‘Ancient’ Genealogy: Fact, Speculation, & Fiction

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Overview

Most people with a lot of New England ancestry descend from one or more ‘gateway’ ancestors – i.e., early colonists who descend, themselves, from English kings, primarily the Plantagenets. The latter, in turn, have their own gateway ancestors, through whom we derive our longest possible ‘ancestral lines’ – into the Dark Ages (roughly A.D. 450-750), and perhaps (though far more conjecturally) even the Classical (Greco-Roman) and Ancient (Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian) worlds.

ALL such descents are hypothetical – that is, all entail many filiative links that are not, in fact, attested in writing, but postulated by scholars on the basis of an assessment of the known chronology, ethno-political situation, and onomastic patterns of the relevant era, locale, and race. In short, ‘ancient’ pedigrees have many ‘dotted lines,’ which are plausible, even likely, but NOT susceptible to proof. (If you’re allergic to dotted lines, now would be a good time to leave!)

Unfortunately, popular American genealogical literature is rife with supposed ‘ancient’ pedigrees which are neither likely nor plausible, and in some cases provably bogus, passing, as they do, through long chains of supposed personages who never existed. How, short of acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of many phases of world and national history, half a dozen ancient and modern languages, the various branches of philology, and an immense (and highly specialized) research literature (surely a job for several lifetimes!), is the ‘lay’ reader to tell the plausible from the preposterous, the reasonable from the ridiculous?

For those who find themselves far up the proverbial creek, this talk and syllabus should serve as a paddle. The talk will identify the major geographic areas, ethnicities, and pre-Plantagenet ‘gateway’ ancestors through whom we MIGHT descend from Dark Age, Classical, or Ancient kings, warlords, consuls, emperors, and pharaohs, and will outline the major sources of data and forms of reasoning upon which such descents are predicated. It will also draw your attention to proposed ‘ancient’ descents which are known to be false, or have been seriously questioned, and identify the absolute historical limits beyond which it will never be possible to go. The syllabus provides an area-by-area list of the best or most interesting or exemplary books and articles which have come my way. (Readers are encouraged to send me more.)
Please note that a one-hour talk covering such a vast subject cannot but resemble the Rio Grande (‘a mile wide and an inch deep’). Likewise, this syllabus doesn’t even pretend to be exhaustive. (In fact, several sources are listed precisely because they contain excellent and far more extensive bibliographies.) Take talk and syllabus as a modest, even cursory introduction – and always follow up footnotes!

Outline

INTRODUCTION

‘COLONIAL’ TO ‘PLANTAGENET’

‘ANCIENT’ ANCESTRY

SCANDINAVIA
  + Sweden: Ynglingar (‘Peace Kings’ of Uppsala)
  + Denmark: Skjoldungr (largely bogus)

BRITISH ISLES
  + Angles, Saxons and Jutes: (a) Cerdic of Wessex (with possible links to Theuderic/?Makhir and Merovingians, v. inf.); (b) Hengist of Kent; (c) ‘Woden’ lines
  + Britons & Britanno-Romans: (a) Welsh dynasties (Coel Han, Cunedda, Ceredig/Coroticus); (b) semi-mythic figures (Vortigern, Ambrosius Aurelianus, Arthur, & Magnus Maximus); (c) the Catuvelluanian house
  + Gaelic Celts: (a) Scottish (Dalriadan) kings > ‘high kings’ of Ireland; (b) kings of Leinster
  + Picts (Cruithni)

GAUL
  + Franks: (a) Ripuarian; (b) Salic (= Merovingian); (c) ‘proto-Merovingian’ > Gennebald I … >Maroboduus?
  + Theuderic/?Makhir/?Natronai ben Nehemiah: > (a) Jewish Exiliarchs, Persarmenia, & Ancient world, or > Merovingians again?
  + Gallo-Romans: (a) Ruricius > Anicii (& Ceionii?); (b) Syagrii & Tonantii Ferreoli; (c) Remigius of Rheims
  + Goths: (a) Visi- (>Artavazd >Mamikonids?); (b) Ostro-
  + Gepids: > Huns (= ‘Hsiung-nu’?) > Chinese (Han Dynasty) Emperors?

