

**Memories of Divinity: The Divine Proportion in Whit Stillman's Barcelona and Dan  
Brown's The Da Vinci Code.**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies,

University of Manitoba,

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Bowen-M Moran

August, 2005.

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA**  
**FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**  
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## ABSTRACT

“Memories of Divinity: The Divine Proportion in Whit Stillman’s Barcelona and Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code” ties the divine proportion to celebrations of the divine feminine endorsing empire as betrayals the Pythagorean cosmology that founded the proportion. Fusing theology, mathematics, architecture, art, ideology and politics in republicanism, specifically in Plato’s Republic, the legacy of the divine proportion has been ironically winnowed to create the aesthetic identity of empire, mirrored in the subversion through co-option of the republicanism inherent in early Christianity. Aesthetic reading of the icons of western cultures after Rome exhibits the tension between the imperial co-option of republican aesthetics and republican ideology. da Vinci’s De Divina Proportione acts as a Vitruvian fusion of ideology and aesthetics to create meaning, through the republican engine of symbolic metaphor in art.

Whit Stillman’s Barcelona exposes the ironic application of the republicanism inherent in both early Christianity and the divine proportion by dominant imperialist powers through the problematic celebration of beauty as the locus of memories of divinity in a post-Christian world. Central in Barcelona is the enigmatic place of the imperialism of the American Republic, the difficulties of the imperial republican and the resulting challenge for a personal search for meaning. Pythagorean beauty defines meaning in *Barcelona*, whilst meaning is redefined into republican equivocality.

Inversely, Brown’s The Da Vinci Code, co-opts the divine proportion to claim an encoding of empire. Brown’s Empire however is a tyranny of the divine, a suppressed rightful throne which reconfigures the republics of Christ and Pythagoras into the ultimate empire.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have come into being without the support of many. To Dr. Dawn McCance, who graciously served as a member of my defence committee, Dr. Pam Perkins, who helped guide me through my graduate program, Dr. L. Buksak, the Film Department at the University of Manitoba, the English Department at the University of Manitoba, my peers in the graduate program, Octavian Orellana, who graciously supplied logistical support, and my dear friends, who have suffered much, I owe much thanks.

To M. Garrett, who guided me to the University of Texas at Austin, I owe the discoveries of much of my research.

To my partner, Genifer, who helped me face this project with patience, interest, support, and caring, I owe my heart.

To my sister, Fern, who stood beside me, guiding with her gentle hand, I owe my benediction.

To Dr. George Toles, who provided that first glimpse into the world within the world around me, who first taught me passion for inquiry, and who continues to inspire, support, and amaze, I owe my eternal gratitude.

To Dr. David Williams, who was there in the best way possible, at every step, I owe far too much. You have re-kindled my passion for the academic life. I can only hope to someday aspire to your example. E unum libertas - thank you.

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## Introduction to the Divine Proportion

Of all the unifying concepts of aesthetics, politics and design in Western culture, none is as long-standing, as permeating, and as indicative of ideology as the divine proportion. As a mathematically-based cosmology, the divine proportion has been with us in the West since before the fifth century BCE. Since that time it has been incorporated into art, architecture, music, medicine, biology, and most importantly, politics, as a method of finding the balance between two opposing extremes.

Although understanding of the divine proportion pre-existed the school of Pythagoras, for all intents and purposes, the placement, organization and insight of his school in Cretona gave birth to the divine proportion as we see it today. From his birth in Samos in 569 BCE, Pythagoras was more than a simple mathematician. Pythagoras was, above all, an observer of nature. All of his laws, all of his contributions towards culture emerged from his sharp eye on the world. Perhaps it was his disgust with Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos, which inspired Pythagoras to seek a common "law" with which to describe the universe.

Ultimately, Pythagoras discovered not a law that controlled the universe around him, but the grammar through which, he believed, God spoke. The grammar that he believed spoke the universe was that of mathematics. Unfortunately, today, when young mathematics students learn about Pythagoras, they most commonly learn the Pythagorean Theorem;  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ , or that the square of the hypotenuse is the sum of the other sides of a triangle squared. What these young students are not introduced to, however, is why Pythagoras was looking to triangles and geometry in the first place.

As Ovid tells us in the Metamorphosis, Book XV: The Teachings of Pythagoras: "The everlasting universe contains four elements that give rise to bodies. Two of these, earth and water, are heavy, and, by their own weight, sink down, while the other two, air and fire, which is more rarefied than air itself, are weightless, and soar upwards, unless something holds them under. Though these four elements are distinct from each other in space, yet they are all derived from one another, are resolved back again into themselves" (341). The explorations of the Pythagoreans were quests to understand the construction of the universe. Through an understanding of how all matter was constructed, Pythagoras believed he could find a way to live a life that echoed this design. Turning our attention directly to the second half of the above quotation from Ovid, it is clear that Pythagoras holds that the fundamental nature of the "four elements" is that they "are distinct from each other..., yet they are all derived from one another" - meaning, that, in a geometric sense, the elements are created and have their form in opposing extremes. Finding a balance between two extremes became the essence of the Pythagorean cult, and the Pythagorean life.

Defining the divine proportion in any other manner than its geometric proof, as it is found in Book XIII, Propositions IX and X of Euclid's Elements, is actually a disservice to the engine of the proportion itself. "A straight line is said to have been cut in extreme and mean ratio when, as the whole line is to the greater segment, so is the greater to the lesser" (3). Re-wording it, however, for those of us who are not mathematically-minded is of great use. When we look at the figure below:



Our line, AB is longer than the segment, AC, while segment AC, is again longer than CB. When the ratio of the length of AC to that of CB is the same as that of AB to AC, our line is cut in mean and extreme ratio, or is in divine proportion.

The Pythagoreans appear to have read this geometric figure as a metaphor for the nature of the universe. Simply put, finding the place between mean and extreme ration is about finding a medium, or *meanus*, which literally is about finding the middle road. And, just as Pythagoras and his followers built an ideology out of this geometric design, they also built their depiction of the forms of the universe out of this same proportion.

The Platonic solids are the geometric forms that are held to be the basic building blocks of all shapes in the universe. Interestingly, all the Platonic solids, designed, constructed and celebrated by the Pythagorean Platonists, are constructed via the divine proportion. Given that all physical matter came to be organized in this way, through triangles, pentagons, and dodecahedrons, and so forth, we should not be surprised to find that this method of cataloguing physical forms became employed in art. Mastery of the shapes of all the forms which matter takes in the universe leads rather directly to mastery of the shapes of the universe.

However, the application and adoption of divine proportion-based Platonic solids in art did not emerge solely out of mathematics. We must not forget that the original impetus for Pythagoras was the observation of the natural world around him. The divine

proportion was originally found in attempts to measure the uniformity we found in our own bodies - the measurement of the insert of our shoulder to our finger tips, and our elbow to our finger tips, taken as a ratio, mirrors the Euclidian proof above. The same proportion is found in our legs, the bones of our fingers, the spaces in our vertebrae. The Pythagoreans also recognized that these ratios occurred over and over again in nature. The ratio of the areas of the chambers of the shells of a nautilus, the ratio of male to female bees in a hive, the ratio of a horse's shoulder to its hoof, from its knee to its hoof, were but some examples that were found. This entire ordered ratio appeared to Pythagoras as evidence of planning in the design of the universe, and as such, as an indication of the will of the planner.

If, Pythagoras reasoned, the will of the planner of the universe could be determined, then a way of life which echoed that will would be the most harmonious possible. Thus there is no separation between the grammar of mathematics and theology, no separation between the grammar of the universe and the will, it seemed, of God. Politics, in order to work, Pythagoras believed, must mirror this design. Pythagoras also recognized however, that this grammar spoke to a certain kind of order, which elicited a certain kind of response. The proportioning of creatures in the world through ratio was the creation, Pythagoras believed, of beauty. While current psychological research hotly debates the variations in responses to beauty, we can read Pythagoras' conception of beauty as the West's first aesthetic cosmology, in which beauty, through the divine proportion, worked as a *techne*, or machine, hearkening back to the will of God. Beauty, as captured in the Pythagorean sense, via the divine proportion, remembers divinity. The

application of the divine proportion to all aspects of the Pythagorean life was the choice among Pythagoras' followers to live an aesthetic life in the memory of divinity.

As we will see in our exploration of the role of the divine proportion from the fifth century BCE to the present day, the divine proportion has been adopted, incorporated, appropriated, and abused in the creation of icons of opposing artistic, architectural and political institutions. It has been given many names over the twenty-five centuries it has been named in the canon of Western art; the golden ratio, the golden section, the golden number, the divine proportion, and, in the 17th century, PHI. The divine proportion has been the foundation of many of the greatest works of Western art - from the Cathedral of Notre Dame, to da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. The cosmology of the divine proportion is uniquely tied to the creation of perhaps the greatest gift the West has given to the world: republican democracy. Given the Pythagorean worldview of the divine proportion as a key component of the numerological grammaturgy of God, we should not be surprised to find discussions of the divine proportion coming into harmony and then conflict with early Christianity. Although pagan in origin, the Pythagorean life is very similar to the life which Christ prescribed to his followers.

In the twentieth century, we still find the divine proportion all around us. In many ways, the divine proportion is even more present in our lives than ever before. Not only is it used in many forms of modern and neo-classical architecture, but it has become the building block for our conception of beauty, specifically female beauty. A trip to a local supermarket checkout counter will demonstrate the divine proportion calling out from the faces of cover models on magazines. The worship of this form of beauty, while at once a co-option and desanctifying of the Pythagorean ideals upon which the divine proportion

cosmology is based, also calls us to read with open eyes, to see the organization behind the commercial facial form, to celebrate again the organizing principle of the universe as Pythagoras saw it. Ever more so today, when the American republic, clothed in the divine proportion, takes on imperial airs, do we find echoes of the Roman Empire, which kept its antithesis, republicanism, alive through its co-option of the divine portion through its own icons.

We must also be wary. Many current explorations of the divine proportion make a fundamental error; they hold the divine proportion to be a numeral, a value that is independent and quantified in and of itself. While the measurement of our shoulder to our fingertips in ratio to our elbow to finger tips will give us an irrational number of 1.61803..., this number is not the "number of God". Explorations that ascertain as much forget the historical context of Pythagoras' discovery of the divine proportion's unique application as a way of seeing. In fifth-century Cretona, Hindu-Arabic numerals did not exist. Pythagoras was thus left with an incommensurable fraction, most likely in Latinate numerals, transcribed into a geometric proof as a model for a basic organizing principle of the world around him. This form had the essential benefit of reminding him of the true nature of ratio; there is no meaning without both components of the ratio itself. Without a reference point, the divine proportion is meaningless.

Finding this reference point is the goal of chapters two, "Memories of Divinity: Beyond the Male Gaze in Whit Stillman's Barcelona", and three, "The Wrong M: The Da Vinci Code and the Codes of da Vinci", in our discourse. We begin with an in-depth exploration of the divine proportion, from its origin, to its place in Christianity, to its co-option in the Roman Empire, its celebration in da Vinci and the Italian Renaissance, its

use in the founding of the American Constitution, and its current use in the icons of the American Republic. First, however, we must start with its entry into the written record of Western culture; we must start with fifth century Greece.

**Chapter I**  
**Foundations of Memory: *The History of the Divine Proportion Ideology from Antiquity to America***

While it certainly appears that the divine proportion was implemented in art in cultures earlier than the fifth-century BCE, the writings of Pythagoras and his followers, in the sixth century BCE, provide the first examples of the philosophical side of the divine proportion put to use in everyday life. For Pythagoras, geometry was not only the common language of art, engineering, and government, but was the grammar of the divine itself.

By the time of his death in the Calabrian colony of Metapontum in 480 BCE, Pythagoras had set in motion a philosophical, aesthetic and political revolution. Much of what we know of Pythagoras' work is indirect, emerging from writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Iamblichus and Euclid. While many of the Pythagoreans themselves went on to evolve their own philosophical ideologies, core Pythagorean values remained.

Assembled in the third century BCE, Euclid's Elements is the repository of Greek mathematics developed in the fifth century that still has a tremendous impact upon our lives today. The twelve central divisions of geometry in which Euclid organized his compendium is the foundation of our standard 12-year matricular education, and it is through Euclid that many of us meet Pythagoras' most famed theorem: "In right handed triangles the square on the side opposite the right angle equals the sum of the squares of the sides containing the right angle." The famed theorem is Proposal 47 of Book I of Elements. Interestingly, it is in Book XIII of Elements, that we find Proposals IX and X, theorems on the "golden ratio".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is occasionally some confusion as to the numbering of the books of the Elements. Euclid appears to have numbered the proposals in a continuous fashion, yet halfway through Book XII, he jumps to Book



Ancient Greek youths were taught geometry using Euclid's Elements almost as soon as it was published. In fact, Euclid intended his Elements as a collection of all Greek mathematic knowledge up to that point, and thus, as a teaching aid. As such, the mathematical foundations for an entire society to learn Pythagorean philosophy and the divine proportion were in place by the third century. Greek education, of course, included more than geometry, much as geometry was not the only subject of the writings of Pythagoras and his students.

Mathematics, as the grammar by which Pythagoras believed god spoke, permeated all aspects of society. Plato, as a student of Pythagoras, used this technical grammaturgy as the cornerstone for his philosophical ideals. "This is in the *techné* I mean. To my mind it is a gift of the gods which somehow they sent down to us by means of Prometheus, with a kind of clearest fire; and the ancients, being better men than we and not so far removed from the gods, have bequeathed us the tradition that things that are said to be proceed from a one and a many and that they have as original constituent a Limit and an Unlimited" (Phillip, 38). J.A. Phillip, quoting Plato writing on Pythagoras, argues that Plato sees Pythagoras as Prometheus, and that the Pythagorean method holds, via metaphor, the same power as the gift of fire to humankind.

Phillip argues against the deification of Pythagoras that writers like Plato and Iamblichus undertake, claiming instead that Pythagoras filled the role of "coach" to a group of compatriots, who then allocated their greatest discoveries to Pythagoras himself. Gillian Clark, in the notes which accompany her translation of Iamblichus' On The Pythagorean Life, challenges Phillip's claims, in many ways rightly so. As Phillip

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XIII, while maintaining the numerical sequence. However, it is still significant that Pythagoras and the divine proportion are found in the same fifth century repository of geometry.

himself writes: “(t)he number theory of the Pythagoreans derives from their cosmology, and in its principle aspects, *is* cosmology” (76). Whereas most students these days only learn his Theorem, the Pythagorean number system was, for his students, the foundation of the entire Pythagorean brotherhood. At its root, as Clark and others assert, lies the divine proportion.

According to Phillip, Aristotle defines Pythagorean cosmology as follows: “From number-determined first principles proceeds a One that is the universe. From this One and its surrounding void proceed number-things-stars, elements, creatures, that make up our world” (76). From this number-determined cosmology emerges every single aspect of Pythagoreanism, from the Harmony of the Spheres to the Theorem itself. Simply put, the first principles place mathematics, specifically in the form of geometry, as the language of the universe, that is, the language by which the entire universe could be understood and represented. Everything else, then, emerges from mathematics. For the Pythagoreans, there was simply no division between mathematical truth and philosophical truth; the two are harmonically tied. Pythagoras’ students, like Iamblichus, took upon themselves the task of teaching others the harmonious mathematic cosmology that they learned in the Pythagorean School. They did so not only out of respect for their teacher and mentor, Pythagoras, but out of the belief that the truths they felt Pythagoras described were indeed sacred and vital.

“The philosopher Olympiodorus (On Plato’s Phaedo, 123.3 Norvin) said that Iamblichus was one of those whose chief concern was *hieratike*, the priestly task of mediating between gods and humans....” (Clark, XV). Mediation between gods and humans is far removed from our current understanding and learning of Pythagoras’

Theorem. Yet, it is precisely the search between the even and the odd for balance, form, unity and a true representation of the nature of the universe (as the Pythagoreans saw it) that led to the employment of the divine proportion in fifth-century Greek sculpture, architecture, and eventually, the political theory of the democratic republic.

Plato's Republic is far and away the most influential text in the history of the democratic republic. Plato's journeys in ca. 380 and 356 BCE to tutor Dion the Younger in Syracuse spread the ideals of republicanism as Plato proposed them from Athens to the world of Greater Greece, from where they blossomed and became part of the history of republican democracy, as it exists today.

Syracuse, as a Greek city-state, had fallen under the control of the tyranny of Dionysis after his unification of Sicily. The constitution subverted, Dion, Plato's intrepid pupil, believing Dionysis would be receptive to Plato's teachings of the vitality of the republican ideals, invited him to help form the mind of the son and heir to the tyrant Dionysius the Elder. Even after Plato travels to Syracuse, even after Dion has been banished and Plato imprisoned, (in his seventh Epistle), his dedication to republicanism as a panacea for the ills of the tyrannical political government is clear. "When one is advising a sick man who is living in a way injurious to his health, must one not first tell him to change his way of life, and give him further counsel only if he is willing to obey? ... So too with respect to a city..." (223). Plato's feverent Republicanism is not an ideology which can be enforced through Imperial means – one cannot force republicanism upon a populace; hence Plato's belief in the importance of impressing upon the tyrant Dionysis the vitality of the divine proportion through argument, debate, and conversation. Plutarch's Parallel Lives of Dion the Younger and Brutus emphasizes

this condition. Both Dion and Brutus, upon rising against tyrants, find their instituted republics to be short-lived, precisely due to the aberrant nature of forcing a republic upon a populace that is mathematically unbalanced, and does not desire such a form of government.

At the core of Plato's Republic is his Pythagorean education and cosmology. Iamblichus attributes Plato's Republic to Pythagoras' invention. A lofty claim indeed, but, even if we discard Iamblichus' claim of a Pythagorean origin, we can trace a direct link between the divine proportion and Republic:

“They say,” Iamblichus writes, “that Pythagoras also invented the whole system of political education, when he said that none of the things in existence is pure. Earth partakes of fire, fire of water, air of both, and both of air; similarly, good partakes of bad, just of unjust, and so on. (On the same principle, reason has impulses in both directions: there are two movements both of body and of soul, one irrational and one purposive.) He constructed, as it were, three lines, representing forms of government, and connected them at the ends to make a right-angled triangle: one side had the nature of the epitritos, the hypotenuse measures five, and the third is the middle of the other two (131). If we calculate the angles at which the lines meet, and the squares on each side, we have an excellent model of a constitution. Plato appropriated this idea, when he expressly mentioned, in the *Republic*, the first two numbers in the ratio of four to three which join with the fifth to make the two harmonies. Pythagoras, they say, also trained people in moderation and in finding the mean, and in how to make every life happy with some principle good, and generally found out how to choose what is good for us and the appropriate actions.”

(Clark, 58)

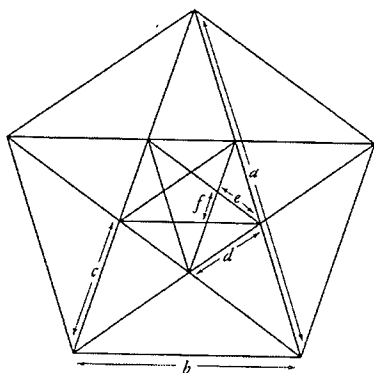
Given the political dimension of the Republic, the core value of *hieratike* as mediation between humans and gods through the language of the mathematically-based Pythagorean cosmology is the basis for the model of government which Plato proposes. Furthermore, given this emphasis on balance, harmony and finding the mean between opposing forces, *hieratike* takes on greater meaning as an applied philosophical ideology

based on Pythagorean mathematic truth. The mathematic truth of ratio and mean in fourth century Greece was that of the divine proportion.

Geometrically, the Pythagorean cosmology also led to an understanding of the physical make-up of the universe as taking place in the form of the Platonic solids. Although denying the possibility of their conception and construction by Pythagoras himself, and despite stating that “(n)o one doubts that these figures were known [and drawn] probably already in the sixth century” (30), Phillip employs a fragment of Aetius, describing the teachings of Pythagoras to explain the foundation of the idea of the Platonic solids. “There being five solid figures, also called mathematical figures, Pythagoras asserts that earth is formed of the cube, fire of the pyramid, air of the octahedron, water of the icosahedron, and the sphere of the universe from the dodecahedron” (42). These figures are important not only for their geometric properties, but also for the forms through which artists are taught to render the world around them. At a most basic level, the process of visualization is the transcription of the world into basic shapes. These shapes become the grammar of the world around us, and, by mastering them, visual artists make representative art the language of divinity.

Each polygon used to construct the icosahedron, dodecahedron, and octahedron has one thing in common: each is constructed by way of the divine proportion. For example, the dodecahedron is constructed of twelve, five-sided polygons, called pentagons. Pentagons are of particular significance because, as Livio writes: “(i)f you connect all the vertices of the pentagon by diagonals, you obtain a pentagram (an inverted 5 pointed star). The diagonals all form a smaller pentagon at the center, and the diagonals of this pentagon form a pentagram and yet smaller pentagon. This progression can be

continued ad infinitum, creating smaller and smaller pentagons and pentagrams. The



**Figure 1 -The Pythagorean Pentagram, created through the divine proportion pentagon. (Livio)**

striking property of all these figures is that if you look at line segments in order of decreasing lengths (the ones marked  $a, b, c, d, e, f$  in the figure), you can easily prove using elementary geometry that *every segment is smaller than its predecessor by a factor that is precisely equal to the Golden Ratio*" (Livio,

35). Further, all of the angles in the pentagon are golden angles, that is, related to each other though

ratio via the divine proportion.

So vital was the harmony of the divine proportion that the Platonic figure, which represented the shape of the universe, was constructed from the geometric figure built of divine proportions. For this means the Pythagoreans adopted the pentagon, with a pentagon in its center as the symbol of their cult, worn upon their clothes. Iamblichus explains the symbol of the cult in a story about the duties of one Pythagorean member to another:

A Pythagorean, they say, on a long and lonely journey, stayed at an inn. From exhaustion, and for many other reasons, he succumbed to a long and serious illness, and his resources were used up. But the innkeeper, whether from compassion or from liking, supplied him with everything, grudging neither service nor expense. When the disease worsened, the man, accepting death, wrote a secret sign upon a writing tablet, and told the innkeeper that if his end came, he was to set up the tablet by the road, and see if some passer-by would recognize the sign. That person would repay what the innkeeper had spent on him, and return the favor on his behalf. The innkeeper, after his death, buried the body with all due care, but had no expectation of getting back what he had spent, still less of benefiting from someone who recognized the tablet. But, eager to try out the instructions, he did regularly put the tablet out to be seen. Much later, a Pythagorean was passing by. He stopped,

realized who had made the sign, found out what had happened, and paid the innkeeper much more than he had spent.

(100)

The secret sign of the story: the Pythagorean pentagram. With mathematical cosmology at its very core, Pythagorean philosophy transposed observations of the natural world into direct ideological and political action. The Platonic solids served not as only models for the physical nature of the universe, but as the representatives of the ideal human state as well. Again the representation of the divine proportion, this time as the pentagram, works as an engine for political and personal action.

Pythagoreanism was a revolution not only in the application of mathematics to the world, nor only in its spirit of fraternity, but in the Pythagoreans' rather progressive attitudes towards gender roles. As the code of the universe, numbers demonstrated a particular balance, and the union of the first feminine symbol -- "2"-- and the first masculine symbol -- "3" -- created the balanced, life-giving, "5", the symbol of love, marriage and progeny, which in turn is the number of sides of the pentagon, of which is built the shape of the universe itself, the dodecahedron. Not only were women treated as equals in the Pythagorean "brotherhood" (Iamblichus lists no fewer than 18 major female Pythagorean mathematicians, musicians, artisans and philosophers, a number which Phillip himself inflates) but the Pythagoreans preached marital fidelity, a concept that was not widely practiced among Hellenistic Greek men, nor later in Rome, on which many Pythagoreans set their sights. By the first century BCE, Pythagoreanism, as a cult, found popularity among upper-class Roman women, partially due to its emphasis on marital fidelity (Clark, 59). The emphasis on marital fidelity was also a key component

on the spread of another cult among Roman women a century or so later, early Christianity.

The relationship between Pythagoreanism and early Christian sects, many of whom were later labeled Gnostics, is rather similar. Both streams of religious worship emphasize an ascetic life, mental and physical training, the denial of excess, fidelity to one's family, and the vital importance of special knowledge for spiritual redemption. Similarities even exist between the mythical life of Pythagoras and Christ himself. Both are thought to be of divine birth, Christ of the Hebrew God, while Pythagoras was said to be the progeny of Apollo. Both performed miracles, including raising the dead, curing disease and driving out demons, and both evangelized, preaching a religion of tolerance, order, and faithfulness. While there are no claims of Pythagoras' return from death, the social component of both men's truth appears to be remarkably similar in its treatment of the sexes, at least until the 4th century AD.

The place of women in the early church is currently a matter of great controversy and debate among Christian scholars. Yet, despite the particulars of arguments based on canonical and non-canonical gospels, politically-based sexism, hegemony and the like, one thing is particularly clear. Like Pythagoras, "Christ is shown throughout his ministry to be positive and egalitarian in his attitude towards women, in having them as friends and followers, talking with them freely, making them recipients of what was to later become Christian dogma, and assigning them roles in parables and stories" (Haskins, 30). At the core of many of these ongoing debates is the role of one particular disciple of Christ, Mary of Magdala, or Mary Magdalene.



The role of Mary Magdalene has come under scrutiny as of late, and as such has been subject to great re-definition in the eyes of much of the Christian public. The role of Mary Magdalene, tied to the use of the divine proportion in da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, is the crux of the controversy surrounding The Da Vinci Code. While some cite the rise of gender studies, feminism, equality and education as factors in the re-interpretation of Mary Magdalene's role in Christian mythology, it is through canonical sources that we gain a glimpse of the early representation of Mary Magdalene.

In a move echoed by Haskins, Burkett, and other Christian scholars, Sister Mary Ann Hinsdale gives the historical Mary Magdalene, Mary of Magdala, the role of apostle apostolica in the Gospels:

Now when Jesus was risen early of the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.

And she wept and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept.

And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.

(Mark 16:9-11)

This role is repeated in each of the canonical gospels, in which Mary of Magdala is given the honor not only of first seeing the risen Christ, but of being the first person to proclaim the "Good News". What set Christianity apart from many other religious sects operating in the hodgepodge of the Roman Empire's plethora of religions is the claim that Christ had risen. Without a risen Christ, Christianity is simply a series of valuable moral lessons as prescribed by yet another *hieratik*. Yet, despite her pivotal role in bringing the news of the risen Christ to the other apostles, Mary of Magdala had become such a figure of controversy that, by the time of the writing of Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, the

first post-Gospel account of the resurrection, Chapter 15:5-8, her meeting with Christ in the garden is entirely omitted (Haskins, 31).

Many recent works have explored the social and political factors that caused Mary of Magdala to face such harsh treatment in the Pauline Epistles and the rising Church. Haskins places partial blame on her belief that in Hebrew culture of the time, women were often reviled, mistrusted and reduced to lesser citizens. Yet, Mary of Magdala, some argue, was most likely a Gentile woman. Christ, in previous incidents, had clearly treated women as equals to men in his preaching. In the past, the argument has also been made that Mary Magdalene was a “fallen woman” i.e., a harlot, a whore, and as such, was simply not worthy of such a role in the Christian ministry. Given that Christ once admonished the Pharisees saying, “Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Matt.21:23, 31-2), it is astonishing that even had Mary of Magdalene been a sexual sinner, she would be unworthy of redemption, while Paul, who himself was a persecutor of Christians, became one of the most celebrated of saints. The core of Christ’s teachings of a religion of love, compassion, forgiveness, and understanding were lost on far too many. Current research fuses the perception of Mary Magdalene, juxtaposed between canonical scripture and orthodox treatment, with the apocryphal works that make up the Nag Hammadi Codices.

In 1945, at Nag Hammadi, in what is now Egypt, two farmers made a discovery in a field, which would revolutionize our understanding of Gnosticism and early Christian sects. In a cave, in their fields, they found a collection of scrolls that were later dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE; the Nag Hammadi Codices appear to be a collection of documents

that make up the pre-Nicean Bible. Granted, it is not known which Gnostic sect amassed the collection, nor is it known for what purpose the materials were secreted away. In many ways, knowing which sect was responsible does not matter. Materials collected by other Gnostic sects, in the forms of the letters of Paul to the Canaanites and other Gnostic Christian groups, were accepted into the canonical gospels. In addition to its historical value, what makes the Nag Hammadi Codices so valuable is the completeness of one of the earliest non-canonical gospels, the Gospel of Thomas, along with the Gospel of Mary, and the Pstis Sophia, or “Holy Wisdom”.

Further clouding the debates on the gospels, both canonical and non-canonical, are the problems of dating them, and disentangling orthodox and Gnostic sects. Writers on early church history often disagree about the historical place of these gospels. The methodology of gospel collection however, does appear to be clear; Christ’s exploits were first circulated in oral form, endlessly told and retold. Later, various versions of testaments were recorded around the time of the end of the first century CE, with revisions taking place for the next two and a half to three centuries. Different groups, separated from each other by politics, geography, and interpretational differences often created texts with variations; some of these variations were slight, others, far more profound.

These differences often led to excommunication, rebellion and bloodshed when these groups came into contact with each other. The struggles between various groups grew even more divisive in the face of sanction by Rome, and the foundation of the Holy Roman Empire. The various church groups did not present a unified front. Prime among the divisions between them are controversies about the nature of the Trinity, and the

rights and privileges accorded to Mary Magdalene<sup>2</sup> because of her sex. These divisions occupy Episcopal declarations of heresy among the Gnostics that run right up to the unification of the one Great Church at the Council of Nicea under Constantine.

