The Descent of the House of Windsor



As news of the death of Queen Elizabeth II travelled round the world on Thursday one item that has popped up in news feeds again (as it does every couple of years) as exciting the imagination of some people is the suggestion that the Queen (and by extension all her ancestors back to King Edward IV, and descendants from King Charles, Prince William and Prince Harry onwards) was descended from the Muslim Prophet Mohammed. Burkes Peerage, normally a reliable genealogy source gave it credence. Some Muslim sources were delighted at the idea; others think it a hoax and a lie.

I'm with Dr David Starkey who says it is plausible. I agree that it is indeed plausible for the reason that over the centuries that Spain and Portugal were ruled by the Moors, one ruling dynasty, the Abbadids, were founded by Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn Abbad (born c984 AD) who is an accepted descendant.

Descent from Mohammed is a prized lineage in the Islamic world and records (such as the line of the King of Morocco) are impeccably kept and researched. Unfortunately because such a lineage is so prized, in some circles the ancestry is forged. But I think Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn Abbad is reliable.

Over those centuries there were numerous instances of members of the Muslim ruling dynasties converting to Christianity and marrying among the aristocracy and even royalty of the Iberian Kingdoms. And over the centuries members of the Spanish and

Portuguese royal families have intermarried with members of the English and Scottish Royal families. Catherine of Aragon, Catherine of Braganza, two sisters of Castille. So a thread is possible, plausible, feasible.

But not, I submit the line proposed by Burkes Peerage and Assahifa Al-Ousbouia the newspaper of Morocco.

That asserts that some time in the late 10th century Zaida of Seville, a great-granddaughter (possibly) of Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn Abbad (and thus a descendant of Mohammed herself – all descent from Mohammed will include the female line at the very beginning from his only child daughter Fatima) being widowed in the battles of that period took refuge in the Kingdom of Castile. There she caught the attention of King Alfonso VI, King of Castile and Leon. She became his mistress, and converted to Christianity. They had a son Sancho.

To put Alfonso in historical context his great general (when he wasn't working against him) was Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, known as El Cid. Alfonso was keen to foster links with solidly Christian northern Europe. One way to do this was marriage and he contracted marriage with Agatha of Normandy one of the youngest daughters of King William I the Conqueror. But she died young before it took place.

As well as the careful scholarship of the Mohammedan ancestry of the early caliphs and current ruling houses of North Africa the genealogy of the English and Scots Royal families is sound, at least for the direct line of descent. But until the Tudor period not as much care was taken to note place and date of birth of the youngest children even of Kings, (especially girls) or anything about them if they died young. So not every source of the Norman court even mentions poor little Agatha.

Alfonso VI did marry at least three times. He sought alliances with the French by marrying, not necessarily in this order, Agnes of Aquitaine, Constance of Burgundy, (they had a

daughter Urraca) a lady called Berta, believed to be from the House of Savoy, a lady called Isabel, said by some to be another daughter of the Burgundian house, a lady called Beatrice, also from Aquitaine and another mistress, Jimena Munoz with whom he had two daughters.

Sancho, his son with Zaida, was the only male child recorded (any others must have died very young). Sancho was made his heir (illegitimacy doesn't seem to have been the bar it became in more recent centuries) and he fought well for his father in battle. Unfortunately he and his wife had no children before he was killed in combat and Urraca became heir and eventually Queen regnant.

Of the other daughters, Jimena's daughter Teresa married Count Henry of Portugal and their son Afonso Henry was the first king of that country. Elvira married Roger and became Queen of Sicily. Another daughter Sancha married into the Castillian nobility. She is the link to the English royal family, and ultimately the Scottish royal family.

Her descendant (Greatx4granddaughter if I have counted correctly) in the nobility of Castile, 250 or so years later was Maria de Padilla who was the mistress of King Peter of Castille. They had four children. Two sisters were married to two brothers, sons of English King Edward III. Constance married John of Gaunt (who I hope you have heard of, from Shakespeare if not history) and Isabella married Edmund Langley.

