The Da Vinci Code:

Dan Brown and The Grail That Never Was

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Dan Brown's bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code*, has enthralled many readers, but many others have pointed out his errors and raised objections to his dubious conjectures. Of particular interest to Arthurians is Brown's conspiracy theory (appropriated from other sources) concerning the Grail, but a discussion of that subject also requires consideration of his presentation of Church history and of the role that art plays in the elaboration of the Grail theory. (NJL)

'*Everyone loves a conspiracy*,' writes Dan Brown, and his novel proves the point.[1] Few books in recent memory have enjoyed the commercial success of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* while also provoking the same degree of controversy. Since its publication, only last year, it has also given birth to a thriving cottage industry: debunking the theories and revealing the errors in Brown's book. By now that cottage industry has become a major manufacturing concern, spawning a number of books (mostly critical, refuting the novel's treatment of biblical and Church history)[2] and an astonishing number of websites: a recent Google search (17 May 2004) for 'The Da Vinci Code' yielded 525,000 'hits.'[3] The success of the novel has also given new life to Brown's earlier novels and to related Grail conspiracy theories, notably Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln's *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*,[4] on which Brown draws heavily.

The novel certainly has something for everyone, and too much for many of us: a fast-moving murder story; puzzles, riddles, and anagrams; art historical mysteries; and multiple conspiracy theories, concerning for example the secret identity of the Holy Grail, the secret society the Priory of Sion (Prieuré de Sion), and ruthless plots by the Vatican and Opus Dei.[5] Of greatest interest to Arthurian scholars is of course the Grail, but before dealing in some detail with that subject, this article will offer brief information on the other two matters of major concern to large numbers of the novel's readers: contentions concerning the Church and questions of art history. The tripartite division is inexact at best and is made purely for convenience, for it is precisely Brown's

melding of Church, art history, and Grail lore that complicates a critique of
his book.

However, there is a question that needs to be asked before proceeding,
and I have heard several people ask it in response to objections about the
accuracy of numerous facts and assertions in the novel. The question often
takes a form such as, 'What difference does it make? It's just fiction.' The
inquiry is legitimate, and in fact, as a matter of simple principle, we have to
ask whether those who condemn Brown are not doing him an injustice by
confusing his narratorial voice with his own views. I believe the answer to
the latter question is no, it is not an injustice. Indeed, Brown himself, whether
as a matter of conviction or of commercialism, has done everything possible
to persuade readers that he *does* believe just what the book says. He has
insisted on the accuracy, the factual nature, of his information and theories.[6]
As Sandra Miesel puts it, 'In the end, Dan Brown has penned a poorly
written, atrociously researched mess. So, why bother with such a close reading
of a worthless novel? The answer is simple: *The Da Vinci Code* takes esoterica
mainstream.'[7]

In fairness, I should note that, whereas Brown long argued for the solidity
of his research and the accuracy of his facts, he seems recently to have insisted
less vehemently on the veracity of his material. On his website, he now
notes, 'While it is my belief that the theories discussed by these characters
have merit, each individual reader must explore these characters' viewpoints
and come to his or her own interpretations. My hope in writing this novel
was that the story would serve as a catalyst and a springboard for people to
discuss the important topics of faith, religion, and history.'[8]

His website has been redesigned more than once since I first saw it (in
late 2003), and if such a concession was made there (or in his interviews
then or for several months afterward), I do not recall it. My recollection is
instead of a categorical insistence on truth and accuracy, the only concession
being that he was initially skeptical (he said) but that, the more he researched
the positions treated in the book, the more he realized that they were correct.

In fact, Brown has repeatedly assured us, in his foreword and (earlier) on
his website and in an endless string of interviews, that he did exhaustive
research and that 'All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and
secret rituals in this novel are accurate.'[9] He has also said that he 'first learned
of Da Vinci's affiliation with the Priory of Sion…[while] studying art history
in Seville.' He adds, 'When you finish the book—like it or not—you've
learned a ton. I had to do an enormous amount of research [for this book].
My wife is an art historian and a Da Vinci fanatic. So I had a leg up on a lot

of this, but it involved numerous trips to Europe, study at the Louvre, some in-depth study about the Priory of Sion and Opus Dei and about the art of Da Vinci.'[10]

He further insists that 'the book is meticulously researched and very accurate and I think people know that.'[11] A good many readers agree, including a number of journalistic reviewers. 'His research,' says the *New York Daily News*, 'is impeccable.' And the book, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, contains '...several doctorates' worth of fascinating history and learned speculation.'[12] (At least the latter review acknowledged that some of it is speculation; not all readers seem to recognize that fact, nor am I aware that Brown has acknowledged it, at least until recently.)