The rationale for the Council of Nicea, the ratification of the Trinity is tied, by one scholar, straight back to Pythagoras:

his mention of the orthodox, Catholic, doctrine of the Trinity may serve to remind us that the Gnostic method of teaching is not so unfamiliar.... The Church writers preferred on the whole to trust to the tradition preserved in 'Holy Scriptures', but when we examine these we find that they themselves are examples of the Gnostic method. 'Thus saith the Lord' say the Prophets: in what does this essentially differ from the *Ipse dixit* of Pythagoras? Nay more, the 'Amen I say unto you', of Jesus is essentially the Gnostic way of teaching. And we cannot stop even here. Thales, Heraclitus, Empedocles, all the great Ionian Greeks, taught like almost a mythical Pythagoras a Gnosis.

(Burkitt, 7)

Imperial Roman culture was obsessed with Gnosis. An important reason for the success of the Roman Empire was its ability to subsume, incorporate and employ the talents of all cultures with which it came into contact. One familiar example of this essentially Roman appropriation can be found in the Roman system of Latinized Greek Gods. Yet, the Romans also established themselves as masters of architecture, sculpture, and mathematics. Prime among them, was the architect of the aqueducts, Vitruvius.

A near contemporary of Christ, Vitruvius is the patriarch of Roman architecture. In truth, Vitruvius himself is more of an architect/engineer, primarily interested in hydrodynamics than a great artist. Yet where he made his most impact was in his pedagogy, writing the essential textbook on architecture, Ten Books. Vitruvius demanded of Rome's architects a strong educational foundation, partnered with experience in order to create the monuments of the Empire. "Architects who sought to be skilled with their

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<sup>2</sup> We will return to the controversy surrounding the role of Mary Magdalene in chapter three, "The Wrong

hands without formal education have never been able to reach a position of authority in return for their labors, while those who relied upon reasoning and scholarship were clearly pursuing the shadow, not the substance. But those who have a thorough knowledge of both like men fully armed have more quickly attained their goal with authority” (Vitruvius, Book I, I, II). The foundation of Vitruvius’ demand for the education of Rome’s architects can be found in Book III, the subject of which is, without irony, Ionic temples.

In adopting the Ionic style, Roman builders were again taking on the best of the Greek architectural world as their own. Vitruvius does not begin Book III with a discussion of architecture, the essential elements of Ionic style, which he later expands upon in great detail, nor does he begin with a declaration of the values inherent in the Ionic style. Instead, Vitruvius explains how *ordinatio* and *symmetria* are used to define the ideal proportions of the human body. As architectural theorist Thomas Gordon Smith writes: “(f)ollowing a Greek aesthetic convention of finding pleasing proportions as the mean between extremes<sup>3</sup>, Vitruvius relied on a ubiquitous model from Greece, the mid-fifth century BCE bronze called *Doryphorous the Spear Bearer*. Polycleitos, who created the sculpture to illustrate the ideal proportions, outlined the bronze’s didactic function in a pamphlet called *Kanon*. Only two lines from this tract survive; one reads, ‘Perfection comes about little by little through many numbers’” (Smith, 27)

Smith explains that Vitruvius reduced Polycleitos’ “many numbers” to core ratios. Specifically, there is the notion that “(i)n the Greek conception of the relationship of anatomy to geometry, the modules of the human body are a natural source from which

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M: The Da Vinci Code and the Codes of da Vinci.”

the abstract circle and square are derived” (28). Yet it is in the words of Vitruvius himself that we see how vital were the relationship between fifth-century Greek proportions and the architecture of Rome:

“Without *symmetria* and proportion there can be neither rhyme nor reason in the composition of a temple.... (T)he members of a temple must have a perfect correspondence of measure of individual parts to the whole. Then again, in the human body the central point is naturally the navel. If a person lies flat with hands and feet extended, the fingers and toes of each hand would touch the circumference described by placing a pair of compasses on the navel. Just as the human body yields this circular outline, a square figure can also be found from it. If we measure from the soles of the feet to the top of the head, and apply that measure to the outstretched arms, the breadth will be the same as the height- as in the case of plane surfaces that are perfectly square”.

(Book III I, III)

The method of proportion Vitruvius establishes here is the same method of finding the divine proportion in a human being, using the navel as a reference point.

The larger significance of this passage is that Book III addresses the building of temples. Roman temples are not only the cornerstones of religion in Roman society, but once Christianity became the state religion in the fourth century, the very houses of the Great Church. The proportions and mechanisms for building the architectural icons of the Church descend directly from the pagan cosmology of the Pythagoreans. Just as Greek temples aesthetically reflect the influence of Pythagorean ideology in Greek society, Roman temples aesthetically reflect the essentially Roman practice of incorporation of ideas of other systems into their own. The early Church, as a religion that established its most vital foothold in the Roman Empire, followed the Roman social pattern for adoption, incorporation and the creation of orthodoxy through essentially heterodoxical constituents. It is not without irony, then, that we return to the history of the early Church

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<sup>3</sup> It is not without irony that Smith’s diction mirrors the Euclidean definition of the divine proportion as the mean between extremes.

in an analysis of the history of the divine proportion. The Pythagorean cosmology that begat the system by which religious monuments were built under pagan Rome, found itself continued in the monuments of the early Church.

Chadwick's detailed analysis of the early Church proposes a basic pattern for the building of what eventually becomes the orthodox, Catholic Church. While Rome was slowly sliding through transitions between different forms of popular religion, including solar monotheism of the sort attributed to the Pythagorean belief in Pythagoras' divine progeny by Apollo, the early Christian church was engaged in a series of debates on the claims of orthodoxy by various sects. As late as the time of Irenaeus (185-90 CE), the oral tradition of the stories of Christ was held in equal regard with the written and recorded Gospels. For the first century of Christianity, the only canonical text was the Old Testament itself, and it wasn't until the controversy with Marcion and other sects, which came to be labeled as Gnostic, that vital importance was placed in the Holy Scriptures. Yet, as early Church historians demonstrate, even the canonical Holy Scriptures themselves were subject to debate, and communicants were liable to Church discipline.

Ex-communication and accusations of heresy between members of the Episcopate were rather common in the early centuries of the Church. While Christianity itself was technically illegal, before the fourth century A.D., its spread among wealthy Roman households caused great stirs<sup>4</sup>. Just as the Roman Empire itself was divided along religious and political lines, so too was the Church. The impetus for accusations of heresy

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<sup>4</sup> Many early historians of the early Church suggest that its popularity came in part due to its emphasis on monetary sacrifice, charitable works, and division of Church area under the direction of individual prynces-bishops. The early Episcopates oversaw the growing financial powers and responsibilities of Church administration, and many sought to increase the size of their financial holdings.

simply grew when Ignatius of Antioch decided to solidify the unity of the Church by declaring the local bishop to be the focus of church power. Without the bishop, the Eucharist, the sacramental core to Christianity could not be performed. By claiming the bishop to be, like Simon Peter, God's representative on Earth, the bishop became essentially the incarnation of a divine monarch. "We ought to regard the bishop," Ignatius declared, "as the Lord himself" (41).

In many ways, Ignatius' strategy had, in the short term, the opposite effect. Bishops were elected from local clergy and given their assumption of the power of God on earth, these elections were hotly contested. During the Great Persecution under Decius in 250-1 AD, the bishops of Rome, Antioch and Jerusalem were killed. In March 251, with Decius gone, two competing candidates for the see of Rome, Cornelius and Novatian were elected. While maneuvering for the support of the rest of the Episcopate, supporters of both candidates were denied the right to communion (the essential Christian sacrament) by opposing factions. When it became clear that Cornelius had the wider support, many who had supported Novatian had to reapply for admission to the sacrament of communion and many were denied<sup>5</sup>. In 260-1 when Gallienus became emperor, he granted toleration of Christianity, restoring confiscated churches, and other lands. The peace the Church would enjoy until 303 was remarkable, and enabled the solidification of power.

From 284 to 305, Diocletian took it upon himself to carry out an enormous remodeling of the Roman Empire. All aspects of Imperial power were refashioned, from taxes and currency, to defense, and the price of goods. He divided the Empire itself, with

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<sup>5</sup> Denial of the sacrament of communion is tantamount to denial of entry into the kingdom of heaven; such was the impact of "heresy".



two Augusti, himself in the East and Maximian in the West ruling with the help of an assistant Caesar. The Caesar in the West was Constantinus, father to Constantine. When questions began to be raised about the loyalty of his army, Diocletian took it upon himself to purge Christians from both his forces, and from his empire. On February 23, 303 the Christian cathedral which stood conspicuously across from the Imperial palace at Nicodemia was destroyed. Soon after, edicts were pronounced authorizing the destruction of churches, and the confiscation of Bibles; all meetings of worship were strictly forbidden, on pain of death. A few months later, Diocletian issued yet another edict ordering the arrest of all clergy. Although this edict appears to have been adopted only in the Roman East, the prisons simply could not contain the sheer numbers of those arrested. In the fall of that year an amnesty was granted, provided that those arrested agreed to participate in pagan sacrifices. In 304 refusals to sacrifice became punishable by death, an edict again seemingly enforced only in the East.

While some churches were destroyed in the West, Constantinus put no one to death for the crime of being a Christian. When he died in York on July 25, 305, his soldiers declared his son, Constantine, Emperor. Although a practicing solar monotheist at the time, Constantine certainly was familiar with, and tolerant of, Christianity. His beloved half-sister Anastasia was a devout and practicing Christian. No sooner was Constantine declared Emperor in the West than he began to consolidate his power in an attempt to undo the schism caused by Diocletian's division of the Empire.

For three hundred years Rome had faced the onslaught of barbarian invasions at her borders and, on the domestic front, continual reversals of religious fortunes were wearing thin. Time and again Christianity was banned, and then permitted, churches

confiscated, and then returned. These constant revisions of law were wearing on Roman society. With Diocletian's abdication of the East in 305, the Eastern Roman Empire, under the new Emperor Galerius, faced more civil bloodshed. The increased pressure on Christians in the East also created great division in the church, specifically between those accused of collaborating with the authorities to stay alive and those who felt actions such as the surrender of bibles to be tantamount to a denial of the faith. Constantine looked over the Empire, and saw it tearing itself in two (Chadwick, 123). So, he decided to do something about it.

On October 28, 306, Maxentius, a rouge son-in-law of Chief Emperor Galerius, was elected Emperor of Rome by the Senate, by this point giving the Roman Empire six leaders. Maxentius was able to hold Rome against Galerius' forces in 306, mainly due to the influence of his supporter, the General Maximian. A conference of the Caesars took place at Carnuntum in 306, which established a temporary peace, but the Empire was so occupied with the brewing civil war that many of the persecutions of Christians in the East relaxed. However, under the territory controlled by Maxentius, persecutions continued. Five years of general peace emerged between the civil factions, marked primarily by Licinius' campaigns against the Samaritans. Having consolidated his power in the West, and having won a temporary political alliance with Licinius, a compatriot of Galerius, who was declared Augusti on November 11, 308, Constantine, decided to move first against Maxentius.

Constantine's alliance with Licinius was of understandable concern to Maxentius and Maximian. Having seized power by manipulating the republican notions of the Senate, Maxentius' hold on power was indeed tenuous. Ever the politician, however, he

played into Constantine's hands by destroying all paintings and statues of Constantine in Rome. Having first gained the support of the Catholic patriarch Eusebius, Constantine invaded Italy with a small and well-organized army in 312. His army soon occupied all of Upper Italy, all the way to the Tiber. Constantine's ranks were buoyed by support from Christians who felt liberated by his troops. As Maxentius' troops awaited attack by Constantine on the right bank of the Tiber, Constantine had his famous vision as reported by Eusebius (*Vita Constant I*, 28-30), in which Constantine saw a fiery cross appear over the sun with the words *hoc signo victor eris* or ἔντοῦτοῦ σήματος (‘‘by this sign you shall conquer’’). He rode into battle armed with the sign, and, bringing to bear his primarily Christian Gallic cavalry, threw Maxentius' troops into mass confusion. Many attempted to escape over a narrow bridge made of boats, and were thrown into the Tiber and drowned, including Maxentius himself. Constantine took Rome, and put Maxentius' son and counsellors to death. On the advice of Eusebius, Constantine did not undertake an out-and-out purge of Maxentius' officials and dependents, winning their support and favor.

Facing Constantine's forces on one side and Licinius on the other, Maximinus choose to attack Licinius in April 313, but was defeated and killed in July of that year. Licinius officially ended the persecution of Christians in the East of that year. To celebrate and solidify their partnership, Licinius took Constantine's sister, Constantina, as his bride. They quickly had one child, thus ensuring a hereditary successor of Licinius' throne who was related to Constantine. Having obliterated all internal opposition, Licinius and Constantine then entered into an uneasy peace.

Not a year later, allegedly the result of an affair involving Anastasia's husband Bassianus who himself took up arms against Constantine, the peace between Licinius and Constantine was broken. With Bassianus put to death, Constantine and Licinius met on the field of battle on October 8, 314. Although Constantine won, the battle tried the very fabric of both armies. Exhausted from years of constant civil fighting, Constantine's troops were simply not up to the task of occupation, and withdrew to previous territories. Meanwhile, Eusebius became bishop of Caesarea, and compiled his Preparation for the Gospel, along with other texts designed to create a unified Scripture.

While many see Constantine's conversion to Christianity as merely a political convenience, he did deliver a series of speeches on the assembly of the saints between 321 and 324. As tensions again mounted between Licinius and Constantine, persecution of Christians, this time for siding with the Christian Emperor, resumed in Licinius' territories around 322. Using the persecution of Christians as a precursor to war, and claiming to be pursuing Samaritans who had been raiding in his territory, Constantine invaded the East in 321. War officially broke out near the Hebrus River in July 3, 324. Licinius was overcome, and, through a series of ever worsening defeats, retreated all the way to Chrysopolis, where he finally surrendered in September. Licinius was put to death in the spring of 325, for allegedly plotting against his victor.

In celebration of his victory and the reunification of the Roman Empire, Constantine founded Constantinople, designed to be the "New Rome" as the seat of Imperial power. As in the past, the divisions between Christian Episcopates in the West and those in the united East continued after the end of military hostilities. Key to these disputes was the opinions of Arius, a priest at Alexandria. The nature of the controversy

surrounded the nature of the Godhead; Arius argued that there was a time at which Christ did not exist, and thus the Son was subordinate to God the Father, and indeed, a creature of flesh. Such arguments about the nature of the Trinity had troubled Constantine before, when he was forced to preside over the Donatists' excommunication from Carthage, and indeed the whole of the Church. When the synod at Arles met in Gaul on August 1, 314, they too voted to excommunicate the Donatists. Constantine's attempts to suppress them failed. The Donatists remained powerful in North Africa for some time.

In June and July of 324, the Council of Nicea met with a clear directive from Constantine: heal the divisions in the Church, unify the scriptures, and found the state religion of the Rome. The Roman Empire was finally emerging from nearly three hundred years of divisions among military, secular, philosophical and religious groups, and, despite his best efforts, division in his Empire again beset Constantine. As Constantine scholar Timothy Barnes reports, "By 324, not only were bishops denouncing one another, but congregations were divided into two parties, and in the theatre pagans taunted Christians about their dissensions" (212). Constantine had dispatched letters to the heads of both sides of the debate, urging them to "behave like philosophers" (213), but to no avail. The situation worsened when riots broke out over the election of a successor to the bishop of Antioch in 324. Having put down Licinius, five other pretenders to the throne, and unified the Empire, Constantine had had enough.

There is widespread dissent among scholars about the role that Constantine played in the Council of Nicea (although there is evidence that Constantine himself interrogated bishops as part of the proceedings). There is also great controversy about the imperative behind many of the Council's decisions, as well as its attitudes towards

gender. In the East, during Licinius' final persecution of the Christians, women were banned from participating in the clergy. There are records of women serving the Episcopate and as presbyters before the Council of Nicea, but none after.

Regardless of differing scholarly opinions on the motives, methodologies and political objectives of the Council of Nicea, one thing is clear: the division that existed between various Church factions before the council were quashed afterwards. Constantine pronounced an edict on April 1 of 326, forbidding married men to have concubines. In addition, the right to bring charges of adultery against another was limited only to males in families; females could not. Virginity was declared a state right; maidenhood required proof on the part of a young bride's family. Those who could not provide such proof, or falsify it, had their property confiscated and were subject to deportation. Rapists were to be burned alive, and marriages against the will of a bride's parents were annulled. If the bride was a willing participant in the marriage against her parents' will, she too was to be burned alive. Those who reported sexual misconduct were to be rewarded; those who encouraged it were to have lead poured down their throats and/or be burned alive (Barnes, 220).

Previous to this edict, the sexual practices of Romans were left up to individual households. By violently disciplining sexual practice, Constantine ensured a stranglehold on his subjects, the likes of which had not been seen before. Controlling a population's sexuality became a rather effective method for controlling progeny, morality, and social dissent. The bishops, who survived the ex-communications as a result of the Council of Nicea, willingly gave their support to this new edict, despite its emphasis on punitive

punishment and neighbourly suspicion. Bishops who did not were banished or put to death themselves.

In its other major achievement--declaring a Canon of Scripture and a formal creed of belief of the Church of the Empire--the Council at Nicea removed any evidence of dissent, multiplicity, and philosophical discussion from the Church. The result is a clear methodology of Imperial control through state religion, which proved, in turn, to be rather effective.

The absences in the post-Nicene Canon of Scripture speak profoundly to the removal of the social equality of Christianity. Gone are the Gospel of Phillip, the Gospel of Mary, and the Gospel of Thomas, along with the Pstis Sophia. There are no longer any overt Pythagorean echoes in the emphasis on the responsibility for individual Christians to pursue self-knowledge. In fact, emphasis has switched to the policing of one's neighbours, both for the moral protection of one's community, and, more importantly, for the protection of oneself and family. With Constantine's emphasis on one Church, one Empire, and one doctrine, Mary Magdalene was relegated in homilies to the role of a "fallen woman", while the Virgin Mary became the role model for female Christians. Under Constantine's homogeneous Empire, no room existed for two persons of authority in the Church. Thus, Simon Peter was recast not as a jealous follower of Christ, denying Mary Magdalene's role out of sexism or his own sense of unworthiness, but as the first Pope, and regent to the throne of Christ.

In a move that seems certain to have emerged from the Senate attempts to grab power by electing Maxentius Emperor in 306, Scroll VI, V of the Codices at Nag Hammadi, Plato's Republic, was also removed from Scripture. All evidences and

incidents of republicanism, the philosophical history of mathematics, and dissent were declared heresy. Ironically, the term the Greeks used to describe the priestly task of mediating between the divine and humans—*hieratike*--now defined the crime of the heresiarch.

In an additional irony, Constantine embarked upon a rather ambitious course of building. In the city of Rome he commissioned the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the Basilica of St. Peter<sup>6</sup>, and the Basilica of St. Sebastian. In Constantinople he built the Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) and Hagia Eirene (Holy Peace) churches. While the New



**Figure 2 - Haiga Sophia, now a mosque, Istanbul.** Photo Credit: Kingfishers

Rome was to be free of all the pagan trappings of old Rome, the program of building churches followed the rules set down in architecture by Vitruvius, which descend directly

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<sup>6</sup> A reworking of the temple of Venus which originally occupied the site, St. Peter's Basilica remains one of the most pagan buildings in the Christian world to this day.



from the pagan cosmology of Pythagoras. The Pythagorean influence is even clearer in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and the Golden Octagon in Antioch. Perhaps unwittingly, in insisting that his architects follow the rules of Vitruvius, the patriarch of Roman architecture, Constantine kept alive the aesthetic education required for the depiction of beauty through the use of the divine proportion. Like a true Roman, he simply transplanted what already worked from the pagan world and adopted it into the Roman Christian world.

Education under Constantine after the Council of Nicea, however, was radically different. No longer were students educated on the link between Pythagorean cosmology and aesthetics, but were instead introduced to Pythagoras through mathematics and music only. Those who studied Vitruvius had clear access to the cosmology behind his aesthetics, but would only study his works in an attempt to become future architects of Rome. Plato's Republic was relegated to the role of philosophy only, alongside the teachings of Socrates, Aristotle and the other Greeks.

Despite fighting under the banner of Christianity, and despite making Christianity the state religion, Constantine himself was only baptized shortly after Easter, 337. Ironically, it was the Arian bishop Eusebius who baptized him, and who later became Constantine's biographer after Constantine's death on May 22 of that year.

Following the enormous power struggle that Constantine's death resulted in, Constantinus II, after solidifying his power, named his cousin Julian, the only suitable member of the Imperial family left alive after his purges, Caesar. Julian proved himself a capable general, fighting back several barbarian invasions to the north. Julian was also a unique child of privilege. Believing himself a philosopher, he spent his formative years in

Greece under the tutelage of Neo-Platonist Maximum of Esephus, and Eusebius. Julian was a particularly popular general with his troops and truly a populist, often intervening in the civil affairs of the territories in which he was stationed, to the dismay of local officials but to the delight of the local populace. His victories on the field of battle resulted in his troops declaring him Augustus not once, but twice.

While he refused the acclamation of his troops the first time, the second time his soldiers would have none of it. He wrote to his cousin in a furtive attempt to foster peace, but was reproached. In his Letter to the Athenians Julian declares that his rise to Emperor was the will of the Gods, and, similarly to Constantine, he had experienced a vision in which a pagan spirit appeared to him, and commanded him to return the Roman Empire to its pagan roots. He led his soldiers in pagan sacrifices as early as the summer of 360. In 361, as Rome stood on the brink of yet another civil war, and the armies of Constantinius II and Julian marched towards each other, Constantinius unexpectedly died of natural causes<sup>7</sup>. Putting the need for a peaceful Rome ahead of the Church, in a final effort to avoid another war of succession, Constantinius had name Julian his successor.

Julian gave full tribute to his predecessor, yet gave over many of his former enemy's officers to death to appease his troops. Julian also took the opportunity of his cousin's death to declare himself openly a pagan. He then took steps to disenfranchise the Holy Roman Church. Many of Julian's attacks on the Church, however, were on philosophical grounds only. Sparing the bloodshed of his predecessors, Julian simply wanted to convince his subjects that Christians were wrong, the descendants of Judaism whom Jews did not acknowledge, and hypocrites. He set up a pagan charitable

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<sup>7</sup> Sources differ on the cause of Constantinus' demise. One source suggests poisoning, another, cerebral hemorrhage, and yet another, a fall from his horse.

organization similar to that of the Church, and, besides philosophically attacking Christianity at every turn, he appears to have left religious decision-making up to the Roman populace. Unfortunately for his plans to restore the glory of the pagan Roman Empire, he died ignominiously from a spear to the abdomen under a guerilla--style attack in battle against the Persians on June 26, 363.

The impact of Julian's short reign was two-fold: firstly, Pythagoras' biographer Iamblichus became a celebrated philosopher and required reading, and secondly, the Emperors who followed kept up a tradition of tolerance towards paganism. This tolerance lasted until 391 when the Emperor Theodosius again declared such practices forbidden. Theodosius himself was drawn into two bloody civil wars, not the least of which was the war against Eugenius, the last gasp of pagan senators to combat the onslaught of Christianity. The long litany of civil wars and strife had overcome the might of the Roman Empire. Barbarian troops had long been included in Roman armies, and with Theodosius' death in 395; the Roman Empire was essentially no more. Although his hereditary rule continued until the death of his grandson on 450, the Roman Empire was essentially spent. The brief respite paganism endured under Julian was forgotten, with Nicene Christianity and the Holy Roman Church becoming the governing apparatus of the remnants of the former Empire, thus setting the stages for the suppression of pagan-influenced art and architecture in the Middle Ages. The power the Roman Empire had enjoyed became that of the Roman Catholic Church.

The spoils of the Roman Empire were carved up by those who surrounded what historians now call the Byzantine Empire, a multi-ethnic, but not multinational, Christian agency of the former Roman Empire. Many of the academic treasures of Rome were

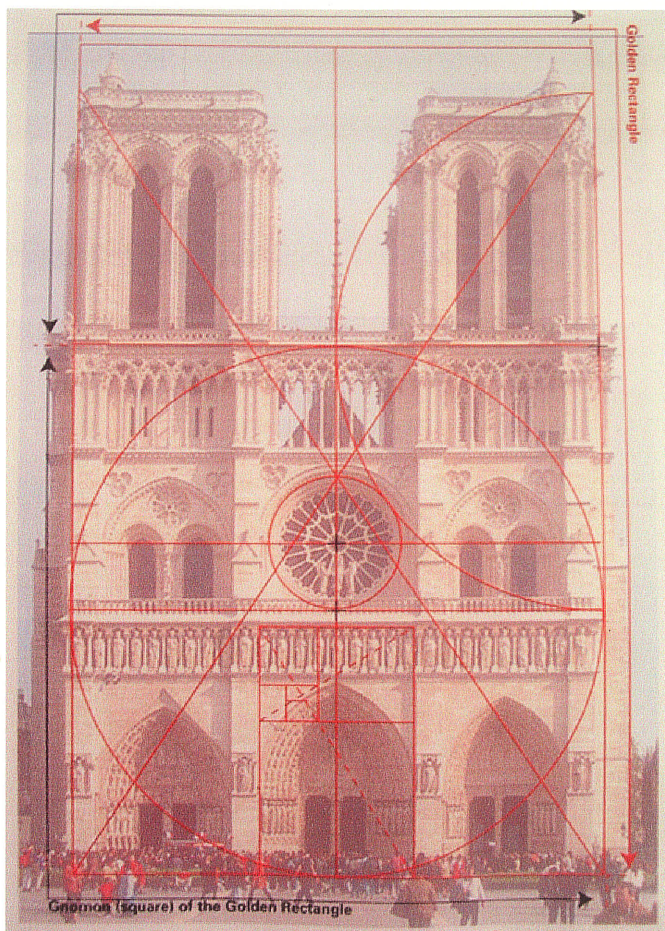
translated into Arabic in the south, mainly through the sackings of Alexandria, first in 616 to Kosrua II, King of Persia, and then in 643 to the Amir ibn al-As. The library at Alexandria was sacked at this time, and its entire catalogue carried off. Vitruvius, Euclid's Elements and Pythagoras were translated into Arabic and the lessons therein taught across the Arabic empires. These translations essentially safeguarded such pagan works from destruction at the hands of overly zealous Christians, looking to root out any pagan influences. In Western and Northern Europe, education among the non-clergy became nearly extinct.

Illiteracy soon became such a problem among Christians that a great controversy emerged over the use of icons in Christian art. Illiterate parishioners were throwing themselves in front of paintings, sculptures and the like with such frequency that in 726 Emperor Leo the Isaurian issued an edict demanding the destruction of all Christian paintings. In the storm of resentment that followed, his edict was rescinded, yet a conscious effort was now adopted to make Christian likenesses as stylized and un-natural as possible, in order to avoid even the slightest hint of idolatry.

In the succeeding dark ages Christian art was not entirely devoid of the divine proportion. Thus, as art theologian William Dyrness writes, "Around 1200, a stirring began in France that initiated a period known as the Early Renaissance....In the middle of the twelfth century, a group of monks, intent on reforming the church settled in France, in the Ile-de-la-cite. There they built a church that would become the predecessor to the Notre Dame Cathedral...(T)hey built a structure that featured for the first time the soaring arches, tracery, and 'curtain walls' of the Gothic style. Partly results of the advances in engineering, so-called flying buttresses were able to support very thin walls

and stain-glassed windows, which were able to reach a great height” (39). The façade of the church is of primary interest, given that the same central stained-glass windows and rise of the Gothic style is stretched on the skeleton of the divine proportion.

As Elam remarks, “The rectangle around the cathedral façade is in golden section



**Figure 3 -Elam's analysis of the cathedral of *Notre Dame*, demonstrating a reciprocal golden rectangle.**

proportion. The square of this golden section rectangle encloses the major portion of the façade, and the reciprocal golden section rectangle encloses the two towers. The regulating lines that are the diagonals meet just above the clerestory window, crossing the corners of the major variations in the surface of the cathedral.... Further the lower portion of the façade can be divided into six units,

each another golden rectangle” (21).

Further evidence of the spread of Pythagorean knowledge appears in the accounts of the fall of the Knights Templar, which originated in France in 1312, a mere 75 years after construction of the Cathedral of Notre Dame was completed. Founded in 1118 by two knights in an attempt to support the Kingdom of Jerusalem and protect pilgrims on their journeys to the holy land, the Knights Templar began modestly. The original icon of

the Knights Templar featured two knights sharing one horse, because, according to legend, they could only afford the one horse between them. Charged with protecting the Temple Mount itself, the Templar ranks grew rapidly.

The Templars also grew quickly in wealth. After establishing a series of Temple churches along the pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem, the Templars sought an easier way to protect pilgrims along the way. The method they chose was ingenious. The journey was so dangerous to pilgrims who carried much of the funds for their journeys upon their persons all the way to the Holy Land and back, that another military religious order, the Knights of St. John Hospitaller was founded to provide hospital care to pilgrims who survived the trip to the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Quickly, the Knights Templar realized that the pilgrims were, for the most part, illiterate. The Templars became the inventors of modern deposit banking, allowing pilgrims to the Holy Land to make a deposit at one Templar temple, and then retrieve that deposit, minus a slight handling fee, in Jerusalem. When pilgrims could not afford the trip, they would often mortgage lands to the Templars, who would then do away with any fees in return for the lands themselves. Without their aid, many pilgrims to the Holy Land would have simply perished. Many bequeathed lands and wealth to the Templars, and within less than two hundred years the Templars had become the wealthiest single organization and largest private landowner in Europe.

