

# Descent from antiquity

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**Descent from antiquity (DFA)** is the project of establishing a well-researched, generation-by-generation descent of living persons from people living in antiquity. It is an ultimate challenge in prosopography and genealogy.

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## 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 (see also British Israelism, Euhemerism). 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."<sup>[1]</sup> 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 Toumanoff, Prof. David H. Kelley, Christian Settiani 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

Innumerable alternative routes of descent from antiquity have been posited.

### 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 Count Ardabastos (b. c. 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<sup>[2]</sup>). 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 Austricusa were ancestors of either Charlemagne's mother or his father, but this claim involves a considerable degree of speculation as well.

## Charlemagne to the Mughals

Charlemagne to the Mughals is a genealogical route connecting Charlemagne with the Mughal dynasty of India. According to this route, numerous oriental rulers, including those of Brunei and the Maldives, should be counted among Charlemagne's descendants.

Charlemagne's great grandson, Emperor Louis II, was the father-in-law of Boso of Provence, whose grandson was Rudolph II of Burgundy. The latter's grandson, Emperor Otto II, was the father-in-law of Ezzo and grandfather of Richeza of Poland. Her grandson, Ladislaus I of Hungary, was the father of Saint Eirene, the only wife of Emperor Ioannes II, who forms a key gateway between early medieval Europe and Byzantium.

Ioannes II and Saint Eirene are thought to have been matrilineal ancestors of Eudokia Palaiologina, Michael VIII's daughter and the only wife of John II of Trebizond. The latter's male-line descendant, John IV of Trebizond, had a natural daughter, Theodora Megala Komnene, who was taken as a wife by Uzun Hassan of White Sheep Turkmen. Shah Ismail I of Persia was their grandson. His Safavid descendants, particularly those governing Kandahar, frequently married the Mughal dynasts and emperors, who passed Charlemagne's blood to other families of oriental royalty. That offspring includes and starts with Shah Jahan.

## Non-European DfAs

### Africa

The Solomonic dynasty, formerly sovereign in Ethiopia, has long claimed descent from King Solomon of the Kingdom of Israel. For all of its circumstantial evidence, the well known claim is nonetheless unverifiable due to the fact that reliable documentation is lacking before the 13th century. Outside of this case in particular, similar oral traditions of various descents from antiquity exist in nations and amongst peoples from all over the continent. Amongst the Yorubas of West Africa, for example, there is a popular belief that the numerous members of the tribe are all descendants of Oduduwa, their semi-mythical emperor and founding father, who is believed to have reigned in the 11th century. Contemporary social status in their various kingdoms, therefore, is traditionally reckoned by what can be described as tanistry: If a person can claim to be a *direct* descendant of the emperor through the lines of his progeny (i.e. his children and grandchildren) as opposed to being an indirect one through those of his more distant relatives, then he or she is probably a dynastic member of one of the royal or high noble families within the contemporary Yoruba chieftaincy system. As with the aforementioned claim by the Ethiopians, however, genealogical verification is generally difficult in these cases due to an absence of written corroboration.

### Pre-Columbian America

Another such case for descent from antiquity originates in the Americas (i.e. pre-Columbian civilization) for the descendants of the Aztec emperor Moctezuma II (himself a direct descendant of the first Aztec king Acamapichtli), among whom can be counted titled members of the Bourbon, Stuart, Habsburg, and Hohenlohe noble houses<sup>[3][4]</sup> (as well as untitled people such as Eduardo Matos Moctezuma) and the holders of the titles of Duke of Moctezuma de Tultengo, Dukes of Ahumada, Counts of Miravalle, Duke of Abrantes, Condes de la Enjarada, Condes de Alba de Yeltes,<sup>[5]</sup> Dukes of Atrisco<sup>[4]</sup> and Dukes of Alba.

## Islam

Social privileges and immunities accorded to descendents of Muhammad have led to a vast quantity of false declarations of their lineages. Similar to other parts of the world, claiming noble ancestry helped reinforce a ruler. In the Ottoman Empire, tax breaks for "the People of the House" encouraged many people to buy certificates of descent or forge genealogies; the phenomenon of *teseyyüd* – falsely claiming noble ancestry – spread across ethnic, class, and religious boundaries. In the 17th century, an Ottoman bureaucrat estimated that there were 300,000 impostors; In 18th-century Anatolia, nearly all upper-class urban people claimed descent from Muhammad.<sup>[6]</sup> The number of people claiming such ancestry – which exempted them from taxes such as *avarız* and *tekalif-i orfiye* – became so great that tax collection was very difficult.<sup>[7]</sup> The Hashemite kings of Jordan,<sup>[8]</sup> the Alaouite kings of Morocco,<sup>[9][10]</sup> and the Aga Khans,<sup>[11]</sup> all claim descent from Muhammad or his close relatives.