However, one of the sure signs that Brown has engaged in more fiction than he admits is his tendency to make virtually everything into evidence for his conspiracy theory—even managing, though without explanation, to have one of his characters comment that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a story about the Grail (p. 261), which is to say, in Brown's context, at least indirectly about Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Even more striking is his hero's suggestion that Walt Disney '...had made it his quiet life's work to pass on the Grail story to future generations' and that Disney's *The Little Mermaid* was '"...a ninety-minute collage of blatant symbolic references to the lost sanctity of Isis, Eve, Pisces the fish goddess, and, repeatedly, Mary Magdalene"' (pp. 261–62). One wonders how many viewers of *The Little Mermaid* have understood that it has something to do with Mary Magdalene. In passages such as that one, it is difficult not to conclude that Brown is having a good deal of fun at the expense of his characters—or, more likely, of his readers.

But most often he seems, as noted, to be entirely serious, and the elements of his novel that have been taken seriously by numerous readers and reviewers include the marriage of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, the Vatican conspiracy, the Priory of Sion, the descendants of Jesus as founders of the Merovingian dynasty (which produced, says Brown, the founders of Paris), and the Grail secret being kept for centuries by men who just happen to be famous writers, scientists, composers, or painters: Botticelli, Leonardo, Newton, Hugo, Debussy, Cocteau, and many others.

The aspect of the novel that has provoked the most—and the most vehement—objections is the anti-Catholic bias that many readers perceive in the novel. Of course, it is not only Catholics who may be troubled by the supposed marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene; I know Protestants who consider it practically a sacrilege. Yet, in addition to suggestions of anti-Christian bias in general, there have been accusations that Brown's novel is

specifically anti-Catholic. The following example is from an article by Sandra
Miesel:

> Unsurprisingly, Brown misses no opportunity to criticize Christianity and its
> pitiable adherents. (The church in question is always the Catholic Church,
> though his villain does sneer once at Anglicans—for their grimness, of all
> things.) He routinely and anachronistically refers to the Church as 'the Vatican,'
> even when popes weren't in residence there. He systematically portrays it
> throughout history as deceitful, power-crazed, crafty, and murderous: 'The
> Church may no longer employ crusades to slaughter, but their influence is no
> less persuasive. No less insidious.'...Worst of all, in Brown's eyes, is the fact
> that the pleasure-hating, sex-hating, woman-hating Church suppressed goddess
> worship and eliminated the divine feminine.... Brown's treatment of Mary
> Magdalene is sheer delusion.[13]

Specific statements that have provoked vigorous reaction include not only
the contention (p. 243) that Jesus and Mary Magdalene married and had a
child, but also the pronouncements that the Bible, '"as we know it today,
was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great"' (p. 231)
and that the divinity of Christ was accepted only at the First Council of
Nicaea (325 C.E.), simply because that doctrine was critical '"to the new
Vatican power base"' (p. 233). In fact, the New Testament canon was largely
set before 325 (and not by Constantine); and the Council overwhelmingly
rejected the 'Arian heresy,' which challenged the generally accepted
consubstantiality of Jesus with God.[14]

I am by no means certain that the notion of Jesus's marriage can be
disproved, but it is equally certain that it is not proved by the assertion (p.
245) that Jewish custom condemned celibacy and virtually required a Jewish
man to be married. That Brown's conclusion is at least open to question is
indicated by his 'virtually': if there were some unmarried Jewish men, Jesus
may well have been one of them. In addition, as with much in Brown's
book, this is an *argumentum ex silentio*: we cannot conclude, from the absence
of evidence that Jesus was single, that he was instead married.[15]

We could go on at length about Brown's ideas—or those of his characters—
on religious matters, but one more example will suffice. He exaggerates wildly
when he states that 'During three hundred years of witch hunts, the Church
burned at the stake an astounding five *million* women' (p. 125; his emphasis).
The actual number is probably closer to 50,000.[16]

Since art history is a central focus of the novel, we should note that *The
Da Vinci Code* contains errors of both fact and interpretation in relation to
the art of Leonardo da Vinci.[17] Let me point out only three or four, beginning
with the question of Leonardo's productivity.

