

How every living European is related to Charlemagne, and why this is entirely unremarkable

Sometimes I get asked if I'm related to the great physicist Ernest Rutherford. His discoveries about the atomic nucleus gave birth to physics in the 20th century. He is the father of nuclear physics, with labs and atoms named after him.

I'm not related to him. I can reveal however 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. If you're vaguely of European extraction, you are also the fruits of Charlemagne's prodigious loins. A fecund ruler, he sired at least 18 children by motley wives and concubines, including Charles the Younger, Pippin the Hunchback, Drogo of Metz, Hruodrud, Ruodhaid, and not forgetting Hugh.

This is merely a numbers game. You have two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and so on. But this ancestral expansion is not borne back ceaselessly into the past. If it were, your family tree when Charlemagne was Le Grand Fromage would harbour more than a billion ancestors – more people than were alive then. What this means is that pedigrees begin to fold in on themselves a few generations back, and become less arboreal, and more web-like. In 2013, geneticists Peter Ralph and Graham Coop showed that all Europeans are descended from exactly the same people. Basically, everyone alive in the ninth century who left descendants is the ancestor of every living European today, including Charlemagne, Drogo, Pippin and Hugh. Quel dommage.

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...](#)