Holy Blood, wholly unbelievable

A praiseworthy investigation into the mystery-that-isn't of Rennes, Sauniere, the holy bloodline and other recent chart-topping tosh

The Treasure of Rennes-le-Chateau
A Mystery Solved
Bill Putnam & John Edwin Wood
Sutton Publishing
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There are times when it's vital to suspend disbelief.
King Lear isn't sitting on a stage in Stratford-On-Avon.
Gandalf isn't acting against blue screen awaiting the generation of CGI effects.

Some suspensions are necessary and life-enhancing.

Others aren't.

'The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail' (HBHG – 1982 and still in print) by Henry Lincoln, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh has achieved the suspension of the disbelief of many of the millions who have bought it.

Careful analysis requires more effort than belief, and here an academic archaeologist and a scientist with a broad understanding of physics have systematically recorded the destruction of the assumptions that underpin HBHG.

'The Treasure of Rennes-le-Chateau' sets a new standard for the investigation of pseudo-history.

Publishers are generally not prone to embarrassment, so we shouldn't anticipate the withdrawal of HBHG any time soon, this despite the fact that Henry Lincoln, whom I admire for his latter frankness about the book, has acknowledged for some years that he has little or no faith in the supposed parchments, in Pierre Plantard or, indeed, in the Bloodline theories themselves. His remaining convictions relate to the apparent wonders of the geometry and landscapes of the area.

Sadly the book, boosted by the success of 'The Da Vinci Code', continues to appear more or less unaltered, including the pernicious nonsense giving a false history to the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion'. Lincoln specifically disclaims the accuracy of that passage.

HBHG, and the many lazy and uncritical authors who have since either adopted or knowingly exploited it, has been criticised on many occasions. But never before has the time or investigative care been taken, by appropriately skilled writers, to bring the fictions and contradictions together in one place. They are summarised and analysed, as is each of the TV documentaries in which Lincoln was involved. Then each element is examined afresh. The result is devastating.

The best hero is a dead one, and the Abbe Berenger Sauniere, a dishonest, greedy, right-wing, probably non-celibate priest with money problems and appalling taste, died in 1917.

It wasn't until more than 40 years later that any of the stories about him in HBHG, repeated endlessly elsewhere by writers variously lazy and dishonest, were invented. This comprehensive book addresses almost all of the fakery and illusion that underpins the legends of Rennes and of Sauniere, but most important of all it disposes of the story of fabulous hidden treasure being found, and used, by this consistently dodgy and unimpressive priest.

Without the treasure – formerly possessed by the Merovingians, the Templars, the Cathars or whoever – Sauniere has no interest, no mystery, no standing.

Without it, the only other explanation for his high spending is that he sold masses on a scale that was illegal and mind-boggling – petty larceny with a religious tinge. Conning his customers into believing that he was working towards the salvation of their departed relatives, when he was actually using their money to pay for unnecessary buildings, and filling them with junk.

It is this reading of Sauniere's character and actions that the believers are desperate to suppress, because then –rather as I suspect Henry Lincoln has already found – there is nothing much left of the Rennes mystery but some intriguing, if overplayed, geometry on the landscape.

While there is still a little harmless debate in that area, Putnam and Wood have established that there was no treasure. None to find, and none found.

They've done us a service.

Please honour their achievement by reading their book.

Kevin McClure

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
A gleaming missile in the War against Pseudo-History