In 1302, the fortress-like Templar church in Paris offered sanctuary to Phillip the Fair, a particularly unpopular monarch who had squandered nearly 10,000 knights and bankrupted the kingdom of France to install his puppet Clement V as Pope, in his bid to become Holy Roman Emperor. Astounded by the opulence of its interior, Phillip inquired

as to the method by which the Templars had established such grandeur. The head of the Knights Templar, de Molay, informed the king of the practice of banking they had been undertaking. Although usury was a sin, the Templars answered only to the Pope himself, who seemed either not to care about the practice, or simply to be unaware. Many of the monastic military orders were more or less left to their own devices as emphasis was placed on Crusades. Within a few months of his brief sanctuary in the Parisian Temple, Phillip had convinced Pope Clement V to issue a secret papal bull denouncing the Templars as heretics.

Under the guise of putting together a new Crusade, Phillip had de Molay and the Templars arrested on Friday, October the 13. The particular savagery of the betrayal has led some to claim the date as the origin of bad luck, in contrast to the claim that Christ was put to death on a Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, which, given the mathematics of the Lunar calendar on which the celebration of Easter is based, rarely happens in April. Brought before the French Grande Inquisition, all Templars were tortured. Of the 140 Templars arrested in Paris alone, 39 succumbed to torture in their first month of arrest. Under torture, the Templar knights admitted, apparently, to trampling on crosses, engaging in homosexual practices, and also worshiping a creature called Baphomet. Most damning were the admissions of Grand Master de Molay to these crimes. While there is speculation as to why he admitted to the crimes for which he was charged, the time he took assembling his testimony of guilt allowed many former Templars to escape west.

Clement V issued a series of Papal bulls, denouncing and demanding the handing over of Templars everywhere. These orders were filled with such fervor that many who wore beards (the typical costume of the military monk), were hounded to death. Thomas

Parker, a Templar historian, adds that "such a person as Peter Auger, a yeoman of the king's chamber, who wore a beard, found it necessary to have the king...certify that he was not a Templar and wore a beard in fulfillment of a pilgrimage vow" (166). The resulting embarrassment of requiring one of the King of England's yeomen to require the King himself to certify his good name required Phillip to try to regain control over Clement V. He did so through a rather typical manner; he demanded that Clement V's predecessor, Boniface VIII be arraigned in spirit, his memory sullied, and his bulls undone.

Boniface VIII had issued an anathema against Phillip the Fair in 1302. Phillip had the dead pope accused of "black magic, sodomy, heresy and blasphemy; the Pope was declared to have had dealings with a demon, denied the immorality of the soul, sanctioned fornication, revealed the secrets of the confessional,... even committing murder... and of sacrificing the Church in a mad desire to abase the French..... With the exception of idolatry this will obviously match anything the Templars were charged with...."(9).

In the charges of idolatry, it is important to note that Baphomet is the basis for the modern representations of Satan. With the head of a goat (although it sometimes sports three cats' faces instead) and the breasts of a woman, Baphomet is most known for the symbol she has upon her forehead - an inverted pentangle, or pentagram. The trials and subsequent burnings of the Templars for heresy and black magic met with such fervor that the pentagram has since been associated with the worship of Satan. The name "Baphomet", when written in Cyrillic, is a cipher for *sophia*, Hebrew for wisdom, and core to the Gnostic text, Pstis Sophia. As previously discussed, the pentagram was the



symbol of the cult of Pythagoras, which is certainly not Satanic in origin. It is conceivable that the Templars, in their collection of Christian artifacts and wealth, came into contact with Gnostic texts, and incorporated them into their practices. The Templars also built in the manner of Vitruvius, and were exceptional stone workers. Although shrouded in secrecy, and subject to conjecture, the Freemasons were founded only a few years after the purging of the Templar Knights; their rituals are clearly linked to the Templar Knights. The Freemasons appear to be founded by surviving Templars who found their way to the lands of Scottish King Robert the Bruce who, having been excommunicated for other reasons, simply ignored Papal demands for the arrest of the Templars.

After the fall of the Templars, much of their property was transferred to the Hospitaller Knights of St. John, who were still at work in the Holy Land, providing hospital services for pilgrims, and the Knights of Malta. The Maltese Knights were given the island of Malta, which had formerly been the Temple Knights main fortress and took the Templar Cross as their symbol. They promptly turned Malta into the house of the slave trade in Europe, trading non-Christian slaves to the United States 300 years later. The Holy Roman Empire continued to exist, with various monarchs from different families heading it; Napoleon himself became "Holy Roman Emperor". The Holy Roman Emperor continued to be crowned by the Pope and still would be, had the Austro-Hungarians not expelled the current heir to the throne in World War II. The Habsburg dynasty, which is still in existence to this day, and is yet the heir to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire, is mostly a charitable organization, known primarily for their ambulatory

work as the knights of St. John - or St. John's Ambulance. The wealth of the Templars appears to have been absorbed by Phillip the Fair.

Yet the legacy of military religious orders, like the Knights of St. John, and the Templar Knights, was the transfer of cultural riches between Christians and Muslims. The Crusades brought Catholics and Arabic Muslims into violent contact. While not fighting each other, however, those on each side of the Mediterranean were busy exchanging goods, art, and mathematical knowledge. Republicanism, too, enjoyed a brief resurgence in Italy after the twelfth century, allowing small centers of art and commerce to flourish in the form of micro-republic city-states. The thirteenth-century Republic of Pisa reared a young man who single-handedly revolutionized the study of Western mathematics and art. Leonardo of Pisa, later known as Fibonacci, was sent to Algeria as part of his father's business dealings with the Arabs across the Mediterranean. He brought back with him Hindu-Arabic numerals, and a new system of mathematics with its all-important 0.

While originally intended to provide an efficient system in which to perform business-based mathematics, Fibonacci quickly discovered the sequence of numerals which became known as the Fibonacci sequence: 0,1,1,3,5,8,13, 21,34,55... Based in nature, the sequence Fibonacci identified contained within itself not only the breeding patterns of rabbits, the measurements of geometric spirals found in the shells of mollusks, and the distribution of branches on the trunks of trees, but the precise ratio of the numerals in the sequence converged upon an irrational number, which the Greeks had represented in fraction form as the Golden Ratio, or the "divine proportion". With his new system for mathematics, Fibonacci became an instant celebrity. Many of his

countrymen also took the journey to Algeria, and rediscovered the "lost" works of Vitruvius, Pythagoras and Euclid. To this compendium of knowledge, Arabic scholars had added their own theories and corrections, giving the inhabitants of the Mediterranean a treasure trove of new ways to interpret the classics. Here was the real birth of the Italian Renaissance.

As part of his invitation to provide mathematic recreation to the court of Fredrick I, Fibonacci introduced the idea of the Golden Ratio to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, with tremendous success (Gies, 85). Once firmly established in Italian court circles, the foremost art schools in Florence began to teach the Greek and Roman rules for the mathematic composition of beauty as part of what became known as a Renaissance education. This school of pedagogy taught sculpture to Donatello, painting to Raphael, Michelangelo and Bottecelli, and both to Leonardo da Vinci.

While there is much debate about the use of pagan symbolism in the Renaissance, as well as the use of pagan mythology as the subject for Renaissance painting (particularly in the case of Botticelli), what is not debated is the lifelike representation of pagan and secular religious figures, which stands in marked contrast to the medieval representations of the same subjects. Furthermore, the overwhelming beauty and mastery of their subjects by these artists is simply impossible to deny. While Botticelli, da Vinci and Michelangelo all used different models, colors and brushes, the similarity of their results emerges from their education in the principles found in the divine proportion.

Perhaps the most important, yet unsung, painter of the Italian Renaissance is Piero della Francesca. Born in 1412 in Borgo San Sepolcro in central Italy to a prosperous shoemaker, Piero spent time as an apprentice to the painter Antonio D'Anghiari. By 1430

he had moved to Florence and was educated in the same pedagogical schools as Fra Angelico and Donatello, with their works as models to follow. Yet, according to Giorgio Vasari, della Francesca was more of a mathematician than a painter. When he grew too old to paint, della Francesca

wrote a series of mathematical works, three of which survive to this day:

“*De Prospectiva pingendi*

(Of Painting Perspective),

*Libellus de Quinque*

*Corporibus Regularis,*

(Booklet on the Five Regular

Solids), and, following in the

footsteps of Fibonacci before him, *Trattato d'Abaco* (Treatise on the Abacus)” (Livio, 126).

Employing many references to Euclid's Elements, della Francesca's books soon found favor among other young painters. As Livio reports, "Piero's lucid book on perspective became the standard manual for artists who attempted to paint plane figures and solids, and for the less mathematical (and more accessible) parts of the treatise were incorporated into subsequent works on perspective. Vasari testifies that due to Piero's strong mathematical background, ‘he understood better than anyone else all the curves in the regular bodies and we are indebted to him for the light shed on the subject,’” (127).

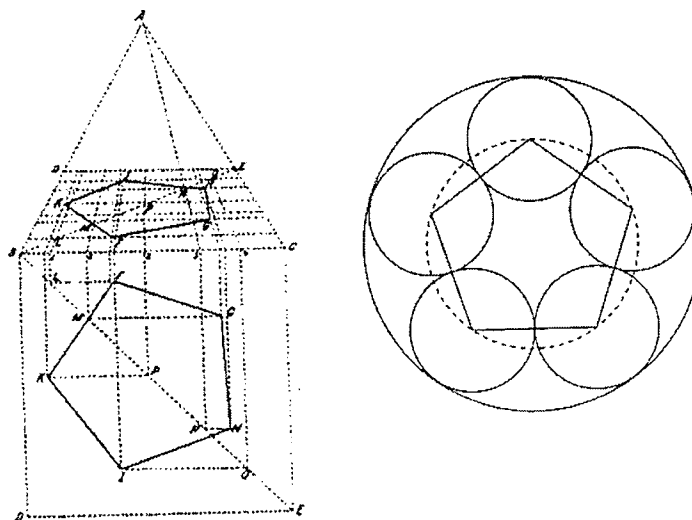


Figure 4 - Detail from *De Prospectiva Pingendi*, depicting divine proportion pentagons.

Two of his demonstrations of plane figures from his book on plane figures are illustrations of pentagons, the divine proportion's cornerstone polygon (Figure 4).

della Francesca also had a rather strong influence on the first writer of a treatise on the divine proportion, Luca Pacioli. Pacioli was born in the same town as Piero, in 1445. Pacioli was educated in Piero's workshop, alongside painters like Perugino. Yet, despite his surroundings among the great painters of the Italian Renaissance, Pacioli was a much better mathematician than painter. He soon moved to Venice where he became a mathematics tutor to the rich, and, under the guidance of mathematician Domenico Bragadino, wrote his first book on the developing art of arithmetic. In the 1470s, Pacioli became a Franciscan Friar, and traveled Italy teaching mathematics at universities. It is likely that he tutored the future Duke of Urbino during this time. The Duke went on to become not only one of da Vinci's patrons, but turned out to be a skilled collector of the writings of many of his Renaissance compatriots.

Pacioli published one of his life's works in 1494, the Summa Arithmetica, a treatise on all mathematical knowledge of the time. Oddly, Mario Livio is particularly hostile to Pacioli, claiming "Pacioli borrows freely (usually with appropriate acknowledgements) problems on the icosahedron and dodecahedron from Piero's *Trattato* and problems on algebra and geometry from Fibonacci and others. Identifying Fibonacci as his main source, Pacioli states that when no other work is quoted, the work belongs to Leonardus Pisanus (Fibonacci)" (130). Hardly a condemnation for what is essentially an encyclopedia of mathematics. Yet, in discussing Pacioli's next work, De Divina Proportione, published in Venice in 1509, and the first book devoted entirely to the divine proportion, Livio accuses him of plagiarism.

Essentially a team effort between Pacioli and Leonardo da Vinci, who provided the illustrations and some corrections<sup>8</sup> to the text, De Divina Proportione is actually a three-book summary of all knowledge of the divine proportion to that date, written in the same style as Pacioli's Summa. Book I, *Compendio de Divina Proportione*, is a detailed summary of the divine proportion, along with a study of the Platonic solids, combined with the other polyhedra. Book II explores the proportion, its applications to architecture,

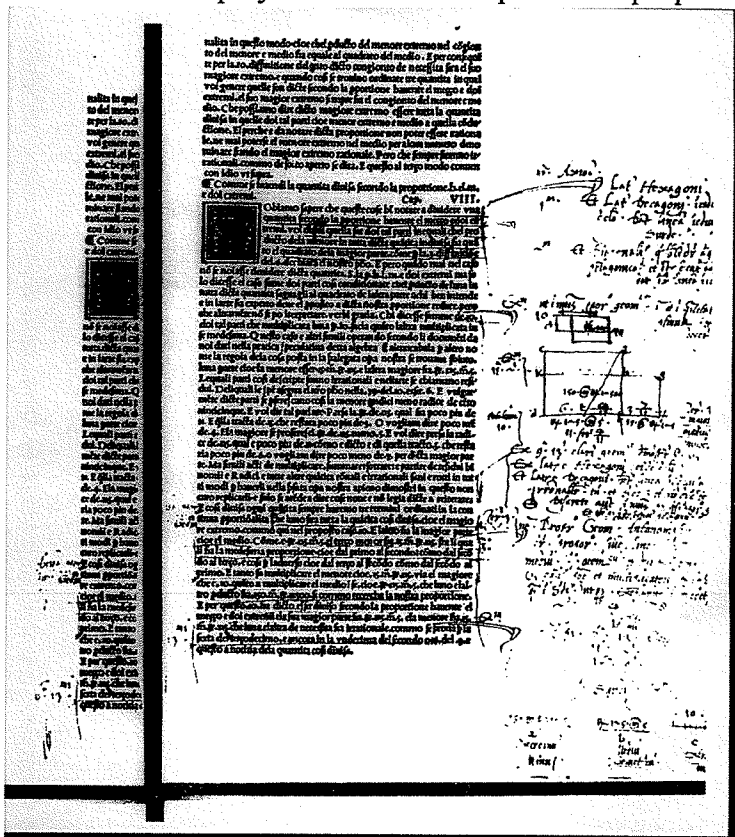


Figure 5 - Detail from 1509 pre-publication edition of *De Divina Proportione*, showing da Vinci's notes in the margins.

typography, and the human body. Included in this section is a discussion and expansion of Vitruvius' report on the Greek rules of proportion. This section also includes a philosophical link to Pythagorean thought, although Christianized: "(I)n the human body every sort of proportion and proportionality can be found, produced at the beck and call of the Highest

through the inner mysteries of nature" (134). Livio claims Book III is essentially an

<sup>8</sup> One of the research highlights of this project has been the discovery, in the archives of the University of Texas at Austin, of a print-proofing edition of De Divina Proportione dated 1509, after Pacioli's return to Perugia. The script marking corrections in the margin is familiar, clearly written in the "indelible left hand" of De Divina Proportione's co-author, illustrator and editor, Leonardo da Vinci, who collaborated with Pacioli on the unfinished De Viribus Quantitatis. Many of the corrections featured in the edition found at Austin, feature prominently in De Viribus Quantitatis and da Vinci's own notebooks. A comparison of these works, by this author, is forthcoming.

Italian translation of della Francesca's Five Regular Solids in Italian (135), although De Divina Proportione was first published in Italic Latin.

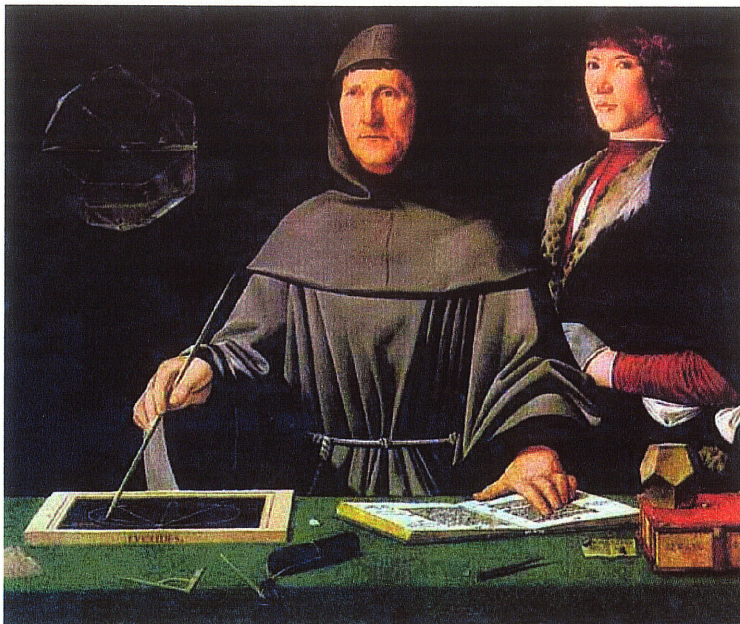
So far, no complete editions of De Divina Proportione appear to exist. The edition used for this inquiry, the most complete currently available in North America, is a pre-publication copy from 1509,<sup>9</sup> itself unknown until the research for this project. The most complete edition of De Divina Proportione, to date, this pre-publication edition contains notes made by the only surviving author, da Vinci himself, written in his ineffable left hand. Even so, the front section of Book III is lost. There are mentions of della Francesca's work in other sections, but none in Book III, again possibly due to loss. Yet, Livio assumes the worst of Pacioli, relying instead on a tract by Vasari denouncing Pacioli: "the man who should have done his utmost to enhance Piero's reputation and fame, since Piero taught him all he knew, shamefully and wickedly tried to obliterate his teacher's name and to usurp for himself the honor which belonged entirely to Piero; for he published under his own name, which was Fra Luca di Borgo [Pacioli], all the researches done by that admirable old man, who was a great painter as well as expert in the sciences" (135). Livio then goes on to beg the question: "...was Pacioli a plagiarist? Quite possibly...." (135).

Unfortunately, Livio provides no direct citation for his own quotation from Vasari, which is technically plagiarism, making it impossible to trace the direct source of Vasari's anger. We are simply left uncertain as to which publication Vasari is condemning Pacioli for. Pacioli's success as a tutor was a double-edged sword, and even Livio tells us that, "in 1489, after being granted some special privileges by the Pope,

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<sup>9</sup> Taken from the microform archives of the University of Texas at Austin. Livio relies on a particularly incomplete, third-hand French translation of a German translation from 1999.

[Pacioli returned home] only to encounter jealousy from the existing religious establishment. For about two years he was even banned from teaching” (130). Pacioli's contemporaries had reason to be jealous. Pacioli was so celebrated by the artistic community of his day, who were the real celebrities of Italy, that Jacopo de' Barbari painted him giving a math lesson on the divine proportion.



**Figure 6 - Luca Pacioli, as painted by Jacopo de' Barbari. (Huntley)**

Pacioli is shown with his book under his hand, drawing a golden triangle on a tablet, while a dodecahedron hovers in the air to the left of him. No other mathematician in history has been so honored. Furthermore, in 1480,

Ludovico Sforza became the regent of Milan, and invited

da Vinci to his court in 1482, after da Vinci wrote himself a letter of reference displaying his talents. Given da Vinci's love for mathematics, it is not surprising to find him as the illustrator of De Divina Proportione, nor to find his famous warning to his treatise on painting, “Let no one who is not a mathematician read my works”(136). da Vinci was at Ludovico’s court in 1496 when Pacioli was invited as a mathematics teacher, joining, perhaps, at da Vinci’s request.

There are few areas of academic study more open to conflicting opinions than da Vinci Studies. Much of the disagreement can be linked directly to the persona of da Vinci



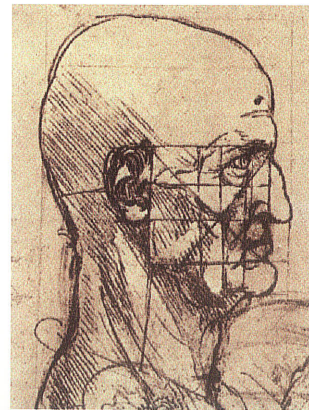
himself. Leonardo da Vinci was an incredibly prolific writer, designer, architect, anatomist, military engineer, painter and sculptor with a profoundly dry sense of humor.



**Figure 7 – Study for *Battle of Anghiari*, (Windsor Codex)**

He also often reused his paper, filling in gaps on sheets with drawings, notes and the like years after first setting pen to page. He often took on commissions that he did not finish, began projects that he abandoned when he grew bored of them, and changed his mind on many works, halfway through. To make matters worse, he wrote backwards, because, as he once claimed, it was easier for his left hand. Pacioli's student Duke Urbino did his best to collect all of da

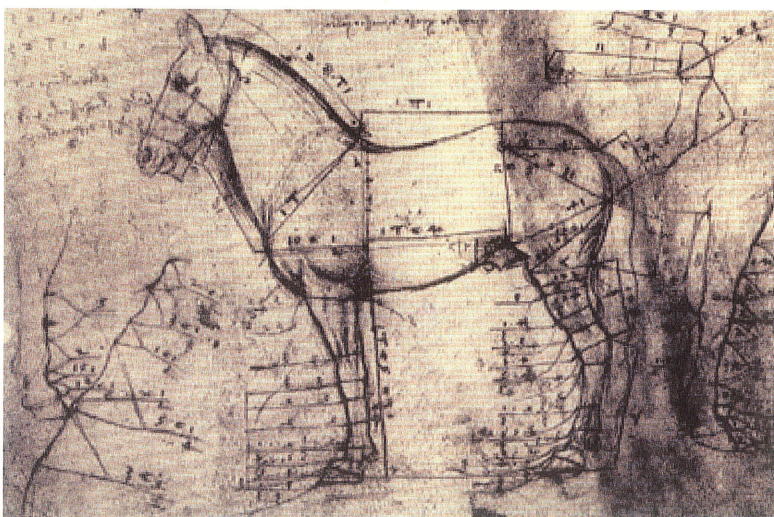
Vinci's papers and manuscripts after his death in 1519, but the Urbino Codex was raided time and again. As such, much of da Vinci's writings were dispersed across Europe, and it is only in the later half of the twentieth century that an effort has been made to bring together all of da Vinci's works into one book-form collection. Editions of these collections often run to several thousand pages.



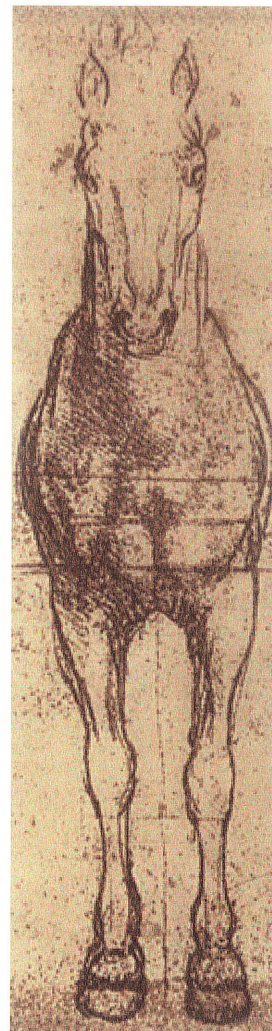
**Figure 8 –Detail of *Battle of Anghiari***

Despite Livio's essentially nonsensical claims that da Vinci had no advanced knowledge of the divine proportion before meeting and collaborating with Pacioli in 1496, despite da Vinci's vast collaborations on the unfinished De Viribus Quantitatis, (the Powers of Numbers) before

Pacioli's death in 1517, a cursory analysis of just a few of da Vinci's works and his Treatise on Painting, present a rather different story. Livio states, "(L)et us not fool ourselves; the feeling of awe we experience when facing 'Madonna of the Rocks' has very little to do with whether the dimensions of the paintings are in a Golden Ratio" (164). Livio then turns to a rather crude rendition of facial proportions from Da Vinci's studies for the never-completed *Battle of Anghiari*, in which the face of one of the men had a box-like proportion around it. "While the overlying grid leaves very little doubt that Leonardo was indeed interested in various proportions in the face, it is very difficult to draw any definitive conclusions from this study" (165) From this study, it is difficult to determine anything



**Figure 10 - Study in the Proportions of a Horse, side view. Note the Golden Sectioning of joints, legs and the body. (Windsor Collection)**



**Figure 9 - Studies in the Proportions of a Horse, front. (Windsor collection)**

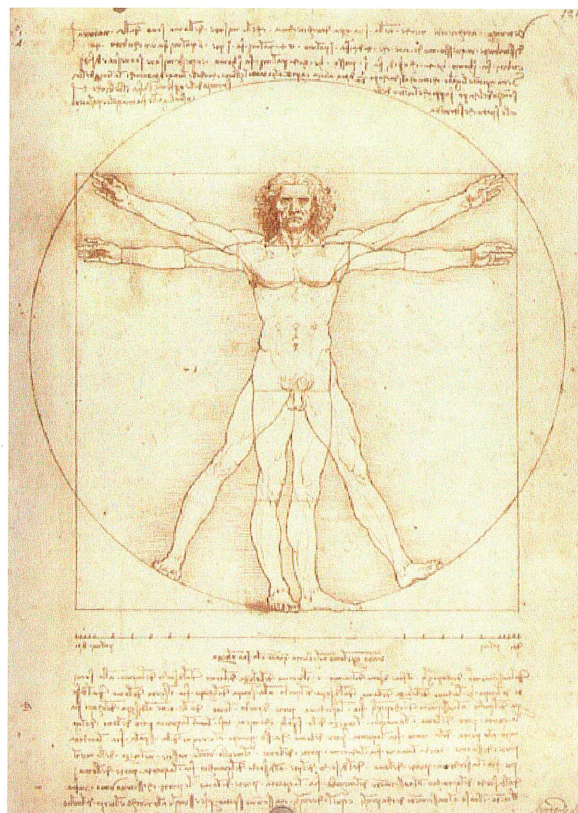
definitive, indeed. Given that there are literally thousands of sketches Da Vinci made of studies for completed works, it is

somewhat of a mystery why Livio would choose this particular work, which barely supports his argument.

Thanks to the efforts in collecting da Vinci's writings, we can turn to da Vinci himself for support. "Do you not know," da Vinci writes in his Treatise on Painting, "that our soul is composed of harmony, and that harmony cannot be generated other than when the proportions of the form are seen and heard instantaneously...? It does not satisfy the mind of the listener or viewer in the same way as the proportionality of the very beautiful parts composing the divine beauty of this face before me, and which by contrast are conjoined instantaneously, giving me such delight with their divine proportions" (26).

Not only does da Vinci believe in the importance of the divine proportion, but he also equates the beauty of the divine proportion with the aesthetics of the divinity itself.

For da Vinci the science of painting is the science of representing nature. "Therefore it is nobler to imitate things in nature, which are in fact the real images, than to imitate... the deeds of man" (21). In opting for the representation



**Figure 11 - *Vitruvian Man*. (Windsor Collection.)**

of things as they appear in nature, da Vinci employs the Pythagorean reasoning that developed the Pythagorean cosmology two thousand years before. In choosing to

represent forms as they appear in nature, da Vinci's manuscripts are filled with sketches of objects, as they appear in nature, rendered into mathematic forms according to the divine proportion. His illustration in *Studies in the Proportions of a Horse*, from the Windsor collection, features a golden rectangle achieved via Pythagoras' theorem in the body, as well as a series of "golden sections" in the legs.

Yet, it is not only in the representation of animals where Da Vinci turns to the rules of the divine proportion. In what may be the most famous sketch of the divine proportion ever, da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* demonstrates not only da Vinci's love of the works of Vitruvius (whom we have already shown to have declared human proportionality to follow the rules of the Greeks), but his humor as well. A close examination of the arm of the *Vitruvian Man* demonstrates the divine proportion at work.

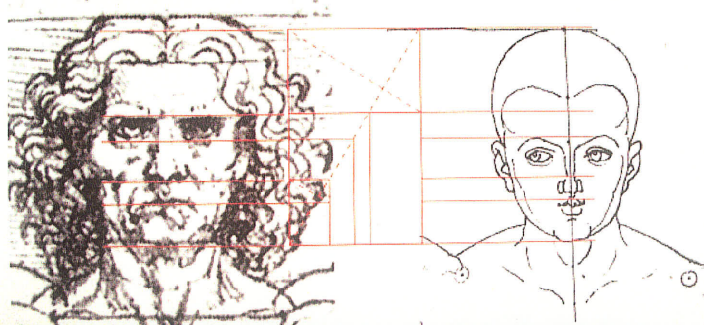


Figure 12 - Elam's comparison images, with *Doryphoros* and *Zeus* above, *Vitruvian Man* and a sketch by Dürer.

The line bisecting the midpoint of the elbow is the self same line we used in our introduction to demonstrate one method of determining the divine proportion on ourselves. Similar lines appear at the figure's knees. Evidence of da Vinci's dry sense of humor is his rendering, in grotesque, his

own face on the body of the “ideal man”. In her analysis of the facial proportions of *Vitruvian Man*, Elam demonstrates da Vinci's use of the divine proportion yet again:

The Canon of Vitruvius includes human facial proportions as well as body proportions. The placement of the facial features yields the classic proportions of used in Greek and Roman sculpture.... Facial proportion analysis is according to Vitruvius' canon and the proportions are almost identical. The diagram (see above) shows a single golden section rectangle as the guide for the length and the width of the head. This golden rectangle is further subdivided by smaller golden section rectangles to determine the placement of features.