As an aside John and Constance had only one child, a daughter, Catherine; she returned to Castille and married King Henry, thus consolidating her claim to that throne. After Constance died John married his mistress Katherine Swynford and legitimated their children as the Beaufort family. A century later they became the Lancastrian side in the Wars of the Roses, also called The Cousin's War.

Isabella and Edmund had several children. Their younger son Richard Earl of Cambridge was the grandfather of the two brothers who were King Edward IV and King Richard III. They were of the Yorkist side of the Wars of the Roses.

So if the line is correct, (and there are doubts, as indicated at the beginning) from 1461 when Edward IV took the throne (for the first time) the King of England was a descendant of Mohammed.

Edward married Elizabeth Woodville a beautiful widow, considered a commoner (unusual for a king then) because her father was a mere knight. However her mother Jaquetta Saint-Pol was no commoner but a member of the ruling house of Luxembourg and connected to the royal houses of Europe. They had many children; two sons who died young in mysterious circumstances (the Princes in the Tower) and daughters, the eldest of which was Elizabeth of York. Edward died of illness and Richard III was defeated at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 by Henry Tudor. Henry Tudor's mother was Margaret Beaufort, of the Lancastrians. His marriage to Elizabeth of York united the two houses and founded the Tudor dynasty; their daughter Princess Margaret married King James IV of Scotland; his dynasty was the Stewarts in Scots, which is spelt Stuart in French.

Since 1485 all monarchs of England, and since 1512 all kings and Queens of the Scots have been descended from Elizabeth of York, daughter of King Edward IV.

But was she, and her father, descended from Zaida of Seville? And even if they were, was Zaida really a descendant of Mohammed? This is the proposed list of the generations.

The descent from Zaida really hinges on who was the mother of the Princess Sancha of Castille who married into the House of Lara in or around 1120? Her mother was said to be 'Isabel'. Which may have been the Isabel from the House of Burgundy,

which many historians consider the most likely, or, as the proponents of the Mohammedan descent say, Zaida, using the name she was given at her baptism. Zaida is only definitely recorded as having one child, Sancho, before dying in childbirth. But what happened to that baby? As I said, dates of birth of younger children, especially the girls wasn't an exact science then.

The other stumbling block is Zaida herself. If she was indeed the daughter of Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn Abbad then she is a genuine descendant. But there are sources, and some of them are Islamic, that say she was his daughter-in-law. If we don't know her lineage she may not be a descendant. Or she may well be, cousin marriage being common in that society, then as now. But there's no certainty.

So it is plausible that somewhere in the lineage of HM King Charles III is a link back to Mohammed. But many of us might have the same.

Before the mass immigration to the UK of the last 20 years British geneticist Adam Rutherford, said that it is "virtually impossible" that a person with a predominantly British ancestry is not descended from Edward III, who had 13 children, most of whom survived into adulthood. He calculated that "almost every Briton" is "descended between 21 and 24 generations from Edward III". Another study shows that 0.5% of the male population of the world carry the Y chromosome indicating descent from Genghis Khan.

If we are contemplating impressive ancestors of the Royal family Jaquetta Saint-Pol claimed descent from Melusine the water sprite, a being with power over rivers and floods. Jaquetta played this up a bit to confound her enemies, which laid her open to charges of witchcraft, so maybe that's not such a good example.



How about the head of the Norse Gods? The King can trace his ancestry very reliably back to Cerdic of Wessex, the founder of the Kingdom of the West Saxons (I'm an East Saxon btw) who landed in Hampshire in 495 AD. The Saxon kings all claimed descent from Odin, Cerdic's defeat at the Battle of Badon (one of the occasions when the legend of King Arthur has real historic fact behind it) not withstanding.

Thor is the eye-catching Norse god, funky hammer, thunderbolts, played by actors with muscles in interesting places. But Odin is the boss. Wise, healing, poetic.

But better than all of them, the Queen and now the King is the earthly head of the Church of England, a responsibility the Queen took seriously, and one that the King has just assured us in his address he too
"As The Queen herself did with such unswerving devotion, I too now solemnly pledge myself, throughout the remaining time God

grants me, to uphold the Constitutional principles at the heart of our nation..”

That matters to me.