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### Skewering Da Vinci

Sincerely held beliefs and clinical dissection of easily debunked historical nonsenses contrast with more opportunistic offerings

Rosslyn

The Story of Rosslyn Chapel and the True Story Behind The Da Vinci Code

Andrew Sinclair

Birlinn Ltd

Pb; 256pp; illus; notes; ind, £9.99 ISBN 1841584177

Rosslyn and the Grail

The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code

Mark Oxbrow & Ian Robertson

Mainstream Publishing

Hb; 304pp, illus, appxs, bib, ind, £15.99, ISBN 1845960769

So, two well-written books on the truth behind “The Da Vinci Code”.

One by Sinclair, who is passionate about his family's supposed links with the Templars, and who bears a heavy responsibility for many of the recent Rosslyn myths, including the silly one about Rudolf Hess. The other is by careful and rational researchers who find nothing mystical – and little Templar – about the Chapel or the places and people around it, though they, too, are passionate about their subject.

Surprisingly, both books are substantially in agreement. Sinclair says of Dan Brown's bestseller: “Its plot is preposterous, its message is pernicious, its history a bungle and a muddle. The claimed mystery of the Priory of Sion has been exploded...(it) is only a thriller, using a mishmash of esoteric texts, often wrongly, to create a tragic farce about the Grail”. He is also critical of “Holy Blood Holy Grail”, and particularly of Pierre Plantard who “had no right to” the name of de St Clair. I like his comment that: “The Head of Jesus and the Grail have been discerned within the 'Apprentice' Pillar, although that solid support of the stone roof has no hollow within, or the whole place would fall down.”

This refreshing rationality is not, however, the thrust of Sinclair's book. He believes the fictions of the Templar fleet's escape to Scotland, of Templars at Bannockburn, and of the Sinclair visit to Newport, Rhode Island, long before Columbus crossed the Atlantic. He continues to argue an impossibly early date for the Kirkwall Scroll. He is driven by his belief that the Sinclairs are inextricably linked to the Templars, that Rosslyn “became a third Temple of Solomon for the Knights Templar and a Grail chapel”, and that “the Templars merged into the Freemasons to play an important role in both the French and American revolutions”.

Oxbrow and Robertson believe none of this. Their book quietly and convincingly explains why not, with respect for their subject, and without offence or histrionics. They have already won the respect of influential minds in our field, and if their book reaches its deserved audience, they should be the talking heads of choice that the media will need, come the release of the “Da Vinci” film. I expect to be fed up with seeing them by summer next year.

Even more effectively than Putnam and Wood's dissected Rennes-le-Chateau – though that was a bigger and harder task – Oxbrow and Robertson take apart the Templar-Sinclair-Treasure myth. They start in the right place – Andrew Sinclair's identifying Sir William St Clair's tomb in the Chapel as a Templar one. This mistake – like many others – arose from Baigent and Leigh's “The Temple and the Lodge”.

Addressing other local ghost and mystery accounts on the way, the authors focus on the real relationship between the Sinclairs and the Templars: they gave strong evidence against the Templars on trial in Scotland. Templars did not marry and have children, which the Sinclairs did. The Sinclairs fought and killed other Christians: the Templars did not. None of the symbolism carved in the Chapel is Templar nor, correctly identified, does any of it suggest pre-Columbian knowledge of New World flora. Further, the Chapel's layout is based on the East Quire of Glasgow Cathedral, and not on the Temple at Jerusalem.

If you want to have one comprehensive book about Rosslyn, then “Rosslyn and the Grail” should be it. It covers far more than I can mention here. And, to be fair, if you want a book that sums up the believer's view from an author who actually believes what he writes, then “Rosslyn” will do well enough.

So much of the rest of the literature is just so cynical. Were there a real, fact-based debate around Rosslyn, the Templars and the Sinclairs we

should, by now, have heard carefully argued responses from those writers who have done so well out of this material: Lomas, Knight, Sinclair, Hopkins, Wallace-Murphy, Coppens, Gardner, Baigent, Leigh, Picknett and many more. I'm not aware of any reasoned response from them or, indeed, of any meaningful response at all. I'm guessing that's how it will stay.

Kevin McClure

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT  
SINCLAIR – WELL WRITTEN, BUT....  
OXBROW & ROBERTSON – AT LAST!