

= Wiglaf of Mercia =

Wiglaf (died 839) was King of Mercia from 827 to 829 and again from 830 until his death . His ancestry is uncertain : the 820s were a period of dynastic conflict within Mercia and the genealogy of several of the kings of this time is unknown . Wigstan , his grandson , was later recorded as a descendant of Penda of Mercia , so it is possible that Wiglaf was descended from Penda , one of the most powerful seventh @-@ century kings of Mercia .

Wiglaf succeeded Ludeca , who was killed campaigning against East Anglia . His first reign coincided with the continued rise of the rival Anglo @-@ Saxon kingdom of Wessex under Egbert . Egbert drove Wiglaf from the throne in 829 , and ruled Mercia directly for a year . Wiglaf recovered the kingdom in 830 , probably by force although it may be that Wiglaf remained subject to Egbert 's overlordship . Mercia never regained the south @-@ eastern kingdoms , but Berkshire and perhaps Essex came back into Mercian control . The causes of the fluctuating fortunes of Mercia and Wessex are a matter of speculation , but it may be that Carolingian support influenced both Egbert 's ascendancy and the subsequent Mercian recovery . Although Wiglaf appears to have restored Mercia 's independence , the recovery was short @-@ lived , and later in the century Mercia was divided between Wessex and the Vikings . Wiglaf died in about 839 , and was eventually succeeded by Beorhtwulf , though one tradition records his son , Wigmund as having reigned briefly . Wiglaf is buried at Repton , near Derby .

= = Historical context = =

Mercia had been the dominant Anglo @-@ Saxon kingdom for most of the 8th century , with Offa , who died in 796 , the most powerful king of his time . Coenwulf , who took the Mercian throne shortly after Offa 's death , was able to retain Mercian influence in the kingdoms of Kent , East Anglia and Essex , and made frequent incursions across Offa 's Dyke into what is now Wales . However , Coenwulf 's death , in 821 , marked the beginning of a period in which the political map of England was dramatically redrawn . Although one eleventh @-@ century source claims that Coenwulf 's son , Cynehelm , briefly succeeded to the throne , it is more likely that Ceolwulf , Coenwulf 's brother , was the next king . He reigned for only two years before being deposed .

The next king , Beornwulf , was of no known royal line , though it has been conjectured on the basis of the common initial letter B that he was connected to the later kings Beorhtwulf and Burgred . It was probably Beornwulf whose defeat of the kingdom of Powys and destruction of the fortress of Deganwy are recorded in a Welsh chronicle , the Brut y Tywysogion , in 823 , and it is clear that Mercia was still a formidable military power at that time . However , in 825 Beornwulf was decisively defeated by Egbert of Wessex at the battle of Ellendun , and died the next year in an unsuccessful invasion of East Anglia . His successor , Ludeca , of unknown lineage , also invaded East Anglia , and like Beornwulf died while campaigning there , in 827 . These defeats , in rapid succession , are likely to have exacerbated the apparent dynastic contention for Mercian royal authority . Outside Mercia , the power of the kingdom of Wessex , to the south , was strong and growing when Wiglaf came to the throne .

= = Ancestry = =

Wiglaf 's ancestry is not known for certain . There are two main theories regarding the ancestry of Mercian kings of this period . One is that descendants of different lines of the royal family competed for the throne . In the mid @-@ 7th century , for example , Penda had placed royal kinsmen in control of conquered provinces . A Wigheard , who witnessed a charter in the late 7th century , was possibly a member of this line . The other theory is that a number of kin @-@ groups with local power @-@ bases may have competed for the succession . The sub @-@ kingdoms of the Hwicce , the Tomsæte , and the unidentified Gaini are examples of such power @-@ bases . Marriage alliances could also have played a part . Competing magnates , those called in charters " dux " or " princeps " (that is , leaders) , may have brought the kings to power . In this model , the Mercian

kings are little more than leading noblemen .

A medieval tradition preserved at Evesham records that Wiglaf 's grandson Wigstan was a descendant of Coenred , who was a grandson of Penda . Wigstan 's grandfathers were Wiglaf and Ceolwulf I ; the tradition might be interpreted to mean that Wiglaf descended from Penda , but it might also be Wiglaf 's wife , Cynethryth , who was descended from Penda . Cynethryth 's name is known from two of Wiglaf 's charters , dated 831 and 836 , and historian Pauline Stafford notes that her name " seems to hark back to the kin of Coenwulf if not earlier royal lines " , but as with Wiglaf himself , nothing certain is known of her ancestry . A different connection is mentioned in the medieval Life of St. Wigstan , which asserts that the " B " and " W " families were related .

