

Are genetic ancestry companies taking you for a ride?

I can reveal that I am a direct descendent of someone of similar greatness: Charlemagne, Carolingian King of the Franks, Holy Roman Emperor, the great European conciliator. *Quelle surprise!*

But we are all special, which means none of us are. In 2013, geneticists Peter Ralph and Graham Coop showed that [all Europeans are descended from exactly the same people](#).

This is merely a numbers game. You have two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and so on. What this means is that pedigrees begin to fold in on themselves a few generations back, and become less arboreal, and more web-like.

With the advent of cheap genetic sequencing, the deep, intimate history of everyone can be revealed. Plenty of companies have emerged that provide this service, such as [23andMe](#) and [Ancestry DNA](#).

People love discovering that they're a bit Viking, or a bit Saracen. This is big business nowadays, and some companies spin fabulous yarns about your forebears as marketing devices. The truth is that we all are a bit of everything, and we come from all over. If you're white, you're a bit Viking. And a bit Celt. And a bit Anglo-Saxon. And a bit Charlemagne.

So what does this all mean? Ancestry is messy. [Genetics](#) is messy, but powerful. People are horny. Life is complex. Anyone who says differently is selling something. A secret history is hidden in the mosaics of our genomes, but *caveat emptor*.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: [So you're related to Charlemagne? You and every other living European...](#)