

Holy Misleading

An unreliable theory being recycled for 'Da Vinci Code' fans doesn't convince

The Holy Place – Decoding the Mysteries of Rennes-le-Chateau

Henry Lincoln

Pb, 176pp, illus. tab. £12.98

‘The Holy Place’ was flawed when first published, and was reviewed accordingly. This edition is, a short 2005 Preface aside, just a reprint of the 1991 original. ‘The Da Vinci Code’ created a vast market which will benefit Lincoln financially, but I can't see what good it will do for anyone else. In the Preface, Lincoln explains that if he were writing the book in 2005, he would write it differently. I suspect that he couldn't write it at all, so much of his material having since been proven untrue.

His surmise is that Rennes-le-Chateau and its surrounds are a Holy Place and a Temple because mountains, possibly manually adapted, surround them in the shape of a pentacle, and lots of geographical, natural and man-made features in that pentagram appear to fall in straight lines, though usually only of a very few points. Why it should be described as a Temple, or should be ‘holy’, is never made clear. At best, it's a bunch of invisible lines.

Unfortunately, the reasons Lincoln gives for looking for the pentagram on which the entire theory is based are, first, patterns on parchments since shown to be hoaxes and, second, the alleged geometry of the Poussin painting ‘The Shepherds of Arcadia’, the one with ‘Et In Arcadia Ego’ written on a tomb. It was painted around 1640, and Lincoln conveys his excitement at witnessing what he believed to be a contemporary tomb and the landscape Poussin painted. “When I first stood before the tomb and realised that I was gazing at Poussin's marvellous Arcadia, I was neither surprised nor puzzled. After all, many artists have painted careful and detailed views of real landscapes.”

As you may know, this was not the landscape Poussin painted (it never even looked much like it was) and the tomb Lincoln identified as being in the painting was actually built in 1933.

Without these elements, without Poussin's supposed geometry, the book is an even bigger nonsense than it appeared to be in 1991.

In an interview with 'Times Online', 27 August 2005, Lincoln says of 'Holy Blood, Holy Grail': "That's 20 years out of date".

Yes, it is, but it's just been re-issued – surely with the authors' authority – with pictures, and is mostly misleading and wrong.

'The Holy Place' is 14 years out of date, and it's mostly misleading too. While I'm aware that Henry Lincoln has considerable health problems, with which he battles impressively, he does have time to make money from Rennes-le-Chateau, leading tours, speaking and, of course, selling books and videos. I'll probably wait in vain to see a major, published correction regarding the whole Rennes mythos, not only from Lincoln, but from his earlier co-authors, too. But it's long overdue.

Kevin McClure.

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT:

Caveat Emptor – There's nothing new here