IMPERIAL ROME
  + Gallo-Romans > Anicii (& Ceionii?) > Classical & Ancient worlds
ARABIC & ‘MOHAMMED’ LINES
+ Banu Qasi of Spain; Zadan Zara; Cordova & Seville; ‘Sarracina’;
Byzantium > Emirs of Mosul (unsatisfactory); various > Mohammed
(all bogus)

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN
+ Byzantium: (a) Rurikids; (b) Charles Constantine > Anna >
Armenia > Parthia > Seleucids, Ptolemids, & other eastern
Mediterranean principalities > classical Greece & Persia, Babylonia,
& Egypt

Bibliography

Colonial ‘Gateway’ Ancestors of Royal Descent

Frederick Lewis Weis, Walter Lee Sheppard, Jr., and David Faris. Ancestral Roots of
Certain American Colonists Who Came to America Before 1700. The Lineage of
Alfred the Great, Charlemagne, Malcolm of Scotland, Robert the Strong, and

_____. The Magna Charta Sureties, 1215. The Barons Named in the Magna Charta,
1215 and Some of Their Descendants Who Settled in America during the Early
Colonial Years. Fourth edition. 1991. [The above two books don’t cover as
comprehensive a range of royally descended colonists as Roberts, below, but give
more dates, places, and bio for those they do cover.]

David Faris, Douglas Richardson, and Walter Lee Sheppard, Jr., projected four-volume
revision of above two sources, still in progress – do NOT pester them!

Gary Boyd Roberts. The Royal Descents of 500 Immigrants to the American Colonies or
the United States...1993. [The most comprehensive treatment of the subject in
print. Lines only, with very few dates & places, but superb bibliography – and no-
one is more ‘in-the-know’ than Roberts about UNPUBLISHED materials, as
well.]

The Plantagenet Ancestry, etc.

W. H. Turton. The Plantagenet Ancestry. Being tables showing Over 7,000 of the
ancestors of Elizabeth (daughter of Edward IV, and wife of Henry VII), the
heiress of the Plantagenets… 1928. [Outdated, and full of errors and fantasy for
the more distant reaches; still a useful reference for the immediate ancestry. Use
with caution.]

George Andrews Moriarty. The Plantagenet Ancestry of King Edward III and Queen
Philippa. c1960. Stuart (see below) published a Comprehensive Index to same in
1986. [Better, but there HAVE been changes since 1960, as reflected in much of the rest of this bibliography. Not a Bible!]


Ernest Henderson III. *Ancestors Ancient, Medieval, and More Recent of Ernest Flagg Henderson III.* [Still in preparation, so DON’T pester! Will cover entire Plantagenet ancestry, in easy-to-follow pedigree charts, as far as it can possibly be chased. Mr. Henderson has taken much expert advice.]

Don Charles Stone. *Some Ancient and Medieval Descents of Edward I of England.* [Still in preparation. (Which, you know by now, means ‘Don’t pester!’) A beautifully organized and illustrated labor of love which will use many of the sources cited in this bibliography, by a competent scholar who is diligently keeping up with the literature and shows excellent judgment.]


Steven Runciman. “Lineage Apparent.” *London Times Literary Supplement* 3 Sep. 1982. [Review of above. Runciman has a legitimate bone or two to pick; should be read.]

Anthony Wagner. *Pedigree and Progress: Essays in the Genealogical Interpretation of History.* 1975. [Contains an early, but classic, general essay on possibilities for tracing lines into the ancient world; very useful charts, though not without a few errors.]


**Scandinavia**

17-43. [Summary: Danish genealogies going back 20 or 30 generations are bogus. This may not be entirely true for Swedish royal line, however.]

**British Isles**


Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Trans. by Lewis Thorpe. 1966. [A fabulist’s 12th-century version of the ancient history of Britain. Largely imaginary, but probably has a few grains of valid data preserved nowhere else. Trouble is, which is which? First extensive version of ‘Arthur.’]


Leslie Alcock. *Arthur’s Britain. History and Archaeology AD 367-634*. 1971. [Focus on Arthur, but also a good general survey of the history of the period.]

John Morris. *The Age of Arthur*. 1973. [Ditto. Morris, however, had the deductive genius’s fatal tendency to draw a pound of inferences from a pinch of fact. Much incidental material of value on Celtic genealogy.]

