and then brutally enforced the greatest coverup in history.

The Jesus Mysteries

One of the major players in this coverup operation was a character called Eusebius who, at the beginning of the fourth century, compiled from legends, fabrications, and his own imagination the only early history of Christianity that still exists today. All subsequent histories have been forced to base themselves on Eusebius's dubious claims, because there has been little other information to draw on. All those with a different perspective on Christianity were branded as heretics and eradicated. In this way falsehoods compiled in the fourth century have come down to us as established facts.

Eusebius was employed by the Roman Emperor Constantine, who made Christianity the state religion of the Empire and gave Literalist Christianity the power it needed to begin the final eradication of Paganism and Gnosticism. Constantine wanted "one God, one religion" to consolidate his claim of "one Empire, one Emperor." He oversaw the creation of the Nicene creed, the article of faith repeated in churches to this day, and Christians who refused to assent to this creed were banished from the Empire or oth-

Was Jesus Real?

INTERVIEW WITH **TIMOTHY FREKE**

In your opinion, is there any evidence that Jesus lived?

None at all. The only evidence we have is fake. There is no evidence at all for the historical Jesus, but loads to suggest that the Gospel story is a myth. If someone found the Jesus story in a cave, like the Nag Hammadi texts were found, and said, "Look I've got this story of a man, he's born of a virgin, walks on water, teaches these amazing spiritual insights, and then dies and comes back from the dead," I think everyone would go, "Well, this is clearly another myth, there's loads of them like this." It's only because we're so familiar with it that we can't see the obvious. One hundred fifty years ago people thought the story of Adam and Eve was true—some people still do. But the educated amongst us know that it's actually an allegorical myth about a transformation. So is the Jesus story. The early Gnostic Christians believed that Jesus was a mythical figure. When they were destroyed in the fourth century, their teachings survived in underground societies, as Dan Brown says. But the secret these societies were keeping alive had nothing to do with a blood lineage of kings and queens. The real secret was the gnosis, the Gnostic teachings of mystical enlightenment.

El Greco's *Christ Blessing*

You brand the wing of Christianity that survived and thrived Literalist. What has been the result of this Literalist reading of the Jesus story?

Whereas Gnostic Christians taught that Jesus was the hero of an allegorical myth, Literalists believed that Jesus was a real historical man.When Literalist Christianity was adopted as the religion of the brutal Roman Empire it viciously stamped out Gnosticism and destroyed the wonders of the ancient Pagan world, bringing about the misery of the Dark Ages. The Gnostics were well known for treating women as equals, but the Literalists were misogynists who eradicated the Goddess from Christianity. Literalist Christianity was and is a very negative version of life. Literalists ignored the Gnostic teachings of universal love and created an authoritarian religion which gave us the horrors of the Crusades, the Inquisition and the mass burning of witches.

GIRAUDON / ART RESOURCE

Constantine could now decide what was acceptable and what wasn't. Suddenly, everything relative to the church became a political issue as well as a religious one.

erwise silenced.

This "Christian" Emperor then returned home from Nicea and had his wife suffocated and his son murdered. He deliberately remained un-baptized until his deathbed so that he could continue his atrocities and still receive forgiveness of sins and a guaranteed place in heaven by being baptized at the last moment. Although he had his "spin doctor" Eusebius compose a suitably obsequious biography for him, he was actually a monster just like many Roman Emperors before him. Is it really at all surprising that a "history" of the origins of Christianity created by an employee in the service of a Roman tyrant should turn out to be a pack of lies?

History is indeed written by the victors. The creation of an appropriate history has always been part of the arsenal of political manipulation. ●

How the Battle for Scripture Was Won

INTERVIEW WITH **BART D. EHRMAN**

Bart D. Ehrman chairs the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. An authority on the early church and the life of Jesus, his most recent book is Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Really Know About Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine. *In this interview, he presents a view different from that advanced by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy about how modern Christianity emerged.*

A major notion of *The Da Vinci Code* is that a major alternate tradition to the Catholic Church—a side of the argument over the meaning of Jesus's life—has been lost to us for two thousand years. How do you look at this question?

There were actually a lot of different sides to the alternate tradition in Christianity, but perhaps the best examples can be found by looking at three of the variant forms of early Christianity: the Ebionites, the Marcionites, and the Gnostics. They are all sects within Christianity, but they are very different from each other.

The Ebionites were these Jewish Christians who emphasized the importance of being Jewish as well as Christian. The Marcionites were anti-Jewish, and believed that all things Jewish actually belong to the god of the Old Testament, who was not the true God. The Gnostics held to the belief that there were a number of different gods.

All of these groups claimed to go back to Jesus, which means they probably originated soon after Jesus' death and resurrection, or within a few decades at least. For example, the Ebionites claim that their teachings were derived from James the Just, who was the brother of Jesus, and who better to know what Jesus taught than his own brother? And they may have been right—they may have been propounding beliefs that James taught. Their faith did not spread widely, however, perhaps in part because their belief that people who were Gentiles had to become Jewish to be Christian meant that men had to become circumcised, which means they probably didn't win too many converts.

The Ebionites emphasized the Jewishness of Christianity. How about the Marcionites?

The Marcionites were followers of the mid-second-century Greek philosopher and teacher Marcion, who had spent about five years in Rome working out his theological system. He believed the apostle Paul had the true insight into Christianity because Paul differentiated between the law and the Gospel. Marcion pushed that view to an extreme, maintaining that if there is a separation between law and Gospel they must have been given to humankind from two different gods—the god who gave the law is the god of the Old Testament, whereas the god who saved people from the law is the god of Jesus. Similarly, the wrathful god of the Old Testament is the god who created this world, and chose Israel, and gave them his law, whereas the god of Jesus is the one who saves people from this god by dying for their sins.

Marcion had a huge following even after he was excommunicated (he may have been the first person to suffer this fate), going to Asia Minor, in modern-day Turkey, to establish churches. In truth, Marcionite Christianity was a real threat to the other forms—it almost took over Christianity as a whole.

How about the Gnostics?

All sorts of groups, very different from each other, are classified today by scholars as Gnostics. They were so different from each other that some scholars like the historian Elaine Pagels wonder whether we should even call them Gnostic anymore. Gnostics as a rule believed that this material world we live in is a cosmic catastrophe and that somehow sparks of the divine have become entrapped in this material world and need to escape, and they can escape when they acquire true knowledge of their situation. The Gnostic system provides them with the knowledge they need for escape, so salvation comes by getting the true knowledge necessary for salvation.

Where the Gnostics come from intellectually is

difficult to determine. They appear to represent a kind of amalgam of a variety of different religions, including Judaism and Christianity and Greek philosophy, especially Platonic philosophy, and they appear to have taken elements of these various religions and philosophies and combined them together into a major religious system. We know that there was a full-blown Gnostic system in the second century, probably early- to mid-second century, which is right around the time of Marcion. It's hard to know if Gnosticism began in Alexandria or if it began in Palestine, or where exactly, but we have evidence of Gnostics in Syria and Egypt. Eventually they make their way to Rome.

So what finished the Gnostics and these other sects? Did they just die out?

Although there were a variety of historical and cultural reasons, most of these groups probably died out because they were attacked—successfully, on theological grounds—and they weren't nearly as effective in their own propaganda campaigns. They failed to recruit new converts even while the orthodox groups created a strong structure.

But what really secured the victory was that the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. Naturally, he converted to the kind of Christianity that was dominant at that time. Once Constantine converts to an orthodox form of Christianity, and once the state has power, and the state is Christian, then the state starts asserting its influence over Christianity. So by the end of the fourth century, there's actually legislation against heretics. So the empire that used to be completely anti-Christian becomes Christian, and not just becomes Christian, but also tries to dictate what shape Christianity ought to be.

The ramifications of this change of events are enormous, of course. It changed the entire way the Western world understands itself, and how people understand something. Think of the concept of guilt alone: If some other groups had won, things might have been completely different.

So did the debates stop once the church had unified itself at the Council of Nicea?

The debates didn't end, but shifted. By the time you get to the Council of Nicea, you just don't have large groups of Gnostics anymore, or Marcionites, or Ebionites. But it didn't stop the debates. They just became more refined, and more heated. As an example, the Council of Nicea was about a form of Christianity called Arianism, which by second- or third-century standards was completely orthodox. By the time you get to the fourth century, however, and the theologians have refined their beliefs, Arianism becomes a major heresy. These Arians believed Jesus must have been subservient to the Father; after all, he prays to the Father and does the Father's will. Therefore, he's a subordinate deity. But the Arians were defeated by the Christians who maintained that Christ is not a subordinate deity, but that he's been divine from eternity past, that he's always existed in relationship to God. And so Christ isn't a divine being who comes into existence—he's always been divine, and of the same substance as God the Father himself.

The shifts in theology weren't as important as another shift that took place when Constantine became a Christian. Now he, an authoritarian political leader, could decide what kind of Christianity was acceptable and what kind wasn't. Suddenly everything related to the church became a political issue as well as a religious one. Some people think that Constantine converted to Christianity precisely because he thought the church might be able to help unify the empire because unlike paganism, which worshipped lots of different gods in lots of different ways, Christianity insisted on one god, and one way. That is why Constantine may have called the Council of Nicea—if the church was going to play the role of unifying the empire, the church itself must be unified. That is the when, why, and how it became a political issue. ●

FIRST DRAFT. Eusebius wrote the original history of the early church.

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Leonardo and His Secrets

Leonardo da Vinci hovers over *The Da Vinci Code* from the first moment in the Louvre to the last moment in the Louvre. He is everywhere in Dan Brown's novel, looking over the shoulder of the plot with the Mona Lisa eyes that gaze out from the cover. Did he integrate a secret coded message into *The Last Supper?* And if he did, was it about Mary Magdalene and her marriage to Jesus? Was it more generally about women and sexuality? Was it a heretical in-joke? Was it a secret gay message? Or was it something even more obscure to us today about the relative importance of John the Evangelist and Jesus Christ? Was Leonardo a secret devotee of the Templars and possibly a grand master of the Priory of Sion? Did he know anything about the Holy Grail beyond what other sophisticated Renaissance men knew? Did he believe the Holy Grail was not literally a chalice but the metaphorical or real womb of Mary Magdalene?

Did he believe in the cult of the sacred feminine? Did he, as several quotes attributed to him suggest, ascribe a feminine character to wisdom and knowledge, much as the Gnostics did.

Why did he write in codes? Who was the Mona Lisa—or was the painting actually a self-portrait? What happened toward the end of his life when he moved to France? Why did this greatest of all painters paint so few paintings? Where did he get his insights into physics, anatomy, medicine, the theory of evolution, chaos theory, aviation, and other subjects on which his thinking was hundreds of years ahead of the world's leading-edge thinkers and inventors?

There are many mysteries about Leonardo, and food for many more thrillers and flights of postmodern imagination to come long after *The Da Vinci Code* has become the answer to a trivia game question.

In the pages that follow, we have tried to illustrate two basic schools of thought. The mainstream view, held by most Leonardo scholars and art historians, suggests that while there are innumerable mysteries and questions in the life and work of Leonardo, there is no evidence to support conclusions as far afield as the thinking that the John character in *The Last Supper* is really Mary Magdalene, or that Leonardo presided over the Priory of Sion, or that he was leaving coded messages behind in his art works to be interpreted in later eras.

The other view—well expressed here by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, and documented much more extensively in their books—is certainly much more interesting, even if the evidence is thin. Their view offers fascinating answers to some of what the more established experts can only point to as a long list of questions. This type of thinking about Leonardo may turn out to have little basis in fact. But it may have a lot to offer metaphorically and conceptually. Reading Picknett and Prince, you can see the wheels turning in Dan Brown's mind as he says to himself, "Now, what if I took a bit of this thread and a bit of that, and wove a plot together like this ... ." —*Dan Burstein*

ART OR ARTIFICE? Leonardo's *Madonna Litta.* To what extent should we look for coded messages in what is clearly a work of art?

ABOVE: *PORTRAIT OF A BEARDED MAN,* POSSIBLY A SELF-PORTRAIT, BIBLIOTECA REALE, TURIN, ITALY / BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY; RIGHT: SCALA / ART RESOURCE

A Feast for All Eyes

THE HIDDEN AND NOT-SO-HIDDEN MESSAGES IN LEONARDO'S GREATEST PAINTINGS

Leonardo's Secret Code Revealed

BY **LYNN PICKNETT** AND **CLIVE PRINCE**

Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince are London-based writers whose books figured prominently in Dan Brown's research. From The Templar Revelation *by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince. Copyright © 1997 by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince. Reprinted by permission of Touchstone, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc., N.Y.*

To begin our story proper we have to look at Leonardo's Last Supper with new eyes. This is not the time to view it in the context of the familiar art-historical assumptions. This is the moment when it is appropriate to see it as a complete newcomer to this most familiar of scenes would see it, to let the scales of preconception fall from one's eyes. ...

The central figure is, of course, that of Jesus, whom Leonardo referred to as "the Redeemer" in his notes. ... He looks contemplatively downwards and slightly to his left, hands outstretched on the table before him as if presenting some gift to the viewer. As this is the Last Supper at which, so the New Testament tells us, Jesus initiated the sacrament of the bread and wine, urging his followers to partake of them as his "flesh" and "blood," one might reasonably expect some chalice or cup of wine to be set before him, to be encompassed by that gesture. ... Yet there is no wine in front of Jesus (and a mere token amount on the whole table). Could it be that those spread hands are making what, according to the artist, is essentially an empty gesture?

In the light of the missing wine, perhaps it is also no accident that of all the bread on the table very little is actually broken. As Jesus himself identified the bread with his own body which was to be broken in the supreme sacrifice, is some subtle message being conveyed about the true nature of Jesus's suffering?

This, however, is merely the tip of the iceberg of the unorthodoxy depicted in this painting. ... [F]or newcomers to the painting might be forgiven for harboring curious uncertainties about the so-called St John. For while it is true that the artist's own predilections tended to represent the epitome of male beauty as somewhat effeminate, surely this is a woman we are looking at. Everything about "him" is startlingly feminine. Aged and weathered though the fresco may be, one can still make out the tiny, graceful hands, the pretty, elfin features, the distinctly female bosom, and the gold necklace. This woman, for surely it is such, is also wearing garments that mark her out as being special. They are the mirror image of the Redeemer's: Where one wears a blue robe and a red cloak, the other wears a red robe and a blue cloak in the identical style. No one else at the table wears clothes that mirror those of Jesus in this way. But then no one else at the table is a woman.

Central to the overall composition is the shape that Jesus and this woman make together—a giant, spreadeagled "M," almost as if they were literally joined at the hip but had suffered a falling out, or even grown apart. To our knowledge no academic has referred to this feminine character as anything other than "St. John," and the M shape has also passed them by. ... Yet Leonardo must have hoped that perhaps others who shared his unusual interpretation of the New Testament message would recognize his version, or that someone, somewhere, some objective observer, would one day seize on the image of this mysterious woman linked with the letter "M" and ask the obvious questions. Who was this "M" and why was she so important? ...

Whoever she is, her own fate appears to be less than secure, for a hand cuts across her gracefully bent neck in what seems to be a threatening gesture. The Redeemer, too, is menaced by an upright forefinger positively thrust into his face with obvious vehemence. Both Jesus and "M" appear totally oblivious to these threats, each apparently lost in the world of their own thoughts, each in their own way serene and composed. But it is as if secret symbols are being employed, not only to warn Jesus and his

BEYOND THE CANVAS. Some see concealed clues in Leonardo's *The Virgin of the Rocks.*

REUNION DES MUSEES NATIONAUX / ART RESOURCE

What Some People See in *The Last Supper*

1. A knife hangs in the air, seemingly tinged with symbolic meaning, as it is disassociated from the rest of the image.

2. In *The Da Vinci Code,* Sir Leigh Teabing suggests that the character to Jesus's right, generally thought to be John, is really female, not male. The idea is that this is Leonardo's vision of Mary Magdalene, sitting in the most important place next to Jesus.

