

Fortean Times 198 (July 2005)

Time for Suspension of Belief

With authors fortunate enough to have traced the Stones of Fire, a tablet from the Ten Commandments and the secret of Jesus' grandchild, who needs academic credibility?

Custodians of Truth

The Continuance of Rex Deus

Tim Wallace-Murphy and Marilyn Hopkins

Red Wheel/Weiser Books (£16.99)

The Magdalene Legacy

The Jesus and Mary Bloodline Conspiracy - Revelations Beyond the Da Vinci Code

Laurence Gardner

Element Books (£18.99)

The Templars and the Ark of the Covenant

The Discovery of the Treasure of Solomon

Graham Phillips

Bear & Company (£12.99)

Three books with much in common. Particularly in their reliance on the literal truth of the Bible, and on the willingness of readers to accept that the authors have extraordinary access to documents, sources, knowledge and artefacts that the readers do not. All these authors are experienced, successful, and influential. Should we believe in them if we cannot verify for ourselves the sources on which they depend? Is the real secret that they have no secrets?

The authors of 'Custodians of Truth' promote both Rosslyn Chapel as a mystical centre housing undiscovered religious objects (a theory rejected by those responsible for the chapel and its heritage) and the pre-Columbian settlement of America by Templars. In their first, eponymous, book 'Rex Deus' was a direct line of descendancy from Jesus Christ. This second book purports to trace the line further back, to the Egyptian Mystery Schools.

The source for the first book was a chap called "Michael", who apparently approached one of the authors after a lecture in 1994. Although his account of the bloodline of which he claimed membership

relied heavily on pseudo-history not pre-dating 'The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail' (1982), and though academic history knew nothing of the organisation or the bloodline, they believed him and wrote a book.

Apparently the research for this new book commenced when another self-styled 'Rex Deus' descendant wrote to them. Using substantially dubious sources, they found enough material to fill another book. Their primary human sources are unidentified and are protected by the authors. If 'Rex Deus' is a fiction, it's impossible to identify who is responsible because we don't know who either source is. On the evidence available, I just don't believe in 'Rex Deus' or the bloodline.

In 'The Magdalene Legacy', Laurence Gardner says he has "privileged access to centuries of suppressed Templar, Vatican and monastic archives". In a lecture in 1997 he said he had "access to Celtic Church records dating back to AD37", and "to Templar documents, to the very documents that the Knights Templar brought out in Europe in 1128 and confronted the Church establishment with, and frightened the life out of them with, because these were documents that talked about bloodline and genealogy". But we can read his book and still not know what these sources are, where they are kept, how they are accessed and what they say. Gardner doesn't respond to enquiries about them. I've tried.

So it's best not to assume that when Gardner tells us that Jesus Christ and Joseph of Arimathea were brothers, that Jesus survived the crucifixion, and that He married Mary Magdalene and had three children, Tamar b.AD33 (who married St Paul), Jesus II b.AD44, whose daughter Aminadab, Christ's only grandchild, supposedly carried on the Grail Bloodline, that he's sharing secrets with us. This material comes from Dr Barbara Thiering, a minor theologian devoid of academic, theological or historical support, who takes chunks of the Bible and gives them new, implausible meanings. Theology's answer to Erich von Däniken. I don't think she ever gave a name for the third child, and Gardner omits her view that Mary Magdalene later left Jesus, and remarried in AD30. Otherwise, this is just Thiering, as is much of the book.

Similarly, rather than coming from any "privileged sources", Gardner's assertion that Christ's niece, Anna, married Archdruid Bran the Blessed (Bron) who was, apparently, the son of King Lear, is taken, I think, from the ramblings of Lionel Smithett Lewis, the dotty, British-Israelite Vicar of Glastonbury, writing in 1922. I have found no other reference. Are Gardner's 20th century British-Israelite references, available to all (I

bought them from Covenant Books) but long-discarded, what he refers to as “Celtic Church records dating back to AD37”?

In ‘The Templars and the Ark of the Covenant’ Graham Phillips, a close colleague of Andy Collins, makes the accuracy of his claims very difficult to assess. Here he thinks he’s found (as you do, questing in England with a couple of chums) three of the ‘Stones of Fire’ from the Breastplate carried with the Ark of the Covenant, missing since 597BC. The back cover of his book – you know, the bit you read when deciding whether to buy – says “When examined by Oxford University scientists these stones were found to possess odd physical properties that interfered with electronic equipment and produced a sphere of floating light similar to ball lightning”.

I was surprised to find nothing in the book itself about the “Oxford University scientists”, let alone the “sphere of floating light similar to ball lightning”.

Maybe I’ve missed something, so I e-mailed Graham to ask him the names, professional positions and contact details of the “Oxford University scientists” who “examined” these stones, when and where the examination took place, how the findings that the stones possessed “odd physical properties that interfered with electronic equipment and produced a sphere of floating light similar to ball lightning” were recorded, and where those findings can be examined. I’ve had no reply. I can’t check a thing.

Similarly, suspecting that he and his friends have found (as you do, questing in England with a couple of chums) a sizeable part of one of the original tablets of the Ten Commandments brought down by Moses from Sinai, Phillips says: “We took the slab to the British Museum in London, which boasts England’s best facilities for identifying ancient artefacts. However, the examination was inconclusive”.

Inconclusive? What does that mean? Who examined it, when, in what Department? What did they say? Surely not, “Well, Mr Phillips, it could be one of the original tablets of the Ten Commandments but I’m not quite sure. Now, I have an ammonite to examine so I’d better be getting on with it. Cheerio!”

Is it really too difficult just to give us the facts?

Phillips’s informants are similarly vague, and their sources untraceable.

There's "Abdul the local guide", who says that "in the twelfth century, European Crusaders had found jewels and artefacts of pure gold hidden in a nearby cave." There's Jack Warren, an Australian student, who tells Phillips about explorer Johannes Burckhardt.

Phillips says Burckhardt wrote that the Crusaders found "treasures of pure gold, precious stones, and a golden chest" (the Ark, naturally). I can't find where Burckhardt used those words, and even if he did, what was his source?

These uncheckables run into the typical Phillips 'questing' chase through British local history, ignoring the carefully-considered conclusions of local historians, and finding the Stones of Fire and part of the Ten Commandments.

The key to success in pseudo-history lies in producing attractive books, but keeping readers away from the research, not answering questions, and not getting involved in discussion. I have many of the resources these authors refer to, and I reckon that there are no new historical, spiritual or mystical secrets on offer here. And if I had one wish, it would be to chair a public debate with these four authors, to investigate what truth really lies in their books.

Kevin McClure