Geoffrey Ashe. *The Discovery of King Arthur*. 1985. [Entertaining re-examination, with good bibliography. Includes semi-serious hypothesis that Cerdic of Wessex was son of Arthur (!)! This probably founders on chronological difficulties, however, if no other.]


Nikolai Tolstoy. “Early British History and Chronology.” Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmadorion 1964: 237-312. [Four articles by four good scholars, coming to four wildly different conclusions as to the chronology of the period – proving that the source materials are simply inadequate.]


Peter C. Bartrum. Welsh Genealogies 300-1400. 8 vols. 1974-80. [Basic set of charts summarizing all the earliest royal British/Welsh; authoritative & generally reliable.]

John T. Koch. “A Welsh Window on the Iron Age. Manawydan, Mandubracios.” Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies 14 (1987): 17-52. [Fascinating article showing that Welsh oral tradition preserved at least ONE fragment of GENUINE British genealogy from around the time of Christ, possibly ancestral to the later Welsh houses, though the connection is lost.]


Marjorie O. Anderson. Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland. 1980. [Contains detailed analysis of the Scottish & Pictish king lists; presented verbatim from original mss.]


John O’Hart. Irish Pedigrees: or, The Origin and Stem of the Irish Nation. 2 vols. 1892. [However unsatisfactory, this is still the basic source, compiled from the ‘Annals of the Four Masters,’ etc., for royal Irish lines; incorporates much sheer mythology, and must be taken with a shaker of salt.]


Gaul


_____. “Les ancêtres de Charlemagne addenda et corrigenda.” *Héraldique et généalogie* 28 (1990): 19-36. [Important additions & corrections, which do not change his Ahnentafel at the 10th generation and further. Also discusses ancestry of Queen Hildegarde & Clovis Magnus.]


Christian Settipani and Patrick van Kerrebrouck. *La préhistoire des Capétiens. Seconde partie: L’aristocratie mérovingienne et carolingienne*. [Still in preparation. Will cover the more speculative or problematic points of the royal genealogies, as well.]

Ralph Whitney Mathisen. *The Ecclesiastical Aristocracy of Fifth-Century Gaul: A Regional Analysis of Family Structure*. 1979. [doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison] [A broad-ranging discussion of attested or possible relationships among Gallo-Roman aristocrats of the 400s, some of whom are certainly or probably ancestral to Charlemagne.]


P. Pius Bonifacius Garns, ed. *Series Episcoporum Ecclesiae Catholicae*… 1873. [‘Official’ lists of Catholic Bishops, from legendary beginnings; useful supplement to above.]

*Les Petites Bollandistes*. 17 vols. [Saints’ lives compiled & edited by the Bollandist monks. Many ‘saints’ were of same episcopal families as above.]


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Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. 1982. [A frightful example of bad scholarly judgment re the Merovingians, etc. See reviews by Anderson, Kelley. Has reasonably good, interesting section on Jesus Christ, however.]

Peter Heather. *Goths and Romans* 332-489. 1991. [Most recent study; casts serious doubts on validity of ancestral patrilineage of Theodoric the Great.]


**Imperial Rome**

Various eds. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani. Saeculi I. II. III*. [series 1, slowly being superseded by series 2] [Basic list of known Romans, AD 1-800.]


M. T. W. Arnheim. The *Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire*. 1972. [Does some Imperial genealogical reconstruction, showing proven or probable continuity of many such families from the Principate to the Later Empire.]


John Morris. “Changing Fashions in Roman Nomenclature in the Early Empire.” XXXX

Martin Heinzelmann. “Les changements de la dénomination latine à la fin du Moyen Age.” In Famille et parenté au Moyen Age (1977): 19-24. [Above three articles will tell you as much as you’re going to find, in systematic form, on how Roman naming patterns worked.]

Christian Settipani. “Ruricius I”, évêque de Limoges et ses alliances familiales.” Francia 18 (1) (1991): 195-222. [Excellent reconstruction of ancestry of Ruricius – a probable ancestor of Charlemagne – showing descent from one of the two greatest families of the Later Empire, the Anicii.]