☛ Brown informs us that Leonardo had 'hundreds of lucrative Vatican commissions' (p. 45). Actually he had just *one*, which he failed to complete.[18] Brown talks further of Leonardo's 'enormous output of breathtaking Christian art' (p. 45); yet, Pietro C. Marani includes in *The Complete Paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci*[19] a checklist of all the paintings either known or agreed to be Leonardo's work and of those largely executed *by others* but in which Leonardo apparently had a hand. In that list, the total number of paintings, many incomplete, is thirty-one. Paul Johnson, in *Art: A New History*, notes that only ten completed paintings survive that are confidently attributed to Leonardo; three others were never finished, and others were begun by him and completed by others.[20]

☛ The figure in the *Mona Lisa*, Brown suggests, may well be a self-portrait of Leonardo. However, most if not indeed all art historians agree now on the identity of the model: the wife of Florentine Francesco del Giocondo.

☛ Brown also refers to the *Last Supper* as a fresco (p. 235). That is not an uncommon error, but an error it is nonetheless: the *Last Supper* is tempera on stone. The novel contains other errors concerning the size of paintings, the source of commissions, and other matters of art and art history. His fanciful interpretations of paintings, including the *Mona Lisa* and *The Virgin of the Rocks*, are particularly striking.[21]

☛ A centerpiece of Brown's theory is the contention that Mary Magdalene is depicted next to Jesus in Leonardo's *The Last Supper*. Since there are thirteen figures in the painting (Jesus and twelve others), that leaves us wondering who was absent that day. The answer is surely, 'no one': John was traditionally shown as a young and delicate person. And whereas Brown sees him/her with breasts, I am unable to locate them, certainly not in the customary place.

The art historical questions constitute a major underpinning of Brown's argument involving Mary Magdalene and the Grail conspiracy, but in fact Leonardo's work is woven into an elaborate web of questionable hypotheses and historical matters, many of them riddled with errors. Beyond what has already been noted above, there is space here for only a few items before we turn to specifically Grail material.

☛ Godefroi de Bouillon, we read, was a French king. He was not. He *is* sometimes referred to as king of Jerusalem, but in fact he was not that either, having refused that crown.

☛ The Templars, according to Brown, built Gothic cathedrals—of course they did not—and the model for their cathedral design was the human vagina. (*Surely* Brown is here having fun at his readers' expense.) But he points out that the eternal symbol of the vagina is the rose, and 'rose' is an anagram of Eros, the god of love (p. 254), all of which seems to contribute to the evidence—somehow—that Mary Magdalene was Jesus's wife.

➤ We learn that the Templars also built Roslyn (or Rosslyn or Rose-lyn) Chapel, but in fact it was built a century and a quarter after the dissolution of the Templars.[22]

The list goes on and on, but the point is clear: Brown's research is considerably less than impeccable. Let us now get to the heart of the matter: the Priory of Sion and the Grail. For anyone who has read Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln's *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*,[23] much of Brown's conspiracy theory will hardly seem new. Here is the briefest account of that theory that I am able to concoct. Jesus and Mary Magdalene married and had at least one child. Mary Magdalene traveled to France, where her descendants eventually founded the Merovingian dynasty. In 1099, the Priory of Sion was founded;[24] some twenty years later, the Templars (the 'military arm' of the Priory, according to Brown, p. 158) were founded in Jerusalem, and they soon began to excavate beneath the Temple. There they found trunks full of documents proving what I have summarized here. These documents were kept by the Priory of Sion, a super-secret organization that exists to this day and that possesses the *truth* about the 'bloodline' Grail (and related matters). The Priory purports to descend from the Merovingian line that was founded by Jesus's and Mary Magdalene's offspring. The grand masters of the Priory (and thus the main keepers of the secret) have in many cases been important public figures in the arts and literature (and occasionally science).