3. Peter's hand, slicing through the air in a menacing way in "Mary Magdalene's" direction, could be a gesture reinforcing Peter's rivalry with Mary Magdalene for control of Jesus's movement after his death, and Peter's jealousy over the important place in the movement Jesus may have given to Mary.

4. The 90-degree-angle space between Jesus and "Mary Magdalene" suggests a "V"—said in *The Da Vinci Code* to be the archetypal symbol of the chalice, the vagina, the womb, and female sexuality.

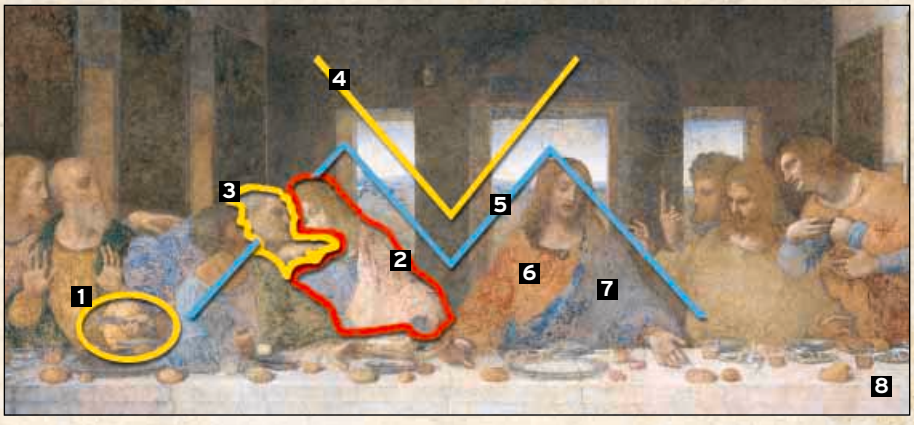
5. The line that outlines Jesus and "Mary Magdalene" traces the shape of an "M." According to another argument advanced in *The Da Vinci Code,* again by Teabing, this "M" could connote either Mary Magdalene or Matrimony.

6. At the center of the painting, the garments worn by Jesus and "Mary" are mirror images of each other's red and blue fabrics.

7. The blue color denotes spiritual love, fidelity, and truth. Red and blue are seen as the royal colors, in this case possibly suggesting the "royal blood" theme and the alignment of the royal House of Benjamin (from which Mary is said to be

descended) and the House of David (from which Jesus is said to be descended).

8. There is no central chalice or wine goblet in ***The Last Supper*** despite the popular preconception that there is. Instead, each person at the table has a small glass cup of his or her own. ***The Da Vinci Code*** jokes that Leonardo somehow seems to have forgotten to paint the Holy Grail itself.



ALINARI / ART RESOURCE

Is Leonardo using this painting to convey some private belief that it would have been insane to share more openly? And could this belief have a message for us today?

female companion of their separate fates, but also to instruct (or perhaps remind) the observer of some information which it would otherwise be dangerous to make public. Is Leonardo using this painting to convey some private belief which it would have been little short of insane to share with a wider audience in any obvious fashion? And could it be that this belief might have a message for many more than his immediate circle, perhaps even for us today?

There is more. An anomalous hand points a dagger at a disciple's stomach one person away from "M." By no stretch of the imagination could the hand belong to anyone sitting at that table because it is physically impossible for those nearby to have twisted round to get the dagger in that position. However, what is truly amazing about this disembodied hand is not so much that it exists, but that in all our reading about Leonardo we have come across only a couple of references to it, and they show a curious reluctance to find anything unusual about it. Like the St. John who is really a woman, nothing could be more obvious—and more bizarre—once it is pointed out. ...

We have often heard it said that Leonardo was a pious Christian whose religious paintings reflected the depth of his faith. As we have seen so far, at least one of them includes highly dubious imagery in terms of Christian orthodoxy, and our further research reveals that nothing could be further from the truth than the idea that Leonardo was a true believer—a believer, that is, in any accepted, or acceptable, form of Christianity. ... What we are looking at in *The Last Supper* and his other works is the secret code of Leonardo da Vinci. ... ●

"No, I do not believe there is a woman in *The Last Supper* ..."

INTERVIEW WITH **DIANE APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA**

Diane Apostolos-Cappadona is Adjunct Professor of Religious Art and Cultural History at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and Adjunct Professor and Core Faculty in Art and Culture in the Liberal Studies Program, both at Georgetown University.

As you know, some people, including Dan Brown, seem to see all sorts of things in *The Last Supper* that traditional art historians do not. What do you see when you look at this painting?

What Leonardo presents us with in his painting of *The Last Supper* is what he does primarily throughout all of his art—the humanizing of art. This is one of his biggest appeals. From my way of reading Christian art, this painting is iconographically important because Leonardo changes the focus of the iconography.

What Leonardo does is portray the announcement, "I am going to be betrayed," and the aftermath of that moment. The disciples are in shock. They look at each other, pointing with exaggerated gestures as if to say, "It can't be me, it must be you, but who could it be, how could it be any of us?" And Jesus is saying, not only, "I know I will be betrayed," but also, "I know which of you is going to do it."

The Jesus figure is set off in a particular way because the others are stunned. He is both the announcer and the betrayed.

What do you think, specifically, about the supposition that the "John" character is really Mary Magdalene?

Initially, my response was this is a very interesting interpretation, to say that there was a woman at the table. It fits nicely with feminist theology. However that doesn't make it true.

If you look at the history of the Last Supper in Christian art, you see the figure of Jesus, sometimes seated at the center of a table, other times at an end of a table. The table may be round, square, or rectangular depending upon social custom as much as for artistic spacing. Simultaneously, you see regularly the figure of John the Evangelist, in closest proximity to Jesus. There is a tradition of John being seen in our eyes as soft, feminine, and youthful.

However, if you look carefully at the Leonardo painting, you will notice other disciples who do not have beards or who could be construed as possessing feminine features. Gender is a culturally and socially conditioned concept. What we accept today as being masculine or feminine is most likely not what would have been accepted in Florence during the fifteenth century. If you look carefully at Christian art, in particular at the depictions of male and female bodies, faces, and gestures, then *The Last Supper* is not such an extraordinary presentation!

Can you be more specific?

I do not believe that there is a woman in *The Last Supper* and I do not believe in any way that it's Mary Magdalene. I think that the V that's there—the one Dan Brown defines as a symbol of femininity—is there, first of all, to emphasize the Christ figure and to emphasize the reality of the perspective within that fresco.

What role do artistic form and perspective play in this?

Perspective is extraordinarily important in Renaissance art, and in Leonardo's art in particular. The apostles are all grouped into triangular formations. For example, there is the triangle composed of the so-called Mary Magdalene-John figure, the gray-bearded figure behind [who is Judas], and the foreground figure [who is Peter]. Dan Brown has omitted any discussion of pyramidal composition in Leonardo's oeuvre, of the four triangular groupings which are important to form the compositional balance for the central triangular figure who is Jesus. It is this pyramidal composition that is one of Leonardo's great gifts to Western art. ●

Da Vinci's Not-So Secret Code

INTERVIEW WITH **DENISE BUDD**

Denise Budd is a Columbia University Ph.D. who wrote her doctoral dissertation on Leonardo da Vinci

Leonardo is known for peppering his works with symbolism and, some say, heretical ideas, in his *Virgin of the Rocks* paintings, for example. Do you agree?

No, I don't. The *Virgin of the Rocks* (see Page 50) was a religious commission for the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception for the church of San Francesco Grande in Milan—not for nuns, as Brown says. Leonardo da Vinci got the commission in 1483. One of the reasons that Dan Brown argues that the painting is heretical is because he misreads the work, confusing the figure of St. John the Baptist with Christ. The composition shows Mary—with her hand suspended over her son, creating a dominant axis—embracing Christ's cousin St. John, who kneels in reverence. The Baptist is the first to recognize Christ's divinity, which he does in the womb, so this composition falls completely within the norms of tradition.

With the added element of the angel Uriel, Leonardo is actually combining two separate moments: this scene, from Christ's infancy, with the scene when the Baptist visits the holy family on the flight into Egypt. Leonardo guides us through the composition by the play of hands, which relate the figures to one another. Presumably, the subject would have been worked out with the confraternity, and it would have played an important role in establishing the iconography, which likely refers to the issue of Mary's immaculate conception, which was not yet a matter of settled church doctrine. During the Renaissance, an artist was not generally given free rein on important commissions. There would have been specific guidelines. And presumably, Leonardo worked within that framework. ●

Why is This Woman Smiling?

BY **LYNN PICKNETT**

Who was the Mona Lisa? Why is she smiling or smirking? Indeed, *is* she smiling or smirking, or is the impression simply due to the genius of Leonardo's unique brushwork, which creates a subtle effect, almost of shifting light? And if it was a portrait of some Italian or French lady, why was it never claimed by her family?...

The *Mona Lisa*, it seems, was a self-portrait. ...This startling—and, on the face of it, sensational and unlikely—hypothesis was put forward in the 1980s by two researchers working independently: Dr. Digby Quested, of London's Maudsley Hospital, and Lillian Schwartz, of Bell Laboratories ... both noticed that the features of the "female" face of the *Mona Lisa* were exactly the same as those of the 1514 self-portrait of the artist as an old man, drawn in red chalk, now in Turin. ...

If, as seems to be the case, Leonardo was both the Mona Lisa and the face on the Shroud, then he had achieved a double coup: He not only became the universally recognized image of the Son of God, but also the "Most Beautiful Woman in the World"—no wonder "she" was smirking mysteriously!

Over the years, it has been suggested, sometimes even seriously, that the *Mona Lisa* was in fact a portrait of Leonardo's unknown female lover, which is considerably more unlikely than the self-portrait theory, on the grounds that he was almost certainly homosexual. ...

If the elusive image of the enigmatic woman was indeed a self-portrait, why did he do it, and why did he keep it with him until his dying day? Perhaps the answer is simply that he thought he had produced a masterpiece. Perhaps he liked the look of himself as a woman, beardless and in drag. ... Yet there are reasons to consider that, like everything else he did, there was also a deeper reason ... .

Like Mary Magdalene, the illegitimate Leonardo was an outsider, a tormented genius without much formal education, humored and flattered in the courts of the great, but always dependent on patronage, always the artistic prostitute. As an outsider, he reached out across the dark centuries to another: Perhaps the dragged-up Leonardo was supposed to represent the Magdalene herself.

From the book Mary Magdalene *by Lynn Picknett by permission of Constable & Robinson Ltd, London. Copyright © Lynn Picknett 2003.*

AKG

Inside the Mind of a Genius

FROM THOUSANDS OF PIECES OF PAPER, A PORTRAIT OF A MASTER AT WORK

BY **SHERWIN B. NULAND**

Sherwin Nuland is Clinical Professor of Surgery at Yale University, where he also teaches medical history and bioethics. From Leonardo da Vinci *by Sherwin B. Nuland, copyright © Sherwin B. Nuland, 2000. Reprinted by arrangement with Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. and Lipper Publications, L.L.C. All rights reserved.*

This is the way I understand Leonardo da Vinci's intent, over the approximately thirty-five years during which he scrawled the more than five thousand manuscript pages of his extant writings, as well as those many undoubtedly lost. Beginning in Milan sometime after his thirtieth year, he began a process that amounts to setting down on paper a long series of notes to himself, some of which were random and brief, and some of which were well-constructed studies of one or another problem of an artistic, scientific, or philosophical nature, usually accompanied by either elaborate or simple drawings. In fact, it would be more correct to say that the drawings, left in various stages of completion, are accompanied by notes, since the former are of far greater significance. The sizes of the manuscript pages vary from quite large, as most of them were, to as small as three and a half by two and a half inches. More than half of the material is on loose sheets and the rest is in notebooks of various kinds. To add to the jumbling, Leonardo sometimes used folded sheets of paper which he later separated and arranged in pages, in such a way that the original juxtaposition was confused.

Almost always, an observation is complete on the page where it appears, although there are a very few instances, in bound volumes of numbered pages, where one finds the instruction "turn over," and "this is the continuation of the previous page." There is no punctuation, no accenting, and a proclivity toward running several short words together into one long one. Just as likely to be encountered is the division of a long word into halves. And once in a while, one comes across words or proper names in which the order of the letters is scrambled, as though in great haste. Some of the letters and numbers are written according to Leonardo's own sometimes inconsis-

ART RESOURCE

VISIONARY. A manuscript page from a treatise on optics, in the artist's classic scribble

tent orthography, and they are at first difficult to decipher until one learns to recognize them, as well as to decipher certain shorthand terminology. In all, these are the personal idiosyncrasies of a personal note taker.

And then there is the so-called mirror writing. Leonardo wrote from right to left, adding considerably to the difficulty of transliterating his manuscripts. It is probably because of the mirror writing that he sometimes turned the pages of his notebooks in the reverse order, so whole sections can be found running back to front. A page of his scrawl is likely to contain a scientific discussion alongside a personal notation concerning daily household doings, and perhaps a sketch without text or text without a sketch or text and sketch all together in a completely lucid arrangement. When seemingly irrelevant notes and drawings are placed on some particular page, they are not infrequently found, when carefully scrutinized by experts, to be not irrelevant at all, but to have either direct or indirect applicability to the rest of the nearby material.

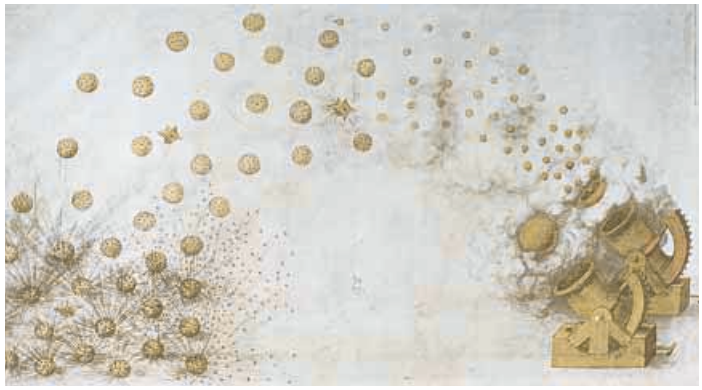
Although there is the volume that has been called since shortly after Leonardo's death the *Treatise on Painting*, its unity is the work of an unknown compiler who brought what he considered to be the appropriate pieces together into a unified form. The codex *On the Flight of Birds* does have something of a completeness about it, but other of the studies on flight are scattered through Leonardo's pages as well. In all of the

It was unpredictable nature that Leonardo saw as the creator of the earth's wonders. There is no mention here of God, and certainly no room for the Creation story.

manuscripts, there is not a single whole work as we conceive of it. What we have been left by Leonardo are the equivalent of thousands of those pieces of paper on which we have all recorded urgent messages to ourselves. Unfortunately, many of them are lost.

Certain of Leonardo's pages were not only never lost, however, but actually were revisited again and again. He might return to a particular sheet at intervals of weeks, months, or even many years in order to add drawings or notes as he learned more about a topic. ...

Although demanding to read, writing as though seen in a mirror is far less difficult than might be supposed. Left-handed people in general find it quite easy, and it may in fact be more natural to them than standard script. ... From all of these considerations, it would appear that there is no mystery in Leonardo's motives for writing as he did. He was almost certainly a lefty keeping notes, scribbling them as fast as he could because his hand was unable to keep up with the quickness of his mind. What some have thought a code seems to have been merely the personal scrawl of a man whose stylistic idiosyncrasies were a kind of shorthand to enable him to put things down on paper as quickly as possible. There is plenty of evidence from various of his comments that he intended eventually to collate much of this material, which would have been just as accessible to him as though he had written it in the standard way, even if to no one else.



AHEAD OF THE CURVE. Leonardo's drawing of a cannon in action, from the *Codex Atlanticus*

As convincing as the foregoing might be, it still remains possible that Leonardo did indeed deliberately record his thoughts in such a way that they would be indecipherable to any but those so determined to understand them as to be willing to devote long hours to the process. Vasari wrote that he had been a heretic, and more a philosopher than a Christian; some must have thought him a crypto-atheist; not a few of his notions were far from those of the Church. This is the man, it will be recalled, who wrote, long before Galileo was accused, "The sun does not move." And this is the man also who saw evidence everywhere, whether in the form of fossils, rock formations, or the movements of water, of the great age of the earth and of the constantly changing character of its geologic and living forms. ... Leonardo depicted that testimony in some of his paintings, specifically in *The Virgin of the Rocks,* the *St. Anne,* and the *Mona Lisa.* In the background of each can be seen the primeval world as he must have imagined it was before it evolved (I choose the word advisedly—he came close to describing the theory of evolution) into its modern form.