T. S. Mommaerts and David H. Kelley. “The Anicii of Gaul and Rome.” In J. Drinkwater and H. Elsor, eds., Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity? (1992): 111-21. [A somewhat different version of the above, showing descent from the Anicii AND from the OTHER great family of the Later Empire, the Ceionii. Note that two brilliant scholars, using the same (limited) evidence, will come to rather – but not utterly – different conclusions. These articles are the finest examples I know of the STYLE of reasoning typically used for such conjectural reconstructions.]


John Morris. “Munatius Plancus Paulinus.” Bonner Jahrsbucher 165 (1965): 86-96. [Includes an elaborate stemma showing CONJECTURAL descent of the Ceionii from Augustus’s first wife Scribonia, and other figures of the early Principate. Many variant interpretations are certainly possible, but reasons are given why SOME descent is likely.]


J. R. Martindale. “Note on the Consuls of 381 and 382.” Historia 1967: 234-6. [Corrects an error in the above.]

*Arabic & ‘Mohammed’*


Forrest E. Barber. “Arab Blood Royal.” The Augustan 18 (1975): 115-24. [Useful discussion & charts, but all ‘Zaida’ lines fail, as her ancestry is in fact unknown.]

Forrest E. Barber. [Letter to the editor.] The Augustan 19 (1976): 190-1. [Admission of above critique’s force.]


T. Stanford Mommaerts. “More Arab Blood Royal.” [unpublished?] [Contains a useful bibliography & numerous interesting charts showing purported ‘Mohammed’ & other royal Arab descents to Europeans; however, many of these don’t seem, to me, adequately borne out by the cited sources.]

Khalid Yahya Blankinship. “On the Alleged Marriage of a Muslim Princess to a Byzantine Rebel.” Genealogist’s Magazine 24 (1993): 190-6. [Shows no basis for alleged marriage of Romanos II Skleros to a daughter of Abu Taghlib, Emir of Mosul. Argues, however, that Moslem/Christian marriages virtually NEVER took place, a ridiculous overstatement.]

Charles J. Jacobs. “A Suggested Moslem Descent for Eleanor of Provence and Eleanor of Castile.” Augustan 12 (1969): 217-23. [From the Banu Qasi. ‘Qasi,’ however, = ‘Cassius,’ which suggests they were originally Hispano-Roman, anyway.]


**Eastern Mediterranean & Ancient World**

Lindsay L. Brook. “The Byzantine Ancestry of H.R.H. Prince Charles, Prince of Wales.” The Genealogist 2 (1981): 3-51. See also his “Letter to the Editor” (corrigenda) at ibid., 256. [Many ‘ancient’ lines are via Byzantine emperors of Mamikonid ancestry; this is the best study of imperial Byzantine ancestry.]


T. Stanford Mommaerts. “A Key to Descents from Antiquity.” *Journal of Ancient and Medieval Studies* 3:76-107. [Some of these 60-odd suggested lines of ancient ancestry may be valid, but for those I’ve checked, the evidence seems weak.]

Christian Settipani. *Nos ancêtres de l’Antiquité. Étude des possibilités de liens généalogiques entre les familles de l’Antiquité et celles du haut Moyen Age.* 1991. See also his privately distributed *corrigenda* to above, c1992-3. [THE most important study of ONE possible line back to Ramessu II of Egypt. Best bibliography around, too. See also his ‘Charlemagne’ book, above, for another Ancient-world line, through Imperial Rome.]


Arthur J. Zuckerman. *A Jewish Princedom in Feudal France, 768-900.* 1972. [Complex, minutely detailed, dry, yet intriguing Rabbinical study of Jewish sources strongly suggesting that Count Theodoric of the Carolingian court = Makhir, Jewish Nasi of Septimania, and a probable member of the purportedly Davidic house of the Exilarchs of Babylon/Baghdad, with possible Ancient-world descent. See Settipani & van Kerrebrouck’s ‘Capétiens,’ however, for bibliography of European articles sharply CONTESTING this.]

David H. Kelley. “Who Descends from King David?” *Toledot* 1 no. 3 (1977-8): 3-5. [Supports Zuckerman, though not in detail; notes STRONG possibility that Raedburh, wife of Egbert of Wessex, was grand-daughter of Theodoric/Makhir.]


Retyped in Marshall’s memory by Julie H. Otto, July 2005