Clarion Review

History

Judah Scepter: A Historical and Religious Persepective
Brian Arundell Howard
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Three Stars (out of Five)

What family doesn't have its legends? The Arundell-Howard family may deserve legendary status for its family lineage: it claims descent not only from the illustrious medieval and modern royal houses of Europe, but also to be the scions of the ancient and even biblical families of the Franks, Troy, and Judea—an unbroken line of succession stretching over 4,000 years.

In this book, genealogist Brian Arundell Howard seeks to prove the connection between his family and the Israelite Jacob, son of Judah. According to his origin story, when Moses and the Twelve Tribes of Israel were preparing to march out of Egypt into Sinai, one family demurred. Seafarers and merchants, the family of Zarah, a branch of the royal house of Judah, took to their boats and headed out into the Mediterranean. They landed on the shores of Ilium, where they rose to become the royal family of Troy.

To Brian Arundell Howard, Homer's *Illiad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* amount to more than poetry and literature. Indeed, he believes they recount his family's history. While archaeological proof of this connection is spurious at best, Howard does weave a thoroughly entertaining if not entirely believable tale. That the family of King Priam's diaspora, from the toppled towers of Ilium, provides the seed for dozens of subsequent royal houses is just one more leap of faith Howard asks of his readers—and it is not the last such jump.

The family of the royal house of Judah, as Howard puts his case, survived antiquity and the fall of the Roman Empire (in which it allegedly had no small part, as it helped father the Frankish kings) to found the Merovingian and Carolingian dynasties. No less a figure than Charlemagne himself occupies a branch of this family tree.

From this, the first in a thousand-year-line of Holy Roman emperors, writes Howard, "the spread of Christianity and its defense would be shared (by) the three lines of descendants of Charlemagne. The Plantagenets', Arundell's, and Howard's (sic) all were born from the line of

Franks and all would strive to continue what Charlemagne had started in Rome, Italy on Christmas Day 801."

The first half of *Judah Scepter* may be more myth than history, but the second half is fairly solid genealogy. The lineage and accomplishments of the Arundell and Howard families and their connection to the Plantagenet dynasty is quite well-documented and rarely disputed.

These noble houses played key roles in the War of the Roses, the English Civil War, and the colonization of the Americas. The Howards were dukes of Norfolk and their descendants came over on the Ark and the Dove in 1634 to populate the Maryland colony of Lord Baltimore. The Arundells, with whom they married, were English earls of that same name. Members of the conjoined family fought in the American Revolution and were counted among the ranks of the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill. Howards and Arundells made many other contributions to their new country, notably in its expansion westward.

Howard packs his book with an immense and at times overwhelming cast of characters. Some appear as but a name amongst a gaggle of soldiers, counts, and bishops, while others dominate several pages. A number of tables, charts, maps, and pictures are included, and these help differentiate the myriad leaves upon the multitude of branches in what is more a forest than a single tree.

How much of what Brian Arundell Howard presents is solid fact and how much is conjecture or the stuff of legend likely matters little to anyone outside of this prolific royal brood. At its very least, Howard's work is a retelling of western history through the lives of a single extended family—a family whose links may be real or imagined or, more likely, could indeed be a combination of both.

Whether the reader will come to believe the story or not, it is a good story, and a damn fine read.

Mark G. McLaughlin