(18)

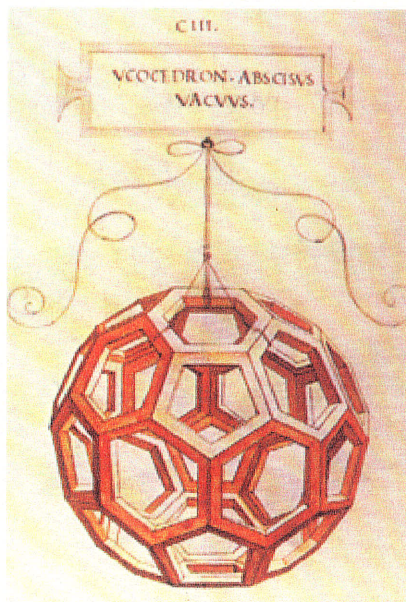


Figure 13 - Reproduction of da Vinci's *Platonic Solids*, printed from woodcut. (Windsor Codex)

Vitruvian man, are identical.

During his collaboration with Pacioli, da Vinci provided illustrations in the *De Divina Proportione* of colonnades and façades

When compared, the two diagrams of golden-section facial-proportion analysis between the fifth-century BCE statues of *Zeus from Cape Artemisson* and *Doryphorous the Spear Bearer*, and the face of the

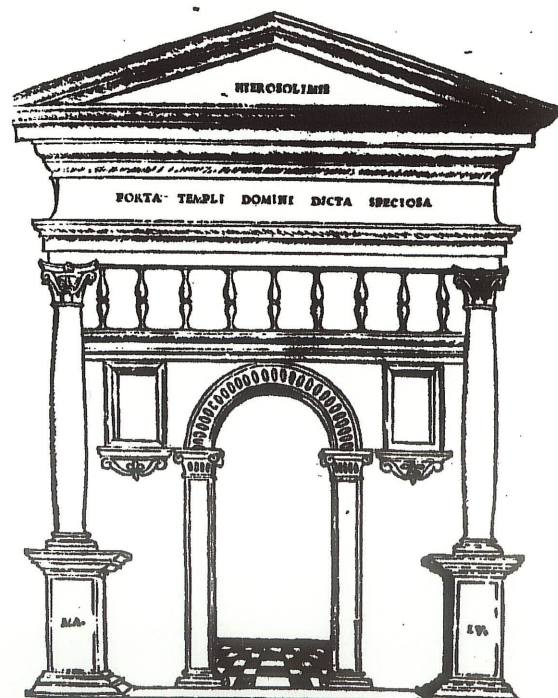


Figure 14 - Architectural Rendering by da Vinci, in divine proportion. (*De Divina Proportione*, 1509 pre-publication manuscript)

rendered according to the rules of Vitruvius via the divine proportion as well as facial proportions, typographic letters, and his sixty drawings of the Platonic Solids<sup>10</sup> (Figure 13).

The colonnades and façades match da Vinci's sketches for churches, cathedrals and other buildings, all done before his work with Pacioli. Clearly, da Vinci believed in such rules for the creation of beautiful art. Yet, his reasoning for creation in this method, as we have seen the quotation above from his Treatise, is the rendering of "divine beauty". da Vinci's seminal works, *The Mona Lisa*, *Virgin on the Rocks*, and his *Last Supper* all do that rather well.



**Figure 15 - Planning sketches of *The Last Supper*. (Windsor Codex)**

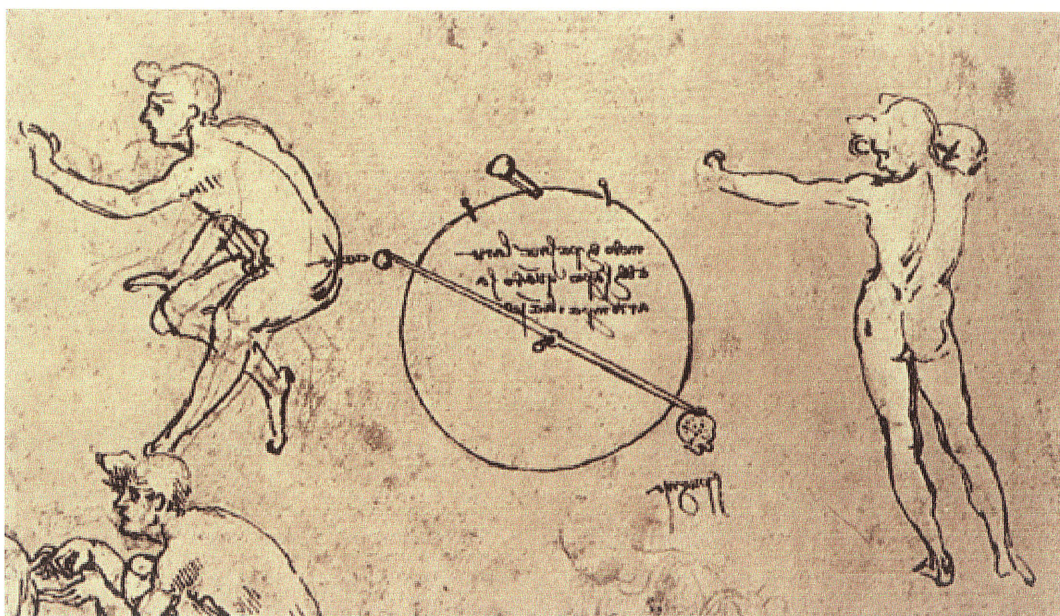
Yet it is not just in composition of facial proportions that the divine proportion finds its way into the representation of divine beauty. Although da Vinci's most famous subjects of beauty are female, there is no more Christian work than his *Last Supper*. While the sensuousness of his *Virgin on the Rocks* caused somewhat of an uproar, his *Last Supper* was welcomed as the definitive

depiction of Christ's primal Eucharist. Although detailed analysis of the painting itself, including supposition that the figure of Thomas is actually Mary of Magdala, is difficult due to the deterioration of the work, when we examine da Vinci's sketches for the "Last

<sup>10</sup> Later printed as woodcuts from da Vinci's drawings.

Supper", we discover the closest marriage possible of the divine proportion and Christianity.

Figures 15 and 16 depict a preparation study for the composition of the *Last Supper*. To the left is the figure who appears to be named as Thomas, to the right is Peter. Between the two figures appears to be a circle, bisected by a ray. Yet this ray is intersected by a mean between the two. That intersection is literally the golden mean, and becomes the placement point for Christ himself. Through this sketch, we can see that da Vinci literally depicts Christ as the divine proportion.



**Figure 16 - *Last Supper* planning sketch, detail, showing Christ's placement literally as the "divine proportion". The upper left circle denotes the hand placement of the Thomas/Mary Magdalene figure, the lower left circle denotes the hand placement of the Peter figure. The pin in the middle denotes the location of Christ's hands, the pin above the height of his eyes. (Windsor Codex)**

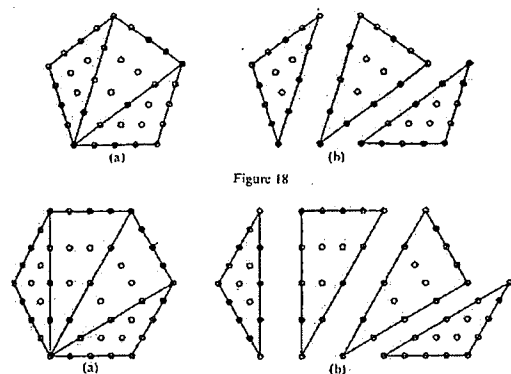
As both Livio and Elam demonstrate, da Vinci was not the only painter of the Renaissance to write on the divine proportion, or to use it in his work. Albrecht Dürer, the German painter born in 1471, traveled to Italy to study painting at the height of the Italian Renaissance in 1494. Under the supervision of the founder of the Venetian school

of art, Giovanni Bellini, he studied the works of other Renaissance painters, as well as Euclid's Elements. After his return to Germany, he published *Unterweisung der Messung mit dem Zirkerl und Richtschiet-- (Treatise on Measurement with the Compass and Ruler)*, the first math book in German. As Livio reports, Dürer echoes da Vinci's belief in the necessity for painters to understand geometry; as Dürer declares: "without which no one can either be or become an absolute artist". (139) The subject of Dürer's work is primarily polyhedra, particularly the dodecahedron, which, being built from a series of pentagons, is related directly to the divine proportion. Dürer's work in turn influenced Johannes Kepler, who declared that "Geometry has two great treasures; one is

the Theorem of Pythagoras; the other, the division of line into extreme and mean ratio. The first we may compare to a measure of gold; the second we may name a precious jewel" (62).

With Renaissance works on the

divine proportion now based in Latin and German, many scientists, artists and



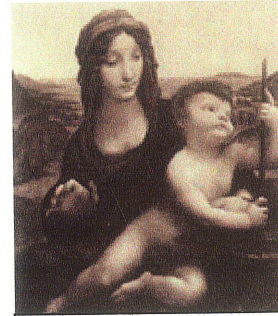
**Figure 17 -Gnomons in Descartes' method, in pentagons. (Descartes)**

philosophers soon found themselves studying polyhedra. With the invention of calculus by Descartes in the seventeenth century, the numerals introduced by Fibonacci in the thirteenth century were now being employed in the most radical re-working of mathematics ever seen. The subject on which Descartes chose to explore his new method of mathematics was the pentagon. In his De Soloridum Elements, Descartes first employs



the use of the gnomon to balance the areas of these polygons. The method by which he tracked his gnomons visually (a method still in use today) can be seen in figure 16.

Recently, a radiograph of the *Madonna of the Distaff*, from the collection of Duke Buccleuch, which, although the subject of uncertainty has been attributed to da Vinci, was made in an effort to explore the undercoating of the painting.



**Figure 18 -  
*Madonna of the  
Distaff*. (Buccleuch  
Collection)**

The theory being explored was that even if da Vinci did not complete the painting, he may certainly have made changes to the original composition thereof. There are two other



**Figure 19 - Radiograph of the  
Buccleuch *Distaff*, demonstrating the  
use of gnomons.**

*Madonnas of the Distaff* in existence, both of which appear to be copies of the Buccleuch, and are the product of other artists. The radiogram is exciting, because it demonstrates the use of gnomons to lay out the form and shape of line and shadow in the contraction of the work.

One of the consequences of the Renaissance was the spread of literacy and democracy in Europe and eventually to the New World. While mathematicians took up and advanced the discoveries of Descartes and Kepler in the realms of astronomy and mathematics,

putting an end to the Church's denial of a helio-centric solar system, Plato's Republic became essential reading for political theorists everywhere. Republic was one of the

documents employed by the Founding Fathers of the United States of America in drafting the “Declaration of Independence”, and “The Constitution”. As such, applied Pythagorean thought became part of the very fabric of the American way of life. It is fitting that the architect of the White House, James Hoban, himself a student of the Renaissance style and the architecture of Vitruvius, would build the seat of American Republican power according to the same mathematic principles as The Constitution itself. Other works of American architecture, such as The Capitol Building, are also styled on Vitruvius' models.

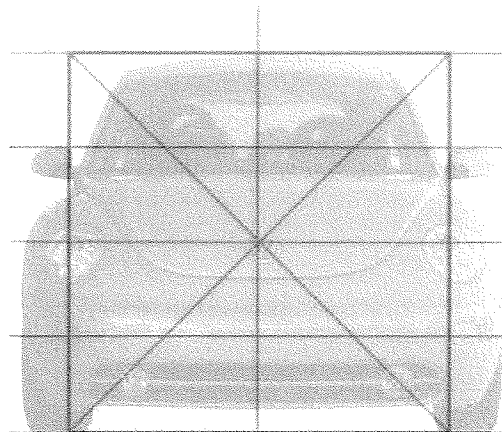
Yet, it is not without a sense of irony that the building least suited to the ideals of Plato's Republic is built in the same form as the polygon celebrated by the Pythagoreans as the symbol of balance and unity: the Pentagon. Just as the United States has housed itself in the models of Roman Imperial might, so too has the fear begun to grow that the United States has foresworn its dedication to republicanism, and given over to imperialism. In his book Back to the Republic, Harry Atwood makes explicit the tie between the divine proportion (through the term the “golden mean”), republicanism, and *The Constitution of the United States*. "It was reserved for the founders of this republic, the framers of the Constitution of the United States to arrest the erratic swing of the pendulum of government and point it to the golden mean..."(36).

Atwood argues that the balance employed by republicanism is the essential midpoint between anarchy and monarchy, an argument which he builds using the model of the divine proportion. Again, we see the theories of Pythagoras applied to political philosophy, but in this instance the divine proportion is employed as a metaphor in an attempt to arrest a move towards imperialism. The divine proportion, with its associated

philosophies of beauty, divinity, and republicanism, is the language through which these ideals have been communicated in Western culture, since fifth-century B.C.E. Greece. As a mathematical formula it continues to be the subject of exploration, as

scientific journals such as "The Fibonacci Quarterly" attest. The divine proportion is still at use in art as well, although the move towards

advertising art builds a problematic connection between the codes by which a sense of awe and divinity are transmitted, and car ownership.



**Figure 20 - Elam's design analysis of the Volkswagen "Beetle" demonstrating the divine proportion.**

## Chapter II

### The Memory of Divinity: *Beyond the Male Gaze in Whit Stillman's Barcelona*.

**MONTSERRAT: “Beauty is the closest thing to divinity that remains in the modern world. All the old gods are dead, there is no god that we know, but in beauty the memory of divinity remains.”**

(Barcelona 32:36)

A faith of beauty in Western society has by now subverted the former place of religion, specifically Catholic Christianity, to re-forge, and re-member a seemingly new iconographic form of worship. At the core of this worship of beauty in Western culture is the belief in the object of beauty as somehow divine.

Whit Stillman's Barcelona (1994) highlights this translation of the beautiful into the place of the Godhead through the guise of the conventions of romantic comedy. Yet, the tale of the pseudo-Romulus and Remus of Barcelona, cousins Fred and Ted, is also the story of the tensions between republicanism and imperialism in a post-Christian world. As we have shown in our first chapter, the conflict between republicanism and imperialism is millennia old, having its roots in the translation of Greek ideals and political forms into the aesthetic and political forms of the late Roman Republic. These ideals have the Pythagorean tradition of the divine proportion as their spine that is a Pythagorean belief in mathematics as the grammaturgy of divinity found in the representation of beauty.

Ted's search in Barcelona is more than simply a search for ideals. It is part of a greater religious quest on which he feels himself. This quest that Ted has undertaken, and on which Fred is also embarked, is a search for divinity in the smallest glimpses of

female beauty. Ted's religious search in Barcelona is thus a search for small miracles, or, to be more precise, a search for the "right kind of eyes" with which he can glimpse these small cues to a larger divinity. As we saw in chapter one, this approach is essentially Pythagorean in origin; the grammar of the divine proportion composes the small "truths" found in beauty. We should not be surprised then, that, the celebration of beauty, in particular, female beauty is an ambrosial component of this film.

MONTSERRAT: "Beauty is the closest thing to divinity that remains in the modern world. All the old gods are dead, there is no god that we know, but in beauty the memory of divinity remains."

(Barcelona 32:36)

Fred and Ted begin Barcelona with a tour of the memories of antiquity, of the real Barcelona's classical architecture, including the cathedral, the remnants of the old Roman walls, the Palace of the Catalan Government, and the City Hall. The first images of the



Figure 21 - Detail of the Three Wise Men from Gaudi's Sagrada Família (Gaudi)

eponymous city, apart from the opening montage, are the architectural skeletons of an aesthetic crafted on the rules of Vitruvius, built, as we saw in chapter one, on the mathematic cosmology of the Pythagoreans and the divine proportion.

Conspicuously missing from Stillman's cinematography are

images of Gaudi's architecture,

including Gaudi's cathedral, the Sagrada Familia. Architecturally, the modern Barcelona is, after all, Gaudi's city. Yet, as we explore the themes of Barcelona, this manifest absence becomes explicit. The Sagrada Familia is being built entirely through donations from individuals – Gaudi's vision being that the common person would be the founder of his greatest work, a tribute to the republican equality of the kingdom of Heaven.

The Sagrada Familia is an architectural monument, in all of its stages, to the cosmology at the root of both republican ideals, and the divine proportion. As we can see in the image above, the Sagrada is a Romanesque form of the Imperial Roman church in layout and plan, yet, is also ornately ornamented in images of ecumenical biblical scenes, and not built via Church funds, but entirely by private donation. Gaudi's revisioning of an icon of the Church, in his church, that is formed, both monetarily and in the form of Republican images, is an application, in stone, of the divine proportion taken to its logical extreme; the divine proportion as an aesthetic way of building icons.

Barcelona itself opens with a montage that juxtaposes images of urban terrorism (a bombing of the American Library, and vandalism of an IBM window front), with images of Ramon (a character who later proves to be of great importance) post-coitally taking Marta (later to be Fred's love interest for much of the film) in profile and declaring "Perfecto". Through such metaphoric montage, the opening of the film declares an active, fevered battle between Romanesque imperial forms, "classical" beauty, and anti-capitalist republican ideals, between the elevated "divine" and the "memory of divinity" in common persons.

Just as Rome appropriated the Pythagorean rules of beauty through the writings of Vitruvius for its imperial glory, and just as the early Church appropriated Roman pagan

temples as the core design for its places of worship, imperialists have ironically adopted a love of divine proportion-based art as their own. However, Stillman's film problematizes the easy identification of imperialism with specific nations by foregrounding the anti-American xenophobia often adopted by Marxist-leaning "republicans". As Stanley Kaufmann points out, "Stillman's film functions as a warning—bright, sexy, funny, yet a warning. The best members of the social set that he knows are proceeding into the twenty-first century as if they could shape it like the twentieth, which was itself in some part a failure to repeat the nineteenth. Stillman hears his people asking: Why can't high spirits prevail? Why can't questions about Beauty and Worth still occupy young men's thoughts? Why can't spurts of religious schwarmerei sufficiently warrant faith?"

(Kaufmann, 31). Fred and Ted's lives in Barcelona are a struggle to understand their proper place in a world, which preaches republican freedoms while privileging imperial power. As such, we find three essential conflicts within the diegesis of the film.

Barcelona is an exploration of the idolatry of beauty in several modes, whether Marianist, Madelanean or da Vincian. The film is also an inquiry into the struggle between imperial and republican ideology, made real in the competing histories and interpretations of modern Spaniards and Americans. At its core, Barcelona plays on the theme of whether common contentment or exalted ecstasy is the best way to recover the memory of divinity

Perhaps the best way to dissect the struggle that Fred and Ted face in Barcelona is to relate it to the struggle early in Church history between iconoclasts and iconographers. During Fred and Ted's opening journey through the icons of classical beauty in Barcelona, Ted declares his intentions to separate the aesthetics of the beautiful from his experience of loving a woman, hoping to "look into her eyes and maybe seeing her soul".

For Ted, the love of a woman is on par with the love of God, an expression of his desire to be “one” in spirit with the beloved. Ted seemingly expresses his own feelings of dissatisfaction in the love of the body beautiful with the old “sin” of idolatry. Given that Ted seeks (yet does not find) solace in the iconoclastic text of the Old Testament, Stillman clearly highlights the continuing tension between the worship of beautiful icons and the “memory of divinity” which these icons are supposed to evoke.

As early as the writing of Deuteronomy, there had been tension between those who read the tale of the golden calf in terms of the second commandment, forbidding “graven images” as iconography, and those who hold representations of the divine in physical form as part of the process of worship. This tension emerges from the contradictory nature of the Judaic laws, which both prohibit and embrace iconography. In the second commandment, God declares, “Thou shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus, 20: 1-17). At the same time, Moses enshrines these very laws on “graven” tablets in a visual icon, the Ark of the Covenant. As Joseph Gutman writes in his article “Deuteronomy: Religious Reformation of Iconoclastic Revolution?”, “The Ark of the Covenant enshrined in the Jerusalem Temple was declared the receptacle of the true Yahweh (i.e., Deuteronomic) legislation, a law personally handed to Moses by Yahweh on Mount Horeb. Hence, the Jerusalem Temple, containing Yahweh’s true revelation, was worthy of being His place of worship---no minor irony, since of all shrines the Jerusalem Temple probably had ‘the greatest propensity... toward pagan syncretism’” (36).

Syncretism is the pagan practice of fusing essentially differing systems of belief, resulting in heterogeneity. Interestingly, the practices of the early Hebrews mirror the



later practices of the Roman Empire, in absorbing, adopting, and making their own others' beliefs. However, in the Roman system, the emphasis was an attempt at cultural homogeneity, a thorough assimilation and domestication of foreign gods into the Roman pantheon. Some theorists see the conflict between iconoclasts and iconographers as the direct result of the influence of Pythagorean founded, Hellenistic, Greece:

Christians inherited from their Judaic past a strong bias against anthropomorphic representations of divinity and an explicit prohibition of the "making" and "worshipping" of "graven images". Although there were efforts to resist it, pressures from without eventually forced them to accommodate their forms of worship to the cultural conventions of the Hellenistic-Roman world. An anonymous decorative and symbolic art, serving purely narrative and didactic purposes, may have entered Christian meeting-rooms and cemeteries as early as the third century; but the devotional use of images of Christ and the saints was apparently an innovation of the fourth-century church, which employed them as accessories of the cult of the saints.

(Jones, W. 76)

The Pythagorean emphasis on an ultimate monotheism, in which one unknown God is the sole overseer and creator of all the other Gods in the pantheon, is the result of their inclusive numeric cosmology. The "divine proportion" is an attempt to go beyond anthropomorphic form, to an ideal of harmony rooted in the numeric, mathematic grammar of the universe, rather than a return to a system based on human (or animal) idiosyncrasies. This move towards the extra-human divine found its application in the essentialist philosophies of Christianity.

Ted's attempt to ignore physical forms of female beauty is an attempt to recover lost ideals of "spiritual" form and to glimpse some evidence of God in this world, by looking into the eye of a "rather plain, or even homely girl" and seeing her soul. Ted, in "picturing" this act, is nonetheless forced to reject iconography by means of the image itself. And so we, in turn, see an image, presumably from Ted's imagined POV, in which

we see the ironically named Aurora turning and peering towards the camera lens. (Fig 22.) Ironically, Ted the iconoclast becomes Ted the iconographer and thus Ted the syncretist, much as Stillman both interrogates and valorizes his own medium.



**Figure 22 - Aurora peers into the lens.  
Barcelona.**

To see another's soul is paramount to Moses' vision of the burning bush; it is a communication with divinity that provides concrete answers to the question of life after death. The burning bush tells Moses, "I am that I am", which became "YHWH" –an effort to translate the divine into a profane icon, "Yahweh". While the text of the message of the burning bush is the name of the only self-existent being, the medium of the message is not only that such a being exists, but that a spiritual world beyond the limit of death also exists. What Ted presents to us is his desire to do away with all of the extraneous and distracting debris of doubt by obtaining a vision of the essences. While we see Stillman align his lens with the iconographer, we never see Aurora's soul.

Ted's conflict with iconography is not, however, with the essence of iconography itself, nor with the Deuteronomic rejection of iconography. Instead, Ted's difficulty is with the effect of the icon's aesthetic:

"TED: This whole thing with beauty is really very bad. I mean, you haven't even spoken to a woman and already you're subject to all these feelings, some of them very powerful."

(Barcelona, 8:13)

The origin of the conflict that Ted feels when he sees a beautiful woman is mirrored by the conflict Bishop Serenus of Marseilles had in the sixth century CE, prompting him to remove icons in the churches of dioceses in order to prevent their viewing and subsequent worship. Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) wrote Serenus twice, both times commending Serenus on his vigor, yet chastising him for the removal of these icons. Ted's "spiritual" vision similarly exposes his fears of the power of aesthetic response, of what we might call the "aesthetic fallacy," the notion, as Keats, phrased it, that "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty". (49) In concert with Fred's objection to Ted's iconoclasm, Gregory the Great demanded that Serenus re-instate the icons in his churches, for their educational value:

Furthermore, we declare that it has come to our attention that you, Brother, seeing certain adorers of images, broke and threw down these images. And we commend you indeed for your zeal, lest anything made with human hands be adored; but we declare that you ought not to have broken these images. For a picture is introduced into a church that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books. You, Brother, should therefore have both preserved the images and prohibited the people from adoring them, so that those who are ignorant of letters may have wherewith to gather a knowledge of history and that the people may in no way sin by looking at a picture.

(79)

Fred's rather clumsy attempts to convince his cousin of the foolishness of his anti-aesthetic are not so different from the reasoning that Gregory employs in declaring the sanctity of icons. For Fred, the crux lies in seeing, but not surrendering to the power of sight, in absorbing, but then dominating, and thus earning, in syncretic fashion, the experience of vision. Fred, later on in the film, is shot in the eye.

While Ted falls back on a Christianity in his iconoclasm, as we can see, Fred and Gregory the Great both recognize the importance of iconography. Barcelona presents Ted

as its only character who identifies himself as Christian, and who ties his iconoclasm directly to his Christianity. Yet as St. Jerome attests, part of the root of Christian iconography can be traced to the adoration of Christian tombs and monuments, to the vivid, visual recollection of departed spirits:

St. Jerome's approving description of the veneration of saints by the illumination of the altar, even in the absence of appropriate relics, implied that the opportunity existed for the substitution of another kind of memorial; and in the fourth century images acquired a heightened devotional role through their association with the cult of relics. St. Augustine, an ardent proponent of intercessory prayer and relics, noted the connection between such superstitious practices as the "adoration" of tombs and images; and the earliest examples of sacred images, the *brandea*, were themselves a *kind* of relic, showing by their marvelous origins and powers that they shared in the saints' *virtus*. Conscious of scriptural prohibition of image-worship and confronted on all sides by the analogous practices of pagan "idolaters" whom they despised, Christian theologians and moralists tried to resist this trend, or, belatedly, to rationalize it according to prevailing philosophical, hagiographical and artistic fashions.

(Jones, 77)

Ted, therefore, may be mistaking his aesthetic response to beauty, which he greatly fears, for his aesthetic response to what beauty represents. Ultimately, the film moves towards some form of syncretism between Fred and Ted's beliefs. As we have seen in our first chapter, the grammar which many Western Christians have constructed icons belongs to the "divine proportion" of Pythagorean belief, a method of representing the grammar of God (according to the Pythagoreans) as it appears in nature.

As the conversations about the place of beauty between Ted and Montserrat demonstrate, the notion that beauty has taken the place of religion is not at all far-fetched in this film. Core to the belief that Ted, Fred, Ramon, and even Dicky Taylor come to share is the essence of *virtus*<sup>11</sup> (in the form of characteristic excellence) as captured in the

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<sup>11</sup> It is not without irony that we employ Jones' use of 'virtus' when introducing the concept of divine femininity. 'Virtus' is of course the applied form of 'vir', the term for man. 'Virtus', is St. Jerome's usage

physical representation of beauty. Ramon's "perfecto" is a declaration not only of beauty, but of the perfection he believes to be contained in what beauty is itself. This relationship between beauty and the ideals that believers hold beauty to mean takes physical form in *brandea*. Funerary *brandea* are relics, often ordinary objects that take on specific religious significance through their contact with a divine or blessed personage. Early Christianity, like many other religions, embraced the process of venerating everyday objects as symbols of the divine truth in Christ. Physical beauty, in the form of female beauty in Barcelona, is the *brandea*, or relic, which is the storehouse of the "truth" of the divine proportion. Again, this practice of finding truth, and thus beauty, in the body has roots in Christianity, specifically the practice of the reliquary, in which the physical body part of a saint was housed in a special and often ornate container. Ramon's pursuit of the beauty of the female form in "perfecto" is a similar search for relics of the divine found in the body, but is simply post-Christian.

Thus, in a system descended from the Judeo-Christian system, in this case Barcelonan society, we should not be surprised to find Ted struggling to contain his aesthetic response to an essentially pagan principle. As Jean Seznec tells us in his The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its place in Renaissance Humanism and Art, the Church fathers struggled to find a balance between the iconoclasm of Deuteronomy-based doctrine, and pagan cultural traditions, such as astronomy: "St. Thomas Aquinas admits that the stars determine individual character, at least in a physical sense, and since most men follow their passions – that is to say, their physical appetites – it is really by the stars that they are led into sin..." (48). For Ted, the

power of the stars that Aquinas<sup>12</sup> writes about is comparable to the power of physical beauty to direct his aesthetic response. However, given that “most” does not mean “all”, Aquinas allows room for “some men” to be able to withstand the effects of the stars.

Seznec argues that the practice of euhemerism, which transformed pagan gods and heroes into historical beings, in turn celebrating them as inventors and imparters of knowledge and wisdom, helped to legitimize these figures in art and culture. The pre-Christian men who are able to fight off influences like stars, for example, in turn become deified in myth, and euhemerized in Christian culture. In short, they become secular types of the heroes in whom Ted places great faith, writers such as Franklin, Carnegie, and Betcker, who emphasize personal responsibility and will as *the* essential requirements for success in a capitalist system. Everything in Ted’s Barcelona thus hinges upon the ‘right’ aesthetic response to a particular situation at a particular moment. Whether practicing of low-pressure sales (Ted denounces high pressure sales as a form of fraud), in which “you are providing a real and useful service in which the customer and the salesperson grow, in turn helping to build economies of scale in which all persons benefit” (Barcelona 38:27) looking into a plain or even rather homely girl’s eyes and seeing her soul, Ted spends a great deal of the film waiting for the aesthetic moment of “Truth” which may be akin to redemption through grace.