The existence of an order (not a priory) of Sion in the Middle Ages is irrelevant. There actually has been a modern 'prieuré de Sion,' but its connections to anything medieval are fabrications. In 1956, a Frenchman named Pierre Plantard[25] registered an organization by that name in France;[26] he later claimed to be the direct descendant of the Merovingian kings and to have been 'grand master' of the Priory from 1981–84. (And as the descendant of the Merovingian kings, he was naturally the true claimant to the throne of France.) In fact, he was, among other things, an extreme right-wing anti-Semite who had been actively pro-Vichy during the war. When the French government was collapsing in 1957 and de Gaulle seemed the likely candidate to lead a new government, Plantard reportedly claimed personal or ancestral connections between himself and de Gaulle; there is no evidence to support such a claim, and he was apparently trying to gain a position of power. Some of the documents that the *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* authors and other enthusiasts cite as evidence do not exist or have mysteriously disappeared, but others do exist (in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris and elsewhere). Notably there are the 'dossiers secrets' cited by Brown as proof of his ideas.[27]

Unfortunately (for conspiracy theorists), the 'dossiers secrets,' including a list of the descendants of the Merovingian royal line, are known to have been deposited in the library by Plantard himself, who then cites them in support of his claims. Plantard and his fraud were revealed by journalist Jean-Luc Chaumeil during the 1980s, as well as by a BBC Documentary 'The History of a Mystery' in 1996.[28] Questioned in detail by judge Thierry Jean-Pierre in 1993, Plantard finally admitted that he had fabricated his story, founded the Priory of Sion (with a few friends), and, with an associate, forged the documents.

Ultimately, the 'key' to the Grail secret, according to the novel (and a good many Grail conspirators in addition to Brown) rests on a linguistic 'error' involving 'San Greal,' which, we are informed, should actually be 'Sang Real.' (This is a matter on which Brown's characters discourse at some length; see pp. 160–63, 249–50, and passim.) The real revelation is made by Leigh Teabing (the character whose name is an anagram of 'Baigent,' as has been repeatedly noted by commentators): '"The word *Sangreal* derives from *San Greal*—or Holy Grail. But in its most ancient form, the word *Sangreal* was divided in a different spot."' And, as Teabing illustrates the division on paper, Brown explains: '*Sang Real* literally meant *Royal Blood*.'

Thus, according to Teabing/Brown, the earliest form was *sang real*. In fact, that was *far* from the earliest form. As Arthurians know, the earliest form was simply *graal*, a common noun referring to a serving dish. The word was first used to indicate a particular (initially mysterious and later specifically holy) object by Chrétien de Troyes in the late twelfth century. Then, the first explicit literary identification of this object with the dish of the Last Supper and the vessel of the Deposition was offered by Robert de Boron in the early thirteenth century. The form described by Brown as 'the most ancient' first occurred, in fact, some 250 years later, with Henry Lovelich, in the mid-fifteenth century.[29] Richard Barber points out that 'In 1180, as far as we can tell, no one would have known anything of the "holy thing" called the Grail.'[30] And it is certain that until much later no one suggested that the Grail means 'Holy Blood.'

We can trace back much farther the notion of a vessel associated with the Crucifixion and Deposition. An image from the ninth-century Utrecht Psalter shows a person holding a vessel into which flows the blood of the crucified Jesus.[31] Yet, that is long before the first mention of the Grail, and conceptually we are very far removed indeed from any notion that the Grail is associated with Jesus's bloodline, rather than his blood.

Dan Brown, however, has neatly deflected these problems by having his hero Robert Langdon explain that 'according to the Priory of Sion...the

Grail legend—that of a *chalice*—is actually an ingeniously conceived allegory'
(p. 163). The chalice is '"…an allegory to protect the true nature of the Holy
Grail' (p. 238), a woman. 'When the Grail legend speaks of "the chalice that
held the blood of Christ"…it speaks in fact, of Mary Magdalene—the female
womb that carried Jesus' royal bloodline' (p. 249). We might object again
that the very word 'Grail' is first mentioned almost 1200 years after the time
of Jesus, and we might repeat that, once the word ('Grail') becomes current,
we find in both iconography and literature its explicit connection with Jesus's
actual blood—not his wife or his descendants. In response, though, Brown,
through his narrative voice or his characters, could use those facts to support
his point: that the Church has been extraordinarily effective in suppressing
the truth.

The most remarkable aspect of this Grail conspiracy theory may be its
circular reasoning. Indeed, it combines circularity with Brown's most daring
argumentum ex silentio. We are told, or rather, one character tells another (p.
257), that '…Christ's lineage was in perpetual danger. The early Church
feared that if the lineage were permitted to grow, the secret of Jesus and
Magdalene would eventually surface and challenge the…doctrine…of a
divine Messiah…' Now it *is* at least plausible that, if Jesus and Mary
Magdalene had consorted and conceived, the Church *might* wish to keep it
quiet. Therefore (in Brown's version of things), since their marriage is not
known to anyone, the Church *must have* been successful at keeping it quiet—
and therefore it must be true. Thus the very lack of proof constitutes its own
proof, demonstrating just how effective the conspiracy of silence has been
through the centuries. (However, one cannot help wondering how it is that
Lovelich and Hardyng inadvertently revealed the secret in the fifteenth
century.)