As a man who more than once proclaimed that everything is part of everything else, he surely related the generation of the world to the generation of a human being. His fascination with the one was of a piece with his fascination with the other.

It was unpredictable nature that Leonardo saw as the creator of the ever-changing wonders of the earth, and he did not hesitate to say so: "Nature, being inconstant and taking pleasure in creating and continually producing new forms, because she knows that her terrestrial materials are thereby augmented, is more ready and more swift in her creating than is time in his destruction." There is no mention here of God, and certainly no room for the biblical Creation story. Regardless of my own conviction to the contrary, perhaps considerations like these should be factored into any theory attempting to understand the totality of why Leonardo should have chosen to write so inaccessibly. The dangers of easily discovered heresy in that Church-dominated time cannot be underestimated, as we know all too well from the treatment not only of Galileo, but of others too, who dared to question doctrine. ...

Had Leonardo set out to record a volume of the principles by which he lived his life, or a book of aphorisms for which he wished to be remembered, or a compendium of his interpretations of the universe and its relationship to mankind—had any of these been his intention, he could not have accomplished them more effectively than he did in what would appear to be a scattershot miscellany of random thoughts sprayed over the pages of his loose sheets and notebooks, amid sketches, ar-

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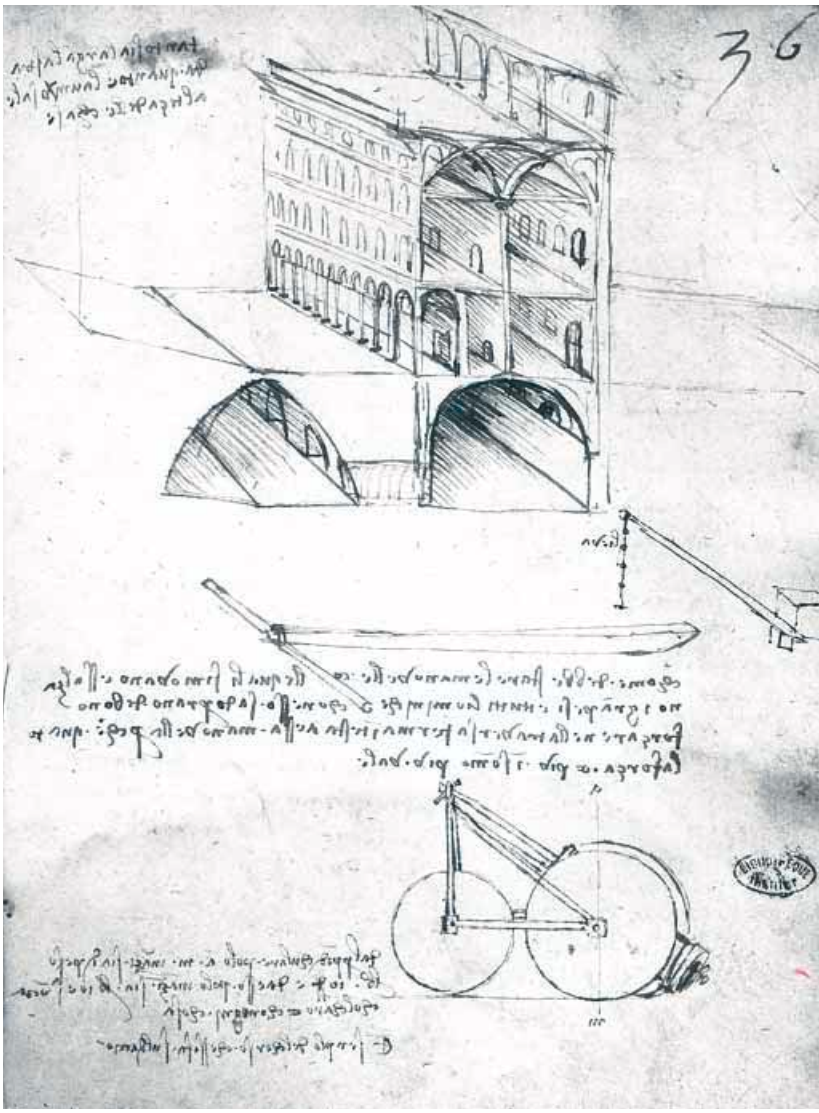
chitectural plans, scientific observations, mathematical constructs, quotations from other authors, and records of daily life. He exposes at once his innermost musings and the overt thrust of the message he devoted his life to transmitting: That a human being can be understood only by turning toward nature; that the secrets of nature are discoverable by observation and experiment free of preconception; that there are no bounds to the possibilities of man's understanding, that there is a unity between all elements in the universe; that the study of form is essential, but the key to understanding lies in the study of movement and function, that the investigation of forces and energies will lead to the ultimate comprehension of the dynamics of nature; that scientific knowledge should be reducible to mathematically demonstrable principles; that the ultimate question to be answered about all life and indeed all nature is not how, but why. ...

Some of the aphorisms in Leonardo's writings have the soaring quality of biblical verse, and even parallelism, reminiscent of *Proverbs, Psalms*, or *Ecclesiastes.* Here is the Leonardo who famously wrote, "Beauty in life perishes, not in art," expressing his certainty that painting is art's highest form: "Thirst will parch your tongue and your body will waste through lack of sleep ere you can describe in words that which painting instantly sets before the eye. ... "

Of course, many of the notations are far from being so lofty. There were lists of books to read or acquire; and there were recordings of the mundane activities involved in caring for a large household and directing a workshop of artists and artisans; and there were letters to various patrons complaining of nonpayment. ...

Every once in a great while, the reader encounters a statement so prescient that it is necessary to stop and read it again and then yet again, to be certain that it is being interpreted correctly. Leonardo introduced so many new concepts that there is a tendency to credit him with more than he actually deserves, and one must be cautious lest there be overinterpretation of some of his statements. But it is nevertheless not possible to avoid the thought that he is in the following passage elucidating the basis of the evolutionary principles that in numerous other manuscript pages he undoubtedly expresses in his observation of geological formations, waters and fossils. "Necessity is the mistress and the teacher of nature," he writes. "It is the theme and the inspiration of nature, its curb and eternal regulator." The necessity is the need to stay alive—it is the catalyst for the evolutionary process.

In like fashion, he seems to have understood the principles that would in later centuries come to be called inductive reasoning, and the role of experimentation in elucidating the general laws of nature:



BACKPEDAL. Leonardo typically used mirror writing; whole notebook sections run back to front.

> *"First I shall make some experiments before I proceed further, because my intention is to consult experience first and then by means of reasoning show why such experiment is bound to work in such a way. And this is the true rule by which those who analyze natural effects must proceed; and although nature begins with the cause and ends with the experience, we must follow the opposite course, namely (as I said before), begin with the experience and by means of it investigate the cause."*

Such a way of proceeding was unheard of in Leonardo's day. It was seventeenth-century thinking at a time when the great mass of philosophical men were doing just the opposite, namely, expounding overarching theories to explain their experiences and observations. ●

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In the Netherworld of Conspiracies

Like a good spy thriller, the plot of *The Da Vinci Code* moves from one stunning secret to another, from one coded message to the next, from an ancient conspiracy to a modern one, exploring all the while some of the most fundamental secrets of the archaic past and even archaic areas of the brain itself, where secret fears, compulsions, and ancient traumas reside.

Dan Brown has said that Robert Ludlum is among his favorite writers, and you can see in *The Da Vinci Code* a touch of vintage Ludlum. Start with compelling and powerful secrets, throw an ordinary man (and a beautiful woman) into fast-paced, high-stakes action to figure out these secrets against the ticking clock of a threat to civilization, confront the characters with dark, powerful secret societies and conspiracies, and wrap it all into action fast-paced enough to make the reader forget the cardboard characters and the plot holes.

The role of secret societies in such plots is not to be understated. And, as the novel points out, everyone loves a good conspiracy. In the case of the three most prominent secret societies in *The Da Vinci Code*—the Templars, the Priory, and Opus Dei—each one is a fascinating world unto itself, although the novel exaggerates greatly each one's power, influence, and history.

The Templars, for example, may have had some cult-like practices in medieval days that could be construed as sacred sex rites. Mary Magdalene may have figured more prominently in their culture than in contemporaneous Christianity. But it is extremely doubtful that they believed the Holy Grail had anything to do with Mary Magdalene's womb and the royal bloodline of the offspring she may or may not have had.

The Priory of Sion, while interesting to speculate about, may never have really existed as anything more than a minor political arm of the Templars during their heyday. As for the modern era, the Priory may be a complete canard in its twentieth-century incarnation.

Opus Dei is certainly wealthy, powerful, and secretive. It may well be pledged to a religious philosophy and even a set of political goals that many find anathema. But it is not dispatching albino monks to the streets of Paris to murder people over ancient religious secrets.

That is not to deny the concerns and fears some people may have about this or any other secretive group or conspiracy. "At the end of an exhausting century," wrote *Newsweek* recently, "conspiracy is a comfortable way to make sense of a messy world. One-stop shopping for every explanation. Things don't just fall apart. Somebody makes them fall apart."

The public also wants heroes and heroines like Langdon and Neveu. Given all the crazy and conflicting information coming at us in our daily lives, we all wish we could be like these New Age superheroes, acting intelligently and heroically—mentally and physically—to solve problems and avert disaster. They must crack the code before it is too late!

Welcome to the netherworld of *The Da Vinci Code.*
–Dan Burstein

CROSS OF GOLD. François-Marius Granet's nineteenth-century idealization of a knight taking the Templar oath

DAGLI ORTI–MUSEE CALVET AVIGNON / THE ART ARCHIVE

Knights of Mystery

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN THE MEDIEVAL TEMPLARS AND THE MODERN PRIORY?

BY **LYNN PICKNETT AND CLIVE PRINCE**

The following excerpt is from Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince's The Templar Revelation, *the original source of a number of* The Da Vinci Code*'s theories about Leonardo, the Templars, and the Priory of Sion. Copyright © 1997 by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince. Reprinted with the permission of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group from* The Templar Revelation *by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince. Picknett and Prince are London-based writers, researchers, and lecturers on the paranormal, the occult, and historical and religious mysteries.*

The names of Leonardo da Vinci and Jean Cocteau appear on the list of the Grand Masters of what claims to be one of Europe's oldest and most influential secret societies—the Prieuré de Sion, the Priory of Sion. Hugely controversial, its very existence has been called into question and therefore any of its alleged activities are frequently the subject of ridicule and their implications ignored. At first we sympathized with this kind of reaction, but our further investigations certainly revealed that the matter was not as simple as that.

The Priory of Sion first came to the attention of the English-speaking world as late as 1982, through the best-selling *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, although in its homeland of France reports of its existence gradually became public from the early 1960s. It is a quasi-Masonic or chivalric order with certain political ambitions and, it seems, considerable behind-the-scenes power. Having said that, it is notoriously difficult to categorize the Priory, perhaps because there is something essentially chimerical about the whole operation. ...

The underlying power of the Priory of Sion is at least partly due to the suggestion that its members are, and always have been, guardians of a great secret—one that, if made public, would shake the very foundations of both Church and State. The Priory of Sion, sometimes known as the Order of Sion or the Order of Our Lady of Sion as well as by other subsidiary titles, claims to have been founded in 1099, during the First Crusade—and even then this was just a matter of formalizing a group whose guardianship of this explosive knowledge already went back much further. They claimed to be behind the creation of the Knights Templar—that curious body of medieval soldier-monks of sinister reputation. The Priory and the Templars became, so it is claimed, virtually the same organization, presided over by the same Grand Master until they suffered a schism and went their separate ways in 1188. The Priory continued under the custodianship of a series of Grand Masters, including some of the most illustrious names in history [see Page 65], among them Leonardo da Vinci, who, it is alleged, presided over the Priory for the last nine years of his life. Among its more recent leaders were Victor Hugo, Claude Debussy, and the artist, writer, playwright and filmmaker Jean Cocteau. And although they were not Grand Masters, the Priory has, it is claimed, attracted other luminaries over the centuries, such as Joan of Arc, Nostradamus (Michel de Notre Dame) and even Pope John XXIII.

Apart from such celebrities, the history of the Priory of Sion allegedly involved some of the greatest royal and aristocratic families of Europe for generation after generation. These include the d'Anjous, the Hapsburgs, the Sinclairs, and the Montgomeries. The reported aim of the Priory is to protect the descendants of the old Merovingian dynasty of kings in what is now France, who ruled from the fifth century until the assassination of Dagobert II in the late seventh century. But then, critics claim that the Priory of Sion has only existed since the 1950s and consists of a handful of mythomaniacs with no real power—royalists with unlimited delusions of grandeur.

So on the one hand we have the Priory's own

KNIGHT CRUSADER. Godfrey of Bouillon captured Jerusalem in 1099. Nineteen years later, his brother founded the Templars.

ALINARI / ART RESOURCE

IT'S OFFICIAL! Pope Honorius II recognizes the Templars at the Council of Troyes in 1128.

claims for its pedigree and raison d'être and on the other the claim of its detractors. ...

Any mystery connected with the Priory of Sion also involves those warrior-monks [the Templars], and so they are an intrinsic part of this investigation.

A third of all the Templars' European property was once found in the Languedoc, and its ruins only add to the savage beauty of the region. One of the more picturesque local legends has it that whenever October thirteenth falls on a Friday (the day and date of the Order's sudden and brutal suppression) strange lights appear in the ruins and dark figures can be seen moving among them. Unfortunately on the Fridays when we were in that area, we saw and heard nothing except the alarming snufflings of wild boars; but the story shows how much the Templars have become part of local legend. ...

The main facts concerning the Knights Templar are simple. Officially known as The Order of the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon, they were formed in 1118 by the French nobleman Hugues de Payens as knightly escorts for pilgrims to the Holy Land. Initially there were just nine of them, for the first nine years, then the Order opened up and soon it had established itself as a force to be reckoned with, not only in the Middle East, but also throughout Europe.

After the recognition of the Order, Hugues de Payens himself set out on a European trip, soliciting land and money from royalty and nobility. He visited England in 1129, when he founded the first Templar site in that country, on the site of what is now London's Holborn Underground Station.

Like all other monks, the knights were sworn to poverty, chastity, and obedience, but they were in the world and of it and pledged to use the sword if necessary against the enemies of Christ—and the image of the Templars became inseparably linked with the crusades that were mounted in order to drive the infidel out of Jerusalem, and to keep it Christian.

It was in 1128 that the Council of Troyes officially recognized the Templars as a religious and military order. The main protagonist behind this move was Bernard of Clairvaux, the head of the Cistercian Order, who was later canonized. But as Bamber Gascoigne writes in *The Christians:*

> *He was aggressive, he was abusive ... and he was a devious politician who was quite unscrupulous in the methods he used to bring down his enemies.*

Bernard actually wrote the Templars' Rule—which was based on that of the Cistercians—and it was one of his protégés who, as Pope Innocent II, declared in 1139 that the Knights would be answerable only to the papacy from that time onwards. As both the Templars and the Cistercian Orders developed in parallel, one can discern a certain amount of deliberate co-ordination between them—for example, Hugues de Payens's

REUNION DES MUSEES NATIONAUX / ART RESOURCE

lord, the Count of Champagne, donated to St. Bernard the land in Clairvaux on which he built his monastic "empire." And significantly, André de Montbard, one of the nine founding knights, was Bernard's uncle. It has been suggested that the Templars and Cistercians were acting together according to a pre-arranged plan to take over Christendom, but this scheme never succeeded.