Known descendants of Wiglaf include his son , Wigmund , and his grandson , Wigstan , both of whom share the " Wig- " at the start of his name ; alliterative family names are frequent in Anglo @-@ Saxon dynasties and are often thought to suggest possible kinship . Other possible descendants of Wiglaf include the last Mercian king , Ceolwulf II . A large number of duces or praefecti (ealdormen) with similar names are found as witnesses in Mercian charters of the late 8th and early 9th centuries , including Wigbald , Wigberht , Wiggca , Wigferth , and Wigheard , but there is no evidence that these nobles were related beyond the similarity of their names .

= = First reign and defeat by Wessex = =

The Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle records Wiglaf 's accession in the entry for 827 (erroneously recorded under the year 825) . The entry reads " Her Ludecan Myrcna cing 7 his fif ealdormenn mid him man ofsloh , 7 Wiglaf feng to rice " , which means " Here Ludeca , King of Mercia , was killed , and his five ealdormen with him , and Wiglaf succeeded to the kingdom " . In 829 , Egbert of Wessex successfully invaded Mercia and drove Wiglaf from his throne . The immediate consequence of Egbert 's defeat of Beornwulf in 825 at the battle of Ellendun had been the loss of Mercian control over the south @-@ eastern kingdoms of Kent , Sussex , Essex and East Anglia ; Beornwulf 's and Ludeca 's disastrous military expeditions against East Anglia in 826 and 827 also confirmed Mercia 's loss of control of that kingdom . Egbert 's defeat of Wiglaf in 829 completed his domination of southern England , and Egbert went on to receive the submission of Eanred of Northumbria at Dore , on the northern border of Mercia , later that year . These events led the anonymous scribe who wrote the Anglo @-@ Saxon Chronicle to describe Egbert as the eighth bretwalda , or ' Ruler of Britain ' .

Egbert remained in control of Wessex until some time in 830 . He was in power there long enough to issue coins (struck in London) bearing the title " Rex M " , for " Rex Merciorum " , or " King of Mercia " .

= = Second reign = =

The Chronicle reports that in 830 , Wiglaf " obtained the kingdom of Mercia again " . Wiglaf 's return to the throne has generally been taken by historians to indicate the end of Egbert 's overlordship of Mercia . In particular , historian Frank Stenton argued that the wording of the Chronicle makes it probable that Wiglaf recovered the kingdom by force , and that if Egbert had given the kingdom to Wiglaf this would have been recorded . A charter of 836 has also been cited as evidence that Wiglaf was acting as an independent ruler at that time ; it records a council at Croft , in Leicestershire , attended by the Archbishop of Canterbury and eleven bishops , including some from West Saxon sees . Wiglaf refers to the assembly as " my bishops , duces , and magistrates " , indicating not only a recovery of control over his own territory , but some level of authority over the southern church . It is significant that Wiglaf was still able to call together such a group of notables ; the West Saxons , even if they were able to do so , held no such councils . Essex , which had been a Mercian dependency , may have been brought back under Mercian overlordship : a King Sigeric of the East Saxons , described as a minister of Wiglaf 's , witnessed a charter in Hertfordshire at some point between 829 and 837 . London , where Egbert apparently lost control of the mint , remained a Mercian town through Wiglaf 's second reign and beyond . Berkshire also appears to have returned

to Mercian control , though it is possible that this did not occur until after Wiglaf 's reign . Perhaps more surprisingly , given the new strength of Wessex , it appears that the territory along the middle Thames which had formed the heartland of the Gewisse (the precursor people of the 9th @-@ century West Saxon state) remained firmly in Mercian hands . In the west , either Wiglaf or his successor , Beorhtwulf , brought the Welsh back under Mercian control at some point prior to 853 , when a rebellion against Mercia is recorded .

A charter of 831 , which Wiglaf calls " the first year of my second reign " , was issued at Wychbold near Droitwich ; it is significant that Wiglaf makes no reference to any overlordship of Egbert 's in this charter , issued within a year of his recovery of power , and that he acknowledges his temporary deposition . In East Anglia , King Æthelstan minted coins , possibly as early as 827 , but more likely c . 830 after Egbert 's influence was reduced with Wiglaf 's return to power in Mercia . This demonstration of independence on East Anglia 's part is not surprising , as it was probably Æthelstan who was responsible for the defeat and death of both Beornwulf and Ludeca .