As with all conspiracy theories, I believe we must think of this one in
terms of Ockham's razor: with two competing explanations, the simpler is
likely to be correct. So on the one hand, we have Sion, the fraud Plantard
and his forged secret documents, Mary Magdalene and her marriage to Jesus,
the Templars, the paintings in the Louvre, the museum itself, a series of
famous people who have never revealed the truth (but *have*, at least in
Leonardo's case, supposedly left abundant clues), and a host of other major
points and minor details. On the other hand, we have the facts that the
form 'Sang Real' was an English fifteenth-century error and that the Grail
was a twelfth-century literary invention that was quickly identified with an
(ostensibly) historical object, the chalice of the Last Supper. The conclusion,

it would seem, is unavoidable: Brown's ideas are elaborate, fascinating, and wrong.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose, however, that Brown did not do the meticulous research he claims, and suppose further that, despite his protestations, he does not believe the Priory, Mary Magdalene, and Grail theories propounded in his novel. What if the assurances of truth and accuracy are merely a fictional motif created by Brown in much the same way earlier writers often managed to find a manuscript in a wall or a bottle, thereby asserting the veracity of their narratives? If that is the case here, then Brown is surely laughing all the way to the bank, which, by now, with over seven million hardback books sold, he doubtless owns.

But it is not easy to accept the suggestion that Brown's sincerity is a pose or a hoax. In interviews and in print, he has appeared too earnest and confident, too convinced, too much a Grail evangelist, and I am persuaded that he believes—or at least did when he published it—that he has created a novel around the true story of what his character Teabing describes as "'the greatest cover-up in human history'" (p. 249).

A final and personal note: I confess that I did enjoy, just as casual reading, the murder mystery, the chases, and other plot elements, though many of them are clumsy, particularly in Brown's exposition and dialogue. But even as a thriller, it has its problems, in that very often the theory overwhelms the narrative, instead of motivating it. Moreover, for Arthurians as well as for other serious scholars, distractions and errors are at least as numerous as the twists and turns of the plot. Still, it is not easy to think of a popular book that has excited this much attention in years. So it is fortunate that, for every ten casual readers who provide adulatory reviews (e.g., 'the best book I've ever read'), there is at least one reviewer who pulls no punches: 'without doubt, the silliest, most inaccurate, ill-informed, stereotype-driven...piece of pulp fiction I have read.'[32] To that we might add only Brown's own admission (pp. 171–72): 'A career hazard of symbologists [is] a tendency to extract hidden meaning from situations that had none.'

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NOTES

1 *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 169 (his emphasis), repeated
   p. 381. Incidentally, the book's success, according to James M. Lang, '...did not come
   about by good luck. Doubleday, Brown's trade publisher...sent out 10,000 free review
   copies of the book before it was published, and sent the author on a grueling
   promotional jag in support of the book.' See Lang's 'Adventures in Commercial
   Publishing,' *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 19 March 2004, p. C1.

2 Among others, see Richard Abanes, *The Truth Behind the Da Vinci Code: A
   Challenging Response to the Bestselling Novel* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2004);
   Darrell L. Bock, *Breaking The Da Vinci Code: Answer to the Questions Everyone's
   Asking* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2004); Dan Burstein, ed., *Secrets of the Code:
   The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries Behind The Da Vinci Code* (New York:
   CDS Books, 2004); James L. Garlow and Peter Jones, *Cracking Da Vinci's Code:
   You've Read the Fiction, Now Read the Facts* (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2004);
   Martin Lunn, *Da Vinci Code Decoded: The Truth Behind the New York Times #1
   Bestseller* (New York: Disinformation Co., 2004); Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Da Vinci
   Deception: Credible Answers to the Questions Millions Are Asking About Jesus, the
   Bible, and The Da Vinci Code* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004); Amy Welborn,
   De-coding Da Vinci: The Facts Behind the Fiction of the Da Vinci Code (Huntington,
   IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2004.)

