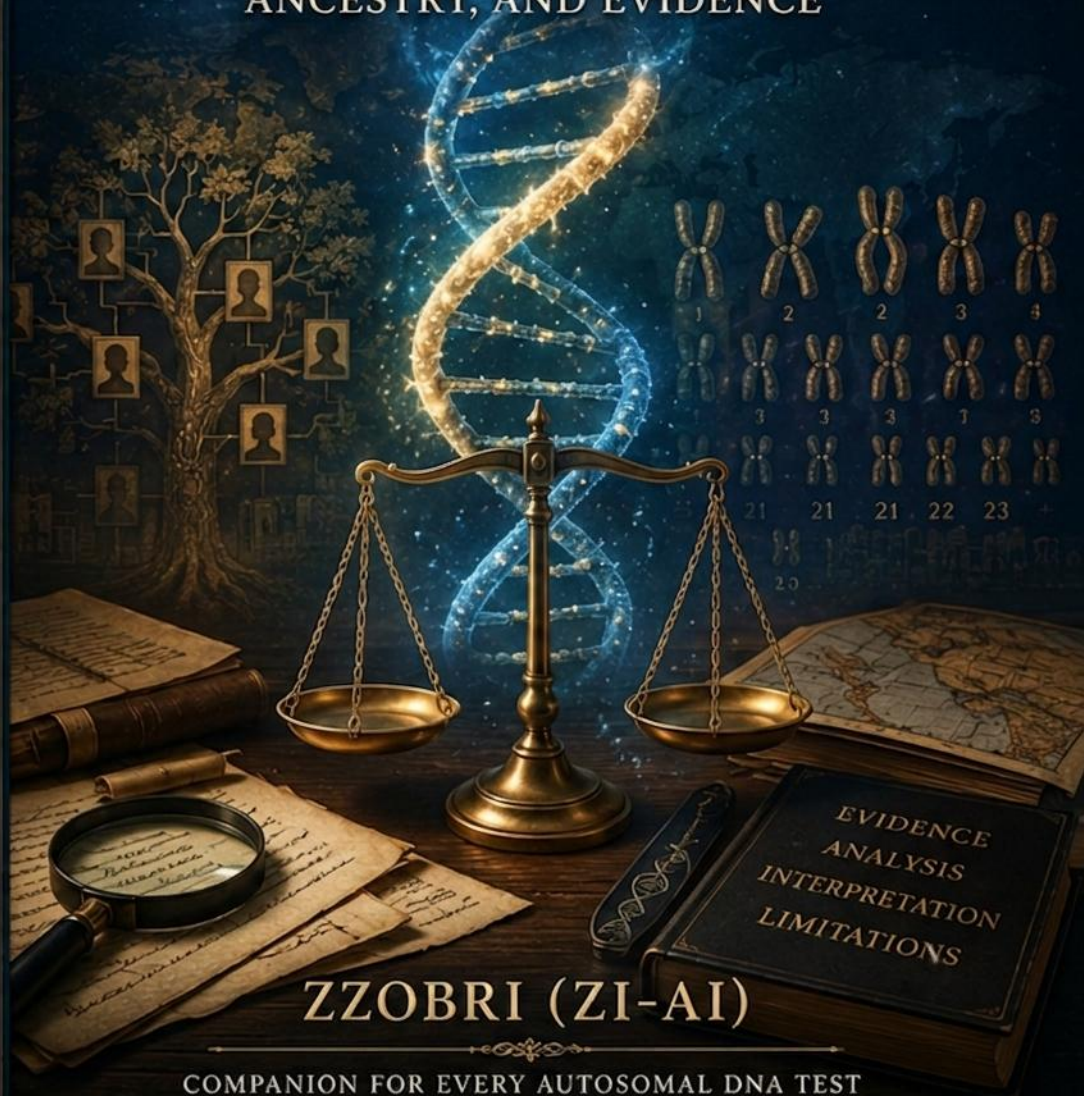


WHAT DNA SAYS — AND WHAT IT DOES NOT SAY

UNDERSTANDING DNA,
ANCESTRY, AND EVIDENCE



ZZOBRI (ZI-AI)

COMPANION FOR EVERY AUTOSOMAL DNA TEST

WHAT DNA SAYS — AND WHAT IT DOES NOT SAY

Understanding DNA, Ancestry, and Evidence

Companion for Every Autosomal DNA Test

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Note on Composition

This work was developed through an extended collaboration between the author and several artificial intelligence language models, including ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Grok, and others.