It is hard to exaggerate the prestige and financial power of the Templars when they were at the height of their influence in Europe. There was hardly a major centre of civilization where they did not have a preceptory—as, for example, the wide scatter of such place names as Temple Fortune and Temple Bar (London) and Temple Meads (Bristol) in England still shows. But as their empire spread, so their arrogance grew and began to poison their relations with both temporal and secular heads of state.

The Templars' wealth was partly a result of their Rule: All new members had to hand over their property to the Order, and they also gained a considerable fortune through massive donations of land and money from many kings and nobles. Their coffers were soon overflowing, not least because they had also amassed impressive financial astuteness, which had resulted in them becoming the first international bankers, upon whose judgment the credit ratings of others depended. It was a sure way of establishing themselves as a major power. In a short space of time their title of "Poor Knights" became a hollow sham, even though the rank and file might well have remained impecunious.

Besides their staggering wealth, the Templars were renowned for their skill and courage in battle—sometimes to the point of foolhardiness. They had specific rules to govern their conduct as fighters: For example, they were forbidden to surrender unless the odds against them were greater than three to one, and even then had to have their commander's approval. They were the Special Services of their day, an élite force with God—and money—on their side.

Despite their finest efforts, the Holy Land fell to the Saracens bit by bit until in 1291 the last Christian territory, the city of Acre, was in enemy hands. There was nothing for the Templars to do but to return to Europe and plot their eventual reconquest, but unfortunately by then the motivation for such a campaign had disappeared among the various kings who might have financed it. Their main reason for existing dwindled to nothing. Lacking employment, but still rich and arrogant, they were widely resented because they were exempt from taxation and their allegiance was to the Pope and to him alone.

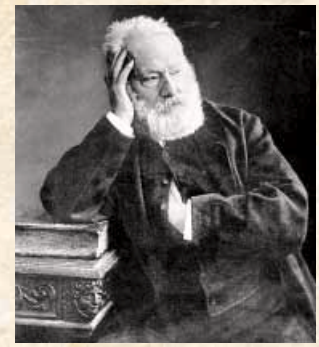
So in 1307 came their inevitable fall from grace. The supremely powerful French king, Philip the Fair, began to orchestrate the down-

The *Dossiers secrets* and the Murky Priory of Sion

In the 1960s, a number of mysterious documents began to be deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris "in a thin, nondescript volume, a species of folder with stiff covers that contained a loose assemblage of ostensibly unrelated items," write Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* the grand conspiracy theory tale that underlies *The Da Vinci Code.* The documents, which included pamphlets, letters, news articles, and "numerous genealogical trees," purported to establish the existence of the Prieuré de Sion, or Priory of Sion, a secret society dating back to the time of the Knights Templar, and one pledged to keeping alive the great religious secrets supposedly held by that powerful and shadowy group. Among the eye-popping list of "Grand Masters" who allegedly headed the organization over the centuries: the celebrated medieval alchemist Nicolas Flamel, whose term is listed in the *dossiers secrets,* as the papers are known, from 1398 to 1418; Sandro Filipepi (Botticelli), whose dates are given as 1483-1510; Leonardo da Vinci (1510-1519); Isaac Newton (1691-1727); and, more recently, three famous Frenchmen: Victor Hugo (1844-1885), Claude Debussy (1885-1918), and Jean Cocteau (1918-1963).

Sandro Botticelli

Isaac Newton


Victor Hugo

Jean Cocteau

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SCALA / ART RESOURCE (2); EXPLORER / GAMMA; WILLY RIZZO–GAMMA

Researching History's Most Shadowy Societies

INTERVIEW WITH **LYNN PICKNETT** AND **CLIVE PRINCE**

The Templar Revelation, *by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, was a best-seller in its own right. The authors' further thoughts on the Templars, the Priory of Sion and the* Dossiers Secrets:

What are the *Dossiers Secrets* in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and why does Dan Brown give them such prominence in *The Da Vinci Code?*

Dossiers Secrets is a convenient term, coined by Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* for a set of seven related documents of varying lengths—in total, less than a hundred pages—deposited in the library between 1964 and 1967.

The purpose of the documents is to establish the existence of the Priory of Sion and its role as guardian of historical and esoteric secrets, but *Dossiers Secrets* only drops hints as to their nature.

What is the direct connection between the Knights Templar and the Priory of Sion?

The central paradox of the Priory of Sion is that there's no evidence of its existence before 1956, yet it claims that it's been around since the Middle Ages. In recent years, though, it's changed its story, claiming to have been founded in the eighteenth century.

The conclusion that we've come to since writing *The Templar Revelation* is that the Priory of Sion that declared itself to the world in 1956 was invented then, but as a front for a network of related secret societies and esoteric orders that do have a genuine pedigree. There's a close connection between the modern Priory of Sion and secret societies that claim descent from the medieval Templars. These neo-Templar groups can all be traced back to an eighteenth-century society called the Strict Templar Observance, which claimed—with some justification—to be the authentic heir of the medieval Templars' secrets. And the organization led by Pierre Plantard [reputed grand master of the Priory of Sion in more recent times] acts as a front for these groups. The network of orders behind the Priory of Sion is closely entwined with certain forms of Freemasonry, such as the Rectified Scottish Rite.

Templars' cross from the order's church in Treviso, Italy

> There's no doubt the Templars also sought esoteric and spiritual knowledge—although you won't find much about that in standard history texts.

What made the Templars so famous? What secret information are they supposed to be guarding?

Historically, it is accepted that the Templars were unusually skilled in the fields of medicine, diplomacy, and the military arts—being the elite forces of their day. They acquired much of this knowledge on their travels, especially in the Middle East, and a good deal from their enemies, the Saracens, who were particularly renowned for their scientific knowledge. (One reason why the Saracens were so far ahead of the Europeans is that all scientific experimentation was banned by the church.)

There's no doubt the Templars also sought esoteric and spiritual knowledge—although you won't find much about that aspect of their raison d'être in standard history texts. The Templars were so secretive that nothing is known for certain about their hidden agendas: It's a matter for informed speculation. They've been linked to everything from the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Grail to the lost Gospels and the Shroud of Turin. Nobody really knows for sure.

Who is Pierre Plantard?

Pierre Plantard was grand master of the Priory of Sion until his death in 2000. He was their public face. With him, the Priory of Sion emerged into the public domain, mainly through the interviews he gave to Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln. Who the grand master is now, or even if there is one, is a matter of conjecture.

DAGLI ORTI–THE ART ARCHIVE

fall of the Templars with the connivance of the Pope, who was in his pocket anyway. Secret orders were issued to the king's aristocratic representatives, and the Templars were rounded up on Friday the thirteenth of October 1307, arrested, tortured, and burnt.

That, at least, is the story as told in most standard works on the subject. One is left with the idea that the entire Order met its horrible doom on that day long ago, and that the Templars were effectively wiped off the face of the earth forever. Yet that is nowhere near the truth.

For a start, relatively few Templars were actually executed, although most who were captured were "put to the question"—a well-worn euphemism for suffering excruciating torture. Relatively few faced the stake, although notably their Grand Master Jacques de Molay was slowly roasted to death on the Ile de la Cité, in the shadow of Notre-Dame Cathedral, in Paris. ...

The accounts of Templar confessions are colorful, to say the least. We read of their having worshipped a cat or indulging in homosexual orgies as part of their knightly duties, or venerating a demon known as Baphomet and/or a severed head. ... This is hardly surprising—not many victims of torture manage to grit their teeth and refuse to agree with the words put in their mouths by their tormenters. But in this case there is more to the story than meets the eye. On the one hand, there have been suggestions that all the charges levelled against the Templars were trumped up by those envious of their wealth and exasperated by their power, and that they provided a good excuse for the French king to extricate himself from his current economic difficulty by seizing their wealth. On the other hand, although the charges may not have been strictly true, there is evidence that the Templars were up to something mysterious and perhaps "dark" in the occult sense. ...

Much ink has been spilt on the debate over the charges made against the Templars, and their confessions. Had they actually committed the deeds to which they confessed, or did the Inquisitors invent the charges in advance and simply torture the knights until they agreed with them? (Some knights had testified that they had been told that Jesus was a "false prophet," for example.) It is impossible to say one way or the other conclusively. ...

Certainly the Priory of Sion claims to have been the power behind the creation of the Knights Templar: If so, then this is one of the best-kept secrets of history. Yet it is said that the two Orders were virtually indistinguishable until their schism in 1188—after which they went their separate ways. If nothing else there does seem to have been some kind of conspiracy about the conception of the Templars. Common sense suggests that it would have taken more than just the original nine knights to protect and provide refuge for all the pilgrims who visited the Holy Land, especially for nine years; moreover, there is little evidence that they ever made much of a serious attempt to do so. ...

Another mystery connected with their beginnings centres on the fact that there is evidence that the Order actually existed well before 1118, although why the date was falsified remains unclear. Many commentators have suggested that the first account of their creation—by William of Tyre, and written a full fifty years after the event—was simply a cover story. (Although William was deeply hostile to the Templars, he was, presumably, recounting the story as he understood it.) But once again, just what it was covering up is a matter for speculation.

Hugues de Payens and his nine companions all came from either Champagne or the Languedoc ... and it is quite apparent that they went to the Holy Land with a specific mission in mind. Perhaps, as has been suggested, they were searching for the Ark of the Covenant, or for other ancient treasure or documents that might lead them to it, or for some kind of secret knowledge which would give them mastery of people and their wealth. ... ●

One is left with the idea that the entire order met its horrible doom long ago, and that the Templars were effectively wiped out. Yet that is nowhere near the truth.

A MIGHTY FORTRESS. Monzón Castle in Aragon, given to the Knights Templar in their glory days

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The Enigma of Opus Dei

TO SOME IT IS A CULT-LIKE ORGANIZATION. TO OTHERS, IT IS DOING THE WORK OF GOD

BY **JAMES MARTIN, S.J.**

James Martin, S.J., is an associate editor at the Catholic magazine America *and a priest at St. Ignatius Loyola Church in Manhattan. "Opus Dei in the United States" was originally published in* America *on February 25, 1995.* *Copyright © 1995 by America Press. All rights reserved. For subscription information, visit* www.americamagazine.org.

Opus Dei is the most controversial group in the Catholic Church today. To its members it is nothing less than The Work of God, the inspiration of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, who advanced the work of Christ by promoting the sanctity of everyday life. To its critics it is a powerful, even dangerous, cult-like organization that uses secrecy and manipulation to advance its agenda. At the same time, many Catholics admit knowing little about this influential group.

TOWERING SECRETS. Opus Dei's U.S. headquarters on Lexington Avenue in New York City

Any look at Opus Dei must begin with Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the Spanish priest who founded the group on October 2, 1928. On that day, according to Opus Dei's literature, while on a retreat in Madrid, "suddenly, while bells pealed in a nearby church, it became clear: God made him see Opus Dei." Monsignor Escrivá, invariably referred to as the Founder by members, envisioned Opus Dei as a way of encouraging lay people to aspire to sanctity without changing their state of life or occupation.

His group grew rapidly, spreading from Spain to other European countries. Over the next two decades the Work, as members call it, moved into Latin America and the United States. In 1982 Pope John Paul II granted Opus Dei the unique status of "personal prelature"—the only one in the church. In other words, it operates juridically much as religious orders do, without regard for geographical boundaries. Today Opus Dei counts 77,000 members (including 1,500 priests and 15 bishops) in over 80 countries. There are over 3,000 Opus Dei members in the United States, with 64 centers, or residences for members, in 17 cities.

Further evidence of Vatican favor—and added legitimacy—came in 1992 when Escrivá was beatified in a ceremony attended by 300,000 supporters in St. Peter's Square.

Secrecy and Privacy

It is difficult to read anything about Opus Dei without running across accounts of its alleged secrecy. ("Pope Beatifies Founder of Secretive, Conservative Group" ran a *New York Times* headline in 1992.) Indeed, while a few members of Opus Dei are well known, most are not. Critics also point out that most of Opus Dei's organizations are not clearly identified as being affiliated with Opus Dei.

Opus Dei denies all this. "It's not secret," says communications director Bill Schmitt, "it's private. Big difference." He describes the vocation to Opus Dei as a personal relationship with God. But most critics are not concerned about whether members publicly announce their affiliation with Opus Dei. When critics speak of "secrecy," they refer instead to frustration in their efforts to get answers about the basic corporate activities and practices of Opus Dei.

Ann Schweninger is a 24-year-old former Opus Dei member now living in Columbus, Ohio, where she works with the Diocese of Columbus. "Opus Dei plays by its own rules," she said. "If they don't want to have something out in the open, they won't make it accessible." According to Ms. Schweninger, the only official document available is the catechism of Opus Dei, which even members can read only with the permission of the house director. "It's kept under lock and key."

RICHARD B. LEVINE

HOMAGE TO ESCRIVA. Pilgrims pack a prayer service for Opus Dei's founding father.

Lay Institution

To encounter Opus Dei is to encounter dedicated, energetic Catholics engaged in a variety of occupations. It is also to encounter a sometimes bewildering array of priests, numeraries, supernumeraries, cooperators, associates, directors, and administrators.

Numeraries are single members who pledge a "commitment" of celibacy and normally live in "centers." Numeraries turn over their income and receive a stipend for personal expenses. Numeraries (accounting for roughly 20 percent of the membership) follow the "plan of life," a daily order that includes Mass, devotional reading, private prayer, and, depending on the person, physical mortification. There are separate centers for men and women, each with a director.

Most members are supernumeraries, married persons who contribute financially and sometimes serve in corporate works like schools. Associates are single people who are "less available," remaining at home because of other commitments. According to two former numeraries, women are required to clean the men's centers and cook for them. I asked Bill Schmitt if women had a problem with this. "No. Not at all."

Casting a Wide Net

Traditionally, Opus Dei's effort to attract new members has led them to colleges and universities. It has sometimes led them into conflict with other groups.

One man who attended Columbia University in the early 1980s, who asked not to be named, described the process of being recruited. "They had someone become my friend," he said bluntly. After Mass one day he was approached by another student. Eventually he was invited to the Riverside Study Center near Columbia's campus. He was not certain exactly what it was. "I thought it was a group of students that were a think tank or something."

After becoming more involved, he decided to investigate on his own. He spoke with a few priests and professors and was surprised at how little he really knew. At the next circle meeting he raised some questions about issues that troubled him—for example, women and minority presence in Opus Dei. "They really didn't have any answers and asked me not to return." And more disturbing for him: "I never heard from my friend again. I was totally cut off." ●

ERIC VANDEVILLE–GAMMA

The Riddles Have It

***THE DA VINCI CODE* IS AN ARTFUL WEB OF MYSTERIOUS CODES AND SECRET SYMBOLS**

Da Vinci: Father of Cryptography

BY **MICHELLE DELIO**

Michelle Delio, who wrote this article for the April 2003 issue of Wired *magazine, is a journalist who has frequently written about encryption, Internet security, hackers, spam, privacy, and related topics. Reprinted from* Wired News, *www.wired.com.* *Copyright © 2004 Wired Digital Inc., a Lycos Network Company. All rights reserved.*

Most of all *The Da Vinci Code* is about the history of encryption—the many methods developed over time to keep private information from prying eyes. The novel begins with Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon receiving an urgent, late night phone call: The elderly curator of the Louvre has been murdered inside the museum.

THINK PAD. Leonardo was bursting with ideas, and his notebooks are a jumble of visual expressionism.

Near the body, police have found a secret message. With the help of a gifted cryptologist, Langdon solves the enigmatic riddle. But it's only the first signpost along a tangled trail of clues hidden in the works of Leonardo da Vinci. If Langdon doesn't crack the code, an ancient secret will be lost forever.

The book's publicity hints darkly that the story lays bare "the greatest conspiracy of the past 2,000 years." Perhaps, but anyone who is interested in conspiracy theories won't find anything new here.

Where *The Da Vinci Code* does shine—brilliantly—is in its exploration of cryptology, particularly the encoding methods developed by Leonardo da Vinci, whose art and manuscripts are packed with mystifying symbolism and quirky codes.

Brown, who specializes in writing readable books on privacy and technology, cites da Vinci as an unheralded privacy advocate and encryption pioneer. His descriptions of da Vinci's cryptology devices are fascinating.