Both Wessex 's sudden rise to power in the late 820s , and the subsequent failure to retain this dominant position , have been examined by historians looking for underlying causes . Dynastic uncertainty has been suggested as the reason for Mercia 's collapse ; the 820s were certainly years of instability in the royal line . The lack of detailed information about Mercian and Wessex administration makes other theories hard to evaluate : for example it has been suggested that the West Saxons had a stable tributary system that contributed to its success , or that Wessex 's mixed Saxon and British population , natural frontiers , and capable administrators were key factors .

Another proposed explanation for the events of these years is that Wessex 's fortunes were to some degree dependent on Carolingian support . The Rhenish and Frankish commercial networks collapsed at some time in the 820s or 830s , and in addition , a rebellion broke out in February 830 against Louis the Pious , the first of a series of internal conflicts that lasted through the 830s and beyond . These distractions may have reduced Louis 's ability to support Egbert . In this view , the withdrawal of Frankish influence would have left East Anglia , Mercia and Wessex to find a balance of power not dependent on outside aid .

Wiglaf 's recovery , however , was not complete . Egbert 's influence was certainly reduced after 830 , but Mercia never recovered control of the south @-@ east , except possibly for Essex ; and East Anglia remained independent . It appears that Wulfred , the archbishop of Canterbury at the time of Egbert 's victory , remained loyal to Mercia : his coinage terminates when Egbert 's Kentish coinage begins ; and since a charter of 838 shows Egbert agreeing to return property to the church in Canterbury it is evident that he had seized property from the church earlier . Æthelwulf , Egbert 's son , was king of Kent during his father 's reign , and fear of continuing Mercian influence in Kent may have been the reason he gave estates to Christ Church , Canterbury .

= = Coinage and charters = =

Coins from Wiglaf 's reign are very rare . They can be divided into portrait and non @-@ portrait types ; and of these , only the two non @-@ portrait coins may be from Wiglaf 's second reign . Other than these , there is no evidence of any Mercian coinage until the reign of Wiglaf 's successor , Beorhtwulf , which began in about 840 . This may show that Wiglaf remained subject to Egbert 's overlordship after 830 , though most historians consider Wiglaf to have recovered his independence at that time .

Charters survive from Wiglaf 's reign ; these were documents which granted land to followers or to churchmen , and were witnessed by the kings who had power to grant the land . One such charter of Wiglaf 's , granting privileges to the monastery of Hanbury in 836 , does not exempt the monks from the duty of constructing ramparts , indicating a concern for defence . Wessex charters do not begin to show such exemptions until 846 . These clauses are explained by the increasing Viking presence throughout Britain : Viking raids had begun at least as early as 793 , Viking armies were in Kent by 811 , and from 835 Viking raids were a concern for the kings of Wessex .

The 836 charter also contains an early reference to the trimoda necessitas , the set of three obligations that kings of the era placed on their subjects . These duties were the building of royal

residences , the obligation to pay feorm , or food rent , to the king , and hospitality to the king 's servants . The privileges granted came at a cost : Wiglaf and one ealdorman received life interests in estates , and another ealdorman was paid six hundred shillings in gold . It is perhaps notable that in common with many other Mercian charters of the 9th century , this grant is of privileges rather than land : the chronicler Bede had commented a century earlier that excessive grants of land to monasteries were leaving kings without land to grant to the nobility , and the Mercian kings may have been responding to this problem .

= = Succession = =

The date of Wiglaf 's death is not given directly in any of the primary sources , but it can be determined from the known chronology of his successors . The Anglo -@ Saxon Chronicle records that Burgred was driven out of Mercia by the Vikings in 874 , after a reign of twenty @-@ two years , and charter evidence indicates that Burgred succeeded in the first half of 852 . A regnal list credits his predecessor , Beorhtwulf , with a reign of thirteen years , which is consistent with date references in his charters . Hence it would appear that Wiglaf 's reign ended in 839 . A tradition records the death of Wigstan in 849 , and refers to Wigstan 's father , Wigmund , the son of Wiglaf , as having been king , but this is the only evidence for Wigmund having reigned and must be regarded with suspicion . The descent of Beorhtwulf is not known , but it appears that dynastic tension was a continuing factor in the Mercian succession , in contrast to Wessex , where Egbert established a dynasty that lasted with little disturbance throughout the 9th century .

Wiglaf was buried at Repton , in a crypt which still can be seen . The monastery church on the site at that time was probably constructed by Æthelbald of Mercia to house the royal mausoleum ; other burials there include that of Wigstan , Wiglaf 's grandson . The vault and columns in the crypt are not original and may date from Wiglaf 's time rather than Aethelbald 's .