The purpose of these systems was not to originate the subject matter or determine the conclusions presented. Rather, they assisted in structuring, refining, reviewing, and critically examining the material throughout the writing process.

The underlying content, historical material, family records, documentary evidence, research, interpretation, and final conclusions originate from the author. Throughout the preparation of this manuscript, numerous sections were repeatedly examined, questioned, challenged, rewritten, and independently reviewed using different AI systems. Areas of agreement and disagreement were carefully considered, and the final text reflects the author's own judgement after that process of evaluation.

Artificial intelligence was therefore employed as an intellectual tool for analysis, organisation, language refinement, and critical review. Responsibility for the content, interpretations, and conclusions remains entirely with the author.

This collaboration reflects a new method of scholarly writing in which artificial intelligence serves neither as an author nor as an authority, but as an assistant in the disciplined examination and communication of ideas.

Decode only what the evidence can say.

Never understate or overplay.

Articulate only what it can truly convey.

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Note on Scope

This book examines autosomal DNA testing — the most widely used form of consumer ancestry testing and the form through which most people begin exploring their family origins. Its primary subject is DNA evidence itself: how it is generated, how it is interpreted, what conclusions it can support, and where its limitations begin.

Part I explores the foundational principles of DNA evidence, including inheritance, ethnicity estimates, DNA matching, reference populations, and the strengths and limitations of genetic investigation.

Part II applies those principles to a real-world investigation using the actual DNA results of three closely related individuals:

- Agnes Chapman (mother)
- Becket Effendi (son)
- Ismat Effendi (son)

The family was selected because its DNA results provide a broad range of ancestry signals across multiple testing platforms, making it a useful example through which the strengths and limitations of autosomal DNA analysis can be examined in practice.

The investigation draws upon results from multiple commercial testing platforms (AncestryDNA, MyHeritage, LivingDNA, and Genomelink), independent analytical systems, documentary genealogy, oral traditions, and historical research.

Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA testing are discussed later in the book, but they do not form part of the present investigation.

Throughout the investigation, careful distinctions are drawn between evidence, probability, possibility, and speculation.

Two questions remain central:

What does the evidence say?

And equally important:

What does the evidence not say?

INTRODUCTION

A much-anticipated DNA report arrives.

Maps appear. Percentages appear. Ethnicity estimates, regional assignments, and lists of possible relatives fill the screen. All of it generated from a simple tube of saliva or a cheek swab. The result looks precise, scientific, and authoritative. The hard work, it seems, is done.

But it has barely begun.

The test seems to be telling a story.

But what story is it actually telling?

That question lies at the heart of this book. To answer it properly requires both principles and evidence. The principles are explored throughout Part I. The evidence is examined throughout Part II by means of a real-world family investigation.

From my earliest memories, my father, uncles, and other elders never ceased conveying to me my family's traditions, genealogy, and historical accounts.

Among the traditions passed down to me was an oral as well as documented lineage of over forty generations going back to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Alongside this were traditions connecting parts of the family's history to the lineage of the Prophet-King Sulayman (Solomon), son of the Prophet-King Dawud (David), and to historical events associated with the Babylonian exile in what is now modern-day Iraq.

Whether all of these traditions were correct, partially correct, misunderstood, or incapable of being tested by autosomal DNA was itself part of the question. A claim does not cease to be important simply because it remains unproven. Claims, traditions, records, and family memories form part of the evidence that an investigation must examine.

Yet knowing a history and understanding it completely are not the same thing. I always wanted to know more.

When I first became aware of the Human Genome Project in the late 1980s, and later learned of consumer DNA testing, I became fascinated by what this new form of evidence might contribute. For many years I hoped that one day I would be able to compare DNA evidence with the oral traditions, genealogies, and historical records that had already been passed down to me.

That opportunity finally arrived — and when it did, I approached it as an investigator.

I was the first of my direct family to test. Several weeks later, my mother and my brother received their results.

Before receiving the DNA results, I had already considered what the results might reveal in light of what was already known, what was suspected, and the reasoned conclusions I had drawn from approximately five generations of paternal and maternal family history. I was interested to see how closely that prior understanding would correspond with the genetic evidence that later emerged.