Throughout history, entrusting a messenger with a private communication has been rife with problems. In da Vinci's time, a major concern was that the messenger might be paid more to sell the information to adversaries than to deliver it as promised.

To address that problem, Brown writes that da Vinci invented one of the first rudimentary forms of public-key encryption centuries ago: a portable container to safeguard documents.

Da Vinci's cryptography invention is a tube with lettered dials. The dials have to be rotated to a proper sequence, spelling out the password, for the cylinder to slide apart. Once a message was "encrypted" inside the container only an individual with the correct password could open it.

This encryption method was physically unhackable: If anyone tried to force the container open, the information inside would self-destruct.

SETH JOEL–CORBIS

Da Vinci rigged this by writing his message on a papyrus scroll, and rolling it around a delicate glass vial filled with vinegar. If someone attempted to force the container open, the vial would break, and the vinegar would dissolve the papyrus almost instantly.

Brown also brings readers deep into the Cathedral of Codes, a chapel in Great Britain [Scotland's Rosslyn Chapel; see Page 84] with a ceiling from which hundreds of stone blocks protrude. Each block is carved with a symbol that, when combined, is thought to create the world's largest cipher.

"Modern cryptographers have never been able to break this code, and a generous reward is offered to anyone who can decipher the baffling message," Brown writes on his site.

"In recent years, geological ultrasounds have revealed the startling presence of an enormous subterranean vault hidden beneath the chapel. This vault appears to have no entrance and no exit. To this day, the curators of the chapel have permitted no excavation."

Brown specializes in literary excavation. His previous books have all involved secrets—keeping them and breaking them—and how personal privacy slams up against national security or institutional interests.

"My interest in secret societies sparks from growing up in New England, surrounded by the clandestine clubs of Ivy League universities, the Masonic lodges of our Founding Fathers and the hidden hallways of early government power," Brown said. "New England has a long tradition of elite private clubs, fraternities, and secrecy." ●

Deciphering the Symbols

INTERVIEW WITH **DIANE APOSTOLOS-CAPPADONA**

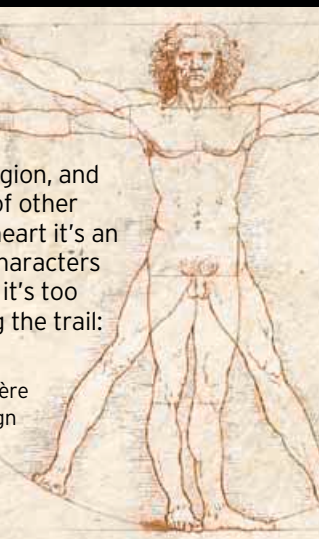
Diane Apostolos-Cappadona is Adjunct Professor of Religious Art and Cultural History at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and Adjunct Professor and Core Faculty in Art and Culture in the Liberal Studies Program, both at Georgetown University. She is about as close as one can get to being a real-life professional symbologist.

What is the importance of symbols in Christianity—and in religion in general?

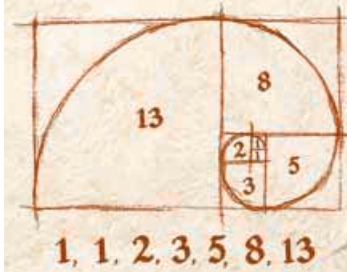
Symbols are a form of communication that operates on a variety of levels. They do such "simple things" as teach the ideas or the history of a faith or tradition, teach the stories of religious or societal traditions, teach religious doctrine, and explain how one is to gesture and posture and stand during liturgical services. There is the further understanding that symbols—and this principle is at work for all world religions, not

A TREASURE TRAIL OF CLUES

The Da Vinci Code may throw out more tantalizing re-readings of art, history, religion, and Western beliefs than a score of other bestsellers combined. But at heart it's an old-fashioned thriller whose characters must decode the clues before it's too late. A few of the riddles along the trail:



The Vitruvian Man. Jacques Saunière replicates Leonardo da Vinci's design with his dead body. Along with the anagram he scrawls, it's a clue to where he has hidden an all-important key for Sophie.



The Fibonacci Sequence. When unscrambled, the numbers Saunière scrawls on the Louvre floor reveal math's famous sequence—and the code to enter Saunière's bank box.

The Rosewood Box. Inside the box lies the cryptex, a container designed to carry secrets. If forced open, it will self-destruct. The inlaid rose pops out, revealing the next clue.

The *Codex Leicester.* Mimicking Leonardo's famous code, the message beneath the inlaid rose is written backwards. All it takes to decipher it is holding it up to a mirror to read it—once the riddle is solved.

בפומת
שופיא

The Atbash Cipher. The key to unlocking the cryptex uses this ancient Jewish substitution code: The first letter is substituted for the last letter, the second for the next, and so on.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROB CADY AND DOUG STERN–*USN&WR*

specifically Christianity—are a way of communicating an embodied identity of knowledge.

Do the meanings of symbols tend to change over time?

Yes, the meanings of symbols can change because of shifts in theology, doctrine, art styles, politics, and economic situations.

What's a Christian symbol that's changed over time?

The fish has had multiple connections and meanings, from the Last Supper to the risen Christ. The fish was found in original depictions of the Last Supper. The fish had many meanings in early Christianity; then, it basically disappeared from the Christian consciousness ... only to return in the late twentieth century when the ichthys was retrieved, or rediscovered, as a symbol. It, not the cross, was the first symbol of Christian identity. The fish, from the Greek *ichthys,* as it is transliterated into English, is related as an anagram of the earliest prayer of the Christian tradition. Taking the first letter of each word from the prayer "Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior," the Greek letters spell ICHTHYS—that is, the fish.

What symbols historically have been connected to Mary Magdalene?

The most important one is the unguent jar, which relates to her being the anointer and connects her symbolically, if not metaphorically, to the other women anointers in the scripture, including the women who anointed the feet and the head of Jesus before the crucifixion. The female anointer who cared for—that is, washed, anointed, and dressed—the body of the deceased was a common practice in Mediterranean cultures. These anointers were always women.

What about the pentacle, which is used as an important symbol in *The Da Vinci Code?*

The pentacle has five sides. The symbolic meaning is related to numbering, numerology, and the significance of the number five. In Christianity, five is the number of wounds of the crucified Jesus (his two hands, his two feet, and his pierced side). Five relates fundamentally to the concept of "the human"—two arms, two legs, and a head. Numbers have meanings. There are mystical numbers, normally odd numbers, and therefore indivisible. Seven, for example, is the number of fulfillment; there are seven days in the creation story.

Then there's the fleur-de-lis, which plays a prominent role in Dan Brown's book.

The fleur-de-lis is a symbol of both France and the city of Florence. It's a lily—a flower that in Christianity signifies the trinity. According to tradition, King Clovis—whose baptism made him the first Christian king of France—initiated the use of the fleur-de-lis as the sign of purification for both his own personal spirituality (that is, when he was baptized) and the purification of France. It became the emblem of French royalty, and later an attribute of many French saints, including Charlemagne. It's im-

WHEN A ROSE IS NOT JUST A ROSE

From the first artistic renderings of the human sense of the sacred that were painted on prehistoric cave walls, to the temple statuary of ancient Egypt and Greece, to the magnificent stone carvings in Europe's Gothic cathedrals, visual signs and symbols have played a key role in our sense of the divine, the ritualistic, and the religious.

Along with its fast-paced plot and intriguing historical allusions, *The Da Vinci Code* also offers readers a treasure trove of Christian and pre-Christian cosmology, with symbologist and hero Robert Langdon explaining the significance of the religious iconography every step of the way—and, not incidentally, making a case for the "sacred feminine" that preceded Christianity.

The Pentacle
One of the oldest symbols known to man, its origins are shrouded in mystery. In the novel, Jacques Saunière paints a pentacle—a pentagram in a circle—on his stomach just before he dies.

The Fleur-de-Lis
A symbol that represents both the French monarchy and Christianity's Holy Trinity, the fleur-de-lis appears in *The Da Vinci Code* on the key that is given to Sophie Neveu by her grandfather.

The Chalice
In Christian art the chalice signifies the Last Supper and the sacrifice of Jesus. But as Robert Langdon explains to Sophie in the novel, it is also a symbol of the feminine, and of the womb.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROB CADY–*USN&WR*

portant in *The Da Vinci Code* because the key shaped in a fleur-de-lis would connect to the purification of France.

In some instances, like this one, Dan Brown uses symbols very well. Those are the elements that make *The Da Vinci Code* both believable to someone who has symbolic knowledge and absolutely fascinating to those who don't have any idea what these signs were about. The fleur-de-lis connects visually to the lily, which in turn has multiple meanings in Christianity, particularly in relation to women, from purity to innocence to royalty. It was sacred traditionally to the virgin and mother goddesses throughout the Mediterranean world prior to Christianity. Then, it became a significant symbol for Mary. Weave all of those meanings together, add the relevance of this symbol to French history, and Brown has a powerful symbol to use.

That raises the question of Mary Magdalene's alleged French connection.

There are several legends and traditions about the Magdalene being the missionary to France, the patroness of France, saving France, Christianizing France, spending her last days in France, and being buried in France. You have your choice; you can go to the Dominicans or the Benedictines, to Vézelay or Aix-en-Provence. You have that whole tradition, even down to the making of madeleine cookies, which used to be served only on the twenty-second of July—that is, her feast day on the Roman calendar.

Do you believe that the Holy Grail is a metaphor or a real object ... or both?

I believe that there has been—and always will be—a perpetual mythology about the Holy Grail. Further, there is a history of an understanding that the Grail was a true physical object that could be touched, to which Christians would have had great devotion, and which for some reason disappeared. According to certain legends and popular traditions, the Grail disappears and then reappears in England, reputedly brought there by Joseph of Arimathea. The place in England where the Grail reappears is at the site we would identify as Camelot.

Of course, the important principle is that the concept of the Grail is a metaphor for the spiritual quest. So to be honest, I suppose my answer is that it's both—both a metaphor and a real object.

What about the idea put forth in *The Da Vinci Code* that the Holy Grail is actually Mary Magdalene?

That's a very Jungian reading of Mary Magdalene—women as receivers and containers, women as vessels. But historically this is a connection that is older than Jung. You find this symbolism in classical mythologies. There are a variety of metaphors here. The mysterious connection in terms of sexual intercourse is the one that matters most. Women receive the male during sexual intercourse. They thereby conceive a child and hold that child in their sacred vessel, and then expel the child from their sacred vessel.

The Star of David
The opposite symbol from the chalice is the blade, which represents a phallus or spear. When united, the two form the Star of David, which Langdon identifies with the union of male and female.

The Rose
The rose represented beauty and love in the Greco-Roman culture. Sir Leigh Teabing says it symbolizes "the five stations of female life—birth, menstruation, motherhood, menopause, and death. "

The Fish
An early symbol of Christianity was the fish, an anagram that forms the Greek word ichthys. The first letter of each word of the prayer "Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior" spells ICHTHYS—the fish.

The Cross
The best known of all Christian symbols, the cross—as Robert Langdon points out in the novel—existed as a key symbol long before the crucifixion. There are over 400 variations on the cross.

Tarot Cards
Scholars trace the origins of Tarot back to fifteenth-century Italian card games. But occultists believe that Tarot cards date back to ancient Israel or Egypt and are encrypted with mystical secrets

The Hoax
Behind It All

The spectacular publishing success of *The Da Vinci Code* has generated millions of satisfied readers and fans, on the one hand, and a wide variety of critics on the other.

Calling it a "gleefully erudite suspense novel" and a "riddle-filled, code-breaking, exhilaratingly brainy thriller," Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* added, "Even if he had not contrived this entire story as a hunt for the Lost Sacred Feminine essence, women in particular would love Mr. Brown." Patrick Anderson, writing in *The Washington Post,* called it a "considerable achievement" to write "a theological thriller that is both fascinating and fun."

Even many religious groups responded positively—if not to everything in the book, then to the opportunity it afforded them to introduce their own commentary on the same subjects that Dan Brown was addressing. On the website *explorefaith.org* John Tintera wrote, "Despite being somewhat simplistic, if not outright false, I think the religious content of *The Da Vinci Code* offers a timely wake up call to the Christian church. In doing so, it invites Christians to take a fresh look at our origins and our history, both the good and the bad, which is something we don't do often enough."

Soon, however, even as the reading public continued to lap up the novel, critics who don't usually write book reviews started to comment. Religious groups that took deep offense at what they believed was Dan Brown's desire to attack or defame Catholicism or Christianity began to be heard from. They wrote long commentaries, responding to every idea in the book that they believed to be erroneous. In some cases, they were right about their facts, and Dan Brown was wrong—on matters like when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered or some of the details of what happened at the Council of Nicea. But in many ways, the religious critics were proving Dan Brown's point: They were so frightened by the novel's popularity that they felt they had to engage in polemics with a writer of popular fiction.

The notion of Brown doing meticulous research also began to come under attack a few months after the publication of the book. Some saw *The Da Vinci Code* as highly derivative of books like *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* and *The Templar Revelation*—books Brown cited by name in the text of *The Da Vinci Code* and credited on his website as important to his research. As various writers have pointed out, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* which has been circulating widely since its publication more than twenty years ago, has its own credibility issues: It is generally considered to be an occult stew of myth, legend, and outright hoax, mixed in with some very intriguing historical details. Finally, the secret sect that first started it all off, the Priory of Sion, has been exposed as a fraud. But as Dan Brown would argue, *The Da Vinci Code* is a novel, after all; and besides, there are enough other historical issues, controversies, and implied secrets to keep most readers satisfied anyway. —*Dan Burstein*

SYMBOL OF THE PRIORY OF SION

The Da Vinci Con

BEFORE DAN BROWN, THERE WAS THE BESTSELLER *HOLY BLOOD, HOLY GRAIL*

BY **LAURA MILLER**

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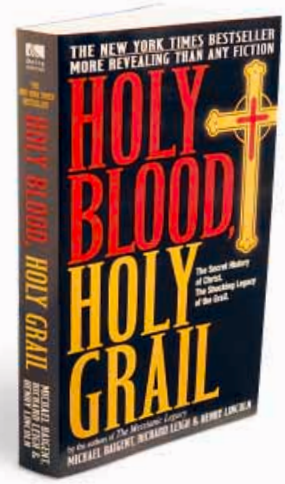
The ever-rising tide of sales of *The Da Vinci Code* has lifted some pretty odd boats, and none odder than the dodgy yet magisterial *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln. A bestseller in the 1980s, *Grail* is climbing the paperback charts again on the strength of its relationship to Dan Brown's thriller (which has, in turn, inspired a crop of new nonfiction books, from *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* to *Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries Behind The Da Vinci Code). The Da Vinci Code* is one long chase scene in which the main characters flee a sinister Parisian policeman and an albino monk assassin, but its rudimentary suspense alone couldn't have made it a hit. At regular intervals, the book brings its pell-mell plot to a screeching halt and emits a pellet of information concerning a centuries-old conspiracy that purports to have preserved a tremendous secret about the roots of Christianity itself. This "nonfiction" material gives *The Da Vinci Code* its frisson of authenticity, and it's lifted from *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* one of the all-time great works of pop pseudo-history. But what seems increasingly clear (to cop a favorite phrase from the authors of *Grail*) is that *The Da Vinci Code,* like *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* is based on a notorious hoax.



The back story to both books, like most conspiracy theories, is devilishly hard to summarize. Both narratives begin with a mystery that leads sleuths to vaster and more sinister intrigues. In Brown's novel, it's the murder of a curator at the Louvre; in *Grail,* it's the unusual affluence of a priest in a village in the south of France. In the late 1960s, Henry Lincoln, a British TV writer, became interested in Rennes-le-Château, a town that had become the French equivalent of Roswell or Loch Ness as a result of popular books by Gérard de Sède. De Sède promulgated a story about parchments supposedly found in a hollowed-out pillar by the town priest in the 1890s, parchments containing coded messages that the priest somehow parlayed into oodles of cash. Lincoln worked on several *Unsolved Mysteries*-style documentaries about Rennes-le-Château, then enlisted Baigent and Leigh for a more in-depth investigation.