## Japan

In the East, a descent from antiquity may be easier to establish. The Japanese imperial family claims descent from the Emperor Ōjin,<sup>[12][13]</sup> who is generally considered historical, though his time of life is uncertain. However, contemporary Japanese records do not commence until several centuries after Ōjin's time, and the tradition reports a major change to a cadet line shortly before the start of the literate period.

## China

Due to China's long history of literacy, cultural continuity, and tradition of keeping family records, China has a number of families claiming DFA, including some of the oldest in existence. The following are some examples:

Kung Tsui-chang, who succeeded to the title Sacrificial Official to Confucius in the Republic of China in 2009, is claimed to be the 79th-generation male-line descendant of Confucius, and many other Chinese claim descent from this line.<sup>[14][15]</sup> Confucius himself was said to be a descendant of the Dukes of Song, who in turn were said to be descendants of the Shang dynasty kings. A 75th generation descendant of Mencius and a 75th generation descendant of Zengzi,<sup>[16][17]</sup> and a descendant of Yan Hui also have titles of Sacrificial Officials.<sup>[18]</sup>

In 2013, a DNA test performed on multiple different families who claimed descent from Confucius found that they shared the same Y chromosome as reported by Fudan University.<sup>[19]</sup>

In 1452, Wujing Boshi was bestowed upon the offspring of Mengzi-Meng Xiwen 孟希文 56th generation<sup>[20][21][22][23][24][25][26]</sup> and Yan Hui-Yan Xihui 顏希惠 59th generation,<sup>[20][21][22][23][24][25][26]</sup> the same was bestowed on the offspring of Zhou Dunyi-Zhou Mian 週冕 12th generation,<sup>[27][28][29][30][31][32]</sup> the two Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi-Chen Keren 程克仁 17th generation<sup>[20][21][22][23][24][25][26]</sup>), Zhu Xi-Zhu Ting 朱梃 (Zhu Chan?) 9th generation,<sup>[33][34][35]</sup> in 1456-1457, in 1539 the same was awarded to Zeng Can's offspring-Zeng Zhicui 曾質粹 60th generation, in 1622 the offspring of Zhang Zai received the title and in 1630 the offspring of Shao Yong.<sup>[36][37]</sup> Zhang Zai's offspring received the appointment as wujing boshi along with Zhu Xi's, Cheng Hao's, Cheng Yi's, and Zhou Dunyi's offspring.<sup>[38]</sup>

Confucian sages (Disciples of Confucius and Neo Confucian scholars) offspring were granted the office of "Wujing Boshi" (五经博士; 五經博士; Wǔjīng Bóshì).<sup>[39]</sup> There were 22 of them.<sup>[40][41][42]</sup> *Present Day Political Organization of China* by V.V. Hagelstrom and H.S. Brunnert contains a list of people who were awarded the title:<sup>[43]</sup> *The title of 五經博士 Wu3 Ching1 Po2 Shih4, or simply 博士 Po2 Shih4 (literary designation, 大瀚博 Ta4 Han4 Po2), is also transmitted to the eldest, in a direct line, of the descendants of the following famous men of antiquity* : 1. 周公 Chou1 Kung1, 2. 顏淵 Yen2 Yüan1, 3. 曾子輿 Tsêng1 Tzu3-yü2, 4. 閔子騫 Min3 Tzu3-ch'ien1, 5. 仲季路 Chung4 Chi4-lu4, 6. 有子有 Yu3 Tzu3-yu3, 7. 端木子貢 Tuan1 Mu4 Tzu3 Kung4, 8. 卜子夏 Pu3 Tzu3-hsia4, 9. 言子游 Yen2 Tzu3-yu2, 10. 冉伯牛 Jan3 Po2-niu2, 11. 冉仲弓 Jan3 Chung4-kung1, 12. 顓孫子張 Chuan1 Sun1 Tzu3 Chang1, 13. 孟子 Mêng4 Tzu3, 14. 伏生 Fu2 Shêng1, 15. 韓愈 Han4 Yü4, 16. 周敦頤 Chou1 Tun1-i2, 17. 邵雍 Shao4 Yung1, 18. 程顥 Ch'êng2 Hao4, 19. 程頤 Ch'êng2 I2, 20. 張載 Chang 1 Tsai3, 21. 朱熹 Chu1 Hsi3, and 22. 關羽 Kuan1 Yü3.<sup>[44][45][46][47]</sup> It was also granted to the cadet branch of the Confucius family at Quzhou.<sup>[48][49][50][51][52]</sup>