“Redemption through grace”, as one critic writes, “is thus for Stillman not the severe Calvinist dogma that redemption can only come to the radically undeserving, but rather the warmer and more humane teaching that it always comes in unexpected ways.

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<sup>12</sup> Aquinas’ actual words are “Plures hominum sequeuntur passions, quae sunt motus sensitivi appetites, ad quos cooperari possunt corpora coelestia....” (48)– “The majority of men follow their passions, which are movements of the sensitive appetites in which movements (of the) heavenly bodies can co-operate.” The majority does not mean all.

There is another Christian term for this: Providence” (Austin, 19). So it is not without irony, then, that Marta, Fred’s love interest in the film, learns to speak English in Providence, Rhode Island. The gag by which we are introduced to the irony of Marta’s foundation for English is key to the founding of grace in Barcelona as an aesthetic event. Earlier in the film Ted has remarked to Fred that one of the “cool” places that he hangs out at, which is full of “trade fair girls” (perhaps *the* most desirable women of commerce) is marked by the fact that many of these women learned to speak English in England and thus to speak English with “these terrific English accents.” Fred responds, “I hate that.” Upon meeting Marta, Fred first asks her, “Where in England did you learn to speak English”, to which she responds “Providence, Rhode Island”. (Barcelona, 12:06)

Unwittingly undercutting Ted’s aesthetic evaluation of cool trade fair girls, she also precipitates his entire aesthetic crisis with the iconographic nature of female beauty. As audience members, we laugh, our response to the grace of irony, which has undercut Ted’s assertions, even as it delights and bemuses us. The delight and bemusement we express is our verbal response to the qualified visual and auditory aesthetics of the film. Later in the film, it is Fred who sees Marta having sex with another man, just after he has learned she has stolen from Ted, thus exacerbating a history of childhood theft between the two cousins. Fred steals back from Marta and her drug-dealing lover, then gets into a taxi, where he is shot in the eye: Providence, indeed. Our aesthetic feelings towards grace move from a sense of charm to a sense of darkness. Our laughter is again, ironically, turned sour. Much of this appears to go without saying, until we turn back to Kaufmann.

Comparing Barcelona to Stillman’s earlier work Metropolitan, Kaufmann writes, “First, it is immediately apparent that his sheer cinematic fluency has taken a great leap

forward. In the earlier film I frequently felt that Stillman had shot scenes with no prior vision of them. He just got them into the camera one way or another so that he could move on<sup>13</sup>. Scene after scene in Barcelona is quite the reverse: the way that we see is relevant to what we're seeing. And scenes are often finished with a quick fade to black, which gives the film a smart, astringent tone. But the great advance is in the film's embrace. It is about something more than the mere existence of its people" (30).

Kaufmann points us straight to the core of the aesthetic theme of Barcelona: "the way we see is relevant to what we are seeing." In aesthetic terms, Kauffman suggests that a nascent eye will see possibility, whereas a ripened eye will see none of the sort. In Judaeo-Christian terms, we can interpret this aesthetic reading in turn as suggesting that grace and providence lie where we see them.

Sight is specifically the sense with which Stillman, through choosing his medium of cinema, and his characters, through their explorations of the meaning on the glimpse of the beautiful, choose to situate beauty. Revisiting Montserrat's exposition of the thematic approach to beauty within the cinematic text of Barcelona is thus a search for an aesthetic way of seeing.

MONTSERRAT: "Beauty is the closest thing to divinity that remains in the modern world. All the old gods are dead, there is no god that we know, but in beauty the memory of divinity remains."

(Barcelona 32:36)

When taken in context, Montserrat's statement is again steeped in Stillman's irony. She and Ted are lying in bed, nude, having made love, thus having obliterated any claims Ted

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<sup>13</sup> This author could not disagree more with Kaufmann's uninformed assumptions of a hurried, "get it in the can" approach to Metropolitan. Given the film's meagre budget, funded entirely by the sale of Stillman's Manhattan apartment, and its Manhattan setting, much of the film was shot hand-held, and in the earliest hours of the morning. The result is a Manhattan that is not opulent, not glamorous and somewhat hostile; precisely the image of Manhattan that Metropolitan's mise en scene is designed to capture.



can possibly entertain about transcending carnal knowledge of beauty through moral abstinence. Even further, given that Montserrat appears to be in the midst of telling Ted a story of her own sexual coming of age, we can view the scene as being steeped in a loss of purity and a defiling of innocence. Adding to the irony at work in the scene is that Montserrat is paraphrasing the belief of her live-in boyfriend, Ramon, to whom she is being faithless (albeit at Ramon's urging), and against whom Ted will strive in the first two acts of the film as his anti-American antagonist.

The irony at work in the scene is that Ted, despite his fumbling attempts to establish himself as an anti-Ramon, agrees wholeheartedly with Ramon's belief in the divinity of female beauty. Ted has, after all, just spent the entire first act of the film struggling against the power of his aesthetic response to female beauty to overcome his will. Ramon is also a fevered and somewhat manipulative anti-American womanizer, who seduces women by passionately seizing them by the chin, turning their heads towards a mirror and huskily announcing, "Perfecto". His appeal to a presumed feminine narcissism thus marks him as an anti-Ted. As viewers sympathetic to Ted, we see Ramon the same way Ted does, as a bumbling, offensive, and potentially dangerous enemy. His role as Ted's antagonist bears out Kaufmann's assertions that Barcelona shows us a world in which the way we see is relevant to what we see. Yet Ramon is more than a capable debater, handily turning Ted's metaphor of ants at a picnic as a benevolent explanation of America's foreign policy into a revelation of Ted's apparent lack of basic humanity; he is also a genuine, caring human being, apologizing to Fred for his part in writing newspaper stories that may have inflamed political passions that led to Fred's shooting, and Fred's subsequent pain and loss. There is nothing insincere about Ramon's

“sincere regret” (Barcelona, 93:12). As Stillman reminds us, we are often most offended by those who most closely resemble ourselves. A rejection of someone who appears too much like ourselves is a rejection of a shadow-side of ourselves that we despise.

Yet, Barcelona also arises above ironic dualities. While Ramon, Fred, Montserrat and Marta all resist Ted’s devaluation of sexual attraction (Marta announces at the start of one scene: “I think it is true what they say about the sexual revolution being over. I won’t go to bed with just anybody anymore, I have to be attracted to them sexually” (Barcelona, 67:43), each of them demonstrates a profound belief in the sanctity of human relationships. For example, Marta refuses to nurse Fred back to health, shamed by her infidelity into leaving Barcelona for the Maldives, announcing she will change herself to lead an exemplary life<sup>14</sup>. Fred pleads for his cousin’s consent to begin a romantic relationship with Montserrat, clearly begging the question, “What if you and Montserrat aren’t meant for each other, and Montserrat and I are? What if I’m Montserrat’s only chance at happiness?” (Barcelona, 90:36). Ted weds Greta, to whom his physical attraction is enhanced by her announcement that Ramon is “repeleente”, but who herself is strikingly, classically beautiful. Despite Stillman’s ironic treatment of Ted’s iconoclasm, Barcelona maintains, in its turns of character, an aesthetic of the grammar of beauty as the language of “divinity”.

Feminist scholars like Laura Mulvey would claim that Ted and Ramon’s celebration of female beauty is nothing more than the infamous “male gaze”. The locus of power, Mulvey argues, lies within phallogentrism: “The paradox of phallogentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order

and meaning to its world. An idea of woman stands as lynch pin to the system: it is her lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence, it is her desire to make good the lack that the phallus signifies” (Mulvey, 833). Much of the current debate over the status of women in the Church likewise underscores Mulvey’s notions. Perhaps the crux of the debate around the Virgin Mary and Mary of Magdala, and the resulting controversy tapped into by The Da Vinci Code, has its roots in opposing sides of this debate about the locus of power in the “male gaze”<sup>15</sup>. Is the “look” in the one who sees, or in the one who is seen? What, we must ask, do the female figures in Barcelona lack?

When we trace the iconography of Barcelona’s characters back to Pythagoras, we find that the ancients located a sense of lack in the viewer, more than the viewed. As Wind tells us, “All we must remember is that the bounty bestowed by the gods upon lower beings was conceived by the Neoplatonists as a kind of overflowing (*emanatio*), which produced a vivifying rapture or conversation (called by Ficino *conversion*, *raptio* or *virificatio*) whereby lower beings were drawn back to heaven and rejoined the gods (*remanatio*)” (Wind, 37). The “bounty of the gods” of which Wind speaks here is beauty in the Pythagorean sense. The response of the viewer, one of the “lower beings” to whom the “*emanatio*” flows, is to complete the circulation of this “vivifying rapture” by returning, not appropriating, the animating power of beauty to its source. Yet this cycle of *emanatio/remanatio* does not make either party, the viewer or the viewed, the supreme

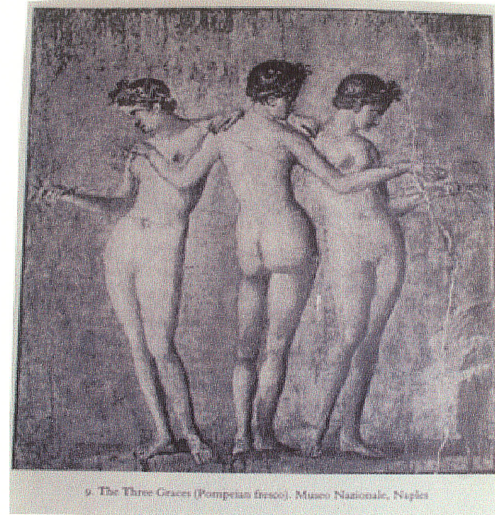
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<sup>14</sup> Whether or not Marta is sincere can certainly be debated. Ultimately, Stillman does not neatly tie up this loose end, nor does he firmly establish that Fred is shot because of the rising animosity against his alleged CIA involvement, and not because he takes the money in Marta’s flat.

<sup>15</sup> There is no female symbol more powerful than the Virgin Mary who both literally and symbolically, lacks a phallus. Likewise, the threat that Mary of Magdala seems to present to the Church in Brown’s hypothesis in The Da Vinci Code is that she did not lack a phallus. This argument is somewhat ironized and inverted by psychoanalytic critics who claim that the female “lacking” of a phallus is what leads to both female identity and heterosexuality. The Virgin then, both lacks and does not lack a phallus, while Mary of Magdala, does not lack a phallus because she lacks a phallus.

location of power, but rather makes them both “electrified poles,” as it were, in the aesthetic affect.

As we noted in chapter one, Pythagoreanism, like early Christianity, held both genders equal. The transfer of the mythology of the pagan gods into the Christian world was only possible, Seznec shows, when the myths were Christianized and transformed into morality lessons. The *modus operandi* of female pagan iconography was to refashion pagan artworks of such beauty into personifications of Christian moral virtues, while preserving their beauty intact. Thus, the



**Figure 23 – *The Three Graces*, (Pompeian Fresco, Seznec)**

aesthetic effect of these artworks spared them the hammer of Christian mores,<sup>16</sup> and transplanted the divine proportion into later Christian, Renaissance, and cinematic art.

Stillman and John Thomas, his cinematographer, play on Renaissance aesthetics often in Barcelona in their choice of palate, chiascuro-like luminescence in lighting, and ultimately in composition. Of particular importance is their refashioning of Montserrat as the central figure in a composition that echoes the “Three Graces”. The *Graces*, known in antiquity as the three Muses (below), and frequently the subject of Roman frescoes such as those unearthed at Pompeii, were a particularly popular subject in Renaissance art.

<sup>16</sup> Darkly ironic when viewed from Mulvey’s claims of phallogentrism in the cinema, pagan sculptures that depicted men were often literally emasculated. Of particular offence to Christian sensibilities was the



Figure 24- Botticelli's *Primavera* (Uffizi)

Perhaps the most famous re-creation of this ancient representation of “divine beauty” in all of Renaissance art is Botticelli’s *Primavera*, where the female figures are elevated by a lightness, a *ballon*, that draws the gaze of the beholder upwards in the first motions of Neoplatonic *remanatio* in Botticelli’s *Primavera*.

While Stillman’s cinematography remains bound by the surfaces of modern experience, he still gives us his version of the *Graces* through

simple POV editing.

We are led to this composition through a series of images: Fred and Ted walk to meet with Montserrat and others, and, cresting a hill, look over a wall. Fred and Ted walk into frame, the wall bisecting their bodies so that just their heads and upper torsos come into frame. Fred and Ted then look toward the camera, directly at the viewer.

We are thus first placed in the vantage point of the viewed, what they behold. A reverse shot reveals an oddly angular composition of Montserrat and a group of other women, dancing. This moment of dance is markedly different from earlier scenes of disco dancing, such as the moment in which Ted is mocked for falling in love with

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Roman tendency to depict males in sculpture with large erections. The offending organs were often



**Figure 25 - Fred and Ted peer over the ledge. (Barcelona)**

Montserrat while dancing to a Bee Gees song. Dance at this point is not part of an awkward mating display, nor is it the crux of a joke. Montserrat and the others with whom she dances do so without knowledge of the male gaze from the other side of the wall; they are not

performing for Fred and Ted. It could be argued that Montserrat and her companions are performing for us, and that is why we see Fred and Ted from the female vantage point.

However, the composition of the reverse shot suggests otherwise.

The angular planes of the composition mean that the dancing women, in movement that mirrors each other, change, in our line of sight, from numbering four, to three, to four again. This seemingly mystical transformation is no more than a



**Figure 26 - Stillman's *Graces*. (Barcelona)**

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smacked off with hammers, emasculation thus saving the male statues themselves from destruction.



Figure 27 - Correggio's *Three Graces*. (Seznec)

trick of the plane, yet it underscores the divine nature of feminine beauty as it is projected in this film. With characteristic Stillmanesque irony Montserrat remarks, “Ah, Ted. Stay there, we will come down”, as if she were one of the Three

Graces casually commenting to a “lesser being”.

Correggio, in his *Three Graces*, also places his figures on an elevated plane, again drawing the viewers gaze upwards, mirroring the ascendant comment Montserrat makes to Ted. In his analysis of Correggio's *Three Graces*, Wind points out the composition of the work that places Amor, most often the Grace placed in the center of the triad, in a particularly Christian role: “As the Grace Amor is seen from the back, she may still be understood in the sense of Servius as the ‘outgoing’ Grace: turning towards the Beyond, she is doubly rewarded by the other Graces, who grant Pulchritudo and Voluptas ‘in return’ for the offering of Amor” (46). Stillman and Thomas's composition situates Montserrat similarly in the place of Amor, with her back mainly towards Fred and Ted. In keeping with the aesthetics of this composition, Montserrat proves to be at once an objet d'amour and a source of vision for both cousins, as well as a fully developed character in her own right. Indeed, as the narrative of the film continues, we find our characters moving towards a definition of love adopted by the Pythagorean Platonists: “Love is Desire Aroused by Beauty” (Wind, 46). It is the union of the three images that is powerful. Each figure on its own is empty, but the figure of Amor, in facing away from

the viewer and towards the beyond, serves as the balance between the two, facing the spiritual great Beyond. “With all this insistence on a supernatural orientation,” Wind concludes, “this philosophy produced a theory of balance, in which Aristotle’s prudence, his ethics of the ‘golden mean’, was reconciled with the Platonic enthusiasm of Proculus” (47).

Ramon’s belief in the divine form of the female face, when related to the rules of Pythagorean beauty, is not so far-fetched. Montserrat, as the only blonde female character, stands out in the film, closely resembling a Botticelli model (Figure 26).

Additionally, the composition of the *Three Graces*, above, which we have shown to be mirrored in the film’s composition of the female dance, calls to mind another level of aesthetic analysis in Renaissance composition. As we discussed in our introductory chapter, da Vinci’s *Last Supper* planning sketches show Christ between the Magdalene/Thomas figure and Peter.

Our analysis has shown that mathematically, in this Pythagorean



**Figure 28 - Botticelli's *Graces*, detail - note the resemblance to Tushka Bergen, playing Montserrat.**

triad, Christ visually resembles the “golden mean” between these two characters.

Compositionally, the same method is employed in each of the traditional forms of the



*Three Graces* above, as well as in Stillman's cinematic composition. Stillman calls us to see Montserrat as the golden mean, and thus as a symbol of feminine divinity.

What becomes troubling for this view of her, however, is Ramon's rejection of Montserrat. Given that Ramon sees the female face and form as a basis for the memory of divinity, we could expect that if Montserrat were in fact a symbol of the memory of divinity, Ramon would value her more than he does.

It is his anti-American tirades, however, and his corresponding inability to let Montserrat remain with Ted that gradually reveal Stillman's commitment to a republican politics of the "golden mean". Time and again, Ramon draws together conspiracy theories and historical fact, suppositions with half-truths, in tirades that undermine his own commitment to "divine proportion". Ramon's self-righteous condemnation of American foreign policy as a revival of empire turns less on his republican sentiments than on his disgust for American aesthetic values. Marta summarizes his judgment, recounting to Fred Ramon's condemnation of America as the "plastic, throw-everything-away society with its notorious racism, violence, crime and vulgarity, complete with shopping malls full of loud obnoxious fat people. That and the total lack of culture" (*Barcelona*, 54:31). Ramon's critique of America, at least as imparted to Montserrat and Marta, is as shallow as the object of his attack, if not more so. His claim that Americans started the Spanish-American war in 1898 by blowing up their own ship *The Maine* in a Cuban harbor, conveniently overlooks the fact that Spain was clinging to the last vestiges of its own empire in the face of the rising American Empire. Ramon thus portrays himself as a republican, who somewhat unwittingly employs imperial tactics against an imperial republic.

Ultimately, we see that Barcelona's America is no tyranny. Fred and Ted, for all their misgivings and patriotism, are not envoys of the Syracusan tyrant Dionysius the Elder. And, try as he might, Ramon is no Plato. Ramon falls into the trap of reading American political action as a metaphor for all Americans themselves. His clever turning of the ant metaphor with which Ted stumbles to explain American foreign policy reveals more about Ramon's understanding of the misguided competition between himself and Ted for Montserrat's affection, and Ted's own strategy in it, than it does about American foreign policy.

Nor does the Sixth Fleet, for whom Fred is supposed to be an advance man, ever arrive in Barcelona. Instead, the fleet is involved in some sort of punitive military action.

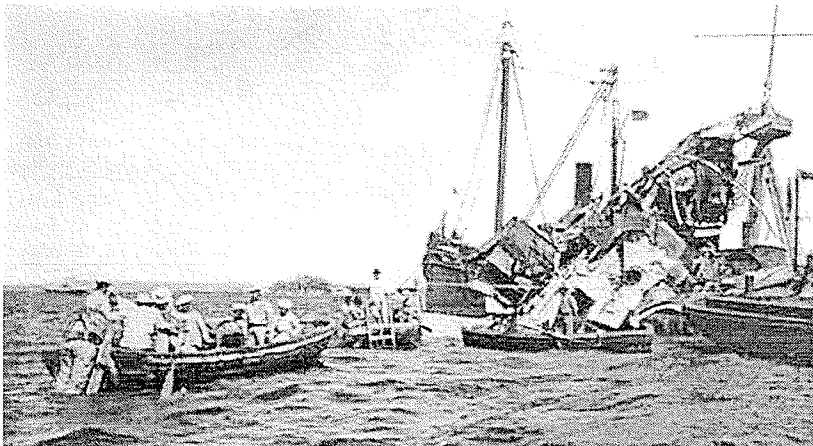


Figure 29 - The wreckage of *The Maine*. (*Time Magazine*)

Ramon declares that the attacks are nothing more than “a quick attack on some foreign boogey man, which will rescue the American President’s declining popularity” (Barcelona,

62:15). Such an attack is precisely the sort of maneuver that Ted tries unsuccessfully to avoid. In confronting Ramon during the Night of San Juan sequence, and denouncing Ramon's conspiracy theory tying the sinking of *The Maine* in 1898 to the USO bombing to which Fred and Ted heroically rush, Ted walks right into the trap Ramon has laid for him. By denouncing “everything you (Ramon) said” as a lie, Ted unwittingly turns the

combination of fact (*The Maine* sank from an internal boiler explosion) and paranoid conjecture into seeming truth. In announcing his belief in the nefarious intentions behind an unnamed American military action, Ramon aligns Ted with American foreign policy, and thus, American imperialism.

Ted's own metaphor of the ants takes this association one step further. Ted attempts to explain American policy by saying, "A fierce cadre of red ants has taken power and is oppressing the black ant majority. The stated American policy, which I am in no way endorsing, is to aid the black ants in over-throwing the red ants and restoring democracy, keeping the red ants from aiding their red ant comrades in neighboring ant colonies" (*Barcelona*, 62:48). Ramon's response is, not surprisingly, an aesthetic condemnation of Ted's metaphor:

"That is at once the most honest and most disgusting description of American policy I have ever heard," Ramon spits back. "The third world is just a bunch of ants to you" (*Barcelona*, 63:54). Ramon's interpretation finds an echo among his companions, one of whom cries, "Those are people dying down there, not ants" (*Barcelona*, 64:02).

Not yet completely daunted, Ted attempts to explain his metaphor. "I think you misunderstand. I was reducing everything to ant scale: an ant White House, an ant Congress, an ant Pentagon...." Ramon interrupts, now turning Ted's metaphor itself against him: "Secret ant landing strips, illegally established on foreign soil" (*Barcelona*, 64:10). When taken in context, however, Ramon's declaration of the America's hidden intentions reveals more about Ramon than about Ted. Ted is a guest at this retreat, and, in fact, Ted is the expatriate. Ramon's attack on him is an attack on a foreign "boogie-man", executed to rescue Ramon's own failing popularity, in this case with Montserrat.

Ramon's reference to the explosion of *The Maine* in 1898 is thus not without a sense of imperial irony. The sinking of *The Maine* became the prelude to the Spanish – American War, which effectively ended Spain's imperial history in the Americas and the Philippines. Ramon's "republican" hostility is tinged with a sense of resentment over the end of Spain's intercontinental power, and of America's superpower status.

As we have seen in chapter one, the greatest monuments of American Republicanism, namely the White House, the Capitol, and the Pentagon, were all constructed in accordance with Vitruvian and Pythagorean principles. These buildings, reduced to ant scale by Ted, still maintain the golden ratio in their construction, and are precisely the republican icons of American politics that Ted names. The unique mathematic essence of the golden ratio is that it is not a measurement, but a ratio, a result of the relation between two quantities expressed as the quotient of one when divided by the other. As such, the measurements of these two numbers can change, while the ratio between them remains constant. This is, in fact, the crux of the numerical cosmology of Pythagoras. As Atwood demonstrates, the icons of American republicanism would be no more than empty shells without the practice of republicanism within their walls. Indeed, the aesthetic elements of these buildings reflect the spirit of Plato's Republic that founds the American Republic itself. It is nonetheless in the aesthetic memories of divinity where the communication between Ted and Fred and their Barcelona counterparts falls apart.

The list of "big questions" that Kaufmann sees Stillman's characters asking in Barcelona ends on this wise: "Why can't the rest of the world see the benevolence of America's intentions, blunted though they often are by clumsy execution?" (31) Clumsy

execution, however, is aesthetically poor execution, and it is in the actions of the American cousins that misreading occurs. Ted repeatedly fails to understand the intentions of others; he believes Dicky Taylor is not only a jerk, but is going to fire him; he believes that 'Maneuver X', which his cousin rightly identifies as 'playing hard to get', will convince Montserrat of the benevolence of his actions; and he does not see the danger to his cousin until Fred is shot. Fred, too, although sometimes more perceptive than Ted, fails to read the aesthetics of his situation effectively, either: his crushing of the red ants with a rock, while meant as a joke, is taken as a horrific threat. Fred and Ted often question what the other claims to be a truth, perhaps out of an ambivalent distrust of the other, while Marta, Montserrat, and Ramon take what they both say to be gospel, especially when it is mere gossip.

Although introduced innocuously through a joke about the "taut leather straps" that Fred insists Ted wears beneath his clothes, gossip by the two cousins about each other takes on a much more ominous tone. Stillman seems painfully aware of the unfortunate effectiveness of the moral policing of others as a form of social control, a practice that we noted in chapter one as operating with particular effectiveness under Constantine in fourth century Rome. Barcelona is a city, it would seem, that is not just walled in the divine proportion, but is founded on the social and moral *Imperium* of the Roman Empire. The old tensions between republican and imperial values are played out in this film in terms of the marriage plot.

In attempting to ascertain Ted's status with Montserrat, Fred determines that Marta has informed Montserrat, against Fred's wishes, of Ted's secret desire to marry Montserrat and "spend the rest of his life with her". A later scene between the two

cousins reveals that Fred has in fact simply guessed Ted's intentions, and made up the confidence in an effort to impress Marta. Marta takes it upon herself to tell Montserrat of Ted's "confessed" intentions, claiming, despite her sexual relationship with Ramon behind Montserrat's back, that Montserrat is her "friend". "I had to tell her," Marta declares. "I think there is something very right wing and facha<sup>17</sup> about a boy who immediately wants to marry a girl he likes" (Barcelona, 65:17). Fred's incredulous response is, "I don't think Ted is a fascist of the marrying kind" (Barcelona, 65:20).

Marta's statement collapses the distance between ideology and spirituality, between heart and head, and particularly between church and state, with the blatant misreading of Ted's desires for Montserrat. Marta cannot see Montserrat the same way Ted does, and thus, does not entertain the possibility that, for Ted, Montserrat is symbolic of "the memory of divinity". While certainly echoing the myth of Pygmalion, Ted's love of Montserrat is not an attempt to control her, or to possess her, or to convince Montserrat of the wonders of America. Marta cannot see that Ted wishes to receive what he sees to be the divine knowledge that Montserrat can and will impart to him. Their romantic relationship is a metaphor for the union of the divine with the mundane, or the ascension of the lowly through a "vivifying rapture" in the "conversation" with beauty.

At the core of this "rapture" is the aesthetic experience itself, in which truth is not a fact, but an experience, a sense of being placed in communication with divinity. In several respects, the conflict that Ted faces in his search for *virtus* recapitulates the age-old tension between Marian iconography and the historically variable image of Mary of Magdala. Revisiting earlier Church debates, this time in light of the current controversy between the two Marys and in light of the symbolic presentation of the *Three Graces*

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<sup>17</sup> *Facha*, is slang in Barcelona for fascist – specifically the fascism practiced by American imperialists.

(i.e., Montserrat in Barcelona) we find a curious analogy between Ted's ambivalent iconoclasm and current developments in Catholic and Protestant iconography. A March 2005 feature article in Time magazine highlights the evolving place of the iconography of both Marys in Christian Churches. Somewhat ironically for Catholics, who are currently facing a revision of their faith based on their traditional shunning of Mary of Magdala, Protestant churches and their offspring, primarily Presbyterian and Methodist churches are facing a renewed interest in the role of Mary, the mother of Christ.

“For roughly 300 years,” David Van Biema writes, “Protestants, while granting Mary her indisputable place as the mother of Jesus, regarded any additional enthusiasm as tantamount to ‘Mariolatry’, the alleged (and allegedly non-biblical) elevation of the Virgin to a status approaching Christ’s” (50). The main rejection of “Mariolatry” lies in the idea that the Virgin must not have a status approaching Christ’s. Yet, Christ’s status emerges from his knowledge and teachings. As we argued in our first chapter, what set Christianity apart from any other religion in the first century was the unique knowledge of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. This “special knowledge” is the same that Mary Magdalene possesses in both the Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels, and which, in light of the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary also possesses. This “special knowledge” and active role in the story of Christ has seen a recent re-incorporation into Methodist, Presbyterian, and other Protestant churches, due in some part to the current ecumenical trend between many churches as well as the expanding multicultural acceptance of Guadalupean origins.

Van Biema ties this recent re-exploration of the role of the Virgin in part to the influence of feminist studies. “Feminism has encouraged popular speculations on the

lives of female biblical figures and the role of the divine feminine (think *The Red Tent* and *The Da Vinci Code*)” (51). Central to our analysis of Barcelona has been the exploration of the role of the divine feminine symbolized through beauty. However, as our first chapter demonstrated, the divine feminine in the Great Church, and its subsequent suppression, is uniquely tied to the heterogeneity of Pythagoras and, subsequently, to an essentially pagan syncretism.

At the core of Serenus’ sixth-century iconoclasm is a profound anti-syncretic element. Serenus’ prime concern is the policing of heresy, those heterodox beliefs that are not sanctioned by Church doctrine and ideology. Serenus wishes to assert the Church’s uniform doctrine of one Truth by founding the rule of Christ along monarchical lines. These same lines took a profound anti-feminist turn in the founding of the Church of England, and its resulting iconoclasm in 1538, with the burning of a statue of Mary in Walsingham under the direction of Henry VIII. Typical of the history of Protestant worship, this suppression of the visual image at the expense of the abstract Word, encouraged an iconoclasm of spirit in favor of faith as the “evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).