What eventually emerges from the welter of names, dates, maps, and genealogical tables crammed into *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* is a yarn about a secret and hugely influential society called the Priory of Sion, founded in Jerusalem in 1099. This cabal is said to have guarded documents and other proof that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus (who may or may not have died on the Cross) and that she carried his child with her when she fled to what is now France after the Crucifixion, becoming, figuratively, the Holy Grail in whom Jesus's blood was preserved. Their progeny intermarried with the locals, eventually founding the Merovingian dynasty of Frankish monarchs. Although deposed in the eighth century, the Merovingian lineage has not been lost; the Priory has kept watch over its descendants, awaiting an auspicious moment when it will reveal the

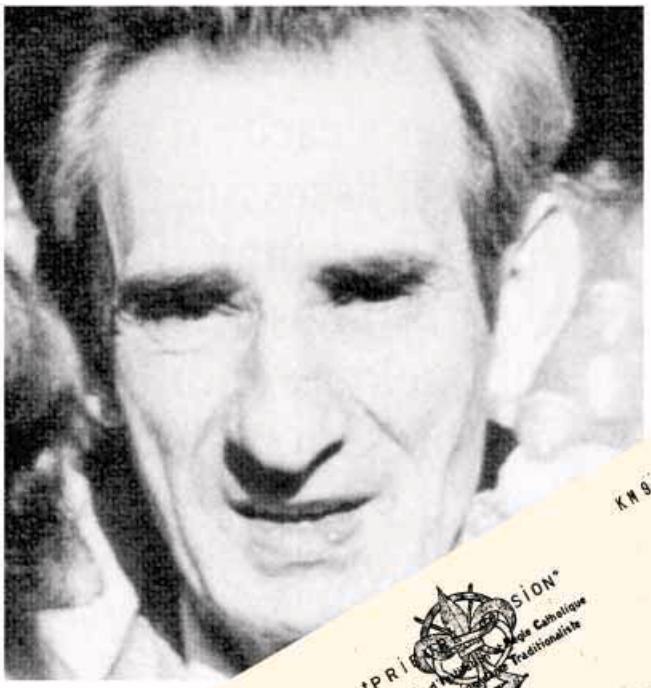
astonishing truth and return the rightful monarch to the throne of France, or perhaps even a restored Holy Roman Empire.

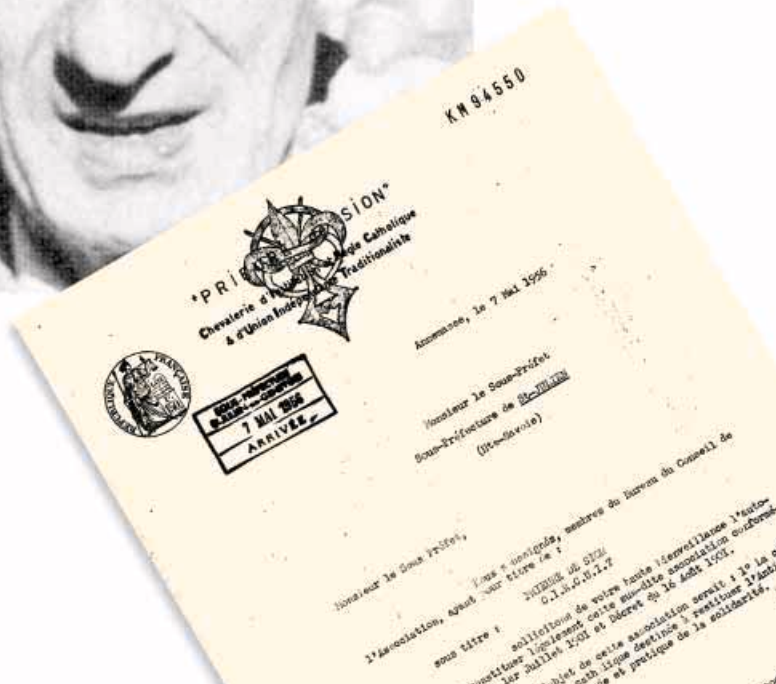
All the usual suspects and accouterments of paranoid history get caught up in this thousand-year jaunt. The Cathar heretics, the Knights Templar, the Rosicrucians, the Vatican, the Freemasons, Nazis, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* the Order of the Golden Dawn—everyone but the Abominable Snowman seems to be in on the game. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* is a masterpiece of insinuation and supposition, employing all the techniques of pseudohistory to symphonic effect, justifying this sleight of hand as an innovative scholarly technique called "synthesis," previously considered too "speculative" by those whose thinking has been unduly shaped by the "so-called Enlightenment of the 18th century." Comparing themselves to the reporters who uncovered the Watergate scandal, the authors maintain that "only by such synthesis can one discern the underlying continuity, the unified and coherent fabric, which lies at the core of any historical problem." To do so, one must realize that "it is not sufficient to confine oneself exclusively to facts."

Thus liberated, Lincoln et al. concoct an argument that is not so much factual as factish. Dozens of credible details are heaped up in order to provide a legitimizing cushion for rank nonsense. Unremarkable legends (that Merovingian kings were thought to have a healing touch, for example) are characterized as suggestive clues or puzzles demanding solution. Highly contested interpretations (that, say, an early Grail romance depicts the sacred object as being guarded by Templars) are presented as established truth. Sources such as the New Testament are qualified as "questionable" and derivative when they contradict the conspiracy theory, then microscopically scrutinized for inconsistencies that might support it. The authors spin one gossamer strand of conjecture over another, forming a web dense enough to create the illusion of solidity. Though bogus, it's an impressive piece of work.

Finally, though, the legitimacy of the Priory of Sion history rests on a cache of clippings and pseudonymous documents that even the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* suggest were planted in the Bibliothèque Nationale by a man named Pierre Plantard. As early as the 1970s, one of Plantard's confederates had admitted to helping him fabricate the materials, including genealogical tables portraying Plantard as a descendant of the Merovingians (and, presumably, of Jesus Christ) and a list of the Priory's past "grand masters." This patently silly catalog of intellectual celebrities stars Botticelli, Isaac Newton, Jean Cocteau, and, of course, Leonardo da Vinci—and it's the same list Dan Brown trumpets, along with the alleged nine-century pedigree of the Priory, in the front matter for *The Da Vinci Code,* under the heading of "Fact." Plantard, it eventually came out, was an inveterate rascal with a criminal record for fraud and affiliations with wartime anti-Semitic and right-wing groups. The actual Priory of Sion was a tiny, harmless group of like-minded friends formed in 1956.

Plantard's hoax was debunked by a series of (as yet untranslated) French books and a 1996 BBC documentary, but curiously enough this set of shocking revelations hasn't proved as popular as the fantasia of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* or, for that matter, as *The Da Vinci Code.* The only thing more powerful than a worldwide conspiracy, it seems, is our desire to believe in one. ●

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"PRIEURÉ DE SION"
Chevalerie d'Honneur Société Catholique
à d'Union Indépendante Traditionaliste

Annemasse, le 7 Mai 1956

7 MAI 1956
ARRIVÉE

Monsieur le Sous-Préfet
Sous-Préfecture de [illegible]
(Haute-Savoie)

Monsieur le Sous Préfet,

Nous soussignés, membres du Bureau du Conseil de l'Association, ayant pour titre ce :

ORDRE DE SION
G.I.S.A.C.R.I.T

sous titre :

sollicitons de votre haute bienveillance l'autorisation légalement cette sus-dite association conformément à la loi du 1er Juillet 1901 et Décret du 16 Août 1901.

Le but de cette association serait : 1° La [illegible] constitues ligue destinée à restituer l'Ordre [illegible] ... et pratique de la solidarité.

PLANTING THE SEEDS. Colleagues of Pierre Plantard (left) admitted assisting in his fabrications. Below, the "official" letter creating the "Priory of Sion"

TOP: PYGMALION

The French Confection

THE TALE OF RENNES-LE-CHATEAU MAKES FOR GREAT READING. ONLY IT'S NOT FACT

BY **AMY D. BERNSTEIN**

Amy Bernstein, with a doctorate from the University of Oxford, is an expert on French Renaissance poetry. Her dissertation comprised a new edition of the sonnets of Jacques de Billy de Prunay, a Benedictine monk as well as an author and translator.

Like a perfect *île flottante,* which upon tasting reveals itself to be mostly air, the Rennes-le-Château-Prieuré de Sion (Priory of Sion) story is a magnificent French confection of pseudo-history built on a delicately thin substructure of truth. Many people have analyzed the set of facts and legends involved in this story. My conclusion from reviewing the most credible among them is that beginning in the 1950s, a small group of men with neo-chivalric, nationalist, and sometimes anti-Semitic leanings was able to perpetrate what is almost certainly a marvelously intricate hoax that still draws people in today.

PARISH PRIEST. A statue of Abbé Saunière at the church in Rennes-le-Château.

It is no surprise, then, that *The Da Vinci Code* draws heavily from details of the Priory of Sion-Rennes-le-Château affair described in the 1982 bestseller *Holy Blood, Holy Grail.* By introducing murdered museum curator Jacques Saunière in the first chapter of *The Da Vinci Code*—a character who shares the same surname as the central figure in the Rennes-le-Château enigma—Dan Brown picks up where the original tale leaves off. In doing so, he is just one more of the many in France and England who have made a cottage industry out of an obscure provincial drama that took place over a hundred years ago. Here are the basic outlines of the original Rennes-le-Château-Prieuré de Sion story.

In 1885, the abbé Bérenger Saunière, an educated young man from a local bourgeois family, became the parish priest of the church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Rennes-le-Château, an isolated town in the department of Aude in southwestern France, not far from Le Bezu, a local mountain peak (from which was undoubtedly derived the name of the judicial police chief, Bezu Fache, in *The Da Vinci Code).*

The year of Abbé Saunière's appointment as parish priest was also marked by national political elections, with candidates taking an obligatory position on whether France should return to a pro-Catholic monarchy or remain a republic with a constitutional separation of church and state. During the election period, Bérenger Saunière became embroiled in this debate, earning a reputation as a fiery preacher supporting the return to a pro-Catholic monarchy. As a result, he gained the protection of the Countess of Chambord (widow of the pretender to the throne of France), who is said to have given him 3,000 livres to renovate his church.

In the late 1880s, during the course of the renovation of his dilapidated church, Saunière is said to have discovered some coded parchments hidden in a hollow pillar supporting the church's altarpiece. Advised by his bishop, Félix-Arsène Billiard, Saunière reportedly brought the parchments to Paris to show them to experts. While in Paris, he is reported to have made the acquaintance of a circle of occultists and esoterics, among them Emma Calvé (with whom he supposedly had an affair). Upon his return from Paris, he suddenly, and for no apparent reason, gained access to large sums of money with which he financed a number of building projects. These included the renovation of his ancient parish church and the construction of a large house (the Villa Bethania) and a tower (the Tour Magdala) which he used as his study and library for his increasingly large collection of books. He was able to maintain a lavish

INTO THIN AIR. The Tour Magdala at Rennes-le-Château, which Saunière built as his study.

living style, despite the meagerness of his priestly income. It was rumored, but never proven, that he had found treasure hidden in various spots within the church precincts.

Eventually it came out that the abbé Saunière was selling mass indulgences by mail all over Europe, which offered a plausible explanation for his wealth. He was removed from his position as parish priest and prohibited from saying mass, and later tried and convicted for trafficking in masses by the diocesan authorities in Carcassonne. He died on 22 January, 1917. Interest in the local legend of the buried treasure endured, however, and an article about it appeared in the newspaper daily, *La Dépêche du Midi,* in 1956.

Enter the Priory of Sion

In that same year, in another part of France, a small group of friends formed a recreational club on 25 June, 1956, in Annemasse, Haute-Savoie, which called itself the Priory of Sion. It was disbanded the following year but soon morphed into a second, politicized incarnation under the direction of Pierre Plantard. Drawing on the neo-chivalric, utopian, nationalist, and anti-Semitic principles of Paul Le Cour, who had exercised a major influence on Pierre Plantard in the 1930s and '40s, the Priory of Sion began publishing a periodical called *Circuit,* which appeared on and off during the 1950s and 1960s.

Plantard had a history of involvement since the 1930s with anti-Masonic and anti-Semitic nationalist organizations. He first attempted to establish an association, called The French Union, in 1937, "to engage in purifying and renewing France." His shadowy activities with right-wing and nationalist organizations continued after the war up to the founding of the Priory. During all that time, he did not seem to have had any means of employment. He served four months in Fresnes prison in the early 1950s, convicted of fraud and embezzlement.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Plantard launched a concerted effort to forge a trail of documentation to support his bogus claim of being a descendant of the Merovingian royal line, and to establish the bona fides and pedigree of the Priory of Sion. The story of Rennes-le-Château was little known at that time but it dovetailed conveniently with his own fictions, given the abbé Saunière's right-wing political leanings and his links with an occult circle in Paris. In fact, it served as a convenient point of departure for Plantard's fertile imagination.

During the 1960s, a number of fake documents were deposited at different times in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris by Pierre Plantard and his associates under various pseudonyms. The first set, composed in 1965 and fabricated by his accomplice, Philippe de Chérisey, included parchments supposedly found by Bérenger Saunière in Rennes-le Château, as well as other documents concerning the Priory of Sion and genealogical

ANTONIO RIBEIRO–GAMMA

After a fight over royalties, Plantard and de Chérisey began to tell people quietly that the parchments planted in Paris had been faked. But the word leaked out very slowly.

CROSSROADS OF MYSTERY. Rennes-le-Château has proved the ruin of many a conspiracy theory.

documents of the Merovingian kings. Members of the Priory of Sion were listed, including figures such as Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and Jean Cocteau. The next part of the hoax was to spin and disseminate the fairy tale.

One of the authors whose services were enlisted to tell the fabulous story was named Gérard de Sède, who, it seems, was a willing pawn of the Priory. He published two books concerning the dossier's secrets and the tales of Rennes-le-Château: *L'Or de Rennes ou la vie insolite de Bérenger Saunière, curé de Rennes-le Château,* and in expanded form, *Le Trésor maudit*. After these books were published, however, Plantard and de Sède had a fight over royalties from *L'Or de Rennes,* and Plantard and de Chérisey began to tell people quietly that the parchments had been faked. But the word leaked out very slowly. About this time, Robert Charroux participated in the filming of a documentary for ORTF (the French National Film Organization), and in 1972 published a book about Rennes-le-Château, entitled *Le Trésor de Rennes-le-Château,* which continued the fiction about the parchments. By 1973, however, Jean-Luc Chaumeil, a journalist who had become deeply involved with Pierre Plantard, wrote a story claiming that the secret dossiers were a hoax.

As interest in Rennes-le-Château deepened, replete with secret symbolic codes in the paintings of Poussin and Teniers and clues to the location of the Holy Grail, historians and journalists began to dispute other parts of the story as well. In 1974, René Descadeillas, a bona fide historian, began the debunking of the story of the treasure of Rennes-le-Château in a book entitled *Mythologie du trésor de Rennes, ou l'histoire véritable de l'abbé Saunière curé de Rennes le Château,* saying that Saunière had amassed his wealth through trafficking in mass indulgences.

A British film producer, Henry Lincoln, became interested in the Rennes-le-Château story and did a series of three documentaries for BBC-TV: *The Lost Treasure of Jerusalem* (1972), *The Priest, the Painter, and the Devil* (1974), and *The Shadow of the Templars* (1979). None of these dealt seriously with the possibility that the Priory of Sion documents were an elaborate hoax, even though by then their authenticity was subject to widespread questioning as well as allegations of out-and-out fraud. As a result of the enormous interest engendered by the BBC programs, Henry Lincoln and two others involved in the documentaries (Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh) came out with their book, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* which discussed not only the mysteries surrounding Rennes-le-Château, but also the claim that the Merovingian kings of France were the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The book went on to become a bestseller and an enduring international sensation.