3 Owing to the (still) relatively recent publication of the novel, many of the efforts
   to refute the views expressed in Brown's novel are necessarily from internet sources.
   I cite far more of them than would be the case in regard to most subjects. If some
   are more polemical than factual, that simply illustrates the passionate responses
   the novel has elicited. Owing to the number of sites I refer to, I have not indicated
   in individual cases the date on which I accessed them: although I first examined
   some of them in late 1993, all of those that are cited in this article have been
   accessed anew, except where otherwise indicated, between 15 May and 24 May
   2004.

4 New York: Dell, 1982.

5 Brown, not surprisingly, has denied that he is a conspiracy theorist. On his website,
   the frequently asked questions include 'Would you consider yourself a conspiracy
   theorist?' His answer is, 'Hardly. I'm quite the opposite, in fact—more of a skeptic.'
   But then he goes on to add, 'However, the secret behind *The Da Vinci Code* was
   too well documented and significant for me to dismiss.' See <http://
   www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/faqs.html>.

6 On CNN, for example, Brown stated, as he has repeatedly done, that '99 percent
   of it is true. All of the architecture, the art, the secret rituals, the history, all of that
   is true, the Gnostic gospels. All...that is fiction, of course, is that there's a Harvard
   symbologist named Robert Langdon, and all of his action is fictionalized. But the
   background is all true.' See <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0305/25/
   sm.21.html>.

7 'Dismantling *The Da Vinci Code*,' in *Crisis* magazine (1 September 2003); rpt. at
   <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/persecution/pch0058.html>. James

Patrick Holding also asks and answers the question: "'Is this not a work of fiction? Why worry about a few misplaced facts?' I'll tell you why. While waiting in line to purchase *The Da Vinci Code* at the local Borders bookstore, I scanned a primary chapter of concern, having been informed by Bob Passantino of its historically inaccurate content. A woman behind me spoke up: "Oh! That's a great book!" I looked back at her. "Not really," I replied shortly. "It's full of poor scholarship." The woman was shocked. "But it's just fiction," she replied. Curious nevertheless, she asked for an example. So, I picked one. "Well, it has the date of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls wrong. If the author cannot get something that elementary and fundamental right, it is reasonable to wonder what other historical "facts" presented in this text are wrong. And there are a lot of wrong "facts" presented as the historical background to this fiction book." "Interesting," she said, nodding. This is why it is important that someone worry about the historical inaccuracies that serve as the historical basis of this fiction book—because most people are not equipped to filter fact from fiction and they will absorb as truth whatever someone says is true.' See <http://answers.org/issues/davincicode.html>.

8   <http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/faqs.html>.

9   In earlier interviews he also insisted that the 'secret societies' he discusses are real. He did so, for example, in a *Today Show* interview on 9 June 2003: 'all of the art, architecture, secret rituals, secret societies, all of that is historical fact.' A transcript of that interview is at <http://www.danbrown.com/media/todayshow.htm>. One wonders if he has at last read the numerous accounts of the founding of the Priory of Sion in 1956 (rather than 1099); see below.

10 See<http://www.booksamillion.com/ncom/books? id=2838938122825& isbn=0385504209&asset=bookpagereview>.

11 <http://www.seacoastonline.com/2003news/03162003/news/18067.htm>..

12 The former is quoted on the main page of Brown's website at <http://www.danbrown.com>. The second of those reviews, which goes on to call the novel 'brain candy of the highest order,' is located on a sub-page, <http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/reviews.html>. That page now offers nearly forty enthusiastic excerpts of reviews or of comments by other authors.

13 <http://www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm>; see above, n. 7. Jennifer Braceras also comments on the subject: 'Brown's portrayal of Catholic teachings and the Church as an institution reinforce the perverse stereotype of Catholicism as a bizarre cult.' See <http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/braceras200403020838.asp>.

14 For detailed accounts of these two points, see, among many others, Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1987; and Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). The Old Testament canon was set by the end of the first century C.E. For the New Testament, the question of canonicity is extremely complex, owing to the number of efforts to define a canon, the natural contradictions among attempts, and the difficulty of dating many documents. The first effort was apparently that of Marcion in the mid-second century, and some scholars will argue that the canon

was largely fixed by the end of that century or during the following one, whereas others will point out correctly that disputes over the status of certain books (especially Revelation) continued for a very long time. What is clear is that Constantine did not make the decisions or determine the canon.

