

Overview

The idea of descent from antiquity is by no means new to genealogists. Hellenistic dynasties, such as the Ptolemies, claimed descent from gods and legendary heroes. In the Middle Ages, major royal dynasties of Europe sponsored compilations claiming their descent from Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, in particular the rulers of Troy. Such claims were intended as propaganda glorifying a royal patron by trumpeting the antiquity and nobility of his ancestry. These descent lines included not only mythical figures but also stretches of outright fiction, much of which is still widely perpetuated today. The distinguishing feature of a DFA compared to such efforts is the intent to establish an ancestry that is historically accurate and verifiable. Nevertheless, DFA research still focuses on the ancestries of royal and noble families, since the historical record is most complete for such families.

The phrase descent from antiquity was used by Tobias Smollett in the 18th-century newspaper *The Critical Review*. Reviewing William Betham's *Genealogical Tables of the Sovereigns of the World*, from the earliest to the present period he wrote "From a barren list of names we learn who were the fathers or mothers, or more distant progenitors, of the select few, who are able to trace what is called their descent from antiquity." [1] The possibility of establishing a DFA as a result of serious genealogical research was raised in a pair of influential essays, by the *Albany Herald*, Sir Iain Moncreiffe of that Ilk, and the late Garter King of Arms, Sir Anthony Wagner. Wagner explored the reasons why it was difficult to do, and suggested several possible routes, based on the work of genealogists such as Prince Cyril Tomanoff, Prof. David H. Kelley, Christian Settapani and Ford Mommaerts-Browne. The following years have seen a number of studies of the possibilities. These are highly variable in the quality of their research. Many, if not most, of the DFA-related publications widely used by amateur genealogists are essentially worthless.

No DFA is accepted as established at this time. However, research has established the outlines of several possible or likely ancestries that could become DFAs. Moreover, the project has stimulated detailed inquiry into the prosopography of ancient and early medieval societies, an effort which is of great value in illuminating the social transformations which took place in those societies.

Postulated routes in Europe

Rome to Charlemagne

One proposal is to establish Charlemagne's descent from one of the senatorial families of the later-day Imperial Rome based in southern Gaul. This project is of particular interest since all European royal families can trace their descent from Charlemagne, as can many other people who are able to trace their descent from European nobility. While such a link possibly existed, extant sources do not permit reconstructing it with any degree of certainty. The record of senatorial families in the 5th and 6th centuries is very sparse. While a large amount of data exists with which to construct a prosopography of the leading provincial families of Imperial Rome in southern Gaul, it is not yet possible to establish a Gallic line that traverses the Imperial Age, though a Roman line through a Gallic one had been proposed in 1991 by Christian Settapani. Therefore, all reconstructions of the DFA through Western European monarchs must remain precarious at best and speculative at worst. Though two possible lines are proposed for the ancestry of Arnulf of Metz, both are linked to the ancestors who are in turn reputedly linked to the Gallo-Roman genealogies. One of these proposes a descent from the proconsul Flavius Afranius Syagrius.

Rome to Hermenegildo Gutiérrez

A possible alternative route to Settapani's original scheme goes through the Counts of Coimbra in 9th century Portugal. That route was originally suggested in a discussion between Settapani and Francisco Antonio Doria; it starts with a comes Ardabastos (born circa 611), son of a Visigoth refugee in Byzantium, Athanagild (in turn son of Saint Hermenegild and Ingunthis) and of Flavia Juliana (a Byzantine noblewoman related to the family of Emperor Maurice), that later moved to Provincia Spaniae (Byzantine possession in Spain) and fathered Erwig, king of the Visigoths (680–687). It is argued that this individual was descended from a Byzantine Artavazd of the great Mamikonian clan. The line is documented in a

controversial deed that links the full descent to the historically attested count Hermenegildo Gutiérrez (878). The deed itself is dubious, and while some have suggested that the genealogy it contains could still be authentic, the lack of surviving documentation from the period spanned makes independent evaluation impossible. It is also said that the mentioned Count Ardabastos was a great-nephew of Emperor Maurice, grandson of his brother Peter Augustus, whose ancestry, though Armenian, was of a lower birth. Interestingly, even if Count Ardabastos was "only" a grand-nephew of Emperor Maurice, with no kinship to the Mamikonians, through his maternal grandmother Anastasia Areobinda (wife of Peter Augustus and great-great granddaughter of Flavius Anastasius Paulus Probus Sabinianus Pompeius, Roman consul in 517) he was a lineal descendant of the Valentinian and Theodosian dynasties, as well as of the very ancient gens Anicia, whose first mention dates back to the end of the 4th century BC (Quintus Anicius Praenestinus, curule aedile in 304 BC[2]). If the proposed links between Count Ardabastos and Hermenegildo Guterres are correct, it would be possible to trace a blood-link between Theodosius I or Valentinian I and Ramiro II of León (grandson of Hermenegildo Gutiérrez) and so to the modern European royal houses.

Attila the Hun to Charlemagne

Many genealogists attempted to reconstruct a valid line of descent from Attila the Hun to Charlemagne but no one succeeded in working out a generally accepted route.

Steven Runciman's book on the First Bulgarian Empire, for instance, includes a pedigree of Kubrat from Attila's youngest son, Ernakh, as the Bulgarian khans apparently believed to have been descended from Attila. While no sources are cited and intermediate generations are missing, there is another complication in the Bulgarian route: no documented link between the Bulgarian dynasty and Charlemagne.

Christian Settipani suggested a more plausible descent, although it cannot be reconstructed generation by generation as well. The scholar gives credit to the traditional claim that Attila's daughter was one of many wives of Ardaric, king of the Gepids. It is assumed that the 6th-century Gepid rulers descended from Ardaric and that some royal Gepids claimed descent from this marriage in particular, although details are unclear.

A key link is the documented alliance between a Gepid princess Austrigusa and Waccho, king of the Lombards. According to Settipani, Waccho and Austrigusa were ancestors of either Charlemagne's mother or his father, but this claim involves a