

Egbert of Wessex

Egbert

King of Wessex

Reign 802—839

Predecessor [Beorhtric](#)

Successor [Athelwulf](#)

Born c. 769^[1]
Kingdom of Wessex

Died 4 February 839 (aged 69/70)
Kingdom of Wessex

Burial [Winchester](#)

Issue [Athelwulf](#)

Father [Ealhmund](#)

Egbert (also spelt **Ecgberht**) (c. 769–839) was [King of Wessex](#) from 802 until 839. In the 780s Egbert was forced into exile by King [Offa of Mercia](#) and King [Beorhtric of Wessex](#), but on Beorhtric's death in 802 Egbert returned and took the throne. He was the father of King [Athelwulf of Wessex](#).

Early career

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Egbert was the son of Ealhmund, King of Kent.^[2] He was descended from Ingeld, brother of King [Ine of Wessex](#).^[3] In 786 he made a bid for the throne of [Wessex](#) after the death of King [Cynewulf of Wessex](#).^[4] Offa of [Mercia](#) however, made Beorhtric king instead. As a youth, Egbert was seen as a problem for Beorhtric who didn't want Egbert in England.^[4] While Beorhtric was negotiating to marry Offa's daughter he asked that Egbert be handed over to him. While Offa was considering doing just that, Egbert fled Mercia and at some point left England.^[a] He appears to have been welcomed at the court of [Charlemagne](#) for at least three years, but possibly up to thirteen years. This is at the time when [Frankish](#) ports were closed to [English](#) ships and trading because in 789, Charlemagne made an agreement with Offa to marry his son Charles to one of Offa's daughters, but Offa made it a condition that his son Ecgfrith should marry one of Charlemagne's daughters. Charlemagne was so offended by this he suspended trade relations with England.^[4] While at the Frankish court Egbert married a noblewoman, Redburga.^[5] She was possibly a close relative of Charlemagne.^[6] Egbert and Redburga had a son born in Francia, Athelwulf,

in about 795. In 802 Beorhtric died and Egbert returned to become King of Wessex, probably with military aid from Charlemagne.^[5]

King of Wessex

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His first few years as king are not well recorded. It is very probable that he used this time to reorganize his army and his [administration](#).^[6] Egbert formed an [alliance](#) with [Wulfred, Archbishop of Canterbury](#). In 815 Egbert invaded [Cornwall](#) and brought it under his rule.^[6] He allowed sub-kings to rule it for him. In 825 the new king of Mercia, [Beornwulf](#), invaded Wessex. Beornwulf had extended his authority over [Kent](#), [Essex](#) and [Middlesex](#). In what [Frank Stenton](#) called "one of the most decisive battles of Anglo-Saxon history" Egbert defeated Beornwulf.^[7] This was the end of the Mercian kings dominating [England](#).^[7] Egbert sent his son Athelwulf with an army to overthrow Baldred, the Mercian sub-king.^[8] As a result, all of Kent, Surrey, Sussex and [East Anglia](#) submitted to Egbert.^[8] Beornwulf tried to recover East Anglia later the same year and was killed in the attempt.^[7] Kent, Surrey and Sussex remained a part of the kingdom of Wessex from this time on. Essex was later lost to the Danes.^[9] Egbert appointed his son Athelwulf as sub-king of Kent which included all the new territories of Wessex.^[8]

Egbert then defeated all of Mercia in 829.^[8] The king of [Northumbria](#) submitted to him after the defeat of Mercia. He assumed the title [Latin](#): *Rex Merciorum* (King of Mercia). This title was also on coins made in the former Mercian port of [London](#).^[10] In 830 [Wiglaf](#) returned to power in Mercia, but the gains of Kent and southwest England remained with Wessex. Egbert died 4 February 839.^[11] He left a territory larger than any other Wessex king since Ine.^[12] He was the *bretwalda* or [overlord](#) of [Anglo-Saxon England](#) until Wiglaf returned in 830. Even so, he remained the most powerful king during his time.^[12]

Family

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Together he and Redburga had:

- [Athelwulf](#), who succeeded his father.^[13]
- Athelstan.^{[b][13]}

Notes

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- a. [↑] The [Anglo-Saxon Chronicle](#) claims Egbert was in exile from England for three years. But the events in his life suggest he may have been gone thirteen years.^[4]
- b. [↑] often confused with Edgar's grandson Athelstan, sub-King of Kent.^[14]

References

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

- 1. [↑] Weir, Alison (18 April 2011). *Britain's Royal Families: The Complete Genealogy*. ISBN 9781446449110.
- 2. [↑] Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 207
- 3. [↑] Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, Trans. L.C. Jane (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), p. 1
- 4. [↑] [4.0](#) [4.1](#) [4.2](#) [4.3](#) Mike Ashley, *The Mammoth Book of British Kings and Queens* (New york: Carroll & Graf, 1999), p. 313
- 5. [↑] [5.0](#) [5.1](#) James Panton, *Historical Dictionary of the British Monarchy* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), p. 389
- 6. [↑] [6.0](#) [6.1](#) [6.2](#) Mike Ashley, *The Mammoth Book of British Kings and Queens* (New york: Carroll & Graf, 1999), p. 314
- 7. [↑] [7.0](#) [7.1](#) [7.2](#) Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 231
- 8. [↑] [8.0](#) [8.1](#) [8.2](#) [8.3](#) Barbara Yorke, *Wessex in the early Middle Ages* (London; New York: Leicester University Press, 1995), p. 94
- 9. [↑] Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 233
- 10. [↑] Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 232
- 11. [↑] Detlev Schwennicke, *Europäische Stammtafeln: Stammtafeln zur Geschichte der Europäischen Staaten*, Neue Folge, Band II (Marburg, Germany: J. A. Stargardt, 1984), Tafel 78
- 12. [↑] [12.0](#) [12.1](#) Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 235
- 13. [↑] [13.0](#) [13.1](#) Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, Trans. L.C. Jane (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), p. 155
- 14. [↑] Mike Ashley, *The Mammoth Book of British Kings and Queens* (New york: Carroll & Graf, 1999), p. 317

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- [Britannia: Kings of Wessex Archived](#) 2013-07-27 at the [Wayback Machine](#)

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