The full story is told in my previous book, *Intention Before the Test*.

Although my family's results provide the case study, this book is not about my family.

The primary subject is what DNA evidence is genuinely capable of saying — and what responsible investigators must acknowledge it cannot.

Throughout this book, two questions will repeatedly appear:

What does the evidence say?

What does the evidence not say?

Those questions sound similar. They are not.

Much misunderstanding arises from treating them as though they were the same question.

The evidence provides information.

Interpretation provides meaning.

Both are necessary.

Only one is directly anchored in the data.

Millions of people have now taken DNA tests, and millions more will do so in the years ahead. Their reports contain maps, percentages, ethnicity estimates, regional assignments, and lists of genetic matches. Some find the results fascinating. Others find them confusing. Yet many discover that different testing systems appear to tell different stories.

The challenge is no longer obtaining DNA evidence.

The challenge is understanding it.

We must view our genetic data not as a final verdict, but as an assembled body of evidence. Autosomal DNA rarely functions as a direct witness to history. More often, it provides fragments of evidence that must be interpreted within a wider context of family history, genealogy, records, and historical research.

To help examine those fragments systematically, this book is structured into forty-six chapters, corresponding symbolically to the forty-six chromosomes usually inherited by a human being. The symbolism also serves a practical purpose. The evidence is presented in manageable stages, with each chapter examining a particular aspect of the investigation before building upon those that came before. Some repetition is therefore intentional, as key principles are revisited in the light of new evidence and new questions. By the end, the reader will have considered not only the individual pieces of evidence, but also how they fit together as a coherent whole.

But before we can examine the evidence, we must first understand where it comes from. Every DNA investigation begins in the same place: with a question.

Part I establishes the principles needed to understand DNA evidence: inheritance, chromosomes, ethnicity estimates, DNA matching, and the limits of genetic analysis.

Part II applies those principles to a real investigation involving the three family members previously introduced. The investigation draws upon documented genealogy, historical questions, and selected analyses from six of the more than two hundred DNA outputs generated by multiple testing systems.

By the end of this journey, you may not know everything about your ancestry. In truth, nobody does. But you will be better equipped to distinguish evidence from speculation, probability from possibility, and interpretation from fact.

Before asking what DNA says about us, we must first understand what DNA is capable of saying at all.

Only then can the investigation begin.

PART I
THE EVIDENCE
(Chapters 1–23)

Chapter 1

THE QUESTION

What Can a DNA Test Actually Tell Us?

A DNA report arrived. One person opened it and found confirmation. Another opened the same report and found mystery. The report had not changed. The questions being asked of it had.

Many people approach DNA testing with a simple expectation. They believe the test will tell them who they are and where they come from. The advertisements often reinforce this impression. Maps appear. Percentages appear. Ethnicities appear. The result looks precise, scientific, and authoritative.

Yet the first question an investigator should ask is not:

What does my report say?

The first question is:

What is a DNA test actually capable of saying?

That distinction may seem minor, but it changes everything.

A thermometer measures temperature. A scale measures weight. A clock measures time. Each instrument is valuable because it measures something specific. Problems arise when we ask an instrument to answer questions it was never designed to answer.

DNA testing is no different.

Before examining percentages, regions, matches, and family histories, we must first understand the nature of the evidence itself. What exactly is being measured? How reliable is it? What conclusions can legitimately be drawn from it? And where do its limitations begin?

These questions form the foundation of every chapter that follows.

The purpose of this book is not simply to explain DNA. It is to learn how to think about DNA evidence.

Before we can read the evidence, we must understand what the evidence is. That is where this investigation begins.

- End of Sample -

DNA CAN REVEAL BIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE.

ONLY CAREFUL INVESTIGATION CAN REVEAL THE TRUTH.

Millions of people have taken an autosomal DNA test, yet relatively few understand what their results actually mean.

This book is not another guide to ethnicity percentages. It is an investigation into DNA itself—what it can establish with confidence, what it can only suggest, and where its limitations begin.

Drawing upon multiple testing platforms, independent analytical systems, genealogy, oral tradition, and historical research, the author examines DNA evidence in the same way an investigator examines a case file.

The question throughout is never merely:

“What does the DNA say?”

But also:

“What does the DNA not say?”

For anyone who seeks clarity, rigour, and truth in the age of genetic testing, this book will be an essential companion.



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