Back in France during the late 1970s and '80s, the early debunkers of the parchments came out with their own clarifications. Jean-Luc Chaumeil, in *Le Trésor du Triangle d'Or,* included de Chérisey's confession that his parchment forgeries were copied from an ancient text found in the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie.*

Long after the unmasking of the hoax, Gérard de Sède finally came out with his book, *Rennes-le-Château: Le dossier, les impostures, les phantasmes, les hypotheses,* in which he essentially admitted that the dossiers were forged and that the Merovingian line does not exist today. In 1997, BBC-TV also produced another program admitting that the story was not true. But the myth lives on, mostly because people want it to; and the list of French books on Rennes-le-Château and related subjects—not to mention the burgeoning bookshelf and Internet world of English-language commentaries—continues to grow. ●

ANTONIO RIBEIRO–GAMMA

Even the Facts are Fiction

"FACT: The Priory of Sion—a European secret society founded in 1099—is a real organization. In 1975 Paris's Bibliothèque Nationale discovered parchments known as Les Dossiers Secrets, *identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci. ... All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."*

—THE DA VINCI CODE

The above statement from Dan Brown has wielded an enormous power of suggestion over readers. *The Da Vinci Code,* after all, is a novel—not every detail is supposed to be factual and accurate. Yet, somehow, readers take this particular work of fiction as seriously as if it were a work of nonfiction.

Indeed, separating fact from fiction has turned deciphering the *Code* into its own Holy Grail hunt. Here, journalist David Shugarts, attempts to sort out the truth from the fantasies.

Page numbers refer to the U.S. English-language hardcover edition of *The Da Vinci Code,* published in 2003.

FICTION | Page 18

It would take a visitor an estimated five weeks to "properly appreciate the 65,300 pieces of art in this building" (the Louvre).

If you spent an average of one minute per piece of art, and did not sleep, it would still take forty-five days of twenty-four hours each. Luckily, not all 65,000 pieces are on display, so you don't have to try. The number on display is nonetheless formidable—approximately 24,400 works. If you put in six eight-hour days a week looking at one piece of art per minute, this would still be more than eight weeks.

FICTION | Page 26

Brown says the Louvre security cameras are all fake, and most large museums use "containment security." True?

False. The concept of the gates that drop down and trap a thief comes from *Pink Panther* or *The Thomas Crown Affair*-type movies, not from reality. The Louvre not only believes in security cameras, but recently made a major upgrade of its security system. Thales Security & Supervision is managing "a total of 1,500 proximity access control readers, 10,000 contactless secure badges, 800 video surveillance cameras, including 195 with digital recording systems, and more than 1,500 intrusion alarm points," according to the company.

FACT | Page 29

Brown says Opus Dei founder Escrivá published* The Way *in 1934, with 999 points of meditation for doing God's work in one's life. He says there are now over four million copies in circulation in forty-two languages.

Generally accurate. Actually, the original title in 1934 was *Spiritual Considerations*. It was revised a number of times. According to an Opus Dei website (*www.josemariaescriva.info*), the book "has been translated into forty-five different languages and has sold more than 4.5 million copies worldwide." *The Way* does indeed have 999 points.

FICTION | Page 36

Langdon says the pentacle is "representative of the* female *half of all things—a concept religious historians call the 'sacred feminine' or the 'divine goddess'." True?

No. The pentacle represents both male and female.

FICTION | Page 45

Brown says Leonardo had an "enormous output of breathtaking Christian art ... . Accepting hundreds of lucrative Vatican commissions, Da Vinci painted Christian themes not as an expression of his own beliefs but rather as a commercial venture—a means of funding a lavish lifestyle." True?

Not true. Leonardo's output was not enormous. He characteristically had trouble finishing works and they would drag on for long periods. The number of paintings he finished is extremely small compared to most great figures in art history.

FICTION | Page 98

Brown says, "French kings throughout the Renaissance were so convinced that anagrams held magic power that they appointed royal anagrammatists to help them make better decisions by analyzing words in important documents."

Louis XIII, who reigned from 1610 to 1643, ascending to his throne at age nine, was famous because he appointed a royal anagrammatist, Thomas Billon. But there's not much evidence to suggest Billon had a big role in decision making. His function was "to entertain the court with amusing anagrams of people's names."

FICTION | Page 106

Brown says, "Long before the establishment of Greenwich as the prime meridian, the zero longitude of the entire world had passed directly through Paris, and through the Church of Saint-Sulpice.The brass marker in Saint-Sulpice was a memorial to the world's first prime meridian ... ."

The first known attempt to establish a prime meridian came in the second century B.C., when Hipparchus of Rhodes proposed that all distances be measured from a meridian running through the island of Rhodes. A stronger attempt was made by Ptolemy, whose prime meridian went through the Canary Islands.

In the Footsteps of *The Da Vinci Code*

BY **DAVID DOWNIE**

What do Place Vendôme, the *Mona Lisa,* astronomer Louis Arago and a medieval bishop named Sulpicius have in common? Simple: *The Da Vinci Code,* Dan Brown's breathless, five-hundred-page quest for the Holy Grail, set primarily in Paris.

The thriller's hero, professor Robert Langdon, is a Harvard "symbologist" lucky enough to be lodging at the $1,000-a-night Ritz on elegant Place Vendôme when foul play begins nearby at the Louvre. The museum's director, the grand master of a secret society charged with protecting the Grail, is murdered thirty yards from Leonardo da Vinci's enigmatic *Mona Lisa,* one of the tale's keys. An invisible north-south line bisects the Louvre and a church south of the Seine, Saint-Sulpice. The line is the Paris Meridian, first plotted in 1718, then recalculated with precision in the early 1800s by Arago. It predates the Greenwich Meridian and since 1994 has been marked with 135 brass disks.

Other sights scattered around the book's somewhat surreal Paris cityscape include the Palais-Royal, Champs-Elysées, Tuileries Garden, Bois de Boulogne parklands and Gare Saint-Lazare train station. But it's the blood-soaked Louvre and looming Saint-Sulpice, and the treasure hunt for brass "Arago" disks, that are currently attracting squadrons of Grail seekers, many of whom travel with dog-eared copies of *The Da Vinci Code.*

GLASS GRAIL? Pondering the meaning of the Louvre's upside-down pyramid in the shopping concourse

Until 1645, a Romanesque church and graveyard stood where the imposing, colonnaded pile of Saint-Sulpice rises today, between the Left Bank's Luxembourg Garden and Boulevard Saint-Michel. ... Long known for its towering, 6,588-pipe organ, and Eugène Delacroix's gloomy *Jacob Fighting an Angel,* Saint-Sulpice has roughly the same footprint (360 feet long by 184wide and 108 tall) as Notre Dame cathedral. Grail pilgrims now flock here to admire the astronomical gnomon that features prominently in the book. Its significance is twofold, revealing the location of a secret keystone and introducing readers to the Paris Meridian. The author dubs the meridian a "rose line." Apparently roses are symbolic of the Grail and therefore of Mary Magdalene.

Designed to calculate the spring equinox (and from it, Easter), the gnomon's brass strip crosses the transept's floor, then climbs a stone obelisk along the north-south axis. At noon the sun's rays passing through an oculus on the transept's south wall focus on the strip, giving the solar calendar date. Easter (a movable feast with pre-Christian roots) falls on the first Sunday after the equinox, so the gnomon accurately establishes the holiday's date.

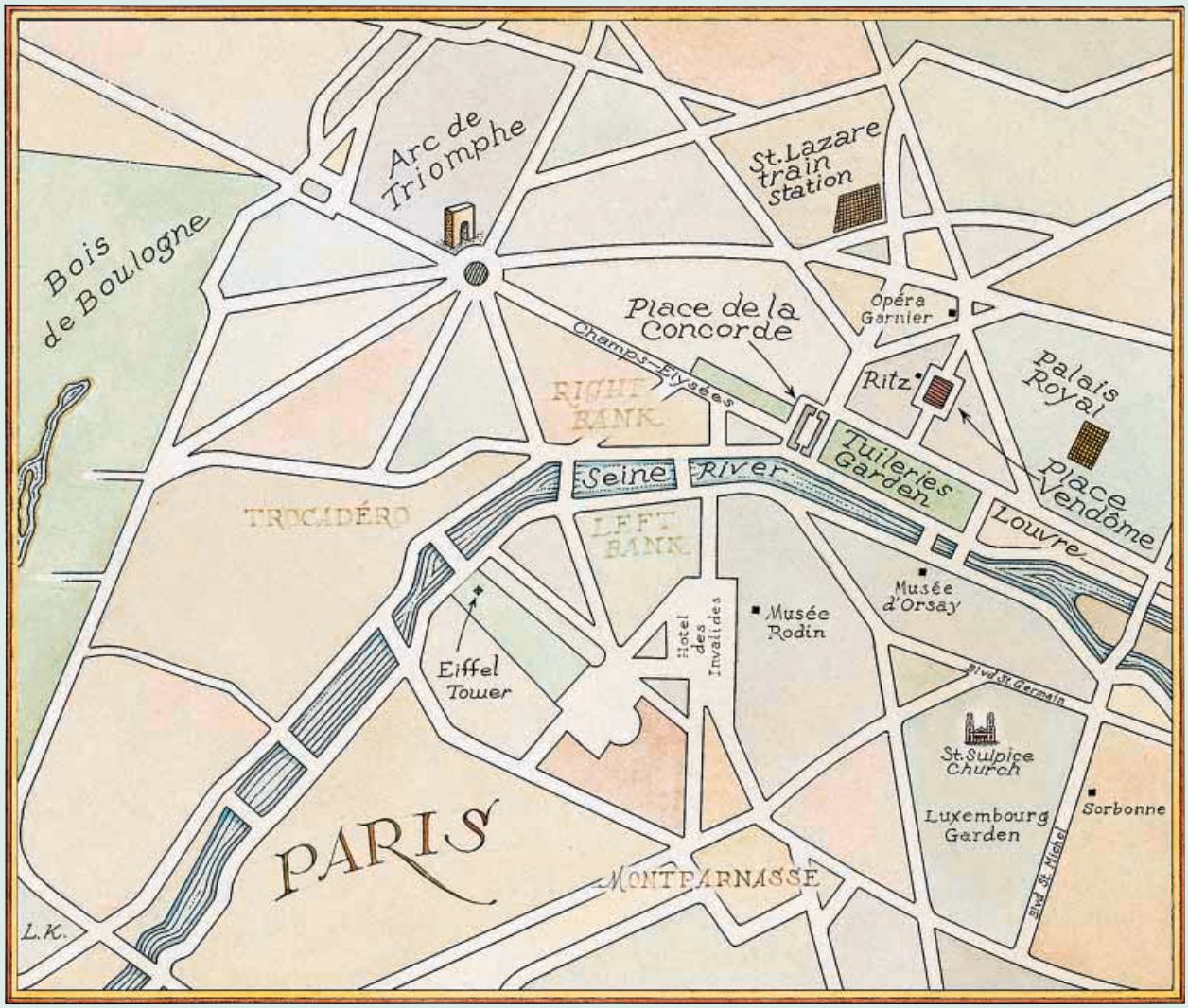
In Brown's bestseller, a murderous albino monk named Silas breaks the tiles at the obelisk's base while searching for the keystone, then batters to death a nun assigned to protect it. On a recent visit to the site, Grail pilgrims could be seen prostrate, rapping the floor in front of the obelisk. Others listened to church guides explaining how the gnomon works, or searched for the luckless nun's upstairs rooms.

In reality, the Paris Meridian passes nearby but does not actually correspond to the gnomon's axis.

Church sacristan Paul Roumanet discounts Brown's claim that a temple of Isis lies beneath the sanctuary. On a tour of the crypt, no ancient temple could be discerned, though Romanesque walls and columns remain.

However, conspiracy theorists may be pleased to learn that a subcrypt containing five tombs is off limits to the public. Further, according to the *Guide de Paris Mystérieux,* it was in the Romanesque church's graveyard that in 1619 three witches attempted to evoke the devil, and for many years, local residents held "macabre dances" on the toppled tombstones.

STEFANO DE LUIGI–CONTRASTO / REDUX



The brass Arago disks are a work of installation art titled *Hommage à Arago,* by Dutchman Jan Dibbets. Following an imaginary meridian, they lead north from No. 28 Rue de Vaugirard (near Saint-Sulpice) to Boulevard Saint-Germain, Rue de Seine, Quai Conti and Port des Saints-Pères. Across the river at the Louvre, three disks traverse the museum's Denon Wing (in the Roman Antiquities section, on a staircase, and in a corridor). Five others stipple the Cour Carrée behind the main glass pyramid designed by I. M. Pei at the behest of former French president François Mitterrand.

(Warning! If you haven't read *The Da Vinci Code* yet, you might want to stop here. What follows gives away some key plot points.)

In the book's epilogue, Professor Langdon feels the Arago disks pull him south across the Palais Royal into the Passage Richelieu, eventually converging on the pyramid (which, Brown says, has 666 glass panes, a number symbolic of Satan). It's here that the "rose line" turns due west and runs through the Louvre's subterranean Carrousel shopping concourse to an "inverted pyramid" hanging from the ceiling.

In the protagonist's mind, this upside-down pyramid is a metaphorical chalice or grail, symbolizing the "sacred feminine," first venerated here in the Earth goddess rites of antiquity. On the floor beneath the skylight stands a small stone pyramid, symbolic of a blade or phallus. The tips of the pyramids point at each other, hinting that underneath a hidden vault might just contain chests of ancient documents, and the tomb of Mary Magdalene—the Holy Grail.

Ninety percent of the Louvre's annual six million visitors make a beeline for the *Mona Lisa,* making it difficult to spot Grail pilgrims who may be looking for bloodstains or messages near the celebrated painting. But the many budding "symbologists" counting panes in

LASZLO KUBINYI FOR *USN&WR*

Mitterrand's pyramid do attract attention.

Were it not for the author's claim that "all descriptions of artwork [and] architecture ... in this novel are accurate," it might be unsporting to reveal that the number 666 can't be divided evenly into four sides of a pyramid. (And, according to a spokeswoman for the architect, the Pyramid contains 698 pieces of glass.) Similarly, pagans never danced around the Carrousel, and there is no chamber beneath the phallus. The miraculous "rose line" capable of a 90-degree turn is none other than the so-called "Triumphal Way," a perspective laid out in 1670 by Louis XIV's royal landscaper Le Nôtre.

However, there may yet be material in Paris for a Grail sequel. The Triumphal Way runs past an ancient Egyptian obelisk in the Place de la Concorde, and Mitterrand might well have belonged to a secret society or two. Who knows what the symbologists will discover when the Louvre's subterranean concourse is remodeled in 2007 to further speed access to museum shops and the *Mona Lisa?* ●

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Rosslyn Chapel: The "Cathedral of Codes"

Saunière's clues lead Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu to the Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland near the end of *The Da Vinci Code*. When the pair arrive at the chapel to search for the Grail, they discover that the meaning of the legend is more complicated than they previously imagined.

Rosslyn Chapel is a real place, with a fascinating history. Work on the chapel began in 1446 at the behest of Sir William St. Clair, a hereditary grand master of the Scottish Masons and a reputed descendent of the Merovingian bloodline. Sir William exercised personal control over the chapel's construction, which halted shortly after his death in 1484. Only the choir—the part of the church occupied by the choir and the clergy, where services are performed—is completed.

The chapel is replete with religious imagery that has become a touchstone for endless speculation by esoteric writers, Grail enthusiasts, and conspiracy theorists. It is no wonder Dan Brown set the next-to-the-last scene in *The Da Vinci Code* in this chapel, much worshipped by occultists the world over.

Rosslyn is reputed to be an approximate copy of the design of the ancient Temple of Solomon and is adorned with innumerable carvings, including Judaic, Celtic, Norse, Templar, and Masonic symbols, in addition to mainstream Christian images. The many different signs and symbols ... give Rosslyn Chapel its nickname: the "Cathedral of Codes."

Curators at Rosslyn Chapel are fond of pointing out a code scrawled on the walls of the crypt, a code supposedly left by the masons. Legend has it that the code indicates the presence of a great secret or a hidden treasure within the chapel walls, but so far no one has been able to decipher its meaning.