Zhang Daoling's offspring, the The Celestial Masters held the title of 正一嗣教真人.<sup>[53][54][55]</sup>

Lords of the Zhou dynasty claim descent from deified legendary figures in pre-historic era. As such, all families descended from Zhou dynasty rulers can, in turn, trace descent back to gods and heroes in Chinese mythology. This includes the Confucius and Mencius families mentioned above, who both claim traceable descent from the Yellow Emperor. The Five Emperors were asserted as ancestors of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties.<sup>[56]</sup>

The modern purported descendants of Cao Cao were authenticated with Y chromosome DNA testing, since the remains of Cao Cao's granduncle provided Y chromosome O2\*-M268 which matched that of the claimed descendants.<sup>[57]</sup>

There are numerous families in China who purportedly claim descent from antiquity figures. Some of these lines go back to pre-Qin dynasties, which in turn can be traced back into legendary history.<sup>[58][59]</sup>

The Sui dynasty emperors claimed to be patrilineally descended from the Zhou dynasty kings.<sup>[60]</sup>

The Tang dynasty emperors claimed to be patrilineally descended from the ancient philosopher Laozi (whose personal name was Li Dan or Li Er),<sup>[61]</sup> the Han dynasty General Li Guang,<sup>[62][63]</sup> and Western Liang ruler Li Gao. The Yenisei Kirghiz khagans claimed to be descended from Li Ling, who was a grandson of Li Guang, and therefore claimed to be related to the Tang dynasty emperors.<sup>[64][65]</sup> This family was known as the Longxi Li lineage (隴西李氏) which includes Li Bai.

Descendants of the Tang Emperors live in Chengcun village near the Wuyi mountains in Fujian.<sup>[66]</sup>

The Shatuo Later Jin leader Shi Jingtang claimed descent from the Han dynasty chancellor Shi Fen (石奮).<sup>[67]</sup>

The Song dynasty chancellor Sima Guang (1019–1086) was descended from the imperial family of the Jin dynasty (265–420).

The Qing dynasty official Yue Zhongqi (岳鐘琪), who served as the Governor-General of Shaanxi and Gansu provinces during the reign of the Yongzheng Emperor, was a descendant of the Song dynasty general Yue Fei.

One of the Duke of Zhou's 72 generation descendants family tree was examined and commented on by Song Lian.<sup>[68]</sup>

The Zhikou (Chikow) Chiangs such as Chiang Kai-shek were descended from Chiang Shih-chieh who during the 1600s (17th century) moved there from Fenghua district, whose ancestors in turn came to southeastern China's Zhejiang (Chekiang) province after moving out of Northern China in the 13th century AD. The 12th century BC Duke of Zhou's (Duke of Chou) third son was the ancestor of the Chiangs.<sup>[69][70][71][72][73][74]</sup>

## See also

Some ancestries have been proposed and researched, including:

- Descent from Adam and Eve
- History of Portugal (711–1112)
- Descent from Genghis Khan
- Family tree of Confucius in the main line of descent

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Useful material on this topic can be found in the archives of the UseNet newsgroup [soc.genealogy.medieval](mailto:soc.genealogy.medieval), (which is also archived at GEN-MEDIEVAL (<http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/GEN-MEDIEVAL/>)), and at GEN-ANCIENT (<http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/GEN-ANCIENT/>). The Yahoo! group Ancient Genealogy ([http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ancient\\_genealogy/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ancient_genealogy/)) discusses DFA-related issues.

Much of the published work on this topic is no more reliable than medieval genealogies, and should be used cautiously. A well-known example is:

- R. W. Stuart, *Royalty for Commoners: The Complete Known Lineage of John of Gaunt, Son of Edward III, King of England, and Queen Philippa* (4th edn) (Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 2002).

This is also true for most DFA material on the web, see e.g. many of the descents at [1] ([http://www.angelfire.com/ego/et\\_deo/index.htm](http://www.angelfire.com/ego/et_deo/index.htm)).

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