Explicit in Barcelona is both Ted’s religious search, as well as his allegiance, in the first act, to a Protestant-styled Bible-based theology. Hiding his Bible in a copy of *The Economist*, Ted declines to go out with Fred and Marta, instead opting to stay home and read Ecclesiastes and the iconoclastic Deuteronomy. Stillman, seeking to alleviate the potential bleakness of Ted’s actions, has Ted begin to dance, rather exuberantly, to “Pennsylvania 6-5000”, a swing jazz standard. Marta and Fred re-enter the apartment, and watch Ted, momentarily stunned, as he dances with his Bible. When confronted, Ted



announces that this Bible-dancing “ritual” is part of his “Presbyterian Church. Well, Protestant” (Barcelona, 18:23). Stillman seeks to undermine both the literalism of Biblical belief by demonstrating the dynamism of Ted’s “Biblicism” and the obviousness of the scorn with which Marta and Fred react to his Bible-dancing. Fred also does his best to mitigate Ted’s iconoclasm, and Ted ultimately gives up his iconoclastic fear of the “memory of divinity” in female beauty. As Van Biema might put it, Ted effectively gives up his Protestantism.

However, Barcelona does not explicitly celebrate Catholicism, either. The Virgin Mary is not the holder of “special knowledge” symbolically celebrated through Montserrat. In fact, as Ted kneels to pray for Fred’s recovery, he turns to Greta and asks, “Do you know some Catholic prayer?” Greta rather over-zealously throws herself into a painfully humorous silent benediction. Later, as Ted begins his courtship with Greta, he asks her if she’s religious, to which she answers “quasi”. Clearly, Greta is no Marian surrogate either. In fact, the character who is most clearly symbolic of the divine feminine, Montserrat, is visually tied to the more pagan-inspired works of Botticelli than any other artist.

If we are to link Montserrat to any Biblical figure, we must link her to Mary of Magdalene. A vital difference must be made, however, between the literal life of Mary of Magdala and what she symbolically represents in both Apocryphal and Canonical scripture. In The Da Vinci Hoax, their denunciation of The Da Vinci Code, Carl E. Olson and Sandra Miesel attack not only the current revisionist questioning of the role of Mary Magdalene, but the process of questioning itself. These authors undertake such a bridling of revisionists by labeling the veneration of Mary Magdalene as “a complete

transformation involving the removal and destruction of core beliefs about the nature of God, the person of Jesus, the nature of the Church, and the truth about sexuality and marriage. All this flows from a highly individualistic and self-centered approach to spirituality. ‘The whole point, for many in the movement’ [theologian Phillip G.] Davis explains, ‘is to discover divinity within the self and to encounter it in female form’”(91).

These authors base their resistance to “heresy” on two figures who are supposed in Christianity to be diametrically opposed: the Virgin Mary, and Mary of Magdala. As Olson and Meisel write of one of the latter’s contemporary champions, Susan Haskins, “In her study *Mary Magdalene, Myth and Metaphor*, Susan Haskins suggests that the restoration of Mary Magdalene to her rightful place will lead to a ‘radical revision’ of Christianity’s view of woman. The resistance of the Catholic Church to female priests, she believes, ‘derives from deeply entrenched responses’ that have been shaped and conditioned by the many centuries of dogma upholding the image of the Virgin Mary” (101).

By paraphrasing Haskins’ doubt about the Church’s upholding of the *image* of the Virgin Mary, Olson and Miesel link the debate about the two Marys with the debates over iconoclasm and iconography that have troubled the Church for its entire history. By tying Monsterrat to the symbol of Mary Magdalene, Whit Stillman’s links her further to a personification of republicanism, specifically in republican resistance to the tyranny of imperialism. As we saw in our first chapter, several of the Gnostic scriptures, declared heretical by the Church in the fourth century CE, depicted the struggle between Mary of Magdala and Simon Peter, and the power struggle between the two. The Gnostic books have their most profound differences from the Canonical scriptures in their presentation

of a commingled, heterogeneous, syncretic authority, an authority that was declared heretical by the Holy Roman Church.

Heresy, as we demonstrated in our first chapter, is likewise a perversion of the Greek term *heretik*, meaning to act as an intercessory between the mortal and the divine. In tying Montserrat's divine femininity to Mary Magdalene's symbolic role, one might well see them both as heretics, in the proper etymological sense. In this sense, the aesthetic search in Barcelona that Fred and Ted undertake is a search for an intercessor to provide the sort of peace which they find at the film's close, at The Lake. Fred and Ted have only learned one symbolic lesson: the vitality of syncretism, and the revolutionary power of aesthetic sight. The memory of divinity in Barcelona is what lies beyond the "male gaze", that "divine proportion", which is also the power of beauty to promote action and change, and to bring together seemingly opposing elements into a new and harmonious form.

*Chapter III*

***The Wrong "M": The Da Vinci Code, and the Divine Proportion in the Codes of da Vinci.***

When measured by financial success, there is simply no novel like The Da Vinci Code. Released in 2003, the novel, still in hardcover-only editions, tops various bestseller lists two years later. Sales for The Da Vinci Code have broken all previous sales records for a novel. In the first year alone, Christian presses published more than ten related texts, most of which identified themselves as “debunkings” of The Da Vinci Code. All in all, the phenomenon that has become the sales history of The Da Vinci Code is still growing, even at the time of this writing. There have been numerous television specials, which, oddly enough, explore the “secrets” contained in the plot of the novel. Tourists are paying thousands of dollars to go on “Da Vinci Code” tours. Essentially, The Da Vinci Code has become an industry in and of itself. Yet, the engine that drives this industry is not the revelation of hidden secrets, nor is it the resurrection of the divinity of beauty as celebrated through art. The Da Vinci Code industry is driven by one thing: controversy.

Much of the controversy that surrounds The Da Vinci Code emerges out of the assertions at the beginning of the text that “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate” (Brown, 1). Brown's claims of authenticity, which have raised the ire of Catholics and conservative Christians, as well as the interest of readers, adds an ingenious sense of authenticity to his text, thus deepening the impact of suspension of disbelief at work in the novel. The publication during the 2004-05 Christmas season of The Da Vinci Code: Special Illustrated Edition, compounds the sense of “historical” truth found in the text. Images, after all, in our visually attuned culture, are the signature of the real, far more so than mere print. It is this

sense of veracity surrounding the text, compounded by the inclusion of the images in the illustrated edition, which has led both to its incredible success<sup>18</sup>, and to the scathing attacks of its critics, who dispute these claims of truth. Despite the nature of the text, which is, after all, a novel, its status as a historical fiction not only attracts the greatest condemnation by his critics, but highlight a far more vital issue at the core of the controversy itself, the nature of aesthetic “truth”. In using the “divine proportion” to declare his political “truth”, Brown subverts the veracity that he claims to hold dear.

As we have shown in our previous two chapters, the divine proportion is a ratio, not a measurement. When applied as a measurement, the golden ratio only holds meaning as a ratio between two numbers, that is, in reference to the proportions of the object being measured itself. Yet, when Brown's hero Langdon introduces the divine proportion, via its seventeenth-century name “PHI”, he introduces it first as a ratio, but then, through his sentence structure, collapses the signifier-signified relationship of “PHI”-ratio into “PHI” as a number:

"This number PHI," Langdon continued, "one-point-six-one-eight, is a very important number in art. Who can tell me why?"

Stettner tried to redeem himself. "Because it's so pretty?"

Everyone laughed.

"Actually," Langdon said, "Stettner's right again. PHI is generally considered the most beautiful number in the universe."

The laughter abruptly stopped, and Stettner gloated.

As Langdon loaded his slide projector, he explained that the number PHI was derived from the Fibonacci sequence - a progression famous not only because the sum of the adjacent terms equaled the next term, but because the quotients of adjacent terms possessed the astonishing property of approaching the number 1.618-PHI!

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<sup>18</sup> A recent *National Post* article entitled “Da Vinci Code Seems Heaven Sent”, demonstrates The Da Vinci Code's unheard of success. At the time of writing, December of 2004, both The Da Vinci Code and The Da Vinci Code: Special Illustrated Edition, in hardcover, sat atop more best-seller lists than any other work of fiction, ever. The only book to displace The Da Vinci Code from its place on *The New York Times* bestseller list is The Da Vinci Code: Special Illustrated Edition, which is also in hardcover, and much more expensive. The Da Vinci Code, judged by any publishing standards, is simply an unprecedented phenomenon.

Despite PHI's seemingly mystical mathematical origins, Langdon explained, the truly mind-boggling aspect of PHI was its role as a fundamental building block in nature, Plants, animals and even human beings all possessed dimensional properties that adhered with eerie exactitude to the ratio of PHI to 1".

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Langdon's explanations of "PHI's" place in the ratios of natural objects are spot on. Unfortunately, Brown's writing style contributes to historiographical confusion. As we demonstrated in our first chapter, the term "PHI" came into use in the seventeenth century, when mathematicians gave a Greek letter symbol to an irrational number. As 1.618..., "PHI" did not exist in Western Europe until the 13th century, when Fibonacci brought Hindu-Arabic numerals back with him from Algeria to Pisa. Fibonacci himself discovered the relationship of the integers in his sequence to the Euclidean recording of the divine proportion. Fibonacci did not discover "PHI", or the divine proportion. Instead, like the Pythagoreans, Fibonacci found it contained within a code he observed in a sequence of numerals he had arranged in a particular order. The cult of Pythagoras was certainly aware of the divine proportion more than two millennia before "PHI", developing it as it exists in Euclid's Elements as an irrational fraction.

In Brown's defense, however, he does not assert that his historical accounts are accurate, only the "artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals" are. In aesthetic terms, however, Brown's abbreviated writing style creates slippage between what his protagonist states as historical truth, and what the historical truth actually is. Essentially, this stylistic difficulty creates a collapse of meaning:

"Guys and girls. Try it. Measure the distance from the tip of your head to the floor. Then divide it by the distance from your belly button to the floor. Guess what number you get."

"Not PHI!" one of the jocks blurted out in disbelief.

"Yes, PHI," Langdon replied. "One-point-six-one-eight. Want another example? Measure the distance from your shoulder to your finger tips, then divide it by the distance from your elbow to your fingertips. PHI again. Another? Hip to floor divided by knee to floor. PHI again. Finger joints. Toes. Spinal divisions. PHI. PHI. PHI. My friends, each of you is a walking tribute to the divine proportion."

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Langdons' examples of the divine proportion applied to human anatomy are again accurate. What is missing from his description, however, is that the divine proportion is a ratio, not a measurement. Brown's diction reinforces this omission; he employs "quotient" without explaining that a quotient is a ratio, not an "answer" in and of itself. In repeating "PHI, PHI", Brown collapses the space between "measurement" and "ratio". On the page, as the numbers of his quotients shrink, so too does the length of his sentences, becoming fragments, then two word phrases, then, a three-letter term, repeated three times. The collapse of the signifier and signified has become complete. As Langdon asserts that PHI measures 1.618, so do human beings measure out as 1.618. The final sentence of the paragraph, which asserts that "each of you is a walking tribute to the divine proportion," is an inversion of the very foundation of the Pythagorean cosmology that gave birth to the divine proportion. The divine proportion is rather a tribute to the plan of the universe, which is evident in proportion and expressed in ratio.

Brown's inversion of the Pythagorean cosmology at the root of the divine proportion only initiates a series of perfidies in his text. First, Brown stands the cosmology on its head for the sake of a conspiracy theory which underlies his plot. This conspiracy, in turn, betrays the Republican ideals at the root of the divine proportion, and the history of republican democracy, in order to assert Brown's claim that the royal

offspring of Christ and Mary Magdalene, founders of the Merovingian dynasty, are the rightful rulers of the kingdom of humankind.

Sophie could now see the title of the family tree.

#### THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN

"Mary Magdalene is here," Teabing said, pointing near the top of the genealogy.

Sophie was surprised. "She was of the House of Benjamin?"

"Indeed," Teabing said. "Mary Magdalene was of royal descent."

"But I was under the impression Magdalene was poor."

Teabing shook his head. "Magdalene was recast as a whore in order to erase evidence of her powerful family ties."

Sophie found her self again glancing at Langdon, who again nodded. She turned back to Teabing. "But why would the early Church care if Magdalene had royal blood?"

The Briton smiled. "My dear child, it was not Mary Magdalene's royal blood that concerned the Church so much as it was her consorting with Christ, who also had royal blood. As you know, the Book of Matthew tells us that Jesus was of the House of David. A descendant of King Solomon - King of the Jews. By marrying into the powerful House of Benjamin, Jesus fused two royal bloodlines, creating a potent political union with the potential of making a legitimate claim to the throne and restoring the line of kings as it was under Solomon."

Sophie sensed that he was at last coming to his point.

Teabing looked excited now. "The legend of the Holy Grail is a legend of royal blood. When 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."

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Brown uses the democratic, egalitarian ideals of Pythagoreanism to attack the imperial Roman Catholic Church, but on the grounds that the Church has usurped the true heir of Heaven's empire. Certainly the Roman Catholic Church is imperial, and a vestige of the Roman Empire, and certainly the relationship between Christ and Mary of Magdala, along with the egalitarianism of the earliest days of the Church, has doubtless been repressed by imperial control. However, Brown betrays the ideals that made early Christianity revolutionary, the ideals of republicanism, democracy, egalitarianism,



syncretism, and the practice of aesthetics itself, in favor of the ultimate monarchy of Heaven. There is nothing more imperial after all, than the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, no emperor more absolute, no matter how benevolent.

Perhaps we should not be surprised at the notion of a divine monarch in The Da Vinci Code, as it is, after all, a grail legend. The associations between the legendary King Arthur and the Holy Grail are rather clear, and Arthur is celebrated in Morte d'Arthur and other Arthurian tales as a benevolent monarch. Yet, benevolent or not, monarchy is an exclusive, elitist, and imperialist form of government, founded on the supposedly "natural" chain of being. The celebration of the benevolent monarch at work in Brown's text turns on a political rejection of the proportional grammar of the universe that the Pythagoreans celebrated at the heart of their cosmology. As we demonstrated in our first chapter, Pythagoras and his followers held the divine proportion to be the grammar of God, and evidence of God's plan. The divine proportion is the root of Plato's Republic, and thus the root of republican democracy. A monarchy, no matter how altruistic, is in essence out of harmony with this grammar, and thus cannot be a representation of God's will on earth. The two systems are fundamentally incompatible.

Unlike the fate-based chain of being, wherein evidence of God's will is found in the existence of the monarchy itself, Pythagoras' cosmology has less to do with determining God's will than it does with ascertaining evidence that such a will exists. Essentially, the "truth" for Pythagoreanism lies in the individual's ability to interpret the latent meaning of the code of the divine. The crux of republicanism is the right of the individual to interpret and decide for him or herself. Atwood's metaphor of the golden mean as the soul of republicanism in American democracy asserts a theory of the method

of government that is both by and from the golden ratio. Finding a balance between opposing extremes is the basis of republican democracy, just as locating a balance between two opposing measurements in a human being is the role of the golden ratio. Decoding the aesthetics of the golden ratio is a method aimed at reading and creating balance, which may have implications, but does not have exactitudes.

Yet, Brown passes off an aesthetic reading as an absolute truth. Such a practice effectively forsakes aesthetic principles, particularly the Pythagorean principles found in the golden ratio. For Brown's "symbolologist" protagonist Langdon never explains the vital requirement for the interpretation of his symbols: historical context. Instead, Brown's central characters, Langdon, Sophie, and Teabing translate visual artifacts into political and historical "facts". The crucial reading of a visual work, in Brown's novel, is da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, presented it as a work without any other interpretation, aside from the dynastic one; the "memory of divinity" slips from a memory of balance and proportion, in art as in life, to a memory of power over the body politic.

Time and again, Brown supplies accurate descriptions of artworks, but pairs them with imprecise, political interpretations that, while not in themselves concrete, are passed off as such. As we demonstrated in our first chapter, the divine proportion found its way back into use in Western art in part through the interdisciplinary pedagogy of the art schools of Renaissance Italy. da Vinci himself illustrated and co-wrote De Divina Proportione, the first ever book-length treatise on the divine proportion. In De Divina Proportione, da Vinci and Pacioli challenge the cultural beatification of images over print, arguing against our feeling that images are somehow more "real" than the print-symbols on a page. Figures on the page are themselves extreme stylizations of images,

which paintings, photographs, etc, are representations of and thus are just as valid. da Vinci underscores the relationship of typographic symbols to the images they represent by rendering an entire typographic alphabet in De Divina Proportione, in divine proportion. Brown, however, follows the history of the divine proportion in a somewhat cursory manner, to arrive as we do, at da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, and its crucial compositional aesthetics.

Brown's manipulative reading of the compositional aesthetics of all the visual art found in The Da Vinci Code, from *The Last Supper* to the Cathedral of Notre Dame, down to the very typography of the letters of his text, ironically denies the history upon which these works are founded, in favor of a monoglossic, monarchist interpretation. Iamblichus, da Vinci and other artisans of the divine proportion remind us that the proportion is the reliquary of polyvocality, ambiguity, and freedom. For Brown, "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty", only when "beauty" signifies the resurrection of the feudal system through the royal bloodline of incarnate deity. For republican proponents of the divine proportion, 'Beauty' and 'Truth' more properly signify intelligible ratios for liberty, choice, creation, and change. Brown chooses to read *The Last Supper* as a monarchist icon, when the reality appears to be profoundly opposed to this reading. *The Last Supper* likely does contain a "da Vinci code" of sorts, and its exploration does indeed shake the foundations of orthodoxy in the Church. We have already demonstrated in our first chapter the very real possibility that da Vinci has represented Thomas, whose apocryphal gospel is contentious to current Church doctrine, if not Mary Magdalene at the right hand of Christ. Either possibility is ripe with significance.

da Vinci's planning sketches clearly show Christ to be a literal instance of the divine proportion between the figure of Peter on Christ's left, and the androgynous figure on his right, which is rather fitting, given Christ's role among his disciples (recall figures 14 and 15). Neither we, nor Brown, dispute claims that da Vinci was aware of the divine proportion, nor the belief that he employed it in his art<sup>19</sup>. After all, it is through the divine proportion that Brown lays claim to a hidden truth in Mary Magdalene's role. The novel's murder victim Saunière arranges himself in a visual allusion to da Vinci's Vitruvian man – the most famous representation of the divine proportion-- and then uses the Fibonacci sequence to communicate with his niece Sophie, who becomes the heroine of the novel, from beyond the grave. Brown's plot uses the divine proportion as a code to communicate his theme. As various explanations of the divine proportion and divine proportion theory are interpreted and applied, Langdon and Sophie begin to unravel the conspiracy that Brown claims is afoot. Through da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, Fibonacci, and the divine proportion, we are brought to the "proper" interpretation of *The Last Supper*.

Langdon smiled. "As it turns out, the Holy Grail *does* make an appearance in *The Last Supper*. Leonardo included her prominently."

"Hold on," Sophie said. "You told me the Holy Grail is a *woman*. *The Last Supper* is a painting of thirteen men."

"Is it?" Teabing arched his eyebrows. "Take a closer look..."

...Sophie examined the figure to Jesus' immediate right, focusing in. As she studied the person's face and body, a wave of astonishment rose within her. The individual had flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and a hint of a bosom. It was without a doubt...female.

... "That, my dear," Teabing replied, "is Mary Magdalene."

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<sup>19</sup> Several writers on the divine proportion, Mario Livio being the best example, claim either that da Vinci had no knowledge of the divine proportion, or that da Vinci only gained such knowledge after working with Pacioli, merely as an illustrator, on *De Divina Proportione*. The historical evidence does not support such claims. (See chapter 1).

Of course, Brown's symbologist Langdon does not suggest the possibility of another reading of the figure in the painting. Such an inclusion would be detrimental to the establishment of the conspiracy theory central to the plot of The Da Vinci Code. Brown tries nonetheless to cover himself by not claiming that the artworks speak for themselves.

In The Da Vinci Hoax, touted by Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago as “the definitive debunking”, Carl E. Olson and Sandra Miesel take the position that the artworks speak the truth of orthodoxy as determined by tradition and extra-textual evidence. They identify the feminine figure in the painting as the disciple John, citing “a parish church of Ponte Capriasca near Lake Lugano [which] contains a mid-sixteenth century fresco copy of *The Last Supper*. On that fresco are the names of the apostles left to right” (269). Interpreting the identity of figures in this painting by da Vinci through the naming of these figures in a later copy of *The Last Supper* by a different artist, found in a different room, in a different city in Italy is itself problematic. Their further contention that this grouping is a composition of the trinity of characters who play significant roles in the Passion is repeated several times, in an equally problematic assertion of orthodoxy:

“The grouping of John, Judas and Peter is purposeful.’ The group [of three] at Christ’s right, John, Judas and Peter”, [art critic Leo] Steinberg points out, “clusters the three who are destined for roles in the Passion.’ Judas betrays Jesus, Peter denies Jesus, and John- ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) - was the only apostle<sup>20</sup> to stand at Jesus’ Cross (Jn 19:26-27).

Steinberg finds other "significant pairs" in the painting, including Peter and John, and Jesus and John. Accordingly these two apostles frame Judas, the traitor, who, Steinberg contends, personifies greed and disloyalty. While Jesus and John are depicted as being apart from each other, their mirrored

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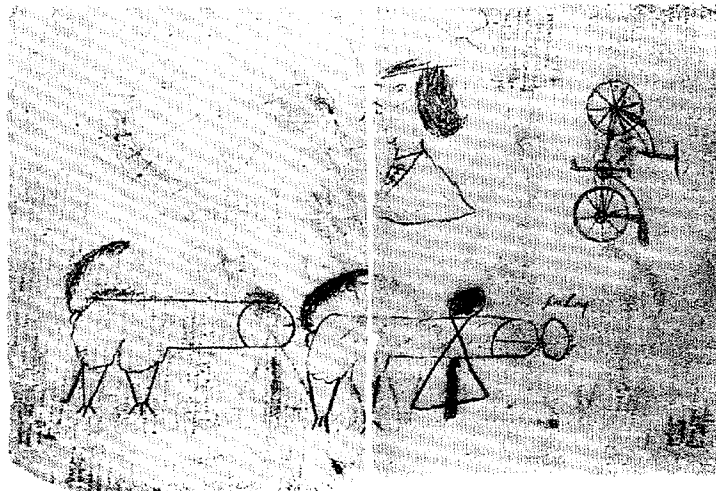
<sup>20</sup> Despite their citation of verses, Olson and Miesel are wrong. No apostles stand by Christ on the Cross, as the Church’s definition of an Apostle is one of the select group who experienced the risen Christ, and then went forth to proclaim the “Good News”. John the disciple most certainly stands by Christ during the crucifixion, but until Christ has risen, no Apostles exist as such.

images indicate that they are “soul mates... matched in outline, in [original] hue of garment and tilt of head”.

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While Olson and Miesel agree that “the figure [to Christ's right] is undoubtedly effeminate, as Leonardo depicted the youthful John in the early fifteenth-century Florentine style,” they are keen to identify the youth in the painting according to the style of other paintings in the same era. This approach can be taken to other paintings of the period, including Leonardo's own *St John the Baptist* (ca. 1413-1416) which depicts a “young man who is quite effeminate in appearance and who also has flowing hair and delicate hands” (269-70).

This same interpretation of effeminate males in da Vinci's work appears in Tony Robinson's History Television special "The Real da Vinci Code". Art historian Charles Nicholl,



**Figure 30 - Full page of the now-famous "bicycle" sketch from the Windsor Collection, with pornography.**

curator of *The Last Supper*, claims not only that da Vinci painted John the Baptist as an androgynous figure, but that da Vinci did so because of his homosexuality. There is certainly evidence of da Vinci's playful depictions of sexually-aroused males, as his notebooks are covered with his pornographic drawings of erections - most notably the famed "bicycle sketch" of the Windsor Collection



**Figure 31- Pompeian Priapic Fresco, common in upper-class Roman homes.**

which may have in fact resulted in the sketch, depicting the first known image of the bicycle, being hid from public view for so long. Other works by da Vinci include a depiction of a golden-tressed angel, sporting a lewd grin above an enormous erection. Neither the History Television special, nor The Da Vinci Hoax, nor Brown touches on da Vinci's depiction of erections, since erections are not likely fodder for primetime television, anymore than for a book from the Ignatius Press or a New York Times "Best Seller".

The only reported incident of

homosexuality in da Vinci studies is an anonymous accusation in 1476, in which

"Leonardo [along] with all the pupils of Verrocchio is accused anonymously of sodomy. The accusation is not proved and all are declared not guilty" (Reti, 13). This accusation of sodomy, while echoing accusations leveled at the Knights Templar by Phillip the Fair (see chapter 1), was never proven, but has been confused with da Vinci's depictions of androgynous figures sporting enormous erections. Modern critics, unaware of the styles of non-Christianized Roman art, misread such figures as evidence of da Vinci's

homosexuality. In emulating Vitruvius and other Roman artists, however, da Vinci may have simply echoed pagan celebrations in Roman art of priapic forces. Even if da Vinci were demonstrating his own sexual predilections in his depiction of John the Baptist, and this depiction were echoed in *The Last Supper*, clearly such a move would contradict Church doctrine regarding homosexuality, thus problematizing *The Last Supper* as an orthodox depiction of the relationships of Christ in the company of his disciples.

Bolstering the orthodox position are the biblical passages cited by Olson and Miesel in which the disciple John is indeed identified as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”<sup>21</sup>. One cannot expect them to entertain this possibility however, in the context of a contemporary culture where “(t)he 'sexual revolution' is the single most formidable dividing line between the culture and serious Christians. But if religion is a human invention, there cannot be an objective moral law, and all things are permitted. In an often unrecognized way the passion that drives debates about *The Da Vinci Code* has more to do with abortion and homosexuality than it does with the origins of Christianity” (15). Aside from the obvious fallacy that an objective moral law cannot be of human origin, the political ideology in their criticism is not only reactionary; it plays straight into Brown's hands.

Brown's characters claim that the Church suppressed Mary Magdalene's relationship with Christ in part because it contravenes doctrine on sexual morality. Women are dangerous because of their sexuality. Sexual shame and virginity are

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<sup>21</sup> Olson, Miesel and other critics object to Brown's use of the apocryphal Gospels of Thomas and Mary for his misinterpretation of the passage that “Christ loved Mary Magdalene more than the rest and used to kiss her often on the mouth,” based, these critics claim, on a flawed translation of these non-canonical texts. While denying Brown's interpretation, they endorse it by proxy, highlighting the “special relationship” between Christ and John, as evidence of John's pre-eminence. Like many of the arguments that Miesel and Olson make, they would like to have it both ways, claiming at once that both literal and non-literal translations of Gospel are appropriate.



certainly the polar opposites of orthodoxy, and orthodox opposition to women's ordination is founded on ancient notions of the "sin" of Eve. As we touched on in our first chapter, Mary Magdalene was herself recast by the Church, from the role of the first apostle to that of the repentant whore, a true heir of Eve.<sup>22</sup>

Much of the current research, which redefines the historical role of Mary of Magdala, concentrates on the confusion surrounding her identity. As Hinsdale demonstrates, Mary of Magdala is not to be confused with Mary, Christ's mother, Martha, Mary the sister of Lazarus, or the woman from Christ's famous sermon, "Let he who is without sin, cast the first stone," from the Gospel of John. According to Hinsdale and others, Mary of Magdala was a wealthy, older woman, who followed Christ on his mission, ministering to him. Hinsdale and Haskins both claim that much of the practical funding of Christ's ministry came from Mary of Magdala's wealth. This is the same woman from whom Christ is thought to have cast out seven devils, and who became the first Apostle. Clearly, the apostle Paul must have known about Mary of Magdala, yet he omits her from his own account of the resurrection. And the canonical gospels, while demonstrating Mary of Magdala's role in the resurrection, offer little in the way of explanation for the omission in Church practice of the celebration of her as the first Apostle. When we turn to the non-canonical gospels, however, we find the record of a great power struggle between Peter, the first Pope, and Mary of Magdala. Brown references the Nag Hammadi Codices in The Da Vinci Code; however, he only makes a cursory analysis of the Codices, does not address the complexities of Gnosticism, and

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<sup>22</sup> Much was made in the West of the Eastern Church's depictions of Mary Magdalene in red clothing, so much so that the color red became synonymous with symbolizing adultery. Again, schisms founded in art worked their way into the political sphere, mirroring the divisions of political power between East and West.

only addresses passages that appear to directly support his characters' analyses, all of which lead his characters to monarchy.

Unfortunately, Brown's translation also appears to be poor. Despite the tremendous historical impact of the Nag Hammadi Codices, as well as the importance of the Codices to his text, Brown relies on a seemingly non-academic edition, which, unlike modern, monarchist works such as The Templar Revelations: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ, The Woman with the Alabaster Jar, and The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine (263), is not cited. Also, Brown does not include images<sup>23</sup> of the actual collection of the Nag Hammadi Codices in his The Da Vinci Code: Special Illustrated Edition, strangely omitting images of the rarest and least-known works which appear in his novel. In a visual sleight-of-hand, Brown does include an image of one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (*xii*), without ever making reference to it as such, thus suggesting to his reader that the Nag Hammadi Codices make a visual appearance in The Da Vinci Code: Special Illustrated Edition, when in fact they do not. This visual bait-and-switch is part of the process of conflation that Brown undertakes in the design of the visual form of his novel, echoing our discussions above of the slippage of meaning via his diction, and seen later in his reading, *vis-à-vis* his characters, of monarchism in *The Last Supper*.