15 Concerning the religious controversies and in particular the notion of Jesus's marriage, Brown himself notes that '…many people in organized religion have come out in support of this novel, and, of course, many have come out in opposition as well. The opposition generally comes from the strictest Christian thinkers who feel the idea of a 'married Jesus' serves to undermine His divinity.' See <http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/faqs.html>. Incidentally, the organization Opus Dei has something of a stake in the argument, having been criticized (at least fictionally) in Brown's novel. See their response at <http://www.opusdei.org/art.php?w=32&p=6438>. It should also be noted that at least once Brown has his main character defend the Church, though less than categorically: 'Langdon was having trouble buying Teabing's premise that the Church would blatantly murder people ….Having met the new Pope and many of the cardinals, Langdon knew they were deeply spiritual men who would never condone assassination' (p. 266).

16 Carl E. Olson responds, 'In fact, the number of people (both men and women) executed between 1400–1800 for suspected witchcraft was about 30,000–80,000. Not all were burnt, not all were women, and most were not killed by Catholics or officials of the Church. Many were executed by the state and some were killed by Protestants in England and other Protestant countries.' See <http://www.envoymagazine.com/envoyencore/Detail.asp?BlogID=1124>. Olson and Sandra Miesel have co-authored *The Da Vinci Hoax: Exposing the Errors in the Da Vinci Code*, forthcoming from Ignatius Press (Fort Collins, CO).

17 For some of the art historical problems, see Bruce Boucher, 'Does "The Da Vinci Code" Crack Leonardo?' *New York Times*, 3 August 2003, p. AR 26.

18 Sandra Miesel at <http://www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm>.

19 New York: Abrams, 2000, 2003.

20 In *Art: A New History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 247.

21 A notable example of Brown's interpretive fantasies is the contention that a pointing finger in the Louvre's *The Virgin* [or *Madonna*] *of the Rocks* is a threatening 'cutting gesture' corresponding to the modern image of someone passing a finger across the throat.

22 In 1307 the Templars in France were arrested; similar arrests occurred in England and Spain; trials and executions followed, and the order was officially dissolved in 1312. In general the Templars who escaped were absorbed into other orders. However, groups calling themselves 'Templars' have continued to exist even into recent times—which certainly does not mean that the Order of the Knights Templar built a fifteenth-century chapel.

23 From the late 1960s on, interest in the 'mystery' of Rennes-le-Château in particular had been keen, owing to books such as Gérard de Sède and Sophie de Sède's *L'Or de Rennes ou la Vie insolite de Bérenger Saunière, curé de Rennes-le-Château*

(Paris: Julliard, 1967). That interest was intensified in the 1980s by the French translation of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, done only a year after its publication in English. Rennes-le-Château is said to have had thirty thousand visitors during the first year following the translation. The French version is by Brigitte Chabrol, *L'Enigme sacré* (Paris: Pygmalion/Gérard Watelet, 1983).

24 Later, Pierre Plantard suggested that the Priory of Sion was founded in the seventeenth century rather than at the end of the eleventh.

25 The most convenient and doubtless most extensive documentation of Plantard's life and schemes, notably the Priory of Sion, may be that of Paul Smith. See his exhaustive site <http://priory-of-sion.com>.

26 The name of the organization was apparently inspired by Mont-Sion near Geneva; at the time, Plantard was living in the vicinity, in Annemasse (Haute-Savoie).

27 Moreover, Brown notes that the dossiers 'had been authenticated by many specialists' (p. 206). In the context of his fiction, that is surely correct. In reality, of course, it is not.

28 For an unusually clear account of the situation, see <http://www.portail-rennes-le-chateau.com/davincicode1.htm>. See also Jean-Luc Chaumeil, *Le trésor des Templiers*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Veyrier, 1990); the original title was *Le trésor du Triangle d'Or* (1979), but the new edition includes additional information.

29 See Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004), p. 215. Barber notes that French and Welsh sources consistently called the object the Holy Vessel or the Holy Grail, whereas Lovelich refers to it as 'the Sank Ryal' or 'Seint Graal,' thus inventing, by wrong-division, a new meaning for it, 'royal blood.' At about the same time, John Hardyng followed suit with the 'misreading "sang real" for "san Greal"' (Barber, p. 227).

30 Barber, p. 27.

31 Barber, p. 121.

32 Peter Millar of the *Times* of London, on 21 June 2003. This and excerpts of other reviews of the novel can be found at <http://www.e-scriptor.com/_On_Davinci>.