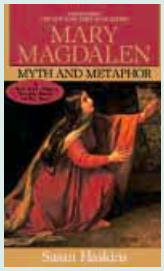
Technology may, in the end, solve many of the chapel's mysteries. In January 2003, the grand herald of the local branch of the Scottish Knights Templar—self-proclaimed successors to the warrior monks who fled to Scotland in the fourteenth century to avoid religious persecution—announced that the Knights were using new scanning technology "capable of taking readings from the ground up to a mile deep." They hope to discover ancient vaults beneath the chapel that contain the reputed Rosslyn treasure. —*Arne de Keijzer*

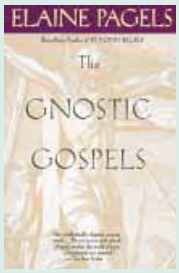
LUCIFER BOUND. Detail from a carving in "The Cathedral of Codes," Scotland's Rosslyn Chapel

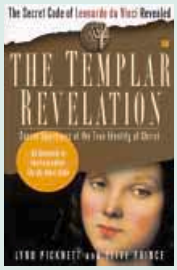
SANDRO VANNINI–CORBIS

If You Loved the Novel...

BY **JENNIFER DOLL**







The most pressing question for those consumed by the Code *might be simpler than the decoders and debunkers would have you believe: What do you read next? At one point, bookseller Barnes & Noble had a list of more than eighty related titles. Since then, the number has surely grown. Some suggestions of books, movies, and websites for further reading, viewing, and investigation:*

DAN BROWN'S KEY SOURCES

All of these are referenced by Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code,* and they'll give you the theories behind the controversial concepts. While not always the most scientific or scholarly, they're certainly compelling.

Holy Blood, Holy Grail by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln; **The Templar Revelation** by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince; **The Woman with the Alabaster Jar** and **The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine** by Margaret Starbird, and **Jesus and the Lost Goddess: The Secret Teachings of the Original Christians** by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy.

MARY MAGDALENE

Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor by Susan Haskins

Haskins, an independent researcher and writer, presents a fascinating and thorough analysis of the Magdalene, explaining what she was, what she was not, and what she is today.

The Golden Legend by Jacobus de Voragine

This book, possibly the most widely read after the Bible during the late Middle Ages, imparts the miraculous stories of Mary Magdalene and other saints.

www.magdalene.org

This website dedicated to the Magdalene features a gallery of art, book reviews, articles, and a Body of Myth section with an FAQ that tackles key questions.

The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene by Jane Schaberg

Schaberg, professor of religious studies and women's studies at the University of Detroit Mercy, combines feminist theory and biblical scholarship as she deconstructs the Magdalene in this innovative work, which incorporates the voice of Virginia Woolf.

Mary, Called Magdalene by Margaret George

This epic historical novel imagines Mary as she lived in Galilee, and what happened after she met Jesus.

JESUS, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

King Jesus: A Novel by Robert Graves

This fictionalized historical account of Christ's life was extremely controversial when it was published in 1946 ... and still is.

www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/

This *Frontline* series tackles historical evidence about the life of Jesus and the rise of Christianity.

The Last Temptation of Christ by Nikos Kazantzakis, and the movie of the same name by Martin Scorsese. Kazantzakis and Scorsese focused on humanizing the figure of Christ in their works. Reader and audience responses range from "brilliant!" to "blasphemy!"

Who hasn't seen, or at least heard of, Mel Gibson's 2004 **The Passion of the Christ?** But you may have forgotten about classics such as **Jesus of Nazareth** (1977, starring Robert Powell) and **The Greatest Story Ever Told** (1965, starring Max von Sydow). Both are available at libraries and video stores.

LOST GOSPELS AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

The Gnostic Gospels by Elaine Pagels

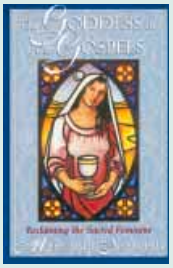
A professor of religion at Princeton University, Pagels examines the origins of the Christian faith with her trademark clarity and readability.

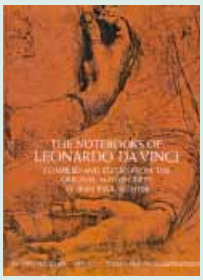
The Nag Hammadi Library edited by James M. Robinson

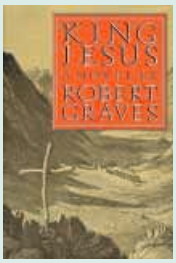
This book is your literal bible for the Lost Gospels, compacting English translations of the Gnostic scriptures into one 549-page volume.

www.ccel.org

This website features original writings by







Eusebius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and other key players in the early Christian world.

ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND SYMBOLS

www.westminster-abbey.org/
www.rosslynchapel.org.uk/
www.rennes-le-chateau.com/

Along with visitor information, these three websites display images, floor plans, and the histories of their famous buildings. You'll also find a host of related links and interesting FAQs.

http://www.aviewoncities.com/paris.htm

This website about Paris includes descriptions of key tourist (and *Da Vinci Code)* locations as well as an interactive map of the city.

www.louvre.fr/louvrea.htm

The Louvre website in English allows you to take a virtual tour (following Jacques Saunière's footsteps, perhaps?), read the museum's history, or find information on specific exhibits and art.

www.symbols.com

Contains more than 2,500 Western signs, from the fleur-de-lis to subway signs, and information about their histories and meanings. **The Dictionary of Christian Art** by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona and **Signs & Symbols in Christian Art** by George Ferguson also offer comprehensive looks at religious symbols in art.

LEONARDO DA VINCI

Leonardo: The Artist and the Man by Serge Bramly

An essential for those interested in Leonardo's life and leanings.

The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci

This two-volume work compiles the day-to-day scribblings of the artist, from the fantastic to the feasible.

Leonardo Da Vinci: The Complete Paintings and Drawings by Frank Zöllner

A masterpiece of a book, this includes all 34 of Leonardo's paintings and 663 drawings.

www.arthistory.about.com/cs/leonardo/a/last_supper.htm

This handy website answers ten key questions about Leonardo's famous painting and provides links for more information.

CODES AND CODE BREAKING

Simon Singh, author of **The Code Book: The Science of Secrecy from Ancient Egypt to Quantum Cryptography,** also has a website, *www.simonsingh.net,* which features a "Crypto Corner" peppered with challenges to measure your cryptographic mettle.

Cryptanalysis by Helen F. Gaines, is one of the classic books on cryptography and includes a variety of practice ciphers and how-tos, along with solutions.

The Codebreakers: The Story of Secret Writing by David Kahn

This epic (nearly 1,200 pages) tome traces cryptography back to its origins but focuses on the twentieth century, with particular attention to World War II. A must for history buffs.

Fun "do-it-yourself" websites include
www.anagrammy.com
www.wordsmith.org/anagram/index.html
and www.wordles.com

SECRET SOCIETIES

www.opusdei.com

The website for the formidable Catholic organization includes a response to *The Da Vinci Code.*

www.ordotempli.org

The "Official International Knights Templar Website" includes a petition form for admission to the order, as well as a research archive with information on the Merovingians and the Priory of Sion.

www.templarhistory.com

The home of *Templar History Magazine* features articles, forums, book reviews, and even a catalog of merchandise. Templar T-shirt, anyone?

FUN & GAMES

Did you know that if you google "Depository Bank of Zurich" or "Robert Langdon," you'll come up with a seemingly real website? Also try **www.randomhouse.com/doubleday/davinci/** for games, quizzes, and contests related to the novel and **www.danbrown.com** for FAQs with the author.

CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF THE GENRE?

If you're in the mood for another intellectual thriller, try **In the Name of the Rose** and **Foucault's Pendulum** by Umberto Eco, **Lucifer's Shadow** by David Hewson, **The Eight** by Katherine Neville, **The Rule of Four** by Ian Caldwell and Dustin Thomason, and **The Flanders Panel** by Arturo Pérez-Reverte.

Dan Brown's Next Caper

FOR ROBERT LANGDON, THE CLUES MAY BE POINTING IN ONE DIRECTION: WASHINGTON

BY **DAVID A. SHUGARTS**

When we last left them, Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu had found her family at Rosslyn Chapel, but they had not yet found the Holy Grail, said to be Mary Magdalene's relics and documents proving her marriage to Christ. Author Dan Brown says his new novel will pick up where *The Da Vinci Code* left off. So where will Robert Langdon pitch up next? The clues lead me to believe that Harvard professor Langdon will be found scurrying throughout Washington, D.C., frantically chasing the symbology of Freemasonry. "Is there no help for the widow's son?" is the question spelled in code inside the dust jacket of *The Da Vinci Code*. This is an old Masonic plea for help from a brother Mason.

The hunt will likely involve secret treasure and could be taken underground, among crypts and tunnels unnoticed on normal tours of Washington's famous buildings. Places to visit should include the Capitol and the Washington Monument, of course, but also the House of the Temple, a Masonic edifice of mystery and lore, guarded by sphinxes, whose cellars contain great treasures of symbology. I am intrigued by the National Cathedral as well, with its crypts, gargoyles, and grotesques (including Darth Vader).

FINISHING TOUCH. The Washington Monument gets its aluminum tip—or is it the blade symbol?

It's a rich playground of symbology. If you can see a circle or a square in the art and architecture of Washington, you might be another Robert Langdon. See also: the compass and square (the Mason's tools), a star of five or six points, a Maltese cross, a pyramid, a rose, and any incarnation of a goddess or "sacred feminine," chalice and blade, vulva and phallus.

Consider just the amazing history of the Washington Monument, arguably the world's largest phallic symbol, which surely adds to its significance in Dan Brown's landscape. Early designs for it included a pyramid 100 feet square at the base, and later a pantheon, to honor all the U.S. "gods." The final obelisk design was years in the making. It does not sit at the true center of the cross formed by the Capitol and White House vistas. It rises 555 feet (five-five-five, get it?). Oddly, the very tip is an aluminum pyramid inscribed "*Laus Deo*" (Praise God).

Central to Brown's themes is the antagonism between science and religion. In an ultra-simplistic view, religion can be split into Catholics versus Protestants. Somewhat unfairly, Masons have been put into the anti-Catholic camp.

Freemasonry, a men's fraternity that gives $2 million daily to charity, has been tarred with many controversies, ancient and modern, so the animosity of Rome is just a welt in an almost endless flagellation. It is a favorite pet of conspiracy theorists in general, and has been on the periphery of Dan Brown's previous novels, especially since certain Freemasons proudly wear the regalia of the Knights Templar. Further, the dreaded Illuminati (prominent in Dan Brown's first Robert Langdon novel, *Angels & Demons*) were an offshoot of Freemasonry. George Washington was perhaps the greatest of Masons, but he was joined among the Founding Fathers by Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, John Adams, and a host of others.

A colossus named Albert Pike straddles Freemasonry and Civil War history. A massive, 300-pound man who in later life looked exactly like Merlin the magician, Pike wrote the quintessential Masonic tome, *Morals and Dogma*. Conjuring the ritual foundations of Scottish Rite Freemasonry, it expounds with authority on Druids and Gnostics, hermetics and the kabala, alchemy and geometry. Pike in the early 1850s joined both the Masons and the Know-Nothing Party, a strongly anti-Catholic and pro-slavery group.

During construction of the Washington Monument, 193 carved stones were donated from all over the U.S. and certain countries (as well as thirty Masonic lodges and councils) to adorn the inside walls. Pope Pius IX sent a special stone from an ancient Roman church. But one night in 1854, the Know-Nothings stole "the Pope's stone" and it has never been found.

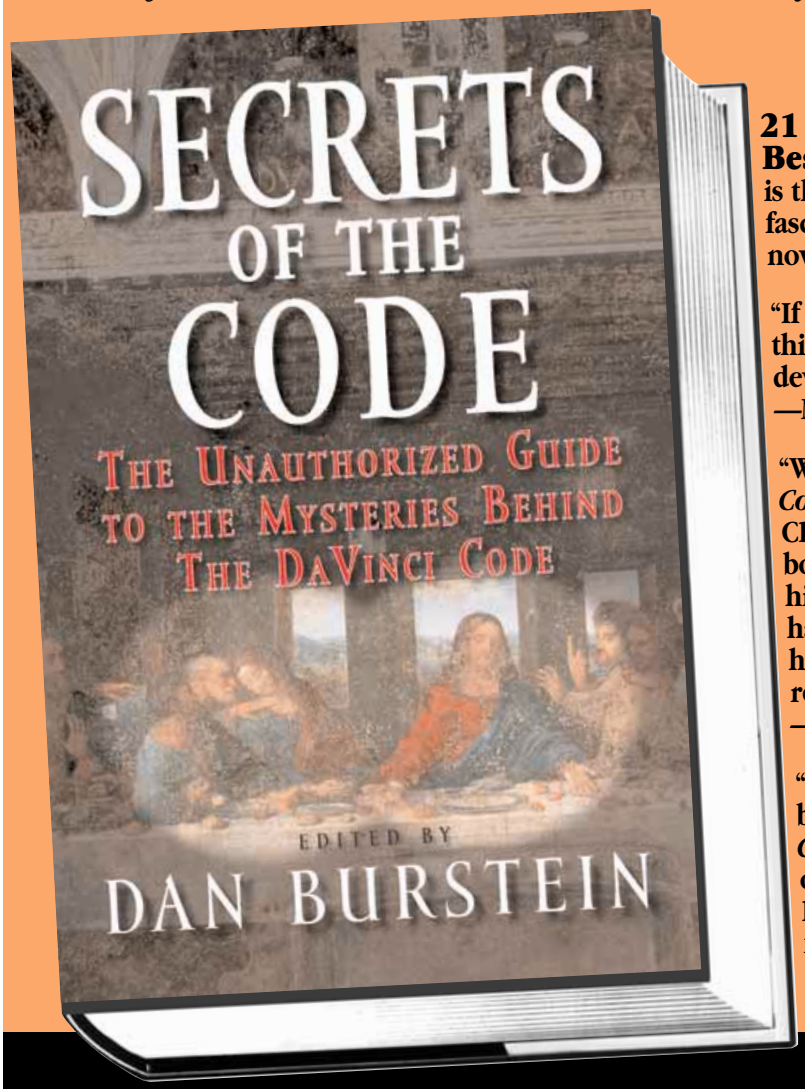
Mysteriously lost stones are something of a Washington Monument tradition. The 24,500-pound cornerstone, laid in a grand Masonic ceremony in 1848, was promptly lost from view in the construction and no one today knows exactly where it is.

Cryptic guess: Island of a Mason who was no mason, in Rosslyn's shadow, a bridge is Key. ●

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The *New York Times* Bestselling Blockbuster

This special issue of *US News and World Report* is based largely on *Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries Behind The Da Vinci Code.*



21 weeks on the New York Times Best Seller List, ***Secrets of the Code*** is the one book to read if you are fascinated with the ideas in Dan Brown's novel.

"If you want a clear understanding of the thinking of both the debunkers and the devotees of DVC, this is the one to read."
—Marcia Ford, www.faithfulreader.net

"What does Dan Burstein's *Secrets of the Code*, an unofficial reader's guide from CDS Books, offer that the other tag-along books don't? For starters, he unravels a hidden message on the dust jacket of the hardcover edition, and, unlike the others, he doesn't attack the book from a religious standpoint."
—*Wall Street Journal*

"One of the best of a recent boomlet of books on the subject is *Secrets of the Code*, edited by Dan Burstein, a collection of various scholarly and critical opinions. Burstein's bottom line? Brown's book is fun, brainy—and fiction."
—*Reader's Digest*

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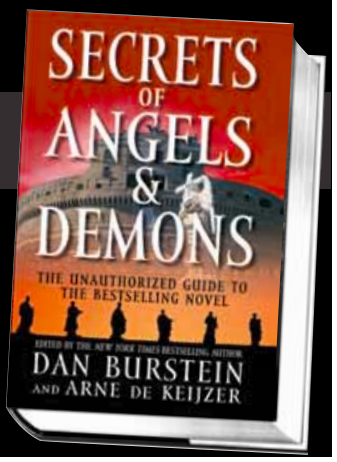

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