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<sup>23</sup> The Nag Hammadi Codices collection is actually a series of photographic negatives, collected by The Jungian Institute. Given its age and incredible historic, theological and cultural value, unsurprisingly, the codices were broken into parts, and auctioned off. The Jungian Institute tracked down the various collectors and obtained permission to photograph the scrolls. Once collected and collated, the Jungian Institute gave up the academic copyright, and made these negatives accessible to any academic institution that desired them. The translation employed in this inquiry is the first sanctioned, organized, and printed by the Jungian Institute.

In addition to their historical value, what makes the Nag Hammadi Codices so valuable is the completeness of one of the earliest non-canonical gospels, the Gospel of Thomas. There is still debate about the dating of many of the gospels, both canonical and non-canonical. While writers on early church history often disagree about which gospel fits where historically, what they do agree upon is that, at first, many of the tales of Christ's exploits were circulated in oral form, endlessly told and retold. Various versions of testaments were recorded around the time of the end of the first century CE, with various revisions taking place for the next two-and-a-half to three centuries. Given its design, a collection of sayings of Christ, recorded without accompanying information on dates, times and locations, the Gospel of Thomas is particularly difficult to date precisely. However, given its difference from other, more "Gnostic"-leaning texts, and its similarity in depicting the language of Christ and his followers, it is possible that the Gospel of Thomas is, according to Nag Hammadi researcher Elaine Pagels and supported by many others, the earliest account of Christ's teachings recorded in writing. "Codex II from Nag Hammadi, which contains the Gospel of Thomas, is dated about 400. It can, however, be demonstrated, that the manuscript had a significantly older Coptic *Vorlage*" (Blatz, 110). Already, in 233 CE, Origen mentions the Gospel of Thomas, alongside the apocryphal Gospel of Matthias, in his first homily on the orthodox Gospel of Luke (109).

Yet another part of the controversy surrounding the Gospel of Thomas is that, apart from a rather brief mention in the writings of Hippolytus<sup>24</sup>, who died in 236 CE, it remained essentially unknown until its discovery at Nag Hammadi. Earlier Christian Presbyters recorded other Gnostic texts in writings denouncing them. Even the Gnostic

“heretical” text, the Pstis Sophia, which has been in known existence from the second century CE, and attributed (albeit somewhat doubtfully) to Valentius, points to the Gospel of Thomas as an example of the special wisdom of Christ.

The controversial passages in the Gospel of Thomas on the role of Mary Magdalene, and indeed the most controversial passages in the entire Gospel center on one particular saying: “Simon Peter said to them: Let Mariham (Mary) go out from among us, for women are not worthy of the life. Jesus said: Look, I will lead her that I may make her male, in order that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter into the kingdom of heaven” (129). As Haskins remarks in her notes on the passage: “The transformation is to be effected by mutual elimination of sexual characteristics, rather than the hermaphroditic manifestation of features similar to Paul in Gal 3:27-8. Sexual transformation also featured in Ovid, Plato, and Egyptian mythology” (410). Again, Brown’s characters do not address the trans-gender implications of the Gospel of Thomas, nor Haskins’ reading which ties it directly to other ancient traditions. Apart from Egyptian mythology, which passionately supported the theocratic monarchy at the centre of the upper and lower kingdoms, Plato’s Republic, and Ovid’s Metamorphoses, two of the works that Haskins compares directly to the Gospel of Thomas in terms of sexual transformation, are both profoundly republican texts. Ovid’s Metamorphoses is an undercutting of the entire Elysian mysteries (the same type of meta-irony employed later in the Italian Renaissance by da Vinci to undercut orthodoxy), employing ironic gender-transformation to undercut the presumed eternalism of the imperial Roman tradition that Ovid was supposed to deify.

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<sup>24</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia describes Hippolytus as a martyr, presbyter, and anti-pope. Although written on by Eusebius, and even sainted, Hippolytus himself appears a controversial figure, and as such, is often

Haskins' comparisons of the Gospel of Thomas to Ovid point to an undercutting of imperial, monarchist ideology through the aesthetic design of text, a strategy we will find time and again in da Vinci, and echoed in other apocryphal gospels.

Other Nag Hammadi texts, including the Gospel of Mary and the Pstis Sophia, feature similar attacks on Mary Magdalene by Simon Peter: "My Lord, we are not able to bear with this woman, saying instead of us; and she lets not any of us speak, but she is speaking many times" (42). Mary Magdalene herself resists Simon Peter's attitude towards her, saying, "he is wont to threaten me, and he hateth our sex" (42). These Nag Hammadi texts establish a clear "turf war" for Christ's approval and affection in days following the resurrection, setting at odds Mary Magdalene, the first Apostle, and Simon Peter, the first disciple. Yet, when we read Christ's proposed equality between man and woman in the Gospel of Thomas, we find a doctrine of equality between the sexes through the teachings of Christ. The metaphor, "I will make her male," speaks volumes about the abilities of women to fulfill the life of an apostle through the practice of Christ's teachings.

Some current Christian scholars classify this assertion in the Gospel of Thomas that Mary Magdalene is the equal of her male apostolic counterparts, as Gnosticism simply raising its head in an otherwise Christian testament. Yet, writers on Gnosticism like Burkett and Haskins point out time and again that many Gnostic sects were not in fact egalitarian. Brown, in his characters' claims for Gnosticism's support for the dynastic role of Mary Magdalene, ignores this reality. For many Gnostics, women were evil. Furthermore, Christ, in the tract from the Gospel of Thomas quoted above, speaks of Mary Magdalene in the future tense; he "will" make her male, thus authorizing her place

in the timeline in which he is speaking as her disciple. If women were evil, there is no reason for the heroine of the Pstis Sophia, to be female. Furthermore, given that Gnosticism is collectively organized by scholars as a group of early Christian-like sects that hold wisdom to be the highest of all human ideals, it makes little sense for the Coptic word for Wisdom, *sophia*, to be female.

Even today, conservative elements in the Church find the notion of women's equality distasteful, just as Simon Peter, according to these gospels, despises Mary Magdalene's role. Yet, it is another Nag Hammadi codex, the Gospel of Philip, which provides the most inflammatory claims about the relationship between Mary of Magdala and Christ:

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 Savior answered and said to them, 'Why do I not love you like her?'  
(NTA-194)

This passage from the Gospel of Philip does find its way, in part, into The Da Vinci Code: Special Illustrated Edition. Teabing hands Sophie a copy of the text, and the portion she reads appears in The Da Vinci Code, in italics. Brown's characters concentrate on an additional line – again the subject of poor translation - which reads: "And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene" (Brown, 256). Teabing then applies this problematic translation, without any indication of difficulty, to his reading of a marital relationship between Christ and Mary Magdalene:

"Au contraire." Teabing smiled, pointing to the first line. "As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant spouse".  
(256)

Despite his confidence in his Aramaic, Teabing's assertions to Sophie, which in turn act as affirmations to Brown's reader of Teabing's interpretation, are not echoed by Aramaic scholars, who point to Aramaic as an interpretive language, based primarily in context. Haskins herself juxtaposes several readings of "companion", moving from a reading of one who supports Christ in his ministry (which disputes orthodox positioning of Mary Magdalene as a whore), to the possibility of a sexual relationship, to the possibility of a marriage. Unlike Teabing, Haskins, Pagels and other scholars shy away from applying definite certainty to Aramaic nouns outside of context.

Interestingly, while many contextualize, and then dismiss the Gospel of Philip as a Gnostic heresy perpetrated by Valentinus in Rome ca. 138-158 CE, Hans-Martin Schenke asserts that, "This is, on one hand, non-Valentinian material, whether it was collected from common Christian tradition or literature, or through Valentinian channels, and on the other, views and practices in which the Valentinians were no different from the developing Great Church. The Gospel of Philip is of particular importance in this perspective for the transmission and the use of sayings of the Lord, for discourse in similes and parables, and generally as a witness to the catechetical tradition and practice of early Christianity" (Schenke, 186).

While Schenke's explanation of the importance of the Gospel of Philip may not persuade those convinced of its Valentinian origin, or of its heterodoxy, the Gospel of Mary, dated in Greek<sup>25</sup> to the third century CE, reflects Mary of Magdalene's unique relationship with Christ, and locates her among the disciples as found in the Gospel of

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<sup>25</sup> Precise dating of these early, apocryphal works, while still the focus of intense debate, is still difficult as many of the early Biblical writings first appeared in Hebrew, Coptic Vorlage, or the area dialect of its particular writer's home, and were then translated into Greek, and then into Latin. Generally, texts that only

Thomas, the Pstis Sophia, the Gospel of Philip, and the four Canonical Gospels. Simon Peter again berates Mary of Magdalene, openly accusing her of lying to the other disciples about the unique lessons Christ has taught her. As she weeps, Levi comes to her aid:

Levi answered and said to Peter: "Peter you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us. Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect man and acquire him for ourselves as he commanded us, and preach the gospel."

(Mary: 18:6-18)

Whether or not Levi's reference to Christ loving Mary of Magdala more than the others is about sex, about the faith wisdom imparted in Pstis Sophia, or about his appearing to her before the other disciples, what is clear is that there is a division of power among the disciples. They do not present a unified front, and there is intense discussion about the rights and privileges accorded to Mary Magdalene because of her sex.

It is precisely this division that occupies the Episcopal declarations of heresy among the Gnostics that run right up to the unification of the one Great Church at the Council of Nicea under Constantine. Despite historical evidence for Brown's characters' assertions of the ecumenical role Mary Magdalene played in the Christ story, the novel does not explore the Gospel of Mary, claiming instead "I daresay, Peter was something of a sexist" (259). Indeed, Levi's defense of Mary Magdalene would weaken Brown's claims for a royal dynasty. Instead, Brown has Teabing make the case for Mary of Magdalene as the rightful heir to the throne of Peter, claiming: "According to these unaltered Gospels, it was not *Peter*, to whom Christ gave directions with which to

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exist in Greek are held to be at least a century older than the dated Greek version. The same rules are held true for the Canonical gospels.



establish the Christian Church. It was *Mary Magdalene*”(256). No such direction can be found anywhere in the Gospel of Mary. To be far more precise, while Christ does impart “special wisdom” to Mary Magdalene, which is recorded in the Gnostic Gospels, this wisdom concerns charity, humility, equality and love. Brown’s glossing of the contents of the Gospel of Mary is evidently meant to hide this contradiction.

If Brown’s characters do not seem to be informed about the history of the Church’s treatment of Mary Magdalene, neither do they recall the moralistic policing of human sexuality that Constantine undertook after his conversion (see chapter 1). Despite evidence supporting Brown’s characters’ assertions of a conspiracy to stigmatize Mary Magdalene, and by extension, an active, equal, female partner in the life of Christ, the novel relies instead on Teabing’s assertions about a royal bloodline that could restore the throne of David. Brown’s critics, on the other hand, shy away from revanchist claims associated with the heirs of Mary Magdalene and her divine spouse, since the throne of Peter would then be put in obvious dispute. Better, it would seem, to stigmatize a woman’s fitness to be an Apostle, than to stigmatize the institution of monarchy or empire itself.

To Browns’ critics, the best defense is a strong offense. “*The Da Vinci Code* challenges beliefs that are central to Christianity,” Oslon and Miesel write, “the celibacy and divinity of Jesus, the place of the apostles, and the purpose of the Church” (23). After claiming, however, to undertake a criticism of The Da Vinci Code, in which “we want to examine The Da Vinci Code carefully and with fairness, relying on available scholarship-Christian and non-Christian- and sound thinking” (19), they attack all non-Christian scholarship. The trouble with Brown, they suggest, is that he “has a strong belief in a

variety of feminist notions about God. His novel is obsessed with radical feminist notions of the 'sacred feminine' and ancient goddess worship, all served up in a syrupy, breathless fashion reminiscent of romance novels. The major theme of Brown's novel is the call for a recovery of the 'sacred feminine'"....(23-34) They write him off, with some justice, as an atavistic proponent of the cult of the Great Goddess, or as a throwback to the Eleusinian Mysteries. At the same time, they seek to confuse those ancient mystery cults with contemporary "radical feminist notions"<sup>26</sup>. Associating Brown's style with the 'clearly' unserious style of popular romance novels<sup>27</sup>, they play the trump card of social hierarchy, resituating the novel, along with "radical feminism," at the bottom of the social ladder, beside the other "dregs" of popular culture

Given The Da Vinci Code's record-breaking sales, and thus its enormous appeal in popular culture, academic critics have been as loath as orthodox critics to engage the novel on its own terms. Any novel that appears as straightforward as The Da Vinci Code must be, it seems, without critical complexity. Unfortunately, this reluctance to engage the novel on the level of scholarly criticism has left the field open to reactionary criticism from the political right, but not from the political left.

The narrative of The Da Vinci Code is essentially a series of intertwined plots culminating in Langdon's discovery, at the end of the novel, of the final resting place of the Holy Grail. However, the narrative is constructed in such a fashion that it is difficult

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<sup>26</sup> Rigorous scholarship on the place of the sacred feminine in Renaissance pagan iconography by Wind, Haskins, Pagels, and others, for example, is far from the buzz-word imagery summoned by the phrase "radical feminist notions".

<sup>27</sup> While claiming to be willing to rely on "recent scholarship, both Christian and Non-Christian", Olson and Miesel use the romance novel as an indication of inferiority, despite the wide scholarship on popular culture, and the research of Muller, Anandale and others into genres of popular literature, including horror, science fiction and most extensively, romance.

to unravel the climactic points of each of these interwoven plots, and thus a challenge for those not performing a close reading to separate one sub-plot from the other.

Each sub-plot in The Da Vinci Code is marked by a chapter division highlighting the character focus of that part of the narrative, creating a sense of multiple events which occur in the same moment, and a clear chronology when one event is followed by the next. The narrative really begins before chapter one, in the Prologue. Essential to the plot, this prologue tells of the death of Jacques Saunière in the Louvre at the hands of Silas the albino monk. After questioning him at gunpoint about the location of an untold object, Silas shoots Saunière in the abdomen and leaves him for dead. Saunière realizes that he is going to die, and takes the last agonizing minutes of his life to arrange himself in such a manner that it will send the proper code to the proper persons (namely the protagonist Robert Langdon, and Saunière's niece Sophie) to unravel the secret location of the holy grail.

The next several chapters introduce the other major characters, and emplot them in the narrative. Each of these characters is separated by geographical location, and each scene brings the characters closer and closer together. The code Saunière has left behind for the French Judicial Police to find, leads to Langdon's summons by Fache, the dogmatic Catholic police sergeant in chapter one, although he meets Fache only at the end of chapter three. Sophie does not enter the plot until chapter nine. This delay in assembling his characters gives Brown time to introduce, the foundation of his thesis<sup>28</sup> that, as Langdon puts it, reveals da Vinci's duplicity:

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<sup>28</sup> As we have shown, however, da Vinci painted themes more in line with heterodox Christianity rather than beliefs that were "anything but Christian" (50). Langdon's history of da Vinci at this point of the narrative is problematic in its convenient reading of the historical facts of da Vinci's life (declarations of flamboyant homosexuality are but one example of such readings that we will examine later).

“Even Da Vinci’s enormous output of breathtaking Christian art only furthered the artist’s reputation for spiritual hypocrisy. Accepting hundreds of lucrative Vatican commissions, Da Vinci painted Christian themes not as an expression of his own beliefs, but rather a commercial venture – a means of funding a lavish lifestyle. Unfortunately, Da Vinci was a prankster who often amused himself by quietly gnawing at the hand that fed him. He incorporated in many of his Christian paintings hidden symbolism that was anything but Christian – tributes to his own beliefs and a subtle thumbing of his nose at the Church.”

(50)

Sophie, at her introduction, properly deciphers the code Saunière has left for her, revealing to Langdon, but not to Fache, that Saunière is her estranged grandfather.

Convinced that Fache is going to try to pin Saunière’s murder on Langdon through his misreading of the message Saunière has left behind, Sophie helps Langdon to escape the Louvre, and together they begin to unravel the series of clues left by Saunière and his compatriots in the secret Priory of Sion, of which Saunière was the Grand Master, in order to disclose the “true” place of Mary Magdalene in Christianity, and the location of the holy grail.

During the geographical cut-aways between each of these character introductions, we are introduced in turn to Opus Dei, to Silas’s on-going attempts to locate the Grail for Archbishop Aringosa, the head of Opus Dei, and to Silas’s murder of a Catholic nun. We are also introduced to a seeming conspiracy between senior Vatican officials and Aringosa to recover the grail for the Catholic Church. The Vatican officials provide Aringosa with several million dollars with which to purchase the grail. We are also introduced, via Silas, to the mysterious figure of “the Teacher”, who appears not only to give orders to Aringosa, but to Silas as well. Through Silas’s sub-plot we are introduced to several of the more controversial claims about corporeal mortification by some members of Opus Dei. While introducing the Opus Dei organization, and describing

some of the darker sides of the practices of some of its members, Brown appears to paint Opus Dei as a cult of fanatical murderers.

As Langdon and Sophie race across the French countryside, attempting to outrun the French Judicial Police and recover the Holy Grail, they eventually require the shelter and services of one of Langdon's "academic" contacts, Sir Leigh Teabing. Teabing is a Grail historian and, in the design of the plot, an expert on as many aspects of Church history as Langdon. Teabing provides much of the information that has roused the ire of Brown's orthodox critics. Indeed, this character's assertions are particularly inflammatory, but, as we will see, ultimately are not entirely supported by the emplotment of the narrative. Additionally, we find a partnership emerging between Aringosa and Fache, a murderous conspiracy at work to uncover the location of the Grail, the "true" history of Sophie's family as royal heirs of Christ and Mary Magdalene, and the resting place of the Holy Grail.

These intertwined sub-plots have caused some confusion on the part of Brown's Christian critics, who read all of the characters' assertions and actions as being Brown's own views. The climactic points in the narrative, however, all point to Langdon's plotline, and to no other, as Brown's "truth". The other major characters in The Da Vinci Code disappear from the narrative at the end of their particular climaxes, taking with them any potential endorsement of Grail history. When Saunière is removed from the text, he does leave behind the code to be solved. But the various sub-plots, which encode, in turn, various answers and complications for the protagonist<sup>29</sup>, are resolved and

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<sup>29</sup> Each of these subplots follows literary convention. There is the "Opus Dei complicity plot", the "romance plot", and the "murder mystery plot". Each of these plots comes to resolution only through the disappearance of the character central to that particular plot. .

dismissed one by one, until only Langdon remains with his “answer” at the end of the novel.

One of these plots thus problematizes, by means of a fallible explicator, many of the accusations Christian critics hurl at the novel. The fallible narrative is supplied by Teabing, who at the end of the “murder mystery plot” is revealed as “the Teacher”, the one who is in fact responsible for an alleged conspiracy in the novel. Teabing arranges for the deaths of all of the senior members of the Priory of Sion, for the manipulation and appropriation of members of the Opus Dei prelature, and for the betrayal of Langdon and Sophie, while threatening them with death. Given that readers are aligned with Sophie and Langdon, Teabing’s efforts to get his hands on the Holy Grail by means of lies, manipulation and murder, can easily result in his misleading some readers who bristle at his assertion that “the early Church needed to convince the world that the mortal prophet Jesus was a *divine* being” (253). Indeed, some critics confuse the “heretic” Teabing with the heretical Dan Brown.

Rarely are authors of historical fiction held to the same level of accountability as Brown seems to be held to by his critics. The majority of “debunkings” and exposures of a so-called “da Vinci hoax” mistake the assertions of the villain of novel for those of the author. Read with more critical rigour, the novel not only shows Brown's hero as disputing many of the claims that Teabing makes, but also relieves Silas, Cardinal Aringarosa and Fache of complicity in the murder-mystery plot itself. Silas has been controlled by Teabing; Aringarosa has been struggling to protect the Church from Teabing's manipulations while recovering a lost icon. Even the openly dogmatic Catholic police captain Fache is a better reader of Teabing than many of Brown’s critics. “*Sure,*

Fache thought. *Insane*. Teabing had displayed ingenious precision in formulating a plan that protected his innocence at every turn. He had exploited both the Vatican and Opus Dei, two groups that turned out to be completely innocent” (427).

Furthermore, Langdon defends the modern Catholic Church against Sophie's accusations of the ongoing suppression of the role of Mary Magdalene. “No one is more indoctrinated”, Langdon argues, “than the indoctrinators”. Additionally, Langdon himself is troubled by Teabing’s assertions that the Church is behind the murders of the Priory Grandmaster and his *senechaux*. “Langdon was having trouble buying Teabing’s premise that the Church would blatantly murder people to obtain [the Grail] documents. Having met the new Pope and many of the cardinals, Langdon knew they were deeply spiritual men who would never condone assassination. *Regardless of the stakes*” (276). It is Sophie, in fact, who has to face her complicity in the murder that sets in motion the plot of The Da Vinci Code. Her revulsion at witnessing the intercourse of her grandfather and grandmother in a cultish setting is what drives a wedge between herself and Saunière, estranging him from his family<sup>30</sup>, and leaving him entirely alone. It is only after his murder that Sophie comes to realize the extent to which he has striven to protect her, and to give her the code-breaking tools which will restore her to her birthright. While the text celebrates Mary Magdalene, it does not exonerate Sophie in any simple way. Thus a legitimate criticism of The Da Vinci Code is that it re-introduces the sexism practiced by some Gnostic sects who held women to be inferior and thus incapable of achieving

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<sup>30</sup> At this point in The Da Vinci Code, Sophie is not yet aware that her grandfather was in fact, having sexual intercourse with his long estranged wife. After the suspicious deaths of Sophie’s parents, Saunière splits up the family, only reuniting them under protected, ritual circumstances, into which rather ironically, Sophie walks unannounced. The result of a childhood spent code breaking and puzzle solving, this event further complicates Sophie’s difficulty in interpreting her birthright.

*gnosis*<sup>31</sup>. Sophie's male grandfather has to sacrifice himself for both his and her redemption. No one else in the text must die in order to find redemption, not even Silas who performs the actual murders. Indeed, he too finds redemption before his death.

Brown's critics, however, while holding to ideals of balance and fairness, react with vehemence when Brown even suggests the possibility of Church complicity in the suppression of the apostolic role of Mary Magdalene, despite the contrary evidence of Canonical and apocryphal scripture. Olson and Miesel state that, "(a)s Christians, we believe that all truth ultimately comes from God, the Father of lights (Jas 1:17), his Son Jesus Christ, who is 'the way, the truth and the life' (Jn 14:6), and the Holy Spirit, who 'guides us into all truth' (Jn 16:13)". They employ scriptural references as the foundation of the "truth" they seek to expose in their text, yet ignore and dispute any scriptural hint of Mary Magdalene as the first apostle. Instead, Olson and Miesel accuse Brown of levying "a lengthy attack on the authority of the Catholic Church, followed by assertions of Mary (of Magdalene's) preeminent place in the Church, 'second only to Jesus, ranked above both male and female followers<sup>32</sup>" (81).

Unfortunately, there is clear historical evidence of papal fallibility on the question of Mary of Magdala. On September 21, 591 CE, Pope Gregory the Great, from whom we

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<sup>31</sup> The "catch-all" term "Gnostic" does little justice to the variety of beliefs and practices of various groups. Unfortunately, such terminology leads critics to discuss Gnostic groups as though they were in fact all alike, when, in reality, the role of females, was celebrated in some Gnostic sects, and maligned in others, while still others believed the ideal state of humanity was a fusion of the genders. We must not forget those groups that feminized *gnosis* itself, as *Sophia*, or "wisdom".

<sup>32</sup> Olson and Miesel actually attribute this particular quotation to Brown by proxy. It is found in Templar Revelations, which is mentioned in The Da Vinci Code, and which Olson and Miesel claim to be one of Brown's primary texts, along with Holy Blood, Holy Grail, The Woman with the Alabaster Jar and others. Implied in their argument is the idea that not only is Brown a heretic, but he is a plagiarist. We saw this same discrediting technique in Livio's accusations of Pacioli's work in De Divina Proportione (see chapter 1).



also have the “seven deadly sins,” preached a homily that recast the first apostle of Christ as a sexual sinner:

She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom the seven devils were ejected according to Mark. And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? ... It is clear, brothers, that the woman had previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts.

(82)

Current church doctrine, in the face of the unpopularity of exorcism and demonic possession – with which the seven devils cast from Mary Magdalene have also been identified -- redefines them as an expression for mental illness. Olson and Miesel thus seek to excuse Gregory's misreading of Scripture, claiming that “Gregory was not a biblical scholar; he was first and foremost a pastor of souls” (84). Gregory's authority as the Vicar of Christ is literally the Church's authority; and because of that allegedly infallible relationship between Pope and Church, this papal misinterpretation of Mary Magdalene was held as doctrine for fourteen hundred years, until 1969. While Brown does not refer to this problematic aspect of Church history in regards to Mary Magdalene, he is oddly accused of attacking the authority of the Church. Olson and Meisel thus unwittingly re-inscribe an imperial authority even as they browbeat the author for his “heretical” misinterpretation.

Given that orthodoxy is based on the intentional fallacy—da Vinci's supposed intent as the “author” of *The Last Supper*, and Brown's supposed intent as the author of a heresy – it seems reasonable to explore the full range of symbolic options in order to show how “authorial intent” is more often a metonym for “critical intent”. Here, for example, at the heart of Olson and Meisel's trinitarian reading of the compositional aesthetics of *The Last Supper*, there is a pre-Christian tradition of symbolism, which as

easily supports Brown's reading of da Vinci's encoded "intentions". Pythagoras, after all, celebrated the trinity as a union between masculine and feminine numbers, and thus the first numerical representation of the divine proportion as the product of two opposing energies, in this case, the masculine and the feminine.

As we saw in our second chapter, Wind and others have demonstrated that this essentially pagan "trinitarianism" found its way into the representations of the *Three Muses* in the Italian Renaissance, most notably in the *Three Graces* of Correggio, Donatello, Botticelli and others. And da Vinci's awareness of fifth century BCE statuary such as *Diophorous the Spear Bearer* and *Zeus*, -- with its careful modeling of the divine proportion in idealized human forms -- authorizes an interpretation that better accounts for the Pythagorean element in his visual composition. The intent of Brown's protagonist, Robert Langdon, is evidently to switch codes, from a manifest language of Christian orthodoxy to the hidden language of a secret society. While Brown's critics may be right to assume that his own intent is the same as his protagonist's intent -- to reclaim an ancient pagan territory lost to the rising power of the Holy See-- doubtless the intent of the critics themselves is to prevent Langdon's switching of symbolic codes that would imperil the authority of the throne of Peter.

What the defenders of orthodoxy miss, however, in their reading of the novelist's intent is a somewhat naïve substitution of a royal bloodline—the throne of David passed on through Christ to his descendants in the line of Mary Magdalene – for a spiritual throne, that of Peter. The critical struggle turns on the question of true heirs to the "one true King," rather than on the question of monarchy itself. A better ground on which to critique Brown's misreading of "the divine proportion" is the anti-monarchical,

republican ethos of Pythagoreanism. One could read da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, for instance, as a typically da Vincian statement, locating the ultimate image of republicanism in a work which the Church has used to bolster its claim of imperial power. Brown's betrayal, in other words, may not support the empire of Heaven, but the republic of earthly "beauty", of the "divine proportion" as it is expressed in social forms.

A liberal alternative to Church doctrine, as undertaken, for example, in Holy Blood, Holy Grail (1983), is just as vulnerable to "debunking" as The Da Vinci Code, but Brown has been careful to place responsibility for this "liberal" view in the mouth of an unreliable source, Teabing, who largely repeats the Donatist and Arian heresies of the early fourth century CE.

"(T)his was a secret the Vatican had tried to bury in the fourth century<sup>33</sup>. That's part of what the Crusades were about. Gathering and destroying information. The threat Mary Magdalene posed to the men of the early Church was potentially ruinous. Not only was she the woman whom Jesus had assigned the task of founding the Church, but she also had physical proof that the Church's newly proclaimed *deity* had spawned a mortal bloodline. The Church, in order to defend itself against the Magdalene's power, perpetuated her image as a whore and buried evidence of Christ's marriage to her, thereby defusing any potential claims that Christ had a surviving bloodline and was a mortal prophet."

(264)

In this speech, Teabing reasons in the same vein as we have seen in Barcelona, most notably in Ramon's supposition of America's own sinking of *The Maine* in 1898 by the United States as a pretext for the Spanish-American war. In his chronological leap from the fourth to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Teabing closes the gap between a

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<sup>33</sup> Miesel and Olson and others point out, rightly so, that Teabing's assertions that "the Vatican" had tried to bury any sort of conspiracy in the fourth century are ridiculous, given that the Vatican did not exist in the fourth century. Such mistakes in Teabing's history, however, are attributed to Brown rather than to his conspiring and fallible character. Teabing is attempting to manipulate Langdon and Sophie in this scene into believing that not only the French Judicial Police, but the entire Vatican, the ultimate authority over one billion Catholics, is out to get them, thus forcing them into Teabing's confidence and control. Such a

fact (the Crusades) and a falsehood (a fourth-century Vatican) to enact a logical slippage between historical events and conspiracy theories. The existence of some evidence for the suppression of Mary Magdalene's role in Church history turns into bold assertions of "a mortal bloodline" running from Christ and Mary Magdalene via their supposed offspring (a relation which is not even established in the Gnostic codices) down to the present heir of this "divine right". The intent of this misreading is evidently that of the villain Teabing, not of the author Dan Brown.

Even cursory formal analysis allows us to distinguish between claims made by a villain and those made by a protagonist. Given that Teabing is clearly diabolical, and that he is displaced from the plot before the close of the narrative, his assertions about the human nature of Christ are not authorized by the narrative as a whole. But more careful analysis shows how Teabing's assertions are in themselves contradictory; if Christ isn't divine, neither is Mary Magdalene, so there is no Holy Grail, at least, not one of the sort Teabing infers. On the other hand, Langdon's part in the emplotment carries through to the novel's last words. Langdon believes Mary Magdalene to be divine through her relation with Christ and her bloodline to be so as well, which is why he falls prostrate at her grave. Even so, his reverence for the "sacred feminine" amounts to little more than a sexist reduction of Mary Magdalene to a royal vessel of the *divinas rex*.

Oddly, it is the villain who prepares the hero to betray the Pythagorean principle of the "divine proportion": Teabing claims that the secret society, the Priory of Sion, has hidden the truth about the offspring of Christ and Mary Magdalene for centuries. Sophie's grandfather Saunière, whose murder begins the plot, is supposed to be the

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possibility is hitherto ignored by critics, who instead accuse Brown of being a poor writer. Brown may not be the deftest author ever, but given the financial success of his novel, he certainly is no lightweight either.

Grand Master of the Priory, and one of only four individuals who know the whereabouts of the Holy Grail. If the meaning of the Grail is remarkably elitist, then it is also abstruse, since the secret *gnosis* is also inexplicably fatal. Yet, Langdon's kneeling at the tomb of Mary Magdalene contradicts this potential criticism of elitism. After all, we can also read the deaths of the priory leaders as martyrdom. However, the same could then be said for Silas' death as well. Silas could be argued to be a martyr to a different cause, yet a martyr nonetheless. Regardless of the unclear interpretation of themes of martyrdom in The Da Vinci Code, the Priory is the first link between Teabing's theory and Brown's desecration of the divine proportion.

"According to the Priory," Teabing continued, "Mary Magdalene was pregnant at the time of the crucifixion. For the safety of Christ's unborn child, she had no choice but to flee the Holy Land. With the help of Jesus' trusted uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene secretly traveled to France<sup>34</sup> then known as Gaul. There she found safe refuge in the Jewish community. It was here in France that she gave birth to a daughter."

(265)

Given the Diaspora of Jews across the Roman Empire, it is very much possible that such a trip across the Mediterranean took place. The problem, however, with this interpretation is that a royal bloodline reduces the "divine proportion" to a sign not of heavenly "ratios" in earthly forms but of a right to rule. Even such a sign need not betray the republican roots of the proportion, given that Christ's teachings do redefine monarchy. The ironic title above the Cross, "King of the Jews", takes on an added irony

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<sup>34</sup> Again, Teabing's history is one of convenience. France did not exist as such in the first century, but was part of the province of Gaul, recently conquered by Julius Caesar in a development that marked the death of the Republic. In 43 BCE Rome began the invasion of Britain, using Gaul as the launching platform. The structure of the Empire at that time, according to Glay's History of Rome, afforded mobility across the recently conquered provinces up and settlement from Palestine, up until the various Jewish revolts of the seventh decade of the Christian era.

in its transformation of lordly power into lordly humility. It is the next step that Teabing takes, however, that is most problematic.

“Christ's line grew quietly in France until making a bold move in the fifth century, when it intermarried with French royal blood and created a lineage known as the Merovingian bloodline” (267). In fusing the divine bloodline of Christ with the French royal bloodline, Teabing argues that the rightful heir to the throne of France is likewise the heir to the throne of David and Solomon. In the end, this is the position that Langdon accepts as truth:

Like the murmurs of spirits in the darkness, forgotten words echoed. *The quest for the Holy Grail is the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene. A journey to pray at the feet of the outcast one.*

With a sudden upwelling of reverence, Robert Langdon fell to his knees.

For a moment, he thought he heard a woman's voice... the wisdom of the ages... whispering up from the chasms of the earth.

(456)

Langdon reacts like a worshipper, genuflecting in a reflection of Catholic tradition, at the tomb of Mary Magdalene. The experience is beatified by the sense of a spirit calling out from beyond the grave. Mary Magdalene, for Langdon, is not only divine, but a long dead Queen. Holy Blood, Holy Grail, too, makes the same conclusion, although in a slightly different manner, as the alleged head of the Priory of Sion at the time of its writing, Pierre Plantard, claims that he is the heir to the throne of France, the current head of the Merovingian dynasty and the descendant of Christ. According to Brown and the writers of Holy Blood, Holy Grail, the Priory of Sion, an institutional offshoot of the Knights Templar, who were declared heretics, burned at the stake and destroyed for their alleged worship of Baphomet. Historically, it seems far more likely that the Knights Templar were destroyed by Phillip the Fair in an effort to claim their vast

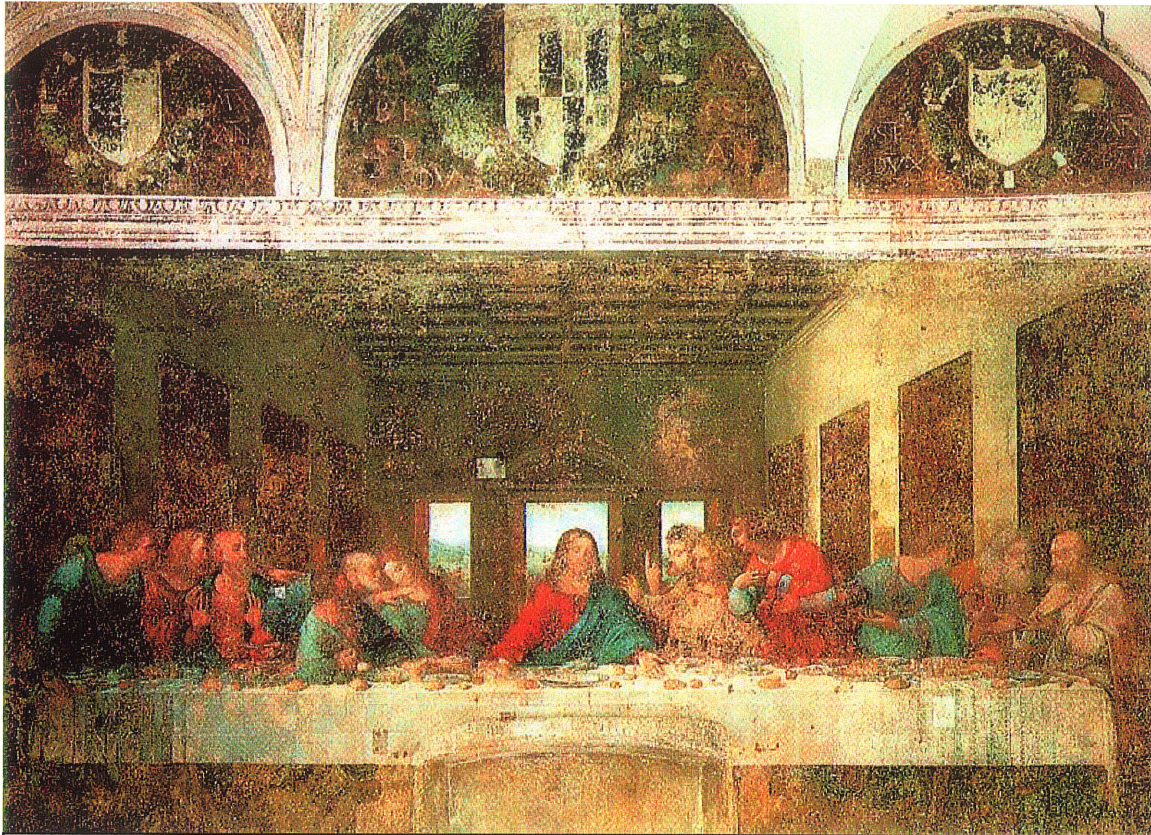
financial and property wealth for his own. What obfuscates the tales of the Templars' fall is the Basmomet itself, which is linked to the Pythagorean icon of the pentagram, redefined in the Templar heresies as an image of devil worship. The history of the Templars themselves contradicts Teabing's monarchical claims – the Templars were not a monarchical organization, but a Holy Order, overseen only by the Pope, and Phillip the Fair himself is only a distant relative of the last Merovingian king.

Whether the Priory of Sion is a historical fact or not, Langdon's reaction to the "presence" of Mary Magdalene, and the slippage of Brown's whole plot, point alike to the fusion of Church and State in The Da Vinci Code, to a celebration of the *divinas rex*. What is lost in this fusion, of course, is any relevance of the "divine proportion" as it appears in art to its political disproportion in supporting the bankrupt claims of monarchy against the French Republic. A more relevant political use of da Vinci's "ratio," and a more direct link between aesthetics and forms of power in the novel, would assert the political validity of the status quo. The "divine proportion" is the enemy of monarchy, not its spurious support.

Plato's Republic, as we saw in our first chapter, is founded on the divine proportion, and is the opposition to tyranny. The cult of Pythagoras, who held the existence of the divine proportion in nature as evidence of God's grammar, believed that this grammar led to an ecumenical, republican way of life. The Pythagoreans rejected monarchy as tyranny, developing instead a ratio-based system of government that we now recognize as republican democracy. The celebration of these ideals through the inclusion of the divine proportion in art was a celebration of what the Pythagoreans held to be the best-regulated state of humanity, the balanced, ratioed republic. The divine

proportion's association with beauty, in art, as in nature, is a mathematical sign of proportion in the government of the cosmos, as in the government of human politics.

“Beauty” is the “golden mean” between two opposing points.



**Figure 33 - *The Last Supper*. (Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan).**

In his interpretation of *The Last Supper*, however, Brown actually subverts the golden mean. Langdon never refutes Teabing's distorted claim “that Jesus and Magdalene are clothed as mirror opposites of one another” (254). While Christ is clad mainly in red with a blue drape, the figure to his right, whom Brown identifies as Mary Magdalene, is clad in red with a yellow drape. Red and blue are in fact opposite colours in Renaissance colour wheels. Common practice was to clad figures in paintings in complementary colors, as can be seen in the colors of the other figures. Blue and yellow,



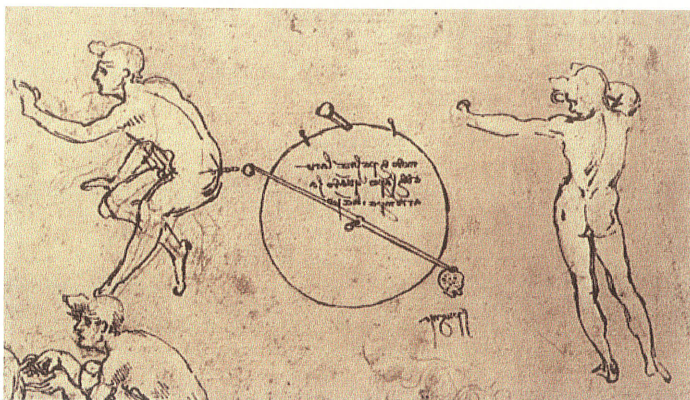


Figure 34 - Detail from *Planning Sketches for The Last Supper*. See also Figure 16.

however, are complementary colors, so the palate of these two figures situates them as complementary opposites. The combination of complement and opposite in this pairing of extremes recalls the method of

sketching da Vinci used in his composition of these two figures in the painting. da Vinci's journals demonstrate that his planning sketches focused on the placement of the hands of the different figures in *The Last Supper*. The sketches of the figures to Christ's left and right, thought by non-orthodox critics to be the figures of Peter and Mary Magdalene, show Christ's location denoted by a point between these two opposites. To Christ's right, the figure's hands are elevated; to his left, the figure's hands are lowered. Everything about these two figures is in opposition, with Christ literally sitting between them. da Vinci's palate also echoes the complementary, yet opposing relationship Christ has with both of these figures. The whole composition is in keeping with a certain strain of interpretation by those familiar with da Vinci's other works.

"Venturing into the more bizarre", Teabing said, "note that Jesus and His bride appear to be joined at the hip and are leaning away from one another as if to create this clearly delineated negative space between them."

Even before Teabing traced the contour for her, Sophie saw it -- the indisputable  $\sim$ , the shape of the focal point of the painting. It was the same symbol Langdon had drawn earlier for the Grail, the chalice, and the female womb.

The analysis, this time through the inclusion of the symbol ( ~ ), plays into an earlier discussion of the divine proportion. The divine proportion in Euclid's Elements is the method of finding the ratio of two points of mean and extreme measure on a line. Brown's insertion into the diction of the text the symbol ( ~ ), makes a pointed difference of the male and female symbols<sup>35</sup>. The female symbol is, after all, constructed by points on a line bent at the locus of ratio relationship between the mean and end points of that line. Brown has inserted a literal depiction of the divine proportion, which ties it indisputably to the sacred feminine, into the typography of his text as part of his analysis of *The Last Supper*. Brown then uses it to create another icon, that is, a letter. Brown's typography creates a monoglossic parallel between the relationship of icon to letter, and signifier to signified.

“(If you view Jesus and Magdalene as compositional elements rather than as people, you will see another obvious shape leap out at you.” He paused. “A *letter* of the alphabet”.

Sophie saw it at once. To say the letter leapt out at her was an understatement. The letter was suddenly all Sophie could see. Glaring in the center of the painting was the unquestionable outline of an enormous, flawlessly formed letter M.

(254)

Teabing, of course, wants to make the letter “M” the sign of a sexual secret, that Mary Magdalene is the legitimate bride of Christ. For that reason, the “most blatant M, of course, is emblazoned on the altar at Our Lady of Paris in London, which was designed by a former Grand Master of the Priory of Sion, Jean Cocteau” (254). Had Brown halted in his analysis at this point, he would have limited the misreading to Teabing, and would

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<sup>35</sup> Brown employs further manipulations in his typography. He uses *italics* in his characters' dialogue to denote particular emphasis of key points. Again, such a move, while situated in the realm of aesthetics, cues his reader to the signified meaning of his sentences, reducing points of argument to italicized, one-word phrases, that connect to transmit Brown's manipulation of the “divine proportion” towards his monarchical reading.

not have distorted da Vinci's habitual practice.<sup>36</sup> The second half of De Divina Proportione, the treatise co-written with Pacioli and illustrated by da Vinci, contains, in da Vinci's hand, renderings of all the letters of the alphabet, in divine proportion *The Last Supper's* "M" is no exception, as it matches up with da Vinci's compositional drawing,



**Figure 35 - Aesthetic Comparison, demonstrating the congruence of da Vinci's M from De Divina Proportione, with the composition of *The Last Supper*.**

rather well.

Since da Vinci regularly employed the divine proportion in his typography,



**Figure 36 - "M" from De Divina Proportione.**

the "M" composition, centered by the literal embodiment of the divine proportion at the compositional tip

of the "M", is likely intentional and particularly telling of the compositional theme of the painting. "M" is a self-referential sign in the work itself, an aesthetic signature of proportion and balance. Brown, however, goes Teabing one better in fanciful interpretations by taking his "*Matrimonio or Magdalene*" (254), as the "true" meaning of the "M", and transforming it into *Monarch*, or *Merovingian*.

An aesthetic reading of the "M" in *The Last Supper* points beyond self-reflexivity in the composition, however, requiring us to see other elements in the painting. The first thing we note is that this is not a fresco, but a sort of tempura on stone, located in the

<sup>36</sup> Critics of the "M" interpretation of *The Last Supper* claim that one can find nearly all the letters of the alphabet in da Vinci's compositions. This claim, however, in the light of da Vinci's other works,

dining hall of the Santa Maria della Grazie, in the city-state of Milan, commissioned by da Vinci's patron, Ludovico Sforza. da Vinci himself designed a new technique for painting *The Last Supper*, applying a base to the brick of the wall, and then adding to it. da Vinci also composed the background and lighting in the painting as a modification of



**Figure 37 -Detail of *The Last Supper* showing the disembodied hand holding a dagger.**

his chiaroscuro style, altering his signature style, of which he was already known as a master. This modification took into account the large windows to the left of the painting, and created the illusion of added depth to the room itself. The

result is that the viewer of the painting, in the room in which it is

located, feels him or herself to be in the same room as Christ and the Disciples, at the Last Supper. With all this careful attention to composition, balance, and spatial context, what is then most telling about *The Last Supper* is what appears to be a mistake-- the disembodied hand holding a dagger.

True to Brown's analysis, this hand appears from nowhere. All other hands in the painting are accounted for. Brown's critics counter the claim of the hand's odd lack of ownership by offering the traditional, Church-sanctioned interpretation. The hand is the hand of St. Peter, they claim, foreshadowing Peter's violence in the garden later that night (272). The traditional interpretation of the disembodied hand nonetheless plays into

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particularly *De Divina Proportione*, which features an entire alphabet typographically rendered in divine

Brown's interpretation of Peter as hostile to Mary Magdalene. Brown reiterates the commentary of Haskins, Pagels and others who explore the hostile relationship between Peter and Mary Magdalene outlined above. In this incident, however, it is Langdon, not Teabing, who ascribes the dagger's ownership.

"Peter had a problem with that," Langdon said, pointing to *The Last Supper*. "That's Peter there. You can see that Da Vinci was well aware of how Peter felt about Mary Magdalene."

Again, Sophie was speechless. In the painting, Peter was leaning menacingly toward Mary Magdalene and slicing his blade-like hand across her neck. The same threatening gesture as in *Madonna of the Rocks*.

(259)

While Langdon does support claims that Peter was hostile to Mary Magdalene, and employs the composition of figures in *Madonna of the Rocks* to do so, he also proposes the theory that the dagger is, after all, anonymous. Given Peter's apocryphal hostility towards Mary Magdalene, which Brown recounts in detail, then Brown should conclude that it is Peter who holds the weapon. If the dagger remains anonymous, however, it obscures this reading. The close reader of the painting is left wondering to whom this weapon should be assigned.

Long before he was a painter, da Vinci was an engineer of weapons. He wrote himself a letter of recommendation to Sforza at the age of 19, declaring, "Most Illustrious Lord, having now sufficiently considered the specimens of all those who proclaim themselves skilled contrivers of instruments of war, and that the invention and operation of said instruments are nothing different from those in common use: I shall endeavor, without prejudice to any one else, to explain myself to your Excellency, showing your Lordship my secrets, and then offering them to your best pleasure and

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proportion, supports, rather than undermines, a reading of *The Last Supper* as containing an "M".

approbation..." (7). He then lists ten such devices to whet his patron's appetite. Since da Vinci designed literally hundreds of military machines and weapons, then the anonymous weapon in *The Last Supper* itself gestures towards da Vinci's presence in *The Last Supper*. The dagger points away from the focal plane of the painting, away from Christ, away from Judas, and away from Mary Magdalene. The dagger itself, as a tool, becomes a means for the mechanical separation of an object. At its most basic, the blade makes two of one. Metaphorically, the dagger can be read as the incarnation of the work that it does - the dagger is not, after all, sitting on the table, it is in the anonymous hand. The dagger as a sign of da Vinci's own obsession with weapons, points to da Vinci's purposeful inclusion in *The Last Supper* of a weapon without a wielder. The student of da Vinci, fully aware of his other self-referential jokes<sup>37</sup>, might well read *The Last Supper* itself as a tool, pointing out the divine proportion. After all, the point of the dagger echoes, in yet another plane, the point of the "M", itself a mirror of the divine proportion's use in the composition of the figures in the painting.

da Vinci had a habit of inserting himself, tongue in cheek, into other works that highlight the divine proportion. His *Vitruvian Man*, the subject of which is literally the divine proportion, places his head, in grotesque, on the body of the "ideal man". In effect, da Vinci engages in the practice of self-deconstruction in art works that likewise deconstruct received traditions. By including himself in these works da Vinci does not celebrate himself, but rather makes light of himself in order to place the realm of the beautiful on the same plane as the natural and the farcical. The da Vinci code, in so many

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<sup>37</sup> In addition to inserting his face, in grotesque form, in his planning sketches for *The Battle of Anghiari*, the *Vitruvian Man*, and others, da Vinci's notebooks were written backwards, in his own "ineffable left hand". He appears to have been uniquely aware of both the content of his writings, and of the mode in which their meaning would be transmitted.

of his works, is literally a code made up of components of the man himself, which is meant to lead his reader to the divine proportion. The "M" from *The Last Supper* more likely, then, stands for "mean" (*meanus*) than anything else. In Euclidean fashion, da Vinci's "M" points to the mean, the literal site of the divine proportion, as an engine of ratio and a machine of republicanism. The ultimate application of the divine proportion applied to human behavior is the republican city-state, in which his political aesthetics are embodied.

Divine proportion aesthetics, by their very nature, encourage republicanism through their lack of single definition. For such ratio-based art lends itself to a multitude of interpretations, which, in turn, fosters discussion. Discussion then lends itself to the exchange of ideas as well as to the development of new ones. Practitioners of "ratio" such as Plato, Vitruvius, and da Vinci found the divine proportion itself to be generative of new forms. By contrast, Dan Brown's novel might well generate conflict, and multiple interpretations, but his intention is to reveal the one "true" history written and painted in code, in order to reduce a plurality of powers and rights to the power of the single, divine, ruler. His adoption of an ancient Pythagorean concept in fact reduces complexity to singularity. His "plot" to co-opt beauty for monarchy robs all the beauty from a system designed to celebrate not only what beauty represents, but what beauty is. Under the sign of the divine proportion, balance, ratio and proportionality all lead to freedom. Were we to follow the Pythagorean ideal of living God's grammar, we would better realize the memories of divinity in our very lives.

## ***Epilogue***

The journey we have been on in this exploration has covered twenty-six hundred years of human history. We have shown, in our first chapter, the development, through the ideology of the cult of Pythagoras, of an aesthetic system based on mathematics, centered in ratio. More importantly, we have seen the tie between that system and the political foundation of republican democracy. It is this tie between the divine proportion, political ideology and the divine proportion to which we must now turn our attention.

There is a two-fold danger inherent in The Da Vinci Code. Brown's co-option and misuse of the divine proportion to support a resurrection of the throne of David is a profound undercutting of the foundations on which the divine proportion is based. Brown's reading of the divine proportion and da Vinci's compositional strategies denies the beauty of the ambiguous, heterodox system; that da Vinci and other divine proportion artisans held dear, in an effort to stake a claim in a retrogressive political system based on the out-moded divine chain of being. Such a throwback to absolute monarchy is tantamount to an embracing of tyranny, and is the most fundamental betrayal of Platonic and Pythagorean ideologies possible. Both Plato and Pythagoras suffered under tyrants; both reacted against them by developing philosophical systems embracing freedom. To turn the systems developed as a reaction against tyranny into an endorsement of the restoration of a divine monarchy is to deny the essence of these systems themselves. The second danger that emerges from The Da Vinci Code, while still clearly political, is much more subtle, and thus much more dangerous.

As we have shown, Brown's diction creates slippage between signifier and signified, redefining, for the sake of his narrative, the terms on which he relies. This



action in itself is not dangerous; in fact, we can argue that any narrative creates some form of slippage between an icon and what that icon represents, simply by placing that icon in relation to others. After all, meaning has much to do with context. The threat, however, lies in Brown's removal of historical context to redefine the process of aesthetic definition itself. Langdon asserts time and time again that only one reading is possible of PHI, only one reading is possible of the *Vitruvian Man*, only one is reading possible of *The Last Supper*. The nature of aesthetic reading, primarily aesthetic reading of compositional elements based on the divine proportion, is ambiguity. Given that divine proportion aesthetics are founded in ratio, performing such a reading requires that we approach the process with ratio in mind; that is, with an eye towards the mean between two opposing forces. Context, both historical and critical, helps guide our readings, but does not define them. The design of divine proportion aesthetics is intended to create progeny, to foster discussion, resolution, and thus the creation of new forms and ideas, which, in turn, foster the creation of new modes of expression and thought.

While such a system is built from ambiguity and uncertainty, it is the very heterodox nature of multiplicity that in turn breathes life into such a way of creating art and thought. The fundamental ideology behind the divine proportion as envisioned by Pythagoras is that ambiguity, founded through the middle way, fosters the creation of new modes. Thus, readings of compositional aesthetics based on the divine proportion, when placed into the cultural and historical context of the Western world after the sixth century BCE, often have, at their root, openness to heterodox, representative, republican ideals. Divine proportion-based aesthetic readings are often less concerned with being

"right" and more concerned with capturing, for an instant, one aspect of the work in question, with an eye towards fostering further interpretation and discussion.

Beauty, under such a system, is less a given, then, than a political ideal. Beauty, in the divine proportion system exists in the creation of balance between heterodox and often oppositional forces. da Vinci reminds us that beauty is both a means and an end, that is, a machine, which creates and reminds us of our ability to create through finding balance. This progenitive force is at work at the close of Barcelona. In this scene, Ted, Fred and Dicky Taylor, barbecue hamburgers at The Lake, while visiting with Montserrat, Greta, and Aurora. Stillman has created an ironic Pythagorean balance of trinity, with not one, but two trinities, both male and female, among his characters. What is most telling in this scene, however, is Ted's privileging of the multi-cultural romantic experience.

TED: See, that's the great thing about getting involved with someone from another country. When we act in ways which would objectively appear assholeish, they chock it up to just another American trait.

FRED: Cosa de gringos.

(Barcelona, 99:47)

Ted's declaration juxtaposes the nature of objectivity with the creative power of context, in this case, through cross-cultural romance. Aurora, Greta and Montserrat still resemble the *Three Graces*, in that their *virtus* lies in their ability to redefine the "objective", rendering it forever subjective. In the context of Fred, Ted and Dicky, the female trio redefines the behaviours of their paramours, freeing the men from their fears of inherent lack of self-worth, turning negative behaviours instead into a national trait that can be contextualized, understood, and ultimately disarmed.

At the root of this grace is the ability for the female characters to redefine how they see the behaviours their male counterparts exhibit. This redefinition is ultimately freeing, both for Fred, Ted and Dicky, as well as for Montserrat, Greta and Aurora. To place this design into the context of Ireneaus' crisis of iconography, what we find endorsed by the close of Barcelona, Pythagoras' cosmology, Plato's republicanism, and the divine proportion itself, is a system that iconoclastically redefines icons time and again. Meaning emerges from the tension between these two extremes, iconoclasm and iconography, in such a way that meaning is only possible through their interaction. Without iconography, iconoclasm is meaningless; without iconoclasm, iconography has nothing to represent.

The ability to find meaning at this middle point between the two extremes is what Brown denies, and is the essential trait of an imperial mindset. What is most dangerous in The Da Vinci Code is its endorsement of an imperial mindset, in which heterogeneity and heterodoxy are not only impossible, but they are the enemy. It is not without a bitter irony that we revisit Atwood's belief in the essential American Republic as the "golden mean". Perhaps some of the success of The Da Vinci Code results from the emergent mode of imperialism in the text. We are at a strange time in Western culture, where republics openly engage in the process of building empire, and the imperial mode can be found everywhere in our cultural texts. This dominant mode is most active currently (and ironically) than in representations of beauty. Television programs such as "The Swan" and "Style by Jury" redefine beauty itself as the result of the inscription of others' hard and fast rules of what is beautiful and what is not, onto one's flesh. We appear engaged in the process of celebrating an imperialist imposition of the beauty of others onto ourselves

- a rather frightening concept indeed. One is left to wonder, however, if we are not ultimately celebrating the creation of beautiful Frankensteinian monsters in the current cultural endorsement of imperial domination.

When we turn our eyes back to history, we find that in the West, imperial modes of dominance are in themselves, transient. All empires fall. Even the Roman Empire, of which vestiges remain today, does not exist in its imperial form. The Holy Roman Empire was, as Voltaire famously quipped, “Neither Holy, Roman, nor an Empire” (1), but only the result of the power inherent in ways of seeing. Rome herself was a multicultural, trans-Mediterranean milieu of different tribes, customs and cultures that recognized and incorporated indigenous beliefs. Although the Roman system adopted local beliefs in an effort to sublimate and dominate them, often this incorporation had the opposite effect. Similarly, the use of the divine proportion in the rules of Vitruvius cemented a representation of the Republic in the *Imperium*, keeping alive the antithesis to the Empire itself, through its chosen icons. The same can be seen in the declarations of orthodoxy in the Christian Empire; the denial of Apocryphal scripture, up until 1945 CE, helped to keep alive the knowledge of the existence of alternative testaments. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices did not create an awareness of the Apocrypha; it simply took an awareness that was created and maintained by those in the Church who were attempting to destroy alternative gospels, and gave it focus. To read the Nag Hammadi Codices through the same approach of aesthetic reading through the divine proportion would be not to privilege one collection of gospels over the other, but to explore the relationships between the two, and to find meaning as a result of the balance between the two.

Perhaps the mean can still be found in the role of the *heretik*. As we found in chapter one, “*heretic*” became redefined through the process of declarations of orthodoxy among the early Church. Returning to its original context, the *heretik* was the conduit for the communion between the human and the divine. Christ filled the role of *heretik*; so, too, did Plato (which is perhaps the reason for the inclusion of the Republic in the Nag Hammadi Codices); and so, too, did da Vinci. Pythagoras believed that the role of the *heretik* was a role filled by mathematics, and, that the divine proportion was the expression of the best method of creating communion between humans and the divine. Iamblichus' text is titled On the Pythagorean Life for one explicit purpose; to remind his readers that heresy is a way of life. It is this aesthetic way of life that Brown ultimately denies. Ignorance of our past in the West, especially when carried out through the guise of historical fiction, is a tremendous disservice to us all. The ancients call to us through the heresy of the divine proportion. They call to us to live in balance, free to create, to give life, and ultimately, to live in communion with the divine.

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